

**PHOTOGRAPHY
AS THE EXTENSION
OF A BODY**

**Zbigniew
Tomaszczuk**

The technique of daguerreotype revealed in 1839 (named as such due to the name of its inventor, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre) was a unique image. This image appeared on a light sensitive polished sheet of silver-plated copper¹ touched with iodide of silver and, what is significant, it would not allow itself to duplicate directly. While watching a daguerreotype a crucial part was a viewer's involvement due to the importance of the angle. The image was positive, but from another angle, negative. The mysterious change from positive to negative was undoubtedly a kind of visual surprise, and a mirror surface gave it a name of "a mirror gifted with memory". What is more, the surface of daguerreotype was very sensitive to mechanical damage, that is why the whole was protected by glass and framed into a special case. It could be said that the daguerreotype-viewer relationship had a performative character. Of course, the daguerreotype creation process itself was connected to various special activities, and as such required many gestures from the photographer.

Richard Shusterman in his *Photography as Performative Process*² essay writes that photographic performative process happens while arranging, preparing and photographing shots during the photography session. Following this lead, the aforementioned situation of

19th century daguerreotypist introduces new interpretative possibilities of photographic performative process, connected to the technology of historical methods of photography. And, for example, another photographic process, named collodion process, required, as described by Wanda Mossakowska, a dozen activities to finish with a satisfactory effect³. Nowadays many photographers reproducing these techniques explain their fascination of the complex, demanding technologies, in contrast to contemporary automatic photographing, with a need to experience of many surprises while dealing with technical matter and attempts to conquer the not so predictable effect. These activities in particular are connected to the need of unassisted preparation of photographic material and physical contact with a work in the darkroom, they seem to be a return to the state, when the creation of a photograph was related to overcome many technological difficulties.

The usage of large format camera placed on a tripod stand also differentiated the work of early photographers from the digital cameras operators nowadays. That is why many people who use at present a large format camera lay emphasis on the specification of its usage. I shall use Piotr Komorowski's words, who used to be related to the tendency of the so-called contact photography as a photographer. The author wrote: The placement of a camera on a tripod, choosing a shot with the world seen "upside down", a black cover isolating the photographer from everything, which is not an image on a focusing screen and other necessary manipulations create a mystery, which in itself lures with its disparity, beckons with mysteriousness, promises more than usual⁴. As a result, independently from the final effect that is a negative, a dozen of unusual today, mysterious activities are as necessary in the process. This mystery is a contribution of also the viewer. I remember a situation when, along with students, we had photographed a views of Warsaw with such a camera, and suddenly

we heard a noise caused by the crash of a car stopped abruptly. The unlucky culprit explained that he focused so much on the unusual situation of a man standing next to a tripod, whose only visible part were legs under the cover. Not many people connect photography with such a scene.

The popularization of automatic, small cameras, and especially common accumulation of hundreds of thousands of photographs in the web caused another reaction – an appearance of a some kind of distance between a human and a photographic camera. For years I have been photographing Praga-Północ in Warsaw, and back then I used to answer “because I’m a photographer” for the question “why?”. Nowadays, in order to avoid conflict, I say “because I’m an anthropologist”, although I have not much in common with this field, but for the one asking this name is mysterious enough, that is seems to explain my constant presence on a foreign territory, where a photographer is thought to be related to common invigilation.

In 1888 the American market saw the release of a Kodak camera, foreshadowing an era of amateur photography. The famous advertising slogan, „You Press the Button, We Do the Rest” shifted the focus from the technological process to the very process of photographing. The camera was sold with a roll of film already placed inside. In order to take a picture, you had to choose a proper shot, at least a meter away from the camera, take a shot, and then rewind the roll in order to take another shot. The size of a camera was an important factor, as they released the photographer from needing a tripod, which resulted in an interesting photography esthetics of a new trend of taking pictures. Thanks to the Kodak camera and its successors, photographs stopped being so formal. Relaxed, smiling or laughing even persons were photographed much more often. The pictures were not staged, playing children were portrayed, even unaware people were having their photographs taken in parks or beaches, during picnics,

holidays, travelling or simply at home, during everyday activities. [...] A revolution in photography started by the Kodak camera found its full excess in the informal photographs taken with a phone camera⁵. A new era has begun, era of direct connection of the camera to the photographer's body, who is now able to keep it with him constantly.

In 1928 a notorious trial for murder took place in Berlin. It was forbidden to take pictures in the courtroom, however, a photo essay was released in "Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung", taken by Erich Salomon. The author took pictures in hiding, with the Ermanox camera, characterized by its relatively small size, equipped with a bright lens, allowing a creation of a photograph without a flash. A camera has been permanently parted with a tripod. A photographer appeared as an "invisible" person, because he could take pictures even in hiding, with difficult lightning conditions.

But a true revolution in the human-camera relationship was caused by the release of 135 film, and a handy, indistinctive Leica camera. The photographer became mobile, often forgoing direct central shots in favor of bird view worm's-eye view. Especially qualifications connected to the physical ability started to give fruit in the usage of documentary photography. Enhancement of photosensitivity of photographic material allowed the usage of unmoved pictures by using a quick shutter⁶. One of the Leica's users was a French reporter Henri Cartier-Bresson, who created a style of "decisive moments", which are a combination of the ability to catch a particular moment with building a visually convincing shot⁷. It is worth to quote him: I just discovered Leica.

It became an extension of my eye and I have not parted with it since. For days I have hunted on streets, tense and ready to jump, determined to "capture" life – to catch it red-handed⁸. References to hunting mentioned by Cartier-Bresson often appear in relation to photography. The precursor of the research on essence of movement, Étienne-Jules Marey, built a so-called photographic rifle in

1882, which was a combination of a machine gun with a camera, which allowed taking twelve shots per second on rotating glass film. Roughly at the same time a Warsaw photographer Konrad Brandel built a portable camera, which he called a photo-revolver, which allowed taking a series of photographs, very useful in reporting work. Exactly this kind of photography, which need a quick reaction of a photographer, is referenced when we say “to shoot”.

It is not for no reason that a popular album with nature photography released in 1954 by Polish naturalist, Włodzimierz Puchalski, is named Bloodless hunt. In 1882, an Alsatian Albert Posso, working at a French company Enjalbert, designed a most realistic camera in the shape of a gun, revolver de poche, in cylinder magazine of which 10 glass films size 16 x 16 mm were placed. In the barrel a lens was placed, and in order to release the shutter you had to use a trigger. A small amount of these cameras is in museums right now⁹. A combination of a camera and a machine gun was a basis for the creation on contemporary camera produced by Russians under the name photo-sniper. In the 1970s you could buy such a camera in Polish shops, combined from the Zenit 122 camera and the Tair 300/4,5 lens, placed in a typical buttstock, and with a trigger to slow a shutter. Usage of this equipment allowed taking photographs with using a long-focus lens without needing a tripod. Here the term “bloodless hunt” as hunting for theme found its reflection. Both a hunter and a photographer could aim its prey and pull the trigger. A philosopher Vilém Flusser described it as such: By watching a movement of a man using a photographic camera (or the movement of a photographic camera, which “uses a man”), one could think that it is located in a state of lurking: it is the very same ancient gesture of a paleontological hunter, who lurked in tundra¹⁰. A photographer brings home a loot which results from the camera’s program.

In the hunt for a theme another helpful thing was the fact that 135 mm film cameras had also a very crucial virtue: they allow taking

a series of photographs without changing the photographic material each time. It caused a brand new relationship of a photographer with his own body. A film theoretician, Karl Sierek, described this problem using as an example the activity of German cultural expert, Aby Warburg. He wrote: Especially in serial photography, Warburg as a photographer directly interferes into the action: he quickly manipulates the camera, in order to prepare a shot; he, unnoticed, fixes his equipment, in order to receive a favorable view; he at a good clip changes the position of his body, so that the camera is placed in a proper position. While photographing, Warburg starts his own body as an extension of his eye, transforming the action and drama into a physical action of images. The photographer invests kinetic energy, shaping a body of an image from it of intense artistic values¹¹. Then, the author makes point on interventionism and dialogue character of Warburg's gesture of photographing, by writing:

No wonder that alongside such interventionist acts of photography happens a direct jump from the feeling of a body to the feeling of an image¹². He also indicated that a slightly tilted camera can also dynamize an action, and a sequence of photographs creates a series of performative acts¹³.

At the beginning of the 20th century a term "action shot" has begun to be used widely, starting with a famous experiment of Eadward Muybridge, who, in 1878, with the help of a number of cameras placed in one line, for the first time ever photographed a particular phases of a horse's canter. Quick shots, usually taken in hiding, are now a domain of a group of photographers called paparazzi¹⁴, who enter without permission the privacy of famous people. In their job they often use techniques known in secret services, using cameras equipped with telephoto lens allowing to take pictures from afar, or in the contrary, mini spy cameras, and by using also surveillance, bugging, and provocation etc. gain access to people of interest. Their

work often causes conflicts and dangerous situations. The most famous and tragic situation, for which paparazzi were accused of, was the death of Lady Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Al-Fayed, who were running away from them at night, on 30th/31st, 1997¹⁵.

In the case of paparazzi we can discuss a certain kind of voyeurism, but this approach may be also an accepted strategy of artistic activities. For example, a worth mentioning are conceptual and performative realizations of French artist, Sophie Calle. Many of her works, mainly photographs, films and texts, are a result of her observations of strangers. In the realization *Suite Venetienne* the artist followed a man, whom she met at a party in Paris, documenting his trip to Venice in hiding. The result was a black-and-white photographs with a text. In another series she asked her mother to hire a private detective to follow her every step, to later use the material in her *The Shadow* series. It was supposed to be, as she claimed, a proof of her being. In another series, *The Hotel*, she took a job as a maid in a Venice hotel, where she photographed private belongings of the guests, building a story through these photographs by introducing them into a public space of private lives of the observed.

Let us return to the relationship between the photographer and the camera. Before the invention of a camera with an inner exposure meter, a photographer had to measure light with a manual device, analyze its indications and translate them to camera functions. Each change of the stage lighting required repetition of the process. By introducing the light measure through an inner exposure meter, using preselection of time or diaphragm was possible, largely simplifying a proper correction of exposure. The automatic measure of light made the photographer independent from the constant control of these parameters, and became an amazingly useful in many fields of photography. Introduced to the Japanese market Nikon F, additionally equipped with an engine to rewind film with the speed of

4 frames per second, became a favorite tool of embedded journalists. The camera had useful in this kind of photography replaceable lenses and was very solid. A known case of Don McCullin, a photographer, whose life was saved thanks to the construction, by stopping a bullet shot at him.

The process of photographing simplified once again once a Kodak camera Instamatic, which did not require putting a film on a reel, was produced. All you had to do was put a cartridge and the camera was ready to use, which also guaranteed an automatic exposure.

What is interesting is that some of the photographs still prefer to use viewfinder cameras. A famous New York photographer Joel Meyerowitz explained that the reason is that the specifics of his work require both an observation of what he sees while looking through a viewfinder, and what he can independently watch with his other eye. He himself prefers – in opposition to Carter-Bresson – capturing a decisive moment even despite an imperfect frame. In his action prevails an emotive factor over constructing a form of a shot.

The work of this kind of street photographer often requires a close approach towards the scene photographed. It creates a particular relationship between a photographer and a model, which often relates to an aggressive entry to space. An example of a photographer like this is Bruce Gilden, who not only approaches very closely a person he photographs, but also blinds their eyes using a flash very closely. This requires overstepping certain psychological boundaries of photographed people. A similar method of photographing, used by an American – Mark Cohen – is concentrated on tiny details and fragments of gestures, and is called “invasive method” by him. He rarely uses a viewfinder, holding a camera at arm’s length. By focusing on geometry, fragments of the body, he creates surrealist images. By using a flash even during a day, he extracts elements from the background.

At the beginning of the 1990s a social movement of photo-amateurs caused the revival of USSR's camera, LOMO. A plus point of this camera, apart for its small price, is a good glass lens, a metal case and small size, as well as a half-automatic service. An appearance of various versions of this construct caused a international movement called Lomography. Users of the camera started to promote esthetics based on "10 golden rules of Lomography". And here they are:

1. Wherever you go, take LOMO with you
2. Take pictures from night to day
3. Lomo is a part of your life
4. Take „hipshots”
5. Photograph objects from the smallest distance
6. Don't think!
7. Be quick!
8. Before you take a shot, you will never know what is on the picture
9. You will not know even after taking it
10. Don't bother with caring about rules in traditional photography.

I would like to indicate the importance of the role of photographing as an element of everyday activities and as an act of separating the camera from the eye. A new photography esthetics were created, based on a kind of surprise, which can be a part of such spontaneous photography. It could be said that some kind of society gathered around the Lomographic Society, and many people from all around the world are its members. It is also an official distributor of the cameras, holds exhibitions, workshops, releases catalogues with Lomophotos. It organizes competitions for creating the so-called "Lomo Walls", which require to gather as many photographs in one place and place them on a wall in order to make the viewer fall under the "Lomo-stare". The photographs are placed one after another in order

to achieve the biggest space with photographs – often in one place there were over 100 thousands pictures presented¹⁶.

A completely different gesture of photographing is presented by people using the most popular nowadays digital cameras with an image displayed at the back side. Here is a return to photography seen on focusing screen, except that the image is not reversed – neither upside down, nor in sides. A new situation is undoubtedly a large amount of frames taken by the photographer today. If he does any selection, he does it post factum. In general postproduction is an immanent factor of digital photography.

The appearance of smartphones established a new reaction, a whole new series of body gestures. A Swiss photographer, Corinne Vionnet has shown it convincingly in her *Here Now* series, which features portraits of people half-hidden behind a smartphone's screen, captured during taking pictures. This work impress commonness of photography as a kind of gesture transferring an image to the Web on us, as well as the fact that our presence in a public place may be at the same time registered. Selfie, of course, belongs to the most common, almost ritual photographs taken with a smartphone. We need to differentiate this kind of photographs from self-portraits performed earlier. Firstly, because they are generally created in order to be shown on the Internet, and secondly, because they are created as a result of combination of the body with the photographer. Nicholas Mirzoeff adds: selfie is a combination of a perception of oneself, self-portrait of an artist as a hero and a technical image specific to modern art – a combination functioning as a digital performance¹⁷.

The incredible popularity of these photographs which flood social media in a million copies every day, created a rivalry and a competition which one of them should be taken in most extreme places and situations, what, in many cases, resulted in death.

Let us return for a moment to a specifics of analogue photography related to the work in a darkroom. When the photographer-laboratorian copied photographs, he had to perform a dozen of gestures to reveal particular fragments of an image, in order to obtain a satisfactory tonal capacity of a print. This particular hand gesture often looked like a pantomime. There is a known example of an American photographer, Jerry Uelsmann, who specialized in optic photomontage, and who often used during a production of a print from many enlargers at once, moving between them. It must have looked like a complicated ritual.

At the end it is worth to quickly mention spatial relationship of a view towards the photographic image. A possibility to create large magnifications of photographs, characterized by high definition, which are introduced to exhibitions similarly to great paintings created a particular situation. In the case of works by Andreas Gursky the viewers, in order to see the whole, must take a few steps back, and in order to see detail, they need to come closer. As they watch a print, viewers walk around the work – it is not recognizable with one look. In the modern times of being flooded with billions of digital photographs, large format gave a chance to catch attention and to return the contemplation of an image. What the viewer receives in the gallery, is not identical to what he receives while seeing a reproduction in an album. A scale of the original generates different psycho-physical relations, the participation of the viewer became more active.

- 1 Or simply a copper one.
- 2 <http://magazynszum.pl/krytyka/fotografia-jako-proces-performatywny> (17.07.2018)
- 3 Wanda Mossakowska, Walery Rzewuski (1837–1888). Fotograf. Studium warsztatu i twórczości, Warsaw 1981, p. 45–49
- 4 Piotr Komorowski, initial text in: Kontakty [exhibition catalogue], Galeria Pusta, Katowice 1998
- 5 Michael Pritchard, A History of Photography in 50 Cameras, translation by J.J. Malinowski, Warsaw 2017, page 38.
- 6 Aparat Leica had a shortest shutter time: 1/500 of a second.
- 7 The philosophy of a „decisive moment” was described in his book, released in 1952, Decisive Moment.
- 8 Susan Sontag, O fotografii, translation by S. Magala, Warsaw 1986, p. 168.
- 9 <https://fotoblogia.pl/6533,to-rewolwer-czy-aparat-photo-revolver-de-poche-z-1882-roku> [access: 23.07.2018]
- 10 Vilém Flusser, Ku filozofii fotografii, translation by J. Maniecki, Katowice 2004, sp 38
- 11 Karl Sierek, Fotografia, kino i komputer. Aby Warburg jako teoretyk mediów, translation by J. Gilewicz, Warsaw 2007, p. 61.
- 12 ibidem, p. 64
- 13 ibidem, p. 65
- 14 The name „paparazzo” originates from the 1960 Federico Fellini movie, in which an insistent photographer named Paparazzo is a character in.
- 15 In the same crash also the driver Henri Paul died.
- 16 <https://www.signs.pl/artykul.php?sid=3588&fo=> [access: 26.07.2018]
- 17 Nicholas Mirzoeff, Jak zobaczyć świat, translation Ł. Zaremba, Cracow-Warsaw 2017, p. 46.

Zbigniew Tomaszczuk
Photography as the extension of a body

The text concerns the performativeness of the process of making photographs. It discusses examples of experiencing photography through such medium as the photographer's body. The relations between the photographer and the technological changes of photography have been analysed. The main subject is the process of making photographs concluded with a reflection on the relation between the viewer and the large format photographic artwork.

KEYWORDS:

PERFORMATIVENESS, LARGE FORMAT CAMERA, DECISIVE MOMENT, GESTURE OF MAKING PHOTOS, SELFIE



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