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ASPECTS OF LIGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHY - SEIBERLING

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of The University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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ASPECTS OF LIGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHY

BY

CHRISTOPHER SEIBERLING

A.B., Oberlin College, 1968

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in the Graduate School of
The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico
December, 1975

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Because of the broad approach used in this dissertation, I found it necessary to rely on interviews and informal idea exchange as much as formal scholarship. More specifically, this paper would not be possible had the following photographers not graciously submitted to lengthy, time-consuming interviews: Harold Jones, Roger Mertin, Ray K. Metzker, and Minor White.

In addition, I wish to thank the following teachers and associates who individually provided invaluable assistance and guidance: Thomas Barrow, Van Deren Coke, Douglas George, Richard Knapp, Charles Mattox, Beaumont Newhall, Alex Quenk, Frank Seiberling, and Jessica Seiberling.

ASPECTS OF LIGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHY

BY

Christopher Seiberling

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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Albuquerque, New Mexico
December, 1975

Light is not only a basic condition for photographic process but also a versatile tool for photographic image-making and a metaphorical agent for photographic expression. In a cross-cultural context, there are universal but complex religious interpretations of light phenomena; light has been associated with mystical experience and alchemical process and has been symbolic of enlightenment or salvation. In literature light implies many ideas, e.g. the "colorless all-color of atheism" (Melville) and the "inexplicable" human condition (Beckett). Current attitudes toward light, generated by advances in technology, dominate fading religious concerns.

Among twentieth century photographers, C.H. White and George Seeley used light to express traditional values which Alfred Stieglitz discarded in favor of personal, unverbalized meaning; Minor White evolved a systematized approach to the meaning of light. Edward Weston, in comparison, considered light in a utilitarian context: light was not a subject in its own right but instead aided the explication of the subject's essence.

Two artists who have expanded current understanding of light in art in general are Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Dan Flavin. Moholy thought of light as a separate medium for artistic expression and as a link between technology and the arts. Flavin, using common flourescent tubes, directs the viewer's attention away from the glowing object and toward the viewer's own reaction to light as phenomenon. In both cases secondary meaning is eliminated in favor of utilitarian and phenomenological considerations.

Among contemporary photographers, Ray Metzker uses light,

based on perception, to elicit nonverbal, visceral understanding of eternal human dilemmas. Roger Mertin, using light in an intuitive, responsive way, switches attention from the meaning of light in the photograph to the effect of light on the film. The dichotomy between light as utilitarian but noteworthy tool and light as agent of perception and meaning continues, although traditional connotations of light have dwindled.

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INTRODUCTION

Light is a basic condition for photography. On a theoretical level, light is required to disturb silver halide ions in order for a latent image to be formed. On a practical level, the photographer must adjust his or her equipment according to the intensity of light in any given situation in order to secure an adequate latent image. Beyond the direct application of light to photography lie issues relating to perception: photosensitive materials record tonal variation, but because of binocular vision, human perception can also differentiate objects on the basis of edges; many representational artists, accordingly, have relied on line for visual description in two dimensional media other than photography. The monocular camera depends on-- and excels at-- tonal separation for illusionistic representation. Light requirements for tonal separation by photography are often different from those needed for edge separation by stereo vision.

Fascination with photography can therefore provoke a heightened sensitivity to light phenomena. Roland Rood observed in 1905 that the tonal scale from black to white was much more compressed in photography than in nature, and consequently he urged the serious photographer to "...evolve an entirely new philosophy of values...;" he noted that to include sky detail in a landscape, the sacrifice of detail in dark trees might be necessary; but, he argued, this approximates human perception (Joseph Albers' simultaneous contrast) and is therefore desirable.[1] Charles Caffin in 1901 urged his readers to consider the processes of perception and

suggests that they would discover "...how large a part the distribution of light and shade plays in the attractiveness of a scene."[2] Ansel Adams went a step further, establishing a convenient method for transferring perceived values into photographically recorded values. His resulting Zone System, with its empirical precision and orderly technical methods, has become a basic tool for many photographers.[3]

Photographers in general tend to demonstrate an awareness of meteorological and geographical aspects of light. Charles F. Lummis, writing in Land of Sunshine in 1895, extolled the virtues of light in Southern California:

> The photographer at once discovers that sunlight here is, in technical results, as different a thing from sunlight in New York or England as the sky from a second-hand tin pan. It gives him cameos of definition, wonders of detail, and a real revelation in antitheses of light and shade, vigorous without being violent.[4]

Edward Weston, accustomed to the same sunny locale, was reluctant to photograph under overcast skies in Mexico.[5] More recently, Harold Jones explained that his delicate use of light was attributable in part to the fact that he began using light in Rochester, N.Y., "...and in Rochester there's no such thing as blinding light 'cause it's always grey."[6] Roger Mertin, responding to a suggestion that a particular photograph had been made in late afternoon, said "...a Rochester day always looks like late afternoon."[7] Ray Metzker described Philadelphia light as "linear," and New Mexico light as "penetrating."[8]

Awareness of light phenomena is prerequisite for the more significant concerns for light in twentieth century photography. At the beginning of the century, the beauty and meaning of light

dominated photographic attitudes; subsequent photographers have evolved two distinct approaches to the consideration of light. The first, represented by Alfred Stieglitz, Minor White, and Ray Metzker, emphasizes the study of the perception and meaning of light. The second, represented by Edward Weston and Roger Mertin, emphasizes the effects and uses of light. The groups are not mutually exclusive by any means, and neither group could be described as currently dominant. But investigation into symbolic meaning could be described as declining, and interest in artistic action and process is perhaps increasing. If art in general is becoming more specific, this trend may be indicated in the changes in the consideration of light in photography.

Two important ideas have received additional impetus from fields other than photography-- the idea of photograph as object and the idea of light as phenomenon. László Moholy-Nagy was unable to pursue all of the photographically related ideas he suggested, and many are still not fully explored. But his fascination with the possible applications of light and with object quality of photographs helped liberate photography from its dependence on the window illusion. Dan Flavin, by reducing art to plain phenomenon, has focussed attention on response to phenomena in general and to light in particular.

The consideration of light in photography must begin within a cultural context which, if no longer the most interesting aspect of light, has nevertheless governed most considerations of light since the turn of the century. Literary and religious aspects of light have certainly lost their impact, and are consequently

being replaced, perhaps, by contemporary cultural attitudes toward light.

* * *

The broad area of discussion to be presented here requires certain limits. One area which cannot be covered here because of its own breadth includes workers interested in the interaction of light on photosensitive materials. Two comprehensive exhibitions have approached this concern: "Light and Lens" at the Hudson River Museum, and "Light and Substance" at the University of New Mexico,[9] both in 1973. The "Light and Substance" show, in addition to those working with photosensitive materials, included photographers interested in the consideration of light phenomena. Roger Mertin, to be discussed at some length later, provided a major impetus for the "Light" half of the show.[10] The "Substance" half represents a newly revived field of endeavor, the literal action of light on photographic materials; this field was extensively investigated around 75 years ago but has only in the past few years received renewed and expanded attention. This area unfortunately must be reserved for a separate examination.

Because this paper deals with only a few, basic ideas concerning light and photography, many established and important workers will by reasons of space be excluded. Among these are Ansel Adams, Harry Callahan, Jerry Uelsmann, Emmet Gowin, Linda Connor, Steve Fitch, Michael Becotte, Steve Kahn, and Mark Cohen. The unique contributions by these photographers deserve special consideration not possible here. Light is a broad topic in any field, and it is difficult to know where to begin. We will approach the subject being replaced, perhaps, by contemporary cultural attitudes toward light.

The [illegible] of the problem [illegible] a strong interest in the interaction of light on photosensitive materials. Two contemporary exhibitions have emphasized this concern: "Light and Land" at the Hudson River Museum, and "Light" and "Substance" at the University of New Mexico,[9] both in 1976. The "Light" and "Substance" show, in addition to those working with photosensitive materials, included photographers interested in the consideration of light phenomena. Roger Mertin, to be discussed at some length later, provided a major impetus for the "Light" part of the show.[10] The "Substance" half represents a newly revived field of endeavor, the direct action of light on photographic materials. This field was extensively investigated around 75 years ago but has only in the past few years received renewed and expanded attention. This area unfortunately must be reserved for a separate examination.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Cultural Context

Light and darkness cannot be discussed in relation to photography without at least briefly considering some religious, cultural, and literary references to light. Most cosmogonic myths include light as a catalyst or as an initial ingredient. The light-dark duality, in addition, carries strong, though not identical metaphorical power in many of the world's religions, primitive or advanced. Mystics in many cultures have associated light with revelation or spiritual insight. Dante and Milton have provided many artists with references to light and darkness and need not be discussed here.[1] Secular literature abounds in references to light and whiteness, which has similarly wide associative powers. But this overwhelming number of references in literature, religion, and anthropology cannot be summed up into a simple duality wherein light equals good or knowledge and dark equals evil or ignorance. The complexity of the issue, in fact, may explain its continuing viability. The following discussion, though not by any means comprehensive, is designed to suggest the breadth of sources for a contemporary consideration of light.

Judaic creation myth describes order being established out of chaos, light out of darkness; but God is never fully identified with light in the Old Testament because this would violate the God of Israel's absolute transcendence.[2] In contrast, light and darkness in Zoroastrian and Gnostic literature and in the Qumran scrolls are depicted as elements in fundamental conflict.

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Judaic creation myth describes order being established out of chaos, light out of darkness, but God is never fully identified with light in the Old Testament because this would violate the God of Israel's absolute transcendence.[2] In contrast, light and darkness in Zoroastrian and Gnostic literature and in the Manichean writings are depicted as elements in fundamental conflict, Zoroastrianism features a conflict between the gods Ahura Mazdah and Ahra Mainyu, and the Dead Sea Scrolls (which may have been derived in part from Zoroastrianism)[3] describe the forces of light, truth, and life opposing those of darkness, falsehood, and death. Although the Gospel of St. John indicates that Christ won a qualified victory in the battle between the forces of light and darkness,[4] the Qumranians indicate in the _Manual of Discipline_ that the battle is still in progress.[5] Accordingly, the text instructs the sons of light to "...hate each one of the sons of darkness."[6] The Qumranians saw victory as within reach, but the later Manichees were more pessimistic: they postulated that "...the world was not a zone between light and darkness but entirely in the darkness, from which it has emerged only through the ever feebler admixture of the fallen light particles."[7] The second century Gnostic Basilides distinguished the true, pure light from the weak, reflected, stolen light which illuminates the world.[8] For the Zoroastrians, the Qumranians, and the Gnostics, light and darkness were uniquely dynamic forces directly associated with salvation and damnation.

The concept of cosmic light appearing in order to generate faith shows up in medieval European myths: the Grail astounded Percival with its independently produced light; St. Augustine earlier had "...trembled with both love and horror..." when confronted with holy beams;[9] Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) wrote that "...when the mind of man is rapt to that abyss of the Divine Light...whatever is adverse and troublesome is swallowed up in glory."[10]

The alchemists in medieval Europe extended the Gnostic tradition in describing the alleged qualities of light and darkness. C. G. Jung, in Mysterium Coniunctionis, paraphrased the alchemists's attitudes, retaining their penchant for anthropomorphic metaphor and mystifying paradox:

> The longing of the darkness for light is fulfilled when the light can no longer be rationally explained by the darkness. For the darkness has its own peculiar intellect and its own logic, which should be taken very seriously. Only the 'light which the darkness comprehendeth not' can illuminate the darkness.[11]

For the alchemists, grey and black also correspond to Saturn and the evil world; Jung wrote that they "...symbolized the beginning in darkness, in the melancholy, fear, wickedness, and wretchedness of ordinary human life."[12] But the alchemists were interested in the union of opposites, balancing Sol and Luna, welding form and matter into an "amalgam" complete with androgynous overtones. In addition, the mysterious conjunction required the catalytic presence of Mercurius, who besides being hermaphroditic, was called the "lux moderna:" according to Johann Daniel Mylius in 1622, Mercurius claimed, "I illuminate all luminaries with my light."[13] The alchemists, concerned with the dual nature of all things, could not make the same distinction between light and dark as did the Gnostics in describing salvation and damnation, but the alchemists did adopt and expand Gnostic ideas of the spark. The Gnostics held that humans carry a tiny particle deriving from the world of light.[14] Meister Eckhart referred to this particle as the scintilla vitae, the "little spark of the soul," and the related symbolism of the point was extended by Gerhard Dorn (1602)

to include creation, and by Michael Maier (1616) to include gold.[15]

Light has been subject to sexual identification in many sacred and philosophical texts. The alchemists mentioned androgynous characteristics; Simon Magus, for example, indicates that in semen and in milk there is a very small spark which "...increases and becomes a power boundless and immutable."[16] In one episode of the Manichaean creation myth, particles of light were consumed by male and female demons of darkness; the Third Messenger of Light appeared as a "virgin of light" to the male demons and as a "naked shining youth" to the female demons, provoking violent sexual release of the light particles.[17] A Chinese supreme deity of light and darkness was also hermaphroditic,[18] although in Taoism, _yang_ (as opposed to _yin_) associated maleness with light, warmth, and heaven. In contrast, light in the Percival myth appears in what Jung describes as "the heavenly, feminine symbol of the Grail," as opposed to the "...dark, earthly, masculine symbol of the spear."[19]

In comparison to the tradition in the West represented by Christians and alchemists, light in most eastern religions is associated with enlightenment rather than salvation. An early Zen master, Shen-hui (686-760), compared the unconscious to a mirror:

> When the mirror is said to be illuminating, it is because its self-nature has this quality of brightness. When the Mind of all beings is pure, the great light of knowledge which by nature belongs to it will illuminate all the worlds.[20]

Furthermore, darkness is not an evil or active force, as D. T.

Suzuki explains with a cave analogy:

> As the Buddhist scriptures have it, the darkness of the cave itself turns into enlightenment when a torch of spiritual insight burns. It is not that a thing called darkness is first taken out and another thing known by the name of enlightenment is carried in later, but that enlightenment and darkness are substantially one and the same thing from the very beginning; the change from one to the other has taken place only inwardly or subjectively.[21]

Mahayana Buddhism describes the light of the sky at dawn, when there is no moon, as equivalent to the "Clear Light named the Universal Void."[22] Mahayana understanding of light more specifically implied wisdom in a Buddha. The texts generally describe light as revealing the "true nature" of every aspect of reality.[23] Attention to the light of the Buddha was apparently very intense: a controversy arose among the adherents of Pure Land Thought in Japan in the thirteenth century over whether Amida Buddha's light was the cause of faith or the visionary effect of disciplined meditation.[24]

Around the world light is associated with mystical revelation. In India the yoga approaching final revelations may glimpse the Dharmadhatu, "the pure light, the light perfectly devoid of color."[25] Similarly, the Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the choice the dead must make: the frighteningly bright, pure light indicates the higher, more difficult choice over the more familiar, impure, dull white light of the Devas.[26] The shamans among the Iglulik Eskimos possess a mystical faculty called qaumeneq or angakoq which consists of

> ...a mysterious light which the shaman suddenly feels in his body, inside his head, within the brain, an inexplicable searchlight, a luminous fire, which enables him to see in the dark, both literally and metaphorically speaking, for he can

> now, even with closed eyes, see through darkness and perceive things and coming events which are hidden from others.[27]

Such internalized light is also found among the Wiradjuri in Australia, who feel a relationship between the condition of a supernatural being and a superabundance of light. One becomes a shaman when one is filled with "solidified light."[28]

But the appearance of the sacred accompanied by light is by no means limited to primitives and medieval mystics. There are many accounts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of mystical experience. One of the best-known is by Dr. R. M. Bucke, a nineteenth century Canadian psychiatrist: he rode home in a hansom cab after an evening with friends and was suddenly "...enveloped by a flame-colored cloud...followed by a sense of exhultation and joyousness."[29] Similar flashes of light accompanied by a sense of release have been reported by other westerners.[30] Eliade points out that while mystical experience has often been associated with the appearance of extraordinary light, the analysis of the experience is "...irremediably linked with language, and consequently with culture and history." He explains:

> One can say that the meaning of the supernatural light is directly conveyed to the soul of the man who experiences it--and yet this meaning can only come fully to his consciousness clothed in a pre-existent ideology. Here lies the paradox: the meaning of light is, on the one hand, a personal discovery, and on the other, each man discovers what he is spiritually and culturally prepared to discover.[31]

The link between light and culture or history is perhaps more concretely demonstrable in literature than in reportage of mystical experience, and in any case specific changes in attitudes toward light do not presuppose the affirmation or denial of the

actuality of supernatural light. Unfortunately, perhaps, the abundance of light references in literature prevents me from listing more than a few examples. Edgar Allan Poe's tales and poems frequently include references to starlight, moonlight, lamps, and tapers. In "The City in the Sea," for example,

> No rays from the holy heaven come down
> On the long night time of that town
> But light from out of the lurid sea
> Streams up turrets silently.[32]

This ghoulish light also appears in Herman Melville's Moby Dick when Ahab transforms the blood-chilling appearance of St. Elmo's fire into neo-pagan ritual. In an extraordinary chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," Melville finds that "whiteness refiningly enhances beauty," but also may represent "transcendent horror." He observes that "...by its indefiniteness it [whiteness] shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe." And he contends that "... there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows-- a colorless all-color of atheism from which we shrink."[33] Melville clearly relished oxymora and delighted in raising doubts about fundamental assumptions held by the fire-and-brimstone Protestants in the mid nineteenth century.

Samuel Beckett's use of light and darkness further strips away traditional associations in order to emphasize the extreme futility of culturally acceptable attitudes toward death fears and life hopes. In Krapp's Last Tape, Krapp recalls a romantic incident with a girl in a punt when he had looked deeply into her eyes: "The eyes she had...Everything there...everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of

(hesitates)... the ages."[34] Pozzo, in Waiting for Godot, describes the human condition: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."[35] In Endgame, Hamm, who is blind, sits at a dark, sunless window facing the waters and bathes himself in imaginary light. He exclaims, "That's what I call light."[36] Such sardonic reversal of ordinary attitudes was apparently painstakingly deliberate. In an interview Beckett said,

> If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable...where we have, at one and the same time, darkness and light, we have also the inexplicable.[37]

Beckett represents an extreme position in both philosophy and literature, to be sure; it is perhaps ironic, then, to note that in attempting to subvert the old Christian light-dark duality, he has instead revitalized it and given it a new and highly contemporary metaphorical possibility.

Current popular understanding of light depends as much on science and technology as on linguistic-cultural tradition. After explaining that life as we know it can exist, but also requires, electromagnetic radiation only between 3500 and 7000 angstroms, scientist Bentley Glass concluded that "life is ultimately a photochemical phenomenon."[38] Marshall McLuhan, in an often-quoted remark, noted while pointing to a glowing light bulb, that it "...radiated pure information-- at least to those who understood its signal."[39] The information of scientific understanding obviously reduces capacity for mystery.

While commercially successful songwriters like Leon Russell

and Carole King reiterate old cliches ("you are the light of my life") for the edification of current teenagers, a more significant educational influence is neon advertising. Gyorgy Kepes, long enchanted with the romance of light and technology, elucidated the popular fascination of city lights seen from an airplane, suggesting how Melville might react to such a view:

> ...if Melville could now rise high into the air and see the metropolis in its evening raiment-- festive, rich, and clean, he would exclaim at this distant world of light and color, this magnificent image that excites our reverence and awe.
>
> Here is a new window to the cosmos, a new mirror in which to see ourselves and to envisage our hopes and our potential strength.[40]

This positivistic approach no longer dominates writing on art or society. A snide but scientific experiment on the sexual activity of starlings, which are normally inactive in winter, demonstrated that the starlings of Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square-- all exposed to brilliant artificial light-- retained sexual capacity while a control group of starlings at Oxford did not.[41] The cynical implications of corruption inherent in the technological advances in light have been reinforced by the heavy use of public and commercial aspects of light, e.g. the use of sun symbolism in advertising in the late sixties and the transformation of sun worship; John Perreault, a Village Voice columnist, observed,

> Even we post-moderns worship light on grimy beaches, on the edges of turquoise swimming pools...in search of the ultimate sun-tan. We offer ourselves as burned sacrifices to that blinding carcinogenic light. We lie prostrate and naked before a religious symbol as old as man. As the inner light retreats, the outer light is increasingly courted.[42]

Light has been reduced to a carcinogen for some observers; others consciously or unconsciously pursue the mystical tradition.

Whether understood in terms of cultural barometer, spiritual awakening, or literal phenomenon, light continues to be an effective and significant aspect of art-oriented activity. These three variables have all survived in twentieth century photography. Although none is marked for extinction, each has suffered inconsistent popular support.

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4. John 3:19-21 and 12:36.

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23. J.H.M. Whiteman, The Mystical Life (London, 1961), p. 30.

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25. Eliade, The Two and the One, p. 30.

26. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

27. Knud Johan Victor Rasmussen, Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos, p. 112, quoted in Eliade, Shamanism (New York, 1964), p. 61.

28. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 138.

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34. Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (New York, 1959), quoted in James Knowlson, Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett (London, 1972), p. 26.

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CHAPTER TWO

Attitudes Toward Light in Twentieth Century Photography

1. Caffin and the Photo-Secession

Photographers inevitably concern themselves with light. The persistence of this concern is marked by a fluctuating attitude which reflects the taste of the times as much as the sentiments of the individual photographers. At the beginning of the century Charles Caffin wrote Photography as a Fine Art in an atmosphere of controversy;[1] in defense of the argument suggested by the title, Caffin frequently mentions the photographer's ability to utilize the eloquence of light.

At the turn of the century light was considered first in terms of meaning. Light was used to evoke moods in pictures of moonlit nights and dewy dawns and to evoke symbolic associations. Caffin and the Photo-Secessionists proved conclusively that photography could indeed present the same formal ideas of form and content as any other medium. The sentimental meanings of light, passed over by progressive painters, were revived for the last time by members of the Photo-Secession. The only real modernism in their attitude toward light was the necessity of training one's perception to identify existing light phenomena.

Caffin argues that evoking the power of light requires training and attention. Along with compositional rules, the photographer must learn "...the laws...which affect the distribution of light and shade; his eye must be trained to distinguish

values."[2] Careful observation of a scene will demonstrate, he wrote, "...how large a part the distribution of light and shade plays in the attractiveness of a scene. The real scene is a maze of shadows as well as light."[3] Caffin presents Stieglitz's "An Icy Night, New York" and "Reflections-- Night, New York" as paradigms for use of light:

> In both the combined effects of brilliant and of diffused light are remarkable, and "An Icy Night" amply justifies his [Stieglitz's] contention that a certain amount of "halation" (the muzzy halo surrounding some of the lights) is true to facts and pictorially pleasant.[4]

Limiting oneself to describing or recording observable light phenomena would preclude full utilization of the evocative powers of light, according to Caffin. He finds Gertrude Käsebier's success attributable to "...her management of line and form, and of light."[5] In her "Fairy Tales," a mother and two boys bend over a book near a window. One boy's face is in shadow, which, Caffin extrapolates, is an

> ...indication of quiet, penetrating earnestness...The qualities of his brother's mind, on the other hand, one may judge to be a more obvious kind, so there is a spiritual suggestion in the contrast of light and dark in the two faces.[6]

In Käsebier's "La Grand-mère" Caffin finds the "...mixture of sun and shadow suggestive of the life of the poor."[7] Clarence H. White's "Landscape with Sheep," according to Caffin, is

> steeped in warm atmosphere...light still lingers on the sloping banks and glints on the fleece of the sheep. As you peer into the dark spots of the picture, you notice ...curious and unexpected pranks of light, which lend a mystery and suggestiveness such as the scene would have in nature.[8]

It is difficult to disagree with Caffin on the importance of light as a basic ingredient in certain kinds of photographic

eloquence, but for the most part he is clearly swept off his feet by contemporary sensibilities. A mixture of sun and shadow suggests the life of the poor only as much as the life of the rich; to judge the qualities of a boy's mind on the basis of the light-- or shadow-- falling on the child's head makes little sense to us now. Nevertheless, the apostrophes to the beauty of light indicate what Käsebier, White, and others had in mind. Caffin describes as "truly beautiful" Käsebier's "Going to Boston," which shows a little boy with hat, suitcase, and lamb. A string runs from the lamb down to the bottom edge of the picture. "How wonderful that quivering thrill of light," exclaimed Caffin, "which appears and vanishes in the line of the string!"[9] The sensibility which generated a picture of a child going to Boston with his lamb would naturally describe an intermittent appearance of light in Caffin's now quaint fashion.

The sensation of light has not grown old fashioned, of course; many photographs from the first decade of Camera Work have become icons of the era, Clarence H. White's "The Orchard" and Stieglitz's "Hand of Man," for example. These, and less well-known works, though imbued with sentimentality, have survived because other attributes have become noteworthy. The appearance of light, for example, need not provoke a gush of emotion-- it may appear as an arresting phenomenon. In Clarence H. White's "Entrance to the Garden" (figure 2-1), a high, latticed rose arbor arches over the entrance to the garden, flanked by luxurious foliage. A well-dressed youth reclines on the left, in front of the elaborate arch. Directly in the center of this pleasant landscape, an extra-

ordinary vertical rectangle of light appears. Spatial clues are few-- it is difficult to tell how far away this light rectangle stands from the arbor; because the darkness surrounding the light patch remains undifferentiated, the light patch loses its ordinary connotation of negative space. Halation blurs the edge of the rectangle, which consequently appears to come forward. The cool, romantic scene is dominated by the approaching rectangle of light; without the presence of the reclining young gentleman, the light would have a distinctly forboding evocativeness. The fascination of the picture, then, does not depend on the youth-leisure-garden attributes-- the enigmatic light rectangle, the halation, and the spatial confusion now dominate.

George H. Seeley, though less well-known, was elected to the inner circle of the Photo-Secession and consequently must have been highly regarded by the Stieglitz entourage. His "The Firefly" (figure 2-2) until recently would have been dismissed with a colloquialism. A young woman, wearing an opal-studded headband and a dark costume, holds a glowing object-- though not identifiable, apparently the firefly-- in her left hand, palm up, across her breast. An enigmatic metallic object, possibly a musical instrument, curves up from behind her hand and disappears left of center at the bottom edge of the picture. Light halates around her neck from behind and glints off the metal object. The woman's stiff and solemn pose, her odd headband, and her simple costume suggest a tableau of some ancient Anglo-Saxon ritual with firefly as grail-object (if this analysis seems far-fetched, keep in mind that another photograph by Seeley reproduced in the same

issue of Camera Work of two damsels reclining in speckled sunlight is called "The Burning of Rome"). Joseph T. Keiley wrote in 1911 that Seeley's pictures were "...suggestive of the dreamy sadness of living ghosts."[10] Light glowing in darkness helps promote speculation generated largely by the props: this type of picture has long been out of favor, but the recent success of Ralph Eugene Meatyard requires placing such activity into historical perspective.

The members of the Photo-Secession felt that photography was for the expression of "beauty and spirit," according to Robert Doty.[11] Caffin concluded that "...light affects our imagination even more than color, and therefore...a good photograph, which reaches its beauty through its interpretation of the manifold aspects of light, may yield us as much enjoyment as a painting."[12] Stressing the symbolic aspects of light perhaps accounts for the initial success of these photographs, but the tendency to extrapolate, rather than dying out with the Photo-Secession, merely changed in rhetoric. Käsebier, White, and Caffin evoked what might be considered traditional meanings of light-- purity, innocence, youth, goodness, and virtue. But the broad assumptions upon which these values were placed were slowly beginning to be called into question, and the means of representing these fading ideals were themselves disintegrating into caricature, the exercise of which Stieglitz apparently found stifling.

2. Stieglitz's "From the Shelton, Looking Northwest"

Alfred Stieglitz was concerned with light throughout his

career which can be thought of basically in terms of three periods-- the transition from the first to the second period happening in 1907 on the occasion of "The Steerage," and the transition to the third period happening in 1917 with the arrival of O'Keeffe: Stieglitz's consideration of light did not coalesce until the final stage when he evolved the concept of equivalence which, for Stieglitz, was his major theoretical accomplishment. Equivalence cannot be adequately dealt with here: briefly, Stieglitz came to consider meaning in photography no longer in terms of traditional cultural values but instead in terms of personal feeling-states. As a result light lost its significance as a sentimental symbol for Stieglitz and became instead a vehicle for personal meaning. Light in this capacity was not crucially connected with Stieglitz's other innovation, the extended portrait, which he demonstrated in photographing O'Keeffe.

Stieglitz surrounded himself with argumentative mystique-- he refused neutrality whenever he had a chance, and those with whom he had contact found themselves responding to him in an equally unequivocal manner; the most abundant testimony, recorded by Dorothy Norman and Herbert J. Seligmann,[13] suffers from the bias of disciples. But evenhanded accounts of Stieglitz's attitudes are hard to find, and we must reluctantly rely on Norman's and Seligmann's transcriptions. Stieglitz's world view, taut with conflict, appeared in the form of parables, metaphors, and symbols. If the gospel's two scribes lacked detachment, they at least gave a clear sense of Stieglitz's way

of thinking, and by analogy, of photographing.

In the late twenties and early thirties, when Stieglitz was approaching seventy, he photographed tall buildings in New York, from the windows of An American Place and from the Hotel Shelton. His interest in skyscrapers went back to about 1903 when he and Steichen photographed the Flatiron Building from ground level. Marin, Demuth, Sheeler, O'Keeffe of the "291" circle and others had dealt with tall buildings and structures, e.g. the Brooklyn Bridge. It was not surprising, then, that he would turn to skyscrapers, but it was equally unsurprising that his own attitudes would appear, altered somewhat, perhaps, by the others in his circle.

"From the Shelton, Looking Northwest" (figure 2-3) produces an initial impression of blackness, which changes to darkness when one sees depth and detail in the lower zones; but the darkness causes a confusion between the buildings in shadows and the darkened interstitial space. Matisse noted, in comparison, that in New York "...the sky begins after the tenth story, because the stonework is already eaten up by light. The light and its reflections take the materiality from the buildings." [14] Matisse, looking up, saw light; Stieglitz, looking down, saw darkness. The street and all visible human activity have vanished under the vast shadow which blankets itself down on the uneven surface of the city. A new steel skeleton, gleaming in the morning sun, awaits its skin. The near skyscraper on the right still bears the marks of recent construction: the windows remain "X"ed to remind workers glass has been installed. The shadowed side of

this building merges with the more horizontal surface of the cast shadow. The newer, taller buildings, then, cast shadows on the lower, older buildings. This supplantation cannot have been lost on Stieglitz, an old man struggling against his times and himself. He shows no interest-- in this photograph-- in depicting the teeming life on the street; instead he stares out at the as yet uninhabited structures blocking his view. The shadowed edge of the new building on the right meets the sunlit side with such sharpness that the sense of perspective seems to reverse from convex to concave, but the sunlit parapet on the shadowed side prevents this illusion from persisting. This apparently impersonal picture is centered on a narrow vertical rectangle, which though brilliantly sunlit, does not appear to be attached to any structure. That light-struck anomaly persists: because simultaneous contrast makes the little rectangle the brightest thing in the picture-- it is surrounded by rich blackness-- one might say it persists with vehemence. The clarity, the contrast, and the lack of visible activity could be understood as reinforcing a blank stare, or as belying personal significance.

Stieglitz would freely admit that there was personal significance in this photograph, but to describe it as concretely autobiographical apparently was not appropriate. He told Dorothy Norman,

> Everyone has his blind spot. The very root of our character is in what we do not know about ourselves. Unless we become conscious of what our blind spot is, there is bound to be falsification in whatever we may write in autobiographical vein. But if we are truly aware of all there is to know about ourselves, we could not go on living.[15]

this building merges with the more horizontal surface of the next shadow. The other, taller buildings, then, cast shadows on the lower, older buildings. This explanation cannot have been lost on Stieglitz, as [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] depicting the [illegible] life on the streets. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] at the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], the shadowed edge of the new building on the right meets the [illegible] side with such sharpness that the sense of perspective tends to reverse from convex to concave, but the [illegible] [illegible] of the shadowed side prevents this illusion from persisting. This apparently important [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in a narrow vertical rectangle which though [illegible] [illegible], does not appear to be [illegible] to any structure. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] because simultaneous [illegible] above the [illegible] rectangle the brightest thing in the picture— it is surrounded by rich blackness— one might say it [illegible] with [illegible]. The [illegible], the contrast, and the lack of visible [illegible] would be understood as reinforcing a bleak story, or as [illegible] personal significance.

Stieglitz would freely admit that there was personal significance in this photograph, but to describe it as [illegible] autobiographical apparently was not appropriate. He told Dorothy Norman,

> Everyone has his blind spot. The very root of our character is in what we do not know about ourselves. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of what our blind spot is, there is bound to be [illegible] in whatever we may write in autobiographical vein. But if we are truly aware of all there is to know about ourselves, we could hardly go on living.[illegible]

This notion relates directly to the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty written about thirty years later: "what I see is not mine in the sense of being a private world," he wrote. "What is mine in my perception are its lacunae."[16] Stieglitz undoubtedly was trying to explore those gaps, although they confounded him until the end.

Dorothy Norman frequently found Stieglitz using black/white, light/darkness metaphors in his rhetoric. "Man is faced by inevitable choices," he told Norman at An American Place in the thirties.

> Man is forever being asked, in one way or another, whether he believes in white or in black. But how is he to choose the one above the other? The very fact that the question is asked proves there is no absolute answer.
>
> How conceive of black without white? Why reject either, since both exist? Indeed, it is at the very point at which black and white form a positive manifestation of life that I am most aroused.
>
> There is within me ever an affirmation of light. Thus no matter how much black there may be in the world, I experience tragedy, beauty, but never futility. I am aware of the duality, the ambiguity of world forces forever at work. Yet it is when conflict hovers about a point, a focal point, and light is in the ascendency, that I feel the necessity to photograph.[17]

"From the Shelton, Looking Northwest" indicates by inference that the time of day is morning and that the whole dominating shadow will be swept from view. The central vertical rectangle, now tiny, will soon be linked with the sunlit right side of the new skyscraper. The pessimism inherent in the shadow-casting monoliths promises to be burned away, as if from the brilliant rectangular core in the center of the blackness. The resolution of such a conflict is only temporary: the conflict will be rejoined the next morning. Perhaps, then, the uncompromising sharpness of the photograph merely underscores a more realistic understanding

of the conflict's permanent lack of resolution. Light and darkness, then, could in Stieglitz's view represent "the duality, the ambiguity of world forces " a notion which reminds one possibly of Manichaeism. In any case light, for Stieglitz, was a metaphorical vehicle, removed from the confines of superficial associations and re-established as a personal symbol with mystical overtones.

3. Minor White

Although he followed the technical tradition of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, Minor White drew his philosophical attitudes from Stieglitz: the concept of equivalence, amplified and expanded, has dominated his thinking for over thirty years. White has assumed that photography's forte is personal, and ultimately, archetypal meaning, and to that end he has developed a hierarchical system for the understanding of light. For White, light is far more than a simple illuminant-- it becomes a centralizing force and symbol in photography and in life.

Discussion of his ideas and photographs is complicated by the equality of importance of the two activities: throughout his career he has written with at least as much insistence as he has photographed. He has been a diarist, the entries being called "Memorable Fancies" (after William Blake); he was editor of Image; but most importantly he was co-founder and editor of Aperture: his writing generally carries a sense of reflection and speculation. In contrast, Stieglitz refused to write an

autobiography, as noted previously; Weston's Daybooks, on the other hand, are concretely autobiographical. White's "Memorable Fancies" deal extensively with abstract reflections about personal experiences and frequent musings about books, ideas, and photographic experiences, all oriented toward a quest for wisdom. The pictures, accordingly, must endure severe strain when the viewer attempts to infuse into them the philosophical conjecture of White's writings. In his magnum opus, Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations, White alternates the pictures with aphoristic text, clearly indicating a felt congruence. In 1968 an invitational photographic exhibition at M.I.T. was organized by White and called by Wayne Anderson, Director of Exhibitions, "...a more or less prophetic exhibition."[18] Its title was "Light^7." Six years later White insisted to me that the framework laid out in Aperture Volume 14 number 1, a monograph on the show, still described his attitude toward light.

Light represents a multilevel system of ideas to White. The show's title indicates levels as well as powers of light. The exponential seven implies that each level is seven times larger, deeper, closer, or more awesome than the previous level. The number seven, favored by numerology enthusiasts,[19] appears frequently in the Book of Revelation-- seven thunders, seals, trumpets, and angels. When the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet, "...the mystery of God...should be fulfilled."[20] Similarly, White wrote that "Image which leads us to our Creator can be called Light^7."[21] The other levels include Light^1, in which the activity of light, even though invisible, yields photo-

graphs; Light[3], wherein "...a sense of mutual awareness exists between light and subject-- a dialogue if you wish...;"[22] and Light[5], defined by the presence of the light source in the picture and "...sensed as a moving Force, that is, the felt, the intuited, significance of the photograph."[23] "Why seven?" White asks, rhetorically.

> "Seven reflects what we may expect of any medium at those rarified moments when psychology, art, science, and religion overlap in one outward manifestation. At such moments, "as the masks drop from us," we stand to gain a conscious connection to the spiritual cosmos.[24]

He goes on to say that "Light[1] through Light[7] is to be understood as a sizeable arc of a much larger cosmic circle."[25] The number seven has cross-cultural significance, as White undoubtedly is aware: for example, in Mithraism (Mithra was an ancient Persian god of light), the ceremonial ladder by which one ascended to heaven had seven rungs.[26]

Light holds still other ambivalent metaphorical possibilities for White. Light is capable of killing, making love, healing, and more importantly perhaps, serving as a catalyst or a vehicle for self-knowledge. The vast panoply of light symbolism invoked by White implies that the viewer must shoulder new responsibilities if White's premises are to be accepted. He told me that the difficulty in communicating with photographs is the viewer's lack of training. But even extensive training will not completely obviate the difficulty, for "the relation of photographer and photograph and respondent is as mystical as light itself."[27] The personal nature of his communication may account for this insistence.

"Ever since the beginning," White wrote in Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations, "the camera has pointed at myself."[28] With this statement White cut away the necessity of dealing with subject matter on its own terms, cleanly separating himself from pure Westonian doctrine with the concept of equivalence. Although White considers his total oeuvre essentially autobiographical, his approach to picture-making has in fact evolved slowly over the years. In 1952 he adopted a neo-Westonian position: "The state of mind of the photographer while creating is a blank."[29] By "blank" White presumably meant open, receptive to anything, sensitized-- like photographic materials. By 1957 White's decription of the desirable photographic frame of mind had changed to "...a state of heightened awareness the opening stages of which I can initiate at will (in successful later periods the later stages are 'taken over' by something else)."[30] In 1963 White had moved a little further-- "when both subject matter and manner of rendering are transcended, by whatever means, that which seems to be matter becomes what seems to be spirit."[31] And in 1974 he told me that he feels himself to be a "tool in the hands of some higher force" of which light, he added was a symbol. "light is a huge ray: a literal one, a physical one, and a psychological one, all going back to something very absolute." The ray at its widest point is the kind of light which makes photography possible-- a light which delineates material things. More concentrated light-- closer to the ray's originating point-- reveals things for what they are. Closer yet and you feel heat-- you "experience the sun." Closest of all to the point, the light

becomes symbol.

For White the photographs serve as apt illustrations for the autobiographical quest, but extrapolating White's Self out of his pictures is a bewildering task, the necessity of which is open to question. One well-known photograph, the first in the series "The Sound of One Hand Clapping" (1959) is called "Metal Ornament." Whatever kind the ornament, it is aged-- the lower edge is damaged, and circular deposits in the bowl's center show periodic filling and evaporation. Neither of the two overlapping circles is perfectly concentric with the bowl itself, indicating that the object either is not attached to the surface upon which it rests, or that it has been jarred. Inside the area of the deposited rings' overlap is a third, much smaller circle, but it too eludes the center of the bowl. The background behind or beneath the bowl appears to be bolted sheet metal, suggesting a water tank or other outdoor utilitarian device. The remarkable presence of the object depends on the reflection of light from the dull inner surface-- a soft, luminous, almost lunar glow. The light catching the inner surface, in fact, causes a temporary illusion of convexity. This worn, aged bowl, oddly lacking a center, depends on the presence of light for its temporary arresting power. Perhaps, for White, hierophany is indicated. The Grail of the Percival legends, a bowl which glowed as though from some internal light source, was a medieval symbol for, among other things, self-realization. White said of this photograph that many interpretations were possible, but agreed that the light seems to come "from within itself [the bowl]

as if it had its own batteries." The difficulty with such analysis, as White would agree, lies in the inevitable discrepancies between the photographer's intent and the receptiveness of the viewer. If the photograph is autobiographical in implication, then perhaps White himself is the only important viewer, allowing the rest of us to look or muse, each after his or her own fashion.

The constant search for equivalential imagery has resulted, perhaps, in a need to define critical language used to describe photographs. White extended the idea of equivalence into the concept of sequence. John Szarkowski preferred the term "constellation" to "sequence" "...since it emphasizes the coeval independence of the individual pictures and avoids the suggestion that the meaning of the sequence is essentially thematic."[32] White, however, sought the specificity inherent in the idea of sequence in the early fifties, when he saw the role of the critic as "vital catalyst;"[33] but by 1967 his attitude had changed: he claimed that "...the photographic critic is passé," advising in addition,

> ...now more important and more meaningful to the photographer is to be out in the sun, to be out in the streets, or to be in the studios and darkrooms making photographs and making images.[34]

Unfortunately White has failed to heed his own advice: forsaking the ramifications of criticism has been an impossible task for White, unable to resist the lure of meaning.

4. Edward Weston

Light, for Edward Weston, could not be separated from its

function-- illumination. No aspect of his work should be overanalyzed, he felt. Throughout his long career he dealt with light in a very careful manner based on perception-- "seeing more definitely,"[35] delineation of form and texture-- the effects of light, rather than the meaning of light. By around 1930, when his thinking had matured, Weston not only had stripped away Pictorialist associations of light, but he had eliminated almost all meaning in light beyond obvious, obvservable description. While Stieglitz was using light and darkness in New York to metaphorically approach "...the tragedy, the beauty, but never the futility..." of his experience, Weston was trying to reduce his photographic attitudes to the most concrete level possible. In a letter to Ansel Adams in 1932, he indicated an emphasis away from the theoretical and abstract.

> No-- I don't want just seeing-- but a presentation of the significance of facts, so that they are transformed from things (factually) seen, to things known: a revelation, so presented-- wisdom controlling the means, the camera-- that the spectator participates in the revelation.[36]

The thing photographed, for Weston, speaks of itself; his role was to help it enunciate clearly, through careful control of light, camera, and photographic process.

Weston rarely wrote about light in an abstract fashion. His frequent mention of Mexican clouds and sky in the Daybooks are occasionally typical of diarists's casual comments about weather-- he commented, for example, that "the bull fight needs sunshine, brilliant and hot."[37] He wrote in 1924, "I am desperate over this continued cloudy weather, yet I used to love grey days: it must be that now it prevents my working,"[38] referring to the

fact that sunshine was required to expose palladio prints. But the lack of sunshine interfered more significantly with the perception and appreciation of form:

> I am not even provoked to make negatives these drab days. One should do something just as significant while the rain falls and clouds hang low, but I at least am not aroused; perhaps because I am not visually excited as by the definite form which the sun invests.[39]

Light from this point of view is the servant of form. In direct opposition to Stieglitz, he avoided situations in which the evocative power of light might dominate. He wrote in 1930,

> I do not want the play of sunlight to excite the fancy nor the mystery of gloom to invoke the imagination, wearing colored glasses-- the transitory instead of the eternal. I want the greater mystery of things revealed more clearly than the eyes see, at least more than the casual observer notes.[40]

Articles in Camera Craft (signed by Weston but written by his wife Charis yet still accurately reflecting Westonian attitudes, according to Beaumont Newhall)[41] exhibit a very utilitarian attitude toward light: light is a "tool;" the "simpler" light of midday is often more "useful" than morning or evening light because attention is drawn to the subject rather than to a "...mood evoked by the play of shadow."[42] The story of how Weston photographed the famous "Pepper No. 30" sums up the Westonian approach: after several days of experimenting-- trying different backgrounds, in shade and in sunlight-- Weston placed the pepper in a tin funnel, solving the light and background problems simultaneously.[43]

For Weston the power of the photographic experience comes not from light as much as things. Perhaps Weston would agree with

Merleau-Ponty, who claimed that things are more significant than their essences, because perception and understanding of essence rest on the things from which they are distilled.[44]

> Things offer themselves...only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps...but to let them be and to witness their continued being-- to someone who therefore limits himself to giving them the hollow, the free space they ask for in return, the resonance they require...[45]

Within this thing-oriented framework light can act only as a causa agens: a sensitive approach to things in front of the camera requires an attentive attitude toward light, but over-attention to light itself would in Weston's philsophy, result in arcane insularity.

The apparently utilitarian attitude toward light adopted by Weston may have changed in the 1940s as Weston grew away from deliberately non-committal observation and into more personal, philsophical reflection. In 1940 Edward and Charis traveled across the country making photographs (for an expensive edition of Leaves of Grass) of neglected cemeteries, decaying bayous, vacant buildings, and the like. Ben Maddow finds this series "...astonishingly, and quite frankly, funereal."[46] In the same year Weston photographed the cliffs and cypress trees at Pt. Lobos. These are darker, more somber than earlier works and are freer in organizational terms, depending on the interaction of disparate pictorial elements rather than on strict delineation of a single object or of a well-composed landscape. The lightness in the dead and living cypress trunks, struggling out of a dark, nearly undifferentiated background, could be seen as a bleached

white or a weak luminosity. In either case light cannot be said to be merely serving form here: the forms themselves are clear indicators of Weston's attitudes toward his own mortality, and the descending gloom directly reinforces this new, very personal input.

Weston's changing attitude toward light manifests itself more clearly in his photographs than in his writings: as for most photographers of note, the image is the primary mode of expression. In 1916 when he was photographing "through the sentimental pictorial haze,"[47] he urged the establishment of a non-painterly, purely photographic esthetic.[48] In 1934 he wrote that the photographer's goal should be "...an impersonal revealment of the objective world,"[49] but at the same time he was back-sliding on his own dictum of absolute adherence to the ground glass image.[50] In a letter to the Newhalls and Minor White in 1946, Weston excoriated White for over-analyzing his work in an article previewed by Weston but which White never published: "Critics psycho-analyzed themselves-- and no more," Weston complained. He denied, moreover, any preoccupation with death: "Death was not a theme-- it was just a part of life-- as simple as that."[51] Failing health and loss of youthful vigor were reasons enough for a change in attitude, even if he refused to admit them. The intellectual toughness of his earlier work has influenced younger photographers to such an extent that forty years later A. D. Coleman and other critics have complained that Weston's influence has become stifling.[52]

5. Meaning and Utility

Stieglitz, White, and Weston all shared dependence on the transparency fallacy, which could be defined as the acceptance of the photographic image as directly corresponding to the objects or scene at which the camera had pointed. In the Westonian view, "the photographer's power lies in his ability to recreate his subject in terms of its basic reality;"[53] the window-nature of the photograph was taken for granted. Earlier, Caffin and the Photo-Secessionists, Stieglitz included, understood the surface aspects of a photograph; softness of focus, non-silver processes, and print manipulation in general tend to force attention to the two-dimensional surface. This attention was in effect abandoned by Stieglitz after "The Steerage" when he began to make images more intrinsically photographic. Stieglitz rightfully discarded outmoded nineteenth century esthetic considerations deriving from painting, but in pursuing the unique virtues of photography he apparently found it necessary to abandon the formal innovations of the manipulated work around the turn of the century.

Stieglitz (in his later years) and White worked with the assumption of the transparence of the photograph. But they made an additional assumption that this illusion could be invested with metaphorical meaning, an extrapolation Weston emphatically avoided: the clarity of the photograph, Weston felt, should reveal the object with such precision that the viewer might more nearly understand its essence, but for Weston, meaning stopped

there. For Stieglitz and White light was a multilevel concept which included perceived phenomena at one end and symbolic meaning at the other. For Weston light was a tool, to be used in the "revealment" of form and essence. This utilitarian, specific approach relates much more directly to the attitudes toward light held by Moholy-Nagy and Flavin, discussed in Chapter Three, than to the attitudes of Stieglitz and White. In this sense Weston, deliberately or not, was helping move photography toward a concrete position from which its practitioners could more easily share attitudes being developed in other media; Weston continued to cling to illusionistic representation of form-- the photograph illustrated an object and could not be considered an independent art object. But Weston's consideration of light by itself is a definite indicator of a return to specificity which he championed in the 1930s.

ENDNOTES

1. P.H. Emerson had recanted his photography-as-art position in The Death of Naturalistic Photography (London, 1890), and Caffin had vehemently denied the possibility of art in photography only a few years earlier.

2. Caffin, p. 10.

3. Ibid., p. 61.

4. Ibid., p. 45.

5. Ibid., p. 81.

6. Ibid., p. 71.

7. Ibid., p. 76.

8. Ibid., p. 126.

9. Ibid., p. 69.

10. Joseph T. Keiley, "The Buffalo Exhibition," Camera Work No. 33, 1911, p. 27.

11. Robert Doty, Photo Secession (Rochester, 1960), p. 11.

12. Caffin, pp. 153-154.

13. Norman recorded conversations in the periodical Twice A Year and elsewhere. Cf. also Herbert J. Seligmann, Alfred Stieglitz Talking (New York, 1966).

14. Matisse's conversations with E. Teriade in 1929-30, in Jack D. Flam, Matisse on Art (New York, 1973), p. 62, quoted in Lawrence Alloway, "Artists as Writers, Part One: Inside Information," Artforum Vol. 12 no. 6, March 1974, p. 34.

15. Dorothy Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, An American Seer (New York, 1973), p. 176. Emphasis added.

16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible (Evanston, Ill., 1968), p. 58. Emphasis added.

17. Norman, Alfred Stieglitz, An American Seer, p. 202.

18. Wayne Anderson, unpublished letter to Beaumont Newhall, Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M., 10 January 1968.

19. The Hebrew letters Gimel and Dalid, with a combined numerical equivalent of seven, spell the word meaning "luck."

20. Book of Revelation 10:7.
21. Minor White, ed., "Light^7," *Aperture* Vol. 14 no. 1, 1968, p. 70.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 69
26. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York, 1958), p. 104.
27. Author's interview with Minor White, Arlington, Mass., 13 January 1974.
28. Minor White, *Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations* (New York, 1969), p. 14.
29. Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," *Magazine of Art* Vol. 45 no. 1, 1952, pp. 16-19.
30. Minor White, "Memorable Fancy," Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M. 16 February 1957.
31. Minor White, "Equivalence: The Perrenial Trend," *PSA Journal* Vol. 29 no. 7, 1963, pp. 17-21.
32. John Szarkowski, review of *Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations*, *New York Times Book Review*, 8 March 1970, p. 6 and p. 33.
33. Minor White, "Criticism," *Aperture* Vol. 2 no. 2, 1954, p. 27.
34. Minor White, "Could the Critic Be Passé?" *Aperture* Vol. 13 no. 3, 1967, p. 3.
35. Edward Weston, unpublished letter to Ansel Adams, Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M., 28 January 1932, p. 1.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
37. Edward Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 82.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 154-155.
41. Author's conversation with Beaumont Newhall, 12 March 1975.

42. Charis and Edward Weston, "Light vs. Lighting," Camera Craft Vol. 46 no. 5, May 1939, p. 200.

43. Ibid., p. 204.

44. Merleau-Ponty, p. 109.

45. Ibid., p. 101.

46. Ben Maddow, Edward Weston: Fifty Years (New York, 1973), p. 208.

47. Nancy Newhall, unpublished letter to Edward Weston, Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M. 19 April 1950. Nancy Newhall wrote Weston, after seeing his early pictorial work, "Your stuff seen among its contemporaries deserves the praise it got in those days....The subjects are nearly as goofy as everybody else's, but light realy animates them, plays and sparkles and glows. I get the feeling that the subjects were often just something for light to play on."

48. Edward Weston, "Photography as a Means of Artistic Expression," unpublished paper presented to the College Woman's Club of Los Angeles, Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M. 18 October 1916. He told the College Woman's Club that photography should be separated from the esthetic framework established for painting: "for to have any art value Photography must stand on its own base, must offer some inherent quality not obtainable in other arts."

49. Edward Weston, untitled (?) pamphlet for L.A. Museum, 1934, quoted in Maddow, p. 256.

50. Maddow, p. 256 and p. 257.

51. Edward Weston, unpublished letter to Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, Newhall Collection, Albuquerque, N.M. undated but received 17 December 1946.

52. Cf. Hollis Frampton, "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity," Eternity," Artforum Vol. 13 no. 2 October 1974, p. 49.

53. Charis and Edward Weston, "What is Photographic Beauty," Camera Craft Vol. 46 no. 6, June, 1939, p. 254.

CHAPTER THREE

László Moholy-Nagy and Dan Flavin: "This Century Belongs to Light."

Photographers since 1839 have struggled to reconcile photography with painting and other media. Some have considered photography unique, superior, and deservedly separate from the other arts. Others have considered photography a sophisticated tool and have subordinated any inherent esthetic qualities to those of painting. But with the rise and expansion of photography in the academic, museum, gallery, and magazine circles, the isolation or exile, depending on one's point of view, is coming to an end. The following discussion, then is presented in the context of idea transferral among all media.

1. Early Light Artists and Moholy-Nagy

Light has fascinated painters for centuries-- in nineteenth century painting two basic interests were the perception of light (Turner, Monet), and the meaning of light (C.D. Friedrich, Thomas Cole). A third interest in the articulation of physical light itself expanded initially when technology permitted and subsequently when technology itself became an area for artists to examine.

Most chronologies of light artists begin with Fr. Louis Bertrand Castel (1688-1757) who connected a harpsichord to colored tapes illuminated by candlelight; other early color-organs were

designed by D. D. Jameson and by Alexander Wallace Rimington, who was inspired by Turner.[1] Alexander Scriabin's orchestral work "Prometheus, the Poem of Fire" (1915) called for a colored light display to coincide with the performance.[2] Thomas Wilfred's "Lumia" (1922) may be the single most influential object in this entire group simply because of its lengthy permanent display in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the twenties Wilfred dreamed of "...an eighth art in which the artist's sole means of expression is light."[3] This dream was vigorously tested in the 1960s with mixed results. Light, before Wilfred, had been compared to music, thus involving time and movement; Wilfred eliminated the sound but retained the kinetic aspects.

Other workers in the twenties included Alexander Laszlo with his "color-light music;"[4] Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, Joseph Hartwig, and Kurt Schwerdfeger collaborated on "Reflektorische Farblichtspiele (reflecting color-light play) which involved rheostat-controlled moveable colored lights, accompanied sometimes with music.[5] Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling made a black and white film in Berlin called "Rhythmus 21" which dealt with similar effects.[6] This flurry of activity also included Man Ray's Rayographs and Moholy-Nagy's photograms. It is interesting to note that most of this activity took place in Germany and Paris in less than five years-- the intensity may have helped commit Moholy to a life-long passion for experimentation with light.

László Moholy-Nagy spent more than 20 years refining a prophecy of light. Influenced by the Constructivists,[7] Moholy developed a set of attitudes which depended on concrete assertions about

space, light, and materials. He endeavored to prove, his wife Sibyl wrote later, "the existence of objective visual values, independent of the artist's inspiration...."[8] The products and processes of a technological culture provided more than substance for his experimental metal and plexiglas sculptures: the geometrical uniformity of standardized materials probably reinforced his "...belief...that mathematically harmonious shapes, executed precisely, are filled with emotional quality, and that they represent the perfect balance between feeling and intellect."[9] For Moholy form was self-sufficient; literary symbolism should be abolished; light and space should dominate.[10]

Moholy painted and drew for several years before he developed an interest in photography which he approached as simply another medium holding, perhaps, a special technological fascination. His activity in making photograms prompted philosophical analysis and formal experiments, in direct contrast to Man Ray, who treated the process-- at first, anyway, in a Dadaist spirit.[11] Moholy pointed out that from the beginning, except for brief experiments by Talbot, photography was used to capture the image on the ground glass of the camera obscura, ignoring "...the obvious fact that the sensitivity to light of a chemically prepared surface (of glass, metal, paper, etc.) was the most important element in the photographic process...."[12] The scientific orientation of then current movements provided a sympathetic atmosphere for experimentation with photographic materials. The resulting photograms gave a sense of space while eliminating traditional laws of perspective; the delineation of continuous tonal transition

provided an almost machined sense of form. In the catalog for his first photographic exhibition in 1923, Moholy wrote:

> The concretization of light phenomena is peculiar to the photographic process and to no other technical invention. Camera-less photography (the making of photograms) rests on this. The photogram is a realization of spatial tension in black-white-grey. Through the elimination of pigment and texture it has a dematerialized effect. It is a writing with light, self-expressive through the contrasting relationship of deepest black and lightest white with a transitional modulation of the finest greys.[13]

The surface of the photogram was itself significant; illusionistic representation was eliminated; light no longer reveals reality-- the interaction of light on photographic paper produces a specific object, not an imagined window. Light in this capacity is reduced to its basic function-- the ionization of silver halide particles, a photochemical process possessing its own esthetic attraction.

Moholy considered camera photography within a similar framework. He experimented with viewpoint-- looking down from the heights of a Berlin radio tower, looking up at Bauhaus balconies; he explored the possibilities of negative prints, presenting them occasionally with their positive counterparts. In thinking of photography as an extension of perception, he advocated the use of photomicrographs to expand awareness of texture and detail, and x-ray photography to capitalize on the ramifications of transparence. He suggested that photographers explore the effects of technological change-- speed and motion in particular. He pointed out, for example, that a person in a fast-moving vehicle "...can bring distant and unrelated landmarks into spatial relationships unknown to the pedestrian. The difference is produced by the changed perception caused by the various speeds, vision in motion."[14]

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> ...as as adventurer in many arts he was the true master of none.... Though scarcely any of his signed works are outrageously bad, very few of them approach status as masterpieces of their form.[16]

In the late thirties, after Moholy had left Germany, he publicized light art in articles titled "Light A New Medium of Expression," "From Pigment to Light," and "An Academy for the Study of Light." "It is astonishing," he wrote,

> that after a hundred years of photography and forty years of film,...there does not yet exist a Light Academy which might teach, by means of a definite pedagogical program, an artistically and economically productive comprehension of the new values-- light and color.[17]

The territory to cover, Moholy felt, was vast. A critical framework was needed: "What is the nature of light and shade? What are light values?...What are refractions of light? What is color (pigment)? etc., etc., etc." Moholy concluded that "practical experience in the creative use of color (light) as yet scarcely exists."[18] In 1939 Moholy wrote that "...the work of the future lies with the light engineer who is collecting the elements of a genuine creation." Instigation would still come from artists, however: "Great technical problems will be solved when the intuition of the artists will direct the research of engineers and technicians."[19] But in the pursuit of wider knowledge of the physiology of the eye and

the physical properties of light, he warned,

> ...we must never cease observing the simple or rich phenomena of light and color which are offered by the daily routine at home or on the stage, in the street and in the laboratory--in our physical and chemical apparatus.[20]

Although Moholy was entranced by the possibilities of light--in the early thirties he even thought about projecting light onto clouds[21] -- he did not involve himself with the religious and literary aspects of light at all. Moholy was captivated instead by the relationship art held with science and technology. Light served as a unifying force because of its usefulness in all three areas. Since he saw great gaps in the understanding of light in these three fields, he almost always wrote with an orientation toward the future, when the problems presumably would be solved. Technological, scientific, and artistic advance could be counted on, and the results of such progress were seen as beneficial--placing faith in future technology would otherwise be unjustified. In linking "the new vision" to the new society produced by technology, Moholy succumbed to attitudes now seen as naive;[22] and yet many of his seemingly wide-eyed dreams of the twenties and thirties were realized by later artists, some of whom were totally unaware of Moholy's prophetic suggestions.

2. Dan Flavin

Light art was widely exhibited between 1966 and 1968. A large show at Eindhoven, the Netherlands, "KunstLichtKunst," attracted both American and European light artists in 1966. In the same year

Gyorgy Kepes organized "Light as a Creative Medium" at Harvard; Howard Wise Gallery in New York City also showed light artists. In 1967 Willoughby Sharp announced the birth of "Luminism" in a Minneapolis show called "Light/Motion/Space" featuring kinetic and illuminating works, and Lucy Lippard, Richard Bellamy, and Leah P. Sloshberg organized a more historically oriented show at Trenton, New Jersey titled "Focus on Light." Robert Doty's "Light: Object and Image" opened in 1968 at the Whitney Museum in New York. None of these shows was organized by already existing groups of artists (Group Zero or GRAV, for example), but rather they were the combined efforts of critics and museum directors to synthesize a very popular momement. As Moholy had predicted, light engineers stepped in with ingenious devices, but attitudes toward new technology had changed: Doty found that

> ...passion for technology contains a trap. Too often the artist who becomes involved with the complexities of mechanical and electronic devices emerges as an inventor or gadgeteer, and his goal, the creation of an esthetically significant work, is lost.[23]

Participants in these shows included groups-- GRAV, USCO, and Zero-- and individuals-- Stephen Antonakos, Billy Apple, Chryssa, Dan Flavin, Lucio Fontana, Gyorgy Kepes, Frank Malina, and Otto Piene. Frank Popper, in the catalog for the "KunstLichtKunst" show, noted that most of the light artists are oriented toward experimentation and research, and spectator involvement.[24]

Dan Flavin has consistently stood apart from other light artists. Peter Plagens claims that "Flavin is not a holdover of 60s cool technology, dispassionately expanding the mechanical boundaries of art in the greater art world game."[25] But Flavin

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Dan Flavin has consistently stood apart from other light artists. Robert Pincus-Witten states that "Flavin is not a believer of 60s cool technology, dispassionately extending the mechanics boundaries of art in the greatest art world game."[25] Apparently maintains a similarity to the others in his interest in experimentation-- he calls his works "proposals," and he refers to the products of his activity as a "flourescent light system," thereby demonstrating an interest in the language, at least, of technology. In two Artforum articles, both subtitled "excerpts from a spleenish journal,"[26] he declared his independence from the other experimenters: "Like the lilies of the field, but not my kinetic colleagues, I neither toil nor spin."[27] These articles also included virulent, sometimes crude attacks on critics and historians, suggesting to Jack Burnham that Flavin was suffering from a "profound insecurity;"[28] the works themselves do not express "profound insecurity," however, and the artist's emotional digressions need not be discussed except as manifested by the works themselves. Unfortunately he has loaded his works with parenthetical dedications indicating a variety of overtones-- political, "(To a man, George McGovern);" historical, "(To Piet Mondrian, who lacked green);" and cliquish, "(To Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein on not seeing anyone in the room)." These addenda seem inappropriate when compared to Flavin's commitment to eliminating embellishment from his work and expunging literary and historical reference from critical writings. Nevertheless, the works themselves involve light in what might be the most direct manner possible and consequently suggest a similarly unique viewer response.

The viewer first of all may want to decide what general description might best be applied to that which he perceives. Flavin publicly warned one museum director not to refer to his "effort" as sculpture or environment.[29] Most of Flavin's

installations contain hardware-store flourescent lamp fixtures which deliberately "lack the look of a history;"[30] Interchangeability of parts, in fact, appears to be a part of Flavin's idea of system, any partof which he can "reiterate." The objects-- the tubes and the fixtures-- are significant in themselves, but Flavin has stressed repeatedly that "Electric light is just another instrument."[31]

The educated viewer, then, has learned what he is (or is not) looking at; perhaps the next step would be to reflect upon which precursors were not influential. Flavin claimed he "...knew nothing of the Moholy-Nagy sculpture [the Light Modulator] or, for that matter, all of the output of the European solo systems and groupings like Zero."[32] He also denied Pop as a major catalyst.[33] Wilfred's "Lumia," Flavin noted, was significant largely because its location was a rondezvous for boys and girls and boys and boys.[34] Flavin tried to shock the critics out of conventional analytical modes, but habit dies hard: Burnham said tha Flavin probably avoids a direct link with the Constructivists, "...although it certainly is there;"[35] and Plagens "suspects" that Flavin "...regards himself as anything but a post-Albers superformalist."[36] This negativist approach, Flavin might argue, is no improvement over earlier attempts at analysis: criticism should avoid historical linkage and concentrate on response to the piece in front of the viewer.

A fairly early work, exhibited first in New York in 1964 and in Ottawa in 1969, was titled "the nominal three (To William of Ockham)."[37] The Ottawa catalog tells us that William of Ockham,

a fourteenth century Franciscan philosopher, believed reality was invested exclusively in things; the existence of God depended on faith. Catholic mysticism appears in other Flavin pieces and relates to his own upbringing and seminary training. But to return to the work: the Ottawa installation of "the nominal three" consisted of six eight-foot cool-white flourescent units mounted vertically on a 24 foot partition-- a single fixture mounted on the left (free-standing) edge, two fixtures mounted together in the center, and three mounted flush with the right edge where the partition touched the wall. The wide space between the three groups requires the viewer to step back to a distance from which the separation between the tubes and the fixtures becomes less distinct. The work reads insistently from left to right, one-two-three: a faint rhythm accelerates rightward because the space between the second and third groups is smaller than the space between the first and second. The light from the three tubes on the right edge bleeds onto the wall perpendicular to the partition, so that the extreme right edge is indistinct. The suggestion of expansion meshes with the mystical overtones suggested by the title-- the whole of the trinity is greater than the sum of its parts. The work is direct and simple, elegantly Euclidian; but the weighty mystical overtones, reduced to mathematics, prevent the viewer from concentrating on the phenomenon of the work.

Phenomenon as a concept appears consistently in criticism of Flavin's works. The hardware uniformity, lack of pictorial illusion, and the elimination of the craft issue force the viewer

to deal with the light-producing objects and the viewer's response to them. Mel Bochner, in the Ottawa catalog, invoked Roland Barthe's description of a Robbe-Grillet attitude: "...the object has no being beyond phenomenon; it is not ambiguous, not allegorical, not even opaque, for opacity somehow implies a corresponding transparency, a dualism in nature."[38] Don Judd, also in the Ottawa catalog (in language described by Burnham as appropriate "flat-footed literality"), wrote,

> I think Flavin wants at least first or primarily, a particular phenomenon...The uniformity of the phenomenon and also the length of the fixtures may be the co-existing situation for the considerable freedom in the disposition of the lights. The pieces vary a lot.[39]

Jack Burnham, in Beyond Modern Sculpture, claims that "Flavin takes very much a phenomenalist position in regard to seeing one of his environments; there is no ideal viewpoint, but many, some distant, [some close], from which to see each work and several at the same time."[40]

Kenneth Baker describes another aspect of the phenomenalist position:

> In almost all of Flavin's works the spectator sees himself (and others) by the light the work provides. The force of this recognition is not that the work confers upon the spectator the sense of his presence to it and to himself. Rather, one is made to see oneself and to realize that one does not look out upon the visible but always sees it from within it.[41]

The source of this notion of the visible is Merleau-Ponty's The Visible and the Invisible, also drawn upon by Peter Plagens. Plagens reiterated the viewer's dilemma, claiming that the works "...seem to look back at you." Plagens found that "The insistent rays of an irradiant work of art deprive the spectator of even his

sure ground as the seer by rendering him, too, as a possible object."[42] The insistence inherent in the flourescent works forces the viewer to pay attention; the intimidated spectator must react to the clueless piece and can find little else to discuss beside his own reaction. The phenomenalist viewpoint is therefore thrust upon the viewer.

"Untitled 1973" (figure 3-1) was shown in New York at the Castelli Uptown Gallery in March 1974. No subtitles or dedications were given to alter the viewer's frame of mind upon entering the main room and seeing on both the left and right walls an L-shaped configuration of circular cool-white flourescent fixtures. The rings, placed tangentially in a row slightly above the floor, extended into the two far corners and then rose in neat vertical columns nearly to the ceiling. Each fixture interrupts the circularity of the flourescent tube, resulting in a C-shaped arc of light. All rings were placed in the same position of rotation so that the non-illuminating hiatus in each ring is at the three o'clock position. The column of rings in each corner rises directly above the final ring in the horizontal row and the rotation remains constant. The wall inside the L-shaped configuration is unlit, except by the rings, and undifferentiated. The dark, shiny floor reflects the ring shapes somewhat; above the rings a gently undulating wave of bright reflected light appears on the wall.

The circular shapes are first of all decorative. Associations ranging from eyelet lace to Greek frieze details come to mind. In addition, the shape of the fixture inside each ring is decoratively concentric. In earlier pieces, for example "Documenta 4,"

a 1968 installation in Kassel, Germany, [43] Flavin also ran flourescent fixtures along baseboards and up room corners, but these earlier "efforts" created illusions of convexity, making the wall float, and so on. The Castelli installation appears neither optical nor mystical; instead Flavin achieved an objective written eight years earlier:

> I believe that art is shedding its vaunted mystery for a common sense of keenly realized decoration. Symbolism is dwindling-- becoming slight. We are pressing downward toward no art-- a mutual sense of psychologically indifferent decoration-- a neutral pleasure of seeing known to everyone.[44]

Don Judd earlier had praised "the uniformity of the phenomenon;" here the uniformity of the fixtures and the precision and simplicity of the installation all help produce a "...sense of psychologically indifferent decoration." The indifference, because of the illumination by a series of utilitarian lamps, remains monotonously insistent.

Scrutiny of the Castelli installation resembles idle examination of, for example, a decorative architectural motif-- except for the insistence of the light. The tendency, in such an examination, is to muse, to associate freely. In the phenomenological mode, one's response based on perception has its own validity, independent of anyone else's response. Flavin with his "psychological indifference," does not direct the tone of the response; he would allow one to perceive an implication of movement along the floor then up the corner, but he might counter that the exact three o'clock position of each fixture refutes any sense of motion. Nevertheless, one could imagine a mechanical, segmented device, a caterpillar with wheels, rolling up the wall. The absurd association fades a 1968 installation in Kassel, Germany.[13] Flavin also ran fluorescent fixtures along baseboards and up room corners, but these earlier "effects" created illusions of convexity, making the wall float, and so on. The Castelli installation suggests neither optical nor mystical [illegible] instead Flavin achieved an objective vision eight years earlier:

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Scrutiny of the Castelli installation resembles this examination of, for example, a decorative architectural motif-- except for the presence of the light. The tendency, in such an examination, is to move, to associate freely. In the phenomenological schema one's response based on perception has its own validity, independent of anyone else's responses. Flavin with his "psychological indifference," does not direct the tone of the response. He would allow one to perceive an implication of movement along the floor from up the corners, but he might counter that the exact three o'clock positionof each fixture refutes any sense of motion. Nevertheless, one could imagine a geometrical, mechanical device, a caterpillar with wheels, rolling up the walls. The absurd association takes quickly, because the arrangement of the light fixtures is as precise and mechanical as the fixtures themselves and as uniform as the light they emit; there are no substantiating clues. The monotony finally becomes overpowering-- one might be tempted to kick out the foot-level lights. In the end, the impersonal, fragile tubes survive, the light remaining insistent.

3. Light: Plastic Medium or Artist's Instrument?

Moholy and Flavin would no doubt have been an incongruent pair. Flavin refused to acknowledge Moholy as an ancestor, and Moholy would have taken exception to Flavin's enfant terrible stance. Nevertheless, they have both considered light and perception in ways which continue to influence more traditionally photographic activities. They both have thought of their involvement with light in Constructivistic terms. Moholy openly acknowledged the connection, welcoming the elimination of esthetics based on the traditions of historical art. Moholy's view of light as "time-spatial energy"[45] corresponds directly to the Realist Manifesto of 1920[46] at which time Moholy was declaring that "...the new world of the proletariat needs Constructivism..."[47] The political aspects of Moholy's Constructivist connections faded, but he remained committed to the suggestive possibilities in the materials he used-- plastics, photo-sensitive surfaces, and lights.

Flavin's debt to the Constructivists, based largely on the attention to materials, is shared by other current workers:

Plagens claims that Constructivist tradition "...penetrates most New York sculpture like Liquid Wrench."[48] In addition to the hardware aspects of Flavin's pieces, Flavin erected four flourescent "monuments" to Tatlin over a four-year period. The designs for these monuments relate directly and formally to Tatlin's legendary "Monument for the Third International," which, incidentally, strongly influenced Moholy's sculptural activity.[49] But Flavin has not committed himself to esthetic or political attitudes of Constructivism, although he designed a poster for McGovern's 1972 Presidential campaign. Moholy and the Constructivists promoted supra-individualism and "objective visual values" which were distinctly non-phenomenological: "We must assume," wrote Moholy in the twenties, "that there are conditions of color relationships and tensions, light values, forms...which are common to all men and determined by our physiological mechanisms."[50] Flavin may be interested in "a neutral pleasure of seeing known to everyone," but because electric light is "just another instrument," he has "...no desire to contrive fantasies mediumistically-sociologically over it or beyond it."[51] Moholy on the one hand dreamed of art in x-rays and on clouds; Flavin on the other is "pressing downward toward no art..." The major distinction between them is that Moholy thought of light as a "medium of plastic expression"-- light was a substance to be modulated; Flavin, on the other hand, is concerned with light as a tool rather than a medium, and consequently he forces attention to the viewer's response.

Flavin's flourescents and Moholy's photograms are similarly

non-representational; both artists have utilized standardized materials; and they have sought equally to eliminate the significance of manual involvement or craft. The resulting literality provokes greater attention to the viewer's own perception and response-- a direct conflict with the intentions of most photographic workers in the Weston-White tradition. This conflict was dramatized when Moholy met Weston, as related by Beaumont Newhall, who was present:

> Once in Carmel, Weston was showing Moholy some of his prints ...Moholy kept finding in the photographs hidden and fantastic forms, which were often revealed only when-- to Weston's obvious, but politely hidden annoyance-- he turned the prints upside down. These after-products of Weston's vision fascinated Moholy. He considered photographs not interpretations of nature but objects in themselves fascinating.[52]

The resolution of the conflict between photograph-as-object and photograph-as-window represents a challenge for many photographers working currently. In attempting to remove photography from the strictures of the transparency fallacy, some photographers have emphatically emphasized the object-quality which fascinated Moholy. Others are beginning to explore the conceptual aspects of photographic activity itself. In both cases light tends to be considered a tool, occasionally a tool of extraordinary versatility and independent significance.

ENDNOTES

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2. Ibid., p. 6.

3. Nan R. Piene, "Light Art," Art in America Vol. 55 no. 3, May-June, 1967, pp. 24-27.

4. László Moholy-Nagy, Painting, Photography, Film (Cambridge, 1969) p. 22n. Moholy describes the apparatus and comments that Alexander Laszlo should have been more objective and scientific in his experiments. See first edition of Painting, Photography, Film (1925) for an example of Laszlo's score.

5. Sharp, p. 6.

6. Piene, p. 25.

7. Cf. Sharp, on Malevich; Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality (Cambridge, 1969), p. 192, on Malevich; Richard Koppe, "Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and his Visions," Art International Vol. 13, December 1969, pp. 43-46, on Lissitzky.

8. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, pp. 30-31.

9. László Moholy-Nagy, Abstract of an Artist, published with The New Vision (New York, 1947), p. 80.

10. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, pp. 194-195.

11. Cf. Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography (London, 1968), p. 233.

12. László Moholy-Nagy, "Light-- A Medium of Plastic Expression." Broom, Vol. 4, 1923, pp. 283-284, in Nathan Lyons, Photographers on Photography (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966) p. 72.

13. László Moholy-Nagy, quoted in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, pp. 27-28.

14. László Moholy-Nagy, Vision in Motion (Chicago, 1947), p. 245.

15. Ibid., p. 246-248.

16. Richard Kostelanetz, ed., Moholy-Nagy (New York, 1970), p. 207.

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19. Lásző Moholy-Nagy, "Light A New Medium of Expression," Architectural Forum Vol. 70 no. 5, May 1939, p. 398.

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21. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, p. 72.

22. Cf. Terry Fenton, "Constructivism and Its Confusions," *Artforum* Vol. 7 no. 5, January 1969, pp. 22-27.

23. Robert Doty, Light: *Object and Image* (New York, 1968), no pagination.

24. Frank Popper, "Introduction," in Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, *KunstLichtKunst* (Eindhoven, 1966), no pagination.

25. Peter Plagens, "Rays of Hope, Particles of Doubt," *Artforum* Vol. 11 no. 10, June 1973, p. 35.

26. Dan Flavin, "Some Remarks..." *Artforum* Vol. 5 no. 4, December 1966, pp. 27-29, and Dan Flavin, "Some Other Comments..." *Artforum* Vol. 6 no. 4, December 1967, pp. 20-25.

27. Dan Flavin, "Some Remarks...," p. 27.

28. Jack Burnham, "A Dan Flavin Retrospective in Ottawa," *Artforum* Vol. 8 no. 4, December 1969, p. 55.

29. Flavin, "Some Other Comments...," p. 21.

30. Flavin, "Some Remarks...," p. 27.

31. Dan Flavin, untitled statement in Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, no pagination.

32. Flavin, "Some Other Comments...," p. 21.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

35. Burnham, pp. 53-54.

36. Peter Plagens, "Los Angeles," *Artforum* Vol 10 no. 3, November 1971, p. 84.

37. See installation photograph in National Gallery of Canada, *flourescent light etc. from Dan Flavin* (Ottawa, 1969), p. 96.

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21. [illegible]-Nagy, p. 389.

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25. Peter Plagens, "Rays of Hope, Particles of Doubt," Artforum Vol. 11 no. 10, June 1973, p. 32.

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27. Dan Flavin, "Some Remarks...," p. 27.

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41. Kenneth Baker, "A Note on Dan Flavin," Artforum Vol. 10 no. 5, January 1972, pp. 38-40.

42. Plagens, "Rays of Hope, Particles of Doubt," p. 33.

43. see installation photograph in National Gallery of Canada, p. 255.

44. Flavin, "Some Remarks...," p. 27.

45. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, untitled statement, source unconfirmed, in Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, no pagination.

46. see Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, Realist Manifesto, in Robert Goldwater, Artists on Art (New York, 1958), pp. 454-455.

47. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "Constructivism and the Proletariat," MA, May 1922, in Richard Kostelanetz, p. 185.

48. Plagens, "Rays of Hope, Particles of Doubt," p. 33.

49. Kostelanetz, pp. 10-11.

50. Lászlo Moholy-Nagy, Painting, Photography, Film, p. 13; see also "Position Statement of the Group MA" in Kostelanetz, p. 186.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Some Current Considerations of Light in Photography

1. 1955-75: A Sampling

Almost all contemporary photographers have expressed more than a passing awareness of light in three principal ways: the perception and notation of light phenomena, the interaction of light with photosensitive materials, and the meaning or significance of light and darkness. Dark, melancholy photographs by W. Eugene Smith, Charles Harbutt, Dave Heath, and others abounded in the fifties and sixties. Smith's dark photographs of the late fifties very often contained small, dramatically highlighted areas suggesting, perhaps, the exaggeration of an Eckhart-like spark of hope in an otherwise pessimistic outlook; Charles Harbutt photographed a blind child feeling the warmth implanted on a wall by a narrow shaft of light. Dave Heath's somber _Dialogue with Solitude_[1] might be seen as melancholia verging on desperation.

In contrast to these emotionally laden works, several of Duane Michals' early photographs, published in _Contemporary Photographer_,[2] show cooler, more detached observation of light phenomena. In three portraits the subject, in each case a pensive, sympathetic individual, appears in the foreground but is dominated by the activity of light: in one photograph, behind a sleeveless-dressed woman with a sickle of light under one breast, light forms a flickering shape suggesting a fire or a pile of light

stacked against the wall like Pennzoil cans in a gas station; in another, the cool darkness of a gymnasium in the background balances the light blazing away at a T-shirted black athlete with a towel around his neck; in the third, a neat, narrow-tie executive sits in an informationless environment, armed in shining array up to the chin and up half his face, possibly from a reflection off a glass desk top. None of these three photographs is simply a portrait because the presence of light dominates the subject in each case. Michals, obviously aware of light phenomena, perhaps had not fully decided how to use his newly discovered powers of observation. His later serial works may indicate that metaphorical suggestiveness was more important to him than notation of light phenomena.

Another photographer expressing a strong interest in light is Oliver Gagliani, whose photographs are in the meditative tradition of Minor White. The dark images of peeling paint, old doors, and inscrutable wall detail appear to glow in the lighter areas with an almost phosphorescent luminosity. "Light serves to reveal the inner life or spirit of the object," Gagliani said.[3] The light should not dominate, he feels; "The quality of light should be in harmony with the thing you're shooting." In most of his pictures there is little indication of actual light activity; instead, by careful control of exposure and development, he has created a sense of luminosity where only flat, indirect light had in fact existed. The few sunlit images evoke a feeling not of harshness or heat, but rather of un-exaggerated illumination and shadow. Gagliani does not turn to philosophy or literature placed against the wall like Pennzoil cans in a gas station; in another, the cool darkness of a gymnasium in the background balances the light bleeding away at a T-shirted black athlete with a towel around his neck; in the third, a neat, button-tie executive sits in an informal college environment, sunlight shining only up to the belt and up half his face, possibly from a reflection off a glass desk top. None of these three photographs is simply a portrait because the presence of light dominates the subject in each case. Michals, obviously aware of light phenomena, perhaps had not fully decided how to use his newly discovered powers of observation. His later serial works may indicate that metaphorical suggestiveness was more important to him than notation of light phenomena.

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Alchemy has been an admitted source of speculation for other photographers,[4] partially indicating, perhaps, the influence of the recently fashionable interest in other arcane disciplines. Harold Jones expressed a passing fancy in such matters, speculating in an interview[5] that light can be

> ...a metaphor for magic; alchemy-- if a fifteenth century alchemist could spend the time in a darkroom making one print, through some time warp, he would go crazy! It would be like a religious experience for him.

The fundamental involvement of light in the chemistry of photography, for Jones, is no prosaic premise:

> ...it's a highly magical business...you have possession of this thing the subject, i.e. in the form of a latent image without taking it away...and that's pretty spooky and terrific and I like that part of it. That light is what photography's all about, I think, for me.

This sense of involvement includes observation of light phenomena: "When the sun's going down and the light bounces from windows to to complement his photographic activities but learned to paint, and he talked about photography in mystical analogies; he suggests, for instance, that "light is like climate," and as far as emulsion is concerned, he declares, "I mostly listen to the photograph. Photography has nothing to do with seeing at all." In his opinion the trouble with most younger photographers is that they work visually, and the result is that "...the image stops when it gets to the back of the eye." The paradoxical suggestion that photography is aural rather than visual is absurd, except to a follower in the mystical tradition. Although Gagliani probably would deny a direct link to alchemical teaching, he certainly has gone beyond Paracelsus' advice to "...strive for the spirit of the thing."

Alchemy has been an admitted source of speculation for other photographers,[4] particularly fascinating, perhaps, the influence of the recently fashionable interest in other arcane disciplines. Harold Jones expressed a passing fancy in such matters, speculating in an interview[5] that light can be

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The fundamental involvement of light in the chemistry of photography, for Jones, is so [illegible] precise:

> ...it's a highly magical business...you have something of this thing, the subject, i.e., in the form of a latent image without taking it away...and that's pretty spooky and terrific and I like that part of it. That light is what photography's all about, I think, for me.

This sense of involvement includes observation of light phenomena when the sun's going down and the light bounces from window to other surfaces , it's really a killer." Light on some occasions "...seemed like a drawing, like a hieroglyphic thing." He delighted in the way sunlight would "...touch it [a surface] and move across it, caress it-- that's as close as I can come without getting gaudy about it." Some of Jones's pictures made since the Autumn of 1973 reinforce this manner of observing light activity in terms of its delicacy and movement: the subtle reflections at sunset barely feather the otherwise uninteresting wall and street surfaces which Jones photographs. In spite of his extensive metaphorical descriptions of the activity of light, Jones was less interested in the kind of metaphysical analysis of meaning proposed by Minor White. Jones suggested a biological argument: "...light is the ultimate life-giving source we know. There is no other. As basic as you can get. So it becomes a divinity, really, in a sense." Jones concluded that metaphysical response to light "...is both important and at the heart of the way some people work, but I never think about it that much."

Ralph Eugene Meatyard (1925-1973) utilized darkness more than light phenomena to suggest certain kinds of poetic response. He photographed trees, barns, dolls, mirror, and masks in a largely rural Kentucky landscape of insistent vegetation and abandoned buildings. His children and friends posed and moved in front of the camera, acting out what have been called surreal, southern Gothic dramas. But Meatyard's photographs "... transcend the limitations of that genre," wrote A. D. Coleman, "to function as disturbing metaphors for a relentlessly shifting reality."[6] The photographs are partially observations of rural decay, partially

glimpses of fantasies, and partially records of droll but arcane family ritual. The posed nature of many of the pictures evokes the tableaux of George Seeley and Gertrude Kasebier, but, as Van Deren Coke, Meatyard's teacher, noted, he "...had the ability to make a highly implausible situation seem real."[7] The resulting pictures, Coke found, "...are closer to disquieting reveries than nightmares." A number of Meatyard's pictures show children, his poet friend Cranston Richie, and others inside dark, abandoned buildings, very often with light splintering in cracks, through windows, or around doors. In one of these (figure 4-1), two children writhe on the floor or pause, gloved against the cold, while white light attacks a portion of the floor with the intensity of carcinogenic radiation. The light, though strong, was apparently not his main concern. According to Coke, light, for Meatyard, "...was a foil for darkness."[8] The darkness in Meatyard's photographs is neither the shadow of anomie in Harry Callahan's cityscapes of the fifties nor the tormented but romantic gloom of W. Eugene Smith's urban images; instead, the darkness might be understood in a Zen context, involving an awareness, though not a fear, perhaps, of death: Meatyard was highly interested in Zen and its relevance to photography.[9] He died at the height of creative effectiveness, and his influence has not yet diminished. "Meatyard is not only a major photographer," wrote Coleman, "but a backwoods oracle in whom many younger photographers may find...a spiritual father."[10]

Two photographers demonstrating an intense, though different interest in light are Ray K. Metzker and Roger Mertin. In several ways they represent two significant approaches not only to the

consideration of light in photography but also to photography in general. Metzker's approach begins with acutely trained perception and literary rumination and ends with a fluid, personally symbolic, feeling response. Mertin, in comparison, begins with an unverbalized, experimentally photographic reaction, and the results involve concrete sensations with equally strong personal content. My intention in making this lengthy comparative presentation, based on interviews and analysis of their work, is not to imply the exclusivity of these two attitudes or the superiority of either one, but rather to demonstrate the viability of both approaches.

2. Ray K. Metzker

Metzker's greatest formulative influence came from Harry Callahan. Metzker noted that

> ...the first real awareness of light comes through him.... Creativeness...is a kind of torch that burns. Somewhere along the line you'd have to say that somebody hands you the torch, and I think Harry was that guy.[11]

From Callahan Metzker learned not only a sensitive approach to light but also the breakdown and reassembly of photographic imagery. He is best known, in fact, for his large graphic multiple-image constructions, which show Callahan's strong influence. Minor White, in reviewing The Persistence of Vision,[12] to which Metzker was one of six contributors, wondered if Metzker's multiples "...stem from the over-population explosion, or a Constructivist star in his horoscope."[13] Fifteen years later these observations may have lost their negative connotations. Nevertheless, I will confine my discussion to more recent, single

images made during the two years Metzker taught at the University of New Mexico, because they represent the culmination of his thinking to date about photography and light.

In almost all of his work, Metzker has photographed unnoticed detail in previously unnoticed juxtaposition. In Chicago, Philadelphia, and Atlantic City, the three areas where the majority of his photographs has been made, the urban fascination has had to do with flux. He said in an interview that he could stand and watch people and moving things flowing in complex, ever-changing, unpredictable patterns; the pattern may be there but one does not know how it will reveal itself until it does, "...like waves approaching a shore." The idea of flow is curtailed in the Albuquerque series, made between 1970 and 1972. Unlike earlier photographs, the Albuquerque series rarely contains people or moving objects; in almost all of them a wall appears as the dominant object confronting the camera, and clouds appear in many of them. Subject matter has almost always appeared in Metzker's photographs in the context of juxtaposition; starkly lit faces appear out of the blackness of the Chicago Loop; the half-frame series involved spatial distortions in a double-image presentation; in the Albuquerque series, clouds and shadows oppose walls and other objects. The unnoticed nature of the subject matter indicates the significance of perception; Metzker called his style of looking and seeing "scanning and whooping;" by scanning he meant the process of apprehending in which all perceived detail is consciously noted. He attempts to prevent value judgments from interfering with the consideration of anything. By "whooping" images made during the two years Heinecken taught at the University of New Mexico, because they represent the culmination of his thinking to date about photography and flux.

In almost all of his work, Metzker has been concerned with [illegible] the [illegible] subjects, and although [illegible], the urban scene where the majority of his photographs has been made, his urban fascination has less to do with flux. He said in an interview that he could stand and watch people and moving things literally by complex, ever-changing unpredictable patterns; the pattern may be there but one does not know how it will repeat itself until it does, "...like waves approaching a shore." The idea of flux is expressed in the [illegible] series, made between 1970 and 1972. Unlike earlier photographs, the [illegible] series rarely contains people or moving objects; in almost all of them a wall appears as the dominant object confronting the camera, and clouds appear in many of them. Subject matter has almost always appeared in Metzker's photographs in the context of juxtaposition; [illegible] out of the blackness of the [illegible]; the [illegible] series involved spatial distortions in a [illegible] presentation; in the [illegible], [illegible] and [illegible] opposite walls and other objects. The unchanging nature of the subject matter indicates the significance of perception. Metzker defined his style of looking and seeing "scanning and absorbing," by which he meant the process of apprehending in which all perceived detail is consciously noted. He attempts to receive [illegible] from interacting with the experience of any site.

he referred to the visceral response, triggered by something he scanned, which in turn prompts him to take a picture. Although he tends to photograph with a loose set of ideas in mind, he relies on intuitive visceral reaction to make the exposure.

In a 1972 untitled photograph[14] (figure 4-2) Metzker found urban detritus-- a burnt-out concrete block building and a ruined spiky-leafed plant-- below a magnificent, surging cloud formation. The photograph is simple enough: the greyish, flat-roofed building centers on a blighted door. From the top of the doorway smoke must have billowed up, blackening the lintel and the concrete block wall above it, for the pattern of soot widens toward the top of the wall. To the right of the door stands the spiky plant, also dark, with a piece of paper on one of the leaves like a price tag. Under the doorway, obscuring the steps, is a trash heap, possibly removed from inside the building. The enigmatic plant, blackened lintel, and garbage pile are curious, perhaps, but not especially remarkable. Above the building, however, rise billowing clouds, still lit by the sun which has set on the building and objects below. The picture contains little noteworthy photographic input-- the viewpoint is essentially frontal, the composition is uncomplicated and unremarkable, and no camera or manipulation is evident even on close examination.

The significant formal element is the remarkable luminosity and tonal richness of the middle zones resulting from-- rather than persisting in spite of-- the strong contrast and graininess of the print. Metzker said that the coarse grain structure "...tends to produce a luminosity within a given area on the

print, particularly in the greys. [...] The luminosity then, is the result of that grain structure." The formal qualities of this phenomenon are important to Metzker: "...in some cases in the middle greys I myself am excited and I want to get close enough where I can really see that grain; sometimes I have to print it contrastier where the grain will stand out even more." We are presented, then, with a tonally rich print of an enigmatic assortment of leftovers, a modern, urban midden; the buoyant clouds encourage the viewer to consider the enigma.

Metzker had been thinking about concrete block buildings and the sky; when he saw the combination of the "scarred and scorched" building and the "exotic" plant, he told himself, "You've got to go back and look at it." The print prompted other speculation, however. He saw in the print what he called "...two kinds of light...There's that flat, almost dirty kind of light against the building, and then you have this splendorous,...great Spanish light." The light differences are not the only indicators of duality: Metzker referred to the building and its accessories as "...so flat and perhaps smudged and withering..." But on the other hand,

> ...not only the light of the sky, but even the direction of the clouds...bespeak exuberance, and outpouring, and brilliance, or gilding: the one set of terms is in opposition-- stark opposition-- to the other."

For Metzker, the result is a visceral response: "I've always felt that when you can get those kinds of oppositions going simultaneously within a piece...that's terror." The duality began with the plant and the building, but Metzker saw the final opposi-

tion in terms of light.

In another 1972 "Untitled" photograph[15] (figure 4-3), blackness operates actively, and the soft dusk light remains a passive illuminator. A neatly clipped, jet-black bush on the left merges with equally black low foliage across the lower half of the picture. In front of the low shrubs, a curb curves rightward from the bottom edge of the picture, disappearing into the dark foliage. Behind the bushes is a windowless, stuccoed wall emblazoned with disintegrating advertising, indicating that the building is-- or was-- a motel. Rising directly behind the motel wall appear small segments of two trees; their trunks and large branches form Roman numeral-like shapes. Backed by the white sky and the jet-black tree trunk shapes, the texture and middle gray of the motel wall become exceedingly rich. The bush on the left and the low shrubs meet in a curving V-shape, pointing toward the lower left corner. The curb rising through the darkness points in the opposite direction. The tonal juxtapositions, simple composition, and rich wall detail complete the deceptively simple image.

The wall appears to float on the undifferentiated blackness; the blackness, on the other hand, seems to move on its own. "That black is not fixed, in a sense," Metzker said. "[It's] furry, [it has] a soft edge, it creeps...it's not contained by a sharp line and so there's a quiet movement, that's the best I can say." The dusk light allows the wall to remain luminous while reducing the shrubbery to darkness; "...the wall is a very quiet, quiet surface and the black can be rolling out onto it like a fog moving across a piece of pastureland or something like that."

In response to an observation of the merging of the shrubbery with the foreground, Metzker said, "In a way it's a bush, and in a way it's something like black velvet or black fur-- the whole thing." That these metaphors do not fully mesh did not bother Metzker; he found the overall quality "ominous," but he refused to otherwise describe or limit the associative possibilities.

Clouds appear in other photographs from the Albuquerque series, including one[16] (figure 4-4) where the image is dominated by a stuccoed wall in deep shadow, photographed in the middle of the day. The clouds show in a narrow strip of darkened sky between the top of the picture and the top of the high wall. The edge of the wall is brilliantly lit as are the tops of two lower walls which abut the main wall at an angle. Below these is a sidewalk portion, bleached nearly white. Curb detail is lost in darkness, but two garbage cans appear in the shadow next to the large wall, illuminated by the brilliant sidewalk. The photograph provokes an impression of the solvent strength of light, penetrating all surfaces facing the source of radiation, blinding the viewer until the sidewalk begins to float. In response to this reading, Metzker said, "At an earlier time in my experience, I would have been satisfied...[with this description] as being the prime activity. But all of that was, I would say, subordinated or hinged to the cloud." Above the high, seamless wall float clouds which carry-- for me-- a sense of impersonal ubiquity, lacking the Spanish baroque turbulence seen earlier. For Metzker the clouds were no backdrop:

> By that time in Albuquerque, I'd really discovered those white, white clouds and the hovering quality of them, and

> in a sense I was searching out for...heavier tones by which the clouds could stand. There was a whole thing which was built around the setting or what was appropriate or what could serve those clouds...The cloud is the prime subject [or, more precisely], the prime motivator.

The wall appears dark, new, impregnable, and the clouds offer, perhaps, a hovering suggestion of relief, escape. In the other photographs discussed, the walls acted as foils for either darkness or glowing clouds. In another picture in the series, the wall "...has a magical whitish glow to it." In still another, a zig-zag wall appears in full sunlight, revealing every banal concrete block, again as a backdrop for other visual activity.

In discussing his response to light in broader terms, Metzker indicated that he reacts primarily on the basis of perception but that he carries with him a sense of the meanings and suggestions of light.

> The basic premise that I would have to admit to-- perhaps that's not where I started, but where I really begin to feel the excitement and the power of photography-- is the recognition that light is so fundamental to the whole existential experience; that is, you cannot communicate, you cannot have growth, without light...It's just so fundamental.

Light, he said, "...is a kind of catalyst. When it's there, you begin to think." The perception of light activity immediately provokes a response he first described as "sensuous" or "visceral" but then amended to "magical." He explained: "Magical, because when you see that light-- when light touches something, that thing is enhanced or transformed, or there's something-- well-- awesome or magical." His fascination with light was difficult to hide: he referred to the captivation of "...light at play..." and consistently attached a metaphor to the particular action of light on a scene as he saw it-- "dancing," "caressing," "gilding,"

"scorching." Philadelphia light he described as "linear," New Mexico light, by comparison, was "penetrating." For Metzker metaphors of this type remain limited in usefulness, indicating only how a photographic phenomenon "...has come alive in the system of...[an] individual," and he avoided specific metaphorical transferrals to particular photographs.

Black and darkness have remained an important metaphorical impetus independent of associations as a foil for light. While working in Chicago and again after returning from a trip to Europe in 1970, Metzker noticed that "...black was so dominant [in my work] that I wondered if *that* was really the metaphor." Many of the Chicago and Philadelphia photographs in addition to many of the multiples of the sixties are indeed dominated by strong black design or pessimistic presence of darkness. In fact, Metzker went on,

> I often felt just simply the struggle between both the light and the dark; I could put it into those terms: the *struggle*; which raises the question: which one will win? Usually struggles have some kind of end.

The light-dark struggle is not, for Metzker, a decayed metaphor cadaverously leering at its former potence. The struggle remains a vigorous image, and Metzker finds it necessary to find subtle ways of keeping the metaphor vital.

The sense of struggle was reinforced obliquely by several observations Metzker made, all indicating attunement to the fragility of the significant photographic situation. Photographing unmoving objects would not appear to require the decisive intuition ordinarily associated with Cartier-Bresson and others, but the time of day, especially at dawn or dusk, can change light con-

ditions from optimum to useless in minutes, and even the objects themselves may be altered in time. Metzker returned to the burnt building and spiky tree a couple of days after the first encounter, thinking,

> ...maybe there will be a different cloud formation...[and wondering] in what way would that change the meaning or the feeling of the final...[photograph]. And they'd chopped the tree off, and, [he laughed], there was nothing!

Similarly, he interrupted a comment on the photograph of the black bush and motel wall to say that "...one week later they painted the wall." The very impermanence in the configuration of light, time, and objects apparently is a source of fascination for Metzker.

The doubts raised by the ideas of struggle and impermanence are eased in the successful print. Going out to photograph objects in carefully chosen light, with an interesting group of ideas in mind is not apparently enough; "...whether it's all going to come together to create terror, that you don't know, but it's simply because you're working steadily, earnestly, [that] these things happen." He said in relation to a photograph he felt successful,

> I could never have intended it. But when it's there, you know, if you've thought about these things, whew! The recognition is immediate, when it all comes together in a print.

Metzker's goal appears to be creating a special sort of terror; he also mentioned the idea of looking into an "abyss." This idea, of fundamental philsophical inquiry relating directly to intense emotional reaction, can be compared directly to Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime and the beautiful. The sublime, as Burke discussed it in 1757, has as one of its sources a feeling of terror, which, wrote Burke, "...is productive of the strongest

emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[17] The sublime, for Burke, was an indescribable emotional response connoting transcendence, and "...terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[18] Metzker is not, in my opinion, deliberately seeking a link to Burke's or any other philsophical system. By using the word "terror," he is implying, rather, that a photograph can suggest fundamental inquiry in a nonverbal, uncategorized fashion. It is interesting to note, perhaps, that for Burke darkness was the more powerful metaphor for the sublime, but Metzker's terror has been associated with light. In any case, Metzker's philosophical or literary responses to his photographs are tempered by the understanding that an intense emotional reaction can cause the photographer to demand (for himself) an explanation; finding all explanations lacking, he must return again to the image. Terror, then, is a measure of success.

3. Roger Mertin

In the past few years Roger Mertin has photographed trees, friends, cameras, hands, cords, polyethylene, car mirrors, flash guns, weeds, and beds. He has invariably used a 35mm camera and fine-grain film; almost all of his pictures have a horizontal, full-frame format and have been consistently printed with emphasis at both ends of the tonal scale. These attributes could be applied to much of the photography currently produced around the country by those expressing a casual, anecdotal world view without ideoemotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[17] The sublime, for Burke, was an incontestable emotional response connoting transcendence, and "...terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[18] Baltz, as well, is by no means, deliberately making a link to Burke over any other philosophical system. By using the word "Terror," he is implying, rather, that a photograph can beget fundamental inquiry in a metaphysical, unarticulated fashion. It is interesting to note, perhaps, that for Burke darkness was the more powerful metaphor for the sublime, and Robert's terror has been associated with light. In any case, Baltz's philosophical or literary touchstone to his photographs are inspired by the understanding that an intense emotional reaction can cause the photographer to demand (for himself) an explanation; finding all explanations lacking, he must return again to the image. Terror, then, is a measure of success.

3. Roger Mertin

In the past ten years Roger Mertin has photographed trees, friends, cameras, books, cars, wirephotos, car mirrors, farm guns, weeds, and beds. He has invariably used a 35mm camera and fine-grain film; almost all of his pictures have a horizontal full-frame format and have been consistently printed with accents at both ends of the tonal scale. These attributes could be applied to much of the photography currently produced around the country by those espousing a modest, essential world view without illusion.

logical orientation: non-judgmental observation. These photographic attitudes combined with social subject matter, public and private, yield a strong sense of conscious contemporaneity in the illustration of costumes, activities, and environments. Mertin, too, is synchronous with the times, but not because he has absorbed the national 35mm photographic effervescence. His work, his speech, and his manner lack calculation-- his primary mode is response rather than reflection. Through almost total reliance on a nonverbal, intuitive approach, Mertin has managed to synthesize many currently significant issues in photography of the seventies.

Recently, Mertin has combined two photographic effects in situations for which they are ordinarily considered inappropriate; the combination of the two effects compounds the violation of tradition. He uses an electronic flash in a wide variety of light conditions including broad daylight, in combination with slow shutter speeds, without using a tripod. The flash and camera movement create an odd combination of frozen detail, finely delineated by the flash, and liquid blur, in which melting objects are seen in various stages of losing their forms and recognizeability (figure 4-5). The exaggeration of the flash further increases the distance of the reality illusion: faces and objects close to the flash unit are occasionally overexposed, and metallic, plastic, and other glossy surfaces generally reflect artificial catchlights or sparkling highlights. Mertin sometimes flashes or solarizes portions of a print, involving still another separation from ordinary photographic illusion; these departures from convention remain photo-

graphic departures, well within the analytical capabilities of the photographically sympathetic audience, and consequently suggest queries into the nature of photographic perception. Small bits of immaculate detail might be thought of as foveal concentration, in comparison to macular information and peripheral blur.[19] Ordinarily the sharply focussed camera image is entirely foveal, a problem recognized, but not successfully solved by P.H. Emerson in the 1880s.[20] Mertin has never claimed to be carrying out experiments in the representation of human perception, but an analogy may still be justified: in some of his photographs the fluidity of blurred forms may suggest retinal input which is ignored in favor of the flash-arrested detail, momentarily and often irrationally fixed upon by consciousness.

The flash-blur combination more concretely implies consideration of time and motion. The duration of the flash may be one ten-thousandth of a second. The shutter controls the other exposure which usually is fairly long. Mertin has cautiously admitted an interest in the sense of motion in several photographs: he mentioned a sense of motion or movement specifically in discussions of a photograph of a "white tubular thing" stuck between four trees and a photograph of Michael Spencer coming down a stairs.[21] Regarding the comparison between flowing and frozen objects, Mertin said, "I'm aware of it; I guess it's one of the aspects that I'm working with." But, like other abstracted concepts, he thought about the issue in terms of specific problems, for example, "...what happens when you photograph when there's a fairly stiff wind as opposed to when there's no wind?" Although

Mertin found it difficult to elaborate verbally on the ramifications of the subject, he did say that in relation to concentrating on the use of flash or other interventions, "I'm more interested in making *pictures*, and right now the combination of light and time is very important."

Mertin refused to describe his interest in light as fundamental, and in fact he resisted the idea of separating the various concepts with which he was working. Nevertheless, he spoke of the photographic problems suggested by the use of flash, the combination of ambient light and flash in particular: "I'm intrigued with that notion just purely in photographic-visual terms, and how [the subject] is affected and contradicted and modified and changed by a flash exposure as well." He thought of the daylight and flash as being "...very integrated...two pronged. The ambient light and flash are equally important. The flash I use at this point to more specifically clarify or define or isolate or emphasize the subject *per se*." He indicated that at some point he might like to reverse the roles of flash and daylight, so that "...the flash [would] become how the daylight has been operating." The emphasis of the discussion of light and flash was on experimentation: "In one sense you could identify it [the flash gun] with a new brush." Later he said that "...sometimes I could see using light as one might use a 2B pencil and at other times it might be a 6H."

Mertin could describe the experimental options and the resulting effects, but he was reluctant to extract specific meaning or metaphoric significance from the results of the experimentation.

In the "Plastic Love Dream" series, mirrors frequently appear. "The mirrors had more-- at the time they were done-- to do with the reality of reflections: a conscious awareness on my part about aspects of reflections I was interested in." Mirrors appeared later in a photograph of Michael Becotte holding an automatic camera[22] and in a photograph of a fur-sleeved woman in a car.[23] In this last-mentioned photograph and others wherein the flash gun was included, "...there was some recognition of the mechanical, computer-like object which I was interested in,...very specifically for that reason." In photographs of his photographer-friends Michael Spencer and Gary Metz getting a haircut, severe over-exposure by flash, directed at the camera in the first case and at the subject in the second, obscures the individuals. This effect Mertin describes as "...veiling; it veils the person; in one sense it makes it a less specific person." Analysis of light as a phenomenon or a photograph as a message carrier is simply not one of Mertin's pressing needs. He explained his non-judgmental stance:

> I suppose I'm sort of lazy, in the sense that after they [the pictures] are printed, the next event that happens to them...is that they may or may not get exhibited somewhere, and at that time I make some decisions about how they go together which I think has a lot to do with... [the] question [of symbolic content]. And I haven't had much opportunity to do that; I obviously could *make* it,...but I haven't.

If light does not carry specific connotations for Mertin, neither does darkness. "It's a contrast, in one sense, obviously, it's the unisolated, or unemphasized part." He went on to note his objection to large areas of undifferentiated blackness in a photograph. Darkness was used in the "Plastic Love Dream" series

In the Atlantic Love Songs series, mirrors frequently appear, "The mirrors and camera at the time they were done... it is with the reality of reflection), a reflection superimposed on as much about aspects of selfishness I was interested in — mirrors [illegible] [illegible] automatic camera" and [illegible] of a [illegible] in a box.[34] In this instance, his own photograph and others wherein the flash gun was included, "...there was some recognition of the mechanical, computer-like object which I was interested in.... very specifically for that reason." In the opposite of his photographs (friends Michael Hooper and Gary [illegible] a balloon), became more obscure the flash, directed at the camera in the first case and at the subject in the second, obscures the individual. This almost Gothic celebration of "...telling as would the stranger if the human it makes it a less specific person." Analysis of light as a phenomenon or a protection as a message carrier is simply not one of [illegible] governing needs, he explained his non-judgmental stance.

> I suppose it's sort of lazy, in the sense that after they [the pictures] are painted, the next event that happens to them,...is that they hang on and not get shifted somewhere, and at that time I make some decisions about how they go together which I think has a lot to do with...[the] question [of] symbolic meaning. And I haven't had much opportunity to do that; I certainly could make it,...but I haven't.

If light does not carry specific connotations for [illegible], neither does darkness. "It's a contrast, in one sense, obviously, it's the technical, or understated sort." He went on to note his objection to large areas of undifferentiated blackness in a photograph. Darkness was used in the Atlantic Love Songs series

> ...to veil the fact that a lot of [the photographs]...were done in the same room or that a lot of them were done with a lot of wierd stuff around that didn't seem to be of interest to me. And now...the ones that I find more interesting are the ones that have a richer informational load in them.

In some pictures, for example the photograph of the fur-sleeved woman in a car, Mertin said, "Sometimes, obviously, I'm just bouncing light." But Mertin emphasized repeatedly that he could not describe the significance of light, "...beyond the fact that we need it. Sometimes," he hedged, "I'm aware of light as a subject or as the subject, and other times less so." Light was in any case not a "pure subject;" in response to a question about the qualities of light, Mertin said,

> ...as you were listing the possible adjectives to light, I was realizing that I haven't really ever thought about them in that fashion, and I guess I'm wondering if that, in one sense, establishes an answer to your earlier question about "Is light a subject?" Meaning that if it were a prime subject, I might begin to think about opaque [sic] light or translucent light...Light as a pure subject is more an intellectual idea than an actual fact.[25]

Mertin conceded that others "...have identified my pictures in terms of light," and he was reluctant to deny the idea out of hand: "I haven't gone around consciously structuring intellectual understanding about them [the pictures]," he said. His attitude toward light and its relationship with his photography might be reflected in his description of others whom-- and with whom-- he has photographed, Michael Becotte and Michael Spencer. In at least two instances, they were "...photographing, simultaneous[ly] with my photographing,...engaged in a similar pursuit. Their consciousness of the light [i.e., flash] is somehow sublimated by their pursuit." The active intervention of light and the concerns for experimentation and observation are central to Mertin's way of

photographing. But he apparently does not feel light to be of clearly central significance; light is sublimated by, and therefore subordinate to, "the pursuit," as yet undefined.

In 1974 Mertin was continuing work on two groups of photographs, one of which, with a "working title" of "Trees," is a growing encyclopedia of trees from Rochester to Martinique, in various stages of life, some mutilated, decorated, or otherwise altered by persons unknown. (figures 4-6 and 4-7). Mertin has not gained for himself a complete understanding of the "Trees" series, and consequently his remarks were contradictory at times, revealing the complexity of his involvement in the project. He said that the photographs of the trees were more objective than the second, "Autobiographical" group; he sees them as "...more of a survey or a document or something." He was fascinated by the "urban aspects" of trees, that is, the evidence of human interaction with trees.

> The pictures...show certain attitudes that seem prevalent--the notion of a box of blasting caps chained to a tree, someone else knotting a rope around a tree, someone else wrapping a piece of plastic around a tree-- while those are very obvious levels on which to respond,...the connection of someone else is there...

The survey of "wounded trees" is not just a compilation of examples--"...they're all specifically portraits of individual trees in certain kinds of landscapes [on] one level, for me." Mertin suggested the possible utility of "...learning to talk the language the trees talk," and he repeated his interest in

> ...the notion that you could make a portrait, somehow, photographically,...of every tree, which implies that each tree is somehow an individual tree and has certain unique qualities of its own, even though it might [also] reside in some larger tree category.

photographer. But he apparently doesn't feel light to be of clearly central significance; light is modulated by, and therefore subordinate to, "the poles," as yet undefined.

In 1974 Martin was continuing work on his groups of photographs, and [illegible] creating photographs of trees that [illegible] to [illegible], in varying degrees of focus, were [illegible], decorated, or otherwise altered by various methods (Figures 4-6 and 4-7). Martin has not gained for himself a complete understanding of the "Trees" series, and consequently his remarks were contradictory at times, revealing the complexity of his involvement in the project. In part they are the photographs of the trees were more objective than the second, "meta-photographic" group. He sees them as "...more of a survey or a document of something." In the text noted by the further [illegible], there is, the evidence of human interaction with trees.

> The pictures...show certain artifices that make peculiarities noticed of a set of [illegible] marks attached to a tree, someone else sketched a rope around a tree, someone else sketched a piece of plastic around a tree-- while there are very obvious levels on which to respond,...the connection of someone else in there....

The survey of recorded trees is not just a compilation of examples... they're all specifically portraits of individual trees in certain kinds of landscapes [of] the land), for one thing, [illegible] suggested the possible utility of "...learning to talk the language the trees talk," and he expanded his interest in

> ...the notion that one could take a portrait, whatever, photographically,...of every tree, which implies that each tree is a presence or contains a life and that one is a witness [illegible] by its self, even though he might [also] not be the [illegible] tree existence.

He also mentioned an interest in specific aspects of trees, particularly having made "a lot" of pictures of roots.

The tree photographs by Eugene Atget, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1973, were admired by Mertin, who said that he shared some of Atget's attitudes, for example, "...the willingness to make more than one picture out of one tree or group of trees, even to the point of printing them." Atget also photographed roots, and although he did not use artificial light in making his tree pictures, halation occasionally created an effect analogous to Mertin's flash-and-blur combination. Mertin did not see the Atgets until December 1973, long after beginning his own tree series.

Mertin called the tree pictures "objective;" he described them as "portraits" and "documents." But because of the introduction of the flash and camera movement, the sense of neutral recording is diminished by the photographic manipulation. The personal involvement, although important to Mertin, does not supersede-- for him-- the documentary or portrait aspects of the "Trees." Mertin's assessment, in my opinion, may be revised after the series is completed.

The other group of photographs, which Mertin called "Autobiographical," includes photographs of friends and others at play, in a spirit of detached, intellectual playfulness. Mertin's photographs of friends with their spouses appeared in a one-man show called "23 Couples" in Rochester in 1972, and in 1973 he photographed a mock burial of a mannequin staged by one of Les Krims's students. Mertin felt that the "Autobiographical" group

was by comparison more subjective than the "Trees," a judgment which again may change. In 1971 Gary Metz got a haircut which was presumably facetiously considered an important event, worthy of recording on film and magnetic tape. The tape recording, Mertin said, was later thrown out by Becotte. "It was really great; the [automatic] camera goes 'ka-choonk, ka-choonk, ka-choonk,' which began to take on the quality of the scissors." Microphone cords and flash cords snaked around the room; Becotte is seen in one photograph holding an automatic camera (figure 4-8); Joan Mertin (then Roger's wife; they are since divorced) holds a microphone; and Metz aims the flashgun at himself in at least one instance. Mertin did not direct Metz to hold the flash: "...he arrived at that movement more than I directed him; it becomes a very direct working relationship with, in that instance, Gary and myself." Some of the photographs in the "Autobiographical" series were "...consciously planned, and others are dependent on interaction between myself and people that I happen to be with." The products of this and similar sessions Mertin referred to as "reciprocating photographs," and he tolerated the notion that some of the photographs were products of a "friendly conspiracy." His interest in the use of the flash gun, as a matter of fact, began in that fashion: "It seemed to be around-- in the notion of the friendly conspiracy. Other people... [to whom] I was exposed were beginning to use flash as well."

The sense of group participation, I feel, is a significant indicator of an unstated motivation for this group of Mertin's photographs. Although Dada, Surrealist, and Pop artists engaged

in group creations, the end products seldom evince a concrete sense of group activity. In "Plastic Love Dream," Mertin said, "I was more consciously directing," but here, the product explicitly manifests the conspiracy. The photographer frames the image and releases the shutter; the others, rather than following directions, act in the spirit of the event. "Photographs," Mertin said, paraphrasing from the introduction to American Indian Portraits[26] "... are gifts, or things we steal, and I guess I pretty well subscribe to that." Where the subjects are also photographing, the roles are exchanged. These photographs, then, deal directly with photography as a means of interaction: photographic paraphenalia appear as subject matter and photographers appear as actors. But more importantly, there is photographic attention paid to the means of image-making-- the blurring by subject or camera, the local over-exposure, the flash-frozen detail, and the flash-thrown shadows are all distinctly photographic phenomena. There is greater attention paid, in some cases, to the means of representation and to the distortion of that representation, than to that which is in fact represented.

Light, for Mertin, serves a photographic purpose. Rather than asserting the significance of light interaction with the material world, which places premium importance on perception, Mertin is demonstrating the significance of light interaction on photographic materials. He produces images which escape accurate previsualization; one can only guess how direct or reflected light will expose film in a hand-held camera during a quarter of a second, and, in addition, the eye cannot even fully apprehend the

effect of a light burst lasting only one ten-thousandth of a second. Mertin's pictures, then, are by necessity based on intuiting the combination of photographic manipulations to produce a satisfactory result. Mertin's photographs therefore deal directly with chance, precisely because the results cannot be predicted. Although no effort is made to justify the equality in significance of every exposure, the decisiveness of the moment does not depend on the photographer's conscious control or visual comprehension of his activity. Operating without direct, conscious control permits the introduction of a casual, fluid attitude which is currently an accurate temporal indicator.

Light becomes a utilitarian phenomenon of primary importance in this framework-- a vital, active, photographic force. But at present, for Mertin, light does not carry the kind of personal, metaphorical significance it has for other photographers. Mertin currently avoids theories, doctrines, and analysis on principle: "... Given the notion of being a visual artist, I suppose, you wonder how ...the reality of a specific verbal presentation, philosophically...might contradict or begin to influence what the pictures are about." The implication, perhaps, is that Mertin prefers to work without verbal restrictions inhibiting his photographs, but that others, if they wish, may draw separate conclusions.

4. Light and Photography

The consideration of light in photography appears to vary according to the individual photographer's predilections. Some effect of a light burst lasting only one ten-thousandth of a second. Mertin's pictures, then, are by necessity based on leaving the combination of photographic manipulations to produce a satisfactory result. Multiple exposures (Mertin's favorite) combined with flashes, practically assure the results cannot be predicted. Although no effort is made to justify the equality in significance of every structure, the decisiveness of the moment does not depend on the photographer's conscious control or visual comprehension of his activity. Operating without direct, conscious control permits the introduction of a casual, field attitude which is currently an accurate temporal indicator.

Light becomes a tactile-like phenomenon of primary importance in this framework — a vital, active, photographic force. But at present, for Mertin, light does not carry the kind of personal, metaphysical significance it has for other photographers. Mertin currently avoids theories, doctrines, and analysis on principle: "... given the notion of being a visual artist, I suppose, you wonder how ... the reality of a specific verbal presentation, philosophically ... might contradict or begin to influence what the pictures are about." The implication, perhaps, is that Mertin prefers to work without verbal restrictions inhibiting his photographs, but that others, if they wish, may draw separate conclusions.

1. Light and Photography

The consideration of light in photography appears to vary according to the individual photographer's predilections. Some photographers have very little interest in light beyond basic practical considerations. Harold Jones compared Garry Winogrand's use of light to "...a lawyer reading a poem as evidence [as opposed to] someone who loves...[poetry] reading the same poem." Light has generally not dominated the thinking of photographers, even those mentioned in this paper, but light has obviously served as an indicator either of serious philsophical consideration or of approach to the process of photographing.

For Mertin light is a tool to be used more in the spirit of Flavin's remark, "Electric light is just another instrument" than in the sensibility of Moholy's statement, "Light [is] a medium of plastic expression." It is not the light itself which interests Mertin, I would surmise, but rather the effect of its interaction. For Flavin and Mertin the phenomena of the effect is significant: in Mertin's case the effect is the combination of flash, ambient light, and camera movement interacting with the film; in Flavin's case the effect is caused by the installation on the viewer. The differences between the two are clear: Mertin's success or failure depends on how light affects the film-- the act of photographing is at stake; Flavin's success or failure depends on how light affects the viewer-- the act of exhibition is at issue. Flavin, of course, is able to achieve a directness unavailable to those presenting photographic prints-- the phenomena of light is by necessity vicarious in a photograph; in this sense Flavin's "effort" is on an entirely separate plane which photography may by definition be unable to reach. Although Flavin's and Mertin's purposes and achievements are by no means similar,

their utilitarian approaches to light appear to share a degree of commonality: it is not the modulation of light which interests them but rather how light modulates other things. Both artists resist or refuse involvement in the meaning of light.

Light has not lost its relevance or connotative strength for all photographers, however. But if Flavin is forcing attention to the perception of light as the primary role of the spectator, it should be noted that he is encapsulating anexperience known to photographers for years and presenting it for independent consideration in a purified form. Jones and Metzker both talked of the magic inherent in the action of light; both delighted in the recognition of light-dominated visual phenomena. The emphasis on the photographer's perception implies the importance of what the photographer carries with him in the way of basic understanding, experience, and so on. "The photograph," Metzker said, is the closest thing to holding or sustaining the experience [of seeing]." Unlike Weston, who was interested in the essence of the object and the form of the presentation, Metzker is interested in the act of seeing; Mertin, by comparison, might be said to be interested in the act of photographing. Seeing, however, tends to imply a heavier reliance on the experience of the photographer; emphasizing the photographic act, conversely, implies a greater reliance on the optical-mechanical-chemical interaction which takes place when the shutter is released. The success of photographic seeing, said Metzker, depends on

> ...the totality of the experience; totality: what you're thinking, what you've thought, what you consider as possibilities, the way you're working...; [when] they come

their utilitarian approaches to light appear to cause a degree of commonality. It is not the modulation of light which interests them but rather how light generates other things. [illegible] of natural [illegible] in the [illegible] of light.

[illegible] of definitive [illegible] for all photographers, however. But if Purvis is forcing attention to the perception of light as the primary role of the spectator, it should be noted that he is an [illegible] photographers for years and presenting it for independent consideration in a purified form. [illegible] and Fletcher both talked of the major interest in the action of light; both culminated in the recognition of light-generated visual phenomena. The emphasis on the photographer's perception implies the importance of what the photographer carries with him in the way of basic understanding, experience, and so on. "The photograph," Fletcher said, is the closest thing to holding or mastering the experience [of nature]. Unlike Renshaw, who was interested in the essence of the object and the form of the presentation, Fletcher is interested in the act of seeing; Purvis, by comparison, might be said to be interested in the act of photographing. Adams, however, tends to imply a heavier reliance on the experience of the photographer; emphasizing the photographic act, conversely, implies a greater reliance on the optical-mathematical-chemical interaction which takes place once the shutter is released. "The success of photographic seeing," said Fletcher, depends on

> ...the totality of the photographer's [illegible]: what you've [illegible], what you've thought, what has [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] ... [what] [illegible]

> together... [there is] such a sense of discovery, and discovery brings with it elation, ecstasy, exuberance.

Attitudes toward light, in Metzker's view, depend partially on intellectual training but more importantly on the experience of perception. Both Jones and Metzker mentioned time as a significant variable-- for Jones on the basis of motion-- light as an "animal;" and for Metzker on the basis of the conjunction of light, object, and moment of perception. But these temporal aspects, rather than being of independent interest, more importantly contributed to explaining the visceral reaction with which both Jones and Metzker responded to light phenomena.

We are presented, then, with an antinomial confrontation: light as a quality to be perceived, thus emphasizing perception and meaning, in comparison to light as an experimental photographic tool, to be used with the effect as arbiter of its use. Both attitudes are equally defensible. Interest in the inquiry into the meaning of light is declining, however, and is not likely to resurface for some time. Light will remain significant for photographers because of its axiomatic relationship with photography and because of the fundamental, though changing, cultural relevance of light.

"Light is the 'old sultana,'" wrote George Limbour in 1953, "whose charms withered away at the beginning of this century."[27] But Limbour was wrong; announcing the death of light at any time is at best premature. Continuing inquiries into perception may require light as an agent, and experiments in the nature of photographic recording and the photographic act may also utilize light as a tool. Because of the fundamental attraction of light and

because light is an indespensible component of visual art, one can expect interest in light-- instead of dying-- to simply reappear serving new conceptual or metaphorical purposes; one can further expect that the champions of this new artistic inquiry will bring along the archives of light art for intellectual-- and spiritual-- support.

ENDNOTES

1. Dave Heath, Dialogue with Solitude (Culpeper, Va., 1965).

2. Duane Michals, "Duane Michals: A Portfolio," Contemporary Photographer Vol. 5 no. 2, Spring 1964-1965, pp. 11-36. Portraits discussed are on p. 22, p. 35, and p. 36.

3. Author's interview with Oliver Gagliani at Asilomar, Cal., March 1975.

4. Cf. Steven D. Foster, "The Symbolic Photograph: A Means to Self-Knowledge; A Jungian Approach to the 'Photographic Opus.'" M.F.A. dissertation (Albuquerque, 1972).

5. Author's interview with Harold Jones, New York City, January 1974.

6. A.D. Coleman, "From Dolls and Masks to Lynchings," New York Times 11 March 1973, Section 2, p. 26.

7. Van Deren Coke, Ralph Eugene Meatyard: Portfolio Three (Lexington, Ky., 1974), no pagination.

8. Author's interview with Van Deren Coke, Albuquerque, N.M., 31 October, 1974.

9. Coke, in his Introduction to Ralph Eugene Meatyard: Portfolio Three, reports Meatyard's strong interest in Zen; Meatyard referred to some of his images as "Zen photographs," and these, wrote Coke, "...are dominated by allusions to death, loss of identity, and the fact that we don many different masks in the course of a day."

10. Coleman, p. 26.

11. Author's interview with Ray. K. Metzker, Philadelphia, Pa., January 1974.

12. Nathan Lyons, The Persistence of Vision (New York, 1967).

13. Minor White, review of The Persistence of Vision, Aperture, Vol. 13 no. 4, pp. 59-60.

14. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum accession number 73.1.

15. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum accession number 73.2.

16. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum accession number 73.4.

17. Edmund Burke, A Philsophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, J.T. Boulton, ed. (London, 1958), p. 39.

18. Ibid., p. 58.

19. The fovea centralis, a small depression in the retina, is the area of most distinct vision as required, for example, by such tasks as needle threading. The macula lutea (in which the fovea is located) is the area of distinct vision as required by reading. See Edward Hall, The Hidden Dimension (Garden City New York, 1969), p. 70.

20. see Peter H. Emerson, Naturalistic Photography (London, 1889; facsimile reprint edition: New York, 1973), p. 97.

21. Author's interview with Roger Mertin, Rochester, N.Y., January 1974.

22. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum accession number 72.30.

23. Untitled (Toronto) 1971. In "Light and Substance" Show, 1973-1974.

24. Reproduced in University Art Museum, Light and Substance (Albuquerque, 1974), p. 8.

25. As possible adjectives characterizing the quality of light in a photograph, I listed "a sense of translucence, a sense of luminosity, a sense of pure light, a sense of opaque whiteness."

26. Charles R. Reynolds, American Indian Portraits (Brattleboro, Vt., 1971).

27. Georges Limbour, Tableau Bon Levain A Vous De Cuire La Pate: L'art Brut De Jean Dubuffet (Paris, 1953), pp. 54-55, quoted in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception (Evanston, Ill., 1964), p. 190.

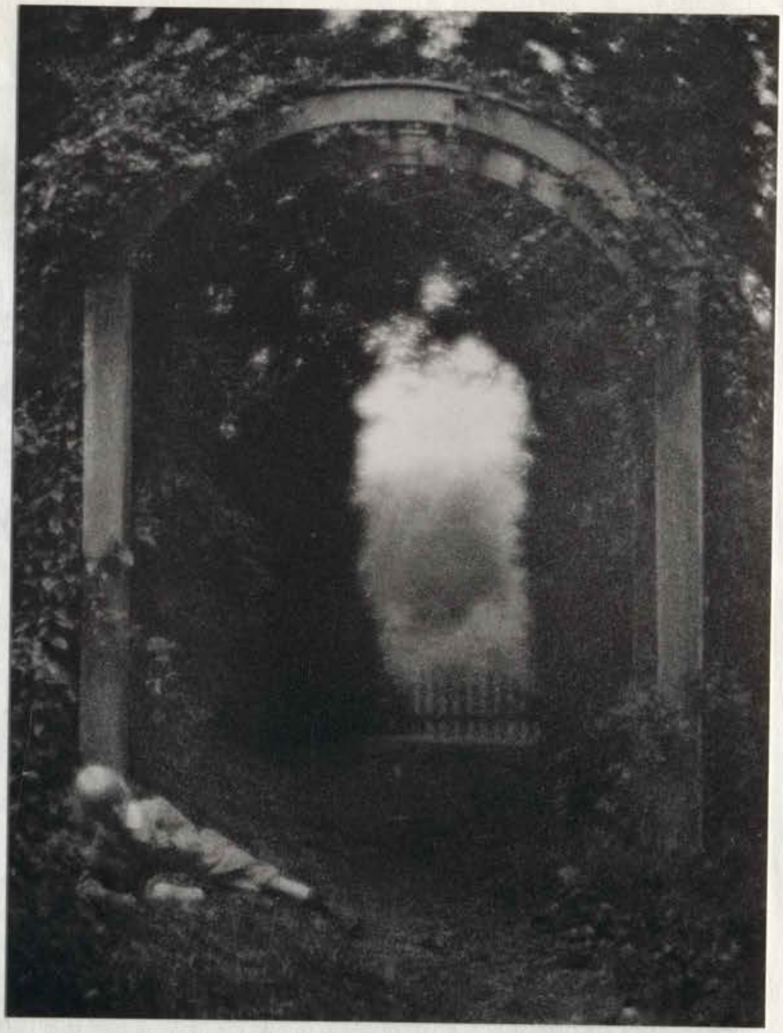

Figure 2-1

Clarence H. White. "Entrance to the Garden." Camera Work Vol. 23 Plate XI, July 1908.

Figure 2-2

George H. Seeley, "The Firefly." *Camera Work* Vol. 20 Plate I,

October 1907.

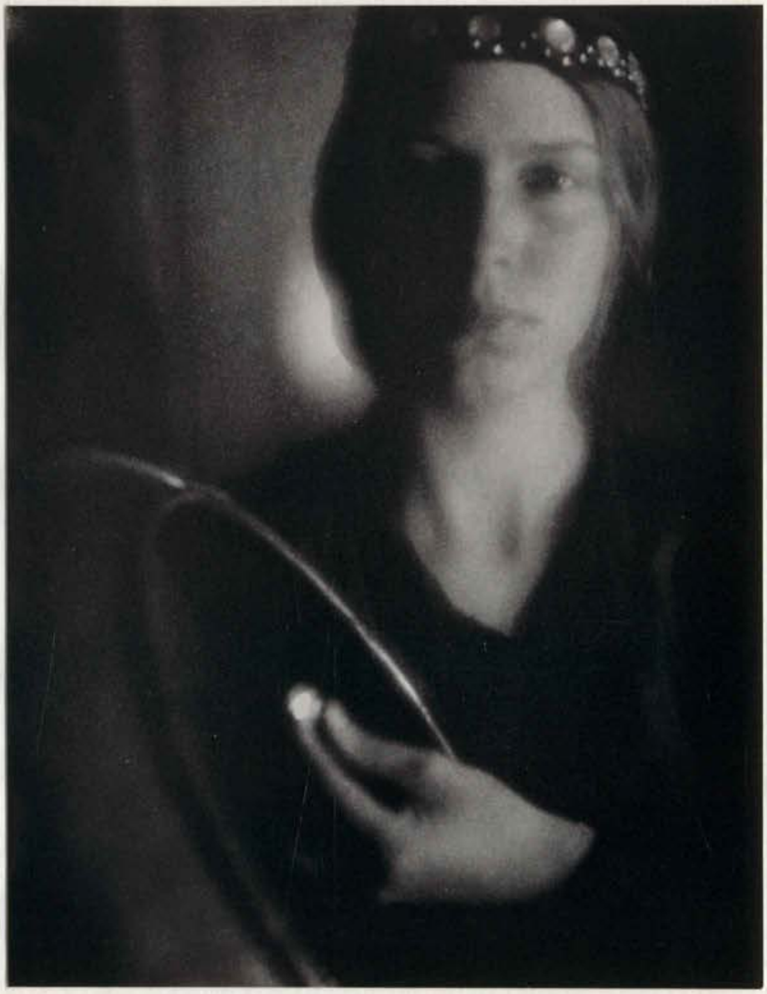

Figure 2-2

George H. Seeley. "The Firefly." Camera Work Vol. 20 Plate I,

October 1907.

Figure 2-3

Alfred Stieglitz. "From the Shelton, Looking Northwest," (1935?)

Doris Bry, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographer* (Boston, 1965), Plate 60.

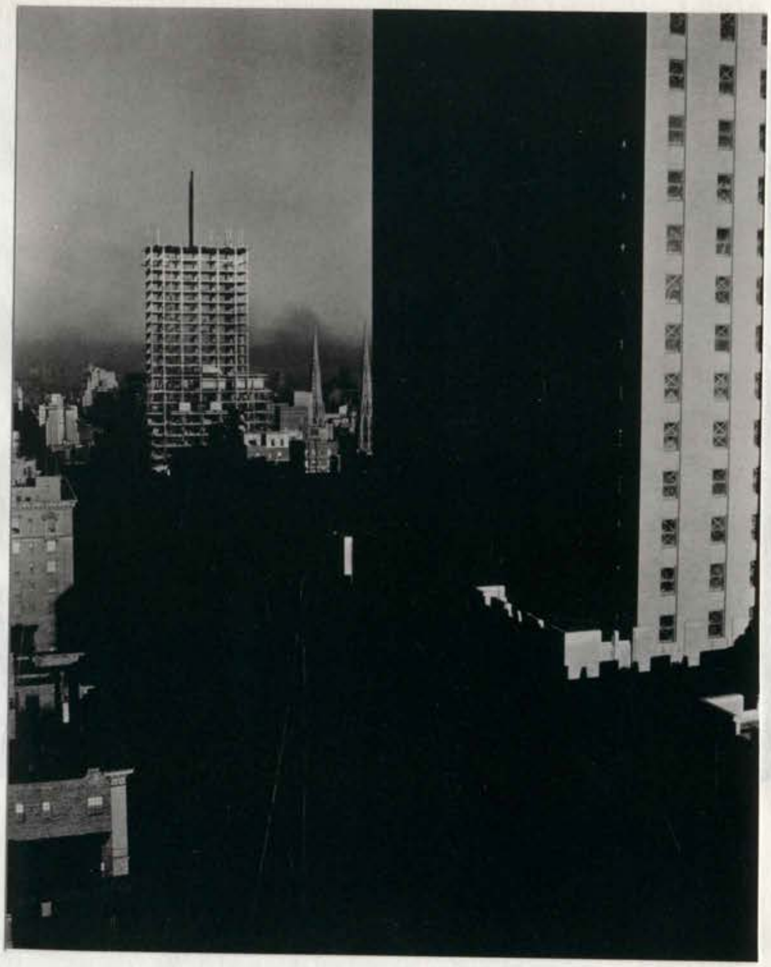

Figure 2-3

Alfred Stieglitz. "From the Shelton, Looking Northwest." (1933?)

Doris Bry, Alfred Stieglitz: Photographer (Boston, 1965), Plate 60.

Figure 3-1

Dan Flavin, "Untitled 1973." Installation photograph. *Arts Magazine* Vol. 48 no. 8, May 1974, p. 60.

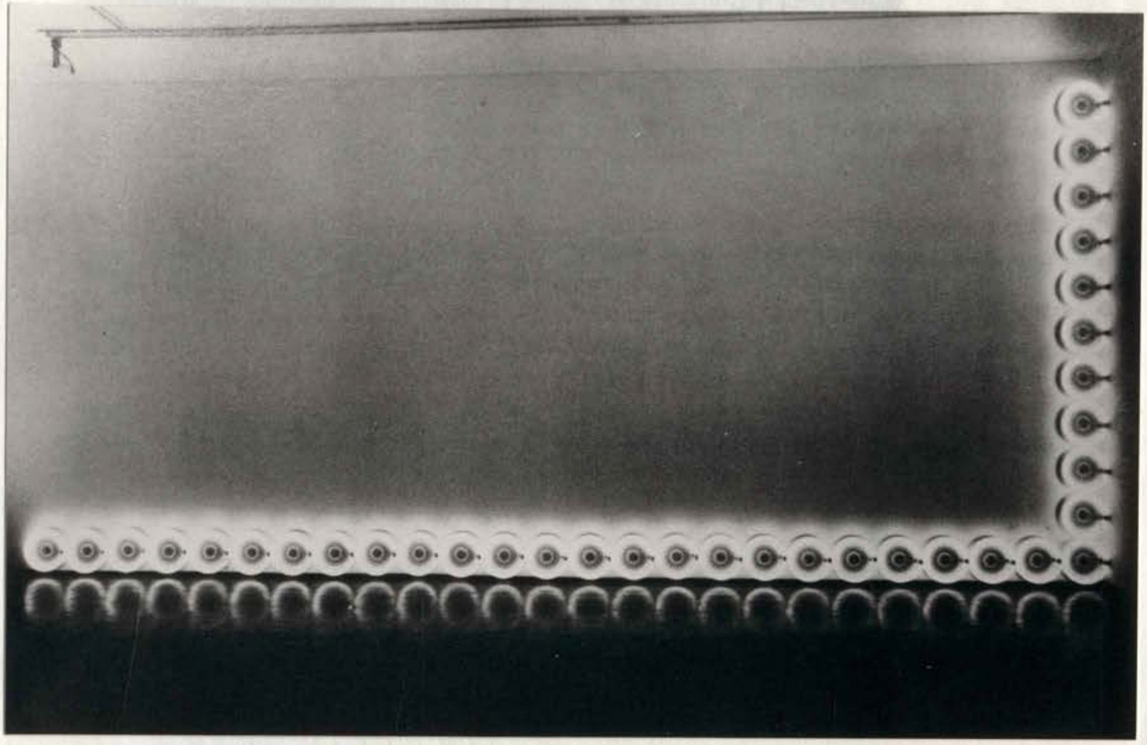

Figure 3-1

Dan Flavin. "Untitled 1973." Installation photograph. Arts Magazine Vol. 48 no. 8, May 1974, p. 68.

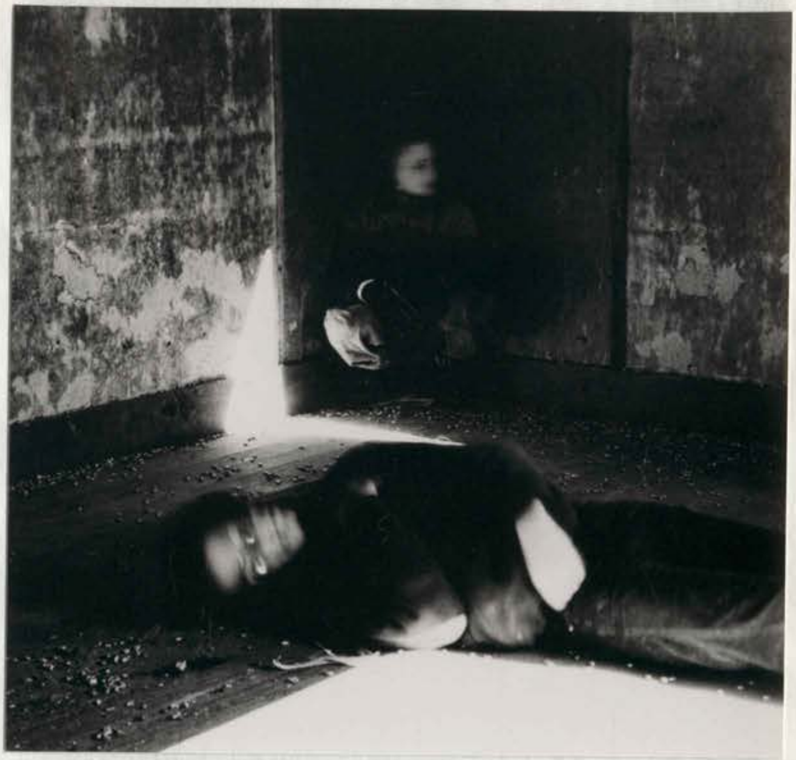

Figure 4-1

Ralph Eugene Meatyard. Untitled 1962. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 72.23.

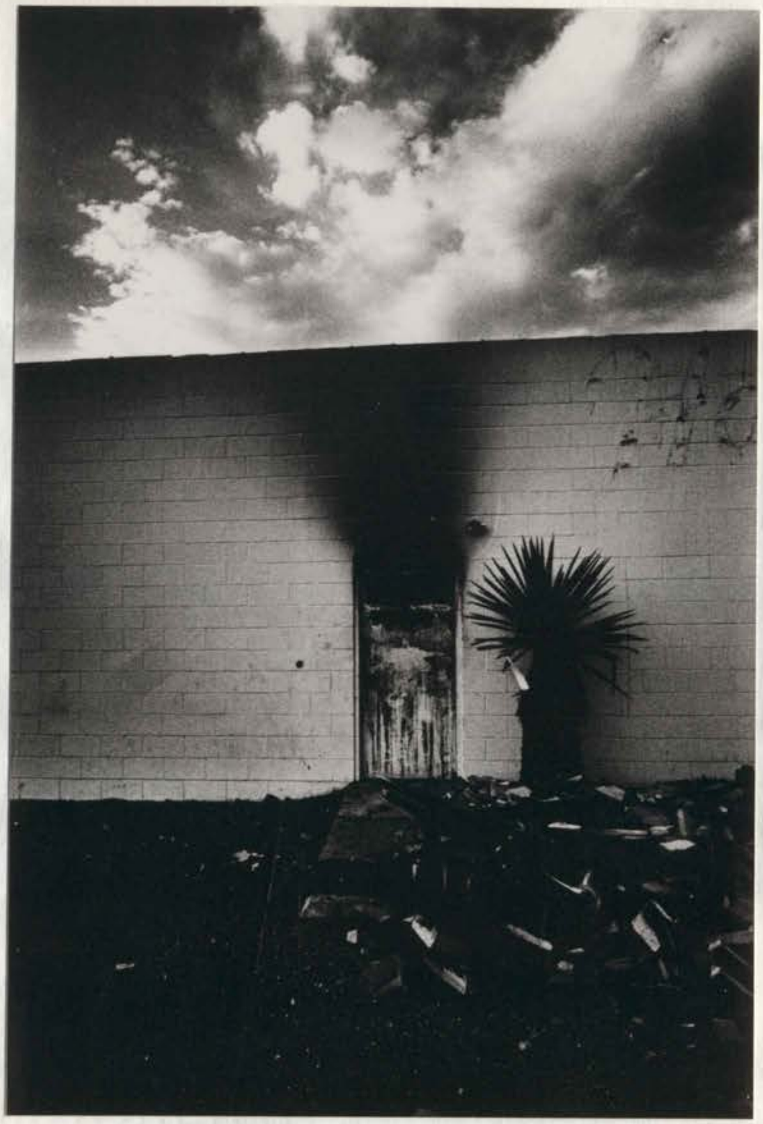

Figure 4-2

Ray K. Metzker. Untitled 1972. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 73.1.

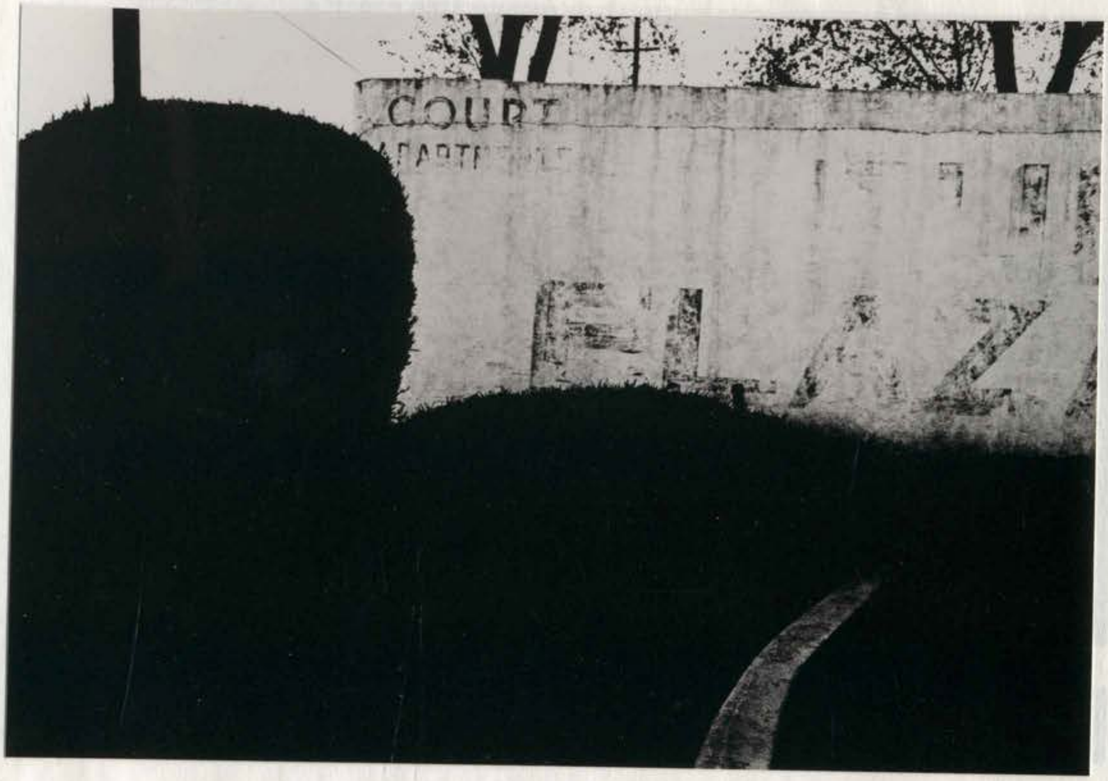

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Figure 4-3

Ray K. Metzker. Untitled 1972. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 73.2.

Figure 4-3

Ray K. Metzker, Untitled 1972, University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 73.2.

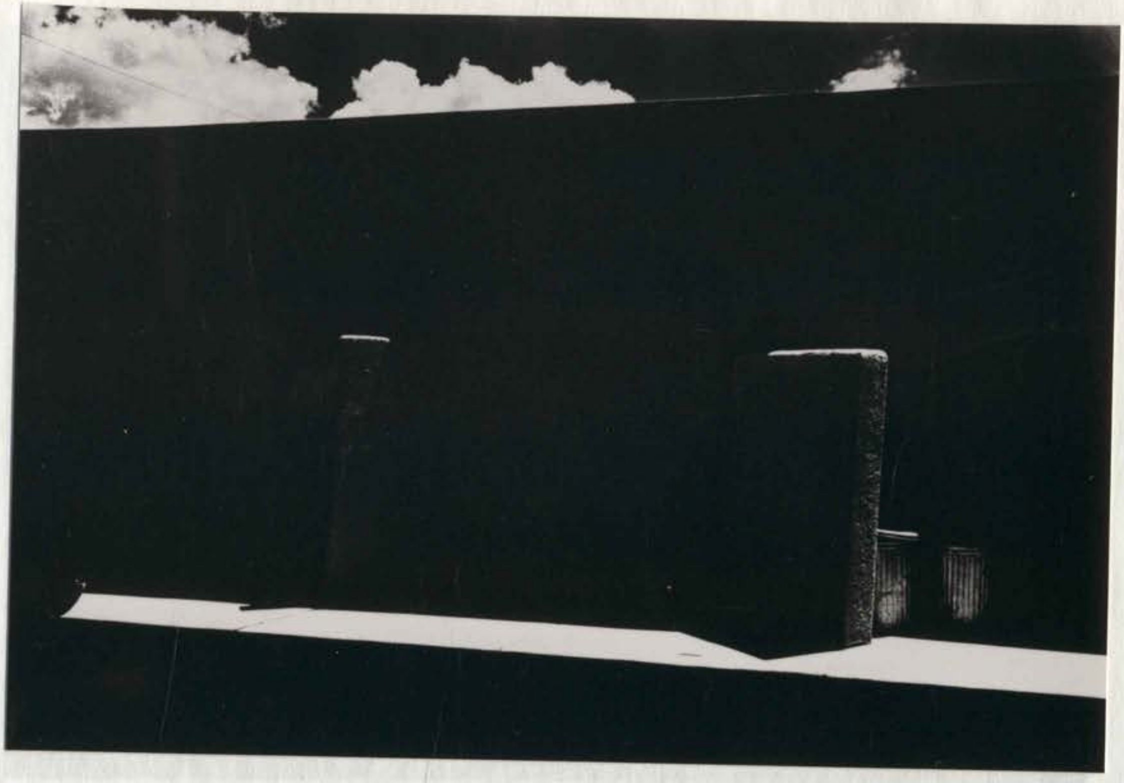

Figure 4-4

Ray K. Metzker. Untitled 1972. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 73.4.

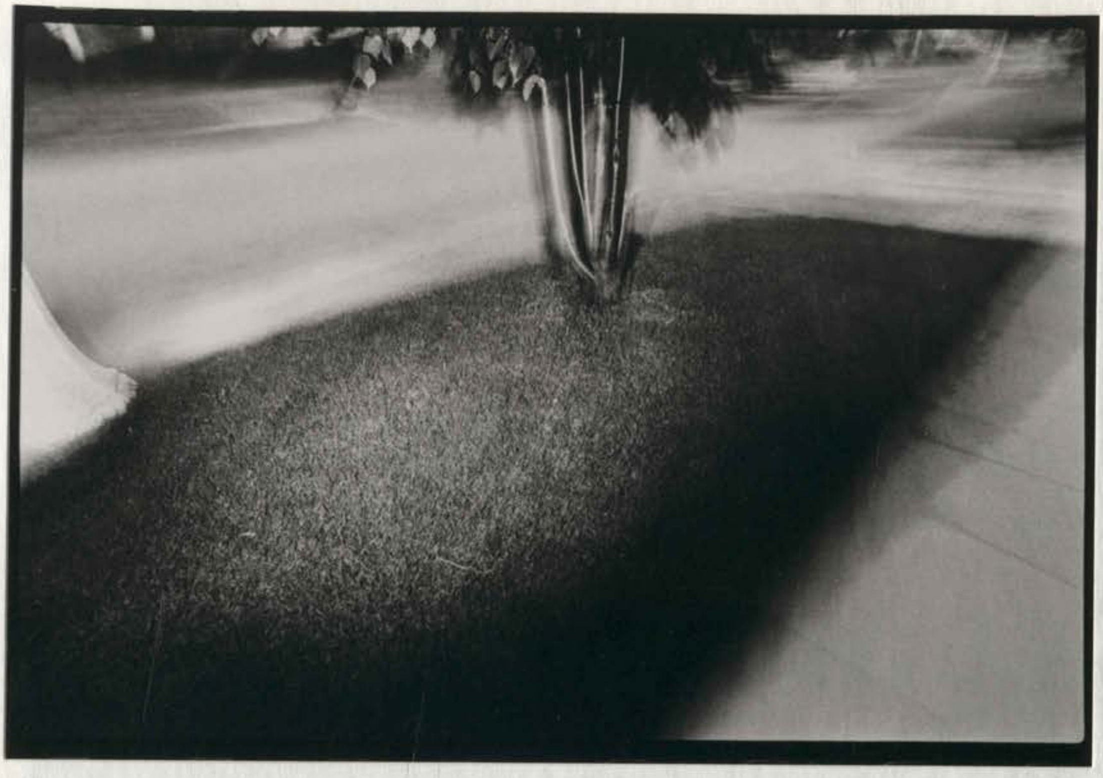

Figure 4-5

Roger Mertin. Tree (Rochester, N.Y.) 1973. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 74.55.

Figure 4-5

Roger Mertin, *Tree (Rochester, N.Y.)* 1973. University of New Mexico Fine Arts Museum Accession no. 74.55.

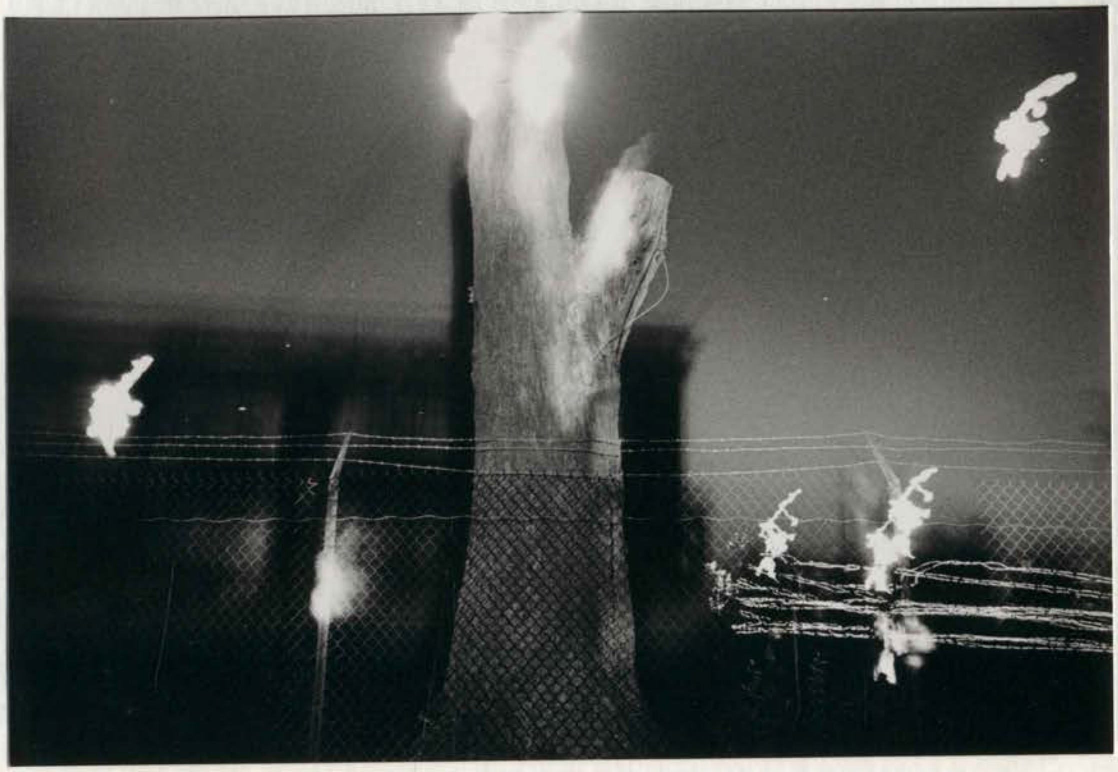

Figure 4-6
Roger Mertin. Untitled (New York) 1974. Collection of the photographer.

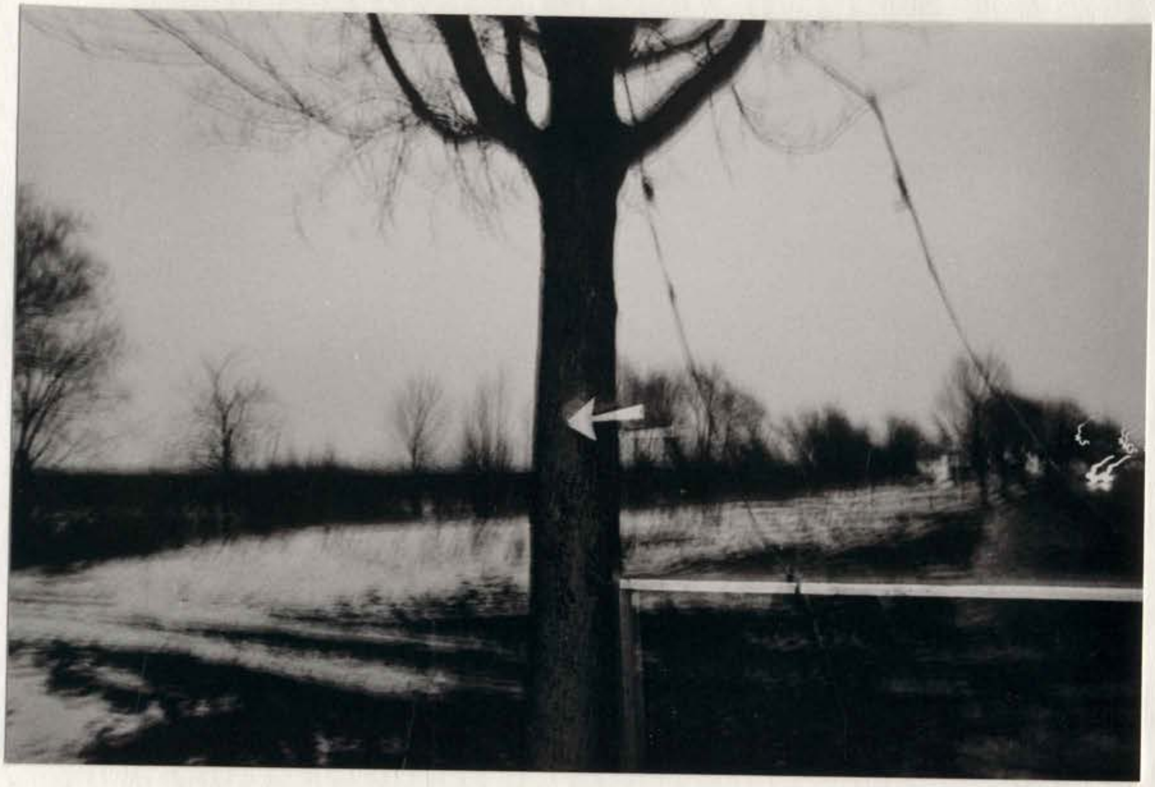

Figure 4-7

Roger Mertin. Untitled (New York) 1975. Collection of the photographer.

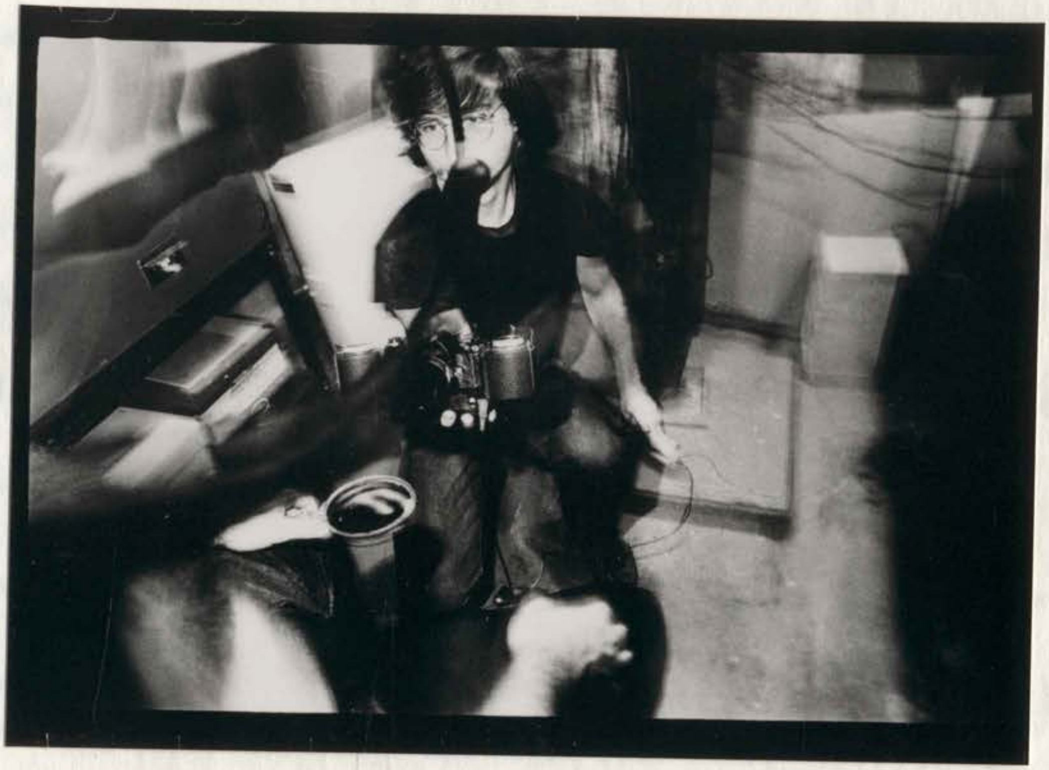

Figure 4-8

Roger Mertin. Untitled 1971. University of New Mexico Fine Arts

Museum Accession no. 72.30.

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