

IMAGERY

PHOTOGRAPHY AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION

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1. TALKING WITH IMAGES: ANALYSIS

THE IMAGE IN OUR OWN HANDS

In the private picture lies the true form of all photography.
How does the language of image function with the way photography works?

A picture is actually nothing more than an image with various signs, directly visible in the portrayal or hidden in the form. The time and the culture in which we live determine the way we interpret pictures. To make understandable how the signs can be hidden in the image, we can compare photography with language. The words form a sentence and the sentences together tell a story. We can "read" a picture the way we can read a text. We can search the field of the image with our eyes and look for the meaning of the image. But in a picture there are no words and sentences. We have to grasp a meaning from the total image, in which (in principle) every detail plays a part. When you take a picture, you will have to understand the way you can bring an image about. The big question is how meaning originates in the photography. A portrait not only represents a person, but it represents a person in a certain way. To be clear, we make a distinction between an image and the expression of a picture. The image is that what we see, for instance a person, and we see the expression in the way that person is represented/portrayed. The posture of the portrayed person plays a big part, as well as the details, the light, the frame, the composition. To be short: all the elements of the photographic design.

THE TECHNICAL IMAGE

The way pictures are made determines the real characteristic of photography. The camera is registering and catching a bit of reality. Photography, video and film are technical images. A picture is naturally linked with the world around us because it can only originate if something has really stood in front of the lens. The picture is in a way a two dimensional copy of the three dimensional

reality at the moment the picture is taken. A painting emerges from paint and a picture emerges from the reality itself. The character of technical images implies that we don't experience them as original, independent images, but as images of reality. But they are certainly not exact replicas of reality, because the maker of the images plays a crucial part. Therefore, we can better call a picture a personal experience of reality. A photographer always chooses something from reality, because it touches him or interests him. He looks at the world with his personal view. Because the picture stems from an encounter of the photographer with the reality, there's always a subjective and an objective component in a picture.

THE PICTURE AS EXPRESSION

The picture can be provided with a "thought". The expression of the picture transcends the image that is represented in the picture. How this expression came to be, can be examined by an analysis of the different aspects of a picture. We can consider photography as a language, of which we can examine the grammar, style forms and story structure. The image in a picture refers to reality. It is the subject of the picture. If we consider the expression of a picture, we don't only consider the subject but also how it is represented. You can use photographic technique as a means for expression. For instance: a harsh black and white print of a tree can give a special meaning. The tree becomes a dark silhouette and looks threatening. Also light and composition can stir the picture in a certain direction. You can take a picture of the tree during sunset or in bright sunlight. The subject of a picture can be clarified by text, but text can also put the viewer on another track. For instance: when we put "American Oak" next to a picture it will have a totally different effect than if we put "Location of Crime". In the creation of a photograph, the key to a good understanding of the signs will be their mutual relationship. But even if the signs are used accurately, their meaning will not be the same for everyone. There is no "iconic dictionary" or "book of signs" which we can consult. Photography can therefore be considered as an open system of signs. A photographer can use all kinds of signs in a picture, chosen according to personal conviction or preference. Every beginning photographer sees things in his picture which were previously unnoticed.

TO USE SIGNS

A sign is an element in the picture, which gives the viewer a signal. We determine three main groups of photographic signs:

1. **Signs of content:** subject of a picture.
3. **Signs of form:** technique, composition (light, moment, standpoint) color or tone.
4. **Signs of context:** picture is part of a series, sequence or has a text.

The place in which a picture is shown determines its social category: a newspaper, a museum. The context also determines the target group of the picture. Advertising agencies use this phenomenon.

A theme underlies the subject and represents the deeper, invisible layer of the story. The theme is therefore never a sign, because it's not directly visible

SIGNS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

In language we use symbolic signs: every word has a meaning. The meaning of a word is determined according to agreements. Language has a linear form, and we can pronounce or write words only in an imaginary line. Therefore, we can elaborate logical reasoning into language. Language is analytical and abstract. The picture shows immediately what there is: it is iconic (imaginative). Photography has a special directness and clarity. Photographic images don't have a linear form but a cyclic one. We don't read a picture according a line, rather our eyes roam the surface of the picture. Another aspect is that we always see a concrete object in a picture. We can therefore say that photography is intuitive and concrete. With images we react primarily with intuition and secondarily with analytical capacity: "The weight of the words, the shock of the pictures". Because of the intuitive form of photography, the information it gives reaches us in a subconscious way. The partially unconscious character of photographic communication creates the possibility of "hiding" ideas in the image. It's possible you can only understand the underlying vision when all parts of it have been analyzed. Photography is, in the broader sense of the word, extremely erotic. It is constantly tempting the spectator. Because there is no fixed relationship between the signs in a picture and the meaning, photography can also be vague and unclear. Here we arrive at the difference between the common meaning (denotation), which everybody understands, and the double meaning (connotation), which is subjective and hidden. The connotation is also a culturally determined interpretation. To make an effective choice of available signs, the photographer needs to have an understanding of the way his spectators will interpret forms and symbols. Every culture, or subculture, has a specific code, with which images are read. Codes form a relationship between signs and meanings, according a fixed pattern. According to these codes, signs are interpreted and meaning is given to photographic images.

2. THE STRATEGY OF CHOOSING: CONTENT

EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION

In reviewing a picture you can determine three aspects:

right choice of subject. The subject has to be in a way archetypical for the whole.

THE SUBJECT AS METAPHOR

In a metaphorical subject the image in a picture represents a non-visual world, the world of ideas, values, thoughts and feelings. Therefore, with a metaphorical subject the form or the symbolic value is of great importance. This is the vehicle of the metaphorical meaning. Some fruits can have by their similarity of form "erotic forms". The telephone can be a metaphor for communication, longing or expectation or exactly the reverse: loneliness and distance. The division between a metonymical and a metaphorical subject is not always very clear. These two forms can melt together. The metaphorical subject is not chosen for what is, but for what is actually not. It is chosen for what it is radiating or to where it refers. We should also note the difference between symbols and metaphors. A symbol has a strict meaning within certain ideas of a specific culture. A cross in Christianity has the symbolic value of suffering, penalty and death. Symbols are limited and can also be clichés. A metaphor doesn't have a fixed meaning, but always refers to something within a specific context.

II. THE DEEPER LAYER: THE THEME

UNDER THE SKIN

You can identify a subject directly after seeing a picture, but a theme is, as it were, underneath. Often it is necessary to see more pictures of the same series or by the same photographer. The theme is actually the essence of the picture. All the other things are aesthetic entourage, although extremely necessary, meaningful and indispensable. Sometimes themes arise gradually, as a binding element of several subjects. Often themes stem from interests, which have been slumbering for years and which emerge slowly. In practice it seems that themes and ideas often live subconsciously within the photographer, and emerge through the images themselves. Photography serves as a liberator of psychic energy. We distinguish two types of themes: the closed theme and the open theme.

THE CLOSED THEME

The closed theme can be determined before a picture is taken. This kind of theme can be the starting point for a photo series. This strategy is applied in publicity photography. The photographer has to work from a concept, which has been formulated by an advertising agency. Conceptual photography is also based on a closed theme. The photographer departing from a closed theme, thinks from concept to image.

THE OPEN THEME

The open theme is not known in advance. The open theme is an idea that lives in the subconscious of the photographer and which often, like an obsession, wants to emerge. The characteristic of an open theme is that it can't be described verbally. A lot of artists know this phenomenon. A photographer who works with an open theme gives himself the freedom to photograph whatever his heart desires. The image is, in this case, the master of the language.

III SOME STRATEGIES

BETWEEN FEELING AND REASON

There are different ways to choose a subject or a theme: the methodical, researching way and the open, intuitive and instinctive way. Taking pictures is, besides being an instinctive association with the subject, also an intellectual process of searching, thinking and reflecting on the subject. The myth still exists that an artist is someone who can only act on feeling. But although intuition plays a big part, intellectual analysis, even if it's done afterwards, can't be missing.

SEARCHING BY INTUITION

A theme does not exist automatically, but develops in the course of a longer period. The choice of subject in an open theme is often made intuitively. We see that the intuition is often far ahead of the intellectual analysis. A photographer may already have intuitively chosen a subject which he himself can fathom only after years.

THE METHODOICAL APPROACH

When a subject is not easy to map out, the necessary pre-research is indispensable. It can be necessary to collect information through libraries, newspapers or articles in magazines. A methodical way of working is an intellectual quest, in which subjects and motives need to be selected and studied in depth. Anthropological, sociological, historical or geographical elements can play a part in this. It's also important that by a methodical approach a clear connection be made between the central theme and the different concrete subjects, so that the photo series may become a unity.

BORROWED MOTIVES

Old motives can have endless potential for actuality. They are not bound to a certain time, but always again emerge in specific circumstances. When an artist cites old motives, he uses them in a new, actual context. Every photographer, whether he is aware of it or not, is constantly re-creating the history of our culture of images. Knowledge and insight of the history of photography, and of the

culture of images in general, can therefore be a great source of inspiration for every photographer. It can also prevent him from reinventing the wheel. Can a photographer still be original? Maybe not always in the choice of a subject, but he can in any case still be authentic, if his own approach is inalienably personal.

3. THE GRAMMAR OF THE PICTURE: FORM

THE TRAVEL AND THE VEHICLE

No matter how much or how little we know or understand of photography, we want a picture to be beautiful to look at. A photograph may also have a surprising or striking form, which causes us to continue looking. We can call the form the vehicle of the content. The form is also part of the story, because the form impresses the photographer's expressivity upon the viewer.

We can distinguish four main ingredients in form:

- 1. Light.**
- 2. Point of view.**
- 3. Composition.**
- 4. Moment of taking the picture.**

We must also include the extra element of the influence of the employed technique.

I. THE LIGHT

DIFFUSE LIGHT

Diffuse light comes from all directions. The contrast between light and dark areas is not big because all elements get equal attention. Diffuse light is softening and can, because of its connotation of sobriety and lack of drama, give the connotation of romance and idyll. We see diffuse light being used in many situations in which the subject in its natural form is more important than its dramatic impact. Many current styles use diffuse light to emphasize their distant, objective posture.

FOCUSED LIGHT

Focused light of the sun, lamps or flashes, causes sharp and dark shadows. According to the definition: focused light is coming from one point, exactly the opposite of diffuse light. On stage, for instance, we see spotlights, which give a dramatic effect. You can stir the attention of the spectator with it. Focused light is hard, and you can see very well where it is coming from because of its shadows. Focused light gives more possibilities for building up the composition and accentuating sensitive values. In a portrait, the

photographer can focus on the things which are essential to him. By using focused light the photographer can also accentuate structures, an important part of architectural photography. Focused or harsh light can have the connotation of power and dynamics. The photographed subjects are lifted above every day life and receive an extra dramatic dimension.

FRONTAL FLASHLIGHT

If the light comes from the front, we speak of frontal light. This plain, but very contrasty light, is the typical characteristic of flashed pictures. Our family pictures are often made with frontal flashlights. The picture as a snapshot: spontaneous. Another connotation is the 'fast press picture'. Although not always true, we think the press picture is always made with a flashlight. This is because of the movies we see. In pictures created with flashlight we are more tempted to look at the subject than at the esthetics of the picture, because the aesthetics are (so to speak) "ignored".

LIGHT AS IN A THEATRE

The available light doesn't always have the quality the photographer wants to use to image his subject. In the studio, but also on location, the photographer himself can create light with lamps and flashes. With lamps you can create exact contrasts, shapely shadows and concentrated light bundles. In general we can state that studio light comes from different directions, as in the theatre. We all know examples of advertising pictures in which the product is glamorously represented. This light can look magical too, probably because in nature we don't know this kind of light. With different points of light, frontal, counter light, diagonally from the back, from a high point or from beneath, different effects can be created, such as threat, revelation, mystery, dynamic tension, intimacy or coolness. The challenge for the photographer is to use exactly the right light for the expression suiting his subject.

II. THE POINT OF VIEW

THE INVISIBLE FACTOR

The viewer cannot stand next to the point of view in order to see what the difference might be. The point of view, and therefore the direction of the camera, is of critical importance. On different levels the point of view influences the design of the image. The point of view determines:

- 1. Proportion.**
- 2. Perspective.**
- 3. Background.**

Normal points of view, eye heights for instance, which we experience as natural, have a hidden subjectivity.

TO STRIVE FOR NEUTRALITY

To take a neutral point of view in photography is actually not possible. But it's possible to distinguish a point of view which is more or less subjective.

A neutral point of view gives a quiet frame in which all the elements get an equal part. In a neutral point of view the photographer tries to be as objective as possible. This goes together with diffuse light, which emphasizes the effect of neutrality.

UNUSUAL POINT OF VIEW

Pictures can surprise us with an unusual point of view. One can observe from a high vantage point in order to see the environment from above. Unusual points of view can originate from random shooting but may also create connotations, as the history of photography shows. Just after the invention of photography, photographers tried to take pictures from balloons in order to try out "bird's-eye" perspectives. In the twenties, with the rise of avant-garde photography, one also looked for higher points of view in the search for new aesthetics. Photographers climbed high bridges and masts to explore the expressive possibilities of the medium. The pictures they took – from high points of view – were abstracting the images of the street, as though looking at a ground plan. They created the sense of ordering and planning, elements that influenced the rise of the industry.

III. THE COMPOSITION

THE FLAT PLANE

We see things three-dimensionally. The fundament of perception is that we are always looking for a pattern. With recognizable forms, we can't interpret the reality.

At the moment of taking a picture, we also form an impression. If we push the button, the three-dimensional field becomes a two-dimensional plane, and everything in that plane gets a fixed position. During perception we can isolate specific objects and we can leave things out, but the sensitive plate is registering without any form of selection: the foreground as well as the background. The essence of the composition is in the ordering of lines, planes and patterns. The chaos of reality changes into the order of the composition. The ordering of a picture only expresses a meaning in combination with the content, in which the composition speaks the language of the form: imagery in the most literal sense.

We always look for proportions. The bigger and more contrasting the motive, the "heavier" the motive is.

FRAME AND PROPORTION

The essence of the composition is determined by frame and proportion. A closed frame gives the feeling of unity and definition. In an open frame the image is, so to say, continuing outside the borders. The open frame gives the observer the suggestion that something exists outside of the image. With proportion we consider the total structure of a picture, or the way the most important elements within the frame are arranged. In landscape, the construction is determined by what's above or under the line of the horizon. Often a picture is constructed around one main, Dominant motive and is surrounded by left over space.

A picture can be symmetrical, with equal proportions at both sides. The attention for the central motive is in this case maximal. An a-symmetrical construction, when the main motive is placed of the center, enlarges the tension and the dynamics of the picture, but it can also destabilize it. The "golden section" has always been a special form of a-symmetry. The relation between the two image planes is about 2 : 3. This creates a dynamic without losing the balance.

LINE AND DIRECTION

We can make a division between real lines and optical lines. An imaginary optical line is drawn between two different elements of the image. Also, the direction of a person's look in a picture can suggest an optical line. A vertical line in architectural photography can be provided by pillars and walls. The horizontal line in a landscape is provided by the horizon itself, but this can also be another line with the same direction. Horizontal lines create space and have the connotation of tranquility, openness and passivity. Diagonal lines are often used to give the picture a dynamic effect. Probably this suggests perspective, because we recognize a diagonal line as a perspective line. Lines can give a picture a direction. Direction in the image automatically gives movement because all the elements seem to want to move in a specific direction. If, in the end, movement itself is a motive, it will attract a lot of attention.

PLANE AND RHYTHM

To see planes is one of the most difficult aspects of taking a picture, because they are often hidden in the depth of the three dimensions. Also, light and relating tonality play an important role in the forming of optical planes: planes of light and shadow. Often the base of a composition is a plane, which is formed by the main motive. We distinguish: square, triangle and circular planes, which represent different emotional values. A square plane is static and powerful and is associated with rationality and order. The triangle suggests more movement and dynamic and can be associated with emotion and change. A round plane can be associated with softness, rhythm

and undulating. By the combination of several planes, you can reinforce the movement or power in a composition. Planes (and also lines) can form rhythmic patterns by repetition.

PERSPECTIVE AND DEPTH

Perspective gives the illusion of depth in a flat plane and this is perceived realistically in a photograph. Before photography existed, painters worked with the camera obscura, which reproduced the image of nature in the right perspective. Perspective in a picture is dependent on the point of view and the angle of the lens. When all the converging lines disappear into one point, we speak about: line perspective. You can also suggest depth by putting a motive in the foreground, so that the other motives become small and seem far away. A wide angle lens gives a wide and spatial effect, while a telephoto lens gives a feeling of space being compressed. Perspective can also be ignored, for instance, when a frontal picture is taken of a building. Extreme perspectives in photography give surrealistic, dreamy effects, probably because we don't know these naturally.

TONALITY AND COLOUR

Tonality in taking pictures is determined by two things: the light and the clarity of the subject. The tonality can also be directed and influenced in the darkroom. The articulation of photographic expression has two extremes: The soft tonality with a richly nuanced tonal scale of grey tones, and the harshly, contrasting picture, with heavy accents. Pictures with mainly clear motives and little black have a light tone. They suggest a thin, fragile atmosphere. Pictures with a dark tone have an obscure, 'melancholic', or closed atmosphere. In color photography the colors accentuate and emphasize the sensitive values that the subjects radiate. Red has the tendency to come to the fore and be dominant to the observer. Blue has the opposite effect. The color tends to fade into the background and suggests space. This corresponds with the emotions with which blue is associated: coolness, distance, space, grandeur. But blue can also be an ominous color when it suggests the night. All colors give a diversity of associations. Also, contrasts between colors can emphasize controversy of the content. The saturation of the color is also important: the full color versus the pastel tint.

TECHNIQUE AS EXPRESSION

Photographic technique consists of:

- 1. Choice of film.**
- 2. Size of the negative.**
- 3. Technique of printing.**
- 4. Focal sharpness.**
- 5. Depth of field.**

6. Lack of sharpness due to movement.

Rough grain can give the picture an impressionist flame of unsharpness. At the other end of the spectrum is ultimate sharpness, connoting the power of the conviction of realism. There are different procedures: kalotype, cyanotype, the platinaprint, the gumprint and the heliogravure. A lot of this technique stems from the nineteenth century. Because photography traditionally represents reality, the possibilities for personal expression are more limited than in other art forms. Special techniques therefore become more valuable. With the digitization suddenly we get an endless variety of expressive techniques, which also increase the chance for 'kitsch' images.

IV. THE FACTOR TIME

THE MOMENT FIXED

Photography freezes moments. Photography, more than any other medium, makes us realize that time is a linear proposition: a straight line, on which a dot is moving. A picture is also always an impression of the past and never of the present - even in a polaroid picture - because the moment in which we look at a picture is always later. The decisive moment is important for photographers who are dependent on events. One who controls everything can wait until the shot is ready, but even for him everything depends on one instant. Only digitization can change this by addition or subtraction from the original picture thus altering the "moment".

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

The most basic relationship photography has with time is the one with the event. The conserving characteristic of photography is essential for photojournalists. The "decisive moment" presumes that a photographer has chosen the moment which is important for him to tell his story. In the moment the picture is taken the photographer is not only registering history but also his vision of the event, and with the later he is expressing himself.

RETARDED MOMENT

If the event is absent in the photograph, a totally different relation with time arises. We see this in still life, architectural pictures and landscapes: permanent things. The photograph seems to portray a 'slow change', because as permanent things form part of history, so are they part of the change. The decisive moment doesn't play a role here: even after a day the building, the trees and the vase are still there. This form of 'non-moment' brings the photograph closer to the expression of timelessness, still growth and 'duration'. In directed images, photography has freed itself from the theory of the decisive moment, because the situation itself is created in front of

the camera. But nevertheless the moment the picture is taken is always, in one way or another, essential. In practice, it seems that the moment in which an image originates will never come back in the same form.

MOVEMENT AND CHANGE

In a sequence, time is represented in the form of space: pictures are placed next to each other. A means to imagine altering processes in several pictures is to use no depth of field which is caused by long shutter times. In (purposely) not sharp pictures we get the feeling of movement as if we look at a series of moments.

4. THE LOCATION AS INDICATOR: CONTEXT

THE LOVER AND THE PASSPORT PICTURE

A picture must be shown somewhere, and that place is in itself an indicator of context. In a passport, a passport photo has an unambiguous function for a customs official. It serves clearly to identify the person. If the same person gives his or her picture to a lover, the function (and also the connotation) will immediately change. We can also place a text with or within the picture. An associative link can be made between pictures by putting them together in one frame: above or underneath, to the left or right from each other. Photography can be linked with other disciplines such as painting, graphics, drawing, sculpture and spatial installations. When we speak about the context in a broader sense we refer to the environment of a museum, a newspaper or even the street. Every place or medium also has a specific code, which refers to the target group. If we look on an even larger scale, we see that the production or – presentation of every image appears in a specific ideology, which is linked to time and culture.

I. RELATIVE DIALOGUE

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PICTURE ALBUM

If holiday pictures are classified in chronological order, two pictures next to each other tell us that they have been taken in succession. At least, this is our interpretation of them. The pictures can also be arranged in different ways, for instance by theme or event. Every image has an irrevocable relationship with another image, in the way that words in a sentence form connections with each other. Sometimes, the mutual relationship between two pictures is implicit. Documentary photographers often present their work as a picture series. The story, thus the subject, is the connecting element. A special form is the sequence, in which the pictures are placed according to a fixed principle after each other. There's a difference between pictures that are meant to be put together (as in

an collected oeuvre) and a photo work in which several pictures together form one coherent whole. By adding pictures to each other, we create the same linear structure as in language. Two or more pictures can form a sentence. By presenting several images next to each other, we create the possibility of visualizing complex ideas.

THE PHOTO SERIES

The narrative element in detachable pictures is often difficult to imagine. The imagery of events or stories requires a series of pictures, placed together. A photo series, a photographic story (if made as a documentary), doesn't necessarily have a chronological connection, but exhibits a certain dramatic unity of place and time. The pictures in a photo series often show an image of a subject from different moments and places. The mutual relationship between the pictures in a series is therefore not bound by a rigid scheme. Each of them shows moments which give a total image of a place or a situation.

In documentary photography the narrative series originated in the thirties, when the photo-essay in illustrated magazines first appeared. People could see stories from other, often distant countries, in magazines. In the sixties, illustrated magazines were rivaled by television, signaling the end of the glorious photo-essay.

THE PHOTO SEQUENCE

In a sequence, the arrangement of the images is much stricter and the order in which they are viewed plays a crucial role. In a sequence the omission of a single image destroys the sequence's integrity. The order may be arranged according to different principles, of which time and space are the most important ones. The sequence often looks like a film, in which images succeed each other over small time spans, but this need not necessarily be so. Not only are there different principles of ordering images, there are also different ways of assembling them. A good example is the picture combination, in which pictures are taken at different moments but when put together, form a cubist tableau. In conceptual photography the sequence is frequently used, because in this way an analytical application of images is possible. The sequence is an important form of medium research.

THE ASSOCIATIVE COMBINATION

The relationship of the pictures to one another is determined by a theme or an idea, implicitly present in the images. The associative combination is much more open than a series or a sequence. The meaning to be ascribed to a photo combination has many more layers. Photo combinations never give information but always ask questions. A variation of the photo combination is the photo collage. (Associative) photo combinations or photo collages are rarely

applied in documentary photography (where there are possibilities for them), but they are applied in several forms of autonomous and conceptual photography.

II. IMAGE AND LANGUAGE

MUTUAL COMPLETION

In various situations there is a combination of photography and text. We describe pictures, give them titles and frequently use them in communication, where text plays a large part. Advertising, for instance, has a keen way of relating pictures to text. In newspapers and magazines, pictures are always combined with text. The clearest relationship is seen in a subtitle or caption (which often directly explains the picture), or when the picture illustrates an article. In amateur photography, the title of a picture often has a superfluous tautology: the title says exactly what is already present in the picture. In photographic works of art we see text and image put together in a way, which demands more effort on the part of the observer. Research has proven that we use different sides of our brains for text and images. For language the analytical side, and for the image the intuitive side. Photography and language can complement each other perfectly. Therefore, the obsessive separation of the image (sacred) and the language (banal) insisted upon by some critics, can seem exaggerated. In our culture it is language, with its abstract possibilities, which is the most dominant form of communication, despite the presence of images. Probably the most interesting way of using language and image is to encourage the observer to make a connection between looking, thinking, sense and sensibility.

THE ADDED VALUE

Because photography and language are complementary in medium and information, a combination of both elements can give added value and since they also complement each other in the transferal of information, the same may be said to be true. The most common form of parallel information can be found in journalism. The literary complement of the picture is the subtitle. This combination also occurs in free photography, in the cooperation of a poet and a photographer for instance. The added value of text and image is only interesting when both keep their autonomy. Both photography and language have their own eloquence and therefore, even when they are parallel, have to be chosen for their merit: the directness and the clearness of the image and the narrative power of the language.

TO CREATE A FIELD OF TENSION

When picture and text retain their autonomy, the relationship creates tension. This is different from the contrast between text and image. What is visible in a picture need not be confirmed by the text and what we read. We don't look back in a picture. With the contrast between text and image no information is given, but there are questions asked (about reality, perception and photography). In autonomous photography, and especially conceptual photography, creating a problem is not unusual. In documentaries we see research into the possibilities of image/text relationships.

A TENDENTIOUS TEXT

A text in the vicinity of a picture assumes an indicative function. This is familiar from newspaper subtitling and magazine advertising. A text can influence tendentiously the interpretation of a picture. A portrait looks totally different when the subtitle says that the subject has been sentenced to death. When the text is included in the picture, it acquires an expressive value. The text is then meant not to only steer the connotation of the picture, but the graphic form of the characters and their presentation are of equal importance.

III. PHOTOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

THE SPACE AROUND A PICTURE

How would a picture from a newspaper look in a museum? The picture in the newspaper is especially focused on news and information, imaginative power being in second place. Hanging in the museum deprives the picture of its news value and transmutes it into art. The museum visitor is more alert to style, is not expecting advertising billboards and is tempted to believe the authenticity of the newspaper picture. Lately we see the codes are shifting. When musea and galleries show documentary photography, the question is if the code of art is being broken, because documentary photography can of course also be seen as autonomous art.

THE PICTURE AND MASSMEDIA

Some people predict the end of documentary photography due to the influence of television. Until now this has not been very serious. It merely changed the role and the form of photo-journalism. The importance of photography in printed form hasn't diminished. Photo-journalism and mass media belong together and, for a documentary photographer, publication is the most important way of getting his work exposed. The newspaper has a journalistic code. A photograph, placed next to an article, is primarily read as a picture, in which the transfer of

information about the news is central. Aspects such as formal beauty play a part but only as a vehicle for information. The photograph implies a certain degree of 'truth'. A picture on the front page of a newspaper is considered by the reader to be news. He believes that the event in the picture has really occurred. The picture is after all the convincing proof. Everything in the image has 'truly happened' and can have an enormous impact on public opinion. This gives the media (and indirectly the photographers) great power and therefore responsibility. They can use photography to direct opinion, and that's what they are actually doing. The mass media don't bring objective truth but rather interpretations of reality. Such interpretations strongly depend on the reputation of the newspaper or the magazine. An important aspect, of course, is the direct influence of the article or the subtext. This largely determines how we look at the picture. Therefore, there is a struggle between the picture and the text. Quality magazines choose pictures, which require the observer to think rather than simply be informed, pictures in which the photographer gives his personal interpretation.

THE EXHIBITION

In an educative exhibition photography plays an informative role, whereas in a one man exhibition in a museum the artistic power of someone's work is the main topic. For the photographer an exhibition is the best way to show the quality of his work completely. An exhibition can be compared with 'live' music, while a publication looks more like a soundtrack. The under-lying code is one of autonomous art. Autonomous art feeds our need for aesthetics, is an authentic creation, is loose from actuality, transgresses borders, has a philosophical function and in no way excludes (political) engagement. A picture in a museum is isolated from its social context in contrast with a picture in a newspaper. Nevertheless, documentary photography is more and more exhibited. It is increasingly taken seriously as autonomous work by photographers as well as by curators. The position of autonomous photography in relation to the visual arts has experienced a similar emancipation. It is recognized as a mature discipline, with its own specific image language.

OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES

Advertising discovered long ago the domain of the street. Big billboards arise along highways and in the city to attract attention to new products. In free photography this phenomenon hardly exists. The characteristic of "another" context than the known cultural places, make those pictures not expected. Billboards are for publicity. The picture on a billboard provides publicity for a product. We also see a side effect, namely the democratization of opinion. If the public sees photography in public spaces, it seems to censor the

works here and there, by destruction, graffiti or obliteration. Images that don't fit a specific opinion seem to have a vulnerable position on the street. Proof that in photography the border between art, morality and politics is very thin.

5. THE INTENTION AS STARTING POINT: FUNCTION

OPINIONS ABOUT THE MEDIUM PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography is a medium, in which various aims can be reached. Why do you want to communicate through photography, and with what intention do you make a picture? The intention of the photograph will be reflected in its function. In every function the vision plays a certain part, although this is not implicit. In practice we can distinguish between different functions.

Almost everybody knows from his own experience the use of private photography to register life's little events in order to preserve memories.

Another example is to be seen daily in newspapers and magazines, namely pictures which are used in publicity. In publicity photography the reality is 'created'. This kind of photography doesn't use the medium to memorize a truly lived moment, but as a visual seducer which promises (delicious) moments in the future. There are other functions, for instance medical photography, which has a strictly scientific function, or illustrative photography, which is used to illustrate magazines, covers, annuals and such in an attractive way. In the history of photography we see two main streams. The most important contrast exists between documentary photography and autonomous photography. Documentary photography strives to represent reality like it is, to give information in a political and social context. Autonomous photography doesn't want to portray the visible world, but the inner world of the artist. But we can also make a division in three aspects:

1. **Documentary photography:** photography which registers reality.
2. **Autonomous photography:** photography as fantasy.
3. **Analytical photography:** photography as construction.

THE REALITY BEHIND THE IMAGE

Documentary photography takes the medium as a window on reality. Of course this is a colorful and subjective window, but the reality behind the image is the leitmotiv. In photography what has the real world as a subject, we can distinguish

1. **Landscape.**
2. **Architecture.**

3. Portrait.

4. Reporting.

A specific form of documentary photography is social photography, which we see often in reporting. The core of social photography is the involvement of the photographer with his social context, and the wish to represent this in photographic images. Social photography consequently has an important ethical aspect. The aesthetics in this case play no main part, but the form nevertheless remains very important. The photographic beauty of a social picture can therefore lead to a complicated discrepancy: to enjoy a beautiful picture, while its content is horrifying.

THE FANTASY SPEAKING

Autonomous photography doesn't consider photography as a representation of reality, but more as a representation of fantasy. It wants to use photography as a mirror of the soul. Even in the nineteenth century discomfort existed among artists concerning the realistic character of photography. They sometimes made 'fantastic' pictures, by printing several layers on top of each other or by editing them into each other. Or they deliberately made the image not sharp by employing special printing techniques (like the gum print). Recently trends in staged photography have purposely kept the image very realistic.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS ANALYSIS

Conceptual photography considers the picture as a construction of reality. The picture never exactly represents reality because that's impossible. A picture itself can not show or imagine a single thought. In conceptual photography a scala of 'grammatical' forms has been developed to fulfill this task. Conceptual photography exploits the communicative possibilities of photography in a broader sense. Collages, photo combinations, sequences and combinations of photography and text are all used. An important theme of conceptual photography is the research into the medium itself. What influence has photography had on our way of seeing? By showing how photography represents the world, it can be clear where 'unreality' sneaks into the image. This creates an opening for translating ones own vision or idea into photographic images.

6. TO STUDY IN DEPTH A WAY OF WORKING: GENRE

TO CHOOSE THE GENRE AS THEME

If the subject belongs to a specific group, we speak about a genre. In practice we can divide many pictures into four main genres:

1. Portrait.

2. Reporting.

3. Landscape.

4. Still life.

We can consider the genre as a work form with regard to content, in which a theme can be displayed to best effect. The choice of genre depends on two crucial things: what you want to show, and how you want to express it.

BEYOND RESEMBLANCE: THE PORTRAIT

An interesting photographic portrait contains a certain extra value that goes beyond the primary demand of resemblance. A good portrait shows more than an image of an individual. It also shows age and maybe his mood. Social position may be visible in some details. A portrait may also extend beyond a subject, showing an area or a culture. A portrait may indirectly show the condition of a group or a population. We distinguish:

1. The individual portrait.

2. The social portrait.

3. The subjective portrait.

Individual portraits give an image of a person, whom we don't yet know or which confirms what we may already know. Such a portrait often has the extra function of a 'character sketch', although character cannot actually be captured in a picture. The photographer tries to show the portrayed person as much as possible, as himself. The social portrait directs the viewer's attention to the background of a specific group of people. The individuality of the portrayed person is often lost in anonymity, because his name, profession or circumstances are not known.

Actually, the border between documentary registering and taking photographs with a point of view is very vague. The photographer is never a passive recorder and he can't bring his unbridled fantasy into an image.

Important elements that give meaning to a portrait are:

1. Look.

2. Pose.

3. Background.

4. Necessary objects.

In the look and the pose, feelings and moods can be expressed. Background and objects are symbols of society and culture.

DOCUMENTS OF LIFE: THE REPORT

The documentary is a genre which can be elaborated in different ways and with different intentions. We make a distinction between three different kinds of reporting:

1. The involved report.

2. The personal report.

3. The constructed report.

Involved reporting is often a reaction to an ethical conscious, i.e., that social problems have to be shown to the 'masses'. Such photos spread by the mass media, influence public opinion.

The leitmotiv of the personal report is the expression of subjective experience of facets of society. The personal report is a reaction to the problem of engagement. A personal report doesn't depart from a subjective experience of relationships in society, but shows them explicitly, in the choice of content as well as in the form. The constructed report departs from daily reality as a given, but it stages situations from reality, which in turn represent reality.

In the journalistic photography, important signs are:

- 1. Location.**
- 2. Moment.**
- 3. Point of view.**

The choice of moment can determine the whole story. By the point of view, the photographer can emphasize his personal vision.

THE CONTEXT IN SIGHT: THE LANDSCAPE

By landscape we mean photography which is focused on town and country planning. Another more technical term is topographical photography. The Greek word 'topos' means place. Topographical photography is about places, regions, and spots: everything surrounding us. Urban surrounding (or urban landscape) now belongs more emphatically to landscape photography than in former days. Landscape photography can be used in different ways. We distinguish:

- 1. Personal landscape.**
- 2. Critical landscape.**
- 3. Conceptual landscape.**

In personal landscape, the photographer tries to create in an image the link between human beings and nature. This form of landscape does not try to show country planning as it is, but rather to create a personal image. The landscape can hereby be registered in a pure and unspoiled state. Nature represents the pure world, the opposite of the cultural world which we have created around us.

Critical landscape photography does not focus on unspoiled nature, but on the regions which have been changed drastically by the human being. The critical landscape also (or especially) registers so-called ugly things, like lampposts, electricity-masts and factories. The emphasis is on the way the 'natural landscape' is effected by the human being.

Conceptual photography doesn't represent the landscape as a final product, but uses topographical images to portray the landscape and its living surroundings. Photographers who work conceptually, are not interested in photography as pure portrayal without manipulation. Sequences and photo collages are better equipped to represent complex ideas.

The important form signs in landscape are:

- 1. Light.**

2. Point of view.

3. Perspective.

THINGS ARE SILENT: STILL LIFE

If we look for a general definition of still life, we arrive at something like 'an image of objects', in which the sort of object can vary. A picture of an interior is not considered as a still life, while a picture of a vase is. This explicitly implies a limit in still life determined by size of subject. The intention is understood by studying the context in which a picture is placed. Many still lifes are made for advertising. They show products (or associations with them), which trigger our lust to buy. If we look for the essential character of this genre, we notice that in all still life we are confronted with an intimacy with 'dead' things, as though they might reveal something by their silence which would otherwise be invisible. We distinguish three kinds of still life:

1. Formal still life.

2. Metaphoric still life.

3. Documentary still life.

In the formal still life the emphasis is on form and expression of material. Aesthetics is very important, but no goal in itself. Beauty is a vehicle to treat form and material. In formal still lifes one tries to bring out the essential character of the object, without looking for possible references.

In the metaphorical still life, the psychological aspect is emphasized. Here, metaphorical meaning plays the biggest part. This meaning is often in the psychological domain and has to do with fantasy and the subconscious. The attention shifts from the objects themselves to what they mean. A stone is nothing but a stone, but in a metaphorical still life, it may be a model for power or the hardness of nature.

Most forms of still life belong to autonomous photography: photography which refers to the inner world of the photographer. In documentary photography, however, there are social references. The documentary still life refers to the social world. Objects can refer to the owner or, symbolically, to a way of life, a social status, or to an entire culture. The expression of the still life is determined to a large extent by the photographer himself, through choice of motive, composition and light.

7. THE PERSONAL HANDWRITING: STYLE

OBSTINATE CHOICES

The point of view of the photographer is the technical image that the camera supplies. But we have seen in the former chapters that the photographer has sufficient means to create a personal image. Therefore, in photography, just as in other art forms, we can define the term style as an individual language of image consisting of a

combination of several returning elements: technique, form and content. Style is a consequent and recurrent application of the personal use of tools to create an image. Because of this a personal radiation occurs: the handwriting of the photographer.

When a special form has been used for many years, a certain degree of wearing out can occur. Pictures that have been made in a known style therefore acquire an undesired side effect: as an observer you no longer see the content of the picture, but are distracted by the already familiar form. The 'unexpected' is an important element which creates movement in every art form, also photography. New forms of style in photography can arouse the curiosity of the observer and show the same subjects with a renewed freshness. Of course, the phenomenon 'trend' creeps in here. What are the ingredients of style? A style can be recognized by different aspects of the photographic language: technique, design, treatment of the subject and presentation (in a context). Most styles are based on design. In the fifties, photography had a harmonious composition of image, in which you could find back the "golden section. In the seventies this changed drastically. Photographers preferred more expressive compositions, using diagonal lines and a-symmetrical planes. In a picture a code is built in by technique, design and content, which changes with every cultural era. One of the conventions we see in portrait photography of the nineteenth century, is the way people posed. Spontaneity didn't exist, due to technical reasons (long shutter times) and the morals of the time.

Photography has experienced a long history of styles and ideas. Nineteenth century pictorialism, new pragmatism (straight photography), surrealism and the conceptual photography are examples of this. There is always an intellectual or social décor, including art, science, philosophy and politics, that is hidden within a style. The pictorialists wanted photography to look like the much more highly regarded art of painting (photography was, after all, only mechanical). The pictorialists wanted to deal with Beauty. The pictorialists came from a social upper class, which had seen many social values change. As a reaction to the advancing democratization of the masses, they wanted in photography to retain the traditional merits of the art.

As a reaction to this, New Photography was looking for the highest degree of sharpness, an objectivity of registering, new points of view, rigid form. They photographed by preference industrial or abstract subjects. The picture was changed by the new photographers from beauty into experiment, from tradition into avant-garde and from looking like a painting into pure photographic documentation. The backgrounds of New Photography were the new élan in art and society: the rise of new techniques and industries, growth of cities, political changes and avant-garde art styles. The new photographers belonged to a class of artists and revolutionaries, which left tradition behind them and searched for confrontations with the public, in

magazines for instance. New Photography has created the foundation for many forms of contemporary photography.

Present styles are rather diffuse and not easy to identify by name: the phenomenon of postmodernism embraces a wide variety of styles. Modern photographers have developed a contemporary language, which shows old themes in a new light or formulates new themes in their own way.

THE EMPTINESS OF THE IMAGE

In documentary photography, we see different reactions to the social reporting of the seventies. At the end of the eighties, under the influence of diverse cultural trends (such as postmodernism and a reaction to the fact that social photography could not change the world anymore) a lot of photographers started to look for a form that had more distance. The subjects became less loaded and the form became emptier. The "distant eye" became part of the photographic style. This style is characterized by sober use of image, a less personal approach to the subject and an optimal use of the medium's technical possibilities.

IMAGININGS OF THE MIND

A photographic style that occurs in several variants is a form of posed photography, in which the persons in the picture reflect the ideas of the creator. This approach serves the fantasy of the photographer: a photographic variable of expressionism. In such photography we find expressionistic elements not in the elaboration of the image (or in its composition) but rather in the treatment of the subject.

A LITERARY REALITY

The constructed photo-report often departs from existing social reality, but doesn't photograph it directly. Instead of that, certain situations are set up like theatre stills and then photographed. The reason to fabricate is two fold: on the one hand this has to do with the crisis of engagement into which documentary photography has fallen, and on the other hand the need to experiment with form plays a part, in the way of working as well as in the presentation.

Documentary photography undergoes more and more cross-pollination with autonomous photography. The border between staging and reality becomes more and more vague.

THE PARADOX WITH A FALSE BOTTOM

Photography and painting have always influenced each other. In mixed media, both disciplines are combined with each other in one work. Pictures can be painted or can be part of works from the visual arts. By the application of painting technique, photography can be removed from its pedestal of 'the truth'. One can put the reality of a picture into perspective with painting. That can set different processes in motion. The picture starts to look more real than it is, thereby

assuming the power of a documentary, similarly the realness can be put into perspective by the influence of the medium on the illusion. Truth, the real power of photography, becomes paradoxical. The more real it seems, the bigger the illusion.

THE PHOTOCOPY AS ART

The possibilities of a color copy machine seem surprising when applied to objects or people. The style of the color copy is strongly determined by the characteristics of the machine. In the first place, the glass plate plays a big role: everything on top of it will be squeezed. Secondly the different color layers, that make a copy, create shifts in color: an object becomes half red and half blue. In the third place, everything is registered in actual size and in great detail. The latter is an aspect in which technique meets the attitude of present-day photographers: the picture as document.

THE WORLD AS A THEATRE

Photographic reporting has suffered recently from inflation. The classical form, namely 35 mm and black & white, has been familiar for many years via newspapers and magazines. Because this massive presence is so overwhelming and intensive, this style of photography has become prevalent.

This has not only to do with the form of the report, but also with the subjects and themes. Because social problems, which are the domain of reporting, have become increasingly diffuse, it has become more and more difficult to deliver photographic judgements. Some current forms of reporting are recognizable by their milder, opener choice of subjects and by formal elements which tone down the degree of reality. The clear relationship to reality is relaxed, making place for a vision in which surrealist elements are not out of place.

8. THE POSITION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER: AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

PHOTOGRAPHY AS COMMUNICATION

The tendency to speak in terms of a 'beautiful' or 'ugly' picture stems from a lack of adequate language. How different discussions would be if we were to question, for instance, whether or not a picture is important? In that case the photograph is not seen in terms of aesthetics, discussion of which can be misleading. The importance of a picture is measured by the communicative value it has.

Communication is dependent on the interaction between sender, medium and receiver. The sender uses a specific medium to send the receiver a message. In our case, the sender is the photographer who

brings his message across to the observer through photography. The message may be anything from a journalistic report to intimate poetry. We have seen that the photographic message is not always clear due to the openness of photographic portrayal. In addition the context influences the interpretation of the observer. At the moment a picture is published (with the exception of family snapshots) photography becomes a form of mass-communication. The reproduction of photographs has given photography enormous reach and impact. Due to mass distribution photography has great influence on our way of perceiving, judging and thinking. Sometimes pictures even replace reality. Countries we have never been to are familiar to us, because we have seen so many pictures of them. And our own pictures may even tend to push aside memories. The reality around us becomes more and more an image of reality: the virtual reality. Photography is probably the most important medium in our present image culture. In large part it owes this characteristic, that distinguishes it from the traditional visual arts, to: its resemblance to reality. Therefore it can be used in many ways. It is a scientific medium, can be used in advertising, illustrates schoolbooks, plays a part in the identification of people, and may be used to influence opinion and political conviction.

Photography has come to fix or determine our image, for instance, the relationship between the sexes, between races and between different cultures.

The world, as registered in a picture, is not neutral: it acquires from the moment of exposure, a psychological, social and political significance according to how it is presented. Because a picture reaches us via a specific channel, it carries with it a specific ideology. Publicity makers may have convictions other than artists, men will have different convictions than women. A simple family picture is also made with a certain ideology, often the one of the "happy family". Photography is controlled by a network of personal emotions, cultural values and social interests. It can happen that while you are riding your bicycle, passing a billboard, you might encounter a horrible war picture recommending clothes of a certain brand. The photographer must therefore be conscious of the place his picture will have in the social context. He will also have to think about his own role as communicator. Where does he stand in the totality of the cultural and social constellation?

We formulate three characteristics of the photographer:

- 1. Authenticity.**
- 2. Persuasiveness.**
- 3. Integrity.**

These characteristics relate to authorship, the medium of photography and the social context. We view these characteristics in the light of cultural pluralism, the digitizing of photography and the rationalization of society. The intention is not to give solutions. We can only ask

questions and draw attention to problems. Each photographers must formulate his own answer.

AUTHENTICITY AND PLURALISM

We see more and more pictures around us, while one trend after another disappears. Therefore it's becoming more and more difficult for a photographer to form his own image, let alone to create his own style. In the (modernistic) tradition there is an unwritten law that demands that every artist be original, practicing his own style. The artist, and the photographer too, have to be innovative and not just follow tradition. He must continually create a new image language. But who ever sees the enormous number of images that art and mass culture present to us on a daily basis, must wonder if originality can still exist? Aren't we continuously busy with retaking and 'restyling' existing images? Does not authorship of a unique become a fiction? The criticism of postmodernism in traditional photography is that there is a myth created from the eternal urge to innovate. New and original should, by definition, be better than traditional and tried and tested. Instead of this a pluralism of styles and trends has been followed. We also find this back in recent photography.

Is originality not possible anymore?

Maybe it's meaningful to make a difference between original and authentic. The originality of a photographer says nothing about his authenticity. The latter originates from the measure to which someone is authentic, consequently standing close to himself and working from that perspective, while originality shows a clear new style form.

A photographer can therefore be 'original' without being really authentic. On the other hand a photographer can be authentic and make pictures in a known style. In the postmodern world the value of a photographer is not just measured in the traditional terms of modernistic tradition, in which the artist was seen as the eternal innovator of style.

Style-pluralism is not the only issue. The opinions about the function of photography are divers, very different and also confusing.

Photography is for the one a personal quest for the ultimate image, but for the other it is a critical instrument.

One can look at photography from the point of view of psychoanalysis, in which expression has a central place, and compare the picture with a dream: the picture showing the subconscious of the creator. One can approach photography semiologically, where one tries to discover the logic in the image. Or photography can be considered for its social function. In this case, one must question the value of emancipation in photography. These philosophical angles are not mutually exclusive, complementary: each examines a specific characteristic of the photographer. Is he important as an individual, as a communicator or as a social person? Can he claim to autonomy as creator, or must he be placed in a network of interests?

One can question whether or not authenticity might also be fictional, when placed in a social context. An independent subject, which by itself expresses its own world (of feelings) does not exist. The autonomy of the individual seems a untenable position. The individual is, in a cultural sense, a product of his environment. So much so that his individuality is sometimes at stake. Because our cultural environment is so determined by the mass media, the individual recedes more and more into the background.

The multitude of themes are reduced to archetypical primaevial themes, all lying between the extremes of love and death. But every period has its own problems regarding primaevial themes asking for a contemporary interpretation. Therefore, there will always be space for an authentic reaction. In the light of the emotional fading away of the individual, it seems a political action, for the photographer to demand his own aesthetic space in a network of functional interests. Personal expression requires examination of one's own position.

Personal photography will always originate from an inner need to create, with all the means offered by the medium, one's own image, one that is not only autarchic, but also capable of reaching the observer. A communication that stems from an inner reflection on the world, will also (in the confusion of styles and trends) continue to reach its target. Authenticity can therefore also appear from a highly personal synthesis, created by a photographer or artist from existing styles, including image quotations and references to known images, as a collage in our image culture.

THE ENCODED TRUTH

Where are the limits of the communicative possibilities of photography?

Can the photographer actually determine the final meaning of a picture?

This has, first of all, to do with the openness of focal points playing a part in photography. Secondly, this will strongly depend on the picture itself. Does the photographer take a picture that is easy to understand, or does he create an image which requires a lot to guesswork? We can distinguish the difference between an unambiguous picture and an open (ambiguous) picture. An unambiguous picture has a simple and direct relationship between the focal points and the connotation. An open picture has more layers, can be 'read' in different ways, the focal elements therefore evoking several connotations. An open picture is richer and opener, but at the same time also vaguer and maybe less reliable. A scientist who makes a medical picture will strive for unambiguous pictures, but an artist will strive for the complexity of the image. Between those two extremes lies a fragile balance. It is important for the photographer to understand the culture in which his images are read. When he uses a style, thus a code that has no relationship (anymore) to the receiver, his images can lose their significance.

The basis of persuasiveness in photography is the way in which the image is created: as a reproduction of reality. Every interpretation has the aspect of reality as a starting point. A radical change in this is caused by the digitization, already effecting strong consequences for the medium.

The 'degree of truthfulness' will not only become more complex, but also the total experience of photography will undergo a large change. What changes, is the possibility to manipulate endlessly without this being visible. The photographic image doesn't have to refer anymore to reality, but can be a digital collage. Expression in photography will be without limits: every arbitrary image element can be bound with any other arbitrary image element. Now the elements will become more important, because they tell the story: they will directly refer to the concept of the photographer, just as in painting.

The technical detachment of photography and reality is connected to a broad cultural phenomenon. Digitalization arises in an age in which the idea "truth", in all fields of science, politics and philosophy, is relativized. Photography can let go of reality at the moment the ideology of objectivity is abandoned. It is striking that in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when photography was invented, it showed a similar coherence with its time: the wish to represent reality was connected to the rise of exact science and the technology, thus directly with the wish to objectify.

While chemical photography derived its persuasiveness from its documentary power, the receiver of the photographic message, in the digital age, takes the illusion as standard and does not believe in pictures that look true to life. Even if we doubted the objectivity in traditional photography, we always departed from reality in front of the lens.

Who can guarantee that we are looking at a non-manipulated, 'real' news picture?

Quality magazines don't want to burn their fingers with digital manipulation which may ruin the bond of confidence with their readers. Probably new terms will be invented to determine whether it is a real picture or a manipulated illustration.

Digitalization reveals that the photographic truth is encoded.

Communication by photography seems to be based on ideas about what we take for real, realistic and true. The notion of the truth of the picture will be weakened by digitalization. A new notion of truth is appearing, in which not only the visible, but also the thinkable, perceptible, and the unconscious play a part. For autonomous photography or publicity photography, digitalization gives more possibilities for expression. The observer already knew that the publicity photography was staged and was therefore an imagine of an illusionary world. But also here persuasiveness is limited by the cultural recognition of the evoked fantasy world.

THE PHOTGRAPHIC LOOK

The third characteristic expected of the photographer, integrity, has to do with the relation between his work and the society that surrounds him. The images a photographer makes will have to take a position, if he doesn't want to be doomed to meaningless solipsism. Photography is not free of values, just as science and politics are not. For a photojournalist, social and political integrity are natural givens. There are ethical problems having to do with the question of how far you can go with showing misery. Are you going to shock excessively, are you going to walk over dead bodies? Can you intervene in a situation to make it worse or make it seem more beautiful? In which magazines can you publish your pictures? These are questions with which a photojournalist must deal, often practical, but with a theoretical component in the background.

But it is the photojournalist who is chosen as the scapegoat. The social aspect of photography has become more and more discredited, partially because of the atrociousness of the news, partially because of the form of documentary reporting. To a large extent the ethical impasse has its cause in society itself. The major ideologies (such as Communism and Christianity) have vanished or lost their effect. They have made way for pluralism and the relativity of political differences of opinion. Taking pictures in the third world has been stigmatized as a 'victim photography', simply confirming the positions of the rich countries. The humanistic aspect received the most criticism: it didn't criticize the ideological structures, but only showed pitiful people and awakened charitable feelings in the observer. It seems as though photography is no longer capable of a relationship with society. Escapist forms of photography are the result from a feeling of impotence on the part of many photographers. But the theory of the great ideologies disappearance is blind to the deep ingrained presupposition of our own culture: the ideology of money as an expression of total rationalization in our society. We see the rationalization traverse all sections of our society, by which control and calculation, feasibility and economy seem to be the only applied norms. Private life is more and more detached from big power structures: the human being as individual is left to himself. The considerate society has no place anymore in this process: it is economically unwarranted. Western society has created a myth of progress and growth, of economic priority and scientific control. One of the photographic traps of the rationalization of our society is that social and psychological problems, that in the past could be easily recognized, have now become invisible. Real poverty is recognized by dirty clothes, but modern poverty has been visually hidden from the eye of the photographer. Many social problems are more subcutaneous than twenty to thirty years ago.

Rationality, with the economy as peak, has meanwhile colonized the whole world: even the third world prefers now sweet drinks, which are related to a bubbling life style. Many countries are more than ever dependent on a Western cultural pattern; they only lack the

flourishing economy. The political, economic and social problems of many countries around us, even those very close by, have not diminished, and they annoy by their persistence. But is our only choice an apathetic defense mechanism or relentless spreading of the misery of the world? In other words, do we have to photograph more dead bodies, preferably with their eyes open to the camera, or shall we plunge massively into healthy landscape, complete with sheep and birch tree?

The critical posture of photography is attentive to many other aspects that are the result of present culture, from lost sensuality to the threatened environment.

Must, or can, the photographer still maintain an ethical posture? As a social creature he can probably not avoid doing so. Photography as a medium has an important place in making people more sensitive to ethical awareness. Here we have to distinguish ethics from morality. The latter represents a system of rules and warnings that have often been invented by special interest groups. The search for your own presuppositions and your own "look", your own relationship with the world, is probably the most important part of photographic integrity. It should be clear that this is not restricted to photo journalism, but applies to all forms of photography.

