culture and the place of photography within it. Increasingly in gallery education, it seems that the photographic specialist is not distinguished from other kinds of artists or educators. James observes that at present there is an invigorating overlap of roles in the photography arena, as 'curators educate and educators curate.'

Photography is the medium of popular culture, non-art, the everyday. Photography is everywhere and belongs to everyone. Hence the frequent reference, particularly by educators working with non-artists, to its 'familiarity' and 'accessibility'. In contrast to other kinds of images, photographs are said to be unthreatening, liberating, easy to relate to. Susan Bright describes how a public programme was devised to accompany Tate Modern's *Cruel and Tender* show. Here it seems that the familiarity of photographs dovetailed with the evocativeness of the 'work' theme to produce a varied programme which drew upon both 'art' and 'non-art' expertise.

However, the very familiarity of photography can also lead to trouble. Norma-Lousie Thallon describes two projects in Glasgow, one with homeless people and the other with elderly hospital patients. Her experience runs against the common perception that photography is an easy medium to use with vulnerable people. Thallon found that the notion of a photograph as an accurate depiction of reality - as visual evidence - led to many confusions and difficulties. Questions arose as to the authorship of the work when the participants required a great deal of help in making it. There was uncertainty about the fate and ownership of the images after the workshops were over. And misunderstandings arose as the photographs were moved from private home or hospital settings to the public space of the gallery, where different expectations came into play.

The interview with Tiffany Fairey of PhotoVoice, also suggests the sensitivity of photography to context. She describes a project with young girls in Kabul who were encouraged to take their own pictures. The work was then exhibited and sold, both in Afghanistan and London. How were photographs taken by girls in Kabul being read by buyers in London? PhotoVoice considers the explanations written by the participants to be as important as the photographs, perhaps to do the job of 'anchoring' as the images move from one setting to another. To Fairey, the results of giving to people (who might normally be on the other side of the documenting camera) the means to speak and represent themselves, overrides the conundrums of audience. 'I teach them how to use a camera,' she says, 'and they teach me how they see and understand the world.'

David Campany points out that photography has had its most profound effect on art in its silent, mediating role - providing a record of art made through other means. Virtually every work of art can be, and sooner or later will be, offered up for our inspection in photographic form. 'The tension' he writes 'between the ambitions of self-conscious art photography and the artless photography of art can never be entirely reconciled.'
In planning this volume, we considered upping the quality of the images with better paper or reproduction methods. In the end it was decided that the aim was not to let photographs 'speak for themselves', but rather to reflect on the nature of the photographic. For this, one can illustrate a photograph in the way one illustrates a painting, performance or sculpture. In a sense it was a decision to use photography in its mediating role, to illustrate itself.

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Thinking and Not Thinking Photography

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Writing in 1985, the photographer Lewis Baltz reflected on the erratic profile photography had within art. It seemed that many museums and galleries tended to turn their attention towards it all at once and only every couple of decades or so. After years of indifference, institutions would seize upon it like 'a hyperkinetic child discovering a new toy'.[1] Photography would be forgotten, only to be found as if for the first time. As a result there would be what seemed like an eternal return of the same ideas, the same debates and the same questions, encountered afresh over and over. So often thought of as an aid to memory, photography was subjected to regular bouts of institutional amnesia. Why might this have been? And is it still the case?

In 1982 the artist and writer Victor Burgin opened the still influential book *Thinking Photography* by stating that the essays it gathered together were only 'contributions towards photography theory' [my emphasis] because no theory existed at that point.[2] In the years since, the photographic has certainly been at the centre of a great deal of theoretical attention. It has also been taken up by much of the advanced art of our time. Yet, none of this has resulted in a neatly definable photography theory. Instead, the photographic has come to be understood as a terrain that is as varied and inconsistent as it is extensive.

A photograph might be a fixed image but, socially speaking, photography does not keep still. A photograph might be sharp but the totality of all that is photographic can't be held in focus. It is too big and too diffuse to be a unified field. It is resistant to definition, not least because culture does so many different things with it and these things change over time. It escapes fixed formulation in such a way that it is never fully satisfying, or perhaps even possible, to say once and for all what it is, either on a technical level or a cultural level. This is what the theorist Peter Osborne has recently called the 'peculiar generality of the photographic image'.[3] And it is this peculiarity that generates the inevitable inconsistencies in the way it is approached and thought.

Despite the peaks and troughs in the profile of photography, its effects on art culture over the last century have been enormous. However, neither of its

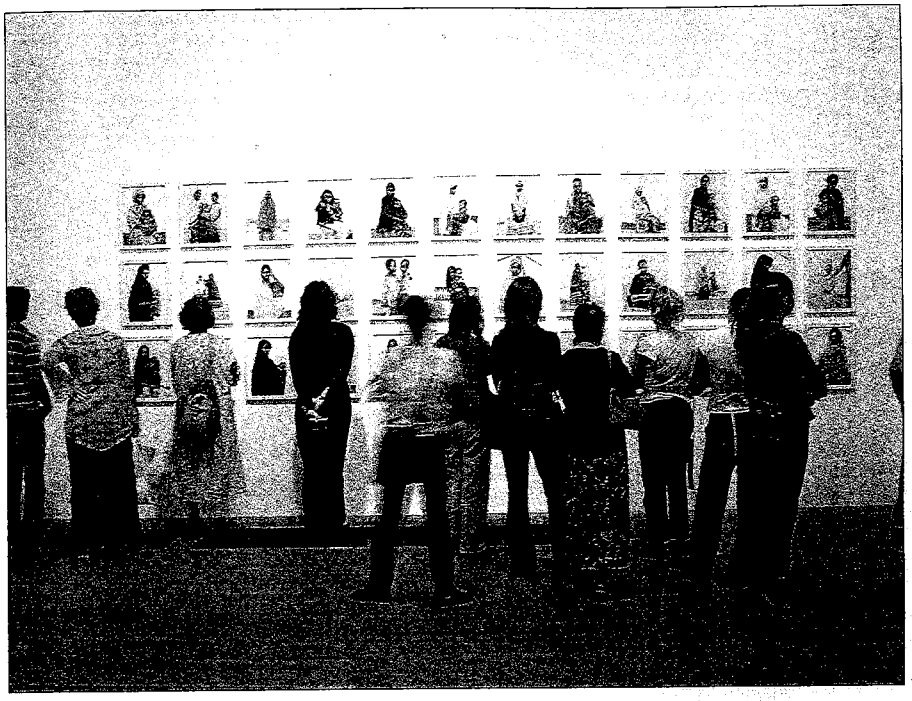
two major impacts has happened in the name of a distinct or distinctive medium. Firstly there is the matter of reproduction. Photography has been the silent mediator of all art for over a century now. Art comes to us via books, catalogues, magazines, slides, posters, postcards, web pages and so on. The cultural critic Walter Benjamin recognised this as early as 1931. 'It is indeed significant' he pointed out, 'that the debate has raged most fiercely around the aesthetics of photography as art, whereas the far less questionable social fact of art as photography was given scarcely a glance. And yet the impact of the photographic reproduction of art works is of very much greater importance for the function of art than the greater or lesser artistry of a photography that regards all experience as fair game for the camera.'[4]

Understandably, it is sometimes hard for those with a commitment to photography to swallow the fact that the medium has had its most profound effect when at its most neutral, in its most subservient role. The tension between the ambitions of self-conscious art photography and the artless photography of art can never be entirely reconciled. As Mark Haworth-Booth of the Victoria and Albert Museum points out, 'this unresolved conflict is very much part of the medium's history.'[5]

Secondly, and not unrelated to Benjamin's remark, is the fact that photography spliced itself most forcefully into the vanguard art of the second half of the twentieth century on the basis of its artless, general and anonymous social character. It was its apparent lack of specific qualities that made it so attractive to Pop art, Conceptualism and the art that has followed. Unencumbered by the weight of tradition, photography held out the possibility of reconnecting art and social life after years of abstraction and other conservative reductions. Hence the active embrace of photography as an industrial, automated and de-skilled technology. We see this in the silkscreens of Andy Warhol, in the mass produced photo books of Edward Ruscha with their mimicry of bureaucratic snaps, and in the simple photos made by Bruce Nauman to document his performances and ephemeral sculptures. Hence also the term 'artists using photography' that designated a less protective, less guarded loyalty to a definable medium than that traditionally held by art photographers. Their thoughtful use of photography in deliberately impure, promiscuous ways was a critical reworking of the unthinking promiscuity of the photograph in capitalism's mass culture. Even in the more elaborate artistic strategies of recent years, photographic purity is rarely a concern. In the staged tableaux (typified by Jeff Wall or Cindy Sherman) and the grand vista (typified by Andreas Gursky) that are currently so widely exhibited, the creativity, skills and references are rarely particular to the medium. Instead artists import the techniques of painting, literature and cinema, working with a hybrid conception of photography.

Describing the role played by photography in art of the 1960s and 1970s, Jeff Wall has used the term 'the art concept of photojournalism'.[6] He was referring to the way the important art of that time understood photography in its worldly condition - as a set of embedded social practices that could be analysed, critiqued, challenged and subverted. Artists probed photography's assumed role as social fact in news, science and law, opening up a space to reflect upon the authority often given to photographs in daily life. This turn of photography in art towards a reflection on photography's roles outside of art has become its most important mode. Photography has not entered art on an independent footing but as something inextricably bound up with non-art, and with the photographic in all of culture's spaces. Today we see practitioners and curators working with 'art concepts' of all the various fields of photography. For example, Tate Modern's recent show *Cruel and Tender: the Real in the Twentieth Century Photograph* was a presentation of the art concept of the document (more of which later).

More broadly we have seen the art concept of the fashion image; of the snapshot; of the portrait; of the medical photograph, the architectural photograph; the film still; the passport photo; the archival image; the penal image; of kitsch; of the topographic image and so on. The gallery has become the space to look askew at the general field of the photographic, to engage directly or indirectly with a commentary upon the image world at large. The space of art has thus come to function either as a dissecting table to which the different forms of the photographic are brought for



Installation shot of the work of Fazal Sheikh, Cruel and Tender, 2003, Tate Modern, London

creative reflection, or as a set upon which they can be reworked. These two metaphors - dissecting table and set - map quite well onto what seem to be the two key impulses behind much current photographic art: the forensic interest in detail and the cinematic interest in mise-en-scène. These impulses are so forcefully present today because all photography in art is somehow obliged to enter into a dialogue either with the notion of the photo as visual evidence, or with the culture of the moving image in which the still now finds itself, or both.

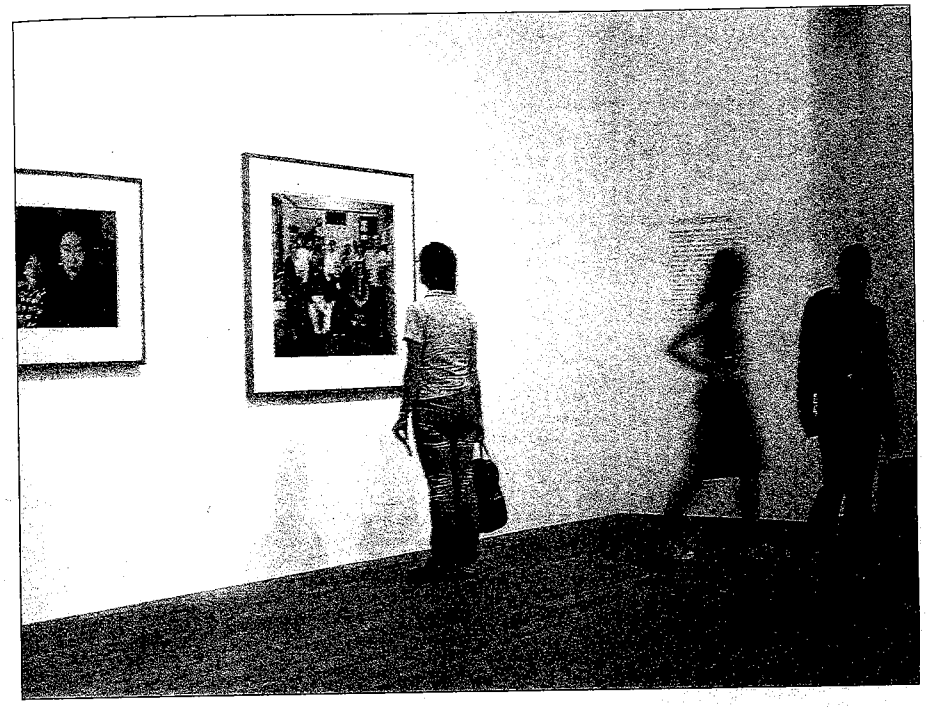
The question of dialogue, of exchange, is of course anathema to the thinking or making of photography 'purely on its own terms'. Nevertheless, the desire to discover a core of what might be particular to photography, and universal to all photography, is still very seductive both in art and in theoretical writing.

Indeed it may well be that the compulsion to fix the identity of photography is directly proportional to the difficulty of doing so. This is encapsulated neatly by the different writings on photography by one of its most influential commentators, Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida* (1980), his final book, was a search for an essence of photography, a search made in (and prompted by) a state of personal mourning for his deceased mother.[7] Barthes gazed alone at images, in his own time, away from mass culture. He located the essence in the photograph's embodiment of mortality and its relation to the past. All photographs have this, he argues, but it is palpable in just a few, viewed in the right frame of mind. The book is the closest thing photo theory has to a best-seller (along with Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, 1977). It is still widely read by artists and students of photography. Famously though, Barthes had little more than contempt for art photography, it being a perversion of the uncanny mechanism which for him really defined the photographic. For Barthes it is the viewer who must do all the thinking about image, not the photographer. By contrast in his earlier writings Barthes had been less interested in pinning down some elusive and perhaps non-existent core than looking at photography's dispersed social effects as news, publicity and advertising in mass media.[8] Here the meaning of photography is located in its basis as the most culturally widespread form of representation. What he theorised was the way the photographs we see fashion opinion and how opinion then fashions the photographs we see.

A reader moving across the divide in Barthes' writings will detect a pull between the different approaches, between thinking directly and thinking indirectly about photography. The pull is far from unique to Barthes. The oscillation structures our everyday experience of images: at some points we absorb them, even rely on them, while at others we question and reflect on them. This can seen be in the recent attempts to piece together photography's past in book form. Michel Frizot's *The New History of Photography* (1998) and Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History* (2002) are as vast and sprawling as their subject is when thought about in its widest sense. Despite the word 'history' appearing in the singular in their titles, each book is itself a consummate patchwork of incommensurate histories. Where once photography was narrated as a single linear narrative marked out by technical and creative innovation, now it is a subject that barely unifies itself at all, even in books of over five hundred pages.[9] This is a notable shift. Today it is photography's total dispersal that warrants special attention.

The movement between photography as something to be approached head-on and something to be looked at awry has played itself out very clearly in exhibition culture. Even within the domain of specialist institutions attitudes still vary enormously today. There are galleries that defend photography on the basis of a perceived aesthetic particularity. Others, such as The Photographers' Gallery in London, attempt to present photography in all its various social functions. The former can often appear rather parochial and paranoid in their defensiveness, while the latter can seem too distracted by their own inclusiveness. It is a tension most have learned to live with over the last couple of decades, understanding that it is not possible to take up an ideal perspective to view the photographic 'correctly'.[10]

The split can also be felt within some of our larger institutions. Consider for example Tate Modern's recent show *Cruel and Tender: the Real in the Twentieth Century Photograph* presented from June to September of this year. It displayed projects by two dozen photographers, living and dead, all of whom have worked for the gallery, in or around what might be called a documentary style.[11] It has been discussed widely as being Tate Modern's first photography exhibition. This is true on one level but untrue on another. The museum has been showing photographic work since it's inception. Photographs have formed an important part of its previous shows such as the inaugural *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* (2000), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (2001-2), *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera* 1962-1972 (2001), *Century City* (2001) and *Andy Warhol* (2002). In addition, photographic work by dozens of artists and photographers has been displayed as part of the museum's permanent collection. Even while *Cruel and Tender* was running, photo-based works by another twenty people were also on show.[12]



Installation shot of the work of Thomas Struth, Cruel and Tender, 2003, Tate Modern, London

Put together, this represents a substantial amount photography, and of greater variety than the deliberately narrow focus of *Cruel and Tender*. But it wasn't announced as photography and so it didn't constitute a 'photography exhibition' for the public.

What is different about a photography exhibition may be less to do with the nature of the work than what me might call the mode of attention that is produced for it. In *Cruel and Tender* the emphasis was very much on the medium. This was visible in the curation, in the show's mediation for the public, in the publicity and in the ensuing reviews. In other words it constituted a statement about something called Photography. Given that the photographic is such a heterogeneous field, any single statement about photography is likely to fail on some level. So it was that *Cruel and Tender* received a decidedly mixed press. At the same time,

the photographic work exhibited within other shows at Tate Modern has received little attention at all in discussions of its approach to photography. It's a cautionary tale that suggests that it is often the curatorial mode of attention that dictates the reception of photography.[13]

It may be that in the years since Lewis Baltz's comments with which I opened, museum culture has had a more sustained relationship with photography. Or maybe not. It still seems to come to us in concentrated fits and starts. London has just had what was billed as a 'Summer of Photography' - by chance or design several popular venues were showing photographic work at the same time.[14] The 'Month of Photography' or even the 'Year of Photography' has become a commonplace in cities around the world. Here in the UK the Brighton Photo Biennial is about to commence as I write. And of course special issues on photography appear intermittently in magazines and journals. These kinds of critical mass are ways of co-ordinating, raising money, raising consciousness, constructing audiences, producing modes of attention. Perhaps it is precisely because photography is so ubiquitous in daily life that it is impossible for art and its audiences to sustain a constant relation to it. Photography moves in and out of attention, between being the background condition of our visual culture and becoming an object for consideration. Perhaps this movement is a condition of photographic images themselves. It is obvious to say, but they are seen and seen through.

Notes

[1] Baltz, L. (1985), 'American Photography in the 1970s' in Peter Turner ed., *American Images: Photography 1945-1980*. Penguin Books/Barbican Art Gallery

[2] Burgin V. (1982), 'Introduction' to Victor Burgin ed., *Thinking Photography*. Macmillan

[3] Osborne P. (2003), 'Photography in an Expanded Field: Distributive Unity and Dominant Form' in David Green ed.,*Where is the Photograph?* Photoworks/Photoforum 2003

[4] Benjamin W. (1931), 'A Small History of Photography' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*. New Left Books (1979)

[5] Haworth-Booth M. (1998), 'The Museum and the Photograph: Collecting Photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1853-1900' in Mark Haworth-Booth and Ann McCauley, *The Museum and the Photograph: Collecting Photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1853-1900*. Sterling and Francine Clark Institute

[6] Wall J. (1996), ''Marks of Indifference': aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art' in Goldstein and Rorimer (eds) *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles / MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, pp246-267. Reprinted in part in Janus (ed) *Veronica's Revenge: Contemporary Perspectives on Photography* (1998)

[7] Barthes R. (1980), *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux

[8] See the essays in Barthes' collections *Mythologies*, Jonathan Cape (1972) and *Image-Music-Text* Fontana (1977)

[9] For discussions of the constructions of photographic history see Mary Warner Marien 'What Shall We Tell the Children? Photography and its Text(Books)' *Afterimage April* 1986 and P.A. Kuznerz, 'Survey Histories of Photography' *History of Photography* vol. 25, no. 4, Winter 2001.

[10] The same is true of the currently available photography magazines and journals.

[11] Those in the show were Robert Adams, Diane Arbus, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hiller Becher, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Rineke Dijkstra, William Eggleston, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Paul Graham, Andreas Gursky, Boris Mikhailov, Nicholas Nixon, Martin Parr, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Thomas Ruff, August Sander, Michael Schmidt, Fazal Sheikh, Stephen Shore, Thomas Struth and Garry Winogrand.

[12] These included works by Sol Lewitt, Gunther Forg, Astrid Klein, Roni Horn, Zoe Leonard & Cheryl Dunye, Anna Fox, Sonya Boyce, Marcel Duchamp, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Cindy Sherman, Vito Acconci, Craigie Horsfield, John Coplans and some anonymous colonial postcards of North Africa.

[13] One might compare this to the situation at New York's Museum of Modern Art which has many departments that exhibit photography, only one of which is a Department of Photography. See Phillips C. (1989), 'The Judgement Seat of Photography' in Richard Bolton ed., *The Contest of Meaning: critical histories of photography*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press and Keith Arnatt's 'Sausages and Food: a reply to the interview with Alan Bowness of the Tate Gallery' in *Creative Camera 214*, October 1982 (reprinted in Campany D, ed., (2003). *Art and Photography*. Phaidon Press)

[14] This seemed to centre on *Cruel and Tender: the Real in the Twentieth Century Photograph* at Tate Modern, a retrospective of the work of Cindy Sherman at the Serpentine Gallery, Guy Bourdin at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Philip-Lorca diCorcia's *Storybook Life* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. All took place in the summer of 2003.