

Strategies for creating photographic objects – an attempt at classification

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Abstract: The article analyzes photographic objects, trying to propose a classification method in terms of their creation strategy, taking into account, first of all, the relationship between photography and an object. The author of the article distinguishes and defines four main strategies based on the analysis of selected photographic objects, as well as his own implementations. The main thesis is the existence of various creative strategies in which artists implement execute their concepts by using complementary features of objects and images. According to the author of the article, the analysis and appropriate classification of photographic objects may lead to the development of photographs' usage and knowledge about the perception of a photographic image in the context of architectural space.

Keywords: photographic object, photo-object, photography in architecture, Beszterda, Kowaniński, Robakowski

Introduction: Features of photography, features of a photographic object

When considering the relationship between a photographic image and a photographic object, one should start with an attempt to find their distinguishing and common features. Probably the most accurate definition of photography was created by professor Stefan Wojnecki, who stated that it is an image made of a priori data factors [1], i.e. containing selected, predetermined patterns of shape and colour. According to such understanding of photography, an interesting context is also added by Jacek Dukaj in his essay *After writing (Po Piśmie)*, stating that *photography is the first technology of direct transfer of experiences* [2] and that *photographic images look not so much as (...) interpretation, but fragments of the world, miniatures of reality that everyone can make or acquire.* [3] On the other hand, when trying to look at the photographic image from the viewer's point of view, you can see that he has a unique trust in it. Even in case of viewers who are aware of the subjectivity of the image inherent in the fact of using a small angle and a specific viewing direction, as well as stopping time, there is a confidence that what they see in the photograph actually has existed in front of the camera lens at the moment the shutter button was pressed. So we are dealing with a kind of contract between the photographer and the viewer, under which the photographer presents a priori factors, and the viewer believes that he is looking at a fragment, a miniature of reality. It can be said that the inscribed feature, the most characteristic of the medium of photography, is its ability to present parts of reality, or more precisely: parts of reality that have passed. These clippings, although they do not look like an interpretation, are in fact exactly interpretation, and the Dukaj's direct transfer of experiences is the view of the viewer who believes in the intentions of the photographer and the photographer who wants to pass on, how he perceives what he saw from his prospects. Thus, the viewer of the photograph interacts not so much with the image, but with the past world presented, with the angle of view, the moment and the period of stopping the photographed event, characteristic of the physical and psychophysical frame of reference of a particular observer.

The above features seem to apply to the photographic image presented in a way abstracted from the environment, not taking into account the method, time and place of presentation. It should be noted how important

for any contacts of the viewer with photography is their context, namely: time, space and the method of presentation, which may support or disrupt it. Thus, it seems that the concept of a photographic object is a conscious attempt by the creator to direct the context of the presentation of photography or to plan its complementary coexistence with the object in a way that creates a new quality, combining them into an artwork of a completely new character and meaning. In such a case, photography becomes part of the object, one of its most important and not necessarily the most important element and the object, being part of space, introduces photography into architectural context. In such a form, photography is not in direct relation to space, but coexists with it as part of an/the object. This relationship is especially visible in the case of site-specific projects created in interiors, where the artist uses the features of space as part of his implementation, thus shaping the dialogue between art and architecture. At this point, it is noteworthy that one can imagine architectural projects that are created in such a way as to use the specificity of a photographic image similarly to photographic objects.

It is also possible to create an object that interprets photography, i.e. reinterprets the photographed reality, presenting its features in a spatial form in absentia, i.e. without the physical presence of the image. In this case, we are dealing with a meta-message that paradoxically develops a photograph into a spatial presentation, which previously closed a different space in terms of width and height. Such an object becomes an intermediary in understanding the image, the feature of which is an mediation [4][5] between the presented world, the sender of the message, a set of cultural meanings and the recipient, but also an intermediary between the photography itself and the recipient. Thus, it subjects to viewer's interpretation what the author of the object interpreted from the original photograph. It should also be noted that spatiality is not the only feature explored by artists creating photographic objects. Their creators also use sensory activities aimed at senses other than sight: they encourage to touch, sound their objects, expose recipients to heat, cold, smell or moisture. In other words, by creating an object, they have the ability to influence the recipient by means of direct targeting of specific senses, shortening the way to his mind. When working with the image only, to reach the goal, and in a much more individualized way, it is only possible to influence associations. This remarkable feature of objects also affects the relationship between the viewer and the creator. It is exceptionally interesting, precisely with reference to artist photographers who use objects in their practice. So far, the viewer has treated the artist as a mediator between him and reality. His trust moves from what he sees to what he experiences, although he knows that this time he is experiencing the transmission of concepts to a much greater extent than reality. Touch, taste, smell, warmth, coldness, spatiality – all this makes the viewer perceives the artwork with the senses, which in most cases are not questioned and the author's concept, is experienced more fully. While it is commonly known that the viewed image can be manipulated, is it possible, for example, to manipulate the touched structure? In this way, the viewer, instead of looking at the world, looks into the artist's mind. At this point, his trust is not directed to the world represented, but rather to the world experienced, and trusting what he experiences, he no longer considers the a priori data factors in the photograph, but directly the artistic concept.

Feature	Photography	Photographic object
form	two-dimensional image	spatial object
transmitted factors	existing in nature, a priori data in a moment of shooting	imagined by the author
time received	present recorded in the past	present
creation factors	point of view, exposure time, depth of field, creative methods (not disturbing the understanding of the image as a photograph)	space, colour, sound, smell, texture manipulation
sensuousness	sight	sight + freely selected by the author
viewer's trust	to diegetic/ presented the world	to your senses
role of image	central	depended on creative strategy

Classification method

In the article, the author uses the method of analysis and logical construction, trying to analyze selected examples of photographic objects and propose their classification by making a synthesis. Later in the article, four strategies for creating photographic objects will be distinguished: the strategy of extension, complementarity, dissonance and reinterpretation. It should be noted that the list is not exhaustive and will probably need to be supplemented in the future. It would be arrogant to assume that the creativity of artists can be arbitrarily and definitively closed within the classification. Decisions about assigning to a specific strategy were made on the basis of the dominant feature, defined as a clear, meaningful and intentional relationship of the spatial form with the image. In this sense, the author of the article tries to look at the problem holistically and not to favor either the author's or the recipient's perspective. However, the article assumes that the dominant feature is the result of an aware author's creation. For this purpose, the discussed examples have been selected so that the intentionality of the main feature raises as little doubt as possible, but also that it is possible to discuss them from both perspectives – with the help of sources, directly by the author or by observing recipients' reaction during the presentation of objects. Among the selected examples, there are the author's realizations whose purpose is to deepen the analysis below based on his own experience. A significant problem that had to be faced when creating the following classification is that the features assigned to distinguished strategies often coexist in one object. In this case, the dominant feature will be the one that defines the understanding of the object. Hence, the nomenclature of strategies comes from the features distinguished on the basis of this reasoning.

In the study, the author decided not to include the strategy of creating objects that interpret photography as a medium, and do not use or do not refer to specific photographic images, is intentionally not included. The decision is dictated by the reasons resulting from the lack, in such cases, of a relationship between a specific image and a specific form. Moreover, from the point of view of semantic possibilities, each medium can describe another, and it never has been the basis for considering such a relationship as a synthesis of both.

An important observation for further considerations is that the relations between the photographic image and the object as well as the described strategies using them may be a guideline for the creative use of photography in an architectural interior. One can imagine hypothetical architectural realizations using the features of photography in a way similar to the way artists create photographic objects, and even spaces designed as their large-scale counterparts. Therefore, the proposed classification focuses on the features related to the reception and understanding of the photographic image on the one hand, and the spatiality of the objects themselves, which is correlated with the image itself, on the other hand. In this approach to the problem, the essence of classification is to find universal features that can be scaled to an architectural object. This will apply to both the situation where the image works with the object and where they are opposed to each other. Moreover, taking into account the definition of photography by Stefan Wojnecki and the fact that it also contains an ephemeral image such as film or projection, the classification may also provide guidance on the coexistence of such images with architectural space.

Amplification

The most popular and conceptually simplest strategy for creating photographic objects is amplification. It is a situation in which the author of an object extrapolates his understanding of photography to its exhibition environment, adding supporting elements or non-linguistically guiding understanding. The amplification can start trivially when the author selects the type of frame that supports the meaning of his photographic image. For example, wanting the recipient to be able to see himself in it and to comment on the human condition, he frames the photograph in a highly glossy material, thus giving an additional, extra-photographic feature to the image and expanding its intangible field of influence. Another example may be the interaction with the environment obtained by simply presenting a photograph in such a way that it gives the impression of not a window to the world, but an object placed in space. An excellent example of such action is the work by Włodzimierz Kowaliński entitled *Wrapped Madonna*, presented by the curator Dr. Tomasz Jędrzejewski at *Brand New Man 1.2* exhibition at the Art Gallery in Płock, framed in a black, aluminum frame with a simple white passe-partout however not hung on the wall, but leaning against it, standing on the floor. The curator's assumption was to



Fig. 1. Włodzimierz Kowaliński – *Wrapped Madonna*, exhibition *Brand New Man 1.2*, Płock Art Gallery, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak



Fig. 2. Krzysztof Ślachciak – *Principle of Mediocrity*, exhibition *It's more likely we're not special*, Pusta Art Gallery, Katowice, City of Gardens, photo: Krzysztof Ślachciak



Fig. 3. An attempt to photograph through a mirror image, exhibition *It's more likely that we're not special*, Spectrum Galerie, Fankfurt (O), Labyrinth New Art Festival 2021, photo: Krzysztof Ślachciak

refer to the picture itself, showing the work as if it had been taken off the wall and prepared for taking it out. This seemingly simple curatorial decision resulted in the content of the photography being transferred into the space and context of the presentation. The viewer was not supposed to look inside the image, but to treat it as an object coexisting with the gallery space. In this case, the connotations [6] of the photography were emphasized by the method of presentation.

Another example of amplification is the author's work entitled *Principle of mediocrity*, which presents a multiplied portrait of a woman and is presented at exhibitions in the format of 20×30 cm in a black, wooden frame, the dimensions of which are matched to the pedestal on which the work lies. According to the author's

assumption, it is to give the impression of a continuation, that the photography is embedded in the pedestal. The image of a female portrait, multiplied and presented with its upper edge to the recipient, is additionally extended by a mirror placed at an angle to the edge of the work surface, and it is there that the image of the work is viewed by the viewer. The form of the object was to present a de-individualized, neutral face as an element of the most numerous category from the title *Principle of Mediocrity*, which says that if we choose an element from a random category, it is most likely that it will come from the most numerous category. In addition, the use of a mirror introduced additional images that made the object immaterial. They can also be interpreted as things always seen in some reflection, always projected by something. Conversations with recipients and observed reactions, in particular frequent attempts to photograph an image multiplied by the angle of reflection of the mirror, seem to confirm the author's assumptions. In the case of this work, the extension is not only metaphorical, where the meaning is emphasized by the form of the object, but even physical, because the mirror twice enlarges and spatializes the image presented in the photograph.

The advanced form of the enlargement strategy can be seen in the works by Wojciech Beszterda from the series entitled *Antinomies*. The author, considering the problems of understanding the image and cognitive bias, closed ambiguous photographic images into black objects covered with glass, while placing a magnifying lens on their surface. By the description of the works, Beszterda provokes an in-depth look at the presented images, which is exceptionally well legible in the 1920 photo by Eugene Falleni from the Sydney police station. The woman transformed into a man so successfully that she managed to marry twice. Her first wife – Annie Birkett was murdered, what was the cause of the arrest. The recipient of the object can explore with a magnifying glass how successful the transformation recorded in the photo was on his own. In this way, the author encourages the exploration of the main, bothering feature of photography, and thus places it in the role of a research object.



Fig. 4. Wojciech Beszterda – Falleni (object date: 2014) from the *Antinomies* series, exhibition: *Work Show*, BWA in Piła, 2016. Photo by Wojciech Beszterda, courtesy of the artist

Complementarity

While the feature of complementarity should be characteristic of every successful photographic object, the creative strategy based on it is distinguished by the intentional creation of a new quality detached from the original overtone of the photography. In this approach, photograph, which forms an element of the whole object, is not the subject, but a part, and only when interacting with the form creates a ready, new work. It can therefore

be said that the artist's main task is to create a relationship between photography and spatial form in such a way that they create connotations that will not be noticed in a form devoid of photography and formless photography. This requires the artist to be highly aware of his own works, working on associations, and referring to iconography known to his viewers. In the complementarity strategy, photography loses its central role, and the viewer perceives not so much the a priori factors, i.e. a fragment of reality mediated by photography, but the harmonious form and image here and now. Thus, his assessment is less affected by the way in which a section of the past is presented and selected, and to a greater extent by the artist's creative thought. Features of this strategy can be seen in the famous works by Józef Robakowski, which the author calls interactive objects. It applies in particular to *Rollers* (1970) and *Blown-up Head* (1971). In both cases, photography seems to play an auxiliary role, using its representational features for the meaning of the object, but not having the decisive meaning of what specific portraits are presented in them.

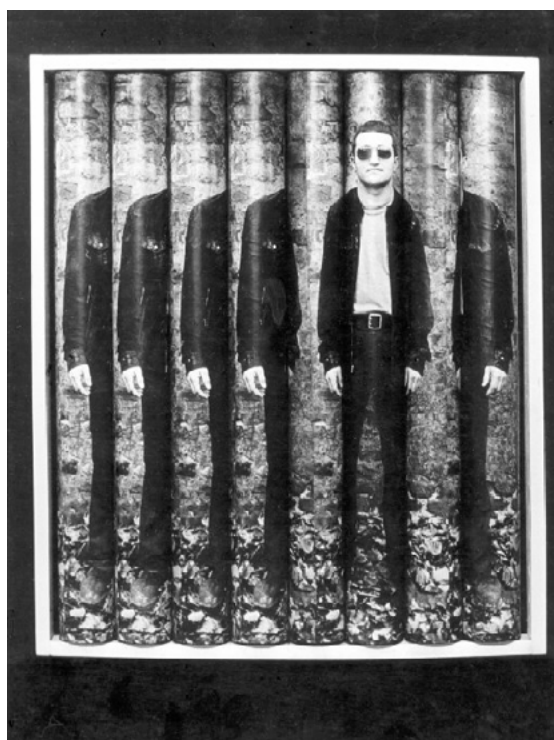


Fig. 5. Józef Robakowski – *Rollers*, 1970, source: <https://fototapeta.art.pl/2002/jro.php> access: 21.08.2022



Fig. 6. Józef Robakowski – *Blown-up Head*, 1971, source: <https://culture.pl/pl/galeria/prace-jozefa-robakowskiego-galeria> access: 21.08.2022

The work entitled *Apnea (Bezdech)* is the project by article's author from 2021 presented at the Rozruch Art Gallery at the photographic and sculptural exhibition entitled *Impermanent*. The object consists of a pedestal placed on it, an illuminated, water-filled aquarium with a photo of a woman printed on the bottom and water dripping from the ceiling into it. The conceptual assumption was to find a method to appeal to the feeling of discomfort associated with being under water and the lack of air. The dripping water symbolized the passage of time, but was also interpreted by viewers as a reference to the so-called Chinese water torture. In the case of this object, all its elements were created for the purpose of cooperation and complementarity of existence. The photograph itself makes no sense without water, and the object of this photograph will not be understandable.

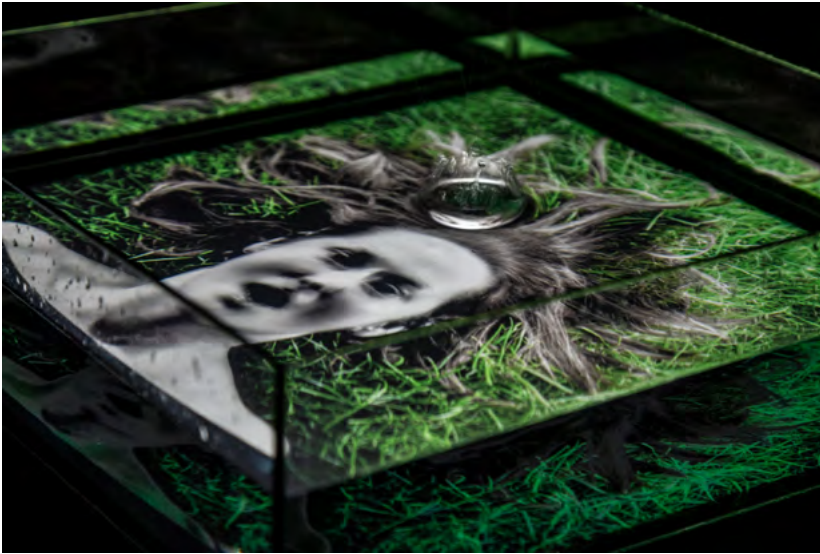


Fig. 7. Krzysztof Ślachciak – *Apnea*, 2021, the *Impermanent* exhibition, Rozruch Art Gallery, Poznań, photo: Krzysztof Ślachciak

Dissonance

According to the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language, a dissonance is a discordance of the sound or consonance of two notes of different pitches or a gross disturbance of harmony. By adopting this term to understand the strategy of creating photographic objects, we can say that it is a deliberate juxtaposition of photography and form in such a way that their connotations create a semantic conflict with each other. We can guess that Józef Robakowski's *Chair* may be an example of the application of this strategy. The artist covered the surface of the chair with images of people, making the original function of the chair questionable by the recipient. Everyday object has been changed into a place for presenting human images, which in common understanding can be realized by a photograph hanging on a wall, placed in a newspaper, on the Internet. There is also a dilemma whether it is appropriate to sit on a chair whose surface is filled with human images. Isn't that disrespectful?



Fig. 8. Józef Robakowski – *Chair*, 1970, source: <https://artinfo.pl/dzielo/krzeslo-1970-r> access: 21.08.2021

Wojciech Beszterda's *Pillows from Bad Dreams* are an excellent example of an implementation based on a dissonance strategy. The artist placed on the pillows his pictures of animals killed by cars and left by the road, forcing viewers to confront positive associations of an object on which, in order to rest and relax, we put our heads, with the image that causes at least discomfort. The exceptional strength of this juxtaposition is based on the highly opposing vector of both factors. These objects make us reflect on our attitude to nature, looking away from the suffering of animals that are not ours and the fate of homeless beings.



Fig. 9. Wojciech Beszterda – *Pillows from bad dreams*, 2014, photo: Wojciech Beszterda courtesy of the artist

Reinterpretation

Another possible strategy is Reinterpretation. An example may be the original object entitled *The Pale Blue Dot*, which was originally presented at the exhibition entitled *Cosmic perspective*, for which the ideological starting point was the photograph taken by the Voyager 1 probe, whose title was transferred to the object. The aim was to create the focal point in the exhibition space around which it would take place. The original photograph showing the Earth from a distance of 43 AU is understandable to the viewer only after explaining what he is looking at. Therefore, it was necessary to create a situation in which he would be intrigued and give him a chance to reach this conclusion on his own. The result was an object in the shape of an elongated pyramid with a cut off top, through an opening where you could look inside. Inside, shifted along the axis of symmetry, a blue dot pulsed slowly. The object was enriched with sounds coming from it, which came from the so-called Voyager Golden Records – gilded disks placed on the probes containing the sounds of the Earth, greetings in 55 languages and our address in the galaxy mathematically written. The object did not use the original photograph at all, but only its connotations. Therefore, it can be said that he reinterprets what the original photograph interpreted. Visitors of the exhibition and the following ones where the object was presented, sometimes spent several minutes constantly looking through the opening of the pyramid. Of course, one can argue whether such an object is even photographic. However, it can be postulated that it is because, despite the fact that photography does not appear in it in a material way, it is the subject and the basis for the

creation of the object, and the object itself, as a rule, does not go beyond the meaning of photography. From the point of view of the adopted methodology for classifying photographic objects, it can be stated that the reinterpretation strategy is a specific, developed type of amplification strategy. In fact, the vector of the object-to-photography relation is directed at the photograph, but at the same time it cannot be said that it itself is in any relation to the object.



Fig. 10. Krzysztof Ślachciak – *Pale Blue Dot*, 2020, exhibition *Cosmic perspective*, Rozruch Art Gallery, Poznań, photo: Krzysztof Ślachciak

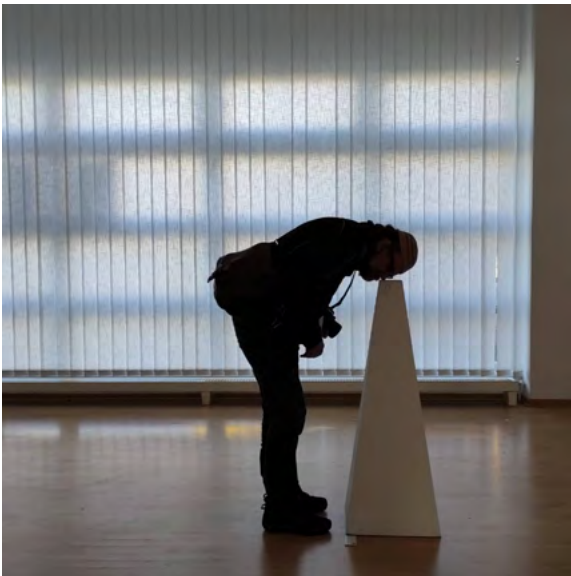


Fig. 11. Observation of the interior of the object, exhibition *It's more likely we're not special*, Spectrum Galerie, Fankfurt (O), Labyrinth New Art Festival 2021, photo: Krzysztof Ślachciak

Summary

Considering the features of the distinguished strategies, it can be concluded that in some cases they constitute a set of coexisting features, with some of them assuming the role that defines their understanding. Some objects may not show particular features clearly indicating the strategy; in others we may have a problem with distinguishing them. At first glance amplification and dissonance seem to be mutually exclusive, but we cannot conclusively state that it is impossible to create an object that connects them together. Complementarity,

i.e. coexistence for a coherent, synthetic work, will be a feature of all strategies, on the other hand, an object built according to the complementarity strategy may not have features of either dissonance or extension. By contrast, reinterpretation appears to be an advanced form of amplification strategy. Each of the distinguished strategies seems to display features that enable their use in architectural space. Using amateur examples, it can be said that the expansion strategy is often implemented in apartments by using a photo wallpaper and comparing it with houseplants. On the other hand, the projection of fire or a fireplace from YouTube, which changes the character of the leisure space into a “fireplace room”, where the TV set has been in the center so far, coexists with the space and, to some extent, implements the complementarity strategy.

The classification proposed in the article is open-ended, and its legitimacy is based on the assumption that systematizing knowledge about the relationship between a photographic image and a spatial object may lead to their more aware use. This may be important both for interior design objects and for architectural interiors themselves, in which photographs, as defined by Stefan Wojnecki, of images composed of a priori data factors, can interact with space in a way that is characteristic only for photography.

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Strategie tworzenia obiektów fotograficznych – próba klasyfikacji

Streszczenie: Artykuł analizuje obiekty fotograficzne starając się zaproponować metodę klasyfikacji pod kątem strategii ich tworzenia, biorąc przede wszystkim pod uwagę relacje między fotografią a obiektem. Autor artykułu wyróżnia i definiuje cztery główne strategie na podstawie analizy wybranych obiektów fotograficznych, a także własnych realizacji. Główną tezą jest istnienie różnych strategii tworzenia, w których artyści, realizując swoje koncepcje, wykorzystują komplementarne cechy obiektów i obrazów. Zdaniem autora artykułu analiza oraz odpowiednia klasyfikacja obiektów fotograficznych może prowadzić do rozwoju wiedzy o postrzeganiu i wykorzystywaniu obrazu fotograficznego w kontekście obiektów przestrzennych, a także wnętrz architektonicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: obiekt fotograficzny, fotobiekt, fotografia w architekturze, Beszerda, Kowaliński, Robakowski