

On the architecture of contemporary photography

The Eye and the Icon

(Architectural Principles and Theory,
Architectural studio 1 ARK-E1502)

16.11.2020

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“The city and photography agree with each other. Perhaps we could even say that they contain each other: the city is always in the photograph like the photograph, first of all, was to be born in the city. (The first photograph: Roofs of buildings in a city, not a landscape, not a portrait.)”

- Jean-Luc Nancy, "Trafic/Déclic" in *Portraits/Chanties* p. 79



Nicéphore Niépce, 1827 Image made on a sheet of bitumen-coated pewter





Henrik Cajander, 1842, daguerreotype

Nicolas Faure, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,
Jean-Luc Nancy

Portraits / Chantiers



mamco



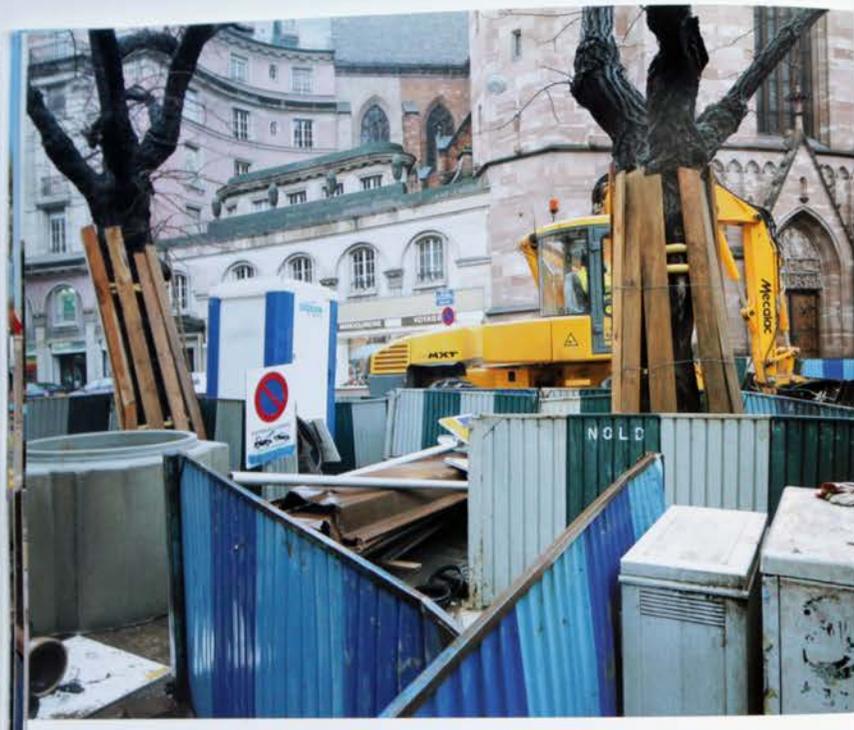
Renaud Teissère



Blondine Dechalet

Roland Niklaus





Place St-Pierre-le-Vieux



Place St-Pierre-le-Vieux

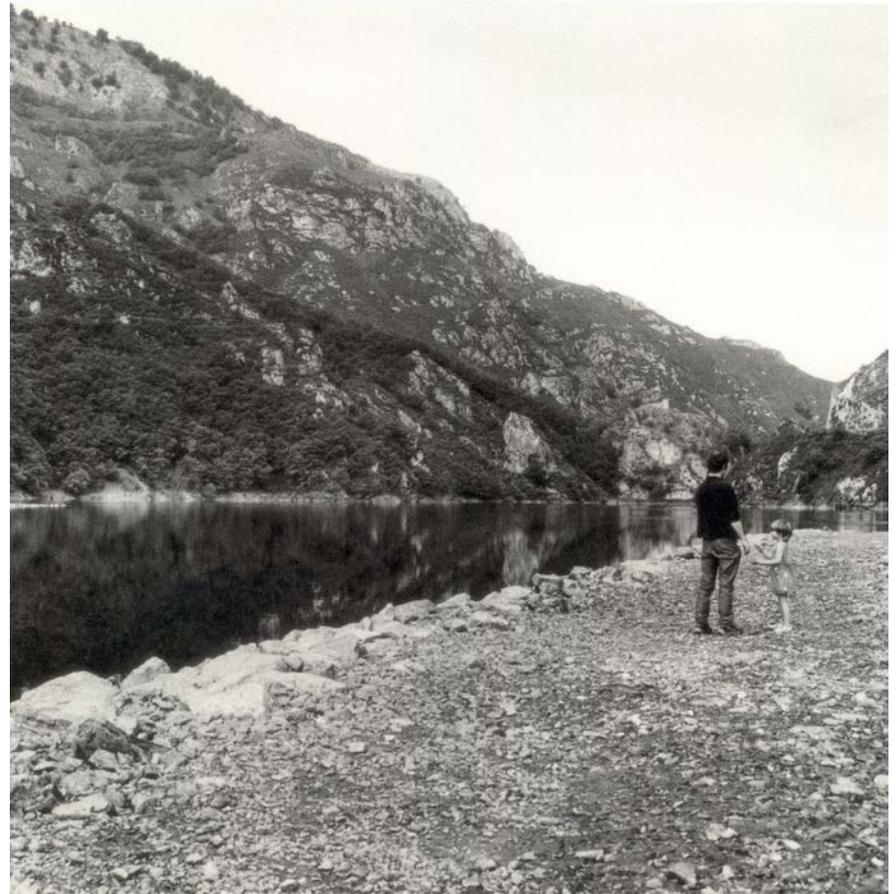


Place National



Place de la République



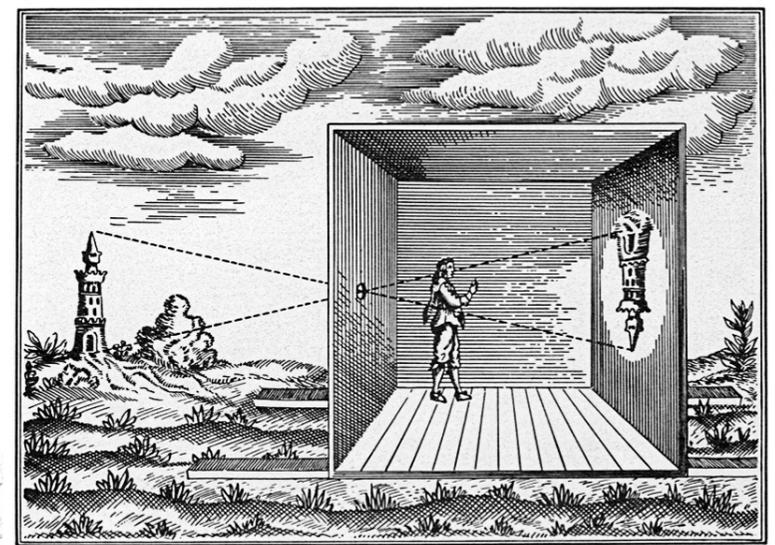
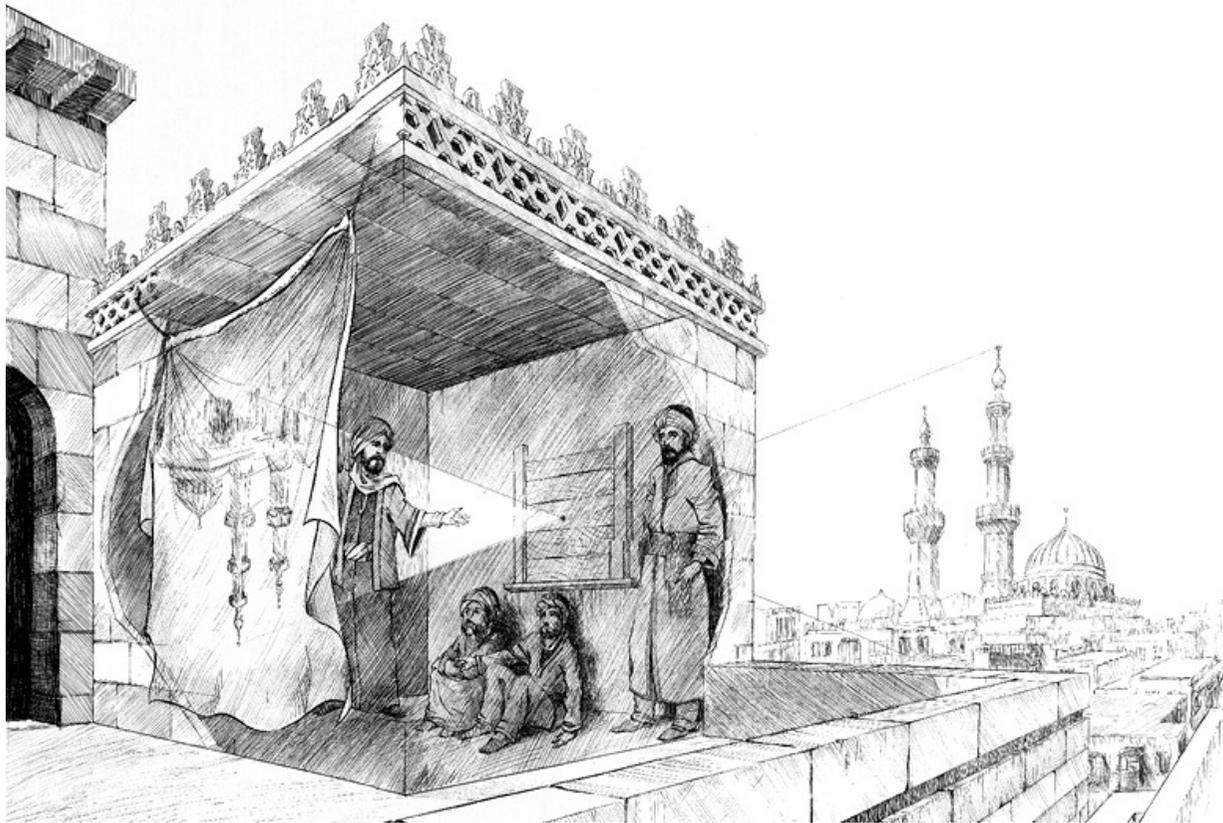




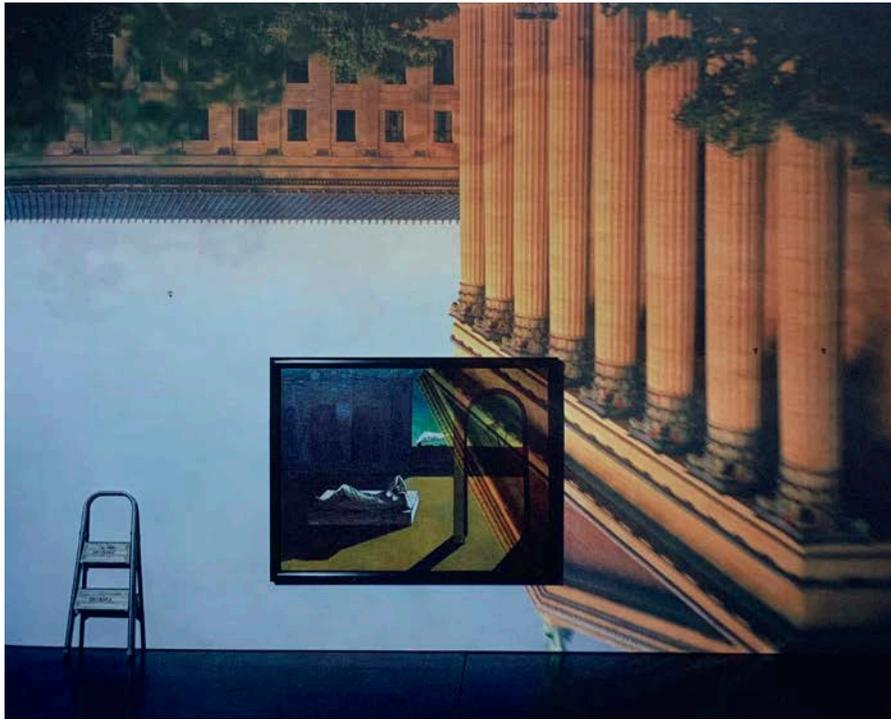
Mikko Mälkki



Mikko Mälkki



Alhazen's early camera obscura, in Egypt



Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura: The Philadelphia Museum of Art East Entrance in Gallery #171 with a de Chirico Painting*, 2005



Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura: View of Central Park Looking North – Fall*, 2008



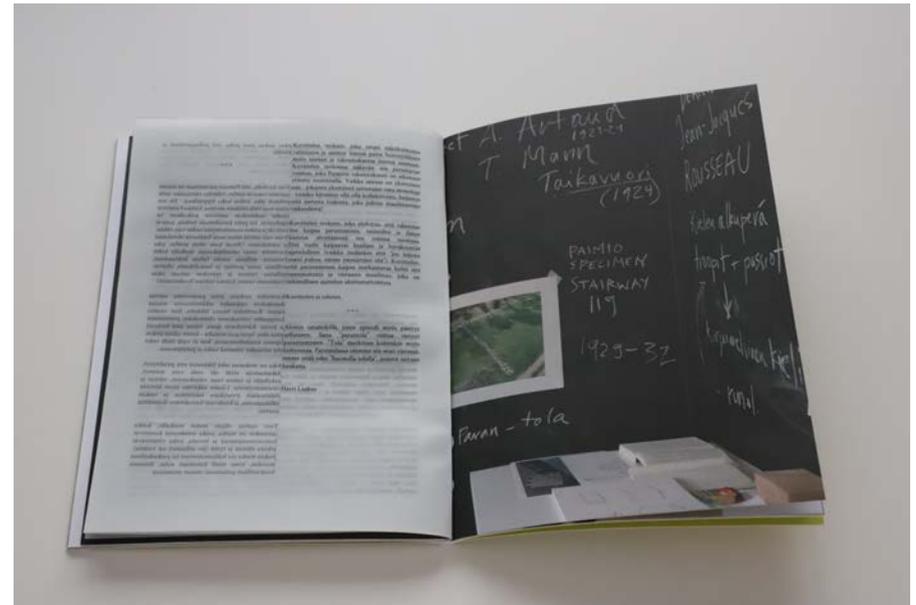
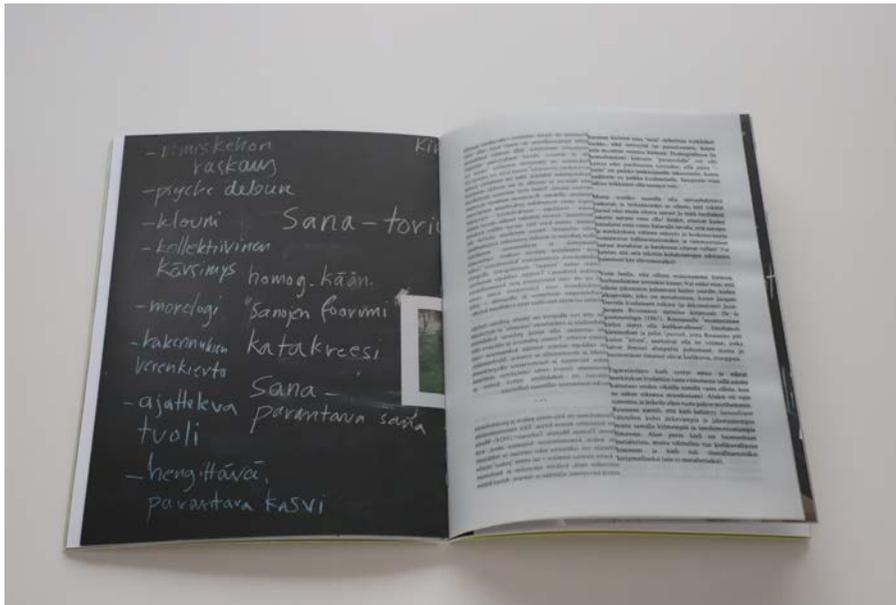
Marja Pirilä,
From series *Speaking House*





Portfolio of





Parantola (2016) at the Paimio Sanatorium exhibition organized by ARTE 2.-22.7.2016

Sanatorio Episode 1 / Sanatorio Episode 2



city | 'sɪti |

noun (plural **cities**)

1 a large town: *one of Italy's most beautiful cities* | [*as modifier*] : *the city council*.

- *British* a town created a city by charter and usually containing a cathedral.
- *North American* a municipal centre incorporated by the state or province.
- [*with modifier*] *informal* a place or situation characterized by a specified attribute: *the staff were in turmoil—it was panic city*.

2 (**the City**) short for **CITY OF LONDON**.

- the financial and commercial institutions located in the City of London: *the Budget got a stony reception from the City* | [*as modifier*] : *a City analyst*.

DERIVATIVES

cityward | 'sɪtɪwəd | adjective & adverb ,

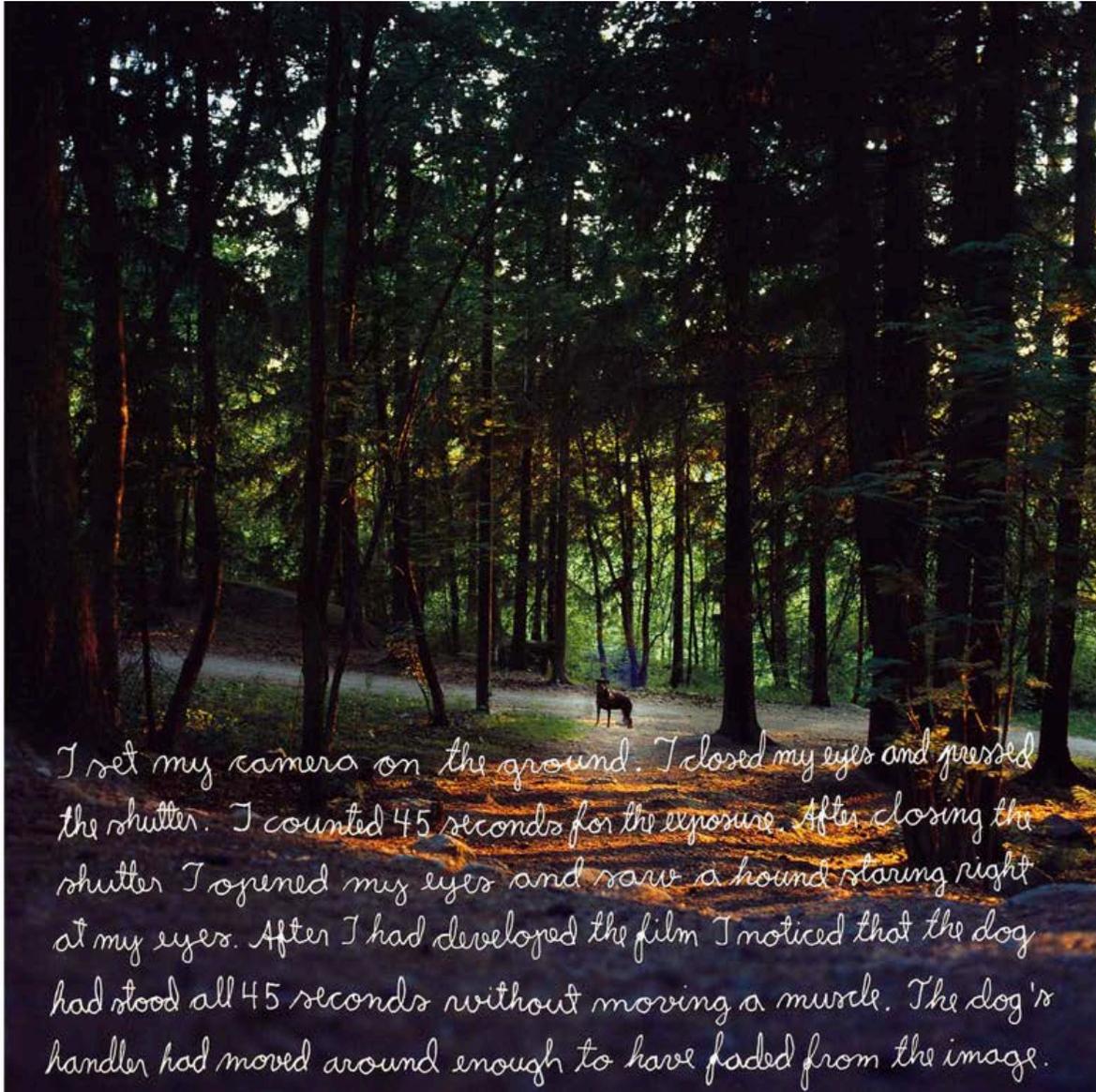
citywards adverb

ORIGIN

Middle English: from Old French *cite*, from Latin *civitas*, from *civis* 'citizen'. Originally denoting a town, and often used as a Latin equivalent to Old English *burh* 'borough', the term was later applied to the more important English boroughs. The connection between city and cathedral grew up under the Norman kings, as the episcopal sees (many had been established in villages) were removed to the chief borough of the diocese.



Louis Daguerre, 1838 Boulevard du Temple, Paris



I set my camera on the ground. I closed my eyes and pressed the shutter. I counted 45 seconds for the exposure. After closing the shutter I opened my eyes and saw a hound staring right at my eyes. After I had developed the film I noticed that the dog had stood all 45 seconds without moving a muscle. The dog's handler had moved around enough to have faded from the image.

Jari Silomäki
From series *My Weather Diary*



Nanna Hänninen: Basel
from Sankt Anton (2006)



Nanna Hänninen: Electric Power
Plant of Kuopio, 2006



Nanna Hänninen Vertical
Landscape, 2013
Pigment ink photographs on
hardened optiwhite glass, Stockholm

Repopulating the Street: Contemporary Photography and Urban Experience

Rosemary Hawker

Over the past thirty years, the city as represented by art photography has been shown as progressively empty and alienating. While the emptiness of nineteenth-century streets was due to the limitations of photographic technology, it was actively pursued as a formal device by the New Topographics photographers. Recent art photography shows an even more pronounced trend towards showing the city as vacant. This contrasts starkly with the densely populated, bustling, urban environments typical of twentieth-century street photography. This essay argues that images of an empty contemporary city can be understood as a symptom of disciplinary relations internal to photography as an art form, and as a consequence of art photography's distancing of itself from vernacular representations of the city when the distinction between art photography and vernacular photography is at risk of collapsing. Empty urban images tell us about modes of experience in the contemporary city and about photography itself. This essay uses the trope of the banal as a way of locating the 'extreme form of the everyday' that typifies the contemporary photographic discourse of the street. Philip-Lorca diCorcia and Melanie Manchot both address the everyday street as an acute site for understanding the negotiation of public space and contemporary experiences of the city. Both refer to yet go beyond the dichotomy of the city as empty or full and reveal a different set of relations to the street through photography.

Keywords: Paul Strand (1890–1976), Max Dupain (1911–1992), Jeff Wall (1946–), Philip-Lorca diCorcia (1951–), Melanie Manchot (1966–), street photography, New Topographics, everyday, banal, vernacular photography

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1 – Wall's work began as a photograph of actors on a set but these figures were removed.

Contemporary photographs of the city are often curiously empty and still, a condition made emphatic in Jeff Wall's *Dawn* (figure 1).¹ Such images work against the more familiar image of a densely peopled and dynamic city that excited early modernist photographers and that has informed the genre of street photography ever since (figure 2). Today, much of the world has achieved a population density, structure and organisation that was rare when modernists advertised the vibrancy of urban experience. The myriad social networks of the city enable new ideas of community and individual connectedness. Yet, over the last thirty years, the city as represented by art photography and most recently by prominent photographers such as Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Greg Girard, Gabriel Orozco and Laurenz Berges – the list is long and yet reductive – is shown as progressively vacant, its streets empty of human activity and interaction.

No doubt there are multiple influences – many external to photography – that have led to what I describe. One could learn much from studying the actual process of urbanisation to understand the relations played out through this photographic



Figure 1. Jeff Wall, *Dawn*, transparency in lightbox, 2001. Courtesy of the artist.

trope. Nevertheless, this essay can only make a simpler argument – that the numbing emptiness of the city as found in so many contemporary photographs can in part be understood as a symptom of disciplinary relations internal to photography as an art form and a popular cultural practice. These starkly depopulated urban settings are the result of art photography distancing itself from vernacular representations of the city that have thoroughly absorbed the language of art photography. The aesthetic of the everyday, celebrating the work-a-day yet dramatic, busy and characterful city, as it does particularly in street photography, has been so successful, so widely embraced and repeated, as to become generic. Photography that claims the status of art does so partly in its opposition to the vernacular, avoiding widely recognised formulas, in pursuit of a more acute and aesthetically challenging form of the everyday. I refer to this amplification of the everyday as 'the banal' but my use of the word 'banal' is not



Figure 2. Paul Strand, *Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, New York*, platinum print, 1915. © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive.



Paul Strand Fifth Avenue at 42nd street, 1915



72



73

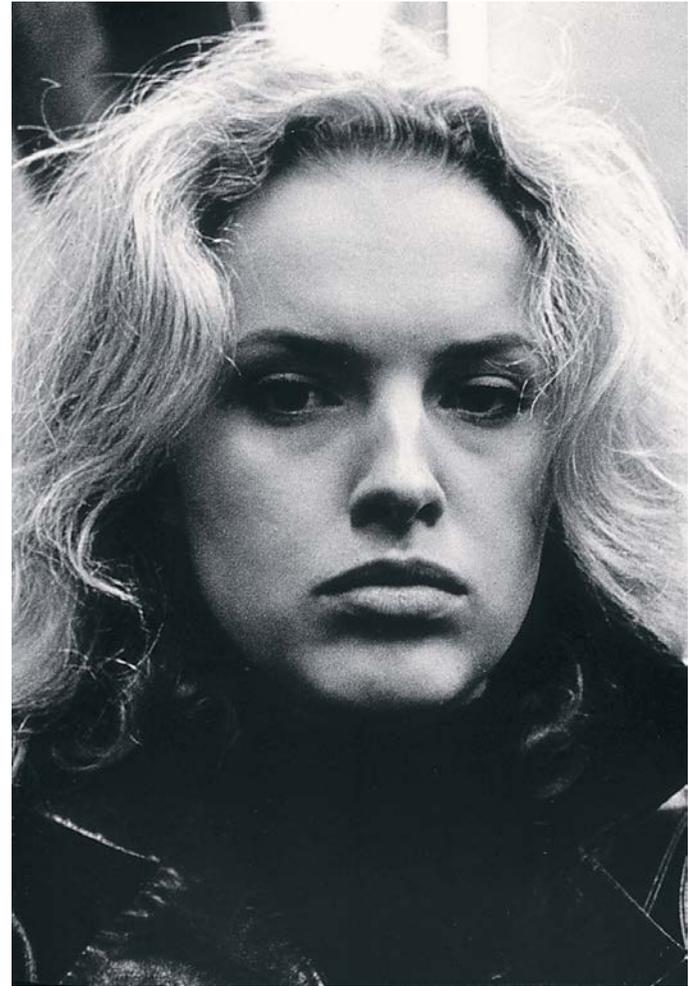
Stephen Shore from
Transparencies: Small Camera
Works 1971-1979



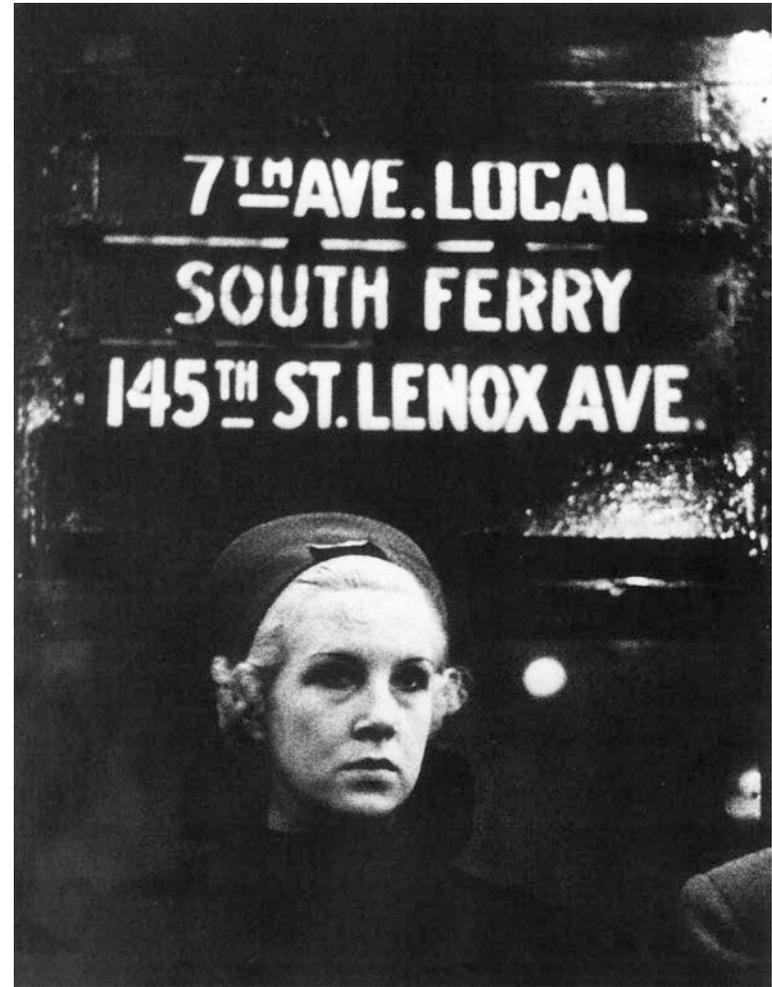
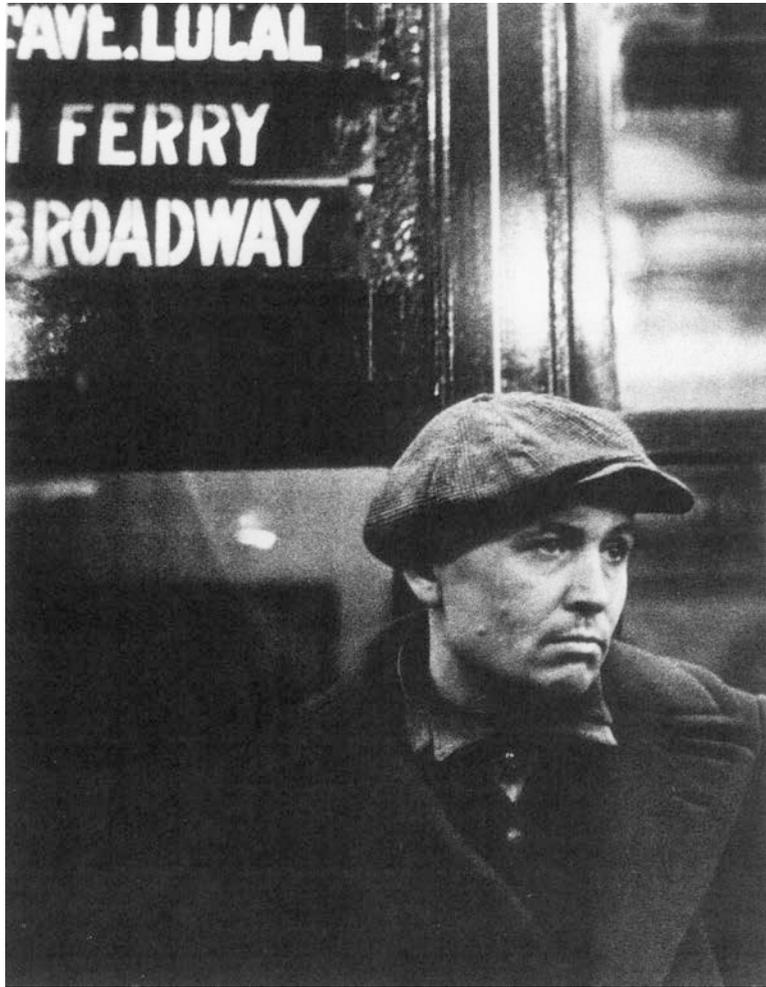
**Stephen Shore Church
and Second St., Easton,
Pennsylvania, 1974**



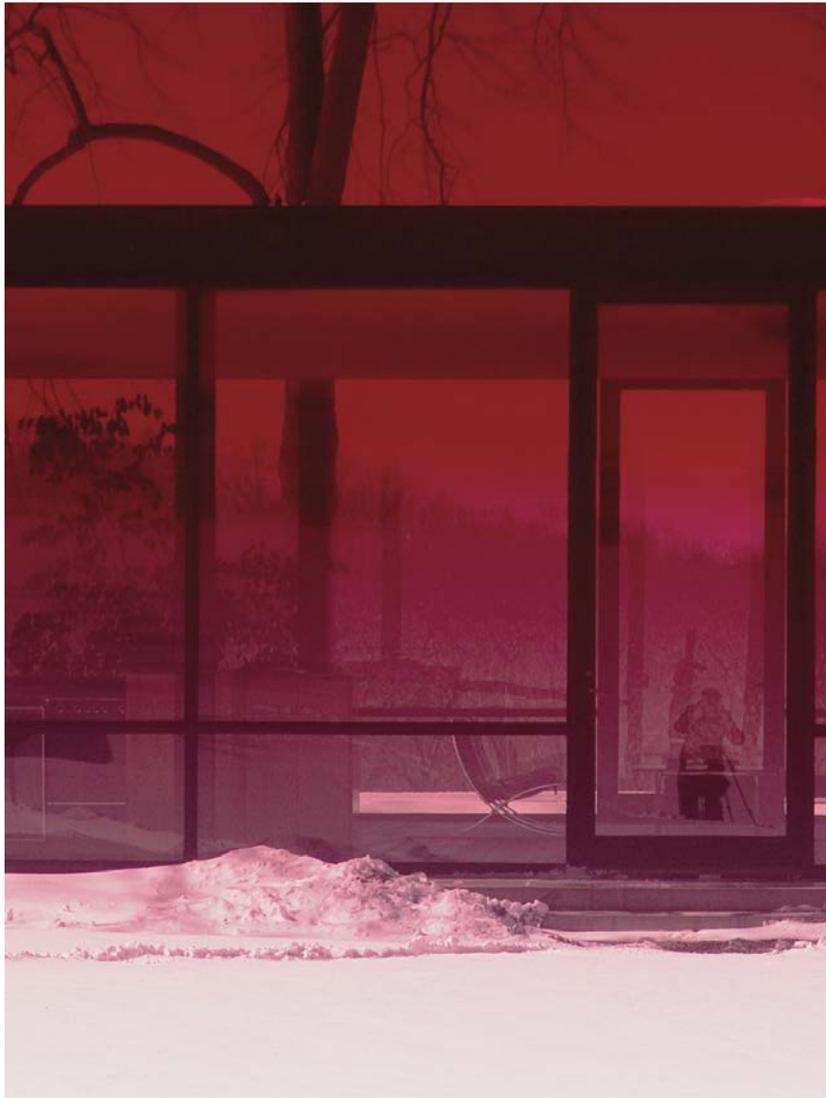
Philip-Lorca DiCorcia: from series *Heads* 200-2001



Luc Delahaye: *L'autre*



Walker Evans: *Many Are Called*



Spontaneity and Materiality: What Photography is in the Photography of James Welling

Diarmuid Costello and Dominic McIver Lopes

Images are double agents. They receive information from the world, while also projecting visual imagination onto the world. As a result, mind and world tug our thinking about images, or particular kinds of images, in contrary directions. On one common division, world traces itself mechanically in photographs, whereas mind expresses itself through painting.¹ Scholars of photography disavow such crude distinctions: much recent writing attends in detail to the materials and processes of photography, the agency of photographic artists, and the social determinants of the production and reception of photographs. As such writing makes plain, photographs cannot be reduced to mechanical traces.² Yet background conceptions of photography as trace or index persist almost by default, as no framework of comparable explanatory power has yet emerged to replace them. A conception of photography adequate to developments in recent scholarship is long overdue. Rather than constructing such a conception top-down, as philosophers are wont to do, this paper articulates it by examining selected works by James Welling.³ There are several reasons for this: Welling's practice persistently explores the resources and possibilities of photography, the effect of these explorations is to express a particular metaphysics of the mind's relation to its world, and appreciating why this metaphysics is aptly expressed by exploring photography requires a revised conception of what photography is. In as much as it provides a framework for a richer interpretation of Welling, the new conception is also capable of underwriting a wide range of critical and historical approaches to photography.

Prologue: Aluminum Foil

Welling's artistic breakthrough came in 1980 with a series of silver gelatin contact prints of 4 × 5" Kodak Tri-X negatives depicting aluminium foil. Taken as a whole, *Aluminum Foil* constitutes a remarkably resolved and uncompromising early artistic statement. Though, technically speaking, the prints could have been produced any time during the previous hundred years, they would have been hard to anticipate prior to their creation, given the many norms of photography they seem happy to forgo.⁴ Pictorially, they are difficult to resolve. They have an unrelenting, 'all-over' quality, appearing harshly lit yet very dark – an effect achieved by over-exposing in camera to secure sufficient density of detail in the shadow, then over-exposing again when printing to bring out that detail.⁵ Instead of the glittering array of reflections that one might associate with crumpled foil, one finds expanses of black or deep shadow punctuated by febrile highlights. Commentators often call these works 'abstract', but this description needs to be qualified. It may not be obvious what they depict, but all

**Detail from James Welling,
0467, 2009 (plate 5).**

DOI:
10.1111/1467-8365.12417
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
42 | 1 | February 2019 | pages
154-176

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- Diarmuid Costello and Dominic McIver Lopes





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