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How Photography changes the Now and the Future

Abstract

This thesis deals with the question of how the present moment, the now, is being changed by its materialization through photography. As a consequence, the question of how this photographic intervention in the now can change the future, will be asked and dealt with. This paper is based on the observation of people’s behaviour when it comes to photography. The simple experience of a certain moment seems not to be sufficient nor satisfying. People seem to strive for materializing the now, the moment that they are experiencing by taking photos. Grotesquely, the now that people try to capture, seems to be changed by exactly this attempt. As a consequence, the now that people are living in is not authentic anymore, just like the photograph resulting from this intervention does not and cannot show reality as it is. So, what is the literal and actual worth of a photo, if it changes what it wants but fails to represent? In this paper, a few possible reasons for the modern obsession with photography, such as satisfaction, power, self-knowledge and recognition are being discussed. The theoretical background is based upon theorists such as Roland Barthes, Celia Lury and Vilém Flusser.
1. Introduction

This thesis deals with the question of how the present moment, the now, is being changed by its materialization through photography. Also, the question of how this photographic intervention in the now can change the future, will be asked and dealt with. It will be based on my personal perception and experiences, as well as on theoretical references regarding photographic theory, especially from Roland Barthes, Celia Lury and Vilém Flusser. Finally, since this paper serves as an inspiration for a practical design project, I will give an idea of where this project could possibly start from by asking questions that came to my mind during the writing and researching process.

As the Swedish curator, critic and historian of contemporary art and photography Jan-Erik Lundström states:

"[...] we are citizens of a photographic culture, where values, identities, ideals are articulated, where powers are exercised with, by, and through photographs. Photographs are one of the building blocks of our society of consumption and mass-media culture; they are central components in our own and our culture's perceptual apparatus."\(^1\)

The starting point and inspiration for this paper is based on the observation of people’s behaviour when it comes to photography. The simple experience of a certain moment seems not to be sufficient nor satisfying. People seem to strive for materializing the now, the moment that they are experiencing, by taking photos. This might have various reasons. In this paper, I will discuss a few of those reasons in order to draw a clearer picture of what might stand behind this modern obsession with photography.

Grotesquely, the now that people try to capture, seems to be changed by exactly this attempt. As a consequence, the now that people are living in is not authentic anymore, just like the product, meaning the photograph, resulting from this intervention does not and cannot show reality as it is. So, what is the literal and actual worth of a photo, if it changes what it wants but fails to represent? When following this thought through, we can even think of photography as being a way of consciously or unconsciously changing the now. And a change in the now can lead to a change in the future. Consequently, this opens up a question about the power of photography.

In terms of design, I see myself more and more in a social context, interacting with people, their lives and their realities. I am very much interested in social and psychological processes within society and therefore I am observing these subtle factors around me. At first sight, photography doesn’t seem to be a very subtle

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\(^1\) Jan-Erik Lundström, “Realism, Photography and Visual Culture,” in Symbolic Imprints, ed. Lars Kiel Bartelsen et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, no year), 51.
social topic in times of Instagram, Snapchat and selfie-sticks. But these tools are only the tip of the iceberg, that is built upon a whole philosophical universe lying beneath it. For me as a designer, it is necessary to explore this hidden universe, since it is the key to a deeper understanding of photography as a social issue.

Photography surrounds us in everyday life. It is necessary, especially, but not only for designers, to be aware of one’s responsibility when it comes to choosing photography as a medium or tool within one’s professional or private life. People should be aware of its power in order to enable them to deal with it consciously. When thinking of a photograph as a filtered representation of a changed now, people might become more critical about what they see and how this visual input changes them.

When thinking about photography in relation to design, we, of course, know that photography plays an important role as a form of visual representation. But not only can photography be used as a contemporary representative, it can even, through its ability to change the involved actors’ now, affect their future. This thesis is supposed to show this power of photography without labelling it as negative or positive. It is rather supposed to be seen as a tool to see photography in another light and therefore empower people to deal with it and its consequences.
2. Reasons for photography

According to the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser, “Photography was invented in order to render imaginable the events around us. Not only the political events, but also the scientific and technological events.” Flusser then explains that a photograph takes an event out of its context and transcodes it into happenings before it goes back to history. This means that photographs were used as a memory of history, a documentation. Photography therefore was invented to give an objective image, but the problem with that was, that since the camera is coded, it is even less objective than a painting, according to Flusser. He states that the photographer was supposed to step back from history into something that could be called mystical transcendence from where he photographs what happens. So, photography was invented to document history. But this relationship changed after the Second World War when suddenly politics were made in order to get into an image. So far, the purpose of politics wasn’t clear, but now, its purpose turned out to be its representation on an image. The world started evolving around this desire to have images of happenings, images of the world. As a consequence, events startet to accelerate and rolled towards the image. Flusser reduced the photographers’ intention as follows:

“First, to encode their concepts of the world into images; second, to do this by using a camera; third, to show the images produced in this way to others so that they can serve as models for their experience, knowledge, judgement and actions; fourth, to make these models as permanent as possible. In short: Photographers’ intentions are to inform others and through their photographs to immortalize themselves in the memory of others.”

In the following chapters, I will discuss a few theories of how photography is anchored in our modern society.

Satisfaction through consumption

Photography can be used as a tool to consume time. In the Western world, where consumption seems to be a core drive for a lot of our behaviour, we seem to also be keen on consuming and consequently possessing an intangible

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concept like the now. We do not only want to live the now, but we want to make sure, that it will be ours forever. We feel the urge to possess it. Long-term enjoyment can be found in the action of consumption itself. Especially consuming experiences makes people happy, as theorists have found out. In comparison to materialistic possessions, experiences are intangible and therefore are not so much subject to a rapid adaptation, which leads to a higher level of happiness.\textsuperscript{5} Photography seems to be a common way to consume experiences and therefore to achieve happiness. It gives us the possibility to materialize experiences on a piece of paper or on a screen, in other words making a tangible, possessible product out of the now, while it is still referring to an experience that used to be intangible and therefore personal. But, as a consequence there’s a question that comes up: Can we really possess the now through photography or are we receiving a representation of an artificial or at least changed now instead?

Power through prosthesis

In Western societies we can observe a phenomenon that we call prosthetic culture.\textsuperscript{6}

Prosthetic culture is the idea that human culture is comprised of human and object interaction, specifically the set of objects from the earliest tools to the most advanced artificial limbs. Applied to digital culture, prosthetic culture treats the computer as an external brain or cybernetic mental attachment. Humans shed prosthetic devices, whether virtual or real, increasingly quickly.\textsuperscript{7}

In that sense, photography can also be seen as a tool that is used as a prosthesis for human eyes. It makes it possible to see things in another way than they could be seen naturally, therefore it extents our ability to see. Photography does not just represent, but rather introduces us to a way of seeing and therefore transforms our contemporay self-understandings. For a subject in a prosthetic culture there is a shift from the stage of self-knowledge towards self-extension, meaning that by making use of a prosthesis, one defines his existence according to “I can, therefore I am”. It is the prosthesis, either a perceptual or mechanical one, that makes the self-extension possible.\textsuperscript{8}


\textsuperscript{6} Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity (Oxon: Routledge, 1998), 3.

\textsuperscript{7} “Prosthetic culture,” accessed October 27, 2016, http://cyborganthropology.com/Prosthetic_culture

\textsuperscript{8} Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 3.
Looking at it from that perspective shows that we seem to be able to expand our natural abilities through photography and therefore acquire more power over our environment. Through photography, we are able to frame, freeze and fix objects. The photographer, who is acting as the Operator, turns the motif, the Spectrum into an object by using it to exhibit his art.9 This shows the power of photography. It can turn a subject into an object. Framing an object, like photography does, doesn’t only change the context, but also creates the illusion for a spectator of being able to see the situation from all positions at once. It is therefore talked about a process of outcontextualisation. Photography enables us to freeze time as well as to fix objects. This leads to a process of indifferenziation, meaning that the spectator cannot differentiate between cause and effect, object and subject. Their borders blur.10 As we can see, photography acts as a prosthesis for the sense of sight, which gives people more power over their environment. At the same time though, it can confuse our senses, since it interferes with traditional relations of reality.

Self-knowledge through visibility

The search for the own identity is deeply rooted in people. When can someone be recognised as an individual? One of the factors that label an individual as such is what scientists and philosophers call embodiment: “[...] individuals are constituted as such through the recognition of their possession of a unique body.”11 Through numerous techniques in modern society, such as for example photographic portraiture, this embodiment can be recognised. According to Celia Lury this is a quite recent phenomenon, since the pre-modern artists’ goal of representing a face was not necessarily rooted in the desire of conveying a likeness of the individual but to depict office, religious symbolism or patterns and colours. In her book Prosthetic culture, Lury explains how from the Renaissance on, representing the uniqueness of an individual became the core of a new realism of visual representation.12 As a consequence, we are still living in a visual-centered Western society. We seem to believe in everything we see, but it is hard for us to believe something that cannot be seen, perceived through our eyes. “[...] visibility is an imperative of contemporary life.”13 Visibility and self-knowledge are closely intertwined, meaning that in order to be aware of ourselves, we need some kind of visual assurance. “[...] photography – itself not a static apparatus – thus offers one way into an exploration of the historically specific and dynamic relations be-

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10 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 3.

11 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 7.

12 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 7.

13 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 2.
tween seeing and knowing.” Individuals strive to be seen as such through the recognition of the possession of an own individual body. This embodiment can be recognised through photographic portraiture.

**Recognition through representation**

The nature of a photograph is the representation of its referent. As Roland Barthes states “[...] [a photograph] is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope.” He points out that a photograph is always this antiphon of „Look“, „See“ or „Here it is.“

So, people have always used photography as a referent to something that they wanted to share with others. It was the Kodak #1 camera in 1888 that marked the change of photography towards becoming a tool for everybody. Through social media, this aspect has reached new dimensions though. The medium photography underwent a basic change: it was democratized, since it is no longer only some professional individuals with access to the best equipment that are able to take photos. But even though a simple iPhone is (technologically seen) good enough to deliver nice photos, it still requires a certain effort and dedication to actually make good photos that are liked by people. “For many Instagram users, the main goal is to get more “likes”, to make images that will be “successful” and “popular”, and this task requires having advanced level of visual literacy.” The audience (or the spectator), as well as the content has changed fundamentally. The pictures on social media are directed towards a different audience and serve another purpose than a traditional photo album. This means, that also the type of photographs is being adapted to this broader audience. In this context, the term competitive photography is introduced. Its core is the focus on photographic technique, aesthetics and creativity. For competitive photographers, the main goal is to achieve “Likes” from other competitive photographers. The “how” and “what” is equally important to competitive photographers, whereas the main goal for typical non-competitive photography (for example family snapshots) is to show the “what”, since their spectators (relatives, close friends) are primarily interested in what they can see on the photo, not how it looks. Competitive photography, as it is found on social media, is to a large extent based on the photographers’ search for recognition.

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3. Materialization of the now

When talking about photography, we are talking about a medium that transforms something intangible, the now, into a tangible object, a photograph. This process is what I call “materialization”. The Oxford Dictionary describes the word “materialization” as follows: “The fact of taking place or starting to exist as expected or planned.” The verb “to materialize” is defined as to “represent or cause to appear in bodily or physical form”. This fits quite well with the actual technical and social process that is happening when taking a photo. Photography does not only deliver an actual material, a photo, but it also materializes a certain moment and interferes with the moment’s intangible personality.

Perceiving the now

In this context, the now describes a specific moment in time that we experience in a stage of physical presence and that is irretrievable. The following paragraphs will discuss the sensory experience of the now, as well as the factors that shape the now itself.

Talking about the now means talking about a highly subjective topic, since it is, like everything we perceive, perceived through our five senses. The one sense that is being considered the dominant one is the sense of sight. There is a general claim that “[...] visibility is an imperative of contemporary life.” But, according to the Finnish Architect and Philosopher Juhani Pallasmaa this is not only a contemporary issue since “[...] sight has historically been regarded as the noblest of all senses [...]” As we can see, there seems to be a long tradition of sight being considered the main sense of perception. Photography therefore seems to be a logical way of people’s attempt to materialize the now, since it makes use of and feeds their presumably main sense, the sense of sight. In order to experience the whole now, we of course, need to and automatically do make use of all our five senses though. By leaving out four of our five senses, photography can therefore never make the now authentically experienceable.

Apart from the perception of the now as a sensory impression, there are other kinds of (external) factors such as time, space, involved actors and context that shape the essence of the now and therefore also shape people’s perception of it.

Materializing the now

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the now is an irretrievable moment in time, whose perception is highly subjective. Photography of

23 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 2.
fers a way of framing, freezing and fixing and therefore making this intangible concept of the now first of all experienceable for longer and second of all experienceable for audience. 25 Obviously, photography materializes the now. As Vilém Flusser states: “History went on, the events advanced linearly. But photographs went one step up into transcendence, they transcended history and they froze events into happenings.”26

It seems quite logical though, that by changing one factor within a system, the whole system changes as a consequence. In other words, by taking a photo and therefore inserting the medium camera with all its consequences into the now, it might change the now itself. Within that system, I can define two parties: the observing photographer and the observed motif.

It seems that, no matter from what perspective we are looking at it, the materialization of the now through photography creates an artificial now for all involved parties. As a consequence, there are many questions that one can ask: What is the essence of the now? Is this essence, which in general defined as „the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, especially something abstract, which determines its character“27, getting lost by changing it through photography? Consequently we then would need to ask if the changed essence of that now defines a new now that only exists through the materialization through photography. Like this, we could look at photography as a designer of a new now, a new reality.

The factors’ now changes

By inserting the medium of photography into the now, its system fundamentally changes. The actors within the now, that used to be equally important and valuable, suddenly turn into parties with different agendas, interests and roles. In Camera Lucida, Barthes is talking about a disturbance of ownership. The question of who owns a photograph has been dealt within juridic cases. This shows that photography turns subject into object.28 Obviously, photography builds up a hierarchy and puts everyone in his or her place. This new hierarchy interferes with existing relationships by changing people’s behaviour on different levels.

Change of the photographer’s now

I suppose, the majority of people in the Western World can relate to the position of being the

photographer or Operator, as Barthes calls it. \(^{29}\) Strangely, this technical instrument gives one power and puts him or her above the others who, by the insert of the camera, automatically turn into motifs. Flusser states:

If one observes the movements of a human being in possession of a camera (or of a camera in possession of a human being), the impression given is of someone lying in wait. This is the ancient act of stalking which goes back to the palaeolithic hunter in the tundra. Yet photographers are not pursuing their game in the open savanna but in the jungle of cultural objects, and their tracks can be traced through this artificial forest. \(^{30}\)

Basically, this means that the photographer is in the position of a hunter, whereas the motif is the fleeing animal. As we can see, the social order is being changed through photography. Consequently, the photographer’s now changes as well. According to Barthes, the photographer seems to turn into an observer or rather a documentalist who steps back out of the now. Barthes calls this the position of the observing subject. \(^{31}\) Secondly, the photographer him-or-herself is being interrupted (or lets him-or-herself be interrupted) and changes his or her focus. This seems to be inevitable, since the interaction with the medium camera would not allow the photographer to stay inside the system and, at the same time, to stay an equal part of the situation. This interference with the now changes the photographer’s now within that very moment of taking a photo. The Operator’s emotion, as Bathes supposes, „had some relation to the little hole (stenope) through which he looks, limits, frames and perspectivizes when he wants to „take” (to surprise).” \(^{32}\) The photographer fears the death of the motif that is taking place when the motif feels like a subject turning into an object. The photographer’s gesture embalms this death, even though he or she is showing „contrortions to produce effects that are lifelike.” \(^{33}\)

### Change of the motif’s now

When looking at it from the other perspective, from the perspective of the Spectrum, as Barthes calls it, it becomes clear that within the moment of being observed through a lens, everything changes. He even goes as far as saying „I constitute myself in the process of „posing“, I instantaneously make another body for myself,

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\(^{30}\) Vilém Flusser, *Towards a philosophy of photography*, 33.


I transform myself in advance into an image.\textsuperscript{34} The photograph creates or mortifies his body, whereas he himself suffers from a sensation of inauthenticity. Within the moment of feeling like a subject turning into an object (the moment of being a spectre), Barthes experiences a micro-version of death.\textsuperscript{35} “In front of the lens, I am at the same time: The one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.”\textsuperscript{36} This shows the power of the photographer, since he is the one who calls the spectrum into existence, on a metaphorical level. It is in the photographer’s hand that generates the image of the spectrum, the motif. Photographs are not known for being subtle, so the fear of how one might come out on paper is an understandable one. A photograph is not comparable to a painting, which, back in history, served as flattering representations.\textsuperscript{37}

When taking my own experience as an example, I can observe a significant change in my behaviour when it comes to being photographed. Thoughts about my physical appearance pop up and don’t disappear anymore. It influences my mood heavily and I seem to be completely helpless about this. As a consequence, I sometimes feel anger directed towards the photographer for putting me into this position and confronting me with a topic that I did not even want to be bothered with. Also the other people on that photo or in that situation evoke a certain frustration within me. Often, I can observe them embrace the situation, they seem to be happy about posing and selling themselves. Finally, they even want to see these photos and seem to be very pleased with the outcome of their performance.

The now is not always an extraordinary adventure that asks for being immortalized, but by doing so, yet another layer is added to the now. This changes the motif’s now insofar as it suddenly turns into an actual event that is worth being remembered, just for the reason of being photographed. As Flusser states in a lecture about photography:

\begin{quote}
[Since after the Second World War]
everything wanted to be photographed and filmed […] the purpose of marrying was to be photographed at the wedding. The purpose of going on the Moon was to be so that Mr. Nixon could be on television and see how people walked on the Moon. The purpose of the Arab hijackers of airplanes was to be taken on television.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, 10.

\textsuperscript{35} Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, 10-14.

\textsuperscript{36} Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, 13.

\textsuperscript{37} Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, 11.

Thinking this thought further makes us realise that obviously photos are being used as a medium to make people feel like being part of something bigger than only the now. They become part of the history, not only of their own, but also part of other people’s history. How does this feeling of becoming history within the now change the motifs’ now? Is there something happening on a social level? To answer this question, I refer to my own personal experience. I could observe, that if people are all operating as the motif together on the same photograph, it causes a peculiar change of team spirit. Suddenly, the group feels more like a team that went through something together and became immortal, became history together. This is a social impact on the motif’s now, that consequently affects the motif’s social future.

The factors’ future changes

If we assume that the photographer’s as well as the motif’s now can change through photography, we can think of photography being a tool to change their future as well.

The hierarchy that is being changed through photography might not be re-established straight away, since a change of hierarchy always has an impact on people’s relationship. A change in people’s relationship can be very subtle, but still it might influence people’s interaction with each other. The reason for this might be a change in their self-esteem, depending on their position in the hierarchy.

If we have a look behind the camera, we see the photographer who is, in that moment of taking a photo, the one using the motif as an object for his art. Flusser compares the photographer to a palaeolithic hunter, who doesn’t hunt in the Tundra, but in the jungle of cultural objects. Through this, logically, the hierarchy and relationship between the photographer and the motif changed. The photographer was the one “creating the motif” and therefore creating and influencing the world’s future history. This shows a certain power of the photographer. On the one hand, he or she experiences a certain empowerment that therefore leads to self-confidence. So, on the one hand, the photographer influences his or her future directly by this empowerment. On the other hand, the photographer also influences his or her future in a broader context, meaning that by taking photos that make history, he or she also influences his or her own future in a social context.

According to my own experience, the action of taking a photo has a certain impact on people’s emotional state. It can be this confrontation with one’s physical appearance that changes their self-perception to the positive or negative. The knowledge about having been made immortal and having become history on or rather through that photo leads to various emotions among people. Depending on their individual background, they might feel empowered by being physically represented on a photo, or they might feel insecure. In order

to illustrate this, I would like to refer to a personal experience. It happened to me recently, that I was being asked to be photographed for a fashion-column in a newspaper. I was taken by surprise, not really wanting to be represented nor being seen by people I was never gonna be able to see myself. Even though, I did not agree on being photographed, the rest of my day was affected by this event. The simple possibility of being photographed confronted me with my physical appearance, with my insecurity. As a consequence, I stayed in that emotional state of discontentment with myself and my body. I noticed that thoughts about how to dress better and how to change my physical appearance came to my mind more frequently, especially in the following days. This happened two months ago and still there is a mark that has an impact on my now, which is also my future.

This personal experience coheres with the so called Objectification-Theory by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts that puts forward the thought that “Women’s Bodies Are Looked at, Evaluated, and Always Potentially Objectified”\(^{41}\) Photography offers an even greater ground for this, since it is a medium that additionally to the every-day objectification of women, offers the possibility to make women’s bodies’ consumable for an even bigger audience.

4. The photo – the materialized now

Within the moment of being photographed, a scenario loses one dimension and ends up being two-dimensional while creating the illusion of being four-dimensional. In other words, a photo “encourages a view as if it could be seen from all positions at once.” 42, like in a spatial continuum. Another factor that clearly distinguishes the now from the photo is that the actual now can be perceived through all of our five senses whereas a photographic image always just shows the visual layer of the moment that it represents. Of course, the photograph as an object can be perceived through all five senses as well, but there the photograph has already become an object itself and the moment that is represented on the photo is only a part of this new now’s visual impression.

To illustrate the difference between the now and the representative photo, I would like to refer to René Magritte’s famous image that shows a drawn pipe and a subtitle that says Ceci n’est pas une pipe. Magritte’s aim was to show that the image of something must not be confused with the actual thing that it represents, since these two things are not the same. Interpreting the image of something as the actual thing leads to a neglect of the image’s inspiration and personality. 43 His artwork referred to the model of a linguistic sign, the linguistic triangle developed by Ogden and Richards, that deals with the relation between a symbol, a referent and a reference. 44 Roland Barthes does not agree on a photograph being entirely comparable to a linguistic sign though, since a photograph’s nature is to carry its referent with itself. 45 As he states: “A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents) [...]”. 46 “The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying both of them [...]”. 47 What he means is that there cannot be a photograph without something or someone. “Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.” 48

William Henry Fox Talbot, an English mathematician, scientist and linguist was experimenting with a Camera Lucida, a predecessor of photography that was based upon an optical installation that made it possible to draw a quite detailed representation of nature. But the

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42 Celia Lury, Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity, 3.


inaccurancy caused by “...man’s fallible mind and hand ...” made him develop this tool further. He looked at photography as a pencil of nature: “By directing light through a lens into a box, Talbot thought he was commanding nature to reproduce a visual image of herself [...].” In other words, he made nature take a photo herself and therefore showed, that photography can also be seen as an index, that indicates the presence of nature in that very moment of when the photo was taken.

As a conclusion, we could say that a photograph can be seen as a sign, as well as an index of something. The “something” or the moment that is represented on the photo can exist without the photo, but the photo cannot exist without the moment. The moment though, that has been photographed, did not exist in exactly this way as we perceive it through the photo, but it changed because of the photo that materialized it. Therefore, a photo never shows reality, but a changed version of it.

**The changed factors**

When I was talking about an actual moment, I defined two contributing parties or factors: the photographer and the motif. These factors have been changed physically as well as mentally. Their three-dimensionality got lost and turned into a two-dimensionality by being respresented on a piece of paper or a screen. Also, their relationship changed within the moment of being photographed, which consequently leads to a change of the situation and therefore influences the actual photo as a representation of the situation.

But now, when talking about a photograph that has been taken, there is a new party coming up, the Spectator, as Barthes calls it. “The Spectator is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs – in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives...” Just like for the actors that are part of the photograph, the spectator also experiences various kinds of changes by looking at a photograph.

As I have stated before, photography has the power to change people’s present as well as their future. It does so by making use of people’s unbreakable believe in what they see. People very often think that visibility equals reality. The reliability of our senses has in the first place been questioned by radical constructivists and trusting an image of (what we consider) reality is for sure not more reliable. Nevertheless, we tend to forget that a photograph acts as a filter for reality and take for granted what we see on this piece of paper. “[Naive spectators] tacitly accept that they are looking through the photographs at the world out there and that there-

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fore the photographic universe and the world out there are one and the same […]”

52 But what we see on a photo is highly influenced by our individual “world out there.” As the American cultural theorist Susan Sontag states:

To an Israeli Jew, a photograph of a child torn apart in the attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in downtown Jerusalem is first of all a photograph of a Jewish child killed by a Palestinian suicide-bomber. To a Palestinian, a photograph of a child torn apart by a tank round in Gaza is first of all a photograph of a Palestinian child killed by Israeli ordnance.

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Our interpretation of a photo creates an impact on our present while we are looking at the photo, on an emotional as well as on a rational level. When thinking this thought further, we can see how powerful a photograph can be in creating people’s experience of reality.

As Roland Barthes points out, a photograph is comparable to a child’s gesture pointing at something and saying “Look, here it is.”

The addressee of this gesture is the spectator. This spectator might or might not have been part of the materialized moment represented on the image. Depending on that, the spectator’s now within the moment of having a look at the image differs. If the spectator was part of the actual moment, he or she knows the initial now and therefore can see the representative image for what it is, a representation. He or she is consciously or unconsciously aware of the difference between the actual moment and the represented one and therefore sees something else on the photo than an external observer. The second type of spectator is the one that has not been part of the actual, real now that is represented on the photo. He or she has no possibility of knowing the background of the photo, so as a consequence, it is impossible for him or her to build their opinion on something else than the representation of a changed now. I would call them “entire victims” of the photographer and the motif.

Barthes defines two kinds of interest in a photograph: studium and punctum. He uses these two concepts to describe the emotional impact of a photograph on the spectator. First of all, he states that there are photos that leave him so indifferent that he doesn’t even think of them as images. Then, he describes photos that he has a general interest in, which require a “[...]rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture.”


52 Vilém Flusser, Towards a philosophy of photography, 41.

53 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Picador, 2003), 11.

most from a certain training.”57 This is what he calls studium. In contrast to studium, he names punctum.

"The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."58 “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”59

Barthes concept of studium and punctum is dealing with a photograph’s power to affect, even hurt the spectator. Logically, the impact of a photo that interests someone through studium is different from the one that evokes a feeling of punctum. Whereas a photo of studium interests and therefore affects a spectator on a rational level, a photo of punctum affects the spectator on a personal, emotional level. This emotional effect caused by punctum goes deeper than the rational one caused by studium. Therefore, we could assume that a photo of punctum, which hurts, doesn’t only do this in the moment of seeing it, but it also affects the spectator’s future. The wound caused by the punctum doesn’t heal immediately or completely, but it leaves a bruise afterwards, in the future.60 This bruise is what causes a change of the spectator’s emotions, opinions, ways of seeing the world. A photo showing a scenario of war can hurt the spectator in a way that he or she changes their opinion on a certain political issue. A photo showing models on the runway can hurt in a way that it makes the spectator question his or her own body, rise or lower their self-esteem and therefore changes his or her behaviour in the future. Photography can in this context be seen as a method of sexualisation, or more specifically of sexualized evaluation of women. It supports the main enactment of sexual evaluation, which is the gaze or the visual inspection of women’s bodies.61

5. Further thoughts

This paper led its readers, as well as its writer through a journey about photography by touching philosophical, psychological and phenomenological points. It showed the power of photography and made the users of photography aware of their responsibility. Also, it opened up new ways of thinking about photography and served as research and inspiration for the implementation of a practical design-project. In these last two sections I will quickly give an idea of where this project could possibly start from by asking questions that came to my mind during the writing and researching process.

Is there an alternative way to materialize the now without changing the future?

As the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa points out in his book The Eyes of the Skin, sight has historically had great importance among our senses. This might be the reason why materializing the now barely happens through recordings based on the senses of smell, touch, taste or hearing. Can there be a method to make the now experiencable for others by making use of our other four senses? I was asking myself, if there might be a possibility to materialize the now without interfering with it. What could be gained from this kind of materialization would be an authentic now and therefore an authentic future while still having some kind of “product” that serves as a memory of that now.

Can photography act as a speculative designer?

The term of speculative design describes a way of design that connects the present with the future. It thinks about how the future could be by looking at the present. It is not so much about predicting the future, finding out about future needs and what is going to happen in the future. Speculative Design is more about possible future scenarios. It is about imagining freely how the world and everyday-life could be different and what kind of future we would prefer. An example that the speculative designer Anthony Dunne gave in his talk at Resonate Festival 2013 deals with electrical impulses and the human body. The designer Ka Fai Chov was thinking about future bodies. He was exploring how the input of electrical impulses can make bodies move. Then he started thinking about this the other way round. If it is possible to insert electricity into a body, how could there be a way to also get an output of electrical impulses generated by muscles? Consequently, he was thinking about how we could record these electrical signals and establish some kind of library of dance movements out of them. These gathered signals could then be used as some kind of remote control by inserting them into another body which would move according to the electrical signals. Through this project, the designer...

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is showing how it is to have one’s body controlled by an external power.  

Photography’s power to change the future could, in my opinion, mean that it can take the role of a speculative designer. Photography makes the now visible, but at the same time it interferes with it and creates an artificial image of the now. If this image of the now (the photo) is being perceived as reality, it would mean that photography, simply through its pure existence, already is something like a speculative designer. Because this is, what it has in common with speculative design: it looks at the present, shows it in a different light and through this, changes the future.

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64 Resonate Festival “Speculative Everything – Anthony Dunne at Resonate 2013” https://vimeo.com/65074246
Bibliography


