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## *Photography and the Role of the Artist*

CHRISTOPHER GEOFFREY MANLEY

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## **Abstract**

How do we think the photographer as a creator? This question often provokes a debate regarding the limits of the photographic medium: In particular, the potential for freedom of creative expression. The concern that photography is unable to afford the artist sufficient creative control over her work follows from the observation that photographs are causally related to the object photographed. Consequentially, the viewer is unable to take an interest towards the photograph as an aesthetic representation; since it is the object photographed that holds the attention of the viewer, rather than the photograph itself.

However, I contend that in reaching this conclusion we overlook the decisive impact of photography on the creative practice of picture making. Rather than illustrate the artist as restricted in her use of the photographic medium, I aim to show how photography has transformed the relationship between artist, subject and medium. The access to and engagement with her subject requires a different kind of approach.

Instead of following the usual route that attempts to mark out a description of creative practice which has as its centre the intentions of the artist, I claim that a more insightful approach may surface from rethinking the role of the artist: A role in which the quality of intention does not follow – solely – from the imaginative or interpretive intentions of the artist, but emerges from a multitude of perspectives.

# Photography and the Role of the Artist

A doctoral thesis submitted by Christopher Manley

Undertaken in the Philosophy Department at the University of Durham, 2010

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## **Photography: Intention, transparency and the role of the artist**

### **Introduction**

A discussion of the role of the artist in relation to the creative practice of photography often falls prey to misrepresentation. This distortion, I claim centres on the notion of intention; and is based on the idea that due to the mechanical process of photography we are unable to take an interest towards the photograph as representative of the artist's intention. In this investigation I aim to reconsider the notion of intention in relation to the photographic. It is my claim that the creative practice of photography requires a different attitude towards the parameters of expressivity.

Very quickly after the formal recognition of its technical principles, the debate regarding the artistic potential of photography formed many contradictory perspectives. From the Pictorialists belief that photography afforded the artist a new way of picture making to Baudelaire's rejection of photography as a creative art-form, the landscape of this discussion is extremely familiar in debates regarding the aesthetic potential of the medium. There is nothing new about asking the question; is photography art? However, I contend that agreeing one way or another does not help us understand better anything peculiar to the creative potential of photography.

So then why discuss the role of the artist in relation to photography? If we have – whether grudgingly or not – accepted photography as a valid artform what need is there probe any further, characteristics peculiar to the medium? I agree that there would be no need to do so were it that a discussion of the creative practice of photography followed from a clear understanding of the parameters of the intentional. Yet the problem of locating the photographer's intention remains.

The problems remains, I claim, because in discussing the creative potential of photography, we have yet to confront what I consider to be a transformation of the role of the artist – in relation to pictorial representation. I am not suggesting that the creative practice of picture making has been irrevocably altered – wholesale – due to the impact of photography. Simply that in discussing photography, we must consider the possibility that the role of the creator and therefore, her

intentions, take on a new direction. In this introduction I intend to establish what I consider to be the source of the misinterpretation of the creative practice of photography.

### **Photographic neutrality**

The view that I will be opposing in this investigation concerns the description of photography and photographing as a process which debar human intervention; in the act of photographing the photographer is for Andre Bazin rendered neutral.<sup>1</sup> The manner by which photographic realism removes the intentional from the creative act has for Bazin enabled us to think of the photographic ‘image [as]... formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.’<sup>2</sup>

I will begin with what I regard to be the consequence of Bazin’s argument – concerning our understanding of the parameters of creative practice. Bazin’s discussion regarding the function and creative limits of photography has set in stone much of our modern criticism regarding creative photography:<sup>3</sup> In particular, concerning the *presence* of the photographer’s intention – and from it our understanding of the photograph as expressive of a creative intent. Bazin thought that due to its mechanical process, photographs disallowed human intervention. Therefore, beyond the documentation of the object before the lens, we need not think of the medium as offering the artist a unique approach towards the creative practice of picture making. Bazin’s essay introduces us to the debate regarding photography and intention. However, it does not

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<sup>1</sup> In Bazin’s influential essay the *Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1967) he discusses the impact of photography on the creative practice of picture making. For Bazin, the consequence of photographic realism enables the painter to give up what he refers to as the Renaissance project of realism; a striving towards realistic depiction. The mechanical objectivity of photography has, he claims, redirected the artistic practice of picture making towards pure expression and imaginative interpretation. This investigation focuses on what significance this has for our consideration of the creative practice of photography.

<sup>2</sup> Bazin, A. (1967), p.13

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we might trace Bazin’s concerns regarding the creative potential of photography back to Baudelaire or more usefully Elisabeth Eastlake. However, Bazin’s argument regarding the impact of photography on the creative practice of picture making offers us a useful starting point with regards to how we are able to disseminate our understanding of the creative potential of the photographer.

examine the parameters of intentionality in representational art. Therefore, whilst it is necessary to trace the lineage of this discussion back to Bazin, I do not consider his argument beyond this introduction.

My aim regarding the interpretation of the creative practice of photography concerns the role of the artist. The view that the mechanical debars creative intention, as introduced by Bazin, has taken on a more sophisticated form; in particular it has fostered a predilection towards underlining the limits and idiosyncrasies of human intervention – in relation to the creative practice of picture making.

This perhaps, is due to the temptation to look for the painter – when measuring creative potential – in the practice of the photographer. However, by comparing a description of the photographer against the painter I claim we have a tendency to overlook the complexities of photographic practice. We often think that because the photographer is unable to control each and every aspect of the object before the lens theirs is a medium which is aesthetically less valuable.<sup>4</sup>

In the first section of this investigation I will criticise what I regard to be a traditionalist understanding of creative practice; in particular concerning our understanding of the artist's intent. In doing so my aim is to underline what I consider to be a misguided approach towards evaluating the photographer's intent.

## **Transparency**

I begin by tackling the notion that due to the status of causal dependency, photographs are transparent images. If we are to afford the photograph pictorial status – argues the transparency theorist – they are to be considered as the kind of pictures that enable us to see the object

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<sup>4</sup> Certainly, in post-production the photographer is able to alter each and every aspect of the pixel or grain and to be sure there are some strong views concerning photography and manipulation. However, I think that due to multifarious uses of the medium, discussing one way of doing as more valid than another is often unhelpful. Within this discussion I make no value distinction between the digital and the analogue. If the image began with the depressing of a shutter release – as willed or otherwise – I regard that image as a photograph.

photographed and so we may think of the photograph as giving us perceptual access to that object. The concept of transparency is I claim a consequence of Bazin's estimation that photographs do not involve human intervention. I do not reject the claim that we may describe a photograph as a transparent picture; insofar as we see *through* a photograph to the object photographed. Nonetheless, I will argue that because a photography is causally related to an *event*, transparency does not entail *likeness*; the term *event* in this thesis refers to the 1/60<sup>th</sup>, 1/30<sup>th</sup>, 1/15<sup>th</sup>, etc., of a second exposure.

I do not aim to deny that photographers are – in some respects – in service to a machine, nor do I deny that the photograph – at the time of exposure – is not causally related to the object before the lens. However, I also claim that it is due to these factors that we find ourselves compelled to rethink the role of the artist.

### **Presence of the artist**

To think about how we point towards the *presence* of the artist – her intention – in a photographic work, I claim, underlines our misunderstanding of its artistic appropriation. Some thinkers, as I will illustrate point out the composition as illustrative of the artist's intention. Others, perhaps more naturally direct our attention towards the object photographed as the cause of our aesthetic interest whilst others still look to amalgamate these two possibilities.

Perhaps the most common argument in support of the notion that the photographer has intentional control over her subject matter incorporates a historical perspective of the development of medium. The techniques of picture making in photography, so the argument follows have given the artist a different kind of freedom; normally related to developments in the craft of picture making, intentionality refers to the possibilities connected by the chemical and mechanical progression of photography. Whilst I acknowledge and occasionally reference the arguments in this area, I find that it not only sidetracks but actively distorts our main concern: To locate the manner by which the camera has added to the creative practice of picture making, I

contend that we need to consider how the mechanically dependent causal process has compelled the artist to rethink her role in relation to the interpretive and intentional.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, I claim that all other concerns – have the potential to – bypass what is most striking about the artistic appropriation of the photographic medium: That a photograph is related not primarily to the object before the lens but the duration of the exposure. A photograph, therefore, is – due to the causal process that involves a time-based exposure – a document of a moment. It is in an exploration of the moment or event, rather than the creation of an appearance that I claim we will find the photographer's intent.

By accepting that the photographer is unable to control every last detail within the frame, I will argue that the photographic work is not solely an expression of the artist's *voice*. Nonetheless, this absence or silence – of an all pervasive authorial presence – does not reflect negatively on the creative appropriation of the photography; moreover I claim that it enables us to consider the photograph as not only an expression of the artist's voice but how that voice relates to and is a reflection of the environment within which it is expressed.

I contend that the identity of the artist, in this sense, should not be understood as defining the content of her work. Moreover, the intentions of the artist who chooses to photograph form, I claim, in dialogue with her subject matter. Michael Kenna perhaps best underlines this point in describing his role in the making of his beautifully crafted landscapes:

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<sup>5</sup> See Scharf, A. (1965). Aaron Scharf's intelligent discussion of *Creative Photography* traces the history of artistic appropriation of the medium. Scharf's expert understanding of the history of artistic photography clearly defines the arguments concerning an aesthetic understanding of photographic techniques. However, Scharf's aims are quite different from those relating to this investigation. Whilst Scharf outlines a historical trajectory of the developments of artistic practice in photography, I aim to outline what is peculiar to the creative practice of photography. Not by pinpointing technical differences but by provoking a discussion of the impact of photography on our understanding of the intentional, the interpretive and the imaginative: In short, a discussion of the impact of photography on the role of the artist.

In my photographic work I'm generally attracted to places that contain memories, history, atmospheres and stories. I'm interested in the places where people have lived, worked and played. I look for traces of the past, visual fingerprints, evidence of activities - they fire my imagination and connect into my own personal experiences. Using the analogy of the theater, I would say that I like to photograph the empty stage, before or after the performance, even in between acts. I love the atmosphere of anticipation, the feeling in the air that events have happened, or will happen soon...<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the relationship between the artist, subject and her tool kit takes on a unique prominence in the creative practice of photography. It is a relationship in which the role of the artist is not only defined merely by reference to her intentions but how the work reflects the environment in which that intention is born.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenna, M. in interview with Telford, A. in *Wraparound*, Vol. 1, No.1, 2003.

## Chapter 1

### The artistic aims of the photographer Intentionality and Appearance

#### 1.1: Finding the photographer

In the Analytic Tradition, the argument regarding the aesthetic value of a photograph often revolves around a debate concerning representational value. Furthermore, within the parameters of an aesthetic discourse this involves an evaluation of the potential for the viewer to take an interest towards the photograph for its own sake. The challenge, according to the view that I will explore in this chapter is to prove that photographs are interesting as photographs; and not merely pictures that are transparent to the object photographed.

In order to consider the potential that we may appreciate photography as a representational artform, it is first necessary to establish a criterion of correctness. This requires that I tackle two basic questions: What is the conceptual model of a photograph that I will be using and what are the conditions that need to be satisfied in order to call a picture representational art? The working model of a photograph that I use in this chapter is also a component integral to the argument concerning the value of the medium as a representational artform. I begin my discussion of photography and representational art with a critical exploration of Roger Scruton's argument in his essay *Photography and Representation*.<sup>7</sup> My abstract notion of a photograph is informed by his argument that we may describe the photograph as a picture that stands in causal relation to the object that is photographed; 'The ideal photograph... stands in a certain relation to a subject. [A] photograph is a photograph *of* something... the relation is causal... In other words, if a photograph is a photograph of a subject, it follows that the subject exists.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), pp. 119-148

<sup>8</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 121

For Roger Scruton, this description of a photograph is also used as evidence against the claim that we may appreciate an ideal photograph as representational art. Before I consider the second question; that addresses the conditions that need to be satisfied in order for us call a photograph representational art it is first important to add a corollary about the abstract understanding of photography that will be employed in this discussion. The conception of a photograph is in this thesis premised on a *logical ideal* rather than a normative substantiation, as it is for Scruton: ‘By an ‘ideal’ I mean a logical ideal. The ideal of photography is not an ideal at which photography aims or ought to aim.’<sup>9</sup>

The potential for a medium to allow the artist to produce a work of art that is an embodiment of a thought about its subject is often taken to outline the parameters of representational art. This notion of representational art is the framework that I will explore and eventually aim to challenge as unsuitable to our aesthetic understanding of the photographic representation. My examination of representational art will focus on the notion of *intentionality*: In Scruton’s argument he establishes the lack of intentionality – due to the mechanically derived causal process – as central to our inability to take an interest towards the photograph as an aesthetic representation: ‘The photograph lacks that quality of ‘intentional inexistence’ which is characteristic of painting. The ideal photograph, therefore, is incapable of representing anything unreal...’<sup>10</sup>

Scruton’s notion of *intentional inexistence* is, I contend, central to an understanding of the aesthetic representation that I will challenge as explicative of the artistic limits of the ideal photograph; for Scruton, I claim, intentionality is a quality that is central to the cause of aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation. In order to say that our interest is held by the representation and not merely the object photographed it is necessary to recognise an intention at work in the creation of an appearance.

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<sup>9</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.120

<sup>10</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.131

Therefore, in order to appreciate the ideal photograph as representational art, it is necessary, for Scruton, that our interest may be recognised as dependent on the intentions of the photographer. Because of the mechanically derived causal process, Scruton argues that our interest towards the photograph cannot be determined by the photographer's intentions but by the object photographed: '... when we say that *x* is a photograph of *y* we *are* referring to this causal relation, and it is in terms of the causal relation that the subject of a photograph is normally understood.'<sup>11</sup>

In the absence of intentional inexistence, argues Scruton, we are unable to say that our aesthetic interest is held by the photograph. Because a photograph is a photograph *of* its subject, it is the subject photographed that is the cause of our aesthetic interest – rather than the photographer's intentions. Consequently, Scruton refers to the photograph as a *transparent* image and in doing so outlines the parameters of a discussion of the aesthetic character of photography: 'The photograph is transparent to its subject, and if it holds our interest it does so because it acts as a surrogate for the thing which it shows. Thus if one finds a photograph beautiful, it is because one finds something beautiful in its subject.'<sup>12</sup>

Yet, in his description of intentionality, I will argue that Scruton reveals a gap in our understanding of representational art – where photography is concerned. In particular, I think this regards our understanding of intentionality as central to the cause of our aesthetic interest towards the representation. For Scruton, intentionality, as it is understood in representational art is recognised in one sense to be the embodiment of a thought – about the way something looks in representational art: '...to understand a painting involves understanding thoughts. These thoughts are, in a sense, communicated by the painting. They underlie the painter's intention, and at the same time they inform our way of seeing the canvas.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 131

<sup>12</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.134

<sup>13</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 123

In the case of the ideal photograph, it is clear that the photographer's thought does not underlie an intention to see the subject the way it appears in the photograph; at least not in the same way that it does in painting. The painting example that Scruton offers, I contend, is useful as a way of demarcating what I claim is most prominent about his conception of representational art – that I outline and challenge in this chapter; that intentionality is a quality that is central to our understanding of a picture as representational art.

In my challenge I do not intend to undermine the notion of intentionality as central to our appreciation of the painting, neither will I attempt to contest the conception of intentionality as, in one sense, the embodiment of a thought about the subject. Nonetheless, I will argue that it is possible to appreciate the ideal photograph as representational art; and in turn, for the artist's intention – in the creation of a photograph. Recognising intentionality in photography, I claim, requires a different approach towards our understanding of the configuration of intentionality. The mechanically derived causal relationship, I contend, disrupts the centralised place of intentionality in representational art, as we recognise it in painting.

However, the mechanical process that demarcates the conception of the ideal photograph does not completely dissolve the possibility of intentional control, rather, we find that it is displaced; central to acknowledging the different configuration of the intentional in photography is our understanding of relationship between the appearance generated in the photograph and the object that is causally related to the appearance. As Dawn Phillips claims in her counter to Scruton's notion of the ideal photograph argument, a photograph is not merely a record of an appearance but the *recording* of a moment in time: 'A photographic event occurs when a photosensitive surface is exposed to the light and a recording of the light image takes place. The photographic event is *the recording of the light* image. It is important to recognize that in this description 'a recording' is not the same as 'a record'.<sup>14</sup> The photographic process involves the recording of the objects before the lens. Nevertheless, it does not follow that a photograph will be a record of the objects before the lens.

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<sup>14</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), p. 337

Of central importance to this discussion of artistic photography is the notion of the *photographic event*. In re-constructing the cause of our interest towards the photograph, I contend that it is the photographic event and not the object photographed that holds our aesthetic interest; the task in this chapter will be to underline this approach as illuminative of a need to reconsider our understanding of the intentional in relation to the photographic artform. Whilst I do not disagree with Scruton's claim that an ideal photograph stands in causal relation to the object photographed, I do not agree with his claim that this relationship extends to resemblance. My understanding of the photographer's intention is informed by Phillips's claims that a photograph is not causally related to the appearance of the object before the lens but the *photographic event*. A photographic event, argues Phillips does not generate the appearance that we appreciate in the photograph but is the element to which that appearance is causally related:

Information recorded during the photographic event can be processed in different ways to result in any number of images – even ones with very different properties. These photographs are not unified by sharing visual resemblances with and a causal relation to a 'pro-filmic event'... Rather they share in common a causal relation to one and the same photographic event.<sup>15</sup>

Broadly speaking, however, I agree with Scruton's claim that the photographer's intention is not central to the cause of our aesthetic interest towards the photograph. The photographer's intention, I claim, does not necessarily circumscribe our appreciation of the way the subject photographed appears but emerges through our interest towards the appearance as set in the context of the *photographic event*; whereas in painting we attribute the appearance of the object represented to the artist's intentions, in photography, we are unable to do so – as it will become clear throughout this chapter. Nonetheless, I contend, it is not merely the appearance that holds our interest but what the appearance can tell us about the photographic event. Rather than

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<sup>15</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), p. 339

understanding intentionality as central to our appreciation of representational art I will argue that in the ideal photograph it becomes *de-centred*.

Before I describe the de-centred notion of intentionality in photography – as key to our understanding of photography as representational art – it is first important to discuss in depth, the notion of intentionality that I claim offers us an inadequate interpretation of the photographic artform. I will begin by considering Scruton's notion of intentionality in representational art. In particular, I am concerned with his understanding of the intention in representational art as synonymous with the expression of a thought:

...properties of the medium influence not only what is seen in the picture but also the way it is seen. Moreover, they present to us a vision that we attribute not to ourselves but to another person; we think of ourselves as sharing in the vision of the artist, and the omnipresence of intention changes our experience from something private into something shared. The picture presents us not merely with the perception of a man but with a thought about him, a thought embodied in perceptual form.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2: Technological interference

For Scruton, artworks are a way for humans to both interpret and comment on our experience of the world. Indispensable to this process is that the practice of creativity enables the artist to make a work that allows her to freely interpret her subject; without the medium that she chooses to represent her intentions encroaching on this process. In this sense our interest is not merely held by the subject represented but the representation of that subject matter. In representational art, argues Scruton, the appearance of the subject matter is able to tell the viewer something not only about the subject but also about the artist's thoughts about that subject:

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<sup>16</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 123

...painting being fully articulate, can attract attention as the principal expression of a process of thought. It can be understood in isolation from the special circumstances of its creation, because each and every feature of a painting can be both the upshot of an intentional act and at the same time the creation of an intentional object. The interest in the intentional object becomes an interest in the thought which it conveys.<sup>17</sup>

Characteristic of our experience of the representational work of art, for Scruton is that it be uninterrupted by any concerns which are external to the intention to see the subject in a way that is expressive of a thought about that subject; for this reason I claim that his notion of intentionality – in terms of representational art – must be understood as central to the cause of our aesthetic interest. By engaging with the work of art as an artist's interpretation, we understand our aesthetic interest to be in one sense different from our interest in the subject represented: For example, if I take an aesthetic interest towards a painting of Churchill my aesthetic interest towards the picture is held by the depiction of Churchill. My interest towards the depiction is not merely held by the subject but also – and significant in the process of determining my aesthetic interest – the depiction.

We need not treat the depiction and the subject as wholly separable, but there is, as Scruton points out a difference. An interest towards the depiction can also be characterised by the intention to see the subject in a certain way: 'We are interested in the visual relationship between the painting and subject because it is by means of this relation that the painting represents. The artist presents us with a way of seeing his subject.'<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is to the intention of the artist that we accredit as the cause of our aesthetic interest towards the depiction:

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<sup>17</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.141

<sup>18</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.125

Moreover...[the artwork] present[s] to us a vision that we attribute not to ourselves but to another person; we think of ourselves as sharing in the vision of the artist, and the omnipresence of intention changes our experience from something private into something shared. The picture presents us not merely with the perception of a man but with a thought about him, a thought embodied in perceptual form.<sup>19</sup>

An aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation, contends Scruton, is an interest towards an *appearance*. An appearance, that we appreciate as the embodiment of a thought about the subject is not merely caused by our seeing the subject depicted. Moreover, it is by recognising that the appearance of the subject in the picture is dependent on the intentions of the artist that we are able to take an aesthetic interest towards the representation:

...the painting stands in this intentional relation to its subject because of a representational act, the artist's act, and in characterizing the relation between a painting and its subject we are also describing the artist's intention. The successful realization of that intention lies in the creation of an appearance...<sup>20</sup>

Contrarily, when we take an interest towards the ideal photograph, claims Scruton, it is an interest directed towards the object photographed, not towards the artist's thought about the object. Whilst our interest towards the painting recognises that the appearance of the subject depicted acknowledges the artist's intention, in photography we are unable to characterise the appearance of the subject in such a way. In place of intentionality, in photography, we regard the appearance of the subject as causally related to the mechanically derived causal process:

In characterizing the relation between the ideal photograph and its subject, one is characterizing not an intention but a

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<sup>19</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.123

<sup>20</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.120

causal process, and while there is, as a rule, an intentional act involved, this is not an essential part of the photographic relation.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3: Intentionality and appearance

Central to our understanding of the aesthetic experience as caused by the creative act for Scruton is characterised by a lack of interest – on the part of the viewer – towards the object depicted; lacking in the sense that we appreciate not the appearance of the subject – itself – but an appearance that is caused by a process that originates in the artist’s intentions. To be able to create representational art, we might infer from Scruton’s characterisation of intentionality that the artist must be bound, only by the limits of her imagination. If the artist’s creative process is limited by the constraints of a medium – such as in photography – the viewer is unable to take an interest towards the work as expressive of a thought about the objects depicted.<sup>22</sup>

By claiming that the aesthetic representation is not dependent on our acknowledging its fidelity to the object depicted Scruton defines our aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation to be determined by the notion of disinterestedness: Not to be confused with uninterest, to be disinterested towards something is to take an interest in it for its own sake rather than its functional or instrumental value: ‘It is commonly said that an aesthetic interest in something is an interest in it for its own sake: the object is not treated as a surrogate for another; it is *itself* the principal object of attention.’<sup>23</sup> Scruton points out that when we take a disinterested interest

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<sup>21</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.121

<sup>22</sup> ‘Art is an abstraction; derive this abstraction from nature while dreaming before it, and think more of the creation that will result than of nature.’ Paul Gauguin’s criticism of his peer’s predilection for faithful rendition of nature, I claim, informs Scruton’s attitude towards intentionality. For Scruton, the artist is not in service to the objects she paints but those objects are in service to her imagination. (see Williams, R. 2004, p. 149.)

<sup>23</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 128

towards an object we do not desire to take possession over it but adopt a contemplative attitude in our appreciation of a pictorial representation.<sup>24</sup>

For example when I take an aesthetic interest towards Klimt's portrait of *Margarete Stonborough-Wittgenstein* (1905), I am not only concerned by the merit of likeness – and perhaps not at all when called upon to describe the aesthetic character of my experience of the painting. Moreover, I appreciate the painting as the artist's interpretation of the appearance of his subject: the formal qualities, unified in the picture are those elements that hold my aesthetic interest. It does not matter if, for example I notice that Klimt has misrepresented the nose of his sitter. In matters concerning my aesthetic interest I do not compare the nose of the sitter with the nose of the subject in the painting, as my interest is directed towards the detail of the representation.<sup>25</sup>

When we understand the contents to be constructed in accordance with the intentions of the picture maker we are able to appreciate the picture as representational art. Following the argument outlined in Scruton's account of the parameters of the aesthetic character of representational art, it could be concluded that the ideal mechanically reproduced image could only disrupt the potential for intentional input: 'Our ability to see intention depends on our ability to interpret an activity as characteristically human.'<sup>26</sup> Because the camera and photographic process interrupts the link between the intention and the thought, for Scruton, we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph qua photograph.

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<sup>24</sup> See Scruton (2011), p.47-52

<sup>25</sup> Scruton's use of disinterestedness in his description of the aesthetic representation is indebted to Immanuel Kant's interpretation of the concept. Although Kant was not the first philosopher to consider this notion as central to our aesthetic understanding he reflected on disinterestedness as characterized by an interest towards the formal properties of a representation. Likewise, Scruton, as we will come to understand claims that to take an interest in an image as an aesthetic representation we must be disinterested towards the depiction rather than the object depicted.

<sup>26</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.123

Phillips argues in response to Scruton's claims about causality and appearance that a photograph does not merely enable the viewer to take an interest towards the subject photographed.<sup>27</sup> Long exposures of a moving object, for example, may make some if not all of the features of that object indiscernible when seen as photographed.<sup>28</sup> Phillips argues that Scruton is wrong to talk about the photograph as having a *subject*: The photographic image is the end stage in a process that begins with the recording of a duration – the exposure – rather than the tracing of an appearance; an notion of the ideal photograph that we may infer from Scruton's interpretation: 'The ideal photograph... stands in causal relation to its subject and 'represents' its subject by reproducing its appearance.'<sup>29</sup> Yet, as Phillips contends, because the photographic process is causally related to the duration of the exposure, our interest towards the image is not necessarily observant of the object photographed:

[Nonetheless]...the appearance of the photograph does not lead the viewer to learn about the *appearance* of the photographic event. The photographic event does not have relevant visual properties – it is not a visual event. This contrasts significantly with any version of the original causal story which is concerned to establish that the photograph shares an appearance with the pro-filmic event.<sup>30</sup>

I agree with Phillips, that our interest towards the photograph does not necessarily involve the identification of the object photographed. The causal process does not necessarily produce images in which the appearance of the object photographed determines is preserved. Because a photograph is an image that records, for example either, 1/60<sup>th</sup>, 1/30<sup>th</sup>, 1/15<sup>th</sup>, etc., of a second, our interest is not merely caused by seeing the subject but an appearance generated by the duration of the exposure.

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<sup>27</sup> See Phillips, D. (2009), pp. 327-340

<sup>28</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), p. 335

<sup>29</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 130

<sup>30</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), pp. 338-339

Phillips's criticisms of Scruton's contention that our interest towards the photograph corresponds with an interest towards the appearance of the object photographed offers a fresh approach: Although the photograph does generate an appearance that is causally related to the object in front of the lens, it is not merely the appearance of that object that holds our interest. Moreover, it is an appearance that invites us to contemplate the photographic event. Although the image that holds our interest may not necessarily bear any resemblance to that photographic event: 'the appearance of the photograph leads the viewer to learn about the photographic event.'<sup>31</sup>

Phillips's conception of the photographic event poses a particular challenge to Scruton's conception of the parameters that demarcate our aesthetic interest towards the photograph; regarding our appreciation of the photograph as an appreciation of the appearance of the object photographed. Scruton contends that our interest towards the photograph corresponds to an interest in the appearance of the object photographed: 'It follows, first, that the subject of the ideal photograph must exist; secondly, that it must appear roughly as it appears in the photograph...'<sup>32</sup> For Phillips, because a photograph does not necessarily generate an appearance that relates to the appearance of the object photographed it is not inevitable that our interest will be held by the appearance of the object photographed: 'The photographic image stands in a merely causal relation to those objects [photographed], but this does not entail that they must be the subject of our interest when we view a photograph.'<sup>33</sup>

Phillips's conception of our interest towards the photograph as causally related to an event rather than the appearance of the object photographed, I contend enables us to reconsider our approach towards the photographer's intentionality. If it is not merely the appearance of the object that holds our interest, but an appearance that is related to the duration of the exposure I claim that we may learn something about the photographer's intentions as forming in the event. However, in this sense, the intentions of the photographer, I claim do not form in the same way as Scruton

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<sup>31</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), p.338

<sup>32</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 131

<sup>33</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), pp. 339-340

describes. For Scruton, intentionality is recognised in representational art as the creation of an appearance. As a photographer is not able to control all aspects of the photographic event insofar as its appearance in the final image is concerned, the intention cannot be understood as central to the cause of an aesthetic interest.

However, I claim that the photographer's intention does in some way cause our interest towards the photographic representation. Yet, it is an intention that may be described as *de-centred*; we do not appreciate the appearance of the object photographed as causally related to the photographer's intentions but we may take an interest towards the appearance as communicative of a thought about the photographic event. When we take an interest towards the photograph, I claim that we do not necessarily take an interest towards the way something looks in the photograph but what the appearance can tell us about the photographic event. As the photographer Joel Meyerowitz contends, our interest towards the photograph does not merely relate to the way something appears but what can be said about the possibilities that we relate to the appearance: 'I find it strangely beautiful that the camera with its inherent clarity of object and detail can produce images that in spite of themselves offer possibilities to be more than they are.'<sup>34</sup> Our interest in the ideal photograph, for Meyerowitz often enables the viewer to engage with the photograph as representative of a number of possible descriptions of the photographic event. In appreciating that our interest is not necessarily guided by a unified intention we are, I claim, recognising the configuration of the photographer's intention; to appreciate the photograph as an open description or narrative that is causally related to the photographic event.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bannon, A. (2003), p.666

<sup>35</sup> In relating a meaning to an appearance that is generated by the photographic process I claim that we are taking an interest towards an event that we are distanced from. In one sense, it is fitting to describe the representational meaning of a photograph as a possibility, as evocative of Freud's concept of *the Uncanny*. In the Freudian uncanny we are able to appreciate something as both familiar and strange at the same time. When we take an interest towards a photograph, acknowledging the mechanically derived causal process may convince us that our interest is caused by the object photographed. Yet, in recognising that our interest towards the subject photographed is situated within a moment in time, from which we are distanced, our interest towards the subject may seem strangified. In taking an interest in Meyerowitz's *Falling Man* (1967), for example, the scene that we see depicted may lead us to conclude several possibilities that we believe to have caused the man to fall over. None of these possibilities are conclusively rendered in Meyerowitz's photograph and therefore our interest towards the photograph may be described as evocative of the uncanny; whilst the viewer is able to see what Meyerowitz has photographed, it is through the eyes



1. Joel Meyerowitz, *Fallen Man*, 1967

An understanding of the notion of intentionality – that I intend to introduce in this thesis – may be described as de-centred in terms of its configuration in the ideal photograph. To explore the possibility that photography does enable intentionality it is necessary to make a criticism of the possibility that the media employed in creating the technologically reproduced image can offer us a different approach towards describing intentionality in representational art.

#### **1.4: Technology and the role of the artist**

To criticise the view inferred in Scruton's argument that technological advance is harmful to creative practice of making representational art I appeal to a point raised in Walter Benjamin's essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.<sup>36</sup> For Benjamin, the new forms of mass production that emerged during the nineteenth century quite simply transformed creative practice. As Noël Carroll notes, technological advance, for Benjamin irrevocably alters our conception of the artwork. Not only has it changed the way in which we are able to access artworks but also how they are used to engage with the world:

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of the camera that we appreciate the photograph as *real*. The event itself that Meyerowitz has photographed is for the viewer *real* only as a possibility. Whilst I think that an exploration of Freud's notion of the *uncanny* may prove useful I do not take up such a study in this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), pp.211-244

Mass reproducibility changes the structure of art. Each age evolves a different sort of art relative to its productive forces, since changes in the productive forces inevitably bring about changes in its historical relation to the ideological superstructure of society and to the existing social relations of the productive forces of the relevant epoch.<sup>37</sup>

For Benjamin, the new forms of production also enable us to revisit a conception of creative practice of making representational art: Not only in relation to the artist's toolkit but also as a reassessment of the relationship between the artist and intentionality; recognising that *appearance* is causally related to a mechanically derived causal process, the photographer does not seek to create an image in which the appearance is an embodiment of an intention. By choosing to photograph, I contend, the attitude towards the expression of a thought is different; rather than, as Scruton contends, simply absent: 'The result is that, from studying a photograph [the viewer] may come to know how something looked in the way that he might know it if he had actually seen it.'<sup>38</sup>

Since photography stands in causal relation to the objects photographed, there is as a consequence in its creative appropriation a transformation of the role of the artist; in relation to how the artist is able to use that medium to express a thought about the subject. For Benjamin, the potential for creativity in the representational arts progresses through the emergence of new technical means of production: 'The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard...'<sup>39</sup>

For Benjamin, artworks before photography maintained their value due in part to the elevation of the status of the artist. The act of creating artworks and our conception of human involvement, for Benjamin is challenged in the creative appropriation of the photographic medium: A culture

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<sup>37</sup> Carroll, N. (1998), p.120

<sup>38</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 130

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p230

of the artist genius, he claims, grew from an appreciation of the work of art that due in part for its propensity to compel contemplation developed a value that had its base in ritualistic tradition:

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition... Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult... We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind.<sup>40</sup>

Photography requires the artist to take a different approach towards her creative practice. Not least because the photographer can, due to the causal relationship, only make a picture of her subject if it was present when the picture is taken. For Benjamin, this has the propensity to disrupt what he perceives as the false ritualistic basis upon which we appreciate representational art: ‘for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.’<sup>41</sup>

The photographer argues Benjamin, in comparison with the painter is unable to create an ideal photograph that removes the subject from the environment in which they were photographed; in a painting our appreciation of the subject corresponds to the artist’s thought – communicated in the generation of an appearance – rather than the subject before the lens. For Benjamin, because ideal photographs are images that represent – for example – 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second of a particular scene they are able to give new insight into the subject they depict. In discussing the photographer’s intention, therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the parameters of expression. Benjamin illustrates this point by comparing the differences between the painter and the

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<sup>40</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p. 217

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.218. It should be noted that Benjamin’s conception of the value of photographic art is motivated towards a particular political end – that being, at his time of writing a tool to usurp the fascism. There has been much criticism of Benjamin’s view of value of the mechanically reproduced image. I will consider, briefly, the more important criticisms of his position in the *Mechanical Art* essay in chapter 7.

photographer to that of the differences between the magician and the surgeon. The painter in his analogy is regarded to be synonymous with the magician, insofar as he remains at a remove from the world which he represents in his work. The photographer is described to be analogous to the surgeon – due to the mechanisation of her tool-kit – must engage directly with her subject: ‘The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself... [and] he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body...’<sup>42</sup>

Benjamin’s analogy, I contend, underlines a difference in kind in the creative appropriation of the two media used in the creation of representational art. Whilst I do not agree with his view that photography has transformed pictorial representation I do think it offers a viable alternative to Scruton’s conception of representational art. In comparison with Scruton’s view, I think that Benjamin recognises a difference in kind and more importantly offers a way of approaching this difference – that does not seek to demand a likeness in the two artform. In order to explore the photographer’s intention further, recognising the relationship between the photographer and environment in which she is working as influential may be useful in garnering an understanding of the photographer’s intention. Scruton’s view by contrast, I claim, is too narrow insofar as he does not offer an exploration of the possibility that intentionality available to the painter is rejected by the photographer. Whilst this may not undermine his claims relating to – what I refer to as – a centralised notion of intentionality it does, I contend, illuminate the need for a fresh approach towards an understanding of intentionality involved in the photographic artform.

### **1.5: The fantasy of technology**

Central to Scruton’s description of representational art is that the depiction not only tells us how something looked but how it looked to the artist: ‘This is what makes painting and literature into representational arts: they are arts which can be appreciated as they are in themselves and at the

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<sup>42</sup> See Benjamin, W. (1999), p.227

same time understood in terms of a descriptive thought which they articulate.<sup>43</sup> When the outcome of creative process is dependent on a machine, the potential for imaginative expression is by implication, for Scruton, disrupted.

As a consequence the contents of the work are not wholly attributable to the intentions and imaginative intellect of the artist: Instead of taking an interest towards the artwork as a product of the artist's skill and imagination, for Scruton, the imaginary quality is replaced by a fantasy. In the case of photography, this is because the object of our interest is not mediated by a thought but is present to our visual experience. Therefore, according to Scruton, we are unable to take an interest towards a thought about that object:

And surely it is this too which makes photography incapable of being an erotic art, in that it presents us with the object of lust rather than a symbol of it: it gratifies the fantasy of desire long before it has succeeded in understanding or expressing the fact of it.<sup>44</sup>

For example we may marvel at the intricate construction of the imaginary landscapes in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings; however, in keeping with Scruton's terms, we are unable to afford the same kind of interest towards a Joel Peter-Witkin photograph. This is because – in the case of Peter-Witkin – our interest, argues Scruton, is still determined by those objects depicted rather than the depiction itself. The intention of the photographer does not guide or generate an aesthetic interest: 'Even in the case of a docile fantasy, it must be remembered that the desire which underlies it is real... The subject of fantasy really does want something... but he wants it in the form of a substitute.'<sup>45</sup>

Pictures that are produced by technologically advanced media, for Scruton it would seem are unable to engage our imaginative interest as aesthetic representations, but provoke a fascination towards the object depicted. Therefore, the idea mechanically reproduced image, for Scruton, may only disrupt the relationship between the artist and the creation of representational art.

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<sup>43</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.141

<sup>44</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.147

<sup>45</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.153

## 1.6: The fictive in representational art

Ideal photographs, insofar as they are causally related to the object before the lens allow us to contemplate and criticise the object photographed in some way. In this sense our aesthetic appreciation of the photograph does not relate the appearance of its contents as causally related to the artist's intentions. The appearance that we appreciate in the photograph is, for Scruton, a duplicate of the object that it depicts and therefore to see its appearance as pointing to a gesture by the artist is to appreciate not an intention but makes a fetish of its appearance: '...a fantasy desire will characteristically seek, not a highly mannered or literary description, not a painterly portrayal, of its chosen subject, but a perfect simulacrum – such as a waxwork, or a photograph.'<sup>46</sup>

For Scruton, in order to call a picture representational art our interest towards it must recognise that the appearance generated in the creation of an image is communicative of a thought about the object represented: '[representational works of art]... present to us a vision that we attribute not to ourselves but to another person; we think of ourselves as sharing in the vision of the artist, and the omnipresence of the intention changes our experience from something private into something shared.'<sup>47</sup> Primarily, this concerns the value of intention: if we are to take an aesthetic interest towards the picture then the intention must be regarded as the aspect that is central to the cause of that interest.

For Scruton, the impact of mechanical media on artistic creativity is potentially negative because in the process of making a picture, it is the reproduction of an appearance rather the intention to create an appearance that holds our interest. Because the photographer is unable to use her medium to interpret the appearance of her subject – in a manner which does not involve a

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<sup>46</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 152

<sup>47</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 123

mechanically derived causal process – the viewer is unable to appreciate the outcome as expressive of an intention to see the subject in a certain way:

You cannot paint modern life, merely by producing recognizable images of it – for after all, there are images of modern life in photographs, and photographs are a thousand miles from paintings, even when (to the unthinking person) they look the same. You can paint modern life only if you produce your image of it as *painters* do – which means using brush and pigments with same broad intention as they were used by Titian, Rembrandt or Gainsborough.<sup>48</sup>

I agree with Scruton that the photographer is unable to exact the same intentional control over her subject as is the painter. However, I contend that if we are to use a notion of intentionality as central to the measure of representational art – as I claim that Scruton does – then we disallow a fulfilling investigation of artistic photography. For Scruton, acknowledging intent is central to our recognising creative practice and this is evidenced in our understanding that the artistic representation as in one sense a fictionalisation of the subject; insofar as our interest towards the subject represented in the picture is attributed to the artist's interpretation of that subject's appearance: 'We see not only a man on a horse but a man of certain character and bearing. And *what* we see is determined not by independent properties of the subject not by our understanding the painting.'<sup>49</sup>

Because the viewer appreciates the depiction as also determined by the artist's intention, interest may also be caused by contemplating the subject in a manner which the artist is inviting us to appreciate its appearance; as Scruton contends in his essay, *In Search of the Aesthetic*: 'Representation is a form of presentation, and it is not the thing itself, but the way that thing is presented, that captures our attention. A fictional world is being presented to us, and it is in and through the presentation that this fictional world enters our thoughts.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), pp.221-222

<sup>49</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.123

<sup>50</sup> Scruton, R. (2007), p.247

Once again, I agree that this is characteristic of our interest towards paintings; that we take an interest towards the representation as, in one sense, an embodiment of the artist's intention. Yet I do not think that we need look for this quality in representational photography. The artist – in taking a photograph – is unable to sublimate the subject within her intention subject due to the causal process. The photographer, as Elliott Erwitt notes is interested in exploring the narratives found in the event. Rather than attempting to convey a thought about the objects they photograph, photographers often describe their intentions as a kind of *response* to a *narrative* that they encounter in an event:

I rarely stage pictures. I wait for them... let them take their own time. Sometimes, you think something's going to happen, so you wait. It may pan out; it may not. That's a wonderful thing about pictures – things *can* happen. It's not that I'm against staging, or anything else, when you're not cheating or working with false purposes. Even as you wait, you are, in a way, arranging and manipulating. You're getting ready to frame the event...<sup>51</sup>

The photographer's intention, I contend, does not circumscribe our interest towards the representational meaning. In this thesis I will describe the photographer's intention as present, yet de-centred. In taking this approach, however, it is first necessary to examine an understanding of the parameters of intentionality in representational art and consider this in relation to photographic art.

We have so far considered what I perceive to be an important aspect of Scruton's complaint regarding the potential for a photograph to be considered as representational art: That being a criticism of the impact of technologically advanced media on creative practice and in particular human intention. My next task is to underline those characteristics that Scruton claims to

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<sup>51</sup> Erwitt, E. (1988), p. 10

describe the boundaries of artistic photography. In doing so, I will also present my own interpretation of the aims of artistic photography as a counter weight to Scruton's position.

### **1.7: Photography as a means to an end**

Critical to Scruton's sceptical view of the potential to appreciate a photograph as representation art concerns the disruption of human intentionality due to the mechanically derived causal process; which causes the viewer to engage with the ideal photograph as an image that is transparent to its subject. He regards to notion of intentionality as axiomatic in terms of its ability to enable the viewer to take an aesthetic interest towards the work as representational art – as expressive of the artist's thought:

Our ability to see the intention depends on our ability to interpret an activity as characteristically human, and here, in the case of representational art, it involves our understanding the dimensions and conventions of the medium... to understand art is to be familiar with the constraints imposed by the medium and to be able to separate that which is due to the medium from that which is due to man.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the mechanically generated causal process, the aspect that we may attribute to human activity – the intentional – is for Scruton, removed in the ideal photograph. This is countenanced by the causal relationship between the subject and photographic representation. So our interest towards the photograph is premised not on the potential to interpret the appearance of the picture as evidence of *human activity* but a causally derived mechanical relationship: 'if  $x$  is a photograph of a man, there is a particular man of whom  $x$  is a photograph.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.122/123

<sup>53</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.121

However, it is difficult to think of a tool that could not be reasonably understood to potentially disrupt by happenstance or design, the intentional content – that we may take to be an embodiment of a thought about the subject photographed. A painter may choose a certain brush for its particular affect, just as the sculptor may use a chainsaw effectively on a block of wood but not marble. The material tools of a particular medium both guide and shape the artist's interpretation and to this end guides our understanding of the parameters of intention; thus allowing us to appreciate both the artist's mastery over and use of the tools of her chosen medium.

To think of the structure of representational meaning as defined by the artist's intention, I claim, potentially eliminates any further discussion of photographer's intentionality. In terms of the photographic representation, I think that Scruton's argument reveals an interesting gap in our understanding of creativity and intentionality. Accepting that a photographer, by photographing is unable to create an image that may be appreciated as causally related to a thought about that object is problematic to a positive discussion of photographic art. This view is consistent with an understanding of the aesthetic representation that relies on a centralised notion of intention. I contend that such a configuration disallows a fulfilling discussion of photographic artform.

Re-considering the constitution of intentionality in photographic representation enables us to take an alternate approach towards our understanding of the formation of the photographer's intention. If we conclude, as I claim Scruton does, that our interest towards the photograph is co-existent with an interest towards the object photographed some exploration of photographer's attitude towards taking an aesthetically pleasing picture of her subject may offer some useful insight. In Scruton's examination of the ideal photograph, our aesthetic interest, he argues, is bound up in the subject rather than the depiction of the subject: 'The photograph is a means to the end of seeing its subject; in painting, on the other hand, the subject is the means to the end of its own representation.'<sup>54</sup> However, in *seeing* the subject photographed, I claim that our interest may also be affected by the photographer's intentions. Whilst, I agree with Scruton, that a photographer may not exact the same kind of intentional control as the painter, we may appreciate a different kind of relationship between the photographer and her intention; and

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<sup>54</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 133

consequently, as I will argue, the notion of intentionality has a different kind of configuration in the photographic artform.

Consider for example the artistry of the portrait photographer, Yousuf Karsh. Karsh is perhaps most noted for his wartime portrait of Winston Churchill. Karsh maintained that his expressive portraits were achieved by engaging in a most uncommon manner with his subject. This is perhaps supported by the now mythical claim that Churchill's stoic expression – in the iconic photograph – was caused by Karsh physically removing the trademark cigar from the lips of the British Prime Minister; this fact is of course not apparent in the photograph itself. Nonetheless, I claim that whilst Karsh's interaction with his subject is not central to the cause of our aesthetic interest towards the image it does indeed contribute.

In conversation with Karsh, George Bernard Shaw underlined a quality lacking in photography that the painting has in abundance, which paradoxically, is perhaps also central to its creative potential. Shaw observed that the painter due to the necessity of presenting her subject matter through imaginative interpretation is often unable to produce an image which allows the subject to speak for himself: 'The trouble with painters is that they put far too much of themselves into their work. That is the reason portraits of me make me look as if I took spirits.'<sup>55</sup>

The photographer, whilst unable to put her own identity into the work – in the same manner as available to the painter – I claim found an alternate way of making aesthetically pleasing representation of her subject. What is most powerful about Karsh's portraiture, I contend, is the way in which he regards his expressive potential as emergent through the his interaction with the subject; creating an image that holds our interest not merely because of the way the subject appears but also due our acknowledging that the appearance is causally related to the photographic event. The photographer's intention, for Karsh, does not emerge in the appearance of the subject but by contemplating the appearance as situated to the photographic event.

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<sup>55</sup> Shaw, G.B. in *Life Magazine*, February 7<sup>th</sup> 1944 Published by Roy E. Larson, p.87



2. Yousuf Karsh, *Winston Churchill*, 1941

It is Scruton's assessment that the aesthetic representation holds our interest as not only a representation of the depicted subject but also as a thought about that subject. Mechanical causality, following Scruton's argument, disrupts the human intention, insofar as we are unable to perceive the depiction as an expression of the artist's intention: 'In characterizing the relation between ideal photograph and its subject, one is characterizing not an intention but a causal process...'<sup>56</sup> We therefore, are unable to take an interest towards the photograph as expressive of a thought about that subject.

Whilst Scruton's thesis is helpful as an explication of the creative difference between the photograph and painting it leaves us with a gap in our understanding; insofar as a description of creative potential of the photograph is concerned. I aim to show that our appreciation of a picture

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<sup>56</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 121

as an aesthetic representation need not be dependent on our *seeing* a depiction as expressive of the artist's intention; that the aesthetic representation is an interpretation of the subject. Moreover, I think there is a need to present a positive thesis of the photographic that does not seek to ignore the two features that emerge from Scruton's argument; the lack of intentional and interpretational control.

### **1.8: The photographer's intention?**

For Scruton, the first problem we encounter when attempting to carve out a semblance of the intention in the photographic artform concerns its configuration in the creation of an appearance: 'Of course I may take a photograph of a draped nude and call it *Venus*, but insofar as this can be understood as an exercise in fiction, it should not be thought of as a photographic representation of Venus but rather as the photograph of a representation of Venus.'<sup>57</sup> Any sense of the intentional that we may appreciate is not a property of the photograph but the object photographed. This is because, as Scruton's asserts causal provenance dictates that '...representation is not a property of the [photograph].'<sup>58</sup> For him, the representation takes place not in the photograph but in the subject. Therefore, our appreciation of the representation of Venus, he argues, is directed towards the subject rather than the photograph – as having the quality of being an aesthetic representation.

An important characteristic of this understanding of the aesthetic representation is that it enables the viewer to take an imaginative interest towards the depiction. Whilst we do not necessarily need say that the depicted subject is imaginary we may take an interest towards its depiction as imaginative. In this sense we treat the depiction as an expression of a thought about the subject; '... it is characteristic of aesthetic interest that most of its objects in representation are imaginary... It is important because it enables the presentation of scenes and characters toward which we have only contemplative attitudes.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.131

<sup>58</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.139

<sup>59</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.127

Since, for Scruton, an ideal photograph does not enable the artist – in photographing – to interpret the appearance of their subject we are unable to see the contents of the photograph as communicative of a thought that is imagined by the photographer. We can, of course look at a photograph of Andy dressed up as Venus and take an aesthetic interest in Andy's representation of Venus but for Scruton, '...the representational act, the act which embodies the thought, is completed before the photograph is ever taken.'<sup>60</sup>

Scruton's argument that photographs do not engage our imaginative interest hinges on our accepting that the creation of representational art is dependent on a notion of intentionality that is central to the cause of our interest. For the photographer, I think that it is not necessarily important to be able to interpret the subject in a manner which is available to the painter; and although Scruton does not claim that photographers assume that a camera enables them to *interpret* their subject matter he does claim that such a use would *misinterpret* the *logical* ideal of her medium; he illustrates this limitation of the medium as evidence to his claim that we are unable to appreciate photographs as aesthetic representations. '...when the photographer strives towards representational art, he inevitably seems to move away from that ideal of photography which I have been describing toward the ideal of painting.'<sup>61</sup> I claim that by discussing what is peculiar to the photographer's approach towards her creative practice will enable us to see why photographs can be valuable as aesthetic representations.

Scruton's discussion of the aesthetic potential of photographic representation, I claim, is lacking in its exploration of the medium as used by photographers with the aims of making an artistic representation. I think acknowledging this lacking is important in terms of our understanding how the medium of photography enables the artist to interact imaginatively with her subject. By exploring how photographers engage with their subject, I aim to underline an approach towards representational art that is peculiarly photographic.

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<sup>60</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.131

<sup>61</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.137

## 1.9: possibility and representation

I claim that it is by exploiting the causally derived mechanical process that a photographer can provoke our imaginative and contemplative engagement. Scruton contends our aesthetic interest towards a photograph is caused by attending to the appearance of the object photographed rather than the intention to see the object as it appears in the depiction. We may infer from this, therefore, that the aesthetically meaningful content of the photograph is provided by attending to the object before the lens: the causal process disallows us to appreciate the photograph as an expression of the photographer's intention – to see the subject in a certain way. The way the subject appears in the photograph, therefore, we do not attribute to the photographer. '[Photography] can present us with what we see, but it cannot tell us how to see it.'<sup>62</sup>

We may, for example find a photograph sad because of the way that the subject appears to us in the photograph. For Scruton, sadness is represented by the subject, not the photograph. In reiterating this claim, I contend that we also find a positive view that discovers a manner by which photographs engage our imaginative interest as representational art. Central to this positive view is developing an aesthetic understanding of the photographer's approach.

Meyerowitz in a documentary on street photography illustrates neatly the creative impetus to photograph. His comments may also, I claim, show us more generally why it is possible to appreciate photographs as aesthetic representations: '... the camera puts a frame around life. What happens in the frame is the content. [The photographer] can put together things that do not necessarily fit together. [The photographer] is just framing what's possible.'<sup>63</sup>

What I take Meyerowitz to mean by this in more general terms is that photographs do not merely show us how something looked. A photograph may provoke contemplative interest because the photographic frame presents the viewer with a number of possibilities – ways of taking an interest towards the subject as photographed. I claim that it is not necessary to attribute these

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<sup>62</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.133

<sup>63</sup> Meyerowitz, J.(2003)

possibilities to our seeing the subject but, more importantly, our seeing the subject as photographed.

Attributing a *possibility* to a photographer's intention requires us to satisfy two queries; firstly, we need to know how a possibility may be causally related to an intention. Secondly – and perhaps more importantly – we should understand what is meant by our use of the term *intention*. Answering the second query is a more involving task than the former and is the broad aim of this thesis. In order to demonstrate the parameters of the photographer's intention it is important to illuminate a difference in the notion of intentionality: In particular, concerning the difference of its configuration in painting and photography.

In painting, I have argued that – as Scruton claims – intentionality is central to the cause of our aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation. In photography, however, the intention is not central to the cause of our aesthetic interest; due to the mechanically derived causal process that is involved in the creation of a photograph. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the human intention is absent in photography. Informed by Phillips's conception of the photographic process, I contend that an aesthetic study of photography has more to learn from exploring the photographic image as causally related to the photographic event rather than merely the object photographed. This conception of the photograph enables us to counter Scruton's claim that an interest towards the photograph may be defined as an interest towards the object photographed.

Because our interest is causally related to the photographic event and not merely the object photographed, an interest towards the appearance is, I claim, situated in the photographic event. Whilst we may be familiar with the appearance generated by the mechanically derived causal process we are estranged from the photographic event, to which the appearance is causally related. A possibility, as I claim it is understood in Meyerowitz's conception is descriptive of an aesthetic interest towards the photographic event: In taking an aesthetic interest towards the photographic event, I contend, we recognise that the meanings we attribute to the appearance generated by the photographic process not concretised in the image; but emerges as possibilities, nascent in the photographic event. The photographer's intention, likewise, may be described as

emergent in the photographic event as a possibility. Therefore, we find that the photographer's intention is de-centred in our understanding of it as causative of our aesthetic interest.

Scruton does consider the possibility that by the measure of framing that we are able to appreciate the photograph as representing an idea or thought about the object photographed. Yet he contends that the 'representational act, the act which embodies the representational thought, is completed before the photograph is ever taken.'<sup>64</sup> Whilst I am inclined to agree with Scruton that the appearance of the object in the ideal photograph is causally related to the object rather than the photographer's thought about that object, this does not necessarily extend to the representational act. In considering the photograph as a document of the photographic event, the meaning that we attribute to the object as it appears in the ideal photograph need not correspond to the appearance of that object.

To consider this further I contend that we must explore what is characteristic about Meyerowitz's claim that photography enables us to take an interest not merely towards the subject photographed but also the possibilities that are nascent in the photographic depiction of that subject. By taking an interest towards the subject as meaningful in a number of possible expressions, I contend that we do not merely relate these possibilities to the subject but the representation.

I am, in this instance using the word *possibility* to illustrate a difference between the subject and its appearance in the photograph; insofar as our seeing the subject in a photograph may cause us to afford it certain qualities that are not necessarily caused by seeing the subject but by responding to our seeing that subject as photographed; which I claim may provoke our imaginative interest. Edward Weston's *Pepper No.30* (1930) is a striking example insofar as lighting and composition seem to underline its shape in such a way that the vegetable is anthropomorphised and we also see it as a strong man flexing his muscles. Weston found in photography an ability to create images in which the meaning did not merely form in the object photographed but possible meanings that are nascent in the objects photographed:

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<sup>64</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 131

...I have on occasion use the expression, ‘to make a pepper more than a pepper.’ I now realize it is a misleading phrase. I did not mean ‘different’ from a pepper, but a pepper, *plus*, - an intensification of its own important form and texture, - a revelation... Photograph as a creative expression – or what you will – must be seeing *plus*. Seeing alone means factual recording. Photography is not at all seeing in the sense that the eyes see...<sup>65</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that in lieu of this that our interest towards the object photographed is separable from an interest caused by that object – as photographed. Indeed I agree with Scruton insofar as he claims that an ideal photograph directs our interest towards the object photographed: ‘The camera, then, is being used not to represent something but to point to it.’<sup>66</sup> Yet in pointing out the subject, and by virtue of our noticing not *simply* the subject but the subject as it appears in the photograph, the camera also enables the viewer to appreciate not merely the object photographed but its emergence in the photographic event. The appearance of the object photographed, although related to that object is not by extension determined by its appearance – before the lens; the photographic event, that has been described as the duration of the recording process is the quality that determines the parameters of the causal relationship.

### **1.10: The Aesthetic possibility in the event**

As the photographer Duane Michals observes, the subject photographed is not necessarily of primary importance in the photographic representation. For the photographer it is not merely the appearance that generates representational meaning but the possibilities that we find in the appearance that are representative of the photographic event. For Michals, photography enables him to create appearances that embody not necessarily a thought but a narrative like structure

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<sup>65</sup> Weston, E, (1973), p.240

<sup>66</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.132

and therefore, do not merely direct our interest towards the subject photographed: ‘Photography deals exquisitely with appearances, but nothing is what it appears to be.’<sup>67</sup>

Charlie White is one such photographer whose work explores the photographic appearance as a representation of a thought about the photographic event. His often surreal images and elaborate arrangements frequently incorporate weird looking puppets – merging studio portraiture with digital manipulation techniques.<sup>68</sup> Photography allows White’s suggestive narratives to flourish, I contend, due to their being rooted in the mechanically derived causal process; insofar as we are unable to see meaning as unified by a solitary intention, meaning emerges as a suggestive and complex narrative.

For White, the thought that he seeks to communicate is not intended to be a unifying element. White is interested in exploring the psychology of human relationships, in particular in social and institutional settings. Therefore, it is important that the representational meaning in his work remains nascent: White wants to acknowledge that in the complex rituals of our social relations the way things appear to us can sometimes deny or even mask meaningful experience. The ideal photograph for White enables the creation of representational art in a way that is different from painting: in painting, the representational meaning relates to a thought about the subject, but in the ideal photograph the source of the meaning relationship is not limited to a single unifying source: ‘A picture is just a million questions now... Did it really happen? Do I believe it? The picture doesn't lie. It is a lie.’<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Michals, D. in Johnson, B. (1198), p. 116

<sup>68</sup> Although White’s photographs often involve digital manipulation techniques, I claim that they do not transmute the logical idea of photography. His photographic depictions are themselves interesting not as works that determined by the alteration of appearance but appearance that is dependent on the mechanically derived causal process. Indeed, I claim that this process is central to our understanding of White’s intentions.

<sup>69</sup> White, C. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.02/white.html> (accessed 13/04/12)



3. Charlie White, from the series *Understanding Joshua*, 2001

In the series *Understanding Joshua* (2001) White creates a number of scenes which to a varying degree we might call familiar – a party scene, a lovers’ quarrel, for example. Yet the inclusion of a grotesque puppet – whom we may or may not take to be Joshua – seems to disrupt a sense of familiarity that we attribute to the event. The puppet acts as a foil and challenge to the meaning relationship that we ordinarily attribute to a social gathering. This coupled with an overt colour palette, his tableaux seem to draw our attention to complex tensions present in the meaningfulness of appearance; an element which is unified by the documentary quality of his images.

For White the camera offers the artist the ability to explore the tension that exists between appearance and meaning. The representational meaning of his work is not embodied by a centralised intention, as Scruton argues is important to our appreciation of representational art. In White’s work, the intentional becomes – purposefully – de-centred; the meanings that we attribute to the representation emerge not as unified by the intentions but as fragments or possibilities that relate to the photographic event; a gesture, colour scheme or expression strikes

our interest not merely towards the subject photographed but as representative of the photographic event. Yet for White, we are unable to access the meaning relationships that form in the event. The meaning relationships are nascent in the recognisable gestures – as possibilities – that we attribute not merely to the object photographed but our understanding of the photographic event.

In another example of White's work – *US Gymnastics Team* (2005) from the series *Everything is American* (2005) – we see an injured young gymnast – apparently in pain – in the arms of her concerned instructor. Two young gymnasts behind the central characters look at the scene in the foreground with a distinct lack of interest. Their apparently false and potentially hostile postures create a surreal sense of tension. White's series often embodies a strange or *defamiliarised* narrative: In one sense the arrangement seems to reflect a decisive or intentional input, but this is negated or at least challenged by the causal derivation of the photographic capture: the viewer is unable to say with certainty that this is what White is intending to express. Yet, this sense of uncertainty, in the meaning of an appearance is the foundation upon which the parameters of his intentions are built.

For White appearances can be both alienating and distancing insofar as the connections formed between their meanings are concerned: Photographs document the subject before the lens but the meaning we afford the subject photographed may be different to the meaning we afford the subject itself. Nonetheless, we do attach certain meanings to the subject – by virtue of appealing to the appearance of the subject photographed. For White, the camera is able to show a tension in this relationship; his images explore the way that appearances communicate meanings and are representations of how this effects our interaction with the world: White's use of the camera underlines the role of the photographer as different in kind to that of the painter: His intentions emerge not through the creation of an appearance but the narrative structure of his images, causally related to the photographic event. Yet intentionality is not a unifying element like we understand it in painting. In order to consider how intention differs from its place in painting, it is necessary to explore the relationship between meaning and appearance in the photographic representation.



4. Charlie White, *US Gymnastics Team*, 2005

### 1.10: The art of mirrors

For Scruton, to reiterate, the mechanically derived causal process interrupts, and is a quality that is counter-intuitive to the creative practice of representational art. If an ideal photograph engenders an interesting appearance it is the subject photographed that we find interesting rather than the photograph: ‘The ideal photograph also yields an appearance, but the appearance is not interesting as a realization of an intention but rather as a record of how an actual object looked.’<sup>70</sup>

In this chapter I have begun to explore the idea that contra-Scruton we are able to appreciate the photograph as representational art. In order to obtain a correct approach to an understanding of the photographic representation I claim that we must reconsider our configuration of intentionality: I have introduced the notion of a de-centred intentionality as peculiar to our

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<sup>70</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.121

appreciation of the photographer's representation. My aim in offering a different approach towards describing the representational meaning in photography is to produce an understanding that enables a more fulfilling exploration of the creative parameters of the photographic medium.

Scruton does accept the possibility that we are able to appreciate the ideal photograph as different from an appreciation of the object in the photograph. He agrees that we are able to take an interest towards the photograph that is to some extent removed from how we would ordinarily view the subject photographed: 'A photograph will be designed to show its subject in a particular light and from a particular point of view, and by doing so it may reveal things about it that we do not normally observe and, perhaps, that we might not have observed but for the photograph.'<sup>71</sup>

Yet, for Scruton, this does not provoke us to think of the photograph as an aesthetic representation. A photographer, for Scruton, cannot make a picture that is representational of a thought about its subject. Nevertheless they are able to show us the subject in interesting new ways. Although photographs allow us to see the object photographed in new and interesting ways it is the object photographed and not the representation that is the cause of our interest: 'The art of mirrors may, like the art of photography, sometimes involve representation... But representation will not be a property of the *mirror*.'<sup>72</sup> For Scruton then, aesthetic representation is bound up in the intention of the artist; by taking an interest towards something as an aesthetic representation we take an interest towards something insofar as it is caused by a human intention:

The image becomes articulate [as an aesthetic representation] when (a) the maker of the image can seriously address himself to the task of communicating thought through the image alone, and (b) when the spectator can see and understand the image in terms of the process of thought which it expresses.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.139

<sup>72</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.139

<sup>73</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.141

Therefore, crucial to our conception of the aesthetic representation is that our attention is held not by the object photographed but the artist's intention to see the object the way it appears in the photograph. Scruton's claims about what I refer to as a centralised notion of intentionality in our conception of representational art enable us to reflect on the work as in one sense embodying the identity of the artist; insofar as we acknowledge that the content of the representation leads us to consider a thought about the subject depicted; by acknowledging the image as the communication of a thought we are given access to the way in which the artist sees the world and its subject matter, and thus we find in the work an imprint of the artist's identity. The identity of the artist is important to our recognition of the work as an embodiment of an intention, insofar as it is important to our understanding of an image as representational art. Photography, according to Scruton does not provoke this kind of interest precisely because the mechanical element of the medium disrupts the transmission of the photographers thought. Because of the mechanically derived causal relationship, the photographic representation does not tell us what the photographer thinks about the subject, only that: '...from studying a photograph ... [we] may come to know how something looking in the way that ... [we] might know it if ... [we] had actually seen it.'<sup>74</sup>

In this sense, for Scruton, appearance emerges not as a communication of a thought but where a thought is communicated it is attributed to a thought about the subject as it appears in the photograph. What is communicated – in terms of the artist's intent – is not an interpretation but as Scruton argues, an appearance which we relate to the subject as it appears in the photograph. This appearance in turn conveys to us a certain meaning which we may relate to the subject.

I agree with Scruton, insofar as he contends that the artist is unable to use the camera to create an ideal photograph in which an appearance is representative of a thought about the object photographed. Yet, I also think that to take this as concluding our discussion of the creative potential of photography is a mistake and is illustrative of a gap in our exploration of representational art. Rather than assess the potential for the camera to enable the artist to make a

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<sup>74</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.130

picture in which the appearance of the subject is intentionally created I think it may be more interesting to see how mechanical causality has impacted positively on artistic intention.

### **1.11: Challenging the role of the artist**

We may find a useful example of this in the work of Gillian Wearing. In her *Album* (2003) series, she creates a body of work both using and re-creating her family portraits. In each image from the series Wearing recreates a photograph of one family member, using herself as the model. The work examines the notion of identity and roles within the family structure. For Wearing, photography allows the artist to challenge the notion of representational art as dependent on a centralised conception of intentionality; in her work the expression of a thought is ambiguous in its formation, insofar as it does not circumscribe our aesthetic interest. Wearing's work does not merely share a thought about her subjects but demonstrates the complexity of this task; it is not just the thought that we engage with but its context, and this aspect, for Wearing can become overwhelming or make an expression fragmented.

Her appropriation of the photographic media is also important to our understanding of her intentions. Had she used painting to explore the same ideas, our interest towards the appearance generated in the representation would have been unified by Wearing's intentions. In photography, the same kind of interest is not possible; we recognise that by creating an ideal photograph Wearing is not able to intentionally control the ideas about appearance; as in White's work, her intentions are nascent rather than unifying.



5. Gillian Wearing, *Self Portrait as My Father*, 2003

Wearing often uses photography to confront familiar and conventional conceptions of identity. In Wearing's work, the camera often emerges as an unsurpassable authoritative element; disallowing or interrupting her from completing the intentional act of interpretation. For example, In *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992–93) Wearing approached – seemingly at random – people in the street, asking them to write down on a piece of a paper a spontaneous thought or feeling. She would then make a portrait of the individual holding the piece of paper. Images in this body of work illustrate a disjunctive relationship between the subject and the slogans that adorn the paper they hold.

Wearing's work provokes an imaginative interest insofar as it allows us to engage with the often tension filled relationship between meaning and appearance. Since the camera records that which is before the lens, Wearing's photographs often enable us to ask questions about the way we relate meaning to an appearance: 'It leaves a lot to the imagination, that's what art should do. It leaves you something to go away with, something to think about. It doesn't say: this is a story, completely, and this is my take on it.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Wearing, G. <http://www.postmedia.net/999/wearing.htm> (accessed 16/02/08)

For Scruton, whilst a painting also deals with appearance our interest towards the appearance is guided by the interpretive: ‘The aim of painting is to give insight, and the creation of an appearance is important mainly as the expression of a thought.’<sup>76</sup> Our interest in appearances when looking at the photograph, he argues, is guided not by the interpretive but causally related to the subject photographed: ‘A person studying an ideal photograph is given a very good idea of *how something looked*.’<sup>77</sup>

I do not think that Wearing’s work enables us to disregard Scruton’s claim that photographs disallow the artist to present the subject as an imaginative interpretation. The representational meaning in her work relies on the viewer acknowledging a causal relationship between the image and the photographic event. Nonetheless, I contend that it is the causal element that enables the viewer to take an aesthetic disinterest towards the subject: As Wearing claims, photographs do not give us the *full story* precisely because we are not able to attribute their content to a unified thought about the subject; what can be said about the photographic image – in terms of the communication of a thought – may emerge only as a possibility.

I claim that the disjunction, between meaning and appearance is enough to enable the viewer to take an interest towards the photograph *qua* photograph; insofar as the camera, by pointing towards the subject enables the photographer to engage creatively with the relationship between subject and appearance. Yet, for Scruton, key to our understanding of a picture as representational art, is the description of its detail: if our interest towards the detail is causally related to the representation and not the object represented then we are able to say that the image is a work of representational art. Because the detail of the photograph relates to the way the subject appears we are unable to say that what we are looking at relates to something that the artist wants to express about her understanding of the subject:

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<sup>76</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.129

<sup>77</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.130

An interest in an object for its own sake, in the object as a whole, must encompass an interest in detail. For if there is nothing *for* which one contemplates an object an object, as has frequently been argued, there is no way of determining in advance of looking at it which features are, and are not, relevant to one's interest. It is for this reason that we cannot rest satisfied with nature but must have works of art as the objects of aesthetic judgement.<sup>78</sup>

### 1.12: Detail

The search for meaning in a photograph is therefore curtailed or thwarted: there is no point in an interest in detail since there is nothing that detail can show. Detail, like the photograph itself is transparent to its subject. If the photograph is interesting, it is only because what it portrays is interesting, and not because of the manner in which the portrayal is effected.<sup>79</sup>

To call an image representational, for Scruton, we must also be able to say that it holds some meaning that is autonomous from the object depicted. Scruton argues that the photograph like the mirror image, is causally related to the object it depicts. Therefore, in a sense we must think of the photograph as an image that does not have any content of its own; that is to say, we do not appreciate the mirror image separately from the object reflected in the mirror.<sup>80</sup>

He does consider the potential for a photographer to control the detail of her composition. Yet he argues that if a photographer intends to make a representation that engages our aesthetic interest

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<sup>78</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 136

<sup>79</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.137

<sup>80</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.139

she must create an image in which the detail engages our interest irrespective of the object it represents; detail, therefore, when it is aesthetically engaging is a property of the image rather than the subject. Causal derivation, argues Scruton, denies the possibility for the artist to take a photograph that allows us to see its detail as – wholly – attributable to her intent:

Even if he does, say, intentionally arrange each fold of his subject's dress and meticulously construct, as studio photographers once used to do, the appropriate scenario, that would still hardly be relevant, since there seem to be few ways in which such intentions can be revealed in a photograph.<sup>81</sup>

Conversely, he argues that we do not merely attribute the content of a painting to the object it depicts: whilst we may acknowledge a relationship between the two, the depiction due to its status as an interpretation is separable – in terms of how we direct our interest – from the object depicted. By taking an interest in something as an aesthetic representation, therefore, we take an interest in its content as peculiar to the representation itself. For Scruton, due to causal derivation we are unable to attribute the contents of the photograph to the image: 'Detail, like the photograph itself, is transparent to its subject.'<sup>82</sup>

According to this view of the aesthetic parameters of the ideal photograph, in order to create a picture that may be appreciated as an aesthetic representation, the photographer, must create an image that is essentially ideally unphotographic; insofar as by making an image in which we are able to appreciate the detail as attributable to the image rather than the subject she must do away with the causal element which as Scruton argues is elemental to the ideal photograph: '... when the photographer strives towards representational art, he inevitably seems to move away from that ideal of photography which I have been describing toward the ideal of painting.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.136

<sup>82</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.137

<sup>83</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.137

By manipulating the negative or image, contends Scruton, the artist is moving away from the ideal of photography. The photomontage, digital manipulation or scratched negative all, for him, serve as examples in which our interest towards the image is not concerned with its photographicity. In these instances, claims Scruton, the causal link is disrupted and we do not take an interest towards the image as an ideal photograph. In order to create an image – using photography – in which we attribute the detail to the image and therefore the artist’s intention ‘... one must then so interfere with the relation between the photograph and its subject... [and by doing so the image] ceases to be a *photograph* of its subject.’<sup>84</sup>

If we are to take an aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation that is not merely caused by the subject of the depiction then the detail must also refer to the artist’s intentions. Detail, in its aesthetic context refers to the artist’s interpretation, imagination and intention. His conclusion insofar as we conceive of detail in the photograph reveals the converse: photography ‘can present us with what we see, but it cannot tell us how to see it.’<sup>85</sup>

### **1.13: Detail and the de-centred intent**

Scruton’s conception of representational art as an intentionally created object is, I contend is too narrow: in particular his description of the content of the aesthetic representation understood as an expression of a thought about the subject, that we attribute to the artist. Photographic detail, as Scruton rightly points out does not refer to a thought about the subject – due to causal dependency: The mechanical causal process, we may infer from his argument, disrupts the potential for the artist to create a representation that may be appreciated for its expression of a thought about the subject. So if we are unable to take an interest towards the detail in a photograph as – wholly – attributable to the image, how is the artist able to use the camera to express a thought about the subject?

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<sup>84</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.140

<sup>85</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.133

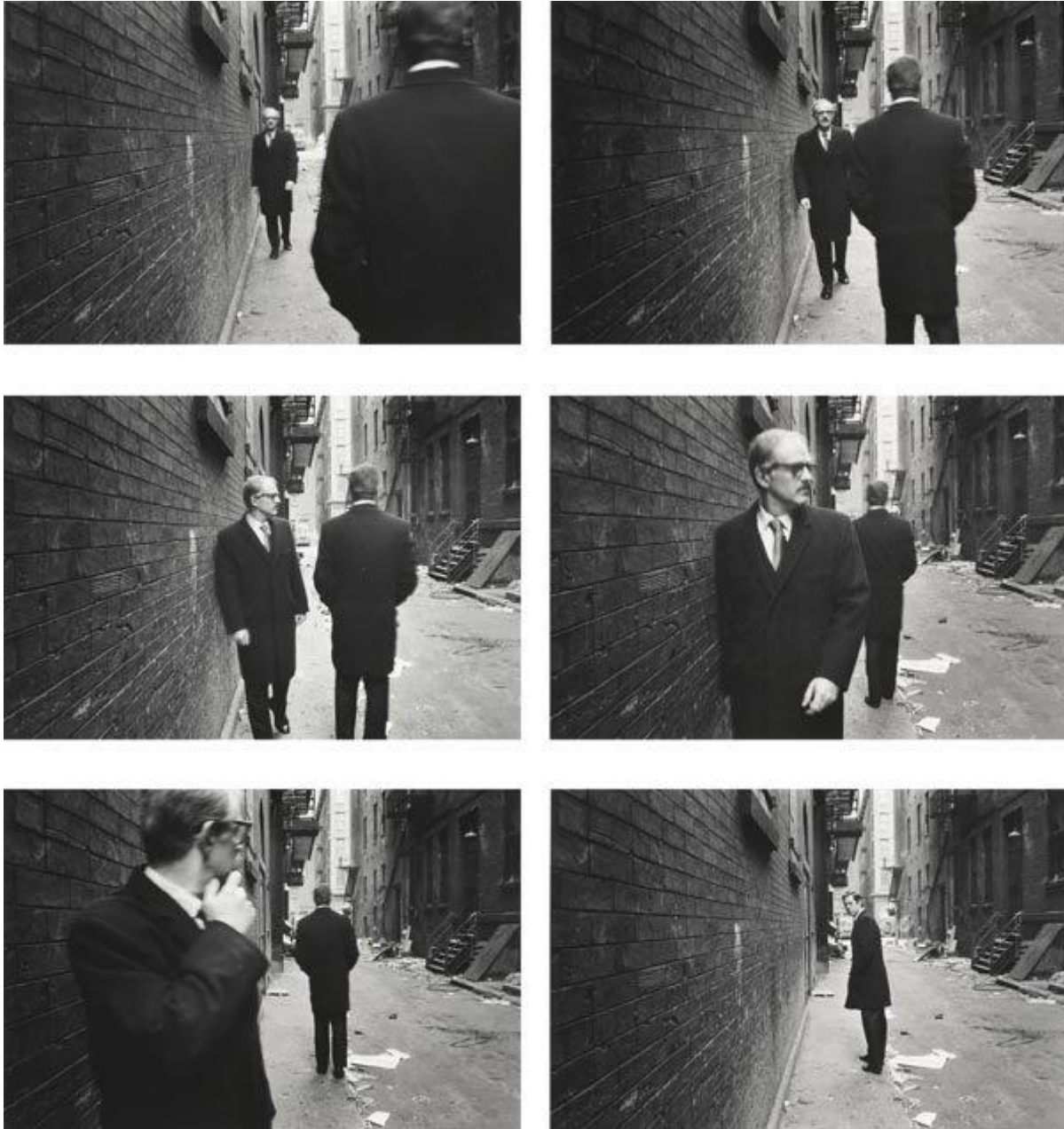
In Michals work, his arrangements do not rely on the viewer realising the intentional as a unifying element; we do not take the image to embody a thought about its subject matter: since the appearance generated in the image is not causally determined by Michals's intentions. Moreover, what holds our attention, I contend, is reliant on – in comparison to the painter – a sense of authorial absence. As Michals argues photographs enable us to ask questions about what we are looking at and what can be said about the relationship between meaning and appearances: 'My photographs are about questions. They are not about answers. I think photographs should provoke, should set up the question, the premise, and shouldn't give the answer.'<sup>86</sup>

Michals's work often documents an exchange, or some kind of interaction; for example in his work *Chance Meeting* (1969): In this series we see six images, each of which records the inconspicuous instance of two people passing each other in the street. As the event unfolds we notice that one of the individuals gives a passing – yet what appears in the photograph to be a decisive – look as he walks by the other individual. This seems to go unnoticed as they both pass each other. In the image in final image in the series, the man who threw the initial glance is disappeared and the look is returned.

What Michals intends for us to see emerges not by our taking an interest in the way things appear but rather what certain appearances suggest: We do not see, yet we are able to imagine that in the passing glance, something meaningful is taking place. In sensing – but not seeing literally – a tension emergent in the passing glance we begin to see the subjects and their appearance in a different way: the back alley setting, the impersonal attire which the two individuals wear, the way in which the brick wall seems to make the passing feel more claustrophobic. For Michals's it is not just the appearance from which we derive meaningful engagement but what the appearance is able to tell us about the *photographic event*.

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<sup>86</sup> Seidner, D BOMB Magazine, Summer issue 1987 <http://bombsite.com/issues/20/articles/923> (accessed 14/02/08)



6. Duane Michals, *Chance Meeting* , 1969

For Michals, lack of intentional control enables him to engender a greater sense of complexity in the subject that he explores in his photographs. In particular, causal dependency plays a vital role in Michals's approach towards expressivity. Whilst a photograph may enable the viewer to take an interest towards the subject photographed it is not necessary that in doing so they will learn anything certain about that subject. It is in this sense that Michals' work is interesting as representational art: Appearance generates interest insofar as it emerges as a vehicle that both

conveys and yet also cancels meaning; whilst a photograph enables us to attend to the way that the object appears in the photograph, it is not merely the appearance that holds our interest but its context within the photographic event: ‘I am interested in the nature of things. The nature of something is quite different from the way it looks.’<sup>87</sup> The difference or inaccessibility, I claim, is expressed by Michals’ work because whilst the viewer may see the 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second photographed by Michals the viewer does not have access to the photographic event – the duration of the exposure.

An aesthetic interest is not necessarily guided by the way the subject appears but also the photographic event to which that appearance is causally related. For Michals photography allows him to create work in which the expressive emerges not as the unifying quality but as a possibility: Photography, therefore, enables Michals to create representational art in which his intention is not in harmony with the appearance that he invites us to contemplate but emerges as fragmented; insofar as that intention becomes de-centred in photography.

Scruton may contend that he has addressed and successfully challenged the possibility that photographs can be expressive of an intention to see the subject in a certain way. Scruton considers an example in which he points to a passing drunk and exclaims *Silenus*.<sup>88</sup> He discusses the possibility that by describing the subject in this way; ‘I am inviting you to think of him in that way [and in doing so] I have expressed a representational thought...’<sup>89</sup> Yet he concludes that it is not the photograph or his pointing finger that we see as the representation. The camera or Scruton’s finger may indeed point towards the drunk but it is the latter and not either of the former that we see as a representation of Silenus. ‘The subject, once located, plays its own special part in an independent process of representation. The camera is not essential to that process.’<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Michals, D. <http://www.photoquotes.com/showquotes.aspx?id=139&name=Michals,Duane> (accessed 13/04/12)

<sup>88</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.132

<sup>89</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.132

<sup>90</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.132

Yet, I do not think that Scruton's claim poses a problem for a de-centred conception of the place of intention in creative photography. As he contends, the photographer is unable to use the camera to enable the viewer to see something photographed as something else – as an expression of her thought. If we see the drunk as Silenus it is because it is in our seeing the drunk – and not the photographer's thoughts about that drunk, although we may also share them. Nonetheless, as I expressed in the example of Michals' work, the photographer does not seek to engage our attention in the way in which Scruton is addressing. Michals does not require the viewer to see the subject in a certain way: moreover, he points to the subject and poses the question; "what do you think that means?" As we have underlined in Michals's work, intentionality emerges as a subtle mechanic in photography; it does not unify the representational meaning of the work.

As Michals' work illustrates, we are not necessarily able to say anything conclusive about what the photograph is expressive of – in terms of our acknowledging that the representational meaning is unified by the photographer's intention. However, I contend that the artist is able to use this quality, peculiar to photography, to create images that hold our interest as artistic representations. In Michals's work he is not pointing to the drunk and saying, 'look Silenus'. His aim is more complex; he wants the viewer to think about what they are looking at and consider how and why certain meanings emerge. Creating meaningful photographs, for Michals is like seeing the whole picture in the pieces of a puzzle without fitting together the pieces; this is the photographer's problem – to show how this embodies a thought, yet does not seek to reconcile that thought as a whole or unifying thought in the image. For Michals, photography does not seek to unify this puzzle but only to show that it can enable us to engage contemplatively with our experience of the world:

That alone is a problem... you have to organize your mind in such a way as to know how to express this. The nuances, the chance meetings with people, the sexual interests...the decisive moments in everyday life that heighten awareness. How can I express these things? It's very subtle; more like haiku than hardcore rock music.<sup>91</sup>

### 1.14: The photographer's problem

'The photographer's problem, therefore, is to see clearly the limitations and at the same time the potential qualities of his medium... This means a real respect for the things in front of him.'<sup>92</sup> It is likely that Scruton would agree with this view. Paul Strand, the protégé of Alfred Stieglitz and mentor to Henri Cartier-Bresson, used photography to document the everyday goings on in city life. He also saw, contra Scruton, that the camera could tell us not only about the way something looks but also convey a thought about our experience of the world.

Strand was interested in the complexities of appearance, identity and self expression. Everything that occurs before the lens could be 'organized to express the causes of which they are effect, or they may be used as abstract forms, to create an emotion unrelated to the objectivity as such.'<sup>93</sup> The creative process of the photographer – as understood by Strand – is not to present the subject as a representation that is unified by an intention; moreover, photographer's set themselves challenges to create images that enable the viewer to contemplate and re-think meaningful relationships. I have introduced the notion of a de-centred intention that finds the photographer's *thought* in the *photographic event*. In this configuration we may acknowledge the intention not merely by attending to an appearance but by finding that appearance in the context of the photographic event.

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<sup>91</sup> Seidner, D. <http://bombsite.com/issues/20/articles/923> (accessed on 17/02/08)

<sup>92</sup> Strand, P. in Lyons, N. (1966) p. 136

<sup>93</sup> Strand, P. in Lyons, N. (1966) p. 136

### 1.15: Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a critical exposition of Scruton's claim regarding the creative practice of picture making. The ideal mechanically reproduced picture disallows the production of a representation in which the appearance of the object depicted is unified by the artist's intention. This method of producing an appearance is lacking in the ideal photograph, argues Scruton, and therefore the viewer is unable to appreciate the photograph as representational art. His aim is to identify a difference between photographic and painterly representation and in doing so show why the painter but not the photographer is able to use her medium to create an image that we may appreciate as representational art.

Whilst I agree that underlining the distinction between representation in painting and representation in photography is important, I think it also illuminates a gap in our thinking about the creative potential of photography. As will become apparent throughout this thesis, there is a good deal of literature that seeks to take the causal process seriously and it is my intention to do the same. I think that in following this route it will become clear that mapping out the creative potential of photography requires a reassessment of the relationship between the artist and her intention.

In this chapter, I have sought out to show that Scruton's assessment of the relationship between artist and camera, whilst accurate in recognising the provenance of causality perhaps suffers from association with the painterly – a charge which he also acknowledges.<sup>94</sup> The painter's relationship with her subject, for Scruton leads to a negative assessment of photography's potential to be appreciated as an aesthetic representation. However, I claim that whilst we need to acknowledge the difference between the media – in terms of how they afford the artist intentional control over her subject – it is important that we separate from our discussion of causal derivation a measure that takes its nodal points from the medium of painting. In doing so I claim that we may come to see the mechanically derived causal process as a quality that requires the artist to find a different approach towards the expression of a thought about the appearance of

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<sup>94</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.139

her subject. At the centre of this alternate approach will be a positive appraisal of the loss of a centralised notion of the intentional.

In chapter 2 I will explore the historicity of the qualities that Scruton denies as capable of constituting an aesthetic representation – the loss of the intentional. In doing so, my aim is to show that photography has had a positive effect on how the artist understands her work as an expression of a thought about her subject. The very qualities which Scruton denies, I contend, emerge as aesthetically engaging insofar as they enable the artist to form a different kind of purpose in expression – that is no less valuable as representational art.

## Chapter 2: The modern eye

### 2.1: The modern eye

Alfred Stieglitz in conversation with some painters, whilst he was a student in Germany: “Of course this is not Art, but we would like to paint the way you photograph.” His [Stieglitz’s] reply was, “I don’t know anything about Art, but for some reason or other I have never wanted to photograph the way you paint.”<sup>95</sup>

Scruton’s essay on aesthetic representation sets out to examine ‘... whether there is some feature, suitably called representation, common to painting and photography. And we wish to know whether that feature has in each case a comparable aesthetic value.’<sup>96</sup> We know that due to the mechanically derived causal process Scruton claims that we are unable to take an interest towards the photograph as an aesthetic representation. In order to appreciate a picture as representational art it is necessary that our interest is held by the artist’s intention. I contend that due to its reliance on a notion of intentionality that is found in our understanding of painting, this argument only clouds our exploration of the creative potential and aesthetic understanding of photography. As Stieglitz and his interlocutors neatly underline, we may see the photograph as expressive of something we attribute to the artist’s understanding. However, it is when we begin to look for values that originate in the relationship between the painter and her intentions that doubt over the creative and aesthetic potential emerges.

Rather than making an attempt to isolate photography from painting – as a way of addressing its creative and aesthetic potential – I think perhaps a different approach is required. We have been discussing Scruton’s assessment of the representational value of photography; key to his claim that a photograph cannot be appreciated as an aesthetic representation regards the photographer’s inability to make a photograph that works as an expression of her intentions. In one sense – concerning the relationship between medium and artist – Scruton’s assessment of the creative

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<sup>95</sup> Goldberg, V. (1988), p. 285

<sup>96</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.120

potential of the photographer is measured against values that originate in painting: In particular regarding the aesthetic representation as the *expression of a thought*. Scruton argues that the photographic causal process, when compared to the painter's relationship with her media underlines the absence of intentional and interpretive control which he describes as characteristic of the aesthetic representation: 'The photograph is a means to the end of seeing its subject; in painting, on the other hand, the subject is the means to the end of its own representation.'<sup>97</sup> However, I contend that this comparison is problematic because it can lead us to look for the painter in photography. In taking this approach, it would seem that we place demands on photography – in terms of its creative potential – that are bound to raise scepticism or a negative assessment of its creative and aesthetic potential.

Rather than searching for the painter in photography, therefore, I contend that an opposite approach may be helpful. By looking for the photographic in painting my aim is to consider how characteristics of the former have enabled the artist to take a different approach towards expressivity and intentionality: Central to this, will be a discussion of what I perceive to be the positive impact of the photographic causal process on the creative practice of pictorial representation. My aim in taking this approach is to question Scruton's assertion that interpretive and intentional control, are characteristics central to our appreciation of the image as representational art.

I accept Scruton's logical ideal that a photograph is causally related to the object before the lens and therefore our interest is held by that object rather than a representation causally related to the artist's intention. Nonetheless, I do not accept that this disallows us to take an aesthetic interest towards the photographic representation. My claim is that we do not appreciate the photographer's intentions as central to our interest towards the representational meaning. However, we do recognise that our interest is guided by an intention. In this sense, we acknowledge the photographer's intentions as present yet de-centred: The appearance of the object depicted is not causally related to the photographer's intentions but our interest towards the photographic event is also causally related to the photographer's intentions.

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<sup>97</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.133-134

For Scruton, we relate the appearance generated in the painting to the painter's thought about the object depicted: We know that it is, to a greater or lesser degree her intention for the object to appear as it does in the painting. When we look at a photograph, however, we are not always able to say with confidence that the appearance of the object in the photograph can tell us anything about the photographer's intention. This is for Scruton the reason why we are not able to appreciate the photograph as an aesthetic representation. I described the absence of intentional control in a different way.

I recognise that intentionality relates not merely to the appearance of the object photographed but the relationship between appearance and the photographic event: Interest towards appearance is not merely caused by attending to the way something looks but how we relate that appearance to the photographic event. However, a difficulty remains; that being the propensity to describe our interest towards the photograph as causally related to an intention. Nonetheless, by acknowledging that a photograph points towards a photographic event rather than merely the way something looks when it was photographed we are able to challenge the notion that intentionality relates merely to the construction of appearance. In this sense, as Phillips recognises the *subject* of the photograph is not necessarily recognisable as the object photographed but the *event*: 'In general, the duration of the photographic event corresponds to the period of time the photosensitive surface is exposed to light... Different lengths of exposure time will produce significantly different records.'<sup>98</sup> In one sense we may think that our interest towards the photograph is caused by our seeing the subject, rather than the artist's intention to see the subject in a certain way – due to causal dependency. In another sense we may also recognise that our interest towards the subject as we see it in the photograph is different – not merely caused by seeing the subject: Our appreciation of a gesture, look, shadow, etc, that we see in the photograph may hold our interest because of a sense of unity that it appears to give the image.

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<sup>98</sup> Phillips, D. (2009), p. 338

Yet, as Meyerowitz contends the meaning that we attribute to the photographic event emerges as a *possibility* – rather than a representation unified by an intention. Whilst this does not offer a counter to Scruton's claim that photographer's are unable to create images that are causally related to their intentions it opens up a gap in the debate about representational art and photography; it enables us to consider the potential that the photographer's intention is present but not central to our interest towards the image. If we are to better understand how the photographer's intention emerges I contend that we must focus not on appearance but the photographic event. As the noted photography critic John Swarkowski argues, in understanding the photographic artform we are moved not to consider appearance but event: 'It isn't what a picture is of, it is what a picture is about.'<sup>99</sup>

Our discussion of intentionality and photography has, so far, revealed a subtle mechanic; we are not, in appreciating the ideal photograph, compelled to acknowledge the photographer's intentions as constructive. Nonetheless our interest towards the frame is guided by certain decisions, to include or exclude certain subjects. How we relate the ideal photograph to a thought about the object(s) photographed, however, remains a problem.

The causal relationship, I claim does not disallow the expression of a thought, it enables the artist to take a different approach towards how we are able to think about the artwork as an expression of a thought. Photographs can be interesting as pictures that challenge the traditional notion of expressivity that is available to the painter. The photographer is able to create images that hold our attention because we are compelled to contemplate the possibility of what is expressed; for many artists photography is an approach that allows them to challenge the relationship between object and meaning.

I aim to present the view that the mechanically derived causal process creates a relationship in which the artist finds her expression by – to a certain degree – relinquishing her interpretive powers; in this sense the artist is not only interested in conveying her intention to create a unique appearance. Moreover, the artist is interested in showing the relationship between appearance

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<sup>99</sup> Swarkowski, J. <http://www.photoquotes.com/showquotes.aspx?id=75&name=Szarkowski,John> (no pagination), accessed on 26/6/12

and meanings as they form in the photographic event. That we are unable to say that the photograph expresses a thought about the subject in the same way that we find by looking at a painting seems to be illustrative of the medium's creative appropriation.

Photographers often use the camera to make images that challenge the way we think about engaging our interest with the subject captured before the lens. For Gregory Crewdson photography enables him to express his interest in the tension between the familiar and the strange. The cinematic influence in his images is striking and this is also evidenced by his use of film studio lights and large production teams. The result of his carefully crafted tableaux, are scenes that invite us to contemplate the possibility of a narrative that the camera records. Yet, because of the photographic causal process we are unable to attribute these scenes to the photographer's intention – in the same way that we may do in a painting.

The inability to regard the photograph as an expression of a thought about the subject, I claim enables Crewdson to create images that are rich in mystery. Because the photographic image is a recording of a moment in time we appreciate the representational meaning as causally related to the photographic event. Yet as we do not have access to the photographic event, the meaning that we form in relation to his images is not wholly realised; but emerge as possibilities, rich in narrative. It is not Crewdson's intention for the viewer to see the subject in a particular way but it is his intention to create pictures which provoke us to ask questions about the possibility of a narrative. We are drawn towards the photograph not merely because of the subject photographed but because of the possibilities that we attribute to the photographic event; as though the image *also* contains a narrative that due to the mechanically derived causal process we do not have access to.



7. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled*, 2001-2

Scruton underlines causality as a quality of photography that disrupts the relationship between the artist and her thought process – to the extent that we are unable to attribute the resulting image to the artist’s interpretive understanding of the subject; consequentially, our aesthetic interest is not held by the image but the subject. Nonetheless, by measuring the creative potential of the photographic medium against the painterly, I claim that Scruton closes the door shut on a serious discussion of the impact of causality on creative practice. If, on the other hand, we take seriously the loss of intentional and interpretive control in Scruton’s logical ideal I contend that we may unfold an alternate yet no less profound understanding of the artistic expression based on a reassessment of the relationship between artist and her intentionality.

To introduce this view, I will first consider how the ideal photograph impacts positively on the artist’s attitude towards expression in representational art; presenting its invention/discovery as historically important in terms of how the medium enables the artist an alternate approach

towards exploring the relationship between meaning and appearance. Photography, I will show has enabled the artist to rethink her approach towards expressing a thought about her subject.

## 2.2: The remarkable appearance

In his address to the Chamber of Deputies in 1839 Dominique Arago outlined the reasons why Daguerre should be awarded a pension for his innovations in photography. One of the reasons given by Arago notes that the ‘...[r]emarkable invention of M. Daguerre is a great service rendered to the Arts.’<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, Arago was not alone in the instigation of photography as a useful artist’s aid. William Henry Fox Talbot invented the fixed negative as an aid to improve his sketch work and even Baudelaire thought that photography performed a service to the arts, even if it was as ‘a very humble handmaid’<sup>101</sup>. Yet this does not give us a rounded understanding of photography’s true impact on pictorial representation. A more profound understanding of photography’s effect on pictorial representation may be discerned from what I recognise as its first important collision with painting; in the infamous Palais des Champs-Elyses Salon show of 1865 in Paris. The event that caused such an explosion of moral furore was a work by the French painter Edouard Manet.

Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) was roundly lynched by both critics and the public; excoriated as a moral abomination, the crowd of those who came to visit the exhibition simply to jeer at Manet’s work became so vast that the salon ‘... needed to deploy guards to protect *Olympia* from the malicious designs of the indignant spectators.’<sup>102</sup> Rather than comment on the artist’s brushwork or interpretation of the subject critics attacked the painting from an altogether different perspective. It was not the depiction that the critics deplored but the subject matter itself; a subject matter that according to Manet’s dissenters had no place in art. Manet was criticised, not for his ability to express a thought his subject, but for his decision to depict a nude in a realistic style.

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<sup>100</sup> Delaroche in Trachtenberg, A. (1980), p.18

<sup>101</sup> Baudelaire, C. in Trachtenberg, A. (1980), p.88

<sup>102</sup> King, R. (2006) p.152

Both critics and the public were repelled by the idea that an artist would consider such a realistic depiction of a prostitute as beautiful, although painters in Western Europe had over the last twenty years begun to celebrate in their advocacy of naturalism a sense of the contemporary realism.<sup>103</sup> The criticism that *Olympia* received seems to reflect an attitude towards picture making that is enthused by a rejection of a realism that I contend is influenced by a photographic way of looking. The unavoidable realism that arrived through the photographic picture, I contend, gave the painter a new way of thinking about appearance. The realism that was available – unavoidably to the photographer – underlined for the painter a reduction of the distance between the sitter and the artist that had not before been expressed. For Manet and the Post-Impressionists it was not only the intention that could provoke contemplative interest but the momentary.

### 2.3: Lighting the subject

Yet it is not only a different approach towards re-imaging the subject that photography enabled; stylistic tropes in photography also influenced the painter's interpretation of colour, tone and lighting. In the *The Judgement of Paris* Robert King discusses the influence of photography on Manet's masterpiece. Manet's *Olympia*, as King notes is visibly influenced by photographic techniques. Bright and contrasting colours flatten Manet's tonal range washing out shadow thus creating harsh lines. These qualities, insists King mimicked techniques that marked the photographic process of the mid-nineteenth century. Such techniques included strong artificial lighting and long exposures that caused the image to lack in detail and as King argues, visibly inspired Manet's approach to depicting his *Olympia*:

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<sup>103</sup> In England, fifteen years previously, we should note that the critic's darling John Everett Millais's reputation was soured by his depiction of Christ as a working class child in *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849).

If Victorine had indeed been photographed by Nadar (who sometimes used battery-powered arc lamps to cast light on his subjects), the result would not have been dissimilar to the stark image Manet produced on his canvas, whose lack of detail, moreover, resembled the hazy images produced by photographers as a result of long exposures required by paper-negative prints.<sup>104</sup>



8. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

In his lecture on Manet's paintings, *Manet and the Object of Painting* the philosopher Michel Foucault dedicated a section to the painter's innovative use of lighting. In particular, Foucault addresses Manet's use of artificial lighting. He notes that in his *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863) not only does there seem to be natural light which bathes the female character in the background, but also of an artificial light which strikes *brutally* the characters in the foreground. Again in his description of *Olympia* Foucault addresses the light as a force that pierces so as to reveal every aspect of its model:<sup>105</sup> 'the light is certainly not a soft and discreet lateral light, it is a very violent light which strikes her here, full shot.'<sup>106</sup> In underlining the stylistic influence – of photography – on the painter's depiction of his subject, I claim that we may observe a difference in attitude

<sup>104</sup> King, R. (2006) p.108-9

<sup>105</sup> Foucault, M. (2009), p.62

<sup>106</sup> Foucault, M. (2009) p.67

towards thinking about the creation of an appearance. This also extends to how the artist begins to think about framing, light and even the way in which they look at the subject.

#### **2.4: Contemporary beauty**

In the work of the Impressionists, the attitude towards depicting and representing the subject began to reveal more of the influence of photographic documentation in painting. For example, the French painter Gustave Courbet claimed that the artist should, principally, be an observer rather than interpreter of his subject matter. Expression, for Courbet reveals itself not only in the artist's interpretation but unfolds the context within which that interpretation is held: 'Beauty, like truth, is relative to the time in which one lives and to the individual capable of comprehending it. The expression of the beautiful is in direct proportion to the perceptive powers acquired by the artist.'<sup>107</sup>

As the creative attitudes of Manet and Courbet attest, a stark realism began to unfold in the interpretation of aesthetic representation during the mid to late nineteenth century. This realism was based on observation and an interest towards the artist's contemporary environment. Claude Monet, as Paul Smith notes, wanted to make paintings that were not beholden to a unified narrative. For Monet the painting was not simply a product of the imagination but could describe our sensuous experience of the temporal.<sup>108</sup>

Scruton does acknowledge the quality of resemblance as an aspect of our interest in representational art. In taking an aesthetic interest towards the representation, the subject is not removed from that kind of interest. Rather, his point – regarding the difference between photographic and painterly representation – concerns the cause of the aesthetic in our interest; which he argues is not merely found in our seeing the subject but in our seeing it in a certain way, according to the artist's intention. In order to say that our interest is held by the depiction and not the subject depicted, even though we make reference to the subject, it is the intent to look

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<sup>107</sup> Courbet in Taylor, J. (1987) p.348

<sup>108</sup> See Paul Smith's insightful discussion of Monet's *Women in the Garden* (1866-7), p.83-7

at the subject in this way – rather than the subject’s appearance – that signifies the image as an aesthetic representation:

...there is the case where the reasons for the interest are reasons for interest in the *picture* (in the way in looks) even though they make essential reference to the subject and can be understood as reasons only by someone who understands the reference to the subject. For example, the observer may refer to a particular gesture of a certain figure... Clearly, that is a reason not only for an interest in the subject but also (and primarily) for an interest in the picture, since it gives a reason for an interest in something which can be understood only by looking at the picture.<sup>109</sup>

In discussing Manet’s *Bar Aux Foiles-Bergere* (1882) Scruton underlines in his logical ideal the difference between photographic and painterly representation; in which the former is dependent on acknowledging that our interest is held by seeing the subject and in the latter recognising that our interest is caused by the representation: ‘Here it could not be said that the painting is being treated as a surrogate for the subject: it is *itself* the object of interest and irreplaceable by the thing depicted.’<sup>110</sup>

For Scruton, in order for the viewer to say that his aesthetic interest is directed towards the representation – and not the subject represented – his interest must be provoked by a thought about the subject. This is, for Scruton, an essential quality of the aesthetic representation; whilst the viewer may recognise the subject represented and even be able to say that the representation presents that subject in a good likeness, it is not the subject that presents itself but the artist whose communication with which the viewer is taken: ‘...to understand a painting involves understanding thoughts. These thoughts are, in a sense, communicated by the painting. They

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<sup>109</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.128

<sup>110</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.128-9

underlie the painter's intention, and at the same time they inform our way of seeing the canvas.'<sup>111</sup>

It is the causal relationship between the subject and mechanical instrument, that for Scruton, I claim, denies the possibility of creating an aesthetic representation. Yet I think that this view of causal derivation is perhaps too hasty and we yet may see a way by which photography allows the artist to rethink her understanding of the artwork as an expression of a thought.

In Manet's bar scene, for example, it is not only his masterful rendering of the subject but the relationship he creates between the subject and her environment. Indeed, the disaffected expression of the barmaid is reminiscent of those expressions that we find on the face of the sitter in the photographic portraits of the late nineteenth century. The weights and neck clamps used by the photographer in the studio made the photographic portrait an event that had to be endured by the sitter. With this in mind I claim that Manet's technique and stylistic approach creates a picture that not only seems to situate the viewer in the room, but in that moment. As Galassi notes in comparing the compositional structures of Uccello and Degas, the Post-Impressionists did not consider the frame as a tool which should contain merely the depiction: 'A comparable sense of these changes may be had by ignoring the artist in favour of the viewer. The latter has no place in Uccello's picture, but he is a virtual participant in Degas's.'<sup>112</sup> I think that in Galassi's observation we find a difference in attitude towards representing the subject. This difference relates to the way in which the artist thinks not only about the depiction as an expression of a thought but also – and in some ways equally as important – the depiction as a document of the moment.

In Degas's *The Orchestra at the Opera* (1870) for example his use of framing seems to disrupt rather than unify our interest towards the scene he is depicting: Our attention is directed towards a depiction of the orchestral pit. In the background we are able to see, half cut off and out of focus, a troupe of ballerinas mid-performance. As in Manet's bar scene, our interest towards the painter's subject is realised within the moment that he has depicted. As Carol Armstrong notes,

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<sup>111</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.123

<sup>112</sup> Galassi, P. (1981), p.11

Degas, although derisive of the photographic medium, appropriated it because it enabled him to challenge an understanding of the parameters of creativity:

Degas had always tended to disparage photography for its instantaneity and its lack of art. Yet its fascination for him seems to have lain precisely in that which he disparaged. Though, with his predilection for difficult viewing conditions and long posing times, he worked against the instant vision of the medium, he also appears to have been drawn towards its process of reflexivity and self-generation, and to have found within it a way of dissolving the fixed, authorial self of representation within the very process of repetition out of which representation is constituted.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Armstrong, C. (2003) p. 243



9. Edouard Degas, *The Orchestra at the Opera*, 1871

## 2.5: Outside the frame

The photographic frame enables a sense of realism that whilst inclusive of those objects before the lens is notably exclusive of those objects outside the frame. Sometimes we may even be interested to know what is happening outside the frame; and even feel that it may better our understanding of what we see in the frame. Indeed it may be the absence or unintelligible appearance of the photographic record that may provoke an interest not merely towards the object photographed but the event that the camera records. As in Crewdson's work, we often feel that the moment exposed onto the 8x10 plate reveals a fragment of a narrative. The narrative that we see unfolding in the composition is often compelling because we feel that it does not contain the whole *story*.

The photographic narrative, I claim has a fragmentary quality: the viewer is unable to say that the photograph is an expression of a thought about the subject, in the same way that we think of in painting. Expressivity, therefore, is not unified by the artist's intention, nonetheless, it affords the artist a different approach. An interest towards the representational meaning in Crewdson's work for example, is caused not by the intention to see the subject in a certain way but by taking an interest in the photographic event.

The photographer is able to record virtually everything that passes her lens. Nonetheless, in doing so she is faced with another challenge. How to make an image that is expressive of her perspective or interest towards the subject. Yet, this quandary, I claim, has the potential to mask what is most fruitful about the almost arbitrary infinitude of choices available to photographer when framing her shot. Whilst it allows her to take her time over framing her subject it also allows her to purposefully do away with traditional composition. In the work of Edouard Degas for example, the influence of the mannerisms of photographic frame is used to give his images a disruptive quality. Degas' decision to photographically *crop* his subject awkwardly often creates a *fragmentary perspective*: Our interest towards the work as evidence of a unified intention is, I contend, in the same way that we think of it in photography, brought into question. We start to think of the picture as not only an expression of a thought about the subject but as the document of a moment. As Carol Armstrong acknowledges, this gives the pictorial surface a fragmentary rather than a unified quality:

...the photographic crop... singled out Degas's use of fragmentation as the signature of his work. Unexpected points of view, the human body never seen as a whole or as a unity, a way of framing that is to crop and cut into and never to close off...<sup>114</sup>

## 2.6: Striking the imagination

Within this discussion I have examined contra Scruton that the qualities of intentionality and the interpretive are central to our understanding and appreciation of a picture as an aesthetic representation. I have begun to develop the idea that photography has offered the artist an alternate perspective with regards to her treatment of intention; and in Scruton's discussion there is a gap in terms of a positive exploration of the creative potential of photography.

For Scruton, the aesthetic representation and the interpretive are bound together insofar as the former is determined by our interest being provoked by the latter. Representational art, he argues, holds our interest not because we see merely the subject depicted but because we find something expressive about the way in which the subject is depicted. For Scruton, what is expressive we attribute to a thought about the subject or an intention to see the subject in a certain way and not an appearance we attribute to the subject itself.<sup>115</sup>

Therefore, we attribute the meaningful value of the depiction to the artist's intention to communicate or share some understanding about the way something appears: even if we appreciate the painting for the way in which it appears to resemble the subject, it is our understanding of artist's skill that fosters this appreciation.

Yet, I contend that there is something problematic in this formulation. Since photography has enabled artists to make studies of their subject, I claim that our interest towards *seeing* the

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<sup>114</sup> Armstrong, C. (1988), p.109

<sup>115</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.141

subject depicted has taken on a different importance. Insofar as the photographer is able to make a record of her subject – in a way in which the painter cannot – our interest towards the subject in pictures has necessarily begun to take a different shape.

Photography, I contend, has endowed the artist with a tool that is able to depict in such a way that the intentional is de-centred; we not only think of the aesthetic representation as a product of the artist's imagination but as a comment or reflection of the complex relationship between objects and their meanings.

## **2.7: Documenting Meaning**

Rene Magritte's *Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe* (1926), I claim, illustrates deftly the complexity of the photographer's attitude towards intention. The depiction of the text and image in Magritte's painting expresses a playfully satirical interpretation of the relationship between objects and their meaning(s). The realistic depiction of a pipe and the underlining text that informs the viewer that *this is not a pipe*, I claim, can give us insight into the complexity of the expressive in photography.

In this chapter – and the previous chapter – I have been discussing the possibility that we may appreciate the photograph as an expression of a thought about its subject. The initial problem encountered in stating this claim is underlined by Scruton: how can you take an interest towards the photograph as an expression of a thought about the subject when you recognise that a photograph is causally related to the subject? If a photograph is aesthetically interesting – which Scruton does not deny – then it must be the subject that is the cause of our contemplative interest; so we attribute the expression of a thought/idea to the subject?

I am unconvinced by this conclusion for the same reason that Scruton gives in his rejection of intentional control. How is it possible to regard the subject as the sole cause of our contemplative interest? We may not always be able to say that it is the subject that draws our contemplative interest. In documentary photography, for example, it is often the context – social, historical, geographical, etc – that defines our interest towards the subject. But we may not always have

access to a context; a photograph may be of a detail or out of focus and still remain aesthetically pleasing. I claim that the photographer may indeed use her medium to express a thought about the subject, yet we need to alter our approach towards how we think about the act of intention – maybe even seeking to discard it altogether in its current use, when thinking about photography.

Magritte's painting, I claim, may give us some insight into how we might approach a better understanding of the photographer's art. The relationship between image and text in one sense, I contend, reflects the photographers understanding of the relationship between the subject and photograph. A photograph, as we have discussed in Michals' work does not necessarily express what the photographer thinks about the object photographed; the thought itself emerges as something akin to a possibility or suggestion that we may describe as narrative like in form. For Michals, photography is disruptive of the traditional relationship between artist and intention in such a way that it allows him to create images that deal with the complexity of expression. In his work we may relate our aesthetic interest to our seeing the subject but do not necessarily find the subject to be the cause of what is expressed. For Magritte the potency of expression is often found not merely in the expression of a thought but by exploring the complexity of its articulation: 'Everything that is visible hides something else that is invisible.'<sup>116</sup>

Magritte's paintings are often challenging because they have a disruptive quality. Scruton claims that our interest towards the appearance of a painting is caused by our acknowledging the artist's intention. However, Magritte is able, rather masterfully, to disrupt this relationship; his presentation of appearance confronts our assumption that the contents of a depiction are unified by the artist's intention. Instead, as in the case of *Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe* Magritte reveals that the intention to express a thought and its articulation are not necessarily unified.

Michel Foucault realises, that in Magritte's work, the *intentional* is challenged. Rather than placing the imaginative on a pedestal he seeks to describe it as indicative of a complex and multi-layered narrative; '... at the moment when he should reveal the name, Magritte does so by

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<sup>116</sup> Ross, E. Tush, (2003), p. 53

denying the object is what it is.<sup>117</sup> For Galassi, this disruptive quality of the pictorial representation is a characteristic peculiar to photography: ‘That we now value photography’s disruptive character is perhaps the best measure of the degree to which the medium has shaped our conception of modern art.’<sup>118</sup>



10. Rene Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, 1926

Foucault explores the way by which Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29) underlines the fragmentation of meaning that emerges through the communication of a thought. For Magritte the representational does not necessarily engage the viewer as the communication of a unified thought but also as a multiplex of meanings; in this sense what is expressed emerges more akin to a dialogue than an expression of a unified thought about the subject. As Foucault observes, the representational in Magritte takes place as a dialogue between resemblances: ‘Resemblance makes a unique assertion, always the same. This thing, that thing, yet another thing is something else. Similitude multiplies different affirmations, which dance together, tilting and tumbling over one another.’<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Foucault, M. (1992) p.24

<sup>118</sup> Galassi, P. (1981), p.29.

<sup>119</sup> Foucault, M. (1992) p.46

Magritte's work, I contend, allows us to look again at the way the artist perceives intention as the communication of a thought. His paintings allow us to challenge the view – held by Scruton – that in order for us to take an aesthetic interest towards a representation there must be some sense in which we see that representation as unified by the communication of an intention. Magritte's paintings seem fascinated by the way in which meanings relate to appearances and I contend that there is something remarkably photographic about the way in which he achieves this end.<sup>120</sup> We may not only attribute the expression to the artist's intention but the artist's interest in the complexity of expression. In Magritte's work, we often engage with a content that, I contend, is informed by the mechanically derived causal process; insofar as we appreciate the image for its expression of an underlying incongruity in the relationship between appearance and meaning. Yet the expression of such an inconsistency is not defined by a centralising intention but its lacking.

In these two opening chapters, I have criticised the established view of photography in relation to creative practice. In the first chapter I examined an understanding of the aims of creative photography and in this chapter I have explored the positive view of the impact of photography on the creative practice of pictorial representation.

Rather than contradict Scruton's claims regarding the ideal photograph I have examined how the mechanically derived causal process has enriched the artist's creative attitude towards picture making. Photography, I claim, has enabled the artist to reconsider her role as interpreter. In this chapter it has been my intention to reconsider how we think about photography in terms of the impact on representational art. In taking this approach I have underlined a need to move away from a centralised notion of intentionality.

However, I have only addressed the impact of causal dependency on creative practice. I have not explored the de-centred notion of intentionality beyond a discussion of the need to outline its characteristics and examine why they might enrich our understanding of the photographic artform. Scruton, in his discussion of representational art presents us with what I agree is an

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<sup>120</sup> See interview with Terry Gilliam, *The Observer*, 19/6/11

important demarcation; that being the differentiation between the representational value of a photograph and a painting.

Causal dependency, he argues denies the artist the potential to make a representation that the viewer may take an aesthetic interest towards that is separate from an interest caused by seeing the object photographed. In this chapter I have argued that Scruton's comparison whilst useful is problematic insofar as it is dependent on an understanding of the relationship between the artist and her intention that does not look beyond its formation in painting. Therefore, I claim it is necessary to re-examine a configuration of intentionality in relation to photography. However, before I make such a study it is first necessary to make clear the parameters within which we are able to talk about intentions – specific to the photographic medium.

Therefore, in the next chapter I will consider a different approach towards the understanding of causal derivation in photography and how this effects our exploration of the creative potential of the medium – in terms of appreciating the representational value of a photograph. In particular I will discuss Kendall Walton's claim that a photograph enables us to *see literally* the subject *through* the photograph.

Before concluding this chapter I will consider some further criticisms of Scruton's argument. My aim in giving an exposition of Scruton's detractors is to illustrate a trend in some of the criticism levelled at his claims. For the most part, whilst clear, the criticisms operate on the same assumptions as Scruton's argument. By this I mean that their conception of a photographic aesthetic refers to an understanding of pictorial representation based on the painterly. Whilst we may take some interesting points from these arguments, they highlight the need for a reassessment of the epistemological foundation of our discussion of the creative potential of photography.

## **2.8: Some reactions to Scruton's transparency thesis**

So far I have considered some of the problem's concerning Scruton's understanding of aesthetic representation pertaining to the artwork. I have not, however, considered the possibility that the ideal photograph could be judged as an aesthetic representation according to standards by which Scruton claims paintings should be judged – in terms of the aesthetic representation. This notion that – akin to the painting – a photograph can be appreciated as an aesthetic representation is supported by a few philosophers. Robert Wicks takes up such a position without appearing to disagree with Scruton's prognosis; 'a photograph, ideal or actual, captures and preserves the appearance of its subject.'<sup>121</sup>

For Wick's, causal provenance enhances our experience of the subject. Although the photograph is causally related to its subject he argues that it also allows the viewer to take a disinterested attitude towards the subject. Wicks argues that in order to grasp the photographic aesthetic; 'one must attend to the image's features that arise from the photographic medium *itself*.'<sup>122</sup> What characterises the difference between a transparent interest towards the subject – which for Scruton is the only form of aesthetic interest that we can take towards the photograph – and an interest towards the photograph as an aesthetic representation is not the *momentary* but the preservation or *freezing* of the moment. For Wicks, that the photographer is able *capture* and *preserve* is enough to allow that we are able to interpret the photograph as an aesthetic representation. But is this enough to counter Scruton's contention?

Wick's argues that the tools available to the photographer are sufficient evidence of artistic *gesture* or *intention*. However, it is not Scruton's intention to deny the difference between my experience of the photograph depicting my friend standing in the rain and my standing in the rain beside the subject whilst the photograph is taken. From his argument it follows that the photograph is transparent to the subject, so any aesthetic interest must be towards the subject rather than photograph. It is not the difference between seeing the subject as photographed or *in the flesh* but the photographer's inability to control or arrange the subject – in the manner available to the painter.

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<sup>121</sup> Wicks, R. (1989), p.3

<sup>122</sup> Wicks, R. (1989) p.4

Wicks contends that by photographing the artist is able to transform the object photographed. In this sense, we think of the act of photographing as in some way, an act of interpreting. Yet, as Scruton contends, to posit this belief is to accord photography qualities that we understand as painterly. Problematic to the approach taken by Wicks, is an inability to discern a photographic aesthetic; to underline qualities that we might take to be peculiarly photographic.

To say that my interest in the photograph is an interest towards certain *features* of the picture that we refer to as photographic is for Scruton to misrepresent the creative potential of the ideal photograph. Therefore, whilst Wick's offers us an interesting approach to our understanding of photographic practice he does take seriously the medium itself. Conversely, Scruton does as we have discussed allow that a photograph may tell us something different about the object photographed, yet he does not attempt to characterise this difference. It is my task within this investigation to describe the artistic relevance of these characteristics.

One such approach that elaborates on this idea we can attribute to the philosopher William King. King gives an account of someone captivated by a photograph of the Notre Dame: 'It isn't that I don't remember what it looks like. I do. It's sitting here alone, lingering over details, I relive a pleasant May of wandering about the island, sunning along the river.'<sup>123</sup> King argues that as well as taking an interest in the subject, we also engage with those memories and feelings attached to our interest in the subject. In this sense, one treats the subject itself as an abstraction; it does not stand for itself, but those emotions that I recall when looking at a photograph of the Notre Dame.

It is this abstraction that King argues is sufficient for one to consider the photograph as an aesthetic representation; 'The dominant interest here is not in knowing the appearance of the subject. One remembers that. The interest is in memories that are stirred, feelings that are evoked.'<sup>124</sup> King does not contradict Scruton's claim that the photograph is transparent to the subject. He claims that we recognise that a photograph is *of* the Notre Dame yet still take an aesthetic interest towards the picture. For King, the photograph provokes our aesthetic interest by appealing to emotions and meanings attached to our memory of the subject.

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<sup>123</sup> King, W. (1992), p.259

<sup>124</sup> King, W. (1992) p.259

It is because I realise that this picture is a *photograph of* the Notre Dame that I am reminded of its existence and those feelings that are attached to that memory: ‘The interest is in memories that are stirred, feelings that are evoked. Again, as Scruton argues, the interest is in the subject, and – we add – *its emotional impact*, not in the photograph itself.’<sup>125</sup> However, one might ask King; if I have not seen the Notre Dame would I still be able to consider a photograph of it as an aesthetic representation? Photographs, we might easily agree do hold the potential to stir our memory. However, surely that is because the object photographed provokes a memory of a certain event, not because of an interest towards the photograph itself. This image of the aesthetic character of photography is certainly more appealing yet it is not further developed. Therefore, it does not seem that King offers a successful rejection of Scruton’s claim.

Whilst we may appreciate that the aesthetic quality of the photograph is its ability to provoke certain memories or feelings we might also argue that certain paintings may provoke such an interest. For Scruton, however, to say that our aesthetic interest towards the photograph is characterised by a sense nostalgia amounts to the claims of a fantasist: Since he regards that our interest is provoked, primarily, by the object photographed and to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph is to endow it with the quality of representation that it does not have.

In this section I have considered views that seek to undermine Scruton’s claims regarding the consequence of photographic transparency – in relation to our aesthetic interest towards the photograph. Although, there are some interesting counter-claims, none of these criticisms address the problem that is at the heart of Scruton’s argument; can we appreciate the ideal photograph as an image that is causally related to the artist’s intentions? What is required, I claim, is a thorough exploration of characteristics that we might say are peculiar to photography as a representational art.

## 2.9: Conclusion

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<sup>125</sup> King, W. (1992) p.259

“Blank” as the creative photographer’s state of mind is, uncritical as it is while photographing, as sensitized, as prepared for anything to happen, afterwards with the prints safely in hand he needs to practice the most conscious criticism. Is what he saw present in the photograph? If not, does the photograph open his eyes to something he could not see by himself?<sup>126</sup>

Minor White’s estimation of the process of photographing may help to put in perspective, Scruton’s understanding of both the ideal in photography and painting. The aim of the painter, according to Scruton is not the ‘accurate copying of appearances’<sup>127</sup> but the intentional, imaginative and interpretive representation of the object before the lens; even a faithful depiction of her subject does not allow the viewer to *see* the subject in the same way that is possible in our appreciation of a photograph. Photography, to reiterate, cannot – according to Scruton – achieve this due to the causal relation to its subject. White does not seem to contradict Scruton’s contention, however, he conceives of a creative impulse that is peculiar to photography.

For Scruton, our understanding of an aesthetic representation is separable from our interest towards the object represented. For White the representational is manifest only if the artist has the ability to engage with rather than interpret their subject matter. It is not necessary for the artist to consider their work as a unique interpretation in the sense that Scruton requires.

In this chapter my aim has been to articulate and challenge Scruton’s assessment of the creative potential of photography. What separates creative expression from simulacra he argues is our understanding of the artistic representation as the intentional creation of an appearance. The causal relationship between a photograph and the object before the lens disallows the artist the potential to make an artistic representation in this sense. I have explored an approach towards the creation of representational art that reconsiders the role of the artist. Informed by the camera’s dispassionate eye, the Post-Impressionists set out to create representations that explored not only the way things look but to express the momentary. We can see in the quick brushstrokes, awkward framing and attention to the detail of the environment that they depict an interest in the

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<sup>126</sup> White, M. in Lyons, N. (1966) p.167

<sup>127</sup> Scruton, R. (1998) p.119

temporality of their subject matter: The Post-Impressionists did not seek out the infinitude in meaning but its contemporary configuration. Manet and Degas sought out to create a viewer who took an interest towards their representations not as a dispassionate appreciator but – as Galassi describes – a participant. In Magritte’s work we see a development of this theme that, I contend, is also influenced by the photographic. Magritte’s surreal imagery of the pipe illustrates this deftly as he sets out to explore the subtle narratives in the causally created relationship.

In the last two chapters my discussion of creative practice has underlined in the mechanically derived causal process a different kind of relationship between the artist and her intentionality. In considering the impact of photographic realism on creative practice I have opened up discussion for the possibility of a reassessment of the role of the artist in relation to photography. By the close of this thesis it is my aim to present an illustration of the role of the artist that we might say is peculiar to the photographic medium. Before I outline this approach, however, it is first necessary to consider what is unique about the photographic representation in order to establish a need for a discussion of its aesthetic character.

I will now give a critical exposition of Kendall Walton’s radical version of causal provenance; as a consequence of which he describes the photograph as a *transparent picture*. Whereas Scruton’s explication of the causal derivation is concerned with the parameters of creative practice, Walton attempts to underline what is peculiar about the photograph in terms of our visual experience.

### **Chapter 3: Transparency and the visual**

#### **3.1: Introduction**

To recall the argument so far: The view held by Scruton, that the photograph is a transparent image, is set in context of clarifying the values peculiar to our understanding of the aesthetic representation. In describing the qualities of an aesthetic representation he assesses the potential for a photograph to hold our interest as representational art. Due to mechanically derived causal process Scruton concludes that we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the ideal photograph. The causal relationship between the photograph and its object photographed denies the possibility of an intentional act that for Scruton enables us to take an interest towards the representation that is not wholly determined by our seeing its subject matter.

In the last two chapters I have underlined Scruton's claim as problematic insofar as our understanding the creative potential of photography is concerned – in particular in relation to a progressive understanding of the role of the creator. Whilst I agree with Scruton's conception of the ideal photograph; insofar as he recognises that the photographer is unable to create an image that is causally related to her intentions, I propose that this aspect of the medium is central to its creative appropriation.

Scruton's negative assessment of the intentional act in relation to photography illuminates the need for a reassessment of the creative potential of the medium. This is because, I claim, his interpretation of the intentional act is based on a model that is peculiar to painting: Scruton may not base his argument on the assumption that the photographer is using the camera with the aims of having the intentional control of the painter. Yet, the merit of his argument, which finds creation of an aesthetic representation to be based on what I consider to be a centralised conception of intentionality is characteristically painterly; this conception disallows a discussion of creativity that I claim is peculiar to the artistic appropriation of the ideal photograph. However, in making a study of the creative potential of photography I agree that it is necessary to look to comparison; in the preceding two chapters Scruton's characterisation of the intentional is closely bound to painting and this, I agree, allows us a platform upon which we may recognise a difference; between the approach of the painter and the photographer. However in chapters 3 and 4 I will move away from study of the intentional and towards a description of some of the qualitative differences between the two mediums.

I will consider what is peculiar about the aesthetic experience of a photographic picture; in terms of how the viewer considers the relationship between the viewer and the image. Ultimately, I will relate this to the intentionality debate but that aspect will be explored later, from chapter 5 onwards. Over the course of the next two chapters I will discuss the relationship between the photograph and the object photographed and examine our understanding of the parameters of perceptual access that it entails. Whilst this chapter involves a discussion of perception I do not debate the value of the technical details explored in relation to photography; since in this debate I am concerned with outlining the problems in the philosophy of art pertaining to the parameters of creativity, and in particular in relation to intention.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, I will discuss the impact of the mechanically derived causal process on our conception of pictorial representation. A discussion of Kendall Walton's important essay on photographic transparency will inform the basis of this dialogue.

Primarily, this discussion concerns the relationship between the viewer and image. For Walton, the viewer's experience of the photograph, due to causal derivation is caused by *seeing* the object photographed. Walton claims that '... the viewer of a photograph sees, literally, the scene that was photographed.'<sup>129</sup> In making this claim he is attempting to show amongst other things, the difference between realism that we attribute to painting and realism that we afford the photograph. In particular he wants to distance a conception of photographic realism from Andre Bazin's association with a historical lineage that traces back to picture makers of the Renaissance: For Bazin, the discovery of photography signals the end of the aim to make pictures that are true to reality; allowing that photographs are a part of this project for Walton dilutes what is special about photographic realism:

I shall argue that there is a fundamental difference between photographs and painted portraits of Lincoln, that photography is indeed special, and that it deserves to be called a supremely realistic medium. But the kind of realism most distinctive to photography is not an ordinary one. It has

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<sup>128</sup> For an interesting argument on perception and pictures see Kulvicki (2009)

<sup>129</sup> Walton, K. (1984) p.252

little to do with the Post-Renaissance quest for realism in painting or with standard theoretical accounts of realism.<sup>130</sup>

By dissociating photographic realism from the aims of realism in painting Walton sets out to describe the relationship between the viewer and image in terms that are peculiar to the photographic medium. What is particular about photographic realism – and indeed makes it distinct from realism in painting – is that a photograph, argues Walton, allows the viewer to *see* the subject, recorded by a mechanical causal process: photographs are transparent pictures. Starting from this point Walton sets out to show how photographs, in one sense, put us in *perceptual contact* with the subject photographed: ‘... to perceive things is to be in *contact* with them in a certain way. A mechanical connection with something, counts as contact whereas a humanly mediated one, like that of painting, does not.’<sup>131</sup>

At a glance, Walton’s claim appears to be in line with Scruton’s argument that photographs cannot be considered as aesthetically engaging pictures. Yet as I will unfold in my exposition of Walton’s argument, his discussion of the causal relationship between photograph and object photographed does not delimit creativity; moreover, in chapter 4 I will discuss the possibility of exploring the aesthetic character of photography based on Walton’s transparency thesis.

Yet the problem of coupling the mechanically causal process with artistic creativity remains; if a photograph enables the viewer to see *literally* the subject through the photograph then how is it possible to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as representing a thought about its subject? Whilst I do not seek to undermine Walton’s claims, I am also reticent to accept that photographs enable the viewer to see *literally* the object photographed; artists such as Charlie White and Duane Michals – discussed in the previous chapter – often use the camera to challenge the notion that photographs give the viewer perceptual access to the subject photographed; because our interest towards the object photographed is held not merely by the appearance but also the *event*.

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<sup>130</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.251

<sup>131</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p. 269-270

Duane Michals' *Things are Queer* (1973) explores the complex relationship between appearance and meaning; important to this correlation is recognition of an event that punctuates and unfolds the complexities of his images. The representational meaning often emerges not merely in relation to the object photographed but the event in which we find that object. Michals creates a body of work in which each picture in the sequence is used to disrupt or interrupt the viewer's understanding of the perceptual relationship that is held in the previous image. Whilst the images do enable perceptual contact, this does not mean that the viewer is able to identify correctly the subject that is photographed; for example each image in Michals' series seems to undermine our perceptual relationship with the subject photographed in the previous image. Michals' series in one sense represents the complex relationship between perception and belief: In the first image we see a photograph of a bathroom, yet in the next image we see the same bathroom dwarfed by a naked human leg. The leg seems to be saying to the viewer; *this is not a bathroom*.

As we considered in the previous chapters the creative use of photography often represents a tension that exists between the subject photographed and its appearance in the photograph. This tension, I claim may be caused when photography is used to stimulate a discussion of the relationship between visual experience of the world and how meaning converges and diverges from this experience. What makes this tension all the more potent, I claim, is the absence of authorial intention that is present in painting; it holds the potential to stimulate a sense of ambiguity and suggestive power in the photographic work of art. Walton's description of the transparency does indeed leave room for this kind of debate. Yet, there is, as we will consider no exploration of the possibility that the qualitative difference between photographic and painted pictures may also incur an important difference in the creative appropriation of the two media.



### 11. Duane Michals, *Things are Queer*, 1973

Walton does not claim that the causal relationship between subject and image disallows an interest that is determined by seeing the photograph. He argues that our visual experience of a photograph is caused by our seeing the object *through* the photograph: ‘...to be transparent is not necessarily to be invisible. We see photographs themselves when we see through them.’<sup>132</sup> Because photographs are transparent they are also pictures that are unaffected by the photographer’s intentional act or beliefs – about the way the subject looks.

I aim to show that the presence of the photographer does have an effect on our perceptual relationship with photographs and the object of which they are a recording. Yet, in observing the photographer’s intent, it is first necessary to establish the confines of such a discourse. As the photographer Bert Krages deftly illustrates the relationship between the photographer and her tools impacts significantly on her approach towards image making; to such an extent that I claim we cannot mean the same thing when we mention intentionality in relation photography – that is recognisable from a discussion about painting:

<sup>132</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.252

Photography is more difficult than visual arts such as drawing and painting because the camera records the objects in front of the lens. For example, if an artist drawing a flower fails to see lint stuck between the petals or on the stem, it will not show up in the drawing. Photographers do not have the luxury of unconscious omission.<sup>133</sup>

I will argue that whilst a photograph does allow the viewer perceptual access to the subject before the lens, the potential for the creation of an aesthetic representation remains. Yet, due to the differences in pictorial representation that Walton discusses, it is a different kind of approach towards creative intention that we find in painting. The photographer Gary Winogrand once remarked that he did not photograph to capture the object before his lens but to ‘...see what things looks like photographed’<sup>134</sup>. Walton’s transparency thesis, I propose, goes some way towards opening up the debate of an understanding of creative practice in a sense that is peculiarly photographic. My aim is to describe how the mechanically derived causal process and subsequent loss of intentionality – in the sense that we are familiar with in painting – has impacted on the artist’s approach towards the creation of representational art.<sup>135</sup>

### **3.2: Walton’s transparency: The potency of photographic realism**

To suppose that a photograph is or has a transparent quality invites the question; how does this affect our appreciation of the photograph? The philosopher Kendall Walton argues that to ask this question is a mistake – at least insofar as our normal understanding of how we think about a picture is concerned. Photographs, claims Walton, are transparent pictures and to understand what this means we first need to dissociate the term picture from our usual understanding of it in reference to paintings and drawings.

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<sup>133</sup> Krages, B. (2005), p.3

<sup>134</sup> Winogrand, G. in Johnson, B. (2004), p.228

<sup>135</sup> Snyder and Allen (1975) hold a similar view to mine. However, they reject the notion that photography has extended the potential of our visual experience of the world; ‘instead of saying that the camera shows us what our eyes would see, we are now positing the rather unilluminating proposition that, if our vision worked like photography, then we would see things the way a camera does.’ (1975, p.152).

Photography, he argues, has enabled us to extend the boundaries of our ordinary visual experience; therefore, we should not think of photographic pictures in the same category as other kinds of pictures. Rather than taking the photograph as a descriptive kind of picture, photographs, argues Walton ‘...gave us a new way of seeing.’<sup>136</sup>

As with Scruton, Walton illuminates this claim by marking out a distinction between the representational and a non-representational content of a picture. By demarcating the territory of the representational as determined by and also determining the scope of human intention, photographic picturing is described in terms of the mechanically derived causal relationship. However, his claim does not stand as a measure of aesthetic value in the same manner as Scruton considers. Walton’s aim is to consider how and in what way photographs picture things.

For Walton, the visual information of a photograph is inseparable from the object photographed. Nonetheless, there is a qualifying difference between seeing the object ordinarily and seeing it through the photograph. In order to illustrate this difference, Walton seeks first to expose and do away with the confusion surrounding transparency. In particular, Bazin’s view that a photograph is a surrogate for the thing it pictures. Walton argues that a photograph does not put us in the presence of the photographed subject. In seeing the subject we do not forget that we are looking at the surface of a photograph; the unnatural depth of field or rectangular picture frame which cuts off other objects from view: ‘Only in the most exotic circumstances would one mistake a photograph for the objects photographed... photographs look like what they are: *photographs*.’<sup>137</sup>

Yet technical and stylistic tropes – like film speed, depth of field, printing technique, etc – and the edges of the frame that remind us that we are not in the presence of the subject do not lead us to believe that we are hallucinating. Or that it is something other than the subject that we see when looking at the photograph.

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<sup>136</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p. 251

<sup>137</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.249

In Bazin's argument Walton finds a starting point: He finds useful – yet not entirely clear – Bazin's claim that the screen puts the viewer "in the presence of" the actor. It does so in the same way as a mirror – one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it – but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection...<sup>138</sup> In Bazin's conception of the photographic image as a mirror he underlines what he perceives to be peculiar about pictures made using a camera.

The mirror analogy, for Walton, underlines something characteristic about the kinds of pictures that photographs are. Different from Scruton's use of the mirror conception – insofar as Scruton likens the photograph to a mirror in order to show that photographs enable the viewer to see the subject and not the artist's representation.<sup>139</sup> For Walton, photographs are like mirrors inasmuch as they help us to see things, but we do not confuse the image they produce with the object they enable us to see. For Walton this tells us that photographs are the kinds of pictures that we may describe as prosthetics: 'Photography is an aid to vision also, and an especially versatile one. With the assistance of the camera, we can see not only around corners and what is distant or small; we can also see into the past. We see long deceased ancestors when we look at dusty snapshots of them.'<sup>140</sup>

### **3.3: The Real in art**

Yet, in making this assumption we seem to be left with a familiar problem; how can a picture become akin to or like our ordinary visual experience? For Snyder and Allen, the idea that photographs enable us to see as we do ordinarily is a predictable yet pedestrian error. They claim that philosophers who discuss the relationship between perceptual access and the photograph often neglect the affect of a process on the making of a photographic picture:

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<sup>138</sup> Bazin, A. (1967) p.97

<sup>139</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 139

<sup>140</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p. 251

A photograph shows us “what we would have seen” at a certain moment in time, *from* a certain vantage point *if* we kept our head immobile *and* closed one eye *and if* we saw things in Agfacolor or in Tri-X developed in D-76 and printed on Kodabromide #3 paper.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, Snyder and Allen are to be celebrated for their claim that the photographic process does have an impact on our interest towards the object photographed.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, Walton does not reject the claim that photographs have the potential to stimulate our interest as *interpretive* images. Central to his argument, nonetheless, is the notion that our visual experience of the photograph is caused by seeing the subject rather than a pictorial description or interpretation.

### 3.4: Walton’s neurosurgeon

‘Photographs are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them.’<sup>143</sup> This statement is as bold as it appears; when we look at a photograph – according to Walton – we are in perceptual contact with the object photographed and, therefore, photographs are like prosthetic aids to our vision; they help us to see the world. But what makes us think that a photograph helps the viewer to see the world as it appears? And, how would an artist appropriate a medium that makes pictures that the viewer is able to *see through* to create representation art?

The second question forms as the topic of this thesis and is a problem that I am seeking to consider at length. The first is more pressing and concerns our understanding of the representational value of a photograph. Walton sets out to answer the first question, as a way to

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<sup>141</sup> Snyder, J. and Allen, N. (1975), p.152

<sup>142</sup> Whilst Snyder and Allen’s description of the photographic process is certainly useful, I claim that one part of this description could do with some further refining. The claim that in order to see as a camera we would need to have one eye open could in a sense be misleading insofar as it requires us to assume that the camera and photographers sight are inseparable. However, this seems problematic if we are to note that when the photographer depresses the shutter release they are – whilst the image is imprinted on the film plane or digital screen – unable to see. The sense of *blindness* that a photographer experiences – when the photograph is being taken – I will underline in the second half of this investigation is important to our understanding of its aesthetic character.

<sup>143</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p. 251

show what is special about photographic pictures. He prepares two examples that show the perceptual similarities between looking at a photograph and looking at the object photographed.

His first example illustrates the difference between what he calls ‘intentional counterfactual dependence and natural counterfactual dependence.’<sup>144</sup> *Intentional* and *natural* dependence describe two states of visual perception regarding the pictorial representation. Intentional dependence refers to a state of perception that is contingent on our acknowledging that the object of our visual experience is guided by an intention for us to see it as we do; our interest in the object of our visual experience in this sense is determined not by seeing the object photographed but the way that we see it. Natural counterfactual dependence, conversely, refers to a visual experience which is caused by our relating the visual contents of that experience not too an interpretive or intentional thought about the object, but the object itself.

### **3.5: Intentional counterfactual dependence**

Walton gives an example of a neurosurgeon who attaches the optic nerves of her patient to a supercomputer, thereby gaining control over the movement of her eyes. Whilst the surgeon may believe that her patient is receiving an objective visual experience, ultimately it is dependent on intentions of the neurosurgeon; the neurosurgeon’s ‘... patient *seems* to be seeing things, and her visual experiences are caused by things she seems to see. But she doesn’t really see them; the doctor is seeing for her.’<sup>145</sup> This kind of visual experience is for Walton similar to the kind of visual experience that we encounter when looking at a painting; because our perceptual experience is guided by the intentions of the painter.

### **3.6: Natural counterfactual dependence**

To illustrate a contrast between the transparent and intentionally produced picture, Walton introduces an example of a patient who has received an eye transplant. As with the neurosurgeon’s patient, in a sense, the transplant patient’s visual perception is mediated.

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<sup>144</sup>Walton, K. (1984), p. 265

<sup>145</sup>Walton, K. (1984), p. 265

However, whilst the neurosurgeon's patient's visual perception is, for Walton, *intentionally dependent* on the neurosurgeon's supervision, the transplant patient's visual experience is *naturally dependent* on what they see. *Naturally dependent* seeing is not influenced or mediated by the intentions of an intentional force. Whilst the transplant patient is able to see due to the aid of a donor, her visual experience is not mediated – as is the neurosurgeon's patient.

Therefore, she is in control of her own visual experience; the patient's visual experience is not dependent on the beliefs of the neurosurgeon – as they are for the patient whose eyesight is controlled by a machine. Walton makes this example to show the difference between our visual experience of a painting and a photograph: 'In order to see through the picture to the scene depicted, the viewer must have visual experiences which do not depend on the picture maker's beliefs in the way that paintings do.'<sup>146</sup>

Central to Walton's conceptual analysis of our perceptual experience *through* the photograph regards not only transparent status. He is also concerned with classifying transparency in terms of photographicity: photographs are *aids* to our vision argues Walton, therefore, we think of them as pictures that we see through rather than pictures that enable us to see directly. Critics of Walton's transparency thesis – whom I discuss in the next chapter – often argue against transparency due to a belief that it denies photographicity. Nonetheless, as I will underline, Walton's notion of pictorial transparency entails photographicity; insofar as it is an argument that seeks, in one sense, to underline the difference in kind between photographic and painted pictures.

Before we consider some objections to Walton's transparency thesis we have yet to discuss how he understands the photograph as a visual aid that places the viewer in perceptual contact with the object photographed but also is to be distinguished from our ordinary visual experience. Central to this configuration is for Walton an exploration of the difference between photographic and descriptive pictures.

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<sup>146</sup> Walton, K. (1984) p. 264

### 3.7: Transparency and the descriptive

Walton acknowledges that our beliefs about and interaction with the world does affect our visual experience of photographs.<sup>147</sup> Yet, when it comes to thinking about what determines our response to the conceptual content of a picture there is, for Walton, a distinct difference between transparent and descriptive pictures. For example, no matter how realistic the painterly or written description may be, we recognise that what we are looking at is dependent on the beliefs and intentions of the individual who has made the description. Photographs, he argues, are different because perceptual contact is not mediated by the intentions or beliefs of the photographer: ‘Investigating things by examining pictures of them (either photographs or drawings) is striking analogous to investigating them by looking at them directly and disanalogous to investigating them by examining descriptions of them.’<sup>148</sup>

What makes photographs different from written or intentionally dependent descriptions concerns the way in which we understand the instance of the mechanically derived causal process. Taking a textual description as example, Walton shows how a reader might mistakenly identify the object that is being described because of the visual dissimilarities between word/number: ‘The numerals “3” and “8” are sometimes easily mistaken for each other. So when reading about a tree which is actually 85 feet high, one might easily take it to be 35 feet high.’<sup>149</sup>

This shows us, claims Walton that the visual content of descriptive pictures is not always dependent on having *real similarity relations* with the objects they depict. Whilst a photograph may depict something in such a way that we do not recognise that object the viewer is unlikely to mistake the subject photographed for something that it bears no visual resemblance to. Even in cases in which the photograph is blurred, made in close up or the negative is over/under exposed, perceptual contact – however unremarkable the quality of the picture may be – with the subject photographed is not broken; we do not, for example, take it that the subject itself is blurred. Due

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<sup>147</sup> See Walton, K. (1984), p.272

<sup>148</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.270

<sup>149</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.270.

to mechanical causality photographs, unlike paintings and descriptive pictures, argues Walton, allow us to see as we do ordinarily; insofar as our perceptual contact is dependent on the way something looks rather than a human belief or intention:

We have learned that perceptual contact with the world is to be distinguished from two different sorts of nonperceptual access to it: access mediated by intervening descriptions as well as access via another person. The common contrast between seeing something and being told about it conflates the two. When someone describes a scene to us, we are doubly removed from it; contact is broken both by the intervention of the person, the teller, and by the verbal form of the telling. Perceptual contact can itself be mediated-by mirrors or television circuits or photographs. But this mediation is a means of maintaining contact. Viewers of photographs are in perceptual contact with the world.<sup>150</sup>

### 3.8: Conclusion

By underlining what is special about photographic pictures, Walton may have set up the parameters for an approach towards a positive discussion of the creative potential of the medium. Differentiating photographs from other kinds of pictures, I claim, may enable us to consider the aesthetic and creative in characteristically photographic terms without appealing to comparison – with painting – for verification of value. However, at present the job of discerning the aesthetic value of a photograph – due to its status as a transparent picture – looks somewhat difficult; whilst Walton does not seem to be arguing that photographs are devoid of aesthetic potential his claim that we *see through* photographs may suggest a negative prognosis.

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<sup>150</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.273

In chapter 4 I will consider some criticisms of Walton's transparency thesis; in which the claim that we see *through* the photograph or *literally*, the subject photographed is taken to be problematic. In offering a counter to his claims about photographic transparency I will discuss the argument that due to the viewer being removed from the scene – photographed – photographs are pictures that are not transparent in the way that Walton proclaims. However, I propose that Walton's transparency thesis enables us consider that which is peculiarly photographic in value, aside from the painterly. Therefore, I will consider the possibility of establishing an aesthetic discourse on photography taken from Walton's transparency thesis.

At this stage I am inclined to agree with Walton, insofar as I think it is necessary to think of photographs as pictures that are different in kind from paintings and drawings. I also agree that they do in a way act as a kind of prosthetic; we do not mistake a photograph for its subject but it does in a way enable us, potentially, to *see* the subject – photographed. Yet I also think that implicit in Walton's argument is a danger relating to a positive discussion of the creative and aesthetic potential of the photographic medium. Although the propensity for creative potential is not denied by Walton's thesis, there is no serious consideration of the possibility that the loss of intentional control as it commonly understood has had a positive and interesting impact on the artist's creative process. Therefore, I intend to consider the qualitative difference that is underlined by Walton and assess the possibility that it has a positive impact on creative expression.

## Chapter 4: Seeing through Walton's transparency thesis

### 4.1: Introduction

Walton claims that a photograph can act as an extension of visual perception. This is not to say, however, that photographs are unextraordinary: whilst photographs may put us in perceptual contact with the objects they depict, argues Walton, this does not mean that they are also inconspicuous or uninteresting.<sup>151</sup> The viewer is not blind to the fact that it is a photograph that she is looking at – as opposed to believing that she sees the subject in the photograph before her. Yet neither does the viewer think that what she is looking at is anything other than the object photographed: 'We see photographs themselves when we see through them.'<sup>152</sup> Some philosophers find Walton's conclusion difficult, in particular when trying to outline a discussion of the possibility that photographs are aesthetically interesting.

Walton's claim that we see through photographs may appear problematic when discussing the aesthetic and creative potential of the medium. This seems all the more troubling when he presses home the point that we should not treat photographic pictures as we do paintings or drawings; it may not be the photograph that creates our interest since as Walton argues they are pictures that we see through: 'One may pay no attention to the photographic images themselves, concentrating instead on the things photographed.'<sup>153</sup>

Walton's interpretation of photographic transparency, for a number of critics, poses a serious problem with regards to the aesthetic value of the medium. In this chapter I will consider some of these arguments that seek to successfully contradict Walton's claim – that photographs are transparent pictures. My aim is to explore the claim that by basing a discussion of photography on transparency as the consequence of the mechanically derived causal process, we delimit a full and interesting exploration of the aesthetic and creative potential of the medium. However, as

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<sup>151</sup> See Walton, K. (1984), p. 252

<sup>152</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.252

<sup>153</sup> Walton, K. (1984), p.253

Walton does not deny that photography can be used creatively, I will also discuss an aesthetic interpretation of his transparency thesis.

#### 4.2: The context theorist

The context theorist proposes that if we are to argue that photographs allow us to see *literally*, the object photographed, then it is possible that we are in danger of neglecting the different uses of the photographic medium; for example, recognising the distinction between the function of a passport photograph and a family portrait. We might imagine, for example that our interest towards a photograph is affected not – solely – by the objects photographed but circumstances that we may regard to be external to the documentary value of the photographic picture. In this sense, we may think of our interest towards the photograph as not – solely – determined by perceptual contact but it is also dependent on our acknowledging the imprint of a certain context. This position I will refer to as the context thesis.

The context theorist understands that our seeing something is not determined *literally* by our seeing that object photographed, but acknowledges that our visual experience is also dependent on our acknowledging a certain context. This notion, I contend is expressed neatly by the philosopher Bas Van Fraassen: ‘To understand representation we must... look to the practice of representing, to how representation is a matter of use; and this involves attention first of all to the users in a broad sense of “use.”’<sup>154</sup>

To engage with something as a representation, is for the context theorist to think about the use in which the medium that created the object holding our interest is being employed. This concerns not only the intentions of the artist/picture maker – although these concerns are not neglected – but the manner in which the medium is used to communicate its subject matter. Indeed, for the context theorist representation is not defined by appealing to the intentional but the context in which we engage with the object represented.

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<sup>154</sup> Van Fraassen, B. (2008), p.23

If determining how a picture functions as a representation is problematic perhaps it is because we have so far discussed its parameters in terms of a particular medium – the painterly; our interest in context has been to this point concerned with the intentions of the picture maker. Van Fraassen argues that our mistake is to consider the concept of pictorial representation as defined by medium – or qualities that are medium specific. In doing so, we ignore the defining characteristic of pictorial representation, which for Van Fraassen, is determined by *use* value:

...if it is an image of something at all then *what it is an image of* depends on the use, on *what I use it to represent*. So the question *what does it represent?* must in this case be taken as elliptic for *what is it being used to represent?*<sup>155</sup>

To say that our visual experience – ordinarily or otherwise – is dependent on a certain context often means that our visual experience is determined by seeing an object *as* something else or according to a certain situation: for example I may see Jack Nicholson as a lothario in one press photograph and as a psychopath on a poster for Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980). Whilst I would not claim that I am looking at a different person, it would be inadequate – according to the context theorist – to say that we *literally* see the same person. Probing this aspect of our visual experience further, Van Fraassen argues that even looking at a photograph of something, seeing the object – even under Walton's terms – requires us to make an interpretation. The interpretation, in this sense is made in line with a particular use:

What is represented, and how it is represented, is not determined by the colors, lines, shapes in the representing object alone. Whether or not A represents B, and sometimes only, *on the way in which A is being used*. "Use" must here be understood to encompass many contextual factors: the intention of the creator, the coding conventions extant in the community, the way in which an audience or viewer takes it, the ways in which the representing object is displayed, and so forth.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Van Fraassen, B. (2008), p.21

<sup>156</sup> Van Fraassen, B. (2008), p.23

For the context theorist, to reiterate, to say that we see the object photographed – through the photograph – neglects the context in which we think about our seeing that object. Our seeing that object is not only counterfactually dependent on seeing that object through the photograph. Although, we might say that this is one aspect amongst others: ‘Even for the optical microscope I am offering a change in view, by favouring and emphasizing the “creation” metaphor over the “window” metaphor. Though valuable as a heuristic guide, to take the “window” metaphor literally acts as a brake on the possibilities of interpretation.’<sup>157</sup> To say that a visual experience is determined merely by perceptual contact seems to overlook not only the medium but the contextual; our visual experience, for Van Fraassen is not crafted by perceptual contact, moreover, perceiving is identified as an act that is specific to a particular context.

However, I do not think that this description of our understanding of photographic representation as dependent on a *context* or *use* overpowers the force of Walton’s statement. Whilst we may say that the context defines or illustrates a particular meaning relative to the subject it is synthetic and therefore, not descriptive of the kind of perceptual contact that photographs allow. It is not the *context* or *use* that the viewer is in perceptual contact with when she has a photograph in her hand. Context may indeed be applied to what the viewer is looking at – the subject photographed – although it does not alter or undermine transparency. Nonetheless, the context theorist does underline something interesting about photographs that I think that the transparency theorist may overlook. The way we look at photographs – apply meaning, take an interest – may also tell us something about their value as prosthetic aids. Taking an interest towards the photograph as determined by a context rather than the subject photographed may in one sense be illustrative of their value as representations.

By arguing that photographs may be meaningful in ways that seem to be at odds with their status as transparent pictures we acknowledge the peculiar way that photographs give us access to their content; or perhaps even disallow access to the subject. Since we are only given visual access to the subject photographed, recognising meaning or context is not necessarily straightforward. In this sense, the context theorist has a point, but I think it can be put in a different way: Whilst we may acknowledge that due to mechanical causality, ideal photographs are transparent pictures,

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<sup>157</sup> Van Fraassen, B. (2008), p.100

nonetheless, the meaning of a gesture, smile or shape may only be taken as a possibility. The possibility we attribute not merely to the appearance but the appearance as representative of the photographic event. This approach I claim may give us fresh insight into the exploration of representational art and intentionality relating to the photographic artform.

### **4.3: Seeing through interpretation**

If we are to agree with the context theorist; that we see *contextually* not *literally* then we may be inclined to ask what affects our interpretation of those objects we see? Do we take an interest towards the context in which the object photographed is found? Or, perhaps it could also be the social or political circumstances that surround our experience of the photographic picture? The context theorist asks us to consider what else other than perceptual contact effects, or has a bearing on our understanding of a visual experience that in turn informs perceptual contact.

The context theorist certainly presents a challenge to the transparency theorist claim that we are able to see through the object photographed by posing this question. However, it is a position that does not tackle the transparency theorist assertion that we are able to *see* literally. Regardless of the context or use in which we experience the picture, we still recognise that it is a photograph of something – causally related to the object photographed.

One such position that does consider the *literal* in relation to transparency is found within a viewpoint I will refer to as the egocentric theory. The egocentric theorist argues that our ordinary visual experience is marked by a sense of autonomy; when we see as we do ordinarily, we acknowledge that object in both spatial and temporal relation to ourselves – insofar as ordinary or literal seeing involves an egocentric relationship.

In ordinary seeing we get information about the spatial and temporal relations between the object seen and ourselves. We learn, not merely that some possible states of affairs is actual, but that it is actual here and now. Call this “egocentric information.” That seeing provides us with egocentric information is connected to the fact that seeing is perspectival.<sup>158</sup>

So if I see Wayne Rooney ordinarily – am in perceptual contact with him rather than an image of him; I acknowledge this experience in relation to my presence within this room and at this moment. To see Wayne Rooney in a photograph is to remove my awareness of the spatiotemporal relationship that is a quality of our ordinary visual experience for the egocentric theorist.<sup>159</sup>

My visual experience in this sense is autonomous from the spatiotemporal relationship that I would need to acknowledge that a photograph is transparent and therefore claim that I am in perceptual contact with Rooney. My experience of seeing him *through* a photograph is not just dependent on perceptual contact, argues the egocentric theorist, but also a number of factors that are external to this. For example, I may be holding the picture in my hand or studying it on a desk, whereas when I am in the same room, my visual experience is not necessarily mediated or controlled in the same manner. When Wayne Rooney is in the room with me, I am aware of the egocentric element in my visual experience; it is *me* doing the looking, therefore, there are no special circumstances surrounding my perceptual contact.

For the egocentric theorist, to see *literally* we need also acknowledge ‘temporal relations between the object seen and ourselves.’<sup>160</sup> To be in perceptual contact with the world requires some recognition of the spatiotemporal in that experience; in particular acknowledging that *this* visual experience is determined by the perspective of the beholder. Characteristic of the visual

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<sup>158</sup> Currie, G. (1991), p. 26

<sup>159</sup> See Currie, G. (1991)

<sup>160</sup> Currie, G. (1991), p.66

experience that I am having, is for the egocentric theorist underpinned by a belief that the experience is of the ‘here and now.’<sup>161</sup> Whilst I may have the photograph in my hand in the *here and now* I do not think that the object photographed as present in the *here and now*.

To be in perceptual contact with something, argues Currie, we must recognise that part of the content of this experience involves ‘egocentric information.’<sup>162</sup> Egocentric information is the evidence that supports the belief that perceptual contact relates the beholder’s perspective. Egocentric information, according to Currie denotes ordinary seeing; which we may recognise as determined by a direct spatiotemporal relation to the subject we are looking at: ‘That seeing provides us with egocentric information is connected to the fact that seeing is perspectival. I could not place myself in the world if I saw the world from no particular perspective.’<sup>163</sup>

Ordinary seeing, according to Currie, necessitates that we engage with objects in physical and psychical relation to ourselves; my perceptual experience of the world related to my perspective.<sup>164</sup> Yet should we take this view as conclusive? One might argue, for example, that whilst I recognise that my perspective does not stand in egocentric relation to the object photographed I may interpret the object in terms of ordinary seeing insofar as I acknowledge that object photographed to be the cause of my visual experience.

Both the context theorist and the egocentric theorist present an interesting counter to the transparency theorist; they argue that in order for me to say that I am seeing *literally* – that I am in perceptual contact with the subject – the parameters of that experience must be in line with my spatiotemporal situation. For the context theorist, to claim that the photograph may be interpreted as a pictorial representation does not deny provenance of the mechanically derived causal process. Nonetheless, it also offers an interpretation of our visual experience – of a photograph – as not wholly dependent on the object depicted but also relative to the context in which we see the photograph – as an object to be contemplated for its own sake. For Van Fraassen

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<sup>161</sup> Currie, G. (1991), p.66

<sup>162</sup>Currie, G. (1991), p.66

<sup>163</sup>Currie, G. (1991), p.66

<sup>164</sup> See Currie, G. (1991), p.26

representation is contextually realised. Because in a sense we understand the photograph to be *taken* from the ordinary, it suggests a remove from that which it is causally related to.

In Walton's *Marvellous Images* he dedicates the better half of a chapter to the challenges set against his version of the transparency thesis.<sup>165</sup> He begins by addressing the foundations of his claims regarding photographic transparency; involving the prognosis that the viewer *literally* sees the subject *through* the photograph. Walton reinstates his position by claiming that the meaning of *literally* is misinterpreted by his interlocutors: transparency, argues Walton, does not disallow aesthetic representation or creative appropriation. His aim is to outline the character of photography as different from painting, not calculate the difference as an evaluation of aesthetic quality:

My position is that photographs... induce imagining seeing and are representation (depictions, pictures), in addition to being transparent... As I emphasized in "Transparent Pictures"... interaction between the role of photographs as aids to vision and their role as representation, is one of photograph's most important and intriguing characteristics. To construe transparency as excluding imagining seeing is to miss out on it completely.<sup>166</sup>

By describing photographs as transparent pictures, I contend, he enables the potential to describe qualities peculiar to the photographic medium; foregrounding this, he also underlines a discussion of transparency as a quality that makes a photograph a different kind of picture from a painting. Currie does not contradict Walton's claim that a photograph is causally related to the object photographed. Yet in taking Walton's understanding of *literal* to mean *ordinary*, Currie objects to Walton's interpretation of photographs as transparent pictures. Yet, Walton also acknowledges that *literal* in his sense is different from *normal* or *everyday* in terms of how

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<sup>165</sup> See Walton, K. *Marvellous Images* (2008), pp.117-132

<sup>166</sup> Walton, K. (2008), pp.126-127

photographs enable the viewer to see their contents. Whilst Walton argues that photographs put the viewer in perceptual contact with the world, photographs are described as prosthetics or visual aids. This description, I claim, successfully avoids any of the confusion that Currie suggests is occurring in his egocentric thesis. Because, as Walton argues, we see *through* photographs it is less likely to conflate our visual experience of the picture with an *ordinary* visual experience of the subject. Taking this into account, we may begin to think of the photographic picture as affording us a different kind of access to an experience of the pictorial representation.

#### **4.4: pictorial status**

If we refer to the photograph as a picture do we call into question its status as a transparent object? In the first chapter, we discussed Scruton's important essay on photography and aesthetic representation in which he does not refer to the photograph as a *picture*. Whilst this move may not be intentional, it seems to underline Scruton's claim that photographs may not be interesting as representations. The context theorist argues that our interest in a photograph is also determined by a certain context or set of circumstances that are separate from the visual information. Walton does not reject that I acknowledge the photograph as a picture. But, since I do see the object photographed, he argues that I must be looking at that object and not a representation. But is it possible to both see through and take an interest in the photograph as pictorial representation at the same time?

The answer is no, according to those who claim that due to its pictorial status we are unable to see literally the object photographed. The photograph's status as a picture, in this sense affects significantly not only how we see but also interpret the objects photographed. The pictorial status view contends that our visual experience of something we see in a picture is determined by codes that form our conception of a picture.

Gene Blocker argues that there are four characteristic elements that constitute pictorial status. When taking an interest in something in a picture, our experience is interpreted according to

these rules. But what gives the photograph its status as a picture? Firstly, ‘that the picture is a picture of one thing (or an event) to be picked out against a background.’<sup>167</sup> Secondly, the event or one thing photographed is the most prominent object within the picture frame. Third, the background is rendered – conceptually – as generic, for example; a photograph taken with a section of Central Park woodland in the background is interpreted generically as woodland. Finally, knowledge of the object or event is construed contextually dependent on its size in relation to background and furthermore the viewer’s contextual knowledge of the objects photographed: We consider those objects most prominent within the frame to guide our interpretation of the background. Blocker’s view that our visual experience of a photograph is dependent on pictorial conventions seeks to successfully undermine Walton’s notion of natural dependency. It also suggests that our interest towards a picture may be determined in such a way that is regarded as autonomous from the object depicted.

For Blocker, our visual experience of the object photographed also involves recognising certain pictorial conventions. Yet, I am inclined to think that it also neglects the very fact that the picture is a photograph: If I am looking at a photograph, I recognise qualities that distinguish it from other types of pictures – even if by degree. We may acknowledge certain pictorial conventions yet we also notice that the photograph is causally related to the object photographed.

The claim that pictorial status indicates that our visual experience is affected by certain societal norms or traditions represent a view that is also shared by the context theorist: That the photograph communicates not simply what it is a photograph of, but reveals something about the context in which the visual experience is found. Our understanding of something that is communicated – such as a photograph – for Van Fraassen presupposes certain conventions be they social or otherwise; ‘Since communication presupposes community to some significant extent...’<sup>168</sup>

The pictorial/context/egocentric theorists argue that photographs are pictures that are more than just aids to our vision. In taking up this charge in opposition to Walton’s claim that photographs

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<sup>167</sup> Blocker, H. G. (1977), p.161

<sup>168</sup> Van Fraassen, B. (2008) p.21

are transparent pictures, these counterarguments, I claim, misrepresent the core of his thesis. Walton argues that whilst photographs are transparent *pictures*; they are not invisible.

Yet, this dissatisfaction with Walton is in one sense well founded: His argument although keen to differentiate photographs from other kinds of pictures seems to neglect aesthetic or creative potential; insofar as he reiterates that transparency denies that the viewer may take an interest towards the photograph that is not caused by the object photographed. Although I am inclined to see Walton's view not as a criticism of the creative potential of photography, but as a challenge; to open up a discourse on the creative appropriation of photography that is not dependent on describing a value system that seeks to be or is comparative with painting.

#### **4.5: Aesthetics through the lens**

Walton does not explore the potential of a transparent aesthetic, only that photography allows us a new way of seeing: 'The invention of the camera gave us not just a new method of making pictures and not just pictures of a new kind: it 'gave us a new way of seeing.'<sup>169</sup> If we are to establish photography as a new way of seeing does it also require us to re-think our aesthetic understanding of representational art in the context of the photographic medium? Or at least consider a kind of transparent aesthetic? Walton does not explore this, at least explicitly; however, his view that photographs are prosthetic aids to our vision does enable the potential to think about them as having an intrinsic representational value that could provoke aesthetic contemplation.

There are those who hold the position that due to its status as a transparent picture a photograph is able to afford the viewer a unique aesthetic experience. This position, which I will refer to as the transparent aesthetic view, does not reject Walton's version of transparency; insofar as it is an argument supportive of the claim that we are able to see literally, the object through the photograph. However, central to this position is that we are able to take an interest towards the photograph as a photograph – providing we also accept that a photograph is a transparent image. By claiming that we are able to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as a

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<sup>169</sup>Walton, K. (1984), p.251.

photograph, the transparent aesthetic theorist is in disagreement with Scruton's version of transparency.

For Scruton, to recall, we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as representational art. His understanding of the *ideal* photograph seeks to convince us that photographic representation cannot be the cause of aesthetic interest since a photograph is a transparent object. However, as Dominic Lopes contends art and our appreciation of the aesthetic is no longer removed from the ordinary or every day.<sup>170</sup> Artists often remove/take what we might consider to be ordinary or uninteresting objects and re-appropriate them as a work of art without altering the appearance of the object represented – in their interpretation.

Photographs are not dissimilar in this sense; the artist, her toolbox, materials, techniques and attitudes towards creativity, contends Lopes, are concepts in a continually transforming landscape; because of this we are required, regularly to re-visit our understanding and interpretation of aesthetic character:

Anybody interested in the aesthetic value of art must now wonder how an encounter with a work of art (for example, Andy Warhol's *Brillo boxes*) can engage any aesthetic interest not also engaged by a very similar non-art object (for example, Brillo boxes).<sup>171</sup>

Lopes does not contradict Walton's assertion that we literally see the object through the photograph. His claim is in part as a response to Scruton's assertion that an aesthetic interest towards the photograph must be purely an interest towards the object photographed. Both Scruton and Walton agree that the photograph is transparent inasmuch as it stands in causal

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<sup>170</sup> It is interesting to note that Lopes does not consider the impact of photography on creative practice. It seems to be taken on assumption that we understand the parameters of creative practice to include everyday objects. It is less clear why Lopes thinks we should consider the everyday and conventional as aesthetically interesting. An interesting discussion of the problem of discerning artworks from non-artworks is taken up by Arthur C. Danto in *The Transformation of the Common place*, Harvard (1981).

<sup>171</sup> Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.233

relation to the object photographed. The difference between the two rests on the understanding of aesthetic parameters of the medium.

For Scruton, it is the aesthetic value of representational art that is his main concern. Therefore, his conclusions rest on a comparative study with painting. For Walton, however, comparison operates as a way of making distinct the two mediums – painting and photography. In this sense, the value of photography is not dependent on a comparative value of representational art since he notes that photographs are different in kind from paintings – in terms of their value as artworks. Furthermore, Walton does not deny that photographs can be interesting as representations: ‘My position is that photographs, documentary photographs included, induce imagining seeing and are representations (depictions, pictures), in addition to being transparent.’<sup>172</sup>

What appeals to Lopes in Walton’s interpretation of transparency is the acknowledgment of a pictorial surface; we see literally, *through* the picture surface; therefore, for the transparent aesthetic theorist this is evidence enough to suggest that in taking an interest in the photograph as a transparent picture we also take an interest in the photograph: ‘Photographic transparency is not photographic invisibility.’<sup>173</sup> This point, I contend, underlines not only the difference between Walton and Scruton’s interpretation of photographic causality but also highlights the way ahead in undertaking a study of the medium’s creative potential.

To distance the transparency thesis from Scruton’s interpretation Lopes also contends that the viewer is able to appreciate the photograph as a culmination of the photographer’s intention: ‘A... mistake is to think that photographic transparency rules out either intervention on the part of the photographer or the role of photographic conventions in the photographic process.’<sup>174</sup> This aspect of Lopes’ transparent aesthetic is an extension of Walton’s idea that photographs are similar to prosthetic aids; insofar as they are pictures *through* which we see the world. In this sense, Lopes is pointing out that we may take an interest towards the photograph due to some

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<sup>172</sup> Walton, K. (2008), p.126

<sup>173</sup> Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.239

<sup>174</sup> Lopes, D.M. (2008), p.239

intentional input; because we recognise that the photographer wants us to show us how something looked, from a particular angle, in a certain light, etc...

The difference between our experiencing the object as seen in normal everyday seeing – face-to-face – and *through* the photograph is central our recognising the aesthetic character of the medium for Lopes. In Scruton's comparative study, he underlines why he thinks photographs should not be appreciated in the same way as paintings; because, due to causal derivation they are transparent. Walton, in separating photographs from other kinds of pictures – such as paintings – shows us that a comparative study does not tell us anything about photography, but risks conflating photographic seeing with everyday face-to-face seeing.

Therefore, Lopes in showing the difference between everyday face-to-face seeing and seeing *through* the photograph seeks to underline the aesthetic character of photography; insofar as seeing *through* the photograph '...isolates the photographed object from the context it would normally be seen to inhabit... seeing through photographs decontextualizes.'<sup>175</sup>

Seeing the subject face-to-face, argues Lopes, means that under normal circumstances we are affected by our present to conscious experience of that object. However, our visual experience of the subject *through* the photograph may enable us to take an interest towards the subject differently from our seeing it ordinarily. In seeing *through* the photograph, the viewer is in recognition of the subject's absence; and in acknowledging this absence there is also the potential to recognise a sense of autonomy – insofar as the viewer is able to take an interest towards the subject that is different from how she might do when face-to-face with that subject.

For Lopes, absence of the subject – seen *through* the photograph – is important insofar as it shows us that photographs can help us see the subject without thinking of it as being present; '...photographic seeing through normally obtains in the absence of the object seen, whereas face-to-face seeing obtains only when the object lies before the eyes. Put another way, photographic seeing through bridges distances, either spatial or temporal.'<sup>176</sup> By recognising the absence of the

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<sup>175</sup>Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.241

<sup>176</sup> Lopes, D.M. (2008), p.241

subject the viewer also acknowledges a difference that enables her to think of her visual experience as different from seeing *face-to-face*.

I contend that we can also think of the absence of the subject from the viewer's spatiotemporal environment as important to our understanding of the representational meaning of a photograph. Photographers use this *absence* to represent the often strange understanding we have of reality. Hiroshi Sugimoto is one such photographer who uses the camera to record scenes that challenge how we relate to reality and the here and now.

Sugimoto's *Diorama* (1972-1994) series is striking example of this pursuit. In photographing stuffed animals set against a faux backdrop, Sugimoto represents the often blurred lines between the real and the fake: Photography enables the viewer to see what is photographed, yet Sugimoto's innocuous compositions give the viewer perceptual access to a scene that is itself removed from the subjects it represents:

I visited the Natural History Museum, where I made a curious discovery: the stuffed animals positioned before painted backdrops looked utterly fake, yet by taking a quick peek with one eye closed, all perspective vanished, and suddenly they looked very real. I'd found a way to see the world as a camera does. However fake the subject, once photographed, it's as good as real.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> No pagination <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/diorama.html> (accessed, 4/1/12)



12. Sugimoto, *The Devonian Period*, 1992

#### 4.6: The presence of the camera

For Lopes, the subject and how it is appreciated is also affected by the presence of camera. It is often true that the presence of a camera can alter or change the context in which the object photographed is seen. One only has to think of the varying attitudes and reactions that people adopt whilst standing in front of a camera; its presence can provoke vanity and hostility in equal measure. Yet, regardless of the type of response, for Lopes its presence is intrusive; ‘the camera... intrudes upon or disturbs what it photographs, especially when it is a person, thereby showing it in a way inaccessible to the naked eye.’<sup>178</sup> This claim seems to echo Susan Sontag’s intuitive response to the effect of the mass produced camera.

For Sontag through the act of photographing, the photographer metaphorically removes the object photographed from its *natural* setting; photographers capture their subject, for Sontag, in

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<sup>178</sup>Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.241

the literal sense of the word. To say that we are able to see something in a photograph as we would not have been able to otherwise is for Sontag to say that that object has been removed from its environment; in this sense we appreciate the photograph for its quality as a *capture* rather than as an image that we see through: ‘A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.’<sup>179</sup>

Lopes’ conception of a photographic aesthetic, in one sense, seems to reflect Sontag’s dualistic conception of the photographic image as an uneasy truce. If we are to express an interest in the photographic image this also involves an interest in the object photographed; ‘...seeing photographs is typically twofold in the sense that it melds seeing the photographed objects and its properties with seeing the photograph itself and its properties.’<sup>180</sup>

For Lopes, our aesthetic interest towards the photograph is twofold because we see *through* the photograph and acknowledge it as captivating at the same time. This seems problematic in terms of articulating or disseminating what is aesthetically interesting about photographs. If it is the object photographed that we take an interest towards then it might not always be possible to take a disinterested view towards the photograph. One could, for example, imagine that a for the viewer who has lost a finger in a tragedy involving a coach and horses, Alfred Stieglitz’s *The Terminal* (1892) may be a reminder of a terrible memory. Whilst a painted version of this photograph may also produce such an emotional response in the case of Stieglitz’s image it is the objects photographed and not a representation that is imagined by the artist. In the photographic version of a coach and horses there is in one sense, a *real relation* between the image and the object; it is not a fictively realised depiction of the object that we are looking at but a depiction that is causally related to the object, as we see it photographed. To say, therefore, that it is primarily the object photographed that holds our interest seems problematic to an aesthetic realisation of our interest.

Photographing, as Sontag suggests, potentially reveals a complex relationship between the subject and the structure of meaning that holds our interest when we look at it in a photograph;

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<sup>179</sup> Sontag, S. (2002), p.16

<sup>180</sup> Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008) p.241

the camera assumes the position of a beholder who is somehow removed or autonomous from the scene depicted – insofar as we attribute the perspective to the camera; yet we also recognise that our interest is directed by the photographer’s decision to photograph a particular scene. There is, therefore, a tension between the photograph and its subject; our interest is caused by seeing the subject due to mechanically dependent causal process, nonetheless, our interest towards the subject is not wholly caused by the subject; since the causal process is not necessarily a record of the appearance of the object before the lens but the duration of the exposure.

The ability to provoke an aesthetic interest towards the subject as *taken* from the environment in which it is photographed I contend we must attribute to the photographer’s intention. Whilst I do not mean intention in the same sense as Scruton – that it is recognised in representational art as the expression of a thought about the subject that we take to be unified by the appearance of the subject that is constructed by the artist. The photographer may indeed intend for the viewer to engage with her work as expressive of a certain thought about its subject, yet I claim that the photographer does not treat the work to be unified by that thought. I will describe this understanding of intentionality – or indeed lack of intentionality – in chapter 7 and 8.

Photographs, as Sontag understands reveal certain details that are potentially able to hold our contemplative attention. Once we begin to contemplate these details, for Sontag we are no longer looking at the scene that was photographed; in a sense the detail is removed or *taken* from the scene depicted. Sontag saw in Diane Arbus’ work an expert understanding of this: ‘To photograph a thing is to appropriate the thing photographed.’<sup>181</sup> The idea that photography has altered how we think about *looking* requires further attention. For Sontag a photographer invites the viewer to pass judgement on the object photographed whilst denying access to that object.

#### **4.7: The aesthetic frustration**

Lopes’ approach is refreshing insofar as it underlines what is photographic about photographs and proceeds to show that these qualities do not necessarily deny aesthetic potential. Within this

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<sup>181</sup> Sontag, S. (2002), pp.3-24

approach, however, there is secreted the remnants of the ideological tug of war from which it seems to follow that because photographs are causally related to their subject matter they are not aesthetically interesting as representational pictures. Lopes presents this without denying the potentially negative view that; ‘... [t]he materials of photography are the world itself. They are handled by determining the content of seeing through.’<sup>182</sup>

Yet embedded within Lopes’ adherence to the transparency thesis is Walton’s claim that we see *through* the photograph and therefore as pictures they do hold our interest. Considering this view as expressive of an aesthetic and creative potential is possible insofar as it recognises the photograph as a picture that is different in kind from paintings and drawing and therefore an aesthetic appraisal requires a fresh approach. Lopes’s argument is useful insofar as he illustrates the need for a completely new approach.

#### **4.8: Conclusion**

Seemingly, an attempt in earnest to describe the aesthetic or creative potential of photography has so far either veered towards a comparative study with painting or a description of photographic transparency that seeks to separate the medium from other kinds of media that are used to create pictorial representation. The former approach, I claim, is based upon a painterly conception of the pictorial and the latter, attempts to describe the aesthetic character of the photographic representation understood as a kind of prosthetic representation.

In this chapter, my discussion of the transparency theory in relation to photographic creativity has raised two concerns; firstly, the problem of seeing literally: The argument that transparency theory conflates seeing through with seeing literally. A problem, that as Walton has underlined illustrates a misunderstanding of his thesis. Secondly, there has arisen the problem regarding pictorial representation. Those who oppose Walton’s transparency thesis argue that photographs, due to their being removed from the spatial and temporal realm are not transparent. The problem remains, however, in showing if photographs do not enable us to have perceptual contact with the subject photographed, then what else is it that we see? Denying transparency, therefore,

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<sup>182</sup> Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.243

seems problematic. However, as Walton and Lopes contend transparency *does not mean invisibility*.

I think, therefore, we need not involve ourselves any further in a debate that demarcates transparency as having negative implications on a discussion of the aesthetic potential of photography. Nonetheless, points raised by Lopes, in his interpretation of Walton's thesis could perhaps be developed further. In particular, the relationship between transparency and absence; Lopes claims that photographs *bridge* the gap, insofar as they enable us to see something that is not *materially* present in our spatial and temporal domain. I have offered that photographs may also do the opposite for the exact same reason: Identifying the appearance of the object photographed may be understood as not always possible. Yet this does not mean that we need to relinquish the claim that photographs are transparent pictures. This might reasonably be assumed because of real-similarity relations or due to photographic techniques such as close up techniques, focal length or under/over exposure.

Employing a shallow focus or long exposure can lead to a creation of an image in which the object photographed appears as indiscernible or indistinguishable. This can, I claim, heighten a sense of the absence or distance that the viewer feels towards the object photographed. Nonetheless, I think that this kind of absence that is preserved – under normal circumstances of seeing through a photograph – may tell us something peculiar about the aesthetic and creative potential of the medium. This is underlined in Michals' work that we discussed earlier. Michals often documents – and also stages – a dialogue or exchange between two people in his work. What holds the viewer's interest is I contend caused by the absence of the spatiotemporal realm in which we see the subject; the viewer is unable to engage with the exchange or conversation that Michals' documents and therefore, our understanding of it may become representational – insofar as the viewer takes an interest towards the photographic event as a disinterested participant.

In exploring this gap or absence further I think we may come to a better understanding of the creative and aesthetic potential of the medium; in particular relating to the role of the artist. I agree with Walton and Lopes insofar as it is important that we think of photographs as pictures

that are different in kind from paintings and drawings; like prosthetic aids they are pictures that enable us to see the object photographed – rather than a representation of the subject. In this chapter I have underlined the difference in terms of the relationship between the viewer and the picture. Unlike in Scruton's interpretation of photographic transparency, however, I have not ruled out the potential to appreciate the photographer's intervention. Nonetheless, in accepting this potential we have yet to make an exploration of this relationship in terms that are expressly photographic. Lopes himself, points out that in differentiating between face-to-face seeing and seeing through the photograph he does not evaluate the aesthetic potential of seeing *through*:

Granting that an interest in seeing things through photographs may not be satisfied by seeing the same objects face-to-face, the case has not yet been made for a photographic aesthetic: it remains to be shown that the interest is an aesthetic interest.<sup>183</sup>

In the next chapter I will continue to explore the relationship between the viewer and the photograph. My aim is to underline what is characteristically aesthetic about the experience of seeing through the photograph by examining what informs this kind of interest. In particular I shall consider the perspectival aspect of the relationship as important to our re-examination of the role of the artist. I hold the perspectival to be an important feature of this discussion because it involves not only a discussion of the relationship between viewer and the image but also the image and its *construction*.

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<sup>183</sup>Lopes, D.M. in Neil, A. and Ridley, A. (2008), p.242

## Chapter 5: Through the picture

### 5.1: Introduction

In this chapter I will examine further the relationship between the viewer and the world *through* the photograph. I am particularly interested in discussing the role that the photographer has to play in determining an aesthetic interest towards the photograph. I will consider the role of the photographer, in the context of the composition. The composition is an important aspect of a discourse concerning intentionality in representational art; insofar as it involves the act of putting together parts with the intention of creating a whole. The parts of the composition of an aesthetic representation may be divided, argues Scruton, but each part is meaningful only as a representation of the whole:

It is clearly true that we understand the representational meaning of, say, a Carpaccio through understanding the representational meaning of its parts. But the parts themselves are understood in *precisely the same way*...<sup>184</sup>

I agree with Scruton that in dividing up the parts of the representational meaning of a photograph we may reveal meanings that are not peculiar to the image but depend upon the ‘...reference of its parts...’<sup>185</sup> The *parts* of a photograph in Scruton’s estimation are not appreciable as parts of a unified *representational meaning* but in relation to the objects that they depict. However, I contend that in discussing the photographic composition we may discover a more fitting approach towards an understanding of its value as an aesthetic representation; that does not put stress on appreciating *representational meaning* as dependent on acknowledging that an appearance is determined by the artist’s intention. An important aspect of the composition that I will be focussing on is the perspectival. Perspective as it is discussed in this chapter regards the relationship between composition and the creative intentions of the photographer. James Elkins

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<sup>184</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.126

<sup>185</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p. 125

refers to this kind of consideration of the perspectival as the *metaphorical* discourse on perspective.<sup>186</sup> This is because it is a consideration of perspective concerned not with mathematical description of spatial relations but the *symbolic*, historic and meaningful relations that can be derived from a discussion of the composition in relation to the perspective represented in the picture.

In this chapter I will discuss the possibility that we may consider the photographer to be the author of the composition. My intuition is that we are not able to do so – at least not in the same way as we do for the painter. Yet I do not think that this means the viewer is unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as representational art. I do think, however, that it requires that we take a different approach towards our dissemination of the role of the photographer in relation to the creative practice of pictorial representation.

Walton's transparency thesis goes some way towards showing the way forward in outlining this approach: since it requires the viewer to recognise that – to a certain extent – their aesthetic interest is caused by the subject as it is seen *through* the photograph. Therefore, I will argue that, in one sense, the perspective of the viewer stands in a kind of *real relation* to the object photographed – albeit that the viewer is able to take a disinterested view towards the *real relation*. The notion of a *real relation* in this context enables us to establish a difference in the relationship between the depicted and the depiction. The perspective of the viewer of a painting I will often refer to as passive – by comparison – since as I will show it is a perspective that is subsumed by the fictive construction of perspective.<sup>187</sup>

Photographs often strike our interest because they enable us to *see* the object before the lens. Because of the mechanically derived causal process our interest towards the relationship between meaning and appearance may also involve the recognition that we see the object *through* the

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<sup>186</sup> See Elkins, J. (1994), p.17

<sup>187</sup> The real perspective of the viewer refers to the vantage point of the person standing before the picture. By *fictive* I do not necessarily mean unreal or mythical: I use the term in this discussion to denote a perspective that is constructed according to the artist's intentions rather than a mechanical process. So a perspective is fictive insofar as what can be seen – may still be real yet – is not the world through the picture but an imagined representation of the world.

photograph. An appreciation of perspective from which I *see* the object photographed, therefore, is not – at least wholly – sublimated by intentions of the photographer. In looking at the photograph I may believe that I am looking at the object photographed through the photograph and this may affect my interest towards that image. This view of our interest towards the photographic image, I contend, need not result in a negative prognosis of our propensity to appreciate photography as representational art; causal dependency enables the photographer to take into account not only what is framed but also – as we noted in the work of Crewdson – the possibility of what is beyond the frame; both spatially and temporally. I will consider this difference as expressive of the need to form a unique approach towards a description of the creative role of the photographer.

The previous two chapters have been focussed on discerning the value of transparency in relation to the artist' intent: exploring the impact of transparency on our understanding of the creative aspect of picture making. From this study arose a debate regarding aesthetic potential. Walton's thesis that we see *through* photographs is understood by some theorists as counter intuitive to a study of the aesthetic potential of the medium: inasmuch as the potential for the viewer to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph is undermined – because the viewer is unable to engage with the artist' intent.

Walton counters this position by claiming that his argument has been misinterpreted: He reiterates the point that his conception of transparency does not deny the representational value of a photograph; seeing through a photograph does not mean that the viewer is unaware that he is also looking at a photograph. Following on from this, I also considered Lopes discussion of transparency in which he sought out to describe the potential for an aesthetic reading of Walton's thesis; by underlining the importance of the difference between face-to-face seeing and seeing through.

In characterising the experience of seeing *through* the photograph as dependent on differentiating seeing through from our ordinary visual experience, Lopes sets out to describe the tools for an aesthetic study of the medium. Illuminating the transparency thesis as the focal point in this study, he claims that an aesthetic characterisation of photography must be closely related to a

study of how we see the world; seeing through the photograph, he argues, has an impact on how we look at and come to think about how we look at the world: ‘...photographs afford revelatory, transformative, defamiliarizing, or confessional seeing when they show us objects as having properties that they could not be seen to have face-to-face.’<sup>188</sup> The recognition that photographs document the object before the lens yet re-present that object in a way that denies the viewer spatiotemporal access, may, I contend offer us an insight into how the medium can be used to create representational art.

## 5.2: Defamiliarizing perspective

For Lopes, photographs have the potential to give us aesthetically interesting experiences because we see through them; and in seeing through them we are able to see the world of our ordinary experience in a different and sometimes aesthetically interesting manner. Taking transparency as the basis of an aesthetic discourse – insofar as he underlines that they are pictures that we *see through* – seems to me to be the right approach. Nonetheless, as Lopes points out there is work to be done.

Primary to our engaging with the aesthetic qualities of a photograph, I claim, is to make distinct what is creatively and aesthetically interesting about *seeing through*: In this chapter I am concerned with relationship between the viewer and the photograph; in particular, in context to the role of the creator. My aim is to consider in what way, if at all the viewer’s aesthetic interest caused by the photographer’s pictorial composition. Lopes argues that the viewer is able to see that the object photographed is absent from her spatial and temporal domain. The *absence* or *distance* between the viewer and the subject, Lopes proposes, enables an aesthetic interest towards the subject that is a consequence of seeing *through* the photograph.

The notion of a seemingly paradoxical element in the perspectival relationship beholder and object; that both distances and bridges the gap between the viewer and perceived subject is

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<sup>188</sup> Lopes, D.M. (2008), p.243

acknowledged by Erwin Panofsky in his seminal essay on perspective.<sup>189</sup> Panofsky posits that a philosophy of perspective should recognise the historical epistemology of the relationship between viewer and subject. It is not only determined by mathematically governed rules but also the epistemology of the relationship between the beholder and the subject:

Perspective creates distance between human beings and things... but then in turn it abolishes this distance by, in a sense, drawing this world of things, an autonomous world confronting the individual, into the eye. Perspective subjects the artistic phenomenon to stable and even mathematically exact rules, but on the other hand, makes that phenomenon contingent upon human beings, indeed upon the individual... Thus the history of perspective may be understood... as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control...<sup>190</sup>

Lopes also claims that due to their transparent status, photographs have the potential to both *bridge the gap* – between spatial and temporal domain – and in this sense interest the viewer because what is before the lens becomes defamiliarized; insofar as a photograph of a certain time in a certain place may be viewed in a different time and place and therefore its subject matter may appear in some sense as unrecognisable. I agree that photographs have the potential to do both when we take into account – as does Lopes – that they allow the viewer to see the world through a frame.

In this sense, it might be argued that our judgements about the world – that are made when we see through a photograph – are to a certain extent dependent on how the subject matter is framed; one could imagine, for example, a photograph of a house taken by an estate agent that provokes a

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<sup>189</sup> See Panofsky, E. (1997)

<sup>190</sup> Panofsky, E. (1997), p.67

great deal of interest from potential buyers. However, when the house is viewed for the first time it is discovered to the horror of the potential buyer that the house sits next to a working nuclear power plant. In this instance it is possible that the potential buyer may feel that he has been duped by the way the house has been framed in the original photograph. In the absence of the spatial and temporal, the photograph has the potential to defamiliarize the viewer; seeing the house through the photograph – without the presence of the nearby power plant – it is in one sense removed from the context of its environment.

Yet, this sense of an *absence* as affecting the viewer's experience of the photograph is unrecognisable unless he is to visit the house and see for himself the defamiliarizing effect of the photograph. I do think, however, that artists often use photography to make works that represent this absence and in doing so produce aesthetically interesting works of representational art. Showing this correlation; between the photograph of the object and the photographer's intention is a complex task that I seek to unfold in this thesis.

### **5.3: Constructing the Frame**

Considering the photographic frame and its value as a composition that is aesthetic in value requires us to make a survey of the foundations of an aesthetic discourse of the perspectival. My aim is to explore the possibility that a dialogue about the creative and aesthetic character of photography is possible by reconsidering the attitude towards the frame and the pictorial composition. Taking this approach, however, requires some work on differentiating the photographic composition from the representation of the frame in other kinds of media. In the first chapter I discussed Scruton's claim that the framing of a photograph does not draw the aesthetic interest of the viewer towards the photograph.<sup>191</sup>

I will begin by exploring the perspectival aspect of the composition: For Scruton, the framing of a photograph is unable to be considered as an indication of the photographer's intention because it is incapable of creating a *fiction* or object of *intentional inexistence*; the frame, he argues does

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<sup>191</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p.132

not contain a perspective that is cultivated by or exists as an expression of a thought because it is an image that is causally related to the subject.

Insofar as a viewer is aware of having a perspectival relationship with the photograph, it is for Scruton a relationship with the object photographed rather than the photograph. Following on from Walton's claim that photographs are pictures that are different in kind, I will underline an approach that describes the aesthetic and creative potential that does not rely on a value system that, I contend, establishes a criterion of correctness comparative to our understanding of the role of intentionality in the medium painting.

I will examine the perspectival in this chapter in its metaphorical manifestation. Perspective, in its literal or mathematical description as Bernhard Schweitzer recognises, concerns not the '...“deconstruction” but “construction,” (of space) not the display of objects as they are experienced, but the collection of scattered objects by legitimate rules...'<sup>192</sup> My interest in the metaphorical understanding of perspective concerns the relationship between the creative and the constructive: I will consider how this notion of the perspectival – as an entity which is constructed by the image maker – effects our engagement with the creative and aesthetic experience of the image.

My claim is that the negative interpretation of the creative potential of photography is often a consequence of an understanding of perspective as a fictive construction: Because we are unable to say that the photographer is the architect of the perspective in his image, the viewer is unable to appreciate the image as an aesthetic representation. Whilst I agree with the view that a photographer is unable to cultivate a fictitious perspective, I contend that rather than nullifying creative nascence it affords her a different approach. Peculiar to this difference, I claim, is that the viewer is able to see through the picture. In recognising this, the photographer regards her composition not as intentionally constructed – in the same way that we think of painting as intentionally constructed – but as an expression of a number of possibilities. Therefore, the

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<sup>192</sup> Schweitzer, B. (1953), p. 25

photographer's intentions are not central to the cause of our aesthetic interest; yet we may realise them as de-centred.

Before I present my position which aims to invoke a discussion of the creative potential of photography that is not merely dependent on the *intentions* of the artist; I will examine what I perceive to be a link between the negative interpretation of photographic creativity and intentionality. I will explore the two interpretations of perspective in relation to the creative act of pictorial representation as discussed by Jonathan Friday.

Friday's critical account of the creative potential of photography does not dispense with the role of intentionality. He presents an *integrative* account of the creative and aesthetic potential of photography in which he discerns the conscious framing of the photograph as evidence of intention and construction of an aesthetically interesting perspective: 'Fundamentally, a photograph transparently represents objects and states of affairs by virtue of these appearing within the frame of the photograph. Thus, photographs represent the objects as a result of the intentional framing and composition carried out by the photographer.'<sup>193</sup>

This integrative position recognises that our conception of the construction of the pictorial representation is dependent – to a certain extent – on an interpretation of a model described by Alberti in 1436.<sup>194</sup> Friday considers how Alberti's model of pictorial composition impacts on our aesthetic interpretation of the photographic by drawing it in comparison with a study of Kepler conception of the pictorial.

I will explore the integrative theorist's illuminative discussion of the Albertian and the Keplerian models of the pictorial representation. The integrative theorist acknowledges that, traditionally we think of an aesthetic representation by appealing to the Albertian picture. This conception underlines the notion of the perspectival as an element that we may take an interest towards as a property of the picture; insofar as it created or interpreted by the picture maker. However, claims Friday, we are unable to describe a photograph as an Albertian picture; insofar as our

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<sup>193</sup> Friday, J. (2002) p.75

<sup>194</sup> See Alberti, L. (1966)

understanding of the composition is concerned. The Albertian conception of the pictorial often relies on a *fictive* conception of perspective.

On the other hand, a Keplerian interpretation of the pictorial – according to the integrative theorist – changes direction in a discussion of the artistic construction of perspective; relating the viewers aesthetic interest towards the image to an experience of the object photographed rather than fictive interpretation: ‘... the Keplerian picture represents the frame of the visual field and thereby encloses a representation of the world seen, or more simply, a representation of vision.’<sup>195</sup> However, as I will show, this approach retains some of the qualities that are distinctively related to the Albertian picture and for the sceptic are to be considered unphotographic in its ideal manifestation. Therefore, I will show that the integrative theorist does not quite go far enough in exploring a purely photographic approach towards discussing what is peculiar to the creative practice of picture making.

The Albertian schema as we will discuss conceives of the pictorial composition as a synthesis: resolved by the artist’s construction of a perspective that incorporates the position of the spectator. Therefore, perspective in terms of the Albertian model is valued not for its relationship to the real world but for its abstraction; the perspectival is understood to be a *fictive* construction. The Keplerian picture, however, according to the integrative theorist allows us to engage with a perspective that we acknowledge as *ordinary* insofar as it is causally related to the subject; that is not an inventive, interpretative or imagined perspective but a perspective that incorporates the relationship between the beholder and the world.

#### **5.4: The Albertian and the Keplerian**

Friday’s critical re-evaluation of the photographic representational art begins with two conflicting interpretations: The *Albertian* and the *Keplerian*. This distinction captures very clearly the brevity of the problem concerning photographic pictorial representation; which in this chapter concerns the relationship between intention and the construction of a perspective. He

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<sup>195</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p. 6

discusses both conceptions of the pictorial as a means of illustrating a difference in our attitude towards the composition: The Albertian view, claims Friday, has stood since the Renaissance as the test of our understanding the frame in terms of its aesthetic and creative value.

Friday offers the Keplerian interpretation as a challenge to this understanding, insofar as it helps us to rethink our attitude towards an aesthetic understanding of the composition. Initially, I am inclined to agree with the integrative theorist's claim that our aesthetic interpretation of the picture is dogged by an approach towards the composition that requires us to conceive of the viewer's perspective as passive, insofar as it is sublimated by the artist's composition; the Albertian model requires the viewer to engage with a synthetically constructed perspective and therefore her interest towards the subject becomes subsumed by a fictional construction of perspective. In Hanneke Grootenboer's *The Rhetoric of Perspective*, he underlines the fictive quality of perspective insofar as it; '...splits real space outside a picture frame from the mathematical space that has to be *imagined* within the picture frame.'<sup>196</sup>

Central to the Albertian conception of the pictorial, argues Friday, is that we recognise perspective as intentionally determined by the artist's construction of space. Therefore, when we take an aesthetic interest towards a pictorial representation we acknowledge perspective as a quality which is interpretive of the relationship between the position of the viewer and the subject. The perspectival, in its Albertian conception is to be understood as fictive in this sense as it requires the viewer to engage imaginatively with the perspectival relationship between himself – the viewer – and the picture.

In a Keplerian interpretation we do not take an imaginative interest towards perspectival. For the integrative theorist a Keplerian view enables the viewer to consider the photographic image as representative of a *real relation* between object and image in which the object is represented; insofar as does engage with the picture as illustrative of fictive beholder. I think that by demarcating this difference we will perhaps open up further a discussion of the photographic in terms of its aesthetic potential. Rather than looking for ways to synthesise the photographic

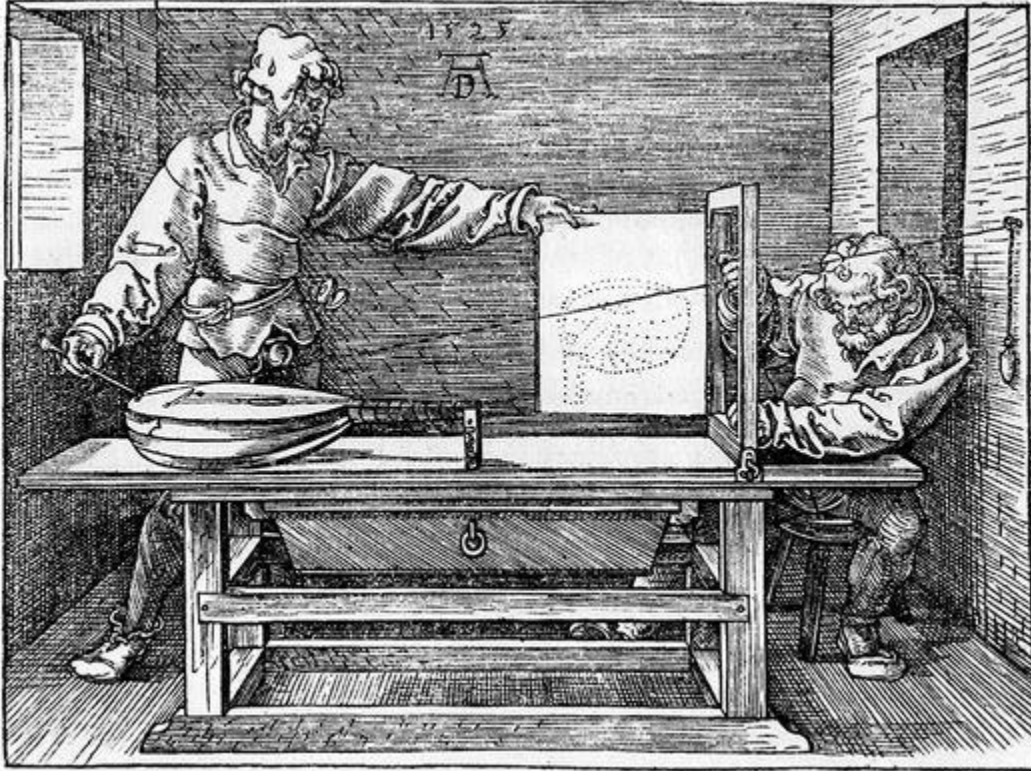
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<sup>196</sup> Grootenboer, H. 2005, p. 3

frame with the artist's intention, perhaps we may find a better approach towards understanding a different kind of intentionality available to the photographer.

### **5.5: The Albertian picture**

Alberti's *On Painting* is recognised as shaping not only the approach towards artistic creativity but also the theorist's dissemination of the aesthetics of pictorial representation. *On Painting* is split into three sections; the first discusses the geometrical element of pictorial construction and the following two the narrational and expressive rendering of subject matter within his mathematical model. Its fluid rhetoric sets out the mathematical rules of perspective by which Alberti claims an artist must attend to if they are to make a creatively unified representational picture. In the second half of the treatise he describes what we might refer to as the aesthetic character of an artistic depiction. In this section he outlines the correct approach towards constructing the expressive qualities of a painting. Our interest in Alberti's theory in this chapter is concerned with the notion of *perspective* as an aspect of the artist's intention – in terms of the attitude towards its construction. Furthermore, I am interested in considering the consequence of this model on our understanding of the artist's role in relation to picture making in photography.



13. Albrecht Durer, *Man drawing a Lute*, 1523

The task of the painter, in making his depiction both believable and expressive, asserts Alberti, is primarily to assimilate the perspective of the beholder within the picture. Therefore, perspective is considered to be a quality of the construction of a picture rather than a quality which relates directly to a beholder: The representation contains a vantage point from which the viewer regards the construction of a perspective that is causally related to the artist's intent.

Alberti describes his pictorial schema as a *visual pyramid*; the perspective of the synthesised beholder is represented at the apex of the pyramid. The base of the pyramid refers to the pictorial plane which in turn defines the psychical and physical distance of the beholder from the base of the pyramid. Alberti's visual pyramid is a device that directs the artist towards making geometrically accurate depictions. However, its ultimate aim is not to show us how something looks but to subsume the perspective of the viewer within its construction:

The pyramid is a figure of a body from whose base straight lines are drawn upward, terminating at a single point. The base of this pyramid is a plane which is seen. The sides of the pyramid are those rays which I have called extrinsic. The cuspid, that is the point of the pyramid, is located within the eye where the angle of quantity is.<sup>197</sup>

Alberti describes pictorial perspective as expressive of a vantage point that is separate from our ordinary visual experience. The visual pyramid, directs the beholder towards a particular perspective that is constructed by the artist. A sense of perspective, as contained within the frame, therefore, is appreciated because it creatively manufactures a synthesis; between the space in which the viewer is observing and the space that is represented in the picture frame.

The search for the *internally realised beholder*, I claim, has been a common feature of the arguments made against the possibility of appreciating photographs as aesthetic representations. The role of the artist in relation to the creative practice of picture making is in this sense, I contend, marked by the Albertian construction of the concept of a picture as ‘...an open window through which I see what I want to paint. Here I determine as it pleases me the size of the men in my pictures.’<sup>198</sup> We may also, I claim, appreciate the photograph as a window onto a world that is to a certain extent determined by the artist’s intent. Nonetheless, because the photographer’s *window* is causally related to the photographic event, it is a frame that represents the *here and now* and therefore we are unable to consider it as a portal that allows for the fictive construction of space.

The purpose of aligning the gaze of the viewer with the perspective constructed within the picture is primarily, I contend, to assimilate the perspective of the viewer. Perspective, therefore, as considered by Alberti, is acknowledged by the viewer as representative of an imagined beholder; in this sense we may regard perspective as not merely representative of a vantage point but also as an expression of a thought about its subject.<sup>199</sup> That is to say that when looking at a pictorial representation we engage with the picture as though it allows us to see, from where we

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<sup>197</sup> Alberti, L. (1966), p.48

<sup>198</sup> Alberti, L. (1966) p.56

<sup>199</sup> See Harries, K. (2001), p.78-9

are standing a world that is beyond our own; insofar as the picture is causally related to the artist's intentions rather than merely the subject depicted in the image. For the integrative theorist, this distinction means that our aesthetic interest is determined by identifying the perspectival relationship as an imaginatively constructed element of the pictorial representation:

The geometrical element of the definition is the identification of a picture as a surface intersecting the visual pyramid at some distance with a fixed centre. The visual pyramid is a representation of the visual field in which it is imagined that a pyramid extends from the eye to enclose the visible world. Beholders of Albertian pictures are assumed to take up the position of the eye at the apex of the visual pyramid of which the picture is a section.<sup>200</sup>

For Alberti, beauty and creative endeavour lay also in its rhetorical invention. The notion that the artist must strive to make a painting that speaks of her intentions is compounded by the interpretation of perspective as an element of the picture that is representative of the artist's thought or intent. The visual pyramid for example constructs an apparently natural relationship between the viewer and the perspective contained within the painting. Whereas in truth, the viewer is always separated from the depiction by the very fact that he must engage with a fictive or interpretive perspective – as the integrative theorist recognises: 'The eye of the beholder of the Albertian picture is therefore always outside and to the front of the picture surface looking into the world depicted.'<sup>201</sup>

This leads us to the second aspect of Alberti's theoretical treatise on painting. So far a description of Alberti's thesis has concerned the notion of perspective as the interpretation of the spatial relationship between an imagined viewer and the subject. Yet, central to the aesthetic potential of the pictorial representation relates not only to the accuracy of perspectival depiction but also the subtleties of composition.

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<sup>200</sup> Friday, J. (2002) p.4

<sup>201</sup> Friday, J. (2002) p.4

The composition for Alberti is the aspect of pictorial representation that contains the *narrative* of the work. The primary function of the narrative is to engage the viewer's interest not only in the appearance but also the rhetoric of the composition which Alberti refers to as the *istoria*. The *istoria* is the aspect of a picture that as Michael Ann Holly recognises unifies the structure of representational meaning that we relate to the depiction: '...the *composition* was a structure articulated to a higher end: to make manifest the narrative power of the *istoria*, the telling of the story by appropriate emotions expressed through harmonious action.'<sup>202</sup>

To create an *istoria* Alberti argues that the painter should be learned in the rhetorical arts. The rhetorical quality of the pictorial is for Alberti akin to the narrational qualities employed by poets and storytellers: 'artists should associate with poets and orators who have many embellishments in common with painters and who have a broad knowledge of many things. These could be very useful in beautifully composing the *istoria*.'<sup>203</sup>

## 5.6: Keplerian representation

The Albertian model, for the integrative theorist, relies on an understanding of the composition as a space within which perspective is appreciated for its fictive construction. Friday claims, that if we are to think about the photograph as a contemplative and meaningful picture, we must rethink our conception of the pictorial construction. The counter-example that he offers reconsiders an aesthetic interpretation of the composition based on a Keplerian model of the pictorial representation.

Johannes Kepler's treatise *Optics*<sup>204</sup> is not concerned with our aesthetic contemplation of the pictorial. His illuminating work on optical mechanics describes the manner by which light is focussed onto the retina to form as a picture. As Tiger Holtsmark points out: 'The Keplerian 'picture' is a purely geometrical proposition, which states that when two or more rays of light from the same point having passed through some optical device meet again in another point, this

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<sup>202</sup> Holly, M.A. (1996), p.19

<sup>203</sup> Alberti, L. (1966), p.90

<sup>204</sup> Kepler, J. (1604)

second point is a ‘picture’ of the first.’<sup>205</sup> The integrative theorist’s interest regarding Kepler’s optical revelations concerns a reassessment of the perspectival in pictorial representation. Friday uses a Keplerian view to illustrate an understanding of perspective that does not require a synthesis of a real with an imagined view; therefore, it allows for the exploration of an aesthetic attitude that is not reliant on an appreciation of the perspective as an element of pictorial that is fictively constructed.

In the Albertian model, we understand perspective as an aspect of the picture that is fictively created, whereas in the Keplerian schema the picture surface is determined by a *real relation* between the beholder and the object perceived; perspective does not relate to a synthesis between a real and imagined view but through a mechanically derived causal process. Standing before a painting the viewer may believe the painter has depicted a scene from a perspective that in one sense may be called *real*; perhaps it seems as though the artist has painted from memory. There is still in this recognition, an understanding of the painting as expressive of an intention to see the subject in a certain way; the viewer also acknowledges that it is the artist’s belief and/or mental state that guide – to a certain degree – the memory.

The *real relation* that I refer to concerns not necessarily a human intention – although it may also be involved – but as in the Keplerian model, interpreted by Friday. The picture that we take an interest towards, does not involve a perspective that causally related to the artist’s intentions but a perspective that is the conclusion of a mechanically derived causal process: That is to say the picture is caused by the refraction/reflection of light, exposed onto a photographically sensitive surface. It is the object before the lens that holds our interest. Describing the photographic perspectival as representative of a *real relation* does not necessarily indicate a belief in the viewer that he is in the *presence* of the object photographed.

The notion of a *real relation* is descriptive of the causal relation between the image and the object photographed. Nonetheless, the causal relation, as we have discussed previously in this thesis, does not indicate likeness; causal relation involves not merely the object photographed but that object situated in the photographic event. It is not necessary to conclude therefore, that the

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<sup>205</sup> Holtsmark, T. in Greene, M. (Ed), (1969), p.64

appearance of the object in a photograph shares a likeness with its appearance as we see it ordinarily. This, I contend, enables us to consider the possibility that our interest towards the photograph does not merely concern an interest in the way something appears when it is photographed – or at least when we talk about *appearance* in a photographic sense its meaning has a special usage. For the integrative theorist, whilst appearance – generated in the photograph – is causally related to the object photographed our interest is not necessarily caused merely by the object; it is also related to our *seeing* that object from the photographer's perspective.

To ferment this view Friday integrates the Albertian visual pyramid with an interpretation of the Keplerian notion of perspective. For Alberti, as we have discussed, the apex of the pyramid stands for the perspective of the beholder, albeit, a fictively synthesised perspective. In its Keplerian formulation the apex of the pyramid contains a perspective that we determine by referring to the light rays and the subsequent image that takes place on the retina of the beholder; therefore, the perspectival, because of the mechanically derived causal process is expressive of a *real* rather than *imagined* beholder.

Perspective in the Keplerian conception is not intentionally crafted but the consequence of mechanically derived process. In this sense, the *distance* between the object depicted and the beholder is different; the beholder relates not to perspective as an interpretation but a *real relation* between the photograph and its subject matter: 'If an Albertian picture resides at some distance from the apex of the pyramid, the Keplerian picture represents the world from the apex. At the apex of the visual pyramid is the eye and visual experience.'<sup>206</sup> For the integrative theorist, our interest towards the photograph involves perceptual access to that part of the world recorded by the camera. I claim, however that we need not be concerned with perceptual access in this way since the photograph is a photograph of what is before of the lens for the duration of the exposure.

The integrative theorist's interpretation of Kepler presents us with a conception of the visual pyramid that challenges an Albertian conception of perspective; in terms of reconsidering our

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<sup>206</sup> Friday, J. (2002) p.6

aesthetic understanding of the photographic. For Alberti, we might say, the aesthetic complexities are due in part to our understanding of perspective as being a fictive construction.

For Friday, however, it is possible to think about the pictorial differently, to challenge the notion that our aesthetic understanding of perspective as solely determined by the artist's arrangement. I am inclined to agree with this position; that we may contemplate the place of perspective within a work for its mutability and temporality. However, the question that I have been considering throughout this thesis – albeit in a different configuration – remains unresolved; if a photograph is unable to synthesise perspective how can it hold our aesthetic interest as representational art?

### **5.7: Crafting the visual**

The Keplerian interpretation offers the potential to explore an aesthetic understanding of the photographic frame as a space in which the viewer finds that her interest is directed towards the real rather than imagined representation of the perspectival. However, if we are unable to say that the photograph is an expression of the artist's thought about her subject then how should we go about discussing its potential to hold our interest as an aesthetic representation? In other words, how can a perspective which is representationally *real* rather than *imagined* provoke an interest that is aesthetically interesting? An example that might prove illuminating, I contend, is found in the work of photographer, James Casebere.



14. James Casebere, *Neovision Underground #1*, 2001

In Casebere's *Neovision Underground #1* (2001), the viewer looks out across a hallway that appears to be of ancient Mediterranean or perhaps colonial architectural design. The scene is emptied of people. A subtle light pours in through the archway to the right of the picture. It is, however, because the hallway is flooded with water that our attention is held most fixedly. The stout pillars seem to turn to jelly when reflected in the still water giving the scene a disconcerting stillness.

A sense of the surreal unfolds in the scene depicted; we see *through* the picture to the scene depicted, in which our groping for a narrative structure to our visual experience is constantly re-affirmed; nothing within the frame gives us a reason for the flooding. The building represents a historical presence that is palpable, yet the emptiness of the scene only evades any revelation of its time period. The photograph shows us a scene that would appear to contain a very interesting story, yet we are unable to *see* its narrative. And then we learn that the scene is entirely constructed by Casebere himself. The building is in fact a table-top construction, made to look like an old colonial building on a West Indian plantation.

The cause of our aesthetic interest, I contend, cannot be countenanced without celebrating the photographicity of his works – both technical and intentional. Not only do we appreciate the skill with which the construction is put together but also the care taken over the lighting of each scene. The choice of lens, depth of field, all these are elements of Casebere's constructions that contribute to a sense of fictive realism that his photographs provoke. He takes care to make sure that his images look as though they are photographs of life-size buildings.

Yet Casebere has employed these techniques not just to fool or deceive the viewer but in order to provoke contemplative interest. For Casebere photography is aesthetically interesting because it has the potential to create images that enable the viewer to take a contemplative interest towards appearance as a representative of the event; event, in this context refers to the duration of the exposure that is a part of the photographic recording process. As we discussed in the previous chapter, photographs do not only *bridge* the gap between viewer and image – in terms of the spatial and temporal – but also have the potential to become aesthetically interesting because of the absence of those objects photographed; the viewer acknowledges himself as distanced from the photographic event. In creating realistic, *trompe l'oeil* sets, the *absence* of the viewer emerges as a mechanism that creates contemplative interest.

Absence of the traditional notion of intentionality, interpretive control and a fictive perspective are characteristics that for Scruton and the negative proponents of the transparency thesis make photographs untenable as aesthetic representations. In Casebere's work, however, these are qualities that potentially enable the artist to engage contemplatively with her subject. For

Casebere, the photographic composition is able to hold our aesthetic interest because of its potential to challenge the relationship between subject and viewer. It is the *real* rather than *imagined* relation between viewer and subject that interests Casebere as he creates an image which provokes the viewer to rethink the meaning structure of the object of her visual experience. The meanings that we relate to the objects we see may change or emerge differently when we see them through the photograph.

For Casebere this approach towards his work allows him to challenge beliefs and ideas about our relationship to the world and its objects. The viewer is not passive in the Albertian sense of the perspectival relationship but is – due to photographic transparency – realised to have an active role in the meaning construction of the image. This does not mean, however, that the representational meaning of the work is incomplete without the presence of a viewer. It acknowledges that because the image is causally related to a photographic event, the meaning will be found – to a certain extent – as relating to the object photographed. Since the picture is not considered to be an imagined view, our interest towards the image does not engender the artist's intention –as it does in the painting – but the narrative structure of meaning emerges something akin to a possibility.

Photographers often use their medium to explore the complex relationship between objects and their meanings: and in doing so, they are often interested by the way which we relate to our experience of the world and its complex of meaningful structures. Rather than as a passive receiver of a constructed perspective, the viewer engages actively in the discourse of the image, exploring the tension that is set up by the photographer's suggestive use of composition. Roni Horn is one such photographer whose work explores the distancing effect of photography; her androgynous subject in *You are the Weather* (1994-95) being one such example. Like Casebere, Horn uses photography because it has the potential to create a sense of ambiguity; the spatial and temporal distance between the viewer and the subject enables her to create images that express a sense of awkwardness about experience. Representational meanings emerge as a possibility rather than unified by an intention:

There is always the experience that what you cannot see deeply affects what you can see... Presence occurs when a thing is what it appears to be... So I have a certain way of working that is concerned — not with the invisible, but with the nonvisible; meaning it's there and you can sense it. The nonvisible is confluent with the visible, it's the bigger part of the sensible.<sup>207</sup>

### 5.8: Losing the interpretive

The integrative theorist makes a clear distinction between our aesthetic understanding of the perspectival in photography and painting: In photography the perspectival is representative of a real relation between the image and the subject, whereas in painting perspective involves a fictively constructed relationship. In making this distinction Friday works towards reforming the Keplerian notion of perspective around the Albertian *istoria*. Friday contends that photographs allow the viewer to take an interest in the perspectival as relating to the photographer's intention; insofar as – for example – the viewer recognises that the photographer intended to show the subject looking a certain way at a certain time:

The possibility of very different ways of picturing vision provides a clue to the source of a Keplerian picture's intentional meaning. Indeed, in this possibility we find the Keplerian picture's unique counterpart to the Albertian *historia [istoria]*. A Keplerian picture does not merely represent vision, it does so together with a manner of seeing – a way in which the world is represented as being seen.<sup>208</sup>

Whilst Friday's interpretation of Kepler allows that the viewer may take an aesthetic interest towards our ordinary visual experience, it must be as an interpretation of a visual experience – the photographer's. The sceptic might ask of this conclusion; what assurances do we have that our interest towards the ideal photograph is determined by the photographer's intention? Or,

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<sup>207</sup> Horn, R. in interview with Spinelli, C. (June, 1995)

<sup>208</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.13

simply reiterate; that since the photograph is causally related to the photographic event not those objects as the photographer intends us to see them we are unable to take an interest in the photograph as a representation of the authors intention. At least in the same way we do a painted picture.

In his interpretation of the Keplerian picture, Friday presents our interest in the photograph as an interest in the intentions of the photographer to look at the object photographed; insofar as our interest in the object photographed recognises that our visual experience is being directed by the photographer's composition. However, the photograph, he argues, is a representation unlike the painting. Rather than our taking an interest in the representation as an intentionally dependent – as we might when appreciating a painting – we take an interest in the photograph as the representation of a visual experience: 'As spectators of such pictures [Keplerian], what we see is a representation of the real world as it appears in ordinary perception.'<sup>209</sup> Photographs, argues the integrative theorist, give us the experience of 'actually seeing the world'<sup>210</sup> and therefore, we are able to think about how seeing the world from the photographer's perspective is aesthetically interesting.

Yet, as Robert Silverman observes, Kepler interpreted the eye as non-interventional instrument. It is involved in the transferral of information but does not tell us how to look at or interpret. Therefore, when a viewer takes up perspective of a camera, perspective does not relate to a human interpretation but the Bazinian *non-living agent*:

19<sup>th</sup> Century photochemistry produced an ironic corollary to Kepler's 1604 discovery that the eye behaves like a lifeless mechanical instrument – a *camera obscura*. By replacing the retina with a sensitive plate, the camera had become an eye.<sup>211</sup>

In this sense, therefore, the Keplerian model is problematic insofar as its aesthetic amalgamation with the Albertian *istoria* is concerned. The Keplerian model of the eye precludes the kind of

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<sup>209</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.12

<sup>210</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.12

<sup>211</sup> Silverman, R. (1993), p.738

synthesis with the Albertian conception of the *istoria* that the integrative theorist is arguing for: When we think of the Keplerian notion of the pictorial, the perspectival does not relate to a synthesis between a real and imagined perspective but illustrates the mechanical nature of the relationship between the depiction and the objects depicted.

To employ the Albertian notion of pictorial perspective, therefore, seems to contradict or defeat the aims of the Keplerian interpretation. I agree with Friday, that the Keplerian model is useful insofar as it makes distinct the viewer's relationship to the perspectival. However, I also think that employing the Albertian *istoria* to describe the photographer's intention is problematic; it requires the viewer to synthesise the mechanical view with the photographer's thought or intent – which as Scruton points out brushes against our understanding of the ideal photograph.

## 5.9: Conclusion

The role of perspective in our understanding of the aesthetic representation has prior to this chapter been discussed as an element that is fictive in its construction. In this sense, we understand an aesthetic experience to be cultivated, if and only if, the viewer is to engage with perspective as an aspect of a picture that is synthetically created by the artist. The ordinary perspective of the viewer – standing outside the picture – is a *passive* element insofar as it is synthesised by the imagined perspective; created by the artist. The integrative view, however, underlines the possibility that photographs are pictures that require the viewer to think about the creative aspect of perspective in a different manner.

The photographic representation of perspective, argues the integrative theorist, does not relate to a thought or intention about the object depicted – in the same way that a painting might. We see the objects depicted from a perspective that we may take to be the photographers, a perspective that is neither fictive nor imaginatively synthesised. Therefore, we are able to explore a different way of thinking about perspective in relation to the creative practice of picture making.

The Perspective of the viewer, in terms of its Albertian conception is rendered passively; it is subsumed by the imaginative perspective imagined or interpreted by the artist. The Keplerian

notion of perspective, on the other hand, retains the representation of a real relationship between the perspective and the image: This is because the causal relationship between image and the subject before the lens is determined by a mechanical process. Since the photographer recognises that photographs entail a causal relation between image and object before the lens – situated within the photographic event – the viewer engages not merely with the image but also that which a photograph depicts. The viewer, for the photographer, therefore, is in one sense an *active* element of her creative intent. But in what way are we to think of the perspective of the viewer as being an *active* element of the pictorial representation and more importantly its aesthetic character?

In answering this question I intend to offer a different direction for this discussion. A direction from which I think a better understanding of what is unique to the creative practice of photography may be more likely to emerge. The example that I want to consider as a starting point, concerns the metaphorical notion of perspective; in particular the viewer's interest towards the perspectival element of the pictorial representation.

In Daniel Collins' discussion about anamorphic art and perspective he considers the role of the viewer in relation to the pictorial construction of perspective. In picture making, he contends, for the most part the perspective of viewer is a passive entity; something which is to be eliminated by the artist. However, in the case of anamorphic art, we are able to think about the perspective of the viewer as having an active role. Leonardo da Vinci made, possibly the earliest use of anamorphic technique of depiction. However, perhaps the most renowned use of Anamorphosis is to be found in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533).

In Holbein's depiction we see two regal looking ambassadors posed amongst an array of fine trinkets. At the bottom of the painting an odd and seemingly overly stretched out shape divides the ambassadors. Viewing this portion of the painting from the same linear perspective used to render the two ambassadors, the viewer is unable to make sense of the shape. However to move to one side painting, the strange shape begins to come into view. As the viewer moves to one side, the surreal looking shape no longer looks unfamiliar and the shape of a skull emerges.



15. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533

In order to *see* what is on the picture surface, the beholder of an anamorphic picture must become *self-aware* of her positioning before the canvas. The relinquishing of an ordinary or Albertian perspective is not merely a passive act but requires the viewer to think about where they must stand in order to *see* properly that which is depicted. Collin's interpretation of Anamorphosis suggests a different conception of perspective: It offers an interpretation of the viewer as not only aware of her position, physically, but also provokes the viewer to reflect on the *real* perspectival relation: that is to say a perspective that is not imagined or fictive but causally related to the object depicted in the photograph. The viewer, in this sense is aware of the act of submitting to the perspective; rather than accepting that his perspective is sublimated by a synthetically imagined perspective.

Returning to the Casebere example may be useful here: his photographs of table-top constructions suggest an imagined perspective – insofar as his pictures may fool the viewer into believing that he is looking at a habitable building. Yet it is not an imagined or a fictive perspective that engages the viewer. It cannot become – wholly – imaginative because once the viewer becomes aware of the subject as a table top construction he becomes conscious of the *real relation* between the image and the object photographed. Casebere creates an image that does not provoke a contemplative interest towards an intention as an expression of a thought but a

possibility; in which we relate the structure of representational meaning not to the intention of the artist but the way the object looks in the photograph.

For Casebere this allows him to create images that enable the viewer to contemplate the structure of meaning as it relates to an experience of the world through appearances: Because the viewer relates the perspectival to a *real* rather than imaginatively constructed perspective, meaning relates to the way something looks rather than the intentions of the artist. His visual trickery, therefore, has a decisive purpose; to enable the viewer to contemplate her involvement in the conference of meaning. The perspective that engages the viewer is not understood to be representative of a fictive construction but a real relation between image and object; because of this as Collins argues, there is a sense of perspectival awareness towards the picture in which the presence of the viewer is understood to have an active rather than a passive role:

...at the moment that the artwork or object of vision takes over as the primary center, the viewer is no longer the center of the world. An observer 'oblivious of his own outer existence' is neither an observer at the center nor an observer who is a participant in the construction of meaning. My use of the term 'eccentric observer' suggests a viewing subject who not only acknowledges the oblique and contingent nature of her point of view, but who also realizes that the full appreciation of the aesthetic objects stems not from 'oblivion' (that is, literally, a 'forgetting') but from playing an active role in the creation of the aesthetic object.<sup>212</sup>

Collins introduces a notion of perspective that is not fastened to a traditional notion of intention. Intention does not emerge wholly in relation to the designs of the creator but involves a sense of *participation*. This, I claim is due to the kind of access that the photographer is able to gain to her subject matter; the mechanically derived causal process produces a picture that is not wholly tied to an imaginative perspective. Therefore, the viewer finds perspective to be a feature of the pictorial depiction that relates to the object before the lens.

In Collin's discussion of the viewer as recognising themselves before the picture as an *eccentric observer* we find an interesting road ahead. In the next chapter I will discuss further what it

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<sup>212</sup> Collins, D. (1992), p.74

means to say that the viewer is an *active* rather than a *passive* element of the structure of meaning in the photographic representation. Central to this will be a discussion of the creation and expression of meaning in the photographic representation.

## Chapter 6: Fascination through the lens

### 6.1: Introduction

‘...the perceptual experience of the world depicted in a photograph and perceptual experience of the world itself must be closely related.’<sup>213</sup>

Those who claim that we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as a representation are troubled by the idea that we may appreciate the photograph as a product of the artist’s intention. This view is held by some proponents of the transparency thesis. A reaction to the negative interpretation of photographer’s creative potential, therefore, often seeks to undermine the transparency theorist’s claim that photographs are pictures that we see through.

Yet I claim that working with the transparency theorist – towards an exploration of the creative potential of photography – is not necessarily restrictive. In discussing Walton’s argument that we *see through* photographs, the notion that photographs may provoke aesthetic interest in a special way – different from paintings – has begun to gather some speed. In particular, discussing the distinction between face-to-face seeing and seeing through; insofar as we see the object through the photograph in an environ that we are separate from – the photographic event.

Friday’s exploration of the perspectival drew out a further quality of the medium relating to its representational value; our interest towards the photographs involves that we acknowledge a kind of real relation between the viewer and the object photographed. This is different in kind from an interest towards the painting, a relationship wherein the perspectival is understood to be representative of a vantage point that is imagined or fictively constructed. This distinction, I agree, underlines a qualitative difference between paintings and photographs.

A discussion that seeks to re-evaluate the creative potential of photography must also, it would seem, reconsider the relationship between viewer and the pictorial. Friday’s integrative argument combines the causal with the intentional; whilst he recognises that photographs enable us to take

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<sup>213</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p. 49

a contemplative attitude towards the object photographed he also argues that photographs may be appreciated as intentionally produced images. The photographer's decision to frame the subject before the lens in a certain way, he claims, is expressive of an intention to illustrate a certain thought or idea about the object photographed: 'The visual perspective of a picture in the Keplerian mode is always the product of the artist's conception of how vision ought to be represented.'<sup>214</sup> Integrating the Keplerian view which offers a different understanding of the perspectival relationship with the Albertian *istoria* Friday contends that we are able to appreciate photographs as intentional creations.

Yet, since I began this discussion, I have been mindful of Scruton's criticism of this view. The claim that due to the mechanically derived causal process the photographer is unable to use the camera to express a thought about the object in front of the lens, I claim remains unchallenged; at least no challenge, in my view, has successfully undermined this position. Friday's argument that intention is recognised in the framing of a photograph is problematic; if, for example, we are taken into account the work of photographers like Walker Evans and Robert Frank: Two photographers who pioneered the shooting from the hip technique – which involves taking a photograph without bringing the viewfinder to the eye. In this sense, composition does not necessarily form as central to the photographer's intentions. The camera was used as a tool freed up from the photographer's – a human – perspective. It allowed the photographer to respond to her environment without creating an image that was embedded within a thought; the thought is still present, yet it does not circumscribe what could be said about the appearance of the objects in the photograph.

For Frank the meaning relationships that can form between objects and their appearance create a sense of familiarity that can be misleading. Frank used the camera as a way of penetrating the familiarity that punctuates our visual experience of the world: '...in my photographs what I wanted to photograph was not really what was in front of my eyes but what was inside. That was what made me want to pick up a camera. The nature that I became familiar with inspired me and

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<sup>214</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.14

I used it as a background.<sup>215</sup> If it is Frank's eye that we attribute to the composition, his use of it often seems non-natural and we become aware of its being used in a way that is akin to Walton's prosthesis. For example, in Frank's iconic work, *The Americans* (1958) he would often shoot with a camera poking out of his jacket or from the waist, in order that he could get – unnoticed – into the middle of the scene he wanted to photograph. Frank is not interested in the way things look but how appearances form in the ebb and flow of the moment. In taking up the camera, the photographer relinquishes the ability to present his work as an expression of a thought about its subject. Yet in doing so, a different relationship between the artist and intention emerge. In this chapter I will explore what this difference means for expressivity and ask the question; how do we relate the meaning we find in a photograph to a thought about the subject?

## 6.2: Expressing the real

Unlike in painting, photography enables the viewer to reflect on the *real* relationship between the object and the image: paintings enable the viewer to take an interest in a representation that is constructed by the artist according to her intentions. In photography, the representation is causally related to the object photographed and largely independent from the photographer's intentions. I have argued that the experience of a painting differs from a photograph insofar as the viewer's relationship to the picture is concerned. I have described the difference between the two as demarcated by the *passive* and the *active*. In painting, I have argued that the viewer is a *passive viewer* insofar as her vantage point is neutralised by the fictively constructed perspective of the painting. The viewer of a photograph is, by contrast an *active viewer*, since transparent status represents a real relationship between object photographed and the picture.

I claim that the *real relationship* involves not only a different kind of relationship between the viewer and the picture but also between the viewer and the photographer – insofar as the viewer takes an interest towards the picture as representative of an intention. In this chapter, therefore, the challenge is to explore this relationship further and consider how it has impacted on the creative practice of pictorial representation. I will start from the integrative theorist's claim that

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<sup>215</sup> (no pagination) <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2010/02/theory-interview-with-robert-frank.html>

when we appreciate a photograph it is because we gain perceptual access to the object photographed. In particular I want to focus on the notion that our interest towards the photograph is determined by the object photographed. For Friday's integrative theory this has a certain consequence: We take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph because the objects photographed relate to certain meanings that are caused by seeing the object photographed.

The integrative theorist works towards a description of the meaningful value of a photograph by circumscribing it within the Peircian triadic notion of the sign. For the Integrative theorist, this system allows us to see how photographs work in terms of their meaning relationships: They are *pictures* that *coincidentally point* towards the subject photographed. In this sense they are for the integrative theorist *coincidentally* iconic and indexical signs. The corresponding relationship between the picturing – iconicity – and pointing – indexicality – illuminates the relationship between the viewer and the photograph: A relationship that recognises both the transparent and intentional quality of a photograph. Friday makes it clear that his use of the Peircian semiotic does not involve a critical dialogue with the current arguments about the concepts of a sign. Moreover, his intention is to show how the use of the Peircian categories helps us get to grips with the aesthetic character of the medium: 'I should add that I am not particularly interested here in what Peirce has to say about these categories, but in what can be said about them.'<sup>216</sup>

In discussing the integrative theorist's conception of the aesthetically meaningful content of a photograph I will assess how this effects an exploration of the creative aspect of photography. The integrative theorist claims that when we take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph we recognise that; '... the meaning is possessed by the objects depicted rather than by the picture itself, the latter being just the vehicle for manifesting the appearance of an independently meaningful world.'<sup>217</sup>

Whilst I agree that photographs are often meaningful because of the object in front of the lens I contend that this view has the potential to undermine an exploration of the representational potential of the medium; in particular a discussion of the peculiar manner by which photography

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<sup>216</sup> Elkins, J. (2007), p.135

<sup>217</sup> Friday, J. (2002) p.13

affords the artist intentionality. I will put forward the view that meaning does not always relate to the object photographed. In particular, I am interested in examining how the photographer's intentions emerge in the photographic event.

As the ideal photograph is causally related to a time based event – duration of the exposure – this, I claim, also enables the viewer to consider what is outside the frame as having some on an interest towards the object photographed: it is also important to note that because the photograph is causally related to an event that is absent from the viewer's spatiotemporal realm, there is to an extent some uncertainty with regards to what may be said about the meaning relationships that the viewer is able to appreciate through the photograph. We may also say that a painting draws our interest towards an event but we do not ordinarily take the representation on the canvas to extend beyond the frame. Photographs, on the other hand, document a *part* of the world, for a *duration*; our appreciation of a photograph, therefore, must be aware of the fact that there is always something happening outside the frame beyond the 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second. But what does this tell us about the aesthetic character of photography?

Photographs, unlike paintings, in one sense do not give us the full story; we appreciate the photograph as a photograph of something at a certain moment, although we do not have access to the moment. Yet, it is perhaps this quality that if explored further may reveal to us the aesthetic character of the medium. As Meyerowitz notes, photographs are compelling because whilst the photographic frame may not reveal the photographer's intent as a painting does, it allows the viewer's imagination to engage with what is possible. He found that by pointing a camera at the world, he could make images that did not simply show what things look like but could reveal a whole complex of narrative like meanings. For Meyerowitz, artistic photographs are not simply documents, but are representative of possibilities. Locating the intentions of the photographer in this complex is a task that I contend relates closely to an exploration of the *possibility*.

Nonetheless, before I present this view I will first explore the integrative theorists claim that photographs are meaningful because the object photographed is possessive of a certain meaning. In the last chapter I explored the integrative theorists claim that due to causal dependency we engage with the perspective as entailing a real rather than imagined vantage point. In this chapter

I will explore the consequences this has for a discussion of aesthetic and creative value. As I have mentioned, the Peircian view – as it will be taken up in this chapter – refers to the meaning relationship, between subject matter and depiction.

### 6.3: Signposting

The three major categories of the sign into which Peirce places our abstract understanding of experience involve the *icon*, *index* and *symbol*. There are many subdivisions of these categories. However, I will not go into further detail regarding their rigorously contested definitions here; my aim is to consider if the Peircian sign system can help us to circumscribe the meaning relationship between object photographed and its representation in the photograph.<sup>218</sup> Friday illustrates, very neatly a simplified illustration of the function of each of the three signs:

Peirce gave these categories of sign (and representational character) the now familiar names ‘symbol’, ‘index’ and ‘icon’. Symbols signify solely in virtue of conventional practices... A flag flown at half-mast, for example... Indices, by contrast, are signs that signify in terms of contiguous with what it signifies. A pointing finger is an index because it is contiguous with what it signifies... however, (indices) are sometimes called ‘natural signs’ – objects or states of affairs that signify by pointing to their causes or effects... the notion of an ‘icon’ is roughly equivalent to that of a ‘picture’.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on interpreting Peirce see Christopher Hookway’s *The Arguments of the Philosophers: Peirce*, Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1985.

<sup>219</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.47/8. Before I look at how Friday works Peirce’s triadic structure into his own system of describing the photograph as a transparent representation I would like to consider the manner in which he treats the relational aspects of what he refers to as *categories of the sign*. What appears to be important in Friday’s interpretation of the relation between sign and its representation is the manner by which we perceive there to be a *connection*. That is to say that our understanding of a sign relates to the cognitive faculties. Essentially, I do not take Friday’s interpretation of Peirce’s triadic system to be problematic. However, it does reveal the potential to follow a further line of questioning with regards to our interest in the aesthetic character of a photograph: In what sense do we take an interest in the signifying qualities of a sign? For example, if I see a flag at half mast, as Friday offers I would usually see it as a ritualistic signification of grief or mourning. However, do we see meaning as a resolution of cognised ideas, or as a continuous process? Certainly, on one level we take the meaning of a sign for granted, if we profess to understand its meaning – since we often make a link between sign and meaning without realising it.

For Friday the indexical quality of a photograph stands for its transparency. The photograph is causally related to the object photographed – for Friday – in the same way as ‘[t]he number of rings to be found in the cross-section of a tree trunk is an index of the age of a tree...’<sup>220</sup> The indexical sign is representative of the causal relationship that photographs have to the object in front of the lens; photographs, he argues direct our attention towards the object photographed and therefore our interest is held by the photograph insofar as it points toward that object. For Friday, the photograph’s indexical/transparent status as we have just mentioned is *coincidental* with its iconicity. So how is the transparent/indexical quality of a photograph dependent or coincidental on its iconicity?

Friday identifies two qualities of the icon. Both qualities, he argues, are unified by the icon’s pictorial function; that is, an icon resembles *pictorially* and *conventionally* the object it represents – like the *green man* at a pelican crossing resembles a person walking. The first of the two qualities of an icon that the integrative theorist identifies concerns the figurative or literal resemblance that the icon shares with the object it represents. This might be compared to the likeness shared between a portrait painting and a sitter or as Peirce points out the photograph and the object photographed.<sup>221</sup> The second instance whereupon a sign resembles the object it represents concerns the non-figurative.

The non-figurative icon resembles or pictures its object by way of abstraction: Pictorial abstraction in this sense refers to convention; maps for example allow us to *see* the gradient of

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Alternately, one can argue that rather than signify – by either symbol, icon or index – a sign reveals the working parts of a meaningful understanding. In this sense, Peirce’s semiological system is not concerned with a holistic sign-object relationship but an aspect or particular quality of the object. A critical reading of Peircian semiology would divert from the task in hand, however, it is a complex task worth undertaking. Martin Lefebvre – in Elkins (2007) – underlines the mutability of the sign-object relation by illustrating relevance to be dependent on sub-categories of the sign. Knowledge about objects and their meanings is often dependent on context. Therefore, the sign-object relationship refers not simply to an essential meaning but a complex dialogue between context and its appropriation.

<sup>220</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.47-48

<sup>221</sup> Peirce, C.S. (1978), p.106

the hill that we are determined to climb. The abstract icon refers to pictures that allow us to see certain objects yet do not visually resemble them. Following on from this we may also take an icon to be a sign that is not attached to a particular object insofar as it does not necessarily infer likeness by way of resemblance: ‘A final, but crucial, feature of Peirce’s account of iconic representation is his claim that icons may represent fictional objects and states of affairs.’<sup>222</sup>

So, to return to our earlier question; how is the indexical/transparent aspect of a photograph coincidental with an iconic/representational quality? For Friday, the answer relates to both the object photographed and the act of composition: a photograph is a picture – albeit in the Keplerian mode – in the sense that it resembles iconically those objects it pictures. However, it does not resemble or picture in the ordinary sense, since iconic quality for Friday is dependent on indexicality. A photograph, for the integrative theorist, therefore, pictures by pointing towards something:

When we reflect on what it is for the iconic and the indexical to be coincident, we begin to discern something of importance for understanding photographic representation. To point to the world by picturing it, a photograph must picture the world *in a manner* that points back at it... if a photograph points back at the world by giving us, in some sense, the *appearance* of the world, then perceptual experience of the world depicted in a photograph and perceptual experience of the world itself must be closely related.<sup>223</sup>

The integrative theorist’s aim here is twofold. In the first instance he offers a counter to the photographic sceptic’s claim that we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph because of transparency. Secondly, it is an attempt to describe how we engage with the aesthetic content of a photograph: If photographs are aesthetically interesting it is because we are able to see certain aesthetic qualities by looking at the subject matter and importantly by acknowledging the way the subject photographed is framed. Primarily because we recognise that the subject has been photographed for a reason; that it occurred to the photographer that the

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<sup>222</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.48

<sup>223</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.49

object looked aesthetically interesting. In this sense we see that it is the photographer's intention to share with the viewer an aesthetically pleasing scene. Photographs, argue Friday enable the viewer to engage contemplatively with an aspect of, or certain meaning related to the subject.<sup>224</sup>

In one sense I agree that we are able to take an interest towards the photograph because the object photographed looks aesthetically interesting. We recognise the picture to be contiguous with the object before the lens, rather than an intention to see the object in a certain way. I also agree that photographs offer the artist a different way of approaching her subject matter and therefore, we need to take some time to consider what is unique about the medium in relation to its creative practice. Yet I do not agree with the assumption that our interest towards the photograph is necessarily determined by an interest in what the photographer has photographed. Photographs do not, I claim merely intentionally *point* towards the object photographed.

#### **6.4: Disrupting the signifier**

The sign-object relationship, for the integrative theorist, describes how objects are *possessive* of meanings. Because we think of a photograph as a *picture of the world* that is causally related to the object photographed. However, I find the integrative theorist's interpretation of the pictorial in relation to photography to be problematic. In particular, regarding the perspectival *real relation* that supposedly explains the indexical quality of a photograph.

In developing a critique of this view I am inclined to agree with Joel Snyder, who argues in a round table discussion with Friday that photographs do not necessarily *point towards* their subject matter, if indeed we are able to say that the photograph has a subject. For Snyder, a photograph does not necessarily contain nor indicate any information about the subject, such as a particular meaning or expression: 'If you are saying that the picture [photograph of a glass] allows us to attend to the glass, who would want to argue with that? But the picture isn't ostensive...'<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> See Friday, J. (2002), p. 79

<sup>225</sup> Elkins, J. (2007), p.137

Photographs, argues Snyder may be causally related to the object photographed but this relationship does not necessarily extend to the aesthetic content: ‘What you want to say is that when you see a photograph of this [the glass], something else is going on. What else is going on? Drop the pointing [indexical relationship], because there is nobody pointing.’<sup>226</sup> The fact of the causal relation does not, for Snyder, extend to the discernment of aesthetically meaningful content.

As Snyder argues, photographs enable us to attend to the object before the lens but they do not point towards a particular meaning; at least if they do, it is not necessarily a meaning that we can say is *possessed* by the object photographed. Nonetheless, neither can we say that the photograph is – in the same sense that we find in painting – expressive of a thought about the subject. Authorial anonymity, however, can enable the photographer to create a kind of dialogic relationship with meanings.

An understanding of the Peircian sign-object relationship as dialogically related that I find to be helpful is expressed by Roberta Kevelson. In Kevelson’s interpretation of Peircian aesthetics she treats the role of the sign as dynamic. The meaning that is related to the object, therefore, is not to be considered as holistic, but represents a fragment or unique perspective: ‘One cannot analyze an impression which is taken or perceived as a whole; one cannot analyze a work of art to the extent that it is successful in being interpreted as having holistic integrity and self-referential coherence.’<sup>227</sup> This is frequently the case in Yinka Shonibare’s work. His tableau photographs often act as a collision point rather than a hermeneutical synthesis of meanings.

In his series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), Shonibare places himself at the centre of a recreation of a Victorian tableau – inspired by Hogarth’s *A Rakes’ Progress* (1733). From Shonibare’s images emerge ideas that relate to cultural and historical notions of racial identity drawing on Hogarth’s subversive attitude towards aristocracy and power. Due to a causal rather than interpretive relationship to his subject, however, the intentions of the photographer do not

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<sup>226</sup> Elkins, J. (2007), p.137

<sup>227</sup> Kevelson, R. in Parret, H. (1993), p.216

circumscribe the aesthetic content of the work; the photographed subjects are not possessive of certain meanings, moreover, I claim that we find meaning to be dialogically engaged: That is to say that the meaning is not possible holistically, as – due to the causally mechanical process – we are unable to relate the image to a unified intention.

Photography allows Shonibare to express his thoughts about ideas concerning identity without interpreting, or enabling the viewer to see the work as expressive of a particular intention that is pervasive. The possibility for creating an image that expresses a thought about a subject is for Shonibare possible, only insofar as that thought is not wholly autonomous; the thought itself is mediated by a further presence or conduit that is represented in the work by the mechanically derived causal process. In this sense photography enables him to challenge the notion that artistic expression is itself merely an autonomous practice.<sup>228</sup> The aesthetic content of his work is not only a quality that emerges through the artist's expression of a thought but also as a dialogue in which he is engaged: 'What I want to suggest is that there is no such thing as a natural signifier, that the signifier is always constructed—in other words, that what you represent things with is a form of mythology. Representation itself comes into question.'<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Shonibare, Y. [http://www.yinkashonibaremba.com/resources/content/articles/10/32/MUSEUMOFART\\_2003.pdf](http://www.yinkashonibaremba.com/resources/content/articles/10/32/MUSEUMOFART_2003.pdf) (accessed 24/2/12)

<sup>229</sup> Shonibare, Y. <http://www.theroot.com/views/bomb-root-yinka-shonibare-interview> (accessed 24/2/12)



16. Yinka Shonibare, *Untitled*, 1997

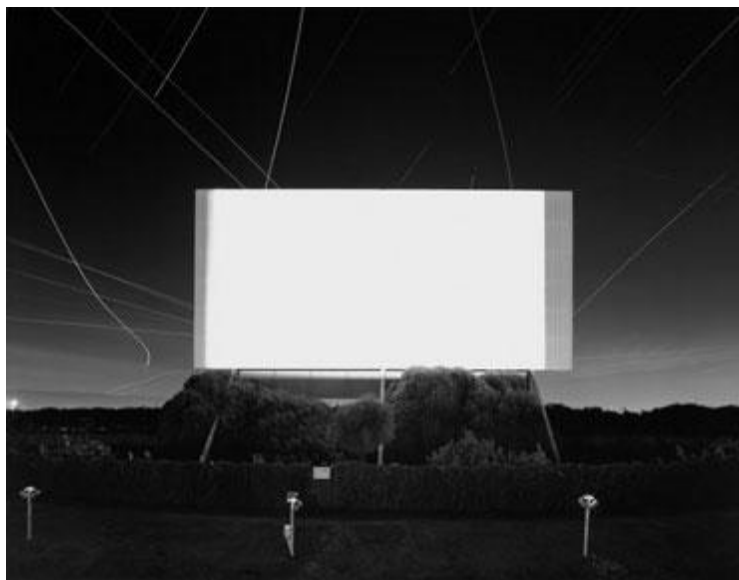
Shonibare's work seeks to underline disruptive rather than affirmative relationship between the subject and its meaning. Shonibare accesses photography due to its potential to disallow a unified notion of intentional control. Because the viewer is unable to treat the work as solely a product of the artist's intention, Shonibare's elaborate scenes play with an unresolved meaning; the photograph does not *point* conclusively to any particular meaning – that we may refer to the artist's interpretation – but presents the meaningful and aesthetic content as a suggestive interplay between subject and appearance. It is in this sense, I claim, that Snyder argues we are unable to consider photographs as *pointing* towards the subject; since as is illustrated in Shonibare's work, if things are possessive of meaning it is not a straightforward and easily discernible relationship:

You don't measure photographs against the world: you measure the world against photographs. To enjoy photographs, or to study them, or think about them critically, requires not a one-to-one translation, but a recognition – and this is [Edward] Weston's thought – that the object matter in the world does not determine the subject matter of the photograph... What I fear about the causal stuff is that it stops you from seeing the photographs as pictures.<sup>230</sup>

For example, when we look at Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Union City Drive In, Union City* (1993) one may be inclined to ask; what is being pointed out? We see an exposure of a drive-in cinema that has apparently been made over a long period of time – possibly the length of the film. We can reasonably deduce this by noticing the plane/star trails and the blanket of white that covers the film screen. We know that under normal circumstances when we look at the screen of a Drive In or a sky at dusk we do not see a blanket of white or elongated white lines that curve across the sky: Possibly because we are unable to gain perceptual access to the world at multiple points in time at the same time. But by acknowledging that what we see is not usually the case – in relation to our ordinary visual experience – we seem to be ignoring what it is that we are actually looking at: A blanket of white covering the film screen and white curved lines drawn across the sky. By describing this photograph as a picture that points towards the screen of a Drive In, it seems that in one sense we are no longer talking about the photograph.

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<sup>230</sup> Elkins, J. (2007), p.155



17. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Union City Drive In, Union City*, 1993

Furthermore, is our interest towards the photograph necessarily contingent on what the photographer wants to show us? It would be difficult for anyone to believe that *Union City* is a representation of Sugimoto's visual experience – although the picture may represent what he wants the viewer to see.<sup>231</sup> But we do not necessarily attribute the composition of a photograph to what the photographer was looking at or wants the viewer to look at; insofar as the viewer recognises that the photographer is unable to construct, wholly, meaning relationships between the object photographed and its appearance in the photograph.

The aesthetically meaningful forms not only in relation to those objects depicted but a consideration of perspective that is not attributable to a unified relationship between the depiction and the depicted. If Sugimoto is showing us how things appear, it is not the world as we are able to see it ordinarily. Yet neither is it the world as he witnessed it. As in Shonibare's work, I claim that Sugimoto is interested in presenting us with a perspective that allows us to

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<sup>231</sup> Satisfying this claim would support the integrative theorists claim that creative photographs represent how the artist thinks we *ought* to see the object photographed. Yet due to the mechanically causal process, it is not wholly possible to say that a photograph is representative of the photographer's thought about the subject of her picture.

take a contemplative attitude towards the object photographed and its complex of meaningful relationships; as they form in the photographic event.

### 6.5: Determining intent

The integrative theorist claims that it is the compositional characteristic of a photograph that allows the viewer to acknowledge the photographer's intention. That is, the decision to point the camera in one direction as opposed to another; to focus on a particular detail as demonstrative of a particular thought or intention – about the subject. This act, of framing certain objects, according to Friday illustrates the context in which we interrogate the aesthetic content of a photograph: 'Fundamentally, a photograph transparently represents objects and states of affairs by virtue of these appearing within the frame of the photograph. Thus photographs represent the objects as a result of the intentional framing and composition carried out by the photographer.'<sup>232</sup>

Friday argues that it is not the photograph itself but the objects photographed that *possess* meaning. This is because, as he maintains, photographs picture by *pointing* towards the object photographed. However, it is also due to the photographer's act of framing certain objects that are meaningful that we are able to take a contemplative attitude towards the photograph. Meaningful content, therefore, emerges through our acknowledging the composition as dependent on the photographer's intention. But is this claim convincing?

The integrative theorist acknowledges that meaning is *possessed* by objects in a multitude of ways. We recognise something as meaningful, he argues, because we interpret it in a certain way. Interpretation where it relates to photography, continues the integrative theorist is affected by the object photographed: 'If there is such a thing as a 'pure given' of perception, then it has no content until a person with a particular purpose, history, knowledge, attitudes interest and the like individuates its objects by means of a demonstrative thought foregrounding certain properties and thereby singling out an object as one of the things that it is... The interpretation is in the act of seeing.'<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.75

<sup>233</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.79

This point would seem to give some significance to Friday's claim that photographers have some intentional control over composition; a photographer might frame a certain object because of its resonance within contemporary socio-historical setting or find an event meaningful because of its cultural relevance. For the integrative theorist, the photographic frame communicates something about the photographer's intention. The photographer, therefore, does not produce or control meaning in the same manner that is available to the painter. The viewer's aesthetic interest is dependent on acknowledging that we see the object photographed:

[A] photograph represents by virtue of communicating a demonstrative thought... What this suggests is that photographs *might* also be thought of as representing 'a version of reality' – a way in which the world can be visually construed. Since the representational thought achieving this results from the manner in which the subject matter is singled out by the frame of the photograph...<sup>234</sup>

Yet, do we always find that the artistically expressive content in a photograph is relatable to the photographer's composition? I have begun to consider the possibility that it is not always necessary to acknowledge the photographer's intentionality – in the same way that we recognise the painter's intentionality. Photography offers the artist the potential to create images in which the tools appropriated do not always enable the artist to create a work that is unified by the photographer's agency. Nonetheless, I think that the loss of a unifying intention is a conscious choice and allows the artist – in using photography – to think differently about how artworks enable the expression of a thought. Because photographs are causally related to a photographic event the approach towards structuring the content of the picture is different from painting.

It may be more fruitful to explore what is peculiar about the relationship between the photographer, subject matter and picture; that I claim is based upon a de-centred notion of intentionality rather than a composition that is unified by the imagined construction of an appearance. I contend that in examining this conception of intentionality we will be in a better

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<sup>234</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.79

position to discuss the role of the artist in relation to the creative practice of photography as representational art.

Characterising the loss of intentional control as a creative impetus is difficult when considering Scruton's claim that underlining the aesthetic representation is the intentional. Yet, for photographers the mechanical process is central to the aesthetic character of the photographic medium; the aesthetic emerges not merely in the appearance but in the appearance as representative of the event: The structure of the representational meaning, therefore, is not merely present by attending to the appearance but what the appearance can tell us about the event. For Sugimoto it is that photographic event that holds our interest, not merely the way something looks when it is photographed:

Dressed up as a tourist, I walked into a cheap cinema in the East Village with a large-format camera. As soon as the movie started, I fixed the shutter at a wide-open aperture, and two hours later when the movie finished, I clicked the shutter closed. That evening, I developed the film, and the vision exploded behind my eyes.<sup>235</sup>

### **6.6: Re-establishing the boundaries of intentionality**

The need to reassess the creative potential of photography, therefore, is necessary in order to contextualise the potential to create representational art within an understanding of the medium. Underlining the boundaries of the medium – such as the loss of a centralised notion of intentionality – I contend enables us to look more carefully at how creativity relates to photographic practice. This is evidenced, I claim, by underlining the provenance of the photographic event as the cause of our interest towards meaning relationships in the image. Yet, as we discussed in the first two chapters of this investigation, we may not think of the causal relationship as inclusive of the photographer; at least not in the same way as we do painting.

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<sup>235</sup> <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/theater.html>

To think of the meaningful and aesthetic content of a photograph as wholly determined by the intentional – be it photographer or subject matter – is, I contend, a mistake. I claim that we might instead consider the photograph as expressive of a different relationship between author and intent; determining intention as a de-centred rather than as central to the cause of our aesthetic interest is an approach that may benefit our understanding of the photographic artform. In particular in a discussion of the relationship between the photograph and its structure of representational meaning. Umberto Eco describes the complexity of this relationship as ‘... a series of successive transcriptions.’<sup>236</sup> For Eco, photographs do not only give the viewer access to a document of a certain object but also hold the potential for the viewer to reflect on the artistic content of the photograph to be expressive of narratives that are not always unified.

Photography, in this sense enables the artist to engage with her authorial presence in an entirely different manner. Whereas, the conception of creative picture making in painting is often dependent on our recognising authorial intent, for the photographer the authorial does not emerge as a thought about the way something looks. Sugimoto’s work demonstrates quite eloquently the role of the photographer insofar as intention is concerned: Sugimoto, the camera and the viewer all *see* in relation to the exposure something quite different.

Sugimoto recognises that the camera allows him to create images in which the artist’s presence is *de-centred*; the viewer’s appreciation of the photographer’s thought forms not due to the intentional control over appearance but by attending to the event that is represented by the appearance of the object photographed. For the photographer, meaning is not possessed by the object or its appearance but is found in the photographic event. Much of Sugimoto’s work is consumed by the relationship between time and meaning. For Sugimoto the camera does not merely document the world but is a tool that allows him to penetrate the surface of appearance. His long exposures almost always eradicate the conventional relationship between meaning and appearance; enabling the viewer to contemplate the structure of representational meaning as forming in the event rather than the object photographed.

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<sup>236</sup> Eco, U. in Burgin, V. (1982), p.33

### 6.7: The possibility of representational meaning

In chapter 1 we got a glimpse of the idea upon which the notion of artistic photography as involving a de-centred notion of intentionality is based: For example, Meyerowitz's describes the photographic frame as a vehicle that draws his interest because it enables him to create images that represent *what is possible*. These *possibilities* are aesthetically interesting because, as Meyerowitz points out, they draw our attention towards the object photographed but do not give us access to it. Our interest, therefore, is not merely held by the object but those *possibilities* that we attribute to it.

This, I contend allows us to rethink the relationship between artist and her intention. The question of intention has continually underlined our discussion of creative practice. Rather than seeking to fit photography into a model of creativity that matches with our understanding of intention in painting perhaps an entirely different approach is required. As John Berger acknowledges, where aesthetically interesting, photographs are pictures in which we find meaning to be complex because of its fragmentary rather than unified quality:

A photograph is a meeting place where the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer, and those who are using the photographs are often contradictory. These contradictions both hide and increase the natural ambiguity of the photographic image.<sup>237</sup>

As the viewer is not always present when a photograph is taken, the ability to discern the meaning relating to the objects photographed is not always established as an objective fact: A viewer may discern several possible actions – by appealing to the way something looks like photographed – and contingent meanings when looking at the world through a photograph. Acutely aware of this potentiality of the use of the photographic medium, I claim that photographers regard their intentions as present yet de-centred.

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<sup>237</sup> Berger, J. Mohr, J. (2008), p.7

There are two tasks to undertake in relating the representational meaning of a photograph to a de-centred notion of intention. Firstly, it is necessary to establish the qualities peculiar to a de-centred notion of intentionality. I will achieve this by underlining a *point of divergence* from what I regard to be a centralised notion of intentionality; which I claim is important in Scruton's characterisation of representational art. This will be the main task in the next chapter. Secondly, I will show how the viewer relates the representational meaning to a de-centred intention. This involves a lot of descriptive work in two areas; the photographic event and the actual use of the medium towards artistic end. The latter, I claim, informs our understanding of the former; insofar as it enables the viewer to appreciate the photographer's intentions. I will discuss the unfolding of the de-centred intent in chapter 7 and illustrate its usage towards an artistic end in chapter 8.

In order to situate a de-centred notion of intentionality within its artistic usage I will work towards a description of the creative practice of photography as illustrative of this conception. In order to characterise the parameters of a de-centred notion of intentionality I will describe the structure of representational meaning as *performative*. Such a description is not as a means to forming a normative understanding of the photographic artform. Moreover, I claim it will illuminate the relationship between the photographer's intention and what Joel Meyerowitz refers to as the possibilities present in the photographic composition.

In discussing Margaret Iversen's essay on performative photography Diarmuid Costello and James Elkins consider the possibility that we take an aesthetic interest towards photographs as we might a performance: '[Iversen's] paper raised the question of a *performative* photography, a photography that does not function to document some event or entity in the world that precedes its being recorded, but is itself an agency that brings something into being through its own action.'<sup>238</sup>

The photographer often regards the task of photographing as a performance – sometimes even developing their practice through the construction of an elaborate charade. Hans Eijkelboom, for example has tailored his overcoat in such a way that a shutter release cable discreetly leading to a

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<sup>238</sup> See Elkins, J. (2007), p.196

pocket may be depressed without his subject knowing that they have been photographed. The notion that photographs do not show us things that are meaningful but enable the viewer to attend to a subject matter that appears to *act* out its meanings is an idea that photographer Gary Winogrand understands very well. In *Central Park Zoo, New York* (1967) Winogrand photographs a couple who are both carrying Chimpanzee's. Shot at a time when issues regarding race, interracial relationships and equality were responsible for a great tension that split the political ideologies of the North and South of the United States Winogrand's photograph was certainly – and I contend still is – provocative.



18. Gary Winogrand, *Central Park Zoo, New York*, 1967

It is not, I contend, the subjects in Gary Winogrand's photographs that possess the meaning/critique that is often ascribed to Winogrand's photograph. As I discussed in chapter 1, photographers recognise that their subject matter cannot *speak* for it/themselves and in the same way neither can the photographer speak for the subject. Because of this, what often draws us towards the subject – engages our interest – is not wholly attributable to any particular intention but meanings that relates appearance to the photographic event. Attributing a certain meaning to the photographed subject, therefore, we take an interest towards the subject as performative of that particular meaning.

The notion that photographs are aesthetically interesting because of their performative like quality will be explored in the following chapters. I aim to show that due to the inability to treat the medium as interpretive, the photographer's creative expression is dependent on how they

engage with their subject matter and setting. The photographer's intention is not revealed like that of the painter's but must in a sense become actively engaged with the subject, so that it emerges through the photographic event rather than merely the way something looks photographed.

### 6.8: Framing intent

Acknowledging that photographs can be aesthetically pleasing in their own right it would seem from this inquiry is no simple task. Perhaps the most complex case made in support of this claim is made by Jonathan Friday. His integrative argument follows that we take an aesthetic interest in the photograph due to the photographer intentionally framing meaningful objects. However, this argument is not without its problems.

The claim that intentionality relates to composition, I claim, is not satisfactory. Henri Cartier-Bresson, renowned for his street photography, worked on the basis that photographs are not made by appealing the photographer's composition alone, but due to a great deal of happenstance: 'I'm not responsible for my photographs. Photography is not documentary, but intuition, a poetic experience. It's drowning yourself, dissolving yourself, and then sniff, sniff, sniff – being sensitive to coincidence. You can't go looking for it; you can't want it, or you won't get it. First you must lose yourself. Then it happens.'<sup>239</sup>

In this sense, I claim that to discuss the compositional element as a unifying quality, expressive of the artist's intention is misleading. This point is illustrated by Henry Wright's *Untitled* (2003). Wright photographed – without using the viewfinder – street scenes in Paris, London and New York on black and white super 8mm film. After developing the film, he put onto slide film a number of the frames chosen from the super 8mm film. A slide projection of the chosen frames was photographed on a copy stand using black and white 35mm film from which final prints were made.

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<sup>239</sup> Cartier-Bresson, H. (1997), p.96

In Wright's work it is not so much the intention that is important as is the repetitious: Not only the act of photographing and re-photographing, but finding this act as a refrain; the final image taken as a single frame, removed from the super 8mm film in normal usage would have passed by the viewer without pause. Likewise, for Wright, the photographer is unable to intentionally capture or compose that which is before his lens. The act of photographing, I propose is best described as performative insofar as the presence of the photographer takes on a dialogical form; with camera in hand Wright seeks to interrupt and engage in dialogue with his environment, rather than interpret or construct a representation of his surroundings: The performative is an element of his practice insofar as it creates the parameters of his engagement with the objects photographed.

## 6.9: Conclusion

This chapter concludes my discussion of the transparency thesis. The claim held by the photography sceptic to recall, follows that because a photograph is transparent we are unable to find anything interesting to say about photographs; since it is the object photographed that holds our attention. The most insightful argument against the sceptic incorporates the transparency thesis as a way of illustrating photography as a medium that needs to be made distinct from our interest in the painterly conception of pictorial representation. For the integrative theorist the photograph is transparent, however, we take an interest in the objects photographed due to the photographer's intention to frame certain objects.

Yet I contend that the integrative theorist's argument does not go far enough in making the break from a painterly conception of the creative practice of picture making. For Friday, to take an aesthetic interest in the photograph we must be able to recognise some intentional control – framing in the case of the transparent representation. To take an aesthetic interest toward the photograph, therefore, we must be able to acknowledge a conception of the intentional that is akin to our appreciation of the Albertian picture. This means that the objects within the picture frame must be representative of a conscious decision made by the artist. As we have discussed, for the integrative theorist, meaningful content, is *possessed* by the object photographed only if we recognise it is because they are framed by a photographer.

By rethinking the foundations of the integrative theorist's bold claims regarding the conception of pictorial representation after photography I contend that we may conceive of a more decisive break from the traditional painterly conception of the intentional in representational art. In this conception of the photograph as a transparent representation the integrative theorist conceives of our aesthetic interest towards the photograph as an interest towards the photographer's perspective, which for Friday contains an *expressive perspective*; 'Skilfully used, the medium of photography is capable of capturing and sustaining aesthetic attention by virtue of the expressive perspectives on the world that it is suited to creating.'<sup>240</sup>

Expressive perspective, Friday argues amounts to the photographer's intention to frame certain objects that are meaningful. The question that the sceptic might well ask at this point, I contend, is also central to our understanding of the photographic aesthetic: "Can we see the photographer's intention by appealing to the framing of certain objects?" The photographic sceptic, I can perhaps safely presume would answer, no. And on this point I am in agreement. The absence of intentional control, I contend is often the very reason that artists choose to photograph.

This, I claim must have a striking impact on how we are to think about both the transparent and representational quality of a photograph. In this chapter I have looked at how photographs carry and express their meaning – in terms of our aesthetic understanding. For the negative proponent of the transparency theory, the answer to this problem is clear; since photographs are transparent, it is the object photographed and not the photograph that carries and expresses meaning. For the integrative theorist, the response is more complex: The photograph relates to the photographer's decision to frame a certain object, which we acknowledge through appealing to the composition. Yet, it is the object photographed that is *possessive* of the meaning that we see in a photograph.

A good deal of our discussion of creative practice up to this point I claim has been dependent on the assimilation of qualities that I refer to as *painterly*. It seems as though the notion of intention and the propensity for the artist to use of the camera to interpret is central to a discussion of

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<sup>240</sup> Friday, J. (2002), p.83

creative practice. However, in this chapter I have begun to consider the possibility that intention and interpretation, as the sceptic contends, are not only absent – in the traditional, painterly conception of the intentional – in photography but this absence is illustrative of photography's aesthetic value. Therefore, if we are to distance ourselves from the current arguments criticised in this investigation a re-examination of our interest towards the photograph is required. In particular, we need to consider what photography offers the artist in relation to its creative potential.

Unlike our understanding of the painterly, expression is not fixed to the content of a photograph as something that we attribute to the artist's intention. Instead we might think of the photograph as reflective of certain intentions that are attributable to the artist, the objects photographed, photographic tropes and concerns that are external to all three. As Douglas Greenlee observes we realise that aesthetic content does not necessarily unify meaning or expression, on the contrary it has a decidedly more fragmentary quality:

To say that a work of art has meaning may be only to say, for example, that some of its parts or elements have meaning. And the meaning in question may be that kind of meaning which a part in a whole is often said to have when it contributes to the aesthetic 'excellence' of an organic whole.<sup>241</sup>

In the next 2 chapters, I set out to do two things. Firstly I will describe what I mean by saying that photography offers the artist a significantly different approach to engaging with her subject matter. In order to do this I will draw upon an interpretation of Walter Benjamin to illustrate the creative act as a constantly transforming concept.

Benjamin's critical technique will inform the epistemological conditions of this approach. However, this path is not without its own problems. Traditionally a Benjaminian perspective is often expected to focus on the de-auratising impact of technological media on art. As discussed in chapter 1; this focuses on the way in which technologically advanced media such as photography has altered our access to artworks, creative practice and an aesthetic understanding.

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<sup>241</sup> Greenlee, D. (1973), p.141

However, my interpretation of Benjamin offers a quite different service. As this investigation has largely centred on the role of intention in developing our understanding of creative practice of representational art I will consider how photography has affected the artist's relationship with her subject matter. Firstly, I will revise the current approach taken in this investigation towards examining the role of intention in relation to creative practice. Artists who choose to photograph, I aim to show, do so fully aware that they are unable to exact complete or unified intentional control over her subject matter. Furthermore, I will argue that the lack of intentional control is often what compels artists to adopt the photographic medium. In order to describe and illustrate this different approach towards creative practice I will first reconsider the epistemological foundations upon which we base our understanding of the role of intention in creative practice.

## Chapter 7

Ansel Adams on the creative practice of photography: ‘The negative is the score, the print is the performance.’<sup>242</sup>

### 7.1: Introduction

In the last 2 chapters I set out to explore how the expressive and aesthetically meaningful form in the photographic artform. I presented and later rejected the integrative view that photographs are aesthetically interesting because they represent the photographer’s perspective. The problem that I find with this viewpoint is similar to that which the photographic sceptic acknowledges; that photographers are unable to express a thought about the object photographed. Whilst I do not think that our interest towards the photographic representation is devoid of an appreciation of the intentional, it is not central to our aesthetic understanding of a photograph. An aesthetic understanding of the photographic medium, I claim, is in need of a conception of the intentional that is peculiar to the parameters of its practice.

In this chapter, I will present a *de-centred* notion of the intentional. In doing so, I will consider an approach towards the creative use of photography in which its mechanical limitations are appropriate to the aims of the artist. I will endeavour to present an understanding of creative photography that like Friday’s integrative thesis incorporates the causal and the expressive. Problematic to the integrative thesis, as I understand it, is that the conception of the intentional is not altered from an understanding that is characteristic in painting insofar as intentionality is considered to be central to the cause of our aesthetic interest. Therefore, a de-centred conception of the intentional seeks to describe the intentional as it is manifest in photography.

The initial steps I claim that are required to be taken in order to illustrate the intentional as a feature of artistic photography also necessitates an outline of the point at which a conception of

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<sup>242</sup> Adams, A. in Bannon, A. (2003), p.644

the intentional in photography diverges from its place in painting. In describing the point of divergence my objective is to characterise the place of intention in photographic art. This would, I contend, offer a counter to the position held by the photographic sceptic; that we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the *ideal* photograph that is not an interest towards the object photographed. At present I have underlined the intentional as present in artistic photography, yet as a force that is de-centred by the mechanically derived causal process. In further developing the notion of a de-centred intentionality my aim is to underline its value as descriptive of our appreciation of the aesthetically representational in photography.

The arguments that are purported to counter the sceptical viewpoint of intentionality, that I have examined so far, have not sufficiently taken to task an outlining intentionality peculiar to the practice of ideal photography. I claim that this is because these arguments do not seek out an approach towards the intentional is explicative of the difference between the centralised place of intentionality in painting and its de-centred place in photography. For example, in Friday's integrative theory, the aesthetic in photography is characterised by our interest towards a picture of the world from the photographer's perspective. Dominic Lopes argues for a transparent aesthetic of photography, in which he incorporates Walton's prosthesis conception of photography. Aesthetic appreciation of the photograph is possible because they are pictures that we see *through*. Our interest is held by the object photographed, yet because we see through the image it is different from our ordinary, day-to-day seeing. Therefore, we are able to appreciate the photograph as representative of the photographer's intentions.

In considering these arguments, that seek to undermine the claim held by the photographic sceptic – a position that is in this thesis represented by Scruton's argument in the *Photography and Representation* essay – I have found to be lacking an exploration of an understanding of the place of intentionality in photography. I do not think we need to redefine the notion of intentionality in art, merely it is the *position* of intentionality that requires reconsideration; it is my claim that a description of a de-centred notion of intentionality constitutes a different kind of relationship between the artwork and its structure of representational meaning. Because the prevailing epistemological discourse of intentionality within this investigation has posited it as

quality central to the expressive potential of an artwork, I find the need to adopt a different theoretical perspective.

Walter Benjamin's critical theory will offer a characteristically alternate approach. Benjamin did not develop a theory of artistic photography but was concerned with – amongst other things – the impact of the medium on creativity. A great deal of Benjamin's writing on photography and the *mechanical arts* is concerned with a conception of the artwork as a tool for political change. As in Friday's discussion of Peirce's semiology, I am not interested in engaging in an evaluative discourse on Benjamin's discussion of the function of art, but what may be discerned from his approach towards an aesthetic critique. Benjamin observed that photography challenged the artist to rethink her approach towards representation: For the painter, the representation is something which is removed from the *reality* that she depicts, whilst it is the task of the photographer to enter into that *reality*: 'The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.'<sup>243</sup>

Benjamin's discussion of the photographic medium as an artform that is different in kind from painting – in terms of its representational potential – enables us to consider a categorically different relationship between the artist and the emergence of the intentional. The comparative study of painting and photography as a means to discover the parameters of the aesthetic representation was for Benjamin injurious to a study of the photographic artform:

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<sup>243</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.27

The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever.<sup>244</sup>

Important to Benjamin's discourse on the photographic artform is a difference that is underlined by the artist's appropriation of the mechanical tool. In chapter 1 I considered this observation as pertinent to illuminating a conscious choice to de-centre the intentional. In this chapter I will describe the point of divergence as a notion as explicative of a notion of intentionality that is not central to the cause of an aesthetic interest. In order to illustrate a fragmented view of the intentional, it is first necessary to describe the point of divergence that is important Benjamin's discussion of the art of photography.

## **7.2: The point of divergence**

In chapter 1, I discussed Scruton's conception of the aesthetic representation. I considered his argument that the *ideal* photograph is unable to produce in the viewer an appreciation of that image as an aesthetic representation.<sup>245</sup> Because a photograph is causally related to the object before the lens, it is the object photographed rather than the photographer's intention that holds the aesthetic attention of the viewer. Important to his claim about the parameters of the aesthetic representation is the notion of intentionality.

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<sup>244</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.220

<sup>245</sup> The *ideal* photograph, argues Scruton is a *logical* rather than a *normative* conception. (See Scruton, 1998, p. 120) Whilst I have set out to challenge Scruton's notion of the *ideal* photograph in terms of its aesthetic conception I have not offered a complete rejection of his conception of the ideal photograph.

Paintings, due to the manner of their production, require the viewer to take an interest towards the representation as expressive of the artist's intention: to share a thought about the subject's appearance. In the case of the ideal photograph, the viewer is unable, in his appreciation of the image, to share with the photographer, an expression of a thought about the object photographed. Insofar as what may be expressed by a photograph is not attributable to the photographer's intention but the appearance of the object photographed.

Scruton examines the representational contents of the painting and the photograph in order to describe the conceptual parameters of representational art specific to the media. Because the photograph is causally related to the subject, due to the mechanised production of the image, the contents of the image that attract an aesthetic interest are caused by the object before the lens: effectively, because the process of creating the image is a mechanical one, the artist is unable to make a picture – without distorting the causal link of the ideal photograph – that conveys a thought about that subject.

The representational content of a painting if we look more closely, he argues, reveals a different relationship to the objects they depict. It is a difference that we may see by comparing the referential relationship between the representation and the object represented. For example, whilst an aesthetic interest towards the photograph may not involve perceptual recognition of the object photographed; we acknowledge that an interest towards the photograph is causally related to the object photographed. Because the referential parts of the photograph are all causally related to the object before the lens this means, according to Scruton, that an aesthetic interest must refer to object and not the photographic depiction: 'If I ask someone why he is looking at a picture, there are several kinds of reply he might give. In one case his reasons will be reasons for an interest only in the things depicted... Here the interest in the picture is derivative; it lies in the fact that the picture reveals properties of its subject... [and] is being treated as a means of access to the subject...'<sup>246</sup> Contrarily, in painting the parts that reference the object depicted are not causally related to that object, but the painter's intention to show the object in a certain way. Therefore, our aesthetic interest towards the parts that refer to the object depicted are causally related to the intention rather than the object depicted:

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<sup>246</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 128

It is clearly true that we understand the representational meaning, of, say, a Carpaccio through understanding the representational meaning of its parts. But the parts themselves are understood in *precisely the same way*; that is they too have parts, each of which is potentially divisible into significant components, and so on ad infinitum... As we see the meaning of a painting so do we see the meaning of its parts. This contrasts sharply with the case of reference in language, where we *construct* the meaning of the sentence from the reference of its parts, and where the parts themselves have reference in a way that is ultimately conventional.<sup>247</sup>

For Scruton, intentionality is central to our aesthetic appreciation of the picture. In order to appreciate the picture as an aesthetic representation it must be due to an acknowledgement of the depiction as circumscribed, not by the appearance of the object depicted but the intention to depict the subject in a certain way. Ultimately, because the parts of the photograph do not reference the photographer's intention – as we find intentionality in painting – we are unable to appreciate the photograph as an aesthetic representation. The difference between our aesthetic appreciation of the painting and the photograph in Scruton's argument underlines the importance of intentionality in art:

...there is the case where the reasons for the interest are reasons for an interest in the *picture* (in the way it looks)

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<sup>247</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 126

even though they make essential reference to the subject and can be understood as reasons only by someone who understands reference to the subject. For example, the observer may refer to a particular gesture of a certain figure, and a particular way of painting that gesture, as revelatory of the subject's character.<sup>248</sup>

This kind of interest is also realised, by Scruton, as dependent on acknowledging the intentionality to share a thought about the subject depicted. If an aesthetic interest is not caused by the reference to an intention, then the referents that produce in the viewer the aesthetic interest are caused by an interest towards the subject photographed and not the picture: 'Such an interest [towards the painting] leads naturally to another, to an interest in the use of the medium – in the way the painting presents its subject and therefore in the way in which the subject is seen by the painter.'<sup>249</sup> This is for Scruton, 'the core of aesthetic experience of pictorial art...'<sup>250</sup> and underlines the centrality of intentionality in his conception of the aesthetic representation.

For Benjamin, it is possible to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph that is caused by the photographer's intentions. The camera does not distil the potentiality for self-expression but is a tool that invokes a different mode of expression. Benjamin underlines Camille Recht's description of the difference in expressivity as found in the manner by which the two media differ in their *shaping* of their subject matter:<sup>251</sup>

Painter and photographer alike have their instruments. For the painter, the processes of drawing and colouring correspond to

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<sup>248</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.128

<sup>249</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 128

<sup>250</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.129

<sup>251</sup> Camille Recht was a critique who wrote the introduction to Eugene Atget's monograph *Lichtbilder* (1930)

the note-shaping of violin-playing, while the photographer and the piano player have the advantage of the mechanical dimension, which is subject to restrictive laws that place nothing like the same compulsion on the violinist.<sup>252</sup>

Benjamin, in a manner that is not dissimilar to Scruton recognises a categorical difference in the parameters of expression between the two media. He argues that both the painter and photographer may use their medium to express a thought about their subject. Nonetheless it is necessary to demarcate the difference not as a limiting factor – for photography – but as a point of divergence. Once again, akin to Scruton, Benjamin also holds that there is a difference in the aesthetic appreciation of the picture according to our understanding of the place of intentionality; as, for Benjamin, the parts of the photograph that produce an aesthetic interest refer not only to the artist's intention. Whereas, for Scruton, this difference indicates a lacking in photography, for Benjamin it illustrates the need to challenge our current understanding of intentionality as central to a conception of the aesthetic representation: 'There is a tremendous difference between the pictures that they [painters and photographers] obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman [or photographer] consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.'<sup>253</sup>

After underlining the intentional as a quality that manifests itself as different in kind – in photography and painting – I will now assess what can be said about this point of divergence. Informed by Benjamin's description of the aesthetically meaningful as fragmented rather than unified by the intentional, I will present a positive thesis of the de-centring of the intentional. The framework for this thesis is motivated by Benjamin's assertion that aesthetic meaningfulness is a quality of the artwork that is historically determined.

For Benjamin a critique of the artwork must take into account the historical conditions in which it is made; the environment in which the artist is working, the technological developments of the

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<sup>252</sup> Benjamin, W. (2009), p. 183

<sup>253</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p. 227

epoch and the political situation are all qualities that for Benjamin punctuate the parameters of an aesthetic understanding. The technological advance made in the nineteenth century, therefore, impacted on the boundaries of our conception of intentionality and expression. Greame Gilloch cites this impact as characteristic of the challenge that Benjamin set himself through his writing; to envisage a conceptual framework that is historically forming and therefore remains under constant critical challenge:

...central to Benjamin's work is the insight that texts, objects and images have a particular existence, or 'life', of their own which goes beyond, and cannot be reduced to, the intentions and purposes of those who created them. This is not an act of fetishisation, the ascription of human capacities and qualities to inanimate things. Rather, it is the contention that the meaning and significance of a text [or image(s)] are not determined by the author at the moment of [creation] but are contested and conceptualized anew as it enters subsequent contexts...<sup>254</sup>

### 7.3: The critical challenge

For Benjamin the work of art serves a purpose that extends beyond appreciation for its own sake. Indeed the concept of *l'art art pour l'art* for Benjamin has the potential to damage the authenticity of the artwork: 'With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography... art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art.'<sup>255</sup> A theory of the artwork that seeks to hide from its aesthetic character the material conditions in which the work is produced, argues Benjamin, undermines its exhibition value in

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<sup>254</sup> Gilloch, G. (2002), p. 2

<sup>255</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.218

favour of cult status. The elevation of the work of art and intentionality of the producer to cult status, for Benjamin undermines the authenticity of art. The authentic work, in his writing is evaluated for its potential to challenge the ubiquity of cult status; in doing so, the work of art becomes vital as a critique of the status of social relations. Only a medium in which the value of original is interchangeable with its reproduction can a theory of art that transcends the work beyond its subject be properly challenged:

Mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual... From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.

His critique of art and the theory of artistic production, therefore, would seem to form in its conceptual amalgamation as having a divisive purpose; as expressive of a dichotomy in which the politicisation of the aesthetics is described as the means by which its authenticity may be redeemed. There has been much criticism of Benjamin's appropriation of technological reproduction as a means of rethinking the purpose of art. Indeed Benjamin's friend and publisher, Theodore Adorno, criticised the grand illusion that there could be a revolutionary appropriation of mechanically produced art as naïve: Adorno argues that the technologically reproduced image and moving image could be more readily produced and widely distributed by the forces that Benjamin considers could be upturned by the use of mechanically reproduced art.<sup>256</sup>

Yet, aside from Adorno's charge of naïveté made in response to the claim that mechanically reproduced art has the potential to transform the function of art, it is encased within a theoretical

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<sup>256</sup> See Gilloch, G. (2002), p. 164

framework that describes the impact on the attitude towards expression that was caused by the de-centring of the intentional: ‘...a different nature... speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye; different above all in that, rather than space permeated with human consciousness, here is one permeated with unconsciousness.’<sup>257</sup>

Photography, for Benjamin, *penetrated* the world in such a way that it enabled artist and viewer to take a different kind of interest towards the expression of a thought about our meaningful experience of the world. The *unconsciousness* that Benjamin was interested in is represented in the photographic image as the everyday gesture that engages us only by habit and therefore must pass us by in an instant. Those moments, frozen in a photograph, he argues, can provoke a contemplative attitude that was not possible in the continuum of time, or in works of art in which our interest is causally related to the artist’s intention. Yet that detail which refers our interest towards the representational meaning is not unified by the artist’s intent; for Benjamin this means that what is expressed in the work is not brought to *consciousness* by the artist. The aesthetically meaningful, therefore, forms in fragmentation, expressed as narrative like structures that emerge in fragmentation through the details of the work:

Yet at the same time, photography reveals in this material physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things – meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable.<sup>258</sup>

Central to Benjamin’s writing is a critique of the structure of meaningful experience that circumscribes our experience of the world. Art, for Benjamin, is the mode that enables us to

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<sup>257</sup> Benjamin, W. (2009), p. 176

<sup>258</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p. 512

reflect on that structure of meanings that we encounter in our experience of the world. Benjamin describes two conceptions of the aesthetically meaningful: one that regards the artwork as an object that is expressive of a meaningful structure that is unified or symbolised by the intentional and a second mode in which the aesthetically meaningful emerges as fragmentary; Benjamin describes the second conception of the artwork as allegorically composed because he allows that the detail of a work of art may be emblematic of an intent without that intention circumscribing the entire meaningful structure of the work. The first mode, for Benjamin, describes the artwork as an object in which its expressions transcend their subject matter.

The second mode, for Benjamin, is vital to our understanding of – what was for him – the new technical apparatus of the artist: Because it includes the possibility that a structure of representational meaning is not determined by a centralising force in the intentional. I will now describe the differentiation between the *symbolic* and *allegorical* conceptions of the aesthetically meaningful as representative of the point of divergence.

#### **7.4: The framework of a new approach**

In Benjamin's early writing he began to form an approach towards a critique of the structure of representational meaning that would characterise his entire theoretical oeuvre.<sup>259</sup> In particular, Benjamin was concerned with examining meaningfulness in our everyday experience. Its formation as both a social and aesthetic phenomenon characterised the contents of his critical studies. For Benjamin, true meaningful experience was heading towards a crisis point; the *new* mechanical modes of mass production held the possibility to damage the authenticity of meaningful experience when we come to rely on them as giving us *access* to the world and a conception of meaningfulness:<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> See Benjamin, W. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (1977)

<sup>260</sup> This would offer one suitable explanation as to why Benjamin championed the new mechanical modes of production. Because the *current* technological advances are most likely to be those modes through which we engage with information about the world, they present, for Benjamin, the greatest potential to form as a revolutionary critique of our epistemology. Artistic appropriation of mechanical media, for Benjamin, was paramount to undertaking a critical engagement with the epistemology of our structures of meaning.

Man's inner concerns do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience. Newspapers constitute one of many evidences of such an inability. If it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose. But its intention is just the opposite... to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader.<sup>261</sup>

The artwork is for Benjamin a tool that unlike the press may engage our interest as a part of the individual experience: This is because the work of art enables us to both experience and express emotions about the world that we can relate to as a personal experience. Whereas the newspaper, for Benjamin, enables a kind access to the world that does not seek to incorporate the experience of the reader, the work of art holds the potential to provoke an experience which is unique to the person who appreciates that work. Whilst it may be possible to have a meaningful experience when watching/reading/ listening to the news, it is an experience that holds our interest as information and therefore, as Benjamin notes, it does not engage us meaningfully, as of our own experience.

Critical to his theoretical framework, is that meaningful experience is historically forming and therefore, an examination of its conceptualisation can be found in not only artworks but the objects of the phenomenal world. Benjamin's ultimate intention was to set up a critical framework that could describe the historical character of meaningful experience. Influenced by Jewish mysticism, Benjamin saw that this task could be reached by an examination of meaning that sought to return meaning to its *origin*:

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<sup>261</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p. 155

There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development.<sup>262</sup>

Benjamin identified two approaches that constitute our approach towards a useful critical examination of the epistemology of meaning: the *symbolic* and the *allegoric*. Both mechanisms reside, he argues, not in a thesis that seeks to establish an essentialist perspective of meaning but are modes of its representation: ‘If philosophy is to remain true to the law of its own form, as the representation of truth and not as a guide to the acquisition of knowledge, then the exercise of this form – rather than its anticipation in the system – must be accorded due importance.’<sup>263</sup> Because, for Benjamin, a theoretical framework, in one sense underlines the epistemological boundaries of the epoch in which it is espoused, he examines our expression of a founding epistemology as representational – rather than exacting or normative.

Benjamin’s theoretical framework was an attempt to move away from – or at least critique – a symbolic conception of the representational. For Benjamin, the symbolic image of representation manifests itself as unified by a centralising force: the meaningful structure of the symbolic image of representation is conceived of as complete; insofar as it expresses a unique perspective. Representation, in a symbolic interpretation, carries meaning that does not merely refer to object represented but is expressive of its own unique meaningful structure. Therefore, the referents that symbolise meaningfulness are peculiar to the representation itself: ‘The measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instance in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden and, if one might say so, wooded interior.’<sup>264</sup> Benjamin’s symbolic interpretation of

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<sup>262</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), p.46

<sup>263</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), p.28

<sup>264</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), p. 165

the representational, I claim, is able to show us a conception of the representational that is self-constitutive in terms of its structure of representational meaning.

As with Scruton's conception of the aesthetic representation, Benjamin's conception of the symbolic representation regards the meaningful elements as referring to an intention rather than merely the object represented. The aesthetic realisation of the symbolic representation, establishes the artwork as an object in which its referents express a structure of meaning that are intrinsic to that work. As John McCole argues, the symbolic, for Benjamin establishes its own meaningful structure: 'The aesthetic symbol's affirmative bias lies in its pretense of incarnating a "plastic" stabilized totality.'<sup>265</sup> Therefore, the representation for Benjamin, in its symbolic configuration is expressive of a meaning that transcends the historical moment in which its referents are found.

In Scruton's interpretation of the aesthetic representation he also underlines the loss of time as a quality that is central to its conception. In comparing the painted and photographic portrait he argues that what holds our interest in a photograph is often an appreciation of the appearance of the subject photographed when the picture was taken. In the case of the painted portrait, it is not merely the appearance of the subject that holds our interest. Indeed, how the subject appeared when the portrait was painted may not concern the viewer at all. For Scruton, the intention to see the subject in a certain way – as depicted in the painting – is the central force that guides our interest towards the aesthetic representation. As our aesthetic appreciation of the representation is not causally related to the subject the relationship between the subject and its depiction may be characterised as transcendent of the temporal realm to which the depiction refers:

One of the most important differences between photography and portraiture... lies in the relation of each to time... photography... is thought of as revealing something

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<sup>265</sup> McCole, J. (1993), p. 138 *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, Cornell University Press

momentary about its subject – how the subject looked at a particular moment... Portrait painting, however, aims to capture the sense of time and to represent its subject as extended in time, even in the process of displaying a particular moment of its existence... The aim of painting is to give insight, and the creation of an appearance is important mainly as the expression of a thought.<sup>266</sup>

Scruton's conception of the aesthetic representation, I claim, involves a centralised notion of the intentional. This can also be said about Benjamin's notion of the symbolic representation. In his conception of the symbolic representation the meaningful structure is centralised, insofar as all its referents emerge as unified: 'The meaning of a symbol is not dispersed across a plethora of disparate referents, but is concentrated intensively in a single image.'<sup>267</sup> Both theoretical frameworks involve a conception of the aesthetic as an experience in which the parameters of expression and meaningfulness are synthetically unified. The relationship to the temporal is important in terms of how it configures in the aesthetic experience of the representation. For Benjamin as, Bainard Cowan argues, the symbolic conception of representation permits a description of aesthetic appreciation that is emptied of time: 'Experience would then become something to appreciate entirely in itself. Time seems to stop for this perfect moment, and problems of communication are annulled.'<sup>268</sup>

We find this approach towards a conception of the aesthetic representation present in Scruton's writing on representational art. In Scruton's conception of representational art, this concerns the referential relationship between the subject and the aesthetic content: For Scruton, the aesthetic content refers to the artist's intention to depict the subject in a certain way. An aesthetic interest towards the representation, therefore, does not regard its referents as causally related to the

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<sup>266</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 129

<sup>267</sup> Gilloch, G. (2002), p. 80

<sup>268</sup> Cowan, B. *Benjamin's Theory of Allegory* in *New German Critique*, No. 22, Winter 1981 pp. 109-122 , P. 111

temporal realm. As Scruton notes in order to understand the meaningful and expressive value of the artwork we need not look for its structure outside of that work:

The interest is not in the representation for the sake of its subject but in the representation for its own sake. And it is such an interest that forms the core of the aesthetic experience of pictorial art, and which... would explain not only the value of that experience but also the nature and value of the art which is its object. We see at once that such an interest is not, and cannot be, an interest in the literal truth of the picture.<sup>269</sup>

In Benjamin's interpretation of the symbolic representation, the expressive and the meaningful are elements are naturalised in the representation. As Jeremy Tambling points out in his interpretation of Benjamin's symbolic conception of the representation, the aesthetically meaningful emerges as made permanent by the representation: '...it seems that what the symbol describes as 'natural', making the danger of symbolism that it concentrates certain values as natural, permanent and having an essential and unchanging existence.'<sup>270</sup>

### **7.5: The allegorical as a point of divergence**

The symbolic image of representation, on its own, he found to be inadequate because it constructs a theoretical framework in which the represented becomes insufficient or secondary to our understanding or interest. This model disallows our consideration of the represented as a referent that is in some way constitutive of the representational content. For Benjamin, the relationships formed in the representational meaning are not merely self-referential because, he argues that our understanding and appreciation of them form according to certain epistemological boundaries; that are for Benjamin historically forming.

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<sup>269</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p. 129

<sup>270</sup> Tambling, J. (2010), p. 116 *Allegory*, Routledge

In Benjamin's conception, *history* is not revealed in by attending to the past event but as narratives that punctuate our experience of the present: '...nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history... For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.'<sup>271</sup> Benjamin, therefore, also posits a different approach towards our conception of the representation. The *allegorical* model is for Benjamin more suited to a conception of the representation that takes into account the disagreements and inconsistencies that punctuate its formation, as Howard Caygill notes:

Allegory emerges out of the difficult relationship between appearance and essence, and is based on the recognition that there is a discrepancy between them. This discrepancy is for Benjamin not a falling away from the symbolic, but an inevitable consequence of the experience of time and finitude<sup>272</sup>

The allegorical, in Benjamin's writing is presented as a point of divergence from which he considers a historically forming conception of the parameters of an aesthetic understanding to emerge. The allegorical conception of representation is for Benjamin expressive of an understanding of history in which meaning is not symbolised by the *event*. In the symbolic conception of the event, Benjamin argues, we regard history of a series of moments that are complete or finite in terms of their meaning relationships.

The consequence of a unified structure of representational meaning, he argues, is that we find meaning in our present experience to be complete or ready-made; by this, Benjamin means that meaningful experience is regarded as attached to the event rather than individual personal experience. To illuminate this idea, Benjamin appropriates Baudelaire's work on the passer-by. In Baudelaire's conception of the passer-by, he found an experience of the world in which

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<sup>271</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), pp. 246-247.

<sup>272</sup> Caygill, H. (1997), p. 59 *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, Routledge

communication or correspondence is lost. The urban setting that is the site of Baudelaire's writing on the passer-by documents the loss of the individual in the crowd. Meaningful experience, therefore, is consigned to the *event* rather than present fully as a unique experience. The passer-by, however, represents the possibility of a communication that could engender a meaningful experience, yet within an urban setting emerges through an expression that is representative of the crowd rather than the individual.

Significantly, Baudelaire injected into his poem the look of the eye encumbered by distance as the *regard familier*. The poet who failed to found a family endowed the word *familier* with overtones pervaded by promise and renunciation. He has lost himself to the spell of eyes which do not return his glance and submits to their sway without illusions.<sup>273</sup>

The danger present in this pessimistic conception of the structure of representational meaning is a loss of identity. The allegorical representation, he argues, posits a conception of the aesthetic in which representational meaning does not form as unified by the event. For Benjamin, the event forms not as a series of meanings that are symbolically unified but are present to our experience: Therefore, for Benjamin, history is best viewed by re-tracing the meaningful content in objects and artworks rather than an attempt to relive the original event. This makes Benjamin's conception of the allegorical representation of history as a materialist rather historicist conception:

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in

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<sup>273</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.186

which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the ‘eternal’ image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience of the past.<sup>274</sup>

In this sense, meaning is not centralised by a representation of the event in its unique historical setting. The allegorical conception of the representation regards the event as readily accessible through contemporary experience; in such objects as artworks, artefacts, everyday objects and critical writing. Whilst this position is not entirely opposed to the symbolic conception of the representational it does offer a unique approach towards our understanding of our relation to the structure of representational meaning. For Benjamin, the allegorical interpretation of the representation seeks to describe an approach towards criticism that does not look to a qualitative definition that is transcendent of the experiential. Indeed, for Benjamin the experiential is a quality that is essential to a critical discourse; if it is not present, no exacting examination of the meaningful can be performed. The meaningful structure, of the event, therefore, no longer symbolises a moment in time that can be consigned to an unreachable past, but enables a conception of history that is a constituent part of understanding of the present experience:

Pervading Benjamin’s writing about history is an awareness of the all-too-human propensity to forget the past and in doing so to look away from the truth to oneself; to be fascinated by the image of a symbolic other that is free from all real conflicts, to be fixated by the “beauty” of this image... and fail to recognize one’s own face, the face of history, with all its marks of suffering and incompleteness.<sup>275</sup>

Benjamin’s allegorical representation of meaning presents us with a quite different image. The symbolic representation situates a structure of representational meaning as inherent within the

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<sup>274</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p. 254

<sup>275</sup> Cowan, B. (1981), p. 112

particular representation. The allegoric counterpart, whilst recognising the unitary expression of the representation attempts to do the opposite in terms of its structure. Meaning is not formed in the detail – of the representation – as equal in value to the meaning of the whole. The allegorical formation of representational meaning emerges as a number of possibilities rather than a unified construct as it is in the symbolic conception of the representation. This symbolic conception of the value of the representation, Benjamin claims is not the only approach available for use in our examination of the aesthetic. As Gilloch argues, an attempt to examine the aesthetic value of new media such as photography within the traditional discourse will overlook the qualities that constitute their aesthetic value: ‘For Benjamin photography and film are qualitatively new media which can neither be understood nor evaluated with respect to traditional aesthetic categories and criteria.’<sup>276</sup>

The allegorical structure of the representational, I claim, provides us with an alternative approach towards our understanding of the work of art because it rejects an intention centred construction of meaning and expression. This presents us with an image of the artwork as an object that does not symbolise a structure that is centralised by an intention. Allegory is important to an understanding of Benjamin’s aesthetics, because it re-situates a conception of the expressive.

The expressive as we have discussed it so far, emerges through the artwork as illuminative of the artist’s intention. The structure of representational meaning expressed in the artwork, in this sense, is in accordance with the artist’s intention; insofar as the meaning of its referents – the represented object(s) – are causally related to the artist’s intention. Benjamin does not seek to reject this possibility in his allegorical conception. Moreover, his allegorical conception of the representation enables us to explore a conception of the work of art that is not dependent on a centralised notion of the intentional. A de-centred notion of the intentional, therefore, forms the expressive content of the work of art.

The de-centred conception of intention is informed by a description of the expressive contents of the work as allegorically forming. Central to this image is the notion of a structure of

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<sup>276</sup> Gilloch, G. (2002), pp. 173-174

representational meaning that is a fragmented rather than a unified whole; the work of art as an object that is expressive of a thought about its subject becomes aesthetically interesting not because we perceive that intention as unifying but as fragmented quality of its structure of meaning. Appreciation of the aesthetic representation in Benjamin's allegorical image reconstitutes the intentional as a multi-narrative like in structure. Each strand of the narrative emerges to have a different resonance within the work that refers to not merely the artist's thought about the subject, but also through the subject. Intentionality, in this sense is viewed as a de-centred quality of the work of art; as Eduardo Cadava notes in his understanding of Benjamin's allegory, it offers an understanding of the work of art as an object that due to its de-centred notion of intentionality is no longer perceives that quality as unifying: '...allegory is not only the loss of the artwork's originality or singularity, however, but also of transcendent radiance.'<sup>277</sup>

The *new* mechanical media appropriated by the artist, I claim, requires an allegorical approach towards a consideration of their aesthetic value because the symbolic approach is unable to encapsulate the expressive potential of a representation which is not unified by an intention. Benjamin offers an analogy which demarcates the point of divergence from which the allegorical is removed from its symbolic conception; in which the structure of representational meaning in the allegorical conception finds its referents are not necessarily unifying because they are not accessible as an expression of a single or unifying thought:

Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death's head. And although such a thing lacks all 'symbolic' freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity – nevertheless, this is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of

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<sup>277</sup> Cadava, E. (1997), p. 19

the individual. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing...<sup>278</sup>

The *death's head* serves as analogy because it encapsulates a point of reference that for him demarcates the character of the allegorical representation. Embedded in its image, Benjamin argues is an expression that is not free from its referents – that is the object represented. In his image of the death's head, therefore, Benjamin finds an analogy of the allegorical concept of representational meaning; insofar as it is an image that involves both convention and expression. Central to this notion of the allegorical notion of representational meaning is that the intention forms in such a way that is expressive of a lacking or loss: 'Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.'<sup>279</sup>

### 7.6: Confounding Origin

Benjamin's *death's head* analogy of the allegorical conception returns us to his broader project of a discourse on the *origin* of meaning. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, his discussion of an origin of meaning does not involve a description of origin as a fixed point in space and time; for Benjamin, origin of meaning is not something that is expressible in-itself but can be grasped as a representation. There are two approaches that I have outlined as descriptive of Benjamin's approach towards a representation of the *origin* of meaning: The symbolic conception of representation presents us with its own unique structure of representational meaning; in which the referents are themselves constitutive of their meaningful value. The aesthetic value of the symbolic representation, therefore, is descriptive of the representational artwork as holding our attention according to an inner logic that the work seems to possess. We may refer to primary or centralising force of that inner logic, I contend, as the intentional aspect.

The allegorical conception of the representation presents us with an image that does not have a unified structure of representational meaning; insofar as Benjamin identifies the relationship

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<sup>278</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), p.166

<sup>279</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), p. 178

between an expression and its structure of representational meaning as a multi-narrative composition. This allegorical conception is tied up with Benjamin's historical materialism that regards our understanding of meaning as bound to the objects that we use to order our everyday experience. For Benjamin, the objects of our everyday experience form ideas and meaningful relationships with the world that we are not always conscious of.

Artworks often permit us to contemplate those aspects of our experience that we are not able to think about ordinarily: Representational meaning, in this sense, for Benjamin is also to a certain degree a part of experience that is unconscious. Benjamin argues that we are not always able to say that the work of art is unified by the notion that it is expressive of a thought about its subject. *New media* such as photography and film enable the artist to explore this unconscious relationship in a way that understands and incorporates the unconscious. The allegorical notion of representation circumscribes a conception of the aesthetic that is not unified but fragmented in terms of outlining the structure of representational meaning.

The notion of an Origin of meaning in this sense, as Carol Armstrong notes, is pessimistic insofar as it includes the possibility that whilst it maybe expressed in the artwork it is also, potentially, ungraspable. However, pessimistic this may seem it is not wholly negative, for it makes it possible for us to consider the artwork as an object that engages our interest as expressive of both a conscious and *unconscious* thought about its subject.

...instead of offering us a straight line between "origin," act, and object, it [connection between the depiction and the depicted] catches us up in a circle of responses. So, like photography, it also confounds the very concept of the "origin" and of the act of origination (not to mention the necessary, almost causal relationship between the act of origination and the accomplishment of possession...)<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Armstrong, C. (1988), pp.125-5

In one sense, Benjamin's writing on the allegorical is esoteric and difficult to describe as a critique of aesthetic judgement; because in his writing descriptive terms are passed over in favour of analogy and imagistic representation. The allegorical conception of representation, for example, outlines a notion of the origin of meaning as ungraspable yet present in our unconscious – and therefore, expressible through the work of art, or a historically materialist critique. However, his allegorical account does, enables us to consider an approach towards describing the aesthetic representation that is not dependent on an intention centred conception of the artwork. Benjamin's allegorical conception of representation encompasses an image of the artwork that recognises that its parameters of expression are closely linked to medium. As Caygill notes, Benjamin's conception of the artwork considers medium as defining the parameters of intentionality:

Benjamin follows Schlegel in identifying the 'construction' of the work of art with its form. Yet it is not form in the classical sense of a shaping principle imposed upon matter, but form understood as the configuration of a medium of expression... for is both medium of expression and that which is expressed.<sup>281</sup>

### **7.7: Photography as an allegorical artform**

Photography presents us with a problem when examining its aesthetic merits: The photographic image, we may appreciate as aesthetically pleasing, yet discerning the cause of this kind of interest has provoked much debate. I have hitherto examined the arguments for and against the notion that our aesthetic interest is caused by the photographer's intention. Establishing this as a fact is a difficult task, because the evidence that we look for in other pictorial media – notably painting – is not present, at least in the manner that we usually expect it to be at hand: The pictorial depiction in a painting, for example, shows the appearance of its subject that is causally related to the artist's intention. When we look at a photograph, on the other hand, the

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<sup>281</sup> Caygill, H. (1998), pp. 43-44

photographer's thoughts about the way the object photographed looks is not evident in the way that object appears in the depiction – at least in the same way that we appreciate in the painting. Although, as I considered in chapter 1, it is not necessary to say that the photograph depicts the way the object photographed looks. Because the photograph is causally related to the event we are, therefore, unable to attribute the appearance to the photographer's thought about the object before the lens.

In this chapter I have considered Benjamin's approach towards this debate as a way of resetting the parameters of the discourse. I described his dual conception of the representation as explicative of the point at which our discussion of the aesthetic character of photography diverges from the traditional conception of representational art. The symbolic conception of the representational, I have claimed resonates with Scruton's conception of representational art: In Benjamin's symbolic conception an aesthetic understanding of the representation forms as a synthetic construction of its structure of representational meaning. The work of art contains referents, the parts of which are equal in their value to the whole.

The allegorical conception of the representation is a departure from an understanding of the work of art as an *expressive whole*. The structure of representational meaning in the allegorical conception does not consider the work of art to be unified according to a centralised intention. There is, effectively, in the allegorical conception a de-centred notion of the intentional and consequently we do not identify the work of art as merely expressive of a thought about its subject. For Benjamin, photography brought into view, not only the photographer's intention to show the viewer the way something looks but also the *unconscious* as descriptive of those details that hold our attention yet are not attributable to the intention. When we take an interest towards the photograph, contends Benjamin, we do not only see the object photographed but notice things about that object that we would not under ordinary circumstances. The camera, therefore, presents the artist with an opportunity to explore what Benjamin refers to as the 'optical unconscious.'<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Benjamin, W. (2009), p. 176

The notion of the *optical unconscious*, for Benjamin, is descriptive of the allegorical character of a photographic aesthetic: Photographs, he contends, open our contemplative interest to an experience of the world that is not available to us ordinarily – because we see the world *through* the photograph. Photographers, therefore, do not seek to present us with an image that is circumscribed by an intention – to show us how they think something looks. Moreover, the photographer is interested in presenting a representation in which the expressive forms are fragmented rather than unified:

The fact is, it is a different nature that speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye; different above all in that rather than a space permeated with human consciousness, here is one permeated with unconsciousness. While it is quite normal for a person to have some idea... of how people walk, for instance, that person will certainly know nothing... about their posture in the split second of their stepping out.<sup>283</sup>

The allegorical conception engenders an approach towards an aesthetic understanding of photography that describes the fragmented character of the aesthetic representation – within the photographic medium. In the symbolic conception of the representation the structure of the work of art is unified by the intentional. In photography, because this centralised conception of the intentional is not possible, that which emerges through the photograph as expressive is not necessarily related to an intention – recognisable as the artist's. The photographic work of art, therefore, holds our aesthetic interest, not necessarily because it shows us the way something looks but because it enables us to contemplate detail as expressive in such a way that is ordinarily inaccessible to human consciousness. The Victorian writer Elizabeth Eastlake roundly criticised the potential to appreciate the photographic representation in the same way that we may the painted representation. However, she also acknowledges that photographs enable us to take a contemplative interest towards the world that is not available to our ordinary conscious perceptual experience:

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<sup>283</sup> Benjamin, W. (2009), p.176

Though the faces of our children may not be modelled and rounded with that truth and beauty which art attains, yet minor things – the very shoes of one, the inseparable toy of the other – are given strength of identity which art does not even seek.<sup>284</sup>

For Benjamin, the notion of the optical unconscious permeates artistic photography as characteristic of its fragmented conception of expression. Because photography deals with, but cannot represent the *whole* meaning of what takes place before the frame it is not possible to say that a photograph is able to give us access to what is in front of the lens – insofar as our interest in the meaning of the things photographed is concerned. The image produced by the photographic process of exposing light through an aperture onto a photo-sensitive surface, emerges in a very real sense as a fragment; we see through a photograph – *iff* the object photographed is correctly exposed, focused, etc – a fragmented picture of the world: Even a well framed portrait may be betrayed by the ambiguous smile of the sitter or a ruffle in her dress. As Scruton points the photograph is unable contain a unified structure of representational meaning that is peculiar to that image because we do not appreciate its detail as intentionally dependent.<sup>285</sup>

### **7.8: The fragments of representational meaning**

Nevertheless, in Benjamin's allegorical conception, the aesthetic representation is characterised by its fragmentary structure of representational meaning. Because photographs are images in which we find that the meaning of the object is not centralised by the intentional, a change in our attitude towards an appreciation of the aesthetic representation occurs. The representational meaning of detail of the photograph is not – as it is in painting – equal in value to whole of the picture. Therefore, the detail that holds are aesthetic interest emerges as a *fragment*; not

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<sup>284</sup> Trachtenberg, A. (1980), p. 65

<sup>285</sup> See Scruton, R. (1998), p. 136

necessarily unified by the whole of the picture and so its representational meaning carries with it a narrative that is unique to that detail. As Linda Rugg observes, the camera enables photographers to frame the world in such a way that allows the viewer to see through the picture the object photographed. By the same token a photograph may also *disallow* the viewer access to the object photographed by the use of framing, depth of focus and exposure – amongst other techniques. This can enable the photographer to focus on, or intentionally cut out objects. Such a possibility, argues Rugg, causes us to appreciate a *fragmentary* quality in the representational meaning of the photograph:

Like allegorical objects, photographs function as “fragments” in that they are moments blasted from the continuum of time... Their capacity for cutting space into fragments can be clearly seen in those photographs that do not center their objects in a frame; an odd angle or a chopped-off building or body part renders visible what might ordinarily be overlooked.<sup>286</sup>

Whilst a photographer is not always able to introduce the detail that holds our attention as expressive of a unified representational meaning – this does not mean that we appreciate the photograph as devoid of intention. Benjamin’s description of the camera underlines its potential to open our contemplative interest to an *optical unconscious*; that we are unable to appreciate ordinarily. The camera, in this sense I claim, resituates the artist’s conception of her role in the production of the artwork – as expressive of her thought about the subject/object photographed. Rather than considering the production of representational meaning as circumscribed by the intentional, instead it is realised as a quality that it is perceived – in the photographic medium – to be unified by its *performative* character. The allegorical conception of representational meaning, as Rugg describes emerges not as a number of parts that are equal to the whole but assesses the value of each part as fragments that potentially have their own different representational meanings.

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<sup>286</sup> Rugg, L. (1997), p. 156

The fragments, I claim, do not act to constitute a unified representational meaning but are themselves expressive only as possible narratives. Furthermore, because the image is causally related to a photographic event the image is expressive of a meaning that we are unable to describe as inherent in the object photographed, photographer's intention or viewer's understanding. Because we do attribute the meaning relationships to the object photographed it is suitable, I claim to describe the structure of representational meaning as *performatively* realised in the photograph; primarily because whilst we relate the meaning to object photographed it is causally related to the event in which we *see* the object rather than the object itself. An aesthetic interest towards the photographic representation, therefore, regards its representational meaning as a related to its referents *performatively*:

[There] would seem at first glance to be a difference between allegory and photograph – this denotative reference to the world itself outside the text for allegories are not meant to represent actual objects in the world, and it seems that photographs cannot help doing so. But it is not that allegories do not refer to objects from nature or experience for they always seem to refer to persons and/or objects from nature or experience; it is that those objects have their meaning only in performance in the allegorical code.<sup>287</sup>

As we discussed in the opening chapter, the structure of representational meaning in the photographic composition often emerges as expressive of a tension; that is characterised by the ambiguity of meanings that we relate to the objects photographed: As we recognise a *real relation* between the depiction and the object depicted – due to the mechanically derived causal process – so we note that the meaning relationships relate to the object photographed sits within the photographic event. This enables the photographer to not only document but challenge meaning relationships that form in and between objects that we see through the photograph.

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<sup>287</sup> Rugg, L. (1997), p. 156

In Eugene Meatyard's *Lucybelle Crater & fatherly friend, Lucybelle Crater* (1970-72) for example the intentional does not concretise the structure of representational meaning but emerges as fragmentary in character; it is in tension with a structure of representational meaning because it is not resolved within the other detail of the objects photographed. The mask, which we may – or may not – take to be the object which indicates Meatyard's intention has a dual purpose: it both represents and at the same time denies access to meaning which we relate to the object photographed. The mechanical process of photography enables Meatyard to create images that create a fragmentary structure of representational meaning rather than one which is symbolically unified by his intention.



19. Eugene Meatyard *Lucybelle Crater & fatherly friend, Lucybelle Crater*, 1970-72

In chapter 1 I considered the notion of *tension* as an embodiment of an ambiguity that characterises the structure of representational meaning in a photograph; the notion of tension underlines the complex relationship between the object photographed and the meaning that we relate to it - according to the appearance of that object we see through the photograph. I considered Duane Michals's and Charlie White's work as illustrative of this conception of representational meaning. In Both artists work, the representational meaning, I contend, takes on an allegorical structure. We appreciate the representational meaning as fragmentary rather than symbolically unified by the intentional.

Yet in denying a centralised notion of the intentional it has not been my aim to deny the presence of the photographer's intention. Rather, by re-considering the place of the intentional as de-centred, I have aimed to describe an allegorical conception of the aesthetic representation as more suited to an understanding of the aesthetic character of photography. In contrast to the position that appropriates intentionality as definitive of the structure of representational meaning, it emerges through the artwork as a fragment; not necessarily unified or unifying.

In this chapter I have presented a view, informed by Benjamin's notion of the allegorical that seeks to offer an alternative conception of the structure of representational meaning in pictorial art. I have argued that in appreciating the aesthetic representation we need not consider the artist's intention as the centralising quality of its aesthetic characterisation. Benjamin's notion of the allegorical conceives of an interpretation of the representational in which the intentional emerges as a *fragment* of the representational meaning rather than its unifying quality. The allegorical conception of the representational, I contend, presents us with an approach towards describing the aesthetic representation in which the intentional forms as a narrative like fragment.

In presenting a conception of the quality of intention as informed by Benjamin's notion of the allegorical I have not, however, described the character of the de-centred intention as it is manifest in the photographic medium. In the next chapter, therefore, I will explore how the notion of a de-centred intention relates to an expression of a thought.

## **Chapter 8: The act of photographing**

### **8.1: Introduction**

Unlike the work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.<sup>288</sup>

The description of artistic photography as expressive of an intention makes for a most inconsistent and discontinuous study. However, whilst I may not have successfully outlined a clear definition of the aesthetic character of photography, I have presented a comprehensive rejection of the negative interpretation of the transparency theory of photography; which follows that because photographs are causally related to the subject before the lens we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph as representational art. At the centre of this argument is a question regarding agency. Representational art, argues Scruton, holds our attention because it shows a thought or intention communicated by the artist: Due to the mechanical causal process, it is argued that the link between representation and the artist is

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<sup>288</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.77

broken. I have argued that Scruton's conception of the aesthetic representation reveals an inconsistency in our understanding of the photographic artform. Whilst his conception of the aesthetic representation acknowledges a criterion that describes our aesthetic interest towards a painting, by virtue it seems to fall short of doing the same of our understanding of photography.

I have argued that we may begin to better understand what is peculiar to the creative practice of photography if we rethink the relationship between the artist, her tool box and subject matter. The artistic practice of photography demands from the creator a unique attitude towards the expression and understanding of an intention.

Therefore, integral to the aim in this thesis has been the re-assessment of the notion of intention as a concept that is at the centre of our understanding of the creative photography. In the last chapter I have argued that we need not consider representational meaning as causally related to the artist intention. In order to outline this view, I claimed that an alternative framework of the aesthetic representation is required; one which conceives of the intentional as de-centred.

In this chapter my aim is to describe intentionality that is unique to the photographic medium. The intention or expression that engages an aesthetic interest is, I claim, to be regarded as a possibility that may be described as a narrative like fragment: Yet, we need not necessarily ascribe the *fragment* conception of representational meaning as a unifying; moreover, it is allegorically unifying. The allegorical notion of representation, as we have discussed in the last chapter incorporates representational meaning as a quality that forms in the detail yet does not regard that detail as equal in value to the whole – of the picture – as we might when appreciating the detail of a painting. As in so many of the photographs that I have discussed in this thesis we attribute the meaningful to something that is enacted by the subject by relating appearance to the photographic event. As Meyerowitz observes, in photographing, intention is not necessarily a unifying quality but illuminates possibilities that may hold our contemplative interest when we are looking at the photograph. Informed by Meyerowitz's usage of the *possibility* of a narrative, our interest towards the photograph as – also – an interest towards the object photographed, relates meaning to the object photographed as possibilities. Yet, I claim that we can describe

representational meaning as a possibility that is intended by the photographer. To show that the representational meaning is illustrative of the photographer's intention I will describe the narrative *possibilities* that hold our aesthetic interest as *performative* in character. In this sense, I claim that we appreciate the representational meaning as peculiar to the photograph rather than the object photographed. For Winogrand, representational meaning in photography relates not only to the object photographed but also the photographic representation; our interest towards the photograph is not separate from an interest towards the object photographed, rather the meanings relate to the object photograph in such a way that we might think of those objects as *performative* of their meanings:

There's the sense that they sort of happen, [the photographs] rather than they are being made. At the same time, there is very much the look of a stage set. I think my work is theatrical.<sup>289</sup>

My claim is that when we take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph we appreciate the representational content of the photograph as a performative element; the object photographed does not cause our aesthetic interest, but the object *through* the photograph. Therefore, what can be said about the meaning of the object photographed relates only to the way it looks through the photograph. The representational meaning of a Sugimoto, for example, is not merely caused by the objects photographed but as Winogrand argues the way they look photographed. I describe the essential quality of *a way something looks photographed* as performative because its representational meaning is in one sense taken on or performed by the object photographed. In a very rudimentary sense, I do mean that the objects photographed play the part of the representational meaning that embodies a thought expressed by the photographer.

This view of representational art also enables us a better perspective of a de-centred notion of intentionality. Describing the object(s) photographed as *performative* of the representational meaning, we also acknowledge that the objects themselves do not necessarily intend the meaning that they *appear* to be expressive of – rather, they are enacting it. Neither do we recognise the way the objects appear – in the photograph – to be an embodiment of the photographer's

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<sup>289</sup> Winogrand, G. in Fahey, D. (1988), p.2

intention. The photographer's intention is not found by appealing to the way the object appears – as it might for an artist in a painting – but the way it appears in the photograph; a painted representation, for example, can show us the way the artist imagines the subject looks. Photographic intentionality, I claim, emerges not as the expression of a thought about the subject but as a thought about the moment: The photographer's intention emerges not as a unifying thought about the moment but as a narrative about that moment – that is not necessarily unified or resolved by the objects photographed: the detail of the object in front of the lens carries not a single or unified meaning but, when photographed, a multitude of possible meanings emerge and it is in this ambiguity that the photographer's intention is manifest. Gregory Crewdson's work offers us a good example of this understanding of photographic intentionality; in creating his tableaux he is interested not merely what can be said about the way the object photographed looks but also what that appearance can tell us about the moment. Crewdson's compositions often engage our interest as representations of a fragment of a narrative. In this sense the photographic representation is an image in which its representational meaning emerges as *performed* by the object photographed.

My aim is not to suggest that a photograph or photographing *sui generis* is appreciable as performance: describing the structure of representational meaning as performative enables us to consider more concretely the emergence of the photographer's intention. In photography, I claim that we need not think of the representational meaning as wholly determined by the artist's arrangement. Moreover, the intention we relate to the photographer emerges as a possibility that we appreciate as *performed* by the object photographed. In this sense, we may think of the photographer as having a role within the composition that is more suggestive than interpretive. Photographs hold our aesthetic interest not merely because we see the subject but also because of the possibilities that are caused by seeing the subject *through* the photograph. The photograph does not give the viewer access to what is happening but can provoke a contemplative interest towards what we can see in the photograph rather than the subject. For Winogrand, photography enables the artist to express a thought, not about what is happening but as a *performance* of what is happening: 'The Picture [photograph] plays with... the question of what actually is happening.'<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Winogrand, G. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wem927v\\_kpo&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wem927v_kpo&feature=relmfu) (accessed on 25/1/12)

In this sense what the photographer wants us to take an interest towards emerges as a narrative like element of the composition. For Winogrand the narrative element unfolds as the happening that he captures with his camera: ‘I generally deal with something happening... What’s out there is a narrative.’<sup>291</sup> The aesthetic content, in this sense, is not necessarily caused by seeing the object in the photograph but a representational meaning that we appreciate in such a way that leads us to think of the object in the photograph as *performative* of that meaning. Photographers, I contend often treat the photographic frame as a performative space; in which the object appears to be expressive of meanings that the viewer may or may not be able to attribute to that object:

...maybe somebody's doing a certain kind of gesture and you wait for that to happen again because you saw it while you were paying attention to some-thing else. It can be very interesting.... I'll say it this way. I don't see photographs until I see photographs.<sup>292</sup>

In this chapter I will discuss what Winogrand means when he says that he *doesn't see a photograph until it appears* and what this can tell us about the role of the photographer in the creation of representational art. I will explore the notion that by responding to or arranging that which is in her frame, we may find that the photographer’s artistic intention emerges as de-centred.

In discussing the influence of Walker Evans on his own approach towards photographing, Winogrand describes the representational meaning of a photograph to emerge in the photographic event. The representational meaning for Winogrand, therefore, has a *physical* presence, insofar as we appreciate the meaning to relate to the object photographed: Photographs enable the artist to explore how meanings are revealed in the people and things he photographs. For Winogrand, photography enables him to express a thought about the familiar appearance or gesture. Yet, at the same time, these instances of familiarity are not – unquestionably – *present* in or *possessed* by the subject in any other sense than our appreciation of a gesture as a

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<sup>291</sup> Winogrand, G. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wem927v\\_kpo&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wem927v_kpo&feature=relmfu) (accessed on 25/1/12)

<sup>292</sup> Fahey, D. (1988), p.2

*performative act*. Winogrand found photography to be aesthetically interesting because it allows him to create images that did not just document the subject but *dramatized* the gesture:

...I think in the end it's photography's own intelligence. It was the first time I became aware of the physicality of the photographic idea. I really became aware of it in a very muscular way. I had seen it before in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson and stuff like that, but I guess Bresson's work was too close to what I'd been seeing in Life magazine, so that it didn't dramatize itself in the way Evans's work did. Evans's work was outside the pale of that world of publication...<sup>293</sup>

In this chapter, as I have mentioned I will describe how the photographer is able to express her aim; to explore how the de-centred intentional opens up a different approach towards our understanding of creative practice in photography.

## **8.2: The photographic eye**

As Benjamin acknowledges in *The Work of Art*, essay photography allows the artist to think of the eye as a creative tool – whereas before it may have been in service to the hand. The camera has given the artist a tool with which she is able to take a contemplative attitude towards the visual experience of the everyday:

For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth developed only upon the eye looking into a lens. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was

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<sup>293</sup> Fahey, D. (1988), p.1

accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech.<sup>294</sup>

To understand how the camera has allowed the artist to rethink the eye as a creative tool is to first find its artistic appropriation in its proper historical context. In the first two chapters I considered the impact of photography on pictorial representation; in particular, Manet's close attention to photographic technique in his depiction of the sitter. Photography entered a world that was changing rapidly. Not only in the artistic world, but our relationship to the environment was becoming transformed through technological advance. Transport, industry and the financial infrastructure, through scientific research and political reform embraced a new world perspective that saw our attitude towards the landscape alter irrevocably, as Ross King notes in *The Judgement of Paris*: 'The railway... like photography, caused a shift in visual perception by altering the relationship between the viewer and the physical landscape, across which one could travel at speeds in excess of fifty miles per hour.'<sup>295</sup>

Photography arrived, in a sense as a compliment to this change. It brought to both art and the physical world a greater sense of nearness at a time in which cities were growing upwards and outwards. Distance, due to improvement in transport was also becoming greatly reduced. Yet at the same time, the mechanical reproduction of our visual experience introduced a different kind of *abstract* perspective; insofar as the camera removed the human perspective. Photographic art, as I discussed in the last chapter has opened our visual experience to an appreciation of the *optical unconscious*: a re-presentation of our visual experience as an experience of the world that we do not always notice. What draws our attention towards the photograph was not necessarily the once before inaccessible, but the mundane and the everyday. The photographer found it essential to familiarise themselves within their chosen landscape. As Winogrand claims, the photographer is drawn towards the familiar gesture; for him it emerges through the photographic as a *dramatic* element – as though the object photographed were performative of that gesture.

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<sup>294</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999) p.213

<sup>295</sup> King, R. (2006), p.251

Photographs have often been used to illustrate ideas about the world that may at first appear abstract or unfamiliar. When Eadweard Muybridge settled Leland Stanford's bet in 1874, photography was still very much viewed as the hand maiden to both the arts and sciences. The Governor of California hired Muybridge to prove his claim that whilst in gallop all four of a horses' hooves left the ground simultaneously – a popular argument of the day which may or may not have included a financial wager. However, Muybridge's discovery illustrates not only the objective authority of the photographic eye but also acknowledges the photographic as a challenge to our perceptual cognisance of the familiar.

Photography as illustrated by Muybridge allows us to contemplate the *familiar* and the *conventional* on a level that the painting naturally excludes; the potential to see and reflect upon an object and or situation as it occurs, yet the meaning relationships that we appreciate in the photograph, I claim, we are not always able to attribute to the photographic event; inasmuch as it is a machine that enables a different way of thinking about our perceptual access to the world. The camera, has given us new way in which we are able think about the eye in creative practice. In this sense, I contend is not simply an extension of our ordinary visual experience; the camera as an *eye* is a removed observer; the image produced by the camera does not necessarily give us a full view of what is recorded but with regards to our interest towards the object photographed reveals meaning relationships as fragmentary like. To attempt to endow the artistic photographer with the same intentionality as is available to the painter, I claim, misaligns our understanding of the artistic expression that we appreciate in the photograph. Artistic expression in photography which I will now consider cannot, I contend, be understood without some consideration of the use of the tools of the medium; an exploration of the photographer's use her camera to a creative end will, I contend, give us a better sense of the parameters of intentionality.

### **8.3: Creativity and the invisible**

To treat the camera as an eye, that enables us to *see* the world in a way that was not possible before photography is certainly a common-sense understanding of the photographic. Yet, I claim it often leads to our overlooking the creative potential of the medium. As the Muybridge example illustrates, photography does not just have the potential to extend our comprehension of visual

experience but illuminates the notion that we do not necessarily *cognise* what we *see* merely because it is before our eyes. As photographer Dorothea Lange claims, photography often provokes artistic inspiration because of its capacity to show us what the eye misses: ‘While there is perhaps a province in which the photograph can tell us nothing more than what we see with our own eyes, there is another in which it proves to us how little our eyes permit us to see.’<sup>296</sup>

I contend that we may gain a closer understanding of the creative practice of photography by describing the *photographer’s eye* not as a unifying element but as purposefully disinterested towards the entirety of the detail before the lens. Since the viewer is unable to say that the photographic composition is *wholly* intended by the photographer, a more dynamic and often dissonant relationship is born between artist and her intentions. Intentionality, that we recognise as central to comprehending the artist’s expression is, I claim, de-centred in photography. Representational meaning, therefore, becomes fragmentary and takes on a performative like character in the detail of the work. We attribute meaningful relationships to the objects photographed, yet since we do not have access to those objects – but only their photographic representation – we may say only that the meanings appear to be enacted photographically; insofar as it allows us to see those objects *through* the photograph as representative of a certain meaning that we relate to the photographic event.

The aesthetically meaningful content of a photograph, I claim, engages our interest as a *re-enactment*; insofar as we react not merely to the way the object appears but what that appearance can tell us about the photographic event; since the viewer is unable to engage with the subject but a reproduction or record of the subject. In turning the camera on the familiar – or unfamiliar – the photographer creates an image in which the event that is captured in the exposure is dislocated from the moment that is often exposed onto the film or digital screen. The meaning relationships, therefore, do not form merely due to an appearance but relate to the photographic event. The meaning that we relate to an appearance, in one sense we appreciate to be performative, insofar as it directs our interest towards the photographic event.

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<sup>296</sup> Lange, D. In Lyons, N. (1966), p.71

The photographer, as both Winogrand and Benjamin acknowledge do not by photographing capture the Bressonian *decisive moment* but make something more akin to an *incisive moment*. The object before the lens becomes subsumed within the structure of the image in a way that is similar to the stone or block of wood out of which a figure is crafted. The representational meanings relate not merely to an appearance but the texture out of which the appearance is carved. As Siskind observes, the photograph may be appreciated as an *act* that is both engaging and engaged within the frame:

The object has entered the picture, in a sense; it has been photographed directly. But it is often unrecognizable; for it has been removed from its usual context, disassociated from its customary neighbours and forced into new relationships.<sup>297</sup>

The act of depressing the shutter release observes Siskind subsumes and to a certain extent removes the subject before the lens from the context in which it is photographed and we engage with the representational meaning as performative. Yet it is not drawn whole into the photographer's arrangement; as Benjamin acknowledges the presence of the object before the lens as somehow *interrupted*:

...a different kind of nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows little of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between the hand and the metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Siskind, A. in Johnson, B. (2004), p.184

<sup>298</sup> Benjamin, W. (1999), p.230

The photographer in this sense is engaged in withdrawing from the familiar the mechanism or narratives of its routine. These narratives, I claim, are aesthetically interesting because their intentions form as theatrically resonant in the object through the photograph. Whilst the viewer is able to connect with an aspect of the photograph that appears familiar, it is not necessarily the subject that appears familiar to the viewer but closer to a performance of familiarity. This is because the act that is perceived *through* the photograph may only be *present* as a possibility. Hence, an interest towards something that is familiar is closer to the re-enactment of that familiar aspect which is *present* to the viewer as a possibility. It should also be noted that it is not necessary that what is found to be familiar in a photograph sets the context for an aesthetic interest.

The photographic document as expressive of a series of performed yet unfulfilled or non-unifying narratives emerges through the work of many photographers. In *Life is Perfect* (2004) Paul + A – Paul Jeff and Sarah Dowling – enacted 50 myths and legends involving the murder of a lover, recording the performance on 5x4 Polaroid film. In this work the photographic document has two functions: to both preserve and explore the discontinuity of the narrative function of the photographic event. In this sense, the act of photographing concretises the event as performance. The record, therefore, becomes indistinguishable from the performance and only the presence of the shutter release cable in each image interrupts the validity of the acts of murder – performed before the lens as Paul + A note:

As Performed Photography the photographs are not merely a record of the live art action, but the performative act and the record are collapsed into a single utterance and are indistinguishable as separate parts of the work. The photograph should not be seen as a record of an event nor is the performative act privileged as an event worthy of record.<sup>299</sup>

In *life is perfect* the photographer as interpreter is not so much restored through the presence of the shutter release cable but is subsumed by the photographic capture: The *act* of photographing

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<sup>299</sup> Jeff, P. quoted in Watt, D. (2007), p.87

permits a record of the event, yet at the same time it is an event that the viewer is unable to access. Therefore, the photographer becomes like the Isherwoodian observer, a passive interpreter yet actively engaged with her subject: ‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.’<sup>300</sup> Through the loss of the centralised conception of the intentional, photography also enables the artist to distance herself from the subject in terms of developing the representation as a meaning unified by the intention.

Rather than appreciating the intention as a unifying quality of representational art it emerges as fragmentary in the photographic event. For example in Jemima Stehli’s *The Strip* (1999) the intention emerges through the artist’s engagement with her subject. The representational meaning emerges not merely through engaging with the way the object appears in the photograph but the event within which that appearance is held. In Stehli’s *Strip* we see the photographer standing – with her back to the camera – performing a striptease for a man who sits in front her with a shutter release cable in his hand. We recognise Stehli’s intention not as a unifying aspect of the work but as allegorically composed; the structure of the representational meaning does not engage our interest as solely determined by the photographer’s intent but also forms in relation to the response of the subject holding the shutter release cable.

#### **8.4: Enacting intent**

The photographer often finds herself to be physically present in the photographic composition; be it in front or behind the camera. The structure of representational meaning, therefore, often emerges within parameters that are determined by the photographer’s relationships within the environment she is working. The photographer’s toolkit does not enable her to interpret the object photographed; as one might imagine the painter’s toolkit does. Moreover, it is illustrative of the way that photographers intend to engage with their subject matter – and so, I claim, we must think of style and signature in a different manner, from its place in painting. From Elliot Erwitt barking like a dog, to Diane Arbus’ necklace of cameras, photographers often enter into the image making process as complicit in the performance that I claim describes the representational content of photographic art. Not only in her use of the camera, but the manner

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<sup>300</sup> Isherwood, C. (1998), p.9

by which the photographer participates or engages with the environment in which she is working, demarcates the parameters of intentionality.

There are at least three uses of the camera that we might notice when appreciating an ideal photograph; the photographer who uses the camera as a way of responding to the environment in which he is working; most notable in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson. Bresson is noted for his description of the photograph as a *decisive moment*; in which the photograph is an expression of a fleeting harmony. Bresson would often dance along the street chasing his subject; partly in the belief that people would think him mad and therefore he was less likely to court confrontation. The photographer who uses the camera to create a response is often present in the work of Crewdson and White; photographer's who are noted for their elaborate set constructions. However, we also find this approach in Sugimoto's work whose work is elaborately constructive but does not involve the use of a studio. In the third instance the photographer seeks to remove recognition of the camera, the presence of the photographer or both. In this approach we are able to see how the structure of representational meaning emerges as performative: Photographer's often treat the environment in which they are working as akin to a stage upon which the use of the camera becomes part of the performance. To this end photographers often use their toolkit as a means of working without being seen. Bruce Gilden and Philip-Lorca diCorcia's use of the flash gun offers us a good example of this. Whilst both photographers use the flash gun as a provocative tool, to gain a reaction from their subject matter, it has a more base function: To distract the subject from the presence of the photographer.

Gilden, like diCorcia often uses the street as his subject matter. He photographs the unsuspecting passerby by stepping into their path and thrusting both camera and flash gun in their face. Yet in doing so, it is not always the camera that provokes a response. Gilden's intrusive style of making his pictures – and explosive use of slow flash sync – purposefully disallows the subject the time to respond to the camera. Indeed in the documentary, *Street Shots Bruce Gilden* (2005), Gilden claims that his subjects often respond as though he is photographing what is directly behind them.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Walker, B. and Silenzi, A. (2005)

Gilden seeks to obliterate from the consciousness of his subject the camera. Although, more pointedly perhaps, the presence of the camera.<sup>302</sup> Dealing with, or setting out the parameters of the presence of the camera is often central to our identifying the intentions of the photographer; in understanding the parameters of the response to the presence of the camera, the viewer also begins to understand the parameters of the idea that the photographer wants to express. In diCorcia's series *Heads* (1999) like Gilden the street becomes for the photographer a performative space. As in Gilden's work, diCorcia uses flash to illuminate his subject. But rather than use his presence to provoke a response, he photographs his unknowing subject using a telephoto lens – allowing him to photograph from a distance which gives him anonymity. The flash guns are attached to scaffolding away from the camera but synchronised to fire off when the shutter release is depressed. In this series diCorcia aims to challenge the role of photographer as documentarian by creating images that dislocate the relationship between photographer and the photographed: 'Everybody's used to seeing photographs that look like you're part of the room. I and the camera and the point of view are outside this scene. I try to eliminate any sense that the viewer – and the photographer by inference – is participating in what is going on.'<sup>303</sup>

Gilden and di Corcia's approach, I contend, underlines the approach towards creative practice that is characteristically photographic: The development of the eye as both creative and critically reflective tool emerges through a performative engagement with her subject matter; both photographers seek out not simply the subject but a certain type of engagement with their subject. In doing so, the narratives that permeate their images seem to be a consequence of some kind of dialogue that is taking place either between the subject and the photographer or the subject and the event. In different ways, these photographers go about examining the meaning of the gestures – and their detail – that punctuates our daily existence; either by using the camera to respond to the gesture or provoking a response, it is a tool that the artist uses in order circumscribe the parameters of her intentions. Yet the intention itself is not pervasive in the creation of representational meaning; which emerges not as possessed by the object photographed but allegorically resonant in those objects as they appear in the photographic

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<sup>302</sup> For example, most – street – documentary photographers working with film favour the Leica range finder cameras because for its near-silent shutter action.

<sup>303</sup> DiCorcia, P. in Enright, R. and Walsh, M. (November 2008), p.34

event. Therefore, it seems fitting to describe the intentions as *performed* because our aesthetic interest towards the photograph is caused by the gesture that is *enacted* by the subject.

This is evident in Shikuza Yokomizo's *Stranger* (1998-2000) series insofar as the work is dependent on the participation of her subject. Yokomizo wrote an anonymous letter to a number of selected addresses. In the letter she writes that at a specific time in the evening she will be poised with camera in front of a window at that address. If the intended subject did not want to participate they would demonstrate their refusal by closing the curtains. If the subject was willing they are invited to stand in the room with the lights on. Yokomizo would make a portrait of the subject and leave without any further communication.

The presence of the photographer, in the *act* of photographing, therefore, is not removed – yet neither does it elicit a traditional centralised notion of intentional control. Moreover, the photographer becomes a part of or engages in dialogue with the environment or situation within which she works. The subject is not passive aspect of dialogue but is actively engaged. The role of the photographer – as illustrated in Yokomizo's *Stranger* series – is to set the parameters of this dialogue. Central to the development of a dialogue by which the photographer is able to conduct her creative practice, therefore, is often an ethical code; which underlines not only the photographer's approach towards her subject but the parameters of expression; within which the photographer will explore.

### **8.5: The creative ethic in photographic practice**

By examining the photographer's attitude towards her subject matter, I contend we are able to explore what is peculiar to photography in terms of its creative potential. So far in this discussion I have examined the photographer's attitude or creative ethic in terms of the intentional. Particular to the creative practice of photography, I have argued is a loss of the intentional – at least a notion of intention central to the cause of the viewer's aesthetic interest. Considering, therefore, what is central to the creative practice of photography has been a discussion of the changing relationship between artist and intent.

I have underlined the *presence* of the camera as axiomatic insofar as it determines the manner by which a photographer engages with her subject matter. Acknowledging the photographer's use of the camera – in terms of its presence in relation to the subject – indicates the intention of the photographer; insofar as it shows us how the photographer seeks to engage with her subject, by setting the parameters of a response and the ideas that she wants to explore. Gilman through his use of flash aims to erase the *presence* of the camera whereas di Lorca seeks conversely, to obliterate the *presence* of the photographer – through his use of a long lens. Yokomizo's work rests somewhere in between these two photographers: preferring instead to contemplate the complexity of consensual human relationships. The photographer, for Yokomizo is both familiar with and at once estranged from the subject of her images.

In the work of these photographers, the *act* of photographing plays an important role: The setting up of a shot, approach towards their subject matter and use of toolkit create an outline of their creative practice. Yet it is not an all encompassing structure. Neither photographer attempts to determine the outcome completely: the photographer's intentions unfold within the parameters of engagement or set of rules that are necessary to establish in order to create a cohesive structure of representational meaning.

The *act* of photographing, therefore, involves the adherence to an ethics that demarcates the conduct of the photographer which in turn establishes the parameters of engagement with the environment in which she is working. The technical and stylistic tropes of a photographer's creative practice may be – to a certain extent – scripted. However, the *act* of photographing, due to the causal derivation also emerges through the subject's engagement with the photographer's presence. We appreciate as central to the photographer's intention an ethical code of practice that underpins the structure of representational meaning. The attitude towards not only her subject but also the tools of the medium often craft a body of work that is expressive of a narrative – in which both photographer and subject are engaged.

The photographer's ethic often forms in relation to the landscape in which she works. However, as the photographer Dorothea Lange notes, the structure of this ethic is not intended to become subsumed within her working environment. Instead, it is to be considered as disruptive; insofar

as she seeks bring to the surface of the photograph the abstract and idiosyncratic qualities of the familiar and the conventional:

In this unwillingness to accept a familiar world photography puts invention to a destructive work. That the familiar world is often unsatisfactory cannot be denied, but it is not, for all that, one we need abandon... in its distrust of the familiar, photography appears to be in flight... even though we live in worlds familiar to each other, there is in the photography of how they are familiar a very special difficulty. If not by nature, then at least by tradition the artist is individual... His gift is not that which brings together but which sets apart. But in working with a world of the familiar this is not so much so. Then the photographer must himself become a familiarity... This does not mean the photographer need make a sacrifice of his right to express himself. On the contrary, he expresses himself – perhaps more fully – in a different way. Among the familiar, his behaviour is that of the intimate rather than of the stranger.<sup>304</sup>

For Lange, the familiar presents the creative photographer with a different problem – to that of the painter. For Lange that problem is in part bound up in an ethical responsibility; the photographer's task is for her to adopt an approach towards her practice which will enable her to represent what she thinks about meaningful relationships in the environment in which she is working. The familiar or conventional for Lange is sufficiently striking without the aid of a fictional narrative. Her iconic image of the *Migrant Mother* (1936) perhaps illustrates most neatly this attitude towards photographing. If the photographer is to produce creative work, she must become a familiar entity within the situation she is photographing. The aim, therefore, is

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<sup>304</sup> Lange, D. In Lyons, N. (1966), p.70/1

not to wrest meaning from the situation/object photographed but allow it to emerge allegorically in the subject.

Indeed Lange saw that the photographer in order to create expressive and meaningful pictures should develop a strong ethical code. Part of this process, for her was saturated in the photographer's ability to familiarise themselves with her subject matter.<sup>305</sup> In doing so the photographer is able to create images that do not impose authorial presence; for her this enables the artist to capture without distorting the nature of her subject matter. Yet she also acknowledges that it is not simply the photographer who is present at the time of photographing. The camera, she recognises, is a presence that both subject and photographer cannot avoid. It is a presence which not only has an impact on the photographers work but the practice of image making. An impact that we will now consider in terms of its effect on our conception of the pictorial representation:

For better or worse, the destiny of the photographer is bound up with the destinies of a machine. In this alliance is presented a very special problem. Ours is a time of the machine, and ours is a need to know that the machine can be put to creative human effort... Though not a poet, nor a painter, nor a composer, he is yet an artist, and as an artist undertakes not only risks but responsibility.<sup>306</sup>

Yet even for Lange, the camera presents a destiny that is often at odds with the photographer. Unhappy with the original composition of the *Migrant Mother*, Lange partially removed the thumb of her main subject from the negative.<sup>307</sup> Certainly and perhaps contrary to the sceptics view, photography has not limited the artist's creative control. Indeed, digitisation has enabled the photographer to work with an even greater sense of immediacy; digital photography, transforms the artist's editing process. Not only does the digital back-screen enable the

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<sup>305</sup> To get the *Migrant Mother* picture, Lange began photographing her subjects at a distance, slowly moving closer with each shot.

<sup>306</sup> Lange, in Lyons, N. (1966), p.69

<sup>307</sup> Koetzle, H.M. (2005), p.191

photographer to have immediate access to the image but enables the photographer to think about the creative process differently.

The negative requires the photographer to think about the depressing of the shutter release as a decisive and final act. With the advent of the digital camera, however, the act of photographing becomes a template; using a digital camera, the photographer can edit whilst she shoots. For this reason perhaps, the digital image in photography often comes under scrutiny for its apparent lacking in documentary value. Yet, I contend that contrary to ongoing debates regarding the photographic legitimacy of the digital camera one only need be reminded by the work of the Pictorialists. In particular, Oscar Rejlander's *Two Ways of Life* (1857), a combination print utilising no less than thirty-two negatives. The potential for editing in photography, I contend, has not been transformed, but perhaps the creative process within photography has and will undergo a continual transformation. Innovation to photograph tools will potentially change the way in which the photographer has access to the image and its structure.

### **8.6: The relationship between: subject, camera, photographer**

The artist's relationship to her subject matter is of course in many circumstances determined by the materials of her toolkit. The tools available to photographers allow not only for the removal of a thumb but a wholesale transformation of the image structure. Nonetheless, I do not claim that the aesthetic character of photography is dependent on stylistic choices. Lange's point regarding the familiar is perhaps more illuminating: artists often choose to photograph because it is a medium that allows them to engage with their subject matter without the necessity for interpretation.

As discussed in the last chapter, the aesthetic value of an artwork in its allegorical configuration is expressive of a fragmentary rather than unified relationship – between the artist and her intention. Intention does not emerge as decisive or central to the cause of an aesthetic interest but as a narrative that is resonant in the photographic event. In order to isolate the qualities of the de-centred notion of intentionality, I have described it as having a character that is akin to the

performative. Whilst the photographer is not able to produce an image in which all detail relates to her intentions there are certain characteristics of the photographic representation that may represent her thoughts. By familiarising herself within a chosen environment, she begins to notice certain gestures/objects that are peculiar to it. In the viewer's appreciation of the photograph the recurrence of certain gestures/objects can tell us about the photographer's intention. As Winogrand underlines, the photographer is drawn to her subject matter by noticing peculiar details or habits; idiosyncrasies that define a subject due to their repetition. As the photographer often uses the camera to explore her environment, repetitions and idiosyncrasies begin to crystallize into a narrative like structure. Yet because of causal provenance these narratives crystallize as suggestive rather than unifying fragments. The subject appears to embody certain meanings – due to an appearance that is situated in the photographic event – as an actor takes on a role.

Photographing, therefore, becomes a strange process of elimination. As the photographer begins to build her body of work, certain *observations* begin to take a hold of the work – the series of images: These observations appear as repetitious details, characteristics that the photographer is drawn towards. Through the serial capture of these particular observations, both the work and subject matter begin to unfold certain narratives; yet it is a narrative(s) that we need not appreciate as unified by the photographer's intentions. A helpful example of this may be found in Hans Eijkelboom's photography.

Eijkelboom's creative practice involves a strict routine in which the act of photographing is often guided by tasks the artist sets himself. In *New York by Numbers* (2010), Eijkelboom, over a three week period photographed people who wore numbers on their clothing. Shooting from the hip, he removes from his compositions the intention to frame his subject in a certain way but moreover emphasises the desire to use the camera to respond to his surroundings. Eijkelboom's work develops its aesthetic value as a series: he is interested in using the camera to explore patterns and repetitions in our environment and consider how they often punctuate our meaningful experience of the world as narratives; yet they are distanced or dislocated from one another.



20. Hans Eijkelboom, *New York By Numbers* 2008

In underlining the principles of Alfred Stieglitz's working practice Jay Bochner also notices that the artistic practice of photography emerges through a self-exploratory study of the photographer's environment. The *presence* of the photographer is felt through the narrative(s) that emerge in her work. However, this representation of the artist can be strangifying as it seems to reject both interpretation and the centralised presence of the intentional. The creative practice of photography, therefore, does not simply document but reflects the place of the photographer in the environment in which they are working. As Bochner notes in his reading of Stieglitz's *Equivalents* (1925-34) the photographer engages not directly with her subject but with the relationship or understanding that is shared:

Stieglitz can never get close, [he] has in fact wilfully chosen a subject he cannot approach at all... All this defamiliarization tends to make abstractions of the *Equivalents*... while real, they seem not to have the usefulness of the real, and are this always opening up to the use of our imagination.<sup>308</sup>

Indeed the presence of the photographer is palpable in the war torn landscapes that punctuate Don McCullin's body of work. His intimate portraits often fuse the horrors of war with glimpses

<sup>308</sup> Bochner, J. (2005), p. 269

of humanity; his eye, when trained on the intimate, has produced some of the most expressive and emotionally sensitive images that depict the limits of human strength and suffering. These themes that weave in and out of his often distressing images construct a rich and abstracting narrative. For example, in *Dead North Vietnamese Soldier* (1968) we see strewn beside a lifeless body a bag of bullets and an open wallet containing what we might take to be a photograph of his sweetheart. It is perhaps because of McCullin's search for the humane in war that his images often reflect so much terror and ugliness.

It is perhaps tempting to suggest that underlining qualities as characteristic of the photographic arts is difficult because of the mechanically derived causal process that determines the outcome of the image. For example it would seem difficult to suggest that due to the diversity of their subject matter and indeed approach towards composition that Witkin and McCullin share the same ideas about photography. Witkin uses photography to depict the surreal, whereas McCullin uses his lens to focus on a very dark realism; aspects of humanity such as war, famine and torture. Witkin's images are fastidious arrangements, whereas McCullin's narratives unfold before the camera – although it would be remiss to call them spontaneous.

Nonetheless, in the work of both photographers, I claim, there is a shared vision of the photographic. Both claim that a photographer must not attempt to distort the documentary value of a photograph; photographing requires a sense of sincerity, not towards the picture making but the subject. It is tempting to say that this sincerity stems from a humanist perspective – and in McCullin's case this element is certainly present. However, in this discussion I am concerned with examining an objective perspective of the creative practice of photography. If the photographer is interested in photographing a particular subject, the sincerity is often directed not only towards the subject or its surroundings but the narrative and/or dialogue that is affected through the convergence of these two elements; the causal and the performative.

For a photographer the connection between the artist and her subject matter does not unfold between an interpreter and the interpreted. Rather it might be described as the unfolding of a intention in which the structure of representational meaning emerges as akin to a performance. The task of the photographer is not to interpret the event in which they are photographing, but to

become subsumed within it, without interrupting: As McCullin notes, the photographer must become aware of, or better still, a part of the atmosphere of that landscape in which they are photographing: 'Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.'<sup>309</sup> Likewise Witkin acknowledges that in order to express a thought about her subject the photographer must somehow become a part of her surroundings: 'When I photograph a person, I basically become that person, if only for a short period of time. And before I photograph them I have to get their agreement, make them understand what I'm doing, convince them of my sincerity - even if they consider my sincerity to be crazy.'<sup>310</sup>

Both Witkin and McCullin often take an intense interest towards a particular detail: A facial expression or gesture provoke the depression of the shutter release. Photographers, who make expressive works of art, are able to immerse themselves in their surroundings. They do not frame the subject but become familiar to its movements, allowing its details to form a sense of pictorial unity. Yet this is not a unity that we can attribute to the photographers intention, neither the picture surface: It is found in the image, yet only as representational because of the viewer's inability to access the photographic event to which that image is causally related.

Minor White's protégé, Paul Caponigro saw photography as way in which the artist could directly engage with their subject matter; it enabled him as an artist to explore the subtle and suggestive quality of subject matter. For Caponigro the camera allows the artist to find in the detail of the our familiar surroundings, narratives that allow us to take a contemplative attitude towards the conventional: 'Photography's potential as a great image-maker and communicator is really no different from the same potential in the best poetry where familiar, everyday words, placed within a special context, can soar above the intellect and touch subtle reality in a unique way.'<sup>311</sup> The conventional, for the photographer is an aspect of her craft which must resonate without perversion. Rather than use the hand to craft out the parameters of expression, the photographer trains the eye to gather information and familiarise themselves with her subject.

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<sup>309</sup> McCullin, D. (1994), Page. 96

<sup>310</sup> Witkin, J.P. in Horvat, F. *Interview*, (June 1989)

<sup>311</sup> Caponigro, P. in Cravens, R.H. (2002), p.101

As I have discussed throughout this investigation, relating the photograph to a human intention is a difficult and onerous task: I have sought out to define the parameters of the intentional by claiming that in the case of artistic photography it becomes de-centred. This has led me to reconsider the notion of intentionality in representational art which I have described as allegorically forming in photography: this configuration of representational art, I contend, enables us to consider the intentional as a narrative like fragment of the artwork, rather than a unifying element. In resituating an aesthetic discourse on photography from a position informed by Benjamin's conception of the allegorical, my aim has been to describe, like Scruton, a logical ideal of the photographic artform. Before concluding this discussion, I will not recap the process that has led me to claim that the photograph may hold our interest as representational art.

### **8.7: The parameters of creativity**

In the first two chapters, I discussed Scruton's description of aesthetic representation. For Scruton, our aesthetic interest towards the aesthetic representation is determined by acknowledging the artist's intent.<sup>312</sup> Scruton's claim is that the viewer is unable to take an interest towards the photograph as representative of the photographer's intention – to interpret the subject. That is not to say that the viewer is unable to find the photograph aesthetically pleasing; only that the aesthetic interest is caused by the subject rather than the photographer's intentional control of the image.

My response to this claim was to show the positive influence of photography on the creative practice of picture making; as a way of reconsidering how ideas about image making that were peculiar to photography informed the practice of artists who were working in the mid to late nineteenth century. Intentionality, contends Scruton, is central to our understanding and appreciation of creative practice. However, I have argued that in exploring the creative potential of photography, the absence of the intentional – at least a de-centred that is illustrative of the need to form a different approach towards representational art.

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<sup>312</sup> Scruton, R. (1998), p.14

In discussing Walton's transparency thesis, I considered the possibility that we might appreciate the aesthetic character of photography due to its transparency; since photographs are pictures that we are able to see *through*. Walton's approach offers an alternative to Scruton's interpretation of causal dependency insofar as he does not measure creative potential against the propensity to intend the image to express a thought about the subject.

Finally, in my criticism of the transparency theory, I have considered the integrative theorists position who supports the claim that it is possible to take an aesthetic interest in a photograph as a transparent representation; we are able to take an aesthetic interest in the photograph, whilst at the same time acknowledge that a photograph is causally related to the object photographed. Central to this proposition is the claim that in order to take an aesthetic interest in the pictorial representation we must appreciate the picture as the artist's perspective of the subject matter. To take an aesthetic interest in the photograph as a transparent representation we recognise two opposing characteristics simultaneously; firstly that a photograph is transparent to the object depicted and, therefore, our interest in the picture is an interest in the object depicted. Secondly, our interest in the object depicted is an interest towards the picture as expressive of the photographer's visual experience.

According to the integrative theorist we may take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph because we acknowledge that the photographer has consciously composed the photograph: Our aesthetic interest towards the photograph, therefore, is dependent on our acknowledging the photographers intention to point something out to us. However, as the photographer Luc Delahaye observes, the camera enables the artist to detach himself from the scene before the lens. Rather than emerge as interpreter, the photographer is distanced by virtue of the mechanical tool with which they use to make their picture: The photographer's intention, contends Delahaye is to be drawn into the scene in which they are photographing:

I consider the act of taking pictures as artistic performance in itself: a sum of movements, which have no other finality than their own perfection. I am the only viewer of this part. The consequence is “being there,” fully and simply, without affects or emotions.<sup>313</sup>

In the first chapter I found, in Scruton’s argument, a position that could tell us what photography is not – in terms of its potential to be appreciated as an aesthetic representation – but on the other hand not a great deal of this discussion involved an understanding of creative merit; not that Scruton’s argument denies the value in the artistic potential nascent in photography, only that we are unable to appreciate the ideal photograph as an aesthetic representation. From this discussion I gleaned that the underlying problem that characterises a discussion of the photographic artform involves the demarcation of intentionality: When considering the potential to appreciate the photograph as an aesthetic representation we have often in our discussion been directed to as; “Can we appreciate the photograph as an expression of a thought about the object photographed?”

Answering – or attempting to offer a solution to – this question has either led us to a negative resolution; due to mechanical nature of the causal process, or, a positive solution that equates composition with intentionality. Yet, like the photographic sceptic, I remain unconvinced that composition equates to intentionality. Mechanical causality, I agree, really does seem to disallow the creation of an ideal photograph that is unified by the artist’s intention. Dissatisfied with the positive prognosis I offered an alternative perspective of representational art, informed by Benjamin’s conception of the allegorical representation. In this notion of representation, the content that we appreciate as the representation of a thought is not recognised as the unifying element. Moreover, we appreciate it as an ambiguous or fragmentary like in character and so it emerges as one narrative within the work rather than its defining narrative.

Representational art, I have argued, does not necessarily present us with an image that holds our aesthetic interest because we see it as somehow unified by the artist’s intention. Intentionality, in its allegorical configuration is de-centred and therefore, we do not necessarily acknowledge it to

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<sup>313</sup> Delahaye, L. in Johnson, B. (2004), p.308

be a unifying quality of the aesthetic representation. The notion that intention is not necessarily a unifying element of the aesthetic representation, I contend, presents us with a *point of divergence* from a notion of intention that is regarded as the cause of an aesthetic interest. The notion of intentionality – as de-centred – that I have discussed over the course of this thesis, I claim, sits alongside the view of the intentional, propounded in Scruton’s argument. Therefore, rather than being explicative of a claim that seeks to transform our conception of intentionality in representational art, my aim is to consider the creative character of the photographic artform, I claim that an approach informed by Benjamin’s allegorical conception of representation enables just that. The notion of intentionality in Scruton’s conception of the aesthetic representation facilitates a discussion of what is lacking in photographic art, rather than the possibilities that are nascent in its configuration of intentionality that are peculiar to the photographic medium.

### **8.8: Photographic**

I have argued that the intentional input of the photographer must emerge in a different way. The painterly comparison within this investigation has operated as it does for the photographic sceptic: To illustrate that the practice of picture making for the photographer is removed from the kind of access that the painter has to her subject. I have described the photographer’s intention as a *fragment* of the representational meaning rather than its unifying element. To illustrate how this emerges through the work, I have drawn upon the image of the *performance*; to show that we attribute the representational meaning to the object through the photograph rather than the object itself.

In Lee Friedlander’s street work, the people and objects he photographs often emerge as part of a chaotic narrative. By including his shadow or reflection, Friedlander often creates images that seem detached or curiously dispassionate towards their subject matter. His images are often packed with information; a close up head and shoulders shot of a woman in the street – from behind. A shadow casts the figure of Friedlander’s head on her back. To the right of the woman a hustle of cars litter the frame. Ahead of her, another pedestrian appears just visible and the New York architecture encloses everything, presenting the viewer with a fragmented and disjointed sense of narrative.

But this is Friedlander's aim, to show everything functioning at once, all together, yet at the same time as unique and detached from one another. Photographing allows the artist to focus on the detail, to frame it, yet it also captures the unexpected. The familiar, in his images, often emerges as strange – allowing for disinterested contemplation – insofar as the detail emerges to strike up ambiguous relationships with objects to which that are otherwise unfamiliar; in terms of our appreciating an intended meaning. For Friedlander, a zest for the unexpected and unintended is crucial to the creative practice of photography:

I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new car (a Hudson) on a clear day. I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry, and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and 78 trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography.<sup>314</sup>



21. Lee Friedlander, *New York*, 1966.

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<sup>314</sup> Friedlander, L. in Galassi, P. (2005)

In Friedlander's work his intention emerges as a fragmentary quality of the work, neither unified nor unifying. The details of his images that *perforate our imagination* do so not as unified by an intention but in such a way that I conclude we may describe as performative: insofar as we relate our aesthetic interest towards a gesture or meaning that we attribute to the object as photographed in the composition – rather than merely the object photographed or the photographer's intention.

Perhaps there is no other image by another photographer that so succinctly demonstrates this point than Henri Cartier-Bresson's *Behind the Gare* (1932). The photographic frame in Cartier-Bresson's picture gives the appearance of a unified intention: A unity that we are tempted to attribute to a narrative that is defined by the composition. However, this is a temptation that I claim, we must resist; as the photographic sceptic reminds us and I think we should adhere to, a photograph is dependent on a mechanically derived causal process.



22. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare St. Lazare*, 1932

Cartier-Bresson sought out something very particular through his work. Influenced by Eugene Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* Cartier-Bresson saw that photography enabled the artist to dispense with the traditional parameters of the intentional.<sup>315</sup> Cartier-Bresson took from Herrigel

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<sup>315</sup> Herrigel, E. (1985), pp.20-22

an attitude towards creative practice that was unconcerned with intention. Instead the artist should submerge themselves in the perfection of technique, indifferent of their own intentions towards creative practice: The camera forces the artist to develop her practice through engaging with the world rather than a thought about it. Photography for Cartier-Bresson conveyed a sense of unity that certainly appears on the picture surface, yet it is not a unity that can be wholeheartedly attributed to the composition or the photographer.

For Bresson photography both allows and betrays a sense of harmony; enabling the artist to find in the environment in which he is working an approach towards expression that does not require the imposition of interpretation. But then all the different objects in *Behind the Gare St. Lazare* do, somehow, look unified by design. And certainly we are able to interpret in many of Cartier-Bresson's photographs a fascination and playful attitude towards geometry. So what can we learn by claiming that what is peculiarly photographic about this image is its fragmentation? And doesn't this seem counterintuitive when we think about photographs such as *Behind the Gare St. Lazare*?

To think about how we appreciate the photograph as a photograph we must keep in mind certain qualities that are peculiar to the photographic image. As discussed extensively in this thesis, a photograph is causally related to the photographic event. In this sense, to take an interest in the photograph is to take an interest towards an image that unlike the painting presents its subject matter without the same kind of authorial *presence*. The photographer is unable, even by arranging the objects within the frame to present those objects as causally related to her intention.

Therefore, in this sense, to interpret each object in *Behind the Gare* as symbolically unified is to evade what is photographically expressive about the image. As discussed in the previous chapter, synthesis in the photographic composition is fragmentary; we acknowledge synthesis as emerging through a narrative that is performative rather than finite: the objects seem to act out the meaning – and it is in this sense that we appreciate their meaning as representational in the photograph. The aesthetic character of a photograph, therefore, emerges as a narrative like

quality of the pictorial surface. This relationship can perhaps be best understood through descriptive analogy. I will break this down into steps.

Firstly, if we regard the meaning relation of each object photographed to the image we acknowledge that their values are independent from one another and not equal in relation to the *whole* expression of the picture. However, we may also appreciate the picture appears to be expressive of a sense of unity. In doing so we, potentially, begin to notice that a certain pattern emerges; objects seem to *connect* with one another as we see them as nuances of a whole. The third and final stage is the acknowledgement that the photographed objects are certainly not – in their own right – nuances of a whole; in the same way that we might think of detail in a painting. Rather, each detail/object appears as both a separate and unifying element within the photographic frame.

It is tempting to interpret the photograph as constructed in the same manner as a painting; inasmuch as all its parts either add to or contain the meaning of the image as a whole. Yet in doing so, I would agree with the sceptic, that we misinterpret the aesthetic character of photography. The aesthetic and creative potential of photography, I contend, lies, not within the interpretive or intentional but the performative character of its detail: insofar as the photograph does not sublimate the object photographed into a synthetically constructed meaning.

## **8.9: Conclusion**

The view, presented to us by the sceptic follows that because the photographer is unable to interpret her subject matter in the same way as is available to the painter we are unable to take an aesthetic interest towards the photograph. Central to the sceptic's claim is that the artist's intention is the main or sole cause of an aesthetic interest towards the pictorial representation. The intention of the photographer – in terms of her making an ideal photograph – is not relevant in our aesthetic interest; since what the photographer thought about or wants the viewer to notice is not necessarily present in our interest towards the subject. In my criticism of this position, I have not attempted to contradict these basic principles; that the ideal photograph is understood as a causal relation between image and the object photographed.

Central to my re-assessment of creative practice of picture making has been the notion of intention. I have sought out to re-situate the concept of intention within the creative practice of photography; taking into consideration the different kind of relationship that is available to the artist vis-à-vis the potential to present her work as an interpretation of its subject matter.

In this chapter I have considered certain characteristics that underline the creative practice of photography. I contend that it is counterintuitive to say that by simply pointing a camera at an object, the photographer is able to make an aesthetically pleasing image. Perhaps, the camera operator might get lucky and create one or two impressive images but doubtful an entire body of work. In this chapter I have discussed the photographer's approach to her subject matter as defined by an ethics or approach towards her subject.

In describing the creative process of photography, artists often discuss the camera as a tool that enables them to re-examine the way that they think about *looking*. For Edward Weston, the camera can be used as a creative medium if it used as a response to rather than as an interpretation of subject matter:

...the photographer's most important and likewise most difficult task is not learning to manage his camera, or to develop, or to print. It is learning to *see photographically* – that is learning to see his subject matter in terms of the capacities of his tools and processes, so that he can instantaneously translate the elements and values in a scene before him into the photograph he wants to make.<sup>316</sup>

For Weston, the aesthetically pleasing is not merely *found* in or *possessed* by nature but is there to be teased out by the artist who is able to *see photographically*. In many of his nudes, the meticulous attention to the play of light acknowledges a form that reveals an aesthetic understanding of the photographic: His images are not abstractions, the forms that are created by the interplay between shadow and the human body do not distance the viewer from Weston's subject.

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<sup>316</sup> Weston, E. in Lyons, N. (1966), p.173



23. Edward Weston, *Nude*, 1934

It is the photographer's attention to detail in this sense that brings us to the second category discussed in this chapter. The camera not only as eye but as a medium which has allowed the artist to reevaluate the eye as a creative medium. As we have examined, the sceptic's interpretation of intentionality often misrepresents the photographer's intention in making creative artworks.

The photographer's intention as I have presented in this chapter is not to transform the subject into a figment of their imagination; or to show in a way that enables the viewer to see the work as an expression of a thought about that subject. Creative photography reveals the photographer's intention in a manner unique to the medium. The camera presents the artist with a creative tool which allows her not to interpret but rather engage – in a dialogic or reciprocal relationship – with their subject matter. As we discussed in the last chapter, aesthetic content need not be considered as, solely, an intrinsic quality of the artwork. I acknowledged that it is possible to interpret its character as fragmented; the representational meaning of the photograph emerges as fragmentary in quality.

To describe the character of the creative practice of photography as performative, I claim, is to underline two notions that are peculiar to the medium. The first relating to the causal process and the de-centred notion of intentional control: Causal dependency not only describes the way by which we recognise the relationship between the image and the subject but also the change in character of the artist's approach towards representing the subject.

In effecting a loss of the traditional notion of intentional control the camera requires the artist to treat the subject as a participant rather than a passive aspect of her creative practice; insofar as the subject will not appear in the image in a way that is illustrative of the artist's intention. In taking this approach towards her practice the artist provokes the viewer to appreciate the resultant image not as an interpretative representation but as a performative of the representational meaning. The notion of the performative relates not merely to the causal relationship but also meanings that are related to the subject as photographed. These meanings are not necessarily possessed by the subject but emerge as suggestive and therefore provoke a contemplative interest that is engaged not with the moment itself but its performance.

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