ADRIANO D'ALOIA* - FRANCESCO PARISI**

SNAPSHOT CULTURE
The Photographic Experience in the Post-Medium Age

1. POST POST-PHOTOGRAPHY

From the 2000s onwards, the experience of photography has changed radically because of various social and technological events: the embedding of cameras into multimedia and multifunction mobile devices, the expansion of photographs' arena of visibility to the Internet, and the spread of easy-to-use photo-editing software for both desktop computers and mobile devices. In today's convergent digitalized mediascape, built-in cameras, social-networking sites and smart apps have made photography more accessible, ubiquitous, public, cheap, democratic and engaging than ever before, paving the way for a renewal of photographic experience. Our everyday life is a "life more photographic": photography is everywhere – around us as an environment, attached to us as an extension of our physical and perceptual faculties, and inside us as a framework for memory, identity and affect[1].

On one hand, social and media mutations have set the scene for the emergence of experimental and non-professional practices that have progressively reshaped photography's spatiotemporal and sociocultural boundaries: editing, filtering, remixing, posting, sharing, tagging, commenting etc., have became part of our natural everyday behaviour. A new 'extended photographic agency' has arisen. Indeed, as we take and publish a photograph with our smartphone, we are not only content-generator users, but also social-media managers, layout artists and graphic designers of our own online profiles, walls and blogs. Rather than 'users', we are intuitive developers or even digital artists, as we work directly on materials, code and technologies to manipulate our own or others' content or to create new artefacts. Rather than 'collectors' of images, we are 'archivists' of our own *big* database, a distributed repository of computational information that constantly needs to be organized, tagged, cleaned and synchronized.

New aesthetic objects have appeared in the media environment. Animated GIFs, cinemagraphs, selfies, time-lapses, picspams, etc., are concrete manifestations of a creative agency that centres on photography. But as these hybrid objects demonstrate, digital has re-set the fracture between handmade (pictorial, artificial) and mechanical imag-

* Università Telematica Internazionale UniNettuno – adriano.daloia@uninettunouniversity.net. Author of sections 1, 2 and 4.
** Università degli Studi di Messina – fparisi@unime.it. Author of section 3.
[1] D. Rubenstein, K. Sluis, "A Life More Photographic", *Photographies*, 18, 2-3 (2008): 9-28; M. Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography. Digital Media and Society Series*, Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2012, 11-15; J. van Dijck, "Flickr and the Culture of Connectivity: Sharing Views, Experiences, Memories", *Memory Studies*, 4, 4 (2011): 410-415.

es caused by the advent of photochemical photography[2]. In a scenario characterized by continuous, endless multi-directional remediation flows that reshape and hybridize the content, genres, formats and vehicles of image-making, the photographic image repositions itself as a multimedia, transmedia and crossmedia object. Moreover, following the logic of remediation, the development of photographic devices, technologies and uses has created a backfire effect on conventional photography, e.g. photojournalism, museum exhibitions, auteur and art photography. For example, moblogging (publishing content on digital platforms from mobile and handheld devices) fosters citizen journalism while also redefining professional photojournalism and news-making. Similarly, iPhoneography (the 'art' of creating photos with an iPhone) not only enables users to shoot quality photos with smartphones but also impacts on art-making and art exhibitions. And reversible cameras and selfie sticks not only allow users to take a picture of themselves but also revolutionize the notion of the self-portrait and autobiographical photography.

On the other hand, and as a result, those changes exacerbated the crisis in photography theory: the fierce debate about the impact of digitalization on the ontology of photography that dominated the 1990s sounds hopelessly obsolete and unproductive today. Rather than a theory of post-photography centred on (the loss of) indexicality and the rhetoric of the 'death of photography'[3], what the new photographic culture calls for is a reconsideration of the epistemic and interpretive models devised to describe the relationship between representation, art, reality and identity[4]. In some sense, it seems that photography theory has been reluctant to recognize the relevance of its object in light of conceptual advances in media studies: e.g. the bidirectional effect of *remediation* involving the relationship between 'new' and 'old' media[5]; the *convergence* of content across multiple media platforms[6]; the centrifugal *relocation* of a medium's specific traits within a broader, more varied media experience that expands, reshapes and 'dilutes' that specificity[7]; and the indissoluble bond between media and society that gives rise to the *social media*, i.e. not only socialized media but also a mediatized society, in a networked, interconnected and technological sense[8].

Such a reconsideration primarily involves the centrality of photographic content and the problem of photography's referentiality, in a move towards a dynamic account

---

[2] See J. Friday, *Aesthetics and Photography*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002, 37ff.

[3] Fundamental sources are P. Dubois, *L'acte photographique*, Bruxelles: Labor, 1983/Paris: Nathan, 1990; R. Krauss, *Le photographique: Pour une théorie des écarts*, Paris: Macula, 1990; F. Ritchin, *In Our Own Image: The Coming Revolution in Photography*, New York: Aperture, 1990; W.T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye. Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992; A. von Amelunxen, S. Iglhaut, F. Rötzer, eds., *Photography After Photography*, Munich: GB Arts, 1996. For an account of the different positions in the debate, see M. Lister, "Photography in the Age of Electronic Imaging", in L. Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, London-New York: Routledge, 2004³ [1996], 297-336; S. Giusti, *La caverna chiara. Fotografia e campo immaginario ai tempi della tecnologia digitale*, Milano: Lupetti, 2005; C. Marra, *Le idee della fotografia. La riflessione teorica dagli anni Sessanta a oggi*, Milano: Mondadori, 2001.

[4] Many of these concepts have been developed largely within the debate on the philosophy of photography: see D. Costello, D. Lopes, *The Media of Photography*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012; D. Costello, D.M. Phillips, "Automatism, Causality and Realism: Foundational Problems in the Philosophy of Photography", *Philosophy Compass*, 4, 1 (2009): 1-21; J. Cohen, A. Meskin, "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62, 2, (2004): 197-210.

[5] D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999.

[6] H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York University Press, 2006.

[7] See F. Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy. Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

[8] M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* [1996], Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

of realism focused on the medium's nature, the creative use of technology (with even artistic results) and the pragmatic dimension (what photography *does* rather than what it *is*). It is actually quite simple to differentiate ontologically between analogue and digital photography in terms of the photochemical or binary process of image production (i.e. images' essence or authenticity in relation to reality), although the distinction may blur when uses and practices are considered.

We propose the term 'snapshot culture' to name the combination of ontological, technological, aesthetic and practical shifts in contemporary photographic experience. By 'photographic experience', we mean the extension of the medium of photography to all those objects, processes and practices that continue to posit the 'photographic' as the primary means of understanding and communicating about our lives. The digitalization of photographic aesthetics and related media practices provides an elective case for studying some of the most challenging developments in visual media aesthetics within the broader landscape of the *post-medium* condition[9] and for reflecting on how photography theory has responded to such challenges in the *post-theory* era. This special issue offers a critical investigation of photography's 'persistence' in the media experience through both an analysis of concrete objects and phenomena and the refinement of theoretical approaches to photography.

2. FROM HUNTING TO CAPTURING

Dictionaries define a 'snapshot' as an informal photograph taken quickly, typically with a small handheld camera. Since the advent of photography, one of the snapshot's chief features has been the ability to arrest the linear course of events and offer still 'slices' of the undetermined flow of time and movement, 'frozen' fragments of reality that became detectable, even scientifically. The snapshot's contemporary form appears to focus on the pauperization of time: quickness, immediacy and randomness characterize it as something 'instant' in a sense that differs from what is known as 'instant photography'. No more just a self-developing film that makes the result of the photographic process immediately available, it has come to represent a compression of temporal experience in terms of speed, length and range. In other words, a key feature of snapshot culture is the shift in the meaning of *latency* reduction: from instantaneity as cutting the delay between the shot and the availability of the image to instantaneity as eroding the image's temporal value and resonance. Snapshot culture produces 'shot-and-shared' images that postpone or even annul the planning/intentional phase of image-making. Snapshots may be seen in a negative light, as the overabundance and redundancy of ephemeral, dramatic and even banal photographs betoken the "primacy [of the image] over the existence it is supposed to depict"[10]. The advent of the 'snapshot style' prompted a shift from photography as preserving a lasting memory to photo-image-making as immediate experience of everyday life.

[9] F. Guattari, "Towards a Post-Media Era" [1990], in C. Apprich, J. Berry Slater, A. Iles, O.L. Schultz, *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*, Lüneburg-London: Post-Media Lab – Mute Books, 2013, 26-27; R. Krauss, *'A Voyage on the North Sea'. Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999; L. Manovich, "Post-Media Aesthetics", http://www.manovich.net/DOCS/Post/_media/_aesthetics1.doc; F. Casetti, "I media nella condizione post-mediale", in R. Diodato, A. Somaini, eds., *Estetica dei media e della comunicazione*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011, 313-328; R. Eugeni, *La condizione postmediale*, Brescia: La Scuola, 2016.
[10] M. Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography*, Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2012, 9.

Whereas the snapshot continues to recall the semantic area of shooting and hunting and a portable handheld object – like a gun, always ready to shoot – it no longer implies a clear, distinct and unequivocally intentional act. Before built-in cameras became available, the photographer was a sort of 'hunter' who intentionally searched for meaningful, memorable moments to record in their personal and collective memory. In contrast, the essence of the snapshot-maker's activity is – almost onomatopoeically – instantaneity, randomness, unintentionality and superficiality. The advent of the third millennium marked the end of photography's 'hunting season'. Rather than carefully and diligently searching for the worthy subject and moment to be immortalized and stored for private, artistic or journalistic purposes, the democratization of *capturing* images became an inexpensive and undemanding task on a massive scale. Rather than shooting to kill, as hunters – professionals, amateurs, reporters or tourists – do (or used to), we just 'capture' images as if 'taking notes' of what is happening around us, anxiously collecting visual fragments of our ordinary experience. We are heavy producers of fleeting images that continue to snatch precise moments in space and time but have no significant spatial or temporal value *per se*, until they are publicly re-contextualized, as our existential *status*, on the Internet.

An overview of contemporary snapshot photography reveals a twofold dynamic: the *persistence* of the originary traits of the photographic experience coupled with the *modulation* of new opportunities offered by technological improvements and social changes.

On one hand, the changes in current photographic practices and uses should be conceived as epiphenomenal reflections of the modern individual's more grounded, enduring attitude towards photography, rather than as ontological transformations. For snapshot photography as well as for other 'new' media, the typical postmodern rhetoric of newness "is not merely temporal, but indeed reflects a tendency toward continuing innovation"[11]. Ever since it was invented, photography has offered mechanical and reproducible images of the world and the self. Its 'newness', however, compared to other visual media such as painting, is not a matter of technical or material progress but rather of the extension of the limits of visibility. As Francesco Casetti writes, "A given medium is defined by a specific type of watching, listening, attention, and sensibility. Therefore, it is not the permanence of its physical aspect, but the permanence of its way of seeing, hearing, and sensing, that ensures its continuity"[12]. In this sense, digitalization and the advent of new photographic practices and objects do not affect the essential nature of the photographic experience[13]. Continuities and similarities in terms of the practical and aesthetic engagement that photographs trigger in both image-makers and image-observers have persisted since photography was invented. Despite having purposes, objects and procedures of its own, snapshot culture continues to fulfil the originary concerns of photographic (read modern) culture: freezing and fixing the image of precise moments on a portable and viewable medium; the mechanical/automatic replication of images; the recording and investigation of reality; the representation/identification of the self (and the other); the poetic and artistic discovery of the world and of human beings; the archiving of individual and collective memories; the crystallization of time and space...

---

[11] See R. Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70 (2012): 67.

[12] Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy*, 29.

[13] See also C. Marra, *L'immagine infedele. La falsa rivoluzione della fotografia digitale*, Milano: Mondadori, 2006.

In brief, although the digital has deposed device-content indivisibility, and the snapshot has reshaped practices and devices, photography retains its cultural power, its symbolic significance, and its experiential specificity.

On the other hand, the effect of socio-technological changes in the photographic experience's *enduring* traits should be viewed in light of the modulation and negotiation processes they require. Saying that the core of the photographic experience has not changed qualitatively does not mean that the experience is exactly the same. In this sense, snapshot photography's originary functions have become more radical (either intensified or weakened). As the contributions in this special issue show, the snapshot is an 'exchange object', the virtual 'currency' in an 'ecosystem of visibility' dominated by a new and *inaesthetic* meaning of *fotogénie*. In such an environment, based on Simmelian sociability and instant interactions rather than on stable relationships, the snapshot is a 'buzz-image' that satisfies the need for instantaneity, immediacy and shareability. But it is also a sort of 'relic' that nostalgically evokes or even resurrects extinct objects, devices and uses. 'Old-style' photography's persistence can be material (as with the return of Polaroids) or virtual (e.g. Instagram vintage filters).The snapshot is an 'open-source image' produced by image-makers who, although non-professional, can proactively edit, reassemble, remix, manipulate and add to this now dynamic object. The snapshot breaks down the borders between private and public space[14]: it is a *personal collective* object, one that extends the traits of mobile-phone communication, i.e. interpersonality and intimacy, to the practice of personal photography[15]. A snapshot is both personal property and a 'collective good', located both in a single device memory and in the cloud or on social-networking sites, and thus traceable and searchable by search engines. The snapshot produces a shift from the need to *trace* (taking and keeping photographs) to the need to *feel* (looking at and sharing photographs).

Although the complexity and variety of these dynamics (among others that the special issue discusses), it can be argued that snapshot culture made the photographic experience a more *perfomative act*. By the latter expression, we mean not merely the 'dramatization' of the photographic 'act', i.e. the process of setting up, preparing, and taking the shots, involving subjects, devices and sets, like a sort of theatrical performance[16], but rather the 'internal', psychic execution of acts. On one hand, the snapshot *agency* is the outcome of the enhancement of overt motor activity (such as preparing the set, posing, shooting, editing, sharing etc.). *Capturing* snapshots made photography a 'prosthetic' medium materially: consider, for example, the act of holding the smartphone at arm's length to take a selfie, and the function of the selfie sticks used to make those pictures easier to take; or the mutation of the task of 'pushing a button': no more the camera shutter release but a series of virtual buttons to touch in order to shoot, filter, save, share and like photographic images. On the other hand, and more interestingly, capturing a snapshot is the expression of an *embodied* experience, i.e. the intrinsic, bodily, sensory, motor nature of cognition[17]. Much more than in the past, the snapshot implies close physical contact with the devices (a smartphone in one's pocket or held

[14] See C. Zuromskis, *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2013.

[15] See M. Villi, "The Camera Phone as a Connected Camera", in A. Moschovi, C. McKay, A. Plouviez, eds., *The Versatile Image. Photography, Digital Technologies and the Internet*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013, 88-89.

[16] Which is how Richard Shustermanuses that term: see Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process".

[17] See F.J. Varela, E. Rosch, E. Thompson, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Expe-

in the hand, an *extension* of both the body and the cognitive functions that is, however, almost literally part of our body). By contrast, the intended purpose of the product of the photographic act is a *detachment* from the image (as it is posted on the world-wide frontier of the Internet and thus placed beyond the limits of our possessions and our body). As a 'gesture' of both *taking and giving*, *capturing and releasing*, *individualizing and sharing*, the snapshot experience can be seen as the radicalization of the extended/embodied dynamic of the photographic experience, a continual succession of introflective and extroflective acts executed by the *performative mind*[18]. Approached with this perspective, the snapshot is a fundamental means of constructing a new aesthetic relationship with the world and the self.

3. THE EXTENDED OBSERVER

For their massive dissemination and pervasiveness in everyday life, much more than any other type of images, snapshots are cognitive prostheses that concretely extend the human mind and senses[19]. But the extending capability of pictures – all pictures – is also acknowledged in the debate. *Homo sapiens* has existed for 200,000 years, but its first visual representations (in the Chauvet Cave) can be archaeologically dated back to about 30,000 years ago. Rock art is shrouded in an air of mystery, because it is not clear why our ancestors started creating pictures or why they did so in hidden, barely accessible places. But they did, and – as cognitive archaeologist Lambros Malafouris points out – the growth of practices of the imagination since the 'invention' of pictures is probably no coincidence: the intriguing aspect of Malafouris's argument is that, once created, pictures have had a retroactive effect on our minds, shaping the very way we imagine[20], as if pictures had amplified and refined the visual machinery that created them.

Photographs, however, were the first pictures ever made by humans that were mechanically produced[21], and photographs' mechanical nature caused new aesthetic reactions in the modern beholders. According to Patrick Maynard's theory, "photography might be simply characterized as the *site of historically the most spectacular interaction of depictive and detective* functions"[22]. What he means is that – precisely because of their mechanical and prosthetic conception – photographs both *increase* our perceptual

---

rience, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991, 172-173; S. Gallagher, D. Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, London: Routledge, 2007.

[18] A. D'Aloia, "L'arto fotografico. Estensione e incorporazione nella tecnica e nell'estetica del selfie", paper presented at the International Conference *Photography and Visual Culture in the 21st Century: Italy and the Iconic Turn*, Rome, December 4-5, 2014. Publication of the proceedings forthcoming.

[19] See R. Menary, *The Extended Mind*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010. On the relevance of the Extended Mind theory in media studies, and in particular in the theory of photography, see M. McLuhan, "The Photograph: The Brothel-Without-Walls", in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964; L. Manovich, "Visual Technologies as Cognitive Prostheses: A Short History of the Externalization of the Mind", in M. Smith, J. Morra, eds., *Prosthetic Impulse. From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006, 203-220; F. Parisi, "Arte, mediazione, cognizione", in M. Guerri, F. Parisi, eds., *Filosofia della fotografia*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2013, 205-220.

[20] L. Malafouris, "Before and Beyond Representation: Towards an Enactive Conception of the Palaeolithic Image", in C. Renfrew, I. Morley, eds., *Image and Imagination: a Global History of Figurative Representation*, Cambridge, Mass.: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2007, 289-302.

[21] The distinction between mechanical pictures and hand-rendered pictures has been proposed by L. Perini, "Depiction, Detection, and the Epistemic Value of Photography", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70, 1 (2002): 151-160.

[22] P. Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization. Thinking through Photography*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, 120.

access to the world and *show* something representationally. Prosthetic instruments like mirrors or telescopes increase our perceptual access, and paintings (usually) show a fictional world behind an 'Albertian window'[23]. But with the advent of photography, the media functions of prosthetic visual tools and pictures converged in the same medium. Over the last two centuries, then, the human impulse to visually represent the world has taken a major step forward, becoming closer to vision itself[24]. With the widespread use of cameras and the digitalization of the process, seeing photographically[25] is not confined to taking or looking at pictures but has become even more a kind of vision. (We are talking about photography because it was the first type of mechanical picture ever made, but cinematography technology is obviously responsible for the advent of the extended beholder, as the Cine-Eye proposed by Dziga Vertov clearly illustrates).

More precisely, the integration of technology and vision can be conceived as a long-lasting process, and if we consider that visual technologies are primarily responsible for extended vision, we can glimpse what is going on. With photography, humans started to see more than their biological apparatus had permitted, and prosthetic advancements have allowed our vision to follow this path. We need not be distracted by the fact that photographs are pictures, whereas vision is an activity. Following Maynard's definition of photography, we know that photography both broadens our vision and shows that increment in perspective on a medium. Because of this dual feature of photography, there are at least two kinds of extension: the performative act of taking pictures and its outcome (the photograph itself). But the photograph is just a material expedient, a medium that we need in order to preserve our vision; so pictures are just a way to get what we really desire, aesthetically speaking: optical empowerment. Photographs, then, could be replaced by real experiences; the outcome of the empowered vision will not be a picture any more but a perceptual experience undergone directly through the device.

The 'eyeborg project' by Canadian filmmaker Rob Spence is a clear example of the progressive integration between device and subject. The myth of prosthetic vision has become real for this man who lost his right eye after an accident and had it replaced with an 'eyeborg', i.e. a synthetic eye that transfers the first-person visual perspective onto a portable screen[26]. The eyeborg project is a kind of physical embodiment of the principle of extension: the new eye replaces a function previously carried out by Rob's organic eye, and we can also suppose that, due to technological improvements, his eyeborg will enable him to see more than before. Marshall McLuhan's metaphor, in which media both replace and may potentially empower our senses, has come true.

In Rob's case, though, the difference between the eyeborg and the other visual instruments is not as crucial as one might imagine; indeed, like modern cameras, the eyeborg needs a physical medium for storing and viewing the picture. The eyeborg sends a signal to the monitor, bypassing the brain, so that the *experience* of vision – both personal and collective – is very similar to what the rest of us have. Things would be

---

[23] On the distinction between Keplerian and Albertian pictures and the associated aesthetic attitudes that they produce, see J. Friday, "Photography and the Representation of Vision", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59, 4 (2001): 351-362.

[24] On the role played both by early optical technologies and by scientific and philosophical knowledge in shaping the new modern observer, see J. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990.

[25] K. Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism", *Critical Inquiry*, 11, 2 (1984): 246-277.

[26] "Eyeborg Project", http://eyeborgproject.com, accessed March 3, 2016.

radically different if the signal were transmitted directly to the brain, in which case the vision experience would actually be prosthetic.

We do not possess such a technology, that would be similar to the one shown in the dystopian TV series *Black Mirror* (in episode 1x3 "The Entire History of You"). But a brilliant example of extended senses is that offered by Neil Harbisson, a visual artist affected by achromatopsia, who uses an antenna – also called an 'eyeborg' – to translate colours into sounds. The fascinating aspect of this process is that acoustic inputs are not connected to the ears, but directly to the upper occipital bone:

> At first, I had to memorize the sound of each colour, but after some time this information became subliminal, I didn't have to think about the notes, colour became a perception. And after some months, colour became a feeling[27].

This means that Neil does not hear sounds and then mentally match them with the imagined correspondent colour; rather, he has complex perceptual experiences that are completely new sense data. Such augmented experience is constantly upgraded:

> My antenna is in constant evolution. The biggest upgrade I've had this year is that I can now connect myself to the vision of other people. The antenna can connect wirelessly to other cameras or antennas around the world. So if for instance I'm in an office in Europe and would like to connect my antenna to someone else's view, I could perhaps be experiencing a sunset in Australia while facing an office wall. The possibilities of wirelessly connecting the antennas allows us to share a sense, to share an experience other than just information[28].

Nowadays, optical augmented-reality tools can be conceived as the technological continuation of extended vision inaugurated by photography, another step towards the immediate, transparent integration of observer and observed. These new optical prostheses are actually the concrete manifestation of a new merger between different media functions. They represent the technical development of the double projection previously synthesized by photographic engagement: during the augmented perceptual experience, by increasing our perceptual access to the world, we see more of it, and hence we can experience it in a completely new way[29]. So in our opinion, the most important insight to keep in mind when seeking to calibrate our critical gaze properly in order to illuminate our future with visual media is the one that Walter Benjamin found missing in a photography critique in an article in the *Leipzig City Advertiser*:

> Nevertheless, it is this fetishistic, fundamentally anti-technical notion of Art with which theorists of photography have tussled for almost a century without, of course, achieving the slightest result. For they sought nothing beyond acquiring credentials for the photographer from the judgment-seat which he had already overturned[30].

Perhaps, in judging what photography does for us, we should ask what are the new mediated experiential conditions of the contemporary and increasingly prosthetic gaze.

---

[27] N. Harbisson, *Human Antenna*, courtesy of the artist.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] For a discussion about this double direction, see P. Montani, *Tecnologie della sensibilità*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2014, 82-93.
[30] W. Benjamin, "Short History of Photography" [1931], *Screen*, 13 (1972): 6.

4. PRAGMATIC AND PERFORMATIVE AESTHETICS OF SNAPSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY

As Enrico Menduni's essay in this special issue explains, the advent of digital imaging, social networking and mass-amateurization in the 1990s has driven the debate on analogue *vs* digital photography and on the loss of its 'indexical aura' ever since. Those watershed moments aside, photography remains a major vector of the 'iconic turn'. For it has continued, with great adaptability and persistence, to document and bear witness to history and reality, as a prosthesis of personal and collective memory, a guarantor of the world's visibility in everyday life, a *mediator* between stillness and movement, between the complexity of text and the duration of video, between life's indivisible linearity and the snapshot's mechanical freezing of time.

Although it might seem a typical word of the contemporary age, the term 'snapshot' was coined in 1860 by British scientist and theorist John Frederic William Herschel. He used it to refer to a swift, immediate shot, ready to capture subjects and situations without studying the pose, light or composition. This chimes with another common definition of snapshot as a quick shot fired off by a hunter without deliberately aiming. As Federica Muzzarelli underlines in her contribution, although instant photography had been technically possible since 1880 thanks to the introduction of silver bromide gelatine, it remained unexplored for many years. In effect, it was awaiting the transformations in customs, behaviour and lifestyles that prepared society and culture to fully exploit the practicality, informality, speed and immediacy of digital snapshots produced with easy-to-use handheld devices such as smartphones and *screened* in real time.

As the essays in this special issue discuss, the focal point of the contemporary debate shifted from an ontological to a pragmatic matter, from the *essence* of photography to the *performativity* of the photographic experience in its various forms. Such a perspective is required in post-medium aesthetics, characterized by convergence and hybridity of content, where media boundaries blur. Adopting a semio-pragmatic perspective, Enzo D'Armenio uses the notions of medium 're-use' and 'intermedia imagination' to analyse cases of the remediation, or 're-interpretation', of photography in the audiovisual experience. Such a 're-framing' of photography (i.e. through family-photo, chronophotography and motion-capture techniques) into a film directs the spectator's interpretive activity in light of the communicative context.

Audiovisual products such as TV series can also inspire the creative manipulation of images by a specialkind of content-generating users: fans. Olimpia Calì's case study explores the world of *photomanips*, i.e. fanarts made by editing existing photos or screenshots, and *picspam*, the practice of creating galleries of screencaps that isolate particular frames of a TV series.

The abundance of images available on photo-sharing websites and social media has also changed how images are stored and viewed: not as a single image in a frame but now as potentially infinite sequences of images, a 'photo-stream' that provides *continuity* by connecting image to image; not as an image to print and keep but now as images created to be transmitted and viewed on screens and displays in a 'slide-show' or scrollable wall.

Given the constant growth in the number and use of images on the Internet, especially on social networks, the issue of abundance and redundancy of big (visual) data also drives the methodology and research procedures in media studies. Gabriella Taddeo's essay discusses methods and tools for analysing this visual stream quantitatively and qualitatively and for efficiently connecting visual analytics with their physical and contextualized meanings. She examines two multi-method (human and automatic)

studies by Lev Manovich's team on Phototrails.net and Selfiecities.net. Whereas such methods provide new information-display solutions, innovative ways of representing the results, and a specific epistemological approach, they lack some of the crucial contextual, meta-communicative and performative aspects. Taddeo outlines a method that integrates big-data measurement with the analysis of the communicative intentions of the subjects involved.

The snapshot is a purely visual medium no longer. Rather, it is a hybrid of textual and iconic components, where different kinds of text – captions, titles, tags and comments – are an essential, even intrinsic, and indivisible part of the media object. An analysis of snapshot experience would be incomplete without a close look at hashtagging. This phenomenon is more than just a way to classify material objectively and make it available for search enquiries and non-linear navigation, for it is also a means of expressing identity and emotions. Jeanette Vigliotti's piece analyses hashtagging on the most popular photo-social network: Instagram.The author argues that the hashtag hyperlink induces users to upload their individual experience in the form of photographic language onto a public website where their own visibility is an 'exchange object', a currency for obtaining Likes, in a vicious cycle of ostentation. The needs to see and be seen are chiasmatically rendered in an Instagram public profile, which implies a double-sighted construction of the visible subject, like a modern heterotopic museum that transcends space and time.

The 'permanent present' and the 'spatial displacement' of photo-sharing sites undermine the tension between memory and oblivion. Photo-sharing sites are not *archives* built to keep memories but *databases* of poses, attitudes, atemporal instants, and forgettable souvenirs. The tension between memory and the impossibility of oblivion – even after death – in digital dashboards resonates throughout Anna Grebe's contribution on the 'death selfie'. This is a type of selfie that becomes a snapshot of the moments before the subject's sudden accidental death. By retrospectively including the imminent death, this particular genre of selfie negotiates between visibility and invisibility, representability and unrepresentability. It seems literally to embody the 'thanatological' theory of photography, i.e. the Barthesian idea that the referent has already been overtaken by death within the photographic process and that, in Sontag's words, photography is "the inventory of mortality". As an extension of this 'classic' position, Grebe argues that the selfie should be understood as a practice of *memento mori* in the context of post-mortem photography.

As asserted above, snapshots differ from 'instant' photography for the irreduction of 'experiential *latency*'; yet the manipulation of snapshots' 'internal' temporality is one of their most important and interesting features in terms of hybridity. In some cases, in fact, the user's active intervention in the images' internal temporal dimension – as with time-lapses or animated GIFs – represents in a positive, creative sense the chiasmatic combination, or at least the oscillating co-presence, of stillness and movement. The snapshot is not necessarily a single still image but rather, potentially, a sequence of two or more. Lorenzo Marmo's contribution focuses on the widespread resurgence of the animated GIF as symptomatic of many contradictory facets of the current online environment: the tension not only between stillness and movement but also between euphoria for the new and archaeological nostalgia, between authenticity and fetishism, between laughing and longing, between the loop as humorous visual rhetoric and as compulsive repetition.

Highlighted for its gestural and affectual nature, the GIF is conceived as an object of renegotiation of the interaction between bodily experience and technological

processes. The cinemagraph – a particular type of animated GIF that is almost entirely static, apart from some small details that move subtly in an infinite loop – is the focus of Alessandra Chiarini's contribution. The juxtaposition of stillness and movement generates a contrast between instantaneity and continuity. The cinemagraph's loop also implies an 'archaeological' concept of animation that affords the viewer an exquisitely 'monstrative' pleasure that transcends any narrative quality of the image, recalling the attractive compulsion to repetition of pre-cinematic optical toys. The nostalgic resurgence and remediation of the 'old' in the 'new' also affect devices and techniques, such as the Polaroid. The case discussed by Sergio Minniti is particularly relevant, given the pioneering role of the company founded in 1937 by Edwin H. Land in the history of instant photography. The author constructs his argument on the idea that materiality and, in particular, the reappropriation of analogue technology are still fundamental in amateur photographic practices, even in today's digitalized and dematerialized context.

Lorenzo Donghi's contribution also spotlights the mass-amateurization of photography and the impact of that change in photographic culture, with particular regard to photojournalism and art exhibitions. Donghi examines the *Here Is New York* project, a photographic exhibition that opened in New York City a few weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and adopted a very different visual rhetoric from that used by mainstream media (US television and newspapers) to represent the event. The curators decided not to distinguish between pictures taken by professionals and amateurs – both treated as *eye-witnesses* – so the case is symptomatic of the transition to 'diffuse witnessing' enabled by digital photography.

A factor behind this 'shared gaze', participative and significant in equal measure, is that the traumatic nature of the represented event transcends both the 'photographic quality' of the image and the photographer's professionalism. This new dignity ascribed to amateur 'operators of visibility' or 'media producers' depends merely on their being in the wrong place at the right time. The amateur *agency* should be conceived not as a new opportunity created by digital technologies but as a form of relationship with the events, a new condition of visibility and 'visual participation' in history.

The precarious endurance of *singular gaze* is discussed in Simona Arillotta's contribution on the controversial impact of digitalization on photojournalism. The author revisits the classic pictorialism/straight-photography dichotomy and focuses on the adoption of pictorial *Pathos formel* typical of the Christian tradition – the *mater dolorosa*, the *pietas*, the *deposition* – as compositional archetypes for constructing dramatic scenes from the war front. These references, however, are not deliberate. Rather, they arise because of photojournalism's nature as 'transparent witness' and because "[t]he meaning that results in part from the image is not limited to either details within the frame or the intentions/self-understanding of the photographer"[31]. Photography's persistence in the current debate and in photojournalistic practice derives from the persistence of pictorial models in photographic *re*presentation of reality. Arillotta, however, bases her argumentation on the 'fluid indexicality' of contemporary photojournalism – in the case of the digital manipulation of war photos – and the loss of integrity and reliability of institutional photography.

The problem of an image's 'integrity' is, of course, substantial in the field of documentary photography, which implies a 'high fidelity' to the photographed events and sit-

---

[31] See D. Campbell, "Abundant Photography, Discursive Limits and the Work of Images", in Moschovi, McKay, Plouviez, *The Versatile Image*, 266.

uations. In June 2014, the World Press Photo Association commissioned David Camp-
bell to carry out a research project on "The Integrity of the Image", to examine current
practices and accepted standards regarding the manipulation of still images in photo-
journalism and documentary photography. As the study highlights, the notion of 'ma-
nipulation' now needs to be reassessed in light of a new and different process of 'pho-
tographing' reality: "We are now in an era of computational photography, where most
cameras capture data rather than images. This means that there is no original image,
and that all images require processing to exist"[32]. Computational photography, which
derives from the hybridization of digital photography, computer vision and CGI, implies
a transition from picture-making through digital devices to 'data-collecting', i.e. acquir-
ing an amount of information that makes the image much more connected to reality than
pixels isolated in space and time. This new technique shifts the issue from the problem
of the process's authenticity/fidelity (i.e. whether the digital maintains pseudo-referen-
tial contact with reality) to that of its quality. The digitalized, although indexical, form
of reality created by computational-photography sensors is infinitely richer than simple
visual records. An example of a computational-photography device is the Lytro, studied
by Ruggero Eugeni in his contribution to this special issue. The Lytro Illum, a 'plenop-
tic' or 'light-field' camera, captures information (colour, intensity and photons' angle
of incidence) and offers a three-dimensional environment of the scene in the frame. As
Eugeni emphasizes in the theoretical section of his article, that environment affords the
observer an overt bodily and interactive experience (via simulation and imagination,
respectively) of both space and time (respectively that of the image and that of vision).
A renewed attention to the intimate relationships between technology and sensoriali-
ty – between artificial *sensors* and human *senses* – in light of groundbreaking notions
such as 'embodied simulation' would certainly revitalize the theoretical debate on the
aesthetic dimension of the photographic experience.

---

[32] D. Campbell, "The Integrity of the Image. Current Practices and Accepted Standards Relating to the
Manipulation of Still Images in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography", World Press Photo Acade-
my, November 2014. Accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.worldpressphoto.org/sites/default/files/upload/
Integrity%20of%20the%20Image_2014%20Campbell%20report.pdf.