

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS MANY FACES

*(Introduction to Thematic Section)*

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In his intriguingly titled book – *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Michael Fried raises important questions about the role of photography and its relationship with the viewer. The philosophy and its “problems,” theatricality, literariness, the position of the object (i.e. the objectivity of photography) as well as that of the subject, were already discussed during the late 1960s, when the medium was often placed on the border between art and technical skills, especially in the local context. Conscious of the weight of the statement given by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* that “photographs [...] are looked at when one is alone,” this thematic issue is aimed at expanding the boundaries within which photography is thought and discussed, examining the circumstances that determined the limits of representation as well as criticism of representation, its “ghettoization” as well as numerous conflicts that it brought about (and not only depicted). A beam of light is not reflected off the subject in only one direction; the ray returns to the photograph, symbolizing the relationship analyzed in numerous relevant studies. These studies will continue to harbor doubts about the status of photography as art, and not just a mechanical reflection of reality, which is too complex a topic for one editorial.

Photography, as a turbulent field of events which encompasses not only the flow of visual content, but also meaning and knowledge, is present in all areas of human activity. It is an active participant in the development of modern society, conveying information from the fields of culture and art, as well as technical and natural sciences. The development of the medium is unique, in recent times almost completely devoid

of the objectivity that characterized it for a long period of time. Although today it is reduced to quick, endless scrolling, mostly on screens of smartphones, photography in the project *Ekspozicija. Themes and Aspects of Croatian Photography from the 19th Century until Today*, funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (under No. IP-2019-04-1772), is considered as a discursive field that describes the world in which we live and have lived, and in which photography has significantly influenced the development of culture and society. In addition, photography is a social practice, while photographers, at least some of them, are participants in this practice, and their position is neither innocent nor passive, as stated by Allan Sekula. Not even historical recordings are left to remain in the past; they are not only the dispositive of something that was once visible, but also mediate plenty of data that are incorporated into general knowledge; photographs, at least as we perceive them, are also communication, a sign, and a statement, sometimes they are “just” text. They influenced a pictorial and educational turn, and became part of the multi-layered research included in the project, which is discussed to a certain extent in the contributions in this thematic issue.

The social role of photography, copyright, photography as a conceptual art medium, photography from the socialist-realist period, ethnological and architecture photography, as well as writings on photography and its gender aspect, observed on individual contributions or as syntheses of various aspects or entire periods, in accordance with their multiple layers, contradictions and controversies – these are some of the plentiful visions of the appearance and existence of photography represented in this issue. The breadth of topics, areas and periods covered here shows the extent to which photography as a medium is susceptible to the reading of cultural and social phenomena, which it reflects perhaps more clearly than other media. The articles come from various research areas, and most of them apply the methodology and results from several disciplines – history, art history, architecture, design and art criticism, ethnology, visual and cultural studies – which demonstrates the interdisciplinary focus in this volume, which we structured using the logic “from the individual to the general.” While the first block of articles includes papers that deal with aspects from individual oeuvres, the second block examines certain periods, areas, and genres in a synthetic fashion.

The first block begins with an article by **Suzana Leček**, looking at the collection of private photographs of the Nova Gradiška pharmacist and social chronicler Karlo Dienes from the 1920s, focusing its research on the social use of photography. The author interprets a segment of photographs of public events involving political disputes, social conventions, practices of visual communication and the privilege of a social group, and the selection of the research corpus points to a departure from the usual historicization of photography (as Dienes was not an amateur photographer

in the usual sense of the word, but more of a hobbyist) and represents a focus on viewing history and social phenomena “from below.” **Hrvoje Gržina’s** historical episode involving the topic of copyright reconstructs the course of the *Kalvarija* affair, a drawn-out, ten-year international legal dispute (1938–1948) that was the result of **Milan Pavić’s** unsigned photograph *Kalvarija* being published in the American magazine *Minicam*. The article reveals the foreign policy strategies of government institutions (ministries, consulates) of several countries (Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Independent State of Croatia, Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, USA, Argentina), as well as historical laws that regulated copyright. Based on archival sources, primarily letters, the text gives us a precise insight into a particularly prosaic episode that implicitly undermines the mystification of the position and status of the artist, the myth of the spiritual exaltation of art. **Rozana Vojvoda’s** article examines the conceptual use of photography in the work of multimedia artist and curator Antun Maračić over several decades of his work, with processuality singled out as a constant artistic strategy. From photographs from the 1970s, used exclusively to document the course of an event, to photographs from the war period of the 1990s whose theme is absence and emptiness, and finally photographs taken in the 2000s focusing on changes in light and meteorological phenomena, the author highlights photographs that comment on current social processes, such as the extreme “touristification” of Dubrovnik as it is turned into a backdrop, as well as the post-transition ruination of factories, the disappearance of jobs and the consequent emigration.

The block of articles relying on synthesis opens with **Jelena Matić’s** paper presenting an overview of socialist-realist photography based on examples of Croatian and Serbian authors taken between 1945 and 1952. In addition to providing a more complete insight into this scarcely researched period in the history of photography, it also maps the photography scenes of interwar and early post-war Zagreb and Belgrade, providing insight into exhibitions, club activities, main protagonists, professional periodicals, and critical reception. While examining selected photos, the author stresses a strong influence of interwar modernism, especially straight photography and New Objectivity, on the style, morphology, choice of subject and shooting angle, and composition of photographs created in accordance with the doctrine of socialist realism in the context of strict artistic prescriptiveness. The final three articles are based on the corpus of professional periodicals, as **Jasna Galjer** analyzes the role of photography in the transmission of architecture ideas and visual language in a transnational context using architecture magazines from the 1950s and 1960s, looking at photography and architecture as a area of complex relations in the field of culture production. The author examines the Zagreb magazine *Arhitektura* on equal footing with famous foreign magazines, which she categorizes as mainstream

– those that produce canonical narratives – and alternative, so-called little magazines, with a critical and activist twist, and a specific visual design that relies on urban subcultural aesthetics. In addition, architectural photography reflects global cultural phenomena, so images of the impressive verticals of skyscrapers from the 1950s are read as visual signifiers of modernist urban expansion, and the depiction of people in architectural photographs points to the stronger socio-critical role of architecture in the 1960s. **Ana Šeparović's** article follows the emergence and early development of the discourse on photography in Croatia. In line with European and world trends, early discourse on photography initially followed the positivist paradigm of the 19th century, looking at photography as a mechanical reproduction of the visible. The 1920s were marked by a pictorialist understanding of the artistic nature of photography in accordance with aesthetics taken from paintings, and photography would finally be seen as art and interpreted in the categories of modernist formalism during the 1930s. The article also discusses the tensions between amateurs and professional photographers on the photography scene during the period, which spilled over onto the pages of photography magazines. Regional, mostly Croatian magazines specialized in photography in the post-war period form the research corpus of **Sandra Križić Roban's** article, which focuses on the representation of women. The presence of women in these magazines published in the period 1950–1980 is explored from the position of women photographers-authors, who shoot and write about photography, but also from the position of the subject in the photographs created by men. Looking at the female perspective not only draws attention to the patriarchal social order and its consequences, but also helps us understand many aspects of the cultural context of photography, such as the attitude to the body, socially engaged topics, documentary, filming in public space, experimentation with light, as well as conceptual reflections on artistic language, stereotyping, the position of the racial and ethnic Other, etc. The fact that an equally unfavorable situation is present in the world is of little comfort, as the author notes the similarities in comparison with the statistics on the representation of women in *Life* magazine.

Finally, we should mention David Bate's opinion on the complex social formation of photography, which has not only evolved historically, but that development has been present in all parts of the world. We can look at it as an encouragement both to the researchers working on this project, and to the collaborators who answered the call, leading to changes in writing about photography. Although many will think that they understand the image they are looking at, photography is never simple or unambiguous. The relations between the audience, subjectivity (in the sense of the subject's position) and the person taking the photograph determine not only the ways in which we will use and interpret the observed photographs, but also how they will

be integrated into critical practices; how will they, ultimately, respond to the three-part regime system established by Jacques Rancière – *representative, ethical and aesthetic*. Perhaps these regimes will help us “manage” with the material, organize it thematically (or according to some other criterion) within two hundred years of development – a framework defined by the relations between culture and art, where photography has found its place.