

# I Introduction

Maria  
Śliwińska  
Poland

This issue of *Uncommon Culture* is devoted to photography, a magnificent medium which revolutionized communication. From the beginning, man was looking for a way to share information and emotions with other people. The direct way was limited to face-to-face communication and required the presence of both sides at the same time and in the same place, which obviously is the best way of communicating but for a limited audience. Sharing ideas and views with people present in the same place but not exactly at the same time become possible first through drawings like those from Altamira in Spain, Lascaux in France, or Alta in Norway, and many other places we still can admire and learn from in spite of the passage of time. Further development of communication through the written word was made possible through the use of such media as books and journals, quite frequently enriched with illustrations which for a long time served as the best means of communication, but which was still not satisfactory. As Arthur Brisbane, one of the best known American newspaper editors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century noted in 1911 even before the invention of photography, “*A picture is worth a thousand words*”, and upgraded its value in 1927 significantly, to “*One Picture is Worth Ten Thousand Words*”. Was it because of the Niépce photograph?

The invention of photography made a real difference in the world, both in the private lives of many people who immortalized themselves in this way, and in journalism and science as a documentation tool. However, it was also an art.

Before it could happen, many trials had to be undertaken. These started with works on understanding the laws of optics. Here we recall just a few of these works, such as those devoted to geometrical optics in *Perspectiva*, by Witelo (known also as *Erazmus Ciolek Witelo* or *Vitello Thuringopolonis*), completed about 1270–78, and based on a Persian Ibn al-Haytham work from before 1041. Witelo experimented with optical darkness (*camera obscura*) to obtain the rainbow in rock crystal. Earlier *camera obscura* was also used in the ancient world by the Chinese (Mozi) and Greeks (Aristotle, Euclid) among others, as well as the above-mentioned Persian scientist and philosopher, and later by Leonardo da Vinci. Experiments with the *Laterna Magica* in the fifteenth century of Venetian engineer Giovanni Fontana, and those in the seventeenth century of the German priest Athanasius Kircher, also formed a prelude to the invention of the modern camera and photography. Further works of Newton in his *Optics* of 1704 moved the discovery of the camera even closer. And finally, such enthusiasts as Thomas Wedgwood (1771 – 1805), using the advice of chemists, succeeded in creating permanent pictures by capturing camera images on material coated with a light-sensitive chemical. Even though wasn't fully successful, he is still considered the first photographer. His achievements described in articles inspired others who moved work on photography forward.

Among the many working on this field, the next milestone was achieved by the French inventor Joseph Niépce (1765 – 1833), who developed heliography, and is known as the author of the earliest surviving photograph, the famous *View from the Window at Le Gras* taken with the use of *camera obscura* in 1826 or 1827. This required a very long exposure in the camera (a minimum 8 hours or even a couple of days). Niépce cooperated with the painter Louis Daguerre, who was also interested in the development of photography and achieved a measure of fame for his invention of a method of photography named for him, the daguerreotype.

Also important in taking the first steps in the development of photography was the versatile English scientist William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 – 1877), who invented the calotype process and used photography as an artistic medium. Talbot's invention was most probably a few years earlier than Daguerre's but he wasn't aware of the parallel experiments and did not register his invention immediately. Apart from that, he is known as the author of *The Pencil of Nature*, the first book illustrated with photographs. A few further milestones in photography development that should be mentioned include James Clerk Maxwell's first demonstration of colour photography in 1861. The next steps taken by Kodak include the first easy-to-use camera presented in 1888, and the first commercially available transparent celluloid roll film in the following year. Many other improvements resulted with the invention of cinematography by the Lumiere brothers Auguste and Louis. Finally, the process of scanning photographs in 1957 by the American engineer Russell A. Kirsch brought us to the work conducted today by many cultural heritage institutions, which by digitisation of their resources make them available online to the world.

This issue of *Uncommon Culture* includes materials collected mainly from the partners of the EuropeanaPhotography project, and as in previous issues, are divided into chapters: general articles listed in the first section, interviews and descriptions of projects related to photography, short articles that describe the situation in particular countries, and book reviews and reports from conferences.

The general articles start with a kind of poem by Emanuela Sesti (of Fratelli Alinari in Italy) about catalogues and inventories. She underlines the importance of the work of an invisible army of archivists, librarians and museum custodians who work on making documents available to us, and let us find the document we need through cataloguing it, adding proper metadata and classifications that are understandable not only to professionals but also to computer systems and ordinary users. She claims that photographs from the archives *provide us with the tools to read history, creating a storyboard, an illustration without a text, and lead us to read the present through the images of the past.*

The next article by John Balean from the TopFoto UK archive brings us to the newspaper sector, which increased interest among readers by adding pictures, first engravings and later on photographs, starting with Herbert Ingram's *The Illustrated London News*. The French *l'Illustration* published photographs taken by Thibault



documenting the attack on the barricades by General Lamoriciere's troops during the French Revolution of 1848, thereby launching photojournalism. This inspired others like Roger Fenton, working for Messrs Agnew and Sons of Manchester, to provide photographic documentation of similar actions like the Crimean War in 1855. As a result, he has been called the first photojournalist. The works of many other agencies followed these first works.

In contrast, the article of David Iglésias Franch from Girona deals not with historical issues but rather technological work on digitisation. He demonstrates that *numerical images talk by themselves, since they contain both the information of every single pixel in the image and the information that allows the interpretation of their totality in different devices: a camera, a screen, or a printer*. He presents examples of digital photographs with metadata included, and discuss the standards that are important in the digital world. He underlines the importance of standards for the management of archives.

Bruno Vandermeulen from Leuven University Library tries to combine the past with the present by presenting projects with an interest in vintage photography and old techniques as a basis for new works of art. He presents here works of Mark Klett, Simon Norfolk, Shimon Attie, Sally Mann, and Broomberg and Chanarin, all inspired by old photographs. One of them was John Burke's album from Afghanistan in 1878. The others were materials from the Archive of Modern Conflict based in London with circa 4 million images on the history of violence and war which inspired a project *The Holy Bible*.

In the section Interviews & Projects, two European projects dealing with photographs are presented: Europeana Photography and Euro Photo. The first one relates to old photographs digitised by the consortium of nineteen partners with goal of delivering 430,000 high-quality early photographic images to Europeana. The progress of the work and some additional tasks like organisation of exhibitions or distribution of information about the project are presented by the Coordinator, Professor Frederic Truyen, and his assistant Sofie Taes from the Catholic University in Leuven. The second project contributing photographs to Europeana is EURO-Photo, with ten European press agencies who took pictures in the past decades during their day-to-day activities. After processing digital-ready materials, they provided to Europeana one million photographs from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Valentina Bachi interviewed project coordinator Maurizio Lunetta from ANSA, the leading Italian news agency. Both projects have to resolve some technological and IPR-related issues.

This section is enriched with an interview of Claudio de Polo and Andrea de Polo, the owners of Fratelli Alinari. This is the oldest firm in the world working in the field of photography, the image, and communication, with circa 5.5 million photographs collected, many of them digitised using the most advanced technology. The last article in this section, by Antonella Fresa from Promoter srl., presents the newly-established association Photoconsortium, the International Consortium for Photographic

Heritage, which is the result of work on the Europeana Photography project. The association is open both for institutions and organizations and for individuals interested in photography. Among the many goals of this network of excellence on digitisation and photographic heritage is training and knowledge sharing.

The section of Short Articles includes contributions describing some important facts or figures in particular countries in the area of photography. For this section, we obtained fifteen articles from ten countries. Among them is **Austria**, represented by Gerald Piffl from the IMAGNO agency, describing Franz Hubmann (1914-2007) as a well-known photographer, but unknown collector who gathered a good collection of photographs from the 1960s up through the 1980s, which are now managed by IMAGNO. **Bulgarian** pictorial photography, including its origins and development, is described by Katerina Gadjeva, professor at the Institute of Art Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She explains the geo-political situation in Bulgaria, where a major role was assigned to Expressionism whilst the other more extreme movements like Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism did not gain acceptance in Bulgaria, whose photographic art was under German influence from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The photography of **Denmark** is represented by work of Holger Damgaard (1870-1945), a Danish press photographer described by Mikkel Ferneborg and Lisa Henssel Jørgensen. They present his diverse works that can serve for many kinds of research, including fashion development. However, they note that after 32 years without having missed a day of work, he left 39,000 glass plate negatives – an impressive result for that time, but which today can be reached within a year by a fulltime-employed photographer. **Italian** photographic achievements are presented by Patrizia Pampana from the Geographical Society, who describes the collection of Giotto Dainelli (1878-1968) containing circa 18,000 photographic negatives. This collection, described and organised by its owner, a geographer, geologist, ethnologist, explorer, traveller, and photographer at the same time, explains the world from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the photographs taken by Dainelli are those from the Karakorum mountain range, the Alps, and Central Asia, among others.

Julius Kanarskas from the Kretinga Museum in **Lithuania** describes one collection of the Counts Tiškevičiai (Tyszkiewiczów in Polish) from the photographic collections. Among them are photographs from the period between 1860 and 1935, taken both in Lithuania and abroad. It includes photographs by the Polish photographer in exile in Paris Benedykt Henryk Tyszkiewicz (1852 - 1935), the majority of whose photographs are available at the Musée Nicéphore **Niepce** at Chalon-sur-Saône in France. This collection contains 420 items from a set of circa 3,000 old photographs created before 1940 and stored in the museum. **Polish** photography is described by two articles. One of them, by Aneta Kopczacka from the Museum of History of Photography in Kraków, presents the work of Fortunata Obrąpalska (1909- 2004). She is called the First Lady of Polish *avant-garde* photography, as she explored new areas of photography



and received a number of awards from many exhibitions. She used new techniques like solarisation and photomontage. The second article, by Maria Śliwińska from ICIMSS, is a short overview of first experiments in photography done either on Polish territory or abroad by the first photographers and inventors.

**Romania** is also represented by two articles, one of them by Emanuel Bădescu from the Romanian Academy Library describing 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs, starting from the first calotype made by Romanian photographer Carol Popp de Szathmari in November 1848. An album compiled by Szathmari in 1862 also belongs to the earliest Romanian photographs that include portraits, group images, and vedutae, most of them of Bucharest. Numerous photographs illustrate this article. The second article, written by Dorottya Újvári, describes works of Hungarian photographer Ferenc Veress (1832-1916), a pioneer of photography active in Transylvania, which belonged at that time to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Veress opened the first photographic studio in Transylvania, in his hometown Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca now) in 1853 when he was 21 years old.

An article by Anna Grusková from the Theatre Institute in Bratislava, **Slovakia** moves us to the theatrical world. She makes us aware of the difficulties in taking photographs of people moving when acting. One of the oldest photographs from the Bratislava National Theatre come from a staging in 1935 of “Lady Macbeth in the Mtsensk District”. These kinds of photographs are difficult to make, as they should include elements of theatrical expression, such as lighting, sound, movement, mystery and secrets, or art. The theatre’s collection of photographs includes not only portraits of actors and actresses, theatre ensembles, costumes, set design, and theatre buildings, but also various forms of social life in cities, towns, and villages.

The most complex description concerns the situation of **Spanish**, or more precisely, Catalanian photographs through the contributions of four authors. Among them are an article by David Iglésias Franch, about the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion in Girona, with collections covering the first hundred years (1839-1939) of photography; and an article by Lourdes Martínez Prado describing a set of photographs from the construction of the Oliana dam in 1946. Imma Navarro i Molleví presents photographic collections in the National Archive of Catalonia whilst Francesc Sánchez Mata gives an overview of the Josep Marimon i Vidal Photographic Collection of the same archive. And finally, Alan Smith from TopFoto presents the work of **English** photographer John Topham (1908–1992), who was fascinated by photography as a schoolboy as well as at the time of his work for the Metropolitan Police, which he used as an opportunity for taking pictures of sociological scenes and conditions from the places avoided by the upper class.

Unfortunately, we are missing here information from such countries well advanced in photography as France and Germany. This suggests that *Uncommon Culture* should plan another issue devoted to photography to expand on this interesting topic.