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BIO-PHOTOGRAPHY

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It. *Bio-fotografia*; Fr. *Bio-photographie*; Germ. *Bio-Fotografie*; Span. *Biofotografía*. The notion of bio-photography portrays a fundamental condition of contemporary man on a global level: the total mobilization of images that makes existence and photography coincide.

The prerequisite for the use of the notion of bio-photography is the transition, which emerged about a quarter of a century ago, from analogue to digital photography (images formed by images: pixels). In particular, the notion of bio-photography is called upon to capture the aesthetic backlash that occurs when image-producing devices take on a primarily organic character (in this regard, bio-aesthetics has been discussed: Montani 2007). More generally, bio-photography has the analytical task of orienting us in that process underway in contemporary society that implies, in comparison to the past (paradoxically precisely due to an overabundant production and circulation of digital snapshots), the exhaustion of the special value of photography, the photographic gesture and the role of the professional photographer (some define this condition as post-photographic: Fontcuberta 2016).

ANALOGUE & DIGITAL

The post-photographic condition is the result of an ontological and anti-naturalistic concatenation: with the digital image, first and foremost thanks to its immateriality, the traditionally codified gap separating reality and image tends to disappear. Indeed, analogue photography retains full confidence in the photographic "a priori", since it is taken for granted that something has actually happened (Roland Barthes spoke of the photographic "intractable" in this regard: Barthes 1980). Photography, in other words, possessed its own autonomous language *vis-à-vis* reality (Bazin 1999); and thanks to this form of independence it evoked, when compared to painting for example, a degree of aesthetic objectivity without historical precedent.

With digital photography, the specificity of photographic language tends to vanish; digital images, due to their boundless number and the ease with which they can be produced, themselves become the reality on which the material and psychological symbols that make up our society are modeled. The most genuine performance of the digital, at this point, reveals itself to be its performative charge: it invents reality; or rather, it duplicates it, leaving the external referent without any particular weight for the generation of an image (Chéroux 2009). In digital photography, nothing exceeds its capacity for reproduction. One could in this regard, in order to better clarify the terms of this process, use a formula: *the digital does away with the outside*; that is to say, for photographic art in the digital age there is no problem of truth (Baker-Moran 2016). Digital practice is placed in a condition where the gap between what is and what we see essentially blurs. In the digital age, in fact, what happens, happens only to be photographed, because everything that is documented possesses a performative quintessence fostered by a structural intermedial tension (digital photography, in fact, even only without the web, is unimaginable: Bolter-Grusin 1998).

The possibility of digital photography to dispense with reality implies another crucial element for bio-photographic cognition: the irreversible end of the classical copy-original dichotomy (Gunther 2015).

EXISTENCE AND END OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Digital photography turns life into a performance designed to manage our daily condition marked by a heavy loss of experience. Analogue photography, with its anchorage to an external reference, cannot give off a purely conceptual image and for this reason retains a link with experience. On the contrary, digital photography, even when it captures an ordinary scene, appears as an abstract, informal gesture and for this reason is able to reveal the presence of a purely conceptual aesthetic – even in a generally post-aesthetic situation such as the contemporary one. Digital photography, in other words, by setting aside the idea that photography would be called upon to capture reality, becomes an opportunity to experiment with new forms of the visual which, while not revealing any particular aesthetic charge, actually produce new forms of art (Rubinstein 2021).

Digital photography dispels any friction between reality and image through the systematic convergence of being and existence: the *click* and the vision coincide at the moment when the time of the image is no different from that of reality. Digital photography irretrievably separates the waiting, the patience, the abyss of time, and the vision of the image. The union between images and reality, an alliance that defines our primarily visual and psychological reality, has been realized. In this regard, it is significant to note that we do not generally have in our hands telephones that allow us to take photographs; but cameras that allow us to do what we traditionally thought qualified mankind: communicate verbally. Evidently, in the age of hyper-technology, human communication through digital images, mostly photographic, precedes verbal communication (Fontcuberta 2016).

Digital photography would release a plebeian, wild, popular charge, since it would affect everyone (Gunther 2015). For this reason, we would have entered a bio-photographic age in which photography dissolves due to overuse: photography spreads everywhere, everyone takes photographs and is

photographed, making it difficult to determine the specificity and boundaries of photography. Capital to this process is a psychological and affective reformulation of the digital society in which the conduct of life seems to be modeled on the demands of a photographic gaze (Orlando 2017). The automatic immediacy of the digital encourages the formation of a photographic unconscious that affects everyone (in fact, this formation of an unconscious linked to the photographic gaze would be a constitutive performance of photography that the digital would tend to radicalize: Benjamin 2018).

When we talk about bio-photography, we have to refer to everyday forms of life on a global level. Think of the mobilization of the photographic image that new devices allow (the quantity of photographic images and the speed of their circulation is the most striking fact of this process: Siddi 2020); an astonishing diffusion that lets the peculiar and professional function of the photographic medium vanish. Today (almost) all of us take photographs non-stop. This implies that the traditional photographic practice disappears because the act of photographing has become a spontaneous and unreflective action like breathing; it has nothing auxiliary; on the contrary, photographing proves to be our privileged contact with the environment we inhabit. Today, if a social environment persists, it has to do with photographing and with the circulation, distribution, rapid and uncontrolled viewing of images.

In the society of the planetary world-economy, the peculiarity of the photographic gesture tends to vanish, because living – on both a symbolic and material level – basically means inhabiting a cosmos of relationships in which digital photographic images pull the strings; our fears, our unconscious, our desires, our fragility and our stupidity are sedimented in the images. In short, we have entered a bio-photographic age in which photography ends. In this universe, existence can be considered, on both a psychic and a social level, a digital experience: existence becomes photographic; photography becomes existence. If, at the beginning of the 20th century, all art seemed to overlap with the potential of photography, today existence itself becomes a bio-photographic experience.

The intermediary index of digital photography seems to fulfill a libertarian aspiration: to remove the private. In reality, rather, the private and intimate character of our existences, when anchored in the distribution of images through the web, tends to overlap with our public sphere; or, rather, it becomes our exclusive public dimension. Thus, according to a classical bio-political condition, private and public currently become indistinguishable to the point of coinciding (Colman 2016), giving the most genuine representation of what a bio-photographic condition is.

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