

The Photo - A Support Practice Poetics of a Plastic Experiment around the Photographic Medium

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Abstract: Although it is the essential element in the photographic representation, since it is the surface on which a shot will be projected and a luminous imprint (trace) will be materialized, plastic research concerning sensitive photo paper as a material was very timid: they were limited to the level of representation and plasticity of the image only.

The next plastic practice would be a series of experiments through which I sought to point out the essential role of the medium (photo-sensitive paper) in the "manufacture" of the photographic image as well as the questioning of its artistic value. Above all, I wanted to open the field to experimentation in the practice of photography and to highlight the materiality of the photographic medium through the personal interventions that I carried out on this sensitive paper. The medium which was the object in which the information to be transmitted is incorporated and stored (the photographic image) will then become, following my manipulations, an object, another, bearer of materiality which will be revealed by the gesture and the repetition of the gesture. Thus the materiality of the support in itself becomes a revelation and the revelation of the materiality of the support becomes the very founding act of the photographic image, which, during this experiment, will borrow a new plastic dimension, including the principle of base will be posed on the how of a result in the concretization of the materiality of the photographic support.

Keywords: photography, manipulation, support, image, plastic art.

Introduction

Because it was immaterial and spectral, photography has often been denied the status of matter. The flatness of the

photograph, the absence of pigment, of any pasty material, led to consider it as an image. It is still considered to be the disembodied product of an operation of a

mechanical nature, the product of an eye or a mind and not of a hand capable of modulating a touch or a pattern.

Photography was in this sense considered as a transparent medium. Its process consists of the production of visible appearances while recording the trace of a luminous impression. It is the art of producing and fixing the image of objects by the action of light on certain substances 1. Hence, "any photograph will be the result of a physical imprint that has been transferred to a sensitive surface by reflections of light" 2

Its product will be an image that can only be considered the result of a purely chemical process in which the intervention of the operator cannot be assimilated to a true act of creation.

Research objectives

The next plastic practice consists of a series of experiments through which I sought to point out the essential role of the support (photosensitive paper) in the "manufacture" of the photographic image as well as the questioning of its artistic value and those through the personal interventions that I exercised on this sensitive paper.

Research issue

How to open the field to experimentation in the practice of photography and how to highlight the materiality of the photographic medium in artistic practice?

Research Methodology

In this research, I have chosen to present, a series of experiments around the

photographic medium. This is a series of varied handling of photosensitive paper through which I have tried to highlight its indispensable role in the production of the photographic image. I also sought to question the role of the hand, and to emphasize the importance of the gesture in photographic creation.

The question of support in the field of photography

In the vocabulary of the plastic arts of the twentieth century, "a support is a material that receives the trace of a tool (pencil, brush) or receives materials from a layer of paint, ink, pigments, etc., ... up to traditional elements. The supports can be classified into rigid, semi-rigid and flexible supports, or even passive supports (which are forgotten), active (which modify the trace of the tool or the material) or productive (which themselves produce the trace). 3

In the field of photography, this definition loses part of its validity. The photographic support is considered a "sensitive surface, plate or paper ... a Tabula - Rasa, a blank sheet of paper on which you can write with light 4

Photosensitive paper is a flat surface treated a priori and covered with a mixture of chemical component consisting of silver bromide crystals suspended in gelatin, also called "emulsion". The latter becomes insoluble under the action of light and will play the most important role on the properties of the surface sensitive to light rays.

Throughout the history of photography, the photographic medium has been the subject of great research by both chemists and photographers (Niepce, Talbot, Blanquard-Evrard, etc.). All had one goal: to increase the sensitivity of a surface to result in the representation of an image as true as life. Today, we are offered a wide range of photographic support which offers us the possibility of choosing the one that best suits our practices. For example, we can distinguish: soft, normal, hard, mat, glossy, semi-gloss paper, etc. Each has its own physicochemical qualities that go into the "production" of the photographic image. The history of photographic papers would thus be a history of salts and textures, written by scientists: chemists and physicists, as well as photographic researchers. Here, "the image is expressed in tactile and organic words because it lies down on a medium whose properties it marries. The image is taken in barite, halide, gelatin ... It ranges with gray, grades and grains."5

Although it is the essential element in the photographic representation, since it is the surface on which a shot will be projected and a luminous imprint (trace) will be materialized, plastic research concerning sensitive paper as a material was very timid: they were limited to the level of representation and plasticity of the image only: whether in terms of format, quality, or the nature of the photo paper. Contrary to the boom that the medium had undergone in other fields of art, and in particular that of painting

The end of the sixties saw the emergence of a group of painters who

decided to question the work of art, by questioning the medium and its plastic role. They were the New Realists, whose approach consisted in highlighting the physical materiality of the support and the surface, determining the other systems linked to the problem of pictorial representation. The surface had negated itself as an illusionist space and as a window open to the world, as it was considered in the spirit of the Renaissance. The support itself had denied itself as a landmark of the work, as a pictorial space materialized by canvas or paper ... as a surface on which the painter, using a certain number of codes plastics intervenes to animate it. The artists of this period laid bare the support and the surface to show its substance, to bring to light the physical elements essential to creation. The medium that was never shown thus became a subject of experimentation, for its texture and materiality, in order to show its physical constituents. With the new realists, the medium is the world itself, what surrounds them, and it is the choice that the artist can make of it that will give it the status of a work of art."6

In photography, the role of the photographic medium was reduced solely to a simple carrier and transmitter of visual information, to a surface which undergoes the action of light and chemical agents, just to reveal a representation, an image, a illusion.

Through this plastic practice, I try to challenge this photographic medium and bring it itself to the surface. I try to make it more active and more present in the

representation of the photographic image and even in its composition.

Poeticsof plastic experimentation:

The next step would be a series of personal experiments that I had carried out on photosensitive paper. This practice will have work as raw material: the negative recovered from two photos taken in black and white (**Fig. 1** and **Fig. 2**) as well as a varied range of sensitive photo papers each presenting different qualities (mat, gloss,) and distinct formats (18/24, 30/40,).

A practice whose process consists of a series of manual interventions on the photosensitive paper support is at the origin of all photographic productions. An experiment that would be different from what this art undergoes today: photograms, photo montages, digital photos ..., and those keeping the classic techniques and traditional means of photographic art, at the level of development and essentially at the

level of draw.

This is what I had just called **manipulation** * of the photographic medium, although the term existed in this field as early as the second half of the 1970s.

The support which was the object in which the information to be transmitted is incorporated and stored will then become, following my manipulations, an object, another, bearer of materiality which will be revealed by the gesture and the repetition of the gesture, "**a repetition of the even which is never the same**"⁷

(*) **Manipulation**: A term that had been attributed to one of the most remarkable Technical processes in the photographic field; this is "The Photogram", camera-less photos taken by exposing objects to the light of the enlarger directly on sensitive paper. Man Ray was one of the most brilliant photographic artists in the practice of this method, and his "Rayographs" have earned him the name "The Clear Room Poet."

Fig.1



Title: Regard Expression1

Date and place: September 2019- Tunisia

Camera: FUJICA - ST605

Film: Film36 Black / White 400 AZA

Format: Rectangular in Portrait mode

Size: 30 / 40cm

Support: Glossy Photo Paper

Color: Black and contrasting white

Light: Artificial

Framing, angle and lens: close-up photo with a Normal lens (perspective corresponding to human vision) and a frontal angle.



Title: Regard Expression2

Date and place: September 2019- Tunisia

Camera: FUJICA - ST605

Film: Film36 Black / White 400 AZA

Format: Rectangular in Portrait mode

Size: 30 / 40cm

Support: Matte Photo Paper

Color: Black and contrasting white

Light: Artificial

Framing, angle and lens: close-up photo with a Normal lens (perspective corresponding to human vision) and a frontal angle.

Fig.2

If I like a photo, if it confuses me, I'll linger on it. What do I do, the whole time I'm there in front of her? I look at her; I scrutinize her, as if I want to know more about the thing or the person she is presenting. "⁸

This quote from (R. BARTHES), I consider it very sensitive because it seems to better express this attachment that I felt towards each of these two shots (**Fig. 1** and **Fig. 2**), and in this practice, the great discovery for me was the photographic medium photosensitive paper. A flat surface, white, virgin at first ... but in the depths of its flatness, at the heart of its whiteness and virginity, lie a great plasticity and an infinity of possibilities. A plasticity that I had just released following a series of handling and personal intervention on the photographic medium before its exposure to the light of the enlarger

As I said at the start, photosensitive paper will now be: object, support, place and

raw material of my practice. The latter will be a field open to all kinds of gestures. A field where gesture, repetition and chance intersect until each image loses its essence, to let the medium become a material in power. The hand will thus become the essential tool of work throughout this practice. It will be both an adding and subtracting material: compared to the support (photosensitive paper), the hand will be the element that will bring it about, thus confirming its essential role in the practice of photography. On the other hand, at the level of the image, the hand will be the basic element of its defeat and, somewhere, the beginning of its disarray.

Handling of the photographic support:

Crumpling, folding, waving, tearing, will be my way of acting on the support (photosensitive paper). Although I kept the same traditional means of printing the

photos, I tried to go beyond simple plastic transposition at the same time.

This is because my approach implies openness to plasticity which was not the function of the mechanical work specific to photography. During the development and printing of the shots, all the choices were repeated: format, paper, cropping, and special effects.

In my practice, I followed the same route, but I also carried out a manual intervention on the photographic medium, before its exposure to the light of the enlarger. In the dictionary of (Synonyms and Opposites), the verb manipulate is the equivalent of: "... to handle, shape, model, feel, touch, feel, ride, express." ⁹

The crumpling of the sensitive paper was the first act in my experience. Crumpling a piece of paper is such a simple, easy, familiar gesture ... and when it relates to the photographic medium, it becomes so expressive and so productive. In the darkness of the laboratory, I took the photosensitive paper in my hand, I crumpled it ... and between my fingers, I felt its ends bending, crushing, piling up against each other, superimposing the one on top of the other ...

By force, the photo paper gradually deformed, until eventually taking a new shape. It became a relief support, presenting folds, ridges and hollows, creases ... In the enlarger, I position my manipulated support and I start the timer. This sensitive surface will be exposed to a light source, which after passing through the negative, will have to reach a goal, which in turn will project an enlarged or reduced image, that of the positive image. With my media crumpled, it wasn't. During its projection, the trajectory of the light source had undergone a deviation.

The slanted angles that had arisen on the surface of this crumpled sensitive paper had prevented light from being projected from the same angle of incidence. This light was in close and buried in the folds and sinusitis of this support and this is what I had just noticed following the revelation of this first image.

An image which had indirectly undergone the action of my crumpling gesture, because it lay down on a support which had kept in it the traces of my manual intervention, and by force, it found itself obliged to appropriate hers.

Results of the first act of manipulation (wrinkling):



Fig. 1.1



The portrait that had just appeared on the surface of that crumpled paper had transformed into a distorted, fragmented figure made up of planes that overlapped and merged into each other. It is a portrait that seemed to be born from the depths of the paper until it merges with those of its surface and then disappears between its creases.

The rustle was "the key gesture," the first spark that opened the doors wide for me to experiment. As I progressed through this series of manipulations, my hands took ease in giving new shapes and dimensions to the photographic medium I was using.

Another way of working with photosensitive paper was "folds". "Micro perceptions or representations of the world," writes DELEUZE, "are these little folds in all directions, folds in folds, surplises, according to folds 10

And my support, sensitive paper, made folds, folds, infinity of folds.

Results of the second act of manipulation (folding):

Throughout my experiences, I insisted that each of my gestures suggest its own character. I wanted to get something new out of the rehearsal. The gesture and its repetition then become the very subjects of my plastic experience.

In this third series of manipulation of the photographic medium, I proceeded to tear as a new process in my creations. My gestures were improvised and at the same time guided by moving images which occupied my mind and which I tried to release, to concretize and to materialize.

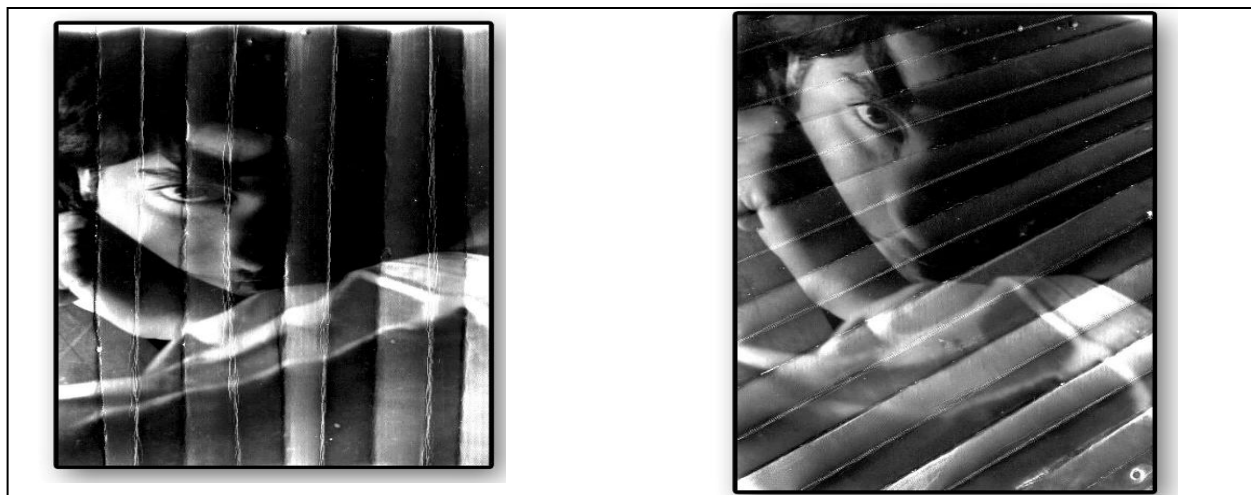


Fig.2.2



Fig.2.3



Results of the third act of manipulation (the tear)

Going from one experience to another, by changing my way of acting on the medium, i realized that this fear that I initially had for photo paper towards its fragility, its sensitivity ... had dissolved little by little, and that my hesitant hands began to take possession of the entire surface of the paper.

This is why, wanting to go to the end in my practice, I used other materials; a pointed gouge will be the tool that will accompany me throughout this new series of experiments. Using this sharp metal tool, I attacked the gelatinous surface of the

medium ... I attacked it and destroyed its shiny layer until the first layer of the paper was exposed.

Results of the fourth act of manipulation (scratching):



Fig.1.4

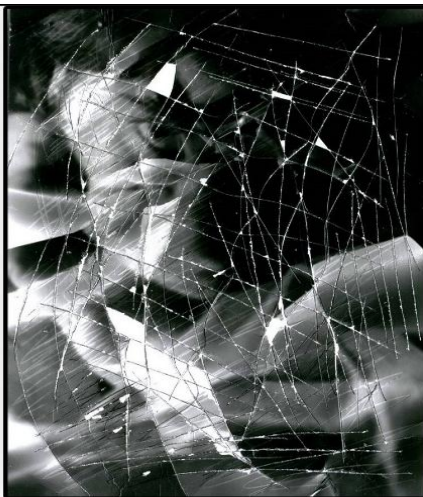
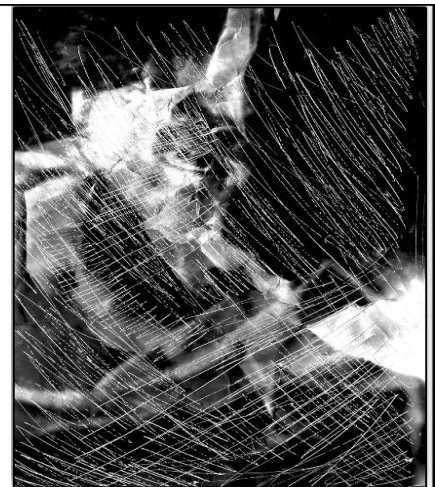


Fig.2.4



It was often said that "every print is unique and valuable, and that you never print a photo twice in the same way. "11, and in the face of these series of experiments, and the various images that I had just produced, I could only affirm this point of view.

I worked in the dark, in the dark. I crumpled, folded, scratched a white paper backing and then revealed an image. This atmosphere favored the intervention of chance and opened wide the field to unforeseen and unexpected accidents. And following the printing of the photos, the tears, the holes, the cracks... themselves become a goal to be reached, and the gestures that gave birth to them themselves become means and new work processes. Spontaneous chance turned into willed chance, manipulated chance that revealed both the image and its medium.

We thus find, the photographic medium got rid of its passivity and transformed itself into an active, productive element, also part of the composition of the image. We find it clearly imposed by its new texture and acting on the image when it is revealed.

In this practice, one arrives at a disappearance of the real image and the revelation of an unreal image. We obtain photos that appear as clusters of blots linked, juxtaposed and melted into each other. They appear as quasi-abstract, non-figurative images, far from reality and in perpetual agitation.

Conclusion

Being both subjective and objective, I tried through this self-poietic essay to describe the different stages of my practical approach and to explain the different phases of my plastic experimentation around the photographic medium, this medium which, through my manual interventions, I managed to reveal all the materiality that it was hiding and to make it my creative process. This revelation of the photographic medium had in turn led to a new revelation of the photographic image. It is an image that goes beyond the simple illustration of reality, an image that would not be a double, not a copy of reality

And following their revelations, we can conclude that, in the field of photography, the medium - sensitive paper - and the image can only work in complementarity.

During my experiments, there was a role reversal, the support becomes an image when it reveals itself on the surface and becomes part of the composition of the photo, and the image becomes a support when it becomes element carrying materiality, retaining in its form "The memory of a contact, the memory of a gesture"¹²

Photography will then become a matter of support, a true "**Support Practice**".

Acknowledgments:

The author would like to extend thanks to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Faisal University – Saudi Arabia for the

financial support under Nasher Track (Grant No206074).

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