TRUTH IN PHOTOGRAPHY:
PERCEPTION, MYTH AND REALITY IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

By

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Photography was originally considered a way to objectively represent reality, completely untouched by the photographer's perspective. However, photographers manipulate their pictures in various ways, from choosing what to shoot to altering the resulting image through computer digitalization. The manipulation inherent to photography brings to light questions about the nature of truth. All art forms manipulate reality in order to reveal truths not apparent to the uncritical eye. Photography today is largely seen as a postmodern art form, and postmodernism states that truths do not necessarily last, but instead truths alter and shift with changes in culture. Modernism, however, states that some truths do last, and these truths reflect basic, universal conditions of humanity. These lasting truths are often expressed in mythic themes and archetypes. Science, journalism and art make use of the connection between myth and truth, most notably, in the mythic archetype of form: beauty. Scientific, news, artistic and

documentary photography all use the archetype of beauty as a connection to truth. Beauty, however, is based on the beliefs of a culture, and does not necessarily define truth. In the end, both postmodernism and modernism have their place in photographic philosophy. Understanding of photographic truth, like all other truths, depends on an understanding of culture, belief, history, and the universal aspects of human nature

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Many people see the phrase “Truth in Journalism” as an oxymoron these days. From such incidents as an NBC news crew blowing up a car to illustrate the dangers of a particular brand of automobile, to a reporter for the Boston Globe who admitted that she created sources in order to better tell a story, the public is left wondering what in journalism is really true and what is fabricated. This mistrust extends to the photographs used in news stories. With digital manipulation, for instance, photographs can be seamlessly altered to reflect whatever the photographers or editors wish to show. When the O.J. Simpson murder case was the biggest news story of the day, the picture of Simpson on *Time’s* cover had noticeably darker skin than the same mug shot picture featured on *Newsweek* or on other prominent news magazines (see fig. 1-1). When the public became aware of the altered photograph, *Time* justified the manipulation by calling the picture “cover art,” and therefore not subject to the same standards as straight news photographs. Adam Clayton Powell III wrote, “The editors argued that it was not unethical, because *Time* covers are art, not news, a

possible surprise to unsuspecting readers who thought they were looking at photographic reality."[1]

A news photograph is often not just an interesting picture used to highlight a story, sometimes it is a mode of storytelling that incorporates ideas of truth, reality, cultural value systems, and perception. This paper will discuss these issues, then, in order to come to a better understanding of the role of photography in society. In order to do so, I have read philosophical and scientific literature on aesthetics, photography, art, perception, truth, myth and reality. By researching these areas of thought, I hoped to come up with a coherent understanding of contemporary photographic philosophy. I also read works discussing the history of documentary photography, news journalism, and science journalism, and I looked at the viewpoints of established industry photographers, such as National Geographic and Magnum photographers. When you're focused on a topic you tend to see evidence of it everywhere, so some of my unrelated readings found their way into this paper as well.

The justification for conducting such research comes from my own frustration whenever reading criticism of photography. Most critics seem to come from one school of thought and use their critical works mainly to persuade others of their philosophy's validity. I find a lot of photographic criticism incomplete, disappointing, incoherent, or completely opposed to my own aesthetic ideas. I found that I often enjoyed the observations made by professional photographers who were relatively unschooled in philosophy, but their views of photography

[1] Adam Clayton III Powell, "Technology and the Death of Ethics (and the Possible Rise of the New Ethics)," Media Ethics 8 (1996): 1.

were more often than not inconsistent, contradictory, or vague. By studying the philosophical underpinnings of photographic criticism, such as defining truth as it applies to photography, I hoped to reach a clear vision of photographic philosophy that existed beyond the rhetoric. By researching such a broad array of topics, I hoped to find the similarities among them. Whatever they have in common, I assumed, must point toward a more unified and coherent system of thought than currently exists.

This study requires, then, a full understanding of modern philosophy, not just as it applies to aesthetics and photography. A serious limitation on this study is being able to reach this understanding in a limited time frame. The danger of overlooking key points of philosophy is great, and misunderstanding of other points poses a considerable risk as well.[2]

My research led me to see that in defining truth, philosophical camps were almost uniformly split between postmodernists, who believe that truth is socially constructed and ever-changing, and modernists, who believe in universal, unchanging truths. I believe I have found a way to make use of both theories, however. There are truths that change over time and according to culture; the process of scientific investigation proves there is no final answer, but rather there is a process of constant discovery. New information gives light to new theories. But there are also truths that last, because there are aspects of the human condition which remain constant. These lasting truths are often revealed in

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[2] I have, in fact, encountered such a problem in researching my topic: I discovered my own ideas of "the sublime" were not just misinformed, they were dead wrong! Luckily, a rereading of the literature and a re-evaluation of the theory led to far more interesting possibilities within my paper.

mythic archetypes and themes. Both theories are relevant to a discussion of photographic philosophy. Photographs tell both stories that have universal appeal and stories that reflect changing social values.

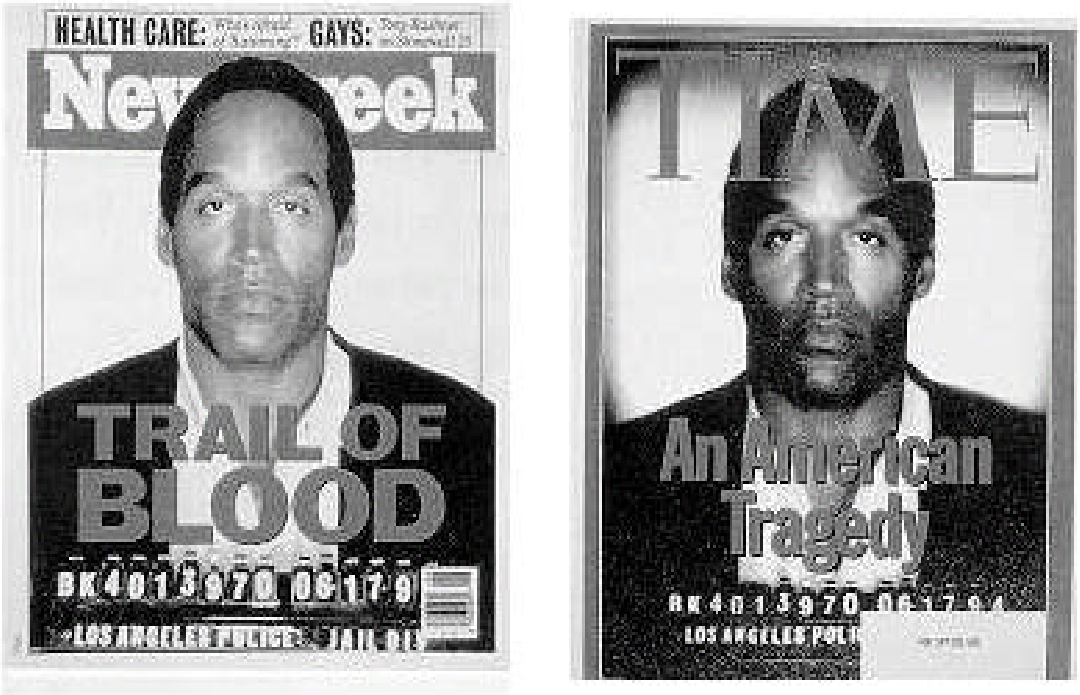

Figure 1-1: Cover art from June 27, 1994 editions of *Newsweek* and *Time* brought to light questions of photo manipulation practiced by the press. Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age. Ed. Hubertus V. Amelunyen, etal. (A project of Siemens Kulturprogramm and G+B Arts, 1996)

CHAPTER 2
PHOTOGRAPHY

A History of Manipulation

When photography was first introduced 150 years ago, it was seen as the perfect documentary medium because the mechanical nature of the medium ensured unadulterated, exact replicas of the subject matter. The technological advances of cameras and the subsequent development of photojournalism led to clearer, more realistic photos. For instance, rather than the stiff poses required by early, long-exposure cameras, lighter, transportable cameras allowed photojournalists to take unrehearsed snapshots. Historian Judith Gutman claims that, “for the first time the public saw photographs of bored ministers, ungainly postures, and cunning smiles behind cigar-smoking officials.”[3] (see fig. 2-1) Because photographs could expose the facts of life behind the façade, the public decided photographs were credible witnesses of reality. Photos told “the truth” by exposing people in an unrehearsed and candid manner. Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed enthusiastically, "Photography is distinguished by its immediacy, its authenticity, and the remarkable fact that its eye sees more than

[3] Judith Mara Gutman, “The Twin-Fired Engine: Photography’s First 150 Years,” Gannett Center Journal 4 (1990): 58.

the human eye. The camera shows everything."[4] Photography created a record of events that even courts of law embraced as indisputable fact.

Although many news photographers claim their photographs represent the undistorted truth, in actuality a great deal of manipulation goes into the production and publication of a photograph. One type of manipulation is the improvement of the film itself, to fix scratches or other flaws in the film. At *National Geographic*, for example, photographs are commonly altered to compensate for such problems. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins report:

> Some of these alterations are designed to "enhance, repair, and delete" – to take care of problems like scratches on film and lens flares. Others seek to compensate for the "compression effect" of the paper print, where size is smaller and a smaller range of bright to dark is available. Electronic color-correction devices allow them to "enhance contrast, add sparkle, and change the density range in order to brighten the picture, or occasionally produce a print that is better than the film."[5]

Another reason for this type of photo manipulation is to improve the subsequent degradation that occurs when representing three-dimensional reality in a two-dimensional photograph. The photo editors at *National Geographic*, for instance, "start from the proposition that film materials are "far from perfect in reproducing what was really there." Enhancement processes can, they say, create an image

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[4] Qtd. in In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers, Ed. William Manchester (New York: American Federation of the Arts in association with WW Norton & Co., 1989) 14.

that is closer to the pre-photographic reality than the photographic exposure itself.[6]

Another type of manipulation occurs during the picture-taking process. In creating a photograph, the photographer chooses the subject matter, composes the scene, and uses filters and other such tools to change the nature of the photograph. Art critic Geoffrey Batchen, while claiming that photography inherently involves the absence of truth, describes how the normal processes of preparing a news photograph for publication involves a great deal of manipulation:

> [T]raditional photographs - the ones our culture has always put so much trust in - have never been "true" in the first place. Photographers intervene in every photograph they make, whether by orchestrating or directly interfering in the scene being imaged; by selecting, cropping, excluding, and in other ways making pictorial choices as they take the photograph; by enhancing, suppressing, and cropping the finished print in the darkroom; and, finally, by adding captions and other contextual elements to their image to anchor some potential meanings and discourage others.[7]

So a photograph, although professing to depict truth, actually involves manipulation of both object and message. To say that photographs depict the

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[5]Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, Reading National Geographic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 81.
[6]Lutz and Collins 81.

[7]Geoffrey Batchen, "Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography," Aperture 136 (1994): 48.

truth is not correct; what they actually depict are slices of life selected and framed by the photographer. The photographer chooses what aspect of reality he wishes to represent both when he takes the picture, and when he readies it for publication. Even when a photographer tries to capture the scene precisely, he may miss representing the essence of the scene before him. "Photography, even of the most realistic type, can articulate truths even though facts may be wrong and conversely, can also be quite wrong as to the essence of a situation despite getting the facts right," writes Fred Ritchen. "This makes the conventional emphasis on photography as simple mechanical transcription appear even more shortsighted."[8] Manipulation in photography may therefore be *necessary* in order to represent the scene or subject as accurately as possible. Events do not always seem clear and self-explanatory in photographs, and without captions some photographs become decidedly ambiguous. Ironically, a photographer may be compelled to manipulate a photograph In order to represent the subject or scene as faithfully as possible.

Digital Imaging

Computer technology has been applied to photography, creating digital imaging and a new realm of ethical qualms. Because digital images can be seamlessly altered, there has been a great deal of hand wringing about the "evils" of practicing this type of photography.

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[8]Fred Ritchen, "What is Magnum?" In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers, Ed. William Manchester (New York: The American Federation of Arts in association with W.W. Norton & Company, 1989) 422.

In truth, digital imaging has simply forced everyone to acknowledge the inherently manipulative nature of photography and to understand that it never represented "truth" in the first place. Batchen says:

> Digitization abandons even the rhetoric of truth that has been an important part of photography's cultural success….newspapers have of course always manipulated their images in one way or another. The much-heralded advent of digital imaging simply means having to admit it to oneself and even, perhaps, to one's customers.[9]

The advent of digital imaging causes us to question and redefine the nature of the photographic visual medium, just as the invention of photography caused artists to re-evaluate the nature of painting. In technique, the difference between a photograph and a painting is easily seen. Paintings are based on lines drawn by hand, while photographs are a collection of microscopic particles exposed to light in much the same fashion that our eyes respond to light. Even the most realistic of paintings do not come close to the reality captured by the photograph. When photography first came on the scene 150 years ago, the artist Paul Delaroche exclaimed, "From this day on, painting is dead."[10] Painting did not die, however; instead, photography caused painters to redefine their standards and ideas of what constituted "art." Because photographs superceded painting in realistic depictions, Realism became outmoded and painters began

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[9] Batchen 48.
[10] William J. Mitchell, The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 1.

experimenting with different styles of representation, such as Cubism and Expressionism. Photography even instigated a revolutionary new movement within the art world: Impressionism, which was based upon photographic theories of light.

Digital imaging similarly redefines the representational nature of photography. James Enyeart, director of the George Eastman House, says that "it may be that digital imagery will liberate photography and reality from being questions of representation by sufficiently distorting the truth of both. Art, it seems, thrives wherever and whenever it is set free of expectations." [11]

Digital imaging actually differs from photography as much as photography differs from painting. Photographs are analogous, or continuous, representations of space with infinite spatial or tonal variations. Photographer Edward Weston described the analogous characteristics of photography:

> First there is the amazing precision of definition, especially in the recording of fine detail; and second, there is the unbroken sequence of infinitely subtle gradations from black to white. These two characteristics constitute the trademark of the photograph; they pertain to the mechanics of the process and cannot be duplicated by any work of the human hand.[12]

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[11]Qtd. in Truth and Fictions: A Journey From Documentary to Digital Photography, Pedro Meyer (New York: *Aperature* Foundation, Inc., 1995)

[12] Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," Encyclopedia of Photography 18 (Singer Communications Corp. *Reprinted in* Classic Essays on Photography, Ed. Alan Trachtenberg. Leete's Island Books, Inc., 1980) 172.

Digital images, on the other hand, are composed of discrete pixels. The images are encoded by dividing the picture into a Cartesian grid of cells. A limited range of integers determines the color or intensity of each cell. Fine details and curves are approximated to fit the square pattern of the grid cells, and tonal variations have definite values of gradation.

Enlargement of a photograph usually reveals more details, although the resulting blow-up is fuzzier or grainier than the original picture. A photographic negative has more detail than first meets the eye, and closer observation can reveal infinite variations of tone and form. Digital images, on the other hand, with precise gradients of spatial and tonal resolution, have fixed amounts of information. Enlargement of a digital image will ultimately reveal the grided microstructure of the image. Nothing new is revealed by further enlargement of a digital image – the pixels simply become larger squares of color.

There are an amazing variety of ways to manipulate digital images, and as computer programs become cheaper and more widespread, manipulation of images will become more common. Judgements about what is an acceptable degree of manipulation shift with changes in technology, in a publication's staff, and in photographer's purpose in creating a manipulation. There will always be those willing to distort visual images in hopes of distorting the truth. For instance, the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin removed the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky from a photograph taken on May 5, 1920, which showed Soviet President Vladimir Lenin giving a speech to the Russian people. Trotsky had become a political embarrassment, and was therefore "erased." During the

McCarthy era, a crude cut-and-paste photograph depicting U.S. Senator Millard Tydings conversing with communist leader Earl Browder may have hurt Tydings' chances in his run for office. Other such instances of photographic manipulation before the advent of digital imaging abound.[13]

Digital alteration techniques have already been used in documentary film. The German documentary *Crash 2030: Investigating a Catastrophe* (1994, directed by Joachim Friedrich) shows what would happen if global warming were to continue at present rates. Digitally generated images of water levels are integrated with normal film shots of the landscape to produce a visual image of the filmmaker's argument.[14] Documentary filmmaker Dai Vaughan identified one crucial difference that separates photography from all other art forms. If writers, painters or sculptors wish to document a horse, they need only the tools of their trade and their imaginations. Photographers, however, not only need the proper equipment and tools, they actually need a horse. Since the advent of digital photography, this distinction is no longer completely valid.

Just as people can lie with words, they can lie with pictures. Art historian Fred Ritchin notes of the ethical qualms the photo industry has about digital images:

> Saying, "the camera never lies" is as foolish as asserting that the computer always does. Just because words can be fictional does not require the outlawing of news articles; similarly with photographs. The initial clarification that is needed is the

[13] For these and other examples, see Mitchell, The Reconfigured Eye.
[14] Kilborn and Izod endnote #4.

> separation of one kind of communication from the other, properly labeled.[15]

In digital imaging, as in standard photography, writing, or conversation, we must depend on the integrity of the communicator while still maintaining a healthy dose of skepticism, so as not to be erroneously persuaded. Digital imaging is not "an evil," as described by some in the industry, but merely another tool at the photographer's disposal.

[15] Fred Ritchin, In Our Own Image: The Coming Revolution in Photography (New York: *Aperature* Foundation, Inc., 1990) 143.

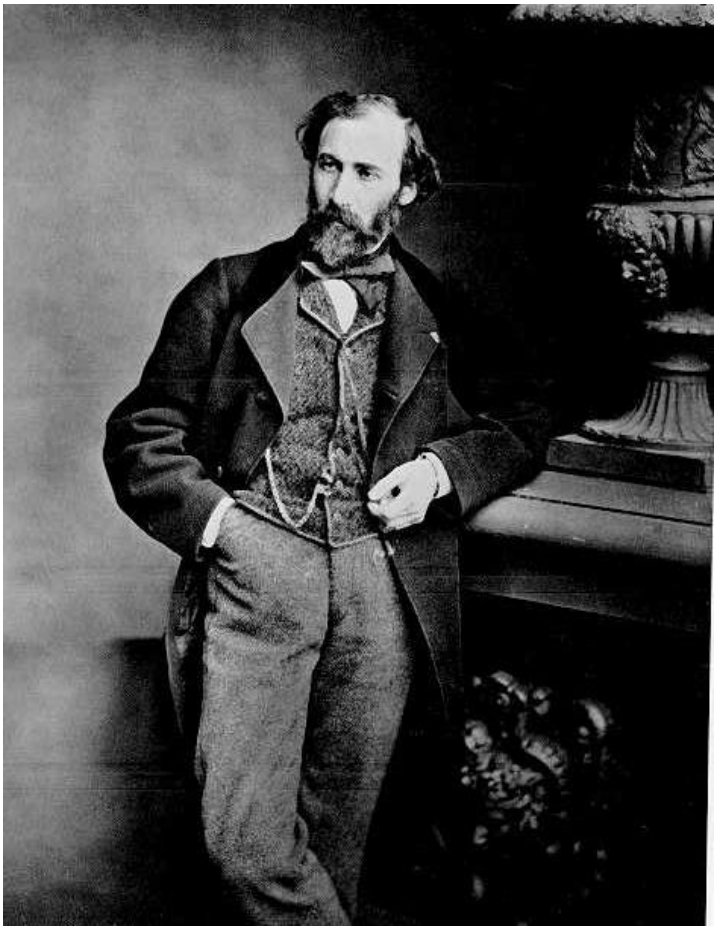

Figure 2-1: The above ("Octave Feuillet," Nadar) typifies the stiffness of early photographs. Improvements in photographic technology allowed for more candid shots, as below: "The Axis Play Pool," John Heartfield. The Best of Popular Photography Ed. Harvey V. Fondiller (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1979)

CHAPTER 3
PERCEPTION

Photography and Perception

Biologically everyone perceives images the same way. Visual sensory perception is based on the functions of the eye – light enters the eye, hits the cells of the retina, and the brain interprets the impulses of those optical cells into coherent, understandable forms. Differences in the perception of images arise from the cognitive aspect of perception – the interpretation of what those images mean. For instance, people from different cultures will often disagree about what they see, and even those in the same culture can often disagree about the meaning of what they see.

For perceiving photographs we rely primarily on our sense of sight. Our eyes react to light, and everything we see depends on the qualities of the light as it reaches our eyes. The *ecological theory* of sensual perception, developed by Cornell University psychology professor James J. Gibson, is based on the light-dependency of images.[16] Gibson's theory posits that visual perception relies on the way light affects the appearance of objects, and slight changes in this "ambient optical array" result in different sensations of size and depth.

[16] Paul Martin Lester, "The Sensual and Perceptual Theories of Visual Communication," Visual Communication: Images With Messages (Washington: Wadsworth Publishing, 1995) 60.

The difference in the light qualities between reality and the photographic depiction of reality accounts for one reason we are able to perceive a difference between the two. Art theorist Ralph Haber writes:

> In the image on a photographic print, no matter what the source of illumination, the ratio of the highest reflectance to the lowest reflectance on the surface will rarely exceed 30 to one and virtually never 50 to one. This is a limitation imposed by the nature of flat reflecting surfaces. In a natural scene, however, spectral reflectance, the light reflected from water, mirrors, metal, or narrow edges of almost any object, may be hundreds, thousands, or even millions of times more intense than the light coming from the same source reflected from other surfaces in the corresponding picture…. The perceptual impact of these contrast restrictions is to make pictures look flatter than the scenes they represent.[17]

Although the photograph involves a reduction in proportion, perspective and color, we still understand that the photograph is a representation of reality. Roland Barthes notes that the reduction from object to image does not cause us to perceive a photograph as a lesser form of reality: "It is not at all necessary to break down this (photographic) reality into units and to constitute these units into signs substantially different from the object they represent …the image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect *analogon*, and it is just this analogical

[17] Ralph Norman Haber, "Perceiving the Layout of Space in Pictures: A Perspective Theory Based Upon Leonardo da Vinci," Perception and Pictorial Representation (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979) 92-93.

perfection which… defines the photograph."[18] Mathematically, a photograph is not in an exact 1:1 ratio with reality, but it is close enough for us to understand that a photo mirrors reality very accurately.

There is a difference between sensation and perception. Sensation refers to how outside stimuli activate the nerve cells of the sense organs. Perception refers to the process the brain goes through to make sense of that stimuli. Although perception originates in the sense organs, knowledge of the world in the form of memories, cues and prompts are also factors in perception.[19] Because the interaction between sensation and perception is continuous and almost instantaneous, some theorists posit there is no fundamental distinction between the two.[20]

Because perception is not just the brain's response to stimuli, but is also an interpretation based on memories and various cultural cues, it relies on signs to indicate certain meanings. For instance, symbolic signs such as the alphabet are signs of sounds comprising the patterns of speech. The content of a photograph is perceived in terms of signs as well. Roland Barthes, in describing how a photograph utilizes signs to relay a message, states:

> I know that I am in a North African country, because I see on the left a road sign in Arabic script, in the center a man in a gandurah, etc.; here the reading closely depends on my culture, on my knowledge of the world; and it is likely that a good press

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[18] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1985) 5.
[19] Robert Sekuler and Randolph Blake, Perception, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1990)

> photograph readily relies on the supposed knowledge of its readers, choosing those prints which involve the greatest possible quantity of information of this kind, so as to "euphorize" the reading; if we photograph the destruction of Agadir, we had better scatter around a few signs of "Arabicity," although "Arabicity" has nothing to do with the disaster itself; for the connotation resulting from knowledge is always a reassuring power: man loves signs, and he loves them to be clear.[21]

Signs are not inherently understood, but learned through living in a particular culture. Photographs are referred to as *iconic* signs – those signs that closely resemble the thing they represent.[22] Art theorist George Legrady argues that, "competence in reading visual imagery is an acquired skill similar to the process of learning language, a social activity defined by the norms of a particular culture."[23] The more signs someone recognizes, the more they can "read" into a scene. Aldous Huxley claimed, "the more you know, the more you see."[24] How much one perceives depends not only on what the senses can detect, but also on the number of cultural signs one recognizes and understands.

We read photographs as we read the world around us, a world that is full of uses, values and meanings. John Tagg states, "It has been said, for example by Umberto Eco, that if photography is to be likened to perception, this is not

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[20] William N. Dember and Joel S. Warm, Psychology of Perception, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1979) 8.
[21] Barthes 18.
[22] American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce formulated 3 types of signs: iconic, indexical and symbolic.
[23] George Legrady, "Image, Language, and Belief in Synthesis," Art Journal 116 (1990): 267.

because the former is a 'natural' process but because the latter is coded."[25] And he goes on to say:

> The meaning of a photographic image is built up by an interaction of such schemas or codes, which vary greatly in their degree of schematisation. The image is therefore to be seen as a composite of signs, more to be compared with a complex sentence than a single word. Its meanings are multiple, concrete, and, most important, *constructed*.[26]

This understanding of cultural signs leads to some confusion when studying how people perceive photographs. A photograph is both an object in itself (i.e., a cultural sign), and a transmitter of messages through the use of signs. Roland Barthes argues that,

> on the one hand, a press photograph is an object worked up, selected, composed, constructed, treated according to various professional, aesthetic, or ideological norms which are so many connotation-factors; and, on the other hand, this same photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, attached – more or less consciously by the public which consumes it – to a traditional stock of signs.[27]

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[24] Lester 62.
[25] John Tagg, The Burden of Representation (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) 187.
[26] Tagg 187.
[27] Barthes 7.

A photograph allows us to study a scene for more detail than we would be able to see by looking at the scene firsthand. The vision of a lens is fixed, whereas the human eye is constantly changing its focus, from left to right, from near to far, a constant change of perspective. As William Manchester observes, "in that sense we are all shifty-eyed."[28] The static state of the photograph allows us to study it in detail, closely scrutinizing the photographic image for aspects we may not see if we were to witness the actual scene. Norton Batkin believes that the stillness of a photograph is what ultimately distinguishes it from all other art forms, because we know that the static moment was captured from a world that is always in motion. "What makes photographs philosophical is that they prompt and defeat theory, " Batkin writes, "The theories photographs prompt are appropriately invoked because photographs are taken from nature. The way photographs defeat the theories they prompt is how they depart from nature."[29] The very stillness of a photograph is unnatural, and creates for the viewer, according to Batkin, "the shock of stillness." That is part of the reason photographs fascinate; they suspend the unceasing march of time into moments of frozen detail.

The passage of time, as will be shown, is thought by some to alter our notions of truth and reality. A discussion of theories about truth and how it

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[28] Manchester 20.

[29] Norton Batkin, Photography and Philosophy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990) 81-2. Batkin states that paintings are not defined by stillness because they are not mechanical, automatic reproductions of nature. Paintings are based on the artist's gaze, which cannot freeze time as photographs do. Before Eadweard Muybridge's famous stills of a horse running, for instance, artists never depicted a horse with all four feet off the ground because our eyes cannot actually see it happen. Similarly, an artist generally does not depict people's faces in unusual states or positions, whereas unposed photographs often capture people in unusual states, such as eyes caught in mid-blink, or mouths open while talking.

compares to reality relates to perception, because some theorists posit that our perceptions "create" reality.

Reality, Perception and Truth

The idea that there are absolute truths has been with us a long while. The Greek philosopher Plato, for instance, promoted the idea of ultimate truths when he advocated his notion of ideal forms.[30] Plato believed, however, that mankind could never tangibly possess ideal forms – such forms could only exist in the mind. Perhaps, like Plato's ideal forms, the notion of "reality" can only exist in the mind. Art historian Norman Bryson is of the opinion that:

> 'Realism' lies in a coincidence between a representation and that which a particular society proposes and assumes as its reality; a reality involving the complex formation of codes of behavior, law, psychology, social manners, dress, gesture, posture - all those practical norms which govern the stance of human beings toward their particular historical environment.[31]

If reality is historically and culturally based there cannot be a "ultimate reality" but instead highly variable and subjective realities. K.C. Cole calls our cultural viewpoints *reference frames*: "A particular reference frame defines a particular world where things move together, tell time according to the same clocks, are ruled by the same forces. Normally, we take our reference frame for granted; we

[30] As described in Plato's *Republic*.
[31] Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 13.

mistake it for "reality."[32] A shift of one's frame of reference can alter reality, and such shifts often occur, either gradually, such as in the natural development of a culture over time, or instantly, as with the discovery of a new scientific theory. K.C. Cole further argues that our frames of reference are all dependent on measurement. Notions of hot and cold, old and young, flat and curved are all contextual measurements of reality. She writes:

> People invent, and reinvent, concepts like zero and nothing and species and organism just as they "invented" the so-called imaginary numbers now essential for dealing with everything from electric circuits to four-dimensional space-time. They aren't a "given" any more than shapeless space or a "second" as a measure of time. Or as physicist Frank Oppenheimer used to say, frustrated when people would warn him to accept the limitations of the "real world": "It's not the real world; it's a world we made up."[33]

If our notion of reality depends on this world that we "made up," through our measurements, culture and history, it would follow that our notion of truth is also a product of such factors. By this view, truth is just another contextual measurement by which we judge reality. From this standpoint, how "true" or "false" something is depends on our perceptions.

If we view reality through our frames of reference, and frames of reference shift over time, it would naturally follow that our ideas of truth will change over

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[32] K.C. Cole, The Universe and the Teacup: The Mathematics of Truth and Beauty (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998) 193.
[33] Cole 200.

time as well.[34] This seems valid, for a glance through any outdated history textbook will show what appear to be glaringly biased or distorted representations of historical events that, at the time, seemed true. The changing nature of truth caused the philosopher Kierkegaard to note, "The truth is a snare: you cannot have it, without being caught. You cannot have the truth in such a way that you catch it, but only in such a way that it catches you." [35] Those who believe they have a final truth are usually accused of being caught up in the clutches of dogmatism. Even science is not exempt -- scientific truths appear to change over the course of time, through both changes in a culture's philosophy and in the processes of experimentation. For instance, CBS's medical correspondent Bob Arnot recalled:

> At the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the editor once took me through their back archives and he said, 'You know what? Almost every single thing that was published in the year 1959 is now a lie. All we are trying to do is to figure out how to publish the best lies.'[36]

Scientists never say they have discovered a truth, instead scientists state that their experiments either support or a reject a hypothesis. Theoretical astronomers, for instance, may never *really* know what comprises a neutron star, because there is no way to physically prove their theories. George Greenstein writes,

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[34] The idea that truth and reality are dependent on time and culture comes from the theory of postmodernism, which will be discussed at length later in this paper.
[35] S⇑ren Kierkegaard, The Papers of S⇑ren Kierkegaard, v. 11, pt. 1, section 352.
[36] Jerome Aumente, "A Medical Breakthrough," American Journalism Review 17 (1995): 29.

> I do not know if my theory is right. I do not know if it is a good one, correct in its essential respects – or whether it is a pipe dream: irrelevant. I cannot say whether the years of toil I expended in this work were justified, and if the task was worth the effort. Nor do I believe I will ever know for sure…. Theoretical research does not lead to such certainties. Usually its results are quite intangible. It leads to new ideas – but ideas are uncertain and debatable. It leads to new points of view – but this is not enough if we want hard and fast results. It is only if we are very lucky that far down the road theoretical research leads to what we have been looking for all along: understanding.[37]

All of the disciplines that organize knowledge strive to reach that one simple yet elusive destination: understanding the nature of existence and making sense of the world. Journalist Pete Hamill, for instance, notes that newspapers "can't be a mere diversion from the realities of the world; we must help people *understand* that world. Few of us are presumptuous enough to believe that we are offering the readers the gift of wisdom. But without knowledge, wisdom is impossible."[38] But how can wisdom and understanding be achieved if there is no such thing as enduring truth? If truth changes over time, how can knowledge be passed down through the years? The existence and survival of old texts, such as the works of

[37] George Greenstein, Frozen Star (New York: Freundlich Books, 1983) 108.
[38] Pete Hamill, News is a Verb: Journalism at the End of the Twentieth Century (New York: Library of Contemporary Thought, Ballantine, 1998) 26-7.

Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, and Dante, for instance, seem to suggest that there are certain truths that do last, truths that stand the test of time.

Philosophy has long grappled with the definition of truth. A discussion of modern philosophy is therefore necessary in order to understand current concepts of truth.

Modern Philosophy and Truth

The relativistic philosophy explained above, that truth is a product of culture, which alters over time, is a central conviction of postmodernism. According to the postmodern viewpoint, culture is constructed, and because our ideas of reality are entirely dependent on culture, reality is also constructed. In the words of Frank Oppenheimer (cited above), “It’s not the real world, it’s a world we made up." Yet everything we know is tainted, because postmodernists believe that perception is an imperfect method of experience. Communication of our perceptions is seen as doubly imperfect, because pure experience is tainted by both our perception of it and through our attempts to transmit that experience to others. According to postmodernists, we cannot separate our human perspective from reality, therefore we can never really know what reality is. This is why many believed photography could be the perfect postmodern art form: photography was originally seen as a purely mechanical, objective means of communication, solving the postmodern dilemma of human perceptual interference.

A quality of the photographic negative is that it allows for multiple, identical reproductions of an image. With digital photography, perfect

reproductions became possible, without the degradation to which negatives were susceptible. This mechanical reproduction negates the individualism of a work of art. Some would argue that the very nature of photography *created* the postmodernist viewpoint. In postmodernism, there is no such state as individualism because we are all products of our culture; we are all stamped-out products of the machine age. This denial of the individual denies personal emotion and unique viewpoints.[39] According to Andy Grundberg, the postmodern viewpoint also denies "a belief in the authenticity of experience, the sanctity of the individual artist's vision, in genius, in originality."[40] Postmodernism posits that we have reached an artistic dead end, and there is no chance for a fresh, original perspective, because everyone is corrupted by culture. Postmodernism also believes that there is a finite number of possible images, which we have now completely exhausted. All art is now mere imitation, borrowing, and replication. Andy Grundberg states, "Photographs are no longer seen as transparent windows on the world, but as intricate webs spun by culture."[41] In the postmodernist perspective, we are prisoners enchained by our culture.

Postmodernism did not just grow out of photography, however; it also stemmed from Marxism, semiotics, poststructuralism, feminism, and psychoanalysis. Modernism has the same roots, which makes sense since postmodernism is a reaction against modernism. Modernism has a belief in originality, progress and the power of the individual. Modernism uses the

[39] Walter Truett Anderson says postmodernism's denial of the individual is very similar to the teachings of such Eastern philosophies as Buddhism, which seeks liberation from the ego. Likewise, he says the postmodern idea that truth is made rather than found also reflects Buddhist philosophy.

symbolic language of images, and it has a much more optimistic outlook than does postmodernism. According to modernism, we are not imprisoned by our culture, rather, by living in culture we become tutored in a rich symbolic language. This symbolic language opens up the literal, more obvious messages of an image, enabling us to see more, to learn more, and to expand our horizons.

The modernist theory that images contain signs which must be decoded in order to be understood comes from Structuralism. Created by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and allied with American philosopher Charles S. Peirce's theory of semiotics, structuralism began as a theory of language and knowledge, but has since been applied to other fields of research. Structuralism holds that the obvious meanings of signifiers or signs are irrelevant; instead, signs must be decoded for their deeper, non-obvious meanings. According to Andy Grundberg, structuralism posits that signs "do not wear their meanings on their sleeves."[42] Terry Eagleton argues that structuralism evolved from a historic process that began with Copernicus, who argued that the earth revolves around the sun, despite the universally held belief that all evidence proved the sun revolves around the earth:

> Copernicus was followed by Marx, who claimed that the true significance of social processes went on 'behind the backs' of individual agents, and after Marx, Freud argued that the real meanings of our words and actions were quite imperceptible to the

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[40] Andy Grundberg, Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography, 1974-1989 (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1990) 7.
[41] Grundberg 101.
[42] Grundberg 3.

> conscious mind. Structuralism is the modern inheritor of this belief that reality, and our experience of it, are discontinuous with each other.[43]

Poststructuralism takes this position one step further, stating that "our perceptions only tell us what our perceptions are, not about the true conditions of the world."[44] Everything we know is tainted by the fact that we perceive through our human faculties. According to Jacques Derrida, there is no such thing as a "pure, unblemished meaning or experience," because every form of communication or representation is dependent on signs, which are inherently incomplete or distorted. Poststructuralism and postmodernism are equivalent, the former describing the field of semiotics, the later describing the field of art. Because postmodernism is a reaction against modernism, postmodernism is largely characterized by its opposition to the basic tenets of modernism. Eisinger details the ways in which modernism and postmodernism oppose each other:

> In place of the modernist idea of inherent meaning in works of art, postmodernists have proposed an idea of contingent meaning. In place of hermetic formalism, postmodernists have asserted the inescapably social nature of all art. The modernist concern for the essence and purity of artistic media has been overturned by a concerted effort to dissolve all boundaries of art to understand the functioning and significance of any given medium of

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[43] Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory:An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 96. Qtd. in Crisis of the Real, Grundberg 4.
[44] Grundberg 4.

> communication. The modernist respect for purely visual meaning has been rejected for a belief that meaning can exist only in language or in structures derived from language. The primacy of originality has been rejected through an attack on the very possibility of originality; the respect for subjective expression has been undermined with a theory of subjectivity as social construct. The modernist belief in universality has been replaced by an emphasis on the historically specific. And the modernist pursuit of transcendence has been scoffed at as a distraction from the more worthy investigation into the material conditions in which art is produced.[45]

The modernist concern for the "essence and purity" of art is a concern with the representation of truth, and the modernist "belief in universality" is a belief in absolute truths. Postmodernism instead supports the relativistic position explained earlier in this paper. In the postmodern world there is no such thing as absolute truth. Postmodernists would say, for instance, that the truth to a woman is different than the truth to a Native American, which is different from the truth to a Caucasian man. To insist on a universal truth would be to deny the differing experiences of different social groups. For a postmodernist, to do otherwise would be politically indefensible.

According to Walter Truett Anderson, there are actually four worldviews currently in use; the postmodern, the scientific-rational, the

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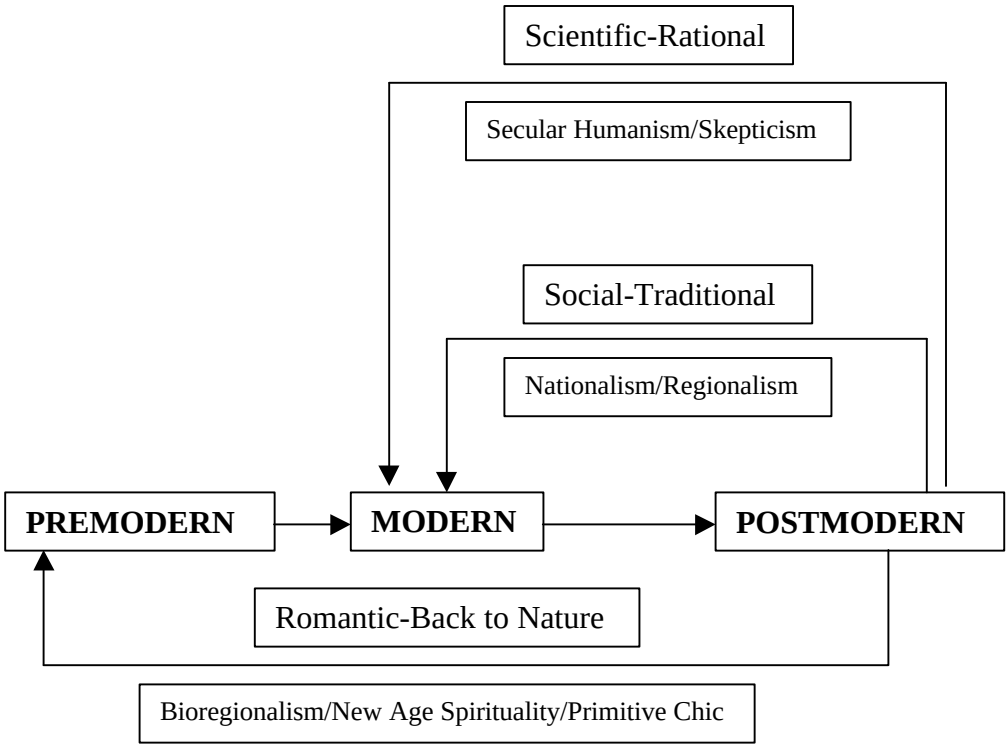
[45] Joel Eisinger, Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period

social traditional, and the neo-romantic. Anderson created a map to of these four views[46]:



The postmodernist believes that truth is socially constructed. The scientific-rationalist believes truth can be found through methodical, disciplined inquiry. The social traditionalist believes truth can be found in the history and heritage of Western Civilization (such as the great literary and philosophical traditions of the Greeks, Shakespeare, the Founding Fathers, etc.). The neoromantic believes truth is found by attaining harmony with nature or through a spiritual exploration of the inner self (or

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(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995) 247.

[46] Anderson says of the evolution of this map: "This four-way mapping grew out of numerous workshops I have done with different people, and in the process we have traced many sets of issues – international politics, ideas about nature, ideas about ethics and morality – as they appear to people of different worldviews. We have noted that the culture wars are not a simple polarization between two groups. The skirmish lines cut in different directions on different issues. Once, when we were having a discussion

both).[47] Modernism, according to Anderson, is today defined by the partnership of scientific rationalism with social traditionalism.[48] Modernism therefore is not on the cutting edge of intellectual thought, but instead represents the backward glance. Because of this reliance on tradition, which philosophers such as Habermas see as a lack of vitality or creativity, some have proclaimed that modernism is dominant but dead.

Although postmodernism is currently the preferred philosophy among *avant-garde* critics and theorists, as shown above there are many who prefer to follow a different tune. But the most realistic situation would perhaps be, as Anderson puts it, a "multilingual" philosophy; to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each view rather than to rely completely on one and discount all others. Anderson writes that "some people seem to be completely organized around one way of understanding truth, are deeply threatened by others, and repress their own tendencies to wander into the forbidden worlds of postmodernism or neo-romanticism."[49] For all of postmodernism's tendencies to dwell in nihilism, irony, or disinterest, the philosophy does have some extremely valid viewpoints that cannot be discounted simply because they seem distasteful.[50] Anderson and

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about this, somebody said: "What we're looking at here isn't just a map of culture – it's a map of the mind." Anderson 115-16.

[47] The four viewpoints also all differ on the view of the "self." Romantics believe the self can be found and defined by looking inward, while scientific rationalists believe the self is defined by outward exploration. Social traditionalists believe the self is defined by one's role in society. Postmodernists believe there is no true "self," and that what we take to be a self is based on momentary bodily states, environment, culture, and language. The self makes no sense outside of context, hence the postmodernist statement that there is no such thing as individualism.

[48] Although Anderson says they do argue on certain points, such as evolution versus creationism.

[49] Anderson 116.

[50] Anderson, for instance, has a very positive view of postmodernism that I find appealing. He states that seeing truth as socially constructed doesn't mean there's nothing "out there." He says, "It means

psychotherapist Maureen O'Hara suggest that although we live in a postmodern era, we have not necessarily left modernism behind. They write: "Most of us slip back and forth like bilingual children between postmodernism, constructivist modes of thought in which we regard reality as socially constructed, and modern, objectivist modes of thought in which we regard reality as something that is nonhuman yet *known* (or at least potentially knowable) with unshakable certainty through some approach to the truth – science, religion, history, psychotherapy."[51] Postmodernism tells us that reality moves toward chaos, things fall apart, and in the words of Yeats, "the center does not hold." Yet we fight against this perspective, searching for a pattern to reality through our various systems of thought.

An acceptance of postmodernism does not necessarily discount modernism, even though the two often are in direct opposition. But it is difficult to look at all of the various viewpoints and then try to come to an understanding about truth. All the current viewpoints have their own ideas about truth: what it is, where you look for it, how you prove it. This understandably leads to a great deal of confusion: how can all these different notions of truth and reality be correct? If, as postmodernists say, one perspective is not inherently any better than any other, and if the perspectives tend to cancel each other out, how are we to choose, and what are we then left with?

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understanding that all our stories about what's out there – all our scientific facts, our religious teachings, our society's beliefs, even our personal perceptions – are the products of a highly creative interaction between human minds and the cosmos." Anderson 8.

[51] "Psychotherapy's Own Identity Crisis," Anderson 172-3.

Because there does not appear to be a consensus about the definition of “truth,” it is still debated, and philosophy often plays out this debate in the art world. According to the scholar Lawrence Beyer, the whole purpose of art is to uncover hidden truths, thus making it the ideal platform from which to conduct the debate. Beyer states that “artists, in the modern view, serve society not only by delighting the senses, but by striving to pull strands of truth free beneath the packed earth of the status quo.”[52] The philosophical question of truth is played out in the photographic artistic medium as well.

[52] Lawrence Adam Beyer, “Intentionalism, Art and the Suppression of Innovation: Film Colorization and the Philosophy of Moral Rights,” Northwestern University Law Review 82 (1988): 1117.

CHAPTER 4
THE NATURE OF ART

The Function of Art

Artists aspire to achieve the same type of understanding about truth as do other schools of knowledge. The word "fact" is derived from the Latin *factum*: a thing done or made. Works of art, or artifacts, are made or created with skill, hence a close relationship between the words "art" and "fact." Richard Kilborn and John Izod write about the association between something created and "truth."

> The term 'fiction' has had a number of meanings… it referred to imitation (a copying of fact, so to speak). In addition, it meant to feign – which is particularly interesting since the individual who feigns creates with the imagination, and the resultant idea can either be truth or a lie, or, even more interestingly, neither.[53]

So although we typically refer to "fictions" as falsehoods, artistic fictions, be they in the form of novels, paintings, or photographs, may hold or reflect truths.

When theorists squabble over the question, "What *is* ART, exactly?", there is a great deal of disagreement, but most do agree that art involves a way of looking, leading toward appreciation or understanding. In other words, art gives

[53] Kilborn and Izod 122.

us a different frame of reference and thereby changes our perception of reality. Art can accomplish a change in perception by deliberately slanting reality, to not tell us what "is," but "what is important." Art can shed all the distracting trivia of the common day-to-day, and show us what matters. Robert Adams states:

> Geography by itself is difficult to value accurately – what we hope for from the artist is help in discovering the significance of a place. In this sense we would in most respects choose thirty minutes with Edward Hopper's painting *Sunday Morning* to thirty minutes in the street that was his subject; with Hopper's vision we see more.[54]

Not only can art simplify in order to show what matters, but it can also often show us things previously unseen; art shows us *more*. Rosalind Hursthouse notes: "Artists create their own visions of the world in their pictures, and we discover, with a thrill of recognition, previously unrecognized aspects of our familiar unpictured world."[55] Art can open up aspects of the world previously unknown and bring to light ideas never previously considered.

By taking such liberties with reality, by uncovering and revealing underlying meanings, by showing us "what matters," the artist can help us make sense of the world. This is one reason art has always been with us. Humans have always had a need to understand who we are and why we are here. These are the fundamental questions that science and philosophy grapples with and, more often than not, fails to answer. Sometimes, art does a better job answering

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[54] Robert Adams, Beauty in Photography (New York: Aperture, Inc., 1981) 16.
[55] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Truth and Representation," Philosophical Aesthetics, Ed. Oswald Hanfling (Cambridge: Blackwell in cooporation with the Open University, 1992) 276.

such fundamental questions. Oswald Hanfling writes that in "concepts such as those of art, knowledge and truth do not spring up at random; they are reflections of human needs and interests, of the situation in which we find ourselves and our perception of the world in which we live."[56] Humanity has found it necessary to practice art, in part, as a means for achieving understanding.

It must also be remembered that artists do not always just try to represent current people and events, but also depict historical scenes (such as the countless Madonnas) or the expected future (such as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse). Artists create new visions of our world, retell well-known old stories, and make predictions for the future. They tell us how things once were, how they are, and how they will be. Art gives us a contextual measurement by which to view the world, thereby influencing our perceptions.

In this light, all photography, be it artistic, scientific or news/documentary, is an art form. Photography can change the way we look at the world. Photography approaches art insofar as it is made or created with skill. Photography can also be philosophically allied with art because it manipulates versions of reality in order to reveal truths.

Art as Persuasion

The ability of art to persuade the masses goes back to the beginning of written history. At times, artists have been mere tools, used by those in power to convince the masses of a particular ideology. Artists often were commissioned by the church or ruling government to create work espousing religious doctrine or

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[56] Oswald Hanfling, "The Problem of Definition." Philosophical Aesthetics. 3.

political ideologies. According to John Merryman and Albert Elsen, the concept of the artist as a political and cultural rebel is a modern idea. They state: "From antiquity, and with rare exceptions, the artist unquestionably served the needs of the church, court, and commune. He was image-maker for cults, cities, and kingdoms, and always on terms set by the sponsor." [57] The personal ideas of the artist often were not reflected in the overall message of the art. Laurence Beyer argues that, "in this more confined role, the artist has served not as gadfly, but in effect as a public relations arm of the establishment, giving concrete expression to the dominant community worldview or bringing honor or glory to the reigning authorities."[58]

When artists began working independently, fulfilling their own agendas and espousing their own beliefs, they often acted in opposition to the ruling government or dominant religion. For instance, Sheldon Nahmod writes that, "[Modernity] led to the various avant-garde art movements with their attacks on the established order."[59] Philosopher Jurgen Habermas states that, "the project of modernity formulated in the 18th Century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop… autonomous art according to their inner logic…[The ultimate goal was] the rational organization of everyday social life."[60] Artists began using their artwork to express their own beliefs, persuading the masses to their own point-of-view.

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[57] John Merryman and Albert Elsen, Law, Ethics, and the Visual Arts, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) 335.
[58] Beyer 1117-8.
[59] Sheldon H. Nahmod, "Artistic Expression and Aesthetic Theory: The Beautiful, the Sublime and the First Amendment," Wisconsin Law Review (1987): 249.
[60] Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity-An Incomplete Project," The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on PostModern Culture (Bay Press, 1983) 10.

Thus, art has often been used as a form of political or social persuasion, either as a tool of the ruling class or church, or as a mode of argument against government and the values of the majority. More recently, especially with the growth of advertising, art has come to be used as a form of consumer and cultural persuasion. For instance, professional artists today practice a form of consumer persuasion when they try to attract purchasers and get them to invest in their products. Art today is more often viewed as a commodity to be bought and sold rather than as a significant political statement. In an American Council for the Arts report, Richard Brown observes:

> This quite recent historical development has profoundly affected the artist. Today's artist is no longer seen as a craftsperson, as in pre-industrial times, nor as the seer or desperado pictured in the romantic counter-image of the industrial era. The commodity market for art has created a star system in which the successful artist has become both a mass-producer of icons for sale as investments and a commodity himself.[61]

Art persuades, in part, by evoking emotions and feelings. The emotional impact of art can influence and communicate just as effectively as spoken, elucidated ideas. As Martin Redish argues, "an individual's "mental' processes cannot be limited to the receipt and digestion of cold, hard theories and facts, for there is also an emotional element that is uniquely human and that can be 'developed' by

[61] Richard H. Brown, "Art as a Commodity," The Modern Muse: The Support and Condition of Artists. Ed. C.R. Swaim. 1989. 13.

'non-rational' forms of communication."[62] For instance, advertisers practice a type of consumer persuasion when they use the emotional influence of art to generate positive feelings about their products. Rosalind Hursthouse, an art theorist, describes how this emotive effect of art affected her own concept of war:

> The words 'war is terrible' have some power; they evoke connections with suffering, blood, pain and loss. But the words 'military glory', 'honour', 'courage', have a similar power; they evoke connections with suffering, blood, pain and loss nobly borne, and reiterating 'but war is terrible', against those words ("Honour!" "Courage!"), may start to seem feeble and stale. The familiar words invite, 'Well, war is terrible in some ways, but glorious in others; there are two sides to every question; you can see war in this way or in the way.' And that is what I used to think – reluctantly, but perforce – that there were at least these two ways of thinking about or 'seeing' war. But then I was lucky enough to get to Madrid and see both Goya's paintings on war and Picasso's *Guernica*. Because I saw them all in the same week I do not know what effect they would have had if I had seen only *Guernica* or only the Goyas, or indeed, only one or the other of the Goyas, but I certainly know what the effect was of seeing all the paintings I did see. It created in me an image of 'war is terrible' which is *dominatingly* vivid. Now, when I look at pictures which represent war as glorious, or read poems, novels or plays about military glory, or honour and courage

[62] Martin Redish, Freedom of Expression: A Critical Analysis (Michie, Co., 1984) 58.

> displayed in war, or see films about them, or hear music supposed to invoke a passionate willingness to fight for one's country or one's cause, Goya's and Picasso's paintings always come into my thoughts. 'No, no,' they always say, 'don't be fooled. This is the way it is – terrible, terrible.'[63]

This type of emotive persuasion can be stronger than any type of rational argument. There is nothing to argue against; either you feel the emotions or you do not. If the artist can effectively "push the right button," to make an emotional argument that seems sincere and resonates within, the artist has won his case. The mythologist Joseph Campbell notes,

> Ask an artist what his picture "means," and you will not soon ask such a question again. Significant images render insights beyond speech, beyond the kinds of meaning speech defines. And if they do not speak to you, that is because you are not ready for them, and words will only serve to make you *think* you have understood, thus cutting you off altogether. You don't ask what a dance means, you enjoy it.[64]

There is simply nothing to argue against; either the artwork resonates or it does not. Such "arguments" are unanswerable, and therefore extremely powerful. This emotional influence of art carries over into the photographic realm. The photographer Nancy Newhall, for instance, believed that "the power of the

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[63] Hursthouse 278-9.
[64] Joseph Campbell, Myths to Live By (New York: Viking Press, 1972) 102.

photograph springs from a deeper source than words – the same deep source as music."[65] Documentary photography, for instance, deliberately uses the emotional power of images to persuade, and thereby improve, society.

Persuasive Art: Documentary Photography

As stated above, one reason art is practiced is due to the human need for understanding. Another function of art is to satisfy the need to keep a record of events that are deemed significant. Before photography, events were chronicled through written accounts or through various forms of pictorial representation. Photography enabled people to document significant events with more visual accuracy than any other medium. The American documentary photography movement gained its fullest momentum in the thirties and forties, through the Farm Security Administration's attempts to document the Depression and through the efforts of World War II photographers. Photographers such as Dorthea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, and Walker Evans both recorded history and shaped our view of it through their own photographic styles and techniques.

Thus, documentary photography is more than just a recording device. The film critic John Grierson, one of the founding fathers of documentary film, defined the medium as "the creative treatment of actuality."[66] Grierson believed that documentary could be an effective tool to provide cultural and educational enlightenment, and saw the chance to involve citizens in the social process as the primary function of the documentary medium. The term "documentary" came to mean a photographic format which appropriated photography's association

[65] Qtd. in Eisinger 110.

with immediacy and truth, but which aimed at making sense of society through a specific type of representation. Joel Eisinger states that, "the central theoretical issue in documentary photography was that of truth.",[67] but the discussion of truth in the early years of the documentary was very narrow, encompassing only questions of partial truths or outright fabrications. The public was unforgiving, however, when questions of photographic manipulation arose. For instance, when Arthur Rothstein was documenting the Dust Bowl in South Dakota for the Farm Security Administration, he found a sun-bleached steer skull. Thinking that it was the perfect symbol with which to dramatize the drought and the consequences of land mismanagement, Rothstein photographed the skull in several different positions; some in parched earth, some with sparse grass. The FSA published one of these photos to publicize a trip Roosevelt made to the Plains (see fig. 4-1). Eisinger writes of the public reaction to Rothstein's manipulation:

> The hostile Republican press discovered that there were several other less devastating versions of the picture and made a stink. That Rothstein had moved the skull was considered a serious breach of documentary integrity, and the FSA was rocked by charges of fakery and propaganda. The public was not prepared to accept a news photograph as the creative interpretation of reality.[68]

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[66] John Grierson, Grierson on Documentary (London: Faber, 1966 (First published 1946)) 13.
[67] Eisinger 79.
[68] Eisinger 90.

Documentarists always knew that some manipulation was necessary in order to make a point, however much they denied it. Walker Evans, even though he himself did not live up to this standard, was quoted as adamantly stating, “You don’t touch *a thing*.” Most documentarists never admitted to manipulation until after the documentary movement of the thirties and forties was over. But they all understood that documentary truth has to be created, that literal representation in photography can fail to signify the fact or issue at hand. Arthur Rothstein says in justification of photographic manipulation, “Provided the results are a faithful reproduction of what the photographer believes he sees, whatever takes place in the making of a picture is justified.”[69] Wilson Hicks, one-time photo editor at *Life*, supports this viewpoint when he explains that, “the photographer’s purpose is to re-create an actuality in substance and in spirit in such a way as to make clear the ideas which the photographs are intended to convey and to give coherence to their compositions.”[70] Documentarists need to convey stories with meaning, and their methods in doing so can often bring documentary photography out of the world of straight news photography and closer to the realm of art. The documentary photographers of the thirties and forties saw the documentary aesthetic as a balance between a type of social record and a work of art. As such, documentary photography seems to bridge the world between straight news photography and purely artistic photography. Documentarists often try to achieve a level of drama and sensitivity in their photographs on par with art, to combine straight news photographs with artistic methods to tell a compelling,

[69] Eisinger 89.
[70] Eisinger 90.

emotional story. This dramatization of truth allows photographers "to capture particular truths while simultaneously transcending them to reach a level of universal truth,"[71] a function of art as discussed above.

Documentaries need to speak in a language the audience can understand, so documentarists often employ certain structural techniques used in fiction, "both to give coherence to the story they are telling and to ensure that audiences are able to relate to the events being played out before them."[72] Documentarists achieve this both in the manner of how the photographic subject is represented, in the captions that typically accompany documentary photographs, or in the story that the photographs highlight. The balance between structural and narrative ploys needed to increase interest, and the honest reproduction of events, is one of the most difficult and hotly debated topics among documentarists.[73]

The documentary medium is a form of storytelling that persuades the audience to see the subject matter in a particular light. Documentary photography is especially powerful and compelling because of its close association with immediacy and truth. Documentaries can be seen as tools of persuasion in that audiences tend to fall in line with the documentary's argument. It is not always the documentary photographer, however, who shapes the story.

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[71] Eisinger 81.
[72] Kilborn and Izod 9.
[73] "For all their claims to present the world as it is and their attempts to engage the attention of their audience by the force of their argument, documentaries can never attain the level of objectivity to which they sometimes aspire. Thus, whilst many viewers may be disposed to believe in the general truthfulness of the account (especially when it has the mark of some institutional authority), they are aware that the account offered is one seen from a particular perspective." Kilborn and Izod 5. The combination of words with images also brings about the complex issue of how we experience images; in purely visual terms, or in a way that is saturated with language, or both.

The U.S. Government, for instance, controlled the documentary photographs the American public saw of World War II soldiers.[74] By doing so, the government hoped to manipulate the public morale to ensure support for the war effort. More often, editors choose photos that best illustrate certain stories, stories that may have an agenda or focus that differs from the photographer's original intent.

Photography, because it mechanically reproduces the scene before it, was at first considered to be a method of representation that excluded the artist's perspective. However, I have thus far shown how photography is an inherently manipulative medium. To call photography untruthful is not correct; a quality of art is that it does manipulate in order to reveal truth, or to show us aspects of the world we normally would never consider. We do not consider art to be untruthful, but we do understand it to be a deliberately fictional representation of reality. We look at paintings, novels, or other forms of art and try to interpret what the artist is trying to convey. What is the artist's purpose in representing the subject in this way? This is not to suggest that all art has a deeper meaning beyond the surface details, but the art that lasts, that stands the test of time, tends to address certain questions that reflect upon the universal experiences of mankind. One way art can do this is by using certain themes and archetypes that are shared throughout the mythologies of many cultures. Although not commonly acknowledged, myth still powerfully shapes the perceptions of modern society.

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[74] Eisinger writes, "The decision in 1943 to release photographs of dead Americans was not motivated by a policy of truthfulness so much as a feeling that the American public would no longer accept a thoroughly sanitized war. Before 1943 the government reasoned that to show pictures of the American dead would have a demoralizing effect on the home front. Later, conventional wisdom decreed that concentrating only on victorious images would breed overconfidence. Showing the dead at this point, it was felt, would strengthen resolve." Eisinger 84-5.

Figure 4-1: Published photo of Arthur Rothstein's skull series, Pennington County, South Dakota. Farm Security Administration, 1936. The Best of Popular Photography Ed. Harvey V. Fondiller (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1979)

CHAPTER 5
TRUTH AND MYTH

Myth and Meaning

As stated previously, art is often used as a tool by ruling powers to persuade the masses. Often, religious leaders have been the dominant authority figures of a culture, and thus art and religion have a long, entwined history. Art has been used to celebrate various religions throughout the world for centuries. Religious leaders have also used art to strengthen their authority over the populace. For instance, some believe the Pharaohs of Egypt commissioned giant statues to be carved far away from the main cities in order to keep the locals subservient by reminding them of the power of the Pharaoh and of the Gods who supported him. Religious art did more than just celebrate and sustain a religious ideology, however. It also kept alive religious mythology, retelling the stories and values that defined the religion. People could look to religious art to reinforce and clarify their beliefs.

Although our post-industrial society prides itself on rationality, our current stories and art make use of many of the same themes as religious mythology. Even our journalism and news photographs rely on this mythic-based dialogue to transmit certain ideas, thoughts, and values. The myths of a modern culture conform to suit the character of the culture, and are often so well disguised that we do not even think of them as “myths.” Every culture has myths, however –

they merely take on an acceptable shape, changing and adapting to suit a culture's tastes and standards. Although the superficial details of mythic stories change over the course of time, the underlying meanings remain consistent. These unchanging values of myths are called *archetypes:* original models after which other things are patterned. For instance, the Cinderella archetype is heavily encoded within the American culture: a poor girl is mistreated, unloved, and unappreciated by her family and is rescued from her life of misery by Prince Charming. S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert Dardene write:

> Folklorists discuss the oral tradition in terms of an ideal "story," an archetype that does not exist but that is re-created in individual tellings. Thus we have a "story" of Cinderella, of which there is no definitive version, but that we recognize as the same "story" regardless of variation. At a broader level, we know a "Cinderella" story when we hear one.[75]

Such themes can be found in all sorts of storytelling, both primitive and modern, and are consistent through diverse cultures. Edward O. Wilson argues that, "their generality is the reason why Hollywood plays well in Singapore, and why Nobel Prizes in Literature are given to Africans and Asians as well as to Europeans."[76] Art reflects these patterns and images because they are an intrinsic part of human nature, and speak to us on a deep, emotional level.

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[75] S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardene, "Myth, Chronicle & Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News," Media, Myths, & Narratives, Ed. James W. Carey (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1988) 72.
[76] E. O. Wilson, Consiliance (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) 229.

Myths are distinctive forms of speech, narratives that are familiar and reassuring to the host culture. Myths are a culture's way of trying to articulate the core concerns and preoccupations of society. Perhaps it is not all that surprising, then, that although the stories seem to change to reflect their host culture, similar mythic themes seem to persist in different cultures and at different times. Roger Silverstone says that, "myths persist, though often in a diluted form, and, like some good wines, do not always travel well without changing some part of their character."[77] Joseph Campbell explains more fully:

> Myths, states Jung, when correctly read, are the means to bring us back in touch. They are telling us in picture language of powers of the psyche to be recognized and integrated in our lives, powers that have been common to the human spirit forever, and which represent that wisdom of the species by which man has weathered millenniums. Through a dialogue conducted with… a study of myths, we can learn to know and come to terms with the greater horizon of our own deeper and wiser, inward self. And analogously, the society that cherishes and keeps its myths alive will be nourished from the soundest, richest strata of the human spirit.[78]

Karl Jung saw mythic archetypes as recurring patterns, or universal blueprints, in the human psyche. Jung stated that our belief in myth is reflected in our dreams, and that by unlocking the mythic code of our dreams we can come to an

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[77] Roger Silverstone, "Television, Myth & Culture," Media, Myths and Narratives 23.

understanding about our lives. Jung believed that such an understanding could lead to meaning, direction, order and a sense of wholeness.

It is the commonality of human experience that explains why myths are so similar among different cultures and at different time periods.[79] Almost everyone undergoes certain rites of passage, for instance, the cycle of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. Myths guide us along these passages of life, telling us how the world works and how we should conduct ourselves in it. Because myths guide us through human experience common to all, we view them, either consciously or not, as reflecting the deepest truths of life. And perhaps, because myth reflects the unchanging facets of the human experience and human nature, they do represent absolute truths. Postmodernism states that truths change over time because human culture and perceptions change over time, but the existence of myth proves there are some aspects of humanity which remain indifferent to the passage of time.

News & Documentary Photography and Myth

The purveyors of myth hold a great deal of influential power within a culture. Previously, the purveyors of myth were almost solely religious

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[78] Campbell 14-15.

[79] Alternate theories about why myths are so universal do exist. The Anthropic Cosmological Principle states that human life is not an accidental anomaly, but that the universe took the only possible course of evolution that allowed life to emerge. Therefore, the universe is reflected in us, and we are reflected in it. Another theory, the Gaia Hypothesis, states that Earth is a living organism; a mega-organism in which there are mutual interactions between the organic and inorganic portions of the planet. If we endanger the Earth, we will be dispensed with as threats to the life and health of the organism. V↔clav Havel states of these two theories, "Both remind us, in modern language, of what we have long suspected, of what we have long projected into our forgotten myths and what perhaps has always lain dormant within us as archetypes. That is, the awareness of our being anchored in the Earth and the universe, the awareness that we are not here alone nor for ourselves alone, but that we are an integral part of higher, mysterious entities against whom it

authorities. In our more secular society, journalists often fill this role. Through the dispersion of news, journalists tell stories that address societal concerns. R. Darnton, a journalist, states: "Because of our tendency to see immediate events rather than long-term processes, we were blind to the archaic element in journalism. But our very conception of "news" resulted from ancient ways of telling stories."[80] Pete Hamill adds:

> (Newspaper editors) have to know the city intimately, study its history, understand its cycles and rhythms, its language and myths, its legends and lore. Without such knowledge they can't ensure that news has context. They can't instruct the young, push them, cajole them, inspire them to find stories and tell those stories with power and relevance.[81]

Journalists are storytellers in our culture, only they must remain true to real events in their telling, rather than create or transform events as a novelist or moviemaker does. Journalists pride themselves on this objectivity, of stating just the facts. When a story is broadcast on a news show, the audience does not usually wonder if the story is true, or whether the journalist is lying. We trust journalists to give us objective information that is relevant to our lives. We also trust that this information is true, because journalists are seen as "news specialists." Bird and Dardene suggest that "in the mythological matrix, the audience tends to put faith in those "specialists" who have access to the "truth,"

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is not advisable to blaspheme. This forgotten awareness is encoded in all religions." V↔clav Havel, "The Search for Meaning in a Global Civilization," The Truth About Truth 237.

[80] Qtd. from R. Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," Daedalus 104 (1975): 191.

at least in those areas that are unfamiliar. Myth, like news, rests on its authority as "truth.""[82] By accepting journalists as "news specialists," we believe that the news they relay to us is true and, for the most part, unbiased. As news specialists, journalists themselves fulfill a mythic archetype: the messenger, or communicator. In Greek mythology, the God Hermes represented the messenger archetype; the Roman equivalent was the God Mercury. Because we see mythic archetypes as representations of "the true," the association between messenger and journalist reinforces our belief that journalism is "the truth."

On closer inspection, the notion that journalism equals truth does not hold up. For instance, because journalists look for certain elements to carry or propel their story, they cannot be considered wholly objective. Just as fiction uses the different or particular to illustrate universal values, so do news stories. Journalists tend mainly to report on stories that have certain elements, or "news values." Bird and Dardene observe:

> Indeed, "news values," which journalists often imply are something intrinsic in events, to be deduced using "news sense," are culturally specific story-telling codes…. Stories never "reflect reality" and tell of mundane, everyday events. They are about the different and the particular, which yet represent something universal – just as is news.[83]

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[81] Hamill 36.
[82] Bird and Dardene 80.
[83] Bird and Dardene 73.

In other words, journalists, as members of a particular culture, are bound by the "culture grammar" that defines rules of narrative construction, a realization that changes the notion of an "objective" transposing of reality.[84] New Journalism, for instance, uses the devices of fiction in order to tell a compelling news story. John Hersey states that a problem with this type of fiction-structured reporting is that, "since perfect objectivity in reporting what the eyes have seen and the ears have heard is impossible, there is no choice but to go all the way over to absolute subjectivity… What is, or may be, going on in "reality" recedes into a backdrop; it dissolves out of focus and becomes, in the end, fuzzy, vague, unrecognizable, and false.[85]

Regular news reporting is not fiction, but it is a *story* about reality, rather than reality itself. These constructed stories, drawing their themes from myth, give people a schema for viewing the world and for living their lives. The documentary form of journalism, "the creative treatment of actuality," uses fictional narration devices more freely and overtly than do straight news stories. Roger Silverstone states:

> If the mythic in television documentary draws the viewer into a world of fantasy, of the heroic, then the mimetic pulls him or her toward the real. It does so by the label "documentary;" it does so in images that in their presence guarantee fidelity to a separate and unmediated reality; and it does so through its narrative forms,

[84] Bird and Dardene 76.
[85] John Hersey, "The Legend on the License," The Yale Review 70 (1980): 23.

> essentially word driven, that define an argument or a logic that by its very invisibility is recognized as natural.[86]

Documentaries are modes of storytelling that use fictional narrative methods. A narrative consists of causally-linked events that occur at a specific place and time. Documentarists rely on several narrative techniques, such as the 'a day in the life' format, the 'problem – solution' format, and the 'journey to discovery.' Richard Kilborn and John Izod write that, "much beloved of ethnographic and natural history documentarists, (the 'journey of discovery') gives the audience the agreeable illusion that it is sharing…the quest for knowledge new to Western humanity."[87] Whereas narrative in fiction centers on the characters and how they interact with events, narrative in documentaries centers on evidence and argument. Another, more crucial difference between fictional narrative and the documentary narrative is that fictional stories do not necessarily have to be backed up by fact, while documentaries must remain accurate representatives of real events. Kilborn and Izod state:

> At first sight the modes (of documentary) are rather like (fiction) genres precisely because they too depend on their continued currency on a broad set of conventions which are repeated time and again. However, when we look closely, the likeness is not perfect. Whereas in fiction the various genres usually represent

[86] Silverstone 38.
[87] Kilborn and Izod 118.

> different types of imaginary world, the documentary modes represent the actual historical world in different ways.[88]

News and documentary narratives are not necessarily all in spoken or written form. Most news and documentary formats are heavily dependent on both still and live-action photography. The pictures form a narrative that is sometimes more compelling than speech or the written word. News and documentary photography effectively record the texture of current experience, and invest that experience with meaning.[89] Photographs, as stated earlier, are symbolic narratives. But in order for these symbolic narratives to remain effective, the photographs must remain current. According to Robert Adams:

> Serious photography, no matter how "straight" or apparently objective… like everything else we devise, can be depended upon to quit working. Eventually the symbols so outlast their original context that they no longer effectively point anywhere, becoming instead only artifacts for the documentation of cultural history.[90]

It could be that while archetypes retain their effectiveness, our understanding of archetypal representations constantly changes. News photography, due to its coverage of contemporary issues, constantly revitalizes its stock of symbols, and therefore remains an effective communicator to the public.

In propagating myths, the inarticulate nature of photographs may be more effective than words. The Italian writer Italo Calvino states, "Myth is the hidden

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[88] Kilborn and Izod 57.
[89] Adams 83.

part of every story, the buried part, the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get there… Myth is nourished by silence as well as by words."[91] Christopher Janaway supports this non-verbal aspect of myth when he states: "Myth can present an attractive and worthy picture that satisfies us in ways argument cannot."[92] D.H. Lawrence states that myths are beyond speech: "Myth is an attempt to narrate a whole human experience, of which the purpose is too deep, going too deep in the blood and soul, for mental explanation or description."[93] Myth touches us on a level that resonates deeper than mere explanation or even rational, logical thought, just as art does. And, just as in art, myths distill for us the experience of life, telling us what is important, what is expected, and what is understood. It could be that non-verbal symbolic narratives, such as photography, are inherently better than verbal narratives at articulating the core beliefs of myth. News and documentary photographs, it would seem, serve as a marriage between myth and art.

Science Photography and Truth

Photography is not only used by journalists and artists, however. Scientists also make wide use of photography's various applications. Science and truth have a long association, and the modern era was in part defined by a belief in science's ability to objectively discover absolute truths.

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[90] Adams 83.
[91] Italo Calvino, "Cybernetics and Ghosts," The Literature Machine. 1987.
[92] Christopher Janaway, Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 160.
[93] E. McDonald, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, pt.4. 1936.

Currently, science does not claim to discover final truths, yet scientists are often seen as unquestionable authorities in our technology-driven culture, very similar to the earlier unquestionable authorities of religion. Journalists actually contribute to this image, strengthening the connection between science and authority. Journalists tend to hold scientists in high esteem, and they promote scientists as superstars, super geniuses, or as brilliant eccentrics who operate outside the realm of normal human activity.[94] Scientists often are consulted for their opinions outside their area of expertise, giving them the broadly defined status of "wise" due to achievements in their narrow fields of research. This promotes the notion that scientists are inherently insightful, and therefore reliable authorities.[95] Because so much of our culture is dependent on science and technology, we are also dependent on these wise authority figures. We look to science just as we look to myth for instructions about how to live our lives. The USDA releases its ideas of a proper diet in the form of a pyramid, for instance, and we soon see that pyramid as a blueprint for "the right way" to eat. In the mythological matrix, scientists are represented by the archetype of "keepers of wisdom," or "seers." The Roman equivalent would be the God Apollo, and in the King Arthur story we see them represented in the figure of Merlin.

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[94] One reason for this attitude among journalists is due to their dependence on scientists, often solely relying on them to guide them through new scientific information. This lack of critical reporting is seen by Challem (1993) as a result of being overwhelmed by the complexity of science reporting, or insecurity in one's own ability to accurately report the complex information into an easily understood format. A study by Van Trigt (1994) found that medical journalists most often gained information from doctors, universities, peer-reviewed journals, and the pharmaceutical industry. Journalists, ever afraid of being seen as not wholly objective, have been of late moving away from this dependence on scientific authority. Less unquestioned reliance is being placed on the established medical journals.

[95] Dorothy Nelkin, Selling Science: How the Press Covers Science and Technology (New York: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1987)

Science has had a long association with religion. "For most of history," writes *Newsweek* reporter Kenneth L. Woodward, "religion and science have been siblings – feeding off and sparring with each other – rather than outright adversaries in the common human quest for understanding."[96] Although the French Enlightenment in the 18th century and Darwin in the 19th century caused a seemingly irreconcilable rift between the two belief systems (one that persists to this day), many modern scientists still acknowledge an existing bond between religion and science. "Science without religion is lame," Albert Einstein said, "Religion without science is blind."[97] The astronomer and atheist Carl Sagan admitted that science and religion have something in common when he stated, "We all have a thirst for wonder. It's a deeply human quality. Science and religion are both bound up with it."[98] Science and religion generally also share a belief that truth is found or revealed, rather than made, as postmodernists believe. Yet a principal difference between science and religion lies in the search for truth. The common quest of both science and religion is the search for truth and understanding, but religion relies on faith whereas science relies on proof obtained through observation and experimentation. In the search for truth, both science and religion have a clear set of rules that are stringently enforced. In religion, there is a final, unquestionable authority (God) who acts as judge. The authorities in science appear to be other scientists, who, in the process of peer-

[96] Kenneth L. Woodward, "How the Heavens Go," Newsweek July 20 (1998): 52.
[97] Qtd. in Sharon Begley's article, "Science finds God," Newsweek July 20 (1998): 47-51.
[98] Carl Sagan, Contact (New York: Pocket Books, 1985) 173. Carl Sagan concluded that since the birth of the universe could be explained by physics alone, there was nothing in the universe for a creator to do, and that every thinking person must therefore admit the absence of a God. A disbelief in God, however, did not prevent Sagan for recognizing certain intrinsic truths about the nature of either religious or secular belief systems.

review, test one another's hypotheses. Scientists build upon each other's discoveries, as well. In science, the quest for truth appears to be an unending process, as each new discovery paves the way for more insights. According to Harvard historian Gerald Holton, the idea that science has degrees of truth, rather than a final truth, goes back as far as Galileo.

We put our faith in our scientists, not only because of our belief in the truth of mythological archetypes, but also because science represents the search for truth. We often rely on journalists, our messengers or scribes, to interpret this knowledge for us. This interpretation, however, can often be biased or distorted. In the reporting of science, for instance, journalists tend to see the majority scientific opinion as the authority. "In a study of major news media coverage of health hazards, Singer and Endreny (1987) found that both print and broadcast stories about health controversies (such as abortion, euthanasia, and recombinant DNA research) 'tended to accept the frames provided by the dominant institutions currently active in the debate'."[99] In the initial reporting of a new sensation, a fair spectrum of opinions is usually represented, but eventually the majority opinion becomes the final authority, while detractors are drowned out or viewed as "fringe" and eccentric.[100] This treatment of scientists by journalists can lead to apathy among the general public, because if *they* dared to argue with the figures of authority, they, too, would be considered fringe or strange for arguing against the prevailing scientific opinion. It is easier to trust an established authority than to question areas where we cannot be sure we fully

[99] Jane D. Brown and KimWalsh-Childers, "Effects of Media on Personal and Public Health," Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994) 22.

understand the complexity of a subject. Science, in this way, becomes a closed priesthood, its secrets closely guarded by its adherents. Hillier Krieghbaum warns:

> As Dr. J. Bronowski argued in *Science and Human Values* (1956): There is no more threatening and no more degrading doctrine than the fancy that somehow we may shelve the responsibility for making the decisions of our society by passing it to a few scientists armored with a special magic.... The world today is made, it is powered by science; for any man to abdicate an interest in science is to walk with open eyes towards slavery.[101]

On the other hand, journalists often open up the world of science to the general public, and by doing so increase our capacity for understanding. Photojournalism may do this job better than just written journalism. Pictures may sometimes be better than text for telling a scientific story. A digital image of a hydrogen atom, for instance, will seem clearer to the general public than a detailed paragraph describing the structure of the atom.

Science and the visual arts have much in common. Both science and the visual arts have an interest in color and light, and both attempt to achieve understanding derived from observation. John Galloway writes:

> It is no coincidence that the world's two great flowerings of representational art – in Ancient Greece and in the Renaissance (and continuing up to the present day) have corresponded with the

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[100] Pfund and Hofstadter 1981.

> two great ages of science. Art and science are more intimately interwoven than some – scientists and artists alike – would have us believe.[102]

Science and the arts may tend to flourish together because practitioners from each field draw from one another for inspiration. Roger Silverstone argues that traditional science texts and science documentaries "both involve a rhetoric and a poetic structure, both are artful, both seek to persuade and convince.[103] Photography, in fact, can often make people see the inherently artistic nature of science. Silverstone states that, "something we might call science, specialized, inaccessible, literary, often dull and inconclusive, becomes, in the hands of *Horizon* or *Nova* or unequivocally in the hands of Carl Sagan, a drama, an adventure: heroic, powerful, accessible, visual, probably unchallenged.[104] Not only can photography make traditionally dull science topics seem artistic, but photography can also make such topics seem exciting. Photography can expand the audience for science by making science both more interesting and accessible. The visual media can reach far more people than print, especially when they are transmitted via television. Over the years, photography has done much to promote and popularize science. John Galloway makes this point when he writes:

> Photography's influence on the process of science is incalculable. But I suspect there is yet more to the relationship between

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[101] Hillier Krieghbaum, Science and the Mass Media (New York: New York University Press, 1967) 10.
[102] John Galoway, "Seeing the Invisible," Impact of Science on Society 168 (1992): 329.
[103] Silverstone 38.

> photography and science. It is sometimes said that science is public knowledge, one implication being that artistic knowledge is somehow private. To me that seems nonsense. Much – even most – of science is closed to everyone not closely engaged in it. In as much as some scientific knowledge is public it is photography that has made it so.[105]

Not only has photography made science more popular, but photographic techniques have actually helped advance the growth of science by giving scientists new tools to work with, for example, high-speed and low-speed photography, x-rays, time-lapse, fiber optics (see fig. 5-1). The camera has allowed us to see things we never would be able to see on our own. Pictures of living cells, crabs on the ocean floor, and close-ups of far-off planets are some examples of what photography has enabled us to see. Computer technology and digital imaging have advanced this capability even further:

> Computer generated images carry on the mission of knowing through seeing: three-dimensional looks through the human skull; the region where Voyager 2 would pass between Uranus and its moon Miranda; bands of color representing varying temperatures on the skin of the space shuttle Columbia as it landed.[106]

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[104] Silverstone 38.
[105] Galloway 342-3.
[106] Leah Bendavid-Val, National Geographic: The Photographs (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1994) 236.

Science, likewise, has impacted the aesthetics of photography. By trying to maintain a degree of objectivity, “straight” (rather than artistic) photographers embraced photography’s ability to record details with a sharp, scientific eye. The documentary medium, in fact, was seen as a scientific, objective way to tell a story. There are too many philosophical differences between scientists and journalists, however, to make scientific photography equivalent to documentary or news photographs. Although the stated goal of both scientists and journalists is to uncover the truth, conflict arises over the definition of “truth.” Journalists tend to view truth historically, with their role defined as recorders and interpreters of that history. When all the information is available, when the story unfolds, the truth makes itself known; a final truth. Such an attitude assumes that there is a final, undeniable truth. The nature of scientific discovery tells us another tale. Science constantly changes in the light of new evidence; there is no final truth, only constant discovery. One journalist complained, “Science tends to discover ongoing truth. It’s never got the final truth.”[107] Joseph Campbell writes:

> But now, finally, what would the meaning be of the word “truth” to a modern scientist? Surely not the meaning it would have for a mystic! For the really great and essential fact about the scientific revelation – the most wonderful and most challenging fact - is that science does not and cannot pretend to be final. It is a tentative organization of mere “working hypotheses” that for the present appear to take into account all the relevant facts now known.[108]

[107] Aumente 29.
[108] Campbell 17.

Both journalists and the public have a difficult time with this notion of evolving truth. However, the fact that scientific truths are never final is actually a benefit to journalism. New information propagates new stories. Joseph Campbell, for one, is an ardent enthusiast of this modern notion of truth:

> There is to be only a continuing search for more – as a mind eager to grow. And that growth, as long as it lasts, will be the measure of the life of modern Western man, and of the world with all its promise that he has brought and is still bringing into being; which is to say, a world of change, new thoughts, new things, new magnitudes, and continuing transformation, not of petrifaction, rigidity, and some canonized found "truth."[109]

Just as journalists and scientists disagree on the definition of truth, they also disagree on how to communicate truth. Many scientists object to the literary devices journalists employ in telling a story, for instance. Journalists strive to capture the essence of the science, but scientists expect the "nuts and bolts" of their findings to be expressed as well. This leads to accusations by the scientists of oversimplification and inaccurate reporting.[110] Scientists' use of technical language makes them resist the "like" or "as" nature of analogy; they prefer a more exact terminology. But many feel this is exactly why journalists are needed; scientists often do not communicate in a clear, easily understandable manner. M.W. Thistle wrote in a 1958 *Science* article, "I know a lot of scientists

[109] Campbell 17.

whom I love, but whose operations in the English tongue remind me of an elephant on stilts - ponderously inelegant... the ones who (communicate) badly err on two counts: a bumbling, fumbling use of the language itself and a thoroughly mistaken idea of how much detail is required. There is no substitute for adequate training in writing and speaking."[111] Pete Hamill agrees with the importance of skillful writing when he notes:

> The mere stacking of facts is not, of course, enough. The facts must be organized into a coherent whole. They must tell a story. And the great story usually tells us something larger than the mere facts, something about which novelists and philosophers have called… the human condition.[112]

In order for a journalist to have his story read by the public, he must make that story appealing and interesting. Photography aides in this process, giving the public clear pictures to accompany and illustrate the text. The best stories and photographs do more than just tell a story well, however, they also reveal underlying truths lying beneath the details.

Although science and journalism may never reconcile their philosophical differences,[113] they continue to impact and influence one another. Likewise,

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[110] Nelkin 1987
[111] Krieghbaum 45.
[112] Hamill 26.
[113] The popularization of science is another point of contention between scientists and journalists. Journalists often humanize their science stories in order to make the science more understandable and approachable, approaching stories from the human-interest angle in order to attract audience interest. Scientists look down on this practice and would prefer for the journalists to focus primarily on the hard science and the impact the findings will have on the scientific community. "Many scientists to this day question the 'popularization' not of research but of people as well as their research. They cannot accept the

artistic photography, while differing philosophically from both scientific and news photography, can influence and be influenced by them as well. If photography can be classed into three separate and distinct groups, straight news, artistic, and scientific, then documentary photography borrows from all three of these groups. From artistic photography it borrows an aesthetic, from straight photography a faithful representation of immediate events, and from scientific photography a concern for objective documentation. But just as documentary photography has something in common with all three photographic styles, it also differs from all of them as well. All of these types of photography however, grapple with the philosophical question of truth. Because myth is closely related to truth, and because it still plays a role in public discourse, mythic archetypes are expressed in photography as a means of addressing the question of truth. One way this is accomplished is through the use of geometric archetypes, or archetypes of form, which are visual symbols representing mythic themes and values. These archetypes of form are similar to the classical ideas of what constitutes beauty, hence an association between truth and beauty that dates back to ancient times. To quote a Latin phrase, *Pulchritudo splendor veritatis* – Beauty is the splendor of truth.

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notion that the people are often just as important to the science writer and as interesting to the reader as research findings." Kriegbaum 24.

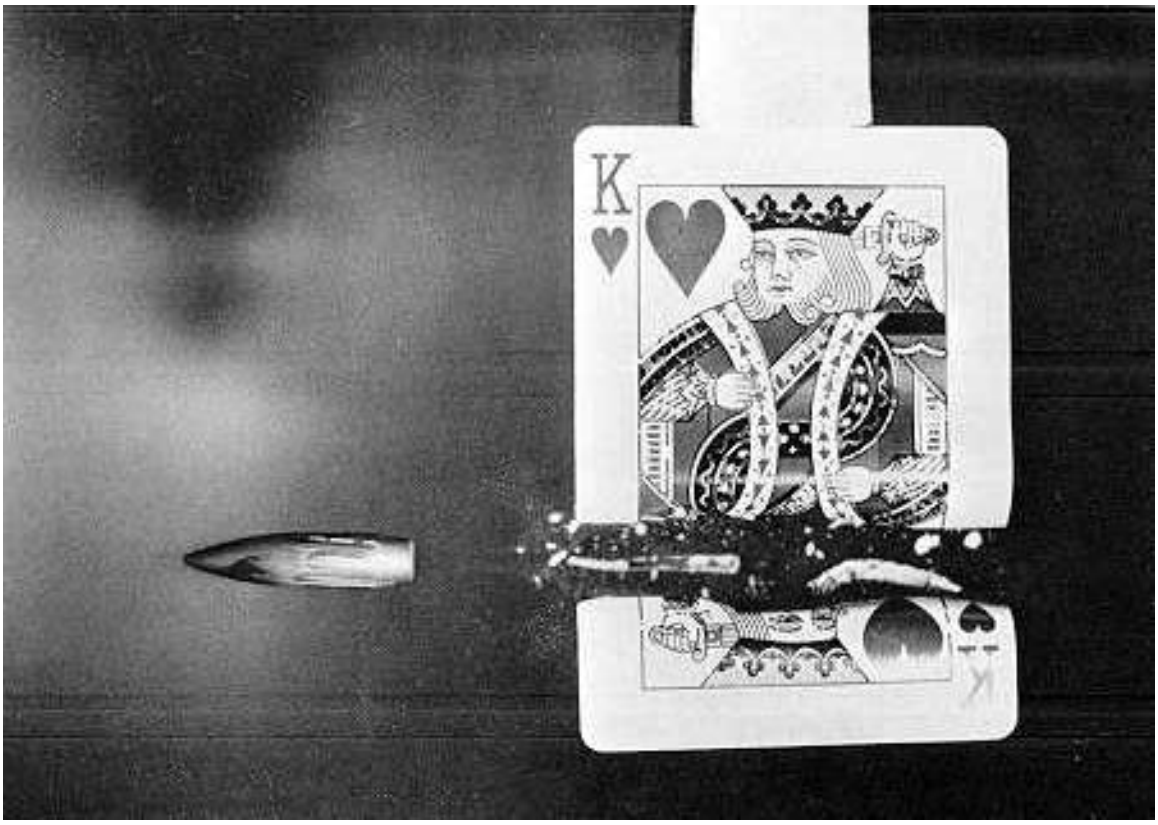

Figure 5-1: “High-Speed Photograph,” Harold E. Edgerton. Photography has been a boon to science, allowing us to see new aspects of the world. The Best of Popular Photography Ed. Harvey V. Fondiller (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1979)

CHAPTER 6
ARCHETYPE OF BEAUTY

Truth and Beauty

One quality of art and photography that is associated with truth is the representation of beauty. This connection between truth and beauty has long been acknowledged, causing the poet Keats to write:

> Beauty is truth, Truth beauty –
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> that is all ye know on earth,
>
> and all ye need to know.[114]

One reason beauty and truth are linked is because of beauty's connection to myth through archetypal patterns. Archetypes can be geometric patterns (such as circles, spheres and triangles) that occur naturally in nature. Artists often use these patterns as signifiers or clues of deeper meaning. A cross, for example, is a geometric pattern that signifies the story of Jesus, and the values and meanings in that story to Christians. Michael S. Schneider states: "Religious art is sacred not only due to its subject matter but also because it was designed using the subtle symbolic language of number, shape, and proportion to teach self-understanding and functional self-development."[115] Religious art often relies on symbols and patterns to convey meaning and truth. Beauty similarly is

[114] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 49-50, Lyric Poems, Ed. Stanley Appelbaum. (Dover Publications, 1991) 36.
[115] Michael S. Schneider, A Beginner's Guide to Constructing the Universe: The Mathematical Archetypes of Nature, Art and Science (New York: HarperCollins, 1994) xxiii-xxiv.

associated to truth due to its archetypal representation of order and form. This emphasis on order coincides with the Platonic ideal of beauty, which is based on unity, regularity and simplicity. Plato stated that every living person is in the process of becoming, of moving toward the ideal. The more "beautiful" something is, the more it will be seen as closer to the ideal. We are therefore more inclined to perceive some things as favorable simply based on appearance.[116] This preference for order carries over into our evaluation of images.

Because order defines beauty, the opposite of beauty could perhaps be chaos. "Why is Form beautiful?" asks photographer Robert Adams, "Because, I think, it helps us meet our worst fear, the suspicion that life may be chaos and that therefore our suffering is without meaning."[117] Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson recognizes that chaos is the opposite of beauty when he states, "I acknowledge that a plastic order exists which is capable of preventing us from disintegrating because of banality, chaos, and oblivion."[118] Both Adams and Cartier-Bresson also suggest that the opposite of beauty is not just formlessness, but meaninglessness. Order, or beauty, therefore, is also associated with meaning.

The idea that beauty is associated with truth and meaning has long been a basic belief of scientific philosophy. Heisenberg, in a discussion with Einstein, notes:

> If nature leads us to mathematical forms of great simplicity and beauty – by forms I am referring to coherent systems of hypothesis,

[116] In Plato's *Republic*
[117] Adams 25.

> axioms, etc. – to forms that no one has previously encountered, we cannot help thinking that they are "true," that they reveal a genuine feature of nature.[119]

These mathematical forms that Heisenberg mentions are related to archetypal geometric patterns according to Michael S. Schneider, who notes that, "scientists confirm with formulas what ancient seers knew through revelation: that the world's patterns and cycles are harmonious when seen as mathematical relationships."[120] Beauty, perhaps because of its relationship to myth through archetypal patterns, seems to be understood as something true or right by the unconscious mind.

Plato's definition of beauty – unity, regularity, and simplicity – reflects qualities of our most valued scientific theories. The archetypes of beauty – geometric patterns of order – are reflected throughout nature: in a snowflake, a leaf, a solar system (see fig. 6-1). Science seeks to understand nature, and when natural patterns of order are revealed, scientists believe they have uncovered a truth. Beauty in science is often equated with symmetry.[121] Many scientists believe that the more symmetrical, or beautiful, a theory is, the more likely it will be true. K.C. Cole writes:

> The search for symmetry turns out to be a very effective tool for looking beneath superficial differences that camouflage similarities to find a more substantive, permanent meaning. Symmetry

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[118] Manchester 55.
[119] Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, Truth and Beauty: Aesthetics and Motivations in Science (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 65.
[120] Schneider xxv.

> therefore lends a satisfying concreteness to the vague sense that there is beauty in truth, and truth to beauty.[122]

James W. McAllister points out, however, that scientists tend to prefer scientific theories that correspond to certain aesthetic values, often at the expense of theories that are less aesthetically pleasing, but no less true.[123] The fact that a scientific theory is symmetrical (i.e. beautiful) does not prove it to be true. K.C. Cole confirms McAllister's observation of a scientific bias toward the beautiful when she notes, "It is nice to know that there's a real quantitative connection between things we admire for aesthetic reasons and things that steer us toward a deep understanding of nature, including, perhaps, human nature."[124] Ultimately, beauty is only about appearances and beliefs. The ugly may be just as true as the beautiful, but we *prefer* the beautiful to be true. What is considered "beautiful" often depends on what we, as a community, believe. Thomas Kuhn, in his book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, notes how scientists periodically re-evaluate their beliefs about the world to make room for new ideas and discoveries.[125] McAllister states that many "true" scientific theories were thought to be ugly when they first were introduced. "At first," he notes, "many astronomers regarded Johannes Kepler's theory of planetary motions as ugly for portraying the planetary orbits as ellipses rather than combinations of circles."[126]

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[121] According to the physicist Lawrence Krauss, "to understand nature, that is, to understand its rules, is equivalent to understanding its symmetries." Qtd. In Cole 185.
[122] Cole 174.
[123] James W. McAllister, "Is Beauty a Sign of Truth in Scientific Theories?" American Scientist 86 (1998): 174-183.
[124] Cole 174.
[125] This is a postmodernist perspective, as opposed to the modernist idea of science as steady, objective progress.
[126] McAllister 177.

When “ugly” scientific theories are proved to be successful, they may eventually come to be regarded as beautiful. Beauty has been consistently related to form, order, and symmetry, but our understanding of beauty changes over time.

The Sublime and the Beautiful

Our understanding of beauty can change, yet the influence beauty has remains consistently powerful. Plato wrote in the *Phaedrus*:

> The soul is awestricken and shudders at the sight of the beautiful, for it feels that something is evoked in it that was not imparted to it from without by the senses, but has always been already laid down there in the deeply unconscious region.

Physicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar writes, “This ‘shuddering before the beautiful,’ this incredible fact that a discovery motivated by a search after the beautiful in mathematics should find its exact replica in Nature, persuades me to say that beauty is that to which the human mind responds at its deepest and most profound.”[127] But I believe this better describes the feelings associated with contemplation of the sublime, which is connected to the beautiful.

The Kantian idea of the sublime appears at first glance to be the antithesis of Platonic beauty. “According to Kant,” Sheldon Nahmod argues, “while beauty is connected with form and thus with what is enclosed in boundaries, the sublime - which does not exist in nature but only in the mind - involves an experience of

[127] Chandrasekhar 54.

boundlessness, of formlessness."[128] An example of the Kantian sublime are the emotions one feels while trying to comprehend mathematical infinity - we realize the idea while simultaneously realizing we can never achieve it:

> Kant's definition of the sublime assumes an unbridgeable gulf between an idea and its representation. Whereas beauty mediates between knowledge and desire in an attempt to bridge that unbridgeable gulf, the sublime is the feeling generated by that very gulf.[129]

Beauty is achievable, pleasurable, and evokes feeling of peace and contentment. The sublime, rather than the opposite of beauty, is instead a higher, less restful form of appreciation. Paul Crowther states, "Psychologically speaking, the feeling of sublimity is characteristically one of awe, or astonishment, or exhilaration, etc., rather than the restful contemplation we enjoy in relation to beauty."[130] Beauty is calm and surety; the feeling of truth found. The sublime is awe and exhilaration, but also a restless feeling of the need to achieve understanding. It is this feeling of restlessness which can propel a search for further truth. Kant stated, "The mind feels agitated in the presentation of the sublime in nature, while in aesthetic judgement about the beautiful in nature it is in restful contemplation."[131] I believe the experience of "shuddering before the beautiful" is misrepresented; what causes one to shudder is the sublime.

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[128] Nahmod 233.
[129] Nahmod 234.
[130] Paul Crowther, "The Aesthetic Domain: Locating the Sublime," British Journal of Aesthetics 29 (1989): 29.
[131] Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, Ak. 258.

The sublime is often connected to beauty, however. Kirk Pillow, in fact, argues that rather than being separate states of contemplation, beauty is a quality *necessary* in a work of art for the sublime to be accessed. Pillow believes that "beauty induces reflection," and that "aesthetetic reflective judgement suspends the workaday activity of determinative judgement." With one's determinative judgement put aside, the imagination is set free, "awakening our interest in the supersensible."[132] In this view, beauty acts as a base from which the sublime is reached. Perhaps what motivates "a search after the beautiful," or the true, is the sense of the sublime that follows from an appreciation of the beautiful. As stated previously, beauty promotes feelings of peace and satisfaction, of truth found, whereas the sublime promotes the need to search for truth. Henri Poincar— writes that one reason people are drawn to science is because of an appreciation of beauty,[133] but restful contemplation of beauty may not be enough to keep them there. Perhaps a sense of the sublime, an exhilarating awe of nature and the laws of the universe, is needed in order to propel the search for scientific truths. Albert Einstein, a scientist with a deep belief in God, noted that his desire to discover more about God acted as an incentive to studying science. Some scientists have noted that the best way to 'understand the mind of God' is to study the laws of physics. The sublime is often referred to in both science and religion as the *numinous*, which both

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[132] Kirk Pillow, "Form and Content in Kant's Aesthetics," Journal of the History of Philosophy 32 (1994): 443-459.

[133] "The scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it; and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing and life would not be worth living… I mean the intimate beauty which comes from the harmonious order of its parts and which a pure intelligence can grasp." Qtd. in Chandrasekhar 59.

science and religion cite as a major motivating factor in the search for answers. In religion, the numinous refers to that which is sacred or holy; the spiritually elevated. In science, the numinous is seen awe or astonishment for the mystery of an object.[134] Edward O. Wilson suggests that a mythic sense of the sublime encourages us to search for understanding when he states:

> Our minds travel easily – eagerly! – from the familiar and tangible to the mystic realm. Today the entire planet has become home ground. Global information networks are its radiating trails. But the mystic realm has not vanished; it has just retreated, first from the foreground and then from the distant mountains. Now we look for it in the stars, in the unknowable future, in the still teasing possibility of the supernatural. Both the known and the unknown, the two worlds of our ancestors, nourish the human spirit. Their muses, science and the arts, whisper: *Follow us, explore, find out*.[135]

Many have believed, however, that science and art are incompatible. Because scientists dissect something in order to discover its function, many believe the wonder (the sublime) and beauty of an object is destroyed in the process. The poet Wordsworth wrote:

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
>
> Our meddling intellect
>
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;

[134] Interestingly, the dictionary defines "numen" as first, a spirit believed to inhabit certain objects or phenomena, and second, as creative energy or genius.
[135] Wilson 232.

> We murder to dissect.[136]

Many poets have written of science as a destroyer of beauty and the sublime, including such notables as e.e. cummings, Emily Dickinson, and Edgar Allen Poe. Walt Whitman described how after he listened to "a learned astronomer" lecture, he became sick and left, preferring to go out into the "mystical moist night air" so he could look up "in perfect silence at the stars." The physicist Richard Feynman decries such an opinion among poets, stating:

> Poets say science takes away from the beauty of the stars… What is the pattern, or the meaning, the why? It does not do harm to the mystery to know a little about it. For far more marvelous is the truth than any of the artists of the past imagined! Why do the poets of the present not speak of it? What men are poets who can speak of Jupiter if he were a man, but if he is an immense spinning sphere of methane and ammonia must be silent?[137]

Detailed scientific knowledge does not necessarily kill beauty. Indeed, many scientists say that such comprehensive scientific knowledge only enhances beauty. Fenyman, for instance, described how a friend held up a flower and said, "I, as an artist, can see how beautiful a flower is. But you, as a scientist, take it all apart and it becomes dull." Feyman's reply was that such a notion was nonsense. "I see much more about the flower than he sees… a science knowledge only adds to the excitement and mystery and awe of a flower. It only

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[136] William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," lines 25-32, The Complete Poetical Works of Wordsworth, Ed. Andrew J. George (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1932)

adds. I don't see how it subtracts." Feynman added, "It's much more wonderful to know what something's really like than to sit there and just simply, in ignorance, say, "Ooooh, isn't it wonderful?"[138] As with art, science helps us to see more. It is the manner in which knowledge is communicated, rather than the knowledge itself, that either enhances or detracts from the beauty of an object. Edward O. Wilson believes science and art mutually benefit one another. He writes, "Science needs the intuition and metaphorical power of the arts, and the arts need the fresh blood of science."[139] Chandrasekhar agrees with this opinion, stating, "that one can derive joy from studying and understanding science, that one can learn science the way one enjoys music and art – it seems to me people ignore these aspects. Indeed, I feel that an appreciation of the arts in a conscious, disciplined way might help one to do science better."[140] Perhaps this harmony results from shared aesthetic values; the scientific search for symmetry carries over to art forms such as music and photography. Edward Rothstein, who was both a mathematician and a musician, wrote that when we search for symmetries we are "defining which aspects… we find essential and which aspects are irrelevant."[141] As stated previously, art often shows us the important, relevant details through a manipulation of representation. "Beauty," writes photographer Robert Adams, "is in my view a synonym for the coherence and structure underlying life."[142] Therefore beauty, because of its archetypal nature, performs a function of myth and art, "of distilling the essence of life out of

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[137] Richard Feynman, Lectures on Physics (Redwood City: Addison-Wesley, 1989.)
[138] Martin Gardner, "Science vs. Beauty?" Skeptical Inquirer 19 (1995): 16.
[139] Wilson 211..
[140] Greenstein 208.

the messy mix that nature presents us."[143] This association between myth and beauty does appear to promote a sense of connectedness, a feeling that the world operates on connections that lie buried beneath superficial differences. "What's beautiful in science is the same thing that's beautiful in Beethoven," says the physicist Victor Weisskopf. "There's a fog of events and suddenly you see a connection." Weisskopf goes on to state: "It expresses a complex of human concerns that goes deeply to you, that connects things that were always in you that were never put together before."[144] Beauty, therefore, has been seen as a route to understanding.

Beauty and Photography

Beauty is a common theme in science, art, literature and journalism. All these modes of inquiry seek to uncover "truth," and beauty is a way for them to "prove" they were successful in their search. But just as beauty does not always equal scientific truth, it does not define other truths either. The same applies to photographs – beautiful pictures are not inherently any more true than ugly ones. In fact, many beautiful photographs are manipulated, showing a falsified vision of reality. And just as with scientific theories, belief affects whether we see a photograph as beautiful or not. The photographer Robert Adams writes:

> What Capra's photograph (of a Spanish loyalist, fatally wounded a moment earlier) shows is truth – a common, terrible, and therefore

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[141] Cole 174.
[142] Adams 24.
[143] Cole 174.
[144] Cole 184.

> important truth. But again, does this mean the picture is beautiful? Is Truth Beauty and vice versa? The answer, as Keats knew, depends on the truth about which we are talking. For a truth to be beautiful, it must be complete, the full and final Truth. And that, in turn, leads me to a definition of Beauty linked unavoidably to belief.[145]

(see fig. 6-2) News and documentary photographers, in fact, have often shunned beauty, stating a preference for a grittier style of photography. A photographer who prefers to represent beauty is often seen as someone who irresponsibly depicts the world through rose-colored glasses. *National Geographic*, for instance, has been accused of only presenting the sunnier side of life due to its preference for strikingly beautiful images. Anne Chamberlin, a writer for *Esquire*, comments, "War, pestilence, starvation, revolution and natural disasters have not shaken its conviction that the world is a beautiful place."[146] One notable instance in which the *Geographic* glossed over troublesome events in order to represent a happier and more beautiful picture is in their April 1974 issue. An article on the Middle East stated that Syria's Jews were happy with their place in the Arab country. "About twenty representatives from the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish War Veterans went

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[145] Adams 31. Adams himself did not see the Capra photo as beautiful because he thought it was limited; that it showed only "a partial truth."

[146] Anne Chamberlin, "Two Cheers for the National Geographic," Esquire Dec. 1963: 299. Qtd. from Abramson 191-2.

so far as to picket the Society's headquarters, protesting what they termed a 'whitewash of Syria's treatment of its Jewish citizens,'" reports Abramson. Abramson quotes the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, who states that life for Jewish Syrians is "so fraught with harassment, restrictions, terror, torture and even rape and murder, that the *Geographic* article was shocking in the magnitude of its distortions."[147] Rather than beauty representing truth, beauty distorted a picture of real conditions. Richard Kilborn and John Izod write:

> The pursuit of beauty or of 'art for art's sake' in the work of the documentarist was a sign of aesthetic decadence. The realist documentary (as opposed to what Grierson called the romantic documentary, which merely celebrated the beauty of the world) must demonstrate its makers' social responsibility by a laboriously achieved sympathy with the historical world it represented. To be sure, the inspirational effort that process demanded might produce its own poetry.[148]

Despite the belief that beauty is a sign of irresponsibility or decadence, most successful documentary photographs can still be considered beautiful in form, even when the subject matter (the content) is ugly. Fred Ritchin writes, "Most good photographers are aware… that the relationship between content and form is fragile and easily betrayed, that the horror and stench, the apocalypse of dead

[147] Abramson 236.
[148] Kilborn and Izod 42.

bodies can come across in an image as strangely serene, even beautiful."[149] (see fig. 6-3) Perhaps, due to the association between beauty and the serene sense of a truth found, such a photograph can appear beautiful. The horror of war is, unfortunately, an undeniable truth about the history of human existence.

In photography, as in other forms of art, simply a beautiful form is not enough to suggest truth or to reveal meaning. If photographers take a picture simply because the image looks nice, the end result may often be banal rather than beautiful. Adams states: "If the dead end of romantic vision is incoherence, the failure of classicism (the classical representation of beauty)…is the cliché, the ten-thousandth camera-club imitation of a picture by Ansel Adams."[150] An imitation of a work by Ansel Adams does not echo its meaning, because it is a mere reflection of form. Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson describes in his professional artistic manifesto *L'instant decisif* (The Decisive Moment) how "everything is summed up in this supreme moment when form briefly takes on its essential meaning."[151] Cartier-Bresson therefore acknowledges that although form can have meaning, something deeper than superficial beauty is required to reveal meaning, or truth, or understanding.

Knowledge, history and culture all play a role in achieving understanding. Bob Gilka, *National Geographic's* director of photography in the 1980s, states: "Most of the photographers who bombarded us with underwater stuff didn't know

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[149] Manchester 417.
[150] Adams 27.
[151] Qtd. in Manchester 54. Cartier-Bresson is famous for his non-manipulation of the image. A Cartier-Bresson print is never cropped or enlarged, the photographer would set up his camera and wait for the magic moment to arrive, complete. Even though Cartier-Bresson did not indulge in the standard forms of photographic manipulation, he still selected the scene he wished to capture, which is a form of photographic manipulation.

what they had photographed. They were pretty fishes and pretty corals, pretty this, pretty that. David (Doubilet) became one of the few to realize it was important to know what these things were, and he made it his business to find out."[152] A dramatic or beautiful picture will catch the eye, but it often won't engage the mind unless it is placed in context. This is why, according to Adams, photographers and other artists need a firm grounding in the history of their art to be successful. To be able to reveal meaning in new ways, one must know how meaning has been revealed in the past.

But, as stated previously, beauty does not guarantee either truth or meaning. Beauty, like myth, depends on what we as a community believe. Despite the fact that order and symmetry define beauty, we may not acknowledge the 'beauty' of an object unless we are willing or ready to do so. This ties our sense of the beautiful inexorably to culture. Postmodern art highlights this culturally-dependant quality of beauty to prove how truth is product of culture. As stated previously, the idea that truth is defined by culture is the position of postmodernist philosophy.

Beauty in Aesthetic Philosophy

Modern philosophical theories reflect on the issues of beauty and belief, as well as the issues of symbolism and meaning. One of the differences between modernism and postmodernism has to do with the artistic representation of the sublime. As stated above, the sublime is characterized by boundlessness and formlessness. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to

[152] Bendavid-Val 200.

represent the concept of the sublime in a work of art. We can conceptualize the infinitely great and the infinitely small, but all of our attempts to describe or represent such concepts seem inadequate. According to Jean-Fran÷ois Lyotard, modern art devotes itself to expressing the sublime, "to present the fact that the unpresentable exists."[153] Abstractionists have taken Kant's definition of the sublime as "absence of form" literally.

In modernism, art involves both the beautiful and the sublime. Lyotard states that modern art "allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure."[154] Upon viewing this combination in modern art, the viewer is conflicted between pleasure and pain: pleasure in appreciation of the beautiful form, yet pain in "that the imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept."[155] Kant suggested that in experiencing the sublime, pleasure is derived from pain.[156] Modern art also struggles with the question of 'what is beauty?', seeking to escape the traditional definition. A preoccupation with the question of beauty is one way that both the beautiful and the sublime are included together in a modern artwork.

In postmodern art, however, beauty is eschewed entirely as an outdated, ineffective model. When you consider that postmodernists believe that chaos ultimately wins out over order, this makes perfect sense. Postmodernism looks

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[153] Jean-Fran÷ois Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism?" Art in Theory 1900-1990:1013.
[154] Lyotard 1014.
[155] Lyotard 1014.
[156] Some have interpreted this as neurosis or masochism. I prefer to think of it as a pleasure derived from man's intellectual potential, in that he can conceive of the infinite, combined with frustration in the realization that we have not (yet) achieved it.

down on beauty as nostalgia, or at least as a man-made construct; beauty is, after all, based on belief. Postmodernism instead seeks new forms of presentation, not for enjoyment, but as a means of expressing the unpresentable, the sublime. According to Barnett Newman, postmodernism also rejects other "props" of the sublime such as memory, association, legend and myth.[157] The rejection of such props often makes some see postmodernist work as shallow and emotionless. For instance, Frederic Jamison, who describes the symbolic language of images as "hermeneutical" in that we read the image for clues to a deeper reality, states that because postmodernism abandons the hermeneutical, it lacks depth. Jamison suggests that postmodernism is in part characterized by superficiality – "of flatness and depthlessness" – because the symbols that are used most often lack any meaning, other than to symbolize that they are symbols.[158] This repudiation of symbolic meanings is due to the postmodern standpoint that the surface image completely comprises reality. Postmodernism may have determined its own dead end by stating that the surface is everything. It is no wonder that postmodernism is often characterized by malaise or nihilism; why bother giving anything more than a cursory glance if there is no sense of deeper meaning? Without the symbols of myth, such as beauty, it is possible that a sense of the sublime may never be achieved, and it is the sublime that often prompts a need to search for deeper understanding.

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[157] Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," Art in Theory 1900-1990: 574.

[158] Jamison asks whether a Campbell's Soup can in a Warhol print says anything deeper than its explicit comment about the commodity culture in which we live. He compares the Warhol print that with the modernist painting *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, which expresses alienation, anomie, isolation and anxiety. (Although the canvas is, of course, silent, we see the scream in the waves of in the sky, the water, and the texture of the paint itself.)

Postmodernism has touched upon most of the fields in the liberal arts, and photography as been especially affected. Both modern and postmodern art promote the idea that images must be decoded. In modernism, this decoding is achieved by understanding a language of symbols or signs that indicate deeper meanings. Postmodernism says photographs need to be decoded according to their relationships to other factors within the culture. Whereas modernism treats a photograph as an image containing meaning, postmodernism sees a photograph as a cultural object. Eisinger states that "postmodernists are interested in who sees a photograph and where, who buys it or sells it, and what people say or write about it. For postmodernists, meaning does not arise from one sees in a photograph so much as from how the photograph is used."[159] Because postmodernists don't believe in the possibility of individualism, the idea that a photographer can infuse his photographs with personal, original meaning is seen as impossible.

Photography, as stated previously, is a manipulated medium, despite the protestations by news photographers of complete objectivity. The photographer chooses his subjects, frames his pictures, and alters the appearance of the photograph in the darkroom. He creates according to his own personal vision and aesthetic taste. This fact alone would seem to negate the postmodernist viewpoint, however, postmodernists claim that which we take as individual taste is a product of culture, any

[159] Eisinger 248.

subjective aspects photographers believe they have infused in a photograph are really only borrowed from a pre-existing pool of ideas.

This pre-existing pool of ideas is related to the language of mythic archetypes. Some storytellers maintain that there are only a handful of plots, which have been in use since ancient times, and the only differences among these stories arise in the manner of telling. The same could be said for themes in news or documentary photography, that the themes are universal but there is room for individual points-of-view through the manner of telling. Themes remain the same, and it is only our understanding of them that changes. News and documentary photographers have acknowledged a belief that "if one could see clearly enough, than one might see evidence of universality within the human and natural worlds and even a transcendent spirit immanent in all the visible world."[160] Modernists believe that such a mark of universality is what makes the difference between a typical, everyday news snapshot and a photograph that is a work of art (see fig.6-4). Eisinger writes, "If postmodernists insist that the pursuit of the aesthetic and the transcendent are politically irresponsible, then modernism may remind us of our aesthetic and spiritual needs."[161] As such, modernism may still effectively act as the opposing mode of thought to postmodernism. In modernism, myths wear modern clothes, and they change their clothes (their form) in order to adapt to a culture, but the content remains basically the same regardless of culture. In postmodernism, the clothes make the myth, and the wardrobe is limited.

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[160] Eisinger 7.
[161] Eisinger 269.

Although the postmodernist viewpoint currently prevails in most of the critical literature on photography, I believe there is still room for some of the tenets of modernism in current photographic thinking. The continued efficacy and resonance of mythic archetypes and themes throughout society would seem to indicate that symbols are effective in conveying meaning. The fact that new photographic images continue to capture our interest and even astonish and amaze us seems to suggest that the malaise postmodernists wallow in is not wholly reflective of the attitude expressed by the general public. Originality, genius, and individuality are still possible within a society of shared beliefs, influences and experiences. After all, as stated previously, art often means different things to different people. Although beauty has always been associated with form, order, and symmetry, individual understandings or representations of beauty vary. Even two people who grow up in the same culture can have very different opinions about a Van Gogh painting, a Mozart symphony, or a photograph by Ansel Adams. While the existence of myths suggests there are inherent, universal aspects of human understanding, there are enough differences among us to ensure we may never reach the dead end that postmodernists claim we have already crashed into.

Figure 6-1: "Leaves, Glacier National Park, Montana," 1942, Ansel Adams. In science, the symmetrical is associated with beauty. Photography: Essays and Images Ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980)

Figure 6-2: Robert Capra's photo of a Spanish Loyalist, Time/Life, Inc., 1936. The Best of Popular Photography Ed. Harvey V. Fondiller (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1979)

Figure 6-3: Bodies of executed Georgian soldiers are strewn on the outskirts of Sukhumi the day after Abkhazian forces captured the Parliament Building. Anthony Suau, Freelance/Time Magazine. The Best of Photojournalism: Newspaper and Magazine Pictures of the Year, v 19. Ed. Joe Coleman (Durham: The National Press Association and the University of Missouri School of Journalism, 1994)

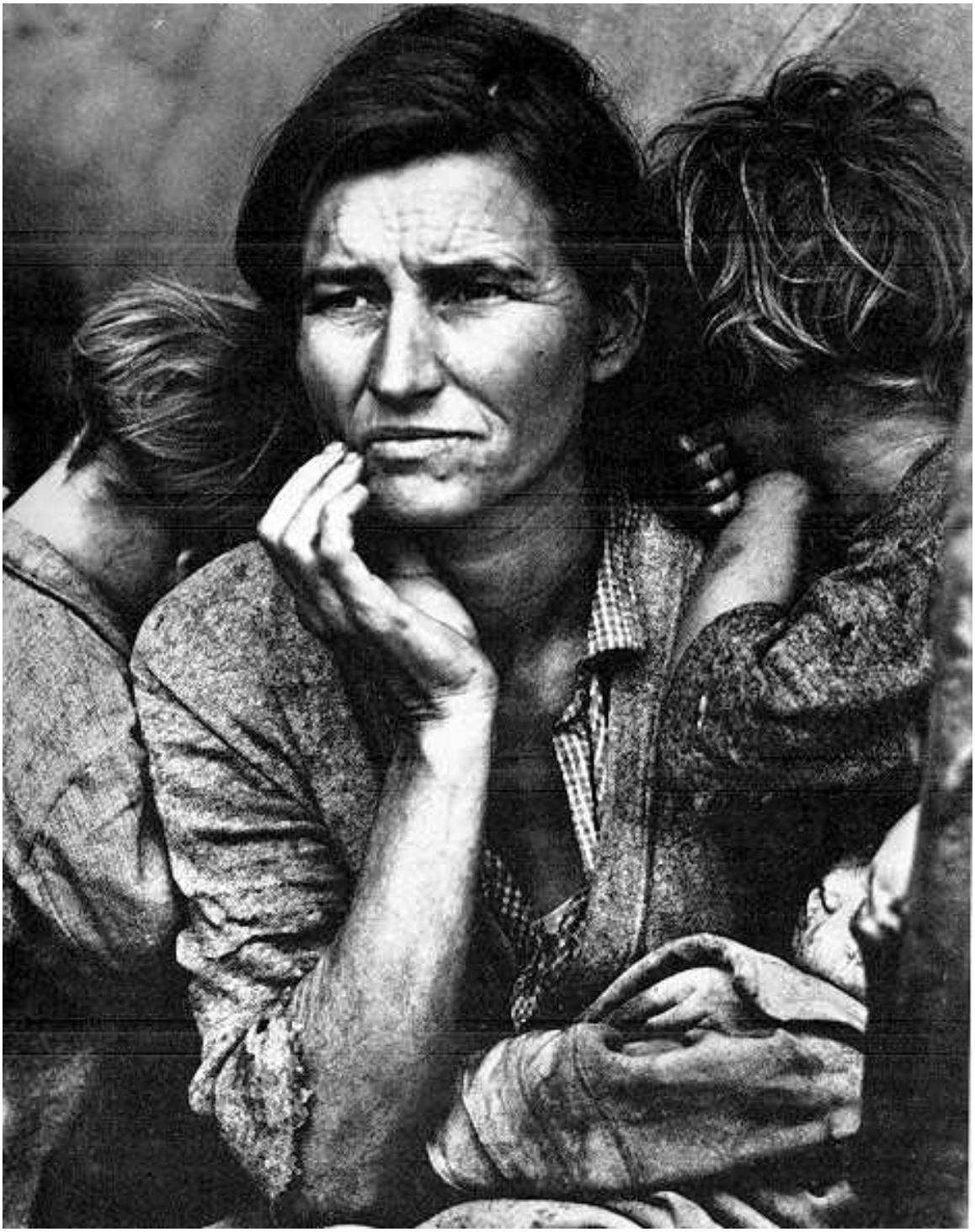

Figure 6-4:"Migrant Mother," Dorthea Lange, 1935. Modernists believe evidence of universality within the human world is what makes the difference between an average news photograph and a work of art. The Best of Popular Photography Ed. Harvey V. Fondiller (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1979)

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Photographic truth, like all other truths, depends on culture, belief, history, understanding, and human nature. There are truths that change, while others remain constant. The truths that remain constant will most likely reflect basic, unchanging facets of human life, such as of nature and biology, or of how to best cope with the demands of living in society. These unchanging facets are often related through mythic archetypes, and these archetypes are often featured in art works that endure over time. These works of art endure *because* they capture aspects of our own experiences, perceptions, attitudes and intentions. If they did not fairly reflect our own lives, they probably would not last.

But even these unchanging truths are under constant reconsideration. Reality is not static, it is in constant flux, undergoing revision as new aspects of life continually come to light. Walter Truett Anderson says that we have coped with this quality of reality throughout history:

> The quest for universal understanding goes on. But the scale changes, and the perspective shifts. What's happening now is in many ways similar to what happened a few centuries ago when people were exploring the planet: They kept discovering they lived in a wider world and re-drawing their maps. If you read a history of

> that adventure you can see an ongoing process, cycles of deconstruction and reconstruction.[162]

This is certainly true in science, where scientists are often adopting new instruments, looking in new places, and revising old theories. But it is also true of art, of philosophy, of any system of thought that seeks to reach an understanding about reality. These modes of inquiry reflect histories of thought built upon thought, of theories revised in light of new evidence, and of perspectives altered with new information. In order to understand where we are and where we are going, we must have an understanding of where we have been. It is only by looking at the past that can we face the future with a clear, comprehensible vision.

This is also true of this paper: a quick summary will hopefully give a clear understanding of the conclusions reached. I have stated:

1. People generally see photographic manipulation as a move away from the inherently truthful nature of photography, but actually manipulation is often required in order to reveal truth. Photographs rely on signs in order to convey these truths to the public in a symbolic language that is culturally learned.
2. The definition of truth is still debated among philosophers and theorists. Postmodernism states that truth is a product of culture, which changes over time. Modernism states that there are truths that

[162] Anderson 240.

are universal and unchanging. Art, and therefore photography, is an arena in which these philosophical questions about truth are tested.

3. Myth is often seen as a transmitter of enduring truths that exist beyond culture. Myths represent enduring truths because they deal with universal, unchanging facets of humanity. But myths also need to reflect culture in order to survive. Beauty, a mythic archetype of form, acts as a symbol for truth in art, photography, science and philosophy.
4. Although truth is influenced by the beliefs of a culture, it is not entirely defined by them; what we believe to be true is not always correct. Culture and truth are not always compatible, but we can only define truth based upon the knowledge at hand. Culture changes, so what we see as truth often changes. But some truths, such as myths, endure, because the conditions they describe endure.
5. Photography reflects both enduring and changing truths. Photographs tell both stories that have universal appeal and stories that reflect changing social values.

I believe Walter Truett Anderson is correct in his theory that we should become “multilingual” in all the competing philosophical worldviews. Each has points worthy of consideration, and a strict adherence to only one method of thinking could be seen as deliberately turning a blind eye. But finding a workable balance strikes me as one of the most difficult of all things.

Having a multilingual approach, however, would most likely aid our understanding of photographic truth. Although we are aware of the manipulation

that can occur to photographs on the scene, in darkrooms, or on a computer, we still trust that, for the most part, photographs are reflections of real life. Already a representative for “truth” due to its nature as a reflection of reality, when it is used by scientists as a tool, by journalists to illustrate, or by photographers to show the beauty of the world, the photograph’s relationship to truth is reinforced. Because of photography’s close association to truth, scientists, news journalists and documentarists often use photography to persuade.

Part of our trust in photography stems from our unconscious faith in mythic archetypes as universal truths. Myth is a symbolic language reflecting conditions inherent in human culture, and it affects how we see the world and tells us how we should conduct our lives. Although unacknowledged by the conscious mind, myths influence our ideas of what is “true” and guide us down the path toward understanding. Photography speaks in an extremely powerful symbolic language, a language that derives power from its non-verbal, almost subconscious quality. Although news and documentary photographs are not formally considered “artistic” photographs, the best perform the same function as art: by choosing and selecting which aspects of reality to highlight and address, they do away with the trivia and chaff of the day-to-day, and show us in many ways how life may be led and understood. Through manipulation, they reveal truth, or at least, what the photographer perceives to be truth.

Our understanding of reality depends on a knowledge and awareness of both the internal and external world. Photography, as both a reflection and a manipulation of reality, is likewise viewed and judged by that vision. It is only by

understanding why photography is so closely aligned with truth that we can come to comprehend our own deep-rooted faith in its authenticity.

APPENDIX
A SAMPLE OF ETHICAL STATEMENTS BY MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND SCHOLARS ABOUT DIGITAL MANIPULATION

> The Norwegian Institute of journalists came up with a solution, which was that, if a photograph were to be run that had been digitally manipulated, it must contain, very similar to the copyright symbol, a circle with an "m" in it, standing for "montage," not in the corner but prominently displayed in the photographic image itself.
>
> - Christopher R. Harris, Director, Digital Imaging Laboratory and Assistant professor of photojournalism, Middle Tennessee State University.[163]

> Journalists should take it upon themselves to evaluate the problems sometimes presented by digitexting and be prepared to strictly limit the practice. It is not the journalist's job to create or amend reality. To the extent possible, the task of reportorial journalism is to present the world as it is and allow consumers of journalism to determine for themselves their outlook on it. Notwithstanding the various forces operating on journalists, they must recognize the extreme importance of the maintenance of

[163] Don E. Tomlinson, Conference Convener and Ed., Computer Manipulation and Creation of Images and Sounds (Washington D.C.: The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University, 1993) 22.

> photographic reality. Protocols should be written and closely followed so that journalism can feast on the upside of the computer age without being devoured by the downside.
>
> -Don E.Tomlinson, discussing the results of a conference on computer manipulation and creation of images and sounds.[164]

> A manipulated image is not less desirable than one that is not; only something precious is sacrificed whenever such manipulation goes to extremes… There's no denying that computer imaging is becoming, not merely a way to change or improve on the silver image, but an entire art form. Nevertheless, photographers should realize that anything that removes the "photographness" of their photographs not only can change their work, but also diminish and devalue it at the same time.
>
> -Frank Van Riper, commercial photographer[165]

Asked if it bothers them that their medium aims to mirror reality in news reports yet adopts digital technology that effortlessly and imperceptibly distorts reality, respondents taken as a whole showed a mixed response. However, news directors were significantly more likely than editors to be bothered. Both groups taken as a

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[164] Tomlinson 54.

[165] Frank Van Riper, "A Cautionary Tale: Digital Manipulation Can Not Only Improve Photos But Also Raise Questions of Credibility," Nieman Reports 48 (Spring 1994): 19-20.

whole strongly supported the notion that it is wrong to alter images in any way that deceives the public.

Newspapers were significantly more likely to have ethical protocols (procedures, presumably unwritten, of a specific nature) to decide when and how to manipulate images. Further, the data suggest that protocols are working more satisfactorily for newspapers than for TV stations. Also, of the roughly half of all respondents who said their news organization relies on written codes of ethics in matters related to digital manipulation, survey responses indicated that newspapers were significantly more likely than TV stations to use them.

-results from a study questioning photo editors and television news directors about digital manipulation.[166]

The Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) revised their code of ethics to include digital manipulation. The new guidelines urge newspapers "to guard against inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortion through emphasis, omission, or technical manipulation." The 1975 code suggested "common sense and good judgement" in "applying ethical principles to newspaper realities." The

[166] George Albert Gladney and Matthew C. Ehrlich, "Digital Manipulation of Still and Moving Pictures," Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media 40 (Fall 1996): 501.

revision adds, “As new technologies evolve, these principles can help guide editors to insure the credibility of the the news and information they provide.”[167]

> In the end it comes down to the issue that, no matter how an image is produced – whether you collaged it together, or used a lens, or a satellite – it’s going to be presented in the framework of some kind of authority and validation. Much more important to me than pushing a few pixels around in a scanned image is that the structures of editorial control and authority are really starting to break down with electronic media.
>
> -William Mitchell, professor of architecture and media arts and sciences and dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[168]

> When I was at *Esquire*, every cover that was done was Scitexed. Sometimes it was a straight color correction. But when you get into bigger issues you are dealing with bigger things. When we did the JFK cover for the [30th] anniversary of his assassination, we’d gotten a still from the Zapruder film. The film was 8mm and became completely blurry and lost its colors when blown up to cover size. So we retouched it. It was to get a more truthful image,

[167] Tony Case, “APME Retreats on Strict Ethics Code,” Editor & Publisher 127 (August 13, 1994): 18. This article actually said the codes were being suggested. A later article (October 29, 1994) confirmed that the suggestions had been approved.

> because you could not see where Jackie's hat ended, or what the colors were. The intention was completely legitimate and honest, to make this image as vivid and real as possible.
>
> -Rhonda Rubinstein, editorial design consultant and former art director of magazines such as *Esquire*, *Newsweek*, *GQ*, and *New York*.[169]

> When I first started doing illustrations and photographs ten years ago, I would turn in a photograph, and the art director would say, "This image of this black man's face is never going to print on this page. I'm going to have to tell the press guys to lighten this area," or, "I don't like the color of that person's blouse, can you change it?" I recently got a letter from *Condé Nast*, and in one of the sections of this thing you sign, it says, verbatim, [the company assumes] "the right to crop, retouch, or otherwise modify the work." That one statement basically strips the artist of all rights. *Wired* magazine does the same thing, where they say, "It is further understood that *Wired* has the right to edit or manipulate the artwork(s) as it deems appropriate." Now in the letter that *Condé Nast* sent to every single artist they have had, it said in one of the paragraphs, which to me borders on blackmail, "If we do not receive a signed agreement from you in 30 days, we may not be able to work with you in the future." It's insidious and frightening to

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[168] Janet Abrams, moderator, "Little Shop of Horrors: The Ethics of Manipulating Journalistic Imagery," Print 49 (Nov-Dec 1995):36.

me because it's limited the number of people I can work with. There's a whole breed of art directors and designers coming up with this mentality. Some of these magazines feel like an image is just another block of type. It's another thing they can cut and chop and turn upside down and backwards.

-Matt Mahurin, magazine photographer and video director.[170]

[169] Abrams 36.
[170] Abrams 40.

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Leslie Mullen interned at the U.S. Senate in 1990, then attended college at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. She transferred to the University of Florida, Gainesville after two years. She graduated with honors from the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in political science and a double minor in English and environmental science. While working on her master's degree, she worked at WUFT-FM in production and as an on-air announcer and technical director, assisted in conducting a Robert Wood Johnson study on health-care coverage by the U.S. media, and worked at Barnes & Noble bookstore. After graduation, she will work as a science communication intern for NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.