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Everyday Aesthetics and Photography

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Everyday Aesthetics and Photography

Thomas Leddy

1. *Introduction by way of Clive Bell on photography*

Everyday aesthetics as a new subdiscipline within aesthetics benefits by constantly going back to and borrowing from earlier theorists, even those who were primarily concerned with the aesthetics of art. To that end, I will begin my discussion of everyday aesthetics and photography with a look at that classic formalist aesthetician from the beginning of the 20th century, Clive Bell (1958). Bell was notoriously very negative about photography. He basically saw photographs as mechanical imitations of reality. He also famously criticized illustrative or descriptive painting for doing what photography can do better. One of the problems he had with people who have no taste is that they read into art facts for which they can feel emotions of ordinary life, i.e. any emotion that is not the aesthetic emotion. These people, when confronted by a painting, instinctively refer back to the world of ordinary life. They treat created form as though it were imitated form, a painting as though it were a photograph. Instead of «going out on the stream of art into a new world of aesthetic experience, they turn a sharp corner and come straight home to the world of human interests» (Bell [1958]: 29). This is using art «as a means to the emotions of life» (*ibid*.) not as a means to aesthetic emotion. Similarly, photography takes people away from aesthetic interest into the world of human interest.

Although I reject Bell's dualism (why does aesthetic emotion have to be separated from human emotion?), I agree that photography, particularly amateur photography, is usually concerned with the world of human interests, i.e. with that aspect of our world in which such everyday emotions as love and sorrow are appropriate. The average person pays more

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attention to the associations a picture of grandma might bring than to the relations of lines and colors that might be found in such a picture.

But does this take us away from aesthetic interest? More specifically, is aesthetic interest impossible when combined with human interest? As a paper assignment, I sometimes ask students to discuss something aesthetic in their homes. Often they will write about the photographs that have meaning for them, including photographs of relatives, pets and friends, and the fond memories they evoke. They tend to place a high value both on such photographs and on the experiences they generate. If Bell is right that aesthetic experience is limited to experience with objects that have «significant form» then these experiences would have little or nothing to do with aesthetics. However, Bell's aesthetic theory has not been popular in recent years and most philosophers would agree that expressive properties are as important as formal ones when it comes to aesthetic experience. If something has the expressive property of sadness, for example, this relates to the emotions of everyday life. Moreover, talking about such photographs often involves using aesthetic predicates: for example, we might say "in this picture Aunt Mabel looks graceful" or "that's a beautiful picture of your cousin". So, even though these photographs may not count as art, and do not give the special aesthetic emotion Bell required for an experience of significant form, we can still speak of them in aesthetic terms and look at them as aesthetic objects. A similar point could be made in relation to other well-known aesthetic theories. For example, a family snapshot may not generate what John Dewey called «an experience» (Dewey [1989]). Yet, it still may be considered aesthetic simply because it involves attribution of aesthetic properties.

However, the relevance of aesthetics to amateur photography might have more to do with the thing photographed than with the photograph itself. Or it might have more to do with the viewer's reactions to the thing photographed. Let us consider the second point first. The photograph of a loved one may be used as a mere *prompt* for memories and musings, and these might be what really have the relevant aesthetic properties, not the photograph. For example, grandma had a beautiful soul, and looking at her photograph may allow us to muse on this beauty or on memories associated with it. Granted, using a photograph in this way is not a matter of aesthetically experiencing the photograph taken as an isolated object. But does the photograph have to be taken as an isolated object to be taken aesthetically? It is arguable that if one is dwelling on the *look* of such a photograph, or even the look

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of things within, or depicted by, the photograph, the experience has an aesthetic character regardless of how isolated it is. It has this character even if it brings associations. This is true even though the experience is not aesthetic in the same way as is appreciating an abstract painting. That is, evoking memories and musings does not preclude the experience *as a whole* from being aesthetic. The experience of seeing an amateur photograph, or even a professional photograph of a relative, friend, or personal hero can be seen as having two aspects: (1) what is seen in looking at the photograph, and (2) the meaning of that experience, including associated thoughts and memories.

If we follow Dewey in taking an experience (and particularly what he calls «an experience») to be an organic whole then there is no reason in principle to take musings and evoked memories to be outside that experience (Dewey [1989]). Moreover, if there is a pervasive quality for the experience as a whole (assuming, again, that this is what he calls «an experience») then these elements of the experience will partake in the experience as a whole. Many will argue that the price paid for including musings and memories within "an experience" is too high since this will make objectivity in aesthetics impossible. Yet, this need not be the case. True, if a work of art is to be identified with the experience it evokes this will make it many things since it will evoke many kinds of experience. It is arguable then that every experience of a work of art that meets the standards of "an experience" will be different. Identity and objectivity may then seem to be lost. We might, however, just need a more nuanced view of identity and objectivity: one that does not exclude a subjective aspect to experience.

That each of us has our own experiences when encountering works of art or items of everyday life does not exclude an objective dimension to those experiences. Assume that person A and person B both have "an experience" when observing Frith's *Paddington Station*, a painting of an English railway station that was quite popular in Bell's time but which Bell considered not to be art (Bell [1958]: 22). Suppose also person A connects it with musings and memories different from person B. This does not preclude the possibility that there are certain features of this painting that can be shared by all and that can generate a relatively objective judgment. Incidentally, these positive features might well include being able to generate powerfully related memories and musings in appropriate audiences. The judgment of *Paddington Station* might, by the way, swing in the positive direction (maybe even to the point of saying that it is art) if these aspects of experience are included, i.e. if we are

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not limited to a purely formal analysis and evaluation. Something similar can be said for a photograph that serves much the same function.

Contra Bell, we should not exclude the emotions of life from aesthetic experience. This may seem obvious when thinking of everyday aesthetics, but it is arguable even that such emotions should not be excluded from the aesthetic experience of art. Aristotle stressed that the goal of tragedy is to give us a *katharsis* of pity and fear. Pity and fear are emotions of life. Following Bell in rejecting such emotions as relevant to aesthetics and art would be to reject the tradition that they can be important not only for tragic plays but for the arts in general. Moreover, and this is my concern here, it would block their importance even in the aesthetics of life. Of course, Bell might mean that, although the emotions of life are involved, the key issue is aesthetic emotion; that if and only if something gives us that emotion is it art, and if and only if it gives us that emotion is it aesthetic. I would not want to deny that aesthetic emotion in Bell's sense exists or that it is important. We can see a variety of things in such a way that the relations of lines and colors alone (bracketing any other sources of information) give us an intense aesthetic experience. Focusing in this way might even be a necessary phase in a complete aesthetic experience. My point, though, is that something can be aesthetic without necessarily evoking aesthetic emotion in Bell's sense, i.e. emotion in response to "significant form" independent of emotions of everyday life. In short, aesthetic interest is possible when combined with human interest.

2. *Amateur photography*

But what about amateur photography, which plays such an important role in our everyday aesthetic lives? Take, for example, the recent fascination with "selfies": pictures taken of oneself usually by smartphone and shared in social media. Can amateur photography give us aesthetic experiences? Is the "selfie" or other types of amateur photo aesthetic? It might be argued that the aesthetic here is narcissistic and shallow. Nonetheless, those who take these pictures of themselves pose the subject and manipulate the image to enhance certain desired qualities.

In support of the idea that amateur photos can have aesthetic qualities one can just refer to the ways in which curators select such photos for exhibition in museums, thus bringing out their art-like qualities and foregrounding other aesthetic features. The use of the ama-

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teur photographs of E. J. Bellocq would be an excellent example of this. Bellocq photographed prostitutes in New Orleans perhaps for advertising purposes. In the 1970s some of his negatives, found abandoned in a drawer, were reprinted by photographer Lee Friedlander and presented as a show in a museum.

However, although these photographs may be quite poignant and even beautiful, many of their aesthetic qualities may be more a function of Friedlander's intentions than Bellocq's. So did they have aesthetic qualities before Friedlander saw, framed and presented them, i.e. when they were still amateur productions? The answer should be "yes", for surely Friedlander noticed them and chose to do something with them artistically because of aesthetic features he saw in them. So, even though amateur photographs might change their aesthetic properties when transformed as found objects by a representative of the artworld into art, this does not preclude their having such qualities in the first place. What, then, about amateur photographs experienced in their usual contexts in everyday life?

In answering this question we should first distinguish between two kinds of amateur photography: the kind with and the kind without art pretensions. Many amateur photographers submit photographs to art venues of various sorts: newspaper contests, county fairs, photography club exhibits, and group shows in galleries. These photographs, although often crude, simplistic or trite, may still be seen as art simply because they are intended to be art. To put it more bluntly, they are art, even if usually bad or mediocre art. Other photographs made by non-professionals, however, have no pretensions to art at all. Also, many photographs made by professional photographers have no (or minimal) pretentions to art, for example photographs of a wedding party. However, photographs that make no pretentions to art may have aesthetic qualities, may be intended to have such qualities, and may even be seen as importantly art-like in a variety of ways. Again, wedding photographs are an example.

Amateur photographers (of the non-artist variety) join many other non-art photographers, and even most art photographers in doing three things: they transmit, or in some cases highlight, aesthetic qualities already evident in the subject-matter as seen independently of being photographed; they enhance aesthetic qualities of their objects (for example, when a graceful row of trees comes off as even more graceful in a photograph); and they create new aesthetic qualities (for example, when framing a scene creates a sense of balance within the photograph that is not present in the scene photographed). All three of

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these are appreciated not only in amateur photographs but in photographs commonly used in professional family photography (e.g. professional portraits of babies), advertising, fashion, entertainment, sports, and the news. All are even present in most art photographs.

Related to these concerns is what has been called "vernacular photography", which has been defined as photography taken either by amateurs or professionals that takes as its subject-matter objects of everyday life. This is related to vernacular architecture, which is the architecture of ordinary buildings. Vernacular photography has been understood to include snapshots, class portraits and passport photos (Wikipedia [2013]). Famous photographers such as Walker Evans have been known to collect postcards and other examples of vernacular photography and even include vernacular photographs within their own photographs, as in photographs of advertising. However, if vernacular photography were defined simply in terms of its subject matter being everyday life it would have too wide a conceptual reach since it would then include virtually all of the art photographs of Walker Evans and a vast range of other art photographs as well. I prefer limiting the term to photographs by non-artists, i.e. to photographs by people who are not art-photographers[1].

Recently, curators in such museums as The Museum of Modern Art in New York, SFMOMA in San Francisco, and the National Gallery in Washington have put on shows of amateur photography. However, as I mentioned in the Bellocq case, this may take us away from the original intentions of the photographer and may therefore somewhat distort our understanding of everyday aesthetics. This is not to say that such exhibits are bad for the aesthetics of everyday life: such exhibits draw attention to amateur photography and feature many aesthetic effects and discoveries that might otherwise be neglected. Fine art and everyday aesthetics feed on each other in elaborate and complex ways.

[1] However, we cannot say that vernacular architecture consists of all buildings by non-architects since many things considered examples of vernacular architecture were designed by someone and that person usually fits at least one definition of "architect". That is, building designers are almost always professionals of some sort and these are almost always called architects. Passport photo takers are professionals but not professional photographers: taking photographs is just one of their duties as e.g. passport agents or police sergeants.

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3. *Bourdieu*

Particularly interesting in relation to the question of amateur photography is the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his associates from the 1960s (Bourdieu [1990])[2]. Insofar as Bourdieu was mainly interested in the role that amateur photography and its analysis may play in sociology, and insofar as he was fiercely critical of philosophical aesthetics, particularly in its Kantian form, it is not *easy* to appropriate his work for the purpose of developing a philosophical aesthetics of everyday life. At the same time it is necessary to discuss him insofar as his work plays an important role in how photography theorists see amateur photography. Another difficulty in reading and using Bourdieu is that his analysis is quite specific to France, ca. 1965. For example, he was still able, at that time, to talk extensively about peasants and their attitudes towards photography. Today we no longer speak of a peasant class and it is not clear whether such a distinct group still exists in France. The rural poor however are still a world-wide phenomenon, and what Bourdieu has to say about French peasants may well have important parallels in other cultures today. Similarly, the camera clubs that played a role in everyday photographic practice in the 1960s, and which Bourdieu discusses, are perhaps somewhat less prominent today. Moreover, during this period there was still a question whether photography could be a fine art, whereas, today, photography has a major presence in art museums. At best, we can see Bourdieu's views on peasant and working-class perception of photography (and the upper-class as well) as providing some hints on how to analyze the attitudes of different classes towards photography today.

Given that he is a sociologist it is not surprising that Bourdieu emphasizes the family and its values in the production and consumption of photographs. This is particularly true for the peasant. For peasants, photographs (both amateur and professional) were mainly used to commemorate special family occasions. The peasants he studied preferred to have these photographs taken by professionals. The taking of snapshots was limited to youthful vacation activities during the courting period. Urban working-class photographers, however, often joined photography clubs. Upper-middle-class photographers, by contrast, were often concerned with achieving certain aesthetic effects similar to those found in fine art. Bour-

[2] The title of Bourdieu's book is ironic since he and his associates only sometimes treat photography as a middle-brow art. Peasant uses of photographs are hardly middle-brow for example. Also, Bourdieu does not eliminate the possibility of photography as a high-brow art.

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dieu observes that Kantian ideas of disinterestedness fit middle-class values, but not those of the peasant or working class, where the value of photography was either in what Kant called «the agreeable» or in the photograph's moral implications. Thus a photograph of a dead soldier, when shown to peasants, would elicit responses about the subject matter, e.g. war and death, and their attitudes towards such things. Popular taste (that is the taste of the lower classes) evaluates the photograph entirely in terms of what is photographed and in terms of the function it is supposed to serve.

The main thing we can derive from Bourdieu is that everyday aesthetic experience of photography is different for different classes. An example of this is his insight that the urbanized working-class individual favored popular over the scholarly aesthetics associated with the elite and the upper classes. Indeed, working class aesthetics is even constituted in opposition to that aesthetic. We should not assume, then, that photography is just at the level of what Kant called «the agreeable», just experienced morally, or just appreciated in disinterested terms.

One can, however, raise the following problem for Bourdieu. Although photographs of weddings have a strong moral dimension (which is modified for different social classes) this should not be taken to imply that they are appreciated by peasants or working-class people in a non-aesthetic way. They can still, for example, be appreciated for their beauty, grace, and elegance, or denigrated as ugly, inappropriate, crude, or graceless. That is, the rejection of Kantian-style aesthetics is not the same as rejection of aesthetic value.

Bourdieu may, nonetheless, be helpful in constructing an aesthetic analysis of the experience of a wedding photograph, as well as other types of non-art photographs. First, although his analysis of wedding photographs is mainly directed to the peasant class, it can be extended to all classes, with certain modifications, as well as to all classes in our own time. Bourdieu argues that the function of festive events such as weddings is to revitalize the group and that the photograph is associated with this insofar as it provides a way to solemnize such events thereby reaffirming social unity. This point may help us in constructing an aesthetics of everyday life photography.

Following Bourdieu, one can speak of four levels of the aesthetic contained in a photograph of a wedding. First, the wedding itself is an event with aesthetic properties, not only visual ones that can be captured by photographs, but non-visual ones that can be evoked or suggested. Second, the photograph can be appreciated qua photograph, in a way that is rel-

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atively isolated from its subject matter. Here it is appreciated for formal properties. Third, the wedding is related to something else that may be perceived aesthetically, i.e. the unity, or the reaffirmed unity, of the society itself. The photograph can bring this out too. Finally, the photograph is aesthetic insofar as it is associated with the wedding and also societal unity by way of solemnizing both. More strongly, one can say that the photograph contributes to the sense of social unity by way of featuring unity-related aesthetic properties in the wedding.

It is finally of interest that Bourdieu places photography in a hierarchy between the «sphere of legitimacy» which includes the fine arts, and the «sphere of the arbitrary» which includes clothes, cosmetics, cookery and other everyday aesthetic areas of choice (Bourdieu [1990]: 96). The other arts that fall within the «sphere of the legitimizable» are such popular arts as cinema, jazz and chansons. Yet, contrary to Bourdieu, it is arguable that each genre has its fine art, legitimizable and arbitrary aspects: painting for example can exist at the level of the merely arbitrary (as in painting for advertising copy), at the popular level of amateur painting and at the fine art level. Photography can be at the level of the everyday (which for some reason he refers to as arbitrary), at the level of the legitimizable (as in sports photography), and at the level of fine art.

As I have indicated, my concern here is with the role that non-art photographs, of the sort that is displayed in homes and on office desks, plays in our aesthetic lives. The category of photographs being considered, then, is broader than that of amateur photography and also includes various forms of professionally-produced non-art photographs, for instance wedding photographs and those found in posters representing rock stars.

4. *Lyotard*

Lyotard, who takes photography more seriously than Bell, and with less sociological emphasis than Bourdieu, is at least ambiguous about amateur photography (our current area of interest). He says that the knowledge that used to be passed down through the schools of painting is now «programmed» inside the camera so that, in a click, an ordinary citizen can organize spaces and make pictures that enrich our cultural store of memories (Lyotard [2011]: 131). The amateur only needs to choose the subject and, although there are conventions to such choices, can actually discover things about the world in doing so. This was es-

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pecially true in the 19th century when the amateur tourist photographer acted as a kind of ethnographer. Yet, he argues, although photography at first followed classical painting in calling upon a «communal taste» and an «aesthetics of beauty», it quickly violated Kant's requirement that there be no *a priori* laws involved in taste insofar as it involved careful programming through various physical processes in the production of images (Lyotard [2011]: 132). These images also bore the stamp of the laws of the sciences that study such processes. As a result photography lost the capacity to present what he calls, variously, «the indeterminate», «the invisible in the visible», and «the unpresentable». The unpresentable then became the business of abstract art. Photography also lost the capacity to present or evoke feeling, or what he calls, probably following Walter Benjamin, «aura». This development is particularly stark for amateur photography. Although the amateur chooses the subject, the manufacturer controls the look of the photograph. Thus, on his view, amateur photography has much less to do with experience than with industrial research.

If we stopped here in Lyotard's analysis it would seem that amateur photography could provide no valuable aesthetic experiences at all. However he also holds that amateur photography, which at first seems little more than a consummation of the camera's capacity to make an image, belongs to a state which heralds a condition in which a new objective infinity of techno-science continually constructs and deconstructs the world. This is a fancy way of saying that our new techno-science-engineered world is fascinating and astonishing in a way that evokes a certain kind of sublime experience: one that is both terrifying (or at least, amazing and overwhelming) and productive of delight, in accord with Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime. Lyotard then argues that, as communities no longer need art to provide images that encourage spiritual allegiance (for example, noble images of rulers), community identity is formed through mediation of the exchange of goods and services in the market-place. He sees the connection between amateur photography and the new constructive/deconstructive situation of the market-place in relation to techno-science as connecting photography with a new sort of cultural sublime. In this, photography is relieved of the traditional role of art in modernity. Instead it provides the kind of ideological identification that painting provided *before* modernity. This allows it to engage in ethnographic research and even photographic art. In short, the conditions of modern life allow amateur photography to transcend itself.

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Lyotard therefore believes, contra Walter Benjamin, that mechanical reproducibility does not mean the end of art but rather the transformation of photography so that it finds itself asking questions similar to those of avant-garde painting. Just as the most serious painting asks the question "What is painting?", the most serious photography asks "What is photography?". Art photography, which is seen as developing out of the same conditions that created amateur photography, becomes philosophical. It asks the big and deep questions. At this level, the artist (whether painter or photographer) tries to present the non-presentable, the non-demonstrable, and the ineffable. Lyotard associates the non-presentable with the referents of the "What is…?" questions central to the school of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. He also associates it with Kant's "Ideas of Reason". He seems, then, to be saying that the question "What is photography?" cannot be asked without also asking about such non-presentable "absolutes" as the universe, humanity, the good, and the just. Of course, as a postmodernist, he doesn't believe in absolutes, but the questions are still asked.

Lyotard has discussed early abstract art's allusions to the invisible world and Barnett Newman's paintings of the 1960s (which Newman himself associated with the concept of "the sublime"). However, photography takes a different path. After all, very little art photography is actually abstract. He implies, then, that "the invisible" may be presented by way of non-abstract or representational arts as well as by abstract art. Thus amateur photography, but more importantly, fine art photography insofar as it reflects on the postmodern condition of photography, is a possible medium for allusion to the sublime. This is not to say there are no dangers in the current blend of market and technology. Indeed, Lyotard's sharpest criticisms are directed against what he calls an «eclecticism of consumerism», which he characterizes as pandering to the habits of magazine readers. It is this consumerism that strips artists of their responsibility to try to present the non-demonstrable, and in this lies the corruption of art.

What I take from Lyotard's discussion is that there is a dynamic relationship between amateur photography and art photography, and that art photography, at least in our postmodern era, realizes a potential to be found in amateur photography insofar as it, like abstract art, is able to present the unpresentable. However, in glorifying the avant-garde use of photography Lyotard shortchanges or neglects the aesthetics of the ordinary. It is hard to see the appreciation of a photograph of a grandmother (for example, by one of my students) simply in terms of the photographic machine's image-making capacities which is de-

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void of feeling, as Lyotard does. To say that amateur photography has almost nothing to do with experience, as he asserts, is surely wrong. The existence of complex scientific, technical and market relations behind the production of amateur photography does not erase anyone's experience. Indeed, these relations are nearly invisible to the user photographs and thus are not part of experience any more than the complex computer systems needed for Facebook are part of the experience of Facebook. Nor is it clear that amateur photography gains any value (normally speaking) by participating in the infinite dialectic of techno-science and the marketplace. This seems to over-intellectualize a much simpler, but still valuable, experience[3]. Nonetheless, I agree that the "What is Photography?" question invariably takes us back to consider amateur photography and the various other modes of photography most relevant to everyday life, i.e. the photography of advertising, portrait photography, illustration, and so forth. Although art photography thematizes the question, it is essential to art photography that it is part of a larger domain of photography upon which it reflects, as it also reflects on other aspects of everyday life. To this end I will look specifically at recent trends in art photography's portray of the everyday.

5. *Contemporary art photography and its exploration of everyday aesthetics*

Most contemporary art addresses issues of everyday life in some way or another. Contemporary art photography is an example of contemporary art, and so, not surprisingly, it takes everyday aesthetic phenomena very frequently as its subject matter. Picking up one book on the topic, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (Cotton [2004]) I find in the frontispiece an image of a woman seated in her bedroom (Sarah Jones, *The Bedroom*, 2002). The stark colors of the red wall contrasts against the white of the window frame and the dark blue of the sky, the woman expressively turned away from us like a figure in an Edward Hopper painting. Such a photograph not only presents us with an art object worthy of aesthetic interest, but also with a way to aesthetically see something from everyday life.

[3] It is ironic that Lyotard attacks magazine readers in his critique of phony modernism since these are precisely the readers Benjamin admired, the ones who dwell on the mechanically reproduced images that give them immediate pleasure without the nostalgia of aura. How can Lyotard pronounce a sublime value in the techno/science marketplace dialectic and also reject this primary representative of photography at the level of everyday non-art experience?

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Individual chapters of Cotton's book deal with different genres of contemporary art photography. Although most of these genres deal with everyday life in some way, I find particularly apt a quote from the beginning of the chapter called *Something and Nothing*: «The photographs in this chapter show how non-human things, often quite ordinary, everyday objects, can be made extraordinary by being photographed». As the title of the chapter suggests, the stuff of daily life ostensibly counts as the subject, the "something" of the picture. Cotton continues: «But because we may ordinarily pass these objects by, or keep them at the periphery of our vision, we may not automatically give them credence as visual subjects within art's lexicon … Through photography, quotidian matter is given a visual charge and imaginative possibility beyond its everyday function» (Cotton [2004]: 115). Such photography-based artists as Fischli and Weiss, Gabriel Orozco, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Jeff Wall are discussed in this chapter. Another chapter deals with photography and intimate life, featuring photographers like Nan Goldin. Here the aesthetics of the human body, its sexuality, degradation, and expressiveness are explored. In both cases the photographer takes the quotidian and, through framing, lighting, and other manipulations, transforms it into something with a unique «visual charge».

A third chapter deals with the "deadpan" aesthetic in which the subjects include what Cotton calls «a range of manufactured locations of industrial, architectural, ecological and leisure-industry sites...» (Cotton [2004]: 82). An example is *Oil Fields #13, Taft, California* by Ed Burtynsky. These are also everyday life phenomena. Photographs of architecture play a special role in the "deadpan" genre where such photographs treat architectural works as the theater in which we live life and not just as a certain class of objects of artistic appreciation (i.e. works of architecture). Although the photographs in this chapter are more sublime than beautiful, nothing keeps sublime experience from being part of "the everyday".

In the last chapter, Cotton addresses photographers influenced by postmodernism who draw from such things as family snapshots, magazine advertising, surveillance, and science. (We have already addressed the issue of using such images under the category of "vernacular photography"). Many of these photographs are therefore photos of photos or of scenes or displays that contain photos. An example is *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* by Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye in which we see a photo of a pile of staged or fictional photos from a family album. One could argue that such photographs explore the role photographs and related images play in our everyday lives.

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6. *Photography and transparency: the aesthetic qualities of the subject matter itself and a specific problem in the aesthetics of nature*

Photography is used in a vast number of ways: as a method for recording the look of family members and events, as the main source of images we see in advertising, as an important source of illustration and study in scientific investigation and medical care, as a record of our physical and cultural environment providing us with an important basis for historical knowledge, as a tool for surveillance and police control, and as the elemental basis for such media as film and video. It influences the way we see the world around us and the ways we portray the world through other media. Most of the ways in which photography enters our lives have or can have an aesthetic dimension, although some dramatically more than others (for example fashion photographs as opposed to police mug shots).

Traditionally, philosophical discussion of photography has centered around two questions (1) can photography be an art form? and (2) what is the nature of photographic representation (assuming that it represents at all)? The first question has mostly been decided in the affirmative and I will not address it here. The second raises some interesting questions about the relationship between photographs and everyday life. If photographs of objects are in some sense closer to the objects they photograph than paintings of the same objects then appreciation of a photograph, or at least some aspect of that appreciation, might be reducible to appreciation of its object. Kendall Walton (1984) famously speaks of the transparency of photographs. They may be transparent in some sense, although I do not think they are transparent in the way a mirror might be, i.e. in allowing us to "see" our own faces as though the face were right in front of us. After all, they are composed objects many of whose properties are due to the maker's work, or at least the maker's choices. However, they are transparent in the sense that they often direct our attention to aesthetic properties that are already there in the subject-matter and before the taking of the photograph. A picture of a beautiful woman can feature her beauty more than any other aesthetic quality. Appreciating photographs is, in part, another way to appreciate things photographed. This is why photography influences our appreciation of everyday phenomena.

Art photography, in particular, encourages the photographer to view the surrounding world in an aesthetic way. Yet this can be problematic. Most photographs, like paintings, are two dimensional and rectangular. The edge of the photograph plays an important role in its

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composition, and yet, the scene photographed is not two-dimensional or rectangular. Consider photography of natural landscapes. A large part of everyday or amateur photography consists of tourist photographs taken in natural settings. Allen Carlson has argued that it is improper to appreciate the natural environment by way of the landscape/scenery model of appreciation (LSM), i.e. we should not appreciate nature as if it were a landscape painting (Carlson [2011]). Carlson explicitly mentions the kinds of photographs tourists take at natural sites as an example of people wrongly following this model in appreciation of nature. Now, although Carlson himself has no problem with artistic photographs of nature, one can imagine someone like him having a problem with appreciation of such photographs on the grounds that they take us away from appreciation of nature. Someone might even hold that Ansel Adams' photographs are a hindrance to nature appreciation, partly because he manipulated his photos and sometimes added features that were not there in the original scene, and partly because they were, on this view, distracting intermediaries between the viewer and real experiences of nature. Yet this would be too extreme since many nature enthusiasts get intense aesthetic pleasure from photographs by Ansel Adams and others, and this doesn't seem to hinder them from also appreciating nature by way of taking a walk in the woods with a naturalist present to explain the science behind what they see.

One could imagine similar arguments directed against appreciation of photographs of urban scenes. For example, in the style of Carlson's critique of LSM, someone might argue that appreciating a city is not like walking through a gallery of pictures, and that therefore appreciating the city via photographs or through seeing it with a photographer's eye or by way of taking amateur photographs is inappropriate. Still, although someone might complain that photographs do not capture all of the aesthetic qualities of actual scenes it is still the case that, rather than discouraging appreciation of urban and suburban scenes, at least in the case of art photography and also amateur photography that has art or aesthetic pretentions, the appreciation is encouraged, as can be seen in the way that one notices certain parts of the urban scene after working with photography. In a talk I recently heard, photographer James Welling observed that he was much more sensitive of color in nature after working with color in photography.

It might be further argued, along these lines, that the differences between photographic experience and direct experience encourage a formalistic way of seeing because of the emphasis on two-dimensionality and the rectangular frame, and that this takes us away from

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appreciating the urban *as* urban just as much as nature photography would take us away from appreciating nature *as* nature. My reply would be that, in each case, the artist's acts of selection get us to see in new and different ways, ways that bring out certain aesthetic qualities that might not be immediately evident. It shouldn't be a matter of "either/or". Rather than detracting, the aesthetic experiences we get from photography enhance the aesthetic experiences that come from direct interaction with both natural and human environments.

Another criticism might be raised concerning the position I have offered here, that the business of everyday aesthetics is to address the ordinariness of the ordinary and that by applying at least some of the principles of art photography to everyday aesthetic phenomena amateur photography seeks to transform those experiences, and is in some way, inauthentic. There is a kind of conventionality characteristic of amateur photography, and one could argue that dwelling on this aspect of everyday experience *blocks* more unconventional and perhaps more beneficial approaches to everyday experience. Thus the amateur photographer who takes typical tourist photos may be judged to be missing various interesting aspects of the potential tourist experience by way of ignoring ambience and other features that cannot be captured in the snapshot. Amateur photography might even be seen as kitsch, as a form of photography that goes for easy pleasures, easy effects and easy sentiments.

All of this may be true. However, art photography often avoids these charges. In art photography social conventions of beauty and appropriateness are often violated, and in doing so the ordinariness of the ordinary may be emphasized. For example Ed Ruscha's *Twenty-Six Gas Stations* is a series of photographs that, although they look like ordinary snapshots, do not aestheticize these gas stations in any conventional way. Rather, the ordinariness of the gas stations is stressed. Still, as was suggested by Cotton, something extraordinary is also often found in the ordinary, precisely by violating conventions of looks, color, arrangement and so forth, or even conventions of what is photograph-worthy. Moreover, the very emphasis on creativity in art photography militates against over-dependence on the conventional.

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7. *Conclusion*

Everyday photographs as well as art photographs may be aesthetically appreciated. Although this may be most obvious in the case of advertising and fashion photography it is also true for amateur photographs. Non-art photographs play an important role in our everyday lives and should not be neglected by aesthetics if aesthetics is to be a general study of aesthetic experience. That these photographs draw much of their value (often a very personal value) from being associated with memories and musings does not make them non-aesthetic. They, and the objects within them, can still take aesthetic predicates. Such photographs have aesthetic qualities related to the objects they depict and to choices and manipulations of their makers, choices that often involve transformations intended to enhance or at least foreground those aesthetic qualities. The emotions evoked by such photographs relate to an aesthetic situational whole of which the photographic object is just one aspect. The relative transparency of photographs allows them also to be a medium for our appreciation of the everyday life phenomena they depict. The choices and manipulations of the maker is a third aspect. These choices can happen at the level of the conventions (and sometimes oddities) of amateur photography or at the level of practices of professional non-art photography (as in photographic portraiture).

Art photography, unlike amateur photography and non-art photography more generally, asks big philosophical questions in a non-linguistic medium. These include not only "What is photography?" but also such questions as "What is man?" and "What is justice?". Art photography, however, should not be seen as taking us to a separate world (a world of Platonic Forms, for example) but as continuous with and interconnected with the various forms of photography associated with everyday life. It does not so much move us out of the stream of life (as Bell would have held if he had countenanced such a thing as art photography) as transform that stream, just as tragedy transforms pity and fear through catharsis. Insofar as it is a meditation on the nature of photography itself, art photography explores and reflects upon the vast range of photographic practice, sometimes quite directly in the case of post-modern photography, and this is a form of aesthetic exploration of everyday aesthetics. Insofar as it is a meditation on the other subjects of photography, for example, the home, the workplace, the streets of the city, and even works of art (dance, architecture, etc.) it is also an exploration of everyday aesthetics.

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One might say that art photography is the tip of an iceberg of aesthetic experience with photography: the rest is the vast range of everyday photography and the even vaster range of everyday aesthetics which, in its visual dimension, is also taken into photography. Although Plato's philosopher-king returns to the cave of everyday experience only to encourage others to escape, the art photographer returns for nourishment, for the material he/she transforms, and for the constant experience of finding the extraordinary in the ordinary.

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