

Rhetoric of the image: contributions to a philosophy of photography

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Abstract

Photography is a peculiar and powerful medium, based on an inherent rhetoric of the image capable of influencing the viewers. This article conceptualizes and problematizes such power of the image, addressing to a critical and reflexive perspective on the visual rhetoric language of photography. Following a theoretical and conceptual approach in the framework of a philosophy of photography, the purpose of this article is a) to argue the relevance and the practical and social effects of visual rhetoric and its relation to press photographs, i.e. understand visual rhetoric applied to photographic images in journalism; and b) to understand the repercussions of this approach on visual communication to the relevant and emergent perspective of a philosophy of photography, when the cultures are more and more visual in a civilization of the image, which is mixed with the social phenomenon of misinformation in a digital age.

Keywords: image, interpretation, philosophy of photography, photojournalism, rhetoric of the image.

1. Introduction

This article questions the power of the image. It addresses to a critical and reflexive perspective on the visual rhetoric language of photography into the framework of a philosophy of photography. Following a theoretical and conceptual approach, the purpose of this article is a) to argue the relevance and the practical and social effects of visual rhetoric and its relation to press photographs; and b) to understand the rhetorical effects on visual communication to the relevant and emergent perspective of a philosophy of photography.

The power of the image lies in its ability to convey complex ideas, evoke emotions, and communicate messages in a direct and impactful way. Images have a unique capacity to transcend language barriers and cultural differences, making them a universal form of communication. Images can encapsulate complex concepts or ideas in a simple visual element or symbol which can carry deep cultural, religious, or historical meaning, making it a powerful tool for communication.

Images can instantly capture attention and elicit an emotional response. A striking or emotionally charged image can provoke immediate feelings of empathy, sympathy, awe, or shock without the need for lengthy

explanation. Images have the power to evoke a wide range of emotions, from joy and nostalgia to sadness and anger. They can create a strong emotional connection between the viewer and the subject matter. Images create and foster empathy and understanding. They foster empathy by putting a human face on distant or abstract issues. Photographs of individuals in challenging circumstances can help viewers connect with their experiences on a personal level.

The power of the image is also in the memory and recognition. Images can enhance memory retention. People tend to remember visual information better than textual information. Iconic images often become ingrained in collective memory and can be instantly recognized years after they were created. In the journalism field, images can tell stories or capture moments that encapsulate a narrative in a single frame. They can provide a snapshot of a larger context, inviting viewers to imagine what led up to that moment and what might follow. In addition to the informative and referential functions in journalism, the image also shows its power in persuasion and influence. Images can be used persuasively to influence opinions, attitudes, behaviours, and shape public opinion.

The press photograph documents reality and what happens, safeguarding the possibility of manipulation and the phenomenon of misinformation. Photographs and visual images provide a tangible representation of reality. They can document moments, places, and people in ways that written or spoken descriptions may fall short. "Every photograph is a certificate of presence", states Barthes (1982b, p. 87) in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*.

Photojournalism impacts public awareness through the visual engagement. Image is more immediate and accessible than text. The image can quickly capture the viewer's attention. The image is seductive, it is easy to be understood, to see what it conveys. For Sartori, visuality is dominant in culture and social behaviour, giving rise to tele-guided opinions. There is a primacy of the image, but also the prevalence of the visible over the intelligible, which leads to seeing without understanding. As Sartori (2011, p. 13) argues, the image is not seen in Chinese, Arabic, or English, because it is simply seen. The photographic message is, to a great extent, universally readable, just by looking at its content. According to Barthes (1982a, p. 10) in *L'obvie et l'obtus*, there is a status of the photographic image: it is a message without a code. The photographic message is continuous because, unlike the text, which requires literacy from the reader and skills in reading and deciphering messages, the image simply needs to be seen, regardless of culture, as it is seen by anyone no matter their language, which is a code. This statement by Barthes about the absence of code in the image is relevant to demonstrate greater capacity for interpretation and transmission of messages through the image than through text, on the one hand, and the predominance of the visible over the legible in contemporary cultures increasingly more visual, as Sartori highlights, on the other. Based on Sartori's argument, we can discuss whether the image promotes or inhibits the critical thinking of the public that observes the image. The image can stimulate critical thinking if we consider that images can prompt viewers to think critically and engage with the subject matter on a deeper level. They can raise questions, challenge assumptions, and inspire discussions.

Images can reflect and comment on societal issues, cultural values, and historical events. They can serve as a visual record of significant moments in history and provide a lens through

which we can examine the past. A particularity of the power of the image is that it constitutes a universal language. Images can be understood by people across different languages and backgrounds. They have the capacity to transcend linguistic barriers and communicate concepts that might be difficult to express through words alone.

Therefore, the power of the image lies in its ability to transcend words, evoke emotions, tell stories, and communicate ideas on a deep and universal level. Whether in advertising, journalism, art, or personal communication, images have the potential to leave a lasting impact on individuals and societies.

The image is rhetorical in the sense that it is eloquent in a non-verbal way, but resorting to a more captivating, understandable, and seductive visual language, as visual rhetoric is aesthetic, since visual rhetoric refers to the use of visual elements to communicate and persuade and, therefore, it involves the use of images, design, and other visual elements to convey a message, make an argument, or evoke a particular response. The aesthetic aspect of visual rhetoric is closely tied to the principles of design and the visual appeal of the elements used in communication. The aesthetic qualities of visual rhetoric are important because they contribute to the effectiveness of communication. Well-designed and aesthetically pleasing visuals are more likely to capture attention, convey emotions, be memorable, and engage the audience, ultimately enhancing the overall impact of the message being communicated. Images can also be appreciated for their artistic qualities. Visual aesthetics and creative composition captivate viewers and encourage them to engage with the image on a purely visual level.

Rhetoric (from the Greek *retoriké*, art of speech) is traditionally understood as the ability to persuade or motivate an audience. It is a capacity that guarantees persuasion (a word derived from the name of the greek goddess *Pheitó* that personified seduction and persuasion), the control over the public. By referring to the use of appropriate means of good and necessary results and the use of inappropriate means of illicit and immoral results, Plato's two types of rhetoric are implied: the "bad rhetoric" or sophistic rhetoric and the "good rhetoric". Rhetoric is the technique that ensures persuasion for evil or for good. For evil, when it deceives and turn away from the

truth, being criticized in Plato's *Gorgias* (2004, 452e). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato (1997, 261a) discusses rhetoric as a force to influence the mind through words on any subject, anywhere. The first is the "bad rhetoric", by cultivating falsehood and passing it off as truth, the second is the "good rhetoric", i.e. rhetoric as psychagogy (guidance or direction of the soul towards desirable ends in life).

In Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* (2004, 1355b), the ultimate end and virtuous use of rhetoric is the careful and conscientious use for good purposes, i.e. the ability to discover what is appropriate in each case in order to persuade the audience. For Aristotle, rhetoric is a technique, art or ability to extract from any subject the degree of persuasion that it contains. As such, its rules don't apply to any specific kind of topics. There may be cases of good and bad use of visual rhetoric as a power to express, report, manifest or simply show any situation (good or bad). Image can be an appropriate or inappropriate medium for good and necessary results or for illicit and immoral results.

The potentialities of rhetoric become evident in contemporary visual cultures, with the new information and communication technologies. Just as rhetoric was conceptualized circa 25 centuries ago as an art and technique by Plato and Aristotle, the current visual cultures are prodigal in visual rhetorical strategies and image devices. Barthes (1988, p. 11) recognize that "the world is incredibly full of old rhetoric", but also full of signs (Barthes, 1988, p. 158), especially images. The primacy of the image, which results in the profusion of the spectacle for Debord, is understood by Deleuze (1985, p. 33) as a civilization of the cliché where images are hidden, i.e. where something is hidden in the image. The expression "civilization of the image" was used pertinently by Fulchignoni, in *La civilization de l'image* (1969), but for Deleuze, it is a civilization of the iconic inflation that rests on redundancy, concealment, distortion, manipulation. In turn, for Debord (1995, p. 12), "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images".

Any sign is a form of transmission of meanings that can be carried out through verbal signs or non-verbal (visual) signs. It is not always direct, linear, explicit; on the contrary, it is often rhetorical, i.e. implied, connoted. Rhetoric is the art or technique of well conceiving and

presenting speeches, considering the various factors that intervene in the effectiveness of the transmission of meanings to their recipients (Lausberg, 1998, p. 18). The mastery and implementation of rhetoric makes any discourse (e.g. public discourse and media messages), more capable of influencing, persuading or seducing its audiences. Therefore, the theory of argumentation, conceived as a new rhetoric (or new dialectic) covers the entire field of discourse that aims to convince or persuade, whatever the audience to which it is addressed and the subject on which it focuses (Perelman, 1977, p. 19).

Photography is a sign and transmits denoted and connoted meanings. Faced with the presence of a photograph published on the pages of a newspaper, we must consider that someone produced it following certain procedures and that the image is related to a certain place, people or event and, therefore, must be underlying an intention, fulfil a function, elicit a visual experience and reactions from its observing audience.

However, more than a sign, photography is a language that can be both artistic and documental. The practice of photography as an act of aesthetic expression, in the first case, and an act of information, communication, and knowledge, in the second case, attributes a status of human activity and manifestation to photography. In turn, Umberto Eco considers that in photography as art, aesthetic codes and codes of meaning intervene. In the case of photography as a document, informative codes intervene. It is in this sense that Umberto Eco (1968, p. 170), unlike Barthes, defends in *La Struttura Assente* the existence of levels of coding of the image, but also of the text, in mass media messages, such as in advertising speeches or in news and informative narratives. As a human product, the photograph manifests the communicative intentions of those who produce it (sender) and aims to establish any relationship of meaning, information, influence, or persuasion with the recipient by making visible something about the world.

By manifesting communicative intentions and fulfilling its functions, press photography is both rhetorical and aesthetic. Published in the pages of newspapers, the photograph is appealing, attracts attention and arouses interest in what it shows. For this purpose, it is structured in terms of content and form, using tropes, such as metaphor or metonymy. For example, war

photographic tropes are a way of structuring information and conveying it to media audiences. According to Umberto Eco (1968, p. 171), they correspond to the tropological level of codification of visual messages. Through photographic images, the event is encoded and transmitted mainly in indirect but rhetorical messages, i.e. polysemous. Our knowledge of the world is sustained by rhetorical (e.g. metaphorical and metonymic) procedures. Rhetoric participates in the construction of the social and visual reality. The media images help to build it in a hegemonic and imposing way, using models, prejudices, and stereotypes. The frequency and format of Ukraine war images on the television influence our perception of the event and impose rhetorical models to understand it in a different way than photographs published on newspaper pages.

The rhetoric of photography refers to the persuasive and communicative strategies employed by photographers to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and influence the audience's perception of an image. Just as in spoken or written rhetoric, where verbal language is used to persuade and communicate effectively, photography uses visual elements, composition, lighting, framing, subject matter, and other techniques to achieve similar ends, such as: composition, framing, lighting, colour and tone, perspective and point of view, timing and moment, narrative and storytelling, and digital manipulation and post-processing techniques.

2. What is the philosophy of photography?

The philosophy of photography is a field of study dedicated to examining philosophical questions related to the nature, function and meaning of photography. It seeks to analyse the ethical, aesthetic, epistemological and ontological aspects of photography, exploring its philosophical implications and challenges.

The philosophy of photography questions photography's ability to objectively represent reality, investigates the limits of authenticity and manipulation in photographic images, and reflects on the role of photography in the construction of memories, identities, and collective narratives. It is the ideal disciplinary field to critically reflect on the philosophical implications of the practice of photography as a means of expression, documentation, and visual communication, and its social influences and effects. It investigates and discusses fundamental

topics and questions, such as: a) authenticity and truth; b) the ontological status of photographs; c) aesthetics and interpretation; and d) ethics and responsibility. These aspects are discussed separately below and coincide with the critique of photography in relation to the captured image, in the sense of an adequate relationship between the representative (the photograph as a sign, expression, signifier) and the represented (content, meaning). Accordingly, Eco (1986, p. 223) states that an image is, above all, a sign and, as such, it is a semiotic phenomenon. Considering this and the fact that "man is a semiotic animal" (Eco, 1986, p. 202), he concludes that "a photograph is already a semiotic phenomenon" (Eco, 1986, p. 224).

Between the representative and the represented, there must exist a) authenticity and truth; b) referentiality, a documental relation of representation, of semantic transitivity *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, as Eco (1986, p. 213) explains. It concerns with the aesthetics of the representation with influence on the perception and interpretation of the meaning of the image; the ethics and responsibility of the use, practice of the image and its effects on audiences, as in the war photojournalism.

An author who adequately represents the perspective of a philosophy of photography is Flusser, whose work reflects this comprehensive undertaking on the function of photography. In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser (2006, p. 6) considers that images are surfaces that intend to represent something that, in most cases, is out there in space and time. Images owe their origin to imagination, the ability to abstract and encode phenomena and to decode encoded messages. According to Flusser (2006, p. 6), imagination is the ability to make (code) and decipher (decode) images.

Images are not signs with unequivocal and denotative meanings. On the contrary, they offer their receivers interpretative and connotative meanings (Flusser, 2006, p. 6). Images are codes that mediate the individual and the world, which is not immediately accessible, as images fulfil the function of representing the world. If the images are signs, mediations, and carry meanings, they require interpretation, decoding, deciphering, which conditions the way the individual understands the world.

Flusser offers a unique perspective on the nature of photography and its impact on human perception, communication, and culture.

According to Flusser's philosophy of photography, photographs are codified messages and not mere representations of reality. As encoded messages, photographs are created through a complex interplay of technological, cultural, and human factors. He suggests that photographs are products of conscious choices made by photographers within the constraints of their equipment, conventions, and intentions.

Photographs are surfaces, flat, two-dimensional surfaces that function as a meeting point between the human mind and the world. The photograph becomes a window through which viewers access a coded representation of reality. The interpretation of a photograph involves deciphering this code to extract meaning.

Overall, Flusser's philosophy of photography offers a thought-provoking exploration of how photography influences human thought, communication, and culture. He challenges conventional understandings of photography as a simple reflection of reality, inviting us to consider the deeper implications of images as coded messages within a complex apparatus of technology and culture.

2.1. Authenticity and truth

Photography is often understood as a direct representation of reality. However, photographs can be manipulated and edited to create desired effects. With recent technological developments, it is increasingly easy and accessible for anyone to modify the content and form of a photograph, which means changing its authenticity and truth. Therefore, the philosophy of photography questions, among other fundamental inquiries, the extent to which photographs can be considered true and authentic.

The authenticity and truth of photography refer to the accuracy and faithfulness with which a photograph represents the reality it depicts. Photography has long been regarded as a medium that captures real moments, objects, and scenes, often with the assumption that photographs present an objective and unaltered view of the world. However, discussions about the authenticity and truth of photography have evolved due to various factors, including technological advancements, artistic intentions, and ethical considerations.

2.2. The ontological status of photographs

Photographs are physical objects, but they also carry meanings (denoted and connoted) and represent something beyond themselves. The need for the philosophy of photography is justified by the imperative investigation of the relationship between the photographic image and the object or event it represents and explores the nature of the photographic image as an artifact.

Basically, photography is: i) a reference resource of the truth (proof of the event); ii) a historical-documentary resource (formation and liberation of the memory of the war and of the conscience of the world, to give an example); and iii) an artistic resource (object of contemplation and aesthetic valuation).

In the relationship between the photographic referent and the real, Dubois (1992) registers the three main ontological modalities that can occur with photography: a) photography as a mirror of reality; b) photography as a transformation of reality; c) photography as a trace of the real. According to Dubois, photography is primarily an index and, only later, can it become similar, an icon, and acquire a meaning, a symbol, corresponding these three ontological categories to the main classification of signs in Peirce's semiotics.

In *The ontology of the photographic image*, Bazin (1980, p. 241) approaches the dimension of similarity between photography and reality in terms of 'association', which he interprets as a transfer of reality. It goes from the object to its reproduction (the photograph). In this perspective on photography, given its mirrored relationship with reality, the verisimilitude between reality and its photographic reproduction is affirmed, which motivates the belief in its truth and authenticity.

The binding nature of photography to the reality it captures demonstrates its willingness to approach the real, according to Fontcuberta. Consequently, in *El Beso de Judas: Fotografía y Verdad*, Fontcuberta (2002, p. 12) asserts that the domain of photography, despite appearances, is located more properly in the field of ontology than in that of aesthetics.

2.3. Aesthetics and interpretation

The philosophy of photography examines the aesthetic issues related to photography such as composition, colour, light and form. In

addition, it analyses how photographs are interpreted and how the context influences the perception and meaning of the image.

Interpreting the rhetoric of an image involves analysing and understanding the visual elements and compositional choices within the image to uncover the intended message, emotions, and themes that the creator of the image is trying to convey. Just as one would analyse written or spoken language to understand its persuasive and communicative techniques, interpreting the rhetoric of an image involves decoding the visual language used by the photographer or artist.

2.4. Ethics and responsibility

Photographs have the power to influence opinions, shape narratives and emotionally affect viewers. The philosophy of photography investigates, therefore, the ethical responsibilities of photographers, the role of photographic images in the news media (and in social media, where fake news is most disseminated) and the ethics of using photographs in sensitive situations, such as the war photojournalism and documentation of events considered historical and which also include warlike conflicts and violence.

The ethics and responsibility of photography encompass a range of considerations related to how photographers engage with their subjects, their audiences, and the broader social and cultural contexts in which their work is presented. Photojournalists, as creators of news visual information and social communicators, have a responsibility to uphold ethical standards in their practice, especially when dealing with sensitive subjects and when their work has the potential to influence public perception. The key aspects of the ethics and responsibility of photography include, for example, treating the subjects with dignity and respect, striving to present accurate and truthful representations of the subjects and scenes photographed, documenting events accurately and objectively, and avoiding conflicts of interest that could compromise the integrity of the visual information.

3. Interpreting visual signs

For there to be an interpretation, there must first be something to be interpreted. Any interpretation starts from pre-existing elements of meaning, such as signs, which precede interpretation. An image is a sign and, as such, it

calls for interpretation. Any sign belongs to some code that, in turn, is part of a broader structure of meaning, a social and cultural system of meaning, like a language.

Unlike other languages (e.g. painting, cinema, literature) that create fictions and imagine alternative realities, the object of photography must exist. For Barthes, this is the distinctive aspect of photography, the *noeme* (essence) of photography: what photography captures is the existent, what exists or existed. "The name of photography's *noeme* will therefore be: 'That-has-been'" and "what I see has been here" (Barthes, 1982b, p. 77). With digitization and in the current technological age, photography has lost this indexical umbilical cord with the real and may not correspond to any referent, even in informative contexts like photojournalism. The referent is the real object that was placed before the lens, without which there would be no photography, contrary to fictional production and the practice of image in painting, which can fake reality without having seen it. "The photograph's intentionality is the Reference, as certitude, that the photographed object was." (Stiegler, 2009, p. 14).

Peirce defines the photographic sign with respect to its relation to the object (the secondness of the sign) as an icon and as an index. In Peirce's semiotic perspective, photography is iconic and is like the object it represents. Photography maintains a physical connection with the object, which makes it indexical, as the photographic image is physically obliged to correspond point by point to nature (Peirce, 1978, 2.281).

Peirce introduced the concept of the trichotomy as a fundamental principle in his philosophy of semiotics, i.e. the study of signs. Signs are divisible by three trichotomies: i) the sign as a mere quality (an actual existent); ii) the relation of the sign to its object consists in the sign's having some character; iii) its interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility (Peirce, 1978, 2.243). This division explain the relationship between photographs as visual signs, their objects, and their interpretants (the meanings conveyed). Peirce's trichotomies provide a comprehensive framework for understanding signs and their relationships to reality, perception, and interpretation. He aimed to provide a more nuanced and systematic approach to the study of semiotics, shedding light

on the complexities of communication and meaning.

The indexical nature of photographs explains their specific uses as evidence, attestation, singularity, and designation and links photography and its status of image-truth, while it feeds the confusion between visible-real-reality and truth (Joly, 2005, p. 88). The power of indexical images is recognized in its journalistic uses, where it is understood *a priori* in relation with authenticity and reliability due to its informative and referential function. Thus, the indexical image is the image whose relationship with reality is direct and constitutes an exact or correct representation of a part of reality (Gardies, 2011, p. 155).

The cultural approach to the image understands press photography as a cultural practice, inserted in a social framework of news production, as the image is a crucial element in the information system. The information image is, according to Gardies (2011, p. 175), the privileged place of indexicality in images. This type of image is ideal for informing, increasing our knowledge of reality, but also testifying to the facts and events in which the facts take place. Photography demonstrates a scientific and positivist impulse, which convinced that we are in a position to understand reality; therefore, it is not surprising that the image, after its invention, was quickly put at the service of information (Gardies, 2011, p. 176).

Thus, documentary press photographs reporting war events, for instance, are photographers' ways of seeing reflected in their choices. The technical progress that photography allows is demonstrated in what Benjamin (2005, p. 517) reveals in his writing *Little history of photography*, when he refers that "what is again and again decisive for photography is the photographer's attitude to his techniques."

Photography emerges from a set of contexts, and it becomes creative. When photography takes itself out of context, severing the connections, "when it frees itself from physiognomic, political, and scientific interest, it becomes creative" and "the lens now looks for interesting juxtapositions; photography turns into a sort of arty journalism." (Benjamin, 2005, p. 526). In a sense, interpreting is a way of seeing. Interpreting a photograph is a way of seeing and understanding the visual elements and denoted and connoted meanings.

4. Rhetoric of the image

The rhetoric of the image refers to the persuasive and communicative aspects of visual representation, particularly in the context of art, media, and visual communication. It draws parallels between visual elements and rhetorical devices commonly associated with language, such as metaphor, symbolism, composition, and arrangement, to convey meaning, emotions, and messages to an audience. The rhetoric of the image examines how images can effectively persuade, inform, and engage viewers.

Visual metaphors employ elements to create associations between objects, concepts, or ideas not directly related. Visual metaphors allow expressions in a more aesthetical and rhetorical manner, engaging meanings beyond their literal representations and evoking emotions, ideologies, or concepts that resonate with audiences, often using universal or widely recognized symbols. In the essay *Rhetoric of the image*, Barthes refers that connotative signifiers correspond to the general ideology; the set of connotators is a rhetoric (Barthes, 1977b, p. 49).

In visual rhetoric, the arrangement of visual elements within an image's frame can also influence how viewers perceive and interpret the image. Similar to sentence structure in verbal language, the composition and framing of an image guide the viewer's attention and shape their understanding of the content. Just as rhetoric in verbal language often aims to evoke emotions in the audience, the rhetoric of the image uses colour, lighting, facial expressions, and other visual elements to elicit emotional responses from viewers. An effective visual rhetoric considers the intended audience and tailors visual elements to resonate with their preferences, cultural backgrounds, and values. This engagement enhances the persuasive power of the image.

The rhetoric of the photographic image is somehow the practice of the philosophy of photography. The relationship between the rhetoric of the image and the philosophy of photography is rooted in their shared exploration of how visual communication and representation function, as well as their examination of the deeper meanings and implications of images. While the rhetoric of the image focuses on the persuasive and communicative aspects of visual representation, the philosophy of photography delves into the fundamental nature of photography as a medium and its impact on

perception, truth, and meaning. These two fields intersect and inform each other in several ways, such as a) the interpretation and meaning, b) the use and effects of symbolism and metaphors, c) the subjectivity and perception of the image, and d) the context and intention of the visual message.

Regarding a), the rhetoric of the image and the philosophy of photography delve into the ways images are interpreted and the meanings they convey. The rhetoric of the image emphasizes how visual elements and techniques shape the way images are understood by audiences. The philosophy of photography examines how photographs convey meaning, considering the relationship between the image, its subject, and its viewers.

Concerning b), the rhetoric of the image often explores how visual elements like symbols and metaphors can be employed to communicate complex ideas. Similarly, the philosophy of photography considers how photographs can use symbolic and metaphorical elements to convey deeper meanings and provoke thought.

In relation to c), both fields recognize the subjectivity of interpretation and perception. The rhetoric of the image acknowledges that viewers bring their own experiences and cultural contexts to the interpretation of images. The philosophy of photography contemplates how individual and collective perceptions influence the understanding of photographs.

As Barthes states in the essay *The photographic message*, the press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic, or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation. For Barthes (1977a, p. 19), “the photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs”.

Finally, in respect of d), both consider the importance of context and intention in the interpretation of images. The rhetoric of the image examines how the context in which an image is presented influences its reception. The philosophy of photography addresses how a photographer’s intention and the context of image creation impact the image’s meaning and authenticity. The rhetoric of the image explores how images communicate ideas and emotions to audiences. The philosophy of photography contemplates how photographs serve as a means

of artistic expression and communication, both for the photographer and the viewer.

5. Application of the philosophy of photography: photojournalism

In this paper, we investigate the concept of authenticity in photography as one example of the philosophy of photography. This involves exploring questions about the nature of truth, representation, and the relationship between the photograph and reality. The concept of authenticity in photography could be applied in photojournalism, whose declared goal is to capture and convey real-life events and situations as they occur. However, the authenticity of the images can be questioned due to several factors such as manipulation, selective framing, or digital editing. This raises philosophical questions about whether a photograph can ever truly represent an objective reality.

From a philosophical perspective, the photograph is often considered a trace of reality, capturing a moment in time. Yet, the act of selecting a frame, adjusting exposure, and post-processing the image introduces subjectivity. In this example, the philosophy of photography can explore the boundaries of truth in images meant to depict reality.

This might involve discussions about the ethics of editing and altering images in photojournalism. How much editing is permissible before a photograph becomes a distortion of reality? Does an edited image still hold the same truth value as an unedited one? These questions prompt us to consider the role of intention, context, and audience perception in assessing the authenticity of a photograph.

Additionally, the philosophy of photography can lead to guidelines and codes of ethics for photojournalists and photographers, encouraging transparency about the editing process and its potential impact on the truthfulness of the image. It can also influence how media outlets and viewers approach and interpret news photographs, promoting critical engagement with visual information. The application of the philosophy of photography in the photojournalism demonstrates how deep inquiries can inform real-world practices, ethics, and conversations surrounding the creation and interpretation of images.

A recent real-life example of photojournalism rhetoric is the powerful and

emotive image captured by John Moore in 2018. The image came to be known as the “Crying girl on the border”. The photograph depicts a two-year-old Honduran girl crying as her mother is being searched and detained by U.S. Border Patrol agents at the U.S.-Mexico border. The image quickly gained widespread attention and became emblematic of the controversy surrounding the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy, which resulted in the separation of families at the border.

The photograph’s composition and timing evoke strong emotions, which constitute a powerful rhetoric of the image. The child’s distress and vulnerability, captured in her tears and her outstretched arms, appeal to public opinion empathy and compassion. This emotional connection encourages viewers to consider the human impact of immigration policies. The photograph’s powerful visual impact led to extensive media coverage, sparking conversations on news outlets and social media platforms. Its circulation influenced public discourse, policy discussions, and activism around immigration issues.

However, this image raises ethical questions about the role of the photographer faced a dilemma: intervene to help or document the moment objectively. By choosing to document, he demonstrates how the rhetoric of the image in photojournalism is about communicating stories, evoking emotions, and engaging viewers.

6. Conclusions

This article demonstrates how the rhetoric of the image contributes to the philosophy of photography and how both are related in a complex and multifaceted way and deal with the same object: the image.

Rhetoric of the image contribute to the philosophy of photography regarding to: a) visual persuasion and meaning: analysing the rhetoric of images explore how visual elements and composition choices contribute to the meaning

and impact of a photograph; b) understanding the semiotics of photography, which is related to philosophy of photography – as image (e.g. Peirce’s semiotic); c) ethical implications of visual representation that are central to both rhetoric and the philosophy of photography (e.g. how images influence opinions or manipulate truth); d) aesthetics and emotional impact since rhetoric often concerns with evoking emotions and eliciting responses from audiences, playing a crucial role in the philosophy of photography; and e) interpretation: understanding the circumstances under which a photograph was taken and published in the newspaper, the intentions of the photographer, and the context in which it is viewed all influence its interpretation, in which the philosophy of photography can benefit.

Continuing research on the rhetoric of the image within the philosophy of photography offers a promising path for exploring the complex interplay between visual communication, perception, and meaning. Relevant and future continuation of such research may consider, for example, the technological advancements and the ethics of image-making, investigating the impact of emerging technologies on the rhetoric of photographic images (viz. how artificial intelligence, augmented reality, or virtual reality might shape the creation and reception of visual messages), on the one hand, and exploring the ethical dimensions of image-making and the rhetoric embedded in photographs (viz. the responsibilities of photographers in conveying accurate information and the potential ethical dilemmas arising from digital manipulation), on the other. By addressing these two considerations, research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the philosophical implications of photographic rhetoric, keeping pace with technological and cultural changes while enriching the broader discourse on visual communication and meaning-making.

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