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THE PICTURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

No.

1. Photograph printed on Agfa grade 1 paper.(M. Boran)

2. Same negative printed on Agfa grade 4 paper.

3. Photograph with exposure set for object 'A'.(M.Boran)

4. Photograph with exposure set for object 'B'.(M.Boran)

5. From the series "DAISY" GALLOPING by Eadweard Muybridge.

6. Photograph taken at 1/15 of a second.(M.Boran)

7. Photograph taken with 28mm lens.(M.Boran)

8. Photograph taken with 125mm lens.(M.Boran)

9. Untitled photograph by Eikoh Hosoe.

10. DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH by Michelangelo da Carravagio.

11. THE LAST SUPPER by Leonardo da Vinci.

12. AT THE RACE TRACK by Edgar Degas.

13. WOMAN IN BLUE READING A LETTER by Johannes Vermeer.

14. CABARET AU TAMBOUR by Eugene Atget.

15. 'Party' photograph.

individuals over any other information. For example, the most common format of travel or holiday photography reduces the person depicted to a size which can speak of little but their presence. The depiction of the site usually reveals no more about it than one might find in a postcard, generally available on site at less cost. The photograph bears witness to presence and satisfies the desire for a representation combining, in varying accounts, objective evidence and a certain self-conscious informality.

Photography's importance derives from the fact that it connects us to 'reality' by re-presenting it to us. However, this implies a faithful copy of that reality, and is a problematic concept, even if the 'reality' concerned is a purely physical one. As Ernst Gombrich points out, "The artist no less than the writer needs a vocabulary before he (sic) can embark on a 'copy of reality'." [1] This vocabulary must not take the form of accepted conventions about how reality is to be represented and how the representation is to be read. Obviously these two aspects are interdependent. It is not possible to take part in one without implicating the other. Thus, if we are to decode a picture, we must be familiar with the process by which its subject has been coded.

This is an essential factor in the acceptance of photographs as scientific evidence. For example, particular photographic practices and technologies have evolved to serve specific areas - x-ray photography, kilrain and so on.

Wherever possible, controls are included with the subject. These would include standardised colour and tone scales, rules of standard measurements, etc. Additional information concerning the type of process and exposure used may accompany the photograph. This serves to contextualise the photograph as the result of a series of known events. Its information may then be viewed as the outcome of an experiment in a controlled enviroment.

The case for the existence of UFO's or the Lough Ness monster is abundantly documented photographically, yet their existence is by no means accepted. These photographs, while not taken within the rigorous context of scientific evidence, are often accompanied by detailed accounts of how and where they were taken. The difference in the credibility of the two types of photograph lies not in what is discernable from the prints but in the accounts of how they were made.

Footnotes

[1] Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p.75.

CHAPTER 1

Photographic theory is by no means a homogeneous entity. However, there are widespread critical models of the nature of photography, in particular its relation to the reality it represents. Although the extent of its implications varies, a basis in physical fact is common to notions of this 'reality'. At the very least, photographs are presented as being faithful to objects, their physical properties and relationships. The acceptance of a photographic transparency ranges from Rodolf Arnheim's notion that "The objects themselves print their image",[1] to an acceptance of a central analogical content. John Berger says that "The material relation between the image and what it represents... is an immediate and unconstructed one",[2] and "Photographs do not translate from appearances they quote from them".[3] It is the selection and use of this quotation that he identifies as "cultural". This is similar to Barthe's model of the connotative messages developing on the basis of the denotative, "a message without a code".[4] The connotative messages are the coding procedure, but at the same time "are not strictly speaking part of the photographic structure".[5] Berger also acknowledges the photographic misrepresentation but explains it as either the outcome of

the quotation "The lie is constructed before the camera",[6] or the result of 'unphotographic' manipulation; "You can make a photograph tell an explicit lie only by elaborate tampering, collage and rephotographing. You have in fact ceased to practise photography."[7] The aesthetic or social analyses of photography tends to deal with what happens before the viewpoint and subject are chosen, and after the print has been made. The 'realism' deemed to be inherent in the process of photography is identified as being the result of 'natural' scientific principals upon which many photographic practices and assumptions are based.

For the purposes of analysis we shall divide these principles into the physical and the chemical. The physical concerns the formation with light of the image, while the chemical concerns the making permanent of this image. This critical model is based on two separate but often overlapping premises. Firstly, that the physical device, the camera, while not in itself natural, is equivalent to the natural design of our eyes. Therefore what we see by the camera is what we would have seen ourselves. Secondly, that the photograph itself is a purely mechanical reproduction of the image the camera sees. In a sense it is equivalent to the retina of the eye, in that it conducts the image to us. This also implies that faced with the final photograph we might trace back to the reality of its subject.

Most photographic theory stresses the importance of how the photograph is made. At the same time it acknowledges the

existence of what it terms 'trick' photographs which may not be distinguishable from 'straight' ones on the basis of examining the print. While this points to serious flaws in the idea that the print could be the route to understanding the subject, these photographs are usually marginalised as not breing true to the nature of photography. This is a catch-22 situation. 'Straight' photography seems to be the only type which upholds the notion of photography as transparent. Yet this definition is all that separates 'straight' from other photographic activity. Straight photography then might be said to be that which is not manipulated beyond the 'necessary' limits of the process. However, if we examine the process of straight photography we can see just how intrinsically manipulative it is. All the elements I shall discuss are absolutely necessary for the making of an image, and would not be considered out of place in, for example, intentionally 'documentary' photography.

The first step is the choice of film. This will determine the amount of grain in the print and so effect the definition and resolution of the subject. Apart from the obvious differences between black-and-white and colour films, all films register different shades and colours in different ways. For example, some black-and-white films register blues with higher tonal values in comparison to other colours. Different films and enlarging papers have different contrast characteristics, and so possible tonal or colour ranges. These characteristics will greatly effect the type and range of

Fig. 1

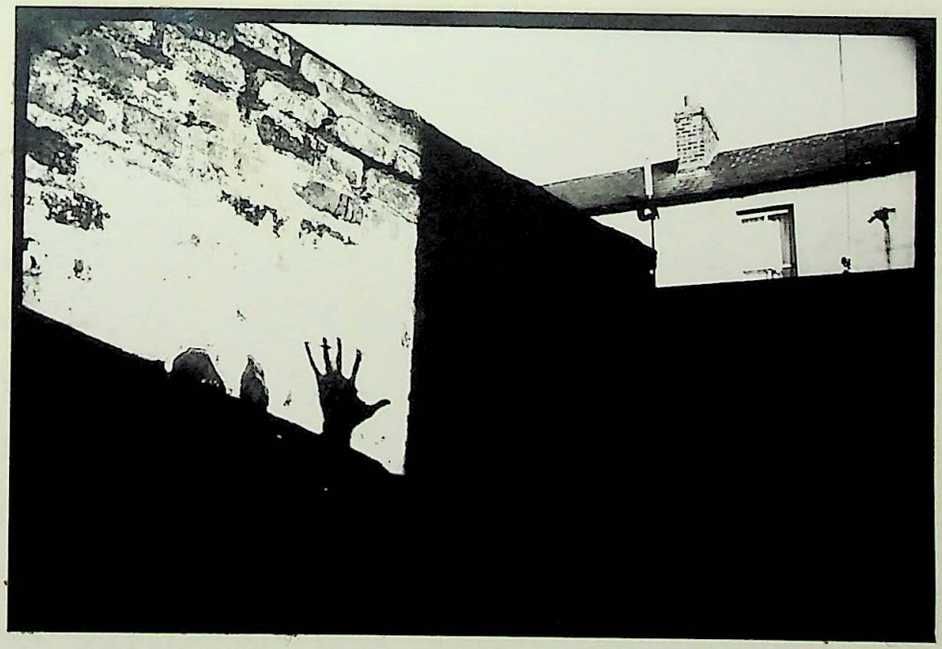

Fig. 2

information a photograph can present. Therefore different films and papers will, in changing the image, also change our understanding of what it represents (figs. 1 and 2).

Photographic objectivity is concerned mainly with the representation of objects and their relationships.

It seems necessary to point out that the agent and essential ingredient of photographic production is light. It is the light, formed into an image by the lens, which acts upon the emulsion of the film. In fact, light is the 'subject' of every photograph. Objects are only represented by virtue of the fact that they reflect light. The setting of exposure times and aperatures is based on the amount of light illuminating a given scene. This would seem to cancel out the variable effects of the light. For example, its brilliance would be compensated for by a correspondingly shorter exposure and/or smaller aperature. However, this entails the choosing of a standard mid-grey on which to base the exposure.[8] However, light effects the image in other ways. Artificial light and daylight produce different types of colour or tone, as does daylight at different times of the day. Differences in diffusion, distribution and direction of light will also have a great effect on the resulting image. For example, in the case of uneven distribution, the exposure can only be set to 'correctly' register one area within the scene. The photographer must choose which area this is to be, not on the basis of what is there, but on what he or she considers to be of most importance (figs. 3 and 4).

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

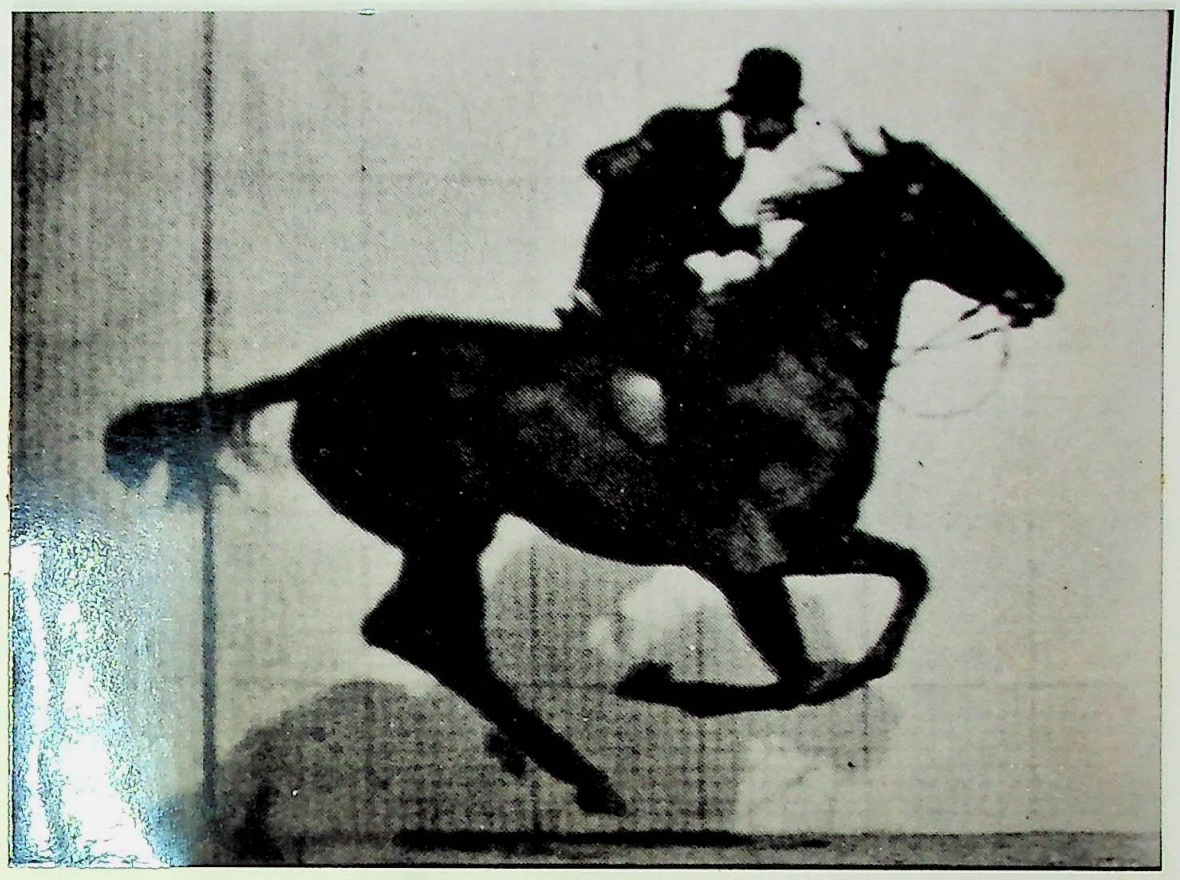

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Exposure is controlled by its time-length in relation to its lens aperature. Lens aperature also effects depth of field, that is the range in which the subject will be in focus. If the focus is set to sharply delineate one object then the depth of field controls the sharpness or otherwise of the other objects represented

Where still objects or scenes are concerned, the setting of the shutter speed, the time-length of the exposure, creates little problem. However, when we come to recording movement of the subject or with a moving camera, this aspect becomes yet another definer of information. Movement during the time of exposure is recorded as a blur. The extent to which a moving objects loses shape and definition is dependent upon its speed relative to the shutter speed and the movement, if any, of the camera.

When Muybridge photographed a galloping horse to ascertain the position of its legs at any given moment, he used a very fast shutter speed to do so (fig. 5). Had he used a slower speed he would have obtained a blurred image (similar to fig. 6). In the first photograph, the moving horse was still - relative to the shutter speed. Thus the horse is represented as suspended in mid-air with the stillness with which the camera might record an absolutely stationary object. Yet what we know from other sources suggests that the horse was indeed moving, but that the camera recorded it so quickly that it represented its actual physical shape at one point. If we look at the photograph taken at a slower shutter speed

we see the legs of the horse represented as a blur. Yet we do not assume that this animal is shaped in this way. Again we draw on outside information, we establish the shape of horses as constant and explain the difference between the images as differences in their method of making.[9]

A photograph is in essence an arrangement of tones and tonally delineated shapes. The multiplicity and inter-dependence of possible casual factors renders the photograph unable to objectively inform about its subject. Only with outside information which would establish certain conditions concerning the subject and operation could it yield its limited range of information. It does not so much bear witness to its subject as to its means of production, or which it is but the end product. As we have seen this is so even when all the 'norms' which seek to standardise the process are upheld. Instead of being able to use the print as the path even to the image in the camera, we must make assumptions and trace the information in the opposite direction.

Even with an abundance of technical information about the process of transformation we cannot regain the information concerning the subject which is lost in the process. Nor is it possible to separate the treatment of a subject from that subject. When the treatment interferes with the information presented, it changes our idea of what the subject was.

The design of a camera, and the resultant manipulation of the light entering it, does bear a certain similarity to that of the eye. However, beyond the common use of lenses to manipulate the light, the similarity does not establish any other link between camera vision and human vision. Human vision is stereoscopic, i.e. the product of two separate lenses to render three-dimensional relations. Monocular camera vision cannot independently relate size or distance. For these qualities are interdependent. For example, the represented size of an object is both the product of its distance from the camera and its actual size. In this already indeterminate equation there is another variable - that is, the focal length of the camera lens, which also effects size/ distance of objects in relation to one another within the image. The eye sees at an angle of about 180 degrees: its field of vision is a demisphere. The photographic standard is the rectangular image of the 50mm lens which sees at an angle of approximately 50 degrees. Of course, this relates to the fact that the retina is a demisphere while the receptive area in the camera is the rectangle of film opposite the lens. This also places an emphasis on composition of forms within the rectangle which is absent in human vision. Photographic lenses range from the ultra wide-angle fish-eye lens to the telephoto. While the fish-eye 'sees' a demisphere like the eye, its registration on the flat film plane produces 'unnaturalistic' distortion. However, it is not possible to establish the focal length of the lens without 'outside' knowledge of the subject. Different focal length lenses effect not only the size-distance relationship in a photograph,

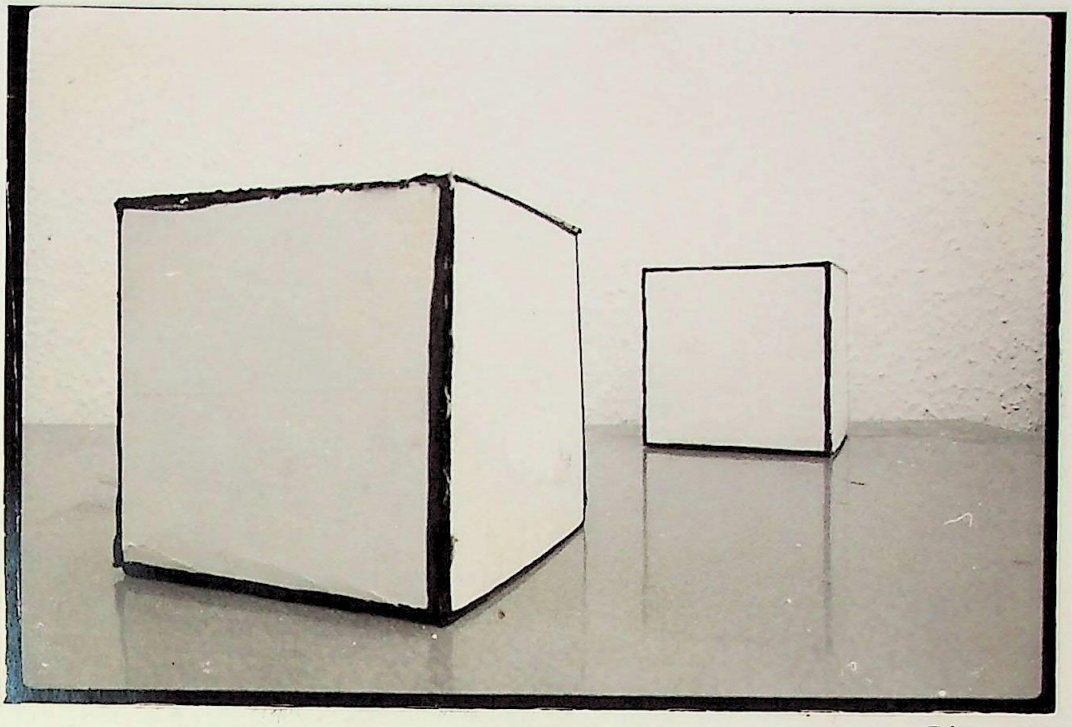

Fig. 7

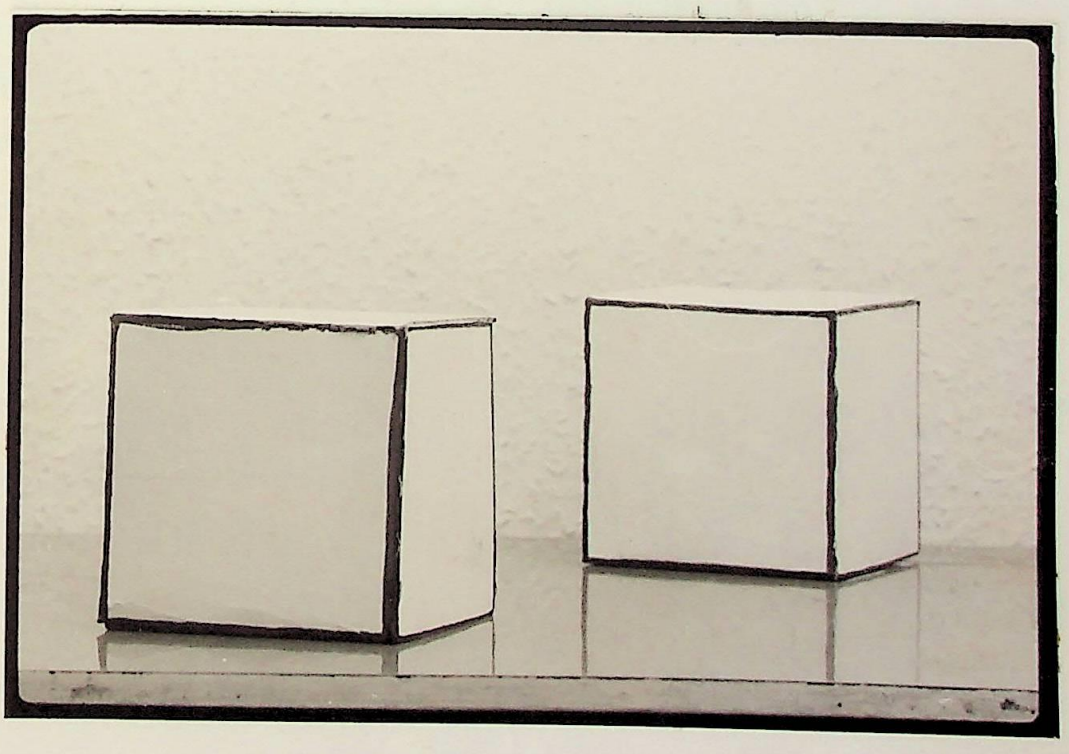

Fig. 8

but also the relative rendering of two-dimensional perspective (figs. 7 and 8).

To say that the lens of an eye produces an image on the retina in the way a camera does on the film is a simplification of the process of vision. In the living human eye, the image is kept in constant involuntary motion by the movement of the eyeball and contraction and dilation of the pupil. Indeed if there were a single static image in the eye, the retina would not be able to continue to register it due to an effect known as sensory fatigue. Obviously then cameras and lenses are not designed to reproduce the system of human vision but rather to produce an effect which may, in a limited way, be equated with reality by vision.

We can see then that photography is neither a substitute for vision nor is its product, the photograph, an objective record which allows undirected access to what the camera 'saw'. Rather it is a system for producing static flat images whose treatment is based upon the setting down of pictorial information within the possible range of tone and definition.

Thus the photograph neither accurately represents what was, nor must what it represents necessarily have existed. Critical investigations have tended to negatively define photography in order to isolate what is purely photographic about it - that is, what separates it from other pictorial representations.

Halla Beloff defines photography as "a representation dependent on the visible presence of matter represented".[10] This rather loose definition does not cover even the practice of 'straight' photography. It must be pointed out that the 'visible' referred to is not necessarily visible by any system other than photographic. Also we must change the 'presence of matter' to the presence of matter or effects of light. Thus we might alter Beloff's statement to define 'straight' photography as dependent on the photographically visible presence of what is represented. If we were to place the limitation 'straight' on to painted or drawn representations, we might define it as basing the logic of the picture in observed phenomena. Thus we might equally define 'straight' painting as dependent on the visible presence of what is represented. Indeed we could go so far as to say that most representational painting has its roots in the visible presence of its subject, although this presence may have been mediated by various studies or sketches. This is borne out by the fact that there is a strong tradition of artists who paint from the model.

If we look at the photograph (fig. 9) by Eikoh Hosoe, we assume that it does not show the whole truth of its subject. We assume, for example, that the boy or girl did have a body, but that it was shadowed from the light and so not represented. Nor do we imagine that what it does show really existed, the grain of the image, the harsh contrast, and so on. However, it is true to say that the photograph does seem to attest to the existence, if not of this exact boy or girl, of a boy or

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

girl who was present before the camera. Of course, the photograph here bears witness merely to the existence, in some form, of a reproduction in a book.

If we examine Carravagio's painting DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH (fig. 10), we can see that it carries much the same sort of information regarding the actuality of its subject. Given the nature of the detailed treatment of the image, or at least part of it, it seems reasonable that it, or parts of it, were painted from models. Of course, the painting itself may have been based on a series of intermediate sketches in conjunction with his knowledge of anatomy. Yet even this information has its roots in observed fact. While he may not have painted this actual painting in the presence of the model, it is likely that he did make preparatory studies directly from the model. Again there is no way to decode Carravagio's treatment of the boy so we must content ourselves with the information that a boy existed and was studied by him. If we assume that the head was not decapitated, then we can say that the absence of its body is a result of the treatment of the image.

All representational art has its roots in the visible presence of its subject at some stage. The more visually descriptive and detailed the image the more its status as a document increases. At the same time no image can be an absolute objective document. For the transformation of observed phenomena into image must always be manipulated in

terms of the possibilities of the medium and the artist's decision-making process. "Painting is an activity; and the artist will therefore tend to see what he paints rather than paint what he sees".[11] Gombrich's conclusion is equally applicable to photography which, as we have seen, is also a manipulative activity.

Footnotes

[1]Rudolf Arnheim, quoted by Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, vision and representation," Reading into Photography, p.68.

[2]John Berger, Ways of Telling, p.93.

[3]Ibid, p.96.

[4]Roland Barthes, Image Music Text, p.17.

[5]Ibid. p.20.
Barthes does continue to formulate a system for the analysis of the effect of connotative messages on the photographic message as a whole.

[6]John Berger, Ways of Telling, p.96.

[7]Ibid. p.96.

[8]Technically speaking, the surface which reflects 18% of the light which falls upon it should be represented as mid-grey. However, this excludes all 'overall' and automatic exposure meters from producing 'standard' photographs.

[9]The same comparisons might also be made between photographs taken with a 'moving' and a 'still' camera. Both these terms are, of course, relative to the shutter speed.

[10]Halla Beloff, Camera Culture, p.7.

[11]Ernst Gombrich, Art and Illusion, p.73.

CHAPTER 2

Photography was not invented in what we might call the classical sense. It is neither the result of a single technical innovation nor visionary genius. Rather, it evolved gradually through the experiments and innovations of a number of people working more or less independently of each other. Tellingly, there is no date which would separate conclusively a pre-photographic age from a post-photographic age. The seventh of January 1939 serves as the date upon which photography was introduced to the public. Yet by this time each of its 'inventors' had already been successful in devising his own methods. It was L.J.M. Daguerre's process, the daguerreotype, which had been developed through his partnership with Nicephore Niepce, that was introduced publically. It was only in its aftermath that it could be seen that there had been a race to perfect the process. This process was the fixing by chemical means of the image formed in the camera obscura.

The date and author of the first photograph is by no means clear cut and it depends largely on the definition of photography used. Taking the term photo-graph literally - light writing - one could say it was Johann Heinrich Schulz as far back as 1725. Schulz succeeded in making negative

images of word stencils by the action of light on silver halides. Thomas Wedgewood was the first to combine the two principals, the physical and the chemical, but he did not succeed in finding a way to fix his results. Whether he actually made images with the camera is unclear because he did not persist, considering the necessary exposure time to be too long. In 1824-6 in France, Niepce made a six to eight hour exposure and was successful in fixing it. Independently of this, Fox Talbot in Britain was to develop his negative/positive process by 1835. The fixing of the image is necessary so that it might be exposed to light to be viewed without affecting it.

This was the final stage in the evolution of photography, yet the solution was known to Carl Wilhelm Scheele in 1777, though he was not to apply it to this field. However, the photograph exists before it can be fixed; more importantly the concept and possibility of photography already existed before 1826, and by the first decade of the 19th century it was thought to be important enough to merit its determined exploration by a number of individuals.

"In 1685 the camera was absolutely ready and waiting for photography". [1] All that remained was the application of existing knowledge to make it recognisable as the photographic camera. By the 1770's they were as small as 6-8 inches long by 2-3 inches wide. They already had focusing mechanisms along with actual diaphragms for controlling image brightness and depth of field. Even the problem of chromatic

abberation in lenses was solved. In fact, the design of the camera did not significantly change from the 1770's until the 20th century. To trace back the history of the camera obscura and its application, we must return to the Renaissance.

Although many and complex changes took place during the Renaissance, most significantly for our purposes is that vision was adopted as the basis for representation. This resulted in the use and therefore importance of the pictorial illusion of three-dimensional space. A picture is defined by Leon Battista Alberti in his book DELLA PITTURA of 1435 as a plane intersecting the pyramid of vision at right angles. The pictorial plane is likened to a pane of glass on which the view 'behind' can be traced. The pyramid of vision takes the subject as its base and the eye of the viewer as its apex. Thus the picture acts like a window on to its subject.

The importance of this model is that it sets out the basic vocabulary of illusionistic painting which allows it to be developed upon in a logical and scientific manner. This basic vocabulary consists of, first, the choice of a single mathematical point of view from which the picture is to be constructed and at which it will psychologically place the viewer. This is also the basis for the placement of the vanishing point within the picture and so establishes perspective within a geometric system. This in turn lays the foundation for other schemes to invoke space and distance

like foreshortening, perspective, and so on. It also involves framing of the subject in terms of a rectangle and thus emphasises composition within the picture which edits both by exclusion and internal emphasis. The relative positioning of subjects establishes a specific time of view. This basic model was to inform the construction of realistic-illusionistic picutres from the Renaissance on.

It is also the basis on which the image formed by the lens or pinhole may be considered a realistic picture. Only when a lens is placed parallel to a flat surface do the relationships correspond to those in the vision pyramid. The picture plane is transposed to the image plane, behind the lens, by the positioning of the lens at the apex point. In the same way, this sets out the vocabulary for the construction and understanding of the camera image.

The fact that pinholes could be used to manipulate light to form an image was known as far back as 1038. The Arabian scholar Alhazen who used it to observe solar eclipses also noted the link between the size of the hole or aperature and the sharpness of the image. The use of the pinhole for producing images of objects and views is indicated by Roger Bacon in 1267, thus predating the Renaissance concept of the picture and its basis in vision.

The construction and use of the camera obscura for drawing was first described by Giovanni Battista Della Porta in his book MAGICA NATURALIS of 1589. It could be argued that this

is the origin of the concept of photography, in that here we have the idea of fixing the image produced by a lens, albeit manually. This is also important in that it sets down the treatment as well as the formation of images as answerable to a model and scientific principles which were to be advanced upon in tandem with the development of technology.

A history of the mechanics of an art based in vision might be understood in terms of the development of new conventions for the application of pictorial devices or schema. Obviously this history is limited due to the fact that it concerns only one part of the making of pictures. It would propose a linear path for development which is rarely the case. However, it does isolate the particular area in which photographic vision was to play such an important role. If we compare two paintings, one from the beginning of the Renaissance period of innovation and one from the end of the 18th century, we can see some of the changes. Leonardo Da Vinci's LAST SUPPER (fig. 11), painted between 1495 and 1498, clearly uses the conventions of 'the picture as window' to define its space. The space it constructs is one of order, placing Christ at the centre with the perspective lines, and so space seems to radiate from his head. The space is constructed according to knowledge and is synthesised on the basis of a reading of perspective. The space is not so much the product of observation, but rather uses vision to code its information, like a map. Also like a map, it does not directly involve the viewer but places him or her at a distance, opposite Christ, and lays the scene out before him/her.

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

In contrast AT THE RACETRACK (fig. 12),painted by Degas in 1869, presents us with a world of disorder. It involves us closely, not only by placing us 'in' the scene represented, but also by relying on our ability to 'make sense' of the cropped images and so on. This fragmentary nature serves to isolate a single moment of the view 'through' the already established edges of the picture. Degas uses the pyramid of vision to analyse and isolate elements of the process of vision, emphasising the effects of both light and movement. There is no systematic perspective and areas, particularly the lower left hand corner, are spatially undefined.

Obviously there are a number of different pictorial and conceptual influences at work in each case. Among these we might single out the introduction of photography as playing an important role in the development of the picture as window. As we have seen the seeds of Degas' pictorial logic lay in the setting up of the Renaissance model of a picture. The development is not the result of a new model, but the change in the use of the old. We might characterise the changes as the movement from visual pyramid as neutral, distant and static, to involved and mobile with an emphasis on transitory phenomena; for example light, smoke and clouds, and so on. While it is true that Degas did base much of his work on photographic images, these devices were used and explored long before photography came into being. We have only to examine the use of light or space in Dutch painting of the 17th century (fig. 13).

Fig. 13

It was really only with the pictorial logic of the 1800's that photography would prove itself useful, as evidenced by the new impetus toward its realisation. This period saw the rise of neoclassical principles in art as a sobering reaction to the fantasies and frivolities of the 18th century. The classical principles emphasised the distinction between natural rendition and the idealisation deemed to be necessary to high art. The sketch was an important learning area for students and was not constrained by the public nature of exhibitions. (The sketch, of course, can be broken into two categories, the cartoon for resolving composition and the study for observation.) The strengthening of this distinction so separated the study as to isolate it as an almost independent area of activity. At this time landscape painting held low currency in academic circles due to the idea that it was lacking the essential human drama of a great deed and was without intrinsic moral value. However, although it did not become a coherent school as such, it did gain a certain currency in its practice, which grew as its aims developed. Landscape painting, and in particular the landscape study, was to become the centre of experimentation and innovation in a new 'naturalism' in picture making. While the idea of a 'realisitc' landscape painting practice contradicted neoclassical principles, it did fit in with the place of the sketch - that is, devoted to the study of nature so that its results may then be systhesised. As Turner was to say, 'pictures made up of bits' rather than 'pictures of bits'.

The English painter John Constable played a central role in the development and acceptance of the landscape as a genre. Although as a general principle he continued the convention of making drawings by synthesising from his sketches. In 1824 he said, "It is the business of a painter not to contend with nature, and put this scene (a valley filled with imagery 50 miles long) (sic) on a canvas of a few inches, but to make something out of nothing".[2] Later in 1836: "Painting is a science and should be pursued as an enquiry into the laws of nature. Why then should not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments".[3] Here we have the idea of isolating an aspect for the purposes of an enquiry, on the basis of a scientific experiment, into 'the laws of nature' or the physics of vision. The artistic concern for the humble natural subject needed a new vocabulary. This was manifested in a willingness to take the subject as it presented itself. In short it involved picture making based on 'perception' rather than 'knowledge'. This dichotomy between 'mind' and 'eye' was and is central tc the development of the history of picture-making, a history through which photography found its 'raison d'etre' in seeming to embody the process of the purely visual model. The relatively short period between the development of a theoretical base for a purely visual logic and the introduction of photography serves to attribute what were common pictorial schema to photography. Yet it is clear that photography developed out of the broader techincal and conceptual development of the notion of a picture and how it should represent. The almost total and immediate acceptance of

photography is not the result of any scientifically objective 'realism'. Rather it bears testimony to the fact that the conceptual groundwork for the reception of photographic images had already been laid. The development of the picture was not simply based on that of the pinhole camera but rather the design of the camera was developed to conform to notions of how the picture should look.

Photography neither introduced the concept of purely visual logic, nor did it settle conclusively the arguments against it in favour of a pictorial system which would express knowledge in a visual code. Thus we can see a consistency between the Abbe Dubois complaint about landscape painting: "The most beautiful landscape... is of no more interest to us than an actual tract of country",[4] and Daumier's: "Photography imitates everything and expresses nothing".[5]

Footnotes

[1] Helmut Gersheim, The Origins of Photography, p.16.

[2] John Constable, quoted by Peter Galass, Before Photography. p.27.

[3] John Constable, quoted by Ernst Gombrich, Art and Illusion, p.29.

[4] Abbe Dubois, quoted by Peter Galassi, Before Photography, p.20.

[5] Honore Daumier, quoted by Heinrich Schwarz, Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influences, p.114.

CHAPTER 3

In the first chapter I discussed how a photograph does not show us what we would have seen, nor is what it shows necessarily visible. In short, photographic vision is independent from our vision, although there is a much emphasised common area. In Hosoe's photograph we can see less than we 'know' to have been there, and therefore presumably less than Hosoe saw when taking the photograph. However, because of these independent characteristics it can also show more than the photographer saw. Photographic vision is both quicker and more acute than human vision, and so it may show things which the photographer might not, but could have seen.

This phenomenon was well known from photography's earliest times, not only because of its novelty (for previous pictorial systems were always mediated by human vision), but also because photographs were not enlarged and so their rendering of detail was extremely acute. In his book THE PENCIL OF NATURE Fox Talbot recommended the examination of photographs with a magnifying glass which "often discloses a multitude of minute details which were previously unobserved and unsuspected".[1] Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked how "The more

evidently accidental their introduction, the more trivial they are in themselves, the more they take hold of the imagination".[2] This is, in effect, what Barthes identifies as the punctum of a photograph, and separates it from the 'studium', the intentional message. The apparent seamlessness of the photograph fails to objectively distinguish between the photographer's intentions and the outcome of photographic processes, which may have been based on the treatment of a different element. For example, once the camera is focused on a particular object, then other objects in the same range will be equally in focus, however inconsequential the photographer may have considered them, if indeed he/she had seen them. It is the manifestation of the uncontrollable, or less controllable, element which is part of all processes.

The Pictorialists wanted recognition of photography as art and in line with this they sought to exert complete control over their work. Thus they reduced photographic vision to its common area with human vision, and so stressed its similarity to painting. Emerson spoke of effacing the specific nature of photography as being his, and presumably others', aim.

However, if this 'raw' uncontrollable element found little favour with notions of art as crafted and intentional it endeared photography to the Surrealist aesthetic. Photography certainly seemed comparable with Breton's central concept of the found object. In interpreting the found object, the

person projects his own 'meaning' so the objects acts as a sign of the unconscious desire. The Paris streetscapes of photographer Eugene Atget were particularly admired by the Surrealists. "Ostensibly these were documentary records of architectural details, formal gardens, baroque statuary, for museum archives. But Atget could not help making individual works of fine art, expressing his personal vision".[3] The extensive presence of detail and 'accident', aspects peculair to photography, were thought to be the product of his naive use of photography to document the passing of Parisian architecture.

Yet we know he worked as a commercial photographer, reproducing works of art among other things. His camera was specially designed to allow its focal length to be changed, like the contemporary zoom lens. His use of wide-angle, for example, not only allows the inclusion of a whole facade from a limited distance, but also creates a certain 'stage perspective'. The theatricality of his photographs which also relates to his interest and career in the theatre is not simply the product of his choice of subject, but is emphasised by a technical understanding of the medium.

Yet even without this background information, it seems odd to attribute so much of his work to purely unconscious accident. For in many cases these elements are so central that it is extremely unlikely he could have been unaware of them when printing them, let alone exposing the plate. Even

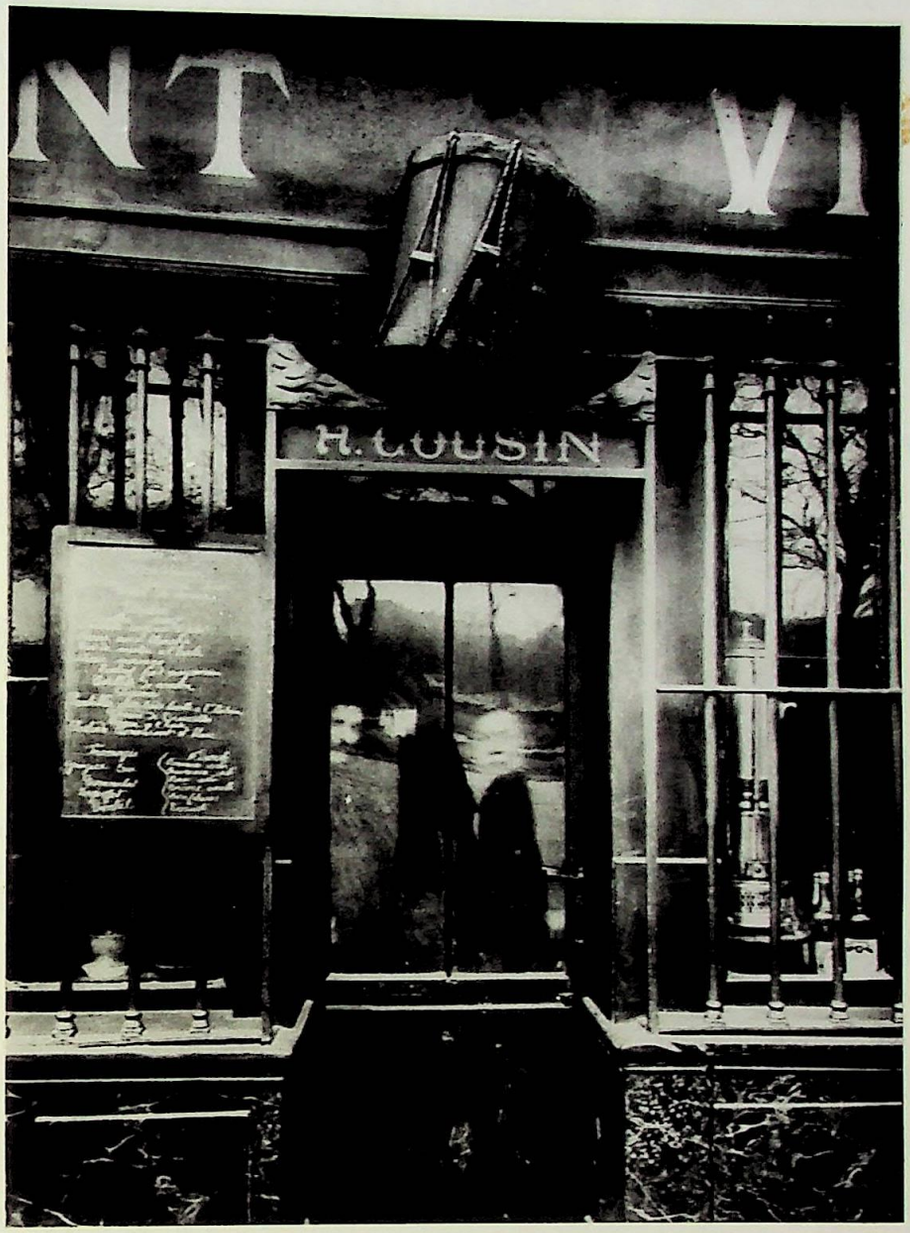

Fig. 14

if he had been so technically incompetent as to be unable to deal with them, it is hardly feasable to suppose that he would have chosen to print and present photographs with such 'subverting' elements (fig. 14). It is also unlikely that these 'unforeseen' details or accidents which may have gone unnoticed at the time of exposure would also be passed over during printing. Even at this stage they could be effaced from the print if deemed too disrupting. This of course raises the question: when is a photograph made? And what constitutes its production?

For a more detailed examination we can take the case of the photograph (fig. 15) 'snapped' informally at a party by a friend of mine. I gave her the camera 'ready to shoot'. I had already chosen the film, a black and white fine grain film which is correspondingly 'slow' - that is, it needs more light in the form of longer exposure or at a larger aperature. The lens was a 28mm wide-angle, becasue I assumed that a broader area of view was required than would be available with a standard lens where subject distance is limited by being indoors and the nature of the occasion. I fitted a flash on the camera which would 'bounce' its light off the white ceiling and so avoid the harsh and flattening light of a direct flash. Bouncing gives more even and 'natural' lighting. There is an automatic metering system in the flash which must be synchronised to the lens aperature. Automatic exposure meters work by reducing the average tonal distribution to grey, yet the walls are light coloured and would make this reading too low. I set the aperature

Fig. 15

slightly higher to try to counteract this effect, without of course knowing how much wall area would be included in any given photograph and therefore how much compensation was needed. My friend then selected and framed the subject, focused and exposed the film. When processing the film I overdeveloped it slightly to increase contrast for the other photographs on it. It was printed on Agfa Grade 2 paper, without any other interference to the tonal relationships. I set the range of tones, basing the exposure on the figure on the left hand side. The photograph has 'the look' of a photograph I would have taken and as such falls short of fulfilling my friend's intent. When presented with the photograph she was surprised at the dominance of the figure on the left. Her 'subject' was the group of seated people. She had unintentionally included this figure due to being unused to the bulk of the camera and its broader area of view. She did position herself so as not to have the figure obscuring others, but was largely unaware of the importance the camera would bestow on it. The dominance of this figure is exaggerated by the wide-angle lens which in emphasising perspective distorts the size/distance relationship between this figure and those behind him. With a standard lens they would appear closer (figs. 7 and 8). The tonal values of the print serve to obscure the 'subject' again in favour of this picture.

For its taker the photograph was a strange concoction of unintentional information revealing things she hadn't thought would be in the print while failing to reveal much

of what she had. However, I, in making the print, had seen these elements and could have cropped the image or shifted the tonal range, had I realised. Also had I known the conditions under which this particular photograph was to be taken I could have chosen different equipment. This photograph is by no means an experimental model, nor was it intended as such. It does, however, illustrate the role played by the totality of the photographic process in realising intent in the final print. We may divide this process into three general areas - the choice of equipment and method, the framing of the subject, and the printing and processing. Obviously these areas are not totally independent of one another nor internally cohesive to the extent that they couldn't be further broken down. The production of this photograph also serves as an analogy to the production of photographs under the influence of the photographic industry. We might draw a parallel between my role in its production and that of the consumer industry in most of contemporary photographic production. As I chose the equipment and method of production for this photograph and its treatment, so too does the consumer industry in marketing and limiting the types of processes and equipment available.

Since its introduction, Photography has always been closely linked to economic and broader social factors. It was the French government who announced Daguerre's discovery, followed quickly by Fox Talbot placing controlling patents on his process. For, whatever its other merits, photography was

relatively less labour-intensive and more industrial in its production. The rise and growth of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century also caused a dramatic increase in the market for the portrait which was so important as a status symbol. There was a rapid growth in commercial photographic studios. Although it was becoming more standardised, it was still a skilled craft and the domain of commercial professionals and a much smaller number of amateurs and artists. As its applications grew, so too did its market and commercial value.

In 1887, George Eastman introduced a mass produced box camera, the Kodak, with the slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest'. The camera left the factory loaded with film and ready to use. After the exposure was made it was returned for processing and printing. The re-loaded camera and the prints were sent to the photographer. The growth of the photographic studios stopped and numbers began to drop drastically. In the art world there was a growing emphasis on the art and craft of photography. However, the success and popularity of the cameras were assured for it offered the possibility of the untrained public making their own images independently, and at less cost. Its effect was two-fold: it democratised the production of photographs in the choice of subject and, more importantly, separated this aspect from the rest of the process. Before this time photography was a craft. Its process and equipment were tools developed for specific effects and tasks. For example, the portrait photographer would use a lens of a longer focal length to

distance the sitter, and avoid distortion of the features. What Kodak offered was not the means of production as such, but a standardised aspect of it. The photographic market was dominated by the portarit, either personal or group, and so it is not surprising that this would be the task around which mass production would be centred. It was at this time that the present multinational consumer industry of photography began to develop. Many of these early companies still largely control the market today -Kodak, Agfa, Voightlander, Gavert, and so on.

The photographic industry today serves almost all aspects of photographic production from amateur to enthusiast to professional. There is an increasing growth in processing laboratories to service the expansion of these markets. Camera technology is developing towards automation. Automatic exposure metering is not only a standard feature, but very often excludes the possibility of manual override. Built-in flash is triggered if the available light is too low. Automatic focusing ensures that whatever is in the centre of the frame is in focus. In short, the conditions of use open to the photographic consumer are broader, yet the decision-making process is still standardised to produce 'acceptable' results.

In a sense the photographic industry implies that the second stage referred to earlier (the making of the exposure and related choices) is when the photograph is made. This is the only part of the larger process into which the

'photographer's' intent is channelled. The attempted standardisation of all activities save these serves to further emphasise the role played by framing and choice of subject. If it were possible to standardise all photographic production in an absolute sense, then it would be possible to 'read through' the print. The differences between images would then be attributable solely to the subject and view. In practise, however, it works the other way round. It is because these are the only activities open to the photographer that they are of such importance.

It is the subsequent limiting of comment and intent which makes much 'snapshot' or 'family' photography so uninteresting to the outsider. They are only of value if we know the people involved or we were there ourselves. Even then, they are rarely shown without some reference to how, when or where they were taken. In this context they function to evoke memory rather than to describe.

The photograph like any image is a message and as such its reception and understanding are closely linked to how it is perceived to have been made. The dominance of the consumer industry over photographic practice and people's experience of it diverts attention from the full range of activity necessary for the production of photographs. As already mentioned, this range may loosely be divided into three stages - the choosing of equipment and determining the method; the framing and exposure; and the processing and printing of the actual photograph. Through standardisation the industry attempts

to remove the important effects of the first and last stage so that the second can be offered as the means of production or, at least, its determining part. The adoption of standards does not reduce the intent inherent in the effects produced under these conventions. In the consumer market conventions are not determined by any 'nature' of photography, but are the product of the necessity to standardise and limit for mass distribution and compatibility. As we saw in the first chapter, there can be no standard for the treatment of the subject in choosing either the method or means of production. Standards of 'conventional' photography are determined largely by audience expectations. The limitation of the 'audience's' experience of photographic production and the cultivation of expectation result in a certain currency for photographic transparency which cannot be justified by the actual process.

Footnotes

[1] Fox Talbot, quoted by Halla Beloff, Camera Culture, p.113.

[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted by James Borcoman, Eugene Atget 1857 - 1927, p.72.

[3] Halla Beloff, Camera Culture, p.82.

CONCLUSION

Rosalind Krauss describes the photographic sign as an index, which she defines as: "a signifying mark that bears a connection to the thing it represents by having been caused, physically, by its referent." [1] Certainly the change in the photographic emulsion is caused by light. However this casual connection does not imply any visual similarity, nor does it establish a chain of events which would allow analysis of the causal factor. For example, a smear of ink across a page does not look like the finger which may have caused it, nor does it establish the relative relationship between finger and page in terms of pressure, speed and so on. This inconclusive causal factor is, as we have seen, manipulated in terms of the preparation of emulsion and its treatment. The light is manipulated to form an image of a particular type. In short, this indexical element is used as a part in the creation of an independent pictorial equivalent. The extent of the role played by the other parts of this process precludes this element from determining the nature of the photograph.

An analysis of the role and effect of these factors is necessarily limited, for it requires a translation of a complex and involving process into a language with a certain

linear logic. In the first chapter I outlined the process in terms of choices. This was intended to show that it does not determine its own direction or follow a convention. Obviously this model does not adequately account for either the subtlety or totality of the production of the photograph. This is further compounded by the fact that the range and path of the process is not always the same. Indeed, the boundary between what is and is not considered a photograph is itself unclear. Thus any general definition of photography must first presuppose an extremely particular practice, and so limit its application and usefulness. Likewise the history proposed in the second chapter is limited in viewing change only in terms of particular issues. It attempts only to establish the particular prehistory of photography through which it could be seen as the ultimate achievement within that convention of pictorial 'realism'. The consumer industries' - both the 'amateur' and the 'professional' - presentation of photography establishes a limit which concentrates production on the moment of exposure. It is important to remember that this limit is an artificial convention for which practical guidelines have not, as I have shown in chapter 1, been established.

Photographic criticism and production should address itself to the photograph as a pictorial construction, and not in terms of its faithfulness to, or abberation from, 'realtiy'.

Footnotes

[1]Rosalind Krauss, "Tracing Nadar", Reading into Photography.p.121

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