



Publications in the Field
of Art Therapy

Susan Hogan: "Photography"

Book Review

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Emerald's *Arts for Health* collection, in which Susan Hogan's *Photography* is situated, stands at the forefront of interdisciplinary work linking the arts, health, and social care. Bringing together scholars, clinicians, and artists, the series demonstrates how creative engagement functions as a form of nonclinical support "a kind of shadow health service" (Crawford, 2022, p. xii) that sustains wellbeing and fosters social connection. Each concise volume, written for professionals and general readers alike, translates insights from the health humanities into accessible guidance on how artistic practices can enhance both mental and physical health. Including titles such as *Body Art*, *Magic*, *History*, *Painting*, *Film*, *Singing*, *Video*, *Music*, and *Creative Writing*, among others, the

series redefines creativity as a cornerstone of what Paul Crawford calls *creative public health*: "a fantastic, non-medical, but medically relevant way to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities" (Crawford, 2022, p. xii).

Within this wider framework, Susan Hogan's *Photography* extends the series' vision with remarkable depth and clarity. Continuing her long-standing effort to make art-therapy and visual-culture scholarship accessible without diluting their intellectual or political complexity, Hogan offers a work that is both comprehensive and engaging. *Photography* is ambitious in scope: it functions simultaneously as a sweeping history of the medium, a conceptual mapping of its theoretical foundations,

and a reflection on how photographic practices can be mobilised for wellbeing and social transformation. In keeping with the aims of the collection, she writes with clarity and precision, avoiding jargon while guiding readers through complex ideas with confidence and generosity. At the heart of the book lies Hogan's fascination with the *camera obscura* - one of the nineteenth century's most striking technological and metaphorical inventions. From the earliest optical experiments to the digital saturation of the present, she traces photography's evolution with purpose and insight. The inclusion of twenty-nine carefully selected black-and-white photographs enriches the discussion, providing visual counterpoints that deepen the reader's engagement. The book follows a subtle, deductive chronological structure: it begins with broad historical, conceptual and methodological foundations before moving toward the practical and therapeutic uses of photography. This progression makes the work both intellectually rewarding and emotionally resonant, inviting readers to consider how the act of looking - and being seen - can become a source of understanding and healing.

The author devotes the early part of the book to a panoramic history of photography, tracing its path from the *camera obscura* and early cyanotypes to the omnipresence of digital imagery. Her decision to foreground *Anna Atkins* (1843) rather than the usual male inventors

marks a *deliberate feminist intervention into photography's canon* - a small but significant act of rebalancing. The historical sweep is impressive: natural-history documentation, architectural and landscape work, the rise of portraiture and the *carte de visite*, photojournalism, documentary traditions, anthropological uses, the art-photography debate, and the evolution of the family album all feature here.

The writer is at her most compelling when she explores how these technological shifts reverberate through subjectivity. The transition from the slowness of film to the instantaneity of digital images transformed how people remember, connect, and represent themselves. Camera phones have flooded daily life with images, collapsing the boundaries between private and public life. As Hogan observes, "from the start of the twenty-first century, mobile-phone technology incorporating digital cameras made photography both pervasive globally and democratic" (Hogan, 2022, p. 50). This shift redefined not only the practice of photography but also its cultural and psychological reach.

Complementing this account, the trajectory of photography's technological change extends from these early optical experiments to the digital saturation of the twenty-first century. In 1957, Russell Kirsch produced the first digital image by scanning a photograph of his son; in 1969, George E. Smith and Willard Boyle

developed the charged-coupled device (CCD); and by 1975, Steve Sasson at Kodak built the first digital still camera (Smith 2018). Fuji's DS-1P followed in 1988 as the first digital consumer model, marking what Smith (2018) describes as a "seismic shift" in photographic practice and ethics. Building on these innovations, Ebrahim (2003) documents the next turning point: the convergence of digital imaging and mobile technology. By 2001, the Nokia 7650 integrated the first phone camera, followed by the Nokia 6650 in 2002, capable of recording video. As Smith (2018) notes, "the word 'selfie' first appeared on an Australian internet forum in 2002 and has since become the most widespread form of self-portrait" (p. 43).

Following this extensive historical trajectory, Hogan turns to the conceptual questions that underpin photographic meaning. She introduces readers to key debates surrounding polysemy, verisimilitude, objectification, and the uneasy relationship between word and image. Drawing on canonical thinkers such as John Berger (1972), Susan Sontag (1977), Roland Barthes (1981), and Liz Wells (2003), she demonstrates that *photographs do not merely record reality but actively construct it*. What distinguishes this author's approach is its clarity: rather than indulging in theoretical opacity, she shows why theory matters. Without conceptual frameworks, photography risks being reduced

to description - its complex role in shaping perception and identity left unexplored.

As Victor Burgin (1986) reminds us, "all discourses are 'theoretical'; the discourses we call theoretical are self-consciously so. Theory sets out to question the underlying assumptions of common sense in order to replace them, where necessary, with better founded, or more comprehensive, explanation" (p. 41). Hogan's analysis echoes this insight, arguing that theoretical awareness enables us to see how photography both mirrors and manufactures social meaning.

From theory, Hogan moves to *method*, demonstrating how photographs can function not only as cultural artefacts but also as instruments of inquiry. She presents a range of research strategies - semiotic analysis, photo-elicitation, content analysis, and photo-documentation - showing how each can reveal emotional and social dimensions often overlooked by conventional research. As she writes, "images may be more comprehensible than most other forms of academic discourse" (Hogan, 2022, p. 113). Readers interested in a fuller discussion of visual methodologies will find Hogan's earlier article with Sarah Pink and Joanna Bird particularly useful (Hogan, Pink, & Bird, 2011), which expands on how photography can enrich qualitative research practice.

Although *Photography* is conceived as an introductory text, it never underestimates its readers. Hogan writes with an unusual rhythm - diving into complex

theoretical debates and methodological discussions, then surfacing to re-engage newcomers with clear explanations and renewed perspective. This oscillation between depth and accessibility mirrors her broader pedagogical ethos: to expand understanding rather than simplify it. She invites readers to contextualise the *camera obscura* not as a relic of optical history but as a critical metaphor for perception itself - how we see, what we choose to see, and what remains invisible. In doing so, the writer pushes even novice readers beyond the merely descriptive, encouraging a reflective and critical engagement with photography as both an art and a way of knowing.

Complementing the conceptual discussions of the book's first half, the second part of *Photography* moves decisively into the terrain of practice - where art and health intersect. Hogan explores how photography, once an instrument of representation, becomes a means of self-inquiry and psychic repair. She situates this transition within a distinctly British genealogy, invoking Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, whose *re-enactment phototherapy* emerged from the incandescent feminist climate of the 1980s. Conceived at a time when feminist artists were questioning both clinical authority and the patriarchal gaze, the practice blurred the lines between therapy, activism, and research. Through role-play, performance, and staging, participants reconstructed memories that

had been silenced or distorted, transforming private trauma into shared critique. Hogan presents this as a pivotal method for reclaiming agency. As Martin observed, "Identity is not inborn, pregiven or 'natural'... it is striven for, contested, negotiated, put together in historical circumstances and subject to challenge and change" (Martin, 1991, pp. 95–96). Spence's own experiments illustrate the stakes of such practice: she used the camera as a "third eye... analytical and critical yet remaining attached to the emotional and frightening experience [she] was undergoing" (Spence, 1995, p. 130). For Hogan, this legacy remains vital because it exposes the ethical and political dimensions of the image in medical and therapeutic contexts, challenging the reductive neutrality of the clinical gaze. Readers seeking a deeper understanding of this approach can turn to *Phototherapy: Psychic Realism as a Healing Art?* (Martin & Spence, 1988) and Shen (2023), which further elaborate its technique and theoretical underpinnings.

Jo Spence's reflections on her time in hospital further sharpen the book's critique of medical power. Through her own experience of cancer treatment, she exposed how institutional medicine disciplines the patient's body, silences emotional experience, and *often erases gender from clinical understanding*. Her photographic practice became a counter-diagnostic tool - an act of self-representation that reclaimed authority

from the medical gaze. The camera, for Spence, was both witness and weapon: a means to interrogate how illness is framed, displayed, and managed. This perspective resonates with Véronique A. S. Griffith's (2020) ethnographic insights into the absence of gender awareness among physicians and the persistence of patriarchal assumptions in medical education. Both reveal how women's pain is refracted through diagnostic systems unable to grasp the lived reality of the body. Readers seeking further discussion of Griffith's study and its implications for art, health, and gender may see Loureiro (2021) for a detailed analysis.

In this light, *Photography* redefines the *camera obscura* not as a metaphor for passive observation but as a participatory instrument for self-knowledge and collective healing. Hogan thus demonstrates that photography's therapeutic potential lies not in sentimentality but in its capacity to question systems of power, visualise neglected experiences, and open new spaces for understanding within the arts and health.

Hogan's final chapter, *Therapeutic Photography*, widens the scope of her analysis to embrace the multiplicity of photo-based healing practices now used across art, health, and community contexts. She begins by disentangling the long-standing confusion between *phototherapy* and *therapeutic photography*, explaining that while the former is typically conducted within a clinical alliance under pro-

fessional supervision, the latter encompasses a broader field of creative and participatory work. Drawing on Gibson (2018, pp. 154–155) and Halkola (2013, pp. 155–156), Hogan defines therapeutic photography as a structured yet open process that deepens self-understanding, reduces inner conflict, and enhances coping strategies through the making and discussion of images. She then explores how photography operates within art-therapy settings, citing examples from cancer care, substance-use recovery, and community workshops, where taking or reflecting on images becomes a means to externalise emotion and construct meaning.

Subsequent sections trace how therapeutic photography in practice uses diverse techniques - photo diaries, self-portraiture, and photo-elicitation - to stimulate recall and insight. Hogan's discussion of photography as part of projective processes emphasises how images can reveal unconscious aspects of self, while her treatment of self-portrait therapeutic photography highlights its lineage in the feminist work of Jo Spence and Rosy Martin (1988), and its contemporary renewal in Cristina Nuñez's (2013) collaborative self-portrait projects. She then turns to family albums and photographs made by others, showing how these materials function as catalysts for autobiographical storytelling and intergenerational reflection. The chapter culminates in an exploration of

metaphoric uses of photography - how visual metaphors help participants think about selfhood and relational patterns - and in a final note on photography's place within wider photo systems, where private and social meanings intersect.

Across these subthemes, Hogan resists easy categorisation: following Lowenthal (2013), she presents therapeutic photography and phototherapy not as separate disciplines but as points on a continuum of "photo-based healing practices." In closing, she affirms photography's distinct power to bridge emotion and analysis, art and care - transforming the *camera obscura* once more into an instrument of illumination and wellbeing.

Photography stands out as an outstanding and original contribution to the growing dialogue between art, health, and social research. It is a book in which Susan Hogan "swims deep and surfaces gracefully," moving with assurance between the complexities of theory and the accessibility of practice. Few authors manage this oscillation so deftly: she plunges into challenging philosophical waters - questions of representation, identity, and the ethics of looking - yet resurfaces to engage her reader with clarity and humanity. Her command of the literature is impressive, and the

integration of visual material gives the volume a rare aesthetic coherence.

The inclusion of a "*Further Reading*" section at the end is particularly valuable, offering readers a map through the expanding field of arts for health. If there is one minor limitation, it is the absence of a *glossary*, which might have helped orient newcomers to key theoretical and methodological terms. Still, this omission does little to diminish the book's overall achievement: the author offers a work that both informs and inspires, bridging the gap between art therapy, visual culture, and social inquiry.

All in all, *Photography* deserves recognition as one of the most insightful and versatile texts in the *Arts for Health* series. It will appeal equally to students, practitioners, and researchers across art therapy, visual sociology, and cultural studies. For those approaching the intersection of art and wellbeing, Hogan's book provides not only a rigorous framework but also a humane and motivating vision of what creative practice can achieve. It is a work to read, return to, and teach from—an exemplary synthesis of scholarship and sensitivity that reaffirms the enduring capacity of photography to heal, to question, and to connect.

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