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FEATURE

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## A VISUAL THINKER

For **Daniel Schwartz**, photography is more than reportage, it is a vehicle through which he can investigate the world. A new publication from Thames & Hudson takes us on a journey through his remarkable archive. Elizabeth McClair Roberts reports.

How do you present a whole lifetime of work, particularly when its preoccupations cross boundaries as far apart as cultural history, political geography and the environment? Maybe you approach it in the way editor Beat Wismer took Swiss photographer

Daniel Schwartz's archive, from 1974 to 2021, and turned it into a captivating journey through many world regions and the people who inhabit them. Maybe, also, you focus on the underlying and deeply felt humanity that runs through all the work. If you do that, you might produce a

book as fine as *Tracings: Photography and Thought*, Schwartz's new book published by Thames & Hudson.

Schwartz is a remarkable man. Not only a documentary photographer of some renown, he was also, from 1990 to 2005, a photographer and editorial contributor





The anchor chain, Bach Dang Shipyard, Haiphong, Vietnam, 30 September 1993

for the cultural magazine *Du*. He has released numerous books and he has been published internationally.

*Tracings* invites the reader to interact with its pages. It opens with a series of black & white images in which we find ourselves immersed in situations that most of us have never experienced: war and deprivation, abandonment and desperation, the environment and its catastrophic changes. But within these confines we see people, struggling but surviving, unwilling to capitulate to the circumstances forced upon them. And we see this through the

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The work is divided up into six sections – Motif, Association, Absence, Form, Observation and Duration – with essays written by Wismer, Fanni Fetzner and Giovanna Calvenzi. These are complex and thoughtful texts that enhance and expand

is an intricate and sophisticated volume that rewards the time spent with it.

In his acknowledgments at the back of the book, Schwartz writes: 'Photography is a vagabond among the arts, and it lies in the nature of the craft that a certain something, mechanically or unconsciously netted in the frame at the instant of its creation, emerges much later, and in retrospect appears to be still potent and declarative.'

I think this remark sums up the photographer's approach, both at the time of shooting and in the way he uses his

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Scavenger on the Bantar Gebang dump, Bekasi, Java Barat province, Indonesia, 14 November 1994

46  
B-W



The bamboo pole, Quang Ninh province, Vietnam, 30 July 2000

archive to uncover the heartfelt statements about how he understands the world and what he aspires to for its future. These are not lightly held views.

Fetzer writes in her essay: 'He does what he does because it interests him, and because he believes that his role as a photographer is to get close to human chaos, clashes and interventions.' She continues: 'Daniel Schwartz invites us to really look and trust in our own ability to read the image.' Between this doing and our receiving is the interaction that every photographer should hope for – that intimate link that asks us to participate in a dialogue.

Following this line of thought, Calvenzi writes in his essay: 'The path to *Tracings* was deliberately demanding... [it] came about as a process and in response to a need to retrospectively identify connections that have arisen since the mid-1970s. According to Schwartz, each of his books represents a particular stage in the development of his way of seeing, and each book reflects his altered experience as an observer.'

The book as a whole is an odyssey of imagery and the thinking that underlies it. It's a journey in which the craft of photography is used to explore a train of ideas which can be batted back and forth between the photographer and the viewer. It is, at times, challenging but like much that demands our attention, it acts as an enhancement to our understanding of what is an impressive body of work.

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**Tracings: Photography and Thought**  
by Daniel Schwartz accompanies an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, Switzerland, until 4 February 2024. The book is published in hardback by **Thames & Hudson**, price £50.  
[thamesandhudson.com](https://www.thamesandhudson.com)



Departure at -10°C, Siziwang Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, 30 December 1987



Underground life, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 4 March 2000