The Ontology of Photography: A Reassessment

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Abstract. This paper explores some issues concerning the ontology of photography. It would appear that photography's ontology bears some significant specificities comparing with other art forms. First, the study of negative film and printed photograph relations shows us that photography has a multi-layered ontology, since although the latter is ontologically dependent upon the former, it stands autonomously as work of art. Second, I will consider the problem of forgery in photography. It seems that photographs are autographic and allographic, fakeable and unfakeable. Third, ontological status of negative film will be explored. Apparently, current ontological categories aren't pertinent as far as negative-photograph's ontology is concerned. That's why, relying on Gérard Genette ontological notions, I propose to consider the negative film as «immanence» and the printed photograph as work's «transcendence». In this regard, printed photograph functions as a manifestation of the negative film.

Keywords. Ontology, photography, negative film, printed photograph.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Guy Rohrbaugh points out «we surely live in a golden age for the ontology of art» (Rohrbaugh [2012]: 29). In spite of several scholarly reflections on the subject during last decades, as Thomasson indicates, the ontology of art is «a difficult philosophical problem» (Thomasson [2004]: 83). This problem aggravates when it comes to the ontology of photography. I will argue that this ontological complication is due to medium specificities of photography, which are to some degree similar to music (traditionally scored works of classical music) and visual arts like etching. That's why we need to introduce a particular ontology for photography which could describe the possible modes of existence peculiar to this medium. Issues that I examine here are certainly debatable and I owe a considerable part of my suggestions to preceding efforts to explain the ontological status of artworks.

There are few studies devoted to the ontology of photography. Without intending to go into the details of this absence, the ontol-

ogy of photography has not yet been completely absent in contemporary studies (see: Rohrbaugh [2003]; Mag Uidhir [2012]; Soulages [2005][1]; and Benovsky [2010][2]). The pioneering text of André Bazin placed in opening of his *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?* (1958) is possibly the first study devoted to this subject. Nevertheless, Bazin's reflections rely upon phenomenological perspective that may appear today far removed from the current debates of ontology as it is discussed in analytic aesthetics. The question which arises above all is to know what the ontological modalities of a photograph are. To put it another way, what sort of thing is a photograph? And, more particularly, how a printed photograph is related to its negative/raw file? I will try to propose ontology of the photographic image by comparing it with the ontology of the other art forms. We would see that the ontology of photography

has specificities that are not found as such in the other arts.

In the following sections, I limit my arguments only to the analogue photography as it is practiced through exposure of negative film, developing process, and printing the image on the photographic paper. Assuming though that digital photography proceeds often according to the same steps, except that the negative film is replaced by pixels and developing process is substituted by photo editing practices. The result could be printed or displayed on screens. Furthermore, here I maintain a nominalist standpoint. If «nominalism is the doctrine that there are no abstract entities» (Field [1980]: 1), then there is no abstract entities such as photography. All that exists are individual concrete photographs that are created and can come into and go out of existence.

Which are the ontological relations between negative and printed photograph? Which kind of thing is a photographic negative? Could it be compared with musical score? The act of projecting the negative onto the paper with a photographic enlarger should be considered as an instantiation, an interpretation or a definite causal relation that takes place when the negative becomes a positive printed photograph? Is it justified to consider the negative as a photographic work before printing it? These are the main questions of this paper.

To begin, it is important to keep in mind that photographs (at least in analogue photography) are not created through a single operation. Since from film exposure to the printed photograph there are several steps that each one could possibly modify the ontological properties of the final result. For instance, photo manipulation (retouching) occur during the transposition of a negative image to a printed photograph (either directly on negative film or through negative's projection on paper). These manipulations not only produce ontological modifications but also could sometimes count as aesthetically valuable. Therefore, the interdependence of the aesthetic and the ontological is an essential issue as far as photography as fine art is concerned.

The question is whether the negative is ontologically more important than printed photograph. If

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[1] Although the reflections of Soulages does not conceive an ontology in the strict sense, they relate to the «mode of being» of a photograph through the necessary processes of realization of a photographic work. Soulages introduces in this regard two ontological levels: irreversibility and the unachievable. The first level relates to the irreversibility of the photographic act. Thus, once the film is exposed it is impossible to change or rework it. At this level, each photo is ontologically unique and irreplaceable, a fixation of reality seen photographically. The second level relates to what Soulages calls «the work of the negative» and consists of obtaining a photograph through technical steps of printing in the laboratory. Thus from the same negative the work of the negative is unachievable, insofar as it can always be reworked and accomplished again in a potentially different way (Soulage [2005]: 115). He concludes that the origin of the value of the photograph lies primarily in this temporal irreversibility, because the photo retains the photographed at the cost of losing everything else: «The photographicity is this amazing articulation of the irreversible (*l'irréversible*) and the unachievable (*l'inachevable*)» (Soulage [2005]: 115).

[2] In an interesting debate Benovsky refutes the thesis that photography is among the universals. In what may be called the «metaphysics of photography» Benovsky shows that photography is not placed in the category of (Platonist) non-spatio-temporal universals nor in that of (immanent) space-time universals (Benovsky [2010]: 52). He concludes that photography is a «bizarre» entity (58).

former is the case, why so much scrupulous attention to the quality of prints by photographers? If the latter, why so much attention to the preservation of negatives by photographers, curators, and archivists? Why the negatives are handled and stored with special care, while once the printing process is finished and the perfect photographs are achieved, they are almost abandoned in archive? Furthermore, work of photography – as it is exposed in galleries or saled in outbiddings – is always a printed photograph. It is surely counterintuitive if, for example, Andreas Gursky puts one of his negative/raw files on the art market. As if one goes to the record shop in order to buy the score of Mozart's 40th symphony! The negative as well as the score are only «potential» work of art and must be actualised to be available for public. Thus to see «an image on the negative is a bit like seeing the sketch of a painting that is not yet complete» (Benovsky [2010]: 47).

2. THE PROBLEM OF «NOTATIONALITY»

Analogically, the negative film plays the role of the score or drama, that is to say there exists *the* work and realization of *a* work. Is this analogy all illuminating in order to understand the ontology of the photographic image? I suppose not. On the one hand, even if the score requires an acoustic realization to become the musical work, the interpretation of the score must conform to the norms and requirements defined and specified by the composer. Although a so-called free interpretation is possible, there is a *correct* interpretation of a score, this correctness finally determines the success of the interpreter and its scrupulous «fidelity» to the musical structure of the score (hence the slogan «nothing can replace the score»). The same is the case in the staging of a drama. Nevertheless, the problem begins where the photographic film often carries no prescriptions determining the process of the printing of a photograph. To speak like Goodman, the printing of a photograph is not «notational»[3] because photography does not

benefit a notational system. There is a standard notation in music that determines the quality and accuracy of performance, «since complete compliance with the score is the only requirement for a genuine instance of a work» (Goodman [1968]: 186). Accordingly, provided instructions by composer must necessarily be followed by those aware of the relevant conventions and practices to perform a strict instance of the work. Not having access to such instructions about a given negative, we cannot generalize this procedure to photography. Reasoning in this way, there would be no, then, a *strict instance* of a given negative.

In addition, the score and the manuscript can alter even after the end of creation. For example, musicians may find unplayable a measure of a given score because of a notational error or because of acoustic incapabilities of an instrument. In literary text, it often happens that one can not read a word or a sentence on a given manuscript or one can find inexplicable syntactic errors in it. In these cases, it is possible to «correct» these disorders in order to ensure the aesthetic coherence of the work. In the case of photography, though, there is no a prototype compare to which one can remove disorders of the work. Once the negative is exposed and developed, the visual structure is fixed forever. Thus, it seems that literary and musical works possess a syntactically flexible structure, which is therefore correctable, whereas the negative film is a syntactically inflexible and therefore incorrigible structure. This inflexibility is due to the «syntactic disjunction» of the image in general: «if syntactic disjunction and articulation are not guaranteed, the system is dense. This is the case of an image» (Pouivet, [2010]: 94).

As for photography, the absence of a standard notation adds to the complexity of aesthetic evaluation of a «genuine» print of a photograph. For example, look at the images of Rennes Cathedral. The structure of these three images appears simi-

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[3] According to Goodman «a system is notational, then, if and only if all objects complying with inscriptions of a given character belong to the same compliance class and we can, theoretically, determine that each mark belongs to, and each object complies with inscriptions of, at most one particular character» (Goodman [1968]: 156).

lar to us, while a few modifications of contrast and gradation during printing process display three aesthetically different manifestations of the same negative. Which could be the «genuine» print of this photograph? In the absence of a notational system it is *theoretically* impossible to identify it. Then we are faced with a multiplicity of images that are ontologically and hence aesthetically different. It could be the common point of photography and etching, because the latter is realized «in a system without either syntactic or semantic differentiation» (Goodman [1968]: 192). Consequently, without any notational system, the ontology of photography moves away from the music.

Moreover, as Genette has shown (Genette, [1997]: 98), there is another no less important difference dealing with the result of the execution of a score and a drama, and printing a photograph: the first two cases proceed to an *ephemeral event* while the printing produces a *permanent object* namely a photograph. We thus see the ontological specificity of photography, because it is on the one hand ontologically close to orchestral music but, at the same time, distinct from it. In this respect, photography is in the class of the literary work because the manuscript can instantiate in multiple copies just as a photograph can be printed. But that's not all, since all these copies, despite their differences in size, font, etc. have the same aesthetic value (Italo Calvino's literary value of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979) remains identical in all its editions, since «identity of language» and «syntactic identity» (Goodman [1968]: 209) of all copies are guaranteed). On the contrary, the slightest change in the photograph's base (paper, plastic, screen) or in the size of the print will modify its aesthetic properties, not to mention all the possible modifications (contrast, tone, gradation, etc.) in the process of printing of the same negative, which are resulting from possible variations that occur in the optics and chemistry of the printing process. If it is true that artistically relevant variations are unavoidable in each artistic performance, then «photographic works also admit of such variation, having correct instances (prints) that differ in such artistically relevant properties as tonal contrast, print medium, and size» (Davies [2012]: 270).

Suppose we find a negative of a famous photographer, say Ansel Adams (1902-1984), in his archive. Apparently, this negative has been abandoned by photographer for an unknown reason and we decide to print and present it as an artistic discovery. First, there is no information that can help us to achieve a print as Adams could print it. Second, possibly not all photographic materials of Adams' day are available (paper, developer, fixer, etc.). Even if these materials are still available, the principal problem that the lab technician inevitably comes up against is how to print the Adams' negative while not having access to prescriptions (the least they can be) in order to print a photograph *as Adams intended it to look*. Obviously, the printing process is not an insignificant act in the realization of a photographic work. For there are several technics that intervene and can modify the aesthetic values of a photograph, technics such as retouching, cropping, choice of paper, underexposure, overexposure, gradation, etc. Thus, what results from this print is only an *adaptation* inspired by Adams' negative, and certainly not *the* work of the photographer. That's why concerning photographic work we can introduce the notion of «co-creation» as creative-technical cooperation between the photographer and the lab technician. This co-creation in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) is more clearly manifested, because we know that he benefited the expertise of Pierre Gassmann (1913-2004) as his lab technician, who had a decisive role in the accomplishment of the photographer's works. The final photograph is the resultant of two different creative acts.

Nick Zangwill has similarly mooted a distinction which would be helpful here. According to him, in an artwork production there could be two agents involved: who has the «aesthetic insight» and who has the «aesthetic idea». Accordingly, the person with the aesthetic insight is not the same person as the person who had the aesthetic idea. Here is Zangwill: «Artists might have an idea and then execute it themselves. Or they may leave much of the execution to someone else –

the studio assistant or factory worker. The studio assistant or factory worker may have the aesthetic idea, but it derived from someone else – the person who had the insight. That person is the artist» (Zangwill [2007]: 46). Correspondingly, the photographer *as creator* has the aesthetic insight by the fact that he is at the origin of the photo-creation. However, the work of lab technician *as producer* is not less important than photographer creative act. For s/he is actually involved in the accomplishment process of the photographic work.

3. TECHNICAL REPRODUCIBILITY, FORGERY, AND PLAGIARISM

Is photography a reproducible art? If we mean by reproducibility obtaining aesthetically identical works, the answer will be negative. Although it is possible to print countless photographs based on one and the same negative, it is always probable that none of these prints are identical to others (the example of Rennes Cathedral's images shows it well). In fact, the question of reproducibility involves *volens nolens* the problem of forgery. To solve this problem, Nelson Goodman has proposed a distinction between «autographic arts» and «allographic arts».

A work of art is autographic «if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine» (Goodman [1968]: 113). According to this definition, photography is not *prima facie* an autographic art, because it is at least *theoretically* possible to duplicate a photograph without any significant variation. Suppose a print machine that reproduces a negative in innumerable prints. In this case, photography reveals as an allographic art, due to the possibility of producing multiple images of the same negative, those which, given their similarity, have identical aesthetic properties. But it's only the appearance of things.

First, photography, as a work of art, and as the result of technical expertise, requires often the intervention of the lab technician in order to improve the technical quality or to correct aesthetic defects of the photographer – even if the photographer and the lab technician are the same person. Thus, this technical intervention would produce different effects in each print and, therefore, the result could be a different photograph. Second, due to absence of a notational system, it is virtually impossible to reproduce identical photographs based on a single negative without any modification among them. Imagine that a photographer makes two modified prints of the same negative one at the beginning of his career and the other during his stylistic maturity. Which one can be designated as «genuine» photograph? Not to mention two print by two different lab technicians.

Or suppose one decides to reprint a negative of a deceased photographer because of, for example, damages that have already been done to the so-called original photograph. It seems that (once again due to absence of a notational system) variations are inevitable. Do these variations make fake photograph? In order to designate the fake, a reference work is needed such a way that in relation to which other reproductions appear inauthentic. If such a reference has already been approved by the photographer, then there would be only one «genuine» photograph of a negative and, in this case, the photographic work would be autographic. Therefore, all other possible variations must be rejected as fake. In this case, the replacement of a damaged photograph by a new print of the same negative produces but a fake photograph.

The problem becomes more complicated when one decides, for example, to rephotograph a photograph that has lost its negative or when it is out of use because of damage. Will the result be a fake? Another case: scanning a photograph with a high resolution device produces another «photograph» or just a fake one? Apparently, as Ralls points out, photographs «can be identically copied, *or* faked, but are obviously not in a notation» (Ralls [1972]: 16; author's italic). Exploring Goodman theory of autographic/allographic distinction, Flint Schier proffers a case in which «it is instructive to contrast the question of the fakeable with the puzzle of

the plagiarisable. It seems that just as you cannot fake or forge *Ulysses*, so you cannot plagiarise the *Mona Lisa* [...] Plagiarising involves both copying someone else's work and falsely claiming that the result is your own» (Schier [1986]: 29). It seems that photography could be both copied and plagiarised. Suppose that an amateur photographer finds the exact location of Cartier-Bresson's *Brie, France* (1968) and takes a photo exactly the same as far as composition and visual configuration are concerned. Could he expose this photo as his own work? It's a puzzling matter, since the photo is *truly* his own but he could *falsly* claim its originality. His photography is thus a plagiarised one. So Schier point out that «it is interesting to note that the photographic image, which is mechanically produced in the first place, does not *easily admit* the notions of either forgery or plagiarism» (Schier [1986]: 30; my italics).

The puzzling question of photographic authenticity eventually leads us to introduce a new ontological category that includes both the possibility of the uniqueness and multiplicity of photographic works: photography is a multiple-instance autographic art that could be copied and plagiarised. Cast sculpture and etchings are certainly multiple-instance autographic arts, but the significant difference is that they couldn't be plagiarized. Since another instantiation of Rodin's *The Thinker* is just a copy of it and one could not *truly* claim to be its creator. But, as it is mentioned, one could *truly* take a photo like André Kertész's *The Fork* (1928) or even Ansel Adams' *Moon and Half Dome* (1960) without being condemned to forgery. Theses cases break out the borders between original and copy, authenticity and forgery: a photography then could be original (taken by photographer) and, at the same time, plagiarised (taken *following* another (known) photography).

A topic that winds through discussion is to compare the photographic art with Jorge Luis Borges' 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (1939) in which Menard has the ambition to write *Don Quixote* as an original literary work and not as a mere copy of it. It is tempting to see how Menard's ambition could be compared with

aforementioned photographer who strive scrupulously to take the same photograph as, say, Ansel Adams' *Moon and Half Dome* having in mind to «create» exactly an identical photograph as to represent the same visual and compositional properties. There are several issues at stake. Firstly, if this photographer achieves a photograph identical to Adams', should it be object of the same aesthetic appreciation? Formally, there are not any differences between two photographs and it could reasonably be appreciated as Adams' work. Of course, it is counterintuitive, since *originality* is one of the principal criteria of aesthetic appreciation, for seeing the original object allows «a live causal connection with genius» (Lamarque [2010]: 75). The role of originality either in artistic creation or in aesthetic appreciation is obviously a matter of dispute and I don't intend to develop it here. What I am seeking for is the manner to identify the originality of photography as an art work. I will thus rely on the Levinson's notion of «contextualism» – which has been taken by granted in Lamarque's *Work and Object* (2010) though in a subtly different manner. According to Levinson

contextualism is the thesis that a work of art is an artefact of a particular sort, an object or structure that is the product of human invention at a particular time and place, by a particular individual or individuals, and that that fact has consequences for how one properly experiences, understands, and evaluates works of art. For contextualism, artworks are essentially historically embedded objects*, ones that have neither art status, nor determinate identity, nor clear aesthetic properties, nor definite aesthetic meanings, outside or apart from the generative contexts in which they arise and in which they are put forward. (Levinson [2016]: 20; my italics)*

The context in which a work of art is produced is then integrally tied up with its very identity. Nevertheless, according to formalism, the photograph taken by an amateur having the same visual configuration as of Adams' work must likewise be aesthetically appreciated without paying any considerable attention to the fact that Adams' work is historically prior to the amateur (or any oth-

er) photographer. But «if contextualism is right, objects that share the same manifest form may in fact not have the same status, content, or value as artworks» (Levinson [2016]: 21). We can draw out such a consequence from this first moment of debate that it is obviously not appropriate to aesthetically appreciate these two photographs even though they have exactly the same visual configuration. Since the historic-photographic context in which Adams' work takes place must be considered as a decisive factor in our aesthetic evaluation. This «ontological contextualism», as Davies calls it, «acknowledges the socio-historical embeddedness of some of the features making up the work» (Davies [2003]: 34).

But we are encountered with photographs circulating for example on the Web whose photographer and their creative contexts remain unknown to us. Can we aesthetically appreciate such photos without referring to their context? It seems plausible to think of such photos as valuable as far as their mere visual configuration is considered. But are they to be considered as photographic works? In this moment, I will proffer an explanation of which the salient feature is Lamarque's inspiring distinction between «object» and «work». He maintains that «a work is a cultural entity whose existence depends essentially on appropriate cultural conditions» (Lamarque [2010]: 4). He adds: «Works are a species of cultural objects whose very existence rests on essential possession of fairly complex intentional and relational properties» (Lamarque [2010]: 56). A work is of course an object due to its material structure but, as Lamarque indicates, it is object of a «distinct kind, cultural or institutional» (Lamarque [2010]: 4). Following this explanation, we are to make a multi-layered ontology as follow:

– Photograph-*qua*-event
– Photograph-*qua*-picture
– Photograph-*qua*-work

As Ansel Adams puts it remarkably in his *Personal Credo* (1943) «a photograph is not an accident – it is a concept». The conception is thus the main criteria to designate a photograph-*qua*-work. This conception is that which occurs in a cultural and historical context. Therefor «the character of a work, its salient features, its value, broadly conceived, indeed its very identity as a work, will be bound up, to a greater or lesser degree, with the historical and cultural context of its creation» (Lamarque [2010]: 67). Seeing a photo without knowing its provenance in an undetermined historical context is just seeing photograph-*qua*-picture. Since «the provenance of the object in front of me is crucial in determining what work I am giving my attention» (Lamarque [2010]: 85) and, consequently, its provenance «is all important in constituting the full aesthetic appreciation» (Lamarque [2010]: 87). Today, due to smart phones, every body can take photographs of such and such event. But the result will stop at the second layer *i.e.* photograph-*qua*-picture. For a picture becomes a photographic work, it must meet several conditions of which the acceptance by «artworld», that is, to be placed in a relevant context, is determinant.

4. NEGATIVE FILM-POSITIVE PRINT ONTOLOGICAL RELATION

Let's go back to the question we asked at the beginning: what sort of thing is a photograph? In order to answer, we must go through the debates concerning the ontological status of the work of art in general and the photographic work in particular (for an enlightening survey see Livingston [2016]). The relationship between the negative and the photograph proves to be puzzling because, as we have just seen, we can not explain it by taking into account the ontology of music, literature, or the visual arts. Actually, photography has some common ontological traits with these arts, but the differences are also obvious. To begin, we must study the proposed theories for the ontology of art and consider their possible relevance to photography.

A) Singular/multiple

Although photography looks *prima facie* a multiple art like drama, music, and etching, there

are some kinds of photography that are singular of which the perfect examples are Polaroid and photogram. Additionally, it is logically possible that a photographer decides to print only one photograph of a given negative, or in the cases where all the prints of a negative have been vanished or completely damaged except one. Photography thus isn't *sensu stricto* a multiple art. Nevertheless, to the extent that the negative is at the origin of several prints, photography must be classified as a multiple art. As we see, it's a matter of dispute to decide whether photography is a singular or multiple art. In another proposition, Wolterstorff distinguishes «performance-work» from «object-work» and claims that in one hand, «most if not all performance-works are universals[4], in that they can be multiply performed» and, in the other, «any one of the several objects of an object-work can be destroyed without the object-work thereby being destroyed» (Wolterstorff [1975]: 118). According to this explanation, the negative/print pair could be regarded as «object-work» because the existence of the prints is independent of the negative and the destruction of one do not require losing of the other. But concerning photography, the problem is that we can not designate the best print of a negative as, for example, we do it reasonably for a musical performance. There are standards that determine the correctness of such performances and, therefore, Wolterstorff maintains that works such as printmaking, cast sculptures, repeatable works of architecture are «norm-kinds», that is «kinds determined by the properties normative within them, where the properties normative within them are precisely those selected, for example by the composer as required for

the correctness of a performance» (Thomasson [2004]: 83). And this is also the case for «object-work». That's why Wolterstorff adds that «object-works are norm-kinds, and being such they have associated with them certain requirements for something's being a correct example of the work» (Wolterstorff [1975]: 118). A negative film could not function as norm for its printed photograph, for one can print a photograph in variety of indeterminate ways. On the contrary, performing a score or staging a drama requires a framework which often accompanies the work itself. In photography, it is practically difficult to specify the requirements in order to achieve «a correct example of the work», i.e. a printed photograph exactly created according to certain norms determined by photographer. Negative, then, could not be a norm-kinde. We need say more.

B) Norm kind/instance

What is common between a «performance-work» and an «object-work» is the way of their performances: to play notes or to perform roles, to execute etching's prints are done according to certain *prescriptions* of composer, author, or artist. But what are the norms and standards of printing a photograph? In the absence of a notational system, the printing process remains indeterminate. Suppose there are several prints with variable properties of the same negative in a photographer's archive. How can one identify the most «exact» print of the negative? If all photographs are in one way or another deficiently printed, can we conclude that the photograph of this particular negative does not exist? If we find an unpublished score in the archive of a composer, it has no ontological differences compared to those that are known and even approved by the composer himself. While an unprinted negative does not have the same ontological properties as the printed photographs made by the photographer or approved by him. It seems that Wolterstorff's proposal to consider object-work as «norm-kinds» does not apply to photography.

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[4] I won't discuss here the nature of universal/particular distinction as it is applied to the ontology of art. For, concerning photography, this distinction is highly problematic because neither negative film nor printed photograph could be classified as universal, for the fact that both are physical entities. As Margolis have pointed out «a work of art, then, is a particular. It cannot be a universal because it is created and can be destroyed; also, because it possesses physical and perceptual properties» (Margolis [1977]: 48).

C) Structural type/physical object

There is another way to explain the type and its instantiations by distinguishing the «structural types» from «physical objects». An etching is a structural type that could be at the origin of several prints. The essential thing is the instantiation of etching's basic structure in these prints. But as for the relation between negative and printed photograph, this structure can radically be modified. Because it is always possible to eliminate a significant part of the negative during printing so much that the result shows only one of its constituent visual elements. In this case can we say that the «structure» of the negative has been instantiated in the printed photograph? Or it's about *re*structuring the photograph? Analogously, if a director decides to simply remove act two and four of *Hamlet*, is it still an instantiation of this drama? It is difficult to consider such a restructuring (or destructuring?) as an instantiation of *Hamlet*[5]. Therefore, the «structuralist» solution does not clarify the ontology of the photographic image.

D) Type/token

In order to explain the nature of multiple works, Richard Wollheim proposes a model of Peircean origin based on types and tokens distinction (Wollheim [1980]: 49). Here also the proposal fails when it comes to photography. For «types and kinds, traditionally understood, exist eternally, independently from all human activities; thus, contra traditional beliefs and practices regarding the arts, works of art on such models cannot genuinely be created by artists at all, but only selected from the range of available types or kinds» (Thomasson [2004]: 83). It is therefore counterintuitive to consider the negative as a type or as a kind, since it exists as a real object while having concrete properties[6]. Perhaps this distinc-

tion explains the ontological nature of the score but certainly fails as to the relationship between negative and printed photograph[7]. Negatives are *real entities* that can be replicate, whereas types are *abstract entities* instantiated by concrete individuals. Again, as far as causal relation between negative and printed photograph is concerned, it seems irrelevant to consider negative as a type, for types are generally taken as «abstract objects that do not have determinate spatial locations. It is therefore questionable whether they can enter into causal relationships with things that do» (Davies [2012]: 267). Moreover, as Brennan puts it reasonably, «to talk of two tokens being of the same type, after all, is simply to indicate some relationship between them, rather than to make the ontologically bold claim that some further thing exists which they both instantiate» (Brennan [1988]: 74). To put it otherwise, two or more photographs could have the same properties as their original negatives; but it does not mean that they possess the same ontological status of the negative. Since, for example, the colours or light and dark zones on the negative are not the same as they are embodied on the paper of a positive picture. It is just the case for digital photographs too, since raw file is a collection of bitmaps while the printed photograph is an analog entity having concrete and palpable properties like visual forms and colours. Let's take a look to the nature of type-token relation. Brennan proposes three sufficient conditions as to explain who *x* to be a token of the same type as *y*: «First, *x* must possess a structure that is highly similar to *y*'s. Second, *x* is *materially* similar to *y*. And,

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[5] From another perspective Jerrold Levinson also refuted the thesis that the musical work is a «sound structure» (Levinson [2011]: 63-78).

[6] The existence of types is epistemologically problematic too. For the types dos not sustain in a causal relation with

us and since all human knowledge necessitates such a relation, then types are out of the borders of our knowledge (Wetzel [2009]: 23).

[7] To overcome the problematic relation between type and token in art, Joseph Margolis proposes a «reversal» model according to which artists make primarily the token of the type that they have created, since «to credit an artist with having created a new *type* of art – a particular art-type – we must (normally) be thus crediting him in virtue of the particular (token) work he has made», and he adds «the type does not exist except instantiated in its proper tokens» (Margolis [1977]: 46).

thirdly, it is *possible* to obtain one of them using a process in which the other has a suitable *causal* role to play» (Brennan [1988]: 77; author's italics). Even though the negative-print relation satisfies the first and third conditions, the second one, as we have seen, remains unsatisfied. Not to mention the cases in which the printed photograph does even not meet the first condition, because not being «highly similar» to the negative due to several modifications which occur during printing process. How then explain the relationship between the negative and the printed photograph?

As far as we can see, all proposed explanations regarding the ontological status of art works fail when the negative film/printed photograph is concerned. I will then propose an alternative account relying on Genette distinction between «immanence» and «transcendence» to overcome the problems and theoretical dead ends as encountered in the field of negative film/printed photo ontological relations. Here we will consider the negative film as immanence and the printed photograph as transcendence or manifestation of the former. It seems that Genette's proposition avoids us from the problem of abstract entities and it could adequately be applied to negative film/printed photograph ontological relation.

5. IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

One of the first questions that arise in ontology of art is whether a work of art is an abstract or concrete entity. A work is abstract if it has this peculiarity of being reproduced in several copies without losing its authenticity. For example, the Piano Concerto No. 22 of Mozart is an abstract entity for this reason that it is possible to play it many times in several places. In any case, the work of Mozart, namely the score, is a repeatable work while it is unique in its ontological immanence. On the contrary, a work is concrete when it can not be instantiated in several instances. Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889) is thus a concrete work because it is not repeatable or instantiable: it is a unique work hanged on MoMA and all the

other paintings that look like it are either fake or copies aesthetically inferior to it. Accordingly, if the negative is considered as an abstract entity, it could be instantiated several times. This claim, as we have seen before, bears certain problems: the problem deals with the fact that the identity of the so-called original work (negative as abstract entity) differs from concretely instantiated examples (concrete entity or printed photograph).

In his *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence* (1997) Gérard Genette (1930-2018) proposes a distinction between ontological immanence and transcendence of artworks which elucidates, and refines Goodman's basic distinction between autographic and allographic arts. According to Genette, the allographic work has two modes of existence: ideal immanence and physical manifestation. The properties of immanence are constitutive of the object whereas the properties of the manifestation are of contingent nature but, at the same time, possess its constituent characters: «the object of manifestation exhibits both the constitutive and contingent properties, while the object of immanence exhibits only the former» (Genette [1997]: 91). For example, Dino Buzzati's *The Tartar Steppe* (1940) as an object of immanence has certain constitutive features (characters, a certain plot, stylistic qualities, etc.). All copies of this novel in all languages are the physical manifestations of the original manuscript written by Buzzati. Contingency consists of all the differences of these copies: the number of pages, the typography, etc. Yet, in spite of all these differences, the immanent object remains the same, *i.e.* the novel created by the Italian author. Can we apply this ontological explanation to photography? Of the seven examples cited by Genette (music, choreography, architecture, culinary work, stage production and fashion design) the photography is curiously absent (Genette [1997]: 93). However, this allows us to apply this distinction as follows:

Immanence   Photographic work

Manifestation   negative film   positive prints
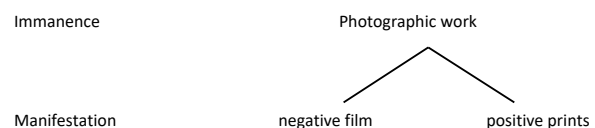
Ontological Status of Works of Art

Music	Score	Interpretation	Multiple	Repeatable	Allographic	Unfakeable
Literary work	Manuscript	Publishing	Multiple	Repeatable	Allographic	Unfakeable
Etching	Plate	Printing	Multiple	Repeatable	Allographic	Fakeable
Painting	Canvas	-	Singular	Unrepeatable	Autographic	Fakeable
Sculpture	Statue	-	Singular	Unrepeatable	Autographic	Fakeable
Photography	Negative	Printing	Multiple/ Singular	Repeatable/ Unrepeatable	Autographic/ Allographic	Fakeable/ Unfakeable

Photography by author (Rennes Cathedral, France, 2013)

The photographic work in its immanence is unique (for example, the negative of Cartier-Bresson's *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare* (1932) as it is exposed by the photographer at a certain time and place). The physical manifestation of this photograph is nevertheless multiple, because there are innumerable positive prints of it including all its digital manifestations on the Internet or on the other possible vehicles. Let us consider the ontology of photography in this perspective. On the one hand, photography *prima facie* is a technic for capturing the effects of light on a photosensitive surface (light, X-rays, infrared, etc.) which results in an exposed, negative film. On the other hand, the negative is traditionally printed in one or more examples. Here we are dealing with the specificity of photography: it is a two-step process. For there is a negative film as immanence that is *not yet a photograph as such*, and a photograph as transcendence that can only be manifested *through the prior existence of a negative*. In this regard, the printed photograph is transcendence, because its history of production or reception goes beyond of the immanent ontological limits of negative film. As Genette puts it: «transcendence is a secondary and derivative mode, a complementary, and,

on occasion, compensatory supplement to immanence» (Genette [1997]: 161).

6. CONCLUSION

In the case of painting, for example, the work is formed by the *direct* intervention of the creative act of the painter. Photography can be realised by the work of one or more persons. The aesthetic experience of a yellowed, pale, and depressed photograph is certainly not similar to the same photograph when freshly taken out of the laboratory. The question is whether it is artistically (even aesthetically) legitimate – in the possible case – to reprint the negative in order to access a new photograph. This question is dealing with the fact that photograph is a two-stage art: photographing and printing. This peculiarity differs ontology of photography from other art forms. Its ontology is, in some respects, comparable with music, literature, and drama, and in some other respects similar to painting and etching (see above table). Thus, photography has «multiple ontology». Photography could be at the same time autographic and allographic, fakeable and

unfakeable, singular and multiple. Relying on Genette's ideas, I proposed to consider negative film as immanence and the printed photograph as transcendence or manifestation of the former. The advantage of considering printed photograph as transcendence is that the visual structure of the work could be changed over time, according to interpretations of photographer himself or his lab technician. it means that different printed photographs could be emanate from a single negative film, each of them manifesting proper aesthetic properties which could not be found as such in the negative film considered as the immanent work. It seems not unreasonable to propose a reassessment of current ontological categories in order to conceive the mode of existence of a photographic image. Since the existence of negative does not guarantee the existence of photograph-*qua*-work, it is then essential to consider a photographic work in its historical context. Photographs are then context-dependent, i.e. culturally and historically determined spatial-temporal entities. Finally, the explanation that I propose is that each (analog) photograph is ontologically dependent upon a negative as immanence, that could be manifested in multiple spatial-temporal particulars (prints) having certain or all of its properties. Photographs as negative are singular, autographic objects (created in a definite historical – artistic context) while as printed are indefinite multiple, allographic objects due to their printing process undertaken by lab technician or other than photographer himself. Regarding the absence of a notational system in photograph, each print could be an *adaptation* of the negative.

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