

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING
UP TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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INTRODUCTION

Photography, which is now an integral part of our lives, came into being in Europe about 1830 as a result of several simultaneous experiments in optics and chemistry. Because of its scientific origins it has essentially been regarded as a product of technical rather than aesthetic traditions. The medium has been considered an outside, by many artists, which had disrupted the course of painting. The idea that photography had taken over the representational function of painting, forcing it to eventually become abstract, was accepted by many.

This argument, which seems to have been started around 1900 by painters who used it to justify their rejection of nineteenth century naturalism, has its roots in the belief, begun in 1839, that photography is the epitome of realism. This idea, however, is not acceptable without qualification and in the first chapter of this thesis, I will examine the shared mutual roots of both photography and perspective painting, and the changing aesthetic ideas, whose development allowed photography to develop.

The second chapter is given over to the effect that photography had on painting almost immediately after its development, dealing with those aspects of the medium which painters utilized in their work.

This transfer of ideas and aesthetics, however, was not all in one direction, and Chapter III essentially deals with the manner in which painting ideals and aesthetics, in their turn, influenced the new medium and photographer's approach to their subject matter.

The final chapter deals with photography's most significant and influential role in its relationship to painting; its action as a catalyst and spur to the development of the modernist movement in Painting. It is possible that this development may have occurred anyway - that fact that it happened at the time and in the manner in which it did is largely due to photography. Photography was not the sole reason for the development but it was an extremely prominent one.

SHARED ORIGINS OF PERSPECTIVE ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Both perspective art and photography share the same origins.

Perspective drawing derives from the study of the optics of perception which began during the Renaissance. In 1453 Leon Battista Alberti published "On Painting" and since then a perspective painting has been defined as a plane intersecting the pyramid of vision (ILL. 1). At the apex of the pyramid is the eye. The pyramid's base is the perimeter of the picture. The picture is the projection on the intersecting plane of everything that lies within the scope of the pyramid extending to infinity. In his book Alberti put forward the theory that if it is perfectly drawn and viewed with only one eye from the apex of this imaginary pyramid, a perspective picture will be like a window, through which we view the subject.

The predecessor of the modern camera is the camera obscura (ILL. 2) which was also the result of the study of optical perception. The principle on which the camera obscura worked, that a beam of light passing through a small hole in one wall of a dark room projects an image on the opposite wall, was known to Aristotle, to the ancient Chinese and to Leonardo da Vinci. Early written accounts of this phenomenon invariably stress its use as an aid in drawing. Daniel Barbaro, a professor at the University of Padua, in 1568:

Close all the shutters and doors until no light enters except through the lens, and opposite hold a sheet of paper, which you move backward and forward until the scene appears in the sharpest detail. There on the paper you will see the whole view as it really is,

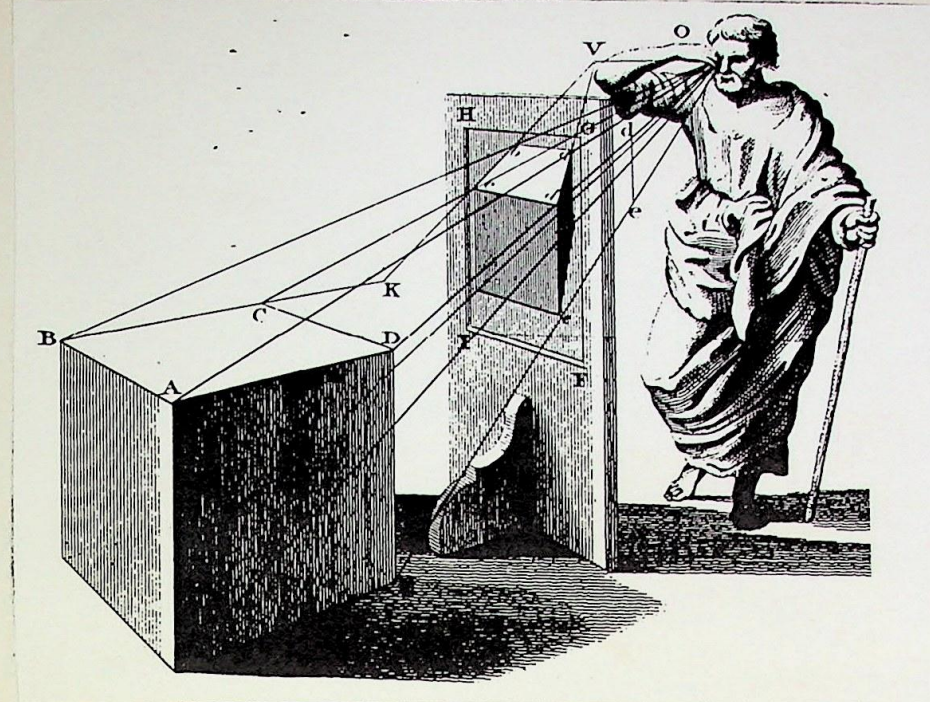


ILLUSTRATION 1: THE PYRAMID OF VISION

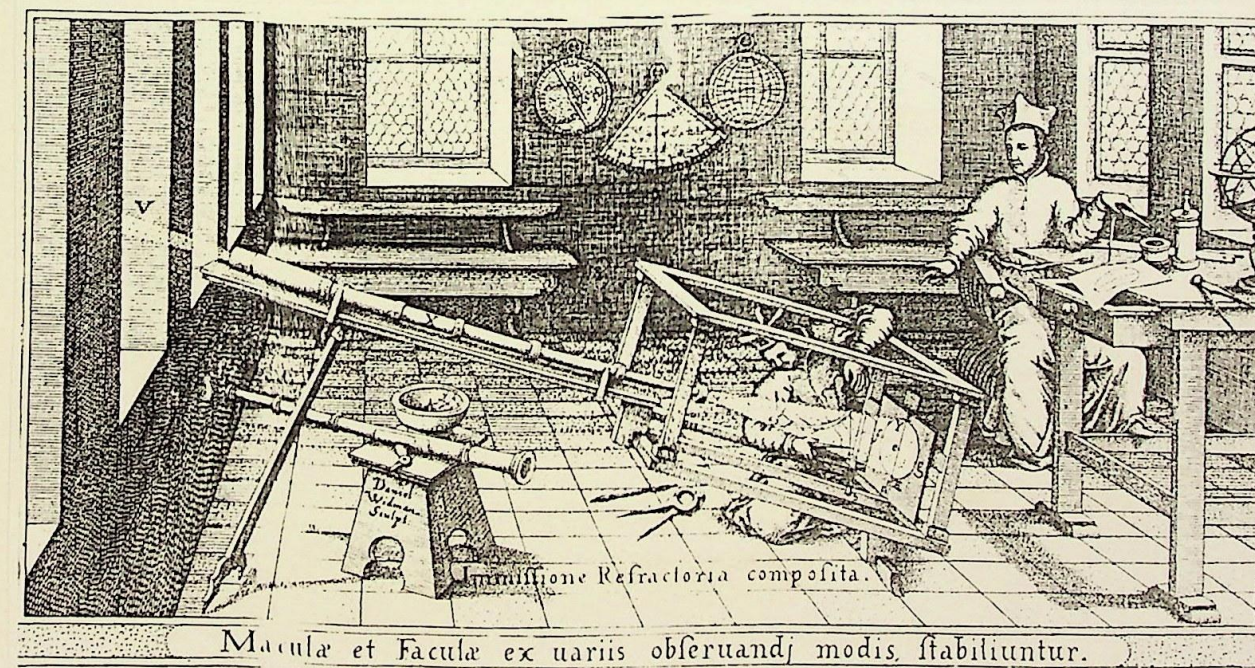


ILLUSTRATION 2: THE CAMERA OBSCURA

with its distances, its colours and shadows and motion, the clouds, the water twinkling, the birds flying. By holding the paper steady you can trace the whole perspective with a pen, shade it and delicately colour it from nature.¹

It was only a relatively short step from perspective drawing to early photography. The first step was to trace the image as it falls on a transparent two-dimensional plane. With the introduction of convex lenses, the image could be more conveniently inverted onto an opaque surface, such as paper or canvas. In the nineteenth century the artist was removed from the inside of the camera and the back wall was coated with a light-sensitive material. The photographic camera came into being. This camera can be seen as nothing more than a means for automatically producing pictures in perfect perspective.

The Convention of Composition

Renaissance perspective adopted vision as the sole basis for representation: every perspective picture represents its subject as seen from a particular point of view at a particular moment. Working within this narrow conception, artists still managed to paint in an extraordinary variety of ways. For example, the pictures of Piero della Francesca, Emanuel de Witte and Edgar Degas are very different in appearance. These differences may be understood by the way each of them conceived of the role of vision in art, and these conceptions themselves can be seen to form a coherent history.

If we compare An Ideal Townscape from the circle of Piero della Francesca, c. 1470, (ILL. 3) and Emanuel de Wittes Protestant Gothic Church c. 1669 (ILL. 4) we see that the subject of each painting is a regular, architectural structure, symmetrical along an axis. The earlier painter took this as his axis of vision and therefore his picture, too, is symmetrical. The ground plan of the square is as clear as a map and all scales can be checked precisely by reference to the path.

De Witte's painting, however, is asymmetrical. His point of view is off the axis of symmetry of the church and his line of sight is oblique to it. De Witte's conception also differs in that he includes only a section of the interior of the church, whereas the Italian view takes in the entire piazza. The Italian painter did not concern himself with time in his painting which bathes in the clarity of even light, and this strengthens the architectural logic. With his use of the momentary play of light and shade, De Witte places his painting in a specific time, and ignores the architectural logic.

Both of these painters are faithful to the rules of perspective. However, the Italian painting was done in the service of its subjects absolute order, while De Witte's was done under the disruptive influence of an arbitrary viewpoint and moment in time. In the first painting we stood outside and in the second we are drawn in. These differences point to a change in the standard of visual realism. The old standard did not disappear

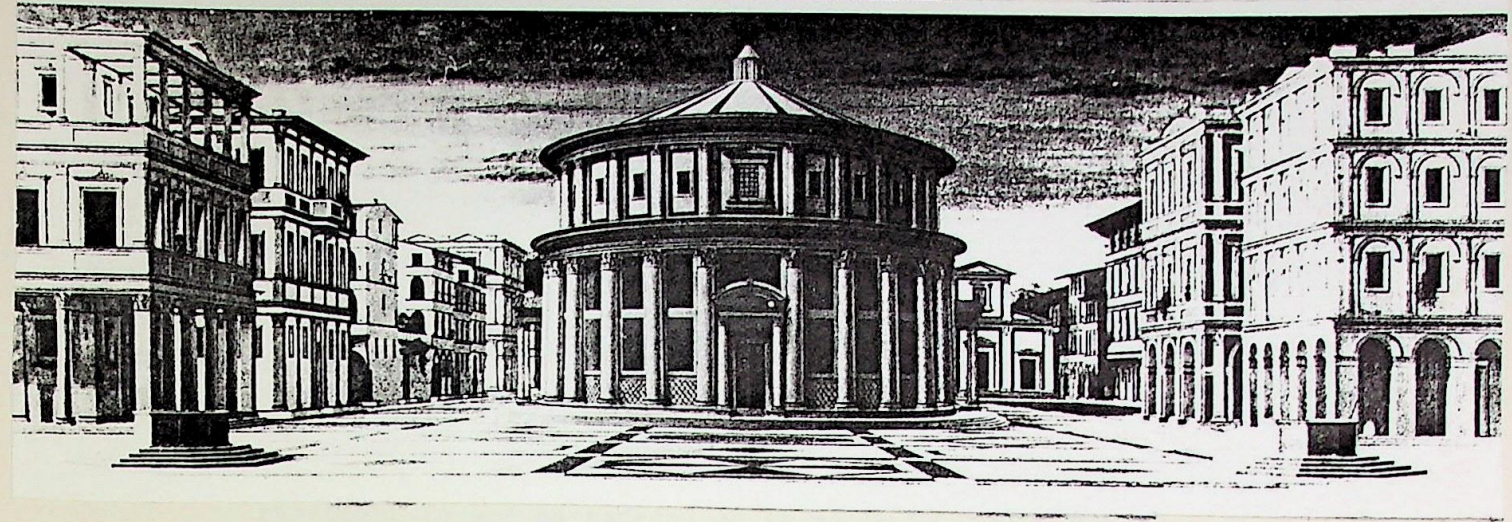


ILLUSTRATION 3: AN IDEAL TOWNSCAPE FROM CIRCLE OF PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA



ILLUSTRATION 4: PROTESTANT GOTHIC CHURCH BY EMANUEL DE WITTE

but it was seen to be conservative. Also different from the norm was the vanguard formed by paintings with a new visual syntax which did not enter the mainstream until much later. An example of such work is The Grote Kirk c. 1636 (ILL. 5). In this painting the light is not as radical as it is in De Wittes but the structure is much more so. Here the frame cuts into the pillars in the foreground, which are massive in comparison to the pillars in the background, hiding most of the features in the interior. It was 250 years later before such a disruptive composition became the normal option of every painter. In Degas' The Racing Field c. 1880 (ILL. 6) the point of view and the frame cut the figures and horses and compresses them into an unfamiliar pattern. Although Degas composed his picture as carefully as Uccello, his intuitive procedure was totally different. Uccello used the visual pyramid as a static, neutral container and inside this he organised the subject of his painting. Degas, however, used the pyramid as an active element and it plays a decisive role in the composition. The obstructions are caused by his chosen viewpoint which results in asymmetry within the frame, which excludes as well as includes.

There is a tradition of pictorial experiment which connects Uccello to Degas. There is a progressive link between Uccello and De Witte, De Witte and Saenredam (The Grote Kirk). In the seventeenth century, painters began to introduce prominent foregrounds, which, although accurate in perspective, would have been thought of as bizarre a century before. In Jacob Van

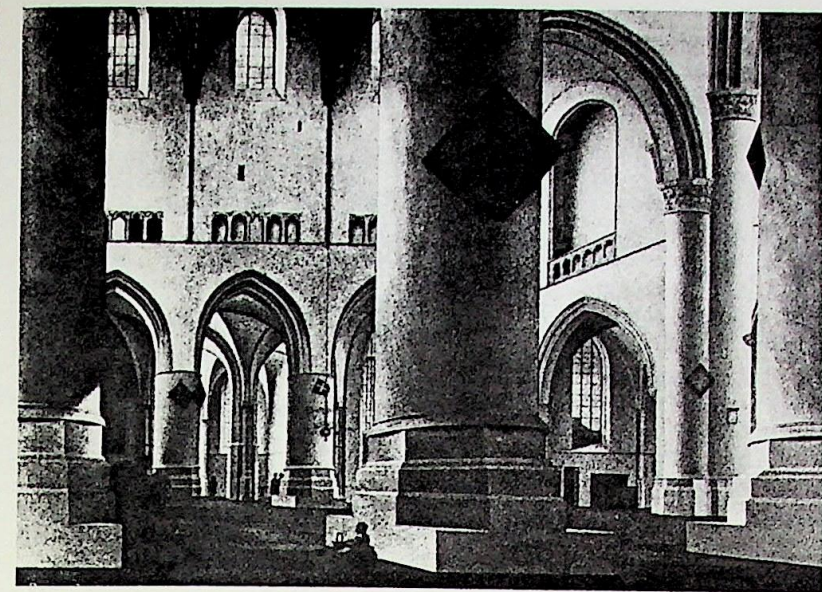


ILLUSTRATION 5: THE GROTE KERK BY PIETER JANSZ SAENREDAM

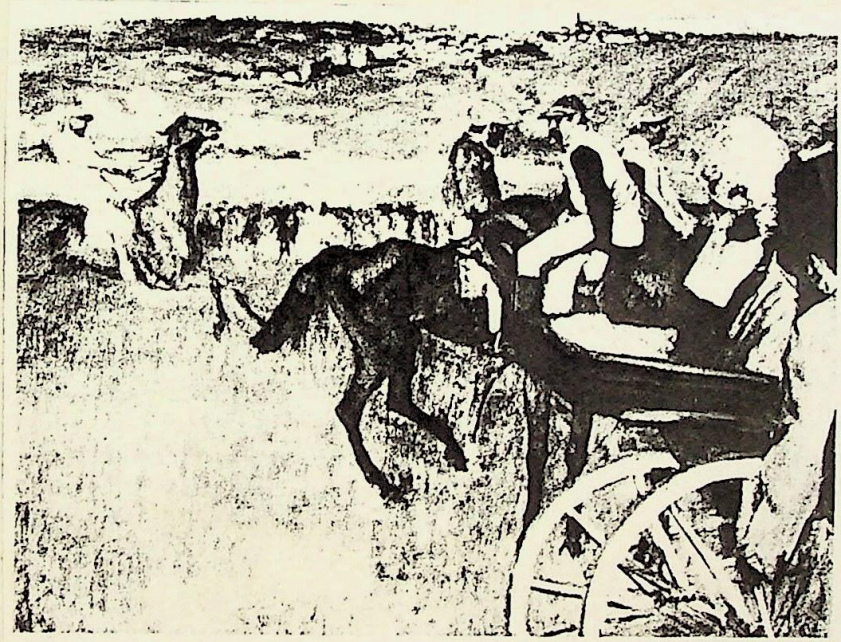


ILLUSTRATION 6: THE RACING FIELD BY EDGAR DEGAS

Ruisdael's Bentherm Castle c. 1670 (ILL. 7), the boulders in the foreground, of no intrinsic value in themselves, are given as much prominence as the castle itself. The space between the boulders and the castle, the foreground and background, is filled by a number of diagonals which lead the eye into the picture and to the subject. This series of diagonals performs the same function here as the path did in Uccello's painting, by providing a two-dimensional measure of a three-dimensional space.

In a painting done 160 years later, Friederich Loos View of Salzburg from the Monchsberg c. 1830 (ILL. 8), the contrast is even sharper between the foreground and the subject. There are no diagonals here. No pictorial link. Because there is no link in this painting the viewer is made to feel his own presence in a much stronger manner. This painting appears to be more realistic. However, this is a relative viewpoint as even Uccello's painting appeared realistic when it was produced. In the history of perspective each new strategy, for the achievement of realism, appears to succeed by destroying the existing convention. However, the convention which was destroyed has merely been replaced by a new convention.

The Sketch

The Neoclassical artists of 1800, led by the French painter Jacques Louis David, rejected the art of the previous generation partly because of its frivolous content and partly because of its artificial style. This gave rise to a new standard of pictorial



ILLUSTRATION 7: BENTHEIM CASTLE BY JACOB VAN RUISDAEL

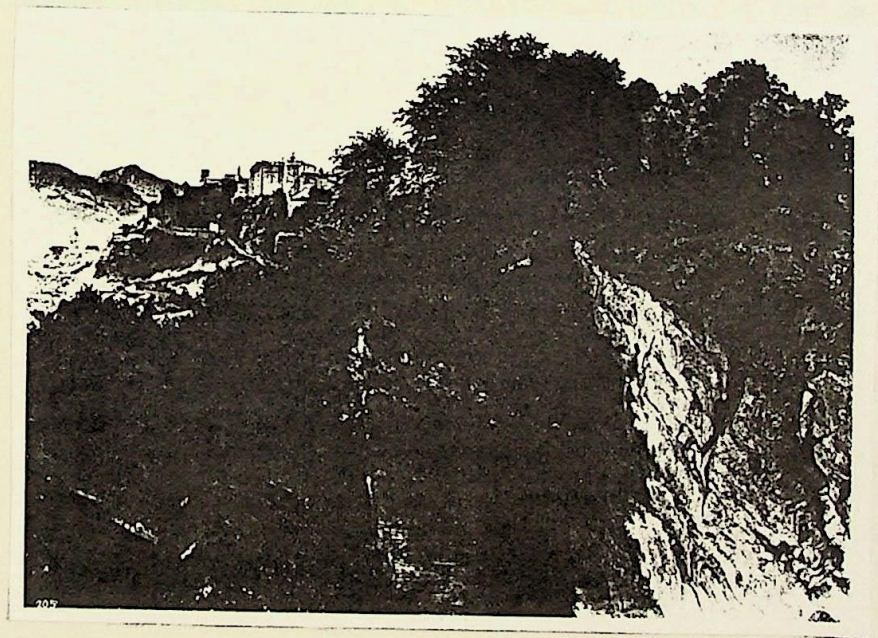


ILLUSTRATION 8: VIEW OF SALZBURG FROM THE MANCHSDERG BY FRIEDRICK LOOS

logic, the growing spirit of realism. They sought to replace the fantasies of the eighteenth century with a much more sober art based on precise visual observation. By placing emphases on the distinction between imperfect reality and the imagined ideal, Neoclassical theory created a gap between the observational study and the finished painting. This isolated the sketch to a domain of specific artistic issues. This gap could be most clearly seen in landscape painting.

The landscape sketch was academically considered as an aspect of craft and was therefore much more open for experiments in realism. This allowed for a shift in artistic values to develop. The landscape sketch based on concern for visually humble things, became, around 1800, a vehicle for an original pictorial order. The use of this type of realistic landscape painting contradicted the dominant Neoclassical principle of an ideal art. However, these innovations were possible largely because they did not challenge the authority of public art. These landscape sketches presented a new and essentially modern pictorial construction. It is the construction of an art which is composed of the singular and chance rather than the universal and the stable. It is also the construction of photography.

The large and immediate impact which photography was to have on painting was partly because the new medium was invented and developed in an aesthetic environment which increasingly valued the fragmentary, the ordinary, and the uncomposed. Those land-

scape sketches which were straightforward visual records were seen at the time as pictures of bits, in contradiction of the accepted convention of the time which was pictures made of bits. These sketches were very independent from the traditional standards of artistic value, and it is this very independence which they share with much early photography. The difference, however, was that in painting, the new standards were won through long experiment whereas photography rendered the old standards obsolete from the beginning because of its inability to compose.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

- ¹DOUGLAS DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY AS FINE ART, p. 8.

PHOTOGRAPHY'S INFLUENCE ON PAINTING

Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre was a Parisian artist who operated a diorama, a display he had devised consisting of large panoramic trompe l'oeil images lit from above or behind and which were made to look as realistic as possible. He used a camera obscura to create these enormous pictures. In search of a means to perfect his show, Daquerre devised a method to fix the image inside the camera obscura and it was this process which was the first photographic technique to win popular acclaim. Although Daquerre was a painter by profession, the initial enthusiasm for photography was directed at the mechanically realistic detail of the images and not at its possibilities as a fine art medium. The process was first shown to the public in 1839 and the Mechanics Magazine of that year exclaimed:

In one, representing the Pont Marie, all minutest indentations and divisions of the ground or the building, the goods lying on the wharf, even the small stones under the water at the edge of the stream and the different degrees of transparency given to the water, were all shown with the most incredible accuracy.¹

The photograph was perceived as a mechanically reproduced slice of reality. Daquerreotypes were widely proclaimed a "miracle". Edgar Allan Poe in America claimed that they disclosed "a more absolute truth than the work of ordinary art". The photograph had the power to cut deeper into the mass consciousness than any other graphic medium. One daquerreotype caused a scandal

when it was displayed in a shop window and due to public pressure it had to be removed, for obscenity. Even though it was only a photograph of people eating in a restaurant, the image was too shockingly real.

The medium was, at this time, perceived to be primarily objective and scientific in its nature. This assumption was endorsed by the critics of the time such as Baudelaire. He mimicked the claims of the new medium's defenders:

Since photography provides us with every desirable guarantee of exactitude (they believe that, poor madmen!), art is photography. From that moment onwards, our loathsome society rushed, like Narcissus, to contemplate its trivial image on the metallic plate.²

However, as we have seen in chapter one, photography was a cultural phenomenon in its origins. The inventors and users of both the camera obscura and the modern camera were painters who were inspired by the same goals as other artists. The technological and industrial applications of the medium followed its invention by 50 years. It was only in 1888 that Eastman Kodak introduced a cheap everyman's camera with the slogan:

You push the button, we do the rest.³

This assumption that photography was objective and scientific led people to expect from it an impersonal rectitude which it did not possess.

Portrait Painting

As if in response to Baudelaire's derisive statement, the first artform directly affected by photography was portrait painting, during the eighteen forties. Landscape painting was affected in the latter part of the decade. The genre to be affected first was that of the portrait miniaturists.

Portraits in miniature underwent a major change of style after the appearance of photography. Some traditionalists held fast, but the majority were rather quick to assimilate the new methods offered up by the seemingly impartial eye of the camera. Often portraits in miniature were painted directly over a photographic base, as in the work of Francois Rochard. Except for the smallest personal touches these miniatures are no different from photographs.

Portrait painters found that by using photographs, the traditionally long sittings could be reduced or even eliminated. Ingres may have been among the very first artists to use the daguerreotype for portrait commissions. In 1855, Eugene de Mirecourt associated his work with the photographs of Nadar.

Young Nadar is the only photographer to whom he sends all those perfect likenesses he wishes to have. Nadar's photographs are so marvellously exact, that M. Ingres, with their help, has produced his most admirable portraits, without necessity of having the original before him.⁴

Nadar, whose real name was Gaspar Felix Tournochon, was also involved in the theatre, literature, and drawing, and even took the first aerial photograph in 1858 from a hot-air balloon. His studio was visited by the most fashionable personages of the time, and in 1874 it was used as the gallery for the first exhibition of French Impressionists rejected by the Louvre. He placed major emphasis on the personality of his subjects, whom he usually photographed from a three-quarters angle against a plain background, under the soft light from the glass roof of his studio.

The portraits of Ingres contain some odd features which are a direct result of his having worked from photographs. In many early photographic portraits the head of the subject is resting on one hand, this being necessary to steady it during the long exposures which were needed at the time (ILL. 9). This photographic convention was transposed to the work of those painters such as Ingres who used photographs.

Nadar was one of the first photographers to use artificial lighting for his work. However, one of the side-products of the use of electric battery or pyrotechnic systems such as magnesium wire was that the sharp divisions of tone which were found in earlier photographs taken in direct sunlight were much more exaggerated. It is possible that Daumier, who was a friend of Nadar, may have studied these unusual tonal effects to develop what was already a characteristic of his work. "Don Quixote and



ILLUSTRATION 9: UNTITLED BY PUYO

Sancho Ponza" is an example of just such an effect, where the extreme division of tones is such as to eliminate the middle tones.

Around 1884, Fontin Latour and a group of his friends were conducting experiments in photography using artificial light. These experiments finished with the completion of his painting: "Autour du Piano" (ILL. 10). The lighting in this painting is very similar to that of photographs taken with artificial light during the same period.

The burnt-out effect which was a result of artificial light is especially noticeable on the faces and on the sheet music. This is because these are the lightest tones and they naturally reflect the most light. Correspondingly the dark clothes which did not reflect much light appear as merging dark masses.

This burnt-out effect and other indigenous side-effects which were a result of the photographic process were responsible for photography beginning to describe its own unique boundaries. One of the first theorists to notice this truth was Lady Elizabeth Eastlake. Wife of the Director of the National Gallery of Art in London, she wrote a review for a British periodical in 1854. In this review she wrote about the history of photography and some of its surprising strengths:

Photography is a new form of communication between man and man - neither letter, message nor picture... Far from holding up the mirror to nature, which



ILLUSTRATION 10: AUTOUR DU PIANO BY FANTIN-LATOIR

is an assertion usually as triumphant as it is erroneous, it holds up that which, however beautiful, ingenious, and valuable in powers of reflection, is yet subject to certain distortions and deficiencies for which there is no remedy. The science therefore which has developed the resources of photography, has but more glaringly betrayed its defects. For the more perfect you render an imperfect machine the more must its imperfections come to light: it is superfluous therefore to ask whether Art has been benefited, where Nature, its only source and model, has been but more accurately falsified.⁵

Although the photograph has a strong link to the real, perceived world and appears to present the truth, it does, in fact, lie. That the lens records, what it perceives at a given time in a mechanical fashion, is the source of the medium's powers. But it is this record in combination with its deficiencies which we call photographic.

Photography had begun in Paris and caught on extremely quickly, there were many dedicated amateurs there. It was natural enough then that it was in France that photography exerted the most influence on painting. However, it did much more than influence the visual appearance of painting itself. It helped to speed up the shift in emphasis, which had begun with the Neoclassical artists, as regards subject matter. No subject was too humble and painters encouraged by the work of these amateur photographers with their willingness to take "snaps" anywhere, anytime, became less and less formal in their approach. With scenes, landscapes etc. with photographs there also coincides a new "snapshot" look about the subjects and composition of the

new paintings. The cutting-off of figures, horses and carriages was one of the more strikingly indigenous side-effects of the instantaneous photograph and it is reflected in the painting of the time. This was a new convention in painting which was introduced through photography. It was used frequently by Degas, an example being The Racing Field c. 1877 (ILL. 6^{CHI}).

However, there is a considerable difference between the use of this convention in photography and its use in painting as exemplified by Degas and that difference is one of intention. In the other examples given so far, of the use of a photographic convention in painting, such as Ingres portraits, the use of the convention in the paintings was dictated by necessity. If it was necessary for the subject to steady his or her head with an arm to facilitate the exposure of a photograph, then it was necessary to paint the subject in that pose if worked from that photograph. It was not necessary for Degas, however, to paint The Racing Field in its cropped format. If he had just used photographs to provide specific information, for example, of a carriage, then he would surely have used a photograph of the entire carriage. That there are so many examples of this type of cropping in his work is indicative of deliberate intention. Degas used this photographic convention in order to make the visual pyramid play an active, decisive role. The convention was not imposed, it was assimilated into the work. Degas worked from a whole to an aspect: he analysed. There is no cropping in

Degas's earliest pictures of racecourse scenes. He probably first used it in his "Jockey's at Epsom", of 1862, in which the head of one horse is neatly cut where it joins the neck. From 1862 it becomes a constant feature in his work, especially when the subjects are horses or dancers.

The way in which Degas presented a form of cinematic progression, particularly in his compositions for dancers, had not been tried before in painting. This juxtaposition of similar subjects, and in some cases, the same subject, to simulate the appearance of a single moving figure even precedes the photographs of Jules Marey (ILL. 11). In a later work after Marey, Dancer Trying her Slipper (1883), Degas represents one figure in the same position but from different angles. This does not mean, however, that he was not influenced by photography. Disderi took many photographic series of dancers which were arranged in a similar manner to Degas' work. In two of Degas' works "Scene de Ballet", and "Le Pas Battre", which date from 1879, the dancers are painted frozen in mid-air. These works coincide with the arrival in Paris of the unprecedented instantaneous photographs of Eadweard Muybridge.

Late in 1881, Jean Meissonier entertained in his Paris home a large group of artists whom he had arranged to meet ~~May~~bridge and view his work. Among the guests were Gerome, Leon Bonnat, Destaille, De Neuville, Jules Goupil and many others. A year before this gathering Meissonier had been shown Muybridge's

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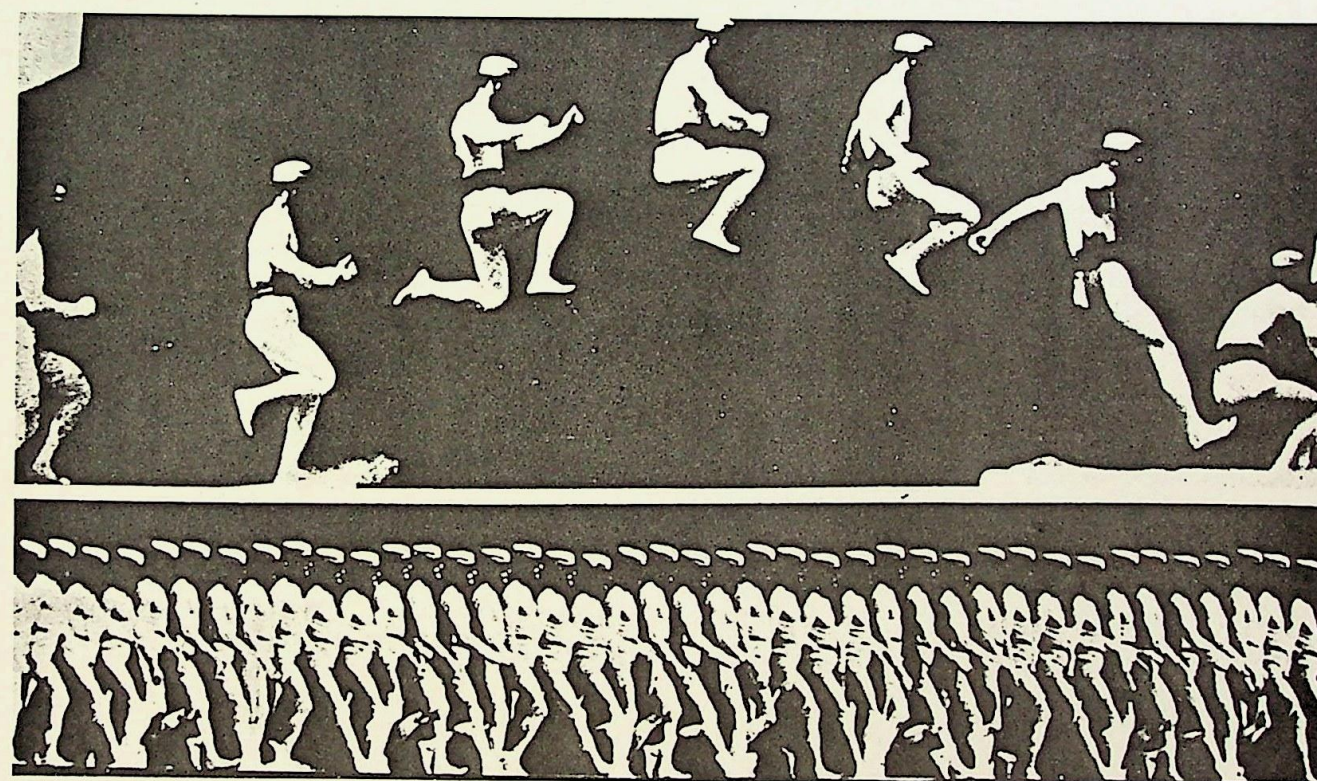
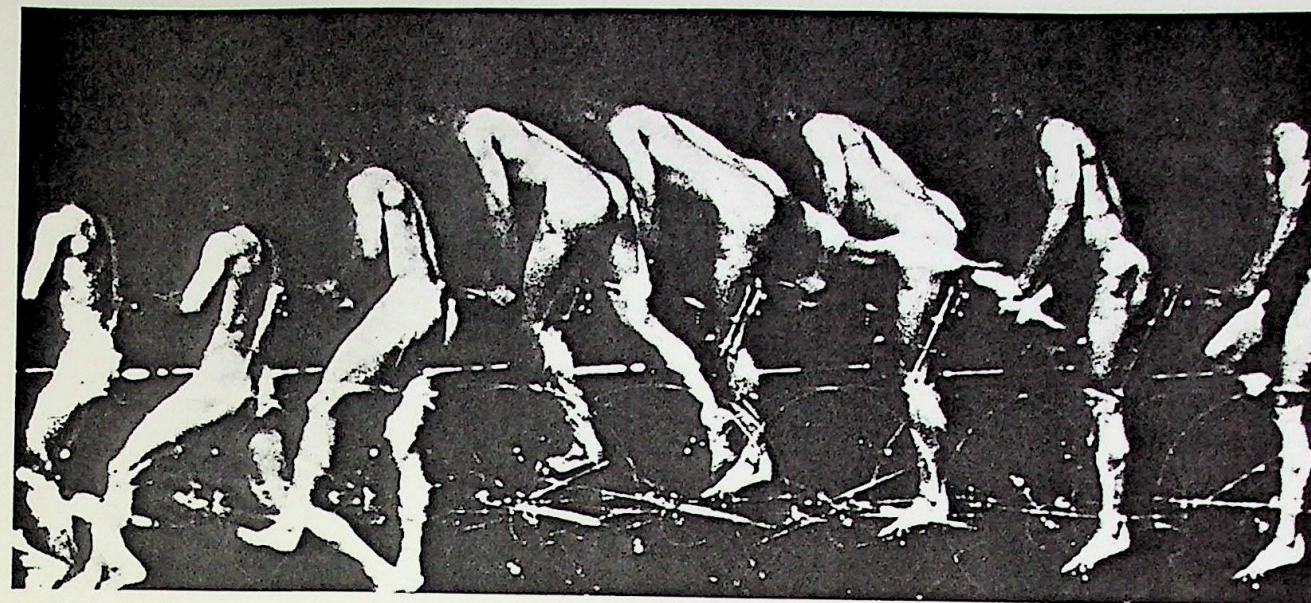


ILLUSTRATION 11: UNTITLED BY JULE'S MAREY

photographs of horses in action. This time Muybridge himself showed not only his photographs of the horse in motion but also:

The attitudes of men in the art of wrestling, running, jumping and other exercises.⁷

These, though few in number, were most admirably represented and the warmest applause came from those whose greatest works on the canvas or in marble are those of the human figure.⁸

In May 1887, Meissonier stated that he intended to repaint his then famous "1807", and reposition the horses in accordance with Muybridge's photographs. He declared that his previous observation of horses in motion had been wrong. However, not everyone agreed with Meissonier. Some thought animals should not be shown as they actually are, but in a such a way as to "suggest" motion whatever the artist and his public thought that to be.

This situation arose because realism is culturally relative. Before photography, painting had held a cultural monopoly for the depiction of realism. Paintings looked realistic, not because they were, but because they conformed to the conventions which society developed for depicting realism. In this case the hobby-horse attitude, front legs stretches forward and hind legs stretched backward, was the traditional convention. Meissonier was adopting a photographic "truth" as the basis for realism. Yet these photographs themselves were not even acceptable. When Muybridge showed his studies of a horse in motion, none of the photographs showed the hobby-horse attitude and the

pulic thought they looked absurd. It can be seen that neither painting nor photography are realistic, rather they are both conventions for depicting realism.

In France, between 1850 and 1859, a School of Realism appeared which advocated an extreme of pictorial objectivity which was only feasible with the use of the camera. To us it is obvious now that Courbet's work was executed within a convention and was part of a tradition through which he was influenced by earlier painters, but his contemporaries thought he had "sprung" from nowhere with a style which was not influenced by any school. Even those who totally disliked his work thought it was very objective and strong on independent style. Courbet's work was seen as stark and ugly. His contemporaries objected to his "total" disregard for the traditional rules of art. They also objected to the indecency of his nudes. Courbet's work was often compared with photographs, and was said to be just as ugly, artless and feeble. His great mistake, according to his critics, was that he seemed to believe that verocity was truth. The Cult of Ugliness, as Realism was called, was seen to threaten the sacred Ideal of Beauty. Realism was the new enemy of art and it was believed to be born of photography. Complained Delecluze:

The taste for naturalism is harmful to serious art... It ought to be said, that the constantly increasing pressure exerted during approximately the last ten years, on imitation in the arts, is due to two scientific forces which are fatal in action, that is to say, the daguerreotype and the photograph⁹ with which artists are already obliged to reckon.

These criticisms were levelled at the Salon of 1850-51, all of which is hard to believe now. To us it is quite apparent that Courbet's work was conditioned by convention and that he paid more attention to history and the old masters than he liked to say.

By 1853 the threat to art was seen to come not so much from Realism, but from the photographic image itself, which it was seen, had infiltrated all schools of painting. Even those who painted in the "Neo-Greek" style were criticized for painting figures like sculpture. Their "ideal" world was being painted more or less as it might have been found in nature. Photography was seen to produce a brutal reality with sad effigies of human beings which were extraordinarily ugly. Any painting which made use of photography was seen in the same light. The ugliest, most obscene photographs were, of course, nudes and Courbet painted his nudes in the same realistic manner as the photograph. Or so it was thought at the time. Almost always Courbet's nudes were painted in positions which were derived from antique conventions. This element was never overblown but it was always there. Essentially it was the element of the Ideal in his work which so outraged the critics. His fat and ugly peasant women were pretending to be nymphs.

In 1854 in a letter to his friend and patron, Alfred Bruyas, Courbet asked to be sent a photograph of a nude woman. He described the nude in this photograph as standing in the middle

behind a chair. There is a photograph by Julien Vallou de Villeneuve, whose photographs Courbet seems to have made use of which fits this description. It is very similar to his painting "L'Atelier". During the year 1855, both Courbet and the Societe Francaise de Photographie held private exhibitions. Each of them wished to protest at the exclusion of work from the Salon and the photographers wished to assert their position in the Hierarchy of art. The advocates of "artistic photography" had found it expedient to attack not only the Realist painters but also those photographers who fell into the error of producing purely imitative photographs.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

¹CLAUDE NORI, FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHY, p. 33.

²DOUGLAS DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY AS FINE ART, p. 7.

³DOUGLAS DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY AS FINE ART, p. 10.

⁴AARON SCHARF, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY, p. 49.

⁵DOUGLAS DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY AS FINE ART, p. 12.

⁶ROBERT TAFT, THE HUMAN FIGURE IN MOTION, EADWEARD MAYBRIDGE.

⁷ROBERT TAFT, THE HUMAN FIGURE IN MOTION, EADWEARD MAYBRIDGE.

⁸AARON SCHARF, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY, p. 128.

EARLY AESTHETIC PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography gained an immense popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century and eventually reached every level of society. The middle class which had come to power at the beginning of the century, revelled in an optimism which was linked to the idea of progress and humanistic values. It needed a mirror to project a flattering image of itself and it found one in photography. People lined up to get into photography studios and by 1852 millions of portraits were being taken in France alone. No longer was the portrait reserved only for the upper classes. The rise of photography coincided with the era of capitalism and materialistic thinking and it mirrored the fascination of the times with anything scientific. It became the first great myth of industrial civilization.

Although portraiture became a large industry and was responsible for the popular dissemination of photography, it did not satisfy the aesthetic aspirations of many photographers. In the desire to compete with painting, these photographers began to manipulate the image, to retouch negatives and even paint over the print. From its earliest beginnings painters and engravers had been involved in the altering of photographs. From 1839 onwards, engravings and lithographs were produced from daguerreotypes. Due to the long exposures necessitated by the difficult early process, anything which was not static, i.e. people and vehicles,

was not recorded on the print. In an attempt to please the public who did not like these depopulated photographs, figures and traffic in the Romantic style were added. These photographs, in their original state were not aesthetically acceptable. Before they could be accepted it was first necessary to slot them in with the previously established pictorial convention.

Because the photographic emulsion used at this time was overly sensitive to blue light, the sky in a negative was recorded as a solid tone and the print as a result appeared with a white cloudless sky. This was intolerable to photographers who wished to emulate and compete with painting, and to solve the problem, two different exposures were taken and the final print was a combination of both. This new technique of using several negatives to make one photograph was called combination printing. Many early photographers who sought to emulate the look and meaning of traditional painting compositions, found themselves defeated by the photographic medium itself. The photographs described with equal precision, or imprecision, the major or minor features of a scene, or showed it from the wrong point of view, or included too little or too much. Even photographers who wanted only a clear record often found themselves with a disturbingly unfamiliar picture.

Pictorialists

However, a school of photographers developed who were determined to overcome these photographic "defects" which separated photography from painting. They were called the Pictorialists and foremost among them was a Swedish painter called Oscar Gustave Rejlander.

Rejlander's solution to the problem was the technique of combination printing, which he used to make allegorical compositions after the style of the academic painting of the day. He conceived and executed an immense composition called, "The Two Ways of Life". For this he used twenty-five models who played roles ranging from "Religion" and "Charity" to "Gambling" and "Wine". He posed the models in small groups, taking many photographs. Then masking the paper, he printed the negatives, one by one, in their appropriate positions. The final print which was nearly three feet long was entered in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, where it was bought by Queen Victoria.

"The Two Ways of Life" can be seen as a desperate attempt to legitimise the new art-form of photography by aping the aesthetics, composition and subject matter, of academic painting. Photography had not yet found its own standard of artistic and moral authenticity. It still laboured in the shadow of its predecessor. Combination printing, however, was responsible for the introduction of montage into the vocabulary of art.

The man who had most influence on the aesthetics of photography during its formative period was Henry Peach Robinson. Like Rejlander, Robinson also used the combination printing technique. However, he did not strive to produce allegorical scenes, rather he went in for more concise, powerful, and realistic scenes of Victorian life. His photograph, "Fading Away", a composite composed of five negatives shows a dying girl with her grief stricken parents by her bed. His contemporaries were shocked by the subject; it was felt to be in poor taste to represent so painful a scene. This criticism can not be ignored simply as Victorian sentimentality, as much more explicitly painful subjects were being painted at this time. But the fact that it was a photograph implied that it was a truthful representation and objection. It was viewed literally. Even though this photograph was very similar to "The Two Ways of Life", it had broken down a barrier of convention which had been inherited from painting.

However, Robinson's strongest influence was through his prolific writing. His book "Pictorial Effect in Photography" (1869) had many editions and was translated into French and German. The book was, in effect, an easy manual for the production of art-photographs and was based on the academic rules of composition for painting. Robinson illustrated his text with reduced photographs of his own work and with woodcuts of paintings, particularly those of David Wilkie. He analysed the structure of these paintings for his readers, and suggested that picture making, be it painting or photography, shared the same rules

and formulae. It was not just Robinson's book alone which converted his generation. The trend in all the arts at this time was romantic. At this time photographers were trying to persuade the public that the medium was as noble an art as painting. Although photography was looked on as an extension of painting, it was considered a very poor relation. Not only did Robinson popularize an emulation of painting aesthetics, but he also encouraged artificiality. His followers began to retouch their negatives and tint their prints in order to erase "mean" blemishes, particularly their portraits.

Any dodge, trick, any configuration of any kind is open to photographers use... It is his imperative duty to avoid the mean, the bare, and the ugly, and to aim to....correct the unpicturesque.... A great deal can be done and very beautiful pictures made, by a mixture of the real and the artificial.¹

Whereas at this time painters had begun working outdoors, influenced by photographic amateurs, Robinson was simulating nature under a skylight: with shrubbery mounted on a rolling platform, a stream improvised from the dark-room drain, and clouds painted on backdrops.

Many French pictorialists, such as Commadant Puyo and Robert Demachy, kept protesting that photography was not an art at all but simply a technique for reproducing images and so easy that any fool could do it. Most of the pictorialists in France were mediocre and frustrated painters, or wealthy amateurs who wanted to preserve the status of the unique work of art.

They believed that only photographs that resembled paintings could in any way be considered art. They chose only the most traditional subjects and produced many allegories. What mattered to them was not what they portrayed so much as how it was portrayed.

Realism

However, not everyone believed that they should avoid awkward forms and correct the unpicturesque. A school of realism appeared in France around 1850. P.H. Emerson advocated the opposite of everything stated by Robinson in "Pictorial Effect in Photography". Instead he advocated an extreme of pictorial objectivity which was only feasible with the use of the camera alone. While Robinson continued to propose investing photographs with the spiritual attributes and subjective qualities with which he associated painting, Emerson in his book Naturalistic Photography (1889) advocated photography as an independent medium, with no need to borrow from or imitate others. Emerson also stated that individual vision could be expressed with the camera, unaided, and that emotional content lay in the untouched image alone. At first, Emerson, thought that he was using a scientific approach, devoid of romantic nonsense. His work was simple and straightforward, concentrating on the casual aspects of his subjects' lives.

There is no doubt but that Emerson attracted the most adherents and had most impact on the shaping of photographic history. The direct images of realism excited most attention, especially the

photograph-as-discovery, as exemplified by the American photographers Timothy O'Sullivan and Eadweard Maybridge. They used new large-plate cameras which allowed them to produce large prints crammed with detail. In these photographs, painting was at last matched.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III

- ¹DOUGLAS DAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY AS FINE ART, p. 13.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Influence of Chronophotography

The experiments of Muybridge and Marey with photography and movement influenced more than the manner in which painters depicted horses. Whereas Maybridge had put together collections of photographs, with each photograph representing an individual movement within its own frame, Marey reproduced each phase of the movement in its correct spatial position relative to all the other phases recorded on the same plate. This continuous movement of superimposed images revealed the continuity patterns of the movement itself. Muybridges' photographs were concerned with the internal changes in the anatomical structure of his subject and Marey's in the measurable graphic signs of movement. By attaching white strips along the length of the arms and legs of his subject and then taking photographs at fast, regular intervals, and printing all these shots on one frame, he was able to obtain oscillation graphs of his subject.

In his earlier printings Seurat's main interests were in the luminous effects of light and colour. Later he also concerned himself with other visual phenomena, among them, the optical and expressive properties of movement. His friend, Charles Henry, was a scientist who proposed in his writings, theories

on the expressive nature of directional lines. He wrote about contrast, rhythm and measurement, and their application to aesthetics. In discussing patterns of the progressive movement of the human body, Henry refers to Marey's work.

Seurats painting, Le Chahut, (1889-90), was partly an attempt to apply Henry's theories on dynamics. The superimposed sequence of dancers and the repeating folds of their clothes look quite like the patterns found in Marey's photographs. Even though two of the dancers were male, he painted all the legs female, presumably in order to retain consistency. At the dancers' feet can be seen directional lines, trace images which fly back from their toes. They do not coincide with any tangible form and it would appear that these lines are there to express the sensation in graphic form of movement, quite like the trace lines found in Marey's photographs.

From the very beginning, movement has had the centre stage as regards photography and its effects on painting. When the exposures were too long to record a moving object, it was the lack of that object. When Muybridge could take a photograph at one-thousand of a second it was the highly improbable poses which his subjects were frozen in, which caused controversy. For those artists working within the tradition of nineteenth century naturalism, the clarity and inertia of Muybridge's photographs was preferable to those of Marey.

But for those artists who rejected realism in painting and who wished to obscure the literal identity of things and instead give preference to the abstract realities of movement: to the movement itself rather than the object in movement, its rhythms and patterns - Marey's images were more suitable.

One of those artists concerned with new means of representing time, space and movement at the beginning of this century was Marcel Duchamp. He often expressed his disgust with "retinal" painters, concerned with sense impressions, who in his opinion continued to paint the same picture over and over again. Rejecting the painting of the recent past as an influence, he arrived at a point where he deliberately chose his own sources outside painting. It was not colour theory but chronophotography and the concept of a fourth dimension which caught his imagination. Duchamp was not a painter but a jack-of-all-trades. His contribution was to the broad field of art itself. here is a visual connection between chronophotographic form and Duchamp's painting, such as, "Five Silhouettes of a Woman on Different Planes", which was first exhibited in the Salon d'Automne in 1911. Here, as in Marey's photographs, are repeated superimposed images of a single figure. It was only a short step from this work to his most important painting (ILL. 12) "Nude Descending a Staircase" (1911-12). Duchamp himself stated that the idea for this painting came principally from Marey's photographs and others which were similar.



ILLUSTRATION 12: NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE BY MARCEL DUCHAMP

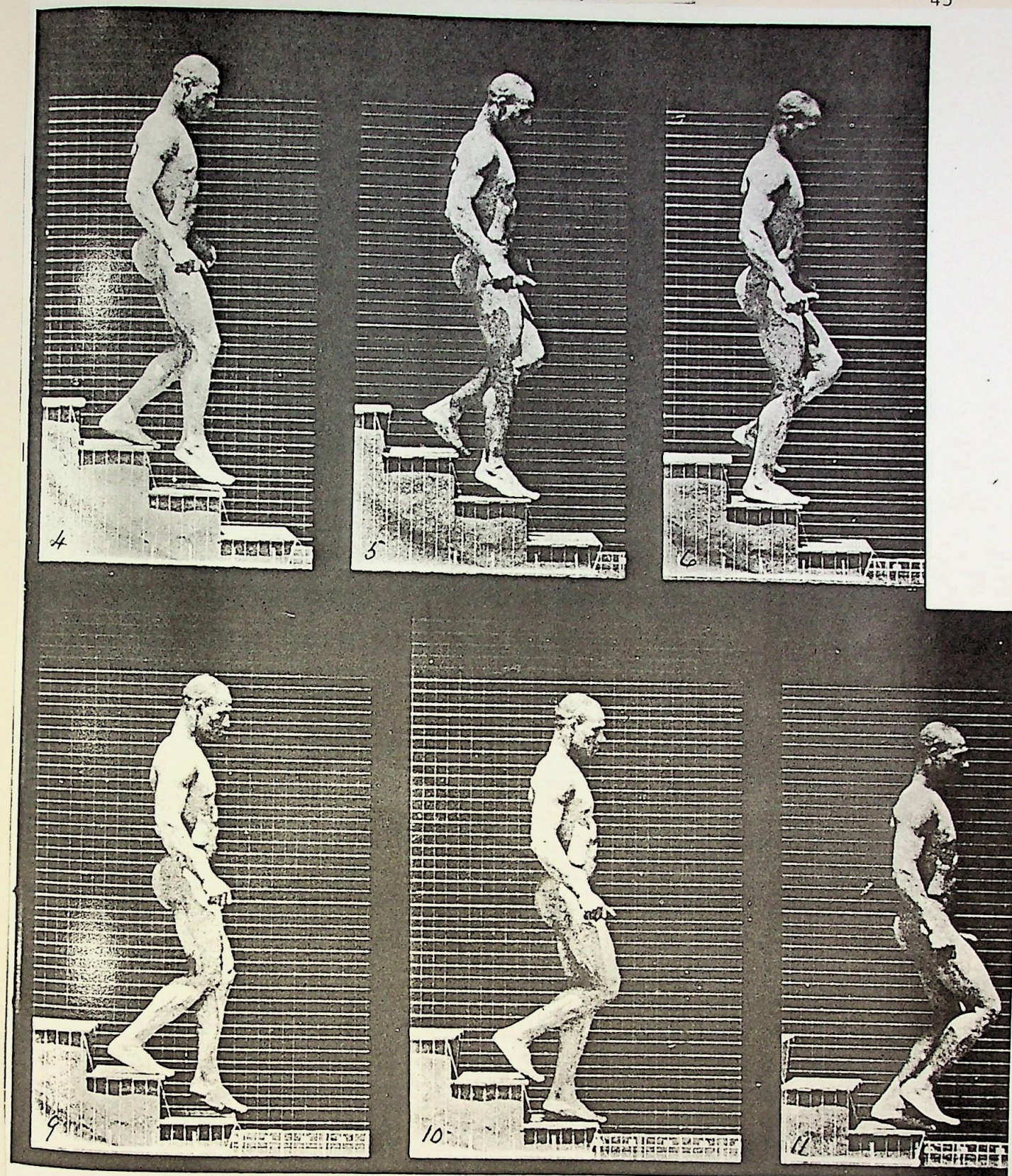


ILLUSTRATION 13: MAN WALKING DOWNSTAIRS BY EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE

The final version of the 'Nude Descending a Staircase', painted in January 1912, was the convergence in my mind of various interests, among which the cinema, still in its infancy, and the separation of static positions in the photochronographs of Marey in France, Coskins and Maybridge in America.

Painted as it is, in severe wood colours, the anatomical nude does not exist, or at least, cannot be seen, since I discarded completely the naturalistic appearance of a nude, keeping only the abstract lines of some twenty different static positions in the successive action of descending.¹

Visually this painting bears a strong resemblance to Marey's photographs and the subject of the work itself is the same as one of Maybridge's series, entitled "Man Walking Downstairs" (ILL. 13).

Duchamp is also recorded as establishing a connection between the painting and sculpture of the Futurists and Marey's work.

The Futurists also were interested in the problem of movement at that time and when they exhibited for the first time in Paris, in January 1912, it was quite exciting for me to see the painting 'Dog on a Leash' by Balla, showing also the successive static positions of the dog's legs and leash.

The Futurists themselves, however, flatly denied any connection between their painting and any form of photography. In 1913 six members of the Milanese Futurist group, Boccioni, Carra, Balla, Russolo, Severini and Saffici wrote:

Warning. Given the general ignorance in matters of art, we Futurist painters declare that everything referred to as "photodynamic" has to do exclusively

with innovations in the field of photography. Such purely photographic researches have nothing to do with the Plastic Dynamism invented by us, nor with any form of dynamic research in the fields of painting, sculpture or architecture.

This was not the first nor the last time during the history of art that the relative status of painting and photography had caused dispute and rivalry. It was still not quite acceptable for a painter to admit influence in his work by "mechanical" photography. But in the context of Futurism this statement was particularly self-contradictory. These same painters had declared themselves to be the champions of the bold and the new, yet here they were, in a very old-fashioned manner, jealously guarding the definition of what art could be. It was not just the pioneers in the study of movement that these painters wished to disassociate themselves from, but also a fellow Futurist, Bragaglia, who was a photographer.

Bragaglia had been producing the photographic images he called Photodynamism since 1911, and it was the liberation of the 'reproduction of motion' which interested him. With his photographic images he was attempting to liberate the art of photography from the slavish imitation of reality to which it had been relegated. He saw great possibilities in photography as a means of experimentation and was mostly interested in its potential for capturing the sensation of movement rather than the sequential stages that had been analysed one by one by Marey and Muybridge. His images in photographs such as

Young Man Swinging, The Typist and Photodynamism of Boccioni were achieved through long exposure.

At the same time as Bragaglia was working on Photodynamism, amateur photographers were taking shots of action events such as car races and aeroplane flights. Mechanical magazines were flourishing and were filled with photographs of cars and engines. The photograph was beginning to manipulate the mass media. One amateur whose work has survived is Jacques Henri Latique. Virtually all of his photographs are concerned with movement of some sort, from a fountain in its garden, to car races, galloping horses and flying kites. From the beginning of this century visual interpretation of the human condition was no longer the exclusive concern of the painter: artist. Photography was now the great rival in mankind's portrayal of itself. No longer was the painter's image of himself or the rest of the world influenced only by the dictates of his own profession.

The Documentary Photograph

The camera and the printing press had been linked from the "birth" of photography. Originally the Daguerreotypes themselves had been made into printing plates. The metal daguerreotype plates were made printable by etching out the clear silver areas and building up the highlights by the newly discovered electrotype process. They could then hold ink and could be printed like an etching or copper-plate engraving. This technique was

then improved by Hippalyte Louis Frizeau, who borrowed from the aquatint engraver the trick of breaking up middle tones into minute divisions of black and white dots by sprinkling the plate with powdered resin. The development of the negative-positive process brought more successful photomechanical techniques. This method and similar ones, however, had a common disadvantage, they could not be printed on an ordinary printing press together with type. This goal was attained with the invention of the half-tone plate in the eighteen-eighties. This important invention was perfected at the same time that the technical revolution in photography was taking place. Dry plates, flexible film and hand-held cameras made it possible to produce negatives quicker, easier and of a greater variety of subjects than ever before. In the words of Walter Benjamin:

For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech.⁴

The consequent demand for photographs became so great that specialisation became common and photographers began to produce pictures for the printed pages of magazines and newspapers. Because of books, newspapers and other print media, which could print thousands and even millions of copies of photographs, a growing number of photographers were attracted to the media. News photographs were taken as early as 1842 and by the fifties

all the illustrated weeklies contained portraits of celebrities and pictures of railroad wrecks, each bearing the credit, 'From a Daguerreotype'. These photographs were not taken for their aesthetic interest but as factual records. They gave rise to the documentary photograph.

From the end of the nineteenth century many photographers could be seen walking the streets of big cities, recording extreme poverty, unemployment and exploitation, and the horrors of war. These photographs were direct, honest and immediate. Even though a large number of these photographers would not use the word "aesthetic" in connection with their work, many of them displayed considerable artistic ability. Jean Atget was virtually unknown when he died in 1927. He never showed in a salon. Not even one of the hundreds of photographs which he had taken since 1898, of Paris, Atget, like most of these documentary photographers, had very little interest in the fine art aspect of his work. His primary function was to be a witness and he photographed everything around him which he saw. The historic buildings of Paris, shop fronts and carriages the people who earned their living peddling umbrellas or lamp-shades, delivering bread or pushing carts. He photographed inside palaces, bourgeois homes and rag-pickers' hovels. Each of these categories is a series of his work, each of them comprising hundreds of photographs. Before he died, the Surrealists, who were attracted to his work because of its melancholy air, reproduced a few of his pictures, in 1927.

In the 1870's while most photographers were growing rich taking portraits of the middle class, others were taking part in the political events of the day. In 1871 Braquehors, for instance, gave his services to the Communards and stood in the middle of the street taking photographs of the fighting. On the other side of the conflict, E. Appert worked for the army and those in power. He published a book "The Crimes of the Commune", which showed the crimes of the internationalists. It became a best seller among the middle class. Appert retouched photographs and used photo-montages to falsify these crimes and became one of the first to use photography as an instrument of propaganda. Photographers such as Appert, Atget, Gustave Le Gray, Marlock and Charles Negre, who took their pictures without any artistic goal in mind, injected photography and art in general with a new vitality. Their concern with the social aspects of life about them was largely responsible for the introduction of politics into the sphere of art. Marlock photographed the first workers' demonstrations, taking photographs of them in working class families sitting rooms showing there was no electricity; at that time it was too expensive. Groups of women photographed together smile because their working day had been reduced to ten hours.

The documentary photographs of the nineteenth century were of major importance in the formation of the industrial world's image of itself. In the shaping of this image they did more to influence art as we know it in the twentieth century, than the

aesthetically motivated "art" photographs. What conscientious painter could concern himself with Neo-classical ideals when living with and confronted by photographs of battles with their grotesque dead, slums and ugly streets full of ragged children and deformed beggars. Before the advent of these photographs, if you did not venture outside your cozy living-room to such area you could not be troubled. Now, however, they were lying on your drawing room table, looking out from books and printed everywhere. These photographs questioned society and led artists to question art's role in that society. This condition of questioning was largely responsible for the rise of the avant-garde and the advent of Modernism. A new era was beginning.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹ANNE d'HARNONCOURT and KYNASTON McSHINE, MARCEL DUCHAMP, p. 256.

²ANNE d'HARNONCOURT and KYNASTON McSHINE, MARCEL DUCHAMP, p. 257.

³CAROLINE TISDALL and ANGELO BOZZOLLA, FUTURISM, p. 140.

⁴WALTER BENJAMIN, ILLUMINATIONS, p. 221.

SUMMARY

The period of time dealt with in this thesis terminates just when the standard of technical reproduction of photography not only permitted it to reproduce and transmit all works of art, industry and politics, but also just as it was developing an aesthetic mode entirely of its own. The photograph is now a permanent source of art and has a place alongside, and not inferior to, painting.

In the nineteenth century photographers laboured with the constraints of a medium which was only in the first stages of technical development. The medium also lacked a coherent tradition or a well developed sense of purpose. During these decades, painters, spurred on by a rapidly changing tradition, led the way in applying this new aesthetic vocabulary, which photography had been instrumental in developing. It was the uncertainty of photography's status, its increasing, developing technical uses which made it such a powerful vehicle of change.

However, it was not the development of new aesthetics in painting, nor its own aesthetic development, which was the new medium's most important achievement. For the first time in history, artworks were reproduced on a mass scale. Not just photographs themselves, but paintings and all other works of art as well. Our knowledge of most works of art today is gained not from direct experience of them, but through their

photographic images reproduced in books, in catalogues, in magazines or on the screen. Photography has altered the context of art and has caused a change in the way in which it is regarded. The authenticity and uniqueness of a work of art, its aura, is destroyed in the mass reproduction of it. It loses its cult value and this is then replaced by its exhibition value.

It was Atget and the other documentary photographers around 1900 who were first responsible for this elevation of exhibition value. They photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence, and these photographs acquired a political significance. Art was separated from its basis in cult and this transformation of the nature of art is probably photography's most significant achievement.

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