

The Visual Power of Photography and Its Status as a Representation

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Abstract I shall introduce a hermeneutic perspective and photography analyses from visual theory to the debate concerning the status of photographic representation (together with film, as it is based on the photographic method) which continues within Anglo-Saxon aesthetics and analytical aesthetics. I mostly confront Roger Scruton and Gregory Currie's thoughts on the photograph and its object (source), representation-by-origin and representation-by-use with Gottfried Boehm's concept of aesthetic nondifferentiation, and Georges Didi-Huberman's analyses of photographs. This shall allow me to identify the two aspects of photography (independence of an individual object and visual dynamics of an image) which have a significant impact on the status of photography as a representation and on the potential of cinematographic creation as a story told through images.

Keywords Photography. Representation. Aesthetic nondifferentiation. Film frame.

Sommario 1 Photography and Representation. – 2 Distance of the Photography. – 3 Visual Power of Photography and Frame. – 4 Conclusions.



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We become invested in films, we get emotionally involved in depicted stories, we identify with the protagonists, we care about their fate. Film magicians create for us a fictional world with distinct characters, dynamic action, and scenes brimming with emotions. Gregory Currie writes about the particular vividness of the film experience in contrast to the other representational arts – even though film relies on the photographic method, i.e. it simply registers a certain previous state of things, it records actors playing their roles (Currie 2018, 186).¹ Yet we follow the adventures of the protagonists, not just the movements of those particular people. The question arises – how is it that we see Robin Hood and not a specific actor? From where does film get its vividness, its power to draw us into a fictional world?

This problem is an echo of an earlier debate concerning the status of a photograph as representation (and thus also of the film, recording a certain state of affairs). The discussion oscillates between defending its representational qualities and denying them. The denial is linked to the causal process of photographic development. This process is supposed to eliminate or diminish the role of the artist's intention, so that photographic representation becomes limited to the person or object placed in front of the camera. Roger Scruton took a particularly clear stand in this debate; one that he presented in his impactful text *Photography and Representation* (1981), which prompted a lot of responses and counterarguments, and some of its sentiments are still valid. In reference to this text and Currie's works, I shall outline the previously-suggested denial or doubts concerning photographic representation.

I recall the above-mentioned debate in order to point out the two important aspects of photography that can make it easier to answer the question about the vividness of the film, or rather the potential for such vividness. The first aspect concerns the relationship between a photograph and its object, or more precisely, the distance between the object of a photograph and the photograph itself as an independent, physically distinct object with its own features, which offers us a certain view. The photograph – through what it represents – has visual dynamics, a composition (more or less fortunate, harmonious, etc.) through which we recognise figures in particular proportions and mutual arrangement. They can be perceived and interpreted not only by reference to the photographed object and the context of creation, but also through their aesthetic nondifferentiation. I thus include in this debate the issue from image hermeneutics (mostly in Gottfried Boehm's conception),² which shall allow me to acknowledge the key role of film

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2 Boehm 1978, 451.

tools both in constructing the representation and managing the viewer's attention. I shall use the examples of specific film shots in reference to the rules of cinematography.

1 Photography and Representation

Scruton forms a thesis about the nonrepresentative nature of photography. He explains his stance by highlighting the differences between photography and painting. To this end, he creates models of them, logical ideals which include their most important distinguishing features. From the beginning, however, this makes recognition of the representative potential of the former dependent on its differences from painting. Scruton sees this distinction mostly in the ability (or lack of it) to express artistic intentions, which are the indicator of representation. What is representation? It is a relationship in which one object "expresses a thought about" another object or "is designed to remind one of" another object (Scruton 1981, 580). It is a relationship which is described through the categories of thoughts about the object, which are communicated through the image. It occurs in painting. An artist creates an image of a certain object according to his thoughts (and abilities) while offering the viewers a way of seeing it:

These thoughts determine the perception of the man who sees with understanding, and it is at least partly in terms of our apprehension of thoughts that we must describe what we see in the picture. We see not only a man on a horse but a man of a certain character and bearing. (581)

Yet how are these thoughts communicated? What makes them accessible to the viewer? Can we assume that it is the way of representation (representation for its own sake) (586), which, according to Scruton, is the main point of interest in the case of painting? This is an important issue because it can determine how the artist's intention is expressed in a work of art. Is the intention recognised through drawing the attention to a certain way in which a character was painted, to the painter's style, or the technique applied?³ Does this rely on the viewer's observation of a character's features emphasised in the painting, its particular nature, on their recognition of, for exam-

3 Additionally, my reception, the way I perceive and understand an object, does not necessarily have to conform to the artist's intention. From a hermeneutical perspective, the author is not the authority that determines the proper interpretation. However, this does not mean that a work of art is not treated as carrying a certain message or thought.

ple, an interpretation of, e.g., a mythological or biblical motif? That is an even more basic question. Expressing thoughts through painting requires translating them into shapes and colours, into a composition which determines the relations between the elements, focuses on certain characters while leaving the other in the background, and emphasises important gestures or glances. This is how “certain character and bearing” can be observed. The given object appears through its means of representation, which I understand as a method of organising the visual field. The way the object is shown contains its interpretation. An object or a character is always depicted in a certain way (in a particular technique, colour palette, proportions, etc.) and this influences how it is received and judged (as powerful, strong, with an angry glare, weak, pensive, etc.).

This is the aesthetic nondifferentiation described by Boehm.⁴ On the one hand, it is a quality of visual objects: what appears, always appears through a certain combination of colours, in a certain position in relation to other elements of the image or to the background. Nondifferentiation is also an aspect of image reception: the understanding of an object (attributing to it certain features, behaviours, role in a given situation) depends on how it appears. However, Scruton does not recognise the power of visual dynamics (he reduces them to an object’s visual properties)⁵ in the viewer’s experience, in which he distinguishes:

1. The intentional object of sight: a god (defined by my experience);
2. The represented object: a warrior (defined, to put it rather crudely, by the painter’s intention);
3. The material object of sight: the painting (Scruton 1981, 580).

The visual component of the image is either not listed here or was equated to the material object. The represented object reveals itself through the artist’s intention, but we must remember that it is realised in the specific visual field of the painting.

A photograph is not considered a representation (or it is, but in a very limited sense), it is denied the possibility of expressing intention due to the causal process of development: a recording of light

⁴ Boehm takes this term from Hans-Georg Gadamer. According to the latter, nondifferentiation means that in the hermeneutical experience, a work of art is inseparable from its non-aesthetic elements. The experience of sense is a unity with the formal, the semantic, the subjective and the cultural. The unity and sense of the work of art are revealed in a simultaneous presentation of meaning and becoming-present within the presentation, together with the circumstances in which the work is being shown - all this is part of the work’s being. Boehm emphasises the unity of sensual appearance and creation of being in aesthetic nondifferentiation. Gadamer 2004, 73-4.

⁵ Scruton 1981, 586.

reflected from an object placed in front of the camera.⁶ Thus, a photograph does not rely (or relies to a lesser extent) on the author's intention, but is determined by the existence of a real object. Scruton explicitly states that the relationship between the photograph and its object is a causal one, not based on intention. This corresponds to Kendall Walton's photographic transparency thesis, which is based on the conviction that a photograph has a counterfactual dependence on its object (if there were no object, there could be no photograph) and on showing real similarity relations (Walton 1984, 265. 271). The photograph is not supposed to be a medium which allows thoughts about the object to be expressed, it simply shows the object, it reveals its appearance. What is in the photograph (identification) is separate from the "how" of the picture. When viewing, we do not focus on the qualities of representation, but rather on the features of the object itself.⁷ Currie, while distancing himself from Scruton's radical approach, reaches similar conclusions when he writes that a photograph might be taken accidentally, and we could still observe and determine that it is a photograph of a particular object. However, he finds the counterfactual dependence thesis inadequate, since it can be also applied to painting and the potential dependence on the features of the object observed by the painter. It does not account for mediation through the artist's intention (or lack of it).

Currie introduces a distinction between sitters and sources. In the case of a painting, a real object or person might serve as a model for the representation, but they do not necessarily belong to it. The representation itself can refer to a mythical character, etc. In other words, a model facilitates the process of creating a representation, but is not required. In the case of a photograph, a real object is essential, it is its source (Currie 2008, 268). Moreover, the photographed person will always remain a particular human being. A photograph is forever connected to a certain person.⁸ Because of that, however, a photograph is characterised by a particular closeness, or intimacy, towards its object. It is an important aspect which not only relies on a connection to a specific, living (or once living) individual, but we could also add to the scholar's statement that this intima-

6 How then should we approach the paintings and drawings which were made with the use of a camera obscura or camera lucida, like in the case of the watercolour drawing *Scenery from Mr Jenkins cottage* (1850) by John Rea or *View of Coffins Beach* (1862) by Fitz Henry Lane?

7 A question may be asked here about the difference between amateur and artistic photography - however, in terms of primary features, scholars do not see the necessity. Currie also writes about the dominance of the image source in reference to artistic photography. See Currie 2008.

8 Of course we are talking about analogue photography; digital processing of an image exceeds photographic activities in terms of what belongs to ideal photography.

cy means capturing something ephemeral, e.g., an emphatic gesture, raised eyebrows, a glance, a movement of the hand, or posture, which occurs only for a moment.

According to Scruton, the source of a photograph is its main and only subject and a photograph cannot turn the object into a representation of something else. On the other hand, Currie does not deny the photograph's potential to be a representation. However, he distinguishes between representation-by-origin and representation-by-use. In painting, representation-by-origin depends on the painter's intention and the limits of their imagination, while representation in a photograph is always connected to the source. Only through its usage can a photograph represent something different. My doubt concerning ascribing photography to the category of representation is based on – as Currie states – that in particular circumstances a “pepper pot may represent a regiment by being so used in the course of explaining the battle” (2010, 19). As Currie says,

So a photograph or film image may represent one thing by origin – Cary Grant for instance – while representing something else because of the use of that image in a project of narrative communication. (20)

Does a pepper pot fulfil its function in the given context as well as a photograph, or a film shot? Do the latter not possess certain visual qualities which make them more suitable as a representation? Does the way a photograph was taken (its composition, etc.) not impact the way it represents and the features it emphasises?

The relation between the image and its source or model, the object involved in the process of photograph development, is the indicator of the possibility of communicating thoughts about the represented object. Thus the representation is linked to the relationship (mechanical, causal or intentional – that is, mediated through the artist's sight and brush) with the preliminary object of the painting, or even dependent on it. This does not take into account the function of the visual layer of the image with regard to what it depicts (and how it does that). The omission of the visual layer makes that dependence possible. This is also confirmed through Currie's distinction, which does not consider the role of the visuality of a photograph in the representation it creates.

The representative potential of photography (or rather, the lack of it) is further examined by Scruton with reference to the relationship with the source of a photograph, which also influences how film is approached. It is a recording of an arranged situation acted out in front of the camera, along with the acting, scenography, make up, etc. Cinematographic tools can only record the representation and broaden its reach through arranging situations impossible on the stage.

On the other hand, a film is supposed to make the efficiency of representation and conveying the reasoning behind it more difficult – the viewer needs to understand that the person caught on camera is trying to show behaviours and emotions which are not their own and belong to a fictional story. Scruton states that the audience is given no criterion of relevance, no criteria listing the things on which they should focus (1981, 599). A film is subjected to accidentality and multiplicity of elements such as dust on a jacket, actor's wrinkles, a multitude of appearing elements which interfere with the message – especially when compared to a theatre stage. Yet Currie states that a film contains certain elements designed and recognised as by design, which are evidentially significant for some aspects of the story (but not all are significant), and recognising these meaningful elements is tied to, e.g., the camera movement (2010, 57). Thus, he confirms that cinematographic tools indicate what is relevant to the story, yet this is still not the same as conveying thoughts on the object.

What about choosing the shot, the specific perspective that sets limits to what appears in a photograph? According to Scruton, these activities do not make the photograph a representation for two reasons. First of all, these are aesthetic actions which emphasise the charm of the given place, but they are not the expression of thoughts on the object. Second, they do not occur in the photographic medium, but before the picture is taken. In a thought experiment, Scruton offers the example of a frame he would place at the end of a street, so that it shows the desired view:

I move the frame so that, from the chosen spot, only certain parts of the street are visible, others are cut off. I do this with all the skill available to me, so that what is seen in the frame is as pleasing as it might be [...] But how could it be argued that what I see in the frame is not the street itself but a representation of it? (1981, 596)

However, Currie argues against such correlation between perceiving a view and observing a photograph by pointing out the lack of ego-centric information in the case of the latter. The presence of this information depends on the location of the person observing the view. The location determines our access to the view – which means that seeing is perspectival (1991, 26). Photographs do not offer such information, and the access to the view is not determined by my angle of viewing a photograph.

Moreover, seeing is perspectival, but it is also embodied and multi-sensory. The light which reveals the view can also be the thing which obscures it, if we have the sun in our eyes. A romantic morning and a foggy landscape (or a rainy city) are associated with the sensation of moisture or cold. We perceive distance by estimating it in geometric parameters, but also by the reach of our body's movement. Depth

is not just positioning one object behind the other, but is also the evidence of corporeal being among things – as Maurice Merleau-Ponty would say (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 265-79). These are important phenomenological conclusions concerning embodied seeing and sharing (being in) a space. Such perception offers us a richness of sensations, which are not reduced to recording visual features. Similarly, even if we place a frame limiting the view, the view will always be inseparable from its spatial context and will remain ingrained in its horizon.

2 Distance of the Photography

The lack of egocentric information not only means that I am not situated in the location of taking the picture, but also that viewing a photograph establishes its own different perceptual situation and that the photograph is an independent object with its own material features. No matter where I position myself in relation to the photograph, I cannot change the perspective of the view on it. It appears that the above considerations overlooked not just the role of visuality in the photograph, but also its materiality. A photograph is a distinct object with its own physical features, and an image independent from its viewers or its creator themselves. It comes into being through registering the visual qualities of its object, and it also shuts out its other features. A sort of photographic reduction takes place, reducing the object to its visuality. The object becomes removed from its spatial context while the chosen frame determines the composition of the picture, and defines the surroundings which become the background for the given object or person. It shows the objects' proportions and visual relationships which are observed regardless of the spatial whole of the original view. It becomes clearer because of that removal.

A photograph is an item which is independent of the photographed object. Thus not only does physical distance appear between the photograph and the object, but also the distance of the object from itself. Although an object, as a source, is always a specific individual, the visuality becomes removed from its context. If this is not a cut, then it is certainly a rift between a photograph and its object, which allows for rich and creative usage of the photograph, while oscillating between closeness and remoteness. The way of reception of the photograph and the objects oscillates between a sense of remoteness and closeness, incomprehensibility and obviousness – depending on whether we know the particular person, whether we treat the photograph as a record of a specific event or confront it with a visuality that we cannot ascribe to any particular situation, and its composition is exceptionally clear. Such works can be found in Spencer Tunick's creations. *Dream Amsterdam* from 2007 shows alternating

stripes: a white stripe and a stripe formed by nude people facing back. Their corporeality – arranged into repetitive patterns, crowded in a vertical frame – becomes abstract.

We might not recognise a particular person or context, but we can be struck by a facial expression, a captured gesture or a position shown on a photograph. They become the basis for interpretation of the picture, they evoke associations, feelings of familiarity or strangeness, and determine the features we ascribe to the given person. This particular expression can be found in Jacques Henri Lartigue's works, like in the photograph of a laughing couple from 1925; in Anysia Kuzmina's photograph of hands (2017); or in Anders Petersen's shot of a kiss from 1978.

Photographic images can be both intimate and universal. Ken Rosenthal, through his original method of exposure and development, creates memory images.⁹ They resemble pictures from family albums, but they cannot be linked to specific people because of their particular visual quality: a blurriness and softness which gives them an oneiric atmosphere (like in the photograph series *The Seen and Not Seen*). Blurriness not only stops us from recognising the person, but it also changes the nature of the environment itself. In the photograph of a woman under water (number 237-1 from the series), the whole image is arranged in such a way – through the woman's position in vertical lines, the contrast between the bright, shimmering water and the dark silhouette, and between the bright bottom and dark top – that it evokes the impression of ascending, of calm and stability, or even an image of holiness.

The photographed objects become easily available, they reach out to the viewer; sometimes they are reduced in size, sometimes they are enlarged and thus made homogenous. The photograph is reproduced, moved, subjected to modifications and juxtapositions. Colloquially speaking – it has a life of its own. This is because a photograph is a separate object, not a view within a frame. The life of a photograph and the changes it introduced to the way of experiencing the photographed objects were described, among others, by Walter Benjamin (1969, 217-51). Because of these qualities, the photograph became the foundation of Aby Warburg's work. Through photographs he traced transformations of, among others, antique motifs beyond the previous classifications of the history of art. Because of this removal, we can easily juxtapose a photograph with other photographs or texts in other contexts, and influence the way of understanding of what is photographed. Such transformations are traced, among others, by Georges Didi-Huberman (2018) in Bertolt Brecht's works, e.g. *Arbeitsjournal*,

⁹ <https://petapixel.com/2014/09/23/conversation-fine-art-photographer-ken-rosenthal/>.

in which the author confronted photographs of war, cities in ruin, speeches, councils, different persons and daily life photographs. He arranged them in the manner in which films are edited - he created tensions, conflicts, he emphasised differences. He used these photographs as tools of reflection. Of course, we could say that this is representation-by-use (depending on the context in which Brecht placed them), but without their visual content they would not fulfil this role: they would not emphasise shocking similarities or differences. In this case, using these photographs means experimenting with their potential meanings, meanings of what they depict. This in turn would not be possible without the distance between a photograph and its object.

In *Kriegsfibel*, in which Brecht (2017) arranged photographs from newspapers with various captions, there appear, among others, pictures of soldiers: one standing above the other, dead or dying. We identify them as an American and a Japanese soldier, moments after the former shot the latter. We could say that identification is a basic representation-by-origin. The contexts which Brecht gives them by adding different comments or epigrams change our perception of the posture of the standing man and of the situation itself. Does the representation, or its meaning change? Is the way we perceive, ascribe features to people and determine their relationship, a part of representation?

The caption for the newspaper featuring one of these photos refers to the tactical necessity which forced the American to shoot the Japanese. In Brecht's work, however, there is another comment, a question: what necessity put them in this situation? Brecht's works fulfil Benjamin's postulate in which he says that "What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value" (Benjamin 1997, 169). A photograph becomes engaged in new contexts because of the montage, which allows the photographed object (with all of its visual expression) to be confronted with other pictures or captions, which change the way we interpret a given situation, relationships or posture.

The above examples of using photography don't just show how interpretation of what is shown on a photograph can change depending on the right context - or at least the reception of the meaning of the representation is changed. In this case, is this representation-by-origin, or representation-by-use? Can we say that a photograph in the first context of its publication (the newspaper from which Brecht cut it out) was representation-by-origin, or is it representation-by-use in both cases? Is representation-by-origin always obvious and is there only one? Is it enough to say that a photograph represents-by-origin two men on a beach without recognising the situation, or determining the relationship between those people? Will reconstruction of the event ensure representation-by-origin? So many questions arise, which

shows that the issue of representation and defining the object of a photograph is not apparent.

Doubts concerning the causal relationship between the photograph and its object, which is supposed to be the foundation of representation-by-origin or determine the subject of the photograph (in the case of Scruton), do not only arise with regard to those of Brecht's works analysed by Didi-Huberman. Dawn M. Phillips provided important arguments in this matter. She questions this relation by showing that the causal relationship between the photograph and the object placed in front of the camera does not necessarily result in the subject of the picture (neither does it need to convey the real qualities of the object or result in an image). The subject is not the result of the mechanical process of photographic development. Phillips says that, "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" (2009, 331). The author carefully forms her theses and states that if a photograph has a subject, it is not because of a causal relationship. She also confirms that this idea suggests another one: namely that intention plays a part in the creation of a photograph, and even more so - let us add - in determining its subject. Can we then establish that the object placed in front of the camera is automatically what the photograph represents?

An important example of the concept that the object in front of the camera and the record of the light it reflected do not obviously determine the subject of the photograph, but that the subject emerges through interpretation and montage activities (through juxtaposition against other photographs), is the unreadability of the picture analysed by Didi-Huberman. It refers to a photograph from a series taken by a Sonderkommando in a concentration camp, and smuggled from the camp in order to serve as evidence. I do not intend to engage in a broad discussion regarding the possibility and moral justification of imagining and reconstructing the situation in which the photographs were taken. I shall refer to only one aspect of these photographs: to the black frames, or rather - black, illegible fragments obscuring large parts of the pictures. However, the black areas appeared as a result of the photographic process, they are the mark of the state of things and objects in front of the camera in the specific moment. As Didi-Huberman writes, "This mass of black is nothing other than the mark of the ultimate status by which these images should be understood: their status as visual event" (2008, 36). Illegible fragments become the subject of the photograph and the representation of the situation only after the sequence is established, with the aid of other photographs and the scholar's explanation. The black mass is the darkness of the build-

ing where the photographer was hiding. Changes in the shapes of the frames correspond to the change of the photographer's location, while blurry fragments and askew framing offer us important information about the urgency, the risk, the secrecy of the whole action. Is this representation-by-origin, or representation-by-use (use in the sequence, by adding a comment)? Does recognition of the situation and the photographed object not happen through establishing the intention and location of the photographer? This shows how non-obvious the subject of a photograph can be, and that the source of a picture does not guarantee representation (or its evidence). The aforementioned analysis by Didi-Huberman is also an example of how – in the process of interpretation – we oscillate between judgment of the visual aspects of a photograph and reconstruction of the situation in which the photograph was taken (together with the trace left by the objects in front of the camera).

3 Visual Power of Photography and Frame

The visual aspects of photography and the composition can be shaped through a photograph, and also expose the particular objects and determine their significance. Among them there are the visual qualities which do not depend on the source of the photograph, but on the photographer's decision – as Jiri Benovsky shows (2011, 559-80). These are: aperture, focal length and shutter speed, and we can also add the choice of lens. Aperture impacts the depth of field, i.e. which object shall be in focus. Focal length affects how the objects show their spatial relations (it can create a sense of depth, increase the distance or make the objects appear closer to each other) and the field of vision they cover. Benovsky confronts Walton's transparency thesis, according to which we look through a photograph at the source itself. He compares photographs to telescopes and mirrors that help us to see through them (1984, 251). This thesis corresponds with Scruton's conviction about the lack of impact of the photograph on the photographed object. Benovsky, by listing these photographic tools and their impact on the image, states that "the overarching aim of photography is not accuracy in depicting the world; it is rather, the aim to make us see the world in a way the photographer wants us to see it" (2011, 392).

If a photograph or a single film frame were to remain transparent with regard to its objects, it would not matter which frames were included in the film representation, and the possibility to create stories through images would be limited. Even single photographs can stimulate the imagination; they suggest relations between the characters and their potential motivations. One of Gaetano Luisi's photographs from the *Echoes passing through the sea* series (2012) – in

which we can see a woman in the water in the foreground, on the right, and a ship far away on the left - has a great narrative potential. This potential results from the composition, which shows the woman and the ship on opposite sides, the contrasting line of the horizon which splits the image in two, and the overlapping line of the woman's gaze, diagonal and directed towards the ship.

Frames can be wrong or misleading, or good and artful. They lead the viewer scene after scene by carrying sufficient information which shall be revealed in a particular moment of the film. Through various tools, filmmakers shape the visuality of the film to tell a story - they reveal information about the protagonist, their desires and emotions, they offer the means of perceiving them, they show their relationships with the other characters. The way the protagonist appears affects how they are received, how their behaviour is interpreted and judged. This constitutes aesthetic nondifferentiation of the film. Skilful shaping of visuality (in accordance with the many different rules and conventions, and also through creative use of visual mechanisms) allows for precise communication and management of the viewer's attention.

Phenomenal transparency, mentioned by Currie, only increases aesthetic nondifferentiation. The term, which the English philosopher introduced, refers to the qualities of a film experience and consists of focusing not on the image surface, but on the represented object itself. Currie writes:

When we see a cinematic image we usually do not attend to any property of the image surface; we attend rather to what is represented. We may attend to how the people and objects in the scene are laid out, the point of view of the camera, the kind of lens used, and so on. In doing that we are focusing on what is represented, by what technical means and as a result of what decisions. (2018, 192)

However, it is also worth mentioning here that the tools used to create the scene and the filmmakers' decisions affect the represented object itself, the way it is perceived and understood.

A film representation includes many different factors, such as movement, sound and montage, which orders the sequences, creates the dramatic effect of the scenes through timely planning, and builds the film as a whole.¹⁰ However, the shot understood as a film frame - a photograph - is the content-carrying element of a film. It does not just gain meaning in a given sequence, it affects the sequence. Therefore,

10 This is consistent with the conclusions of Noël Carroll, who emphasises the role of order of events, the amount of time of showing an element, and its scale in the viewer's attention management. See Carroll 2008, 116-46.

the composition, spatial relations between the objects, lighting and depth of field, are subject to decision at the frame level.

It is important whether the things within the frame are in the foreground, within the depth of field, in the centre of the composition or situated according to the rule of thirds, or in a specific location. These different elements require specific decisions. Placing one character on the foreground and the other in the background (in the case of, e.g. two people looking in one direction) introduces a hierarchy of importance between these characters. Capturing one character before the other in one shot, e.g. through a panoramic view, suggests a connection between them. Using a balanced composition showing two characters creates the effect of tension, it gives their meeting aspects of a confrontation.

Close-ups draw the attention to the character's emotions and reactions; they can also evoke a sense of confined space, stuffiness, or the character being stuck in a hopeless situation (as it was used in C.T. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928). Long shots allow the character's gestures and the way they move to be emphasised; they reveal more about their surroundings, they show them in a context and establish the relation between the character and the space. Medium close-ups allow the character's reaction with the environment to be contrasted. Gustavo Mercado analyses an interesting case (2011, 43). It is a shot from the film *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (Tom Tykwer, 2006), a part from the scene of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille's execution, right after the crowd has been intoxicated with the smell of perfume. A medium close-up is used, which is a meaningful choice: it clearly shows the protagonist's emotions, his disaffected, disdainful look and his loose shoulders, indicating the calm and relaxation of a person who was about to be killed.

In such a close frame, however, it is difficult to show a wider space (in this case the marketplace and the gathered crowd), and space is significant as an effect of the protagonist's actions and the object of their reaction. This is why the camera is situated slightly above the character's eye level, which usually gives the impression of reducing the character's power; yet here, by placing him in the middle of the frame - along with his clear emotions - it creates the effect of him dominating the environment. The depth of field is balanced, so that it does not draw the attention away from the protagonist's face but it retains the background as the context of the scene. Using similar techniques, i.e. a shot from above, central placement of the character can work differently in an appropriate context. In one of the last scenes of the series *The Morning Show* (2019), this is the way of presenting the forsaken, defeated Mitch Kessler, who is seated behind a large table. The camera is situated so that it captures the symmetry and perspectival depth defined by the lines of the table, other furniture and walls that surround the character, and appear

to dominate him and point to him. His central position is also significant, as he was an egocentric, formerly admired by other characters, and now he has lost his social status, job and respect. What is different between these two methods of framing is the size of the location: the character is shown in a broader context, and the expression of emotions is evident through the character's posture (a close-up is not necessary).

Awareness of cinematographic tools is also necessary if there are lots of elements in the film that are perceived as significant – if filmmakers do not take this into account, the message can be unclear, ambiguous. Therefore, a film can be subject to randomness (as seen in the works of beginner artists), but cinematographic craft relies on skilful managing of the viewer's attention, on visual presentation of a number of pieces of information. The elements which are not clear and on which we – as viewers – do not focus on, and which Currie would describe as insignificant, are equally important. They are the equivalent of what Boehm calls the iconic thickness in the case of painting. These are the elements of a painting which are not attributed or adjacent to any figure – they are an interspace of ambiguous content. This space is a vast continuum which brings to light the figure and the relations between figures and the whole representation. This is the paradox of iconic thickness. These elements, which cannot be attributed to a particular figure of meaning, organise figuration and allow the explication of sense: “This impossibility of utterance which is not capable of describing the intensity of the phenomenon and breaks down in it, [...] exposes what is pictorially the thickest” (1978, 463). What has not been articulated plays an important role in the process of the image's interpretation (1996, 164).

In the case of film, what are iconically thick are those elements which are not brought to light, which stay out of the depth of field; it is the background which allows one to focus on the character while it remains in the dark. A rather painterly effect of thickness was achieved in the very tense group scene in the film *Exiled* (Johnnie To, 2006), right before the shoot-out: the characters are situated in various places within the frame, some in the background (with significant shortening and well lit), others in the foreground, almost flat without the depth effect, fading into the undefined blackness, separated by hanging fabrics, doors or just darkness. However, more often this insignificant in-between space is filled with objects, buildings or sights which do not attract attention, but which are a continuation of the presented world and build a specific atmosphere; they are the elements of architecture, e.g. vertical lines in scenography, which are not significant in themselves, but which allow the effect of bias (deformation caused by tilting the camera and increasing the effect of tension) to be created; they are the details which in any given moment can be highlighted, e.g. through focusing on them, and become a part of the plot.

4 Conclusions

Scruton's reflection (whose perspective is similar to the one taken by Currie or Walton) on the status of the photograph as a representation was focused on the relationship between the object (the source) and the photographic image. This relationship was the basis for the ability to express the artistic intention while at the same time expressing the thought which is the object of interpretation. The subject was equated to the object, ignoring the material and visual aspect of the photograph as an image. However, as a result of photographic reduction (the process through which the photograph comes into being, independent of both its source and the viewer), it becomes distanced from the photographed object.

The latter becomes removed from its own context, time, space and situation, and is reduced to its visuality. It appears within a given frame, in which the proportions and relationships between the elements and the background are established. At the same time, it offers closeness of the object, its intimacy, i.e. concreteness and the captured moment, an ephemeral gesture, a display of emotions. Through this removal, we can observe the gesture and experience it. In a film, this is additionally intensified by the length of a given shot – the amount of time the viewer is exposed to the given emotion.

This distancing is also the reason why interpretation of the photograph – recognising what is in it, what the situation is, or what it means – is not always obvious. We can be moved by an emotion but we cannot identify it or relate it to anything. Sometimes it turns out that establishing the representation-by-origin requires using a photograph: placing it in the given context or juxtaposing it against other photographs. Thus representation-by-origin is not always evident. On the other hand, representation-by-use is not discretionary – we cannot compare the use of a photograph to the use of a pepper pot to explain battle strategy. A photograph is an image, it has visual dynamics within which a figure appears against a given background, in a particular location with regard to other elements. The figure becomes revealed and defined through this dynamics; we observe it, receive it, judge it through its visuality – in aesthetic nondifferentiation

The removal of the photograph from its source, as well as the power and suggestiveness of its visual dynamics (depending on a successful or unsuccessful shot), are a necessary condition for the cinematographic creation, in which a two-dimensional moving picture shows viewers a complex world, frame by frame. Even single shots provide information about the protagonist through how they show the character and their surroundings (depending on the situation, location, or depth of field, which are decided by the filmmakers and allow them to manage the viewer's attention and offer them their vision). Thus shaped, the visual dynamics of shots and frames, the context, and

also the order and rhythm introduced through the whole sequences of images in the montage, constitute the film plot – a rich representation of a given story and its protagonists.

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