

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN
PhD Thesis in Fine Arts and Decorative Arts

**THE ARTISTIC IMAGE BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE
IMAGINARY. PHOTOGRAPHY AS ART**

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The characteristic feature of the representation of exterior reality in arts results from the exclusively visual access of knowledge and from the primacy of the emotional approach, as opposed to the rational one of science and philosophy.

The artist has no choice: he relies only on what his senses and understanding capacity grasp from the surrounding reality, namely the **appearance**. Thought and imagination arrange, select and transform the elements extracted from reality, and also add new ones. The incomplete vision, at first sight, will be modified by new waves of sensations, reasonings and wishes. Eventually satisfied, the artist will make this accessible appearance "his reality". It will be the source of his creation, his work.

Plato wanted a meaningful art, *opened towards an idea*. For centuries, following Greek thinking, reality was considered as a hidden way of things, because they are covered by their sensitive appearance. *Therefore, to capture reality does not mean to gain what you see, but what is beyond what you see*. The interest of art in nature cannot therefore be restricted to capturing sensitive reality, the surface appearance, accessible to the senses.

In his turn, Aristotle (384-322 BC) extensively discusses the relationship between nature and art, using the term "mimesis," imitation, other than making a copy identical to the model. For him, art is incapable of truth and essentially remains only the appearance of things. He admits that art does not really claim to be truth, an act of knowledge. Instead, he emphasizes its role of discharging passions, "catharsis", hence its therapeutic function.

Medieval Thomist philosophy formulated a similar adage: "Ars imitatur naturam." Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) was equating "similitudo et imago". Such concepts have encouraged arts orientation towards nature in the transition to the Renaissance. Magister Eckhart (1260-1327) doubted the possibility of authentic mirroring, at least in portraiture, saying: *Whoever and whenever sees my resemblance does not see me, because my face is not*

my nature.

After the decline of medieval arts, "mimetic virtuosity" regained the ancient splendor of Renaissance humanism. Man was now apotheosized in the light of high values: *dignitas, maiestas, nobilitas, magnificentia, generositas, gravitas*. Michelangelo sacred even the act of creation, relating it to God: *Good painting is nothing but a copy of the perfection of God, a reminder of divine painting, music and a tune that intellect can perceive only with great difficulty*. A modern revival of this idea (V.I. Stoichiță) transfers "imitation" from copying nature to the resemblance of the action of the artist to that of divinity at the time of creation: therefore it does not mimic creation, but creativity.

Such performance cannot be achieved by a simple "anatomical mold", by blind copying ("*imitatio*"). It requires selecting and settling forms ("*electio*"), followed by image reconstruction as a mental project. The requirement is illustrated by another legend: the same famous Zeuxis would have been asked by the Agrigento city leaders to paint a portrait of beautiful Helen. First, he asked to see all the young girls of the place naked and chose five of them as a model. He then took from each one the most beautiful and well proportioned parts and recomposed an image that had great success. Rafael used to tell this story to his disciples and this is how he painted his admirable Madonnas.

The Renaissance was a time of peak for art and knowledge, for Man in its highest sense.

As we are part of nature, art is also a natural fact, but a separate entity independent of nature, sometimes its opposite. The artist takes the observed image not by isolating it, but in its emotional and conceptual context. Therefore, the creative act is correlated with many determinants, aesthetic and extra-aesthetic (cultural, historical, religious, social, etc.). Only by understanding them as a whole "the artist transforms the invisible into visible": *To capture reality does not mean to gain what you see, but what is beyond what you see. The interest of art in nature does not mean capturing sensitive reality.*

The problem has been the object of extensive analysis. Kant attributed to art the capacity to establish a relationship between the universe and the human mind, like philosophy. Schelling found that art has the privilege of possessing the most reliable means of transposition of the spirit to the absolute. Truth would then be a particular form of aesthetic perfection (H. Keyserling, see idem). Gaston Bachelard spoke of a "feeling for nature", located at the root of all feelings and therefore "filial feeling." He invoked in this sense the psychoanalytic view of Mary Bonaparte: *Nature is an all-comprehensive eternal mother projected into the infinite. Nature is sentimentally a projection of the mother.*

Roland Barthes draws our attention that humanity seems to be condemned in its creation to "analogy", i.e. servitude to nature. Hence painters endeavor to get rid of it. But how, he asks: *By two contrary excesses: either by pretending to have a spectacularly platitudinous respect for it (thus saving the copy made) or by distorting the mimicked subject (anamorphosis).*

Through an expressive metaphor, Eugenio d'Ors shows that in order to produce art, *our spirit takes a piece of reality and surrounds it, inventing the artistic image.* Moreover, figurative thinking is what manages through continuous invention to capture the *expressive sense of reality.* If we find everything we want in nature, we must be educated and inspired enough to want only what (and how much) is necessary for the development of our work. That is to express reality, but in terms that are not fully ... realistic.

Romanticism dramatically exacerbated the weight of the subjective factor in the act of artistic creation. The focus shifted from external representations (for others) to inner experience. The operation is not easy, and therefore in art there are few pioneers, those "giants on whose shoulders dwarfs stand", where they can see without effort far away, like in science.

Art had long gained autonomy, the battle had been won and its rivalry to nature ceased. Therefore artists changed their direction of action. They learnt to look not only around them, but more and more inside them. For a long time they stopped painting what they saw, but what they perceived. This dynamics of conceptions was extremely vivid in the course of history, marked by many a contradiction.

If in the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti saw *roots planted in nature*, Eugene Delacroix, during the romantic period, said that *nature is only a dictionary where one can look for the meaning of words, from where one can extract the elements that make up a sentence or a story, but no one has ever considered a dictionary as a composition.* Gauguin will express exactly the same. He recommends his friend, Schuffnecker not to copy too much from nature, but after extracting the fundamental elements of the image, to think more about creation. It is the position of all the great artists of the past, although not always declarative, becoming increasingly stronger, the battle flag of the moderns. Knowing when and where to stop the representation of nature means to "feel it", which involves the subjectivity of each artist.

The great English landscape painter John Constable distinguished two equally important aspects of the artist-nature relationship: *the artist must be a patient disciple of nature*, but he must also learn *the art of seeing nature*, a very difficult thing to achieve. Whistler proposed a very plastic image: *Telling a painter that nature should be taken as it is*

is like telling a musician that he can sit at the piano. Nature contains color and form, elements of all paintings, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music.

An enthusiastic apologist of modernity, the poet Andre Breton (1925), criticizing the narrow conception of imitation, showed that *the error was to think that the model could be taken only from the outside world*. He saw the future of art in its detachment from it: *Today all spirits agree with the revision of art. Plastic work will refer to a purely interior model or will not be*. Another writer, who was also an art critic, August Strindberg, asked: *We should paint what we see in ourselves and not copy the mountains and plains, because they are inexpressible*.

The traditional restriction imposed on art by reality was deplored by many voices. The first abstractionist, Kandinsky, theorized that *the suppression of the object does not diminish the expression means but multiplies them infinitely*. Hartung, in the same line, but more radically, explains: *Artistic expression was constrained by the represented reality, which is an obstacle to pure and free expression*. Piet Mondrian, who led abstractionism to the limit, included this evolution of art in a general historical trend: *Denaturalization, one of the essentials of human progress, is therefore of prime importance in neoplastic art; to denaturalize means to abstract*.

The issue was widely discussed by Guillaume Apollinaire (1913), who saw a feature of many modern artists in painting pictures without a real topic. Speaking of "pure painting" he evoked the well known status of music that enchants the audience, without however offering nature sounds like a babbling river, the noise of a torrent, the rushing wind in the forest or the harmonies of human language: *The trend is toward an entirely new art that will be to painting what music is to literature*.

This delineation was largely influenced by the invention of photography, which ended a dispute that lasted for centuries. This does not mean that nature was removed from the field of art. "Chase away the natural and it returns at a gallop" was uttered once. But Kandinsky himself expressed a concern: *If we break the bonds that unite us with nature and dedicate ourselves exclusively to combinations of pure colors and independent forms, we create works that are just geometric decorations*. Here is the motivation, as formulated by a philosopher: *All people become aware one day that the very nature hides a beauty that transcends and defies all arts*.

Indeed, some of the great modern artists have continued to maintain the connection to which they owed their creative force. Auguste Rodin confessed with emotion: *I obey nature in everything and never pretend to command it. My only ambition is to be its faithful slave*. To

Brancusi, *art is not an evasion from reality but an entry into the true reality, the only valid reality*. This conception is also expressed by the radical surrealist Paul Klee: *Art does not exist to reproduce the visible, but to make visible what lies beyond the visual universe*. Another great innovator, F. Leger, expressed this urge: *To be free and yet not lose touch with reality!* But as the English landscape painter, John Constable, noted in 1836, before the great success of Champollion, *the art of seeing nature is something as difficult as is the art of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics*.

A particular problem is raised by mystical "visions" and hallucinations, which are incorporated by the artist in material forms similarly to real scenes, although existing only in imagination. Since Leon Alberti, it has been emphasized: The painter only aspires to imitate what is visible in the light.

Contemporary art philosophy significantly extends the relationship between nature and art, using three goals pursued by the artist: "beautifying nature", "spiritualization of nature" and "rivalry with nature". And the bit of truth contained in art is enough to give it that quality highlighted by classics called "verisimilitude".

The first attempts to theorize the genesis of the artistic image date back to the Renaissance. Leon Battista Alberti (treatise "On Painting", 15th century) differentiated three objectives: 1. "Circumscribing shape" (determining edge, contour), 2. "Composition" (combination of things) and 3. "Light reception" (light and shadow received). At the same time, Piero della Francesca proposed another triad "drawing" (contours and profiles of objects), "measure" (proportion between them) and "color" (the way colors appear and how they change in relation to the light). The analysis of Roger de Piles (France, 17th century) is more complete, including drawing, color, composition and expression.

For artists, drawing always stood at the forefront and this is why they all had to train as excellent drawers. The relationship between line and color may vary. Wolfflin distinguished two artistic styles: "linear", characterized by clear outlines, precision and certainty of composition, and the "painterly" style, where masses of color are the main elements, while the outline may even be lost. In the Renaissance, drawing reached a high degree of perfection, especially in the Florentine school.

The contour line is the main aspect influenced by talent and originality, individualizing style through the "distortions" undertaken. It was in fact the most important invention in the fine arts, because in reality it does not exist. It was established as an artifact

to enable to define and determine the forms in order to give objects reality and individuality. *Where do they see lines in nature?*, Francisco Goya asked himself. This is why painting began with the line, and it is with it that all painters begin their work today. In figurative art drawing may be enough to express something, while color remains silent. If here, the faithful reproduction of the contour was the common ideal - ability that led to academicism - "deformation" ("styling") was required to increase expressiveness. An example: the lengthening of the bodies became a "brand" of originality in the work of Boticelli and more obviously, El Greco. The latter was influenced by the Cretan School of Byzantine Icon Painting, where he had learned in childhood, not by astigmatism, which was a wrong speculation.

In modern times, design will become the main pivot leading to a rapid stylistic diversification. It has been said that an artist is essentially a "distorter" because only in this way can he avoid the conventional. With a great sensitivity, Edgar Degas emphasizes that design is not the form itself, but *a way to see the form*.

Brancusi most convincingly illustrates the evolution of the shape from an object to an idea, through serial metamorphoses: the "flight", not the bird, the "kiss", not some couple in love , the "splitting of the water surface", not the fish with the scales and tail, the "cock-a-doodle-do" as the scale of musical tones, not the crowing bird. All these refinements involve simplification, condensation, abstraction, i.e. a reduction to the essence, to the archetype.

Color is what "makes" the painting as the line makes the drawing. It largely contributed to stylistic differences. In a friendly epistolary dispute between Pallady and Matisse, the first highlighted the supremacy of drawing, which has purity and may be sufficient alone. Matisse, on the contrary, believes that *drawing is the female and color is the male*. Pallady notes in his diary: *I think on the contrary that drawing is self-contained, while the color without drawing remains an invertebrate work*.

Composition is the main test of mastery, especially for complex work with multiple characters. The idea of creation is expressed by what strikes the eye first and then continues to organize the composition, detail after detail: history, organizing the surface, spatial grouping, harmony of proportions, full-empty ratio, integration of forms in the background, etc.

In the problem of spatiality, the painter discovered geometrical perspective at a late stage, in the early Renaissance, and then learned with difficulty how to apply its laws. He sensed the possibility of expressing depth by color. Something of the candor of emotional perspective, up to complete reversal for respecting the hierarchy of characters, has been preserved to our days. Painting acquired depth and left the two-dimensional plane by the

representation of the bodies in relief.

The shadow - light polarity is one of the most profound organizing principles of the sensible world, so that its solution in art is a major test of talent. Many artists chose generously illuminated plastic forms. Others preferred a delicate chiaroscuro ("sfumato" Leonardo 's magic).

Freedom of creation was won with difficulty because each generation was formed under the auspices of its predecessors, which inevitably functioned as a brake. The great stylistic shift from the late nineteenth century, the "explosion", could not occur without a fight.

Photography, as was proved during the course of time, had a strange destiny. It developed from old procedures auxiliary to painting. It had an explosive evolution in the mid-nineteenth century, in its black and white version, in competition with painting, having the advantage of great simplicity, speed and low cost. It experienced a great diffusion through the diversification of performance, especially after the introduction of color. In our era, due to digital processing and to its extensions into the real and virtual environment, it is a force in all areas of human existence. It is a filter of reality, but equally an imaginary pictorial reality. Through improvement, the camera has become a "third eye", which operates through its own language - a new *lingua universalis*.

We can say that we live in a real world of photography: *in modern society, everything is photographed always, everywhere, any observer of photographic images is a photographer and photographed at the same time*. Pictures fill the pages of books for children. Photography is a valuable tool of pedagogy, at all ages. It has become a fetish of communication, love and friendship. It is the most compelling invitation to travel and also their memory. It can be used by manipulation as a powerful political weapon. It is one of the most popular hobbies. It has been brought in galleries and museums, glorified as art. It has become the most effective way for the wide dissemination of the works of art, which was once the attribute of engraving. By reproduction, it provides a true "democratization of art", which requires the re-evaluation of the difference between the original and the copy. It is anchored in the field of scientific research in the disciplines of nature and the cosmos. Through its extensions - television, cinema, video and internet - it actually doubles our existence.

It is appreciated that *the invention of photography revealed a new level of consciousness, the power of imagination and representation, whether visible or legible, and*

set in motion a revolution of artistic culture, as pointed out by Eugene Savinescu. From a sociological point of view, photography, in the process of turning from a "post-industrial object" into "pure information", appears as *one of the most fascinating phenomena of contemporary times and immediate future (-) and becomes an existence that is no longer "objective" , but "inter-subjective"*.

His work involves various problems. From an aesthetic point of view, he must reconcile fidelity to the immediate raw truth with the desire (temptation) to give shape, visual and communicative expression. Under the moral aspect, he must reconcile personal participation with its suspension, emotional experience with detachment, direct involvement in the event with the obligation to record it. The viewer, in turn, may have a similar or different position in relation to the photographer, appropriating the proposed picture or rejecting it. Just like in painting.

Subjectively, each of us can be in any of these three positions: photographer (operator that executes the photograph), referent (the person being photographed, called "spectrum" by Roland Barthes) and spectator (viewer). In other words, *a photograph can be the object of three actions: photographing, being photographed, or looking at a photograph*.

In his dictionary draft in 1857, Eugene Delacroix placed photography, recently brought to interest by Daguerre in France, among "mechanical procedures", along with lithography. He appreciated this type of reproduction of reality as "easier and more economical" than etching, but far from replacing it. In the preface to the book "For a philosophy of photography" (1997), Vilem Flusser identifies two "crucial inventions" in human culture: *The first, about the middle of the second millennium BC, can be called "the invention of linear writing"; the second that we witness, "the invention of technical image"*. The author further explains: *a technical image is an image produced by a machine*.

In an abstract language, photography has been discussed as "the new technology of the visible". The spectacular development of the modern era – through its extensions in the media and art - has raised many debates regarding the relationship between real and visible, while questioning the equality between them. But does the camera see more than the human eye?

The relationship between photography – a means for capturing objective images - with art is interferential. Not everything that is photography is art. Art is creation, and one of the most elevated of the human spirit. Its materialization in a plastic work is conceived and completed by the direct action of the artist. The tools used - pencil, brush or chisel - are only extensions of his hands. With their help, the artist expresses himself, by fixing in a plastic form his thoughts and emotional impulses. Technological processes such as bronze casting in

the case of sculpture do not belong to the creative act. The darkroom, once used by artists to facilitate drawing, was also auxiliary. Accordingly, the photographer's tool is the camera. This is used only for recording the existing realities, without being able to create *de novo* images. Is then the photographer a librarian, just a "photo maker" with no access to the sphere of arts?

As a product of the camera, the picture is the result of a technical circuit controlled by an irremovable program. In an abstracted definition, *a photograph is an image produced and distributed in accordance with the device software, whose purported function is to inform*. It means that the photographer, after choosing the time and frame, only has to trigger exposure through a simple "click". Completely automated apparatus acting independently are an exception to this scheme.

The chain of interrelations is in this case more complicated, as each fundamental concept includes in its turn other concepts, according to V. Flusser: *The device contains automatism and games, the program contains chance and necessity, the image contains magic and information contains the symbol and improbability*. Thus, it appears as *the image of a magical state of affairs whose symbols inform the receiver*.

Another defining element is derived from the rigorism of the "copyright": the photographic act occurs outside the photographer's lens, while the painting is done directly by the artist, designed and completed by his mind and hand, therefore entirely subjective. This is why photography was not accepted as an art for a long time. However, it has recently been pointed out that the "objectivity" of the technical image is just an illusion.

The concept of "technical art" is seemingly paradoxical because it seems to exclude the subjective factor of creation, and thus its uniqueness. *First, photography did not develop as an art because of its technical nature!* as stressed by Jacques Rancière. The machine is a logistics base for the photo whose running program is the human spirit. In this way, it can be regarded as a brush or a chisel. There is obviously a difference: handling is not performed by the hand, as it is by the designer's thinking in partnership with the artist's sensitivity. The device does not work by itself, but is interposed between the photographer and the subject of his choice. But *photography did not become an art by imitating art modes either* (idem). The art status of photography was not due to pompous subjects or to the pseudoartistic ambition of "pictorialism". It was rather the effect of assuming the "ordinary".

In line with the old playful art theory proposed by Schiller, it has been proposed that *photography is not a tool, but a toy and the photographer is not a worker, a "homo faber", but a "homo ludens"*. By developing this idea, it has been said that *the devices are toys that*

always repeat the same movement. The programs are always the same game that combines elements.

The device is a functional unit with the person who handles it. The relationship, however, is not univocal, but functions in conformity with at least two models: * the "technical" photographer that gives a good reproduction of the subject; * the "creative" photographer that interferes with the device (with its program!) in a creative way.

Vilem Flusser more rigorously identifies three types of relationships: * photos produced in a fully automatic way, where a human or computer controlled program acts * photos taken by photo makers, where the device program escapes all control * photos taken by the conscious photographer ("photos of the photographer"), where man seeks to maintain control from which the program tries to escape and forces the device to remain in situations desired by him.

The mentioned philosopher believes that these varieties are symptomatic of the three tendencies of post-industrial society: *the trend towards automation under full and constant control, the trend towards autonomous automation, and the trend towards the revolt against the autonomy of programs.* For him, a "photo making" society is absurd because it is devoid of criteria and meaning, so that all possibilities included in the program leave no choice.

In order for mechanical arts to become visible and exert a modeling force, *they should first be recognized as an art*, in the opinion of Jacques Rancière. *That is they should be first practiced and recognized as something else than reproduction or dissemination techniques.*

Since the camera, as an intelligent tool controlled by the laws of optics, "is scheduled to produce photos", each of these reflects one of the programmed options. Their number is high, but not all potential photos are interesting and many are "redundant" ("bearing no information"). It is one of the pitfalls of technicality that threatens to robotize, to reduce this "miraculous" conquest to a poor "image machine". What saves it is a machine-artist partnership, namely, the intrusion of spirituality in the mechanical act.

Traditional art began by copying the visible reality, a servitude that was eliminated at a late stage. A detachment of art from the outside world has been currently reached by two alternatives: to create a new reality or full abstraction.

Considering this evolution, Eugen Savinescu, being aware of the necessity of photography to be faithful to reality, meditates: *Painting can mimic reality without seeing it or can very easily propose a reality or exemptions from reality without being accused of forgery or manipulation.* And by contrast, says the same author, *as far as the work of art cites reality itself through photography (our underlining), it becomes trivially true, because its*

relationship to external reality is mandatory. The opinion is unanimous: The artist (photographer) is forced to stay in touch with reality.

Here lies the individuality of photographic art: it cannot invent objects or characters or landscapes, but is limited to copying reality. This is why it was fully credited with the truth: *The machine "sees" the plans, it detects them automatically, mechanically, because it does not think and does not know anything, it is not afraid of any defect and is not haunted by any ghost.*

Because the image is produced by the action of light reflected by the reality fragment captured in the camera lens, the image can only be a copy: *You can photograph only what reflects light, so what actually exists.* This is further explained by Roland Barthes: *Any photograph is a certificate of attendance. This certificate is the new gene that its invention has introduced in the image family.* This feature makes the photograph a complete "full" picture par excellence, to which nothing else can be added: *We cannot doubt, seeing a photographed scene, that things really happened.* The philosopher sees the simple and clear norm of photography in the credibility of this retrospection: *This was once.*

We owe Barthes the most beautiful hymn to the power of authentication of the past through photography and to the "umbilical link" with the lost time that it allows. Thus, looking at a photo of his mother as a child, he reflects: *It is for me the treasure of rays emitted by my mother as a child, by her hair, her skin, her dress, her eyes that day.* Contemplating at other time the portrait of Baudelaire, he has a thrilling revelation: *The light that emanated from Baudelaire's face when Nadar's camera captured and fixed it forever still touch me without any doubt.* We see here a magical link accomplished by photons once detached from his cheek, which impressed the paper, leaving undeleted traces, and the image will return perpetually to the viewer of now and tomorrow.

Image mediated communication over time gets a transcendental vibration when considered with the sensitivity of the mentioned author, who meditates poetically: *Photography is an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, some radiation left that comes and touches me, the one that am here (...). A missing human being comes and touches me like the delayed rays of a star.*

A recent analysis identifies some reserve that would relativize the theory of indisputable testimony: *Photography provides a degree of reality (truth) (so not all, our underlining) that traditional arts cannot afford.* A more unequivocal appreciation was expressed: *Certainly, a photograph does not always see pure truth.*

However, the definitions converge to recognize the primacy of external reality in the

genesis of the photographic image: *A photograph is a thin slice of space and time*, Anca Oroveanu wrote, its framing is as arbitrary as selected by the photographer: *A photograph is pure contingency and can only be that (always representing something)*. From this angle, photography can be seen as art due to its fidelity to reality, because reality itself can provide most beautiful and expressive images, which do not require corrections or aesthetic improvements.

The initial enthusiasm led to an exaggeration of the device's ability to represent reality "as it is" under the slogan "a photograph cannot lie". Having recently entered our culture firmly based on rationalism, it appeared to us as neutral, an impartial arbiter of truth. This explains why analog photography was legitimized as evidence of authenticity in science. Even if it is only a "trace", it has the power of material proof, it is an "object-image", a quality that extends to its animated variant, cinema: *Any analog photograph assumes that what was captured in the photograph was (real)*. This quality would never be recognized for painting, which only reflects the artist's subjective experience. And yet, as an artifact, photography offers many possibilities of error and forgery (phishing) – *the alteration of what was*.

From the point of view of individual subjectivity, the picture greatly enriches emotional experiences by triggering the recovery of the past, like a diary. Jacques Derrida includes it in the concept of "object image" that along with the mental image represent the two sides of the same phenomenon. It has the advantage of durability, while the latter is ephemeral, it vanishes, because memory fails. Instead, the "object memory" lasts similarly to libraries.

Karoly Feleky shares the same concept, briefly expressing the great privilege of photography: *Each photographic image sends an ephemeral moment to eternity*. In other forms, the picture repeats endlessly what happened once, "then and there", not to be repeated again. More specifically: *Once the event ended, the picture will continue to exist, giving the event a kind of immortality (and importance) that otherwise would be lost*.

For Roland Barthes, the invention of photography ended for the first time his reluctance regarding the past reality: *The past is starting with this moment as sure as the present, what you see on paper is as sure as everything that is palpable*. With one caveat: it is *a reality that can no longer be reached*. He therefore called "spectrum" the object-image printed on photographic paper that "was". In this spirit, he is keen to make a distinction, although considered "scandalous", probably because it defies common sense: *Photos remember no past. The effect they produce upon me is not to return to what has been*

abolished (by time, by distance), but to certify that what I see really existed.

Because the sensory perception of reality is to the greatest extent visual, the photographic image has a particular importance for reconstructing the past. It will revive memories step by step. Hence its role to enrich memory, to help achieve gnoseological accuracy, "to save from oblivion values that time destroys and that will disappear". It is an occasion *that invites us to reflect on the imaginary of reality and on the reality of the imaginary*, according to a refined expression of Edgar Morin.

In connection with time, another specific feature of photography should be stressed: the synchronism of the design and construction of images. The merging of the perception of life and its reflection has been discussed. This is complete for instant images. In general, the photographer sees first and then acts so that the act of creation takes place in a dynamic hand-eye sequence. Thanks to the sensitivity and the experience gained, the image to be obtained can even be mentally anticipated: *When looking through the viewfinder of the camera, the photographer does not see the current scene, but the future pictures that he allows to become present (reality) by pressing the shutter button.*

Good photos cannot be taken anywhere and anytime. They often require premeditation and persistent hunting of the image. In 1935, a renowned photographer from Boston expressed a warning regarding the risks involved in using the camera without control: *Let us use the device for the purpose for which it was created: let us focus on the work that we can do the best and not compromise this means of expression by attempting to do with it what we can achieve the worst.* Roland Barthes called "photographic referent" *the necessary real thing placed in front of the objective, without which there would be no picture.*

The problem is essentially different depending on the goal pursued. We could schematically distinguish three phases: amateur photography ("album"), documentary photography ("scientific"), and creative photography ("art").

The first is undemanding, is usually done hastily and at random (fairground photos, trip photos, family photos, etc.), having a predominantly sentimental value, to ensure the heritage of intimate memories. The condition of fidelity can be discussed here, depending on the skill and exigency of the amateur photographer. Modern techniques have increasingly facilitated the aesthetic quality and condition, threatened by clumsiness and bad taste.

In the second, accuracy is the main requirement. Because through this type of image, the truth of information is certified, it becomes the material evidence of a new scientific discovery. Thus, photographs are a documentary archive. Attention has been drawn to the

danger of sacralization (and manipulation) of images used for knowledge development at the expense of verificationist rigor.

Art photography is much more demanding and requires a comprehensive analysis.

The topic area is unrestricted. There are no incompatible topics, any of them can become art, through effects, transfiguration or message. As such, there is no infallible recipe to ensure the success of artistic photography. The selection principle is the same as in traditional art, as expressed by Delacroix at the age of recognition: *Any topic is good thanks to the author. Oh, young artist, are you waiting for a topic? Everything is a subject, the subject is yourself, your impressions, the emotions that nature awakens in you. It is within yourself that you have to look, not around you.*

As photography emerges from the objective reality *par excellence*, it is from here that the motifs are extracted, from the surrounding world. However, it is well known that the resulting artistic quality of the photographic image is not due to the fidelity to reality, but to the expressiveness and the message given by the artist. And photographers followed the aesthetic trends of their time, creating an artistic language specific to the new discipline.

First: what is photographed? The choice depends on the photographer's deliberate option for one area or another, hence the numerous specializations known: landscape, portrait, animal photographer, photojournalist, photographer of art, genre scenes, fashion, underwater photographer, etc. Each image is also responsible for emotions experienced at that time, a state of mind, an expectation: "that's it!" .

Then, why taking picture, what is the motivation for it, what do we want to express?

Follows a series of other problems: When? - the choice of the moment. How? – establishing technical strategy. And all questions converge into one: "Why" photography? What is its meaning, its message, to whom does it speak? Because without any doubt, taking pictures is not just collecting images that we like or that we consider important. And if pictures cannot explain anything by themselves, they remain "unpredictable invitations to deduction, speculation and fantasizing".

Good photos are generally those that transcend the ordinary and bring new expressive elements, are challenging or make you think, they move you and make you suffer or be happy.

For Benedetto Croce, in 1902, photography, "if it is something artistic, this is to the extent that it conveys, at least in part, the intuition of the photographer, his point of view. And if it's not entirely an art, this is so because the natural element is more or less impossible to eliminate". This was the first reference to photography in an aesthetic treatise and it opened a discussion that continues today.

Deciding whether or not photography is art means, in the first place, to know "if it is capable of artistic expression". In other words, to assess its creative potential, its "artisticity". On the other hand, it is considered that a photograph taken with "artistic intention" should not differ visibly from a simple photograph. The distinction is made by the act of musealization, which introduces it in the artistic circuit. And in fact, innumerable photographs have acquired over time, beyond the accidental, meanings that have introduced them into art heritage. Some have even become frequently cited references. Roland Barthes believes that "photography can really be an art," but not through the photographer's persistence to compete with the artist, but by obedience to the "rhetoric" (expressiveness, meaning) of the image.

In recent years, a very favorable view of photography as an art has developed, motivated by several features: speed of execution, independence from a model, from a stylistic manner (harvesting of the image from reality, its uniqueness), the possibility of reproducing the infinite variations and changes that can be made on the negative, for the analog version, absolute freedom of processing for the digital version.

According to an ancient legend, the first plastic representation of man would be made by drawing a charcoal contour around his shadow cast by the sun.. In fact, the style of painting called "linear" was practiced in prehistoric times, as seen in cave art. Due to its simplicity, it existed for millennia, and in Egyptian painting and later in the Minoan and Hellenistic one, the colors are flat, decorative. It also characterized the art of the whole East and remained defining of Byzantine painting.

Only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries will Giotto invent in Italy the "pointed" or "naturalist" style, which has developed around the western painting. It reached its peak in the Renaissance, in some models from which artists could not be separated for centuries : the sinuous elegance and delicate forms (Botticelli), "chiaroscuro" (sfumato: Leonardo), sculptural majesty (terribilita': Michelangelo), suavity female (Rafael), sumptuous color (Venetians), asceticism and tragic gothic (Grunewald, the precursor of expressionism). Followed - into baroque excess - theatrical lighting reflector (Caravaggio), later dramatized by enhancing light-dark contrast (Rembrandt), crowding exuberant characters (Tintoretto, Rubens), spiritualizing them (El Greco), cruelty, horror scenes and atmosphere (Goya).

The transition to modernity of human plasticity was made through the lucid filter of classicism and neoclassicism (stranded academicism). The temptation for the perfect copy generated realism and naturalism that through the nude anticipated the vulgarity of pronography. Courbet painted for the great Turkish consul in Paris that blamed "human

origin” with extreme precision, like an anatomical drawing. After a brief romantic twitch of temperament (Caspar, Gericault, Delacroix), human plasticity was poured in the living light of Impressionism (Monet and by excellence Renoir). Meanwhile, dynamic dancers draw Degas’ attention, like body contortions while having their baths.

With Post-Impressionism, the explosion of novel mutations accelerated. Creative resources were enriched with solid construction (Cezanne), dramatic expression (Van Gogh), musicality colors (Gauguin), simplifying shorthand lines (Toulouse Lautrec), perpetuation of light vibration (pointillism of Seurat). In response, there was the violent discharge of colors and shapes (the fauvism of Derain and Vlaminck). Hence, Matisse evolved towards curves of high expressiveness, pure and melodious. A strong sensual emphasis was placed by Modigliani in his provocative nudes, withdrawn from his only exhibition (1917) for “insult to decency”.

Smaller and short-lived resonances had cubist and futurist experiments. But expressionism (later reissued by neo-expressionism) imposed and generalized much more vigorously. It assumed sovereign rights in outlining the body and human physiognomy, extended until today. By Pascin and Egon Schiele the female nude knew cruel, devoid of grace deformations. The Viennese Secession metamorphosed women into precious jewellery by Gustav Klimt. Picasso was unique by the bold decomposition of shapes voluptuous models * 2). In sculpture Brancusi purged the human body and face, preoccupied only by symbols. The idea of human - landscape led Moore to modeling massive anthropomorphic sculptures, like rocks.

Dadaism and neodadaism overthrew all aesthetic values observed until then, challenging and annihilating everything, to the deformation to unrecognizable human forms. Surrealism played absurdly with man, down to complete detachment from his genetic pattern (delirium or alienation ?).

With time everything, became possible. Hence some tragic sense of contamination which pervaded any plastic representation of the human body. Mutilations of the physiognomy of Francis Bacon 's Koonin’s monstrous women 's, boulders appearances of mineral, Dubuffet imagined starting from the scribbles of children and the mentally ill (“raw art”), anthropomorphic suggestions insects (Miro) prints on canvas of ”women - brush” paint coated (Yves Klein), filiform humanoids (Giacometti), etc.. are all samples of a bold and unfettered imagination, driven by one motivation : the novelty, originality at any cost, to do anything, to be the first to do it, surprise... a shock ! The threat of ”déjà vu” become, in the academies, the dread of young artists.

In all these numerous instances in which the human body appeared in art, on the forefront we find the nude. It often appears enveloped in an aura of sensuality, induced or not by conscious relationship of the creator (the male in general) and its model (the woman obviously the privileged). The tonality of the emotion vibrates in a wide range, from evanescent erotic - pure poetry –to the most brutal sexuality. Hence the heterogeneous symbolism of art criticism, regarded with particular attention by psychoanalysis.

Art did nothing but take the magnetic fascination of the old mythologies, where the splendor was disputed between goddesses like Aphrodite and Diana or where voluptuous nymphs, naiads, nereids and driads hid in the wooden groves. They were followed by the Biblical “Suzannes in the bath”, harems with lascivious odalisques, in the modern times the attractive ”baigneuses”, the nightlife, the softness of resting. Dance offered the eye the lanced slender bodies composing and recomposing graceful movements, “ornaments of duration” for Paul Valery. Under such circumstances, the statute of nudity could not be unitary: there were two main codes: beauty and obscenity.

A whole literature was inspired by the cultural complex of the ”naked woman”, suggestive of a torrent of desire. Lyrical effluvia have substituted swan with free ruffle the waters in its immaculate whiteness, like a light. The river itself has become a ”sexual function”: water evokes natural woman nudity in its pure lines, bathing naked and white. We must believe Emil Cioran, who with his nihilism, said in his first book (“On the Heights of Despair”) that ”the reality of the body is one of the most terrible realities”; for art, of course, we understand it not as a source of anguish, but as heavy and continuous presence, unavoidable.

If aestheticians eliminated, theoretically, pornography from art, the artists themselves have often lost the boundary between them. Many of them still keep, away from the public eyes, certain more “indecrete” works. Erotic art still remains nowadays a much debated domain.

The invention of photography spawned a whole new universe. The first tests necessary for the technical aspects were made on landscape and still life, because of the prolonged exposure. With its minimization, man quickly became the favorite subject. The portraits were of course the most desired. For the nude, it was the painters who expressed a particular interest, in view of the benefits over to the traditional workshop model. Delacroix, among others, used the daguerrotypes – considered ”treasures for a painter”- and left two albums with nudes made by him.

The photographers ambitions soon led to the establishment of the "pictorialist" current, oriented towards replicas of famous paintings. As technology and experience improved, photography as art consolidated. Nadar contradicted the fear of vulgarity, manifested in the time, through a nude resembling "Spring" by Ingres (1856). Rejlander (a Swede settled in England, where he became the first photographer of nudes) made a bright nude diagonally in ample, melodic curves, against a dark background (1857). In New York A.L. Coburn breaks away from pictorialism and publishes in "Camera Work" nudes in new forms, abstracted, with admirable relief called "photograving" (1905). Also in America, Stieglitz and White exhibit in 1907 a faded torso, in chiaroscuro, with unclear foggy contour, but with strong shapes. The same qualities, placing nude on dark background, imposed Edward Steichen (1903-1906). The Czech R.F. Lehnert raised a serious cultural problem with a photograph of a beautiful black woman, lost in a desolate setting, with two metal bracelets as accessories (1910).

Such artistic images contradicted the accusations of indecency, shamelessness, lasciviousness, infamy etc. Bernard Shaw, also an amateur photographer, was right to write: "The device can represent the flesh in such a superb way that, had I the courage, I would never photograph a body without asking for the clothes to be removed".

An important moment marked the American Man Ray, painter by training, integrated into the Parisian Surrealist movement. After the beautiful nude "Ingres's Violin" (1924), he rediscovered the process of "solarization" which created unexpected images: "Woman with long hair", 1929) a beautiful young positioned as under a guillotine, her hair flowing in cascades), "Solarization", 1931 (the tight girdle of white hands shining in the light around the head). Sometimes he framed just an expressive segment of the body (face, torso, pelvis).

Edward Weston, also American, became one of the most prominent representatives of modern artistic photography, akin to sculptures by Rodin and Brancusi's choice: *I proved through photographs that nature holds all the abstract forms (simplified) which Brancusi or any other artist could imagine (...) It may be said that Brancusi imitates nature the same way I am accused of imitating Brancusi, precisely because I find these forms at first hand in nature.* He metamorphosed the anatomy of the female nude – as plastic unit, but also by fragments – by the position chosen and the subtle light-shadow effects ("Nude squat in lateral position", 1934, Nude squat viewed from the front", 1936, "Nude lying ventrally", 1936).

A stylistic singularization brings Bill Brandt who, photographing in a dark room under artificial light, obtains black and white, clear images, without relief and gray shades, reminiscent of collage. It reinforces the effect of perspective up to the abstraction (a volume

in 1961 appears just under the title "Perspective of Nudes").

The postwar period saw an explosion of novelties. G.P. Lynes, an American close to French surrealists, exploits the effects of reflection of the nude in the mirror (*Nude in the Mirror*, 1945). Lucien Clergue breaks the traditions of decent rendering, still dominant in the 50's, bringing a new interpretation to the shape of the body, the relationship of water and light (*Nudes of the sea*, two series, 1956 and 1975). A.C. Johnston, who lives in Hollywood cinema circles, composes splendid photos of famous stars, with refined and decent semi-nudes (Gloria Swanson, 1920, *Lying nude*, 1950). Toto Frima uses Polaroid to get interesting views of the nude in a sharp perspective (1985, 1988). Charles Wilp component of the group "New Realism" by the vague shapes of the characters makes reference to memory or dreams (*Untitled, Rear View of Nude*, 1972).

Andre Kertesz photographs the nude through frosted granular glass, obtaining ghostly vaporous forms (1972). We owe him one of the most beautiful photographs of the twentieth century, "The Swimmer" (1917) because of the lights and shadows on the water. Carlo Cerati transforms the female body into a corrugated landscape, profile photo on black background, a marble nude lying face up (1973). Ferdinando Scianna recovered skilfully in composition, the contrast between white hands and black skirt, and further up through the transparent silk blouse the white breasts are visible (1981). The game of shadows and light was harnessed through refined eroticism of Broekman in the series published under the title *Woman of Light* (1983). Toto Frim recovered surprisingly the *racourcis* (1985-1988). H.D. Spengler draws the attention by faded obtained by Polaroid, repeated also by Cibachrome (1990). J. Sieff strongly sculpts the nude with light, bringing forth the sinuous line of delicate and mysterious bodies (1992). Paolo Raversi renders the discretion of a white nude on white background, barely outlined, contoured by a subtle line (1993). H. Newton resumes the perspective of the triple of Velasquez in "The Maids of Honour" when photographing a nude with its reflection in a mirror in which the photographer also appears (2008).

"Original" effects were sought also by integrating the body into unwonted relations: unusual dresses and ornaments, cross-dressing, tattoos, makeup, precious or artificial positions, particular biological and pathological conditions (pregnancy, deformities, surgical scars, mastectomy), involvement in practical activities etc. Wolfgang Pietrzok appeals to a sophisticated technique combining photography with prints, making the absolutely innovative nudes series called "Squashing" (1989).

The photographic investigation in this thesis addresses the forms of the human body. It

holds several key vectors, extracted from the anatomic materiality and purified to abstraction. We look for archetypal power lines that could be included in the universal harmony.

The temptation of art to detach itself from the crude reality crude, defeating gravity and rising again to the pure idea is old. We find it in countless formal stylization that succeeded in ancient times to crystallize some of the fundamental symbols of human culture. Thus many old letters alphabets were designed, the Greco-Roman masks of tragedy and comedy, various conventional signs of civilization, etc.

In the genesis of non-figurative art (abstract) "enlightenment" was decisive for Kandinsky who used the name "First watercolor abstract". This was reached for "geometric" variant - and through Cubism (Picasso and Braque) which still retained residues of reality.

From Cubism originated the "purism" of Ozenfant and Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) - during 1918 to 1925 - under the consign : *Intensity and optimal quality obtained by as little means as possible!* Their concept was appreciated as an attempt without resonance, relying on the number alchemy and divine proportion which would lead to the limits of the intelligible the reality from which it started. They championed the art ascension to "those impersonal, disinterested, out of time, place and space areas, which is bordered on mathematics, poetry, arts and everything human heart and brain hold most pure". The program appears clearly from the latter's meditation before the wonders of Hellas (1930) : "I draw only by two traits this place of all the measures and say : Look, it 's enough. What simplicity, what sublime limits! Everything is inside... extent, height. And that's enough."

The "Purist manifesto "calls on "the pure and simple order of human nature. "It stresses the need to invent a painting as much as possible. Purification by forgetting should be accepted as sacrifice by the artist, for his own sensibility to exercise all his creative force. Purist art is required to collect, retain and express the "invariant", a geometric concept applicable to art. Purists state the existence of absolute beauty and universal perfection, which they try to approach scientific and pictorial means.

In the same plane we also find the "neoplasticist" Piet Mondrian. He wrote in his daily diary: *The inner life, its strength and joy, determines the form of the art (...) Art is meaningless unless it expresses the immaterial, such as enables man to rise above himself* (p40 dict.) He thus defined the style called "new art in painting" (1917): *The truly modern artist feels consciously the abstraction in a beautiful emotion recognized as cosmic and universal (...) The new plastic is dualistic through composition. Through the exact plastic of cosmic relationship, it is a direct expression of the universal. Through rhythm (...) it is an expression of the artist's individual subjectivity. This way it unfolds before us its universal*

beauty, but without renouncing the general human element.

In a synthesis of 1920 Mondrian enunciates the principle of neoplasticism which he had initiated: "a balance achieved through the equivalence of nature and spirit of the individual and the universal, of the feminine and masculine." "The equivalence matter-spirit would lead to the "matter-spirit unity", which creates a harmony unknown until now. These are theses tributary to the theosophy which attracted him.

The idea of simplicity and purity of artistic forms has been applied to C. Brancusi sculpture. For him "simplicity is not an end in art, but one comes to simplicity unwillingly, approaching the real meaning of things". In his work, he tended towards a detachment from the materiality of things and raising to essentials, to the idea. *The hand meditates and finds the thought of matter*, he said. He first demonstrated this by the transfiguration in 'flight' of a bird or a "flash of movement" of the fish etc..

In the struggle to decrypt the hidden meanings of human forms, Brancusi synthesized by his successive "kisses" ever more pure, the first variant of the Montparnasse cemetery in the Gate of Kiss, all the power of love. The sculptor also made the miracle of the barely worked ovoid (but how?) which expresses in turn the muse's inspiration, the serene sleep, the ascension to the world of the newborn. And, although a large number of portraits bear women's names, they have all been much metamorphosed under the chisel, to scrutinize the universe with their immense eyes.

Black and white photography fascinated by its specific ability of enhancing the relationship between light and shadow. We understand why reproducing the human body and face, it first sought to render the relief with maximum fidelity. The discovery of the process of "solarization" has helped emphasize the contour by a bright halo. Artistic expressiveness proved to be more powerful in black outline, such as in graphics. The arabesque game resulted was a new calligraphy, a new language. The digital technique in partnership with computer processing optimized the process to the creation of refined images that seem drawn by the artist's hand and not by machine..

Should be quoted here the performance of Eikoh Hosoe, one of the most renowned Japanese photographers. In the 50s and 60s he had exhibitions and published books with photos of dancers and nudes in interesting positions, achieved in strong contrast (*Man and Woman, 1960, Killed by Roses, 1963; Embrace, 1971*).

The personal project kept as a working method the black and white photography, the most appropriate for the subject chosen. It is currently experiencing a revival, thanks to the

recognized status as a "landmark of craftsmanship, subtlety and refinement" (Dorel Gaina). Black and white images can be viewed as objects with extreme accuracy. They provide the most delicate chiaroscuro effects and also allow graphics highlighting contour ("calligraphic qualities", Eug. Savinescu). Both aspects are essential for a photographic study of the human body.

The partnership between the digital camera and the computer – excluding "image manipulation"- further ensures total freedom in separating the forms by changing the tonal key (*soft - hard, high key, low key*), the adequacy of the background, the optimal framing of the subject, etc. The possibility of testing facilitates unlimited "metaphorical transfiguration" (K.Feleky) till the finding of the most expressive variant.

For the geometric confrontations Polaroid photography was also resorted to.

The project seeks the most fundamental elements, the most basic, and to do so it investigates the various areas of the body, shapes, curves and twists, their transformations. The selection of the areas of interest that will be offered for examination, took into account their potential aesthetic significance. The photos obtained make us discover almost abstract compositions, sometimes fantastic landscapes. There may appear details surprised from angles that have never been used before: it is the "moment of grace". The exact topography of the object photographed remains generally hidden, being geometrical lines whose anatomic location cannot be recognized. It is a factor allowing the viewer to imagine or guess what exactly remains hidden – like in a charade.

In several situations new experimental architecture was constructed, through various movements and repositioning. They enrich the "body language" with new forms.

Attention has focused on the play with curves, sometimes generous, broad, sometimes agitated. Perfect symmetries and parallels may be captured, ordered like in a curtain. The rigid line and even the right angle are not absent either from this human landscape. All the forms are melodic and harmonious. They are the essentially pure. They invite contemplation and meditation. And, as Apollinaire wrote, "to cherish purity means consecrating instinct, humanizing art, and deifying personality"(namely man!).

Given the narrow framing used, the images obtained are "aperspective" (Fl Maxa). They are therefore in resonance with a specific feature attributed by some aestheticians of our time, in which "the game with the perspective can only be ironic or polemical", and perspectivist representation "ceases to be relevant".

Since man is part of nature the forms revealed in these selectively targeted photographs merely confirm the harmonic relationship between the macrocosm and

microcosm that is "man". When Leonardo drew the body in a double frame - circular and square - a consistent with the old conception of Vitruvius, he had in mind the community between the human being and the universe ("complicity with the universe" said Cioran).

Our investigation confirms the uniqueness and integrality of existence in its whole. The "music of spheres" poetized by Heraclites, the "divine proportion" or the "gold number" which pins down absolute beauty, reflect the trust (and hope!) of man in universal harmony. In order to resist being drawn into the "chaos" situated at the antipode of "cosmos", man, with his ontological frailty, needs a safe haven of order, balance and harmony. In configuring this haven within the cosmic habitat in which he was born, art certainly brings its contribution.