Putting People in the Picture: Art and Aesthetics in Photography and in Understanding Organizational Life

Antonio Strati

Abstract

This article considers both the common ground and the diversity between the aesthetic approach to the study of organizational life and conceptual art photography. Based on a personal account, it emphasizes the empathic–aesthetic understanding of action in interactive organizational contexts. The issues addressed are the social construction of organizational memory, the importance of time in organizational life, the interweaving between the reality and non reality of organizational artefacts, the pervasiveness of organizational reproduction, the relation between the 'I' and the 'eye' in the investigation of organizational processes, the improper use of organizational production, and the relationships between the collective and social construction of creativity niches.

Descriptors: aesthetic approach, art photography, art and organization, organizational symbolism, creativity, tacit knowledge, internet

Antonio Strati
Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Italy

Introduction

It pleased me so much that I noted it in my diary. It was a Saturday afternoon. Not the morning, because, in Italy, telephone calls are charged at peak rate on Saturday mornings. Surfing the Internet is therefore too expensive, unless you know exactly what you are looking for and can go straight to what you want. I adore technological innovations, but the Internet is still too backward and chaotic, and often excessively wasteful of time and therefore of money. Matters are different at the university: there you can log on directly, so that at least there are no telephone charges. But one still wastes a lot of time, so that if I want to visit a new site or use a search engine, I take advantage of my student reception hours. I log on, between one student and the next, and while we are talking or working, my computer can cruise the *mare magnum* of Internet sites, almost on its own. Whether it takes a minute or much longer to download information from a site does not matter. I do not feel that I am working with a leech which drains me of my patience, energy and time.

However, between one student and the next is not enough time to explore a site thoroughly, and it is never an appropriate moment to enjoy a beautiful image displayed by one or other virtual gallery. Nor is it a good moment for more simply searching out information about a new photographic product or

Organization Studies
2000, 21/0
53–69

0170–8406/00
0021–0003 $3.00

the activities of a museum. I have arranged my workstation in such a way that everything is 'in view': the sun that shines into the room when the door onto the corridor is open, my computer screen, and the mountains in the background. If there is a photograph on the screen, it is visible to everyone who enters the room or walks along the corridor when the door is open, and it is probably clear to all of them that, at that moment, I am not working, but 'doing something else'.

This is to say that I am unable to mix my artistic research on art photography with my university research on the sociology of organizations. On the one hand, I do not want to take advantage of the facilities provided me by the university organization, because this would betray the trust that it has placed in me — although on some occasions, this has inevitably happened. On the other hand, and this is more important, because it is the more delicate matter, I seek to keep these 'destinies' of mine very distinct and separate.

Yet is also true that, for some time now, my research and writings on aesthetics in organizational life seem to have brought my artistic and academic research closer together. I am not completely certain that an outright merger has taken place, but I do notice that I have sought to look at organizational life with the eyes of an artist, when writing on both aesthetics and organization, and above all, that I have proposed an 'aesthetic understanding of organizational life'.

Artistic Research and Academic Research

I am aware, in fact, that the experience gained from my artistic research has provided me with a large stock of knowledge about everyday life in organizations. Knowledge of this kind, I believe, has been deliberately neglected by organizational theories and management studies, although, on the other hand, it only partly has to do with art, given that it is aesthetic knowledge.

Aesthetics is not art; rather, it is concerned with sensory perceptions acquired through vision, hearing, smell, touch and taste. It is aesthetic judgement, or in other words, that which is affected by the beautiful, feeling disgust, having sublime sensations, etc. These are specific forms of knowledge, that do not belong to the intellective domain but are unavoidable and constitute its *analogon*, as Baumgarten puts it, and its alternative, as Vico argued. They are forms of knowledge that cannot be explained in functionalist and positivist terms. Bearing in mind Kant's remarks on the taste for the beautiful, as a disinterested and absolutely free form of delight, not everything in the everyday lives of organizations always has a purpose and a product, whether individual or organizational.

In my book *Organization and Aesthetics*, when discussing the organizing of a group of roofing workers, I tried to show how both their knowledge that their feet were firmly planted on the roof, and their sentiment of beauty at working 'up there', were essential to the interpretation, and how these

were largely aesthetic aspects rather than factors due exclusively to mental knowledge. Equally important were my own sensory perceptions and aesthetic judgements while doing the research. Was I both admiring and terrified at the same time, so that I experienced a sentiment verging on the sublime? Did I imagine myself in the place of one of the men on the roof, seeking empathic understanding with what was happening in that organization? Did I feel in possession of the tacit knowledge — as Michael Polanyi would call it — necessary to belong to that organization, or did I know how to acquire it? Those who carry out research are also capable of sensory perceptions and of aesthetic judgements, and it is not necessary for them to be guided solely by rational faculty. Art and artistic worlds, as they have been described by Howard Becker, are not directly relevant; and nor is conceptual photography a stream of art photography to which Italo Zannier, among others, relates my photographic work, because I am in search not of copies of reality, but rather of abstract concepts, insights and feelings 'formed' — in Pareyson's words — as concrete, material and artistic photographs. Of direct relevance, though, are the experiences lived through the eye of the conceptual photograph — the experiences evidenced in the questions concerning the aesthetic approach that I have emphasized: what do we look at when doing research, and what do we feel when looking at it? On what does our attention focus, and where does our sensibility finish? What is the ground of our freedom to feel emotion or an aesthetic sentiment? These are questions profoundly rooted in my artistic experience as a conceptual photographer, and they reveal the ways in which my artistic research has linked with my academic research. Yet they are elementary questions, however important they may have been in delineating the essential features of the aesthetic approach to organizational life.

However, to say that these are elementary questions is not to deny their specificity: otherwise it would not be possible to grasp the autonomy of each of my two 'destinies', or to grasp that of the influence of artistic experiences on organizational research. By fixing the ambits of its autonomy and by marking out its boundaries as clearly as possible, I have sought to insulate my artistic research against the limits imposed by excessive recourse to causal and rational explanations of everyday life that predominate in academic research. There have always been causal explanations in my photography, indeed there have been many of them, but they have never had the same weight and value as in academic research. Inspiration, intuition, feeling, losing oneself in a state resembling a physical–mental trance, having an idea, the talent to create: these, instead, have always been the inexplicable explanations of my artistic photographs. When inspiration falters, as it inevitably does, there happens what was described in Federico Fellini's film *8½* by Marcello Mastroianni (playing Guido, the director and the author's *alter ego*): 'I have really nothing to say, but I want to say it just the same, to say "what I don't know … what I'm looking for … what I have not yet found"'.

This is not to imply that intuition or having ideas do not find legitimation or are even celebrated in academia. The difference is that they are then

explained, whereas in artistic research there is no need for this. If an explanation has to be given, then that is a task for the critics, not for me. My job is to create the artistic artifact. This artifact — and here one understands why I have stressed that the specificity of these questions should not be neglected — represents neither the mainstream of photographic research nor the core of reflections on it. A photographer photographs the Other of its author while, as Giuseppe Bonini wrote in the catalogue accompanying an exhibition on the places of the imagination, by '"following the tracks of the Other" I called myself into question, "my own body, my own image"'.

It is this factor that has probably held the two types of research together, which is certainly a great deal. The bodies of knowledge acquired in each domain have interwoven in a communication that has often taken place unconsciously. Moreover, my university tenure has always given me the freedom to do whatever artistic research I wish, without being conditioned by the suggestions or advice proffered by art critics or exhibition curators. At the same time, knowing that I am able to do something non-academic has given me a broad margin of freedom within the academic domain, whereby I have not been obliged to join some or other research group seeking success and power.

The knowledge that I have gradually accumulated in each of the two domains, however, has not spilled over into the other. This is not like the case of a university lecturer who uses the knowledge acquired from his or her academic work to perform collateral activities such as teaching on training courses or undertaking consultancy work. Nor is it like, say, a professional fashion photographer who employs the knowledge gained from his professional work to create art or exhibition photographs. In these cases, what is learnt in one domain often spills directly over into the other. The lecturer can use experience acquired from consultancy work in his/her empirical research, or at any rate s/he develops contacts that may be useful in organizing in-company internships for his or her students. More in general, both the lecturer and the university gain prestige, importance and financing. For the professional photographer, one may say the same: prestige, satisfaction and self-esteem place him in a market segment where he can increase his fees or more easily obtain commissions.

The essential point, however, is that the research path remains essentially the same. The lecturer continues to teach and to carry out research, even if academic research and organizational consultancy are not the same things, and nor are university teaching and management training courses. The fashion photographer, for his part, continues to take, print and sell photographs, even if artistic photography and professional photography are certainly not the same things, and neither are the fashion house that commissions the work and the gallery that exhibits it.

These synergies only rarely occur between my activities as a conceptual photographer and an academic. They would obviously be more numerous if my academic research concerned the sociology of art or the history of photography, but the stumbling block of positivist and rational explanation would still be present, as I pointed out in the chapter 'Aesthetics and

Organizational Skill', when describing the organizational culture of the Department of Visual Arts in an Italian university. These synergies would also be much more frequent if my academic research were conducted in the area of visual sociology, so that I could put my knowledge of the photographic medium to work. However, I am wary of the production of iconographic material in the course of research. The little experience that I have gained randomly and chaotically in this area has left me with the unpleasant impression of a sort of cage made up of faithful documentation and rational accounting, which imprisons it and makes it monotonous.

What is certain, though, is that had I ventured into these fields of academic research, I would have benefited in terms of familiarity with theoretical debates and with scholars, critics and promoters of art photography. This is not what I have done, though, so my usual practice is to note an Internet site that interests me from the point of view of artistic research, perhaps after briefly visiting it at the university, and then to explore it calmly and thoroughly at home.

A World of Reproductions

In point of fact, the thing that gave me so much pleasure had not begun on that Saturday afternoon, but in the morning. On returning home, I collected my mail from the letter box. There was a rather bulky envelope from the United States, sent to me by Polaroid Collections of Cambridge, Massachusetts. It contained a request for permission to put one of my pictures on the Internet. In fact, a change is taking place in the media used by museums and galleries to disseminate artistic images, and this change also involves photographic art. This is obviously not a new phenomenon, one only now brought into being by the Internet and information technologies. For example, there has been widespread use of audio-visual reproductions of works of art kept in museums, galleries, buildings and churches. In Italy, this has mainly concerned the tourism business, in the so-called 'cities of art'. This process of change has certainly not supplanted books, catalogues, art magazines or tourist guides. The new media have added different artifacts, rather than superseding the paper-based reproduction of art works. Consider slides, for example. Although widely available, they have not taken the place of the museum guide nor of the souvenir postcards bought for one's own collection, rather than to send to friends or relatives.

Yet, if slides are well made and well conserved, they have the advantage of ensuring a relatively faithful reproduction of shapes and colours. Like many art photographers, I have often used them to make copies of my photographs. Today, I have too many of these slide copies of my pictures. Many of them have been catalogued and signed; many of them need to be re-catalogued, and there are also many to stuff into boxes and forget, or else to throw away because they do not reflect my current artistic interests.

So much time has been devoted to making copies of my pictures: work which should be systematic, technically precise and painstaking. It is work

that has nothing to do, at least apparently, with the production of artistic artifacts, for instead, it concerns their dissemination, classification and filing. Memories of an ongoing artistic project are constructed in several copies. One of these memories is kept for myself, while the others are destined for gallery owners and museum archives. However, I cannot be sure which particular photograph is going to be of interest to exhibition curators, gallery owners, the heads of collections and museums, or critics and journalists. Consequently, I do not know how many copies are needed of this or that photograph. Moreover, when things are going well, my photographs circulate among exhibitions, or they are being viewed by exhibition organizers, magazine editors, purchasers for museums and collections. This means that the photographs are not always to hand for reproduction when the need arises. The result is that I have both too many and too few of them.

It is therefore only apparently true that the slide of a original photograph belonging to some artistic project has nothing to do with the latter. Slide copies have always been essential for the presentation of my work to the directors of galleries and museums, the organizers of exhibitions, critics and journalists. Furthermore, reproduction in the form of slides has usually been the way in which it has been possible to reproduce my work in catalogues, magazines or books.

This makes the reproduction work even more complex and chaotic. Although 35 mm slides are reasonably satisfactory, 6 × 6 cm slides are much better in terms of the accurate reproduction of shapes and colours, and in some cases 9 × 12 cm or 4" × 5" film sheet is especially suitable. In all three cases, the reproduction should be as faithful as possible, in the sense that it should retain the distinctive features of the original. Photography is generally believed to be the objective reproduction of reality. It is not. Photographers, especially art photographers, are well aware of this fact whenever they try to make copies of their original pictures. The range and intensity of colours vary from one brand of film to another, and it is often impossible to reproduce certain tints of the original because they are 'burnt' or overwhelmed by the technical characteristics of the film. One is consequently forced to choose what should remain of the original photograph in its reproduction, rather than seeking to create an objective reproduction of it. The work of reproduction, in fact, is a complex process of interpreting the original, of which some features are highlighted, while certain nuances and details are omitted, however loath one may be to do so. Reproducing well, means deciding what to keep of the original so that it can be 'read' properly, and what to leave out of the original, because, in the majority of cases, the latter cannot be reproduced in its entirety. Slides are made of the original, using slightly different exposure times and diaphragms so that a comparison can be made before reaching the final choice — a choice that is always unsatisfactory, because something from the original is lacking.

Compared with slides, and compared with the results that can be achieved with photography in general, reproduction via Internet is light years behind, in terms of both the definition of shapes and the saturation of colours. The

pixels that make up the image on the screen are enormous in comparison to the imperceptible grain of a film or a photographic print. Of course, high definition equipment is available, which can be used to come close to what is called 'photographic quality'. However, this equipment is still very expensive, as well as taking up a massive amount of computer memory. Downloading an image with such high definition, via Internet, takes an inordinate amount of time, with the result that the on-line image is an information-impoverished reproduction of the original.

Although I was fully aware of this problem, I was still pleased to think that one of my pictures would finish up on the Internet. I was pleased, despite the fact that I am often overwhelmed to the point of nausea by the endless welter of reproductions, which have the anaesthetizing effect described by Odo Marquard when he warns against art being transformed into insensitivity and dreariness. One thinks, for example, of Michelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel of Rome, painted between 1508 and 1512, and of the innumerable times that the image of God's forefinger almost touching Adam's has been reproduced in some form. It is not that I am against the reproduction of original images in books, postcards, tourist guides, conference posters, slides, video recordings, mugs and T-shirts. Indeed, in my wardrobe at home, I still have a T-shirt bearing my self-portrait, where my face is framed by my hands, their shape blurred by the light, and from which sprout thorns like prickly pears. This is a disquieting self-portrait which was included in my first exhibition, held in 1980, at the Galleria Il Diaframma of Milan, and which, like other works of mine, has had the fortune to be published on several occasions. The T-shirt was given to me by Monas Hierogliphica, who organized the exhibition in New York the following year, because, unlike the other photographers in the exhibition, I had declared myself decidedly in favour of the reproduction of art photographs: I would be happy to see young people wearing T-shirts with my picture printed on them.

However, this is not to say that when I read the request by Polaroid Collections, that I had envisioned one of my photographs being projected onto the whole world. When I start surfing the Internet, I feel as distressed as if someone was going through my bookshelves at home, throwing out books, magazines and papers, without even telling me the criteria being used. In the Babel of the Internet, I am never sure of finding what I want, nor even of discovering how to find what I am looking for. I am faced by the jumble of different criteria that make the Internet the Babel that it is today, and I say 'today', because there is no guarantee that what I find today will still be there tomorrow. For example, if a student is looking for the examination syllabus of a particular faculty, is s/he certain to find it? S/he may indeed do so, but it may be the syllabus for last year, or else perhaps not all the course syllabuses are available, or s/he may find the message 'site under construction' — which gives the false idea that a site can be constructed once and for all, rather than being in perpetual reconstruction. Reading the request by Polaroid Collections, therefore, did not arouse fantasies of projecting my image across the world, but more a feeling of distress at the random way in

which someone would happen upon my photograph — or find it, should they be deliberately searching for it. Instead, what I felt was pleasure mixed with curiosity at something that I could still not define: the virtual display of an image, or in other words, an event in virtual space, lost in the *mare magnum* of the Internet. It was the pleasure that you feel when you say to yourself: 'Who knows what will happen?'.

Something similar happened when the RAI Italian television network wanted to make a programme — directed by Lillo Gullo from the studios in Trento — about my photographic work. I was certainly unaccustomed to having a television crew in my home; nor did I have much experience of preparing a film report on my work, although I had been involved in some video productions before. I was therefore aware that a television programme about my conceptual photographs would be a very different matter from presenting the pictures from one or other exhibition. The photographs selected should have a televisual 'pay-off' and should be chosen on that criterion. The sequence of images should take account of the fact that the TV camera constitutes the eye of the viewer. The tonal coherence of the photographs should therefore enable smooth transition from one image to the next, with crescendos to avert boredom, unexpected jumps to excite curiosity, interludes when the camera lingers on a particular image or detail, and lulls so that the viewer can sip a drink or say something, or even just seek relief from the power and intensity of an image. In this case too, interpretations and constant reconstructions are necessary, bearing in mind that photography and television are two different languages and technologies, and also that the audio-visual reproduction of art photographs is necessarily unfaithful. The definition of the image, or the quantity of visual information contained in it, is superior in a photograph and the format of the image is not fixed *a priori* in a photograph: it may be large, small, oval, rectangular or rhomboid as the photographer wishes. It may be a cut-out or a composition, or it may have the standard size that optimally proportions the negative to the print. Audio-visual recordings are much more constrained. They reproduce both tiny details and entire photographs in the same size. If there are no external points of reference, the image loses its own proportions and assumes those of the television screen.

Therefore one cannot expect the faithful reproduction of photographic originals, but rather the televisual reconstruction of their sense. So those who said that they had seen my photographs on television were telling the truth. At the same time, they were also not telling the truth, because my photographs had been shorn of their dimensions; and those who had seen them on a black and white television — the programme had been made when colour television was still relatively uncommon — had seen them transfigured into a visual language different from that of the originals. And what about the quality of the television sets on which my photographs had been seen? Where they tuned in properly, and how clear had the signal been at the time?

Those who saw my photographs reproduced in the catalogue edited by Gabriella Belli for my 1982 exhibition at the Provincial Art Museum of

Trento found themselves in a rather similar (but not the same) situation. It was similar because, when they were printed typographically, all of them had a greenish tinge which, in my eyes, altered my exploration of nuances of colour and the physical manipulation of the emulsion. It may be that I was alone in seeing this, and in regarding it as irremediable interference by others in my work. It struck me, however, as a gross intrusion which had taken place during the process of turning my photographs into the catalogue, and I saw my power over my images lost somewhere in my relationship with those who had produced the catalogue. Nevertheless, the catalogue aroused considerable interest: indeed, the photography critic Roberta Valtorta emphasized its complexity, writing in the photography magazine *Zoom* about Belli's 'committed introduction', the dialogue 'extremely rich in citations' between Gullo — the TV programme director — and myself, and the musings prompted by the 'interference among different languages'. The main part of the catalogue contained the photographs reproduced on a 1:1 scale, two per page, arranged side by side in the bottom half of the page, and paginated so that four images could be seen at a time — four images that constituted a completed, but unfinished, discourse leading into the next four-image discourse.

Catalogues, magazines and especially books of photographs are probably the best and most accurate ways to reproduce photographs, given the high quality of contemporary printing techniques and the close linguistic consonance between the two media. The photographs are 'laid' on the printed page just as the emulsions are set on the paper used for the photographic print. A book does not impose an abrupt change of language and therefore does not compel reinterpretation of the art work. Television does, however, and it was during the preparations for the RAI-TV programme that my photographic work acquired a name.

I have never wanted to give titles to my photographs or to write captions for them, since this is like giving linguistic explanations for images. Even my signature, if it can be seen together with the image, is an interference, because it adds extraneous meaning. Signature, date, title of the exhibition at which the photograph was shown should be hidden away on the rear. I usually give a title to my exhibitions, but I do not think it necessary to communicate this title to the visitor. I make an exception in the case of large exhibitions, such as the one held at the Trento Provincial Art Museum, which filled four exhibition rooms of the Palazzo delle Albere, so that it was necessary to inform the visitor that the photographs belonged to different stages of an artistic project and had been taken at different periods. The title lent itself well to the visual journey on the walls, because it interrupted this journey as well as introducing it. Visitors were first informed that they were looking at photographs of '*Reggio Caraibi*', an imaginary place created by combining the city of my birth, Reggio Calabria, with the Carribean where the photographs were taken, in 1981. They then moved on to the photographs of '*Aqui me quedo*' taken in the same period, to those of '*Non c'è niente*' taken in 1979/80, and finally to '*Yellow Light in Budleigh Salterton*' of 1982. However, for me, it makes no sense to

interrupt the image-by-image flow with captions such as 'Portofino, 1984' or titles like, say, 'Conceptual Detournement of the View of Portofino, 1984'. Such scripts introduce explanations which mar enjoyment of an entirely image-based journey, and are only necessary, I believe, for collective exhibitions. So, whereas names are important, I dislike script that overlaps with the image and alters its meaning.

Nevertheless, I have never underestimated the value of giving a name to one's own artwork. It makes the meaning of my endeavour explicit, sustaining it and defending it. The name given to my work was '*Photopoesia*', which emphasized that I did not 'take photographs' but instead produced photographic artifacts which were not standard photographs. The technique I employed in 'making photopoems' was, and still is, entirely photographic, since it exploits all the technological potential of the photographic materials and equipment used. The works produced may have a bulk that likens them to sculptures, but this is always and only achieved by means of photographic emulsions and their extreme and even improper use. My exploration of the possibilities of photographic materials — that is, the emulsions of negatives and prints — gives distinctiveness to the photographic artifact, making it autonomous and different from the reality it records. The resultant photopoem is, for me as its creator, the photograph of the sentiment felt at the moment when my gaze fell on whatever I then recorded photographically. It has nothing to do with the objective and detached reproduction of what I saw through my viewfinder, just as it is not the faithful reproduction of either the whole range of emotions felt at that moment or of the most powerful of them.

Eye and I

The request for permission to reproduce one of my photopoems on the Internet gave me pleasure, just as some months previously, when I had been asked to give permission for my photographs to be included on a CD-ROM of the Collection. I didn't think about it any further, and laid the papers on the desk in my study, to look at more carefully, together with the other things, in the afternoon. In a way, I treated the letter as if it was a bureaucratic document that would be required if and when one of my photographs was printed on the CD-ROM and circulated on the Internet. In the afternoon, therefore, I completed the form with the information requested, and signed it. The non-human element — one of Bruno Latour's expressions, which I like because it highlights the cultural materials so central to the aesthetic understanding of organizational life — had once again brought a power relation and its asymmetry to light.

What practicable alternatives, in fact, does an author have in these circumstances? There was no doubt about the integrity of these initiatives to promote the Collection and its photographers, but they were also initiatives in whose planning and organization I had no influence. Nor had I the desire to take part in it, just as I did not feel that I had either the will or the ability

to act as the curator of my photographic artifacts, or to be their promoter or salesman. I was their author, and that for me was extraordinary enough. Other art photographers, on the contrary, are both excellent authors and excellent marketers of their work. They constantly hold exhibitions; they have photographs published everywhere and even publish at their own expense; they hold courses; they attend all the important meetings and cultivate the people who matter; they write criticism; they sit on the organizing committees of exhibitions or organize their own shows.

Initially, after my first exhibitions, I tried it to do the same myself, but failed. I was so pleased that someone should spend time looking at and talking about my work that whether it was followed by an exhibition or publication in a magazine did not matter. If it happened I was happy, but this was something other than looking at and talking about my work, something that belonged to another time, that of the future, rather than the present. I was so unfocused on achieving results, in whatever form, that even the exhibition at the Trento Provincial Art Museum was organized on someone else's initiative. It was, in fact, the owners of Monas Hierogliphica — who had organized exhibitions of my work and that of other Italian photographers in the United States — who showed my work to the director of the Trento Provincial Art Museum. I was informed about this and invited to show some more examples of my work to the director of the museum. Then, one winter's day, in London, a telegram which announced that the exhibition programme for the new year would include my work was delivered to me at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations of London, where I was spending my first sabbatical after obtaining tenure. I was thrilled, because it is only very rarely that museums display art photography, and even more rarely by novices like me.

At that time, there was a great deal of interest among critics and gallery owners in 'young Italian photography', as it was called. In the space of a few years, my photopoems were exhibited at personal and collective shows in cities located in the United States, China, Great Britain, France, West Germany as well as in Italy. Things are different today, but there was a time when people were willing to talk about photography and to look at photographs. Consequently, I tried to promote my work. Although not always, there were occasions when it was a pleasure to do so; a pleasure in itself. It did not matter whether the gallery owner or critic who was viewing my work talked about it as well; it was enough that they were looking at it: carefully, and with surprise, pleasure or even astonishment, gradually entering my world, leaving their habitual world behind. Enchanted for an instant, they would go further and further into my images, as happens in Akira Kurosawa's *Konna Yume Wo Mita*, where the person looking at Van Gogh's painting is progressively absorbed by it, until it becomes his world. This rarely happened in my case, but when it did, I felt that I had achieved something, that those pictures had something special; in a word — that my art was 'Art'.

I noticed this while watching people looking at the photographs. Words have never given me this knowledge; indeed, emphasizing a nuance of

colour, a shot or a light is almost an interference, although they provide a way out of a state of mind that sooner or later must be left behind. As a photographer, therefore, I have always watched how people look at my images: with analytical precision at their saturation with colour, at the fullness of the image, at the lines composing the shapes, at the technical quality of the materials used, deciding whether other photographers have done the same thing before me; with attention, astonishment and enchantment, entering the image, becoming part of it, joining the artistic quest of which it is both the artefact and metaphor, moving through my world, among my materials, among the artifacts that I produce. I watch whether some sort of evocative–sensory process is aroused in the person viewing one of my photopoems. Whether, when looking at a seascape, for example, they make a gesture as if they want to touch the waves, turning to me as if they have understood, as if they have been given pleasure, as if they have heard the wind on the waves and smelt the salty breeze. Alternatively, I look to see whether they use their hands to feel the materiality of the photograph, to gain more precise physical sensations of the body and texture of the photopoem.

I watch, that is to say, whether their faces tighten or soften to betray an emotion, whether the rhythm of their gestures changes, whether speech is suspended; whether something is conveyed by the light in their eyes, by the colour of their cheeks, by the rhythm of their breathing, by the movement of their lips — rather like the change that takes place in the face and expression of the old village woman during Babette's Parisian banquet, in Gabriel Axel's film, when she begins to taste the wine and relish the food. At these moments, I feel a profound joy of the kind described by Hans Robert Jauss when writing about the pleasure aroused by the aesthetic enjoyment of others. This sentiment is so intensely felt, owing to the fear that 'all this' is not actually happening, because of the suddenness with which it happens, because I am the creator of the artifacts able to arouse such aesthetic enjoyment. It is a feeling of pleasure complicated by the fact that I too have the photographic artifacts in front of me, and that I too, in my own way, am enjoying them. I feel aesthetic pleasure at the photographs that I have made, and at others' aesthetic enjoyment of them, while I strain to discern a gesture, an expression, an emotion: to discern and to feel at the same time, therefore, because both of these processes tell me what is happening.

A further complication, though, concerns power relations. The person viewing the photographs has, willy-nilly, power over the photographer because — as I have emphasized in my article 'Aesthetics and organization without walls', based on research on art photography in Europe — the photographer may or may not become an author in this delicate process. Once an author, he or she is entitled to view the work of others, and is therefore urged to help in the promotion of art photography by, for instance, organizing an exhibition, setting up a collection, selecting photographic works, writing about photography and teaching it, or starting his or her own gallery. Consequently, the person inspecting one's work may also be an art pho-

tographer, or may have been one in the past, but this does not make the power relation less asymmetric. I, however, view the process as if the power relation were reversed in my favour, because I feel that I am wielding the power as I show my photopoems, and that this power increases as I show the sequence of images, if the person looking at them is taken with them. If they aren't, then the power vanishes immediately. The sentiment of pleasure is mixed with that of power, therefore.

Chance plays a large part in providing the opportunity for such a sentiment. I still remember when the director of Il Diaframma of Milan, as he was walking through the small lobby outside the exhibition room, noticed one of my photographs that I was showing to the art photographer exhibiting in the gallery at the time. 'Lovely', the director said, 'Can I see?' After some minutes, from the table at the other end of the lobby, he began calling the well-known photographers present at the inauguration to look at my work. He called them by name, and while he was asking me whether he could show my work to them as well, he held up first one photograph and then another, so that no one present could fail to see them. It was like a dream. Someone asked me, 'Where did you get the idea from'; someone else, 'And this, how did you do it?'. Others discussed, but not with me, what sort of photography it was; whether it was photography or art; whether the effect achieved was due to the film; whether the technique employed qualified as photographic. Even after all this, however, I was not immediately invited to show my work in the gallery — although it happened shortly afterwards — but I had made a small step forward in the world of art photography, and, in a way, that gave me pleasure too. I had done it through the front door: one of the most prestigious galleries in the world, famous photographers, images that identified me, even if no one yet knew my name.

It was all due to coincidence. For some months prior to this, I had been trying to make an appointment with the director. The joy with which I remember the episode, as well as my first exhibition, were due to the helpfulness that an artist happened to show towards a young author, and to the fact that the gallery owner's gaze happened to fall upon my work. A random set of elements fortuitously coincided: nothing would have happened had the director been looking elsewhere as he crossed the lobby, or had the photographer not insisted on looking at my photographs in that corner of the room, or had I not had the courage to take the train to Milan with my box of photographs.

Improper Use

Saturday afternoon, therefore, is the best time for me to surf the Internet. Not that it often happens, but if I have to look for something, this is the time when I feel ready to cope with the frustrations of searching out information on the mighty pachyderm of the Internet. When my search is successful, I find it exhilarating to have defeated enormous physical distances;

Photograph 1 *Riviera Mediterranea*, 1990

my disappointment at not finding what I want is mitigated by the discovery of things that I did not know. These are the moments when I feel in charge of the 'Internet-as-pachyderm', rather than being drained by the 'Internet-as-bloodsucker'. However rare, these successes are rather like cherries: no matter how many bad ones there may be, the few good ones make you keep on browsing.

So it was, that I set off in search of the Polaroid Collections site. The address was given in the letter accompanying the form that I had completed and signed, and a photocopy of the photograph from the Polaroid 50: Art and Technology Exhibition — *Riviera Mediterranea, 1990* — that they wanted to put on the Internet. This photograph has always given much pleasure, to me too. I made it from 8" × 10" Polaroid colour emulsions which I removed from their supports and extended one on top of the other on 30 × 40 cm drawing card.

The emulsions were stretched from their original 20 × 25 cm dimensions to cover almost the entire area of the card. The shapes and colours of the original colour prints were altered by this process. In other words, they were altered manually, when the emulsion was stretched on the paper. When the first emulsion had been stretched, I had a general idea of the way in which the original photograph would be changed. The emulsions that I then superimposed saturated the colours, created nuances, and gave material body to the image. All the emulsions were colour prints of the same image, but each of them had specific features derived from the framing and the development. Given that Polaroid film develops instantaneously, I work on it with my fingers, a rolling pin or a spatula to stop the print from developing evenly. In this way, I create new colours and modify the pre-existent ones. When the emulsions are spread on the paper, they are wet, because they have been soaked in warm water for varying lengths of time so that they are soft enough to be scraped off their backing material. As one emulsion is set on another, some of the original shapes are retained and accentuated, while others are slightly changed or attenuated. I thus create successive backgrounds and planes in the image, lines which peter out or merge, distinct shapes and others left incomplete as if they were jottings or hints.

Riviera Mediterranea shows a large palm frond with other fronds and vegetation below and behind it, and the sea of the Ligurian Riviera in the background. In its simplicity, this is a conventional and widely photographed subject. Yet it was chosen from more than 22,000 images in the Collection as one of the fifty photographs 'that represent the technical innovations that hallmark the continuing innovations of Polaroid and show the creativity of artists who selected the instant medium', as Barbara Hitchcock writes in the introduction to the exhibition.

Conclusion I, Spring 1998

Fifty years, fifty photographs, but by whom? That afternoon, the site gave a complete list of the photographers in the exhibition: Ansel Adams, Paul

Caponigro, Robert Frank, Lucas Samaras, Andy Warhol, Minor White ... what company! In April, the list of photographers was still there, but then it was removed, so that it was impossible to discover who had taken the other photographs selected. For some time, the site only consisted of a heading which stated the importance of the exhibition, while the rest of the space was devoted to an exhibition of some years before and to some photographers.

Conclusion II, Winter 1999

The exhibition is now elegantly described across five full pages of the site. The three-dimensional effect of the exhibition title enlivens the pages, consisting of short texts and images which, although the size of postage stamps, can be enlarged. But there is still no complete list of the photographers, and only a few photographs are shown. Mine is no longer there, but neither is Warhol's nor those of numerous other photographers. Perhaps they do not perform as well as the others as regards the overall tonal equilibrium of the page, when reproduced on the Internet. In any event, mine was not there, although it may have been or perhaps will be in the future. With the Internet, in fact, you never know how things stand, because everything that appears on it, disappears just as easily.

Conclusion III, Spring 1999

The above words were a forewarning that the Internet provokes uncertainty as to what one can take to be reality. My photograph is 'now' there, so the previous conclusion must therefore be changed, if only because of the joy of seeing the photograph exactly where it was supposed to be. However, the conclusion only needs to be changed slightly, because I still feel unsure that *Riviera Mediterranea* will remain where it is 'now'. The Internet is very different from the printed book, and since interactivity is its fundamental feature, it may be necessary to write a different conclusion in the future.

References

Axel, Gabriel, *director*
1987 *Babettes Gaestebud*. Denmark.

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb
1750–58 *Aesthetica, I–II*. Frankfurt am Oder: Kleyb (photostat: Olms: Hildesheim, 1986).

Becker, Howard S.
1974 'Art as collective action'. *American Sociological Review* 39/6: 767–776.

Becker, Howard S.
1982 *Art worlds*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Belli, Gabriella, *editor*
1982 *Antonio Strati photopoesia*. Trento: Museo Provinciale d'Arte.

Bonini, Giuseppe
1982 'Sui luoghi dell'immaginario' in *Luoghi dell'immaginario: momenti della fotografia italiana contemporanea.* G. Bonini (ed.), 9–14. Suzzara: Galleria d'Arte Contemporanea.

Fellini, Federico, *director*
1963 *8½.* Italy.

Gullo, Lillo, *director*
1981 *Antonio Strati photopoeta.* Trento and Rome: RAI-TV, Rete Tre.

Hitchcock, Barbara, *curator*
1996 *Polaroid 50: art and technology.* Travelling exhibition. Cambridge, MA: The Polaroid Collections.

Jauss, Hans Robert
1982 *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Kant, Immanuel
1790 'Kritik der Urteilskraft' in I. Kant, *Werke in zwölf Bänden*, Vol. X, edited by W. Weischedel (1968). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Kurosawa, Akira, *director*
1990 *Konna Yume Wo Mita.* Japan.

Latour, Bruno
1991 'Technology is society made durable' in *A sociology of monsters: essays on power, technology and domination.* John Law (ed.), 103–131. London: Routledge.

Marquard, Odo
1989 *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica. Philosophische Uberlegungen.* Paderborn: Schoningh.

Monas Hierogliphica, *editor*
1981 *12 Italian photographers.* New York: Italian Cultural Institute.

Pareyson, Luigi
1954 *Estetica. Teoria della formatività.* Turin: Giappichelli.

Polanyi, Michael
1958 *Personal knowledge.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Strati, Antonio
1990a 'Aesthetics and organizational skill' in *Organizational symbolism.* Barry A. Turner (ed.), 207–222. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Strati, Antonio
1990b *Riviera Mediterranea.* Polacolor 8 × 10 film Type 809 emulsion transfer on paper. Size 30 × 40 cm. The Polaroid Collections, Cambridge, MA. Exhibited in: 'Polaroid 50: art and technology'. http://digitalimage.polaroid.com/studio/exhibit/50yrs/strati.html

Strati, Antonio
1992 'Aesthetic understanding of organizational life'. *Academy of Management Review* 17/3: 568–581.

Strati, Antonio
1995 'Aesthetics and organization without walls'. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies* 1/1: 83–105.

Strati, Antonio
1999 *Organization and aesthetics.* London: Sage.

Valtorta, Roberta
1983 'Antonio Strati photopoesie'. *Zoom*, March.

Vico, Giambattista
1725 *Principi di una scienza nuova.* Naples: Mosca. 3rd ed., 1744.

Zannier, Italo
1986 *Storia della fotografia italiana.* Bari: Laterza.