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## Hidden Meanings of Image of Communication in the Medium of Photography (Wisdom and Madness of Photography)

### Abstract

In their theoretical study, the authors of the paper address the hidden meanings of image of communication in the medium of photography. Specifically, they focus on the encoding and subsequent interpretation of images on the basis of their inner construction. At the same time, the authors are trying to find an answer to philosophical questions – whether photography is wise or rather foolish, whether it represents life or death, and contemplate the question of whether a photograph is more an embalming of a moment or its memento mori.

### Key words

Photography, portrait, reality, communication, encoding, decoding, visual culture, phenomenology, epistemology

Photography periodically deconstructs and constructs its self-correcting mechanisms and enters any historical period: “that is not an identical repetition of the same, but rather an interaction causing a perpetual return of the same as something else.” Instrumental components of the medium of photography (intention, visibility, technology) intuitively react to the process of democratization of

technologies, image hybridization, aesthetics, and coding of the image communication. For the post-media era (mentality), it loses the option: “to show “the essence” of what it depicts, while gaining its own value by ceasing to try to compare with the depicted objects. If an image accepts its *différance* – a visible, but still ineffable difference to what it is depicting – it rids itself of what it should represent, of its referent”.

It is the hybridization and the mix of the high and the low in an extreme hyper-connectivity of public environment of social media online platforms that expands “the ghost” of the massive extent of control of what is artistic and what is not. Thus defined dictate and development of mass media faces the control mechanism of “normative of the individual” and creates anthropological reversal: “meaning of which exceeds descriptive-analytical possibilities of both the phenomenology and semiotics because it exceeds all oppositions between the visible and the invisible, the perceptible and the imperceptible.”

These are often semi-professional platforms of interpretation (Facebook, Flickr, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest etc.), which unconsciously formulate meanings and norms of photographic

image and relativize and devalue the function of traditional forms of representation. One of the processes of detoxification from the aforementioned addiction (it must not be an illusion of a tendency – “predilection” – towards anonymization and disguise) is the production of images rich in meaning, capable of communicating. These extremely subjective reactions of human creative ontological potential uncover “the dystopia” of an image specifically in the hidden encoding, in setting hidden communication meanings generating intentionality, visibility, and technology.

Roland Barthes, with an imperative of a philosopher, contemplates the question of the secret of photography when he legitimately asks: “who could help me?” His desire stems not only from the image of his mother but also from the construction of life of a meta-image, evidence arising from the technique of its usage and, despite its tremendous expansion, he is not sure whether photography even exists and has its own “genius”.

In current hyper-connectivity of the individual, Barthes’s photographic image “evades us” unless it “has a classification, i.e. a corpus” – the classification and distribution we subject it to in, for example, the theories of inner structure of the medium of photography.

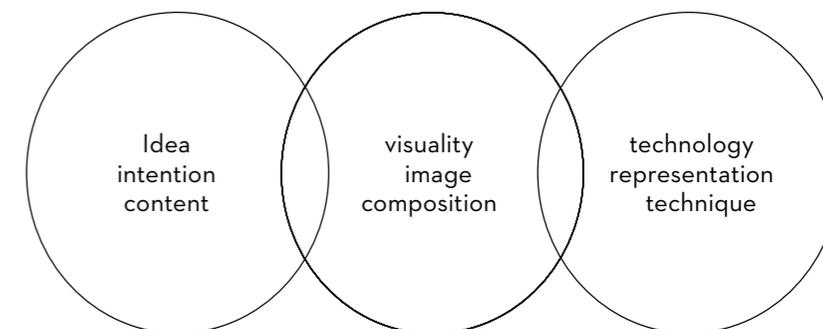
### Wisdom of Photography – Politics of Memory

“With the advent of photography, the fact of reproduction, each image has become reality and is a witness of what is and what was, and thus also of that which remains forever.” (David Freedberg)

The principle and rules of interpretation in the case of a photographic image assume

a necessity of instrumentality (functionality) and a system of inner construction (a scheme of the medium of photography). There are three important components required for a credible photographic representation – ideological, contextual (intentional) component, image composition (visual), and technological (representation technique). Within a defined extent, they are connected by a complementarity of all three elements (Picture 1).

modalities of dissemination.”<sup>1</sup> The area of inner structure of the medium of photography is supposed to provide: “a sensible representation correspondent to authentic experience”, the formation of recommendations, platforms for mechanisms of control and an existence of: “metaphysical belief allowing “natural” reception of photography; it shifts a recipient (spectator) towards conviction of its exceptional rhetoric of authenticity”.<sup>2</sup> Ján Šmok defines the functionality



Idea/intention/content  
visuality/image/  
composition  
technology/representation  
technique

Picture 1: Interconnection of Three Elements.

(Source: own processing)

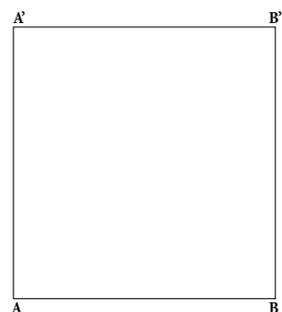
Encoding, personal strategy, and interpretation node project these relationships towards complexity – a general interpretive and semantic level of historical iconography (empiricism of art and social history) and an individual perception of a relationship “between an image and an event, as an image does not speak the reality, but stages it to make it into representation” (subordinate to tempering interaction of the aforementioned components) “and is subject to various logics depending on the customer and percipient and the

and representativeness of photography through a paradigm of a square with “culturally determined topographic axes” – a process of stylization and individualization. J. Šmok reasons with a loss of function of the objective reality, which becomes only a means (props) that allows formation of emotional messages (transmission). He calls it transformation from the informative “statement” to the emotional – “the loss of informativity and accentuation of emotivity”. He methodologically describes a tendency to change, an absence of quality of reality and an emerging prevalence of quality of an

<sup>1</sup> FIŠEROVÁ, M.: *Fragmentální vidění. Ranciere, Derrida, Nancy*. Prague : Togga, 2019, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> PAVLOVIČOVÁ, Z.: *Etika a princip authenticity*. In *Filozofia*, 2004, Vol. 59, No. 9, p. 627–640.

image. These two developmental tendencies are defined by the rate of individualization and stylization. Šmok defines them by the boundaries of a square (Picture 2) that graphically form the whole “system of emotional messages (transmissions).”<sup>3</sup>



Picture 2: System of Emotional Messages.

(Source: ŠMOK, J.: *Stavba a skladba fotografického snímku*. Skripta lidové konzervatoře Stredočeského kraje.

Prague : SKNV, 1975, p. 25.)

Point A stands for “a representative statement”, maximally objectively (accurately) represented; the meaning of representation constitutes the generally emotionally positive reality. Point A’ is, similarly, “a representative statement”, but the meaning (coding) is maximally individual. In the line A – A’, the scheme of interpretation is “a process of individualization”. The line between points A – B is a process of the loss of direct representativeness of “the statement”, i.e. the meaning (coding). It is a process of stylization. The process of stylization in the line B – B’ is a process of an exclusively

individual effect. The sides of the square thus constitute the theoretically possible boundaries of the process of the mixing (hybridization) of an image in the process of individual content coding in interaction with formal image stylization directed at individual (personal) form of abstraction.<sup>4</sup>

From the phenomenology point of view, the process of interpretation (of a photograph) is an important “language of art criticism”. Michael Braxandall admits a certain relativization of phenomenology that is not anchored within the professional classification of the

science of arts. He points out:

“Although there does not appear to be a ground for a clear or general qualification of typology of indirect art-critical words.”<sup>5</sup>

He groups them into three approximate divisions of moods:

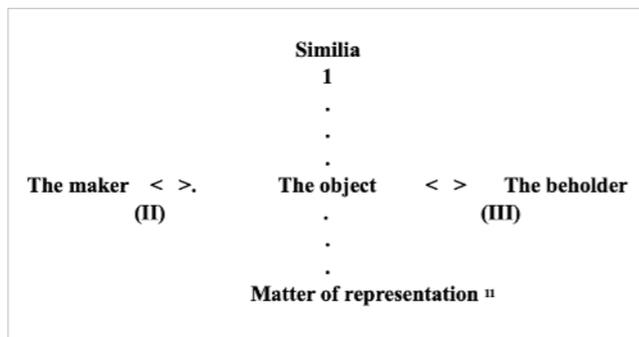
1) Words pointing to a certain type of visual interestingness, using comparison, metaphor, rhythms that have a comparative effect – (accurate setting, group of verticals, square format, triangle, excited, calm, soulful).

2) Words characterizing a work of art through action or the cause of its formation (creation) – (calculated, sensitive, elaborate, difficult, development, adaptation).

3) Words referring to the methods and means used to affect a beholder, of the perceptive reaction of a beholder – (impressing,

unexpected, notable, disturbing, (feeling, effect)).

4) M. Braxandall argues that: “these moods could loosely be described as comparative, metaphorical (I), causal, inferential (2), and subject or ego words (III).” He visualizes this argumentation in a scheme (Picture 3):



Picture 3: Scheme of Visualization.

(Source: KESNER, L.: *Vizuálne teórie*, Prague : H&H, 2005, p. 254-255.)

Barthes puts Photography under empirical (professional/amateur), rhetorical (landscapes/objects/portraits/nudes) or aesthetic (realism/pictorialism) examination. History of photography has invoked the most significant and strange disputes over a photographic image; according to Barthes, a certain “cry of anarchisms, marginalisms, and individualisms”, generating “images that are immoral, irreligious, or diabolic” (as many have declared upon the advent of photography). It is not a kind of “pleasure joined with the stereotyped (worn-out) image” but also “an image more “false” (less authentic)”, with an epithet of “an impression of nauseated boredom, as if the universalized image were producing a world that is without difference (indifferent).” Barthes’s inversion (reversal) emphasizes the question of ethics and the process of getting to know photography, which, once it becomes a general

sign language, rids the human world of conflicts. Questions and cries “let us abolish the images, let us save immediate Desire” for interpretation of reality; on the other hand, let us characterize the construction, system, architecture of a photographic image that is subject to “the civilized code.”<sup>6</sup> Barthes asks photography: “Mad or tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits; mad if its realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revolutive moment which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic ecstasy.”<sup>7</sup>

Epistemology of “the tameness and madness” of photography is connected not as much to the hermeneutics of what has been written, but rather to encompassing what is unique, individual, and original that stems from the exuberance of an image – to produce, recycle, fabricate, be a hallucination of cultural symbols. The problem mostly points out the common position of the science of arts, culturology, and the professional community aiming to express and formulate a system of interpretation. Barthes and “the society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it.” Barthes calls this means “banalization” – to tame the Photograph is “to generalize it, to gregarize it until it is no longer

confronted by any image in relation to which it can mark itself, assert its special character, its scandal, its madness.”<sup>8</sup> One of the symptoms of this period is the self-amputation of a photographic image which lacks all self-correcting aesthetic consistency, which Barthes ascribes to a reversed image-repertoire: “where everything is transformed into images: only images exist and are produced and are consumed” – post-factuality, techno-morality or post-truth of anthropological reversal (Pérez Tornero). Barthes also writes about “good will” – “I could not help thinking about Photography: for I could say all this about the photographs which touched me (out of which I had methodically constituted Photography itself). I then realized that there was a sort of link (or knot) between Photography, madness, and something whose name I did not know. I began by calling it: the pangs of love”. According to him, to photograph is to become mad due to pitying the passing beyond the unreality (illusion) of the things represented (reality): “taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die, for if the Look insists, if it traverses, with the photograph, Time, it is always potentially crazy: it is at once the effect of truth and the effect of madness.”<sup>9</sup>

### Madness – Erosion – Cohesion of Photography

“Whatever the extent to what photograph can be worn out or tarnished, however it might be damaged by dampness or light – those remorseless natural

phenomena that destroy depiction in bronze and stone – it is immortal”. (Roland Barthes)

Michael Braxandall similarly perceives the situation as a social anticipation of “a global image” (group of images – creations) of pictorial style that can be interpreted as a generational “cognitive style”, producing hybridization of images in local mental conditions. He also draws attention to a given reality (examination of practice) – through new premises, experience, and perceptive abilities – by seeing in a given cultural context, reconstructing culturally specific visual experience; what he calls “a period eye”. This main line of critical interpretation is thus not supposed to conceal premises of the new outlook, interpretation levels or generational replacement, but, on the contrary, it is the responsibility of the theoreticians to make transformations of an image – Photography – visible to everyone and to analyze their validity from both the view of the possibility of the author’s individuality and identity, and the art science theory and work. On the other hand, it is necessary to avoid Jorge Ribalta’s reflections, in which photography appears as “fantastic recapture” that overly deviates from the traditional technological state, causing photography to self-destruct and become an insignificant paradigm of visual culture.<sup>10</sup> “We need to interpret interpretations more than we need to interpret things and they always must make sense” (Richard Brilliant). The language of interpretation is an indispensable form of verification of

<sup>3</sup> ŠMOK, J.: *Stavba a skladba fotografického snímku*. Skripta lidové konzervatoře Stredočeského kraje. Prague : SKNV, 1975, p. 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> ŠMOK, J.: *Stavba a skladba fotografického snímku*. Skripta lidové konzervatoře Stredočeského kraje. Prague : SKNV, 1975, p. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> KESNER, L.: *Vizuálne teórie*. Prague : H&H, 2005, p. 254-255.

<sup>6</sup> BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora*. Bratislava : Archa, 1994, p. 102-104.

<sup>7</sup> BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora*. Bratislava : Archa, 1994, p. 104-105.

<sup>8</sup> BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora*. Bratislava : Archa, 1994, p. 102-103.

<sup>9</sup> BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora*. Bratislava : Archa, 1994, p. 103-105.

<sup>10</sup> KESNER, L.: *Vizuálne teórie*. Prague : H&H, 2005, p. 14.

an institutional and scientific norm, as well as the associative power of an individual's perception. How and what to interpret is always a story of a meeting, interaction, of relationship, of dialectic. Richard Brilliant observes the construction of a "simulacrum" and the penetration of subjectivity into the hermeneutic act of explanation and interpretation of an artistic work.

*"Valorization of the interpreter and of his interpretation may interfere with, even obliterate, the viewer's visual experience of the artwork. But, then, the competent viewer is rarely autonomous. His confrontation with the artwork, if serious, requires an ongoing exchange between his own preconditioned perceptions and the contemporary idioms with which he expresses them to himself in thought or in public. Thus, he enters into an ongoing process of interpretation, whose end may be indeterminate but whose rules of exposition are not."*<sup>11</sup>

In the pedagogical process, there is an assumption that "something" has already existed in an objective state, in the author's identity, before we even started to interpret it. Visual language simulates a social concept detached from general iconography anchored in history. Although many things are being recycled, it methodologically shifts the poetics of reality perception (of relationships, identity, people, work, objects) not only into the context of accusation and falsification (so-called post-humanistic document), but also the emotional, subjective construct of an intense aestheticizing situation bordering on kitsch. In this approach (coding) there is also sensitivity towards understanding

our evolution, existential, spiritual, and self-reflective attitude of an author with a question (maybe intuitive) about norm-setting values, and the meaning and purpose of art. In an erosion of an image, it is sometimes a hard, exposing path of personal symbolic reference - "meanings of being hiding the fate of the world" (C. G. Jung).

### Wisdom and Madness of Silence and Noise of an Image

*"The expression to keep quiet is strange in itself. Because quietness is what keeps us."* (Georges Bernanos)

Extension of noise in a photographic image is not an apology of silence. An opinion of the famous Reuters photo-editor Alexia Singh: "...a good photograph makes you scream. It is unbelievable", is authentic and legitimate. On the other hand, splitting attention is "a mystagogy" of noise and silence of an image and only partially allows us to penetrate the secret of photography, while not dishonouring this mad partnership. Silence in an image is the true philosophical attitude - "looking beyond the penultimate".<sup>12</sup> Madness of silence is to differently express something that cannot be expressed by words, only by an image. During creative observation of reality, silence, as opposed to noise, never becomes a stereotype that should be excluded from the process of photography. It is the silence at the beginning and, paradoxically, at the end of the discovered secret as a shape-forming morpheme (root) of the recorded image. In the etymological sense, noise divides and separates. On the contrary,

silence in an image connects individual elements to the chain of events in relation to space - it is a visual paraphrase of an inner image (map) of a human. Concerns about the idea that the spectator will not notice and understand the intention inserted into the image do not stem from silence itself, but from what it exposes between lines, when we are "reading the image's story".<sup>13</sup> Photographed characters - "forgettable existents" are stories independent of time and of the recorded moments and events in photographs. They are autonomous and nontransferable. In Plato's sense of words, they (we) are the direct narrators (diegesis), when, within the context of meaning (mimesis) of the "imitator", we make the continuity of vivid noisy images and memories present.<sup>14</sup> Silence (the madness of silence) of an image is forgettable mainly due to the sujet (plot), passage of events tempering power, noise, morphology, content of stimuli which represent a certain parabola - the ability to connect individual stories of place and time with the personal projection of one's mental construct into another story. Through these small spatial stories, the silence of an image orients itself on connections (contexts of noise) of history and an ongoing tension between the past and the present. Noise (of the past) and silence (of the present) are determined by the function of memory, but do not always represent a construction with a tendency to bind ideas and imagination solely with the recorded reality. According to the dictionary, silence is "a state of a person who

<sup>13</sup> SARAH, R.: *Síla ticha*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2017, p. 237-257.

<sup>14</sup> CHATMAN, S.: *Příběh a diskurs: narativní struktura v literatuře a filmu*. Brno : Host, 2008, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> SARAH, R.: *Síla ticha*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2017, p. 156-157.

<sup>11</sup> KESNER, L.: *Vizuálne teórie*. Prague : H&H, 2005, p. 310-311.

stops talking". It indicates "an absence of noise, commotion, and a state of place where no sound can be heard." Although silence is terminologically connected to solitude, quietness, it does not at all mean withdrawal, emptiness or soundlessness.<sup>15</sup> Silence of Photography certainly does not represent a fear of contamination by the noise of an image. To interpret these imaginations (representations) is almost like a "philosophical reversal" that does not come easily. For a photographic image, it can be a touch with silence that does not happen mechanically or ideologically through an absence of something. On the contrary, it records and evaluates the most intensive presences of the symbolic (of noise, silence) in the space and the physicality. P. A. Florenskij refers to the symbolist Andrei Bely (1880 -1934), who sees philosophy as an alternative to science and art, as "an alternative searching for its own way to glimpse the highest transcendent reality." The term "symbolic art" puts philosophy in the position of dependency on knowledge through revelation - symbolic knowledge.<sup>16</sup> "It is a way of defiance and stepping out of real reality to the one even more real." (P. A. Florenskij). In silence, we are able to think about questions of Photography that often bring an illusion of transparency. They give an impression that through them we can comprehend everything, master and organize everything. Silence is "a mystagogy" and it allows us to partially enter the secret of reality and not violate it. If we want to

<sup>15</sup> SARAH, R.: *Síla ticha*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2017, p. 157- 237.

<sup>16</sup> RUSNÁK, P.: Špecifika Florenského personalizmu. In *Konštantínove listy*, 2018, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 170.

keep the secret, we must protect it from the profane everydayness. An author - photographer is quiet, because he observes, listens, and embraces everything brought by the silence of what is seen. He must stay silent to express in other ways something that cannot be expressed by words, only by an image. In our being, it is the silence of thinking and observation; after pressing the shutter button, it becomes a materialized image of thought. We understand the message of an image (symbolic reality) when we enter its quietness; when we learn to observe it in its secrets of pain. An image (photography) is a constant pain of an author, as each vivid photograph is born from pain from the meeting of the soul with a place. Noise is "perspectiva artificialis" that transports a perspective as it is seen by the human eye. The look of silence is internal, based on the openness of the soul of space that is perceived also tactilely and topologically as relationships of objects and geometry of the symbolic reality of the related visual signs (points). Hibernation of madness of an image's noise is "a frame" with an imaginary crooked horizon, in silence and remoteness, with a minimal condition of intelligibility.<sup>17</sup>

J. Derrida suggests: "in photography we remain visible, although we are no longer seen." Thanks to the belief in our look, photography allows us to survive metonymically: "because we know that once an image has been realized, recorded, it will be reproducible in our absence...," in the future that brings our death.<sup>18</sup> A loose paraphrase of life about the

<sup>17</sup> SARAH, R.: *Síla ticha*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2017, p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> FIŠEROVÁ, M.: *Fragmentální vidění*. Ranciere, Derrida, Nancy. Prague : Togga, 2019, p. 161.

suffering of St. John of the Cross is analogically (implicitly) present in the suffering of a photographic image that constantly accompanies us when we enter "The Night of Sense", which unmasks all thought constructs including those connected to the belief in an image transcending all certainties that the human mind has about thinking and order (system). We are falling into a bottomless abyss and, eventually, into "The Night of Faith", into the loss of any rate of imagination. In these postulates of "senses, reason, faith" in one's self we, however, still experience transformation in the attempt of grasping the ideal. For photography, the personification of this path to nothingness is our own Self, it is an image of the greatest possible suffering for "the image of liberation". Historical suffering of Photography and image exposes "the negative extreme" of human capabilities in the clearest possible way.<sup>19</sup>

### Note to Paradox of Photography - Life and Death

A certain power of creation through materialization of not only the untouchable but also the impalpable, conservation of an elusive vision, sparkle of light, and a consequent fixation of these scenes on hard metal had, at first, invoked feelings of discomfort and fear in many people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Feeling of dizziness from the unknown is something we also recognize today, so we cannot be surprised that an invention based on alchemy, on developing and appearing, needed some time before people dared to come close to it.

<sup>19</sup> MÜLLER, A. U., NEYROVÁ, M. A.: *Edita Steinová*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2012, p. 251-252.

Honoré de Balzac, a pioneer of literary realism or naturalism, was among those who had not avoided doubts and fears of daguerreotype. He assumed that every body in nature consists of an infinite number of thin layers – specters – perceptible by sight within all directions. Daguerreotype always catches one of the layers and removes it from the body. Every time someone is photographed, they lose one more layer, i.e. a part of their constitutive essence.<sup>20</sup> This Balzac's theory is partially interpreted by Nadar in his photographic biography. Despite his statements, Balzac was one of the first people to sit in front of Nadar's lens and let him portray them. It led to the only portrait of Balzac in history (Picture 4). In the photograph, he holds his hand over his heart and looks beyond the frame of daguerreotype with a strange expression. It is questionable whether Balzac's fear of photography was real or feigned.



Picture 4: Nadar: Honoré de Balzac. (Source: BnF Gallica. [online]. [2020-09-14]. Available at: <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53118945v/f1.item>>.)

It is, however, certain that the vague fear of photography has gradually transformed into an addiction to the “embalming” of a moment. According to André Bazin, what is depicted by a photograph, i.e. what is in a photograph, is “snatched from the flow of time”<sup>21</sup>. On the basis of this thought, time is also the main foundation of what was identified by Roland Barthes as the essence of photography which he called “this-has-been”<sup>22</sup>. Photography thus proves that the object has been real, which, however, can lead to a false idea that it still exists. The value of some timeless eternity of an object, subject or a moment gained by a photograph is substituted by its direct placement into the past. To some extent, Barthes’s “this-has-

21 BAZIN, A.: The Ontology of the Photographic Image. In TRACHTENBERG, A. (ed.): *Classic Essays on Photography*. New Haven : Leete s Island Books, 1980, p. 238.

22 BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora, poznámka k fotografii*. Prague : Fra, 2005, p. 77.

been” negates Bazin’s “embalming”. André Bazin regards photography as something that preserves life, while, on the other hand, Roland Barthes considers photography a reminder of the inevitability of death – *memento mori*. Something that had lived must have died and something that had begun must have ended. Photography tells us not only that someone or something certainly existed or something happened in past, it also interconnects the past and the present. According to Roland Barthes, a photograph is “the living image of a dead thing” and it is “Photography’s inimitable feature (its noeme)”<sup>23</sup>.

Intersection of the past and the present leads to an alteration, or distortion, of time. Through analogical linking of the past and the present, of now and then, of the living and the dead, human experience with photography has shaken the perception of time. The mystery of photography, the time paradox of a photographic image, might thus lead us to an impression that photography puts the objects (or whatever it depicts) in a state of the eternal present, eternal life. This opinion could be interpreted as a space-time context of a communication act or as a dynamic interaction between the present look and a look from past. The most common occurrence when looking at a photograph is the confrontation, comparison, and evaluation of the changing state of the photographed element in time.

David Green states that if we accept the thesis that each photograph is in its nature situated in the present time, it is suitable to replace Barthes’s phrase “this has been” to what Green calls “this

23 BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora, poznámka k fotografii*. Prague : Fra, 2005, p. 77.

is now and here”<sup>24</sup>. If we look at a photograph, we not only make the past present – make alive something that no longer might be, we also transform a completed event into an imperfective state. Thierry de Duve suggests that inside a photograph life continues; time behind its frame flows, but what it portrays has not been reached by the flow of time.<sup>25</sup> That is why we are also able to observe the transformation of the depicted situation, object or subject in time. A simple example of this could be looking at one’s portrait from youth at an old age. In the post-barthesian era, the negation of the past as a dominant premise for thoughts related to understanding the essence of the medium of photography occur more often. Photography as a reminder of human transience can be described as obtrusive and melancholic. However, this perception is still seen as more or less dominant.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, we would state that as death is innate to everything alive, it is innate for photography to bind life, artificially capture and specifically deprive time of its power. Connection between human existence, death, and photography could be marked as another example of its wisdoms and madnesses. Within the context of photographic paradox, Thierry de Duve reflects on the functioning of a snapshot and

24 GREEN, D.: Marking Time: Photography, Film and Temporalities of the Image. In GREEN, D., LOWRY, J. (eds.): *Stillness and Time: Photography and Moving Image*. Brighton : Photoforum / Photoworks, 2006, p. 12.

25 DUVE, T.: Póza a momentka, neboli Fotografický paradox. In ČISAŘ, K. (ed): *Co je to fotografie? Příbram : Herrmann & synové, 2004, p. 274.*

26 GREEN, D.: Marking Time: Photography, Film and Temporalities of the Image. In GREEN, D., LOWRY, J. (eds.): *Stillness and Time: Photography and Moving Image*. Brighton : Photoforum / Photoworks, 2006, p. 17.

time exposure. From the existential and phenomenological point of view, he states that the former is inclined towards “life” and the latter towards “death”. He considers a snapshot an aggressive and artificial interference with the flow of things. It usurps “life”, but is incapable to convey it. Time exposure repeats, reconstructs, time that has already passed; a moment that has ended. The result of a snapshot is a frozen living being, a frozen slice of life stuck in an unfinished movement. On the other hand, because time exposure already directly deals with the past time, it evokes immortalized continuance. That is one of the reasons why time exposure has a social and aesthetic function typical for a serious, static portrait of a monumental character.<sup>27</sup> An example could be a reportage photograph (snapshot) that depicts a runner in the moment of tearing through the finishing tape. It is a photograph depicting a fraction of natural movement – an extracted hundredth of time lived, of a dated event. By pressing the shutter button, a photographer becomes “an agent of death”<sup>28</sup>. Aggressiveness mentioned by Thierry de Duve can be seen on a sportsman’s convulsive pose in which he is captured – confined. By the shutter clicking, the outside movement changes – life changes to the death of a movement – to a pose. On the contrary, let’s imagine the same sportsman that is being portrayed while holding the winner’s trophy and looking into the lens. Such photograph does not depict the sportsman

27 DUVE, T.: Póza a momentka, neboli Fotografický paradox. In ČISAŘ, K. (ed): *Co je to fotografie? Příbram : Herrmann & synové, 2004, p. 274-275.*

28 BARTHES, R.: *Světlá komora, poznámka k fotografii*. Prague : Fra, 2005, p. 88.

at the exact moment of earning his victory. The time exposure portrait works with past time. In this genre, the photographer ignores Bresson’s *decisive moment* and, instead, intentionally presses the shutter button only after it is gone. By posing, staging, and an absolute control over the visual expression, he breathes life into the petrified subject just like a master sculptor breathes life into his sculptures. At the same time, such portrait frees the subject from the tyranny of the moment through introducing him into a state of timelessness. In a reduced visual form, it expresses the same fact – the sportsman’s victory. However, through the symbolic interpretation – time exposure, a magnificent monument is created. We can state that the photographer in this case becomes “an agent of life”. The click of a shutter changes a static depiction of a person absent of any outside movement into a sculpture that condenses life – inner movement.

In reflecting on the nature of photography and aspects molding its character, no sharp boundaries exist. It would be short-sighted to reduce photographic paradox into a simple contrast between the snapshot and time exposure. Because time exposure is a result of every snapshot and each time exposure has at first been a snapshot. According to Thierry de Duve, photographic paradox is expressed by two lives and two deaths that are set in opposition *in chiasm* (intertwined).<sup>29</sup> Another aspect of photographic paradox, which can be described as both the wisdom and the madness of photography and is closely

29 DUVE, T.: Póza a momentka, neboli Fotografický paradox. In ČISAŘ, K. (ed): *Co je to fotografie? Příbram : Herrmann & synové, 2004, p. 274-275.*

20 NADAR: *Když jsem byl fotografem*. Prague : Akadémiia múzických umení, 2018, p. 8.

connected to life and death, is the mourning. Photography has many functions related to the diversity of forms and their usage. Among the most basal of these is the informative and emotional function. It is the emotional dimension of photography that is connected to its perception as a memory or remembrance. It thus becomes a stimulus for memory and feelings. From the sociological point of view, portrait photography is an inseparable part of funeral traditions that help human society to cope with death.

Shearer West states that portraits were primarily invented to serve as symbolic objects of funeral rituals. Relationships between various portraiture forms and rituals connected to death or burial is natural.<sup>30</sup> Nowadays, a photographic portrait of a deceased person becomes mostly an object that evokes memories and is a part of the mourning process for the bereaved. This emotional power of photography is based on its *indexical nature*<sup>31</sup> - i.e. its direct connection to the material world, the reality it depicts. Portrait photography is a visual imprint of a real person, without whom it could not have been created. Whether the portrayed person is dead or not, a photograph is a testimony to human existence. A photograph of a deceased person is, similarly to all other imprints of their life (clothes, notes, jewelry, objects, etc. that are

in causal relation to their being), a part of an intimate collection of monuments. Photography primarily works only with visual perception. Geoffrey Batchen therefore considers this medium a very bad means of capturing any memories. A photograph lacks other sensorial aspects that are a part of human experience, such as sound, touch, taste, temperature, etc. They are thus replaced by a two-dimensional substitute.<sup>32</sup> Literally, it is “a *flat memory*” that is significantly reduced. Photographs are thus somewhat abridged versions of extrasomatic memory in the form of visual images. We are largely surrounded by photographs that are sterile, cold, and artificial; it is common to approach them apathetically. If we are looking at a photograph of a deceased who we had known, positive or negative emotional bonds with this person come to the fore. Although a photograph is only “a *flat memory*”, it still nostalgically influences people more than anything else. Looking at a photograph and contemplating the deceased person, their life, and mutual interactions revives faded memories of life. Human minds compensate for the missing sensorial aspects; in the silence of imagination it creates vivid illusions of them.

Therefore, the role of photography is maybe not as much in creating a memory of the past rather in creating a positive image for the future. From this point of view, we can regard photography, and especially portraiture, not as preserved memory, but rather as

future nostalgia.<sup>33</sup> Let's photograph today, so we have something to build our reminiscing on tomorrow. No wonder Honoré de Balzac and many others thought that photography possesses something magical, that it transcends the world as we know it and touches the world of the metaphysical. Even today, when photography is devoid of all mysticism, it still fascinates people with illusionism that they voluntarily believe in. We place into photography more dimensions than it can take; we put ourselves into it (“*our layers*”). We do it with confidence that one day in the future it will return to us, or the ones that come after us, what we have put into it. Photographic paradox, the contradictory reflections on the time aspect (past - present - future), snapshot and time exposure (movement - staticity), life and death (transience - eternity) attempt to find conciliation between the wisdoms and madnesses of photographic image; to find conciliation between losing, searching, and finding, in whatever order.

### CONCLUSION

The medium of photography has had its specific secrets since its advent. These words are also spoken and confirmed by renowned photographers (Šmok, Nadar), philosophers (Barthes, Flusser), and writers (Sontagová, Balzac). That is why it attracts various interdisciplinary personalities, who analyze it even during the present days. We have tried to write our study in a similar spirit, as we are always trying to search for, promote,

tell, and examine the secrets of photography; its madnesses and wisdoms that it still has and that need to be revealed and scientifically researched. Photography is a living medium that is constantly developing due to its dependence on the technological progress of society, as well as its ever-surprising means of expression, aesthetics, and its intersections with philosophy or sociology. Some authors attempt to systemize it on the basis of its inner structure - the functionality of photography (Šmok, Sedlák Braxandall). They analyze it from the view of its construction - as if wanting to find a fixed outline of its functioning, arrangement of its segments, while, at the same time, it remains ungraspable in its expressions - it has its madnesses (Barthes). Therefore, we are trying to analyze it on current interpretational levels and thus to create some message for the future. However, new functionalities of this medium are constantly being sought out and found, which is caused, among others, by the development of other scientific disciplines, such as aesthetics.

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<sup>30</sup> WEST, S.: *Portraiture*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Within the context of this study, we direct attention mainly at the direct, causal connection between photography and a portrayed person. However, photographic portrait possesses characteristics of all three Pierce's classes of signs. It is similar to what it represents (icon), is a result of portraiture (index), contains gestures, face expressions, and props whose meaning can be interpreted through social or cultural habits (symbol).

<sup>32</sup> BATCHEN, G.: *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*. New York : Princeton Architectural Press / Amsterdam : Van Gogh Museum, 2004, p. 94-98.

<sup>33</sup> WEST, N.: *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. Charlottesville, VA : University of Virginia Press, 2000, p. 155.

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