

AMIN YOUSEFI

Imagine Amin Yousefi looking through his camera and into those pre-1979 faces, collapsing the stack between now and 1978–1979. The geography between London, where he made the project, and Iran. We will see what was going on in the minds of those eyes during the revolution. The point is *something* on, and photography is pretty much looking unknown *something* significant. 'It seems that their gaze was waiting for my eyes for decades, through a multitude of lenses and reaching me', he writes.

The psychodynamics of re-photographing are complex. Yes, it always feels a little transgressive to do it, and a little transgressive to look at the results. But against the notion of appropriation and theft, there is an equal and opposite notion of homage. Of paying close attention. Of respect. Of communion. Re-photographing also makes us look slower and closer, accepting what cannot be known but must be thought, nonetheless. It keeps the door open.

— Text by David Company

All images from the series *Eyes Dazzle as They Search for the Truth* © Amin Yousefi, courtesy of the artist

AMIN YOUSEFI holds an MA in Photography from the University of Westminster. A native of Abadan in the province of Khuzestan, Iran's most oil-rich region and the scene of bloody war with neighbouring Iraq, Amin's work examines the event of photography, the sociopolitical aspect of the medium, the violence against protests in the Middle East, and how the act of photography can conceptually mirror the structures of these relationships. Amin's work and writing have been featured in *Aperture*, and he has participated in several exhibitions, awards, and prizes, such as Carte Blanche Awards, Ag Talent, and Der Greif.

DAVID COMPANYY is a curator, writer, and managing director of programmes at the International Center of Photography, New York. His work has been published by MACK, MIT Press, and Kehrer Verlag, amongst others; and recent titles include *On Photographs* (2020), *So Present, So Invisible — Conversations on Photography* (2018), and *A Handful of Dust* (2015). In 2020, David curated the Biennale für Aktuelle Fotografie in Mannheim, Germany.

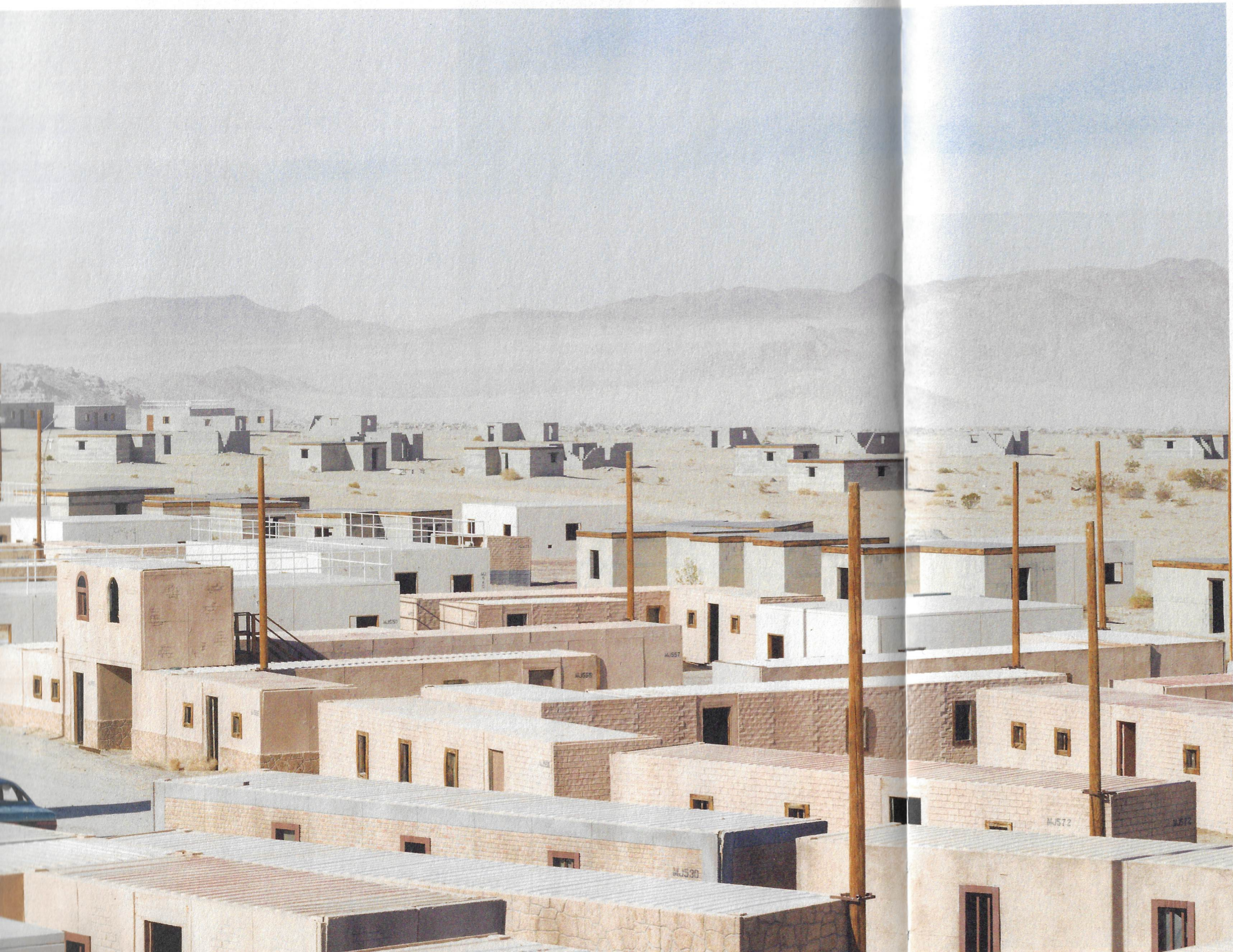
ANDREA OREJARENA & CALEB STEIN

75

American Glitch

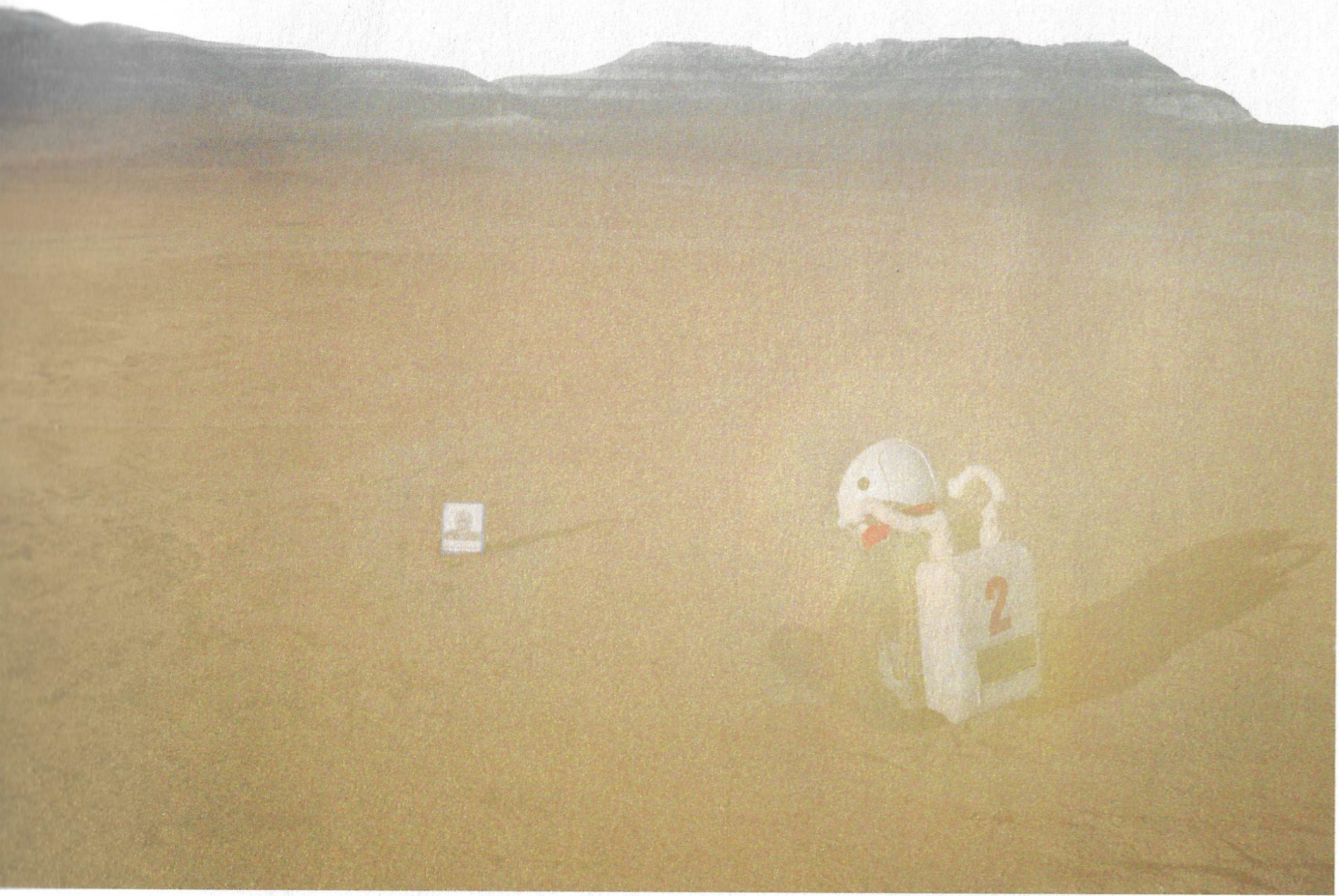














American Glitch



The digital and virtual realms may bear the promise of perfection, of a seamless and flawless world, yet the opposite is true. Behind veils of perfection, and more often as part of the veil, imperfections show up. Technology is human, after all, and so is all its ‘glitches’.

Before I learned about the project *American Glitch* by artist duo Andrea Orejarena and Caleb Stein, I’d never even pondered the dictionary meaning and origin of the term *glitch*. Surprisingly, the word is rather young and comes from astronauts’ slang describing a malfunction (first registered in 1962 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*). It’s a *hitch* or *snag*. As an intransitive verb ‘to experience a glitch’ means a setback, a malfunction, or for things to go wrong. A glitch is not unlike a bug, yet is rather something more mysterious, alluding to the unexpected and unprogrammable (*glitch* is sometimes described as an acronym for *Gremlins Lurking In The Computer Hardware*).

For Orejarena and Stein, the notion of glitch proves a fruitful framework for reflecting on many questions, not least on the ubiquitous medium of photography

and its changing meaning and purpose in the screen age — where the ‘poor image’, in Hito Steyerl’s term, circulates in unfathomable quantities. They also wondered as to what registers as a glitch in a still image compared to the moving image (in an essay in their upcoming eponymous book, David Campy reflects on glitches in relation to the virtual in American cinema).

In a statement on *American Glitch*, the artists refer to the ‘ocean of information’ in which we’re living now, leaving us ‘perpetually asking what’s real and what’s fake’. The idea that we’re living in a simulation is becoming more popular. This notion ‘appears online where images are posted as personal evidence of spotting a “glitch in real life”’. Such ideas have been explored in popular films like *The Matrix* (1999) and *The Truman Show* (1998), as Orejarena and Stein point out.

For many years, several of them during Covid-19 lockdowns, the artists have been exploring the World Wide Web (akin to ‘our collective subconscious’) in search of evidence of real-life glitches on social media posts and in Reddit conversations. This search led to a large archive on the artists’

computers of threads and images, which became ‘a place for a new form of community and connection across time and space’.

Are Americans living in a simulation and can proof to the contrary be found in the land (of mountains, deserts, forests, and farmlands) that ultimately delivers the raw materials that fuel our virtualities? As a way of placemaking — adapting to their new homeland — the duo set out to travel by car the vast United States, to which Orejarena immigrated from Colombia and Stein from the United Kingdom, to photograph sites reminding them (or the conspiracists on the internet) of glitches in real settings. Could the artists find proof for all the wild theories they’d encountered in the virtual rabbit holes?

Some of the photographs they took on the road appeal to the tradition and grandeur of American landscape photography. Others are as surreal and mysterious as the imagery collected in Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel’s *Evidence* (1977), which through its interweaving of science fiction, technological experiments, and catastrophe, questions conventional wisdom about photographic truth in the same manner as

American Glitch, albeit before the internet and social media began complicating this even further.

The project continues the string of intriguing photographic-artistic views on the United States by outsiders (often duos as well), such as quite recently, for example, *The Great Unreal* (2009) by the Swiss duo Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs, whose comical and daring approach to the American landscape turned things upside down in their collages, in a satirical wink to the earnestness which often characterises domestic American landscape photography (think of the New Topographics).

Orejarena and Stein step into this venerable tradition (already by the plain grandeur of their title *American Glitch*, eighty-five years after Walker Evans' *American Photographs*) as relative insiders, but

coming to the landscape with their heads filled with glitches unimaginable to earlier photographic explorers of a United States that seems to become weirder by the decade. Not least by virtue of all the (military) secrecy playing out in the backlands, visible parts, or remnants of which fuel an entire conspiracy business (such as speculation about visiting extraterrestrials).

One telling image in *American Glitch* shows a pattern of roads in the desert in the shape of some Martian computer motherboard, as seen from the sky. Here, real estate speculation went awry, as the prospected suburbs never got built, and perhaps never will. The artists call it 'the perfect suburban cul-de-sac'. I'm left to wonder as to what constitutes the glitches here?

— Text by Taco Hidde Bakker

All images from the series *American Glitch* © Andrea Orejarena and Caleb Stein, courtesy of the artists

ANDREA OREJARENA & CALEB STEIN are an artist duo based in New York. Their work uses the intersection of technology, memory, and desire to explore American mythologies as they grapple with their relationship to their adopted home. Orejarena & Stein are fascinated with the emergent property that comes with making each photograph together with a single camera. Their work explores notions of the collective and collaboration in an often individualistic medium. Their work involves extensive research into collective image-making and the ocean of images surrounding us. Their work has been exhibited internationally and is in a number of permanent collections, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Nguyen Art Foundation, and the Ann Tenenbaum & Thomas H. Lee Collection. Their book *Long Time No See* was published by Jiazazhi Press in 2022 and is in the special collections library of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA, amongst others. Andrea & Caleb have a forthcoming book, *American Glitch*, published by Gnomonic Book in 2024 with an introduction by David Company.

TACO HIDDE BAKKER is a writer, teacher, and curator in the field of the arts, specialising in photography. He studied at two art schools and obtained an MA in Photographic Studies at Leiden University. He has contributed writing to numerous artists' books, catalogues, and magazines, amongst which *Camera Austria*, *Foam Magazine*, the *British Journal of Photography*, and *Trigger*. He is the author of *The Photograph That Took the Place of a Mountain* (Fw:Books, 2018), a collection of essays and other writings on photography and visual art. Taco teaches Theory at the Utrecht University of the Arts (HKU Media).

CRISTÓBAL ASCENCIO Las flores mueren dos veces

