

DISSEMINATION. STATE OF THE ART

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Reflecting on strategies for disseminating photography and image heritage at this time is most opportune. It is a fact that, since their introduction, the development of digital technologies has substantially affected the dynamics of image consumption as well as those of archiving, and has done so in all areas encompassed by the management of this heritage. But, of all of these, it is perhaps the field of communication that has seen the most significant changes. And not only because of the possibilities that digitization brings, in its most purely instrumental sense, but above all because of the profound transformation in the uses and distribution channels for the image to which electronic technology has given rise.

If this trend had already manifested itself sufficiently strongly in recent years, in the field of heritage photography – and chemically-created images in general, held by all kinds of entities or individuals - the modification of the communicative habits which the recent viral pandemic has caused, has unexpectedly highlighted the need to take a definitive step forward to position itself in the virtual environment. It is no longer an option: it is the territory occupied by the photograph-object transfigured into image, ethereal, ubiquitous and omnipresent.

On the other hand, it is a situation that invites us to think differently with regard to the current dynamics of the archive, which is widening its social character and placing the user in a more central position. Good examples of this are the neighbourhood participation projects

for the construction of collective memories, or initiatives to integrate users as providers of knowledge around the content of the archive in collaborative documentation projects.

But together with this paradigm shift, closely linked to the acceleration of the digital transition, other more traditional models of dissemination of photography coexist, such as exhibitions in museums and galleries. These are fundamentally the spaces where photography is recognized both as an artistic form and a cultural expression, and constitute the last redoubts in which to collectively experience photography in its original analogue forms, clearly in the minority compared with the other imagery that forms the visual sphere of our times.

Their materiality, however, does not exclude all chemically generated photographs from also being present in the digital environment. In fact, this is the way in which institutions are improving access to their holdings and collections. Despite this, the conversion to the new technological forms leads to some difficulties. It is a process in which the photograph is dematerialized and decontextualized physically and culturally, and the function, the initial meanings and materiality of photography itself are in danger of becoming blurred, setting those bodies in charge of managing this heritage a huge challenge in preserving and transmitting their original values. Thus, today, whether through physical or face-to-face means, or in the virtual environment, the dissemination of photographic heritage presents a challenge full of opportunities but one that is, at the same time, quite complex.

From this turning point, encompassed by the 30 years of I&R Conferences, it is therefore entirely appropriate to revisit the different contributions in this field, a period of a few years that have conjecturally witnessed the birth and evolution of digital technologies applied to the image, and which have seen how what began as a strictly technological phenomenon has become a genuine cultural

revolution with an unprecedented social impact; and how, unlike other evolutionary mutations – something to which the history of the medium is no stranger – this time along the way the ontological foundations of photography itself have been shaken up, which are a prime example of the debates around post-photography.

In this sense, the papers presented at the Image and Research Conference - some of which, relating to the dissemination of photography, are reviewed in this text - addressed through different approaches to dissemination, constitute a clear example of the communicative transversality of photography and the theoretical and practical challenges it poses. Some excellent arguments that have given cause to highlight the valuable role of the intellectual underpinnings that these contributions have meant for the scientific development of the specialty in the management of photographic heritage in general and for the dissemination of photography in particular.

I. The Photograph as a Document

The first four editions of the Conference were entitled *La imatge i la recerca històrica* (The Image and Historical Research) which made clear that, in the archival field, image documents were claimed as a central element in the dynamics of historical research. However, in light of the papers presented at these first Conferences, the practical application of this postulate still lacked a systematic implementation by researchers. Thus, in the 1990 edition, Bernardo Riego showed himself to be in the same vein when he said that “[...] se está haciendo historia de la fotografía pero no Historia con la fotografía” (‘...the history of the photograph is being created, but not History with the photograph’, Riego, 1990). In other words, the dissemination of

photography was still understood as a basically illustrative and complementary function.

That same year, the historian Albert García Espuche presented a paper which reported the incidental role too often attributed to images and the little attention devoted to their documentary potential that, as the author observed, extends through different layers of information capable of being analyzed through various scientific specialties (García, 1990). The discourse, which can be surprising today from a methodological point of view, is undoubtedly a vindication of the epistemological interest of photography and its normalized integration into research. However, it also inevitably leads to the question of the status of photography in the archives at that time, and consequently, to reflecting on some aspects of how they are managed and how they are accessible currently, and on the need to adopt a proactive attitude in the dissemination of the content of the archives.

Focusing on the field of research in urban history, the text highlights a number of aspects found in photographic resources and audiovisual areas of analysis with an almost inexhaustible information density: for the study of urban planning and architecture, infrastructures, amenities, street furniture, etc. It is a perspective that, based on structuralist concepts relating to the indexicality of photography (understood in the manner of semiotics, as a sign that maintains a physical referential relationship with respect to that represented) consists mainly of bringing out what, being present, had until now remained hidden from the observer's view.

In a way it is an exercise close to what Walter Benjamin called the archaeology of the present, an idea taken up by Xavier Antich in his essay *Els plecs de la mirada* (The Folds of the Gaze), in which he evokes Eugène Atget's work on Paris and the fascination it aroused in Benjamin. Atget photographed Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, leaving behind the nineteenth century model in which the

image of the city had achieved an archetypal dimension, spread by the phenomenon of cartomania and designed for mass consumption (a model that, in historiographical terms, is also a sign of its times and the values of the society that produced it). Atget's photography stops, however, in the details, in the forgotten corners, in the indifferent streets, in the folds of the city, which is where, according to Benjamin, the truth resides. As Xavier Antich points out, Atget's position responds to a new attitude:

“Unexpectedly, Benjamin's intuition discovers the most revealing thing about Atget's photographic work: the city as the scene of a crime in which each trace is incriminating evidence, the effect of a sought-after cause, the product of a transformative action. Photography, therefore, as a reading of the city and the urban processes of modernization, in all its prismatic complexity (historiographical, sanitizing, criminal, speculative, touristic) and, at the same time, as a visual story articulated through this same city and built on top of it, as a palimpsest”. ¹

Interestingly, Atget's work subsequently aroused a remarkable fascination and from very different perspectives. Thus, in the 1920s, surrealists found a referent in them through an operation of decontextualization, in which the photographs took on a certain sense of subversion of reality, close to the aesthetics of the objet trouvé and the paradoxes proposed by the movement. And on the other hand, the documentary and aesthetic values of Atget's work came to be appreciated through being salvaged by Berenice Abbott, Atget's former assistant, who, after the photographer's death, kept the negatives until, in 1969, they were acquired MoMA in New York. A few years later, the New York museum organized an exhibition of the photographs of Atget's Paris, which finally produced an effect of aestheticization of the work – an inherent function of the museum as an institution - that gave the photographs an artistic importance.

However, Atget's work was not created from these points-of-view. Significantly, the research carried out by the MoMA on the numerical codes of Atget's negatives concluded that it was a system of organization closer to the dynamics of an archive than to those of an intellectual or artistic order. In other words, his work originally had the sense of a catalogue. All this leads to recognizing in photography a territory that is as defined by its appearance as it is diverse in its possible readings, a sign of the prismatic complexity – in the words of Antich - that photography takes on as a visual product. And it is for this reason that photography comfortably inhabits the environment of the archive, from where it is able to project itself, generating knowledge but also critical reflection and artistic creation, as demonstrated in the paper presented in 2018, *Pràctiques artístiques i arxius d'imatges, nous usos de fons i col·leccions fotogràfiques* (Artistic Practices and Image Archives, New Uses of Photographic Holdings and Collections, Ros, 2018), or as confirmed by the recent work of Joan Fontcuberta on damaged archive materials. Exercises that, in short, expand the understanding of photography and its uses and functions.

Without going into technological or methodological details, it should be noted that, from an archival point of view, this testimonial power of photography directly affects the tasks of cataloguing, the description of the images and, especially, the access points attributed. Experience shows that the interest of the users does not always respond to the most obvious readings of images or, as in the case of studies in urban history presented by García Espuche, images can report aspects not necessarily related to the main theme of photographs. It is therefore necessary to have specialized personnel with a good mastery of documentary and thematic vocabularies, and incorporate the work into a thesaurus to ensure that indexing is done correctly.

Another of the important implications derived from the previously mentioned multifaceted body of photography, relates to the incorporation into the catalogue of contextual aspects for the interpretation of photographs. García Espuche's very pioneering text proposes two areas of cultural and technological analysis, which, in 1990, were still very new: the knowledge of photographers who worked in the past; and historical technical procedures. Both subjects provide contextual information for the reading of the image, they facilitate the dating and interpretation of the content and, at the same time, can generate an informational return in the cross-referencing of data. These are aspects that, although at that time were still far from established as an object of study, have made remarkable progress in recent years with results as commendable as the Clifford Portal² (Martí, 2016), an online directory of photographers active in Spain in the nineteenth century, with nearly 5,000 references, open consultation and constant growth, or other compendiums published in recent years in book format ³, which attest to major progress in the model of research on photography.

Other aspects relating to the cultural position of the photograph have subsequently been approached from a historical and social perspective, such as in the Huellas de Luz (Traces of Light) project, presented at the 2012 Conference by the Laboratorio Audiovisual de Investigación Social (Audiovisual Laboratory of Social Research, LAIS) in Mexico (Green and Roca, 2012) which addresses knowledge of the contexts in which the photographs were produced which, in the social studies of Latin American history, are of particular importance due to the persistence of colonial dynamics. The contextual information of photographs is always important, especially if historical photographs are considered as a document, since they have been created at a cultural crossroads distant from that of today's spectator. Knowledge of the initial production and

receptive environments (the technical nature of the photographs, the social functions assigned, the historical and economic circumstances into which they are placed, the channels by which they were distributed, etc.) are essential data for the re-signification of the images and for overcoming of the cultural ellipsis that separates the original environment from the present. In this same vein, the micro-historical and local studies of photographers, commercial firms and heritage groups, which have often also had their space at the Conference, also form a contextual environment for the reconstruction of the productive visual structure and modes of historical reception.

Rightly so, García Espuche pointed out in his text the need to create image centres, an issue that has fortunately gained momentum in recent years in which photography in the archive has been valued and has favoured the creation of specialised centres or, at the very most, sections with their own specific weight within archival bodies which aim to give suitable treatment to their image collections. But it hasn't always been that way. For example, in terms of research into urban history, there are holdings and collections specifically created for its study, as is the case of the photographic archive created by the SPAL (Local Architectural Heritage Service) of the Diputació de Barcelona preserved in the General Archive of the same institution, a centuries-old archive that encompasses the whole of the twentieth century and is a fundamental reference for the urban and architectural study of the Catalan territory. Despite the existence of collections of this calibre, it can be thought that, if urban history hadn't fully integrated photography into its methodological project until the 1990s – nor other fields of scientific and social research - it is probably because the genre of the photography archives had not yet achieved a sufficiently established status in this regard, and its dissemination inevitably suffered for this. Without being able to tell clearly which came first, the chicken or the egg (nor

undermining the decisive role played by the implementation of digital technology) the change in the attitude of researchers as to how to interrogate photography – a change in attitude that makes one think of how Atget interpreted the city of Paris - is undoubtedly an important turning point in the conception of photography in the archive, which has helped to place these collections at the centre of interest for researchers and to broaden the management and dissemination horizons of the bodies safeguarding photographic heritage.

II. The Photograph as an Exhibited Object

The photograph is to be seen. But it doesn't always have to be seen on walls of museums, exhibition spaces and galleries. Since the beginning, the various photographic forms that have arisen over time have passed through certain circles of dissemination and have developed very diverse functions, whether within the familial or the professional environment.

But, if in the age of mechanical reproduction as formulated by Walter Benjamin, photography was called into question as an artistic form – also because, for centuries, the original and unrepeatable character of the work of art was considered typical - with the development of the negative and copying processes, the possibilities of combining different media and techniques began to be recognized in photography, which offered the critics arguments of an aesthetic nature with which to equate it with other arts, such as painting. However, the weight of the classical concept of the work of art as a unique piece held back the introduction of photography into artistic circles for at least the first two decades of its life: it not only questioned the criteria and values that underpinned the way of understanding the artistic field, but also posed a direct threat to the

established commercial world of painters, cartoonists and miniaturists. Undoubtedly photography altered the economic structure of the graphic reproduction sector, and although it also created new markets, it was quite difficult to accommodate in the field of art.

Today photography is defined as a transversal visual product. Its mimetic abilities were reshaped with the introduction of historical and social components, which helped to enhance its documentary status; and its communicative abilities, of any order, are now analysed through various disciplines such as semiotics, psychology, sociology, philosophy and art history, all of which have a specific weight in the way of constructing the narratives and settings for modern exhibition spaces.

From this premise, Lorna Arroyo's paper on the strategies for photography exhibition projects (Arroyo, 2016), explains how the status of photographs finally tended to be identified in relation to the means of distribution by which they are communicated (either a printed medium or in a gallery, for example) which is what encodes meanings and gives one or another information category.

This Fregolian condition of photography adds another question, one perhaps even more complex, such as the temporal, spatial and, ultimately, cultural disruption between the moment of production of the exposed photograph and the present moment of the observer, especially in the case of historical or heritage photography. Thus, two circumstances are produced that become fundamental to address their communication: the alteration of discursive spaces (the channels or communication spaces are different); and the cultural ellipsis between the moment of production and the rereading of photographs. These reflections call for an exercise in contextualization of the production environment at different levels, which can refer to the iconographic content of the images, the interpretation of the technological forms with which they are

presented, or the evocation of the communicative environment for which they had been designed.

However, despite the fact that this is an issue that rightly belongs to the exhibition sector, it is inevitable to think about the consequences that this has for the transformation of photography in the digital environment, where these problems multiply exponentially and, as Arroyo points out, others are still added, such as those relating to the veracity of images or, at the same time, of the profound transformation that the professional sector has undergone.

At the base of all this debate is the recognition of photography as a complex cultural artefact, composed of an image and a medium. This distinctive objectual nature, which is potentially expressed in an extraordinary diversity of processes and formats, constitutes an important part of the information transmitted by the photographs. Therefore, photography is not only graphic information, but is also the way information in itself is materialized and this can be very important in the process of re-signification of the images it communicates. Therefore, any exhibition project must consider how this reality affects its purpose and evaluate its implications in the preparation of the exhibition discourse.

The aspects of contextualization, referring to the different orders mentioned, will also arise when addressing other methods of dissemination, since they are revealed to be inherent to the very essence of photography as a cultural construction, which shows, at the same time, an extraordinary capacity to accommodate itself rapidly to the most diverse visual communication environments.

Exhibiting photography – in this case, exhibiting the photographic object - is one of the classic forms of communication aimed at a collective audience, and therefore reviewing the evolution of its different formulations is also one of the best ways of discovering how photography has been understood over time. This is an exercise that Arroyo also addresses in her text and reveals an essential aspect in

the understanding of exhibited photography, especially with regard to the placement of the present-day observer. Similarly, it is an issue wholly current as regards the exhibition of contemporary creative photography, which applies mainly in the field of the (unfortunately) few public museums that exhibit it and, with greater profusion, to the exhibition rooms of private collections and foundations which, in recent years, have been incorporated into the cultural world. A good example of this dynamic is Foto Colectania, a foundation in Barcelona with its own collection that presented its project at the 2004 Conference, which structures its activity around the dissemination of photography in general in addition to its collection, and thus has a generous exhibition hall that hosts very diverse exhibitions, not always strictly linked to contemporary creation (Font, 2004).

The first stagings of exhibitions solely devoted to photography understood as artistic expression took place at the end of the 19th century centred on pictorialism, a trend that represented the natural evolution towards reinforcing the creative component of photography. It moved away from its themes of the most strictly instrumental functions and, at an aesthetic level, focused its attention on the production of positive copies worked with quasi-handmade techniques in order to produce definitively singular and unique pieces. For this reason, it was a time when common practices encompassed in the so-called pigment processes – carbon, gum bichromate and, a little later, in the early twentieth century, bromoil - that create, at the same time, many small variants that persist in the photographer's personal vision.

In the exhibition field, this ideology also extended to dissemination models inspired by the traditional arts and, specifically, by analogy, painting. In the logic of the movement, the control of the exhibition space played an important role as part of the creative process and innovative concepts were introduced that resulted in continuing, for

example, the notion of the uniform background canvas which sought to create an atmosphere of visual comfort for the viewer, or the use of bright and wide passe-partouts, together with the idea of having the photographs with a generous space between them to separate them visually and create a sense of selectivity and individuality.

As Arroyo recalls, this model, representing a radical break from the compressed nineteenth-century exhibition arrangements, was taken up particularly by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen and put into practice at the 291 Gallery in New York, which they jointly managed during the first decades of the 20th century. Especially Steichen, who as well as a photographer was very active as an exhibition designer, developed his staging ideas in this gallery in an almost experimental way, until reaching new forms in which the space was involved in all its dimensions (and which culminated in the realization of his most high-profile project, *The Family of Man*, organized in 1955 for the MoMA in New York).

But shortly afterwards, the avant-garde gave a conceptual turn to the idea of art itself, in the way that the poet and essayist Paul Valéry was already advancing in the late 1920s, in a text that also announced the ubiquitous presence of the work of art through modern communication media (reflections which, by the way, also invite us to think about the transformations we are faced with today):

“In all the arts there is a physical component which cannot be considered or treated as before, which cannot be subtracted from our modern enterprises of knowledge and power. In the last twenty years, neither matter nor space nor time has been what it always was. We must expect such grand innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts and, in this way, to act on the process of invention itself, perhaps leading to marvellously modify the very idea of art.” [4](#)

This idea, which Benjamin also took up in his reference text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, reveals a scenario in which photography finds an environment conducive to creating new discourses and narratives. An environment where the importance of the work is more in intellectual production than in formal execution and which, at a technical level, gives rise to the experimentation and subversion of the canons, as happened with the painting and sculpture of the time

With a remarkable influence on the visual model proposed by the graphic press, in terms of photography exhibitions, this trend has its exponent in the staging proposals of the avant-garde, especially in the Russian model, which created certain spaces characteristic of the propaganda exhibitions led by the works of El Lissitzky and Kasimir Malévich, who at the same time had great influence on the Bauhaus, with Moholy-Nagy and Walter Peterhans as the main exponents. The Russian model was later criticized by German and Italian totalitarianism in the 1930s, who reconverted it, taking Lissitzky's approaches towards a monumentalist conception, and modifying the viewer's relationship with the work which was no longer intended to be a dialogue, but to induce respect and distance.

From modernity, then, photography has been exhibited under different conceptions and often with undisguised political weight. But, if there is an influential model in exhibition historiography, it is undoubtedly that which Beaumont Newhall developed in the 1940s for the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). Newhall was appointed in 1940 as curator of the museum's photography department, a position that had been created for the first time. The collection was oriented towards creative photography, leaving aside the other functions that would have allowed it to be explained, for example, as a document or as a technique. To this effect, Christopher Phillips, a philosopher and a writer expert in communication, summed up Newhall's legacy in this way:

“Looking at the first exhibition staged by Newhall and Adams, “60 Photographs: A Survey of Camera Aesthetics,” and reading the texts that accompanied it, one finds a number of markers set in place to delimit the kinds of photographs with which the new department would be concerned. Quick to appear are notions of rarity, authenticity, and personal expression- already the vocabulary of print connoisseurship is being brought into play.” ⁵

This short text introduces an important aspect in the dissemination of photography, such as the use of textual language linked to exhibition projects. First, it must be said that the application of a standardized terminology for the description of photographic heritage is a transversal question in the set of activities involved in its management, but that it has not been definitively resolved despite being listed as a priority, for example, in the approaches of the Plan Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Fotográfico (National Plan of Conservation of Photographic Heritage) prepared by the Spanish Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport, published in 2015. And as for the Catalonia, if we look at the National Photography Plan of the Generalitat for the same year, the work for terminological systematization is not even specifically addressed, since the document focuses rather more on general strategic aspects (however, on the website of the Generalitat de Catalunya, there is a translation of the Thesaurus of Art and Architecture available, in which the terms relating to photography are under review thanks to the initiative of a working group that brings together professionals from the sector).

Regarding the technical and scientific language of use in the professional environment, despite the existence of several sufficiently valid proposals, a unitary criterion has not yet been implemented. In large part the problem is due to shortcomings relating to the training of professionals, for whom it has not been

easy to access the appropriate knowledge for the specific management of photography, which is still a relatively young discipline in our environment; but it also denotes the delay in establishing effective leadership in order to meet the criteria, despite the remarkable efforts to establish a declaration of principles through the various national plans. However, the tendency to develop ever wider search environments – which can extend beyond local or even state boundaries, such as Europeana or The Commons - Flickr – make the definition of a universally standardized and adopted vocabulary increasingly important in order to promote the recommended semantic interoperability.

The terminological question, also pointed out by Arroyo in her presentation, therefore involves two different areas which encompass, on the one hand, the descriptive aspects of the documentary field that have been mentioned and, on the other hand, affects the different levels of language used in the communication of photography. This last aspect, which involves both the exhibition of historical and contemporary photography (and consequently, both in archives, museums and galleries), was already raised at the 2010 Conference by Pau Maynés [6](#) and Pep Benlloch, linked to the Laboratori d'Estudi de Materials Fotogràfics Contemporanis (Study Laboratory of Contemporary Photographic Materials, LEMFC) at the University of Valencia, when they explained:

“One of the new aspects of our current approach lies in the desire to distinguish and argue for the use of the various linguistic registers used by our community, distinguishing between the three levels of language identified in the terminology currently used, namely scientific-technical language, professional jargon, and colloquial or informal use.” [7](#)

The quotation alludes to how different levels of language are applied in different discursive spaces, for example, in the professional environment or in terms of communicative actions and products with different audiences and expectations. A notable case is found in the texts that usually accompany photographs, which are often labelled with expressions typical of the technical field, but which are confusing for the general public. For example, in the description of photographic processes, apart from possible questions of judgment (such as the tendency to name generic processes using with trade names), linguistic loan words (e.g. vintage, later prints) or inaccurate expressions (such as silver jelly), which derive from the way in which photography is, with greater or lesser success, described in professional practice, it becomes clear that it is necessary to rethink how this information is transmitted to the public. One should also say that the poster, brochure or catalogue, are conceptually different spaces, which support different languages and can therefore allow for different levels of communication, among which there may be more inclusive contexts.

The texts are important in the communication of photographs, although of course, not only because they can refer to the material aspects of the objects on display, but also because they perform other important contextual functions, closely looked at by Arroyo, ranging from the explanation of the exhibition message (in the form of panels, room texts, brochures, etc.) to the individual reading of each image on the labels. To all this we add the dissemination texts, which can circulate through different channels: leaflets, posters, materials for the media, the website and social networks, and the catalogue. The latter constitutes what Arroyo calls the permanent content of the exhibition, and highlights both the graphic aspect – the catalogue must be expertly edited and printed - as well as the intellectual aspect, as it offers a good opportunity to develop knowledge around topics, authors or trends related to photographs.

Given the ephemeral nature of exhibitions, the production of a catalogue, whether published on paper or only in digital form, is a fundamental tool for understanding the work on display, but it is also a way to make the investment that has been made in organizing and producing an exhibition more profitable and, for the future, is the most lasting reference of the content and reflections that the exhibition has generated.

As for exhibition techniques, there are some aspects to highlight, such as the staging strategies, relating to the way of ordering the spaces, illuminating the photographs, grouping them or giving them meaning in relation to the central discourse of the exhibition. In this regard, Arroyo emphasizes the cultural distance that extends between the time of production of the photographs and the time of the present-day spectator, an observer who, in addition, has had also their perceptual experience greatly expanded due to the omnipresence of the screens, who is prepared for visual consumption of products with all different types of characteristics, dimensions or levels of portability, and who brings with them their own individual dynamics, such as their interests, background and customs. In this sense, in addition to textual resources, the presence of objects related to production systems (cameras, tripods, plateholders, photometers, accessories, etc.) provide good illustration, either to show the processes used to create the photographs, or to explain the working dynamics of photographers, as would be the case, for example, with exhibiting contact sheets in display cases. Or even exhibiting original negatives, which, given the sudden disconnection of the public from analogue technologies, can be tremendously educational if presented with a suitable narrative treatment.

One last issue that should be mentioned is a wholly fundamental fact for exhibitions, which is the aspect of conservation. Despite the obviousness need for scrupulously observing the technical

requirements of the photographs exhibited, it is not always a properly resolved topic, with the physical and chemical vulnerability of photographic materials and processes often underestimated. In this regard, it is worth noting the role of the curator, who, in addition to responding to aspects relating to the permanence of images, is an indispensable figure for creating high-quality installations for photographs and for their handling and installation in the exhibition room.

The care of photographic objects is important to ensure their permanence, and exhibiting them always carries risks that must be evaluated and, at any event, minimized. Historical photographs of physico-chemical production are artefacts that are practically discontinued, and those currently produced, either through traditional systems or through electronic printing, are also sensitive to the damage associated with the passage of time. If this is an essential issue in cultural terms, it is no less so in economic terms, especially when it comes to photography that passes through the commercial world of art and which is largely associated with private collections.

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The extraordinary transversality of photography as a visual and communicative product generates very different fields of production, which today have given the image an indisputable role in society. As an artistic form, the expressive potential of photography is difficult to compare with the complex relationships it establishes with reality, while demonstrating a high capacity for conceptualization that fits perfectly into contemporary debates and discourses.

In this environment, the exhibition of photographs is also one of the most common ways to publicize the content of private collections, which often have a social vocation as a meeting point and sphere of interaction with the environment into which they are placed. But, in

photography, rather than talking about collecting, we should talk about collections.

If photography is capable of generating unexpected and piercing connections, in the manner of the Barthesian punctum, it is understandable that the activity of collecting photography also responds to a deeply personal, instinctive impulse which can define a way of understanding the world, bringing it into question or, ultimately, relating with it. This supposition has an extensive and diverse meaning which gives rise to the formulation of proposals focused on different aspects of photography, some examples of which are the collections presented at the Conference in recent years, such as the Col·lecció Miquel Galmes, which constructs a complete vision of photography with a wide-ranging collection of cameras and hardware, library and graphic work (Foix and Parer, 2018); the spectacular ensemble of the Instituto Moreira Salles, Brazil, which brings together entire collections from some of the country's most important artists (Burgi, 2018), or the Colección Fernández Rivero, of an historical nature, which also carries out interesting didactic and research activities from its headquarters in Malaga (Fernández, 2012; Fernández and García, 2016). But despite the many facets of the activity of collecting photography outside the archival environment, when talking about photographic collecting, reference is often made to the collection of contemporary work, a practice which is also inspired by the individual personality, feelings and viewpoint of each promoter.

The public structure related to the collection of creative photography is, however, limited, except for some exceptions such as the INSPAI image centre of the Diputació de Girona, a project presented at the 2008 Conference which, apart from managing an important archive of heritage photography, includes scope for promoting contemporary and experimental images (Navarro, 2008). In this scenario, private collections play a decisive role in the

activation of the contemporary creative fabric and promote its integration into cultural worlds. And through the galleries where they are exhibited, critical thinking, experimentation and the sensitivity towards photography as an artistic expression are promoted, as well as having a communicative function that is, for now, essential in the field of creative photography. It is worth mentioning collections such as those of the Fundació Vila Casas (with the spaces of the Palau Solterra in Torroella de Montgrí exclusively dedicated to photography), the Colección Telefónica (which has also promoted exhibitions in cooperation with the public sector) or the Fundación Mapfre, which continues to focus on photography with the launch of the KBr Barcelona Photo Center, located in the Mapfre Tower of the Olympic Port in the capital.

On a structural level, private collecting centres can be understood from a historical perspective as a strategic proposal related to the cultural dynamics generated during the last decades of the 20th century, thanks in large part to the economic and social circumstances that took place in that period. In these circumstances, the creation of public contemporary art centres was promoted, which in some cases originally had established links with the private sector, such as the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (initially through the MACBA Foundation) or the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (MNCARS) in Madrid. At the same time, cultural policies favoured the growth of the art market and, therefore, also the creation of collections both in the public sphere – for example those constituted within the framework of the autonomous regional institutions, as a tool for the self-affirmation of identity - and the individual sphere, and also in the corporate sphere, as an investment for social as well as economic prestige. Currently, the situation of private collecting, as well as the expenditure allocated to public collections, seems to herald a cyclical change with an uncertain outlook, despite the existence of guild or corporate initiatives

(associations such as 9915 or the Fundació Art i Mecenatge) that work to define the role of collecting in the cultural framework of the future.

Within this setting, the case of Foto Colectania is a project where other interests come together that do not revolve exclusively around collecting in itself, but, as announced in the paper presented in 2004 by its director, Pepe Font de Mora, it is also about creating tendencies and promoting the debate on the culture of collecting photography (Font, 2004). On this premise, Foto Colectania has constructed as a dissemination project for itself, with a dynamic and didactic vocation that plans its public projection through activities such as lecture series, round table discussions, access to its specialist library and, of course, the organization of exhibitions.

The presentation of the paper includes a series of shows that were held during the first years of the organization's life, most of which were organized in collaboration with other private collections; a line it has continued to follow and which has provided the opportunity to see the work of top photographers in Barcelona as well as thematic exhibitions of extraordinary quality which have significantly enriched the photographic exhibition scene in the city. As for exhibiting its own collection, Foto Colectania has been more reserved, consistent with the idea of promoting photography collecting in general and promoting the plurality of perspectives, but, in any event, it devotes much of its resources to the care and cataloguing of its collections.

In this regard, in view of the description of the photographs in the collection that included in the paper, it is interesting to see how the use of language in this environment moves around a fairly specific semantic field, which champions rare and unpublished copies, turning these qualities into primary values of the work (among others there are expressions such as copias de época, extraños vintages, rarísimo, inédito, única copia, álbumes originales [vintage copies, foreign vintages, rarity, unpublished, unique copy, original albums]

etc.) which bring to mind the words of Christopher Phillips about the Newhall and Adams exhibition at the MoMA in New York that has been cited above.

Among other factors, this has a clear relationship with its position in the market. For example, although Foto Colectania declares itself unconnected with the direct marketing of art, it is clear that, like the other collections, and especially those that project beyond domestic boundaries, it has the capacity to generate synergies that are not completely unrelated to the commercialization of photography. Regardless, it is a circumstance that has gone hand-in-hand with the practice of collecting since the moment creative photography also became a professional activity, to which collecting gives support and room to circulate, and therefore plays an essential dynamic role that favours artistic production and generates wealth in multiple directions, even taking into account that, at least in Spain, taxation isn't particularly kind to collecting in general, one of the main complaints that arises in any forum around this activity.

However, the dynamics of private collecting involve actively cultivating relationships with the various agents from the world of artistic photography, as well as with the public sector, which is thus encouraged to increase and diversify its range, and gives rise to the development of an alternative dialogue (a line of collaboration that, as seen, is at the base of large public centres of contemporary art, and which is also formulated in the Plan Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Fotográfico Español [National Plan for the Conservation of Spanish Photographic Heritage]). These more or less stable alliances therefore have great potential, but they also present some risks, because the private collection reflects the interests and tastes of a particular project – and therefore is a rightly arbitrary and biased selection of the whole reality - as opposed to public collections, which generally have a more defined objective and certain commitments with respect to the community they

represent and address. Therefore, although giving space to the plurality and innovative visions generated by creative photography is positive, it is also necessary to assess the role they play in defining public space or whether they create significant interference in the market. In any case, it is an aspect to be taken into account in the building of public collections.

As regards other forms of dissemination, although the object value of photography is of vital importance to collectors, presence on the web is increasingly decisive, not least in publicizing their projects, inviting the public to visit their collections and offering information about the activities carried out around them. Today, web pages and social networks are also built by this sector as key spaces for dissemination and public projection.

III. The Photograph in the Digital Environment

In the Seventh edition of the Conference, held in 2002, special emphasis was placed on digitization and its applications in the archive environment. As we entered the 21st century, the incorporation of archives into the virtual space was in full swing, following in the footsteps of technological advances. In the meantime, we tried to find the best way to fit the archive's own functions into the new electronic environment and the opportunities generated by managing heritage photography collections through their digital representation were being explored. Apart from other aspects involved in the management that would benefit from the digital conversion of collections, it soon became clear that, in the field of dissemination, still unimaginable possibilities were opening up thanks to the ever-expanding spread of the internet. By the end of the millennium, online presence had already become an indisputable common ambition.

In this scenario, Manuel Santos presented the paper *La fachada de tu archivo, estrategias y herramientas para la difusión digital de archivos fotográficos* (The Facade of your Archive: Strategies and Tools for the Digital Dissemination of Photographic Archives), an extraordinary text that analyses the beginnings of the digital journey of archives, focusing its interest on online dissemination practices and, specifically, on the development of websites (Santos, 2002).

Although it is surprising looking back, in 2002 websites were still in the early construction phase. It was only in 1991 that the first website had been launched at CERN (the European Nuclear Research Organization), in Switzerland, and it was a project initially designed only for the academic field, although the enormous possibilities of the new technology probably didn't escape its developer, Tim Berners-Lee. However, in 2002, there were already three million active web pages worldwide, but there wasn't a general implementation, nor anything like it. Therefore, Santos's commitment to exploiting the internet's functionalities in the field of archives was tremendously stimulating and almost visionary, considering that today, in 2020, websites are essential for communication strategies at a global level and there are now around 1,740 million.

The general approaches laid out in the paper are still valid from a tactical point of view, but the text needs to be seen at a distance of eighteen years from when it was published, a period in which there has been a profound transformation at the instrumental level – due to the technological evolution of systems - at the methodological level – by the determination to find consensus in order to take advantage of the full potential of networked archives - and especially in the field of communication, where this change has led to a radical alteration in user's habits, forcing the archives to devise new forms of relationship with the public. Just look at the figures of a comparative analysis of the queries made in the Spanish state archives between 2003 and 2013, which presented the following

data: in 2003 there were 231,090 face-to-face consultations and 260,000 virtual ones; in 2013, face-to-face consultations decreased to 77,491 and virtual consultations exceeded 23,000,000. [8](#)

Therefore, although dissemination has always been understood as an end-point activity within the functional scheme of the archive – although conceptually the main reason - the new dynamics in the relationship with users have forced a redefinition of dissemination practically from the foundations: in its forms and channels, and in the interaction of communicative actions within the workflow, where they are now much more present. This approach, which entails a new positioning of the user, now shifted to the core of archive services, suggests the definition of a new archival science – as the world of museums did in its change to the new museology in the early 1970s, in which new functions are incorporated into the communicative field and a space of interactivity is generated, one previously unprecedented. In this thesis, one of the collateral consequences is that the archivist must take on a series of technical, organizational and tactical competencies that are in addition to their original occupation, which also requires considerable time investment. The profession itself is therefore taking a major turn.

As the title of Santos's paper proclaims, certainly the websites remain the façade of the archive, the image of the institution, but the new dynamics of dissemination have meant that, in recent years, they have become much more than that. Currently websites have established themselves as the central axis around which services are deployed, content is located and through which a very major part of the archives' relationship with its users is channelled. In this scenario, in recent years social networks have assumed a fundamental role in the archives' function of dissemination and have helped to give them visibility, partly freeing websites from having to bear the full weight of communicative action. Because social networks are now at the forefront of dissemination and act as

redirectors of traffic to the web, they then become a more formal space where the functions of the archive are developed at length, where catalogues and search engines are housed, and are the main hub for all the activity and content of the archive.

Regarding the functional quality of the websites, the paper proposed several strategies for their construction, which continue to have validity at the theoretical level and which deal with the treatment of the content (quality, independence, updating, quantity, interconnection of information) and the usability of the web, focused on the architecture of information, design, accessibility and interoperability (portability). However, due to the evolution of technology, and also due to the consequent extension in the range of computer service products - which have made it easier and more affordable to build web pages - the technical implementation is obsolete. For example, currently several companies offer, hosting services in addition to the domain name that include design templates (you no longer need to be a programming expert or have an in-depth knowledge of coding languages), free SSL certificate (to add security to transactions), email, marketing tools, social networking-related features, cloud data hosting services and paid web positioning, among others. Therefore, the essential question is not how the website is implemented technically, but what is offered, how the information is organized, how it is presented and what features are available to provide a good experience.

It is important to emphasize that the user's interest has become increasingly focused on the consultation of online collections and on obtaining services relating to access and reproduction, and therefore it is a priority to provide the technological structure and legal support to facilitate the reuse of the collections. This is an approach that also repositions the role of the archive as a tool for social and economic dynamization of communities, in an approach that is expressed in the proposals raised by the EU through the various published

framework documents that, as will be seen later, have led to the launch of reference projects in the dissemination of heritage at a European level.

In this regard, the technological improvements experienced in recent years and, again, the universalization of their use, have facilitated the implementation of numerous digitalization projects and, less easily, the opening up of collections to the web. The effort made by administrations to promote this service is remarkable, in some cases extending to giving support for the creation of collective search portals with a view to increasing the visibility of archives (see for example the contributions of Luz Gámiz and Albert Sierra around the “Fotografia a Catalunya” portal (Gámiz and Sierra, 2016; Gámiz and Sierra, 2018). As Santos posited in his paper, from this point of view, in terms of dissemination, the concept of the web archive has evolved towards a collaborative and linked model, in which the increasing adoption of standards – that of a basic set at the very least - with the aim of technical interoperability must be present.

But while the current strategy is clearly to set up a global and interconnected environment for joint access to documentary heritage, recent studies on the performance of theoretical models of websites and archive portals (by way of example and, in both cases, focused on publicly owned archives) show that, in general, there is still work to be done to come to grips with a model that allows for consistent integration, for example, on European portals. Thus, the analysis carried out through web traffic indicators for the evaluation of websites of the state archives of Spain, Portugal and Latin⁹ demonstrate that while the generic parameters attributed to the sites meet expectations (fast and regular access, coherent design, functioning of links, etc.) the specific properties assigned to archive websites still present certain deficiencies, some relating to access to description tools and others also located in the field of dissemination,

such as reference to scientific production relating to the archive, the cultural agenda or access to virtual exhibitions, which in the study obtain a fairly mediocre grading. On the other hand, studies on archive portals in Spain, published in 2018¹⁰, indicate that aspects such as interoperability and support information (search itineraries, research guides) are still weak points that need to be improved.

One of the most interesting aspects of this study, and which it is appropriate to consider from a universal perspective, points to the need to reconfigure the relationship with the user, starting to establish more friendly and better directed information retrieval standards aimed at their genuine and diverse interests. This translates, among other things, to presenting the data in a more accessible and less specialized language, to giving a simpler and more homogeneous form to inventories and to optimizing the user support tools. In this regard, for example, the importance of designing information retrieval systems was also stated the authors of the paper presented at the Conference in 2012 on “Proyecto Albúmina” (Albumin Project), from the Centre de Tecnología de la Imagen (Centre of Image Technology, CTI) at the University of Málaga:

“[...] if it is a question of information serving a large number of different interests, the design of our system has to take this into account, because a well-organized and analysed collection that lacks a retrieval system appropriate to the needs and interests of users is doomed to failure.”¹¹

In this regard, it is necessary to stress the need to take into account the proposals made by professional associations to unify criteria in the implementation of the description tools, the structure of the information and the use of metadata standards, preferably with those specific to the description of photography which already have a fairly extensive literature and with proven examples of application.

As much as the incorporation of new guidelines in archives is always complex in systems that already have constraints and that have often limited human resources, we must be aware that the interoperability factor is vital for the presence of online files in a future that is already present.

The paper by Manuel Santos, as well as having an eminently technological and strategic character in relation to the construction of websites, also raises some important questions relating to the archival apparatus and the conservation of collections. Specifically, it makes a list of activities parallel to the digitization project, such as the preparation of the originals for scanning, cataloguing tasks, migration scheduling and the updating of infrastructure, evaluating formatting standards and the application of legislation to which the collections are subject. Far from being aspects that have been overcome, many of them continue to generate debate and contributions driven by the inevitable technological changes, which obliges careful monitoring of the emergence of new practices and improvements in the management of digital archive.

* * *

Dealing with a project to give online access to holdings and collections is therefore a complex task both from the point of view of planning and technology. In both aspects, one of the most experienced initiatives is Photoconsortium, presented at the 2016 Conference (Truyen and Iglésias, 2016). It is an international consortium formed at the close of the Europeana Photography project, which brings together the work and synergies created in achieving this EU-backed proposal for the promotion of European cultural heritage in image. The association, which unites some thirty corporate and institutional members, as well as experts from several European countries as individual members, offers a range of digital

resources and services, and forms the benchmark for the aggregation of content in Europe given that it is a centre of expertise in photography. An interesting aspect to highlight is its interest in publicizing little-known collections, as well as domestic photography, in order to broaden the vision of European history and societies beyond the official discourses and traditional categorizations. Thus, it allows us to share in the recovery of vernacular memory, which is also growing in local environments which very often use platforms, websites and blogs to enrich and disseminate their collective heritage

The paper talked about the lessons learned during the course of the project, largely relating to the technological challenges involved in the launch of a large-scale project that involves actors with very diverse origins and experiences. But it is precisely this international dimension, through cooperative work, that has led to a background of solid expertise capable of generating a series of rules for good practice. In addition to the excellence of the studies endorsed by the various published guides, these recommendations have the advantage of having a broad and proven implementation by the various associated members, and are therefore proposed as influential models for the establishment of norms and standards in institutions. The main achievements explained in the paper are those relating to digitization (the need to incorporate technological partners, the development of specific procedures, the establishment of work protocols and quality control) and the publication of images online (metadata management and structure, preparation of a thesaurus for the semantic enrichment of metadata with multilingual support), which despite being of an instrumental nature in the final instance, are guided firmly by the criteria and deontological codes of the management of heritage in photographic media.

In this sense, and it certainly couldn't be otherwise, in the field of digital conversion the value that Photoconsortium gives to the

knowledge of the original photographs, their formal characteristics and access is remarkable. Photographs are fundamentally objects, complex artefacts that in addition to containing an image, are loaded with a series of technological and cultural references that provide the necessary context to recover their meaning from a present-day standpoint. The complexity of photography not only derives from the particularity of the various physico-chemical processes for the creation of images, but can have a significant degree of sophistication in its presentation modes – as is the case of encapsulated photography - as well as a specific social purpose – such as commercial formats of albumin papers on cardboard - or involve a dynamic experience, such as the turning of pages in an album. Therefore it is important to know the material and technological nature of the heritage managed, its physical vulnerabilities, its forms, presentations and mountings, the social, individual or collective functions assigned to the different formats, or the way in which they were manipulated and observed. Transferring all this information to the digital object is not easy, but these are aspects that cannot be overlooked and must be present, albeit encoded, to avoid disconnecting the photographs from the images they contain. And in this regard, the consortium works to optimize the capture processes (with the leadership of KU Leuven and the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion of Girona City Council) in order to improve the standards of scanning, especially regarding old photographic processes.

Apart from the technical guidelines for digitization, metadata then plays a fundamental role in the contextualization of images, and therefore the Photoconsortium has extensively developed everything that refers to the description and indexing of photographs in order to facilitate the aggregation of content with common minimum references. As mentioned above, a good structure of information and metadata encoding through the use of standards are paramount

aspects. In this way it is possible to map the information and publish it on other systems, outside the local environment, and obtain a more consistent return on investment. And with the prospects currently raised by the acceleration of the digital transition, this strategy makes more sense than ever.

Together with technological aspects, for every institution, the management of intellectual property rights and copyright are crucial in the dissemination of holdings and collections. Also, with Photoconsortium, the project focuses on the value of cultural heritage in order to facilitate its use and reuse, including commercial, and therefore information on the legal status of objects available on the portal is essential for users to know what they can and cannot do. This explains why, with Europeana, the description of rights is one of the fields that must be mandatorily reported, since it clearly impacts the primary objectives of the website.

Without going into details on legislation, which are specifically examined in another section of this publication, the legal scenario proposed for publication in Europeana must overcome several problems: those arising from the diversity of regulations operating in Europe (at national, regional or local level), the desire to combine the creative reuse of heritage with the protection of the interests of different business models that also manage cultural heritage, the protection of rights to privacy of the families and individuals who contribute to it, as well as the commitment to the integrity and authenticity of this shared heritage. Although this situation generates many variables, a proposal was drawn up at Europeana to label the legal status of the content available through its website. This proposal was formulated in accordance with Creative Commons rights declarations, which were extended with other new rights, currently up to fourteen, in order to provide the legal tools for sharing cultural heritage while respecting the different casuistics and at the same time making the dissemination viable. However, the philosophy

of the project is in line with European policies that give digitised heritage a key role for social innovation and economic growth. And from this point of view, one of the most significant contributions is the formulation of a new approach to legal issues which, taking as a basis that cultural heritage is an asset, advocates for thinking of cultural heritage as primarily a right and an asset that belongs to the community, and not just as a collection of commercialized objects subject to the laws of private property and legal control.¹² This does not, of course, mean that commercial exploitation rights cannot be reserved to the extent necessary; even in the case of sharing works in the public domain, some institutions find a way to recoup the investment made in caring for and digitizing their collections. However, it is a change of mindset that gives an idea of the direction in which it is working towards at the European level, and in this sense it also forms a benchmark for work at the local level in relation to the expectations of dissemination provided by the virtual environment, and which can transversally affect the management of collections – without necessarily being problematic - for example with regard to acquisition policies, the structure of the descriptive tools and metadata, the vocabularies used and, of course, the mechanisms for releasing the collections to the user.

The strategic mission of the consortium, focused on the promotion of photography and photographic heritage, is therefore carried out through different activities aimed at the dissemination of European photographic collections. On the one hand, it supports physical and virtual exhibitions at Europeana as well as organizing its own, with the online publication of thematic galleries, maintaining an educational portal and also a fairly active blog that invites you to discover the great diversity of the available content. On the other hand, it has a function of providing fundamental support to institutions for the digital transformation of their photographic collections and the online dissemination of the same, arising from

the need to unify criteria and technology for the aggregation of content on Europeana. This effort results in the coordination of dedicated face-to-face training activities, as well as a series of technical and training resources published on its website, with special attention given to digital conversion and the structuring and treatment of metadata, which are the result of rigorous research work and which have become an indisputable benchmark in the field of heritage photography.

In fact, innovation and technological experimentation form an important part of the activities of the association which, as part of its purpose of incentivizing and improving the way photographic heritage is shared in Europe, targets, among other objectives, the research into automated systems for generating and enriching metadata based on image recognition technology (visual tagging). And in relation to vocabularies, it is working on the advantages of the semantic web and assessing the contribution of existing thematic thesaurus such as that of the AAT (Art & Architecture Thesaurus) of the Getty Institute.

Photoconsortium thus provides new perspectives for the dissemination of photographic heritage, on the one hand turning the focus on the awarding of licenses (prioritizing the right to culture and, from this starting point, finding just solutions so as not to hinder that right) and, on the other, with the development of technical procedures and methodological criteria to make the dissemination of this heritage possible under the best conditions in terms of image quality, searchability and reuse. This is more than enough reason to always have its proposals on the radar and perhaps to encourage one to collaborate in the increase of the photographic heritage available on Europeana, exponentially increasing the visibility of the archive itself.

* * *

If the structure and quality of metadata are fundamental to the dissemination of online archives, the way this metadata is linked to the digital object offers advantages if it is included in the form of internal metadata. In this way, the graphic and textual information of the file travel together when it is shared (it is downloaded, copied or the name is modified) and it is less likely that the images will be disseminated without the minimum context, referring for example to the authorship or the legal status of the photograph, which are the two most important items of data in the reuse of the images. With this premise, the paper by Professor Patrick Peccatte, invited to the 2016 Conference (Peccatte, 2016), explained the research and problems around internal metadata in the environment of social networks.

In recent years, social networks have positioned themselves as one of the communication tools with the greatest impact on contemporary society. At the moment they have a very wide reach, which is growing exponentially, and are already included in the communication flows of many institutions that manage images and which try to reconcile two dynamics that apparently have little in common, such as those of the archive and those of social networks: the former working for permanence and credibility; the second marked by transience and presumption of disclosed information.

If a list of advantages and disadvantages is made, it can be said that the publication on networks provides a good relationship of investment and return, is a scalable medium (depending on the resources that can be invested), offers the possibility of reaching a global audience, facilitates the interaction and development of collaborative projects. On the minus side, there is the decontextualization of the content linked to the possible loss of the documentary trail, dilution of authority or lack of control over content, the blurring of the boundary between the professional field

(archivists) and users, and, last but not least, it can call into question the work of professional photographers. However, it should be noted that, through networks, institutions can increase their visibility in a way unprecedented until a few years ago (statistics offer figures of sidereal dimensions), and this is an opportunity that cannot be wasted. But networks are just that, a medium. As is also a paper publication, for example. Each of these channels offers a different discourse space, with certain codes, but this should not prevent them from being good ways to disseminate photographic culture if the way of taking advantage of them and of minimizing the disadvantages is known. Certainly the presence of online images presents a number of major challenges, which often make some professionals uncomfortable with their dynamics. In any case, as Peccatte stated in an interview published in 2017 on the Archimag website: “Le web est un vrai foutoir, mais je le prends tel qu’il est!” ¹³

The paper firstly gives a brief overview of the main metadata standards (IPTC/IIM, XMP and Exif) in order to analyse what happens to this information when images are shared on various social platforms. His research is linked to the monitoring carried out by the International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC) association of the feasibility of its standard and especially for the fulfilment of the Embedded Metadata manifesto, which defines some of the main areas for the creation and storage of metadata so that, as far as possible, it is preserved whole.

The analysis was carried out in two different periods, in 2013 and 2016, to which the most recent repetition of the test, Spring 2019, can be added, in order to assess how trends are evolving. Four different parameters are assessed in the tests: if the metadata is displayed correctly; if, as a minimum, what is known as the 4C package (metadata caption, creator, copyright notice and credit line) is included; and whether the metadata is maintained when using the Save As or Download function. The results are not too good, and it

should be noted that they are especially bad for networks such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, which are precisely among the most popular.

Despite this, it can be said that, apart from those that have just been mentioned, in general there is a tendency – albeit very slow - to show some progress. The platforms that present better behaviour are Behance (a professional adobe platform for design, illustration and photography creatives), Flickr and Google Photos. In fact the latter, which was averagely competent in the 2019 assessment, implemented the visualization of author metadata and copyright in the search engine when clicking on an image from the end of May 2020. That is, the file no longer needs to be specifically scanned in another application because the metadata is displayed directly below, if the provider has included it. It would be good if this was a consolidated trend and, above all, that photography management organizations, of any nature, recognized it as a good way to protect their interests and also a way of generating a return for the institution.

For its part, Flickr has so far been one of the few platforms that adapts relatively well to the dissemination of image heritage. At the 2014 Conference, you could see the experience of the Centro de Estudios de Castilla-La Mancha (Castilla-La Mancha Study Centre, Almarcha, Fernández and Villena, 2014), in which they explained that, despite having accessible the collections on their website, the presence on this platform had made them visible to an audience interested in its content but one that was not used to searching in the catalogues of archives and libraries, while the opportunity to have two-way communication with its users was also highly valued by the institution.

Also located on the Flickr platform, Peccatte presented the PhotosNormandie project in his paper, of which he is co-editor. Through the use of IPTC fields, its aim is to improve the description

of a collection of photographs relating to the Archives de Normandie, 1939-1945 (project (currently discontinued) launched by the Conseil Régional de Basse-Normandie which, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the D-day Landings, gathered together nearly thirteen thousand images from the national archives of the United States and Canada. For the PhotosNormandie project some 3,000 rights-free images were selected, but others were also made available to be consulted, although with more restrictive operating conditions, which allowed the work to be extended to other archives, such as the Cherbourg-Octeville municipal library. Since the collection had serious deficiencies in the descriptions, the main purpose centred on the redocumentation of the photographs – which is what Peccatte calls this process - starting from a call for collective description and indexing. The procedure was quite regulated and went through different filters before being definitively drafted by one of the collaborators. However, it took into account that the information is always potentially improvable and, faced with criticism of possible inaccuracies in the descriptions, specialists and the academic groups were invited to participate in the research.

The project, which has generated some seven thousand, eight hundred new annotations for the photographs, is an excellent example of participatory provisioning, which has received honours and recognition from the public. Flickr provides sufficient tools both to organize images and to preserve metadata embedded in the digital object. This ensures the permanence of the work carried out, which has been extremely helpful since the platform has undergone several changes in recent years in terms of ownership and orientation, which have weakened its initial strength, so much so that, at the end of 2020, Flickr is currently at a dangerous crossroads for its continuity. On PhotosNormandie's part, there would be no damage: the internal metadata would allow them, if necessary, to

migrate to another system with relative ease and without losing one jot of information.

The project is currently on-going and with some improvements on the horizon, such as the realization of an Anglophone version and the geolocation of images, for example, on Google Maps. While geolocation is information that digital cameras currently collect automatically in GPS fields (a subset of the Exif standard), in the case of old photographs that have been digitized, it involves a laborious task of researching and entering data.

This is also the case of the project on the photographs of the Catálogo Monumental de España (Monumental Catalogue of Spain) which was presented in the Experiences section of the 2008 Conference (Arcas, Pérez and Ransanz, 2008). The aim of this initiative was to be able to show a collection of photographs from the Catalogue, previously digitized, on a geographical viewing platform. With remarkable technical expertise, the team was able, based on KML language (an xml extension for the representation of geographic data), to create an application that allows the photographs of the collection to be viewed on Google Earth, navigating by geographical and thematic layers (in categories such as archaeology, religious monuments, castles, museums and libraries, landscape, courtyards and gardens, etc.) as well as a final layer that allows you to discover the collection from the list of photographers who participated in the preparation of the Catalogue and who are represented in the selection from the project.

A similar task was carried out in the production of the mobile phone application, Barcelona Visual, developed by the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona (Photographic Archive of Barcelona, Serchs and Ruiz, 2012), where, in addition to geocoding, augmented reality technology was incorporated for a more complete experience of the proposed itineraries through the city. The design of the application allows a selection of photographs from the AFB to be shown in

different modes: in a list, on a map, in mosaic, as a slideshow or in augmented reality mode, which allows the opacity of the old image to be modified in order to see the changes with respect to the present day.

Despite the volatility of the social media sector - fast changing and subject to user inertia (and therefore that of the market) - it is currently the most powerful and popular virtual communication channel on the planet. The metrics on its use are spectacular (it is estimated that users exceed three billion globally) and is accessible through a wide variety of devices, although currently studies suggest that 92% of access is through mobile phones. This data is tremendously revealing and important for the orientation of the communication policies of institutions in the future, as well as for the implementation of the most suitable technological solutions in each case. The uses and benefits that may arise surely compensate for the effort of establishing and keeping these channels open, but they must always be understood within their own communicative paradigm, without granting them functions or capabilities for which they have not been intended (at least until now), and their uses must always be weighed in relation to the purposes of the institutions and the heritage they safeguard.

* * *

The dissemination of photographic heritage carries an important responsibility, and it should be said that the virtual environment presents a series of challenges that, in the first instance, are of a conceptual order. If, when talking about photography as an exhibition object, several problems related to the recovery of meanings for the present day viewer were raised, what could be more disturbing than separating the image from its original medium and losing the aesthetic and sensory perception of physical photographs? Above

all, understanding that today there is a great lack of knowledge of analogue technologies, memory of which has been lost in a surprisingly short period of time. Thirty years ago it was unthinkable that someone with just a minimum of experience would not recognize a slide or a colour negative. Today, this is not the case. And it is a shame, because this means the ignorance of a major part of the visual inheritance itself and therefore represents a quite dramatic loss of cultural references.

Social networks, in particular, are a territory occupied precisely by these generations born in the digital age for whom the connection between image and photograph-object has become more distant. It is true that networks do not make it easy when distributing the information relating to the photographs (and you may also think that it necessary to press for this to improve), but attitude is fundamental to overcoming these problem, which can be resolved in any other communication channel: including a photo caption or a reference to a published image (in a book, a brochure, a document uploaded to the internet or a Facebook post) is not a technological issue but one fundamentally of judgement.

It is not difficult to predict that the digital environment will be pre-eminent in the dissemination of image heritage in the near future and that it will move with unstoppable fluidity. But the wind cannot take away what is essential in photography: its primary values relating to its objectual and communicative nature, a nature that is complex, sophisticated and diverse.

The role of the archive and, in general, that of the institutions that look after photographs is, therefore, to preserve and disseminate the collections and holdings, preserving not only the images but also the memory as the cultural artefacts that they are. Digitization and documentary work are particularly important in maintaining their original values, and any channel and discourse can be suitable for pedagogy with respect to photographic fact, its technical and

aesthetic history or to publicizing the most outstanding photographers. In addition, giving context and meaning to photographs of the past is to enrich those of the future. And of course, it is to make the world more understandable.

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