

Institution: University of Warwick
Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy
Title of case study: Aesthetics after Photography
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Since the 1960s, mainstream photographic art practice has undergone a significant shift, from a primarily factual, documentary medium to a vehicle of aesthetically rich, often narrative, pictorial art. Photography's internalization of digital technology has hastened this shift. In light of this, the research on 'Aesthetics after Photography' has re-evaluated the aesthetic capabilities of photography by examining its use by artists since the 1960s. This re-assessment has changed the way that curators and conservators (Tate, V&A) conceptualise the nature of photography. It has been used to curate a high-profile exhibition of a leading British photographer, benefitting the galleries (Mead; Maureen Paley) and the artist. Public conferences (Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Institute for Philosophy) and publications of podcasts, books and catalogues (Tate, Mead; The Hermitage) have brought the research to a wider public.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>There is now a substantial theoretical literature on photography in art history. By the late 1970s photography had superseded painting as contemporary art's privileged object of critical and theoretical enquiry. Since the mid-1980s there has also been growing interest in photography as a distinct domain of philosophical aesthetics. Three things are striking about these debates, when taken together: i. they take place largely in ignorance of one another; ii. they arrive at remarkably similar views about what distinguishes photography from other forms of picture-making; iii. despite this, they draw conflicting implications for photography's status as an art. For many art critics and historians, the photographic apparatus's capacity to limit artistic agency underwrites its promise as a new artistic resource; for many philosophers, the 'mind-independence' of photographic image formation puts its artistic standing in question.</p> <p>Given such opposed intuitions, we pursued an interdisciplinary approach to advance debates in ways that could not be achieved in isolation, thereby benefiting from expertise and methodologies normally kept apart. For example, by drawing on art historical expertise and photographic art we were able to show that standard philosophical theories of photography are grounded on a narrow diet of examples and an implausibly thin conception of the medium. Conversely, by drawing on characteristic forms of philosophical argument, we were able to show that common assumptions about the 'ontological' differences between analogue and digital photography in art history and criticism do not withstand philosophical analysis. Throughout, our aim was to use each discipline to illuminate blind-spots in the other.</p> <p>Our focus was the relation between aesthetic theory and photographic art over the last 50 years. Despite significant changes in the latter, the former continues to reflect the hold of the same old underlying picture: a causal, 'mind-independent' process, mediated by a mechanical or automatic apparatus, generating objective, 'naturally counterfactually dependent' images at odds with fully fledged artistic agency. The photographer may tamper with the image, thereby weakening mind-independence and enhancing its capacity to reflect artistic intentionality. But absent such 'extra-photographic' interventions in image production, photographs are inherently compromised as vehicles for aesthetically relevant intention. This picture permeates both philosophy and art history: we concluded that there is good reason to question it. We do not take the mechanical mediation of sound to undermine the art of playing piano, nor the causal determinants of trajectory and velocity to undermine the art of playing a winning pass in tennis. Pianist and tennis player alike act through the causal process: why assume photography is any different? That the transfer of paint from brush to canvas is wholly governed by causal laws has never been taken to undermine painting's status as art. Publications arising from the project have also shown orthodox accounts in art history and philosophy remain committed to an unexamined conception of what counts as a photograph that rule out imaging processes necessary to a photograph's existence as 'extra-photographic.'</p> <p>The research was conducted between 2007 and 2011. Co-I Diarmuid Costello is Associate</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Professor (Reader) in Warwick's Philosophy Department (appointed 2006); PI Professor Margaret Iversen is (now) Emeritus Professor of Art History & Theory at Essex. Post-doctoral fellows were Drs. Dawn Wilson (née Phillips, Warwick) and Wolfgang Brückle (Essex). Wilson and Brückle are now both tenured faculty in Hull and Lucerne respectively.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Costello, Diarmuid and Margaret Iversen, eds, *Photography after Conceptual Art*. Special issue of *Art History*, 32:5 (Dec., 2009). Art History Special Book Series, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. [Peer-reviewed]

Costello, Diarmuid and Dominic Mclver Lopes, eds, *The Media of Photography*. Special issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70:1 (Winter, 2012). Also published in book form by Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. [Peer-reviewed]

Costello, Diarmuid, Margaret Iversen and Joel Snyder, eds, *Agency and Automatism: Photography as Art since the 1960s*. Special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 38:4 (Summer, 2012). (A significantly expanded book version, including classic early texts, is forthcoming from Chicago UP.) [Peer-reviewed]

Costello, Diarmuid, 'Automat, Automatic, Automatism: Rosalind Krauss and Stanley Cavell on Photography and the "Photographically-Dependent Arts"' *Critical Inquiry* 38:4 (Summer, 2012), pp. 819-54. [Peer-reviewed; REF2]

Costello, Diarmuid, 'The Question Concerning Photography', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70:1 (Winter, 2012), 101-113. [Peer-reviewed; REF2]

Costello, Diarmuid and Dawn Phillips, 'Automatism, Causality and Realism: Foundational Problems in the Philosophy of Photography', *Philosophy Compass*, 4:1 (Jan., 2009), pp. 1-21. [Peer-reviewed]

Evidence of research quality:

On the strengths of the special issue, 'Agency and Automatism,' the editor of *Critical Inquiry* has solicited a significantly expanded book version for Chicago University Press to appear in 2014.

Editor, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, on Costello's proposal for *The Media of Photography*: 'The Editorial Board was VERY excited about the proposal, especially the innovative character of many of the ideas and its scope in general, and voted unanimously in favour of it. They also were highly impressed with the way the proposal itself was written and presented, citing it as a model of how a special issue proposal should be done.' [Email correspondence].

Research awards:

'Aesthetics after Photography', AHRC Standard Grant, PI Iversen, Co-I Costello £487,000, Oct 2007 – Sep 2010 (extension to March 2011); Reviewers Grade A+.

Additional research funding secured includes a Leverhulme Visiting Research Professorship secured by Costello for Prof. Dominic Mclver Lopes (UBC) from the Leverhulme Trust, £44,000 Jan-Jun 2012; and a Shpilman Institute of Photography 'Philosophy and Photography' award, \$15,000 USD, 2012 for work on *On Photography* for Routledge's *Thinking in Action* series, for which he has been commissioned.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research on the aesthetics of photography has fired public debate about the status of photography as an art. Specifically, it has raised the profile of modern British art photography, contributed to the position of independent galleries, and influenced curatorial ideas about the nature of photography. These impacts have been achieved through an exhibition of an under-

exposed contemporary British photographer, workshops with gallery curators and conservators, public events, and through non-academic publications such as books, exhibition catalogues and podcasts.

High profile events have brought the researchers and their academic networks into contact with practising photographic artists and curators. These include: a two day panel with art theorists, curators and critics at the Association of Art Historians Conference at Tate Britain (3-4.04.2008), a two day event with photographic artists at the Institute for Philosophy, London (21-22.11.2008) and a public conference, 'Agency and Automatism', at the Tate Modern (10-12.06.2010) with a keynote by Jeff Wall, the most influential contemporary photographic artist. This conference, ticketed by Tate (£25/£20 concessions), sold out the 250-seat Starr auditorium (for a total income of £6250) and attracted a substantial waiting list. Podcast recordings of the talks are available through Tate and iTunes and have been downloaded 1480 times in 2013 alone. The popularity of the conference and podcasts demonstrate the public appetite for discussion about photography's aesthetic and artistic significance. The research stemming from these events was published as special issues of the leading journals *Art History*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *Critical Inquiry* and in book form for a general readership. *Photography after Conceptual Art*, published as a book in 2010, has sold over 2000 copies (as of August 2013) making it the best-selling title ever in *Art History's* book list.

Costello was invited to curate 'Twenty-Nine Pictures,' the first mid-career retrospective of Hannah Starkey, an important but under-exposed contemporary British photographer at the Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre (Jan-Mar 2011). This was accompanied by 85pp hardback colour catalogue, with an essay by Iversen and an interview by Costello. The show was reviewed in traditional media and online magazines/blogs including the Claudia Winkleman Show (BBC Radio 2, 04/02/11; approx. audience 2.5 million, RAJAR figures), *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, eight specialist photography magazines/websites as well as 30+ general websites and blogs. *The Telegraph* online culture pages reprinted an extract from Costello's interview with the artist. The show was listed as an 'Art must-see' for January 2011 by the leading culture website *Culture24*.

The exhibition recorded a footfall of 6812 visitors over 49 days, a daily average of 139. In 2010-11 the Mead's average was 108, in 2009-2010 it was 94; as such it is the Mead's most successful show of the last 3 years. 100 copies of the catalogue were sold during the show at a special price of £10, 107 were sent to various critics, curators and institutions around the world (at no cost), and a further 183 sold by the gallery's distributor (at £16 each; total £2928). The evening discussion (1 Mar 2011) with Starkey was over-subscribed (138 turned up for a 100 seat event and many stood) and the podcast has been downloaded 544 times to July 2013. This level of exposure helps justify the gallery's existence as the only space-intensive, non-income generating resource within the Arts Centre, and thereby ensure that it remains free to the public for the foreseeable future. As her first curated retrospective, the show also raised the profile of an important UK-based photographer, thereby benefiting both the artist and her gallery, Maureen Paley (London), generating interest in a further one-person show at Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast (3.6 – 9.7.2011).

As part of Prof Lopes' Leverhulme Professorship, Costello and Lopes convened a seminar for Tate curatorial staff, V&A conservators and invited specialists at Tate Modern (May 2012) to coincide with the publication of their special journal issue 'The Media of Photography'. About the philosophical conceptions of photography discussed, Tate's Director of Collection Care Research said:

'It is surprisingly rare that the divide between the museum and academy is breached and in speaking to the museum curators and conservators afterwards they very much appreciated the opportunity to engage in this discourse. The discussion of the photographer Dan Holdsworth was picked up the following week at a Photography Acquisition Meeting. This linked the questions raised in the seminar about the defining characteristics of a photograph to curatorial decisions and discussions. In this very direct way, the seminar has had an impact on the discourse within the museum in relation to contemporary photographic practice.'

Costello has also contributed to catalogues for exhibitions in the UK (White Cube, London) and Russia (The Hermitage, St. Petersburg).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Exhibition catalogues:

1. Chuck Close: Seven Portraits, St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, Feb-April 2008. Exhibition toured from White Cube Gallery, London. A full colour dual-language hardback catalogue including an essay by Costello, 'Painting through Photography, Photography through Painting' was produced:

http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/chuck_close_family_and_others_masons_yard_2007/
http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/04/2008/hm4_1_191.html

2. Hannah Starkey: 29 Pictures, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Jan-Mar 2011. 85 pp full colour, hardback catalogue. Essay by Iversen, interview with the artist by Costello. Sales of 283 provided by Mead Gallery. Interview extract reprinted in *The Telegraph* online culture pages.

3. Assistant Editor, Art History, on the reception and trade sales of book *Photography after Conceptual Art* in Art History's Wiley-Blackwell series. (Best-selling book in their series.)

4. Curator of Interpretation, Tate Modern, on sales/waiting list/reception etc of 'Agency and Automatism' conference (June 2010).

5. The conference is permanently available as a 5-part podcast archived on iTunes U. Go to: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/digital/podcast-directory>. Click on 'visit Tate podcasts on iTunes' link, then search 'Agency and Automatism' on Tate's iTunes pages (in 'Symposia 2010' collection). Alternatively go to: <https://itunes.apple.com/institution/tate/id426723905> and search 'Agency and Automatism' directly. 1480 downloads in 2013 provided by Tate.

6. Director, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, on 'Hannah Starkey: Twenty-Nine Pictures'; statement and website <http://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/events/visual-arts/hannah-starkey>.

7. Selected media references for this show:

Daily Telegraph review and reprint of Costello interview (26 Jan 2011):

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/8283609/Hannah-Starkey-In-Conversation.html>

The Independent, featuring a 21 picture gallery (18 Jan 2011):

<http://www.independent.co.uk/artsentertainment/art/features/hannah-starkey-twentynine-pictures-2187389.html>;

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/hannah-starkey-twentynine-pictures-2187389.html?action=gallery>

Culture24 (26 Jan 2011): <http://www.culture24.org.uk/art/photography-and-film/art323428>

8. Director, Maureen Paley Gallery, London on significance of this show for Hannah Starkey's career.

9. Head of Collection Care Research, Tate Britain, re the impact of consultancy/closed seminar for Tate Curators/V&A Conservation staff on 'New Directions in the Philosophy of Photography'.