The Photographer’s Eye

John Szarkowski
The Photographer’s Eye

• No longer in print, published in 1966

• John Szarkowski was the Director of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art from 1962-1991

• Personally picked by Edward Steichen to be his successor
The Photographer’s Eye

• The book is an attempt to define the characteristics of photographs

  • “What photographs look like, and why they look that way.”

  • Argues the importance of looking carefully and bringing every bit of intelligence and understanding as a viewer
Photographs

• Early photographers struggled with the mechanical aspect of photography
  • Many emulated other arts such as pictorial painting
    • Henry Peach Robinson’s *Fading Away*
    • *Two Ways of Life* by Oscar Rejlander
Photography Characteristics: Made vs. Taken

- Unlike paintings that were “made,” based on traditional skills and theories, photographs were selected, or “taken”
  - Photography is defined *not* by those emulating traditions of painting
  - It’s characteristics are shown in the work of those who purposely break from tradition, or who are ignorant of previous tradition
Photography: Art by the Masses

- The dry-plate process expanded the base of photographers
- Roll film made photography available to everyone
- Multitudes of photos began to be the sole influence for new photographers
  - With hand-held cameras came new points of view such as *snapshots*
  - Photography created it’s own vision
5 Aspects of Photography

- The Thing Itself
- The Detail
- The Frame
- Time
- Vantage Point
The Thing Itself

- Photography deals with the actual
- Clearer, permanent version of aspects of the world
- Photograph appears true, lens is impartial, photographer’s role ignored
- Reality is filtered, reduced in size, clarified or exaggerated
RP Ricci
Photography
Untitled
Bryce Pincham
Dream Big
The Detail

• Isolating and documenting fragments gives details meaning and significance

• Details in photography often reveal compelling clarity

• Details relevant in photography were too ordinary to paint

• Photographs could be read as symbols
Lorne Resnick
Sisters
Amy Pollard
Market Day
The Frame

- “To quote out of context is the essence of the photographer’s craft.”
- Photographer must decide what to include and what not to include
- The frame creates new relationships between subjects in the frame by cropping
- There are an infinite number of croppings in any given situation
Yuri Dojc
O King
MacDuff Everton
*Dawn at Taj Mahal*
Time

- Photographs are a record of the *present time* of which they were taken
- Photographs are not instantaneous
  - They describe shorter or longer lengths of time
- The photographer selects a decisive moment to capture the image
Patrick Cavan Brown
Artic Terns
Vantage Point

Photography utilizes unusual angles of view:

• Bird’s eye view
• Worm’s eye view
• Foreshortening (or not)
• From the back
• Selective focus & depth-of-field
• Ambiguity, obscurity
Onne Van der Wal
Shaman Ice and Boots
Summary

- ‘Photographer’s Eye’ aspects native to Photography
  - The Thing Itself
  - The Detail
  - The Frame
  - Time
  - Vantage Point