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"Cuanto más penetramos en una obra de arte más pensamientos suscita ella en nosotros, y cuantos más pensamientos suscite tanto más debemos creer que estamos penetrando en ella".

G. E. Lessing, *Laocoonte o los límites entre la pintura y la poesía, 1766.*

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Fotografías de **Antonio del Junco**.

Fotografía de portada de **Tamara Djermanovic** intervenida con fotografía de **Antonio del Junco**.

Fotografías de 'Conversando con': **Antonio Cuesta**.

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PANORAMA: FILOSOFÍA DE LA FOTOGRAFÍA
Zsolt Bátori (Coord.)

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The philosophy of photography: From ontological and epistemic status to interpretation

Zsolt Bátori*

The Panorama section of the 5th issue of *Laocoonte* is devoted to the philosophy of photography. As the coordinator of this section I would like to thank the editors of the journal for choosing this intriguing topic for the current issue. I would also like to thank our colleagues who acted as blind reviewers in the selection process. It is the outcome of the collective effort of many that we have a thematic Panorama section of twelve articles and the invited text on this topic. The articles are diverse from the point of view of their specific questions and their philosophical methodologies, and they also belong to various philosophical traditions. What unites them in this issue is their keen philosophical focus on the ever-changing practices of photography.

The invited text for the Panorama section on the philosophy of photography is Robert Hopkins' article *El verdadero reto de la fotografía (como arte representacional comunicativo)* [*The Real Challenge to Photography (as Communicative Representational Art)*]. Hopkins argues that the fundamental resources of representations are the content and the vehicle of the representation, and the interplay between the two. According to Hopkins, artworks that belong to communicative representational art forms (such as painting and literature) rely on and exploit the full range of these three types of resource in order to communicate ideas in an artistically interesting manner. However, authentic photography (being an imprint whose content is determined by a chain of sufficient, mind-independent causes) can fully exploit only the resources of content and the vehicle of representation in its artistic communication. While exploiting the artistic resources of the interplay between the content and the vehicle of representation is central in the development of other representational arts, authentic photography is restricted in this respect and cannot reach the levels of complexity of artistic communication that are available to other representational arts.

Paloma Atencia-Linares does not agree with the arguments presented by Robert Hopkins in his invited article, and in her paper *Is photography really limited in its capacity to communicate thought? A response to Hopkins* (¿Es cierto que la fotografía presenta limitaciones en su capacidad de comunicar pensamientos? Una respuesta a

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Hopkins) she provides a number of arguments against Hopkins' position. Atencia-Linares first argues that photographers can, in fact, vary content-determining vehicle properties without varying the content of an image as an authentic photograph (being an imprint whose content is determined by a chain of sufficient, mind-independent causes). For instance they can change the quality of lines, and the patterns of lights and shadows, without varying the content. Second, she argues that photographers can vary content-neutral local properties as well, without varying the content. For instance, it is possible to enhance or reduce the brightness of some parts of the image without changing its content. Thus, it is not the case that authentic photography is restricted in its range of resources, as suggested by Hopkins. Finally, Atencia-Linares argues that while the interplay between the content and the vehicle of representations is one way to make communicative intentions manifest, it is not necessary in order to communicate thoughts.

Guilherme Ghisoni da Silva discusses the connection between a metaphysical theory and photography in his article entitled *What does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives?* The paper first provides a detailed explication of the presentist theory of time. According to presentism only the present exists, and those particulars that exist change with the passage of time. Since particulars exist only in the present, there can only be present tense propositions about things: there are no past *de re* propositions. After discussing the presentist theory of time and its semantic implications, the author investigates what different theories of photography have to say about what it is we see when we look at photographs. While some theories of photography hold that we can (indirectly) see the objects themselves in photographs, other theories deny this position, arguing that we only perceive the photograph as a depiction of the visual properties of the objects portrayed. The author first argues that presentism is incompatible with the position that we can see the past objects themselves in photographs. He then suggests a version of presentism that nevertheless accounts for the descriptive and causal referential aspects of photography.

In her article *La importancia de llamarse Aylan: Fotografía y activismo en tiempos hiperconectados* (*The importance of being called Aylan: Photography and activism in hyperconnected times*), Esther González Gea investigates the intimate relation between photography and war (and other crisis contexts). The author first provides a detailed overview of the evolution of the war photography genre during the history of the medium. She then proceeds to explain the role of iconic photographs of the dead (civilians or solders) in the process of social and political discourses about these tragic events. The role of photographic images has long transcended straightforward documentation and now powerfully shapes the reception and interpretation of the events they portray. This is especially true in the case of those images that become iconic symbols of human suffering or martyrdom in global news and social media. The author tackles the process of narrative building: how some images, but not others, attain iconic status through the mediatization of humans and their stories; and as such reach beyond these single images, instead serving as symbols for the vast extent of human tragedy.

The relationship between photography and reality is a profound question in itself, with the potential to be made even more complex in circumstances when we have lost our traditional notion of reality. In their article entitled *Fotografía y post-realidad* (*Photography and post-reality*) Ana Martí Testón and Adolfo Muñoz García consider

how the digital practices that have emerged during the past 20-25 years have changed our photographic practices. In this world of *selfies* and *likes* in social media, traditional concerns about the veracity of the medium, such as likeness and representation, have profoundly transformed; and even the questions we once asked about photography have lost their original contexts and meanings. For the most part, photographs have lost a sense of the corporeal that we have associated with them for most of the history of the medium: the rapidly expanding new contexts for photography frequently require only their digital, dematerialized existence. In the coming age of virtual reality the role of photography will be further transformed according to new practices in post-reality.

In his article *Poder y agencia icónica: El negro africano como víctima en la cultura visual hegemónica* (*Power and iconic agency: The black African as a victim in the hegemonic visual culture*) Hasán Germán López Sanz first discusses the role of methodological tools used by researchers of postcolonial and subaltern studies to investigate the Eurocentric representation of Black Africa. He proceeds to describe some aspects of European colonial heritage, comparing France with Spain from the point of view of colonisation and Eurocentric cultural hegemony. It is in this context that famous images, like Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of a starving child in Sudan, are discussed: what kind of understanding does their interpretation encourage in the rest of the world about the continent that they depict? It is not that the images of starvation and suffering are not a reality for that continent, but they do not portray the diversity and complexity of Africa either. Instead of providing a balanced view, they feed the fascination of the global media with abnormality. Audiences who view photographs of victims of war and abuse from their positions of relative safety may be better informed about the predicament of people less fortunate than themselves, but it is a further question what interpretations these images induce, and how it is possible to avoid presenting oversimplified, one-dimensional views about Africa through the distorting glasses of the Eurocentric global visual culture.

In her article *Performatividad indoamericana en el discurso gráfico y textual de Vogue (2000-2017): Elementos para una crítica razonada* (*Indoamerican performativity in graphic and textual discourse of Vogue (2000-2017): Elements for a Reasoned Critique*) Julimar del Carmen Mora Silva examines representation of American Indians in the collections and brands of high fashion, as they appear in fashion weeks, and documented on the Vogue website with numerous photographs. Using the visual aesthetic features and historical symbolic content of ethnic groups is one form of cultural appropriation, and the article systematically examines this process. From her study of visual and textual data from several years, the author provides a systematic analysis of the process by which complex semantic contents are produced that associate American Indians in various ways with exotic "other". The "other" thus enters the contemporary fashion scene with its exotic history, aesthetics and symbols, but this type of use for commercial purposes is ambivalent. The "rebranded" ethnic groups themselves do not have the chance to participate in the process and discourse of their own cultural appropriation, and they do not have an economic share in the commercialisation of their culture either.

Mar García Ranedo investigates important differences between two closely related photographic genres: photojournalistic documentary photography and street photography.

She presents two series of photographs in her article *Entre la fotografía documental*

y la fotografía callejera: marginalidad y género (*Between documentary photography and street photography: marginality and gender*). A detailed introduction to the history and theory of documentary and street photography serves as the basis for her subsequent discussion, which explores both the important differences and the parallels between the two series, from the perspective of their visual characteristics, aesthetics and communicative content. These photographic practices are also understood as social practices, and the author argues that both documentary and street photographers have a social responsibility to explore and analyse the life of the city and its inhabitants. However, while documentary photography is descriptive and informative, the role of street photography is to engage in an instantaneous dialogue, in which socio-political dilemmas are revealed and analysed in the processes of producing, interpreting and appreciating photographic works.

In her article *El asco en la fotografía documental* (*Disgust in documentary photography*) Mª Jesús Godoy Domínguez discusses the emotion of disgust in the context of scholarly debate concerning negative emotions. The author takes as her example Sergei Ilnitsky's photograph *Kitchen table*, the winner of the World Press Photo in 2015. The image is especially interesting, because – belonging to the documentary war photography genre – it is not readily accommodated by aesthetic traditions that rely on any version of the Kantian notion of disinterest. It is debatable if we have any aesthetic experience at all when attending to this image, but if we do, then it is a further question which properties of the work elicit that experience, and what kind of aesthetic experience it is. The author discusses the mechanism and role of so-called negative emotions such as disgust and repulsion, in the theoretical context of current philosophical debates about our aesthetic experiences (the paradox of fiction and the paradox of negative emotions). She argues that disgust and repulsion are not necessarily negative experiences if the aesthetic appreciation of works evoking them also leads to revelations, interpretations and understandings that we appreciate and value.

Milagros García Vázquez investigates the aesthetic and theoretical foundation of the work of László Moholy-Nagy in her article entitled *Hágase con luz y con luz se hizo: El origen de la fotogramática de László Moholy-Nagy* (*Do it with light and with light it was done: The origin of the photogrammar by László Moholy-Nagy*). The author first provides an overview of the artistic development of Moholy-Nagy. It was within the creative context of the Bauhaus movement that he first started to experiment with the medium of photography whose artistic status was yet to be determined. Moholy-Nagy became interested in photography because he believed that photographic works do not have to resemble other art forms in order to exploit the artistic possibilities of the medium. For Moholy-Nagy the genuine photographic artistic possibilities are derived from a technique in which light is the central driving force. His artistic approach is to paint with light, that is, procuring the artistic qualities that he seeks by using technology that photography alone can offer. Photograms and photomontages are unique photographic techniques, in which the creation of forms is elevated to the level of language: a grammar of light, or photogrammar, as it was named in the title of the article.

In her article *Una transgresión incómoda: Entre lo privado y lo público en la fotografía de familia* (*An uncomfortable transgression: Between the private and the public in family photography*) Miranda Tapia first investigates the notion of private and public in their diverse cultural and historical varieties. The author goes on to discuss the photographic self, portrayed with its autobiographical aspects, and the family photograph in which

we traditionally only see harmony, laughter and joy. There is, however, a different contemporary practice of portraying frustration and crisis in the family, or even the process of a family breaking apart. We are presented with an analysis of examples of photographic works portraying alcoholic fathers, single parent families, and the like. Some of these works are autobiographical while others may be staged and fictional, but they all share a marked change, a deliberate breaking away from the family photography genre's traditional approach to family.

Mônica Zarattini discusses contemporary fine art photography in the context of a theoretical discussion about hyperrealist image consumption; since in hyperrealism technical images take on new functions as their uses have blurred the boundaries between image and reality. In her article *A imagem-enigma na fotografia contemporânea* (*The puzzle-picture in contemporary photography*) contemporary photographic practices are discussed in the context of "hypervisibility" of the selfie culture that is based on today's practices of photographic consumption. She raises the question why some photographic works are appreciated as artworks on a par with products (paintings, sculptures, etc.) of other contemporary fine art practices. The author argues that fine art photography must leave behind the documentary aspect of its nature, even to become "antiphotographic", in the creative process. The theoretical discussion leads to analyses of artistic practices of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschemberg, Joseph Kossuth, Dennis Oppenheim, Bernd & Hilla Becher, Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, among others.

Víctor Murillo Rigorred discusses the work of Gerhard Richter, relying on the theoretical notion of 'index' in his article *La pintura como huella: fotografía y pintura en la obra de Gerhard Richter* (*Painting as a footprint: photography and painting in the work of Gerhard Richter*). The starting point of the article is an explication of Peirce's term 'index' and its relevance to photographic images. The causal, mechanical connection between the image and its denotation (the object physically causing the image as its memory in matter) is thought to be a characteristic of photography, but for Richter this connection became an essential component of his paintings. The mechanised process is explicated as "machine art", as opposed to traditional notions and practices of paintings. The nature of Richter's photo-paintings and abstract paintings is hence closer to the nature of photographic images than to traditional paintings as we know them from the history of art. As a result, the aesthetic categories belonging to photography and painting are rearranged, creating novel ways of interpretation and appreciation.

As we have seen from this overview of the articles in this Panorama section, the current philosophical interest in photography is diverse in at least two respects. First, there seems to be no canonised methodology for talking about photographs, and second, there seems to be no standardised list of topics that would constitute the (or even a) philosophy of photography. While some articles have tackled metaphysical issues about the nature of photographic images and their epistemic status, others have been concerned with the interpretive processes of images as they are produced and appreciated in various social and political contexts. It is the hope of the coordinator of this Panorama section that the growing philosophical interest in the medium of photography will provoke further development of thought around these issues in the coming years.