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Blind Running: 25 Pictures Per Page

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Abstract

This experiential visual open work is built from a myriad of words, languages, cultures, and critical theories.

> *. . . books and bombs, dance and record labels, mothers and daughters, small villages and islands, diaries and story, colonization and immigration, violence and healing, leaving and returning . . . wild animals*

It is a collaborative attempt to use untranslated images and untranslated embodied praxis trusting in one another to look out for the enhanced dangers of running to meet gruelling deadlines and unrelenting competition for survival in the academy while at the same time stubbornly resisting, via a blindfold, the reigning forms of knowing and communication.

In the summer of 2016 a group of 13
people, from a multitude of different life
experiences gathered for a 4 day retreat
from academia held at a seminary.

Our mission was to explore
art as a way of knowing.
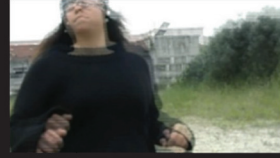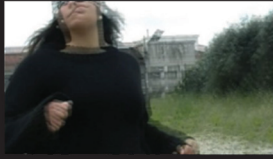
WHAT are we
doing?

"Ready?"

"Set?"

"gooooO"

"BREAK FREE!"
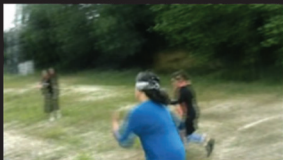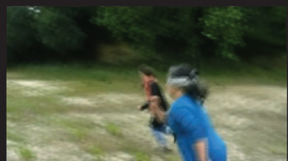
"We´ve got
your back"

Thinking

Feeling

Let´s put ourselves
on the line

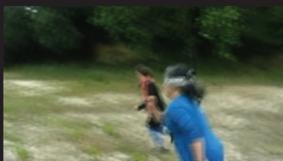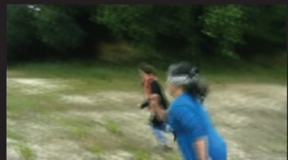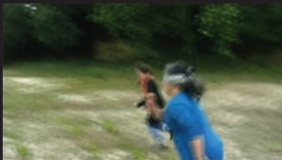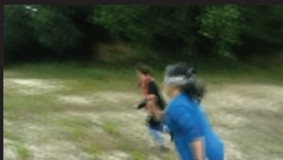Transform and live moments of equity with space for all our sensory perceptions, reasons, logics, intuitions, inspirations and wisdom.

Trust,
just run

"

THESE ENCLOSURES
BECOME INTERNALIZED.

WHAT WAS OUTSIDE IS
REPLICATED WITHIN.

" (Sousanis, 2015, p. 11).

Dear reader,

If you have been obedient to the norms of left to right, top to bottom reading, you have already made your way through a photo essay, which ended with one of the blindfolded runners escaping the confines of the filmstrip to enter the images of Nick Sousanis (2015) which we have quoted. Did you linger on the images? Did you smile in recognition or resonance; or, did you flip casually through the pages, perhaps with some annoyance at the ambiguity of the presentation, or maybe with relief to get here quickly as your tall pile of other work beckons?
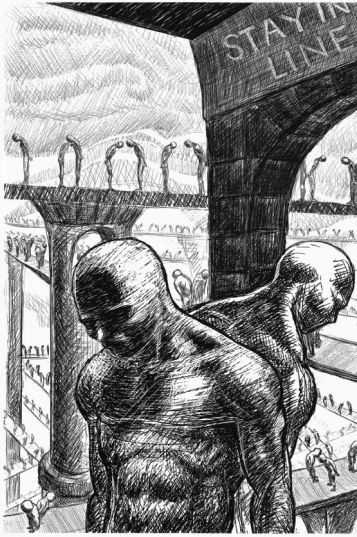
" (Sousanis, 2015, p. 3).

The photo-essay presentation, "Blind running: 25 pictures per page" attempts to meet three objectives, whose value could be contested and which might be in conflict with each other. The first and most normal objective is to communicate about the idea of *blind running* which emerged from a 4-day summer school about ways of knowing. The second is a continuous reflective engagement – a blind running – with all those who have helped create this chapter, and, third is a hope that any ambiguity, strangeness or confusion provoked by the graphic pre-sentations will invite readers to join in blind running as a way to reflect on what your expectations and practices privilege.

Although our original intention was to offer the photo essay without further explicative text, the editors of this book, asked us to touch on our rationale and challenged us to sharpen our communications. To this end, we draw attention to how any of us might identify with the images represented throughout the pages and what might keep us from seeing the lines within which we may or may not want to stay. As this work deals directly with practices of scholarship – researching, publishing, teaching, learning and routinely engaging with editors regarding the specifics of how to communicate in publications such as this chapter, we invite Tatiana and Xyangyun, to run blindly with us as well. With the help of the publisher, we are trying to take up opportunities
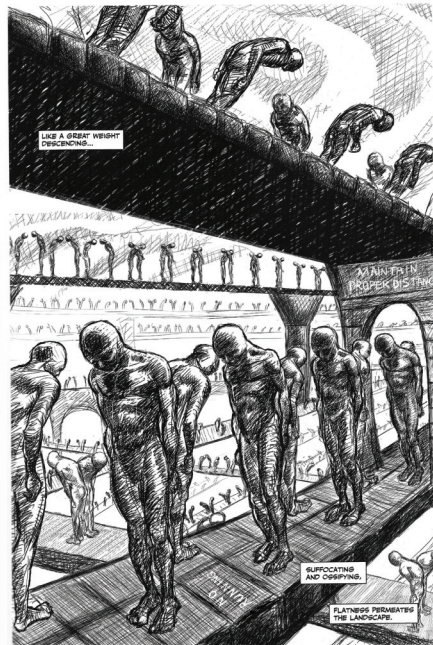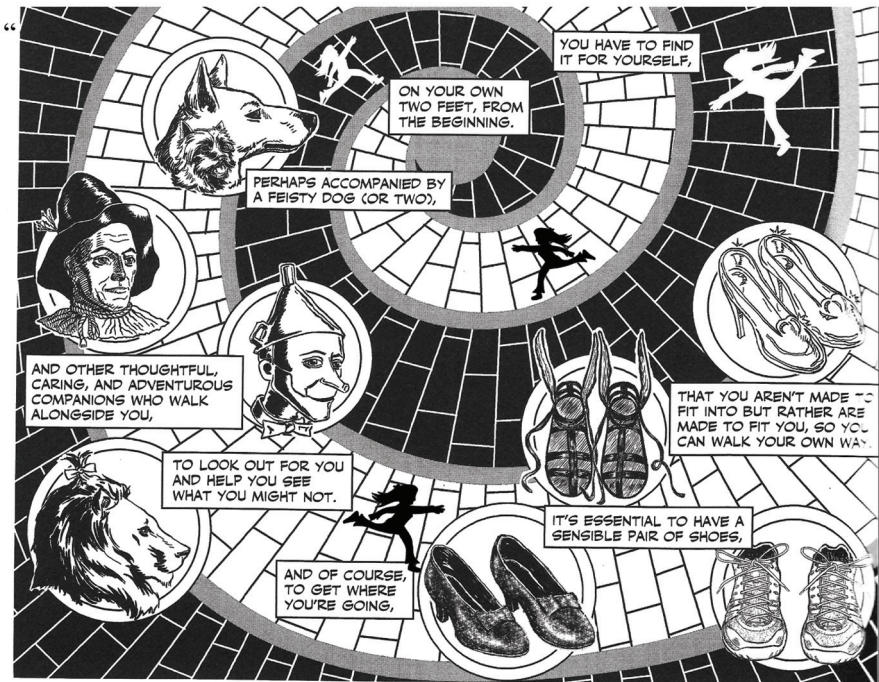

" (Sousanis, 2015, p. 5).

created by the medium we are using, knowing that fonts and margins can change our presentation, but also aware, like Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) that the message may still be massaged in ways unexpected by us: a benefit of blind running (cf. Open work, Eco, 1989).

What we are doing with the graphic essay is inviting readers to "try on" and experiment with the idea that their truths, interpretations and reactions to the graphic essay may be influenced by visual myths about teaching, teachers, mind and body (Barthes, 1977, 1981 cited in Hallewell & Lackovic, 2017). Additionally, in asking the reader to do this, we are deliberately taking a blind position. We cannot foresee who reads this, how and what are taken as truth and experimental myths. We give up control, as we have also asked the editors of the book to do.

We are not blind, but yet we are and through the act of deliberately covering our eyes to words, can we not learn to see that which the words most powerfully hide?

" (Sousanis, 2015, p. 144).

Chemi (2017) recognized artistic experiences as a place where we can find "a safe haven for cognitive and emotional challenges, for experimentations, for learning and developing, for including heuristics in knowledge, for indirect cognition and communication (metaphors), for training resilience and opportunity-seeking strategies". However, our safety is difficult to protect and we can only run blind without harming or being harmed in higher education, when our colleagues "have our backs", through a mechanism of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which is strengthened via the "generative capacities of art, imagination, intuition or playfulness" (Fegan, 2017, p. 134).

Communicating with Images

In the introduction to the handbook of Visual Research Methods, Pauwels (2011) points to a growing number of scholarly journals dedicated to visual images but little integration of the findings and practices between the social sciences, humanities and behavioural sciences. Less than 25% of the handbook's 754 pages have graphic images with the majority concentrated in a handful of chapters. None of the chapters uses images to convey the prime communication (e.g., graphic novels, comics, photo essay).

Photos as illustration are common in much writing; photos as analysis, exploring what the contents of a photo can tell us about an experience is less common, but not unknown yet, a third use of photos, to make an argument, is quite rare (Newbury, 2011). Very few images are published as text within non-art journals (Pinola-Gaudiello & Roldán, 2015). In our search, we have found the images, which we have quoted from a recently published graphic novel/PhD dissertation (Sousanis, 2015) about accessing multiple modes of understanding. We also became aware of the collaboration of Stephanie Jones and James F. Woglom who have been creating comics based education research publications. We contacted these researchers to know how they thought their graphical work should be quoted and found that we would be running blind in this attempt as well.

Therefore, we looked further but found very little research on how photos are used in higher education. Hallewell and Lackovic (2017) researching lecturing practices, pointed toward Posser and Roth (2003) who used a taxonomy of four functions for using photos: decorative, illustrative, explanatory and complementary and who revealed that "the semiotic potential of photographs in lectures is *underused*" (p. 13), suggesting that higher

education practitioners could benefit from training in this regard. In the study of psychology lectures, little critical questioning of the photos used was found: a disturbing finding since meaning-making is based partially on "the socio-cultural conditioning surrounding the photograph: who it is viewed by, presented by, created by, where and why is it produced, who are the agents who have intentions and power (Hodge & Kress, 1988)?" (Hallewell & Lackovic, 2017). Our insistence on using blurred photos is to invite an exploration of the semiotic potential of these repetitive film frames, and provoke further critical reflection via our engagement with images in conversation.

Figure 1. Image from Jones and Woglom (2013, p. 173) "I've faced a similar problem of considering quoting from graphica pieces and not wanting to just quote the "words" from the piece, but include the images themselves . . . I think if we just start doing this in our work it will become acceptable practice. Quoting the words seems at best insufficient and at worst, a misrepresentation of the source we quote. Good luck! I would love to see what you create" (personal communication Stephanie Jones, April 10, 2017).

In this short chapter, we hope that we have offered support for those who have taken analogous risks, or who are considering taking them; all of which potentially makes the running field less dangerous and therefore more inclusive. We seek to be agents of our own power in trying to decolonize higher education (Neilson & São Marcos, 2017) using multiple ways of knowing, in particular artful ways, and blind running through the largely uncharted world of graphic conversations (cf. Valdez Ruvalcaba, 2011). In taking this step, we expose our vulnerabilities rather than taking time to hide them and in doing so we trust that others will have our backs.

Acknowledgements

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