

## ABSTRACT

*The Expectation of Narrative in the Photograph* is an investigation into the expectation of the narrative structure within and outside the photograph. The means of this exploration is to uncover the type of narrative structure that is in place in the photograph, and at what point in our reading of the still photographic image does this narrative structure come into play. By looking at the various types of photographs (found anonymous photographs to postcards to fine art prints from individuals such as: Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus, Edward Weston and Richard Avedon) that are in circulation in today's contemporary society, I present a theoretical exploration of an expected narrativity being implicit in the photograph. To complement this photographic narrativity, I also look into the literary equivalent and theories of realism found in the work of William Faulkner, Henry James and Ernest Hemingway.

In the latter sections of the text, I look at three distinctive bodies of photographic work. Therefore the issue of a-temporal *in medias res* narrativity is a key aesthetic feature and factor when reading and looking at and into the work of Cindy Sherman, Jacques-Henri Lartigue and Robert Frank. To parallel the aesthetics of this investigation, I also use a phenomenological position, borrowed from Husserl's theories of temporal understanding and Bergson's theory of perpetual present, to outline a consideration of reverse causality in the photographic act (the creating of a photograph) which helps the reader come to define and read the resulting photograph as a historical trace of a larger story.

The text advances the understanding of photographic narrativity which traditionally tends to be seen under the rubric of filmic or literary narrative structures. The central argument of the text will therefore expand the notion that there is a certain type of narrative which is particularly photographic and that a revision of this distinctive narrativity will open up further debates and dialogues of a narrative photographic reading.

**THE EXPECTATION  
OF  
NARRATIVE  
IN THE  
PHOTOGRAPH**



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*Queen Street -Toronto, 1988*

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# PREFACE

In this dissertation I am looking at the aesthetics and reading phenomenon of whether or not there is such a consideration of a narrative in the photograph. In order to accomplish this, I have used interdisciplinary methods of analysis. By integrating such diverse subjects of inquiry such as: Realism, philosophy (aesthetics and phenomenology), literary theory, structural criticism of language and art history, I have been able to investigate the diversity presented by the photograph. Although in the tradition of academic investigation this seems complex, I must point out that because of the nature of the topic 'narrative of a still photograph' this type of complex treatment was necessary, and it proved to be very beneficial. The main focus of this text is on photograph rather than the photographic medium.

The contributions that this dissertation makes to the aesthetics and reading discourses of critical photographic analysis outweighs the complexity of the investigations and debates being explored. I feel the dissertation provides a greater understanding of the very complex nature of the photograph, and at the same time, elevates the photograph into a wider context of theoretical investigation. Although I am using a philosophical approach in some stages of the dissertation, I am aware that in any academic investigation neutrality is something that must be retained and continually considered, but, because I am dealing with such a subjective form of cultural practice and personal expression it is impossible to be completely neutral in ones analysis. In this instance, I bring to the subject my own sensibilities, as an artist when dealing with the photograph. Having a substantial degree of practical experience and knowledge of the photographic medium, I use this in such a way as to further the theoretical investigation and philosophical considerations at hand throughout the dissertation.

I want to thank two individuals who started me on this road and subject of considering the narrativity of the photograph. To my Master of Fine Arts degree supervisor, Professor Kenneth Baird at the University of Michigan, School of Art, and to my Bachelor of Applied Arts degree supervisor, Murray Pomerance, Artist and Associate Professor at Ryerson Polytechnic University - thank you. For both of you have been great mentors for me and have given me models of artistic temperament to follow.

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# INTRODUCTION

The story as a form of personal and cultural expression is a fascinating concept when linked to another form of personal expression, that of the photograph. In the history of the photograph the extracting of a story behind the visual image has been central for the viewers and audiences of the photograph. Therefore merging both this form of expression and one's expectation of meaning results in our understanding that the photograph is a complex medium in which the obvious narrative is not always the first impression at hand.

Implicit in every contemporary photograph is the nineteenth century expectation of having a story existing beyond the framed visual realism. The reason being is that we tend to believe the photographic image to be real. With this historical expectation of a story it is not surprising that personal expectation of a story is what generates our aesthetic appreciation of the photograph. This story - the product of the photographer and audience - can take many forms just as the photograph itself takes on many varied forms of composition ranging from the portrait to still life to digital imagery to landscapes. Thus in our contemporary moment we have come to view and read the photograph through the historical eyes of the nineteenth-century assumption that what we are seeing in the photograph is real. Our ardent attachment to the actuality - the thing seen in the photograph - is not accomplished through some complex process of reading. It is simply accepted and expected that this image - the photograph - will have a story. In this story the characteristics of character, event,

happening, and setting are present and can be easily linked to a literary tradition of narrative. For all these characteristics are found within the stories of past and present literature and photographs.

This is to say, the text that we have come to expect in the photograph is simply a constructed variation of our own desire for meaning. To fully investigate the expectation of narrative in the photograph, we must first isolate where and how this effect is produced.

My intention is to investigate whether or not the narrative of the photograph is an expectation or is it simply a historical assumption. I am going to explore the way in which the story of a photograph is derived partially from the context. And seeing that the content is in an a-temporal notation relies on this external context (presence) for any expectation of a temporal continuity to appear. The photograph to have a story must have this type of continuity with reality. Therefore the photograph becomes a carrier of our and the photographer's intentional expression.

Although these characteristics of a literary story are present in the photographic image, the singularity of the photograph is expanded through the content, context and our expectations of these two features into a variety of possible expressions. These resulting expressions - possible stories - are capable of producing a complex array of reactions. Albeit these characteristics of text are important, context plays a prominent role in the photograph. It is context which allows the photograph to refer outside itself in order for the content characteristics of event, setting, happening and character to generate a larger picture. Just as a literary version can refer to a larger spectrum of expression, so too can the photograph. The resulting story obtained from the photograph just happens to begin with a single visual image rather than a textual impression in the form of a textual description.

The distinction I am making here is that the text is more able to develop a narrative through interconnected relationships built up through dialogue and

narration. The photograph, in order to present its story, must rely on context and content in order for the narrative to find its appropriate expression. In this process the visual content is rearranged in the context, so that the audience can place the characteristics such as; events (actions, happenings), and existents (characters and settings) into a narrative structure. Thus the ability to have a story ultimately resides in the viewer's ability to extract the content and rearrange it relative to the context in order for the narrative expectation of the photograph to be achieved.

In the case of the photograph this rearrangement process is undertaken by the transaction between the photographer and the viewer. From this point of view the photograph can be said to carry all the features, dialogue (content) and narration (context), to form a story (narrative text): it simply presents it in an alternative form - a singular visual image. The process of extraction by the reader (viewer) is produced by an act of referential direction for the content. Thus the understanding of the story is achieved through a system of shared expectations and assumptions of constructing a story from a historical single instant. This position of absence (history) referring to a presence (the contemporary moment) is the same writing technique of inference found in a literary text in which the introduction or the existence of a character or happening is inferred to rather than explicitly stated. Another way to consider this literary parallel in the visual, is through a process of off-frame connotation. In this off-frame space the ability to suggest other scenarios can be utilised to construct the basis of a narrative. We find this technique being explored by Cindy Sherman in her *Untitled Film Stills*.

Through the implication of off-frame inference, the story (the photograph) can exist through the context of the existing moment in order to propel the content into a varied range of possible narratives or meanings. The resulting dialogue and narration that is present, through inferred absence (history), is one in which the photographer mediates the content (composing the thing in the frame), just as the

author of a story can place and provide clues and traces to have the story unfold according to his or her own sensibility. This ability to reform and mould the environment is what I am referring to as our ability to compose a story.

It will be this characteristic of story telling and eventual reading that I will be investigating. The central thesis of this investigation lies in our ability to construct and present an altered view of reality in the form of a realism. This will be one of the central issues explored in this text. If the realism of the photograph is a process of artificial construction - narration (composing) - then to make the claim that the story in the photograph is an effect of this narration process encapsulates the natural proposition that the photograph has a narrative effect based on the reality effect found in the photograph.

The next logical position to explore is whether or not there is such a thing as a story in a photograph. This question raises a further issue in the rhetorical context: does the photograph simply have a narrative effect?

In Chapter 1 I look at the commonly held belief that the photograph is a product and process of contradiction - the narrative effect. This contradiction is produced at the very moment the photographic process is initiated by isolating a temporal thing onto a single frame of a-temporal existence. The duration perceived by the photographer moving through the environment is transcribed at the moment he or she decides to take an exposure and make a photograph. This contradiction, between an expected a-temporal image and actual duration, gives the photograph realistic characteristic. Another way to consider this is through an assumption that, within the photograph there is a referential expectation surrounding the frame. From this expectation, assuming a story or history exists, we come to disavow our own actual knowledge, and rely on the verisimilitude of absence assumed to be behind the stillness of the content. This unseen continuation (mimetic narrativity) can be seen as the realism captured in the photographic process.

From the literary perspective, this effect of realism has been dealt with before. Roland Barthes in "The Reality Effect" observed that through the distinctive functions of description and narration we have come to associate reality with a normality that becomes an assumed cause or device for furthering the effect of realism. We can read this debate unfolding in the following passage.

...the enigmatic character of any description, of which something must be said [is that the] general structure of the narrative... appears essentially predictive; to be extremely schematic, ignoring the numerous digressions, delays, changes of direction, or surprises which the narrative conventions add to this schema, it can be said that, at each juncture of the narrative syntagm, someone says to the hero (or to the reader, it does not matter which): if you act in this way, if you choose this alternative, then this is what will happen (the *reported* nature of these predictions does not alter their practical effect).<sup>1</sup>

Even though, Barthes' general observation of description is an acceptable, and a useful place to begin, what I am interested in is how this essential predictive characteristic of description is identical to the descriptive reading engaged in when we come to look at the photograph.

In trying to explore this issue of a contradiction, we must assume there is a 'shift' from our present understanding of actual description and that of the physical duration we read as a narrative. Coming to this understanding of an expected description we come to base our engagement with the photograph on our actual experience of a shift from a physical duration to a narrative potential. The contradiction arises from the temporality that goes nowhere. This 'temporality that goes nowhere' confirms that the photograph holds the moment in a specific composition on a sheet of film. In reading the content of the photograph (or silently listening to the narration of the photographer - looking at the content) we actually experience a lapse (historical temporality), but we really want to experience the narration of the photographer. We remain in a suspended animation in which, momentarily, the physical sensation of time ceases to be an effect of the photograph.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes. "The Reality Effect" in *French Literary Theory Today* Tzvetan Todorov (ed.) R. Carter (trans.), New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982: 12.

In other words, the story unfolds in the present space of the framed content. By suggesting that looking at the content of a photograph we experience a loss of time, in the conceptual spatio-temporal sense we have been caught as readers, in an a-temporal narrative paradox. , Thus, even though we may assume that this description (narration) is directing us to "act in this way", we are simply following an inferred absence placed there by the photographer and the context placement of the photograph.

In the traditional context of narration we expect, as Barthes points out, that someone will point out that "if you act in this way, if you choose this alternative, then this is what will happen". This implied consequence gives us the feeling of experiencing duration, whereby a progression from one consequence to another will take place. But when we consider the photograph as a description, the question emerges as to how does expectation and our understanding of time and space effect the photograph being a description? It is obvious to say that the photograph does have an implied time and a relative space. The effect of progression is achieved through the additive process of these two concepts being considered simultaneously. In order to consider the ramifications of this narrative effect we must understand how a narrative functions.

Referring back to Barthes, who observes that "narration [is a] vast traffic control centre, provided with referential (and not merely discursive) temporality", the reader can retrace the movement of the story.<sup>2</sup> Thus the obvious bridge between the photograph and description is that of a narration - the describing of its own content in referential temporality. Consider for the moment the analogy of dropping bread crumbs so that we can find our way back to our original starting position. These traces of past markers allow the inference of a further presence to be expected. To suggest that there is a referential narration (the dropping of bread crumbs) would

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*: 12

suggest that there is a narrator who is recounting the description in an implied time and relative space. Thus, in a series of narrative consequences the narrator continually recounts an event, thus we come to expect a further event to reoccur. In the orthodox context, the narrator would be the photographer. But seeing that she is not present her referential status as narrator is suggested through the implied and relative content of the photograph.

It is not surprising then that when we encounter a photograph the narrator is present, but not in a physical manifestation; we have come to expect the narrator (the photographer) to recount the moment in referential terms.<sup>3</sup> By recounting the description before us, we assume a narrative dialogue and our expectation of a story (following the bread crumbs) allows the photograph (as a series of traces) to unfold. Furthermore, I argue that, as we continually exist in our day-to-day lives within additive narration, so we come to understand narration in a referential context. It becomes an invisible part of how we come to describe movement, progression and duration. Hence, when we encounter a still photograph, the strangeness of the described realism, and the overriding daily referential context of our own narrativity collide into the explicit stillness of the photograph. In this collision the contradiction is formed - narrativity within stillness. It is not surprising then that this contradiction must be overcome in order for the story of the photograph to be extracted. The simplest way of achieving this is to disavow the stillness of the photograph and activate the calming effect of narrativity. With this action comes the implied time and relative space of referential realism - the expectation of narrative.

In Chapter 2 a closer look at the story development is presented. I engage on one side, the struggle between an expected meaning and presented facts. On an

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware that this position centres on the issue of whether or not the photographer is present continually when we come to look at the photograph. I would suggest though, just as the photographic meaning is based on context, that the ability to accept whether or not the photographer is present as a narrator is also based on context. Furthermore, it is based on the type of photograph we are looking at and reading. In the "art" photograph the artist as narrator is continually referred to by their off frame status as creator, author or photographer. Thus when we look at the work of Arbus, Serrano, or Parr, these artists (as voices or points-of-view) are the undeniable narrators of the compositions before us.

other side, there is the desire for narration or a personal dialect (voice) to overcome the presented facts with a referential context. This aspect of personal voice is explored in the work of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Richard Avedon's *In The American West*. In their desire to combine personal expressions and facts they both produced works that centre on this form of narrative using a personal dialect. We therefore need to bring to the photograph a resolution that will conceptually satisfy the referential narration we are seeing in the still content. It is this external effect of combined resolution which again contradicts the stillness of the photograph.

It is apparent that the "singularity of the description"<sup>4</sup> is the photograph's central aesthetic. And the still photograph can have a multiple narratives (meanings) extracted from the framed content. Although different narratives may be suggested, the composition (the content) never changes. What changes is the way the context affects the content, and this can only happen as an external effect rather than an internal consequence. In the literary context Barthes suggests that

the singularity of the description (or of the "useless detail") in the narrative fabric, its isolatedness, brings up a question of primary importance for the structural analysis of narrative...Is everything in the narrative meaningful, significant? And if not, if there exist insignificant stretches, what is, so to speak, the ultimate significance of insignificance?<sup>5</sup>

Taking this position, I suggest that the "useless detail" is precisely where we begin to place ourselves as readers of the content. So that we can come to the useless detail (the overall content of the photograph) begins to fall together as a narrative. This ability to see into the photograph for the useless detail suggests that we consciously by-pass the stillness of the photograph as an insignificant aesthetic, and that our overriding desire is to extract its meaning through these useless details. They make the photographs real for us.

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<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes. "The Reality Effect" in *French Literary Theory Today* Tzvetan Todorov (ed.) R. Carter (trans.), New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982: 12.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*: 12

What is the significant effect of the photograph? In chapter three the continual acceptance of the photograph as a description is explored - not from the literary context but now from the philosophical position. It is this stillness of narrativity that propels the insignificant into a position in which we continually replace this stillness with conceptual movement. The stillness is seen as a consequence rather than an insignificant effect of narrativity. We achieve this by ignoring the actual causal content of the photograph, and instilling a referential time and space for the content. What this instilling of a duration effect results in is making the photograph significant within a non-Aristotelian narrative structure. To clarify, we deny the stillness in order to see it referring to a larger external duration. This implied progression outside of the frame gives the photograph its referential quality. Another way to state this is to say that the photograph is a notational fragment of a larger referential narrative - reality.

In this respect we relate the continuous narration outside the frame back to the still description. We have come to expect this from our daily engagement with the surroundings of narrative. This additive referential structure continually encompasses us. The consequence of this is knowingly to accept the photograph as a fragment of a larger reality. In other words, we come into the middle of the unfolding narrative, and must work our way through to the narrative beginning (the original photographic moment) then carry this information forward to the present (future of the narrative conclusion).

By raising this issue of *in medias res* narrativity in Chapter 3, we are immediately thrown into the conceptualising of the photograph within the terms of 'denotation' and 'connotation'. I would argue that these two forms of *notation* are terms in which the Barthesian term useless detail can be paralleled. What I am suggesting in this chapter is that the terms, denote and connote, and cause and effect, are never present physically in the still photograph. They must refer outside the

content as forms of qualification - a grounding characteristic in our acceptance of the photograph as depicting real things. This absent notation for the content, by external referentially and inferred composition, is identical to the type of description we discover in literature. What we are seeing before us in the photograph is a composition of 'details'. And in order to begin the listening (transcribing) process of narration, which by the very act of description subverts the stillness of the photograph, we must have the effect of narrative progression. At this moment, the effect of temporal passing is significant within the 'details', we overcome the a-temporal stillness of the photograph and have been given a sense of progression in the form of a reverse causal duration. This reverse causal structure satisfies our desire for a sense of historical continuity. We are endlessly probing the photograph for insignificant details that refer to our own lives, and when we find them we transfer them outside the stillness of the photograph. This reordering of insignificant (useless) details to significant things gives us the assurance of a real story or its a real photograph of a real thing.

This is one aspect I explore in Chapter 4 by examining Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. Although this is explored from one specific type of fine art perspective, I am looking for those insignificant details that allow us to transcend the stillness of the content in order to place it with in a narrative. These first details are what direct us to refer back to our own understanding of potential stories behind the still image. It is our expectation of the stillness of the photograph that furthers the causal insignificance of these details in order that our insistence on a story is placed within a given frame of reference. Thus all these details may seem insignificant to the main emphasis of the photograph. But they are nevertheless the necessary impetus for the viewer to (possibly) narrativize the photograph.

These details are insignificant, but they provide the necessary connotations of proportion. Now that the photograph has been found to have connotative details

the stillness of the content no longer remains still, which relates to the effect of a narrative existing beyond the frame. This is the very position which Sherman's work emphasises. The viewer cannot help but be enticed into thinking that a narrative will explain any given photograph. From the moment of reading the specific yet vague caption, the stillness of the photographic instant is significant, or more appropriately the film still suggests an unfolding narrative. This struggle between stillness and narrative temporality is ongoing in Sherman's work. It is never really resolved. It is the insignificant details in Sherman's work which initiate the paradoxical resonance of the *Untitled Film Still's* captions. This insignificant detail is not, by any means, the same as Barthes' *punctum*. It would be naive to say that this contradiction is the punctum of the photograph. Although Barthes' *punctum* has a specific function in defining the photograph with personal resonance, it is not the same as an insignificant detail. For the punctum is significant, even if it is subjective, based on personal affectability. This punctum, as is well known, gives the photograph its prick or point of life, as does the insignificant detail.

In Chapter 5 the work of Jacques-Henri Lartigue is explored through this very point of life as a detail, but in a personally auto-referential form of notation - the photograph as a diary.

From the other side of this equation there is a fear manifested in the still photographic image. A fear that if the insignificant details are not contextualized by the photographer, then our predictive narration will be insignificant or abstract. This would account for Christian Metz's observation that the "photograph is a mirror of our own ageing (death)". Ultimately the only way to overcome death (stillness) is to maintain a narrativity through a continual progression of additive descriptions. The culmination of all these descriptions (all these significant and insignificant details) creates its own series of consequences in which the reader is rewarded with referential

significance. It is this characteristic of conclusion and resolution of a story which we find in the work of Robert Frank.

In Chapter 6 the monograph *The Americans* is explored through this novelistic significance. Even though Frank's text is about "Americanness", it critically looks at the ageing process of a nation in 1956. The photograph becomes both a form of significant moment and a critical detail in which the maturing process is revealed for all to see. In this chapter I question whether or not is there such a thing as a 'useless detail' (or as Jack Kerouac has said, *the EVERYTHINGness*) in a photograph, and whether or not all of the content is deemed to be significant or not when we coming to look at and read photographs as narratives. In the case of Frank's text even the smallest detail is compelling and necessary for the resolution of the story. And it is the ability of the photograph to present details in descriptive accuracy that provides the reader with the expectation of a story.

Once progression, movement, significance and duration cease to exist, stillness or frozen stiffness become the only alternative. Therefore it is not surprising that the photograph is so widely used and popular. We can become authors of our own narratives by mechanically creating images of small fragments into a language of our own narrativity. It is as if we can cheat death by activating or rewriting (denoting and connoting) a story of our own past or lapsed visual existence. By aligning a story outside the photograph in the empty off-frame space, we can jump-start the visual reality of stillness so that we can read the progressional effect of a day-to-day narrativity. Just as a car on a frozen morning will not start, the ability to bring it to life comes through the external off frame vehicle connected by two wires of contact. It is this ability to reactivate a frozen narrative that imitates the act of reading literature.

With the ability to intervene in the stillness of the photograph comes an off-frame story. This does not satisfy the a-temporal narrativity of the photography.

But, it does! For what is a-temporal narrativity other than our ability to activate the photograph through language? Therefore, as we stand peering into depths of stillness we can pacify this paradox by contradicting the a-temporalness with our own daily coherence of narrativity through language. In other words, the photograph is a temporal narrative through our ability to refer outside the framed content by using language. By having this a-temporal narrative, the photograph has two structures which define the overall message or evidence of the still content. This paradoxical nature also functions to affirm that a narrative is unfolding. We are then assured that the stillness is no longer something to fear for we have overcome the immobility of the content and we have given narrativity (language or life) to the photograph in the form of a story.

# 1

## *Finding the Narrative in the Photograph*

What are we considering when we suggest there is a narrative in the photograph? To suppose that there is a narrative is to acknowledge that there must be a structure which supports the idea of a story existing in or around the photograph [in the form of its being readable]. In a system of communication in which a narrative is achieved, there must be a framework which supports the system of there being both a sender (the author / creator), and a receiver (the reader / observer) of the narrative - whether it be visual or textual. As the material (the narrative communication) is passed from one to the other, a transference of coded or encoded information takes place. Under ideal conditions the information sent would result in a meaning being obtained. Alongside this ideal exchange there will be sets of rules, and conventions - the syntactical forms and codified structures - that, by a process of shared cultural understanding, will condition the resulting meaning to fit the shared understanding between the sender and receiver. Although this narrative is one in

which a progression is conceptually achieved it is not a linear progression as Victor Burgin points out. "[T]he narration of the world that photography achieves is accomplished, not in a linear manner, but in a repetition of 'vertical' readings, in stillness, in a-temporality."<sup>1</sup> Although this narrative is not linear, and is vertical in a-temporality, it still accounts for the production of a story in readable terms.

To counteract any loss of important details, and diminish the amount of unwanted interference or noise affecting the direction of the narrative, Didier Coste points out that, "there is no narrative without (actual or implied) repetition."<sup>2</sup> Repetition exists as a continual rehearsal of events through the reuse of syntactical codes and rules for the construction of the ideas, descriptions and impressions of the narrative. Even though this idea of repetition exists in both Coste's account of narrativity and Burgin's account of vertical narrativity, the authorial conscious, then unconscious, construction can be seen as not as straightforward as the statements might suggest. In some ways, the argument of repetitive events creates a specific syntax which rests on the level of intentional creation and runs parallel to a narrative which exists on the level of intentional expression. Seymour Chatman sees narrative as a structure which unfolds its "content plane"<sup>3</sup> (syntactical units) in a successive, and not necessarily linear, progression of understandable forms. Once it does so, what Chatman calls the "expression plane"<sup>4</sup> (meaning) is allowed the freedom to impact with the cultural environment in which it is presented. Therefore, expression (or meaning) becomes identified with a-temporal discourse, which is a manifestation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Burgin. "Seeing Sense" in *The End of Art Theory*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International Inc.: 69.

<sup>2</sup> Didier Coste. *Narrative as Communication*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: 37.

<sup>3</sup> Seymour Chatman. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978: 174.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 174.

syntactical units in which the story is delivered in a contradiction of unfolding yet never really achieving a physical destination: the novel, the film, the tale, the painting, and the photograph.

These forms of a-temporal discourses all have a specific syntax which are relevant to their own particular characteristics or procedures of presentation. If the process of repetition is inherently a prerequisite of the codes and rules found in their specific narratives, then logically the narrative must in some way be reliant on the repetitiveness: the codes and rules of grammar that mould their specific text into a structure of a particular form. These codes and rules have contingent positions which determine how the message will appear and be read in relation to its discourse. This forms the basis of what we can define as the non-linear composition - Victor Burgin's vertical narrativity. So these codes and rules become primary units of the composition which, once continually present and repetitive, lies in a vertical relationship inside the 'warehouse' (the supporting framework) which is the narrative. As one unit section is comprehended and given a relative expression in this warehouse, then the next appears, and so on; and so on goes the process of repetitive understanding: a continual process of successive impact. It is not surprising then, that when we come to narrativize the photograph we are standing in a vertical position in which we must repetitively comprehend the details in order to give it a story.

Here I would wish to propose the question: can this story be accomplished visually as well as textually? When I speak of the visual story, I am referring to the photograph as a text. Thus I can suggest that the realism found in the visual story can be seen in the same way as its literary counterpart - in its embodiment of the environment which lies around us. Edward Weston speaks of this type of realism when he says, "I see no reason why not to photograph the

obvious."<sup>5</sup> As we enter into the visual story of the photograph, each detail is described and defined in linguistic terms and the resulting collective composition (our understanding) will have its own contingent syntactical grammar, thereby giving us a specific description which will be compared to other images or stories encountered later. The composition becomes a narrative of definitions that share a mutual space, and their meanings will ultimately result in the totality of "realistic" interpretation, resulting in a story based on fragments.

When discussing any notion of realistic documentation, we encounter certain concepts that are crucial to the variations of realism that could arise. These are *mimesis* (imitation) and *verisimilitude* (the narrated semblance of truth). Although I started out by illustrating how we might define the visual image through language, I now want to take this strategy of realism and illustrate how conveniently it fits within the argument of the photograph being read as a vertical narrative. For literary realism has a close affiliation with the environment, and this close affiliation reflects the same relation the photograph has with the environment. Therefore the crucial terms for discussing the techniques of realism (*mimesis* and *verisimilitude*) are increasingly apt for the discussion of the photograph in terms of producing an unfolding story.

It is inevitable that there will be more than one way of interpreting the meaning of a realistic work. In a mimetic interpretation we are reading the work in relation to how it imitates or mimics the actual reality we know from our own experiences of the environment.<sup>6</sup> How faithfully does the text imitate the real world? In *verisimilitude* we are reading or wanting the work to reveal its ability to

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Weston. (Daybooks. II, 252) in *Edward Weston: Forms of Passion, Passion of Forms*. Gilles Mora (ed.) London: Thames and Hudson, 1995: 9.

<sup>6</sup> My usage of the term 'environment' reflects the experiencing of elements for their determination and textual definition as with the immediate environment around us. And as we become more sophisticated in definitions and meanings of the environment around us we can extend these meanings to a larger, more complex environment, that being the world. Hence my change in terms from environment to world.

have the semblance of truth. This truth is the consideration of reality that we have come to recognise through our influences and repetitive dealings with the world around us. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein claims that the world and language are not on opposite sides of interpreting reality, or the sum of our experience of the world, is shaped by language itself.<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein's idea is that the world we have access to is only knowable from our representations of it in language. This representation through linguistic understanding is what determines our experiences; thus, experience of reality is a "truth" based in the language which defines it. Conceding this point then, truth becomes a subjective position rather than objective universality and throws the concept of verisimilitude and mimesis into a contingent and relative position. Truth is an element of both categorisations, becoming an experience of realism extracted in cultural, social, and ideological linguistic contingencies. Realism is, and happens as, a result of its position or placement for reading the language and accepting authenticity based on this context of it being language. The amount of truth (realism) contained in the work will be determined by how much experience (language) we have at our disposal to contextualize its authenticity. This leads us to reconsider and look at how the photograph (as a realist story) is affected by and responds to the concept of being authentic.

By being an authentic reflection and rendering, this characteristic and terminology aligned itself in the nineteenth-century to be the prime illustration of how the photograph should be read. The fact that reading the photograph in realistic terms meant that it is acknowledged as an accurate visual rendering of the thing; a mirror and window that opened up and reflected reality in all its nuances and subtleties. As Roland Barthes observes, "the Photograph sometimes makes

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<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations* 3ed. G.E.M. Anscombe (trans.) Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968: 96 (p.44).

appear what we never see in a real face (or in a face reflected in a mirror)."<sup>8</sup> A statement like this illustrates the nineteenth-century desires and ideological understandings already contained in the individual through the consumption of realist fiction. There was no need for translation or romantic abstract interpretation. A simple turn of description and reality was reflected in the product of the new medium. It became the perfect vantage point from which to view the world. The writings of Henry James are an appropriate parallel to this conception of the photograph [being a more perfect window opening out onto reality]. In *The Art of the Novel*, James states that the best way of writing a fiction is to look out onto the world through the consciousness of the subject. One of the best visual examples of this statement is can be found in Robert Frank's *View from hotel window, Butte, Montana*, Figure 1.1.

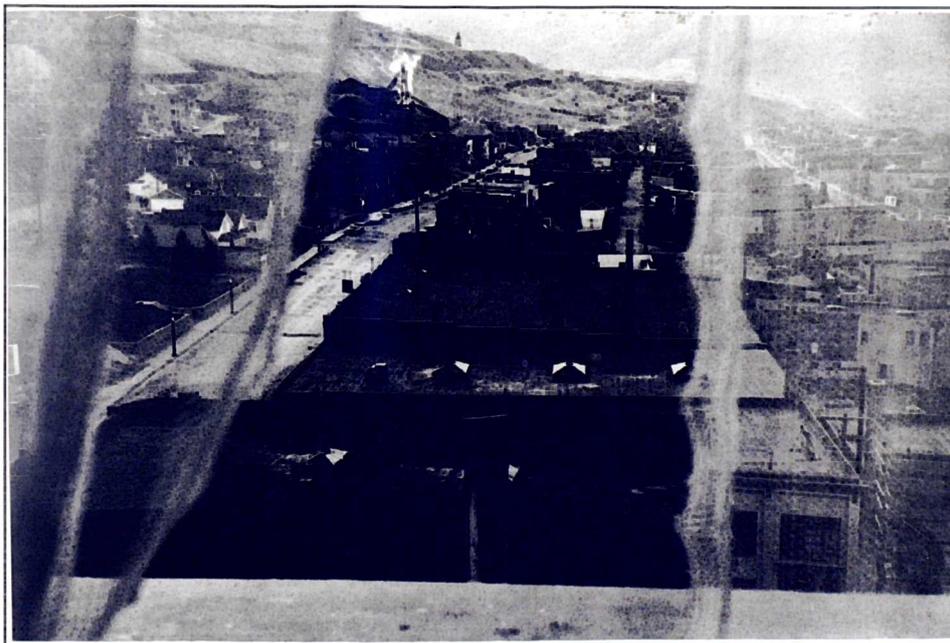


Figure 1.1 Robert Frank, *View from hotel window, Butte, Montana*, 1955/56

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<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida* Richard Howard (trans.) London: Vintage Press, 1993: 107.

Frank, as a writer of the scene, will take this actual window, opening up onto the world, and describe the world before it (Butte, Montana) as if photography is akin to a written description. In James version

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million - a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater human sameness of report than we find. They are but mere windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field glass, which forms, again and again, for observation a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.<sup>9</sup>

In this passage we find several instances in which the visual takes on a certain priority. The concepts of *window* and *apertures of dissimilar shape* can be directly transcribed onto the mechanistic act of seeing photographically. These fictions that James refers to are in his words "mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft" and when we look at the photograph (the hole or aperture) we are indeed seeing life on a still surface, frozen, lifeless and disconnected. These surfaces (the paper image) are ready for observation and waiting for a context to express its details into a story. And this context comes through our ability to be the implied reader who is observing the world through the magnified window with a pair of eyes framed by field glasses. No other visual medium can isolate the environment as does the photograph when reconnected through its aperture - its mechanical eye. This isolation is certainly evident in Figure 1.1. Frank's composition of Butte, as seen through the triple frame of the window sill, curtains and photograph frame creates a multiple impact of fragmented isolation from the external world just outside the walls of the hotel

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<sup>9</sup> Henry James. *The Art of the Novel* London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934: 46.

room. In other words, the world is so close but yet it is still so far way - *you can look but cannot touch.*

Prior to the development of the photographic medium, the understanding and definition of realism was based in literary texts that were read as conveyors of truth and perfect descriptions of life, closely following temporal order and historical linearity. In such texts one event followed another in a pattern of very careful and well-thought-out successions. Based on the desire for resolution in the realist text a seemingly logical progression was the key to reflecting life in the realist genre. So in these texts, recounting life through descriptive observations tended to be the model followed. Hence this model set the stage for the introduction of the photograph. It would become the new form of descriptive observation, material realism, one which could transcribe and record the semblance of authenticity in a faithful documentation.

I would argue that the realist desire in literature (its narrativity) allowed the photograph to become rearranged with a capacity for expressing mimesis and verisimilitude. Its [continually recurring] physical and authentic visual image reinforced the descriptive capacity of the medium. The descriptions created are material details of the world in realist terms. But the suggestion that the photograph is a real depiction carries with it a set of predetermined connotations as to its being a truthful documentation of reality. For example the photographic work of Baron Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gros.

In his documentation of the ruins of ancient Greece these compositions become a material source of ancient architectonic forms. However, *Athens Temple ruins, Greece 1856*, Figure 1.2, is more than a mere realist description of the ruins Baron Gros encountered. This photograph becomes a story fragment of the ancient ruins in which a trace of a culture can be unfolded. Thereby this repetition of reality, even though the photograph constructs a specific real look,

becomes aligned with the potential reading of its story as a realism. Its "look", the authentic realism produced by the mechanical, optical and chemical processes, is actualised and accomplished through its ability to render a [light and mirrored] impression of reality onto a two-dimensional surface.

In some respects, this is a mimetic recreation which gives a truthful meaning to the material description of the photograph. This process of mimesis parallels the repetitive usage of words in their formed compositions (on a two-dimensional surface) to form descriptions (textual compositions and or descriptions) of the world. Repetition exists, in the photographic context, as a form of composition in which the capacity to be authentic is read as the reflection of reality; the world imprinted on the surface of paper which appears as a realistic narrative.



Figure 1.2 Baron Jean-Baptiste Louis Gros, *Athens, Temple Ruins, Greece, 1856*

This narrative, the registered impressions on the paper, will change as the position (the context) of the narrative (the photograph or text) changes. Victor Burgin outlines this type of positional determination, although not explicitly,

when he argues that "objects presented to the camera are *already in use* in the production of meaning, and photography has no choice but to operate upon such meanings. There is, then, a 'pre-photographic' stage in the photographic production of meaning which must be accounted for."<sup>10</sup> (I would also include our use of words, and subsequently the overall compositions of these words, as having this pre-determined quality.) Notwithstanding the objects or subjects present are being continually reused as a means of recreating a story (content) and expression (discourse). And if we remember that the photograph and text are culturally located, the repetitiveness of presentation will result in a particular type of meaning being connected.

The photograph (leaving aside text for the moment) becomes embedded in the grammatical heritage of meaning, it captivates its old definitions, and the resulting pre-determined definitions are observed as new narratives with new meanings attached to the objects presented. The depiction we see on the surface of the paper is a composition seen through a new configuration, reframed onto a "pre-photographic stage". The story and discourse of the photograph is constructed out of these revitalised meanings injected with a new delivery and "visible" potency. The potency and delivery of the narrative is achieved through the ability of the camera to isolate, frame and suspend the object in its new reconfigured determination. The single instant can redefine itself into a new sustained visual narrative - what Burgin sees as a vertical narrative. This is a process of metamorphosis - a transformation from the "pre-existing" (used) into the post-existing (new). Another way to consider this, is to imagine an object at the bottom of a tower and once I move it from its initial location, to the top of the tower, its physical description is the same what has changed is the context or location. We can take this action and now relate it to the fraction-of-a-second

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<sup>10</sup> Victor Burgin. "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" In *Thinking Photography*. Victor Burgin (ed.) London: Macmillan Press, 1982: 47.

achieved in the photographic act. Registered, framed and suspended in an atemporality, the pre-existing meaning is reconsidered and transformed, by the way of a chemical, optical and mechanistic process, into a two-dimensional reflection with a new post-existing description, delivering with it a new meaning.

Another factor is that this narrative is also constructed out of the contradiction between the used and new meaning achieved through redelivery - the taking of the photograph makes the instance of a vertical narrative possible. Pointing the camera lens and making an exposure is an act of intentional determination, a conscious decision that the thing before the camera has interest. The contradiction between seeing it before us, "the real thing", and the desire, now, to see it "realised" on paper is also a factor in the process of giving it a vertical rather than a linear narrative meaning, by which the pre-existing meanings are replaced with the photographic description.

This movement, a desire to redevelop a story whose expression is achieved through the apparatus of the camera, can also be thought of as a space and time difference. Our narrative is now captured and, through an already existing shared cultural understanding surrounding the photograph, it exists, or becomes immediately read as having existed in front of the camera. This fragment of suspended time, recorded as a meaningful thing, embodying only fractions-of-a-second, becomes the briefest period in which to build this narrative tower.

Take, for example, a football seen on the grass and ready to be kicked. Our understanding of the ball is formed and conditioned by the pre-determined meanings of previous encounters with a ball on the grass. As being informed by these previous encounters, the potential meanings of what this ball is understood to be a ball. We discover it can be kicked; if it has enough volume of air, and striking it will result in the ball being lofted into the air by the force of our leg and

foot interactions. We may discover many more types of actions and they all will become inscribed with individual linguistic meanings. Therefore understanding this particular ball is based on tactical discovery and encounters with more variations in the future which will give us an extended language to attach more complex meaning to the ball, thus increasing our reference base to draw upon.

But, what happens if we discover a photograph of a ball? We have no way of physically interacting with it, except for the conceptual referencing of our previous interactions with pre-encountered balls. Thereby, we discover the ball photograph as a description that must be reconfigured and regenerated from the pre-existing "pre-photographic" meaning attached to balls we have known in the past. Even though we can imagine the ball in flight or bouncing wildly across the pitch, the ball photograph exists in a visual repetition or animated moment of the "real" ball. We infer its possible actions and come to ascribe new descriptive meanings to the ball photograph. A ball in a photographic form becomes reinscribed as a single instant narrative for the balls in the past - a repetitive sign. The absence of the "real" ball becomes the isolation and presence of the ball. It remains only as a mimesis suspended in its narrative verisimilitude.

At this moment we are provided with a contradiction between the imitation and the truth of the narrative surrounding the ball photograph. The descriptive meaning of the ball photograph is a contradiction always present in the photograph. The imitation of stillness and the vertical movement of the narrative is designed to activate our reading of the ball photograph as a visual description of a "real" ball.

Outside of these complex associations, the photograph can be read as a narrative, even if it is a ball photograph. What is continually present is the sense that any form or structured expression between a sender (the photographer of the ball) and a receiver (the observer of the ball photograph) has the potential for a

message - assumed to be a narrative. Roland Barthes argues in "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" that a narrative

...is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, and never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite backgrounds: Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.<sup>11</sup>

If narrative exists in every form of visual and textual means, then the photograph must express a narrative as well. Although there is a repetitive tendency to the medium, the medium also has developed a cultural narrativizing. The medium is a more "actual" or "factual" way of recording Life; the photograph has been associated [and accorded] with the power to communicate in "visual realism," as was pointed out earlier.

(Certainly the nineteenth-century ideology embracing the newly-created medium regarded it as a fascinating and sometimes mystifying way to record life. Initially, great technical skill and knowledge was required to render a "lifelike" mirror appearance on the copperplate [Daguerreotype], or glass plate [Ambrotype]. As the medium technically matured, it became a readily acceptable means of visual documentation. It became invested with the ability to express and communicate, among other ideological mandates, the colonial and expansionist ideals of a culture in transition from the pre-industrial economy to an industrial one, driven by its fascination with the machine.<sup>12</sup> It was seen as the ideal apparatus to illustrate the "otherness" of the world which, in some circles, was seen as a fascination and threat to the dominant ideology. And through its power to communicate in direct and straightforward imagery, it reflected the mass

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<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" In *New Literary History*, Vol. VI (2) Winter 1975: 237.

<sup>12</sup> John Tagg make numerous observations on the ideological and political implications of photography during its nineteenth-century pre-history period in his *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. London: MacMillan Education Publications, 1988.

appeal of the industrial revolution (and ethos). The far reaches of the world became the pearl of the camera, from the architectural ruins of Eastern Europe to the mysticism of the Orient. The reason for this interest in seeing the world was due to the pre-dominant attitudes of a colonialist ideals. Therefore the world could be conquered and brought back in convenient photographic form. )

The photograph became an object of visual desire, a merging of science and art, and with expansionist attitudes explored, conquered and recorded the world and made the world a commercial product in the form of the *carte de viste*. The photograph now emerged with the power of being able to express in a single image, with accompanying text, a personalised validation of an adventure - a document (a story) in pictures and words. Communiqués, messages and evidence both visual and textual could be sent to others to inform, validate and register an absence and presence of a journey. I believe it is this development of the photographic medium that defines the notion that the photograph can be read as a narrative.

With the attachment of textual information, the influence of a codified language is what I would deem to be the central point in the transformation of the single instant photograph into a readable story. In the postcard we not only read the textual information but we, as receivers of the photograph, are asked to interpret the visual description on the front in relation to the textual message on the back. This is the intertextual consideration of co-existing narratives - taking the visual description and reading it through the same pre-determined system of text, and then reconsidering the two (the visual and textual) back into a larger narrative. This expanded narrative is a synthesis of the two divergent forms of description. They can be read either independently or concurrently, depending on the context of reception. We will see this form of expanded narrative in Chapter 3 in the postcard of *San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico, n.d.*- (see page 131).

The portrait, on the other hand, has always been associated with the referential term *self*: either of self or of family. It was a way of achieving a personal heritage - historicizing life or death. According to Susan Sontag: "A photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask...a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) - a material vestige of its subject..."<sup>13</sup> The portrait studio became a setting of personalised commemoration and with it came the intentionality to validate a self-centred uniqueness and individuality. To have your portrait taken by this 'magical' and fascinating mechanical process of recording light became considered as an event. Subsequently the portrait photograph acquired a definition of being an image of truthful and accurate expression.<sup>14</sup> The realist photographic meaning of truth attached itself to the portrait. The studio photographer provided an intimate and formalised form of personal expression. The photographic studio was the site where the impression of your physical appearance on a glass or copper plate was transformed in an authentic determination. The intentional act of the documentation gave the individual photographer a way to understand his or her "actual" self in a new fashion - to be seen as a *verisimilitude* in the form of a visual repetition. Certainly, the nineteenth-century ideology gave individuals a way to be realised, quite literally, as being "visionary". In this realisation the photograph (with its seemingly mirroring potential) was marvelled for its accurate depiction of details.

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977: 154.

<sup>14</sup> I am aware that with this new means of self-expression came the personal desire to see oneself as "perfect" as possible. Therefore the efforts of faithful reproduction provided by the claims of the new medium was circumvented by the portrait studio providing retouching services. Retouching gave the commercial studio a way to satisfy the patrons desire to see themselves in the best conceptualised expression of themselves. This meant in some case the removal of blemishes or any other physical inconsistency that might detract from the overall "aesthetic" appearance of the patron. Therefore, we must keep in mind that this discussion of truthful documentation is contingently based on what ideological period of photographic reproduction one is discussing.

As production and consumption increased and the numbers of portrait photographs and studios multiplied, so did the ingrained notion that with the document comes always the "authentic" rendering of the subject. Sitting or standing before the camera was a way to authenticate your physical presence and truthful contingency in this world. No other genre in the repertoire of photography has had such a long lasting effect in perpetuating this realist notion; 'with the photograph comes identical truth'. Therefore a continual repetition of pre-determined understanding was being inscribed and acquired by the medium of the portrait photograph.

William J. Mitchell briefly touches on this subject in *The Reconfigured Eye* :

"photographs are very strongly linked by contiguity to the objects they portray, we have come to regard them not as pictures but as formulae that metonymically evoke fragments of reality."<sup>15</sup> Therefore the photograph becomes invested with the formulaic ability to continually represent truthful expression.

The continual representation, an act of repetitiveness, is what the portrait photograph states explicitly. Its repetitiveness would suggest that there is a continual transformation. Yet the photograph, although it is repetitive, also has, thanks to its mechanistic heritage another characteristic which allows this repetitive nature to be used. This characteristic is identical to the concept of literary polysemy. To suggest that there are multiple meanings in literature is "to account for and to articulate the concept of a literary term (lexia) having a pluralistic potential of signifieds attached to a single signifier."<sup>16</sup> Taking the concept of multiplicity to the photograph allows the photograph (the signifier) to bear two or more definitions (signifieds). This translation is not enough to prove that, with a natural ability to be repetitive, the photograph develops into possibly several different narratives. The question arises here: can two or more definitions

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<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, William J. *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992: 27.

<sup>16</sup> Didier Coste. *Narrative as Communication* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: 92.

(narratives) be drawn from the same photograph? To address this question, a photograph would need to be deconstructed, in such a way as not to affect its plurality and repetition, but through various contexts we can observe whether or not a different narrative is formed based on its context. The problem arising from this type of illustration, is how do we determine the correct "truthful" narrative from the fictitious ones? Certainly this statement implies that there is one correct narrative and that the others which are generated are false. My point here is not to separate right from wrong but to use the concept of multiplicity to illustrate that the photograph, being this formula of realism, is easily read as a narrative in any context. Wittgenstein's observations about the truth-seeking is reflective of this relationship between the photograph and reality being as the same as a picture and what it represents.<sup>17</sup> If reality is found in a photograph in the form of a formula, then through our contextual deconstruction of this formula we find that the photograph carries with it a pre-determined authenticity.

Now, if this truth-seeking is contained in the photograph, which I have suggested can be read in various contexts, then one must assume that in any given context a narrative will be achieved from the photograph. Therefore, rather than one true statement, we find the photograph carrying many truths. Is this not a contradiction: how can there be more than one truth in the photograph? Perhaps it is not a matter of truth but of a matter of contingency, for are not contingency and context one and the same? Truth can only be contingent to the point in which it is expressed within a given context. It is this concept of contingent multiplicity which best defines the photograph as a narrative, by suggesting that the photograph is a seed which has a specific signifier (the content) and when placed in divergent contexts (contingencies), the varied signifieds (growth patterns) are allowed to establish themselves: and this affords us the opportunity to trace back

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<sup>17</sup> see Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (trans.) Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press Inc., 1992: 10.

through the growth potential of the photograph to create a narrative based on this contingent truth. This reading back is a transgressive method of finding the beginning moment of the germination of the photograph. And through this retracing process a textual contingency is used to safely say that the content in the photograph is a repetition of the real in two-dimensional terms.

I think it would be beneficial at this point to take one photograph and place it in two different contexts in order to test this contingent multiplicity and, at the same time, validate the whether or not the photograph can be a fictional narrative akin to realism.

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In our first context, let us start with a rather straightforward photograph and place it in a context of aesthetic reverence - the art gallery. In this atmosphere the subtleties and nuances of the visual content can be addressed and considered in the aesthetic determinations of art.

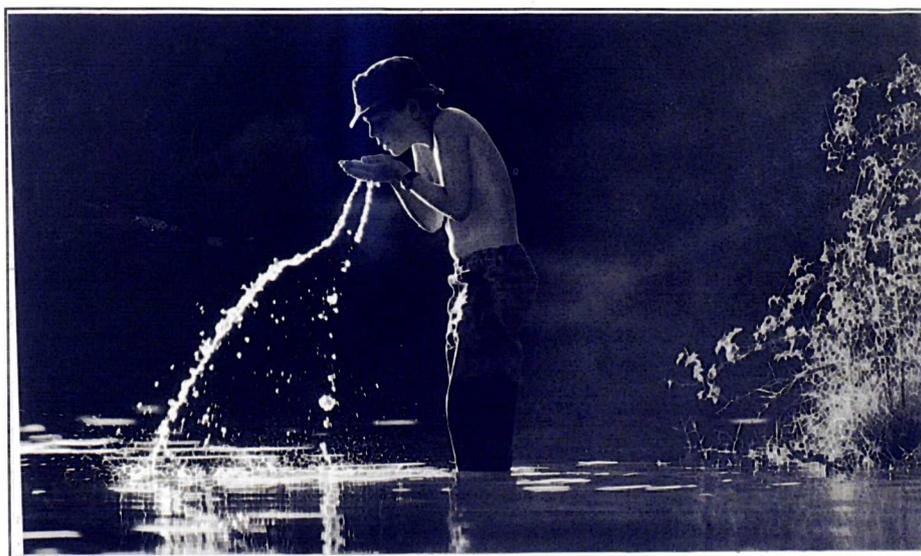


Figure 1.3

*A Boy in The Water, n.d.*

In Figure 1.3 we see a photograph that contains three main visual elements: a boy standing, a small lake or pond, and the encroachment of foliage

on the right side of the frame. (The background detail has been conveniently diminished in order to focus our attention of the central character, that being the boy.) In this concentration of subject matter, we see the boy caught in a moment of cupping his hands in order to drink the water which he has just scooped up from the pond. The boy stands in the water up to a mid-calf depth. His jeans are of two varying tonalities which would indicate two possible interpretations of this effect: first, that the boy has either been in the water for a long period of time thereby allowing the water to have time to soak up the fabric or second, he has recently been in a deeper section of the pond. Both interpretations are possible and could be realistically viable. We have no way of knowing which one is the more accurate interpretation and can only speculate on the one that may be relevant to its context. Leaving aside the content for the moment, if we continue to imagine encountering this photograph in the gallery context in which it exists on the wall isolated from any other photographs, then I would offer that, our first reaction would be to question why it sits in isolation? The answer, based on context, would be to suggest that it has a "special" meaning which isolation affords it the ability to express more directly, by eliminating other possible meanings - interconnected narratives from other photographs. Returning to the content, because the boy exists in the centre of the composition, we are directed to engage him as the main character in this composition. Seeing no overtly dynamic or profound details in the photograph, I ask, what makes this photograph warrant this gallery context? Certainly it has no obvious technical or historical features. Therefore it must be the overall clarity and in Weston's consideration "the ordinary-ness" of the photograph in which the meaning is derived. The combination of the content and its simple and direct depiction is what gives the photograph its potential to be in the artwork. But we are still drawn back to the question of why this "ordinary" anonymous photograph is considered art in a gallery context? Having no historical information (caption or signature) to draw

on, we must entertain the notion that the photograph is what it is. This is to say that the ordinary photograph of a simply moment in life is what make it art. Therefore our aesthetic of the photograph; the purity of depiction, the truthfulness of representation, the moment of spontaneous interaction between the boy, environment and water are what merits the gallery context. In other words the unmanipulated photograph carries with it the consideration of truthful and unaltered re-presentation of reality.

We can continue to interpret this photograph endlessly and extract many aesthetic translations which would justify its context. But what I want to illustrate here is that the given context of the photograph (the metonymic formula) controls the narrative impact of the photograph, even one of an anonymous nature. Therefore to imagine this photograph in a gallery would activate a whole history of associated connotations, about the ordinary photograph being a site of artistic and aesthetic importance. Therefore the given contingency of this photograph becomes reliant upon its context which moves it from commonality to potency, from absence to presence. The authentic contingency of the photograph, what Henry James would call a *window* upon the world, is now seen as having aesthetic expression - realism. By giving this photograph a given setting, it is also afforded a contingency of being an artwork. By being this type of narrative statement its story message is validated within historical, social and cultural determinacy. In the resulting verisimilitude of this photograph, the textualization process will be externalised as only one of the possible narrative statements valid for this context. The variation of this resulting verisimilitude is that this photograph is simply an imprint and ends up being a constructed artistic truth - fiction. Therefore we can imagine the possible caption that would appropriately satisfy the pleasure of this photograph in a gallery context while also satisfies its ordinariness.

A boy standing in water, no shirt, jeans half wet, and cupping his hands in order to drink the water which pours through his fingers.

In our first context, we began with the anonymous photograph in a gallery and ended up with theory that a truth contingency, based on its content and context, gives the photograph the resemblance of truth and its potential to be a narrative statement. Therefore this photograph, Figure 1.3, if seen as art, implies the opportunity to contemplate the realism we are seeing and narrativize it into a story of the simple pleasures of life.

In our second context, an opposing context to our first, let us imagine the Figure 1.3 as a greeting card, Figure 1.4, which we have just received as a gift. Although the content is the same, what has changed is the given context. Our first question is whether or not this new context will affect the overall truthful contingency and realism of the photograph, by observing it in its now "true" context.

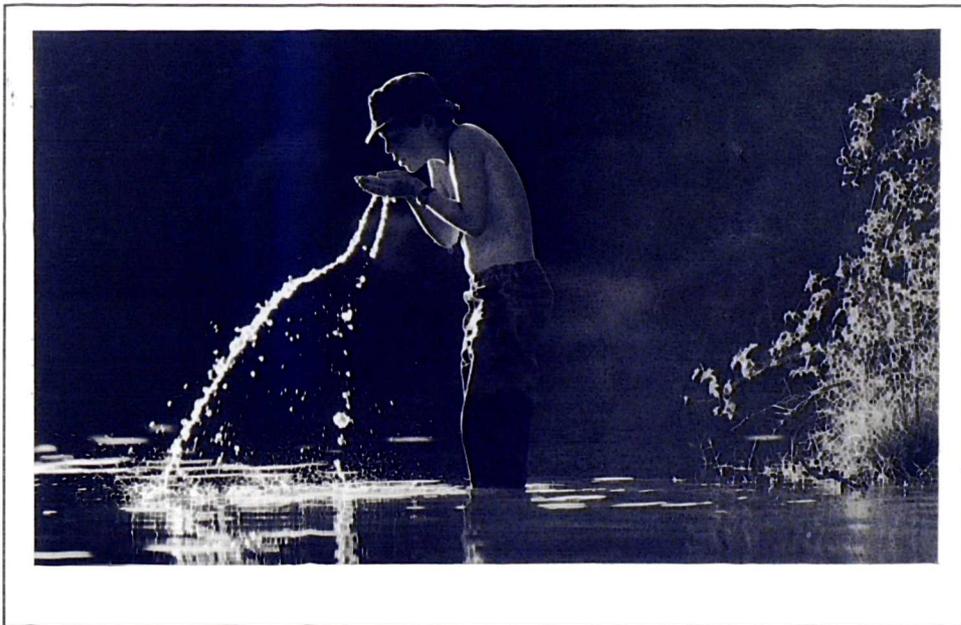


Figure 1.4

*Greeting Card, n.d.*

Our first question is why does this knowledge affect the overall expression and meaning of the photograph? I would argue it does not. What is affected is the

gallery propelled the photograph into the realm of artistic aesthetics but still relied on the truthful contingency for its power of expression. In our second opposing context, we observed the photograph reflecting a symbolic realism, embedded in the tradition of mimesis and verisimilitude. It forfeited its truthful contingency in order to grow into a fictional observation rather than a truthful one. Certainly one can question the validity of these two scenarios because they are based in pure imagination and speculation, but what they do illustrate effectively is that the photograph does have the potential of being read as a narrative. It also illustrates, whether or not we are looking for the truthful contingency or realism of the photograph, that the context controls the type of narrative expectation being generated.

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We have just observed that a photograph can have various types of narrative expectations or the beginnings of a story. The next question to be addressed would be; if a photograph is so flexible, then are we satisfied that what we are receiving or reading is authentic? To address this question, we must accept that an exchange has taken place and that we are confident that an exchange in information is occurring. We have taken the material description, language in the Wittgensteinian thought, and read it in relation to a given context. I would argue that when we come to the photograph, especially in isolation, our pre-determined and culturally conditioned response to the photograph is that 'there has to be a story and that we should look for it and try to read it'. In actual fact, when we come to the isolated photograph and not knowing anything other than its content, a story is not always readily apparent. What is produced is an indecision about its history, means or purpose for production. We hesitate in gaining access to the meaning because we are missing either the beginning or the end. In an

interesting reversal of moments, the "decisive moment"<sup>19</sup> has been transformed into the indecisive moment. This indecisive moment, the inability to move back to the beginning, spans the difference between the visual interpretation and textual reading. It is clear that it is the given contingency which co-ordinates how we respond to the photograph as a narrative. The potential narrative that we are seeing and / or reading is conditioned by this still moment. Until the context has been fed into the formula, the resulting story expectation of the photograph (and the potential understanding) is open and fragmentary. Therefore, the photograph as a realism is context-driven - this makes the visual creation a realism based on pre-determined understanding.<sup>20</sup> This aspect of changing determination, based on the still indecisive moment, is another contradictory aesthetic inherent in the photograph. The act of identifying the highly realistic nature of the photograph with the highly textual comprehension of the content is what is meant by an oscillation between its two transpositional natures. It is a movement from the external (Figure 1.3 as realistic document), observing the visual, to the internal (Figure 1.4 as symbolic realism), defining it in language. And this shift back and forth between the internal document and external determination across the authenticity in the photograph, reflects the durational passage of a narrative - a movement from one context to another. For narrative reading always involves, and is based on, an inherent progression, transgression or *in medias res* movement in the story. And rather than being progressive (a narrative which beginning at the beginning and moves through it middle to the end) or transgressive (a narrative which begins at the end and moves through the middle

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<sup>19</sup> The 'decisive moment' was articulated and defined by Henri Cartier-Bresson as the moment in which all the elements of time, composition, content and context, come together to make the "perfect" photograph. And the strategy of the photographer was to be ready and aware enough to see and record this event.

<sup>20</sup> Another factor in the building of a narrative within the photograph, is the homogeneous nature of the photograph, its cohesive visual look which always signifies it to be just what it is - a photograph.

to the beginning), I would suggest that the movement into the photograph is always an act of *in medias res* reading. A reading that starts in the middle and moves to the beginning before reaching its end resolution.

The photograph and its narrative, as we have seen, are and will always be reliant on its context. Context is always present for the successful interpretation of the photograph. Therefore, the photographic story is based on context and this determination defines the type of narrative. As contexts change so do the narrative types. A discussion of narrative types can be as varied as the means of expression the photograph can generate. The photograph can be manicured into arenas of evidence, experience and knowledge and be variously regarded as authentic or artificial, fantastic or factual. Photographs produce only contingent stories which are created from the textual references produced by describing the details of the content in relation to the contingent reference accompanying them.

A photograph is a story caught in a stasis of duration. By reiterating this statement, I must acknowledge certain conditions and characteristics that are shared by both structures. First is the ability to be read. (I am assuming here that when I look at the photograph, I am entering into the realm of reading the visual content. During this reading I am deriving meaning and associating this meaning back through language in order to contextualize an "overall" picture of the photograph. Hence we have obtained this overall picture through a process of reading.) Thereby the definitional list that I acquire from the content, is also achieved through a process of consumption, digestion and evaluation. In his "Photographic Practice and Art Theory", Victor Burgin further argues that the photograph, "the still", has the potential to be read but that the reading is contingent on the ideological production of the image.

By ideology we mean, in its broadest sense, a complex of propositions about the natural and social world which would be generally accepted in a given society as describing the actual, indeed necessary, nature of the world and its events. An ideology is the sum of taken-for-granted realities

of everyday life; the pre-given determinations of individual consciousness; the common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions. Ideology takes an infinite variety of forms; what is essential about it is that it is contingent and that *within it the fact of its contingency is suppressed*.<sup>21</sup>

The context of the photograph and its readability is its normalising function which makes this ideology-based way of seeing contingent on the historically bound thing seen in the photograph to be actual and real. This is another reason for the very multi-purpose nature of the photograph and why it can be thought of as being a shifting story. If contingency controls the ideological propositions that define the relationship I have with the world, then the photographic narrative, being a sum of ideological propositions, will respond identically to the given contingency of social and cultural determination. Therefore, to be read, the photograph must have a contingent position within ideology. Production, as varied as it can be for the photograph, must always respond to its contingency. As I pointed out earlier, the readability of the photograph comes through a process of transposition, moving through the visual content into a textual interpretation, and now this movement is ideologically (language) contingent, which culminates with a specific, albeit subjective, story based on its content, then context.

What I am proposing by this observation is that we see the photograph as a means of bringing about the convergence of a visual and textual production to form a duration. And this duration is the formulating of a narrative (*story*) in an a-temporality.

The narrative is a culmination of the events that creates its own inclusion and some kind of meaning. A narrative story is also a shell which contains the inner events, settings, characters and happenings that allows the culmination of these elements to be read as achieving a conceptual passage in time. Thus the photograph can be seen as the shell in which the same elements are combined to

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<sup>21</sup> Victor Burgin. "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" In *Thinking Photography* Victor Burgin (ed.) London: Macmillan Press, 1982: 46.

create a meaning. This photographic *story* is composed from the real environment. And this composition is by no means solidified as being fixed or objective. Rather, it is fragmented and approximated, based on the variables of ideology and context. We could say, that it lacks a defined beginning, a place in which to start a dialogue of understanding. It lacks a resolved conclusion, and it lacks ways of determining its place or value of expression. This latter element could be a result of there being a continual dependency on context, whereby the content is left without a definite history, which results in the story floating as an open ambiguousness chain of elements. A way to examine this fragmentary existence is to observe the photograph in isolation and then in combination with other photographs.

When the photograph is seen in isolation the textual story is limited. By isolation I am referring to a photograph that has no readily perceptible context and ideological position present (as is the case with an anonymous photograph<sup>22</sup>). When we come to the content in a fragmented state, a loss of unfolding story elements is apparent. In this state of transitory unknowing, the photograph initially attracts attention by what Roland Barthes refers to as the intersection between the denotational "naturalness" of the image and the "*being there* of the thing."<sup>23</sup> We can suggest the photograph is, at this initial moment, "meaningless" as regards production of a complete story. But with the introduction of a context the photograph acquires a position and the ability to move in a durational meaning. In the case of an anonymous photograph, we can describe the content in detail and speculate on its apparent production, define its

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<sup>22</sup> I am certainly aware that any photograph will have a context in which to exhibit its potential story telling capabilities. Even a photograph found on the street, in the gutter, will have to bear this context and the resulting story of that found photograph bears this context. Therefore a key product of the following investigation will be to determine if there can be a photograph without a context and whether the photograph then always bears a context.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes. "Rhetoric of the Image" In *The Responsibility of Forms* Richard Howard (trans.) New York: Hill and Wang, 1985: 33.

setting, location and characters, and create a potentially satisfying story. Certain genres of photography, again by means of cultural repetition and ideological acceptance, will have a similar effect to them. And this effect or compositional technique will canonise itself through repetitive practices thus defining the effect as a look. The sense of a genre therefore defines the type of expression to be extracted from the content. But without our knowing the "real" context, the photograph is left to be an open, incomplete fragment of a story (that is, it is a look-alike story). We have entered the middle without knowing the beginning or future and although we may be able to compile endless speculations about the image, a sense of incompleteness prevails [around the photograph] until the beginning (the history prior to our entry) is discovered. We cannot actualise the story that we have "constructed" if all we have is only a contents list. A core or thread of meaning and purpose is missing. In other cases this thread acts as a binding mechanism, a syntax, which holds the content details together in a cohesive progression of narrativity. It is obvious that the verticality can survive as a "real" amalgamation of denotational elements, a stack of descriptions, as it were. Obviously a meaning for this stack of descriptions relies on these three elements coming together in an order for the story is to unfold.

An illustration would be beneficial at this moment in our discussion. I am aware that there is no such thing as an anonymous photograph, that is, one that is utterly absent of a context. In any given encounter with a photograph, whether it be in a book, in a shop-window or lost on the pavement, these potential sites will be undeniable contingencies that will affect the overall interpretation of the photograph. Yet for argument's sake, I want to imagine that we have found such a photograph. This will afford us the opportunity to explore just how a given set of contingent circumstances control the development of the story.

In our third context, as we look at the found photograph, Figure 1.5. The first observation to be made is that its physical appearance is inconsistent with our

traditional experience of the photograph. This material difference indicates that the photograph is produced through the Polaroid system of reproduction. Immediately this discovery penetrates the photograph and will condition the overall narrative achieved. We are affected by the appearance of the photograph because the Polaroid system differs from the more widely used negative-positive method. What makes the Polaroid unique is that - even though there are exceptions to this - it offers no negative, so that the image achieved is an "original" production. In other words no multiple reproductions can be made from this image.



Figure 1.5

*Found photograph, 1993*

This means that the Polaroid photograph shares a distinctive comparison to the nineteenth-century daguerreotype. Although this twentieth-century photographic process is more instantaneous compared to the very arduous, and labour-intensive daguerreotype process, the two systems share this quality of uniqueness. Once they have been damaged or lost, another reproduction from

the negative can never be simply produced because the Polaroid system does not allow us access to any negative, [as does the commercially accepted negative-positive system].<sup>24</sup> Leaving aside the technical and physical difference, it is sufficient to say that these differences will have an effect on the overall narrative of the photograph.

Now that we have established that this photograph [that] we have found is a Polaroid, we can turn our attention to the content which will hopefully direct us to a story based on this photograph. Although the exposure quality is less than perfect, we can make out that it is a portrait. Although not in the traditional sense of a studio composition. But we can see that it tries to mimic this studio aesthetic except for being taken outdoors, against a brick wall. The content of the photograph is a child. The gender could be that of a girl or a boy. This ambiguity gives us a momentary hesitation in initiating the story. We expect that this indecisiveness will be resolved. There are no apparent physiological features that would indicate one gender or the other. Let us decide the subject, for the sake of argument, is a girl.

We see that she wears a faded dress, although this is not distinctly definable either, because the composition of the girl in the frame has cropped at the bottom half of what appears to be a dress. The pose of the girl confronts the photographer with a casual but humorous air of defiance. With the content now defined we can turn our attention to how this content, (when joined with the evidence of it being a Polaroid, and the fact that it is way found) affects our reading of the photograph in a narrative context. The short answer to this would be to say that this photograph holds no readily apparent interest to warrant further

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<sup>24</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the absence of a negative is one aesthetic feature, and perhaps a drawback, to the Polaroid system. Although this is not a widely held opinion of the system, Polaroid does in fact offer various types of sheet films that allows a negative to be obtained. Through a process of soaking the chemical backing in a bath of sodium sulfate the developer residue is washed off the acetate backing, leaving a negative that can be used to make black and white reproductions. This system of negative production is possible on Polaroid 545 B&W sheet film, traditionally used in their Land Cameras.

commentary. But this is my main concern, for I want to argue that even an anonymous or found photograph, if time is taken over the content and physical quality, can reveal a story. Therefore to say that a photograph only needs a context for it to have a narrative seems premature. Although this story is constructed, 'constructed' seems to be the key term in the production of a story from photographs. We can parallel this with the construction of a story in a literary genre. The argument can continue with the statement that - 'this found photograph is not a complete story for it does not contain within it a beginning, middle or end.' I am certainly aware that this traditional view (stemming from Aristotle's principles of tragedy) of a story having some type of beginning-to-end format is an historical 'precedent' of literary fiction. This is true if we accept the fact that construction is crucial in the production of any story and that the completion of this story will be based on stacked descriptions found in the photographic environment. So, there should not be any relative distinction between the finding of a photograph and the construction of a story for it, and constructing a story for a photograph within a determined context, such as the art gallery. The differences affect the overall 'authenticity' of the story which is paralleled within the actuality of the content depicted in the photographs. We have come to expect that the story defined from the photograph will be based partly in the context. Also, on our pre-determined understanding of the photograph having actuality, but there appears to be no reason, outside of this, why a photograph cannot have a "constructed" story - this being a fictitious story as the basis of its content.

Listing the content reveals a structure that gives us a verticality ready for a rearrangement or reconstruction into a story: the small child, the girl, the faded dress, the brick wall, the defiant yet happy smile and the black and white tones. All these elements await context in order to reconfigure themselves into a narrative. But as the context for the photograph was found, it helps little in

defining the narrative that will best suit the photograph. At this indecisive moment the photograph is anonymous and with the lack of history comes an instant of contradiction. We can say that the photograph simultaneously reveals and hides the identity of the child. With no element to activate the textual progression of the narrative, the photograph will remain in this indifferent state. And rather than provide the traditional view of absence bringing presence, it gets reversed, in this constructed context of the anonymous photograph, to be presence bringing absence. There is the presence of the child and we know from the indexical nature of the photograph that she really exists or did at that moment. Being a Polaroid photograph, it imitates the identicalness of the child at that moment. It is a one-of-a-kind (object) and moment instantly brought together through the process in instantaneous reproduction.

In accepting this position, this presence reveals absence; a missing piece to the puzzle which will control the narrative must be discovered. We know from our previous observation that the context is what has reversed the narrative formula, therefore it must be another factor which will construct the complete story. This missing piece is text, the language that grounds the visual content to logical authenticity. Also the text accompanying the photograph can be seen as a historical shifter. This shifter is a "referent [which] is determinable only with respect to the situation of its utterance."<sup>25</sup> In other words, until this application of a shifter in the form of text, the photograph has no potential existence as a true depiction. In the case of our found photograph (see page 29) it remains in this presence-being-absence state. Until this shifter, a caption, is integrated into the contingency of the photograph, its story is incomplete. And being incomplete, it will effectively be isolated without any possibility of a narrative. This is not to

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald Prince. *Dictionary of Narratology* Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1987: 87.

say that the photograph is narrativeless, the narrative is just dormant - inactive - until a shifter comes along to activate its content into a durational movement.

It is at this point in the construction of the narrative for this photograph, that the observer / reader's speculative input will activate the dormant narrative to give the content a purpose of existence - a meaning. Although this meaning may be speculative, it will satisfy the desire for a story to be extracted. The final condition which controls the lost photograph's potential to be a narrative is that the observer / reader becomes an active participant in the filling in of details, providing the information necessary to give the photograph, even a found photograph, a real existence in which to travel.

In this state of isolation, the incompleteness of the overall narrative meaning is apparent. The found photograph floats as an open script. Its lines are written, its location determined, yet it still lacks a stage (context-shifter) in which to present its character(s), stage set, props and expression. I am aware that the photograph (I am referring here to the singular image) can be and have descriptive definitions of its own. What I am suggesting is that in our third incomplete story context, the photograph needs a textual meaning so that it can be read as "a discernible organisation".<sup>26</sup> Only when a suitable context, text, is provided does the direction of the story become determined. Until that moment of determination the photograph, to some extent, is meaningless, or should I say, open with no sense of direction or conclusion.

It is the context that charges the photograph to expel its content into a narrative structure. I am not concluding that the photograph in isolation has no definite meaning or is unstructured. What I am pointing out is that it needs a context in order for the meaning of its content to be understood in terms of its potential story in a narrative form. For example, in a photograph of a dog, like

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<sup>26</sup> Victor Burgin. "Photographic Practice and Art Theory" In *Thinking Photography*. Victor Burgin (ed.) London: Macmillan Press, 1982: 21.

that of William Wegman's work with his dog Man Ray, we have a simple depiction - a dog, with a caption being the context of this depiction. It reads "Barking"; the context has now simultaneously transfigured the content into a complete story - photograph as a narrative. More complex examples of this transfiguration would be found in the form of collecting photographs and juxtaposing them with text to produce a specific story.

The textual accompaniment can be seen as a way of fixing the content into a readable complete story - *National Geographic*, *Life* and *Picture Post* are some of the past examples of this use of text and photographic image. This form of image and text was also widely used by photographers during the Depression era of the United States. Specific examples of this type of "text" documentary collaboration<sup>27</sup> between photographs and words can be seen in Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) and Dorothea Langer and Paul S. Taylor's *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion in the Thirties* (1939). A variation on this formula is James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in which text and photograph play a decisive but not redundant parallel role in which neither has an overshadowing influence on the other. In this novel the photographs are collected in the context of the opening pages of the book as Book 1. But the co-existence of Agee's words, contained in Book Two, bears no obvious reference towards Evans' photographs. They (the photographs and text) exist within the same environment of the book but the photographs inhabit their own contingent world, and rather than being passive they have become active, while the text attaches itself to itself, or rather illustrates its own descriptions. The idiosyncratic nature of the text is reflected in how, according to David Minter in *A Cultural History of the American Novel*, "Agee

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<sup>27</sup> I am using the term collaboration where the juxtaposition of text and image works well - and also implies a consciousness of the dual systems of representation. A seminal text on this type of collaboration is Jefferson Hunter's *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Text* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987.

assumes that words become images and images, words; and he assumes that the world to which he belongs depends upon the power of words and images to shape as well as to represent life."<sup>28</sup> Agee's text becomes the textual photographs of the lives he creates through intensive, almost invasive, observation while Walker Evans' photographs become the photographic texts which describes in observational simplicity the characters, settings, happenings and actions in the depressed American South. The two mediums find a mutual context in the space of a book in which the harmonious balance between photograph as text and text as photograph is achieved. Even though the context of the book controls, to some extent, the formal positions of how the photographs are laid out in a succession similar to a prose text, what happens to the photographs is that they become textualized - made verbal. And the descriptions and observations in the textual expression become the content - the list of actions, happenings, characters and settings that waits for the verbal (visual) to complete its story. Therefore what we witness in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is a reversal of the traditional relationship between photographs and text as captions. This can be simply illustrated by the following extract of James Agee's text and Walker Evans' photograph, Figure 1.6.

They are one of the most ordinary types of working shoe: the blucher design, and soft in the prow, lacking the seam across the root of the big toe: covering the ankles: looped straps at the heels: blunt, broad, and rounded at the toe: broad-heeled: made up of the most simple roundnesses and squarings and flats, of dark brown raw thick leathers nailed, and sewn coarsely to one another in courses and patterns of doubled and tripled seams, and such throughout that like many other small objects they have great massiveness and repose and are, as the houses and overalls are, and the feet and legs of the women, who go barefoot so much, fine pieces of architecture.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> David Minter. *A Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: 200.

<sup>29</sup> James Agee and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941: 269.



Figure 1.6

*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men , Boots, (Book 1), 1939*

We could ask, in order to fully study this phenomenon, whether this reversal of tradition affects the resulting story of the photograph? Or does the still photograph rely on the context for its readability? To address these questions we need to isolate the nature of the photograph. To isolate photographs and observe other non-related photographs in the same collection will determine whether or not a story emerges, and will to some extent illustrate how effective this theory is in validating the concept of the photograph as a narrative. Although there will be an object or subject in place, I want to specifically illustrate how the photograph's story is based in realistic terms. The coherence and meaning of this collection will be read as a complete but constructed expression. Just as we have seen in our previous examples of constructed (photograph and text) stories, when photographs are collected together, in the absence of text or any other type of context, what is produced is an illustration rather than a story. For example the monograph of prints by Matt Mahurin entitled, *Photographs*.

The monograph consists of forty-seven black and white prints which span a production period of four years (1984-1988) and depict portions of the North

American, Central American and European urban and rural social landscapes and inhabitants. Even though this world of images is reproduced in a somewhat vague and raw minimalist way, what is revealed is a symbolically personal vision, a vision of the primordial and darkly romantic nature of the human condition. The prints, in this enclosed and collective world, lose all sense of individual context and become visionary fragments expressing one person's reaction to a varied, multifaceted and complex humanity. A vision both sociologically real and psychologically romantic is created, enhanced and even magnified by the prints being sequenced into a fabricated world which is a compiled fiction but also a realistic narrative. An effect of simplicity emerges and a minimising of external interference is achieved through the prints being rough in content composition and only being reproduced on the right hand side of the book. The effect achieved through this presentation is that there is no reverse print on the back subsequently eliminating any super-imposition and interference; it allows the successive impact of each print to remain solid and fixed within the progressive sequence and conscious attention of the reader. The gravure method of reproduction and the un-coated paper stock allows the prints to exist and take on a physical quality of a portal into this world. They become the perfect example of a vision created in a camera obscura - a living screen (a meta-vision) in which the elements (only nouns) of a narrative combine to create a fabricated reality of their own. Derived photographically out of (the) physical reality, a haunting yet striking fictional and frustrating vision of life is revealed.

Striking parallels can be made to other photographic works and literary genres. Most obvious would be those of Edward Steichen and his production of imagery during the Symbolist movement, as well as the literature of Gothic Romanticism. In which Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley would be key and influential figures of this literary expression.

Each print in Mahurin's collective world exists as an individual figment and because there is no other textual contingency (caption) on the page, these figments, momentarily fragmented from their context, project an aura of isolation and ambiguity - a form of meaninglessness. In so far as they are momentarily undefined, they allow the reader (the ability) to encounter them and sequence them into a "seemingly" coherent structure (perhaps just as a simple list of object and subjects). The prints have no visual content connection to one another; they exist as visual fragments of Mahurin's created world. His technical use of deep shadows, with a limited grey scale and shallow focus, allows the prints to further exist as empty spaces and to be juxtaposed in a seemingly casual and unrelated coherence. From this seemingly casual presentation an incoherence emerges within this collective world. This incoherence can be a product of two different ways of seeing the prints: first, purely for information and documentation - an "aspectival" way. Henry Sayre points out that this way of seeing is "a merely mechanical way of seeing things"<sup>30</sup> and illustrates his argument through the quotation of Poussin's observations of there being

two ways of viewing objects: simply seeing them, and looking at them attentively. Simply seeing is merely to let the eye take in naturally the form and likeness of the things seen. But to contemplate an object signifies that one seeks diligently the means by which to know that object well, beyond the simple and natural reception of its form in the eye. Thus it can be said that mere aspect is a natural operation, and that what I call *Prospect* an office of reason which depends on three things: the discriminating eye, the visual ray, and the distance from the eye to the object.<sup>31</sup>

The second way of seeing these prints is to observe them as "found" figments which - by a process of interjection on the reader's part - make connections between the prints. With no contextual meaning afforded to the

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<sup>30</sup> Henry M Sayre. "The Rhetoric of the Image: Photography and the Portrait as Performance" in his *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1980* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989: 43.

<sup>31</sup> quoted in Sayre from Alpers, Svetlana *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983: 48-49.

prints we are left to associate the content back and forth between them. This desire to see them in an ordered and coherent system of expression is the reader's way of heightening what appears on the page. With no context to refer them back to, we must provide the action, otherwise the photograph remains an open signifier waiting for a signified in order to complete the statement of the sign. When we "take in" the limited resolution, details and content of these prints and "contemplate" the object composition in relation to the technical resolution, the photographs are propelled into a realm of questionable reality. The observer is able to create and complete the prints' possible context, because conceptually they imagine and fill in the empty spaces in order to fulfil the desire to see an ordered and collective meaning with grammatical coherence. Mahurin provides the collective order that initiates our psychological desire to complete the compositions. In the seemingly confusing incoherence of his collective world, the desire to find a coherence and order in rational and definable terms is one of the reasons why we fill in the lifeless dark spaces with our interpretations (and states of being).

Inside this new realm we find ourselves transforming into a complete narrative the actually documented world provided by his prints, the environment, and the camera apparatus. We summon up direct references in order to give the prints their possible meanings in relation to our own experiences of the object within an environment. This is reinforced by the elimination of any intended textual pre-determination, introduction and biographical information on Mahurin or the prints. This absence of concrete "truthful" textual evidence binds the book as a collection of raw material in which the observers create, with their own imaginations, new monologues or states of being alongside Mahurin's collection. We become the silent partners, the implied readers, who now read rather than observe the "real" (then history), and the now (active present) to form a travelogue story.

At this point I think it would be prudent to explain what I see as the distinction between observer and reader, by contending that the photograph is a narrative there must be a reader controlling its action and thus completing its syntax [to be a narrative]. The observer looks at the photograph as a description of the environment in authenticated terms, and in Poussin's distinction this is a way of *simply seeing*. In this consideration the photograph can be seen as possibly an aspect context. The reader, on the other hand, scans the photograph for information which activates the content to become an active element in the constructing of a story. Another distinction is that the observer sees the photograph as a mere copy of the real and the reader places the photograph into the real as a active narrative. In "How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World", Kendall Walton makes a distinction between the real and realism (fiction). He suggests that

the barrier between worlds is not air tight, however. There are epistemological holes in it... Along with our epistemological access to fictional occurrences goes the capacity to be affected by them. We respond to what we know about the fictional worlds in many of the ways that we respond to what we know about real worlds.<sup>32</sup>

If we respond to a fictional world (a collection of photographs) in the same way that we respond to the real world, then it would be accurate to assume that when we look at Mahurin's collection we are drawing upon previous responses on how we should approach the photographs. It is apparent that this previous shared and mutually responsive act of grammar is what Victor Burgin was addressing when he underlined the notion that we use the "pre-photographic" meaning of the object in order to respond to the photograph. The hypothesis then, is that the world we are about to see is one which is based on our own pre-photographic observing of images. In the case of Mahurin's collection, which will be addressed as a narrative, his photographs is this realist world - an actual real world removed

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<sup>32</sup> Kendall Walton. "How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 37, No.1 (Fall 1978): 12.

from its context (temporality) and now placed into a present a-temporal state.

We respond to the world as if it were a real world, and the only variation is that in the role of reader the collection of events and existents that unfold and follow has been given a narrative existence. This collective world floats as an open list of material descriptions that is not complete until the reader, who activates the powers of contemplation, brings to bear on these photographs a language in which the seemingly narrative "truths" can emerge.

Although the collective photographs are of real existents and events, their heavy tonal scale, the minimised definition and details, and ambiguous out-of-focus resolution are prime techniques for the generation of a romanticised narrative which requires the reader (the implied reader) to explore rather than simply see its textual articulation. The subtleties of each print, their seeming lack of technical proficiency and meaningless connection to one another, are characteristics that ignite this contemplative act of reading. The work is not "realistic" or "faithful" to the ordinary in terms of Ansel Adams or Edward Weston but in a symbolic depiction reflects the heritage of Edward Steichen or works by Robert Demachy. In other words, the photograph has moved from rendering objective reality to rendering an expression articulated in a highly stylised visual language. The reader enters *initially devoid of any preconceived understanding* and the prints provide enough empty space in which reading (contemplating) rather than observing (simple seeing) is the desired response. Reading the collection in this manner we consciously apply a language to the darkened cavern and at the end of this cavernous space there is a glimmer of light (knowledge). This reflected knowledge attracts and holds our attention. As we continue our journey through the isolated fragments of successive prints, the collection yields little until our journey through the collection has journeyed through the black and white world and finally reveals a consciousness (the implied author) contained in the collective verisimilitude of the prints. To see if this

observation is completely viable, let us take the first five prints in the collection, Figures 1.7 - 1.11, as an example.



Figure 1.7

Matt Mahurin, *London*, 1988

In Figure 1.7, the muscled dog, its head centralised in the print, its body virtually non-existent because of the black space which envelops the entire print, wears the leather harness with an air of complacency. While the overall meaning has not revealed itself, the content (the centralised muscled head of the dog) describes its expression in our minds. We acknowledge its possible existence and contemplate its meaning; our understanding and the content are tied together in a physical and mutual act of prospective seeing, and we confront and come face to face with the terms, of what I see as, "control", "isolation", "restraint" "resignation" and "silence".



Figure 1.8

Matt Mahurin, *New York City, 1987*

In Figure 1.8, we are again cave dwellers (or prisoners) within the black space of the print, albeit the subject has changed. A human face illuminates and fights the surrounding darkness and in a glimpse of recognition we acknowledge the struggling facial features and read it in and with a cultural identity. The fragment of identity is still too ambiguous to make any concrete interpretation about the narrative. And when reconsidered in relation to the previous print, we discover that the terms used in reading that previous print can be simultaneously used in reading this print, and the subsequent ones. Although we see no muscle, the extreme use of black space controls and confines the fragmented face in, and controls it, restrains it and silences it.

Therefore in two prints Mahurin provides us with only the bare essentials of subject; time and place (context) are never allowed to redirect our implication in and reading of the texts - the visual figments.<sup>33</sup> The lack of a caption elevates

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<sup>33</sup> I am aware that I could turn to the back page of the album where the list of print captions is to be found. But at this juncture I want to play out this concept of how we can be directed to read in a very specific way by the way Mahurin has presented his collection of prints. I feel that by finding the conventional dating tags (the caption) would still not help the overall

the feelings and experiences of masochism and anguish (controlled, restrained, silenced and isolated) and we share, through direct visual pre-photographic meaning, the physical and psychological conditions described in the two prints.

In Figure 1.9, we remain in these condition of uncontrollability and we realise that we assume the role of a child. The world we have seen so far is one in which darkness pervades and / or fragments of light which only remains as glimmers.



Figure 1.9

Matt Mahurin, *Nicaragua, 1987*

Now we stand back and look upon ourselves emerging from the empty darkness and we must be convinced that the hand, its gentle articulation of the rat-tail comb, provides a new comfort, a new meaning, a new experience and a hope of security. That moment, when we must release doubt and scepticism in order to move forward out of the darkness and into the light it is not an act of symbolism but an

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narrative formation of the work. All these captions do are to redirect our interactive attention away from the narrative that is being generated and return us to the place of the photograph always simply a documentary device. This is not what I want to illustrate in this section.

act of visual trust. Mahurin presents and describes the sometimes forgotten *prospects* of (life's) struggles within one's self, society and culture.

Taken so far, these prints have constructed a story in which we can infer that the visual description provided by the content and heightened by the absence of a context are being used as a catalyst to produce a specific awareness - a reading of the physical and psychological response to the world. Certainly from these initial three prints there has been no world present, only subjects, but we must remind ourselves that in any descriptive act, the information obtained will be processed through our own knowledge and understanding of the subject described. We will fill in the details in order to give the prints a world in which we can exist. This world is the cavernous recesses of the mind. It was Shelley who used the concept of the cavern, cave or grotto to be a metaphor for the refuge, security and seclusion of the mind which, in turning in upon itself, became a form of introspection. In *Epipsychidion*: "from the cavern of my dreamy youth", Shelley expresses in poetic symbolism what we are seeing in Figure 1.9. What connects Mahurin's work to the Romantic ideal is that in both cases the images (visual and mental) are allowed to well up from the depths of the mind without obvious conscious control. Here again we see the distinction between the *aspect* and *prospect* way of seeing and perceiving an object.

In Figure 1.10, we have emerged from the darkened world to a grey cool, almost empty and lifeless world. Our only indication of life is the ability of a paper pigeon to descend across the face of the other figure who stands with one eye glaring towards us. As a transparent observer, taking the position of the photographer, we gaze upon this scene and formulate why and how the character of this figment has become so isolated and resigned to the fact that saving the descending paper pigeon is inconsequential.



Figure 1.10

Matt Mahurin, *Paris*, 1987

He stands motionless as a sentinel watching us rather than the motion of the paper pigeon. The symbolic act of survival (for life and death) is played out in front of us. As the pigeon falls, its direction is frozen before its eventual collision with the edge of the frame. At this position it acts as a shield between us and the glaring sentinel. The only thing that cuts across this barrier is the gaze of the eye that acknowledges our presence. The depressive ambience, the aura of impending collision, is projected through our impending collision with the eye. This is not an eye of soaring weightlessness, this eye comes from the deepest recesses of the mind to challenge, to confront and to question us on terms of identification. The very heavy tonal range of the face provides enough information for the reader to know that the figure is of African descent, and the overall decision to allow the tonal range to be so very heavy (almost without detail) adds to the very introspective and somewhat confrontational atmosphere

generated in the print. The halo of light which outlines the sentinel figure is the indication that there is an end of the cavern. In order to pass into the light we must pass by and confront the guardian of the light. We have emerged from the cavernous spaces of the mind and now our final obstacle is to acknowledge the eye that keeps us in the dark, away from the light and knowledge of the world to follow.

We might ask how is this narrative achieved? A relatively consistent tonal range, in the prints, gives the overall impression that the individual works can be discussed in a narrative. I am certainly aware that any two random images can be placed in juxtaposition to one another and their meanings, although unrelated, will begin to affect each other because of their close proximity. A narrative or mutual meaning will then arise. What is fascinating is that Mahurin's collection, even though there is a very clear indication that these prints are to be seen as individual moments (personal snapshots), has a coherency which allows them to be linked. This integration into a narrative is promoted by their subject matter and printing tonality. The collection moves from being isolated and fragmented vignettes in a novel to become a novel which unfolds, not as the classic narrative championed by Henry James, but in terms of the new novel (*nouveau roman*) where this device, *bricolage*, is used in creating this new genre.

In Figure 1.11, our last print in this discussion, the paper pigeon of the previous page has been transformed into a "real" description. Again Mahurin's technique of centralising the subject matter draws our attention away from the existing environment to concentrate the reader's attention, and powers of contemplation, on the subject.



Figure 1.11

Matt Mahurin, *Paris, 1988*

The pigeon (perhaps a speculation but I would argue an apt one given its position in relation to the previous print) has a coarse and almost decomposed flight and appearance, perhaps reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's swallow in *The Happy Prince*, who after serving the statue Prince dies from cold and exhaustion. In a fraction of an instant this print illustrates a startling visual description given by Wilde's text. With all its social and political commentary, this print becomes a photographically relevant vignette. In this instant of time, the shutter's eye blinks and compresses a hundred years, transfiguring reality into a statement. By contemplating the print we actively give it a completed narrative by interpreting the statement through pre-photographic meaning which comes to us through our language.

To bind these five prints into a possible narrative would be to fabricate a false finality for the entire collection, given that these prints are only the initial

five in a collection of forty-seven. They would only provide a beginning to which we would need to add the rest of the collection to draw a possible complete narrative to the monograph. However we can safely say that the prints read so far portray a remarkable story in which the struggles and battles of contemporary humanity are being waged. In the prints, their darkly horrific absences become a source of profound beauty which allows them to emerge from the darkness into light. We as readers fill in and create a narrative; our verbal attachment coalesces with Mahurin's visual statements and a collaborative narrative is formed. Illustrated in this world are the stresses of the real, and the dark spaces become emblematic of incompleteness; the hand seen in Figure 1.9 (see page 44) provides a new comfort, a new meaning, a new experience and hope for protection. In this world we must release doubt (that these are not real images) in order to move forward out of the cavernous recesses of our mind and come into the light (knowledge). This is not an act of symbolism as present in the prints but an act of visual interpretation. Even in extreme darkness there is always light which will illuminate the empty cavern and fill the statement with a being. What we have witnessed, albeit partially, is Matt Mahurin giving us his vision in the form of compounded statements produced successively and collected into an imitation of narrative progression (the book world). He asks us to become readers rather than simple observers, to be active rather than passive, to use the power of language to interpret the statements and statements in a completed narrative rather than an open story without any interpretation available to it.

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These observations are examples that justify a narrative existence in the photograph. Outside this common condition the reader interprets the work through a *linguistic response*, based on an understanding of our real world, and *reading* based in the form of contemplating the active participation of applying language. The linguistic response, we have read, is a form of reaction to an aesthetic work. And what simple seeing (observing) does to it is to transcribe the meaning into pure information that has no immediate effect on the reader. To look at a postcard would be a prime example of simply seeing a photograph. In the case of meaning, as Victor Burgin has pointed out, it has a pre-conditioned effect. But, when we take this new meaning, that being the meaning we have come to acquire through contemplation (reading) in the photograph, we find the photograph becoming activated with the potential of being read as a story.

Seymour Chatman points out that narratives are abstract and transparent structures because of their ability to be *transpositionable*.<sup>34</sup> By being transpositionable, the narrative, in its abstract and transparent form, reflects this ability to respond to any given situation and have meaning extracted from it. This may suggest that there must be a pre-meaning in which we would be able to respond to the narrative in any given situation. This reflects again the pre-photographic definition. Therefore narrative must have a pre-narrative condition and causality attached to it. It is this notion of multiple positions (contexts) that reflects the photograph's variable contingent potential which was pointed out by Roland Barthes. The observation was that communication - the message (the narrative) - is derived from the photograph through its conditioned and controlled determinative position and temporal location in society (Victor Burgin's ideological contingency).

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<sup>34</sup> Seymour Chatman. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978: 20. Chatman uses the term *transpositionable* as a reference to the narrative as a structure. He is suggesting that the narrative is a form of multi-positional structure and it is context-bound.

Therefore context is transpositionable or variable and is the key factor for both structures. It would be obvious then, that both structures (the photograph and narrative) can be formed in and function within the discourse of a book, a film, a magazine, a personal diary, a postcard or a portrait.

Fundamentally we now need to ask, how is it possible that the photograph is meaningless until given a context? To answer this question, we first must look at the supporting elements and structure of a narrative. And the obvious place to study narrative is in its traditional literary form as the novel or short story.

In a structuralist analysis, narrative is observed to be a structure of contingent descriptions and observations which control the formation and production of meaning, ultimately achieving an ending or conclusion. In a narrative we are given components that structure themselves into a linear or non-linear development and when linked together make up a structure that culminates in the equation - story plus expression equals meaning. The specific elements included in a narrative are: events and existents which have corresponding implications, actions and happenings, and characters and settings, respectively. These are all manifested through a means of expression - the discourse (the way the narrative is presented: the textual or visual). Seymour Chatman, in his "Towards A Theory of Narrative",<sup>35</sup> provides a very useful illustration of a narrative structure.

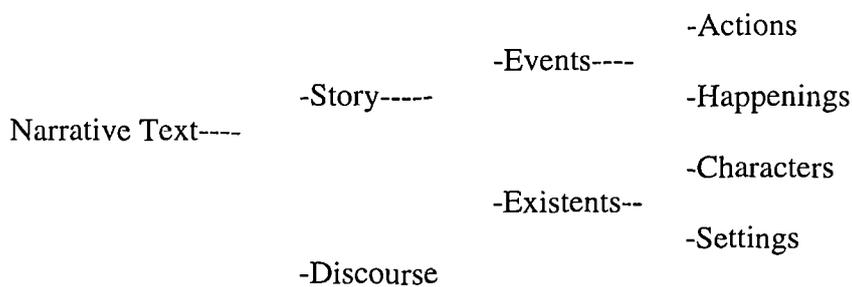


Figure 1.12

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<sup>35</sup> Seymour Chatman. "Towards A Theory of Narrative" In *New Literary History* Vol.VI, No. 2 (Win. 1975) : 295.

As we enter into the narrative text, the story component is our first intimation of there being a possibility of an event and existents to be extracted. Entering further into the text, these events have internalised actions and happenings which take place and project the story into a more complex scenario. Running parallel to the events (the actions and happenings) are the existents which introduce the characters and settings. Through these layers of interaction, we have been given the content and details of this content and its subsequent meaning is ultimately being expressed. If we look at the conceptual structure of the narrative (through its novelistic appearances) it is possible to argue [and illustrate how there can be a definitive observation made] that the photograph in a collection operates in and derives from this identical structure.

Therefore, I am going to use the structure of narrative and its ability to express stories or express information as a framework in which to argue that the photograph is a narrative even in its most isolated or collective context. My reasoning for this study is to observe how the derivative literary response and textual reading (stories) based in a textual structure controls the photograph, thereby succeeding in taking this highly visual realism into the realm of a literary understanding. By doing so, I will illustrate that there must be a point of text inscription present in the photograph in order for there to be a contemplated meaning (a complete narrative statement containing a noun and a verb).

Concepts such as the implied author and implied reader are going to be key characteristics and worth studying. And, if the presence of an implied reader or narratee is validated when overlaid upon the structure of the photograph, then the result is a message or story exchange. The confusion arises in attempting to determine what type of message it is. It's not purely textual and it's not purely visual. Therefore I would suggest that it is a narrative form in which the visual

statement and textual application exist as co-dependents and subsidiary units of expressions, whose message is incomplete without the factor of each other's contingency and the existence of an implied reader. The overall narrative needs the visual, and the visual needs the textual in order for there to be an exchange derived or extracted from the photograph. On its own the photograph is nothing more than an isolated name. It has all the necessary elements to form a narrative but it lacks other different pieces to complete the necessary function of building a grammatically correct message. We can think of the photograph as a Lego piece or word, "a brick" waiting for another unit to be fastened onto it in order to build itself into a structure which would eventually result in a formation having a potential expression. Therefore as an isolated unit, the actual "material vestige" printed on a piece of paper is waiting for an engineer or designer to complete a form. The two-dimensional image has a potential for textual meaning, but it is not realised until it is transfigured into an "aesthetic object."<sup>36</sup> The textual message comes into existence when the reader experiences the real object, that is the actual content of the photograph, aesthetically. The reader "unearth[s] the virtual narrative by penetrating its medial surface".<sup>37</sup> The photograph, therefore, is a noun with an aesthetic potential (textual story) attached although its narrative is incomplete until it is read by the implied reader. In an isolated form and separated from its context (reading this aesthetic potential), it is confined to a marginality awaiting contextual reference. Its importance - the textual input - is only achieved by way of direct contact with a context and reader. We must ask ourselves: does its expression - the narrative - contain the elements (Events: actions and happenings; Existents: characters and settings) to construct this visual and textual co-dependent dialogue?

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<sup>36</sup> Roman Ingarden. "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Object" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. XXI, No. 3 (Mar. 1961): 289-313.

<sup>37</sup> Susanne Langer. *Felling and Form* New York, 1953: 260.

Although photographs have an encoded cultural determination which potentially defines them to be read textually, the three elements that control this narrative potential are the historical biography (real author / narrator as photographer), the content (existents and events) and the context (implied author / narratee). If we study a simple definition of a narrative, we will then be able to account for these three elements that must be present in order for the photograph to become a narrative. Gerald Prince offers in his *Dictionary of Narratology* a general definition of narrative, which is

the recounting (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictitious EVENTS communicated by one, two or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES.<sup>38</sup>

The act of recounting is crucial to our understanding of how we derive a narrative from the photograph. It is this ability, the act, to register on a light sensitive surface compositions (ideas, impressions, messages, expressions - textual or visual) which, then, can be framed (composed) into a structure which has, perhaps, a beginning, middle and end.<sup>39</sup> I am aware that not all types of narrative material will have a linear progression, but if we consider that, through our ability to derive (act as readers), and our necessity to extract meaning from a structure, it could be suggested that in any given material, once we as readers enter into the material at hand, a progression or movement through the material will occur. Conversely, if positioned at the end of the material, a transgression, a working backward, will occur. And in the case of (our) approaching the material *in medias res* - a working from the middle to earlier and later points will occur. Meaning, therefore, must be a consumption and digestion of material, a

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Prince. *Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987: 58.

<sup>39</sup> Gerald F. Else (trans.) *Aristotle's Poetics*. Ann Arbor, Michigan.: The University of Michigan Press, 1967: 30.

traversal of information, and once synthesised and processed into coherent structures, an extracted meaning will occur. Subsequently, this results in our acknowledgement of a meaning in the form of a narrative, and in the case of the photograph, a co-developed narrative will be extracted. Therefore a narrative does not necessarily have to be defined in a progression from beginning (the unknown) to end (the resolution). I am confident that it is the *in medias res* scenario that reflects the reader's entry into the narrative world of the photograph.

One way to explore this contention of the *in medias res* effect of the photograph is to study the difference in two contrasts forms of literature. One is the Classic Novel and the other is the New Novel. What I am going to illustrate is that in these two seemingly divergent genres there is a common connection that can be drawn toward the study of the photograph as a narrative.

In the "classic" novel we see a modelling after history. Events, existents, happenings and actions all occur in a temporal or chronological order within the novel; one sequence of events follows another in an ordered and progressively understandable fashion. Effect and result are observed as being linked to the conceptual understanding of how the events occurred and in what order.

Therefore temporality or time is the contingent and controlling factor in the classic novel narrative. David Carroll suggests:

The nineteenth-century or "classical" novel has traditionally been accepted as the norm, the model for what the form and the essence of the novel are or should be - assuming for a moment that the novel possesses a form and has an essence - just as the prevalent ideal of what history is or should be is largely a nineteenth-century concept. It has often been argued with some justice that in the nineteenth century the novel explicitly models itself after history (Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens, Tolstoy).<sup>40</sup>

But this is only one type of narrative. In the twentieth century, history modelling was not seen as the ideal of narrative fiction. The concept of fiction - hence

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<sup>40</sup> David Carroll. *The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982: 119.

narrative that controls the expression of fiction - was being challenged. Its ordered progression (the classic structure of beginning, middle and end) followed the conceptual model of time and in the nineteenth century, the concept of time was illustrated through the expression of history. Thus, time and history became inter-changeable terms, and reality was seen in these terms, so that the novelist or observer of reality was seen to observe and then record faithfully the unfolding events in time.

In the twentieth-century, the concept of narrative transformed itself to reflect intellectual and post-industrial views of history and time. In the art of fiction writing the two terms, history and time, were no longer seen as counter-dependants. It was through this re-evaluation of narrative performance that an alternative could be created - a discontinuity of time could be generated in order to reflect a more "realistic" fragmentation of reality. We could be dropped into the centre of the story, *in medias res*, in a way which reflected modern society's attitudes towards history. Here the sensation of momentary disorientation provides a more real experience of having to find our way through the maze of open-ended events. Positioning the beginning in a form of discontinuity and asking the senses to reach a conclusion by way of transgressional or non-linear means was a way of subverting the classic style. In the "New Novel", our quest for the meaning begins with a transgressive movement of discontinuity. For as David Carroll has pointed out, in order to follow the narrative, the point of view in the New Novel is one of open-endedness. The new novel, such as Claude Simon's *Triptych*, is one example in which

...in the midst of extreme disorder, a new order is established... From this perspective, dichronology plays a central role. Freed from pure chronology succession which would have linked them together by only one of their sides, events are brought together in all ways possible, brought

into each other's presence in terms of a kind of eternal present, where chronological order gives way to a morphological order.<sup>41</sup>

What we end up observing in a novel such as *Triptych* is that the events are linked through a common referencing back and forth in which one event unfolds in the detail of another. It is this quality of detail shifting that can be used within the photographic context as well. Then through both variations of the novel, the *nouveau roman* and the *classic*, we witness a change from the use of history as narrative to the a-historical disorder of narrative for technique. In both cases and variations we can safely say that they resemble the way we approach and look at an individual photograph in isolation, serialisation or sequencing. The trait they share is "the quest" (progression, transgression or *in medias res*) and direction, either linear or multi-fragmental in a spatio-temporal frame. What all narratives have in common is now a relative contingent term based on the point of view the "implied author" creates, although narrative is a product of the narrative voice (implied author) or can be a product of the comprehension of the reader (narratee). The continuous factor in all narratives is that there is a desire for resolution or finality and as Didier Coste reminds us, "narrative keeps the idea of death in front of us".<sup>42</sup> This is another trait that the photograph has in common with the structure of narrative, the concept of death.

This can be seen on two levels. First, there is the parallel between the capturing and removal of the object or subject from its time continuum - hence conditioning its contact with reality. Second, there is the parallel of the notion of the camera being able to shoot its object or subject ( always assuming that the camera is loaded with film). This ability to render on film an "exact" reference to the object, and the fact that this reference is "lifeless" (in the sense of having no physical or meaningful existence) and yet present is what gives the photograph an

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.: 129.

<sup>42</sup> Didier Coste. *Narrative as Communication*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: 9.

"immediacy" similar to that of fiction. Peter Brunette and David Wills address this very point of immediacy in their *Screen / Play*. "But the immediacy" of photography means that the structure of death becomes as it were visibly apparent on the representation surface itself. This double and contradictory referent - presence and death - occurs in the context..."<sup>43</sup> This lifeless reference is a direct reflection of the "finality" observed in both the photograph and a work of fiction, which presents itself as an observation culminating in the fascination of contradiction in the photograph and the fiction. This can be illustrated in Ernest Hemingway's short story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", which presents a narrative which illustrates what I see as a photographic description. I would go further and say that Hemingway literally seeks a camera vantage point. The events and existents resemble clear and direct observations. The minimal amount of dialogue used in describing the setting, characters, actions and happenings reflects a vision as if seen through a camera lens. Our vantage point travels through the lens of clarity and we become the companions of the narrator. We see through a camera eye (the implied author's eye) and read the story unfolding in short fragments or vignettes of composition - photographic statements are successive, yet all the details are not given. And through a process of verisimilitude, these short vignettes become photographic statements. In the constructed environment of the text our vantage point is implicated in the anonymous observations of the implied reader, who listens with referent detail - a camera pointed at and absorbing all that happens and we, as anonymous as the camera, read through the scene to become I's (eyes) of the developing story.

Our eyes (I's) are now the counterparts of the narrator and we read through observation: two waiters and an old man drinking alone in the cafe. The setting, two o'clock in the morning, and the waiters want to close the cafe. We, as

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills. *Screen / Play: Derrida and Film Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989: 115.

anonymous bystanders, the street photographer, hear and watch the discussion and the events that are unfolding. The two waiters discuss the life of the old man, who now, to the disgust of the two waiters, motions for another drink, setting up a pointed response from one of the waiters: "You'll be drunk ... ." It is this action (the old man's desire for "another" and his possible drunkenness) that prompts the older waiter to discuss the old man's resistance to leave, and this affects the waiter's desire to close up and extinguish the light. Light becomes the central and symbolic focus of the sanctuary of the old man, and of our camera. For without light there would be no reflections from the objects and the vision we have would cease to exist, to the detriment of the waiters and the necessity for our eyes (I's) to see the events unfolding. The irony is that the old man is deaf and we as silent readers, spectators, are compelled to parallel the old man's resistance to leave. Hence the commentary of the waiters is not only directed towards the old man but towards our presence as well, the only difference being that we hear and read it and the old man does not. The dimming of the light softens the sharpness and clarity of the old man's vision and his possible drunkenness diminishes his ability to focus on the events which surround him. But we have the advantage of objective voyeurism and can invisibly witness the narrative unfolding. Hemingway describes the setting with objective detail; the narrative moves through a series of short but photographically (as long as the light remains) clear fragments of the cafe, the presence of the old man and the two waiters. He positions us in relation to them. Our own contingency is always in front of the events, the ideal vantage point or point of view for a photographer or bystander to take in life. And photographers, like writers, are always looking for the best vantage point from which to read and consume life. We can imagine and read this ideal vantage point in this excerpt:

It was late and every one had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the day

time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. The two waiters inside the cafe knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"What about?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was nothing?"

"He has plenty of money."

They sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the cafe and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind. A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The street light shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.<sup>44</sup>

It was late and everyone had gone home except the narrator and the implied reader. We stand in front of the setting observing the old man and the actions of the two waiters. We are close enough to the characters that the dialogue is clear. There is no distance at which the dialogue of the old man sitting alone is unclear. Just as the created picture is clear and briefly descriptive, the dialogue contains the same type of minimal clarity. Only necessary information is relevant to complete the picture, in order to position the viewing of this story with unimpeded vision. The old man sits by the shadows of leaves made by an electric light. The simplicity in the grammar "the old man sits" can be seen as the most direct form of photographic portraiture. With no sense of artifice, the straightforward composition aligns itself to be seen as photographically contingent. The parallels become more striking as the narrative continues.

In a brief conclusion, the issue of fictional narrativity is possible in the photograph through the consideration of the instance in which the reader penetrates the visual image. It is therefore not surprising that the comparisons I

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<sup>44</sup> Ernest Hemingway. 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place' In *The Hemingway Reader* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1953: 419-422.

have made throughout this chapter illustrate the initial *in medias res* form of narrativity to be found in the photograph. So, when considering that there is a narrative in the photograph is acknowledging the readability of the photograph through this orientation of an *in medias res* structure. Alongside of this discontinuity is the paradoxical position of the realism of the photograph which provides the truthful authenticity a basis in which to activate, what Roland Barthes has defined as the "reality effect".<sup>45</sup> If this reality effect is present in the literature, then as I have argued, the photograph being a literary narrative would be effected by the same reality effect when reading the photograph as a fictional account of reality.

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes. "Reality Effect"(rpt.) in *Realism* Lilian R. Furst (ed.) New York: Longman, 1992.

## 2

### *How we come to Read the Photograph as a Narrative*

When we look at a photograph what do we see? In a materialistic frame of mind we are looking at positive reproduction from a light-reflective pattern of a "thing"<sup>1</sup> recorded onto a two-dimensional film surface - the negative. Through a simple process the negative impression is transferred onto a light sensitive paper medium which forms a positive image of the original negative impression. In different moments, ones of contemplation and curiosity, we disavow the intrusion of these materialistic or mechanistic facts and details, and search for the meaningfulness of the photograph. What is this meaningfulness? At first glance the photograph is purely a factual document, but within this first glance there are two ways of looking at the photograph. The first example is the descriptive: *A woman standing on the sidewalk with her cardigan unbuttoned - her hair blown*, Figure 2.1a.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'thing' is used here to simply to denote the great variety of objects, subjects, environments and events that are capable of being depicted and documented by the photographic medium in the photograph. 'Thing' becomes the ideal term which encompasses the photographic mechanics of using reflected light to record the things that pass in front of the camera's lens.



Figure 2.1a

Anonymous, *Untitled*, n.d.

The second example is illustrated with the captioned text, *Aunt Mary, 1962*. During the contemplation of the first descriptive event this material description takes on the character of a more straightforward narrative. This is the key to the referential narrative of the photograph; the position at which the photograph becomes a representative with meaning lying-in-wait to be extracted. Another way to approach this aspect is by considering it to be the culmination of an interaction between the content contained in the photograph and our description of it to ourselves.

Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, offers the macro-dimensions of "time and causality"<sup>2</sup> as the two crucial concepts in the understanding of how a

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<sup>2</sup> see Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*. 3 Vols., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983-84: (3) 107.

narrative or story (history) is structured. These aspects of narrativity direct the meaning in both of the descriptive and illustrative acts of contemplative discovery. The brief description of the woman standing on the sidewalk can be further modulated into the more in-depth narrative: and once causality [content and caption] is considered, the photograph takes on a more referential narrative meaning. What happens is that the photograph, seen in terms of time and causality paradigm, gives us the sense that we are directly acquainted with the physical thing and event. This type of viewing activity seeks its own explanations. In order to accomplish this, we as observers fill in the lost details of the content, therefore we bring an in-depth sense of a larger meaning to the photograph rather than superficially obtaining referential information from the photograph itself.



Figure 2.1b

*Aunt Mary, 1962*

In other words we bring the illustrative aspect narrative rather than just a mere explanation of the photograph. With this in place the woman caught looking over her shoulder on the sidewalk is more than just a casual woman bystander, she is Aunt Mary in 1962.

A further consideration is that, during these contradictory moments we are primarily dealing with the photograph as a running dialogue waiting to be told. Consequently, the dimensions of time and causality are central to the photographs a-temporal narrative. And as we pass through these dimensions, conceptually, the engagement of a narrativity in photographic terms is achieved. The temporality in the photograph is effectively achieved by the observer's understanding that the content is a record of history, no matter how recent. The photograph is always history. Time continues as the photograph remains a-temporal. This applies either to the superficial or in-depth reading of the photograph. In either of these instances we perceive more than just the framed content or mechanical copy, for as soon as we enter the frame a dialogue with the composition begins. It is as though time and causality has been restarted and we will find a direct or indirect sense of the emerging narrative. In suggesting that there is a type of dialogue or interaction with the photograph, I am furthering Ricoeur's concepts to something in the order of an 'in-depth time and causality' being activated by external phenomenon [captions].

But also there is another consequence to this debate. What happens when the actual history of the photograph is found out not to be the history we have come to know it by? Does this new content, or history, define the pre-existing context and will this new context alter our narrative reading of it. This is simply achieved by now stating that Figure 2.1a and 2.1b are not really a simple photograph of a woman bystander, or Aunt Mary, 1962 respectively, but a photograph (originally in colour) taken by William Eggleston in 1971. Hence Figure 2.1c *Memphis* is actually a photograph taken by William Eggleston. And

given the documentary status of Eggleston's work, this photograph now contains a further narrative which must be addressed. What this minor comparison illustrates is that the narrative reading is based on the ability to place the content in a "proper" context. And if the context is found to be fabricated then the illusion of realist contingency is in the forefront. Thus this shift in reading potential addresses the very issue of reading contingency of the viewer and the impact they have on the narrative extraction of the photograph.



Figure 2.1c

William Eggleston, *Memphis, 1971*

Changing emphasis for the moment, I want to look at the conceptual progression of a narrative. Tuen van Dijk, in "Narrative macro-structures: Logical and Cognitive Foundations", suggests that the procession through which a narrative is formed is one in which the macro-structures [private sense] develops

the narrative through the following sequence: "initial state" —> "transition" —> "final state".<sup>3</sup> Although his theory, once set on paper, sets up a linear progression similar to Aristotle's, I do not see it as deterministic in the sense that a foregrounded beginning, middle or end is necessary. The stages of progression, although they are initial, transitional and final does not necessarily have to suggest a linear progression. And when Ricoeur's macro-structural dimensions of time and causality are integrated, the diachronic nature of Dijk's theory is reduced. For example, when approaching the photograph through the illustrative narrative, we can acknowledge that there is an *initial* encounter - *Aunt Mary, 1962*. At this stage we move back in time, reversing our current diachronic progression by conceptually entering the synchronic moment instilled in the photograph. Then through this *transition* we move backward within the held historical temporality of the photograph to the content temporality - 1962. Therefore the content of the framed photograph on the mantel has been shifted, not physically but conceptually, from one position in time [1996] to another [1962]; what this offers us, then, is a descriptive narrative - an initial story for the photographic moment. Thereby, the observation can be stated that a further illustrative narrative lies below the descriptive surface of the photograph. In order to complete this narrative, the content must be returned to its content time [1962] in order for it to have a history and nostalgic importance.

This illustrative narrative is important for it provides the photograph of Aunt Mary with a series of causal functions: event, existent, action, happening, character and setting. In this transitional moment the descriptive to illustrative the referential movement from 1962 to the actual moment 1996 and back to the nostalgic are the filled in details of the narrative. Thus the illustrative narrative of this photograph is not a linear movement forward, but a process of initially

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<sup>3</sup> Tuen A. Van Dijk. "Narrative macro-structures: Logical and Cognitive Foundations" In *PTL: Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 1976: 547-68.

reaching back, then pulling transitionally forward, and then finally turning back: and this process is continually repeated. This would suggest that the macro-structure of the photograph is not only capturing a single instant of a subject, but is capturing a subject in a frame in which a conceptual dialogue can be achieved. What I am referring to is that the narrative extracted from the photograph appears to be a linear narrative, but in actual fact the narrative is in a transition of perpetual motion - duration.<sup>4</sup> This applies to either the descriptive or illustrative narrative.

Beside this "perpetual" motion the photograph can be read as factual or fabricated. It can be thought of as being similar if not identical to the creation of a narrative in the selected examples: short story, a novel, or a poem. Just as there are numerous ways to write an idea, experience or visual impression, there are numerous ways to compose a photograph. This compositional rendering will always be present. In some ways this rendering, based primarily on the content of the photograph, is articulated into categories which at first glance would not seem to express a textual comparison. This is because what we come to expect is not a traditional development of narrative units but a visual reproduction based on and copied from reality. Consequently the initial reaction is to read it as a copy of the 'thing' created on a paper medium as referent of a previous time. The private interaction with this thing is rather like the textual notation or personal description of the thing. The photograph is therefore, in a commonly held belief, a recording of things, not a story notation of the thing taken from the environment. This is where the transition comes into play. We must take the common visual recording and transform it into a textual notation. The information derived from the thing being transformed into a notational expression is, I would argue, the

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<sup>4</sup> This concept of 'duration', initially theorised by Henri Bergson will be discussed in chapter three where its full implications can be integrated to how the photograph can be considered to be a form of 'backward causation' or time travel.

transition from mere material description to an in-depth text. This can only be achieved by the viewer's desire and ability to translate and fill in the visual as a textual narrative inscription. , The copied thing - and this copy is always controlled to a certain extent by the encountered context of the copy - exists in a current synchronic moment and ultimately has time and causality attached to it.

The conclusion to these observations are that the appearance of a completeness exists in the photograph and this self-contained meaning is achieved through the subsequent translation of historical time and causality into a perpetually continuing dialogue with its content as text. This is where the narrative expectation lies and comes into play. With its ability to offer a more or less faithful visual description, this copied thing can be understood as equivalent to real thing. In order to finalise the narrative, the real thing must be articulated through our ability to move within a transition phase -language. This is only possible because for every thing that is photographed a synchronic moment happens in which time is arrested and causality is initiated. And with our ability to translate, that is, to take the photograph (the copied thing) and refer back to its original counterpart. This reference back is the language needed to read the photographic content. What is taking place is a deconstruction of the content and placing it in a current framework of language which will offer the photograph a seemingly truthful or faithful description of the real thing. The photograph, then, must go through this process of translation, out of its in-depth macro-dimensions (IMD) and into the current textual reference by the observer who will translate the composition into a textual language. Once a textual description is given a meaning can be composed from the new notation. When this meaning has been achieved a narrative or story is afforded to the photograph.

To the majority who use photography and collect the products of this medium, the photograph is seen as mirror-like rendering that bears actual descriptions of the thing rather than textual inscriptions of the thing. It is these

descriptions which tend to generate the potential for IMD's to developed "naturally" into a textual narrative. This interaction with photographs provides a vertical spectrum in which a narrative can be understood as existing.

Rather than continuing to refer to the content of the photograph as the thing, I want to suggest a more appropriate and relevant term for the content with its narrative potential. This more adequate term is 'composition'. The composition is an inner-connected reference through which the frame of a photograph and its internal dialogue can be extracted. The only difference is that the photograph as an a-temporal composition has to be given time and causality (IMD) in order for the composition to progress into a narrativity which will then develop into our current definition of a story.

By positing that a narrator is involved in the narrative development of the photograph, it provides an opportunity to illustrate how the photograph can be thought of as the medium in which an act of description can be rendered. To accept that there is a narrator is to assume that there must be, at some point in the reading of the work, a narratee. The space between the narrator and narratee is where the interactive development of causality [cause and effect] takes the form of a description. Between these opposing ends of a compositional structure lies the space in which the information is obtained, transferred and passed on. The narrator, in the broadest sense, can be any one who recounts a composition. The narrator is always present, at least by implication, and can range in various degrees within the text either in a major position (as a protagonist) or a minor one (as witness or bystander). The best way to observe this explicit or implicit narrator is to analyse specific photographic works that encompass these types of implied narrators.

Lee Friedlander's *straight* photographs of the 1960's and early 1970's are perfect examples of the explicit and implicit narrators presence in a composition.<sup>5</sup> In several works Friedlander's motive was to address the issue of the photographer's presence in the visual documentation of the environment. Friedlander directly implicates his presence as the photographer of the "transparent" photograph. By composing his figment presence in the photographic frame, the photograph can no longer simply be seen as a window through which we observe outwards onto the environment. With the window open, a subject who stands in front of it establishes himself or herself as an implicit "other". And this "other" is the photographer we traditionally disregard in order to look out of the window. Therefore, the ease with which the other's vision can be appropriated by the viewer is controlled by the frame of the composition. In Friedlander's photographs his presence and his undeniable appearance through a returning gaze; we can no longer look outwards onto a composition without considering is what we are seeing is what Friedlander wants us to see. Friedlander's presence is an explicit existent in which the composition centres on his vision rather than ours. In other photographs, his presence becomes an inferred presence rather than an obvious consideration in the composition.

Through the use of mirrors, reflections, silhouettes and shadows, Friedlander, as the protagonist "I" of these compositions, notes his description of the environment before us as narrator. [Presence in this sense is his point of view rather than a mere vantage point in the environment in which to take a

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'explicit' will be used to address and define the specific appearance and inclusion of the visual presence in the photograph of the photographer. In the obvious sense, when reading the work, there is no doubt that any fragmented appearance of the photographer or author is to be read as a conscious inclusion in the composition. On the other hand, if we are considering the implicit stance of the photographer or author an ambiguity to why the inclusion is part of the composition. The ambiguity bears or reveals not a direct specific or obvious sign of his presence. Any act of conscious determination by a photographer to document his or her presence in the photograph is a explicit act of self-documentation. What I want to illustrate is that photographs have a close correlation to the way in which a voice, the photographer's or author's, can be explicitly or implicitly embedded into the compositions in order to direct a particular reading of the compositions narrative

photograph] There are two photographs which will illustrate my observations on the role of narratorship in photographs. They are *Hillcrest, New York*, 1970, Figure 2.2 and *Texas*, 1965, Figure 2.3. The differences between these two works are that *Hillcrest, New York*, is an explicit composition, a specific description with his presence as the narrative voice rather than a simple listing of details, whereas *Texas* is an inferred narrative description.

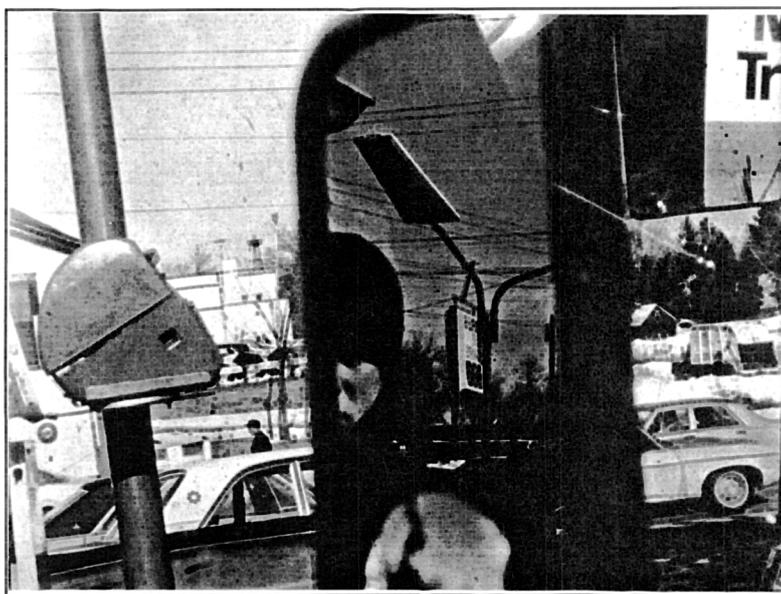


Figure 2. 2

Lee Friedlander, *Hillcrest, New York*, 1970

In Figure 2.2 we see the narrator, this being Friedlander, inscribing his presence into the frame of the environment, and according to Victor Burgin giving us "the effect of representation...."<sup>6</sup> Although I would agree with Burgin's observation being an "effect of representation" which is the same as an effect of description, I would further point out that Friedlander is composing the photograph through the use of collapsing space, of fragments juxtaposed and of diminished horizontal and perspective directions. In fact what these techniques are doing is positioning the viewer within the composition as 'subject other'. The frame becomes the limits of the composition where Friedlander can no longer

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Burgin. "Looking At Photographs" In his *Thinking Photography*. Victor Burgin (ed.), London: MacMillan Press, 1982: 150.

simply describe but has to 'describe' his position, as an ideological position, in relation to the photograph. Through the use of a Cubist aesthetic, Friedlander is creating a composition of a fragmented sense of his presence and collapsed self-presence within a photographic record of "Hillcrest, New York". Thereby, Burgin's observation that this photograph creates the effect of representation is somewhat superficial for what is effectively being proposed is a specific description concerning the discontinuity of representation created by the photograph. It is this breaking-apart of order in order to state it in a new articulation. To make a descriptive statement is in itself an act in which the presence of a voice is a basic element of expression. It seems obvious from Friedlander's fragmented "self" image within the frame that it works much more effectively when considered as being a narrative in which in-depth macro-dimensions (IMD's) are occurring. Through the rendering of his presence, the "I" of the protagonist is continually reinstated as narrator. We are reminded that this is a conscious description in which the "I am" is recounting the narrative. And since the "I am" is continually present in this photograph, a sense of authority comes with the composition - an authoritarian voice or point of view. Hence as a simple description of *Hillcrest, New York*, this photograph does not fulfil that criterion; but as a more complex narrative with a specific voice - it does.

*Hillcrest, New York* (Friedlander's version of it), is continually seen in which Friedlander is telling us "I am here", "I am here, folks," and "I am here, folks, in Hillcrest, New York". He reiterates his presence through a collapsed sense of describing an environment in spatially fragmented units. And through this use of a fragmented perspective, mirrored doubling and reflective distortions the centralised "other's" presence becomes a narrative which coherently describe Friedlander as the narrator and the viewer as the narratee. Friedlander literally occupies the centre of the text, thereby becoming the central character in his own text. The sense of self-protagonist, the "I" and "eye" narrator, exist

simultaneously in the same photograph. We are no longer spectators of a casual description of *Hillcrest, New York*, we are active observers of an articulated and personalised narrative description of *Hillcrest, New York*.



Figure 2.3

Lee Friedlander, *Texas*, 1969

In Figure 2.3 we see a similar narrative technique in use, although it is not rendered so explicitly. The inclusion of the shadow, the inference of the presence of what appears to be the photographer, is caught in the lower left of the frame. This shadow reflects a more subtle descriptive technique of implicating the photographer as narrator [in the composition]. The shadow refers back to my earlier discussion of these works being narratives created from the use of in-depth macro-dimensions. In *Hillcrest, New York*, I pointed out that the direct inclusion of the photographers presence was a literary technique of writing himself into the composition as narrator.

*Texas*, also illustrates the act of implication in its ambiguous state, for the shadow has no real identifiable identity *per se*, although semiotically (and commonsensically) we acknowledge it to be a signifier of the photographer, Lee Friedlander. What is important about the shadow is that it can be also be a

surrogate signifier of our own presence standing in front of the environment being photographed simultaneously. In the real world shadows have no identity unless they are attached to something. So the shadow in the lower section of the foreground has no identity until we give it one. We can either assume it to be our own shadow, being cast down along the ground halved at mid-torso, or it can be simply acknowledged as the that of narrator of the composition - the photographer or bystander - or it can be an animate object. Therefore, as readers of the notational composition, we become implicated in the narrative through the presence of a shadow that has an absence of identity. This empty space, in the shape of a human subject, is where we become implicated in the composition and become the narrator and narratee simultaneously for a fraction of a second. This ambivalence complicates the reading of photograph. Although intellectually acknowledging the shadow to be that of the narrator, the photographer, we are nevertheless ambivalent about whether or not this subject is telling us something or whether or not it is simply pointing out a way to look at the Texaco logo as the Texas star. This is where the caption as a translation of symbolism, logo to state symbol, comes into play as creating the setting of the narrative.

We knowingly become bystanders standing slightly behind the photographer and in a dual consideration and the presence of the unknown shadow reinforces this knowledge of being a bystander standing next to the photographer.. This affords us the opportunity to watch ourselves becoming the narrators of the photograph. The understanding of the invisibility of the narrator affords us the opportunity to re trace whether or not we are witnesses or the photographers of the photograph. This retracing is the key to both compositions having time and causality.

In *Hillcrest, New York* it is an explicit statement and in *Texas* it is an ambiguous statement. As viewers we are implicated in the both statements. The retracing of the other in *Hillcrest, New York* is achieved through the narrator's

face reflected back out of the photograph towards the reader. The trace of the narrator in *Texas* is represented by the shadow. The conscious replacement of the shadow at the bottom left of the photograph, so that it mimics our own shadow, affords the photograph the opportunity of becoming a homodiegetic narrative in which the narrator is only present by conscious inference on the reader's part. So, rather than taking a secondary heterodiegetic position, the reader is asked to take a primary role as the implied reader in order to feel part of the photographic experience. Consequently, as implied readers, our position is that of the photographer and not the bystander. We are aware of our own involvement rather than a passive recounting of the thing before us. To a certain extent, the cultural norms of the photographer / narrator become a shared vision between the viewer and photographer. Thereby, the implied reader is placed in a contradictory position: he or she is simultaneously a reader (active) and a listener (passive). Another way of articulating this position is to say that the photograph, being a composition, allows the spectator to become the reader and provides him or her the opportunity to participate in several levels of interaction - visual and textual.

On one level the reader partakes in every nuance of the composition. On another level the onlooker is a casual observer, acknowledging the composition but not actively engaging it. These two ways of interacting with a photograph always place the narratee in a state of considering time and causality - the narrator as narratee, the reader as listener, the protagonist as bystander and the photographed as photographer. The inclusion of the shadow to implicate the reader as listener in this composition illustrates Friedlander's conscious desire to implicate and exploit a homodiegetic narrator: a narrator who is a character in their own situation being recounted. Then, in this case, the shadow does have an identity, that of the narrator who happens to be the photographer; hence my exact point that this photograph is an implicit attempt of embedding a narrative voice.

These techniques are a way of engaging the reader as listeners in the narrative that is being described.

Therefore we must reconsider these two works as narratives; they are compositional descriptions that have narrative macro-structures in which an "initial state" is provided, then through a process of "transition" a progression towards the "final state" is achieved. And the way this is achieved is through the implicit and explicit inclusion of the narrator in the narrative compositions.

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The other side of this argument can be found in two still life's from Edward Weston. In works such as *Pepper*, 1930 - Figure 2.4 and *Cabbage Leaf*, 1930 - Figure 2.5, a highly descriptive, yet simple, composition exists. Although the manifestation of Weston's voice is indebted to his pure technical skill and rendering of these subjects. The obvious narrative visual presence, the "I am taking this photograph", is missing. It is only through his signature, the act of inscription do we accept these compositions to be Weston's descriptions. Jonathan Culler points out in *On Deconstruction*, that the "[signature can] lie outside the work, to frame it, present it, authorise it, but it seems that truly to frame, to mark or to sign a work the signature must lie within, at its very heart".<sup>7</sup> The signature becomes more than a contextual signifier of the narrator, it becomes the continual present voice. And in Weston's case, the "eye" of the author is the voice of the photographer. Until we acknowledge the inscription of the authorial presence, the voice of the photographer, the composition of the work is left with an inauthenticity. What is being described in these works are not the scientific or bio-organic qualities and forms of vegetables: these are not catalogued studies

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Culler. *On Deconstruction* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982: 192.

of microscopic analyses on details of growth patterns. Weston is describing surfaces, but he is not merely listing factual details, he is creating an articulated narrative in which the mundane and "ordinary" surfaces themselves are being described. This is achieved through his ability to control the photographic process to such an extent that the everyday vegetable becomes a highly poetic composition. The reason for this translation of the everyday and common to the articulated is certainly contained in the modernist aesthetic in America. This trend for the unmanipulated and straight photograph provided artists such as Weston with an aesthetic which could define a powerful vision of photography as a fine art. But when a pepper is photographed by Weston it becomes a narrative composition. Also, the pepper becomes a modernist expression which can be expressed along the lines of Gertrude Stein's poetic technique of reiteration. This literary technique for text was a key structuring principle in Stein's work. In her lecture entitled "Poetry and Grammar", the concepts of *reiteration* and *repetitive intonation* were seen as central to a new consideration of literary expression.

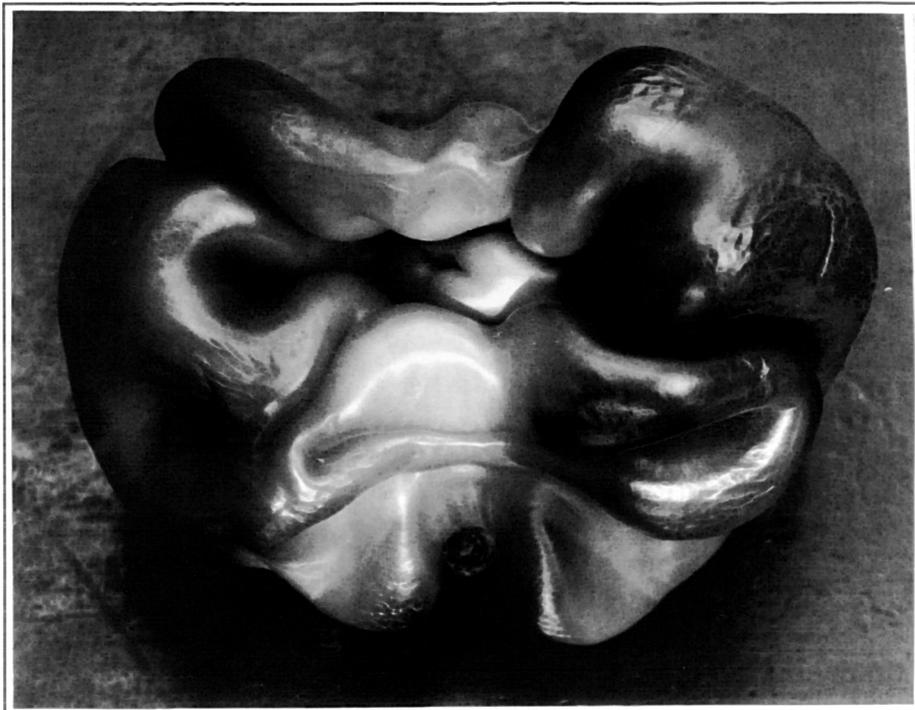


Figure 2.4

Edward Weston, *Pepper*, 1930

What is fascinating is that when we parallel the still-life work of Edward Weston, we can safely see these photographs as reiterated description of a proper name. Thus Weston's visual depiction can be reiterated as *A pepper is a pepper is a pepper is a pepper.*

Appropriately, a fragment from Stein's lecture will illustrate my suggestion that Stein's concerns with the discontinuity of human perceptions and the ability of the imagination to be stimulated through observation and re-representation does reflect what we are experiencing when we look at a still life of Edward Weston.

Poetry is I say essentially a vocabulary just as prose is essentially not.

And what is the vocabulary of which poetry absolutely is. It is a vocabulary entirely based on the noun as prose is essentially and determinately and vigorously not based on the noun.

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing but losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is. And there are a great many kinds of poetry.

When I say.

A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

And then later made that into a ring I made poetry and what did I do I caressed completely caressed and addressed a noun.<sup>8</sup>

The main comparison that can be derived from this passage is that Stein makes a specific suggestion poetry is a "a vocabulary entirely based on the noun..." In this theory, it consists of the re-representing nouns and observing how they function when repetitively reformed. This is what photography, the photograph, is; its primary function is the re-representing of nouns, names,

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<sup>8</sup> Gertrude Stein. *Look At Me Now And Here I Am: Writing and Lectures 1909-45.* Patrica Meyerowitz (ed.) London: Penguin Books, 1984: 139.

objects and spaces through observing them onto the two-dimensional film plane. In this case, "It is a [visual] vocabulary entirely based on the noun..." When we consider Weston's pepper and cabbage leaf, the visual vocabulary of the photograph is obviously "entirely based on the noun ... ." Not only does reiteration function as an aesthetic technique, but photography is materialistically based on this function of repetitive reproduction - albeit visual. To say that Edward Weston's *Pepper* is the poeticised equivalent form of a real pepper is now a completely acceptable statement. Therefore what is being represented is not an actual pepper but a composition propelling the pepper into a highly charged modernist expression. Even though this displacement changes our reading of the pepper and what it can potentially express, the reiterated "non-reality" of the pepper is just that, a repetition of a *Pepper* in a visual verse. The intensity of vision, the almost macroscopic cropping, allows the reader to get close enough to almost touch the skin of the pepper, but the contradiction of being close enough to touch denies the reader the sense of tactile feeling.

In Figure 2.5 the poetic expression of the cabbage leaf comes through the vocabulary that Weston chooses to compose with. The curves and lines (veins) of the leaf are described in compositional terms so that the organic form is seen as the essence of aesthetic light. The visual delicacy is seen more than a photographic quality its rather than a functional description. The consumption of the leaf is a purely visual experience. Its purity exists as a cabbage fragment, reiterated as a composition of curving surfaces and shadowed forms. The leaf becomes a narrative feast for the eyes and the mind. This is Weston's description of the leaf as hand in poetic and photographic irony. *One can look but cannot touch.* Although we can see its form and imagine its possible smooth texture we can only define this resting form through language and language is where we enjoy the cabbage. What we consume then is not so much an actual leaf of cabbage - although I intellectually know there must have been an actual leaf- but

Weston's vision of it. This is where Weston implicitly signs his vision on the composition - written in photography but expressed in language.



Figure 2.5

Edward Weston. *Cabbage Leaf*, 1930

By considering that a narrator does exist in the photograph, then the narrator must also have the potential range of importance. The narrator is always either explicitly there, as in Lee Friedlander's self-portraits, or implicitly stated as in Edward Weston's still life's. It is only the degree to which a signature is visually there and given that we can acknowledge this level of presence. The narrator becomes a crucial element in the consideration of the photograph as narrative.

To return to the notion of the photograph as a window, we can say it can open out onto a reality whilst the narrator photographer stands in front of the window sill in order to render a description or observation of the "a-reality"<sup>9</sup> into narrative terms. Once this conscious act of exposure is accomplished, a

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<sup>9</sup> My coinage of "a-reality" is used to define a composed and fragmented reproduction of reality created by the recomposing imposed by the framing system of the camera. This subjectivity is derived from the conscious act of composing - a picture-taking by the photographer. Although "a-reality" can have a faithful and accurate determination it is still a composition of reality with varying degrees of narrative authenticity and truth.

transformation occurs, in that the thing is transferred into an inherently explicit vision of the photographer's which immediately becomes transparent<sup>10</sup> and refers (itself) back to the original thing. The resulting composition is opened up to possible explicit involvement, unless otherwise implicit; both techniques are used by Lee Friedlander. At this moment the photographer becomes the continual narrator, always reinstating his or her observations, presences, and voice in the composition. Therefore, when we read the composition, the visual inscriptions of the narrator's voice announce to us their representation. The narrator still exists but has moved laterally away from the camera window and allowed us to take his or her position and look through the frame of reference and at the narrator's positions. To cite a cliché, *we become the eyes of the photographer* and in a contradictory moment we have found ourselves in the parallel identities of narrator and narratee. This is only accomplished when the narrator is not explicitly articulating a cultural determination, in which we are asked to stand back and not assume the narrator's narrative position. This is what Weston's still life accomplishes; although they may allow us to describe the propositions, they still embody his visual signature, which reinstates his presence as artist / author. There is no way to disavow his signature or narrative voice. There is no moment of ambivalence. Every detail is articulated in order to express the narrator's vision. In a strange movement the photograph has shifted from a simple record to an personalised composition - his undeniable point of view. Therefore to read a composition of Edward Weston's is to listen to his descriptions of the world, his eyes and voice are one narrative expression - not so much a picture of a 'real' cabbage leaf or pepper.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the transparency or realism of the photograph see Kendall Walton's 'Transparent Pictures: On The Nature of Photographic Realism' in *Nous* XVIII, (Mar.1984): 67-72. For an alternative view, see Donald Brook "On The Alleged Transparency of Photographs" in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (Sum.1986):277-282.

This process of reinstatement continually makes the photograph into a narrative of visual observations. Although, it is a seemingly paradoxical situation in the photographic medium, and is one which makes it such a fascinating and powerful tool of communication. This moment only exists for fractions of a second, which parallels the time it takes for an exposure to be made onto the film plane and the time it takes to make a signature. It is not surprising then, that the in-depth macro-dimensions of the signature (reading the time and causality) as narrative are further factors in understanding the photograph as textual composition.

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Now that I have defined how I see the photograph as a descriptive composition, I want to explore the act of communication in relation to how a narrative in a-temporal terms can be extracted from the photograph. Communication, therefore can be thought of as providing a conscious composition which provides a personalised expression of an idea or statement. This expression will be expressed by the narrator to the narratee. In a similar vein the term description, has the parallel structure in which the material being expressed is now being provided by the description to the addressee.

The definitional difference is that description is "the representation of objects, beings, situations or (nonpurposeful, nonvolitional) happenings in their spatial rather than temporal existence, their topological rather than chronological functioning, their simultaneity rather than succession".<sup>11</sup> Narrative, on the other hand, thought of as an act of enunciation "is the individual act of speech production. The result of this act is an utterance. Utterance is a pre-structural

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<sup>11</sup> Gerald Prince. *Dictionary of Narratology* Lincoln, Nebraska: University of

semiotic entity designating the product of a speech act which may be a text or a fragment of a text. The text as a result of enunciation contains traces of the speech act in the form of indexical words pointing to the participants, time, and space of enunciation."<sup>12</sup> In short, description is equalled to representation just as narrative is equalled to composition.

What I want to do is take these two aspects, description and narrative, and apply them to a collection of photographs and observe how the different interpretations and expressions generated are similar to the compositions of literary equivalents. Ideally this observation will uncover the differences of effect in the expressive potential of the photograph. Before this specific exploration can begin we must first define how the photograph has the ability to compose the world before it.

Both description and narrative involve an act of expression and included in this act are certain conditions that must be in place for this act to succeed. The conditions involved in both instances are as follows. There needs to be a sender and a receiver. There needs to be a composition which is being sent and which we shall assume is likely to be received. With this situation, the sender can be thought of as being the author, subsequently the narrator, who takes on the role of describer. At the other end of the structure there is the receiver, or addressee, who can be thought of as the reader or observer who assumes the role of implied reader for the description or narrative. Ideally what is being sent is a composition, a message or a piece of information. Therefore the composition, the product of either a described or narrativized act, can be considered to be the

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Nebraska, 1987: 26.

<sup>12</sup> Winfried Noth. *Handbook of Semiotics* Bloomington: Indiana Press: 1990: 332.

photograph and given that it is an conscious creation, having been composed similarly to any other type of expression, it fits into our model with relative ease.

Another condition worth illustrating is the shared acceptance that in both cases there is some type of personalised voice being expressed. Consequently, the photograph as a composition can be explored similarly to a literary model. This offers us the opportunity to observe the textual nature of the photograph and observe that photographs are not mutually exclusive expressions of factual reality.

Having defined the conditions necessary for the photograph to have a narrative potential, one further aspect must be addressed. To accept that these two qualities, description and narrative, exist in the photograph is to acknowledge that there must be a language controlling them. And language, as a symbolic system of communication, offers an interesting point of departure for the consideration of an exchange of dialogue. In order for there to be this exchange between a sender and a receiver, this language must have a mutual context. Therefore the question raised is: what type of language is being used in the photograph in order for it to be considered a composition and what are the articulated forms creating the narrative and descriptions?

Let me begin by saying that there is not only one language per se. This language can be reflexive of various cultural demands in which the photograph finds its context. But the overriding language involved in the photograph as a narrative is one of translation. The consideration of translation is based on a desire to see the photograph as a descriptive textual form rather than a merely visual record. This translation is a complex operation of taking the depicted thing and relating it back through language in order to give it a linguistic definition. The thing contained in the photograph must be translated in order for the

composition to be sent. We come to comprehend the visual as a textual composition through the rephrasing of the visual into a language we can understand. It is these textual compositions of the visual contained in the photograph that become the descriptions in symbolic codes.

When comprehending (or reading) the photograph, the subsequent potential structure with its code intact takes the form of a narrative. Therefore to accept that the composition is a narrative is to confirm that the description will have a coherent meaning. Although it may not be apparent on first reading, its codes will ultimately lead to a resolution. This is ultimately due to the fact that not all systems of translation are shared and interpreted into a subjective rather than an objective act of understanding its narrative

When considering why this misreading may happen it is useful to consider that the photograph is not only a visual copy of a thing. It does have the potential, in the right circumstance, to be an expression in a textually dependent environment. This is a result of being continually translated from the visual into a description of history. Even in the "most" simple (or what appears to be simple) copy of a thing, such as photographs taken on a vacation and preserved and cherished as past memories, the photograph is a complex container of descriptions. Through language this visual memoir has the ability to express a narrative in a visual a-temporal composition, not through a caption, but through a running dialogue between the photograph and photographer. A possible narrative dialogue would form a statement like: *When we arrived at..., the day was so incredibly beautiful... Here we are at the centre of town.... And on the right there was this lovely little bistro with the most succulent pastries....* This

provides the photographer with a way of reconfiguring the visually encapsulated narrative, although this is not done explicitly by the photograph but by the interaction between the reader (now the photographer) and the listener (now the spectator). The interaction between the visual content and the "owner's" desires to express the memories is what defines the language of the photograph such that others can comprehend the visual as the textual memories of the vacation. What we have is an intertextual translation of visual content into linguistic micro-codes to form a narrative. And we must remember that this narrative is typically subjective or coloured by subjectivity, even though the actual content of the photographs may be "truthfully depicted". The process of reprocessing this information, the translating of it and reiterating of it into a textual form, takes the visual and reforms it not only into a language but into a particular type of language. It mimics the position in which we find ourselves when reading a literature in the realist genre.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly then, the photograph can be visually read as a composition that must be continually translated from its visual existence of a thing into an expressible description and narrative. This transfiguring can now afford the photograph the opportunity to be considered as an a-temporal expression.

As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests in his 'Discourse of the Novel', "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language", and language is realised "itself as something about which there can be no doubt, something that cannot be disputed, something all encompassing".<sup>14</sup> Consequently, once the photograph

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<sup>13</sup> See my discussion of realism as mimesis and verisimilitude page 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. "Discourse of the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* Michael Holquist (ed.) Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.) Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981: 294 & 286.

has been translated into words, there can be no doubt. It cannot be disputed and its narrative is all encompassing - or is it? I feel confident that when this process of translation succeeds, the fact that the composition was actually copied and existed momentarily in front of the camera, combined with the fact that we then use words to describe it, suggests an overwhelmingly 'real' authenticity on the narrative. This code used in translation designs the necessary formation and appearance in order to give the photograph its accuracy of descriptions. The photograph therefore becomes seen as a document rather than as a possible fabrication. Although this may be the commonly held opinion of the photograph, I would argue that the photograph is not always this true form of realism and it can 'truly' lie. But through this process of translation a slight distortion happens. The visual content may be actual and authenticated by words but the composition, the way the content has been framed, visually and textually, becomes subjectively articulated, thereby shifting the objectively true designation into the realm of subjective contingency. It is at this point that the photograph find its way to become comparable to the literary realism of fiction.

In this realistic form it is read not as a mirroring visual expression, but as a linguist representation based in words and image. Although the visual content will ultimately control the degree to which authentic expression is possible, and given that language is not a universal, the context will generate the necessary impetus for the message to be sent and received in an a-temporal duration.

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As I discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter, the translation of the photograph is context-determined. This observation will have a direct impact on the conclusion (meaning) being expressed. The crucial point I want to make here

is that context-determination will enable the photograph to be read as a visual language. By utilising Bakhtin's statements on how the writer derives, sees, understands and thinks through a given language,<sup>15</sup> we can compare this given language found in the photograph to a literary counterpart. Just as the novel or poem will change based on its writer's or poet's vision, so the photographs of different photographers vary in their descriptive and narrative presentation. Certainly this deterministic concept, the notion of a subjective vision controls the shape and form of a given language, has direct links with the potential interpretation of the photograph. To an extent, the context is subjectively based as well, and the narrative extracted from the content and context relationship will be apparent. What is important about this subjectivity is that we can now see that the context of the photograph and its descriptions and narratives share a multiple causality, because the polysemic variations of interpretation the photograph has with society are culturally determined, what Bakhtin expresses as a "given". This given will also affect how the photograph is translated into a narrative and its final meaning. Ultimately the subjective context will affect the given language created by the poet or writer. Hence the given language will be read through this context producing what is termed their style. This stylistic rendering has a direct reciprocal effect on the composition; the composition is actually controlled to some extent by the stylistics of the writer's, or, in our case, the photographer's subjective position.

Effectively what is happening is that the words describing the visual composition of the photograph are being generated and regenerated through several levels of inter-textual determination. These exist as positions and ideologies which are exterior to the specific moment of reading. Therefore,

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of how William Faulkner expresses his characters voices and psychological impact in given languages see Judith Lockyer *Ordered By Words: Language and Narration in the Novels of William Faulkner* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992. (Esp. Chapter 3).

contained in any narrative, a given language is always apparent and will be read back through its contextuality as well. Encountering portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, a given language will always tend to emerge which is based on the photographer's appropriation of an ideological code -a visual style of grammar.

Let us take for example the contrast between the given languages of Richard Avedon's *In The American West* portraits and the portraits of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. Although they are similar in their basic photographic language, the given articulation of the subjects range in diversity because of their compositions. Therefore the expressions of each will be based on their specific codes of rendition and their potential vision of what this base language can express.

Rather than attempting a full comparison between Avedon's and Sherman's works, it is sufficient to say that because Sherman is using herself as subject in a series of performance-orientated compositions, the in-depth macro-dimensions of the photographs are consciously exploring the woman as actress in instances caught by the camera to create acts of filmic display. These production values are diametrically opposed to Avedon's community-extracted subjects in the *American West*. Although Sherman and Avedon are both performing and articulating persona representations in portraiture, their subject positions with the camera and subjective context give their works specific and very divergent narratives.

The portraits of Richard Avedon's *In The American West* exemplify a narrative of direct observation which is positioned within an individual's mind, and these observed realities create a fictionalised history informed by a nostalgic and mythic ideology of the western frontiersman. This collection of portraits can be compared to a parallel expression found in the work of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. My main concern will be to illustrate that in both works there is a given language being articulated and that this language, the textual and visual, is

expressed in a concatenation of monologues to form narratives which positions us within an ideologically and subjective based discourse about Life: the highly complex family of the Burdrens in which their lives centering around the simple existence in Yoknapatawpha County; and the "Americans" (whether they appear to be marginalized or not) playing out a mythic western ideology between 1979 - 1984.

When we encounter Richard Avedon's portraits we are first struck by the all-encompassing detail of the individual. It is the penetrating direct observation that confronts the spectator. The large format clarity of the subject is like a detailed description in which the somewhat confrontational image comes through the framed edge surrounding the subject. In this space, the visual composition of the subject is casual but the clarity is carefully defined allowing its individuality to penetrate the reader's consciousness. The individuals appear to have been cut out of some "other" reality and pasted onto a white seamless background. They literally exist in front of the reader. As a direct impression of subject, it becomes a narrative description of social class through which the individual characters are described. The endeavour for truthful purity of definition is seen as the details of technical perfection which allows these photographs to have a proliferation of Avedon's voice rather than the subjects. The heightened effect of this large format 'f.64'<sup>16</sup> precision is also translated into a carefully composed realism that defines Avedon's photographic language. The language in these portraits define Avedon's statement that "This is a fictional West, I don't think the West of these

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<sup>16</sup> The term relates to one of the smallest aperture sizes that can achieve extreme focus, depth-of-field and clarity of photographic reproduction. This aperture is only found on a large format 4X5 and 8X10 view camera lens. The term became distinctive with a group of photographers in the early 1920's. They felt the best way to represent the photograph as an artwork was through direct and obvious technical perfection and clarity of image. Photographers such as Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, just to name a few, all participated in this use of achieving complete technical and chemical perfection in order to make reproductions. Notwithstanding, the photographs completed under this realist mandate were to be seen as extreme personal compositions produced within the modernist era of American photography. A precursor to this position was Alfred Stieglitz's term the 'straight photograph' which was intended to counteract the growing manipulative aesthetic and taste finding its way into photography.

portraits is any more conclusive than the West of John Wayne."<sup>17</sup> Here Avedon has conceded that these portraits are narrative performances in which a myth of the American west is played. Avedon's use of a sterile background allows only the individual to speak this narrative with authentic clarity, thereby allowing realism to control the fictional characteristics that would eventually signify the truthful descriptions of the portraits. Just as the writer speaks for the characters in a novel, Avedon's vision speaks for his characters in his novel entitled *-In The American West*. The given language, the detailed physiognomic articulation of individuals and their subjective appearance speaks through their own marginality, race, gender and class dialect. They each carry their own context signatures which mark an identifiable visual narrative. It is the combination of the identifiable signatures which carry specific narratives and the context-determination of the photograph that forms the 'difference' or 'stereo-typed otherness' we observe in these portraits. By appropriating these differences, Avedon generates a collection of disparate voices which speak, not in a singular voice, but in a particular voice or dialect. It is this given language, the dialect voice, that Avedon appropriates and uses in order to translate his photographic language into a dialect of the America West. Through the techniques of straight composition and detailed reproductions, the composure of the subjects in the frame are accentuated by Avedon's use of a seamless observation which consequently works to reinscribe Avedon's signature over the top of the subject. This signature is a photographic signature which identifies itself as an Avedon narrative - hence the title of the collection *In The American West*. By locating and photographing the uncelebrated and ignored of American Western society, Avedon is reinstating a description based on his subjective usage. He is not simply describing individuals before the camera; Avedon searches for the visually extreme Western dream and

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Avedon. *In The American West* London: Thames and Hudson, 1985: (Background to monograph).

uses the subjects dialect in order to write his own fictional epic. He appropriates dialect in order to promote his own Western dream.

This is reminiscent of, though not exactly identical to, William Faulkner's narrators and characters in *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner's use of the character monologue to montage a story is one immediate comparison that can be made to Avedon's collection. A formalistic comparison is that Faulkner uses fifty-nine different textual portraits to create a story which compares to Avedon's collection of ninety-eight portraits in the Thames and Hudson monograph.

*As I Lay Dying* reads as a collection of connective events and happenings. As the fictional time progresses from the first description of Addie dying in her bed, to her death, to her journey as an object in a coffin and subsequently to her burial ten days later, the individual character monologues provide an outlet to fill in the family connections, as the stories complexity unfolds. Although from the start we are aware that the story is diachronically moving forward, there are moments when Faulkner must diverge from the Aristotelian narrative of the story, leading us into a digressional recounting of family history, memories and retold events which will clarify and authenticate character's developments. This provides us with the opportunity to become intimate with the characters which makes the story seem more "real" and directly observational. For example when Addie Burdren's voice comes in after she has long been dead and in the "box", her monologue tells of how she and Anse came to be married. It is through this type of recounting of historical memory that Faulkner clarifies the psychological dialogue for the reader. Addie's voice is like a photograph in a family album being described by her. The prologue to the first meeting with Anse Burdren in Jefferson is the retelling of events which parallel Anse riding by the school house to see Addie. Repetition is another technique used to create a compelling story. And the irony of this ghostly voice is that Addie is the centralising character in the story and dead. Therefore this voice is an historical voice just as a photograph has

the ability to speak about its past. Everything revolves around Addie's death, her body and her death-bed wish to be buried back in Jefferson where she lived before meeting Anse. Her desire to see her own life and death as a circle is important for the concept of continual renewal reiterated in the ending of the story.

This recurring voice is given the responsibility of controlling time and explaining the causality found within the characters. The other members of the story are given voices only when they have something to say. What Faulkner achieves then, through this collection of polyphonic voices, is that history as time and immediacy as memory are the controlling factors of the stories narrative. And when these two macro-structures, history and immediacy, are integrated into one structure, the possibility of direct observations are accorded to the story. Therefore to separate the individuals out would be to interrupt what David Minter describes as Faulkner's technique of "observed realities".<sup>18</sup>

All of the characters form portraits of themselves and have a place within the overall structure of the story, depending on how much or how little they say in it. Their appearances and re-appearances can be singular or multiple. Although the story's central narrative surrounds the matriarch's death and the ultimate macabre ten day journey of Addie Burdens' body to Jefferson for burial, this complex journey takes the reader through the multi-dimensional family and their journey as a narrative to describe personalities. No one person narrates, but the entire family and others have a point of view to illustrate through a given language; family members, neighbours, city folk and bystanders all give personal insights. What is ultimately achieved is not one vision but many points of vision whose individual voices represent a more actualised way of story telling. Although the chronology has the appearance of being linear, one event leading to another, the effect of this is that one person's point of view influences another - a

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<sup>18</sup> David Minter. *A Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: 227

continual operation of causality leading time and memory in a continual circle of motion. This becomes a process of receiving information backwards rather than forwards. This gives the story no real sense of creating a simulated direction for the journey, one which imitates time as a recurring and enduring "perpetual present"<sup>19</sup> in which chronology creates itself as a memory rather than existing as a present development. It is this concern for enduring perpetual movement that Faulkner constructs. By taking an observed language and expressing it in its dialect in order to circumvent the traditional view of story telling, Faulkner aspires to "tell the truth in such a way that it will be memorable, that people will read it, will remember it because it was told in some memorable way..."<sup>20</sup> What better way for a writer to write than in a given language. This technique always presents a different point of view, a different fragment and a different character's voice. Therefore, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is the counterpart of Avedon's photographic given language. Each character within the novel exists independently of each other and as a result of this psychological independence we receive a heightened sense of in-depth macro-dimensions. The connection between a character and the verisimilitude of reality enhances the sense that we

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<sup>19</sup> This notion of time being perpetually present is what Henri Bergson is defining as time being a creative evolution in which it occurs and is continually enduring. This is a process of continual determination in which time is determinate only on the basis that it is continually recurring. An illustration of this concept is found in his *Creative Evolution*, where he states:

The evolution movement would be a single one, and we should soon have been able to determine its direction, if life had described a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly burst into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long. We perceive only what is nearest to us, namely, the scattered movements of the pulverised explosions. Bergson, Henri *Creative Evolution* Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 109.

What this quotation illustrates is that Bergson posits time as being not linear. He suggests that it is rather a circle of time that grows in a concentric progression but, this growth is actually indeterminate and needs to break itself apart to continue to expand in a circular growth pattern. Therefore time grows through a process of determinate fractures rather than a smooth movement in chronology.

<sup>20</sup> William Faulkner. in *Lion in the Garden*. James Meriwether and Michael Millgate (eds.) Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1968: 226.

are perpetually in the presence of the story. We are directly observing the characters and listening to their individual consciousnesses. This effect offers the characters the ability to compose in time their own memory appearances, thus creating a more personalised but fictional vision of reality. This ultimately becomes the technique of realism.

Faulkner has constructed a family articulating individually but existing cohesively together through their funeral journey to Jefferson. It is this independent yet cohesive appearance, a reading through a common goal, which also parallels Avedon's portraits. Although the individuals represented in Avedon's fictional American West are not related, they become familiar through the enduring context of the book. Each member carries his or her own identity and visual details within the book. The book as a creative evolution acts simultaneously as a family frame and binding structure in which each individual member becomes part of Avedon's family album. And depending on where they appear in the collection, they will affect the following members' ability to speak independently. In other words, we acknowledge the presence of their individuality but because of the format of the collection, the encapsulated voices in the album, they all become implicated in a given idea of what the American West is. Although the portraits cannot describe each other, as do the characters in Faulkner's story, they can by association affect each other's descriptive projection. What this illustrates is that Faulkner's notion of telling something "in some memorable way..." is of relevance to the way we come to read Avedon's portraits. Therefore we can position Avedon as an omniscient narrator who used his context, the one appropriated from the subject, to direct our reading of a setting or scene. The explaining of an event and the articulation of the thoughts of others are contained in the name, place and date which accompany each portrait. This is reminiscent of Faulkner's technique of captioning each monologue with the character's name so that we acknowledge who is speaking. It also offers, as

Judith Lockyer points out in *Ordered By Words*, Faulkner's ability to give one character, specifically Darl, "the uncommon powers of omniscience"<sup>21</sup> and "Darl's language calls special attention to his capacity as narrator... Darl assumes much of the responsibility for setting forth scenes, for explaining events, and articulating the thoughts of others."<sup>22</sup> Take for example Darl's poetic description of Cash and Pa working in the shed at night, in the rain, to complete Addie's coffin:

THE LANTERN SITS on a stump. Rusted, greased-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth. Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas. The boards look like long smooth tatters torn from the flat darkness and turned backside out.<sup>23</sup>

In a later appearance we hear Darl describing Cash after his near drowning:

CASH LIES on his back on the earth, his head raised on a rolled garment. His eyes are closed, his face is gray, his hair plastered in a smooth smear across his forehead as though done with a paint brush. His face appears sunken a little, sagging from the bony ridges of eye sockets, nose, gums, as though the wetting had slacked the firmness which had held the skin full; his teeth, set in pale gums, are parted a little as if he had been laughing quietly. He lies pole-thin in his wet clothes, a little pool of vomit at his head and a thread of it running from the corner of his mouth and down his cheek where he couldn't turn his head quick or far enough...<sup>24</sup>

And finally, there is Darl's ability to articulate a detail from his fully realised picture of himself in the future:

The wagon stands on the square, hitched, the mules motionless, the reins wrapped about the seat-spring, the back of the wagon toward the

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<sup>21</sup> Darl Burdren is the second son of Anse and Addie Burdren. He has the imagination of poetic language which labels him "strange" or "mad" and "the one folks talk about". He is hated by Dewey Dell and Jewel for his insight to their particular failures: Dewey Dell's pregnancy and Jewel's illegitimacy. But given his insightful narrative ability he is the major voice in the novel and his character emerges as the central observer of the families history, present and future. Therefore he is the thread of coherence we follow through the novel.

<sup>22</sup> Judith Lockyer. *Ordered By Words: Language and Narration in the Novels of William Faulkner* Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991: 79.

<sup>23</sup> William Faulkner. *As I Lay Dying* New York: The Library of America Classic Series, 1985: 49.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: 105.

courthouse. It looks no different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive. There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps do to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams.

"Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes."<sup>25</sup>

How does Darl Burdren relate to Richard Avedon as being an omniscient narrator? Well, in the first instance, we have Darl with his ability to articulate in a visual and insightful language. His articulate descriptions are continual presence which gives him an insight to the psychological complexities of his family. Though he is described by others to be quite mad and deserving of being locked up, he still speaks from a direct point of view of his own (and others) positions within the story. Without his presence to describe the events and characters of the family, the journey and story would be incoherent. A further parallel with Avedon and Darl is that they both offer us the opportunity to see past the superficial surface of the characters and look at the *punctum* of a family. Their mutual responsibilities are to position us within the text and guide us, with their ability to use language, towards a perpetually recurring temporality and causality. Darl's ability to describe is clear and straightforward, just as clear and straightforward as Richard Avedon's portraits. Let us for example consider these portraits.

Figure 2.6 allows a detailed point of view from which to see the rough clarity and greying stubble of chin whiskers. The flat black hair with its tufts of grey which mimic the greying stubble which becomes the focal point in which the tonality of the photograph is repeated in the eyes. The eyes reflect back a

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.: 172.

penetrating and confronting gaze as we stand in front of and watch Clifford as Clifford watches us.

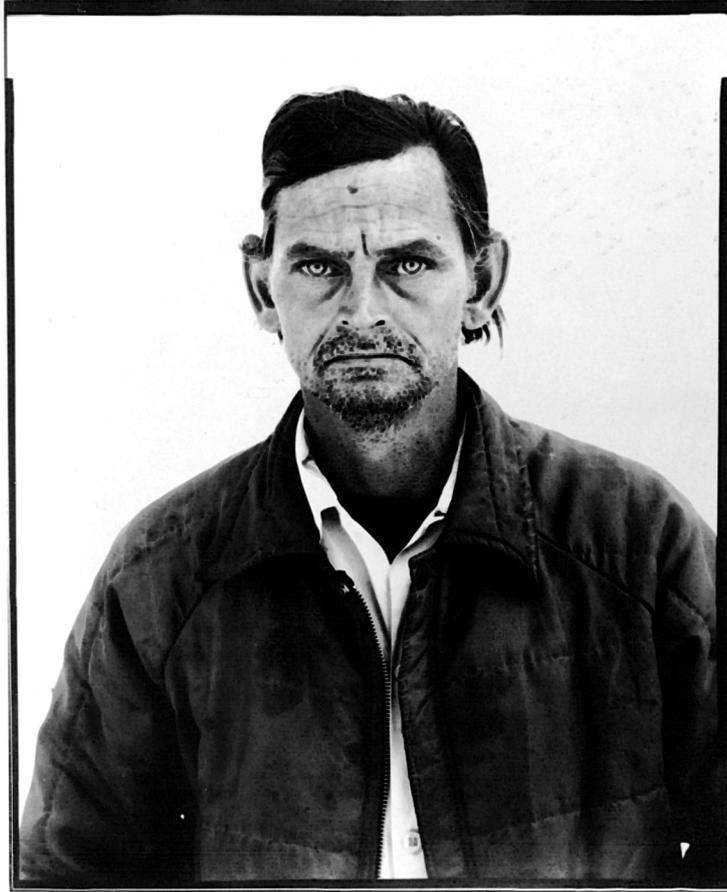


Figure 2.6. Richard Avedon, *Clifford Feldner, unemployed ranch hand, Golden, Colorado 6/15/83.*

In Figure 2.7, the washed expression has been wiped away by the effects of a travelling carnival life. The pale tonalities of the portrait speak to the softness of the vest and to the softness of "woman" which has been hardened by the effects of physical work. I would suggest a life of *on the road in one town then the next, week after week after week*. Her "feminine" surface described in the print quality is in opposition to Clifford's rugged and hardened gaze and appearance. Although the compositions are seemingly identical, individuality is achieved through the choice of tonality, exposure and lighting control which

effectively portrays their differences of personalities alongside the physical differences.



Figure 2.7 Richard Avedon, *Debbie McClendon, carney, Thermopolis Wyoming, 7/29/81*

In Figure 2.8, the physical resemblance between Bill and Clifford is striking; the almost identical amount of facial hair and stubble would indicate that these two individuals may be the same person. The clothes and hardened facial features caused by the physical hardships of drifting and cattle ranching are the elements that make these two men one description. Their lifestyles have come to shape and carve their visual appearance. What is the difference between a drifter and an unemployed ranch hand? Does an unemployed ranch hand become a drifter when he is not tending to the cattle or hay fields, and is out on the road looking for a new place to hang his saddle, or is it the drifter who becomes an

unemployed ranch hand when he has no ranching job? Although these semantics of socio-cultural definitions may be trivial, they do offer a way to approach the shared identity that Avedon is searching for.

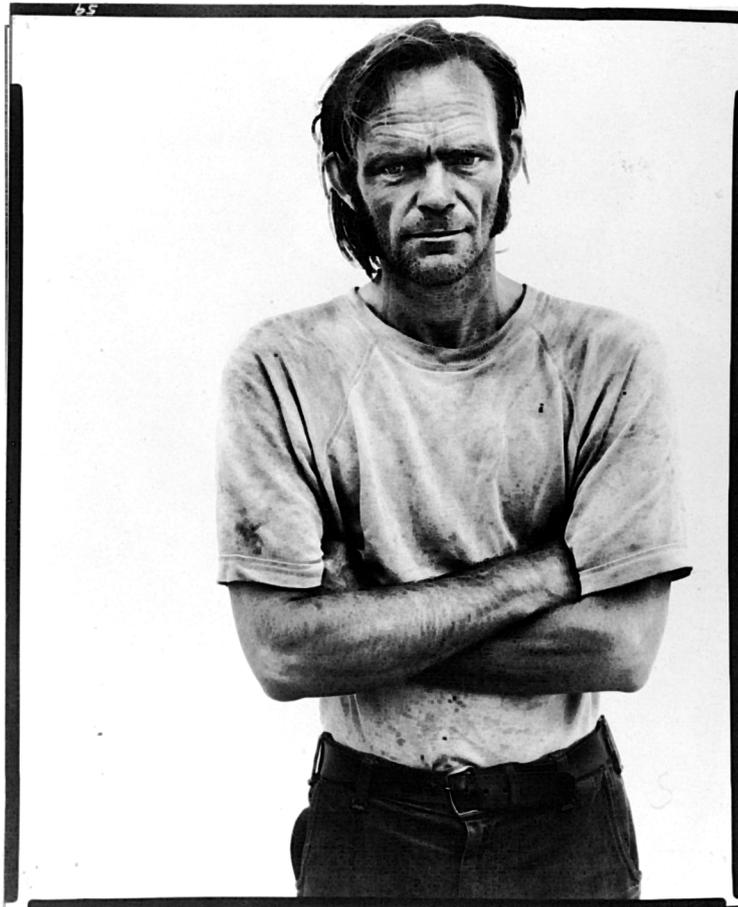


Figure 2.8 Richard Avedon, *Bill Curry, drifter, Interstate 40, Yukon, Oklahoma, 6/16/80*

Avedon looks for difference and individuality but makes them into a family through their shared dialect which defines their difference yet describes shared physical traits.

These three portraits illustrate Avedon's attempt to collect a common portrait of what he sees as the American West, and this can be compared to the earlier descriptions of Darl, who Faulkner uses as a narrator to describe and compose the family portrait of the Burdrens.

The parallels that can be expressed between Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Avedon's *In The American West* are innumerable and even though they are diverse the means of expression are apparent in both their use of descriptions and narratives of expressions. Both titles provide the reader with an observed reality which takes place on a journey not so much through an environment as through the individual consciousness of the characters in each story. I am confident that Faulkner's story and Avedon's photo-album share the interchangeable characteristics of the photograph as narrative and narrative as photograph.

The ideological implications found in both texts are there as a direct result of the dialect used in their separate compositions. What is the ideological stance? In the case of Faulkner, which has some bearing on the desires of Avedon, it is to observe the forgotten and marginalized, and is that of a white male who comes to "celebrate the magic of the commonplace."<sup>26</sup> This is a coming to terms with the powers of the omniscient narrator. This stance can only be accomplished within Avedon's case with a direct and forthright photographic manner. In Faulkner the words are common but precious objects in a discourse which clearly defines his and his characters' social point of view. Avedon presents not only what he sees, but, through appropriation, takes the ordinary details of the individual and transcribes them into what Faulkner expressed as being memorable and "set it on fire."<sup>27</sup> It is not so much that the technical quality of the photographs and story are memorable but that they both draw out, in an individual dialect, the subject's fate and existence.

The unobscured vision does not hide the true identity. What is hidden is the language which describes the subjects, and this screened language is rearticulated into a stylistic realism rather than a truth. The visual language in

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<sup>26</sup> David Minter. *A Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: 228.

<sup>27</sup> William Faulkner. in Meriwether, James and Michael Millgate (eds.) *Lion in the Garden* Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1968:

Avedon's portraits is seen explicitly dialectical terms. It is this concept of a common dialect, "the other" or "the forgotten" which forms the narratives of the compositions that are being photographed, expressed and appropriated through their individuality. Neither text, *In The American West* and *As I Lay Dying*, is a monolithic narrative but they do both represent an affirmation of a lost dialect and dream presented in a contemporary descriptive form of realism.

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When we consider the photograph as housing a hidden language, we confirm the notion that the photograph is a transparent container of a discourse. The language read on the pages of the text or used in everyday conversations is as transparent as the photographic surface. The photographic content is seen through the exterior surface of this house of language which constructs levels of meaning. Although my metaphor is extracted from Henry James's concept of the house of fiction, my vision of this house is that it is a translucent rather than a solid structure. Take for example the photograph of an unclothed man Figure 2.9. We acknowledge this photograph through a process of transparent language, moving through the different levels of this surface and, at each encounter, with a particular phrasing and comprehension of particular ideological and cultural signs of what an unclothed man stands for. Therefore, as we move through these levels a change of understanding forms itself into a notation or momentary meaning for the photograph of an "unclothed man". Although this notation is inscribed onto a piece of paper, it exists as a tangible impression for further referencing. Consequently, the visual notation, "unclothed man", is a photograph to be comprehended in the transparency of language. And depending on the context, the unclothed man photograph will have a specific cultural meaning attached to it. Therefore, what has happened is that the photograph has moved from a visual to an internal understanding contained in an all-in-composing grid of language.

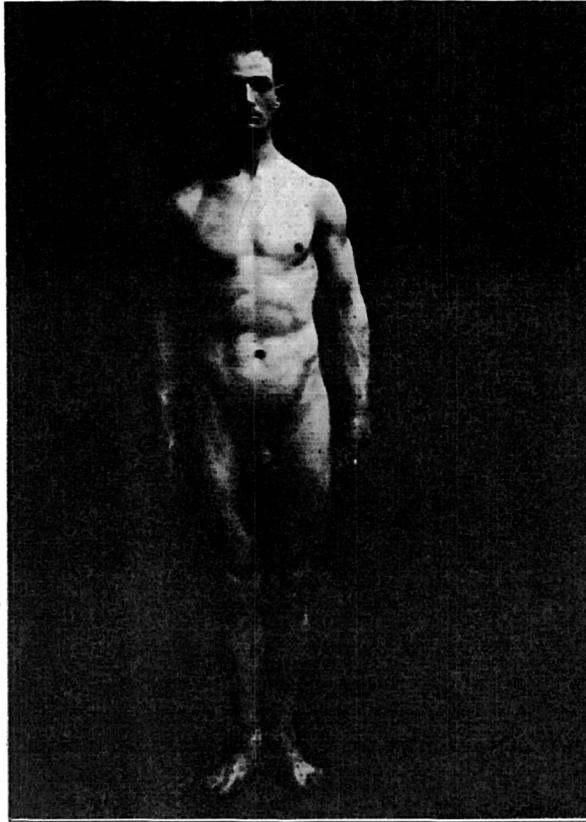


Figure 2.9

Anonymous Man, c 1850

In other words the immediate visual surface content of the photograph attracts our attention and as we move toward it, it begins to recede into the sanctuary of the house or structure of language. And in order to obtain its full visual impact we must follow it into the structure and rediscover it in a specific context, this being a particular external space which has a given ideological and cultural determination attached to it. This space is where the photograph becomes loaded with various levels of signification. To put it another way, as we follow the visual surface we travel through a conceptual structure. Hence the "unclothed man" is exposed not only to the space of the internal environment which he stands, but is also exposed to the gazing observer who will construct a conceptual structure in which to shelter him. Language is this shelter, and as ideology gives the language its ability to articulate specifics of cultural determination, the

observer has a way to compartmentalise the visual content into an "acceptable" narrative.

If we test this metaphor through an actual photograph it will be readily apparent that the conscious act of reading the content as a linguistic code takes place in the external movement from the outside to the internal movement inside the haven of language. In its present form, an anonymous "unclothed man", Figure 2.9, can only suggest a specific biological gender description. Here is an unclothed man standing in a space which appears to be a room or studio. As soon as the desire to contextualize it becomes apparent, the ideological walls of the structure of language provide a matrix in which the adage "the clothes make the man" becomes an apt comparison to how a structure of language can surround the photograph with ideological context. Although the naked or nude notation is always present, it is protected with a transparent surface which shelters it from misrepresentation.

What has happened is that this unclothed man has now become an element in a naked historical statement of 1850. Once we intellectually retrieve the historical documents on the grounds of the trends and uses of photography of this period, and apply them like clothing, this naked man becomes a cultural dressed photograph. His purpose and reason for being naked is still unknown but the historical implications shelter him in a clinical or pseudo-scientific reference. Indeed we know from historical records that the photograph was used for visual investigation and that the belief in "truthful recording" was a key factor for using the photograph as a scientific document. Although he is stripped of his clothes he is dressed with ideological determination to uncover the male form.

What is this structure and what kind of form and shape does it take? I would point out that these surfaces are transparent and not opaque. The act of looking at the structure is like a penetration through into another space which is analogous to a visual transition - the barrier which allows the visual content of the

photograph to be penetrated yet offers also another space to be generated immediately after. This occurs through the process of seeing through the externalness of actuality to the internalness of cognition. This is why the shift from visual to the linguistic is achieved with such great ease when conceived as this progression through a structure. The transparency of the structure generates the need for language in order to generate a description of this structure. We see the thing in the photograph but to fully comprehend it we must enter into this thing which will enable us to cognitively define the thing on the paper surface. What we have then, is a progression which must involve a duration of time, even though it may only be fractions of a second. The conceptual length of this duration, where understanding and cognitive responses are interacting with one another, is where we comprehend the photograph as bearing an a-temporal narrative. It is this still length of time which consequently becomes the basic space in which a description can be generated from the photograph. Although the content is motionless and framed, just as on a screen, it is this apparent contradiction between progressing through a transparent space and cognitively seeing a meaningful surface which controls the a-temporal narrativity in the photograph.

Ultimately, the progressing through a house as a metaphor for this space is a way of suggesting that perpetual duration is a co-habitor in the structure. And this situation only arises as a result of the direct engagement with the photograph as a descriptive narrative.

Even though context will effectively condition the meaning of the internal narrative, the immediate direction of the narrative will be initially open and indeterminate. It is this exterior structure which initiates the desire to move the content to description. What we see behind the transparent barrier is an actuality, but in order to comprehend it as this actuality it must be articulated through language into a definition or description first. This articulation gives the content

an authentic existence, a wall on which to hang itself, and a presence in the house also offers a contingent temporality and existence. This is achieved through reclaiming the content as a description or composition. Once a sufficient level of description is achieved, a process of translating the narrative will begin. To come full circle, we have traversed the corridors of the house trying to find the appropriate location to hang the photograph. The two major features of this act are authenticating the description and giving narrativity to the composition. By moving through the photograph we have traversed a threshold in order to describe it and once it has found its context it can now take a position on a wall. As a consequence of this, the wall provides a supportive ideological surface which offers a potential meaning for the content.

Both description and narratives are forms of language, and in the case of the photograph, language becomes the definable super-structures of the photographic content. When peering through the transparent walls of the house, the obvious determination to see the photograph as a description is acknowledged, which activates the recognition of a narrative being present. This narrative is a reconstruction of historical temporality which is (its) history and history is nothing more than time and causality. The photograph as a history, and logically it is a history described through visual language, which can have nothing more than narrativity as its structure for meaning.

The claim can be made now that the photograph can be a linguistic discourse. I think what needs to be defined is how this pseudo-language controls meaning. A way to answer this question is to consider the photograph as either a pictographic or hieroglyphic sign and compare these two similar forms of language with the photograph as a language. As I have suggested in the previous section, there tends to be a translation process involved, taking the content into a symbolic notation of the content. This is to say, we have a tendency to describe first, functionally, then define the content later. But if this the case, if the

photograph was considered to be a pictogram, the definitional meaning would override the functional meaning. The consideration of the photograph as pictogram offers an exploration of the content as a basic unit of description. Take for instance the previously discussed photograph of an "unclothed man", Figure 2.9. Certainly the differences between the content of this photograph and the pictographic image of the schematic notation of a "man" - "pictogram man", Figure 2.10, are obvious without further illustration.

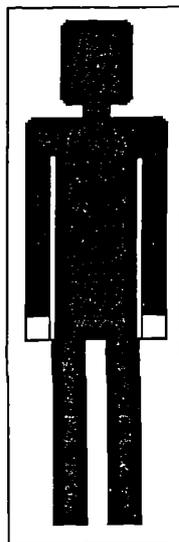


Figure 2.10

But the question is, can they both exist as two differing considerations of a grammatical statement containing time and causality? One is symbolic and the other is indexical, and one must concede that these two visual representations offer evidence to be seen as dissimilar. One is a drawing, a picture, of the ideal symbolic concept of a Man, Figure 2.10. The other, Figure 2.9, is a photograph of a real man exposed unclothed in a context of being either naked / nude - depending on your aesthetic definition. But when considering the descriptive qualities of the two, the differences are not so dramatic as to eliminate their shared common narratives. Although the schematic man is a simplified graphic description, and the photograph on the other hand is an optical impression of a real man once removed in temporality, they can also share a conceptual meaning. The

only discrepancy is that the photograph tends to be more obviously and culturally authentic in its resolution, whereas the pictogram is more indicative of graphic description.

Jacques Derrida points out that the differences between these two forms of language is that language can be thought of as containing two types of sign determination: the "expressive" and the "indicative."<sup>28</sup> The "expressive sign" in language is authentically self-present with possessed meaning and content and the "indicative sign" in language is merely a conventional use which reduces signs to lifeless and arbitrary distinctions. By applying these two sign determinations to the "unclothed men", Figure 2.9 and 2.10, the photograph can initially be thought of as two varying expressive signs of language; one is authenticity and the other is self-possessed content. On the other hand, the "unclothed pictogram man" can be seen more appropriately as an indicative sign of a conventional and lifeless markings used for an arbitrary intentionality. What both representations do offer and exemplifies is Husserl's main concern for further theorising that an expressive sign has 'purpose' whereas the indicative sign is mere 'sense'. Purpose and sense not only becomes the key differences between the two images but a key concept in the ability of the photograph to be considered as a narrative. With the "unclothed man" (see page 104) the purpose is anonymous, as is its photographic context, which initially eliminates it from being thought of as an expressive sign. Without purposeful determination the photograph is meaningless even though the content is perhaps visually authentic. Subsequently, it becomes an indicative sign of a sense of an unclothed man only providing a defined 'sense' of a naked man. It is lifeless and to some extent arbitrary because of this momentary lack of purpose. Therefore the man, his unclothedness, his isolation in a space are only descriptions

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<sup>28</sup> This observation by Derrida is based on his analyses of Edmund Husserl's theory of signs. The complete investigation can be found in Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973: 17-26.

and his expression, sense, will only acquire meaning through purposeful determination.

Perhaps a more useful way to approach these investigation is through Roland Barthes' terminology, as *cardinal functions* <sup>29</sup> which define the base unit or semantic seed of a narrative. Therefore these cardinal functions are the basic units similar to the sense and purpose of language. And as the units are linked together with intentionality, their grammatical positions are implicated, and the narrative structure of the photograph moves towards becoming this cardinal function offering potential meaning. Although we can speculate prior to this, the sense and purpose will still be arbitrary - the same is true for the "unclothed pictogram man", Figure. 2.10. The speculation or purpose of this image as an indicative sign is representative of a more symbolic mark for the meaning of the male body type - a gender determination. Indicative in this context can be defined as the arbitrary presentation of an image for general expression. Therefore without specific purpose the "unclothed pictogram man" becomes contextualized as an indicative sign for a gender. It has meaning and authenticity based on its functional context and purpose. But what stops the "anonymous man" (see Figure 2.9 page 104) from being a more indicative sign? In some ways nothing, as only purpose controls the degree of authenticity of the visual mark which prevents this and all photographs from being lifeless markers. Although cultural opinion, as a form of purpose, may frown upon the photograph being an arbitrary sign, as I see it, there is no theoretical difference in language between the unclothed man and the unclothed pictogram man. They are both visual expressive and indicative presentations of a "man"; one simply happens to be actually unclothed which carries purpose in itself and the other is indicative of the nakedness sensed under

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<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" In Roland Barthes *Image-Music-Text* New York: Hill & Wang 1977: 93.

the clothing. What separates them is the meaning of either of the "unclothed men" in conceptual terms.

Another consideration to take in account is the symbolic versus the realistic. What these two features may inherently activate is an interruption between the expressive or indicative sign. By considering the indicative sign within the symbolic frame of reference, it serves as a way to approach the conditions necessary for the photograph to be considered an artwork. What is at stake are not the potential aesthetic qualities to express its message, but the type of intended narrative composition being generated. Therefore the photograph is more comfortably considered and associated with a socio-cultural purpose, whereas the pictogram, when removed from its indicative marker, becomes a purely functional sign rather than an expression full of sense. Hence the "unclothed pictogram man" cannot intentionally, on its own, offer an ideological expression to the reader whereas the "naked man" has the potential, on its own, to express ideological meaning, one which may purposefully offer an authentic description about Men. And this authentic description can offer a narrative. This is not the case with the pictogram. It offers only a generic symbolic mark which can only function within current usage for language. It is a graphic image and only indicative of its sign function, therefore it can never be misunderstood or misread - unless it is removed from its cultural context. Its sense, although arbitrary, only exists within the intentions of a specific cultural context that utilise symbols for communication. This is how the pictogram can eventually generate itself into a hieroglyphic language. The drawing takes on cultural sense and purpose when authenticated into a determination of "natural" language. This seems valid when we consider that it is Husserl's basic position on language.

But as Christopher Norris has pointed out in his *What's Wrong With Postmodernism*, "speech-acts are always already caught up in a network of pre-existent codes and conventions which enables them to signify - to work for all

practical purposes - regardless of the speaker's avowed intentions.<sup>30</sup> Therefore Husserl sees the phenomenology of language, ie. causality of speech-acts, as a way to define meaning not with the ability to escape the confines of intentional and pre-existing codes and conventions. Why this is important is that it offers the photograph, as a description or speech-act, the same potential to enter the confines and conventions of language. Therefore Norris's observation is appropriate and no matter how hard the photograph tries to escape these rules, it continually finds itself adhering to them. For without the codes and conventions the content would be incomprehensible and the message would cease to exist or have purpose or sense. The "unclothed man" would be nothing but a pattern of tonalities with no readily apparent coherence, as a mass of shape and form which relates to no convention of expression.

Whereas the photograph is dependent upon the intentions of language, its content is already authentic and self-present, and the meaning will always be read through the codes and conventions of language. Therefore, the hypothesis that the photograph is a more intentionalized and complex form of hieroglyphic language is valid. And with all cultural forms of language, it can be formed into a narrative structure that can offer descriptions, either aligned with or resisting ideological trends. I am aware that the ideogrammatic inscription forming the hieroglyphic language has but one meaning attached, and because the photograph has the potential of inscribing many purposes and senses, the comparison cannot be a simple one. What is important about this comparison is the way interpretation is generated. It is not just a straightforward development from hieroglyph to photoglyphic. It is the way in which the symbolic picture, the drawn mark and the continual reproduction of the thing, develop themselves into

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher Norris. "Derrida and Kant" In his *What's Wrong With Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990: 202.

linguistic codes and understandings in order to form their content, drawn or reproduced, into a meaning.

But what does this comparison tell us about the photograph's ability to be a description in an a-temporal narrative? We can suggest that language, as a set of functional units, called phonemes, and the photograph can share this same theoretical foundation of language. For when we scrutinise the photograph within the grammatical rules of language we uncover, to a certain extent, the amount of indicative and expressive intentionality involved in reading the photograph. What we end up with is that we see the photograph as an intentional visual language. If we are willing to accept that the photograph is a language, just like the hieroglyph, then the same codes and conventions also control the photograph's narrative ability to describe. The only difference is that the traditional opinion is that a speech-act is performed by a speaker and, seeing that the photograph is an inanimate paper surface containing only a visual image, it cannot speak for itself: it must have someone speak for it. Although I would agree that this is a significant difference and has the potential to dissolve my argument so far, I want to point out that I am dealing with the photograph as a narrative and that this narrative is a product of a speech-act.

With this determination in place we can safely conclude that the photograph will contain expressive and indicative signs as well, and that the ability to be a narrative is a condition of intentionality. So long as the photograph exists in the house of language and it abides by the house rules of communication, narrative will be granted. (Even though this concept is similar to Frederick Jameson's seminal evaluation and critical text *The Prison House of Language*, I feel the concept of language is not a constraining structure in which an oppressive and deterministic imprisonment is achieved. Notwithstanding Jameson offers a critical overview of the concept of language in which the subject has no escape from it, I want to position language not so much as something we

must escape from or be imprisoned by, but see it as a structure in which we function and exist in; such as a house rather than a prison. Therefore my notion of language is not Alcatraz in which no escape is possible but a residence in which it provides comfort and personalised taste.)

Although the photograph may change its location within the house, these codes (environments) and conventions are still present. It is when the photograph vacates one convention and moves to another does the narrativity of the photograph change its ability to communicate in the previous residential convention.

Therefore in order for the photograph to have a narrative in the form of a description in a-temporal conditions determination must be in place. Determination, referring to the type of house it is positioned in, offers the photograph a context in which it can be a narrative. In order to read this narrative, either as a description or composition, the conventions of the house must be provided in which the photograph can be read. What occurs is a cognitive transition and reception of the visual as linguistic order. Therefore this structure, a framed doorway leading into the house, can also be seen as a mechanism which determines how we come to read the narrative formation of the photograph residing in this specific convention within the house.

For the ease of further discussion, I want to redesign the house metaphor from an architectonic structure in which the possibility of many potential rooms and connecting passage-ways are inferred, to a more geometric three-dimension grid in which the organised space can be illustrated far more effectively. By placing a wire-frame three-dimensional structure around the photograph, we can imagine the photograph as being transparent and existing on the zero median point in this grid structure. On either side of this point preceding positively is the *aspect* grid, and receding negatively is the *prospect* grid. If we look at an illustration of this grid surrounding the photograph would look something like the

following drawing - Figure 2.11. The naked man has now been clothed in a suitable ideological language.

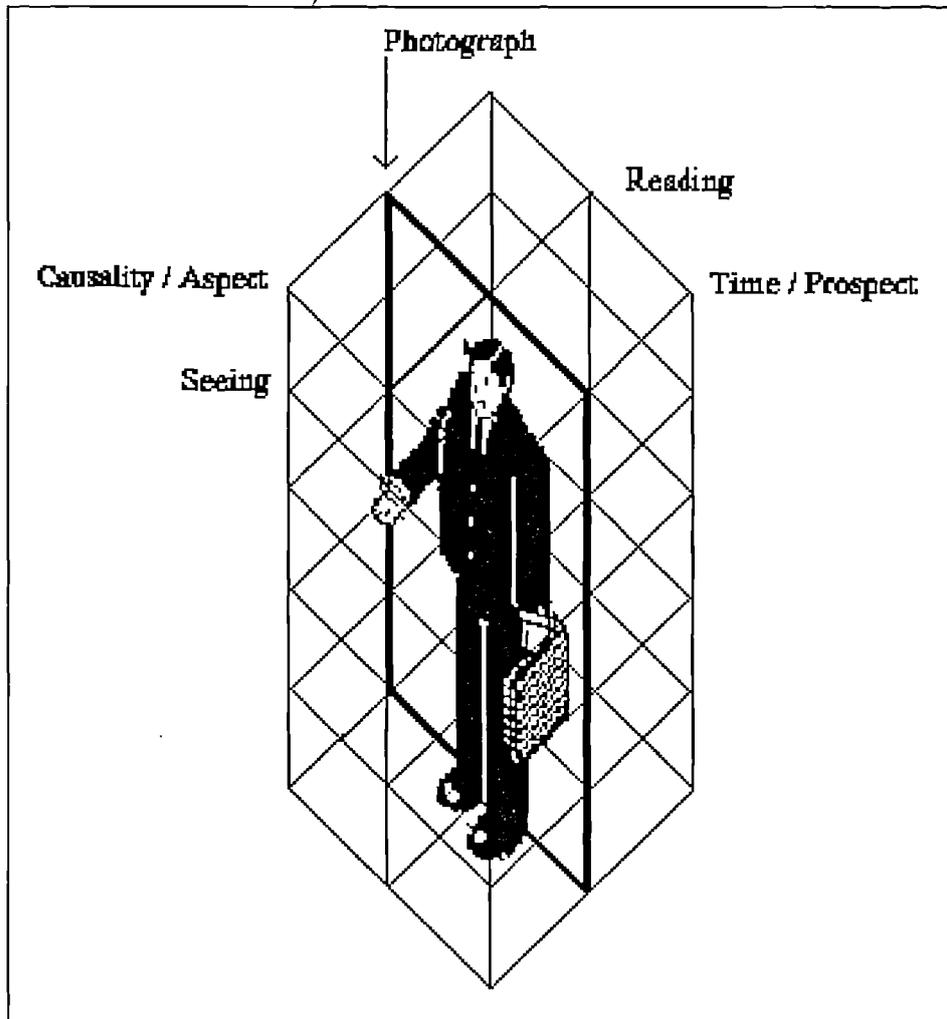


Figure 2.11

We see that the grid's divided units of measure are identical and the overall size of the grid parallels the frame size of the composition. Each of the measured units has a position which gives the interpretation of a grid the coherence necessary for reading. And as we deconstruct the grid, each unit will be similar in size, shape and measure. What is different about these identical units are their positions which are relative to the overall composition behind the grid. Although they may fit anywhere in the grid, the surface composition seen through the fronting layers of the grid determines their intended position. The composition is

therefore responsible for controlling and determining the positions of the grid units into a cohesive structure in front of the composition. What makes this grid more complex than that of draftsman's grid depicted by Albrecht Dürer drawing, *Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude*, c.1525 - Figure 2.12, is that it exists invisibly in front of the photograph as a multi-layered conceptual system of interpretation.



Figure 2.12

Albrecht Dürer, *Draftsman Drawing Reclining Nude*, circa. 1525

Therefore this grid has many levels of grids in front of one another and this grid is what affords the photograph the opportunity to be read and seen simultaneously. Not only does it offer various levels of conceptual interpretation, but it provides a systematic way of understanding how the photograph as a narrative is moulded by the codes and conventions of language. As the grid is defined unit by unit, the intended position of that unit will effectively influence the relevant sense of the composition existing behind or in front of the grid. Subsequently, each fragment of the composition will be affected by the determinate linguistic purpose of the grid units that exist in front or behind it. The grid's purpose is this particular interpretational feature. What is occurring is a continual progression through the various levels of interpretation, and as each spatial unit is passed through the following proceeding space, a unit emerges until

the original content is understood. The space, or should I say duration, we have passed through is where the narrative of the composition is formulated. The durational space has time and causality in it and depending on the level of meaning we obtain a description will emerge out of the content. In other words, once we have gone through each spatial fragment, and achieved purpose and sense, the photograph can be read as a unitary cohesive narrative. Our narrative understanding happens on the level of passing through of the grids, which defines the content into a descriptive convention. This also can be thought of as a journey in a-temporal duration. Passing beyond this grid one step further behind, receding negatively from the composition, another grid exists, which gives it its truly three-dimensional existence. This grid is current temporality in which the historical contingency of the composition has been pulled back through the positively existing grids in order for the meaning to gain immediacy. The further we progress negatively with the composition, the more immediacy we are giving it and as this immediacy intensifies, the historicity of the composition and the timed description become less apparent. Although we could digress infinitely, at some point the resonating composition must be returned to the past time position in order for the full description to be finalised. It is like a spring being stretched; in order to fully understand the in-depth macro-dimensions the stretched spring must be released resulting in the full compression of its structure. The photograph is identical; we reach back in time and pull forward the content composition and, seeing that the composition is attached to history because of its mechanistic qualities, to pull it forward into our current temporality, we stretch the composition like a spring. The more we pull, the more the content must release itself from its original time - conceptually. The act of watching the photograph recoil its content into the present temporal moment is the nostalgia and melancholy of the photograph. We read it in a present temporality and in the passing of current temporality a future meaning is generated. Therefore, every

time we retrieve it, the effect is the same. The action which brings the content forward out of history into current temporality gives it purpose and sense, then releases it back to history, is where meaning resides. Not in the photograph itself, but in the act of cause and effect. This is one further consideration of the photograph as narrative. The diminished historical time is finally returned to its initial state so that the effect of returning it causes the meaning of the content to be described in an a-temporal contradiction - a movement in a still photograph.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the determination to see the photograph not in a casual way, but with a purposefulness, is important for its identification as a language. Subsequently, as a language, it will have a narrative. And this narrative will be a dialogue which functions within the contradiction of diachronic progression and synchronic moments of time. This consideration of the photograph existing as a language and having a narrativity directly implicates the photograph as having a movement in time. This sense of movement explicitly defines the act of making the photograph a description with a duration. With duration comes the sense of a progression, and with progression comes the contradiction of an a-temporal movement. To be a narrative, the visual must be translated into the linguistic. The movement from the initial state, the visual, through a transition to a final state, a language, as Tuen van Dijk has pointed out, is our key to the understanding of the a-narrativity in the photograph. Therefore to claim that the photograph is a narrative is to claim it is a language with grammatical structures. Just as any language can have varying degrees of stylistic presentation and meaning, so does the photograph, as we have seen in the discussion of Richard Avedon's and William Faulkner's work. The concept of a dialect offers the recognition of its validity in the sense that Avedon's portraits describe a fictive ideological vision. So if language is used within an ideological position, the photograph is also ideologically implicated. Ideology and the house of language become the architecture which offer a space in which to observe the

photograph as narrative. Narrative in this instance is past temporality, which is history, for the photograph can never be concurrent with running diachronic temporality. It always exists as a past narrative. And because language imitates this past temporality as well, time and causality become even more key considerations of the photograph as a description. Therefore the photograph as an a-temporal narrative has to be seen and read as a temporality in which time and causality define the contradictory direction and meaningfulness of the content. This visual dialogue becomes the movement we engage in when read the photograph. The movement into one temporality to another and back out again is the intellectual transition involved in reading the photograph. Frederic Jameson makes this point when discussing the ontological implications of the synchronic and diachronic model of language. "The former lies in the lived experience of the native speaker; the latter rests on a kind of intellectual construction, the result of comparison between one moment of lived time and another by someone who stands outside, who has thus substituted a purely intellectual continuity for a lived one."<sup>31</sup> What this suggests is that, when we engage the photograph in a determinate language we are activating consequently the "lived experience of the native" reader. And in the latter moment the reader activates the intellectual faculties of time, history, and memory to construct the narrative. It is not that these two instances of temporality are to be kept isolated from one another, but acknowledging that the photograph, when approached, these two instances are reciprocally present and dependent on one another's presence. In other words, we approach the photograph first through its actuality, then through our cognition, the photograph can be seen and read as a description with either an explicit or implicit determination.

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<sup>31</sup> Frederic Jameson. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972: 6.

### 3

#### *Defining the Narrative Structure in the Photograph*

...the visual perception of a motionless object. The object may remain the same, I may look at it from the same side, at the same angle, in the same light; nevertheless the vision I now have of it differs from that which I have just had, even if only because the one is an instant older than the other. My memory is there, which conveys something of the past into the present. My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates, as a snowball on the snow.

Henri Bergson *Creative Evolution*

If we were to replace the term 'object' with the term 'photograph' in this statement, we would gain a useful position from which we can come to look and understand the photograph as a narrative. The specific type of narrative is one in which the temporality of cause and effect is the main driving force of its structure. Replacing the terms, also, illustrates the type of 'internal' movement involved in extracting the duration of the photograph. In this statement we can observe the motionless composition of the photograph to be an 'object' depicting a single instant of time. Bergson's uses *la durée* as a metaphor encompasses a visual and mobile fact of describing time, I see the same characteristics at play in the consideration of the story emanating from the photograph having this durational effect. Seeing that the term 'duration', in Bergson's context, has no physical change of spatial determination from one state to another, the metaphorical presence of temporality has occurred. The resulting metaphorical effect is brought on by the cause of travelling back into the single instance of time - a memory. Therefore this instance can be paralleled to the idea of the photograph as a temporal memory. Carried in

this metaphoric temporality is causation, cause and effect, and once the determination that a duration has taken place the photograph remains looking like an instant but now expresses the potential for narrativity.

This internal movement, which contains a beginning and end, is the central context for the photograph's ability to be determined to have *la durée*. This conceptual state, Bergson points out as, "conveying something from the past to the present" which "advances on the road of time", effectively positions the observer to conceive the photograph as having a causal context in the form of a narrative movement. At this point, it is apparent that the contradiction of having movement in a single instant of time is what Bergson metaphorically envisioned *la durée* to express - the distillation between time and space in which time characterises inner life and space characterises the continual renewing of instances rather than a succession of instances.<sup>1</sup> On the more basic level, the photograph with its ability to render a single instant of time and render a visual space simultaneously is the visual contradiction of Bergson's distillation of *durée*.

What we witness as observers in the photograph is both time and space. Time is the inner still life that is rendered on the paper surface inside the frame borders of the photograph, and the space is the collapsed three-dimensional composition rendered as two-dimension. These two photographic features of *la durée* are continually renewing and rendering themselves in the frame which, then continues to rejuvenate the single instant rather than the succession of instances. This is why, I am borrowing the metaphor of *la durée* to examine whether or not there is an implicit narrativity in the photograph - outside of the narrativity brought to it by the observer.

Taking a closer look at this aspect of duration and applying it to how we may extract a narrative from the photograph, we immediately see that the type of

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 10.

narrative is not so much the story of the photograph but the contradiction between the inner distillation between time, the instant of the photograph's denotation, and space, the continually representing itself as connotationally new. Since the bringing-forth of the past into the present is initially a transgressive movement, what is even more telling is that this duration reciprocates in presenting itself as a historical structure - the distillation of history and present, then future. The photograph, therefore, becomes a representation in which lived time<sup>2</sup> does not exist but the sense of temporality is instilled through the denotational content which gives it a sense of impending narrative movement. Duration, moving from denotation (history) to connotation (present), is the foundation on which the narrativity of the photograph is framed. This durational frame is erected through the photograph's ability to render time and space into a form of visible contradictory lines, but also, the frame can be seen as the internal mechanism in which time<sup>3</sup> is rendered in an instant. The photograph, although being a carrier of this historical determination, requires a further spark in order for the narrative to be explicitly visible. The depicted thing we see in the photograph may progress in its lived time but the sense of progression in the composition, and its sense of authenticity, are achieved through the observer's consideration of composition from the view point of the present taken back to the past, then brought into the future moment of lived time. This present past is always implicit in the composition and is being continually erected into the present future. However, the suggestion that every observer looking at the content of the photograph will have a direct pathway to the

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<sup>2</sup> My reference to *lived time* is made to refer to what we consider to be the passing of time. Also as how we understand the hands of a clock ticking by or the day passing into night.

<sup>3</sup> In *Real Time* D.H. Mellor discusses the direction of time as "the difference between *earlier* and *later*". \* He later shifts the terminology to define the terms of *earlier* and *later* to *past* and *future* respectively. In this discussion the difference between these two states of perception is the space in which time is the a causal precedence. Therefore time is the conceptual space in which precedence of the cause and perceiving the differences between them creates the sense of temporal order. Consequently, in his point of view "the direction of time is the direction of causation". \* (\* Mellor, D.H. *Real Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981: 140 & 156.)

exact past of the content, is not always the case. What happens is through a selective reading, the initial retrieving of the content, denotations, and our cultural knowledge of the photograph which always generates the past as a present, combine to bring this recorded single instant forward into a future present. This retrieval, the reaching back reminiscent of our own act of recollection, is the event which supports the *durée* metaphor.

Phenomenologically, this aspect of the photograph can be simply illustrated by two photographs taken by the same photographer twenty-six years apart. The two photographs are by William Christenberry and they are of a store front in Stewart.

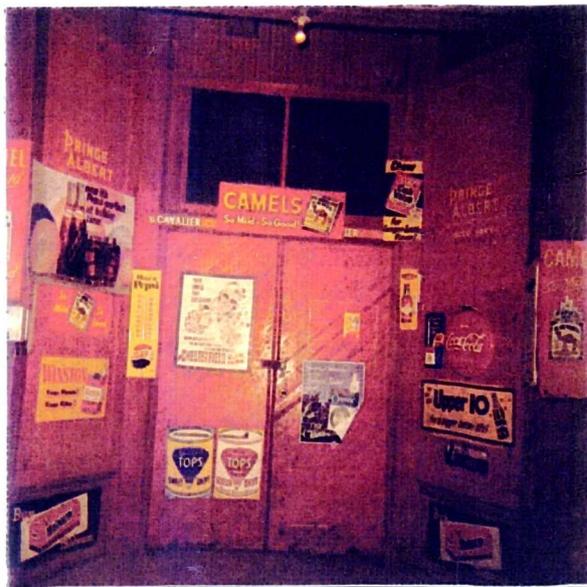


Figure 3.1 William Christenberry, *Store Front, Stewart, 1962*

In Figure 3.1 we see the store front in the year of 1962 and in Figure 3.2 we see it again in 1988. Apart from the obvious overgrown, vacant disarray, weathered colour and graffiti in Figure 3.2, what these two photographs illustrate is the ability of the photograph to hold a contradiction of time and space in order for there to be a narrative implied. The photographs' narratives are based on the same ability of the observer to reach back into the past and retrieve this instant of

synchronic time and bring it forward to the present. What we extract from this intervention is the denotational meaning of the content. Therefore the photographs offer the same type of event even though the story (connotation) may vary based on the time exposure - either 1962 or 1988. To dismiss the store front photograph as a connotatively present retrieved from the past is undeniable.



Figure 3. 2 William Christenberry, *Store Front, Stewart, 1988*

The past I am referring to is the historical time of the photograph, rather than an actual lived time. Even though the content of the photograph is always a historical past, the point I want to make here is that the optical chemical mechanics of the medium are continually creating instant modules of narratives. This representation is continually being regenerated against one time (historical) and another (lived) to give the photograph its narrative continuity. [Edmund Husserl

refers to this concept in his discussion of 'Brentano's Theory of the Origin of Time'. Husserl states; "It is therefore a universal law that a continuous series of representations is fastened by nature to every given representation. Each representation belonging to this series reproduces the content of the one preceding, but in such a way that it always affixes the moment of the past to the new representation".<sup>4</sup> As I briefly outlined this concept in Chapter 1, I am now going to expand it further in conjunction with our current discussion of Bergson's *durée*.

The content of the photograph will always remain to some degree beyond the observer's apprehension, for no one viewer will have direct access and knowledge of all the details in the photograph. These details include: the exact time and place it was taken; the intention or determination for taking the photograph - let's call this its 'cause'; and finally, the purpose for its "true" final expression. (This is certainly applicable in Christenberry's two previously discussed photographs.) What these three observations point to is that there is a process of interpretation and intervention involved in looking at any photograph. Alongside these three observations are: the speculation and historical precedents which control the potential readability or specific meaning of the photograph in question. This principle provides a further framework whereby the readability or meaning (in this case narrative) can be extracted from the composition. Some of the more obvious photographs that fall conveniently into these observations are: family photographs (snapshots or vacations), a formalised portrait in the studio, the still life, postcards, or advertising. These and the many more genre specific photographs, art, social documentary or journalism, will have direct connotative references. Whereas the photographs taken of a store front in *Stewart* in 1962 and 1988 are initially open and have no immediate specific narrative (unless we considered the contradiction between the date as one possible narrative), thereby

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Time (1893-1917)*. John Barnett Brough (trans.) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990: 12.

providing a framework in which to structure a narrative based on the intentionality of the photographer.

A moment of speculation will clarify my point. In a given situation in which not all denotative information is present and the connotative references are not immediately understandable, a photograph will seem to be empty of narrative. Such a photograph will continually exist as an historical fragment rather than a fully articulated document. This is the case with Figure 3.1. The reading of the photograph, as Roland Barthes states, “operates as an overlapping of two systems of signification, an order of symbols invested with socially structured, culturally relevant connotations; and an “objective” order of purely denotative meaning on the basis of which symbolic order functions.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore without the “overlapping” of the two forms of time (historical denotations and lived connotations) the narrative relevance of the photograph is primarily left as an figment of the past. I would even argue that with all of the specific context (connotative) and content (denotative) references overlapping, the photograph continues to express overlapping descriptions.<sup>6</sup> This reiterates my position that the store fronts of Stewart remain a description of the past, in which it continually renews its metaphoric narrative currency through Bergson's concept of *la durée* - the past rolling into the present. This is certainly more evident when the two photographs are seen together, rather than separately. Therefore Figure 3.1 and 3.2 must remain seen as a past in order for it to have a present, and by having a past and present we have the beginnings and future of a temporal structure. The photograph never really changes. Its duration is

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes. "The Photographic Message" in *The Responsibility of Forms*. Richard Howard (trans.), New York: Hill and Wang, 1985: 19.

<sup>6</sup> My use of the term description is a very specific one. See Chapter Two for a detailed account of the term description as composition. This issue of the photograph being composed and framed in a specific way by the photographer isolates certain features of the act of photography. It also gives the photograph the quality of a description or of intentionally describing something. It is the determination to compose a 'particular' rather than a 'general' rendering which places the photographer in the act of describing. Therefore enacting this role the photographer is generating compositions of time and space - *durée*.

this continual state of the past needing to rekindle itself into the present, which is identical to how Bergson defines consciousness.

Bergson's consideration of the consciousbeing is to illustrate that "to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."<sup>7</sup> Although Figure 3.1 and 3.2 must change in the conceptual consciousness of the observer in order for the photograph to have duration, and to be a narrative, the progression of change is not simply reconfiguring the past into the present. The suggestion here is that both *Store Front's* need an intervening agent in which to effect this change. This points to the consideration that we, as agents of change, are continually recreating the photographs narrative. So that Figure 3.1 is continually preserved as a single instant of the past and a present recollection. And in order for there to be a change in the photograph, for there to be a re-narrativization, this single instant must be brought into the changing present. This is simply achieved by juxtaposing Figure 3.1 with Figure 3.2. What we do as agents of change is in effect a form of causation which alters the perception of the past, this being the store front, into it being an existing present - even though they are caption dated. Although this past can only 'find' a narrative through the agency of the observer, the conceptual duration we bring never allows us to live a single moment over, because we are in a continual progression of self-evolution. This is where the contradictory nature of the photograph is to be found.

We can look at and through the causation of change at Figure 3.1 and 3.2 reliving its past. This is to say, we can continually live over their one and only instant; the instant contained in the framed composition. This continual renewal becomes the central feature of the narrative as it represents the concept of *the past moving into the present*. This occurrence or reoccurrence is the basis on which the causal relationship of looking at photographs generates the narrative. Photographs

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 10

are durationless until the moment of conscious and determinate intervention by an observer who activates duration; both store front photographs therefore tap into this conceptualisation in order for the single instant of historical time to present itself as a past moving into the present, thereby instilling a sense of conceptual movement in the form of a metaphoric narrative.

The connection between Figure 3.1 and 3.2 is the single instant of time. They present a store front as an expression of absent individuals. Here we find that the photograph is not so much a nostalgic medium but actually represents for the individual the ability of revisiting time as an entry in a travel log, a composition which is written after the fact of seeing the original composition. We then come to read the evolving road of lived time. Therefore, whether or not the content and context have any private relevance for the individual, the photographs represent the possibility of describing a past instance of time. Not universal time, but the lived time of witnessing a composition of the past, then documenting it, then returning twenty-six years later to relive this instant again.

This observation creates a further question in which, we need to ask how this ability to see and perhaps travel back in time is possible, and whether or not the implications of this question are relevant to our present discussion of the photograph as having a narrative. The first part of this question can be conveniently addressed by analysing the methodology of the photographic medium. This will also offer a preliminary answer to the second concern, as well as offer an opportunity to pin-point the genesis of travelling back into the past.

The single instant 'past' is accomplished at the moment when the exposure of light-reflected patterns, or photons, are registered on the film plane. This event is the making of an exposure, that is: the depressing of a shutter release button which causes the shutter curtain to open and close in fractions of a second. We can think of this as a curtain on a window in which the duration necessary to open and close it simultaneously effects our comprehending the composition through the

window, which is thus imprinted into a single instant memory. This window can be further compared to the opening and closing of the eyelid which allows the light-reflected impression of the environment to be registered on the cones and rods of the retina forming a reverse pattern of stimulus - an inverted picture signal of light.<sup>8</sup> The creation of a photograph is identical. The light reflected off the thing, which exists in front of the lens, is not only recorded but inverted on the light-sensitive base of the film - the emulsion. The film exists behind the shutter curtain and frame - this combination creates the rectilinear composition of information on the negative. (I am referring here to the thirty-five millimetre format camera, but ultimately all various format systems operate with the same mechanics of recording patterns of light onto a two-dimensional film plane. The only difference is the size and shape of the finished negative.) This composed moment, the finished photograph, will become a recorded composition because of its continuation of lived time is compartmentalised into fractions of a single, rather than a multiple, instant. This stilled time becomes observed as a visual image in which the perpetual duration of time is recorded and halted simultaneously. Although this composition is seemingly a still, its potential for progression is not eliminated. It resonates with static time and present continuation. This is why Christenberry's *Store Fronts* can be effectively brought into the present. As Bergson suggests "the present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause."<sup>9</sup> What we actually look at in both photographs, is, then, the intentional cause of halting duration in its temporal direction which is translated into the photographic effect of stilling time into a framed composition. Effectively, we are looking at the past through a form of conceptual "reverse causation" which

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<sup>8</sup> This action of opening and closing the eye in order to capture a registration of an event or composition is what Jacques-Henri Lartigue tried to achieve as a child when his camera was broken one summer. This aspect of capturing a photo-quality imprint, what he called his "eye-trap", will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 17.

allows the individual the ability to imagine he or she is visually travelling back in time to 1962 and 1988 respectively.

This concept of backward causation can be described through an extensive quotation from D.H. Mellor's *Real Time*. My intention here is to define the conditions for the possibility of travelling backward in time. In Chapter Nine, "The Direction of Time", Mellor uses a literary theory in order to offer the position that backwards time travel or reverse causation is possible in fiction. And seeing that I am considering the photograph, as a literary realism in which narrativity exists, then this fictional technique has an applicable position.

Imagine I am travelling backward in time, which is conceivable if backwards causation is, since all it means is that all causal processes inside me run backward, i.e. every effect within my body comes before its causes instead of after them. In particular, therefore, my perceptual processes will run backward. Suppose then that while travelling I see E precede E\*, which implies on my account that my seeing E affects my seeing E\*, but not *vice versa*. But if my seeing E\* is an effect of my seeing E, it follows here that it occurs earlier, not later. That is, I actually see E\* before I see E, despite my directly seeing those events to occur the other way round. In short, when travelling backward in time, the temporal order in which I perceive events differs from the order in which I thereby perceive them to occur.<sup>10</sup>

My interest in this passage is Mellor's reworking of "causation" and its relevance to the perception of time in a textual form. If we replace the traditional text with the photograph, we can see there is a interventional connection that affects the reading of what we are really looking at in the photograph.

In the standard consideration of cause and effect, E precedes E\*. When the photograph is taken, we can call the action of taking the photograph E\*, which is the perception of the photographer wanting to record a previously seen composition. The effect of intentional determination (cause) for this action, we can call E. This composition has now passed and must be retrieved in order for it to be photographed. This determination is an event in its physical sense and illustrates the

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<sup>10</sup> D.H Mellor. *Real Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981: 153.

securing of a past as an effect. So when I return to look at **E**, this being the photographed composition of the now past previous composition, the preceding **E\*** is the photograph which will become the descriptive material (effect) we come to read when considering the temporal progression that has passed. But if I see a photograph prior to knowing the cause of the effect, what has in fact happened is that I am looking at the material description (effect) prior to knowing the intentional determination (cause). Hence to know **E\*** before **E** is an instance of backward causation - albeit an instantaneous one. I am aware that the cause is implicitly contained in the photograph, but this implicitly does not negate the experience of travelling backward in time through the description of the now past single instant recorded in the photograph. An illustration to this experience is seeing a postcard, Figure 3.3.

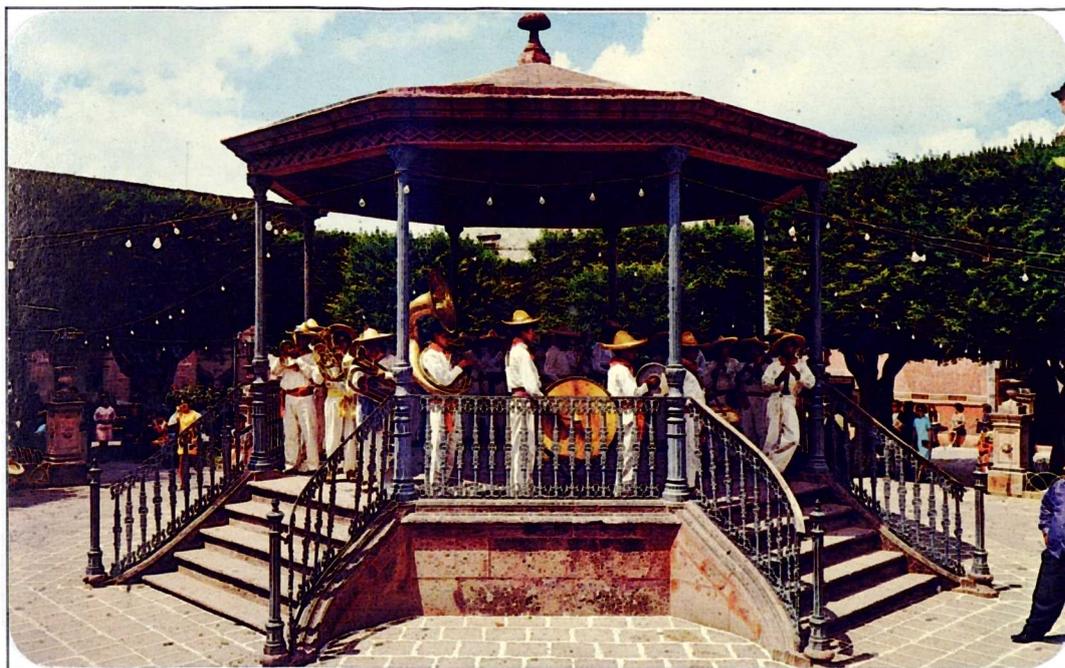


Figure 3.3

*Main Square, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico [n.d.]*

Having no access or prior experiencing of the actual content of this postcard, what happens is that when I receive this postcard, and not knowing its photographic cause, its **E**, I am essentially seeing the senders effect (material

description) of a past instance of time  $E^*$ . If the opportunity should arise that I come to experience the  $E^*$  content on the postcard, at some later date, what happens is that I am now looking at  $E\leftarrow$  rather than the  $E^*$ . Since to look at the  $E^*$  before the  $E\leftarrow$  is a reverse form of time travel, my experience of  $E\leftarrow$ , the actual thing, will be altered by my previous perception with the postcard  $E^*$ . This may account for the feeling of discontinuity, we experience when looking at the actual thing, now  $E\leftarrow$ , after looking at it in some other form, i.e. photographically described on a postcard.

Borrowing from Husserl's *The Continua of the Running-Off Phenomena* we can redesignate the ordinates of his original diagram on the illustration of musical notes to illustrate the discussion of reverse causation.<sup>11</sup> (See Diagram 3.A)

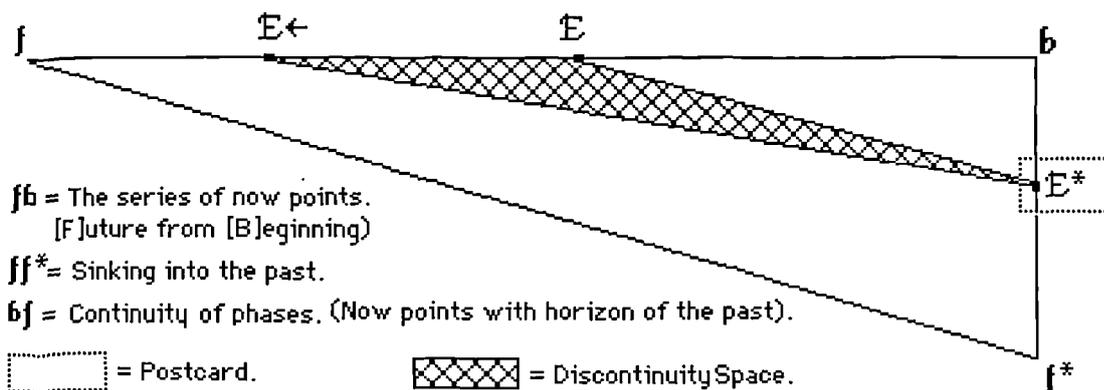


Diagram 3.A

This is not the only form of reverse causation that exists in photography. The act of taking a photograph, can be considered as a form of moving backward in time.

How is this achieved? The answer lies in the following scenario in which the lived time order of events has been reversed from the traditional direction of linear

<sup>11</sup> In Edmund Husserl's diagram of time the ordinates are  $AE$  which would replace  $FB$ ,  $AA'$  would replace  $FF^*$ , and  $EA''$  would replace  $BF^*$ . These ordinate symbols are merely indicative of the designations I have retained in my diagrams. Also the consideration of  $e$  to  $e^*$  would be replaced with  $P$  and  $P'$ . For a complete illustration of Husserl's diagram of time see Husserl, Edmund *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Time (1893-1917)*. John Barnett Brough (trans.) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990: 29.

movement which follows the direction of causation. Travelling back in time is achieved through the moment at which I determine or perceive a thing prior to photographing it: let us call this cause **Z**. Once intentional determination, the controlling factor of composing **Z**, has concluded that there is a real necessity to photograph this thing **Z**, this produces the effect (event), the act of taking a photograph of **Z**: let us call this **Z\***. My photograph of the now past thing is rendered in a single instant of time: let us call this **Z-**. This occurs even though the linear progression of lived time has continued and therefore the impression of time progressing is implicit. What effectively has to happen is that I must retrace the content of the photograph in the now past memory of **Z**, hence I am moving backward instantaneously, wanting **Z** to exist again prior to **Z\***. Consequently the photograph I make will be a trace of this momentary instant of moving backward in time. We can call this trace the photograph **Z-**; which is the effect of the cause **Z\***. The logical reading of **Z-** before **Z** is suggesting then the photograph is a single instant description of lived time in reverse order. Figure 3.3 is then, an ideal example of this form of trace rendering.

As earlier mentioned, the act of making a photograph the **Z\*** is wanting to see the thing **Z** occurring again as **Z-**. This determination of recording a temporal description creates the need to secure a **Z-** photograph or trace impression of the thing perceived initially. At the very moment of taking the photograph a 'marker', a subject or person, thing or monument, must be placed in order to mark the original spot **Z**, so that, when the photograph is completed the ability to retrace its now past **Z** occurs implicitly in **Z\***. Therefore, I place a marker in order to retrace my intentions to remember the initial **Z** found in the photograph. Because I have placed a marker, the real thing, in what is to be its original position, I read the photograph **Z-** as a real depiction of the real thing. This looking at **Z-** through my recollection of **Z** creates the experience of a momentary loss of directional time. I have therefore travelled back to the moment of photographing the real thing. The retracing of the

real thing through the finished photograph thus reinforces the notion that reading a photograph is not to be considered a forward temporal progression but actually a reverse causation of reading a material description (effect) for its intentional determination (cause).

If we take a photograph, Figure 3.4, we can effectively see how this material description of *a snail in the grass* works as a 'real' description of *as snail in the grass*.



Figure 3.4

Ken Giles, *A Snail in the Grass, 1996*

By reading Figure 3.4 as a *real snail* through the *photographed snail*, which has now long passed (or maybe not, seeing that it is a snail), the conditions for a transgressive movement exist. (See Diagram 3.B)

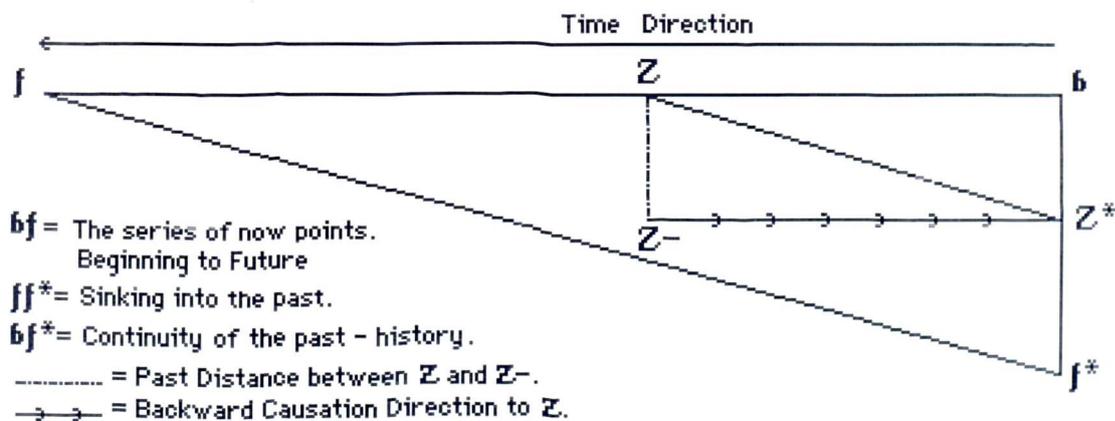


Diagram 3.B

This reverse order accounts for the snail photograph being read as a historical trace which accounts for its fascination as a traced marker of the real encountered with the snail. This discussion can be plotted on a further diagram which clearly defines the reading of the real snail through the snail photograph.

To clarify this claim, and to consider the photograph's, Figure 3.4, wider narrative possibilities, we can imagine that I have been sent this photograph. In this scenario, I have no recourse but to look at the *photographed snail* and to imagine the *intentionality to photograph this snail* which then establishes the actuality of there having to be, at some moment in the past, a *real snail*. The speculations I come to are generated from the photographically described content. No matter how much I want to deny the effect of looking at the snail as an optical trace, the photograph is such that it inherently generates the opportunity to consider the effect before the cause. It is undeniable then that we are continually looking at the effect rather than the cause. The same is true with the postcard of San Miguel de Allende on page 131. When I imagine a *real snail Z* through the *snail photograph Z-* (which is a discontinuity of the temporal order of events), this duration I am now experiencing is the narrative duration behind the photograph of *a snail in the grass Z\**. The *real snail Z* has been photographed to become a *snail Z<* and somewhere in the future the real snail is inconsequential to the *photograph of the snail*. What is immediately important is that I am looking at *the snail photograph Z-*. So once I look at the *photograph of the snail*, now in the far future from when it was taken  $Z^{-2}$ , again, I must retreat through the *snail photograph Z-* in order to narrativize the story of a

*snail in the grass*  $Z^*$ . What this accomplishes is a way to envision why a *photograph of a snail* will act as a memory for a [the] *real snail*  $Z$ .

This complex inscribing creates the necessary residual memories of my own past of real snails. This reverse narrativity of the photograph is where we retrace the intentional determination of coming upon *the snail* and wanting to *photograph the snail* even though it only happens in fractions of a second - a narrative duration has been retraced through *the snail photograph*. Therefore to move forward in time when reading the photograph, *a snail in the grass*, is actually to reverse lived time through the reverse reading of effect before cause.

The following diagram illustrates the above discussion of receiving and reading a photograph. (See Diagram 3.C)

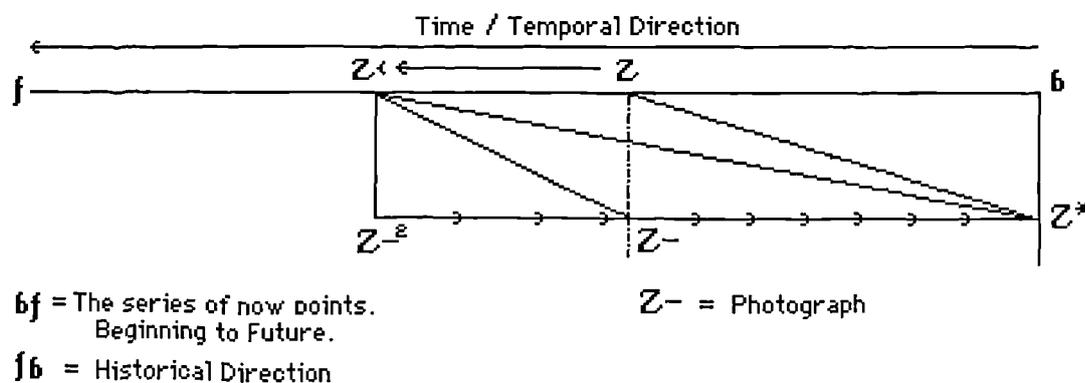
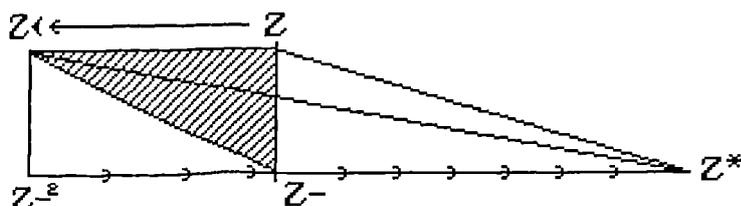


Diagram 3.C.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> We can see from the sizes of the shadowed area taken from diagram 3.C that a displacement is produced when looking at a photograph. The increasing shaded area illustrates the increasing history felt when looking at photographs as a temporal narrative.



The shaded area represents the increasing durational space between the original thing photographed  $Z$  and its continuation on a temporal progression.

As I pointed out earlier, the mechanics of the photographic medium continually records traces in reverse narrativity. So that when we look at the photograph we immediately transcend our lived time for its historical time. Consequently, all photographs are intentional determined events generated from a reverse causal act of composing things in lived time as material descriptions.

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An alternative approach to this reversal of *time* or historical temporality can be considered through the observations made by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*. Historical time is one of the central themes in Volume Three, which demonstrates that history (past time) is the space between the concepts of lived time and universal time. This space is where the production of meaning overlaps to address a split between our knowledge of the two times.<sup>13</sup> Therefore historical time is similar if not identical to the stilling of time in a photographic composition; both are conceptual durational temporalities. What is important about this concept of a historical time and its relationship to the reading of the photograph is that it integrates our lived time with the photographs material description of a universal time to create a scene of a still instant of lived time. In other words, through the photograph we come to understand the content as marking a certain point in a given cycle of time. Therefore we can suggest that the

reconfiguration of time [and] its invention and use of certain reflective instruments such as the calendar; the idea of succession of generations -- and, connected to this, the idea of the threefold realm of contemporaries, predecessors, and successors; finally, and above all, in its recourse to achieve documents and traces.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88: 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*: (3) 104.

Since reflective instruments, as Ricoeur states, “contribute to the reconfiguration of historical time,”<sup>15</sup> it is the idea of the calendar and trace which has a direct compatibility with the photograph’s ability to be read as a narrative in a single instant.

I want to first consider Ricoeur's definition of the “trace”, then move to discuss briefly the implications of considering the photograph as a calendar - in its metaphorical context.

Ricoeur's key discussion of the “trace” spans four pages; for this reason I have isolated the key statements that are relevant to the forthcoming discussion.

This also offers a systematic structure in which to approach the discussion.

Ricoeur's main considerations of the trace are thus:

...The trace invites us to pursue it, to follow it back, if possible, to the person or animal who passed this way. We may lose the trail. It may even disappear or lead nowhere. The trace can be wiped out, for it is fragile and needs to be preserved intact; otherwise, the passage did not occur but it did not leave a trace, it simply happened...Hence the trace indicates “here” (in space) and “now” (in the present), the past passage of living beings.[3:120]

...The trace is a phenomenon not so much historical as it moves toward the intra-temporal, that which is *within-time*.. [3:122]

...The trace illustrates the inverted form of the exchange between the two figures of time, that of a mutual contamination. [As well as the] “three major features of “within-time-ness”: datability, the lapse of time, and its public character. The trace consists in this overlapping. [3:123-4]

...to follow a trace is a way of “reckoning with time.”[3:124]

...The significance of the trace has to be reconstituted in terms of successive time... the trace, as visible to everyone, even if it can only be deciphered by a few, projects our preoccupation, as illustrated by our hunt, search, or inquiry, into public time, which makes our private duration commensurate with one another. [3:124]

...Essentially,...a trace is distinguished from all the signs that get organized into systems, because it disarranges some “order.” The trace is this disarrangement expressing itself. The trace left by a wild animal disarranges the vegetation of the forest:.. [3: 125]

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid: (3) 104.

The trace is thus one of the more enigmatic instruments by means of which historical narrative “refigures” time. It refigures time by constructing the junction brought about by the overlapping of the existential and the empirical in the significance of the trace.[3:125]<sup>16</sup>

In these quotations we can immediately observe the obvious comparisons that can be made with the photograph. It is advantageous, therefore, to take each statement separately, and to do so with a photograph will make the forthcoming comparisons about the trace most effective to our current discussion. The photograph I will be utilising is that that of Thomas Eakin and Jess Godley, simply entitled *Chronophotograph*, 1884, Figure 3.5.

(To clarify, I want to validate my claim that the photograph is a trace by, what I see as, the connection between light impressing or “tracing” itself on a light-sensitive surface. The historical precedent points to Henry Fox-Talbot who was determined to develop a type of “photogenic drawing”. His intentions led to a process whereby the light patterns reflected off the thing would record themselves without the intervention of the hand of man. Fox-Talbot's allusion to drawing, albeit without the use of the hand, has direct implications for the action of tracing or inscribing a mark on the paper. This process of tracing is still used today in the contemporary practice of photography - create a negative trace (impression) first then a positive impression is made off the negative figment. In “A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art”, Fox-Talbot outlines the mechanical and technical creation for this process, conceived as an art form:

Now Light, where it exists, can exert an action, and, in certain circumstances, does exert sufficient to cause changes in the material bodies. Suppose, then such an action could be exerted on the paper: and suppose the paper could be visibly changed by it. In that case surely some effect must result having a general resemblance to the cause which produced it: so that the variegated scene of light and shade might leave its image or impression

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid: (3) 122 -126.

behind, stronger or weaker on different parts of the paper according to the strength or weakness of the light which had acted there.<sup>17</sup>

The quotation illustrates Fox-Talbot's determination and intentionality for the creation and production of an impression of light on a paper surface. This impressed description therefore can be simply defined as a trace of light. And for the purposes of the remaining discussion this material image can be considered as a trace.)

"The trace invites us to pursue it" and when we consider the photograph as this trace which we must pursue, the narrative of the photograph becomes the elusive feature that must be explored. As I have stated earlier in this chapter, the photograph holds a reverse causal composition and historical time description - a trace; this also would account for the need to "to follow it back, if possible, to the person or animal who passed this way".

In Figure 3.5 we are seeing a male body, in multiple exposures, passing an axial line. This composition is an obvious visual illustration of these two opening statements of Ricoeur. As we pursue the narrative reading of the chronophotograph further, its elusive meaning and purpose for production act to identify itself as being an experiment in tracing the body through lived time. Not only do we follow the body across the inner space of the frame and see the multi-impressions of the body, caused by the use of the Marey-wheel camera. We also see that the trail can be lost, "it can disappear or lead nowhere".

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<sup>17</sup> William Henry Fox-Talbot. "A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art" in *Classic Essays on Photography*. Alan Trachtenberg (ed.) New Haven, Connecticut: Leete's Island Books, 1980: 29.

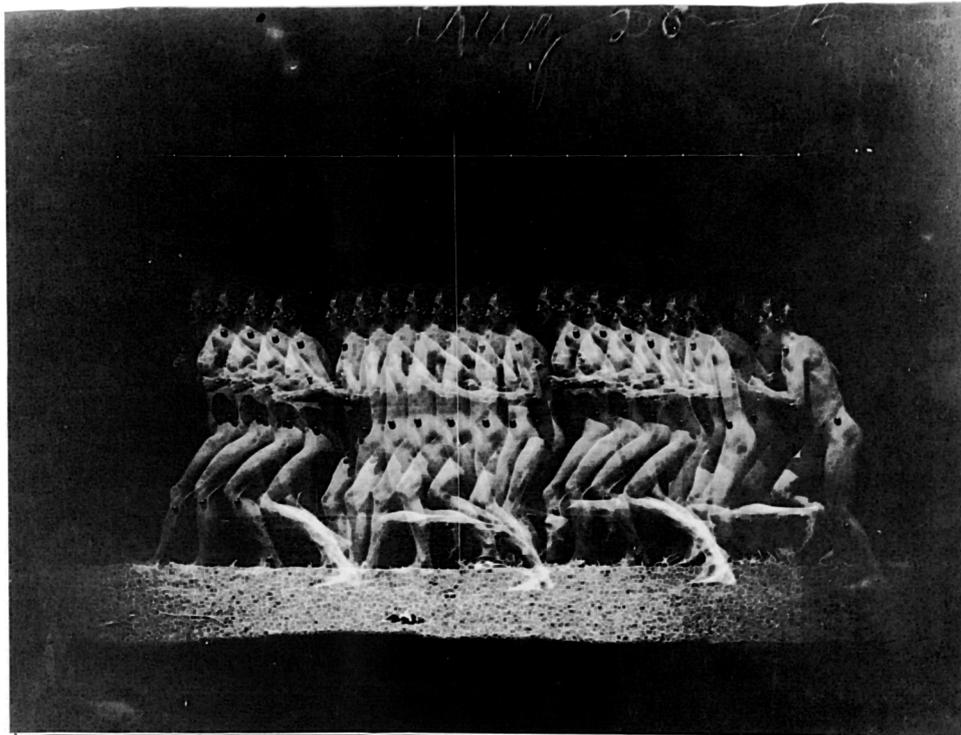


Figure 3.5

*Chronophotograph, 1884*

By referring to the trail being lost or “wiped out”, we acknowledge that the physical characteristics of the photographic medium, its reproduction of the content from the negative to a positive image, is not permanent. The content can be lost, altered, or removed “for it is fragile and needs to be preserved intact”<sup>18</sup>. And without the content (or photograph) kept intact, the passage of the body, its traces across the frame, “did not occur but it did not leave a trace, it simply happened”. This last statement accounts for the referential quality of the photograph to be taken as an actual recorded trace of the thing being there in front of the camera. Not surprising then, that this actual referential position accounts for the historical and “universal” understanding of the photograph being seen as a form of visual evidence.<sup>19</sup> Therefore without the preservation of the content in Figure 3.5 it

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88: 95-96.

<sup>19</sup> An extensive consideration at the evidence quality of the photograph can be found in the work of John Tagg *The Burden of Representation*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988. For briefer accounts see Rudolf Arnheim “The Two Authenticities of the Photographic Media” In *JAAC* 51:4 (1993): 537-540, and Andy Grundberg. “Ask It No Questions: The Camera Can Lie” In *The New York Times*, Aug.12, 1990, Arts and Leisure, 1, 29.

would have simply happened and we would have no trace of the event. However through the trace of the happening the “here” and “now” of the composition can be seen to produce a narrative of the event.

It is the phenomenon of the trace which finds itself “within-time”. We can observe this in chronophotography through the repetitively registered impressions of the male body running across the frame. These multiple figments indicate that the idea of the trace is finding itself in the viewer’s concept of “within time”. In other words, in the time it took to open and close the shutter, the man ran a given distance “within time”. This visual technique of the chronophotographs was accomplished by the slatted openings of the Marey-wheel passing the open shutter camera at a given rate of speed. Subsequently creating, what we come to read as the now points (tracings) of a temporal progression. The print therefore documents the mechanically imposed sense of lived time as it materially describes the movement of the body in a universal time. By simultaneously recording the running man in a moving narrative module the visual impression of a beginning to end duration is achieved. These traces become interpreted as recording movement.

As a given slit passes the lens, this cause allows the momentary trace effect to be recorded, and on each subsequent passing the slit causes another trace effect. The understanding of photograph can be interpreted as a visual composition of a length of lived time and the direction of “the past passage of [a] living being”.

Also the chronophotograph depicts and satisfies the inverted form of exchange between two figures of time; (the) lived time and (the) universal time. This is accomplished by the reading of the successive traces as a linear plane of movement - typically considered as Time. The only reason for this reading is that the single disk Marey-wheel camera only allows successive but consecutive impressions to be recorded. The visual trace of the male body is caught in a strobing progression of duration which describes the conceptual link between the two times and their dependence of another. The narrative reading is accomplished

through our understanding that the body represents moments of the lived time which subsequently manifests itself into the photograph of lived time moving in a single instant - this is known as universal time. Therefore through a process of verisimilitude the traced movement of lived time, the individual now points - traces, are connected to form a visual description of Bergson's *durée* metaphor.

As information the chronophotograph acts as a trace which records the following: a visual length of an instant of time; the registering of a possible duration of time, which can be expressed as the body recorded in Figure 3.5 frozen throughout a framed space; it is, also a record of the past passage of a living being; and finally, a document of a moving image within the photographic medium. Therefore Figure 3.5 contains the necessary characteristics which makes the overall understanding of the photograph as a trace, for it "actually" works on the level of integrating all of these preceding features which occurred in the past, and then the "here and now". This knowledge helps us retrace the movement of the body in the frame and help us understand the contradiction of the photograph.

If we look closer, the contradiction of the body beginning [from] nowhere and ending [in] nowhere is certainly acceptable. (This is obviously caused by the slow and inconsistent emulsion used in the photographic plate and the inconsistency of the wheels centrifugal movement.) This contradiction can be used to further illustrate a characteristic of the photograph, namely its ability to occur and not leave a trace. In other words, by taking a photograph we do not leave a mark on the thing, nothing will be disarranged or altered. The order that exists before our photograph will continue to exist but by making a photograph we only create a trace of an existing order.

"To follow a trace is a way of reckoning time"<sup>20</sup>, and when we follow this body its traced progression offers us the opportunity to visually reckon the potential

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88: 95-96.

direction of time as linear. The significance of this universalism is that it does reconstitute the successiveness of time, and makes it visible to everyone. It illustrates the search involved in providing a visual example of movement, during the later part of the nineteenth-century, and also creating a photo-optic moving image - a prototype of cinema. This photograph actually illustrates the traces in which lived time can be mechanically recorded. It also demonstrates how an understanding and knowledge of duration can be linked with each other. In other words, this visual articulation of movement can be seen as a way to take duration and recreate it into a still of temporal progression; this can be the defining characteristic of photography which has direct implications for film theory.

“Essentially... a trace disarranges some order:”<sup>21</sup> The chronophotograph encapsulates this disarrangement in the form of the fragmented registration of the body moving across the imposed frame space. The composition is an arrangement of marks, the male body, left on the film plane, a simple technique of creating multiple exposures during one long exposure. By inscribing the white line on the surface of the print, this axial line of registration effectively changes the body figments before and after this line. The traces of the man become the marks left behind as he ran through the “forest”. The photographic or forensic marks are evidence of where he was, where he is, and where he has been; the multiple exposures are the traces of his presence in a space. And in a patriarchal expression, the irony of this male body being naked as it runs through the frame could also be highly symbolic of the male desire to mark its territory by leaving its scent as marker of his presence and dominance. The dominance of its presence is the dual expression that can be extracted from Eakin's and Godley's experiment. Therefore reading this photograph as a story of temporal displacement and visualising of time,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: 95-96.

we come to understand the scientific rather than the aesthetic historicity of this type of chronophotography..

As Ricoeur points out,, the disarrangement which expresses itself is the trace which is left behind. Although this trace is characteristic of, and an apt analogy for, all photographs, I want to change the comparison slightly to define the qualities of the photographic event and subsequently what we ultimately come to understand the photograph to be. Rather than discuss the animal which disarranges the vegetation, either for food or comfort, let us change the term 'animal' to 'photographer', (perhaps the same being) who has intentional determination. He or she comes to rearrange the environment, either for aesthetic nourishment or intellectual comfort. [Although this comparison can work both for the actual physical disarrangement of the environment by removing elements that are not conducive to the overall aesthetic composition of the photograph, and the simple pointing of the camera and making an exposure as an rearrangement, I see the complete act of com(posing) the environment in the camera viewfinder as a rearrangement of the existing order.] The comparison of trace as a rearrangement of the environment seen through the geometrical space of the camera reflects the notion that the 'trace' is a disturbance of the pre-existing arrangement or order. Also this comparison will be a useful departure in the following section on disorder and order.

“The trace reconfigures time” and in this chronophotograph we see the reconfiguring of our conception of time understood as a linear direction. It also illustrates the empirical notion of the photographic medium being read as truthful especially in the nineteenth-century. How this is achieved? The empirical implication of this print can be defined as a way for the dominate industrial society or scientific community to understand movement in linear progression which would have a direct bearing on further scientific developments such as heavier than air

flight.<sup>22</sup> Photographic experiments of this type were seen as the “junction” point between which empirical science and philosophy can exist. In either way, the trace on the paper or Ricoeur's definitions of trace illustrates the main features of both. The photograph can be seen and read as a historical documents or philosophical inquiry. Therefore to address this concept of trace on a further level, it is necessary to explore the implications of this trace as an event in the overall narrative of the photograph. This event is neither an implicit or explicit temporality embedded in the photograph, the event is a condition of the mediums ability to record the thing in front of it - a trace recording. Again, Ricoeur points out, the trace is an “*historical time* [which] becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”<sup>23</sup>

As I have pointed out, the narrative progression of the photograph as trace is one of reverse causation. Thus any discussion of narrative would have to account for this quality of time reversal and historical travel. This is not to say that the narrative is generated from a negative progression; what it simply illustrates is the validity of the concept of the photograph always being approached as an event of *in medias res* narrativity. As we enter into the event unfolding in the photograph the immediate reaction is the present, and once the present has been defined, the implicit character of reverse causation immediately sends us back in time; and in order to control this historical time, we must struggle to find its past “here” and “now”. To restate, we must retrace its disarrangement, tracking backwards in order to retrieve its eventual meaning. And to understand this historical event is to

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion on the implication of these scientific / photographic experiments see Marta Braun *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830 - 1904)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur *Time and Narrative*. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88: 52.

retrace its past intact back to that future which really is our present before entering the content or still narrative of the photograph.

Before expanding on this discussion, I briefly want to explore the implications of Eakin's & Godley's photograph being a depiction of a metaphoric calendar - one which is not documenting a year, month, day, hour or minute but an eighth-of-a-second. Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the calendar opens with the statement that

The time of the calendar is the first bridge constructed by historical practice between lived time and universal time. It is a creation that does not stem exclusively from either of these perspectives on time. Even though it may participate in one or the other of them, its institution constitutes the invention of a third form of time.<sup>24</sup>

If we are to consider the photograph, Figure 3.5, (see page 141) as a metaphoric calendar, we must first ask how is it possible that this photograph, or any other photograph, can be seen as a bridge between lived time and universal time? This can be achieved when we accept that the content of the photograph - the male body caught in the successive traces of its progression - describes the mechanical linearity and direction of lived time. By accepting this fact, the composition will depict not only lived time as linear, but we can accept this photograph as an authentic attempt and evidence of a scientific experiment. In other words, the overlapping direction created by the mechanics of the camera and the nature of lived time is assumed to be illustrative of what linear time looks like if recorded by a still photographic process. Therefore the photograph becomes representative of this third time: depicting traces, its content, as existing in lived time but expressing universal time. This again is our contradiction at work. The photograph thus exists as this material description which both simultaneously expresses and rejects both forms of time. Ricoeur continues by defining the "three features common to every calendar.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid: (3) 105.

Together they constitute the computation of, or division into, chronicle time.”<sup>25</sup>

Chronicle time in this context is the combination of lived time and universal time discussed in the preceding pages. The simplest analogy of this sum of time is: we function in our own lived time, then at some moment we refer to the conception of universal time conceived on the face of a clock. At that moment we find that we have combined lived time and universal time in order to position that moment (the movement from lived time to universal time) in the context of chronicle time. At this moment I want to consider the characteristic of the calendar as an “axial moment [which] is the zero point for computing [or dividing] chronicle time.”

This suggests that the calendar is a variable line on which the determination, computation, division and consideration of universal time is continually being referred back to its lived time in order to define the moments of past, present and future. This can be simply illustrated by considering the vertical white line inscribed on the surface of Figure 3.5 as the moment in which chronicle time has begun. As it is almost centred in the print its position effectively allows us to mark and compute the divisions of passing chronicle time. Everything that is considered as past, present and future is inferred from this line. Once this determination has been made the resulting composition on either side of the line can be progressional traces forward or regressive traces backward from the moment of chronicle time. As we consider the traces to the left of this line as the future and the traces to the right of the line as the past, and the line as the present, this reading defines Ricoeur's concept of the bi-directionality of the calendar.

If we did not have an actual experience of retention and protention, we would not have the idea of traversing a series of events that have already occurred. What is more, if we did not have the idea of a quasi-present...we would not have the notion of a traversal in two directions, which Benveniste very aptly speaks of as “from the past toward the present or from the present toward the past”. There is no present, hence neither past nor future, in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid: (3) 106.

physical time as long as some instant is not determined as “now”, “today”, hence as present.<sup>26</sup>

What this quotation defines is that the presence of the line on the photographic surface acts as the reference point in which we locate the bi-directionality of the calendar. Although this is a speculation on my part, I feel that the inclusion of just one vertical line on the photograph suggests this consideration of a chronicle mark at which to define the present, past and future. I would further suggest that if this photographic document were one of “true” scientific inquiry, the inclusion of two lines would have to be inscribed; one at the beginning of the exposure, at the right hand side of the frame, and one at the end, at the left hand side of the frame. What these two lines would frame is the distance (space) in which the total number of traces could be counted in order for there to be accurate record of movement - albeit mechanically animated. These two lines would conclude then, that twenty traces of stilled movement would recreate (if simulated mechanically) motion that could be animated to illusionistically represent a naked man running through a forest. Although we can derive this information from the photograph without these lines the photograph does contain the ability to express the contradiction between lived and universal time. But as it exists in this context, even with the plotted points along the top, Figure 3.5 is a being used as a metaphoric calendar whose ultimate meaning is expressing what a visual picture of chronicle time would look like.<sup>27</sup>

In the present discussion, Ricoeur states that this quasi-present is undetermined, I am referring to it in as singular vertical line which can represent

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid: (3) 108.

<sup>27</sup> In another perspective this calendar comparison defines the type of narrative entry we have to the photograph. As I discussed in Chapter One, we enter into the photographic event in an *in medias res* presence rather than the Aristotelian model of beginning, middle and end. Therefore this mark (calendar) mimics the point at which we gain access to the narrative space. From this position we can travel back in time, to the beginning (lived time), and once there we travel forward into the future (universal time), by passing through what once was the present (chronicle time). Subsequently, we encounter this *in medias res* duration through a narrative space which spans three variations of time.

this variable indeterminacy. Since this line is the only present axis which controls the computation and dividing of the space of the photograph, my initial observations of the traces before and after the line will become reminiscent of the past (lived time) and future qualities of universal time. And the capacity of the photo-mechanical apparatus to record traces of single instances of time, particularly in the case of the Marey-wheel camera, ensures that chronicle time is afforded a visual articulation which presents itself as a linear progression. A further consideration is that, as we move the line, this quasi-presence, this sense of past and future, will be determined relatively to the axis position. Therefore what Eakin's & Godley's photograph illustrates is that the chronophotographic document not only records, in mechanically animated form, the linear temporality of chronicle time but visually traces the passing sense of a narrative event in which we have passed through lived time to get to universal time. And in the same passing instant of it being a metaphor for this journey, the calendar determination in reading the photograph from left to right is stated as a spatial proposition from which "tomorrow" and "now" to "yesterday" can be in a single instant of chronicle time.<sup>28</sup>

To illustrate many of the points discussed, a diagram of Eakin's and Godley's chrono-photograph can be drafted. This simplifies the suggestions made that the photograph is a bridge between lived and universal time. (See Diagram 3.D.)

Ultimately Ricoeur's main thesis is that narrative retains the dichotomies of time (lived and universal), and presents narrative as a mode of textual reconfiguring. This is central to the way in which the divisions between the "reality" of the historical past and the "unreality" of fictive narration illustrates that history [the trace and calendar among other configurations] makes use of fiction and fiction uses history as each refigures chronicle time.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid: (3) 107.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Muldoon. "Time, Self, and Meaning in the Works of Henri Bergson, Maurice

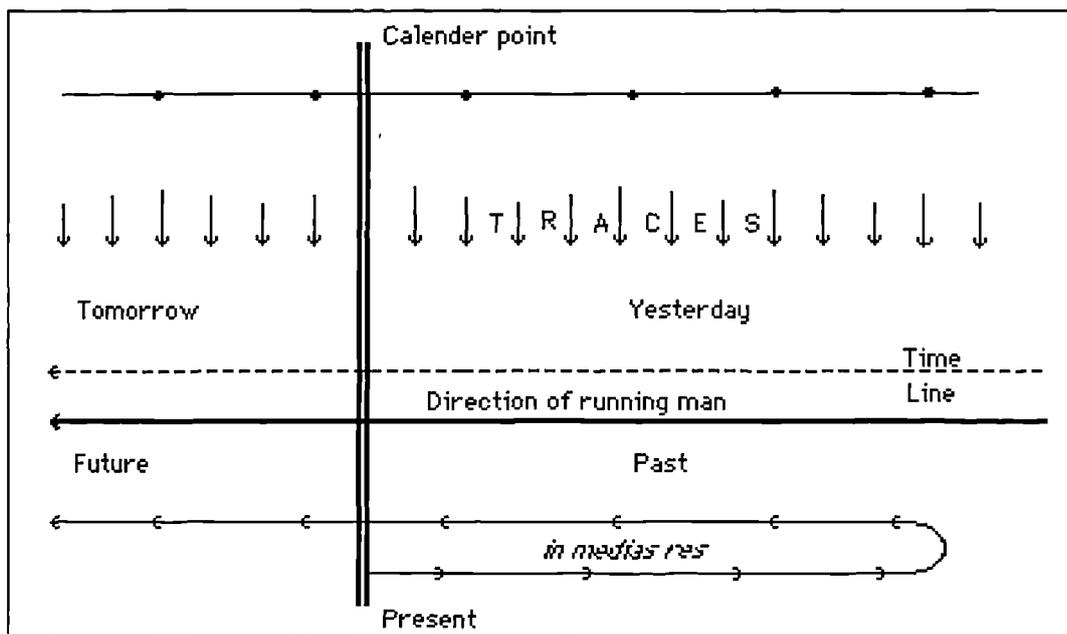


Diagram 3.D

By considering a trace and calendar to be a type of historical fragment, we can now assume it to have the same characteristics as a narrative. Bergson's opening statement with its emphasis on the passage of *the past into the present*, can now be implemented to illustrate the striking comparisons the trace or calendar and the photograph. It also provides an appropriate definition of what the photograph phenomenologically achieves. When I replace Ricoeur's chronicle or "physical time" with the term "the photograph", an illuminating definition emerges. This does not suggest that Ricoeur is explicitly discussing the narrativity of the photograph, but his discussion of the trace becomes a useful tool in my discussion.

[the photograph] is segmentable at will, it is a source of the idea of an instant in general, stripped of any meaning as the present moment. And as connected to movement and causality, it includes the idea of a direction in the relations of before and after, but pays no attention to the opposition between past and future. It is this directional aspect that allows an observer to regard [the photograph] in two directions. In this sense, the two-dimensional aspect of observing [the photograph] presupposes the single direction of the course of events.<sup>30</sup>

Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur" In *Philosophy Today*. 35 (Fall 1991): 255-268.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88: (3) 107.

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Extending this discussion, I want to ask how does the photograph achieve this status as trace in which chronology becomes reconsidered as historical time in which duration and narrativity are encoded automatically? This question can be addressed first by considering the isolating effects of the trace as a narrative characteristic involved in the act of looking at a photograph. On another level it illustrates what we discover to be the photograph's ability to give this seemingly instantaneous trace a sense of temporal continuity. Both use the identical traits of being seen as historical artefacts, with a perpetual exhibition of "one instant replacing another" to finally build up a picture or story of its chronicle time.<sup>31</sup>

I want to explore both of these characteristics further. Beginning with the production of the photograph, we can see that Bergson's observation about the object remaining the same is acceptable and the instant of change is relevant to the phenomenology of looking at the photograph. Even though we are comprehending the thing photographed through the determining framework of the camera, lens and shutter frame, these predetermined structures do not foreground the automatic narrativity of the photograph. What physically, rather than phenomenologically, happens in the mechanics of creating the photograph is that the imposed rectangular frame of the camera shutter window conditions and, as we look into it, highlights the difference between the two perceived instances. These two instances are: first, the continual duration of the composition seen prior to the intention to photograph it and; second, the "here" which is the causal intention of making the determined decision to photograph it - the "now". [The term "Now" is used here to represent the

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<sup>31</sup> Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 7.

intentional photographic act. It combines both the desire to record a thing and the mechanical action of the camera shutter as it is pressed by the photographer.] The first instance I see as a solely past mental state which reflects Bergson's conditions for being a conscious being. As I stated, the past (here) is continually gnawing its way into the present (now) and this process is a never ending [but enduring] conscious operation. This is simply stated as the here and now determination of the photographing act. This cerebral and physical action illustrates what effectively happens when, the instant I frame the thing into a composition and press the shutter, it becomes a latent trace of the past; the "here and now" past<sup>32</sup> has become an intentionally determined photograph. What I have done by making this photograph is to create a past "here and now" in a materialistic description (history). Thus my history (photograph) isolates and halts chronicle time in an instant in front of me. While I cannot see the "here and now" composition I saw prior to the framing of it until I have the finished photograph in front of me, making the exposure will always be the "now" which ceases to endure to become the future. Once I have accomplished this change, the recorded determination becomes both conceptualised as the instant, which has just "now" passed. My memory of the original "here" which really is "now" the photograph of the "here and now" has to become my memory of the original "here" previously past from

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<sup>32</sup> I am aware that this conjunctive term, "*now past*" is a contradiction in its intentional usage and that each term excludes one another. But in the context of our current discussion it provides a useful way of approaching the consciousness of time passing. Edmund Husserl, in his "The Preservation of the Objective Intention in the Retentional Modification", defines it thus:

The now as actually present now is the givenness of the present of the temporal position. When the phenomenon recedes into the past, the now receives the character of being a past now; but it remains the same now, except that it stands before me as past in relation to the current actual and temporal new now. Husserl, Edmund *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Time (1893-1917)*. John Barnett Brough (trans.) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990: 68.

Although Husserl has used the past now to shift it from first presence to secondary presence, I feel the more logical way to approach this event is to define it as "now" past; which in some sense makes more grammatical sense and also foregrounds the quality of linear progression I am currently investigating.

the “here and now”. Therefore the first instant prior to pressing the shutter has been wiped clean. Although I accept this failure of my memory to hold the authentic “here” in the present, I have been given the opportunity, through the “now” photograph, to recall it again. I can intervene in chronicle time and record moments of “here and now”. Even though it will not be identical, it will carry the acceptable visual realism of the “here and now past”.

What has happened is that because one instant of the past (here) has replaced another (now), the durational equation of past into present is not operational without conscious intervention on the material description. Therefore the photograph illustrates Bergson's statement about what would effectively happen if there were no duration: “there would be no duration but only instantaneity.”<sup>33</sup> Mechanically this is exactly what the camera and the photographic procedure achieve - instantaneity. It is this “here” past instant we look at when the negatives are translated back into a positive reproduction to form what we remember to be and see as the past “now” photographically. This is Bergson's central point in stating that “memory...conveys something of the past into the present.”<sup>34</sup> Although memory controls the past, the photograph controls the “here and now” past into the present more effectively - although this controlling factor is subjectively based. And with this operation built into the mechanics of the camera, the photograph is a secondary memory of historical here and now. Understandably then, this characteristic of the determination and intervention of the reading of the photograph addresses Husserl's main desire to have this quality of now and past nows illustrate:

The moment of the original temporal position is naturally nothing by itself; the individuation is nothing in addition to what has individuation. The whole now-point, the whole original impression, undergoes the modification of the past; and only by means of this modification have we exhausted the

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<sup>33</sup> Henri Bergson. *The Creative Mind: A Introduction in Metaphysics*. Mabelle L. Andison (trans.) New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946: 179.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid: 4

complete concept of the now, since it is a relative concept and refers to a “past,” just as “past” refers to the “now.”<sup>35</sup>

The deterministic capability of the photographer can be seen as a way of describing the effects of memory passing from what Husserl would define as a primary state to a secondary state. This movement reflects the durational progression in which the photograph can generate a narrative structure whereby moving from one state (primarily memory prior to photographing), to a present state (secondary memory evolving as the photograph). Whereupon, this set of connected states is conditioned by where we are, conceptually and relativistically, as we read the photograph. Therefore, the product of this operation, the photograph, carries the genetic code which gives the resulting offspring its readability and appearance of narrative. Bergson's metaphor of duration enables us to consider the enduring and recurring past in the present, and Husserl's observation of the now in which the relative conditions of past and future are embedded, enable us to define the photograph as a still state in which the perpetual and phenomenological changes are collapsing together to form necessary transitions to produce a narrative temporality out of a single instant of chronicle time. And this still but temporal narrative sets up the conditions which allow an event to be extracted from the photograph.

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This notion of the photograph as being an event offers a further perspective on its potential as a narrative. It not only immediately illustrates the mechanics of photography but also incorporates the quality of looking at the composition as an event - not only on the historical but on the phenomenological level as well. The defining characteristic of an event is that it occurs “when a change is brought about

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<sup>35</sup> Edmund Husserl. "The Preservation of the Objective Intention in the Retentional Modification" In his *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Time (1893-1917)*. John Barnett Brough (trans.) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990: 70.

by an agent.”<sup>36</sup> This change, in relation to the making of a photograph, can be considered when time is diachronically frozen by the recording of light reflective patterns in fractions of a second. So through event, fractions-of-a-second, we can conceptually consider the photograph as being a figment of a narrative. Since chronicle time has been instantly recorded, the reading of the photograph reactivates the synchronic implications of what we have discussed as Bergson's concept of 'perpetual presence'. Seeing that we are approaching the concept of narrative within the context of it being an event, its feature of change and necessity of an agent point to a more expanded viewpoint in which this event is considered as a communicational element. In *Narrative as Communication*, Didier Coste points out that:

An event is something that comes to be, that is extracted from a continuous background - time as linear - thus creating discontinuity in time because the something has no existence before or after. Nothing can be perceived [meant] as an event unless it is the site of a change of sign... As present, as a point in time, an event has an oxymoron structure:...The narrative utterance that signifies an event is the device by which we make time responsible for the contradiction; actually, time is the name we give to the inferred cause of all contradictions of this sort.<sup>37</sup>

This event (the photographic instant or the making of a photograph) exists and is extracted instantly from our consideration of time as a linear progression.

Bergson, on the other hand, strongly rejects this position and wants to present inner (lived) time not as this straightforward progression or durational movement:

something which “advances on the road”. Coste alternately suggests that time is linear, and that 'event' has no existence before or after without the effects of contradiction. Even though Bergson uses the analogy of the road, which would seem to suggest a leading direction, Bergson's concept is far from linear. Time, for Bergson, is an occurring evolution in an enduring state of fragmentation, then

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<sup>36</sup> Gerald Prince. *Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987: 28.

<sup>37</sup> Didier Coste *Narrative as Communication*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: 18.

creative renewal. “We perceive duration as a stream against which we cannot go.”<sup>38</sup> Although Bergson represents that duration as stream, what we must not lose sight of is that the surface appearance may be linear, but the internal matrix of this duration, time itself, whether it be road or stream, contains opposing currents in which the linear flows can be seen as an event occurring in durational movement. The road and current of the stream may be conceptually linear, but the instant we stand on the road or enter the current, our position in the flow of current determinately affects the seemingly linear continuity of time and causes an inverse current to be created. Therefore our intentionality to photograph in the synchronic flow has broken the linear continuity, creating an obstruction as well as an obstacle in the our perspective of the road. The flow of vision or duration has been broken. The simplest analogy is that with a flow of water in which a thing is causing an eddying effect around which the continuous flow must now negotiate. What is happening is that the continuous flow creates its own contradictory current; and a form of chaos emerging around and behind the thing. And rather than continuing on a linear progression, the current is sent into a contradictory progression. An illustration of this durational contradiction is that of Etienne-Jules Marey's 'Studies of air flow movement' 1901, Figure 3.6. These photographic studies were undertaken at the request of the American Samuel Pierpont Langley, who was the secretary of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington between 1887-1902. Without going into a detailed historical account of these studies, which has been succinctly accomplished by Marta Braun in her *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey*, I am interested in these studies because they illustrate the contradictory cause and effect of a thing entering into a flow of linear progression. Langley initiated these studies for he required some visual illustrations of the effects of air flow on wing formations.

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<sup>38</sup> Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 45.



Figure 3.6 Etienne-Jules Marey, '*Studies of air flow movement*' 1901

Figure 3.6 illustrates thirty photographs made of variations on wing designs. They illustrate the effect of tunnelling air currents which are caused by the wing formation to the flow in a resistant design. Figure 3.6 shows that this wing design was less than ideal. Outside of design experimentation, these photographic experiments would validate Wilbur and Orville Wright's ability to fly a heavier than air machine in a controlled flight. Also, they illustrate the chaos and opposing current dynamics of the interruption caused by the objects design being non-aerodynamically formed.

Although it may be an unorthodox comparison, the air flow experiment does illustrate, in my opinion, the interruption of the flow of time once it has been entered into by the apparatus of the photographic camera. This interruption is

analogous to the observation that “in order to perceive a line as a line necessitates taking a position outside of it, and taking account of the void which surrounds it”.<sup>39</sup> Therefore this line can only be seen from outside it, and consequently the ability to see a photograph is to see the photograph from its outside. This is one of the reasons why we can see the line of temporality being drawn across Christenberry’s *Store Fronts*. We become the camera vision which stands outside and observes the instant of movement, hence a narrativity remains outside the photograph rather than, actually, being inside it.

Shifting the parameters slightly, we can consider the event of taking the photograph as reflecting the ability to perceive a line: the line being a metaphor for narrativity. This can be defined as the point at which the line can be both a before and an after. In other words the photograph is the trace instant at which the cause, *before*, and effect, *after*, has not yet occurred. It denies, or fails to participate in, the binary contradictions. It stands outside as the difference between the before and after unfolds. Only once the photograph is visually created can there be a visual indication drawn. Therefore Bergson’s road continually recreates itself in seemingly numerous directions. As the obstruction continues to be the agent which effectively changes the linear flow of time, the photograph can also be considered as this obstruction in which linear time is changed. Although this change is effectively created from a single instant it nonetheless represents the creative evolution Bergson is addressing. Thus once the shutter is activated, the agent activating the change, the “now” past instant of time, is brought forth to the present through the redirection of linear progression - the photograph is this redirection of linear progression. The previous analogies of a standing figure on the road can be changed to express a figure standing on the side of the road. This new figure now has a more ideal vantage point in which to take a photograph that records the line of

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Muldoon. “Time, Self, and Meaning in the Works of Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur” In *Philosophy Today*. 35 (Fall 1991): 255.

duration. This provides the visual reference to a flow of time even though we cannot readily see it. Hence, the new figure, taking a photograph, effectively defines Bergson's creative evolution in which he states that:

The evolution movement would be a simple one, and we should soon be able to determine its direction, if life had described a single course, like that of a single ball shot out from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst in their turn into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for time incommensurably long. We perceive only what is nearest to us, namely, the scattered movements of the pulverised explosions.<sup>40</sup>

It is these shattered movements, the photograph, that become the things we perceive as giving time a visually determined direction. In other words, the endless explosion of shutters being pressed creates the evolutionary fragments which then become the evidence of a passing duration. These fragments can now be thought of as events in which lived time is interrupted and recreated into a perpetuated universal time. The photographic event will have the same contradictory characteristic of chronicle time being both lived and universal time simultaneously. For this event, the making of a photograph, carries with it the explosive evolution of making time through the bringing of the past to the present. Although there is a distinction between them, the photograph being a material description and duration being a conceptual description, the two still moments parallel the contradiction necessary for a photograph to have a narrative existence.

I have addressed a considerable number of ways in which to position the photograph as a narrative, albeit outside the recorded instant. To recount some of these ways would be advantageous before proceeding further. One is the way in which the photograph can be defined as being an event with the ability to record a line (narrative) brought about by an agent. And in order for it to be an event it has to be extracted from a continuous temporal background. This background can be considered as lived time, which is the necessary element in order for time to be

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 109.

conceptualised as a linear temporality. The composed image of a single instant of time becomes a precedent for the photograph's ability to record events in narrativity. Consequently when we look at the photograph, we have direct access back to the outside "discontinuity in time" that created the photograph - neither a before nor an after. This can be attributed to the fact that, when we look at a photograph, - *A Snail in the Grass* (see page 134) it is "conveying something of the past into the present". It is this evolution from material description to conceptual description that forms both the durational features found in and around the photograph as composing a contradiction of *lived time* and *universal time*.

We can also address Coste's concern that there must be a necessary change of signs to show that the narrative act of communication exists. This again illustrates the photograph's capacity to be considered an event. This change of signs (lived to universal) is not a direct replacement of signifiers and signified but a rearticulation of the composition from "now" past datum, *lived time*, to "here and now" present *universal time*, in the form of uncovering the narrative utterance in *chronicle time*. What we are reading in photograph is the contradiction between our past lived recollection and our present universal time, which feeds the content a future chronicle temporality, which ultimately creates the outside narrative meaning. As this movement is not linear by any means, and Bergson's metaphor is directly aimed at the individual rather than the dialectical universal, Bergson reconfigures Hegel's concept of time as being a circle spiralling outwards;<sup>41</sup> time as a contradiction of opposing structure, a dialectic. Time for Bergson is a self-evolving and a perpetual recreation in which intuition and attentive recognition are controlling factors. Since it could be claimed that the photograph is a contradiction

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<sup>41</sup> These general observations between Hegel and Bergson's time definitions have been discussed in Messay Kebede's "Ways Leading to Bergson's Notion of *Perpetual Present*." In *Diogenes* 149 (Spring 1990): 22-40.

which subsequently forms a dialectical relationship, I still define the photograph as being more closely represented by Henri Bergson's metaphor.

The second structure is that lived time can be observed, as Coste has pointed out, as an oxymoronic structure in which contradiction controls the narrative utterance. When we take this observation and compare it to the photograph as a chronicle utterance, the trace or calendar metaphor of the photograph becomes read as generating a narrative with no duration. Hence we have the contradiction of the single instant being read as moving.

In a further comparison of the significance of configurations we see the striking coherence of defining the photograph as a trace and a calendar of events. Then, with this variation, we can see how the photograph takes a trace of time and reflects back the contradictory effect of the past being brought into the present in a single instant. Therefore to say the photograph is a present past is not so unusual. Although this happens on the mechanical and structural level of photography, the narrative we use to define this event can be seen as having the same perpetual evolution - a temporality which Bergson sees as attentive recognition,<sup>42</sup> linear in appearance but acting as an explosion of fragmentation. The photograph is being continually used in this evolving configuration and "we [come to] perceive only what is nearest to us, namely, the scattered movements of the pulverised explosions". And, on the microscopic level of creating a photograph, the light photons hitting the light-sensitive silver emulsion of the film causes a latent pattern to form an image of negativity. Only until the development of this latent image can the negative image be reconfigured into a positive reflection of that now past explosion.

The photograph resulting from this negative is to be a document and container of this instant of time where the opportunity to be read as a continuous

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<sup>42</sup> Henri Bergson *Matter and Memory*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970: 130.

evolution, but read as an event occurring. This event gives the photograph its contradictory historical temporality. Thus an outside narrative is necessary to sum up the equation of how the past lived time overlapping the present universal time comes to be seen as the narrative utterance of the content in chronicle time. Certainly the variable in this equation is the agent activating the shutter; this action creates the intentionality for an outside narrative. The mechanism of opening a curtain to allow time to register itself, does not eliminate itself from determination, but isolates it in another state in order for it to be perceived as an immediate experience in the form of the photograph. And this “immediate experience shows us that the very basis of our conscious existence is memory, [a trace] that is to say, the prolongation of the past into the present, or, in a word, duration, acting and irreversible.”<sup>43</sup>

Why are these concepts of trace, historical temporality and duration important to the theory of the photograph as a narrative? For Ricoeur, historical time is the bridge between the lived time and universal time in which the metaphor of the calendar is a significant form of narrative. In Bergson's observations on duration, he points out that “duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future...”<sup>44</sup>. What these observations point out is that the photograph, when considered to be empty, still contains a narrative. **The photograph is a movement through the simple process of reading the past instant of time as “gnawing *perpetually* into the future”.** Therefore the photograph is a narrative in terms of a phenomenological and hermeneutic temporality.

Briefly, I want to explore the analyses of what happens when we accept that by looking at the photograph we are reading a narrative. [I want to return to the

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<sup>43</sup> Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. Arthur Mitchell (trans.) Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975: 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: 7.

mechanics of the photograph, because within this context, Bergson's "Idea of Nothing" or the *negative proposition* will place the photograph (its mechanics of creation) as being a disorder of an order.]

As I have stated, Bergson defined duration as a perpetual present, and this has yet another implication of relevance to the photograph. It concerns how we look at and read the photograph. Looking at a photograph, without any predetermined meaning, functions as a method of simple observation of the content.

Subsequently Bergson's "idea of disorder, in the sense of absence of order,"<sup>45</sup> will expand the concept of 'looking at the photograph' into what Bergson suggests as

The idea of disorder would then have a clear meaning in the current practice of life: it would objectify, for the convenience of language, the disappointment of a mind that finds before it an order different from what it wants, an order with which it is not concerned at the moment, and which, in this sense, does not exist for it. But the idea would admit a theoretical use... In a general way, reality is ordered exactly to the degree in which it satisfies our thought. Order is therefore a certain agreement between subject and object.<sup>46</sup>

The first comparison to be made is that the photograph has created a space in which a disorder exists, and looking at this space can be considered as an acknowledgement of this composed disorder. Initially, looking controls the type of significance one is expecting from the photograph. This means that when we come to the photograph; being that it is a two-dimensional image and apparently has no internal temporal movement or obvious narrative, this conceptual hesitation allows the onlooker a disordered space in which to translate the content into an order which bears directly to and on the present moment chronicle time. The instant we discover this disorder space, the disorder or contradiction of the photograph, a brief disappointment is externalised. Although this disappointment is not prolonged, the fact of looking at the photograph and seeing it disavows a direct temporal movement, [this] allows the space of disorder to present itself. This disorder has to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 241.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid: 243.

be reconfigured as an order for it to achieve a potentially narrative meaning. The internal disorder therefore parallels the photograph as being a contradiction in terms of defining duration. Without order there would not be disorder and without disorder there would be no order, so it would be safe to suggest that without the impression of the past (created through the disorder of an interruption of lived time) there would not be a present (created through the order of universal time) and *vice versa*. Bearing this in mind, I can suggest then without activating the shutter and making an exposure, there would be no disordered space created in which order (composition) can exist simultaneously within disorder (content). Given this fundamental act of photography, we are continually asked to expect a narrative outside of the photograph.

Having no internal temporal movement the photograph is an enigma of narrativity. By mechanically recording a disorder I am referring to the instantaneous need to take the content in front of the camera and reconfigure it into a ordered equivalent - a composition. This term has the ability to create a temporal movement that is implicit in the photographic form. Therefore the conceptual movement we conceive is stemming from the order originally created from disorder. Until we re-order it into an understandable narrative, giving it a beginning (history), middle (present) and end (future), and thus giving it meaningful significance, the photograph will remain disordered.<sup>47</sup>

As Bergson points out, “negation of one [order or disorder] consists in the affirmation of the other”.<sup>48</sup> Bearing this in mind, the narrative generated outside the photograph is constructed through the opposing counterparts, and then reforming the disordered contradictions is perceived as the appearance of an ordered meaning. By considering this as a phenomenon of the photograph in which the past

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Ricoeur "L'imagination dans le discours et dans l'action" translated by Richard Kearney. In his *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard*. London: Harpers Collins Academic, 1991: 140.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 243.

gnaws continually into the future, it appears to have a narrative based on its ability to present things for us to rename. On the other hand, if it is perceived as an ordered reflection of reality, then the disorder (the trace cut from lived time) is highlighted; and this disordered trace becomes the resulting desire to see it as a spatial proposition.

Bergson states that “order is a certain agreement between subject and object.” When considered in the context of the photograph, the varied levels of the recorded subject and rendered object must find an arrangement for there to be order. At the primary level, the photographer must take the disorder of the environment and construct a seemingly ordered picture. This determined composition does not have to be an aesthetically fixed or dynamically unfixed or the many other types of compositional determinations that are possible in making a photograph. What needs to be considered is that the photograph is formed through the determined and intentional relationship of subject and object.

On another level the photograph and the observer must find an appropriate arrangement for there to exist an ordered recognition of narrativity. Although the photograph stays the same, what changes is the appearance of disorder in so far as it becomes a readable order. This reconfiguring must be adaptable for there to be an instant in which meaning can function; whether or not the content is immediately understandable or not. The qualities that give the photograph its ability to be so adaptable, as we have discovered, can be expressed as the ability to reorder time - lived to universal to chronicle. This characteristic is responsible for the direct meanings we extract through the composition. And knowing that there is not one singular expression possible, meaning points to the photograph's ability to be a multi-functional narrative module.

As the photograph continually gnaws its way into the future, the continuing presence of the past allows it to be continually rejuvenated into the present. And depending on where this present is housed, the photograph will continually find

itself as an arrangement of a disorder - otherwise an order in a material description. Thereby the photograph is then contradictory in its two simultaneous propositions: **the marker (trace) of disorder, and the trace (marker) of order.**

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Taking these observations in consideration, I want to illustrate how they function in the works of Lee Friedlander. The two photographs are taken from his retrospective exhibition *Like A One-Eyed Cat*, held at the Seattle Art Museum Gallery in 1991. These photographs will demonstrate the photographs' ability to be simultaneously an order and disorder.

The first photograph is titled *Albuquerque, 1972* - Figure 3.7, the second photograph titled *Kansas City, 1965* - Figure 3.8. In Figure 3.7 we see an extreme and conscious effort to create a rectilinear composition. This deterministic composing can be seen as an obvious attempt to record the disorder of the environment. The conscious positioning of the horizontal lines of the electrical wires, the vertical lines of traffic-lights standards, light posts and sign posts, and diagonal lines of shadows, roads and sidewalks, Friedlander renders an undeniable articulation of a grid. In all this co-ordinated space the appearance and position of the dog and its shadow emerge as the present point (or possible punctum) which all this rectilinear space surrounds. At this point, the dog becomes a signifier of history and future will occur on the other side of it as a signified. As a trace of the interruption of disorder the dog waits endlessly yet patiently until the light changes. But it never will in photographic terms. The dog is a marker of (the) disorder; in its present world (lived time) it will sit and wait until the agent of change creates a conceptual temporality (universal time), through interpretation, which will activate the outside narrative into a proposition that will help the dog across the road. As it waits and waits and waits with attentive concentration, the semblance of order is suggested. As we are the observer behind the dog we have chronicle time - and our time continues to moves on - in which the disorder of the photograph has to be restructured into a order in front of us. In all the

apparent lines of stop and go intersections Friedlander creates the conflict of the dog's lack of movement in a single instant. To achieve this we must use our conceptual imagination. As we are the agents of change, we go through the varied spaces in the composition to reconfigure the single instant of lived time, disorder, into a textual proposition, order, which will activate our narrativity of the photograph.

To illustrate this point we can arbitrarily take a line from the photograph and use it as a reference point or entrance point into the photograph.



Figure 3.7

Lee Friedlander, *Albuquerque*, 1972

The line I want to focus on is the large vertical line that bisects the photograph. This line was “actually” a pole and as it visually intersects the waiting dog, this intersection can be considered as a present point. In the early discussion on Eakin's and Godley's chronophotograph, I discussed the vertical line as a metaphoric calendar or an entrance point into the external narrativity of the photograph. The same striking parallel can be made between Friedlander's *Albuquerque* and the chronophotograph. In both instances the temporal progression is one of direct yet indirect conditions. The mechanically generated chronophotograph produced a visual recording of a temporal linearity. In this direct search for the visualising of time a

documented representation was achieved. In the indirect photograph, *Albuquerque*, the agent of change must impact the disorder for there to be a sense of a compositional order. In both compositions a narrative can be developed - as we shall discover.

I want to position our narrative entrance on this line that bisects the waiting dog, for at this point a forthcoming present, past and future can be developed. I am suggesting this because of the way this entrance point sets up a superficial grid and the dog becomes a marker of a temporal order. As the only character in this story, the dog offers a way to refer [back] to a present. Which again is analogous to the present being a mark on a line in which the notation of this mark is the beginning position from which to enter a narrative.<sup>49</sup> If we move to the right of the line (present point) and away from the present this is in effect to progress backward in time. For behind the present is the past - possibly the way the dog has come. (See Diagram 3.E.)

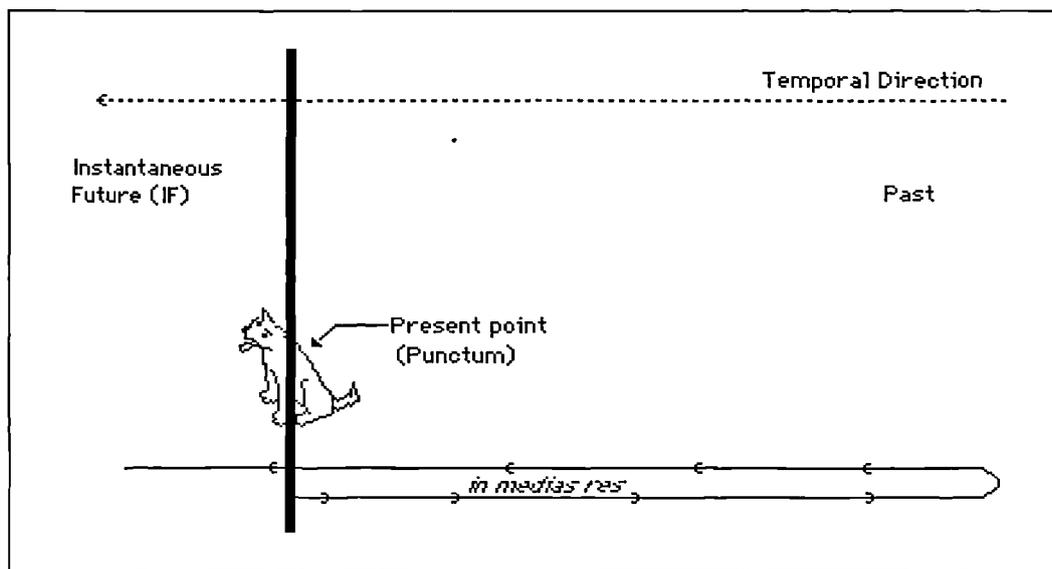


Diagram 3.E

<sup>49</sup> I am aware that using the direction in which the dog is facing is to subjectively refer to the reading of temporality as a reading of left to right from the present point. But what diagram 3.A illustrates is that when we read or interpret the narrativity of the photograph we must begin in the present, read back into the past and the move forward into the now future. This reading back and forward is equivalent to the temporality and time in Eakins and Godley's chronophotograph.

To move forward from the present is to progress into the instantaneous future. The (IF) area can be stated as the area in front of the dog, which it might embark into.

By arranging the disordered environment in this ordered description, Friedlander generates a photograph of how time is frozen and considered visually readable in photographic terms. The main character of the composition is positioned not in the centre of the frame but positioned off centre which gives us a sense of the size relationships (spaces) between the instantaneous future and the past. The fire hydrant, the car park, the apartment block and the house all combine to create a speculation on the journey of the dog and how it came to be here at this present point. The past tends to be filled with more things and details in which to construct a more resolved narrative story - hence my reading of the visual right of the picture to be the history. In the instantaneous future the visual details are hardly existent. This constructs the reading of the instantaneous future as the space in which a potential happening is possible. In this future all there is is a parked car existing partially hidden by an electrical control box; its fragmented body illustrates the emergence of time effecting the visual creation of a car, and conversely the road that continues off frame has the same visual effect of emerging in the instantaneous future. The comparison between the vacant (IF) future and filled past reinforces the direction of time or narrativity as a continuously perpetual evolution. As it evolves from moving backwards then forwards this circular movement illustrates not only Bergson's observation of time as perpetual evolving, but Husserl's point that any representation must bring the past in order for it to be understood in the present. Even by speculating that this photograph has been reversed from its real composition, this would not alone discount it from being analogous to the reading direction of temporal progression. In order to know the present, we must be able to travel in time, and as the photograph is a still instant of a "now" past event, the consideration of movement and temporality is one in which the linguistic imagination has to contend with the primary memory and expectation. The dog is

the present in which the past gnaws at the present. Paradoxically, the dog signifies the present and past simultaneously; the future has yet to happen or has it? This question is the conflict we encounter as the dog waits patiently for the light to change. The past will always be the present and the shadows will neither get any longer nor any shorter. Therefore we read Figure 3.7 as a ordering of a single instant. Here we recognise Husserl's observations of the pure self-presence and the instant like now to be "the presence of the perceived present..." To suggest the moment (the photograph) "is *continuously compounded* is a further consideration of Husserl's notion of primary memory and expectation (retention and protention)."<sup>50</sup> Out of this photograph the present emerges into the consideration of the spaces on either side of the main character as a "now" in which retention and protention collide. Subsequently the expectation of order and the primary memory of a photograph reconfigures into a reading of time composed from a marked disorder to a ordered event.



Figure 3.8

Lee Friedlander, *Kansas City, 1965*

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<sup>50</sup> Edmund Husserl. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Time (1893-1917)*. John Barnett Brough (trans.) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990: 64 (his emphasis).

As Jacques Derrida has pointed out in *Speech and Phenomena*, Husserl's sense of the trace is "a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of difference it introduces...Such a trace is - if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed - more 'primordial' than what is phenomenological primordial".<sup>51</sup> What we are looking at in *Albuquerque* is the marked difference of a trace between the present and the instant which culminates in the documenting a moment as the present into past and back again. And since this *present of the past* is definitively part of the photographic medium, it also reflects the conceptual direction we must transgress to obtain the story which can be seen as a sequence moving from disorder to order. It is this form of narrativity that is continually explicit in any photograph, and the ability to read this order is the responsibility of the agent of change. If we take the type of narrative and draft a diagram of Figure 3.8 the resulting diagram 3.F, would resemble the diagram generated from Figure 3.7.

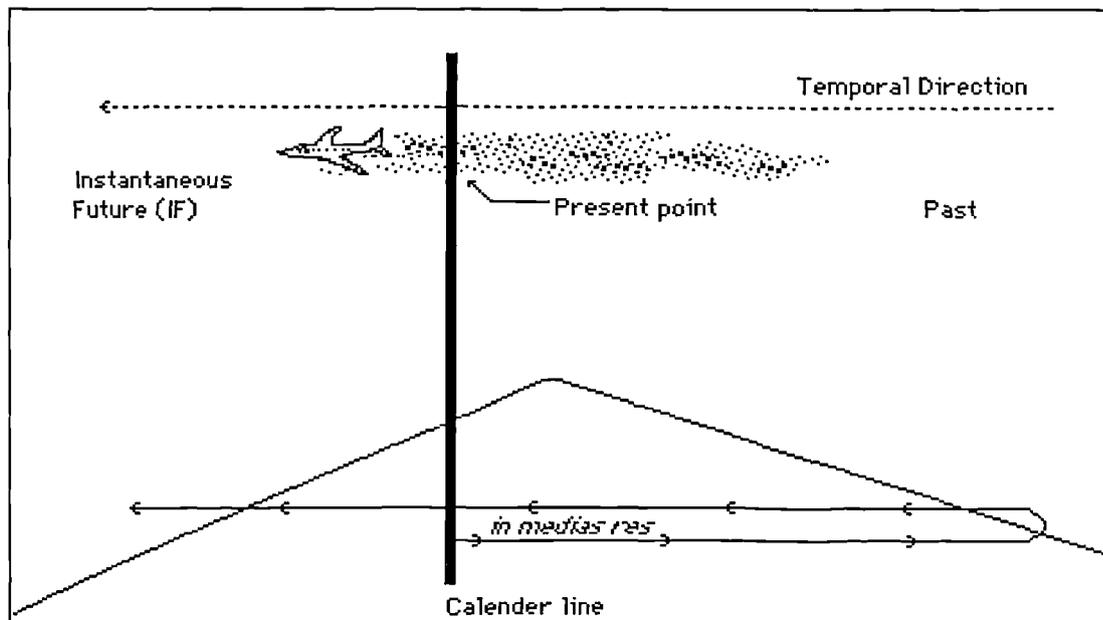


Diagram 3.F

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, Jacques *Speech and Phenomena*. David B. Allison (trans.) Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973: 66-7.

What these comparisons point to is that the photograph is a disorder only to be reconfigured into an order. And the linear progression from which a narrative can be extracted is achieved through this translation which is the agent responsibility of the reader. Consequently the indirect order in the photograph is obtained through a process of discovery. The narrative is excavated through overlaying a grid like that of an archaeological site, through which discovery of artefacts will reconstruct the narrative of the site. This grid is used to record and document the exact points in which the things or particular artefacts are excavated at the site. The given positions are recorded and the things are named and the relative positions of one another function to define the relationships one thing has with another. These point-like nodes can be used in interpreting a possible coherent picture or story of the past. Ideally this interpretation will then be read as the history which then becomes read as *the past brought into the future*: this future being the present. The whole narrative uncovered at the site is reflective of the movement of tracing or retracing the original past and bringing it forward into the future.

Taking this analogy of the archaeological grid one step further, and placing it over the *Albuquerque* photograph, Figure 3.9, we are now able to (with accuracy) locate the positions of the things in the photograph.



Figure 3.9

Archaeological Site - Albuquerque, 1970

By plotting the positions a narrative retracing can be constructed through the co-ordinate interpretation of the objects found in the 'here and now' at the site.

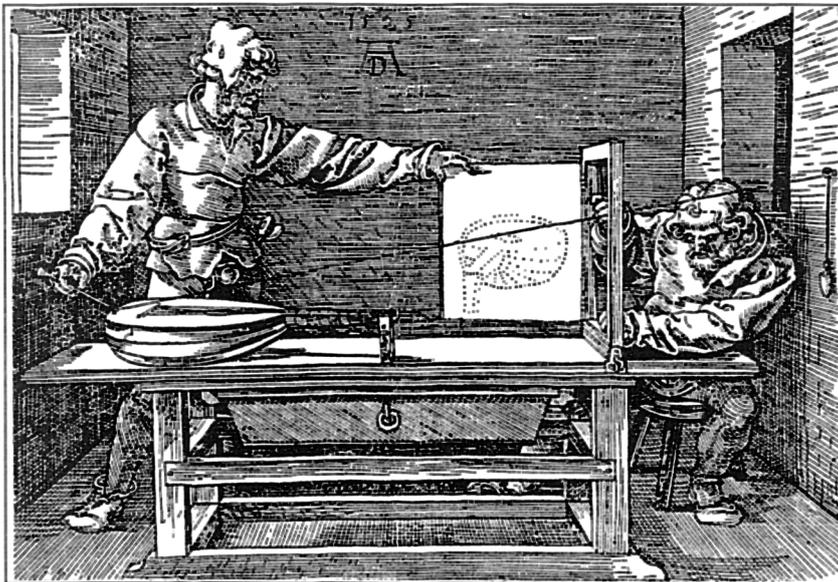


Figure 3.10 Albrecht Dürer, *Draftsman drawing a Lute in Perspective*, c. 1525

A similar technique of using a line and point system to trace the surface structure of an object is illustrated by Albrecht Dürer's *Draftsman Drawing a Lute*, c.1525, Figure 3.10.

It is safe to say that the resulting interpretation or narrative picture derived from all this external plotting of line and point positions would result in the same type of material descriptive or site proposition of Figure 3.9. This transcribing of information into another textual medium is reflective of the narrativity which I discussed earlier.

In the case of *Kansas City*, I stated earlier that it was an illustration of order, and although it records the ideal of one point perspective, it renders the visual disorder to time into an order of chronicle time. As we discovered in chronophotograph the order of a multi-point impressions creates a pattern of events seen as a present of the past. In *Kansas City* this ordered composition is apparent only in the form of a photographically controlled moment of happening. This is achieved through Friedlander's use of one point perspective which visually directs the eye down the centre of the composition which is immediately halted by the telephone pole which creates an obstructed view of the perspective view. What this obstruction creates is a barrier over which we must travel upward in order to discover a clue to the temporal order. As we progress upwards the immediate impression is that of the passing aeroplane which has been rendered on the film plane just past the telephone pole. Its exhaust trail leaves a trace of its previous position. It is this tail of exhaust, which allows us to effectively construct the past - and from the past we can construct the future. This mark left in the atmosphere is the key point from which to generate a possible narrative of temporal expectation of this photograph.

Although the one-point perspective does not lend itself easily to left-right reading, we can take the indicated trace and follow it backwards in order to determine the direction of the aeroplane from its future tense position. Therefore, the visually right side of the composition is the past where the left is the future.

The fascinating thing about *Kansas City* is the way in which this one point perspective can be reconfigured into expressing a multi-point progression. This element virtually controls the temporality of the composition. The elements to the left and right of the pole takes on the qualities of past and instantaneous future. Therefore it would be appropriate to say that the “punctum” offered by Roland Barthes suggests “the notion of punctuation, and because the photograph I am speaking of is in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points;... .”<sup>52</sup> The punctum of *Kansas City* can be reconsidered to be the point at which the intersection of present and past of the photograph come together. It is this point which gives the agent of change a means of interpreting the visual description as a coherent narrative statement. Although initially *Kansas City* can be considered an ordered composition, we are reminded that in this order there must be disorder for there to be a contradiction in which the instant of time can be conceptually extracted. The photograph becomes momentarily disordered in its composition as a present into the past and back again. It is this “prevision of the past” which defines both Figure 3.7 and 3.8 as a 'disorder' which then is ordered. This statement encapsulates what I see as the comparison between Bergson's observation of the philosophical nature of time and the photograph.

...the 'thing' [composition] and the 'state' [moment] are only artificially taken snapshots of the transition; and this transition, all that is naturally experienced, is duration [time] itself.. Such is immediately perceived duration, without which we would have no idea of [duration] time... We perceive the physical world and this perception appears, rightly or wrongly, to be inside and outside us at one and the same time; in one way, it is a state of consciousness: in another, a surface film of matter in which perceiver would grasp, in a single, instantaneous perception, multiple event lying at different points in space; simultaneously would be precisely the possibility of two or more events entering within a single, instantaneous perception.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. Richard Howard (trans.) London: Vintage Press, 1993: 26-7.

<sup>53</sup> Henri Bergson. *Duration and Simultaneity*. Leon Jacobson (trans.) & Herbert Dingle (intro.) New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965: 44-45.

The obvious comparison to be made is between the 'thing' as definitive of the flow of self-sufficient continuity and the 'state' as the passing through time which we pass. Therefore the reconsideration of Friedlander's two photographs in this context is that, they are seeing the transitions in which the content flows in a self-sufficient continuity. We achieve this understanding through our referring back to our own continuity in time. Therefore as we read through the photograph, the transitions encountered act as a devices in which the interruption of lived time is conceptually passed through. In other words, the photograph is held outside the line of lived time and expresses a stasis of continuity that reflects a universal time.

*Albuquerque* and *Kansas City* do not immediately define themselves as recording multiple events lying at different points as does Christenberry's *Store Front, Stewart, 1962 & 1988*. What needs to be considered is that the event of Friedlander taking the photograph is one, and the plane flying overhead is another, and the dog sitting at the corner is another. These are the multiple events that define the photograph as having an implicit instantaneous perception. And it is here that the best illustration of multiple events is seen in an instantaneous perception, as well as the illustration of the 'thing' [composition] and 'state' [moment] as artificially taken snapshots of transition. I would change the statement slightly that this transitional contradiction in the photograph can be seen as expressing the material description of time - specifically in relation to the readable narrative lying outside the photograph.

## 4

### *Cindy Sherman's Film Stills: An Expectation of Narrative*

The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it.

In the cinema, whose raw material is photographic, the image does not, however, have this completeness (which is fortunate for cinema). Why? Because the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views; in the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favour of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is a *spectator*. Like the real world, the filmic world is sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl says, "the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style"; but the Photograph breaks the "constitutive style" (this is its astonishment); it is *without future* (this is its pathos, its melancholy); in it, no protensity, whereas the cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic (what is it, then? - It is, then simply "normal" like life). Motionless, the Photograph flows back from presentation to retention.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

In this quotation we recognise the conceptual distinctions that Roland Barthes is placing between the cinematic image and the photographic image. My interest is not so much in the divergent distinctions that he notes as in the way he uses Edmund Husserl's observations of time-consciousness to effectively define the cinematic image as pure expectation, *protensity*, and the photographic image as *retention*; primary memory of a trace seen as a representation. Although this division offers an acceptable distinction between the two image types, I want to

explore how these two concepts, expectation and primary memory, come together in Cindy Sherman's black and white work, *Film Still*, to form the paradoxical narrative found her still photographic representations.

Since Cindy Sherman's work presents itself as combining both these principles of expectation and primary memory. The illustrate just how this contradiction is extracted; keeping in mind that both the photograph and cinematic image partake in and derive from the same potential of expectation and primary memory seen as a narrative continuation.

Sherman's work was conceived in the climate of the emerging "postmodern" era in the United States dating from the years 1977–1980. Since that time the work has continued to draw critical attention for its lasting social commentary and theoretical stance. And rather than offer another critical cultural overview of the work which has already been succinctly presented by writers such as Henry M. Sayre, Laura Mulvey, Judith Williamson, and Arthur C. Danto, I want to focus on the aesthetic issues of a filmic temporal narrativity within the work. I realise that there is no way to separate out the aesthetic from the socio-cultural issues that are raised by her work; for to discuss only the theory outside its cultural context is to avoid the cultural implications of the work. Therefore I will make some use of existing references to the cultural, political and psychological implications as I progress through my discussion. These comments are by no means as extensive or exhaustive as those other writers have presented. I will therefore offer an alternative look at them through my observations and hope to shed new light on these fascinating works of paradoxical aesthetic.

In the eighty photographs we can see, even at first glance, the principle of off frame expectation is explicit. This expectational aesthetic becomes externalised through the captioning of the photographic print as a "film still". Another is through the subject, being visual, "caught" in what appears to be a spontaneous self-recognition of another subject out of frame. This 'stance' of

recognition aligns itself with the textual captions to create the linguistic expectation presented in the caption's message. The explicit reference to an unknown off-frame action or presence redirects the reading of the photographic image out of its immediate consideration as a still photograph. The actual compositions have the curious habit of presenting the female actress in a posture of looking or peering out of the framed exposure. The reading is of something "other" which is about to happen or is happening already. This "other", whether a person or event, has caught the actress's visual attention. Given that a textual statement accompanies the posing technique, one's typical reaction to these works is that these are actual moments from a film. Understood in this context the film still can be read as a trace of primary memory or retention. But this initial determination is soon re-evaluated because of the photographs being printed in the 8X10 inch format. The photographic work does not reflect the "film" industry format<sup>1</sup>, and this discrepancy is used as a reflective device, a type of question mark appearing at the end of each work.

Although we may have discovered the aesthetic devices underlying these photographs, these discoveries do not eliminate the inherent contradiction being raised. If we consider the meaning found in the caption "film still" to be a timed-based principle for progressive image frames, then only seeing a single instant from this expected progression sets up a contradiction between the caption and photograph. *The contradiction created between reading the text and seeing the content sets up the observer to interpret these photographs through the filmic reference, thereby directly implicating these works as fragments from a film.* Its being considered as a single instant extracted from a film makes the print appear

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<sup>1</sup> By stating this common fact, I am aware that most film stills are done on location by a photographer. But there are situations where images from the actual film have produced the promotional posters. Hence in some context of frame enlargement either image type can be easily misinterpreted as actual film stills. Some of the possible variations of film stills are: publicity stills, locations shots, and frame enlargements.

to derive from a larger visual narrative. This formalist understanding reinforces the expectation that these works have a narrative outside their present existence as photographs. Beside this immediate contradiction between the use of the word “film” and the larger scale reference this signifies, the word also implies the whole historical development of what a moving image narrative looks like.

In conjunction with this history is the question of how we have come to read these works, given our previous encounters with films as narratives. The expectation created by the textual and content framing of the actor contained in the still photographic image, along with the expectation generated on the part of the viewer looking at the work through the captioned context, create another supportive frame of reference. These multiple references combine to generate a specific, if not misleading, way to read the work. And this desire to achieve a specific interpretation resides outside the present framed content and caption. What effectively this referential paradox presents to the viewer / reader is the contradiction I spoke of earlier, in which the traditional still image will not be sufficient to extract the meaning of these works. Consequently a new system of interpretative reading or *modus operandi* of looking must be generated. One which is laden with a potential expectation of there being a narrative. That is to say, the observer is continually reminded that these works are “still”, yet they actually appear to be extracts from of a film - well, not really, but there is just the suggestion they might. This explicit reinscribing functions to effectively redirect the reading of the photographic image as just that -*Film Still*.

The inherent nature of the photographic medium, as Barthes has observed, is “crammed full” and “taken in flux.” These qualities allow another contradiction to present itself. This is the effect of primary memory (or melancholy in Barthes' vocabulary) which simultaneously exists along side the expectation of narrative. In one sense we have a past meeting with the potential movement of the future. This meeting is obviously taking place conceptually. An alternative way to

approach this meeting is to think of it as a contradiction which provides meaning. This may be stating the obvious, but the contradiction is: that the photographic medium provides the type of frame space necessary for the cinematic image to exist - one cannot do away with the other. Therefore the photographic image provides the spatial materiality in which the caption, *Film Still*, can effectively take this content outside its original context to create an expectation of a pre-existing narrative. The result of this contradiction is that the photograph is seen as a single instant of the story that has the potential to express the story or narrative of the film. It is on this stage that the continuation of a possible story will be played out. The visible and invisible stage exists as the reciprocal inside and outside of the photographs. If the content and “still life” compositions Sherman creates are the visible stages, sets or locations, then the logical association is that things inside the photographic frame are mere props. This interpretation completes the photograph as a space in which a drama with an actress has been caught in a single moment of her performance.<sup>2</sup> Better yet, the stage can assume the qualities of an environment in which the playing out of this drama is seen as an “actual” happening or event drawn from a larger continuing narrative.

Another implication is that, when these works are captioned as “film stills” they become completely dependent on the referencing back, through our expectation, to the fact the instant we are seeing was perhaps documented on a

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur C. Danto sees this effect as specific to Cindy Sherman’s work. In the preface to her monograph of black and white *Film Stills* he suggests that the work presents itself as a cross between performance art and photography. And, rather than these works being considered photographic art, they should be seen as performance art that uses the material of photography. I will be referring more to his observation through this chapter.

“In the stills, the use of photography is more integral to the performance than a photographic record of what took place, and it is important to work this out in order to get a deep and true understanding of why they are so powerful. Their uniqueness is due to their being simultaneously and inseparably photographs and performances.” Danto, Arthur C. “Photography and Performance: Cindy Sherman’s Stills” In *Untitled Film Stills - Cindy Sherman*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990: 11.

film stage, location, or set. Therefore the significant features of cinematic production becomes a prominent feature of these photographs. For example, let us consider *Film Still # 47, 1979* - Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.1

Cindy Sherman, *Film Still # 47, 1979*

We are immediately directed to read the woman watering her garden in sunglasses and hat as a scene of “suburbia”. Given the way she has been photographed, we, as viewers or indeed intruders, enter only through the front of the frame. We look at her in her secluded private space. The overwhelming sense of intrusion is created through the instantaneous look back out of the frame. This caught-off-guard glance toward the camera / viewer locates our presence as viewers in the negative rather than positive sense. The partially opened mouth has a sense of voice which is never heard; this silent articulation of *who are you* extends the visual feeling of intrusion. The overhanging trees in the foreground act as one of two internal framing devices which direct our gaze towards the

figure's actions and position. The fence confines her in a perspective space and at the same time visually entraps her. This fence is similar to a box canyon in which no visual or physical escape is possible. We, as viewers, visually contain the woman in her and our private space. The resulting effect of this confinement is to set up the viewer as the other: either as an intruder; or, less dramatically, as the husband, coming from the house with cool drinks and a camera; or the neighbour coming over to borrow a rake; or many more possible others. These other (imaginary) scenarios are external narratives being generated by the relationship between the caption and content. What Sherman has achieved is to position the viewer within two concepts of space: first, the enclosed space of the garden in which the woman has been caught slightly "off guard" while watering; second, the conceptual space contained in the caption which points to there being a larger scenario for which we have no title - a mystery film. This event or moment of unexpected encounter provides the opportunity for these visual and conceptual exchanges to be externalised, by the viewer, as possible recognition between us and the subject. This mutual recognition is the ambiguity of what happens next. The effect is similar to that created by the silent moment at a dinner party when all the guests are simultaneously waiting for the others to speak, and when an instantaneous silence is created along with the expectation of *what happens next*. This hesitation directly observed in Figure 4.1 constructs the ambivalence necessary to suggest the sense of enclosed silence, intimacy and then intrusion, which allows this print to depict itself as a happening. The sense is of an impending narrative on the brink of enactment.

As many commentators have noted, Sherman's persona in these photographs, is that of an actress involved in a succession of costume dramas. In this respect these photographs may be seen as the record of a masquerade or fabrication; a still life for the purpose of filming; a constructed reality where realism is based on the expectation of reality. The conceptual space I spoke of is

the one of imaginative production. And in keeping with the concept of film production, we would therefore assume this space, framed by the photographic cropping, to be a location at which this filming is taking place.

Speculating for a moment, if this photograph was literally released as a production film still, we would expect it to relate directly to the narrative of the film. [Obviously in practice a film production company would hardly allow the still to circulate without a title or caption referring explicitly to the film. Therefore the consumer would have some expectational information on which to form a conceptual impression of the film's narrative.]

Returning to Figure 4.1, our attention moves towards the woman down the fenced enclosure of the garden and the overhanging tree branches. The edges of the photograph acts as a confinement to narrow our field or point of view and interpretation on the content. Subsequently, we become implicated, not as the omniscient narrator, who may have an overall view of the narrative, but as another character in the film. Thereby we are expected to know only a part of the developing narrative. In 'A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body', Laura Mulvey has addressed this specific point in the work, and suggests that

The viewer is subjected to a series of double takes, estrangements and recognitions. The camera looks: it 'captures' the female character in a parody of different voyeurisms. It intrudes into moments in which she is unguarded, sometimes undressed, absorbed into her own world in the privacy of her own environment.<sup>3</sup>

These moments, double takes, that Mulvey considers are identical to Figure 4.1 visual actions photographed in which we read the actress's performance as an instant of unguarded privacy. In this given space and through this controlled confinement, the viewer is offered the role of a voyeur. As Michael Evans has pointed out, "the frame embraces both the internal structure of a given

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Mulvey. "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman" In *New Left Review* 188 (July-August) 1991: 136-50.

work and its reception.”<sup>4</sup> If we then consider that the framing of the actress is both a significant and internal structuring mechanism, the content of Figure 4.1 becomes representative of the “micro-text reflecting the macro-text”.<sup>5</sup> This would suggest that the internal micro-text, the content, is describing and composing the external macro-text, the context, in order to present an expectation of a story which will be based on content. Therefore the content and caption come together to create this intrusive role for the observer.

We can extend this micro /macro observation by suggesting that the primary memory, retention, reflects the expectation or protention contained in the photograph. I can suggest this because as Frank Lentricchia points out, the act of pressing the shutter of the camera acts as a form of memorialization; the moment has finished before it is reproduced. Thereby the representation lives long past its referent.<sup>6</sup> What we see in Film Still # 47 is a memory of the event; the photograph reflects the expectation of a possible narrative about to unfold because the referent lives in the next set of frames which is inferred from the caption *Film Still*.

Therefore when we happen upon the woman in her garden, and are directed to consider this visual representation as a frame from a film, the expectation of it being a suburban scene is one obvious conclusion to be drawn. Although we are implicated as the so-called “other” character, the resulting narrative does not have to be one of sinister motivation. The conclusion presented by Mulvey is obviously drawn from the specific socio-political perspective the work takes. I am not denying that this work, or the others in the collection, addresses these important questions of cultural voyeurism within the context of representing women in society and art. What I want to point out is the way the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Evans. "What Is A Frame" In his *Claude Simon and the Transgression of Modern Art*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988: 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 3.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Lentricchia. "Don DeLillo" In *Raritan* 8 (1989): 1-29.

inside frame reflects the outside frame reading of the work and how this relationship encourages a narrative reading of the work. In this transgression of boundaries<sup>7</sup> the contradictory meaning or the polysemic nature of the photographic image is established and suggested as being a narrative. As we move through one boundary to the next, a journey has taken place, and in the journey will be a narrative to be retold.

It is apparent, then, that the “crammed full” internal photographic space feeds the other external cinematic space. As these two spaces are entertained by the observer, the potential of a dialogue between the two would be formulated. As one shifts the boundaries and then finds another framed boundary to read, so a memory space is created behind. It is through this oscillation between internal retention and external protensity that we find the simultaneous contradiction of the film still. This encounter is preceded by the question - *what happens next?* And the paradox to this grammatical structure is one of being expected to have an encompassing narrative prepared while knowing all the time that we do not really need one.

We see this contradiction most explicitly in *Film Still #83, 1980*, Figure 4.2. In the same use of framing, the woman is being observed through what appears to be a series of concrete steps and steel railings. The edges of the concrete walls on either side of her focus our attention on her - with newspaper in hand. The significance of her appearance in trench coat and, again, sunglasses, creates the necessary mystery about her identity. In a strange sense she has no identity, although we may create one for her: secretary, spy, prostitute, business executive or actress. Her determined walk is another signifier to prompt a possible speculation as to where she has been or where she is going.

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<sup>7</sup> The idea of transgressing boundaries is, as Michael Evans has suggested, explicit in the idea of the frame. He states “[t]he idea of frame carries with it, as do all boundaries, the possibility of transgression, and it is this overlapping movement which constitutes the principal impulse and engenders the discontinuity and displacements characteristic of modern art.” *Ibid.*: 11.



Figure 4.2

Film Still #83, 1980

To photograph (describe or compose) a subject in this way sets up the observer to be guided very specifically as to the appropriate reading of the content. We generate the desire to look or not to look, thereby following the woman and possibly speculating on her life. This frame of inquiry sets up the consideration of what the possible scenario could be. Therefore the need for narrative and expectation of narrative develop into this aspect of simultaneous contradiction: the silent moment of *what happens next* which leaves the observer in the contradiction of seeing the photograph as an expectational memory.

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Returning to Barthes' observation of the photographic image as being without future and only existing as a signifier for the lack of the actual referent, I see this statement as implying something completely different from the signified expectation of narrative. If this is a correct observation, then I can take it one step further and suggest that, because the photographic referent is the signifier inside

the frame and it feeds the expectation of the signified caption outside the frame, the resulting sign creates a referential narrative. When we transgress their respective boundaries, a form of mimetic temporality is created. Giving this sign the expectation of time and memory of an instant is crucial to the completion of the photograph as a film still - thus satisfying one prerequisite of narrativity which is progression. In other words, a sense of movement from B to A to C.<sup>8</sup> This aesthetic is in all the film stills. For example, *Film Still #15, 1978* - Figure 4.3 and *Film Still #16, 1978* - Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.3

Cindy Sherman. *Film Still # 15, 1978*

The actress in each of the respective film stills, at first glance, seems to be different, although the costumes, the sets, locations and stages also help to create

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<sup>8</sup> This alphabetic labelling is indicative of the *in medias res* narrativity discussed in Chapter 3. The following is a brief explanation of an *in medias res* structure: B → A, then A → C. [A = Past, B = Present, C = Future]

in her having some seventeen distinct personalities. Although the physical appearance of the woman remains the same, the psychological change of these other personalities are the internal differences expected and then externalised in the similarity of appearances between the two figures. Figure 4.3 and 4.4 might be considered documents of the personality transition of one multi-personality subject.

In the movie *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane* , we are immersed in the black comedy of two sisters, one severely injured in a car accident, and the other continually reminiscing about (and trying to revitalise) her childhood performing career. The development of similarity and difference is achieved by the way in which the two sisters, initially so different, come to a realisation of their internal psychological sameness in the closing scenes of the film; both have been manipulating one another all their lives.

If we consider this issue of simultaneous internal similarity and external difference, Figures 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate a type of narrative structure that can be extracted from the collection. As the internal appearance may stay the same, the external “difference” of the actress posing or characterisations are outwardly expressed by her costumes and personality traces. Alternatively this can be stated as Sherman's attempt to explore the theatricality of cultural and debate, photographically, how women are seen as internal and external 'image' objects. For the internal psychological self may remain, but the externalised self-image can be altered to reflect its conformity with self-purity on display within a given environment. This expression of changeability gives the film stills their specific critical coloration. As Cathy N. Davidson observes, “Sherman's chameleon displays and her refusal of self-reflexivity discredit the notion of a

difference. Also, the narrative expectation or potential change of story is generated by this difference of content. But on closer inspection [which is a telling intention and effect of the work; ie. looking at woman], the two seemingly different characters are really the same actress. What this discovery points to is that there may be two different stories being told here - or is there just one story being illustrated by two different moments in the same film? These questions raise a whole series of expectations about the potential type of narrative being presented. I could suggest that these two different but similar photographs, juxtaposed, reflect perhaps film stills from real movies produced. The immediate ones that come to mind are: *Sybil* -1976 or *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane* - 1962.



Figure 4.4

Cindy Sherman, *Film Still # 16*, 1978

In *Sybil* we are told the story of a young woman who, as a child, was traumatised by having horrific physical and psychological abuse, which resulted

unified, continuous self.”<sup>9</sup> This chameleon metaphor is also inherent to the medium of photography as Barthes extensively points out.

...every image is polysemous; it implies, subjacent to its signifiers, a “floating chain” of signifieds of which the reader can select some and ignore the rest. Polysemy questions meaning, and this question always appears as a disfunction, even if this dysfunction is recuperated by society as a tragic act (a silent God affords no way of choosing between signs) or a poetic one (the panic “shudder of meaning” among the ancient Greeks); even in cinema, traumatic images are linked to an uncertainty (to an anxiety) as to the meaning of objects or attitudes. Hence in every society a certain number of techniques are developed in order to fix the floating chain of signifieds, to combat the terror of uncertain signs: the linguistic message is one of these techniques. On the level of the literal message, language answers, more or less directly, more or less partially, the question *What is it?* Language helps identify purely and simply the elements of scene and the scene itself: it is a matter of denoted description of the image (a description that is often partial), or in Hjelmslev's terminology, of an operation (as opposed to a connotation).<sup>10</sup>

What is most striking about these two statements and Sherman's work is that they combine to present the critical position of how photo-centric representation is so variable. It is partially due to the medium being completely referential. And through the observer's inherent question *What is it?* as noted by Barthes, the necessity of a linguistic message is to direct the chain of signifiers. Thus the linguistic entity, the caption *Film Still*, for the photographic image becomes the scene in the photograph where the ambiguous memory and expectation can have their meaning articulated and pinned down. Again we see the relationship of the external (caption) and internal (content) combining to prompt the answer of the question, *What is it?* *Film Still* defines the content and asks us to redefine the content through a referential quality in order to break the continuous chain of

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<sup>9</sup> Cathy N Davidson. "Photographs of the Dead: Sherman, Daguerre, Hawthorne" In *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 89 (Fall 1990): 667-701.

<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes. "The Rhetoric of the Image" In *The Responsibility of Forms*. Richard Howard (trans.) New York: Hill and Wang Publishers, 1985: 28.

signifiers and ultimately this redefinition asks us to re-evaluation the content and caption as being specifically culturally placed.

In a single artistic gesture, Sherman is achieving multiple levels of commentary: one is the consideration of the photographic medium as a representation in which adaptability is integral; another is, the rhetoric of the pose contained in the photograph and presence of language inscribed on the photograph. The combination of photographic actuality and language referent becomes a form of representation which Barthes and Derrida have commented on, albeit from differing points of view.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes expresses a more self-reflective expression between the distinct feeling of sameness-but-difference through the context of a self-transformation before the camera lens.

But very often (too often, to my taste) I have been photographed and I knew it. Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of *posing*, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one... I know how to work upon my skin from within [inside]. I decide to “let drift” over my lips and in my eyes a faint smile which I mean to be “indefinable”, in which I might suggest, along with the qualities of my nature, my amused consciousness of the whole photographic ritual: I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know I that I am posing,... ‘myself’ never coincides with my image...<sup>11</sup> [*my emphasis*]

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida approaches it from a more abstract position and suggests that, referring to the theme of supplementarity in writing and text, the representation of presence we read in a text is due to a large part on the substitutional qualities of repetition.

*...this theme describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain, the structure of substitution, the articulation of desire and language, the*

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<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. Richard Howard (trans.) London: Vintage Press, 1993: 10-12.

*logic of all conceptual oppositions...*It tells us in a text what is a text, it tells us in writing what writing tells us...there is nothing outside the text...the concept of supplement and the theory of writing designate textuality itself...[and] the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already *infiltrated* presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. <sup>12</sup> [Derrida's emphasis]

From these two observations, the conclusion can be drawn that the film still work is drawing from an internal (the self) and the external (self-portrait) change afforded both in the photographic and linguistic mediums. In terms of Barthes' observation, the work is a type of self but not self-transformation into an image. Sherman takes external self and transforms it, her role, into an image of the other - essentially internalised woman as image. In Derrida's observation, the fact that the entire collection of film stills (as a whole) can be seen as a chain of conceptual oppositions through the theme of supplementarity, or substitution. The internal self role is supplemented for the external representational presence which refers back to the internal self as externalised in the image of its-self. Hence there is nothing outside these texts because the internal text is where the space of continual repetition and the splitting of the self is contained. Thereby allowing substitution to reinscribe the presence of an image in the form of a re-presentation. The underlying issue here is that of substitutional repetition which both Derrida and Todorov note as a key element in the expression of narrative.

It is "emphasis" and "inversion" ['dissemination' in Derrida's context] that separate the units of a story, which in turn create the transitivity of narrative.<sup>13</sup> If Figures 4.3 and 4.4 are seen as two units of a single story working together yet independently in a repetitive *modus operandi*, this would account for our expectation of a narrative surrounding the work. Then the terms 'emphasis' and 'inversion' are relevant terms with which to interpret a linguistic structure and

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. (trans.) Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974: 163.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Jay Nelson. *Causality and Narrative in French Fiction from Zola to Robbe-Grillet*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1990: 5.

describe the scene (content), thereby 'inverting' and 'emphasising' the conceptual reference of a film scenario for a photographic representation, making these works responsive to a narrative reading.

The next step is to take our previous issue of repetitive supplementation and connect it with the just discussed terms of emphasis and inversion. The most effective way to proceed is to simply say: as the inverting repetitive quality continues, this reinforces the modification of the visual emphasis into the textual and the textual into the visual. This ideally prompts the observer to the conceptual narrative lying outside the work rather than inside it. This transitivity itself creates the expectational responses we have to the work. To clarify, the references from the caption [existing outside the content on the edge of the frame] and the photographic signifiers are being repetitively emphasised and inverted between each other. Therefore as this shift is being played out the film stills present or represent the "self" as something other than "self-portrait". As we are intrigued by this resonance of re-representations, the external influence of the text is acknowledged as (f)actual. Derrida suggests that "there is nothing outside of the text"<sup>14</sup>; subsequently, the existence of nothing, the transcendental signifier, outside the text, conversely suggests that everything referential is a basis of comparison we have for the existence of a narrative in the internal content.

*If the single photograph were to be considered a text, or if a collection of photographs were contained in a 'textual' format, we then could suggest that there is nothing outside the text. This would imply that what is contained inside the text is referentially actual. Therefore everything we see / read in the collection is not necessarily a transcendental signifier, but does bear a relational referent, which would account for the visual being read as a text. What we achieve, then, is an outside which refers to the inside and an inside which requires a reference*

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. (trans.) Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974: 158.

from the outside. In other words, the similarity of Sherman the actress to the images in all the *Film Still* work, demands a difference of appearance, but for there to be a difference there must be a similarity. The similarity is a combination of the substitution: Sherman as actress leading to actress as image. What this proposition suggests is that these works are to be looked at as a "*Film Still*". So, as the similarity is drawn from the supplementarity of difference and the difference is drawn from the internal photographic ability to create "another" as content, they each emphasise and invert each "other's" difference as similarity and *vice versa*.

How does the supplementary shift in the work propel the reading of narrativity? As a partial answer, I can suggest that it is the internal and external influencing constituted by the caption and the photographic medium itself. They create the considerations of an expectation that there is a narrative to be extracted. It is the proper name *Film Still* that controls the textual expectation of a narrative and the photograph controls the primary memory of the event imagined by the observer. Brought together they form the expected narrative and intended narrative of the work.

I am aware that this device or technique of re-representation, or as I have termed it "inverting supplementarity", of one medium for another, in which the photographic qualities are used to generate or entice curiosity, is a form of parody. (This form of parody becomes a main representational aesthetic in a vast majority of post-modern performances and art. It was also seen as a way to reconfigure the modernist photographic aesthetic which had so dominated the American scene, and, to some extent, is still being used. We can see without any difficulty this type of parody in the work of Andre Serrano's *KKK* or *Piss Christ*, Richard Prince's *Marlborough Man*, and Sherrie Levine's *Photograph After Edward Weston*. Without going into a long and protracted debate on these works, it is sufficient to say that they all explore the technique of representation

with the necessary space in which to effectively make a commentary on the cultural iconicity of the contemporary postmodern art. As well as encapsulating the parody of contemporary consumerism, these artworks works also re-evaluate the canons in society and art. They illustrate the varied types of closely guarded and “codified systems of notation employed in the media (photographic art world) of pictorial representation”.<sup>15)</sup>

Certainly in a gallery context, as Laura Mulvey so astutely points out, the viewer is “aware that the *Film Still* is constructed for this one image only, and that nothing exists either before or after the moment shown”.<sup>16</sup> As a point of contention, I would argue that this alone should not eliminate the work from addressing the issue of how the qualities of retention and protention invert and *emphasise one another* to supplement a narrative. Therefore they do have a before and after, otherwise, the potential of reading them would not exist, for expectation is implicit in the external caption just as primary memory is explicit in the external content of the photographic content. *Film Still* as a caption captivates and directs the observer into (if only momentarily) considering that there is a story to be read. Mulvey herself has alluded to this very principle in her article sub-heading: 'Soft-Core Pastiche', 'Metamorphoses', and 'De-fetishizing the Female Body'.

The intentionality of the artist is to parody a Western ideology, social and cultural image history, and to this extent, the work examines the historicity of woman seen as victim, accent or cardboard cut-out for the heroics of men to be highlighted. This does not discount the potential re-reading of the work as (f)actual film stills. It reinforces the idea that these are to be read as film stills. How else would the narratives be generated to make such parody possible?

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<sup>15</sup> John M Carvalho. "Repetitions: Appropriating Representation in Contemporary Art" In *Philosophy Today* XXXV (4), 1991: 307-324.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Mulvey. "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman" In *New Left Review*. 188 (July-August, 1991): 136-50.

A moment of indulgent speculation is necessary to prove a point. If these works were to be found in an antiquarian shop, in a box marked *Film Stills*, and even if I had no indication of the title of the film, I may treat these photographs as a collection of fragments from one or several film productions. At this point I have to make clear that there are several possible types of film stills: one is the genuine frame enlargements, extracted from the finished film footage; another is, the 'phony' publicity still, shot on set with a still camera but often at a different angle and with a stilted pose; and finally the computer-merged film still. This is where fragments of previously shot photographs are seamlessly integrated to create one composite film still. This was the case for the promotional still for *Rain Man* where Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise are seen together, but in actual fact they were electronically brought together.

In this scenario I want to see them as fragments of the original film - as a type of montage pointing indirectly to, yet coming directly from, the overall narrative or narratives of the film.<sup>17</sup> The reason I may come to this conclusion is that the actress constitutes a repetitive continuity across all the film stills and they, the film stills, appear with the inscriptions *Film Still #1, 2, 3, ... 80*. Although the set, location and stage changes, which makes them readily different in appearance, the one continuous element is the actress. If I were so inclined, I could sit at home, and from just the numbering sequence, I could piece together or develop a sequence (scenario) that could possibly account for the situations or events being presented. Although there would be major gaps in the story line it seems likely

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<sup>17</sup> In his book *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, David Bordwell discusses at length the possibility of Eisenstein's examination of film resemblance to language. In his first comparison Eisenstein explores cinema to the Japanese writing system. Prior to this it would be Eikhenbaum's conception of "cine-phrases" and "cine-periods" that would have a direct effect of considering film as language. Ideally what montage and film editing suggest to Eisenstein is the ability to create meaning which cannot be expressed by a single frame. What this would suggest then, is that the need for more than one frame image to create a meaning. Therefore the very fact that Sherman's work consists of multiple depictions would validate this claim that meaning, whether its visual or linguistic, creates multiple meanings through continuity and rupture.

that a plausible temporal progression could be created and extracted. As Barthes suggests, the crammed-full photographic referents that are inside each still frame and these referents will “flow back from presentation to retention”. Therefore, we can consider retention as primary memory in which the photograph as memory can be traced through its referents. Thus as Peter Brunette and David Wills suggest, “the ambiguity of the term *film frame*” may be read as a sign of language's unconscious understanding of the work of the trace”<sup>18</sup> (here we recall the extensive discussion of the trace in Chapter 3). These considerations can be an entrance point into how I can reorder the disarrangement of the environment I discovered in the film stills. I can therefore take my purchased film stills and construct a conceptual narrative based on the traces found in the work itself. These traces are the marks that were left by the woman and I can journey back through them in order to develop a picture of her past, present, and future movements. This conceptual picture and physical diagram will form the supporting structure of the narrative. This search backward is a way of taking the fragments presented in the pseudo-montaged collection and retracing or reconstructing a possible beginning, present position or potential future for them. I am effectively creating a conceptual picture [narrative] based on the story board of significant events created from the *Film Stills* for which I have no title. This points to the concept of reading and interpretation, how I read the traces, and whether or not I interpret them correctly in order to find their relative temporal progression. Barthes' observation, that the photographic image is crammed full of referents, makes a significant impact on how and where I will position the individual works. These referents are the actuality through which I can re-read and reinterpret these past traces, so that I can reconstruct a temporal order or pseudo-moving picture. It may take many possible twists and turns, it may be

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Brunette & David Wills. *Screen / Play: Derrida and Film Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989: 105.

tragic or happy, it may be sinister or horrific. These possible scenarios are endless because of the dual and multiple nature of the photographic medium, its inside and outside, which creates an ambiguous foundation for the ambivalence of the caption. The speculation of there being many films out of these stills is possible because the inside traces become conflated with one another in the re-reading and expectation of narrativity.

What we have learned from this artifice is that the concept of montage can be used as a way to link diverse images, not to suggest a seamless narrative but to form points or marks along the way of a potential narrative. These marks are derivative of the referents contained in the photographs themselves. In their discussion of Marie-Claire Ropar's observations on the development of signatory writing within the film image, Peter Brunette and David Wills suggest that montage is a form of writing in which continuity and rupture must exist simultaneously:

For Eisenstein, each shot had figural meaning, of course, but he also insisted that the meaning lay in the nature of montage itself, which gives rise to a textual process that undoes the meaning of the individual shots by neutralizing, fragmenting, and making them conflict with one another. It is important to stress that the conflict at work in montage also functions within individual shots - called "internal montage" by Eisenstein - in the arrangement of forms, lines, and volumes...

Thus, even the so-called invisible editing of classic Hollywood cinema, as Eisenstein pointed out, must both maintain an illusion of continuity and linearity, which implies the effacing of editing, and make each shot different enough from the preceding one to justify its inclusion in the construction of its own invisibility. Continuity and rupture, in other words, are simultaneously foregrounded.<sup>19</sup>

Picking up my box of film stills, as I attempt to piece together a suitable narrative from the montage of photographs, it becomes apparent that the numbering sequence found on the individual stills is perhaps irrelevant, and that a construction based on referent content would better suit my endeavours. We must

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Brunette & David Wills. *Screen / Play: Derrida and Film Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989: 129.

not forget that if continuity and rupture exist simultaneously in montage, then the continuity we have set upon the depiction of one singular actress, while the rupture could take the form of breaking the numbering sequence in order to retrace an appropriate and possible narrative. Another form of rupture is the multiple roles being played out by one actress. My reason for this digression is to point out that the photographs can be structured into presenting a series of events or sequence of happenings. This type of notation can then be read or interpreted as having a temporal and textual connection. By simply recontextualizing the stills, a connection is inferred and subsequently a more concrete form of conceptual picture would be apparent. This interpretative desire is a way of discovering the story or meaning behind the collection.

An example of this direct recontextualization is the collection of photographs compiled by Diane Keaton under the title of *Mr. Salesman*.<sup>20</sup> Diane Keaton came across this collection of photographs from the 1950s, taken from the visual training exercises presented to potential salesmen, through a mutual friend who had access to an archive of these images. This training material was in the form of the old thirty-five millimetre audio-visual slide-tape presentation. What she achieved was to isolate specific frames, of the many at her disposal, and sequence them into a narrative of the “Mr. Salesman” experience. By doing this she effectively created a rupture of the “true” pedagogical story telling, which then became discontinuous. The re-sequenced film stills were then seamlessly juxtaposed to create an expressive dialogue and characterisation of that career. Seeing that the book comprises some fifty images and space does not allow me to reproduce the entire collection, I have reproduce sixteen to illustrate the point that photographs can be narratively connected when they are juxtaposed to one another. It also illustrates that there is an inherent need on the part of the viewer

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<sup>20</sup> I have reproduced sixteen photographs from the *Mr. Salesman* monograph and they can be found in Appendices A, see pages 340 & 341.

to make an ordered or meaningful narrative for them. This even happens in this micro-representation of the book collection.

Keaton's editing is effective for several reasons: first, they are reproduced in a book format, and the quality of a framed beginning, middle and end implicit in the structure of a book instils a clear semblance of narrative. The work contained in the book has no trouble in suggesting the sequential qualities necessary for the meaning to be expected, then extracted by the reader. Second, the continuity of the black and white content in which we see the depiction of "male suits" going through their training exercises, instils the sense of coherence necessary for reading to take place. Finally, there is the form of rupture caused by the recontextualization of the work out of its original context. This sense of rupture prompts a need to retrace the material evidence back to its original source in order to find its "now" new relative meaning. This rupture offers itself as a sign to be retraced, hence the expectation that **there must be a meaning and if I start from the beginning it will make sense**. These facts point to the simple conclusion that any two or more photographic images can be narrativized because of the inherent actual referential content contained inside the frame, which instils the sense of a past memory. With a past memory we must be able to retrace it. It becomes a form of curiosity: the curiosity of wanting to know who, what, where, when and how and why these photographs were created and why they are existing side-by-side. The ambiguousness created with the curiosity is the enticing quality implicit in all photographic representations.

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Returning to Sherman's *Film Still* work, we must now ask how does the intentional determination of captioning the collection as *Film Still* work in relation to the photographic content. Mulvey's claim that the works have no before or after is perhaps correct on the level of interpreting them from the gallery context and the intentionality of the artist. But as I have shown, if the context

shifts, the retextualization of the work as “film still” does not discount them from being read as just that. On this level then, they would exist externally from the intentionality of the artist, and they thereby require a before and after. And to exist in this state, an expected narrative may be discovered if one desires to read them as possible extracts from a Hollywood film, or for that matter a home movie.

Although this is not the intended direction of the work, it does point to the fact that the caption is an undeniable reference to the consideration of there being a before and after. The expectation of a beginning and future for the content is part of these photographs as *Film Still*. In other words, the narrative of each still will be open to reading. Although in the majority of the work the scenario of the female actress is a central theme, the intended meaning or finalised story will be based on a subjective reading depending on how and where photographs appear in the series. The caption *Film Still* and the continuity of the female character become deterministic traces which work together to invent a narrative which, as Arthur C. Danto notes, “the still must tease with the promise of a story the viewer of it itches to be told.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, if Barthes is correct in his observation of the photograph being without future, this apparent contradiction would take the expectation or promise of a story into a contradiction. The way out of this contradiction is through the caption. The reference that surrounds the words *Film* and *Still* is there as a boundary which we must transgress. The meaning of each word will only be completed through the resulting ability to move internally with the content. To have the word *still* we expect, as Danto has pointed out, that there must have been movement, or we suppose that there was movement. It is then implausible to resolve the photographic image, in this context, in terms of having no before or after, beginning or future. It may not have a future inside its frame but its future lies outside the still frame. The

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur C Danto. "Photography and Performance: Cindy Sherman's Stills" in *Untitled Film Stills - Cindy Sherman*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990: 9.

expectation of a time narrative is a factor in the creating of meaning from both the photograph and text. In the expectation of them being, but the obvious nature of them not being, *film stills* lies the seductive quality of this work.

I can illustrate this by comparing two photographs: *Woman Nudist in Sun Glasses* - Figure 4.5 by Diane Arbus; and the previously discussed Figure 4.1 (see page 183).



Figure 4.5 Diane Arbus, *Woman Nudist in Swan Sun Glasses*, 1970

If, for the sake of argument, Figure 4.5 was entitled *Film Still*, then the expected meaning behind or after the photograph would be something more ambiguous than a record of a female nudist wearing sunglasses, standing on the lawn with trees and bushes in the background. This rupture has been observed as being the result of the discrepancy between the similarity and difference which comes with any form of imitation.<sup>22</sup> In its original context, Figure 4.5 is a portrait of a female nudist wearing sunglasses, holding what appears to be her robe, as she

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Brunette. & David Wills. *Screen / Play: Derrida and Film Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989: 72.

stands in an exposed space of lawn and trees placed behind as a backdrop. Nothing else exists between our view and her presence, and in the intense contrast of the photograph, caused by the whiteness of her body reflecting the intensity of the light, which calls for the sunglasses, she becomes transformed by her stance in front of the backdrop of trees into a gleaming marble statue set off alone in an isolated park. These trees will frame and accent the smooth curves of the statuesque form. The imitative pose of a statue is reminiscent of Erastus Palmer's sculpture *The White Captive*, c.1859 - Figure 4.6.



Figure 4.6 *The White Captive*, c.1859

It is interesting to note that the sculptural title of Palmer's work highlights a critical observation of Arbus's photographic habits and *posthumously* the psychological struggle she was shielding at the time of her suicide in 1971.

Susan Sontag in *On Photography* address two ways in which the act of photography was practised by Diane Arbus.

The camera has the power to catch so-called normal people in such a way as to make them look abnormal. The photographer chooses oddity, *chases it*, frames it, develops it, titles it.

“You see someone on the street” Arbus wrote, “and essentially what you notice about them is the flaw.” The insistent sameness of Arbus's work, however far she ranges from her prototypical subjects, shows that her sensibility, *armed* with a camera, could insinuate anguish, kinkiness, mental illness with any subject...

The authority of Arbus's photographs derives from the contrast between their lacerating subject matter and their calm, matter-of-fact attentiveness. This quality of attention - the attention paid by the photographer, the attention paid by the subject to the act of being photographed - creates the *moral theatre* of Arbus's straight-on, contemporary portraits.<sup>23</sup> [*emphasis mine*]

In the first instance it is the terminology of the hunt with which the searcher is armed, when she determines the “subject”, frames it, and titles it - basically she makes it her captive. Secondly, despite the terminology, this pursuit take place not so much in a hunting ground as a theatre in which the characterisations or roles are predetermined: ‘Diane Arbus, you will play the role of the white female, retired advertising/fashion photographer, turned moral/social documentarian; New York population and landscape, you will be yourselves’. The motivation for these roles is to “convey the anti-humanist message which people of good will in the 1970's are eager to be troubled by...”<sup>24</sup> My intention is not to make fun of a tragic and very important moment (and member) in the history of American social realism photography. My point is that the division between what Diane Arbus was achieving in the late 1960's, until her death, and what Cindy Sherman was to create some ten years later, bears an interesting relationship in the way that a camera is used as a tool in a theatrical performance. One is using real life to parody the theatricality of life and the other is using theatricality to parody real

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Sontag *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1973: 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid: 33.

life. Both are making important statements on urban and rural life in America. Another way to express this commonality is the way in which Arbus was using the inside of American society, the forgotten and marginalized, to get at the outside image of what America embraces, and Sherman is using the outside American image to get at America's inside ideological point of view towards woman.

To return to our theme, what Arbus achieved was to take this woman in *Woman Nudist in Swan Sunglasses* and transform her into an image. The aesthetics of imitation are so apparent that the photograph is an undeniable curiosity for discovering and the true meaning and its subsequent story is hidden beneath the surface imitation. In the recontextualized form, captioned as *Film Still*, which I am not denying will also be as provocative as the original, the meaning is achieved through the text which slots this photograph possibly into a highly ambiguous image which has no immediate genre comparison. [Although we could stretch the imagination to include pornography as a genre comparison.] It could be a private home movie, a secret fragment kept hidden and locked away, so the kids or grandparents will not see what Mom was really like when she was young and lacking inhibitions. My point here is that the ambiguity of the language, *Film Still*, suggests and sets up a whole series of questions or possible narratives which in turn set up a whole series of retracings in order that we may determine the appropriate before and after of this frame. I would go as far as to suggest that with any indeterminate language or ambiguous text, whether it is *Film Still* or *Apple Tree Lane*, which accompanies a photograph, similar if not identical questions would be raised.

This is a form of cross-referencing in order to find the connection between the two independent types of language. In this new relationship between photograph and text, a narrative satisfies the two different meanings. The production of this narrative is not one of cause and effect but effect, then cause:

retracing the clues in the photograph and text to decode and find the elusive narrative that will give meaning to the new relationship.

A reverse consideration of Sherman's collection is that, by existing as mere snapshots in which the quality of enticement and voyeuristic desires would have not been specifically generated, the still melancholy of photography would have ceased to be addressed. Therefore to captivate the audience's curiosity, the paradox of there being a before or after, inside and outside frame movement, the application of a text or language was used to generate the necessary questions. The questions in turn propel the work into a critical and provocative look at female representation, not only in film but also in the canon of Western Art, which includes photography. This culminates in the realisation that the photographic referent is full of historical memory and the expectation of an emerging story is based on this historicity and language. The content now is not just visual but factual. This can be illustrated by another comparison of Figure 4.4 (see page 190) and Diane Arbus's *Lady in a Rooming House Parlor, 1963*, Figure 4.7. The similarity between the compositions, each woman sitting in a chair disregarding the photographic act, is the first comparison that can be made. Although the age difference between the women is apparent, both subjects are positioned in empty spaces, isolated from the rest of the room and world. The quality of isolation and independence is highlighted in the two different techniques of framing. In Figure 4.4 the low frontal angle gives us a ground floor perspective focusing upward to the woman wearing black. This point of view gives the impression one would have kneeling before a matriarch. In Figure 4.7, the extreme distance and the wide angle lens used creates the visual articulation of loneliness and isolation. The figure is absorbed in this large cavernous space - again, immersed in something other than acknowledging the photographic act, reading a newspaper.



Figure 4.7 Diane Arbus, *Lady in a Rooming House Parlor*, 1963

The fear of approach is expressed through the women's lack of acknowledgement between herself and the camera/observer, which conversely provides the visual attitude of independence and matriarchal dominance. They reflect an air of superiority back outside the frame towards the observer. Although this is a subjective description of the content, the potential for a narrative is contained in both. One narrative, *Lady in a rooming house parlor*, is just a little more explicit than the other, *Film Still #16*, which is more open-ended. What would happen if, because of their close resemblance of content, we were to combine the two titles into one title which read *Film Still #16 - Lady in a Rooming House Parlor*. In Figure 4.7, the sense of isolation and distance we have, could allow the photograph to be read as a fragment from a film in which "the older woman" slowly becomes isolated and distanced from the rest of the world.

I suggest that one possible film which could speak to both these photographs existing within one caption is Joseph Mankiewicz's 1950's look at the theatre world of New York, *All About Eve*. In the film we see the older theatre star [Margo Channing - *Bette Davis*] take under her wing a young, seemingly innocent rising star [Eve Harrington - *Anne Baxter*]. As the story (film) is based in desires for power and stardom in the theatre world, the same struggle for dominance of image between the two women is played out in both Arbus's and Sherman's photographs. They also can be seen as two possible depictions of the same actress at different points of her career. In Figure 4.4, the woman is young, confident, in control of great theatrical power, someone to be looked up to. In Figure 4.7, she is now forgotten by the changing attitudes of the theatre world, and left in isolation where all she has is the memories of the past as she reads the latest edition of *Variety*. What we have seen is the possibility of there being a before and after in every photograph.

This observation illustrates the ability of the camera, both the photographic and to some extent the film camera, to generate more than one specific narrative. Thus its agility of representation is a key factor in also having a content which is polysemous as well.

In order to generate narratives out of photographs, another *modus operandi* must be constructed. This "other" mode is assuming that there will be a narrative itself, and as Stephen Heath states in 'Narrative Space', a "frame space, is constructed as narrative space...narrative contains mobility that could threaten the clarity of vision in a constant renewal of perspective; space become place

narrative as the taking place of film..."<sup>25</sup> Effectively what Heath is pointing to is the inherent nature of framing to generate the expectation of a narrative. Thus the photographic medium relies on the frame, whether it be rectilinear or circular. The reading of the content inside the frame is assumed to have been taken in or at a place. This place is therefore the site at which an event or act has taken place. By discovering the causal relationship of having a fragment of an event before us, in the form of a photographic record, the actuality of this record confirms that the photographic moment *actually did happen*. The assumption I am making is that the fragment we see before us is a moment of a larger narrative; the framing of this place becomes loaded with potential narrative. For example, *Film Still #43*, 1979 - Figure 4.8.



Figure 4.8

Cindy Sherman, *Film Still #43*, 1979

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Heath. *Questions of Cinema*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981: 36.

By using this place in which the actress is attired in the pseudo-westernised version of a dress and in juxtaposition to a desert landscape, this composition becomes highly reminiscent of Clementine's helplessness and femininity in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, which was filmed on location in Monument Valley, Arizona. The potential for a larger, more impending narrative is the obvious connection being made here. Through the juxtaposition of the woman against the landscape of Monument Valley, the combined significance of this place is denotative of the "southwestern cultural experience", thereby making the overall articulation of this photograph anything other than just a "still space" or portrait or vacation snapshot. Certainly the possibility of reading this as a vacation snapshot is completely plausible. But when we consider this is a place, not a space, this determination defines the need to search for the narrative. And when we consider the intentionality of Sherman's work to critically rework the representation of women, it seems more relevant to consider this depiction a place loaded with potential narrative. It will always be a space, such as a space on a piece of paper in which a woman, the central character, will be cast for a part in a genre film.

Peter Wollen in his *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* points out that in the context of Ford's film, women maintain their social position in a way which is defined and governed by oppositions to the male hero, virgin / vixen or wife / mother, in which a lifetime of service and subordination is required.<sup>26</sup> If we take a closer look at Figure 4.8, it becomes apparent that this opposition is being parodied: the opposition of the woman in a dress and barefoot, a direct

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Wollen. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. London: Secker Publishing, 1969: 87, 94.

“feminine” characterisation, set against the monumental grandeur and open rugged landscape of the monumental valley behind her. The opposition between the phallic and masculine historical connotations of the place works in opposition to render her feminine presence in the photograph one of helplessness. The lost and helpless woman looks off-frame in order to see if her hero will save her from this wild formidable place, the open desert which can only be tamed by the masculine hand of a hero or law man. She waits by her only means of protection, a tree, that is, mother nature. The construction of the role is only complete when the rescue leads to her being swept off her feet, resulting in a life of “happiness” with her hero in a town which signifies the civilisation of culture. Obviously this is a scenario which is based on Sherman's intentions to look critically at the way women have been portrayed in society and art as being dependent on the active male. How Sherman achieves this is by evoking the textual connection between the language of genre films and the context of the frame used in the film industry to define a space as a place. Therefore Sherman works from the inside of the film, taking a genre in order to criticise the outside acceptance of the *auteur* theory that created this type of genre film.

Even though Barthes' observation of the photographic referent being without future is applicable, this does not simply deny the photograph a beginning and future. To deny this is to deny the fact that when we see the photograph as a space, in which an event took place, we are continually referring to the expectation of the past event which took place in this space. In order to see the direction or the future in the photograph, we need to see this space as a place in which a trace was left. Then we can effectively follow this trace backwards in order to discover the beginning; the expectation of the fact that there was a past

posits the possibility of moving forward from the past to the future. To have narrative is effectively to create a spatial journey out of a place, and once we have a journey, it then can be considered to have a point of departure. And to be in a place is to have travelled from A to B through some distance, no matter how small. Ideally in every journey there will be a story of the causes and effects, explaining how I got from A to B then on to C. It is this repeating of the journey back from B to A then to C which creates the photographic narrative. This story, created out of a reverse order of events, is the contradiction from retention B (primary memory / photographic content) to protention A (expectation of the photographic event) then to C (supplementing expectation for a future meaning) in Sherman's work. This is Husserl's main theory of representation in which a past representation (A) is always implicitly connected to any new representation (C).

Although these photographs have been critically acclaimed for addressing the effects of the representation of women in society and art, I want to explore one final aspect of the work, which is the intriguing play of intentionality whereby the photograph is used as a vehicle to play out the concepts of presence and absence. The issue this raises is how the emerging development of stories within the still photograph is achieved. The simple question is simply answered through the exploration of what happens when a photograph is captioned with the words *Film Still*. The effect of qualifying the work with text is similar if not identical to the consideration of the content of the photograph conceptualised as existing in a framed space. This frame space serves to "create its own frame that conversely, constructs its own inside."<sup>27</sup> Obviously, the visual content becomes internalised

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Brunette & David Wills. *Screen / Play: Derrida and Film Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989: 105.

through the idea of another frame of reference - specifically, a frame of a film. As well as exposing the visual content through internalisation, the reference of socio-cultural habits will be internalised within the work. *Film Still*, as a framing caption, provides us with an appropriate metaphor to begin to discuss how Derrida's presentation of metaphor in "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" is paralleled to Sherman's visual metaphors.

In discussing the creation of a metaphor, through the observations made by Aristotle, Derrida in 'White Mythology' insists that

the metaphor consists in a substitution of proper names having a fixed meaning and referent, especially when we are dealing with the sun whose referent has the original of always being original, unique, and irreplaceable, at least in the representation we give of it... The proper name, here, is the non-metaphorical prime mover of metaphor, the father of all figures...<sup>28</sup>

If we envisage Sherman's series as a collection of metaphors, it is thanks to this function of substitution. The first substitution that we can define is the way in which the textual caption given to the referents of what we are seeing have been substituted. In other words, the change of proper names, from "untitled photograph" to "film still", is the initial supplementary change we can observe in Sherman's work. As Derrida has pointed out, proper names will always have fixed referent meanings and ontology attached to them. Therefore the referent chain that follows the name change from "photograph" to "film still" is effectively changing the chain of reference meaning. Historically we know the precedent of the photograph is one of a "single instant" record and the reference of the cinematic or film image is one which carries the connotations of successive frames creating an illusion of temporal movement. The shift from only "still" to "temporal movement" effectively changes our reading of the content contained in

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida. "White Mythology" Originally In *Poétique* 5 (1971): 243. [Citation hereafter will be by page number.]

the frame. This change in meaning occurs on the external level of reference and affects the internal content. It also allows the interpretation of the proper names 'film still' to evoke their inverted chains of reference. Yet the content has remained the same, and the friction created between the photograph and caption forms a resonance within the pre-existing visual content and pre-existing chain of references.



Figure 4.9

Cindy Sherman, *Film Still # 20*, 1978

We can see this substitutional change in *Film Still #20, 1978*, Figure 4.9, by simply considering this photograph to be snapshot of “Mom on her way to go shopping” or as a social document taken by Robert Frank in “Grosse Point, Michigan”. Either photograph existing in this context is certainly plausible, but by substituting proper nouns with the phrase “film still” the evoked reference to a time-based narrative is conceptually implanted into the reader's imagination. The shift from simple photograph to a complex dialogue is the metaphorical function that resonates within these film still photographs. And because we are continually reminded that these are not “actually” film stills, the journey between

Figure 4.9 being and not being a film still is where the metaphor is created. It requires the viewer to read the photographic image as possibly a fictive or realist construction of social behaviour.

A further metaphorical function exists in these works. Derrida has conveniently defined where and how this other metaphorical function may be found. Through the Aristotelian definition of the noun, Derrida extends his insights by suggesting that:

The noun is the first semantic unity. It is the smallest signifying element. It is a composite, (*phoné sémantik*), each of whose elements is in itself insignificant, (*asémos*), without meaning. The noun shares this characteristic with the verb from which it is distinguished only by its atemporality. [236]

When we look at this specific use of “film still” as a caption on a photograph, it is apparent that the noun is “film” and the verb is “still”.<sup>29</sup> The noun carries with it the reference that will direct a reading and interpretation of the visual content. “Still”, on the other hand, is the temporality needed to move the film reference out of its temporal narrativity. When we consider the caption as a complete textual unit, as it sits next to the photographic content, the contradiction between “film”, its reference to images made to create movement, and “still”, its reference to a-temporality, becomes a new form of reference. Considering our earlier discussed principle of substitution, the photograph reference is supplemented for the new film still metaphor. When this metaphor is inscribed on the photograph, thereby signifying a contradiction of temporality and a-temporality, the likelihood of having a metaphor increases. It is this double substitution which conceptualises the frames in which this supplementation can take place. Only by transgressing this meta-boundary can we extract a meaning for this metaphor. Ironically, once

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<sup>29</sup> I am certainly aware that this word has many grammatically functions, and it can be used in an adjectival, noun or conjunctive context, but in this very specific context the word still is used for its verb connotations.

we have extracted the meaning of the metaphor, the metaphor becomes a cliché.

Therefore the appropriate definition of metaphor in Sherman's *Film Still* work is offered by Derrida's "White Mythology" text.

[M]etaphor is in its place in the *Poetics*, which opens as a treatise on mimesis. ...Mimesis is never without the theoretical perception of resemblance or similarity. To produce a good metaphor is to see a likeness...[and likeness as mimesis]. Mimesis is proper to [women]. Only [women] imitates properly. [women] alone takes pleasure in imitation, [women] alone learns to imitate, [women] alone learns by imitation. The power of truth, as the unveiling of nature is by mimesis. [237]

My change in gender supports my observations on Sherman's work in substituting the real photographic document for the conceptual reference to a film still as an act of metaphorical imitation. The other in her work is the content itself, in which Sherman as actress is imitating the social representations of woman in a cultural critique. The similarity between photograph and the film still image makes it possible for Sherman to create these expectational metaphors. And as we "learn from imitation" these works speak to a wider, potentially more powerful narrative truth by utilising the mimetic technique of imitation and substitution.

One final comment before concluding this chapter: it is intriguing to remember that Derrida spoke of the proper noun in reference to the sun. When we consider that sunlight or a form of artificial sunlight was needed to create all these works. The photographic process itself becomes a form of metaphor - imitation. Also, the great effort of film production companies to imitate the reality of the sun's light completely can be another form of metaphor between the sun and image. This perhaps would account for the contemporary expectation that the primary memory (photograph) is based on imitation.

Before concluding I want to look briefly at Husserl's terms of retention and protention in relation to the terms presence and absence. In the earlier discussion Husserl stated "primary memory, or as we said, retention continuously attaches itself to the [now past] impression". In the lecture 'Protentions in

Recollection’, Husserl expands the concept of protention to suggest that “every memory contains expectation-intentions whose fulfilment leads to the present. Every process that constitutes its object originally is animated by protentions [expectation-intentions] that emptily constitute what is coming as coming, that catch it and bring it forward to fulfilment”.<sup>30</sup> What these two reworked definitions point to is that as retention is still a form of primary memory [an impression that has now passed] and protention is a form of expectation of the next impression, the two combine to form an internalised consciousness which attaches itself to a now past impression or temporal object as a form of the conscious understanding.

In the *Film Still* series the visual content can be considered as form of retention; this retention runs parallel to the conceptual idea of the photograph being a form of memory. This is to say, photography reflects the contemporary or historical desire to record passing events as things existing in a time. Even though Husserl was considering the temporal objects of his lectures to be musical tones, I foresee no conceptual confusion arising by asserting that the things in front of the camera, ready to be photographed, are temporal objects, which can be consciously determined in these considerations of retention and protention. These things do exist within a temporality; one just happens to be acoustic and the other; visual. Both have to do with memory and expectation. The difference, if there is one, is that retention continues to digress into the now past, but the photograph has the potential of remaining a visually fixed form, continually in the forefront, always recalling an expectation of it being a memory. Protention, on the other hand, parallels the textual caption inscribed on photograph. It is this external consciousness or language which controls “what is coming as coming, that catch[es] it and bring[s] it toward fulfilment.” Consider a photograph taken on a vacation then positioned in a family album with just the date and place inscribed

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<sup>30</sup> Edmund Husserl. *On The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time: 1893-1917*. John Barnett Brough (trans.), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991: 30, 54.

on it. With only the date and place noted, this photograph directly references the past for a future narrative. The text and photograph combination gives a defined point of reference in which the inference of co-relational meaning is expected. It is the meaningfulness of language which creates the expectation that this hypothetical photograph constitutes initially a primary memory with a protensity of narratives - stated definitively as the stories we tell. Therefore the expectation brought about by the external signifiers, language, is one way in which the photograph becomes complete in its fulfilling the expectation of a narrative embedded in the visual content. This is all too obvious in the way a textual caption can activate the expectation of meaning. Consequently, the photographic medium carries with it the expectation that the document can be articulated so as to constitute a form of storytelling derived from memory. To validate this claim we would need to accept that all "photographs" have implicit in them the need for a caption. Or, to turn this statement around, the viewer requires the caption in order to validate this visual composition. If this is the case, then the caption acts as a bridge between the observer and the photographer's intentions. And to travel along this bridge from the photograph (B) back to the photographing moment (A) and through to the potential understanding of the journey (C) necessitates the development of a narrative to valid this journey.

*This explanation points to the characteristic of the noun which is inherent in everything I have discussed so far. The characteristic of substitution works to fulfil the space in which a binary hierarchy is created. It is advantageous to explore this theme of substitution which directly expresses how a metaphor is created and can be interpreted. The basic pretence of the work is that a metaphor in Western textual debates is created through the concept of substitution: removing one context and providing another which creates the space for the third context. This third space is the metaphoric space in which the work may speak to some type of hidden truth.*

In conclusion, I want to discuss the principles that I have been dealing with in Cindy Sherman's work. The first is the principle of the internal retention and external protensity of the works narrativity. It is these two sustaining terms which point to a possible answer to how the creation of narrative is formed out of the photograph. As we discovered, this emphasis and inversion of principles is responsible for the expectational reading to the work. We found it to be attached to the photograph in the form of an inscribed textual statement, that is the caption. Therefore the internal content references of the work are directly controlled by the external textual references, and it is the act of substitution that creates the effectiveness of reading a narrative. An extension to this change can be found in this internal and external substitution. It parallels the consideration of retention and protention. This parallelism is necessary for the consideration of there being a time narrativity to the photograph. This time is the key to the photograph's capacity to support a metaphoric reading rather than existing as a mere cliché or reality - better known as realism. The initial change of names created metaphors and thereafter they became clichés and as Danto has pointed out, "[Sherman] stopped making the stills when, as she put it, she ran out of clichés."<sup>31</sup> However this statement should not define the work as lacking in theoretical interest. If we reverse this statement and consider the cliché as an imitation, and imitation as a *form of substitution*, and substitution as being necessary to create metaphor, the renewed direction of the work is that there is a narrative - albeit hidden waiting to be read. Although these photographs can now be considered retrospectively clichéd, they still possess the ability to describe a contemporary ideology in mimetic terms.

A parallel with a short story of Honoré de Balzac can provide a telling insight into Sherman's *Film Still* work. The technique I referred to earlier is that

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur C Danto. "Photography and Performance: Cindy Sherman's Stills" In *Untitled Film Stills - Cindy Sherman*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990: 14.

of description which embodies the qualities of resemblance and similarity within the written form as a means of expression. Alain Robbe-Grillet, in discussing this technique in the novels of Balzac states: "The aim of those descriptions is to make one see and they succeed. Most of the time it was a case of erecting a décor, of defining the frame of action, of presenting the physical appearance of its protagonist."<sup>32</sup> This technique of erecting a décor, framing and presenting physical appearance is obvious when we consider this passage from Balzac's *Gillette: The Unknown Masterpiece*.

At first glance she seems wonderful. But a second look reveals she is stuck to the background of the painting and that one couldn't walk around her. She is a silhouette with one side to her only, a figure cut out, an image which cannot turn around, cannot change position. I am not conscious of any air between that arm and the ground of the picture: space and depth are lacking; yet the perspective is correctly done and the gradation of light and shade exactly observed: but despite these praiseworthy efforts I find it impossible to believe that the warm breath of life animates this beautiful body. It seems to be that if I were to place my hand on the firmly rounded throat, I would find it as cold as marble! No, my friend, blood does not flow beneath this ivory skin, the crimson dew of life does not swell the network of veins and capillaries intertwining beneath the amber transparency of her temples and breast. Here is life, movement - there is only stillness; in every piece life and death struggle with each other: here is a woman, there is a statue, there is a corpse. Your creation is unfinished.<sup>33</sup>

This passage is taken from the section in which a young, potential apprentice artist, who turns out to be Poussin, has come to the home of Master Francois Porbus for advice on becoming a "great" artist. The young Poussin has shown his latest work to Porbus and Porbus's response was as quoted It would also be the division of ideal and real that come into play both in Balzac's short story and Sherman's film stills. For it is Gillette who is the real lover of Poussin, and in order for Poussin to get a look at Frenhofer's ideal woman, he must convince the real woman to become a model for an ideal woman. Briefly the story revolves

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<sup>32</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet. *Pour un nouveau roman*. Paris, 1972: 53. Quoted in Micheal Evans *Claude Simon and the Transgression of Modern Art*. London: MacMillan Press, 1988: 17.

<sup>33</sup> Honore de Balzac. *Gillette or The Unknown Masterpiece*. Anthony Rudolf (trans.) London: The Menard Press: 11-12.

around the desires between two different artists for the attainment of the ideal beauty to express nature. But in both their desires, the young Gillette becomes sacrificed for the love of an ideal. Porbus who sums up the essence of art when he realises the unattainable. “We must capture the spirit, the soul, the physiognomy of the things and beings”.<sup>34</sup> My interest is not the striking degree to which the description contained in the written text of Balzac parallels the photographic description of *Film Still # 6, 1977*, Figure 4.10.

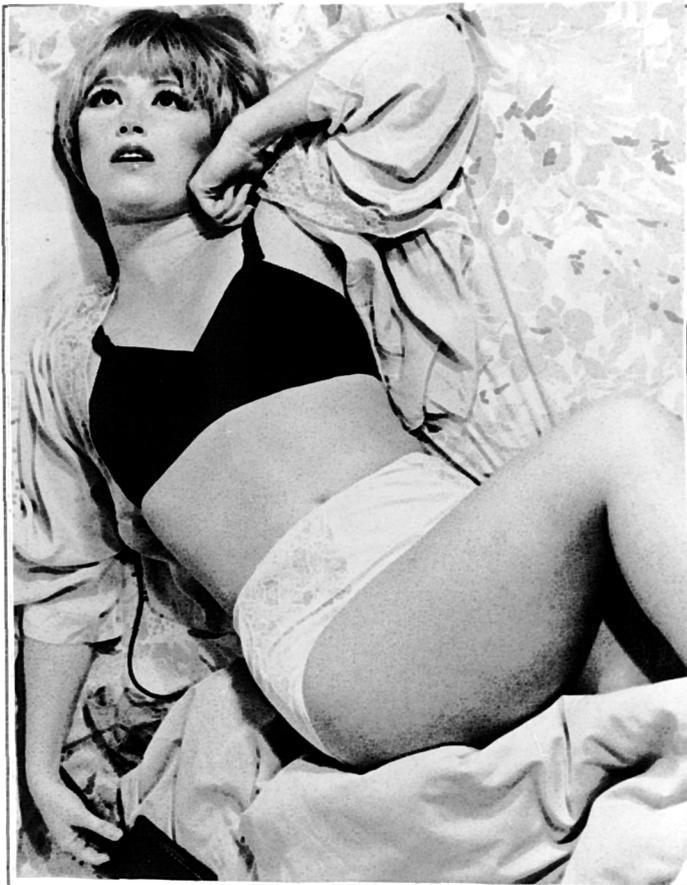


Figure 4.10

Cindy Sherman, *Film Still #6, 1977*

It is how this text, and the story of Gillette's struggle between the ideal - art - and the real - woman - can be seen in the camera's ability to render in resemblance and similarity an almost identical match with the text. The resemblance of the ideal woman to a figure cut out, a silhouette with ivory skin which in turn creates the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

similarity of stillness of a statue: these type of descriptive divisions and techniques can be visually extracted from Sherman's work. The absence of any space between the ideal woman and the bedding can be a significant factor in considering the photographic process as a form of realist description. And when we consider that the textual description is presenting a real woman as a form of art, Figure 4.10 only becomes the critical alternative towards which Sherman has been working. Sherman recreates the struggle between the desires for the real and the ideal through using modernist "male" artist's own desires to express and imitate nature. Through a product of theatrical-portrayal, Sherman (ad)dresses this aesthetic from the inside rather than the outside. It is this reversal that grants the power of Figure 4.10 to speak of the appearance of beings rather than of accepting an appearance. On its own, this work comments on and critically investigates the artificial aesthetic of the modernist mentality towards women as muses for the male gaze which desires to substitute for nature or God. Although *Film Still #6* is a critical reworking and engaging of this aestheticization of women, the ability for there to be a narrative is one in which the scene from Balzac's story can be comparatively interpreted as a scene in a performance still. Since Sherman wants the viewer to consider these depiction's as *Film Stills*, the fascinating thing is that this photograph could be substituted for the painting on which Master Porbus is commenting. Consequently through substitution we can discover a further level of metaphorical commentary within Sherman's work, the metaphorical play on the theme of description which the photographic medium carries over from its realist infancy.

# 5

## *Jacques-Henri Lartigue: A Diary Vision Narrative*

The 'visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation.

You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing. (Think for example of the question: "Are sense-data the material of which the universe is made?")

But there is an objection to my saying you have made a 'grammatical' movement. What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you have invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song.<sup>1</sup>

*Philosophical Investigation* Ludwig Wittgenstein

Does this above philosophical observation on the discovery of finding a new way to say, or image, mirror what we have come to associate with the photographic work of Jacques-Henri Lartigue? In a certain respect it does. Wittgenstein's statement illustrates a specific, if not fundamental, shift in the way we come to see the photographic composition of the youthful vision of Lartigue. This new discovery noted by Wittgenstein can be seen throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M. Anscombe (trans.) Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1978: 121e (400. & 401.).

photographic work of Lartigue. It is especially apparent in the photograph of his room with toy cars lined up to speed away on the carpeted floor Figure 5.1.

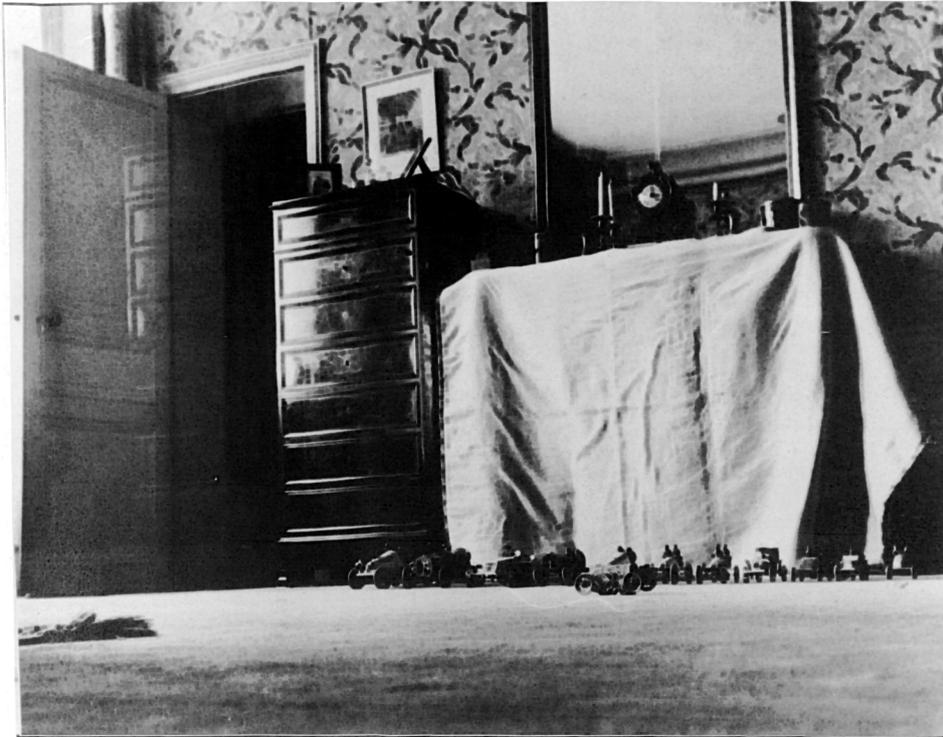


Figure 5.1 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *View of my toy cars on the floor, 1906*

The camera placed on the floor provokes a point-of-view which imitates the vision of a spectator or companion watching this starting line at floor level, and at the same time, composes the vision of the boy who spends time on the floor playing alone with miniature cars. We can speculate that, perhaps one day in the future, these toy cars will become the real thing. The floor becomes a landscape in which the foreground and background become divided into the immediate present of childhood and distant adult future. The distant future is visually the open door and the future which looms above. This empty space, which leads to another place or landscape, is the dark and empty passageway of the adult world. But for the moment the immediate child landscape, the floor of the room, is the imaginary race course where the winners and losers are unobstructed by the objects of maturity. This curious shift is from a mature

vision, a vision of composition, balance and intellectual rendering, to a vision of a child, a casual, uncritical vision, where *everything* is seen as fascinating. The child-like vision is aided by the implicit magic and fantastic quality of the camera. And through this “magic” of the camera, combined with the vision of the uncritical child, we can extract a continually looked for “grown-up” world.

By suggesting that there is a quality of the fantastic in Lartigue’s early bedroom photograph, a comparison to the fictional genre of the fantastic can be made. In the seminal text, *The Fantastic*, Tzvetan Todorov defines two central concepts contained within the literary genre. One is the principle of hesitation that the reader receives through the fictional characters’ self-understanding of their particular situation; the second is the ambivalence of uncertainty which is related to the consideration of the central characters’ self-understanding of the situation, whether or not it is real or imaginary. These two effects can be the central visual aesthetic in Lartigue’s initial photographs, therefore a complete definition of the fantastic can offer even more comparison between the imagery and genre. Todorov suggests that these two requirements are then integrated into what he sees as the definition of the Fantastic.

The fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work - in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

How is this definition relevant to Lartigue’s photograph? This question can be answered by considering the parallel between the vision of a small boy who is

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<sup>2</sup> Tzvetan Todorov. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre*. Richard Howard (trans.) Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973: 29.

being the spectator and the power of the imagination of this small boy to create photographs such as Figure 5.1.

In Todorov's definition he described the necessity for the author to create for the reader a sense of a world of living persons and to produce a quality of hesitation between the real and imaginary of this world. In Lartigue's photograph this world of living persons is constructed through the signified meaning of the bedroom furniture and the room itself. This is a room inhabited by real people. But, because of the distorted lower point of view, this re-presentation<sup>3</sup> instils the quality of hesitation about whether or not the room is really inhabited. Because we are to some extent looking through the eyes of the photographer, we assume his characterisation of this photograph. Therefore, Todorov's principle of entrustment is fulfilled. In the final condition, we as readers of this photograph must adopt a certain attitude towards the photograph as a textual genre. As Todorov pointed out that the instance on allegorical or poetic interpretation is irrelevant. Therefore, in this photograph the interpretation is caught between the actual and imaginary. Although I realise that the imaginary quality is achieved through the device of altering the traditional point of view, this device does not deny the reading of the set-up by this manipulation of the "real" to form a contradiction between the actual and the imaginary. This contradiction feeds the condition of hesitation. Thus Todorov's three conditions have been met in Lartigue's photograph. Therefore, to say that this photograph is fantastic(al) is

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<sup>3</sup> My use of the term re-presentation rather than "representation" is not reflective of Noel Carroll's observation on the representational theory of photographic image and cinematographic image. He suggests in his "Concerning Uniqueness: Claims For Photographic and Cinematographic Representation" that "Once the relation between the image - the photograph or the cinematic shot - is thought to be some sort of identity relation, the ruling idea of representation becomes re-presentation, i.e., the image is thought to *present again* some object or event from the past." [p. 17 In *Dialectics and Humanism* 2 (1987)]. Within this point of view, I feel that with the quality of hesitation required in the fantastic, the principle of hesitation in the photograph, can only be achieved through the consideration of the photographs re-presentation of the thing in a past context. Thus the uncertainty and hesitation of that past uncertainty (memory) is achieved through the questioning of whether or not the photograph is a re-presentation of the real thing in a context of a past memory where hesitation or uncertainty about its "realness" is manifested.

certainly an appropriate definition of the “fantastic” aesthetic found in Figure 5.1. What is compelling about this photograph is considering it as a “fantastic” literary equivalent that draws into question the possibility that the imagination of a small boy was really fulfilling itself through the “magic” of the camera. What gets extracted from this are the further qualities of the “fantastic”, “magical” and “imaginary”, and these three characteristics will be either directly or indirectly in place in Lartigue’s other photographs, as we shall discover.

Returning to the photograph, the looking up or a lower than “normal” horizon perspective are the visual traits of a small child rather than the mere wonders of the larger, more grown-up world. This surface point of view and the ordinary subjects of Lartigue’s uncritical vision become the enticing attraction of the photographs. A further example is the self-portrait taken in his bath with hydroplane ready to take flight *Self-Portrait, 1904*, Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2.

Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Self-Portrait, 1904*

It is this type of unselfconscious vision that would characterise Lartigue’s early photographs as what he would later name as “eye-traps”. Lartigue as a child

wrote in his early journals how he was the continual spectator because his brother, Zissou, and cousins, Robert and Louis

won't let me join in their games. I feel so small and lonely I want to cry. I keep watching them and watching them play...when, all of the sudden, I had a remarkable idea...an invention out of a fairy-tale! An invention thanks to which I was sure that I would never again be bored or sad...never, never, never.<sup>4</sup>

We can imagine the young Lartigue sitting and watching the others play their most wonderful games, wondering how he could be like them and take part. It is *perhaps the desire to take part* that causes him to come up with this invention from a fairy tale, another form of the fantastic. Lartigue continues discussing, in his journal, how his new imaginative invention works

This is how my invention works: I open my eyes...close them...open them again...open them very, very wide...and Hop! I have captured the image! Like a camera I catch the picture with everything in it...the colors, the real size. What I kept in my mind is something *alive*; and it moves and smells! [ibid]

This desire to retain the fleeting visual impression or picture will become further visual traits of his early childhood photography as spectator. We can see the parallel between his imaginary invention and that of the real operational mechanics of the camera eye. In hindsight, it was because his camera was broken that the young Lartigue, feeling again the outsider, with no way to feel part of the action and events going around him, invented the pseudo-human camera as one way to replace for the loss of his real camera. When considering that Lartigue was inventing the ability to operate like the eye of the camera lens shutter, this can be used as another metaphor and compelling compositional device in his photographs. As we take on the allegory, "vision of a child as spectator on an the adult world", we alternatively rediscover the new imaginative grammatical movement or perhaps rediscover the simple grammar of our own childhood, the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.). *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 6.

simple opening and closing of the eye to trap the “real”, even in a fleeting momentary flash of retention. Lartigue would write, “My invention is a beautiful secret. It can capture anything!”<sup>5</sup> Rather than a shift in conceptual articulation, a form of mature reasoning, the young Lartigue is discovering a simple system of retaining pre-existing signs seen from a different point of view. And this physical invention would not fulfil the potential desires to capture *everything* as would the magic of the camera. In distress Lartigue would write,

But one morning I woke up...and I was miserable. It was so annoying and distressing to discover my invention didn't work any more! I thought I would be able to put it all down on paper after I had captured the images in my 'eye-trap'. But it didn't work as I hoped it would. I wonder...if you suddenly discover that you are a tiny human being with a staggering powerlessness, to see *reality*...if this is what is meant by growing up?<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in his struggle to recapture the eye-trap invention he discovered that it did not work any more and that even writing or sketching was not achieving the visual results he wished to capture, Lartigue returns to the photographic camera as his means of achieving his eye-traps of *everything*.

It would not be until 1963 that these mechanical “eye-traps” of a new or forgotten visual grammar would have their first public exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. This time span, between their production and John Szarkowski's eventual exhibition of the works, illustrates that these photographs were presented out of their original context of being collected in diaries that are intimately connected with Lartigue and not originally intended for public consumption outside the immediate family. As Shelley Rice has noted in “Remembrance of Images Past”

Photography had a peculiar double function in Lartigue's life. On one hand, it was thoroughly “modern”, and he used it to document objects and events that were part of the radically accelerated tempo of 20th-century life. On the other hand, however, photography became his medium of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 7

choice for freezing time: for arresting change, for preserving what exists, for refusing the disorderly flux of temporal life.<sup>7</sup>

The freshness of his visual grammar is not so dynamically captivating when we considered the work was originally produced for his diary writing. For the diary can be seen as a chronological record of one's thoughts, descriptions, daily events and emotions. This may be yet another possible explanation to why the photograph became an important element in his diaries. They are the "eye-traps" of a boy who saw the potential to be part of the *reality* he was seeing. Further, Rice noted that the camera became his way into the events from which he felt disconnected or cut off.<sup>8</sup> By considering the early photographs as moments arrested for a boy and his visual diary, they become transformed from mere snapshots to compositions in the form of a visual writing. This visual writing was to validate his participation as spectator of and in his family's upper-middle class lifestyle. And when his imaginary eye-trap invention did not work, we read the distress of not being able to write as well. "I thought I would be able to put it all down on paper after I had captured the images in my 'eye-trap'"<sup>9</sup>, but this did not happen and he needed another form to achieve his spectatorship. Later, Lartigue remarked that "the memory is always more beautiful than the reality... and that's marvellous, since it's certain that all present realities will become memories."<sup>10</sup> The photographs made with his mechanical eye-trap become a language based on memory: written down and arrested into a frozen temporality.

The composing of the thing in front of the camera lens and shutter, the shift from being an active participant in the event or outing to being the observer is one way we can approach the photographs. Lartigue's acute vision has been allowed to freeze and write down with a refreshing innocence the immediate

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<sup>7</sup> Shelley Rice. "Remembrance of Images Past" In *Art In America*. November 1992: 128.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: 124.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 124.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 128.

moment. With the magic of the camera, he has overcome the alienation brought about by being the youngest member of the family. This also highlighted his feeling of being excluded from the family events, and a way to overcome this alienation, he can now be a participant - a participant as observer with a camera. This is evident in this diary entry; "I have decided that from now on I will use *human* means instead of magic, [imagination], to make my beautiful "eye-trap" work."<sup>11</sup> He now stands outside the immediate moment in order to write down, in visual terms, what he sees in human means. This *human* refers to the mechanical means of the camera. Initially we read the magic of the camera being replaced with the magic of invention and when the invention could no longer retain the immediate past, magic is now replaced with *human* means. We can infer then that this replacement of imaginary magic with human magic is a form of maturing or "growing up". This perhaps means he realised the potential of the camera to retain "better" images. And rather than relying on a predominantly textual description, it is the combination of the human eye trap and text that will inform his attention.

The innocence of these moments, such as *Simone Roussel on the beach, Villerville, 1904*, Figure 5.3, translates into an eye-trap vision which is typical of early twentieth-century photography.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 7.



Figure 5.3 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Simone Roussel on the beach, Villerville, 1904*

This innocence can also be the “amateurishness” of the snapshot and it can be associated with someone who is not “inside” the photographic medium either as a commercial or professional practitioner.<sup>12</sup> But these two features alone do not provide enough evidence to dismiss the eye-trap vision from existing. We can just imagine, along with the imagination of Lartigue, when he makes this new invention work. Another reason for this innocent quality is the technological advances photographic films had made by the time Lartigue received his first camera from his father. This allowed the young Lartigue a clearer form of documentation of motion in fractions of a second, versus the longer exposures of some twenty years previous. Lartigue would use the capacity of this camera to “freeze” and “arrest” the events around him, just as he did when his imaginary invention worked. Fractions of a second exposures are the “realities [that] will

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<sup>12</sup> The argument could be raised that during the late nineteenth-century the desire to render the subject in front of the camera in an ambience of innocence was certainly being practised by professional photographers. I would not want to deny this obvious professional and commercial success. Therefore, the work of such a “pictorialist” as Peter Henry Emerson is a prime example of this innocence. Especially when considering photographs such as *Snipe Shooting, 1886* and *Poling the Marsh Hay, 1886*. - reproductions of these works can be found in Mike Weaver’s *The Art of Photography: 1939-1989*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989: 151, 152.

become memories". It would be the combination of casual child-like innocence, adolescent interest, and the instantaneousness of photography that would form an innocent aesthetic within Lartigue's photographs. To a child the questioning of visual composition and balance is not a central concern. What is central is the documenting of what interests him at that moment rather than the desires of his audience. Thus the interest of a child and adolescent is ideally suited to the instantaneousness of photography. For as the quickness of interest is caught so then is the quickness of exposure which can document the fleeting moments of games, experiments and outings.

This is most evident in Figure 5.3, where, at the moment the dog has directed its gaze toward Simone and Simone has looked towards Lartigue, the exposure was made. At this curious split second Lartigue chose to make the exposure. Outside of this triangular gazing is the quality of the photograph retaining the memory quality he so desired as a child. It becomes the holiday record of not only Simone but of Lartigue himself, through the camera's ability to refer back to the initial referent, and through the photographed referent re-establishing his presence there at the scene. Although he is invisible, his presence as the invisible trace through the recording of Simone and dog on the beach is marked as "I took this photograph" or *My first photo of my cousin Simone Roussel*. Lartigue's "I" or "my" referent is as an observer; this is the implicit statement embedded in the "holiday" snapshot / photograph.

The austere and formalised composure that we see in photographs from professionals of this time period such as Alfred Steiglitz, Edward Weston, Clarence White, Heinrich Kühn and Paul Strand are not part of Lartigue's vocabulary. The ability or desire to see and capture and retain the moment is more important than what the eventual metaphorical, conceptual or symbolic meaning would be. To get close and discover the mechanisms of twentieth-century operations are the key visual interests which can be observed in the majority of

Lartigue's early work and remain more apparent in his later work. To state the obvious is to say that the boy with a camera at such a young age was prepared to document the new and fascinating emerging industrial age, and comes face to face with the fast-paced mechanisation and fascination of cars and planes. Within these "industrial creations" came the fantasy of "real" speed and male adulthood. It would be these rapid changes in industrialisation which brought with them the extension of the ideals of the future: even faster cars and eventually heavier than air flight, with which every boy was fascinated. Although these traits are not explicitly visual in the photographs they do find themselves in the vision of a boy emerging from adolescence to manhood, taking part more and more in his brothers' interests through his camera. It would be his desire to document the interesting and strange which determined what found itself in front of his camera. Experimentation and invention would also play a key role in what Lartigue would document. Therefore the photographs can be considered as a form of a visual diary and a perfect medium for collecting moments and resolving interests and memories of these new and fascinating scenes.

Speaking of his fascination with the concept of flying, Lartigue reminds us: "but for me and for the young people of my time it was something fantastic, miraculous. All the beautiful dreams as a young boy happened in the air."<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is visually revealed in *Zissou takes off in his "ZYX 24", Rouzat, 1910*, Figure 5.4.

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<sup>13</sup> Ezra Bowen. (intro). *Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. The History of Photography Series, New York: Aperture, 1976: 6.

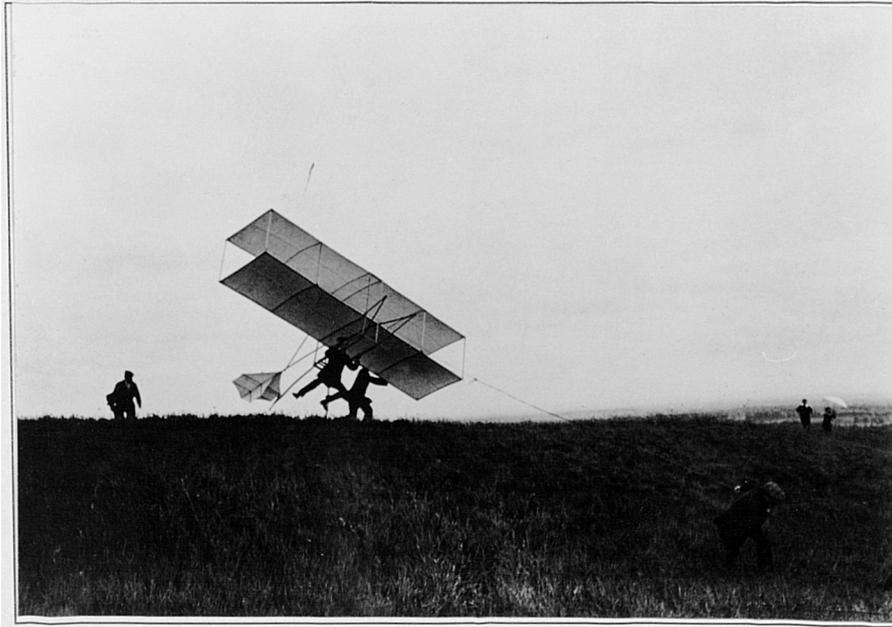


Figure 5.4 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Zissou takes off in his "ZYX 24"*, Rouzat, 1910

Adding to the growing list of terms which will come to define the photographic vision of Lartigue, we can add: “inventory”, “arresting”, “retentional” and “fascinating”. It will be through these terms that we can consider the adolescent photographs as a form of translation - a translation which takes the work from being a pure formal referent, or memory, to symbolic expressions of the new future. This is achieved through the “authenticity” of his innocence. The photographs rely on this “authenticity” and the creation of these real picture captures a boy’s life within a century of change. In other words, a form of wanting to move forward, grow up, yet wanting to stay the same. It comes to the fear of the unknown, and through the camera this fear is recorded for further reflection and reasoned reassessment.

A way to approach this shift in visual vocabulary is to draw a brief comparison between the first person writings of diaries and the form of fictional diary novels. Although both these forms contain first person pronouns, the differences between the “I’s” can express different impressions to the reader. As Lorna Martens has pointed out, the diary is a form of writing in which the writer usually writes about the immediate past. And whether or not there will be a reader

or not, the diary is a form of temporal progression based on day-to-day recounting.<sup>14</sup> In the diary novel, the form of temporal progression is “imitated” to suggest to the reader that the text and narrative structure is a diary. Ideally the fictional diary novel is a form of diachronic dimension in which a first person narrative is constructed out of the traditional authentic resonance of the diary.<sup>15</sup> When we come to consider Lartigue’s photographs in the context of a diary, and seeing that, as I have suggested, they are a form of diary writing (albeit textually visual and visually textual), the compositions of Lartigue’s photographs will be subsequently divided into the two forms of “I” compositions found in the diary. The visionary “I” in Lartigue’s photographs is the same person I want to explore as narrator to the content. On one level the early photographs illustrate an “I” composing in a visual form a spectator of his own. In other words, the photograph as diary composition becomes a means of authentically recounting events in the immediate past. The other version is the later photographic compositions of a mature adult, can be seen as “I’s” “emphasiz[ing] the narrator quality rather than the immediately personalising of them in present moments.”<sup>16</sup> We can see then that there are two distinctive forms of fiction which replace the early and the later work of Lartigue.

On both levels they make compositions in the performative, and the constative. It is through these two distinctions that J.L. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words* will define how the function and quality of statements can be changed. It would be accomplished through his analysis of the structures of sentences, and subsequently, statements. His initial observation is that there are two functional forms to a first-person pronoun statement. First, there is the “performative.” This exists as mostly non self-referential, for “they do not

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<sup>14</sup> Lorna Martens. *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.: 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: 6.

'describe' or 'report' or state anything at all and they are not 'true or false'.

Second, is that the "constative" mostly suggests a self-referentiality pertaining to the implied narrator who writes or observes from the outside."<sup>17</sup>

In terms of the photographic work, the performative composition paralleling the photographs would be "I do take photographs". The constative composition would be something like "I am taking the photograph". They both exist in every photograph, but depending on the context and the content, the performative or constative aesthetic will be dominate. It is identical in the writing of either the diary or the diary novel. The "I" in the diary is performative and the "I" in the diary novel, a fictional stepping outside to observe, will be emphasised by the constative "I". The overall visual aesthetic we see in Lartigue's early photographs is the performative statement. We interpret this "I do take photographs." as the newly discovered vision expressed through the "unconventional" things photographed, like those of Figures 5.1 (see page 226) and 5.2 (see page 229) Wittgenstein's observation on the new discovery is another apt definition of Lartigue's bedroom. Through a new set of signs the room becomes transformed into the imaginary place or field of larger-than-life cars. The new set of signs is basically a reconfiguring of the old pre-existing signs - basically a new point of view. The shift from the performative to the constative act can be seen as a fictionalising reference in which the fundamental visions of the self are expressions we infer from Lartigue's mature photographs.

This shift from performative to constative "I's" can be initially observed in the difference of framing and composition of the photograph. For example, in *My Cousin Bichonnade, Rouzat, 1911*, Figure 5.5 and *Bibi and Yves, the chauffeur, Hispano-Suiza, 1927*, Figure 5.6, the mature vision is one of Figure 5.6.

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<sup>17</sup> John Langshaw Austin. *How To Do Things With Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975.



Figure 5.5 Jacques-Henri Lartigue *My Cousin Bichonnade, Rouzat, 1911*

The simple accident of falling off a bicycle has been photographed by Lartigue in a statement that would suggest “I do take photographs”. The humour of falling off a bicycle can, to some extent, be only fully appreciated by a child who sees the funniness in his cousin’s momentary failure to ride the new bicycle with puncture-proof *Durcale* tires. Over the span of sixteen years the eye-trap has matured through the numerous photographs he has taken, and the constative statement “I am taking a photograph” becomes visually apparent. The defined sense of self-presence is a statement which can account for the distorted and highly angular composition. The new form of composition, framing and aesthetic distortion can be features that point towards this new constative photograph. Yet on another level the child “I”, in the performative, is still implicit and hidden.

The similarity between Figure 5.1 and 5.6 are similar yet they do illustrate a diversity of compositions which comes with maturity.

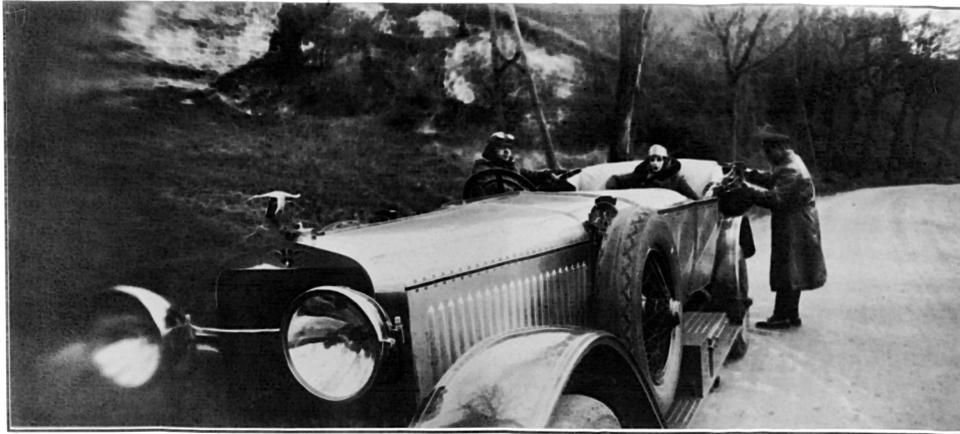


Figure 5.6 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Bibi and Yves, the chauffeur, Hispano-Suiza, 1927*

The heavy and extreme foregrounding of both objects is another comparison between the two photographs. Another visual trait is that the return look from Bibi and the disguised Mama in Figure 5.6 indicates the intentionality in taking a photograph. It was this moment in the outing that the decision was made to take a photograph. Therefore what we can extract from their defined gaze is that the observer, Lartigue, possibly has the indefinite presence of neither truly or falsely being there. We can imagine him stepping out of the car, taking his position in front of the car bonnet, directing the subjects to look at the camera, and taking a photograph. This intentional recording can be a form of controlled composition versus simply waiting for things to happen. The shift from simple spectator to now decisive director is one analogy. I see this as the fundamental shift between the two photographs: Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6. One is a photograph taken by a simple unselfconscious spectator, while the other is a controlled and directed attempt to make a “Photograph”, perhaps in the “artistic” sense of the word.

In Figure 5.5, the vision is that of an adolescent who is perhaps some extent invisible to the other members of the family. Certainly the instantaneous

quality of this photograph lends itself to being read as a statement of “I do take photographs”. It is this type of performative statement that allows the “humorous” quality of the image to come through. In hindsight, knowing the young age of the photographer, the sense of fun that could be attached to this moment is a possible reason for the photograph being taken, whereas in Figure 5.6 the vision has changed, with the distorted, elongated depiction of the car, the controlled position of the three figures, and the ambiguity of the location perhaps foreshadowing the struggle for a defined sense of self. The constative statement “I am taking a photograph” positions this photograph within a mature vision, something we would expect from a seasoned photographer. Also, his invisible presence as a spectator outside the car in some way defines the “artistic” vision. The decision to take this vantage point and use this type of wide angle perspective, and be this close to the front of the car are all decisive characteristics of a considered rather than a child-like photograph. The decisive vision is reminiscent of Edward Weston’s *Automobile* - Figure 5.7.

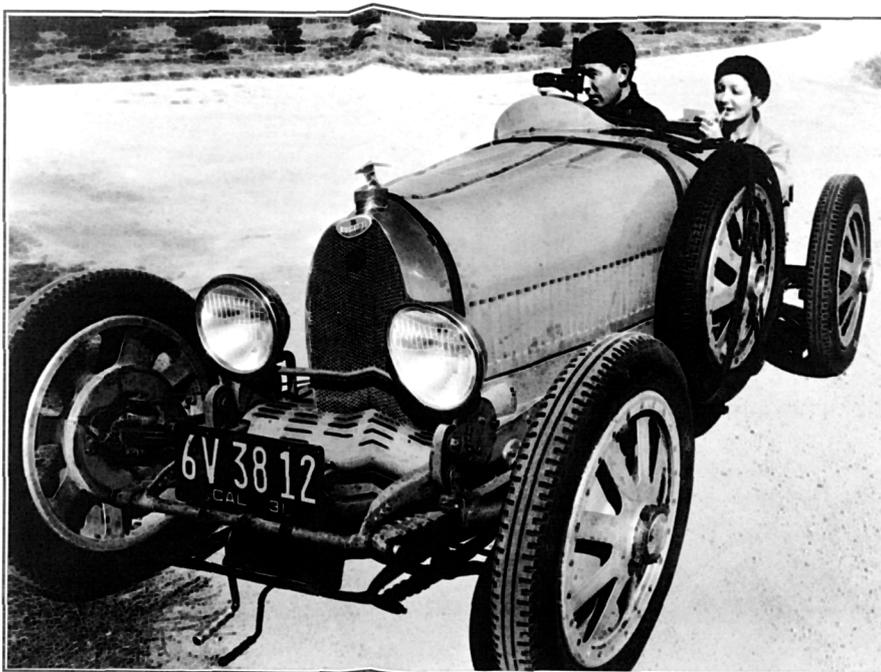


Figure 5.7

Edward Weston, *Automobile*, 1920

In the striking comparison we see the stretched forms of the car, and the distortion of a surface appearance to instil a sense of the surreal through the use of the common. Although the presence of a car was obviously not a common occurrence at the time, it symbolised a sense of industrialisation, and Surrealists such as Man Ray found it to be a perfect object to recontextualize into an icon of the surreal.

In *The Diary Novel* Lorna Martens notes that the distinction between the diary and the diary novel can be explained by the way in which first person pronoun statements are expressed. The main distinction is in the way the “I” statement in the diary novel is constructed:

In the [diary novel] the “I” is indeed the self as seen by the other; the other is implicitly present as a kind of voyeur. The [text] distances himself from himself, steps outside himself, and observes himself from the outside as another person would. <sup>18</sup>

In Figure 5.6, I would suggest that Lartigue is distancing himself from the performative composition he initially started with. He is no longer just “doing”, as a form of diary vision; he is now consciously considering the photograph as an mature spectator and utilising that maturity to create and define his sense of self. The “photographer” is now stepping out and seeing himself as others would see him, as the artist; therefore the photographic compositions have changed to fit this new “I” as the constative photographer.

This transition is expressed succinctly in the *Self-Portrait, Rouzat, 1923* - Figure 5.8. Here we see the new constative spectator observing his own vision as artist, and the narcissistic vision of his own persona is only one of the levels I wish to explore. The beautiful young artist is depicting his own likeness through the levels of vision that permeates this photograph: the mirror as a form of reversed self-reflection; the photograph as an actual referential self-reflection; the painting as yet another form of symbolic reflection of self.

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<sup>18</sup> Lorna Martens *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 42.



Figure 5.8

Jacques-Henri Lartigue. *Self-Portrait, Rouzat, 1923*

In all of these observations, the young and handsome Lartigue emerges as the central figure and object of his own observations. These levels of self become nothing more than the expression of self through the statement, “I am taking this photograph, creating this painting, making this picture, and expressing who I am”. The “I am” in this statement is the self impression of Lartigue himself. Twenty years earlier we read the kernel of this self-portraiture summed up in the following magical impression of photography’s ability to capture the self.

Sometime, when I am taking a photo, I can, if I hurry, go and stand in front of the camera after taking the cover off the lens and in that way make a photo of myself - I have to race back and put the cork back on. The idea is not bad.<sup>19</sup>

I am aware that the main reservation to these observations, is that they are about the comparison between the self-statement in the diary novel and Lartigue’s photographic compositions. Since one is visual and the other, the diary, is textual, a straight comparison is unorthodox. If we return Wittgenstein’s observation quoted at the beginning of this chapter: “What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things”. The comparison does not seem insurmountable. If the consideration of a new discovery, imagination as a form of self-composition, can be articulated in grammatical terms, then the old vision, the

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 5.

image, was a form that perhaps outgrew its performative act of describing. This points to the development of a vision based on the desire to see photographs as texts for the diary. Their primary function could be multiple - as retentional fragments or fictional descriptions of the self to name but two. The visual changes that occur in the composition, framing and subject matter from Lartigue's early childhood photographs, through his adolescent photographs, and finally to his mature images as a married man can be seen as this shift from the performative to the constative compositions a narrator would consider when speaking about his past, present and future self. These changes are continually run through and paralleling the photographs, functioning both as forms of diary and diary novel entries. What these narrations culminate in, is the expression of a new continual use of the constative discovery, in which the self can be seen as the other through the vision of the photographic camera. Photography is a medium in which one can stand outside the events unfolding and observe them as a new discovery. Thus we are able to retain these events as events caught in eye-traps. And as an "outsider", the "bystander", the young "flâneur", the events that unfold before him can be simply recorded into neither true nor false compositions in constative "I's" of points-of-view. This point of view will always be seen through Lartigue's filtration of the event. As the spectator, he can pick and choose the moment to make the photograph. Subsequently, these photographs are constative statements of his relationship to his own self-presence as spectator. There is no way of denying his "I am taking this photograph" in his mature photographs.

It would be the performative way of seeing that would become the fascinating and magical quality of photography for Lartigue. From his childhood diaries he recounts that "Photography is a magic thing and nothing will ever be as much fun".<sup>20</sup> This recollection suggests that a boy has become fascinated with a

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<sup>20</sup> Ezra Bowen (intro.) *Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. The History of Photography Series, New York: Aperture, 1976: 7.

new “optic-mechanical” toy and invention. It also points to the performative act of taking things as he sees them. The fun and enthusiasm of the camera are also embedded in this statement. The boy was a boy, this is to say he did most things that boys, coming from a financially secure background, did at that time. But with the introduction of a camera, like that of his amateur photographer father, Henri Lartigue, the boy starts to achieve a mature vision. Soon, however, he becomes a photographer for whom the finished photographs become more than simple childhood diary entries, and in which *everything* was considered acceptable for photographing: there was nothing not worth recording. This is evident from the vast amount of photographs Lartigue completed in his lifetime. The fact of some 200,000 photographs Lartigue is said to have taken speaks for itself!

Two extremes of subject matter and framing will illustrate this diverse interest in the environment around him; One, *Florida, 1967*, Figure 5.9, and Two, the *Garden of Pont-de-l'Arche, 1904*, Figure 5.10.



Figure 5.9

Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Florida, 1967*

Obviously the extreme time difference, 1904 and 1967, expresses itself as a different impression. The difference of place, Florida and his family country

residence, is another consideration. But is it? When we consider the foregrounding of the water, the pool and pond fountain in both photographs, an expression of a magical place can be inferred. And when we are reminded that Figure 5.10 was, as Lartigue recounts it, “my secret garden”, Figure 5.9 takes on a secret garden connotation.

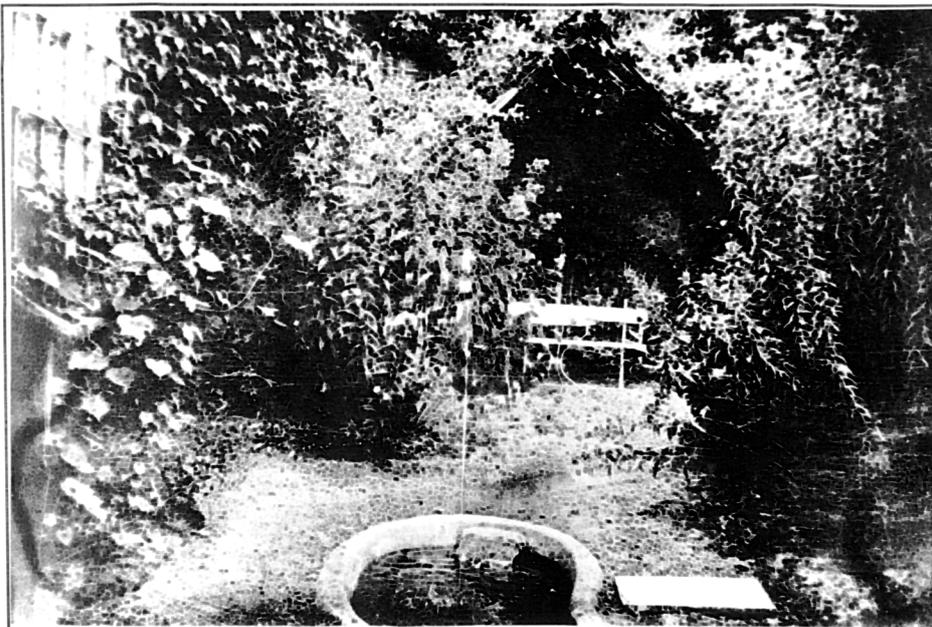


Figure 5.10 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Garden of Pont-de-l'Arche, 1904*

Obviously making a general statement such as this would need some kind of credible argumentation. This will be forthcoming in the latter sections. For now, let us assume that it is extremely likely that Florida will be a metaphor for a secret garden.

With the help of the magic of photography the constative “I’s” will stand outside, alongside, and in front or behind the world and photograph it. His intimate vision is enacted as a constative statement rather than as a mere performative act with the camera. My suggestion is that the mature Lartigue, with the camera - retaining the magic - stands outside the reality which he lived in before, as a child. He now is not merely a performative spectator, but one who is constative. He is aware of himself as a spectator and how this self-understanding

can be made to make artistic meaning, continually reinstating his presence as photographer. It is through the transition from simply performing an act of magic with the camera to seeing the environment through spectatorship that best describes the later photographs. Remembering Henri Bergson's statement that one can only observe a flow if one stands outside it, it will be this bystander vision that can stand outside and look at the line of reality pass by which best illustrates Lartigue's early work. So many of Lartigue's early photographs are about this standing alongside, watching in amazement the passing-by of things. This is most apparent in the speeding rally car, Figure 5.11. The speeding car is caught half off frame as the shutter is released and the exposure made.



Figure 5.11 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *First Prize of the A.C.F. Dieppe Circuit, 1912*

The appearance of a prevailing pan caused by the three-hundredths of a second exposure distorts the stationary figures in the background. Their reverse leaning dynamically suggests the sure speed at which the cars pass by. The wind of the vehicle has caused a reverse suction, affecting the ability to stand and causing them to be pulled in the opposite direction. They become fantastic leaning cuts against which the foregrounded speeding car blurred in its fleeting moment of

movement. These multiple visual dynamics create levels of speeding opposition in which the final articulation illustrates visually another “surrealist” or “photo-dynamic” description of the *First Prize of the A.C.F. Dieppe Circuit, 1912*. In order to record this event the photographer must have a vantage point outside the action in order to render it visual. In another context it becomes a record of the moment in which the excitement of the race day is recorded as in a visual composition rather than in textual memory. This photograph can conversely be considered a photograph that describes to the implied reader a diary entry. In his diary, Lartigue wrote:

Papa says, “Get ready, a car is going to pass *very* soon.” For a moment I am so excited it makes me dizzy! I’m going to use a 300/second, because of the cars’ speed...We get home; I am *exhausted*. But before I fall asleep I keep thinking of the twelve photos I took with my Spido-Gaumont...and all the other ones I took with my Bloc-Notes. In my dreams I’m sure I’ll go on hearing the roar of the racing cars speeding by.<sup>21</sup>

From the text we get the direct impression that the entry was composed directly from the photographs. Did Lartigue write this passage, then develop the photographs or was it the other way around? In Avedon’s edited text, we first read the passage, then see the photograph. It may however have been that the photograph informed the diary entry. Certainly these questions add to the speculation of whether or not we consider Lartigue’s photographs and text as a diary or diary novel. In either scenario the photograph is playing a major role in the recording of memories for Lartigue.

I would like to suggest, then, that if these visual works are to be considered as parts of the diaries, it would be useful at this point to explore them as a belonging to a literary aesthetic of diaries. This will provide the necessary definition to distinguish the type of compositional technique being used by Lartigue. It also provides a way to distinguish between the diary proper, which

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of the Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 28.

“emphasises the time of writing rather than, the diary novel, which emphasises the time that it is writing about. In the diary the progressive sequence of dates on which the diarist writes forms the basis of the way in which the implied reader, if there is to be one, will come to read the narrative. This sequential progression of successive date or entries is the narrative temporal continuity.”<sup>22</sup> It is this form of present-tense progression which defines and distinguishes the diary and to some extent the diary novel from other genres of fiction. If we consider Lartigue’s photographs as a form of visual writing statements as I have suggested, then the photographer can be considered to be an author who usually writes about the immediate past daily.<sup>23</sup> My suggestion that these photographs form a visual writing is based on the conclusion drawn from Lartigue’s own habit of keeping a diary for his entire eighty-three years. It would be in this form of textual and visual confines (the diary) that the photographs would find a public context. This public context would be in many forms but one of the most comprehensive is Richard Avedon’s, *Diary of a Century*. This text is based on excerpts of Lartigue’s photographs and diaries edited together by Avedon. What we have, then, is a pre-eminent photographer, Richard Avedon, editing together a “pictorial” narrative based partially on textual impressions, artistic and photographic statements originally destined for private consumption. It would be this type of biographical novel that would be seen as the fragmented reconfiguration of Lartigue’s original diaries.

As we will discover in an imaginative scenario of two still lifes, by focusing on only a fragment of the whole still life we can effectively achieve a

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<sup>22</sup> Lorna Martens. *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 3.

new meaning or vision from the old signs. Richard Avedon does exactly this, by giving us a biographical narrative - this new discovery of a century - contained in fragments of a diary presented in a novel format of image and text. Hence out of the old or undiscovered comes the new vision - achieved through the focusing in and on an alternative, private point of view.

Just as Wittgenstein explains the shift of sign perspective in order to account for a grammatical movement as a new discovery, the photographer achieves this rearrangement of things in front of the camera through the same rearrangement of old signs to new. The things he or she sees in front of the camera become new at the moment when the thing is framed in the contemporary rectilinear or historical circular space of the camera viewfinder.

It is interesting to consider the terminology of the specific functions on the camera. The pre-focusing lens that aids the photographer in locating, registering and composing the view or thing in the view, is named the "viewfinder". This compound name suggests that there is the need to "find the view". This can also suggest the finding of a new view rather than an old one. Or better yet having to retrace, relocate or reregister the old through a view finder. This finder of the view is a mechanical aid to the human eye in creating a new configuration of signs, just as Lartigue would open and close his eyes to make the imaginative eye-trap work. The physio-mental operation is translatable to the mechanical operation of finding a view in the viewfinder. And by using a marker we can relocate the lost view, and in an instant create a new post-existent view - the photograph. Derrida provides an analogy in *Of Grammatology*, when he states that the ability to mark the trace, depends on the absence of a presence. What

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.: 5

Derrida is suggesting, in photographic terms, is that this new traced vision through the viewfinder is referring to an absence, which will ultimately refer to its non-existence prior to creating it in this photographically framed format. The new view is a mark or presence of this absence. Ultimately, the direction of this logic points to the originlessness of this new view. Thus Derrida writes:

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin - within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no imaginary trace.<sup>24</sup>

It is this rearrangement of the things in the viewfinder that becomes the new discovery. Its origin is formed from a non-origin. Once framed, it never existed, because once a superficial frame has surrounded the “old” view it creates a completely new originless view. This new view is the arche-trace of the old view and because this arche-trace has no trace, or marker, this new view is unique - it never existed prior to being framed. This is to say simply, once the view has been framed, it has no previous origin. The view we see now through the viewfinder is unique because it is a photograph. And this photograph is the mark of this trace, the trace which has no origin. And by reconfiguring the relationship or grammatical sequence of the things in this new form of articulation, a new discovery is achieved. A new view is created through the lens, aided by the retracing function of the viewfinder of the camera. It is for this reason that the photograph is a unique form of view re-presentation, and why it can be paralleled to textual language. Although Derrida is speaking within the context of discourse,

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974: 61.

and seeing that Lartigue's photographs are discourse statements, I do not see why these two forms of trace cannot substantiate one another. For once a new statement is created, it is placed in a new frame of grammatical structures which creates a new movement in its wake, thereby making it a completely new discovery with a completely new meaning. Photography accomplishes the same results. I feel that this is one of the magical features of photography that appealed to Lartigue at such a young age. It made the old observations new in which he could give an original mark to his presence in the family, and which marked him as part of the family. Shelley Rice suggests that

the camera served as a means of connection to events from which he felt cut off. Perhaps it was also a mode of empowerment for a boy always smaller and weaker than his companions.<sup>25</sup>

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As stated, a simple imaginary analogy can illustrate the above point. For the moment, imagine we have two still lifes sitting in front of us. In the first we see a typical, if not clichéd, organisation of things placed on a table. The table is light grey, almost indistinguishable because of reflected light on its surface, light that is reminiscent of a lustre created with French oils rubbed arduously into the surface by hand. The things on this table consist of a porcelain bowl containing nine pieces of round fruit. To the right of the bowl is a glass, almost empty, to the right of this glass is a flask, again almost empty. We can imagine the flask containing a very finely aged brandy, its age and taste enhanced by the shape of the bell flask which allows the brandy to breathe in its own aroma of age. In the lower centre right of the composition we see the wood grain of the table; the light hitting the surface of the table is reflected up under the bowl and onto the

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<sup>25</sup> Shelley Rice. "Remembrance of Images Past" In *Art In America*. November 1992: 124.

curvatures and skin of the fruit. The chromatic light adds a cold ambience to the still life which is contradictory to the overall soft contrast and tonality of the things presented. The imagery and textual picture of this still life is one which exists in the my imagination and the textual description I have just given of its composition. The actual composition exists as a whole, and this whole is comprised of nouns which I have just described in textual detail. Although I have presented an imaginary still life I can create another new still life just as a photographer can achieve a more impressionistic or fragmentary representation from the real composition. I can crop or focus my attention on a specific part of the still life. The resulting new image can be reconfigured to express the things into a new composition expressing the intentional desires of the photographer. I can move from a wide angle view of the still life on the table to a macro-close up of the fruit and a portion of the bowl. The isolated detail of the still life hangs off-frame and the centre of the composition is now filled with shape and tonality. The oranges or apples are unrecognisable as being half framed, and their once full articulation is now only a volume of tonal detail.

What I have now is a partially formed picture from the original, or new a picture if I had no previous reference to the first imaginary picture. My vision is made of fragments or details rather than whole things. As an observer of this imaginary composition, I must fill in the fragmented signs to form a composition - my imagination is asked to work more for this new discovery. A possible reason for this effort is that the old signs do not articulate their pre-existent meaning, and I am asked to create a new set of meanings to account for what I am envisioning. In the extreme intensity of the close up, the objects become patterned and textured shapes rather than real identifiable things. This would validate the claim that the old signs have now been detailed, thus changing their potential effectiveness to express definitive meaning. Consequently the only recourse is that the old signs reconfigure themselves into new signs. The tonalities which were secondary to

the fully-formed signified fruit now must become primary signs in order to generate and create their own immediate references. These new signs, extracted from the old, are expressive only as textured flat shapes; thus, I have discovered a new statement that must be rationalised. This new vision, or statement, is reliant on the old grammar used to create it - one needs the other so that the meaning of one can be defined as existing.

Another way to approach this transition of old signs into new is self-evident during the period in photography when the photograph becomes contextualized as a metaphor for the photographer's personal expression - that is to say an "art work". One of the central figures in this transformation would be Alfred Stieglitz, and it can be seen in his most obvious examples of visual transformation in *The Hand of Man*, *The Steerage* and *Equivalent Series*.

Returning to the imaginary still life, I would reiterate that the signs and proper names are the same but the emphasis has shifted from a full referentiality to a subjective isolated emphasis based on macro-description. In a reconfiguring of Derrida's usage of dissemination, I can suggest a similar if not identical form of filtering down in order to shift the old into the new. Therefore this principle of transformation can be a definition for the detailed still life in terms of its having a possible fictional quality which separates it from being initially read as authentic. It is difficult to suggest that the ability to give macro-close ups as can a camera, equipped with a one-to-one macro lens, is something that human vision can accomplish. This newly discovered ability to see things close up is one of the primary mechanical characteristics of the photographic medium. This is evident in Edward Weston's *Vegetables Series*; Robert Mapplethorpe's *Lilies* and *Penis Portraits*; Diane Arbus's *A Child Crying* and *Puerto Rican Woman with a Beauty Mark*; Helmut Newton's *Shoe* and *Bordighere Detail* and Irving Penn's *Memento Mori* and *Flowers*. In all of these examples the main focal characteristic is the ability to see beyond the natural vision. I am aware that these

things, because they have been photographed, are re-presented as “real” because of the referential associations with the photographic medium’s means of reproduction, and to some extent the cause and effect relationship with things in front of it. This by no means negates the potential of the photograph to be considered a fictive composition or imaginative new discovery. I have shown through this simple illustration that, by the act of cropping, isolating and fragmenting the things into a readable compositions, the focused vision can form a new statement, thereby finding itself as something different and unique from the original composition. It would be this view finding, cropping, isolating, fragmenting and observing things from a different point of view, ideally being outside, that would become the captivating language of Lartigue’s photographs.

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I want to now explore the relevance of Lartigue’s photographs as a form of diary novel. This claim has particular interest to my understanding of his later photographs as being compositions of a discovery of self-referentiality. The central theme here is the interest between the “real” or authentic and the “fictive” or inauthentic.

Traditionally the diary, as a form of writing in which the authenticity of thoughts, memories, impressions and expression of the self is recorded, is a factual record of self-understanding. If the diary becomes available, the textual interaction between reader and narrator, usually the author, is a one-to-one discovery of intimate statements of the self. The reader will take on the quality of authenticity and the associations made by the self in the diary. This is to say, the text contained inside it is read as a reflection of a truthful and real account of the person named as the author. In the diary novel, the text may be suspect because of the imitative nature to the pre-existing associations of the traditional

diary; both are forms of interconnected genre, and genre is in itself an imposed form of convention, codification and norms.<sup>26</sup> A better way to think of a genre is as a superficial frame in which the contents can be placed, organised and displayed. This should not negate any sense of realism in the text, but with the diary we are compelled by its intimacy and private nature to accept perhaps some redefining in narrative. This variation in flow is considered as a token of truthful reflection of the inconsistencies of daily life. But in the diary novel these can be read with a somewhat suspicious or fictitious implication. What happens then, when we encounter the same inconsistencies in the photography or set of photographs? Does the truthful description of the photograph become immediately suspect, or do these inconsistencies provide more of a basis to assume a real truth which we have come to expect from daily interaction with the photograph? One possible answer to these questions is that it will always be the context of the photograph that will determine if the inconsistencies found in the photograph narrative description are interpreted as either real or fictive. Therefore in the context of Lartigue's photographs we come to read these photographs as his truthful statements of a boy, adolescent, and mature adult. In another possible answer to this initial question, as Lorna Martens notes, it is because "diaries are defined by periodic and forward marching of time"<sup>27</sup> that we come to trust the authenticity of the text. What we come to trust in Lartigue's photographs and accompanying text is the continual movement, the forward marching of time witnessed by the change in composition and content. This is also evident in Avedon's monograph, a form of biography of Lartigue, which begins at the beginning, with a photograph of Lartigue with his first camera in 1901, and then takes the reader to Lartigue's present seventy-fifth year. The last photograph depicts the young Hiro taking a photograph of Lartigue in 1970,

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<sup>26</sup> Lorna Martens. *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

thereby taking the reader on a condensed sixty-nine year exploration in photographs and text.

It is important to remember that Avedon again is performing a role of author in this monograph. He constructed a complex *histoire* based on the many narratives he collected from Lartigue's diaries and photographs. Just as we observed in Chapter 2, Avedon was an author using a mythic framework, "The American West", to express a fictional *histoire* in a dialectic visual language *In The American West*. Although a dialect plays does major role in Lartigue's novel, the authenticity of the text, the arbitrary gaps between photographs and text and text and photographs are apparent for a collective portrait of Lartigue as spectator. The way we move from time period to time period, skipping moments between them is a device used in fiction and it points to a form of visual and textual implausibility. As Roy Jay Nelson suggests in his *Causality and Narrative*,

...implausibility is not of itself a "weakness." Again it is a matter of ease of readerly inference: if we can readily infer the *narrative* necessity for an event, if we can easily see why, for the purposes of *narration*, it is required, we are more likely to suspend disbelief: the alternative is rejecting the story as a whole. When we have doubts about narrative purpose and the incredible event's place in it, the implausibility appears as a "weakness" in the "chain." Whether we perceive a gap or a weakness, the plane of *narration* has a crucial role: if we are confident we understand its purpose, we can fill the gap, accept the implausibility: if we are unsure of the intent of *narration*, we are impelled to look ever more closely to uncover it, in extra textual allusions, metaphors, and other elements of comparison.<sup>28</sup>

What eases the implausibility of the visual and textual juxtapositions are those decisions made by Avedon. These can, to some extent, be filled in by the reader's imagination based on the textual dialogue running through the monograph. The gaps act as a mechanism to link past and present with possible futures. Because of this intentionality on Avedon's part, we read and see his presence as an invisible

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<sup>28</sup> Roy Jay Nelson. *Causality and Narrative in French Fiction from Zola to Robbe-Grillet*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990: 91.

editor of an autobiographical novel. His voice takes the reader on a narrative based on the authentic documents and facts as written and photographed by Lartigue. Furthering his discussion of reader inference within the an authoritarian voice, Nelson notes that:

The idea of the “author” is also inferred from the existence of a narrative text: in addition to the voice speaking to us from the pages, there is an inventor of events for the voice to relate. And the final inference is that of intent: if things happen as they do in a story, there is, so we infer, a purpose behind it. Like all hypotheses, this one is of in assured veracity. As a text-based assumption, it cannot claim to reveal the “real” intentions of any “real” author. It presumes merely that what indeed happens in a novel fulfils an inferable purpose, which we have called the “intent of *narration* .”<sup>29</sup>

I would want to reconsider these observations and suggest that, in the same respect, we as readers of the text may infer a dialogue between the implausibility of gaps in order to follow the narration of the text. The voice that we see and hear is certainly referential of Lartigue, but in so far as he is the inventor of events we assume this narrative to be that of Richard Avedon. As Nelson notes, the “real” intentions are not being truly revealed, so how are we to approach a text such as Avedon’s? Ideally it would be desirable to read the text as an *histoire* of Lartigue’s *récit*. Taking this standpoint, the editorial construction of the text, or what I see as the “intent of Narration”, becomes hidden. Therefore what we infer in the text are just the “real” author’s intentions. This provides the reader of these photographic statements and text with the ability to fill in the gaps in the *histoire* , thus achieving the *récit* as a *narration* in which as Nelson suggests “we infer the intent of *narration* more from what we know about texts than from what we know about living.”<sup>30</sup> What this would suggest then is that not knowing all the “real” life history of Lartigue, a narrative construction based on Avedon’s intentions becomes the “fictional” narration of Lartigue’s life. Thus we

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: 92.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: 92-93.

accept the implausible spaces as mere moments of transition rather than as a weakness of authentic narrative temporality.

Looking at this observation from another point of view, the juxtaposition of photographs in a text or text within photographs can be described as deriving meaning from and through the concept of what Anne-Marie Thibault-Lauban calls *attribution* rather than mere *implication*. In *attribution*, the content will be read as being somehow connected through its close association to the other element. We come to attribute certain characteristics of meaning through their proximity. This differs from what she sees as the cinematic connection of photographic images being connected through *implication*. The temporal impression of the content meaning, in a sequence of cinematic images, is conceived through the consequence of one image composition effecting another in a chain of happenings.<sup>31</sup> What can be usefully gained from these two observations is that through what I would now call the plausibility of attribution, the narrative of Lartigue's works takes on a realistic sense of narration based on Avedon's editorial determinations in constructing a life based on *récit* and *histoire*. Another way to approach this is through the technique of continuity.

We come to trust this overwhelming collection or continuity of photographs and text, *récit* and *histoire*, to reinforce the connotations of photographs as a form of narration which is not inauthentic. On another level, this cliché is a re-creation of the pseudo-linearity with which narrative has been associated. Narrative is also a convention, norm and codification. But as I have discussed in previous chapters, the narrative of the photograph does not begin at the beginning. It begins in the middle and moves back through the past, then from the past to the future. So how does this affect the reading of Lartigue's

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<sup>31</sup> Anne-Marie Thibault-Lauban. *Le Langage de l'image*. Paris: Editions Universitaires. 1971: 27. cited in Nöth, Winfried. *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990: 333.

photographs encased in this narrative genre of the diary novel? What effectively happens is that each photograph has its own individual story. Once we have retrieved it and pulled it forward into the present context, we continually go through the collection of photographs, reading each page, retrieving each narrative. And as each macro-narrative connects to another, this inter-connected narrative creates itself into a larger description of the overall authenticity being suggested. It is this imitation of smaller histories which connect to a larger narrative that mimics the narration of real life. This also allows the monograph to exist as a real diary in which every twist and turn of a photograph's individual narrative relates to the personal and psychological events of the photographer/author, and not so much the editor. An interesting consideration is that the definition of editor is someone who constructs to a certain extent a narrative. The pulling together of ideas, frames or statements has a potential of suggesting a "filmic" quality in which photographic or videographic images are spliced together to form what appears to be a seamless narration of reality. This is why film can effectively "realistically" transport the audience simultaneously from one time period to another. This comes back to my previous observation about the creation of a new image or discovery out of the old. We can take the old signs and, as Wittgenstein points out, "primarily discover a new way of looking at things". This is achieved through imitation, recontextualization and relocating the old into the new. Lartigue's photographs do this quite effectively; in all of the photographs I have discussed, there is this quality of relocating, recontextualizing and imitation being explored by the spectator with a camera.

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In Figure 5.1 (see page 226) the bedroom scene becomes transformed into a landscape. In this landscape sits a race course where the miniature or small has a

chance to be the big and active. By recontextualizing the grammar of the toy car into the imaginary real, Lartigue presents to the viewer not a distorted view of the toys but a relocating of the vision of a child. The camera becomes the means of suggesting a visual impression that may fulfil the real and larger fantasy of a real car that moves with great speed and dynamics. And when they are seen from this perspective they can take on the potential of a dream meaning. This new meaning is a new sensation achieved through the camera, in which Lartigue is exploring, and it is only through continuous content rearticulation that the old meanings attached to names can become new. Wittgenstein's notation on the grammatical movement becomes an important point of reference: "As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again a new meter, or a new kind of song, [or a new kind of photograph]".

In Figure 5.2 (see page 229) two new grammatical transitions are being made: One, of the boy as boy whose interests are in the sky; Two, a boy whose identity is tied up with the identity of the camera. His self-identity as the consummate spectator defines him and it a certain respect allows him to define his own personality as distinct from the rest of the family members. But as the spectator, he becomes (and became) the other identifiable photographer, the younger [Jacques] Henri Lartigue. Therefore, to be a part of the events, the camera became the way into events of which otherwise he was merely a spectator. It is not surprising, then, that this photograph has the same distorted foreground distance. The space between him and the camera metaphorically reflects the space he felt as a boy being excluded from his brother's and cousin's games. As the camera would have been sitting on the edge or near the edge of the bath, this sitting on the edge becomes another key visual characteristic in Lartigue's early photographs. And in an ironic juxtaposition, the only "true" companion at this moment in life as the dream implicit in the inventions. In this instant a hydro-plane, and the dream of flying, and a camera with its mechanistic eye-trapping,

become the two companions of this spectator. To suggest then that this photograph is a reflection of a self-reflection is not too far from giving a descriptive narrative of this composition.

In Figure 5.3 (see page 234) the empty space which surrounds Simone, the dog, and to some extent, the man in the middle ground of the photograph, is perhaps analogous to his own sense of absence present in the environment. In content, this photograph is a portrait of Simone, his cousin, on the beach of Villerville. Its context is that it is one of Lartigue's first photographs. Its metaphorical meaning reflects the contradiction between the isolation and freedom he felt on the beach. Therefore Simone becomes the referent for his spectatorship. Her isolated position on the tidal flats can be considered as a visual manifestation of how distance can be photographed to represent a separation of human contact. The man in the middle foreground is near but is also psychologically engaged in his own task. Even though the two exist in the same space, the visual distance is translatable into the psychological separation of vast isolation. The photograph comes to describe and metaphorically imitate Lartigue's feelings of despair when not allowed to partake in events, always being the small one or not old enough or not strong enough. In his diary Lartigue reminds us that: "Robert, Zissou and Louis are too big and I am too small. Most of the time they won't let me play with them; I have to be the spectator. They play marvellous games, unique in the world."<sup>32</sup> With this type of observational desire and the camera with its reproducible mechanics of observation, Figure 5.3, certainly expresses the incidents of isolation Lartigue was experiencing during his initial photographic experiments. And to escape this imposed existence of being limited in his participation, the beach became an empty and open space with no boundaries or confines. Lartigue also notes: "I love the sea. The beach must be the most open

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 9.

and vast place on the earth. You can run and run...there are no limits, and no one cries out to you, *Be careful, now!* There is absolutely nothing that keeps my eyes from roaming around - looking far away, as far as they can see.”<sup>33</sup> What Figure 5.3 is expressing is a juxtaposition in the dichotomy of the isolated and controlled portrait, which is set off against this vast and open space with no boundaries. This contraction is thereby making the photographic space the perfect place in which to dream and not be confined into having to act a certain way. Hence this photograph textually states and visually illustrates, in metaphoric terms, the impression Lartigue would come to transcribe in his dairy.

In Figure 5.4 (see page 237) the documenting of Lartigue’s brother Maurice’s (nicknamed Zissou) first flight is in itself a relocating of the distance Jacques-Henri felt by being excluded. The inventor is seen trying out his XYZ and Lartigue is the continual observer of his brother’s achievements. The comparison between the inventor of the eye-trap and the inventor of a flying machine is another possible narrative that lays hidden beneath the visual content of the photograph. In 1906 Lartigue wrote that

There’s one thing all of us want to do...it’s the idea we all dream and talk about...an idea that Zissou is absolutely obsessed with...to get up in the air! In my sleep I can fly...I fly all the time. I can’t get enough of it. But once awake, I’m a little boy again...and miracles don’t exist. Zissou, however, does not dream. Zissou invents; he calculates and draws maps. He is preparing himself for the moment when he will be able to lift himself up from the ground and stay in the air.

Outside of pure content, being a photograph of Zissou accomplishing his obsession, it is this direct distinction between the dreamer, “a little boy,” and the inventor, that is expressed in Figure 5.4. We are able to infer through relocating the textual memories through the visual referents to read this photograph as the dreamer’s ability to capture events in his eye-trap. Thereby we have a realist description of both their respective personalities at this time - the dreamer who

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 16.

sees through the camera and the inventor who accomplishes his obsession.

Ironically, the inventor's obsession is achieved through the record of his moment in the air with both feet off the ground for that split second. For if the dreamer / spectator had not have been there to capture the flight, the ephemeral instance of flight would not have taken the form of a prolonged achievement in the depiction of a photograph. And tragically the dreamer still dreams of flight but the inventor has momentarily fulfilled his obsession. In one context, for Zissou the photograph will be a prize of achievement or a reminder of the failure of an obsession, but for Lartigue it will be a record of a dream he could not fulfil.

In Figure 5.5 (see page 240) we see the evidence of an accident. As I have been describing there are underlying narratives that articulate Lartigue's works. How and in what context do we account for this curious photograph? In causal terms, Lartigue's older cousin, Bichonnade, appears to have fallen off her bicycle. The event is the photograph. What is more fascinating about this photograph is the question to which there seems to be no immediate answer. Was Lartigue waiting for this accident or did he just happen to be in the right spot at the right time? From the position of the photographer, the centre of focal distance, the horizon line relationship of foreground and background, and the position of the subject, Bichonnade, lying in the middle and centre of the photograph, we can speculate that Lartigue positioned himself behind Bichonnade as she mounted the bicycle and began to ride. At the moment that she fell, he took the exposure. Another scenario is just as likely. He was waiting on the side of the road and as she passed and travelled a few metres further, she fell. At this moment realising he needed to capture this situation, he stepped onto the centre of the road and using his waist level viewfinder, composed the photograph prior to taking it. What both these scenarios point to is that Lartigue, at even such a young age, was cultivating a very trained sense of composition and reciprocally becoming a very trained observer. He could in an instant compose or be ready to compose a

photograph. In a stop action instant he was ready for that “decisive moment” to happen. Taking the reference of the trace, it would be this ability to see the trace and relocate its origin that would allow Lartigue to be ready with his camera. Being the spectator, dreamer and observer, he has become conditioned to respond intuitively to situations and events that occur. And Bichonnade falling off her bicycle is just one such occasion. Thereby he has, with this intuitive eye-trap, “discovered a new way of looking at things.”

In Figure 5.6 (see page 241) the vision of the young Lartigue has now matured and we see a different visual description of a moment. Although the foreground distance is still apparent, the distortion caused by the wide angle lens translates itself into a vision which is reminiscent of his bedroom photograph. The sense of visual distance we feel is a possible sign for the new mature vision to be stretched out of its “snap shot” spectator tradition. From his dairies we know that the newly-married Lartigue is now being introduced to theatre and literary friends of André Messager, father to Bibi - the one who sits in the car. Lartigue writes on January 1920: “He keeps introducing us to a lot of literary and theatre figures, and some are becoming our best friends.”<sup>34</sup> With the potential influence of these introductions and knowing the “artistic” movements of the time period, especially the Modernist movements of Dada, Surrealism and Futurism, Figure 5.6 expresses a new narrative - a narrative where the artist engaged in these compositions is embracing photography for its mechanical aesthetic. It would be safe to speculate that the newly married Lartigue is now trying to find another way of looking through his camera. This time it would be to find not only the artist but a way of defining his self-identity. Three excerpts from László Moholy-Nagy’s “A New Instrument of Vision” will illustrate the potential new narrative characteristics we are seeing in Lartigue’s 1920’s photographs.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 116.

2. Exact seeing by means of the normal fixation of the appearance of things: reportage.
3. Rapid seeing by means of the normal fixation of the movements in the shortest possible time: snapshots.
8. Distorted seeing; optical jokes that can be automatically produced by:
  - a) exposure through a lens fitted with prisms, and the device of reflecting mirrors; or
  - b) mechanical and chemical manipulation of the negative after exposure...<sup>35</sup>

Although Moholy-Nagy's text was written in 1932 and Lartigue's photographs are from the 1920's, Lartigue's experimentation in the composition photography can be linked to Moholy-Nagy's aesthetic observations of reportage, snapshot, and manipulation. This observation can certainly be extracted from Lartigue's photographs in which the young artist is trying to define his sense of vision. It is the qualities of "reportage" and "snapshot", with or without distortion, that we find being narratively played out between an old medium he knows so well, and the new form of aesthetic speaking. Other than the artistic experimentation embedded in Figure 5.6, the straightforward content plays a vital role in how he sees himself in relation to the two women in his life: his wife, Bibi, and the hardly distinguishable form of his mother, covered so dramatically with the leathers of early twentieth-century motoring. We can extract from this single photograph a possible new definition of self-understanding as "man" rather than boy. It is interesting to consider that the "heavily" masculine dressed appearance of his mother may in some way be a visually parody in the form of a single portrait of mother and father in one persona.<sup>36</sup> The car, his mother, and

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<sup>35</sup> László Moholy-Nagy. "A New Instrument of Vision" (1932) cited in Mike Weaver (ed.) *The Art of Photography 1938-1989* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989: 231.

<sup>36</sup> This was probably not the case or reason for the portrait, but from the vantage point of simple characterisation and costume the symbolic reference between what the camera itself held for Lartigue, (the promise he keeps referring to and the one he made to his father. "I think I have kept my promise I made to myself when Papa gave me my first camera; I have tried to capture *everything* !") and now we see a different kind of portrait than of his first portrait of his mother. The white feminine dress has been replaced with a black coat and leather cap in order to disguise the mother figure. And when we consider Lartigue is in the presence of his wife, the elimination of the mother figure becomes an interesting reverse of the Freudian mother figure Oedipal complex.

Yves the chauffeur represent the past of his boyhood. The new companion in Lartigue's life, Bibi, and the new aesthetic vision of the car represents the future. So in this one photograph a collision of present, past and future occurs to form a complex narrative of an emerging new self-identity. And it will be this new combination of past and present and unknowing future that will become an overriding statement in Figure 5.8.

In Figure 5.8 (see page 244) we see another self-portrait, now twenty years later, but this time a very controlled and skilfully constructed self-documentation and examination. It will come to narrativize how Lartigue, at this period in his life, has come to speak and see his identity completely caught up in being the spectator. The spectator is not a remorseful enterprise but one to be exploited. The carefully positioned camera, the angle of the mirror to reflect back a perfect imitation, the angle of the painting to symbolically reflect the inner vision of self, and the main subject of the photograph positioned carefully in the centre of all the self-reflection - this complex play of reflecting, imitating and self-referencing, in as many different possible self-identities, illustrates the fragmented sense of identity Lartigue was trying to define in the painting. His attention is not on the painting, so it is not a portrait of an artist working on his latest masterpiece. It is a carefully defined piece of narcissism. The invisible spectator has caught the glimpse of his own reflection. It is this reflection that reconfigures the changes this photograph from being a simple snapshot self-portrait like that of 1904 to a more deeply charged attempt to see the "real" Lartigue. The mature sense of using the camera, and knowing its potential to construct identities, makes this self-reflection more than a simple *histoire*. This is not a reportage, this is a photographic portrait of an artist struggling to portray the handsome young man that sits before the mirror to reflect back every nuance of identity. The chiselled features on the painting are only magnified by the mirrored reflection he sees. The real chiselled features are retranslated as the dynamics of physical attractiveness.

The multiple level of investigation is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus's in James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The struggle to find a personal identity is certainly the main theme, as well as, the struggle in finding his own temperament is certainly illustrated in Lartigue's self-portrait.

We can extract textually a bit of self-doubt in the following extract of Lartigue's diary. "What am I? And what am I doing here? I am a married man - on my honeymoon. I think it must be the funniest thing in the world, me, a married man, and on his honeymoon."<sup>37</sup> It is this subsequent self-doubt in 1920, on the eve of his honeymoon, which provides a textual narrative for this photograph being seen as a statement introspection into one's own self-reflection. To a large extent, figure 5.6 does describe the identity we have come to see Lartigue as, that of the continual spectator, who has now turned the camera on himself to discover the constative "I", as opposed to the simpler performative "I" of his earlier 1904 self.

In Figure 5.9 (see page 246), Lartigue's vision of the twenties has disappeared but Lartigue's vision of the traveller and continual spectator is still apparent. In this simply titled photograph, *Florida, 1967*, we observe the visual distance at which Lartigue stands from his subject. This is a predominant characteristic in the majority of Lartigue's photographs which I have seen. It is this distance, the space from his position and the slide, that opens up to reveal as much detail and information as possible. In one single frame Lartigue can get an incredible sense of the Florida of 1967, as we would expect from someone like Lee Friedlander. Yet the social irony of Friedlander is not the major theme in Lartigue's *Florida*. But the sense of detachment from the social is also captured in the content. The slide, the pool side umbrellas and the water's edge are in the middle ground section of the photograph. The foreground considerations are left

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 116.

virtually empty except for the water of the pool, which bleeds off the lower right hand of the photograph. The subjects, persons in the picture, are consigned to the far background, almost completely eliminated from the immediate interaction of observation. It is this quality of separating and compartmentalising content into spaces which defines another key descriptive tool in Lartigue's photographic *aesthetic*. Organisation and chronologizing are key forms and traits of keeping a diary and imitative qualities in the diary novel. In some forms, such as diary novels, the anti-chronology is seen as a form of suggesting a fictitious quality to the work. As Roy Jay Nelson suggests in *Causality and Narration in French Fiction from Zola to Robbe-Grillet*,

Fictional diaries share with all first-person narratives a limited point of view: we see the fictional world from behind a single pair of eyes. We enter the psyche of the narrator alone, and all we can know is what is registered there now, with the distortions peculiar to the individual diarist. There is no omniscience and no objective viewpoint: if causation appears to be functioning at all in the world outside the narrator's mind, we can have no objective validation of it... Finally, diarists, both fictional and real, are generally at the same time narrator and narratee in their texts. They write for themselves, often with an eye to greater self-understanding.<sup>38</sup>

However, since what we are dealing with is an autobiographical "real" diary in the form of a visual photograph, this should exclude Nelson's remarks concerning the limited point of view and how we stand behind a single pair of eyes. For precisely these reasons are embedded in the photographic act. The medium is constantly being interpreted and the content of the photograph is continually referred back through the referents, and then the photographer. In this instant we are standing behind Lartigue when we see his point of view of Florida. Combining Nelson's observations with the constative "I" of all first-person narrative, we can witness a revealing sense of diarist narrative being developed in Figure 5.9. The "I" is in control of the "I's" so that the retelling or reinscribing we

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<sup>38</sup> Roy Jay Nelson. *Causality and Narrative in French Fiction from Zola to Robbe-Grillet*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990: 151.

are seeing is as accurate as a photographic depiction of the psyche of Lartigue. Therefore the previously discussed characteristics of Lartigue's narrative form of "snapshot" and "reportage" capture and define this photograph as one in which the "I" is organising a space for future description and narration. All the elements are clearly defined and well organised in order that a straightforward articulation can be later recorded textually. Every piece of content has its own space and within its space comes a connected and inter-connected spatiality to others. Since the ability to see everything is the reference of this photograph, it can only be defined in the descriptive recollection of Lartigue. "I think I have kept my promise I made to myself when Papa gave me my first camera; I have tried to capture *everything!*"<sup>39</sup>

In Figure 5.10 (see page 247) we can say then that "the past comes full circle," considering the previously discussed Figure 5.9. In both photographs the depiction of some form of water can be seen as a symbolic form of play and childhood. Also it can be a recurring theme in Lartigue's work, perhaps not on a conscious psychological level but on a subliminal level. In one of his first attempts at photography, the "secret garden" is the subject matter most appropriate for a dreamer to practice with his mechanical eye-trapping invention. When these two photographs are juxtaposed, the sense of a metaphor in the form of *secret garden* comes through as the underlying narrative of both. I am not suggesting that this depiction of *Florida* is Lartigue's ideal of a secret garden, but when we consider the desire to capture *everything* and the notion that "often the diarists write for themselves, often with an eye to greater self-understanding"<sup>40</sup> the decision to capture this must have had some sense of secret garden quality. The way I want to approach this is by suggesting that the garden of his past Figure, 5.10, meets the garden of the future, Figure 5.9. In the past, the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.: 200

<sup>40</sup> Lorna Martens. *The Diary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985: 11.

pond surrounding the water fountain is smaller and the imagination must be activated in this most secret of places, a secret garden in which the dreamer can be fully in control and never left out. And Lartigue wrote, with the aid of the camera:

now I will be able to make portraits of everything...*everything* ! And now I won't feel sad any more when I have to return to Paris: I can take all my photographs of the country back with me...the ones I want to take of my Courbevoie-paradise; ones of the beach, of the woods in Pont-de-l'Arche...and photos of my own garden...all of the flowers and plants I've grown to love so much...

From this point in time, the receiving of his first camera, Lartigue will use the camera to record the places he wants to take back to Paris with him. Therefore these two seemingly different photographs are discovered to be the same type of new sensations. They both describe a place which Lartigue wanted to remember and in this writing for the self, he can relocate through the photograph, places that are his *Courbevoie-paradise*. The origin of Lartigue's initial visual retracing of places became visual material for his diaries when we consider the observations made by Shelley Rice, who reminds us that

Lartigue's photographs and his writing are thus, in a sense, deeply bound to each other: the memories he guards in his diaries are wrenched out of time and frozen in his pictures. Yet these immobilized memories ultimately served another, larger purpose as well: they were part of his attempt to fix his own identity, to retain "himself" as surely as he had retained the past. In December 1914, the 21-year old Lartigue wrote, "Each moment I find myself full of sorrow because I'm growing up. I would like to be able to stay as I am...Or better, I would like to be even smaller...Often I cried because I was getting bigger...This happiness will not last forever". People grow, they age, their friends change and disappear, the world around them is never the same; but memories, Lartigue hoped, if they were written or photographed, could immobilize the self-in-time.<sup>41</sup>

We can extrapolate from these two observations made by Rice and Lartigue's memories, and say that the secret garden photograph is the equivalent

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<sup>41</sup> Rice, Shelley. "Remembrance of Images Past" In *Art In America*. Nov. 1992: 128-9.

of Roland Barthes' *Winter Garden*<sup>42</sup> photograph. In both, the desire to retrieve or relocate the past through an image and text becomes the power of relocating the past in relation to the present in the form of a textual interpretation of a photograph. Just as Figure 5.10 recasts the past into the future, Figure 5.9 recasts the future into the past. This is possible when we consider that the photograph held a significant power for Lartigue to hold the image of himself as a small youth rather than as an adult. The ability to visualise the world in a moment of suspended animation was the way to achieve this. The *Florida* photograph, with its "child-like" slide, its water, heavily symbolic of the ocean and beach, and the organised and compartmentalised spaces which are referential, reworks the image of the child dreamer who sees himself as a continual spectator but wants to change his self-identity by taking part rather than just spectating. This photograph becomes Lartigue's metaphor for the youth which has now passed. And through all the connotations associated with the name and place of Florida, the "modern" landscape we may know is really a land almost surrounded by the ocean, a paradise of tropical flowers and trees, and the epitome of retirement leisure: "Taking it easy, relaxing by the pool, and watching modern life go by." In this difference between the real photograph and the connotations associated with the name and place Florida, we are witnesses to Lartigue's vision, ironically presenting a past youth, symbolised by the water and slide. But the present maturity of the narrator is symbolised by the denoted trappings of modernisation in which a "day at the beach" is really a day at the "Motel 76" concrete pool. Here we see the identity crisis of Lartigue coming to a visual conclusion with a sublime sense of irony surrounding *Florida*. This irony regarding identity is also found in the *My Secret Garden* photograph. The two are just written with an

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<sup>42</sup> The discussion of the photograph, which is never seen, but thoroughly investigated as an image of recollection, memory, and desires can be found in Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Richard Howard (trans.) London: Vintage Books, 1993.

eye for self-understanding, or identities of different time periods, continually striving to remain small and not having to grow up.

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But is this an accurate account of the narratives that are residing in and outside these two photographs and the others discussed? The question is not one of accuracy, but of finding the narratives that definitively describe this photographic language. As I hope to have demonstrated, Lartigue's language of photography was tied distinctly to the two concepts of diary and the diary novel. In these two forms of writing, the performative and constative functions are revealed at different time periods of his life. What we can extract from Lartigue's work is that the connection between photograph and textual accompaniment is a very powerful motivation for narration. It should be stated that the narratives that surround this form of inter-connectivity are highly biographical or autobiographical. In both forms, the relationship between the photograph and the text is one in which the "truthful" or "authentic" connotations of either are fully articulated through the other. This means that the narrator and the narratee are the same person. A further suggestion is that when a photograph is captioned, addressed or adorned with some form of textual accompaniment, the connotations of meaning associated with the proposition can to some extent be corroborated by the visual content of the photograph. And we know that the historical link of photography to its actual referent is something which cannot be denied, although many have tried. There will always be this form of actual referential association lurking behind the photograph no matter how much recontextualization takes place. I realise that I am speaking within the terms of traditional photographic practices, and that the ability of the photographic to lose its referent by scanning it into the digital context of the computer does address the validity of the issue of factuality and actuality. But in the case of structuring a convenient argument on

whether or not the narrative exists in the photograph, the initial observation of it existing outside the denotative content remains intact. As I have just illustrated with the work of Jacques-Henri Lartigue, the narratives of these photographs have a reportage history behind them. This is only apparent when we consider that they are part of a larger, more complex biographical drive in the form of personal diaries. The initial drive for Lartigue was the desire to photograph *everything* and this obsession, just like his brother's obsession to fly, became more than just a performative function. Initially we read Lartigue in the performative as in: "I focus,...I pull the frosted glass out and push a holder with a brand new plate - that has never seen daylight yet-"<sup>43</sup> As Lartigue continued to be the spectator with the camera, his vision matured and he became more and more skilled at being the "trained" observer. The constative "I" took over, and it would be this "I" that would define the rest of his social identity, photographic and self-understanding. He would write, "I am far too down-to-earth, too much of a spectator,...I live in a dream."<sup>44</sup> Here we read the constative "I" of Lartigue. On the one hand, he desires to photograph *everything* and on the other, he is the continual spectator living in a dream. In a moment of speculation, the only way to overcome or document this dream is to be the spectator who photographs *everything*. That way the dream can be materialised and actualised through the self-referential quality of the photograph. To make it more "truthful" then, writing about it in the form of a text to accompany them will complete a frame of narration. This form of record-keeping gives both the photograph and text the verisimilitude necessary to recreate the dream to its visual potential. Hence the dream has been visually externalised, which gives it an existence, or, should I say, an *histoire* necessary for the narratee to read it in self-referential terms. Therefore to live in a dream is not such a bad

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Avedon (ed.) *Diary of a Century: Jacques-Henri Lartigue*. New York: Viking Press, 1970: 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*: 192.

sense of self-understanding for it keeps, ironically, feeding the desires to photograph as the spectator of your own dream. Since life is a dream, speaking of his passionate love affair with Renée Perle after his separation from Bibi, Lartigue found a way to retain this dream. This dream is the photograph, and once you have the photograph you can write about it. And this is what Lartigue wrote: “I look at her profile. A long neck; a very straight, very small nose. A shiny stray hairlock caresses her mouth. She has gloves on...I wish I could see her hands! Hands are so important! She is beautiful. The small mouth with the full painted lips! The ebony eyes!<sup>45</sup>



Figure 5.12 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Renée*, c.1929

And to fulfil the dream a photograph, *Renée*, Figure 5.12, was taken by Lartigue.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 184.

The conclusion can be drawn that the narrative of these photographs and Lartigue's many others resides in the intertextual consideration of photography as a textual language and text as a visual language and when these two languages are combined the result is a realistic new discovery in an self-exploratory narrative. And just as Nelson notes, of Sartre's *La Nausée*, "Roquentin adopts this stance; his diary is not written for public consumption, but for his own edification. He is translating the daily event of life to words, then reading (presumably) the words in order to comprehend the life."<sup>46</sup> What we can extract as a comparison is that Lartigue's photographs were not shown until 1963, and if not for the influence of John Szarkowski, the works might never have been shown to the public. The comparison between Sartre's character of Roquentin and Lartigue, is that Lartigue is using both the word and the photograph to comprehend his life. Thereby Wittgenstein's observation of a shifting new grammatical movement can be seen as a guiding force in the narrative formation of Lartigue's own edification; for Lartigue, "the 'visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison. It might even be called a new sensation...[and what he] primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Roy Jay Nelson. *Causality and Narrative in French Fiction from Zola to Robbe-Grillet*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990: 151.

<sup>47</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M. Anscombe (trans.) Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1978: 121e (400. & 401.).

## 6

### *Robert Frank's The Americans: A Travel Novel Narrative*

A novel is a mirror which passes over a highway, Sometimes it reflects to your eyes the blue of the sky, at others the churned-up mud of the road.

Stendhal *Le Rouge et le noir*

The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery is like the reading.

*Ad Herennium*

*The Americans*, this title alone suggests many possible narratives: novels, novellas, short stories, and *fabulas*, that raise rather than answer the question, what are the Americans? The infinite number of possible answers to this question, in the infinite number of narratives, is only limited by the imagination of the reader looking at the collection of photographs. But when we consider that this title refers to a specific collection of black and white photographs completed by Robert Frank, the possible number of diverse narratives is focused in a single point of view. Also, when we come to the actual text, we realise that this collection of photographs is introduced by one of America's most colourful writers, Jack Kerouac. Then following this eccentric piece of prose *Beat* rambling which parallels the spontaneousness of the photographs, the

collection of eighty-four photographs takes on the ambient colouring of the *Beat* literary aesthetic, but interjects and retains the *Realist* turn-of-the-century travelogue fiction.

We have now narrowed the field of the potential types of narrative. The types of stories, descriptions and compositions generated through the self-reflective *Beat* influence and language of the photograph came to reflect the incantatory quality that is reminiscent of Kerouac's *On The Road* (1957); Allen Ginsberg's *A Supermarket in California* (1956); and A.B. Guthrie's *The Way West* (1949) or *These Thousand Hills* (1956). The collection of photographs were selected from contact sheets taken by Frank during a year-long journey through the the United States of America. It is this selective collection of images that becomes eighty-four different *fabulas* or *histoires* woven into one visual novel of Americanisms. These *fabulas* or *histoires*, seen as individual vignettes of American life, were widely acclaimed as portraits of the American social landscape. As these fragments of American life are composed with events, characters and settings, they provide the necessary content material to produce a novelistic travel narrative. Yet this journey would be for Robert Frank, when published as a monograph in 1959, a journey in which the art of artificial memory, photography, would be the overriding narrative principle of the text.

In this chapter I look specifically at where and how this narrative, a narrative speaking about the art of artificial memory, is generated and reflects the psychological perspective and ideological identity of America during the 1950's. My suggestion here is that in each photograph there is a looking back towards an imaginary or previous memory in which the 'America Dream' of past generations is being played out before the outsider / spectator who holds the camera. I am specifically using the term 'novel' to define this collection of photographs because I see the collection as a coherent story with all the essential devices to produce a coherent statement. The main emphasis of the novel is that it takes, through the point of view of the author, a look at a specific mythic ideal. To achieve this narrative or anti-narrative a host of characters, settings and events

of the American social landscape can be used. And as we shall discover, this novel form, albeit visual, does produce a narrative that addresses many levels of critical observation through the use of memory in artificial terms.

Outside of its socio-historical and cultural critical vision, *The Americans* provides an ideal example of the way photographs can be serialised to provoke a critical awareness of what it means to be defined as an American. My suggestion would be that this is achieved through the desires and fascination with a “Narrative”. By taking this literary stance I am going to construct a hypothesis of how any nationalistic identity can be created through the generation of a narrative to justify the position, psychological and ideological vision, of its cultural background. And especially in the context of the United States in the middle 1950’s, this striving for defining an identifiable narrative with a new beginning, finding the desired middle and achieving the “ideal” end was most urgent. This could be a result of the attitudes of new economic growth experience after World War II. With this new sense of personal and economic growth came the desire to achieve an ideal life. Narrative, as a concept, can be seen as a way either to define or exploit the historical precedents in order to create a “melting pot” identity for Americans. In this context, every character in the *The Americans* becomes an individual voice in the narrative. Their personal identity is expressed through the realism of some feature of Americanness. We either see a setting, an event, or character in which one or several of these voices are being recorded. [And in some cases several of these elements of narrative are expressed at once.]

It is easy to see how the setting is achieved. In the photographic context the textual accompaniment of the captions can help the photograph to define a specific setting, which directs the visual image specific place and sometimes to a specific event. Take, for example, *Public Park - Cleveland, Ohio*, Figure 6.1. From this caption which exists opposite to the photograph, this form of text and image diptych creates a traditional reading from left to right and reinforces the sense of narrative progression. It also ensures that the place and setting are established first so that no element of confusion

will come into play. What this design feature and the captions achieve is the expectation and inferences of the photograph being attributed to being a public park in Cleveland, Ohio. In this setting we are provided with not only a character but an event (if we can consider sleeping an event). A sleeping man on a blanket, half dressed, his shoes off and carefully placed by the tree which hides or obstructs the majority of the lower half of his body from our point of view. His head resting on its side as he quietly and silently lays on a checkered cushion. His left arm braced upward in a ninety degree angle, so that his tattoo of a bikini-clad woman lies in the same horizontal line beside him.



Figure 6.1

Robert Frank. *Public Park - Cleveland, Ohio, 1955/56*

What this visual composition creates is an ambiguous position to what our expectations and inferences of this man sleeping in a Public Park might be. Is it about the uncommonness of this event, is it the place with its large and lonely tree trunk which can act as a metaphor for the isolationist feelings of the counterculture rebel in America? The connotations of a tattooed man being half clothed in a park can suggest either an innocent or cynical point of view on the part of the photographer who may see it as a statement on the rest or on an “anti-establishment” feeling of the 1950’s. Or is the omniscient narrator, Robert Frank, taking us on the exploration of what it means to be an

American in a fashion similar to Jean Kerr's comic exploration of suburbia in *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (1957)?

Given that Robert Frank was neither born nor raised in America, does this outsider quality make him the ideal candidate for this type of visual exploration? Or does this outsider status make him too uninformed about what America was trying to achieve through its melting pot ideology? The expectation that each place would present is different and our encounters with these settings, characters and events would be reflective of these differences encounter. Questions such as these will be answered only through a complete review of the monograph and with comparisons with other documentary genre collections. By the 1950s, the great immigration expansion and explosion of the turn of the century was no longer an issue and the New Deal ideology was fading. These are historical issues and others such as the Korean War raise questions that must be kept for further observations. But for now it is the captioning (text) and Frank's own personality, as outsider and / or photographer, which is externalising the speculations on how one comes to be identified as an American. It also could be suggested that even if the individual works were not captioned, these elements of event, setting and character would be extractable. The effort on the part of the viewer would be more conceptually-intensive, drawing on personal rather than impersonal associations and information. And in some cases the ambiguousness of the composition leaves the reader wondering what the photograph is all about. These open photographic statements become the reflective moments in the novel which have no apparent answer; they are left there as a introspective devices. But because the novel has been labelled in such a manner, we must assume that the inevitable narrative running through it will be influenced by this captioning. Therefore we must take these captions as part of the overall aesthetic of the novel, and through this aesthetic the travelogue or reportage of a social portrait will be constructed. In side this poratrait will be issues of what it means to be an American in the mid 1950's.

My opening quote taken from the anonymous treatise *Ad Herennium* deals specifically with a form of the rhetorical art of memory. It is this rhetorical art form, the oratory, which directly affects how and where a narrative is found in the photograph.<sup>1</sup> What I am addressing is that the camera, with its ability to artificially retain a place and thing, imitates the same rhetorical qualities of oratory. I am aware that as the photograph cannot speak for itself; there must be someone who is speaking for it. It is this type of narrator who points to the fact that each individual photograph does have a macro-narrative being recited by the narrator / narratee. The author, that is, the photographer, who creates the photograph through this artificial act of memorialization, instils in this silence the elements and superficial structure of narrative which then can be extracted by the reader. In two similar instances we can refer to this silent speaking as what Mieke Bal in *Narratology* describes as the facet of focalization.

The subject of focalization, the *focalizer*, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character (i.e. an element of the fabula), or outside it. If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over other characters. The reader watches with the character's eye and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.<sup>2</sup>

As we can read there is a perceptual quality to Bal's notion of focalization in a text. When we consider that there are levels of focalizers within the text, these in some form must be accounted for and isolated, so that no confusion between the internal characters and narrator are misinterpreted. In Figure 6.1 the two possible focalizers could be the man sleeping on the blanket; or it could be the narrator, this being the photographer taking the photograph. The more likely focalizer, in this

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<sup>1</sup> It was through my reading of Philippe Dubois' "Photography *Mise-en-Film*" in Petro, Patrice's (ed.) *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995, that this comparison between the Latin form of memory and the photograph could be seen as analogous to one another. Therefore, I would want to credit the initial idea of this comparison to Dubois which I read in his observation on memory and video. I hope to expand and extend the connection into the realm of narrativity and the photograph.

<sup>2</sup> Mieke Bal. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985: 104.

instant, would be that of the narrator-photographer, for his technical advantage of having a camera over the sleeping man allows us to “accept the vision presented by his character.” And what is his character? In short he is the real author as photographer, born in Switzerland and who now has come to America. Therefore Robert Frank becomes a character in his own novel as he takes on the character-narrator persona; that of an omniscient travelling photographer seeing a new and interesting landscape to photograph. It will be his characteristic vision that we will come to accept as that of the implied author in telling us a story, although Bal is limited in the differentiation between the particular types of focalizers other than referring to them as merely levels. The idea of levels is not as useful as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s more expanded topology of the facets of focalization. In *Narrative Fiction*, Rimmon-Kenan identifies three facets of focalization to be explored: perceptual, psychological and ideological. The focalizer as narrator is an important distinction because at any given time one or more of these three facets are contained in any one focalizer. This is to say that the narrator will have the ability to express any of these three facets at any given moment or several moments. What is interesting about these facets is that they can appear in a host of divergent scenarios. This multi-possibility of variation is an ideal position from which to explore how a focalizer can vary his or her point of view or express a particular point of view.

By beginning with the perceptual as a “panoramic perspective”, as Michael J. Toolan notes in his book, *Narrative*, it is this panoramic perspective of focalization “which allows holistic descriptions of large scenes, and even of several distinct but simultaneous scenes”<sup>3</sup> to be read as the internalisation of the external focalizer’s point of view. Rimmon-Kenan suggest that there are two coordinates within this perceptual facet, those of space and time. In the spatial co-

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J Toolan. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. London: Routledge Press, (rep.) 1994: 72.

ordinate function, the focalizer “takes the form of a bird’s-eye view versus that of a limited isolated observer. In the first, the focalizer is located at a point far above the object(s) of his perception.”<sup>4</sup> In the time co-ordinate function the “internal focalization is synchronic with the information regulated by the focalizer. This synchronic moment is analogous to the photographic camera taking a photograph out of diachronic time. In other words, an external focalizer has at his or her disposal all the temporal dimensions of creating the story (past, present, and future) whereas an internal focalizer is limited to the ‘present’ of the characters (Uspensky 1973: 67, 113).”<sup>5</sup> Rather than discussing the intricacies of Rimmon-Kenan’s text, it is sufficient to say that the three main facets of focalization, plus the co-ordinate functions of time and space contained in the perceptual facet, can be used effectively as key analytical tools in discussing *The Americans*.

Within these three facets that will come to help define how the overall narrative is read by the viewer and conversely presented by the focalizer, another level of “focalizer” is presented by Rimmon-Kenan, but never really discussed. In the opening paragraphs, while discussing the influences of Genette and his usage of ‘focalization’, Rimmon-Kenan points out that the mediation of the term focalizer is some type of ‘prism’, ‘perspective, or ‘angle of vision’. And further notes that “the term ‘focalization’ is not free of the optical-photographic connotations, and - like ‘point of view’ - its purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation.”<sup>6</sup> It is this particular terminology I want to use within this discussion. As Rimmon-Kenan has noted, the connotation of a photograph can be used for the term of focalization. Therefore I want to utilise this literary terminology in describing the visual aesthetic. To do this we must perform a simple dissection. If we break the

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<sup>4</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. New York: Methuen Publishers, 1983: 77.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 78.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 71.

term down to its root, focal, in the sense of the optical definition it could refer to the “focal” length of a camera lens which controls the type of perspective and panorama seen by the photographer, through an angle of view controlled by a prism system of lens.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, with this focal view the photographer, in this case Robert Frank, can conveniently be addressed as a narrator. Focal as a means of vision or point of view and seeing is also an apt connotation for the psychological impact of the characters described in the novel. We can achieve through this controlled way of seeing the varied possible psychological traits of the characters described. Therefore, extracting differences and similarities among the settings, characters and events are all possible through a focalizing analogy.

Rimmon-Kenan’s final facet is that of the ideological. As a means of isolating the type of ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit evaluation’ or “norms of the text consists of ‘a general system of viewing the world conceptually’ in accordance with the events and characters of the story. In the simplest case, the ‘norms’ are presented through a single dominant perspective, that of the narrator - focalizer.”<sup>8</sup> I can suggest then that what is taking place as a form of ideological perspective is to be discovered through the self-referential looking involved in seeing the work as a text rather than as a snapshot of the American identity. Thereby an ideological inference in the text will be seen through the ‘angle of perspective’ through which Frank sees America. This “autobiographical” evaluation can be subjective but it offers similarly a way to discover the impact of the psychological facet as it comes through the visual descriptions Frank presents.

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<sup>7</sup> This angle of view through the viewfinder and the prism systems of lens is only relevant when discussing the operation mechanics of the SLR (Single Lens Reflective) 35mm camera. In this camera the view we see through the lens is achieved through the ability to have a reflection through a periscope mirror. This mirror gives the photographer the ability to see through lens and it is a feature found on the SLR 35mm camera. This smaller size cameras allows for a more “spontaneous” type of photographic aesthetic. It was this size of camera that Robert Frank used in documenting the Americans.

<sup>8</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. New York: Methuen Publishers, 1983: 81.

Before moving on I want to illustrate how these three facets can be extracted from *The Americans*. As we discovered in the opening brief discussion of finding the event, setting, and character of an individual photograph, the perceptual or panoramic perspective of Figure 6.1 is the overall framed composition presented by Frank. He has come upon this man in a public park and with a specific focal length lens (somewhere in the range of a 50 to 70mm lens) has composed and taken the photograph, which will subsequently give the reader / viewer a setting, a character in this setting, and the event taking place in this setting. We can delineate these by a process of inferred expectation: the event being the uneventfulness of sleep; the setting being a Public Park; the place being Cleveland, Ohio; and, the character being a sleeping man. Outside of this direct panoramic or perceptual description are the facets of the psychological and ideological that will complete the narrative or meaning of this photograph. These are much harder to discern from a sleeping character; therefore the focalization of these traits is handed over to the narrator. And through what Toolan (and many others) call *free indirect discourse* (FID)<sup>9</sup> an ‘attribution’ of these facets is created for the sleeping character. As the author and narrator, Frank will construct for this character, through the use of his camera, in the context of framing and composition, a psychological visual impact and ideological angle of view. A simpler way to approach this is through a question Toolan poses. This question will point to a specific relationship between the character’s creation and author’s influence as the controlling factor in the psychological and ideological perspective we have of this character in a *Public Park*. Toolan’s question is in direct reference to the theory of focalization in which he considers ‘attribution’ to be a direct cause of the spatio-temporal perspective and context focalization. The question he poses is thus:

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<sup>9</sup> Michael J. Toolan. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. London: Routledge Press, (rep.) 1994: 72.

Who is the immediate seer here, and whose is the 'zero-point' for time measurement here, to whom we attribute the spatio-temporal orientations we are given?<sup>10</sup>

The answer to this question is that we attribute them to Robert Frank. Although we are the immediate seers and the zero-point of any time measurement of Figure 6.1, we only assume this role of narratee through the eyes and silent speech of the photographer, the narrator. Therefore, what we can attribute to be our immediate time measurement of Figure 6.1 is actually only understandable through Frank's orientation as the focalizer of this photograph. Subsequently we see, assume and accept what Frank gives us as viewers of his photograph. In an essay "Black and White are the Colors of Robert Frank" Enda Bennett quotes Frank's own psychological and ideological understanding of being a photographer. Frank states:

Black and white are the colors of photography. To me, they symbolize the alterations of hope and despair to which mankind is forever subjected. Most of my photographs are of people; they are seen simply, as through the eyes of the man in the street. There is one thing the photograph must contain; the humanity of the moment. This kind of photography is realism. But realism is not enough - there has to be vision, and the two together can make a good photograph. It is difficult to describe this thin line where matter ends and the mind begins.<sup>11</sup>

We can see from Frank's statement that the role of the man on the street is identical to the observer standing on the side of the road watching a parade go by. It is also the ideological perspective of the realist novelist and the psychological perspective of the vision that comes with the French *flâneur* together to form what Frank considers to be a "good" humanity of the moment.

When addressing the psychological, visionary, ideological, and realistic traces of Figure 6.1, the question does not become one of who is seeing, but one

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<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Toolan. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. London: Routledge Press, (rep.) 1994: 75.

<sup>11</sup> Edna Bennett. "Black and White are the Colors of Robert Frank" In *Aperture* Vol. 9:1, (1961): 22.

of who is the 'immediate source' of psychological and ideological revelations and is this personal perspective important? Again our answer will be that the narrator provides both these revelations and this perspective for us. Then it is given to the narratee to either accept this angle of view or to reject it on the basis of differing focal opinion. Therefore, if there is any psychological / visual connotation to Figure 6.1, it will come through the composition Frank has rendered in a ideological realism. We can see that the relationship between the man sleeping and the caption *Public Park - Cleveland Ohio* clearly defines a specific point of view towards this character. Are we left to infer then, that sleeping in a "public park" is perhaps what the Americans do after wars and when not going to church or fighting the pros and cons of segregation or, would it be better to say, does the outsider (now narrator) who comes to America to visually experience the "American Lifestyle" only see a society in (un)rest? Or, given the mood of the times, it may focus on a period in which a culture based on divisions and dividing lines is only seen as a rest before the battle begins again. Hence the use of the tree to suggest the cultural divide taking place even in a setting as tranquil as a Public Park. The psychological and ideological inferences that may be at work in this photograph, can loosely be defined as *the white male establishment is sleeping off the post-war years* or the whole can simply be seen as a quaint pretty picture. We could also point out that the fetal position of the man becomes a reflection of his childhood heritage which is ironically juxtaposed against the adult tattoos which adorn his left arm. *A man, but yet still a boy in sleep in his jeans and two-tone socks.* We are asked to question is this the *all American boy*, dreaming the dreams of baseball fantasies, apple pie and 'home, home on the range' and women in bikinis, or is it an American sleeping away the struggles of an indecisive life of the 1950's?

But what does this picture really say as a psychological portrait other than simply setting out an image of a sleeping man obviously tired? If we consider the

time period in which it was taken, (c.1955), the connotations connected with this time period and subject, and the associations of being a white male sleeping alone in a public park, we can perhaps infer that the counterculture has been captured in an automatic portrait which can be equally validly read as a portrait of a person of middle-class background. The nagging question then becomes, why did this sleeping person get photographed and presented in a collection of photographs entitled *The Americans*? Seeing, literally, that it was made by a European, the novelty of an American sleeping in a Public Park perhaps struck Frank as a fitting metaphor to reflect the isolation, vulnerability, helplessness, insecurity, and estrangement from the American scene. Frank's statement in the *U.S. Camera Annual* about *The Americans* project and the Guggenheim Award he received reiterates this point of view.

With these photographs, I have attempted to show a cross-section of the American population. My effort was to express it simply and without confusion. The view is personal and, therefore, various facets of American life and society have been ignored...It is important to see what is invisible to others - perhaps the look of hope or the look of sadness. Also, it is always the instantaneous relation to oneself that produces a photograph.<sup>12</sup>

It is safe to say that in all of the photographs contained in this novel there will be these questions of distance focalization. Ideally in every photograph the discovery of who is seeing and who is the immediate source of vision will always lead back, through the narratee, to the narrator; in this case Robert Frank. It is important then to remember Robert Frank was born in Switzerland in 1924 and then emigrated to the United States in 1947. Then in 1955 he received a Guggenheim award, the first for a European photographer, to spend a year (1955 to 1956), "on the road" taking photographs of his perspective of America. Therefore the novel will be a visual portrait based on an "foreigner's" point of view, who came to

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Frank. "A Statement" In *U.S. Camera Annual*, 1958: 115. Cited in Nathan Lyons (ed.) *Photographers on Photography*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1966: 66-67.

America to describe his perceptions through impressive (psychological) and expressive (ideological) understandings of what it means to be defined as an American.

A further important feature of the work is the title classification of the novel as *The Americans* rather than just *Americans*. In the title the connotations of the 'other' as focalizer are implicitly embedded in the use of word 'The' before 'Americans'. 'The' is representative of the 'object who is simultaneously the subject', and it also distinguishes the other as a subject other than Frank as the narrator which then gets transposed onto the narratee; "these people are not me". Therefore it is crucial that 'The Americans' designates the things in front of the camera as a proper names, otherwise the focalizing distinction of the narrator as omniscient may be subverted to include the outsider as insider. And as a text, *The Americans*, has been critically acclaimed for its visual criticism of the American way of life. Therefore, it is important to keep this perspective which reinforces the idea of distance and individuality between 'The Americans' rather than simply 'Americans'.

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Returning to my opening discussion I want to now illustrate how this focalization is important to the consideration of the photograph as a rhetorical form of oratory. I am using the term rhetorical in the context of seeing the photograph as a personal form of argumentation. In *The Realm of Rhetoric*, Perelman points out that: "Argumentation is intended to act upon an audience's convictions or dispositions through discourse, and tries to gain a meeting of minds instead of imposing its will through constraint or conditioning."<sup>13</sup> I have discussed in the previous section the silent nature of the speaker; and when we combine it

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<sup>13</sup> C.H. Perelman. *The Realm of Rhetoric* William Kluback (trans.), Carroll C. Arnold (intro.) Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982. 11.

with this form of argumentation, the silent photograph, it provides the basis of the visual oratory element to come through in the form of imposing a silent or 'visual voice'. But before considering how this voice actively conditions the implication of the photographs to be heard as a rhetorical form of memory, I want to first outline the operational-mechanics of creating a photograph within the principles set out in defining this form of artificial memory.

In my opening quote about the *Ars memorativa* or 'art of memory', there are the central principles which reside in both the natural and artificial art of memory. We can see that they exist within a binary system of inter-connected faculties that control how the memory is produced. In Cicero's *De Oratore*, a version of memory is created through connection between the *loci* (site, place or structure) and *imagines* (images or things placed in the site, place or structure). Frances A. Yates outlines in the opening pages of an exhaustive history on the art of memory the ideas contained in the anonymous *Ad Herennium*, which suggests that "there are two kinds of memory: one is natural, the other artificial. The natural memory is that engrafted in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is a memory strengthened or confirmed by training."<sup>14</sup> It is the artificial memory that has a more direct comparison to the photograph, because the way in which the photograph is a form of artificial recording medium. Thus we can see a distinction being made between natural and artificial memory. Therefore this artificial form has more potential for providing possible clues to where this elusive silent voice and invisible focalizer can be found in the photograph. Artificial memory compares directly to the operational mechanics of the photographic camera. We see this similarity in the following passage from the *Ad Herennium* in which:

The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale,

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<sup>14</sup> Frances A Yates. *The Art of Memory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1966: 5.

complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by natural memory - for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like. An image is , as it were, a figure, mark, or portrait of the object we wish to remember... For the background are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangements and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery is like the reading.<sup>15</sup>

To begin the comparison, the photograph is created similarly through the establishment of the connective relationship of backgrounds and images. I would further suggest that the imposed superficial frame of the photographic camera, that rectilinear boundary, creates a boundary for these backgrounds which then get retranslated into a place or site (sight). It is this site which is identical to the *loci* found in Cicero's *De oratore* as a facet in the art of oratory which uses memory in order to achieve its result. The figure, marks and portrait of the object, *imagines*, are inside or written inside this boundary on the surface of the site (sight) background. This completes the second necessary part of artificial memory. The product of combining written images<sup>16</sup> on these backgrounds will end up in creating an analogy to the photograph. Therefore the photograph can be considered as a visual rhetorical form of artificial memory. It forms an argumentative position based on its ability to be seen as a past memory. Through this form of artificial memory, we can extend the comparison to include the idea that the photograph or photography more specifically is a form of inner writing externalised visually. Yates further explains that artificial memory should be created through an individual's understanding of the memory system.

It is essential that the places should form a series and must be remembered in their order, so that we can start from any *locus* in the series and move either backward or forward from it... The formation of the *loci* is of greatest importance, for the same set of *loci* can be used again and again

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<sup>15</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* , III, xvii. 30-xix. 31. Harry Caplan (trans.) Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954: 211.

<sup>16</sup> The notion of writing images can be referenced back to Fox-Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* which I have discussed at length in Chapter 2. Therefore it is easy to see the comparison that can be made between the writing of the light patterns on the film plane and the similar technique of writing images on a background to increase the faculty of memory.

for remembering different material. The images which we have placed on them for remembering one set of things fade and are effaced when we make no further use of them. But the *loci* remain in the memory and can be used again by placing another set of images for another set of material.<sup>17</sup>

The striking resemblance between the frame of the camera being the *locus* or background and its ability to be used over and over again as the developer of a new site or background for image writing furthers the claim and plausibility of the photograph as a form of visual artificial memory.

A variation of this comparison is that the frame of the viewfinder is a boundary in which the internal space enforces the distinction of it as a place. This happens in a form of translation, which tends to be instantaneous; the momentary hesitation felt in finding the image in the framing space would account for this conceptual translation from space to place. The photographer must first find the space and once this space is found, it becomes a place, and this place must now fill the image. The procedure is commonly known as composing. Therefore the comparison between an author and photographer is not that diverse for they both partake in the act of composing. They both find places, backgrounds and sites (sights), to fill with images, and these images can be in the form of events, setting and / or characters.

Also, the suggestion that images can fade and be effaced when they are no longer needed is another trait of the photographic medium. Extending the comparison a bit further, the photographic image can be seen as a visually fragile reproduction on a paper. The fragility of the image parallels to some extent the unreal quality of an a-temporal photograph. For if the vision (the photograph), the registration of the image on the celluloid surface, is damaged the memory of the site and photograph is eliminated. It can never be reproduced in its original state. In the *Ad Herennium*, in the section on artificial memory, backgrounds are

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<sup>17</sup> Frances A Yates. *The Art of Memory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1966: 7.

considered to be “like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery is like the reading.”<sup>18</sup> It is these backgrounds of papyrus on which imagines, like letters, can be rearranged and deposited, which is a familiar process in the creation of a photograph. This is evident in photography even in its most simplistic form, for example using the *Kodak One Step Camera*, in which the plastic camera comes boxed and pre-loaded, pre-calibrated with shutter speed and aperture size. All the individual has to do is point and shoot, i.e. press the shutter release button. Once the person has taken twenty-seven photographs<sup>19</sup> the plastic camera, contained in its cardboard box, is taken to the photo-finishers, the film is processed, and photographs are struck off the negatives. In one hour’s time, the photographs are ready and the artificial memories created. This could all happen in an eight hour day or less depending on how quickly the individual can take pictures. My point is that the simplest form of creating a photograph is a form of creating artificial memories. The decisions about what type of background and image to put in this site will be identical to the mnemotechnic principles of strengthening the faculty of artificial memory. When it comes to the “professional” photographer, the challenge is even more intentionally determined than in casual picture taking.

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<sup>18</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III, xvii. 30-xix. 31. Harry Caplan (trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954: 211.

<sup>19</sup> The reason these *Kodak One Step* cameras can only take twenty-seven exposures is that Kodak has employed a very convenient marketing strategy. The number of exposures are representative of not being able to reload the cameras with commercially purchased twenty-four or thirty-six exposure rolls. Also, the cameras come pre-loaded, and are loaded in the reverse of a normal 35mm camera. In the traditional 35mm sequence, the film is fed out of the protective film cassette onto a take-up spool in the back of the camera. As each exposure is made and the advancing of the film prepares the shutter frame with new raw sensitive film. Once all the film has been exposed the film is then rewound back into the protective film cassette. The *One Step* is the simplified version of this procedure, the film is loaded raw onto the take-up spool and as the exposures are made, the reverse advancing film is fed back into the protective cassette, so that when the all the exposures have been made, the camera must be unloaded. When it is unloaded the camera is basically discarded. Although it can be altered to be reused, most camera stores discard them. Basically this strategy to pre-load raw film into the camera makes the camera for-all-intents-and-purposes useless once all the exposures have been made. Therefore to take more photographs we have to purchase a new *One Step*.

This casualness is more specifically linked to cause, choosing the background, and effect, choosing the image rather than the reverse - effect then cause.

The ability of the photograph to be seen as a form of artificial memory is important because the visual voice which resides behind the visual image is based on the construction of this rhetorical artificial memory. This is to say, the way in which the decision to choose a background and imprint (a form of writing an image) onto this place is the same as remembering and reciting lyrical poetry. It is this reciting that becomes a clue to the puzzle of visual focalizations in the photograph. For implicit in the term 'reciting' is the connotation of relocating or revisiting a past background. Reciting in photographs offers the viewer an unquestionable ability to revisit the background, and its image(s), and recite its inner writing through the focalization of the narrator. This intentional and deterministic action to revisit the background and its image(s) is what artificial memory creates, and in this position, the oration of the remembered focalization will be in a narrative form. This narrative will relate to the type of image we place on the background. Therefore the narrative will take on the specific connotations of the types of image we place on a specific background. And because these image(s) we have read and heard voiced through the narrator can be effaced and fade, the same is true of the photograph. When we no longer need the photograph, as a memory to revisit, rather than erasing it, we discard it - perhaps not in the waste bin, more likely in a box out of immediate consciousness. The only consistent feature of the operational mechanics and artificial memory is that the rectilinear frame will always, in some form, be a spatial boundary to be transformed into a place. Although the shape of the *loci* will be the same, this by no means limits the potential of creating a variation of backgrounds. Again in the Contained in the *Ad Herennium* text this similarity is being expressed:

Again, it will be advantageous to obtain backgrounds in a deserted than a populous region, because the crowding and passing to and from of people

confuse and weaken the impress of the images, while solitude keeps their outlines sharp. Further, backgrounds differing in form and nature must be secured, so that thus distinguished, they may be clearly visible;...And these backgrounds ought to be of moderate size and medium extent, for when excessively large they render the image vague, and when too small often seem incapable of receiving an arrangement of images. Then the backgrounds ought to be neither too bright nor too dim, so that the shadows may not obscure the images nor the lustre make them glitter.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to the 'One Step' analogy, what we receive from the photo-finishers as we open the envelop containing the hard copies of artificial memories, are a standard size and set of photographs. Each photograph will bear the same dimensional boundaries which reinforce the connotations of place, but the backgrounds will be different. And depending on how I used my 'One Step', the 'things' will be arranged so that I can (re-sight) from memory the images in the background, or, more simply stated, I can "read the writing on the background".

[see Appendices B page 343-346, *A One Day One Step Memory* ]

Through this form of writing we can move one step further to discover the visual voice and focalizations within the photograph. But before I begin to discuss this aspect, I want to [illustratively] look at the last quote from the perspective of Robert Frank's *The Americans*.<sup>21</sup>

The first comparison is an inability to secure moderately sized backgrounds. In all of the photographs, this frame boundary defining the images in a background are the same, whether horizontals or verticals. Once we have established a place, i.e. background, then the image(s) or thing(s) can be arranged and written onto the background. And when we need to refer to the image we now know where and in what place it is. This knowing where to revisit is aided by the captions which are another rhetorical facet of the artificial memory. In its latin translation 'Words' are defined as being *verba*. The usage *verba* occurs in

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<sup>20</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III, xix. 31-xx31. Harry Caplan (trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954: 213.

<sup>21</sup> I am referring to the paperback edition of *The Americans* published by Pantheon Books, New York, 1989.

the *Ad Herennium* when the author is speaking of expanding the principles of the theory of images.

... let me now turn to the theory of images. Since, then, images must resemble objects we ought ourselves to choose from all likenesses for our use. Hence likenesses are bound to be of two kinds, one of subject-matter, the other of words. Likeness of matter are formed when we enlist images that present a general view of the matter with which we are dealing; likenesses of words are established when the record of each single noun or appellative is kept by an image.<sup>22</sup>

It would be captions such as *Rodeo - Detroit*, Figure 6.2, that would require these words to find likenesses which would in turn remind us of the 'things' in the background.

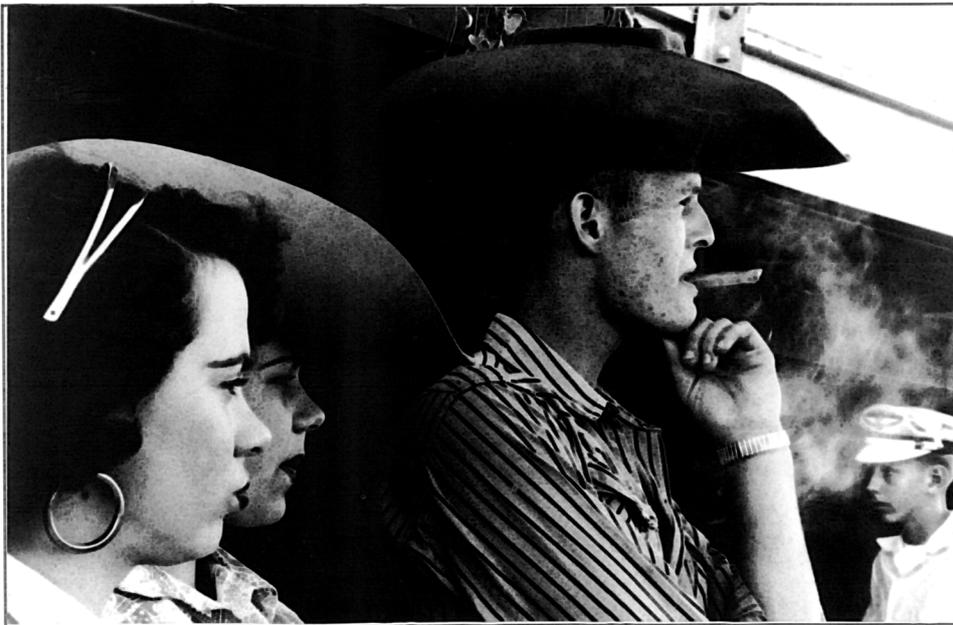


Figure 6.2

Robert Frank, *Rodeo - Detroit, 1955/56*

This is simply the reverse of the traditionally-held idea of the production of the photograph. Ideally it would have been the place, Detroit, in which the event, Rodeo, is taking place that would have been imprinted with the image of what the words *Rodeo - Detroit* recite to us. Ideally it is not the words reciting,

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<sup>22</sup> *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, III, xx. 33 - 34. Harry Caplan (trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954: 215.

but the focalization of the narrator reminding the viewer of a background with an image of an event with characters.

If we take a closer look at Figure 6.2 we see that the imprint of images - the cowboy in his Stetson smoking a cigar; the twin sisters, one with a Stetson and one without; and the small boy in a white captain's cap and shirt to match - are arranged in the background, deserted at that, so that they do not compete with the place likeness implicit in the caption words. The images are not tonally rich, there is no dazzle or glitter, and shadow details do not obscure the images. What Frank has achieved is a well balanced rendition of the type of principle of artificial writing which I have been discussing. Then we come to this script in which each thing will carry with it its own potential to deliver a reading. But this reading will be filtered through the narrator who is describing this memory and reciting the images for the narratee.

Therefore it will be his focalization that will create the memory image which we hear in visual silence. The cowboy, the girls and the boy all deliver their own oratory in the form of connotation and denotation, *récit* and *histoire*. What we as readers or silent listeners receive of this oration, just as in a pantomime, are the memories of a place with an event and characters. This provides us with our own artificial memory of the background and image we are seeing and reading. We can change this around silently to suggest that this artificial memory is perhaps a variation of a fictive or fictional rhetoric. This inauthenticity is only an issue if the words have no images to remind us of potential memory.

This is why Figure 6.2 has the potential to suggest many types of narrative readings, although the focalized voice is apparent through the narrator. The sense that we have previously witnessed this place is non-existent. Therefore its script will be delivered on the basis of a background and thing formed through the art of artificial memory. By having no direct access to the original past memory, then

the only recourse left to the reader is one of a fictional rhetoric. Turning this around slightly is to look at the photograph as being a rhetorical form of focalized memory; the instant that we view the image and background, it becomes real. This artificialness becomes our own reality. We will have no way to transgress away from the script we have just read or encountered. For example in Figure 6.2, having no previous understanding or knowledge of what a rodeo in Detroit would look like, I would not have my own rhetoric to construct an artificial memory of my own. What has happened is that Robert Frank has composed an artificial memory for me and thereby given me a background and image to read.

In my reading of the relationship between the man in a cowboy hat and the twin girls and the small, almost unnoticeable boy in the lower right hand corner of the photograph, Frank is providing me with his description of the relationship between these spectators and the events suggested by the proper name 'Rodeo'. So through a simple process of using word images and indirect referencing, Frank has constructed an ambiguous, if not vague, portrait of a Rodeo in Detroit. Although I may question his descriptive aesthetic, because I may have my own artificial memories of what a Rodeo is like, I must remember that this photograph was taken over forty years ago. And through this long duration the connotations associated with this particular Rodeo have changed. Therefore I cannot simply substitute my own artificial memory for that of Frank's. My recourse is to allow his memory to describe itself. Although the only action that is readily apparent is the cowboy smoking a cigar, the intent gazes of the three major figures in the photograph would suggest that there is some type of rodeo action going on. Again, the caption 'Rodeo', the event implicit in this name and the central subjects gaze does not convince me that this is an authentic rodeo. We can imagine that any number of rodeo events are taking place: Steer Wrestling, Calf Roping, Bull Riding, Bareback Riding, Saddle Bronc or Barrel Racing. This is the unknown

event which is only hinted at by the relationship between the caption and the photograph.

Although this is a very practical resolution to the Figure 6.2 as a form of artificial memory, to infer that Frank's memory becomes an expectation of our memory seems a valid claim to make. By keeping in mind the intent Frank has with the project, we are able to explore the ideological focalization in Figure 6.2.

We need to consider for the moment the relationship of the narrator, in this case the actual author, and how he as the 'outsider' has come to view this event. Ideally, I am suggesting that we take on the narrator, as character, to discover the psychological focalization. Rimmon-Kenan points out that there are two facets to this form of focalization: one is the cognitive noting that this involvement is a product of the internal focalizer's limited knowledge versus the external focalizer's theoretical omniscience; the other is the emotive which again is the product of the neutrality versus involvement in the presentation.

If we begin with the emotive we can infer that this neutrality versus the involvement is most explicit as the emotive psychological impact of Figure 6.2. The neutrality of Frank's presence as focalizer is directly in conflict with the involvement in presentation which takes the form of his descriptions of the way he sees. Therefore this neutrality of the outsider or spectator is directly at odds with his ability to be the involved objective presenter of this event. The event is no longer the suggested rodeo event off frame, but the event of Frank's involvement in taking the photograph. His visual position is so close to the central three subjects that it is undeniable that he is involved in the presentation of this photograph. Yet has this outsider who has come to be the spectator of "The Americans" had his naive neutrality shattered? It is this collusion between neutrality, as spectator, and involvement, as a narrator, which gives Figure 6.2 a further psychological impact. As an outsider is presenting an inside look at these subjects (in this situation, almost from within), the boy in his sailor cap, the

cowboy, and the cowgirl and her “urbanised” sister, take on a whole new set of connotations, being seen as tokens rather than types of Americans.

It is this tokenising narrative which is completely different from that of August Sander’s massive photo-typing of the people of Germany in the early decades of this century. In Sander’s portraits the individuals become defined by their social positions, their perspectives and ideologies, and definitions in society, rather than by their place at the time of photographing. For example Figure 6.3. *Gypsy, 1938.*

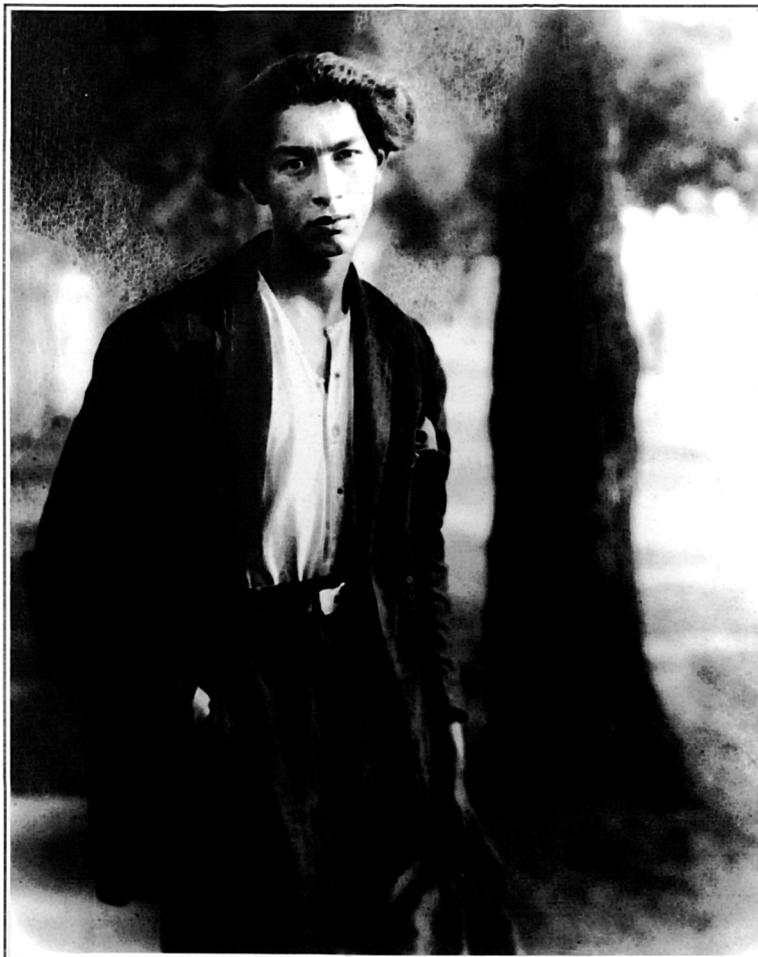


Figure 6.3

August Sander, *Gypsy, 1938*

This photograph is a cognitive rather than an emotive focalization of a type of individual residing in Germany in the 1930's. Sander, as the author of this portrait, can be seen as the internalised focalizer's which is in opposition to the

external focalizer's theoretical omniscience. It is obvious that Sander is the omniscient focalizer and his own unproclaimed theoretical position is the external (past, present and future) characterisation we read for this portrait. The individual in the portrait is the internal focalizer who has a limited knowledge of the purpose of the narrative. He is contained completely in the 'present' within the setting and place that Sander constructs for him. Therefore, Sander composes a descriptive type of character based on his own theoretical omniscient knowledge as photographer / author.

I realise that I have placed much emphasis on the captioning of both Frank's and Sander's photographs. I feel this emphasis is well placed in that, in both of these critical bodies of work, the power of the text to define and describe tokens and types of setting, events and characters, is completely explicit. There is no denying the fact that the textual influence is and has a major effect on how we come to interpret the photographs. In some other context this could be seen as a reverse to the powerful ideology of language that comes with its use. But I would rather see the text as a component rather than as a indicative feature of their works. In the case of *The Americans*, it is a crucial and important feature, that gives us a position, a place, from which we can read the work. Just as we can plot a position on a map, Frank's caption reminds us where he has been and what he has seen. And as each place differs, a different ambience is recreated, something that we come to expect in the work which is generated out of visual vignettes and tableau or monologues. So, as I have tried to justify the heavy reliance on the caption, I have also indirectly pointed to a key defining characteristic which became one of the critical features extracted from *The Americans*. It is the quality of difference and how this difference creates an ideological "world opinion" of what an American identity is. So it is not surprising that Frank as a spectator came to see the differences rather than the similarities of the American identity. For, in an ironic twist, the nineteenth-century ideal of the "melting pot identity"

has not, to some extent, worked. The diverse division of identifiable differences still made up the America of 1955-56, and continue to be analogous to America in 1995-96.

At this point it would be advantageous to see an example of this vision of identifiable difference which Frank successfully achieved. The two most obvious photographs that speak to this theme are *Trolley - New Orleans*, Figure 6.4, and *Canal Street - New Orleans*, Figure 6.5. In both of these photographs we are witness to a composition filled with characters in two distinctive settings, and in these settings the atmosphere of events is described.



Figure 6.4

Robert Frank, *Trolley - New Orleans, 1955/56*

In Figure 6.4 the place, according to the caption, is New Orleans, and the setting an anonymous street in which a *Trolley* is photographed passing by the spectator, who is taking the photograph. The direct gaze of the individuals on the trolley is back towards the spectator. We can infer that this return gaze is a sign that a photographic event, distinct from that of the street trolley passing by, is taking place. The reader's understanding of the event (Frank's photograph) is thereby controlled by the composition presented by Frank. In itself this composition seems rather banal and unreflective of the

Americans he is searching for, but when we are reminded of the time period and place of this photograph, the characters in the composition combine to comprise an ideological observation of token American society: black, female, male, poor, old, wealthy, white and young. When we frame the photograph in this context, the photograph takes on a profound sense of critical intuitiveness that has come to be associated with *The Americans*. As Martha Rosler has suggested in her article “In, around, and afterthought (on documentary photography)”, Robert Frank’s “purloined images of American life in the 1950’s suggest...an identifiable personally mediated presentation”.<sup>23</sup> Therefore in one exposure Frank gives the reader a focalized depiction of the “I” in the form of an artificial memory (a photograph) in which the social hierarchy of the “American” society can be compartmentalised. In the traditional reading from left to right, assuming we contend that the far left is the beginning, that is, the top of the social hierarchical pyramid, and the far right is the end, that is, the bottom of the pyramid, we discover the social ideological struggle of the American landscape. And to make it easier to identify the tokens of this struggle, Frank has compartmentalised them in their own frame which reflects their social status in American 1950’s life.

Leading the procession is the white male, next the white female, next the white children, followed by the black male, and finally the black female. It is a historical fact that this dominance of white over black is a social reality of this period in America. (This was also documented by the work of Dan Weiner in his “Bus Boycott” Series -1956). For social and cultural critics and historians such as bell hooks, the separation or divide of identifiable ‘others’ being marginalized has always lead to this type of social positioning based on race, class, and gender; social status has always relied on these to delineate the structure of American life. Rather than going into a long discussion of a very sensitive debate, it is enough to say that Frank has keenly observed what is still

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<sup>23</sup> Martha Rosler. ‘In, around, and afterthought (on documentary photography)’ In Bolton, Richard (ed.) *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989: (303-341) 320.

present in 1995. This fact of life in America, especially for some heavily marginalized social classes, such as black females are still always taking a back seat. One of bell hooks' interests is in the marginalization of black females who have continually been subjugated to a position of the forgotten 'others' in America -literally given the back seat of the bus.

Frank's photograph is the discovery of the forgotten. The collection is a telling expression of the hard and clearly defined position of status at work in America. But would this not have been expected in the America of 1955? I would have to agree. Therefore this photograph merely reflects the landscape of its time. With that reservation, I would point out that, although the photograph is merely a photograph of its time, the ability to express this fact so "obviously" in the urban landscape illustrates how keen a spectator Frank was. As a trained observer he could express in artistic terms what the author / photographer was striving to achieve at the turn of the nineteenth-century. This keen sight is what Alvin Langdon Coburn is pointing out in his autobiography, when he writes about what photography can achieve.

You ask how a camera can be made to convey a mood, I can only say that photography demands great patience: waiting for the right hour, the right moment, and recognizing it when you see it. It also means a training in self-control...The artist-photographer must be constantly on the alert for the perfect moment, when a fragment of the jumble of nature is isolated by the conditions of light or atmosphere, until every detail is just right.<sup>24</sup>

It is apparent from Coburn's views that Frank is achieving this exact form of patience and recognition of an event. Therefore out of the jumble of the streets of New Orleans, Frank has seen and composed an ideological focalization of the American social structure in an urban landscape. It is this form of narration found in the work of Frank which echoes Garry Winogrand's views about this very issue of narrative in a photograph. His suggestion is that "Images can yield any narrative and all meaning in photography

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<sup>24</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn. *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer: An Autobiography*. Helmut and Alison Gernsheim (ed.) New York: Fredrick A Praeger, 1966: 44.

applies only to what resides within the “four walls” of the framing edges.”<sup>25</sup> If this is a definable point of view, then we should be able to discover any narrative that resides within the four walls of any photograph.

We can test this observation by examining the second photograph I discussed earlier. In Figure 6.5, we discover a mass of characters in what appears to be a confusion of individual direction. The setting is Canal Street in the city of New Orleans. What we have been given now is a definitive place for the narrative to be composed. I feel this photograph best reflects the previous observations of Coburn’s, but another more striking observation can be made. Coburn in his last statement was discussing the potentiality of the photograph being composed as a vignette in a novel. Certainly a passing influence of his friend Henry James can be extracted from this passage, but on a more photographic level, this passage speaks directly to the spectatorship of Frank. As Coburn subsequently points out:

To speak of composition in connection with photographs seems, on first thinking of the problem, to be rather a contradiction in terms -- that you really ought to say “isolation” which would perhaps come nearer to what is done in most cases; but whilst it is impossible to rearrange trees and hills in the manner of a painter, it *is* possible to move the camera in such a way that a completely new arrangement is achieved, a few inches sometimes changing the entire design. For the creation of a picture, vision is of prime importance, and patience, discrimination, and even marksmanship are decisive factors.<sup>26</sup>

From this quotation, we can extract what Coburn considered to be the ideal way to form a composition with the camera. To isolate it, be patient, discriminatory and have the eye of a marksman, this statement seems ideally suited to reflect the psychological focalization of Frank’s *Canal Street* .

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<sup>25</sup> Garry Winogrand. cited in Rosler, Martha. ‘In, around, and afterthought: (on documentary photography)’ In Bolton, Richard (ed.) *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989: (303-341) 320.

<sup>26</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn. *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer: An Autobiography*. Helmut and Alison Gernsheim (ed.) New York: Fredrick A Praeger, 1966: 46.



Figure 6.5

Canal Street - New Orleans, 1955/56

In this composition we see the mass confusion signified by the many possible directions of actions carried out through the characters on the move. In a single instant Frank has discriminated the point at which all the psychological forces of human movement have come together in what could be imagined to be a dance of the masses. For in the chaos a structure will emerge, and with a marksman's vision the exposure has been pulled. Although this arrangement of characters creates an event of massive confusion in the street of New Orleans, we can imagine that all of these characters within the four walls of this frame are representative of Americans in general. For, as a historical fact, Canal Street is in the old part of New Orleans, and this old section was and still is a prime tourist haven. Therefore, what do all these people in the narrative express? It could point to several issues dominant within this period. During the 1950's in America, the rise in the middle class's leisure time and spending power led to its exploitation in the form of tourism. But, as Carol Shloss has pointed out in her discussion of Henry James and his observations of photography, Henry James would, through his narrator in *The Aspen Papers*, reflect upon the advent of photography and how this faithful "instrumentation" of reality would destroy the

“freshness of Europe” because the print anticipates one’s actual experience of places and because that anticipation promoted, as he saw it, overwhelming, uninformed, and insensitive tourism. “When Americans went abroad in 1820 there was something romantic, almost heroic in it, as compared with the perpetual ferrying of the present hour, when photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise.”<sup>27</sup>

To raise a question, does *Canal Street* reflect James’s concern on tourism - the immediate answer is yes it does. My agreement is based on the relationship between the caption and the visual content positioned in the midst of the teeming action of Canal Street. [I am assuming that there has been no attempt at deceiving the viewer by misrepresenting the caption’s place and the photographic content.] On that level of interpretation *Canal Street* does speak for the emerging influx of tourism - albeit in America rather than Europe. Conceding that it is only through the caption that I can suggest this, one further comparison can be made between the psychological impact of tourism and its effects of “destroying” the freshness of a place by anticipating its ambience. In a twist of irony, Frank has taken this art form of photography, that Coburn so greatly promoted, and what James was to see as the photograph’s discursive potential, and turned a photograph into a positive image of a negative attitude.

It is through this claustrophobic perspective that Frank achieves not only perceptual awareness of the street, but composes a momentary profile of American tourism. Just as we heard in the *Ad Herennium* treatise, the “populous region” for a background creates a confusion by the crowding and passing to and fro and weakens the image. I am not suggesting that the crowded composition of Frank’s photograph creates a weak image. What I want to point out is that in the crowded and populous region, such as Figure 6.5, all the passing back and forth

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<sup>27</sup> Carol Shloss. *In Visible Light, Photography and the American Writer: 1840-1940*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1987: 62.

weakens the ambience of the region. Or, in James' observation, it annihilates any sense of surprise. Frank also isolates the strangeness of the American "urban" scene. With patience he discriminates the tokenness of individuals that make up a populace of confusion. Into this chaos comes the question: what does it mean to be defined an American? Again we see, as we did in Figure 6.4, a collection of individuals, the young, the old, the black, the white, the middle aged, the male and the female. In all these characters one common denominator is reflected; as a oxymoronic statement it exists through diversity as commonness of "Americanness". Ideally it will be this perspective that is revealed as another striking focalization being made by the narrator.

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In *In Visible Light* Carol Shloss discusses in a detailed account, the varying ways in which "observing the landscape" was handled and expressed by Peter Henry Robinson, Alvin Langdon Coburn and Henry James. This perspective would develop into what Shloss has defined as "the determining role of observation" and she examines how this determination is expressed by the three. As she points out, in Robinson it is the "point of sight", in Coburn it is the "angle of vision, and in James' fiction, it is the "point of view". In these "realist" observations Shloss concludes that the realist photographer / author saw the world through "trained observation(s) [which achieved] the lurking sensibility with the talent for framing and isolating a picture, the commitment to representation of an unarranged world."<sup>28</sup> It is in these obvious parallels between Robinson, Coburn and James that we see Frank's ability to compose a photograph in a realist *fabula* aesthetic. This 'realist' aesthetic does not begin with James, and his own sense of the real was certainly influenced by his introduction to Zola, Balzac, and

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<sup>28</sup> Carol Shloss. *In Visible Light, Photography and the American Writer: 1840-1940*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1987: 64.

Maupassant. It would be these keen French realists that James would come to criticise, but he still appropriated their sense of aesthetic description. Therefore we can trace a genre heritage, from James to Frank, of documentary being created from the nineteenth-century literary aesthetic of Realism.

It is this narrative technique and aesthetic that we being utilised in *The Americans*. The aesthetic techniques of using a form of visual mnemotechnics to reflect life becoming art influences Frank's compositions of life as imitating art. A short list of examples would be the paintings of Norman Rockwell; the fiction of Rebecca Harding Davis *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861) and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885); the photo-essays of Jacob Riis's *How The Other Half Lives* (1890), Bill Brandt's *England, Home and Darkness* (1936), *A Night in London* (1938), and Eugene Smith's *Pittsburgh* (1954) and *Man of Mercy* essay (1956). It will be this theme of life becoming art through 'realness' and 'likeness' which will become the overriding visual reference point in Frank's monograph. This is explicitly apparent in *Drug Store - Detroit*, Figure 6.6.

In this composition the "real" life line of males, apparently car factory workers, have come to refresh themselves with "orange whip" and a meal. In this juxtaposition of the massive amount of advertising and the almost endless line of men waiting patiently for service and their orders, the assembly line organisation plays off the caption. This is made apparent when we consider the historical influence of Detroit, as the site of Henry Ford's car factory and the fact that the men all appear to be wearing an identical type of uniform. These two signs would suggest the possible relationship of these men with Detroit's status as "the car manufacturing capital of the world" during the industrial boom of the 1950's. The car and other post-war manufacturing replaced the war effort and displaced the women working in this war effort back to the domestic services prior to the war.



Figure 6.6 Robert Frank, *Drug Store - Detroit, 1955/56*

The increasing demand for the automobile as a status symbol propelled Detroit to the forefront of the automobile manufacturing industry. In order to accomplish this task, a massive work force was needed to keep the production lines going and we are no doubt witnessing a smaller version of the production line mentality, in the form of the drug store lunch counter. From real life, the personification of the ideal American persona, comes art which can be a further reflection of an American fascination with the 'imitation of the real'. I would suggest that it is not the individual appearance of imitation which defines the American, but the real life around which Americans have come to reorganise and restructure the world in order to reflect their attraction to imitation. It will be this very metaphorical tactic which we can see being paralleled in *The Americans* and

how Frank has used the techniques of Coburn, James and Robinson to organise, isolate, discriminate and mark the “very details” until they are just right.

In the formal analysis we can see Figure 6.6 observing some very fundamental rules of composition which then get translated back through the content in order that this photograph can speak as a form of visual oratory using artificial memory to recount the background and image(s) in it. The first instance is the lines of sight, the deep perspective line evoking the parallels of lines between the line of men and that of the counter. The fact that these lines of vision are so readily at work. They create and expresses the very nature of the factory production line, which Frank has skillfully observed and composed in his photograph. We see this formalist composition and technique in *Assembly Line - Detroit*, Figure 6.7.

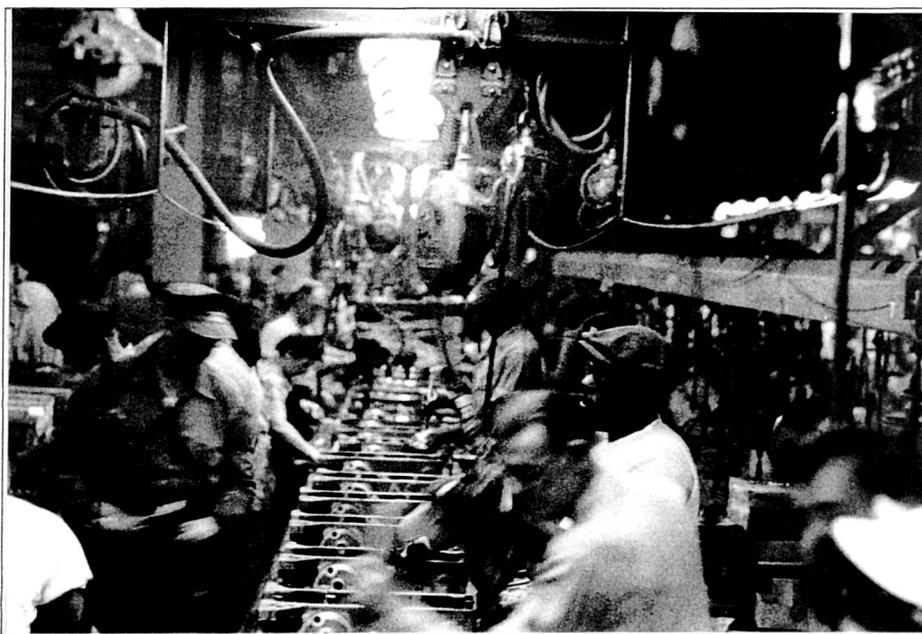


Figure 6.7

Robert Frank, *Assembly Line - Detroit*, 1955/56

Although the line has now been somewhat blurred, given the lack of clarity in the photograph, we can still see the deep sense of linearity of production line space. In this line we can see and imaginatively hear the experience of the factory workers standing on either side of the assembly line piecing together what

appears to be automobile engines. In the *Drug Store* meal counter the same observation can be made. Rather than the men assembling the product we see in the service industry black women changing places with the factory workers, as they become the service / domestic workers who will piece together a meal for their men / customers. What Frank has achieved in these two photographs is the piecing together of a narrative of a particular vector of the American urban landscape. And in this landscape the personification of lines, factories and means of production become the neatly tied up view we are witnessing. As for their focalization, each of these two photographs speaks, to the psychological, ideological and perceptual construction of a American *fabula* in a given context; here, the context is Detroit, a means of endless production of commodification.

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As I suggest, the ability of life to be reflected in Frank's art is through his ability to be the observer of life. The artwork, the photograph become an expression of what is identifiable as American. In this context this personification is stated directly in the *Ad Herennium*.

The things we easily remember when they are real we likewise remember without difficulty when they are figments. But this will be essential - again and again to run over rapidly in the mind all the original places in order to refresh the images.<sup>29</sup>

However, we read this principle as being revised so that art should reflect nature. My understanding of this reversal is that the author / orator wishes to help his memory by arousing emotional effects. So art, speaking in reference to the rhetorical art form, should reflect nature.<sup>30</sup> For in nature one can find the arousing effects to prolong the background and image within it. What is more striking

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<sup>29</sup> *Ad Herennium*, III, xxii. 36-xxiii. 38, Harry Caplan (trans.), Loeb Classics. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954: 221.

<sup>30</sup> Frances A Yates. *The Art of Memory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1966: 10

about this extract is how we can discuss it in relation to visual themes occurring in Frank's monograph. Previously, I suggested that the selected American lifestyle was reflected through art, - specifically photography. To recite a cliché, *the photograph has become the common art of the American lifestyle*. We now can reverse this notion to suggest that art, photographic art, has come to reflect "the natural" or authentic American lifestyle. Is this the context which has made *The Americans* the seminal monograph and portrait of the American identity in the 1950's? We can immediately see this trend by travelling through the collection of photographs - as did Frank through America. The similitude of nature, and the American landscapes in their perceptual, psychological, and ideological forms come to the forefront and are the visual scripts as not explicitly stated in the *Ad Herennium* treatise. It is addressing the cultivation of a stronger artificial memory; ironically, the photograph has replaced the natural memory.

As we begin our journey through the monograph, the first photograph, *Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey*, Figure 6.8, is one that directly speaks to the discussion of "making images as striking as possible."



Figure 6.8

Robert Frank, *Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey, 1955/56*

For all of its formal banality, the figments, figures who stand partially hidden in their respective window frames, become cloaked by their own inner spaces, and the only cloak which truly drapes their identity is that of the American flag. Could we suggest then that this photograph is a metaphor for the “singular ugliness” that hides behind the crown of the ‘stars and stripes’? As an ambiguous and striking memory, the photograph directly speaks to the question of what makes an American an American in the endless parade to follow. Therefore this becomes a fitting photograph with which to begin the travelogue of the American *fabula*. And by using a rhetorical statement at the beginning, the journey becomes more than an art form of memory imitating life. It is impossible to discuss every photograph within the monograph, given the space of this chapter. Therefore I have not chosen to reproduced each photograph, but I have reproduced the book so that the continuity of our travelogue can be maintained. [See Appendices C pages 346-359.] The journey continues and now we arrive at a *Candy Store* in *New York City*, Figure 6.9.



Figure 6.9

Robert Frank, *Candy Store - New York City*, 1955/56

In *Candy Store - New York City* what do we see? In the photo-real sense, we are the narrator's eyes, which have come upon or happened upon this group of teenagers in the back of a 'Candy Store'. As they are all gathered in parallel lines on either side of the composition, the sense of division is all too apparent. The Juke Box acts as the focal point of the gathering, but as a reflection of life we need to ask whether it speaks more to the way we can memorialise the past through the nostalgia of teenage life in the 1950's. Certainly when considering the connotations of youths in a New York City drug store, it raises direct implications of group identities and allegiances, otherwise known as gangs. We only need to remember New York teenage life presented on the stage in *West Side Story* to insert an artificial memory into the *Candy Store* scene. My more immediate concern is the way this photograph can possibly suggest the implications of New York City lifestyle as tied up with the sense of group identity. Even if no blood or mud has been smeared, the lipstick on the lips of the girls reflects a telling story of a Candy Store social as a place where personalities are identified. The organised division of male and female participants illustrate a characteristic endemic to the 1950's teenage American persona. This can be read from the visual division of boys and girls Frank composes in the photograph. Hence, Figure 6.9 achieves a perspective and verisimilitude of the real division and attraction of teenage social interaction and status in the 1950's New York City.

As we set off again, our travels will take us through the places reproduced in Appendices C (see page 346-359). Before we reach our next destination we briefly stop at a *View from hotel window - Butte, Montana* (see Figure 1.1 page 6).

Here we do not see just "any" hotel window view, but we see a view specific to this hotel in Butte, Montana. What this suggests is that the device of captioning the work with a place name and site creates a context of specific rather than arbitrary fragments of American life. Leaving Butte and now arriving at the

*Metropolitan Life Insurance Building - New York City* we see how this reflection of life becomes a ironic description of a New York moment.

In a caption such as *Metropolitan Life Insurance Building - New York City*, Figure 6.10, the expectation is of a completely differentiated composition of the building, as would be the case with, for example, Alfred Stieglitz's *From the Sheldon*, *Looking West*, Bernice Abbott's *New York Series*, or Paul Strand's *Studies*. But instead, Frank offers us a composition based on what the author of the *Ad Herennium* points to as a feature to prolong memory: a form of *comic effect*, which I would change slightly to "effects".



Figure 6.10 Robert Frank, *Metropolitan Life Insurance Building - New York City*, 1955/56

The building is seen looming over the top of a magazine rack from the opposite side of the street. Is there a parody between this massive building of constructed glass, steel and concrete and the pile of magazines being made? Ultimately, irony is created through the juxtaposition of the windows as magazines and the magazines as windows: this multiple juxtaposition asks for a comparison between spaces and places.

But where, exactly, does the comedy come into play? It arises out of the vision of the heavily crammed space in which no escape is possible. Although the spectator has the freedom of choice, a form of visual escapism, the freedom to physically move is limited. The only place to visually or physically hurdle is the rack of magazines. This humorous juxtaposition is generated by the glimmering building with all its reflective windows and by the claustrophobic racks of magazines stacked cover to cover, and it becomes a visual critique of the American consumption of imagery. As our expectation of the caption defines the photograph as an authentic place called “New York City,” the conclusion would be towering buildings and hordes of people similar to what we saw in *Canal Street - New Orleans* (see page 308). This New York City is empty of any life on the street. The ironic twist to this emptiness is the indexes of life in the city: the subway entrance, the lamp pole and office tower, would all indicate that human activity should be visible around the magazine rack, but Frank has caught a single instant when all life has ceased to exist in New York City. All that remains are the indexes of human exit. This is a chilling and sobering view of New York City and the Metropolitan Life(less) Insurance Building.

The contradiction between the [place and] setting and the lack of characters gives this photograph its witticism which is reflective on the stereotype of what a “highly urbanised” American city is like. The real world, exemplified by the steel and glass architecture, and the “other” worlds, found in the magazines brought through the artificial compositions of words and pictures are juxtaposed.

The relationship between the caption and content is what Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, was addressing when he was discussing the shift in the photograph’s cult value and exhibition value.

At the same time , captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting. The directives which the captions give to look at pictures in illustrated magazines soon becomes even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Frank has achieved a visual parody by using the lasting cult value of the photograph as memory. This parody also satisfies the nineteenth-century notion of realism in photography where it is seen as a mirror-reflection. But he takes aesthetic through an ironic twist of the real New York City. This is identical to what Benjamin found in the photographs of Atget as “standard evidence for historical occurrences, [which] acquire a hidden political significance.”<sup>32</sup> I would say definitely, that Frank’s photograph is extending the boundary of being a cult value and an exhibition value. And given the context and critical approval of the overall monograph, the desire to be both cult and exhibition at the same time is an ideal definition of the American landscape Frank found as he observed the ‘otherness’ through the comparison between the magazines and building.

Leaving New York City, we find the visual journey passes by what seems to be an endless array of American diversity. This becomes evident when the reproductions are read through in pages 355 to 360. When this longest section of our travelogue is complete we find ourselves at a *Television Studio - Burbank, California*, Figure 6.11.

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” In *Illuminations* Hannah Arendt (ed.) & Harry Zohn (trans.) New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1955: 226.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*: 226.



Figure 6.11

Robert Frank, *Television Studio - Burbank, California, 1955/56*

As stressed earlier, “the things we easily remember when they are real we likewise remember without difficulty when they are figments.”<sup>33</sup> In Figure 6.11 we see the contradictory trend that was emerging on the media horizon of the American culture, the production and fascination with the television medium. And in this medium we can place the authentic as figments of the real television image. The photograph captures what has become an obsession with the image and the thing that presents the image. The concept of the television studio where, in the 1950’s, real characters would assemble in order to be visually recorded and then transmitted live, via analogue signal, into the homes of eager and fascinated television watchers, was rendered in photographic terms. These “authentic” real characters were placed in a setting of being seen as ‘really’ there in this semi-oval rectangular frame. The framed reality becomes another cult of remembrance as real. The memory of last night’s episode of *The Jack Benny Show*, *The Lone Ranger*, *The Honeymooners*, *Leave It To Beaver*, (and the list can go on) is

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<sup>33</sup> *Ad Herennium*, III, xxii. 36-xxiii. 38, Harry Caplan (trans.), Loeb Classics. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954: 221.

metaphorically expressed in the photograph, just as the connotations of the photograph develop within the mentality of it being a document of the actual thing - the actual recording of the subject who sat before the cameras.

This same nineteenth-century referentially is used by Frank to provide the same critical observation of how easy it is to remember when the thing is “real”, in the context of it appearing to be real on the television screen. Therefore the television screen has become the new authenticity on the block. I would suggest that *television has replaced the conceptual ideal of what a visual truth is and was*. Although Frank is giving us a look at the production apparatus and a single instant in the making of a television program, the question of what is really “authentic” comes into the forefront of the photograph. Just as the television camera has made the real woman into an authentic television image of the real woman, Frank has used his photographic camera, to make the cult real into the artificial or exhibition real. Consequently these two acts of transmission are making a composition on the “inauthenticity” and artificial memory of the real transmitted image. In the television context, the signal is seen on the screen as it instantaneously happens, giving the appearance of it being in real time. Therefore the screen surface of the television becomes the authentic thing we easily remember, because when the content of the screen are figments, we can place them in our sight, thereby giving us a sense of control over the content we see on the screen. **As figments, they have no physical presence; therefore they are easily retained as images rather than as real things.**

In Figure 6.11 we can see a further issue Benjamin was addressing in his “Artwork” essay. By discussing the aura of the artwork we can now shift the generality slightly to a more dated (1950’s) comparison with the television image and photographic image through the observations made by Benjamin.

We define the aura of the latter [natural] as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be...This image makes it easy to

comprehend the social bases of contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary Life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by the way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by the picture magazine and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former.<sup>34</sup>

In this discussion of the distance between the natural and the artificial, it becomes increasingly obvious that the distance Benjamin is discussing is illustrated in Figure 6.11. The “significance of the masses in contemporary Life... to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly” is now possible through the medium of the television screen. With the increasing demand for it, televisions in every home become a hallmark of the ideal American lifestyle. The aura of the image in terms of its authentic and ephemeral becomes only a figment on the screen. And through Benjamin’s use of the transitory and reproducibility of the likeness, we can return to the last section of the *Ad Herennium* to discover that the last principle of artificial memory is strengthened through the ability to “run over rapidly in the mind all the original places in order to refresh the images”. I would suggest then that Frank’s *Television studio - Burbank, California* directly and elegantly addresses the American phenomenon of “accepting reality in its reproduction.” And it is the mystique of reproducibility that surrounds the connotation of the television images as being “transitorily alive”; our memory of them can be refreshed again and again and again. This multiplication enhancement from real to figment to image is the critical view of America’s love of what Philippe Dubois notes as the “separation of representation.”<sup>35</sup> With the notion of “separation of representation” we can literally see

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical; Reproduction” In *Illuminations* Hannah Arendt (ed.) & Harry Zohn (trans.) New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1955: 222-3.

<sup>35</sup> In his discussion of the autobiographical films and videos in which the artists were all photographically trained, Dubois discusses this concept of “experience of an absence” through what he sees as the “separation of representation?” [166] Although he is directing his discussion on the photographic image in a series of films / video’s we can extend this concept to the television

the divisions being played out before us in Figure 6.11. The separation of the female subject (from what) is presented by her separated image seen on the television screen, which is visually reinforced by the physical distance we see between them. The finally level of separation which is apparent is the distance we see by being the narratee of this event, setting and location. The studio as a place where it all happens is a place where we can site the beginnings of the distance which has become so attractive in the American psyche. Finally we can state that as a form of critical focalization, Frank achieves the three facets: perceptual, psychological, and ideological.

We have now left the studio and are travelling towards the completion of our journey through Frank's travelogue. We find that the places in pages 361 to 364 come to define the idiosyncratic personification of Americanness found in the title *The Americans*. Upon reaching our final destination in which we can rest, we see that the *Public Park - Ann Arbor, Michigan*, Figure 6.12, is practically full.

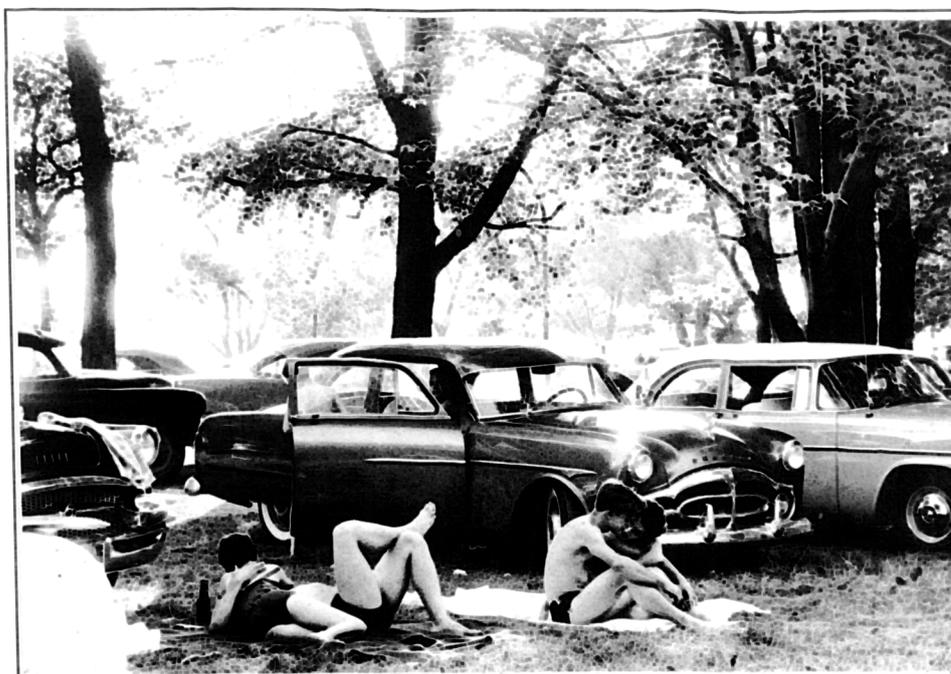


Figure 6.12

Robert Frank, *Public Park - Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1955/56*

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image taken from the presentation of it in Frank's monograph. Dubois Philippe. "Photography *Mise-en-Film: Autobiography (Hi)stories and Psychic Apparatuses*" Lynne Kirby (trans.) In Petro, Patrice (ed.) *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995: (152-172) 167.

It is at this point, standing in front of a composition of cars and lovers, that the passage quoted from Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* is an apt reflection in the photograph. The past journey which we have taken, and which we have witnessed along with Frank, can be analogous to looking at a mirror through which we have the unconscious knowledge that we have passed over the imagery highway and that what this mirror reflects is not our own self-image, but Robert Frank's vision of America. The photographs reflect the "blue skies" and the cleaned off "churned-up mud" of the American landscape. It is these blue skies and churned-up mud we see the decorations of memory which are held as images in our background memory. The blue skies, paint and car polish, are certainly inferred in the gleaming surfaces of the cars found in the *Public park - Ann Arbor, Michigan* and the churned-up mud is the divisions found in the landscape - car versus man.

The division of labour and segregation is seen as the mud being removed and the surfaced polished for a clean-and-tidy effect. All spic-n-span and clean-as-a-whistle. Well, not quite, as we have seen from Frank's photographs. And in 1955-56 these racial divisions of indifference can be seen as the mud which gets tracked onto the shoes and must be cleaned off the white ideological ideal. This mud must be cleaned off and no better place to do this than in a room in which the white patriarchal stalls stand tall and erect, and a throne to boot is ready and waiting for a shoe shine. This room is the *Men's room, railway station - Memphis, Tennessee*, Figure 6.13. In this reflection of American society, we can see the clean white room kept this way with the brooms, reminiscent of Henry Fox-Talbot's *The Open Door*, (1884). We can see the labourer who achieves this aesthetically clean appearance, and we can see who sits on his throne in order

to maintain the status quo of the America he envisions as clean and natural. This type of clean reflection constitutes another aesthetic value in Frank's photographs.



Figure 6.13 Robert Frank, *Men's room, railway station - Memphis, Tennessee, 1955/56*

In the *Public Park*, I believe we discover the culmination of what Frank found to be the common denominator in the perceptual, psychological and ideological identity of being defined 'The American'. As I pointed out in the opening section of this chapter, the designation of the "other" is implicit in the title. Therefore what has Robert Frank discovered to be one of the more prominent identifiable trademarks of the "other", something which he found not to be something "European" like himself? The answer is lying in Figure 6.12; no, it's not the couples lying on their blankets on a hot Michigan summer afternoon. Nor the ideal setting found in the very liberal university town of Ann Arbor, Michigan. (I feel I can suggest this "liberalness", having lived for two years in this university town, the home of The University of Michigan. The appearance of this quiet liberal town is still, to some extent, very alive.) But the identifiable mark or trace of the American is the car or cars that take more prominence in the park than do the couples who are visually squeezed in by the

cars. The humans must vie for space and the cars must vie for a more shaded area of the park. The love of the car, the love of the mechanical, becomes an overriding effect in the photographs. Just as the Juke Box was seen five times, the car becomes more than just a mode of transportation; it becomes an symbol, then an icon of the American way of life. Simply, the distances travelled through the monograph, could have only been achieved by the car which reflects the way of a new, and possibly a better, lifestyle. The car also emphasises the aura of the distances which Benjamin observed in the reproducibility of the mechanical transitory age.

Distances can become transitory and be effaced and fade, just as the records played one after another on a Juke Box can be transitory, and the aura is not so much in the sounds that refresh our memory and emanate from the box, but in the visual image of the box itself. In its ability to change, for the listener to have instant choice without any noticeable delay in time, the Juke Box is the precursor of the selectability of the television. Therefore Frank has become attracted to this and the other icons and symbols of change and selection. So it is only fitting that Figure 6.12 speaks of the consciousness of the car being a prominent feature in any depiction of American Life. This is explicitly obvious in the twenty-five times when the associations, connotations and actual recording of a vehicle appear across the sweep of the eighty-four photographs. On a more critical note, Frank observes the distance and divisions between the social classes of America. Certainly the historical facts are well known of the social and moral conflicts that were occurring during the 1950's in America. The period of desegregation between African-Americans and the White majority was certainly a troubled one in American history, and is still an issue to this date. Thus the *Public Park* becomes a critical look at the affluent white community of Ann Arbor, Michigan. This affluence is explicitly pointed to by the numerous cars which exist in this tranquil park. Frank can stand outside this volatile struggle in

the American landscape because his “outsiderness” gave him an ideal vantage point to see, as Jack Kerouac stated in his introduction to the monograph, “The humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-ness and American-ness of these pictures...Anybody doesn’t like these pictures don’t like poetry, see? Anybody don’t like poetry go home see Television shots of big hatted cowboys being tolerated by kind horses.”<sup>36</sup> Certainly the inference to the myth of the American West is a reflection of his own middle-class background and the fascination of the Americans with the masculinity associated with the West and cowboys. A final question to be asked, then, is what is this humour, sadness and everythingness? Simply recounting some of the captions gives a good indication to the American aesthetic of art imitating life: Rodeoness; Public parkness; Canal Streetness; Drug Storeness, Charity Ballness; Men’s roomness; and the U.S. 285ness. All this ‘ness’ reflects the selected visual journey Robert Frank took. Thus his seeing becomes our seeing and how we are able to focalize his outsider character in his own travelogue, what it means to be seen as *The Americans*.

In conclusion it is important to remember that *The Americans* was initially published in Paris, thus it can be seen as a travelogue of Americana to a foreign audience. The monograph can also be paralleled to more contemporary examples such as the work of Susan Meiselas’s *Nicaragua*, Mary Ellen Mark *Singles Bar*, Larry Clark’s *Teenage Lust* (1970), Martin Parr’s *One Day Trip* (1989) and *Its A Small World* (1995-96). A more striking comparison on the picture postcard theme, can be made between the *Day in the Life of...* series which can incorporate up to a hundred different photographers taking photographs all on one day in a particular country.

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<sup>36</sup> Kerouac, Jack. (intro.) *The Americans* Photographs by Robert Frank. New York: Patheon Books (rpt.) 1989: 5. Originally published as *Les Americians* by Robert Delpire, Paris 1958: United States edition by Grove Press, New York, 1959.

What these parallels point to is how an outsider can document, and perhaps see through a society into the ideological dynamics of a particular subject matter, just as Robert (Delpire) Frank came to America and found himself documenting what makes an American an American. His “otherness” provided him with the opportunity to discover how the effects of finding a new place can express and reveal a narrative of distance, division, segregation, and transitoriness. Therefore with the camera and its ability to imitate the framing compartmentalisation principles of an artificial memory, and record the distance of transitoriness of the American psyche, Frank found the elusive “mud” to be typically American in the 1950’s. In other words, Frank discovered the conceptual structure of narrative in the metaphorical form of using the “highway” or “road” to describe the American scene. Therefore, we may say that, the key to being an American is to be caught up in the concept of Narrative, in a perpetual transitory changing from A to B, B to C, etc., in which an artificial memory, photo-optical vision, is used to give the concept of Narrative its realism. This conclusion can be summed up in one photograph, *Restaurant - U.S. I leaving Columbia, South Carolina*, Figure 6.14.



Figure 6.14 Robert Frank, *Restaurant - U.S. 1 leaving Columbia, South Carolina, 1955/56*

(Admittedly this is not the final photograph in Frank's travelogue; he would end his travels through America with a closing figment / memory of his wife and two children huddled in their parked car on the roadside of *U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas*, Figure 6.15.)

In this empty space the only presence, other than Frank, is the figment of the concept of Narrative. The moving image of the television plays while no one watches it. It exists completely in its own reflection of providing another form of light, knowledge. Its "realism" fights the natural light which also fills the restaurant; the struggle between real and "real" can be seen as a traversing of space and time illustrated by the artificial memory of the television. Its light aura is now the digital "Super-highway" of transitoriness and reproducibility, trying to overcome the divisions, distance, uniqueness, permanence and segregation of the natural over the artificial. This dichotomy, the natural versus the artificial, is another visual reflection achieved through the highways and roads that thread their way through Frank's entire focalizations, or photographs, of *The Americans*. Frank is continually standing on the side of the road looking at what passes by,

and what passes by has the ability to churn up the mud, with Frank being the sensitive observer of this “natural / artificial” phenomenon, the one who records it for all to see. Hence Frank is left saying:

My photographs are not planned or composed in advance and I do not anticipate that the on-looker will share my viewpoint. However, I feel that if my photograph leaves an image on his mind - something has been accomplished.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 6.15 Robert Frank, *U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas, 1955/56*

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Frank. “A Statement” In *U.S. Camera Annual*, 1958: 115. Cited in Nathan Lyons (ed.) *Photographers on Photography*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1966: 66-67.

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion the final analysis can be made that the photograph does carry a narrative. As we have seen in the six chapters the narrative of the photograph is produced by a complex process of internal and external forces and it is not just a simple linear narrative structure. The form in which it presents itself is one in which the active participation of the audience (viewer) is of central importance. For without this component the photograph would exist as just a visual image with no direct or immediate meaning.

In Chapter 1 it became clear that the narrative of the photograph centres around the involvement and participation of the author (photographer) and reader (viewer). It further became evident that for the photograph to have a narrative these two features of the literary structure must be present for the narrative to exist. But to say they are present is to suggest that they are only present through referential status of off-frame connotation. This was obvious in the example of Robert Frank's *View from hotel window - Butte, Montana*, (Figure 1.1 - see page 6). The photograph's multiple frames of view that are explicit in this composition gives the viewer the sense that outside this photograph exists a full range of stories. For as we peer through the window, past the lace curtains, on to the view of Butte, Montana we become involved in the narrative possibilities of what is going on below. And as the world (Butte, Montana) continues on its daily routine, so do we as viewers of this fragment. We begin to imagine the stories that must lie just outside the window frame and just beyond the frame edge of the

photograph. Thus it is not a surprising statement to say that the potential narrative expression in the photograph is always there; it is patiently waiting in silence for someone to activate the possibilities beyond all the frames. It is this off-frame space that will always suggest there are other narratives that exist just beyond the frame edge of the photographic composition.

This implied off-frame narrative was decisively explained in the illustration of two identical photographs (Figures 1.3 and 1.4, see pages 18 and 21). The reading of these two photographs relied on our ability as readers to bring the photographs the capabilities of merging the context with the content. Through this integration process the implied narratives (off-frame) are activated to bring a finality or possible conclusion to the photograph.

This ability to consider the off-frame narrative is what we have come to see the photograph as documenting. It is not the actual content we see in the photograph as history would like us to believe. The photograph may document a specific moment in time and place, but in the common usage of the photographic medium the photograph is used as a way to record a further narrative that existed before and after the photographic moment. This validates the *in media res* judgement of the narrative in the photograph. For this narrative structure aligns itself to the common practice of photographing a single fractional moment in time and place. The off-frame narrative that is implicit in the photograph can be retrieved through the historical instance of our current temporal moment. What has to be rekindled, through the implied happenings, characters, events, and settings that existed through the off-frame space and presence in the composition, is our other memories or imaginations of what went on before and after the photographing moment. What this reading creates is the phenomenology of the photographic narrative, and at the same time, how it is determined. It was these aesthetic implications that were explored in Chapter 2.

Through photographs by Edward Weston, Lee Friedlander and particularly the work of Richard Avedon I looked at how the control and composing of the photograph can be used to achieve a dialect or personal expression in a specific narrative form. By paralleling them to William Faulkner's novel, *As I Lay Dying*, I provided the argument that the narrative expression and expectation of the photograph can be manipulated to fit any possible conclusion. The result of this investigation was to see the 'realistic' photograph as a fictional rather than a truthful actuality. This certainly contradicts the commonly held belief that the photograph never lies. Although it may be said that the photograph can never lie, then it must be said that the photographer is the one who is creating the alternative reality or the lie. (Perhaps lie is too strong of a term for something which simply is a rearranging of *things* to suit the personal expression required.) And in the case of the many photographs looked at in this dissertation they were found to fit this category of fictional narratives. Not only does Avedon's visual novel, *In The American West* fit into this category, but to a large extent all photographs generated since photography's inception in 1839 until now in 1996 fit into this category.

The reason I suggest this is that the photograph is only a partial instance of a larger continuing narrative. This continuing narrative or duration in Henri Bergson's position of *durée* is what must be fractured in order for the photograph to exist. In the stillness of the photograph (the fractured temporality) can be seen as the notion of the 'blind field' existing outside the frame edge. Therefore the duration of the blind field is all too explicit in the photograph. In this context the photographic moment can be rearranged to fit the photographer's aesthetic sensibilities and this alteration of the *thing* in front of the camera will affect the 'blind field'<sup>1</sup> narrative created by the combined content and context relationship. Thus the notion of control comes into play and it is this feature of controlling the *thing* in front of the camera that gives the photographer the

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the 'blind field' is that of Phillippe Dubois. In its original presentation Dubois suggested that this affect of the photograph is, as I understand it, similar to the theory of the off-frame expectation in the photograph. In other words, the blind field refers to the existing of something else going on outside the frame of the photograph. Thus the notion of expectation comes into play when considering the narrative of the photograph.

same authorial characteristic of a writer. Just as authors, writers and artists can rework the words on the page to form a narrative, so can the photographer rework the *thing* in the viewfinder to form a narrative expression. This maybe surprisingly easy to accomplish, but when it comes to unpacking the narrative from the photograph a complex system of understanding and analysis comes into play.

In Chapter 3 I presented observations that the *in medias res* narrative associated with the photograph is one in which the historical moment of the photographing act must be brought back to the contemporary moment. But seeing that this contemporary moment continues in a durational progression, the historical moment is actually brought back through the present into the future. This highly complex retrieval process and phenomenological understanding is accomplished in fractions of a second. When we come to read the content of the photograph our sensibilities to this phenomenon are attuned to expect a narrative to exist. In a parallel consideration, we are considering here that this characteristic of time, and how we as readers of the photograph position ourselves within this varied time, is consistent with our understanding of time and space. For when we come to the photograph we bring with us a conditioned sense of temporality that must be used in order for the historical temporality of the photograph to be understood as carrying the time, moment and place. These qualities of narrative expectation time provide the photograph with the realism of being seen as a truthful expression of the moment.

In Chapter 4 this was the predominant issue raised within the *Untitled Film Stills* of Cindy Sherman. As I suggested in Chapter 2 and 3, the notion of authorial construction is utilised by Cindy Sherman in her black and white film stills. But the contradiction of them being actual photographic works captioned as film stills addresses the very issue of the dissertation. What we come to expect from the work is that the stories being generated are the product of authorial enterprise. And the expectation of a larger off-frame narrative is what propels the work into the realm of expressing historical

time in a larger evocation of cultural social stereotypes. In other words, Cindy Sherman is taking the very common belief and issues of society and reworking them through our own set of expectations and determinations. The reworking of our own understanding of narrative within the photographic medium, and what that medium has come to express, is being challenged by the film still caption. The absent yet implied 'blind field' of Sherman's work allows us to consider our own sense of cultural narrative. Obviously this analysis is by no way investigating the highly critical and cultural importance of her work. What is fascinating is the way we have come to read the work and the expectation assumed when reading the photographs as 'actual' film stills. Not only does Sherman provide a fascinating expression of aesthetic reading, but the photographic medium becomes challenged through the narrative variations inferred by the straightforwardness of her work. This straightforwardness points to what I have suggested as the indexes of a signature in the photographic medium.

It is in Chapter 5 where I looked at work of Jacques-Henri Lartigue and considered his photographs through this signature / diary concept. I also extended it into the literary theory of autobiographical writing. What was resolved was that Lartigue's photographs generate a narrative through a highly personal and self-referential characteristic. One could say that all the photographs in his diaries are to be considered through the notion of self-portraiture, and seen as indexes of his personal vision. The photographs exist as markers and traces of memories long past, but as a child these photographs became more than an expression of the moment, and become a way to sign his name to the daily lives of his family. They became embedded with the external narrative of a child. The aesthetic features of the fleeting, fascinating and the ordinary are the characteristic of the young Lartigue. Thus it is the expectation that sums up Lartigue's ability to find the child-like composition of the world. Lartigue's photographs are as signed autobiographical texts.

It would be the combination of casual child-like innocence, adolescent interest, and the instantaneousness of photography that would form an

innocent aesthetic within Lartigue's photographs. To a child the questioning of visual composition and balance is not a central concern. What is central is the documenting of what interests him at that moment rather than the desires of his audience. Thus the interest of a child and adolescent is ideally suited to the instantaneousness of photography. For as the quickness of interest is caught so then is the quickness of exposure which can document the fleeting moments of games, experiments and outings. ( page 235)

The quote illustrates that the narrative quality any photograph, not only Lartigue's, is completely embedded in the combined relationship of how the photographer creates the composition and where the final photograph finds its resting context. Thus the reading and story extracted from that reading is a multiple reciprocal process between the viewer, the photographer, the content, and the context. When all the variables are considered the narrative expression of the photograph can be partially extracted and initiated. In the ideal situation all these features of narrative will point to the overall meaning behind the photograph or photographs. Of course the argument can be made that there can never be one singular meaning attached to the photograph. As my previous statement on the subjectivity of the photograph suggests, the difference in the viewers would ultimately eliminate the potential for a shared or common opinion on the meaning of a photograph. This shared difference of opinion is the very basis of why the investigation of narrative expectation in the photograph was undertaken. For inside this notion of the photograph having a narrative is the judgements and opinion of the viewing audience. In the case of art works the issue of aesthetics must be raised. And stemming from the issue of aesthetics the photograph has had a long and colourful history of being seen as having many aesthetic features that would make it an art form in its own right. Insofar as the photograph is now accepted as an art form as well as a personal expression, the narrative expectation of the photograph lies behind this aesthetic distinction.

It is the index of the signature which completes the expectation of a narrative in the photograph. Therefore in Chapter 6, I looked at this very aspect of an artist signing his signature to his work. In the work of Robert Frank, his completed monograph *The Americans* becomes his autobiographical film stills of his year long travels around The United States of America in 1955 / 56. Each photograph taken in isolation, then is a series, has a further expectation of referring to a larger more complex expression of seeing an environment for the first time. This first time experience can be misread as a vision of touristy fascination, but what Frank is seeing is the raw and unadulterated lives of Americans. Although the photographs can be read as fictions, as I pointed out earlier, the honest moment of time, history and place come into play. These fragments of a historical moment now long past can be relived through the present future. It is this ability to relive a past moment in time which the photograph can now generate the expectation in the audience as to whether or not there are any narratives or stories to be read. When the book first appeared in America in 1959 it was these off-frame narratives that brought the book its critical acclaim. The blind fields that surround the collection can invoke a history that perhaps has not changed even though the years of 1955 and 1956 have passed. Thus just as the paintings of Edward Hopper can invoke an Americana and a sense of waiting nostalgia the photographs contained in *The Americans* are the story images of what a signature memory can look like. If we are to retrace these memories (a type of personal signature) then, these images become the figments of our journey back through the spaces and places of Robert Frank's shoes. And as figments, they have no physical presence; therefore they are easily retained as images rather than as real things. This is the central issue at the heart of the narrative expectation of the photograph. The narrative that is expected to be centred in the photographic content does

not really exist as the main narrative feature. It is only a fragment of a larger consideration that exists outside the physical presence of the content. Therefore the photographic frame can be seen or understood as a device to direct our attention to the off-frame narrative that has no real presence in the photograph; it is retained as an expectation - something that will be there to help us come to terms with the stillness of the visual image. For the stillness in the photograph is a grave contradiction. Thus the example of the photograph mimicking death is not so surprising, as several critics have suggested. But this is not the issue. What needs to be said clearly is that in any photograph, the involvement and expectation of a narrative is so strong that the ability to just accept it as a facet of the photographic medium has become second nature to us. Therefore we no longer question the narrative qualities of the photograph. The story exists as long as there is a visual image. Hence we have become passive to the far reaching variations of narrative that can be achieved.

It was hoped that the varied photographic, philosophical, literary and aesthetic illustrations developed in this text further the issue of narrative in the photograph. Just as Henry James saw fiction as a house in which one opens the window onto the world and describes what he sees, the photograph (photography) has given everyone the opportunity to be a writer in their own right. And the stories they can tell in single figments of the moment are seen through the history of the photograph. The visual stories and narrative expectation of the photograph can parallel the literary genre. The visual stories can range from scientific discourse to poetry. In both these forms (and others) an expression and critical engagements with the world is created. To engage the world we can achieve a child's point of view or a woman's voice on a film stage speaking to an audience. Therefore the exploration that has unfolded in this text, the expectation of narrative in

the photograph, can summarised by the below edited passage taken form Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. This quotation reflects the sensation we feel when we come to look at and into the photograph. For what we see is a story (narrative fragment) in its self, and there is a larger story waiting off-frame in the wings.

...the visual perception [narrative] of a motionless object [photograph]. The [photograph] may remain the same, I may look at it from the same side, at the same angle, in the same light; nevertheless the [narrative] I now have of it differs from that which I have just had, even if only because the one is an instant older than the other.

# APPENDICES

## A



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



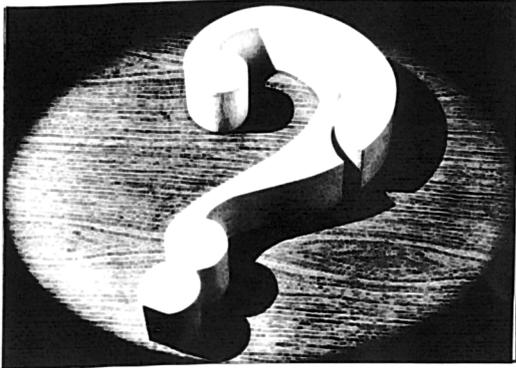
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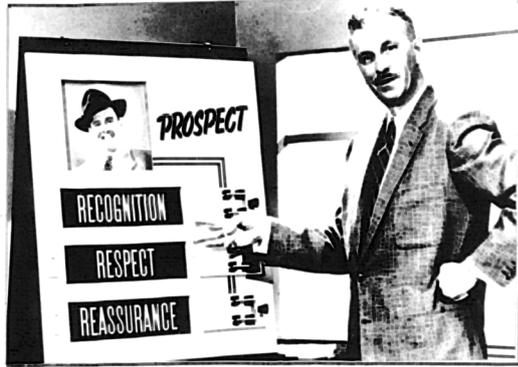
*Mr. Salesman*

# APPENDICES

## A



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*



*Mr. Salesman*

# APPENDICES

## B

### A One Day *One-Step* Memory



1



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3



4



5



6



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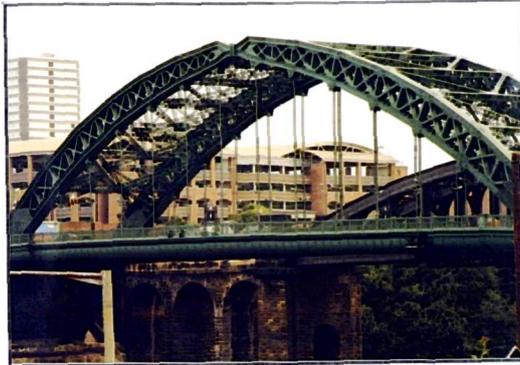


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APPENDICES  
B



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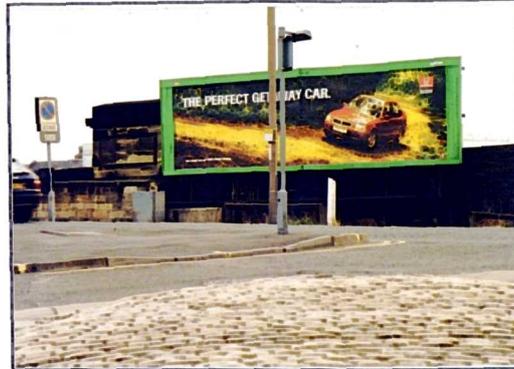
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APPENDICES  
B



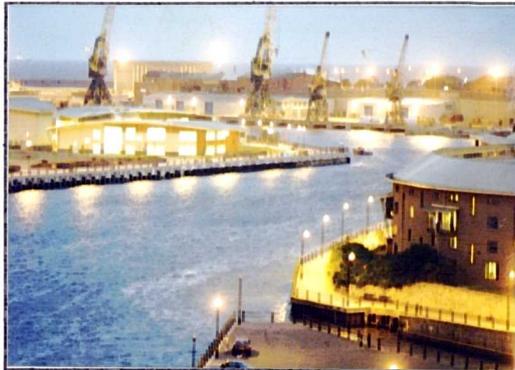
17



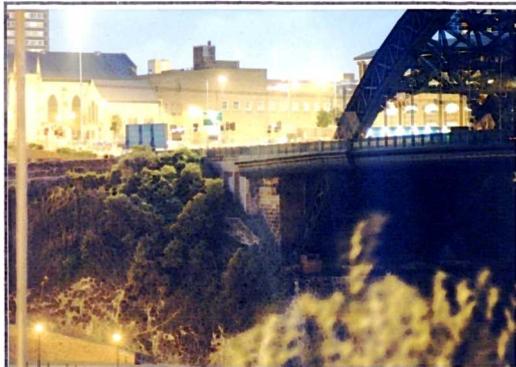
18



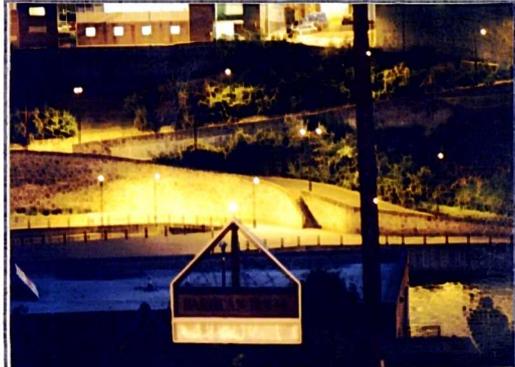
19



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APPENDICES  
B



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# APPENDICES

## C



*Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey*



*City fathers - Hoboken, New Jersey*



*Political rally - Chicago*



*Funeral - St. Helena, South Carolina*



*Rodeo - Detroit*



*Savannah, Georgia*

APPENDICES  
C



*Navy Recruiting Station, Post Office -  
Butte, Montana*



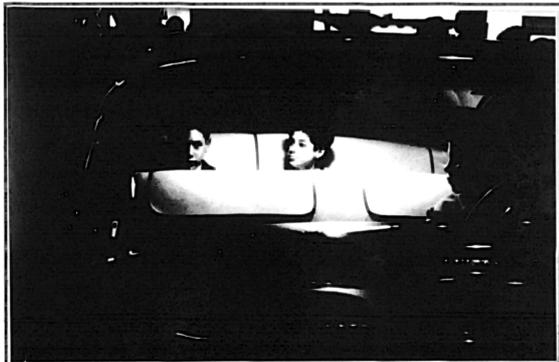
*En route from New York to Washington, Club Car*



*Movie premiere - Hollywood*



*Candy store - New York City*



*Motorama - Los Angeles*



*New York City*

# APPENDICES

## C



*Charleston, South Carolina*



*Ranch market - Hollywood*



*Butte, Montana*



*Yom Kippur - East River, New York City*



*Fourth of July - Jay, New York*

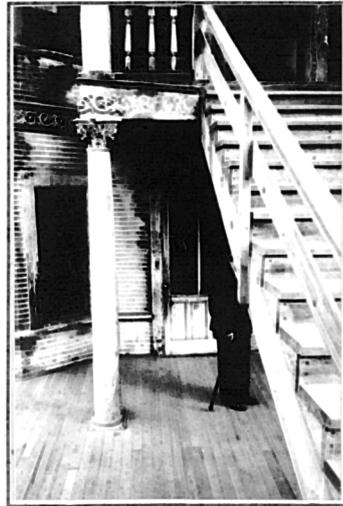


*Trolley - New Orleans*

APPENDICES  
C



*Canal Street - New Orleans*



*Rooming house - Bunker Hill,  
Los Angeles*



*Yale Commencement - New Haven Green,  
New Haven, Connecticut.*



*Cafe - Beaufort, South Carolina*



*Georgetown, South Carolina*



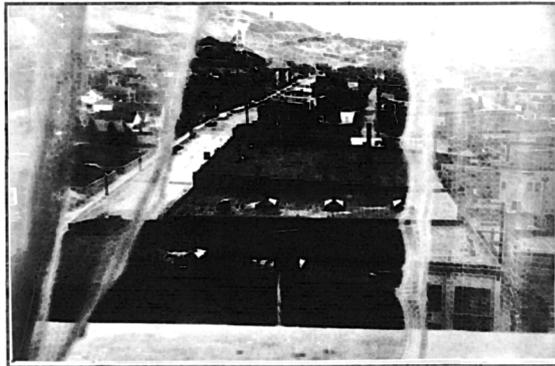
*Bar - Los Vegas, Nevada*

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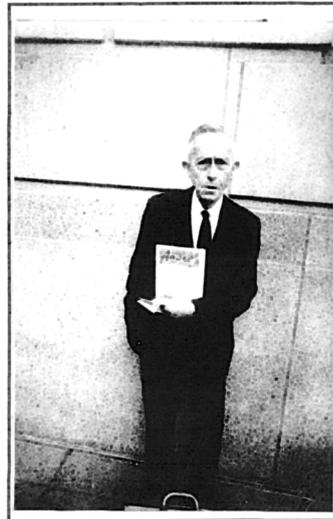
*Hotel lobby - Miami Beach*



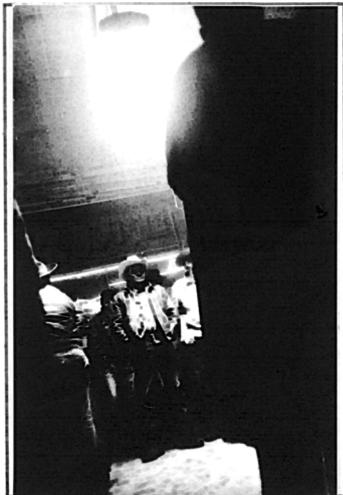
*View from hotel window - Butte, Montana*



*Metropolitan Life Insurance Building - New York City*



*Jehovah's Witness - Los Angeles*



*Bar - Gallup, New Mexico*



*U.S. 30 between Ogallala and North Platte, Nebraska*

APPENDICES

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*Casino - Elko, Nevada*



*U.S. 91, leaving Blackfoot, Idaho*



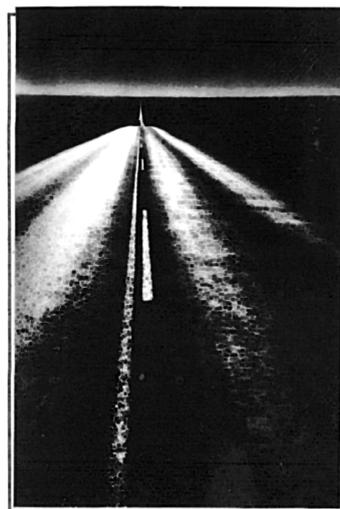
*St. Petersburg, Florida*



*Covered car - Long Beach, California*



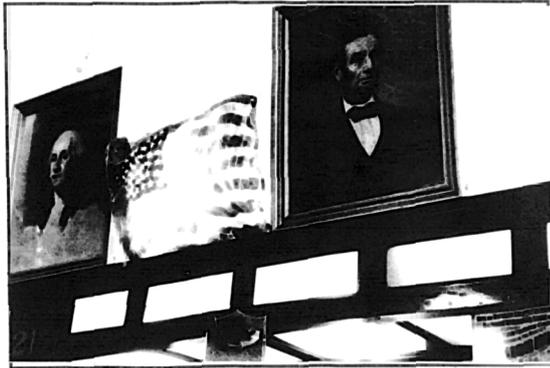
*Car accident - U.S. 66, between Winslow and Flagstaff, Arizona*



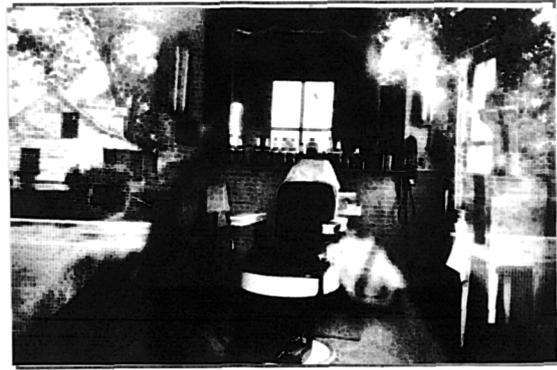
*U.S. 285, New Mexico*

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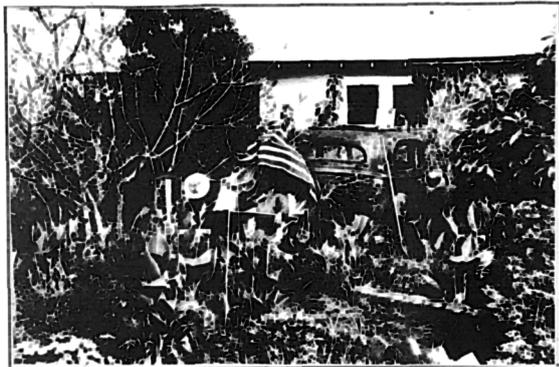
C



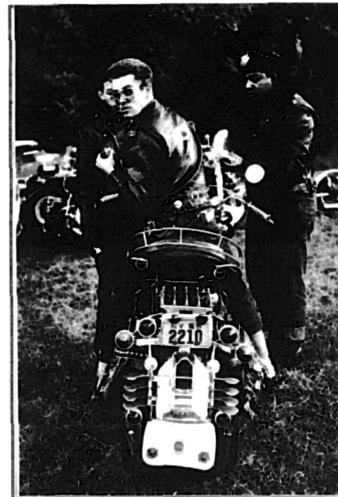
*Bar - Detroit*



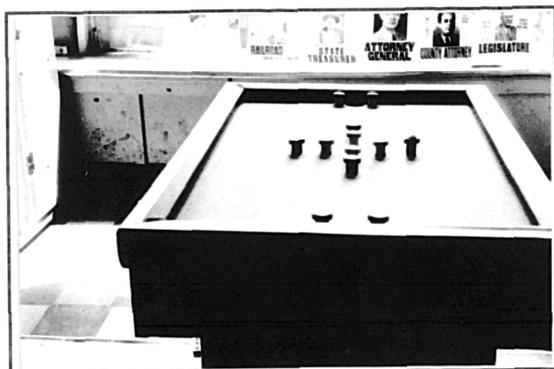
*Barber shop through screen door - McClellanville,  
South Carolina*



*Backyard - Venice West, California*



*Newburgh, New York*



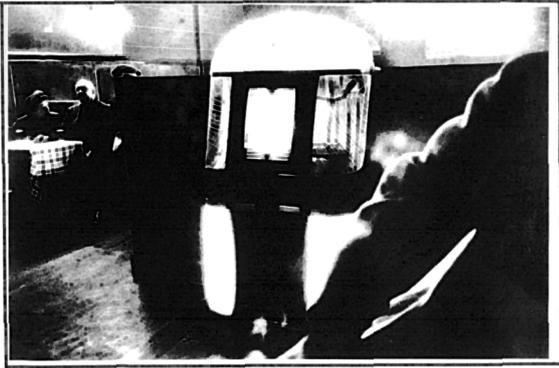
*Luncheonette - Butte, Montana*



*Santa Fe, New Mexico*

APPENDICES

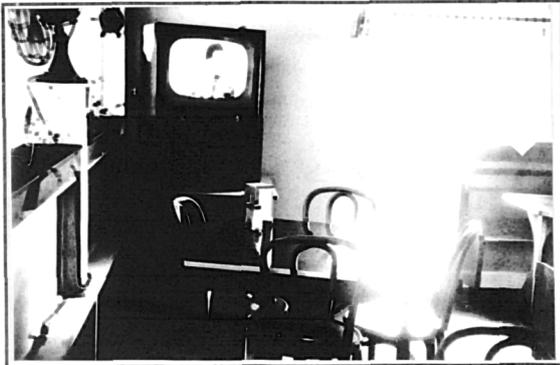
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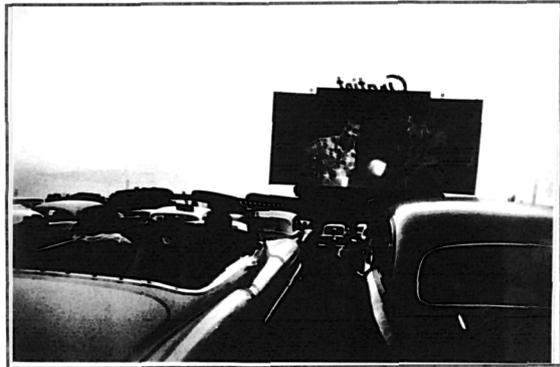
*Bar - New York City*



*Elevator - Miami Beach*



*Restaurant - U.S.1 leaving Columbia,  
South Carolina*



*Drive in movie - Detroit*



*Mississippi River, Baton Rouge, Louisiana*



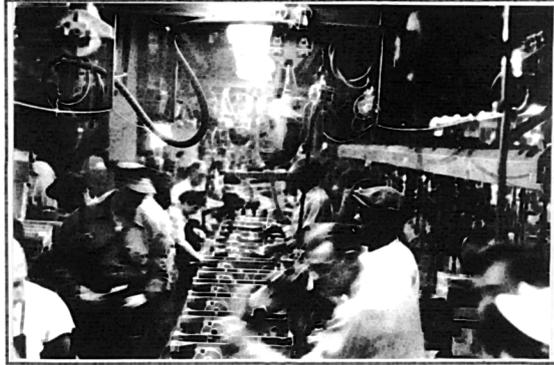
*St. Francis, gas station, and City Hall -  
Los Angeles*

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*Crosses on scene of highway accident - U.S. 91, Idaho*



*Assembly line - Detroit*



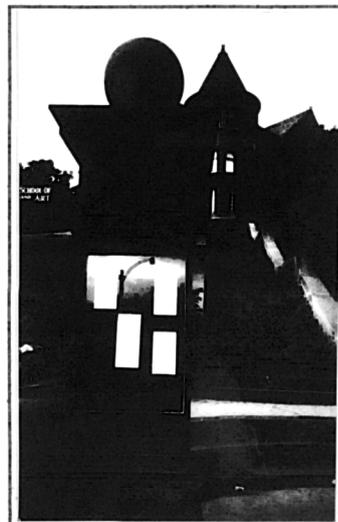
*Convention hall - Chicago*



*Men's room, railway station - Memphis, Tennessee*



*Cocktail party - New York City*



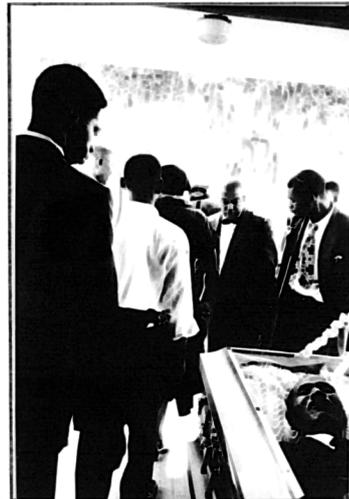
*Salt Lake City, Utah*

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*Beaufort, South Carolina*



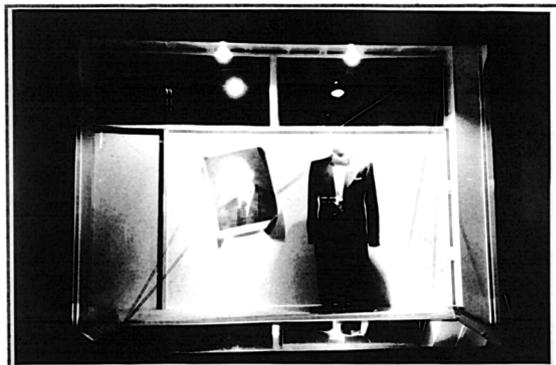
*Funeral - St. Helens South Carolina*



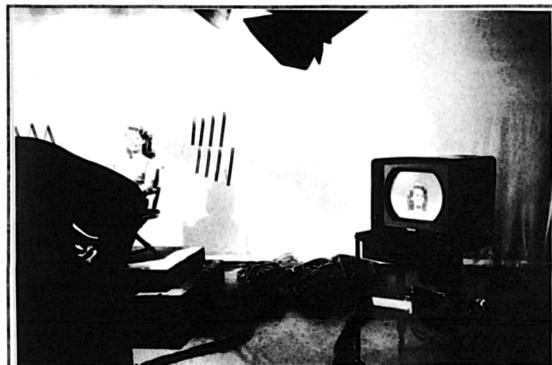
*Chinese cemetery - San Francisco*



*Political rally - Chicago*

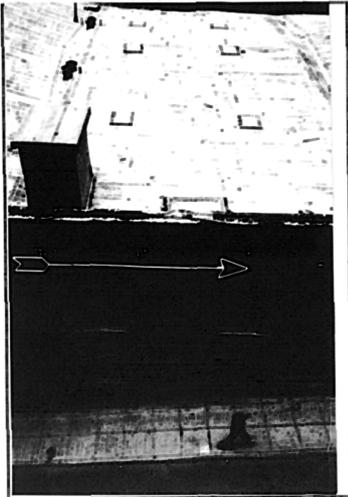


*Store window - Washington, D.C.*



*Television studio - Burbank, California*

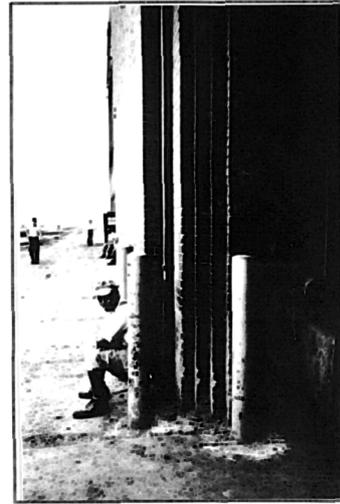
APPENDICES  
C



*Los Angeles*



*Bank - Houston, Texas*



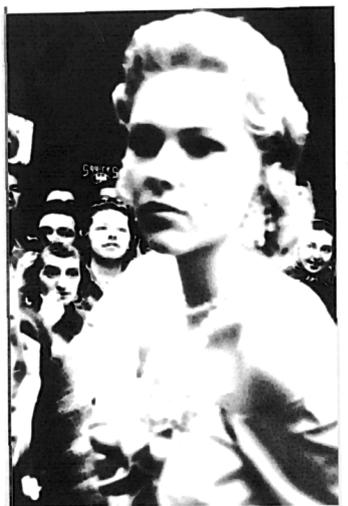
*Factory - Detroit*



*Department store - Lincoln, Nebraska*



*Rodeo - New York City*



*Movie Premiere - Hollywood*

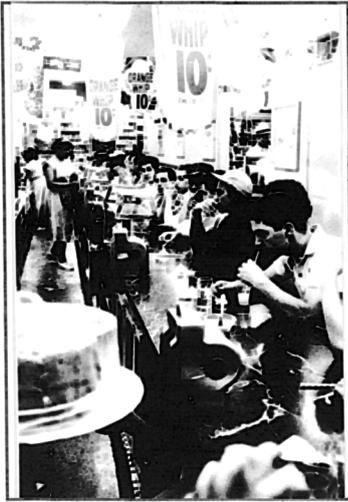


*Charity ball - New York City*



*Cafeteria - San Francisco*

APPENDICES  
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*Drug store - Detroit*



*Coffee shop, railway station - Indianapolis*



*Chattanooga, Tennessee*



*San Francisco*



*Belle Isle, Detroit*



*Public park - Cleveland, Ohio*

APPENDICES  
C



*Courthouse square - Elizabethville,  
North Carolina*



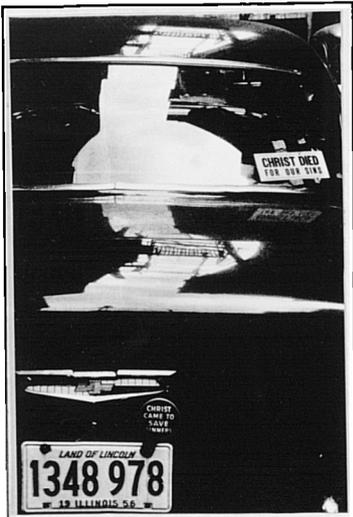
*Picnic ground - Glendale, California*



*Belle Isle, Detroit*



*Detroit*



*Chicago*



*Public Park - Ann Arbor, Michigan*

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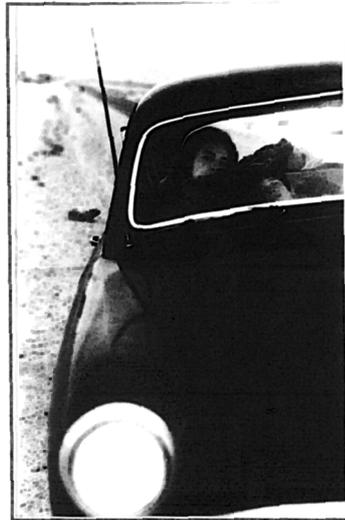
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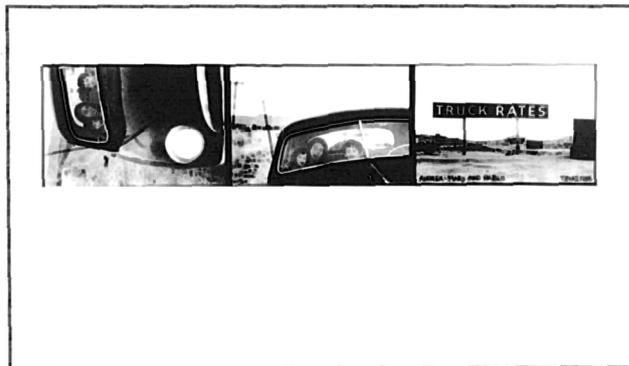
*City Hall - Reno, Nevada*



*Indianapolis*



*U.S. 90, en route to Del Rio, Texas*



*The photographs in this volume were taken by Robert Frank in 1955/56 on a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.*

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