Photography
A Middle-brow Art

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objective truth of her condition and her future. The class *habitus* is nothing but this *experience* (in its most usual sense) which immediately reveals a hope or an ambition as reasonable or unreasonable, a particular commodity as accessible or inaccessible, a particular action as suitable or unsuitable. In short, a total anthropology would have to culminate in an analysis of the process by which objectivity becomes rooted in subjective experience: it must overcome it by encompassing the moment of objectivism and base it in a theory of the externalization of interiority and the internalization of exteriority.

Everything therefore takes place as if the shadow cast by objective conditions always extended to consciousness: the infra-conscious reference to objective determinisms is one of those determinisms which influence practice and always owe some of their effectiveness to the complicity of a subjectivity that bears their stamp and is determined by the hold they exert. Thus the science of objective regularities remains abstract as long as it does not encompass the science of the process of the internalization of objectivity leading to the constitution of those systems of unconscious and durable dispositions that are the class *habitus* and the *ethos*: as long as it does not endeavour to establish how the myriad ‘small perceptions’ of everyday life and the convergent and repeated sanctions of the economic and social universe imperceptibly constitute, from childhood and throughout one’s life, by means of constant reminders, this ‘unconscious’ which becomes paradoxically defined as a practical reference to objective conditions.

One might say of photography what Hegel said of philosophy: ‘No other art or science is subjected to this last degree of scorn, to the supposition that we are masters of it without ado’. Unlike more demanding cultural activities such as drawing, painting or playing a musical instrument, unlike even going to museums or concerts, photography presupposes neither academically communicated culture, nor the apprenticeships and the ‘profession’ which confer their value on the cultural consumptions and practices ordinarily held to be the most noble, by withholding them from the man in the street.

Nothing is more directly opposed to the ordinary image of artistic creation than the activity of the amateur photographer,
ful rugby manoeuvres. Thus, most of society can be excluded from the universe of legitimate culture without being excluded from the universe of aesthetics.

Even when they do not obey the specific logic of an autonomous aesthetic, aesthetic judgements and behaviour are organized in a way that is no less systematic but which starts out from a completely different principle, since the aesthetic is only one aspect of the system of implicit values, the ethos, associated with membership of a class. The feature common to all the popular arts is their subordination of artistic activity to socially regulated functions while the elaboration of 'pure' forms, generally considered the most noble, presupposes the disappearance of all functional characteristics and all reference to practical or ethical goals. Aesthetes who attempt to liberate photographic practice from the social functions to which the great majority subordinates them, namely and principally the recording and compilation of the 'souvenirs' of objects, people or events socially designated as important, are seeking to make photography undergo a transformation analogous to that which affected popular dances, the bourrée, sarabande, allemande or courante, when they were integrated into the scholarly form of the suite.8

Having constituted photography as an object of sociological study, we first had to establish how each group or class regulates and organizes the individual practice by conferring upon it functions attuned to its own interests; but we could not take as our direct object particular individuals and their relationship to photography as a practice or an object for consumption, without risking falling into abstraction. Only the methodological decision to make a study based primarily on 'real' groups9 was to allow us to perceive (or prevent us from forgetting) that the meaning and function conferred upon photography are directly related to the structure of the group, to the extent of its differentiation and particularly to its position within the social structure. Thus the relationship of the peasant to photography is, in the final analysis, only one aspect of his relationship to urban life, identified with modern life, a relationship which is made apparent in the directly experienced relationship between the villager and the holiday-maker: if, in defining his attitude to photography, he calls upon all
the values which define the peasant as such, it is because this urban activity, the prerogative of the bourgeois and the city-dweller, is associated with a way of life that questions the peasant way of life, forcing him into an explicit self-definition.10

Apart from the interests of each class, it is the objective relationships, obscurely felt, between the class as such and other classes that are indirectly expressed through the attitudes of individuals towards photography. Just as the peasant is expressing his relationship with urban life when he rejects the practice of photography, a relationship in and through which he senses the particularity of his condition, the meaning which petits bourgeois confer on photographic practice conveys or betrays the relationship of the petite bourgeoisie to culture, that is, to the upper classes (bourgeoisie) who retain the privilege of cultural practices which are held to be superior, and to the working classes from whom they wish to distinguish themselves at all costs by manifesting, through the practices which are accessible to them, their cultural goodwill. It is in this way that members of photographic clubs seek to ennoble themselves culturally by attempting to ennoble photography, a substitute within their range and grasp for the higher arts, and to find within the disciplines of the sect that body of technical and aesthetic rules of which they deprived themselves when they rejected as vulgar the rules that govern popular practice. The relationship between individuals and photographic practice is essentially a mediate relationship, because it always includes the reference to the relationship that the members of other social classes have to photography and hence to the whole structure of relationships between the classes.

Attempting to overcome a falsely rigorous objectivism by trying to grasp the systems of relationships concealed behind preconstructed totalities is quite the opposite of succumbing to the seductions of intuitionism, which, conjuring up the blinding evidence of false familiarity, in the individual case merely transfigure everyday banalities about temporality, eroticism and death into false essentialist analyses. Because photography, apparently at least, lends itself very badly to properly sociological study, it provides the desired opportunity to prove that the sociologist, concerned with deciphering that which is only ever common sense,
who often demands that his camera should perform the greatest possible number of operations for him, identifying the degree of sophistication of the apparatus that he uses with its degree of automatism. However, even when the production of the picture is entirely delivered over to the automatism of the camera, the taking of the picture is still a choice involving aesthetic and ethical values: if, in the abstract, the nature and development of photographic technology tend to make everything objectively ‘photographable’, it is still true that, from among the theoretically infinite number of photographs which are technically possible, each group chooses a finite and well-defined range of subjects, genres and compositions. In Nietzsche’s words, ‘The artist chooses his subjects. It is his way of praising.’ Because it is a ‘choice that praises’, because it strives to capture, that is, to solemnize and to immortalize, photography can not be delivered over to the randomness of the individual imagination and, via the mediation of the ethos, the internalization of objective and common regularities, the group places this practice under its collective rule, so that the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group.

In other words, the range of that which suggests itself as really photographable for a given social class (that is, the range of ‘takeable’ photographs or photographs ‘to be taken’, as opposed to the universe of realities which are objectively photographable given the technical possibilities of the camera) is defined by implicit models which may be understood via photographic practice and its product, because they objectively determine the meaning which a group confers upon the photographic act as the ontological choice of an object which is perceived as worthy of being photographed, which is captured, stored, communicated, shown and admired. The norms which organize the photographic valuation of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession or artistic coterie, of which the photographic aesthetic must always be one aspect even if it desperately claims autonomy. Adequately understanding a photograph, whether it is taken by a Corsican peasant, a petit-bourgeois from Bologna or a Parisian professional,
can deal with images without becoming visionary. And to those who expect sociology to provide them with 'visions' what can one say, except, along with Max Weber, 'that they should go to the cinema'?
The Cult of Unity and Cultivated Differences

Pierre Bourdieu

In a large family, everyone knows that even good understanding cannot prevent cousins, uncles and aunts from sometimes having stormy or wearing conversations. Whenever I feel that tempers are fraying I take out our family photograph album. Everyone rushes over, everyone’s amazed, they rediscover themselves, as babies and teenagers. There’s nothing like it for calming them down, and everything settles down again.

Mlle B. C., Grenoble (Isère).

_Elle_, 14 January 1965, ‘Les lectrices bavardent (Readers chat)’

When Fêng was about to pass away [. . .] he said, ‘I have myself seen the masters pass away lying or sitting but not standing. Do you know any masters who passed away standing?’ The monks said, ‘Yes, there is the record of such.’ ‘Do you then know one who passed away standing on his head?’ ‘No, never yet,’ was the answer. Whereupon Fêng stood on his head and passed away.

D. T. Suzuki, _Essays in Zen Buddhism_

How and why is the practice of photography predisposed to a diffusion so wide that there are few households, at least in towns, which do not possess a camera? Is it enough to refer to the accessibility of the instruments used in this practice, and the use of those instruments? There are cheap cameras and, unlike more demanding activities, such as the practice of playing a musical instrument, photography requires little or no training; the absence of economic and technical obstacles is an adequate explanation only if one hypothetically assumes that photographic consumption fills a need that can be satisfied within the limits of economic
Part I

means. But does this not amount to doing away with the sociological problem by providing as an explanation what sociology should be explaining?

The best argument for the psychological explanation by 'motivation' is the fact that ownership of a camera is closely related to income,¹ which seems to allow us to consider cameras as pieces of equipment comparable to cars or televisions, and to see the ownership of such a commodity as nothing but the index of a standard of living.² If an increase in resources has the almost automatic effect of increasing the diffusion of cameras and the number of photographers, we would be right in supposing the existence of 'natural' aspiration to photographic practice which can remain constant across different milieux and situations because, inspired by universal 'motivations', it is independent of social conditioning; according to this hypothesis, behaviour – positive or negative – is the result of only two forces, the more or less intense 'motivations' that provoke action, and the 'restraints' which prevent it.

Starting from these presuppositions, one could thus describe the 'motivations' behind photographic activity as follows:³ the fact of taking photographs, keeping them or looking at them, may bring satisfactions in any of five areas, 'protection against time, communication with others and the expression of feelings, self-realization, social prestige, distraction or escape'. More precisely, it could be argued that photography has the function of helping one to overcome the sorrow of the passing of time, either by providing a magical substitute for what time has destroyed, or by making up for the failures of memory, acting as a mooring for the evocation of associated memories, in short, by providing a sense of the conquest of time as a destructive power; secondly, it encourages communication with others by enabling people to relive past moments together, or to show others the interest or affection that one has for them; thirdly, it gives photographers the means of 'realizing themselves', either by making them feel their own 'power' by magical appropriation or by the recreation, either glorified or caricatured, of the object represented, giving them the opportunity to 'feel their emotions more intensely' or allowing them to express an artistic intention or demonstrate their technical mastery; fourthly, it provides the satisfactions of prestige, in the form of technical
prowess or evidence of a personal achievement (a journey, an event) or of ostentatious expenditure; finally, it provides a means of escape or a simple distraction, like a game. On the other hand, 'financial restrictions, the fear of failure or ridicule and the desire to avoid complications' constitute the main obstacles to the practice.

Thus, in the name of a 'method' whose 'principle is to seek to explain and understand the behaviour of individuals without relying on [...] the reasons given by the individuals themselves', one ends up supplying nothing but a disparate enumeration of the reasons or rationalizations that any subject can invoke, by an effort of the imagination, in order to justify his activity or abstention. This 'vulgate', a discourse half-way between everyday talk and scientific statement, fulfils its function perfectly: it can give the illusion of revealing truths by referring to commonplaces and expressing them in a scientific-sounding language. But insofar as it provides at least a description of the meanings and values which photographers believe that they secrete in their activity, this psychology which, while promising an exploration of the depths, leads no further than the surface of things, is less unsettling than the psychology which, anxious to fulfil its brief, dives into the Freudian abysses of voyeurism, narcissism and exhibitionism.

In fact, it is the very intention of finding the explanation of photographic practice in motivations (that is, in final causes) that condemns the psychologist to penetrate no further than psychological functions as they are experienced, that is, to penetrate no further than 'satisfactions' and 'reasons', instead of investigating the social functions concealed by those 'reasons', and whose fulfilment moreover procures directly experienced 'satisfactions'. In short, taking the effect for the cause, photographic practice, subject to social rules, invested with social functions, and therefore experienced as a 'need', is explained with reference to something that is actually its consequence, namely the psychological satisfactions that it produces.

It is all too apparent that we should not be content, for example, to see the photographic practice of the working classes as the sum of a need inspired by universal motivations and the restrictions of financial obstacles, the concrete product being nothing but the algebraic addition of two abstractions. In fact, we are condemned
to the abstract universality of needs or motivations as long as we
dissociate aspirations from the objective situation in which they are
constituted and from which they are inseparable, a situation that is
objectively defined by economic constraints and social norms.\textsuperscript{6} In
other words, aspirations and demands are determined, in both
form and content, by objective conditions which exclude the
possibility of desiring the impossible.

To understand what it means for manual workers to practise
photography in an intermittent way, on occasions defined by
tradition and according to the canons of traditional ‘aesthetic’, in
short, thoroughly to understand the meaning and function that
manual workers give to photography, is to understand their
relationship to their class condition: their relationship to any kind
of commodity actually includes a tacit reference to the system of
objective possibilities and impossibilities which defines both this
condition and the types of conduct compatible or incompatible
with the objective standard against which they feel they are being
measured. Consequently, in the present case, resignation to a
practice that is rare and rudimentary, and the lack of enthusiasm
for a more intense practice, presuppose the internalization of the
limits defined by economic obstacles and also the awareness that
there exists, as an abstract and impossible possibility, a different
form of practice that is possible for others.

This accounts for the style of the statements by manual workers
interviewed about their photographic practice. The numerous pre-
suppositions, the interrogative or conditional turn of phrase, refer-
ce to the most virtuoso practitioners whom they know, and, more
generally, the often oneiric and ludic style of the statements, point
to this awareness of an abstract and remote possibility: ‘If I had a
good camera I’d join the camera club.’ ‘If I had the free time . . .’ ‘If
I took any I’d take them everywhere I went: in the mountains, at
the beach, in the city.’

All this is contained in the expression used to justify abstention:
‘That isn’t for the likes of us’, that is, we are not the people for
whom this object or this activity exists as an objective possibility;
as a result, this object or this activity would only exist for us as a
‘reasonable’ possibility if we were different, if we were placed in
different conditions of existence. Through this one may see that any relationship with a commodity, of whatever kind, always includes a veiled reference to the concrete particularity of the objective situation which immediately qualifies it as accessible or inaccessible. But to say 'that isn't for the likes of us' is to say something more than 'it's too expensive' (for us): the expression of internalized necessity, this formula is, so to speak, in the indicative-imperative (or 'is-ought') mode because it simultaneously expresses an impossibility and an interdiction.

Moreover, by the very fact that it is constituted with reference to the particularity of the situation, the awareness of impossibility and of prohibition is accompanied by the recognition of the conditional character of that impossibility and that prohibition, that is, by the awareness of the conditions that would have to be met in order to remove them. Thus, in the individual case, the attitude to photography is defined with reference to a system of demands that define a more ambitious and therefore a more expensive type of photographic activity.

An illustration of these analyses can be seen in the words of a manual worker (45) who states: 'I mostly take pictures of my children, obviously; my mates ... I mostly take them for souvenirs because I don't like pictures of people that much. I prefer landscapes, or photographs taken on the spur of the moment, on the move [...]. In that area, I'd rather take indoor shots, but you have to have the equipment, you need screens, lighting, long poses.' In short, a different practice would presuppose different equipment, but different equipment would presuppose a different attitude to photography, and hence different conditions of existence: 'No, I'm not satisfied with the pictures I take, I don't think I could take better ones with this camera; I'd need a better camera [...]. What you have to be able to do is sacrifice a film to get a result and I'd rather get a photograph right first time so as not to waste the money.' Therefore, feeling that a more demanding practice is impossible and prohibited, one prohibits oneself from developing a taste for it and avoids liking it: 'To take indoor shots you have to love photography: if I did indoor shots or close-ups I'd want to develop them myself. I don't have the time or the opportunity or the means.'

According to this logic one can understand the entire meaning of
the relationship to technical objects, of which the relationship to the camera represents a particular case. If those manual workers who are keenest on photography often stress the simplicity of their equipment with a certain pride, presenting as an informed choice something that is also the effect of economic constraints, it is because, in the refinement of technical manipulations, they find a means of reconciling their interest in the most sophisticated (and therefore the most expensive) objects and their concern to avoid the impossible purchase of those objects:

‘Cameras are like everything else, the most expensive one isn’t the best.’ ‘You need good material, but not complicated material.’ ‘Listen, I know a bit about all the different types, well, there are some that don’t look very impressive but do the job very well, when you know your way around them. When you don’t know much about it, certainly, you need lots of mechanical stuff. Look at these “automatics” they have now, with one of those a good photographer could never do the things he could with an “adjustable” one. He wouldn’t want to have anything to do with it. It’s the same with cars.’

This sort of ‘do-it-yourself’ attitude resists the seduction of the technical object as much as it succumbs to it. Unlike the enthusiasm for ‘handiwork’ or gadgets which increases the number of possible manipulations by increasing the number of manipulable objects, this ascetic handiwork compensates for the absence or excessive simplicity of the instrument with skill in inventing ingenious solutions which make it possible to attain the same result using the most universally available means. Affecting a disdain for the refinement of technical objects in the name of the refinement of the technician is the most realistic way of recognizing their inaccessibility without renouncing their sophistication.

A fictive explanation as well as an explanation of fictions, motivational psychology therefore leaves unanswered the question of how it is that photography has experienced such a wide diffusion when it satisfies neither a primary, a natural need, nor a secondary need, created and sustained by education, like going to museums and concerts.
PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE AS AN INDEX AND AN INSTRUMENT OF INTEGRATION

In order completely to establish the inadequacy of a strictly psychological explanation of photographic practice and its diffusion, one must first demonstrate that the sociological explanation can completely account for this practice, and more precisely, account for its instruments, its chosen objects, its rhythms, its occasions, its implicit aesthetic and even its subjects' experience of it, the meanings that they secrete in it and the psychological satisfactions that they derive from it.

One cannot help but be struck first of all by the regular ways in which ordinary practice is organized. There are few activities which are so stereotyped and less abandoned to the anarchy of individual intentions. More than two thirds of photographers are seasonal conformists who take photographs either at family festivities or social gatherings, or during the summer holidays. On the other hand, if we bear in mind the fact that there is a very close correlation between the presence of children in the household and possession of a camera, and that the camera is often the common property of the family group, it becomes clear that photographic practice only exists and subsists for most of the time by virtue of its family function or rather by the function conferred upon it by the family group, namely that of solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life, in short, of reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity.

Because the family photograph is a ritual of the domestic cult in which the family is both subject and object, because it expresses the celebratory sense which the family group gives to itself, and which it reinforces by giving it expression, the need for photographs and the need to take photographs (the internalization of the social function of this practice) are felt all the more intensely the more integrated the group and the more the group is captured at a moment of its highest integration.

It is no accident that the social function and meaning of photography are never more clearly apparent than in a rural community, strongly integrated and attached to its peasant
traditions. The photographic image, that curious invention which could have served to disconcert or unsettle, was introduced very early and established itself very quickly (between 1905 and 1914) because it came to fulfil functions that existed before its appearance, namely the solemnization and immortalization of an important area of collective life. The wedding photograph was accepted so quickly and generally only because it met the social conditions of its existence: just as waste is a part of festive behaviour, the purchase of the group photograph, a conspicuous consumption which no-one can escape without loss of face, is felt to be obligatory, as a homage to the married couple.

'The group photograph is obligatory: anyone who didn't buy one would be seen as a miser (picheprim). It would be an insult to the people who invited him. It would mean not paying your dues. At the table you're in the public eye, you can't say no.'

As an object of regulated exchange, the photograph joins the circuit of gifts and counter-gifts which the wedding has set in motion. The result of this is that there is no wedding without photographs. The ceremony of the group photograph is retained even when amateur photographers are present; the latter can duplicate the function of the professional photographer, the officiant whose presence sanctions the solemnity of the rite, but they can never replace him.

'Sometimes there are amateurs among the guests. But in spite of that they still bring in photographers from Pau; the amateurs take pictures of the couple leaving the church [...]. You can tell from those photographs when it was amateurs who came out; they know that that's what you do. They even take photographs in church, when they're passing the ring.' As another index of the ritual character of photography, 'the photographer never takes pictures of the dinner or the dance'. Neither can photographs by amateurs take the place of 'official' photographs taken in the studio to send to parents and friends: 'Everyone goes off to the studio, even the very poorest.'

If one accepts, with Durkheim, that the function of the festivity is to revitalize and recreate the group, one will understand why the
photograph is associated with it, since it supplies the means of solemnizing those climactic moments of social life in which the group solemnly reaffirms its unity. In the case of the wedding, the picture that captures for eternity the group that has been brought together, or rather the bringing together of two groups, is necessarily implied within a ritual whose function is to consecrate, that is, to sanction and to sanctify the union of two groups effected through the union of two individuals.

It can hardly be accidental that the order in which the photograph was introduced into the ritual of the grand ceremonies of family life corresponded to the social importance of those ceremonies. First communion photographs do not make their appearance until around 1930, and photographs of baptisms are even more recent and more rare. For several years, some peasants have made use of the arrival of photographers at agricultural shows in order to be photographed with their animals, but these remain the exception. In the case of baptisms, which are never the occasion of a big ceremony, and which only bring together close relations, photographs are rare. The first communion provides many mothers with an opportunity to have their children photographed. Once again, this reveals the fact that the meaning and the role of photography are a function of the social meaning of the feast:

‘At a wedding you never ask the photographer to take pictures of the children. No. You see that at first communion, a children’s festivity. The photographer takes it in. At a wedding, the children aren’t the centre of attention, it isn’t their festivity. The kids are left out that day.’

As in the case of the wedding, the photograph takes its place within the circuit of ritually imposed exchanges. The photograph of the communicant taken in the neighbouring town the Monday after the ceremony has joined the souvenir photograph of the first communion which the children used to take to their relations and neighbours in exchange for a present.

The mother who has her children photographed can only meet with approval. In the society of former times, the child was never, as now, the centre of attention. The major feasts and ceremonies in village society were chiefly an adult affair, and it is only since 1945
that children's feasts (such as first communion) have become important; as society comes to place more importance on children, and, at the same time, to assign a larger role to the wife as mother, the custom of having them photographed is reinforced. In the collection of a small peasant from the hamlets, photographs of children make up half of the photographs taken after 1945, while they were almost entirely absent from the collection prior to 1939. Previously, photographs were taken chiefly of adults, secondarily of family groups bringing together parents and children, and only exceptionally of children on their own. Today the hierarchy is reversed.\(^{13}\)

But even photographs of children are allowed to a large extent because of their social function. The sexual division of labour gives the wife the responsibility of maintaining relations with the members of the group who live a long way away, and first and foremost with her own family. Like letters, and better than letters, the photograph has its role to play in the continual updating of the exchange of family information; thus the sending of photographs after weddings generally produces an increase in the exchange of letters. It is customary to take the children (at least once, and, if possible, periodically) to the relations who live outside the village, and most importantly, when the wife comes from elsewhere, to her mother’s. It is the wife who organizes these trips, and she sometimes makes them unaccompanied by her husband. The sending of photographs has the same function: by means of photographs, the new arrival is introduced to the group as a whole, which must ‘recognize’ the child.

Thus it is natural that photography should be the object of a reading that may be called sociological, and that it should never be considered in or for itself, in terms of its technical or aesthetic qualities. The photographer is considered to know his job and no-one else has any point of comparison. The photograph must only supply a representation that is true and precise enough to permit recognition. A methodical inspection and a prolonged observation are conducted, in terms of the very logic that dominates the knowledge of other people in everyday life: by means of a comparison of fragments of knowledge and experiences, each person is located with reference to his or her family line, and the reading of old marriage photographs often takes the form of a
course in genealogical science, in which the mother, a specialist in the subject, teaches the child about the connections which bind him or her to each of the people shown. She works out how the couples came about; she analyzes and compares the sphere of social connections of each of the two families; she remarks on absences, which indicate quarrels, and on presences, which do the family an honour. In short, the wedding photograph is a real sociogram, and it is read as such.

For each guest, the photograph is like a trophy, an index of social influence and a source of prestige. Coming from a *petite maison*, B. M., a peasant from the hamlets, only has three wedding photographs.¹⁴ On the other hand, J. B., a comfortable city-dweller, married to the youngest daughter of the *grande maison*, keeps a large number of them, and also keeps photographs of groups of *mates*, taken on walks or outings. A detailed examination of the groups of guests reveals significant differences: B. M.'s guests are chiefly relations and neighbours, his principle of selection being traditional; at J. B.'s wedding, alongside the statutory guests, we can see the *mates* of the groom and even those of the bride.

To be photographed is to bear witness to one's presence, the obligatory counterpart to the homage received in the invitation; it is the expression of one's honour at having been invited, and of the fact that one is taking part in order to do an honour.

'You were at some wedding or other and you weren't in the photograph. They noticed that. You weren't in the group, they said that M. L. wasn't in the photograph. They thought you'd sneaked off, and that doesn't make a good impression' (Young woman from the bourg, addressing her husband during a discussion).

How could people's dispositions and attitudes not be marked by solemnity? No-one would think of disobeying the photographer's instructions, of talking to their neighbours, or looking in the other direction. That would be a lapse in good manners and more especially an insult to the whole group, especially those 'who are being honoured that day', the couple's families.

Photographs of major ceremonies are possible because – and only because – they capture behaviour that is socially approved
The Social Definition of Photography

Pierre Bourdieu

*Ars simia naturae*

If it is legitimate to wonder (as we shall below) how and why photography is essentially predisposed to serve the social functions which have been very generally conferred upon it, it remains the case that the social uses of photography, presented as a systematic (i.e. coherent and comprehensible) selection from objectively possible uses, define the social meaning of photography at the same time as they are defined by it.

*An art which imitates art*

Thus it is commonly agreed that photography can be seen as the model of veracity and objectivity: 'Any work of art reflects the personality of its creator,' says the *Encyclopédie française*. 'The photographic plate does not interpret. It records. Its precision and fidelity cannot be questioned.' It is all too easy to show that this social representation is based on the false evidence of prejudices; in fact, photography captures an aspect of reality which is only ever the result of an arbitrary selection, and, consequently, of a transcription; among all the qualities of the object, the only ones retained are the visual qualities which appear for a moment and from one sole viewpoint; these are transcribed in black and white, generally reduced in scale and always projected on to a plane. In other words, photography is a conventional system which expresses space in terms of the laws of perspective (or rather of one
perspective) and volumes and colours in terms of variations between black and white. Photography is considered to be a perfectly realistic and objective recording of the visible world because (from its origin) it has been assigned social uses that are held to be 'realistic' and 'objective'. And if it has immediately presented itself with all the appearances of a 'symbolic communication without syntax', in short a 'natural language', this is especially so because the selection which it makes from the visible world is logically perfectly in keeping with the representation of the world which has dominated Europe since the Quattrocento.

As Pierre Francastel observes:

Photography – the means of mechanically recording an image in conditions more or less analogous to those of vision – has made visible not the real character of traditional vision but, on the contrary, its systematic character: photographs are taken, even today, as a function of the classical artistic vision, at least insofar as this is permitted by the conditions of lens-manufacture and the use of only one lens. The camera provides the vision of the Cyclops, not of man. We also know that we systematically eliminate all those recordings which do not coincide with a vision that is not real but rather more-or-less artistic. For example, we do not take a picture of a building from close up, because the recording will not correspond to the traditional laws of orthometry. Try focusing a wide angle lens on the centre of the transept crossing of a gothic cathedral and look at the extraordinary document which you will obtain. You will see that what is called 'normal vision' is simply a selective vision, and that the world is infinitely richer in appearances than one would have thought.

And Proust gives a very beautiful illustration of photography's powers to discordant, of which the common practice is deprived:

... the most recent applications of photography – which huddle at the foot of a cathedral all the houses that so often, from close to, appeared to us to reach almost to the height of the towers, which drill and deploy like a regiment, in file, in extended order, in serried masses, the same monuments, bring together the two columns on the Piazzetta which a moment ago were so far apart, thrust away the adjoining dome of the Salute and in a pale and toneless background manage to include a whole immense horizon within the span of a
bridge, in the embrasure of a window, among the leaves of a tree that stands in the foreground and is more vigorous in tone, or frame a single church successively in the arcades of all the others — I can think of nothing that can to so great a degree as a kiss evoke out of what we believed to be a thing with one definite aspect the hundred other things with which it may equally well be, since each is related to a no less legitimate perspective.4

Elsewhere, Proust describes those ‘wonderful photographs of scenery and towns’, which can provide an

unusual image of a familiar object, an image different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly striking because it surprises us, takes us out of our cocoon of habit, and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these ‘magnificent’ photographs will illustrate a lay of perspective, will show us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected vantage point from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting out a spur from the bank of the river, from which it is actually at some distance.5

Is there not as great a distance between these ‘magnificent’ photographs and ordinary photographs as there is between perspective as a science of the real and perspective as a ‘hallucinatory technique’?6 The ordinary photographer takes the world as he or she sees it, i.e. according to the logic of a vision of the world which borrows its categories and its canons from the arts of the past.7 Pictures which, making use of real technical possibilities, break even slightly away from the academicism of vision and ordinary photography, are received with surprise. Because that which is visible is only ever that which is legible, subjects in all social milieux always resort to certain systems of reading of which the most common is the system of rules for the reproduction of the real that govern popular photography; faced with the most unusual pictures, the forms deciphered by lovers of photography are those which belong to a photographic tradition, such as the study of material; on the other hand, the omission of the norms of the canonical aesthetic, such as the absence of a foreground or a
noticeable background meaningfully linked to the form (for example, palm trees to express exoticism), frustrates understanding and appreciation when it does not provoke pure and simple refusal.

But the whole paradox of popular photography is revealed in its temporal dimension. An instant incision into the visible world, photography provides the means of dissolving the solid and compact reality of everyday perception into an infinity of fleeting profiles like dream images, in order to capture absolutely unique moments of the reciprocal situation of things, to grasp, as Walter Benjamin has shown, aspects, imperceptible because they are instantaneous, of the perceived world, to arrest human gestures in the absurdity of a present made up of ‘pillars of salt’.

In fact, far from seeing its specific vocation as the capturing of critical moments in which the reassuring world is knocked off balance, ordinary practice seems determined, contrary to all expectations, to strip photography of its power to disconcert; popular photography eliminates accident or any appearance that dissolves the real by temporalizing it. Only ever capturing moments which have been torn from the temporal flow by virtue of their solemnity, and only capturing people who are fixed, immobile, in the immutability of the plane, it loses its power of corrosion; when an action takes shape, it always embodies an essential movement, ‘immobile’ and outside of time, the balance or grace of a gesture as eternal as the social meaning it embodies; married couples standing arm in arm express, through a different gesture, the same meaning as the joined hands of Cato and Porcia in the Vatican. In the language of every aesthetic, frontality means eternity, in opposition to depth, through which temporality is reintroduced, and the plane expresses being or essence, in short, the timeless. Thus, by adopting the arrangement and posture of the figures in Byzantine mosaics, farmers posing for wedding photographs escape that power of photography which derealizes things by temporalizing them.

Rather than using all the possibilities of photography to invert the conventional order of the visible, which, because it dominates the entire pictorial tradition and consequently an entire perception of the world, has paradoxically ended up by impressing itself with all the appearances of naturalness, ordinary practice subordinates photographic choice to the categories and canons of the traditional
vision of the world; it is thus not surprising that photography can appear to be the recording of the world most true to this vision of the world, i.e. the most objective recording. In other words, because the social use of photography makes a selection, from the field of the possible uses of photography, structured according to the categories that organize the ordinary vision of the world, the photographic image can be seen as the precise and objective reproduction of reality. If it is true that 'nature imitates art', it is natural that the imitation of art should appear to be the most natural imitation of nature.

But, at a deeper level, only in the name of a naive realism can one see as realistic a representation of the real which owes its objective appearance not to its agreement with the very reality of things (since this is only ever conveyed through socially conditioned forms of perception) but rather to conformity with rules which define its syntax within its social use, to the social definition of the objective vision of the world; in conferring upon photography a guarantee of realism, society is merely confirming itself in the tautological certainty that an image of the real which is true to its representation of objectivity is really objective.11

'Barbarous taste'

It is doubtless due as much to the social image of the technical object which produces it as to its social use that photography is ordinarily seen as the most perfectly faithful reproduction of the real. In fact 'the mechanical eye' accomplishes the popular representation of objectivity and aesthetic perfection as defined by the criteria of resemblance and legibility because this image is the product of an object; idolaters and detractors of the apparatus most often agree, as M. Gilbert Simondon observes, that the degree of sophistication of an apparatus is proportional to its level of automatism.12 However, and for the same reason, the photographic act in every way contradicts the popular representation of artistic creation as effort and toil. Can an art without an artist still be an art? It goes without saying that photography does not realize the artistic ideal of the working classes as an ideal of imitation to the same extent as realist painting, the production of reproduction.
Many subjects sense and express the difference which in their eyes separates the photographic act from the act of painting; by the very fact that there barely seems to be any photograph that is untakeable, or even one which does not already seem to exist in a virtual state – since all it takes is the simple pressing of a button to liberate the impersonal aptitude by which the camera is defined – the hope is that the photograph will be justified by the object photographed, by the choice made in taking the photograph, or in its eventual use, which rules out the idea of taking a photograph simply in order to take a photograph as either useless, perverse or bourgeois: 'It's a waste of film' or 'You have to have film to waste'; 'Some people, I swear, don't know what to do with their time'; 'You'd have to have time on your hands to take things like that'; 'That's bourgeois photography'. By contrast, the still life, even if it is unusual, is more readily granted to the painter, because the simple and successful imitation of reality presupposes a difficult art, and thus testifies to mastery.

This gives rise to certain of the contradictions in the attitude towards mechanical reproduction which, by abolishing effort, risks depriving the work of the value which one seeks to confer on it because it satisfies the criteria of the complete work of art. A contradiction that is all the more stark since the work of art, particularly when it is not consecrated, always provokes the fear of being duped; the soundest guarantee against this is the artist's sincerity, a sincerity which is measured according to its effort and the sacrifices it makes. The ambiguous situation of photography within the system of the fine arts could lead, among other things, to this contradiction between the value of the work, which realizes the aesthetic ideal that is still most widespread, and the value of the act that produces it.

But this contradiction, which only becomes apparent in questions (often induced and artificial) about the artistic value of photography, does no more to alter the attachment of the working classes to the photographic image than does the concern, by which aesthetes are haunted, of knowing whether, because of its subordination to a machine, photographic art allows that transfiguration of the object (even if it is ugly or meaningless) by which we are accustomed to recognizing artistic creation. Is the technology that produces the most faithful reproduction not the one most likely to
fulfil the expectations of popular naturalism, for which the beautiful picture is only the picture of a beautiful thing, or, but more rarely, a beautiful picture of a beautiful thing? 'Now that's good, it's almost symmetrical. And she's a beautiful woman. A beautiful woman always looks good in a photo.' Thus the Parisian worker echoes the plain-speaking of Hippias the Sophist: 'I shall tell him what beauty is and I'm not likely to be refuted by him! The fact is, Socrates, to be frank, a beautiful woman, that's what beauty is.'

Without a doubt, photography (and colour photography especially) entirely fulfils the aesthetic expectations of the working classes. But must we go so far as to say that popular photographs are the realization of an aesthetic intention or ideal, or, in order to explain it completely, is it enough to mention the constraints and obstacles of technology? It is true that most occasional photographers have access only to instruments which offer a very limited range of possibilities; it is also true that the basic principles of popular technique, communicated by salesmen or other amateurs, particularly consist of prohibitions (not moving, not holding the camera at an angle, not photographing into the light or in bad lighting conditions) which are generally confirmed by experience because of the poor quality of the cameras used and the lack of technical competence. But is it not abundantly clear here that these prohibitions encompass an aesthetic which must be recognized and admitted so that transgression of its imperatives appears as a failure? A different aesthetic might intentionally aim for the blurred or unfocused pictures which the popular aesthetic rejects as clumsy or unsuccessful. If, in the case of popular photography (as was for a long time true for the primitive arts), explanation with reference to technical constraints may be satisfactory at first glance, this is primarily true because the field circumscribed by technical imperatives, that is, the sphere of what may technically be photographed, exceeds the range circumscribed by social imperatives, i.e. the sphere of what must be photographed; in this case the technical and aesthetic quality of a picture defined primarily by its social function can only be a *sine qua non*, without ever arousing interest on its own account.

So everything takes place as if photography were the expression of an implicit aesthetic employing a very strict economy of means, and objectified in a certain type of picture without ever (by its very
Part I

essence) being perceived as such. In every way the opposite of a pure aesthetic, the popular 'aesthetic' expressed in photographs and in the judgements passed on photographs follows on logically from the social functions conferred upon photography, and from the fact that it is always given a social function.

In its traditional form, this aesthetic strictly identifies aesthetic with social norms, or, perhaps, strictly speaking, recognizes only the norms of propriety and suitability, which in no way excludes the experience and expression of beauty; the making of a gesture or an object in a way that conforms most strictly to the most traditional norms provides the possibility of more or less subtle, more or less successful justifications which permit praise or admiration. Because it presupposes the uniqueness and coherence of a system of norms, such an aesthetic is never better fulfilled than it is in the village community. Thus, for example, the meaning of the pose adopted for the photograph can only be understood with relation to the symbolic system in which it has its place, and which, for the peasant, defines the behaviour and manners suitable for his relations with other people. Photographs ordinarily show people face on, in the centre of the picture, standing up, at a respectful distance, motionless and in a dignified attitude. In fact, to strike a pose is to offer oneself to be captured in a posture which is not and which does not seek to be 'natural'. The same intention is demonstrated in the concern to correct one's posture, to put on one's best clothes, the refusal to be surprised in an ordinary attitude, at everyday work. Striking a pose means respecting oneself and demanding respect.

When one attempts to persuade subjects to keep a 'natural' posture, they become embarrassed, because they do not think themselves worthy of being photographed or, as they say, 'presentable', and the best thing one can hope for is simulated naturalness, the theatrical attitude. The behaviour of the photographer taking pictures from life seems absurd or suspicious. Hence these questions: 'Where are these photographs going to end up? Paris? Aren't they for the cinema at least? Because you only see things like that in the cinema! They'll show anything!' In the eyes of the peasant, the city-dweller is the one who succumbs to a sort of perceptual 'anything goes-ism'; and this attitude appears incomprehensible to him because he refers to an implicit philoso-
phy of photography according to which only certain objects, on certain occasions, are worthy of being photographed. 14

And we must avoid bluntly opposing the taste of city-dwellers for 'the natural' to the taste of peasants for the hieratic; this would in effect mean ignoring the fact that concessions to an aesthetic freed from social conventions are always more apparent than real. We might imagine, for example, that holidays favour the production of pictures marked by that casual attitude which they encourage and which is expressive of them. In fact, the 'stage' is most often set up beforehand and if, like painters, many amateur photographers force their models into composed and laborious poses and postures, it is because, here as elsewhere, the 'natural' is a cultural ideal which must be created before it can be captured. Even the surprise picture, the accomplishment of the aesthetic of the natural, obeys cultural models: the ideal is still to be 'naturally' as one wants to appear or as one must appear.

In most group photographs, subjects are shown pressed against one another (always in the centre of the picture), often with their arms around one another. People's eyes converge towards the camera so that the whole picture points to its own absent centre. In photographs of couples, the subjects stand with their arms around each other's waists, in a completely conventional pose. The norms of behaviour which must be maintained before the camera sometimes become apparent, in a positive or negative form. The person who, in a group assembled for a solemn occasion such as a wedding, who strikes an unsuitable pose or neglects to look at the camera and pose, provokes disapproval. As they say, 'he isn't there'. The convergence of looks and the arrangement of individuals objectively testifies to the cohesion of the group.

The expression of this sentiment can be seen in the case of photographs showing families, which have been submitted to different subjects for their judgment: all (except one) prefer a pose which is natural but dignified, and photographs in which people stand upright, motionless and dignified are preferred to photographs 'taken from life'. 'In this one, they're proud; they're out walking...'. 'In this one they aren't looking straight ahead, they're distracted. The child is leaning on his father.' Another draws the distinction between a pose which is 'stiff (guindée)', which would
provoking laughter, and one which is ‘dignified (digne)’, and meets with approval. On the other hand, if the picture in which the members of the family seem distracted by one another provokes disapproval, it is because the weak cohesion of the family group is read into it, when it is the group as such that the photograph ought to capture. As one cannot demand that these photographs of strangers should supply what one customarily seeks in them, namely the evocation of familiar faces, memorable places or moments, one demands that they should at least be the representation of a social role, a requirement which would not be asked of one’s own photographs since they fulfil it automatically. ‘Well, it’s a family. I don’t like the mum, she looks miles away. She’s a bit more of a mum in this one. All the same, though! She’s a funny mother, with her dangling arms... This picture’s horrible. Ah! this one’s nice, the children are being polite, mum’s giving father her arm. It’s a family souvenir.’ When we deal with a personal photograph, we know that the mother is a mother and the father a father; in anonymous pictures, the function of the different characters must be clearly symbolized. Mother or father or fiancés, the photograph must show them as such.

It is certainly possible that the spontaneous desire for frontality is linked to the most deep-rooted cultural values. Honour demands that one pose for the photograph as one would stand before a man whom one respects and from whom one expects respect, face on, one’s forehead held high and one’s head straight.15 In this society which exalts the sense of honour, dignity and respectability, in this closed world where one feels at all times inescapably under the gaze of others, it is important to give others the most honourable, the most dignified image of oneself: the affected and rigid pose which tends towards the posture of standing at attention seems to be the expression of this unconscious intention. The sitter addresses to the viewer an act of reverence, of courtesy, according to conventional rules, and demands that the viewer obey the same conventions and the same norms. He stands face on and demands to be looked at face on and from a distance, this need for reciprocal deference being the essence of frontality.

The portrait accomplishes the objectification of the self-image. Consequently, it is only an extreme form of one’s relationship to others. Thus it is understandable that the taking of photographs
always provokes a certain unease, especially among peasants, who are most often condemned to internalize the pejorative image that the members of other groups have of them, and who therefore have a poor relationship to their own bodies. Embarrassed by their bodies, they are unnatural and clumsy in all the occasions which demand that one relax and present one’s body as a spectacle, as in dancing and posing before the camera. And it is always as if, by means of obeying the principle of frontality and adopting the most conventional posture, one were seeking as far as possible to control the objectification of one’s own image. Axial composition, in accordance with the principle of frontality, provides an impression that is as clearly legible as possible, as if one were seeking to avoid any misunderstanding, even if this were to mean sacrificing ‘naturalness’. Looking without being seen, without being seen looking and without being looked at, or candidly, so to speak, and, to an even greater extent, taking photographs in this way, amounts to the theft of the images of other people. Looking at the person who is looking (or who is taking the photograph), correcting one’s posture, one presents oneself to be looked at as one seeks to be looked at; one presents one’s own image. In short, faced with a look which captures and immobilizes appearances, adopting the most ceremonial bearing means reducing the risk of clumsiness and *gaucherie* and giving others an image of oneself that is affected and pre-defined. Like respect for etiquette, frontality is a means of effecting one’s own objectification: offering a regulated image of oneself is a way of imposing the rules of one’s own perception.

The conventionality of attitudes towards photography appears to refer to the style of social relations favoured by a society which is both stratified and static and in which family and ‘home’ are more real than particular individuals, who are primarily defined by their family connections; in which the social rules of behaviour and the moral code are more apparent than the feelings, desires or thoughts of individual subjects; in which social exchanges, strictly regulated by consecrated conventions, are carried out under the constant fear of the judgement of others, under the watchful eye of opinion, ready to condemn in the name of norms which are unquestionable and unquestioned, and always dominated by the need to give the best image of oneself, the image most in keeping with the ideal of dignity and honour. How, under these condi-
tions, could the representation of society be anything other than the representation of a represented society?

If, among the working classes of urban society, social norms still govern the photographic aesthetic, they impress themselves in a less total and certainly in a less absolute way. In fact, once one begins to analyze the judgements of manual and clerical workers, excluded from a scholarly culture of which they are aware and whose sub-products they consume, it becomes apparent that the 'aesthetic' which finds expression in their individual judgements derives its specific characteristics from the fact that it is seen, at least in a confused way, as one aesthetic among others. Even when they identify a beautiful photograph with the photograph of a thing that is beautiful aesthetically, or, even better, morally, they know that there are other definitions of perfection; more precisely, they are never entirely unaware of the aesthetic intentions of the social groups most distant from their own, or the disdainful image which those groups have of their practice.

Unlike the aesthetic of the simple man, unproblematic attachment to one coherent system of norms, the 'popular aesthetic' is defined and manifested (at least partially) in opposition to scholarly aesthetics, even if it is never triumphantly asserted. Reference to legitimate culture is never really excluded, even among manual workers. Unable either to ignore the existence of a scholarly aesthetic which challenges their own aesthetic, or to abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, not to speak of asserting and legitimating them, they escape this contradiction by establishing, sometimes quite explicitly, a dual scale of judgements; they must experience their relationship to aesthetic norms in terms of the logic of dissociation, since they must separate the obligatory practice from the obligatory judgement on that practice: thus, even when they aspire to other photographic genres, at least in intention, they would never dream of condemning the family photograph. This dual set of norms is never so manifest as when it forces a single subject to choose, on his own, between what he does and what he would like to do: 'It's beautiful, but I'd never think of taking it', 'Yes, it's very beautiful, but you'd have to like that sort of thing; it's not for me', formulas which, by their insistent recurrence, demonstrate the tension that affects the 'popular aesthetic' as a 'dominated aesthetic'.
'A lock of hair, a tress, that's pretty as well; it's all messed up; they've done that on purpose; he's played on the flaws to show nothing but hair. That's really great, that one! Was it an artist who took that?' 'One thing I miss is never having done any photography. You can't tell what it is that's been messed up' (woman's hair). 'A leaf? Oh, yes! it looks a bit like a leaf. But taking pictures like that, all the same! Is it from far away or close up? [...] Well yes, if I'd known that, I'd have understood. If I knew photography I'd understand.' (leaf)

On the other hand, and although it breaks the rules of the 'popular aesthetic' by amputating the sitter's face, the close-up photograph of an old woman's hands meets with strong appreciation among the peasants because they immediately see it as the allegorical expression of a thesis (plate 7): 'Oh, that's easier! The wonderful hands of a good farmer; hands like that have won agricultural prizes hundreds of times. That woman has worked in the fields as much as she has in the kitchen; she's certainly tended the vines, looked after the animals: very nice.' What is perceived, understood and appreciated is not the old woman's hands but old age, work and honesty.

A similar process characterizes realist taste: as photographic technology is commonly held to be the technology most capable of providing a faithful and truthful reproduction of reality, the adequacy of the realization to the original proposition plays the same part here as the distance between reproduction and reality, likeness, does in painting. The primary form of the judgement of taste is the appraisal of a disparity between the realization, the signifier, and a transcendent signified, a real idea or model. While painting encourages a demand for realism, photography, which always and automatically appears realistic and therefore achieves no special merit by being so, inclines the viewer to expect conformity to a formulable intention. More profoundly, photography provides an exceptional opportunity for the expression of realist taste; in fact, the moment one questions – because of a distorted image of the machine – the possibility of the photographic act transfiguring the object represented, one is forced or enabled to measure the beauty of the representation against the
beauty of the thing represented. What is shameful about the photograph of a meaningless object is not solely the fact that it does not refer to anything that precedes or transcends it — any statement to illustrate, meaning to reconstruct or use to serve — it is also that one is less willing than ever to admit that this signifier without a signified only appears meaningless because it is its own signified: once one takes issue with the true state and merit of the effort of reproduction, the literal representation of the world becomes a pleonastic treatment of the world.\textsuperscript{28}

Thus, the photographic image ordinarily acknowledged as the most faithful reproduction of reality perfectly fulfils the expectations of the popular naturalism that relies on a fundamental attachment to the object created, naturalist photography, 'the choice that praises', which in many of its aspects evokes a naturist cult.\textsuperscript{29} The picture of a meaningless object is refused with such force, and the systematic distortion of the given object, and of the human face in particular, provokes such a feeling of outrage, because abstracting reinterpretation is seen as a technique of exclusion and an attempt at mystification, but also and particularly a gratuitous attack on the thing represented.

Photographs which take too many liberties with the human body provoke unease or indignation: 'If you're going to take it, you might as well take the whole thing, mightn't you? The face is missing, it's irritating.' 'It isn't bad, but I'd like to see the expression on the face.' 'I'd have taken the face as well' (hands of an old peasant-woman). 'You just see an arm, there's something missing, it isn't enough' (child at the breast, close-up). The face, and especially the facial expression, concentrate the expressiveness of the body so that their removal is felt as a denial of expression: 'Fortunately you can see the eye, and the eye is everything', says one subject.

This is why photographic practice, a ritual of solemnization and consecration of the group and the world, perfectly fulfils the deeper intentions of the 'popular aesthetic', the festive aesthetic, that is, the aesthetic of communication with others and communion with the world.
THE HIERARCHY OF LEGITIMACIES

'Barbarous taste' is never entirely free of all reference to 'good
taste'. It appears, for example, that the inclination of working-class
subjects to rely on 'concepts' – of genre or perfection – capable of
supplying the norm from which appreciation may be deduced, also
expresses the relationship that any culturally disadvantaged group
is condemned to have to the legitimate culture from which it is de
facto excluded; deprived by definition of the implicit and diverse
knowledge of the norms of good taste, the working classes always
seek objective principles which are the only things capable, in their
eyes, of forming the basis of an adequate judgement, and which can
only be acquired by a specific or broad education. The concern
with rules or with the rules of the genre, and the hope that
judgement in matters of taste (as a 'reflecting judgement') may also
become a 'defining judgement', subsuming the particular within
the general (rule, principle or law), also ultimately expresses
acknowledgement of legitimate culture and the certainty of cultu-
ral dispossession. All the same, photography (and the judgements
which it provokes) provides an exceptionally favourable opportu-
nity for grasping the logic of the 'popular aesthetic', because it tends
less than fully recognized practices and works to make one afraid
of losing face by revealing one's ignorance of consecrated norms
and obligatory opinions.

This is so because, in a given society at a given moment, not all
cultural meanings, theatrical presentations, sporting events, recitals
of songs, poetry or chamber-music, operettas or operas, are
equivalent in dignity and value, and they do not all call for the
same approach with the same urgency. In other words, the various
systems of expression, from theatre to television, are objectively
organized according to a hierarchy independent of individual
opinions, which defines cultural legitimacy and its gradations.30
Faced with meanings situated outside the sphere of legitimate
culture, consumers feel they have the right to remain pure consum-
ers and judge freely; on the other hand, within the field of
consecrated culture, they feel measured according to objective
norms, and forced to adopt a dedicated, ceremonial and ritualized
attitude. Thus jazz, cinema and photography do not give rise –
because they do not claim it with the same urgency – to the attitude of dedication, which is common coin when one is dealing with works of scholarly culture. Some virtuosos, in a bid for legitimation, transfer to these arts models of behaviour that are current in the realm of traditional culture. But in the absence of an institution to teach them methodically and systematically as constituent parts of legitimate culture, most people experience them in quite a different way, as simple consumers. Erudite knowledge of the history of these arts, and familiarity with the technical or theoretical rules that characterize them are only encountered in exceptional cases because people do not feel as forced as they do in other areas to make the effort to acquire, preserve and communicate this body of knowledge which is a part of the obligatory preliminaries and ritualized accompaniments of scholarly consumption.

One therefore passes gradually from the fully consecrated arts such as theatre, painting, sculpture, literature and classical music to signifying systems which are abandoned – at least at first glance – to the arbitrariness of individual taste, whether they be decoration, cosmetics or cookery. The meanings that fall within the sphere of legitimacy all share the fact that they are organized according to a particular type of system, developed and inculcated by the school, an institution specifically responsible for communicating knowledge, organized into a hierarchy, through a methodical organiza-
tion of training and practice. It follows that preferences or skills belonging to the sphere of legitimacy, far from being randomly distributed, tend towards a hierarchical or methodical organization; systematization clearly operates on a more or less elevated level according to whether the exercise has been practised for a longer or a shorter time, and with greater or lesser intensity: and we find that systems of taste with regard to legitimate works are closely linked to educational levels. The existence of consecrated works and the whole system of rules defining the sacramental approach presuppose an institution whose function is not only one of communication and distribution but also one of legitimation. In fact, jazz and cinema are served by expressive means which are at least as powerful as more traditional cultural works; there are coteries of professional critics with erudite journals and radio and television discussion platforms at their disposal which, as a sign of their pretension to cultural legitimacy, assume the learned and tedious tone of university criticism, taking on its cult of erudition for erudition's sake, as if, haunted by the issue of their legitimacy, the only thing they could do was to adopt and exaggerate the external signs of statutory authority of the guardians of the monopoly of the cultural legitimacy, the professors: as if their situation of competing for legitimacy and the power of legitimation forced them to express the most divergent or preferably indispensable judgements, and only ever to reach limited groups of amateurs, such as jazz circles and cinema clubs.

The position of photography within the hierarchy of legitimacies, half-way between 'vulgar' practices, apparently abandoned to the anarchy of tastes and noble cultural practices, subject to strict rules, explains, as we have seen, the ambiguity of the attitudes which it provokes, particularly among the members of the privileged classes. The effort of some devotees to establish photography as a fully legitimate artistic practice almost always appears foolish and desperate because it can do practically nothing to counteract the social key to photography, which is never recalled so strongly as when one seeks to contradict it. People who wish to break with the rules of ordinary practice, and who refuse to confer upon their activity and its product their accepted meaning and function, are constantly forced to create a substitute (which may not appear as such) for that which is given as an immediate
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certainty to the devotees of legitimate culture, namely the sense of the cultural legitimacy of the practice and all the supports that go with it, from technical models to aesthetic theories. Unlike a legitimate practice, a practice in the process of legitimation poses and imposes, to those involved in it, the question of its own legitimacy. It is no accident that passionate photographers are always obliged to develop the aesthetic theory of their practice, to justify their existence as photographers by justifying the existence of photography as a true art.

Does this mean that when subjects do not feel measured according to the objective norms of an aesthetic orthodoxy their judgements of taste are abandoned to arbitrariness and deprived of any systematic character? In fact, they are organized according to a type of systematic arrangement which has nothing more to do with individual psychology than that which structures the preferences and knowledge of 'cultivated' people, but which is based precisely upon the class ethos — the set of values which, without attaining systematic explanation, tend to organize the 'conduct of life' of a social class. Thus, as we have seen, for the working and middle classes, the aesthetic expressed as much in photographic practice as in judgments on photography, appears as a dimension of the ethos, so that the aesthetic of the great mass of photographic works may be legitimately reduced, without being reductive, to the sociology of the groups that produce them, the functions which they assign to them and the meanings which they confer upon them, both explicitly and, more particularly, implicitly.
CHAPTER 2  THE SOCIAL DEFINITION OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1 The restructurings of the field of systems of pictorial expression, from the engraving to the 'photo-novel', reveal that each of these systems derives its perceptual and aesthetic rules from its social use. Photography did not simply appropriate one of the functions which had, until that point, been specific to engraving, the faithful reproduction of the real; leaving engraving with the task of illustrating fiction, it reinforced the pre-existing requirements of objectivity and realism by realizing them.


5 Marcel Proust, *ibid., In a Budding Grove*, vol. 1, p. 896.


7 Because there is nothing less natural than this selective and conventional representation, photography can still produce, in some subjects, an experience of 'estrangement', even within the familiar universe. An 85-year-old inhabitant of Lesquire showed great astonishment at an old photograph taken from the balcony of a house opposite his own. At first, he could recognize nothing. He turned the photograph around in all directions. He was shown that it was a picture of the town square. 'But where's it taken from?' He passed his finger along the houses. He stopped, and, pointing to the first-floor window of a house, said: 'But that's my house, isn't it?' He recognized the house next door: 'Where's it take from? Is that the church?' He recognized new details but remained just as confused because he was unable to locate himself.

8 Once again, children are an exception to this, perhaps because their nature is one of change; photography is appropriate, since it is a matter of capturing the ephemeral and the accidental, as it cannot save the fleeting view from complete disappearance without constituting it as such.


10 Photographic representations only really appear 'lifelike' and 'objective' because they obey laws of representation which were produced
before the media for creating them mechanically existed. Used by painters from the beginning of the sixteenth century and continuously improved from then on, in particular by the addition of a convex lens, the camera obscura became very widespread as the ambition to produce "lifelike" images was reinforced. We also know about the fashion, during the second half of the eighteenth century, for portraits known as 'silhouettes' (drawings in profile made from the shadow thrown by the face). In 1786, Chrétien perfected the 'physionotrace', which made it possible to trace three-quarter-face portraits from which, when they were reduced onto copper, a number of copies could be printed. In 1807, Wollaston invented the camera lucida, a device using a prism which made it possible to see the object to be drawn and the drawing itself at the same time. In 1822, Daguerre introduced the 'Dioramas', transparent pictures subjected to changing lighting; in search of pigments which would give his pictures more dramatic force, he carried out experiments on light-sensitive chemical products, pursuing the dream of chemically capturing the image formed in the camera obscura. Learning of Niepce's invention, he improved it and turned it into the daguerrotype. Photography was predisposed to become the standard of 'realism' because it supplied the mechanical means for realizing the 'vision of the world' invented several centuries earlier, with perspective.

11 The law is doubtless one of the best indications of the meaning objectively conferred on photography by our society. If photographic representation of the naked body leads more readily than representation in paintings to accusations of obscenity, this is doubtless because the realism attributed to photography means that it appears less capable of carrying out the operation of 'neutralization' (in the phenomenological sense) that is achieved by representation in paintings.

12 M. Gilbert Simondon points out that in fact 'automatism is a fairly low degree of technical sophistication' and that 'real sophistication in machines [...] corresponds not to an increase in automatism but on the contrary to the functioning of a machine taking on a certain margin of indeterminacy'. (Du mode d'existence des objets techniques, Paris, Aubier, 1958, p. 11.)

13 The photograph in the J. B.'s collection, showing J. B.'s father beside the chainsaw falls into this category (plate 6); the affected pose and the seriousness of the gaze into the camera tend to some degree to 'compensate', for the person photographed, for the incongruity of clothing and décor.
14 Shown the photograph of a pregnant woman (plate 9), pebbles or a leaf, the reaction is almost always the same: 'The things they go out looking for!' 'The things they photograph!', 'Taking things like that, for heaven's sake!', 'It's a relaxed, natural pose... If the woman was having herself photographed, she'd correct her posture.' (The observations reported here and below were formulated by peasants and workers shown a set of twenty-four professional photographs, the subject of which will be quoted each time they are mentioned.)

15 Among the Kabyles, the man of honour is the one who 'looks people in the face (fait face)', who looks the others in the face, uncovering his own face (cf. P. Bourdieu, 'The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society', in J. Peristiany (ed.) Honour and Shame, The Values of Mediterranean Society, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, pp. 191–241). From a similarity between sp-ék (from Latin specio) and sep (from Sanskrit sāpattī, to show respect), Émile Benveniste observes that 'notions of "hommage" and "looking" are often associated, cf. French égard and regard, English regard, respect, etc.' (Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen, Maisonneuve, Paris, 1973, p. 157).

16 In Béarn the younger son who marries an elder daughter and goes to live with her often loses his surname to be known solely by the surname of his new home.

17 W. Hauserstein has brought to light the connection between frontal-ity and the social structure of 'feudal and hieratic' cultures (Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, 1913, vol. XXXVI, pp. 759–60). Philippe Ariès also establishes a relationship between the transformation of the art of portraiture and the transformation of the structure of the family and the system of related attitudes, noting that there is a progressive movement from paintings in which the members of the family 'pose, in a rather solemn attitude, designed to emphasize the connections that bind them' (in such a painting by P. Pourbus, 'the husband rests his left hand on his wife's shoulder; at their feet, one of the two children is repeating the same gesture on the shoulder of his little sister') to portraits in which 'the family is captured in an instant, taken from life, at a point in its everyday life' (P. Ariès, L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime, pp. 389–90). Thus the different ways of treating the family portrait according to different social classes tend to reproduce, in a synchronic way, the different moments of the history of the portrait.

18 It is therefore still for reasons remote from aesthetics that one can be led towards aesthetic preoccupations. The influence of the situation of public presentation seems to be borne out by the fact that the
number of private photographs is much smaller among those who
take colour photographs than among those who do not, and that,
more than anyone else, they submit the photographs shown to a
prior choice, without, however, showing the same selectiveness in
their practice.

19 For example: 'What is it? A film still? If it's the photograph of a
heavily made-up famous actor, it's fine; if not, it's worthless.'

20 When the image of a meaningless object is accepted, it is because
both the fact of its having been taken and the people who took it are
held to be meaningless. Thus, peasants can accept that people take
photographs of pieces of bark or piles of pebbles, but without
attaching the least value to them. If, with a slightly shocked
amazement, one accepts this frivolous city-dweller's fancy, it is
because, when all is said and done, photography is seen as a
meaningless and frivolous activity, which should be left to city-
dwellers.

21 Spontaneous discourse about photography rarely occurs on an
aesthetic level, and even more seldom is photographic practice
spoken of in the language of artistic creation. In a sample of 500
amateur photographs, the pictures which showed any technical or
aesthetic effort amounted to less than 10 per cent.

22 Disconcerted by the semantic availability of the image, and refusing
to admit the immanence of the signified to the signifier, one only
invents a meaning by inventing the subject who could help the
meaningless object to find meaning by conferring a function upon it.
'That's fine for someone who likes water' (breaking wave). 'That
isn't any use except for studying plants; as a worker, I'm not
interested in it.' 'I'd only take that one if I collected leaves.' 'No, it's
a collector's photograph.' 'It might be interesting to botanists.'
(leaf).

23 The proof that the beautiful image is the image of a beautiful thing
(socially defined) is supplied by the fact that when one names a series
of objects, asking whether they could produce a photograph that was
beautiful, interesting, meaningless or ugly, one obtains very much
the same hierarchy (relatively independent of social class) as when
one presents artistic photographs of the same objects (the numbers in
brackets represent the percentage of subjects who considered that
these objects could produce a beautiful photograph): a sunset (78), a
landscape (76), a little girl playing with a cat (56), a woman
breast-feeding (54), a folk-dance (46), a weaver at work (39), a still
life (38), an Old Master (37), the bark of a tree (35), a famous
monument (27), a first communion (26), a snake (20), a rope (16), a
metal frame, a pregnant woman (15), cabbages, a railway cemetery, a quarrel between tramps (12), a butcher's stall (9), a wounded man (8), a car accident (1).


25 This appears to be the popular attitude with regard to all meaning. For example, if classical music or non-figurative painting are found disconcerting, it is because subjects feel incapable of understanding what they must mean as signs.

26 Just as much in a rural environment as among the working classes of urban society, the hierarchy of preferences is the result of a compromise between the hierarchy of legibilities and the hierarchy of values. An easily identified photograph, even if it represents a subject that is morally shocking, will be preferred to another, whatever its subject, which is less easily identifiable. When the two hierarchies coincide, as in the case of the pregnant woman, or, particularly in the rural environment, of the old woman's hands, judgement is almost unanimously favourable: the characteristic techniques most violently attacked in meaningless photographs (blur, lack of focus, etc.,) may then be praised as 'artistic haziness', 'suitable for the subject', 'poetic'; and in fact, as one person in the survey enlighteningly said, 'it's one of those things that you can enjoy with your eyes closed'. Less 'expressive' pictures, or those which permit several different readings, always produce a certain awkwardness.

27 This means, among other things, that, paradoxically, the most enlightened amateurs and even professionals refuse to base the legitimacy of their creations, as everything would incline them to do, on the exaltation of 'objective chance'. The picture always bears its mechanical origin as a defect, and the most perfect accomplishment is held to be suspicious if it is not legitimated by the statement of an intention.

28 This partly explains why realist taste is much more firmly stated with reference to photography than with reference to painting, even in the cultivated class which, as we have seen, is not very distinct from the other social classes when it comes to establishing a hierarchy of objects according to whether or not they would make a beautiful photograph. It is also true that realist taste, very widespread among all classes of society, is more readily expressed with reference to photography than with reference to a consecrated art such as painting.

29 Factorial analysis confirms the existence of a set of correlations
between the behaviour and opinions which express attachment to the image of photography as a mechanical reproduction of the real.

30 Legitimacy is not the same as legality: if the individuals of the most culturally disadvantaged classes almost always recognize, if only reluctantly, the legitimacy of the aesthetic rules suggested by the dominant culture, that does not mean that they cannot spend their whole lives, de facto, outside the field of application of those rules without the rules losing any of their legitimacy, their claim to universal acknowledgement. The legitimate rule can in no way determine the behaviour falling within its sphere of influence, and can even have nothing but exceptions, but it still defines the modality of the experience accompanying that behaviour, and cannot avoid being seen and acknowledged, especially when it is transgressed, as the rule of cultural behaviour when it claims legitimacy. In short, the existence of what I call cultural legitimacy consists in the fact that all individuals, whether or not they wish it to be so, and whether or not they admit it, are, and know they are, placed within the field of application of a system of rules and objective sanctions which make it possible to qualify their behaviour and organize it in a hierarchy in terms of culture.


CHAPTER 3 AESTHETIC AMBITIONS AND SOCIAL ASPIRATIONS

1 This chapter is based on surveys which were carried out by a number of researchers from the Centre de Sociologie Européenne and which have been the subject of reports and articles: ‘Les clubs de photographes amateurs de la région lilloise’, by Raymonde Moulin (in Éléments pour une sociologie de la photographie, CSE, stencilled publication, pp. 175–253); ‘La pratique de la photographie parmi le personnel des usines Renault’, (ibid., pp. 82–174) by Jean-Claude Passeron; ‘Photographie et peinture – Le club photographique de Bologne’, by Dominique Schnapper (in Revue française de sociologie, 1964–5); ‘Quatre photo-clubs de la région parisienne’ (stencilled publication, CSE, 1960, 65 pp.) by Arlette Lagneau and Françoise Flament. From the study on photography in Alsace carried out by