The Photographer’s Eye

Ways of communicating with images and discussing images.

- Selected text by John Szarkowski
- Other credits go to Paul Turounet for help with image selection and arrangement
The Photographer’s Eye


- This book was first published in 1966 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
The Photographer’s Eye

Two Parts:

- **Camera Eye**
  - Decisions Made In The Camera Viewfinder or Screen

- **Mind’s Eye**
  - “Previsualization”
    - The photographer is making conscious decisions on how to photograph the subject in front of the camera. Deliberate choices are made on what to sample from the world and how to represent the subject.
Characteristics of a Photograph

- “What’s contained within the viewfinder frame lines is one of many deliberate and considered aesthetic choices. These choices include the thing photographed, the specific details that are included to heighten and hold our visual engagement, what the photographer chooses to include and exclude, the voice that is doing the seeing and speaking, the particular moment the shutter is released as well as the nature in which what is being seen is revealed. John Szarkowski spoke about these photographic aesthetic attributes in “The Photographer’s Eye” as The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, The Vantage Point, and Time.” - Paul Turounet.

- There are other characteristics that are inherit to photography. Included in this discussion are Light, Visual Emphasis, Expression, and Narrative.
The Thing Itself

“Photography deals with the actual, though the factuality of a picture, no matter how convincing and unarguable, is different than the reality itself. The subject and the picture are not the same thing, though they seem so afterwards – the image, the photograph, will survive the subject.”

- John Szarkowski
The Thing Itself

- One interpretation of this is that an object or subject creates the main reason for looking at an image.

- Another interpretation is that content is most important.
The Thing Itself
The Detail

- “The photograph is tied to the facts of things. These facts, either discovered, found, or created do not reveal the story...”
- …but offered scattered and suggestive clues that go beyond simple description
- …but rather purpose the possibilities of a not so obvious undiscovered meaning.”
The Detail

“I do feel I have some slight corner on something about the quality of things. I mean it’s very subtle and a little embarrassing to me, but I really believe there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them.

- Diane Arbus
The Detail

© Gregory Crewdson, Untitled, 2001, from the series Twilight
The Frame

“The central act of photography, the act of choosing and eliminating, forces a concentration on the picture edge. Compositional considerations of line, form, and balance extend not only in the four directions suggested by the viewfinder or ground glass edges, but also the spatial considerations of foreground / background relationships - the transformation of a three-dimensional world into the flatness of two-dimensional.”
The Frame
The Frame

• “These relationships of the edges, in all directions, reflect the intentional visual and conceptual concerns in how photographic meaning is considered. What is contained within the frame is either energized or passive depending on how these edges are considered, allowing the picture to resonate within the edges and/or beyond them.”
The Frame

© Bill Brandt
The Frame

- “Photography is about finding out what can happen in the frame. When you put four edges around some facts, you change those facts.”

- Gary Winogrand
“The photograph’s edge defines content.”
- John Szarkowski

© Gary Winnogrand, World’s Fair, 1969
Vantage Point

- In equal consideration as the frame, the act of choosing the distance between the subject being photographed and the camera (and photographer) offers the uncanny ability of photography to reveal what our eyes would protest as unattainable with simple human vision - a point of view different from what our eyes perceive.
Vantage Point

© Andre Kertez, New York City
If the photographer could not move his subject, he could move his camera.”

- John Szarkowski
“The photograph is static, but the moments of the world flow, interrupted only by the deliberate fragmentation of time by the release of the shutter. This discrete parcel of time is not just a literal moment of time, whether frozen by an exposure of a short duration or the accumulation of movement, but also where the world is transformed by the decisive moment, 1/125 of a second as suggested by Henri Cartier-Bresson, once the shutter is triggered.”
Camera Time:

The Decisive Moment

Or

The Decisive Edit

© Henri Cartier-Bresson, Behind St. Lazare station, Paris, France, 1932
Camera Time:

Some Photographs are made from capturing an event that happened momentarily, and will never happen exactly the same way ever again. It is a specific moment in time, that will not be repeated.
Time

- “The decisive moment, it is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives the event its proper expression”

- Henri Cartier Bresson
Camera Time:
Shutter-Speed
And Stop Motion
Camera Time:

Shutter-Speed

And Stop Motion
Camera Time:

Shutter-Speed
And
Motion Blur
Camera Time:

Shutter-Speed
And
Motion Blur
Light

- “As photography utilizes light sensitive materials, whether analog or digital, the photograph needs light (and the lack of light) to reveal (and obscure) its visual sensibilities and concerns of content. The presence of light and its level of intensity serve as visual guides in seeing what is in a photograph.”
- Paul Turounet
Light
Visual Emphasis

“Not only does a camera see from a definite vantage point, it also creates a hierarchy by defining a single plane of focus. This plan, which is usually parallel with the film plane in the camera provides a sense of emphasis within the photograph as controlled by the literal focusing of the camera’s lens, depth of field, and the distance from the camera to the subject”

- Paul Torounet
Visual Emphasis

© Kertez, Martinique, 1972
Expression:
An extension of the thing itself

- The mood, body language, facial movements, and attitude of the subject create an impression of what is going on within the scene that was captured by the camera. These characteristics add another level to the subject.
Narrative / Interaction

- The connection or lack of connection between multiple subjects creates a story within our minds. These narratives are yet another level of interest and engagement that an image can have.

- The subjects can be within the frame, or even outside of the frame.....even the audience.