**The Conversation: People, Power and Photography**

Live-streamed on Thursday 19 November 2020

VICKI MCDONALD:
(SPEAKS IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE) *gamba mulgan – nganga gambala niana ngindu*, which is good evening, it's good to see you here in Barrungam, which is the traditional language of the community that I grew up on the Darling Downs. I'm Vicki McDonald, State Librarian and CEO. And on behalf of my colleagues, I welcome you to the second event in The Conversation series. I begin by acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their continuing connection to land, and as custodians of stories for millennia. Here at State Library, we are inspired by this tradition in our work to share and preserve Queensland's memory for future generations. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our panellists and this evening's facilitator Commissioning Editor at The Conversation, Michael Lund.

We greatly value our partnership with The Conversation and encourage you to visit their website to delve into thought-provoking essays written by this evening's panellists. Tonight, we will explore the power of a single photograph and how it can change the world. We can all recall images that have moved us. Some of them may well have been from State Library’s online exhibition *TWENTY*, powerful images lift our spirits, arouse our sense of justice, or break our hearts. A station hand weeping over a drowned calf. A protestor standing her ground. An apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders written in the sky. One moment in time can transform our thinking, thanks to professional photographers and citizen journalists alike.

Tonight's discussion is broadcast across Facebook Live and our website. You can ask questions during the broadcast by adding them to the comments field on either platform. We will try to get to as many questions as possible. I hope you enjoy tonight's event, and now, I'm pleased to introduce Michael Lund.

MICHAEL LUND:
Thank you, Vicki, and hello and welcome to the State Library of Queensland. My name, as Vicki said, is Michael Lund, Commissioning Editor for The Conversation website. And today we're talking about people, power, and photography, inspired in part by this new exhibition here at the State Library of Queensland called *TWENTY*. It's an exhibition featuring more than a hundred photographs of Queensland history over the past 20 years, and it's an online-only exhibition. So what is it about photography that carries power? As said, we can all think of photographs that we've seen that we think are powerful and probably others think that too. It could be photographs we've taken, or photographs by others that have been shared and published far and wide. And it’s this publishing of a photograph that's part of the challenge.

I remember as a journalist when we were still shooting only photographs on film, we were limited in the amount of photographs we could take by the amount of film we had. And we were limited in who could see the photographs by how we could publish them. Digital photography has changed all of that. Today, an estimated 1.4 trillion photographs will be taken worldwide this year and they can easily be shared online via a number of platforms. And there are few limits to the number that we can take and share. So how easy is it to make a photograph count as powerful, amid all that photographic noise that we have today?

You can have your say on the subject in a moment. Please submit your comments as said, by entering them into the State Library Facebook page or in the chat section on the State Library front page website. And give us your name and where you're messaging from. And we'll try to include as many of those as we can later on in the discussion. But first, let me introduce you to our guests. I'm joined here in the studio by Dr Chris Salisbury, a Political Historian and Researcher in the School of Political Science and International Studies at The University of Queensland. And we're joined via video link by Professor Jane Lydon, the Wesfarmers Chair of Australian History at the University of Western Australia, and Dr Christine Fahd, sorry, Dr Cherine Fahd, Director of the Photography Program at the University of Technology Sydney. Welcome to you all. Cherine…

JANE LYDON:
Thank you.

MICHAEL LUND:
Cherine, if I could start with you, and something I'd like to ask all of you, what is it about a photograph that makes it powerful?

CHERINE FAHD:
I think what makes a photograph powerful is also what makes it problematic, which is that we believe them, you know, their relationship to reality and to the real. That makes them appear as though they're factual, and yeah, and I mean since photography’s invention, I think we've put our trust in images. And I think that's being tested you know quite extremely today.

MICHAEL LUND:
Jane, what is it for you?

JANE LYDON:
Oh look there are so many things, but I think the images that speak to me and that seem to have a really strong grasp on us these days, is when an image invokes the humanity of the people or the situation that it's showing. And that's a kind of, that's a historical thing, because sometimes it's breaking a taboo, it’s showing us something that we haven't seen before. So for example a few years ago, I think most of you, most of us, would remember that shocking and very sad photograph of a little boy washed up on a beach in Bodrum in Turkey. A little boy called Alan Kurdi, I think his name was. And I think that was a particularly powerful image because it was published in the media at a time when it had previously been taboo.

And of course I think Michael you would be able to speak to that as well having worked in newspapers and for the media. But, I believe that the decision was made by many editors across Europe to publish it on the front page of the newspapers, because they realised that it was already being circulated on social media. And so that, that sort of marked perhaps a moment of transformation in global visual culture, where an image like that was accessible. And it did in fact have a very powerful political impact. So we know that countries such as the UK changed their refugee policy at that moment. And even Australia, you know, a couple of weeks later also made that change.

So I think it's where it's a powerful image in its own right because of what it shows us about, you know, human beings, what's happening somewhere far away. But that's also…we have to kind of look at it in cultural and historical context, perhaps.

MICHAEL LUND:
True, I do remember that image very well. And I know it's a constant debate in a newsroom about the showing of such images, whether it's on print, online, TV. And the debate often centres around what will be the reaction of the audience, will they be repulsed at the image or repulsed at seeing the image? And it's being repulsed at what the image is showing is what the newsrooms are trying to engage in. But we'll come back to that later. Chris if I could ask you, what for you is a powerful photograph or what makes a powerful photograph?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Well at the risk of repeating Jane, I think the element of humanity, again that is either captured or portrayed or projected from an image. Being an observer and a researcher in politics and of politicians, I'm curious in just how they go about, or whether they're successful at, portraying an aspect of humanity that an audience may relate to. Not all are proficient at it, but those that can kind of nail that projection, can be successful in, you know, attracting support or whether it's winning votes or winning an argument.

Bringing the example that Jane spoke of I guess back to home, how images, and more and more we see images from all around the world being used in domestic political contexts to either reinforce an argument or to perhaps suggest some new initiative or response to a problem. We can all relate on some level and readily because of that access to, you know, pictures from anywhere in the world at the, you know, the click of a button on your smartphone.

MICHAEL LUND:
Before we delve into too much of the nitty-gritty, I want to know first of all from all three of you, who actually determines whether that image is a powerful image or not, and does the person taking it really know that at the time, or is it some something that sort of comes later on?

JANE LYDON:
Well, maybe I'll jump in there. I think that it is quite…it's one of the great unknowns, and it's something that people continue to debate because sometimes there will be a visually striking image of something very significant and important, but it just doesn't seem to hit that cultural nerve. So, I think it's very hard to predict the impact of an image and how it will circulate, will it become viral or will it just be forgotten within a couple of days? So I think that's the endlessly fascinating question really.

MICHAEL LUND:
Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
There is really a beautiful work, you know, a kind of theory by Judith Butler, and she asks a question of ‘when is life grievable?’ And the question, it's a political question because she poses this in relation to say September 11, where you know, one person's life or one atrocity in a particular context is considered a terror, an atrocity, and in another context it's considered the norm. And I'll give you an example. Like if I think about ever since I was a kid I've seen images of starving African children and, you know, to raise money for World Vision or, you know, whatever stories there are, you know, about Africa and famine.

And so we're accustomed to seeing certain bodies portrayed in certain ways in related… related to certain events. So Africa famine does the starvation, etcetera. But to see say Americans, Western bodies, white bodies suffer the same atrocities, would garner very different reactions. And I think this question of power in the image is also contextual and it's historical because we're trained to react to certain images and this idea of, you know, humanity, like what is it that moves us? And I think that that's very subjective and it's also a political question of what moves us. And an ideological question of what we're trained to be moved by.

So you know this question of when is an image powerful, of course I think that example of Alan Kurdi, you know, it was indisputably powerful because what we were witnessing was a child. And, you know, I think that given that that body was a child's body is what made that image so powerful. Whereas we see other bodies, you know, and I think it's, I'm quite interested in those details. Whose body is it, whose life is grievable, whose life provokes a response, a mass response.

MICHAEL LUND:
Whose body, in relation to the New York attacks that you refer to, there's an interesting ongoing debate about the image, that is a very powerful image in my mind, of the Falling Man.

CHERINE FAHD:
Exactly.

MICHAEL LUND:
The man who still to this day has not been successfully identified. And again, it's one of those images that I know has caused angst in newsrooms about whether or not to show it or not. Let me be provocative here to all three of you. Do you think media were right to show the image of the Falling Man, the guy jumping from the burning twin tower building? Chris?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Hm. I have still quite vivid memories of many of the events of that, well late night here in Australia and then into the morning. That's one that is still in some respect kind of burned on the back of the brain, and it was immediately confronting and shocking. And I certainly didn't turn my mind straight away to the, I guess morality perhaps, of broadcasting that image. Only that it was as a part of the broader context of a whole range and suite of shocking images along with those events… was just another to reinforce that this was something extraordinary to behold. In hindsight, perhaps I may have considered it questionable. But in the I guess the drama of what was unfolding at the time, perhaps it’s understandable that an image like that should have been, you know, chosen or allowed to be broadcast to really portray, I guess, some measure of humanity or the loss of humanity perhaps, in that event.

MICHAEL LUND:
It certainly tells a powerful story. Jane, your thoughts?

JANE LYDON:
Yeah, look, I don't have a clear answer to this. Actually some of my students use that image when they're writing essays in the sort of history of photography. And it is very ambivalent and it does kind of reduce that person to a kind of symbol. But I guess my reaction at the time was very similar to Chris', in that I found that one of the most distressing things, you know, people falling off the building or jumping off. And so, in a sense I think seeing what was happening and seeing that image as a kind of, you know, communicated the gravity of the circumstances very powerfully to me. And to me, I think that's probably more important than the question of whether we should have, whether it was in good taste, you know, or not to show us.

MICHAEL LUND:
Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
I find it difficult to take a moral position on whether it should have been pushed or not. I think there’s possibly a lot more questions to ask about that image. I mean, one thing that stands out for me is the way in which, you know you can't help but look. And at the same time, you're horrified by what you're looking at. Like that, the information that's carried in that split second of that image is, yeah, it's unimaginable. But at the same time, you're drawn to this kind of incredible formal arrangement of that image, which is this body free-floating against, you know, a kind of like, you know if you think about aesthetics, it's formally compositionally, it's composed in a way that it's such a classical image. It's beautiful, like you almost describe it formally as beautiful. And that's the problem of that image, is that it's, yeah, it's aesthetically so appealing with this figure against the ground, against the building. But at the same time what it is telling us about that moment is so shocking. And it's that, that tension between those two things that I think, yeah, I can't get past that. I can't resolve it in terms of my own spectatorship.

MICHAEL LUND:
Hmm, difficult. Jane, something I know you wanted to talk about and sticking with the New York attack things in one sense. Can we all be witness to an event that can lead… can we be eyewitness to events that can lead to powerful images?

JANE LYDON:
Sorry, can we all be eyewitnesses?

MICHAEL LUND:
Yes.

JANE LYDON:
Yeah, absolutely. And I think that perhaps these days the boundary between professional and user images, you know, has dissolved really, so that we no longer, or it’s certainly softened, it's a lot more porous than it used to be. So you know, we have everyone recording what's going on around them all the time, which allows everyone really to participate and to share images and to share their own experience. And I think the other, I think a very important issue, I suppose, for those of us who kind of, you know, think about or write about photography, is a shift from focusing on what the author intended. So what the photographer was trying to do for example, and how that image is received. And this, I think, speaks to your earlier question, Michael, about impact.

You can't really predict whether an image will be taken up or not. And of course, we all see these images in very different ways. So somebody might be arguing for an image as evidence of a particular moment or attitude or argument, but another viewer will frame it and tell a totally different story about that photograph that shifts its meaning. So the example of that of course, is the children overboard photograph that was circulated at the time of that debate about refugees. So if everyone remembers, a photograph produced by the Navy was circulated and it showed people in the water, refugees in the water with Navy personnel. Some of them were children that were wearing life jackets, but in a very well-known radio interview with Virginia Trioli, I think Peter Reith said, "look, here you are Virginia, you can see plain as day, this photograph of children who have been thrown overboard as a ploy." So the asylum seekers were being framed as a kind of person who would throw their own children into the water in order to trick the government. And Virginia Trioli, won a Walkley Award because she pushed back very strongly and said, "But this doesn't show anything of the kind, it simply shows a bunch of people who are in the water." And he said, "Well, you know if you want to question me, do you want to question the Navy?"

But as we all know, an inquiry subsequently showed actually that those photographs had been taken while the ship was sinking, and it did not show people throwing their own children overboard. So I think that's a really good example of the way that images can be highly politicised and used as evidence for one side or the other.

MICHAEL LUND:
I'll bring Chris in at this point… politicised images, really? Does that happen?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Mm. Not on my watch. Look we might talk about the children overboard and perhaps even some of the Tampa imagery that have played quite a, I guess had an impact on the conduct of even federal elections in this country. I know Jane has written about those kinds of images and their impact. If we can just veer away for a moment, something occurred to me as Jane was talking, especially about the way that, you know, images can be framed and presented. And certainly, this is very much in the political realm. We often see this.

It struck me that, and this isn't necessarily confined to a point in time even, you know, several years down the track a well-known image may be revisited or revived for purposes of re-interpretation or recasting meaning. And I was just struck then, I'm not sure what brought it to mind, but the image that I think had an anniversary this year of Nicky Winmar, Australian Rules Footballer standing in Victoria Park in Melbourne. I know this is veering away from the realm of politics, but it's a very political image. And was, I think even politicised just recently, that some commentators sought to revisit that image and recast its meaning, and somehow suggest that Winmar wasn't making the stand that was portrayed I think it was 25 years ago. Suggesting that, you know, as an Aboriginal, as an Indigenous football player, he was fully deserving to be in that place at that time.

But just early this year I believe, commentators sought to perhaps alter the meaning of that image and suggest that's not necessarily what he was implying, or that it was even an image that brought into question the racist attitudes of players and then subsequently club officials. Now that I think got fairly promptly kind of shouted down. And those who made or suggested those kinds of re-interpretation were forced to perhaps reflect on what's really a majority view of how that image was represented 25 years ago and still today. But again it's an interesting notion, that pictures don't need to be necessarily frozen in time and their interpretation sort of confined to a particular historical moment. That if there are those who seek to refashion and recast imagery it can still be something that bubbles up from time to time.

MICHAEL LUND:
Interesting. Drawing upon that then, let me… this idea that an image can change its meaning and changing its power over time. How do you think images of today - it's been an interesting year the whole planet plunged into this pandemic - how do you think the images of today are going to be viewed in future years by people? And I'm thinking of some of the images that I feel culturally embarrassed about, people brawling in supermarkets over toilet rolls, countered with seeing images of mass graves, of body bags held into the back of trucks, you know, some horrific images, but yet brawling in supermarkets. So how will the images of today do you think be seen by future generations? Cherine? Plunge you in on that one!

CHERINE FAHD:
Well, I can't stop thinking about the toilet paper photographs. Yeah, look, I don't know, I mean how do we see them? I found I couldn't believe it really. Like when I think about my Instagram feed at the beginning of the year, and you know, take the toilet paper photographs because we all laugh at them. Then when I think back to those empty shelves of toilet paper, that was, I don't know, it was shocking. Because I don’t know, it symbolised, it exemplified something that I was not accustomed to, and that was, you know, it was every person for themselves. And that the kind of hoarding, you know, those photographs, they represented this sort of, you know, individualistic and hoarding fear, there's all this symbolism in those photographs.

And it's interesting to think back to them now because straight, almost immediately after, during lockdown suddenly we found photographs on our, you know, about public spaces kind of, you know, portraying the same thing, they were empty. And it was this kind of idea of emptiness that we were so unaccustomed to at least in, you know, urban spaces, pictures of the airports, or even if I think of the Opera House. I took a photograph of the Opera House steps about three weeks ago. And there's still no one on the Opera House steps. And it's still empty and it's such a strange place. And I think, you know, things like empty supermarket shelves, empty highways, empty, you know, football stadiums, these are things that we've never seen before, not on our home ground, you know, so things that often you see elsewhere, but not at home.

MICHAEL LUND:
We've seen those images in many of the zombie horror apocalyptic films that, (CROSSTALKS) is this why the emptiness feels uncomfortable to what you're seeing today? Because it, because you're mirroring that with something that you've seen fictionalised and that's worrying, that's unnerving, that's scary almost?

CHERINE FAHD:
Yeah, it's and I think in The Conversation article I wrote about those empty spaces, you know, I think it's…and we described it Sarah Oscar who was my co-writer, we described it as uncanny. It was something uncanny. And you know, it's when it's both familiar and unfamiliar. So,you know, the familiarity comes from that we see it depicted elsewhere in popular culture, and visual culture, in Hollywood cinema. You know, but not in everyday life and certainly not in Australia. So yeah, I think it was a strange time.

JANE LYDON:
There's also a really interesting genre of images, I don't know what you thought about those Cherine, showing, they're kind of romantic. They show, you know, the canals of Venice that are clear with fish and, you know nature is kind of fighting back. And so, I wonder whether those will be seen as in a kind of nostalgic romantic way in the future because they... yeah, what do you think about that?

CHERINE FAHD:
There is actually a genre of photography, I don't know if you'd even call it a genre, but there's a particular style of photography that, you know, seeks to photograph places without people. And I think it's the world without us, I think is the idea, that is, it's very romantic. You know, it's kind of, I think this is also why people are drawn to drone photography. So, you know, you've got this kind of bird's eye view of the world, you know, without us in it. And yeah, I don't know. I don't know what that comes from. I guess it is a kind of, there's a term called ‘ruin porn’, which we've discussed in our article, which was about you know kind of the desire to photograph ruins.

And there was something, and since ‘ruin porn’ kind of evolved, there's been other forms of this kind of visual porn where we get excited over particular places and seeing them in particular ways and often that is without us in them. So it's like, you know, what the world looks like, you know, without human presence or human traits.

MICHAEL LUND:
That brings me to another point. You don't have to wait for an empty space these days. Kids these days get out the Photoshop and wipe out the people. How important is it for photographers really, to present an image as what is really happening, or how much of what we are seeing has been manipulated, edited, changed by the photographers and those who present those images to us? And should we worry about that? Jane.

JANE LYDON:
The professional, the photojournalists that I know or whose work I follow and sometimes, you know, in forums on social media, I'll be very interested actually to see debates about exactly that question because they care so much. And for them, it's a matter of professional honour and integrity not to modify an image. And they are extremely critical of a colleague, of their colleagues, you know, of other photographers who do that, who improve the aesthetics of an image by perhaps shifting the framework or adding something or taking something out, because for them, the photograph is proof, it's news and it documents events. And therefore, that's an ethical breach if they do that. I find that really impressive actually.

MICHAEL LUND:
It is. And I know photographers as well who share the same sort of belief. But at the same time, we all know that it's very easy to manipulate an image, even by the way it's taken in the first place. Chris, this comes back to the political manipulation of photographs. How much can, sort of, those kind of images affect our perception of politics and politicians?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Well, I suspect that politicians would hope greatly because I know that there are, you know, governments have media and photography units for instance, and have done for some time. And they're quite conscious of imagery and, you know, moment and message and how those are portrayed and indeed received by the public and to the point where, yes, manipulation perhaps is possibly part and parcel or acceptable even as a part of that communication between politicians and the electorate. I think that is kind of a separate or at least outside the bounds of what we've just been mentioning in terms of professional integrity and or even, you know, aesthetic integrity. This is a kind of a whole different subset, I think, of imagery as message, as communication, where it's perhaps quite permissible and, you know, approved for imagery to be tweaked, adjusted, to have especially politicians, you know, cast in the most positive light possible.

MICHAEL LUND:
Do you think that's to the detriment of politics that they're so concerned about the way that they're portrayed photographically in still and moving image?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
I guess the purest in me would say yes, detrimental. Perhaps it's something we've become immune to or, you know, very much used to. So, whether it's detrimental to the political discourse or the quality of our politics, perhaps others could offer an opinion. But it's certainly part and parcel, I think, today.

MICHAEL LUND:
And just a reminder that we will be taking questions shortly from people. If you want to submit something via the Facebook page for the State Library or in the chat box on the State Library website.

But just keeping on that image of politics, I mean how much can photography drive a movement these days? And I'm thinking of the George Floyd images that we've seen both still and moving images that, you know, really captured a movement around the world. Or was that movement already there and it just needed a nudge from a powerful image or a photograph. Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
I think you're right, the movement is already there, but the footage becomes the kind of, that tipping point. It's this, it's almost like the last straw. It's the evidence. It's the final bit of evidence needed. It's also in that case, I think it's indisputable evidence. And I think you know that... I mean I found that very interesting, the way in which, you know, that footage was shot, the way in which it was watched and re-watched, the way in which it was circulated via social media, and the power that kind of, you know, in terms of Black Lives Matter and the Black Square on Instagram and everything else that followed. So, yeah, I think that definitely it can't, you know, it doesn't exist in a bubble of its own. And some, you know, create something spontaneously out of nowhere that that movement in that debate and that frustration must already be there. And the image just becomes this kind of very powerful catalyst for, you know, taking to the streets or rioting or protesting, you know, images, actors, activism in those contexts. I'm really interested in when they do.

MICHAEL LUND:
One of the interesting things I noticed over the years about that when I first started reporting in Queensland I did many a protest, and then suddenly the protests disappeared from the streets of Brisbane and everything went online. And your support against or for a protest movement was whether you liked, clicked, or shared something and the streets were empty. But we're seeing those street protests return and every protester seems to have a camera in hand. Is that because we need to see a protest in order to take account of it these days? Jane?

JANE LYDON:
Yeah, look, I think it's an interesting question, and I think again sometimes it's that moment of shock or revelation that the photograph speaks to. So, we have our own Black Lives Matter campaign here in Australia, and we've had our own moments of revelation, which somehow breaks through the complacency or the apathy or the lack of engagement, you know people, you know that phrase ‘compassion fatigue’. And sometimes it's the media that initiates that. So for example, if you remember the Don Dale moment on the Four Corners program that was found a couple of years ago, that shocked and horrified people to see children, juvenile offenders being locked up and mistreated in detention. But another case of course, is the case of Ms Dhu, who died in prison in Port Hedland. She was unwell. She was... her complaints were not taken seriously and she died the next morning. So, after the coronial inquiry, her family insisted that the CCTV footage be publicly released. As painful as that was, they wanted everyone to see it. And again I think that galvanised, that had a political impact.

The question about whether that will make people get out on the streets, I mean, it seems to have. There seems to have been a concatenation of events and movements that have led to this kind of street activity. And the exhibition that we’re here talking about, the TWENTY exhibition, I think captures that very extensively and shows a lot of those key moments on Brisbane and Queensland streets, you know from the Stop Adani movement through to Black Lives Matter.

MICHAEL LUND:
Chris, do you think being able to see images of those protests, of those movements, do you think affects the politicians? Does that make them think?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
I think certainly, you know, in some respects image is key and that pertains to both those protesting and the authorities perhaps looking to bed down movements and protest in the streets. That's long been the case I think. It's far more difficult today for political leaders and authorities to effectively control.

But it's interesting that the images from events like those, and that we can see in the TWENTY exhibit, that show either static protests or quite active marches through the streets of Brisbane and elsewhere in Queensland, are captured by those taking part, but also by those either documenting or by those authorities in place to attempt to control or at least to, you know, steer protests in particular directions, whatever the case. But the capturing of images and then the use of particular images from those events, is not just a one-way street. You know, even going back to the images we've seen from the United States, there's photography and video image that's captured by police officers, by dashboard cameras that are part and parcel, I guess, of modern policing. But that also can be a part of that spark that leads to, you know, suddenly a movement forming and hitting the streets. So, it’s very difficult to control or as we've mentioned earlier, to kind of foresee how particular images might have an impact, but both sides of the equation, if we're talking about protest movements, attempt to do that.

CHERINE FAHD:
How much do you think the Arab Spring contributed to this coupling of social media and protest? Because I think it was you that said this Michael, or Jane I'm not sure. You know, there was this period where people weren't taking to the streets for a long time. It seemed like an outdated mode of activism, the protest. But I feel like for some reason, you know in my memory, the Arab Spring became this pivotal moment of citizen journalism where social media became active in ways that it hadn't been before. And it was kind of coupled with protest and activism. And it became a way of furthering a particular cause. Yeah, I just wondered whether you had any opinion on that in terms of, you know, recent protests.

MICHAEL LUND:
Jane?

JANE LYDON:
Yeah, I think that's a great example. And I think, you know, a number of people have written about exactly that moment and the kind of democratic potential of social media and photography during the Arab Spring.

But then others also write about, you know, the way that algorithms rule media and social media. And so, you know, even though we feel like we're taking our own images and we're sharing them and we're presenting our own perspective, ultimately these different platforms, they're the boss and they kind of marshal the images and they end up shoehorning those images into the meanings, you know, the kind of dominant, fairly limited range of frameworks. So, yeah, I wonder what's happening right now.

MICHAEL LUND:
There are many ways of sharing images online as well as the dominant ones. I mean, do you think... I mentioned 1.4 trillion photographs to be taken this year apparently. Is it possible to filter out? Is it possible to censor images today like it was perhaps many years ago? Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
I think it's... I don't think so. I mean I think you can certainly, what Jane said about the algorithms, you can certainly be in a bubble of images where your interests are constantly being mirrored, and your political interests are constantly being mirrored back at you. But there's also, if you're cognisant of that, you can also play games with the algorithms in the way that, you know, I might follow all parties on Instagram. And so I wonder then, how does the algorithm understand my political leanings if I follow the Labor Party, the Greens, the Liberal Party, the Nationals. And you would have to kind of make those choices in every facet of your social media life I guess, if you really wanted to start to see if you could control your algorithmic data puzzle. I think in terms of censoring images in your own field, I think it's possibly more, it's easier to censor your behaviour or change your behaviour like having, what do they call them, digital detoxes and whatnot or not watching the news or not turning on the radio. But in terms of images, I think, you're seeing them when you're not even seeing them, they’re everywhere.

MICHAEL LUND:
We've been talking...

JANE LYDON:
And I think the whistle-blower...

MICHAEL LUND:
Go on.

JANE LYDON:
Sorry.

MICHAEL LUND:
No, you Jane.
JANE LYDON:
I was going to say I think the whistle-blower image is still very powerful, and in fact I think a lot of media now has kind of acknowledged, you know, user-generated input or whatever it's called now. And kind of codify those mechanisms for submitting dangerous information. So for example, today we saw the release of the investigation into the SAS, the Australian military forces in Afghanistan in 2012. And I understand from reading journalism about this on the ABC yesterday, Mark Willacy wrote an article that pointed to the kind of visual focus that another Four Corners program provided through the helmet cam of one of the dog handlers who was present at one of these incidents. And so, it wasn't until there was this kind of testimony, but also the visual evidence that things happened.

MICHAEL LUND:
Good, thank you. Let's turn to some of the questions that have been coming in via social media. Here’s a question from Leslie on Facebook. What are the most effective avenues for citizen photojournalists to share their images intended to influence politics or public opinion? Chris?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
I'm going to have to sort of make a confession that I'm not an avid cross-platform social media user, so I'm not perhaps the best placed to answer. I'll throw to some of my learned colleagues perhaps.

MICHAEL LUND:
That’s alright. Jane? Where should citizen photojournalists put their images to get the most influence?

JANE LYDON:
Well, according to the ABC there are a number of avenues, there are emails, and there's a kind of... in fact it's easy to find a whistle-blower line than it is to find a place to offer an opinion piece these days. So, I would just go on to any of the news outlets and scroll down, and not only other avenues but also there are particular encrypted platforms that guarantee security of the information you're sharing.

MICHAEL LUND:
Wow. My advice would be publish anywhere and everywhere you possibly can. Another question, Gary from Victoria. Where does this - alludes to what we were talking to earlier - where does the line exist between the ethics of photography versus the need to publish an image for the shock value alone? Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
Yeah, this is a really interesting, important question. Look, I think with news... I've never worked in a newsroom. I've studied, you know the ethics of images and taking images in particular, because I'm a photographer. And this, you know, and the question of should I take the photograph or should I exhibit the photograph is always present with news images. I think from my understanding is, you know, it's about the public's right to know. And so I think that picture editors and journalists will publish things based on that, like the public has a right to know and that that image is information and that we need to see that. And I think also that question of what is sensationalised for one person is not for another necessarily. So, it's a very difficult thing to measure. I think it's a very difficult thing to have a position that's right or wrong. Sometimes, you know, you have a gut instinct about something that oh that's not right or, you know, yes we needed to say that, but I can't actually say when and how that happens.

I mean, you know, the Alan Kurdi image which we come back to again and again, I think it's a shocking image and we'd all be better off not seeing it, but it was an important image to see. So…

MICHAEL LUND:
I remember back in the UK there was a big debate about what should or shouldn't be shown on TV news. And a bunch of MPs were given some raw footage from news organisations and asked to draw the line on a particular shocking incident about where they would stop showing the footage. And every one of the MPs went far further than the newsrooms went, which I thought was a very interesting challenge.

Just turning the debate on its head, I have a question here from Rudy. With the speed that photographs are forgotten or sidelined, are photos overestimated? Jane, one for you, I think.

JANE LYDON:
Yeah, so we've been talking about the impact of photographs and how important they are and so on and so on, but yeah, a lot of images have no real impact or, you know, our gaze sort of flicks across them and then, you know, do they register or not and often they don't. Or even images that do make an impression on us we're very quick to forget. And so, many photo theorists have pointed this out and have actually been quite hostile towards a photograph. So Susan Sontag, a very famous writer about photography, was characteristic of what some people call this hostile interpretive tradition, where she actually talks down the effect of the photograph and says, "Well, at the end of the day, what does it do? Not very much." So, of course, she changed her mind or she was, you know, she had a lot of different views and people have disagreed with her. But I think that does speak to the fact that, you know, that is perhaps a major aspect of that process of consuming images. They may not have an impact, we may forget about them, they'll disappear.

MICHAEL LUND:
That comes back to my comment about 1.4 trillion images. Do we... should we go back to the days where we're all limited only to go out in the streets with 12 film photos to take? So we’re much more careful about what we do take? Another question from Emma… sorry, you were going to say Cherine?

CHERINE FAHD:
I was going to say I still took too many images with film!

MICHAEL LUND:
And they were expensive to process. Question from Emma, are we dependent on imagery in our society today? Chris?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Probably the short answer is yes. I don't necessarily see that as a negative, but certainly in terms of the information, you know, this is supposedly the information age. We've never had greater access to, you know, various sources and broad origin sources of information. But imagery is still part and parcel of that, I think.

I mean, going back to a point that Jane mentioned, I think we've probably all canvassed of identifying some kind of relatability or sort of humanity in imagery that might stick with us. I think this makes the visual image a very important tool in communicating and making something perhaps more permanent than it might otherwise be in the absence of any image.

MICHAEL LUND:
Another question here from Erin in Brisbane. Where does the social responsibility of the photographer to their subject lie? Interesting question. It seems like the winning photo is more important in some situations. Cherine, the responsibility of the photographer?

CHERINE FAHD:
I think the photographer has a huge responsibility, and I think it's important as a photographer to be informed, and to have an ethical awareness of the power that you have ultimately as a photographer. I think, you know, that the relationship between the photographer and subject is inherent to all photographic encounters. And you know the camera has been, or Sontag like you mentioned Jane, she likened the camera to a gun. It's a weapon. We look at the language of photography, it's one of violence. You ask someone, can I take a shot of you? We blow the image up. You know, it’s called a photoshoot. So, it’s this language. And you only need to open up National Geographic and read an account of a photographer photographing something. And it is often described in terms of, you know, like a battle. So, the camera is like an all-seeing eye. And so the photographer is kind of complicit in that.

And, you know, I think when I hold a camera that I am in a position of power, and it is my job not to exploit that power. And if anything, my area is in portraiture and it's often my job to try and equalise that, create an equivalence between me and subject, and to try and find ways for the subject to collaborate and participate in the photographic process where it's not just me kind of making orders or demands of the subject. So, I think the photographer-subject relationship is a really, really interesting one. And it's often, to study it, I think in a way it's at the heart of photography because it's about you pointing your camera at someone or something. That's the starting point for this kind of ethical question.

MICHAEL LUND:
Yeah, very good point. Another question from Jane here in Brisbane, is there tension between the social functional purpose of a photograph and the artistic value? Jane, I think that’s for you.

JANE LYDON:
So, yeah, I think there often is. So, we think we've talked about a few images that are formally or aesthetically beautiful, but which are very troubling in terms of what they show us. So the Falling Man for example. And I think people have really struggled with this, you know, there is talk about ‘beautiful suffering’. There is something very disturbing about seeing human suffering that is nonetheless compelling because it's quite beautiful. So, yeah, I think there often is that tension. And again, that speaks to that question of ethics and the ethical relationship that Cherine has just been talking about. So, I'd suggest that it's not just about the photographer and her subject, but also about the way that that image is framed and reframed over time. So, when I’ve worked with historical images, they are often taken 100 years ago for a particular purpose, but we would never show those images today in the same way. So, although they might be visually striking. I think there's always an ethical question about, you know who do you… do you get permission from a family? Do you choose not to reproduce that image?

MICHAEL LUND:
Tricky. Coming to the end of our talk fairly soon. Just a sort of bit of final advice, if somebody wanted to take an image today that they would hope would be powerful, what advice would you give them? Chris?

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Shoot early, shoot often. Yes, I guess, as we've said, broadcast the image across multiple platforms. An image, you know, will rarely I guess speak to every member of an audience. But I suppose, and this might be just a scattergun kind of approach, but yeah, I guess broadcasting or projecting an image through multiple mediums, media channels.

MICHAEL LUND:
Thank you. And I ask you to keep your responses brief. Jane, just very briefly, what would you advise?

JANE LYDON:
I’m a historian so I don't look into the future in quite that way, but I would take a Polaroid, or I would print out my photographs and put them in a biscuit tin and bury them.

MICHAEL LUND:
Cherine, just very briefly.

CHERINE FAHD:
I would say you don't set out to make a powerful image, but you can set out to make a powerful connection with somebody, and sometimes that results in a powerful image.

MICHAEL LUND:
Beautiful. Thank you very much. Well, I'm afraid that's all we have time for. I'd like to thank Cherine Fahd from the University of Technology Sydney, Chris Salisbury from The University of Queensland, Jane Lydon from the University of Western Australia. A fascinating discussion, thank you all for your time.

And we hope you enjoyed the discussion. You can visit the State Library of Queensland website to explore the images from the TWENTY exhibition online, free of charge, and discover more about citizen journalism. You can also read articles, essays by each of our speakers on The Conversation website, conversation.com/au.

This event is presented by the State Library of Queensland and The Conversation, the world's leading free fact-based news source written by academics and edited by journalists. So, thank you all for joining us. Goodbye.

JANE LYDON:
Thank you.

CHRIS SALISBURY:
Thank you, Michael.