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**New Theory Reconsidered: Reply to Scott Walden and Dominic McIver Lopes**  
**Diarmuid Costello**

I am grateful to Scott Walden and Dominic McIver Lopes for their comments on “What’s So New about the ‘New’ Theory of Photography?”. Their responses come from opposite ends of the spectrum in recent philosophy of photography, and I shall reply to them in turn.

Scott Walden, as will be apparent from his response, is what I call an “Orthodox” theorist of photography, albeit a non-sceptical one; so it is no surprise that he remains unconvinced by much of what I say New Theory has to offer. What types Walden as an Orthodox theorist is his commitment to a certain view of how photographs to come into being, together with the further view (not thematized here) that our second order beliefs about how such images come into being impact our first-order beliefs about what we are seeing, when what we are seeing is a photograph.<sup>1</sup> For Orthodox theorists, “resolute” or otherwise, this is what explains photographs’ epistemic advantage over handmade images.<sup>2</sup> Walden himself refers to these second order beliefs as knowledge, but that implies the beliefs in question are both justified and true, whereas I take them to be (at best) justified, but nonetheless false.

What types Walden as a “non-sceptical” Orthodox theorist is that he thinks these facts are consistent with photography being art. And I agree. Although it is not clear from he says here that Walden recognizes this. The reason is straightforward: one can, as Walden suggests, turn automaticity into an artistic virtue rather than vice. Indeed many art practices (and not only photographic ones) have done so: witness the

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<sup>1</sup> Walden (2005, 263, 272).

<sup>2</sup> On the distinction between “resolute” and “irresolute” Orthodox theorists, Costello (2018a, 121-130).

fascination with the aleatory, mechanical or automatic in avant-garde art since Dada and Surrealism as a strategy intended to undercut an overblown conception of the artist as a self-present agent fully in control of all his or her artistic acts. Indeed, this cast of mind is one of the reasons a certain kind of artist turns to photography in the first place—so as to mine its automatism for the aleatory and anomic effects thereby made possible. An obvious example is the valorisation of the uninflected or deadpan photographic document by various Conceptual and proto-Conceptual artists from Ed Ruscha and Bernd and Hilla Becher onwards.

I doubt, however, that these are the kinds of photography that Walden has in mind, so consider a case much closer to the issues addressed in my article. In “The Aesthetics of Photographic Transparency,” Lopes argued that the affordance of clear or revelatory seeing are two kinds of aesthetic interest we can take in a scene *as it appears through* a photograph that we cannot always take in the same scene seen directly.<sup>3</sup> The former arises from photography’s capacity to isolate aspects of a scene difficult to focus on in day-to-day life, the latter from the ways in which photographic framing and the like can defamiliarize an everyday scene. Lopes associates both with a broadly “documentary aesthetic,” and both are consistent with Orthodoxy being true. Modernist images by Lázló Moholy-Nagy, Henri Cartier-Bresson and André Kertész exploiting a combination of dramatic framing, unusual points of view, and collapsed or truncated depth of field are good examples of the latter. Not only do such images exploit photography’s automaticity for artistic gain, they implicitly leverage the folk theory underpinning Orthodoxy to generate their aesthetic pay-off. For it is only if one assumes a certain understanding of photography in one’s audience that one

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<sup>3</sup> Lopes (2003, 445). A similar line of thought recurs as “the first art” in Lopes (2016, 36-47).

will be able to trade on their delight in the fact that—*since this a photograph*—it really must be possible for the world to look like this.

So there is little dispute between us about this.<sup>4</sup> The substantive issue between us concerns whether the underlying beliefs that Walden subscribes to concerning how photographs come into being are true. Here, or so it initially seems, we do disagree: I think the latter are false, and that they are false because they rely on an impoverished understanding of how photographs come into being. More specifically, they are false as a *general* account of how photographs as a kind of image come into being, even though they may be true of how many photographs in genres that are important to us (such as vernacular, documentary or press photographs) do come into being. The fact that the underlying folk theory takes what is true of the latter to be true of the whole is what renders it inadequate as a general understanding of photographic aetiology. Seen in this light, Orthodoxy in philosophy of photography, from André Bazin through to Kendall Walton, consists of a gradual philosophical refinement of these underlying intuitions, intuitions that can be traced all the way back to photography's pioneers.<sup>5</sup>

If New Theorists are right, Walden and the folk implicitly endorse the same mistaken theory about this. To my surprise, Walden seems willing to grant this claim. Thus he writes, while parodying New Theory's focus on the "photographic event" as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of photographs as images available to visual appreciation:

*Such candidate items of knowledge might not be incorrect. After all, such things as automotive and telephonic events regularly take place. But*

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<sup>4</sup> All are automatic images that, in Walden's terms, are "Nonrepresentational"<sup>S</sup> and generative of an aesthetic interest, if not an "aesthetic interest"<sup>S</sup>. That is, all elicit *some* kind of aesthetic interest, just not an aesthetic interest in Scruton's sense, since it may not be clear precisely what thought about the scene is being conveyed.

<sup>5</sup> Costello (2018a, 121-130).

merely highlighting properties instantiated by technologies being studied is not sufficient to foster understanding of those technologies. Instead, such understanding requires the highlighting of instantiated properties that either help users to interact with those technologies or designers to augment or improve those interactions. The properties highlighted by the new theorists in relation to photography are as inert in these respects as the ones imagined highlighted in relation to cars and telephones.<sup>6</sup>

Either Walden thinks the fact that existing folk theory (which new theorists take to be the basis of Orthodoxy in the philosophy of photography) is wrong does not matter, or he thinks that if it does matter it only matters to wrong people. If I have this right, I do not know what to make of it: if philosophers are not in the business of correcting false beliefs, what business are they in? Walden seems willing to grant that the beliefs in question are wrong, only to respond not in terms of philosophical debates, but in terms of engineers (those who have a detailed technical understanding of how a given technology works) or practitioners (those who only need to know how to use the technology in question). But besides being an odd demand to make of philosophers—why should what philosophers do be of service to either camera engineers or camera operators?—this smacks of moving the goalposts. For the debate at issue concerns not how to help engineers or snappers, but what competing camps of philosophers believe is sufficient for a photograph to come into being. And this matters—which is to say that it matters *philosophically*—because if we get this wrong it pushes much of what photographers do in harnessing photographic technologies for artistic ends beyond the domain of photography proper. That should worry both theorists of photography and philosophers of art alike.

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<sup>6</sup> Walden, (2019, MS, 4; my italics)

In a certain mood, I am inclined to agree with Walden that calling what follows from taking such considerations seriously a “New Theory” or “paradigm shift” may be guilty of over-egging the pudding. For it can seem that recalling our attention to the fact that photography requires *harnessing* the capacity of light to mark sensitive surfaces, yet cannot be *reduced* to natural causality (because additional imaging processes are required to make the results available to visual appreciation) is little more than a reminder of what we (should) already know. But it bears noting just how widespread the relevant, and if New Theory is right, mistaken assumptions are.

They arguably recur at several points in Walden’s response, notably when querying the need for New Theory as a response to Scruton’s scepticism. Take the (terrifying!) painting by Norman Rockwell resembling one of Walker Evans’s 1936 photographs of starving Alabama sharecroppers that Walden asks us to imagine. This is an intuition pump that *presumes* the truth of Orthodoxy: that it succeeds is to be expected if the latter really is just a formalization of the intuitions underwriting folk theory of photography. But given that New Theorists dispute that painting represents a bona fide, non-contentious contrast class to photography, this cannot be assumed without begging the question.

It is worth pausing to consider why New Theory arises from responding to Scruton in particular. Scruton’s scepticism crystallizes a powerful pattern of thought that permeates even *non-sceptical*, everyday thinking about photography. Just how standard is easily overlooked, but a continuous line can in fact be traced from Scruton back to 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Take the debate between Robert Demachy and Frederic Evans over the competing merits of the painterly Gum bichromate process versus and the Straight print, or the tussle between Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson over the respective merits of Pictorialism and Naturalism. At stake in both is whether

straight (unaltered, non-combinatory) prints from straight negatives permit sufficient judgement and control to be art. Essentially the same divide was apparent, within two decades of photography's invention, in the competing responses of Elisabeth Eastlake and Oliver Wendell Holmes to photography's treatment of detail. Where the former chastised photography for its mindless lack of selectivity, attributable to the absence of human mediation and transformation, the latter celebrated the beauty that results from according equal attention to the marginal and seemingly unimportant.<sup>7</sup> The fault-line throughout such debates is whether "pure" photography—photography in which the formation of the image bypasses the mental states of the artist—could be art, or whether photographers must choose between sacrificing photographic purity in order to make art, or give up their pretensions to making art as a cost of maintaining their photographic purity. Taking this longer view, there is little in Scruton, or many of his critics, that is not already present in Eastlake and Holmes circa 1857-9. Scruton merely reheats the sceptical side of the debate, and he can do so because the intuitions on which the debate turns remain common. Lopes recognizes this, and *The Four Arts of Photography* sets out to demonstrate the falsity of every premise in what he calls the "the sceptical argument."

My own view—and this is where I depart from Lopes—is that this focus is mistaken, and may represent New Theory's Achilles Heel to date.<sup>8</sup> Mistaken, that is, not in the sense of being wrong, so much as being misdirected. My own view is that New Theorists ought to take Walton rather than Scruton as their stalking horse, and for two reasons: not only is Walton's conception of photography immeasurably richer than Scruton's, it also speaks to both its epistemic and its aesthetic capacities. This is

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<sup>7</sup> Costello (2018a, 10-24)

<sup>8</sup> Costello, (2018a, chapters 2-3)

what makes Walton a representative of “Non-Sceptical” Orthodoxy on my taxonomy: his theory accounts for the epistemic privilege dear to Orthodox thinkers, but it does so in a way that does not rule out its artistic significance. For Walton, as is routinely overlooked in the rush to contest the counter-intuitiveness of the transparency thesis, photographs are not simply transparent; they are also pictures. That they are enables them to function as spurs to the kinds of imaginative capacities and projects in which Walton grounds the significance of pictures in general, thereby securing their aesthetic significance. While, unlike pictures in general, the fact that photographs are also transparent allows them to function as a significant means of learning about the world, thereby securing their epistemic significance. Because it accommodates both, I have argued that is Walton’s theory rather than Scruton’s that New Theorists should be cutting their teeth on.

Be that as it may, New Theory does, as a matter of historical fact, emerge from taking up Scruton’s challenge that photography cannot be representational in his demanding sense. Walden is right to question Scruton’s easy conflation of artistic and aesthetic, indeed I think he might go much further. For the point can be made more broadly than the obligatory nod towards Conceptual Art. There is art not only *after*, but also *before* and, indeed, *alongside*, the aesthetic tradition. That is, there is art that predates a contemplative understanding of art (art in the service of magic and ritual, or propitiating the gods). There is also a rich variety of artistic practices outside the Western canon that we treat aesthetically but that do not so function in their original cultures (West African masks being one obvious example). Finally, there is not only Conceptual art, but a wide variety of avant-garde, political, and “socially engaged” practices that aspire to provoke their viewers to action rather than contemplation. Then there is Scruton’s idiosyncratic, yet oddly uncontested, conception of what it *is*

to take an “aesthetic interest” in a work of art. It is much more common to understand aesthetics as picking out a distinctive feeling than as recuperating the “complete and manifest” expression of a thought. Indeed that it is, is one reason questions about the adequacy of aesthetics to art as a product of human action (hence made for reasons) routinely arise.

If, instead of contesting this underlying picture, one concedes—as Walden proposes—that Representational Art of the kind Scruton has in mind cannot be produced photographically, in order to focus on the many other kinds of art (drawing on other kinds of aesthetic interest) that can, Scruton is entitled to shrug his shoulders. For this is a response that entirely passes Scruton’s argument by. So, while Walden and I may agree that the photographer can use automaticity in the service of their art, without producing works that are Representational in Scruton’s sense, we disagree as to the significance of this fact. Walden is undoubtedly right that this does not matter artistically—artists are free to make art however they want—but, philosophically, this response leaves Scruton completely untroubled.

As to the second condition that Walden claims New Theory must meet in order to show that deflationary responses to Scruton fall short, but which it fails to meet: automaticity (or in Scruton’s version of Orthodoxy, non-agential causality) is indeed the only quality that is “strongly associated” (as Walden puts it), with ideal photographs. For Scruton, this is true by definition: ideal photographs are defined as being transparent to their objects, rather than their creator’s intentions, because they have a strictly causal relation to those objects. Neither I, nor Walden, may agree with this, but neither I, nor Walden, may wish it away. And this is why the considerations Walden raises against New Theory seem to me beside the point. The philosophical debate concerns what constitutes a satisfactory theory of photography. I doubt that

either designers of cameras or software algorithms, or their end users, are given to fretting over photography's alleged "fictional incompetence." This is a philosophical worry, and it only arises given a certain conception of photography's nature. This is what New Theorists are taking issue with, and to my mind it is enough. Walden may believe I think otherwise because I raise the question of to whom, according to New Theory, we should attribute the images on the 6600 rolls of film Garry Winogrand left either un-proofed or unprocessed on untimely his death in 1984. But I raise this, *pace* Walden, not as a proof of New Theory's practical value, but as a challenge to its lack of theoretical specificity to date as to how we should individuate photographs, once photographs are said to originate in photographic events. This matters, theoretically, should it turn out (and it does) that many photographs are the product of more than one. Perhaps Walden thinks this is not to matter enough. If so that would be another difference between us.

All that being said, I recognize the force of Walden's closing consideration: we do feel and respond differently to certain photographs (notably of loved ones and places we are familiar with) to the way we feel about many paintings. That said, there is often a failure to compare like with like in such cases, so it is worth asking what is doing the heavy lifting here—the medium of representation itself or familiarity and memory. However one comes out on that, explaining this need not involve attributing anything so arcane as quasi-philosophical views about automaticity to the folk. It need only involve some sense, however inchoate, that the way in which the photographs to which most people are routinely exposed (previously on "instamatic cameras" now on phones) come into being, by instantaneously recording their sources without obvious labour or skill, significantly differs to the way in which most handmade images come into being. Indeed, this may even be for the kinds of reasons that Walden has drawn

attention to elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> And such a sense, acquired in this way, may be grounded in beliefs that are reasonable, yet nonetheless misleading when generalized.

My response to Lopes will be briefer, in part because there is less distance between us. Lopes and I are fellow travellers in these debates, even if I have taken issue with the “permissiveness” of his own version of the New Theory elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Lopes’s reply consists in part of providing a more explicit argument for New Theory intended to demonstrate its superiority over its competitors, of the sort I claim above has been lacking to date but, perhaps more interestingly, he does so by making clear some of the underlying methodological assumptions structuring his own approach to these questions. The latter clarifications are particularly welcome.

As Lopes maintains in *The Four Arts of Photography*, Lyric photography presents the stiffest challenge to the Orthodox assumptions underpinning the sceptic’s argument, because only Lyric photography is incompatible with Orthodoxy being true. What Lopes calls “Lyric” photography encompasses a wide variety of practices that foreground the material processes and procedures of photography itself and, in so doing, take issue with Orthodoxy’s primary assumption by standing up to (P): “a photograph is an image that depicts by belief-independent feature tracking.”<sup>11</sup> This is Lopes’s way of styling the mind-independence or natural counterfactual dependency

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<sup>9</sup> Walden (2005, 271-2).

<sup>10</sup> Costello (2016, 135-146) and Costello (2018b).

<sup>11</sup> These include Richard Mosse’s sumptuous hot pink images of war-torn Congo, made by exploiting the effects of the visible spectrum on infra-red film, Thomas Ruff’s coy blow-ups of low resolution pornographic screen-grabs, and Craigie Horsfield’s meditative, almost slow motion images of crowds, circuses, and zoo animals output as enormous tapestries on state-of-the-art digitally programmed Jacquard looms. More controversially, they also include Gerhard Richter’s photo-paintings, on the assumption that these are both paintings *and* photographs, or photographs “completed by” painting.

claim that is Orthodoxy's bedrock. There are other forms of photographic art, but these are compatible with the latter being true; only Lyric photography tackles Orthodoxy head-on. There is a question-begging way of refusing this challenge; it is to reason:

P is not naturally counterfactually dependent on its source,

But natural counterfactual dependency on its source is a necessary condition of being a photograph,

Therefore P cannot be a photograph.

This response is question-begging because the major premise assumes the truth of Orthodoxy when its truth is precisely what is in question. It is nonetheless tempting because it appeals to widespread intuitions about the nature of photography. Because Lopes takes such appeals to be deeply, if unwittingly, theory laden—per my response to Walden—his own work studiously avoids such appeals in favour of what he calls “second-order” methodology. Lopes proposes we think of this on the model of philosophy of science. The empirical sciences provide a well-researched body of data about the natural world. The philosopher of science's task is not to model the natural world directly—this is best left to scientists; it is to make theoretical sense of the first order explanations and hypotheses of empirical science. By analogy, the task of the philosopher of art is not to engage directly with artistic cases—leave that to appropriately trained critics and historians; it is to take the deliverances of first order art criticism and theorizing as primary data for philosophizing. On this model, the philosophy of art asks not “What is Art (or Photography)?” but, rather, “What must Art (or Photography) be, given how it is treated in the relevant first order sciences?”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On this, as well as being unmoved by appeals to intuition, Lopes is close to Kendall Walton's methodological observations in Walton (2007)

As he puts it elsewhere, Lopes's recommendation is to "go social."<sup>13</sup> So understood, photography is at bottom a technology for making images by outputting information recorded from a momentary state of a light image; it only becomes a medium of artistic expression by being subject to the evaluative norms that constitute the arts as appreciative practices. This is because the arts are one kind of social practice, a kind that it constituted by norms of an appreciation nature.

Consistent with this understanding of methodology, *Four Arts* examines a range of photographic arts as appreciative (social) practices. In doing so it takes the writings of art critics, historians and theorists as the primary input for theorizing and outputs philosophical theories consistent that input, subject to whatever fine-tuning (elimination of redundancy or contradiction, streamlining, perspicuous presentation, and the like) elegant theorizing requires. Or so Lopes claims. But one might wonder whether this presentation of what he is up to properly reflects his direction of travel. Recall that *Four Arts* begins by isolating a powerful pattern of thinking that naturally engenders scepticism about photography's standing as art. Lopes formalizes such thinking, and identifies the four arts of his title with different forms of photographic art that "stand up" to each of its premises in turn. This set up, as I have acknowledged elsewhere, is both bracing and elegant.<sup>14</sup> The question I want to raise here, in light of Lopes's methodological clarifications, is whether it adequately reflects his preferred method. The sceptical argument, so formalized, is something that only a philosopher could have come up with. This is not to deny that it may well reflect a widespread, if largely implicit and inchoate folk theory about photography, but rather to note that its formalization is allowed to determine how the first order, critical and historical, field

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<sup>13</sup> Lopes (2018a)

<sup>14</sup> Costello (2016, 136).

is conceived. This requires carving the artistic world at joints quite different to those served up by the relevant first order sciences themselves.

As a result, it is questionable whether Lopes's conceptualization of the field would be recognizable to leading art historians, critics and theorists as a philosophical theorisation of their own, first order, results. On Lopes's way of carving the terrain, for example, historian-critics of traditions as profoundly opposed to one another as Douglas Crimp and Michael Fried turn out to be charting the vicissitudes of a single art. This despite the fact that Crimp and Fried understand their respective canons as directly opposed: Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawlor, and Barbara Kruger as exemplars of postmodern anti-authorial appropriation on the one side; Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth as exemplars of the Tableaux form's inheritance of modernist painting on the other. In so far as the two canons share any artists in common—I am thinking of James Welling and Cindy Sherman—this relies on making diametrically opposed claims for what they are up to, so that they can be recruited to competing sets of critical values. So here we have critics with *directly opposed* values, one dedicated to debunking such “modernist myths” as authorship, expression, aesthetic value and the like, the other to celebrating these very values, and doing so through what they take to be diametrically opposed canons—if the results of first order empirical science are to be believed—being presented as a single art.

It is hard to know what to do with this. Either my own representation of the relevant first order science is misleading (and I am confident that it is not) or Lopes's is. Suppose for the sake of argument that I am right: if Lopes is justified in presenting the field as he does, this notwithstanding, he would either need to show that the first order science is mistaken, by providing some kind of error theory, or to provide some other grounds to justify rewriting it. But doing either would appear to flout his stated

aim of making theoretical sense of the deliverances of first order science. And this is not an isolated example: all of the arts of photography, as they fall out of the sceptic's argument, comprise a wide variety of contrasting, and often tenuously related artistic practices. Suffice to say here that, on Lopes's way of parsing the terrain, there will be as many, if not more, similarities between practitioners of distinct arts as there will be between practitioners of what is supposed to be same art. Once that is true, Lopes's claim that the "four arts" present a philosophical theorisation of first order science, supported by the work of critics and historians, may prove difficult to sustain.<sup>15</sup> If nothing else, this shows that what it is to take first order research as data for second order philosophizing may be less straightforward than Lopes's recommendation to "go social" suggests, especially when first order practice is itself conflicted, as it so often is. In such circumstances it may become unavoidable for second order practice to take a stance on some matter of controversy within first order debate, thereby collapsing the methodological distance between them.

As Lopes remarks whilst explaining his own reservations about first order approaches in aesthetics, "there is reason to doubt that philosophers' judgements about cases provide good materials for conceptual analysis."<sup>16</sup> And I agree. But my question is: what prevents the worry recurring at the next level up? If philosophers do not generally have the critical sensitivity to dispense with the intermediate results of art critics and historians, in order to engage with the first order field directly, why assume they have the critical sensitivity to be attentive readers of what these same critics and historians produce? In itself this need not be a problem—there are good

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<sup>15</sup> Costello (2016, 138-9).

<sup>16</sup> Lopes (2018b, 35).

reasons for disciplinary differences after all—but it may become one given Lopes's presentation of his own method.

Setting this to one side, the question between us is whether New Theory's explanation of the much-vaunted epistemic privilege of (some) photography bests Orthodoxy's. According to the latter, photography's epistemic privilege is a direct entailment of how it is defined, with all the adverse consequences for understanding photography as art that this brings in train. Per my response to Walden, Lopes is right that I think this the decisive test for New Theory. Given the variety, depth and social importance of photography's epistemic uses, it would be a Pyrrhic victory to secure its artistic standing at the cost of rendering the form mysterious. On Lopes's model, the arts of photography are distinguished from photography as a technical process for making images by their responsiveness to social norms. Because the norms in question are appreciative, the arts are appreciative practices. Consistent with this explanation of what makes the arts of photography appreciative practices, uses of photography that subtend quite different social practices will be responsive to quite different norms. When, as in a variety of forensic, diagnostic, scientific or legal contexts, photography is tasked with providing reliable knowledge of the world, the norms in question will be largely epistemic (reliability, accuracy, clarity, lack of ambiguity or propensity to mislead, and so on). But this is a fact about the social practices that such uses of photography serve; it is not a fact about photography per se—as can be seen from the very different norms that govern the appreciation of abstract photography, to pick just one example.

This is a compelling set of claims. The fact that the authority of such norms has to be policed with the threat of serious professional sanction if flouted out in field (where channel conditions cannot be carefully monitored, as they can in lab by highly

skilled technicians) shows as well as anything might that nothing internal to the nature of photographic technology prevents their being flouted. Indeed they very often are. Denying these claims would also require stipulating that a variety of art institutions, including those dedicated to the criticism, collecting and curating of photography are hopelessly confused, given that much of what they spend their time and resources on does not count as photography strictly speaking. From where would philosophers' authority to so stipulate derive?

In a recent symposium about the New Theory, Catharine Abell encouraged Lopes to pursue the implications of the proposed social turn to its terminus. Abell's contention is that New Theory *chez* Lopes should dispense with reference to belief-independent feature tracking altogether, even for epistemic uses of photography, in favour of a theory that leaves the preservation of photography's epistemic values to the institutions that photography serves, and understands photography itself in terms of conveying information from a recording event. How strictly a given institution need police the preservation of such information would no longer turn on anything taken to be intrinsic to the nature of photography—including the capacity to track features independently of belief—but on the functions of the institution in question. That belief independent feature tracking can fall away, without thereby undermining an image's epistemic value, may be seen from the assignment of arbitrary colour values to different kinds of tissue or gas in certain forms of diagnostic, medical and astrological photography to aid extraction of the sought after information. Because in these contexts channel conditions *can* be closely monitored, failing to track features independently of belief can often aid extraction of the target information, hence need not compromise an image's epistemic standing. On Abell's proposed reformulation: "all photographs carry information about the photographic events causally involved in

their production and thus about the pro-photographic scenes information about which those events record. This is a fact about them quite independent of the social norms that govern them.”<sup>17</sup> So understood, what makes one kind of photography more epistemically valuable than another is neither whether it tracks features independently of belief, nor solely whether it is subject to the norms of a knowledge-oriented social practice, but whether it carries information in an easy to extract form, via a channel recognized as effective for the purpose. If Lopes concurs, the challenge now facing New Theory will be to specify, in a non-arbitrary way, how effective such a channel must be to form part of photographic process. I suspect that Lopes’s minimalism on this question to date: “[t]echnically, if there is some modicum of information transfer, we have a photograph” is unlikely to satisfy Orthodox defenders of photography’s epistemic value.<sup>18</sup> Whether that is genuine cause for concern I leave others to decide.

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<sup>17</sup> Abell (2018, 215).

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