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REALISM, PHOTOGRAPHY AND JOURNALISTIC OBJECTIVITY IN 19th CENTURY AMERICA

DAN SCHILLER

When we commend a work of art as being "realistic," we commonly mean that it succeeds at faithfully copying events or conditions in the "real" world. How can we believe that pictures and writings can be made so as to copy, truly and accurately, a "natural" reality? The search for an answer to this deceptively simple question motivates the present essay.

I take it as axiomatic that languages, codes,[1] and conventions—the stuffs of competence in the active manipulation of signs and symbols—are material entities which vary across cultures and which change through time (Williams 1976: 505). Therefore I propose that the nature of belief in "realism" is a historical problem, accessible to empirical analysis within particular cultural contexts.

I intend to show that the reception of photography in 19th century America, and the cultural consequences attendant on that reception, are centrally linked to our conventional willingness to believe that artists can provide copies of natural reality.[2] Of course, we must underscore that "realism" long antedates photography. To take but one example, Ian Watt (1957) has persuasively demonstrated realism's defining hold over the novel in 18th century England. It would be more correct to say, then, that photography itself emerged out of artists' attempts to create *yet more realistic art*. Such attempts were probably motivated by expanding academic and commercial art markets. Daguerre, one of photography's inventors, hoped to fix images in order to reproduce scenes upon canvas without the labor of painting them. In this way his dioramas—large-scale sets of painted scenes passed before observers—might be made to take on an even more lifelike and illusionistic quality.[3] Joseph Niepce, the other major inventor of photography, was trying "to reproduce designs on lithographic stone without the necessity of actually copying by hand the design from the original" (Taft 1938:5). In short, photography was impelled by the commercial impulse to achieve labor-saving, exactly repeatable, and completely verisimilitudinous imitations of works of art and of nature.

Yet photography helped to accomplish a new sort of realism; and what I call "photographic realism" was animated by and in turn sustained a sweeping series of changes in the conventional design, execution and significance of virtually

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the whole field of 19th century painterly and literary art. The key assumption of photographic realism—that precisely accurate and complete copies of reality could be produced from symbolic materials—was rather freely translated across numerous visual and verbal codes, and not only within the accepted realm of art. After first explicating the general significance of this increasingly ubiquitous assumption, I will tentatively explore some of its consequences for literature and for journalism.

A JOUST WITH "REALISM"

Hostile critics often choose to equate realism *per se* with the demonstration of a few apparently basic qualities in works of art. Foremost among these is "objectivity." Wellek (1963:253), for example, defines realism as "the objective representation of contemporary social reality." Hemmings (1974:12), adopting Wellek's definition, explains that realism must be "undistorted by any subjective or partial vision." And Kolb—who, with Nochlin, seems unusually sensitive to the historical and cultural relativism of the style—states that conferees at a 1967 meeting of the Modern Language Association tended to define realism in terms of

> fidelity to actuality, objectivity (or neutrality—the absence of authorial judgment), democratic focus (particularized, ordinary characters), social awareness (and critical appraisal), reportorial detail, and colloquial expression [1969b:165].

Such definitions, despite their authority, seem only to echo what realist writers themselves claim they are doing. William Dean Howells, for example, in 1891 made reference to "the foolish old superstition that literature and art are anything but the expression of life, and are to be judged by any other test than that of their fidelity to it" (Becker 1963:133). And, in the first years of the 20th century, Theodore Dreiser stated the case even more bluntly:

> The sum and substance of literary as well as social morality may be expressed in three words—tell the truth... Truth is what is; and the seeing of what is, the realization of truth [Becker 1963:155].

The infinite regress which these explanations make no attempt to elude centers around an acceptably unproblematic definition of the nature of "fidelity" to "what is."

Clarence Darrow was an early and eloquent American advocate of a dynamic, active realism. In an article on "Realism in Literature and Art" (1893:113), Darrow emphasized that the realist

> must paint and write and work and think until the world shall learn so much, and grow so good, that the true will be all beautiful, and all the real be ideal.

Bertolt Brecht, a leading Marxist practitioner of realism in the 20th century, made a closely related point:

> We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works. ... Were we to copy the style of the realists, we would no longer be realists[4] [1974:50-51].

It is vital that we know that the problems which realism raises grow both out of art and out of reality. In fact, realism in general may be identified with the more or less self-conscious, conventionally coded belief that art and reality are not distinct nor, sometimes, easily divisible. And the belief in fixed standards, inherent either in art or reality, and capable of forging an immutable, natural and permanent bond be-

tween the two equally rigid terms, has come under increasing attack in the past century.

The underlying shift which has occurred in our understanding of the nature of reality itself has successfully challenged the previous belief in a uniform, objective and invariant natural world, enclosing the human social world within it. With customary deftness, Raymond Williams has addressed the contours of this change:

We know now that we literally create the world we see, and that this human creation—a discovery of how we can live in the material world we inhabit—is necessarily dynamic and active. . . . Reality, in our terms, is that which human beings make common, by work or language. Thus, in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially recognized, known and formed is richly and subtly manifested [1961:314-315].

And, at the level of individual cognition, Ulric Neisser has persuasively argued that

there must be definite kinds of structure in every perceiving organism to enable it to notice certain aspects of the environment rather than others, or indeed to notice anything at all [1976:9].

Significantly, Neisser asserts that the study of cognition must become more "realistic" if it wishes to triumph over currently dominant psychological theories. The latter, he protests, are "lacking in ecological validity, indifferent to culture, even missing some of the main features of perception and memory as they occur in ordinary life" (1976:7-8).

Perhaps the most compelling example of current thinking on "the social construction of reality" is given by Goffman—who has not yet himself responded to his own suggestion:

Displays [ritualized behaviors] are part of what we think of as "expressive behavior," and as such tend to be conveyed and received as if they were somehow natural, deriving, like temperature and pulse, from the way people are and needful, therefore, of no social or historical analysis. But, of course, ritualized expressions are as needful of historical understanding as is the Ford car. Given the expressive practices we employ, one may ask: Where do these displays come from [1976:71]?

Where are we left, with regard to "realism," now that both art and reality have been unveiled as inescapably *cultural* constructions?

We must, I think, fashion a definition of realism which adopts and extends Worth's (1978:4) "ethnographic semiotic" through its emphasis on "how actual people make meaning of their symbolic universe" and "how this differs from group to group, from young to old, from context to context and from culture to culture."[5] Ian Watt argues forcefully for a "formal realism" which, I believe, satisfies Worth's requirement (albeit only for one genre, the novel, in one major context: 18th century England):

Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise. . . which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience. . . [1957:32].

More generally, I define realism *per se* as the conventionally coded premise of belief in a correspondence between "work of art" and "reality." This avowedly formal definition has the merit of allowing us to avoid the typical confusion of historically and culturally specific *enactments* of realism with the latter taken as a whole. As Brecht (1974) has indicated, this confusion ordinarily results in *formalism*. For, to the extent that what are usually known as "formal" or "stylis-

tic" conventions—such as the employment by an author of an antiomniscient narrator or of commonplace detail—are thought to embody the full meaning of realism, such conventions are cut loose from their historical context and lose their relation to how actual people actually created a belief in realism. My formal definition, however, attends to how realism is accomplished by analyzing the temporally and culturally fragile answer(s) given by a society to the question: What is the nature of the correspondence claimed for the symbolically coded work in its relation to "reality"? In short, our subject can only be approached by inquiring as to the terms in which a given society poses and responds to the question "What is realism?" A useful consequence of this focus is that we need no longer look within the text alone for realism's essence. Rather, it becomes vital to study the full totality of social relationships, technologies and cultural patterns which motivate, animate and sustain the way of seeing that, then and there, is realism.

The correspondence between art and reality may be loose and lack clear or highly codified rules; and there is some evidence that in 18th century European realism this sort of loose congruence did obtain. The minor French novelist, Gaillard de la Bataille, wrote in 1744, for example, in such a way as to stress the unconfined, open-ended picture which realist writers were requested to paint: "People want speaking likenesses, natural relations of the truth or at least of what may be true" (in Hemmings 1974:11). Even a cursory comparison of Bataille with, say, Dreiser's "truth is what is," reveals that in the intervening century and a half, the nature of realism somehow began to be thought of as a settled question.

Or perhaps Howells was right to claim in 1891 (Becker 1963:136), that realism "is not a new theory, but it has never before universally characterized literary endeavor." As Nochlin put the case:

it was not until the nineteenth century that contemporary ideology came to equate belief in the facts with the total content of belief itself: it is in this that the crucial difference lies between nineteenth-century Realism and all its predecessors [1971:45].

I hope to demonstrate that in fact it was photography which gave to 19th century American realism its special character. Concomitantly, it was photographic realism which insisted that the correspondence between art—indeed, between many visual and verbal codes—and "reality" become absolutely symmetrical. Profound consequences attended the accomplishment of photographic realism across various symbolic codes, and in the pages below I hope to outline a few of the most important.[6]

PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Worldwide, the cultural impact of daguerreotypy, the first major photographic technology, was immediate and far-ranging. The French government's gesture of benevolence which freed daguerreotypy from most international patent restrictions was undoubtedly pivotal: before the end of 1839—the year which marked the consolidation of the technical achievement—Daguerre's pamphlet describing his pro-

cess had been published in 30 editions, "in nearly as many languages" (Rudisill 1971:48).

Daguerreotypy's entrenchment was nowhere else as quick and as general as in the United States. Newhall (1976:33), an authority on early photography, asserts that by 1845 "daguerreotypes were so popular in America that the word was assimilated. . . into everyday language." A best-selling periodical, *Godey's Lady's Book*, stated in 1849:

> A few years ago it was not every man who could afford a likeness of himself, his wife or his children; these were luxuries known only to those who had money to spare; now it is hard to find the man who has not gone through the "operator's" hands from once to half-a-dozen times, or who has not the shadowy faces of his wife and children done up in purple morocco and velvet, together or singly, among his household treasures [Rudisill 1971:70].

The same sort of ethnographic detail was repeated in 1853, when a New York *Tribune* article boasted tellingly of the state of American daguerreotypy at the International Exhibition of Art and Industry, then underway:

> If there be any one department in the whole building which is peculiarly American, and in which the country shines preeminent, it is in that of Daguerreotypes. . . . In contrasting the specimens of art which are taken here with those taken in European countries, the excellence of American pictures is evident. . . . our people are readier in picking up processes and acquiring the mastery of the art than our trans-Atlantic rivals. Not that we understand the science better, but the details of the art are acquired in a shorter time by us, while the enormous practice which our operators enjoy combines to render the daguerreotype a necessary contributor to the comforts of life. Does a child start on the journey of existence, and leave his "father's halls"; forthwith the little image is produced to keep his memory green. Does the daughter accept the new duties of matron, or does the venerated parent descend into the grave, what means so ready to revive their recollection? Does the lover or the husband go to Australia or California, and not exchange with the beloved one the image of what afforded so much delight to gaze upon? The readiness with which a likeness may be obtained, the truthfulness of the image, and the smallness of the cost, render it the current pledge of friendship; and the immense number of operators who are supported by the art, in this country, shows how widely the love of sun-pictures is diffused[7] [Greeley 1853:171-172].

Rudisill (1971:198) estimates that by 1850 Americans spent between eight and twelve million dollars a year on photographs. One company, the Edward & H. T. Anthony photographic company, had sales of $600,000 in 1864 (Jenkins 1975:50). And in 1872 a massive collection of essays on *The Great Industries of the United States* calculated on the basis of figures gathered on the importation of special albumenized photographic paper, that 50,400,000 photographs were made every year (Greeley et al. 1872:880).

Daguerreotypes were no longer the only form of photography; even by 1851 they were being replaced by the collodion process. The latter, being a negative-positive process (daguerreotypy was a direct positive process, which meant that a single copy of each image was the limit for each exposure), offered the commercially enticing possibility of multiple prints together with lower costs (cf. Jenkins 1975:39). Also, in the late 1850s,

> one of the early major mass consumer items was born. The stereoscope viewer and box of view cards were as common a feature of the post-Civil War American home as is the television set, today [Jenkins 1975:50].

"Stereo views," which have faded almost completely from the contemporary scene, were vastly popular throughout the latter 19th century; in 1901, a single producer of stereo views (Underwood) manufactured over seven million of them (Darrah 1964:109). By the 1880s and 1890s the individuation of photographic picture-taking competence was well underway, as cameras began to be mass-marketed;[8] but, decades earlier, the diffusion of photographic images was already thorough.

Generated by a ubiquity of pictures, *the sign system of American photographic realism drew heavily on the unappealable, exclusive and universally recognizable accuracy attributed to these images*. Writing in 1840, Edgar Allen Poe stated

> In truth the daguerreotype plate is infinitely more accurate than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear—but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented [Rudisill 1971:54].

As if to denote the mechanical certainty of the process and its result, daguerreotypists were commonly termed "operators."

The "accuracy" which earned Poe's wonderment has, until recently, reigned unchallenged as the dominant standard of interpretation for photography—indeed, it may still so serve. Ivins, for example, believed that photographs

> were exactly repeatable visual images made without any of the syntactical elements implicit in all hand made pictures [1953:122].

This purported lack of syntax, this transparency of form, is obviously problematic. Throughout her remarkable book, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts*, Jussim convincingly demolishes such notions:

> If there is a possibility that "photography" can be *subjective*, that what it records can be manipulated by an individual or restricted either by the technological limitations of lens or emulsion or by "artistic", i.e., subjective, manipulations in the making of photographic positives on paper, then we must admit that the purely objective character of photography as posited by Ivins is a fiction [1974:298].

On the other hand, however, Jussim's refutation is in one important sense not really the point: for the illusion of photographic "objectivity" has certainly been *real* enough in American *culture* to assure even some of the most astute critics—Poe and Ivins, for instance—of its existence. The more vital issue, therefore, is why photography was and is so widely recognized as being without syntax.

A simple answer is possible.[9] In my judgment, the "subjective manipulations" which comprise any syntax in this case had to be discovered and systematically utilized by photographers in order to achieve foreseeable effects, and equally competently appreciated by the public, for an explicit belief in the existence of such a syntax to arise. Such a belief, however, is tantamount to admitting that photography must employ a style. And it is *this* notion, that photography has a style, that is consistently undercut by photographic realism.[10]

The blockage occurs for two reasons: (a) the general diffusion of photographic images and of photographic realism *before* most persons came to possess the equipment necessary to produce their own pictures; and (b) the existence of photographic realism in *verbal* codes both before and during

the 19th century. Verbal codes, whose practitioners were motivated for their own reasons to seek the easy "objectivity" claimed by photography, have thus come to be a chief regenerative source of the belief in photographic realism.[11] For both verbal and pictorial codes however, the only communicative intention which photographic realism allows is the intention to "mirror" the "natural" world. Such an intention, in its turn, generates a crucial contradiction: *the communication of meaning which, seemingly, is not created within the code, but in the natural world itself.*[12] The verbally and visually coded convention of photographic realism thus intervenes between competence and the explicit acknowledgment of communication within such codes.

From the very first, therefore, photographic accuracy was remarked upon and accorded the highest status. One must wonder whether this could have occurred if "accuracy" had not been motivated, in society, by the rationalization of production—by the simultaneous and intertwined needs for precise machine tools, for a labor force capable and willing to relinquish old procedures and tools and embrace new technologies, and for sales records and accounting procedures able to reliably itemize, record and justify incomes and expenditures to members of corporations, themselves a newly emerging legal entity. The concern for reliability certainly took on new importance in science at this juncture. Hobsbawm (1975:269), for instance, mentions that

"Positive" science, operating on objective and ascertained facts, connected by rigid links of cause and effect, and producing uniform, invariant general "laws" beyond query or wilful modification, was the master-key to the universe, and the nineteenth century possessed it [1975:269].

It is vital, though, to qualify and perhaps to restrict somewhat the actual impact of scientific thought on the development of technology; for recent work seems to indicate that the function of science as a justificatory and explanatory belief-system may sometimes take precedence over its ability to engender operational technologies. Ferguson (1977:833) contends, for example, that "the organization of American technology in the first half of the 19th century tended naturally to follow the pattern set by the world of art." The reason he gives is that artists embodied the nonverbal knowledge which alone could guide precise and proficient construction of workable new technologies. Following the thought slightly further, Daguerre himself may be cited as an important example of the guidance by art of technology—in this case, of photography.

Samuel Morse, the artist, scientist, and inventor who did most to bring photography at once to the United States (B. Newhall 1976:15-27), provides another good instance. In a speech to the National Academy of Design in 1840, Morse asserted that daguerreotypes were

painted by Nature's self with a minuteness of detail, which the pencil of light in her hands alone can trace, and with a rapidity, too, which will enable (the artist) to enrich his collection with a super-abundance of *materials* and not *copies; they cannot be called copies of nature, but portions of nature herself* [Rudisill 1971: 57].

Seemingly both of and about nature, both imitator and imitated, daguerreotypy drew a compelling force from its apparently effortless transcendance of the order of human fallibility. As Jussim observes:

The photograph unquestionably stood for the thing itself. It was not viewed as a message about reality, but as reality itself, somehow magically compressed and flattened onto the printed page, but, nevertheless, equivalent to, rather than symbolic of, three-dimensional reality [1974:289].

It should be evident that despite its central importance as a cultural construct, the notion that photographs are equivalent to reality itself is both mistaken and fundamentally misleading. In Worth's phrasing,

it is impossible—physiologically and culturally—by the nature of our nervous system and the symbolic modes or codes we employ, to make unstructured *copies* of natural events [1976:15].

Nevertheless, photography's uncanny ability seemingly to re-present reality—to depict, without human intervention, an entire world of referents—apparently ensured its universal recognizability as a standard of accuracy and truth.[13] "The Daguerreolite," an article published in the Cincinnati *Daily Chronicle* on January 17, 1840, articulated these features in lastingly significant terms:

Its perfection is unapproachable by human hand, and its truth raises it high above all language, painting, or poetry. It is the first universal language, addressing itself to all who possess vision, and in characters alike understood in the courts of civilization and the hut of the savage. The pictorial language of Mexico, the hieroglyphics of Egypt are now superseded by reality[14] [Rudisill 1971: 54].

Here, then, is the basis for notions of a universal language of art which Worth has rightfully attacked:

the knowledge that there are many codes and languages of speaking—does not seem to extend to our understanding of visual signs. Somehow as soon as we leave the verbal mode we begin to talk about universal languages. . . . We seem to want very much to believe that by the use of pictures we can overcome the problems attendant to words and in particular to different languages. Somehow the notion persists that. . . pictures in general, (have) no individual cultures that "speak". . . in differing languages, or articulate in differing codes[15] [1978:1-2].

In the universality accorded to the language of photography was an exclusive standard of truth, as well. Scharf (1974:23) writes that

the traditional concern with the camera obscura and other implements helped to prepare the way for the acceptance of the photographic image and accommodated the growing conviction that a machine alone could become the final arbiter in questions concerning visual truth.

As early as 1842 the 27th United States Congress had accepted daguerreotypes as "undeniably accurate evidence in settling the Maine-Canada boundary" (Rudisill 1971:240). And, in 1851, a panoramic series of daguerreotype views of San Francisco elicited the following comment in *Alta California*, a local paper:

It is a picture, too, which cannot be disputed—it carries with it evidence which God himself gives through the unerring light of the world's greatest luminary. . . . (the view) will tell its own story, and the sun to testify to its truth. . . . [Newhall 1976:86].

The very word "daguerreotype" "soon came to be applied to any study of society which laid claim to sharp observation and total honestly [*sic*]"[16] (Wilsher 1977:84).

Photographic realism therefore posited that to the correspondence between the work of art and "reality," which earlier realisms had engendered, should be added a rigid belief in the scientifically symmetric and accurate, exclusive,

and universally recognizable nature of their relation. So empowered, photography would hold its creators to account by redefining the ways in which people saw. As Rudisill views it,

a common ground of trust was soon established which equated a picture made by the camera with the truth of a direct perception. Once this sort of reliability was attributed to the medium and it was placed into wide use, it was inevitable that national imagery should henceforth have to base itself on the evidence of the machine. Political candidates must "daguerreotype" themselves on the public imagination; popular portraiture of statesmen, entertainers, or criminals in the press had to credit origin in the daguerreotype when laying claim to accuracy [1971:231].

Photography paradigmatically revised the nature of "accuracy"; for, rather than merely manipulating symbols, photography appeared and claimed to reveal Nature. Thus, the major point: *photographic realism made it no longer acceptable for truth to be a visibly symbolic creation.* Art and science both had to depict *natural* truth or else renounce their claims to accuracy and, therefore, to truth itself.

Examples of the succeeding redefinition may be drawn from both enterprises. Edward Hitchcock, Professor of Geology (and President of Amherst College), wrote in 1851:

What new and astonishing avenues of knowledge.... (I speak) of those new channels that will be thrown open, through which a knowledge of other worlds and of other created beings, can be conveyed to the soul almost illimitably.... [Rudisill 1971:91].

Photography must be accorded a central place in the history of astronomy (Taft 1938:198-200); in geographic and other scientific exploration (Newhall 1976:84-91); and in cartography (Woodward 1975:137-155). In general, as Ivins tells us, photography, although not a perfect report, nonetheless "can and does in practice tell a great many more things than any of the old graphic processes was able to"[17] (1953:139).

Likewise in art, photographic realism redefined the nature of the endeavor. An example from a slightly later time may serve best: I offer Eadweard Muybridge's photographic studies of animal motion, conducted in the 1870s and 1880s.[18] His pictures of horses "contradicted almost all of the previous representations made by artists" in showing that the animals had all four legs off the ground during the trot, canter and gallop (Scharf 1974:213). Since photography had clearly exposed "the error of the old theory of the gallop," and since the technology's claim to accuracy was final and exclusive, a wide class of contemporaries insisted that "artists will no more be able to claim that they represent nature as she seems, when they depict a horse in full run in the conventional manner, or in the mythical gallop" (the writer is J. D. B. Stillman in *The Horse in Motion* [1882], in Scharf 1974: 216). Consequently, after Muybridge's photographs became available in France, for example, "figures of the horse in the conventional gallop no longer appear in the work of Degas" (Scharf 1974:206). To remain true to the new *form* of visual truth, the content of art and the practice of artists had to change.[19,20]

The most crucial consequences of this shift for symbolic production and appreciation have been extensively studied by Gerbner and Gross (1976). Their "cultivation analyses" of television's impact on viewers reveal substantial differences between the social worlds which light and heavy viewers of this eminently photographically realistic medium will construct. As they put it,

The premise of realism is a Trojan horse which carries within it a highly selective, synthetic, and purposeful image of the facts of life [Gerbner and Gross 1976:178].

In other words, photographic realism permits (indeed, forces) "the social tasks to which presumably 'objective' news, 'neutral' fiction, or 'nontendentious' entertainment lend themselves" (Gerbner 1973a:267) *to remain hidden* behind the transparent cloak of the "natural world." Correspondingly, the more convincingly this world is enunciated according to realist conventions,

the nearer its approach to living reality, the more significant would the symbolic function of the picture become, because the observer could better respond to the picture as if to reality itself [Rudisill 1971:13].

When a culture both proposes and abides by a standard which, like photographic realism, is inescapable, universal and exclusive—then events which employ the conventional language of this standard become "true events" regardless of their actual truth value. In no other way, I think, can we explicate the relation signified by the thousands of letters written and sent each year to seek advice from the "fictional" Dr. Marcus Welby.[21]

On one hand, then, since photographic realism becomes historically ubiquitous to the extent that it is both accessible to and competently appreciated by the mass of the population, it harbors a growing capacity for presentation of "truths" which are unappealing to various groups or strata who nonetheless likewise employ the style of photographic realism. On the other hand, to the extent that the inevitably concrete content which forms the very *measure* of competent appreciation is provided by centrally produced, systematically selected, often iterative codes, the latter will tend, relatively autonomously, to cultivate hegemonic, institutionalized rules of social morality. It is, furthermore, vitally significant that these two fundamental aspects of photographic realism need not be, and usually are not, "in sync." This follows from the subordination of photographic realism to commercial endeavor—which may mobilize as *content* material which may offend or even alarm the stratum or class which patterns its specific symbolic form. Thus contemporary reformers are incensed over the depiction of televised violence *per se*, regardless of the symbolic functions served by constant repetition of scenarios in which the poor, the weak and the old are taught to be fearful of attempts to change their plight.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Photographic realism extended the normative belief in a direct, completely accurate and universally recognizable symmetry between symbolic codes and all of reality. Let us now turn our attention to the impact of this standard on verbal codes.

Leon Edel (1974:177) believes that "novelists have sought almost from the first to become a camera"; implicit here is that the existence of photographic realism in verbal codes abstractly prefigured the development of photography itself. Wilsher confirms the subordination of the technology to the cultural form which preceded it:

The readers of Fanny Burney's romance *Cecilia* (1782) were delighted with the realism of her descriptions of London life; a friend, Mrs. Thrale, remarked that the novel was just like a "camera obscura in a window of Piccadilly" [1977:184].

Once again though, photography proper systematically extended its own unique form of realism as the dominant concrete standard of accurate and truthful description. The publisher of *The Daguerreotype, A Magazine of Foreign Literature and Science*, established in Boston in 1847, announced in his prospectus that the journal was

> intended to supply, in its successive numbers, a series of striking pictures of the constantly varying aspect of public affairs, of the state of the public taste, and the bent of public opinion, in the most refined and intellectual countries of Europe; and is, therefore, not inaptly, called THE DAGUERREOTYPE [Rudisill 1971:72].

In 1858, a book review in the *Atlantic Monthly* stated the case more generally:

> To copy Nature faithfully and heartily is certainly not less needful when stories are presented in words than when they are told on canvas or in marble[22] [McMahon 1973:11].

The impact of photographic realism on American literature was immediate and enduring. Hawthorne in 1851 even employed the daguerreotype as a central plot feature in *The House Of The Seven Gables*. The most explicit and conscious utilization of photographic realism that I have found, testifies to its resiliency even long after our period.

H. P. Lovecraft published "Pickman's Model" in 1927 and, like many of his other stories, its most vital concern is the structure of proof and how best to make our naive knowledge of such rules of evidence shock and frighten us as readers.

Richard Upton Pickman, a painter whose "forte was faces," makes a terrifying specialty of "weird art." His unmistakable talent, manifested in works such as his horrific "Ghoul Feeding," has deeply impressed the narrator. Throughout the story the latter shares with the reader his continuously mounting fright, as he recalls the progression which led him to friendship and to increasing familiarity with Pickman and his work. Pickman eventually leads the narrator to his "other studio," located in the very oldest part of Boston. Inside are dozens of the painter's most ghastly canvases:

> It was not any mere artist's interpretation that we saw; it was pandaemonium itself, crystal clear in stark objectivity. That was it, by Heaven! The man was not a fantaisiste or romanticist at all—he did not even try to give us the churning, prismatic ephemera of dreams, but coldly and sardonically reflected some stable, mechanistic, and well-established horror-world which he saw fully, brilliantly, squarely, and unfalteringly. God knows what that world can have been, or where he ever glimpsed the blasphemous shapes that loped and trotted and crawled through it; but whatever the baffling source of his images, one thing was plain. Pickman was in every sense—in conception and in execution—a thorough, painstaking, and almost scientific *realist* [1927:28].

The narrator actually screams when viewing one particularly loathesome unfinished canvas, whose subject is a dog-faced monster with scaly claws and half-hooved feet, drooling as it gnaws at the head of "a thing that had been a man." He sees a badly curled up piece of paper pinned to a vacant part of the canvas, and reaches for it, believing it to be a photograph of some background Pickman plans to paint. At this moment Pickman suddenly draws a revolver and motions

the narrator to silence—then steps out into the main cellar and closes the door behind him. The narrator is "paralysed"; strange scuffling noises are heard; six shots ring out; and Pickman reappears "cursing the bloated rats that infested the ancient well." The two men leave and return to well-lit, middle-class Boston.

The narrator then explains to us that he had "vacantly crumpled" the curled-up paper into his coatpocket during the shooting episode. The last two paragraphs in the story explain his motive in dropping Pickman from his list of friends and at the same moment *create* the real horror upon which the whole narrative is so carefully built:

> Don't ask me, either what lay behind that mole-like scrambling Pickman was so keen to pass off as rats. There are secrets, you know, which might have come down from old Salem times, and Cotton Mather tells even stranger things. You know how damned lifelike Pickman's paintings were—how we all wondered where he got those faces.
>
> Well—that paper wasn't a photograph of any background, after all. What it showed was simply the monstrous being he was painting on that awful canvas. It was the model he was using—and its background was merely the wall of the cellar studio in minute detail. But by God, Eliot, *it was a photograph from life* (1927:32).

Lovecraft has calculatingly inscribed into this story his knowledge of the reader's immediate and unreflecting belief in the natural truth of photographic realism. And, by animating our patterned expectations about photographic truth—by building these expectations into the story—Lovecraft renews and revivifies the larger pattern itself.

Yet the story may also demonstrate the distance which by 1927 a writer might find between photographic realism and his own narrative intentions. In the latter 19th century, by contrast, writers were more concerned over how best to create and structure photographic realism in verbal codes. Charles D. Warner discussed the problem in the *Atlantic* in April 1883:

> We want to think that the characters in a story are real persons ... We cannot do this if we see the author set them up as if they were marionettes, and take them to pieces every few pages to show their inner structure and the machinery by which they are moved [McMahon 1973:51].

American literary realism sustained its illusion by means of antiomniscience, a central narrative technique which

> results in a twofold attempt to remove the external presence of the author through dramatic representation and through the effort to present description and summary, even when it is written in the third person (traditionally the territory of the omniscient author), from the angle of vision of the characters [Kolb 1969a:67].

In turn, the realist author's analyses of social and psychological phenomena had to be translated into action and dialogue (McMahon 1973:50). Or, as Lathrop put it in 1873 in the *Atlantic*,

> This material should be employed out of sight, in the decoction of a rich vitality for the nourishment of the fictitious individuals, and its function should be hidden from the common eye [McMahon 1973:50].

Just as surely as the camera appeared to destroy the need for pictorial syntax, writers were called upon to eliminate any blatant traces of their own subjective presence within their work. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), Henry James objected vigorously to Anthony Trollope's apparent unconcern over this issue: he

admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime [Kolb 1969a:66].

Once the author's figure was no longer seen to visibly intervene in, interrupt or redirect the narrative, the reader could apprehend the story as an unmediated, natural progression of visual images, a series of verbal stereoscopic views. And indeed, Lathrop claimed in 1874 that realism "supplies the visual distinctness which is one of the great charms of the stage"; therefore, "where we thought nothing worthy of notice, it (realism) shows everything to be rife with significance"[23] (McMahon 1973:29-30). Such "significance" was of course written in so that readers could *infer* meaning in the frame provided by the text; but how could it be assured that, since the text was increasingly understood in terms of its photographic veracity, its meaning would not be *attributed* as if within the "natural" world? Thus how possible to make certain that the meaning put into the work by the realist writer would be certainly equated with that taken from it by readers? With photographic realism, the interpreter must either pierce the veneer of objectivity, or be content with *attributing* meaning to the text.[24] In turn writers may believe that they are creating "fictions" but, if photographic realism is successful, readers must think that what they are scanning is photographic truth.

The mimetic basis of photographic realism could create problems for writers on its own account. Dialect, for example, which was favored by realists to evoke specific geographical circumstances, might interfere with the illusion if not handled subtly. In 1895, Charles M. Thompson spoke to this issue:

Surely the proper course, in works not avowedly scientific, is to use only as much of local peculiarity of speech as will give proper dramatic value to the talk of a character, as will not confuse the eye with queer spelling, or render any remark unintelligible without special knowledge[25] [McMahon 1973:22].

Generally speaking, and probably as a defense of their prerogatives as artists, major American realists denied "the significance of mere details and a one-to-one correspondence between the subject and the representation" (Kolb 1969a: 28). William Dean Howells, a prominent American realist, was accused by a reader of "anachronism" for his reference in the first installment of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (November 1884) to the novel *Daisy Miller* (by Henry James). His offense was to make a character in *Silas Lapham* date the action within the narrative to 1875—but *Daisy Miller* was published in 1878. Howells responded to the charge thus:

As I may hereafter repeat this cause of offense to accurate minds, perhaps it will be well for me to state the principle upon which I reconcile it to a conscience not void of the usual anxiety. It appears to me that I discharge my whole duty to reality in giving, as well as I can, the complexion of the period of which I write, and I would as lief as not allow one of my persons to speak of Daisy Millerism, even a whole year before Daisy Miller appeared in print, if it gave a characteristic tint in the portraiture. . . .

An artist illustrating my story would put the people in the fashions of 1884, though they actually dressed in those of 1875, and I think he would be right; for it is the effect of contemporaneousness that is to be given, and the general truth is sometimes better than the specific fact.[26] [Kolb 1969a:29].

Seemingly then, a symmetric correspondence between subject and literary representation was widely found to be forceful and compelling. However, photographic realism in literature extended and, I think, drew upon, the development of photographic realism in a more widely circulated and public genre—journalism. Hofstadter for example, has written that

With few exceptions the makers of American realism, even from the days of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells, were men who had training in journalistic observation—Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Harold Frederic, David Graham Phillips. . . [1955:198].

He might have added that realist authors observed like journalists because they had been trained to write as journalists. And, as we shall see, to write as a journalist, even by the 1840s, had begun to require adherence to a steadily deepening conventional ethic of "objectivity" in news reporting.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM
IN AMERICAN JOURNALISM

In 1848 an article comparing James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the *New York Herald*, with John Walter, proprietor of the London *Times*, gave the following description of their efforts:

The *New York Herald* is now the representative of American manners, of American thought. It is the daily daguerreotype of the heart and soul of the model republic. It delineates with faithfulness the American character in all its rapid changes and ever varying hues. The dominant character of European journals is Walterism—that of American journals is Bennettism. But not only is the *New York Herald* the daily portraiture of the mind, the imagination, the thought of the United States—it is the reflector of the inert mind of Mexico and the South American republics. It gives out the feelings of British America, too. It may be said with perfect justice, therefore, that the *New York Herald* is the face of the Western half of the earth, whose lineaments portray with fidelity the inward workings of this new world. . . [Pray 1855:412].

Such extravagant praise is revealing in several respects. Note, for instance, the accuracy or "fidelity" attributed to the *Herald*; also bear in mind the writer's probably wishful claim that the *Herald* manifested the "dominant character" of American journals. It is worth mentioning, too, that the *Herald* is here afforded the spoils of the recent victory over Mexico.

The journalistic embrace of photographic realism is made more explicit in the dramatic writing of the early *National Police Gazette*. This journal advertised its projected utility in detailing the apprehension of an absconded felon by a magistrate—who was informed of the crime by means of the "London Police Gazette." The magistrate, in the midst of reading about this horrible offense,

raised his eyes carelessly, as one will in cases of casual interruption, but was suddenly paralyzed by the appearance of the figure before him. It appeared as if the monster of his imagination had been suddenly conjured into life, and had slipped from the columns of the journal to glance upon him as a hideous reality [*National Police Gazette*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1-2-3-4, Oct. 16, 1845:53].

More sober, but equally emphatic, was the endorsement made by the anonymous author of *Asmodeus in New York*:

Contrary to what is observed in many other countries, magistrates and policemen admire the press, and extend to it their sympathy on every possible occasion. They regard it as the best detective at their command—the most reliable and efficient agent against evil-doers. When any offense or crime is committed, newspapers give such minute details, such complete information res-

pecting its circumstances and supposed authors, that the latter are soon traced and discovered by the aid of a people whose suspicions and watchfulness have been thus aroused. Though the passport system does not exist in the United States, and in spite of the republic's extensive domains, offenders seldom escape. The Press, with its Argus eyes, soon ferrets them out of their hiding-places, and notwithstanding their disguises [Anonymous 1868:15].

Finally, in the following passage, written in 1873, observe how the author extends praise to the *Tribune* by first rebutting what, he feels, will be the conventional interpretation given to his metaphor:

Whoever seeks a faithful daguerreotype of the progress of mankind during the years which have passed since the founding of The Tribune will find it in the columns of that newspaper. I do not here speak of the mere publication of events as they occurred; of mere journalistic enterprise. I mean to say that The Tribune sympathized with every advance movement, and was part and parcel of it; that the victories of philanthropy, of truth, of justice, of human rights have been also triumphs of the journal founded by Horace Greeley [Ingersoll 1873:483].

The widespread typification of the newspaper as a daguerreotype of the social and natural world extended to the active producers of news as well. Henry Clay, writing to James Gordon Bennett in June of 1841, concerning the admission of *Herald* reporters to the U.S. Senate, somewhat anxiously underscored the mechanism he expected the journalists to provide:

I should be glad that the reporters of your paper or that of any other could be admitted; provided always that whoever is received, in good faith, performs the duty of a stenographer [Pray 1855:291].

Photographic realism was becoming the guiding beacon of reportorial practice. A classic statement is found in Isaac Pray's fascinating—and adulatory—biography of James Gordon Bennett (Pray himself worked on the *Herald*); here, a longstanding and vital link between photographic realism and professionalism[28] was clearly made:

Even the very reformers of the time, of every stamp and kind, are indebted largely to the *Herald* for the promulgation of their own words and thoughts, and usually they have been reported, as they always ought to be, without any running commentary or gratuitous abuse—a license that no reporter ought to indulge in; for a reporter should be as a mere machine to repeat, in spite of editorial suggestion or dictation. He should know no master but his duty, and that is to give the exact truth. His profession is a superior one, and no love of place or popularity should swerve him from giving the truth in its integrity. If he departs from this course, he inflicts an injury on himself, on his profession, and on the journal which employs him. Mr. Bennett's policy has ever been to report *verbatim*, if possible [Pray 1855:472].

The notion that reporters could and should transfer, automatically and completely, the reality of events into writing, is similarly evident in beliefs subscribed to by other reporters. Nathan D. Urner, a New York *Tribune* reporter, describes his reaction upon stumbling across a "story" in the form of a young girl street singer whose father will soon be executed for murder:

Here was a chance for me. I happened to be the only reporter present at the scene—"sensation" was my forte—a "beat" upon all the other dailies had come directly to my hand. . . . But the whole thing stood before me like a picture which it seemed a sacrilege to copy.[29] [Martin 1868:132].

Later, the muckrake journalist Ida Tarbell reminisced,

many years after her exposure of the Standard Oil Corporation had made her famous:

My conscience began to trouble me. Was it not as much my business as a reporter to present this (the favorable) side of the picture as to present the other? (Hofstadter 1955:194]

Her regret follows from the lack of "balance" which, in retrospect, she believes faulted her writing. An even stronger statement of proper reportorial practice may be found in Emma Ware's biography of Jacob Riis, another notorious muckraker:

His friends, trying to prod him loose from his reporter's beat, wanted him to develop his material into fiction; but he was not interested in playing up a story beyond its true implications. The real article was what interested him, he said. Furthermore, he did not believe he could invent fiction [1939:41].

As Tuchman (1972) has persuasively shown, this presumption (or intention) of "objectivity" pervades the occupational ideology of currently practicing journalists. Yet its roots, I am arguing, reach deep into 19th century American culture, where they are intertwined with those put down by photographic realism. For if, as Tuchman (1972) asserts, news objectivity is a "strategic ritual," then it is a ritual which was first performed in the mid-19th century. Moreover, rather than serving only as a defensive mechanism to shield professional newsmen against mistakes and criticism [Tuchman 1972:678], news objectivity may be viewed as the fundamental historical assumption of photographic realism in journalism, typically molding key elements of news form. Far from being *only* a functional aspect of newsgathering operations—and I do not denigrate its importance in this sphere—the claim of news objectivity permits, may even *replace*, the basic assumption of verisimilitude between newspaper and reality. In short, news objectivity allows the otherwise difficult belief that the newspaper "mirrors" or "reflects" reality.

19th century critics often instanced this equation of news with photography in remarks which idealized an unbridgeable distance between works of literature and newspaper reports. G. P. Lathrop wrote in the *Atlantic* in March 1883 that the novel

will never become incorporated with the domain of art until the belief has been abandoned that a mere lumping together of material, with no more integration or meaning than satisfies newspaper reporters, will produce a genuine novel [McMahon 1973:77].

More generally, as McMahon reports, the *Atlantic* critics on the whole "fear that the novel, in becoming a literal recording of facts, may cease to become an art form and degenerate into mere report or journalism" (1973:25-26).

McMahon's charge is with us still. Wellek (1963:255), for example, writes that "in its lower reaches realism constantly declined into journalism, treatise writing, scientific description, in short, into non-art." William Ivins (1953:135-136) also apparently accepts this rigorous division of literature and journalism. Such acceptance indicates a continuity with beliefs evidenced as early as the mid-19th century, beliefs founded on the demonstration, by newspapers, of photographic truth. In 1845, the weekly journal *The Subterranean* published a poem by one James Montgomery, "The Press"; the third stanza of this poem reads:

What is the Press? 'Tis what the tongue
Was to the world when Time was young,

When, by tradition, sire to son
Conveyed what'er was known or done;
But fact and fiction so were mix'd,
That boundaries never could be fixed
[*The Subterranean*, Vol. III, No. 1, May 24, 1845:3].

Clearly, the author implies that the press permitted the separation of fact from fiction or, equally significant, that the press itself animates and therefore testifies to their disengagement.

However, the bifurcation of literature and journalism—despite its seeming rigidity in our culture—has never permitted the emergence of a clearcut boundary between the two (this, after all, is what the critics have been complaining about!).[30] An instructive passage from "The Decline of the Novel" in the *Nation* (Vol. VI, #150, May 14, 1868:389-390) takes its interest from the somewhat enigmatic kinship which it ascribes to literature and news:

The successor of the novel, in the chief of the literary places of power, will doubtless be the family of weekly and monthly journals. It is a family of respectable antiquity. . . . in the half-century since the novel attained the highest rank, (the periodical devoted to literary and social subjects) has gradually been drawing to its standard greater and greater numbers of the ablest writers, till now, in this age of business done by steam and telegraph; in this age, therefore, of news brought by steam and lightning from every quarter of the earth; in this age, therefore, of business newspapers read daily by millions who more and more insist that the daily newspaper shall more and more exclusively devote itself to news; in this age which naturally, then, makes of the newspaper a type to which literature naturally may, and, indeed, necessarily must conform itself if it is to reach the reader—in this age the quarterly, monthly and weekly press, aided by its kinship with its immensely powerful unliterary brother, seems destined to an easy conquest of the throne.

Similarly, David G. Croly, Comtean Positivist and editor of the *New York Graphic* (the first American illustrated daily), remarked in 1875 that "the modern novel and the newspaper are beginning to assimilate, and are becoming very much alike" (Wingate 1875:92). And, in 1906, James McCarthy's *The Newspaper Worker*, purportedly a manual for use by persons hopeful to become reporters, stated that after serving their apprenticeships, young reporters

unless restrained by good sense are in danger of running into the delusion that they are producing literature [McCarthy 1906:13].

One reason for the apparent difficulty of boundary maintenance between news-writing and "literary" writing may be that the newspaper was one of the few accessible and culturally sanctioned "schools" of writing—and only by *actually* writing could any individual attain competence in this code.[31] Or, as McCarthy put it, referring to journalism—and simultaneously buttressing the segregation of fact from fiction—"ability to write is not a birth gift like the divine lispings of the poet" (McCarthy 1906:8).[32]

Pretentious reporters articulated and impelled a more fundamental issue. They challenged the normally unspoken cultural consensus that news, like photographic realism as a whole, is *unselective and nonsymbolic*; and, in turn, that art which employs the language and style of news loses the very symbolic and selective features which define it as art. Actually, of course, the intricate patterning of *news is both symbolic and selective*. Correspondingly, the danger and the promise of photographic realism in literature is not that it may "degenerate" into "mere journalism" but, on the con-

trary, that it may reveal news as the *culturally structured and artistic creation that it is.*[33]

Helen MacGill Hughes (1942:11) pioneered discussion of the art of newswriting:

of all possible "facts", only some can be written as news, for the news is a relative matter. It depends upon the point of view of the reporter who writes it, and the reporter's point of view emanates from the job itself, from the nature of his assignment, and from the character of his newspaper.[34]

As we should be at pains to demonstrate, the newspaper and the assignments which comprise its "beats" change historically: thus the actual content of news objectivity itself also evolves. The course of its development is related to what various institutions, particularly those occupying what Gerbner (1973b and other works) has identified as "power roles" in regard to ongoing newspaper production, will accept as a suitable script for the presentation of the facts. For, as Taylor, Walton and Young have argued, facts

are a product of the work of those with the power to define what is to be taken to be "factual" and of the willingness of those without such power to accept the given definitions [1973:26].

In the culturally imposed hierarchy of genres, journalism is expected to be decisively marked off by virtue of its reputedly non-symbolic, objective character. In turn, once objectivity becomes the dominant convention in news reporting, the assumption or, at least, the ideal, of verisimilitude mediates and defines discussion and comprehension of news. Paraphrasing Geertz (1973:451), we may therefore say about the newspaper that, each day, it generates and regenerates the very objectivity which it pretends only to display.

CONCLUSIONS

Several major questions must be raised for future ethnographic-semiotic inquiries. If, for example, objectivity is culturally contrived, what are the historically changing limits of its embrace? What was and what now will be accepted as a "copy" *in situ*—by different publics and in different codes? May not "objectivity" (whose construction is manifestly supervised by carefully trained reporters) be imposed on particular classes of news for the benefit of a large, but nonetheless limited, social group? If so, how does this imposition register on other groups, themselves perhaps attempting to cultivate relatively distinct and dissimilar notions of what will constitute a suitable "copy"? How far, in short, does the convention stretch?

Despite all sorts of organizational constraints and precautions, the very need to produce an objective copy of reality for daily distribution to millions of viewers and readers inevitably can confront a heterogeneous people with divergent choices concerning the character of the social world. The knowledge that objectivity must be culturally imposed, therefore, may grow out of a more basic issue: fundamental, continuing disagreement over what can and should be accepted as "objective reality." At the heart of such a dispute is the nature of a culture.

Thus the growing body of theory and research which challenges unreflecting acceptance of "unstructured copies of events" may be merely a symptom of a larger conflict. What

are the sources of this disagreement and how may researchers isolate and appraise them?

If the true measure of a science lies in its ability to make valid and correct predictions, then the future of "objectivity" is of central importance. Finally, then, the most vital question: If it is decisively undercut, by what will "objectivity" be replaced? I hope that the emphasis I have given to the cultural structuring of all symbolic activities will help to show that this problem cannot be addressed without recourse to normative, as well as to empirical and analytical knowledge.

NOTES

[1] Following Gross (1973a:59), codes may be defined as organized subsets of "the total range of elements, operations, and ordering principles correlated with a field of reference that are possible in a given mode or family of symbol systems. In the simplest sense, then, any single language is a code existing within the verbal mode." I will employ "code" to describe much more limited cultural forms or patterns as well.

[2] This report forms part of a larger study-in-progress, called *Historical Origins and Symbolic Functions of Objectivity in American News Reporting*. It is a preliminary attempt to frame questions which will be addressed in much greater detail in the larger work.

[3] Earlier, Daguerre had pioneered the development of dioramas, which by the mid-19th century had come to be thriving businesses in France, England and America. Logically, if not technically, the diorama may be regarded as the predecessor of the cinema (Taft 1938:4). Dioramas are also discussed in Benjamin (1973:161-162), and in Gill (1977:31-36).

[4] Brecht here replies to Georg Lukacs, a formidable antagonist who, basing his arguments for literary realism on the works of writers such as Balzac and Tolstoy, underscored the need for contemporary writers to emulate this 19th century "high realist" school (see Lukacs 1971, 1972).

[5] It will, unfortunately, be evident below that Worth's ethnographic semiotic demands more than present historical evidence and technique can furnish in the way of detail. Recently, though, the "new social history" has begun its approach to precisely this level of problem, and I am confident that under its urging both evidence and technique will become available.

[6] Once again I must insist that this sketch cannot substitute for the more specific and thorough research which needs still to be done.

[7] As remarked in Taft (1938:69), the English press supported the belief that "the American process" yielded superlative results. Rudisill (1971:193) confirms this opinion.

[8] Leos (1977:27) observes:

A most egalitarian medium, (images can be made with little or no skill) photography, from the beginning, tends to place its serious devotees on the defensive. The first signs of popularisation evoke fears of the deterioration of quality, and the loss of public esteem.

In the case of photography, widespread appreciation certainly antedated mass competence in production of images; Jenkins (1975:20) remarks that in 1854 pictures sold for "as little as 25 cents each."

[9] My explanation here could not have been engendered without familiarity with Gross's (1973a, 1973b) discussions of communication, competence and appreciation. Communication then, may take place in several modes (e.g., lexical, pictorial-iconic, musical), when a skilled or competent interpreter correctly assumes another's *intention* to communicate within a shared culturally and historically specific code.

[10] Significantly, photographers have long considered themselves artists and, with a small coterie of admirers have competently appreci-

ated and communicated their art; yet photographers had to *battle* to achieve artistic status—as is evident in Nancy Newhall (1975). Furthermore, photojournalists are rigorously exempted from any explicit aesthetic, as is clear in Gidal: "unlike the area of art, photoreportage is not the expression of a projected inner vision, but a documentary report on reality. The "personal touch" is not an integral part of genuine photoreportage; the statement is formed by experienced facts" (1973:5). Yet the process by which photography became an art deserves further study. Hobsbawn's significant comment on the French case (1975:292-293) is that an increasing prevalence of "pirate" photographic copies of celebrities

implied that the original photographs were not legally protected as art. The courts were called upon to decide.... In the course of 1862 the case went through all tribunals up to the Court of Cassation, which decided that photography was, after all, an art, since this was the only means of effectively protecting its copyright.

In 1899, the photographer Peter H. Emerson still found it necessary to explicate the English copyright law:

The hazy notions existing among many photographers as to how to secure the copyright of their photographs, and other details, has led us to make a few remarks on the subject. In the first place the student is cautioned to secure the copyright of every photograph worth keeping... [1899:175].

Finally, Jenkins seems to suggest that a similar, and equally intriguing pattern was emerging in the United States even during the 1840s and 1850s:

As the popularity of the daguerreotype grew, the number of urban galleries increased rapidly and the competition became quite keen. In response to the competitive price cutting certain galleries—some of the large ones on Tremont and Washington Streets in Boston and those on lower Broadway in New York—began to cater to a more elite clientele. Daguerreotypists such as Matthew Brady, Charles and Henry Meade, Martin Lawrence, and Jeremiah Gurney turned their galleries into elaborate parlors with plush furniture and elegant trappings. They featured the qualitative and artistic element in their work, thereby trying to differentiate their work from that of the "factories." Of course, this quality justified a higher price for their products (1975: 19).

[11] Is "photographic realism," paradoxically, a style associated predominantly or even entirely with *verbal* codes? Is it not possible that photographic realism operates as a verbally coded *filter*, through, or against which appreciation and interpretation in various codes proceed? The verbal coding of photographic realism as an exclusive standard of truth seems to square well with Worth's (1975) illuminating discussion of our normal but naive refusal to concede that "pictures can't say ain't." Thus the statement that "X is not a true picture of reality" may be verbally *attributed* to the image depicted on a particular canvas or strip of acetate. Again, this is consistent with Worth's (1975:106) assertion of the hegemony of "linguistic rules for implication and inference." Verbal coding would also go far to explain the ease with which photographic realism underwent "translation" into conventions in verbal codes.

[12] Or, rephrased, the contradiction of photographic realism is embodied in its intention to communicate "interactionally"; a correct interpretive strategy for photographic realism thus begins communicatively but moves directly into the realm of *attribution*. Here, as Worth claims (1975:88), "the meaning is put onto the picture from *outside* the picture itself"—by means of personal and social stereotypy, for example. The attributor in this way may construct "half, three-fourths, seven-eighths or any and all proportions of any work. He may, if we do not constrain attribution by personality and culture, put *anything* into a work and happily extract *anything* out of it" (Worth 1975:97). Worth and Gross (1974) draw a critical distinction between *attributed* and *inferred* meaning. People *attribute* meaning in response to their assumption that a thing or condition simply exists. People *infer* meaning when their assumption of an intention to communicate is evoked by the thing or condition under consideration. Restated once again, the point I am making here is that photographic realism, if successful, invokes *both* of these interpretive strategies at once.

[13] I am all too aware of the gaps in the evidence which must support this claim. Indeed, I do not believe that it has been satisfactorily demonstrated that photography is universally so recognized; or

that there are not significant gradations and modifications of belief in photographic truth according to social group, stratum, or class, context and culture. Once again, clearly, systematic research must be undertaken before a fully valid assessment can be made.

[14] It seems that photography here merely concretized and, probably, vastly extended, a belief which had been available in certain philosophical circles at least, since 1709. In that year, George Berkeley produced *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* which, using vision throughout as an explicative metaphor, eventually succumbed to its power, referring to vision as the "Universal Language of Nature" and as the "Language of the Author of Nature." A significant *philosophical* treatment of the metaphor of vision in Berkeley is given by Turbayne (1970).

[15] Contrast Worth with Nochlin (1973:98), who continues to search—perhaps unknowingly—for some sort of universal visual language of realism:

> From antiquity onward, the naive spectator has admired feats of verisimilitude. . . . As J. P. Stern recently pointed out. . . this issue of realism is "the creative acknowledgement of the data of social life at a recognizable moment in history." And this is true from antiquity on, despite significant differences in formal elements, content or syntax. Inseparably related to the insistence on the social data is the preponderance of metonymic rather than metaphoric imagery in realist structure: the veracity of the image is attested to by the authenticity of the contiguous relationships existing among concrete figures, costumes, settings, gestures, textures and substances at a specific time and in a specific place. This, not generalization, idealization or atemporality, is realist truth.

Or perhaps Nochlin searches only for the key features of Western realism. In any case, although she makes her case with sensitivity, it might be made stronger still by pointing to the really critical issue: how verisimilitude is to be recognized across time and culture. How is metonymy separated, in a culturally coherent manner, from metaphor? With this query we return to form and, specifically, to the form provided by photographic realism, which accomplished such a separation in an unprecedentedly effective way. Perhaps G. P. Lathrop, writing in 1874, had something similar in mind when he complained that "literalism" was precipitated when "the aesthetic balance between fact and idea is, from whatever cause at all, unsettled" (McMahon 1973:33).

[16] Henisch (1977:37) comments on the acceptance of photography in eastern Europe during the same period: "Paradoxically, and in the face of peasant prejudice, the word *daguerreotype* came to stand for truth and honesty wherever the new art made its appearance." By contrast, the new technology's reception in western European nations seems to have been more frequently uneven and mistrustful, due to photography's unartistic lack of selectivity (cf. Rudisill 1971:208). On the other hand, even such suspicion premised a similar belief in the capacity of photography to be realistic or objective.

[17] Rudisill writes:

> many. . . saw directly, for the first time, some aspect of the universe otherwise impossible to apprehend immediately. . . . In such instances, the daguerreotype not only recorded reality acutely, but it added new dimensions to perceiving it [1971:85].

Again, the point is not that photography can copy natural events, but rather, that the belief in its objectivity both encouraged and allowed unprecedented human control of the natural and of the social world.

[18] Larry Gross made this example available to me.

[19] I do *not* mean that there were not dissenters to the standard imposed with photographic realism; on the contrary, there were many who fumed against photographic truth, and their sometimes acid comments lace many contemporary debates over art and aesthetics. And it is important to perceive, with Hobsbawm (1975:292) that realists *themselves* "resisted the simple identification of art with exact and naturalistic reproduction. . . . Photography was useful, because it could help the painter to rise above a mere mechanical copy of objects." Artists had to know, even if others too often did not, that their project rested on the competent exercise of technique and choice.

[20] I would suggest that this fundamental shift, by which verbal and visual symbolic styles were to be replaced by natural "reality," best

accounts for the protest waged more or less insistently since the 18th century (Lowenthal 1968) against what is now termed "mass culture." The English writer Steele complained as early as 1713 of

> this unsettled way of reading. . . which naturally seduces us into as undetermined a manner of thinking. . . . That assemblage of words which is called a style becomes utterly annihilated. . . (Watt 1957: 48).

Style *is* the embodiment of competence, and to make exclusive a style whose most vital premise is that it is not a style, is to rebuff equally sharply the producers and appreciators of previous styles.

[21] My discussion admittedly hedges the question of limits within what are, after all, codes which frequently assert an explicit right to construct and manipulate "unreal" and "fictional" materials. Here, however, one must ask about what *is* conceded to be fictional in current literary and filmic productions, other than a bare, skeletal plot or narrative sequence—exactly that component, by the way, which can undergo translation without necessary and visible alteration. The boundaries of "fiction" and "reality" undergo continuous shifts; furthermore, our tacit knowledge that they do so can be played upon. A recently republished thriller by the spy-novelist Eric Ambler (1977) exhibits an advertisement on its final page: emblazoned in large boldface type above a brief title-list of paperbacks for sale the reader sees, "These books? Fiction. Keep telling yourself that as you read." It seems likely that the segregation in some bookstores of "fiction" and "literature" provides another clue to the going limits of the larger division.

[22] Hobsbawm therefore seems fundamentally mistaken when he says that "Words could. . . represent "real life" as well as ideas, and unlike the visual arts their technique made no claim actually to imitate it" (1975:299). In 1867 E. P. Whipple wrote that Trollope "will never fail for subjects as long as the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland contains thirty millions of people, "mostly bores," and as long as he has his mental daguerreotype machine in order" (McMahon 1973:25). Helen McMahon notes that

> The terms "daguerreotype" and "photography" are used frequently (by *Atlantic* critics) to indicate disapproval. Compare T. S. Perry's comment in his review of Theophile Gautier's *Captain Fracasse* (July 1880) that "in these days when writers of novels so often take photography for their model, it is agreeable to read the work of a man who has a real artistic pleasure in describing the adventures, as well as the surroundings of men and women" [1973:109-110].

[23] The explicitly visual frame created by literary realism is frequently remarked by *Atlantic* critics. In 1860: "The interest of the story is sustained by the distinctness with which the localities in which it passes are depicted" (McMahon 1973:12). In an 1862 review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, E. P. Whipple noted the author's ability "to impress us with a sense of the substantial reality of what she makes us mentally see." He also commends her "foundation of the story in palpable realities which every Yankee recognizes as true the moment they are presented to his eye" (McMahon 1973:12). Even in terms of disapprobation (perhaps significant for the changed cultural status of photographic realism), visual interpretation persisted. In 1889 H. E. Scudder criticized *The McVeys* by Joseph Kirkland: it is only "a perishable photograph which may remind one of a phase of life but. . . has no power to reveal actual life" (McMahon 1973:31).

[24] The extent to which these two alternatives are actually mutually exclusive within a particular context or "reading" is of course still a matter of conjecture.

[25] This citation supplies an unwitting evidence of literary realism's underlying motivation. It was crucial that the author not assume "special knowledge"—either technical or geographical—on the part of his readers, because publishing was fast becoming a national, even an international, business. Photographic realism, by "opening up" literary works to the attributions of as many readers as possible, achieved a transparency unmatched by other styles.

[26] Howells testifies here to the greater manueverability granted to writers than to painters and graphic artists, with which to accomplish photographic realism. The cognitive dissonance caused by a picture even slightly out of fashion seems to have been capable of puncturing the illusion of contemporaneity. Perhaps this is a good place to mention that mixed codes—as in the combinations of pictures and verbal

narrative created in illustrated periodicals—could engender unique problems for photographic realism, in that the conventions used to evoke it might and did vary across codes and publics. Without addressing this issue directly, Fox (1977) has gathered some useful information on its manifestation in English periodicals in the 1850s. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, the fantastically successful weekly which launched American illustrated journalism in 1855, straightaway encountered this problem in its first years of publication. As Gambee reports, concerning *Leslie's* depiction of crimes: "It was when the *New York Times* attacked Leslie for publishing such material that he countered with straight-faced dignity that he failed to see why he should be condemned for illustrating the stories he copied from the *New York Times'* own coverage of the city's police activities" (1964: 15). Here, Leslie strategically employed the universality and supposed complete translatability of photographic realism to come to his own rescue. On the other hand, the fact that "pictures can't say ain't" (Worth 1975) helped to speed the adoption of written *captions* in illustrated journalism, "designed to determine the beholder's attitude" to the inevitably distinct class or order of information contained in the picture or later, photograph (Braive 1966:240).

[27] Is the writer commenting slyly on miscegenation in American society? His use of the verb "delineate" to denote the *Herald's* portrayal of the "American character in all its rapid changes and ever varying hues" certainly parallels the use of the same term, since the 1820's, in relation to blackface minstrelsy—the practitioners of which were frequently termed "Ethiopian Delineators" (Toll 1974:28).

[28] The connection between the two has, since this same period, been intimate and important; its force derived *not* from the *actual existence and practice* of photographic realism in journalism, but from the *normative acceptance of this standard as an ideal*, both by reporters and readers.

[29] Here, journalistic translation occurs photographically, while reality itself is no longer simply "natural"—for it has been culturally framed by Urner's use of "picture" to describe the raw event itself. Albeit probably an unselfconscious instance, such usage nonetheless may presage a most fundamental consequence of photographic realism: awareness of the cultural construction which mediates and defines the relation between society and nature.

[30] Three recent examples of critical anxiety over the difficulty of maintaining this boundary may be found in: O'Connor (1977a, 1977b), where a *New York Times* television critic explicitly addresses the "fact/fiction conundrum" which, he claims, arises in recent "documentary-drama" television specials; and in Waters et al. (1977:56), where it is stated that "by embellishing recent history with fictional dialogue and interpretative simplifications, the docu-dramas place a considerable burden on the viewer's ability to distinguish reality from fantasy."

[31] Thus the entrenched procedure referred to by Hofstadter above, of first becoming a reporter, then a "writer" (Hemingway is another, more recent instance).

[32] Since, concretely, "ability to write" *meant* "ability to write journalistically," the poet—whose competence was clearly different from that practiced by reporters—was quite understandably to become a mystified figure. For where was it possible to learn to write poetry? The obvious alternative was for poets to assert a somehow special, even divine, *experiential* "competence"—which indeed, they seem to do. I owe this observation to Larry Gross.

[33] My argument *in no way* implies that news, because it is art, is one iota less important or "real." To say that it is, is simply to once again mistake a cultural construction for a natural reality. Recall, too, that before photographic realism and its attendant utilitarian conceptions of art as unnecessary adornment, art was in all seriousness considered to be about the most important thing. As Ferguson (1977:835) has pointed out, this denigration of art has helped much in forcing us to be oblivious to the manifold influences of nonverbal thinking on our technological environment: "the tendency has been to lose sight of the crucial part played by nonverbal knowledge in making the "big" decisions of form, arrangement and texture that determine the parameters within which a system will operate."

[34] Spadework by Breed (1955, 1958), Darnton (1975), Gerbner (1964) and others has gone far to validate Hughes' statement. In general, such seminal works fall into what Wright (1975) has called the "sociology of the communicator."

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