

A PLAY ON LIGHT AND PROCESS

A Philosophical Inquiry Into the *New Theory* of Photography
and Contemporary Photographic Art Practice

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By ' photography ' I mean a group of practices that includes creating, storing, and displaying photographs. By ' photographic process ' I mean a distinctive multi-stage process that necessarily includes the occurrence of a photographic event and the material production of photographic images. By ' photograph ' I mean a visual image whose relevant causal history necessarily includes a photographic event.

-Phillips 2009

Abstract

Photographic theory faces a major paradigm shift in the beginning of the twenty-first century, as a result of a long-standing dissatisfaction with earlier theories. Named the *New theory*, by Diarmuid Costello, the contemporary theory seeks to embrace photographic art practices by shifting the focus to a process-based theory, as earlier theorists tended to exclude many photographic practices. In this context, earlier theories will be named the *Traditional theory*, borrowing the term from Dominic McIver Lopes. Specifically, this thesis investigates the scope of the *Traditional theories*, with a focus on the theories which has led to the paradigm shift in photographic theory, in the twenty-first century, and likewise analyse the scope of the *New theory*.

To test the hypothesis that the *New theory* stands better suited for a contemporary photographic art practice, a systematic methodology has been used and by analysis of the two different theories, a comparison has been made. The results showed that the *New theory* lacks definition and seems as radical as the theories it wishes to oppose. Nevertheless, it embraces many of the photographic practices which earlier would not be acknowledged as photographs, by the *Traditional theories*.

Thus, it suggests that the *New theory* indeed stands more suited for the contemporary photographic art practice, but that it still needs adjustments to be able to truly stimulate the photographic art practices, as a sophisticated theory should.

Table of Content

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| A Game of Chess | 2 |
| The beginning of Photography and Theory | 3 |
| <i>Traditional Theories</i> | 4 |
| <i>A New Theory</i> | 14 |
| The beginning of a <i>New Theory</i> | 14 |
| The <i>New Theory</i> and Its Possibilities | 17 |
| What To Do With the Old and the New | 25 |
| Conclusion | 29 |
| Appendix | 31 |
| Bibliography | 34 |
| Figures | 35 |

Introduction

How would one go about describing the process of photographing? Is it an action? If so, is it intentional? Is the photographer in control, or, is the apparatus in control of the photographer? Would it even matter to address these questions, when the viewer is only looking at the actual by-product of this process, that is, the photograph? Is photographic art *only* photography if it is printed on photographic paper? Or is it also photography if it is printed on, say, a sculpture? On a screen? On a carpet? There seems to be *something* that makes photography different from other media, and that is precisely what has been the heart of the photographic discourse since its invention.

The history of photography is easy to describe. A timeline can quickly be put down, from the first accounts of the *Camera Obscura* to the fixed image, the gum print, and the evolution of the apparatus, the film, and, of course, not to forget, the turn to digitalization. However, when it comes to theories of photography, one will quickly find out that it is not as easy to pin down. Throughout the history of photography, many art movements, philosophers and critics have addressed photography, being the revolutionary invention it is, some with scepticism and some with admiration. Most theory has focused on the epistemological values of the photograph, which eventually led to the claim that photographs cannot be art. That is until a new theory is conjured.

This thesis will not be a historical walkthrough of the medium, and topics like indexicality and truth in photographs will not be discussed. Nor will it touch upon whether or not photographs can be art, as it is well established that photographs are indeed capable of being artworks. Many galleries exhibit photographic works, and some museums are solely dedicated to photographic art. If one decides to visit The Royal College of Art in London, one will find photography in the Fine Arts program. Rather, this thesis will aim to characterize the scope of what will be named the *Traditional theories*¹, and the *New theory*,

¹ The term is borrowed from the book *The Four Arts of Photography* by Dominic McIver Lopes (2016), and will be used throughout the paper to distinguish between the *New theory* and the ones dated before the twenty-first century. In contrast, Diarmuid Costello uses the term Orthodox/Orthodoxy. However, *orthodox* is inherent with meanings like religion and righteousness, which does not seem to rightly fit nor cover the scope of these theories, and thus Traditional seems more suitable.

to compare the two. Many important theorists and critics of photography will not be mentioned - although they have shaped the very way photography is being perceived, and are to this day still being taught and discussed - as this thesis aims to address the theories which have triggered the theories of the twenty-first century, that is, the *New theory*. The *New theory* is the current state of affairs on the philosophical discourse on photography and puts forward a new process-based theory.

The two theories stand on opposite sides, gazing at photographs from two truly contradicting viewpoints. The *Traditional theories* fixate on the epistemic and ontological value of photographs, while comparing them with paintings to prove that photographs are incapable of being art, whereas the *New theory* fixates solely on the photographic process. By using a systematic methodology, this thesis will compare the two waves of theories, and critically discuss them, seeking to answer if the *New theory* is more suited for the contemporary photographic art practice, and if it indeed stimulates growth. Are these questions even remotely important to answer? They are indeed, as theory and practice walk hand in hand, and by doing so, encourage new inquiries into the medium and the philosophy thereof.

A Game of Chess

One might ask; what is so important about theory? Is it really *that* important? David Bates (2016) answers this rather perfectly: “*Theory - thinking about things - helps articulate what it is we are grappling with and to find a way through it.*” (p. 11). That is, theory makes it possible to express, evolve and understand a specific topic or medium, as it becomes a tool of knowledge. Every topic has an underlying theory, and it serves to help one understand a medium and hopefully inspire inquiries and critical thinking. The same goes for photography. The photographic discourse has been developing since its conception, intertwining with the photographic practice. As Jae Emmerling (2012), Professor of modern and contemporary art in the College of Arts + Architecture at the University of North Carolina, puts it:

Simply put, there is no “photography” without discourse. . . . Photographic discourse is a continual reworking of positions: it creates by retracing lines of arguments, uncovering archives, redacting histories, and drawing attention to aporias (gaps or impasses, paradoxes) within the discourse itself. As in chess, there is a structure - a field or board, pieces with fixed movement - and yet each enactment, each play (turn or move), both reiterates the past . . . and demands variation. (p. 2-3)

It is this essential conversation, this play of chess, which leads to defining the medium, and draws on many fields such as science, sociology, history, and philosophy, just to name a few. Thus, the first move on the checkerboard was made with the conception of photography and is still advancing nearly 200 years later.

The beginning of Photography and Theory

The first notion of photography stems from the descriptions of the *camera obscura*; a device used to create nearly perfect representations by drawing and painting, and to create extremely accurate perspectives in such representations, and it’s first clear description dates back to Leonardo De Vinci. Later came the *camera lucida* which likewise changed the possibilities of representational art², for the same reasons as the camera obscura, however, more handy. Then, in 1826 Joseph Nicéphore Niépce fixed the first image on a sensitized pewter plate (heliography), and in 1839 Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox-Talbot advanced the process of creating photographs. Daguerre created what is known as the daguerreotypes, which were copper plates coated with silver, and were direct positives. They had the advantages of having great detail and sharpness, but were not reproducible, in contrast to Fox-Talbot’s discovery. Fox-Talbot’s calotypes were made on paper sensitized with silver iodides. Unlike the sharpness in the daguerreotypes, the calotypes were much softer but were made as paper negatives, where the positives could be reproduced from and were what made them reproducible. From the time of the discovery of the light-image to the inventions of Daguerre and Fox-Talbot in the 1830s, and from the

²See; *Secret knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of The Old Masters* by David Hockney for incredible reading on the techniques used to create representational art works throughout history.

paradigm shift at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the critical thinking of the '70s, much has happened within the photographic discourse. Specifically, it will be the critical voices of the '70s which will be the focal point of the following chapter, as it has shaped much of the current photographic discourse.

Traditional Theories

Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, a highly respected British author, art critic and art historian asked in *Photography* in 1857, whether nature itself, i.e. light, can be considered the author of a photograph and a “*picturesque agent*” (Eastlake as cited in Costello, 2018, p.12), thus posing one of the most discussed themes of the photographic discourse; agency and intentionality. Photography truly is a great and complex invention, and difficult to assess, as it is doing what no other medium ever could. It is imprinting on its own.

100 years or so later, André Bazin, writes about the photographic medium and its possibilities in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, where he praises the medium and claims it to be the salvation of the plastic arts. He claims that “*For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of the man. . . . All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.*” (Bazin, 1960, p.7) Not much has changed in how photography is normally viewed. It is still nature which is in focus. Interestingly enough, his account, which is written with great admiration towards the medium, cuts the link between the photographer and the photograph. Hence, stating that it is nature herself who is the great agent behind the photograph, and *not* the photographer. To him, the advantages of a photograph are the fact that in the exact moment the shutter is tripped, no human is in charge of the actual act of imprinting the object, but an apparatus is. Thus it becomes an automatic recording done by light, and therefore ridden from the beliefs of the photographer, and that is precisely why the photographic medium is so powerful. He states further in his text that

The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. . . . it shares, by virtue of the very

process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. . . . The aesthetic quality of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare realities. . . . The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. Wherefore, photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it. (Bazin, 1960, p. 8)

To Bazin, this means that photography liberates realism, creating a form of spiritual-realism, as photographs quite literally share identity with the objects depicted, and becomes the ‘models’ they depict. Additionally, they allow the viewer to see the present and past in a photograph, which he describes as being mummification of time within the photographs. He declares; “*photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. . . . Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as they were.*” (ibid.).

Bazin is not alone in all his views. The philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton, specialized in aesthetics and politics, and whose photographic theories are shaping much of the current discourse, agrees with Bazin, although from a highly critical point, and does not see photographs to be the saviour of any artform. In “Photography and Representation” (1981), he claims that it is impossible for a photograph to be representational as there is no way for the photograph to show the intentions of the photographer, and that it is incapable of showing anything fictional.

Firstly, it is crucial that one accept Scruton’s account of the ‘ideal’ photographs, as only ‘ideal’ photographs are considered photographs, in the eyes of Scruton. He believes that the ‘ideal’ photograph, stands in a causal relation to the photographed subject, and not in an intentional relation, as it is with paintings, where the beliefs of the painter will show in the painting. The ground pillar to Scruton’s claim is the concept of this relation between the photograph and the photographed scene, as there is a lack of intentional in-existence³ in photographs, which is the possibility of mental phenomena, very roughly stated. In other

³ see; Brentano, F. (1973). *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*. London: Routledge & Paul, for further readings.

words, photographs are created by belief-independent mark-making, whereas paintings are of belief-dependent mark-making, and thus, like Bazin, Scruton does not believe in human agency in photographs, precisely because of this causal relation, and that photographs are counterfactually dependent on what they depict. Consequently, photographs are incapable of showing fiction, as they simply cannot show what does not exist, by virtue of the counterfactual dependent belief-independent mark-making. This also means that photography cannot be representational *in the same way* as paintings.

To Scruton (1981), it comes down to several properties that paintings hold, which photography does not; Paintings have the qualities that they can depict time, expressive thought, and fiction; Photography, antithetically, has characteristics which are momentary, automatic, and non-fictional. All three aspects come down to the counterfactual dependency of photographs.

Firstly, photographs cannot show time, as they are “*thought of as revealing something momentary about its subject - how the subject looked at a particular moment.*” (Scruton 1981, p.586-587). Thus, when looking at a photograph, the viewer is presented with an actual moment and ‘slice’ of time, whereas he believes that paintings show their subjects “*extended in time*” (Scruton, 1981, p. 587). This is a point where Bazin and Scruton disagree, as Scruton does not believe that photographs are freeing their subjects from time and space.

The second notion is on the expressive thought, which is described as impossible to be shown in a photograph, because of the lack of intentional in-existence in photographs, and thus the belief-independent mark-making of a light-sensitive surface.

Thirdly, as photographs cannot imprint anything but light bouncing off of an existing object, it cannot depict fiction per fact of the counterfactual dependency. Said in Scruton’s own words:

It follows, first, that the subject of the ideal photographs must exist; second, that it must appear roughly as it appears in the photograph; and third, that its appearance in the photograph is its appearance at a particular moment of its existence. The first of these features is an immediate consequence of the fact that the relation between a photograph and its subject is a casual relation. If *a* is the cause of *b*, then the existence of *b* is sufficient for the existence of *a*. The

photograph lacks that quality “intentional inexistence” which is characteristic of painting. The ideal photograph, therefore, is incapable of representing anything unreal; if a photograph is a photograph of a man, then there is some particular man of whom it is a photograph. (Scruton, 1981, p.588)

Furthermore, Scruton (1981) believes that photographs work as a “*surrogate*” to their subjects, as the photograph is “*transparent*” and thus the viewer does not hold any interest in the photograph itself, but only in what is photographed. For this reason, the photograph cannot be representational art, as the viewer only uses the photograph to gain access to the subject in the photograph (p.590). Thus, when a viewer is looking at a photograph, they do so to gain knowledge of what was put in front of the camera - an important note is that that interest is *not* based on *why* something is placed in front of the camera, but *what*. Therefore, it becomes an epistemological interest of how something looked at some point in time, and not an aesthetic interest.

In “Transparent pictures: The Nature of Photographic Realism” (1984), the American philosopher, Kendall L. Walton, whose work has influenced much of the current discourse, maintains an admiring attitude towards photography, in contrast to Scruton. However, he agrees with him that photographs are counterfactually dependent, or rather, he calls this a natural dependence. He draws on H. P. Grice’s distinction between what is natural, and what is nonnatural by explaining:

Spots mean_N (mean naturally) measles, he says, and the ringing of the bell of a bus means_{NN} (means nonnaturally) that the bus is full. Grice would say, no doubt, that if the explorer did indeed capture an actual dinosaur on film, his photographs mean_N that there is a dinosaur. One characteristic of natural meaning is this: the fact that something means_N that *p* entails *p*. Black clouds mean (mean_N) rain only if they are in fact followed by rain. If the rain doesn't come, that isn't what the clouds meant. This gives us a sense in which photographs are necessarily perfectly accurate. If there was no dinosaur, then the photograph does not mean_N that there was one, no matter what it looks like. (Walton, 1984, p.265)

Hence, what does not occur in front of the camera, independent of the beliefs of the photographer, will not show on the photographs, because of this *natural* meaning. However, photographs can trick the viewer. That is, he believes that photographs are indeed capable of making the viewer *see* fiction, even though the photograph cannot *imprint* fiction. This does not mean that the viewer necessarily *believes* in the fiction which the photograph shows. E.g. if a photographer photographs the reflection of a person in a mirror which is bendable, and the photographer stands in a way where the bend of the mirror allows the person's head to be severed off, and thus shows a body with no head, then the viewer *sees* fiction, i.e. the body without a head, yet the viewer does not *believe* in the actuality of a body without a head (unless it is a photograph of a war zone, however, it is highly unlikely that this exact scenario would be occurring in a war zone), even though that is what the photograph *shows* because the photograph cannot *imprint* something that does not actually exist in the “real” world. It might *show* fiction but it cannot *imprint* fiction, by the fact of the natural dependency and epistemological value of photographs. (Walton, 1984, p. 254) . Therefore, when the viewer is seeing *through* the photograph, they are actually seeing *fictionally* as what is occurring in the photograph, is no longer existing. (Walton, 1984, p. 254)

Walton (1984) also agrees with Scruton on the concept of photographs being transparent, however, noting that this does not make them completely invisible (p. 253) and does not make them surrogates. What one sees is a photograph, but one *also* sees the subject. Thus he states: “*We can be aware, even vividly aware, of both the medium and the maker without either blocking our view of the object.*” (Walton, 1984, p. 262). That is, photographs enable the viewer “*to see the world through them*” (Walton, 1984, p.251), and acts as “*a contribution to the enterprise of seeing*” (Walton, 1984, p. 251) like mirrors and binoculars, the viewer sees *through* the photograph. Thus, photographs let the viewer see the subject, however indirectly, as the one must look *at* the photograph to see the subject *through* the photograph (Walton, 1984, p.252). He also opposes Bazin, arguing that; “*It is simply and obviously false that a photographic image of Half Dome, for example, is Half Dome.*” (Walton, 1984, p. 249), and continues to state that “*Viewers of photographs are in perceptual contact with the world.*” (Walton, 1894, p. 273). This echoes the words of the

French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) who states that “*Perception does not give me truth like geometry but presence.*” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p.14). Walton explains, that

The correspondence between similarity and perceptual confusability is intrinsic, I suggest, to the notion of perception. A process of discrimination counts as perceptual only if its structure is thus analogous to the structure of the world. When we perceive, we are, in this way, intimate with what is perceived. This goes a long way toward explaining our feeling of closeness to things which we see through photographs. (Walton, 1984, p. 271)

Ergo, because of the natural dependent relation of the photograph and the photographed scene, the viewer is looking at a photograph which is extremely similar to the actual world. Because of this, the viewer somehow ‘falls through’ to the photographed scene, and is therefore put in perceptual access to that exact scene.

Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, offer counterarguments to Walton, Bazin and Scruton in “Photography, Vision, and Representation” published in the leading Journal on critical theory, “Critical Inquiry”, in 1974. Throughout the paper, they use the term “characterization”, as a way of describing: “*both individual steps and aspects of the photographic process (a given lens characterizes things in greater or lesser details than another lens) and also the end result of the process (a photograph is a characterization of something)*” (Snyder & Allen, 1975, p. 149). They explain that these characterizations, whether they are paintings or photographs, are based on the choices of the artist and that those choices determine how one understands and reacts to the artwork, thus implying that there is indeed intentions shown in photographs (p.149-151). They emphasise; “*Clearly our interest in this picture does not lie strictly in the objects that it portrays but in the relation between those objects which have been characterized by the photographer’s choice of lens and point of view.*” (Allen & Snyder 1975, p.166). Ergo, it is the photographer’s *idea* about their subject and *how they choose* to photograph it, which determines the outcome of the photograph, thus accepting the photographer's role in the photographic process.

Allen and Snyder are not convinced by the thesis that photographs “*shows how something was, had one seen it themselves*” (Snyder & Allen, 1976, p. 151-152). They argue that a photograph

shows us “what we would have seen” at a certain time, *from* a certain vantage point *if* we kept our head immobile *and* closed one eye *and if* we saw with the equivalent of a 150-mm or 24-mm lens *and if* we saw things in Agfacolor or in Tri-X developed in D-76 and printed on Kodabromide #3 paper. (Allen and Snyder, 1976, p.152)

By doing so, they dismiss Walton’s thesis. Photographs cannot be aids of vision, as one simply does not view the world, the same way as a camera does. Furthermore, they argue that while looking at a photograph, one does not take into consideration which position, angle, point of view or lenses that the given photographer has used, at least not as a prime concern, in order to capture the photograph. Instead, the viewer looks at what these choices convey. They state:

In looking at the photograph, do we really duplicate the camera position in our imagination . . .? Only in vague and metaphorical sense. The experience is much more like looking at a painting in many respects. When we look at a painting . . . we do not mentally reconstruct the actual scene in the artist’s studio . . . Instead, our immediate reaction is that we are looking at a proud, haughty person [as an example], and on analysis we conclude that the artist used a certain manner of depiction in order to give us that impression. (Snyder & Allen 1975, p. 153-154)

Hence, indicating that these choices are based on the intentions of the photographer, thus suggesting that there is indeed intentionality in photography and that a photograph is capable of showing these intentions.

Gregory Currie, known for his philosophical works on aesthetics and ontology, stands in opposition to both Scruton and Walton. In “Photography, Painting and

Perception” from 1991, he states, “*Photography, I claim, gives us representations and not perceptual access*” (Currie 1991, p.23). Thus, if the viewer is put in perceptual access to the subject *through* the photograph, then the viewer can expect that if something were to change about the subject then it would also change the appearance of the photograph. But there is no way for the viewer to know if this is the case if the viewer does not have photographed objects in reach, and thus cannot determine by a fact that there is perceptual access through photographs. He makes an example:

The length of the mercury column in a thermometer depends naturally on the amount of ambient heat. And because the natural mapping from heat the lengths preserves closeness relation, the discriminatory errors we make when looking at the thermometer are similar to those we make when we perceive how hot something is by feeling it on the skin: thermometers don’t “scramble the real similarity relations” between temperatures. If feeling (a degree of) warmth is a way of perceiving heat, then, by Walton’s argument, seeing the length of the column should be a way of perceiving heat also, which it is not. What I perceive is the length of the column, from which I infer the level of ambient heat (Currie 1991, p. 25).

Thus, if one looks at a photograph of a sunny day, one is not put in perceptual access to that sunny day, as one cannot *feel* the warmth which is depicted by the photograph, as an example. Therefore the photograph becomes a “*natural representation, since they display natural dependence*” (ibid.), that is, the photograph gives the viewer information of the photographic scene, but is not a source of perceptual access in the sense that the viewer does not actually get in contact with the photographed scene.

Additionally to this claim, Currie (1991) explains that unless the viewer is given additional information about the photograph, then the photograph does not provide what he calls “*ego-centric information*” (Currie, 1991, p. 26). Ego-centric information is the information about the “*spatial and temporal relations*” (pp. 26) which is given in the actual situation and gives information of the relation between the person and the actual event, thus, what is being observed with ‘ordinary seeing’, i.e, when one is not seeing through a photograph, then that seeing is “*perspectival*” (pp. 26) In contrast, when looking at a

photograph one is looking at a representation of the photographed scene, which does not make the viewer put themselves in perspectival relation to what has been photographed. Furthermore, the photograph does not convey “*temporally extended information*” (Currie, 1991, p.27), as Currie believes that photographs cannot show the changing of time (pp. 27). However, this is highly arguable. As an example; if one decides to place a pinhole camera by the window, placed so it can track the rise and setting of the sun, and leaves it there for a year, then, if the photographer is skilled, they will achieve tracking the sun in a way which ‘ordinary seeing’ could not, and thus show temporal extended information.

Nevertheless, Currie concludes that photographs are indeed representations, like paintings, and that by seeing photographs, the viewer is not actually seeing the photographed object.

Far from every theory or theorists of the photographic universe has been mentioned, and much is still to be investigated to completely understand the properties and possibilities of the photographic art practice if such a thing can even be achieved. However, it has given an overview of some of the aspects of the *Traditional theories* which has spiked some philosophers of the twenty-first-century to rethink photography theory and the medium. So far, the focus has been on two main aspects of the photographic medium: the photographer's role, and the potential of the photograph.

On one hand-side stand, Bazin and Scruton committed to the idea of a belief-independent process where the agency lies in the camera and nature and thus arguing that there is no intentionality, nor human agent in the photographic practice. They may come from different starting-points; Bazin believing the agent is nature itself and that the astounding value of photography lies in the fact that a human being is not responsible for the imprinting of the subject; Scruton simply not believe that there can be any kind of intentionality or expressive thoughts shown through photography, because of the causal relation between subject and photograph. No matter if it is a critical or admiring standpoint, it still is a questionable statement. It is as if both cut the photographic process into two, by severing off the photographer. On the other hand-side is Allen & Snyder, together with Currie, arguing that there is indeed expressive thought, human agency, and intentions in the photographic practice.

But why is this even of importance? Firstly; the epistemic value of photography lies in this very inquiry, as photography distinguishes itself from drawings and paintings, precisely because of the exact moment of the imprinting of light. The automatic values in the photographic process arguably engage the viewer to perceive the photographic as a document, as a thing where there *must* be *some kind* of truth in it, as the process requires an actual, existing subject to be imprinted. As Walton puts it; “*A photograph is always a photograph of something which actually exists*” (Walton 1984, p.250). Nonetheless, even though there is a part of the photographic process which obligates some kind of belief-independent imprinting, there is still a crucial need for a photographer to put this in motion, and thus to understand the medium, one must investigate this role, and what it means for the final product. Secondly, in creating art, it is already established that “mind” is needed, thus, one must ratify whether or not the photographic process is intentional. Yet, it is not the scope to discuss what we already know; that photography can be art, but instead, understand the possibilities of representation and what this means for the photographic art practice.

The question of whether photographs can be representational, is rather complex, connecting with many other probes of investigations into the medium and its ontology. Even so, it is a crucial aspect to investigate in order to understand what photography is and what is possible in the photograph. The waters divide between the notion of the possibility of photography to be representational, with Scruton, Bazin and Walton believing that photography cannot be representational, while Currie, and Allen and Snyder, argues that it can indeed. Each of them, on both sides, arrives at their conclusion based on different standpoints and holds strong arguments concerning fictions, realism, automaticity, and perception. Notably, it ties strongly together with intentionality, tying it all together in one knot.

The heart of the question now is how these theories keep up, in a century where photography *is* viewed as an art-form, and whether one should try to address the photographic artwork not *despite* its properties, and in contrast to other art mediums, as many of the *Traditional theorists* tend to do, but rather investigate it as a medium based on

a process which cannot be reduced to single events and merely analysed as such, but more like a chain of dependent events, that requires some kind of independent imprinting? Many contemporary photographic art practices would be ruled out by the likes of Scruton. Thus, in the turn of the twenty-first century, a new line of thinking emerges, critically addressing the *Traditional theories* and their theses. The question is whether the newer theories are capable of embracing the photographic practice better than the *Traditional theories* are.

A New Theory

From the shift in the *Traditional Theories*, by thinkers like, Currie and Allen and Snyder, a completely new way of thinking philosophically about photography emerges with Patrick Maynard and Dawn M. Wilson (born Phillips and will be referred to as Phillips in this thesis) (Costello 2018, p. 74-75). As a critical response to what they see as a rather weak counterargument to sceptical thinking about photography, they dig into a process-based theory.

The beginning of a New Theory

In 1997 Maynard publishes the book “The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through photography”, introducing a theory, which focuses on the process of photographing, rather than the photograph itself, and thus being one of the major theorists to lay the groundwork for the *New Theory*. By refocusing photography theory back to the photographic process, that is, the marking of a surface with light, he argues that the apparatus is a device and thus allowing it to be recognized for its many possibilities and views the camera as a tool designed precisely for the recording of light and that it should be recognized as such. Furthermore, the notion of the theory does not focus on key points like realism and representation, which previous theories did, and realizes the prospects of the apparatus and its feature-tracking recording of light (Costello 2018, on Maynard p. 76)

Phillips (2009) develops further on the process-based theory of Maynard in her response to Roger Scruton's sceptical account of the photographic medium, in “Photography and Causation: Responding to Scruton’s Scepticism”. Firstly, she opposes

Scruton regarding the thesis of the causality between the subject and the photograph, which is one of Scruton's main theses, and claims that there might even be a chance that there is no subject in a photograph, and thus stating:

I propose that the objects causally involved in the production of a photograph are not, just in virtue of their role in the photographic process, the subject matter of the photograph. Rather, photographed objects are elements involved in the photographic process that constitute part of the causal provenance of a photograph. It is possible for those objects to be the subject, but it is also possible for something else to be the subject. It is even possible that the photograph has no subject at all. (Phillips, 2009, p.331)

Hence, opposing the fact that the photographed object is not necessarily the subject of the photograph, and therefore hinting at the possibilities of the intentions of the photographer showing in the photograph, that is if the photograph has a subject at all. As follows, what a photograph is *of* is not always what a photograph is *about*. She argues that looking into the causal relation between the photograph and the photographed, Scruton is neglecting the inherent possibilities of it being a way of which one can gain knowledge of the medium and its process. Phillips (2009) describes what she calls an “*oversimplified story of the causal history*” (p. 338) as follows:

1. an event of some kind takes place in front of the camera (sometimes called the ‘pro-filmic event’), e.g. a bird flies in front of a waterfall;
2. the camera takes a photograph of the pro-filmic event;
3. copies of the photograph are printed;
4. the appearance of the photograph leads the viewer to learn about the appearance of the pro-filmic event. (Phillips 2009, p. 336)

Echoing Scruton's argumentation of the photographic process. Phillips modifies the account, and offers the following alternative:

1. a light image is formed, using objects and light sources in an ordinary state of affairs;
2. a photographic event occurs — no photograph yet exists;
3. the information recorded and stored undergoes a process to create a visual image (the photograph) or several such images;
4. the appearance of the photograph leads the viewer to learn about the photographic event. (Phillips, 2009. p.338)

A few points are notable. Firstly, the final outcome, that is the photograph and its similarity, (or representational ability or characterization) of the photographic event, is not mentioned in this account, but solely the fact that it will to some extent, depending on the outcome, give information of the photographic event. This stands in great contrast to previous theories, where the photograph itself, and its possibilities, or lack thereof, are one of the major focal points. Furthermore, the notice of the photographic event, which truly emphasizes the difference in the theories, is what is especially interesting. So far, most of the photographic theory has solely been based on the vital moment of the recording of light on a light-sensitive surface. Phillips' account extends the photographic event, by arguing that this event takes place from the recording of the light, to when the actual photograph has been developed/processed. Emphasizing stage two, she notes that albeit the light has been recorded, the light image is still latent, and thus the photographic event must be extended to stage three, where development (both analogue and digitally) takes place. Finally, it comes down to stage four, where the viewer is presented with a photograph that gives *some* information about the photographic event. What Phillips is fixating on here, is the causal relation between the photographed object and the photograph. Thus, looking at a photograph does not necessarily include learning exclusively about the 'real-life' situation, i.e. the photographic event. Consequently, it expands Scruton's notion of what an 'ideal' photograph can be. If one were to accept the line of argumentation presented by Phillips, one would agree to the fact that the photographic event must be expanded to include the development of the photograph from a latent image to a visual photograph, as there is simply no photograph to view before that. Furthermore, one must accept that if the photograph does not need to share great similarity with the photographic event, then the subject of the photograph would not need to be the photographed object, as the intentions

with the photographs were not necessarily to create what Scruton would call an ‘ideal’ photograph, but maybe an abstract photograph of the recording of light, as an example.

This changes the whole focal point of what previously has been the centre of attention in photographic theory, and has thus put down the fundamentals of a process-based theory, and set into motion what would now be called a *New Theory* of Photography.

The *New Theory* and Its Possibilities

From the work of Phillips, advances Paloma Atencia-Linares, by developing on her focus of a process-based theory, yet from a different approach. She argues in “Fiction, Nonfiction, and Deceptive Photographic Representation”, that it is indeed possible for photographs to be fictional by allowing “*an alternative, broader conception of photographic means*” (Atencia-Linares, 2012, p. 21). Which she defines as follows:

Photographic means: any action or technique performed or taking place during the production and storing of an image, including the stages of transduction and storing, that consists solely in the exploitation, manipulation, or control of the incidence of light onto, and its interaction with, a photosensitive material. (Atencia-Linares 2012, p.22)⁴

Hence, photographic means are dependent completely on the photographer's control or manipulation of light, that is; controlling the technical aspects of photographic apparatuses, like e.g. shutter speed or using photographic techniques used in the darkroom, like burning, dodging, or experimental techniques like pseudo-solarization, which she accounts for as being strictly photographic, in her account of photographic means. However, other uses of manipulating the negative, like; cutting, drawing on it or scratching, would not be strictly photographic, and thus not considered photographic means (Atencia-Linares 2012, p. 21). By doing so, she includes e.g. cameraless photographic work and other experimental forms

⁴ When using the terms “transduction” and “storing”, Atencia-Linares notes that the former refers to the developing of the photograph, i.e. turning the latent photograph into a patent or visible photograph; while the latter explains the action of fixing or preserving the photograph. (Atencia-Linares 2012, p. 21)

which do not necessarily include the act of recording light bouncing off of certain objects, but that the photographic event can also be recording light itself, for example. Additionally, with such inclusion of photographic techniques, it would be possible to use strictly photographic means and still produce fictional photographs, by e.g. using two different negatives to create a completely new scenario. The *Traditional theories* do address some of these techniques, e.g. double exposure, but highly disagree with the idea that this would be considered an ‘ideal’ photograph if even considered a photograph at all. Yet, if expanding what is considered the photographic event, and not *only* allowing the actual recording of light to be a photographic event, but rather the whole process of producing the photograph, one could argue that it is indeed possible to create fictional photographs.

Atencia-Linares does however note that it becomes quite complicated to follow the account of the boundaries of photographic means when working with digital photography. Here she clarifies that it is rather difficult to pinpoint where exactly ‘photographic means’ stop, and ‘post-production’ starts, and it might be altering “*the image by technical means different from the projection and recording of light*” (Atencia-Linares, 2012, p.21). This is, of course, problematic, as the digital market has taken over the photographic industry, and thus one could argue, that it would be somewhat frivolous to initiate a new theory if it is not easily appropriate with the current state of affairs. Albeit, the photographic event has become considerably broader and more inclusive, with the new ways of accounting for photographic means, which arguably was much needed.

Diarmuid Costello, one of the leading philosophers of the *New theory* and professor at Warwick University of Philosophy of Arts, names the *New theory* (Costello, 2017, p. 439; 2018, p.68), and writes a comprehensive account of the scope of the *Traditional theories*⁵, as well as the *New theory*, in his book “On Photography”. He holds the belief that Atencia-Linares’ account of the new process-based theory is too “weak”, or “restrictive”, as it does not hold a strong argument against Scruton’s claim of fiction in photography; that the photograph cannot depict fiction, as of the causal relation of the belief-independent mark-making by light. He claims that ruling out what is not considered strictly photographic, like cutting, painting or scratching, on the negatives, is too restrictive and

⁵ Costello uses the term “Orthodox” to describe theories preceding the *New theory*.

‘Scutonian’ by referring to Scruton’s notion that as soon as the photographer paints or retouches too much, the photographer becomes a painter (Costello, 2018, p. 87) He uses two different examples which in his opinion should not be ruled out, but that he believes Atencia-Linares rules out with her account; if a photographer decides to only develop *some parts* of the enlarged image, and leaves other parts undeveloped; and the use of a paper mask to exclude the exposure of some areas during the enlarging in the darkroom (Costello, 2018, p.85-86). However, Atencia-Linares rejects this in “The New Theory of Photography: Critical Examination and Responses”, a debate which she co-authors with Catharine Abell, Dominic McIver Lopes, and Diarmuid Costello published in the journal “Aesthesis” in 2018. She argues⁶ that these techniques are indeed ways of controlling light, and thus would count as photographic means, and furthermore, that even though the photographer uses additional techniques, which would not, by her account, be accepted as strictly photographic means, then the product could still count as a photograph (Abell et al, 2018, p. 220-221). Costello only partially accepts this in his answer⁷ to her account, by arguing that he still does not think that it is completely clear in her argumentation, but does not elaborate further (Abell et al, 2018, p.233).

Dominic McIver Lopes, being a strong voice of the *New Theory* of photography, writes a sophisticated account of both the *Traditional theory* and the *New theory*, using what he calls ‘sceptical methodology’, in his book “The Four Arts of Photography” (2016). He states: “*Methodological skepticism is a tool for articulating when photography can be practised as an art, where each art is seen as standing up to one of the main planks of the skeptic’s argument.*”⁸ (Lopes, 2016. P. 48). In contrast to Atencia-Linares, whose work is focused on the aspect of fiction, Lopes wishes to approach an overall analysis of why the sceptics are wrong, and why a new theory is crucial, but, from the standpoint of saying that photographs can, de facto, be art. This he does by classifying the photographic art practice into four different categories, using each category to prove the falsity of the sceptics argument. The categories Lopes maps out are; classical photography, cast photography,

⁶See: Atencia-Linares' response: “Why Grey Is the New Black”.

⁷ See: Costello’s response: “Whither Photography Theory: Replies To Abell and Atencia-Linares”

⁸ See “the skeptic’s argument” in the appendix.

lyrical photography and abstract photography⁹. What is most distinct from Lopes' account, when talking of the *New theory*, would be the second and third category.

Here Lopes claims that with the second category, cast photography, “*we are looking for photographs that use belief-independent feature tracking to duplicate scenes and thereby express thoughts.*” (Lopes 2016, p. 49), thus opposing the sceptic' notion that photography is not *strictly* mind-independent, i.e incapable of showing intentions and expressive thoughts. He states:

On one hand, a photograph depicts the scene that was in front of the camera when the shutter was tripped, the scene whose features it tracks independent of belief. Call this the photographic “object.” On the other hand, a photograph may represent something further, something that it does not depict. Call this the photograph's “subject.” Put in these terms, the point is that a photograph may have an object and a subject. (The terminology is only intended to keep the two layers of representation straight; please ignore extraneous associations!) (Lopes, 2016, p. 59-60)

Hence, the photograph might be transparent, as Scruton and Walton argue, in each their respective ways, but that it can also be as Phillips implies, that the photographed object(s) are not necessarily the subject of the photograph. Thus; “*We can take an interest in a photograph as a depictively expressed thought even as it depicts only by belief-independent feature-tracking.*” (Lopes, 2016, p. 63-64) and so, proving the sceptic's argument wrong that: “*(S2) if a pure photograph is an image that depicts only by belief-independent feature-tracking, then there can be no interest in it as a depictively expressed thought.*” (Lopes 2016, p.48), and so the argument falls short.

If this is true, it is crucial to view how agency and intentionality are addressed by the *New theory*. The two concepts are closely entwined. Charles Palermo, who is Assistant Professor of Art and Art History at the College of William and Mary, claims that “*The*

⁹ See “Four Arts of Photography” by Dominic McIver Lopes Chapter 3 “To Possess Other Eyes: The First Art” for elaboration of the modernist category; chapter 4 “Thinking Through Photographs: The Second Art”; chapter 6 “Lyricism: The Third Art”; and chapter 8 “Abstraction: The Fourth Art”.

operator always plays a role in photography. Photographs require human agency” (Palermo, winter 2013/2014, p.52). He draws from the G.E.M Anscombe to explain it, he saying that *“when one performs an action automatically, one intends to perform it, but the way one would describe one’s performance is not by naming that action”* (Palermo, winter 2013/2014. P. 54) he elaborates:

I know that I performed an act under a description like “taking a picture.” And I know that I pressed the shutter release deliberately, but I am registering the fact that there is a gap or a disjunction between that description (“taking a picture”) and what I did (pointing the camera and pressing the shutter release, in a pretty minimal scenario) in comparison with other kinds of actions - say for instance, drawing - in which what I do (making and revising marks) and my description of what I do (“drawing a picture”) seem intimately related or even identical. (Palermo, winter 2013/2014, p. 55)

Thus, it comes down to the ‘description’ of the act, which determines the agency. However, it is also crucial to note that there is a moment in the process of photographing, where the photographer has lost control and must let the imprinting run its course. Lopes agrees with Palermo, that there is indeed intentionality and agency in photography and that this *“gap between agency and intentionality makes room for the unexpected, so that we may credit agents with acts whose explanation refers to mechanisms beyond intentional oversight. Photographic agency is no different from agency exercised outside art. . . . Likewise, taking a photograph is an act if it is intentional under some description.”* (Lopes 2016, p. 71). He argues that *“depiction by belief-independent feature-tracking may not be something she does, [but] the camera is not simply a short cut to depiction; it is a necessary ingredient in the thought that gets conveyed.”* (Lopes 2016, p. 67)

Yet, Lopes (2016) does not fully agree with Palermo’s notion of the act of drawing. For the third category of his four photographic arts to be accepted; that is, lyricism, or lyrical photography he must elaborate on the possibility of belief-independent mark-making (or feature-tracking, as he calls it) in drawing. He refers to Galileo’s incredible drawings of the moon, used to investigate its surface and thus demonstrate his

discovery that the moon is, in fact, full of craters and mountains. This was not done to show expressive thought but was done conspicuously accurate, by tracing the shadows on the moon. To do an investigation like this, it is crucial for Galileo to be completely objective. Had he decided that one shadow did not suit his mood and that he, therefore, did not draw it, his investigation would be faulty, and not accepted as proof of how the surface of the moon actually looked like (p.77). Lopes thus argues that it is possible to draw by belief-independent mark-making, and thus the drawing becomes both a drawing *and* a photograph, as he states;

What makes an image a photograph is that it is rendered from information in the recording event. What makes an image a drawing is that its surface is marked by means of certain bodily movements. Drawing and photography are not mutually exclusive. Information from a photographic recording event might guide bodily movements to mark a surface. The resulting image is both a photograph and drawing. (Lopes, 2016, p. 84-85)

As an example, he uses Gerhard Richter's acclaimed works of art made from photographs, which he has traced from a projection onto a canvas, and then filled in with matching colours of paint, creating what Richter himself calls a "photo-painting". Lopes allows this, by referring to the fact that he is using a photographic event i.e. a photograph, and belief-independently traced and coloured as precisely as humanly possible (Lopes, 2016, p. 90). He argues that if one follows the *New theory* of photography, that "*A photograph is an image output by a mark-making process taking input from an electro-chemical event that records information from a light image of a pro-photographic scene*" (Lopes, 2016, p.81), where "*the only feature that specifies photographic mark-making is its origin in a photographic recording event. Nothing rules out photographic image-rendering by making marks by hand. . . . One involves recording by means of a chemical or electronic tool or technology; the other is psychological and neural. This is a difference, but it can hardly matter momentarily.*" (Lopes, 2016, p. 84), then Richters photo-paintings are indeed photographs. It is rather peculiar, however, that Lopes believes that the difference between something psychological and something chemical or electronic hardly matters in this

debate. Is it not precisely there where photography becomes a visual-medium, like no other, as it is dependent on that exact moment, where the photographer must surrender control to the apparatus and let the imprinting happen automatically? Additionally, if one looks at Lopes' account of the *New theory*, then another inquiry seems to spring to mind. It urges one to ask when the *New theory* will draw the line of what is a photograph and what is a painting? Lopes seems to want to include quite a lot of photographic practices.

However, Catherine Abell, Professor of Philosophy of Art at Oxford University, does not entirely agree with Lopes. She argues in her response¹⁰ in “The New Theory of Photography: Critical Examination and Responses” that the way which Richter views colours, may not at all be how others view them and are therefore belief-dependent (Abell et al, 2018, p. 214). Abell believes that Lopes' permissive account of the *New theory*, is too broad, and argues for an alternative account to his definition of the *New theory*, as Lopes' account would allow any representation which has any origins in a photographic event, including accounts which do not show *any* appearance with the photographic event. Costello agrees that Lopes' account is far too permissive, and suggests it adds the requirement that either “*for a mark-making process taking input from an electro-chemical event that records information from a light image of a pro photographic scene to yield a photograph, it must recognisably (or potentially recognisable) depict that scene [or that] . . . the photographic genesis of the resultant visual image should bear on its appreciation.*” (Abell on Costello, Abell et al, 2018, p. 213) Abell believes the latter is the right direction to go, as the former would be a step in the direction of the *Traditional theories* and their ideal photographs and would exclude abstract photographs which the *New theory* wishes to include, and thus, alters Lopes' account to:

A photograph is an image output by a mark-making process that carries information from an electro-chemical event that records information from a light image of a pro-photographic scene and does so through a communication channel of a type that is effective at carrying such information (Abell et al, 2018, p. 214)

¹⁰ See Abell's response: “Out With the Old? The *New Theory* of Photography”

Meaning that the photograph should be effective at showing appreciation of the photographic event. Thus, if Richter were to paint a photo-painting of his house, and then chose to paint it over, to then paint it as accurately as possible *by memory*, it would not be viewed as a photograph, as his memory probably would not suffice as effective at carrying information of the photographic event. Hence, if accepting Abell's alternative, one would accept Richters photo-paintings to be photographs, yet restricting the final product to be effective at carrying information of the photographic event. However, one might feel obliged to ask when a communication channel is effective or sufficiently effective, something Abell points out too but fails to answer.

Abell's account can, however, be used in terms of the epistemological qualities of photography, from the angle of the *New theory*, as all photographs "*carry information about the photographic events causally involved in their production and thus about the pro-photographic scenes about which those events record.*" (Abell at el, 2018, p. 215), hence all photographs carry *some* information. This of course does not mean that every photograph has the *same* level of epistemological value, as this depends on how effective one believes the channel carrier to be, and this is dependent on social constructions. Here Lopes would believe that there is perhaps no need for an elaborate theorization of the epistemological properties of photographs, as these are determined by social practices, and that this is an advantage (Lopes, 2016, p.110). What is accepted on say, a social media group for documentary enthusiasts, could be, and probably is, rather different than what is accepted in the renowned World Press Photo competition. Costello, who does not believe this property has been investigated adequately, concludes: "*For New Theorists, the epistemic value of photography is not an intrinsic feature of photography; it characterizes photography only in so far as it conforms to the knowledge-oriented norms imposed by various social practices that certain kinds of photography subtend.*" (Costello 2018, p.142).

Outlined, the *New theory* embraces many facets of the photographic universe, which earlier would have been ruled un-photographic by some of the sceptical *Traditional theorists*. It does so by drawing on a process-based theory from Maynard and Phillips, extending it to accept works as Gehard Richter's photo-paintings. On one side stands

Lopes, with a permissive account of the *New theory*, and on the other side stands Atencia-Linares with a restrictive account. Costello and Abell situate themselves somewhere in between, agreeing that Atencia-Linares is too close to the likes of Phillips and Maynard, and almost slightly a step towards the *Traditional theorists*, whereas Lopes allows his accounts to become all too inclusive, making it almost impossible to draw a line around what is photography and what is not. One is tempted to ask in what ways these theories provide new ways for photography to develop, and if they are indeed helpful in the understanding of the medium, or if both the *Traditional theories* and the *New theories* are all too radical, in their respective ways.

What To Do With the Old and the New

The early *Traditional theories* compose a strong line of arguments and in-depth claims. Boiled down to one sentence, they claim that photographs can only come about, by automatic means, belief-independently, and that it is light which carries the agency. This, of course, excludes the human agent, and without a belief-dependent agent, no expressive thought or intentionality can be depicted. For this reason, photography cannot be art, and if it is, then it is because it is not strictly photographic, and thus not a photograph. They arrive at this conclusion, by comparing photographs to paintings, and as they believe paintings can never be belief-independent, and will *always* show the expressive thoughts of the painter, then photographs will only be art when they cease to be photographs. This puts them in a tight spot in the twenty-first century where the medium is, without a doubt, considered art. Furthermore, by the strict notions of what is ‘ideal’ photographs, i.e. photographs which depict only by belief-independent mark-making, many photographic practices will not be considered photographs. This does not give the photographic universe much room for growth, and it certainly does not help to constantly view the photographic medium in comparison to painting and drawing. It is as if the early *Traditional theories* have been playing an unfair game of chess, where they know every move of their opponent. As Allen and Snyder put it; “*Of course once a theorist has defined photography as being nonmanipulative, nonimaginative, and noninventive (in a literal sense), and has defined “art” as being manipulative, inventive and imaginative, the distinction between the two becomes relatively clear.*” (Snyder & Allen, 1975, p.163). Allen and Snyder, together with

Currie, are shifting the *Traditional theories* away from the strong and sceptical notions of Scruton, but they do not come up with new concepts that truly shake these rooted theories. What seems most difficult to accept, is the argument that photography has no agency and photographs no expressive thoughts. It is agreeable that not *all* photographs are filled with expressive thoughts, but it seems too constrictive to say that it is not capable at all.

When concerning the agency of photography, it seems the *New theory* stands superior to the *Traditional*. Here intentions and agency are accepted fully, in all its forms, and weaved with the production of photographs, and the manipulation and recording of light. However, the final product is not of great interest in the *New theory*, at least not like it is with the *Traditional theorists*, which is rather peculiar, as it tries to include as many photographic art practices as possible. By focusing only on the process, and allowing almost every account which is stemming from a photographic event, cases like Richter's photo-painting are accepted as photographs, which somehow seems quite broad and somehow a bit extraneous, as it does not seem to add anything essential to the photographic practice to accept Richters photo-paintings. Additionally, one could never know if Richter actually did change details during the production of the photo-paintings, thus the photographic event would be corrupted by his beliefs. One seems to wonder why it is of great importance to create a theory so broad, that it embraces the works of Richter, for example, when his photo-paintings already fits perfectly in the category of photo-realistic paintings. It is quite ironic, Scruton did all he could to exclude photography from art, by comparing them to paintings. Now, it seems that the tables have turned; The *New theory* will do anything to prove the sceptics wrong, to the extent of accepting paintings into the practice.

Of course, it is marvellous to finally see a theory of photography, which embraces the artistic practices of photography, but with no restrictions at all, it somehow removes some of the magic which is part of the medium, by suddenly allowing every painting which has a pro-photographic scene as an origin being counted as a photograph. If one glances through the thesis of Hockney and Falco¹¹, suddenly many paintings become photographs. Unless one argues that it has to be an actual fixed image output, which is the

¹¹ See Hockney, D. (2018). *Secret knowledge: Rediscovering the lost techniques of the old masters*. London: Thames & Hudson.

pro-photographic scene, but nothing points to that in the *New theory*, so why suddenly include these? Is it because Richter himself claims to be a photographer? Maybe Maynard is right that “*we must beware of equivocation on the term photographic art. Art that exploits aspects of photographic use need not be photographic art. All arts exploit aspects of other arts to make new ones, and the aspects of anything likely to be useful to artists are often nonessential.*” (Maynard, 2012, p. 735), the question is just how to determine when something is photographic art or when an art piece exploits photographic use, or means if one prefers. That is indeed difficult for the *New theory* to answer when it does not directly discuss the final output, but only the very process. The *Traditional theories* have had a great focus on the photograph itself, admittedly with quite strict rules, nevertheless, it has been discussed, and has led to incredible investigations on perception. With new technology and digitalization, people are being thrown headfirst into completely new ways of seeing and perceiving the world, so how come the *New theory* does not touch on this at all? Here it seems that the *Traditional theories* get a point.

As it stands now, both theories tend to focus on specific properties in photography. This is of course inevitable in order to fully understand the properties of the medium, however, it seems as if they fail to comment on the bigger picture. The *New theory* definitely stands as the most inclusive one, as it covers most photographic practices, but both make claims about photography, which does not fully unite the two aspects of photography; the act of photographing and the photograph itself. They simply fail to describe them *together* as a *whole*. Abell is, granted, seemingly on the right track:

a photograph is an image output by a mark-making process that carries information from an electro-chemical event that records information from a light image of a pro-photographic scene and does so through a communication channel of a type that is effective at carrying such information (Abell et al. 2018, p. 214)

But is it still too broad? What if one were to add ‘belief-independent’ into Abell’s account: a photograph is an image output by a *belief-independent* mark-making process that carries information from an electro-chemical event that records information from a light image of a

pro-photographic scene and does so through a communication channel of a type that is effective at carrying such information? If this would be accepted, then if a photographer is playing around in the darkroom, lighting up certain areas of the light-sensitive paper with a tiny flashlight, would that count as belief-dependent (light) drawing or would it be accepted as a belief-independent recording of light? If it would be accepted that it would be a belief-independent mark-making process, then the photo-paintings by Gerhard Richter would not be accepted as a photograph, as the image output would not be imprinted by a belief-independent mark-making process, but the account would still allow for all four of Lope's arts of photography to be accepted as photographs.

Additional inquiries about the *New theory* arise; how does the *New theory* tackle the technological developments of the twentieth-century in contemporary photographic art practice? Take the project "Landscapes Without Memories" by Joan Fontcuberta. The landscapes are created from photographs and paintings, fed to a computer and run through a program (Terrang), which is used to render two-dimensional surfaces, like maps, to three-dimensional surfaces, for game design and TV and such. Fontcuberta has fueled the program with renowned works from artists like Dali, Weston, Atget and Stieglitz, forcing it to read the images as 'real' places, and thus having it create three-dimensional images from the works of art.¹² Those that are rendered from photographs, like "Orogenesis: Stieglitz" (fig.1), have their origin in a pro-photographic scene, but not one Fontcuberta can take credit for, in this case, it belongs to Stieglitz. He has had nothing to do with creating a pro-photographic scene, and he does not at any point use any photographic means himself, at least not any which is listed by the *New theory*, so far. Are these accepted as photographs? Say that one accepts that the works that are created from photographs are accepted, how would one go about explaining the ones that are created from paintings, as "Orogenesis: Dali Saint Helena" (fig.2)? So far, one would have to accept that half of the collection of works would be photographic, and the other half not, depending on their origin. This does however seem rather ludicrous, as it is precisely the medium of photography which he is challenging, describing his project as following:

¹² See:

<https://www.artsy.net/show/photo-edition-berlin-joan-fontcuberta-orogenesis-landscapes-without-memory>

I would say that my work raises questions about the very nature of photography. What is the photographic image? *Landscape Without Memory* picks up this idea. I show images that look like photos – which everyone thinks are photos – but they are not photos because there was no lens, no camera, no light. Yet the result is photographic, so it's paradoxical. Should we reassess what we call photography? Of course! These highly realistic virtual landscapes should make us question how we think of photographic realism. (Coignet, 2018)

Yet, arguably that is also what Richter says of his photo-paintings, then why would some find Fontcuberta's works of art more likely to be photographs, than Richters works of art? The outcome between, say, Richter's *Betty* (fig.3) and the works of Fontcuberta (fig.1,2) both tackle some of the same elements, namely about the medium, but the outcome is very different. How come it seems easier to accept Fontcuberta's work as photographic, compared to Richters photo-paintings? Maybe it has something to do with the way which the viewer perceives the artwork *as a thing* and what it represents.

Conclusion

So what seems to be the verdict of the two theories, the *Traditional-* and the *New theory*? Are they any good for the contemporary photographic art practice of the twenty-first century? This is not an easy question to answer. Firstly, it is of utmost importance to note that this is not at all a full account of either the *Traditional theories*, the *New theories*, or photography as a whole. What has been the focus of this thesis has been to compare the scope of two radical sides of the philosophical discourse of photography, in order to examine which one could cultivate the contemporary photographic art practice.

However, from what has been gathered thus far, the conclusion appears quite paradoxical. A few, but essential, points make it difficult to accept the *Traditional theories*. Firstly, the fact that it does not accept photographs as sources of expressive thoughts, thus not possible artworks, is simply not applicable to the twenty-first century, and secondly, by the fault of the first account, it rules out a far too great deal of the photographic practices, to be acceptable. However, it does address the photograph as a thing, and even though it

speaks of it as being either *invisible* or *transparent*, it still inquires into the notion of how photographs are being perceived. Additionally, it thoroughly addresses the epistemological properties of the photograph. Nonetheless, it is too great of a sacrifice for the contemporary photographic art practice, to bluntly and wholly accept the *Traditional theory*, as it would sever off a great deal of its practices.

In strong contrast stands the *New theory*. It is a theory which is fully engaged in the photographic art practice, but which is almost as broad as the other is confining, and does not find much interest in the epistemological value of photographs. It does, though, take a great interest in the agency of photography and endorses the fact that photographs can have expressive thought, intentionality and agency, which is crucial for the contemporary photographic art practice. Catherine Abell's account is thus far the one which is most fitting for contemporary photographic art practice, with a focus on the fact that not *everything* originating or involved with a pro-photographic scene is a photograph, and thus restraining the account of Lopes, to create *some kind* of border, yet, maybe keeping it a bit too inclusive still.

Thus, one could argue that the *New theory* still has some way to go, before it is fully developed, however, it is truly more fitting to the current photographic art practice. As it stands now, the discussion is rather one-sided, with not many players on the field and not much distance between them. It has the potential to embrace a whole new range of technologies, which are at the time of writing implemented already in many photographic art practices, however, it does not, which is quite disappointing. Rather it uses more classical examples as if it does not want to go too far but only wants to include the arts which have been left in the cold before. It is a bit peculiar that these new technologies are not thought into the *New theory*, as it would seem fitting. Is this not what theory and practice are supposed to do? Should they not challenge each other and stimulate growth? Hopefully, the *New theory* will do exactly that, as it surely has the potential to do so. However, there is still time for it to develop before technology supposedly takes over the role of the photographer.

Appendix

The Skeptic's Argument by Lopes in *Four Arts of Photography*:

(P) a photograph is an image that depicts by belief-independent feature-tracking, so

(S1) a pure photograph is an image that depicts only by belief-independent feature-tracking, and

(S2a) if a pure photograph is an image that depicts only by belief-independent feature-tracking then it cannot express thoughts depictively, and

(S2b) if a pure photograph cannot express thoughts depictively then there can be no interest in it as a depictively expressed thought, so

(S2) if a pure photograph is an image that depicts only by belief-independent feature-tracking then there can be no interest in it as a depictively expressed thought, but

(S3a) an image is a representational art work only if there can be an interest in the image itself, and

(S3b) an interest in an image itself is either an interest in it as a depictively expressed thought or as a duplicate, but

(S3c) an interest in an image as a duplicate is only an interest in the duplicated object,

(S3d) so an interest in an image as a duplicate is not an interest in the image itself, so

(S3e) an interest in an image itself is only an interest in it as a depictively expressed thought, so

(S3) an image is a representational art work only if there can be an interest in it as a depictively expressed thought,

(S4) so no pure photograph is a representational art work, but

(S5) photography is an art only if some pure photographs are representational art works,

(S6) so photography is not an art.



Fig. 1: Joan Fontcuberta, *Orogenesis: Stieglitz*, 2005

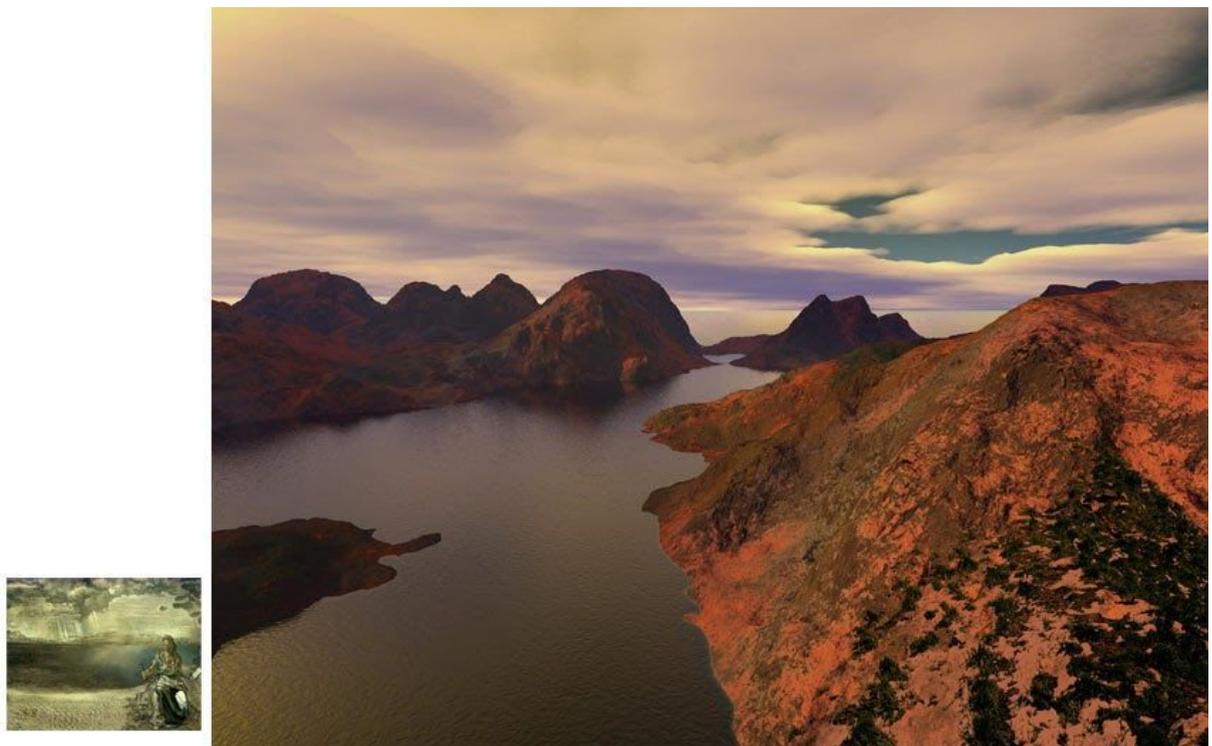


Fig. 2: Joan Fontcuberta, *Orogenesis: Dali Saint Helena*, 2003



Fig. 3: Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988

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