

*Making as thinking.*

*Printing photographs in the darkroom as artistic expression.*

The processes of production in photography remain largely unobserved as expressive practice. In particular, the act of printing photographs in the darkroom is often unrecognised as a creative work itself. Historically, this might result from the traditional criteria for artistic authorship that considers photography as mechanical and impersonal, and therefore incompatible with the classic task of visual art to manifest an extraordinary craft in an art-object. The critique of contemporary art, however, is not concerned with qualifying in such gastronomic criteria and they no longer explain the absence of printing as an expressive practice. Perhaps the reason for this lack of interest in it as expression is that today artistry is commonly seen to belong to the domain of *thinking* rather than *making*. Consequently, photography is considered mainly through its ontological qualities rather than its production processes. This emphasis implies that the act of printing is a mere “uncreative” post-production.

Yet how does artistic thinking manifest itself in the material and practical work in the photographic laboratory? How does its mechanical-bound process relate to artistic intuition? What happens in the darkroom? We propose that the act of printing can possess a broader significance as a tool that can shape the conceptual scheme of artistic practice.

The paper outlines the premises of the darkroom as an epistemic work-space drawing from two art theoretical concepts, that of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1962) and art coefficient (Duchamp 1957). Relating printing photographs to these concepts, it is described as a practice that uses intuitively and organically what is available-at-hand and accounts making as a way of thinking that is a manifold relation of what becomes intendedly or unintentionally expressed in its act. Printing can also be seen an imaginative process of following simultaneous and mutually interdependent thoughts bringing them into awareness. It is an operation in the midst of things, where things interact with one another forward and backward and where the question of what is primary and what is secondary loses its sense. This calls into question the habitual division of artistic practice into a free zone of thought and the secondary material and practical. We examine that printing involves intuitive, intellectual as well as a material investment that are inseparable from the creative process.