AN INQUIRY INTO THE DIFFICULTIES
CONCERNING THE APPRECIATION
OF FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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by

William Allan Grant
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

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Professor Stan Day,
Head, Department of Art,
Murray Memorial Building,
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, CANADA.
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This thesis has been accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by the designated committee members:

Professor Charles Ringness,
Chairman

[Signature]

Professor Hans Dommasch,
Supervisor

[Signature]

Professor Eli Bornstein

[Signature]

Professor Barry Brown (Head, Education Communications),
External Examiner

[Signature]
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...photography was--grudgingly at first, then enthusiastically--acknowledged as a fine art. But the very question of whether photography is or is not an art is essentially a misleading one. Although photography generates works that can be called art--it requires subjectivity, it can lie, it gives aesthetic pleasure--photography is not, to begin with, an art form at all. Like language, it is a medium in which works of art (among other things) are made. Out of language, one can make scientific discourse, bureaucratic memoranda, love letters, grocery lists, and Balzac's Paris. Out of photography, one can make passport pictures, weather photographs, pornographic pictures, X-rays, wedding pictures, and Atget's Paris. Photography is not an art like, say, painting and poetry. Although the activities of some photographers conform to the traditional notion of a fine art, the activity of exceptionally talented individuals producing discrete objects that have value in themselves, from the beginning photography has also lent itself to that notion of art which says art is obsolete. The power of photography--and its centrality in present aesthetic concerns--is that it confirms both ideas of art. But the way in which photography renders art obsolete is, in the long run, stronger.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The photographic image seems to have always sparked controversy concerning its concepts, content and interpretation.

1.1 The Present State of Understanding

In a review by Arthur Goldsmith (1976) of a Museum of Modern Art exhibition, William Eggleston's images were "extolled by the museum's director, John Szarkowski, as 'near perfect' photographs and damned by many viewers as banal snapshots."\(^1\) This report illustrates well the diversity of opinions held concerning the photograph. It also must be received with more than indifference considering the sophistication associated with an institution of this stature.

In the Museum of Modern Art's most recent photographic presentation (Summer, 1978), Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960, the appreciation of artistic value was similarly diverse. In a generally positive review, Robert Hughes summed up the theme of the exhibition as having stressed the "uneventful;" inclusive of, "the odd,

the dumb, and the chancy." In qualifying this disturbing assortment of descriptives as "a kind of official view with which photography itself must reckon," Hughes has indicated what may be cause for concern: a potential for general superficiality within the creative process.

For many individuals, striving to understand the modern photograph relying upon such untraditional bases, has proven difficult. The fact that these grounds and others of similar nature are now artistically accepted approaches for photographic activity, but still directly prompt the diverse appreciation seen in the review of Eggleston's images, indicates that contemporary photography is far from being a fully understood form of artistic expression.

Official Thoughts on Photography as Fine Art Imagery

Many individuals involved in art education and criticism share a viewpoint with Robert Hughes: "there is no debate left whether photography is an art; it is universally accepted as such." This acceptance, however, as Hughes went on to qualify, is only the beginning. Much remains to

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 54.
be accomplished: "the arguments for this or that aesthetic of photography are as brisk and rancorous as ever." \(^5\)

Despite photography's recent artistic acceptance on a more or less general scale, the problems remaining demand much more attention. An admission by John Szarkowski (1974) that, "for an art museum, even today, to make a serious commitment to the art of photography, requires some imagination and the willingness to accept some intellectual risks," \(^6\) demonstrates the need for further discourse and investigation. Szarkowski's reservation, when considered with the qualified acceptance by Hughes and the opposition to Hughes' statement apparent in a contention by Peter C. Bunnell ("today there is little question about the aesthetic merits...of photography as a creative medium..." \(^7\)) accents the unsettled nature of the photograph's artistic distinction.

1.2 Purpose, Delimitation and Benefit of this Study

The purpose of this investigation is to assess some of the aspects influencing the contemporary status of photography in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 53.


of its artistic context. It is necessary to develop an awareness of the complex nature of this context and to explore the obstacles and limitations which exist.

The broader scope of this report is to develop personal comprehension of photography. The numerous roles, forms, and general differences from other two-dimensional mediums photography represents; the difficulties encountered within creative ranks; the evolutionary development of the photograph and its treatment by society are aspects that have influenced the understanding and artistic appreciation of the medium. By looking collectively into these areas, a better sense of the gap existing between the perspectives of Hughes, Bunnell, and Szarkowski, hopefully, should result. Today, it is quite apparent that the photograph can exist under a fine art designation. What, however, accounts for the "intellectual risks," controversy over aesthetic understanding, and the negative attitudes that are still associated with the photograph?

Delimitation

The intention of this report is not to write a historical survey; that aspect has been elaborated upon in numerous works. Nor is photographic criticism of concern. Despite a situation substantiated by John L. Ward that, today, "the critical discussion of photographs is meager and,
for the most part, superficial and vague, " this is not the most crucial aspect in association with the photograph.

The great range of critical difference existing between Beaumont Newhall's and Helmut Gernsheim's partiality for 'purism,' Charles Caffin's and Sadakichi Hartmann's views on 'pictorial' strains, and the inquisition-like appraisal of photography by Susan Sontag will supply grounds for ceaseless critical analysis for sometime. This is, however, quite apart from my purpose; that is, determining what controls reaction to photography, not what makes it art.

In the assessment of the photographic condition, references, comparisons, and distinctions made in relation to (and in terms of) other disciplines are not intended to imply that photography alone is subject to controversy. The other expressive mediums are also prone to intense criticism over the new, sometimes bizarre directions that have been pursued in depth, predominantly within this last century. Some aspects to be dealt with have common ties to these other disciplines, but the consistent focus will involve photography--leaving investigation and evaluation elsewhere to others.

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9 Art deco, kitsch, modern abstraction, conceptual art--environments, happenings, performances--art that as Adrian Henri contends, is unable "to fit into a preconceived artistic framework," but is as "important...as any (continued)
Benefit of this Study

An ominous declaration by Tolstoy in *What is Art?* (1898) reflects the attitudes of many individuals with regard to art. Tolstoy stated:

Art in our society has become so perverted that not only has bad art come to be considered good, but even the very perception of what art really is has been lost. In order to be able to speak about the art of our society it is, therefore, necessary to distinguish art from counterfeit art.10

Possibly, the essence of Tolstoy's statement can shed some light upon photography's present difficulties. We are reluctant to totally accept the artistic quality of photography, with many individuals being fearful of the consequences if we did. The photograph represents such a departure from the traditional artistic disciplines, these consequences—the necessary radical changes in our approaches and sensibilities—seem to compromise the artistic ego. If there are contemporary art forms in danger of the "counterfeit" labelling, many misinformed individuals would place the photograph in a priority position for such a consideration.

In light of the controversial aspects associated with photography as well as other mediums, Tolstoy's thought should not be taken literally. It should serve as a stim-

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ulus for further attempts toward understanding the nature of modern art. It is unlikely, indeed undesirable, that artistic thought could be reduced to a simplistic formula which would promote facile comprehension. However, it is important to search for new answers and interpretations, and to become aware of the diverse ideas that co-exist. This investigation is directed at this goal, through an objective outlining of the controversial aspects surrounding the photograph.

Photography, as previously stated, has been historically examined and, although limited, aesthetically dissected. The interaction between the photographic image and society has been discussed, but the photograph's artistic appreciation has never been analyzed in depth. Anne Trueblood Brodzky stated that the indigestible quantity of raw material in existence concerning photographic activity has greatly contributed to the prevailing confusion. Sorting through this information will be a valuable contribution.

1.3 Scope of this Study

Chapter Two will trace the evolution of the photograph to determine if the cause of its artistic acceptance, at the end of the nineteenth-century, is clearly apparent.

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In Chapter Three, the obstacles to the photograph's artistic acceptance during its formative periods are discussed. Despite the present state of artistic acknowledgement, the former obstacles to acceptance have not been totally reconciled and still interfere with contemporary understanding.

Chapter Four deals with the trends, concepts and distinctions associated with the photograph which hinder artistic understanding. Although the modern artistic license exercised by the authorities (whether delegated or self-elected) tend to supercede any negative implications, sympathetic artistic understanding is wanting.

In Chapter Five, a hypothesis is tendered to explain how and why the negative aspects surrounding photography's artistic comprehension affect its artistic identity. Museums and galleries are seen to contribute to the confusion concerning this identity, as well as the difficulties arising from the conflicting attitudes of photography's critics, 'experts,' and aficionados.

As an added note, throughout this discussion, whenever the terms 'artistic' and 'art' are incorporated, they embody the same meaning as if in relation to a Rembrandt or a Picasso.
Chapter 2

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION

More so than with other artistic disciplines, the appreciation of photography has always been tentative. This situation is attributable to the nature of the evolution of the photograph. Anne Trueblood Brodzky stated:

In photography we are confronting a technique that is already 135 years old. Yet while it has a form of expression, not lacked its own unique history, its greatly gifted artists, nor even its own body of critical writings\(^1\), the self-awareness which has belonged to the world of photographers and specialized commentators has been circumscribed and made obscure --by a lack of resonant understanding, by a lack of reception for the special languages [upon which the photograph relies.]\(^1\)

With an urgency felt by many, Brodzky contended:

"Clearly the need now...is for an understanding of what has happened in the history of photography, a gathering and distilling of the idea, to see as a whole, photography

\(^1\)This literature, however, according to John L. Ward, "is meager and, for the most part, superficial and vague;" The Criticism of Photography as Art (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), p. 1.

as photography."³ It is important to become aware not only of the causes, effects and directions of photographic development, but to discover why negative attitudes and artistic uncertainty have persisted. Susan Sontag has suggested that an informed assessment of the implications of these factors will minimize the effect of any difficulties they may present to the photographic discipline.⁴

2.1 Initial Development of Photography

An individual bowing to the authority of the Encyclopaedia Britannica must accept the contention that, "photography came into being through an artistic urge."⁵ There is a degree of truth to this statement, but its substantiation is based upon a somewhat indirect interpretation of the events leading to, and influencing, the invention of the photographic process.

Foremost, photography was a utilitarian invention. The photograph was a means of recording facts. In this capacity, photography is subject to certain variables with consistency directly controlled by the user. Since personal

³A.T. Brodzky, p. xx.
intervention can affect, but more importantly control photographic recording, it becomes a potentially valid means of artistic expression. This is, however, a relatively new realization, one that was not generally a part of the 'supplemental' and artistically insincere reasoning behind initial development.

Developmental Motivations

The photographic concept from the beginning was seen as a means to make up for a lack of technical competence necessary in the traditional mediums. The camera obscura, a product of at least the Renaissance period, was developed to simplify preliminary sketches for other disciplines, and later, sparked excitement when its possibilities in combination with chemical advances were considered. Two initial developmental contributors of some importance, Joseph Niepce (1765-1833) and William Fox Talbot (1800-1877), were drawn to photographic inquiry not only out of scientific curiosity\(^6\), but also because of control deficiencies in the traditional forms of expression; that is, their "inability to draw on lithographic stone."\(^7\) Both men had strong artistic aspirations and saw photography as a means of realizing their artistic ambitions. They set out,

\(^6\)Scientific curiosity was solely the basis of involvement for many--involvement without any artistic consideration originating with Johann Heinrich Schultze in 1727 with a mixture of white chalk and silver.

\(^7\)B.N.; H.Gn., p. 938.
"intending to eliminate the need for an artist's talent,"\textsuperscript{8} (his creative abilities), through the use of the photograph. Peter Pollack contended that, "photography was invented by nineteenth-century artists for their own purposes."\textsuperscript{9} Some practitioners, however, were deficient in artistic credibility—Niepce and Talbot having been misguided in the 'means to an end' philosophy of their creative endeavours (in at least the context of this era).

A second major contributing factor which stimulated photographic development was a changing political scene.\textsuperscript{10} After the French Revolution, the rising Bourgeoisie created such a demand for 'pictures,' that the possibility of supply from traditional sources was impossible. (This situation accounts in part for the dominant French role in development played through Niepce, Daguerre, Gaudin and others.) Apart from simply supplying images, the Bourgeoisie regarded photography as a means of keeping their rebellion alive by fulfilling their need for class assertion, after having endured long-term cultural oppression. Photography suited their purpose completely, permitting the rejection of the so-called "higher art,"\textsuperscript{11} associated with the upper


\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 13.

classes. The photograph was innovative, traditionally unencumbered, easily obtainable and openly accessible as an endeavour. As Rotzler stated, the photograph was not, "inextricably bound up with the glorious heritage of the privileged;" an aspect many considered better forgotten.

The period around the turn of the nineteenth-century was extremely rich in technical knowledge and ingenuity, promoting rapid photographic growth regardless of the actual motives behind the stimulation. Developing along with the photograph were aspects that have continued into the twentieth-century and which, as then, are still subject to diverse interpretation as to their actual effect upon the artistic status of the photograph.

Prolific Production and Conflicting Concept

As Aaron Scharf has indicated, "never before the discovery of photography, had pictorial images poured forth in such immense quantities [and such diverse quality]." Shortly after the 1829 contractual partnership of Niepce and Daguerre for the purpose of collaboration, the photograph spread quickly throughout Europe. In one year, one

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11 Rotzler, p. 10.
12 Ibid.
hundred and five million images were produced in Britain alone, resulting in the problem of how to deal with such proliferation, some of which professed to be art (an outright impossibility for many, and conditional for others).

Prior to the invention of the photograph, through his experience with the camera obscura, Da Vinci had stated in his Treatise on Painting that superficial results, "lacking in the qualities that distinguish a work of art from an illustration,"\(^{14}\) were to be expected through any mechanical aid. Later, despite a growing concern among many that the photographic concept was indeed potentially hazardous to artistic credibility ("a shortcut to art"\(^{15}\)), simplistic views persisted. The notion arose that by freeing the artist from technical restraints, he could devote more of his creative energy to the internal quality of his work. Many individuals believed that through use of the photograph, "no longer was it necessary to spend years in art school, drawing from the cast and from life, mastering the laws of linear perspective and chiaroscuro"\(^{16}\) to become a credible artist. At the same time, however, it was also acknowledged that, "formal art education had a purpose over and above the mastery of technique."\(^{17}\) Although any indi-

\(^{14}\) B.N.; H.Gn., p. 938.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
individual would certainly not have been harmed by formal art school discipline, the nature of the photographic process made such experience more of an option than in the traditional mediums. Contemporary attitudes toward art have been enlightened, permitting an understanding of this and a proper perspective for any implications. However, with the perspectives of this formative era, and consideration of the stress of its art, the acceptance of the photographic medium then, for many individuals, was much too great a compromise.

2.2 Questionable Evolution Toward a Questionable Acceptance

In the first decades of widespread photographic involvement, the main ambition, according to Arthur Siegel, was, "to record the face of the world in an objective way."\(^\text{18}\) The excitement of this unique and fascinating process was based upon its ability to present distant, unseen or unimaginable aspects of nature and structural surroundings that previously escaped such an accurate and spontaneous recording. It was also most apparent that generally, "the photographer was satisfied with his records of surface appearances and felt no need to search beneath that surface with his camera."\(^\text{19}\)


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., p. 89.
Through stimulation in this manner and limited predominantly to casual usage, the photographic process, applicable virtually by anyone, gained phenomenal momentum. Soon, through abuse, misrepresentation, and the directions pursued, artistic credibility was further hindered.

**Artistic Identity Through Appropriation**

Immediately from the conception of the photograph, there had been hope for artistic acknowledgement through its incorporation. Photography, in retrospect, was too novel, and as yet proved to be intellectually elusive; having value and artistic potential springing from premature and superficial appraisal of its unique qualities.

To exemplify the intensity of these misinformed opinions, it should be noted that when Hippolyte Paul Delaroc first viewed a Daguerreotype, he quickly concluded, "the process completely satisfies art's every need," stating later, that as a result of what photography allowed, "painting is dead."  

It soon became apparent that photography was not the epitome of artistic expression for all concerned. In 1850,

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20 Delaroc; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1972, XVII, p. 939.

Gustave le Gray submitted eight photographic prints to a juried art exhibition in Paris. His work was accepted when at first mistaken for lithographs, but then rejected when their true origin was realized. Photography, at this point in evolution, had not generally established itself with artistic sympathy. The photograph possessed little in common with the entrenched traditional mediums, lacking their structured regulation. To counter this, a solution rapidly became apparent; that was, the eclectic appropriation of aspects from other two-dimensional disciplines to enhance, or reinforce what the photograph lacked. Toward this end, H.P. Robinson, in Pictorial Effect in Photography, plagiarized compositional formulae and other means for aesthetic control from painting handbooks, maintaining that strict adherence would ensure artistic recognition and success.

Thus guided, the inherent photographic qualities soon came to be feared. As James Borcoman stated, "conscious of the mechanical limitations of their medium, photographers increasingly developed new, often elaborate means for augmenting the artistic content of their work." 22

Extreme manipulation or intellectual tagging rapidly became a more integral part of the 'artistic' photograph.\textsuperscript{23} Emerson, J.M. Cameron and other photo-impressionists pursued pictorial photography, taking in the allegorical and genre traditions of painting, while staunchly promoting total denial of photographic traits. Rejlander and, to a degree, Robinson, in pursuit of their own means of augmentation, gained notoriety from the compositional and thematic complexity of their work. However, as with the majority of those who were pursuing a borrowed identity, the basis for any appreciation stemming from oddity and collectability proved unsatisfying.

For the most part, the great quantity of work following such parameters was considered artistically unimportant,\textsuperscript{24} sometimes farcical--almost ridiculous,\textsuperscript{25} and usually quite superficial: "tending to become lost in sentiment and echo painting"\textsuperscript{26}--lying within and overworking, "the stylistic idiom of Pre-Raphaelite painters."\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23}Through her friendship with Alfred Lord Tennyson, Julia Margarate Cameron became involved in what Rotzler dubbed "literary photography." Although her portraits are generally considered superb, the genre and allegorical studies were thought weak and "tasteless" (P. Pollack, p. 165), quite often based upon spiritualistic or sentimental subjects that were tied to, and justified by verse or prose. As a result, the photographs became little more than illustrations.

\textsuperscript{24}Charles H. Caffin, \textit{Photography as Fine Art}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{25}W. Rotzler, p. 16.

It was work that, as Paul Strand later said, had nothing artistically "immoral" behind its conception; there was no reason why its creators, "should not amuse themselves." However, it had "nothing to do with photography, nothing to do with painting, and was a product of a misconception of both."28 Gradually, the photographic artists themselves became aware that their subject choices and methods of presentation were sometimes validly criticized. An example of this was Robinson who, in a review of his popular The Lady of Shalott, interpreted from Tennyson's poem, finally conceded, "it was a grave mistake to try to deal with such a theme with our realistic art."29

Despite what some could consider a growing sense of sophistication attributable to such confessions, work similar to Robinson's continued to thrive and find acceptance, as had Rejlander's The Two Ways of Life previously: "a magnificent picture, decidedly the finest photograph of its class ever produced."30 The key to such appreciation was in the ambiguous difference existing between what art was thought to be and what it was hoped art represented.

27 Ibid., p. 64.
29 W. Rotzler, p. 77.
During this era, art was considered necessarily very much a product of the hand. Although debatable, the perceptive element in relation to the physical result in an artistic creation was not as important due to the highly pre-structured nature with which these conceptions had to comply. The physical appearances and structural complexity of the manipulated photographs, being easily equated with the physical qualities in traditional disciplines, allowed the artistic assumption, albeit limited, to prevail. A more realistic assessment of this work, although then not generally recognized, placed more value on those works that showed the possibilities of the photographic image, thus demonstrating that it could be controlled. This coincides with Francis Wey's contention (1851) that reality could indeed be a potential source for artistic expression, that the camera could change and accent at the operator's option, that, as Eugene Durieu had maintained, "the photographer as well as the painter could choose a viewpoint, concentrate interest on the principal subject, control the distribution of light and in other ways, be as selective as any other kind of artist." These aspects, earlier thought impossibilities, were responsible for much of the artistic discrediting of photography during this period.

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Contributions of this Era

During this initial period, little of artistic significance was acknowledged. Photography had discredited some of its opposition, proving individual control could be exercised but, due to the inherent problems and diversity in photographic creation on a wide scale, an artistic identity was retarded, despite claims to the contrary.

The photographic discipline, based upon unique and traditionally isolated grounds, seemed resistant to any artistic equation. It was relatively easy, and most often indiscriminant and impersonal. With no aesthetic sense of its own qualities, the artistically motivated work from this era was dependent upon emulation of traditional media and total distortion of inherent photographic traits. As a result, for many individuals, the medium was generally reduced to nothing more than an easily managed, cheap imitator. Others, however, still confidently clung to the opposing view, extolling the possibilities of photography, based upon plagiaristic attitudes.

Considering the general benefits of this era, it is somewhat ironic that despite the energy put into the artistically motivated photographs, the work that most often is extolled, even by sympathetic art historians, is the 'straight,' less contrived. The photographs that reflect these qualities resulted from the dominant casual approach; from involvement limited to, "largely a matter of an hour now and then, a brief vacation snatched from the cares of a busy life." Basically, people engaged in photography with no motivation other than to simply use the camera for what it did most competently with ease; that is, to "record the face of the world." The photographs resulting from such activities were alien to the artistic struggle. It was work, as Edward Weston has said, "of amateurs and professionals who practiced photography for its own sake without troubling over whether or not it was art."

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37 Edward Weston, pp. 159-60.
2.3 The Modern Basis of Photographic Acceptance

There are basically three causes of photography's artistic acceptance. The first, and possibly most important was the realization that the photograph could indeed be controlled. The second was the recognition of the importance of the photograph used true to its inherent nature, artistically or otherwise being of little significance. The third is attributable to the arrival at these realizations during a most opportune time in general artistic evolution; that is, the period of great enlightenment which commenced in the late nineteenth-century.

Prior to this stage, the artistic approach in all art revolved around the premise that,"official ideas of art were governed by such concepts as the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime," dealing with, as Charles Caffin implied in *Photography as Fine Art*, the search for and attainment of harmony and the ideal as the discipline toward aesthetic maintenance. This situation had now changed, and as Johnathan Green stated, "a major shift in sensibility" occurred. 39

The restrictions were lessened, allowing art to cease to be regulated by the "external world of nature,

38James Borcoman, p. 70.

institutions, and religion, as the previous guidelines had demanded. Art was no longer regarded as, "a window opening onto the objective, visible world, but as a record of the infinite variations of subjective experience," with the emphasis now, "centered squarely in each individual's unique capabilities for experience and perception." Previously, decadents and symbolists had operated similarly guided, but the positive reception of their creations was limited. Now, all art was free to work outside of the cumbersome traditional restrictions, and to reflect more spontaneity, personality, and intimacy within what was produced. As Aaron Scharf stated, "traditional aesthetic concepts were stood on their heads, or philosophically, ... had finally landed back on their feet." And, any further controversy concerning the photograph's relative position or, "the restriction of its means for traditional or genuinely critical reasons would be only in many respects, an effort to establish some order in the confusion where all things are possible;" making the photograph, although still questionable, impossible to ignore on the artistic level.

40 Ibid. 41 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 249.
2.4 The New Era

This second, and last period of evolution accounted for much reassessment of the problems realized in the first stages of growth. The Linked Ring and Photo-Seccessionist movements strove to find the required discipline and a comprehensive understanding of photographic potential, leading eventually to the theories of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), a reflection of the revolutionary Bauhaus. Many advances were realized in artistic acceptance for the 'straight' photographic approach, through Alfred Stieglitz and his publication, Camera Work; the '291' Gallery in New York; the momentous enlightening exhibition at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (1910); and through recognition of the value in photography's unique way of seeing by artists working in the traditional mediums. (see Appendix A)

The resulting work of Stieglitz, Steichen, A.L. Coburn, Gertrude Kasebier, Frank Eugene and many others, took full advantage of the new situation and its tolerance. They demonstrated the new, controlled subjectivity, and proved with their consistency that the camera, as Durieu had maintained, was indeed not to be regarded, "as a simple optical contraption which responds mechanically to the first comer who cares to try it out, but as an instrument that the photographer can direct and control according to
his personal feelings.\textsuperscript{45} They also pursued in depth the now accepted naturalism along with the other traditional mediums, all working in terms far less reminiscent of the 'ideal.'

With photographic naturalism no longer an artistic detriment,\textsuperscript{46} and the dramatics and power realized in its selective usage, the generalization and sentimentality in past genre and pictorial work was displaced. Simplicity, rather than the former complexity thought essential to prove photographic control, now prevailed. The results found favor as, "capable of imparting the most intense emotional reactions."\textsuperscript{47} The subjective qualities, now artistically viable, transmitted by "unusual angles," "quasi-abstract arrangements," "spontaneity," "selective

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Eugene Durieu; Art and Photography, A. Scharf, p. 107.}

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Naturalism had always been touted the primary attribute of photography, but was thought a hazard to artistic creation due to the traditional directives. It was more or less appreciated that, "what we cared not for in nature becomes a joy and wonder in the photographic picture," (anon. critic, "The Photographic Exhibition,"\textit{Journal of the Photographic Society}, No. 50 (1857), p. 192.) However, "in a painting you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph, there will be as many beauties lurking, unobserved, as there are flowers that blush unseen in the forests and meadows;" a situation accounting for perception of elements by the viewer which the artist had not been aware of in execution; being thought a relinquishment of image control and quite contrary to traditional artistic consciousness. (Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,"\textit{Atlantic Monthly}, Vol. 3, 1857, p. 246.}

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica, p. 941.}
close-up detail," "isolated form," and "controlled brilli-
liant contrasts."\textsuperscript{48} allowed the individual personalities to
emerge. As Aaron Scharf stated:

\begin{quote}
The language or vocabulary of photography \textit{had} been
extended, the emphasis of meaning \textit{had} shifted from
what the world looks like to what we feel about the
world and what we want the world to mean.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

The ambition of modern art (1907) had finally conceded the
photograph its much-sought status. Photography could now
co-exist with traditional mediums; fully acknowledged, as
were the others, able "to body forth the form and ideals
and emotions of actual present life."\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 940.

\textsuperscript{49}Aaron Siskind, "Photography as an Art Form,"
(from an unpublished lecture to the Art Institute of
Chicago, (1958); rpt. \textit{Photographers on Photography},
N. Lyons, pp. 95-96.

\textsuperscript{50}Charles H. Caffin, "Is Herzog Also Among the
Prophets?"; \textit{Camera Work: A Critical Anthology}, J. Green,
p. 111.
Chapter 3

THE OBSCURE BASIS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ACCEPTANCE

Aaron Scharf has stated, "from the 1890's, superceding all arguments, photography was accepted as an established form of art."\(^1\) However, after seeing how photography evolved, it is rather perplexing as to the origin of this new tolerance.

Prior to the photograph's acceptance, the basis of artistic denial was due to lack of conformity with the traditional disciplines. At the heart of these differences were the many questionable aspects attributable to mechanical reliance and to the fact that a formal aesthetic theory or foundation was lacking. In a relative look at these one-time negative influences, past and present, it is evident that little has been accomplished in the way of reconciliation.

3.1 The Persistence of Technologically-Based Obstacles

During photographic evolution, increased technology had always been more advantageous to casual amateurs and those exploiting the photographic image, than to the serious artistic aspirants; the latter would have achieved success despite any obstacles or difficulty in process. Technological advance was a benefit to all in that it allowed increased spontaneity in actual image gathering and led to the incorporation of subject matter that was previously unobtainable. However, it also adversely affected the artistic appreciation of the photograph in three inter-related ways.

The first is attributable to the simplification of the photographic controls. This accounted for easier access to results imitative of past successes\(^2\) which, as Arthur Siegel maintained, ultimately led to stereotyped seeing.\(^3\) This is extremely evident today in the immense

\(^2\)"[Photography], for all its apparent facility, makes great demands upon its practitioners. Photography is a comfortable place for journeymen; it is comparatively easy to produce competent photographs that resemble other photographs. But it is correspondingly difficult to maintain a fresh, intense and personal vision over a sustained period. ...the photographer tends to invest his energy in a small area--perhaps a tacit acknowledgement of the refractory nature of his medium and the difficulty of moving beyond habitual and accepted ways of seeing."; Geoffrey James, "Responding to Photographs," Artscanada, Nos. 192-5 (December, 1974), p. 4.

\(^3\)A. Siegel, "Fifty Years of Documentary," ; p. 89.
quantities of outwardly appearing 'good' photography now produced, much of which, however, is, "usually devoid of any personal meaning," ⁴ and still subject to pervasive use of the once negating "stylistic mannerisms." ⁵

Apart from these visual effects, the simplification also created what Berenice Abbott coined, "the great democratic medium." ⁶ Photography rapidly became what is now the modern-day creative trend which, in the late twentieth-century context, has tremendously magnified the stigmatized situation first expressed by Alvin Langdon Coburn in 1916: "now every nipper has a Brownie and a photograph is as common as a box of matches." ⁷ This proliferation resulted from the photograph becoming what Walter Benjamin referred to as a "cult object"—a result of the distorted purpose to show or prove involvements, "rather than one designed with conscious artistic intent." ⁸

This ease, utilitarian nature, and potential for prolific production associated with photography, have

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⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
been prevailing influences in the elusiveness of the valid artistic identity photography deserves. Appreciation of this fact is suppressed by the state of understanding that has failed to materialize. As Coburn once stated, "photography appears too easy...and in consequence is treated slightenly."\(^9\) Fifty years later, Susan Sontag acknowledged this pervasive attitude and its effect upon artistic credibility: "the disconcerning ease with which photographs can be taken [seems to many an indication of] a very tenuous relation to knowing."\(^{10}\) The mechanics of the photographic process can be very forgiving from time to time, allowing what Sontag has noted due to occasional substantiating evidence: "pictures taken by anonymous amateurs which are just as interesting, as complex formally, as representative of photography's characteristic powers as a Stieglitz or an Evans."\(^{11}\) Realistically, the criticism of photography upon such grounds is totally unjustified. After all, as Coburn suggested, "one does not consider music an inferior art simply because little Mary can play a scale."\(^{12}\) To arrive at this enlightened attitude, it is necessary to accept the fact that photography is the

\(^9\) Alvin Langdon Coburn; p. 54.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 132.
\(^{12}\) Coburn; p. 54.
easiest discipline in which to 'productively' work, but that there is more involved in its artistic nature and consistency than what the superficial evidence implies. Gaining acceptance for this perspective, however, is more difficult than many might wish to admit. The opposite view still prevails:

In the fairy tale of photography, the magic box insures veracity and banishes error, compensates for inexperience and rewards innocence.\(^{13}\)

The second cause of artistic suppression prior to acceptance was due to the apparent supplementation of the artist's talent as his motive for involvement.

The photographic medium seemed to allow a second chance to realize artistic aspirations. It was noted that many individuals were attracted to 'art' photography from other creative disciplines where success had been elusive. Painters among these transferrals were, "generally of no great significance" according to Rotzler, and simply "exchanged paintbrush for camera."\(^{14}\) They attempted to justify their transition by maintaining that they had "found a medium adequate to their needs,"\(^{15}\) but in reality what they had found was a medium 'adequate' for their talents and were 'artistically' productive only in a hit and miss manner.

\(^{13}\) Sontag, p. 53.  
\(^{14}\) W. Rotzler, p. 11.  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 10.
Rotzler maintained that as a result of such participation, "a great many insignificant images" were conceived, but also, "a few really important creative works." The lack of credibility for photography stemmed from the fact that some of these notable images were, "partly the results of conscious creative intent," but also "partly the products of chance." As Aaron Scharf stated, "it became obvious that there was no uniformity in the images produced by the camera, not only because of the inherent technical differences in several photographic processes, but because these processes themselves were subject to other than mechanical control." If a stand was to be taken solely upon this evidence, the photograph would have been indeed worthy of artistic acknowledgement. However, accurately determining what was the result of what, and by whom, with what motivation; was still a problem; one that has continued to plague many individuals engaging in this activity today.

Our twentieth-century photographic industry has contributed greatly to this problem. The manufacturers

\[\text{\footnotesize 16 Ibid., p. 10.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 17 Ibid.}\]


and distributors of equipment and supplies cater to casual photography, not simply to general familial recording, but with attempts that appear directed toward instilling higher ambitions. The significant decrease in rigidity of the modern artistic state has created an ideal incubator for the misconception they perpetuate.

As Susan Sontag stated, "manufacturers reassure their customers that taking pictures demands no skill or expert knowledge, that the machine is all-knowing"—"just aim, focus, and shoot...the computer brain and electronic shutter will do the rest." The Minolta corporation went one step further, proclaiming that through the use of their products, it is "effortless to capture the world around you, or express the world within you." Thus, with guaranteed results, effortless expression of an individual's inner-self (an acceptable motive for artistic creation), and the formally upheld realization that artistic value of any result will be totally independent of any physical or intellectual imposition during creation,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\] Susan Sontag, p. 14.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\] Yashica advertisement; On Photography, p. 14.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\] Minolta advertisement; S. Sontag, p. 185.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\] In his assessment of what the artistic viewpoint should encompass, J.L. Ward stated: "the value of photography as art exists independent of its value as anything else...and that this value can be judged only by direct confrontation with the picture itself." (The Criticism of Photography as Art (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970), p. 24.)
the artistic process via the camera seems to become very simple indeed: "loose cooperation (quasi-magical, quasi-accidental) between photographer and subject--mediated by an ever simpler and more automated machine."^24

Edwin Land's 'instant' camera, whether intentionally exploitive or not, has had a great effect upon the status of the photograph, through the continuance of the early, misinformed attitude of Niepce and Talbot. Although Land's intention (that of involving more individuals in a creative process) is admirable, and what Niepce was seeking is validated in today's context, what is implied in the use of the instant camera, is again a potential hindrance to an increase in photographic comprehension. In a 1949 demonstration of his product, Land stated:

The aesthetic purpose [behind the instant camera] is to make available a new medium of expression to the numerous individuals who have an artistic interest in the world around them, but who are not given to drawing, sculpture, or painting...

In the earlier arts, the artist initiates his activity by observing his subject matter and then responds, as he proceeds, to a two-fold stimulus: the original subject matter and his own growing but uncompleted work...^25

^24 Sontag, p. 53.

Even though Land realized his credibility could be questioned due to the fact that, "this important kind of double stimulus could not exist" in his process, he continued, attempting to establish some sense of artistic value in his invention:

By making it possible for the photographer to observe his work and subject matter simultaneously, and by removing most of the manipulative barriers between the photographer and the photograph, it is hoped that many of the satisfactions of working in the earlier arts can be brought to a new group of photographers.

Although the new process has remained a source of satisfaction for those more or less indifferent to the problems of the artistic photograph, what Land made possible was not generally beneficial to the artistic cause of photography. Through Land's efforts to expand the "great democratic medium" Berenice Abbott had criticized, the most tangible result was one seen previously, but now greatly magnified by the freedom he promoted: "a mass production type photograph, limited in subject material, hackneyed in approach."

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
It may seem unfair to dwell upon the instant camera in such negative terms, but the distorted concepts behind it, and the seemingly apparent advantage it takes, make its potential hazards real. As Land stated:

The process must be concealed from--non-existent for--the photographer, who by definition need think of the art in the taking and not in the making of photographs... . In short, all that should be necessary to get a good picture is to take a good picture. 30

By explaining photographic creation in such simplistic terms, the potential for misconception of photographic value is perpetuated. And although there isn't necessarily a physical or actual handicap imposed upon artistic photography as a result, there does exist a hindrance to a more sympathetic attitude concerning it. Ansel Adams stated:

Sympathetic interpretation seldom evolves from a predatory attitude; the common term 'taking a picture' is more than just an idiom; it is a symbol of exploitation. [On the other hand] 'making a picture' implies a creative resonance which is essential to profound expression. 31

30 Edwin Land; The History of Photography, Newhall, p. 196.

Finally, the third point in the discussion of the effects of technology upon artistic credibility was in the benefits it seemed to allow the science of the art, over its aesthetic or 'creative' understanding.

Innovations frequently arose, indicating the unique, unparalleled ability of photography to present, not truly create, a tremendous variety of remarkable 'effectual' imagery with artistic overtones. Their acceptance, however, demanded a stretching of the artistic sensibility. Examples of the imagery in question are the results of Eadweard Muybridge (his Animal Locomotion series) and Jules Marey (his chronophotographs) which offered striking visual evidence of natural occurrences and phenomenae. This work (as is its subsequent projections\textsuperscript{32}) was immediately appreciated for reasons of enlightenment and scientific curiosity, but was questioned concerning artistic relevance: "was the artist then to confine his representations only to observable things, or was he justified in showing those which, as the instantaneous camera demonstrated, existed in reality yet could not be seen?"\textsuperscript{33}

Although changing attitudes were the basis of the photograph's later artistic acceptance, this type of imagery


3.2 Aesthetic Uncertainty

Similar to the persistent confusion attributable to technological effects, aesthetic understanding of the photograph also has remained somewhat a troublesome problem. Geoffrey James stated in 1974: "photography resists sweeping aesthetic formulations and the kind of prescriptive approach [to criticism]" which until recently, had made art easier to be involved with and reacted to.

In a consideration of contemporary artistically acknowledged photography, it is seen to comprise works similar to that of pre-acceptance periods which were thought "artistically unimportant" and products of misconceptions." This modern work involves that of Betty Hahn, who relies upon photography for creation but who downplays its

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importance in distinction; the work of Naomi Savage and Hideki Hachisuka, based upon total process obscurity along with the creations of countless others who rely on texture screens, lith films, reticulation, and chemical assists to reduce the photographic image in emulation of qualities associated with other mediums; and the work of Ron Tunison, thematically derived and easily equated, conceptionally, with the genre work of J.M. Cameron. Also thriving under contemporary license is work similar to that which was considered the most important result of the first era: the work of Mathew Brady, William Notman, and other objective documentarians. Although not intentionally artistically conceived nor given the important distinction from an artistic viewpoint, this work has served somewhat as a model for many contemporary photographic artists.

What permitted the simultaneous existence of these radically conflicting sensibilities under the artistic designation is a source of some confusion. Aesthetic value in an artistic creation, by definition, seems to imply that some disciplined structure, approach, or comprehension must exist for substantiation and justification. The seemingly arbitrary nature in photography's new artistic allowances appears to have resulted without anything being concretely established. Through a consideration of the conflict among the creators of the diverse, but equally accepted work, and with a look at the difficulties faced
in correcting this deficiency, this problem becomes more pronounced.

**Purism Versus Experimentation**

Since the conventional definition of the photograph more or less involves precise realism, many individuals maintain this aspect must remain the primary criterion for value, be it artistic or otherwise. 36 Berenice Abbott stated in 1951:

> If a medium is representative by nature of the realistic image formed by a lens, there is no reason why we should stand on our heads to distort that function. On the contrary, we should take hold of that very quality, make use of it, and explore it to the fullest. 37

Abbott felt, as purists today, that, "many photographers spend too much time in the darkroom, with the result that creative camera work is seriously interfered with." 38 The experimentalist Moholy-Nagy explained the purists as fearing, "that the open revelation of elements of

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36 "Photography must reconsider its function. It is the nature of the camera to deal with what is--we urge those who use the camera to retire from what might be," Dorothea Lange, "Photographing the Familiar," *Aperture*, 1952, pp. 4-15; rpt. *Photographers on Photography*, N. Lyons, p. 72.


38 Berenice Abbott, "Photography at the Crossroads," *Universal Photo Almanac*, 1951, p. 44.
construction, or any artificial stimulation of the intellect or the introduction of mechanical contrivances may sterilize all creative efforts." In other words, reliance upon qualities originating in the darkroom after image recording, made photography a mere craft and not a discipline based upon pure visual perception.

On the other hand, the experimentalists have always remained equally adamant with their defensive arguments, countering criticism with denials of their own. Some contentions (from both sides) were rather weakly substantiated, but showed no compromise, indicating the unbridgeable gap between the two sensibilities. As Robert Demachy stated, "meddling with a gum print [or other means of manipulation] may or may not add the vital spark, though without the meddling there will be no spark whatever"—a belief not at all foreign to thought in the late 1970's.


40 In 1934, William Mortenson charged that purists were inclined, "to overlook the truth that the final concern of art is not with facts, but with ideas and emotions."; "Venus and Vulcan," Camera Craft, No. 6 (1934), p. 263.

Resistance to Formal Aesthetic Structure

Johnathan Bayer stated, "art operates on an assumption that there is a known framework, an artistic form, vocabulary and syntax that is widely accepted and generally known to others." Today, all disciplines can appear to be at odds with what Bayer proposed, but at one time, the more traditional artistic forms did comply. The photograph, however, never has; a fact acknowledged in formative periods as well as today, despite the omnipresent disagreement. In looking at a recent attempt to remedy this deficiency, photographic resistance to such compliance is witnessed to persist.

In this decade, James Borcoman proposed, "beginnings of a conceptual structure for an aesthetic of photography." This structure was to have its basis on


45 James Borcoman, Artscanada, Nos. 192-5 (December, 1974), p. 73.

46 Ibid., p. 72.
a select assortment of qualities:

Extraordinary amount of minute detail, richness of texture, more than the naked eye can see, every accident of light and shade, clarity of definition, exactitude, perfect delineation, impartiality, subtlety of tonal gradation, exquisite delicacy, the tangible presence of reality and truth. 47

Borcoman insisted that his framework would finally allow a "basis for a critical analysis of what photographs look like and how to respond to them." 48 After assessing its applicability, however, Borcoman appears to have arrived at a formulation far from a comprehensive aid. The basis he chose for the aesthetic criteria is descriptive, not truly artistically definitive. The proposal certainly indicates possibilities, showing what the artistic photograph could be, not what it is consistently. If adhered to, the purist or 'fine print' sensibility would be served, but the experimentalists, in many cases, would be totally alienated.

Apart from the possibility of excluding a large portion of artistically credible photographic work, Borcoman's "conceptual structure" would also be a potential hazard by way of a reduction of the accepted level of creative involvement. Concerning photography, Paul Strand

47 James Borcoman, p. 73.
48 Ibid., p. 72.
once stated: "I don't have aesthetic objectives. I have aesthetic means at my disposal." The literal interpretation of Strand's contention reflects the essence of Borcoman's offering—qualities supplying the direct means to artistic acceptance. Under an objective appraisal, such an attitude based upon guidelines such as Borcoman's could account for superficial and facile, mechanistic photographs. If these guides were to find acceptance, and Strand's contention became widely upheld, the only result would be a formal minimization of the personal element in artistic creation, with renewed onus upon the inherent abilities of the camera. Moreover, this result would provide maintenance to a situation quite contrary to an ambition many struggle under; that is, "placing the authorship of the picture on the photographer and not the machine."

Prior to photography's artistic acceptance, it was realized that, as Charles Caffin stated, mediocrity prevailed. This was more or less a regulatory observation based upon the stereotyping, emulation, technical


50 Nathan Lyons, Photographers on Photography, unnumbered introductory pages.

inadequacies and superficiality seen in the immense proliferation photography accounted for. Realistically, this has remained the only valid critical observation concerning modern production that can be offered even today.

James Borcoman stated that during the formative periods, it was understood that, "there was something so different about this new medium that to judge it by standards belonging to the long-established aesthetics of painting or drawing or other handmade graphic art forms could only result in confusion."\(^{52}\) It was also realized, however, that no other means was at hand. The difficulty in dealing with contemporary production indicates this situation has yet to change. The statements of Bunnell, Hughes, Bayer, James and Borcoman all tend to support the fact that a state of prevailing obscurity surrounding the photograph's artistic identity does indeed exist.

Although the photograph now has its long-sought artistic acceptance, after assessing its position, it is apparent that it has yet to mature. As Moholy-Nagy stated, "photography has not yet achieved anything like its full stature, has not articulated its own intrinsic structure." He adds, although "this lack of results does not contradict the almost unbelievable impact which

photographic vision has had upon our [art] and culture,"⁵³ the photograph is not fully justified; it has not attained full artistic resonance: "The formal crystallization of a work of art is conditioned not merely by the incalculable factor of talent," a highly visible and substantiating element already witnessed as part of fine art photography, "but also by the intensity of the struggle for mastery and a thorough understanding of its medium."⁵⁴ These considerations, as yet, are still of great concern.

⁵³L. Moholy-Nagy; Vision in Motion , Paul Theobald, p. 178.

Chapter 4

AFFECTS UPON APPRECIATION

Despite the photograph's contemporary artistic acceptance, the lack of reconciliation concerning controversial aspects has perpetuated confusion and negative attitudes, greatly affecting appreciation. The artistic appreciation of the photograph still remains provisional.

Concerning photographic activity, Anne Trueblood Brodzky stated in 1974, "The problems that it raises, physical as well as theoretical, have seemed so vast, so intractable."¹ The influence of the negative aspects upon photography is not limited to those individuals who are ignorant of, or indifferent to, artistic matters. If this was the case, their consequences could easily remain ignored. The actual influence is far more pervasive and complex. As a result, its effect cannot be rationalized on the basis of photography's formal acceptance. Geoffrey James stated:

To the layman, the problems of photography can indeed be daunting. A surprising number of otherwise visually sophisticated people tend, when confronted with a photograph, to feel little more than a sense of ignorance.\textsuperscript{2}

Much of this confusion can be attributed to what the photograph 'is' in relation to other mediums and to the various trends and awkward conceptions its use encompasses. The demands these aspects make upon the viewer's tolerance, coupled with the as yet suppressed aesthetic and varied technological comprehension and their effects upon the artistic identity, make positive interaction with modern photography difficult.

\textbf{4.1 Creative Trends and Concepts}

Ansel Adams once stated:

'No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit.'\textsuperscript{3}

The essence of Adam's statement reflects the basis from which modern artistic activity operates, that of freedom to express. Despite the theoretical benefits of such tolerance, this widely acknowledged freedom also accounts

\textsuperscript{2}G. James, "Responding to Photographs," \textit{Artscanada}, Nos. 192-5 (December, 1974), p. 3.

for some confusion in the appreciation of all artistic endeavours, including the photograph. The restrictions, formulations and traditional models, which once made art easier to identify and analyze are now non-existent. More than ever before, personal tastes and diverse subjective interpretations are now the controlling influence in artistic appreciation and production. Although these influences befit and define the contemporary artistic approach, they encourage awkward and radically conflicting thoughts and methodologies within each medium of artistic expression.

Creative Trends

According to Beaumont Newhall, four distinct photographic directions have been pursued since about 1910. All work resulting from these activities can attain equal status, but represent much diversity and contradiction. What justifies their collective value other than the "open-ended definition of art" Susan Sontag referred to, remains unclear.

In the first trend, the 'straight' approach, "the ability of the camera to record exact images with rich texture and great detail is used to interpret nature and

man, never losing contact with reality." The key to the success of this aesthetic sense is strict previsualization and adherence to the belief that, "technique is the realization of the image, without alteration." The result, 'the fine print,' is presented as an experience in itself.

The second trend, the formalistic approach, involves the isolation and organization of form for its own sake. In aesthetic value here, "subject is of no concern, and if indeed it exists, is often distorted beyond recognition." If at all possible, previsualization is infrequently used; "the image...characteristically is produced accidentally." The result of this approach "is rarely considered for its own sake, but is a tool for vision."

The third trend, the documentary, is characterized as Newhall stated, "as essentially a desire to communicate, to tell about people, to record without intrusion, to inform honestly, accurately, and above all, convincingly." In this trend, the subject is paramount and the final print is usually not the end product, but the intermediate step toward the picture on a printed page.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 197.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
The fourth trend, running simultaneously with the former three, is the 'equivalent.' The importance here is not the subject, but the meaning (emotional significance) which the photographic artist and subsequent viewers supply. Alfred Stieglitz used this approach widely, defining the resulting photographs as symbols or metaphors. This trend, in effect, academically justified all others. The aesthetic value of the photograph is not controlled by any particular appearance, style, trend or fashion, but is indiscernibly manifested in a function, rather than a characteristic. About the results, Stieglitz stated, "Unless one has eyes and sees, they won't be seen." the value must be transposed and made personally relevant, being as Minor White proposed, a metaphorical reaction to oneself.

In a consideration of the diversity these trends offer, it is little wonder why appreciation is restricted. The opposing thoughts of the importance of the subject, control of the photographer, previsualization, and what

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14 Ibid.


17 Minor White; p. 173.
degree of value or stress the actual print represents, are
difficult to surmount.

It is easily assumed that the contradictions within
the photographic trends are attributable to the lack of
formulated aesthetic theory and difficulties in reconciling
technology. We have seen in Chapter Three what their
effect has been through a relative look at the purists and
experimentalists. Now, with a further investigation into
personal formulation, the awkward concepts and contradic-
tions which emerge (again attributable to a deficiency in
comprehension), reinforce the appreciation of the difficul-
ties which the trends impose. Also to be shown is the mal-
leability of modern artistic attitudes which permit the
photograph acceptance despite its uncertain aesthetic iden-
tity.

4.2 Conceptual Difficulties

Susan Sontag has indicated that within the photo-
graphic discipline, individual photographers have contrib-
uted to an already confused state through a tendency to
often give "the most contradictory accounts of what kind of
knowledge they possess and what kind of art they
practice."\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\)Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (N.Y.: Farrar,
Sontag stated, "picture taking has been interpreted in two entirely different ways: either as a lucid and precise act of knowing, of conscious intelligence, or as a pre-intellectual, intuitive mode of encounter." Under the first interpretation, the photograph as art is more readily justified, representing conscious intent and acknowledged control. The second, however, is more difficult to accept. As has been suggested, some contemporary photographers, "have made of photography a noetic paradox," advancing the medium, "as a form of knowing without knowing: a way of outwitting the world, instead of making a frontal attack on it." Insights and intuition, the basis by which this is accomplished, are conceded as major artistic considerations, but for many individuals are not sufficiently tangible to stand as artistic criteria, especially after a reconsideration of that "kind of official view" Robert Hughes had reported. With their reliability not above questioning, the spontaneity and apparent lack of rigor evident in modern artistic production could allow the intuitive ingredient to be determined even after the creative process. This occurrence is not as likely in the case of mature and responsible artists, but is a possibility. Any photographic novice will admit reliance on such deception at one time or another.

19 Sontag, p. 116. 20 Ibid. 21 Ibid.
Cartier-Bresson was one of the photographic artists who upheld the noetic paradox and its virtues. He stated: "thinking should be done beforehand and afterwards, never while actually taking a photograph." Bresson stressed that this approach would reveal "the structure of the world" and allow his audience, "to revel in the pure pleasure of form," showing the natural state of existing order. However, such an approach (a relinquishing of control during creation) and belief (that a natural state of visual order exists independent of the artist) lack credibility for many individuals. This raises the question of where Cartier-Bresson and others with similar sensibilities place the creative emphasis; is it on the artist or his subject?

The camera user is subject to more artistic controversy than the practitioners in other disciplines concerning the role of the artist, stress on the subject, and the degree of control affecting his result because of a potentially reduced level of physical involvement. The painter must paint, the sculptor must sculpt; each involving a time period during which some personal intervention may take place. Conversely, the photographer need only press a button, formulating his image in a fraction of

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22 Cartier-Bresson; On Photography, Susan Sontag, p. 116.

23 Ibid., p. 100.
a second. If technique and physical control are not visibly strong elements in a work of art, it is natural to expect some concise and acknowledged, intellectual discipline to prevail. However, due to the abstraction such a situation represents, its analysis, and indeed, its recognition, are difficult considerations.

Assessing the attitudes of Edward Weston brings to light another aspect of some bearing upon the photograph's artistic appreciation. Like Cartier-Bresson, Weston appeared to alienate personal interpretation, which has generally been a major aspect in art throughout this last century. He also, through apparent contradiction of his initial approach later in his career, implied that since fundamental concepts were subject to radical change, the medium was far from a stable state of understanding. Added to this is the confusion resulting from the fact that the awkward and contradictory approaches all lead, nevertheless, to comparable and artistically successful photographs.

The Forgiving and Adaptable Nature of Modern Artistic Acceptance

When Edward Weston first formulated a personal guide for his efforts, he operated under the premise that photography was a visually individual creative process
that was in need of strict, directed control. In 1950, near the end of his working life, he altered his stance considerably:

I am no longer trying to express myself, to impose my own personality on nature, but without prejudice, without falsification, to become identified with nature, sublimating things seen into things known--their very essence--so that what I record is not an interpretation, my idea of what nature should be, but a revelation--an absolute, impersonal recognition of the significance of facts.

Considering this new attitude, Weston appears to be in opposition to many of his contemporaries. Robert Frank maintained that, "it is always the instantaneous reaction to oneself that produces a photograph [of any value]."

To contrast further, Minor White proposed:

To get from the tangible to the intangible (which mature artists in any medium claim as part of their task) a paradox of some kind has frequently been helpful. For the photographer to free himself of the tyranny of visual facts upon which he is utterly dependent, a paradox is the only possible tool.

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Both Frank and White stressed the importance of the personal element or the interpretative relationship with the subject matter as the key to photographic value. They felt that the photographic artist must be "freed of the tyranny of surfaces and textures, substance and form," aspects that Weston chose to let dictate his results.

As James Borcoman recently suggested, Weston, his followers, and others such as White, Bresson, and Frank shared a common ambition: "all were increasingly concerned with a return to the ability of the camera as a machine to record the power of the fact in a way that the human eye could not see on its own..." Some, however, appeared to stress the abilities of the camera over those of the operators. All were searching for the same result, but thought its achievement was attained differently. This considered, the logical question raised is, can White's "paradox" be formulated or Weston's "significance of facts" determined if the thought process was to pause "while actually taking the photograph" as Cartier-Bresson had chosen to work?

Returning to Weston's work, the seeming contradiction between his approach and the result is difficult to comprehend. The act of selective representation that

28 Ibid.
is so much a visible aspect in his imagery is very much a result of subjective response and personal previsualization—aspects he seemed to deny as necessary controls. Prior to his change of approach, Weston stated:

The photographer's power lies in his ability to recreate his subject in terms of its basic reality, and present this recreation in such a form that the spectator feels he is not seeing just a symbol for the object, but the thing itself revealed for the first time.  

In effect, Weston had implied that the photographic artist controls and accents for the spectators what "their own unseeing eyes had missed." In essence, he agreed with Aaron Siskind in that what results is, "an altogether new object, complete and self-contained"—an object that could not have possibly occurred as consistently as Weston demonstrated after his shift, if his contention of "impersonal recognition" and photographing "without prejudice" (for at least some natural aspects) was strictly adhered to.

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31 Edward Weston; On Photography, Susan Sontag, p. 96.

Despite the "contradictory accounts of what kind of knowledge they possess and what kind of art they practice," it is impossible to artistically deny the photographs of Weston, Cartier-Bresson, and others on grounds of ambiguity—whether real or imagined. The high degree of emotion-evoking quality and the visual impact of their imagery tend to supercede the methodology in creation. James Borcoman has suggested a means of explaining why this work can artistically succeed but yet still resist the appreciation as to how. He proposed that the results were formulated with "an awareness of a set of aesthetic laws that had nothing to do with traditional concepts of art." However, until a firm grasp on this new aesthetic knowledge is attained, the difficulties within photography's principles and practices will continue to impose severe restrictions upon photographic appreciation. Although the modern, sophisticated artistic attitudes have allowed full artistic acceptance. It is apparent that much is left to be accomplished. Comprehensive understanding must also be achieved. Norman Bel Geddes stated:

33James Borcoman, p.78.
The camera will develop into the perfect instrument for the artist. It reacts instantly to his sensitiveness and creative imagination. But as yet it is a foreign tool to the artist. 

Comparatively ... the pencil or brush is a simple thing to master. The camera is intricate. 34

4.3 The Photograph in Relation to Traditional Disciplines

Geoffrey James stated:

The differences between painting and photography are fundamental and obvious, but perhaps they can bear repetition. Painting is a synthetic process. The artist begins with a blank canvas and a set of conventions and approaches developed over several centuries; his finished work is a record of its own creation, and to a greater of lesser extent, bears the artist's handwork, his autographic stamp. A Picasso doodle, however casual, remains a Picasso. In photography, the question of personal style is much more elusive. The photographer does not begin by contemplating an empty space; his viewfinder is filled, whichever way he points it. His central problem is one of selection--first the intellectual or perceptual problem of what to photograph, then the more formal problem of how to photograph. 35

Photography has constantly been set apart from other two-dimensional mediums regarding the relative natures of various aspects: difficulty, the physical role of the


35 Geoffrey James, "Responding to Photographs," Artscanada, Nos. 192-5 (December, 1974), p. 3.
artist, aesthetic principle, tradition, and the degree of realism or naturalism incorporated in the work. Considering each of these individually, a suitable context for their implications can be realized, or if not, fabricated through the facility of modern artistic license: "an open-ended definition of art." However, when viewed collectively in terms of a comprehensive theoretical framework, the medium seems indeed an incredulous activity from which unconditionally accepted artistic creations can result. The source of difficulty can be attributed to the premise upon which photography operates and many of the negative aspects in association find direct relation: that of 'selection,' rather than creation in its usual context.

Basing an artistically expressive form upon what can appear, and most often is, a simple act of selection has created what is essentially an academic form of art. Count de Laborde had prophesized in the mid-1800's that photography would be responsible for the establishment of art in "the higher regions of the mind," what he felt was art's true domain. But, due to the diverse reaction to modern photography, it appears society is not yet ready to accept such an occurrence easily. In defining

37 Count de Laborde; Art and Photography, Aaron Scharf, p. 107.
the implications of this aspect in relation to both the creator and later viewer, the academic or intellectual dependence and its accompanying difficulties become most apparent.

Creative Relationship

In a consideration of the craft aspect among the opposing forms of expression, the radical change in thought necessary for photographic appreciation is accented. As Geoffrey James stated, these other disciplines are more or less "synthetic processes," with results, in effect, records of their creation, being 'artistically' conceived and 'artistically' manifested. It is important to inquire if artists working in other areas could operate with a sensibility similar to one possessed by photography--the primary artistic emphasis placed upon concept, rather than the result.

In painting, for instance, what is of more importance, the idea or the object? Any answer may seem a logical impossibility; the two aspects cannot be separated, as the artist must totally interrelate the two. In the traditional mediums, creation is both an intellectually and physically demanding process, having creative resonance in this combination. The artist's thoughts take time to evolve in his work, quite often changing throughout the process. His intellect tells him what to paint or draw,
with time telling him how. With the photographer, his intellect not only tells him what to photograph, but also how. Once this is accomplished, the remainder is instantaneous.

The rationale for photography's existence is based predominantly upon the conceptual element, which is fundamental. The photographic discipline, otherwise, is merely an acquired skill. Any individual desiring artistic involvement can succeed if he is perceptive, without any additional criterion through the learned use of photography. As the Nikon camera advertisement stated, "she can't draw and I can't paint, but no one can say we're not creative." This thesis has utilized such advertisements to demonstrate how individuals are misled as to what artistic photographic success actually involves, but with an individual's existing perceptive ability, photography may become a complement, not a supplement, leading to the physical result. The other disciplines require this same innate perceptive ingredient, but in addition, a high degree of possibly innate physical dexterity to relate mind and hand. Skill in these other areas can be developed or acquired in a sense of formulistic and simplistic visual combination.

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From a Nikon advertisement; *Camera 35*, No. 4, 1978, p. 11.
but cannot be totally acquired or instilled in a technically incompetent individual in the relative degree the photographic medium allows.

The Later Viewer

For the subsequent viewer of the photograph, the problem of recognizing, acknowledging and then relating to the onus within the two-dimensional borders of the photographic paper is encountered. The photograph itself, as a physical object, is not important in the accounting of its existence, as is a painting or drawing. In photography's most direct and common form, the straight print, the physical creation cannot be truly 'creatively' appreciated, only what is depicted. The attitudes and stresses which would allow such assessment need an entirely different basis, a basis quite removed from what the average art viewer now relies upon. Ansel Adams stated, "a photograph is usually looked at--seldom looked into."39 Such an approach must necessarily be changed to allow the photograph the appreciation it deserves. However, until the creative understanding of this controversial medium becomes less obscure, such an accomplishment will prove difficult.

Chapter 5

THE LIMITATIONS TO A MORE SYMPATHETIC INTERPRETATION

As outlined earlier, the hindrances to the photograph's artistic appreciation can be traced to omnipresent, unreconciled aesthetic difficulties; a situation that has allowed the existence of conflicting thoughts and usage, without any bases other than limited and personally restricted theoretical senses. The result of this is a clouded artistic identity. We will see that the individuals in positions of actual influence who have the potential to increase appreciation, seem to accomplish little. The formally delegated and self-elected critical authorities have a limiting effect upon the photograph through their own diverse attitudes. Although many individuals today still cling to the belief that no real problem exists, there is a great deal of evidence that suggests the highly subjective character of the photograph is destined to remain for sometime; a character that suffers not only because of impersonal and indiscriminant facets,¹ but also because of visibility and functional adaptability.

¹J.L. Ward, p. 2.
5.1 The Retarded Artistic Identity

The photographic medium has an exceptionally high level of visibility due to its inherent versatility. Even in the early twentieth-century, Sadakichi Hartmann had noted, "the results of photography permeate all intellectual phases of our life."\(^2\) This situation has become tremendously magnified in later decades, involving the photographic image in every routine activity, from deciding upon purchases to learning what is occurring throughout our world.

The camera has come to serve as the dominant illustrator and conveyer of information on a daily, saturating basis. It has displaced the other creative disciplines which, although still active in utilitarian and applied functions, are now far removed from the saturated use photography endures. The general sense of familiarity that has resulted, accounts for an assumed, pervasive and limiting identity; obscuring photography's artistic potential, attachments and successes with the predominant functional association that has developed.

Painting, drawing, etc., through their relatively restricted use for artistic creation, have developed an all but automatic association. When an individual

\(^2\)Sadakichi Hartmann (1910); Photographers on Photography, N. Lyons, introduction.
approaches a painting in a gallery, he doesn't first ask if it is 'art' prior to assessing its worth. In his precon-
ditioned state, he approaches what has been long-established and accepts that fact, even if not the painting. With photography, he approaches a 'photograph,' decides its per-
sonal relevance and then (if at all) considers whether or not it is art. To comprehend this occurrence, it is neces-
sary to become aware of the psychological controls of our general involvements.

The "Onlooker Theory"

A passage by D.W. Harding illustrates the variables and emotion variety affecting appreciation, not necessarily just of art, but the appreciation of all things.

Part of everyone's time is spent in looking on at events not primarily in order to understand them (though that may come in) and not in pre-
paration for doing something about them, but in a non-participant relation which yet includes an active evaluative attitude. We can say two things of the onlooker; first that he attends, whether his attention amounts to a passing glance or fascinated absorbtion, and second that he evaluates, whether his attitude is one of faint liking or disliking, hardly above in-
difference, or whether it is strong, perhaps intensely emotional and perhaps differentiated into pity, horror, contempt, respect, amuse-
ment or any other of the shades and kinds of evalu-
uation, most of them unlabeled even in our richly
differentiated language.  

With Harding's support, Harold Osbourne has sug-
gested that a controlling situation affecting our appreci-
ation is in existence prior to the actual evaluation
process.  This initial influence, "empathetic or sympa-
thetic identification," preceeds and regulates what he
has coined, "evaluative emotions" which account later for
"evaluative responses." An individual must first identify
with a situation, in this case with the photographic med-
ium, and perceive some personal relevance before he can
make any valid analytical or value judgments and determin-
ations above the superficial. Human nature, however, being
responsible for our tardiness in changing tolerance and
perception levels, and in readjusting to new thoughts,
accounts for an almost unconscious resistance to the art-
istic association of the photograph. As Robert Hughes
stated, "in the past ten years photography has swept, as
it were, from the magazine to the museum."  

Quite rapidly,

3D.W. Harding, "Psychological Processes in the
Reading of Fiction," first pub. British Journal of
Aesthetics; rpt. The Art of Appreciation, Harold Osbourne,
(London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 120.

4Ibid., p. 122.

5Ibid., p. 120-2.

6Robert Hughes, "Mirrors and Windows," Time
Magazine (Canada), August 7, 1978, p. 53.
and without warning, the patrons found themselves confronted with a form of expression and an artistic connotation not previously considered. Consequently, in the short time the photograph has thus existed, only an initial, and quite mild sense of artistic identity has developed.

In addition to the unfamiliarity of the photographic medium, the negative aspects discussed to this point do not necessarily prohibit an artistic identification, but do certainly retard its occurrence. This identity is clouded, not only by the lack of a conditioned artistic association due to its utility and untraditional and awkward aspects (all situations that time and familiarity have made less distractive in other mediums), but also by what the photograph usually represents.

A photograph in its most common form reflects an event, frozen and full of realism—realism not necessarily true in context, but still identifiable and subject to the variables and reactions illustrated by Harding. As J.L. Ward has stated, art, and therefore, the photograph, "cannot function without a responsive viewer." Until the deficiency in familiarity is remedied, and a more pervasive attitude of artistic possibility is attained concerning the photographic medium, interaction with it will

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remain limited. For most individuals, photography has only commenced a struggle for artistic acknowledgement in the last decade. Even in this short period, many advances have been realized. However, considerably more time is required to fully achieve what Osbourne has outlined: a state of sympathetic identification. The development of this state is essential for proper response and evaluation, and for an informed, subjective "attendance" in the photographic "event." Through fully enlightened participation, the indifference and obscurity surrounding the photograph would naturally fall away.

5.2 Physical Influence Upon Sympathetic Identification

Berenice Abbott stated:

Photography does not stand by itself in a vacuum; it is linked on one side to manufacturers of materials and on the other side to the distributors of the products, that is to publishers, editors, business leaders, museum directors and to the public.8

The participation of these individuals has done much to extend photographic scope, and in some isolated instances, artistic understanding, but their predominant effect has been through contribution to the retarding of a more general and sympathetic artistic identity.

We have seen the effects of the manufacturers on artistic distortion, whether intentional or not, through the misconceptions they spread. We have seen, through general experience, the diverse quality and potential for prolific production coupled with total disregard for what is presented, attributable to the editors, publishers and business leaders. And we have seen the effects of the public through their casual and superficial attitudes and involvements—all contributing in part to Berenice Abbott's rather whimsical warning: "unless they do their share of growing up to their responsibilities, the serious photographer can languish or take up knitting." 9

It is not difficult to realize why these individuals appear unconcerned. Most simply are not interested in whether photography suffers or not owing to their abuses as long as their personal demands are met and the photograph functions in their purposes. However, it is somewhat ironic to see the effects of the galleries and museums. They, too, contribute to the suppressed identity and, considering their reason for existence (the betterment of art), any negative influence they impose is not only perplexing, but extremely damaging, possibly with long-term effects.

The Influence of Museums and Galleries

The status of any artistic form, to a degree, is the product of, and shaped by, popular opinion. Many individuals often appear too easily led by others who control what they experience in art exhibitions, and through what is read in critical reviews. In extreme cases, over and above mere appreciation, museums and galleries may also influence what eventually becomes accepted as credible artistic expression through biases, preferences, priorities, or practicalities.

The two types of galleries in our society both have this effect upon photographic status, but in different ways. Privately operated galleries, being more numerous and thus exercising more of a visible effect, tend to set trends, although both public and private 'educate' the patrons they serve. What is offered usually is less than an unbiased selection, with the possibility of suppression concerning areas lacking the momentum that would justify their inclusion (momentum leading to financial return). Contemporary photographic art suffers as a result of this avarice, not appearing as a commercially viable commodity. Although the photographic principle is artistically accepted, the physical object it produces currently lacks
the same artistic resonance. There are exceptions, but generally, this keen business sense has kept the modern photograph out of the gallery situation.10

Public museums and galleries also contribute to the limited appreciation and uncertainties surrounding the photograph. It is unfair to criticize collectively, but usually, photography gains admittance only through special considerations and circumstances. Few institutions have made the commitment the Museum of Modern Art has,11 and although most institutions are now active in photographic collection, what is displayed most often is work other than the contemporary. Since the more historical photographic example is in the public eye more often in the formal artistic atmosphere of these institutions, a misconception may develop. The patrons could easily assume that the 'artistic' ingredient in some cases is based upon possibly damaging stylistic identities of this older work or, is no more than a product of antiquity. This assumption can

10 In the 1850's, when Robinson or Rejlander sold a photograph, it was more or less a 'unique' object. Later, through increased technology that allowed almost limitless reproduction, "a noticeable undermining of the significance in owning a photograph was observed."; W. Rotzler, Photography as Artistic Experiment (Garden City, N.Y.: Amphoto, 1976), p. 80.

11 While writing the founding prospectus for the MOMA (1929), Albert Barr stressed that photography should be a primary consideration for involvement. This institution has greatly aided credibility through its comprehensive photographic representation on a permanent basis.
be attributed to a direct influence imposed by the institution, but also one attributable to our general interest in heritage or the value and special quality we associate with antiquated objects. As Sontag stated:

A photograph of 1900 that was affecting then because of its subject would, today, be more likely to move us because it was a photograph taken in 1900. The particular qualities and intentions of photographers tend to be swallowed up in the generalized pathos of time past. Aesthetic distance seems built into the very experience of looking at photographs, if not right away, then certainly with the passage of time. Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art. 12

When the patrons are later confronted with the potentially different qualities of contemporary photography, simply through a lack of sufficient exposure, they have little to base appreciation upon. The negative reaction to William Eggleston's photographs ("banal snapshots") illustrates the result of the effect this minimal exposure has upon appreciation. Also, artistic distinction based upon the qualities listed by Robert Hughes ("the uneventful, the odd, the dumb and the chancy") is a relatively new situation that likewise is in need of time and constant visual restatement to become more readily acceptable. New sensibilities and attitudes must be established to

approach such work intelligently since, as Hughes stated, it now represents an official, and formally upheld view.\textsuperscript{13} Without the necessary attitude changes, the modern photographic trends could easily enter the pitfall of kitsch, owing their substance to novelty or tongue-in-cheek parody; making them interesting to look at but, otherwise, unimportant.

The museums and galleries have the power, but more importantly, the opportunity, to shape new, more tolerant attitudes for the photograph. Modern photographic art can easily be compared with native and utilitarianly conceived works during the first decades of the twentieth-century. What the institutions accomplished here (after acknowledgement by artists such as Picasso, Derain and Braque) through forcing both the public and critical bodies to simply look in a direction that was previously incomprehensible, could similarly be accomplished for photography. Museums and galleries affirmed the artistic contributions of these artifacts, allowing them wide acclaim in their own right and a place, "among the great art traditions of the world."\textsuperscript{14} If, as Abbott declared, these institutions grow up to their responsibilities, photography would likewise be acknowledged.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[13]{Robert Hughes, "Mirrors and Windows," \textit{Time Magazine} (Canada), August 7, 1978, p. 54.}
\footnotetext[14]{W. Bascom, \textit{African Art in Cultural Perspective} (N.Y.: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 3.}
\end{footnotes}
5.3 The Diversity of Critical Opinion

In the discussion of photography in terms of modern critical thought, tenuous ties to its nevertheless artistic acceptance are emphasized. The difficulties surrounding the basis of this acceptance, changed attitudes, rather than reconciliation of the once negating aspects, are possibly products of a too liberal, general state of artistic allowance; a state that, as acknowledged by Sontag, is now in a position troubled not only by whether or not something is art, but also concerned with whether or not art is actually obsolete.\textsuperscript{15}

Regardless of what has caused the prevailing state of difficulty concerning the photograph, the reactions and thoughts of the critics have done little to dispel the confusion. As J.L. Ward stated, critical discussion of photographic value has been insignificant.\textsuperscript{16} In a realistic assessment of the photograph, all that has been critically determined on any perceptive level is that photography could indeed be controlled to suit the user's wishes; this being a realization of Francis Wey, Charles Caffin, and others that eventually led to photography's acceptance, but which offered nothing else in terms of comprehension.


There are basically two choices to consider when personally formulating the status of the photograph: is the discipline an art or not. If any level of sensitivity is possessed, the former must naturally be upheld; there is sufficient supportive evidence. However, despite this evidence, and the contention offered by Aaron Scharf\textsuperscript{17} in such unequivocal terms, the photograph's artistic relevance has remained subject to dispute from some authorities.

**The Persistence of Traditional Thought**

The retention of archaic attitudes is a factor limiting the appreciation of the photograph. As Ward stated, photography encompasses qualities and aspects that "cannot be reconciled with traditional aesthetic systems."\textsuperscript{18} Despite the widespread nature of this realization, many individuals still base their evaluations upon outmoded traditional formulations.

As previously outlined, prior to the general shift in artistic thought that accounted for the photograph's unconditional acceptance, art was created with the 'ideal' as guiding influence. Artistic distinction stemmed from the adherence to these ideals--"the picturesque, the

\textsuperscript{17} "From the 1890's, superceding all arguments, photography was accepted as an established form of art." Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography, p. xv.

\textsuperscript{18} Ward, p. 2.
beautiful and the sublime"—as well as, "the academic
tradition which held that nature in the raw was never with-
out blemishes, such blemishes having no place in art." 19
If these controlling dictates, based upon sound authority
and proven practice, failed to be observed, artistic nega-
tion was immediate and beyond argument. James Borcoman
stated, "we are not surprised to find that nineteenth-
century attitudes were thus governed. [However] we
may be somewhat surprised to learn that the thought processes
of many contemporary art critics and historians are con-
trolled by similar patterns." 20 As a result of this crit-
ical and historical uncertainty, it is naturally suggested
that an immense number of the artistically ignorant and
indifferent are likewise misled. With the persistence in
adhering to such attitudes, it is little wonder why con-
temporary artistic photography resists sympathetic inter-
pretation and remains prone to confusion—especially when
considering what appear to be extremes in many of the
contemporary trends pursued; Eggleston's images and work
comprising Hughes' aforementioned qualities again serving
as explicit examples.

19 J. Borcoman, "Purism Versus Pictorialism,"
20 Ibid.
This artistic resistance, whether widespread or limited, cannot be ignored as many may wish. The fact that it does exist may be a source of frustration, but when considered with the confusion and denial existing amongst those who accept the photograph, the state of outright rejection seems less meaningful.

Confusion in Acceptance

For those who artistically accept the photographic medium, the most comprehensive aid was offered by J.L. Ward. Through his assessment of contemporary artistic creation, he proposed that artistic value in twentieth-century production be discerned, "in terms of what it is and does instead of how it came to be."\(^{21}\) Motive, intent, control and even the very classification as an involved artist under such a sensibility become superfluous. With such extremity, all troublesome aspects concerning the photograph's actual artistic relevance, certainly find coverage.

Ward stated:

Photographers may feel completely satisfied in documenting slum conditions, studying the motions of tennis players, or experimenting with the interaction of light-sensitive materials, or they may make their pictures for the expressed purpose of being exhibited in galleries. Their intentions make not the slightest difference to the value of

\(^{21}\)John L. Ward, p. 23.
their photographs, as art. Especially in photography, the person who thinks of himself as an artist has frequently achieved artistically poorer results than the photographer who cringes at the word.\textsuperscript{22}

The essence of Ward's proposal is that, "the value of photography as art exists independent of its value as anything else...and that this value can be judged only by a direct confrontation with the picture itself."\textsuperscript{23}

This is, however, far too loose a definition for others concerned, who, although equally as adamant in establishing photography as a fine art, make their allowances far more restrictive.

Helmut Gernsheim is one member of this group; a group appearing to be caught in the middle of the artistic controversy, between those who allow nothing and those who allow, what seems, everything. Gernsheim stated: "in considering the artistic aspect of photography, we are not concerned with photographs intended to serve scientific or technical purposes..."\textsuperscript{24}

Continuing, he also suggested a further means of simplification by a radical, indiscriminant handling of all images resulting from casual involvement: "we can also ignore the billions of snapshots

\textsuperscript{22}Ward, p. 23.  
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 24.  
taken every year by the estimated hundred million camera
users all over the world for no other purpose than to
serve as momentoes of family events and holidays." 25

Although Gernsheim's views may, on first glance,
seem easier to accept than those in opposition, under a
less superficial investigation, their weakness is seen,
Gernsheim himself having been aware of some. In regard
to the utilitarian or applied uses of photography, even
though he insisted that they be artistically ignored, he
stated: "some of them do have great aesthetic appeal." 26
Although 'aesthetic appeal' has yet to be accurately de-
 fined, this is a contradiction indeed difficult to over-
look, and one accenting the value of the opposing, more
tolerant attitude where, as Sontag suggested, utilitarian
photographs can "cease to be about their subjects" and
become "studies in the possibilities of photography." 27

Also, Gernsheim's proposed rejection of all casual photo-
graphic activity is difficult to validate. Although guided
by a belief that is more or less shared by all who

27 Susan Sontag, On Photography, p. 133.
consider the artistic problems of the modern photograph.\textsuperscript{28} his generalized restriction is grossly unfair and inaccurate. If ever accepted as a means of even initial artistic categorization, as Ward suggested, the brilliant and, to many, artistically satisfying photographs of Jacques Henri Lartigue's childhood would have to be ignored.

5.4 The Ambiguous Nature of Critical Authority

It was mentioned at the beginning of this investigation that the body of formal critical authority has greatly expanded its concerns in recent years, now looking into the possibility that art is obsolete. Involvement with such concepts can only serve to complicate an already complex area of thought (artistic creation in general) and contribute to the intellectual stigma modern art has propagated. When comprehensively delving into this authoritative body, however, it becomes apparent that what they formulate, whether collectively or individually, actually only plays a minor part in the appreciation of art,

\textsuperscript{28}Gernsheim stated: "Only a tiny core of amateurs and professionals--perhaps no more than one percent of all camera owners--strive to use their apparatus creatively. In other words, only a minute proportion of the immense output of photographs has any pretensions to art--an important point which critics invariably overlook in discussing the subject. If few photographers succeed in their intentions, this only proves the elusiveness of the creative element in a technique almost anyone can learn to master."; Creative Photography, p. 13.
that is, the appreciation of those individuals above the level of artistic indifference or ignorance. There is a degree of ambiguity in their actual existence which, if not taken into account, makes their internal inconsistencies indeed more confusing. Harold Osbourne stated: "it is impossible not to be aware of a certain deeply rooted ambivalence in prevailing attitudes towards matters of aesthetic judgement."\footnote{Harold Osbourne, \textit{The Art of Appreciation} (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 1.} Osbourne maintained on one hand, "it is taken for granted that the appreciation of art and natural beauty is in some sense a matter for everyone," but, conversely, "society does recognize and support specialists of the arts."\footnote{Ibid.} This situation suggests that society is not willing to accept the responsibility, in total, to define and regulate what artistic involvement encompasses, but yet still demands the right to freely express their personal views. Society has formally acknowledged a small sector as the authority, but, as Osbourne stated, "will boldly hazard and affirm his opinion, although in other fields of expertise, such as medicine or engineering or law, he would automatically defer to the professional."\footnote{Ibid.} Although recognition of this ambiguous situation puts critical diversity (as evident between Ward and Gernsheim)
into a more tolerable context, the proliferation of conflicting interpretations by the lay-public, perpetuate the problems of artistic understanding. Concerning the photographic discipline specifically, Geoffrey James stated: for the most part, "the medium has been left to define itself." 32 Those who do attempt some assistance, however, in the end, realistically appear to offer none.

SUMMARY

This investigation was directed toward obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing photography's artistic appreciation. Throughout the last few decades, the photograph has been formally acknowledged as a credible fine art discipline. Despite this acceptance, a definite degree of controversy still remains on a general level. John Szarkowski, a man very much in touch with, and sympathetic to, modern artistic approaches, has admitted that acceptance of photographic art does involve some "intellectual risks." Determining the causes of this reservation and the assessment of their implications motivated this report.

A review of photographic evolution and contemporary activity was carried out. Several considerations, of both a general and a specific nature, were uncovered which make photography appear as a lesser vehicle for artistic expression. These considerations lend themselves to summary within two key conclusions: the photographic discipline has not yet reached maturity, and the medium appears
to be greatly involved in the restriction of the appreciation concerning its own artistic value. Until the artistic photograph becomes more of a familiar element within our society, the effect of these considerations will perpetuate a limited and conditional association.

The Lack of Maturity

Photography reflects a definite lack of apparent maturity. The contemporary concepts and physical manifestation concerning the traditional creative disciplines are products of dramatic evolutionary change—change noticed over relatively short time spans. The photograph, however, in its usage and physical form, reflects the benefit of very little evolution. Technological advances certainly have had some minor affect, but the photographic image otherwise has progressed insignificantly since 1850; with only, as Geoffrey James stated, "the world and attitudes it reflects" having been greatly altered. Indicative of this resistance to change is the modern adherence to early processes (now labelled 'experimental' pursuits), the prevailing emulation of other two-dimensional mediums, and the unchanged, predominant use of the camera to simply, and without much forethought, record physical surroundings.

1Geoffrey James, "Responding to Photographs," P. 1.
These aspects, coupled with the fact that photography's artistic acceptance was based simply upon changed general attitudes and not upon reconciliation of technological and aesthetic problems, have left us with an awkward situation. Moreover, the compromise of positions that allowed the artistic assumption, albeit limited, to prevail throughout this last century, has not as yet been fully justified.

The Medium as Restriction

The photographic discipline has gradually become its own restriction of appreciation owing to how it has increased utility and methods of image presentation. There are too many individuals involved, pursuing radically diverse paths. Each seems to be motivated differently, exercises contrasting and conflicting controls, and obtains a result with entirely different stresses. Unanswered questions promoted by this situation cause many doubts concerning artistic credibility through a thorough confusing of the artistic photographic identity. Many individuals are induced to ask why should a medium be artistically appreciated if it is more easily defined as a craft? How can a medium be unconditionally accepted as an art when it boasts a master (Cartier-Bresson) who compared the creative photographic artist to a Zen archer,
able to hit the target (creatively succeed) without conscious involvement? And how can a medium be fully accepted that contains a great deal of confusion as to where the emphasis for artistic value be placed—on the artist or his subject? These implications tend to severly undermine the artistic significance of the photograph. Until the somewhat novel associations of photographic vision and its artistic role are displaced, the uncertainties the discipline represents, and the seeming compromise it demands, will outweigh its already established value.

Epilogue

In the late 1800's, Leo Tolstoy had maintained: "the art of the future...will not be a development of present-day art, but will arise on quite other and new foundations having nothing in common with those by which our present art...is guided."\(^2\) He stated that art would not be governed by the "bulkiness, obscurity, and complexity of form which now are valued," but by "brevity, clearness, and simplicity of expression."\(^3\) These qualities are certainly reflected in what modern photography


\(^3\)Ibid.
can offer, but they are currently alien to any existing artistic context. A suitable framework will eventually emerge, but owing to the prior necessity for changes in general attitudes and the attainment of a better informed audience, this realization will require time. In lieu of any immediate solution for the problems faced, Henry Holmes Smith has offered a suggestion to see us through this transitional period.

In the present state of things, each one must conserve the photography he understands, permitting, when his tolerance is sufficient the remainder of the art to be conserved and examined elsewhere. Ultimately each of us may find, to our surprise, that our intolerance often rests on ignorance and our misunderstandings, our accusations of obscurity, unintelligibility, or falseness spring from too narrow a view of a medium that offers an intensity of expression and a range of images much greater than is generally seen.⁴

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Appendix A

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS THAT INFLUENCED PHOTOGRAPHIC ACCEPTANCE
Contributions of Alfred Stieglitz to a New Awareness

As previously contended, the new artistic acknowledgement for the photograph was derived from the general reshaping of artistic thought, and from increased awareness of photographic potential. Stieglitz (1864-1946), through the publication *Camera Work*, greatly facilitated these changes. The magazine strove, not to instigate new trends or justify the artistic possibilities of the photograph philosophically, but to avail itself as an unbiased vehicle for presentation. During the fifteen years *Camera Work* was published (1903-17), it added immensely to the enlightenment of the ardent critics photography possessed. Although not a primary instigator, the magazine served as a catalyst that, "evolved and articulated the transition [of the photograph] from brooding pictorialism to hard-edged modernism," hinting all the while, that the search for an aesthetic structure should be pursued.

Stieglitz solicited reviews from the skeptics, hoping to increase general awareness of the photograph through formal involvement. Paul Rosenfeld succumbed, observing, "*Camera Work* [in itself] is a constantly pro-

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gressive, steadily cumulative work of art." Also won over was Charles Caffin (art editor for the *International Studio* and critic for the *New York Sun*) who demonstrated a dramatic change of perspective from his negative stand seen in a review of the 1898 Philadelphia Salon of Photography (*Harper's Weekly*) in later articles for *Camera Work* and his series, written in collaboration with Stieglitz, for Wanamaker's *Everybody's Magazine*.

Through *Camera Work* and the associated '291' gallery, Stieglitz not only assisted in the reshaping of photographic opinion through forcing direct exposure, but also through attempts at raising the contemporary artistic consciousness by exhibiting European avant-garde art, and by pointing out parallel situations of controversy. His efforts were directed at the vital need to constantly re-evaluate positions, indicating the frequently presumptive tendencies of the critics and their resistance to comprehend quickly, without pious attitudes, new aspects of artistic importance. As Helmut Gernsheim stated: "Stieglitz's artistic perception was far in advance of that of his contemporaries and made him the greatest protagonist of modern photography and modern art in the

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United States."

Indicative of this tendency for premature judgement was the New York presses' review of the first American exhibition of Matisse's nude studies: "they are of an ugliness that is most appalling and haunting, and that seem to condemn this man's brain to the limbo of artistic degeneration;" and as Elizabeth Cary (New York Times) further contributed, they are "ugly and distorted, many of them amounting to caricatures without significance." To accent even more the lack of insight held by the critics, Camera Work reproduced reactions to Rodin's sketches, regarded by many of those in influential positions as, "not the sort of thing to offer to the public view even in a gallery situation devoted to preciosity in artistic things."  

Stieglitz demonstrated his acute sense of perception in recognizing the importance of the contributions of these two artists, as well as Picasso and Brancusi who like-

3 Helmut Gernsheim, Creative Photography, p. 145.
4 J.E. Chamberland, Camera Work, No. 22. 1908, p. 11; rpt. from New York Evening Mail.
6 W.B. McCormick, Camera Work, No. 22. 1908, p. 40; rpt. from a New York paper.
wise were ignored. Acting as the self-appointed stimulator of the public consciousness, Stieglitz realized that, "the New York art world was sorely in need of an irritant and Matisse [Rodin, Picasso, and others] certainly proved a timely one." A shaking up and rousing of the artistic sensibility was vital for further progression in the arts. Through Alfred Stieglitz's and Camera Work's attempts to expand artistic interpretation, to evolve moral and ethical understanding, and to bring about new thresholds of visual acceptance, all art, including the photograph, benefited.

Contributions to Acceptance from the Traditional Disciplines

There is a certain amount of irony considering the role painting played in photographic acceptance. As seen in the early stages of development, "photography, in order to assert its aesthetic possibilities, strove to become pictorial," in direct emulation of painting. The result of such activity was the questionable practice, ruthlessly pursued by the photographic artists, of "endowing their new and most pliable medium with the beauties of former

7Peter Pollack, p. 260.
artistic expressions.\textsuperscript{10} Now, however, a turnabout in mildly plagiaristic activity resulted as "those of the brush" commenced imitating "the accuracy of the camera" and its other distinct inherent qualities.\textsuperscript{11}

As Scharf expressed, "less subject to the vagaries of arbitrary aesthetic systems, the photograph has thus established a set of pictorial standards which transcend all styles and come closer to a universal [and accurate] language of vision than any previously contrived\textsuperscript{12}; the results of Muybridge and Marey serve to prove this unequivocally. Ansel Adams later stated that not only is "all art the expression of one and the same thing--the relation of the spirit of man to the spirit of other men," but also his relation "to the world,"\textsuperscript{13} his environment. Only the camera could show and validate some aspects of natural occurrence that prior to its invention were inaccessible to view, thus unbelievable. The results of photographic rendition in these areas had a great impact on subsequent art. Now, the emphasis was on showing the actuality of things more accurately.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12}Aaron Scharf, \textit{Art and Photography}, p. 245.
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During this period, as Van Deren Coke acknowledged in *The Painter and the Photograph*, "camera vision had become inextricably a part of the artist's vocabulary."\(^{14}\) Photography was utilized more openly as an aid for study, and as a supply of images from which to work in other disciplines. Gustave Courbet and Paul Cezanne painted directly from photographs, and Rodin had relied upon Daguerreotypes while creating his memorial to Balzac. The situation was gradually changing from earlier times when, as Scharf suggested, "artists found it expedient to hide the fact of their use of photographic material or its influence upon them"\(^{15}\) out of fear that "they would lose caste with the picture-purchasing public."\(^{16}\) Delacroix and others were now more candid concerning such reliances, and the 'photographic vision' was in a sense indirectly defended and made more artistically credible by the resistance of these individuals to resulting criticism of photographically based work: "...as vulgar or as ugly, as artless, as feeble, as were the images produced by the machine."\(^{17}\)

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\(^{14}\) Aaron Scharf, p. 245

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 125.

\(^{16}\) Reference made by Scharf, p. 125.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 95.
Although possibly subject to minor consideration, this acknowledgement was indicative of radically altered attitudes, relative to previous views of successful and confidently secure artists. More dramatic evidence, however, is also apparent, as adopted photographic attributes accounted for revisions in former 'looks' of certain painters' creations. Delacroix and later, Toulouse-Lautrec, exhibited definite influence by awkward cropping of figures and extremely asymmetrical composition. These qualities, although not exclusive, were reminiscent of the 'snapshot' effect in casual photography and of the chance movement quality associated with photographic attempts in busy, active situations: both qualities indicative of spontaneity in creation, a unique attribute of the camera. Degas went a step further in pronounced utilization of these appropriated qualities, turning optical aberrations into characteristics of his style. Through the simulation of selective focus and by distorting the imagery in the periphery of his canvas, the qualities and detrimental effects of previous unsophisticated camera lenses were accurately imitated and proved to be complimentary to the resulting creations.

Similar involvements and compassion for the photographic principles and concepts continued to spread, leading eventually to the stark camera qualities in more contemporary realistic art. As Scharf has stated, the
photograph was accepted as a fully validated medium for artistic expression at the end of the nineteenth-century; an acceptance, that as he stressed, superceded any and all arguments to the contrary. The long-sought artistic resonance was granted, leaving the reoccurring problems inherent in its nature to, in effect, reconcile themselves. The photograph was realized as important for many reasons, and although not yet totally comprehended, could not now be denied:

The direct use of photography seems so obvious as to need little or no comment, yet in a period dominated by abstract art, it is sufficiently in evidence in the work of artists of standing to merit discussion. It bears repeating that the photograph opens up an immense visual field. Natural conditions so transient that they would normally be beyond the reach of even the most skilled draughtsman working from memory; the unselective character of the lens; the fact that the images are accessible in the hand at any time, in a way that nature is not—these are among photography's exclusive characteristics. In addition, aspects of nature and of human situations otherwise completely lost in time past, continue to exert their unique cachet through the photographic print. The frozen and remote feeling of the old portrait photograph which repelled artists like Redon has had an immense attraction for others. The subjects, even those in synthetically casual poses, have a rigid alertness that belies their awareness of the camera. Once considered too unnatural, this rigidity now has an appealing stylistic flavour, as can be seen in Arshile Gorky's painted versions of the photographic portrait of himself as a youth with his mother, and in Jacques Villon's etching of 1927 from

18 Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography, p. xv.
an old family portrait in Daguerreotype. Over and beyond their biographical content, they seem to indicate a sensitivity to the hierarchic importance attached to the taking of a photograph. 19

Aaron Scharf, p. 249-50.