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Mark Durden

Photography and the Book

From Fox Talbot to Christian Boltanski

Volume I: Text

1994

PhD. in History and Theory of Art

The University of Kent
Canterbury

ABSTRACT

Photography and the Book examines the use of photography in differing books, from Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature to the photo-books of the contemporary French artist, Christian Boltanski. Spanning nearly 150 years of photography, from the first book with photographic plates to artist's books produced from the late 1960s to early 1990s, the choice of books develops a thematics of photography and truth.

The thesis consists of two parts, the first looking at photography and the book in the nineteenth century, the second examining books in the twentieth century. My discussion of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature considers the status of this first book with photographic plates, and will be showing how it reflects a self-reflexive fascination with photography. Chapter Two, looks at the photo-books of Peter Henry Emerson, discussing his attempts to bring photography closer to the truth of a corporealised vision. Chapter Three discusses photography as described in two nineteenth century novels, as a means of revealing truth of character in Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables and as a means of deception and misrepresentation in Thomas Hardy's A Laodicean. Chapter Four looks at truth in books of science, focusing on the use of the composite photograph as a means of representing the essence of criminality.

Part Two begins with an analysis of James Agee's and Walker Evans's documentary book, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. It examines the problematics involved in representing poverty. Chapter Six will consider the photo-texts of the American writer and photographer, Wright Morris. Here photography, particularly the amateur snapshot, is treated as a talismanic object and stands for a particular truth of experience. The following discussion of Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida will examine the role of photography in a book of theory, behind which lies a metaphysical attachment to the evidential force of certain photographs. An analysis of the artist's books of Christian Boltanski will bring the thesis to a close and up to date, as I examine the whole issue of truth and photography through such bookworks as Detective which mixes uncaptioned portraits of killers and their victims, a book of portraits which exposes photography's limited capacity to convey information about those it depicts.

Acknowledgments

In researching and writing this thesis I have accumulated debts of gratitude to many people. Firstly, I would like to thank Stephen Bann for both his critical rigour and encouragement throughout the four years I have been writing this thesis. He has always been ready to discuss its various stages and never once failed to provide me with invaluable suggestions and ideas. I am grateful for the help of Mike Weaver and Hubertus von Amelunxen who both me gave access to new material and ideas on Talbot. I owe thanks to Christian Boltanski for agreeing to let me interview him and to David Brittain for allowing me to air my responses to contemporary photography in Creative Camera. David Reason has always been the provider of exciting ideas and I thank him for the many interesting discussions on photography we have had.

I was teaching at Kent Institute of Art and Design for the first three years I was writing this thesis and am grateful to colleagues and students there who made it both a stimulating and pleasurable place to work in. I am particularly grateful to Juliet Steyn for her friendship and support during my first teaching job. I am now about to start my second year teaching at Staffordshire University, and would like to thank all those who helped me complete before the rush of a new semester. Thanks go to Hugh for proof reading. I would like to acknowledge the valued friendship of Stéphane Beauroy, John Dutton, Neil Ewins, Peter Finnemore, Peter Fraser, John Gange, Azzedine Haddour, Jim Hamlyn, Jon Kear, Laura Peters and Russell Roberts. I owe my parents and sister a particular debt of gratitude for their kind support and love. Finally, this thesis was written with the enormous support of Lydia Papadimitriou, her love and company sustained me throughout.

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Preface

I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence, and, like a woman whom one surprises at a piece of needlework which she will hurriedly put aside if anyone comes in, she was absorbed in thoughts which she had never allowed to be seen by me. Of myself— thanks to that privilege which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence— there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which, before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us, seizes them in its vortex and flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it... But if, instead of our eyes, it should happen to be a purely physical object, a photographic plate, that has watched the action, then what we see, in the courtyard of the Institute, for example, instead of the dignified emergence of an Academician who is trying to hail a cab, will be his tottering steps, his precautions to avoid falling on his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk or the ground covered in ice... I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always in the same place in the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly, in our drawing room, which formed part of a new world, that of time, that which inhabited by the strangers of whom we say "he's begun to age a good deal," for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished very quickly, I saw, sitting on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, sick, vacant, letting her slightly crazed eyes wander over a book, a dejected old woman whom I did not know.[1]

[1]Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past: 2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 141-142.

I begin with this quote from 'The Guermantes Way' by Marcel Proust to highlight a not untypical recourse to photography in fiction. As the above passage makes clear, for Proust the photograph evidently stood for an unremitting objectivity of vision, offering an impartial, non-subjectivised and decidedly unflattering portrait. Returning after a long absence, the narrator catches a glimpse of his grandmother as he has never seen her before, as someone alien to him, "a dejected old woman" whom, as he says, "I did not know." He sees her as would a "stranger", a "witness", an "observer", in short as would a photographer. For Proust the photograph provides the metaphor for this ruthless objectivity of seeing, one in which involuntary memories do not blur perception. The photographic approach is related to a state of alienation. It cuts through emotions and proffers a depersonalised portrait, harsh and unflattering. The photograph carries a series of associations of objectivity, estrangement and alienation. Freezing a momentary pose from a succession of moments it will even, as Proust proposes, make the movements of the dignified Academician as he hails a cab, seem awkward, "as though he were drunk, or the ground frozen over."

Such analogies are not unusual. The 'camera eye' is frequently upheld as the emblem of objectivity, offering an impartial, depersonalised view of the world. Very often photography serves as a sign of truth, a particular way of seeing, cold and factual. It is photography's particular relationship to truth that will be the focus of my discussion of photography and the book in this thesis. Part of my concern in this thesis will be to bring out the ways in which photography has been variously described during its history, showing what kinds of investments in the medium lie behind these descriptions. I will be showing how writing and photographs work together, how writing is affected by photographs and, conversely, how photographs are affected by writing. But I will also look at

books which describe photography, provide a purely written account of photography— in particular I will be studying two nineteenth century novels and their conflicting treatments of photography, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables and Thomas Hardy's A Laodicean. I will also be looking at photographs without writing; in my discussion of artist's books by Christian Boltanski the failure to disclose captions and texts for photographs serves to expose their dependency on language for its signification. So, while photography very often remains free from writing in these books, photography's particular relation to text plays a key part in our understanding of them.

W. J. T. Mitchell, writing about the difference between word and image, said how the latter is "the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as natural immediacy and presence."[2] This is brought out most strongly when one considers the photographic image, with its seeming transparency and the immediacy with which we are affected by its referent. As I will be showing, the first responses to photography tended to see it outside human agency and beyond, therefore, the constraint of words, "the artificial, arbitrary production of human will."[3] In explaining the gulf between words and images, Mitchell proposes that we imagine the gulf between them to be as wide as the one between words and things, between culture and nature.[4] This opposition is important to this thesis since in discussing investments in photography two distinctive responses to the medium become very evident. These responses can be categorised as those concerned with the photograph as a cultural artifact, coded, analogous to the symbolic status of writing, to language, and those which describe photographs as outside language, as not a cultural sign

[2]W.J.T. Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 43
[3]Ibid. p. 43.
[4]Ibid. p. 43.

but a message without a code[5], part of the world, beyond and resisting interpretation. This dialectic will run through my thesis which will provide a series of differing but related discussions of various kinds of books, mapping out a history of 'photography and the book.' It is not meant, however, to stand as a complete survey, there are many omissions in this 'history.' My choice of books has largely been determined by a desire to maintain a coherent thematics, a thematics concerning photography's relationship to truth, or rather, to various notions of truth, beginning with a faith in photography's remarkably rendition of external phenomena as shown in Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature and ending with the exploration and exploitation of photography's 'evidential force' in the books (and installations) of Christian Boltanski. It is this which ties the various chapters together; chapters which might strike the reader as initially quite distinct, as each in turn focuses on different kinds of photography in different kinds of books, including such a range as books of fiction, the documentary book, books of 'science', a book of theory and artist's books.

My approach to Talbot's The Pencil of Nature in Chapter One will be concerned with the fact that this is the first book incoporating photographs and that, necessarily and not surprisingly, it reflects the excitement and wonderment over the discovery of a new means of representing the world. I will be showing how Talbot's responses to photography are tinged with an almost metaphysical attachment to the capabilities of the medium, as a means of representing things outside human agency. Chapter One will also carefully discuss the issue of interpretation and photography, examining the way in which Talbot's The Pencil of Nature has been read within the history of photography. Chapter Two's discussion of books by Peter Henry Emerson in the later nineteenth century will

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[5]See Roland Barthes's 'The Photographic Message' in Image-Music-Text (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 15-31. I will be discussing Barthes's particular relationship to the photograph in Chapter Seven.

provide an account of the limitations, and even inadequacies, of the medium. While my study of Talbot will reveal a fascination for photography's rendition of things in the world, Emerson's books will show a decidedly contrasting relationship to photography, as the medium is made to retreat from a detailed rendition of phenomena in a desire to match the coporealised nature of human perception. This change in relationship to photography from its reception, by the time of the late nineteenth century, will then be reconsidered in Chapter Three through its discussion of two novels and their references to photography; Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables of 1851, which uses the daguerreotype as a means of revealing a truth of character otherwise unseen, and Hardy's A Laodicean of 1881, which provides a fascinating reflection on not simply the limitations of photography, but its capability of providing false representations.

Chapter Four will shift this debate to a subject crucial to an understanding of photography's relationship to truth in the nineteenth century, the use of photography in what was then regarded as a 'science', criminal anthropology. The chapter will focus on the quest for a picture of the essence of criminality through the composite portrait. I will be discussing the particular role of the composite portrait as illustration to books of 'science', Francis Galton's frontispiece to his Inquiries into Human Faculty and Havelock Ellis's use of the composite as the face of 'the criminal', in his book of that name, first published in 1890.

This thesis is written in two parts. Part One, ending with my discussion of Galton's composites, examines photography and the book in the nineteenth century. Part Two will be focused on the twentieth century. Following Galton's and Ellis's divisive attempts to 'other' those photographed, Chapter Five will

concern a book which attempted to ennoble and enrich the people and lives it sought to represent— Walker Evans's and James 's Agee's documentary book, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. The book will be discussed in relation to the particular problems of representing those denied a means of self-representation, and also in relation to the problem of voyeurism and the problem of aestheticising poverty. I will also be showing how the book incorporates into its own narrative its own failure to adequately record the lives and labours of three sharecropping families. Following this extraordinary attempt at a truthful and respectful record of the poor of the American Depression, Chapter Six will study the photo-texts of the Nebraskan born writer and photographer, Wright Morris, books which introduce a ritualised attachment to photography and places. I will be arguing that his writing and photographs are concerned with a particular truth of experience, what the writer calls "raw material", and that this truth is paradoxically to be found in such clichéd items as photographic snapshots. Morris's photo-texts are involved in a portraiture in negative, a description of people through their belongings, and reflect a magical belief that life is somehow indwelling in the artifacts they have left behind. His books in many ways represent a particular sentimentalised relationship to photography and this relationship will be further explored in the last two chapters of this thesis, in Chapter Seven which focuses on a book of theory, Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida, and finally in Chapter Eight, which examines the artist's books of Christian Boltanski. Both Barthes and Boltanski explore the affective propensity of certain photographs and also begin to define photography's ontology. The books of Boltanski bring this thesis up to date— his latest book I will be studying was first published as recently as 1991— and also clearly bring out the issue of photography's relationship to truth. Boltanski's reflections on photography's ontology also bring him close to the concerns of Fox Talbot, both being fascinated, though to

very different degrees, by what it is about photography that marks it out as distinct from other means of representation.

There is, however, a lot which separates Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature and Boltanski's books, nearly 150 years, the whole history of photography. Fox Talbot begins not only the narrative of my thesis but the history of photography and the book. His book, as my first chapter will now show, contributes an interesting case study in a debate about the status of early photographs and early photographers.

PART ONE

Photography and the Book in the Nineteenth Century

CHAPTER ONE

Hermeneutics and Description in Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*

This chapter will consider what constitutes the first ever book[1] with photographs— "the first work ever published with photographic plates, that is to say, plates or pictures executed by light alone"[2]— Henry Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature (1844-6).[3] The very title of this book describes the photograph as drawn by Nature, and as Talbot goes on to say in the book, photography is "impressed by Nature's hand".[4] This is important. Photography is immediately distinguished from painting. Painting comes from the hand of the painter, is inextricably tied up with an act of expression.[5] Talbot's description of photography stresses its difference from other arts, photography is thought of as an autotelic process, a phenomenon existing almost independent of human agency.

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[1] My main point of reference in this chapter will be the facsimile book of Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature published by Da Capo Press in 1969.

[2]Talbot The Pencil of Nature (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), n.p.

[3]Originally intended to contain 50 plates and to be sold by subscription in six parts, no more than 24 calotypes appeared in six instalments between June 1844 and April 1846. The total production of The Pencil of Nature ran to 1,016 booklets of the six parts. It was produced in Reading by Talbot's assistant Nicholas Hennemann and a series of other helpers. See Robert Lassam, Fox Talbot: Photographer, (Wiltshire: Compton Press1979), pp. 20-21.

[4]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n.p.

[5]The American abstract painter, Jonathan Lasker succinctly stresses the relationship between painter and painting. "Paint bears physical record to the expressions of the human hand. It conforms to the trail of the brush being driven by the impulses of the psyche. In no other art medium is creation more permanently and intimately bound to the movement of the human body..." Quoted in Adrian Searle's 'Unbound' in Unbound, (London: South Bank Centre, 1994), p. 16. (One should, however, qualify this assertion by the fact that not all painting is imbued by the presence of the artist, as I will later be showing in this thesis, seventeenth century Dutch painting provides a precursor to the kind of representation we find in photographs.)

Unlike the painter, the photographer, as Trachtenberg succinctly put it, "never confronts an empty canvas, an abstract pictorial potentiality, but always a world already shaped, already understood." See Alan Trachtenberg, 'Walker Evans's Message From the Interior: A Reading' in October, No. 11, Winter 1979, MIT Press, pp. 6-16.

Talbot's 'Introductory Remarks' to The Pencil of Nature, begin by stressing the distinctive qualities of photography. They set out to avoid the viewer's confusing his pictures with engravings.

> The little work now presented to the Public is the first attempt to publish a series of plates or pictures wholly executed by the new art of Photogenic Drawing, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil.[6]

When he goes on to describe his photographs, Talbot points out how they:

> have been obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper. They have been formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of anyone acquainted with the art of drawing.[7]

He then lays stress on the uniqueness of photography— "an Art of so great singularity, which employs processes entirely new, and having no analogy to any thing in use before."[8]

An earlier letter that Talbot wrote to the editor of the Literary Gazette (dated 2nd February, 1839) further brings out photography's singularity and stresses it being somewhat outside authorial control. He says how :

> it is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes itself. All that the artist does is to dispose the apparatus before the object whose image he requires; he then leaves it for a certain time, greater or lesser, according to the circumstances. At the end of the time, he returns, takes out his pictures, and finds it finished. [9]

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[6]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n. p.
[7]Ibid., n. p.
[8]Ibid., n. p.
[9]Quoted in Gail Buckland's Fox Talbot and the Invention of Photography (London: Scolar Press, 1980), p.43.

Such remarks would seem to accord with Carol Shloss's account of the beginnings of photography, one in which both "[c]ommentators stressed the necessary mechanical connection between the visual image and what was in front of the camera" and "[p]hotographers tended to see the form as autotelic and to ignore their role as manipulators and originators."[10] As Shloss goes on to say, with photography, "[n]o other invention in a time of splendid inventions (the railroad, the telegraph and the steamboat) was so quickly pulled away from the particular genius of the inventor and the ingenuity of his followers." [11]

Much of the recent critical study of Talbot's photographs has been, however, an attempt to pull the medium back to "the particular genius of the inventor". Talbot's work has been interpreted aesthetically, and his experiments with photography seen as a struggle towards mastery and artistry with the The Pencil of Nature regarded as marking Talbot's 'arrival' as an artist.[12] Another recent approach, by Mike Weaver, has argued against a purely aesthetic account of Talbot's photographs and suggested his pictures carry symbolic import— a study in which Talbot is elevated to the position of "scholar-photographer"[13], with his photographs being regarded, not so much as signatures of nature, but 'written' rebuses.

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[10]Carol Shloss, In Visible Light (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 32
[11]Ibid. p. 33.

[12]See, in particular, Larry Schaaf Out of the Shadows: Herschel, Talbot and the Invention of Photography, (London: Yale University Press, 1991). Schaaf sees Talbot representing the first artist to be produced by photography. Talbot developed his particular artistic skill through looking at his own photographs; photography, according to Schaaf, "taught him how to see". This is a rather magical account of the evolution of an artist and is decidedly lacking any discussion of the cultural influences on Talbot's photography.

[13]See Mike Weaver 'Henry Fox Talbot; Conversation Pieces' in British Photography in the Nineteenth Century, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.11-23 and also Weaver's 'Diogenes with a Camera' in Henry Fox Talbot, (London: Clio Press, 1993), pp. 1-25.

This chapter reconsiders the status of Talbot's book The Pencil of Nature, particularly in the light of Weaver's recent hermeneutic approaches to Talbot's pictures. The chapter will thus be addressing itself to reading, and the problems of reading, the first book with photographs. I will be discussing the book in relation to hermeneutics, the hermeneutics of Talbot himself, both etymologist and mythologist, and also the hermeneutics of Weaver in his recent readings of Talbot.

Description and The Pencil of Nature

In defining the identity of The Pencil of Nature one is immediately struck by the fact it has the appearance of a manual, a book explaining the characteristics of photography. As the first book illustrated by photographs, it had to fulfil a certain pedagogic function. The Pencil of Nature begins by giving an introduction to, and explanation of, Talbot's invention and process of photography, and the 24 plates which follow could be seen to serve as demonstrations of the versatility of the new medium, showing its diverse range of representations— there are photographs of an engraving, of books, an old printed page, lace, a still life, buildings, classical busts, china and glassware on shelves.

Each plate is accompanied by a short text, a writing which often insists on the singularity of photography's representation. Rosalind Krauss has proposed a clear relationship between image and text in The Pencil of Nature.[14] The photographic plates serve to "illustrate the arguments in the text in the manner of object lessons, demonstrations."[15] For her, Talbot's plate of a haystack (see fig. 1) "supplies the proof of Talbot's contention that the mechanical image can suspend an infinitude of detail in a single visual plenum, where natural vision

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[14]See Rosalind Krauss's 'Tracing Nadar' in ed.Thomas F. Barrow, Reading Into Photography, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), pp.117-134.
[15]Ibid., p. 127.

tends to summarize or simplify in terms of mass."[16] This interpretation is borne out by Talbot's text accompanying the picture which points out:

> one advantage of the discovery of the photographic art will be, that it will enable us to introduce into our pictures a multitude of minute details which add to the truth and reality of the representation, but which no artist would take the trouble to copy faithfully from nature. [17]

What better way of showing detail than a picture of a haystack? Something the artist would not take the trouble, and would also not have the ability, to render.

In considering the haystack photograph, it is useful to draw attention to the written note Talbot added to the first negative photographic image (see fig. 2). It depicts the oriel window at Lacock Abbey, on thin purplish paper, is barely an inch square and is dated 1835. The wonderment and excitement over this miniature is captured in the note Talbot wrote alongside it. He is amazed at the detail within the image: "[w]hen first made, the square of glass about 200 in number could be counted, with the help of a lens." The text serves to preserve what time might steal from the image— the fixing process was still imperfect and there was no certainty that the image would not cloud over in time. The accompanying text literally fixes the image, describing what the unaided eye cannot see, and also fixing what might fade in the course of time.

Claude Lévi-Strauss has explained the particular aesthetic effect of the miniature, and although his comments stem from looking at a particular painting, his remarks are equally applicable to photography.[18] He responds to the quality of detail in a painted miniature. For him the miniature involves the

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[16]Ibid., p. 127.
[17]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n.p.
[18]See Claude Lévi-Strauss's The Savage Mind (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 22-27.

beholder in a particular mastery of vision. He or she is able to hold in their visual field the whole thing they are looking at. Lévi-Strauss looks at François Clouet's 'Portrait of Elizabeth of Austria' and considers the reason for "the very profound aesthetic emotion which is apparently inexplicably, aroused" by the painting's "highly realistic thread by thread, reproduction of a lace collar."[19] All miniatures seem to have for him an "intrinsic aesthetic quality" and Lévi-Strauss proposes this has to do with the dimensions themselves. Encountering a real object we tend to work from its parts. The resistance it offers us is overcome by dividing it. Reduction in scale reverses this situation. Being smaller, the object as a whole seems less formidable. By being quantatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified. "More exactly, this quantative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance."[20] Unlike our experience of things in the phenomenal world, knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts. This "gratifies the intelligence and gives rise to a sense of pleasure."[21]

Photography's rendition of detail is dwelt upon at most length in The Pencil of Nature in the text accompanying an architectural record, the entrance gateway to Queen's College, Oxford. Although the text does not refer us directly to the accompanying image, its discussion of detail in photography has a clear bearing on the plate (see fig. 3). Talbot introduces the fact that the photograph does not simply render surface detail, but actually has the ability to render things unseen by the human eye. The photograph is said to carry an excess of details beyond immediate perception.[22] Talbot writes about a rich surfeit of

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[19]Ibid., p.22.
[20]Ibid., p.24.
[21]Ibid., p.24.

[22]It should be pointed out that because Talbot's prints were printed from oiled or waxed paper negatives, they reproduced the fibrous texture of the paper. The result was, as Aaron Scharf

detail in photographs and even recommends the viewer to take up a magnifying glass before certain images. (This gesture is to become paradigmatic of early accounts of the experience of the photograph, particularly the daguerreotype.) Looking through the glass also involves a 'reading' of the image in the uncovering of details that have before gone unobserved and unsuspected. The photographer himself often will discover things he has depicted that he had no notion of at the time he made the image. Talbot refers us to a rich cluster of details in the picture, what amounts to a text to be read, one written over the surface of things:

> ...sometimes inscriptions and dates are found upon the buildings, or printed placards most irrelevant, are discovered upon their walls: sometimes a distant dial plate is seen, and on it- unconsciously recorded- the hour of the day at which the view was taken.[23]

This description is very much about the reserve of riches latent in photography. We inspect the image as a detective would the scene of a crime. Through a 'reading' of its surfaces, this close-up inspection of photography, we come across a rich plenitude of signification. There is the sense of a 'beyond' to the photograph in this seeming inexhaustibility of detail.[24]

Talbot's text invites us to take up a magnifying glass to the plate it accompanies in the book, and indeed all photographs of a certain degree of perfection. And a close inspection of the plate reveals the detail Talbot is clearly very interested in, the detail of a "distant dial plate", bearing the measure of the time the

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noted, that in "comparison with the daguerreotype, the calotype was inferior in transmitting the animacula of nature..." See his Art and Photography (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 30.
[23]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n.p.

[24] Fifteen years after The Pencil of Nature was first published, the Boston poet, doctor and amateur photographer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, was to postulate how "Theoretically, a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible". See his 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph' in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Esays on Photography, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books,1980), p. 77.

photograph was taken. Such a photograph records the temporal condition of its own making. Here photography's special relation to time is brought out. Photography, unlike painting, records a particular moment in time, and our relationship to the photograph is strongly affected by this existential certitude, what Roland Barthes has called the 'noeme' of photography, its guarantee of a referent, its "This-has-been".[25] I will be considering Barthes's writings on photography in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

At this point, however, it is clarifying to introduce an essay on photography's relationship to art by Lady Eastlake, first published in 1857. She remarks at length upon the facility of photography to render surface texture, and is, like Talbot, especially drawn to the details of photographs. For Eastlake, details are important because they form part of the historicity of the photograph; as she says, "the facts of the age and the hour are there, for we count the lines in that perspective of telegraph wires, and read the characters of the play bill or manifesto, destined to be torn down on the morrow."[26] No photographic picture is seen for her to be destitute of a special, "historic interest". "Every form which is traced by light is the impress of one moment, or one hour, in the great passage of time".[27] Photography's particular relation to time, fascinated Talbot, photography's singular ability to preserve a fleeting moment in time formed part of the "natural magic" of this means of representation.

> The most transitory things, a shadow, the emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our 'natural magic', and may be fixed forever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy.

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[25]See Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida (London: Cape, 1982), p. 78.
[26]Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, 'Photography' in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 65.
[27]Ibid., p. 65.

> Such is the fact, that we may receive on paper the fleeting shadow, arrest it there, and in the space of a single minute fix it there so firmly as to be no more capable of change even if thrown back into the sunbeams from which it derived its origin. [28]

As John Berger has made clear, time is different in (traditional) painting and drawing where it is the actions of the hand, not photography's impress of a moment, which reveals time. A painting or drawing "contains the time of its own making and this means that it possesses its own time independent of the living time of what it portrays."[29] By contrast, in the photograph "time is uniform: every part of the image has been subjected to a chemical process of even duration. In the process of revelation all parts were equal."[30] The photograph provides an imprint of the light an object emits or reflects onto a photo-sensitive surface and as a result can be seen to belong to a class of signs known as the index.[31] Indexical signs bear a causal relation to their referents, exist as traces of their subjects. Rosalind Krauss has made the connection between the index and photography quite clear, she gives us the example of Man Ray's 'Rayographs' (also called 'Photograms'), produced by placing objects on top of light sensitive paper, exposing the ensemble to light and developing the result. "The image created in this way is of the ghostly traces of departed objects; they look like footprints in sand, of marks that have been left in dust."[32] The photogram

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[28]Quoted in Schaaf, 1991, op. cit., p. 51.
[29]John Berger and Jean Mohr, Another Way of Telling (London: Writers and Readers Co-op., 1982), p. 95.

[30]Ibid., p. 95.

[31]In differentiating sign-types— symbol, icon and index— Charles Sanders Peirce describes the photograph as an index. "Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs [indices], those by physical connection." Quoted in Rosalind Krauss's 'Notes on the Index: Part 2' in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 215.

[32]Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Part 1' in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 203.

makes explicit what is the case of all photography: "every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface."[33] The Pencil of Nature also contains what is in effect one of the first photograms, his image of lace, which originate from lace being directly placed on light sensitive paper, an image arrived at through a literal stencilling off from the real (see fig 4).

In relation to time and photography Talbot's 'View of the Boulevards at Paris' (see fig. 5) and its accompanying text is particularly important. The text marks the closest relationship between photography and writing in the book. It does not simply attempt to re-describe, to re-present, what is shown in the image, but actually serves to attempt to transport the viewer back to the time the image was taken.

> This view was taken from one of the upper windows of the Hotel de Douvres, situated at the corner of the Rue de la Paix.
>
> The spectator is looking to the North East. The time is the afternoon. The sun is just quitting the range of buildings adorned with columns: its facade is already in the shade, but a single shutter standing open projects far enough forward to catch a gleam of sunshine. the weather is hot and dusty, and they have just been watering the road, which has produced two broad bands of shade upon it, which unite in the foreground, because the road, ebbing particaly under repair (as is seen from the two wheel-barrows, &c. &c.), the watering machines have been compelled to cross to the other side.
>
> By the roadside a row of cittadines and cabriolets are waiting, and a single carriage stands in the distance a long way to the right.
>
> A whole forest of chimneys borders the horizon: for, the instrument chronicles whatever it sees, and certainly would delineate a chimney-pot

[33]Ibid., p. 203.

> or a chimney-sweeper with the same impartiality as it would the Apollo of Belvedere.
>
> The view is taken from a considerable height, as appears easily by observing the house on the right hand; the eye being necessarily on a level with that part of the building on which the horizontal lines or course of stone appear parallel to the margin of the picture.[34]

The text begins in the past tense, ("This view was taken"), and immediately specifies the place from which the picture was taken. Switching to present tense, ("The spectator is looking...") the prose then proceeds to take the reader into the picture. Details are pointed out to us (the window catching the last sunlight, the type of road surface) and we are taken right into the image to the distant single carriage in the street and back, still further, to the horizon of chimneys. Talbot is recreating the experience of seeing the view in writing. Having taken us into the picture, Talbot then takes us back out again as the text closes with a return to the site of viewing, our perspectival viewpoint, and the very edge of the photograph, our viewpoint being indicated where the lines "appear horizontal to the margin of the picture." The text takes us both into and out of the picture, carefully describing the view from the window as perceived by Talbot. But it is a view not so much recollected, what he is describing is an essentially photographic way of seeing.

The text describes an act of looking, of looking at the photograph, of poring over the image, leaving the second floor window from which it was taken and hovering into its illusionary space, noting detail after detail— the window lit up, the surface of road, the solitary carriage and the "whole forest of chimneys" bordering the horizon. Everything is in focus, clear and legible. The camera "chronicles whatever it sees". In a fine discussion of this picture and its accompanying prose piece, Hubertus von Amelunxen contrasts the way of

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[34]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n.p.

seeing Talbot describes with John Ruskin's physiological notion of perception where "only one point can be clearly seen and distinctly seen by the fixed eye, at a given moment."[35] Our relationship to Talbot's photograph is different. Here everything is in focus. Details in both foreground and background are all clearly represented. It is the density of representation, a surfeit of details which form photography's particular identity in Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. The next chapter will consider Peter Henry Emerson's use of photography and prose to represent a particular landscape. There details become troubling, we have a retreat from the density of detail that so fascinates Talbot. Though decidedly less dramatic, Emerson's' photographs bear relation to the kind of representation Ruskin celebrates in Turner because both can be seen to involve a partial focusing. Turner's habit of throwing the foreground out of focus was seen by Ruskin to pull the viewer further into the painting and so enhance the experience of depth and distance. In describing the space of Turner's paintings, Ruskin wrote how:

> The spectator was compelled to go forward into the waste of hills; there, where the sun broke wide upon the moor, he must walk and wander; he would not stumble and hesitate over the near rocks, nor stop to botanize on the first inches of his path.[36]

Turner's space makes greater demands on the spectator's powers of visual discrimination and associative combination, an imaginary space very different to the brute facticity of Talbot's space, one in which we "stumble and hesitate" on details.

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[35]Taken from an unpublished English translation, by Martin Coulson, of his Die Aufgehobene Zeit, (Berlin: Nishen, 1988) communicated to me from the author, n.p.

[36]Quoted in Elizabeth K. Helsinger's Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 192.

Some of these details are significant. I will be considering the import of detail in Talbot a little later when I consider Mike Weaver's proposal that what he calls "the etceteras"[37] in Talbot's pictures are not simply part of the clutter of the world but carry symbolic weight, form part of a cryptic coding of the photographs. In a passing reference to this Paris picture, Weaver notes the symbolism of the empty fiacres— "at the metaphysical level the carriage, like any empty vessel, is a memento mori. It evokes the idea of cart burial in which the body of the carriage suggests the coffin."[38] But it is a more literal detail I want to dwell on here. Note how the text for this plate focuses attention on the detail of an open window just catching the last rays of sunlight, a window about to fall into shadow. Text and image both highlight the fixing of a moment, photography's singular capacity to still a point in time. The picture also, as Hubertus von Amelunxen has shown,[39] provides us with indexes of time, the traces of water on the dry dusty road which appear like shadows, ("two broad bands of shade"). Shadows are close to photography's very ontological identity; Talbot even thought of calling photography 'skiagraphy', nature's shadow.[40]

It was the evidentiality of photograph that was of importance to Talbot. Photographs could offer a proof that had simply never been known before. In relation to photographic depiction, writing itself was even seen to be inadequate. Photography's value as an evidential record is clearly brought out in Talbot's picture of several shelves bearing articles of china. It is accompanied with a text which informs us how photography can provide a unique inventory of possessions, an inventory better and more effective than a handwritten catalogue of objects. The photograph is seen to provide proof of

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[37]Weaver, 1989, op. cit., p. 15.
[38]Ibid., p. 23.
[39]Amelunxen, op.cit., n.p.
[40]See H.J.P. Arnold's William Henry Fox Talbot (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1977), p. 108.

ownership and incriminating evidence. Talbot points out that "should a thief afterwards purloin the treasures— if the mute testimony of the picture were to be produced against him in court— it would certainly be evidence of a novel kind."[41]

Seeing in the Dark

While the relationship between the plates and their accompanying texts in The Pencil of Nature is often quite clear, one image and its prose piece stand out, because there is no obvious and immediate connection between them. The text describes photography's future ability to see and record things in the dark. It attests to the belief that the photograph is capable of offering an insight beyond human faculty.

> Among the many novel ideas which the discovery of Photography has suggested, is the following rather curious experiment or speculation. I have never tried it, nor am I aware that anyone else has either tried or proposed it, yet I think it is one which, if properly managed, must inevitably succeed. When a ray of solar light is refracted from a prism and thrown upon a screen, it forms there the beautiful coloured band known by the name of the solar spectrum. Experimenters have found at if this spectrum is thrown upon a sheet of sensitive paper, the violet end of its produces the principle effect: and, what is truly remarkable, a similar effect is produced by certain invisible rays which lie beyond the violet, and beyond the limits of the spectrum, and is only revealed to us by this action they exert.
>
> Now I would propose to separate these invisible rays from the rest, by suffering them to pass through an adjoining apartment through an aperture in a wall or screen of partition. This apartment would thus become filled (we must not call it illuminated) with invisible rays, which might be scattered in all directions by a convex lens placed behind the aperture. If there were a number of persons in the room, no one would

[41]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n.p.

> see the other: and yet nevertheless if a camera were so placed as to point in the direction in which any one were standing, it would take his portrait, and reveal his actions.
>
> For, to use a metaphor we have already employed, the eye of the camera would see plainly where the human eye would find nothing but darkness. Alas! that this speculation is somewhat too refined to be introduced with effect into a modern novel or romance, for what a denouement we should have, if we could suppose the secrets of the darkened chamber to be revealed by the testimony of the printed paper.[42]

Accompanying this text is a minimal and unusual photograph which presents head-on and in close-up two shelves of books, simply entitled 'Scene in a Library', Plate VIII (see fig. 6). Since Talbot's discussion of 'invisible rays' ends with a reference to novels, we might take this accompanying photograph of books as intended to represent these novels. Talbot, however, speaks of these books as not yet written. The status of the photograph is more complicated than that of mere illustration. In her interpretation of this passage, Rosalind Krauss draws a distinction between the book and the photograph.

> As the container of written language the book is the place of residence of a wholly 'cultural' as opposed to 'natural' group of signs. To operate with languages is to have the power to conceptualise— to evoke, abstract, to postulate— and obviously outdistance the objects available to vision. Writing is the transcription of thought not the mere trace of an object. [43]

Following on from this interpretation one might go so far as to suggest the photograph of books might be seen as an analogue of the mind. Books are signs for thoughts and in Krauss's terms the ciphers of a particular beyond, the beyond of language, that power of language to conceptualise, evoke, speculate and outdistance the things available to sight. As Weaver has pointed out, the titles of these books carefully represent Talbot's own interest in Egypt, philology,

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[42]Ibid. n.p.
[43]Krauss, 1982, op. cit., p. 128.

botany and general science.[44] Perhaps this photograph might then be seen to constitute a self-portrait, or rather an attempt, through visual representation, to indicate his own theoretical preoccupations, a way of giving us a 'picture' of his own mind.

Krauss makes specific use of Talbot's account of a camera picturing events in the dark. It forms part of what she believes is a metaphysical discourse which characterised initial responses to photography. It would seem that Talbot's idea of invisible rays which would enable him to take people's portraits unseen, and while they themselves are in darkness, is a fantasy about photography being one day able to reveal hidden secrets of character and behaviour, to penetrate and reveal the true psyche of individuals. This was not an uncommon belief about photography and was to find actual realisation in a fictional story fifteen years later. Nathaniel Hawthorne's romance The House of the Seven Gables, involves a daguerreotype portrait which makes visible the otherwise hidden character of its sitter. I will be discussing this book and the history of the daguerreotype in Chapter Three.

But there is another more literal purchase on Talbot's notion of a photograph being able to see and record what is going on among people in the dark. This involves a relation between surveillance and photography. What better model for surveillance than a form of photography capable of disclosing what goes on between people in the dark? Significantly, Talbot points out the value such a discovery would have for the writer of the "modern novel or romance." The insights offered up by this photographic process are perhaps best seen in the context of a particular fantasy on the part of novel writers of the mid and later nineteenth century in England. Charles Dickens's fantasy of surveillance in

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[44]Weaver, 1989, op. cit., p. 14.

Dombey and Son is perhaps the most notable of these. There the author imagines "a good spirit who would take the house tops off...and show a christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes."[45] The menace of a policing of individuals this implies is taken up in the wishes of the archetypal detective, Sherlock Holmes, in Conan Doyle's 'A Case of Identity'. He declares to Watson:

> If we could fly up out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city gently remove the roof, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chain of events....it would make all fiction, with its conventionalities and forced conclusions, most stale and unprofitable.[46]

Talbot and Hermeneutics.

I want to now turn to a decidedly different perspective on Talbot's photographs and examine interpretations which seek out hidden meanings within them, argue the case that Talbot's photographs are symbolic. I will be looking in particular at the problems raised by such an approach. So far my account has been counter-hermeneutic. My interpretations have concerned the self-referentiality of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. It is a book in which both photographs and their accompanying texts are marked by a fascination with the characteristics of photography: its rendition of detail, its fixing of a moment in a time, and even its potentiality to go beyond human sight and see in the dark.

Mike Weaver's approach to Talbot's photographs is very different[47]. For him, Talbot's pictures take on the characteristics of language. His photographs are

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[45]Quoted in Mark Seltzer's Henry James and the Art of Power, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 33
[46]Quoted Ibid., p. 33.
[47]Weaver, 1989, op. cit. and Weaver, 1993, op. cit.

seen to involve us with a particular kind of emblematic text, one inviting a highly speculative process of interpretation as sense is wrestled from the pictures. Details in the pictures provide the key to the rebuses the photographs set up for their viewer/reader. Weaver makes an intriguing interpretation of Talbot's photographs which culturally locates them in relationship to both an eighteenth century pictorial tradition in painting and Talbot's own scholarly pursuits in etymology and mythology. He points out hidden meanings in the photographs. Talbot's prints are said to neither fulfil simply aesthetic nor descriptive ends, but operate cryptogrammatically. Weaver proposes Talbot's photographs elevate metaphor over description. "Cultural frames of reference" are felt to have been ignored in previous approaches to his pictures.[48]

According to Weaver, Talbot's 'The Haystack' is not a piece of "abstract art ahead of its time", neither is it "an illustration of agricultural ladder use: no farm worker would use a ladder at that angle."[49] The cue to further meanings in the picture lies in the symbolic import of the ladder, a recurring element in Talbot's pictures.

> Emblematically the ladder represents the leading idea of a countenance looking upwards. It appears in the Bible as Jacob's ladder; in alchemy as a ladder of experimental ascent from which it is all too easy to fall, and in freemasonry as symbolic of the ascent of the soul. As an emblem it signifies ascent towards the light.[50]

Weaver's discussion of 'The Ladder' (see fig. 7) from The Pencil of Nature certainly marks a refreshing perspective from the aestheticised account of the picture offered by Gail Buckland. 'The Ladder' is seen by Buckland as the antithesis of a studio portrait;

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[48]Weaver, 1993, op. cit., p. 12.
[49]Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[50]Ibid., p. 12.

> wild vines growing on the side of the building, a strong shadow cast by the ladder, two men with their backs to the camera and one up in the loft, so situated that his face cannot be seen. No colonnades, no rich velvets, no grand poses.[51]

When Talbot took this picture, she points out how he received advice from the painter Henry Collen and explains that he might have suggested a third person should have been included in the picture to balance the composition. There is for her no other reason why the well dressed figure on the left should be in a barnyard scene.

It is certainly surprising that in a book demonstrating the range of photographic uses there is no portrait photograph in The Pencil of Nature. Talbot's 'The Ladder' is, in fact, the only picture of people in the whole book. But here the three figures occupy a curiously decentralised role. The ladder is the centre of composition. We cannot even see the faces of the figures. The text describes the utility of the photograph for portraiture, and involves a promise to present portraits in what he calls "the progress of the present work".[52] Talbot's prose piece closes with a conjecture as to how a photographic record of the nobility's ancestors would throw a revealing light on their family picture galleries. He wonders on what small portion of ancestral portraits "can they really rely with confidence."[53]

For Weaver this is not a depiction of a rural scene but a symbolic scene.

> [T]he third man, dressed in a frockcoat and wearing dress shoes, can be seen either as the master in a conversation piece or the donor in a sacred scene. Others, perhaps, might recognise the vine (of eternity-

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[51] Buckland, 1980, op. cit., pp. 86-87.
[52] Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n. p.
[53] Ibid. n. p.

Jesus the Saviour) as the true counterpart of the ladder: a vine and ladder paradigm.[54]

According to Weaver, as well as drawing upon a hermetic tradition, Talbot was "responsive to the melancholic strain in mid-eighteenth century sensibility."[55] Thus 'The Haystack' is seen to also function as a *memento mori* because, as Weaver says, "all life, like hay itself, is ultimately of this world and perishable".[56] This is not just a haystack but a "charnel house of grass".[57] Turning to other images by Talbot, Weaver is attentive to 'the etceteras' in his pictures. In 'The Garden Gateway', for example, juxtaposed with the closed door, a broom, rake and spade are seen to "evoke a melancholic reflection on life"[58]. The closed door symbolically represents the "grim reaper"; the garden tools the "harvest both of life and death".[59]

In Weaver's iconographic reading, we cannot simply call a spade a spade in a picture by Talbot, because, as he says, garden tools are "binominal in their associations— they cut two ways: on the one hand, they represent the implements by which the garden is kept clear of weeds; on the other, they are gravedigger's tools."[60] Weaver is arguing that we are to see Talbot's photographs as part of an emblematic pictorial tradition and is able to find hidden meanings in almost everything in Talbot's photographs. In a picture of his children with their maid (see fig. 8), Weaver picks out the fact that the girls are depicted together with a little cart filled with garden rakings. "Like other containers in Talbot's pictures— pannier and net, basket and rake— they are

[54]Weaver, 1989, op. cit., p. 21.
[55]Ibid., p. 13.
[56]Ibid., p.13.
[57]Ibid., p. 13.
[58]Ibid., p. 19.
[59]Ibid., p. 19.
[60]Ibid., p. 21.

concealed emblems of the grave."[61] A key to the metaphoric potentiality of such a picture lies in etymology. Talbot's speculations on both the origins of and relations between English words, in his book English Etymology,[62] provides an important basis for Weaver's particular interpretations of his photographs. The little cart as *memento mori* is supposedly confirmed by Talbot's etymology of coffin: "a great case of wicker, any kind of box or case."[63]

English Etymologies was said by its author to give "support to the hypothesis of the original unity of mankind and of a common original of all languages of the globe."[64] Talbot believed in the idea that once words and things were close together and resembled one another— "Things were named at first from their more striking and conspicuous properties: thus the water of the sea was very properly named salum by the Latins, its saltiness being conspicuous."[65] For Talbot etymology was seen as the "lamp by which much that is obscure in the primitive history of the world will one day be cleared up".[66] Talbot's involvement with etymology reflects a particular relation to the world that echoes Michel Foucault's account of sixteenth century knowledge being based on a hermeneutic relationship to the phenomenal world.[67] Then the predominant belief in the West was that the world bore visible marks for the 'invisible analogies', correspondences that were felt to exist between things. "The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man."[68] The face of the world "is covered with

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[61]Ibid., p. 17.
[62]Talbot published English Etymologies at his own expense in 1847 in an addition of 500 volumes.
[63]Weaver, 1989, op. cit., p. 17.
[64]Talbot, English Etymologies, (London: J. Murray, 1847), p. 1.
[65]Ibid., p. 469.
[66]Ibid., p. 470.
[67]See Michel Foucault, 'The Prose of the World' in The Order of Things, (London: Tavistock Press, 1986), pp. 17- 45.
[68]Ibid., p. 17.

blazons, with characters, with ciphers and obscure words."[69] Language was not thought to be an arbitrary system in the sixteenth century but one which:

> has been set down in the world and forms a part of it, both because things themselves hide and manifest their own enigma like a language and because words offer themselves to men as things to be deciphered. The great metaphor of the book that one opens, that one pores over and reads in order to know nature, is merely the reverse and visible side of another transference, and a much deeper one, which forces language to reside in the world, among the plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals.[70]

For Foucault, knowledge within such an episteme was involved in a hopeless quest for truth, an attempt to uncover the traces of God in Natural phenomena. In many ways Talbot was looking for such likenesses. In his The Antiquity of the Book of Genesis he attempted to prove that there are allusions to the Bible narratives in the histories and mythologies of other nations:

> ...there remained a memory in heathen lands, of some mysterious Book having been known to their ancestors, though lost long since, and the greater part of its contents forgotten. But that, nevertheless, a recollection had been preserved of the subject of the Book. That it related to the Creation.[71]

For Talbot the Pandora fable was borrowed from the biblical narrative of the temptation of Eve[72]. His researches here, like those in etymology, proceed as a rather incredible hermeneutic quest for meaning, for truth. There was a lost clarity between words and things, all fables derive from the Hebrew scriptures. And thus the world was not meaningless for Talbot but full and signifying. The

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[69] Ibid., p. 27.
[70] Ibid., p. 35.
[71] Talbot, The Antiquity of the Book of Genesis, (London: Longman, Orme, Green, Brown and Longman, 1839), p. 5.
[72] Ibid., p. 11.

world might be a text to be read. Meaning was to be unravelled from the phenomenal world like the traces of scriptures he tried to find amidst "Grecian Mythology— a singular medley of tales, which have come down to us in a great confusion— a tangled web..."[73]

But etymology signified a kind of hopeless hermeneutic quest for a transparency between words and things, the desire to find an underlying meaning to language. This was very much Foucault's view of the sixteenth century episteme—involving "a knowledge that can, and must proceed by the infinite accumulation of confirmations all dependent on one another. And for this reason, from its very foundations, this knowledge will be a thing of sand."[74] Foucault's critique is close to that made of etymology by Talbot's close friend and noted scientist, Sir John Herschel, who saw etymology as nothing but a fanciful and highly conjectural affair.

> Were language a true picture of Nature, a perfect daguerreotype of all her forms, this proceeding might be pardonable...But common language is a mass of metaphor, grounded not on philosophical resemblances, but on loose, fanciful and often mistaken analogies.[75]

Is Weaver's interpretation of Talbot's work vulnerable to the same fancies of conjecture? Discussing a photograph from The Pencil of Nature, 'The Open Door' (see fig. 9), Weaver points out how the objects represented are clearly emblematic: the broom represents the spirit, ("the broom that sweeps the threshold clean") the bridle, Reason (it "checks the passions") and the lantern, Truth, ("the attribute of the Light of the World.")[76]

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[73]Ibid., p. 6.
[74]Foucault, 1986, op. cit., p. 30.
[75]Quoted in Weaver, 1989, op. cit., p. 15.
[76]Ibid., p. 18.

But, perhaps, one also can see the picture in relationship to photography itself. In this image showing a door opening on a dark interior, a dark room, it is tempting to propose an analogy between what is being pictured and the 'dark room' of the camera obscura itself.[77] John Locke's well known use of the metaphor of the camera obscura as an emblem of the mimetic orientation of the mind, adds further possibilities of a comparison.

> For methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them.[78]

In relation to 'The Open Door', it is worthwhile pointing out Rosalind Krauss's interesting discussion of an early photograph by Stieglitz, 'Sunlight and Shadows: Paula/ Berlin', (1889)[79]. The picture is of a young woman in a room, seated at a table on which she is writing, the table placed by an open window through which there floods the sunlight that supplies the illumination for the image. To Krauss the photograph "presents us with what could almost be called a catalogue of self-definition: an elaborate construction through which we are shown what, in its very nature a photograph is."[80] This self-reflexivity involves a series of photographs within the photograph, portrait photographs framed on her desk and on the wall, but it is the striated bands of light coming through the blinds, from the open window, which provide most interest, the window acting as "a symbolic stand in for the shutter of the camera— for that

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[77]I owe this other reading from a discussion with Mike Weaver.
[78]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Book II, Chapter XI, Section 17 (New York: Dutton, n.d.), p. 107. (First published 1689.)
[79]Rosalind Krauss, 'Stieglitz/Equivalents' in October, Winter 1979, MIT Press, pp.129-140.
[80]Ibid., p. 131.

mechanical aperture which functions to admit light into the darkened room of the camera."[81]

Stieglitz's image speaks of the processes that generate and define its own being. Clearly this is much less emphatic in Talbot's picture; 'The Open Door', records not an interior flooded with light but an exterior view, a view looking into a darkened chamber. But conjectural as the reading may be, such an interpretation would perhaps fit more in accord with the text accompanying the picture, which, while not describing the camera obscura, is, nevertheless attentive to the characteristics of the photograph. The text invites comparisons between 'The Open Door' and Dutch painting— the "authority of the Dutch school of art" legitimised artists "taking as subjects of representation scenes of daily and familiar occurence."[82] It is an attention to the overlooked and momentary, the art of photography will contribute: "A casual gleam of sunshine, or a shadow thrown across his path, a time withered oak, or a moss covered stone may awake a train of thoughts and feelings, and picturesque imaginings."[83] Once again time is the concern of the text: a reflection on differing photographic subject matter, differing states of time, impermanence and permanence. One gains further clarification to these 'picturesque imaginings' when one begins to reconsider other plates of The Pencil of Nature. Thus the first plate of the book which shows not a time withered oak, but, as the title tells us, 'Part of Queen's College, Oxford', a structure indexed by the passage of time. The text accompanying the image insists on the state of irrepair of this stone edifice: [t]his building presents on its surface the most evident marks of the injuries of time and weather, in the braided state of the stone, which was probably of bad quality originally."[84] Looking at Talbot's

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[81]Ibid., p. 133.
[82]Talbot, 1969, op. cit., n. p.
[83]Ibid., n. p.
[84]Ibid., n. p.

photographs one also finds a fine example of the medium's facility to fix a momentary glimmer in the detail of the open window, catching the last rays of sunlight in 'The Paris Boulevards'.

It is perhaps now worthwhile considering Talbot's hermeneutics further. Justification for Weaver's own hermeneutic feats before Talbot's prints is given by an example of Talbot's own reading of an image from antiquity. Here, suggests Weaver, is proof that Talbot's interpretations were not simply confined to texts, images were also seen as weighty with symbolic import. Weaver turns to Talbot's book Hermes[85] and his discussion of Micali's picture of King Arcesilas, a picture which shows the relationship between the mythic king Arcesilas of Etruria with "the Judge of the lower world", Osiris of Egypt. Sacks of grain are being weighed in the presence of Arcesilas which are being carried into a subterranean granary— a picture which is described by Talbot as a "mythos" and in which grain is seen as emblematic of "good works".[86] Following this Weaver proposes a photograph by Talbot might also be seen as a "mythos" and even goes so far as to postulate a similarly symbolic transportation of grain might lie behind Talbot's barnyard scene, 'The Ladder': a particularly conjectural interpretation of such a photograph, since it lacks the grain and there is nothing at all subterranean about the picture.[87]

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[85] Hermes: or Classical and Antiquarian Researches. No. 1., (London: Longman, Orme, Green, Brown & Longman, 1838). The book formed part of a desire to produce a unified history of humankind in which pagan and biblical traditions were reconciled. Its aims were explained in the preface:

> There are many points of contact between the existing monuments of these different countries [Italy, Greece, Egypt] than have yet been observed and pointed out...these great nations must undoubtedly have exerted an influence (be it more or less) upon each other's language, customs and civilisation; and it is the province of the antiquary and philologer to detect and demonstrate the evidences of it which may still remain. (p.vii)

[86] Weaver, 1993, op. cit., p. 12.
[87] Ibid., p. 12.

Against Weaver's example of Talbot's discussion of the representation of the mythical King of Arceslias, one could look at Talbot's reading of images from antiquity in Hermes II. While the image Weaver uses to illustrate his text is not used as an illustration in Talbot's book, the following reading by Talbot is in specific relation to two illustrations in his book (see fig. 10). In his quest for hidden correspondences, Talbot as hermeneut discusses "one of the strangest stories that remains to us from antiquity."

> Diodonus Siculus relates, that when Hercules brought to Eurystheus the wild boar of Erymanthus, the monarch was so terrified that he hid himself in a brazen vessel.
>
> This action of Eurystheus is so utterly unheroic— indeed so helplessly imbecile— that it has been contented by some learned men...that it could never have been intended for serious history, but should be considered as a mere joke.[88]

Talbot considers the way this subject is represented among the tombs of ancient Etrurian art recently recovered from the tombs of Vulci. He directs us to two illustrations from the vases which " treat the subject nearly in the same way, and are certainly imitated from some much more ancient original."[89] Here the reading of Talbot's is attentive to the attitude of Eurystheus and the contradiction between the myth and the image.

> He is represented *with his two hands upraised.* This being constantly so represented, shows that it was a settled part of the tradition. But is this the attitude of one seeking concealment? Certainly not! Against, what a place of concealment is this tub or pithos! how absurd and imbecile.![90]

This contradiction between legend and ancient picture, invites another interpretation.

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[88]Talbot, Hermes. No 2, (London: Longman, Orme, Green, Brown and Longmans,1839), p.152.
[89]Ibid., p. 157.
[90]Ibid., p. 158.

> It is a fragment of the very ancient religious mythology of the East.
>
> Hercules personifies *Vindicta Divina*, the Divine Vengeance, casting an impure spirit, a sinful soul, typified by a *hog*, into the *Infernal Pithos*. The monarch of Hades, the ruler of the Pithos, who answers to Orcus, Pluto, and elsewhere to Abaddon, king of the bottomless pit, stretches forth his hands to receive his victim. [91]

The image is interpreted as a "sublime allegory" concerning the spirit's passage to the underworld, the hands reaching up being associated with those of Hades, "always outstretched to receive new victims."[92] Of course what I am presenting here is another example of Talbot's symbolic reading, but what strikes the reader is his initial attention to the images, his fixing upon what is literally there in the images and the contradiction between what is being shown— the obvious signification of arms upraised— and the existing legend concerning cowardice.

In many ways what I have been doing in my approach to Talbot's The Pencil of Nature is to call attention to what is literally there in the photographs. In many respects I have drawn attention to an obvious aspect of this book, but one Weaver overlooks. Looking at it as the first book accompanied with photographs, I have shown how both its text and photographs reflect a sense of wonderment over the discovery of a new means of representing the world. The Pencil of Nature appears to be less concerned with establishing a symbolic pictorial language, but, instead, is centred upon establishing and defining the particular identity, ontology, of photography.

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[91] Ibid., p. 158-9.
[92] Ibid., p. 159.

The Art of Describing

I now wish to turn to painting, the painting from which, as Talbot points out in the text accompanying 'The Open Door', photography can be seen to take its cue—seventeenth century Dutch painting. In bringing out the salient characteristics this kind of picturing represents, I will be discussing Svetlana Alpers's counter-hermeneutic study, The Art of Describing.[93] Alpers proposes Dutch painting was involved in an autotelic notion of representation and through such notions makes a link between the characteristics of such painting and photography. Her thesis also rests upon tying the representations to be found in Dutch painting to a perception which trusted in optical devices, mechanisms for the assistance of seeing the world: the camera obscura, microscope and telescope.

Alpers's The Art of Describing demarcates two ways of picturing the world—Albertian and non-Albertian. The first is conceived like a window on the perceived world. The artist positions him or herself on the viewer's side of the picture surface and looks through the frame to the world which he or she then reconstructs on the surface of the picture by means of the conventions of linear perspective. The second mode, gives us not a window, but rather a surface onto which an image of the world casts itself, just as light is focused through a lens and forms a picture on the retina of the eye. In place of an artist who frames the world in order to picture it, the world produces its own image without a necessary frame. This replicative image is just there for the looking, without the intervention of a human maker. With the Albertian perspectivalist representation, the picture remained a framed surface or pane situated at a certain distance from a viewer who looks through it at a second or substitute world. For the Renaissance this "world was a stage on which human figures

[93]Svetlana Alpers, The Art of Describing, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).

performed significant actions based on the texts of the poets."[94] Italian art is seen as a narrative art. By contrast, the art of Northern painting is seen as an art of describing. And importantly, photography is seen to be inextricably tied up with this non-Albertian way of describing, a picturing in which attention is given to the surface of the world at the expense of the representation of narrative action.

Alpers questions the idea that painting is underpinned by some form of semantic and narrative reflection. There are pictures that tell no story— Vermeer's View of Delft for example, a painting which is neither the iconography nor emblem of anything but quite simply a view, a fragment of a larger world compressed into a piece of canvas. Alpers's account of the painting is of a process outside human agency, the image of a "world that continues beyond the canvas" has spread itself out on the canvas "staining the surface with colour and light, impressing itself upon it".[95] In the light of such notions, it is not surprising to find that Alpers goes on to link photography with the Dutch tradition. Photography carries the same 'aspectuality'. It is the photograph's indexical nature that is the cause of this.

> Many characteristics of photographs— those very characteristics that make them so real— are common also to the northern descriptive mode: fragmentariness; arbitrary frames; the immediacy that the first photographers expressed by claiming that the photograph gave Nature the power to reproduce herself unaided by man. If we want an historical precedence for the photograph image it is in the rich mixture of seeing, knowing and picturing that manifested itself in seventeenth century images.[96]

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[94] Ibid., p. xix.
[95] Ibid., p. 27.
[96] Ibid., p. 43.

Alpers is writing against the symbolism of Dutch painting and it is here that her interpretation becomes very relevant to my counter-symbolic approach to the photographs of Talbot. Her account of Dutch art draws upon the writings of Constantijn Huygens, secretary to the stadholder of the Dutch republic. His writings reflect a view of the world through microscopes and telescopes and are marked by fascinations for the characteristic of external phenomena viewed through optical instruments. The smallest things that were once invisible can be seen with the help of the magnifying glasses:

> And discerning everything with our eyes as if we were touching it with our hands; we wander through a world of tiny creatures till now unknown, as if it were a newly discovered continent of our globe.[97]

Primacy is given to sight in Huygens's accounts and this is significant for Alpers with her thesis concerning the prioritisation of description over narration and visuality over textuality. But there is a further aspect to this perception of the world through telescope and microscope. "An immediate and devastating result of bringing to mens' eyes the details of living things (the organisms viewed in the microscope) or the farthest and largest (the heavenly bodies viewed through the telescopic lens) was the calling into question of any fixed sense of scale and proportion."[98] Huygens writes about this loss of measure and doubting of our senses.

> If nothing else, let us learn this, that the estimation which we commonly make of the size of things is variable, untrustworthy, and fatuous insofar as we believe that we can eliminate every comparison and can discern any greater difference in size merely by the evidence of our senses. Let us in short be aware that it is impossible to call anything 'little' or 'large' except by comparison. And then, as a result, let us firmly establish the proposition that the multiplying of bodies...is infinite; once we accept this as a fundamental rule then no body, even the most minute, may be so

[97]Ibid., p. 17.
[98]Ibid.,p. 18.

> greatly magnified by lenses without it being possible to assert that it can be magnified more by other lenses, and then by still others, and so on endlessly. [99]

Alpers finds parallels to the disruption of scale described by Huygens in Dutch painting. The pictures are seen to break with a perspectival paradigm in their pure descriptivity, one which bestows equal importance to the tiny and large and upsets the proportions and scale of things. The characteristic feature of Dutch painting for Alpers is a loss of any fixed measure or proportion in their perception on the world. This is clearly shown with her examples: Paulus Potter's painting in which a young bull with a tiny fly on its extensive flank, looms large against a dwarfed church tower in the distance (see fig. 11); Philips Koninck's panoramas which extend the "small reach of the Dutch land into an expanse that rivals the dimensions of the globe itself; the image of the artist reflected in miniature on the surface of a wine jug in Abraham van Beyeren's still lifes".[100]

An overwhelming sense of the density of the phenomenal world is opened up by telescope and microscope. While mirrored in Dutch paintings through their play with scales, Talbot's photographs might also be characterised by this sense of a loss of measure and sense of proportion.[101] This may well explain the measuring impulse that seems to lie behind many of Talbot's pictures. Recall his first reponse to the negative of the Oriel window, his counting the

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[99] Ibid., p. 18.

[100] Ibid., p. 19.
Peter Galassi sees such abrupt discontinuites in pictorial space as part of "a new norm of pictorial coherence that made photographic conceivable", his example is the sharp contrast "between obstructing foreground and distant subject" in Friedrich Loos View of Salzburg from the Monchsberg, (1829-30). See his Before Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 19.

[101] Talbot was both an amateur botanist and astronomist. H.J.P. Arnold's biography of Talbot gives us an insight into his interest in spectacles unseen by the naked eye, opened up to him by microscope (the process of crystallisation) and telescope (an eclipse at Marienburg); see Arnold, op. cit., pp. 73-75 and pp. 246-254.

panes of glass recorded. There is a love of taxonomic forms, of objects— books, glass, china— laid out on shelves. According to Ian Jeffrey, Talbot appeared to delight in identifying those images where "nature appeared to compose itself."[102] For example, Talbot brings the "ponderous mass of a haystack...to an order of crisply intersecting planes; it is revealed by light and the shadows which are a function of light, systematised by the geometries of the ladder and the hay-knife, those simple signifiers by which the dimensions and the location of the object are realised."[103] There is an order or ordering of things in Talbot's pictures. Ladders, for all their potential symbology, can also serve as an effective indicator of scale, introducing a means of measure against the 'immeasurable' grain of the haystack.

In Word and Image Norman Bryson expresses a sense of melancholia evoked by the paintings of Charles LeBrun[104]. LeBrun's paintings are characterised by an 'over legibility'. Everything within his pictures is there to be read, decoded. Even the gestures and expressions of his figures remain clear and transparent to interpretation. Faces physiognomically signal particular emotional conditions. Before such painting, because they "Exist[ing] only to yield up their quantum of meaning, once signification flows out of them, they are left behind for dead."[105] The images translate too readily into narrative. Nothing but the signified holds the objects and figures together in his paintings, and "once it is taken away, they take on the life of husks."[106] Talbot's photographs are not overcoded, but nevertheless the kind of 'reading' of them made by Mike Weaver has the tendency to drain the pictures of signification in a way not too unlike that

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[102]See Ian Jeffrey, 'British Photography from Fox Talbot to E. O. Hoppé' in The Real Thing, (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975), p.7.
[103]Ibid. p. 7.

[104]See Norman Bryson 'The Legible Body: LeBrun' in Word and Image (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 29-57.
[105]Ibid., p. 42
[106]Ibid., p. 42.

felt by Bryson in his relationship to LeBrun's painting. The melancholia Weaver finds in both Talbot's work and the photographer himself, is also part of this hermeneutic process itself, in its emptying out of images.[107]

Bryson has written of two mandates for art history, the hermeneutic and archival.[108] For him the former has been severely neglected and art history should take its cue from the example of literary criticism which never excluded reading and interpretational skills. But literary criticism has itself now opened into a particular debate, with Umberto Eco— critical of the excesses of both nineteenth century hermetic literary criticism and more recent deconstructionist approaches to the text— advocating the need for 'limiting interpretation'.[109] One should add, however, that Weaver's response, distinct from any deconstructionist reading, preserves the author figure. Weaver's readings of the image serves to anchor Talbot more strongly to the work. Indeed, his hermeneutics proceed from the intention of substantiating Talbot's creative identity as an artist. According to Weaver, Talbot's studies in etymology and mythology have a crucial bearing on his photographs because they "show him to have been capable of the most imaginative metaphorical thought".[110] This leads him to go on to compare the photographer to the poet: "A photographer, like a poet, does not deal in separable abstractions but engages in a process by which knowledge is constantly transformed by interests sustained simultaneously over long periods of time, forming eventually a single organism— the creative identity of the artist."[111]

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[107] Weaver, 1993, op. cit., p. 20.

[108] See Bryson's 'Introduction' to Calligram, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. xii-xxix.

[109] For Eco's critique see Umberto Eco's 'Interpretation and History' in Interpretation and Overinterpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 23-43. The quote is taken from p.40.

[110] Weaver, 1993, op. cit., p. 11

[111] Ibid., p.11.

In contrast to such an author-centred approach, my discussion of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature has been concerned to show that his photographs are not fully under his control; the photographer for example, as Talbot himself informs us, can find things in the photograph he never saw when he took the picture. Both pictures and writing are involved with what photography is, or rather, what photography was thought to be. As a result, fascinating as Weaver's readings are they overlook what one might term the 'photographicity' of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. Talbot's pictures reveal a preoccupation with the effects and scenes which lend themselves to photography— the weathered stone on the face of a building, the intricate excess of detail presented by dense foliage or haystack, the fixing of shadows or a momentary glimmer of sunshine. And the book also reveals a concern with the performance of photography, its potential to one day be able to record what goes on in the dark; a rather menacing utilisation of the medium, prophetic of the rapidity with which photography has been used as a means of surveillance.

I want now to turn to books by the English landscape photographer, Peter Henry Emerson; books on the natural landscape which mark a decided shift in relation to photography from that of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. With Emerson we no longer have the fascination for photographic detail, indeed no less than its opposite with his execration of biting sharpness in an image and his use of selective focus as a means to match photography to the corporeality of perception. I will once again be looking at photography in the book and I will be dealing with relationships between image and text. But since Emerson's photographs are accompanied by prose descriptions and accounts of his relationship with natural phenomena, I am not dealing with such clear relationships between image and text as we find with the paired image and prose pieces in Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. Emerson's books are not so demonstrative, not edged by the pedagogic function of Talbot's book. As I will

be showing, a phenomenological paradigm becomes important in understanding them. These photo-books attest to a shift in relationship to photography, bring out the sense of the inadequacies and limitations of the medium, show how photography is not inexhaustible and remains distinct from the wonder of nature. This shift from early nineteenth to later nineteenth century photography in the book, will then be discussed, in Chapter Three, through two books, two novels, which show the changing uses of photography in fiction; from photography, or rather daguerreotypy, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, which is described as being able to make extraordinary insights into character, to the radically different references to photography made in Thomas Hardy's A Laodicean, a book in which photography provides not simply a limited representation, but a misrepresentation.

CHAPTER TWO

The Limits of Representation: Peter Henry Emerson

Peter Henry Emerson sought the truth of a full representation of nature through both words and images. His photography and writing concerns the nature of perception itself and can be seen to mark the emergence of what one might best define as a modernising vision— a way of seeing which challenges the security of a monocular perspectival paradigm.[1] What I will be arguing in this chapter is that both Emerson's photographs and writings can be seen to be characterised by a phenomenological approach to the natural world, by a desire to convey something of the corporeal experience of the density of external phenomena.

Emerson was both a photographer of and writer on East Anglian life— he found his subject in the Broadlands of Norfolk and the coast of Suffolk. Having trained as a doctor, he took up photography in 1882 and, between 1886 and 1895, he published eight sets of photographs in books and in portfolios. It is the peculiar characteristic of a number of these books which will concern me here.

Emerson's photographic books are not at all homogeneous. His last books reveal a marked shift in emphasis from his first which has been interpreted as a movement from a descriptive and informative photography and writing to a more subjectivised and expressive use of words and pictures, a turning 'inwards' as

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[1] I am borrowing the term 'Modernising Vision' from Jonathan Crary. See his 'Modernizing Vision' in ed. Hal Foster, Vision and Visuality (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp.29-44. This essay provides the basis for his more extensive analysis of what amounts to an epistemic shift in the nature of perception dating from the early nineteenth century in his book, Techniques of the Observer, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

his works mature[2]. It is this shift which will be the focus of study in this chapter. And with it will be examined the accompanying notion that his books trace an increasing sense of the disparity between what he saw and sensed and what art and language allowed him to record. By the time of his last books, On English Lagoons (1893) and Marsh Leaves (1895), Emerson reflects on the limits of representation. And as a consequence they are marked by a certain retreat from the intelligibilty of his first books, Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads (1886) and Pictures of East Anglian Life (1888), books in which both pictures and prose would provide informative descriptions of the life and landscape on the Norfolk and Suffolk broads. In On English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves, words no longer clearly relate to the pictures, but provide vivid 'fragmentary' accounts of incidents and landscape phenomena in East Anglia—a diaristic log of impressions in the former and, in the latter, a collection of disconnected anecdotes, marked by a certain predilection towards the grotesque and a delight in local tales and dialect. The photographs of Emerson in these last two books are very often small and reticent, providing a mist- filled world, empty or with figures reduced to silhouettes in the distance.

Image and Text in Emerson's First Books

Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads, Emerson's first published book is large and rather cumbersome, measuring 28cm by 40cm, landscape in format and containing 40 platinotype plates 'from nature' with 'general and descriptive texts' by both Emerson and the painter T.F.Goodall. The book is marked by an uncomplicated relationship between words and photographs. Text and image are paired, the prose tending to 'explain' and narrativise the pictures. As Emerson himself says:

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[2]See in particular Ellen Handy, 'Art and Science in P.H. Emerson's Naturalistic Vision' in ed. Mike Weaver, British Photography in the Nineteenth Century, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 181-195.

> the text, far from being illustrated by the plates, is illustrative of and somewhat supplementary to them; sometimes explanatory, and containing interesting incidental information or folklore intended to bring the scene or phase of life treated of more vividly before the reader, and depicting in words surroundings and effects which cannot be expressed by pictorial art.[3]

Writing fills in what cannot be indicated by the image. Words and images work together, producing an interrelated and more total representation of the life and landscape on the Norfolk broads than if we were offered one medium.

However, while the text can bring the static photographic image to life, "more vividly before the reader", it can also ignore certain 'facts' in the pictures. One image from Life and Landscape..., 'Poling the Marsh-Hay' (see fig. 12), shows a young woman and a second (male) figure carrying marsh hay piled up on a litter. The accompanying text, written by Goodall, ignores the physical hardship involved in poling the marsh hay and the fact that one of the labourers in the picture is female. Instead, 'poling' is simply seen as a "picturesque mode of conveyance" which is adopted because the load has to be carried over ground so soft that cart or barrow would be worse than useless.[4] The prose notes only the pictorial effect of the type of work pictured— the description 'picturesque' inviting intimations of mortality, associations which might have taken the viewer away from the actuality of the photographically witnessed event and to the symbolic overtones of this end-of-the-day scene with hewn hay being carried like the dead on a bier.[5]

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[3] P. H. Emerson, Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads, (London:Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886), preface,. n. p.
[4] Ibid., p. 45.
[5] See Loraine Herbert's 'Explication: Emerson and Goodall, *Poling the Marsh Hay* in History of Photography, Volume 16, Number 2, Summer 1992, p. 181.

Prose in Emerson's first books usually remains dependent upon the pictures. Such a relationship between pictures and prose is indicated by Emerson's 'In The Barley Harvest' and its accompanying text in his second book Pictures of East Anglian Life— a book larger than the first, measuring 35cm x 42cm and illustrated with 32 photogravures and 15 small illustrations. In the prose accompanying the picture, 'In The Barley Harvest', Emerson points out what the scene describes, sets the tableau of labour in context, picks out things we might not see in the image, the sweat on the face of one of the workers, for example. The picture was taken, the text informs us, during:

> one of those short rests so frequent in this hard labour. Here, one man is honing his scythe, while another, his face streaming with perspiration, has taken off his hat with which to fan himself, and stretches forth his hand to his mate, who, leaving his rake in the field, has brought the bottle of 'home-brewed', with which they will all quench their thirst.[6]

Emerson's desire to classify and understand the life and landscape seen and experienced in East Anglia, reached its clearest point in Pictures of East Anglian Life. The book's preface clarifies its author's intention. Emerson's aim amounts to an almost anthropological descriptive project:

> My aim has been to produce truthful pictures of East Anglian Peasant and Fisherfolk life, and of the landscape in which such life is lived. With this end in view, I made ample notes whilst living in East Anglia, so that all the information on shrimping, trawling, smelting, anchor-fishing, poaching, ploughing, harvesting, fencing, brickmaking, eel-picking, decoy-work, and the many other operations illustrated, was gained by actual observation and afterwards amplified and corrected by information gathered from the lips of specialists in the various subjects.[7]

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[6]Quoted in Nancy Newhall, P.H. Emerson (New York: Aperture, 1975), p.198.

[7]P.H.Emerson, Pictures of East Anglian Life (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887), preface. n. p.

By the time of his last books, it will be, instead, 'hearsays' and rather grotesque stories which will be collected 'from the lips' of those working and living in the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. In On English Lagoons and Marsh leaves Emerson's text has little informative aspect, peasant life is not 'framed' and 'typed' by prose and image as it is in Pictures of East Anglian Life. The latter is a book which gives us details about the character and intelligence, habits, politics, diet, superstitions, folklore of the people in East Anglia; a book which was intended to provide, according to Emerson himself, a "humble contribution to a Natural History of the English Peasantry and Fisherfolk".[8]

The motivations behind many of his depictions of East Anglian people are explained in his theoretical treatise, Naturalistic Photography (1889). There Emerson advocated that:

> One thing you must not forget, that is the type; you must choose your models most carefully, and they must without fail be picturesque and typical. The student should feel that there never was such a fisherman; or such a ploughman, or such a poacher, or such an old man, or such a beautiful girl as he is picturing.[9]

In the text for Pictures of East Anglian Life, Emerson differentiates between two peasant 'types', that of the Norfolk and Suffolk type. The former are the "commoner type, average height, with... high cheek-bones, dark bright eyes, and black hair...very active, intelligent and wiry."[10] By contrast, the Suffolk peasant is lacking in the intelligence and fine feeling of his Norfolk counterpart

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[8]Ibid. n.p.
[9]P.H. Emerson, Naturalistic Photography (London: Dawbarn and Ward, 1899), p. 246. (First published 1889).
[10]Emerson, 1887, op. cit., p. 141.

and seen to be "of large muscular development, with light or reddish hair and grey or blue eyes."[11]

One portrait stands out from this book in that it is meant to give us the 'typology' of the Norfolk peasant. Entitled 'Haymaker with Rake' (see fig. 13) it offers us "a specimen of the smaller dark type of peasant."[12] Although the Norfolk labourer is presented as a specimen, a mere object to be typed and classified, the picture taken from a low angle, looking up at the figure, serves to give the small labourer a certain grandeur and monumentality. The peasant is shown gazing contemplatively out of the picture. His gaze addresses, not the viewer, but something or someone, out of frame, to the left. The text accompanying the picture supplies a narrative around the figure, a supplement which serves to animate the image. The text begins with a scene-setting description and changes to a closing succession of musings as to what the peasant might have been thinking when photographed:

> ...the marsh-hay has been cut, and he has been sent with others on a threatening afternoon to rake it into cocks, lest the coming rainstorm should wet it during the night...before him, in the distance, stretches the broad, across which he can just see his cottage-home silhouetted against the sky. His face and the haycocks are softly lighted up by the setting sun, which is nearly clouded over by the coming storm. Who can enter into his thoughts? Who can provoke the workings of his simple mind? Is he thinking of his young wife and baby at home? or of his brothers long since gone to a distant colony? Is he meditating on the age in which he lives? or his own lot? What is he thinking as he rests on his rake? [13]

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[11] Ibid., p. 141.
[12] Ibid., p. 141.
[13] Ibid., p. 141.

The prose moves towards a sense of the indefinable in description. But essentially these early books remain not indefinable but legible and rather self-evident. They are also abundant in informational detail. Appendices to Pictures of East Anglian Life give a summary of meteorological observations, figures of the changing rents, husbandry, live-stock and labour between 1794 and 1886, as well as lists of rare fishes and birds on the broads. After 1888 Emerson's books provide decidedly less informative documents. An increasing fascination for effects of light becomes noticeable. The people in the landscape are no longer foregrounded in the images and the texts become chronicles of Emerson's own experiences.

Emerson and Absorption

This change of accent in his work is marked by the publication of Wild Life on a Tidal Water (1890), a book which recounts through photographs— 30 photo etchings— and text, a sojourn in a houseboat on Breydon Water, Great Yarmouth. The book provides a "[s]imple record" ,according to Emerson himself, of his "impressions and experience whilst living with my friend T.F.Goodall on his house boat on Breydon Water."[14] A stress on 'impressions' is appropriate for the emerging characteristic of some of his pictures in this book, the apparent attention and preoccupation with form, often over and above the representation of human figures. In the image of fishermen repairing cloth— 'In a Sail Loft' (see fig. 14)— the fishermen are pushed to the background of the picture, engrossed in their work. This reorientation of emphasis creates an effect of dedramatisation and denarrativisation. It is as if the figures are incidental features in the picture whose main focus appears to be upon the play of forms, of light and shadows, set up in the contrasting grids of mullioned windows against the sea of crumpled cloth that covers the floor of the loft.

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[14] P.H. Emerson, Wild Life on a Tidal Water (London: Sampson Low and Co.,1890), n.p.

In his introduction to Wild Life on a Tidal Water Emerson emphasized that "all his descriptions were written 'on-the-spot' and with as much care and thought as a good landscape painter bestows on his work".[15] Such writing 'on-the-spot' produces some of Emerson's most haptic prose pieces in his last two books, On English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves. There the shift in character of his books and their image/text relationship is most pronounced.

On English Lagoons (1893) gives us an account through pictures and words of the 'voyages of two amateur wherrymen on the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads'. Illustrated with 15 copperplate photographic engravings, it chronicles 12 months spent on a converted sailing barge. The book is much smaller than the first books, 18cm X 23 cm. The kind of image we find in On English Lagoons is best exemplfied by one small picture, measuring only 12.5 cm X 7.5 cm. Entitled 'The Marshes in June' (see fig. 15), it shows a few sheep, and two figures, one in the distance, the other in the foreground. While pictured near the camera, the latter figure has his back turned towards us, he remains aloof, shuts us out from the picture, absorbed as he is in the landscape scene before him. The picture records an evening or early morning time, the rays of the sun edging in light the left hand side of the silhouetted figure with his back to us. There is no accompanying prose to the image. The prose in On English Lagoons takes the form of a diary, a simple chronological account of scenes and events witnessed and people met during the voyage. (The text matches the movement of the boat, 'drifting' from description to description, place to place.) But one cannot help but think that this image, one of the most exquisite and beautiful of Emersons's miniatures, is set in particular relationship to the prose. It interrupts and acts as a foil to a key point in Emerson's narrative, a point at which he gives voice to his contempt for the city, that place where, he says,

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[15]Ibid., ix.

"degeneration awaits the race, where all is vanity and artifice, for the curse of nature is upon it."[16] The picture is so placed in the book it interrupts this condemnatory sentence, offering the reader a glimpse of an Edenic site void of vanity and artifice.

The image renders a contemplative, harmonic, relationship between figure and landscape. It constitutes a picture of absorption, to borrow from Michael Fried's term, a picture paralleling our own attention and absorption in the picture, the characteristic of a dedramatising and modernising vision with its emphasis on engrossment and reverie as against theatricality. Fried's study Absorption and Theatricality,[17] gives us a beholder-centred account of the evolution of a central tradition within French painting starting from the mid 1750s. At the heart of that tradition was the imperative that the painter find a way to negate or neutralise the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld— that the painter manage in one way or another to establish the fiction, the meta-illusion, that the beholder does not exist, that there is no one standing before the picture. In Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin's paintings of games and amusements one finds what Fried calls "the purified state of the absorptive tradition."[18] His 'Card Player', for example, pictures an " essentially inward, concentrated, closed state of mind"[19] . The young boy's absorption in his game of cards sets up "a natural correlative for [Chardin's] own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work." [20]

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[16]P.H. Emerson, On English Lagoons (London: David Nutt, 1893), p. 26.
[17]Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality— Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).
[18]Ibid., p. 48.
[19]Ibid., p. 48.
[20]Ibid., p. 51.

Fried's thesis rests upon a particular notion of veracity in representation, an absorptive way of picturing which "could no longer be taken for granted as a pictorial effect because for the first time it was called upon to defeat theatricality."[21] His argument stems from Jacques Diderot's articulation of certain 'anti-theatrical' conditions that had to be fulfilled for the art of painting to successfully persuade its audience of the truthfulness of its representations. Figures in paintings should not address the viewer, indeed, a painter's 'dramatis personae' should not even seem, by virtue of their actions and expressions, to evince even a partial consciousness of being beheld. The task of the painter was therefore to extinguish or forestall that consciousness by depicting figures entirely engrossed, 'absorbed' in their actions and states of mind.

It is Fried's comments on the paintings of Jean-François Millet which provide the most fitting perspective on Emerson's images of peasants, since the painter provides the model for Emerson's own photographic representations of rural life in Norfolk and Suffolk. He was indebted to the painter. Six pages of Emerson's Naturalistic Photography are filled with quotes from Millet.[22] According to Fried, Millet's scenes of peasant life of the 1850s and later indicate a "sustained attempt to defeat the theatrical by exploiting a thematics of absorption in work and work-related states as an alternative to the representation of dramatic action and expression."[23] 'The Gleaners', for example, pictures "a thematics of absorption in a mechanically repetitive state"; 'Man With a Hoe' presents a figure "brutalised by physical labour, staring vacantly into space as if registering nothing but [his] utter exhaustion."[24] Contemporary commentators noted the veracity of Millet's way of picturing. Ernest Chesneau noted how nothing

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[21] Michael Fried, Courbet's Realism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 13.
[22] Emerson, 1899, op. cit., pp. 112-117.
[23] Fried, 1990, op. cit., p. 41
[24] Ibid., p. 41.

appeared to pose in Millet's paintings: "not men, nor animals, nor trees, nor blades of grass".[25]

However, Fried qualifies such responses to Millet by also calling attention to the pictorialisation in his work. There is seen to be a tendency within Millet's paintings to "dramaticize his essentially anti-dramatic subject"; an effort, for example, to "monumentalize his figures' humble, supposedly unselfconscious actions."[26] And thus when one begins to bring in relationships between Millet's and Emerson's pictures of labour— Emerson's borrowing from Millet's 'Man with a Hoe' for his 'Haymaker with Rake' for example— one cannot describe them as fully absorptive depictions. The monumentalising of labourers in both involves a pictorialisation, a staging of figures, which disrupts the overriding veracity of a fully absorptive picture.

Traces of the pictorial and theatrical are, however, less evident in Emerson's later representations. 'The Marshes in June' signals this move from the pictorial to a fully absorptive way of picturing. As Fried notes "persuasive representations of absorption entailed evoking the perfect obliviousness of a figure or group of figures to everything but the objects of their absorption"[27]. And this is precisely the aspect of such pictures by Emerson as 'The Marshes in June', in which a figure is so engrossed in the scene before him, so immured in the world, oblivious, that he turns his back to the beholder.

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[25]Ibid., p. 43.
[26]Ibid., p. 45.
[27]Fried, 1980, op. cit., p. 66.

Physiological Optics

On English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves contain some extraordinarily latent images, of figures and boats looming out of mists. They present a murmuring of information, suggestions rather than full descriptions. One finds a certain explanation for this way of picturing in Emerson's theoretical treatise on photography— Naturalistic Photography. In this book he articulates a physiological theory of optics and gives us a clear insight into what amounts to a phenomenological approach to perception. The source of much of this is the scientific treatise Physiological Optics by the German physician, mathematician and physiologist, Hermann von Helmholtz; a study cited at length in Naturalistic Photography. Central to Helmholtz's study was the notion of the imperfection of the eye and the limitations of our vision in relationship to the phenomenal world. His work provides according to Emerson himself, "deeper proofs of the utter impossibility of reproducing nature as we see her."[28] Helmholtz points out how:

> [t]he image formed on the retina is exact only over a very small surface, the yellow spot. All the other parts of the retinal image are seen imperfectly, and the more so the nearer to the limit of the retina they fall. So that the image which we receive by the eye is like a picture, minutely and elaborately finished in the centre, but only roughly sketched in at the borders.[29].

Emerson realised that the human eye does not see as sharply as the photographic lens. He thus execrated 'biting sharpness' in a picture and advocated a differential focusing meant to bring out the principal object or figure in the scene more sharply while softening others, just as the eye would work, instantaneously, all peripheral objects being slightly out of focus.[30]

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[28]Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 184.
[29]Quoted from his lecture 'The Recent principle of the Theory of Vision' (1867), in Hermann von Helmholtz, Helmholtz on Perception- Its Physiology and Development, (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), p. 71.
[30]Emerson, 1899, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

John Ruskin is seen as an incorrigible realist and comes under fire by Emerson. On the obverse of a letter received from Ruskin, the photographer notes how his friend T.F. Goodall had met Ruskin, and found him no critic and, what is more, "saw him copying meticulously a peacock's feather."[31] And yet Emerson was closer to Ruskin than he thought. By 1857, in the 4th Volume of Modern Painters Ruskin articulated his belief concerning perception that "we never see anything clearly".[32] Thus the problem with photography, for Ruskin, comes to be precisely that which is believed to be its very merit— clarity. The truth is that photographs never:

> look entirely clear and sharp; but because clearness is supposed to be a merit in them they are usually taken from very clearly marked and un-Turnerian subjects, and such results as are misty and faint, though very often those which contain the most subtle renderings of nature, are thrown away and the clear ones only preserved. Those clear ones depend for much of their force on the faults of the process. Photography either exaggerates shades or loses detail in the lights and in many ways misses certain of the utmost subtleties of natural effect.[33]

"Such results as are misty and faint" exactly describe many of Emerson's most characteristic later pictures.

Emerson's mimetic project was highly critical and dismissive of realism which was seen to be involved in a myopic vision, a simple failing to see the wood for the trees, involving, what he terms, "merely a register of bald facts mathematically true."[34] Realism involves an over attentiveness to details and misses the particular effect of the whole. While realism might remain true to botany, it was false to nature.

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[31]The letter was dated 21st May, 1886, and is quoted in Neil Mcwilliam's and Veronica Sekules's Life and Landscape: P.H. Emerson, (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts,1986), p. 7.
[32]Quoted in David Harvey's 'Ruskin and Photography' in The Oxford Art Journal, 7:2, 1985, p. 29.
[33]Ibid., p.29.
[34]Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 174.

> The Realist makes no analysis, he is satisfied with the motes and leaves out the sunbeam. He will so far as he is able, paint all the veins of the leaves as they really are, and not as they look as a whole. For example, the realist if painting a tree a hundred yards off, would not strive to render the tree as it looks to him from where he is sitting, but he would probably gather leaves of the tree and place them before him, and paint them as they looked within twelve inches of his eyes, and as the modern Pre-Raphaelites did, he might even imitate the local colour of things themselves. Whereas the naturalistic painter would care for none of these things, he would endeavour to express the impression of the tree as it appeared to him when standing a hundred yards off, the tree taken as a whole, and as it looked, modified as it would be by various phenomena and accidental circumstances.[35]

The truth involved in Emerson's account of artistic practice is one which uses perception as its model—"nothing exists for us but what is perceived' [36]— and the particular physical, spatial relationship that exists between observer and subject. This is implied in the above quotation with its stress upon the painter representing how the tree looks from "where he is sitting", in accordance to what is seen from the physical site of perception; and also representing the various phenomena that might 'modify' the artist's perception. By this one might be led to include the 'aerial turbidity' that Emerson came to pay increasing attention to, in both his images and writing.

Turbidity was used by Helmholtz to designate the palpable character of the atmosphere, the moisture in the air which scatters the light and softens contours. High turbidity creates a haze or mist. Emerson's preference was for soft contours, fading and reappearing, what he called "this lost and found in which lies all the charm and mystery of nature".[37] In perspective scale the

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[35]Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[36]Ibid., p. 27.
[37]Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 73.

camera was all too true, yet false as far as the eye was concerned. A narrow angle lens as opposed to a wide angle was preferred by Emerson. The telephoto lens he used allowed the selective focus he desired to maintain in his pictures. This remote viewpoint gave a more truthful depiction, and yet the more distant and reticent the aspect of the resulting pictures. He was against the convention of photographs having areas of pure black and pure white, such pictures carried an unnaturally harsh tonal contrast. Emerson advocated subtle gradations in photographs. And the perfect time for him became the grey mist-filled day. A time where one can focus sharply and still maintain a 'naturalistic' effect, "for the mist scattering the light softens the contours of all objects."[38]

Emerson's naturalistic representation involves giving an 'impression' of the whole. He desired to match the image with the way the eyes perceive the world. A selective corporeal viewing was advocated, what he termed the "broad and ample generalisation of detail so necessary to pictorial work."[39] Jean-François Millet becomes the source of this belief, quoted by Emerson in Naturalistic Photography:

> Nothing counts except the fundamental. If a tailor tries on a coat, he stands off at a distance enough to see the fit. If he likes the general look, it is time enough then to examine the details: but if he should be satisfied with making fine button-holes and other accessories, even if they were chefs-d'oeuvre, on a badly cut coat, he will none the less have made a bad job[40].

This marks Emerson's main point of contention with Henry Peach Robinson. In his Pictorial Effect in Photography (1869) Robinson argued that because selective focusing is so instantaneous we are not conscious of it, despite the fact that we perceive not from a static monocular eye, but the result of sciatic

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[38]Ibid., p. 73.
[39]Ibid., p. 168.
[40]Ibid., p. 113.

movements of the eyes— change in focus is so quick everything 'appears' in the same focus.[41] However, for Emerson while "in nature the eye wanders up and down the landscape, and so gathers up the impressions, and all the landscape in turn appears sharp...a picture is not 'all the landscape', it should be seen at a certain distance."[42] The eye focuses selectively and gathers up a suggestion of the rest of the landscape. According to Emerson "nothing in nature has a hard outline, but everthing is seen against something else, often so subtlely that you cannot quite distinguish where one ends and the other begins."[43] There is no place for the eyes to rest if all the picture is in focus, "jammed into one plane"[44]. There is an unavoidable falseness involved with sharpness— "The 'sharp' ideal is the childish view taken of nature by the uneducated in art matters, and they call their production true, whereas, they are just about as artistically false as can be."[45] However, Emerson never went as far as those he termed the 'pseudo impressionists', those who when painting "the horse's head and top of a hansom cab, omit all other detail".[46] This amounts to a perceptual error for Emerson. We still see indirectly "in the retinal circle around the fovea centralis," we get more of the suggestion and feeling of horse's legs than the "eccentricities of the pseudo impressionist school gives us".[47] Impressionism leads to a destruction of structure, the 'fuzziness' Emerson's naturalistic photography sought to avoid.

Helmholtz is of particular interest to Emerson's work in that he highlights an inadequacy between description and sensory experience.

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[41] See Henry Peach Robinson, Pictorial Effect in Photography, (London: Piper and Carter, 1869).
[42] Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 167.
[43] Ibid., p 73.
[44] Ibid., p. 75.
[45] Ibid., p. 76.
[46] Ibid., p. 168.
[47] Ibid., p. 168.

> For an exact description of the manifest sensory impressions which a single natural body, particularly of a somewhat irregular and complicated nature, presents to the eye and hand, language is much too limited: a description of such an impression in words would be an enormously extensive and time consuming labour...[48]

He very clearly contrasts the limitations of language with the greater range of visual apprehension of things in the world.

> The elementary signs of language are only 26 letters, and yet what wonderfully varied meanings can we express and communicate by their combination! Consider, in comparison with this, the enormous number of elementary signs with which the machinery of sight is provided. We may take the number of fibres in the optic nerves as 250,000. Each of these is capable of innumerable different degrees of sensation of one, two, or three primary colours. It follows that it is possible to construct an immeasurably greater number of combinations here than with the few words which build up our language...our senses speak to us in languages which can express far more delicate distinctions and richer varieties than can be conveyed by words[49]

Emerson's Modernising Vision

In his recent study, Techniques of the Observer, Jonathan Crary sees Helmholtz's writings on perception as part an epistemic shift, the emergence of a modernising vision.[50] Crary's study proposes that during the first few decades of the nineteenth century a new kind of observer took shape in Europe radically different from the type of observer dominant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Helmholtz's theory of perception contributes to this emergence of a

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48Helmholtz, op. cit., p. 251.
49 Ibid., p. 135.

Interestingly, Emerson's later books, as I will be showing, can be seen to invert this relationship. His texts convey more of the density of the phenomenal world while the pictures they accompany become increasingly preoccupied with mist shrouded worlds, offer limited representations.

50Crary, 1991, op. cit., pp.93-94.

'new observer', a theory in which sight is no longer severed from the body. Helmholtz's account of a corporealised encounter with the phenomenal world marks a shift from the notion of a static monocular eye organising our sensory experience. He constitutes the notion of an autonomous vision, of an optical experience that was produced by and within the subject. Light, for example, is shown to be produced not from without but in darkness, the mere effect of the stimulation of nerve ends by electrical impulses.[51] Emerson was aware of this and points it out in Naturalistic Photography.[52] Such a theory highlighted not only the significance of the body in perception but an interrelationship between the senses. The sense of sight could be triggered by physical contact; a blow to the eye created light, made one see 'stars'.

Crary's description of a shift to a modern perception of the world uses the camera obscura as emblematic of the vision it replaced. The camera obscura provided a model of understanding and mastery of the 'world out there'— "[t]he orderly and calculable penetration of light rays through the single opening of the camera obscura corresponds to the flooding of the mind by the light of reason"[53]. The camera obscura's monocular perception of the world was based on a clear separation between observer and world. And was only broken when artists and scientists began to look direct into the sun, encountered "the potentially dangerous dazzlement of the senses by the light of the sun"[54].

In an imaginative reading of Vermeer's paintings 'The Astronomer' and 'The Geographer', Crary sees them as pictures both produced with the aid of the

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51According to Helmholtz "it is not light alone which can produce the sensation of light upon the eye, but also any other power which can excite the optic nerve. If the weakest electric currents are passed through the eye they produce flashes of light. A blow, or even a slight pressure made upon the side of the eyeball with the finger, makes an impression of light in the darkest room...". Helmholtz., op. cit., p. 85.

52See Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 127.

53Crary, 1991, op. cit., p. 43.

54Ibid., p. 43.

camera obscura and as descriptions of the characteristic of a perception using the camera obscura. They both provide the image of "a solitary male figure absorbed in learned pursuits within the rectangular confines of a shadowy interior".[55] One contemplates a celestial globe, the other, a nautical map. The exterior world is, as Crary points out, "known through a mental survey of its clear and distinct representations within the room".[56] The paintings provide "a consummate demonstration of the reconciling function of the camera obscura: The Camera, or room, is the site within which an orderly projection of the world, of extended substance, is made available for inspection by the mind."[57]. In constrast to Vermeer's representation Crary provides us with paintings which mark a modernising vision, J. M. W. Turner's sun paintings, pictures which reflect attempts to transcribe the dazzlement of looking straight into the sun (see fig. 16). The camera obscura is seen as an instrument which would filter the suns harmful rays, inhibit the very direct phenomenal encounter which Turner sought to represent. [58]

Crary's notion of a modernising vision is predicated on this shift from a classical paradigm entailing a split between the perceiver and the world. The birth of a modernising vision relocates vision in the subjectivity of the observer, a perception conditioned by the physical and anatomical functioning of the body. Although Peter Henry Emerson uses the mechanical device of a camera, his later photographs accord with Crary's notion of a modernising vision. Emerson's later work can be seen to trouble the security of mastery entailed

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[55]Ibid., p. 46.
[56]Ibid., p.46.
[57]Ibid., p. 46.
[58]The epistemic shift Crary describes draws upon Michel Foucault's epistemic demarcation between what he terms the 'Classical Age' and 'Modern Age' in The Order of Things. Foucault uses the writings of the Marquis de Sade to mark the interstice between the two epistemes; de Sade's measured prose evoking the classical mathesis of the Encyclopedia, the relentless erotic excesses they speak testifying to a desire which can never be fully marshalled within a classical paradigm. See his section, 'Desire and Representation' in The Order of Things (London: Tavistock Press, 1986), pp. 208- 211.

within the measured mapping of the phenomenal world indicative of Crary's classical paradigm. Emerson's 'differential focus' and his avoidance of sharp details in his pictures, both resulted from attempts to preserve something of the corporeality of our perception of things in the world in his photographs. His later representations become characterised by an increasing sense of his own physical relationship to the landscape. This relationship is also particularly accented in some of his prose descriptions from nature.

A sense of the undescribable and unknowable emerges clearly in Emerson's work as he seeks a more corporealised representation. His work attests to a confrontation with the limitations of representation. Emerson's first books are marked by clarity and a desire to classify his subject, to inform the reader. His photographs are explained by an accompanying prose; texts which are deictic, explicitly addressing the viewer/reader, naming and classifying what is pictured. By the time of his later books, the text involves no such address. Instead we are given a diaristic journal of experiences and collected stories, hearsays, sometimes whole statements in quotation with idiomatic speech preserved. In this respect we might suggest that his work moves to a modernising vision, in its increasing preoccupation with a phenomenological aspect and retreat from the clarity of his early signification. It is very much a closed world and privatised set of experiences that he attempts to concretise through pictures and words in both On English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves.

Helmholtz articulated clearly a phenomenological response to the natural world. He introduced the notion of perception involving the body, of perception being interrelated and dependant upon motor activity.

> The correspondence...between the external world and the perceptions of sight, rests, either in whole or in part, upon the same foundations as all our knowledge of the actual world— on experience, and on constant

> verification of its accuracy by experiments which we perform with every movement of our body[59].

Thus

> [a] direct image of a portion of space or three -dimensionality is not afforded either by the eye or by the hand. It is only by comparing the images in the two eyes, or by moving the body with respect to the hand, that the idea of solid bodies is obtained....The idea of a body in space, of a table, for instance, involves a quantity of separate observations. It comprises the whole series of images which this table would present to me in looking at it from different sides and at different distances; besides the whole series of tactile impressions that would be obtained by touching the surface at various places in succession. [60]

This physiological aspect of perception provides a precedent for the phenomenology of perception as later articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

> If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are stressed and the whole of my body trails behind them like the tail of a comet. [61]

> ...our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.[62]

Emerson's descriptions of nature in his later books can be interpreted according to a phenomenological paradigm. On English Lagoons is rich with such descriptions. His prose is 'embodied' in a particular way as it very often clearly indicates his own physical presence within the landscape. Written 'on-the-spot', his prose is full with the density of the observed and felt phenomena of nature,

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59 Helmholtz, op. cit., p. 135.
60 Ibid., p. 192.
61 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 10.
62 Ibid., p. 203.

the "fountainhead of sensuous impressions."[63] It is a kind of immersion that takes place between describer and the phenomena described. One cannot help but feel that such descriptions take their cue from Jean-François Millet, whom he quoted in Naturalistic Photography as saying how:

> [w]e should accustom ourselves to receive from nature all our impressions, whatever they may be, and whatever temperament we may have. We should be saturated and impregnated with her, and think what she wishes to make us think. [64]

'Impregnation' is very much the characteristic of the following prose piece in On English Lagoons. The weight of the phenomenal world is very much evident, when at night on the barge Emerson describes what he sees and hears.

> A clear still night saluted me; Pegasus gleaming brightly in the Eastern sky, first attracting my gaze. Across Breydon I could see the lights of Yarmouth flash on the water-line as of yore in those happy days chronicled in Wild Life on a Tidal water. Eels were smacking all round in the starlit water. The sharp cough of sheep came across the marshes; a dog barked hoarsely at a marsh farmstead, and I could hear rats feeding in the mud under the stern. A deep cough from the smelter's craft told me someone was awake in there— the ever restless 'old crab', I suspected. Peaceful as was the night, the air was filed with the murmur of life as myriads of fish, flesh and fowl fought their fierce battles in the air and water and on the earth. The horizon was. shrouded with vapour, but in the zenith the constellations shone and blazed brightly with varied colours, the mist encircling the larger stars with delicate wreaths. I was lost in admiration and wonderment as I sat on the dew bespangled cabin roof looking up into the purple sky.[65]

The world is full. We move from images of the night to sounds and then to the image of the night sky again. A barrage of sensations are described. It is a

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[63] Emerson, 1899, op. cit., p. 174.
[64] Ibid., p. 114.
[65] Emerson, On English Lagoons, (London: David Nutt,1893), op. cit., p. 19.

clear still night, but as the sounds indicate, 'battles' are going on. A spatiality is created by the text, a writing very much from and 'on-the-spot' as Emerson transcribes a scene not simply before, in front of, but around, above and below him.

Emerson's prose, however, sometimes echoes with a sense of inadequacy, of falling short. On English Lagoons is full with encounters with natural phenomena which escape adequate description. One curious and particularly beautiful phenomenon is described in the book.

> Just before sunset a current of wind blew from the east bending upon itself the upper part of a column of smoke rising from a brick kiln. Immediately a heavy dew began to fall and collect upon the marshes, suggesting in places pools of water that appeared to grow quickly, spreading and widening, until lo' the marshes resembled broads extending right up to the marsh walls. A man with a cart drove through the water-like mist, the bullocks crowding up to him as he passed along throwing out clumps of cake on to the marshes.[66]

Emerson goes on to stress the limits of representation following such a phenomenal experience:

> why is mortal permitted to gaze upon such perfect beauty, why is he allowed to lift the veil, for after such magic visions the greater part of life must be prosy indeed, and yet we poor worshippers try to preserve such scenes in paint or fetter them in verse, living with the shadow of the thing that was.[67]

Attempts at representation fall short before the beauty of nature. Art can give us little more than mere 'shadows'.

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[66]Ibid., p. 22.
[67]Ibid., p. 23.

It is with this in mind that we can perhaps understand the characteristic of his later images. They literally are 'shadows' of nature. Pictures in On English Lagoons reveal a retreat from the descriptiveness of his first books. They provide contemplative and evocative scenes. Human figures are mere silhouettes on a far river bank shrouded in mist as in 'Buckenham Ferry' (see fig. 17), a picture which accents the slightly blurred black shape of a passing barge, intruding into the picture frame from the right. 'At the Ferry' (see fig. 18) pictures a milk cart as it moves into the mist. Two human figures are shadowy ghosts. To the left of them is the silhouette of a ferry bell— a significant detail, as Ian Jeffrey has pointed out, in that it evokes sound.[68] Such a detail is important in that Emerson's prose in On English Lagoons reveals a fascination for the experience of sounds coming out of the mist.

While mist hides things, sounds still carry, and Emerson is frequently drawn to this particular experience on the marshes.

> It is marvellous how clearly sounds can be distinguished in such weather— we could hear the clank of the oars on the broad, voices on the distant marshes, and an accordian playing in the village accompanied with the silvery laughter of girls; but all these sounds seemed ghost like. One felt as if the formless, silent grey world around us was peopled with phantoms whose voices sounded clearly though off. [69]

Descriptions of sounds heard in the mist in the prose provide equivalents to the quality of some of the images in his last book, Marsh Leaves, where barges and figures loom out of the ineffable grey. In this book Emerson's pictorial fascination for a mist-filled world becomes more developed. 'The Misty River' (see fig. 19) captures a particular quality, a steam barge hovering into view, a

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[68] See Ian Jeffrey, 'On English Lagoons and Marsh leaves', in ed. Mike Weaver, British Photography in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 205-214.
[69] Emerson, 1893, op. cit., p. 48.

small silhouette in the distance, bellowing smoke. Things exist as mere markers, suggestive signs in the mist in such images.

Again in another prose passage from On English Lagoons, Emerson's description is marked by an attachment to the quality on the marshes of a mist-shrouded world, full with ghostly sounds.

> This still scene, with its delicate mist, only seemed the clearer to accentuate the sounds coming over the distant plains, the hoarse barkings of a watch dog at a marsh farm, the voices of children playing in a distant village.
>
> Then these sounds died away, and the birds' evensongs filled the air; cuckoos called from the mists, all making that peculiar rolling heard in the courting season; reed-buntings snag low, short, sweet notes, nor was their music drowned by the plaintive calls of a male lapwing or the laughing of a snipe, as it circled round and round over its nursery. There, in the solemn silence, one could hear the curious distant 'aho-ho-ho' as the lowing herd walked slowly across the marsh-wall homewards. [70]

Emerson's descriptions of sounds links them with other senses, we 'picture' things through the sounds he describes. The synaesthetic quality of such prose invites reference to Merleau-Ponty's notion of an intercommunication between senses in The Phenomenology of Perception.

> The senses intercommunicate by opening on to the structure of the thing (perceived)...One sees the weight of a block of cast iron which sinks in the sand, the fluidity of water and the viscosity of syrup. In the same way I hear the hardness and unevenness of a carriage, and we speak appropriately of a 'soft', 'dull' or 'sharp' sound. Though one may doubt whether the sense of hearing brings us genuine things, it is at least

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[70] Ibid., p.82.

> certain that it presents us, beyond the sounds in space, with something which murmurs, and in this way communicates with the other senses [71].

Something which 'murmurs' and 'communicates with the other senses' is precisely the quality of some of the images and prose pieces in Emerson's On English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves. Both murmur with presences not quite fully there. And is this not in essence all that art could ever provide for Emerson?

The very structure of Emerson's last book Marsh Leaves is rather like his descriptions of sounds heard in mist. Like the disparate sounds heard in the mist, fragments, not linked, but there, one things after the other, Marsh Leaves presents us with a succession of disparate collected prose pieces. There is no apparent intelligibility, no structure to this book's succession of 65 short prose pieces, interspersed with 16 small photo etchings. The text dominates. The book itself is the smallest of all, measuring 19.5cm by 29.5 cm. It is more easy to hold in one's hands and turn over at leisure, possessing an intimacy lacking in such large scale books as Life and Landscape.... There are no links between the anecdotes. Mist, smoke and snow are most prevalent in the pictures.

One should also take note of the references to time in this book. While English Lagoons still followed chronological time, being a log of day to day occurrences, the text of Marsh Leaves, as Ian Jeffrey has noted, gives two cameos which reveal a "disdain for social time."[72] One story describes a clock which is taken apart and and finally boiled. 'The Fenman's Clock', tells us of a fenman whose fingers were numb when it came to delicate work—

> ...there he was in his cottage, his table covered with wheels and screws. As I asked him how he got on with his self-imposed task, he exclaimed,

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71 Merleau-Ponty, 1974 , op. cit., p. 230.
72 Jeffrey, 1989, op. cit., pp. 205-214.

> "Ay, bor, I onscrewed her and took her works out, and then I got the brush what Jenny sweeps up the house with and brushed the wheels, but I didn't take stock when I got the wheels from, for I laid em all among the other." [73]

The other cameo 'A wherryman his Watch' is a story of how a wherryman ends up frying a broken pocket watch; an absurd tale taken as told him by the wherryman— "one day the pin flew out so the cog wheel get out of the gimcracks; so I took her home and gace her up for a bad job— she want frying. She'd no face on her, and her inside was out of order: she want to have a box o' liver pills." [74]Important to both of these texts is Emerson's phonetic preservation of dialect. Emerson frequently quoted at length in local dialect in Marsh Leaves. Mere utterances take on importance as a result. A concomitant loss in intelligibility and grammatical clarity, at the same time brings a greater life-likeness.

Through the prevalence of mist, snow and fog, things are not fully delineated in Emerson's later photographs. Everything is reduced to a series of marks on the surface of the world: an inn sign by the water's edge, a plume of smoke across the mist. The human figure has become a mere shadowy silhouette in the distance, a marking against the mist, a sign amongst other signs. Emerson preferred to photograph when there was mist or snow rather than on a clear day. An indication for this preference is given in Marsh Leaves. He accounts for the way snow changes the landscape.

> The broad white snow-patches, with their beautiful clumps of reed in one corner, seemed to satisfy the aesthetic sense in its highest form, and lift from the mind the troublesome possibilities and thoughts aroused by the details and life of the everyday scene.[75]

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[73] Emerson, Marsh Leaves, (London: David Nutt, 1895), p. 5.
[74] Ibid., p. 103.
[75] Ibid., p. 153.

Snow simplifies the vista before Emerson and so "take[s] a great burden from the mind..."[76] The sheer weight of detail in the phenomenal world is too much for Emerson. Snow and mist are liked because they allow for a simplification of scenes. They enable the creation of a more graphic representation. John Berger has written memorably on the aspect of Monet's pictures submerged in light. Berger points out how "painted light, unlike the real thing, is not transparent. The painted light covers, buries the painted object, a little like snow covering the landscape."[77] This explains "the attraction of snow to Monet, the attraction of things being lost without a loss of first-degree reality".[78] A vagueness is created by Monet's way of picturing, one "which welcomes and accommodates your memory. The uncovered memory of your sense of sight is so acutely evoked, that other appropriate memories of other senses- scent, warmth, dampness are also extracted from the past."[79] What Berger says of Monet provides a most fitting description of the quality of Emerson's later images.

While there is little sense of structure given by Marsh leaves, its last image does provide a sense of an ending, a farmer is pictured having closed a farm gate at the end, one assumes, of a day's work. But the following last prose piece destroys all sense of intelligibility. It concerns a totally unrelated and rather grotesque story telling us of Polly's valentine; a girl blinded in one eye by a stone, who loses her glass eye and because she goes to school with a green shade over her sightless eye is known as 'one eye and a peppermint'.[80]

76Ibid., p. 153.
77See John Berger 'The Eyes of Claude Monet' in The White Bird, (London: Hogarth Press, 1988), p. 193.
78Ibid., p. 193.
79Ibid., p. 193.
80Emerson, 1895, op. cit., p. 163.

What are we to understand by this tale? It frustrates interpretation. One can understand an image of closing a gate in a book we too are about to close, but founder before the following grotesque tale. It is something 'found', a tale heard, collected and preserved 'as it was told'. Nothing more. We lose a sense of overriding order and clarity.

One should bear in mind that Emerson's last two books were written following the most extraordinary admission in what he called his "burning of books" The Death of Naturalistic Photography. Published only one year after his treatise Naturalistic Photography, it is a small book which denounces the truth of everything he had written before on photography. In it Emerson goes so far as to declare photography "the lowest of all arts", admits to no longer having any theories on art and goes so far as to think of writings upon art and art criticism as "mistakes."[81]

English Lagoons and Marsh Leaves attest to shortcomings rather than a fullness of representation before natural phenomena. The world has a 'density' and depth that highlights an essential poverty within any attempts at representing it. According to Merleau-Ponty, "it is of the nature of the real to compress into each of its instants an infinity of relations."[82] ; "[t]he real lends itself to unending exploration, it is inexhaustible."[83] Jean-Paul Sartre in The Psychology of Imagination also brings out a sense of the overwhelming inexhaustibility of the phenomenal world. For him there is an "overflowing in the world of things: there is always, at each and every moment, infinitely more than we see...this manner of 'brimming over' is of the very nature of objects."[84] Any representation of the phenomenal world can only therefore reveal the

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81See Emerson The Death of Naturalistic Photography, (privately published, 1890). Facsimile reprint included in Naturalistic Photography, third edition, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), n.p.
82Merleau-Ponty, 1974, op. cit., p. 323.
83Ibid., p. 324.
84Jean- Paul Sartre, The Psychology of Imagination (London: Methuen,1983), p. 8.

limitations of representation. Any pictorial image or written description will always fall short of the density of that which it seeks to represent.

And it is then in this phenomenological sense that one can speak of the limits of representation in Emerson's last books. His photograph prints become smaller, more intimate, but distant, less 'present'. Figures and things are reduced to shadows. A mist descends. This obfuscation in his images is matched in his writings with their transcriptions of local dialect and conjoining of increasingly unrelated and absurd stories. A desire to concretise experience, to preserve some of the density of the phenomenal world brings a retreat from intelligibility. It also brings an inversion of the relationship between image and text. In his first books prose would always tend to supplement the images, describe and narrativise the picture, while within his last books prose carries more of the density and volubility of the living world, and things in the pictures are reduced to mere hints in the mist. But nevertheless the effect of such pictures is not one of emptiness, the impression given is that of of a partially veiled world, of things not fully disclosed. His last pictures are 'heavy' with suggestions of the density of a phenomenal world which, one is left feeling, always remains beyond representation.

Emerson's last books mark a decided shift from the kind of response to photography one finds in Talbot's The Pencil of Nature; the details of the photograph which so amazed Talbot, are of no interest to Emerson and simply form part of the mechanical way of seeing of photography. Emerson attempts to bring photography closer to the physiology of perception, but this very process, as this chapter has highlighted, is fraught with difficulties. I now will turn to another fascinating conflict of responses and use of photography in the nineteenth century. However, I will no longer be looking at living photographers, instead what now concerns me will be how novelists have used

photography. I will start with a return to the early years of photography, or rather daguerreotypy in America, and reconsider the fascination for the truth of the medium, through a particular reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, and then proceed to compare this book's account of photography with that of Thomas Hardy's in his novel, A Laodicaen.

CHAPTER THREE

Photography and Truth in Fiction: Hawthorne Versus Hardy

Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, first published in 1851, provides one of the first representations of a daguerreotypist and his craft in American literature[1]. It is a story in which the daguerreotype is described as a means of uncovering a truth that remains otherwise unobserved by the book's protagonists, a means of revealing the true character of an individual. This chapter will begin by looking at how Hawthorne's text can be seen to reflect a fantastic investment in the new invention and phenomenon of the daguerreotype, a text which like many of the first accounts of the daguerreotype, viewed it as an almost magical medium.

The daguerreotype possessed distinctive characteristics. Its image was on a highly reflective surface and could only be seen when held in a certain position. If held at most angles it simply reflected light over the surface into the eyes of the observer, or the viewer's own face. Tilting the daguerreotype in order to view its image, the picture offered was a flickering one, easily turning into a negative of itself. The silvery surface of the picture produced was extremely fragile and had to be protected in a small case, like jewelry. As a direct positive, its image was also unique, remained irreproducible. In the mid-nineteenth century this rather magical "flickering image on mirrored metal" came to stand

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[1] According to Alan Trachtenberg "perhaps" the earliest appearance of photography in American fiction was a pulp novel, first published in 1846: Augustine Joseph Hockney Duganne's The Daguerreotype Miniature or Life in the Empire City. See Trachtenberg's essay, 'Photography: the Emergence of a Keyword' in ed. Martha A. Sandweiss, Photography in Nineteenth Century America, (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1991), pp. 17- 47.

for a certain kind of truth, for objectivity, the impartial representation of facts.[2] While it bore a similarity to handcrafted painted miniatures it also surpassed them. There remained with the daguerreotype an inexplicable excess, an elusive surfeit. With its unlimited mirror-like detail and preternaturally sharp renditions of external phenomena, it offered greater representations than painted or drawn miniatures. Many early descriptions of the daguerreotype are marked by a sense of wonderment before the new phenomenon.[3] The daguerreotype image seemed an almost magical reproduction of a prototype. It was not so much a copy, but a simulacrum, another instance of the same thing; less a picture but a piece of the world in miniature. Alan Trachtenberg has taken up the Baudrillardian[4] implications of an encounter with the daguerreotype, with it being seen to "serve[d] as an extraordinary initiation for modern culture into one of its fundamentally new conditions: the instant convertibility of experience into images."[5] Before looking at Hawthorne's text in some detail it is worth giving examples of some of the first responses to the daguerreotype. They are all characterised by a peculiar attachment to the verisimilar image the daguerreotype offered to its viewer.

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[2]See Alan Trachtenberg 'Likeness as Identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean Mystique' in ed. Graham Clarke, The Portrait in Photography (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), p 175.

[3]The daguerreotype was also met with incredulity. The discovery of Daguerre ran in the press shortly after a whole series of fictive articles in The Sun, New York, concerning the siting of bat like man figures on the moon by Sir John Herschel, the eminent astronomer who had been sent by the British government to the Cape of Good Hope to make certain astronomical observations. Daguerre's discovery was seen as another hoax and not initially believed. Quoted in Robert Taft's Photography and the American Scene, (New York: Dover, 1964) p 9.

[4]See Jean Baudrillard's Simulations, (New York:Semiotext(e), 1983). Baudrillard writes of a precession of the simulacra in which images are felt to possess a greater reality and substantiality than their referents. Oliver Wendell Holmes's article on the stereoscope in the Atlantic Monthly prefigured Baudrillard by over a century when he remarked "give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please." Quoted in John Tagg, Grounds of Dispute, (London, Macmillan, 1992), p. 124.

[5]Trachtenberg, 1992, op. cit., p 176.

In 1839, Lewis Gaylord Clark editor of the New York magazine, The Knickerbocker, described daguerreotypes as "the most remarkable objects of curiosity and admiration, in the arts that we have ever beheld. Their exquisite perfection transcends the realm of belief."[6] To convey an impression of their character, Clark asked the reader to imagine:

> himself standing in the middle of Broadway, with a looking glass held perpendicularly in his hand, in which is reflected the street, with all that herein is, for two or three miles, taking in the haziest distance. Then let him take the glass into the house, and find the impression of the entire view, in the softest light and shade, vividly retained upon its surface. [7]

Samuel F. B. Morse gave an account of the daguerreotype from Paris. In the summer of 1838 he had gone abroad with the object of securing patents in England and France for his electro-magnetic telegraph. His letter describing a viewing of Daguerre's images was published in the New York Observer in March 1839.

> The exquisite minuteness of the delineation cannot be conceived. No painting or engraving ever approached it. For example, in a view up the street, a distant sign would be perceived, and the eye could just discern that there were lines of letters upon it, but so minute as not to be read with the naked eye. By the assistance of a powerful lens, which magnified fifty times, applied to the delineation, every letter was clearly and distinctly legible, and so also were the minute breaks and lines in the walls of the building; and the pavements of the streets. The effect of the lens upon the picture was in a great degree like that of the telescope in nature.[8]

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[6] Taft, op. cit., p. 3.
[7] Ibid., p. 3.
[8] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

Edgar Allan Poe set the daguerreotype in opposition to other representations, magnifying the 'photogenic' image was believed to reveal a greater truthfulness and fidelity to nature.

> If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of nature will disappear— but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. [9]

John Ruskin went even further. I have already discussed his dissatisfaction with photography in the previous chapter. But it is worthwhile qualifying the previous account of his response to the medium, by reference to what constitutes his first reactions to photography. These are decidedly different. Not writing on the paper print, but the daguerreotype, he was so impressed by the representation it offered, he wrote to his father from Venice how "it is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself: every chip of stone and stain is there, and of course there is no mistake about proportions".[10] He went on to say how he found a:

> French artist producing exquisitely bright small plates which contained, under a lens, the Grand Canal or St Mark's Place as if a magician had reduced the reality to be carried away into an enchanted land. The little gems of pictures cost a Napoleon each; but with 200 francs I bought the Grand Canal from the Salute to the Rialto. [11]

It is in the context of such fantastic descriptions of the daguerreotype, that we should begin to consider Hawthorne's own description of the daguerreotype and a daguerreotypist in his romance The House of the Seven Gables. At the

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9 Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Daguerreotype' in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p.38.

10 Quoted in David Harvey's 'Ruskin and Photography' in The Oxford Art Journal, 7:2, Oxford, 1985, p. 25.

11 Ibid., p. 25.

time of its first publication in 1851, daguerreotype production was still very high. In 1853, the New York Daily Tribune estimated that 3 million daguerreotypes were being produced annually in America.[12]

In the preface to his book, Hawthorne used a particular metaphor in describing himself as one who will manipulate his "atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture".[13] This exacerbation of lights and darks is a key to the symbolic nature of his text. The House of the Seven Gables , as Shloss has noted, is largely about vision, "about values rendered in terms of light and shadow"[14], positive and negative. It is tempting to describe this symbolic opposition of light and dark in the text as a 'photographic' or rather 'daguerrean' effect. Photography's characteristic is its rendition of the world in black and white, in light and shadows. There seems to be the possibility of a formal correspondence between Hawthorne's 'chiaroscuro' symbolism in his prose and the very characteristic of a photographic representation.

The House of the Seven Gables is a reflection on the effects of ancestral sin, an hereditary burden, a past which "lies upon the present like a giant's dead body".[15]. Hawthorne's story concerns a house built on stolen land; Colonel Pyncheon built the house of the seven gables on land whose owner, Matthew Maule, he sent to the gallows for witchcraft. In building the house Pyncheon also perpetuated a curse Maule uttered from the gallows, that the false accuser would have blood to drink. When the colonel was found dead in his study the very day the house was opened, the curse seemed a prophesy.

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[12]See Taft, op. cit., p. 63.
[13]Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.1.
[14]Shloss, In Visible Light, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 40.
[15]Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit., p. 182.

The story concerns a series of clearly defined themes. It begins by describing how present occupant of the house of the seven gables, the decrepit Hepzibah Pyncheon, lives alone in its dark interior. Her warm heart is betrayed by her outward expression, a "forbidding scowl", but not an expression of bitter anger and ill-will", rather "the innocent result of her near-sightedness."[16]. This unfortunate trait is significant as Hawthorne develops a theme concerning deceptive appearances; her misleading scowl is to be contrasted with the malicious false smile of her cousin, Judge Jaffrey. Hepzibah is forced by economic difficulty to open up a cent shop in the side of the ancestral residence. Opening the shop is no small thing as we are told how, up until this point, for a quarter of a century, Hepzibah had dwelt in strict seclusion, "taking no part in the business of life, and just as little in its intercourse and pleasures."[17] It marks not only her uneasy confrontation with the world, but such a tawdry commercial venture is set against, and undermines, what little aristocratic pretensions she has left.

Integral to the novel's theme of appearances, is the import given to pictorial representations, portraits are given a particular significance through their revelation of the character of those they depict. Two in particular are of especial interest because they are daguerreotype portraits. I will be coming to these later. But at the outset of the novel two painted portraits are described and contrasted. The first is a painted miniature of Hepzibah's brother, Clifford;

> the likeness of a young man, in a silken dressing gown of an old fashion, the soft richness of which is well adapted to the countenance of reverie, with its full, tender lips, and beautiful eyes, that seem to indicate not so much capacity of thought, as gentle and voluptuous emotion.[18]

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[16]Ibid., p. 34.
[17]Ibid., p. 31.
[18]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

The miniature immediately sets up a contrast with the "portrait of old Pyncheon, at two thirds length, representing the stern features of a Puritan looking personage, in a skull cap, with a laced band and a grizzly beard; holding a bible with one hand, and in the other uplifting an iron sword hilt."[19]

Clark Griffith has effectively drawn out the clear 'black and white' symbolic distinctions that characterise Hawthorne's text.[20] He defines an opposition between 'shadow and substance', an opposition which reiterates the two widely varying forms the Pyncheon character has assumed. The Old Colonel Pyncheon, founder of the line and guilty of its original sin, was a man of "iron energy"[21], a schemer endowed with common sense "as massive and hard as blocks of granite"[22]. Unlike her ancestor Colonel Pyncheon, Hepzibah lives a shadow life under the weight of the sins of the past. She feeds upon the "shadowy food of aristocratic reminiscences."[23] Her brother, Clifford in the portrait, having spent long years in prison for having being wrongly convicted of murdering an older relative, returns to the house as a dim and broken man. He is equally insubstantial with his "a black shadow"[24]; a "material ghost".[25]

Hawthorne sets the house itself, with its funerary interior, dark and decaying garden, against the exterior, principally the sun-drenched street running along before it. As Griffith has described it, "the sharply etched street scenes more often suggest a place of ceaseless turmoil— of processions and tradesmen, carts and omnibuses swarming constantly past....Here in the midst of robust

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19Ibid., p.33.
20See Clark Griffith, 'Substance and Shadow: Language and Meaning in *The House of the Seven Gables*' in, ed. Harold Bloom, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Modern Critical Views, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pp. 13-23.

21Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit., p. 7.
22Ibid., p. 9.
23Ibid., p. 37.
24Ibid., p. 103.
25Ibid., p. 105

housewives and fiercely energetic railroad lines, the present is a tangible, immediately felt reality".[26] By contrast if we turn to the inner house we come at once under the dark shadow of the past, "an explicit past...symbolically embodied in several shadows which Hawthorne deftly singles out from the surrounding gloom: a chair (black with age), a mirror (shaded, shadowy), a map (dim and dusty), a portrait (faded, dusky), a harpsichord (black and coffin like)."[27]

At the novel's outset it is Hepzibah's cousin Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon who appears to still have the 'substantiality' of his ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon. Judge Pyncheon is described as one who eschews "all airy matter and never mistake[s] a shadow for a substance".[28] However, beneath his exterior lies a treacherous secret. The judge was responsible for framing Clifford for the murder of his uncle, when in fact the uncle, as is explained at the novels' close, had died of a hereditary disease, the same ailment which had caused Colonel Pyncheon to choke on his blood.

Jaffrey keeps his own impunity hidden, disguised by the most imposing of exteriors— a sunny, benevolent smile. Sin lurks deep inside Judge Jaffrey like a "corpse, half decayed, and still decaying...with the cobwebs festooned over its forgotten door".[29] On her first encounter with her cousin Judge Jeffrey, Phoebe Pyncheon, a young cousin of Hepzibah's staying at the house of the seven gables, briefly sees his true character. Hawthorne uses particular metaphors of light and dark, sunshine and cloud, to indicate his sudden change in

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[26] Griffith, op. cit., p. 16.
[27] Ibid., p. 16.
[28] Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit.,p. 118.
[29] Ibid., p. 230.

countenance.[30] On her first meeting with him she draws back when he attempts to kiss her and:

> on raising her eyes, Phoebe was startled by the change in Judge Pyncheon's face. It was quite as striking, allowing for the difference of scale, as that betwixt a landscape under a broad sunshine. and just before a thunder-storm; not that it had the passionate intensity of the altered aspect, but was cold, hard inimitable, like a day-long brooding cloud.[31]

This change, however, is only momentary, and "scarcely had Phoebe's eyes rested again on the judge's countenance, than all its ugly sternness vanished; and she found herself quite overpowered by the sultry, dog-day heat, as it were, of benevolence, which this excellent man diffused out of his great heart into the surrounding atmosphere."[32].

What is of interest in this fiction is that it is a daguerreotype portrait of Jaffrey that reveals his true character. Holgrave, Hawthornes' daguerreotypist, shows a portrait of Judge Jeffrey to Phoebe. The story of Hawthorne's novel concerns the relationship between Phoebe and Holgrave. The sins of the past that shadow the house of the seven gables and its occupants are to be appeased when the couple marry at the book's end. Holgrave turns out to be a secret descendant of Matthew Maule and their marriage is meant to signify an end and a healing of the ancestral conflict between Maule and Pyncheon.

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[30] Phoebe herself is symbolically associated with images of sunlight and substantiality and brings light and life to the gloom of the house. "It really seemed as if the battered visage of the House of the Seven Gables, black and heavy-browed as it still certainly looked, must have shown a kind of cheerfulness glimmering through its dusky window, as Phoebe passed to and for in the interior". Hawthorne, 1986, op cit., p. 81.

[31] Ibid., p. 118.

[32] Ibid., pp. 118-9.

Phoebe's first response to the daguerreotype is to say how she does not "much like pictures of that sort— they are so hard and stern; besides dodging away from the eye, and trying to escape all together."[33] Her reference to the picture dodging away is to be explained by the flickering image of the daguerreotype; its image only discernible when it it is tilted so its surface does not reflect light. Holgrave goes on to explain the particular characteristic of the daguerreotype process to her. The daguerreotype is said to produce its image outside human agency. It is the sun that makes the picture and reveals Jaffrey's true character. "There is a wonderful insight in heaven's broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it"[34]. He proceeds to ask for her judgement of the character of the person as portrayed by the small miniature daguerreotype— Judge Jaffrey. The remarkable thing about the face it depicts, he tells her, is that the:

> original wears, to the world's eye— and for aught I know, to his most intimate friends— an exceedingly pleasant countenance, indicative of benevolence, openness of heart, sunny good humour, and other praiseworthy characteristics of that cast. The sun, as you see, tells quite a different story... Here we have the man, sly, subtle, hard, imperious, and withal, cold as ice. Look at that eye! Would you like to be at its mercy? At that mouth!"[35].

The daguerreotype portrait reveals the hard facts of a person's character and cuts through deceptive postures.

Phoebe is reminded of another portrait when she sees the daguerreotype, the painting of Colonel Pyncheon in the house of the seven gables. And as in the daguerreotype of Judge Jaffrey, Colonel Pyncheon's true character is being

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[33]Ibid., p. 91.
[34]Ibid., p. 91.
[35]Ibid., p. 91.

revealed in this painted picture. Only it is not the painter's acuity of vision that does this. It is the changing of the image through the passage of time which brings out his true countenance . Hepzibah notices how:

> in one sense, this picture had almost faded into the canvas, and hidden itself behind the duskiness of age; in another, she could not but fancy that it had been growing more prominent, and strikingly expressive, ever since her earliest familiarity with it, as a child. For, while the physical outline and substance were darkening away from the beholder's eye, the bold, hard, and , at the same time, indirect character of the man seemed to be brought out in a kind of spiritual relief. Such an effect may occasionally be observed in pictures of antique date. They acquire a look which an artist (if they have anything like the complacency of artist, now-a-days) would never dream of presenting to a patron as his own characteristic expression, but which, nevertheless, we at once recognise as reflecting the unlovely truth of a human soul. In such cases, the painter's deep conception of his subject's inward traits has wrought itself into the essence of the picture, and is seen, after the superficial colouring has been rubbed off by time.[36]

Hawthorne bestows particular significance not only on the daguerreotype but painted portraits. He invests iconic images with the particular power of a truth revealing insight.[37] Colonel Pyncheon's true character comes out in his portrait. As Griffith has pointed out, Pyncheon is reduced to a shadow in the

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[36]Ibid., p. 58

[37]Hawthorne's The Marble Faun, a book originally accompanied with prints taken from daguerreotypes, is characterised by a particular magical series of correspondences between pictures and sculptures and the characters of the novel. Art is once more involved with an insight which escapes the ordinary eye. For example, Donatello troubled by the guilt of a crime no less than murder, is unsettled to see the very expression of horror his face bore when he committed the crime, sculpted in clay 'accidently' by Kenyon.

> By some accidental handling of the clay, entirely independent of his own free will, Kenyon had given the countenance a distorted and violent look, combining animal fierceness with intelligent hatred. Had Hilda, or had Miriam, seen the bust, with the expression which it had now assumed, they might have recognised Donatello's face as they beheld it at that terrible moment , when he held his victim over the edge of the precipice.

See Nathaniel Hawhorne, The Marble Faun (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 272.

painting. His "physical outline and substance...seem darkening away".[38] Jaffrey undergoes the same metamorphosis. Towards the end of Hawthorne's book, Jaffrey enters the house of the seven gables and dies in its darkness by what appears to be Maule's legendary prophesy, choking on his own blood. Holgrave takes a picture of the dead judge. In appearance at death, as recorded by the portrait, Holgrave discerns an exact likeness of the uncle whom Clifford supposedly murdered years ago; and concludes that the death had been natural and Clifford had been framed by the judge himself. Only in death is the truth of the character of Judge Pyncheon revealed to the world. "Death is so genuine a fact that it excludes falsehood, or betrays its emptiness; it is a touchstone that proves the gold and dishonours the baser metals."[39] This might as well be a description of the daguerreotype.

The daguerreotype is part of nature, a trace of sun and invested with the sun's revelatory powers. Sunlight is a metaphor of goodness and truth throughout Hawthorne's fiction.[40] But what are we to understand by Holgrave's remark that he 'misuses heaven's blessed sunshine'?[41] There is a certain diabolicism involved with the daguerreotypist's practice. Hawthorne's novel leaves us a little unsure, as Trachtenberg has suggested[42], whether in fact the daguerreotype is the sun's amanuensis, part of an insight from nature, or a magic mirror, the work of witchcraft.[43] The daguerreotype is presented within a

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[38]Griffith, op. cit., p. 16.
[39]Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit, p. 310.

[40]One particularly memorable symbolic use of light is the way it illuminates innocence in the 'Forest Walk' chapter, in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Sunlight plays through the trees and appears on the path ahead of both Hester and her illegitimate child, Pearl. They can never enter the sunlight. Pearl decides to run ahead and the sun illuminates her, only to vanish again when Hester nears her. See The Scarlet Letter, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 201.

[41]Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit., p.46
[42]Trachtenberg, 1991, op. cit., p. 24.
[43]One can find another relationship between mesmerism and photography in a novel by George Du Maurier, Trilby (1894). A large photographic portrait of Svengali in military dress, "his big black eyes looking straight out of the picture", mesmerises Trilby, she falls into a trance and dies. See Trilby, (London: Dent, 1978), p.336.

magical context. Holgrave, the daguerreotypist, is, as he tells his beloved Phoebe, "somewhat of a mystic, it must be confessed. The tendency is in my blood together with the faculty of mesmerism, which might have brought me to the Gallows Hill, in the good old times of witchcraft".[44] Hepzibah believed he "practised animal-magnetism, and, if such things were in fashion now-a-days, should be apt to suspect him of studying the Black art, up there in his lonesome chamber".[45] His pursuit of daguerreotypy is seen as a regression to the witchcraft of his ancestors. There is, however, nothing demonic or evil about Holgrave. He is presented as a mysterious but essentially good character in Hawthorne's story.

To some extent one can see him as a personification of the distinctly modern world beyond the house. Like the world of outward forms he is a figure of many surfaces, somewhat mercurial, forever "putting off one exterior and snatching another to be soon shifted to a third."[46] He rails against the past and tradition. Houses should be temporary edifices he tells Phoebe, built of wood not stone. Love for Phoebe will, however force a change in character and at the novel's close he is transformed, finding it a pity that their new home was built of wood and not stone.

Daguerreotypy, as Hawthorne's novel indicates, is not so much an art but a trade amongst many. The account of Holgrave given by Hawthorne must have been typical of the experience of many country daguerreotypists. Holgrave had been in turn a country schoolmaster, a salesman in a country store, the political editor of a country newspaper, then a pedlar of cologne water and other

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For a discussion of spirit photography in America and Britain see Bill Jay's 'A Case of Spirits' in his Cyanide and Spirits, (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1991), pp. 7-35.

[44]Hawthorne, 1986 op. cit., p. 217.
[45]Ibid., p. 84.
[46]Ibid., p. 177.

essences, a dentist "with very flattering success", and next a lecturer on mesmerism.[47] Holgrave's present phase as a daguerreotypist, Hawthorne informs us, "was of no importance, nor likely to be more permanent, than any of the preceding ones. It had been taken up with the careless alacrity of an adventurer and would be thrown aside as carelessly."[48]

Daguerreotypy is not the only sign of modernity which features in Hawthorne's text. Modernity features in the symbol of the shop itself and, in particular, through the particular symbol of money, as magical as the daguerreotype. Following Hepzibah's first sale, the copper coin left in her hand, gives off a particular power, it rejuvenates her, it is described as "potent, and perhaps endowed with the sane kind of efficacy as a galvanic ring!"[49] The theme of modernity is most strongly brought out, however, in the remarkable chapter 'Flight of Two Owls' in which Hepzibah and Clifford, both fearful Clifford will be judged to have murdered cousin Jaffrey, take flight from the seclusion of their ancestral home. Enclosed in a train they race through the countryside. On their journey, Clifford has a conversation about telegraphy with a fellow traveller. Their conversation about the new mode of communication reflects on the way in which their sense of the world has come to be radically altered:

> by means of electricity the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating hundreds of miles in breathless point of time. Rather the round

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[47] Ibid., p. 176.
[48] Ibid., p. 177.

See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Calotypomania: The Gourmet Guide to Nineteenth Century Photography.' In Photography at the Dock, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991), pp. 4-27. There she successfully contravenes recent attempts to heroicise the 19th century photographer as artist. As a more accurate description of the 19th century photographer.she gives us the example of the supposed portrait of Nadar by Gustave Flaubert, the hack painter Pellerin, who bounces from style to style and career to career in Sentimental Education—"Pellerin, after dabbling in Fourierism, homeopathy, spiritualism, gothic art, and humanitarian painting, had become a photographer; and all the walls of Paris there were pictures of him wearing a black coat, with a minute body and an enormous head". Gustave Flaubert Sentimental Education, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) p. 416.

[49] Hawthorne, 1986, op. cit., p.52.

> globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence.and thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it?[50]

The world of matter is nothing but thought. Everything is interconnected. Clifford even goes on to fantasise about the possibility of the telegraph enabling a link between the dead and living. The telegraph is, he says at one point, an "almost spiritual medium".[51] And what better description of the daguerreotype in the light of the way it come to bring such insights in Hawthorne's story?

Daguerreotypy allows truth to come out in the end and resolves the deceit running through the novel. Crime and ancestral sin are exposed. The daguerreotype portrait in the story reveals Judge Pyncheon's hypocrisy. In the case of the portrait made just after the Judge chokes to death on his own blood, the daguerreotype proves beyond legal evidence that an ancient family disease was the natural cause of death.

Hardy

Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables bears a particularly interesting relationship to Thomas Hardy's novel A Laodicean, first published in 1881. Hardy's lesser known story involves a photographer and photographic portraits also play a key part in the story. However, there is one radical difference. The photographic portrait, as described in Hardy's novel, is not part of the magic of nature but distorted by human hand. Hardy's fiction centres on a failure on the part of photographic images to function as markers of truth. There is also none of the black and white clarity of Hawthorne's novel. If we are to find a 'photographic' aspect to Hardy's text itself then it is in the tendency towards tableau effects of Hardy's prose description, his framed scenes described from

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[50] Ibid., p. 264.
[51] Ibid., p. 264.

a particular point of view. And also in the photographic descriptions of the prose, an attention to the minutiae of seemingly insignificant detail.

The reign of the daguerreotype was short lived. By the end of the 1850s in America and France it had been largely replaced by the collodion and albumen paper process, and as the paper print took its place photography's discourse of mysticism and ritualisation came to radically alter. Thomas Hardy's A Laodicean is a novel which can be seen to clearly reflect the end of any ritualised description of photography. The book severely puts in question photography's relationship to truth.

But before discussing Hardy's novel, it is necessary to give some indication of the climate within which to consider his story involving photography. Carol Shloss has provided a pertinent opposition between the early period of reception of photography and responses to the medium in the later nineteenth century.[52] She distinguishes between two discourses around photography. The first sees photography outside human agency, while the latter views it as a cultural artefact within human agency and subsequently open to manipulation and distortion. This shift in accounts of photography is illustrated by considering Henry Peach Robinson's practice and theorising on photography. The importance of Robinson, as Shloss makes clear, is that he went so far as to express a boredom with precisely the characteristic of the photograph that had excited the imagination during photography's beginnings. Photography's "wonderous detail" no longer excited his interest— "photography gives incomparably the greatest amount of power of minute imitation or copying with the most ridiculous ease, and it has lost the power of surprising us with its fidelity, for the detail of a photograph is one of the most ordinary objects of

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[52] See Shloss op cit., especially Chapter Two, 'Henry James and Alvin Langdon Coburn', pp. 55-89.

civilised life"[53]. Robinson insisted that the inevitable likeness of photographs to the pre-existing world need not exclude artistic arrangement— "an original interpretation of Nature [was] limited but sufficient to stamp the impress of the author on certain works..."[54]

Robinson was among one of the most influential writers on photography in the late nineteenth century. He represents one of the first photographer 'artists'. His Pictorial Effect in Photography, first published in 1869, was motivated by a desire to deritualise the photographic process. It provides a knowledge of the rules, and a study of the principles, upon which pictorial effect depends. There is more to photography than the "obtaining of sharp pictures". Robinson calls for the photographer to consider the adaptability of a scene to artistic treatment, advocating the need for the imposition of an aesthetic order on the phenomenal world, a pictorial 'elevation', the representation of nature in what he calls its "pleasing aspect". His book was written against the notion of photography as mere mimesis.

> It is not open to the photographer to produce his effects by departing from the facts of nature, as has been the practice with the painter for ages; but he may use all legitimate means of presenting the story he has to tell in the most agreeable manner, and it is his imperative duty to avoid the mean, the base, and the ugly; and to aim to elevate his subject, to avoid awkward forms, and to correct the unpicturesque.[55]

His book stands against "a mere servile copying of nature" the result of an over valorisation of the photographic print by certain photographers, "a class of men who have us believe that to touch a photograph with a paint brush is almost the

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[53]Henry Peach Robinson, The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), p.20.
[54]Henry Peach Robinson, Pictorial Effect in Photography (London: Piper and Carter, 1869), p 13.

[55]Ibid., p. 51.

greatest sin a man can commit"[56]. Truth in photography, for Robinson, is simply not enough, beauty is needed. The mimetic paradigm:

> would reduce all photographs and all photographers to one dead level; but the mind refuses to accept a dull, flat reproduction of common-place nature....The highest aim of art, therefore, is to render nature, not only with the greatest truth, but in its most pleasing aspect; to show forth the storm in its grandeur, or to gladden the eye with the smile of nature's light. truth may be obtained without art. The exact representation of unselected nature is truth; the same of well-selected nature is truth and beauty. The former is not art, the latter is.[57]

While advocating that the photograph should be doctored Robinson still adhered to a notion of truth— "I see no reason whatever why the negative should not be improved, if it is found necessary, without any departure from truth"[58]. His desire was for the mixture of fiction and truth— a heightening of how things are. Artifice and mimesis could be balanced to achieve a kind of general truth.

> Cultivated minds do not require to believe that they are deceived, and that they look on actual nature, when they behold a pictorial representation of it....For this purpose— that is, the mixture of the real with the artificial— the accessories of the studio should receive the addition of picturesque or ivy-covered logs of wood, ferns , tufts of grass, &c., either growing in low pots, or gathered fresh. It will be found easy to make up picturesque foregrounds with these materials, behind which a painted view or sky may be placed.[59]

What is important is that Robinson was responsible for removing photography from its habitual identification as a transcription or plagiarism of Nature. He

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[56] Ibid., p. 61.
[57] Ibid., p. 60
[58] Ibid., p. 109.
[59] Ibid., p. 109.

would construct an image using studio accessories, painted backdrops and posed models.[60] His books on photography— Pictorial Effect in Photography was followed by The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph in 1896— mark a clear change in relationship to the photograph from the fantastic investment in the veracity of the medium as evinced in the case of Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables. And it is this climate which provides a clarifying context for Hardy's references to photography in A Laodicean.

Within Hardy's fiction and poetry one can also, however, find references to photography which reflect rather metaphysical approaches to the photograph; approaches close to Hawthorne. Two of his poems describe ritualised relationships to photographic portraits. His poem 'The Photograph' visualises the burning of a photographic portrait. This grotesque poem describing the burning of a photograph details the destruction of someone's image and the felt sense of injury to the person depicted— the author cannot look at the burning picture:

> Till the flame had eaten her breasts, and mouth, and hair
> ....
> And nothing was left of the picture unsheathed from the past
> But the ashen ghost of the card it had figured on.[61]

In his poem, 'The Photograph' Hardy expresses the feeling that when burning the image he is burning the person— "I felt as if I had put her to death that

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[60]For a detailed account of his process see Margaret Harker's Henry Peach Robinson, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), especially pp. 25-40.
[61]Ed.,James Gibson, The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, Variorum Edition, (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 469.

In the denouement of Hardy's A Laodicean,cobwebbed painted portraits, which stand for the decline of the aristocratic family line of de Stancy, are seen to come to life, momentarily, when they are burnt— "the framed gentleman in the lace-collar seemed to open his eyes more widely; he with the flowing locks and turn up moustachios to part his lips; he in the armour... to shake the plates of his mail with suppressed laughter." Hardy, A Laodicean (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 432.

night!"[62]. The photograph is treated as if there is life indwelling in its image. The other poem, 'The Son's Portrait', describes a more cherished and respectful treatment of the image. 'The Son's Portrait' concerns the narrator's purchase of a "fly-pecked" portrait of a child in a lumber shop, his own dead son's. The poem informs us that the wife of his son killed in battle has taken a new bridegroom and discarded her first husband's photograph. The father comes across it in a lumber store, buys it and proceeds to bury the photograph "as 'twere he".

There are other ritualised activities noted in Hardy's fiction and poems that bear a particular relationship to photography. They concern such indexical signs as the footprint in sand which, like the photograph, serves as a trace of an absent being. In the novel The Woodlanders, Melbury seeking to keep the presence of his daughter alive, preserves the footprint of her footstep. Melbury lifts a tile which lay in the garden path to show his second wife— "'Tis the track of her shoe that she made when she ran down here the day before she went away all those months ago. I covered it up when she was gone... Suppose she should be dying, and never made a track on this path any more?"[63] The poem 'The Whitewashed Wall' goes further.[64] It gives a touching account of how a mother habitually kisses her hand to a spot in the chimney corner where under the whitewash her son once traced in pencil the shadow he cast there. The poem describes an attachment to something not even visibly evident, a trace of her child which is, as it were, 'doubly' absent.

But it is Hardy's novel, A Laodicean, with its decidedly different perspective on photography, that is the main concern here. The novel indicates the changing status of photography as it is no longer seen as simply written by the sun, a

62Gibson, 1979, op. cit., p. 862.
63Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 57.
64Gibson, op. cit., pp. 685-686.

mere 'pencil of nature', but a highly malleable medium. Hardy shakes off the magic lure of the iconic image and severely undermines its value as a signifying sign in his novel. It is a story in which photography plays a central role in the narrative. Photography in this fiction is not the source of truth, but the occasion for error and confusion. Two photographic portraits play an important part in the novel's plot; the first because it fails to incriminate and the second because it incriminates falsely.[65]

A Laodicean focuses on manipulation, using photography for different rhetorical ends to those put forward by Hawthorne. It does however takes its cue from Hawthorne's story. Hardy knew Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables very well, enough to cite it in his novel The Hand of Ethelberta. [66] Michael Millgate suggests Hardy drew upon Holgrave for his photographer, Dare, a malevolent version of Hawthorne's daguerreotypist.[67] Like Holgrave, Dare plays an important role in a novel concerned with the working out of hereditary patterns. Both The House of the Seven Gables and A Laodicean introduce a theme of modernity. Like Hawthorne's book, Hardy's story features telegraphy, the steam train, as well as photography. A Laodicean rests on an uneasy juxtaposition between modernity and the medieval— imaged in the opening scene when the young architect, George Somerset, discovers that the buzzing telegraph wire he had been following leads him to an old semi-ruined castle, and not, as he first thought, the village to which he was returning.[68] The wire suddenly vanishes into an arrow slit in a castle keep. He is led, unwittingly, to

65 Hardy had in fact already written about an act of photographic deception in his first story Desperate Remedies. In this novel portraits on 'Cartes de Visite' are carefully manipulated by Manston in order to hide the true identity of his wife. See Hardy's Desperate Remedies (London: Macmillan, 1986) p. 265. This novel, however, does not contain the portrait of a photographer and the developed thematics of spying we find in A Laodicean .

66 Thomas Hardy The Hand of Ethelberta, (London: Macmillan, 1960) p. 357.

67 See Michael Millgate Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist, (London: Bodley Head, 1971), p. 171.

68 Ibid., p. 166

the home of Paula Power, a representative of the new aristocracy, caught between a love for medievalism and the modernity epitomised by her father, an engineer who had made "half the railways in Europe".[69]

Somerset falls in love with Paula, a romance which ends happily despite the machinations of the photographer, Dare, who instigates an activity of spying and deception in an attempt to destroy their relationship. Dare is the illegitimate offspring of an aristocratic family that has nothing but its name— a name, his only sense of identity, which he has tattooed across his chest, but, because of his illegitimacy, has to keep it hidden. He is a de Stancy, the family who lost their ancestral home and possessions to Paula Power's father.

A Laodicean is a novel which involves a number of incidents of eavesdropping and spying, and nearly always to do with the photographer. The gaze functions in a particular way in this text. It is intrusive and prurient. Hardy's novel is of interest in its portrait of the photographer as eavesdropper and articulating early on in fiction the relationship between photography and surveillance. The book is marked by a fascination with conflicts and exchanges of sight, with seeing and power relationships. As Norman Bryson has pointed out "the epithets of the gaze tend towards a certain violence (penetrating, fixing, piercing)."[70] This is very much reflected in Hardy's text itself.[71]

69Thomas Hardy, A Laodicean, (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 117.
70Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 93.

71One can account for this by the context of 'spy mania' in the nineteenth century. See Mark Seltzer's study Henry James and the Art of Power, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984). Seltzer relates realism in fiction to a societal change in which, using a Foucauldian model, power is seen to manifest itself where it hides itself best, in the close scrutiny of individual's behaviour rather than in an explicit and public suppression. Realism is linked to a policing of the individual A relationship is drawn between the disciplinary techniques that Michel Foucault highlights in Discipline and Punish, and the techniques of the novel— the realist and naturalistic novel which appears "on the scene at the same time disciplinary society takes over". Realist fiction is concerned with seeing, "with a seeing in detail. In the sub-genre of realism— detective fiction— the relation between seeing and policing is taken for granted: the range of the detective's vision is the range of his power. That power operates by placing the entire text under scrutiny and under surveillance and involves the possibility of an absolute supervision, in which everything must be

Hardy's story begins with an incident involving Somerset spying on Paula. His initial captivation with Paula begins with him secretly watching her. But, as their relationship begins to develop, Somerset soon realises the problems of such scrutiny— of how, as he says to her, "your actions are not subject to my surveillance."[72] At the outset of the novel, Somerset witnesses a scene at a newly built baptist chapel. Instead of entering the building "he passed round to where the stove chimney came through the bricks, and holding on to the iron stay he put his toes on the plinth and looked in at the window."[73] In the lighted chapel he witnesses the refusal of Paula to be baptised and then an unpleasant scene involving her being publicly criticised for her laodiceanism, for being 'lukewarm', in a sermon by the minister. Somerset's watching of Paula is then accompanied by another kind of watching which takes place within the church. Paula is in the vestry while the sermon is being given. Knowing that she is the subject of the sermon, all eyes of the congregation are directed towards where she is:

> ...the words were, virtually, not directed forward in the line in which they were uttered, but through the chink in the vestry-door, that had stood ajar since the exit of the young lady. The listeners appeared to feel this no less than Somerset did, for their eyes, one and all, became fixed upon the vestry-door as if they would almost push it open by the force of their gazing.[74]

The collective gaze of the congregation approaches the state of a physical force. This notion of the gaze as a potentially injurious force is to be taken up on a number of other instances in Hardy's novel. It is book very much about

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comprehended and policed and in which the most trifling detail becomes potentially incriminating." (p. 51).

[72] Hardy, 1975, op. cit., p. 259.
[73] Ibid., p. 45.
[74] Ibid., p. 48.

spectatorship. And this theme of spectatorship affects the way things are presented in the text. .

The gaze as described in Hardy's text is a particularly insensitive invasion of privacy. Not surprisingly the novel's biggest spy is the photographer, Dare. This notion of the photographer as spy and voyeur is very pronounced in Hardy's novel. It is marked by an equation between photographer and watcher that one finds often drawn upon in later portraits of photographers in fiction and film.[75] And in no other of his novels do we find such recurring instances of spying.

Somerset's spying on Paula in the chapel is to be set against the more intrusive voyeurism of Captain de Stancy when he watches Paula perform in the gymnasium through a hole in the wall. This last act of spying was instigated by the captain's illegitimate son, Dare. He wants his father to fall in love and marry Paula, restore the family name de Stancy to what he sees as their rightful ancestral home, and moreover gain legitimation and enrichment for himself.

A number of other unpleasant instances of spying occur in the novel. One particularly intrusive invasion of privacy is both instigated and conducted by Dare, when he and a rival architect to Somerset, Havill, creep into the dark interior of a wooden tea house during a garden party held at the castle and there, seated at the back as if at the theatre, eavesdrop Somerset's first declaration of love for Paula. The couple have their backs to Havil and Dare, at one point the hem of Paula's skirt even touches Havill's feet. Hardy sets up a

[75]See in particular the two films, Michael Powell's 'Peeping Tom' (1960)and Antonioni's 'Blow Up' (1967). For a discussion of the former see John Gartenberg's 'The Prying Eye' in Creative Camera, CC308, February/March, 1991, pp. 39-43. For a discussion of 'Blow Up' as well as portraits of the photographer in twentieth century popular fiction see Bill Jay's 'The Photographer as Aggressor' in ed. David Featherstone, Observations, (Carmel, CA: The Friends of Photography, 1984), pp. 39-43.

series of tableaux and witnessings at this point. Somerset and Paula have been cut off from the garden party in the tent by a sudden down pour of rain. While they themselves are watched they are looking out upon the dancing couples as upon some rather strange spectacle:

> the rain streaming down between their eyes and the lighted tent of the marquee like a tissue of glass threads, the brilliant forms of the dancers passing and trespassing behind the watery screen, as if they were people in an enchanted submarine palace.[76]

Often in the course of the story Hardy will employ such ways of picturing events. Things are seen from particular viewpoints as some kind of spectacle, or theatre. The scene of Paula's refusal to be baptised is described only from the viewpoint of Somerset, as he looks in through the window. The text frames the scene witnessed. It is given the aspect of a tableau. There is a persistent concern with such ways of picturing through 'frames' in the text. This may well have been merely a reflection of Hardy's understanding and interest in painting[77], but in a novel involving photography such literary devices take on a further significance— the emergence of what might best be termed a 'photographic' sensibility in his texts.

One finds such devices in his other novels. In Jude the Obscure, Hardy provides us with a remarkable passage involving a particular 'framing' of a sunset in the text. Sue Bridehead, on hearing of his illness, visits the husband she had left for Jude Fawley. She approaches the house "in the evening, when

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[76]Hardy, 1975, op. cit., p. 145.
[77]F.E. Hardy's The Life of Thomas Hardy records numerous visits to galleries and exhibitions at home and abroad, beginning with his apprentice years in London when he used to pay regular visits to the National gallery, "confining attention to a single master on each visit." Quoted in Joan Gundry's Hardy and the Sister Arts, (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 26. Gundry says how "[t]here is undoubtedly a painter manque in Hardy. He looks at the world around him with the eyes of a painter..." p. 23.

the sun was going down in splendour over the lowlands of Blackmoor".[78] Phillotson, bed ridden, is too ill to move to the window and see the sunset whose rays never illuminate the gloomy corner of his room. Sue helps him see the sunset by taking a swing-glass "and taking it in her hands carried it to a spot by the window where it could catch the sunshine, moving the glass till the beams were reflected into Phillotson's face"[79]

Even more notable is the extraordinary scene at the beginning of his first novel, Desperate Remedies, in which Cytherea witnesses the death of her father; an event framed like a miniature painting as his falling from the church spire is seen in the distance through the window. Hardy gives us a peculiar description of a dramatic incident. Cytherea, at a reading of Shakespeare in the town hall, looking through one of the windows is able to see her architect father on top of the neighbouring church spire, 'caged with scaffolding'. His dark suit sets him off from the other four figures, workers in white. He is giving directions and has moved to the edge of narrow footway.

> The picture thus presented to a spectator in the Town Hall was curious and striking...It was an illuminated miniature, framed in by the dark margin of the window, the keen-edged shadiness of which emphasized by contrast the softness of the objects enclosed.[80]

The men working appeared "little larger than pigeons and made their movements with a soft, spiritlike silentness".[81] Cytherea gazes at a "sky-backed picture". But watches helplessly and in horror as her father suddenly falls from the tower—"an instant of doubling forward and sideways, and he reeled off into the air, immediately disappearing downwards."[82]

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[78]Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, (Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1982), p. 315.
[79]Ibid. , p. 315.
[80]Hardy,1986, op. cit., p. 7.
[81]Ibid., p.7.
[82]Ibid., p. 8.

Hardy's A Laodicaen sets up a whole series of 'enframings' and exchanges of watchings within its narrative. At one point Dare, while eavesdropping on the conversations during the garden party at Stancy castle, is seen by Somerest. Talking of his proposed extension to Stancy castle to one of the guests:

> Somerset raised his eyes and hand towards the walls, the better to point out his meaning; in so doing he saw a face in the square of darkness formed by one of the open windows, the effect being that of a highlight portrait by Vandyk or Rembrandt.
>
> It was his assistant Dare, leaning on the window-sill of the studio, as he smoked his cigarette and surveyed the gay groups promenading beneath.[83]

Another element concerning sight within the novel, and one bearing relationship to the instances of watching and being watched, concerns representation, or rather a theme of disguise and mimesis. This is clearly shown in the rather extraordinary courtship ritual Captain de Stancy performs before Paula. He acts out the role of one of his ancestors before one of their portraits that line a corridor in Stancy castle. The ancestor in the portrait bares a resemblance to Captain de Stancy and he plays upon Paula's medievalism, her romantic longing for a heritage she does not possess, by dressing up in an upper half of armour and placing himself "in front of a low hanging portrait of the original, so as to be enclosed by the frame while covering the figure, arranging the sword as in the one above, and setting the light that it might fall in the right direction."[84] The mimicry is such Paula is struck by a "new and romantic feeling that the de Stancy's had stretched out a tentacle from their genealogical tree to seize her by the hand and draw her into their mass".[85]

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[83]Hardy, 1975, op. cit., p. 141.
[84]Ibid., p. 212.
[85]Ibid., p. 210.

The episode makes clear the relationship between Captain de Stancy and the portraits of his ancestry. Like the condition of the aristocratic family they now represent, these portraits are pictured in a state of decay. They provide a remarkable array:

> more so for the incredibly neglected condition of the canvases than for the artistic peculiarities they exhibited. Many of the frames were dropping apart at their angles, and some of the canvas was so dingy that the face of the person depicted was only distinguishable as the moon through the mist.[86]

Captain de Stancy stands for the past. Like his illegitimate son he has only his name. Only he does not have to keep it secret.

Captain de Stancy's protean quality, his ability to assume the shape and situation of almost any ancestor at will, is a more pronounced characteristic of his son's. Dare is presented not only as an eavesdropper by Hardy. He has no identity. Hardy portrays him as an impish, diabolical figure. His age it is impossible to say because there was "not a hair on his face to hang a guess upon"[87] His nationality is also difficult to determine. For Somerset he is of "..no age, no nationality and no behaviour".[88] He is mercurial. "A complete negative..if he were not a maker of negatives" as Havill jokes about him.[89]

The decrepit state of the aristocratic family is clearly represented in Hardy's portrait of Captain de Stancy's father, Sir William de Stancy, the person who sold his ancestral home and possessions to Paula's father. When Somerset meets him he is captivated by his appearance. De Stancy is half dead. His

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[86]Ibid., p. 55.
[87]Ibid., p. 82.
[88]Ibid., p. 101.
[89]Ibid., p. 101.

very physiognomy echoes the state of his castle. He had "large cavernous arches to his eye-sockets, reminding the beholder of the vaults in the castle he had once owned."[90] Somerset then checks his own behaviour for conducting such close observation.

> But to study a man to his face for long is a species of ill-nature which requires a colder temperament, or at least an older heart, than the architect's was at that time. Incurious unobservance is the true attitude of cordiality and Somerset blamed himself for having fallen into an act of inspection very briefly.[91]

This is of course of particular significance in the light of Dare's eavesdropping. Somerset resists his own tendency to scutiny. The gaze is involved with power and an intrusion of privacy.

The first use of photography in the novel takes place when Dare is seen by a police constable in Somerset's studio. Dare sneeks into the studio together with Harvill to look at his plans for an extension to the castle. Somerset, thinking the constable's description close to Dare, attempts to draw a likeness. Unable to do so he remembers that Dare had begged for his photo, and in return for it had left one of himself. Ordinarily such a photographic portrait would be sufficient to prove Dare's complicity in the crime. However, Somerset entrusts the photo to Captain de Stancy to give to the constable. De Stancy, the father of Dare, discovers who is portrayed and manages to switch the portrait for one of a young man quite unknown to him of similar age to Dare but in no other way resembling him.

The point of this incident is particularly interesting in terms of the way in which the photographic portrait fails to incriminate. One wonders if de Stancy had

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[90]Ibid., p. 74.
[91]Ibid. ,p. 74.

been given a sketch he might not have made the switch so easily. (Unless, of course, he also had a drawer full of hand drawn portraits that he could pass off as Somerset's.) A similar thought is invoked towards the end of the novel when Dare deceives Paula, and nearly ruins her relationship with Somerset. The deception carried out rests on two tricks played by Dare. The first involves writing. Somerset's letters to Paula were being read by her uncle. In order to hide this exchange of love they hold a secret communiqué through the telegraph. But without handwriting or signature there is no verification of authorship through this new channel of communication. Dare exploits this fact and sends a message pretending it is from Somerset. It says how he has lost his money gambling and asks to be sent money. This is followed by Dare dropping a portrait of Somerset that had been distorted in a particular way so as to give an effect of him being drunk— "It was a portrait of Somerset; but by a device known in photography the operator, though contriving to produce what seemed to be a perfect likeness, had given it the distorted features and wild attitude of a man advanced in intoxication".[92] To Paula "that picture of Somerset had all the cogency of direct vision".[93] It is never doubted.

Precisely because of its believability, the possibility of its distortion goes unsuspected. It is Charlotte, Paula's friend and Captain de Stancy's sister, who eventually discovers the truth of the photographic deception. She visits the shop of a photographer in the town and discovers that misrepresentations were quite possible in the photograph and is shown a series of such prints by him: "'This one represents the German Emperor in a violent passion" he tells her, "this one shows the Prime Minister out of his mind; this the Pope of Rome the worse for liquor.'"[94]

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[92]Ibid., p. 332
[93]Ibid., p. 332.
[94]Ibid., p. 389.

Hardy's text exposes the vulnerability of two mechanical processes to manipulation— both the telegraphic message and the photograph. It is a book which, while showing the onset of modernity, one cannot help but feel also hints at a certain value of authenticity in the hand written and hand drawn, a value lost with mechanical reproduction and communication. If Somerset had given Captain de Stancy a drawing instead of a photographic of Dare, could he so readily have found another picture to replace it? And it was only because Somerset was no longer writing letters to Paula but communicating by the telegraph, that Dare was able to send a false message.

A further aspect concerning the references to photography in this novel is indicated by the metaphor used to explain the shock Captain Stancy has with his unexpected encounter with the photograph of his illegitimate child. He is greatly affected by the picture— "During the following days Captain de Stancy's manner on the roads, in the streets, and at the barracks was that of Crusoe after seeing the print of a man's foot on the sand."[95] He thought he was alone and he is not alone. The past has caught up with him. But, moreover, the metaphor indicates the way the photograph was viewed by Hardy, as index, as analogue of a footprint in the sand, as irrefutable evidence of the near presence of Dare. Like the photograph, the footprint in sand is an indexical mark, a sign causally related to its referent. Of course Hardy's novel rests upon a manipulation of that status, not all photographs may have an indexical relationship to their referents as Dare's manipulated image shows. But the reason the trick is so effective is precisely the believability in the photograph as a writing of nature. When Dare drops the distorted portrait of Somerset, Hardy tells us how both Charlotte and Paula never thought "that the sun could be made to falsify men's characters in delineating their features."[96]

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[95]Ibid., p. 180.
[96]Ibid., p. 333.

I want to now use this notion of the index to consider Hardy's prose and suggest his particular way of describing, his eye for minutiae, reveals an evident fascination for indexical marks, an attention to ways in which things have been physically handled and worn. It is through such an attention one could begin to argue his writing is photographic, or rather, reflects a photographic sensibility. As already discussed in my chapter on Fox Talbot (see Chapter One), photography was widely noted for its ability to render surface incident. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake in her article on photography and art in the Quarterly Review of March 1857, pointed out that:

> the forte of the camera lies in the imitation of one surface only, and that of a rough and broken kind. Minute light and shade, cognisant to the eye, but unattainable by hand, is its greatest and easiest triumph— the mere texture of stone, whether rough in the quarry or hewn on the wall, its especial delight.[97]

For her, photography best succeeded in rendering "everything near and rough- from the texture of the sea worn shell, of the rusted armour, and the fustian jacket, to those glorious architectural pictures of French, English and Italian subjects..."[98] Although writing on the stereoscopic image, Oliver Wendell Holmes reflects part of this fascination for indexical details in the photographic image.

> The very things a painter would leave out, or render imperfectly, the photograph takes infinite care with and so makes its illusions perfect. What is the picture of a drum without the marks on its head where the beating of the sticks has darkened the parchment?[99]

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97 Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, 'Photography', in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography. (New Haven: Leete's Isand Books, 1980), p. 64.
98 Ibid. p. 64.
99 See Holmes's 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography. (New Haven: Leete's Isand Books, 1980), p. 80.

In the very beginning of A Laodicean, Somerset muses on his career sitting on a wooden stile: a "three inch ash rail that had been peeled and polished like glass by the rubbings of all the small-clothes in the Parish".[100] When he approaches the chapel, he is drawn there because "the chapel and its herbage was all trodden away by busy feet" and it "had a living human interest that the numerous minsters and churches knee deep in fresh green grass, visited by him during the foregoing week, had often lacked."[101]

When Hardy describes the old black pew in the castle chapel, he is attentive the state of wear of its faded baize lining which had been "torn, kicked and scraped to rags by the feet and hands of the plough-boys who had appropriated the pew as their own special place of worship...its height afforded convenient shelter for playing at marbles and pricking with pins".[102]

The first description of Paula's uncle insists on his peculiar facial characteristics: "His visage had little of its original surface left it was a face which had been the play thing of strange fires or pestilences, that had moulded to whatever shape they chose his originally supple skin, and left it pitted, puckered and seamed like a dry watercourse".[103] Hardy here makes a joke with physiognomy, in which outward features were believed to indicate internal character. Paula's uncle got his scars from an explosion which occurred during some criminal activity, but rather than stand as markers of his criminality, the scarring gives him the perfect disguise. The very signs of the crime, his guilt, disfigure and mask his identity to the police— keep him safe.

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[100]Hardy, 1975, op. cit., p. 41.
[101]Ibid., p. 44.
[102]Ibid., p. 135.
[103]Ibid., p. 256.

Towards the novel's close, Paula trying to find the whereabouts of Somerset, finds clues confirming that he recently visited the town of Lisieux—"She examined the woodwork closely; here and there she discerned pencil marks which had no doubt been jotted thereon by Somerset as points of admeasurement...some fragments of paper lay below; there were penciled lines upon them, and they bore a strong resemblance to a spoilt leaf of Somerset's sketchbook".[104] Such details lead her to Somerset, the misunderstandings between them are resolved and their relationship restored. The novel closes with their marriage, the burning of Castle de Stancy by Dare, and the newly weds' decision to build a new house beside the ruin.

In Hawthorne's romance the daguerreotype portrait provided a way of seeking out the true nature of an individual, a way of going beneath the surface smile and revealing the darker truth of a person's character. Hardy's text departs significantly from this notion of photography and contributes an interesting debate on the ways in which photography falls severely short as an adequate sign of truth. As Hardy convincingly demonstrates, the meaning of the photograph lies in its use. It does not, as Hawthorne story suggests, reside in the image, in the truth-revealing insight of the sun. The daguerreotype—existing as a positive of the referent on polished metal— would of course be less vulnerable to the distortion the paper portrait undergoes in Hardy's story. One might see the questioning of the truth of photography as wider reflections upon the limitations of the medium by the time of the later 19th century, the sense in which its image can be controlled, that it is not a mere transcript of the sun. In many ways the implications of this novel by Thomas Hardy are quite radical. The story highlights that the referent of the photograph is not always to be believed. Hardy's A Laodicean begins to undermine unnecessary attachments and investments in the seeming truth of the photographic image. A

[104]Ibid., p. 405.

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photographic portrait, like a painted picture, as the novel so clearly demonstrates, can lie. But of course the lie is made within fiction, Hardy the novelist is the final arbiter of truth and it will not be until we look at photography in books by a contemporary artist in the last chapter of this thesis that the author as locus of truth is also undermined.

CHAPTER FOUR

Photography and Truth in Science: Galton's Composite Portraits

Chapter Three discussed two decidedly differing approaches to the photographic medium within stories by Hawthorne and Hardy. Having discussed photographic portraits in two nineteenth century novels, this chapter considers a particular form of portraiture, the photographic composite, and its function as illustration in 'scientific' books in the nineteenth century. I will also be considering the place given the photographic composite in the surviving fragments of a 'utopian' novel written in the early part of this century. The composites are the result of photography being used together with an extensive range of physiological observations and techniques for measuring and classifying the human body, in the attempt to identify and define (among others) the criminal in the nineteenth century. The emergence of criminal anthropology as a human science in the nineteenth century established the criminal as an object of scientific investigation.

What I will be addressing in this chapter will be the role of photography in relationship to criminal anthropology— a group of photographic composite portraits made in an attempt to make visually present signs of 'difference' and 'degeneracy'. This scientific usage of photography sought a particular relationship between description and knowledge, between photography and truth. A belief in the objectivity of the photograph and a belief in the seamless relationship between its image and its referent lies at the heart of photography's frequent use in scientific experiments.[1] My discussion of photography in books

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[1] As David Green points out, "the assertion of a seamless relation between the photographic image and appearances...called for the suppression of all evidence of the photograph's own materiality and the denial of the image's status as a representation in favour of its immediate identity with its referent". See his 'Veins of Resemblance: Photography and Eugenics' in ed.

of science will be based upon a book by the English statistician and founder of eugenics, Francis Galton: his Inquiries Into Human Faculty (1883) with its extraordinary frontispiece of composite photographs. I will also be considering the surviving fragments of Galton's utopian novel, Kantsaywhere (1910) and, in its use of both photographic and hand drawn illustrations of convicts, two editions of Havelock Ellis's book, The Criminal (1890 and 1901) will also be looked at in some detail.

Photography contributed to a change in the nature of scientific illustration. In their study of image-making in scientific atlases, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, propose a shift in the kind of illustration that appears in later nineteenth century scientific atlases.[2] Atlases of the mid-nineteenth century mark a transition between the earlier atlases that had sought truth to nature in the unabashed depiction of the typical— be it ideal, characteristic, exemplar or average— and the later atlases that sought truth to nature through mechanical objectivity. Photography was felt to open a path to truthful depiction, one led not by precision but by automation, by the exclusion of the scientist's will from the field of discourse. The photograph stood for "authenticity, free from the inner temptations to theorize, anthropomorphize, beautify or otherwise interpret nature."[3] With the camera apparently eliminating human agency, the photograph was accepted as crucial in the path to objectivity in scientific image-making.

One case in point was the way in which in the 1850s psychiatric illustration was enhanced by the technological breakthrough of the application of photography. Photography provided scientific representations of the insane which could be

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Patricia Holland, Jo Spence and Simon Watney, Photography/Politics: Two, (London: Comedia and Photography Workshop, 1986), pp. 9-21. Quote taken from p. 10.

[2]See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, 'The Image of Objectivity' in Representations, 40, Fall 1992, University of California Press, pp. 81-128. .

[3]Ibid., p. 120.

studied to gain an understanding of what one eminent British psychiatrist of the mid-nineteenth century, John Conolly, described, as the "peculiar expression and the general character of mental suffering, or derangement of mind, and of structural changes, or of congenital or induced peculiarities in the brain." [4] The photograph's precision of record offered greater information than any hand drawn illustration could ever provide. As Conolly noted, "[t]here is so singular a fidelity in a well-executed photograph that the impression of very recent muscular agitation in the face seems to be caught by the process, which the engraver's art can barely preserve."[5] .

Hugh W. Diamond, resident superintendent of the Female Department of the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum, made the first systematic use of photography in the history of psychiatry. In his 1856 paper before the Royal Society, he describes the importance of photography to "the investigation of the phenomena of Insanity."[6] Diamond actually went so far as to believe he could cure at least some of his patients by exposing them to photographs of themselves. His course of treatment would involve presenting his patients with "realistic" images of themselves as demented, which seemed to startle them into an awareness of their madness. Behind this cure through photography, lies a belief in the truth and objectivity of record the photograph made of its subject. It offered a new way of seeing and thereby diagnosing the mentally ill. While "The metaphysician, and Moralist, the Physician and Physiologist" will approach their inquiry of the insane "with their peculiar views, definitions and classifications" Diamond declares that:

> The Photographer, on the other hand, needs in many cases no aid from any language of his own, but prefers rather to listen, with the picture

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[4]Quoted in Sander L. Gilman, Disease and Representation, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 41.
[5] Ibid., p.42.
[6]Quoted in Sander L. Gilman, The Face of Madness, (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1976) p. 19

> before him, to the silent language of nature— it is unnecessary for him to use the vague terms which denote a difference in the degree of mental suffering, as for instance, distress, sorrow, deep sorrow, grief, melancholy, anguish, despair; the picture speaks for itself with the most marked precision and indicates the exact point which has been reached in the scale of unhappiness between the first sensation and its utmost height— similarly the modification of fear, and of the more painful passions, anger and rage, jealousy and envy, (the frequent concomitants of insanity) being shown from the life by the Photographer, attest the attention of the thoughtful observer more powerfully than any laboured description.[7]

With photography came a means of observation of the insane that neither drawings nor descriptions could provide. The photograph provided a record so accurate it was felt to allow the psychiatrist to listen to "the silent language of nature". And, moreover, as Diamond goes on to say, photography gives permanence to remarkable cases:

> makes them observable not only now but for ever, and it presents a perfect and faithful record, free altogether from the painful caricaturing which so disfigures almost all the published portraits of the Insane as to render them nearly valueless either for purposes of art or of science.[8]

Behind both Diamond's and Conolly's praise of the photograph as precise portrait lies a faith in the physiognomic notion of a correspondence between facial expressions and mental facility. The photograph, as Diamond puts it,

> exhibits to the eye the well known sympathy which exist between the diseased brain and the organs and features of the body...the Photographer catches in a moment the permanent cloud, or the passing storm or sunshine of the soul, and thus enables the metaphysician to witness and trace out the connexion between the visible and the invisible

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[7]Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[8]Ibid., p. 24.

> in one important branch of his researches into the Philosophy of the human mind.[9]

The belief in correspondences between the brain and the features of the body— the very basis of the importance the photographic portrait carried in psychiatric illustration— has a particular history. It is a history that plays as crucial a part in the felt sense of the value of photography to psychiatry as its value to criminology.

Power and the Gaze

Important to this correspondence between outward bodily signs and inner behaviour is a notion of power and the gaze. I already began to look at the relationship between photography, power and surveillance in the representation of the photographer in Hardy's novel, A Laodicean. And I will be taking up some of the issues I will raise here in the next chapter in my discussion of the significance of the gaze in both James Agee's prose and Walker Evans's portraits in their collaborative project of documentation, the book Let us Now Praise Famous Men. The gaze can function as a part of what Michel Foucault, in Discipline and Punish, has termed a 'disciplinary' power. His book describes a shift in power from "the pomp of sovereignity, the necessarily spectacular manifestations of power" to "the daily exercise of surveillance."[10] In certain events— hanging, drawing and quartering— the effects of sovereign power were displayed in cruel quasi-theatrical spectacles, intelligible as acts of centralised power. Under the *ancien régime* the extreme point of penal justice was the infinite segmentation of the body of the regicide; a manifestation of the strongest power over the body of the greatest criminal, whose total destruction made the crime explode into its truth. In contrast,

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[9] Ibid., p. 20.
[10] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 217.

'disciplinary' power is not centralised but deritualised and privatised, working on individuals as individuals. Its object is behaviour and the individual body; its tools are surveillance, examination and training; and its sites, factories, prisons, schools and hospitals.

As John Tagg has argued, photography played a particular part in this surveillance.[11] Tagg draws attention to Foucault's account of a shift in the conception and relation of power from the late 18th century, one which is marked by the emergence of a new curiosity about the individual it was intended to transform. This was unknown at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Then the function of courts was such there was no need to understand the prisoner or the conditions of the crime. Once guilt was established a set of penalities was brought into play that were proportionate and fixed. By the early 19th century in France, Britain and the USA, judges, doctors, criminologists were seeking new techniques to gain a knowledge necessary to the administration of power. Prisoners were encouraged to write down their life stories. The results of such a special kind of observation had to be accumulated somewhere and it began therefore to be assembled in a growing series of registers and reports. Before this the chronicle of an individual, the account of his life, had always been part of the rituals of his power. Disciplinary methods had reversed this situation. As the threshold of describable individuality was lowered, description became a means of control and method of domination.

> This turning of real lives into writing was no longer a procedure of heroicisation; it functioned as a procedure of objectification and subjection....The examination as the fixing, at once ritual and "scientific", of individual differences, as the pinning down of each individual in his own particularity...clearly indicates the appearance of a new modality of power in which each individual receives as his status his own

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11 See John Tagg's 'A Means of Surveillance' in The Burden of Representation (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 66-102.

> individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterise him and make him a 'case'.[12]

John Tagg shows the relation between this "procedure of objectification and subjection" and the insatiable appropriation of subjects by the camera, what he sees as "the transmission of power in the synaptic space of the camera's examination."[13] Photography forms part of a scrutiny of the individual and can be seen to mark the manifestation of a Foucauldian 'micro-physics' of power. One can therefore speak of another history of photography in the late nineteenth century, one involved with scrutiny, with an inspection of individual's places of habitation and behaviour. Photography provided a means of checking and controlling the emergent masses of the working class. Tagg points out how the dominant form of signification in bourgeois society is the realist mode. "Realism offers a fixity in which the signifier is identical with a pre-existent signified".[14] All that matters is the illusion, "the complex codes or use of language by which realism is constituted appear of no account." He calls for the need to realise that the "photographic reality is a complex system of discourses and significations consistent with the text or picture".[15]

Tagg's discussion of photography and power involves a call for us to think no longer of a history of photography, but of 'histories' of differing uses of photography, or rather, of 'photographies'.[16] The generic classification of portrait photography becomes no longer a stable means of identification because it encompasses radically opposed utilisations of the medium. On the

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[12]Foucault, op. cit., p. 191-2.
[13]John Tagg, 1988, op. cit., p.92.
[14]Ibid., p. 99.
[15]Ibid., p. 101.
[16]The sub-title of The Burden of Representation is 'Essays on Photographies and Histories'.

one hand the photographic portrait continued the tradition of portrait painting. It conferred status. As Tagg has put it, "To 'have one's portrait done' was one of the symbolic acts by which individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status."[17] But, on the other hand, a different portrait was being used in prison records and social surveys in which the meaning of the representations of the objects of supervision and reform, were framed by a code of social inferiority. Photographic portraiture, according to Allan Sekula, involved a "double system of representation capable of functioning both honorifically and repressively"[18]. The photographic portrait "both extended the honorific portrait of individuals and in the same thorough and rigorous fashion, functioned in a role derived from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration"[19]. An archive of images of the diseased body, the insane body and the criminal body emerges, an archive in which, as Sekula has pointed out, all images were linked by the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century "a single hermeneutic paradigm had gained widespread prestige."[20] Physiognomy and phrenology were its two branches— both sharing the belief that "the surface of the body, especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character."[21]

The Swiss preacher-author, Johann Caspar Lavater had revised and systematised physiognomy in the late 1770s— analytically isolating the profile of the head and the various anatomic features of the head and face, assigning a character revealing significance to each element: forehead, eyes, nose, ears, chin and so on. He even went further and proposed we could interpret dress style and handwriting as indices of character. Phrenology, emerging in the first

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[17]Ibid., p. 37.
[18]Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive' in October,39, Winter, 1986, MIT Press , p. 7
[19]Ibid. p. 7.
[20]Ibid., p.10.
[21]Ibid., p.11.

decade of the 19th century, sought to discern correspondences between the shape of the skull and what were thought to be localised mental faculties seated in the brain. François Joseph Gall, the founder of phrenology, fled Vienna in 1801, settled in Paris where from 1810 to 1818 he published Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System in General and the Brain in Particular, with an Atlas of Illustrations published in 1819. A clear relationship was declared to exist between the shape and size of skull and the potential for insanity. As one scholar recently put it, at "a time when human passions and psychic functions were widely associated with the heart and other viscera, François Joseph Gall proposed a detailed map of the human brain, identifying both animal and specific human psychic functions to precisely situated brain organs."[22] Postulating that the skull was moulded by the brain, Gall thought that an overly developed faculty would mean larger corresponding cerebral circumvolutions and cause a perceivable bump on a living being's head. Deviance was neither moral nor political protest but instead a simple matter of biological damage or malfunction.

Havelock Ellis and Criminal Anthroplogy

Nineteenth century criminology was heavily based on such phrenological theories. The phrenology of Gall was even seen by the English criminal anthropologist, Havelock Ellis, as having thrust aside what he referred to as the "credulous fancies of the physiognomists."[23] Ellis's book The Criminal, first published in 1890, provides a useful insight into the way in which the criminal was viewed in the late nineteenth century. I will be discussing the place of the composite illustrations in the book shortly, but first I will bring out the way in

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[22]Marie-Christine Lepps, Apprehending the Criminal, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 27.
[23]Havelock Ellis, The Criminal, (London: Walter Scott, 1890), p. 29.

which it presents dominant beliefs concerning the behaviour and characteristics of 'criminal man.'

The book begins by stressing a long history of belief in the particularity of the criminal's appearance; a belief which, Ellis informs us, went as far back as Homer who described the criminal Theristes "as ugly and deformed, with harsh or scanty hair, and a pointed head, like a pot that had collapsed to a peak in the baking"[24].. For Ellis, Homer's above description was now in the process of being tested, submitted to scientific observation, and to statistics, and was felt to have been largely 'justified'.[25] "Beautiful faces", writes Ellis, "are rarely found among criminals. The prejudice against the ugly and also against the deformed is not without sound foundation."[26]

The study of criminality had rapidly emerged as a major field of scientific investigation in England by the late 1880s. At the time of writing The Criminal Havelock Ellis indicates how " a continuous stream of studies— from books of the most comprehensive character down to investigation into minute points of criminal anatomy or physiology— is constantly pouring forth."[27] Criminal anthropology set about measuring, observing and documenting the body in an attempt to discover the particular physiological characteristics of the criminal. Havelock Ellis acknowledges Cesare Lombroso as the first to conceive the complete scientific treatment of the criminal as a human variety in his The Criminal Man, published in 1876. It was Lombroso who first set about weighing and measuring the criminal according to the methods of anthropology.

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[24]Ibid., p. 26.
[25]Ibid., p. 26.
[26]Ibid., p. 80.
[27]Ibid., p. 40.

In 1870, searching for anatomical differences between criminals and insane men, Lombroso examined the skull of a famous brigand and saw in the skull a series of features which recalled an apish past:

> an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals. Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek bones, prominent supercilliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped ears found in criminals, savages and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresponsible craving of evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in their victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh and drink its blood.[28]

Lombroso described the criminal as an atavistic throwback to prehistoric man. This theory was elaborated through various means, anatomical, physiological and psychological moral tests. The result was the production of the notion of the "born criminal type", characterised by a set of hereditary physical, intellectual and moral stigmata Impervious to any kind of reform, criminals were seen as evolutionary thowbacks in our midst. Lombroso's theory showed how we may identify born criminals because they bear anatomical signs of their apishness. Their atavism, both mental and physical, is indicated by physical signs, stigmata. These also included a set of social traits: for example, the argot of criminals, a language of their own with a high level of onomatopoeia; tattooing, reflecting both an insensitivity to pain and an atavistic love of adornment. In the case of tattooing the body is written over, visibly marked. In his book, Ellis borrows a hand drawn illustration of the tattooed body of a French sailor from Lombroso's Criminal Man. As Ellis's notes to the plate state:"His various inscriptions and designs bear witness to his vicious and criminal tastes."[29] . Ellis also considers inscriptions in Prison: "The lower the

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[28]Quoted in Stephen Jay Gould's The Mismeasure of Man, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 124.
[29]Ellis, 1890, op. cit., p. 305.

order of culture the more complete and trustworthy is the inscription as an expression of individual peculiarities."[30]

Crime was seen as biological (Lombroso: "We see in the criminal a savage man and, at the same time, a sick man"[31]). To understand crime, study the criminal not his rearing, education or the current predicament that might have inspired his theft or pillage. Evil or stupid, poor, or disenfranchised, or degenerate, people are what they are as a result of their birth. Criminality, wrote Ellis:

> consists in a failure to live up to the standard recognised as binding by the community....By some accident of development, by some defect of heredity or birth or training, he belongs as it were to a lower and social state than that in which he is actually living. It thus happens that our own criminals frequently resemble in physical and psychical characters the normal individuals of a lower race. This is that 'atavism' which has been so frequently observed in criminals and so much discussed....To admit..in the criminal a certain psychical and physical element belonging to a more primitive age is simple and perfectly reasonable.[32]

Both Lombroso and Ellis believed the criminal to be born not made; a distinct human type who bore outward signs of his criminality— I say "his" because the representations of the criminal I will be dealing with here are predominantly male. Ellis's study The Criminal details through prose and images the physiological peculiarities of criminals: the size and shape of head, the size of ears, the shape of nose, the protuberance of jaw, even the state of their teeth. While he notes the average size of criminals' heads is probably the same as that of ordinary people's heads, "both small and large heads are found in greater proportion, the medium sized heads being deficient....Thieves more frequently have small heads; the large heads are usually found among

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[30] Ibid., p. 169.
[31] Quoted in Gould, op. cit., p. 134.
[32] Ibid., pp.206-7.

murderers."[33] He goes on: "Prognathism has frequently been noted as a prominent characteristic of the criminal face, both in men and women...there is little doubt that the lower jaw is often remarkably well developed in those guilty of crimes of violence".[34] "Even non-scientific observers have noted the frequency among criminals of projecting or of long and voluminous ears."[35]

Ellis includes illustrations as visual testimony to the cranial and facial characteristics of the criminals he has described. But they are drawings not photographs (see figs. 20 and 21). I will be coming to the place of photographic illustrations in his book shortly. Plates 1-VI of the book provide a series of drawings of convicts' heads said to illustrate "in a very remarkable manner many of the peculiarities"[36] Ellis has noted in such descriptions as quoted above. They are reproduced from sketches made by Dr. Vans Clarke, formerly governor of Woking prison. The 36 portraits reproduced in Ellis's book are taken from 111 of a similar character. They are described as 'exceptional' rather than 'typical' heads; representing 10 percent of a 1,000 criminals examined. "My sketches", writes Clarke:

> were taken at the 'model prison' of Pentonville, where the duty of filling up the medical history-sheet of every convict on his arrival devolved upon me, and I was prompted to use my sketch book during the physical examination , on the observation of remarkable peculiarities in many of the heads and faces of the criminals. The portraits were necessarily taken in haste, but they were true, and were considered to be successful as likenesses. I may say that I was compelled to make a selection rather from want of time than the lack of material. In a less marked degree the instances of misshapen heads and repulsive facial characters were very common.[37]

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[33]Ibid., p. 40.
[34]Ibid., pp. 63-64.
[35]Ibid., p. 65-66.
[36]Ibid., p. 53.
[37]Ibid., pp.53-54.

Importantly for Ellis, these sketches were taken some years before the publication of Lombroso's work and it "was therefore impossible for Dr. Clarke to have been unconsciously influenced by any preconceived notions on the subject."[38]

Galton's Composites

However, it was not these drawings which stood as the emblem of 'criminal man'. It is a composite photographic portrait which stands as the frontispiece to the book, purportedly the representative face of 'criminal man' (see fig. 22). The composite, as Appendix A informs us[39], consists of a condensation of the features of 20 criminals—'dullards' in the Elmira Reformatory— into one image. Ellis says he is indebted to Dr Hamilton Wey for this photograph and the two other composites we find in the book.

The use of the composite portrait in criminal anthropology stems from Francis Galton whose experiments with photography in the nineteenth century led him to try and render the collective face of criminal man. His composite portraits of criminals were made as part of a rather singular scientific inquiry, forming part of his statistical studies to prove his eugenic theories.

Before introducing his particular use of photography, some clarification as to what exactly Galton meant by eugenics is needed. Eugenics was commited to the theory of fixed and innate characteristics which the individual possessed. Intellectual ability was inherited. People were born fit and intelligent or born unfit and stupid. Galton sought to construct a program of social betterment through breeding— justifying his program in utilitarian terms: seeking to reduce

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[38]Ibid., p. 54.
[39]Ibid., p.303.

the numbers of the unfit he claimed to be reducing the numbers of those predestined to unhappiness. He claimed that we all agree it is better being healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well fitted than ill-fitted for one's part in life. He defined eugenics in his lecture to the London School of Economics in 1904 as "the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage."[40] According to Galton "our human civilised stock is far more weakly through congenital imperfection than that of any other species of animals, whether wild or domestic."[41] .

Galton's early 1869 work, Hereditary Genius was an attempt to demonstrate the priority of what he called "nature" over "nurture" in determining the quality of human intelligence.[42] A hierarchy of intelligence was proposed and applied to racial groups. This, as Sekula has pointed out, was "characterised by a distinct classicist longing."[43] Galton claimed the Negro was two grades below white races in their natural abilities, while the Athenian of 530-430 BC was as much above. Galton refers to:

> the quick intelligence and high culture of the Athenian community before whom literary works were recited, and works of art exhibited, of a far more severe character than would possibly be appreciated by the average of our race, the calibre of whose intellect is easily guaged by a glance at the contents of a railway bookstall.[44]

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[40] Quoted in D.W. Forrest's Francis Galton: the Life and Work of a Victorian Genius, (London: Elek Books, 1974), p. 256.
[41] Francis Galton, Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development, (London: Macmillan,1883), p. 23.
[42] Francis Galton, Hereditary Genius, (London: Macmillan, 1869).
[43] Sekula, 1986, op. cit., p. 44.
[44] Quoted in Forrest, op. cit., p. 89.

As Sekula succinctly put it "Eugenics can be seen as an attempt to push the English social average toward an imaginary, lost Athens, and away from an equally imaginary, threatening Africa."[45]

Galton's immediate concern was the possibility of studying prevalent mental and psychological characteristics. He desired to trace the peculiarities of the mental and psychological traits associated with criminality within the evidence of physiological characteristics. And it was with this intention he used photography. For Galton the anthropometric method of measurement (à la Lombroso and Ellis) was seen as inadequate to discover what he termed the "true physiogomy of a race".[46] As Galton pointed out in his Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development (1883), '[t]he physiognomical difference between different men being so numerous and small, it is impossible to measure and compare them each to each."[47] He was also opposed to the photographic portrait of the representative criminal type.

> The usual way is to select individuals who are judged to be representatives of the prevalent type, and to photograph them; but this method is not trustworthy, because the judgement itself is fallacious. It is swayed by exceptional and grotesque features more than by ordinary ones, and the portraits supposed to be typical are likely to be caricatures.[48].

The "typical" portraits tendency towards caricature is indicated very clearly in those hand drawn illustrations in Havelock Ellis' book The Criminal. Instead, Galton's use of photography, as his biographer Karl Pearson has made clear, proceeded as a means to discover the correspondence between mental characters and physical characters. His inquiry turned more to the

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[45]Sekula, 1986, p. 44.
[46]Galton, 1883, op. cit., p. 5.
[47]Ibid., p. 5.
[48]Ibid., p. 5.

psychometric side of anthropology. While the anthropologist up until Galton's date had employed portraiture to distinguish types physically, Galton, as Pearson put it, "employed portraiture to distinguish between mental types."[49] And to do so, Galton devised a method of composite portraiture. He collected numerous photographs of persons who were photographed under the same lighting conditions and the same full-face position (see fig. 23). Then the photographs were aligned so that particular features, for example the eyes, were placed on a vertical and horizontal axis. Next, superimposed like the pages of a book, the series was affixed to a wall— each turned over and photographed one at a time. His process is made clear in the following account of his procedure:

> ...I superimposed the portraits like the successive leaves of a book, so that the features of each portrait lay as exactly as the case admitted, eye in front of eye and mouth in front of mouth. This I did by holding them successively to the light and adjusting them, then by fastening each to the preceding one with a strip of gummed paper along one of the edges. Thus I obtained a book, each page of which contained a separate portrait, and all the portraits lay exactly in front of one another....I fastened the book against the wall in such a way that I could turn over the pages in succession, leaving in turn each portrait flat and fully exposed...I focused my camera on the book, fixed it firmly, and put a sensitive plate inside it...I began photographing, taking one page after the other in succession without moving the camera, but putting on the cap whilst I was turning over the pages, so that an image of each of the portraits in succession was thrown on the same part of the sensitized plate. [50]

Galton noted the human capacity of "blending memories together" and compared such mental images to the generic pictures of his composite portraits.[51] In his The Interpretation of Dreams in describing the process of

[49]Karl Pearson, The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton, Volume II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 301.
[50]Galton, 1883, op. cit., p. 9.
[51]Ibid., p. 349.

dream condensation in uniting the actual features of two or more people into a single dream image, Freud compares the dream material to Galton's composites of the faces of family groups.[52]

But what exactly is taking place in the composite? What does this particular use of photography signify? In beginning to answer these questions one important element that must be brought out is the way in which these aggregate pictures resulted in specific relation to a scientific preoccupation at the time— the concept of the norm. The normal acquired its present most common meaning in the 1820s. The normal was one of a pair. As Ian Hacking as pointed out, its opposite was the pathological and for a short time the domain of the normal was chiefly medical. But then it moved into the sphere of almost anything. People, behaviour, states of affairs, diplomatic relations, molecules— all these may be normal or abnormal.[53]

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault has drawn out the workings of power through the concept of the norm:

> Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age. For the marks that once indicated status, privilege and affiliation were increasingly replaced— or at least supplemented— by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogeneous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank. In a sense the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another...within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. [54]

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[52] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 432.
[53] Ian Hacking, The Taming of Chance, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 161.
[54] Foucault, 1970, op. cit., p. 184.

It is from the Astronomer Royal of Belgium, Alphonse Quetelet, we get the key notion of normalisation. His notion of the average man was not talking about the average for the human species. He was talking about the characteristics of a people or a nation, as a racial type. As Hacking observed, before Quetelet:

> one thought of a people in terms of its culture or its geography or its language or its rules or religion. Quetelet introduced a new objective measurable conception of a people. A race would be characterised by its measurements of physical and moral qualities, summed up in the average man of that race. This is, half of the beginning of Eugenics, the other half being the reflection that one can introduce social policies that will either preserve or alter the average qualities of a race.[55]

And this is of course what Galton advocated and what lies behind his composites. Only Galton, however, marks a transition in the conception of statistical laws. His fascination with the exceptional, as Hacking points out, is the opposite of Quetelet's preoccupation with the mediocre. It was the distribution and deviation from the mean, from the norm, which interested Galton.

The application of mathematical probability to human behaviour requires a conceptual move from the empirically observable individual to an abstracted concept. The rise of statistics in the nineteenth century, as Mark Seltzer in his recent study Bodies and Machines has discussed, results in "a conversion of individuals into numbers and cases and conversions of bodies into visual displays."[56] Statistics and surveillance are seen as two of the "crucial technologies of machine culture."[57] The merger of optics and statistics

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[55]Hacking, 1990, op. cit., p. 107.
[56]Mark Seltzer, Bodies and Machines, (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 100.
[57]Ibid., p. 100

proceeds from both a desire to measure and to look. The merger between a "desire to quantify and a desire to see makes possible the visual display of persons in the form of what Galton has termed 'pictorial statistics.'"[58] Seltzer sees Galton's portraits as part of "an iconography of standardisation"; "[t]he invention of a culture of numbers, models, and statistics and the positing of statistical persons."[59]. Hacking's analysis of the rise of statistics in the nineteenth century, reveals a Foucauldian thesis, behind the "avalanche of printed numbers"[60] "lay new technologies for classifying and enumerating, and new bureaucracies with the authority and continuity to deploy the technology."[61] For Hacking, "enumeration requires categorization".[62]

However, while coupled with mechanisms of measurement and surveillance, Galton's process borders on something outside science, indeed one might even go so far as to say there is something verging on the metaphysical in his way of photographing. This making visible of an image before unseen, has its literary precedent in the references to the photographic, or rather daguerreotype, portrait in The House of the Seven Gables (see Chapter Three). Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel gives the daguerreotype portrait the peculiar facility to pick out the truth of criminality, with its revelation concerning Jeffrey Pyncheon's true contemptible character beneath a facade of surface smiles.

Galton used photography to bring out the secret of the very essence of criminality. The criminal face was photographed and combined for the true representation of the criminal. His portraits of criminals began in 1877 when he obtained from the Home Office a considerable number of photographic portraits of convicts held in Pentonville and Millbank prisons. These photographs were

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[58]Ibid., p. 100.
[59]Ibid., p. 5.
[60]Hacking, op. cit., p. 2.
[61]Ibid., p.3.
[62]Ibid., p. 6.

classified into three groups according to the nature of the crime, those convicted of murder and manslaughter, felony, and those of sexual offences. Galton thought that the way to extract typical features from each of the three groups was to rephotograph several portraits onto the same photographic plate. He sought to find the archetypal facial features of the criminal.

Working with such portraits was particularly repugnant for Galton.

> In the large experience I have had of sorting photographs, literally by the thousand while making experiments with composites, I have been struck by certain general impressions. The consumptive patients consisted of many 100 cases, including a considerable proportion of very ignoble specimens of humanity. Some were scrofulous and misshapen, or suffered from various loathsome forms of inherited disease; most were ill nourished. Nevertheless, in studying their portraits the pathetic interest prevailed, and I returned day after day to my tedious work of classification, with a liking for my materials. It was quite otherwise with the criminals. I did not adequately appreciate the degradation of their expressions for some time; at last the sense of it took firm hold of me, and I cannot now handle the portraits without overcoming by an effort the aversion they suggest. [63]

Galton's composite illustrations in the frontispiece of his Inquires Into Human Faculty show the range of his research (see fig. 24). Experiments with composite portraits involved photographs from coins— the attainment of a true likeness of Alexander the Great through composites from his portraits on coins. Such portraits bear significance in relation to Galton's eugenicist beliefs, revealing, as Sekula has suggested, a longing for the vanished physiognomy of a higher race, a lost classical ideal.[64] We are also given a row of portraits showing in turn "health, disease and criminality"; a utopian image of health

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[63]Galton, 1883, op. cit., p. 18.
[64]Sekula, op. cit., p. 44.

versus its dystopian counterparts. The image of health, he informs us, is a composite of 12 portraits of officers of the Royal engineers with 11 privates (see fig. 25). The points they had in common were the bodily and mental qualifications required for admission into their select corps. The result was seen by him to have an "expression of considerable vigour, resolution, intelligence, and frankness".[65] The face of health and the faculties it connotes is seen to "give[s] a clue to the direction in which the stock of the English race might easily be improved."[66] As a contrast to the composites of the Royal Engineers, Galton presents two of "the coarse and low types of face found among the criminal classes".[67] Like Ellis and Lombroso, Galton believed the criminal to have marked peculiarities of character; "his conscience is almost deficient, his instincts are vicious, his power of self-control is very weak, and he usually detests continuous labour."[68] His use of composite portraits proceeded with the intention of uncovering a relationship between such character and outward appearance.

But a paradox emerges within Galton's project. His quest for a 'truth' of physical features peculiar to the criminal was undertaken through composite portrait photographs which did not portray an identity with the referent of an existing individual. Instead, they provided the overriding physiological features of a group of people. Galton's composite portraits remain decidedly unreal, present only ghost-like and 'apparitional' visages. They were destined to fail to present any recognisable representation of criminality. They work in opposition to the existing focus on details by Ellis and Lombroso, where the criminal body was seen to be inscribed with visible signs of criminality. Galton's composites (see

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[65]Galton, 1883, op. cit., p.14.
[66]Ibid., p. 14.
[67]Ibid., p. 14
[68]Ibid., p. 14.

fig. 26), by contrast, remain without this 'legibility' of criminality, as he himself noted.

> I have made numerous composites of various groups of convicts , which are interesting negatively rather than positively. They produce faces of a mean description, with no villainy written on them. The individual faces are villainous enough, but they are villainous in different ways, and when they are combined, the individual peculiarities disappear, and the common humanity of a low type is all that is left. [69]

The effect of the composites, as Galton said, "is to bring into evidence all the traits in which there is agreement, and to leave but a ghost of a trace of individual peculiarities."[70] Ellis's project was predicated on differentiation. Differences are lost with Galton's project. "There are so many traits in common in all faces that the composite picture when made from many components is far from being a blur; it has altogether the look of an ideal composition."[71]

Galton's noting that his composites had "[t]he look of an ideal composition", hints at their particular nature. The resulting effect of his composite portraits was the reverse of existing physiognomic practices. For physiognomy details are important, the peculiarities of the shape of ears, nose, mouth and so on. While Ellis was critical of physiognomy his procedure of criminal anthropology involved a representation based on a distinguishing of traits which has its basis in physiognomy. Galton's process arrives not at distinguishing characteristics. These composite portraits were even seen to be 'better looking' than the individual portraits.

> The special villainous irregularities...have disappeared, and the common humanity that underlies them has prevailed. They represent, not the

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[69]Ibid., p.15.
[70]Ibid., p. 10.
[71]Ibid., p. 10.

> criminal, but the man who is liable to fall into crime. All composites are better looking than their components...[72]

Composite portraits reveal the human condition innately predisposed towards criminality rather than an index of the criminal. If there was a criminal mentality it was not associated with a particular physiognomy. No criminals were recognisable by the faces which emerged in the composites.[73]

Galton later made use of the composite process with a series of images of the mentally ill, Westminster schoolboys, Jews and T.B patients. He photographed 442 patients at Guy's Hospital and made composites of various sub groups of different ages and disease duration. 200 patients suffering from other diseases acted as controls. But as he noted:

> the results lend no countenance to the belief that any special type of face predominates among phthisical patients, nor to the generally entertained opinion that the narrow and ovoid or 'tubular' face is more common in phthisis than among other diseases. [74]

Galton's photographs were disproving rather than proving physiognomic and phrenological notions. Galton never went so far as to admit this. It is his biographer and friend, Karl Pearson who does this as a means of overcoming the general 'disappointment' felt in regard to Galton's composites. Pearson points out how they still, however, "provide a valuable anthropometric result, namely that mental characters are not highly correlated with external physical characters."[75] He goes on to point out how the significance of Galton's photographs was that the "criminal is not a distinct physical type"[76], the results

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[72]Ibid., p. 343.
[73]According to Forrest, op. cit, p. 139, when Galton showed his composite images of criminals to members of the Anthropological Department of the British Association, many were disappointed that no criminal types recognisable by the face had emerged.
[74]Galton, 1883, op. cit., p. 141.
[75]Pearson, 1924, op. cit., p. 286.
[76]Ibid., p. 286.

of his inquiry "cuts directly at the whole of popular belief in physiognomy and phrenology and the old anatomical ideas of craniometry".[77]

In the blurred configuration of Galton's composites, what is common survives, differences do not survive, they constitute the foggy grey areas in the pictures. Although attempting to achieve the authority of the archive, of the general, abstract proposition, what do they tell us? The results serves to undermine the whole project of defining a criminal type. Sekula's and Tagg's studies of nineteenth century photographic portraiture, both take up the relationship between photographic representation and power— the reduction of people to specimens before the lens, denied dignity and individuality. However, with Galton's portraits, photography reveals images which begin to undermine the very project they are part of. His ghost-like images provide portraits of non-existent, unrecognisable and untypical 'criminals'. And moreover they provide representations with a beauty, an attraction, which distracts from such projects of 'othering' as Havelock Ellis's The Criminal.[78]

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[77]Ibid., p. 230.
[78]Another project of anthropometric 'othering', and one which Sekula effectively contrasted with Galton's composites, is found in the work of the Paris police official, Alphonse Bertillon. The latter's anthropometric method involved a process of indexing and classifying differences among criminals. Seeking to identify repeat offenders, Bertillon built up an archive of differing criminal types. What came to be known as Bertillonage sought to find those parts of the body which could be most quickly and accurately measured with the simplest instruments. The measurements which seem at first sight to be chosen almost at random have a vital characteristic in common— they show definitely and easily recognizable points of reference for measurements with the minimum chances of serious error in working: the height, the length of the finger, the span of outstretched arms, the length and breadth of the ear, are all measurements which can be made, and if necessary repeated, by operators using instruments in the use of which they could rapidly be made efficient. His system of measurement and classification involved an index card system, which constantly broke down the body in terms of size: large, medium or small. Bertillon was responsible for the standardized photograph of the head. Pose and lighting conditions needed to be standardised. Full face and profile portrait appeared upon every identification card. The photographic portrait of the criminal face, was broken down, dismembered, into distinguishing features through sectional photographs, in which a number of prints were made of the head in full face and profile and then reduced to sections— half the profile, the forehead alone, the forehead including the eyes, the ears, the eyes alone, and the nose alone. These were mounted side by side to show comparison and contrast. (My account of the process is based upon that given by Henry T. F. Rhodes in his Alphonse Bertillon, New York: Ablard Schuma, 1956.)

This breakdown of the face to parts was the very opposite of the representations Galton was experimenting with. Bertillon, a technologist, was concerned with the precise measurement of the human being. His metric photography is more in line with the anthropometric studies of criminality by Ellis and Lombroso. Foucault's splendid opposition between the account of violent

It becomes very surprising then that Ellis should have used three Galtonian composites for his book, one of which stands as the frontispiece to the book, purportedly the representative face of 'criminal man'. Meant to stand as the essence of criminality it provides an image of classical beauty that severely undermines the book's project to 'other' the criminal. The conjunction of the composite portraits with hand drawn pictures of various misshapen headed criminals, exposes the 'caricaturing' process of Ellis's own project. The use of both the hand drawn and the photographic composite remains not only awkward but offers quite irreconcilable representations. The composites' 'averaging' is the opposite of Ellis's project of anthropometric 'othering' through differentiation. Perhaps this explains the change in illustrations between the first edition and the revised edition Ellis produced in 1901, one from which all the composites were removed. No mention of this removal is given in the preface, but it is clear they no longer fitted the project, form part of the material he has omitted "that is now out of date."[79] What once existed as contradiction to his argument is replaced by a closer tie between illustration and text. Photographic plates depict individual criminal types, giving visual evidence of the characteristics his text describes the criminal bears: large ears, small heads etcetera (see fig. 27). Photography is used to bring out difference.

The composite troubles and contradicts this project of representing the criminal type. Galton's use of photography sought to confirm his eugenicist belief that negative genes are seen to manifest themselves in bodily distinctions, a faith in outward appearance as a legible index of inward behaviour and character.

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corporal punishment, the public cutting up of the criminal body, with an account of the more diffuse disciplinary power of prison surveillance at the beginning of Discipline and Punish is given another twist with Bertillon's visualisation of disciplinary power— the cutting up of the criminal body through photographic classification. Foucault, 1977, op. cit., pp. 3-7.

[79] Havelock Ellis, The Criminal, (London, 1901), p. x.

Galton's composites are in the tradition of the 'typus'[80], the representative archetype and are involved in a certain metaphysical investment in photography; a belief that photography would reveal a hidden truth. The results undermine his whole project. His criminal composites are not emblematic of degeneracy. Criminal otherness is based on differences, an insistence on the 'exceptionals' in a group, a highlighting of distinguishing details which is lost in the composites, details which are simply smoothed out to a more ideal, beautified and apparitional, portrait.

Kantsaywhere

What happened to the composites? What function could they serve? Galton gives us an answer in a fictional novel he wrote at the end of his life, a novel in which the composites are used for utopian ends, providing fitting representatives of ideal types, the ideal he had already imaged through his composite portraits of classical figures from coins. For this use I will return to photography in the book, not the book of science this time, but a book of fiction, a fragment of a story Galton wrote in his very last years[81].

The fiction entitled Kantsaywhere gives us a vision of a society running on eugenicist models. It tells the story of a professor of vital statistics who reaches Kantsaywhere and meets a young lady about to take her Honours examination at the eugenics college. He also enters the examination at the eugenics college and passes its various anthropmetric, intelligence and hereditary tests.

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[80] See Gallison and Dalton, op. cit, pp. 87-88, where they discuss how the 'typus', an anatomical archetype, is made from a series of observations. The typical is distilled from the variable and accidental. Typical images dominate the anatomical atlases of the seventeenth through to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Galton's photographic composites in many ways continue this tradition.

[81] He began writing this work in May or June of 1910. He submitted it to a publisher in December of that year. It was refused and Galton destroyed the manuscript. The surviving fragments of Kantsaywhere are reprinted in Volume IIIA of Karl Pearson's biography of Galton.

But what is particularly striking about this society is the peculiarly 'ritualised' role the photographic composite has in it.

> There is a great demand in Kantsaywhere for composite portraits of families. The material for making these is abundant and excellent, as it has long since become the fashion, now grown into an obligatory custom, for everyone to be photographed at reasonable intervals, both in full face and profile, under similar and standard conditions of light, in addition to whatever more artistic representation may be desired.
>
> I saw several beautiful composites in the Studio, of men and women, respectively. Every family desires at least four family composites, one of the Grand Parental series, including Great Uncles and Aunts on both sides, another of the Parental series, including Father and Mother, Uncles and Aunts, and yet another of Self, Brothers and Sisters. Lastly, one made from the four grandparents and the two parents, allowing one half of the exposure time to each grandparent that was allowed to either parent.[82]

Although a firm agnostic, Galton believed that every nation required its peculiar superstition. For Galton any superstition was seen as a source of strength for the believing group, it provided a stabilising element in society. One finds a splendid example of such a superstition in the remarkable kind of ancestor worship that takes place among the citizens of Galton's utopia, a society which surrounds itself with composite portraits of its relatives— portraits which act as conscience to the inhabitants of Kantsaywhere, a land in which each citizen studied and was proud of his or her forbears.

> Whether the following views were self-born or partly borrowed I do not know, but the people of Kantsaywhere have the strong belief that the spirits of all the beings who have ever lived are round about, and regard all their actions. They watch the doings of man with eagerness, grieving when their actions are harmful to humanity, and rejoicing when they are

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[82] Karl Pearson, The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton, Volume IIIA, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930),p. 423.

> helpful. it is a kind of grandiose personification of what we call conscience into a variety of composite portraits. I expect that many visionaries among them— for there are visionaries in all races— actually see with more or less distinctness the beseeching or the furious figures of these imaginary spirits, whether as individuals or as composites. There seems to be some confusion between the family, the racial, and the universal clouds of spirit-watchers. They are supposed to co-exist separately and yet may merge into one of many different wholes. There is also much difference of opinion as to the power of these spirits, some think them only sympathetic, others assign the faculty to them of inspiring ideas in men, others again accredit them with occasional physical powers. Everyone here feels that they themselves will, after their life is over, join the spirit legion, and they look forward with eager hope that their descendants will then do what will be agreeable and not hateful to them....They have no fear of death. Their funerals are not dismal functions as with us, but are made into occasions for short appreciative speeches dwelling lovingly on the life-work of the deceased. [83]

The occupants of his fictional colony have all passed strict tests of fitness to be there— intellectual, physical and heredity tests. The society is constituted by the best and fittest of human kind. Galton realised that what eugenics needed was a book of noble families within which, inside a given range of ancestry, a certain percentage of members had reached posts falling into a carefully selected list, or achieved results in politics, art, literature or science of a certain degree of worth. His 'utopian' novel reflects this desire, but its vision of a society marked by the surveillance and monitoring of its subjects, is one which is better read as decidedly dystopian. On arrival at this strange colony the narrator found himself "more keenly looked over"[84] than ever in his previous experience. "It is the way of Kantsaywhere, for everybody is classed by everybody else according to their estimate or knowledge of his person and faculties."[85]

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[83]Ibid., pp. 423-424.
[84]Ibid., p. 417.
[85]Ibid., p. 417.

It is very appropriate that portraits play a significant role in Galton's Kantsaywhere, representing the good and venerated members of society. Composites idealise the sitter, smooth out the blemishes, the irregular and unsightly features. In the end it is the only function they can serve, providing emblems of betterment rather than degeneracy. The books studied here reflect a time of particular investment in the truth revealing insights of photography. However, as I have shown Galton's composites fit somewhat awkwardly in the climate of scientific uses of the medium. They go against the grain of the use of photography as practised by, for example, Dr Diamond, where the details and the facticity of photography remained important. Galton's case remains a fascinating one nevertheless, revealing a surprising faith in the revelatory powers of photography, a faith which paradoxically only brought into question the 'scientific' theories he was hoping photography would support.

PART TWO

Photography and the Book in the Twentieth Century

CHAPTER FIVE

The Documentary Project Defined— James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

Francis Galton's experiments with photography followed from a pronounced investment in the truth-revealing capabilities of the medium. In its consideration of the documentary[1] book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men this chapter introduces another investment in photography's truth-revealing capacity. But Galton's divisive quest for a portrait of the essence of criminality stands at the opposite extreme to the noble intentions behind Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, a book which sought to bring dignity to the marginalised people it portrays. The book constitutes a collaboration between the writer, James Agee, and the photographer, Walker Evans, in an attempt to provide an unexploitational and accurate documentation, through images and prose, of the lives of three tenant farmer families of the American South West. It is a documentary project intended, as Agee says, "to be exhaustive, with no detail, however trivial it may seem, left untouched, no relevancy avoided".[2]

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is not unusual in utilising both words and images to provide its social record. By the time of its publication in 1941, there had been a number of documentary books combining photographs and texts in their records of the plight of the impoverished during the Depression.[3] What is, however, unusual about Evans's and Agee's book is the fact it shows a

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[1] It has even been suggested that the book should be seen as "a kind of anti-documentary that used documentary form in order to subvert its premises." See T. V . Reed, 'Unimagined Existence and the Fiction of the Real: Postmodern Realism in *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*' in Representations, 24, Fall 1988, University of California Press, pp. 156-176.

[2] James Agee, Let us Now Praise Famous Men, (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p. xv.

[3] Among those published were Erskine Caldwell's and Margaret Bourke-White's You Have Seen Their Faces, (1937), Archibald Macleish's Land of the Free(1938), Paul S. Taylor's and Dorothea Lange's An American Exodus (1939) and Richard Wright's 12 Million Black Voices (1941).

pronounced sensitivity to issues of representation— both the prose and the photographs remain highly attuned to the boundaries which exist between representer and represented, between the privilege of perception on the part of its authors and the severely under-privileged subjects whose lives, labour, housing and possessions, they seek to describe. The book resulted from a commission in 1936 by Fortune Magazine for an article aimed at increasing public awareness of the plight of Southern sharecroppers. James Agee, the magazine's staff writer, was assigned to do an article on cotton tenancy. He took with him the photographer Walker Evans, a member of the Farm Security Administration unit. For two months the authors travelled in Alabama, living for the most part in Hale County and, in Agee's case, staying with one of the three families whose lives they recorded. In 1941 they finally published their work, not in Fortune but as the book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. When Houghton Mifflin published Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in August 1941, America poised on the brink of war, was poorly prepared for such a difficult and controversial work. By the end of 1941, the book had only sold 600 copies.

This chapter will examine the second edition of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the edition which has come to be the classic version, though it first appeared in 1960, four years after Agee's death. Reissued by Houghton Mifflin, it encountered a much more popular public reception. It includes the unaltered text of the first edition, but has 37 additional photographs, 62 in all, and a memoir by Evans.[4] The photographs by Evans appear at the front of both editions of the book as an independent portfolio, entirely without captions or text, identified simply as Book One.

Agee's text, dense and effusive, is identified as Book Two. In a recent article, T.V. Reed has noted there is the sense of a decided structural uncertainty to the

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[4]The first edition contains 31 photographs, six of which were not included in the second edition.

book.[5] Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is structured in a such a way it disrupts the conventions of a book, of a clearly marked beginning and end. As Reed says:

> Even before Agee's prefatory remarks, the text's form begins its critique by questioning the very notion of beginnings, by making the reader a bit unsure as to where the text itself begins; with the photographs that precede the text? with the verbal portion of the text? with the "Preface" that occurs between them? [6]

Similarly the end of the book is not clearly defined. Following one end-like moment and an "amen", a new section begins with the following words "The last words have been spoken and these that follow are not words; they are only descriptions of two images."[7] The book finally closes with a rather strange account of Agee and Evans hearing the sounds of what they assume to be two foxes trying to communicate to one another, and with a sense of incompleteness with Agee leaving an unfulfilled promise to the reader to tell us the clear thoughts he has after this experience.

Agee even goes so far as to tell the reader to forget it is a book.

> But if that is of any interest to you whatever, it is important that you should so far as possible forget that this is a book. That you should know, in other words, that it has no part in that realm where disbelief is habitually suspended. It is simply an effort to use words in such a way that they will tell as much as I want to and can make them tell of a thing which happened and which, of course, you have no other way of knowing.[8]

Book Two begins with an immediate foregrounding of the problems of what in fact the book is going to do. This is a book with a difference, explicit from the

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[5] T. V. Reed, op. cit., pp.156-176.
[6] Ibid., p. 160.
[7] Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 441.
[8] Ibid., p. 246.

outset of the problems of its very documentary project. Agee begins by saying how it is:

> curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings.[9]

This is the key dilemma concerning such representation. On the one hand, the danger of appropriation and reduction and on the other, the danger of leaving these people— a people denied any means of self-representation— unrepresented.

The Text

As Agee makes clear in the book's preface, the "photos are not illustrative. They and the text are coequal, mutually independent and fully collaborative."[10] While words and images are seen by Agee as "coequal" they remain distinctive. Evans's uncaptioned photos of the tenant farmer families, their homes and furnishings, possess a simplicity, quietness and lucidity when juxtaposed with the baroque richness of Agee's voluble prose. Agee's writing is diverse, excessive, mannered, experimental but above all, highly self-conscious of its own limitations. He insists that to remain faithful to even the relative truth of the real one needs access to a whole range of styles and modes, including both a range of discourses that cross disciplinary boundaries— the text is, as Reed put it, "at turns, sociological, poetic, pedagogical, ethnographic, autobiographic,

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[9]Ibid., p. 7.
[10]Ibid., p. XV.

novelistic, even theological."[11] Agee interrogates literary techniques in such a way that the representational richness of these forms is made to serve those who have been most fully denied access to riches— the sharecroppers of the South.

Despite such excesses, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men embodies the proposition that representational systems are always inadequate, always miss the reality of that which they seek to describe. In relation to its proposed detailed and accurate documentary project, for Agee, "the present volume is merely portent and fragment, experiment, dissonant prologue."[12] From the outset it is designed "as the beginning of a larger piece of work— Three Tenant Families, while standing independent."[13] Mid-way in the book, Agee describes what will follow as "a series of careful but tentative, rudely experimental, and fragmentary renderings of some of the salient aspects of a real experience seen and remembered in its own terms."[14]

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[11] Reed, op. cit., p. 161.
[12] Ibid., p. XV.

Craig Owens contrasts a "deconstructive impulse...characteristic of postmodernist art in general" and the "self-critical tendency of modernism." Using the following distinction by Owens, Agee's and Evan's book can be described as postmodern.

> Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of an image to a referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent. This is the rhetorical strategy of self-reference upon which modernism is based.... Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference. When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficency, its transcendence; rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. It tells of a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred; as such its deconstructive thrust is aimed not only against the contemporary myths that furnish its subject matter, but also against the symbolic, totalizing impulse which characterizes modernist art.

See Craig Owens, Beyond Recognition (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1992), p. 85.

[13] Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. xiv.
[14] Ibid., pp. 245-6.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is thus a documentary project that evinces the very inadequacies of description. Writing falls short of phenomenal experience. Yet, despite this, the text aspires to convey the density of the phenomenal world. Agee describes his intentions in writing in the course of his book.

> I will be trying here to write of nothing whatever which did not in physical actuality or in the mind happen or appear; and my most serious effort will be, not to use these 'materials' for art, far less for journalism, but to give them as they were and as in my memory and regard they are. [15]

While using frequently "art devices" Agee is, as he says, "illimitably more interested in life than art".[16] He tells the reader: "[a]bove all else: in God's name don't think of it as Art."[17]. Agee is trying to write "of nothing whatever which did not in physical actuality or in the mind happen or appear"[18]; "...attempt[ing] to reproduce and analyse the actual"[19]. At the same time his book will also involve the "problems of recording"; a self-reflexive indication of Agee's own struggles to depict the families' lives will form an "organic part of the experience."[20]

Agee's narrative also indicates a struggle to come to terms with the camera, a struggle which, as Carol Shloss has proposed, amounts to a "coherent and powerful sub-text" to the book[21]. Early on in his text, he praises the camera, which seems to him "next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time"[22]. There is a sense that photographs, as indices of the phenomenal world, are better than writing. A few pages into his account, he writes how, "[i]f I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be

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[15] Ibid., p. 242.
[16] Ibid., p. 242.
[17] Ibid., p. 15.
[18] Ibid., p. 242.
[19] Ibid., p. 245.
[20] Ibid., p. 243.
[21] See Carol Shloss, In Visible Light (New York: Oxford University Press), 1987, p. 180.
[22] Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 11.

photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odours, plates of food and of excrement."[23]

Agee begins his book by informing us how he had helped Evans take pictures of a church when they first arrived in the South and goes so far as to adopt the view of a camera in his prose, describing for us what the camera is recording, the structure's "paralysing classicism" with "every grain, each nailhead, distinct; the subtle almost strangling strong asymmetries of that which has been hand wrought towards symmetry."[24] He goes on to say how he:

> watched what would be trapped, possessed, fertilised, in the leisures and shyness which are a phase for all love for any object: searching out and registering in myself all its lines, planes, stresses of relationship, along diagonals withdrawn and approached, and vertical to the slightly off-centred door, and broadside, and at several distances, and near, examining merely the ways of the wood, and the nails, the three new boards of differing lengths that were let in above the left of the door, the staring small white porcelain knob, the solesmoothed staircase...[25]

There are a number of instances in which Agee's prose tries to match Evans's photographic representations. While Evans's picture of the church Agee describes being photographed is not in the book, a later description of one of the tenant farmers' fireplaces and its ornaments provides a textual parallel to one of Evans's images included in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (see fig. 28).

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[23]Ibid., p. 13.
[24]Ibid., p. 38.
[25]Ibid., p. 38.

In his description, Agee attempts to attain the density of detail found in photographs. The fireplace is raised to a sacramental status with Agee giving his descriptive section the heading 'The Altar'.

> At its centre the mantel and square fireplace frame, painted, one coat, an old and thin blue-white: in front of the fireplace, not much more than covering the full width of its frame, the small table: and through, beneath it, the gray, swept yet ashy bricks of the fireplace and short hearth, and the silent shoes: and on the table, and on the mantel, and spread above and wide of it on the walls, the things of which I will now tell.[26]

Agee proceeds to itemise the ornaments, including a fading box-brownie snapshot on the wall, going so far as to dwell at length upon what is in the picture— Annie Mae's sister Emma as a girl of twelve and her mother, both in Sunday dress, the latter's "face fainted away almost beyond distinguishing, as if in her death".[27] One also encounters an unusual photograph by Evans of two faded and worn snapshots pinned to the wall in the Woods' household (fig. 29). Like Agee's detail of the snapshot in his prose descriptions, such a picture functions as a *memento mori*. Reflections on the inexorable passage of time are also invited by Evans's photograph of a fireplace which is paired with it (in the second edition) and which shows an array of calenders from differing months and years (fig. 30). Close inspection of the fireplace photograph also reveals what looks like another snapshot pinned to the wall, its left corner cut off diagonally, its shape matching the blow up of one of the faded snapshots in the other picture, but for some reason— it is faded or catching the light— this particular memento carries no discernible image.

Agee has occasion to bring out the vanitas theme of snapshots once again, towards the end of the book, and there the relationship between photography

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[26]Ibid., pp. 162-163.
[27]Ibid., p. 164.

and death is explicitly brought out as his descriptions concern two portraits on graves. He describes in detail one of the portraits, a studio portrait, a close-up, in artificial lighting, of a young woman.

> She is leaned a little forward, smiling vivaciously, one hand at her cheek. She is not very pretty, but she believed she was; her face is free from strain or fear. She is wearing an evidently new dress, with a mail-order look about it; patterns of beads are sewn over it and have caught the light. Her face is soft with powder and at the wings of her nose lines have been deleted. Her dark blonde hair is newly washed and professionally done up in puffs at the ears.[28].

The pathos of such a photograph is exacerbated by the fact that time, as Agee is careful to observe, is eating away at the image: "This image of her face is split across and the split has begun to turn brown at its edges."[29]

Discussing Helen Levitt's shots of New York, when the possibility of publishing her photographs arose, Agee wrote an introduction that maintained: "[s]ome of the best photographs we are ever likely to see are innocent domestic snapshots, city postcards, and news and scientific photographs."[30] This praise of amateur, non-artistic photography, reveals itself in the attention bestowed upon them in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

It also parallels an interest in found, non-artistic writing. Found texts interest Agee as much as found photos. In his 'photographic' prose description of the fireplace, Agee re-describes fragments of text, scraps of printed ephemera which have been collected and used as decoration around the fireplace.

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[28]Ibid., p. 436.
[29]Ibid., p. 436.
[30]James Agee, Helen Levitt: A way of Seeing (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1989), p. vii. (First Published 1965)

> Torn from a tin can, a strip of bright scarlet paper with a large white fish on it and the words
>
> SALOMAR
>
> EXTRA QUALITY MACKEREL[31]

Agee's prose descriptions end by drawing attention to another, but very different, kind of writing, the personalised signature:

> At the right of the mantel, in whitewash, all its whorlings sharp, the print of a child's hand.[32]

Close inspection of the photograph which Agee's prose mimics also reveals this detail.

Agee also comes across scraps of texts, cuttings from newspapers, as he rummages through the belongings of the sharecroppers. He typographically reproduces these fragments.

GHAM NEWS
hursday afternoon, March 5, 1936
Price: 3 cents
in G
(else

Thousa
are on d
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cording its

for the Birm[33]

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[31] Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 165.
[32] Ibid., p. 165.
[33] Ibid., p. 166.

There is a splendid account of Agee's love of found texts in his biography by Laurence Bergreen. It tells of his time as a student at Harvard in 1929, and how, together with an older student, Franklin Miner, they jointly:

> roamed the streets of Cambridge in search of found objects that afforded them great delight. They rummaged through trash bins for discarded postcards, valentines, and cigarette packages. Cast-off letters held a special fascination. Who was the writer of the homely sentences he held in his hands? What sort of life had he led? He marvelled at the profusion of buried voices, all living, suffering, and expressing themselves unselfconsciously. The writers of such letters had no need to hide behind a cloak of outdated literary mannerisms. They spoke in forthright, direct paragraphs, revealing all, withholding nothing. In short they told the truth. To Agee these letters were an object lesson in good writing.[34]

Found texts provided a truth of authenticity, an antidote to the dangerous tendency of the show of technique. There is also a clear fascination in Evans's photographs for hand written signs: the flamboyant ('dancing') calligraphy of the hand painted FREE DANCE sign, between two city gents chatting (see fig. 31), the misspelt sign over the Woods family's hearth: PLEASE BE QUITE (see fig. 32). A fascination for the non-artistic and vernacular will also be of importance to the American writer and photographer, Wright Morris, whom I will be discussing in the next chapter.

While his prose descriptions might attempt to match the detailed representations offered by photography, Agee is aware of the inadequacies of written descriptions. While words, he says, can be "made to do or to tell anything within human conceit" and this is "more than can be said of the instruments of any other art", photography included, it must be added that words are "the most inevitably inaccurate of all mediums of record and

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[34]See Laurence Bergreen, James Agee: A Life (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 75.

communication"[35]. Photography, on the other hand, offers a much more accurate witness of what once was. It is said to be "like the phonograph record and like scientific instruments and unlike any other leverage of art, incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth."[36] Photography is of importance as part of his quest for truth against the falsity of journalism in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men; "the very blood and semen of journalism", he came to believe, "is a broad and successful form of lying."[37]

Agee reflects on the impossibility of genuine linguistic 'naturalism'. Writing is burdened in a way photography is not. He discusses the task of a writer describing a certain city street. "You abjure all metaphor, symbol, selection and above all, all temptation to invent, as obstructive, false, artistic."[38] Description takes time, a 'weightiness' which the street does not have. As you describe, holding strictly to "materials, forms, colours, bulks, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade, peculiarities, specialisations, of architecture and of lettering, noises of motors and brakes and shoes, odours of exhausts"[39] the account becomes lengthy weighty and ungainly as it tries to convey the density of the phenomenal world. You are left with a "somewhat overblown page from a naturalist novel: which in important ways is at the opposite pole from your intentions, from what you have seen, from the fact itself"[40]. How can language, Agee asks, "impart the deftness, keenness, immediacy, speed and subtlety of the 'reality' it tries to produce"?[41]. The language of reality is the "heaviest of all languages". Photography is not weighted— "for the camera much of this is solved from the start, solved so simply, for that matter, that this ease becomes

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[35]Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 236.
[36]Ibid., p. 236.
[37]Ibid., p. 163.
[38]Ibid., p. 235.
[39]Ibid., p. 235.
[40]Ibid., p. 236.
[41]Ibid., p. 236.

the greatest danger against the good use of the camera."[42] Agee seems to be implying at this point that photography has a danger of providing too fleeting, too impressionistic a record.

In discussing Agee's response to photography another important aspect concerns the visibility of the photographer when taking his or her picture. Evans would often use a 10 x 8 inch view camera to take his portraits; using such bulky and time consuming equipment, the photographer is made present to his subjects, is given a visibility in the act of representation the writer never has. This has been seen to prohibit the candid shot the 35 millimetre camera readily lends itself to. It is hard to take portraits unobserved with a '10 x 8'.[43]

The very visibility of Evans before his subject is matched in writing by the way Agee foregrounds his own presence, makes himself visible in his prose. I will be discussing this shortly, but first it should be added that even with the '10 x 8' camera, Evans, as Agee's descriptions of him taking a photograph of the Gudger family show, could still 'steal' images. Addressing one of those pictured, the writer reveals a decided sensitivity to the intrusion of taking a photograph:

> ...all to stand there on the porch as you were in the average sorrow of your working dirt and get your pictures made; and to you it was as if you and your children and your husband and these others were stood there naked in front of the cold absorption of the camera in all your shame and pitiableness to be pried into and laughed at...[44]

He goes on to describe photography's predatory act.

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[42]Ibid., p. 236.
[43]As William Stott has pointed out Evans's alterations for the second edition involved editing out the more candid pictures taken with a 35 millimetre camera. See his Documentary Expression and Thirties America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) pp. 279-280.
[44]Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 363.

> Walker setting up the terrible structure of the tripod crested by the black square heavy head, dangerous as that of a hunchback, of the camera; stopping beneath cloak and cloud of wicked cloth, and twisting buttons; a witchcraft preparing, colder than keenest ice, and incalculably cruel: and at least you could do, and you did it, you washed the faces of your children swiftly and violently with rainwater, so that their faces were suddenly luminous stuck out of the holes of their clothes, the slightly dampened hair swept clean of the clear and blessed foreheads of these flowers; and your two daughters, standing there in the crowding porch, yielding and leaning their heads profound against the pulling and entanglement, each let down their long black hair in haste and combed and rearranged it (but Walker made a picture of this; you didn't know; you thought he was still testing around; there you all are, the mother as before a firing squad, the children standing like columns of an exquisite temple, their eyes straying, and behind, both girls, bent deep in the dark shadow somehow as if listening and as in a dance, attending like harps the black flags of their hair)...[45].

Evans's visibility of recording finds its equivalent in the way Agee positions himself in situ through the prose, providing an 'on-the-spot' account. He is visible in the text, as shown, for example by the way 'Part One— A Country Letter' begins:

> It is late in a summer night, in a room of a house set deep and solitary in the country; all in this house save myself are sleeping; I sit at a table, facing a partition wall; and I am looking at a lighted coal-oil lamp which stands on the table close to the wall, and just beyond the sleeping of my left hand; with my right hand I am from time to time writing, with a soft pencil, into a school-child's composition book...[46]

But Agee goes further than this and narrativises himself in the book. The use of first person is involved with a mode of narrative new to documentary. This move to incorporate the observer into the report of what he or she observes, brings to

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[45]Ibid., pp. 364-365.
[46]Ibid., p. 49.

documentary the kind of self-reflexivity found in the arts, among them Dziga Vertov's films in the 1920s and André Gide's narratives.[47] Agee reveals a desire for a relationship to be established between the writer and his subjects. Present in the prose, he even gives us a detailed account of the food eaten while staying with the Gudger family. All in an attempt to make his experience present in his writing. He accepts their hospitality after his car gets stuck in the mud near their home late at night. Agee does not like the food but does not want to offend them by showing a lack of appetite— "better to keep them awake and to eat too much than in the least to let them continue to believe I am what they assume I must be: 'superior' to them or to their food."[48] In attempts to concretise his experience, Agee even tries to transcribe the tastes of their food— "The jam is loose of little berries, full of light raspings of the tongue, it tastes of deep sweet purple tepidly watered, with a very faint sheen of sourness as of iron"[49]. This is then followed by a vivid account of his night sleeping with all the bugs running over his body and his attempts to keep them out. For Reed such moments involve an act of political vulnerability and communion. While under no illusions that such shared moments give him any real understanding of their lives, such "moments represent the possibility of understanding, begin a dialogue."[50]

The result of his incorporating himself in the text is that Agee declares his own privileged and exploitational position in relationship to his subject. He focuses on the issue of beauty, expressing a concern that the ability to enjoy the sharecropper's beauty of poverty is a misuse of his privilege. Agee is aware of the extreme beauty of the sharecroppers' homes. His detailed descriptions of their homes and belongings underline this beauty. The partition wall of the

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47See Miles Orvell, 'Walker Evans and James Agee: The Legacy' in History of Photography, Vol 17, Number 2, Summer, 1993, pp. 166- 171.

48Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 414.

49Ibid., p. 416.

50Reed, 1988, op. cit., p. 172.

Gudgers' front bedroom is referred to as "a great tragic poem."[51] The wooden façade of the Gudgers' house, while made from the cheapest of local building material, possesses its own particular riches for Agee:

> each texture in the wood, like those of bone, is distinct in the eye as a razor: each nail head is distinct, each seam and split, each slight warping, each random knot and knothole: and in each board as lovely a music as a contour map and unique as a thumbprint, its grain, which was its living strength...[52].

Such descriptions are edged by a kind of guilt, admissions of the privilege of an educated sight: "To those who own and create it" the beauty of the sharecroppers's homes is "irrelevant and indiscernible."[53] It is only seen by "those who by economic advantages of training have only a shameful and thief's right to it: and it might be said that they have any 'rights' whatever only in proportion as they recognise the ugliness and disgrace implicit in their privilege of perception."[54] "I have a strong feeling", Agee even goes so far as to say that "the 'sense of beauty', like nearly everything else, is a class privilege."[55] An aesthetic approach to the work is troubled. He exhorts his reader to do "art the simple but total honour of accepting and believing in it in the terms in which he accepts and honours breathing, lovemaking, the look of a newspaper, the street he walks through."[56]

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[51] Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 204.
[52] Ibid., p. 142.
[53] Ibid., p. 203.
[54] Ibid., p. 203.
[55] Ibid., p. 314.
[56] Ibid., p. 240.

The Photographs

The problem of aesthetics becomes, however, more noticeable when dealing with Evans's photographs, and it is with this "problem of aesthetics" in mind we might best begin to look at his photographs. Firstly one should note how Evans's photographs have been differentiated from an overly aestheticising representation. For the modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, Evans provided us with "modern art photography at its best."[57] Reviewing a major retrospective of the work of Edward Weston, Greenberg ended by celebrating Evans because he, unlike Weston, did not confuse photography with painting through an "excessive concentration on the medium".[58] Evans's prints possess, as Greenberg put it, "not one-half the physical finish" of Weston's.[59] What is important about them is they show Evans's "original grasp of the anecdote" and clear understanding of the relationship between photography and literature.[60] One should add that behind Greenberg's response to Evans lies a belief in what he calls the transparency of the medium. The aesthetic in photography becomes problematic when photography aspires to mimic the (abstract) developments of modern painting and concern itself with form over and above content.

The austerity of Evans's photographs was even interpreted as anti-aesthetic; his style is "antigraphic or at least anti-art photographic"[61] was how Lincoln Kirstein described it in his article accompanying Evans's earlier book American Photographs. Kirstein wrote how his pictures invoked a surgical metaphor—

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[57]See Clement Greenberg's 'The Camera's Glass Eye' in ed. J. O'Brian, Clement Greenberg, Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2— 1945-46, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), pp. 60-63.
[58]Ibid., p. 63.
[59]Ibid., p. 63
[60]Ibid., p. 63
[61]See Walker Evans, American Photographs, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), p. 192. (First published in 1938.)

the book's photos showed the facts of our homes and times "surgically, without the intrusion of the poet's or painter's comment or necessary distortion".[62] For Kirstein the most characteristic feature of Evans's work is its purity or even its puritanism. It is straight photography, not only in technique, but in the rigorous directness of its way of looking.

> All through the pictures in this book you will search in vain for an angle shot. Every object is regarded head on with the unsparing frankness of a Russian Ikon or a Flemish portrait. The facts pile up with the Prints.[63]

Evans himself saw the austere aesthetic sensibility to his photographs as a striving for a factographic record.

> In documentary not only is actuality untouched by the recorder as much as may be, it is uninfluenced...The documentary artist...does what he can not to change it spiritually. He tries to add nothing to it. No ideology, no polemic, no extrinsic excitement, no razzmatazz technique.[64]

His concern remained with what he called "unconscious arrangement"[65]— the occupants become Evans's collaborators in his pictures, it is their particular arrangements of things which gives his pictures their aesthetic: the simple arrangement of broom, chair and white cloth in plate 12 (see fig. 33). Void of clutter, the interiors also become sites of dignity, Evans allows his subjects to present their homes as they would desire them to be seen, in their 'Sunday best'. I will be discussing the politics of this 'Sunday best' look as a characteristic of his portraits shortly.

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[62]Ibid., p. 197.
[63]Ibid., p. 197.
[64]Quoted in Shloss, op. cit., p. 189.
[65]See Leslie Katz's 'Interview with Walker Evans', Art in America, March-April 1971, p.84.

But it is the very straightness— no unusual angles— the 'cleanness' of his representations, that can also be seen to involve, as Margaret Olin has argued, the introduction of a modernist aesthetic[66]. Evans's photographs are spare. The photograph of cutlery stored behind a slab of wood on a kitchen wall (see fig. 34) states eloquently, as Olin says, "the beauty of frugality."[67] Objects are isolated. The ornaments on a mantelpiece, thus "take on the look of precious objects in a modern gallery. The pitcher and lamp in the Gudgers' kitchen, and the bowl and cloth outside of it, seem arranged with painstaking care."[68] (see fig. 35). The notion of beauty to which they subscribe is that of "distance, disinterestedness, lack of engagement." Olin also views the lack of captions as further isolating these images from life.[69] But one might want to view Agee's text as a prolonged caption, framing the pictures, highlighting the problematics of an aestheticising vision. And one might also see the details in the pictures further locating them back in the realm of lived actuality: Olin's focus on the cleanness of Evans's prints conveniently ignores his evident fascination for litter, those layering of textual and graphic ephemera, for example, in his fireplace photographs. There is also an interesting recurrence of tactile details in his pictures, background details to his portraits reveal bandaged feet, the right foot of the Gudgers' baby in plate 11(fig. 36) and the foot of Sadie Ricketts in plate 24 (fig. 37). The picture of the young child Bert Gudger, plate 8, contrasts his little feet with the work-worn foot of his father in the bottom left of the image (fig. 38). The tactile insistence in such pictures culminates in Evans's picture of Gudger's soiled work boots (fig. 39), a mythic metonym— quoting Van Gogh's well known painting 'Les Souliers'— of physical hardship.

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[66]See Margaret Olin 'It is Not Going to be Easy to Look in their Eye: Privilege of Perception in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Art History, Vol 14 No. 1. March 1991, pp. 92-115.

[67]Ibid., p. 108.

[68]Ibid., p. 108.

[69]Ibid., p. 108.

While the photographs are cropped from those in the first edition to give more space around them, 16 additional photographs show buildings, stores, schools, railroads and the streets of nearby towns where the farmers bring their cotton to be weighed and ginned. The additional photographs show the tenants in the fields, give long shots of their houses. The first edition only provided three pictures of nearby towns. The Second Edition, as John Rogers Puckett has pointed out[70], enlarges our understanding of the tenant's environment; framing and contextualising the pictures of the three families, arranged from the smallest family to the largest. With the fourth group of images we move from the farm to surrounding towns. It is narrated as a journey with the last picture of the third family group giving us a view of the tops of heads and a horse, the family on their way to town to sell their cotton.

Evans's sequence of images closes with symbolism. The last two pictures cannot be simply seen as records. How else can we take the picture of a child's grave (see fig. 40) followed by the last image of a Gourd tree (see fig. 41)? The former depicts a little inverted boat shape in clay, a grave marked by the simple placement of a plate on the mound, a touching means of decorating child's graves which is also described in detail by Agee in the book:

> On one large grave, which is otherwise completely plain, a blown-out electric bulb is screwed into the clay at the exact center. On several graves, which I assume to be those of women, there is at the centre the prettiest or the oldest and most valued piece of china.......two parents have done for their little daughter: not only a tea set, and a cocacola bottle, and a milk bottle, ranged on her short grave.[71]

The image of the grave is followed by a decided change in viewpoint and connotation. We move from the ground to the sky, a picture looking up to the

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[70]See John Rogers Puckett, Five Photo-Textual Documentaries From the Great Depression, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 123.
[71]Ibid., pp. 437-438.

heavens, showing gourds hung from a pole, a closing symbol, as Puckett has suggested, of hope: the gourds are there to attract insect-eating martins to the fields, provide protection for the crops[72].

The Gaze and the Photograph

It is to Evans's photographs of the sharecroppers I now wish to turn. They raise interesting questions concerning the problematics of picturing poverty. The photographs are divided into four groups: three of the families and one of the context, providing pictures of the nearby towns, and long shots of the sharecroppers' houses. One portrait does not fit this grouping, however— the first picture shows the landlord (see fig. 42). While he looks at the camera, the focus is on his ill-matching and crumpled suit, the swelling well fed belly— his eyes and face are not given the significance and centrality they are in Evans's portraits of the sharecropper families which follow. These portraits are characterised by their non-candidness. Evans does not present dirty and sad faces, clear signs of poverty and depression. His subjects are rarely photographed off-guard, but posed, often adopting a frontal gaze, looking the camera (and ourselves) straight in the eye. His pictures are not artistic in this sense, but borrow their conventions from family snapshots. That it is their language he is interested in is clarified by his close-up photograph of two family snapshots, worn and old, nailed to the pine wall of one of the tenant homes.

A year after its first publication, Lionel Trilling singled out Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as a great book. Writing on the photograph of Annie Mae Gudger (fig. 43), he notes how:

> the sitter gains in dignity when allowed to defend herself against the lens. The gaze of the woman returning our gaze checks our pity. In this

[72]Puckett, op. cit., p. 125.

> picture, Mrs Gudger, with all her misery and perhaps with her touch of pity for herself, simply refuses to be an object of your 'social consciousness'[73]

William Stott also draws out the dignity of the poses in Evans's portraits. He notes how Evans does not present "Bud Woods's skin cancer, the Rickettses' 'stinking beds', the horde of flies on the tenant's food and their children's faces"[74] but instead pictures "Bud Woods with a bandanna on his shoulder covering his sores, as one naturally would cover them from a stranger's eyes" (see fig. 44) and how "he shows Gudger's neatly made bed...records people when they are most themselves, most in command, as they imposed their will on their environment."[75] Stott goes on to make the comparison between the snapshot photograph and Evans's portraits of the sharecroppers: "[h]e photographs straightforwardly, as people take/ or used to take/ snapshots: from the front and centre, from eye level, from the middle distance, and in full flat light." [76]

Pierre Bourdieu, in his sociological inquiry into the nature of snapshot photography, brings out the significance of the frontal pose in family album portraits.[77] It is seen to be involved with the subject's having a sense of self-respect.

> Photos ordinarily show people face on, in the centre of the picture, standing up, at a respectful distance, motionless, and in a dignified attitude. In fact to strike a pose is to offer oneself to be captured in a

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[73]Quoted in Stott, op cit., p. 277.
[74]Ibid., p. 277.
[75]Ibid., p. 269.
[76]Ibid., p. 270.
Intriguingly, Stott pays particular attention to an image not included in the book. It is seen as the most representative portrait, a posed family portrait of the Gudgers in their 'Sunday best', standing beside their cabin. It was not until the 1960s, when preparing a MOMA retrospective that Evans printed the negative and said if there were to be another revision of the book he would put it in. Stott, op. cit., p. 287.
77 See Pierre Bourdieu Photography- A Middle Brow Art, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

> posture which is not and which does not seek to be 'natural'. The same intention is demonstrated in the concern to correct one's posture, to put on one's best clothes, the refusal to be surprised in an ordinary attitude, at everyday work. Striking a pose means respecting oneself and demanding respect [78]

For Bourdieu " Honour demands that one pose for the photo as one would stand before a man whom one respects and from whom one expects respect, face on, one's forehead held high and one's head straight."[79] The essence of frontality is the "need for reciprocal deference".[80]

Agee's text provides an insight into the way in which Evans took some of his photographs. While his earlier account highlights the intrusive aspect of photography, dwelling on the violence of the camera, comparing it to a gun, a weapon, his description of George Ricketts having his photograph taken, highlights a decidedly less predatory approach to his subjects, precisely the snapshot representation Stott is attentive to. It is the sharecropper, not Evans, who is shown to set things in motion for his picture.

> He doesn't want it here at the side of the house where everything is trashed and ugly, but with a good background; and in this and in the posing of the picture he gets his way. It is perfectly in one of the classical traditions: that of family snapshots made on summer Sunday afternoons 30 to 40 years ago, when the simple eyes of family-amateurs still echoed the daguerreotype studios. The background is a tall bush in dishevelling bloom, out in front of the house in the hard sun: George stands behind them all, one hand on Junior's shoulders, Louise (she has first straightened her dress, her hair, her ribbon), stands directly in front of her father, her head about to his breastbone, her hands crossed quietly at the

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[78]Ibid., p.80.
[79]Ibid., p.80.
[80]Ibid., p.80.

> joining of her thighs, looking very straight ahead, her eyes wide open in spite of the sun.[81]

Margaret Olin signals the importance of a thematics of looking, or moreover of the gaze within both the photographs and text of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. While most commonly the gaze has operated in the visual arts as "a figure for the direct participation or implication of the beholder"[82] one treatment of the gaze involves the notion of the gaze as an act of aggression. To stare down a challenger is to subjugate that person to oneself. The gaze is involved with a power relation. Olin directs attention to a book published a little later than Evans and Agee's— Sartre's Being and Nothingness. It is in this book we can find an aggressive notion of the gaze with Sartre's well known account of the watcher in the park.[83] There the gaze is theorised from the point of a subject placed at the centre of the world and one who struggles to maintain that centrality. Sartre develops, and insists upon, as Norman Bryson has shown, a particularly paranoid notion of the gaze.[84] His scenario of the watcher in the park involves two stages. In the first, Sartre enters a park and discovers that he is alone; everything in the park is there for him to regard from an unchallenged centre of the visual field. But in Sartre's second movement the authority and centrality of his gaze is brought abruptly to an end. Into the park enters another watcher, and the viewer becomes spectacle to another's sight. Before this intrusion, as Bryson puts it, "all the perspective lines had run in from the watcher in the park, now another perspective opens up, and all the lines rush away from this watcher self to meet another point of entry."[85] Sartre, when confronted with

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[81]Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 369.
[82]See Olin, op. cit., p. 96.
[83]Jean-Paul Sartre Being and Nothingness, (London: Methuen, 1969). See Part Three, Chapter One, Section IV, pp. 254-302.
[84]For a clear account of Sartre's conception of the gaze see Norman Bryson's' The Gaze in the Expanded Field' in ed. Hal Foster, Vision and Visuality, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp.87-108.
[85]Ibid., p. 89.

another, is forced to recognise that he exists as a point of nothingness in the field of vision of the other, that he is no longer the centre of vision.

There is no sense within Sartre's account of the possibility of a reciprocal gaze occuring between two people. For a non-paranoid gaze one has to look to Evans's portraits. These involve the possibility for a respectful regard of the other.[86] Looking is not seen as a contestation, a power struggle between beings. Evans's photos appear to hold out great hopes for a mutual looking. They give the impression, as Olin has noted, that the returned gaze promises a shared subjecthood.[87] In this respect Evans's pictures parallel Maurice Merleau-Ponty rather than Sartre. Merleau-Ponty discusses the notion of reciprocal looking in his The Phenomenology of Perception. In his chapter 'Other Selves and the Human World' he describes an encounter with the other as less of a contestation: "this alien life, like mine with which it in communion, is an open life. It is not entirely accounted for by a certain number of biological or sensory functions."[88]. Dialogue provides the central 'role' to a reciprocal relationship in his account of the perception of other people:

> in the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are intertwined

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[86] However, Evans has produced a whole series of portraits which might seem to undermine his representations in Let us Now Praise.... Shortly after his return from Alabama, he became a secret photographer on the New York subway, between 1938 and 1941, taking pictures of his subject unawares, the decided antithesis of the posed and cofrontational representations he gives us in Let Us Now Praise... A book of his subway portraits was not, however, published until 1966, by Houghton Mifflin, under the title, Many Are Called. In one of the unpublished draft texts for the book, Evans does admit how : "the portraits on these pages were caught by a hidden camera, in the hands of a penitent spy and an apologetic voyeur." He even says how the "rude and impudent invasion involved has been carefuly softened by time and partially mitigated by a planned passage of time. These pictures were made twenty years ago, and deliberately preserved from publication." The motivations behind the thefts were tied up with a desire for an ultimate kind of straight photography. The 62 people he photographed constitute what he referred to as the "nearest to such a pure record that the tools and supplies and the practical intelligence at my disposal could accomplish." All quotes taken from Walker Evans at Work, a selection of photographs, documents, letters, memoranda, interviews and notes, produced by the Estate of Walker Evans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 160.

[87] Olin, op. cit., p. 97.

[88] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 354.

> into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity.[89]

Aware how the gaze might strip him of part of his being, he can however, recover being "only by establishing relations with him, by bringing about his clear recognition of me, and that my freedom requires the same freedom for others."[90]

The Gaze In the Text

As Olin has shown, the gaze is important not only to the photograph but it is important to Agee's text.[91] His text is very much about looking. At the outset of the book there is an emphasis on the exchange of glances between Agee and those he seeks to describe. A group of Blacks sing a song for Evans and Agee and he says how: "I looked them in the eyes with full and open respect."[92] Conscious that they were performing at his and Evans's demand, Agee gives their leader fifty cents, trying at the same time, as he says "through my eyes, to communicate much more"[93]. However, the leader thanks Agee only in " a dead voice, not looking" him "in the eye."[94]. The first account of his encounter with three members of one of the tenant farmer families remains awkward. Their gaze is fearful: "none of them relieved me for an instant of their eyes; at the

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89Ibid., p. 354.
90Ibid., p. 357.
91Olin, op. cit. pp.98-102.
92Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 29.
93Ibid., p. 31.
94Ibid., p. 31.

intersection of these three tones of force I was transfixed as between spearheads"[95].

Agee's text treads a slow and difficult path towards the direct and honest gaze. Such a relation to his subject is never fully achieved, it is never as he says ,"going to be easy to look into their eyes."[96] Towards the end of his text Agee comes closest to a reciprocal gaze between himself and the wife of one of the tenant farmers: "I keep looking at her, and she at me, each 'coldly' 'expressionlessly'"; her eyes, writes Agee, "held neither forgiveness nor unforgivenness, nor heat nor coldness, nor any sign whether she understood me or no, but only this same blank, watchful, effortless extinction" and in the end he is "forced to look away".[97] When he looks at the unforgiving face of Mrs Ricketts at her door, he recognised that her eyes "stayed as a torn wound and sickness at the centre of his chest" and that "we shall have to return, even in the face of causing further pain, until that mutual wounding shall have been won and healed."[98]

It should be also pointed out that another type of looking takes place in Agee's text— voyeurism. His description of the Gudgers' house and its belongings involves a particularly strong act of prying. There is little sense of this, however, with Evans's photographs; they keep a respectful distance from their subject. While all the members of the Gudger family he is staying with are out, Agee gives us a detailed account of their possessions as he rummages amongst their things, opening drawers, itemising their contents right down to the unidentifiable brown dust in the corner of a drawer. There are some 50,000 words detailing

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[95]Ibid., p. 34.
[96]Ibid., p. 189.
[97]Ibid., p. 400.
[98]Ibid., p. 378.

furnishings and "odds and ends". Boundaries of respect are crossed with such 'thefts'.

There is something childish in Agee's inquisitiveness. The objectivity of the descriptive prose, as Agee details and catalogues the objects he rifles through, shifts to a personal and confessional account. His situation in the empty farm house recalls a time in "hot early puberty" when he was left alone at his grandfather's house and he would rifle "drawers, closets, boxes, for the mere touch at the lips and odour of fabrics, pelts, jewels, switches of hair; smoking cigars, sucking at hidden liquors; reading the ...letters stored in attic trunks."[99]

The poor and lowly things the tenant's possess are given importance and value by the attention given them in Agee's prose. Agee says he describes "in fear and in honour of the house itself."[100] Are we to see such excessive detailing as a means of concretising impoverished conditions or as a shameful intrusion of a private space? Agee's prying highlight the difficulty of ambitious documentary ventures. The book itself remains incomplete, unfinished, a 'fragment' as Agee himself admits. It attempts to render something of the lives of poor tenant farmers in the South in the thirties. Photographs and prose work together in an impossible project of detailed and accurate description. It is a book which remains flawed and conscious of its flaws, aware of both its intrusiveness and its aestheticisation of poverty. The text draws attention to the limitations and inadequacies of its representational project. And ends with a sense of the ultimate incommunicability of those its seeks to represent— Agee's account of himself and Evans listening to the cries of animals coming to them from the woods, "the frightening joy of hearing the world talk to itself, and the grief of incommunicability."[101]

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[99]Ibid., p. 136.
[100]Ibid., p. 137.
[101]Ibid., p. 469.

In the 'Notes and Appendices' Agee attacks the work of the photographer Margaret Bourke-White who, together with Erskine Caldwell, had earlier produced a book with photographs and prose on the poor of the South West; entitled You Have Seen Their Faces it was published to acclaim in 1937. Agee includes an extract from a journal on Bourke-White as a means of highlighting the contradiction between this wealthy fashion conscious, celebrity— "wearing the reddest coat in the world", "one of the highest paid women in America"— and the fact that she should have "spent months of her own time in the last two years traveling the back roads of the deep south bribing, cajoling, and sometimes browbeating her way in to photograph Negroes, share-croppers and tenant farmers in their own environments." [102]

You Have Seen Their Faces provides a decided contrast to Evans's and Agee's book. It puts forward a topical and narrow argument that the sharecroppers' life was appallingly impoverished, sharecropping itself a bankrupt and irremediable agricultural system. Caldwell, providing a report on the economic weakness of southern agriculture and the inhumanity of the tenant system, says how the old tenant farmers are "depleted and sterile", "wasted human beings whose blood made the cotton leaves green and the blossoms red".[103] In his introduction to the reprint of the book, Caldwell declares how "[t]he Tortured face of poverty"[104] was not an appealing sight in the Deep South in the 1930s when You Have Seen Their Faces was first published. He goes on to say how many of both the young and the old in these disadvantaged families are "handicapped by physical deformity, untended disease, or, as more prevalent, lack of minimal nutrition."[105] For Stott he "did violence in his text, disparaged their lives and

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[102] Ibid., p. 450-451.
[103] Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, You Have Seen Their Faces, (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 9.
[104] Ibid., n.p.
[105] Ibid., n.p.

possessions."[106] Bourke-White was no better, her large (often full page) photographs are seen to "over-emotionalise the look", they give us "faces of defeat, their eyes wizened with pain— or large, puzzled, dazzled, plaintive; people at their most abject: a ragged woman photographed on her rotten mattress, a palsied child....No dignity seems left them: we see their meager fly-infested meals, their soiled linen."[107]

While taking pictures for her book Bourke-White looked for what she says "faces that would express what we wanted to tell".[108] What was particularly problematic was that the captions given each photographs quote the people saying things they never said. The captions speak for those represented. In a note at the front of the book, Bourke White explained what she was doing—"The legends under the pictures are intended to express the authors' own conceptions of the sentiments of the individuals portrayed; they do not pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments of those persons."[109] The "quotes" which accompany the portraits accent a sense of futility and hopelessness, a white-haired woman is spoken for in the following: "I've done the best I knew all my life, but it didn't amount to much in the end." (See fig. 45.) Those pictured are given such self-deriding comments as "I reckon I forgot to remember how old I is." Bourke-White was photographing her own preconceptions of poverty. Artifice dominated her approach. False statements accompanied what amounted to stolen portraits, as the following admission makes only too clear.

> Flash bulbs provide the best means I know, under poor lighting conditions, of letting your subject talk away until just that expression you wish to capture crosses his face. Sometimes I would set up the camera in a corner of the room, sit some distance away from it with a remote control in my hand, and watch our people while Mr Caldwell talked with

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[106] Stott, op. cit., p. 219.
[107] Ibid., p. 220.
[108] Margraet Bourke-White, Portrait of Myself, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 137.
[109] Caldwell and Bourke-White, op. cit., n. p.

> them. It might be an hour before their faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express, but the instant it occurred the scene was imprisoned on a sheet of film before they knew what had happened.[110]

Bourke-White and Caldwell stand for part of what Agee would call "journalism's lying", their documentary provides an insensitive and damaging representation. By contrast Agee's extended and excessive descriptions approach acts of reverence. Nothing is unworthy of his attention. It is possible that working with a photographer, and noting the visible presence of Evans in making his record, led to Agee's consciousness of his own presence and intrusions, and the result is that he dramatises himself in the act of perceiving and narrating. This move acknowledges the voyeurism of documentary, brings out an awareness of the problems of prying, but, nevertheless, still does not stop him from moments of intrusion and snooping. Persisting in concretising his experience—"the materials, forms, colours, bulk, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade"[111] of his life in Alabama— his subject remains beyond representation in the end: "I have not managed to give their truth in words."[112] The text is in continual revision, its lack of order indicates a straining to communicate experience. Writing falls short of the density of phenomenal experience.

> Calling for the moment everything except art Nature, I would insist that everything in Nature, every most casual thing, has an inevitability and perfection which art as such can only approach...[113]

The above statement by Agee recalls Peter Henry Emerson's acknowledgement of the inadequacies of representing the natural world, as

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110 Ibid., p. 187.
111 Agee, 1975, op. cit., p. 235.
112 Ibid., p. 414.
113 Ibid., p. 233.

discussed in Chapter Two. Though the actualities they sought to represent were very different, both Emerson's and Agee's attempts at representation are marked by a consciousness of limitations. Agee looks to photography as a touchstone of truth, attempts to emulate the "dry truth" of its vision through his prose descriptions. But he knows its shortcomings. His description of Evans as predator behind the camera 'gun' bears this out. But despite the sense of inadequacies of the book, Agee and Evans achieve an important rethinking of documentary. And the camera is not always intrusive as shown by Evans allowing the subject to return the gaze, command respect, a way of picturing which finds its counterpart in the prose when Agee attempts to establish a dialogue with those he describes. What marks out their project is its general avoidance of expectations of poverty, none of the "enfreakments"[114] of their impoverished subjects which one finds in Bourke-White's pictures and Caldwell's accompanying prose in You Have Seen Their Faces, a book of mostly stolen portraits and invented voices— a book which speaks for those it represents, denies them a say in their representation.

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[114] I am borrowing this term from David Hevey who coins the term in his discussion of the problematics of disability imagery. See his The Creatures Time Forgot, (London: Routledge, 1992), in particular chapter five, 'The Enfreakment of Photography', pp.53- 74.

CHAPTER SIX

The Documentary Project Subverted: Wright Morris's Photo-Texts

Following the previous chapter's discussion of the documentary book, I am now turning to a more literary and poetic response to the American rural landscape which one finds in the photo-texts of the Nebraskan born writer, Wright Morris. In these books the prose is not detailing social conditions and the photographs are not presented as documents, both prose and photographs provide partial and subjective views. The documentary book is, as it were, subverted. It might be said his books are characterised by a desire to preserve, even reclaim, what is a rapidly disappearing rural world. What is of especial interest is the significance photographs play in this attempt at reclamation. As I will be showing, Morris's descriptions and use of photographs are edged by a ritualised, even metaphysical response to the medium. His books will introduce a slight change in orientation in my study of photography and the book as I attempt to discuss the affective propensities of the medium, a discussion which will continue in my discussion of Barthes and Boltanski in the following two chapters.

In his preface to the 1978 edition of his collection of essays on American literature, The Territory Ahead, Wright Morris begins by pointing out a decline in nostalgia in American literature in the twenty years since his book was first published. He points out how "the backward look, the consuming longing, is no longer a crippling preoccupation of the writer."[1]. The observation is important, Morris is a writer and photographer who has been preoccupied with this "backward look, the consuming longing." It is with what he terms "raw material" he is fascinated: "that comparatively crude ore that has not been processed by

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[1] Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. vii.

the imagination— what we refer to as life, or as experience, in contrast to art. "[2]. Describing his own work, Morris declares that:

> Raw material, an excess of both raw material and comparatively raw experience, has been the dominant factor in my own role as a novelist. The thesis I put forward grows out of my experience, and applies to it. Too much crude ore. [3]

As a container of raw experience, photography plays a crucial part in Morris's work. In Morris's novel The Works of Love, Adam Brady has his picture taken in order to find himself a wife. The photograph does not describe the Nebraskan landscape— "not an inkling of the desolation of the empty plain."[4] Instead it shows "Brady standing, hat in hand, with a virgin forest painted in behind him, and emerging from this forest a coyote and a one-eyed buffalo."[5] He has ten prints made of this picture, six of them mailed to old friends, four he passed on to travelling men.

> What became of nine pictures there is no record, but the tenth, well thumbed and faded, with a handlebar moustache added, finally got round to Carolyn Clayton, an Indiana girl...What she saw in this picture it is hard to say, as both the forest and the buffalo had faded, the coyote was gone, and someone had punched holes in Adam Brady's eyes. [6]

Photographs frequently crop up in Morris's fiction. His writing involves a particular attachment to photography and especially the kind of time-worn, faded and damaged photograph described above. They convey, despite the artifice of the studio scene in Brady's portrait, an essential truth of experience, what Morris has referred to as the "crude ore" his novels are steeped in. In

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[2]Ibid., p. 4.
[3]Ibid., pp.14-15.
[4]Wright Morris, The Works of Love, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p.5. (First Published, 1952.)
[5]Ibid., p. 5.
[6]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

considering the importance of photography in Morris's books, this chapter will concentrate attention on his two main photo-texts, The Inhabitants (1946), and The Home Place (1948). As the above extract from The Works of Love indicates, photographs also feature in his novels, and this chapter will also be paying particular attention to the extraordinary references made to the photograph in his early novel, The Man Who Was There (1945).

The Man Who Was There

Morris's The Man Who Was There is a book about presence through absence. An experimental and difficult novel, it involves the story of Agee Ward, a war hero missing in action, present through what he has left behind and the impression he has made on the people who knew of him. Morris's novel presents us with a 'negative portraiture'. There is a decidedly metaphysical aspect to the novel as it focuses on the mysterious and unexplained affect Agee Ward has on people, of how he rejuvenates and lives on in others. Ward survives in the things he owned and in the memories of people he knew. His character is defined through his possessions, as if material objects could assume the personality of their owner. Among his possessions are his photo-albums and these enable an inventive way of telling his life story through a series of snapshots in prose.

The novel has a complex design and is divided into three sections. The first section 'The Vision of Private Reagan' is an account of the events of the funeral day of Grandma Herkimer. It begins with private Reagan taking an elderly woman, Miss Elsie Herkimer, to leave Omaha and live with her daughter. She addresses him as Agee Ward, a boy who lived with Reagan, but was taken away by his uncle when he was 14. On the way to the funeral of Herkimer he learns that Agee has been reported missing and during service at the grave has

a vision that both Agee and Herkimer have been resurrected in him. The middle section 'Three Agee Wards', relates the events before which Agee was reported missing and it opens and closes with a series of descriptions of photographs found among Ward's California apartment. The last section, 'The Ordeal of Gussie Newcomb' concerns the particular influence Agee's absence has on his landlady, Gussie Newcomb, who had rented out a room above her garage to him. This final part of the novel concerns her response to the news he is missing and that she has been named next of kin, despite hardly knowing him. A strange connection develops between the two, as she cleans up his room and decides to move into it and rent out her house.

Agee appears, is made present in the text, through photographs. But he is not quite present, never really there in the photographs, he remains other-worldly, escaping representation.[7] The first description of Agee is through the account of a school photograph being taken. A week before his uncle came to take him away, we are told how he had his picture taken "but it was not a good picture of Agee Ward. A girl named Stella Fry had waved her hand right in front of his face..."[8]. Similarly, in the snapshot of him with his uncle at Niagara Falls: "[n]othing shows in this print but the blurred figure of someone just passing and, nearly as blurred, a boy in knee pants at the rail of a bridge."[9] Such absences or partial representations of Ward in the pictures continues up until the last photograph in the album, one which appeared in the newspaper reporting him missing in action. There are 18 men in this picture and an arrow is necessary to single out Agee Ward.

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[7]See David Madden's discussion of The Man Who Was There in Wright Morris, (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc, 1964), p. 45.

[8]Wright Morris, The Man Who Was There, (Lincoln: Bison Book Edition, University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 7. (First Published 1945).
[9]Ibid., p. 71.

> Except for the arrow one might not have noticed him. He stands in the back row, his clothes are dark, his mouth is shut, and his general appearance is very dull. When we look at his eyes we see that he is not looking out at us. This gives him a negative distinction, as the other 17 men show more understanding of what a picture is. They are looking out, smiling, knowing that we shall be looking for them— and they are already looking forward to seeing themselves. [10]

It was simply a "[m]ighty poor likeness of Agee Ward. It was one of those days when he simply didn't look like himself."[11] The mystery surrounding Ward, an amateur artist, is continued in the quality of his drawings and paintings. Indeed, the whole novel perhaps finds its symbol in one of his farmyard drawings: "The whole sketch a bit like a peeling fresco, or even more like a jigsaw puzzle from which the key pieces have been removed."[12]

The Man Who Was There contains numerous details which do not make sense, signs which remain beyond intelligibility, signs which set up curious resistances to meaning for both the reader and the characters within the novel, particularly Gussie Newcomb. Two signs in particular puzzle her. The cryptic note Agee Ward has written on the back of a postcard of Paris to his friend Peter Spivac which she finds among his belongings when tidying his room:

> The only obscene women I know
> are in Vogue and Harper's Bazaar.
> Reflect on this. [13]

Later on in the novel, Morris describes how, watching the bowling from the bench in the park, she reads the sign on the door of the clubroom and cannot quite fathom its meaning.

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[10]Ibid., pp. 136-137.
[11]Ibid., p. 137.
[12]Ibid., p. 81.
[13]Ibid., p.77.

She could not explain why it was the sign fascinated her. It had only been hung there— she could see the string it was on through the window— but in ten years nobody had taken it down.

Lawn Bowling
A way of Bringing Life
into the Community
Without Marring its Beauty.

There was something about what it said that she didn't fully understand, like there was about Vogue and Harper's Bazaar...[14]

Puzzling signs often crop up in Morris's fiction. In his later novel, A Life, Morris presents us with a detail similar to those Miss Newcomb encounters in The Man Who Was There. Floyd Warner makes a journey back to his first adult home— a dusty sheep farm in the Southwest— a scene of dereliction. Morris says how "[h]is own life here had been displaced by a life, or lives, recently departed. He felt their presence".[15] One detail in one of the rooms is important because it "seemed to speak to this feeling, but somehow remained elusive."[16]. What affects him are the:

words on a towel, the towel framed by long-tasseled ears of Indian corn:

WHEN THE GRASS IS PULLED UP
THE SOD COMES WITH IT[17]

Warner wonders what it means "Who had pulled up the grass? What was meant by the sod?".[18] It is as if Morris writes into his books something outside language, sets up resistances to interpretation through such signs, such

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14Ibid., p. 179.
15Wright Morris, A Life, (Lincoln: Bison Book Edition, University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 124
16Ibid., p. 124.
17Ibid., p. 123.
18Ibid., p. 124.

sayings, signs which, speak to a feeling of presence, a feeling which is unable to be pinned down. We are not dealing with meanings, with reading, but responses, the realm of affect. One should also think of such signs in relation to those objects Roland Barthes speaks of in his essay 'The Semantics of the Object', an encounter with objects which resist interpretation, one involving "existential connotations" in which the "appearance or existence of a thing....persists in existing somewhat against us."[19]. I would like to also suggest that there is something similar between the status of the photograph and these signs which do not signify in Morris's fiction; the Bowling Green sign, the note on the back of the postcard, signs which remain not quite within the realm of signification, are like the photographs described in the novel, those unsuccessful snapshots of Agee Ward. As I will be showing the photograph that fails to offer a complete and clear representation, particularly fascinates Morrris, he loves time-worn, faded snapshots, pictures which remain enigmatic, withhold rather than disclose information.

In relation to the puzzling signs in The Man Who Was There, Miss Newcomb comes across objects which take on a clear symbolic import, remain, for her, only too meaningful; the detail, for example, of the cat's saucer in Ward's room, "with a deep green mold growing in it. Right up until this she hadn't felt a thing, she hadn't put her mind on what it is to be missing, but when she saw the saucer she had to turn and sit down on something."[20]. Her disturbance by the detail of the cat's saucer with its green mold is tied to the object serving as a kind of memento mori, a ready prompt to thoughts that Ward might not be simply missing. This, in part, lies behind her response to what is under his bed. In Morris's photo-text The Home Place he describes, as I will be showing, a trespassing into someone's house, and the bed is presented as a particularly

[19]Roland Barthes, 'The Semantics of the Object' in The Semiotic Challenge, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), p. 180.
[20]Morris, 1977, op. cit., p. 156.

charged object since it bears the impression and presence of the person who once slept there. The focus in The Man Who Was There is on what is underneath the bed. Cleaning Ward's room, Miss Newcomb is disturbed by the fact that he has the mattress on the floor. With a photographic attention to detail Morris describes what is under the mattress. Her encounter is one of shock and embarrassment. Something very private is being revealed in this 'negative' of his bed, an encounter tinged with sexuality which is suggested by the embarrassing detail of the Paris postcard with its lewd puzzling message about the girls from Harpers and Vogue.

> Miss Newcomb was so stunned by the sight on the floor she just stood there staring at it— fearing either to call Mr Bloom's attention to it or let it pass. Wads of sweepings had gathered in rolls, some of them like storm clouds with bits of white in them, and in between the floor was every manner of thing. Buttons, cigarettes used and unused, one blue, one brown and one red sock, a ping pong ball, a piece of chewed fat, a tube of hair oil that had leaked a stain, several pencils, and a small brass chinese cat. But worst of all, there was that postcard she had dropped. It was right side up, the writing so clear she thought she would read it from where she stood, and while Mr Bloom held up the bed she reached for it. [21].

Agee lives on through his objects he has left behind. He also is given presence in the book through words, the act of naming, the passing on of his name to others. Ward's name is given to Reagan mistakenly at the opening of the novel. Towards the book's close, the name of Agee is given to Gussie Newcomb's husband-to-be, Mr Bloom, in preference to Wilbur, while Peter Spivac names his son, Ward. As Miss Newcomb declares: "'Who is missing anybody—... with Ward Spivac and Agee Bloom?'"[22] The novel closes with references to Gussie's relationship to Agee, she wears his bathrobe down the driveway when she goes to collect the mail. At the end of the book while sitting in his room in

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[21] Ibid., p. 164.
[22] Ibid., p. 236.

the dark she is almost mistaken for Agee Ward by his friend Peter Spivak. In contrast to Gussie, Ward's friend is someone for whom objects mean little: "'I suppose you're going to tell me that he's here in these books?'...'Why do people say that out of kindness? It's a lie! Why do they say it?'"[23] Such questioning is significant, it is edged by the fact that the whole novel is in a sense about what he sees as this "lie".

What this book presents us with is a photographic text. Photographs feature in the novel, but the whole book can be seen as an analogue of the photographic process itself with its insistence on the indexical relationship between a missing person and the things he has left behind. The strange relationship set up between Gussie and the objects she encounters in Ward's room, is the result of these things being seen to be literally imprinted by his presence, as much a trace of their owner as a photographic portrait is seen to bear the trace of its sitter. I have already proposed that Hardy's prose in its predilection for indexical details is a photographic text (see Chapter Three), but Morris takes this much further, the indexical sign is a key to defining not only the character of such a novel as The Man Who Was There but, as I will now show, the index also provides the overriding characteristic of his photographs.

The Inhabitants

Morris's photographs in the book, The Inhabitants, reveal a fascination with the index. Finished in 1942, but not published until 1946 by Scribner's, The Inhabitants was produced as a large format book. Short prose pieces are paired with photographic plates, the text on one page, an image on the other,

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[23]Ibid., p. 236.

52 of each.[24] The book carries an epigraph from Thoreau's Walden which helps us understand the particular characteristic of the photographs in the book.

> What of architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the in-dweller, who is the only builder— out of some unconscious truthfulness, and nobleness, without even a thought for the appearance and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life....it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are.[25]

Turning to Morris's photographs having read the epigraph, one gets the sense that these photographs of churches, farmhouses, boats, barns, grain elevators and stores, are meant to testify to Thoreau's particular notion of architectural beauty— all the things Morris pictures bear the character of their occupants. His sense of a relationship between inhabitant and home place is such he begins his book with the paradoxical admission that he has "never seen in anything so crowded, so full of something, as the rooms of a vacant house."[26] He does not need to photograph people to give us portraits, the inhabitants are felt to be present through pictures of their dwellings and belongings. Like The Man Who Was There, Morris practices a curious kind of negative portraiture, pictures of inhabitants through the things they have used and the places they have dwelt in.

A cue to his particular aesthetic is taken from Henry James. It was a particular faculty of attention he admired in James, the notion that objects carry a presence, a "mystic meaning." The classic formulation of the Jamesian point of

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[24] I will be referring to the second edition of The Inhabitants, published by Da Capo Press Inc. in 1971. The author has added a preface and replaced two photographs that appeared in the original edition. In all other respects it is an unabridged re-publication of the original.
[25] Ibid., n.p.
[26] Ibid., n.p.

view he wishes to adopt is taken form The American Scene and provides the preface to Morris's second photo-text book The Home Place.

> To be at all critically, or as we have been fond of calling it, analytically minded—over and beyond an inherent love of the many-coloured pictures of things— is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped , disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out: to give out, that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter.[27]

According to Morris, the above quote from James, spoke "directly to what my photo-text books are about"[28]. The quote throws a clarifying light on these books, the importance bestowed on seemingly insignificant objects.

The intentions behind his photography are made clear in his preface to the second edition of The Inhabitants. Morris talks about photographs he took in 1935, pictures which crop up in both The Inhabitants and The Home Place. He photographed "[d]oors and windows, gates, stoops, samples of litter, assorted junk, anything that appeared to have served its purpose. Except people. Only in their absence will the observer intuit, in full measure, their presence."[29] He describes his search for subjects, as a search for "facts of a sort— artifacts", "[e]xpressive fragments that managed to speak for the whole."[30] Morris sees his activity as a photographer as analogous to that of an archaeologist, he salvages material. His early writing testifies to a similar obsession with things. A preoccupation with what he has termed, "time-worn artifacts.", "radiant raw material" characterises both his early prose and photographs. Writing, however, also provides the means to portray some of the complexities of

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[27]Wright Morris, The Home Place, (Lincoln: Bison Book Edition, University of Nebraska Press, 1970), n. p.
[28]Morris, 1971, op. cit., n.p.
[29]Ibid., n. p.
[30]Ibid., n.p.

character— "people, as I knew them, were the subject of my fiction, and I found them— or failed to find them— through the discipline of writing."[31]

Morris is drawn to the structures and artifacts of early decades, to things used and worn, to things that have been shaped by human experience and association or to abandoned buildings whose lives seem to have been played out— an interest in what he once described as "the old, the worn and worn out, the declined, the time ravaged, the eroded and blighted, the used, abused and abandoned.."[32] Wear thus conveys not only a charm to Morris but a particular truth— imbued with elements of the personalities of the inhabitants by daily contact and uses, the enduring objects become in a sense holy. The indexical sign is central to Morris's photography, it defines his particular aesthetic— a fascination with the 'trace', with wear, the evident markings of time, the 'second-hand'. The things photographed bear a particular 'historicity', they are things used, marked with the passage of time. His is a world, as Sandra S. Phillips has pointed out, of ignoble objects— a backyard privy, an old wooden laundry tub, a plank staircase.[33] The beauty of the things photographed rests in their rich surface patina; they remain artifacts which, as Morris has said, "indelibly revealed the hand of man. Not so much the handiwork as the work that is largely shaped by experience"[34]. Another distinctive characteristic of his pictures, as John Szarkowski has noted[35], is their particular quality of light— brilliant highlights and black shadows, the dramatic chiaroscuro set up by the harsh Nebraskan light.

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[31]Ibid., n.p.
[32]Wright Morris, Photographs and Words, (Carmel, CA :The Friends of Photography, 1982), p. 21
[33]Sandra. S. Phillips, 'Words and Pictures' in Wright Morris: Origin of a Species, (San Fancisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art , 1992), p. 25
[34]Morris, 1971, op. cit. n. p.
[35]John Szarkowksi, 'Wright Morris, The Photographer' in Wright Morris Origin of a Species, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art , 1992), p. 15.

Because the things he photographs face the camera frontally, there is no drama of unexpected angles or strange perspectives. Morris will even take pictures of blank walls, the side of a house, absorbed by the pattern of brick, the neatly trimmed hedge, the 'classical' symmetries of a commonplace building (see fig. 46). Dead-pan and plain, some of his pictures are, nevertheless, as Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. has pointed out[36], animated by the occasional detail— a small patch of snow on an empty road before a church (fig. 47), the shadowed repetition of the curving handle of a distant water pump on the white wall of a schoolhouse (fig. 48), the little Vitalis sign in the window of a shop. The subdued and minimalist aesthetic of his photographs is paralleled by his prose writing. Incidents go by unremarked in his novels. In the lives of the Plains' people he writes about, momentous events seem either not to occur or not to bear thinking about, small incidents will very often take on surprising importance. What Morris termed his "style of plotless narration"[37] bears a particular relationship to their setting, the flat unspectacular plains of the Nebraskan landscape.

Even when the setting is decidedly dramatic, a bullfight in Mexico in his novel The Field of Vision, it is the small events of character's lives gathered to view the bloody spectacle which dominate the book.[38] The entire novel takes place during the two and a half hours of its bullfight. Morris's story shows that each character looking at the bullfight sees only him or herself. For the group of people gathered to watch the bullfight, it is not this spectacular event which is of interest for them or Morris, but what thoughts are passing in their heads. With the book broken into 24 sections, each given over to an account of a single

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[36] See Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. 'American Graphic: The Photography and Fiction of Wright Morris', in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Multiple Views, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), pp. 271-302.
[37] Szarkowski, op. cit., p. 14.
[38] Wright Morris, The Field of Vision, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957).

character's mind, the spectacle of the bullfight becomes only the background to what is taking place in the consciousness of each character.

The Inhabitants gives us no narrative. Morris's series of short prose pieces amount to unconnected little plots. They are not commenting on the photographs. As Trachtenberg has noted, while the pictures of the vacant— but for Morris 'inhabited'— houses provide us with the look, the prose voice (sometimes first person, sometimes third person, sometimes dialogue), is a verbal translation of what inhabits the house.[39] But he fails to note that there are two texts on every page; Morris juxtaposes voices within the book. The bold black print at the top of each page deals exclusively with what it is to be an American, sententious, knowing. This voice, a kind of chorus, what Morris calls "the sound track"[40], develops a specific theme concerning what it is to be an American. Against this consistent viewpoint, the short prose pieces provide a series of impressionist fragments. In an essay on photography 'The Camera Eye', Morris remarks on what he saw as the "uncanny effect" of the camera's eye on the writer's "field of vision".[41] Time as a continuous narrative flow, was relevant to sentiment and nostalgia, but not he writes, "to the world of the brownie snapshot, cubist paintings or Einstein's calculations."[42] A new time, "stopped time, a fragmented and reassembled time" was instigated by photography.[43] And this is clearly reflected in the fragmentary structure of his book, The Inhabitants.

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[39] Alan Trachtenberg, 'The Craft of Vision' in Critique, (New York: Krauss Reprint Corporation, 1962), pp. 41-55.
[40] Szarkowski, op. cit., p. 14.
[41] Wright Morris, 'The Camera Eye' in Critical Inquiry, University of Chicago Press, Autumn 1981, pp. 1-15.
[42] Ibid., p. 1.
[43] Ibid., p. 1.

Sometimes the prose pieces in The Inhabitants are like photographs gathered verbatim from conversation or as if copied from a short letter on the back of a postcard as in the following text accompanying plate 31 in the book:

> Dear Son— have moved. Have nice little place of our own now, two plate gas. Have chevrolet 28, spare tire, wire wheels. Crazy to be without it, now get out in country, get out in air. Have extra room, woudn't be so crowded, nice and quiet in rear. Nice warm sun there every morning, nice view in rear. Have plan to sell day-old eggs to high class Restaurants, Hotels,. Soon send you to Harvard— send you to Yale. Saw Robin in yard this morning. Saw him catch worm.[44]

Through this annotated transcription of speech, a vernacular, 'bad' writing, heavy with what Morris terms the "raw material" of experience, one finds the kind of equivalent to the photographic record of worn out, seemingly insignificant objects that fill the pages of the book. As a collection of fragmentary writings, of snatches of conversation, the book recalls the structure— or on might say anti-structure— of Peter Henry Emerson's last book Marsh Leaves as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, a collection of textual fragments, not adding up to an overriding intelligibility. Indeed, both seem to parallel each other in the way they resist our desire to interpret. A conversation in The Inhabitants can, for example, consist of such a minimal and inane exchange as the following:

> Here I come
> Hello Charlie
> How's tide?
> Low Charlie
> How's Scallops?
> Fine Charlie
> Bye Now
> Bye Charlie

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[44]Morris, 1971, op. cit., n.p.

Here I go.[45]

This short conversation is paired with a picture of an old boat, grounded and decayed, long having served its use, an elegiac monument. It is tempting to also relate this image of a boat on land as bearing a relationship to the recurrent Morrisian metaphor of the Nebraskan plains as being like the sea.[46].

His pictures often set up resistances to interpretation, and this is perhaps no better brought out than in plate 11 with its isolation of a single structure, centrally composed in the picture— nothing but a white grain elevator bearing the curious sign: GANO (fig. 49). We are invited to ponder the meaning of these four letters: the name, perhaps, of the company? the type of grain? the owner's name? The puzzling sign accords with the signs which bemuse Gussie Newcomb in The Man Who Was There and Floyd Warner in A Life. Boyd's reminiscences in Field of Vision also provide a detail which parallels the kind of qualities suggested by the Gano photograph. Boyd considers the properties of the godlike figure, the timber merchant, John Crete. He remembers the lumberyard— "A red fence went all the way round it, with the CRETE in white, but the letter R missing where the boards were removed to put in a metal gate."[47] On revisiting the place he finds "The word CRETE was no longer stamped on everything. All five letters were now gone from the lumberyard fence. They were no longer in gold on the window of the bank, or blown up in shadow on the library blind."[48] All that is left is the ghost of his name on the

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[45]Ibid., n.p.
[46]Thus the 87 year old Plainsman, Tom Scanlon, in The Field of Vision, is said to have "a seaman's creased eyes in his face. The view from his window— the one in Lone Tree, where he had the bed pulled over to the window— was every bit as wide and as empty as a view of the sea. In the early morning, with just the sky light, that was how it looked. The faded sky was like the sky at sea, the everlasting wind like the wind at sea, and the plain rolled and swelled quite a bit like the sea itself. Like the sea it was lonely, and there was no place to hide". Morris, 1957, op. cit., p. 43.
[47]Ibid., p. 103.
[48]Ibid., p. 105.

grain elevator "where the last coat of paint— a fading yellow— was peeling off. Under this, coat, shadowy but re-emerging, was the word CRETE."[49]

Like the photographs of Walker Evans, Morris's pictures reveals a classical temperament. In his book The Home Place Morris describes his particular aesthetic, one involving space, an aesthetic of a 'found' order of humble objects, all in their 'place'.

> To sit on a straight backed chair I have to lean forward, on my knees, and look at my hands or something on the floor. On the floor was a piece of worn linoleum. The centre of the pattern had been worn off and Clara had dabbed on one of her own. Brown and green dabs of the brush. Uneven rows. I looked through the door at the dining room, the dark-wood chairs spaced on the wall, the cabinet in the corner, the harvest-hand table, the single frosted bulb on the fly-cluttered cord. Everything in its place, its own place, with its frame of space around it. Nothing arranged. No minority groups, that is.[50]

The lowly things he describes have a beauty of correctness, of "everything in its place...with its frame of space around it." It is precisely this sense of place and space which characterises his pictures, the structures he photographs are often centrally placed and face the camera. Morris' is aware of the aesthetic order he imposes upon the world. As he himself says:

> elements of design frequently take precedence over the subject matter...shaping it to an abstract statement. The tendency to stand, in Thoreau's words "right fronting and face to face to a fact", often reveals in the subject, as well as in my taste, elements that are surprisingly classical. It is a vision of marble imposed on more vulnerable, ephemeral materials, soon gone with the wind.[51]

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[49]Ibid., p. 107.
[50]Morris, 1970, op. cit., p.41.
[51]Morris, 1971, op. cit., n. p.

One image in The Inhabitants in particular (see fig. 50), however, disturbs the classical order of the prints, showing us a pile of junk, used things— logs, part of a broken bench, some old tyres, a white cup, and an unusual object which takes the picture decidedly out of the realm of the ordinary and factitious: a gravestone, displaced, tilted, leaning to one side. Has it been thrown away?. The gravestone bears the distinct lettering ELLEN C, and above it a crown and a cross.

The prose piece accompanying this picture of junk is rather unusual. Beside this picture of discarded objects, the text provides a reflection on the world of magazine ads. Written in first person, the text voices a response to what is referred to as the new world "comin' up", the world proffered, one assumes, by adverts—"I've seen a lot of things a man might fancy, things he might like, but not a damn thing that he could love."[52] It closes by musing on the idea of what Hell is, a world like that shown in advertising, one which is said to be inauthentic, a place bereft of deep feelings, a place as Morris puts is "where people are happy because there's never no more hard times. A nice little place where you get what you like— and not what you love". [53]

Such a critique is continued in a later prose piece which reflects on the sameness of the city, the facelessness and inauthenticity of a world of consumerism.

> All the same. The streets, the stores, the faces, the people— all the same....All people in windows, not people you come to know. A girl in a window showing a ring or holding a bottle and tapping the glass, or stripped down some showing even more. Or a man with a corset to melt your pouch or if you hadn't a pouch it would widen your shoulders, lengthen your life. Nobody thought of talking to her or seeing more than

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[52]Ibid., n.p.
[53]Ibid., n.p.

> the pouch on him, or wondering if whoever they were they were alive. They were just the pouch, or the ring, or the look, or whatever they did. Not something to know or like but something to buy. Something to have if you first just had the dough.[54]

In its musing on sameness, the text bears an interesting relationship to the photograph it is paired with, a picture reflecting on resistances to uniformity (see fig. 51). In Morris's picture, two identical houses are made different by the fact one has recently been renovated— a difference brought out in the freshly coat of white paint that the front steps have been given.

Morris's book narrates a search for what it is to be an American, and closes with an assertion that Americaness is to be found in a set of differences and multiplicity, not homogeneity: "There's no one thing to cover the people, no one sky...And there's no need to cover such people— they cover themselves." [55] His images speak of a rural world, made up of idiosyncratic individual traces, of objects worn, repaired, repainted, things "shaped by experience", testifying to a felt sense of authenticity, a truth of experience, and a truth felt to be threatened with the onset of a homogenising modernity.

The Home Place

His other photo-text, The Home Place, first published in 1948, narrates a homecoming, a return to the narrator's, Clyde Muncy's, childhood home. It provides a theme similar to, but much more condensed, than The Inhabitants, one home not many provides the main subject of the book's prose and

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[54]Ibid., n.p.

[55]This conclusion perhaps explains the characteristic of many of Morris' novels. For example, the multiple perspectives and multiple voices we find in his The Field of Vision, with its attention to its five characters' thoughts demonstrating the way in which the same bullfight is seen differently by each person, a variety of views. The crowd before the bullfight, as described by Morris in this novel, is not a homogeneous mass— "This crisp sabbath afternoon forty thousand pairs of eyes would gaze down on forty thousand separate bullfights."

photographs. The book came out of the experience of revisiting "Uncle Harry's farm", near Norfolk, where as a boy Morris had once spent two weeks of a summer vacation.[56] In contrast to The Inhabitants, the format of The Home Place, is more recognizably a novel with its narrative about the return of a Nebraskan to his childhood home after a thirty year absence.

The photographs on every page have a clearer relationship to the novel. It is not, as in The Inhabitants, the 'shells' but the interiors and details of a home place which we are given in visual form in this book: the bric-a-brac of a lifetime, pill boxes, pin cushions, shotgun shells, flashlights, a watch and chain, a few snapshots. The text is in the form of a narrative and each page is faced by a photograph, 89 photographs in all. One photograph sticks out because it does not follow the convention of the others, occupying a two page spread, with the prose at the bottom: a photograph of a nineteenth century family photograph. The pictures are not separate from, but equivalent to, the events in the narrative, if one can speak of events in Morris's fiction. They cannot be understood as illustrations, and most of them fill the entire page to its edges, so that they are not framed by a white border as they are in The Inhabitants. The photographs are cropped and this removes them as a group from the context of artworks, as 'images' spread out on a white page, and presents them as 'things' and artifacts.

If the theme of the book is the return of a "rural expatriate" and his efforts to revive the past, then the pictures pursue this theme on the level of graphic reminiscence. The pictures of farm equipment, corners of rooms, old chairs, stoves, boots, newspaper clippings, clothes, beds, shaving mugs and lace curtains, are all rich with associations and together they reconstruct the homeplace on the visual level. Muncy's visit in The Home Place lasts a

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[56]Morris, 1982, op. cit., p. 38.

morning and an evening of one hot summer day. Against the background of his past, he responds sensitively to a series of minor events, typical for one who revisits a rural home place.

Morris's photographs are comparable to Evans's pictures of sharecropper's houses. As David E. Nye pointed out, Morris "never exploits a temporary sloppiness to create an image of squalor or untidyness. The stove, scrubbed and shining despite years of uses, the ash bucket empty beside it, looks as it would if Aunt Clara had visitors coming."[57] Morris, like Evans, often gives us portraits through objects, his juxtaposition of an empty chair and a portrait on the wall in a number of prints cleverly highlights this: the chairs as representative of the house's inhabitants as the pictures above them (see fig. 52).

In places, photography 'invades' the text of The Home Place. At one point, the photographic process provides an interesting simile when the narrator says: "I wiped my face on the towel and watched the PILLSBURY stamp come up, slowly darkening, like a print in the developer."[58] A little later he says of Aunt Clara how, "I did not look at her with my camera eye" and goes on to describe how instead he:

> looked at the floor and the hole she had worn in the patch of linoleum, the hole beneath the patch, by rocking and dragging her heel. Every time she rocked forward, the right heel dragged back. Where she walked without her shoes— in the morning and evening— the linoleum had a high shine from her cotton stockings and narrow bare feet.[59]

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[57]See David E. Nye, '*Negative Capability* in Wright Morris's *The Home Place*' in Word and Image, Volume 4, Number 1, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1988) pp. 163-169.
[58]Morris, 1970, op. cit., p. 27.
[59]Ibid., p. 43.

The camera eye is associated with an intrusion of privacy. Morris is careful to avoid this in his own photographs. There are no photographic portraits as such in The Home Place. The book begins with a photograph showing the door of a barn, a man mending an inner tube, the 'old man' of the narrative, his face hidden in shade (fig. 53), and closes with the same figure, entering the doorway, with his back to us (fig. 54): a departure, metaphorically charged, not only because his back is turned towards us, about to disappear into the black interior of his barn, as we finish the book, but in relation to the text, his departure implies the more permanent departure and passage of death—a final ending: "Out here you wear out, men and women wear out, the sheds and the houses, the machines wear out..."[60]

One discernible characteristic of the book is its sensitivity to private spaces. It is a narrative of a homecoming but also about a respect for privacy. The earlier description of looking not at his aunt Clara, but at the details on the floor describes very well the kind of photographic details we find in the book. Morris gives us a negative portraiture as his camera eye looks at traces of human presence, reveal a decided fascination for indexical signs, objects which have been used, time worn possessions. Morris's pictures also have a scripto-visual aspect; his details of music and piano keys (fig. 55), a barber's pole, a pin cushion, the photograph showing the worn-out threads on tyres (fig. 56), all reveal a penchant for different kinds of inscriptions. Signs themselves also catch his eye: the empty shop window photographed front on to the camera which reveals the hand painted letters— MILLINERY— pared down the middle by the frame of the window (fig. 57).

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[60]Ibid., p. 176.

In Morris's photo-text God's Country and My People[61] a fascination for words as image in photography is taken to its ultimate ends. This book is large format like The Inhabitants, but contains nearly twice as many photographs, 83 in all. There is no 'soundtrack' in this book, but a series of prose paragraphs for each print. First published in 1968, God's Country... reuses many of the images included in The Home Place and The Inhabitants. Of those photographs not before published is a very interesting picture of books, three shelves of books, alphabetically arranged (fig. 58). These book are read, used books, some of them with handmade covers and the titles written in pen on the binding. Turning the page of Morris's book, we move from a picture of used books to an image of used tyres, some threadbare, a stack which fills the frame. (The same image we find in The Home Place.) A little later on in the book we find the print of the first page of a book, one of the books already pictured on the shelf (fig. 59). The book is photographed against a newspaper, another page is partly coming away from the book, and the picture carries the detail of an ambiguous stain on the page, intruding on the letter B of the book's title, BABBIT— a pressed leaf? the wing of an insect? Morris's enjoyment of photographing words, the ordered typescript of letters, is followed by an image of a decidedly different kind of writing on the next page of God's Country..., the illegible swirls and markings—numbers, crosses and letters— of white chalk on the rusty side of a freight train (fig. 60).

The Home Place realises the problems of visiting a private space. Its sensitivity to the issue of privacy bears a decided contrast to James Agee's intrusions into the homes of the sharecroppers as discussed in the previous chapter. Morris's novel addresses the complex emotive responses incurred when looking at someone else's personal possessions, a theme already present in his earlier

[61] Wright Morris, God's Country and My People, (Lincoln: Bison Book Edition, University of Nebraska Press, 1981). (First published 1968).

The Man Who Was There, only The Home Place brings out the guilt of prurience more strongly. Responding to a housing shortage in the city, Muncy is considering moving back into the country, his home-place, and thinks of moving into the empty house of his uncle Ed who is ill in hospital. But on entering the home of their dying relative, the narrator and his wife realize they cannot take possession of his house. In a theme familiar to The Man Who Was There and The Inhabitants, Morris stresses the way in which houses that are empty are still felt to be inhabited.

> What is it that strikes you about a vacant house? I suppose it has something to do with the fact that any house that's been lived in, any room that been's slept in, is not vacant any more. From that point on its forever occupied. With the people in the house you tend to forget that , the rooms and the chairs seem normal enough, and you're not upset by the idea of a FOR RENT sign. But with the people gone you know the place is inhabited. There's something in the rooms, in the air, that raising the windows won't let out. There's a pattern on the walls, where's the calender hung, and the tipped square of a missing picture is a lidded eye on something private, something better not seen. There's a path worn into the carpet, between the bed and the door, the stove and the table, and where the heel drags, the carpet is gone, worn into the floor. [62]

But it is not through such subtle signs of a place being lived in as "a path worn into the carpet" which really affects Muncy and his wife. It is Uncle Ed's bed (see fig. 61). Morris sets up an intriguing relationship between the photographic negative plate and beds, contrasting the bed in the house with one in a hotel, where the image of living has become hopelessly blurred by a succession of bodies. Those in hotels lack the indexical clarity of uncle Ed's bed. The photographic analogy also underlines how integral photography is to Morris's aesthetic.

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[62] Morris, op. cit., 1972, p. 132.

> There are hotel beds that give you the feeling of a negative exposed several thousand times, with the blurred image of every human being that had slept in them. Then there are beds with a clean single image, over-exposed. There's an etched clarity about them, like a clean daguerreotype, and you know in your heart that was how the man really looked.[63]

This notion of presence through absence, an indexical relationship between person and belongings, has a particular bearing on the work of Christian Boltanski which will be discussed in the last chapter of this book.

The bed carries a sense of presence, but so does everything, from his boots to the clippings collected from the newspaper Capper's Weekly. The verses are also photographed by Morris, an extraordinary image of nothing but a collage of texts cut from a newspaper (see fig. 62). Muncy and his wife read the sentimental verses out loud to one another. But while reading these, Muncy is suddenly struck by a sense of guilt at his invasion of privacy. Reading these clichéd ditties on love, he feels like a peeping Tom. Muncy, in a remarkable hyperbole, sees himself as disrespectful as those caught smiling at the scenes of a bloody accident or crime in newspaper photos.

> I stood looking at the page, doing my best to ignore the fact that I felt more and more like some sly peeping Tom. I put my hand up to my face, as it occurred to me, suddenly how people look in a Daily News photograph. A smiling face at the scene of a bloody accident. A quartet of gay waitresses near the body slumped over the bar. God only knows why I thought of that, but I put up my hands, covering my face, as if I was there, on the spot, and didn't want to be violated, that is. The camera eye knows no privacy, the really private is its business, and in our time business is good.[64]

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[63]Ibid., p. 135.
[64]Ibid., p. 138.

Following this admission, the ordinary objects in the house become holy. Like Agee in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Muncy valorises the things around him. In a variation on Van Gogh's 'Les Souliers' and echoing Evans's picture of Gudgers's work boots, Morris presents a photograph of uncle Ed's muddy boots (see fig. 63). Muncy stares at the boots in the novel and says how "there's something about these man-tired things, something added, that is more than character."[65] Everything now becomes sacred:

> was there, then, something holy about these things? If not, why had he used that word? For holy things, they were ugly enough. I looked at the odds and ends on the bureau, the pin-cushion lid on the cigar box, the faded legion poppies, assorted pills, patent medicines.[66]

What is interesting is the photograph itself becomes a ritualised artifact for Morris. Towards the end, the novel describes an encounter with a faded snapshot, the one photograph which occupies a different space to the others in the book, rephotographed it is spread over two pages of The Home Place (see fig. 64). Towards the close of the book, the family gather to discuss this very photograph, a print dating from 1892 showing a group portrait outdoors on a winter's day. It stands as a *memento mori,* like the snapshots Evans rephotographed in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Aunt Clara's response to the picture underlies this aspect: "'Most are dead and gone, think it would be fadin!'...'Same as me an you are fadin'"[67]. Colin Westerbeck Jr. has drawn attention to the significance of faded photographs to Morris's work as a whole.[68] He draws attention to one unpublished picture by Morris which shows five old prints strewn on a table. All are in good condition except one, which has faded

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[65]Ibid., p. 141.
[66]Ibid., p. 141.
[67]Ibid., p. 155.
[68]Westerbeck Jr, 1989, op. cit. p. 283.

so much only a faint ghost of the person photographed is left; "yet another man who isn't here. He could be taken", suggests Westerbeck, "as an emblematic figure, a representation in human form of Morris's aesthetic."[69] Westerbeck ties the faded photograph to the anonymous style of his 'portraits' in The Home Place, the old man whose face is always in shadow or who has his back towards us. Morris's unfading photographs of fading photographs reveal something about the habit of keeping pictures to mark and grieve for the passage of time. The faded photograph in The Home Place is passed around by its characters for 15 pages, it is re-animated through discussion. The same photograph is discussed in The Man Who Was There and is even felt to provide better portraits because it is faded. The narrative informs us that "even without faces these figures are good portraits— the absence of a face is not a great loss".[70] One character, who couldn't recognise anybody except himself when the faces had features, does better once they fade: "As soon as their faces were gone he knew them right away."[71]

I suggested earlier that the last image of the 'old man' leaving us, entering the dark interior of his barn, marked a particular elegiac ending to the book, a picture seemingly in accordance with the tenor of such assertions in the text as "out here you wear out, men and women wear out, the sheds and the houses, the machines wear out."[72] However, as the above responses to the faded photograph suggest, there is still felt to be life indwelling in things worn. The Home Place is full of objects, as David E. Nye has noted, "constituting a world whose inhabitants put their own figure into the carpet, as they wear through it down to the floor."[73] The closing lines of the book suggest something wearing in not wearing out.

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[69]Ibid., p. 283.
[70]Morris, 1977, op. cit., p. 64.
[71]Ibid., p. 64.
[72]Ibid., p. 176.
[73]Nye, 1988, op. cit., p. 167.

> On the spring handle of the gear was a white cotton glove, with fingers spread, thrust up in the air like the gloved hand of a traffic cop. The leather palm was gone, worn away, but the crabbed fingers were spread and the reinforced stitching, the bib pattern, was still there. The figure on the front of the carpet had worn through to the back.[74]

Here Morris points to a particular sign, a glove, worn, but with the bib pattern still there, still surviving. Coupled with the metaphor of the figure on the carpet, such a detail stresses this particular notion of things wearing in instead of wearing out. One of Morris's short prose pieces from his later photo-text book, God's Country and My People, makes this point most clearly.

> There's little to see, but things leave an impression. It's a matter of time and repetition. As something old wears thin or out, something new wears in. The handle of the pump, the crank on the churn, the dipper floating in the bucket, the latch on the screen, the door on the privy, the fender on the stove, the knees of the pants and the seat of the chair, the handle of the brush and the lid of the pot exist in time but outside taste; they wear in more than they wear out.[75]

The peculiar fascination for the worn-out, the second-hand, is evinced clearly in what Morris had to say about the faded snapshot. "One of the great and appealing charms of the snapshot" he wrote in an essay for Critical Inquiry:

> is that we can see and easily appreciate what it captures...The impression we receive is usually one we have already had. But as these images recede in time and their numbers diminish, their familiar 'message' undergoes a sea-change. The time-worn cliché is suddenly less time bound, the commonplace is touched with the uncommon...Photographs considered worthless , time's confetti, slipped from the niche in a drawer or album, touch us like the tinkle of a bell at a seance or a ghostly murmur in the attic. And why not? They are snippets

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[74]Morris, 1972, op. cit., p. 176.
[75]Morris, God's Country..., 1981, op. cit., n. p.

> of the actual gauze from that most durable of ghosts, nostalgia. They restore the scent, if not the substance, of what was believed to be lost.[76]

Elsewhere in the essay, Morris speaks of "vernacular language" as having "its consummation in photos".[77] The common sensibility in which Morris believes, is seen not only in anonymous photography, but in anonymous language of the sort that clichés preserve. Morris has discussed this aspect.

> It just can't be touched. It's Capper's Weekly, Keats— these little touches of elegance. They have that rhyming expression of an unspeakable durable cliché, and those are the kind that ring the soul, because they have the burden of centuries behind them. Clichés have an almost sacred function.[78]

I began my discussion of Morris with the notion of raw material and the immediate relation it had to the photograph. There is, however, an important qualification to be made about this notion of raw material. Morris is aware of how raw material has itself become clichéd, "has been handled"— "the raw-material myth, based as it is on the myth of inexhaustible resources, no longer supplies the artisan with lumps of raw life." The writer "now inhabits a world of raw material clichés."[79]

> We are no longer a raw-material reservoir, the marvel and despair of less fortunate cultures, since our only inexhaustible resources at the moment is the cliché An endless flow of clichés, tirelessly processed for mass-media consumption, now gives a sheen of vitality to what is either stillborn or second-hand. The hallmark of these clichés is a processed sentimentality. The extremes of our life, what its contours should be, blur at their point of origin, then disappear into the arms of the Smiling Christ at Forest Lawn....The raw-material world of facts, of real personal life,

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[76] Morris, 'The Camera Eye', 1981, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
[77] Ibid., p. 2.
[78] Quoted in Westerbeck Jr., op cit., p. 288.
[79] Morris, 1978, op. cit., p 9.

> comes full circle in the unreal phantom who spends real time seeking for his or her self in the how-to-do-it books- How To Live, How To Love, and , sooner or later, How to Read Books.[80]

There is also a struggle against the cliché in Morris's texts, the cliché as a sign of inauthenticity. This is articulated through a description, in The Field of Vision, of another photograph, one which pictures a particular 'failure at failing' by Gordon Boyd . Boyd cannot be an authentic bum. A photograph of him 'down and out' shows him as inauthentic, clichéd. It shows him seated on a park bench, sharing his last crust of bread with a squirrel.

> The camera had caught every memorable cliché: the coat fastened with a pin, the cut suggesting better days, the sock there to call attention to the calloused heel, in one soiled hand a paper bag, now empty, and in the other a crust. This crust he shared— the autumn sun shining on it— with his sole companion, a moth eaten squirrel who had plainly suffered the same misfortunes at the hands of life. The clichés told the story. The face of the bum bore witness to it. But of the man behind the face, the failure behind the man, there was no evidence. Every piece of the Fall had been borrowed from the wings, from the costume rack.[81]

This particular photograph, telling us nothing of the person depicted, only informs us of the theatricality of the whole thing. While the truth of this photograph is a truth told through its clichés, some clichés, as I have been suggesting, are important. They become a means of providing raw life; as containers of experience, certain clichés of language, (the ditties in Capper's Weekly) and those of photography (the faded snapshot) become 'sacred' for Morris. One should perhaps distinguish between authentic and inauthentic clichés in Morris, as he himself differentiates between two bad tastes.

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[80] Ibid., p. 12.
[81] Morris, 1957, op. cit., p. 70.

> Bad taste is invariably an ornament of vitality, and it is the badness that cries out with meaning, and calls for processing. Raw material and bad taste— the feeling we have that bad taste indicates raw material— is part of our persuasion that bad grammar, in both life and literature, reflects real life. But bad taste of this sort is hard to find. Bad 'good taste' is the world in which we now live. [82]

There is a paradox with Morris that in his backward look, clichés of language and photographs become important as carriers of truth, provide resistances to the sameness of modernity. One might even see the formality of his pictures— the frontal stance adopted towards his subjects— as borrowing from the snapshot. Snapshots are seen to remain less burdened by technique and style, stand for an important part of that authenticity and truth of experience, the bad grammar, the crude ore so evidently essential to Morris's writings.

Morris's books mark a distinctive and unusual use of photography and prose. All the books I have considered constitute a particular kind of attachment to photography, not simply because two of them contain photos, but because they all involve a photographic way of seeing: his prose writing bears a fascination with details, with traces, indices, details which, like photographs, often carry imprints of human presence. People, as The Man Who Was There so effectively made clear, are mysteriously felt to live on in the things they leave behind. Morris's descriptions of the way in which possessions, bereft of their owner, still carry their owner's presence, are paralleled by the magic seen to be involved in the photographic process itself, one in which someone leaves their trace, like a fingerprint, on the negative plate. And Morris himself was clearly aware of such an analogy as is shown by such a remarkable description as that in The Home Place, of the bed which carries the imprint of uncle Ed's body like a

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[82] Morris, 1978, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

daguerreotype plate its image. This notion of the photograph as a kind of skin, a deposit, a literal trace of that which it depicts, will be continued to be discussed in the next two chapters, as I look at how Roland Barthes, then Christian Boltanski, examine the identity of photography, the former as a theorist and the latter as an artist. The following chapter will be addressing Barthes's book Camera Lucida. What is interesting is that this book, ostensibly a book of theory, is resistant to theoretical closures: the strictures of semiology. In turning to Barthes, I will be returning not only to concerns raised by Morris's books, but also, the problems concerning photographs and interpretation which were raised at the very beginning of this thesis, in my discussion of Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Theory to Autobiography: Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*

In considering Roland Barthes's book Camera Lucida,[1] in this chapter, I will be taking up once again the theme of photography and truth, revealing the particular representational status which is given to photography, one involving a pronounced investment in the truth status of the medium, what Barthes terms its "evidential force".[2] In this book, Barthes affirms the analogical nature of photography and ignores the pre-supposition that the photograph is coded. He refuses to turn away from the "intractable reality"[3] of the photographic image and the pathos it evokes. Indeed, as I will be showing, the book goes so far as to highlight photography's resistances to theoretical discourse.

Camera Lucida sets out to define photography's ontology and in doing so sets up a difference between words and photography. For Barthes, language is seen as epistemologically unreliable, it "is, by nature, fictional" whereas photography "does not invent; it is authentification itself."[4] With its project to define photography's ontology, Camera Lucida, leads us to give it the identification as more of a book of theory than anything else. Certainly, in relation to the other books studied in this thesis, Camera Lucida may seem to have the identity of a book of theory. However, its special significance is its troubling of theory and resistance to an objective discourse. Critics have seen this troubling of theory as an important characteristic of the book. It is a book in which, as Michael Moriarty has suggested, Barthes "feigns to theorize, he makes the characteristic gestures of the theorist, distinguishing, classifying,

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[1] First published in 1980 as La Chambre Claire, the book was first translated into English in1982 by Richard Howard. I will be referring to the English edition throughout this chapter.
[2] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 89.
[3] Ibid., p. 119.
[4] Ibid., p. 87.

defining", but refuses the objective discourse of theory.[5] And, as Victor Burgin has pointed out, it is a book in which Barthes even goes so far as to "abandon[s] the discourse of theory (abstract, general)" and express "impatience with those of, 'photography's commentators (sociologists and semiologists)', who turn a theoretical blind eye to the (phenomenological) experience of the photograph, its 'magic'".[6]

While Barthes has severely put into question an explanation of the meaning of books and texts through the biographies of their authors,[7] Camera Lucida remains one of his most personal books. His reflections on photography mark a shift from his earlier more semiological approaches to the medium.[8] The autobiographical aspect of Camera Lucida stems from the fact that his reflections on photography were made in response to grief over the recent death of his mother, with whom he lived most of his adult life. Death and photography's particular relationship to death, heavily marks this book, a relationship which also becomes very important to Christian Boltanski's use of photography which will be discussed in the next chapter. Death also shadows Camera Lucida in another sense, our relationship to the book is affected by the fact that shortly after the book was published, Barthes was run down by a laundry van outside the Collège de France in Februrary 1980 and died a month later of his injuries.

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[5]Michael Moriarty, Roland Barthes, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.198.
[6] Victor Burgin, The End of Art Theory, (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 90.
[7]See his 'Death of the Author' in Image-Music-Text, (London: Fontana, 1979), pp.142-148. Barthes's essay was originally written for an American magazine in 1967, Aspen, nos. 5 and 6, whose editor invited contributions from various writers and artists of the American and French avant-garde (among them Marcel Duchamp, Sol LeWitt, Alain Robbe-Grillet).
[8]See his 'Myth Today' in Mythologies, (London: Paladin, 1982), pp.109-159. (First published Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957.) Barthes reveals the mythology behind a particular photograph on the cover of a copy of Paris Match showing a young Negro in a French uniform saluting, with his eyes uplifted, what one assumes to be a fold of the tricolour. There is little uncertainty for Barthes about the connotation we are intended to make when encountering this image at the time of the Algerian war: "...whether naively or not I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under the flag, and there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by the negro in serving his so-called oppressors." (p. 116). There is nothing natural about the photograph as discussed here, it is more analogous to a text to be decoded.

Barthes makes it clear from the outset that the principle of his knowledge in this book is to be himself.[9] He takes into account only those photographs where something happens when he looks at them. While not a photographer, he says how he writes on photography from only two perspectives,"only two experiences: that of the observed subject and that of the subject observing", the experiences of being photographed and of looking at photographs.[10] Barthes abandons any semiological approach to the photograph, wanting to approach the medium as "a primitive without culture"[11], choosing to, as he says, "be guided by my pleasure or my desire in regard to certain photographs."[12]

Barthes defends a realist position in relation to photography in Camera Lucida and makes this very clear.

> The realists, of whom I am one and of whom I was already one when I asserted that the Photograph was an image without a code— even if, obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it— the realists do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of the reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic not an art. [13]

He sees the photograph as transparent. When looking at photographs, he tells us how the photograph remains "always invisible" [14]. It is not the photograph that he sees. To see the photographic signifier, its 'grain', we have to focus at a

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[9]Tzvetan Todorov has noted a shift in Barthes's discourse, marked with the publication of his autobiographic Roland Barthes in 1975. Up until then Barthes's work could be divided into periods according to what Todorov refers to as "the tutelary system he had chosen to make heard: a Marxist phase, a structuralist phase, a Tel Quel-ian phase." But starting in 1975, Barthes's books no longer reveal any tutelary system, whatever, any authorative discourse. From 1975 on "it was necessary not to impose his truth upon others, to limit the field of application of his statements to the minimum, to himself." See Tzvetan Todorov's 'The Last Barthes' in Critical Inquiry, Spring 1981, University of Chicago Press, pp. 449-454.
[10]Barthes, 1982, op.cit., p. 10.
[11]Ibid., p.7.
[12]Rolands Barthes 'On Photography' in The Grain of the Voice (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 357.
[13]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p. 88.
[14]Ibid., p. 6.

very close range. Instead, Barthes sees only the photographic referent: "the desired object, the beloved body"[15]. Though Barthes never uses the term index to describe the photograph, his descriptions of the medium in the book point to its indexicality, its existence as a physical imprint in light of its subject, what he sees as photography's "emanation."[16] Photography from the Greek— 'Photo Graphein'— literally means 'writing in light' or, as Barthes notes in Camera Lucida, "in Latin 'photography' would be said 'imago lucis opera expressa'; which is to say; image revealed, 'extracted', 'mounted' 'expressed' (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light"[17].

This notion of the photograph as an indexical trace is close to Wright Morris's relationship to the medium. Like Morris, Barthes locates a particular felt sense of authenticity in photography. Both are preoccupied by an affective relationship to photographs. Barthes also reveals a particular penchant for the time-worn family snapshot. As in Morris's The Home Place, a faded snapshot also occupies a key place in Barthes's book. Only unlike Morris's book, no illustration of the photograph is used in Camera Lucida. The snapshot, a portrait of Barthes's mother, is felt to be too private to print.

The portrait photograph has a special significance for Barthes. He is less interested in photographs of objects

> Seeing a bottle, an iris stalk, a chicken, a palace photographed involves only reality. But a body, a face ,and what is more the body and face of a beloved person?[18]

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[15]Ibid., p.7.
[16]Ibid., p. 80.
[17]Ibid., p. 81.
[18]Ibid., p. 107.

One can imagine him not being very interested in Morris's pictures of empty places and old battered objects. The photographs considered in Camera Lucida are predominantly pictures of people. As Barthes points out in its first page, the whole book stems from a desire to explain the "enduring amazement"[19] of an encounter with a photographic portrait, an image of Jerome, Napolean's younger brother. His amazement results from the gaze of the subject pictured, the peculiar impression that the gaze of Jerome is felt to connect him with Napoleon, for as he says when looking at the photograph: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor".[20] He could not have the same response before a painted portrait. As he goes on to point out in the book, painting can never offer photography's guarantee that the person pictured once existed in flesh and blood.

The form of Camera Lucida is unusual. It is a book of fragments. Much of the writing is concise; the flow of the text interrupted by its division into 48 short sections of a few paragraphs each. As Moriarty has noted, the text is "in accordance with Barthes's aesthetic of the fragment, a suspicion of cohesive discourse".[21] Moriarty also proposes a link between the book's very form and photography, associating continuity with the cinematic image, the text of Camera Lucida is, he suggests, "by contrast determined as photographic, the verbal equivalent of a string of discrete images."[22] The book contains 25 photographic illustrations. All the photographs are discussed by Barthes except one, the only colour picture, a polaroid by Daniel Boudinet, and there is one very important photograph, the portrait of his mother, which is described at length but not reproduced. Broken into 48 short prose pieces, the book is further divided into two parts, ode is set against palinode. Part One sets out to

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[19]Ibid., p. 3 .
[20]Ibid., p.3.
[21]Moriarty, op. cit., p. 200.
[22]Ibid., p. 200.

find the ontology of photography, but, after seeming progress, the investigation unexpectedly peters out. Then the discovery of a particular photograph in Part Two, the portrait of his mother, sets the investigation going again and this time to a successful conclusion. In his quest to find the meaning of photography, a quest to find out what it is about photography that marks it out from other forms of representation, the narrative structure of the book is hermeneutic. Annette Lavers has gone so far as to call it a "hermeneutic thriller."[23] Yet the response to photography, as I will be showing, is counter-hermeneutic. The cue to his response is phenomenological as the dedication to Sartre's L'Imaginaire at the book's outset indicates.[24]

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[23]Annette Lavers, Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After, (London: Methuen, 1982), p.214.
[24]Describing Camera Lucida in an interview, Barthes said how "my book is not a sociology, or an aesthetics, or a history of photography. It's more like a phenomenology of photography." See his 'On Photography' 1986, op. cit., p.357.

Sartre's L'imaginaire offers a clarifying relationship to Barthes's response to photography. In this study Sartre pays attention to the relationship we have with visual images and gives us a particularly interesting account of his relation with a painting of Charles VIII he encounters in a gallery in Florence. Of course this is not a photographic portrait, but the account he gives of his relation to the picture comes close to Barthes's responses to certain photographs in Camera Lucida.

> I look at a portrait of Charles VIII in a gallery in Florence. I know it is Charles VIII, who is dead. My whole present attitude is full of that fact...[but] those curving and sensual lips, that narrow forehead, immediately arouse a certain affective impression which is directed at those lips in the picture...The lips perform a double function simultaneously: on the one hand they refer to real lips long since turned to dust, and derive their meaning only from that source; but act directly on my feelings, because they are a deception, because the coloured spots on the picture appear to the eye as a forehead, as lips. (p.24)

Before the painting "we have the imaginary state that the dead Charles VIII is here before us. It is he we see, not the picture, and yet we declare him not to be there: we have reached him only 'as an image', 'by the mediation' of the picture" (pp. 24- 25). Sartre is aware how the painting comes to mean only what we put into it. The picture offers such a sense of presence that Sartre has to check himself, remind himself that it is just a painting, a deception, put it back in space so to speak, re-establish a distance between himself and the painting by considering the "traces of brush strokes, the stickiness of the canvas, its grain, the varnish spread over its colours." (p.220) The painting is nothing but inert material: a succession of painted brush-marks on canvas. Sartre can say the same of photography. There are cases he says "in which the photograph leaves me so unaffected I do not even form an image" (p. 26). As before a painted portrait, before a photograph, Sartre senses the illusion. Before a photograph we produce an 'imaginative consciousness' "animating the photograph... lending it life, in order to make an image of it" (p. 26). As a perception "the photograph is but a paper rectangle of a special quality and colour, with shadows and white spots- distributed in a certain fashion" (pp.18-19). Barthes does not so easily reduce the photograph, he refuses to give up a realist approach and see anything but the referent.

All references made to the English translation of L'imaginaire, The Psychology of Imagination, (London: Methuen, 1983).

Details

While predominantly portraits, the photographs considered in Camera Lucida are varied in kind, including art photographs, (in particular images by Mapplethorpe and Kertész), journalistic pictures (by Koen Wessing), medical photography (a photograph of two retarded children by Lewis H. Hine), and even a snapshot from his own family album (a photograph of his father as a child). In setting down his responses to photography, Barthes seeks to define its characteristics, its speciality; as he says "I wanted to learn at all costs what photography was 'in itself'".[25] The nature of description in photography, the density of detail, which as I have shown in Chapters One and Three became so important in the first responses to the medium, becomes an important part of Barthes's attachment to certain photographs in Camera Lucida. Certain details are picked out which cut against the grain of any reading of the image.

In defining his relationship to photographs Barthes offers bizarre responses to reportage photographs in Nicaragua by the Dutchman Koen Wessing. The main subject and themes of the photographs do not interest him, he even refers to 'the photographic banality' of a rebellion in Nicaragua. Instead it is the details that he is attracted to. In Wessing's picture showing "a ruined street, two helmeted soldiers on patrol; behind them two nuns"[26], it is the 'detail' of the nuns and their apparent incongruity that for him determines this particular photograph's interest. He goes on to describe another photograph (see fig. 65): "on a torn-up pavement, a child's corpse under a white sheet; parents and friends stand around it, desolate"[27]. But it is certain interferences in his reading which captivate him: "the corpse's one bare foot, the sheet carried by the

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[25]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p.3.
[26]Ibid., p. 23.
[27]Ibid., p. 23.

weeping mother (why this sheet?), a woman in the background probably a friend, holding a handkerchief to her nose"[28]

A certain perversity of response marks Barthes's relationship to photographs in Camera Lucida. He is so struck by details he is blind to the overriding elements within the photograph. This is perhaps no more strongly brought out than in his response to a photograph of two retarded children taken by Lewis Hine (see fig. 66), when he says how he "hardly sees the monstrous heads and pathetic profiles", instead he sees what he calls the "off-centre detail, the little boy's huge Danton collar, the girl's finger bandage"[29]. In relation to such details, Barthes defines two apparent levels of interest within the photograph. His immediate reading of the image refers him to his own culture, " a classical body of information"[30]. This he terms the 'studium', that which refers to "a kind of human interest" and involves a "kind of general enthusiastic commitment": a cultural participation in the photograph[31]. The 'studium' involves Barthes in a simple approval or disapproval of the photographer's interests, in that "very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest— I like/I don't like"[32] . It mobilises a half-desire, the "same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the books one finds 'all right'"[33]. The second element, the 'punctum', refers to a puncture, to punctuation, a "sting, speck, cut, little hole" [34]. It is that which breaks the 'studium'— one has something rising from the

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[28]Ibid., pp.23-25.
One can find an equivalent to the kind of details Barthes is drawn to in photography in literature. This concerns the 'reality effect' produced by what he calls 'narrative luxuries', those useless details within novels that neither exist to advance the plot nor enhance our knowledge of their characters and their physical surroundings. See his essay 'The Reality Effect' in The Rustle of Language, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1986), pp. 141-148.
[29]Ibid., p.51.
[30]Ibid., pp.25-26
[31]Ibid., p. 26.
[32]Ibid., p.27.
[33]Ibid., p. 27
[34]Ibid., p. 27.

surface, a detail, a certain sensitive point, which, unlike the 'studium' is not sought out and animated by Barthes, it animates him.

The 'punctum' stems from what Barthes had previously termed the 'third meaning' in his discussion of film stills in an essay written in 1970[35]. The third, or what he also calls the obtuse meaning, came to be found in certain details, details to do with diguise and make-up in a still from Eisenstein's 'Ivan the Terrible': "a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up, thick and insistent for the one, smooth and distinguished for the other."[36] Such details constitute what Barthes calls a "supplement that my intellect cannot succeed in absorbing" and are felt to be involved in something ultimately which "extend outside culture, knowledge, information."[37] In this essay he also considers a film-still from the documentray Ordinary Fascism (by Mikhail Romm). While the obvious meaning is fascism, "aesthetics and symbolics of strength, the theatrical hunt"[38], the 'third meaning' is found in the "blond stupidity of the young quiver-bearer, the flabbiness of his hands and mouth"[39], and in the disgusting details of Goering's course nails, his trashy ring. One comes to think, however, that in this case, such details are not entirely bereft of meaning, since they appear to provide a condensation of Barthes's own repugnance at fascism. I will have occasion to consider images of fascists in the next chapter of this thesis when I look at one of the books of Christian Boltanski. Only the images used by Boltanski of Nazis operate in relation to the viewer in a very different way, it is the ordinariness, the familiarity of the way they are depicted, that concerns him.

At one point in his essay, Barthes relates the 'Third Meaning' to affect: "I believe that the obtuse meaning carries a certain emotion... an emotion which simply

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[35]See 'The Third Meaning' in Image-Music Text, op. cit., pp.52-68.
[36]Ibid., p. 54.
[37]Ibid., p. 55.
[38]Ibid., p. 60.
[39]Ibid., p. 60.

designates what is loved."[40]. One should add it also can designate what is not loved, what is repellent and hated as shown by his response to the documentary still of fascists. While we do not find such strong repugnance at details in Camera Lucida, Barthes does refer to a number of images in which there are details which, he says, are "ill-bred"[41]. In a portrait by Kertész, Barthes notes the dirty fingernails of Tristan Tzara or in the account of his response to children playing by William Klein, he says: "what I stubbornly see are one child's bad teeth."[42]. In his discussion of Duane Michals's well known portrait of Andy Warhol, his face hidden by his hands, it is not the obvious meaning of this gesture of hiding, but the detail of the "slightly repellent substance of those spatulate nails at once soft and hard-edged" that captures Barthes's attention[43].

Behind his fascination for photographic details, is his discussion of photography in two early essays ('The Rhetoric of the Image' and 'The Photographic Message') and his distinction between denotation and connotation, between what is there, denoted in the image, and what is interpreted.[44] The 'punctum' which Barthes locates in details is connected with this denotative aspect of photographs. Despite studying a photograph as "frank, or at least emphatic" as an advertisement in 'The Rhetoric of the Image' Barthes still speaks of elements which resist interpretation: the denotative aspect of the image, a deictic residue remaining after the advert has been decoded: "If we substract all the signs from the image, it still retains a certain informational substance; without any knowledge at all, I continue to 'read' the image, to 'understand' that it collects in a certain space a certain number of identifiable (nameable) objects, and not

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[40]Ibid., p. 59.
[41]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p. 43.
[42]Ibid., p. 45.
[43]Ibid., p. 45.
[44]See 'The Rhetoric of the Image' and 'The Photographic Message' in The Responsibility of Forms (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 21-40 and pp. 3-20.

only shapes and colours."[45]. Before this "we need no other knowledge than what is involved in our perception."[46]

But one should add that the details in the photograph he is drawn to in Camera Lucida are not always completely outside knowledge. It is in the nature of photography to give us details which constitute what Barthes terms the very "'raw material' of ethnological knowledge"[47]. An example of this is found in William Klein's documentary photograph taken in Moscow, 'Mayday, 1959' (see fig. 67). The photograph is seen to teach "us how Russians dress..I note a boy's big cloth cap, another's necktie, an old woman's scarf around her head, a youth's haircut, etc."[48] The photograph by its very nature involves an excess of information. In the example of Klein's photograph the details constitute an infra-knowledge, a collection of partial objects, which Barthes relates to a number of biographical features which delight him in the text: those biographemes drawn up in his book, Sade, Fourier, Loyola— biographical details which affect him, the details concerning de Sade's large cuffs, Fourier's love of cakes, Loyola's watery eyes.[49]

Beyond the Frame

It is, however, not always details within the photograph which fascinate Barthes. Indeed, one might suggest that there are two aspects of his relationship to photographs in Camera Lucida. On one hand images which, like the Klein, are cluttered with details, and on the other, images which remain latent, suggestive, withhold information, and, one might even say, images which are silent. In relation to this we can begin to understand the significance of the first image,

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[45]Ibid., p.24.
[46]Ibid., p. 25.
[47]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p. 28.
[48]Ibid., p. 30
[49]Roland Barthes Sade, Fourier, Loyola, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977).

indeed the picture which provides the frontispiece to the book— the colour image of a polaroid by the French photographer, Daniel Boudinet (see fig. 68). It is a simple and rather understated image. The view is what one takes to be a bedroom in the morning, the curtains still drawn. Light, however, seeps through the material sufficient to give us a shadowy image. In the lower right of the image, a slight gap between the curtains lights the edge of a pillow. Barthes makes no mention of this image in his book, it remains silent, bereft of words, undiscussed. Its significance to the study would appear to rest in the fact that this image encapsulates a state of suspension within the photograph, of something not disclosed, suggested, evoked rather than revealed.

The picture is tinged with a certain eroticism. The erotics of photography is given particular attention in Camera Lucida and it is in relation to this that Barthes fully articulates the power of photographs to hide and suggest rather than disclose. He even goes so far as to speak of another 'punctum' in photography, one which is not in the image, but instead involves taking the viewer beyond the frame of the photograph itself. Barthes begins his discussion by setting the erotic image against the pornographic photograph, the latter described as "like a shop window which only shows one illuminated piece of jewelry" and where "no secondary, untimely object ever manages to half-conceal, delay or distract".[50] There is felt to be an inevitable stasis about the pornographic photograph. In contrast the erotic photograph signifies a disruption— the erotic is, for Barthes, the pornographic disturbed, fissured. [51] Pornography ordinarily represents the sexual organs. The erotic photograph does not make the sexual organs into a central object. For Barthes, Robert Mapplethorpe is seen to move from pornography to the erotic precisely when he

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[50] Ibid., pp.41-43.
[51] In Barthes's The Pleasure of the Text it is intermittence which is erotic: "the intermittance of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve): it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather, the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance". Pleasure of the Text, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 10.

shifts his close-ups of genitalia to "the fabric of underwear at very close range" where Barthes can also become "interested in the texture of the material".[52]

Barthes has referred to the cinema as having a 'blind field', characters readily move off and on screen. In contrast, the photograph has no 'blind field'— "everything which happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond" [53]. Figures within the photograph are inanimate— they do not move they cannot leave— but they can animate us. Christian Metz in his essay 'Photography and Fetish', differentiates the filmic off-frame space with that of the photographer, the former is seen as 'substantial', the latter, 'subtle.'[54] In film there is a plurality of successive frames, of camera movements, and character movements, so that a person which is off-frame in a given moment may return inside the frame the moment after, then disappears again, and so on. While a character might be off-frame they are not off-film. The character who is off-frame in the photograph will never come into the frame, will never be heard. Before a photograph, "[t]he spectator has no empirical knowledge of the contents of the off-frame, but at the same time cannot help imagining some off-frame, hallucinating it, dreaming, the shape of this emptiness."[55] Metz sees Barthes's notion of the 'punctum' in relation to this off-frame: "depending more on the reader than on the photograph itself."[56]

Such notions are important in clarifying the particular erotic power of another photograph by Mapplethorpe which is reproduced and discussed at length in Camera Lucida (see fig. 69). Barthes finds the paradigmatic erotic image in this picture, a self-portrait in which only a part of the artist's unclothed upper body

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[52]Barthes, 1982, op.cit., p.42.
[53]Ibid., p.57.
[54]Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish' in ed. Carol Squiers The Critical Image, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), pp.155-164.
[55]Ibid., p. 161.
[56]Ibid., p. 161.

appears in the photograph. Smiling and with his arm outstretched, Mapplethorpe has photographed himself leaning half-out of the picture. Barthes speaks of the generosity of this photograph. It gives us an image which, like Mapplethorpe's hand in the portrait, "is caught just at the right degree of openness..."[57]. The photographic image involves a sense of abandonment, a letting go.[58] The "blissful eroticism" Barthes finds within Mapplethorpe's self-portrait, is very much related to the subject half-hiding himself, and his genitalia being out of the frame. The image intices and suggests. It is precisely in the space of the out-of-frame, the site of a loss, of an absence, that fantasy occurs. The erotic photograph is an image that "takes the spectator out of the frame"[59]. Here we have what Barthes refers to as the "subtle beyond" of the 'punctum' as the image launches the "desire beyond what it is permitted to see."[60] Barthes's relation to the photograph is one of imagination, the very opposite of being caught by contingent details in the photograph. His relation to this picture, although obviously very different in kind, comes closer to our relation to Peter Henry Emerson's later representations of landscape as discussed in Chapter Two, both withhold information, suggest rather than depict.

Against Theory

Earlier Barthes had described his reponse to another image by Mapplethorpe—a portrait of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson. Here the two seated figures adopt similar poses but remain asymmetrical; Glass leans away from the axis, his hands are dropped lower and his feet closer together. Compared to Wilson,

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[57]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p.59.

[58]Many of Mapplethorpe's representations of the body are very often precisely ,even geometrically, composed representations. Muscles are taut: the body is fetishized and made phallic. The self-portrait Barthes considers in <u>Camera Lucida</u> has a decidedly different accent: a moment of relaxation, of play, of detumesence.

[59]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p. 59.

[60]Ibid., p. 59.

Glass's posture seems slightly awkward. It is Wilson, however, not Glass, who 'holds' Barthes, but he cannot say why "i.e., say where: is it the eyes, the skin, the position of the hands, the track shoes? The effect is certain but unlocateable, it does not find its sign, its name..."[61] Later, Barthes intimates that his interest in Wilson proceeds from him being someone whom he wants to meet. In setting down the reasons for his attraction towards the Mapplethorpe photograph of Glass and Wilson, Barthes goes against the grain of academic reasoning. His position is deliberately, stubbornly, anti-theoretical at this point. With such remarks the book's whole status as a theoretical text is very uncertain. There are number of responses like this in Camera Lucida. A little earlier he had written about a mid 19th century photograph by Charles Clifford: 'The Alhambra' ,Grenada (see fig. 70); an image depicting "[a]n old house, a shadowy porch, tiles, a crumbling Arab decoration, a man sitting against the wall, a deserted street, a Mediterranean tree"[62]. It is a photograph, admits Barthes, which touches him simply because it is there he should like to live.

The particular attraction towards such photos, the 'punctum', lands, as Barthes informs us, "in a vague zone of myself"[63]. This subjective and privatised nature of the 'punctum' becomes even more evident in his consideration of the 'punctum' in a family portrait by James Van der Zee; a photograph which "utters respectability, family life, conformism, Sunday best"[64]. Barthes locates its 'punctum' in the strapped pumps of the sister. But it only fully reveals itself after the fact: "I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at..."[65]. Through memory the 'punctum' moves places to the necklace in the photograph and its signification for Barthes is particularly introspective, for as he says, it is the:

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[61] Ibid., p. 51.
[62] Ibid., p. 38.
[63] Ibid., p. 53.
[64] Ibid., p. 43.
[65] Ibid., p. 53.

> same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family, and which once she had died, remained shut up in a family box of old jewelry (this sister of my father never married, lived with her mother as an old maid, and I had always been saddened when I thought of her dreary life). [66]

When he considers a photograph by André Kertész, the 'punctum's' metonymic power of expansion is once more private and autobiographic. The Kertész photo shows a blind gypsy violinist being led by a boy (see fig. 71). But this subject does not interest Barthes. He is instead drawn to the dirt road which they are crossing— its surface indexed by tyre tracks and footprints— because, as he says, "its texture gives me the certainty of being in Central Europe"[67]. The photograph is then felt to suddenly annihilate itself as a medium, "no longer a sign but the thing itself", and Barthes recognises with his "whole body the straggling villages I passed through on my long ago travels in Hungary and Rumania".

But the privacy of Barthe's relationship to photographs is most fully realised when, in Part Two, he informs us of how he attempts to come to terms with the recent death of his mother through consideration of her image in the form of a photograph. This photograph, provides the thematic centre of the book, around which all the other photographs are organised. But Barthes refuses to reproduce the image (at most he says how it would only interest his reader's studium: "period clothes, photogeny")[68]. Camera Lucida is both structured upon and determined by an absent and withheld photograph, a photograph

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[66]Ibid., p. 53.

For a psychoanalytic interpretation of Barthes's 'punctum' of the necklace see Victor Burgin's essays 'Rereading *Camera Lucida*' and 'Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo', both in The End of Art Theory, (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 71-92 and pp. 112-139 respectively.

[67]Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p. 45.
[68]Ibid., p.73.

which, as Derrida has suggested constitutes the "'punctum' of the entire book".[69]

Part Two begins with an autobiographic scene-setting for Barthes's final responses to photography. From a discussion of the erotics of a photograph by Mapplethorpe which ended Part One, we move to a consideration and reflection upon the death of his mother. We move from desire to death. Martin Jay proposes we are to read the first 24 sections of Part One as a "Pleasure of the image" while the second 24 stress pain instead.[70] He does, however, qualify this and show how the distinction is not so clear, a morbid preoccupation with death is apparent in Part One, in which Barthes speaks of how every photograph contains a terrible thing: "the return of the dead." On having his picture taken, Barthes describes how he is "reduced to an object— the Photograph is the advent of myself as other, a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity." It dawns on him that "ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me (the intention according to which I look at it) is Death: Death is the eidos of that photograph." I will have occasion to return to this relationship between photography and death later on in this chapter, and also in the following chapter.

Essentially, however, Jay's distinction between the two parts of Camera Lucida is a useful one. The solemn note is immediate as Barthes's introduces the circumstances in which he is viewing photographs in Part Two. One November evening, shortly after the death of his mother, he was sorting a number of family photographs, unable to recall his mother's features. Desiring to find, what he

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[69]Jacques Derrida, 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes'in ed. Hugh J. Silverman Philosphy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty, (New York, 1988). Quoted in Martin Jay's 'The Camera as Memento Mori: Barthes, Metz, and the Cahiers du Cinéma' in his Downcast Eyes, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,1994), p. 453.

[70] See his 'The Camera as Memento Mori: Barthes, Metz, and the Cahiers du Cinéma' in Downcast Eyes, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,1994), pp.435-491.

calls, "a just image" of his mother, he tells us how he eventually found it in an old, worn and faded print.

> The photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called a Winter Garden in those days.[71]

The picture affects him deeply. The photograph has "captured an expression which she had maintained all her life: the assertion of a gentleness." [72] It is this which makes this picture of his mother as a child, as he has never seen her, recognisable. He goes on to cite Proust.

> For once, photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance, just as Proust experienced it one day when, leaning over to take off his boots, there suddenly came to him his grandmother's true face, "whose living reality I was experiencing for the first time, in an involuntary and complete memory." [73]

One should recall at the very outset of this thesis (see Preface) how I discussed the way in which Proust used the metaphor of photography to stand for an unremitting objectivity, to represent the image of the narrator's grandmother when, returning after a long absence, he momentarily sees her as an "old woman he did not know". Writing in the early twentieth century, photography for Proust stands for a harsh and unflattering representation, while for Barthes's, writing sixty years later, photography becomes the means of finding the true expression of his mother, gives him "an involuntray and complete memory."

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[71] Barthes, 1982, op. cit., p.67.
[72] Ibid., p. 69.
[73] Ibid., p. 70.

What Barthes calls the Winter Garden photograph becomes the guide for his final investigations of photography. While it might give him solace in finding her expression, it is also painful. His encounter with the Winter Garden photograph becomes determined by an inexpressible sense of loss: "nothing to say about the death of the one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph which I contemplate without ever being able to get to the heart of it..."[74] .

Here he comes up against an aspect of photography which resists analysis. The Winter Garden photograph cannot be described, he is unable to pin down what it is about the photograph that is so important. Discourse confronts an impasse.

> The air of a face is unanalyzable... Hence I was leafing through the photographs of my mother according to an initiatic path which led me to that cry, the end of all language: 'There she is!': first of all a few unworthy pictures which gave me only her crudest identity, her legal status; then certain more numerous photographs in which I could read her 'individual expression' (analogous photographs, 'likenesses'); finally the Winter Garden Photograph, in which I do much more than recognise her (clumsy word): in which I discover her: a sudden awakening, outside of 'likeness', a *satori* in which words fail, the rare, perhaps unique evidence of the 'So, yes, so much and no more'[75]

Death and Photography

The Winter Garden photograph leads Barthes to return to the question of photography's ontological status. What affects him in photography and what marks it out from any other means of representation is its special relation to time. For painting and discourse, referents are for Barthes mere "chimeras". But in photography he wonders whether we can ever deny that the thing has

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[74]Ibid., p. 93.
[75]Ibid., p. 109.

been there. The photograph's referent is "not the 'optionally' real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the 'necessarily' real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photo"[76]. Reference then becomes the founding order of photography. The essence of the photograph, the 'noeme' of photography, is that which Barthes terms its "That-has-been"[77]. What he sees before him looking at the photograph has "been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred"[78].

A sense of contiguity overwhelms Barthes: the "certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays"[79]. The photograph's inimitable feature is that someone has seen the referent in flesh and blood. "From a real body which was there, proceeds radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here.a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze"[80]. The photograph is seen as an immortalisation of the loved body through the "mediation of a precious metal, silver..a metal which like all metals of Alchemy is alive"[81] . The Winter Garden photograph, however pale, comes to be seen as alive with a "treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, on that day"[82].

Such remarks echo the metaphysical discourse which accompanied photography during its beginnings, one which also reflected a belief in the photograph as containing an animate trace of the subject it pictured. In what was to be the first of three articles on photography for the Atlantic Monthly,[83] the

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[76]Ibid., p. 76.
[77]Ibid., p. 78.
[78]Ibid., p. 78.
[79]Ibid., p. 81.
[80]Ibid., p. 80.
[81]Ibid., p. 81.
[82]Ibid., p. 82
[83]See Oliver Wendell Holmes's 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph' in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp. 71-82.

Boston physician, poet and amateur photographer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, described the photograph as a skin shedded by its subject, and the photographer, a hunter, returning to the darkroom with the 'skins' of the things he has pictured.[84]

For Oliver Wendell Holmes a consequence of his belief in the contiguity between photograph and its referent was a peculiar imaginary identification with certain details of the subject photographed. Like Barthes it was often what he calls "incidental truths" which interested Holmes "more than the central object of the picture." It is the "very things a painter would leave out, or render imperfectly" which "the photograph takes infinite care with and so makes its illusions perfect."[85] He goes on to project a curious fantasy about three images of Ann Hathaway's Cottage in which:

> the door at the farther end of the cottage is open, and we see the marks left by the rubbing of hands and shoulders as the good people came through the entry, or leaned against it, or felt for the latch. It is not improbable that scales from the epidermis of the trembling hand of Ann Hathaway's young suitor, Will Shakespeare, are still adherent about the latch and door, and that they contribute to the stains we see in our picture.[86].

Holmes's article is testimony to a fantastic investment in the evidential force of the photograph. It is seen as a literal emanation from its subject. A veritable

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[84]There is remarkable short story by Michel Tournier which takes up this Holmesian metaphor of the photograph as skin of its referent. 'Veronica's Shrouds', tells the macabre tale of a female photographer, Veronica and her model, Hector. It describes how she first reduces him to an object through her photography— "his body silhouetted by the shadows and luminous areas of one single light, looked frozen, stripped to the bone, dissected by a kind of autopsy or anatomical demonstration". Finally, through what she calls "dermography" she takes photographic imprints of his body on linen, wrapping him "like a corpse in a shroud"— the resultant portraits, Veronica's shrouds, resembling "a whole series of human skins that had ben peeled off and then paraded, like so many barbaric trophies. " See Michel Tournier, 'Veronica's Shrouds' in the <u>Fetishist</u>, (London: Collins, 1983), pp. 94-108. .

[85]Holmes, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

[86]Ibid., p. 80.

forensic attachment to the photograph takes place— photographs of Anne Hathaway's cottage evoke the imagined possibility that details might reveal traces of the epidermis of Shakespeare's hand!

Barthes's emotional attachment to certain photographs is such he comes to feel himself literally 'touched' by the image. For as he says: "light is a carnal medium— a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed"[87]. However, the photograph is seen, as both a certificate of presence and a marker of absence, both alive and animate and as a sign of mortality. At one point in Camera Lucida Barthes is writing about the 'living silver' of the photograph[88], the next he is telling us how it is fated, to be undermined by time, to turn yellow and fade.[89] What was once seen as full is later seen as empty and impotent. The being depicted can never speak, can never be: its secrets are forever withheld. The photograph itself is mortal: "like a living organism, it is born on the level of sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages": made only of paper, "attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes..."[90]. Earlier societies managed so that at least the thing that spoke death was immortal, as immortal as any monument of stone or marble can be. The mortal photograph, as the general witness of what has been, can only offer a certain but fugitive testimony.

Photography's is felt to have a particular relationship to death. A relationship that gives us another 'punctum' to do with time— "the lacerating emphasis of the 'that has been'"- becomes "another punctum (one not of form but intensity)" that interrupts the field of cultural interest in a photograph[91]. This 'punctum' of time is emblematised by a nineteenth century picture of a handsome prisoner, Lewis

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[87]Barthes, 1982, op.cit., p. 81.
[88]Ibid., p. 81.
[89]Ibid., p. 93
[90]Ibid., p. 93.
[91]Ibid., p. 96.

Payne, waiting in his cell before being hanged (see fig. 72). This image comes now to encapsulate for Barthes the essence of the photograph. "The punctum is: he is going to die..."[92] Barthes reads at the same time that "this will be and this has been"[93]. Such a 'punctum' becomes vividly legible in historical photos in which Barthes experiences "a vertigo of time defeated"[94];

> ...there is always a defeat of time in them: that is dead and that is going to die. These two little girls looking at a primitive airplane above their village (they are dressed like my mother as a child, they are playing with hoops)— how alive they are! They have their whole lives before them; but also they are dead (today), they are then already dead (yesterday).[95]

Barthes is attentive to a 'punctum' blurred beneath the abundance of contemporary photographs, one "vividly legible in historical photographs" where "there is always a defeat of Time in them: that is dead and that is going to die."[96] Each photograph "always contains the sign of my future death"[97].

For Barthes what cannot be ignored is the photograph's message of "flat death" yielding up no meaning beyond mortality. "In front of my mother as a child", Barthes confesses, " I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicot's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."[98]

Photography's deathliness is brought out when, returning to the Winter Garden photograph, Barthes tells us of a desire to enlarge the face of his mother depicted within it in order "to understand it better, to know its truth",.to "outline

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[92]Ibid., p. 96.
[93]Ibid., p. 96.
[94]Ibid., p. 97.
[95]Ibid., p. 96.
[96]Ibid., p. 96.
[97]Ibid., p. 97.
[98]Ibid., p. 96.

the loved face by thought"[99]. He fantasises over the image, believing, as he says, "that by enlarging the detail in series (each shot engendering smaller details than at the preceding stage), I will finally reach my mother's very being"[100]. Of course he cannot do so, he is being a "bad dreamer"[101]. However hard he looks, he discovers nothing; if he enlarges the photograph he will, as he recognises, come up against the photographic signifier and "see nothing but the grain of the paper"[102]. (The account given here of photography is now the very opposite of those early accounts of the photograph, of Fox Talbot's advocation to take a magnifying glass up to the photograph to reveal its seemingly inexhaustibile detail.) Ultimately, Barthes cannot penetrate the photograph, only sweep its surface with a glance. The photograph is seen to be flat and platitudinous.

Barthes goes so far as to speak of a madness entailed in his experience of photographs. In the photograph what he posits is:

> not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it. Here is where the madness is, for until this day no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries: but with the Photograph, my certainty is immediate: no one in the world can undeceive me.[103]

He begins to think of those photographs that have affected him and enters "crazily into the spectacle, into the images, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die, as Nietszche did when, as Podach tells us on January 2nd,

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[99]Ibid., p. 99.
[100]Ibid., p. 99. .
[101]Ibid., p. 100.
[102]Ibid., p. 100.
[103]Ibid., p. 115.

1889, he threw himself in tears on the neck of a beaten horse: gone mad for pity's sake."[104]

Camera Lucida draws to an end by considering the way society tempers the madness which threatens to "explode in the face of whoever looks at the photograph"[105]. Making photography into an art constitutes, for Barthes, one of the means whereby photography is tamed. The other means involves a banalisation of the photograph, a generalising of the image, to the extent pleasure passes through the image. He cites the tableaux vivants of vice in a New York porn shop, in which the anonymous individual who will get himself tied up and beaten, "conceives of his pleasure only if this pleasure joins the stereotyped (worn-out) image of sado-masochism."[106] Against this image-repertoire, Barthes calls for the saving of immediate desire. The photograph remains tame if its realism is felt to be relative, "tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits"[107] . Untamed we encounter what Barthes calls the "photographic ecstasy" [108]

Camera Lucida closes by distinguishing between two ways of approaching photography. One way involves what he refers to as subjecting photography "to the civilised code of perfect illusions."[109] The reference is to semiology, a theoretical taming and culturalising of photography; a response which regards the photograph as a cultural artifact, coded like language. But it is the other response which clearly preoccupies Barthes in Camera Lucida, a confrontation with the photograph which involves what he calls a "madness", the madness of an encounter with an absolute realism, as we pass beyond the unreality of the

[104]Ibid., p. 117.
[105]Ibid., p. 117.
[106]Ibid., p. 118.
[107]Ibid., p. 119.
[108]Ibid., p. 119.
[109]Ibid., p. 119.

thing represented, and enter into the spectacle, into the image, confront in the photograph, what the closing lines of his book refer to as, "the wakening of intractable reality."[110] Barthes's call is for a response to photography unconstrained by theoretical hermeneutics, the civilised code of semiology.

From an analysis of Barthes's response to the medium and, in continuing my counter-hermeneutic thesis, I will now turn to photography in artist's books. The kind of inquiry we find in Barthes's book is continued when we turn to the books by the French contemporary artist, Christian Boltanski. Indeed, there is, as will be made clear, close relationships between this book of theory— if we can still call it that — and the bookworks of this artist.[111] With its "thanatology of vision"[112] Camera Lucida provides an appropriate relationship to Boltanski's preoccupation with death and photography. Much of the photography used by Boltanski is not contemporary, his books very often consist of rephotographed old photos, charged with that 'neome' Barthes talks of in relation to old 'historical' photographs. But significantly, while we can find an accordance with Barthes, Boltanski is not so readily defined as a realist, indeed, as I will be showing, his use of photography seeks to undermine assumptions about photography's evidential power. His use of photography cuts two ways, as he exploits our relationships to the medium, on one hand highlighting the auratic status of photographs, and on the other, undermining their truth claims by the lack of verification we have of the authenticity of the photographs he uses.

110Ibid., p. 119.
111While Boltanski says he does not think he has read it, he is aware of the book's stress on there being "something important in the medium" and thinks that it "must be very close" to his concerns. See my 'Sans Souci: Boltanski Interviewed', Creative Camera, CC315, April/May, 1992, Cornerhouse Publications, Manchester, pp. 19-23.
112Jay, 1994, op.cit., p. 456.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Representation Re-annexed: the Predicament of Self-hood in the Books of Christian Boltanski

In my opening chapter on Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature photography's resistance to authorial control was discussed. Following Carol Shloss's thesis[1] concerning early photography, I suggested a characteristic of early responses to the medium was to see it as autotelic, outside human agency. My discussion of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature resisted the way in which he had been situated within an artistic discourse and his photographs seen in continuity with a pictorial tradition. The book, as I showed, was involved in defining and displaying the singularity of what was then a new means of representation. In drawing my thesis to an end I will not only reconsider this issue of photography's identity but also re-examine the issue of authorship and photography. So far, when photography has been discussed in the book, authorship has remained fairly secure. While I may have begun to question authorship with my discussion of Fox Talbot, with this chapter's approach to a series of artist's books by Boltanski published from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, certainties and truths attached to the author figure are completely gone.

In this study of a contemporary artist, I am turning from what was ostensibly theory to practice. Barthes was writing on photography as an observer, he was never a photographer. Boltanski's relationship to photography is as an artist, as a practitioner, but even this definition is not so straight-forward. It should be qualified by the fact that most of the photographs he uses are not taken by him, but rephotographed. Representation is re-annexed by Boltanski. The images he presents to us are plundered from photo-albums on market stalls or from the

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[1]See Carol Shloss, In Visible Light, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1987.

pages of magazines and newspapers. He deals with other people's photographs and, nearly always, pictures of other people, anonymous and untitled portraits; photographs bearing their own histories, a history that remains mostly unknown, forgotten. Severed from their original context, these photographs are rephotographed and re-presented by Boltanski, as part of specific installations and also used within the special site of the artist's book. It is the books that mainly interest me in this chapter, though I will, where appropriate, bring in a discussion of some of his installations. I will consider a range of his books in this chapter, from his first books made in the late sixties and early seventies questioning autobiography and involved with attempts to reclaim childhood, through to later book-works which raise wider questions about history, memory and identity: Detective, Le Lycée Chases, El Caso, Dead Swiss and finally, Sans Souci.

Barthes's Camera Lucida resisted theoretical closure and involved an adherence to a realist notion of photography and the affective power of the medium. Reading Barthes we are left with a radical disjuncture between word and image, between the power of photography on the one hand and a sense of the limited adequacy of any linguistic means of taking account of its power, on the other. Yet we are left with a belief in a certain ontological security about the identity of the photograph as evidential proof, as document. In contrast, Boltanski's use of photography leads us to doubt the certainty of what is represented through photographs. Boltanski begins to challenge the realist premise which provided the basis of Barthes's approach to the photograph. Not only is the documentary status of the photograph radically shaken up, but we can no longer look to the author as locus of truth within Boltanski's books.

Boltanski is even conscious of the constraining frame put on his work by an identification of it as art and remains resistant to the confinement of his practice

within an art historical discourse and the museum space, always testing, indeed resisting, ready classification. The identification of his photographic books as artist's books is used to distinguish them in this thesis from the other kinds of books examined. However, they are books which unsettle and disturb such aesthetic classification. Boltanski is always trying to postpone the immediate identification of his work as art: "the fascinating moment for me" he has said, "is when the spectator hasn't registered the art connection".[2]

The author has a strange place in relationship to Boltanski's books. So far my discussion of photography and the book has given little discussion to the authors of the books examined. I have largely avoided any author-centred account. Books have not been explained through the biography of their makers, although, as the last chapter pointed out, when dealing with an author who most strongly challenged the power of the author, autobiography began to take on significance in Barthes's reflections on photography. Turning to Boltanski's first books, biography might appear to be not unimportant, as he makes himself the subject of them, but as I will now show, all is not what it seems in these books which purport to deal with attempts at reclaiming the past of his childhood.

Childhood Fictions

The self-hood of the artist appears as the subject of his first book, Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance, 1944-1950[3] (Research and presentation of everything that remains from my child-hood, 1944-1950). The book was produced in May 1969 in an edition of 150 and sent out as mail art.

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[2]Quoted in Mary Jane Jacob's introduction to Boltanski's Lessons of Darkness, (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1988), p.10.
[3]A facsimile edition of this book is included in Christian Boltanski: Livres, (Jennifer Flay Editeur, Paris; Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln; Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

The nine-page book includes snapshots of family outings, a class portrait of Boltanski's school in 1951, photographs of his childhood bed, a shirt he had worn, a piece of pull-over (dated 1949), cuttings from his hair, and a tattered page from a school essay (see fig. 73). These artifacts are represented in the form of crude black and white photographs. An archaeological inquiry has been conducted on his own past in a book which reveals the evidence of his childhood as scanty. Boltanski conducts a mock-archeology of self. But what is more, it turns out to be a lie, since he later admits that most of the objects photographed were not even his own, but his nephew's. [4]

Six months later, Boltanski produced a six-page book that claimed to document the future, Reconstitution d'un accident qui ne m'est pas encore arrivé et où j'ai trouvé la mort (Reconstitution of an accident that hasn't happened yet and in which I met my death)[5]. Boltanski goes so far as to reconstruct his own death, 'documenting' his death by bicycle accident through a series of captioned photocopied images, the 'victim's' emergency health card, maps of the accident, the tyre marks on the road, and the final chalk outline of 'Boltanski's' body on the road (see figs. 74-75). The images are deliberately smudgy and unclear.

These books mock the photograph's status as document. In undermining the archival worth of the photograph he is attacking the very basis of Barthes's ontology of the medium. As my chapters on Barthes and Wright Morris have shown, both found in photography an important truth and authenticity, Barthes through the finding of a just image of his mother in a faded snapshot of her a child and Morris's persistent fascination for time-worn photographs. To find a precedent for Boltanski's approach to photography one has to look to the fictional character discussed in Chapter Three, Thomas Hardy's Dare, a

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[4] See Lyn Gumpert, Christian Boltanski (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), p. 24.
[5] A facsimile edition of this book is included in Boltanski's Livres, op. cit.

photographer who practised deceptions with the medium. Only Boltanski has not been dreamed up by a writer, he is a contemporary French artist who has turned lying into a strategy of art making.

On viewing the series of photographs in his book, 10 portraits photographiques de Christian Boltanski 1946-1964[6], made in 1972, it begins to become apparent that something is not quite right. Questions emerge: How many of these portraits are identifiable as Boltanski? Can this really be the same child? (see figs. 76-78). In fact only one is of Boltanski, the rest are images of different children. Such comic jokes are made at the expense of the authority of the author as the foundation of meaning in an artwork. But, moreover, they succinctly demonstrate our propensity to invest in the truth of what we are told the photographs show. It takes a while before we begin to doubt the authority of the information— perhaps even going so far as to consider the possibility of Boltanski having had a remarkably changeable physiognomy during childhood— before finally committing oneself to the fact that the work is lying, that these portraits cannot possibly be all of the same person.

Childhood as a subject for Boltanski takes on a different dimension when one considers his book and installations, both entitled Monuments, (in a varied form the installation is also known as 'Les Enfants de Dijon'). The book was first published in 1986[7] and the installations date from a year earlier (see figs. 79-80). Both stem from an earlier work entitled 'Portraits des élèves du CES des Lentillères en 1973' (Portraits of the students of the Lentillères College of Secondary Education in 1973). For this work Boltanski asked children to give him their favourite photographs of themselves and had the assortments of snapshots and school photographs he received rephotographed. They were

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[6]A facsimile edition of this book is included in Boltanski's Livres, op. cit.
[7]An original copy of this book is included in Boltanski's Livres, op. cit.

arranged frame to frame along the corridor of the school's entrance. Boltanski rephotographed these again for Monuments. Now these children come to stand for death. Rephotographed eleven years later, all of them might well be alive and well as grown ups, but they are dead in the sense that they are no longer children. Our childhood according to Boltanski is the first part of ourselves to die, "We are dead children" he says, "We have the bodies of children inside us."[8] In accordance with this notion, these rather blurred rephotographed portraits were given special import by the way they were displayed. The gallery in which they were exhibited was darkened and the photographs were individually lit, with small lights or desk lamps. School portraits were thus displayed as memorials, paper monuments, recalling a whole tradition of tributes to the dead. These small black and white photographs of children were juxtaposed together with coloured rectangles, arranged in symmetrical configurations and surrounded and lit by small light bulbs. The tangled wires leading to the bulbs were not hidden and served to disrupt the rather austere geometry of these 'monuments' (see fig. 81).

This vanitas theme aside, what is important in such work is the way Boltanski treats photographs ritualistically and it is this treatment of the photograph which decidedly conditions our response to the photographs displayed. The use of such a means of displaying photography is clarified when one begins to consider Walter Benjamin's writing on photography and particularly his accounts of the experience of aura. In his most famous essay, 'The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction'(1936) photography is celebrated by Benjamin precisely because of its non-cult status.[9] Boltanski's display is of course doing the opposite, asserting photography's cult status.

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[8] Quoted in Gumpert, 1988, op. cit., p. 59.

[9] See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in ed. Hannah Arendt, Illuminations, (London: Collins, 1973), pp. 219-253. (First published in 1936.)

Benjamin saw the development of photography as a means of mechanical reproduction spelling the end of the auratic status of art. Mechanical reproduction, for Benjamin, "emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual."[10] According to him "the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual— first the magical, then the religious kind."[11] The aura of artworks rested on their originality, their irreproducibility; "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical...reproducibility."[12] Artworks could be taken out of their privileged sites and brought closer to the masses through photographic reproduction. The aura of art would be seen to wither in the age of mechanical reproduction as the technological changes, initiated by photography, transformed artworks in themselves and everyone's relation to art.

Photography brought things closer. "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."[13] But in contrast in Boltanski's Monuments the process of photo-mechanical reproduction, rather than bringing the subjects pictured closer, creates a distancing effect. The portraits of children take on something of the quality of old, time-worn, photographs. It is in this respect they can be said to be auratic. Benjamin describes the aura as involving "a strange web of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however close at hand."[14]

Benjamin in fact did not entirely see photographs as void of aura. He still felt cult value survived in early portrait photographs:

> the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura

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[10]Ibid., p. 226.
[11]Ibid., p. 225.
[12]Ibid., p. 225.
[13]Ibid., p. 225.
[14]Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography' in ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Classic Essays on Photography, (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980)p. 209.

> emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty. [15]

The aura of portaits is further explained by his fullest account of aura in his On Some Motifs in Baudelaire:

> Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at, means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.[16]

As Hal Foster has observed Benjamin's concept of the aura "inverts the definition [Marx's] of commodity fetishism as a perverse confusion of the human and the thing, a reification and a personification of producers".[17] While in auratic experience the object becomes human in commodity fetishism the human becomes objectified. This effect of the auratic clearly has a bearing on the kind of relationship to objects we discussed in Morris's photo-texts. Boltanski, as I will be shortly discussing, is also very interested in the auratic aspect of objects.

Benjamin contrasted portraiture with the photograph as an historical document. As human figures are seen to withdraw from the photograph, it was the evidential value of the photograph, its historicity, which was seen to have replaced its cult value. The empty streets of Paris pictured by Eugene Atget exemplified this for Benjamin. Atget initiated what he called "the emancipation of the object from aura".[18] Benjamin goes on to declare that: "With Atget,

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[15]Benjamin, 1973, op. cit., p. 228.
[16]Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, (London: Verso, 1992), p. 148.
[17]See Hal Foster's Compulsive Beauty, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 196-197.
[18]Benjamin, 1973, op. cit., p. 228.

photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them."[19]

Boltanski's use of photography exploits the auratic potentiality of the medium. His memorialised book and installations to a lost childhood invite "free-floating contemplation." While the eradication of people in Atget's empty street scenes was felt to foreground history not sentiment, Boltanski's monuments to a lost childhood are invariably concerned with sentiment. The installations had an aspect of the shrine with the lights underlying each photograph's, and concomitantly each child's, importance.

Boltanski has given us a story concerning his childhood. He recently said his own childhood was so unusual it perhaps explains why he used images from other people's normal childhood to represent his own.[20] His mock genealogies might therefore have been a way not of recalling, but forgetting, his past. However, perhaps the story of his childhood I am going to give is only another lie spun by Boltanski to tempt us into interpreting his books through his biography. What follows then might not be true. It is to be read aware that the person who said it is a notorious liar. The story goes as follows. Boltanski was born in Paris on the day of its Liberation, 1944. His father was a prominent doctor, a Jew who had converted to Catholicism to marry his wife. This was still not sufficient to prevent his possible deportation. Receiving a notice to report to the police, his wife publicly pretended marital disagreement, separation, then divorce. Neighbours thought the husband had fled, but in fact he hid in the basement of the family home for the duration of the occupation of Paris.[21]

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[19]Ibid., p. 228.
[20]See Paul Bradley, Charles Esche and Nicola White, 'Interview with Christian Boltanski' in Christian Boltanski, Lost, (Glasgow: CCA and Tramway, 1994), pp. 3-4.
[21]See Lynn Gumpert's ' Life and Death of Christian Boltanski' in Lessons of Darkness, op. cit., p. 53-54.

Boltanski reminisced in a recent interview of how he "remembers the years just after the war, when anti-semitism was still strong in France, 'feeling different from the others.'"[22] The sense of "feeling different from the others" in a Catholic France with a Jewish father, provides a clarifying background for the apparent concerns of two his book-works Detective and Sans Souci, book-works which seek to trouble assumptions of difference. One could frame these books in this narrative of the author Boltanski. Certainly a theme concerning identity emerges in these books, but I do not simply want to explain them as reflecting the artist's troubled sense of self. His autobiography exists as one discourse among many affecting our reading of his books.

Detective

The photographs in Boltanski's Monuments, in the book and particularly in the installation, were given a particular value. It was the overriding affective aspect of these mass of children's faces which was important. In turning to his book[23] and installations[24] entitled Detective (see figs. 82-84), Boltanski stresses the insignificance and severally limited and limiting status of the medium, something which had already begun to be shown in his book-works addressing a mythologised self-hood. However, Boltanski not only provides a succinct

[22]Ibid., p. 54.
[23]Detective is a book-work published in the exhibition catalogue, Lessons of Darkness, op. cit., pp. 15-48.
[24]'Detective' originated from a work made during 1972 and 1973 , during which time Boltanski clipped 408 images of victims and assassins from the magazine Detective and glued them on to grey card. These were taped one on top of the other to the gallery wall and titled 'Images d'une année de faits divers' (Images from a year of news items): Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1973. See Gumpert, 1994, op cit., p. 41. In 1988 he returned to the subject in the form of the book for the catalogue Lessons of Darkness and as part of an installation for the exhibition at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art it accompanied. For this installation, 'Reserve, Detective', each portrait was taped to the front of shoe-size cardboard boxes, each also carrying a date from the year 1972 scrawled on the front, and all stacked on crudely constructed wooden shelves. The impression given was each box contained the hidden narratives which surrounded each portrait. These 'reserves', as Gumpert has suggested, provided archives of closure rather than disclosure. Gumpert, 1994, op. cit., p. 126.

exposé of the inadequacies of the photograph as meaningful document in Detective, but also begins to raise wider questions concerning identity.

For Detective Boltanski rephotographed portraits of victims and their assassins from the French true crime magazine of that name. The photographic portraits on their own, bereft of any contextualising information, tell us so little of the subjects portrayed we cannot differentiate the look of a killer from that of his or her victim. We are left to hazard a guess as to 'who's who'. There is nothing essentially meaningful in the photographs themselves as used in this work. The pictures do not carry truths, instead they trigger guesses, fictions.

But this work is not simply highlighting the limited amount of information given us by the photographic portrait, it also disrupts physiognomic theories in which the facial characteristics of a particular individual were believed to inform us of the inner nature of that person. Detective troubles notions of difference. It is important to note that these are snapshots. It is because the magazine reproduces snapshots of assassins and victims— no mug-shots— it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to tell who is who. The snapshot portrait often involves a complicity between subject and photographer. In his discussion of the representation of the IRA in the British press, Taylor comments upon how press portraits of victim and assassin often differ. Commenting on representations of the victims, he says how:

> The portraits of the dead are taken from a variety of sources: snapshots from family albums, photo-booth self portraits, or head-and-shoulder passport photographs, taken with the sitter's consent. Invariably the people are either smiling or apparently contented. These expressions are in direct contrast to those in photographs a pathologist might use, or which might be produced in a coroner's court. Yet they support, rather than contradict, the brutality of sudden death. The happiness which we see, conventionally, in portraits of people now dead is an ironical

> measure of the crime that killed them. Because similar family photographs of dead republicans may be withheld from the British press, they are often seen through police file mug-shots which are another measure of their criminality.[25]

What Taylor is describing amounts to an offshoot of physiognomy with the press photographs of the Republican presenting him or her with an expression of resistance, a non-complicit look, one bearing a resistance, a hostility to the camera.

The form of Detective is taxonomic. Because of the references to criminality, the form has a clear precedent in the filing of portraits as a means of defining and identifying the criminal type— for example, the taxonomic project of criminal photography and measurement undertaken as a means of identifying repeat offenders by the French nineteenth century police official, Alphonse Bertillon. I discussed this use of photography for criminolgy in Chapter Four, the last chapter on photography and the book I discussed in the nineteenth century. It seems appropriate then that in bringing my thesis to a close with a discussion of this late twentieth century photographer, the particular nineteenth century use of photography should be undermined. Boltanski's use of photography in Detective highlights the inadequacy of the medium in providing an informative record of individual character, but, moreover, questions assumptions about difference and alterity, undermines the physiognomic belief that the criminal bears distinctive facial signs of his or her behaviour.

The implications behind a work like Detective bear relationship to the theorised approaches to photography of Victor Burgin and John Tagg. For Burgin meaning lies not so much in the image, but in the image's use— as he says

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[25] John Taylor, War Photography: Realism and the British Press, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 137.

"whatever specificity might be attributed to the photograph at the level of the image is inextricably caught up within the specificity of the social acts which intend that image and its meanings." [26] Tagg's book, The Burden of Representation begins with a critique of Barthes' notion of the photograph as a magical emanation of its referent in Camera Lucida.[27] The photograph for Tagg is not the inflection of a prior reality but, as he says, "a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes."[28] Notions of truth rest less in the image but in the context in which that image is located, in which the image functions. To speak, like Barthes, simply of an evidential force in the photograph is to ignore a particular set of historical circumstances in which it is legitimate to speak of photography and truth. If meaning lies in the fact of the pre-photographic moment, Tagg asks us to consider what conditions will be needed for a photograph of the Loch Ness Monster (of which there are many) to be acceptable. [29] According to Tagg and Burgin one can only speak of the real in the case of the photograph in terms of the discourses within which its image is caught up. We must not speak of the real, Burgin and Tagg argue, in the sense of the pre-photographic moment.

But, how far can one go along this theoretical path which foregrounds the notion of the photograph as text, as a mere tissue of signs to be decoded? Undoubtedly it remains very difficult, if not impossible, before certain images to escape the affective power of their referents, their 'pre-photographic' moments. Consider, for example, Susan Sontag's account of the first time she saw photographs of the Nazi camps.

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[26] Victor Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs' in Thinking Photography, (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 144.
[27] John Tagg, The Burden of Representation, (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 1-5 ; p. 160.
[28] Ibid., p. 3.
[29] Ibid., p. 5.

> One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation... For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen— in photographs or in real life— ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs— of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.[30]

She goes on to discuss the problems of representation, of an an image-satiation point having been reached:

> The vast catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem ordinary— making it appear familiar, remote... inevitable.[31]

But certain images, like those of the Nazi camps, remain outside this, as Sontag says "they keep their emotional charge." Sontag's discussion of images of the Holocaust, as I will now show, carries with it a particular pertinence to Boltanski's work. The particular horror of the Holocaust remains disturbingly uppermost in the connotations some of his work evokes.

The Photograph as Memorial

The use of photographs as memorial to the Holocaust stems from Boltanski's response to one particular found image, an end of year class photograph of

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[30]Susan Sontag, On Photography, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 19-20.
[31]Ibid., p. 21.

Jewish schoolchildren and their teacher, taken in Vienna in 1931. The historical specificity of the original photograph plays a crucial role in our relation to this work. The work, a book-work Le Lycée Chases and installations (see figs. 85-86), rests on a conjecture that those pictured might not have escaped extermination under the Nazis in the tragic events which were to follow. But even here, when the Holocaust becomes a key point of reference, the work rests only on a possibility, a story invited by the photograph on knowing when it was taken. What does the photograph tell us on its own?[32]

Boltanski made a series of photographic enlargements from the found snapshot, 18 portraits make up the book-work Le Lycée Chases(1987).[33] The tragic history of those pictured is brought out through his enlargements of the photographs. Those pictured are made to look cadaverous through the process of enlargement— all faces are reduced to mere skeletal vestiges. Printed on tissue thin paper, the pictures are easily damaged, fragile mortal things which have to be handled with care. In the installations of this work (see fig. 87) Boltanski makes what he calls altars to those pictured, a series of blow-up portraits of each of those pictured, framed in tin and balanced against the wall atop columns of rusty biscuit tins— memorials for the children of the Jewish high school.[34] In accordance with the assumed tragic history which surrounds each sitter, the lighting is menacing. Each one of the portraits is illuminated by a desk lamp clamped to the top of the tin frame and tilted down so it almost touches the portrait. The lamps block our relation to those pictured, already made distant, strange and deathly through photo-mechanical processes of enlargement.

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[32]Interestingly none of those pictured did die in the war. Many wrote to Boltanski to say they were alive. See Gumpert, 1994, op. cit., p. 161-162

[33]A facsimile copy is included in Livres, op. cit.

[34]The 'Autel Chases' were shown in the 'Lessons of Darkness' at the Chicago Museum of Art in 1988 and in 'Reconstitution' at the Whitechapel in London a year leter.

Mass death is the subject of his Les Suisses Morts (The Dead Swiss), books and installations in which Boltanski presents us with masses of unknown faces, re-photographed portraits from the obituary pages of a Swiss newspaper. The two books entitled Les Suisses Morts, 1991[35] and 1993[36], have a taxonomic form, images of the dead, nine to a page in the earlier book (see fig. 88), the later one presenting a logging, day by day, of the names of those who died in the year of 1991 (see fig. 89). For Boltanski, what he sees as the normalcy and ordinariness of the lives of the Swiss adds to the terror evoked by such work— "there is nothing more normal than the Swiss. There is no reason for them to die, so they are more terrifying in a way. They are us."[37] His work with dead Swiss gives us one grand memento mori, resting upon the contradiction of snapshot photographs, "always taken when the subjects are alive," says Boltanski, "all tanned, muscular, and smiling", but all being used for pictures of the deceased in the obituary pages of a newspaper for the canton of Valais, Switzerland. While we encounter a mass of portraits, it is the singularity of each sitter that becomes important. Boltanski has spoken of the differences of each portrait, each one is important— "in fact there is no 'everybody', I mean there is one who loves spaghetti and the other who has a girlfriend and there is one who is gay...", "the big problem is not to speak about the group, but to speak about individuality."[38]

In his book El Caso, (1989) the representations offered up to our gaze are the very opposite of those in Les Suisses Morts.[39] This book contains an uncompromising use of shocking images, a series of photographs taken from the Spanish newspaper, El Caso. The Catholicism of the country, its history,

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[35]This edition published by (Frankfurt am Main: Museums für Modern Kunst, 1991).
[36]This edition published by (Lausanne: Editions de L'aire, Musee Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1993).
[37]Georgia Marsh, 'The White and the Black: An Interview with Christian Boltanski' in Parkett, Vol 22, 1989, Zurich, p. 36.
[38]Esche et al, op. cit., p. 9.
[39]Reproduced in facsimile in his Livres, op. cit.

explains for Boltanski such violent and bloody imagery, this gruesome fascination with the murdered body.[40] The photographs show the bodies of victims of violent crime— half-naked corpses, close-ups of cadavers, a horror we witness and have to turn away from. El Caso consists of 17 small photographs held together with two metal rings, each image only 5 x 8cm (see fig. 90-91). Small enough to be hidden behind the hand and flicked through without anyone else seeing what is being looked at. The book's format invites a furtive gaze, a self-conscious voyeurism. Its size means we can hide the images also from ourselves. Such imagery is also about not looking, about hiding, for ultimate realism, as Michael Fried has suggested, is not about seeing, but having to look away.[41] Oliver Wendell Holmes has also given us a description of the shock of images of death which is approriate to Boltanksi's book, describing viewing some of the first ever war photographs— Matthew Brady's body-littered stereoscopes of a battlefield in the American Civil war— he tells us how he has to hide the images, shut them away in a cupboard, bury them from sight as if they, the pictures, were the corpses themselves.[42]

Roland Barthes has also written about the effect of photographs of traumas in his early essay on photography, 'The Photographic Message'. With pictures of

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[40]See my 'Sans Souci: Boltanski Interviewed' in Creative Camera CC315, April/May 1992, p. 21.

[41]Fried analyses Thomas Eakins's painting of an operation, 'The Gross Clinic' and points out how the pain of seeing is dramatised by a figure (assumed to be the patient's mother) in the picture who thows up her left arm across her eyes so as not to to be able to see what is taking place on the operating table. The shocking delineation of the operation is an affront to seeing. Fried goes on to suggest the "definitive realist painting would be one that the viewer literally could not bear to look at." It is an image "at once painful to look at and all but impossible, hence painful, to look away from (so keen is our craving for precisely that confirmation of own bodily reality) and that it is above all our conflictedness of our situation that grips and excruciates and in the end virtually stupefies us before the picture." See Michael Fried Realism, Writing, Disfiguration, (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987) pp 64-65.

[42]Holmes introduced images recently issued by Matthew Brady of the Antietam battlefied in The Atlantic Monthly in 1863: "it was so nearly like visiting the battle-field to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewed with rags and wrecks came back to us, and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented." Quoted in Alan Trachtenberg's Reading American Images, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 90.

traumatic events photography escapes myth and becomes true simulacrum; before such pictures we are at a loss for words:

> the traumatic photograph (fires, shipwrecks, ctastrophes, violent deaths, all captured from 'life as lived') is the photograph about which there is nothing to say; the shock-photo is by structure insiginifcant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting its signification. [43]

The two representations of death in Les Suisses Morts and El Caso, recall the opposition between the the natural and social body which as Nigel Llewellyn has recently shown, were so important to the "visual culture of the post reformation death ritual.[44]. He informs us how, in Late Medieval England, the decay of the corpse was sometimes a subject in funerary art in the form of the 'transi', "that is a representation of a corpse often made more horrifying by being shown crawling with toads, lizards, snakes, snails and other creatures redolent of decomposition and sin." [45] Such images of the natural body were intended to serve as potent reminders of the mortality of the onlooker, but they were often juxtaposed with another representation, that of the deceased in full control of his or her social faculties. Llewellyn draws up the distinction between two bodies, the natural and the socialised/nurtured body. "The natural body after death being simply the corporeal remains which had to be removed or treated to contain the inevitability of decay."[46] In the process of dying the death of the natural body was followed by efforts to preserve the social body as an element in the collective memory. The need for social cohesion and continuity in the face of disruption which resulted from death— especially the death of someone like a peer of the realm or a great landowner— was met by this theory of the two

[43]Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in Image Music Text, (London, Fontana, 1979), pp. 30-31.
[44]Nigel LLewellyn, The Art of Death, (London: Reaktion Books, 1991).
[45]Ibid., p. 46.
[46]Ibid., p. 47.

bodies. While the 'transi' figures of the rotting natural body were not accurate or naturalistic portraits, one cannot help but see Boltanski's use of police photograph records, the aftermaths of violent murders in El Caso as offering a contemporary version of the natural body, one which can be opposed to the social body found in the snapshots of the dead taken from the obituary of a Swiss newspaper in his Suisses Morts.

Death figures strongly in the work of Boltanski. He is spoken of it as "one of the few subjects of art."[47] For Sontag, "[a]ll photographs are *memento mori*."[48] As she says, "to take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerablity, mutability. By precisely slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."[49] Moreover, photography from its beginning had a more literal relationship to death with the first daguerreotypes replacing a tradition of postmortem portraiture in painting.[50] As I have shown in the previous chapter, photography's relationship to death was brought out by Barthes in Camera Lucida. From the start of the book photography had a relationship to death. Commenting on photography in an interview on the book, he talks about the "funereal enigma" of photography[51]. Barthes suggests the place of death in our society is in the photograph. [52]. In his discussion of photography and fetishism, the film theorist Christian Metz has stressed the particular way in which photographs are tied to thoughts of death.[53] He points out the significance of the immobility and silence of the photograph, and says how these "are not only two objective aspects of

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[47]See my 'Sans Souci: Christian Boltanski Interviewed' op. cit. p. 22.
[48]Sontag, op. cit., p. 15.
[49]Ibid., p. 15.
[50]For a detailed discussion of this, see David E. Stannard's 'Sex, Death and the Daguerreotype' in ed. John Wood America and the Daguerreotype, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991), pp. 73-108.
[51]Rolands Barthes 'On Photography' in The Grain of the Voice, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) p. 356.
[52]Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, (London: Cape, 1982), p. 92.
[53]See his 'Photography and Fetish' in ed. Carol Squiers, The Critical Image, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990) , pp. 155-164.

death, they are its main symbols".[54] An immediate kinship with death is to be found in the social practice of keeping photos in memory of loved beings who are no longer alive. The person who has been photographed is strictly speaking dead. Photography "is the mirror... in which we witness at every age our own aging."[55] While film gives back to the dead a semblance of life, photography, by virtue of the objective suggestions of its signifier, stillness, "maintains the memory of the dead as being dead". [56]

Death in the work of Boltanski ranges from the funereal aura which surrounds the 'dead' children in Monuments, to the frank and shocking corpses pictured in his book El Caso. But even here, one should point out, death is made visible at a distance, the prints are small and have been diffused through being rephotographed from smudgy newsprint images. El Caso's representation of death is the opposite of the way in which death is given visibility in one of the latest series of photographs by Andres Serrano, large-scale colour photographs which bring us face-to-face with the dead, morgue photography which takes the *memento mori* to sublime extremes (see fig. 92).[57]

Boltanski produced two books entitled El Caso. The other (made in 1988) is corpse-less, and gives us photographic copies of the newspaper pictures of the scene of the crime, places of murder, each marked by a gruesome history, the only signs of that event, arrows marking the fatal spot where the victim died (see figs. 93-94). This time it is what is not shown in the images and that which we believe to have taken place in the scenes depicted that is the source of their disquiet. It is nothing intrinsic in the medium, it is the fact that we are led to

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[54]Ibid., p. 157.
[55]Ibid., p. 158.
[56]Ibid., p. 158.
[57]See Daniel Arasse's 'Les Transis' in Andre Serrano: The Morgue, (Paris: Yvon Lambert, 1993).

believe these are sites of grisly murders which determines our relationship to such pictures.

One might see the 1988 El Caso as a macabre version of Morris The Inhabitants. Both present empty places, are void of people, only Morris's pictures, together with their accompanying prose pieces, speak about occupation, life, habitation: they remain lived spaces. At most Morris's pictures are elegaic but never tragic. We also find such differences when we consider another series of works by Boltanksi which, like Morris, deal with the possibilty of a negative portraiture, the way in which lives can be told through a person's possessions.

This began with a bookwork Tout ce que je sais d'une femme qui est morte et que je n'ai pas connue [58](Everything I know about a woman who is dead and whom I didn't know). Made in May 1970, it reproduced five snapshots given to Boltanski by a friend (see fig. 95). Each was accompanied by a factual description of what was in the photograph. Without knowing the origins of the photographs, the book exposes how little is told us of someone's life by the snapshots. The texts accompanying them do not explain but point up the limited nature of information of the photographs, highlight their archival redundancy rather than their archival value.

Boltanski's attempts to find other people's life in a few snapshots is taken much further in the installations and book-works which resulted from him collecting the belongings of people who died and exhibiting them. Here his work begins to address the function of the museum, and the fact that they preserve, alongside paintings and sculptures, the everyday objects of ordinary people who have died. As he has said:

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[58]A facsimile edition of this is included in his Livres, op. cit.

> I was always surprised that at the Louvre they collected and displayed on the same level small Gallo-Roman oil bottles which were ordinary objects, next to paintings like those of Rubens, for example, objects of splendour conceived by an artist knowing precisely that he was creating art.[59]

Bric-a-brac becomes important by the process of museumification. Objects are transfigured by the vitrine. As part of his childhood reclamations Boltanski produced what he called 'Vitrines of Reference,' in which he preserved fragments from what was supposed to be his own life, cuttings from his hair, objects he had made, pages from his book-works. All were displayed as relics in museum cases.

In one book-work, which accompanied an exhibition of the objects of a woman who had died, Inventaire des objets ayant apparenu à une femme de Bois-Colombes[60] (Inventory of objects that belonged to a woman of Bois-Colombes), the pages are filled with individual photographs of possesions, laid out in isolation. The book's inventory, consisting of 15 small photographs to a page and with its 21 pages, itemises everything she owned, including pull-overs, clothing, gloves, hats, keys, pictures, pills, pans, furniture, cheque-stubs, letters and a metro ticket (see figs. 96-98) The book even offers the *mise-en-abyme* of 3 pages of photographs of books which belonged to the woman (see fig. 99). Each book is photographed face-up, laid out on a neutral background, decidely different from the representations of books in Talbot and Morris, photographed on the shelves, such books one felt were used and in use, not part of such forensic (frenzied) cataloguing. Boltanski's exhaustive document also might recall Agee's excessive itemisation of the possessions of the sharecroppers as discussed in Chapter Five. Boltanski's book stands as a kind of ultimate

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[59]Gumpert, 1988, op. cit., p. 56.
[60]A facsimile editon of this is included in his Livres, op. cit..

document of a life, yet what does it tells us of the person depicted? Boltanski also produced memorials to unknown and forgotten people as for example shown by a small biography book-work he made in 1988, a biography of Géo Harly[61], a performer who never became a well known star, a mercurial character whose life is told us through a few tragi-comic photographs (see figs. 100-101).

Such portraits of lives through possessions have a bearing on the later installations Boltanksi made with used clothing in the late 1980s; 3,000 items in an installation in Canada in 1988 (see fig. 102).[62] An investigation into objects as analogous to the photograph, they are about an extension of the quality of the photographic portrait as index, traces of absent presences, absent people. Clothes for Boltanski are like pieces of dead people. Photographs and clothing are for him seen as:

> simultaneously presence and absence. They are both an object and a souvenir of a subject, exactly as a cadaver is both an object and a souvenir of a subject. Clothing reminds you of the person who was in it. It's an experience everyone has had: when someone dies you see their shoes, see the form of their feet. It is a hollow image of the person, a negative.[63]

But the point here is that Boltanski's use of clothing evokes mass absence, not the life of one individual. As a result such installations carry unavoidable associations of the Holocaust. The unbearable piles of personal property recalling the millions who died; a nightmarish visual metonymy.

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[61] An original edition of this book is included in his Livres, op. cit.
[62] The installation was at the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto, 1988.
[63] Marsh, op. cit., pp. 36-7.

Sans Souci

In moving to a close I would like to now turn to an issue raised by Detective and found in the last book to be considered, Sans Souci.[64] While Detective involves the removing of context, the journal's narratives giving us the particular dramatic life histories behind each portrait, in his book-work Sans Souci, (Without Care) Boltanski is attentive to context. The book was made in 1991 and consists of a careful recreation of a photo-album, with reproductions of old black-and-white snapshots, some faded and yellowed, as many as six to a page, and each page separated (covered and protected) by sheets of tissue (see fig. 103). Only here Boltanski re-presents photo album pictures with a difference, visibly marked by the context in which they were taken. History intrudes. The title is visible in the first print, the lettering 'Sans Souci' on the Berlin palace before which a crowd of over 50 face the camera, a formal group portrait which is not quite symmetrical in frame; a familiar ceremonial occasion, a wedding one presumes (see fig. 104). But something interrupts the familiarity of this image. Are the soldiers in the picture wearing German uniforms? Was this taken during the Second World War?

Turning the page we see a snapshot of a young girl, pen in hand looking up from her work, smiling at the camera (see fig. 105). But our attention is caught by the intrusive and shocking detail of the swastika on a flag behind her. The following photographs are all similarly marked out by significant details. The snaphsot of a family group gathered round the dining room table, with them all smiling to the camera, has a portrait of Hitler on the back wall (see fig. 106). Another shows a group of young soldiers in a bar, together with their wives or girlfriends, gathered together before the camera: to the right one couple caught

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[64] An original edition of this book is included in his Livres, op. cit.

kissing, a curtain raised to expose their private moment to the camera (see fig. 107). What we are offered is something familiar, playful, and yet the snapshot is made disturbingly distinctive, estranged and problematic, by the details of the SS on the uniforms. The poses and play by those pictured— the formal poses on ceremonial occasions, the unposed candid moment of a holiday on the beach or boating on the lake— typify the style of snapshot photographs. But, taken at a time of war, all remain clearly marked by history through a series of signs which disturb and mark out these images as 'troublesome.'

> The first thing that occured to me was how if you have a photo of a German soldier in an album the whole album becomes a little bit strange. But it's not only about Germany, we all have something a little bit strange in our album, something we want to hide. [65]

Sans Souci bears a relation to Detective; it is meant to trouble our notion of difference. There remains nothing manifestly evil about those pictured in the snapshots. It is precisely their familiarity that makes our relationship to this book so difficult to comes to terms with. With Sans Souci the language of snapshot photography (if one can speak of a language of amateur photography) gives to those represented a familiarity we feel they should not have. The snapshot photograph remains open to varied interpretations; writing on an anonymous snapshot given to him by a friend, John Berger points out that "[w]hat the photograph shows goes with any story one chooses to invent."[66] Looking at the photos of Sans Souci, any fixidity of meaning is dependent on our knowledge of those pictured, a relationship to the family depicted. Severed off such ties meaning is reflected back on the viewer, meaning is reclaimed as our own. The snapshots provide 'tabula rasa' which we fill with with our own memories and associations prompted by the scenes depicted. Our identification with the

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[65] Rose Jennings, 'Christian Boltanski Interviewed' in Frieze, Pilot Issue, (London, 1991), p. 15.
[66] John Berger, Another Way of Telling, (London: Writers and Readers Co-op., 1982), p. 87.

snapshot photograph is particularly strong, they extract our memories. Because the pull of the photographs is so strong, this makes the details in Sans Souci that much more disturbing.

Snapshots celebrate identiity. They represent the family circle of kin, neighbours and friends. Essentially the pictures illustrate a story, they amplify biographies and act to spur memory.[67] Such collections, however, provide an edited representation of the family. Photo albums construct their own versions of family history since there is no illness, no death, no divorced spouses in them.[68] Family albums are about forgetting as well as remembering. What Boltanski is doing in Sans Souci, is picking out troubled snapshots, images which were once, one assumes, edited out of photo-albums, thrown out, discarded, memories which preferred to be forgotten and remained so until they ended up on market stalls in Berlin and were salvaged by Boltanski.

Boltanski's work with photography highlights ambiguities within the medium. Working primarily with portraiture his work stresses both the auratic charge of photographs and at the same time highlights a sense of photography's own inevitable fictionality. Context heavily conditions our response to the photographs. Boltanski's apparent predilection for the snapshot rests on the fact that it is a form peculiarly open to interpretation, uncoded, a site of strong investment on the part of the spectator. In the snapshot we are not confronting the unfamiliar, we are witnesses to what Boltanski has called a "collective ritual".[69] Boltanski can however, nevertheless upset that identification. This is when the point of photography's historicity plays a part. Sans Souci utilises

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[67]Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (eds.) Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Snashots, (London: Virago, 1991).
[68]In my interview, op. cit., p. 18, Boltanski says how "[i]n photo albums there are no dead, no workers, no ill people, it is mostly a charming life, always with beautiful babies."
[69]Boltanski: "We have all the same kind of photo albums, always the baby on a beach, the picnic, all clichés". Ibid., p. 19.

signs of history to upset our point of identification, and force a rethinking of identity and difference. Boltanski's work, his particular use of photography, constantly plays games with us, the photograph in one work is raised to cult status, in another written off as mere fiction, a medium of deception and inauthenticity. His work deals with two relationships to the photograph, as being on the one hand an auratic and meaningful object— particularly with his ritualised and theatrical treatment of photography in the gallery site— or on the other, a silent piece of paper, whose meaning is entirely dependent on what information we bring to the photograph.

Conclusion

Writing is a means of fixing the photograph, as those first words in response to the photograph fixed what once could be seen in what is now a very faint negative: the panes of glass in the oriel window of Lacock Abbey. But in examining photography and the book in this thesis what has become increasingly apparent is how photography has been involved in resistances to writing. Writing, language, provides an inappropriate equivalent to photographs. This point was highlighted when I began this thesis by showing some of the problems and limitations of a hermeneutic approach to Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature. To see his photographs as iconographic, as symbolic, tended to overlook Talbot's own evident preocupation in the book with revealing photography's special ontology, the peculiar status they had as representations drawn not by human hand but by the sun.

It has been the counter-hermeneutic nature of the response to the photograph, which has been decidedly central to my discussion of photography and the book. And this counter-hermeutic aspect of photography was no more strongly brought out than in the last two chapters of this thesis, where the authority of an objective discourse was shown to be inadequate to take account of the special affect of certain photographs in Barthes's Camera Lucida and finally brought out through Boltanski's exploitation of photography's power of affect with his thanatological themes.

What was particularly important in my discussion of Barthes and Boltanski was their fascination with photography's identity, its ontology. This provided a certain point of relationship to the discussions of early descriptions and uses of photography in the first three chapters of this thesis. My discussion of Peter

Henry Emerson's books in Chapter Two, like my study of Talbot's The Pencil of Nature in Chapter One, brought out a preoccupation with the particular status of photographic representation. In Chapter Two I showed how Emerson's photographs were reduced to hints, they became increasingly suggestive and veiled, while the text became more voluble and dense. His books revealed a concern with a photography which moved away from the density of the photograph which so absorbed Fox Talbot in The Pencil of Nature. Behind Emerson's books was, as I have shown, a phenomenological concern, an interest in the physiology of perception and a desire to bring photography closer to what he saw was the truth of a corporealised seeing. In Chapter Three the books by Hawthorne and Hardy traced the theme of truth and fiction in photography, mapped out a change in the status of photography in the nineteenth century, from a magical medium, felt to be outside human agency, to a severely limited medium, capable of deceptions. The two novels appeared to reflect a broader change in attitudes to the medium as the daguerreotype became replaced by the paper print, one easy to manipulate and practice deceptions with. Particular experiments and manipulations with photography were discussed in Chapter Four. This chapter shifted the debate from being about books of fiction to books of science, but nevertheless brought out some interesting relationships between them. While Galton's manipulation of photographs in his desire for a collective portrait, could be seen to bring him close to the distorted photography described in Hardy, behind his experiments was a faith in the medium's truth revealing insight as remarkable as the one brought out in Hawthorne's fiction.

With its issues concerning photography, classification and power, Chapter Four's discussion of Galton opened up the thesis to a discourse addressing the problematics of representation, which was then taken up in my discussions of photography and the book in the twentieth century. What the four chapters of

Part Two had in common were their various approaches to the documentary status of photography; from Evans's and Agee's struggles with representation in the documentray book to Boltanski's undermining of the status of the photograph as document in his artist's books.

Following my analysis of Agee's and Evans's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Chapter Six dealt with what I described as the subversion of the documentary book in the photo-texts of Wright Morris, books in which we find a subjectivised attachment to place, a marked sensitivity to privacy and an overriding concern with the authenticity found in certain photographs. In Chapter Seven Barthes's attempts to define the ontology of photography in Camera Lucida defended a realist position; the photograph indicated for him an irrefutable document, a poignant witness of what once was.

Nearly all the authors of the books studied in this thesis up to Barthes, located a particular truth in photography. The first two chapters brought out a difference over the truth of photographic representation between Fox Talbot and Emerson. Talbot's investment in the new medium was shown to be tinged with the metaphysical: evinced through his musing on the potential of photography to one day be able to see beyond human perception, to record what went on among people in the dark. A metaphysics which we find bestowed upon the daguerreotype in Hawthorne's description of it in The House of the Seven Gables, where he deploys it as a magical medium in his fiction, capable of revealing truths of character which go otherwise unseen by his protagonists. In many ways one might see Galton's experiments with the composite photograph as putting Hawthorne's magical notions of photography's truth revealing insights to the test. Hardy is the one who troubles photography's fidelity to truth with his awareness of the manipulated use of photography in his novel A Laodicean. But despite his book's exposition of photography's limited

relationship to truth, the photography we dealt with occured only within the pages of literature. It was not until we began to look at the books of the contemporary French artist, Boltanski, in the last chapter of this thesis, that assumptions of truth in photography were seen to be severly contested. He shows us how photographic documents tell us little, and how they can even be used, on occasions, to lie.

I have gone a long way in this thesis, from a self-reflexive concern to describe and define what was then a new means of representation in Fox Talbot's The Pencil of Nature, to questions concerning photography and history, memory and death, in the books of Boltanski. Along such a 'journey' it has been a theme of truth, of different notions of truth which has been the thread tying together the diverse range of books I have considered. It was very important and valuable to have discovered in the books of Boltanski a fitting end to this journey. Boltanski's contemporary investigations into photography, through the form of the artist's book, deliberately set up a series of manipulations of our relationship to photographs and involve a probing of photography's truth status which picks upon themes developed throughout this thesis. But most significantly in the end, like Barthes's Camera Lucida, his books began to point to something in photographs which resists ready classification and disturbs the constraints of the theoretical (hermeneutic) quest for closure.

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