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Gazing at the City

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

Ramu Aravindan

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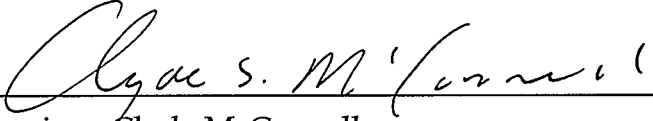
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The undersigned certify that they have viewed and read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, respectively, a Thesis Exhibition and a supporting paper entitled "Gazing at the City": an accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition, submitted by Ramu Aravindan in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



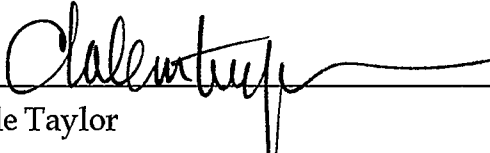
Supervisor, Clyde McConnell
Department of Art



John Hall
Department of Art



John Stocking
Department of Art



Dale Taylor
Faculty of Environmental Design

Date: 9/11/95

ABSTRACT

"Gazing at the City" is a set of thirty seven, medium-format, black and white photographs accompanied by this support paper. Together, they deal with a singular topic: the analogies between the character of a wandering stranger and the visual attributes of documentary photography. This paper examines the theme in three stages. In Chapter 1, I discuss the links between the stranger and cultural documentation within the context of the modern age and try to identify a documentary style that reflects the "stranger's" outlook. In Chapter 2, I discuss how the documentary style is dialectical and inclusive in its method of transcribing the world. Chapter 3 describes how I have tried to use this method to document Calgary's urban landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis started from what is essentially a personal fascination that got me interested in photography some years back. It was of using the camera to respond, comprehend and, at times, meditate upon the characteristics of a given place and time. This idea had also doubled for me as a personal definition of the documentary tradition in photography.

Two aspects of this method of cultural documentation intrigued me while embarking on this thesis. The first was a pair of disparate attitudes that documentary photography seemed to require of the photographer—the aimless abandon of a wanderer on the one hand and the objectivity of an outside observer on the other. Documentary images that I found most compelling, such as those of the American photographer, Walker Evans, seemed to arise from a disposition that was at once keenly observant and disinterested.

The second aspect had to do with the visual quality of such images. They seemed double-sided, functioning simultaneously as social record and as artistic expression. This is arguably true of all cultural artifacts, but in documentary photography the seamless nature of transcription and construction seemed particularly heightened to me.

Could the personality of an observant stranger and the visual qualities of documentary expression, be linked? Could documentary photography be seen as an extension of the stranger's outlook towards the world? Being in Calgary as a foreign student provided me with an appropriate milieu to explore these

questions. The city was new to me, and I could play the part of a wandering, alien spectator with a discreet intent. This paper and the photographs it accompanies have these issues as their central theme.

This support paper is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, relate the three principal topics that are relevant to my thesis: "the stranger", "the city" and the concept of objective documentation in art and literature. I have tried to examine them within the historical period in which photography was invented, the mid-nineteenth century—which is also the time when the modern industrial city, the migrant stranger, and modernist ideas of representation originated. I conclude this chapter discussing the work of two writers, Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), both of whom redefine objective representation through their work; in my view both writers are relevant to documentary photography, the former for developing the concept of the street wanderer (the *flâneur*) and the latter for developing a visual form of literary narration. The function of this discussion is to identify the attributes of a documentary form in which objective documentation and subjective expression collaborate.

Chapter 2 explores the visual attributes of documentary photography in further detail using the work of Walker Evans as an example. The discussion here centres around the issue of transcription and construction. I have tried to maintain that the ambiguous interaction between the two is deliberately heightened by certain modern artists to represent a relative and inclusive view of the world. To explain why and how, I have used a brief discussion of dialectical logic which I believe is relevant to a fundamental issue in photographic documentation—the correspondence between the seer and the seen.

Chapter 3 deals specifically with my photographs, which I conceive of as documents from a cityscape in the process of evolution. I have tried to construct these photographs in such a way that images of natural and cultural processes which a city provides would merge and coincide within their frames. This chapter seeks to explain how I have approached this goal with the help of a documentary style and details certain formal parameters I have used for the construction of this style. It also explains how I have conceived the theme and the display of my photographs for the M.F.A. exhibition.

CHAPTER 1

What transpires during the activity of a photographer strolling the city streets? Primarily, a combination of two process: selection (using instinct and reason), and recording (using a mechanical medium). This synthesis of intuitive response and mechanical transcription inherent in photography could be extended to form the image of the photographer as a half-man/half-machine, a coherent being who responds as well as records. The resultant images could then be seen as evidence of the stimulation that particular landscape had effected upon him. With this in mind I would like to explain what I believe a "stranger's" photographs could potentially communicate.

To link the foreigner's status to one's work could imply that the content had to do with alienation and the confoundedness that goes with it. Alternately, it could suggest that the photographic approach derives from the transitory experience of a tourist, the amused beholder of spectacles. We often see outsiderhood as a brooding confinement within the self, an often self-centered perception of things and, in the case of an artist, a realisation of these attitudes in the image.

Reflecting on the work of Josef Koudelka, who photographed gypsies and was himself a nomad, Czeslaw Milosz writes on the theme of exile: "Transplanted into alien surroundings we are oppressed by the anxiety of indefiniteness, . . . there are [so] many new shapes that they remain fluid,

because the principle of their order through routine cannot be discovered."¹ The theme of indeterminacy, of being adrift, of floating in space are all constantly recurring motifs with respect to the description of the exile, and modern writers and artists across the globe seem to be dealing with these themes as if they contain the meaning to the world.

Who is a "stranger?" Sociologists describe him in terms of an unusual ambivalence about his or her relation with society. George Simmel, in his essay on the stranger, defines him as "the person who comes today and stays tomorrow."² More recent thinkers have seen in him a further ambivalence of identity that defies definitions; for him to be a stranger, his distance and proximity with society has to be one that constantly shifts. Thus, Nikos Papastergiadis writes of where one must be to be in exile: "Perhaps the identity of the stranger is not coterminous with the person's spatial positioning, but emerges from an unspecifiable temporal instance in which his or her sense of belonging is detached from both the 'here' and the 'there'."³ The stranger, then, is not one who arrives today and stays tomorrow—a potential native. Nor is he one who arrives today and leaves tomorrow—a nomad. With the stranger, the present is unpredictable as is the future.

In a modern context, the stranger and the fluid shapes he encounters have a singular origin in the migrant labourers who flocked the cities of Europe in the 1830s. His exile was from the rural home to the zone of opportunities, the modern city, which rose up along with industrialisation. This dislocation must

¹ Essay in Josef Koudelka, *Exiles* (New York: Aperture, 1988), np.

² George Simmel, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, Translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff (Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 402.

³ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity as Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 93.

have been of such magnitude that many ideas we associate with the city today are defined in relation to the migrant: economic pressure and the promise of freedom from it, cultural transformation and the redefinition of values and norms, anonymity within an impersonal setting and the lure of personal liberation, the idea of a threshold between the rural and the urban and its passage. The city is the alienating but redeeming force which the stranger confronts, either to fall or to transcend.

The concept of the stranger defines the characteristics of the city. Starting from the opposition between the individual and the world, dualities appear enhanced in an urban setting. Thus we have victim (the unsuspecting individual) and predator (the master of worldly vices), rustic and urbane, natural and cultural, even day and night as sharply divided notions in an urban setting. The city then becomes not only one of the highest achievements of modern civilisation, but a metaphor as well for the modern individual's relationship with the world at large.

Not surprisingly, the city and the stranger are recurring characters in the art and literature of the industrial age. In Dostoevsky's novels, St. Petersburg becomes a dark and brooding setting in which the stories unfold. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov aimlessly roams in the heat of high summer a city that seems like an extension of his delirious state of mind. In *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin, the central character, senses mysterious eyes of menace from the city crowds as if the metropolis is staring at him. Maupassant's isolated characters, mostly Parisians, engage in strange rituals of companionship. In the field of the visual arts, Daumier extensively analyses the human dimensions of urban life. A recurring motif in his work is the railway, with the masses of people it carries in

and out of Paris. (The locomotive and the steamy train stations are also powerful symbols of the industrial age.)

How were these artists able to transform the reality of the city into a meticulous though often gloomy image of their times? Why do we not have vivid memories of social life, say, of the seventeenth century, handed down by the artists of that age? A mode of representation shaped by the ideological forces which rose along with the city provides us a clue.

In the 1850s, paralleling the rise of the city, cultural attitudes were changing in Europe and Russia signifying the coming of a new age. The accent of these changes was on the scrupulous analysis and description of the banal and the everyday as a means of understanding reality. In their wake, romantic idealism, at its peak in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, began to decline. This shift had a social background which, once again, was related to the city and its migrants. Analysing this historic transformation, F.W.J. Hemmings writes:

Railways spread, factories smoked, labourers left the land and flocked to the towns, where they found inadequate lodging and were paid starvation wages. The contrast between swashbuckling or inward turning romanticism and the harshly positivistic spirit of the age could hardly have been more striking.⁴

A growing distrust in the idealistic values propagated by a section of society, the disparity of these values with every day experience, resulted in a willingness on the part of the common man and the intellectual to suspend any

⁴ F.W.J. Hemmings, Ed. *The Age of Realism* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 37.

belief in a divine ideal that would shape their ends. This search for the "real" and rejection of the "ideal" became a powerful historic force (historicism itself being part of it) that shaped social life.

In the physical sciences, this search took the form of empiricism, in which directly observed evidence was weighed and studied for what it was worth as a means of understanding phenomena. In the social and political sciences, the study of history shifted from a metaphysical standpoint to one centered around man as a social being within the limits of psycho-physical causality. In art and literature it took the form of Realism, which sought to deal with a reality based on the humdrum, lived experiences of contemporary life.

In tune with these changes, artists considered experience as the true source of knowledge, acknowledged the intervention of instinctive ideals that bias experience, denied them and looked afresh at reality. This contemporaneity of both subject matter and form is what infuses much of the art and literature of the period with a sense of immediacy. In addition, as Linda Nochlin observes, many Realist artists associated truth and honesty with a dedication to objective, impartial description and analysis.⁵ Thus, in the works of the French novelist Émile Zola, emphasis on observation becomes a value in itself; descriptive detail becomes so heightened in his works that it has something of a shock value, similar to the effect of an unfamiliar place striking the senses of a newcomer.⁶

The artist's role here is not that of a participant but that of an omniscient witness who can observe the world in an unmediated way and represent that observation. In vivid terms, this procedure of unaffected seeing could be described as the mind isolating itself from the rest of the organism, gathering an

⁵ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 36.

⁶ Hemmings, p. 189.

outsider's view of things and synthesising it to understand reality. The artist of modern times, then, seeks to look at the world from the outside as if he is not a part of it, by becoming a stranger to it.

The realm of popular fiction characterises this modern variety of perceiving reality in certain delightful characters who make a living out of skeptical observation. The idea of looking without prejudices is reiterated in their acute and pervasive use of eyesight. The criminal detective, or the "private eye," is one such figure. He finds pieces of evidence where no one else thought of finding them. Thus, in the story *The Purloined Letter* by Edgar Allen Poe, the detective finds a hidden letter at a location where the police's large magnifying glass or meticulous searches could not reach—on a mantelpiece right under their noses. The psychoanalyst is another example. He makes his forays into the heroine's psyche piecing together accidental slips of the tongue, trivial gestures and insignificant dream bits.

Both the detective and the psychoanalyst work their magic by virtue of their ability to distance themselves and observe evidence in the cold light of analysis. Their characterisation reflects their skepticism, and thus the detective usually wears dark glasses as if to filter the deception of appearances through them. The psychoanalyst is often portrayed with a beard pointed like a dissection instrument as though indicating a deeper reality. The climax in such stories occurs when the protagonist tells us the method that he used to grasp the order that underlies the apparent chaos of the world.

As these characters anticipate, many twentieth century historians maintain that Modernism's view of reality can be seen as an elaboration of the stranger's relationship to his society. Siegfried Kracauer compares the stranger's ability to look objectively at society to that of the detective at a crime scene. By arriving

late, both are distanced from the spontaneous assumptions with which others comprehend the meaning of events.⁷ This gives the stranger, much like the modern thinker, the unique vantage point of an outside observer.

Similarly, defining the role of the modern historian, Kracauer relates that the exile in his extraterritoriality, "... is free to step outside the culture which was his own, [yet] he is sufficiently uncommitted to get inside the minds of the foreign people in whose midst he is living."⁸ The stranger is thus a marginal figure, but precisely because of that he possesses the unique capacity for an alternative view of reality. The stranger's method of building a relationship with his milieu to rise above his susceptibilities parallels the discriminating strategy that the modern artist or thinker uses to arrive at his view of the world.

If writers like Dostoevsky study the social workings of the city with a melancholic particularity, and the detective of popular fiction does so with a deadpan indifference, Charles Baudelaire, the French poet, explores the city with an ironic delight, as if to discover "universal communion" within the chaos of the street. As a vehicle for his explorations, Baudelaire uses a character, an incognito stroller whose thoughts and observations reflect the strange cacophony of modern life. This character is the *flâneur*, an estranged street wanderer who is at once capable of compassion and detachment, analysis and participation. "Multitude, solitude," writes Baudelaire, "equal and interchangeable terms for the active and fertile poet. He who does not know how to populate his solitude, does not know how to be alone in a busy crowd."⁹

⁷ Papastergiadis. p. 123.

⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 84.

⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Parisian Prowler*, Translated by Edward K. Kaplan (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 21.

Baudelaire's allusion here is to a characteristic feature of the city's social life—the unity of spatial proximity and psychological remoteness. The *flâneur* uses this ironic situation as his tool for observation; it takes him into the crowds where he can observe in close detail the shapes and expressions of the city, its joy, anger and sorrow and filth, yet reflect on them as in a soliloquy. Thus, abandoning himself to the sights and smells of the city, strolling anonymously, the *flâneur* reflects on the metropolis as its "chronicler and philosopher."¹⁰

In his exploration of the chaos of the street, the *flâneur* seems to make little distinction between vices and virtues; in this sense, his characteristic trait is an unequivocal use of observation. Here, Walter Benjamin analyses the nature of this character: "In the *flâneur*, the joy of watching is triumphant. . . . It can concentrate on observation . . . or stagnate in the gaper, [and] the *flâneur* has [then] turned into a *badaud*."¹¹ This distinction is critical because unlike the *badaud* who loses his self and becomes inseparable from the crowd, the *flâneur* is in possession of an unusual individuality that lets him move in and out of the crowd at will. Unlike the characters of Dostoevsky who are outsiders to the city and define it through their estrangement, Baudelaire's *flâneur* defines the dynamic correspondence between himself and the city, and to facilitate that defies fixed definitions. In other words, while Dostoevsky's protagonist uses his estrangement as a distant vantage point to view the city, the *flâneur* seems to be both outside the city, thus giving us incisive descriptions, as well as outside his own characterisation as either a confounded or a rational stranger, thereby

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1973), p. 37.

¹¹ Benjamin, p. 69.

giving us a more inclusive perspective. His objectivity is not directed merely towards the city but, it would seem, at himself as well.

Who is the *flâneur* with respect to the modern age, if not its victim or hero? Why the lack of fixed personality, which makes him appear more like a medium than like a character? The metropolis that the *flâneur* prowls is, in fact, the structure of modern civilisation, the city acting as its poetic metaphor. His occupation of collecting trifling, fragmented details, and his technique of seeming impersonality, resemble the very method of Modernism. Until this point this character is not unlike the other interpretations of the stranger we have seen. However, the *flâneur* is also an ambiguous and transparent being. Through this ambiguity Baudelaire presents us a different interpretation of the modern ideals of regarding the world. What the writer tells us here is that reality involves the perceiver as much as the perceived, and so should a representation of it. In order to do this, he deliberately emphasises the *flâneur's* taciturn subjectivity. Thus, Baudelaire's stranger shuttles between objective observation and subjective interpretations giving us many, often dissonant perspectives, much like those of a cubist painting.

Baudelaire's strategy for dissonance is a peculiar skepticism that creates a variety of shifting attitudes encompassing, in the words of Edward K. Kaplan, "...ambiguity and judgement, kindness and cruelty, anger and generosity, reverie and analysis."¹² Kaplan notes that the function of the kind of realism that the *flâneur* personifies is not merely to defeat idealism but also to overcome the complacency that could follow the ensuing victory. The *flâneur's* objectivity thus does not spare even him, and it is this double-edged, ironic objectivity that Baudelaire puts forth as the common character of both the stranger and the

¹² Introduction to *The Parisian Prowler*, p. xi.

modernist enquiry. The writer refers to it as a "suggestive magic" that is necessary for discovering the real meaning of things; ". . . it includes at the same time object and subject, the world outside the artist and the artist himself."¹³

Twentieth-century sociologists like George Simmel reiterate this interpretation of the stranger. In his study of modern society Simmel notes that the formal position of the stranger within a group ". . . embodies [the] synthesis of nearness and distance."¹⁴ Here, the objectivity of the stranger comes from his ability to view society from two opposing points of view and synthesize them rather than view things from a single, distant viewpoint. In more scientific terms, the *flâneur's* objectivity fuses the spatial element (his vantage point) with a temporal element (which lets him view things from two vantage points simultaneously). "Objectivity does not simply involve passivity and detachment," writes Simmel, "it is a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement."¹⁵ It is this dialectical objectivity that the *flâneur* employs for his analysis.

In addition to giving us a critical view of representation, Baudelaire's modernism has a particular function of social analysis as well. The poet never abandons the disjunction of dual oppositions that he sees in reality for the sake of representational coherence. (For this reason, critics find him a difficult writer to analyse even though he is widely enjoyed by readers.) Thus, in Baudelaire, the city, while creating livelihood, also alienates. The stranger, as he rises from his obscurity, also learns to see the world as the other. And the modern perception of reality, while becoming aware of the world around, also cultivates distance.

¹³ Quoted in Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 23.

¹⁴ Simmel, 404.

¹⁵ Simmel, 404.

Baudelaire does not tell us whether a stranger's exile is a result of misfortune or choice. Instead he shows us, in the *flâneur*, the dubious condition of the modern hero. This stranger personifies a socio-economic casualty of an historical period even as he functions as its protagonist; he embodies objective analysis as well as the frightful condition of the mind becoming estranged from the senses. Thus, in the *flâneur*, we have a profound and complex conception of the link between the Realist enquiry and the stranger. He is at once a personification of the ideals of the modern age and an allegory for its ironic relationship with the world.

The invention and initial development of photography occurred consonant with the Realist enquiry in art and literature. In other words, a tool of faithful transcription was born into a milieu in which the notion of seeing without prejudices was becoming the basis for philosophical enquiry.¹⁶ In tune with my discussion of the *flâneur* and his link with modernism, where can we find the use of photography that combines the objectivity of the camera with the subjective spirit of the artist?

The answer lies in a literary work whose form seems constructed out of the specifics of ocular perception. This work was Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, published in 1857. Flaubert's masterpiece was the very prototype of the realist novel, a seemingly reportorial tale of French provincial life without

¹⁶ The simultaneous origins of Realism (and Positivism) and photography has led to critical debates regarding the nature and extent of their mutual influence. For a critical study, see: Robert A. Sobieszek, "Photography and the Theory of Realism in the Second Empire: A Reexamination of a relationship," in *One Hundred Years of Photography*. ed. Van Deren Coke (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), pp. 146–158.

heroes or villains, and in this sense an example of Georg Lukács' definition of the modern novel as "the epic of a world forsaken by God."¹⁷

Flaubert's novel appears, at first sight, as a commonplace, somewhat base tale of adultery with an ordinary farmland as its location. The narration appears transparent and matter-of-fact. Metaphor and simile are abandoned, and this gives the writing a documentary character in which any evocative quality that we sense seems to issue from what is described rather than how the writer describes it. Behind this seeming anonymity of the author lies a complex literary technique, visual in character, which critics have called "concretized form" (as opposed to a "narrative form"). Ezra Pound describes Flaubert's method as "... an attempt to set down things as they are, to find the word that corresponds to the thing...".¹⁸ In order to do this, Flaubert uses a style of intense visualisation which creates an object or a space that can be *seen* by the reader. Here, the writer describes the central character:

Her neck rose out of the low fold of the white collar. The two black sweeps of her hair pulled down from a fine centre part that followed the curve of her skull, were so sleek that each seemed to be one piece. Covering all but the very tip of her ears, it was gathered at the back into a large chignon, and towards the temples it waved a bit—a detail that the country doctor now observed for the first time in his life.¹⁹

¹⁷ Quoted in Hemmings. p. 10.

¹⁸ Quoted in Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 6.

¹⁹ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, translated by Francis Steegmuller (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 18. Quoted in Spiegel, p. 25.

Flaubert's mode of description seems to arise from a visual probe, perhaps like a camera lens, placed outside his characters. Alan Spiegel observes how this concrete literary form renders experience ". . . through scale, proportion, perspective, colour and line, behavioural postures and gestures, plastic shapes and materialised action,"²⁰—in other words, the very attributes of the graphic arts. Flaubert thus shows us specific details of objects (a glass on the dining table), atmosphere and sources of illumination (light coming down the chimney) before his narration reaches the character. As Spiegel observes, objects and people are made to emerge from their context with a clarity specific to the way the eye first scans and isolates objects. "We not only see the light 'streaming in between the slats' as a distinct thing, but we also see how it 'patterned the floor' and how it 'broke off at the corners of furniture.'"²¹

By writing what seems to be a direct visual experience, Flaubert creates a diction in which authorial voice appears muted. His method seems to subdue narrative rhetoric and the mediation of the author, and the story seems to reveal itself to the reader. Interpreted in this manner, Flaubert could be seen as underplaying the modalities of literary narration for the sake of realistic representation. However, such an interpretation gives us only one side of the story. The reason for Flaubert's authorial absence is the use of an artifice of narrative construction whose uniqueness is never hidden from us. In other words, style seems inexistant not because it is abandoned in favour of the theme, but because it is one that is designed to have a virtual character. The writer thus creates a style that is at once transparent and fabricated, and in so doing

²⁰ Spiegel, p. 19.

²¹ Spiegel, 29.

questions the mutual exclusivity of subject and style, and creates a literary form in which the visibility of one is augmented by the virtuality of the other. Flaubert has observed of this incongruous fusion of presence and absence that ". . . the artist in his work must be like God in creation, invisible and all powerful, everywhere felt but nowhere seen."²²

Flaubert's dispassionate method is not one that idealises and objectifies rationality, for he gives us clear indications that it is a deliberate construction. In fact, the function of his authorial anonymity is to subdue identification either with the subject or with the author. This is made doubly clear by *Madame Bovary's* theme, in which the central character is, in a sense, French society and the emerging class structure. No single character is so much better or worse than another that we can identify or sympathise with them; they, along with their moral identities, seem merely participants in a larger historical deed. The author seems to hold no opinion regarding his characters; thus he too is devoid of moral qualities. In this predicament it is our sense of morality or empathy which gives the novel its colour. What the writer creates is a space where values are virtual, much like the social space of reality itself, and the attribution of ethical meaning, if at all necessary, is dependent upon the reader's own ethical sense. Here Realism seeks to embody not merely the appearances of reality but some of its disturbingly ambiguous qualities as well.

The function of this style of "anonymous realism" thus extends beyond literary contemplation. It is a powerful tool of social observation and a didactic method of communication that recognises the ironies not only in the world it

²² *The Selected Letters of Gustav Flaubert*, ed. Francis Steegmuller (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Young Inc., 1953), p. 195.

seeks to capture, but in its own method of capture as well. Marie J. Diamond observes:

. . . while he created a realistic picture of Normandy and the torment of an imaginative woman trapped in banality, Flaubert made the reader aware that reality was not an absolute but could be grasped only through very particular and partial perspectives and, more importantly, that coherence was really the property of fiction.²³

The significance of this realism lies in the fact that the author does not make ethical decisions for his reader and spares him none of the ironies of the world, and in doing so extends absolute respect to the relationship between the theme and the audience. The author seems to be telling us that the ascription of morality, good or bad, comes from our sense of social and cultural hierarchy.

Flaubert's technique of silent, discreet authorial absence is thus very similar in its artistic function to the polyphonic, self-indulgent personality of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, with whom we can never fully identify. Both writers show us that at the core of documenting reality lies a primary, dialectical unity involving the seer and the seen. By emphasising this unity and refusing to look at the world as "the other," both writers give us highly valuable perspectives into the problem of social documentation.

Flaubert's deliberate style of anonymity, visual in character and documentary in function, and Baudelaire's wandering *flâneur*, give us strong

²³ Marie J. Diamond, *Flaubert: The Problem of Aesthetic Discontinuity*, (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 134.

examples to use in looking at the attributes of documentary photography.²⁴ Here, I have sought to interpret "documentary style" as a modern artistic mode of social observation applicable to literature as well as the visual arts rather than as an involuntary photographic style that owes its origin to the mechanism of the camera. In the next chapter, I look at the work of Walker Evans in order to examine the characteristics of this tradition in further detail. Evans, a pioneer of the documentary tradition in photography in America, claimed as his artistic predecessors the two central figures we examined in this chapter, saying: ". . . Flaubert's method . . . I incorporated almost unconsciously. . . . But spiritually, however, it is Baudelaire who is *the* influence on me."²⁵

²⁴ Interestingly, *Madame Bovary* was written after Flaubert undertook an extensive leisure tour in the company of his photographer friend, Maxime Du Camp (Hemmings, 154.)

²⁵ Leslie Katz, "Interview with Walker Evans," *Art in America*, March–April, 1971, pp. 82–89.

CHAPTER 2

Walker Evans' seminal work was done around the 1930s, just before and during the period of the Great Depression. The intellectual climate in America at this time closely mirrors the social mood that shaped Realist art and literature in Europe a few decades before. In this context, Evans' status as an artist and skeptical social historian bears close resemblances to that of the two French writers we had discussed earlier.

In America, the period after World War I saw a steady influx of European capital, the spread of mass production industries and the growth in efficiency of the automobile, all of which resulted in an increase in business and commerce. After the Wall Street crash of 1929 the Depression created an abrupt change in the shared sense of well being among the people. Soon, the government and the industrialists joined hands with the media to work towards the restoration of optimism. Characteristic of the period were rags-to-riches reports, writings that professed the importance of industry and ambition, and guidebooks for success such as Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

One of the effects of this social situation was a steady replacement of an agrarian culture and its way of life by an industrial one. In the wake of these changes American intellectuals hoped for a refocusing of the nation's cultural aspirations. The shift that they envisaged was to a concept of culture that stemmed from local and vernacular values, rather than the universal values propagated by an earlier generation of thinkers. The study and collection of

American folk art, the recognition of black culture, particularly jazz music and works of art which drew on vernacular themes and styles—such as those of John Steuart Curry (1897–1946) and Fred Becher (1888–1985(?))—were part of this process.

Walker Evans conceived his documentary style of photography working with a federal agency documenting the effects of the Depression on rural America. Faced with a complex social situation, most Depression era photographers in America tended to show signs of hard times using graphic and thematic devices of visual argument. Thus we see sharecroppers, clad in shabby clothes, facing the camera with determination writ large on their faces. The ravages of the Depression are illustrated by juxtaposing posters that proclaim America as the promised land with run-down houses and displaced people. Photographers like Margaret Bourke-White and Arthur Rothstein thus force us to look by accentuating the conditions of poverty and irony. In direct contrast, Evans' images seem to stay aloof from any attempt at forceful exhortation. Instead, their concentration is on clear description. They show dispossessed people, but they are seen neither as depressed victims nor as determined campaigners. Images of poverty and inequity do appear, but these, rather than being complained about, are treated as hard and dry facts. Where signs and billboards appear, they are taken in for their merit as cultural artifacts rather than as rhetorical aids.

Evans' concentration, it would seem, was on a larger spectacle contained in an everyday reality that included the Depression and its squalor, the American Dream and its vulgarity, and the daily living habits of rural America and the values it embodied, all partaking in a process of historical transformation. His objective was the observation of an inevitable phenomenon, in close detail, but

without mediation. Max Kozloff, writing in 1989, comments that the power of persuasion in Evans' photographs issue from the photographers' "fearsomely principled" detachment. "Had he been outraged," Kozloff remarks, "we could have understood him better and perhaps dismissed him a little. But he was circumspect."²⁶

Evans' photographs can be seen as addressing the problem of persuasive rhetoric in documentary images. They seem to maintain that persuasion is a matter of empathy between the audience and the subject and that an effort at constructing meaning or sympathy is sacrilege; that relationship, is thus treated with an understanding bordering on reverence. Through these attitudes, Evans motivates us to engage in the photograph's spectacle. It would seem that the images, in their quiet and unassertive manner, share something in common with the frugal simplicity of rural life. As William Stott commented, Evans exercises reverence on behalf of his viewers as well as his subjects. "The latter are not degraded by being made objects of revulsion or pity or fun," he writes, "and the former are not degraded by being thus solicited."²⁷ The effect of this reverence is a quiet kind of persuasion of which Daniel A. Lindley observes :

It is not what the photographs bring to us that is ultimately persuasive. It is what we bring to the photographs; and what we bring is what makes these photographs matter. . . . Evans alone [among the Depression era photographers] sought out, and found, the common ground shared by himself and his subjects and, in so

²⁶ Max Kozloff, "Signs of Light: Walker Evans' American Photographs," in *Art Forum* (April 1989), p. 116.

²⁷ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 270.

doing, he found psychological spaces inhabited by both his subject and his audience.²⁸

Critics have described this attitude as reticent, austere, literal, precise, aristocratic, transparent and impersonal—many of the qualities attributed to Flaubert's prose. This attitude bespeaks a studied, self-conscious belief in the inherent expressive abilities of the subject and the intelligence of the viewer to perceive it. If one were to ascribe an ethical quality to this method, it might transcribe as honesty of approach or justness of feeling, or in Lionel Trilling's words, "delicacy, tact, complete awareness or perfect respect; . . . a tremendously impressive moral quality."²⁹ Evans' rightness of tone is one that gradually sinks in and influences us to take heed. Robert Sobieszek sees in this studied detachment of the photographer's method the attitude of a *flâneur*, " . . . [whose] role was that of witness, observer, critic and philosopher. The *flâneur* was fully possessed of his individuality."³⁰

Evans' posture of detachment appears not only in his attitude towards the subject matter, but also in his treatment of the formal aspects of his photographs—in a style that appears plain and unadorned. Its formative sources lay in an anonymous variety of photographs which were as ubiquitous as the reality they portrayed. As John Szarkowski writes, it is a " . . . photography that

²⁸ "Walker Evans, Rhetoric and Photography," in *Reading into Photography*, eds. Thomas F. Barrow, Shelly Armitage, William E. Tydeman (Albuquerque, NM.: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), p. 166.

²⁹ Lionel Trilling, "Greatness with One Fault in it." *Kenyon Review*, Winter 1942, p. 100; quoted in John Rogers Puckett, *Five Photo-Textual Documentaries from The Great Depression* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 128

³⁰ "Another Look at Walker Evans." *Art in America* 59, no. 6 (November–December 1971), p. 120.

was so plain and common, so free of personal handwriting that it seemed almost the antithesis of art: the kind of photography that was seen in newspapers and newsreels, on picture postcards and in the windows of real estate dealers."³¹ These unknown photographs, whether made to assist in real estate transactions or for the sake of remembrance, were primarily inspired by social and cultural realities, a common origin they shared with vernacular and folk expressions.

The style of anonymity in Evans' work led many initial interpreters to maintain that in his effort to document reality truthfully, the photographer had played down the stylistic aspects of photography. As Alan Trachtenberg observes, ". . . so manifestly did an exterior world seem [in Evans' pictures] . . . that style, technique and pictorial form seemed irrelevant, hardly noticeable."³² This absence of the photographer's hand, however, is a deliberate stylistic device which presents itself in certain discreet, but unmistakable features. Evans' images are characterised by an aloof frontality that resembles a direct, continuous stare. People and objects are taken in from a straight camera angle and from an eye level that corresponds to the normal viewing height. Most often, the light falling on the subject is raking sunlight or an angled, artificial illumination that aids lucid description. He stays clear of unusual, dramatic angles. The overall effect is a simple but deliberate vision.

The physical view that Evans gives us is not dissimilar to the one we would have seen if we imagine ourselves there. The viewer's involvement with the photograph is thus latent in Evans' framing, with its normal camera height, straight angle of view, and simple, direct stare. It comes into play during the

³¹ John Szarkowski, intro to *Walker Evans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), p. 10.

³² Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans' America, A Documentary Invention," in *Observations*, ed. David Featherstone (Carmel, California: The Friends of Photography, 1984), p. 56.

process of viewing. "These photographs persuade us," remarks Szarkowski, "that this is just what we would have seen, and understood, and recorded, had we been there; they have so persuaded even those of us who were in fact there."³³ To enter into this identification is also to enter into a paradox, because by virtue of common knowledge we know that it is a photographer's selection at which we are looking, far removed from us in place and time. Thus the subject, Evans' view of it, and our own comprehension of what we are seeing enter into a complex interface, resulting in a tantalising balance that keeps the act of looking at a photograph in a state of flux.

What are the characteristics of stylistic anonymity in a photographic image? Béla Balazs, the Hungarian film theoretician, describes the double-sided nature of the photograph with reference to the cinema (or the cinematograph):

Every picture shows us not only a piece of reality, but a point of view as well. . . . The physiognomy of every object in a film is a composite of two physiognomies—one is that of the object, its very own, which is quite independent of the spectator—and another physiognomy determined by the viewpoint of the spectator and the perspective of the picture.³⁴

The relationship between objectivity of record and subjectivity of feeling, it would thus seem, is an inherently paradoxical one in photography. The reason is that under analysis, the transcriptive powers of the medium and the

³³ Walker Evans, *Message from the Interior* (New York: Eakins Press, 1966); quoted in Lindley, *Reading into Photography*, p. 166.

³⁴ Béla Balasz, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1952), pp. 89–91.

perception of the photographer appear as if opposed. If the photograph is to be an absolute document, the hand of the photographer would need to be absent (rather than invisible). If, on the other hand, it seeks to be an absolute personal expression, the reference to reality the photograph makes available would need to be completely abstracted, which is equally impossible. Thus, photographic images could read as documents (a mechanical transcription of the real world) or as a personal viewpoint (one among endless variations).

A photograph that seems without author builds on this logical incongruity so that the disappearance of the author's hand is seen as a self-conscious construction. Description is maximised. Simultaneously, it seeks to contain a treatment whose rhetoric seem directly proportional to authorless description. John Szarkowski describes the effect of this method in a discussion about Walker Evans: "Evans at his best convinces us that we are seeing the dry bones of fact, presented without comment, almost without thought. His lesser pictures make it clear that the best ones had deceived us, what we had accepted as simple facts were precise descriptions of very personal perceptions."³⁵

Thinking along the same lines about documentary photography, and how it interacts with our expectations of documentation, Shelly Armitage and William Tydeman observe that: " . . . documentation today means considering not only the connotation of subject and expected, 'appropriate' style, but also the photograph's inherent ambiguity—the curious interplay of subject and style and the role it plays in renewing exhausted forms."³⁶ Similarly, Lewis Baltz, reflecting on the work of fellow photographer Robert Adams, writes:

³⁵ Szarkowski, p. 18.

³⁶ Introduction to *Reading into Photography*, p. 6.

There is something paradoxical in the way documentary photographs interact with our notions of reality. To function as documents at all they must first persuade us that they describe their subject accurately and objectively. . . . Yet of course photographs, despite their verisimilitude are abstractions; their information is selective and incomplete. The power of the documentary photograph is linked to its capacity to inform as well as reflect our perception of the external world.³⁷

Arthur Koestler has called this interplay of subject and style, "bisociation" and defines it as "the perceiving of a situation or an idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference which produces a transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of emotion and thought is disturbed."³⁸ This cultivation of indeterminate semantic relationships is in no way exclusive to photography or literature. It is a corollary of the realist enquiry that gave rise to the relativist notion in which reality is a function of the observer as much as he is a function of reality. The only "real" object, then, is a combined instance of the two. In art and literature, this shift becomes apparent with twentieth century Modernism, in which the definition of Realist representation shifts from what things mean to include "how" they mean as well.

Cubist paintings provide such an example where densely ordered visual and conceptual viewpoints converge into a single image. Similarly, cubist cinema shows multiple narration of the same story (Akira Kurosawa's "Rashomon" is an

³⁷ Lewis Baltz, "Review of *The New West* " in Barrow p. 57. Reprinted from Art in America March-April, 1975.

³⁸ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 195. Quoted in Barrow, p. 7.

example of the concept). The story proper is not concluded and the synthesis lies outside the film, in the process of viewing, if it does at all. Examples can be seen in literature as well, in line with the tradition of Flaubert or Baudelaire. We see this in the writing of Nabokov (who often behaves like a photographer in his pervasive use of the eye), or James Joyce (in whose *Ulysses*, the contents of a day's fragmented experiences, minutely felt and observed, coalesce to form the novel).

This multiple viewpoint is not merely three or more views of the same object projected together (as Cubism is explained in technical terms), that is, not merely multiple visual angles as in a hologram. Its analogue is a "conceptual" hologram; by shifting the event of the painting or novel halfway towards the audience, it seeks creative viewing.

The photographic paradox extends this possibility of conceiving the image as a framework within which the mutual unity of the author and the object is recorded. Its acceptance redefines the representational aspect of the image by changing mode from mimetic to "deictic." James J.Y. Liu, writing about the poetics of paradox, notes the difference between a mimetic and deictic conception of language: "The former sees language as representing reality; the latter sees it as pointing to reality."³⁹ Liu goes on to note that in the mimetic mode the author looks at the external world through subjective emotions or objective analysis and therefore everything is tinged with his colour. In the deictic mode, it is one object that looks at other objects, and therefore one no longer knows which is 'I' and which is 'object.'⁴⁰ In other words, the separation between the author and his subject is unnecessary in the deictic mode because each is the creation of the

³⁹ James J.Y. Liu, *Language—Paradox—Poetics*. ed. Richard John Lynn (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. xii–xiii.

⁴⁰ Liu, 125.

other. This argument redefines issues of representation and authorship because the only stage in which they exist as real is as a unity. A non-mimetic mode is thus, in a sense, a redefinition of trust, between the author and his subject, and between the author and his audience. The concept of "the Other" breaks down here.

How can a paradox be comprehended and expanded in logical terms? What is its philosophical significance? A vivid example based on everyday experience is quoted below. It shows how we resolve a paradox using dialectical logic to point at (rather than depict) an inclusive reality.

Sitting in a railway carriage moving away from a station, I suffer the illusion that the station is slipping backwards. I also believe that the station is motionless and that I am going forward. These two judgements form a contradiction which is resolved when, in ascending to the impartial standpoint of scientific discourse, I recognize that they both presuppose a fallacious, ego-centric view of motion. The truth of the matter consists in a relative movement whose nature can be fully grasped only by a scientific theory that assigns no importance to my limited knowledge.⁴¹

In the documentary photograph, the stage of action for this paradox is the process of viewing, when the viewer tries to understand the authenticity of what is shown and proceeds to scrutinize what it transmits. It is at this point that the simultaneous existence of a fact and a point of view comes to the fore. Each appear as the magic prehistory of the other. The tension between transcription

⁴¹ Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984), p. 167.

and construction in a photograph can thus be seen as a structural analog of a primary metaphysical opposition, that between the seer and the seen. (*Transcription* implies an absence of mediation, or in practice, a negligible amount of it. The object, or "the seen" has the upper hand here. *Construction* implies an abundance of mediation. Here the subject, or "the seer," is in control.) As such, the two elements in the photographic antinomy, fact and point of view, satisfy the four basic properties that form a dialectical pair:

Opposition (Since a third basic property is impossible). Inseparability (as each is a function of the other). Asymmetry (because one is primordial, the other secondary). Self-dynamism (because they steadily interpenetrate and develop without outside action.)⁴²

Once this primary opposition is seen as paradoxical and accepted as such, several secondary oppositions open up. They derive from the fundamental pair and fall into a structure whereby every concept can be seen as real only as a unity of oppositions. Thus, the absence of the photographer becomes a conscious tool to imply rather than contest his presence. The submission to the subject's autonomy becomes a tool to construct a style, rather than oppose it; framing; to include by exclusion, description doubles as perception, and representation as abstraction.

The dialectically constructed image or idea does not propose to give a representation or a comfortable solution. In direct contrast, it provides a framework, within which the principal antinomy is kept suspended for synthesis through a dynamic system of exchanges and cross references. Henri Wald notes

⁴² Henri Wald, *Introduction to Dialectical Logic* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei. 1975), p. 227.

that: "Dialectical thinking implies a steady process. Left unguided, thinking tends to stoop to one of the opposite properties, neglecting the other."⁴³

What, specific to my project, are the parameters that help construct the documentary style in my photographs? In the next chapter I deal with the construction of the image, taking cues from the examples cited thus far.

⁴³ Wald, 228.

CHAPTER 3

The overriding metaphor that I have used in constructing my images is a singular, unqualified act of vision—the gaze. It contains a number of attributes in tune with the idea of this thesis.

The gaze, as any traveler in an unfamiliar land knows, is the first tool with which one attests one's presence. It is the transition point from shy unfamiliarity to open curiosity. It is alert without judgement, its purpose being simply to know. If assertive, the gaze becomes a stare. If submissive, it becomes a glance, often downwards.

The first gaze is double-edged in nature. It reveals to oneself the coming of age in one's own presence. It also reflects the response of others around. The authenticity of this gaze, then, is crucial. (It is not unusual that in a new land, the first real gaze might take weeks or months to come.)

An analogue to the gaze lies in the process of an individual's development when, past the threshold of adolescence, nearing maturity, one learns to recognize oneself in relation to the world around. Just as an individual learns at some point in his or her growth to look unabashedly, curiously—to know—the stranger in a new land learns to gaze. It is, at once, a sign and a tool of knowledge.

Its physiology is direct, with the head held straight, eyes looking out ahead. It is as if the gaze doubles as an emitter of curiosity and a receiver of

information; an invisible ray (which is an attitude) going out of it to come back, refraining from skepticism or imagination, gathering the stuff of observation.

The double-edged tool that the gaze is to the sender is also a tell-tale sign for its receiver. Thus, we have the well known phrase "the stranger's stare" which gives away disguises in detective stories, guilt in lover's quarrels, guile in gambling, lie in interrogations, or the simple uncertainty of an immigrant in a new land. This gesture of the eye is loaded and despite its seeming insignificance with relation to the human body, culturally, we have learned to look for it.

To a gazer, especially for a photographer in the field, the significance of what his eye tells about himself is very valuable. Thus, it is also an instrument of self-scrutiny. It contains not only indications of his state of mind, but a magic response as well that comes back from the environment around, even if unpeopled. I have noticed how, in a given street, crowded or not, one might dissolve one day and stand out annoyingly the next. The gesture of one's eye unfailingly gives the forewarning, reflecting in full and in terms that are enigmatic, how much one is in tune with the environment. If signals are auspicious, vibrations become sympathetic and harmonious, so to speak, and one dissolves in the environment. At such times passers-by take you as one among them. A reassuring calm descends. Otherwise, results can be disastrous.

In his *Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault uses the gaze as a metaphor for pure observation. "The observing eye", he writes, "refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless. Observation leaves things as they are. There is nothing hidden to it in what is given. The correlative of observation is never the invisible,

but always the immediately visible, once one has removed the obstacles erected to reason by theories and to the senses by the imagination."⁴⁴

It is this gaze—in which the distance contained is like a silence that lets one hear, before the need of analysis or meaning would set in—that acts as the formative style in the photographs in this thesis. The parameters for its construction can be broadly classified into three:

The first is a direct angle of view, from a normal eye level, the camera level with the horizon (\pm a few degrees in practice), the lens pointing straight ahead to give a simple eye level portrayal of things. This is to provide a view that is blunt and direct, as if the image is looking back at the viewer. This strategy, in tune with my discussion, is based on the belief that what the viewer brings to the image matters as much as what the image brings to him or her. In addition, it seeks out in its form the points of similarity between the photographer's viewpoint and the viewer's viewpoint.

A second strategy is the critical use of a distance from the scene that complements the directness of the images. Its function is to disperse the area of description throughout the frame. Thus, the entire image seeks to describe rather than a limited zone or a single object. The edges command as much descriptive function as the corners or the centre. This augments the descriptive quality of the image and at the same time checks the attribution of unintended, singular meaning. This style seeks to infuse the image with a quality of aloof observation, a restraint and understatement in which conclusion, or the logic of a rhetoric that leads to conclusion, is distant and minimal.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 107.

A third stylistic detail is the use of compositional devices such as truncation and de-centered attention. These function to bring into play the pairs of exclusion and inclusion, by reiterating the presence of the camera (by way of mechanistic framing) and subduing the photographers presence (by abandoning rigid construction).

I view my photographs as documents from a new cityscape. Traces of construction activities occur in them, either as a process or as a result, as if daily life moves forward in the backdrop of incessant construction. The subjects of my photographs are the mundane activities that one sees in the public spaces of the city. They contain shrubs that spring up along the edge of construction, trees in areas about to be developed, creepers that grow on fences evolving into shapes that look like the map of countries, roads that cleave space to capture distance, automobiles that facilitate that capture, children playing about in housing colonies, men and women walking across vast expanses of built landscapes. I try to use blurred background forms such as signboards, lampposts, domesticated trees and the pale concrete footpaths to create a ground upon which the people advance. There is an implication of borderlines, particularly between nature and human constructs, in many of my images. This is something one finds almost anywhere in a new city, although I welcome their presence and sometimes search out areas where they exist in a familiar and uneventful manner.

I have conceived my photographs as individual images, as monolithic blocks of description suitable for separate reading or viewing. However, they were all made in locations around Calgary, and thus have a collective theme of urban documentation. In addition, I had made them with the same structural approach towards their construction and thus, they could work as a single

installation. For this reason, they are all of the same size and shape, like heterogeneous components which together form a larger descriptive unit.

In this particular exhibition my arrangement of these photographs was based on viewing the lineup from one end to the other (left to right) along with a few rearrangements to even out the entire field of images. Here, I have sought to neutralise juxtapositions that form unintended narrative meaning (as in a film montage that has gone wrong). This, however, is an impossible goal because any two sufficiently detailed images would start interacting, and they would do so differently with different people. Thus, I have tried to emphasise the independence of each image by using contrasting graphic forms one next to the other in some cases, similar graphic forms in other cases, and repetitive subject matter in yet another, so that a repetitive logical order is avoided.

The sequence starts with distant views of the city in the traditional fashion of a viewer approaching a landscape. These introductory long shots are descriptive in nature and homogeneous in their graphic content. They invite close reading of details and the relationships among the details, as they offer no solitary graphic shape as their salient feature. My idea has been to present them as a prologue to the general viewing strategy for the entire show—detailed reading along with the viewing of prominent graphic forms. I have borrowed this idea from a method artists use to view paintings. I have often noticed that paintings constructed with a structurally coherent idea reiterate their theme even as you go close and observe the surface of the paint. Similarly, the anecdotal relationships within the world that the photograph captures could be seen as a continuation of the photograph's overall visual identity.

CONCLUSION

Calgary, for me, is an example of a city in the initial stages of its evolution. There is something of a fantasy contained in this thought. The city's desert-like sprawl is one reason for this; my mental images of the origins of ancient cities are situated in the emptiness of the desert from which everything has to start. I have also wondered how it would be to travel back in time to the cities of the Nile or the Indus while they were in the process of evolution and watch them in fast forward. Is it possible that a cow or a camel visiting those ancient cities would have wondered about the new disease called civilisation that is growing? This may not be a possibility at all because, as many sociologists believe, our love for pristine, untouched nature, which we like to think of as part of our animal past, may very well be, paradoxically, a cultural outcome of industrialisation.

"That careful and reciprocal relationship", reported Levi-Strauss on urban America, "between man and the earth which, in the old world, established the age-old bond whereby one fashioned the other, has never existed here."⁴⁵ I was fascinated, during my initial impressions of Calgary, by the clarity with which the division between a natural and cultural world existed in its urban landscape. I believe that the ambivalence of moral reasoning that one faces before a stark borderline such as this, the decision to accept and resolve the tussle between landscape and cultural constructs is precisely similar to the contradiction I discussed earlier in terms of the photographic paradox. Natural and social

⁴⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Athenium, 1975), p. 92

evolution, two asymmetric opposites, offer a dialectical pair that needs to be resolved using a vigilant, ever-present exchange. Just as mindless development can lead to ruin, a mindless belief in nature, where every human folly is seen with an intolerant contempt, can lead to impoverished humanism. The results of either could be disastrous.

There is a simple reason why the perception of the nature-culture division is an unsettling contradiction. The cultural constructs that we see around are the visible forms of thought. So is the logic that tells us of the distinction between nature and culture or the animate and the inanimate. In principle, any action that proceeds from that very logical structure would, in ways unknown to us, reiterate that division. This is something of a causality loop and the conception of ecology addresses this paradox, even more than it embraces a love for nature. Ecology sees nature as a system that knows how to take care of itself, as it has for millions of years without trees, human beings or the Earth. It speaks of the necessity to see the mind as part of the natural world rather than an exterior probe—of the necessity to be outsiders to perception itself.

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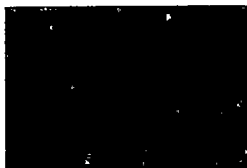
APPENDIX 1

Please see attached slide sleeve for reproductions of the thirty seven photographs from the exhibition "Gazing at the City." The photographs are not individually titled.

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FILE NO.:

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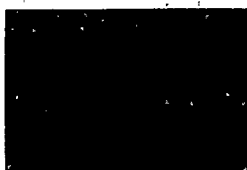
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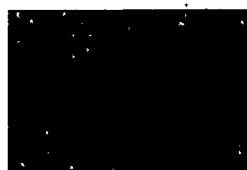
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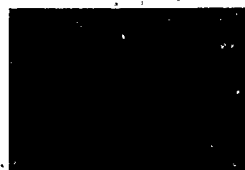
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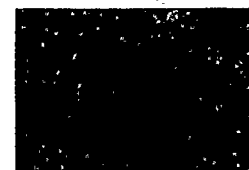
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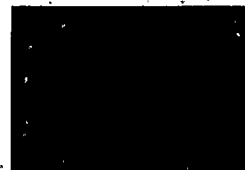
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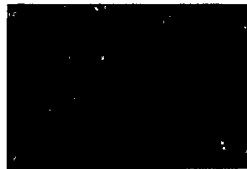
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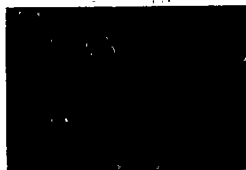
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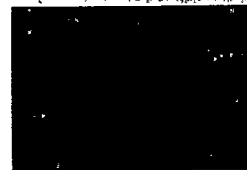
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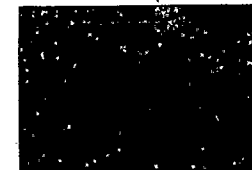
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