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From photography to synthography. *Aesthetic remarks on synthetized images*

Abstract
Firstly, this contribution proposes to address synthographies – images generated through Text-to-image technologies – by deepening the epistemological shift related to the possibility of transposing the image-creation process from the analogue arts to the notational ones (or, by drawing on Nelson Goodman's terminology, from the "autographic" to the "allographic" forms of art).
Secondly, the paper highlights how synthographies can be considered partly autographic and partly allographic, since the linguistic prompts constitute only the notational aspect of the generated images. Furthermore, this contribution argues that the recent critiques around such images, which referenced aspects related to the absence of authorial presence and mechanicality, characterised the history of photography since its beginning.
Finally, the contribution explores how the possibility to create synthographies that are almost indistinguishable from photographies easily might further separate the interaction between the detective and the depictive functions to the advantage of the latter, erasing what remains of the visual reliability and documental value of images.

Keywords
Synthesized images, *Photography*, *Aesthetics*, *Text-to-Image technologies*, *Synthographies*

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1. *Synthography: a new form of notational art?*

In January 2021, OpenAi officially launched DALL·E, a Text-to-image AI software that generates pictures matching text prompts. Since then, other platforms such as Midjourney, Stable diffusion, and Bluebwillow began to permeate visual media globally, provoking reflections and debates on the status of emerging forms of images (Wilde 2023).

If we tackle the main features that characterize synthetic images from an aesthetic perspective, the first relevant feature of Text-to-Image technologies (TTIs) is that they affect a radical linguistic transformation in the visual arts, causing an epistemological shift. In fact, it could be argued that TTIs contribute to transposing the image-creation process from the analog arts to the notational ones or, by drawing on Nelson Goodman's terminology, from the "autographic" to the "allographic" art forms.

In *Languages of art* (Goodman 1968), the American philosopher proposed a distinction between the world of symbolic forms and representations. In Goodman's perspective, works of art are intended as symbols that are part of broader symbolic systems, which can be divided between "autographic" forms of art – such as painting and photography, which lack syntactic and semantic differentiation – and "allographic" art systems. According to Goodman, autographic artifacts can be considered forms of art if they lack an actual syntax that can separate the parts constituent of a work from those that are merely contingent. Furthermore, the autographic characteristic of certain art forms is not characterized by the fact that the resulting artifact is a single product, such as a painting or a statue, but because it is not reproducible. While allographic works merely need to be identified by their notation and spelling, autographic ones require that the knowledge of their creation's history can be used as a criterion to define their identity.

An allographic art form, for example, is the Western musical notation system. Each written note on the page generally corresponds to a single musical tone, and each tone is referred to a different written note. By contrast, autographic forms of art, such as sculpture, etchings, painting, or photography, lack syntactic differentiation and generally refer to undifferentiated symbol systems: "A work of art is autographic if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine. If a work of art is autographic, we may also call that art autographic. Thus painting is autographic, music non-autographic, or allographic" (Goodman 1968: 113).

The standard for determining an autographic work's identity and what enables us to distinguish between the original and something else is its history of production. Some artifacts are, at the same time, autographic and multiple. Therefore, the autographic feature does not necessarily imply the singularity of the artwork.

In the essay, Goodman argued that an artwork can be defined as allographic if it is traceable to a notation. However, in a later work titled *Of mind and other matters*, the author added that the distinction between autographic and allographic artifacts should not be solely based on the availability of a notation: "While the availability of a notation is usually what establishes an art as allographic, mere availability of a notation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition" (Goodman 1984: 139).

With the distinction between autographic and allographic, Goodman did not intend to define an exhaustive classification of the arts, since he argued that such a division could change over time and is not always clearly discernible, as it happens in the case of architecture.

In such a case, both categories can be applied: "(…) Architecture has a reasonably appropriate notational system and some of its works are unmistakably allographic (…). But insofar as its notational language has not yet acquired full authority to divorce identity of work in all cases from particular production, architecture is a mixed and transitional case" (Goodman 1968: 113).

By comparing architecture with musical scores, the founder of Project Zero noted that, on the one hand, architectural plans can be compared to musical scores, if we accept to define them as notational systems that fulfill both the syntactic and the semantic requirements. If architectural plans constitute a literary work, plans and scores do not constitute architectural and musical works: they are only their notations. On the other hand, architectural plans can be compared to scripts that fulfill only the syntactic requirements, as it is impossible to create an original plan from a specific building. Even though scores are way more codified than plans, musical scores and architectural plans are only the notations of musical and architectural works.

2. *Synthographies. A transitional case*

Before tackling the distinction between autographic and allographic works, to better investigate the defining characteristics of the synthographies, it is possible to consider Goodman's difference between singular

and multiple symbol systems. For example, a figurative work can be simultaneously autographic and be attributed to a multiple symbol system, as in the case of numbered prints or xylographies. Paintings, on the one hand, are part of the category named singular symbol systems: "The trouble in the case of paintings, though, is that (unlike expressions) they belong to what I call a singular symbol system. Each painting is unique; in the technical sense of replica. There are no replicas of pictures as there are replicas of words" (Goodman 1978: 48). An analogue photograph, on the other hand, is characterized by a multiple-symbol system and can be considered an autographic form of art:

> Photographic picturing is a multiple-symbol system. The relation among the several prints from a negative is to some extent comparable to the relation among the several replicas of a word. but the two relations are not the same. In the first case, we have an autographic and in the second an allographic symbol system; that is, the relation among the prints consists in their having been produced from the same negative while the relation among the inscriptions consists in their being spelled the same way. (Goodman 1978: 48)

If the advent of digital photography only partially re-defined the autographic process of photographic picturing, since it comprehends the presence of a negative (either digital or analog) and the prints that derive from it, the advances in the field of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have revolutionized the process of image generation. While analogic and digital photography relies on a performative process characterized by a somatic aspect, creating synthetized images through generative artificial intelligence mainly involves the creation of linguistic prompts.

Shusterman (2012) argued that photographing almost always involves a bodily action. The author stated that to operate the camera's shutter release, one needs at the very least to utilize a physical component (most often the fingers). However, there are undoubtedly other somatic abilities that must be mastered, such as holding the camera stable in one's hands to ensure a clean shot and controlling one's body position, posture, or balance to place it best and aim it for the ideal optical image.

Instead, text-to-image generation softwares involve the use of linguistic prompts that are processed by encoded semantic systems able to capture compositional aspects of arbitrary language text inputs (Saharia 2022). Furthermore, since TTI models employ stochastic sampling methods that involve random selection, each time an image is generated – even with the same linguistic prompt – the visual result is different. Elke Reinhuber (2022) argued that it is debatable whether or not the

visualizations produced due to the extensive use of artificial intelligence in the generation of images through linguistic prompts can still be regarded as photographs in the traditional sense (etymologically, artifacts produced by drawing with light). In her perspective, the synthetic production of images – which results in the creation of an artifact that she proposed to define *synthography* – relates to AI but, at the same, includes the process of drawing and the images rendered with 3D softwares.

From the point of view of the bodily action involved in the photographic process, the author observed that the creation of synthographies through Text to image softwares radically differs from the defining aspect of traditional photography, defined as "late photography", which mainly consists of the capturing process. In her view, the more interesting artistic positions of the contemporary panorama are the ones that critically examine the development of artificially generated images, as they allow to re-define the boundaries and the connections between emerging disciplines such as "digital photography", "AI-enhanced digital photography" and the artifacts that Reinhuber proposed to name "synthographies", meaning the visual explication of a sentence, images generated by using linguistic prompts.

3. *Synthetized images and the issue of metacreativity*

In our view, Text-to-image softwares contributes to defining a linguistic transformation in the visual arts, which redefines their epistemological status. To substantiate this argument, it is possible to notice that images generated with Text-to-image softwares are in some way similar to the "mixed and transitional cases" described by Goodman. Such images can be considered partly autographic and partly allographic, since the linguistic prompts constitute only the notational aspect of the generated file, just as a musical score constitutes only the notational aspect of the musical work.

Secondly, according to Goodman, the arts can be classified as either one-stage or two-stage arts (1968: 114), and in his view, Architecture can be considered a two-stage art. The construction of a building implies both the design phase and its actual construction. Similarly, Text-to-image softwares require the design of the prompt, which consists of a linguistic performance, and the actual creation of the image, which is performed by software.

The creation of synthetic images through Text-to-image softwares can be considered allographic in the design phase, since its relevant aspect is the accurate definition of a series of prompts that define the elements that constitute the image. In the second phase, instead, it can be considered autographic. Its most relevant aspects are related to the execution of a series of linguistic prompts that will define the final characteristics of the image, and the history of the image production is a criterion that allows the distinction between two pictures created with the same prompts in different temporal contexts.

Such an issue is related to the problem of the distinction between a copy and a replica. According to Goodman, an allographic work can be considered a replica of another "only if the two share the same syntactical properties and the same notation system" (1968: 131). The distinction between replicas and copies differs from the notion of *technical reproducibility*. The distinction between replicas and copies refers to a process of duplication that is not entrusted to an empirical or chemical mechanism, but instead to the notational aspects of a peculiar symbolic system. The author argued that: "There are no replicas of pictures as there are replicas of words. We must remember that being a replica and being a copy are quite different matters; replicas may differ drastically so long as they are spelled the same way. Since picturing has no alphabet and no notational criterion for sameness of spelling, direct verbal quotation has no strict analogue in painting" (Goodman 1978: 48).

Given these premises, the case of images generated with Text-to-image Technologies can be considered an exception, since it is possible to replicate pictures using the same linguistic prompts. Therefore – in this case – *picturing* becomes strictly related to a linguistic notational system. An exception that presents similar characteristics regards the case of Sol Lewitt's artworks.

Discussing Goodman's autographic-allographic distinction, Pillow argued that such a distinction does not apply to some of Sol LeWitt's paintings (Pillow 2003).

With *Wall drawings*, a series of 1000 artworks created in 1968, the visual artist designed the artifacts' ideational core, consisting of a set of written instructions (the plan), aimed at guiding the external collaborators in realizing the wall drawing.

The draftsman who realizes the artifact is invited not only to execute the artist's plan, but to reinterpret and reorder it according "to his own experience and understanding" (LeWitt 2000: 376). Since each execution of LeWitt's plan produced a different artifact, the sum of the various

realizations does not correspond to several instances of a single work, but rather as an autographic artwork which – paradoxically – are not susceptible to forgery and mechanical reproduction: "Even if the same draftsman followed the same plan twice, there would be two different works of art" (LeWitt 2000: 377).

In Pillow's view, LeWitt's wall drawings transcend Goodman's distinction, since each of them is a two-stage artistic product, given that its realization comprehends both the instructions and the execution phase, and at the same time it can be considered an autographic artifact, as it can be identified via appropriate production histories.

In a recently published essay dedicated to the relationship between artificial intelligence and creativity (Navas 2023), Eduardo Navas suggested that the instructions for the drawing installations designed by Sol LeWitt – carried out by gallery or museum employees who follow his written instructions – are remarkably similar to the prompting used in text-to-image software. Furthermore, Navas pointed out that such instructions have the structure of an algorithm. For instance, the artist's *Wall Drawing #715*, realized in February 1993, presented the following directions: "On a black wall, pencil scribbles to maximum density", which reminds the prompting used in text-to-image generation processes or the structure of an open-ended algorithm.

The author argued that such an artwork is a representative example of the distinction, elaborated by Joseph Kosuth[1] (1991), between the Stylistic Conceptual Art (SCA) and the Theoretical Conceptual Art (TCA). In his view, the "Stylistic conceptual art" differs from the "Theoretical conceptual art", since the latter focuses on the results of an idea in particular shapes that result in an emphasis on the form. In contrast, the former focuses on deploying an idea in which the form is either supplementary or serving as the vessel for it.

Inspired by Lewitt's drawings instruction, the American artist Casey Reas curated in 2004 and 2016 (with a restored version) the exhibition "*{Software} Structures*"[2]. In such an exhibition, the curator implemented three of LeWitt's drawings with programming softwares and asked the invited artists to choose a programming language of their choice, leading to very different visual works. The works can be considered modular

[1] According to the American artist, the actual work of art mainly consists in models and ideas.

[2] https://whitney.org/exhibitions/software-structures. For the concept of software structure see Reas (2014: 146).

versions developed with the same basic algorithm and, as the author suggested, they were aimed at presenting possible connections between conceptual art and computer-based art. However, if we compare such experience to the practice of prompting, typical of Text-to-image technologies to the practices related to computer-based art, we can consider that the prompter does not need to have specific training in terms of programming skills.

As the American scholar Paul Crowther noticed in *Digital art, aesthetic creation*, "the computer-based art has a special significance. The artist in this medium has, by definition, to acquire programming skills, or to cooperate closely with those who have such skills" (Crowther 2019: 7). Instead, in our view, in the use of text-to-image technologies, the prompting process instead requires linguistic-semantic skills and, in the image definition phase, figurative competences that are not related neither to programming skills, as in the case of computer-based art, nor to manual dexterity, as in the case of photography.

Rather than a form of computer-based art, text-to-image technologies belong to the category of artificial intelligence art (AI art). In fact, according to Manovich, the definition of AI art refers to the use of computers "to create with a significant degree of autonomy new artifacts or experiences that professional members of the art world recognize as belonging to contemporary art" (Manovich 2019). Furthermore, according to the author, to be considered AI-art, an artwork needs to be computer-generated and not just computer-assisted, which means that the artist does delegate part of the artistic process to a machine, resulting in a process of reciprocal collaboration. In the TTIs creation process, which consists of creating the prompt, (eventually) defining the dataset, selecting the most relevant significant results and editing them, the artist's role is as relevant as the role played by the AI system.

Within the field of AI art, the image creation process happens differently in artworks generated with Text-to-image technology or with GANS (generative adversarial networks). Such networks, with minimal assistance from programmers, can learn specific tasks that they have yet to be taught to perform explicitly. GANs synthesize data and create images that resemble but differ from the original ones, generating new images, each bearing unique details. As Barale recently underlined, GANs can generate new images, because once "trained on a particular dataset, it becomes capable of producing new data that differ from the initial ones" (Barale 2022: 9).

A difference between these two forms of AI art can be found in the fact that in the cases of software art and art generated with GANs, the processes of image creation do not involve the use of linguistic prompts, as in the case of Text-to-image technologies. Despite such a difference, they both entail a creative or, as we are about to argue, a metacreative use of the AI systems by the artists.

4. *Artificial Intelligence art and metacreativity*

In Navas' view (2023), the emergence of what he defines as *Artificial Intelligence Aesthetics*, is strictly related to the concept of metacreativity:

> A cultural variable that emerges when the creative process moves beyond human production to include non-human systems. This definition includes artificial intelligence and machine learning; for emerging intelligent technology, specifically, this means that a non-human entity is able to learn in order to produce something that appears creative. (Navas 2023: 145)

A first aspect of interest lies in the fact that the image "appears to be creative" since the process of creation implemented by artificial intelligence – as the philosopher of communication Luciano Floridi (2023) argued – mainly consists of "agency without intelligence" (*agere sine intelligere*). According to the author, even if artificial intelligence "large language models" (LLMs) process texts with outcomes that are often indistinguishable from the ones that are produced by human beings, the texts or images creation process that they implement is based on a statistical analysis that allows them to working on the formal structure, but not on the meaning or the semantic. Therefore, it is not correct to state that AI thinks, understands, or is creative, since the statistical processes at the base of their functioning have "nothing to do with the cognitive processes present in the animal world and, above all, in the human brain and mind, to manage semantic contents successfully" (Floridi 2023: 2). What is challenged, instead, is our uniqueness as meaning-makers and our ability to discern whether the content is produced with or without the use of AI, and therefore the concept of authorship.

Artificial intelligence's large language models and Text-to-image softwares can produce artifacts that appear to be creative, but in our view the issue of authoriality – rather than a form of metacreativity – refers to their metaoperative use. In fact, the creative aspect involved in AI art can

be traced back to the peculiar use of the machine performed by the artist, and not in the creative feature displayed by AI, as it is exclusively able to operate statistically, and not semantically. Instead, in our view is the metacreative aspect involved in the human use of AI that might foster the exercise of new forms of technical creativity (Cf. Machado, Romero and Greenfield 2021), which could extend and enhance our expressive faculties. The emergence of such possibilities raises issues and doubts, such as the risk related to the absence of authorial presence and the "mechanicality" of the creative process, which were discussed as well when photography was first invented, as it will be argued in the next paragraph.

5. *Photographies, synthographies and the issue of authorship*

In the abovementioned essay (Shusterman 2012), the author tackled the issues of the relationship between the technical reproducibility of the image and authorship. In his view, compared to other forms of art, photography is characterized by a process of mechanical reproduction, aimed at exhibiting either the photographic print or, in the case of newer technologies, the digital photographic image, and by a performative dynamic: "photography still displays a ritual dimension of performative, dramatizing process" (Shusterman 2012: 76).

The possibility to create synthesized images through text prompts minimizes the bodily performative dimensions involved in creating an image or, to use a more precise term, a synthography.

On the one hand, the creation of images through the use of linguistic prompts does not share some of the aspects that define both painting and photography, such as the tonal balance, the framing of the subjects depicted. Still, at the same time, these aspects are related to the organization of the image structure, which can be described and obtained through linguistic prompts. On the other hand, the accusations related to the absence of authorial presence and "mechanicality" characterized the history of photography since its beginning (Rubinstein 2023), and almost overlap the critics made to the idea that the creation of synthetic images through the use of Text to image softwares can be considered as a form of artistic expression.

In fact, since Niépce's heliography, the calotype processes invented by Henry Fox Talbot and the refinements made by Daguerre, the advent of photography raised aesthetic issues related to the issue of authorship, to

its mimetic relationship with reality, the redefinition of the documental value of images and its artistic value[3]. In his writings devoted to the 1859 Salon[4], Baudelaire included a critique of the photographic practice, which he considered "the refuge of every would-be painter, every painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies" (Baudelaire 1982: 20). Furthermore, the French poet criticized the mechanical character of photography and argued that, since its nature was industrial, it was completely unrelated to human imagination, and stated that "if it (the photography) be allowed to encroach upon the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary, upon anything whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man's soul, then it will be so much the worse for us!" (Baudelaire 1982: 19).

In his view, the technical process that brought to the photographic image, precisely because of its realistic character, could not have an artistic value: "Are we to suppose that a people whose eyes are growing used to considering the results of a material science as though they were the products of the beautiful, will not in the course of time have singularly diminished its faculties of judging?" (Baudelaire 1982: 20).

On the contrary, in 1855, Antoine Wiertz saluted with enthusiasm the invention of photography, as he argued that the introduction of new technological reproduction media would change the *entire character of art*: "For some years now the glory of our age has been a machine which daily amazes the mind and startles the eye. Before another century is out, this machine will be the brush, the palette, the colors, the craft, the experience, the patience, the dexterity, the sureness of touch, the atmosphere, the luster, the exemplar, the perfection, the very essence of painting" (Benjamin 2006: 526).

Some years later, in 1905, commenting on the artistic value of photography, Croce stated that "if photography has anything artistic in it, it will be to the extent that it transmits the intuition of the photographer, his point of view, the pose and the grouping which he has striven to attain" (Croce 1955: 20)[5].

Even though photography and synthographies are two different artifacts, the compared analysis of their respective characteristics and of the reactions that their invention and development raised can provide points

[3] The issue of its technical reproducibility emerged only with Talbot's calotypes (1841), since the first Daguerreotypes could not be reproduced.
[4] First published in the *Révue Française*, Paris, June 10-July 20, 1859.
[5] Our translation.

for reflection. In fact, the interweaving of enthusiastic reactions and concerns that characterized the responses of several intellectuals when photography was first invented (Costa 2008) recalls in our view several worries that the advent of synthesized images and artificial intelligence art is raising in the contemporary debate, as they both concern the issues of technological impersonality, the dependence of the artist on the technical device and the weakening of artistic authoriality[6].

Furthermore, if the development of photography in the nineteenth century heralded the emergence of new technical media with the potential to reproduce specific aspects of the human visual experience directly (Messaris 2001), in our view, the advent of synthesized images might further erode the pictorial testimony value of photography, as it is argued in the next paragraph.

6. *Post-photography, synthographies, and the erosion of images' documental value*

From an aesthetic perspective, the documental value of photography has often been challenged.

In 1936, Gisèle Freund criticized the authenticity of photography in an essay titled *La Photographie en France au XIX^e^ siècle: essai de sociologie et d'esthétique*: "Photography, although strictly linked to nature, has only factitious objectivity. The lens, the supposedly impartial eye, allows all possible distortions of reality because the character of the image is determined each time by the operator's way of seeing" (Freund 2011)[7].

Also, in the French context, in the essay *Esthétique de la photographie* François Soulages argued that – even in the cases of portraits, reportage or advertising photography – we are dealing with artificial artifacts. Therefore, the relationship between reality and representation is highly problematic and only partially driven by a mimetic process (Soulages 1998: 13-19). But only in the essay *The reconfigured eye* (1992), Mitchell described the transition into the *post-photographic era*. In his view, digital

[6] Cf. *L'intelligence artificielle va-t-elle remplacer les artistes?*, available at https://www.beauxarts.com/grand-format/lintelligence-artificielle-va-t-elle-remplacer-les-artistes/.

[7] Our translation from the original French: "La photographie, quoique strictement liée à la nature, n'a qu'une objectivité factice. La lentille, cet œil prétendu impartial, permet toutes les déformations possibles de la réalité, parce que le caractère de l'image est chaque fois déterminé par la façon de voir de l'opérateur" (Freund 2011: 7).

retouching is entirely consistent with professional photographic procedures, and manipulating visual content is just as necessary as controlling the audio information in recorded music.

The conceptual artist, theorist and photographer Joan Fontcuberta further contributed to the development of the concept of post-photography – from its original ideation as a concept pertaining to the digital to its present incarnation as a marriage of image and artificial intelligence – which is based on the idea that the image lost most of its sense of verisimilitude, validity and accountability (Fontcuberta 2015). If in the first decades of its existence "the camera acted as an instrument of truth and the archive, facilitating a mapping and 'encyclopaedifying' of knowledge" (Fontcuberta 2020: 212), in the twenty-first century such values have been eroded since the accessibility of digital images have generated "an oversaturation in which images are no longer submissive mediations between the world and us but have become active" (Fontcuberta 2020: 212).

In his view, the decrease in the documental value of the images went to the advantage of other values, such as the association of the act of photography with connectivity and communication. The concept of post-photography is related to substituting the value of memory with the value of interaction and hyper-visibility and to the idea that photography is no longer the process of "writing with light" associated with documentary and conviction aspects, but rather a universal language that everyone uses daily.

On the one hand, its continuous use substitutes the memory of the past with the nostalgia of the present, which needs to be visually documented to acquire meaning and to be validated. On the other hand, the arising phenomenon of the images that appear to us as a continuous flow is defined by the author as "the aesthetics of access", which consists of a *cascade of images*, each imprinting itself into the prolongation of the next in a perpetual movement.

According to Fontcuberta, such a sense of perpetual movement is related to the fact that digital photography and the post-photographic image rely on "an image without place and without origin: deterritorialized, it has no place because it is everywhere" (Fontcuberta 2014: 12).

Furthermore, to capture a visual frame and construct an image, photographic and digital pictures rely on informational data (patterns, logic, heat sources, and light sensitivity). This information is rendered electronically in the case of digital photography, which uses optical sensors to break down light, color, and photons. Such a characteristic, together with

the resistance to the creative intentionality typical of painting, is what most characterizes photography. Tough, unlike digital or analog photography, post-photography doesn't require a camera to create a picture; instead, it makes an image from a collection of pre-existing data.

A further aspect that goes lost in post-photography regards the relationship between the imagining-depictive function and the image detective function. In fact, according to Maynard, photography might be most characterized "as the site of historically most spectacular interaction of depictive and detective functions" (Maynard 1997: 20). In his view, photo-detective technologies are prosthetic extensions of our internal and external organic information-processing systems, which we use to monitor, control, and interact with our environments. Due to the extraordinary sensitivity of photoreceptors, the image detective function allows us to identify and record the physical circumstances of their causes by observing the minute chemical or electrical changes that light emissions and reflections induce on sensitive surfaces and storing the information that light carries.

By drawing on Walton's remarks on mimetic processes (Walton 1990), Maynard argued that the photographic depiction, which invites us to view the things they represent as we look at it, has developed as a technology characterized by a permanent process of innovation, and became the most prevalent kind of depiction throughout the world.

If the advent of digital photography re-defined the image – which moved from a permanently marked surface to a transient surface (Meo 2018) – the possibility to easily create synthographies almost indistinguishable from real photographies might separate the interaction between the detective and the depictive functions to the advantage of the latter. A particularly problematic aspect is that in the case of synthographies generated with text-to-image technologies, as opposed to depictive forms such as painting and sculpture, it is very hard to distinguish between an image that performs a detective function and one that does not perform such a function.

Concerning this aspect, it is worth noting that in the most recent edition of the Sony World Photography Award, the German artist Boris Eldagsen, head of digital at the "Deutsche Fotografische Akademie" (DFA), presented a work entitled *Pseudomnesia: the electrician* (cf. Abrams 2023), which won the creative open category. The controversial aspect lies in the fact that the artist refused the prize, affirming that the picture was AI-generated, and he used it to test the competition and to create a discussion about the future of photography. The winning image

was not a photograph, but a synthography entirely realized with the software DALL-E 2, and he presented it with the hope that it could be an occasion to create a debate on such an issue. The case described is just an example of a broader process of erosion of what remained of the visual reliability and documental value of the images, whose consequences are not easily foreseen and may well redefine the status of images and the relationship we establish with them.

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