The Metaphors of Photography and the Metaphors of Memory – Artistic Reflections on an Album of Family Photographs –

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Abstract: We can often notice that the discourse concerning photography – both in theoretic discourse and in common language – frequently tends to explain the characteristics, mechanisms, and the manner of existence of photography by transfers of terms, metaphors and imaginary constructions. Starting from this observation, the present study aims at analyzing the metaphoric language use related to photography through images such as that of the imprint, the trace, and the notion of *index*. The analysis emphasizes the similarities between these notions and the metaphors of memory used in the modern scientific terminology: *engram*, *pattern* and *memory trace*. Preserving the analogy between memory and photography, we can observe in the case of the latter, as well, the disjunction between a public memory (*semantic memory*) and an autobiographical memory (*episodical memory*). Family photography, which is the most prevalent practice in the field of photography, falls under the category of the second memory type. In the second part of the study we propose an original "reading" of the family album – an artistic/pictorial interpretation of the metaphors of photography and memory.

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The term „ Photography" is now so well known,
that an explanation of it is perhaps superflouous

William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*

The name of photography – "writing with light"

Names are the first metaphorical expressions given by man to certain things or phenomena at a particular moment. Most names were given in immemorable, ancient times, and that is why philosophers first interrogate the original meaning of words in order to get to the essence of things.

Incidentally, in the case of photography, its "ancient" times happened to take place relatively recently, hardly two centuries ago. There were enough witnesses at its birth, capable to give us an account of the events. These primordial documents are now – to photography – equivalents of founding myths and legends that sketch the understanding and build the sense of the phenomenon.

The term photo-graphy, i.e. "writing with light" contains, on a metaphoric level, what to its inventors appeared to be the essential condition for the existence of this new type of image. This term – which then became the generic name of any method of creating images using light and photosensitive substances without human intervention – appeared around June 1839, photography's official date of birth. However, this is not the only name of photography at the beginning; depending on the inventor, it was named *heliography*, *skiagraphy*, *daguerreotype* or *calotype*.

Fig.1. **Teodora Cosman**, *Running from the Shadow 9/20*, 2006, from the series *Photograms*, 50 x 70 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2006

Despite this multitude of methods and terms, we can say that, in essence, the term used to refer to photography contains two elements which are fundamental for its description and functioning. The first one is light (or its opposite and the absence thereof: shadow and darkness) which can lead us to its metaphysics and the metaphors of mystery and revelation. The second key element is the act of writing, tracing, that of the visible mark – *graphein*, or that of signing, printing, carving in depth – *tupos*: imprint-gestures involving an intimate contact with the support as well as with the thing whose trace remains visible. Therefore, in the case of the "dematerialized" images of today we always feel compelled to make the specification "digital" or "analogue" in order to clarify what type of photography we are talking about. This denotes the fact that something essential has changed in our understanding of this phenomenon, that the name of photography, that of "writing with light" does not entirely correspond to the

manner of existence of the digital images. As André Rouillé afirms, «la mal nommée «photographie numerique» n'est en aucun cas une déclinaison numérique de la photographie. Une rupture radicale les sépare: leur différence n'est pas de degré mais de nature.»[1]

Having mentioned the origins, we should also note that the first process of "writing with light" happened, according to the Bible, at Mount Sinai when God himself wrote the letters of the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone held by Moses. This probably explains the rage shown by the commentator of a German newspaper against photography: "The wish to capture evanescent reflections is not only impossible, as has been shown by thorough German investigation, but the mere desire alone, the will to do so, is blasphemy. God created man in His own image, and no man-made machine may fix the image of God. It is possible that God sould have abandoned His eternal principles, and allowed a Frenchman in Paris to give to the world an invention of the Devil? [...] If this thing were at all possible, then something similar would have been done a long time ago in antiquity by men like Archimedes or Moses. But if these wise men knew nothing of mirror pictures made permanent, then one can straightway call the Frenchman Daguerre, who boasts of such unheard of things, the fool of fools."[2]

Photography seems to bestow divine powers upon man, as Nadar himself tells us:

"How could such brilliant new ideas not fade compared to the most surprising and disturbing one among all – that which seems to offer man the power to finally be able to create through the materialization of the intangible spectrum, which disappears in a moment as a pale swirling of the water in the tank, without leaving any shadow on the crystal of the mirror?! Was man entitled to think that he was indeed creating as long as he captured and fixed the intangible, preserved the passing vision, the flashing of lightning engraved by himself in the most concrete copper?"[3]

It has been said that photography – such as it was originally conceived, as a combination of optics and chemistry – had no premise in science, not even in literary imagination. With few exceptions, there are no texts anticipating an image that could "fulfill the millenary desire of mankind to stop time, to grasp the passing moment, to capture a little part of the real image of the world,"[4] as was naively stated in a manual popularizing photography.

Therefore, it is not surprising that photography appeared to its contemporaries as one of the most surprising and mysterious inventions of the prolific 19th century, engendering countless controversies. As Nadar noted 60 years later: "the discovery of 1839 was suspect from the beginning: this mystery smelled strongly of witchcraft and was tainted

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[1] André Rouillé, *La Photographie. Entre document et art contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 12.

[2] Anon., *Leipziger Anzeiger*, towards 1840, *apud* Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (New York: Dover, 1986), 11–12. This fragment, also quoted by Walter Benjamin in his *Little History of Photography*, is however controversial, some authors denying its authenticity, see Joan Fontcuberta, *Le Baiser de Judas. Photographie et vérité* (Arles: Actes-Sud, 1996).

[3] Félix Nadar, *Când eram fotograf* (When I was a photographer) (Bucharest: Compania, 2000), 12.

[4] Eugen Iarovici, *Măiestria în fotografie* (The skilfulness in photography) (Bucharest: Ed. Tehnică, 1977).

with heresy […]. Nothing was lacking for a good witch hunt: sympathetic magic, the conjuring up of spirits, ghosts. Awesome Night-dear to all sorcerers and wizards-reigned supreme in the dark recesses of the camera, a made-to-order temple for the Prince of Darkness. It only required the slightest effort of the imagination to transform our filters into philters."[1]

Nadar was right, the mechanisms of photography, its ways of functioning and capturing images gave birth to the most surprising and phantasmagoric theories and myths, from Balzac's and Oliver Wendell Holmes' "spectrum theory" to that of the "optogram" – the retinal photography of the last image seen before death.

But beyond these unrealistic hypotheses stemming from the photographic imaginary and – in a wider sense – the scientific imaginary of the 19th century, even the "serious" affirmations on the nature of photography are tainted by the metaphorical projections sourrounding it. This photographic "imaginary" that characterizes the common ideas about photography was maintained throughout the 20th century mostly by the theory of photography itself. It was preserved through the notions of *index*, trace, imprint, or by identifying photography with some of its functions, those of *souvenir*, relic, etc.[2]

Most photographs are considered dull images having no qualities except for those of capturing and delivering, respectively, a small fragment of reality. This way the lack of aesthetic qualities is compensated by the "truth" contained in a photograph – a truth that does not belong to the image but to a so-called unalterable and irreducible reality, presumably bound up with its origins – the "*ça-a-été*" of Roland Barthes. As Régis Durand states, "A partir du moment où elle est considérée comme un art mnémonique (quel que soit le sens exact que l'on mette derrière ce terme), on a affaire à un dispositif instable, un dispositif de captation et de projection imaginaires, dont les termes mêmes sont en variation constante."[3]

According to Lucian Blaga, "the direct expression of a fact is always a more or less dim abstraction. Herein lies the congenital deficiency of direct expression. The plenitude of the fact calls for a compensation due to the deficiency of the direct expression. This compensation is achieved through indirect expressions, through the transfer of terms, through metaphors."[4]

Photography is often presented as a visual translation of the "direct expression". Compared to the richness of metaphoric and stylistic content of a painting, for example - an image constructed from the beginning in a symbolic "language" and filtered through the subjectivity of its creator, no matter how "realistic" it may be - photographs seem to

[1] Nadar, *Când eram fotograf*, 13.

[2] I refer to some of the most famous texts about photography, among them André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'Image photographique," in *Qu'est ce le cinéma?* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 9–17; Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977); Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Ed Cahiers du Cinéma Gallimard Seuil, 1980).

[3] Régis Durand, *Le Temps de l'image. Essai sur les conditions d'une histoire des formes photographiques* (Paris: La Difference, 1995), 36.

[4] Lucian Blaga, "Geneza şi sensul culturii" (The Genesis and Meaning of Culture), in *Trilogia Culturii* (The Trilogy of Culture) (Bucharest: E.L.U., 1969), 276–282.

suffer from an ontological deficiency in the eyes of those who consider them as being the simple capturing of reality (notwithstanding any construction that might be present in the photograph). "I wasn't sure that Photography existed, that it had a «genius» of its own", says Barthes. "The event is never transcended for the sake of something else: it always reduces the corpus I need to the body I see."[1]

The discourse about photography (the one that reproduces the standard ideas about photography) often uses a metaphoric language in order to compensate the shortcomings of photography as "direct expression", the originary deficiency resented about the nature of photography. Therefore, due to its ontological precariousness, to its lack of substance, the photograph is a transparent image that often does not allow us to talk about its very self (as an artistic, aesthetic and mostly fictional object!), but only about a certain reality behind it, surrounding it or being even in front of it, within a dialogue between the viewer and the subject of the image. In short, because of the apparently non-fictional content of the photographic image, its verbalization always gives way to metaphors and fiction.

Among the most frequently used metaphors about photography are the ones related to memory – either by taking into account its function of preserving a disappeared / absent / presumably disappearing reality, its function of personal or family souvenir, its role in the process of mourning, etc., or through analogies between the mechanisms of photography and the mechanisms of memory.

Metaphors of photography and metaphors of memory: *memory as an imprint.*

In order to be able to represent and explain this mysterious and fundamental capacity of the "human soul", i.e. that of memory, people have used various metaphors. For example, "I would have you imagine, then, that there exists in the mind of man a block of wax, which is of different sizes in different men; harder, moister, and having more or less purity in one than another, and in some of an intermediate quality", says Socrates in *Theaetetus*, and continues: "Let us say that this tablet is a gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses; and that when we wish to remember anything which we have seen, or heard, or thought in our own minds, we hold the wax to the perceptions and thoughts, and in that material receive the impression of them as from the seal of a ring; and that we remember and know what is imprinted as long as the image lasts; but when the image is effaced, or cannot be taken, then we forget and do not know."[2]

Aristotle also employs the metaphor of the imprint: "One might ask how it is possible that though the affection (the presentation) alone is present, and the (related) fact absent, the latter – that which is not present – is remembered. (The question arises), because it is clear that we must conceive that which is generated through sense-perception in the sentient soul, and in the part of the body which is its seat – that affection the state whereof we call memory – to be some such thing as a picture. The process of movement (sensory stimulation) involved the act of perception stamps in, as

[1] Roland Barthes, *Camera Luminoasă. Însemnări despre fotografie* (Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography) (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2005), 11–12.
[2] Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/plato/p71th/theaetetus.html (accessed January 12, 2012).

it were, a sort of impression of the percept, just as persons do who make an impression with a seal."[1]

Even the terminology related to memory employed by modern science preserves the traces of these metaphorical definitions: the notion of *engram* designating the hypothetical change having occured in the neural tissue that accounts for the persistence of memory,[2] or that of the neural *pattern*,[3] call to mind the "impression with the seal" or the *trace* left by memory (*memory trace*).

The photographic discourse also uses the metaphor of the imprint in order to explain its functioning: "Dans la chambre obscure se reflètent les objets extérieurs avec une verité sans égale; mais la chambre obscure ne produit rien pour elle-même; ce n'est pas un tableau, c'est un miroir dans lequel rien ne reste. Figurez-vous, maintenant, que le miroir a gardé l'empreinte de tous les objets qui s'y sont reflétés, vous aurez une idée à peu près complète du *Daguerotype*."[4] Photography is conceived through an analogy with memory, as an "external memory", more reliable than the natural one: "Si je n'ose en ce moment vous parler de ces lieux, j'en emporte avec moi l'empreinte précieuse et incontestablement fidèle, que le temps ni l'espace ne peuvent affaiblir",[5] notes Joseph Philibert Girault de Prangey.

In the 19th century, research on memory began to emphasize that this is a biological fact carried out independently of man's conscious capacity of remembering things: "Ecartons pour le moment l'élément psychique, sauf à l'étudier plus loin; réduisons la problème à ses données les plus simples, et voyons comment, en dehors de toute conscience, un état nouveau s'implante dans l'organisme, se conserve et se reproduit: en d'autres termes, comment, en dehors de toute conscience, se forme une mémoire."[6]

Contrary to tradition, which considers memory a psychic fact or a "faculty of the soul", the assumption of it being external to human consciousness allows for analogies with other organic processes (e.g. the latent image formed on the retina) or even inorganic ones. For example, "les vibrations lumineuses pouvaient être en quelque sorte emmagasinées sur une feuille de papier et persister à l'état de vibrations silencieuses pendant un temps plus moins long, prêtes à paraître à l'appel d'une substance révélatrice."[7]

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[1] Aristotle, *On Memory and Reminiscence*, trans. J. I. Beare, in Internet Classics Archive, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/memory.html (accessed January 12, 2012).

[2] Cf. Yadin Dudai, *Memory from A to Z, keywords, concepts and beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[3] See Mircea Miclea, "Sistemele Mnezice" (The Mnesic Systems), in *Psihologie Cognitivă. Modele teoretico-experimentale* (Cognitive Psychology. Theoretical–experimental Models) (Iaşi: Polirom, 1999), 189–236.

[4] Jules Janin, "Le Daguerotype", in *La Photographie en France. Textes et Controverses: une Anthologie 1816-1871*, ed. André Rouillé (Paris: Macula, 1989), 46–51.

[5] J. Ph. Girault de Prangey, 1844, fragment quoted on the website of the exhibition dedicated to him by the Musée Gruérien, Bulle (Suisse), "Miroirs d'Argent. Daguerréotypes de Girault de Prangey", http://www.musee-gruerien.ch/fr/museum/index2_3.htm (accessed January 12, 2012).

[6] Th. Ribot, *Les Maladies de Mémoire* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1909), 3.

[7] Jules Bernard Luys, *Le Cerveau et ses Fonctions* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie, 1879), 105–106.

The researchers investigating the functions of the brain and memory, similarly to many scientists from the middle of the 19th century, introduce photography (as a new "imaging" technique) in their researches. Thus, the neurologist J. Bernard Luys used photography to create an iconography of the nervous centres, applying it not only as a tool but also as an experimental and analogic model of the functioning of memory: "D'un autre côté, la pratique journalière de la reproduction photographique par le collodion sec n'est-elle pas une démonstration péremptoire de l'aptitude qu'ont certaines substances, douées d'une sensibilité élective spéciale, à conserver les traces persistantes des vibrations lumineuses qui les ont sollicitées pendant un certain temps? – Que fait-on en effet quand on expose aux rayons lumineux une plaque de collodion sec et que plusieurs semaines après l'exposition à la lumière on développe l'image latente qu'elle contient? – On fait surgir des ébranlements persistants, on recueille un souvenir de soleil absent."[1]

Like memory, photography seizes, preserves and reproduces for the present an image from the past. According to this mechanistic thinking (which ignores the fact that memory is composed of dynamic relations that have the logic of living things), photography appears as a perfect analogue of memory, and this way an inversion of terms takes place: photography, a recent invention, becomes a functional model of memory: "in the case of young children, the impressionability of the brain substance has such a nature that it is able to preserve, *motu proprio*, all the asalting impressions as passively as a sensitized photographic plate which, once exposed to light, captures all the images reflected on its surface."[2]

Within photography's theoretic discourse, its "official" status as an imprint was established at the end of the 1970s, through the notion of *index*, adopted by Rosalind Krauss from the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. Krauss states that "Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object. Its separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of this physical genesis, one that seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most paintings."[3]

In recent years the notion of *index* and implicitly that of the imprint have lost currency, particularly when confronted with the evidence offered by digital photography (the functioning of which having no more to do with the physical imprint of a given reality on the photosensible surface) and with the new techniques of processing images (which occur in the text of an image, creating it as a painting but without changing its nature).

As obsolete as this notion may now be, the undisputed fact is that for a long period in photography's history, from its beginnings in 1839 until the 1990s, the imprint metaphor played a fundamental role, thus having its rightful place in the history of *the ideas about photography*, whose echoes are still pervading contemporary discourse. Thus, if the advent of digital technology may have generated a new array of image-related metaphors and myths, contemplating photographs from the pre-digital age, such as the family album photographs, is still able to foment an imaginary of memory, of the luminous imprint, of the touch, and of the temporal overlapping of past and present.

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[1] Ibid., 106.
[2] Ibid., 126.
[3] Rosalind Krauss, Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, *October* 3 (1977): 68–81, 75.

Fig. 2. **Teodora Cosman**, *Cathching the Shadow 7/12,* from the series *Photograms*, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 50 X 60 cm, 2006.

Memory as archive: the family album

As Endel Tulving points out, the notion of memory designates both in everyday speech and in scientific jargon not only a way of "imprinting" information but various other concepts as well, for example: memory as the neurocognitive capacity to encode, store and display information, memory as a hypothetical depository where information is kept, memory as the information itself kept in this depository or as property of this information, and finally, memory as the individual's conscious capacity to remember things.[1]

One of the most important purposes of photography is to preserve "in the archives of our memory" all "precious things whose form will disappear."[2] Baudelaire's metaphor used here is that of the photographic archive as global memory, a potential store-house of the knowledge accumulated by mankind.

[1] See Endel Tulving, "Concepts of memory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, ed. Endel Tulving and Fergus I. M. Craik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33–43.
[2] Charles Baudelaire, "Le public moderne et la photographie," *Études Photographiques* 6, (1999), http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/index185.html

A special type of archived memory is that of family photographs: being the most widespread and popular practice of photography, they have, quantitatively, the largest share in the whole photographic corpus.

As Roland Barthes stated, "To see oneself (differently from in a mirror): on the scale of History, this action is recent; [...] Odd that no one has thought of the *disturbance* (to civilization) which this new action causes."[1]

Before the advent of photography, mankind had no other means than the mirror and, of course, the reflections on the water, for contemplating their own image. Between the viewer/subject and the conventional portrait (to which only a small number of privileged people had access) came the always imperfect and subjective hand of the artist. Nevertheless – and paradoxically, because a whole tradition foreshadowed this vocation – the very inventors and promoters of photography considered it unlikely to be able to capture the human figure.

Due to the long exposure time required in taking a photograph, people and their movements seemed impossible to capture. With the subsequent upgrades of the photographic process, it was possible to reduce exposure time to 1–2 minutes. This and the use of devices for holding heads in photo studios, made the human figure become the most privileged domain of photography. The daguerreotype portrait remained, nevertheless, a "luxury item", a unique and fragile piece, with its precious, relic-like aspect, which played a special role from the perspective of early family photographs:

"It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty."[2]

It was only when the use of photographic processes on paper became widespread, in the second half of the 19th century, that photographs became cheaper and easier to obtain: from cult images they became objects of consumption.

"A partir de ce moment, la société immonde se rua, comme un seul Narcisse, pour contempler sa triviale image sur le métal" – asserts Baudelaire disdainfully, and continues – "des miliers des yeux avides se penchaient sur les trous du stéréoscope comme sur les lucarnes de l'infini. L'amour de l'obscénité, qui est aussi vivace dans le coeur naturel de l'homme que l'amour de soi-même, ne laissa pas échapper une si belle occasion de se satisfaire."[3] Nevertheless, his manifesting contempt for photography did not prevent Baudelaire from becoming the subject of some very successful portraits![4]

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[1] Barthes, *Camera Luminoasă. Însemnări despre fotografie*, 17–18.

[2] Walter Benjamin, "Opera de artă în epoca reproducerii mecanice" (The Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction), in *Iluminări* (Illuminations) (Cluj: Idea Design&Print, 2002), 101–131, 115.

[3] Baudelaire, *Le Public moderne et la photographie.*

[4] At this point, where those fond of photography could have formed a rather negative impression about the "poet of modern life", seeing in him the main enemy of photography, we have to specify that he did not have a unilateral opinion about photography. In a different famous passage of the text, he also enumerates its merits. Additionally, he was a good friend of Nadar and he frequently visited his studio, where – as we know – the first impressionist exhibition took place in 1874. Baudelaire's aversion was not specificly adressed against photography, but against the

The two forms of photography incriminated here represent the first great comercial successes: the *carte-de-visite* portrait and the stereoscopic photograph.

The first form of photography, mass-produced and accessible to the large public, was the *carte-de-visite*, patented by Eugène Disderi in the year 1854. It was a photo-portrait of small dimensions, easy and cheap to produce, destined to be collected in albums (even the portraits of contemporary personalities were collected).[1] Stereoscopy, which was very popular from the 1850s to the beginning of the 20th century, is a photo-viewing tehnique similar to that of the 3D movies today. Two photographs of the same scene – taken from slightly different angles – are used and introduced into a device called stereoscope, which imitates binocular vision, thus resulting in a three-dimensional effect. In this period stereoscopy was often associated to pornography because erotic images were also made using this technique.

Eventually, the replacement of metal plates with paper photographs made them accessible to the less wealthy strata of the population, to such an extent that by the end of the 19th century almost anybody could afford a photographic portrait. In 1889 Kodak launched the first rollfilm camera destined for the use of amateurs.

Similarly to Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin saw a "decline of taste" in popularizing and trivializing photography:

"This was the time photograph albums came into vogue. They were most at home in the chilliest spots, on occasional tables or little stands in the drawing room—leather-bound tomes with repellent metal hasps and those gilt-edged pages as thick as your finger, where foolishly draped or corseted figures were displayed: Uncle Alex and Aunt Riekchen, little Trudi when she was still a baby, Papa in his first term at university . . . and finally, to make our shame complete, we ourselves—as a parlor Tyrolean, yodeling, waving our hat before a painted snowscape, or as a smartly turned-out sailor, standing rakishly with our weight on one leg, as is proper, leaning against a polished door jamb.."[2]

This text, written in the 1930s, shows that photography was already a common reference, an experience generalized at the society level, especially in urban areas. Moreover, Walter Benjamin includes in his (short) "history of photography" his own experience related to family photographs.

Before the 1930s, cameras were big and unwieldy, and this is why studio photography was prevalent. A particularly popular genre was that of the "postcard" destined to be sent to distant relatives or given to people as a gift.

World War I caused an increase in photographic activity: the photographs of those who had gone into the line were the proof that they were still alive; the wives and children were also photographed – perhaps for the first time – in order for the father to have a reminder of them.

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perversion of public taste (the public of art *salons*), by the excessive taste for "realism", an idea that dates back to the period previous to the appearance of photography, and which was only intensified by it. In another essay of Baudelaire we find the same virulence, this time addressed towards a "traditional" form of art, that of sculpture.

[1] See Mary Warner-Marien, *Photography. A cultural history* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2002), 84–85.

[2] Benjamin*, Petite Histoire de la photographie.*

Fig. 3. **Teodora Cosman**, *Untitled (Harlequin)*, from the series *The Memories of the New Man*, 100 x 90 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2008

Beginning from the 1920–30s, cameras became more accessible and user-friendly, so wealthy families could now make their own family photographs. Children began to have an increasingly important place in the parents' photographical activities.

The real democratization of photography began to take place in the 1960s, when cameras got into almost all (Western) families, becoming a real consumer product.[1] The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, states in his classical study on the social uses of photography (published in 1965):

"It appears that there is nothing more regulated and conventional than photographic practice and amateur photographs: in the occasions which give rise to

[1] I took over this chronology from Sylvain Maresca's article, "L'Introduction de la photographie dans la vie quotidienne. Éléments d'histoire orale", *Études Photographiques* 15 (2004), 61–67, the study being realized in France. Even though in Romania there are no studies of this type, by simply studying some collections of family photographs we can note that the evolution is similar in our country, as well.

photography, such as the objects, places and people photographed or the very compositions of the pictures, everything seems to obey implicit canons which are very generally imposed and which informed amateurs or aesthetes notice as such, but only to denounce them as examples of poor taste or technical clumsiness."[1]

The study coordinated by Bourdieu influenced the artists of the period in their quest for models outside the artistic canon, due to the fact that it was the first one treating photographs not from the aesthetical point of view but from that of the social artifact, the expression of regularities and standards accepted and shared by society. Boltanski, for example (who knew first hand the ideas presented in the study through his brother, Luc Boltanski, one of the authors), carried out with his partner, Anette Messager, *The wedding trip* in Venice, mimicking the typical touristic photographs of this kind of trips.

Other artists, such as Allan Sekula, were interested in "reading" different registries of this type of archive in order to extract the generally valid principles regulating it. In *Meditations on a Triptych* he uses photographs taken from his own family album, attributing them the value of archaeological documents, based on which the author tries to rebuild the family background and social context that motivates their existence and to which they serve as a sign.

"Years later, the photograph reappears in an almost archaeological light. What meanings were once constructed here? What ideas and desires directed this project? Who spoke, who listened, who spoke with a voice not their own? I want to give what was once familiar an exemplary strangeness."[2]

In all these "sociological" approaches which, starting from a fragment, tend to draw conclusions about the whole social corpus, we can observe the discrepancy between the impersonal and distant way of treating photographic documents and the strong emotivity of the real encounter with the actual person's own family photographs. This is one of the paradoxes of vernacular photography: that of being extremely personal souvenirs and, at the same time, the expression of some social and domestic conventions.

Regarded as a social practice, family photography is nothing more than a set of stereotypical images that infinitely repeat attitudes and situations. This is due to the discrepancy between the two types of memory invested in them. According to Endel Tulving, there is a disjunction between *episodic memory*, the memory of autobiographical events, and *semantic memory*, the memory of general knowledge. Thinking from the perspective of the analogy between photography and memory, we could make the distinction between family photography as personal, autobiographical (episodic) memory and the rest of photography as public (semantic) memory. Thus, for example, the knowledge that Robert Capa was a great photographer and that he documented the Spanish Civil War is generally shared information, related to the semantic memory; similarly, his famous picture of *A confederate soldier dying* is a photograph that became part of the collective memory. In turn, the photographs that record private events, from the domestic or private life, like those of anniversaries, holidays, etc. (e.g. the photograph in

[1] Pierre Bourdieu et al., *Photography. A Middle-brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 7.
[2] Allan Sekula, "Meditations on a Triptych," in David Campany*, Art and Photography* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 210–212.

Tyrolean costume described by Walter Benjamin, or our own childhood photos) correspond to the autobiographical or episodic memory.

According to Endel Tulving's definition, "episodic memory is a recently evolved, late developing and early deteriorating, past-oriented memory system, and probably unique to humans. It makes possible mental «time travel» through subjective time, from the present to the past and to the future, and it allows re-experiencing, through autonoietic awarness, experiences as such."[1]

Thus, when we treat family photographs from an external perspective, as a type of anthropological documents, only semantic memory, the memory of general and shared knowledge is implied. This explains the indifference, or at least the "scientific" interest towards the photographs of others. Thus, just as our own photographs – however trivial – may appear significant to us, so can other people's photographs leave us completely indifferent. This is so because we invest in them the second type of memory, the autobiographical memory. This is what Roland Barthes does in his book *Camera Lucida* published in 1980 and written shortly after his mother's death. Barthes offers here a profound meditation on photography and implicitly on family photographs, on the way they touch us and "puncture" us. There is a real labour of mourning sublimated into text, the discovery of the "true" image of his mother having the value of a revelation. Here is one of the most famous readings of the family album:

"There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I had loved. And I found it.

The photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called a Winter Garden in those days. My mother was five at the time (1898), her brother seven. [...] I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. [...]"[2]

Here photographs clearly become "instruments of time travel" through the regressive reading of the photographic archive, a subjective time that exceeds the author's own biography.

As "episodic memory is the only memory system whose explicit function is that of allowing the individual to re-experience (to remember) the subjectively experienced time,"[3] the family archive allows us to subjectively experience a past that is not our own but which we "appropriate" by the means of memory and fiction.

A beautiful metaphor related to the internalized and fictionalized perception of family memories was created by the American artist Anthony Goicolea, through his diptych of a family reunion (*Supper Diptych*), painted in the form of a black & white photograph and its negative.[4] In fact, this "reunion" is realized by processing several different photographs representing all the relatives of the artist, whom he rounds up and

[1] Endel Tulving, "Origins of Autonoiesis in Episodic Memory," in Henry L. Roediger et al., *The Nature of Remembering* (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001), 17–34.
[2] Barthes, *Camera Luminoasă. Însemnări despre fotografie*, 28.
[3] Tulving, *Origins of Autonoiesis in Episodic Memory*, 17–34.
[4] See artist Anthony Goicolea's personal website, http://www.anthonygoicolea.com/NewAnthonySite/related_drawings/related_drawing_index.html.

places at the same table. This is an enactment of how the photographic family archive "brings together" different people, temporalities and places, connected by the unseen strings of memory and blood.

Fig. 4. **Teodora Cosman**, *Monumentum*, from the series *Jeux de Mémoire*, 50 x 70 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2010

The metaphors of memory in the personal artistic project

In the following, we propose an original "reading" of the photographic archive, filtered trough our own experience related to the family photographs, and pictorially thematized throughout several years within the personal artistic practice. It is a meditation achieved by various means – texts, images – on the family photographs, how they work as an archive and the types of memory that they trigger.

The analogy between photography and memory, based on the metaphor of the imprint, was the starting point of this artistic exercise begun in 2006, with the series of works generically labeled "photograms". These paintings, based on family photographs, were the "visible and tangible traces of these persons and things, of their existence on this earth."[1]

The word *photogram* actually means two different things. First, it is a cameraless photographic process, the image being obtained by placing objects directly on the photosensitive surface: the result is a kind of bright shadow of things on a dark

[1] Teodora Cosman, "Amintirea locuieşte într-o cutie de pantofi" (The memory lives in a shoebox), in the catalogue of the exhibition *Photograms* (Sibiu: Galeriile Passe-Partout, 2007), 2–3.

background. The first photographic specimens obtained by William Henry Fox Talbot were such *skiagraphs*, as he called them, that is "writing with shadow". Experimental and avant-garde photography rediscovered this proto-photographic technique during the period between the two world wars. Among those who used it, claiming the paternity of the invention, are Christian Schad, as "schadograms" and Man Ray, as "rayograms".

In the second sense, borrowed from the language of cinema, photograms are the still sequences caught on film that, run very quickly and side by side, reconstruct the fluidity of movement. The name "photograms", which I have chosen to describe my paintings, holds both meanings of the word.

First, photograms, as real imprints of objects that left their "shadows" on the photosensitive surface, are images that work by analogy with the engram, with the trace of memory, an imprinted image that can be reactivated by recall. The notion of imprint is a paradoxical one, because in it the ideas of uniqueness and multiplicity are equally found: on the one hand, it is the unique mark of something that cannot be repeated (as the fingerprint), and, on the other hand, it is a generating matrix that can produce multiple copies. As a method, the imprint is present in many reproductive techniques, such as printing and engraving techniques, negative–positive photographic processes, serigraphy and even ceramic or metal casting.

Initially, our "photograms" were designed as image sequences, usually unfolded horizontally in the manner of photographic film frames. The series *Fuga după umbră* (Chasing the shadow) (2006) and *Prinderea umbrei* (Catching the Shadow) (2006) are designed to reproduce the same image 20, respectively 12 times, noted with 1/20, 2/20, 3/20 etc. (Fig. 1, 2.), in the manner of the graphic works, reproducible in series. Their horizontal exposure suggests a temporal reading, in an apparent contradiction with the repetitiveness of the images. In fact, this kind of unfolding only stages one of the basic memory processes, namely the retrieval[1] or, in a more poetic sense, the "eternal return" of the Same.

Our way of processing the photographic material is reminiscent of memory's selection and synthesis processes. The initial image, a photograph of a child at the beach, for example, is modified by increasing the contrast and brightness, thereby producing an emaciated image, reduced to the essence, a "shadow of the image". The outlines of the new image is reproduced manually on surfaces of the same format, but prepared differently. The original picture is therefore used as an image-matrix generating a chain of successive images evoking recollections in memory of the experienced event.

Formal similarities between these "photograms" and mechanical reproduction techniques lead inevitably to the Andy Warhol serigraphs. Screen printing is a method of impression similar to the stencil, involving in its preliminary stages the use of photographic processes. There is an intentional dialogue between our method and Warhol's serigraphs, especially the early ones (1961–1964), when he adopts serious issues that do not resemble the "glamourous" path his work takes later, issues such as death and mourning, hitting celebrities (the series *Marilyn*, *Jackie*) and anonymous individuals as well (*Tuna fish disaster*, *Saturday Disaster*). Since 1962, Warhol has exclusively adopted this photomechanical reproduction technique in which the intervention of the artist's hand is not necessary. Unlike Warhol, our works, though

[1] See Miclea, *Psihologie Cognitivă. Modele teoretico-experimentale*, 228–230.

repetitive, are made exclusively by manual means, moreover, each of them is as much the result of chance as that of conscious construction, which renders them unique and unrepeatable.

We would like to emphasize the image character of these paintings, as opposed to the object called *tableau*, the traditional support for painting within the common conception of art. The painting, as a rectangular object to be hung on the wall, has a precise genesis in the history of art, and coincides with the birth of the modern conception of art, as it was developed in the Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti, and triumphs within the modernist meditation on the flatness of the picture plane and its limitations[1]. Any deviation from the "canon" is implicitly a questioning of traditional pictorial representation.[2] Indeed, the form of the "tableau", as we know it, is not a culmination but a phase in the development of human creativity. The very special nature of the photographic material constituting the source of our work allows us to substract them from the hegemony of the picture plane as an autonomous, self-sufficient object, functioning by its own laws in the rectangular space within its frame, regardless of the context in which it was created or set.

Photographs, family photographs in particular, resist the common conception about the artistic image, as they are never entirely pure aesthetic objects, fully constructed and fictitious. They always remain in touch with the subject represented by their function of souvenir, of *monumentum* of a person or thing.

The material used as support for our paintings is not the traditional linen stretched on the chassis, but a synthetic fabric, very thin, transparent, requiring special preparation prior to the application of the drawing. Thus, random accidents due to prior surface preparation are combined in an unexpected and felicitous way with the almost mechanical application of the motif. The result is a fragile object, an almost floating image, suspended midway between painting and hologram, an image-object that depends heavily on how it is manipulated. This image-object refers, by its materiality, to relics obtained by miraculous impressions, like the veil of St. Veronica and the Shroud of Turin, and is reminiscent of the cult of the unique image, of the image-object that characterizes family photography. (This contradicts the common idea that the specificity of "modern" photography would be its reproducibility. In fact, in many cases, as for example the family photograph, the image is preserved in a single copy, often damaged by handling and more permeated with sentimental value – take for example, the photographs of the loved ones we keep in our wallets.)

The redundant repetition of the source image (its false reproducibility) – a family photo album – is only apparent. We actually create a chain of similar images, but not equal to each other, suggesting memory's retrieval and corrections made on the event once lived, whose coloring changes depending on the context of remembering. A unique event is thus recreated with each layer of remembrance, and the resulting image obtained by superimposing all these "sheets", becomes a self-fiction, a story that we tell about ourselves. The unfolding of these sheets metaphorically represents a "sampling"

[1] See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist painting," *Art and Literature* 4 (spring 1965).

[2] On this subject see Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Instaurarea tabloului. Metapictura în zorii Timpurilor Moderne* (The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting) (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1999).

of memory, as if the infinitesimally thin sections of gray substance that the image is printed upon could be removed and offered to sight, as a microscope slide.

The matricial image can be understood symbolically and not only procedurally. Our painting work is organized around several themes, which could be called archetypal: childhood – *Running from the Shadow* (Fig.1.), *Catching the Shadow* (Fig. 2.), *Prolongation of a thought*, *Untitled (Harlequin)* (Fig.3.), etc., birth as the beginning of life but also "nativity" as an iconic theme in the history of art – *Triptych* (Fig. 5.), *Photograms*, *Monumentum* (fig. 4.), the "eternal feminine" – *The Three Graces* (Fig. 6.), *Triptych*, *Ah! Mamaia*, and happiness – *The Last New Years' Eve* (Fig. 7.). Each of them represents one typical aspect of human life, but also a cultural and social aspiration that is reflected in vernacular photography.

So the presented "stories" are not mere biographical accidents but general human issues, a reflection on our singular existence which is however repeatable on the level of the species, bearing the imprint of our mortal condition. Family photographs, by their stereotypical representation, highlight the similarity of gestures and poses, of situations and moments, lived and relived in the same and yet different ways by each generation, its particular themes including especially wedding photography, childbirth, childhood and growth, family reunions, vacations and trips, etc.

The matricial image that is most often present in our creation, perhaps the most fertile in memory, the source of creativity and of generating new images, is that of childhood. This is what Durand says: "That is the aesthetic «halo» which adorns childhood, childhood being always and everywhere a memory of childhood, being the archetype of the euphemic being that ignores death, because everyone was a child before becoming a mature man... [...] The nostalgia of childhood experience is consubstantial to the nostalgia of existence. While childhood is objectively anesthetic, because it does not need to resort to art to oppose a mortal destiny it does not know about, any childhood memory, due to its double power and prestige that is conferred by the lack of primary concern, on the one hand, and on the other by memory, is from the beginning a work of art."[1]

It is interesting how childhood is fictionalized in the case of those artists who did not have a "normal" childhood, such as, for example, Christian Boltanski. This artist, marked by the neurosis of his family, was a special child, almost autistic, and a total social misfit (he did not even attend school) until the early years of maturity.[2] Thus, many of his works, especially the early ones, are attempts to recover the lost childhood by the "reconstruction" of gestures, objects, contexts, with the fervor of a collector of trivia. In reality, all these are auto-fictions, the references to the artist's childhood being total fantasies, the documents are often illegible and an obvious hoax. The mechanism of constructing a fictitious childhood, fitted into the accepted and standard rules through photographs, is exposed by the artist himself, who thus deconstructs the so-called "evidence" of photography.

In a sense, any autobiography is fictitious, "as memory, allowing the return of past hardships, partly authorizes the repair of the difficulties of that time. Memory is

[1] Gilbert Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului* (The anthropological structures of the imaginary) (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1998), 401–402.

[2] See Catherine Grenier and Christian Boltanski, *La Vie Possible de Christian Boltanski* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2010).

really part of the domain of fantasy, because it appoints aesthetic memory."[1] Memory selects and classifies, synthesizes and simplifies, reconstructs the event starting from a mere fragment (picture), it returns and corrects, illuminates some trite moments with the aura of nostalgia, and gives them a mythical tint. The same thing happens in "reading" family photographs: there is a fictionalized reconstitution of the real event, colored with affection present towards the contemplated subject. In this respect, the whole "work of memory" reflected in our creation project is essentially an autobiographical and genealogical fiction in which family photographs participate in a "memory game" wherein each viewer is invited to find herself or himself.

Another layer of memory considered in our artistic project is the "genealogical" one, or an extension of the personal memory, which includes not only autobiographical events but appropriates family memory, transmitted from generation to generation, the "stories" contained in the photographic album, recounted by elders or hermetically sealed forever in a small rectangular space of a small enigma in black and white. Through the *Triptych* from 2007, I created such a metaphor for genealogical memory, joining three photographs of the same event (the birth of the first child), each made from one generation away. (Fig. 5.)

As stated by professor dr. Negoiță Lăptoiu, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Photograms*, this "ingenious Triptych" is an "opportunity to stress the individual specificity seen through the prism of the succession of generations, which is the obvious symptom of the perpetuation of the hereditary dowry generous in beauty, nobility, and personalized distinction."[2]

This triptych structure, form of art with religious connotations, reveals not only the "sacred" nature of the represented scene, but also the presence of triple layers of memory.

The first layer is the autobiographical memory: the miracle of birth repeated on the level of three successive generations: the left panel is modeled after a photo from 1948, the middle one after a photo from 1978, and the right one after a photo from 2006.

A second layer of memory is the genetic imprint transmitted from generation to generation: the newborn of every image becomes a mother in the following image. This succession of generations suggests an infinite continuity both in one sense and in the other, the hallucinatory vision of the chain of being eversince the beginning of mankind until the end of time. One's emplacement in a lineage gives one a feeling of security from the torment of existence, a feeling of temporal continuity that goes beyond the boundaries of our individual life.

Just as the being is generated and also generates other beings, so can we talk about a "generation" of images. In our case, each image makes the next one possible, just as every human being makes the next one possible.

[1] Durand, *Structurile Antropologice ale Imaginarului*, 401.

[2] Negoiță Lăptoiu, "Misterul unor fascinante dezvăluiri" (The Mystery of Some Fascinating Revelations), in the catalogue of the exhibition *Photograms* (Sibiu: Galeriile Passe-Partout, 2007).

Fig.5. **Teodora Cosman**, *Tripthych*, from the series *Photograms*,
3 pieces 70 x 50 cm each, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2007

A third layer of memory is that of cultural stereotype, the custom of mother and newborn photography in the early days of its existence. Studying several family albums, I found that there is a pattern of photographing this eternal situation which is repeated (with minor differences) from generation to generation. Moreover, most family albums begin with this iconic, inaugural image of childbirth and the chronicle of its first years, which provides the occasion for creating the album.

In terms of a "history of iconography" the image of "nativity" repeated in millions of photo albums could be considered as the "spontaneous generation" of the same archetypal mother: the icon of the Virgin and the Child. As one of the sacred stories most commonly shown, the figure of the *Madonna with Child* is one of the most popular and famous figures of the history of art, which explains the persistence of this image-archetype, this imprint-image and its iconic value in the family album.

The triptych of *The Three Graces* from 2010 (Fig. 6.) takes on the persistence of the image as a cultural archetype, this time through the eternal theme of the "eternal feminine". The series title is borrowed from a famous theme of art history, which represents the three goddesses embodying feminine grace and beauty: Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia, represented by artists since Raphael or Canova to Antonio Botero and Nikki of Saint Phalle. Neverheless, the emblematic figure that inspired this triptych is not this image of beauty divided into three, but the very archetype of beauty, Venus, by a not less archetypal image, that of the *Birth of Venus* by Sandro Boticelli.[1]

Fig.6. **Teodora Cosman**, The Three Graces, from the series *Jeux the Mémoire*, 3 pieces 90 x 60 cm each, acrylic on synthethic tissue, 2010

Besides Leonardo's *Gioconda*, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel or Andy Warhol's *Marilyn*, Botticelli's *Venus* is one of the

[1] See Umberto Eco, *Istoria Frumuseții* (The History of Beauty), (Bucharest: Rao, 2005).

most well-known and reproduced images in the history of art. From cosmetic companies to contemporary artists, everybody exploits this symbol of beauty – that has thus become a commercial cliché – multiplying and reinterpreting it, so that we can say that this work of Boticelli has become one of those images that imprint collective memory.

The idea of this triptych came after noticing the similarities between Boticelli's *Venus* and one of the family photographs used as a source. Among the other representations of Venus, most of them in a reclining posture, this version creates a special figure maintaining a statuesque dignity, common, rather, to the representation of the Three Graces. The particularity also resides in the way in which the delicate silhouette appears against the bright backdrop of the sea and of the sky – which is a common occurence in the holiday photos taken on the beach. Based on this observation I speculated, by visual means, the similarities between the posture of Boticelli's *Venus* and the typical pose from the photographs representing female characters at the seaside.

The child is the most photographed character in the family. The photographs from holidays spent at the seaside begin from an early age and are repeated year after year, each summer. Thus it happens that the same person gets photographed every year, in approximately the same posture, over a period of time, and this way it becomes possible to observe the changes occuring during the child's growth, his/her transformation into a teenager, then into an adult.

The insistence of capturing these summer moments, in which the release from the professional duties – obtained through the ten days of vacation – is doubled and accentuated by the freedom of the body, freed of clothes, feeling at ease in the water and in the sun, which – beyond the cliché of social validation – is the expression of the nostalgia of a natural state, of a "golden age" symbolized by the age of childhood.

Besides this nostalgia of the age of innocence, the photographs representing female characters are chaste and clumsy attempts to achieve the ideal of feminine beauty, in the only situation when it is socially accepted for it to be presented nude or thinly clad. Thus, the idea of the triptych of *The Three Graces* consists of the belief that all these photographs of young people, having the sea in *arrière-plan*, photographs that family albums abound in, are the embodiments of the same search for the ideal beauty, doubled by the search for archetypal innocence, the same aspiration that inspired Sandro Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*.

Accordingly, the title *The Three Graces* has to be read in reality "the three ages of grace" of the same triple, archetypal, Venus.

The project *The Memories of the New Man* from 2008 is the most complex one from the point of view of its implications, because it not only discusses photography and family memories, but also the space of habitation, the space in which these memories are accumulated and persist at least for as long as the consciousness perceiving it exists.

This project took place in Hoyerswerda, former East Germany, in a residency for artists, in a block abandoned by the former tenants, where 37 artists from 20 countries lived together for a month, having the mission of creating artistic projects in which their living/creation space was implied. At the end of the residency, an exhibition was organized where the projects were presented, and where, in fact, each artist had an apartment available in/with which to realize the art project.[1]

[1] See the website of the project European Postgraduate Residency, „Art Block", http://www.art-block.blogspot.com/.

The project I created there, titled *The Memories of the New Man*, refers to the commonly shared Communist past of Eastern Europe: the creation of the "new man". This demiurgic project implied modeling both the conscious and the natural, urban, social and even familiar environment; a prefabricated environment like Hoyerswerda, for example, reconstructed after the war according to the design of the new social order, meant to be inhabited by industrial workers. The failure of this ideology clearly took place after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the New Man, not adapted to the new economical and social conditions, found himself forced to leave this town built for him, searching for new jobs. Consequently to this migration a vast area of blocks was abandoned, nature overtaking little by little the land vacated by the people: trees, grass, wild flowers and even wild animals now occupied the playgrounds previously filled with children – an atmosphere calling to mind Tarkovsky's Zone[1] or the towns abandoned after the Chernobyl disaster.

The local authorities finally decided for these abandoned buildings to be demolished in order to bring the area back to nature, but only after permiting the artists to inhabit these places for the last time.

The Memories of the New Man is inspired by the imaginary of ghost towns, or of dead cities like Pompei, the place that incarnates all Romantic phantasms.[2] Similarly, our project was meant to be a last resurgence of the memories that impregnated the interior of the living space, as if the walls had the gift to "photographically" capture the scenes of the lives spent there. Therefore, all original works were pasted on the walls of the apartment, as some spontaneous imprints, latent images able to come to the surface (like damp or sweat) for one last time before the physical destruction of the building. In the *artist's statement* published on this occasion, I made the following statement: "These are the memories of the New Man, ghost like images haunting an abandoned apartment block, coming to surface for the last time before the building is gone. And, like a captain who won't leave his ship, they will stay here until the end..."[3]

The central part of this project was the series *The Last New Year's Eve*, an emblematic image of the passing happiness, taken over and amplified in subsequent exhibition projects, as well.

The theme of *The Last New Year's Eve*[4] (similarly to other famous titles, e.g. Christian Boltanski's *The Last Dance*, Camil Petrescu's *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*, or Bernardo Bertolucci's drama, *Last Tango in Paris*) suggests the very idea of the fragility of this moment of happiness, an eternal aspiration of man, never fully achieved and always overshadowed by the threat that it might be the last one.

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[1] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*, drama form the year 1979.

[2] See Marie-France David, "La Transfiguration de l'objet trouvé: réédification de Pompéi à partir du vestige dans les texts de la fin du XIXe siècle", in Valérie-Angelique Deshoulières and Pascal Vacher, *La Mémoire en ruines. Le modèle archéologique dans l'imaginaire moderne et contemporain* (Clermont-Ferrand: CRLMC, 2000), 49–58.

[3] Teodora Cosman, "The Memories of the New Man", in the catalogue of the exhibition *The Memories of the New Man*, (Hoyerswerda: European Postgraduate Residency, 2008), 2–3.

[4] The series from 2008 is now destroyed, simultaneously with the demolition of the buildings from Hoyerswerda, so we refer here to the series from 2010, created for the exhibition from Fribourg, Switzerland.

Fig. 7. **Teodora Cosman**, *The Last New Years' Eve*, from the series *Jeux de Mémoire*, 70 x 90 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2010

In the Romania of the 1960–70s, when the working week was of six days, when holidays were inevitably taken at "resorts", and during the summer there were 10 days in *Mamaia,* when the travel opportunities were few and the possibilities to leave the country were almost inexistent, the opportunities for having fun were rare and standardized (this does not mean that there were no ways of entertaining oneself in Communism). As celebrating Christmas was officially banned, New Year's Eve parties were particularly prestigious in the "high society". It was a unique opportunity for ladies to show off their elegant clothes, and for men to drink alcohol without the usual restrictions from their wives. It was the party of parties, the crowning and well deserved reward of the "professional activities" of the year, it was, in a way, the "official" occasion to be happy.

The end of this "happiness" was sudden: the construction collapsed with the downfall of communism. We are in the year 1965 and this is a lost generation, a sacrificed generation. These people whom we see smiling and laughing in the photographs, were born in the effervescence of the period between the two wars, survived the disaster of the war and the atrocity of the inauguration of communism, of Stalinist terror. They managed to put themselves together and adapt to the new conditions just to be destroyed again, for good. For our parents or grandparents, whose whole adult lives were lived during the communist period, this time sometimes rhymes

with happiness (despite experiencing real vicissitudes) because it overlaps with the period of their youth.

The series *The Last New Years' Eve*, consisting of paintings made after snapshots of these famous parties, and exposed in a cinematographical manner of "film noir", emphasizes the idea that the end of a moment of happiness is – if not imminent – by all means inevitable, and that the New Year's Eve is always the last.

Conclusion

Indisputably, recent years have brought radical changes in the practice and perception of photography, and implicitly of family photography. The old shoebox in which photographs were kept has been replaced by online social platforms, while photography's discursive space has moved from the field of preservation, imprint and memory to that of global communication and virtuality. Family photographs, as we knew them, have become archaeological objects to an even larger extent, their "age value"[1] increasing with the distance from the memory of the experienced event.

Among the debris left behind by the 2011 tsunami from Japan, photo albums were found, which the cameras highlighted persistently. This cruel metaphor is meant to remind us (despite the false promises of the indestructibility of the digital archive) that at times the *only* reminders of ourselves are our photographs.

Translated by Boglárka Németh

[1] In the sense of Alois Riegl's *Le Culte moderne des monuments. Sa nature, son origine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).