

University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca

PhD THESIS

SUMMARY

**THE NOVELTY OF THE CLASSIC AND
AVANGARDIST PHOTOGRAPHY IN
CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS**

FROM MAJOR VISUAL ARTS TO MULTIMEDIA EXPERIMENTS

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Key Concepts:

Up-to-the-minute, Analysis, Research, Daguerreotype, Digital, Experiencing, Technical Image, Interpretation, Multimedia, Novelty, Partnership, Progress-passive, Out-dated

Despite the appellatives “old” or “new”, photography just like any other form of art is not far behind technology.

On a par with technological breakthroughs, art respectively photography bring along, but also borrow pre-established expectations. When it comes to realms of identity and definition, art introduces and assumes distinct novelties what concerns visual development and its subsequent usage as a medium of communication and evaluation. The birth of these novelties is tightly connected and only possible diachronically, as diachronism implies sources and resources associated with scientific breakthroughs. As a matter of fact, any human act of creation has depended on technical intervention when it came to its initiation, development and manipulation. The arts, just like any human gesture were never estranged from a *modus operandi*.

The scope of the present thesis is to investigate the phenomenon called photography, its basis as well as its extensions into the realm of the contemporary visual arts. . Moreover, a second aspect of importance is the manner in which photography and its adjacent fields influence but are also influenced by various contemporary concepts and visual disciplines, as well as the relevance of the past and its very birth. Additionally, under scrutiny is also the link between various techniques of appropriating the technical image and their affiliation with the visual arts; whether these techniques are invested with creative forces capable of generating new hemispheres and leading to prolific explorations. Least but not last, the emphasis is on photography's influence on the social-humane strata.

Why has photography and its extensions been chosen as proper subject in facilitating the analysis of the visual? Because the birth and evolution of photography and the photographic image has brought forth one of the most significant consequence, the reinstatement of the fierce debate around the signs and significance of the visual. What is more, photography offers challenges as well as partnerships that intermediate and facilitate heterogeneous interpretations and manipulations of the visual image. Along with its quest to accurately describe reality, photography also re-shapes and attaches multiple innovatory nuances to it, concurrently molding the trans-real.

Any new concept necessarily implies proximities and vicinities that validate it and through which it is validated. Without the existence of a concept, one cannot talk about a system, a landscape, a structure or an aggregation; this would only be possible through exercising the imagination and immersion or wandering into nothingness. Hence, everything that represents proximity and vicinity for the concept becomes the concept due to this association. Moreover, due to this interplay, the initial concept transforms itself into proximity and vicinity. It is believed that the "dance" between and among one concept and multiple concepts, proximities and vicinities pertaining to a discipline only generates chaos and lack of structure. Most often such a "game" is seen as dangerous and cast aside, neglected or even banned. Nevertheless, when speaking about the theories of the cultural milieu, of creativity and artistic creation, coupled with the intelligent, elegant and generous approval of a late modernism and somewhat late post-modernism, it is evident that this interplay between concepts and their connection to proximities and vicinities is desired and of high importance. The aforementioned interplay between one and multiple concepts, proximities and vicinities, as well as their fusion is neither a novelty, nor an explosion of surprising revelation when it is connected to the realm of artistic creation. It is perceived as an attribute, a tribute in the name

of the importance attached to certain concepts, especially in the last part of Modernism, coupled with Postmodernism, which in this thesis has been humbly named Neo-Baroque.

Once the artistic projects and processes have passed into a more organized and/or instinctive and intuitive phase, an abstract phase, the artist is invited and permitted to consciously assume and adopt the necessary ingredients: attitude, technique and expressiveness needed to shape the artistic force, which in return creates room and space for the artistic freedom to bloom and blossom. Luckily these specific artistic ingredients are found in the virtual as well as in the actual dimension; they are permitted to appear under any shape or form, as sign or qualified sense, escaping any chronological or trend driven aggression. Perhaps that is why a certain fragment of the early Postmodernist philosophical discourse triumphantly advocates the dissolution and disappearance of history and the historical time. Having this idea in mind, it is obvious that reality attains innumerable nuances. With the alleged disappearance of history we have to be conscious of the abundant concepts in need of revival and reinstatement, be they technical, pertaining to expressiveness or actual facts. The goal would be to restore and bestow them with a new existence.

The definition of photography, though at first seemingly anecdotic, yet with strong undertones, was very nicely put by the great virtuoso, Pablo Picasso: "I have discovered photography." I can kill myself now. There is nothing else to be learned." Of course we realize his cry was a mere token of awe. In the meantime photography has evolved into a vast and specialized field, stretching beyond its scope, into the realm of the extended visual arts, continuously embracing new and varied identities. Thus, it is only natural that in the now, despite its heterogeneous states, photography becomes the evident, almost mundane partner of the extended visual arts.

The complexity and novelty of scientific discoveries on the technical side stimulate the imagination of the artist. These represent a challenge for the artist and even the rediscovery and reenactment of forgotten technologies stand as valid and strong springs of inspiration. Hence, it seems that passive progress, this bygone technology that stimulated and basked in the admiring gaze of those interested to utilize it, can still be used in the present to evoke artistic interest. Through its use and association with elements of novelty it can give birth to a hybrid meant to strengthen the artistic vision and concept of the present.

Created in my own conceptual laboratory, the term passive progress encapsulates the rediscovery and reenactment of certain technological processes and even certain artistic

attitudes, which have been outdated, set aside and replaced by a new wave of scientific and technical discoveries. Nonetheless, they have proven to be renewable and of utter importance once they have clashed with sequences of novelty, initiating innovation.

Regardless of the shape it has, whether it is seen as an object or as a generative force inside the field of the technical image, photography was, is and will be a very important partner for contemporary art, starting with major visual arts down to practical usage in the social and economic strata, as well as for multimedia experiments. Let us consider that during the affiliation between photography and its extensions (cinematography, video, television, trans-photography, digital photography, and holography) photography would prefer a stronger connection to certain elements of novelty pertaining to art and its extension. This would automatically generate a new type of link, one where the elements of novelty of the visual arts would bring forth old, exiled and forgotten processes. These recoveries would then become part of ceremonies of innovation, rejuvenating contemporary photography and its extensions and those of the visual arts, be they traditional and/or experimental.

Furthermore, besides the aforementioned partnership which is dedicated to innovating the present, we also have to mention the process of adding, uniting photography and its extension with the visual arts, all this under the token of equality. This new type of fusion associates the passive memory of photography and its extensions, with the active memory of the visual arts. The result, archaic procedures of classic photography, as well as more sophisticated ones (digital and analog) are smoothly coupled with contemporary visual arts.

Elements of classical and modern photography are encountered in contemporary forms of art as a discourse mediating identity and at the same time assuming the role of the author and replacing other forms of art: painting, graphic arts, sculpting and its vicinities: theatre, dancing, music, cinematography, video, etc. The state of equality is obtained through different levels of insertion of classic and new photography. The outcome is different states of being: fusion, amalgam, conjunction, etc.

An additional and noteworthy detail with regards to the affiliation between old and new photography and the visual arts is that, beside the fact that they have reached a somewhat equal status and are both accepted as artistic expressions, a photographic image does not merely serve as a medium destined to facilitate reproduction, but it actually becomes the infrastructure on which the auctorial gesture of the artist manifests itself, is assumed and comprehended.

Likewise, one of the most important and interesting areas in which classic and progressive photography is admitted and used, is its very vicinities, comprised of direct mediums: cinematography, video, television, holography, and more distant ones: multimedia and light art. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that nowadays a multimedia artist makes use of elements pertaining to classic and progressive photography in order to refine his work of art.

In a nutshell, the very quintessence of this thesis is the fact that at the present, the affiliation between classic and progressive photography, as well as the connection with the visual arts is being acted not as an exception, but as something exceptional. In this sense, the structure of my thesis is reflected throughout three major chapters, eleven subdivisions with their subsequent introductions, conclusions, bibliography and images documenting the theoretical, creational and personal research undertaken. They are as follows:

Chapter 1. Landmarks of Photography in Art History in Comparison with Science

The Origins of Photography comprised of: when, where and how photography was born, basic principles of how to operate the darkroom, proto photography and the techniques used, inventors of the photography, the commercial launch of photography and the survival of the most efficient techniques.

About Photography in Fine Arts: were the meeting point between photography and art is discussed, with great emphasis towards painting, the emergence of pictorialists, the evolution of photography as an artistic medium and its contribution to Fine Arts.

About the Image: where the plastic image and common traits with the photographic image are discussed.

Classic photographic procedures and their appliance in Contemporary Art: here the old photography and the possibility of applying it to Contemporary Art, as well as its powers and the plasticity of the old techniques is questioned.

Chapter 2. The Journey of Photography from a source of inspiration and documentation, to transposition and a unique presence in Modern Art and Contemporary Visual Arts:

The New Visual Technologies (Multimedia) and their impact on the social sphere: where the incidence of the New Technologies arising from technological progress and their repercussions on the social component is under discussion.

Photography as an artistic instrument: this subdivision deals with discussing how the usage of photography allows artists to express themselves, research and explore new and more complex stages of the image via photosensitive techniques and cameras.

Photography as a social instrument / documentary / Mass media: it deals with presenting photography as an instrument which allows archiving, documenting and informing humans, a loyal copy of reality.

The converge of Arts: the main topic being how various artistic mediums collide in distinctive and progressive interpretations and re-interpretations.

Chapter 3. The Impact of Digital Technology on the Presence of Photography in the Contemporary Visual Arts and in Multi Media:

New Media and Concepts in Contemporary Visual Arts: the focus being on the birth of new media and the manner in which these influenced the visual arts due to the novelty in expressing ideas that was introduced.

Multi media and Neo-vision: a debate concerning the concept of Multi media and the greatness of the new artistic vision created, as well as their intermingling.

Digital Photography and the Freshness of Visual Arts presenting the manifestation of digital photography as the essential element of our century, a superior instrument, maybe the most prolific invention of the 21st century and the manner in which digital photography validates its own presence in the realm of the Fine Arts.

These 3 chapters are followed by **Chapter 4** *Personal Contributions to Developing the Field* and its adjacent subdivisions: *Lines of Research, Creative Paths, The Ratio between the Classical Photographic Technique and the New Technologies with regards to my Creation and Personal Research, Case Studies* and smaller subdivisions dedicated to research and personal creation. My personal projects (finalized or in the course of being finalized) are: Organique Project, Almost Dreamers Project, Polaroid Project, Uniq-ness of the Impossible, Calligraphies Project, Proximities Project, Portrait Project. These include research, creative processes and activities, as well as curatorial activity: Admiration Exercises Project: In memoriam Henri Cartier Bresson, Persona Project, Maniphesto Project, and pedagogic research and activity.

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PERSONAL DATA

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DIPLOMAS

2001 Bachelor

2005 Bachelor's Degree, University of Art and Design, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department
Photo - Video, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

2007 Masters, University of Art and Design, Faculty of Fine - Arts, Photo Department - Video, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Erasmus Scholarship at "Ecole Superieure de Beaux Arts" Quimper, France

OCCUPATION

2007 - 2008 Gallery Director, Gallery Preview Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2007 - 2009 Associate Teacher with the University of Art and Design, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department Photo - Video
2009 - 2011 Teaching 3D animation and the history of photography, University of Art and Design, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department Photo - Video

PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS

2004 Morocco: Jurnal Secvențial (Maroc: Journal sequential) - photo exhibition, Transit House, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2007 Visatorii (Dreamers) - photo exhibition space Iulius Mall Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Portret (Portraits) - photo exhibition, bookshop Carturesti, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2010 Post-Saudek - photo exhibition Becaș 2 Gallery/Workshop Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2010 Chip și închipuire - photo exhibition Becaș 2 Gallery/Workshop Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2011 Re-Paradise - photo exhibition Becaș 2 Gallery/Workshop Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2011 Self - photo exhibition Ramada Plaza Hotel Budapest, Hungary

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2005 Exercises of admiration - In Memoriam Henri Cartier-Bresson, photo exhibition in collaboration with French Culturel Centre Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2007 I'm here to stay the art exhibition space ESBAC, Quimper, France
2010 Birds urban - exhibition / art event Culturel French Centre Cluj-Napoca, Romania
2011 Frontier, trans-photography exhibition, Art and History Museum, Zalau, Romania
URMA, exhibitional project on Galleries Night, Baia Mare, Romania

Symposium für Moderne Kunst - DFEWA art exhibition, Mallnitz, Austria

WORKSHOPS & SYMPOSIUMS

2008 Photo-collage workshop with the children of refugees Curzi, Istanbul, Basak Foundation, Turkey

2011 Symposium für Moderne Kunst - DFEWA Residency, Mallnitz, Austria

PUBLICATIONS - BOOKS

2007 Martor discret (Discrete Witness), art photo book with personal works, published at Botez Matei-Teiu, Iași, Romania