Photography, Phenomenology and Sight: Toward an Understanding of Photography through the Discourse of Vision.

Dissertation

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Abstract

Understanding photography can be a complicated prospect sometimes. Even photographs that appear to be direct and transcriptive can be complicated. Numerous cultural and technological discourses are involved in the creation of even the most basic photographs. The overwhelming shift in photographic technology from traditional materials to digital technologies is not the cause of this, but it makes the complex interactions more evident.

Because acts of vision occur in the production and reception of nearly every single photograph, connections between vision, photography and the discourse of vision are an essential part of understanding photography. The primary research question investigated is: What relationships between vision and knowledge, consciousness and subjectivity are described in the discourse of vision, and how do they relate to photography?

Discourse analysis is the methodology used to consider interrelations between the three major strands of the discourse of vision: modernist vision, phenomenological vision, and postmodern vision. How each strand characterizes the act of seeing, and the stated or implied subject-object dynamic are also closely examined. A major focus is
investigating the potential phenomenology offers as an alternate philosophical vantage point for understanding vision and photography.

To consider the unique understandings generated when looking at photography through each of these discourse strands, photographs by artists Thomas Demand, Kelli Connell; photojournalists Olivier Jobard, and Alex Webb; students, and other non-artists are critically examined. These analyses give tangible form to the abstract theories of vision. Finally the research raises questions concerning photography education and the possibilities offered by a phenomenological approach toward photography and looks toward ways digital photography might be visualized as an ontologically productive form of seeing.
Dedication

To Vivyan and Christopher:

May your vision always be as clear and bright as it is now.
Acknowledgements

It is with heartfelt thanks that I want to acknowledge all who supported and helped me through this arduous process: My advisor Dr. Sydney Walker, who always had the right article, new and challenging idea, and just the right amount of guidance ready to hand before I knew I needed it myself. To Dr. Jack Richardson whose advice, friendship, and camaraderie have helped make this process bearable. The questions the two of you have put before me have truly changed the way I see. To Professor Robert Derr whose intense knowledge of photography has continually challenged the way I see, and greatly expanded the reach of this project.

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Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... v
Vita .................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xi

Chapter 1: In the Camera Obscura ...................................................................................... 1
  From Film to Digital ....................................................................................................... 2
  Statement of the problem ............................................................................................. 4
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 5
  Regarding Postmodernism ............................................................................................ 6
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 7
  Limitations of the study ............................................................................................... 8
  Outline of Chapters ...................................................................................................... 8

Chapter 2: Seeing Photography through the Work of Thomas Demand ......................... 12
  Poll (2001) .................................................................................................................. 14
  First Impressions ......................................................................................................... 17
  A Modernist reading of Demand’s photographs ......................................................... 17
  Demand’s work and the distanced viewer .................................................................... 19
  Reading Tavern Beyond the Surface ............................................................................ 24
  Understandings Generated within Demand’s process ............................................... 29
  The Phenomenology of Demand’s photographs ......................................................... 36
    Being in Demand’s scenes ......................................................................................... 39
    Examining an exhibition catalogue of Demand’s work ............................................ 41
  Demand and Da-sein ..................................................................................................... 43
  Seeing Photography ...................................................................................................... 46

Chapter 3: Modernist Vision ............................................................................................. 49
  Grecian Antecedents .................................................................................................... 50
  A Rational Perspective ............................................................................................... 52
  Cartesian Perspectivalism ............................................................................................ 55
  The Camera Obscura as a Model for Thought ............................................................ 58
  The Rational, Detached Subject .................................................................................. 60
  The Hegemony of Vision in Modernity ....................................................................... 61
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4: Phenomenological Vision</th>
<th>64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is Phenomenology?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology and Consciousness</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noema and noesis</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reduction or <em>epoché</em>.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence vs. Existence</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Heidegger</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ready to hand</em> and <em>present to hand</em></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology and Vision</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A critique of Cartesian visual epistemology</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between subject and object</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A doubtful subjective ontology</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking Closer at Phenomenological Vision</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning technology</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instrumental definition of technology</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern technology</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestell</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enframing as danger</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward a Visual Ontology</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The color red: in essence and in situ</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand’s work and the phenomenological reduction</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descartes’ sense of vision vs Merleau-Ponty’s</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision in Heidegger’s phenomenology</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and the flesh of the world</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sartre’s view</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Focus</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Postmodern Vision</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Decentered Subject: Sartre</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Decentered Subject: Lacan</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mirror stage</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire and the gaze</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamorphosis</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision, Discourse and Power</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse and vision</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate regimes of sight</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical observation</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panopticism</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scopic regimes and the individual</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society of the spectacle</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation not representation</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Ocularcentrism as Cultural Dominant</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Photography and the Discourse of Vision</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographic Representation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cartesian perspective</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A postmodern perspective</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A photographic simulacrum</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The photographic keyhole</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The photographic eye of power</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A phenomenological perspective</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobard’s visual presence</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical presence</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No innocent eye</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding an innocent photograph</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern vision and the sink</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sink and the power of The Look</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sink and the sardine can</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content and Context</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological vision and the sink</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than One Look</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7: Methodology</th>
<th>180</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Discourse of Vision</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Analysis</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Discourse Strands</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The modernist strand</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The postmodern strand</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The phenomenological strand</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography and the three discourse strands</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at photographs</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse strands as lenses</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques of applying the critical lenses</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating the lens metaphor</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Limitations of Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking Forward</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 8: Phenomenology and Creative Photographic Vision</th>
<th>206</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lacuna</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sailor’s boots</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological vision and Sailor’s Boots</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world of the boots</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two worlds</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing the sprocket holes</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the assignment</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phenomenological Vision and the Photographic Act.................................................. 220
Kelli Connell ........................................................................................................... 221
Visual depth and breadth ......................................................................................... 227
In Summary ................................................................................................................. 230

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Implications for Photography Education .................. 232
Analyzing Photography and Vision ........................................................................ 233
Connecting theory to photography ....................................................................... 236
Photography and phenomenological vision .......................................................... 237
Phenomenological vision and photography education ........................................ 238
A Dynamic Discourse ............................................................................................. 239
Implications for Photography Education .............................................................. 240
Visuality & Teaching Technique: ......................................................................... 242
Choosing examples .................................................................................................. 243
Teaching picture making through the discourse of vision .................................... 247
Teaching Picture Viewing ....................................................................................... 251
Reflecting on visuality in photography education ............................................... 252
Final Thoughts ........................................................................................................... 254

References ................................................................................................................... 257

Appendix A: Student Participant Recruitment Letter ......................................... 266
Appendix B: Informed Consent & Permission to Publish ...................................... 268
Appendix C: Questionnaire .................................................................................... 270
Appendix D: Photography Permissions .................................................................... 272
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Demand, T. (2001) Poll ................................................................. 15
Figure 2.2 Demand, T. (2004) Küche/Kitchen............................................ 16
Figure 2.3 Photographer unknown. (1937). Evidence .............................. 21
Figure 2.4 Demand, T. (2006). Klause/Tavern I ........................................ 25
Figure 2.5 Casebere, J. (2001). Yellow Hallway #2.................................... 33
Figure 3.1 Euclid's Diagram of Perspective. (Field, 1997, p. 7)..................... 52
Figure 3.2 Alberti’s construction (1435). (Field, 1997, p. 26) ..................... 53
Figure 4.1 Demand, T. (1994). Raum/Room............................................ 101
Figure 5.1 Bentham, J. (1791) Architectural plan for the Panopticon.......... 138
Figure 6.1 Jobard, O. (1994). Operation “Uphold Democracy” .................. 151
Figure 6.2 Webb, A. (1994). U.S. troops land as the press awaits ............... 153
Figure 6.3 Catalano, K. (2008). Should be washing dishes ......................... 166
Figure 8.1 Student Photograph (2007). Sailor’s Boots .............................. 210
Figure 8.2 Connell, K. (2006). The Valley............................................... 222
Figure 8.3 Connell, K. (2006). The Valley Contact Sheet .......................... 224
Figure 8.4 Student photograph (2009). Untitled ..................................... 227
Figure 9.1 Muybridge, E. (1878). The Horse in Motion ................................ 245
Chapter 1: In the Camera Obscura

“Reflection is the courage to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called into question.” (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 116)

One day, quite some time ago, I decided to convert a portion of the cellar in our century-old home into a darkroom. At the time, the space was lined by deep, rough wooden shelves once used by the previous owners to store preserves and canned goods. The shelves still held a number of dusty, cobweb-covered mason jars. Re-visioning the space as a darkroom meant the shelves had to be removed, but the previous owner—in order to be certain—had driven numerous two and a half inch nails into the top edges of the shelves to fasten them to the upright supports. The task therefore involved forcefully hitting the bottoms of the shelves with an upward, underhand swing of a hammer, striking the bottom of each shelf over and over. When once I missed the edge of a shelf with the hammer swing, the trajectory of the tool was inevitable and I hit myself squarely in the forehead with the hammer. I suddenly became painfully aware of the hammer in my hand, and more specifically aware of the less-than-ideal mechanics I had been using to
perform the task at hand. I was also struck by, and can still clearly recall a sudden metallic taste on my tongue.¹

Though not nearly as blunt or sudden as a blow to the head, the overwhelming shift in photographic technology from traditional materials to digital technologies, also forced me to step back—to fully and carefully examine my actions. This time it was the way I was looking at photography—as a teacher and as an image maker—that I contemplated rather than my demolition skills. This research project is a circumspect² examination of vision as it relates to photography. It is a project instigated by, but in no way limited to concerns raised by the decline of film photography and the proliferation of the digital.

**From Film to Digital**

My role as a photography educator, for as far back as I could recall, had been comfortably tied to traditional black and white photographic technologies. Students memorized f/stops and shutter speeds, learned the rules of composition, mastered film processing and used enlargers to make technically excellent prints. The goal of photography education as I understood it was the mastery of the craft and technology of making photographs.

Though the digital revolution had been building for decades, events such as the closing of Agfa, the restructuring of Ilford, the bankruptcy of the Polaroid Corporation

¹ This experience was reminiscent of Goethe’s (1840/1970) description of colors which arise in the body independent of the action of light on the retina.
² The word circumspect indicates a careful, thoughtful and thorough look around. The use here references Heidegger’s (1926/1962) use of the term to indicate a meaningful visual engagement with the world.
and the end of Kodak silver printing paper, made it suddenly clear that digital photography was on course to replace traditional processes in the classroom. It was only when faced with the impending disappearance of the tool that I was accustomed to that I began to question the technological approach.

At first I spent hours catching up to the technology. I bought a digital camera, studied photo editing software, and learned to make digital inkjet prints comparable in quality and appearance to traditional silver prints. As the digital transition progressed though, an uncomfortable doubt grew in the back of my mind. The digital and the silver print might appear the same to the eye, but the cultural conditions surrounding both had become completely different! Focusing exclusively on the technology was not producing an understanding of photography that accounted for these differences. Photography is not the same in a digital era, and digital photography is not the same as traditional analog photography. In the contemporary digital context, picture-making has become simplified on one hand, and more complicated on the other. Making, displaying and viewing photographs is easier than ever. It has become a part of every-day life. The readily available ability to substantially and persuasively edit, retouch and re-mix photographs is also more common and more accessible than ever before. Changes in a photograph’s use and appearance such as this are not minor technological shifts. They represent significant changes in the way photography looks and the way it may be seen.
Statement of the problem

Understanding photography is a complex operation, one that requires understanding the broader connections between photography and the process of seeing. The changes to the medium are not the cause of this but they do make it more apparent. Acts of vision occur both in the production and reception of nearly every single photograph. Vision occurs when the photographer frames the shot, and even beforehand when the picture is thought about, noticed, or planned. Vision is a component of image editing as well: certain photographs are selected or deleted and perhaps digitally altered based on the way they appear to a subjective viewer.

When the photograph is displayed, the end viewer is given an opportunity to engage with the picture through another act of vision. The thinking that informs this look may be just as complex and nuanced as is employed in making the picture. The problem is that understanding photography requires an understanding of the complex interchanges that occur when photographs are seen—before, in the process of, and after they are created. These acts of vision, and theories about them, are all a part of the discourse of photography, but approaches that emphasize the technology alone downplay or ignore the visual. These theories are not restricted to the photographic domain. They are a part of the larger discourse of vision—a field of theoretical inquiry that seeks to describe the complexity of looking and seeing. Understanding the connections between vision and photography and the implications of the acts of vision involved, requires an understanding of the discourse of vision.
Research Questions

The primary question is: What relationships between vision and knowledge, consciousness and subjectivity are described in the discourse of vision, and how do they relate to photography? Several related questions follow: What are the dominant discourse strands that shape the discourse of vision, and how do they each characterize the act of seeing differently? What are the relationships between these different strands in the discourse? What is the status of the viewer in each of these approaches toward vision, and what is the stated or implied relationship between the subject and object of his or her gaze? Finally, what unique understandings are generated when looking at photography through each of these discourse strands?

Investigating these questions entailed an extensive literature review. Throughout this review, I held onto photography as a focal point. I continually looked for connections between the discourse of vision—the philosophies and the theories described in each of these discourse strands—and photography and photography education. In other words, I looked closely at the discourse of vision while keeping an eye on photography.

The phrase discourse of vision is closely related to visuality. Visuality is a term employed by a group of thinkers investigating the social aspects of seeing (Foster, 1988). Whereas vision refers to the technical-optical function of the eye, visuality speaks to the notion that a whole host of discourses—social, technological, psychological, and philosophical—inform and shape the way we see. “Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience”
Visuality is a term that acknowledges that vision is shaped by the discourse of vision. Both terms refer to the same collection of concepts.

**Regarding Postmodernism**

When my struggle to re-conceptualize photography began, there was to my knowledge only one other theoretical platform besides the modernist technology-based approach toward teaching that I had chosen: Postmodernism. As a graduate student in photography I had been introduced to a number of photographers identified as postmodern: Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and though I do not recall their specific names, certainly there were others. Lacking the necessary theoretical background, I was unable to fully understand or appreciate the work of these photographers, much less the movement of postmodernism as a whole. The sense of postmodernism that lingered in my mind was a holdover from Andy Grundberg’s (1990) *Crisis of the Real*:

> There is no place in the postmodern world for a belief in the authenticity of experience, in the sanctity of the individual artist’s vision, in genius, or originality. What postmodern art finally tells us is that things have been used up, that we are at the end of the line, that we are all prisoners of what we see… [and] photography, as a nearly indiscriminate producer of images, is in large part responsible. (Grundberg, 1990, p. 17)

Developing an understanding of postmodern vision that is broader and more inclusive than this narrow view is essential to adequately contextualizing photography within the discourse of vision.
Significance of the Study

A significant outcome of the review of literature was the personal discovery of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy I had never heard of before the project began. It was founded in the early twentieth century by Edmund Husserl and further extended by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others. One of the primary objectives of phenomenology is to re-examine the way consciousness and subjective experience of the world are defined. Ocularcentrism, and Cartesianism—named after Descartes—are two contemporary terms for the traditional, hegemonic world-view that phenomenology critiques. The Cartesian world view is based on the separation of the subject and the object on view, a belief in the transparency and fidelity of representation, and the direct association of vision with knowledge. Phenomenology is critical of many aspects of the Cartesian worldview and came before most of the texts associated with postmodernism. It offers an approach toward vision—an alternate conceptual space—different from the modern-postmodern binary. Though phenomenology is a significant part of the discourse of vision, photography was not substantively addressed by the major phenomenological philosophers. Perhaps because of this, but also because of the difficulty of Heidegger’s texts, and the perceived focus of all of phenomenology on essences, phenomenology has mostly been excluded from serious critical analyses of photography. Barthes (1981) represents the single clear example of a full-length phenomenological description of photography in the historical literature. Several recent texts have returned to phenomenology as a unique approach toward understanding photography including Crowther (2009), Fried (2008), Cheung (2005,
2010), and Smucker (2008). Of particular interest is the fact that none of these authors, except Smucker (2008), employs existential phenomenology in their description of photography. As Fisher (2008) notes, a phenomenology of photography that employs the existential approaches of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty is essentially non-existent. This research begins to remedy that shortfall.

**Limitations of the study**

Though changes in the way photographs are made precipitated this research project, the inquiry is limited to questions of looking and seeing. Technical descriptions of photographic technique are not the focus. Similarly, though it was the transition from film to digital that was the impetus; digital photography is neither emphasized nor described in close detail. The emphasis on photography as the focal point of the research also bounds the scope to which the discourse of vision is investigated. The discourse of vision is a very broad field and only those ideas that bear on the central research questions were approached in the literature review and discussed here.

**Outline of Chapters**

In order to access the ideas found in the discourse of vision and relate them to photography, discussion of the work of a particular artist—Thomas Demand—that makes visible these connections, will be the starting point. Demand’s work is complicated. It appears to be one thing at first glance, but looks different on closer inspection. As with

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3 Smucker (2008) is a focused phenomenological analysis of Bernd and Hilla Becher’s photography employing Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology*. 
vision itself, Demand’s work is more than just an optical reproduction of a scene; it is a complex socially-engaged process. His working methods open up a conceptual space between vision and the way photography usually functions. This provides room to look at photographic seeing from a slightly different philosophical vantage point, offering unique insight into the confluence of visuality and photography.

Michael Fried’s (2008) reading of Demand’s work will offer insight into a modernist way of looking at photographs. This reading will be compared to a similar one found in John Szarkowski’s (1989) *Photography Until Now* to consider implications of adhering to modernist ways of seeing photography. The postmodern and the phenomenological discourse strands will also be considered through Demand’s work. A specific focus will be given to the ways in which his process may be read using the language of phenomenology, but also seen as a form of phenomenological inquiry in its own right.

The third chapter begins the task of historically situating the discourse of vision by considering the intimate connections between seeing and thinking deeply embedded in Western thought. Grecian philosophy, linear perspective, the camera-obscura model of vision, and the influential enlightenment philosophy of Rene Descartes—also called Cartesianism— are examined as profound influences on the dominant modernist model of sight. The subject-object binary, a critical component of this way of thinking, is also detailed in this section.

Phenomenology, a philosophy that challenges the hegemonic Cartesian approach toward vision is described in chapter four. It is the second major strand in the discourse
of vision. The basic tenets of phenomenology that relate to vision are defined, and concepts developed by Husserl are examined in relation to Descartes. Heidegger’s efforts to overcome the subject-object binary are described at length here, as are the ways in which phenomenology is concerned with exposing and critiquing the underlying structures of Cartesian vision. Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology* is also carefully analyzed because of the direct connection that it offers between vision, technology and thought. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the deeply embodied and world-connected ways of seeing described by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. These theories offer a more complete, more ontologically engaged model of vision than the historically dominant way of seeing inherited from Descartes.

Sartre’s essay *The Look* provides a transition from phenomenological vision to the third discourse strand postmodern vision. Sartre complicates the relationship between subject and world by theorizing a radical de-centering of the self through vision. Lacan elaborates upon these ideas and his theories are applied in modified form to critiques of film and photography. Two additional concepts integral to the discourse of vision proposed by Lacan, desire and anamorphosis, are described as well. The idea of the gaze as an externally-located, culturally-mediated form of power and control, developed by Foucault and sharpened by Elkins, is also considered as an integral part of postmodern vision. The view that society is created and controlled by consumer images is evidenced in Debord (1967/1983) and the chapter concludes with a picture of vision in which images entirely detach from reality (Baudrillard, 1981/2001). The picture of vision
described in postmodern theory builds upon what phenomenology started—a critique of Cartesianism—but takes a decidedly anti-visual and anti-ocularcentric disposition.

With the major strands of the discourse of vision sketched-out, the focus of the paper returns to the topic of photography with a consideration of the ways in which each of these three major discourse strands, modernist vision, phenomenological vision, and postmodern vision, is capable of producing a substantially different understanding of individual photographs.

The seventh chapter is an examination of the methodology that guides this research project. The dynamic relationships between the major theories and theorists are outlined in this chapter, and the importance of considering all three major discourse strands in detail is discussed. Also detailed are the techniques employed to critically analyze photography through the various discourse lenses.

The research comes full circle in the final two chapters with a return to questions concerning photography education and the possibilities offered by a phenomenological approach toward the practice of making digital photographs. A student photograph will be examined to consider connections between photography, phenomenological vision and the class assignment that precipitated the photograph. Phenomenological vision will also be examined as a productive approach to making ontologically engaged digital photographs. To begin this investigation, we turn now toward the photography of Thomas Demand.
Chapter 2: Seeing Photography through the Work of Thomas Demand

This chapter begins with a description of the physical—the surface—appearance of *Poll* (2001), one of Thomas Demand’s photographs. This description, by focusing on the visual appearance of Demand’s photographs, lays the groundwork for understanding Demand’s images as works of art. In order to look at the modernist way of seeing this work, Michael Fried’s (2008) interpretation is detailed next. Fried, a modernist art critic presents an updated—though unchanged—restatement of the Cartesian subject-object relationship found in modernist constructions of visuality. Reading Demand’s photographs as Fried does requires a very specific sort of relationship between the viewer and the photograph. John Szarkowski’s (1989) book *Photography Until Now* includes a photograph similarly situated, and a discussion of this picture is included to shed light on some of the implications of reading photographs this way.

Interpreting Demand’s photographs using postmodern theory would most certainly produce understandings considerably different than Fried’s. Such a reading is not the intent of this chapter, and a fully developed postmodern interpretation is not included here, though a certain debt to Debord and Baudrillard is acknowledged. The focus here is to provide an introduction to phenomenological ways of seeing through a close examination of Demand’s photographic constructions.
Demand’s work is complicated and at first glance deceiving to the eye. What you see is not what you think you see. Because of this, Demand’s work invites discussion, debate, and theoretical analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to engage in this discussion on a theoretical level. Both to develop an understanding of what in fact one sees when looking at a Demand photograph, but also to consider other possibilities. Demand’s work seems to trouble the idea of vision itself, particularly photographic vision. This chapter is an inquiry into the conceptual possibilities offered by Demand’s way of seeing things. A critique of the culturally dominant approach toward vision is a core component of the phenomenological approach, and the initial modernist reading of Demand mentioned above is critical to establish a background for these further discussions.

Important to note here is that Demand is an artist who produces large glossy photographs specifically intended for gallery and museum exhibition. I have never seen one of his photographs in person—in an un-mediated state. These facts are significant for several reasons. First this research project is not focused on the work of Demand, though discussions of his images appear throughout. The drive to experience the aura of an actual Thomas Demand print is not an essential part of the phenomenology of his work discussed in these pages. It is the concept of photographic vision that Demand explores that is essential to this project. Demand’s concept in practice—his phenomenology—carries through in reproduction. Of significance also is the fact that the subjects photographed by Demand are not generally accessible to the public any longer. They are—sometimes doubly—out of sight: a part of the past, destroyed and/or otherwise
made un-viewable. Due to the scale, fragility, and high monetary value, Demand’s artworks are similarly inaccessible to the public unless one catches sight of them during an exhibition. There is in this an appropriate conceptual irony. The descriptions detailed in this chapter and elsewhere are based on reproductions in exhibition catalogues supplemented by images found on the internet. *Poll* (2001) is one of his more widely published images, and it is a good place to start.

**Poll (2001)**

*Poll*, (2001), *Figure 2.1* is a large glossy color photograph that appears to show a modern office or call center. Rows of white desks—one in front of the other—begin at the bottom edge of the frame and recede toward the top of the frame. On white shelves above each desk are numerous black, institutional-type telephones. A number of red folders are up on these shelves as well. There are what appear to be white name placards placed on these shelves too, though the placards are blank. On the facings underneath the shelves appear numerous yellow sticky notes and grey squares that might be plastic covering the hardware that joins the desks. Stacked on the desks are piles and piles of yellow paper cards. They are a familiar-looking odd shape, similar to paper ballots. A number of face-down yellow flashlights stand on the desks near the stacks of ballots. At first glance, the photograph appears direct, simple—banal. It appears to be a documentary photograph of a polling place with stacks of ballots sitting out, nothing more. Closer examination reveals that the ballots have no printing on them, and no holes in them. The
folders have no text on them, the yellow sticky notes are all blank, and the telephones have no buttons.

The photograph is entirely lacking essential details that would make it seem *real*. It is in fact, upon closer examination still, found to be a real photograph, that is to say, a straight photograph made with a camera and film and printed without technical or digital manipulation. It is however, not a photograph of some anonymous polling place. Nor is it a photograph of the Florida Emergency Center where paper ballots from the 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore were counted, scrutinized and re-counted—the place this photograph is modeled upon. It is instead, a photograph of a
life-size, 1:1 scale, paper and cardboard sculpture made to look very much like the Florida Emergency Center which was the focal point of intense media attention in the weeks following the 2000 election.

Many of Demand’s photographs are constructed in this manner, and show recreations of equally banal scenes. *Kitchen* (2004), *Figure 2.2* shows a partially open oven, part of a stainless steel counter-top with a sink in it. Plates, bowls and a bright pink pitcher rest on the counter-top or in the sink—all made out of paper and cardboard. A visually persuasive half-empty bowl of soup, or broth—also paper—sits on another counter-top on the other side of the stove.

*Figure 2.2 Demand, T. (2004) Küche/Kitchen* [chromogenic print with Diasec]. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Used with Permission.
*Camping Table* (1999) shows a small table with an empty water bottle, a roll of toilet paper, and other miscellaneous items placed on it. *Bathroom* (1997) shows a portion of a tub full of water through a partially open door and shower curtain. *Corridor*, (1995) shows an ordinary hallway with three closed, pale yellow doors, beige floor, white walls, and fluorescent light fixtures—all seemingly banal, boring subjects. It is difficult to discern what these photographs are about by just looking at them.

**First Impressions**

Many of Demand’s photographs at first glance, especially in reproduction, look like photographs of real-world objects and scenes. *Lawn* (1998) could easily be mistaken for a photograph of a section of green turf grass found in any well-cared for suburban lawn. It looks just like grass. *Clearing* (2003) appears to show an open-space in an actual forest with bright golden light streaming in through the leaves. The streaming light is real, the trees and leaves are not. Most of Demand’s photographs depicting man-made objects are not as deceptively real. The broth in *Kitchen* (2004) appears quite authentic, the stove does not.

**A Modernist reading of Demand’s photographs**

The places where Demand’s photographs are found—art galleries, museums, catalogues of art exhibitions, and internet web-sites associated with art—act to frame these photographs as artworks. The photographs are technically excellent. Many are printed very large. *Poll* (2001), for example is nearly six feet tall and eight and a half feet
long, another aspect that confirms their status as art, as objects meant for wall display and contemplative viewing. The banality of the subject matter is somewhat reminiscent of conceptual photography such as Rucha’s *Twenty six Gasoline Stations* (1962) or Smithson’s (1967) *Monuments of Passaic New Jersey*. The objects depicted in Demand’s photographs complicate the issue though by being sculpture, constructed copies of reality rather than indexical images of real places. It is difficult to say for certain when viewing the pictures whether the photograph or the sculpture is the work of art which should be considered. Demand destroys the sculptures after the photography is complete so the photographs are the only form in which Demand’s work may be seen, but this could also be said of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970).

The relationship between sculpture and photograph is further complicated by the scale of, and the inspiration for, Demand’s work. His sculptures are not small models, but most often life-size, 1:1 constructions that re-create the spaces shown in pre-existing *photographs* of the scenes depicted. The scenes are chosen by Demand mostly from media photographs and internet images associated with crimes, politically significant events, or other images made widely known by mass media.

A satisfactory interpretation of Demand’s work is not easily accomplished by assigning them to a specific genre, or by considering only what the images show—what appears to the eye. Some form of theoretical analysis seems to be necessary in order to interpret what one sees in Demand’s photographs. It is possible to situate and to interpret Demand’s images in a modernist framework, by examining them in terms of the subject-
object relationships created at the surface of the photographs. The art critic Fried (2008) leads the way in this reading of Demand’s work.

**Demand’s work and the distanced viewer**

Fried (2008) examines Demand’s photographs using criteria which he developed for evaluating high modernist sculpture and painting in his (1967) essay *Art and Objecthood*. Fried (2008) writes that in 1967 he claimed that high modernist art works “were fundamentally antitheatrical in that …they took no notice of the beholder, who was left to come to terms with them [the artworks]—to make sense of the relationships they comprised—as best he or she could” (p. 270). For Fried, there was—and still is—no two-way relationship between the viewing subject and the art object: the art work exists complete and completely apart from the viewing subject—a purely Cartesian standpoint toward vision and the separation of subject and object. If one looks only toward the surface of Demand’s pictures, such a reading is inevitable. Any possible associations or residual meanings associated with the original source photographs are stripped from the images by the manner in which Demand controls entirely what the viewer sees. This control, according to Fried, assures that the viewer can bring nothing to Demand’s photographs. Fried identifies

the quality the photographs convey of wanting nothing from the viewer, of giving him or her no opportunity for empathic projection of any kind, indeed of contravening the very possibility of imagining any relation to the depicted scenes other than one of merely alienated looking. (Fried, 2008, p. 266)
This viewpoint invites—actually demands—the sort of Cartesian separation of subject and object that Fried (1967) describes in his essay *Art and Objecthood*. To see Demand’s images in this way, is to see them as objects of art separated from the image-stream of contemporary culture; as pure, disinterested art objects.

Viewed in this context, the meaning of Demand’s project comes into focus. Simply put, he aims to replace the original scene of evidentiary traces and marks of human use—or rather he aims to replace one or more mediatic images of such a scene—with a counter-image of *sheer artistic intention*. (Emphasis in original, Fried, 2008, p. 271)

Demand’s photographs, viewed in this way, expect nothing but detached, aesthetic appreciation from their viewers. As technically expert photographs of well-crafted sculpture, they offer nothing to the viewer except an aesthetic response. They are beautiful, pristine, and mute. Demand, however, is not mute. He talks extensively about his creative process…

A remarkably similar situation surrounds another evidentiary—crime-scene related—photograph found in a seminal modernist text. *Evidence* (1937), a photograph in Szarkowski’s (1989) book *Photography Until Now*, is a picture which has much in common with many of Demand’s source images. The picture, *Figure 2.3* shows a woman, cropped from the bridge of the nose down, sitting at a glossy wooden table. Her right hand holds a pair of shiny, but worn, black shoes—a young girl’s shoes. The hand is twisted uncomfortably inward to show the top, buckles, and the insides of the shoes to the

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4 *Evidence* (1937) is a partial title, the whole title is listed later in this section, but it is necessary, to explicate the function of Demand’s source images, to describe Szarkowski’s use of the photograph before including the complete title.
camera. The woman’s other hand holds a short piece of braided rope, and a dark pair of
socks. The background of the photograph shows the sleeve and part of the hand of a man
standing rigidly behind the woman—off to one side. The woman’s eyes are cropped out
of the photograph. She might be looking at the shoes, or not. Her mouth—devoid of
expression—betrays no emotion. The photograph is lit by flash-bulb, which casts harsh
shadows under the woman’s chin and nose. The hard shadows of the shoes, the rope, and
the socks fall onto her white blouse and tweed jacket.

Figure 2.3 Photographer unknown. (1937). Evidence: The sash cord which was used to
strangle Paula Magagna and her shoes and socks, the only clothes found on her body.
The light from this flash presumably provides the reason for this photograph’s inclusion in Szarkowski’s book. The primary text in the chapter is concerned with technical innovations, those changes in the medium of photography that allowed for the mass distribution of photographs, and the ability of the flash to flatten the image, and emphasize the importance of frontal subject matter is discussed in the pages after this photograph. The significance of this specific photograph is not discussed in Szarkowski’s text. The images occurring on pages before and after this image include an elegant fashion photograph by Irving Penn, another, smaller, flash-lit picture by press photographer Weegee, and an advertisement for an electric starter motor for Ford automobiles. Neither the surrounding photographs, nor Szarkowski’s primary text offer any information, any social context for the photograph other than technical concerns of the medium.

Used by Szarkowski in this way—as an example of photographic technology—this picture functions in a manner analogous to Fried’s reading of Demand’s photographs. Viewed in modernist terms, this photograph, and Demand’s artworks are examples of modernist representation⁵. The meaning of the photograph is essential to itself, contained entirely within the photograph. This picture is an example of flash photography, a disinteresting documentary photograph; Demand’s pictures are works of art. Context, the situation surrounding the origins of the photographs, and the subjectivity of the viewer play no part in how these photographs make meaning.

⁵ Representation is a term closely associated with modernist ways of seeing. Implicit in this use of the word is a specific—detached and domineering—relationship between subject and object. The scope and meaning of modernist representation is detailed in later chapters and more fully in Judovitz (1998).
As alluded to above—as part of the artistic process—Demand elaborates extensively on the origins of his source images and his process. Szarkowski also—though to a much lesser extent—reveals the origins of the photograph of the girl’s shoes. The photograph is titled at the bottom of the page—distanced from the photograph: *Evidence: the sash cord which was used to strangle Paula Magagna, and her shoes and socks, the only clothing found on her body (New York Daily News, 1937).* To reiterate, no elaboration on the cultural significance, context, or meaning of the photograph was discussed in Szarkowski’s primary text. The viewer is forced to turn to alternate sources of information to learn about the origins of the photograph.

The way this photograph is situated in Szarkowski’s book reveals one of the fundamental difficulties presented by modernist interpretations of photography—a problematic explored to the fullest by Demand’s photographs. This particular photograph, *Evidence,* chosen as an example to illustrate a technical aspect of the photographic medium, and the blindness of the primary text to the social context and the partial reference alluded to by the photograph’s caption is appalling and crass. To ignore the source of this image, to leave the narrative unpublished in connection with the photograph clearly illustrates the ethical and emotional vacuity of modernist representation. An internet search of the name Paula Magagna reveals the cultural conditions which surround the photograph: the story of an eight-year old girl raped and strangled to death in a basement in Brooklyn. To leave this information out, to fail to

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6 See for example Krajicek, D. (2009). Summer of Pervert Hysteria: 1937, an internet article that details press coverage, and the associated public panic over a number of similar cases which all occurred in the summer of 1937 in the New York area.
provide or even allude to this important information in the primary text, to use this photography as only an example of flash photography is nothing less than the aestheticization of… of what? A photograph? Flash photography? Or the rape and murder of a child?

Demand’s images—if read at face value—function in a similar manner. They paper-over the horror and trauma associated with the original source images and seem to present a cool, sterilized, aesthetically-detached surface. However, just as the caption Szarkowski provides for the photograph of Magagna’s shoes hints at the larger social significance of that image, Demand provides information that expands the meaning-making process of his photographs outward, both in front of and behind the slick surface of his Diasec prints. This information comes in the form of interviews with Demand, and detailed descriptions of his working methods in exhibition catalogues and on websites.

**Reading *Tavern Beyond the Surface***

Approaching *Tavern 1* (2006), in a museum or gallery, the viewer is confronted by a large-scale, nearly 6 feet wide by eight feet tall, glossy photographic print face-mounted to Plexiglas. The picture, *Figure 2.4*, depicts a front-on view of a small business establishment. The door, set back into the shadows of an entryway, is boarded up. A mailbox just peaks out into the light on the left side of the entry. The shadow from a rectangular sign attached to the wall above and to the right of the entryway falls across the wall and into the darkness of the entryway. A large metal or wooden box with a yellow square on it is affixed to the wall to the right side of the doorway.

kitchen of the establishment. On black countertops rest a coffee maker, a cash register, a meat slicer, a bright yellow/orange ash tray, bowls, plates and so forth. Brightly colored party streamers spiral down from the light fixtures beneath the overhead cupboards. An ominous black doorway fills the center of the frame. *Tavern 4* (2006) shows a dried-up potted palm plant in a frosted or glass block window, and *Tavern 5* (2006) depicts the interior of the broom closet with boxes of cleaning supplies on the tiled floor. A broom or mop leans against an incongruously sunny yellow wall of the dismal, claustrophobic space.

Each of these tableaus is constructed by Demand out of paper and cardboard, carefully lit for photographing. There are no people in these photographs; no people ever appear in Demand’s pictures: the spaces are empty and pristine with no sign of wear or use. Though his models are very detailed and appear quite true-to-life at first glance, many little details are missing: the wooden planks which secure the front door have no grain, there is no lettering on the sign at the front, nor on the boxes in the broom closet. There are no coffee stains on the coffee maker, and no buttons on the cash register. The edges of objects reveal the slight soft burr of cut and glued cardboard and paper. Taken at face value, these images represent nothing other than Demand’s technical expertise both as a photographer and as a sculptor working in paper and cardboard. There is more to them than just that however.

These five images each reference a small tavern in Saarbrücken, where a little boy, identified in the press as Pascal, in order to preserve his anonymity, was raped and murdered. His body was disposed of in a trash bag. The trial garnered extensive press
coverage in Germany, lasted nearly three years. Twelve people were indicted in the case including the little boy’s step-sister. Demand’s tableaus each depict a different aspect of the place. After the crime, the bar was quickly converted to a pizzeria, which went out of business in only two months. When the crime was investigated, “the police had to reconstruct it [back into the tavern] in order to compare the confessions,” (Demand quoted in Colomina and Kluge, 2006, p. 89).

The neglected, potted palm belongs to the Pizzeria, Demand notes. All of these little details, both present and missing in the photographs, fail, and are bound to fail to get the viewer any closer to any sort of representational truth in regards to events at the tavern. These images utterly fail to adequately represent this place or what happened there, just as any representation of this case is bound to fail. It is worth quoting Demand’s comments at length.

What exactly happened at the place shown by the newspaper photos is something only very few people know from having witnessed it themselves. Even the judges and public prosecutors have to rely on distilling a credible version of the story from a cluster of contradictory statements and vague pieces of evidence… different perceptions and interpretations of shared events. The journalists who prepare a picture of what happened for the general public, can only dream of being so close to the events, and yet they’re in a more privileged situation than readers or viewers, who have to rely on the material prepared with some blueprint or formula in mind. Not that I am rebuking journalists, for media-based communication depends on stereotypes and blueprints. The media has to reduce the complexity of reality, otherwise no one will listen or watch. So the process is from the outset geared to a loss of information and a lack of
clarity as regards to the actual events. (Demand, quoted in Colomina and Kluge, 2006, p. 86)

By associating these cardboard reconstructions with such horrific events as the rape and murder at the tavern in Saarbrücken, Demand calls into question the validity, the veracity of any representation predicated upon a Cartesian model of vision. The viewer gains no comforting or tangible information from Demand’s work. There are no rational explanations found here, no evidence that makes clear who, what, when or why.

Just as with Szarkowski’s use of *Evidence* to illustrate flash photography, there is, in Demand’s use of Pascal’s story an ethical dilemma. Creating art and commenting on the role of the media image by referencing this crime puts Demand in a place where he could be charged with seeking personal gain the expense of the boy’s loss. Demand notes, “there’s no easy answer to the question as to whether my decision to approach these events via detours does them justice” (quoted in Colomina and Kluge, 2006, p. 86).

Acknowledging the dilemmas that surround images such as these is an important part of an ethical approach to photography and artmaking. Demand simultaneously participates in and critiques the media frenzy feeding off of the unfortunate events that produced the source images.\(^7\)

\(^7\) Acknowledgment of the ethical dilemma this presents is unfortunately all that can be provided here, as any satisfactory analysis of the issue would require considerable development, and such a direction is beyond the scope of this research project.
Understandings Generated within Demand’s process

As described above, the source-images for Tavern 1-5 (2006) and the events that led to the production of the original scenes constitute a significant part of the meaning surrounding Demand’s constructions. The images serve as impetus, as inspiration for his art making process, but knowledge of the events leading up to and surrounding the source images are also an important part of the meaning-making process on the viewer’s side of the picture plane. The source image for each of Demand’s sculptures varies, but frequently, as with the tavern images, is a photograph that has some associated shock value, cultural significance, or mass-media currency. In his recent exhibition titled National Gallery in Berlin, the source photographs all related to Germany and German identity—a sort of collective visual memory (Monocle, 2009). Room (1994) references an attempt to assassinate Adolph Hitler. Office (1995) is created from a photograph of a ransacked Stasi—East German secret police—office. After the fall of the Berlin wall, East German citizens plundered the offices to find out what the secret police files said about them (Monocle, 2009). Bathroom (1997) refers to the press photograph of the sensationalized case of Uwe Barschel, a German politician found dead in a hotel bathroom. The death was ruled a suicide by Swiss police, but the case was re-opened based on photographs taken by press photographers who arrived on the scene before police did. Model (2000) references a photograph of Albert Speer and Adolph Hitler admiring a model of Speer’s design for the German Pavilion for the 1937 International Exposition in Paris.
Demand’s oeuvre is not limited to explorations of German collective memory. *Corridor* (1995) is a work drawn from photographic records of Jeffery Daumer’s apartment building in Milwaukee. Demand’s short film *Tunnel* (1999), depicts a drive through the tunnel where Princess Diana and Dodi Al Fayed died while being pursued by paparazzi in 1997. *Poll* (2001), as mentioned, deals with the 2000 U.S. presidential election, and *Kitchen* (2004), is modeled after photographs of the hut where Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. troops in 2003. Built upon the world of media images, Demand’s work is deeply entangled with the society of the spectacle described by Debord (1970). They are simultaneously critical of the spectacular image and dependent upon it. Demand’s work accepts the spectacle as a given, as a cultural pre-condition to the act of meaning making. Demand’s work in this way expresses an acute awareness of the postmodern stance toward the image, meaning-making, and the idea of reality.

The photographs are informed by texts which reside outside of the picture frame, and when they are examined in light of events which produced the source images, the meanings they carry are richer and more complicated. The meanings of the photographs, as with Barthes’ (1977) press photographs, are modified by the texts which surround them. The equation is complicated in Demand’s process by the invisibility of the written text when the image is encountered on the gallery wall or online as a free-floating image. It is only in exhibition catalogues that the complete chain of meaning making is found in close proximity. The simultaneous absence and presence of these discursive influences also carry meaning in Demand’s work, alluding in absentia to the host of invisible, culturally embedded texts and discourses that influence the meaning of all photographs.
(Sekula, 1981). Through his artistic practice, Demand constructs in a very deliberate manner layer-upon-layer the structures of signification in his photographs. This may be read as a visible expression of Derrida’s notion—cited by postmodern photography critic Douglas Crimp (1979)—that underneath every picture there is another picture. In Demand’s case, underneath every picture there is a re-manufactured space which refers to another picture.

Demand’s images also ruminate upon the postmodern idea of the gaze, and the sublimated violence associated with photographic vision. Many of Demand’s photographs are deeply entwined with violence, the murder or suicide of a German politician, the atrocities of Jeffery Daumer, the accident that took Princess Diana and Dodi Al Fayed’s lives, the explosion that nearly killed Hitler, the events at the tavern in Saarbrücken, and so forth; but the violence runs parallel to, and is not a direct product of vision. Demand’s pictures are saturated with the silence of sight that follows the violence. The process of distancing that Demand practices through his layered photograph-sculpture-photographic process holds at a distance, almost to the point of near invisibility, the violence to which these photographs refer. This attitude toward violence and vision is considerably different than the indictment of photographic vision given by Sontag (1977) and Elkins (1997), an aspect of the postmodern critique of photographic vision which will be developed in Chapter 6: Postmodern Vision.

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8 The Gaze is a term employed in postmodern discourses to designate complicated social, psychological and political cultural interactions mediated by vision.
Demand’s film *Tunnel* (1999) is another example of Demand constructively describing the relationship between vision and violence the way he sees it. In the film, the camera travels through a cardboard re-construction of the tunnel where Princess Diana and Dodi Al-Fayed died. The film appears to loop a single short piece of video, but the camera pans through the model fifty two separate times, each time showing a slightly different approach through the tunnel. In one pass, the camera takes the passenger-seat vantage point, more toward the right, and appears to very nearly collide with the pillars in the median, but the film goes on, repeatedly offering no new information about the events of that day, no matter how closely the images are scrutinized, no matter how many times the loop is replayed. In *Tunnel* (1999), the viewer glides smoothly through the place where the accident happened. There is no wreckage, no skid marks, not the slightest glimpse of what happened there. In the film it is not through sight that the violence of these places is revealed. In the media storm that followed the incident, the paparazzi were implicated as instigators of the car accident. In Demand’s film, there are no traces of this. In other words, Demand does not bring the visual up on charges in these crimes. He does not, as it were, bring photography to the dock (Solomon-Godeau, 1991) to provide an account of its complicity. Camera vision and the photograph are in fact—in Demand’s work—not complicit with these crimes. They stand as witness to the violence of these events, offering only a partial and incomplete account.

Demand’s working method also evidences an awareness of postmodern theories that find contemporary images to be bereft of underlying meaning. The experience of viewing a Demand photograph equipped with the knowledge of his photographic-
sculptural sleight-of hand carries none of the intimate connection to the original expressed in Barthes’ (1981) encounter with a photograph of Napoleon’s brother. Barthes writes that through looking at the photograph he realized: “I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor” he writes (Barthes, 1981, p. 3). There is in Demand’s construction no such immediate contact with the referent. The “that has been” (Barthes, 1981, p. 85) in Demand’s work is only cardboard and paper. The essence of photography described by Barthes seems to slip away in Demand’s photographs. I have witnessed a form of this experience—this slippage—when introducing students in my photography classes to the work of James Casebere.

*Figure 2.5 Casebere, J. (2001). Yellow Hallway #2 [digital chromogenic print, 72”x 90”]
© James Casebere Courtesy: Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.*
Casebere’s images are photographs of cardboard constructions made using techniques similar to Demand’s. Casebere’s work is more visually seductive and in many ways more immediately accessible than Demand’s. Figure 2.5 shows Casebere’s photograph *Yellow Hallway #2* (2001). Unlike Demand’s banal-appearing subjects, Casebere’s constructions are beautiful, light-drenched, often water-filled chambers lined with arches and vaulted ceilings. The photographs resemble places of worship or culturally significant buildings that one would travel to a far-off country to visit.

When faced with the fact that the photographs are fake, students’ responses range from appreciation of the industriousness of the artist to expressions of anger. They describe feeling deceived or cheated. This response stems, I believe, from the range of unsettling choices the viewer is presented with when he or she is moved or inspired by these scenes. These inspiring views might simply convey nothing of significance, despite the first impression they give. Option two is equally unsettling: perhaps the majesty and aura of such a visually powerful scene can in fact be contained in a mere maquette which the photograph reproduces. The third possibility faced when attempting to explain any deep response to these scenes is that the significance of the image is contained not within the image—not delivered to the viewer by the contents of the photograph itself—but rather brought to the photograph only by the viewer. This unsettling, un-modernist notion is described by Benjamin when he writes “To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in turn” (Benjamin, 1939 as cited in Marsh, 2003, p. 108). The relationship between the viewer and the photograph that this generates relates also to Lacan’s anecdote about the sardine can, a discussion that looks
more toward the psychology of the subjective viewer than the nature of the object on view. These concepts point toward a more complicated relationship between the viewer and the photograph, a post-modern relationship. In addition, by calling into question the site where meaning is made, Demand’s work undermines the faith in representation traditionally granted to photography. In doing so, it enters the theoretical domain of Baudrillard’s simulation and simulacrum.

Baudrillard’s (1981/2001) *Precession of Simulacra* explores the notion that in the postmodern situation, the simulated image comes before and has entirely replaced any original referent, any originary reality. In Baudrillard’s estimation, the once dominant idea that images refer to a specific and knowable truth has given way to an entirely empty system of simulation and simulacra. Images precede—come before and supplant—reality and refer to nothing other than themselves. Demand’s constructions occupy this territory. The play with and play within Baudrillard’s simulacral, shell-game of meaning. The photographs he presents on the gallery wall depict no reality other than the paper exterior of a sculpture Demand himself has created. Baudrillard’s ideas, and Lacan’s mentioned above are expanded upon further in *Chapter 5: Postmodern Vision.*

There is, despite the simulacral nature of Demand’s pictures a surprising depth of meaning associated with them. Despite the twice, or thrice removed connection to reality that Demand’s photographs exhibit, despite the hollowness of his flimsy paper constructions, his photographs retain, through the discourses that surround them, as well as formal connections to the images from which they are derived, a sense of deep meaning.
Gaining access to that meaning involves engaging with the forms of visuality employed by Demand in creating the photographs and the forms of visuality involved in looking at the pictures. Phenomenology is a useful philosophical approach to examining these ways of seeing. Vision is conceptualized in phenomenology differently from modernism and postmodernism. One of the primary goals of this research is to examine questions of photographic vision through each of these different lenses. The question presents itself then, what happens when Demand’s work is considered in relation to the ideas found in phenomenology?

The Phenomenology of Demand’s photographs

Demand’s photographs follow the logic of Cartesian perspectivalism almost to the letter. His sculptures represent a rational modeling of three-dimensional space translated to a flat surface. He employs the finest techniques of perspective control in his camera work in order to create on the film spatial relationships between the sculpted shapes and forms of the sculpture true to his visualization of the space, true to the original photograph. Demand was forced to create duplicates of a number of his sculptures when he first started using photography because he found that the camera lens introduced distortions that altered the formal relationship he wanted to see in his sculpture. In a hyperbolic modernist maneuver, Demand reconstructed these models—reconstructed his world—to purposefully conform to a rational, optical model of photographic representation. This is the irony of Demand’s work. Describing himself as a naive mirror, Demand and his work reflect back a picture of modernist representation. He re-presents
the scenes he constructs precisely modeling his vision in accordance with an external optical system that he forces himself; forces his world to conform to. This process mirrors in more than one way the mathematical rationalization of vision offered in Descartes philosophy. Demand meticulously follows Cartesian visual theory as if it were a set of how-to instructions. The statement that Descartes “tacitly adopted the position of a perspectivalist painter using a camera obscura to reproduce the observed world,” (Jay, 1999, p. 70) could just as easily be applied to Demand in adopting this process.

Demand seems to be following—as written instructions—the musings of another modernist thinker, Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please. (Holmes, 1859, as cited in Trachtenberg, 1980, p. 80)

Demand builds his version of reality, his version of the scene of the crime, provides us with a few negatives of the scene, and then destroys the sculpture. Demand takes a very literalist approach. He deliberately uses this approach to vision not because he is a modernist, not because of his faith in modernist epistemology: his use of these models is ironic. Demand’s methodology follows the letter of the law in order to point out the absurdity of Cartesian vision—to call into question the certainty of representation associated with this way of seeing and believing.

9 Descartes’ account of the function of vision in La Dioptrique may be found in Descartes and Olscamp (1965). Descartes’ visual philosophy is also outlined in Chapter 3: Modernist Vision.
Levin (1999), a contemporary thinker allied with phenomenology, describes the domineering approach to the world that accompanies modernist models of vision through a paragraph that reads much like a description of Demand’s process.

Dictated by masterful visions, the discourse of [modernist] metaphysics is an archive of representations. Now, representation is re-presentation: the subject's deferral of what presences in order to present it again, but this time on the subject's terms, according to the subject's sovereign will. (Levin, 1999, p. 403)

Demand, defers the horror, the messiness and the complexity of the original scenes depicted in his work by reconstructing them on his own terms, according to his sovereign will. The function of this way of seeing, understood in terms of modernist metaphysics is to separate the object on view from the surrounding situation, and to ascertain—visually—certainty about it. “Representation is therefore a strategy for achieving the mastery and domination of a presence, or say a presencing, the contextual openness of which cannot ultimately in fact be mastered and controlled” (Levin, 1999, p. 403). As a strategy for achieving mastery and domination over the scenes he depicts, Demand’s technique is absurd, a joke, ironic. It would be foolish to think that a paper reconstruction of the original scene could offer any deeper knowledge or insight into the original scene, and this is exactly Demand’s point. The contextual openness, the undefined horizon of the original events, the Temporally situated understandings and

10 Acknowledging the play of sovereign will in his photographs, Demand says, “You can walk around a sculpture as often as you like, and with photographs... you have a [single, forever fixed] moment and my particular angle of vision. My tyrannical condition, as it were, is that I prescribe your vision” (Demand quoted in Fried, 2008, p. 271).
interceptions of the scene, are clearly beyond the reach of these reconstructions, beyond the reach of any representation.

And it works. The unsettling of modernist representation that Demand enacts with his constructions, acts as a critique of modernist notions of representation and photography. The critical examination of modernist ways of seeing is one of the cornerstones of the phenomenological description of consciousness and vision. Demand’s critique parallels phenomenology in this respect.

Demand’s work is capable of destabilizing—at least momentarily—accepted notions of how photography works. His photographs stretch the distance between subject and object to such an extreme degree, that the distance created by any conventional photograph becomes profoundly more evident. This is in part due to the disruptive shadow of his personal presence within the photographic construction.

**Being in Demand’s scenes**

Though it may be argued that the photographer’s physical embodied presence plays a significant phenomenological role in the making of every photograph (Brady-Nelson & Nesbitt, 2011 personal communication), in Demand’s work his presence in the space is magnified. He not only moves into the space to make the photograph, he makes the space. The physical presence of the camera also plays a constitutive role in the formulation of the space.

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11 The existence of the photographer’s body as a constituent part of the phenomenology of photography was posited in a presentation to the National Art Education Association by Brady-Nelson, M. & Nesbitt, M. in 2011.)
Rather than using his camera to document a completed model from a particular viewpoint, Demand first sets up the camera in a fixed position and then builds the model in front of it, constantly checking through the lens as he works. This allows him to adjust the details and perspective of the actual model to meet his compositional needs. (Parkin, 1999, ¶ 6)

This alternative approach toward the photographic process speaks to postmodern and phenomenological concerns about the constructive versus the merely transcriptive nature of vision and photography. It calls into question as well the notion that photography can metaphorically transport the viewer to the place in the photograph.

Demand begins with a photograph—sometimes multiple photographs—of a place, and through his process, he creates the opportunity to stand in an embodied way in a simulacrum of the original space. “When I walk around them I feel a strange sense of destabilisation. Once such a space is finished you are very cautious in it, because you know that you would destroy everything if you took a wrong step” (Demand quoted in Colomina & Kluge, 2006 p. 56). And yet it is not the fragility of the cardboard that is as destabilizing as the experience of being in the re-constructed photographic space.

It's the idea of the space that you remember, even if you can't yourself experience the memory of it. That's the strange thing - you transpose yourself to a time and place in which you could never be. Yet you can of course be there in your imagination. You are standing in the midst of the thing that arose in your imagination and then it's all gone and the photo takes over. (Demand quoted in Colomina & Kluge, 2006 p. 56)
The destabilizing effect described by Demand is also a constituent part of the experience of looking at the photographs. To elaborate, it is necessary to describe my personal experience of encountering Demand’s photographs in a catalogue of his exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2006.

**Examining an exhibition catalogue of Demand’s work**

The first photograph in the catalog appears on a page by itself without title or description and shows an extremely detailed representation of a stone grotto in Mallorca—manufactured of course, by Demand out of cardboard for the purpose of making photographs. Turning the page I see a photograph depicting a reel-to-reel tape player also made by Demand from paper, and titled on the facing page with large grey type. It is the third photograph in the catalogue that I find most disturbing, most illustrative, in its affect. This photograph is a highly detailed architectural photograph of a brick building with stone pillars, and a gold cupola. Trees frame the building, and a stretch of grass appears in the foreground. The title *Serpentine Gallery, London, 2006* appears in small type below the photograph. It doesn’t look like a typical Demand photograph; the golden light is more dramatic than in most of his images, and there is perhaps too much detail. I realize quickly, as most viewers will, that this is simply a descriptive photograph of the gallery in which Demand’s photographs were displayed during the exhibit which the catalogue commemorates. The photo is unsettling. It is unsettled in its context. I feel as if there should have been some warning, something to identify it as a regular photograph, not one of Demand’s constructions. This photograph
is apparently presented without any intended irony, as a stand in – a representation of the real Serpentine Gallery found in Kensington Gardens in London.

The effect is even more pronounced when encountering the photographs at the end of the catalogue. After examining numerous pages showing photographs of Demand’s constructions and reading his accounts of the research conducted prior to building his sculptures, I encounter another photograph of his grotto, this one again untitled, but this time the photograph apparently resides within a gallery space with other Demand photographs on walls adjacent to the Grotto image. The effect is indeed, uncanny\textsuperscript{12}. Even the paper this image and the several images that follow is considerably different from the paper on which Demand’s original photographs appear, but I can’t shake the feeling that this photograph is of a constructed space—which of course it is, in that it is a gallery constructed for the purpose of showing artworks. Even though the next page identifies these images with the text: \textit{Serpentine Exhibition photographs by Nic Tenwiggenhorn}, I find myself suspiciously inspecting the seams of the floor and ceiling of the gallery for signs of cut-paper imperfections, signs that this is another of Demand’s photographed sculptures. The work creates within me doubt as to which photographs are real, and which are not. By real, I am left to conclude that Tenwiggenhorn’s photographs are merely one generation closer to the time and place where the camera producing the image stood in a fully-functional space not created entirely by Demand out of paper.

\textsuperscript{12} Foster (1983) uses the title \textit{Uncanny images} to describe in Lacanian terms the unsettling effect of the work of James Casebere whose work is discussed earlier in this chapter.
Demand’s work in this catalogue raises questions of originality, indexicality, and photographic reality. His work subverts the traditional trustworthy relationship between photography and the world shown in pictures. His work is critical of, and calls into question, traditional Cartesian ways of seeing the world.

**Demand and Da-sein**

In addition to destabilizing the essence of photographic representation, Demand’s work does much to question the manner in which the subjective viewer ascertains consciousness of the world through photographs. Demand accomplishes this using methods that bear striking similarity to approaches used in phenomenology.

One of the most significant philosophical investigations of the idea of consciousness in the field of phenomenology is Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. The book offers a close examination of—a questioning of—the nature of being. Consciousness, according to Heidegger, resides not only inside our heads, rather when human beings are *being*, consciousness is directed toward phenomena in the world. A person’s consciousness doesn’t usually abstract the object on view into an inert, rational object. Instead, as Heidegger describes—using an example of a hammer—one is conscious of the functional potential of the object, conscious of hammering, not of the hammer. The term *ready to hand* or handy stands in for this idea in translations of Heidegger’s writing. When the hammer is handy a person just uses it and does not think about it. *Ready to hand* describes this engaged, active consciousness of the work through the presence of the hammer. The phrase *present at hand* is used to indicate a different way of looking at
Present at hand indicates the consciousness of the hammer when the user steps back, objectifies, and looks at the hammer in a more theoretical way.

Photography in Demand’s work makes visible the complexity of photographic consciousness: the complex relationship between photographic being, and photographic theorizing in a way that is similar to Heidegger’s theorem. For example, when Demand first turned to paper sculpture as a student, he created small paper sculptures to visually realize his ideas, and then he would just throw them away. He picked up photography at the suggestion of one of his professors as a tool for recording his sculptures. Both because he was having a hard time remembering all the objects he had made, but also because it allowed him to see the progress or change in his work over time (Monocle, 2009).

Photography is very handy for such a recording practice. In other words, used in this way, photography is ready to hand. The photograph as such, is not of theoretical interest, rather the camera is a tool used to record, and the photographer—Demand—need only be conscious of the work i.e. the pictures, not of the hammer—photography.

In his mature work, there remains a ready to hand component. The images that Demand presents in the gallery allow the viewer to see sculptures that no longer exist—since Demand continues the practice of destroying the sculptures after the photography is complete. The photographs also clearly reveal the fine details of the sculpture, the missing telephone buttons, or the cut-paper edge of the flashlight handles in Poll (2001); the un-modeled match heads and the un-matchbook-like quality of the paper used to make the matchbook in Kitchen (2004). By looking at these photographs, one may get a
very clear picture of what his sculptures looked like. The mimetic capacity, the ready to
hand—handiness—of photography is a part of the function of photography in Demand’s
work. But it’s only a small part.

To look at Demand’s photographs in this way only, is to fall into the modernist,
trap illustrated earlier in this chapter with the image of Magagna’s shoes. Viewing
Demand’s photographs as only an objective record of the sculpture denies the tremendous
amount of meaning generated in coming to terms with the way meaning connects up to
his photographs.

When viewing a Demand photograph, one sees a photograph of a life-size
sculpture modeled upon a reality established or framed by an original photograph. It
becomes obvious when pondering this layered construction, that viewing the photograph
only as ready to hand is not enough. The inability to look directly through the photograph
at the source material—the sculpture keeps getting in the way—forces one to step back
and view the photograph—view photography—in a theoretical way. This layered
approach forces the viewer out of the traditional comfortable way of seeing photographs.
The pictures force the viewer to step back, in a conceptual way, and to more fully reflect
upon the relationships they engender in the world around us. This is the
phenomenological power of Demand’s work.

When Demand uses the camera to document a sculpture based upon a reality
found in a photograph, it becomes progressively more difficult to define exactly what
‘work’ the final photograph is doing. Questions come up, about whether it’s the final
photograph on view that does the work, whether it is the sculpture, the original source
photograph, the viewer’s memories, the events that spawned the source photograph, or a complex layering of all these things that does *the work*.

When looking at a reproduction of a Demand photograph I find myself switching rapidly back and forth between a theoretical and a utilitarian view of the photograph. When the hammer comes up, it’s theoretical, when I hit the nail, suddenly it’s useful: my consciousness of photography flickers back and forth between *ready to hand* and *present at hand*.

Heidegger has no special interest in hammers though. It is only to clarify the concept of *Da-sein*—a term which means human consciousness in the world—that he turns to hammering as an example. Similarly, in this research project, I have no special interest in Demand’s photography. I am concerned rather with *Da-sein*; the way in which subjective consciousness is shaped though the use and understanding of photography in the world. Like the example of the hammer, Demand’s photographs are extraordinarily handy for exploring these concepts.

**Seeing Photography**

In Demand’s work, the chain of meaning-making steps leading to the final photograph—revealed through texts surrounding the work—are an important part of the way his images function. To read Demand’s photographs as radically separate from the image-stream within which they are situated requires a great degree of intellectual and formal focus. It requires an attention toward the surface of the pictures to the complete exclusion of all that surrounds them: a Cartesian, modernist approach toward
photographic vision. Seen in any other way, the connections the photographs make to the world surrounding them plays a significant part in the way they make meaning. The photographs are not ends in themselves, and their function is not to remain mute and detached from the viewer, the source-images, or the source-events that inspire them. Instead, by attenuating the distance between the viewer and the source image—by stretching to the breaking point the connection between subject and object, Demand makes photography visible. He explores the precarious connections between vision and reality predicated upon photography.

Demand’s constructions are a form of inquiry into the ways that photographs create consciousness. Demand’s point—or perhaps his discovery—through this mode of photograph-sculpture-photograph art making, is that these images still inhere in the world, and still allow the viewer to attach social significance to the image—to interact with them—despite his apparent effort to strip away any sense of time, place, use, or human-presence. Despite the fact—or maybe even more strongly because of the fact that his images lack detail, lack a direct connection to the original images—his pictures remind us not only of the original events that spawned his images, but also of the power of photography to mold consciousness of a world made real through pictures. Accessing these levels of meaning requires more than just looking at the images. It calls for an acknowledgment of, and a serious engagement with the theoretical discourses that surround and constitute photographic vision.

Examining these discourses in detail and considering the implications they hold for photography is what this research project is about. An undertaking as large and
complex as this requires a methodological approach. Both the methodology and the conceptual framework guiding this project are detailed in the seventh chapter. To begin describing the discourse of vision that informs photographic vision though, we must first look back—to the ancient and enlightenment philosophies that are the origins of Western visual thinking.
Chapter 3: Modernist Vision

“All the management of our lives depends on the senses, and since that of sight is the most comprehensive and the noblest of these, there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to augment its power are among the most useful that there can be.” (Descartes, 1637/1965, p. 65)

During the early stages of this research project, I was riding a bus from campus toward home, thinking about my research on photography, vision and discourse, when I glanced up and saw two notices posted on hand-rails next to a step down. The English notice read “Watch Your Step,” and the other in Spanish “Pise Con Cuido;” translates as step with caution. The notice written in English is a clear indicator of the power invested in sight. It implies that the mere act of watching is sufficient to ensure safety. In this chapter the philosophical and cultural origins of this approach toward sight are outlined. Greek philosophers and their simultaneous attraction to and distrust of vision open the discussion. The mathematical rationalizations of vision and linear perspective developed in the fifteenth century are considered next, and connections to René Descartes’ approach will be touched upon. Models of vision associated with Descartes and the enlightenment including the camera-obscura are also part of this chapter. The implications of Cartesianism, the implicit separation of subject and object, and suppositions about the dominance of this way of seeing will conclude this background sketch of the modernist approach toward sight. The notice written in Spanish on the
bus—it must be noted—implies that there may be non-ocularcentric ways of functioning in the world, and ways of seeing that involve more than just looking or watching.

**Grecian Antecedents**

In Western culture, thinking has long been equated with metaphors of vision. Modern philosophies of vision which may be attributed to René Descartes (1596-1650), John Locke (1632-1704), and other enlightenment thinkers have their roots much further back in Western civilization. The idea of structuring and describing knowledge in visual terms can be traced back to as early as 500 B.C.E. and the surviving fragmentary writings of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclites (Arendt, 1977; Jay, 1993; Levin, 1993). Levin identifies “the historical privilege of sight, which from the very dawn of our culture has been thought to be the noblest of the senses” (Levin, 1993, p. 2).

Arendt (1977) in her investigation of *The Life of the Mind* writes “from the outset in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing” (Arendt, 1977, p. 110). Jonas (1966) also identifies the early connections between higher thinking and seeing. “Since the days of Greek philosophy sight has been hailed as the most excellent of the senses” (Jonas, 1966, p. 135). The privilege given to sight has therefore made it the first choice among philosophers as a metaphor for knowledge: “the noblest activity of the mind, *theoria*, is described in metaphors taken mostly from the visual sphere Plato and Western philosophy after him speaks of ‘the eye of the soul’ and the ‘light of reason’” (Jonas, 1966, p. 135). The very thought processes that serve as the substructure for Western philosophy may be found in the language of vision. “Aristotle, in the first lines
of the *Metaphysics*, relates the desire for knowledge inherent in the nature of all men to the common delight in perception, most of all vision” (Jonas, 1966, p. 135). To make brilliantly clear the close connection between vision and thought, Martin Jay (1999) seamlessly employs some twenty-one visual metaphors in the introductory paragraph of *Downcast Eyes*, an analysis of twentieth-century French visual philosophy. The paragraph and the intent of Jay’s text are to “gain an illuminating insight into the complex mirroring of thought and language” (Jay, 1993, p. 1). The point he makes is that contemporary language is filled with visual metaphors that stand-in for knowledge and thought. Indeed, one of the difficulties in approaching the question of vision in our culture is that “the predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech and therefore in our conceptual language that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged among things too obvious to be noticed” (Arendt, 1977, p. 110). Arendt (1977) notes an exception to this found in references to God who is heard but not seen in the Jewish tradition. She also indicates, “Metaphors drawn from hearing are very rare in the history of philosophy, the most notable modern exception being the late writings of Heidegger” (Arendt, 1977, p. 111). With these few exceptions noted, it may be argued that the Western focus on vision is so pervasive as to be nearly invisible.

“Ocularcentrism” is the term Jay (1993) uses to describe the dominance of vision in Western thought. He also cites early Greek thinkers as instrumental in laying these foundations, but cautions against too simplistic a view. Vision, even in early Greek thought is not simply the activity of the eyes seeing. In Plato’s philosophy, Jay writes, “‘vision’ seems to have meant only that of the inner eye of the mind; in fact, Plato often
expressed severe reservations about the reliability of the two eyes of normal perception. We see *through* the eyes, he insisted, not *with* them” (emphasis in the original, Jay, 1993, p. 27). Despite his caution not to oversimplify, “it must still be acknowledged that Hellenic thought did on the whole privilege the visual over the any other sense” (Jay, 1993, p. 29). Both the hegemony and the troubled relationship between the idea of vision and the product of the eyes have their roots deep in Western culture.

**A Rational Perspective**

The use of mathematics is one approach toward reconciling the enlightening power of vision and the inherent unreliability of actual human sight. An early example of this may be found in *Figure 3.1*, Euclid’s diagram of perspective in *Optics* written in 300 B.C.E. This figure translates the experience of visual perspective into geometrical terms. *Point O* represents the position of the observer’s eye. *Lines AB* and *CD* represent objects that are of equal height, but different distances from the eye. Since *AB* is further away from the eye than *CD*, it occupies a smaller angle of the field of vision, and therefore will appear smaller.

*Figure 3.1* Euclid's Diagram of Perspective. (Field, 1997, p. 7).
Mathematical concepts derived from the Greeks and their use in rationalizing vision for the purpose of image-making, are revived during the fifteenth century by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446). Though neither of the two paintings he created to illustrate his rule, nor any writings on the topic—if indeed he ever wrote it down—have survived, Brunelleschi is credited with inventing the rule for ‘artificial perspective’ (Field 1997). Brunelleschi’s ideas were codified into a set of rules for perspective in painting by Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) in his treatise On Painting written in 1435 about twenty years after Brunelleschi’s experiments. Figure 3.2 shows Alberti’s construction which illustrates the principles necessary for drawing a checkerboard tile floor using the concepts of vanishing-point perspective.

![Figure 3.2 Alberti's construction (1435). (Field, 1997, p. 26).](image)

In terms of re-visioning the way sight is conceptualized toward the practice of picture making, Brunelleschi’s rule for artificial perspective, and Alberti’s construction

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13 “Euclid’s Optics… was well known in Latin translation throughout the Middle Ages. This is obvious to anyone who studies the works of philosophers of the time. It is not obvious if one looks instead at the works of [Medieval] artists” (Field, 1997, p. 7).
are foundational. Lalvaini (1996) directly links these picture-making developments with modern ways of seeing. “The modern scopic regime was ushered in with the invention of linear perspective in the Italian Quattrocento” (Lalvani, 1996, p. 3) he writes. Lalvani (1996) continues by saying, “if we are to specify the moment of its genesis, it would be the day in Florence in 1425 when Filippo Brunelleschi conducted his Baptistery-view experiments, thus introducing the Western world to the perceptual significance of the ‘vanishing point’” (p. 3).

Not only does the invention of linear perspective affect the way paintings are made, it represents a change, a modernization in the way the viewer and the concept of vision was thought.

The convention of perspective… centers everything on the eye of the beholder….perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. Everything converges on to the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God. (Berger, 1972, p. 16)

Significant also is the reduction that linear perspective brings to vision. “It is important to underline that [Alberti’s] viewpoint was just that: a monocular unblinking fixed eye (or more precisely, abstract point), rather than the two active, stereoscopic eyes of embodied actual vision” (emphasis in the original, Jay, 1993, pp. 54-55). The dynamic and fallible status of actual human vision is in effect bracketed out of the equation in linear perspective—replaced by a singular, static, and abstract vantage point.
Important to the ideas contained in linear perspective is the fact that these models of vision reside conceptually apart from the body of the observer. The laws of linear perspective represent ways of seeing that trump the sense experience of the two eyes. These inventions are presented as discoverable laws concerning the truth of vision, but they are not based on binocular embodied human vision, rather they are based on abstract formulae. There is much similarity in seeing this way and Descartes’ approach toward vision.

**Cartesian Perspectivilism**

Though Greek philosophy and linear perspective play significant roles in the formulation of visual thought, the ways of seeing attributable to the 17th century French philosopher Descartes have also dominated modern understandings of vision. Descartes’ idea of vision, like that of Plato, is neither simple nor unproblematic. Though Descartes privileges vision as the *noblest of the senses*, and extols the virtues of optical devices that extend the power of vision, his philosophy harbors a deep distrust of the impressions delivered by one’s own two eyes. Descartes is sufficiently distrustful of illusion, of the potential misinformation that the eyes may deliver to the mind, that he extends his distrust to the realm of vision as a whole (Judovitz, 1993). At the heart of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*¹⁴, is the reductive methodology of doubt. Descartes sets aside imperfect—human—vision, employing instead a model of perfect intellectual vision; a rational reconstruction of vision in the mind, “a figurative model based on mental

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¹⁴ Though this formulation of Descartes' statement ‘I think therefore I am’ has become canonical, he never formulates the statement in his Second Meditation using these words (Newman, 2010, section 4.1).
schematism” (Judovitz, 1993, p. 63). Those elements of the sensory input that Descartes allows in his thinking are subordinated to higher mental processes.

The passive ability to receive images of sensory things, said Descartes, would be useless if there did not exist in the mind a further and higher active faculty capable of shaping these images and of correcting the errors that derive from sensory experience. (Arnheim, 1980, p. 489)

The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose work is discussed at length in the next chapter, recognizes the appeal but also the futility of Descartes’ efforts to construct a vision free of the flaws and misapprehensions of embodied vision. How crystal clear everything would be in our philosophy if only we would exorcise these specters, make illusions or objectless perceptions out of them, brush them to one side of an unequivocal world! Descartes's Dioptrics is an attempt to do just that. It is the breviary of a thought that wants no longer to abide in the visible and so decides to reconstruct it according to a model-in-thought. It is worthwhile to remember this attempt and its failure. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1993, p. 130)

Though not the origin of Western visual thinking, the philosophical writings of Descartes have been, and remain profoundly influential on Western thought. “No better evidence of its power can be offered than the stubborn hold Cartesian philosophy had on [France’s] major thinkers for so many years” (Jay, 1993, p. 69). Important also is the ocular predispositions of his philosophy and the continued influence his ‘ocularcentrism’ has had on contemporary thought.
Descartes was a quintessentially visual philosopher, who tacitly adopted the position of a perspectivalist painter using a camera obscura to reproduce the observed world. ‘Cartesian perspectivilism,’ in fact may nicely serve as a short-hand way to characterize the dominant scopic regime of the modern era. (Jay, 1993, p. 70)

Cartesian perspectivilism denotes a viewing subject that is rational, and detached, occupying a single enlightened vantage point. This approach toward vision strives toward Descartes’ *Mathesis Universalis*, a mathematically based, universal language.

Descartes assumed that the clear and distinct ideas available to anyone’s mental gaze would be exactly the same… Individual perspectives did not, therefore matter, as the deitic specificity of the subject could be bracketed out in any cognitive endeavor. The same assumption informed the Albertian concept of painterly perspective; all beholders would see the same grid of orthogonal lines converging on the same vanishing point, if they gazed through, as it were, the same camera obscura. (Jay, 1993, p. 189)

Jonathan Crary (1990), a contemporary, postmodern scholar of art and vision, advises circumspection when encountering narratives such as this that present an unbroken progression of conceptual and technological innovation from the Renaissance to present times. Such models he writes have been employed to characterize the progression of human invention from ancient times to the present as an unbroken and continually advancing “progress toward verisimilitude in representation, in which Renaissance perspective and photography are part of the same quest for a fully objective equivalent of a ‘natural vision’” (Crary, 1990, p. 26). In other political camps, he notes the same
narrative is employed to account for the continual evolution and refinement of political domination and control through the visual apparatus. The underlying assumption that Crary takes issue with is the unchanging status of the viewing subject implied by the idea of uninterrupted progress. “Such a schema implies that at each step in this evolution the same essential presuppositions about an observer’s relation to the world are in place” (Crary, 1990, p. 26). Crary’s point in investigating the evolving techniques of observation is that there are historical discontinuities in the way vision is thought, and by extension there are multiple subjective possibilities. Crary’s investigation in no way diminishes the impact of Cartesian thinking on the landscape of visual theory.

The Camera Obscura as a Model for Thought

The term Cartesian Perspectivilism serves well to describe Descartes’ world view, but the camera obscura as a model of thought is no less significant. John Locke’s description of the relationship between sense and thought clearly illuminates the camera obscura model and the investigative approach that Seventeenth-century philosophers took toward the question of sense, sight and thought. Locke (1894) states

I pretend not to teach, but to inquire; and therefore cannot but confess here again, -- that external and internal sensation are the only passages I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: [would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there], and lie so orderly as to be found upon
occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them. (p. 211-212)

Crary (1990) neatly summarizes the character of this model of thought: “The camera, or room, is the site within which an orderly projection of the world, of extended substance, is made available for inspection by the mind” (p. 46). Crary (1990) also describes the extended influence that this model holds:

Historically speaking, we must recognize how for nearly two hundred years from the late 1500s to the end of the 1700s, the structural and optical principles of the camera obscura coalesced into a dominant paradigm through which was described the status and possibilities of an observer. …During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the camera obscura was without question the most widely used model for explaining human vision, and for representing the relation of a perceiver and the position of a knowing subject to an external world. (p. 27)

Crary (1990) further argues that Descartes’ model of vision in thought can be seen as part of the cultural assemblage that constitutes the camera obscura and argues that the camera obscura was, of course, much more than just a model or a diagram of thought and vision. It was an actual apparatus that served numerous and disparate social functions, but as a model of vision, it was significant in that it placed the viewer, the observer, into a box separate from the outside world on view.

If at the core of Descartes’ method was the need to escape the uncertainties of mere human vision and the confusions of the senses, the camera obscura is congruent with his quest to found human knowledge on a purely objective view of the world. (Crary, 1990, p. 48)
The reductive method of doubt that Descartes applied to strip the fallibility of human senses from his thinking certainly produces a more rational—more rationalized—view of the world. Such an approach also entails a very specific and subjective viewing position, one that is not without collateral impacts on the subject’s world-view

**The Rational, Detached Subject**

A product of this model of vision in thought is a binary of subject and object. In other words, the subject, the observer, the person who is doing the looking, seeing and observing is conceptualized as entirely apart from, unaffected by, and unaffecting the object upon which his/her gaze is directed. This is known as Cartesian duality, and represents a significant change from the way the viewing subject was conceptualized previously.

Locke and Descartes describe an observer fundamentally different from anything in Greek and medieval thought…the achievement of these two thinkers was ‘the conception of the human mind as an inner space in which both pains and clear and distinct ideas passed in review before an Inner Eye. (Richard Rorty quoted in Crary, 1990, p. 43)

This shifting concept of vision produces a radically different view of the subjective viewer in modern thought, but also influences the whole of modernist metaphysics.

The Cartesian change from mind-as-reason to mind-as-inner-arena was not the triumph of the prideful individual subject freed from scholastic shackles so much as the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for wisdom. From that time forward, the way was open for philosophers…to attain the rigor of the mathematician…rather than help people attain
peace of mind. Science, rather than living, became philosophy’s subject and epistemology at its center. (Rorty, 1979, p. 61)

Cartesian visual epistemology is a phrase that encapsulates this shift in vision. It designates a focus on knowledge. It is a highly ordered way of thinking and seeing—an approach toward the visual which has had far-reaching influence.

**The Hegemony of Vision in Modernity**

A compelling case can be made that the Cartesian approach toward vision is the dominant paradigm of Western thought: that “the history of Western culture is a history of ocularcentrism and that, in the modern age, this ocularcentrism has taken on a quite distinctive character—and equally distinctive sociocultural functions” (Levin, 1999, p. 398). Flynn (1993) enumerates the tenets of the ocularcentric:

Hegemonic vision denotes first the ideal of detached, disinterested awareness… [and] secondly places a premium on clarity and distinctness, on evidence as the self-transparency of the object, on the apodictic… The final feature of hegemonic vision… is its association with the Enlightenment itself. (pp. 274-275)

Jay (1993) notes both the historical and contemporary influence of Cartesian visual epistemology. “French philosophy remained in the thrall of neo-Kantian and positivist tendencies until well into the 1930’s” (p. 263). I would argue that Cartesian thinking is, if no longer hegemonic, still profoundly influential, and Western thinking, “in the broadest sense, [has] never been able to throw off many of the fundamental assumptions bequeathed to it by Cartesianism” (Jay, 1993, p. 263). Much of Western culture is still in thrall of a Cartesian visual epistemology. In addition, as noted by Arendt (1977) above,
this approach to the visual is sufficiently ubiquitous so as to be nearly invisible. The work of many contemporary philosophers, critics and artists is to make visible the worldview that it produces.

Jay (1993, 1999), and Levin (1988, 1993, 1999) have both produced surveys of the thinkers whose works critically examine the hegemony of vision. Jay and Levin both assert that a rejection of ocularcentrism, may be the one concept that unifies the apparently disparate writings of such thinkers as Bergson (1962), Sartre (1943/1992), Lacan (1981), Foucault (1972, 1973, 1977), Derrida (1979), and other postmodern authors.

Though visual models of thought have held sway for millennia, many of these postmodern thinkers indicate that when ocularcentrism is coupled with modern technologies of imaging, surveillance, production, and reproduction, these visual technologies produce tremendous socio-cultural leverage. In modern culture, ocularcentrism is not only dominant, but domineering. It is coupled with a drive for social control, and power over that which is observed. It implies an observer superior to that which is on view. “The hegemony in question here is instituted by, and in turn reproduces, a will to power, a drive to dominate and master, which is the character-potential in vision that prevails in modern times over other, more enlightened potentials” (Levin, 1999, p. 398). Descartes’ vision therefore may be characterized as extramission.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} Extramission is the belief that vision is the product of rays emanating out from the eye, rather than a passive reception of incoming light rays. Descartes (1637/1965) describes human vision as a reception of incoming light, but still credits the cat with being capable of extramission.
a vision that goes out from the eye into the world and in so doing reshapes the world to conform to his way of seeing.

Routes of inquiry in the coming chapters include questioning the influence of this rationalized and hegemonic way of seeing on the visual discourse surrounding photography and photography education. Also under consideration are those voices that seek to reject, resist, overturn, and expose the implications of visual theory predicated upon Cartesianism. The next chapter will continue to look toward the philosophical discourses that inform the discourse of vision with a shift toward phenomenology and those authors who reject the camera-obscura epistemologically-based approach toward consciousness and strive toward a different, more ontologically situated way of seeing.
Chapter 4: Phenomenological Vision

The camera-obscura model of vision inherited from Descartes and other enlightenment philosophers doesn’t represent the only approach toward thinking about seeing. The philosophy of phenomenology offers a number of alternatives. Though Descartes’ visual epistemology remains profoundly influential, phenomenology has persisted as a marginalized part of the discourse of photography. Evidence of its influence on photography writing can be traced to Barthes (1977, 1981), Sontag (1977), Damisch, (1978), Elkins (1997), Mitchell, (2005), Cheung (2005, 2010), Fried (2008), Smucker (2008), and Crowther (2009), but the form of seeing espoused by phenomenology is by no means hegemonic.

Basic background terms and concepts will be examined first in order to lay a foundation for examining the phenomenological outlook on Cartesian epistemology. Important voices in the history of phenomenological inquiry will also be considered for the ways in which they characterize consciousness of and through vision. The chapter will conclude with a tighter focus on two areas: questions concerning the relationship between technology and vision as addressed by Heidegger (1953/1977a), and questions of how the language of phenomenology offers a more ontologically immersive approach toward seeing. The intent of this chapter is to develop and clarify these ideas. This chapter will provide context for a number of the concepts employed in the examination of
Thomas Demand’s photographs. It will also lay the groundwork for an open-ended look at photography and photography education in a phenomenological light in later chapters.

**What is Phenomenology?**

Phenomenology is a philosophy that seeks an understanding of the world through first-person perception. It is built upon the notion that sense experience—the subjective engagement with things in the world—not just pure thought, may be considered the stuff of philosophy. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity—the relationship between human being and consciousness of other beings—are the concerns of phenomenology. The focus is on description of consciousness rather explanations or analysis. “This first directive that Husserl gave to phenomenology, in its state of being at the beginning – to be a ‘descriptive psychology’ or to return to the ‘things themselves’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 55).

At its most simple and direct, phenomenology may be understood as a study of phenomena, a study of the appearance of things. However several thinkers including Arendt (1977), Heidegger (1926/1962, 1977a, 1977b), Merleau-Ponty (1961/1993, 1962/2007, 1963), and Levin (1999) have employed phenomenology to look beneath and beyond surface appearances to consider the very essence of being through perception and the meanings of perception. Heidegger seeks to explicate the term phenomenology by looking at the Greek roots of the word.

When we bring to mind concretely what has been exhibited in the interpretation of “phenomenon” and "logos" we are struck by an inner relation between what is meant by these terms. The expression
"phenomenology" can be formulated in Greek as *legein ta phainomena*. But *legein* means *apophainesthai*. Hence phenomenology means: *apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself. That is the formal meaning of the type of research that calls itself "phenomenology." But this expresses nothing other than the maxim formulated above: "To the things themselves!" (Heidegger 1926/1996, p. 30)

This chapter focuses on the work of four philosophers. Husserl, because his work lays much of the foundation for later phenomenological conversation, and his terminology is employed by Barthes (1981) in his search for the essence of photography. Heidegger’s thinking is also important because his work radically alters Husserl’s phenomenology and is deeply intertwined with concerns of vision, picturing, technology and being. Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are also considered because together their models of vision represent diametrically opposed, yet synergistic views on an ontological apprehension of vision.

**Phenomenology and Consciousness**

One of the radical insights that phenomenology brings to a philosophy of consciousness is the idea of objectivity-for-subjectivity. Husserl’s understanding of “the intentional structure of consciousness,” (Moran, 2000, p. 16) allowed him to develop this idea. “All conscious experiences (*Erlebnisse*) are characterized by ‘aboutness’. Every act of loving is a loving *of* something, every act of seeing is a seeing *of* something,” (Moran, 2000, p. 16). Moran (2000) also notes that this aspect of phenomenology was not seen by Husserl as a breach with the subject-object divide of Cartesian philosophy, but rather a
revival of Cartesian thought. Later writers associated with phenomenology—Heidegger (1926/1962), and Merleau-Ponty (1962/2007)—would reject Cartesianism and move toward a model of consciousness inextricably intertwined with the world.

**Intentionality.**

One of the fundamental doctrines of phenomenology is the outward directedness of consciousness. Husserl believed that “every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially ‘consciousness of’ or an ‘experience of’ something or other” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 8). In other words, “every act of consciousness, every experience is correlated with an object. Every intending has its intended object.” (Sokolowski 2000, p. 8). Merleau-Ponty (1962/2007) clarifies the difference between the phenomenological approach to the outside world from the enlightenment model of consciousness. “What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is the unity of the world before being posited by knowledge in a deliberate act of identification, is ‘lived’ as ready-made or already there” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 64). Describing the phenomenological relationship between the viewing subject and the outside world is not a question of separation, as it was with Descartes, “it is a question of recognizing consciousness itself as a project of the world, destined from a world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but toward which it is perpetually directed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 65).

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16 Sokolowski (2000) notes that the sense of the word “intend” in phenomenological usage “should not be confused with ‘intention’ as the purpose we have in mind when we act… the phenomenological notion of intentionality applies primarily to the theory of knowledge, not the theory of human action.” (p. 8)
**Noema and noesis.**

The concepts *noema* and *noesis*, are related to the concept of intentionality. These terms allow one to hold separate, yet recognizable, the intertwining of the concept of the object of consciousness, and the object of which one is conscious; or to employ the language of phenomenology, *noema* is “the object which is intended,” and *noesis* “the object as it is intended,” (Moran, 2000, p. 118). The example Husserl gives to illustrate this concept is the German Emperor. The man himself is the *noema* in this case. We may think of this person in more than one way: “as an Emperor, and as the Emperor of Germany. The man himself is the son of the Emperor Frederick III, the grandson of Queen Victoria” (Husserl, 1913/1970, p. 578). In each case, the individual of whom we are thinking is the same—The German Emperor—but two different viewers may be thinking about—intending—this person in very disparate ways.

Sokolowski (2000) indicates that both of these terms must be understood specifically within the context of the transcendental reduction, and that the concept of *noema* and *noesis* are not applicable in a natural or existential approach. These ideas are not meant to indicate an intermediate entity between consciousness and the object of consciousness. Moran (2000) also addresses ontological issues concerning the *noema*: issues concerning the nature, the ontological status of what this thing held in mind *is*, and notes that Husserl’s work never fully addresses these concerns.

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17 Merleau-Ponty (1962) lightly touches upon this in *What is Phenomenology*. Intentionality, he writes, “is understandable only though the reduction” (p. 64).
The reduction or *epoché*.

Getting to the essence of the experience of things in the world is one focus in phenomenology. In order to philosophically step back from the natural world and the messy entanglements that prevent one from properly seeing essences, Husserl proposed a set of procedures (Moran 2000, Sokolowski, 2000). These *procedures* or *steps* were intended to provide the proper transcendental perspective on the various phenomena under investigation. This step back, goes by various names, “the reduction,” the “transcendental reduction,” and the “*epoché*.” Husserl’s reduction, Moran notes, serves a number of philosophical purposes. It contained the notion of *epoché*, or a suspension of ideas and associations found in our natural lives. Moran (2000) writes, “Husserl characterized the practice of *epoché* in many different ways using terms like abstention, dislocation from, unplugging, or parenthesizing,” (p. 147). The term *bracketing off* is often used to describe it. In Husserl’s thinking, it is a critical part of approaching the essence of phenomena, and understanding subjective experience.

In the final analysis everything depends on the initial moment of the method, the phenomenological reduction. The reduction is the means of access to this new realm, so when one gets the meaning of the reduction wrong, then everything else goes wrong. (Husserl, as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 147-148)

The reduction and its role in phenomenology are significant. Rather than cast the very existence of reality into doubt, as Descartes’ *cogito* did, the reduction subtly
undermines the absolute mind-body, subject-object duality attributed to Descartes.

Merleau-Ponty (1962/2007) writes

Descartes and particularly Kant detached the subject, or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it. They presented consciousness, the absolute certainty of my existence for myself, as the condition without which there would be nothing at all and the act of relating as the foundation of relatedness. Undoubtedly, the act of relating is nothing without the spectacle of the world that it relates… the world is there before any analysis that I can make of it. (p. 57)

The reduction continually presents problems for Merleau-Ponty. In his early writing, he adheres to the idea as not limited to transcendental phenomenology, but also essential to existential phenomenology. “Far from being, as has been thought, the formula of an idealistic philosophy, the phenomenological reduction is the formula of an existential philosophy: Heidegger’s ‘being in the world’ appears only against the background of the phenomenological reduction,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 62). At the same time, he acknowledges the reduction as problematical.

The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl questions himself again and again concerning the possibility of the reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would not be problematic. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world, since even our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on to which we are trying to seize… there is no
thought which embraces all our thought. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 62)

Because of the distancing and solipsism inherent in the concept, it continually frustrated Merleau-Ponty, and in his later thinking he sought a more immersive model of phenomenological perception. Whereas Heidegger entirely rejected the idea, Merleau-Ponty held onto the notion of the *epoché*, but maintained that any reduction must always be incomplete.

**Essence vs. Existence.**

Writings categorized under the rubric of phenomenology often have distinctly different philosophical leanings. The sub-categories broadly used to differentiate Husserl’s approach from Heidegger’s are *transcendental phenomenology* and *existential phenomenology*. The distinction is useful in that it indicates a difference in the relationship between essence and existence in the two types of thought. Transcendental phenomenology, such as we find in Husserl’s writing, especially his early work, is dedicated toward gaining access to pure essences via the transcendental reduction. The emphasis is shifted away from the world and more toward “transcendental solipsism,” (Moran, 2000, p. 61). Merleau-Ponty treads more of a middle ground. “Philosophy is not the reflection of a prior truth, but like art, the realization of a truth,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 67). He saw the project of phenomenology as heavily reliant on the transcendental reduction—which could never be complete—but still heavily invested in direct bodily immersion in the world. It was for Merleau-Ponty, a paradox of transcendence versus immanence (Moran, 2000). Even when intent on revealing and
defining the essence of experience or consciousness, phenomenology for Merleau-Ponty was to be engaged in the world. Phenomenology is “a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than their ‘facticity.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 55) His description of phenomenology resides in both the transcendental and the existential:

It is a transcendental philosophy which puts the assertions arising out of the natural attitude in suspense, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always “already there” before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon rediscovering this naïve contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a “rigorous science,” but it also offers an account of “lived” space, “lived” time, and the “lived” world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2007, p. 55)

Merleau-Ponty’s struggles have their origin in the philosophical friction between Heidegger and Husserl.

**Martin Heidegger.**

Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger in his magnum opus *Being and Time*, rejects much of his teacher’s approach and proposes a new direction for phenomenology. Heidegger rejects Husserl’s transcendental idealism, and distances himself in numerous ways from the father of phenomenology.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger drops all Husserl’s central concepts: he no longer talks of consciousness, objectivity, directedness, the *noema, noesis,*
the transcendental ego... Instead, Heidegger wanted to employ phenomenology as the proper mode of access to the phenomena of concrete human life, factual life. (Moran, 2000, p 227)

Heidegger’s phenomenology is thus properly labeled as existential phenomenology; far more concerned with ontological questions, not with the reduction or a transcendental approach. The term *Dasein* which Heidegger coined to indicate a human being *being* in the world, illustrates his existential focus.

*Being and Time* is an analysis of the essence of being. Heidegger directs his inquiry into being through *Dasein’s* relation to phenomena in the world, rather than through solipsistic—mind-in-a-box—concepts of consciousness. “The aim of this analysis is to show up *Dasein* as having the fundamental structure of Being-in-the-world, being with things and with others in such a way that its whole existence is structured by care (*Sorge*),” (Moran 2000, p. 238). “*Dasein’s* Being,” Heidegger (1926/1962) writes, “reveals itself in care,” (p. 227). *Dasein’s* consciousness of a certain object is structured by the use and usefulness of that object. One object relates to others, and relates to a greater web of things that the human being cares about. Consciousness of the interrelated usefulness of phenomena in the world is what constitutes *Dasein’s* rich, interconnected world.

Heidegger distinguishes the type of being that inanimate objects have as distinctly different from that of *Dasein*. Humans are world-rich, but objects, rocks, trees, hammers, are world-poor, if they can be considered to have a world at all. An understanding of being in the world, as Heidegger writes, may be gained through an in-depth analysis of
“the phenomena which are most intimately connected with our leading question – the question of Being. These phenomena are those very ways of Being… readiness-to-hand, and presence-at-hand, as attributes of entities within-the-world whose character is not that of *Dasein,*” (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 228). To more fully explain the relationship between *Dasein* and the objects of every-day life, Heidegger develops the terms *Zuhanden* which is translated to English as *ready to hand* or handy, and *Vorhanden* translated by the phrase *present at hand.*

**Ready to hand and present to hand.**

*Ready to hand* and *present to hand* are two terms that reveal the way in which Heidegger approaches *Dasein:* the idea of being in the world through our engagement with objects in the world. His emphasis is on characterizing and describing being through the use of and awareness of things, rather than concepts. “Traditionally, Heidegger feels, philosophy, including even Aristotle, has prioritized the theoretical encounter with things, things as they are to sight. Sight stands at a distance and seeing does not tamper with the thing seen” (Moran, 2000, p. 233). The theoretical, detached approach toward the world found in traditional philosophy, does not, Heidegger indicates, represent *Dasein*’s true first-order contact with the world. “Heidegger emphasizes that our initial contact with objects is in terms of their use and availability to us for certain assigned tasks” (Moran, 2000).

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18 Moran (2000) uses the words ‘theoretical encounter’ and ‘sight does not tamper with things’ to denote ideas encapsulated in Jay’s (1993) term ‘Cartesian Perspectivilism’ discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
The primordial and usual form that consciousness takes is an absorption in practical activities.

In the natural attitude to the world, we see a tree as a source of firewood or as shelter from the rain, not as an abstract concept. An object is relevant when it is connected in some meaningful way to the activities in which Dasein is absorbed. “To be relevant means to let something be together with something else” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 78). We usually understand a hammer as ready to hand, as interconnected with other phenomena in the world: “the thing at hand which we call a hammer has to do with hammering, the hammering has to do with fastening something, fastening something has to do with protection against bad weather” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 78).

The term ‘handy’ rather than ready to hand is used in Stambaugh’s (1996) translation of Being and Time. This translation clarifies the reading and meaning of the concept.

Handiness is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself initially a theme for circumspection. What is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak in its character of handiness in order to be really handy. What everyday association is initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work. (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 65)

If we look in a theoretical manner at the hammer, if we just stare at it, our relationship to the hammer is not the same. The hammer in usage is different than the hammer under the theoretical gaze.

Heidegger clarifies the concept by describing Dasein’s reaction when the usual approach toward things suddenly becomes unavailable. When the hammer breaks, or
ceases to be functional for the task at hand, *Dasein’s* mode of consciousness toward it changes. The hammer is suddenly looked upon in a different way. But even in this situation, the hammer is not reduced to a theoretical object. Though the hammer is no longer invisibly enmeshed in the task at hand, by obstinately blocking the progression of the work the broken hammer generates an even more world-absorbed presence. The failure of the hammer to function for the task at hand is viewed even more strongly in context of the task. “what is unhandy can be encountered not only in the sense of something unusable or completely missing, but as something unhandy which is not missing at all and not unusable, but ‘gets in the way’ of taking care of things” (Heidegger, 1926/1996 p. 69). Therefore even when broken and un-handy, the hammer connects *Dasein’s* consciousness with the world.

There is a difference between the way we operate in the world when functioning in the usual, natural attitude, and when we gaze upon objects theoretically. Husserl’s concept of the reduction seeks to put the natural attitude into temporary suspension in order to locate the essence of phenomena through the transcendental reduction. Heidegger (1926/1962) sees no need, and Merleau-Ponty, in his later writing such as the posthumously published *The Intertwining/the Chiasm;* sees less need to distance consciousness from the world in this way. Both develop language to allow the philosophical exploration of an engaged being in the world, rejecting ideas that posit a subjective consciousness disengaged from phenomena of the world. These notions of being-in-the-world open a path for conceptualizing vision within an ontological, rather than epistemological framework.
**Phenomenology and Vision**

Phenomenology is an inquiry into the relationship between human perception and questions of being. As such, it offers a powerful set of tools for reconsidering what sight means to us as human beings. By extension it also offers unique insights into technologies of vision and their relationship to human being and human knowing. Implicit in this look into the visual, is a critique of the Cartesian model of sight. Considerable effort is made by those who followed Husserl to dismantle Cartesian visual epistemology and to describe the negative implications of the Cartesian dualist philosophy. Criticism of Descartes is only part of the picture however. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, each construct new and unique models of vision. Using phenomenology they position the subject as ontologically immersed, in a reciprocal relationship with—and particularly in the case of Sartre, as—the object of the gaze. Heidegger’s inquiry into the essence of technology, an extended description of the interrelatedness of being and vision, takes this approach. Heidegger’s idea of *alētheic* vision, adapted and extended by Merleau-Ponty into the flesh of the world, and passionately re-visioned by Sartre, also involves an ontological focus. By scrutinizing Descartes’ visual epistemology, however, phenomenology opens the door to a much more aggressive and sustained critique of vision in modern thought—a critique against the hegemony of vision in Western thought as a whole. This movement will be discussed in *Chapter 5: Postmodern Vision.*
A critique of Cartesian visual epistemology.

The ubiquity of the ocularcentric rationale associated with modernist thinking has served to make the structures which under-gird this visual epistemology all but invisible (Arendt, 1977). Philosophers considering the modernist worldview from a phenomenological standpoint seek to bring these structures into focus and to examine the nature of the subject and object of vision produced within the metaphysics of modernity.

Between subject and object.

A distanced relationship between viewer and viewed is one of the hallmarks of modernist vision. One of the outcomes of visualizing the world in this way is that the object of vision is detached; distinctly and rationally separate from the viewing subject. In adopting the enlightenment world-view—scientific, rational and capable of moving past the myths and misunderstandings of the Middle Ages—Western philosophy not only transforms the relationship between observer and object, but also re-writes the relationship between man and himself.

The essence of the modern age can be seen in the fact that man frees himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in freeing himself to himself…Essential here is the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism…What is decisive is not that man frees himself to himself from previous obligations, but that the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject. (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 127-128)
Levin (1988) considers this changed—modern—relationship to be particularly dire and deeply antagonistic. “The representing of the visible in its absolute otherness,” (p. 66) is the product of seeing the world characterized as subject and object.

The problem with this structure is that it tends to polarize into a situation of opposition, or conflict, and to condense into a rope of pain drawn between two knots of being: the ego-subject which ‘sees’ and the object which, held tightly in its grasp, is ‘seen’. (Levin, 1988, p. 66)

This structural divide, and the stresses that it produces, are defining components of modernist vision, and the tangible products of Cartesian visual epistemology.

**Representation.**

In a Cartesian model of representation, the subject forms impressions of the object on view somewhere in the mind. The body presents these internal pictures to the mind which, as Descartes notes, is located in the brain—implying even a separation between the mind and the brain. Understanding the activity of vision in this way establishes and ensures a divided relationship between subject and object. The separation between mind and body is only part of the concern however. The relationship is structured by a certain—for lack of a better term—posture. In modernist representation, the viewing subject postures himself or herself above, apart from, superior to, the object on view.

In seeing this way, we establish not only a specific relationship to the things within our field of vision, but also our relationship to the entire world changes. Our picture of the world changes, and as Heidegger argues, the world itself becomes picture;

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These ideas tie in with Rorty’s (1979) assertion that Cartesian thought focuses on certainty over wisdom.
not only that we have a picture of the world, but rather the picture we hold in mind, becomes the world. Heidegger explores and develops this idea in *The Age of the World Picture*, an essay devoted to uncovering and examining the essence of the modern age. The age is, he writes, grounded in metaphysics.

In metaphysics reflection is accomplished concerning the essence of what is and a decision takes place regarding the essence of truth. Metaphysics grounds an age, in that through a specific interpretation of what is and through a specific comprehension of truth it gives to that age the basis upon which it is essentially formed. (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 115)

True to form, he seeks to discover this essence through an examination of things, of phenomena occurring in the world. “One of the essential phenomena of the modern age is its science.” (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 116). Science in the modern age, he argues, is tied to objectification and representation as a way of attaining certainty about the things the mind studies. Certainty is a non-contingent, definitive way of knowing the object, the presence, the being on view. Through representation the modern scientist seeks to ascertain truth. This involves a full-frontal approach to vision: the world on view is fixed, frozen in the center of the field of vision for inspection. It involves what Heidegger calls, a “setting-before,” and objectifies that which is in the world.

This objectifying of whatever is, is accomplished in a setting-before, a representing, that aims at bringing each particular being before it in such a

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20 Another is machine technology, (the importance of which is developed later in this chapter. Heidegger also notes “a third equally essential phenomenon of the modern period lies in the event of arts moving into the purview of aesthetics” (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 116).
way that man who calculated can be sure, and that means be certain, of that being. We first arrive at science as research when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation. (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 127)

Heidegger links this way of seeing with the project of modernism. Modernism, and our view of the world, what he calls the world picture, are inextricably intertwined, and closely tied to representation. Representation is not characterized as a simple activity by which we make a picture of something, rather it is characteristic of the way in which man in a modern age extracts the object from the greater undefined realm of horizon, of being, and sets it before himself for contemplation and domination. Heidegger (1938/1977a) calls the posture of representation a “standing over against,” (p. 131) and asserts that this way of looking at things, this mode of representation objectifies and subordinates those things that have their presence in the world. “Only that which becomes object in this way is – is considered to be in being,” (p. 127). This, like many of Heidegger’s important statements, appears repetitive and recursive, so it is important to reiterate and restate his point. Only the things that come to view through the process of representation are permitted to exist, “only that which becomes object in this way is” in other words, only that which is made visible, made present through representation—conceptualized as certainty—is admitted into the modernist sphere of being. That which is outside of representation, is not: is not, doesn’t exist, or is somehow confined to a sphere of being which is outside of truth. “What is to be is for the first time [in the modern age] defined as the objectiveness of representing, and truth is first defined as the
certainty of representing, in the metaphysics of Descartes,” (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 127).

These are of course, old arguments, dating from the nineteen twenties and thirties that set against a philosopher writing in the seventeenth century. They are not however, dated. Heidegger’s concerns still carry currency in the realm of the photographic. William Mitchell (1992) characterizes digital photography as problematic because of its impact on photographic truth. The ease with which the digital photograph lies reveals “the tragic elusiveness of the Cartesian dream” (Mitchell, 1992, p. 225). Photography, science, and concerns about truth in representation, all speak to the persistence of the age of the world picture. Neither antiquated nor left behind in this previous age either, is the final conclusion of Heidegger’s investigation into the metaphysics of modernity and its representations: the vision of the world as picture. If anything, this vision of the world has become more expansive and entrenched through the proliferation of technologically-derived images in the modern day.

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word “picture” [Bild] now means the structured image [Gebild] that is the creature of man’s producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. (Heidegger, 1938/1977a, p. 134)

Levin (1988) considers the posture of the subject-object relationship to be particularly problematic. Representation, for Levin, is outright hostile. It is a way of
extracting the presence of the being on view from the contextual ground in which it resides so that the mind may inspect the object on the mind’s own terms.

It is important, therefore, to bear in mind the inherently *aversive and aggressive character* of re-presentation. As the prefix itself informs us, re-presentation is repetition: a process of delaying or deferring, that which visibly presences. It is a way of *posing at a distance*, so that vision can ‘again’ take up what presences – but this time on ego’s terms. (Levin, 1988, p. 67)

**A doubtful subjective ontology.**

The final outcome of seeing the world through Cartesian eyes is the relationship between perception and the ontological status of the subject. “In the pursuit of certainty by means of his ‘method of doubt’ Descartes separates what is conceptually inseparable: body and mind, doubt and certainty, thought and action, the individual and the community or society in which he lives,” (Dilman, 1993, p. 7). Merleau-Ponty (1961/1993) in his essay *Eye and Mind* seeks to reject the skeptical, doubt-based approach of Descartes. Merleau-Ponty “argues that the radical skeptic borrows something from our experience, absolutizes it, then in his quest for complete certainty, he uses it to terrorize our experience of ‘inherence in the world’” (Flynn, 2009, section 7, ¶ 1). For Merleau-Ponty, “human beings are not purely thinking things or conscious minds lodged in physical bodies. They are flesh and blood beings who are capable of speech and thought and feelings, not something in them called ‘the mind’” (Dilman, 1993, p. 6).

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, argues that Descartes and Kant, due to the nature of a reductive system of doubt applied to attain a distanced understanding, don’t have to
deal with the issue of what kind of a being it is that they posit. In Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum,” there’s plenty of cogito, but not very much ‘sum.’ The ontological status of the subject is cast into doubt.

With the ‘cogito sum’ Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began in this ‘radical’ way, was the kind of Being which belongs to the res cogitans or – more precisely – the meaning of the being of the ‘sum’. (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 46)

As Heidegger (1926/1962) notes, Kant, following in Descartes’ footsteps, “made an essential omission: he failed to provide an ontology of Dasein” (p. 46). Or as Dilman, (1993) notes in commenting on Heidegger’s stance, “Kant had said that it was a scandal for philosophy that the existence of ‘the external world’ had not been proved by philosophers. Heidegger replied that the scandal was that philosophers kept trying to prove it,” (p. 10). For Heidegger, the concept of Dasein—missing in Descartes and Kant— presupposes that consciousness exists immersed in the world, and that such philosophies which “presuppose a subject which is proximally worldless or unsure of the world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world,” (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 250), will never be capable of bridging the subject object divide.

The ‘problem of Reality’ in the sense of the question whether an external world is present-at-hand and whether such a world can be proved, turns out to be an impossible one… because the very entity which serves as its theme… repudiates any such formulation of the question. (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 250)
Sokolowski (2000) also addresses the issue of the dis-embodied model of consciousness that dominates modernist metaphysics.

In the Cartesian, Hobbesian, and Lockean traditions, which dominate our culture, we are told that when we are conscious, we are primarily aware of ourselves or our own ideas. Consciousness is taken to be like a bubble or an enclosed cabinet; the mind comes in a box. (p. 9)

This model of consciousness, leaves out the idea of intentionality, Sokolowski (2000) writes, and when “we start with the premise that we are entirely ‘inside,’… we are greatly perplexed as to how we could ever get ‘outside,’” (p. 10). This creates a dilemma in which we are unable to really enter into or engage with the world. “The mind is not only placed over against the universe or the real world; it is also placed over against the body,” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 11). Intentionality, Sokolowski argues, is the philosophical concept that allows us to move beyond this dilemma, it provides a philosophical avenue by which we can recognize our natural orientation toward the things of the world and the truths that inhere in this engagement.

Judovitz (1988) links the very crisis of modernity with the connections between subjectivity and representation found in Descartes, and finds that “the subject tied to this mathematical reduction of the world is itself an empty formal entity, devoid [of] either human or divine content,” (p. 6). Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, seen as a renewal of the Cartesian project, sought a number of methodological and philosophical routes for bridging the subject-object divide. However as Dilman (1993) writes, “Once an epistemological gap has been opened between us and the world, once this world is
represented as ‘external’, then no amount of inference or thought can close this gap,” (p. 9). As a result, those seeking to move beyond the pernicious and solipsistic outcomes associated with Cartesian epistemology, either struggle with the nature of the subject created by Descartes’ doubt, or, as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty do, adopt a significantly different standpoint from which to understand the way we see the world.

**Looking Closer at Phenomenological Vision**

In the following sections implications of phenomenological approaches toward vision are examined in closer detail. The focus is narrowed to two concepts, Heidegger’s inquiry into the relationships between technology and vision in *The Question Concerning Technology* is considered first. Finally in this section, I will look at the confluence of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre’s ideas on vision in which Heidegger’s *alētheic* vision, Merleau-Ponty’s visual flesh of the world, and Sartre’s *Look* when considered together offer a picture of vision considerably different from Cartesian perspectivilism; considerably more engaged and engaging than Locke’s darkened closet.

**Questioning technology**

In his essay, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1953/1977a) seeks to locate the essence of technology. The modernist concept of technology as culturally neutral, as functional—as a means to an end, “makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 4). In order to open our eyes, Heidegger employs a two-part analysis. He describes technological phenomena, but also hermeneutically examines the language we use to conceptualize technology. In so doing,
he reveals that “the essence of technology is by no means anything technological,” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 4). The essence of technology instead must be understood as a particular way of seeing.

_The instrumental definition of technology._

Heidegger (1953/1977a) begins his investigation by asking what technology is. The answer is immediately self-evident, he writes. Technology is a means to an end. It is something we do, something that man does to get things done. He calls this the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology and it is apparently indubitably correct. It applies to both older handwork technologies and to modern ones.

The instrumental definition of technology is indeed so uncannily correct that it even holds for modern technology, some of which, in other respects, we maintain with some justification that it is, in contrast to the older handwork technology, something completely different and therefore new. (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 4)

Though there certainly are differences in terms of complexity between older technologies and newer—a radar station is more complex than a weather vane—a modern hydroelectric plant on the Rhine is more complex than a sawmill—each of these technologies is a means to an end. Heidegger does not deny that the instrumental definition of technology is correct; however, it is only a part of the picture and does not reveal the essence of technology.

To get closer to the essence, Heidegger examines the instrumental definition in terms of the four original causes found in philosophical thought. Unless we question
these four causes, and therefore instrumentality, and therefore the common definition of technology, he writes, the essence of technology will remain obscured. He uses the creation of a silver chalice as an example. The four causes include (a) the silver; (b) the final form or shape the silver takes; (c) the final purpose of the chalice; (d) the silversmith. These are the four causes by which the cup comes into existence.

Heidegger performs a thorough hermeneutical analysis of each of the four causes, and finds what is common to all four is the sense of bringing-forth. Bringing-forth is a form of revealing, a making visible that which was previously not visible. “Bringing forth brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 11). The four causes of the chalice coming to being work together as a form of revealing.

The Greeks, Heidegger writes, use the term “alētheia,” whereas the Roman translation is “veritas,” to express the idea of revealing. Thus hermeneutically technology is a revealing that is linked etymologically with the notion of truth. This analysis of the four causes finds the means of the instrumental definition of technology as a means to an end to be in essence a form of revealing.

Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth. 21 (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 12)

21 William Lovitt, the translator, notes that Heidegger hyphenates the word Warheit (truth) in the original text. “so as to expose its stem, wahr. [Heidegger] points out elsewhere that words with this stem have common derivation and underlying meaning… connotations of attentive watchfulness and guarding over” (translator’s footnote, Heidegger, 1977a, p. 12).
As a methodological cross-examination, Heidegger also analyzes Plato and Aristotle’s conceptualization of the term *technē*, the Greek root of technology. Though *technē* and *epistēmē* were linked in earlier Platonic thought, Aristotle distinguishes between how and what they reveal. *Technē*, in this later form of Greek thinking, is a form of *alētheuein*: it is an active process that reveals things not readily apparent.

It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us…. what is decisive in *technē* does not lie at all in the making and manipulating nor in the use of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing that *technē* is a bringing-forth. (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 13)

Technology is therefore exposed as a bringing forth, when one looks at it in terms of cause, but also in terms of its Greek etymology.

*Modern technology.*

Modern technology is—as with the older forms of handcraft—a form of revealing. “Only when we allow our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us,” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 14). What is unique to modern technology, Heidegger asserts, is that the form of revealing is not the same as found in the older hand-work technology such as the hand-forging of a silver chalice. Revealing is still essential to modern technology, but there is something fundamentally different in the form of seeing it brings about.

The revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiēsis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [Herausfordern], which puts
to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 14)

*Poiēsis* refers to a form of revealing in which the object on view is allowed to be seen as it is unto itself. *Poiēsis* is the seeing performed “as a skillful woodworker notices the inherent qualities of particular pieces of wood—attending to subtleties of shape and grain, shades of color, weight, and hardness—while deciding what—or even whether—to build from that wood” (Thompson, 2011, sect. 3.7, ¶ 12).

Modern technology does not reveal things in this way. The form of seeing found in modern technology is a challenging forth coupled with a systematic structuring and ordering. The power and energy in nature is called forth, and unlocked but also stored—made available for distribution, for ordering, to be regulated and secured. In this conceptualization of technology “everything everywhere is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering…We call it the standing-reserve” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 17).

To return to the example of the woodworker and the wood, the type of seeing that holds sway in modern technology sees the wood not as holding unique potential, but as raw material to be ordered-up and subsequently re-ordered. “For example, an industrial factory indiscriminately grinds wood into woodchips in order to paste them back together into straight particle board which can then be used flexibly to efficiently construct a maximal variety of useful objects” (Thompson, 2011, sect. 3.7, ¶ 13).

This is a way of seeing that is also different from the objectification inherent in Cartesian Epistemology. Things seen through modern technology lose their presence as
object even. It is dissolution of the object into an ordered, structured, on-demand supply.

To further illustrate, Heidegger gives another example of a familiar object—an airplane.

Yet an airliner that stands on the runway is surely an object. Certainly. We can represent the machine so. But then it conceals itself as to what and how it is. Revealed, it stands on the taxi strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation. (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 17)

Man himself, Heidegger writes, is not beyond the reach of this way of seeing. The term standing reserve brings to mind garrisoned soldiers, ordered and ready to deploy for some purpose. Heidegger chooses the example of a forester; a man who appears to walk the same forest path as his grandparents. The path, through modern technology, is not the same. This man is “commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry… made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 18).

*Gestell.*

Heidegger uses a term to describe this way seeing the world, this structuring everything in terms of standing reserve. He calls it, *Gestell,* or Enframing. The word *gestell* in German normally carries the meaning of a bookcase, or a skeleton. Heidegger chooses this word in order to emphasize the everyday-ness of the effect, but also to emphasize his radical concept of Enframing as the essence of technology.
This way of seeing is linked to in modern science as well. Modern physics offers a way of representing the world as always already ordered and structured. “Modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces,” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 21). To summarize, Heidegger writes

Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of Enframing (p. 24).

Photography is a form of technology, and a form of seeing that may also become caught up in Enframing. Sontag (1977) describes the modern usage of photography explicitly in these terms.

Through being photographed, something becomes part of a system of information, fitted into schemes of classification and storage which range from the crudely chronological order of snapshot sequences pasted in family albums to the dogged accumulations and meticulous filing needed for photography's uses in weather forecasting, astronomy, microbiology, geology, police work, medical training and diagnosis, military reconnaissance, and art history. (Sontag, 1977, p. 156)

But Heidegger does not characterize this process as entirely fixed or complete, it is rather, like his own process of questioning, a path or a way—a destining.

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22 An analysis of Sekula’s (1986) *The Body and the Archive* that considers connections to Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology* has yet, to best of my knowledge, been written.
Enframing as danger.

As a way of seeing, we are not entirely locked into the destination to which this path leads, and there are options, other ways of going, but as a pathway, this Enframing holds the threat of closing off all other ways of seeing the world. Heidegger writes, “as a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 27). Specifically, the more ontologically engaged form of seeing which Heidegger subscribes to is blocked by the modern approach to technology. “Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiēsis, lets what presences come forth into appearance” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 27).

It is important to step back from technology for a moment, and recall the larger scope of Heidegger’s project—an understanding of being, particularly human being. It is important to consider at this juncture because as he argues, this revealing as an ordering jeopardizes man’s relationship to his own essence. The danger of technology is not the potentially lethal devices that it produces, but rather the closure of vision.

Heidegger draws upon the words of the Romantic poet Freidrich Hölderlin, and writes, “But where danger is, grows the saving power also,” (Hölderlin quoted in Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 29). The saving power, our deliverance from Enframing dwells within the very essence of technology itself. As a destining, as a setting upon a path, technology is the possibility of revealing. An acute awareness of this function of technology allows man to acknowledge his essential self within this process and to choose whether and how he will set upon this path. The essence of human being in the
world—our ontological engagement—is constitutively derived from this dialogue with technology. Technology has a paradoxical essence. As Enframing, it works to block all other forms of revealing, as all experience is structured in terms of the standing-reserve, in terms of *Gestell*. On the other hand, it is through revealing that technology is capable of allowing man’s essential connection to the world. It is necessary throughout, that we keep a watchful eye on technology, and that we interrogate the essence of technology, “catching sight of what comes to presence in technology, instead of merely staring at the technological” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 32).

It is, he acknowledges, difficult to envision a human activity wherein we keep an eye on technology in this way. There is—or rather was—such a human activity in the past. “Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. And the *poiēsis* of the fine arts also was called *technē*,” (Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 35)\(^{23}\). It is, therefore in art that Heidegger finds the possibility of escaping the all-Enframing view produced by modern technology. In art, not as aestheticized object, not as “a sector of cultural activity,” (Heidegger 1953/1977a, p. 34) but as a mindful watching of technology. That art offers this potential is due to the essential proximity of these two fields.

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand akin to the essence of technology and,

\(^{23}\) Perhaps Heidegger here, as he is somewhat prone to do, looks backward rather than forward, seeking for days gone-by in ancient Greece that were somehow better, less differentiated and less locked down into the Enframing of technology.
on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. But certainly only if reflection on art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we have been questioning. (Italics in the original, Heidegger, 1953/1977a, p. 35)

Art, Heidegger concludes, is one—if not the only—realm of inquiry sufficiently close to technology to serve as the philosophical watchdog. Photography as a nearly ideal form of technological revealing is at the center of this confluence of vision, technology and art. Important to note, however is that both at the beginning, and the end of his essay, he carefully states that his is not to be read as a set of instructions, or quoted piecemeal. Reflection on art, as well as technology, is a way of thinking which must be situated within the greater, phenomenological approach toward vision.

Toward a Visual Ontology

Heidegger’s question concerning technology, discussed above, is one example of an approach employing a phenomenological method to move vision beyond Cartesian duality. In aligning technē with poïēsis, Heidegger identifies a way of seeing profoundly different from the ways of seeing that dominate modernist visions of technology. Heidegger’s in-depth inquiry into the essence of technology has great bearing on how one might read photographic technology phenomenologically. However, with the question of photographic vision, comes a need to question vision itself. Can vision be thought of ontologically rather than epistemologically? How does phenomenology seek to describe vision that is unique—different from the models which hold sway in Cartesian thought?
The next few sections of this chapter will examine these questions from a number of phenomenological perspectives.

Husserl’s (1907/1964) description of the phenomenological reduction using the example of the color red represents an early step away from Cartesian vision. This approach will be compared to Merleau-Ponty’s (1964/2007) more entangled description of red from *The Intertwining, the Chiasm* to clarify the more ontological approach toward vision found in Merleau-Ponty. To make this contrast even more apparent, Descartes’ (1637/1965) Sixth Discourse *Of Vision* will be compared to Merleau-Ponty’s (1961/1993) description of vision. The metaphors of vision employed by Heidegger (1977b), in his effort to clarify his concept phenomenology, represents another—more complex—example of vision conceived ontologically. Merleau-Ponty’s intertwining of vision and the flesh of the world develops this vision in an existential direction, which leads to Sartre’s analysis of the gaze where concepts of ontological vision are complicated by the presence of the Other.

*The color red: in essence and in situ.*

In *The Idea of Phenomenology* (transcribed from Husserl’s 1907 lectures), Husserl attempts to elucidate the idea of the phenomenological reduction by talking about the color red. This discussion not only clarifies the reduction, it indicates Husserl’s proximity to Descartes. This stands in sharp contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s (1964/2007)

24 *The intertwining—the chiasm* was to be the last chapter in *The visible and the invisible* which Merleau-Ponty never completed. The chapter was published posthumously in French in 1964, and translated into English in 1968. This dissertation references the 2007 collection of Merleau-Ponty’s.
description of the color red written several decades later. Husserl first brings to mind a particular example of redness, be it the blotter on his desk or some such object, it is “a particular intuition of redness,” (Husserl, 1907/1964, p. 44). Considering only the “pure immanence,” of the color, he writes, “I am careful to perform the phenomenological reduction. I snip off any further significance of the redness,” (p. 45). In this way, Husserl writes, he is able to extract a universal essence of redness. “No longer is it the particular as such which is referred to, not this or that red thing, but redness in general,” (p. 45). In this manner, he is able to ascertain the essence of a universal red.

Merleau-Ponty also uses the color red to discuss the reduction but his description of it in his late work is neither distanced nor reductive. Consciousness of the color exists along-side the significance of the object on view. The color may not, in any meaningful way, be stripped off the surface and held up for transcendental inspection. The color red which we look upon, he writes, “is not, as is always said, a quale, a pellicle [a property of the thing, a thin skin] of being without thickness,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394). The perception of red is instead inextricably intertwined with the being to which it is (in)fused. “Its precise form is bound up with a certain wooly, metallic, or porous… configuration or texture… in short it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394).

Not only is the color intimately bound to the object upon which it is found, but the intuition of red which we receive is colored also by the world in which it resides. “This red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394). A red dress is woven from
the fabric of the world, and because of this refers not only to its own redness, but also to things that are not currently in view, not currently visible. The dress “holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto the fabric of invisible being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394). As a color immediately before our eyes, it is “a punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of rooftops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394). The particular red of the dress changes within the constellation of colors in which we encounter it, including color-events long made invisible to our perceiving eyes, colors like “that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Elysée,” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 394). Merleau-Ponty does not see the red of the dress by stripping it to its bare essence. Rather his vision embraces the color. “The look envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 395). In the contrast between Husserl’s reduction of red to a bare essence, and Merleau-Ponty’s rich, embedded description, we find a remarkable shift in vision. Husserl’s idea of consciousness resides much closer to epistemology. Husserl is concerned with establishing the uninflected essence of the perception of the color. Merleau-Ponty’s approach is concerned with the ontology of embodied vision. His reading of the color situates the body within the field of vision. His concern is not only with the perception, but also with the body as the subject of perception. Lest it seem that the discussion has strayed too far from photography, too far into the esoteric language of philosophy, we turn momentarily back to Thomas Demand to consider the presence of these ideas in his work.
**Demand’s work and the phenomenological reduction**

Demand often starts his picture-making process with a specific historical event, or to be more precise, mediated images of an historical event. In the process of translating these pictures to sculpture then back into photographs, he *snips away*—as Husserl (1907/1964) indicates one must do when seeking to step back from the phenomena in question—all specific detail visible in the original scene. By re-creating the ‘scene of the crime’ in paper and cardboard, devoid of the distracting details of the original, Demand is able to perform a nearly perfect *epoché*, a nearly complete bracketing out of the scene in question, creating a philosophical space where the viewer may contemplate only the essence of the original space.

Only the essence remains of the Florida Emergency Center referenced in *Poll* (2001); only the essence of the tavern in Saarbrücken, and so-on. As Merleau-Ponty (1962/2007) emphasizes however, the most important lesson to derive from such an attempt to step back and contemplate pure essences, is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This lesson is an important part of Demand’s inquiry. Speaking about *Office* (1995), his piece that depicts the plundered secret-police office, Demand describes the fine line he treads between the essential and the specific.

I wonder – what are the details that have to be included to make the place a place [*ort*], as opposed to a commonplace [*Allgemeinplatz*]. I don’t want to show the desk as such, but rather this particular desk that we have in our minds. (Demand quoted in Fried, 2008, p. 266)

Even though Demand reduces these scenes to their essential shapes, surfaces and colors, they remain, and are meant to remain socially and conceptually entangled with the
historical situations that spawned the image he models and re-photographs. Just as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the rich and entangled phenomenology of the color red, calling to mind not essential, but specific reds—the color of the soil surrounding Aix, the jackets worn in a hotel he fondly remembers, the color of a specific red dress—as a counterpoint to Husserl’s directive to perform the transcendental reduction in order to visualize the essence of the color red. So too does Demand emphasize the specificity and the cultural significance of the scenes he essentializes.

In an interview during the exhibition National Gallery in Berlin, in October 2009, he spoke about the personal significance of Room (1994), Figure 4.1, one of the first sculptures Demand made based on photographs taken by other people. Room (1994), references an archival black and white photograph of the destroyed conference room where Claus von Stauffenberg attempted to assassinate Adolph Hitler with a bomb hidden in a briefcase on July 20th, 1944.

Demand’s photograph reduces the original image to nearly pure forms: rectangles that resemble window frames, paper tubes that resemble chair parts, one nearly complete chair sculpture, and a large grey rectangle near the bottom left of the frame with two pieces missing. This shape, most likely the conference-room table destroyed by von Stauffenberg’s bomb, is unusual. It is the one shape that is very clearly shared by Demand’s photograph, and the photographs of the original room.

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25 I located several different views of the original scene on the internet, though none show a vantage point looking as far to the right in the scene as Demand’s photograph does. I have to assume therefore that Demand modeled his image on a less-common photograph of the room. Since multiple views are freely
This shape alone is perhaps enough to strike a chord of familiarity in a viewer who has seen photographs of the original scene repeatedly. The original scene is important to Demand: “It played a certain role in my socialization basically,” he states (Monocle, 2009). “Let’s put it this way I looked at the picture… if there was a moral impact on me, I am the product of that project… you know… and the picture would have probably educated me” (Monocle, 2009).
The image embodies the idea of German heroes opposed to Hitler. Though Demand’s sculpture nearly strips the image of any specificity, the familiarity of the shape of the table and the vague familiarity of the space are just enough to prevent the image from detaching completely from these ideas.

Poll (2001), is an example closer to home that treads a similar line between essence and specificity, between presence and memory. For example, the small yellow sticky notes that appear in the photograph are not the notes used by the election officials in Florida. The yellow rectangles in Demand’s photograph have nothing written on them. It is likely that they are not in-fact Post-it® brand paper notes. More likely they are made of a sculptural-type paper used by Demand because it behaves in sculpting exactly how paper in real-life should behave. The post-it notes are stripped of any specificity. They become the essence of Post-it® notes, without being in fact Post-it® notes. The entire photograph acts in the same way. The telephones lack detail, and are generic to the point of being essential; the bank of desks and phones, themselves, generic, like unto the artificial binary this-or-that choice that inspired Demand’s approach to the subject in the first place. By reducing the original photograph of the Emergency Operations Center in Florida where the ballots in the 2000 Bush-Gore election were counted, Demand creates a conceptual distance between his photograph and the original scene—between the

26 In Monocle (2009) Demand describes his use of paper that is not normal paper in the production of Office (1995). The quote is fragmented as Demand is thinking aloud, but conveys the sense that his paper is not normal paper, but one step removed: “to make a piece of paper looking like a piece of paper and not a piece of paper is …there is not one piece of paper like the kind you buy in the shops…. This is normal paper… but it’s a sculptural paper made out of paper. There’s something really weirdly quirky in that” (Monocle, 2009).
viewing subject, and the object on view. At the same time, however, Demand works to
de-essentialize the work, to explicitly connect it to the election proceedings, and weave it
into the rich stream of associations surrounding the re-count. Demand rushed the release
of this artwork to be sure that this essentialized image was exhibited during the media-
flurry surrounding the re-count.

I did my utmost to make certain my photo was ready so that a New Yorker
seeing a picture of the recount in the morning paper could go into a gallery
that same evening and perceive the gallery as a place full of objects that he
or she had previously seen in the news. (Demand, quoted in Colomina &

Similar to the way in which the essential distance between Room (1994) is
countered by Demand’s personal connection to the image of the conference room
bombing in 1944, the proximity of Poll (2001) to the election causes the viewer to bring
to mind specific, personal associations. Nearly a decade later, I would assert, Demand’s
image has the capability of bringing up quite powerful feelings of anger, and uncertainty,
associated with the events following the election; associations that seem ironic and
absurd due to the fact that Demand’s photograph shows nothing other than cardboard
desks and phones, stacks of blank paper and blank yellow rectangles that are likely not
even real Post-it® notes. Demand’s photographs are exquisite visual examples of the
phenomenological reduction, and prime examples of Merleau-Ponty’s reminder that any
such step back, any such epoché, is necessarily incomplete!
Descartes’ sense of vision vs Merleau-Ponty’s

Directing the focus back toward the philosophical discourse, toward two examples on more extreme ends of the visual continuum, we find a significantly more telling contrast in vision by comparing Descartes’ (1637/1965) description of vision in *Optics* to Merleau-Ponty’s (1961/1993) description in his essay *Eye and Mind*. To be sure, the tasks that these authors set out to complete are significantly different. Descartes’ discussion focuses on the—not yet fully understood—relationship between light rays and human vision; whereas Merleau-Ponty’s goal in his essay is to critically examine the scientific way of seeing itself. Looking at these two examples in succession does, however, do much to clarify some of the fundamental tenets of each approach.

Descartes writes, “It has sometimes doubtless happened to you, while walking in the night without a light through places which are a little difficult, that it became necessary to us a stick in order to guide yourself,” (Descartes, 1637/1965, p. 67). Through the medium of the stick, he writes, we are able not only to sense objects around us, but we are “even able to tell whether they were trees, or stones, or sand, or water, or grass, or mud, or any other such thing,” (Descartes, 1637/1965, p. 67). Such a perception of the objects is not perfect, but “confused and obscure,” for those who are unaccustomed to seeing in this way, “but consider it in those who being born blind, have made use of it all their lives, and you will find it so perfect and so exact that one might almost say that they see with their hands,” (Descartes, 1637/1965 p. 67). Such a model, in line with Descartes’ method of doubt, breaks vision down to into its individual components, comparing the action of light rays in their immediacy *and* their effect, to the sensations
derived from the end of a stick. This scientific, piecemeal approach to vision may be for analysis, but it also strips the world of its color, its warmth and its richness. Merleau-Ponty’s description of vision re-invigorates the world, and paints a vastly different picture of vision.

When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without that flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it as it is and where it is—which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself—the aqueous power, the syrupy and shimmering element—is in space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, is materialized there, yet it is not contained there; and if I lift my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections plays, I must recognize that the water visits it as well, or at least sends out to it its active, living essence. This inner animation, this radiation of the visible, is what the painter seeks beneath, the words depth, space, and color. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1993, p. 142)

Key to understanding this description in comparison to Descartes’ is that Merleau-Ponty is not describing the experience of looking into a pool any more that Descartes is describing the experience of walking in the dark with a stick. Both are attempting to metaphorically describe the experience of vision, one scientifically, the other phenomenologically. The experience of vision, in Descartes is a bit-by-bit gathering of data, one ray at a time. In Merleau-Ponty’s example, vision is the rich and syrupy
confluence of light, water, tile and motion. In Merleau-Ponty’s vision, one cannot—and should not—try to separate these into their constitutive elements, but recognize instead, the deeply immersive, *ontological* character of vision.

Merleau-Ponty found Heidegger’s writing profoundly influential, and much of his analysis of vision is a creative and expressive extension of Heidegger’s thought. The idea of vision which Merleau-Ponty described as an opening onto the world is approached by Heidegger through the Greek term *alētheia*.

**Vision in Heidegger’s phenomenology**

In an effort to define phenomenology in *Being in Time*, Heidegger approaches the concept through the *logos* portion of the word phenomenology. The word *logos*, has been translated many different ways from the Greek, but commonly as *word* or *speech* (Heidegger 1926/1962; Heidegger, 1926/1996). Reason and judgment are also two possible translations of *logos*, a fact that causes Heidegger concern. Though the term contains and embraces all of these possibilities, “logos does not mean judgment, in any case not primarily, if by judgment we understand ‘connecting two things’ or ‘taking a position’ either by endorsing or rejecting,” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 28). Instead of accepting a narrow definition of logos in phenomenology, Heidegger indicates that *logos*, means to “make manifest” what is being talked about.

Aristotle explicates this function of speech more precisely as *apophainesthai*. Logos lets something be seen (*phainesthai*), namely what is being talked about, and indeed *for* the speaker (who serves as the medium) or for those who speak with each other. Speech "lets us see,"
from itself, apo ..., what is being talked about. (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 28)

There is, therefore through logos—loosely defined as speech—the possibility of seeing what someone is talking about. “In speech (apophansis), insofar as it is genuine, what is said should be derived from what is being talked about” (emphasis in the original, Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 28).

_Alētheia_ is the component of _logos_ associated with unconcealment, uncovering, or dis-closing in a truthful manner. _Alētheia_ is the Greek term for truth, but it is not exactly the same as the contemporary definition. “The ‘being true’ of _logos_ as _aletheuein_ means: to take beings that are being talked about in _legein_ as _apopainesthai_ out of their concealment; to let them be seen as something unconcealed (_alethes_); to discover them (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 29).

Truth may also be concealed through _logos_, because _logos_ is associated with interpersonal communication—with speech—and though the one speaking may have access to the truth, to _alētheia_, he may choose to lie. “‘being false,’ _pseudesthai_, is tantamount to deceiving in the sense of covering up: putting something in front of something else (by way of letting it be seen) and thereby passing it off as something it is not” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 29).

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27 As noted in Moran (2000), such a concept of Truth and _Aletheic_ vision may not have been available in Greek thought. Heidegger acknowledges this to an extent noting: “In the Greek sense what is “true”—indeed more originally true than the _logos_ we have been discussing—is _aisthesis_, the simple sense perception of something. To the extent that an _aisthesis_ aims at its idea [what is its own]—the beings genuinely accessible only through it and for it, for example, looking at colors—perception is always true. This means that looking always discovers colors, hearing always discovers tones. What is in the purest and most original sense "true"—that is, what only discovers in such a way that it can never cover up anything—
Another approach toward *alētheia* that has bearing on a phenomenological understanding of photography and vision is found in Heidegger’s essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In the example discussed above, Heidegger considers the relationship between language (*logos*) and *alētheia*. There are to be found, similar connections between *technē* and *alētheia*. “*Technē* signifies neither craft nor art, and not at all the technical in our present-day sense… The word *technē* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen… to apprehend what is present, as such” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 180). As a mode of knowing, it is similar to the discursive, speech-based knowing associated with *Logos*. Similar to *Logos*, “*Technē* as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings forth what is present as such out of concealedness and specifically into the unconcealedness of their appearance,” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 180). One finds, therefore in Heidegger’s interpretation of the Greek term *technē*, an approach toward phenomena in the world from consciousness that is profoundly different from the aggressive, appropriative way of seeing associated with Cartesian representation.

Heidegger (1977b) approaches this way of seeing again in his essay *On the Essence of Truth*. His use of the idea *letting things be*, helps to clarify the connection between beings that look and beings that are seen. The phrase *letting things be* does not indicate indifference; rather, it involves an approach toward beings which allows them to be—and allows the viewers to encounter them—on their own terms. To *let be* is to

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is pure *noein*, straightforwardly observant apprehension of the simplest determinations of the being of beings as such” (Heidegger 1926/1996, p. 29)
engage with phenomena in the open region “into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself” (Heidegger, 1930/1977b, p. 127).

The notion of open-ness, of a conceptual space in which one may engage with a phenomenon on its own terms is connected to the idea of dis-closure defined by Heidegger within \textit{alētheia}. “Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as \textit{ta alētheia}, the unconcealed,” (Heidegger, 1930/1977b, p. 127). Such a way of visualizing truth, neither as certainty, nor as a 1:1 comparison against another benchmark concept involves a re-definition of truth at its Greek root.

If we translate \textit{alētheia} as ‘unconcealment’ rather than ‘truth,’ this translation is not merely more literal; it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings. (Heidegger, 1930/1977b, pp. 127-128)

To look at the world in this way involves an engaged, intertwined relationship between consciousness and the world predicated less on grasping and extracting the truth, and more on allowing it to step into the clearing to be seen for itself.

To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are and that presentative correspondence might take its standard from them. (Heidegger, 1930/1977b, p.128)

Such a conscious relationship to phenomena, to beings in the world shares much with, yet noticeably differs from Merleau-Ponty’s vision.
Vision and the flesh of the world.

Heidegger’s idea of letting things be as an approach toward *álētheia* involves a sense of respectful stepping back to allow beings to come into the light of unconcealment on their own terms. Merleau-Ponty’s mature thinking on vision involves no such distance. For him, to see is to dive right into the visual flesh of the world. In Merleau-Ponty (2007), the Cartesian subject-object divide is a thing of the past.

What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 393)

For Merleau-Ponty, we are no strangers in a strange land blundering about trying to find our way, like Descartes’ man with a stick isolating specific facts, gathering discrete bits of data about the world; rather, through vision, we are inherently within the world. Though Merleau-Ponty (2007) also uses a tactile metaphor, stating that “vision is a palpation by means of the gaze,” (p. 396) there is none of the distancing implied by Descartes’ (1637/1965) example of the blindfolded man with the stick. The seer and that which is seen, co-exist: “visible and tangible belong to the same world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 396). There is a chiasmatic relationship between the seer and that which is seen. “It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand,” (Merleau-
Ponty 2007, p. 393). Language, as one may expect, fails to adequately describe the experience Merleau-Ponty approaches. “There is double and crossed sublation of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one” (Merleau-Ponty, p. 396). The chiasm of which Merleau-Ponty writes, calls to mind the decussation, the X-shaped crossing of the optic nerves in the brain, but also speaks to what he perceives as the crisscross nature of our being in vision in the world. Like the grammatical construction of a chiasmus, in which the meaning of one half of the sentence is simultaneously mirrored and repeated in the second, for Merleau-Ponty (2007), vision represents a chiasmatic way of being in the world.

We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? ...the world seen is not ‘within’ [dans] my body, and my body is not ‘in’ the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelopes it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision.28 (p. 399)

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28 The following lines which further clarify the idea of vision and flesh appear in the text in a footnote. “It is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible… a connective tissue of interior and exterior horizons…the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the place of an inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 469). It is unclear whether these words are footnoted by Merleau-Ponty himself, by the editor or the translator. Such placement, however speaks to the unfinished nature of the essay. It was not completed by Merleau-Ponty, but published posthumously.
We find therefore, in Merleau-Ponty’s (2007) description of the visual flesh of the world, an ontological way of seeing. It is a model in which seeing and being co-exist without the Cartesian subject-object divide. Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1943/1992) inquiry into vision and phenomenological ontology builds upon and complicates this model by allowing the Other—another subjectivity, another viewer—to wander into the field of vision.

**Sartre’s view**

Sartre, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, attempts to approach the nature of being through the use of phenomenological description of *Le Regard,* or *The Look.* For Sartre, understanding our subjective relationship to the Other is critical to understanding our being in the world. Our visual relationship to the world cannot be conceptualized in a monadic fashion with the idea the Other tacked on later, rather the look and the Other are integral to the way we see the world. According to Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger seem “to have understood that once myself and the Other are considered as two separate substances, we cannot escape solipsism,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 315). For this reason, Sartre asserts, much of their work attempts to reformulate models of vision along ontological, rather than epistemological, lines of thinking. “That is why the examination of modern theories reveals to us an attempt to seize at the very heart of the consciousness a fundamental, transcending connection with the Other,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 315). However, Sartre notes, even though these philosophies attempt to leave behind the idea of external negation, a transcendental approach retains an epistemological rather than
ontological connection to the Other, and they fall short of the mark because “my
fundamental connection with the Other is realized through knowledge,” (p. 315).

Sartre utilizes the complex terms *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself* to examine
modes of consciousness between the subject and the object. *Being in itself* is the usual
phenomenological state of affairs for most objects- for most phenomena. *Being-in-itself*
simply is being. “Being is *itself*. It is neither passivity nor activity… Being is equally
beyond negation as beyond affirmation,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 27). It may be
characterized as non-conscious being. “Being is opaque to itself precisely because it is
filled with itself,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 28). *Being-for-itself*, is consciousness. It is a
negation of *being-in-itself* which it is also dependent upon. Whereas *being-in-itself* has
the possibility of a fixed identity, *being-for-itself* does not. Sartre uses the example of a
café waiter, and the ‘bad faith’ that he shows in attempting to exist as and only as a café
waiter. This fixed and singular identity is not possible for one who is *being-for-itself*. In
short, since it is impossible to pin-down the being of *being-for-itself*, it is nothingness.
Whereas *being-in-itself* is a stable state of affairs, self consciousness is a step into the
void. It is the self-negation of being.

In discussing *the look*, Sartre (1943/1992) proposes a third term, *being-for-others*.
Sartre sets the stage for this phenomenological analysis in a park. We are, in Sartre’s
example, sitting in the park. We look out across the grass at a man walking on a path.
There are at least two ways to conceptualize the man on the path. It is true, “that at least
one of the modalities of the Other’s presence to me is object-ness,” (p. 340), but that is
only one modality, and the Other is “a fundamental apprehension of the Other in which
he will not be revealed to me as an object but as a ‘presence in person,’” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 340). This perception of the Other goes beyond Kantian and Cartesian models of knowledge about the world, and leads to “a fundamental connection in which the Other is manifested in some way other than through the knowledge which I have of him,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 340). The sense that we have of the man presents to our consciousness in some way other than as object. We are conscious of the man in a mode that is not primarily epistemological.

“This relation, in which the Other must be given to me directly as a subject although in connection with me, is the fundamental relation, the very type of my being-for-others,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 341). This relationship, Sartre suggests, is neither mystic nor ineffable, but embedded in our everyday world. One example he gives to illustrate this is of looking at the man standing near the grass in the setting of the public park. Here Sartre describes the subjective impact of conceptualizing the man as being-in-itself, then describes the effect of a consciousness of the man being-for-itself, and finally considers the implication of the unification of these ideas in being-for-others. The first mode is comparable to a Cartesian world-view. When looking at the man Sartre writes, “if I were to think of him as being only a puppet, I should apply to him the categories which I ordinarily use to group temporal-spatial ‘things,’” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 341). In other words, within this framework, the flow of information, the connection, is unidirectional. Our consciousness is in control of the situation, the man could disappear and nothing else in the scene would change. However, when we are conscious of the man as a man, as Other, the entire scene becomes re-focused, with him, the Other, as the
center point, and “instead of a grouping toward me of the objects [the grass, the bench, 
the walk, etc], there is now an orientation which flees from me,” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 
342). The world becomes reoriented with the man, the Other as a privileged object, as 
himself a subject. We are forced, when recognizing the man as man, to re-evaluate the 
distances, meanings, and orientation of the objects in the park about this new center of 
being. “The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding 
of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the 
centralization which I am simultaneously effecting.” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 343). In other 
words, both of these states of being can be lumped into a new concept—Sartre’s concept 
of being-for-others—which recognizes the simultaneous dual-nature of the view of the 
man as both in-itself and for-himself. Two mutually-exclusive states of being that are 
always in tension when we look upon the Other.

Sartre’s essay also examines the implications of being on the receiving end of the 
look—being the man in the park about to transgress and step on the lawn; or in Sartre’s 
example, being caught looking in a keyhole. In this discussion, Sartre recognizes a 
complete reversal of the flow of power, a model of vision in which the subject is formed 
not as be-holder, but as the object of the gaze. This way of looking reflects an entirely 
postmodern understanding of vision—an idea developed in the next chapter. The 
rejection of the Cartesian legacy started with a few tentative steps by Husserl. It was 
进一步 extended by Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, and brought into sharp focus by 
Sartre.
Changing Focus

Cartesian Perspectivalism, a camera-obscura-like model of consciousness has its roots very deep in Western thought. Husserl’s model of consciousness, though it retained the separation between subject and object, provided a key component for a phenomenological re-visioning of subjective experience in the form of noema and noesis. Whereas the enlightenment model of consciousness occurs entirely within the darkened chamber of the mind, in Husserl’s thought, phenomena in the world begin to play a constitutive role. Heidegger, in seeking to entirely abolish the divide between subject and object in his thinking returns to the Greek roots of vision, and employs a hermeneutical and existential phenomenology to re-conceptualize the act of being: Dasein.

By looking closely at specific approaches to conceptualizing the interconnected nature of seeing and being in the world, this chapter has brought into more clear focus an ontological model of vision against the background of the more distant and distancing epistemological vision inherited from Descartes. In taking the mind out of the darkened closet, phenomenology complicates the relationship between subject and object and opens the door for a much broader, and more sustained critique of Cartesian vision. A number of key authors who take up that critique, and who may loosely be grouped under the heading postmodern are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Postmodern Vision

“If the world that we see around us, when we look at it with a critical gaze, manifests and reflects aspects that appear wrathful, we should take the opportunity to look into the ways in which the character of our vision may be responsible for this condition.” (Levin, 1999, p. 401)

As described in the previous chapter, a phenomenological understanding of vision and of consciousness began the process of re-visioning the Cartesian world-view. By describing a way for the mind to step outside of the darkened chamber of the camera obscura, phenomenology opened the door for a sustained critique of enlightenment approaches toward vision. This chapter will examine a number of the ways that theorists describe vision using a postmodern lens. The discussion will begin with a return to Sartre’s (1943/1992) *The Look* as it describes vision in a postmodern light. Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory also significant in discourse of postmodern vision will be discussed next. Foucault’s examination of vision, discourse and power follows.

Philosophers of phenomenology, as discussed in the previous chapter largely ignored photography but for some postmodern theorists on the visual, it plays a central role. Connections between visual theory, photography and consumer culture are a central part of Guy Debord’s scathing critique of contemporary culture. Jean Baudrillard’s (1981/2001) descriptions of simulation and simulacra are also tied to the cultural shift in image-use. Postmodern vision plays a significant role in the way photography is
conceptualized in contemporary theory. To further develop the background that informs and shapes these aspects of visuality and photography, we turn once again to Sartre.

**The Decentered Subject: Sartre**

Sartre’s (1943/1992) description of *The Look*, as discussed in the previous chapter, begins as a phenomenological analysis of vision. The essay recognizes ways in which the status of the viewing subject is intertwined with the object of the gaze. The analysis moves beyond the phenomenological and into the postmodern when his discussion shifts to consider implications of being on the receiving end of the gaze.

In order to see how Sartre takes vision into a postmodern arena, we must return to his example in the park—watching a man on the path. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sartre acknowledges the Cartesian way of seeing the world. We could perceive the man only as an object, as a puppet. This model is, for Sartre, only a starting point. It is, insufficient—incomplete. Seeing the Other not as an object, but as a sentient being—a living, seeing subject much like myself—is the next step. When we acknowledge the man as Other, we may begin to wonder how things look from his perspective, and momentarily grasp at his view of the lawn some two meters away from him. This is where the ontological slippage begins for me as a viewing subject, because within this perspective “there unfolds a spatiality which is not *my* spatiality” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 342). Attempting to conceptualize vision through the eyes of the Other destabilizes my visual control over the scene. Attempting to visualize the grass in the park, for example through the Other’s eyes is not entirely possible. “I cannot apprehend the green as it
appears to the Other” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 343). Introducing this figure, adding another person as subject in the scene begins to tug at my integrity as a viewing subject. Sartre writes, “Thus suddenly an object [the man] has appeared which has stolen the world from me” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 343). This interaction becomes a fuzzy and uncertain area between seeing and being in the world. It is a place where the monadic subject weighs the question of being in the visual presence of the Other. The balance tips decisively when the Other raises his eyes to gaze back.

To fully understand the power of the gaze, to understand what it means to look, Sartre contends, one must fully consider the reciprocal—being looked at. First it must be noted, that for Sartre, the gaze, and the power that it manifests, the power that it brings to bear is not only embodied in the two eyes. Of course it is most often marked by two eyes turning (toward me), but may also be extended to other objects. Soldiers moving up a hill confer upon the farmhouse at the top of the hill the power of the gaze, the slight movement of a window shade or a shrub may be sufficient to indicate someone looking. To be the object of the gaze for Sartre is to be vulnerable, subject to possible injury. The look, which may be associated with these disembodied eyes for Sartre, is always more than just the eyes themselves. Even when the gaze is embodied in the eyes of someone I see looking at me, it overflows the eyes; it becomes more than just two eyes. The look seems to step before the eyes, and to cover the eyes of the one who employs the gaze. To perceive the look, “is to be conscious of being looked at...the look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are, is a pure reference to myself” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 347).
Inhabiting this world of crisscrossing gazes, for Sartre, like bending over to peer into a keyhole, is to always be subject to—vulnerable to—the gaze of the other. When fully engaged in the world, when I am being-in-itself\(^2^9\), I may suddenly become aware of someone watching me. When this happens—the example Sartre uses is being caught peeping into a keyhole—I become keenly aware of the rushing-away of my singular self-hood into the gaze of the other. As Sartre writes,

I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness, but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other. (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 343)

This model of vision blocks the functioning of the traditional subject-object relationship when I look at another person. To view the Other as the object of my gaze—as simply an object, a puppet—is to deny its real existence as one who may look back at me, and as Sartre (1943/1992) writes, “I cannot be an object for an object” (p. 345). This institutes a paradoxical mode of being.

Understanding the true power of the gaze requires an understanding beyond simply viewing the person in my field of vision as a possible viewing subject, as discussed in the previous chapter. When I recognize the Other looking at the grass in the park, or the statue in the middle of the park, I am forced to re-center my perception.

\(^2^9\) Recall from Chapter 5, Sartre’s term being-in-itself indicates a mode of consciousness in which we go about our business unaware of ourselves as selves. We are focused on the tasks at hand, not being self reflective.
around this new perspective, this new center-point. When I am the object of the gaze, the flight away from me of my universal center-point is much more extreme.

In the previous example, looking at the man in the park and attempting to visualize his perspective, Sartre indicates, the ontological slippage could be contained. However when I become a subject defined by the power and freedom of another subject’s gaze,

the flight is without limit; it is lost externally; the world flows out of the world and I flow outside of myself. The Other’s look makes me be beyond my being in this world and puts me in the midst of the world which is at once this world and beyond this world. (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 350)

For Sartre, the freedom of the Other to look upon me entirely strips me of my freedom, causes my very being to locate, not within myself, but in an un-defined external place. “Everything takes place as if I had a dimension of being from which I was separated by a radical nothingness; and this nothingness is the Other’s freedom” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 351). Though this relationship seems to set up a situation in which I become an object for the other, such is not the case, for Sartre, it is not a sudden conversion of myself from a subject to an object of the gaze, rather it is a case of my subjectivity being located externally. “It is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a thing, but my nature is—over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 352).

It is important also to note that the power of the gaze to radically de-center the subject does not even require the actual presence of the Other. The person standing in the hall, for example, catching me peeping in the keyhole doesn’t really need to be there at
all. The sound of footsteps, any movement or noise that I could take as the presence of the other would be sufficient. Any possibility of the Other catching sight of me is sufficient. Being the object of the gaze strips away my freedom, forces me to re-cast myself in the sight of the Other. In so doing, the gaze also strips me of full control over objects which I hold in my gaze.

My relation to an object or the potentiality of an object decomposes under the Other’s look and appears to me in the world as my possibility of utilizing the object, but only as this possibility on principle escapes me; this is, in so far as it is surpassed by the Other toward his own possibilities. (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 353)

Elkins (1997) describes this power of the gaze and its ability to radically deconstruct the subject in the most violent and destructive of terms. “Looking has force; it tears, it is sharp, it is an acid. In the end, it corrodes the object and observer until they are lost in the field of vision. I once was solid, and now I am dissolved” (p. 45).

Sartre positions this being-seen as being a slave to the Other’s freedoms. “Thus being-seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. It is in this sense that we can consider ourselves as ‘slaves’ in so far as we appear to the Other” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 358). The power of the gaze described by Sartre and reiterated by Elkins resides not within the singular outward looking subject, but instead exists outside, apart from the subject. Sartre’s model of vision situates the viewer ontologically within the world, as do phenomenological models of sight. Sartre writes, “Through the Other’s look I live myself as fixed in the midst of the world, as in danger,
as irremediable” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 359). However, Sartre’s outlook contains none of the sunny optimism of Merleau-Ponty, and the subjectivity posited by Sartre is unstable and troubled.

Though I exist in, rather than apart from, the world as Sartre’s subject, “I know neither what I am nor what is my place in the world, nor what face this world in which I am turns toward the Other” (Sartre, 1943/1992, p. 359). The subject acquires neither the power nor control found in modernist models of sight; instead, transfixed by the power of the Other’s gaze, the subject is, for Sartre, radically de-centered.

**The Decentered Subject: Lacan**

Lacan’s analysis of the gaze extends Sartre’s de-centering of the subject into the domain of psychoanalytic theory. Though Lacan’s ideas do not figure prominently in the analysis of photography here, his theories are touched upon and addressed either in concert with or in opposition to many other postmodern formulations. Because of this relationship, Lacan’s ideas represent a significant part of the background to visual theory. Functioning along-side and drawing upon the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Lacan’s (1981, 2004) ideas concerning the gaze, describe vision as significant in the construction of the subject’s being. As with Sartre, Lacan implicates the gaze in radically de-centering the being of the subject. The mirror-stage theory, desire, and Lacan’s concept of anamorphosis are three components integral to understanding the postmodern discourse.
The mirror stage.

Lacan’s *mirror stage* thesis is concerned with images and with vision, but only from a psychoanalytic perspective, and ‘only in so far as this relates to the formation of the ego and narcissism’ (Marsh, 2003, p. 43). It is important to differentiate between Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage and how his theory is used. It is primarily in a modified form that Lacan’s ideas have been applied to photography and film criticism. Iversen (2007), writes “the received view of Lacan’s mirror stage is that the ego’s stability is an illusion originally precipitated by the impression of bodily coherence that a small child sees reflected back to him- or herself in the mirror” (p. 134). Because the child is able to see himself, he reads into that visual impression the idea of self-mastery. “The image is illusory, or deceptive, because it does not reflect back the child’s real helplessness and dependence owing to the prematurity of human birth” (Iversen, 2007, p. 7). The mirror stage theory posits that from a very early age, our concept of self, the method by which we self-identify is predicated upon an image. It is an image that exists external to us, an image that is fundamentally inaccurate and doesn’t account for the dis-unified functions of our actual human selves. “This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation” (Lacan, 2004, p. 6). It represents a translation of the subject’s not-yet-
realized physical abilities into an idealized image of themselves, of the I. Lacan (2004) writes

for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, [the mirror image] turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an ‘orthopedic’ form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (p. 6)

There are, in other words, notable differences between the subject’s perceived sense of wholeness and agency, and the relative limitations of the actual body. The image is idealized. “In order to sustain this ideal image of the self, the child has to expel all those impulses and objects that cannot be assimilated into the beautiful, coherent picture,” (Iversen, 2007, p. 7). The separation between the ideal image and the reality of the subject’s existence results in a fragmentation of the subject’s identity.

The mirror, Lacan’s theory posits, does not have to be an actual mirror, and the subject can misread this impression of coherence by looking at another person, an older sibling for example. Later theorists Mulvey (1975/1999), Metz (1982), and Baudry (1985) would seize upon this aspect of Lacan’s theory, to posit that all visual images, and especially the moving images of film, have the potential to act as the mirror, and to work toward de-centering and destabilize a subject’s identity well beyond the age of infantile incompetence discussed by Lacan in his Mirror Stage essay. “This process, which Louis Althusser calls the ideological interpellation of the subject, involves concrete individuals misrecognizing themselves as subjects by taking up a socially given identity and seeing themselves in this identity” (McGowan, 2007, p. 2). The movie screen or the photograph
read the Lacan and Althusser is capable of cause in the viewer a form of ideological mirroring. The viewer sees the cultural ideologies presented on the screen and mis-reads them as his or her own formulations.


Althusser understood the mirror as a metaphor for ideological formations. Film theorists who followed his lead argued that the filmic image and the narrative of …movies were complicit in the formation of subjects who, captivated by the image, would identify themselves with idealized film characters and reproduce their social roles. (Iversen, 2007, p. 7-8)

Laura Mulvey’s (1975/1999) *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* is a classic example of Lacan’s theory applied in this manner. The primary thrust of Mulvey’s argument is that the cinema produces and reproduces the sexual imbalance between men and women. “The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey, 1975/1999, p. 837). Within this context, Lacan’s mirror stage theory plays a significant role. As Mulvey notes, it is important within the context of film critique—and photography critique, for that matter—“that it is an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the ‘I,’ of subjectivity” (Mulvey, 1975/1999, p. 836). In short, the viewer of the film identifies with the figures appearing on the screen, and through a
form of Lacan’s mirroring adopts as his or her own the dominant ideology structurally embedded within the film. In the case of the leading male character, Mulvey writes

[as the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (Mulvey, 1975/1999, p. 838)

The gaze directed toward an image in this example produces the function of decentering.

Through Lacan, politicized by Althusser, and adapted for the cinema by Mulvey, we find a description of the gaze that decenters the subject, locates his/her being in the space between the filmic image and the self. Another key component of Mulvey’s discussion is desire—the desire to dominate and control through the gaze.

Desire is a complicit, and an implicit, part of the image-making, image-viewing process. Elkins (1997) considers this aspect of seeing to be what in fact defines the gaze.

Looking is hoping, desiring, never just taking in light, never merely collecting patterns and data. Looking is possessing or the desire to possess—we eat food, we own objects, and we ‘possess’ bodies—and there is no looking without thoughts of using, possessing, repossessing, owning, fixing, appropriating, keeping, remembering and commemorating, cherishing, borrowing, and stealing. I cannot look at anything—any object, any person—without the shadow of the thought of possessing that thing. Those appetites don’t just accompany looking: they are looking itself. (Elkins, 1997, p. 22)
There is, within such a formulation, Elkins notes, the shadow of violence in the
gaze. Implicit in the masochism of the gaze, in its power, is the potential for abuse. “If I
listen very carefully, there is displeasure in every glance. Looking is not only active—it is
a form of the desire to possess or be possessed—but also potentially violent” (Elkins,
1997, p. 29).

This reading of vision and desire emphasizes the outwardly directed side of
desire, those aspects of the gaze intent on mastery and control. In this respect Elkins’
characterization, Mulvey’s theory, and as McGowan (2007) notes, much of early film
theory diverges from Lacan, taking more of a Foucauldian turn. Foucault’s ideas are
discussed more fully in the next section.

**Desire and the gaze.**

That is not to say that desire is not an integral part of vision in Lacan’s thinking.
(p. 46). In a Lacanian framework, one direction of desire is not mastery, not necessarily
gaining control over the object on view, but the perpetuation of desire itself. “Though an
object triggers desire, the subject actually enjoys not attaining its object rather than
attaining it. Desire perpetuates itself not through success (attaining or incorporating the
object) but through failure (submitting itself to the object),” (McGowan 2007, p. 9). The
mechanics of vision are ideal to this formulation because catching sight of something is
not the same as catching hold of it—seeing always happens at a distance.
There is also within Lacan’s formulation of gaze and desire, a de-centering of the subject, through the gaze of the Other. Lacan’s story of the sardine can serves as the focal point of this concept. While out on a boat with fisherman, Lacan sees himself becoming out of place when one of the men points to a floating sardine can glinting in the sun. The man says “You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn’t see you!” (Lacan 1977, p. 95). The fisherman, Lacan reports finds his comment highly amusing, whereas Lacan, an intellectual among men striving against raw nature to earn a living, does not. Lacan reads the comment as directed toward him, and writes, “I was rather out of place in the picture” (Lacan, 1977, p. 96). The relationship described in this exchange indicates a complicated form of desire to be seen through the eyes of the other.

Desire becomes an effect of the Other as the subject tries to position his or her aim (as it were) in terms of the Other desires. In short, in attempt to have desire fulfilled the subject acts out for the Other, trying to anticipate what it is the Other wants so that the Other will reciprocate and see the subject as the object of his or her own desire. Desire is thus for the desire of the Other, the Other’s desire. (Marsh, 2003, p. 85)

Acknowledging both ways in which Lacan’s theories have been employed to describe vision and desire is important to a fully developed background on the discourse of vision. The work of early film critics such as Mulvey employ the first reading of desire, but in other writings such as Marsh (2003) and Iversen (2007), the second reading is employed in order to understand the interrelations of photography vision and desire.
Anamorphosis.

Whereas Lacan’s mirror theory seems to posit a subject de-centered by a flat, planar mirror, his idea of anamorphosis functions more like a fun-house mirror. The anamorphic gaze simultaneously distorts the images of the real, and provides the mechanism through which we are able to visually re-form the image into an apparently cohesive whole.

The world on view, according to this part of Lacan’s theory, never appears in an un-mediated state, but is instead always viewed through a thick distorting cultural lens. Lacan uses the example of Holbein’s (1533) painting *The Ambassadors* to illustrate the idea. The painting depicts two wealthy and influential young men standing in front of a high table covered with instruments that indicate their status as worldly and intellectual: a celestial globe, a sundial and so forth. Both men are elegantly dressed. A lute, pipes and a musical score rest on the lower shelf of the table.

A very incongruous pale streak or stain appears across the bottom middle of the painting. When viewing the painting from the conventional vantage point, the stain is incomprehensible. If the viewer moves to a very shallow and extreme angle to the surface of the painting, the smear suddenly becomes recognizable as a skull. The rest of the painting however becomes distorted from this angle. Through the mechanism of anamorphosis, the painting is simultaneously recognizable and distorted. This concept, like the mirror stage discussed above, is not to be read literally, but conceptually. In Lacan’s example of The Ambassadors, the anamorphic stain of the skull may be reconstructed—made clear, by taking the shallow angle to the painting. Upon returning to
the traditional viewing position, the viewer may simultaneously read that part of the painting as smear and as a skull. The skull is thereby anamorphically transformed, and when standing in front of the painting the viewer may read the visually distorted image as coherent. In a theoretical context, the anamorphic stain, the distortion of the gaze introduced through culture, language, and self-identity, is never clearly realized as the skull is at the shallow angle. It always distorts what we see, though what we see always appears cohesive and whole like the view of the painting from the front with the cohesive image of the skull is held in mind.

Bryson, (1988) interprets anamorphosis, and the broad range of cultural connections that complicate visuality in this way:

Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality… Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena. This screen casts a shadow: sometimes Lacan calls it a scotoma, sometimes a stain. (emphasis in original Bryson, 1988, p. 91-92)

Unlike the flat mirroring of the mirror-stage; the convoluted effects of anamorphosis cause the simultaneous apprehension and mis-apprehension of the subject and the outside world through the visible. For Lacan, like a distorted hall of mirrors, this function of vision captures, holds and works upon the viewing subject. “There is not a single one of the divisions, a single one of the double sides that the function of vision presents that is not manifested to us as a labyrinth” (Lacan, 1981, p. 93). Whereas the
viewer first sees the skull in *The Ambassadors* as distorted, and later corrected, the
cultural distortion that Lacan hypothesizes is not so easily side-stepped.

**Vision, Discourse and Power**

Whereas modernist vision is modeled on the camera obscura and situated in a
posture of looking down-on the object of the gaze; postmodern models of vision are more
inclined toward Sartre’s posture of looking-back over one’s shoulder. In the work of
Foucault (1973, 1977/1991) and later, Elkins (1997), the critical gaze is turned toward
society itself. Turned to see who’s watching us and to discern the role hegemonic
Cartesian vision plays in the structuring and maintenance of modern society.

What is gained in this posture of looking over-one’s shoulder is a postmodern
subject defined through the omnipresent, externally-located power of the gaze. The
power and control of the eye, once entirely found within the eye of the beholder—at the
focal point of linear perspective—becomes externalized. The power of the gaze, Foucault
asserts, is distributed through hierarchies, embedded in language, and scattered amongst
the players in the modern scopic regimes. The term *scopic regime*, first coined by film
critic Christian Metz, indicates “the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern
era” (Jay, 1988, p. 3). The power of vision in modern society is embedded in social
discourse. It is brought to bear through the exchange of looks, glances and gazes, as well
as the physical manifestation of these visions through language, photography,
videography, film and architecture.
Discourse and vision.

Foucault’s (1963/1973/1975), examination of the medical gaze, is critical of the way in which the body, the object of the medical gaze, becomes homologous—essentially one-and-the-same with the language of medicine. Within the medical discourse, the combination of vision and language gives visual, conceptual form to the body of the patient on view. Foucault posits a structural connection between the language of description and the experience of the visual. Language used to describe what is seen works upon the way it is seen. The gaze is found in “the region where ‘things’ and ‘words’ have not yet been separated, and where—at the most fundamental level of language—seeing and saying are still one,” (Foucault, 1963/1973/1975, p. xi). According to Foucault, that which might be seen is linked to, in effect subordinate to—conceptualized in terms of—a fundamental way of knowing: language. In other words, “we must re-examine the original distribution of the visible and invisible insofar as it is linked with the division between what is stated and what remains unsaid” (Foucault, 1963/1973/1975, p. xi). Language, coupled to the gaze in this way is not a transparent medium through which the patient may be clearly viewed, rather, “the articulation of medical language and its object will appear as a single figure” (Foucault, 1963/1973/1975, p. xi).

Elkins (1997) utilizes Foucault’s ideas concerning the medical gaze to examine a photograph of a naked, castrated man and the medical notes that accompany the picture. The photograph originally appeared in a journal article published by a Parisian hospital in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The man stands facing the camera, his arms are
at his side and pressed against his thighs, his thin legs slightly bowed and his knees are touching. His face appears relaxed, or slack. “It is a tired face, and the eyes are gently shut as if to close out the world” (Elkins, 1997, p. 25). The language employed by the doctor in describing the case, Elkins notes, “is professionally impeccable—which is to say horrible, invasive and brutish….The photograph is the harshest of all: it penetrates his privacy with an insistent, intense thrust that cannot be rejected” (Elkins, 1997, p. 27).

Elkins’ analysis is a trenchant example of the power of the gaze read in Foucauldian terms. The photograph, coupled to the cold descriptive language represents the invasive power of vision:

This is the violent side of seeing, where the mere act of looking—an act that can also be the gentlest, least invasive way to make contact with the world—becomes so forceful that it turns a human being into a naked shivering example of a medical condition. (Elkins, 1997, p. 27)

Vision seen in this way is aggressive, violent, and capable of inflicting pain upon the object of the gaze. “It distorts what it looks at, and turns a person into an object in order to let us stare at it without feeling ashamed” (Elkins, 1997, p. 27). Understood in these terms, the gaze does more than just appropriate, as it does in Cartesian representation. “Here seeing is not only possessing…seeing is also controlling and objectifying and denigrating. In short, it is an act of violence and it creates pain” (Elkins, 1997, p. 27).

Elkins is writing, about a specific case, the invasive medicalized gaze of the camera directed at a eunuch, twice bereft of his sexuality, once through castration and a
second time through the invasive cold, descriptive gaze of the medical establishment. The violence of sight, however, has far wider implications. He writes, “[i]t seems to me that all seeing has this property, and even though it can be modified or diluted, it can never be eradicated” (Elkins, 1997, p. 27). Elkins’ assessment of the violence of vision represents an extended and sharpened reading of Foucault’s medical gaze.

**Alternate regimes of sight.**

Foucault’s (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1991) both focus on vision in institutional settings, but the critique that they offer is directed toward understanding the modern scopic regimes at large. The enlightened discourses that celebrate modern vision most often emphasize the far-seeing and rational mechanisms of sight. The emphasis is on “the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam, which were an integral part of the new physics and cosmology,” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 171). Foucault offers a few alternate paradigms of sight which function in parallel with but below the surface of the dominant model.

These other scopic regimes, Foucault writes “were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation… secretly preparing a new knowledge of man” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 171). These lesser, but ultimately controlling technologies, were less concerned with knowledge and enlightenment, but focused instead on control and subjugation. These ways of seeing “had an almost ideal

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30 A third time also with Elkins’ use of the Eunuch’s photograph to support his argument.
Hierarchical observation.

In Foucault’s description, the structure of the military camp is based on lines of sight. Neat rows of tents allow one or a few sentries to keep an eye on things from a few key vantage points. Order and control are clearly visible in this model. This layout functions in a manner similar to seventeenth-century measures taken to quarantine a town infected with the plague. Power is established through spatial partitioning, open lines of sight, and a hierarchical structure of observation and reporting, what Foucault calls hierarchical observation.

The control established by hierarchical observation rests not on the single all-seeing eye of power, it is instead distributed throughout the camp. The discipline of the individual kept in check through the power of the gaze is an integral part of how this model functions. Power in this framework is “organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 176).

The military camp is only one example of institutions that exploit the power of the gaze in this manner. The school is another. “A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the very heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 176). Hierarchical observation is essential to the function of the
school as a social institution, and the examination is perhaps the finest example of these ideas in action. The social function of the exam employs mechanisms of observation and the visualization of the status quo to establish and maintain order. Through the exam, “the Normal is established as a principle of coercion” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 184). Students are held visibly accountable, and their status may be precisely compared to a pre-defined benchmark of normalcy. “The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish,” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 184).

**Panopticism.**

Foucault’s model of power in vision is most clearly illustrated in the architectural ideal of the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham’s architectural design for an ideal prison, see *Figure 5.1*. In Bentham’s model, the prisoners are contained in cells along the outer ring of the building. The prison guard occupies a position in the central tower, and through the design and lighting of the structure, the guard may see any prisoner at any time, but the prisoners never see the guard, and never know if they are being observed or not. In the Panopticon, “inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 195). The inmates are always visible, always potentially subject to the gaze. “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201). The function of the Panopticon is to maintain control, to
establish the power of the gaze and to maintain it with the least expenditure of energy. As a model of the gaze, it works:

- to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary…in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201)

*Figure 5.1 Bentham, J. (1791) Architectural plan for the Panopticon.*

The panoptic gaze is “an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 170). As a
mechanism for inducting disciplinary control with a minimum of effort, panopticism is applicable across a broad spectrum of institutions, “to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers,” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 205).

Foucault employs the model of the Panopticon as a metaphor—a model for the function of the gaze in modern culture. “The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form… a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 205). It is a model of disciplinary power in which the normalizing power of the gaze exerts control over everyone wherever they are visible. It “must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 205). Though Foucault employs the technology of Bentham’s prison to illustrate his concept, the modern technologies of imaging, especially photography and video, are also key components in the mechanisms of modern observation.

Scopic regimes and the individual.

Disciplinary power, illustrated by models of the military camp, the examination, and the Panopticton, represents a form of social control made possible through vision. To

see this form of power only in negative terms, Foucault writes is to lose sight of or to be blind to the full extent of its reach and its totalizing power.

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1977/1991, p. 194)

At its most functional, in other words, the power of the gaze works on the individual through multiple sightlines. Through the gaze the individual takes in an awareness of societal norms. The individual then monitors his or her own behavior in order to conform. The cultural order is therefore not only controlled by the application of observation from above, but the individual also disciplines him or herself through the power of vision.

**Society of the spectacle.**

Foucault is not the only postmodern critic to describe the effects of vision as all-pervasive and controlling. The effect of the populace driven to distraction by the endless bombardment of images, commodities, and images of commodities is described by Debord (1967/1983). In his diatribe against what he calls *The Society of the Spectacle*, he describes contemporary society as entirely consumed with, and constructed by, the spectacle.32 “The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life. Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity” (Debord, 1967/1983, p. 21)

32 An historical precursor to Debord’s description of commodification and distraction is Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* an extensive critique of the 19th century Parisian glass and iron arcades—precursors to the modern shopping mall. See Benjamin’s & Tiedemann (1999),
Whereas Foucault emphasizes the institutionalized practices of vision, and the power of surveillance to shape society, for Debord the endless bombardment of images shapes the cultural landscape. “In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (emphasis in the original, Debord, 1967/1983, p. 7).

Spectacle for Debord may not be viewed apart from, or even as a part of, modern capitalist society; rather, the endless parade of images of commodities and consumption is inextricably intertwined, and becomes the totality of being.

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society’s unreality. In all of its particular manifestations – news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment – the spectacle represents the dominant *model* of life.” (Debord, 1967/1983, p. 8)

To understand Debord’s spectacle in Foucauldian terms, is to understand the oppressive power of the spectacle to represent and enforce visions of the normative, to the extent that any other expressions of being are either overwhelmed, or prohibited. “It is the hierarchical society’s ambassador to itself, delivering its official messages at a court where no one else is allowed to speak” (Debord, 1967/1983, p. 12-13). The spectacle presents, in an un-interrupted stream of images and impressions, the social agenda of the dominant cultural paradigm. As Foucault notes, one must not think of the power of the spectacle only in negative terms. Certainly the spectacle excludes, marginalizes, and
stigmatizes through the persistent presentation of the normative. However, this power is also productive. The spectacle teaches us how to dress, what to eat, how to behave, and above all else, what choices and behaviors are normal, and which are deviant. “The spectacle is the ruling order’s non-stop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life” (Debord, 1967/1983, p. 13). Whereas Foucault’s connection between vision and power left little to no room for resistance (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005), the dérive—loosely understood as an un-structured encounter with the urban landscape—offered a form of resistance for Debord and those he was affiliated with.

**Simulation not representation**

Baudrillard, like Debord and Foucault was concerned with the ways in which culture and vision are coextensive. Baudrillard’s early work was concerned with nineteenth-century objects and images, and the cultural zeitgeist that destabilized the functions of signs previously held in place by fixed social hierarchies. “For Baudrillard modernity is bound up in the capacity of newly empowered social classes and groups to overcome the ‘exclusiveness of signs’ and to initiate ‘a proliferation of signs on demand,’” (Crary, 1990, p. 12).

Baudrillard (1981/2001) considers the social effect of the combined destabilization of signs and the proliferation of technologies of image-production and dissemination in the 20th century. In Baudrillard’s estimation, these profligate signs and copies that flood the modern field of vision no longer refer to any original, to any referent
or source-reality. To illustrate, Baudrillard chooses a selection from Borges (1972). The quote appears in, or to be more precise, makes up the entirety of the chapter *Of Exactitude in Science*. For clarity, the Borges quote is reproduced in full below, as it appears in both in Borges (1972) and Baudrillard (1981/2001).

In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City, and the Map of the Empire itself an entire Province. In the course of Time, these Extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a Map of the Empire that was of the same Scale as the Empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the Study of Cartography, succeeding Generations came to judge a map of such Magnitude cumbersome, and, not without Irreverence, they abandoned it to the Rigours of sun and Rain. In the western Deserts, tattered Fragments of the Map are still to be found, Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar; in the whole Nation, no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography. —From Travels of Praiseworthy Men (1658) by J. A. Suarez Miranda

This selection from Borges embodies the critique of representation in postmodern visual thought. First, it illustrates the absurdity of the modernist faith that *any* representation could ever provide an accurate, sufficiently detailed stand-in for the original object, for reality. Secondly, it serves as a metaphor for the postmodern visual

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33 Baudrillard’s (2001) analysis and Benjamin’s (1936/1969) observations concerning the changed—or lost—aura of the work of art in the age of photographic reproducibility appear as two facets of one cultural movement.
situation: not only is the empire gone but even the idea that visual images stand in for—serve as an abstraction of—the empire is a thing of the past.

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 169)

In the realm of representation, Baudrillard asserts, a fixed external reality is no longer the starting point, no longer the source of the images’ referent. Rather, the map, the culturally produced image that describes the world around us becomes the point of original meaning. “It is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra” p. 169). No longer does one refer to a representation in order to gather knowledge about reality, about the territory. Instead, visual simulations are the entirety of the cultural landscape.

If we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself. (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 169)

Even this inversion of the Borges tale is insufficient to accurately describe the cultural condition of postmodern vision, Baudrillard insists. The postmodern visual landscape is more than just commentary on, or criticism of modernism and the way representation happens in a modernist framework, rather with postmodernism, something fundamental has changed.
It is no longer a question of either maps or territory. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference between them that was the abstraction’s charm. For it is the difference which forms the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real. (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 170)

This leads to the third way in which the Borges quote fully and completely exemplifies Baudrillard’s ideas. Any good scholar attempting to situate Baudrillard’s reference—attempting to contextualize Borges’ allegory of the cartographers—will find that Baudrillard has not pulled an excerpt from a larger chapter. Instead, the Borges quote above is the entire chapter. Furthermore, the citation of Suarez Miranda that Borges includes is most likely a fictional reference. The Borges quote points back to no reality other than itself. By citing it, Baudrillard re-enforces the empty loop of postmodern representation.

The postmodern referential loop creates a form of visual reality that is self-sustaining. It may appear just as real as modernist representations appear, but postmodern representations are not predicated upon a reference to an external, objective reality. In a postmodern framework, all such visions are merely simulations. “Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom)” (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 173). Simulation is predicated upon the emptiness of the reference, “the radical negation of the sign as value…the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference” (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 173). Modernist models of vision, of course recognize certain
representations as false or inaccurate: visual tricks or mis-representations. Mirrors may be used to deceive the eyes, and in some cases, deceptive photographs can be manufactured. Such attempts to explain away or bracket-off the extent of the simulation are futile according to Baudrillard. “Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum,” (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 173).

With loss of a fixed referent, and a complete evacuation of modernist representation, postmodern vision to Baudrillard means a complete destruction of the cultural sub-structure of modernist vision. All of modernist metaphysics, and vision as the vehicle of truth, evaporates into thin air.

No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept; no more imaginary coextensivity… It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. (Baudrillard, 1981/2001, p. 170)

**Anti-Ocularcentrism as Cultural Dominant**

In Baudrillard’s discussion, the nagging distrust of images and vision rooted deep in Western philosophy becomes the full focus of attention. A similar troubling of the relationship between vision, culture and the viewing subject surrounds the postmodern theories discussed throughout this chapter. Sartre’s essay is significant in that it offers a phenomenological way of seeing—discussed in the previous chapter—before moving toward an entirely postmodern way of seeing. Three concepts from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory- the mirror stage, desire and the gaze, and anamorphosis are also
found to be significant theories backgrounding photography, vision, and understandings of how images affect consciousness.

Foucault’s (1972, 1977/1991) approach toward the gaze is sharply critical of modernist ways of seeing. Foucault examines ways in which the subject is described, defined and controlled through the power of surveillance enforced through social structures. Debord finds the self-obsessed stream of consumer images to be the source of visual social control. Representation—the modernist notion of subject-and-object as discrete observable entities is called into question throughout this chapter—but most thoroughly eviscerated by Baudrillard’s (1981/2001) precession of simulacra.

It is not the intent, in grouping this diverse collection of thinking under the same subheading, to assert that their critical approaches toward modern society are the same, or even similar. There is, however, considerable evidence, as presented in Jay (1993) and Levin (1993) that these theorists are united in their “ruthless critique of the domination of vision in Western culture” (Jay, 1999, p. 165). Also important to mention here, is that these ways of seeing and approaching the question of vision are by no means the only approaches culturally in play; either now or at the time when these theorists were writing. One of the concepts fundamental to a postmodern understanding is the absence of credibility in all-encompassing cultural meta-narratives. As Jameson (1991) notes, “the conception of the ‘genealogy’ largely lays to rest traditional theoretical worries about so-called linear history, theories of ‘stages’, and teleological historiography” (p. 191). This is, however, not to downplay the cultural significance and profound reach of all the theories discussed above. The way the gaze is conceptualized—and by extension
photography—varies profoundly based upon the dominant theoretical platforms from which it is envisioned. To borrow Jameson’s words again, “This is… precisely why it seems to me essential to grasp ‘postmodernism’ not as a style, but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features34” (Jameson, 1991, p. 191). Whereas a modernist approach toward vision has not withered and disappeared under the critical eye of postmodernism, neither can the dominance of a postmodern approach be underestimated in contemporary understandings of the gaze. It is therefore, with a wary eye, that we shift our gaze away from the discourse of vision as a conceptual background and toward the ways in which photography may be differently envisioned through each of the three major discourse strands.

34 In the case of this research, attempting to theoretically locate ways of looking at photographic practice is dependent to some extent on notions of cultural hegemony. “If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable” (Jameson, 1991, p. 193).
Chapter 6: Photography and the Discourse of Vision

“The public believed that the photograph could not lie, and it was easier for the photographer if he believed it too, or pretended to. Thus he was likely to claim that what our eyes saw was an illusion and what the camera saw was the truth” (Szarkowski, 1966, p. 8).

“It is this condensation or collapse of social realities into images that parallels the fragmentation of consciousness and experience... and finds apt visual expression in the photographic image world” (Solomon-Godeau, 1991, p. xxxiv).

“Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world” (Merleau-Ponty1961/1993, p. 124).

As the previous chapters have made evident, there is more than one way to look at things. Examining the discourse of vision reveals that differing approaches toward vision produce different understandings of what is on view and what it means to look and to see. Photography is a form of visual practice, and is more fully understood when examined through the discourse of vision. Each of the three major strands in the discourse posits a difference in the way vision functions, and each produces a different picture of vision. Approaching photography, therefore from a Cartesian’s viewpoint, produces an understanding different from a postmodern reading which also differs from a phenomenological interpretation. As each strand represents an important component in
the way vision is conceptualized, considering each in relation to photography is an important part of the process. The question at issue is: what unique understandings are generated when looking at photography through each of these discourse strands?

As illustrated in the discussion of Demand’s work, turning such abstract theoretical questions toward specific examples is useful. It produces tangible readings of abstract theoretical concepts. Demand’s work is particularly efficacious in this regard because the complex, layered nature of his process provides generous openings for interpretation through the discourse of vision.

If the discourse of vision is to be useful for understanding photography though, it must be applicable to more than just the highest levels of fine-art practice such as Demand’s. To explore this possibility, this chapter will examine the implications of these different ways of seeing when applied to photographs made using very direct photographic techniques.

**Photographic Representation**

*Figure 6.1* is a documentary photograph. It was taken by photographer Olivier Jobard, a member of the SIPA photo-press agency. The photograph was made during *Operation Uphold Democracy* in 1994 in Port au Prince, Haiti. Unlike Demand’s photographs which are created in a manner that distances them from the original visual events, Jobard’s photograph was made in close proximity to the event that it depicts. He was only a few feet away from the figures in the foreground of the photograph.
The picture shows soldiers from the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division deploying as part of the multinational peace-keeping force that invaded Haiti in 1994. The soldiers lay prone on the tarmac. They use their duffle bags as cover and direct their rifles out of the frame toward an unseen enemy. Two soldiers and their gear fill most of the bottom center of the frame, and two others are partially cropped out on the left and the right. Further back on the tarmac half a dozen more take up similar positions pointing their weapons out, away from the group. The UH-60 Black Hawk Helicopter that just deployed the troops rises just above and behind the men in the foreground. The spinning rotor blades lift dust into the air as the helicopter rises off the tarmac.
Unlike Demand’s artistic creations which first fool the eye and involve a very unusual creative approach, Jobard’s technique in making this photograph is direct and literal. The photographer witnessed the events through his camera lens, made the exposure, and the image he recorded is what the picture shows. There is, in other words, no reason to doubt that this photograph is as direct a transcription of reality as photography is capable of producing. There is every reason to believe that Jobard fairly and accurately recorded the event pictured and that no image manipulation, technical trickery, or other deception is involved. The photograph is an authentic first-hand visual account of the events.

The apparently unimpeachable Cartesian accuracy of the image makes it initially almost inaccessible through the discourse of visuality. It appears very straightforward, truthful and factual. A critical analysis of the way of seeing generated in and around this photograph requires conceptual distance. Adopting a different visual vantage point is necessary if the visuality involved is to be made evident. Fortunately in the case of this particular photograph there is a visual aid available. This visual aid can assist in the philosophical repositioning necessary for accessing the ways of seeing wrapped up in Jobard’s photograph. It is a second photograph made by photographer Alex Webb of the same event, Figure 6.2. It was made at nearly the same moment as Jobard’s, but from a different physical vantage point. This alternate physical standpoint offers a perspective shift that facilitates the shift in understanding necessary for critically examining this way of seeing. This change in perspective is a powerful conceptual tool. It can be used to re-
examine Jobard’s photograph in a number of ways: from a Cartesian, a postmodern, and also a phenomenological standpoint.

Webb’s photograph is different from Jobard’s. Instead of taking his picture from in front of the soldiers, he made his photograph standing to one side of the line of prone soldiers. His picture takes in a different view and includes both the soldiers and the vantage point from which Jobard made his picture. Because of this, Webb’s picture helps to explain how Jobard’s picture was made. It offers insight into how Jobard’s picture shows what it shows. But it also includes information that Jobard’s photograph does not.
Because of this, Webb’s photograph offers unique insight into the visual event within which Jobard’s photograph is situated.

**A Cartesian perspective**

When viewed through a Cartesian framework, Webb’s photograph casts doubt on the veracity of Jobard’s image. Webb’s picture depicts the same event and the same soldiers prone on the tarmac with weapons aimed over duffel bags. Taken from a higher position above and to the side of the soldiers, Webb’s picture shows not only the soldiers, but also a small crowd of photojournalists. The five soldiers do not appear to be facing an on-coming enemy; they stare right into the faces of the photojournalists. The members of the press jockey for position, trying to get a good photograph. One appears to be running between the prone soldiers to take a position in front of them. The photographers outnumber the soldiers by almost two to one. A number of figures stand in the distance apparently just observing events. None of the primary individuals in the photograph take notice of them.

This photograph presents a very different reality than Jobard’s. It appears confusing, chaotic and more about the press than a military operation. Webb’s photograph makes it obvious that at this particular moment, “the photographers are the only ones doing any shooting” (Ritchin, 2009, p. 147). When viewed next to Webb’s, Jobard’s photograph seems to be more shrewdly framed than it first appeared. It looks as if it was selected from a much wider range of possibilities in order to present a specific and narrow account of the whole event.
Considering this pair of photographs in a Cartesian light is troubling. Jobard’s photograph seems too selective. It tells a lie by omission. It doesn’t specifically misrepresent the scene when compared to the other but it leaves out quite a few people that were clearly a part of the action shown in Webb’s photograph. It becomes apparent when viewing the two photographs together that Jobard’s is very carefully framed to exclude the presence of the press and to emphasize the military aspects of the scene. His photograph is a picture of military action, not a photograph of the press recording a military action. Seen in a Cartesian framework, Jobard’s and Webb’s photographs are contradictory. Both photographs cannot be equally true because of the discrepancies between what each shows.

A postmodern perspective

What is not taken into account when Webb’s photograph is employed as a second Cartesian standpoint, is the possibility that the act of seeing—and thereby the act of photographing—is itself suspect. Jobard’s choice of framing can be criticized, but the fundamental veracity of the photographic medium as an extension of vision—the noblest of the senses—remains unimpeachable. By adopting a postmodern vantage point it is possible to use Webb’s photograph, not to critique Jobard’s picture, but instead to examine the singularity of vision embraced by Cartesianism.

Essential to a Cartesian framework is the concept of a fixed and knowable reality behind these images. A trust in vision to accurately and completely represent that reality goes along with it. In a postmodern framework, both the trust in vision and the concept of
reality are dispensed with. A postmodern reading of the photographs characterizes them both as culturally constructed texts based on the same scene. There is no such thing as absolute truth in what they represent and no underlying reality either. Each is just as much a simulation of reality as the next.

*A photographic simulacrum*

Looking again at Jobard’s photograph through the lens of *Simulation and Simulacrum*, one cannot help but notice how much the image resembles a photograph of a military operation. It appears ordered and iconic. It looks like an invasion photograph ought to look, and brings to mind Robert Capa’s black and white photographs from the D-day invasions in Normandy, and the de-saturated faded color photographs of helicopter operations in Vietnam. Seen in this light, Jobard’s photograph does not represent reality—faithfulness to the events pictured is irrelevant—as it simulates reality. As just another image in a continuous stream, it serves as a just another fragment of the only reality that the postmodern viewer encounters, the media. It is a culturally constructed impression of the operation, a surrogate form of experience that stands in for and supplants reality in the contemporary world.

As Mitchell, (1986) writes, such an understanding of this photograph positions it as “nothing but another kind of writing, a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of what they essentially are” (p. 30). This suspicion in postmodern vision is not directed only toward photography, but is wrapped up in the larger post-modern distrust of vision.
This sort of suspicion of the image seems only appropriate in a time when the very view from one’s window, much less the scenes played out in everyday life and in the various media of representation, seem to require constant interpretative vigilance. Everything—nature, politics, sex, other people—comes to us now as an image, preinscribed with a speciousness…under a cloud of suspicion. (Mitchell, 1986, p. 30)

Ironically, Webb’s photograph seems to be more immune to this type of postmodern suspicion than Jobard’s. Whereas Webb’s image makes visible the carefully framed composition of Jobard’s image—making it seem too precise, too exclusionary; the apparently artless snapshot character of Webb’s image re-enforces its status as truth. It appears as a behind-the-scenes document—as the real truth, a concept which should be absent in a postmodern interpretation of photography.

*The photographic keyhole*

The relationship between these two photographs may also be seen as a Sartrean one. Sartre describes the act of peering through a keyhole as a fully-engaged act of being-in-itself. It is a non-circumspect form of seeing in which the voyeur is totally absorbed in an un-self conscious act of seeing. Similarly, when looking through Jobard’s photograph in a non-critical manner toward the view it offers involves a temporary loss of self-awareness, an absorption in the scene depicted. In Sartre’s account of vision, when the Other steps into the hall or makes a noise that allows the voyeur to be aware of his presence, the subjectivity of the voyeur is altered. He experiences a sudden rushing-away of his self-contained subjectivity. Similarly when viewing first Jobard’s photograph, then Webb’s, a sense of dislocation occurs. One searches for a place to locate the source of the
original gaze, and begins to question which photographer in the second image is Jobard. The viewer becomes unsure of his or her location when looking through the Jobard photograph. Is Jobard the photographer in the green shirt or the white shirt? Which of the soldiers on the ground is the first picture focused on? Where am I as the subjective viewer located in this dynamic? First in Jobard’s place, then in Webb’s, and finally in an un-settled no-place somewhere between the standpoints offered by each of these photographers. The sovereign power of vision initially offered by Jobard’s photograph—a stable Cartesian rationality and control—has been replaced by a restless wandering of the gaze from place to place. This represents a step away from the camera obscura model of vision described by Descartes, and a step toward the de-centered subject described by Sartre. Webb’s photograph initiates a postmodern self-awareness, and the act of vision involved in looking through the photographic keyhole becomes evident.

**The photographic eye of power**

Viewed as a Foucaultian vantage point, Webb’s photograph brings to this visual dislocation a global-political implication. In a Cartesian interpretation of Jobard’s shot, the soldiers are merely present in the photograph. They point their weapons out of the frame toward the unseen enemy. They are absorbed in the task of deployment and securing the landing site. There is an implicit separation between the soldiers and the photographer who made the picture. This separation carries through to the relationship between the viewer of the photograph and the soldiers. The distance is not great, but the
separation is complete. The soldiers deploy, the photographer photographs, and the viewer views.

Webb’s photograph complicates the picture. His shot makes it very evident that the soldiers are aware of the photographers—they would have to be, the cameras are right in their faces. But the camera is not simply another mechanical device, and these are no ordinary photographers. They are not tourists or curious bystanders taking snapshots, these are press photographers, and the soldiers are certainly aware of that fact. They are also likely aware that the images being made will be uploaded within minutes to international press agencies and distributed across the globe. Webb’s photograph makes it very evident that even as the soldiers do their job, they do so subject to the power of the gaze. They are aware of being watched—not only by their commanding officers and the unseen enemy, but by the whole world through the eyes of those cameras. The implication is that they had better act accordingly.

Taking into account the manner in which these soldiers and photographers came to be in this place together for the making of these photographs expands the visual implications. If the soldiers depicted are aware of the photojournalists’ gaze, the officers and politicians ordering and coordinating the invasion are doubly so. The world is watching, and they are also already acting accordingly. There is, in other words, something not entirely transparent in the way photographs such as Jobard’s come into existence. This lack of transparency is what is called out in Webb’s photograph.

The image of military deployment depicted in Jobard’s image—and likely nearly every other image made by the photojournalists on the scene—is not one of a slow,
scripted arrival of soldiers and equipment. These soldiers are deploying rapidly. They have taken up defensive positions with weapons at the ready before the Black Hawk that brought them has even had a chance to lift off.

Webb’s photograph raises this question: if the soldiers in the photograph were swiftly deployed into a combat zone as part of the invasion force, how is it that so many press photographers are there at the same time? It asks “’is this for real?’ Or is this a simulation of an invasion created for the cameras” (Ritchin, 2009, p. 149). Read as a Foucaultian lens, Webb’s photograph is not a critique of Jobard’s choice of framing; instead it may be seen as a critique of the way the entire landing—at this particular location—is being framed for the waiting press photographers. Webb’s photograph may be seen as an indictment of the visual construction that surrounds Jobard’s photograph, not the photograph itself. Differences in the two pictures’ captions reinforce the critical difference between the models of vision they offer. Jobard’s photograph is captioned: *Operation “Uphold Democracy” Port au Prince, Haiti*. Webb’s photograph is captioned: *U.S. troops land as the press awaits Port au Prince Haiti*. The difference in perspective produces two very different readings of the same visual event. What then, can a phenomenological approach contribute to the understandings thus far generated?

**A phenomenological perspective**

Seen as a phenomenological vantage point, Webb’s photograph offers the viewer remarkable insight into the embodied presence of Jobard in the making of his photograph. By looking at the photographers shown in Webb’s picture, the viewer becomes more
aware of the camera location in Jobard’s image. Webb’s photograph allows the viewer to more fully step into Jobard’s shoes and to adopt his sight and his posture when viewing the photograph he made. The picture is taken from a point not much higher than the tops of the prone soldiers’ helmets. The photographer was most likely kneeling, as a number of the photographers in Webb’s image are. Viewed in this way, Jobard’s photograph indicates a specific physical posture. It invites the viewer to feel the rough tarmac on his knees, to feel the tense bend of his neck and back as he maneuvers the camera into the right position to allow the front wheel of the helicopter to barely separate from the soldier’s helmet. Through Webb’s photograph, the viewer also becomes more aware of Jobard’s proximity to the soldiers’ M-16 rifles pointed in his face. Most of these observations could have been drawn from a close examination of Jobard’s photograph, but not if the focus remains only on what it shows and what it factually represents. An awareness of the photograph such as this requires seeing it in terms of the greater undefined horizon within which it is situated.

**Jobard’s visual presence**

The degree to which the photojournalist is phenomenologically aware of and connected to the entire surrounding situation becomes apparent when Jobard’s photograph is viewed through Webb’s. The soldiers carry live ammunition, and their weapons are loaded and ready to fire. Certain of his safety, however, Jobard kneels down right in front of them, visually assesses the scene and waits. Perhaps a few moments, perhaps much longer before the helicopter lifts off; Jobard most likely taking photographs
all the while, conscious both of the work at hand and the surrounding situation. In this position, his back is entirely exposed to the open space behind him, the space toward which the soldiers point their weapons. Jobard does not have eyes in the back of his head, nor is it like that someone is watching his back. Instead, the narrow forward view that his camera shows is informed by a broader, more contextually aware form of seeing. He knows, despite the actions he sees the soldiers performing that there is no immediate threat to his safety. He’s aware of what’s going on around him. His camera lens does not include this in what it explicitly shows but his knowledge and physical presence is an integral part of how the picture was made.

Webb’s photograph breaks down the discrete division between the picture of vision that Jobard’s image offers and the more engaged vision that the SIPA photographer possesses. Webb’s picture shows the presence of the photographer as an integral part of the photographic act. If the soldiers are ordered to advance, they will either have to go around the photographers, over them, or the photographers will have to move. Webb’s photograph emphasizes the way Jobard’s vision is intimately intertwined with the events as they unfold in and around his physical presence. Webb’s photograph forces the viewer of Jobard’s image to become aware of the photographer as an active agent in the creation of the scene on view. Looking at Webb’s image as a phenomenological critique of the way of seeing evidenced in Jobard’s image allows a connection to the physical presence of Jobard and his image.
Physical presence

Viewing Webb’s picture, one becomes acutely aware of the atmosphere in which the photographers operate. The stream of dust blasted by the rotor wash toward the photographers becomes almost palpable. It lifts the shirt on the running photographer, and seems to practically blow over the journalist on the far right of the frame. It causes the second closest soldier in Webb’s photograph to press his face into his duffel bag to keep the dust out of his eyes. This is the gesture that truly connects the photographers to the soldiers. It causes one to wonder about the eyes looking at the soldiers. Was Jobard’s eye protected from the sudden gust by his camera, or was he forced to protect himself from the pelting dust as the photographer retreating from the scene toward the right edge of the frame seems to be doing?

Webb’s photograph emphasizes the close connection between the soldiers and the photographers. Both are subject to the blast of the rotor wash, both press their bodies down onto the hard tarmac and both must feel the heat of Caribbean sun which beats down on them casting sharp shadows in front of them. These physical connections are implicitly contained in Jobard’s photograph, but a Cartesian way of seeing would consider them unimportant—not part of what the photograph actually represents.

A phenomenological analysis of Jobard’s photograph—with the aid of Webb’s picture—shows that Jobard is immersed in and thoroughly engaged with the visual flesh of the world that phenomenology describes. It makes it possible for him to function the way he does, gives him the confidence to turn his back on the invisible enemy that the soldiers look out toward and make the photograph we see. Though Jobard’s photograph
does not show this aspect of his vision, and it wouldn’t be obvious at all without the aid of Webb’s picture, a full phenomenological account of Jobard’s picture speaks to this expanded notion of sight.

Viewed in a phenomenological light, Jobard’s photograph becomes richer. The act of vision that he enacts—informed by the surrounding situation—becomes more apparent, and the viewer is able to more fully appreciate Jobard as a constituent part of the photograph he presents. Phenomenology invites a more engaged, more fully immersive way of conceptualizing vision, and in the case of Jobard’s image, Webb’s picture facilitates the recognition of that engagement.

No innocent eye

Jobard, it must be acknowledged, is no amateur photographer. He is a trained and experienced photojournalist—a member of the SIPA press agency for two years when he took the photograph in Haiti. His is no innocent eye, and he was most certainly aware of the nature of the photograph he was framing. The act of vision involved in the making of his photograph was by no means innocent, or uncritical. His was a complex act of vision, as is evident when his image is examined through the discourse of vision.

What about a less complex image? Can the discourse of vision offer comparable insight when directed toward a photograph less compelling than Jobard’s or one of Demand’s? What benefit—if any—is there in directing the discourse of vision toward ordinary photographs of pedestrian scenes: snapshots, vacation photos, pictures of friends or possessions—an innocent photograph? As with the analysis of Demand’s work and
Jobard’s photograph, employing a specific example is necessary if the abstract concepts are to become tangible.

**Finding an innocent photograph**

The process of selecting an innocent photograph was performed with care. I looked at travel snapshots, photographs of people’s cars, and a number of family snapshots both older and more contemporary. None seemed to present an innocent form of seeing. All had already been subjected, it seemed, to a critical eye either in being created or afterwards through selective editing. At a loss as to what photograph to focus on, I deferred to the work of Thomas Demand once again. His photograph *Sink* (1997) was begun with the same intent, to locate and replicate an image that held as few significant connotations as possible, yet retain something worth looking at. He chose to photograph a sink full of dishes. He started by photographing his own sink but caught himself carefully composing the shot. His solution was to telephone a friend and ask him to take a picture of his own sink quickly and without thinking. Following his logic, I concluded that a sink full of dirty dishes was as banal and pedestrian of a photograph as one can get. Rather than asking a friend to photograph his sink, I chose the Internet as a source that would likely produce an equivalent.

Selecting an image from the search results was also a painstaking process. Images that appeared to be innocent enough at first glance, upon closer contextual examination, were found to be advertisements for dishwashers or cleaning products: purposeful and not guileless forms of visuality. Also eliminated for consideration were photographs of
carefully staged sinks full of elegant dishes—stock photographs intentionally produced as simulacra—pictures made to look like sinks full of dishes ought to look.

The image finally selected, *Figure 6.3* was located using Google image search. Back-tracking the photograph to its source, I found that it had originally been posted to a Blog in June 2008. Much like a diary, the blog describes day to day observations of home life in upstate New York.

*Figure 6.3* Catalano, K. (2008). *Should_be_washing_dishes* [photograph]. Used with permission.
The page which includes the photograph of the dishes also shows photographs of flowers, food that Katya Catalano, the photographer and blogger, purchased or prepared, and quite a few photographs of hummingbirds. The birds are drawn to a feeder hung outside the kitchen window—the window above the sink full of dishes. Moving the computer cursor over the photograph causes the photographs title *should-be-washing-dishes-small.jpg* to appear. The text surrounding *should-be-washing-dishes* (2008) reads:

“here is what I should have been doing…namely, washing those dishes sitting in the sink….you cannot see all the ones sitting on the counter….How can I do dishes when *that* window is just above the kitchen sink? You know, the window with the hummingbird feeder hanging nearby? (Life in the Bristolwood Blog, June 17, 2008, ¶ 7-9).

This photograph is an innocent image. It was not overtly pre-mediated, planned, scripted, or designed. It is an unassuming act of photographic representation—intended only to offer a look at a sink full of dishes. Though the hummingbird pictures and flowers that surround it on the blog might have been framed with artistic intent, the sink is presented as simple representation. It shows a kitchen sink full of unwashed dishes and nothing more. It is not constructed out of cardboard. There is no digital manipulation to the image, no criss-crossed exchange of gazes between soldiers and photojournalists. The blog is available world-wide through the Internet but it only lists a couple of followers; the photograph was not framed as Jobard’s was with an eye toward a global audience. It is a very simple, very direct photograph that does not presume to be anything other than a record of the unwashed dishes. It is no more complex than a simple glance at the dishes...
The photograph shows a light pink porcelain double basin kitchen sink in a sky blue countertop. It is taken from a standing position and slightly off to one side. Two stacked flower patterned plates full of water rest in the bottom of the sink. A sauce pan, an old-fashioned looking cheese grater and a bread knife are stacked neatly on top of the plates. A metal can of what might have been pasta sauce, now filled with water and two paring knives also rests on the plates. A spoon, a fork, and a few other pieces of cutlery are tossed into the sink and rest against a silver metal dish scrubber in the lower right corner of the nearer basin. Small red spots of tomato sauce dot the sides of the basin. Glass drinking glasses on the countertop to the right of the sink are partially cropped out of the frame, as is the plastic bottle of dish soap. The window frame of the above-mentioned window is barely included in the top edge of the picture, and the faucet in between the two sinks is slightly cut off by the top. The photograph is lit by on-camera flash, and the shadow from the faucet just barely touches a textured blue sponge that sits at the top junction between the sink basins. The more distant basin has a plastic covered wire drainer in it, a second metal scrubber, and a large metal spoon that is also cut off by the top frame edge.

It is a very sharp, clear and descriptive photograph. The description above, in fact seems redundant next to the photograph. Seen from a Cartesian perspective, this is a picture as clear as the universal language of mathematics described by Descartes. It is capable of communicating a clear message across all cultures and languages. Accurate in some respects, this is perhaps not the only way to understand the photograph.
There is, unlike in the case of Jobard’s photograph, no second image that offers a tell-all perspective on the actual events that produced this sink photograph. Accessing it through the other two strands of the discourse of vision requires a purely philosophical re-positioning.

**Postmodern vision and the sink**

A postmodern perspective on the sink photograph begins with a comparison between the contents of the photograph and context surrounding it. There are two plates in the sink and apparently only two drinking glasses. It is therefore likely that a couple recently shared a meal and the pile of dishes is a result. As the text that accompanies the image indicates, it is the photographer’s responsibility to clean up—a task deferred to indulge in the pleasure of watching and photographing the hummingbirds outside the window. The pink sink offers an additional clue, and one might not have to research the blog at all for the author’s name to conclude that a woman made the photograph and the dishes are her responsibility. Her identity and the relationship implied is a part of how the photograph makes meaning.

The text that accompanies the image affirms this relationship, but also speaks volumes to the visual power structure that surrounds this photograph. The phrase “what I should have been doing” (Life in the Bristolwood Blog, June 17, 2008, ¶ 7) indicates a minor guilt at having deferred the task of washing up. The guilt is rooted in the power of vision and the disapproving glance. The photographer speaks as if she is being observed and that viewing the sink full of dirty dishes—ignored for the somehow slightly
hedonistic practice of hummingbird photography—will produce in the viewer a punitive
gaze. The combination of photograph and text confers upon the viewer the onerous task
of standing in judgment.

There is also a sin of omission admitted in the text. The tightly framed photograph
intentionally excludes additional unwashed dishes on the counter. The photographer
willingly partakes in Foucault’s disciplinary power, punishing herself by admitting her
guilt and presenting it publicly for judgment. The offense is minor, of course, and the
transgression of photographing the birds equally minor, but the complex interaction
between photographer and viewer is rich and powerful just the same.

**The sink and the power of The Look**

This same visual dialogue can be read through Sartre’s theory. The viewer of the
photograph resides on the opposite side of the picture plane as the photographer. Though
both viewer and photographer view the same scene by the action of photography, the
viewer does not share the same physical space as the photographer. The viewer is, in
other words, entirely incapable of seeing back through the photograph to observe the
photographer.

The text that accompanies the photograph changes this relationship. It effectively
re-situates the perceptual location of the viewer. Catalano does not present the
photograph to the viewer as a detached Cartesian representation. The presentation does
not function on the modernist ‘look what I saw that you did not’ sort of relationship.
Instead, by the interaction of vision and discourse, the viewer finds him or herself invited
into the space where the photograph was taken. Invited either to pass judgment concerning the unwashed dishes, or—as is more likely—to act as confidant and sympathize with the desire to skip the washing up to photograph the hummingbirds.

The viewer is unwittingly drawn into a space which he or she is neither able to fully occupy nor perceive with any certainty. As with Sartre’s example of the man in the park, viewing the photograph forces a sort of ontological slippage. The freedom to look as he or she wishes is slightly stripped away. The viewer is forced to consider the photograph from the photographer’s perspective and forced to choose sides: either in favor of taking pictures of the birds or on the side of the invisible Other who thinks it would be more appropriate to wash the dishes. Read in terms of the power of *The Look*, the photograph introduces a de-centering of the viewer’s self-location.

**The sink and the sardine can**

The viewer of the photograph is not the only subject upon whom the power of the gaze operates in this situation. The sink itself may also be read through Lacan’s anecdote of the sardine can. In Lacan’s example, the joke that the fishermen make: that Lacan can see the sardine glistening in the sun near the boat, but it cannot see him serves to introduce a form of visual dislocation. Lacan, through the crude humor sees himself being looked at as an outsider—as out of place in the working world of the fishermen. The narrative describes a position of looking at oneself from outside of oneself.

The sink and the short narrative that surrounds it function in a similar way. The photographer looks at the sink, and the sink looks back at her. Just as in Lacan’s example,
the vision of the sink draws her away from herself—it beckons her away from the vision of herself that she holds. The photographer wants to engage in photographing the birds and momentarily be something else—a nature photographer, a temporary ornithologist studying the birds’ appearance and their behavior—but the vision of the dishes taunts her.

In Lacan’s narrative, he came to see himself as standing-out, as an outsider, one who did not belong in the boat with the fishermen. This vision forced him to re-position himself in the eyes of the fishermen. It caused a de-centering of his subjectivity. Similarly, the vision of the dishes taunts the photographer, de-centering her, and forcing her to see herself from outside of herself—as a domestic person shunning her chores and making photographs of hummingbirds instead. The pile of dishes goads her like the laugh of the fishermen back to the domestic task she should be performing. The effect is strong enough that it motivates her to make the photograph, upload it on her blog and invite the viewers’ commiseration. Though the fishermen initiated the re-visioning that Lacan writes about, there is an invisible Other in this example that holds visual power over the photographer. This invisible Other admonishes her to return to the washing up. Perhaps it is the person who used the second plate, and perhaps it is the viewer of the photograph that serves this role.

Reading this photograph in a postmodern light, through three different postmodern theories, Foucault’s, Sartre’s and Lacan’s, produces unique understandings of the visual interactions. There are similarities, too. The subjective viewers—both photographer and viewer of the photograph—are de-centered and worked upon by the external power of the gaze that surrounds the photograph and the viewers. Much of this
interpretation is drawn from what the photograph shows, but it is also tied to the context in which the photograph is situated.

**Content and Context**

It is fair to raise a Cartesian protest at this point and focus on the fact that the postmodern analysis includes more than just the photograph. The text that accompanies it and the blog within which it is situated provides context external to and separate from the photograph. The text is allowed to manipulate the meaning of the photograph and offer support for the postmodern interpretations given above. This is of course a valid protest, but only to a certain extent. All photographs come with context. None are context-free. As the discussion of locating this particular photograph detailed, even images that are context independent such as those located through Google image search are contextualized by their presence on the Internet and by images that are visually similar or share similar keywords. Even a discarded photograph, one intentionally thrown away, is contextualized by its presence in the garbage. It acquires the status of discarded and its meaning would be informed by the refuse that surrounds it.

A modernist vision of photography places emphasis on the image itself to the exclusion of all surrounding context. The photograph alone in this visual model is expected to carry the informational load. Surroundings and contexts—including the personal perspective brought by the viewer—are either irrelevant or serve only to distort or overly direct the purely optical understanding of the picture. Though this may be an admirable cognitive goal, it is predicated upon a reductive Cartesian doubt. It is also
unattainable. Even a photograph surrounded by nothing is contextualized in contemporary postmodern society by the fact that it lacks context. The text surrounding this photograph does not therefore represent an extraordinary or unusual form of context which would negate its status as an innocent photograph.

**Phenomenological vision and the sink**

All photographs are situated in some sort of context. How that context is understood, the effect it has on the photograph, and the subjective act of viewing are factors that distinguish each of the discourse strands from the others. A Cartesian understanding ignores the context as much as possible. Unless there are obvious visual clues within the photograph that indicate the picture is untrustworthy, the Cartesian viewer will see the photograph as an accurate transcription of reality—as context independent. In a postmodern framework the context is often read as more important than the photograph itself. The agency of vision resides outside of the subject and always de-centers or dis-empowers the subjective viewer. Vision causes a de-stabilized relationship between the subject and the external world which the photograph is a part of.

In a phenomenological framework, consciousness of a singular useful object such as a photograph is almost unthinkable. All things present to consciousness as part of a network of other useful things. The viewer himself—or herself—is intertwined within this relationship. The viewer in the Cartesian framework holds all the power and cognitively constructs reality, appropriating visions of the object on view to convert them into rational representations held only in the mind. In the postmodern view, the gaze
operates both directions, but it never produces the trustworthy representations of Cartesianism, and nearly always subjugates the viewer in some manner. In a phenomenological perspective, the visual field functions with greater parity, and the constituent components function as co-creative.  

Viewed through a phenomenological lens, should-be-washing-up (2008) is a ratification of the objects pictured. It verifies “that has been” (Barthes, 1980, p. 85). What was before the lens is verified to have existed through the action of the photographic medium. This relationship between object and photograph is the essence of photography for Barthes (1981). Photography verifies the momentary existence of what it shows. “The photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been…. for every photograph existing in the world, the path of certainty; the Photograph’s essence is to ratify what it represents” (Barthes, 1981, p. 85). There is, however, on the back side of this equation—in the case of the sink photograph, and many other personal photographs like it—the ratification of a second being, the photographer. She is known to exist because of this image. Granted, the photograph does not offer much information about the photographer, but her invisible presence as progenitor of the photograph is undeniable. Someone made this picture, and it was made for a purpose. The existence of that purpose and presence serves as a second ratification of being. The photograph tells us she was here, she had this vision, and she made a conscious decision to record that vision and share it. It is an affirmation of a human being in the act of being

35 Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are not blind to the power of the gaze to control and distort reality. See for example Heidegger’s (1953/1977a) The Question Concerning Technology, and Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/2007) The War has Taken Place.
through vision. The viewing of the image also ratifies the existence of the viewer—not just the photographer or the objects pictured.

Read in phenomenological terms this photograph is—as Heidegger’s hammer is—a useful thing. In what ways is it useful? It shows what the sink looks like. It serves as a form of personal communication between the photographer and the viewer. It serves as a record of what the sink looked like on that particular day, and so-forth. A phenomenological analysis of the photograph is less concerned with it as a single useful object. “Strictly speaking, there ‘is’ no such thing as a useful thing. There always belongs to the being of a useful thing a totality of useful things in which this useful thing can be what it is” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 64). Phenomenology is less concerned with the use of a specific photograph—as a means to an end—than it is concerned with the ways in which it connects the viewer to the world in which it is situated.

The photograph should-be-washing-dishes (2008), was no doubt taken to serve a purpose. It was taken in order to accomplish some end, and “the structure of ‘in order to’ contains a reference of something to something” (Heidegger, 1926/1996, p. 64). The answer that phenomenology seeks is not the purpose of what the photograph is—not what work the photograph performs—but instead how the viewer’s consciousness is co-constructed through the structure of in order to. The question is: to what degree and in what sense does the viewer experience the work that the photograph does?

Certainly there are visual stimuli that the photograph should-be-washing-dishes (2008) precipitates. The sink is pink, the countertop blue, the metal knife blade shiny, and the plates are full of water. These facts are fairly self-evident. That these facts are
conveyed visually is undeniable. However it would not be too great a stretch to say that
the metal scrubber in the bottom of the sink looks springy or abrasive, or that the glasses
on the countertop are heavy. The eye gathers the light from the photograph but
consciousness of it is a synesthetic experience. The heavy glasses are registered through
more than one sense—through more than just vision.

A similar phenomenological experience was described in relation to Jobard’s
photograph. Through the phenomenological lens of Webb’s image, the heat of the sun,
and the roughness of the concrete under the knees of the photographer became apparent.
The most palpable instance of this in Webb and Jobard’s photographs is the gust of wind
caused by the rotor wash that pelts the soldiers and the photographers with dust and grit.
The question phenomenology would ask is, where and in what form is the blowing dust
shown in the photograph realized by the subjective viewer? Where is the experience of it
made? Is it only a visual experience rationally and cognitively categorized as blowing
dust? Is it based only on visual data contained within Webb’s photograph? Is the
experience of blowing dust merely a cultural construct—a reference to another familiar
image of blowing dust? Or does the connection occur in a more embodied way? Does the
experience of the photograph reside only in the mind or is it also in the muscle memory
of the eye socket snapping shut to keep blowing dust out of the eye? Or does it reside in
the back and the shoulders that would turn the eyes away from the blowing debris?

36 See Mitchell, W.J.T (2005) There Are No Visual Media for an analysis of this sort applied to a range of
visual art forms and visual culture.
One may ask where the connection ends between the viewing subject and the work to which the photograph is directed? Returning to Catalano’s photograph of the sink, do we feel the weight of the glasses in our muscles, or even smell the tomato sauce in the air as we look at the photograph? What about the viewer with no personal experience with this kind of food? Does the connection end there and the viewer remains incapable of experiencing that trace of the phenomenological experience? Or does the photograph present to consciousness—as most experiences do—whole and complete despite the experiential blind spot? The blind spot, after all, does not manifest as a hole in the viewer’s visual field. Instead it is a space filled in by a non-optical construction of experience.

All of these experiences of the photograph lie beyond the bounds of what the photograph empirically shows, just as any trace of the real lies beyond the bounds of what Demand’s photographs show. Stripped of their original indexical connections by the process that Demand employs, his photographs logically—empirically and scientifically—hold no direct connection to the source event. And yet they still function in relation to—mediate and force the recollection of—the original source events. In the case of a photograph such as Catalano’s which resides much closer to the original source event, the question it provokes is: what else does it connect to, and how else are we aware of what the photograph shows?

The photograph, like all vision, presents only a paper-thin pellicle, a single aspect of the object pictured. What it conceals beneath the surface—and yet alludes to—is a richness and depth beyond the photograph’s surface. “What we call a visible is...
surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968/2007 p. 397-398). From a phenomenological perspective, a photograph such as this is not an aspect of the world torn off and held up for inspection. Neither is it a mere cultural construction—a reference only to other images. Photographs are useful things—substantial and existentially present beings that function as constitutive components of the viewer’s being in the world.

**More than One Look**

Complex and multi-faceted readings of photographs come to light when they are examined through the visualities described in the discourse of vision. The modernist strand characterizes the photograph as representation—the rational product of a visual act that is transparent and authoritative. A postmodern reading emphasizes the external power of the gaze to shape the photograph and the viewer. As a cultural construct, the picture reflects a reality constituted entirely in culture and in the gaze. A phenomenological perspective finds the photograph to be a constitutive part of consciousness. A useful thing inextricably intertwined with the other useful things that constitute the viewer’s field of concern. In the final chapters, this way of seeing photography will be turned toward questions of photography education and the possibility of ontologically engaging with the world through the techniques offered by digital photography. Before pursuing this line of thought we must examine the methodology employed in coming to see the discourse of vision as it relates to photography in these ways.
Chapter 7: Methodology

"Discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behaviour on a pre-existing human agent. Instead, human subjects are produced through discourse. Our sense of self is made through the operation of discourse. So too are objects, relations, places, scenes: discourse produces the world as it understands it.” (Rose, 2007, p. 143)

This research project began as an effort to situate digital technologies within the field of photography as I understood it. What it led to was a philosophical inquiry into the connections between photography and the discourse of vision—a shift in focus that holds implications for how photography and photography education are understood.

Vision is the act of gathering optical impressions delivered to the eye in the form of reflected light. Photography is the use of technologies to record, store and transmit similarly produced optical impressions. Photographic vision involves both and more. It refers to the acts of vision involved in the making of photographs and to the act of looking at pictures informed with knowledge about photography.

The Discourse of Vision

Vision and photographic vision are not as simple as such basic definitions indicate. Vision is a complex process influenced and shaped by discourse. The term discourse used in this context has a very specific meaning:
Discourse… refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. (Rose, 2007, p. 142)

The discourse of vision is the collection of texts, social practices, and technologies that structure the way vision is conceptualized.

Visuality is related to the discourse of vision. Visuality refers to the practice of vision informed by discourse (Foster, 1988; Jay, 1988, 1993, 1995; Bryson, 1988; Krauss, 1988; Mitchell, 1994). It involves vision, a viewing subject, discourse, and the manner in which all three are co-constructed. “A specific visuality will make certain things visible in particular ways, and other things unseeable, for example, and subjects will be produced and act within that field of vision” (Rose, 2007, p. 143).

Because nearly every act of making and viewing a photograph involves vision, understanding photography requires an understanding of the discourse of vision. Developing an understanding of how the discourse of vision influences the way photography is understood is the purpose of this research. The methodology employed in this investigation is discourse analysis.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a methodological set of steps employed to critically analyze the ways in which individual visual, textual, and cultural elements interact with a specific

37 The term ‘scopic regime,’ the idea that certain discursively constructed ways of seeing attain cultural dominance and effectively eclipse other forms of seeing is also related to these two.
field of human activity. These steps include describing the historical background of the discourse, examining the individual discourse strands, and analyzing the power relationships generated between the strands and within the overall discourse.

Because photography is itself a complex social form, it would be more correct to always use the term the *discourse of photography* in this context rather than *photography*. The practice of making pictures with a camera is after all structured and informed by a vast network of texts. Photography is “encoded in academic and ‘popular’ texts, in books, newspapers, magazines, in institutional and commercial displays, in the design of photographic equipment, in schooling, in everyday social rituals, and through the workings of these contexts within photographs themselves” (Sekula, 1981, p. 15). *Photography*—both in general use and in the context of this research project—is the preferred term though, and will stand-in for *discourse of photography*. The phrase *discourse of photography* will be reserved for directing attention specifically toward surrounding discursive factors.

**Methods of Analysis**

Three interrelated analytical techniques are employed in this examination of the discourse of vision as it relates to photography. The first is a genealogy. Understanding the contemporary discourse requires an appreciation of the texts that background current thinking (Powers, 2001; Rose, 2007; Wodak & Meyer 2009). The second component is a detailed analysis of the individual discourse strands that constitute the discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This involved a careful reading of a select group of texts describing
vision, visuality, and photography to ascertain and describe the key theoretical concepts. The third component of the discourse analysis is an examination of interactions between the major discourse strands both within the discourse of vision and as applicable to understanding photography.

The research questions that this methodology addresses include: What relationships between seeing and understanding are described in the discourse of vision, and how are they evidenced in the discourse of photography? What are the relationships between these different strands in the discourse? In other words: what does postmodernism have to say about the modern approach toward vision, and how does phenomenology interact with the other two? How does each discourse strand characterize vision, and what are the implications for the viewing subject?

**Three Discourse Strands**

There are three major discourse strands that constitute the discourse of vision as it relates to photography: modernist vision, postmodern vision, and phenomenological vision. Each presents a different understanding of the implications of sight and each holds distinct implications for the subjective viewer. An emphasis only on the optical and technological aspects of making photographs produces an incomplete picture of photography, one that is blind to the complexity of vision. Similarly, an understanding focused on one discourse strand produces a biased understanding.
**The modernist strand**

The modernist discourse of photography draws on the enlightenment model of vision in order to stake its claims to truth. *Ocularcentrism, Cartesianism, Cartesian Perspectivalism*, the camera-obscura model of thought and *Cartesian Visual Epistemology* are all terms related to this model of sight. As a world view this way of seeing has dominated Western thinking for millennia (Jay, 1993, 1999; Levin, 1993, 1999). It is only in the twentieth century with the introduction of phenomenology that this way of seeing began to be overturned (Jay, 1993). As the dominant discourse, Cartesianism serves as the starting point, the frame within or against which the other discourses are situated.

Proponents of modernist photography employ language rooted in the Cartesian discourse on vision. Arago’s (1839) association of photography with geometry and Sander’s (1931/1978) description of it as a universal language are both reflections of Descartes’ dream of *Mathesis Universalis*. Camera vision, in the modernist discourse offers a form of seeing more accurate, true and universal than actual human vision.

Texts and practices that define photography as a mechanically objective recording process—a value-neutral extension of the photographer’s eye—all rely more or less directly on the logic of Cartesianism for their rationale. Though the actual number of pages dedicated to modernism here is relatively slight, the presence of Cartesianism in the discourse of photography is expansive.

The key concepts associated with the modernist discourse strand are as follows:

- **Ocularcentrism** is a term that indicates the centrality of a modernist approach toward vision in the structuring of Western thought.
Ocularcentrism implies a distanced and detached relationship between the rational subject and the object on view. Ocularcentric thought aspires toward the clarity of vision positioning it as the most valuable and accurate of the senses. Other embodied and emotional forms of knowing are devalued in an ocularcentric approach.

- **The Cartesian Subject** is autonomous, and separate from the world. It is described through Descartes’ methodology of doubt as the Cogito. The Cartesian subject is conceptualized as “a mind in a box” (Sokolowsky, 2000, p. 9), as pure thought.

- **Cartesian perspectivilism** indicates a specific subjective relationship to the external world. In this model of vision, as with Alberti’s construction, the subject’s eye resides at the focal point of the cone of vision. What is implied in this model is the centrality of the viewer, and the uncomplicated way in which the eye takes in the view through rational observation.

- **The Camera obscura model of vision** is a modernist model of sight that positions the viewing subject inside the darkened chamber of the mind looking out upon the world. This model emphasizes the separation of the subject and the object, excludes embodied engagement from the way vision makes meaning, and emphasizes a Cartesian rationalization of the world on view by conceptualizing it as mapped onto a flat surface.
• Modernist representation is predicated upon transparency. It is the idea that an image, a text or a mathematical description is capable of clearly and accurately communicating information about a fixed and knowable external reality. Descartes’ *Mathesis Universalis* and the notions that photography functions as visual truth and as universal language are related to this concept.

*The postmodern strand.*

It is difficult to assess at this point in the cultural pendulum swing whether the Cartesian discourse is truly hegemonic anymore, or whether as Jameson (1991) indicates, postmodernism has taken-over as the cultural dominant. Either way, postmodernism is clearly a significant force in the way vision and photography are currently conceptualized.

Sartre’s discussion of the gaze begins with a single viewer looking out into a park, but as his analysis progresses, the power of the gaze from outside of the viewer is found to radically de-center the consciousness of the viewing subject. The shift in emphasis from a centered, monadic subject to a subject defined by external visual forces is one of the hallmarks of postmodern vision. Lacan’s theories share common ground with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Lacan’s ideas were very influential on postmodern film and photography theory. Laura Mulvey’s (1975) influential essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, draws on Lacan’s (1981) *Mirror Stage Theory* and informs readings of postmodern artists who used photography (Ekland, 2009). Lacan’s concepts have also
been employed by Iversen (1994, 2007) and Marsh (2003) to understand photography in psychoanalytic terms. Lacan’s ideas are woven throughout the visual discourse and exert direct influence on the discourse of photography.

The cultural panopticism and disciplinary power of vision described by Foucault (1977/1991) is another component of the postmodern anti-ocularcentric movement. The visual technologies of science are emphasized in modernist models of vision, but Foucault finds the lesser technologies of surveillance equally influential on the structure of society. Foucault is deeply critical of the modern institutionalized gaze and the way it shapes and controls the individual. The influence of his theories toward vision and discourse—which also serve to structure the analytical framework of this dissertation—is evident in numerous critical texts related to photography. Descriptions of photography as violence (Elkins, 1997; Sontag, 1977) point directly back to Foucault, as does Sekula’s (1986) critical analysis of photography as an instrument of modern policing. Sekula also criticizes the political duplicity of exhibitions like *The Family of Man*, utilizing a Foucaultian approach. Crimp (1980) and Solomon-Godeau (1991) both recognize photography as one of the modernist institutions—wedded to others—that needs to be resisted and overturned as part of the postmodern critique.

Debord’s critique of the society of the spectacle is also very influential upon the postmodern take on the photograph. Though Debord might be considered a modernist because of his belief in a tangible fixed reality external to the spectacle, his critique is distinctly anti-ocularcentric. It places the power of vision not in the central tower of Foucault’s Panopticon, but instead in the distracted and mindless gaze of society.
obsessed with images of consumption. His scathing critique is similar in scope and implication to both Foucault and Heidegger’s world views, and is deeply influential in shaping theories that are critical of photography.

The complete detachment of the image from any external reality as described by Baudrillard represents the far end of the continuum discussed in this dissertation. Whereas the modernist view of vision and photography stresses the direct connection between the object on view and the photograph, in Baudrillard’s estimation, the postmodern image refers only to itself or other equally free-floating signifiers.

The key concepts associated with the postmodern discourse strand are as follows:

- **The gaze** is a term used to describe vision at work in a postmodern manner. Power is an integral part of the gaze. In Sartre’s description, the gaze coming from the Other is capable of de-centering the subject’s self identity. In Lacan’s *Mirror Stage Theory*, the gaze directed from the immature subject toward a mirror or another person produces a similar effect. The power of the gaze is also capable of controlling subjects, and inflicting harm in a postmodern analysis.

- **The de-centered subject** is an integral part of postmodern vision. A number of approaches are employed in postmodern thought to describe the subject whose consciousness resides externally. Lacan’s mirror stage concept, Sartre’s analysis of the Other’s gaze, and the external power of vision described by Foucault all produce a subject where consciousness of self is situated externally.
• **Disciplinary power** is described by Foucault as a form of visuality in which the power of the gaze located external to the viewing subject manifests as social control enacted on and by the subject. The concept of *normal* is made visible, and the subject is coerced into ascribing to normalcy through hierarchies of observation. The exam in the public school setting is a trenchant example of this. The student’s behavior and performance are graded on a visible scale from excellent to normal to failing, and behavior is thereby regulated.

• **Panopticism** is a concept related to disciplinary power also described by Foucault. Related to disciplinary power, it also involves the threat of observation which coerces the individual subject into regulating his or her behavior. The effects of observation are always at work even when observation itself is not. Foucault asserts that the architectural model of the Panopticon describes the modernist function of hierarchical observation throughout contemporary society.

• **Simulation and simulacrum** are terms which represent the loss of a fixed and stable reality in postmodern models of vision. Whereas modernist models of vision depict a concrete reality which may be accurately represented through visual means, in the postmodern world, images refer only to other images. Reality is entirely constructed and contained within the simulacrum.
**The phenomenological strand.**

Phenomenology represents a unique and robust conceptual strand within the discourse of vision, but it has been historically marginalized in the discourse of photography, and this has produced an incomplete picture of photographic vision. Marxists, feminist, semiotic and psychoanalytical... theorizations of photography in the 1970’s constituted themselves in rejection of the connoisseurial and politically suspect discourses of perception and sentiment quite rightly taken to inform many discussions of visual art and photography at the time. It was on this basis that phenomenology was ruled out for most interesting theorization of photography in the later twentieth century. (Fisher, 2008, p. 20)

Because of this, but also perhaps because of the close proximity of Husserl’s early phenomenology with Cartesianism, connections between phenomenology and photography remain largely unexplored. One of the specific goals of this discourse analysis is to contribute to the reclamation of phenomenology for photography with a focus on the potential phenomenology offers.

Phenomenology explains vision differently from Cartesianism and Postmodernism. The difference is significant for this analysis in two ways. First, it provides analytical contrast, allowing the other two theoretical positions to be more clearly understood. It also offers a philosophically-enlightening approach toward vision not confined by the solipsism of Cartesianism, nor predicated upon the anti-ocularcentrism of the postmodern discourse.
Husserl, the founder of phenomenology subtly undermines the separation of subject and object in Cartesianism (Jay 1993), and launches the critique of modernist vision through phenomenology. Husserl’s key concepts provide background for Heidegger’s philosophy, and Merleau-Ponty’s approach toward vision. An understanding of the discourse of phenomenology and photography requires at least a familiarity with Husserl’s concepts, and they are a significant part of the genealogy of the discourse of vision.

Husserl’s *epoché*—or transcendental reduction—is noteworthy. It offers a contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s discussions of essence, and proves useful for revealing some of the more subtle interactions among viewer, picture, and discourse in Demand’s photographs *Poll* (2001) and *Room* (1994).

The links between vision, consciousness, technology and art described by Heidegger (1953/1977a), though far from dominant, appear repeatedly in the discourse of photography. See for example Fried (2008) Sontag (1977), Flusser (1983), and Smucker (2008). Heidegger’s writings are deeply critical of modernist vision. They also detail a form of subjectivity distinctly different from Descartes. Heidegger’s theories offer unique access to inner-workings of Demand’s photography, and his approach is also applicable toward a broader understanding of photographic vision, and for describing student work, as will be discussed in the eighth chapter. The embodied connections between vision and being described by Merleau-Ponty build upon Heidegger’s groundbreaking work, but also relate to—influence and are influenced by—Sartre and Lacan’s discussion of the gaze.
From a phenomenological perspective, Sartre’s analysis of *The Look* partially re-iterates Merleau-Ponty’s connection between subject and world through vision. Sartre’s discussion also leads to a de-centered viewing subject, and therefore serves as an important conceptual bridge between phenomenology and postmodernism.

The key concepts in the phenomenological strand are as follows:

- **Transcendental phenomenology** is associated with Husserl and involves a focus on locating essences of phenomena. The transcendental component of it comes from efforts to withdraw from the complex situated nature of the phenomenon on view to more fully ascertain the essence of it. The terms *noema, noesis*, intentionality, and *epoché* are all related to this effort to bracket-out the object from the surrounding world in order to examine it more clearly.

- **Intentionality** One of the groundbreaking concepts found in Husserl’s research into consciousness is the notion of intentionality. Intentionality hypothesizes multiple possible consciousnesses of a single phenomenon. The example Husserl (1913/1970) uses to explain his concept is the German Emperor. As a subjective viewer looking at or thinking of the emperor, one may conceptualize him in several ways: as man, as emperor, as his mother’s son, and so forth. The essence of this concept is that consciousness of the object is not fixed. There is no one single correct view of the German Emperor and depending on the intentional standpoint the viewer takes, a phenomenon may be intended in many different ways.
• **Noema and noesis:** Through the definition of *noema* and *noesis* Husserl subtly undermined the absolute division between subject and object in Cartesianism. *Noema* is the object *which* is intended by the viewer, and *noesis* refers to the object as it is intended (Moran, 2000).

• **The transcendental reduction or epoché** refers to the philosophical step back—a bracketing, detachment, or unplugging—from the natural engagements with the world in order to ascertain the essence of a phenomenon.

• **Existential phenomenology** focuses on the experience of consciousness in the world and seeks to eliminate the division between viewing subject and external world-on-view. The complete separation of subject-and object in Cartesianism is critically examined, and even the more subtle withdrawal from lived experience required in transcendental phenomenology is eliminated. Existential phenomenology does not—as postmodernism does—locate the concept of self outside of the viewing subject, but posits a co-extensive relationship between phenomena and the subject’s consciousness of them.

• **Da-sein** is the term Heidegger employs to describe a human being in the act of being. *Da-sein* is human consciousness which is simultaneously aware of self, the external world and connections between them. Heidegger defines *Da-sein* in terms of interactions with the world in an engaged and active, a caring manner.
• **Ready to hand** (*Zuhanden*) or handy, is the usual—pre-theoretical way—which *Da-sein* encounters phenomena in the world. Objects that are handy are practically invisible as the subject is aware of their application to the world—to the work and concerns at hand, rather than the object itself. Heidegger’s example of hammering illustrates a ready to hand relationship.

• **Present at hand** (*Vorhanden*) is an alternate form of consciousness toward a phenomenon. It resembles a Cartesian—detached and cognitive rather than phenomenological—consciousness of an object. An object viewed in this manner presents to consciousness as an object disengaged from the surrounding world.

• **Enframing**, *Gestell* as theorized by Heidegger is a view of the world in which everything presents to consciousness as a raw material intended for collection, storage and future re-purposing. Enframing is a product of modernist vision, and an instrumental approach toward technology. When modern technology is seen as a simple means-to-an-end, the viewer remains blind to way in which it structures the world—including human beings—as resources, as standing reserve.

• **Chiasm or chiasmus** is Merleau-Ponty’s concept in existential phenomenology that extends Heidegger’s concept of *Da-sein* and posits a deeply engaged form of being through seeing. Vision is an inextricable part of being, rather than as a form of data that the subject acquires. The
viewer in this concept of vision is a part of the flesh of the world and consciousnesses through vision presents as a confluence of subject and world.

- *Alētheia* is a term associated with the contemporary concept of truth, but is more fully understood in a Heideggerian sense as unconcealedness. It indicates a being presenting to consciousness by revealing itself as itself. The essence of any phenomenon—the *alētheia* of any thing in the world—may only be partially represented through speech, through technē or any other form of representation.

**Photography and the three discourse strands.**

The third component of this analysis considers the interactions between the three discourse strands and the implications for understanding photography. Detailing the way vision is discursively constructed represents more than just a list of theoretical concepts or an analysis of historical texts. Different understandings of photographic vision have been employed to characterize photography in radically different ways: as a universal language accessible to all (Sander, 1931/1978) or as wonton act of aggression (Sontag, 1977). As Wodak & Meyer (2009) indicate, discourse analysis is useful for revealing these differences as “texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contenting and struggling for dominance” (p. 10). With such wide ranging ideological interpretations of photographic vision at stake, understanding the discursive positioning of photography is essential.
The written texts present only a part of the picture though. Photographs and the practices involved in making and looking at them are also a constituent part of how photography and discourse interact. In order to account for this, a number of photographs are examined in detail through the lens of each discourse strand. Different theories found in the discourse of vision produce substantially different understandings of both individual photographs, the acts of vision involved in making them, and photography itself. The theories more fully illuminate the photographs. In some cases, the photograph clarifies the theory. More often than not, the exchange flows both ways.

**Looking at photographs**

Looking at specific photographs through each of the lenses allows the abstruse theories of the discourse of vision to become clearer. The rich and conceptually layered work of Thomas Demand serves as an ideal starting point. Demand’s work is complex and highly accessible through the discourse of vision. In turn, his work has much to say, both about the discourse of vision, and about photography. The photograph *Operation Uphold Democracy* by Jobard serves as an ideal example of traditional photographic representation, and examining it through each of the different strands with the aid of Webb’s photograph, further clarifies the function of these discourse lenses. The analysis of Catalano’s photograph is a second example of using the discourse strands as critical lenses. It is performed without the aid of a second photographic vantage point. It is directed toward a photograph made without the layered intentionality of a Demand,
Jobard or Webb photograph, and indicates the potential usefulness of applying the discourse of vision to a broad range of contemporary photographic practices.

**Discourse strands as lenses**

Looking at photographs through the different discourse strands produces different understandings of the photographs in question. The understandings of Thomas Demand’s work described by Fried (2008) using a modernist approach are considerably different than those seen through the phenomenological strand. For example, in Fried’s (2008) analysis, Demand’s photographs are found to push the viewer away, to prohibit any engagement with the scene other than a detached aesthetic interest. Reading Demand’s work through a phenomenological lens produces a different understanding, one in which the obstructive nature of Demand’s process makes the viewer’s subjective engagement an integral part of how the photographs make meaning. A critique of the Cartesian side of photographic vision also becomes visible in Demand’s work through a phenomenological lens.

**Techniques of applying the critical lenses**

Viewing a photograph through different discursive lenses requires a shift in standpoint for each lens. It involves a form of meta-observation: looking both at the photograph and at the discursive conventions being employed to understand the picture. In practice, this approach means keeping both lens and image in view: a copy of the photograph on the table at one hand, Heidegger’s text—for example—open at the other. The process began this way: first study the photograph, then read a line of text. Look
back at the photograph and think about if and how the philosophical statement applies to the picture. Look back at the text read more, and so forth.

In later stages, as the three discourse strands became more familiar, large theoretical concepts were taken in blocks and compared to the photographs. In this way, the scope of the analysis could be expanded. It involved examining my notes—either mental notes or ones made on paper—to compare the photograph to an overarching concept in the discourse. What does phenomenological subjectivity say about the photograph of the Serpentine Gallery in Demand’s exhibition catalog, for example? Reverse comparisons also produced rich analysis: What does the Serpentine Gallery photograph say about subjectivity? “The objective is to move back and forth between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, documenting each in turn and making informative references to the other in the process” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 235).

The methodology involved looking for parallels between the acts of vision involved in making photographs and the ideas found in the discourse of vision. The fact that Demand sets up the camera first and constructs his sculptures while looking through the lens resonated with a number of descriptions of Cartesian vision. This connection indicated the need for critical comparison between Cartesian perspectivalism, the camera obscura as a model for vision, and Demand’s working process. This in turn produced the realization that Demand’s strict adherence to the Cartesian model is an important part of how his pictures make meaning. Similarly, looking at the relationship between Webb and Jobard’s photographs with Sartre’s attitude toward vision in mind produces a unique understanding of the dynamic on view. Looking at the pair of photographs, while closely
re-examining Sartre’s text, served to further cement the relationship. Looking at Catalano’s photograph of the sink involved a similar process: a comparison between the photograph on view and the lens through with it was being viewed.

To summarize, looking at photographs through each of the discourse lenses involves the close examination of both the discursive construction of vision and the photograph in close analytic proximity. Whereas a modernist view produces one understanding of the work, an analysis through a postmodern or phenomenological lens appears different and produces different understandings. What the photographs are and how they work are seen to be different through each lens. The different readings these photographs might offer are not restricted to theories contained only in the discourse of vision either. Analyzing them using linguistic analysis, such as that described by Barthes (1977) could produce another unique interpretation of the work. An analysis employing a feminist lens could produce another unique reading, and so forth. Each major theoretical lens offers a unique perspective, and each may offer a distinct interpretation.

**Complicating the lens metaphor**

The lens metaphor is useful—but only to a point. What the metaphor fails to account for is the intertextuality of discourses and the importance of subjectivity in the equation. Describing the discourses of modernism, postmodernism and phenomenology as lenses implies that they are discrete objects. This is an oversimplification. One cannot reach into the theoretical camera bag to pull out first one encapsulated and neatly packaged discourse then another—each offering a unique and different perspective.
Instead the three strands in the discourse of vision always operate in relation to each other. The postmodern discourse is inextricably intertwined with the modern. Phenomenology also must be understood as a discourse in tension with the other two. Neither are photographs simple inert objects available for inspection through the discursive lenses. They must be understood in relation to other photographs, other objects, and in relation to the discourses of photography and vision in which they reside (Rose, 2007).

The final failure of the lens metaphor is that it presupposes Cartesian vision. The viewer in the lens metaphor picks up the theoretical lens to view through but remains detached from both the lens and the object on view. The process is in effect much more complex—it involves a co-extensive construction of both the viewer and the object on view. As Foster (1988) indicates, one of the central concerns of theories about visuality is the role that vision plays “in the production of subjectivity” (p. ix). Just as understandings of the object on view are entangled with discourse, so too is the consciousness of the subjective viewer (Foucault, 1972; Foster, 1988; Powers, 2001; Wodak & Meyer 2009; Fairclough, 2003; and Rose, 2007). Vision itself is discursively constructed, and in part constructs the viewing subject. The researcher’s view—as with any subjective view—is formed within and delimited by the discourse within which it is formed (Foucault, 1972; Rose, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

This is one of the inherent limitations and contradictions within the methodology of discourse analysis. It is, for example quite impossible having read deeply into the postmodern and phenomenological discourse on vision, to attempt to return to a purely
modernist way of looking at photographs. The discourse of modernism from this researcher’s vantage point has been intertextually altered by the post-modern.

The discourse of photography, composed of images, technologies, texts, and social practices is rich and complicated. Discourse analysis is a powerful tool for examining the interconnections between these individual discursive constructions. As with all methodologies, discourse analysis has limits.

**The Limitations of Discourse Analysis**

It can be said without any doubt that there are photographs in the world, and that photographs carry meaning. It can also be said without a doubt that there are a large number of texts written about photography, texts which seek to explain how photographs are made, what they are about, how they make meaning, and how they shape the world. Establishing causal links between what is written and what is seen is not so certain. Cause and effect is neither established nor intended in discourse analysis, and this is one of the limitations of this methodology (Fairclough, 2003).

Another limitation of discourse analysis is the emphasis on discourse over actual human subjects. Conclusions concerning the subjective viewer remain abstract. The subject in this methodology is defined in terms of discursive constructions, and though this includes profoundly important conceptualization of the viewing self, it has limitations. As Fairclough (2003) writes, “postmodern theory has closely associated identity with discourse, and identity (or ‘the subject’) is often said to be an effect of discourse, constructed in discourse” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 160). Understanding the
subjective viewer as textually constructed tends to deny the agency of the individual—the power that he or she brings to the equation. This represents a second limitation to the methodology of discourse analysis employed in this research project.

Measures taken to ameliorate this limitation include the inclusion of Fried’s (2008) genuinely modernist take on Demand’s photography to ensure an accurate representation of this perspective. The inclusion within the research of historical accounts of photography—such as Sander’s (1931/1978) and Szarkowski (1966, 1978)—also assists in countering this effect to an extent. In addition, descriptions of the reaction to Demand’s photographs in the Serpentine Gallery catalogue are clearly established as the author’s personal response, and not ascribed to an abstract or generalized subjective viewer. Interviews were also examined to include the artist’s first-person perspective. Finally in the discussion of student work, questionnaires were used to link the student’s personal experience with the process of producing photographs, and the final dissertation text was provided to the students for critical examination prior to publication to ensure a subjectively accurate account of their photographs. These steps, though nominal, are essential to maintaining balance in discourse analysis. As noted by Schutz, “the safeguarding of the subjective point of view is the only but sufficient guarantee that the world of social reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer” (Schutz, 1964 as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263).

Contradictions and limitations are a part of all methodologies, and the benefits of discourse analysis far outweigh the problems. Discourse analysis “pays careful attention to images themselves, and to the web of intertextuality in which an individual image is
embedded” (Rose, 2007, p. 169). Because of this close attention, it allows for meaningful, situated, though often contradictory understandings of photography.

**Summary**

Analyzing the texts that surround photography and vision as discourse allows them to be view as interrelated. Each contingent upon the other and each influential upon the way photography is understood. The modernist discourse once conceived as entirely hegemonic has given way considerably to postmodern concepts of vision. The phenomenological model of vision, which initiated the closure of the Cartesian subject-object divide remains in play as a constituent part of the discourse of vision, but has historically been marginalized as a viable approach toward understanding photography. The subjectively detached modernist view of photographs places emphasis on what they show and the fidelity of that representation. Related to this instrumental approach is an emphasis on the techniques and technologies used to produce photographs—the starting point of this research project. The postmodern strand positions vision very differently. The power of vision is found to reside externally and the subject is defined as de-centered and unstable. The postmodern emphasis shifts from the centrality of the observer’s eye to the power of the external gaze to regulate and control the subject. Postmodern understandings of photography similarly emphasize its function as cultural mechanism. Viewed through a postmodern lens, photography’s privileged status as truth and the reality to which it once referred both stand revealed only as cultural constructs.
The phenomenological strand of the discourse of vision offers a third approach. Rather than emphasizing the rationality of vision, or its function as a cultural construct, existential phenomenology emphasizes the confluence of vision and subjectivity. Understood from a phenomenological standpoint, photography—like Heidegger’s hammer—can function as ready to hand—almost invisibly connecting to the surrounding world and only becoming obvious when it offers resistance. Alternately, when emphasized— as with Webb’s view of Jobard’s photograph—phenomenology can reveal much about the world in which the photograph resides and the original experience from which it is derived. As a means of phenomenological inquiry in its own right—as in the case of Demand’s photography—it can offer deep insight into the ways in which images are seamlessly integrated into contemporary subjective ways of being in the world.

**Looking Forward**

The analysis of the discourse of photography began in this dissertation with a modernist reading of Demand’s photography. It was found to be considerably different from the analysis generated through a phenomenological approach. Both interpretations are rich and meaningful, and offer significant implications for how the viewing subject is conceptualized in relation to the photographs. Additional readings are possible using alternate theoretical standpoints. Each of these standpoints could presumably produce a different reading of photography, and different implications for subjectivity. This suggests a number of things. First, that there are multiple readings possible for any photograph. Secondly, it suggests that there are multiple possible subjectivities produced
by and within the discourse of photography. Finally what is suggested—unless one considers one reading to be absolutely correct and the others patently false—is that photographs are most fully understood when viewed through multiple discursive frameworks. Accepting photographs as generally accurate modernist representations, reading them as postmodern documents and simultaneously acknowledging them as useful for revealing deep phenomenological connections to the surrounding world allows for rich and nuanced understandings of photography.

It is with this sense of balance that the next chapter focuses most strongly on the possibilities offered by phenomenology. This is not because this single discourse strand is the best choice for conceptualizing photography, but because phenomenology has historically been marginalized in the discourse of photography. This chapter will continue the task begun by Fisher (2008), Smucker (2008), Crowther (2009) and Barthes (1981) and seek to explore the potential that phenomenology offers: for conceptualizing photography curriculum, for examining work created by students, and for describing a deeply phenomenological connection between subject and world through digital photography.
Chapter 8: Phenomenology and Creative Photographic Vision

“When the objects of our gaze look back at us, it is possible to see how our way of looking at them has affected them, making them how we see them, making them what they eventually become” (Levin, 1999, p. 401).

Making a photograph is a process in which acts of vision are recorded in tangible form. The acts of vision involved are comprehensible through theories contained in the discourse of vision. Discourse is not only useful for describing vision though; it is a productive cultural force. Both subjects and the objects of vision are produced within it (Powers, 2001; Rose, 2007; Wodak & Meyer 2009). Changing the discourse holds the promise and possibility of changing the way things appear, and the way the subjective viewer sees.

Phenomenology offers a way of looking at photographs, a theoretical vantage point different from the modern and postmodern ways of seeing that have dominated the discourse of photography for decades. Looking at photography from a phenomenological perspective allows the assumptions informing modernism to become visible. It offers an alternate way to approach the context that surrounds photographs and it also offers an alternative to the flawed subject-object relationships tacitly held by both the modern and postmodern forms of visuality.
One of the contradictions revealed through this research, is that in most postmodern conceptualizations of vision, a key component of modernist thought persists: the separation of subject and object. Lacan’s anamorphic stain resides between the subject and the world; in Sartre’s the Look, the I remains separate from the man in the park, and the voyeur remains always out in the hall peering through the keyhole, always wary of the other’s gaze and never permitted to enter the chamber on the other side of the door. Though Foucault pictures a subject deeply immersed in the withering gaze of power— the guard, the teacher—the source of visual power remains ever externally located. When Sontag (1977) writes, “most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter” (p. 10), she not only critiques this way of seeing but also reinforces the Cartesian binary.

Phenomenology seeks to abolish this divide. The view that phenomenology offers is not limited to critique of the Cartesian way of seeing, nor is it only useful for examining existing photographs. It offers an under-explored way to understand and re-conceptualize photography as an ontologically productive visual act.

It is essential in this regard for understanding photography education. If the purpose is to create an understanding of photography, approaching the discourse of vision is necessary and appropriate. The discourse is a productive force, and as an integral part, phenomenology must not be overlooked. If the goal is to teach more than just the technology—more than how to use a camera, use the digital editing software or make prints—the discourse of vision must be taken into account. Teaching students how to see—a practice itself immersed in the discourse of vision—is tantamount to teaching
them how to be. Unless the students are to be conceptualized as disempowered products of the withering Foucaultian gaze, as mindless dupes caught up in Debord’s spectacle, as disempowered subjects of Sartre’s gaze, or isolated and rationally detached minds in Cartesian boxes, the vision that phenomenology offers must be part of the conversation. Looking at phenomenology as a productive form of vision is essential. Teaching students to see in a phenomenological framework is closely aligned with teaching them how to be ontologically engaged—through the act of vision

To further this end, the visuality found in the phenomenological discourse strand will be considered in relation to student photography and acts of vision involved in the creation—not just the interpretation—of digital photographs. Analysis of a student photograph made for a class project comes first. It includes a discussion of the way vision is phenomenologically framed in the project assignment that initiated the photograph. To further explore the possibilities offered when a phenomenological view is employed in the act of making photographs, the processes and visual approaches employed by two image-makers will be examined. One, an accomplished photographic artist: Kelli Connell, the other a student.

**Lacuna**

*Figure 8.1* is a photograph made to fulfill an assignment in a course dedicated toward *Perception and Imaging*. The course was structured upon Richard Zakia’s (1997) book by the same name. The course explored a number of traditional concepts including...
figure and ground, but also touched upon more theoretical concepts including Gestalt psychology, subliminal experience and the production and analysis of visual rhetoric.

The intent of the assignment the picture was produced for, was to explore the idea of lacuna using photography. Two events informed the choice to assign the project. The first was the 2004 film *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* which moved the term lacuna to the fore-front of the class discussion. The origins of the idea had been introduced into my thoughts a few quarters earlier though. Two of my more advanced students had been photographing in and around abandoned houses in rural southern Ohio. In classroom critiques of the images from these outings, I was struck by the way the conversation invariably turned to the people who had once occupied the empty and dilapidated homes. People who were unknown to the students and entirely absent in body from the photographs, continually re-surfaced as the topic of discussion surrounding the pictures. These two events started the thought process, and the resulting class project was titled *Lacuna*. Students were invited to ‘photograph something that wasn’t there.’

I expected students to produce mostly evidentiary photographs. Pictures that indicated the effect of a cause that was no longer visible. I expected to see pictures of marks on the world left by a person no-longer in the field of view, or the invisible presence of force such as the wind moving trees or lifting clothes on a clothesline. As expected, many of the photographs that students produced took a cause-and-effect approach in how they presented the concept. When viewed in a Cartesian light, *Figure 8.1* is fairly typical of the project results, it shows one thing—a pair of boots, but not the thing which is supposed to be missing in the photograph—the owner of the boots.
When examined from a different perspective though, it is not typical. It is “an example which as you can imagine has not been innocently or randomly chosen” (Jameson, 1991, p. 6). It is a best-case example—one that becomes exceptionally rich
when read phenomenologically and also offers insight into the visuality engaged by the project assignment and photography as well.

**A sailor’s boots.**

Though it was made a number of years ago, this photograph has continually stuck in my mind as a picture that is inordinately complex despite its apparent simplicity. The photograph depicts a pair of boots and bears remarkable similarity to a number of van Gogh’s paintings of peasant shoes. One of these paintings is described by Heidegger (1936/1977b) in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. The student would—I believe—be the first to acknowledge that the boots were chosen not for their art historical reference, nor at the conclusion of an extensive theoretical thought process, but instead because they were readily at hand and seemed to suit the project reasonably well. They were chosen as “something that I thought would work at the time” (personal communication, April 4, 2011). The student served in the U.S. Navy, both aboard ship, and on the ground in Iraq during the Second Gulf War, and the boots are his service boots.

**Phenomenological vision and Sailor’s Boots**

Taking a Heideggerian approach toward the boots involves a specific line of thinking. It is a contemplation of how the boots lend themselves to consciousness in order to gain a more essential recognition of the experience of viewing them. Heidegger approaches the peasant shoes in van Gogh’s painting—a depiction of similarly useful things—in this way. This allows one to locate the essence of the shoes, but more importantly to separate them out from—and examine them in context of—the work of art.
In this way, Heidegger’s analysis reveals the conceptual trajectory that the work of art follows. Following his logic should similarly reveal the phenomenological work that this photograph does—separate from yet related to the boots.

Read in phenomenological terms, the boots depicted belong to a class of things that are useful. Heidegger writes, “The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 162). In the case of this photograph, the phrase could be re-stated thus: the sailor wears his boots in the field and on deck. Only here are they what they are. The boots are equipment. They are handy for the purpose to which they were made: as protective footgear for the sailor. They are all the more genuinely so the less he thinks about them, or looks at them, or is even aware of them, as he performs his duty. It is only in this—practically invisible—use of them as equipment that one actually encounters the boots as equipment, as useful, as ready to hand.

There is nothing surrounding this pair of boots in the photograph that indicates this connection though. There is only a small white mark on one heel which could have been caused by anything. There are no clods of soil, no patches of desert sand stuck to them, no reference to the warship upon which they trod “which would at least hint at their use” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 163). A pair of government issued boots and nothing more. And yet—
The world of the boots.

From the carefully polished leather, to the sharply-completed lacing, military discipline is evident in these boots. Any trace of dirt or salt-stain—except for one nagging mark on the sole—has been carefully cleaned from the surface of the leather. In these boots resonates the order of military life. Reflected in them—carried in their physical existence is—is the embodiment of a wearer, a soldier or a sailor. There is contained in them reference to “the good, the bad, the fear, the sadness, and the joy of everyday life” (personal communication, April 4, 2011). These boots are not meaningless objects but useful things connected to purpose. They invite the question “I wonder what those boots, and the person wearing them have done and seen—been through” (Personal communication, April 4, 2011).

These boots belong to the world of discipline and action, of readiness and conflict, and it is within this world, and only within this world, that they fully come into being as equipment. But none of this is evident when the boots function as equipment—when they are used as they are meant to be—in the field.

Heidegger notes, “perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes. The peasant woman on the other hand, simply wears them” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 163). A similar observation applies to the photograph itself. Perhaps it is only in looking at how we are looking that we notice all these things about the photograph. This is of course, exactly the point. Heidegger writes, “Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes is in truth” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 164). By bringing into unconcealment the interconnected nature of the
shoes, not by showing them in action, but by simply showing them as they are, the painting and the photograph both speak to the essence, the truth and the connectedness of the equipment.

Conceptually stepping back and critically examining the act of looking at the photograph reveals a similar existential relationship. When the photograph is looked through as if it were not there, it functions as equipment. But this is not the whole picture, not the alētheia of the photograph. It is only a part of it. The essence of the photograph is the connections that it generates—connections that remain invisible when the photograph is viewed only in an instrumental manner.

**Two worlds.**

One area of discussion avoided thus far, in comparing Heidegger’s analysis of van Gogh’s peasant shoes with *Sailor’s Boots* (2007), is an acknowledgement of the background against which the boots and van Gogh’s shoes each appear. In this respect, the photograph of the boots follows the trajectory of Heidegger’s analysis up to a point, suddenly splitting at the site of the background to expose the intersections of two worlds, not just one.

Though it is uncertain which shoe painting Heidegger specifically writes about in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, as van Gogh painted more than one, Heidegger describes the background as undefined and lacking in specific detail. Many of van Gogh’s shoe paintings share this common feature. The boots in the student’s photograph are not in an equally abstract space. Instead, they reside in a clearly recognizable room. This is
significant. The boots are conspicuously—obstinately— not ‘in the field.’ They stand on clean white carpet in what appears to be a living room. Decorative wicker baskets hang on the wall in the background. Bright sunlight streams through the window hung with sheer white curtains. Out-of-focus trees dapple the sunlight in the yard just outside of the window. Despite the undeniable presence of the boots in the living room, they appear shockingly out of place. In this context, they are no longer ‘boots on the ground.’ They are dis-placed. It is the acute absence of the world to which these boots inhere—the world of the Navy seaman—that passes over the first reading of the photograph—and generates a second. The true lacuna of the work is not the absent owner of the boots; it is the deck of the warship or the sandy street which this piece of equipment is intended for. It is only there that the boots are equipment, only there that they may serve the purpose to which they are uniquely intended.

The location of the boots on the white carpet, removed from their proper place as equipment, represents a profound and expressive reversal of Heidegger’s theorem concerning the hammer. When the hammer obstinately refuses to function, the connections between world and subject are made suddenly and shockingly visible. In the example of this photograph, the boots are not broken, they are in fact very well cared for, neatly laced up, but the world in which they serve as equipment is conspicuously absent from this photograph—replaced with a space in which they do not inhere.

Read in terms of Heidegger’s phenomenology, this photograph simultaneously reveals the world of military discipline and sacrifice, and a fully functional fragment of that world brought home to stand in the living room. It speaks to the uneasy co-existence
of both worlds brought uncomfortably close in the context of a single photograph. The photograph of the boots reveals a productive generation of world-hood… it shows the relationship of something to something else, connecting the viewer to things visually beyond the photograph’s thick black border.

**Showing the sprocket holes**

But the border itself also plays an important role in the way this photographic object functions. Looking through the photographic frame to see the boots—without acknowledging the importance of the frame is an equipmental approach toward the picture, one that denies the presence of the photograph itself. In seeking to differentiate the difference between the way the work of art functions, and the way equipment functions, Heidegger writes, “In fabricating equipment—e.g., an ax—stone is used, and used up. It disappears into usefulness” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 171). Similarly when a photograph is employed only to offer a view of the object pictured the photograph effectively disappears in the process. Indeed, as Heidegger further notes concerning the ax example, “the material [stone for the ax or photographic surface] is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment” (Heidegger, 1936/1977b, p. 171). This photograph—in part because of the black border—does precisely the opposite. It resists perishing—resists vanishing—into being equipment.

The black border acts as self-assertion of the photograph as photograph. It emphasizes the fact that the photograph is *not* an un-mediated visual experience. It brings
into view in a very tangible fashion the apparatus—the phenomenology—of the black and white film photography involved in making the picture. The sprocket holes refer to the transport of the film through the camera, and the flick of the thumb on wind-lever that drives the mechanism. The code ‘KODAK 400TX’ refer to the specific type and character of the black and white film used to make the picture. The frame numbers make evident the process of selection—frame number four—from a role of twenty four or thirty six frames once physically attached to this one. The rough and ragged edges of the outside edge acknowledge the use of a cardboard negative carrier in the printing process, and the slight curve of the bottom edge of the picture indicates a loss of flatness—a bend—in the plastic surface of the film negative when the student placed the film in the enlarger and printed it in the darkroom. The student most likely did not conceptualize all of these implications at the time of creating the photograph, but the meaning inheres in the evidence contained in the border just the same.

From a phenomenological standpoint—within Heidegger’s discussion of equipment—the border serves to break the seamless connection between the boots and the viewer. It asserts the picture’s status as something special, as a frame within a frame, as an art photograph. The border indicates to the viewer that the photograph is not to be taken as a typical useful photograph—meant to be looked through and considered only as a stand-in for what it shows. Instead it presents itself to be examined carefully and searched for greater meaning. The black border invites engagement through the discourse of vision. Similar invitations surround the work of Demand—the pictures appear in exhibition catalogs and are found in galleries and museums. Demand’s prints are very
large, and clearly meant for wall display. The subject of Demand’s photography is unusual—cardboard sculptures modeled on other photographs. These components work to announce the status of the work as art photographs, not typical photographs, and in this way they call for a different type of looking. The border of this photograph indicates its status as something other than a mere instrumental photograph. It is a denial of transparency, but not an assertion of the opposite—opacity. The photograph still allows a view through the frame to the boots, but the border with sprocket holes acknowledges the phenomenological presence of the photograph as a materially created object—an act of vision given tangible form.

**Reflecting on the assignment**

Understanding how this photograph came about requires an examination of the visuality established by the assignment that instigated it. The idea of making a photograph that shows something not visibly present in the frame—a lacuna—is different from the usual approach. It sets up from the very beginning a photographic vision unlike the reifying and totalizing control of Cartesian visual epistemology. By addressing the visual act to that which is not visible, the approach admits uncertainty into the realm of the visual. It involves a re-positioning of the conceptual relationship between figure and ground. The figure and ground may not be seen as entirely separate. This form of seeing invites “a different engagement with the (back)ground, the context, the field: a different way of acknowledging the presence-absence of the ground, a different relationship therefore, to the delimiting horizon” (Levin, 1999, p. 402).
The photographer is forced into an unusual visual relationship with the objects pictured—at the site of production. A relationship that admits the possibility of irrationality and visual uncertainty into the equation—it involves bringing into unconcealment that which overflows the mere visible and in effect remains unknowable until the picture is made and the connections reveal themselves.

Likewise the viewer—if they examine the photograph with an eye toward seeing more than just what it shows—must approach the act of vision in a non-Cartesian manner. Reading this photograph in a phenomenological light reveals the essence of the assignment: to look differently, to take up a different visual perspective with the camera in hand. It is an invitation to look for the relationship of something to something that is not visible. “Since the total visible is always behind, or after or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968/2007, p. 398). The photograph presents the superficial aspect of the boots that we see, but to access the total visible, the viewer must engage with elements wholly beyond the surface. The existential visual condition described by Merleau-Ponty is evidenced in the photograph of the boots and pre-supposed by the parameters of the assignment. They both acknowledge the physical and superficial limitation of all vision. Both also set to the task of working through it, of showing that photography has the potential to bring into unconcealment more than the isolated and disconnected bare surface of the thing that it shows.

The recognition of the essence of both the photograph, and the project that produced it, only came about when both were examined through the phenomenological
discourse strand. Applying the theories found in the discourse of vision not only enriches the way photography may be understood, it re-enforces our phenomenal engagement with the world. As this analysis of the photograph and the assignment shows, this approach is applicable not only to existing photographs, but to the acts of vision that precede the picture as well.

**Phenomenological Vision and the Photographic Act**

The idea of structuring a project around a lacuna is productive from a phenomenological standpoint. It presents the possibility of seeing photography in a different way. It implies that there may be more than one visual approach to making photographs and that photography is capable of generating wider connections than the Cartesian model would indicate.

Looking at photographs through the different lenses of visuality generates different understandings. Similarly, making photographs with the different philosophies in mind is known to generate remarkably different results. The work of *The Pictures Generation* is a case in point. *The Pictures Generation* is the name given to a loose-knit group of artists whose critical approach toward photography came of age in the mid 1970s and 1980s. Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and David Salle were all associated with the group (Eklund, 2009). Though each produced work significantly different from the other, a postmodern approach to photographic vision links them all. One of the most significant outcomes of their work is the ways in which they give the theories of postmodern vision tangible manifestation. A
preponderance of literature exists that explores the implications and outcomes of *The Pictures Generation* and the products of their visual approach. Little, however, has yet to be written about the phenomenological approach toward photographic vision.

To explore how this approach might appear in a contemporary context through the use of digital technologies, we turn to the work of two photographers. One is an accomplished photographic artist, Kelli Connell. The other photographer—to keep the focus close to the concerns of photography education—is a student photographer.

**Kelli Connell.**

*The Valley* (2006) is a photograph from Connell’s extended series *Double Life* in which she explores gender roles, issues of sexuality, duality and personal identity. The photograph, *Figure 8.2*, depicts two women sharing an intimate gesture. One woman lies on her back on a bed wearing a sleeveless dress or nightgown. The second figure, also wearing white, leans over the one on the bed extending far out to kiss the first woman in the space between the throat and collarbones. The moment depicted appears intimate and tender, and the scene is filled with bright white light. The appearance of the photograph is important to this discussion, but the visuality through which it is made and to which it alludes is more so.

Both women have light colored hair, and share strikingly similar facial features. They look like twins. They are in fact, the same person. The picture includes two copies of one person—one reaching to embrace the other receiving the touch. One woman, two photographs combined using digital photo editing software to make one picture. The
digital editing used to combine two pictures into one is not what makes the process phenomenological. What does is the way the photographer entangles her intangible vision of self with the physical manifestation of the photograph. This is partially due to the way she employs her own physical presence in the making of this photograph. As simultaneously present and absent, visible and invisible.

Figure 8.2 Connell, K. (2006). *The Valley* [chromogenic print]. © Kelli Connell. Used with permission courtesy: Catherine Edelman Gallery.

*The Valley*, as with most of Connell’s photographs in the series, has the appearance of self-portraiture. Though the description of the project that Connell provides indicates that the work is about her personal struggle for identity, the figure that
appears in the images is not her. “It’s a surprise to some people but it’s not me” (Connell quoted in Bogle, 2010, ¶ 1). The individual that physically appears in the photographs is Connell’s long-time friend Kiba Jacobson who also happens to look quite like Connell. Jacobson poses in one place in the scene for a number of frames then changes wardrobe, expression, and body language to take the second role in the photographic composite. To produce the final images, Connell scans the separate negatives and combines them using Adobe Photoshop. Though Jacobson appears as both individuals in the final composite, traces of Connell’s presence are a critical part of the process and often a part of the final photograph.

As part of a 2010 group exhibition at Catherine Edelman gallery in Chicago, titled PROOF, Connell exhibited The Valley (2006) along with a contact sheet of the original medium format negatives shot for the composite image, Figure 8.3. In the top row of frames on the proof sheet, Connell leans out across Jacobson who lies on the bed. Connell’s right hand cradles Jacobson’s head, and the light reflecting off of Connell’s white top plays across her friend’s forehead. A few exposures show Jacobson lying on the bed with Connell holding a pillow over her face. In the bottom several frames, the role is reversed, and Jacobson, now wearing Connell’s top, leans out over her friend, who rests on the bed wearing the dress that Jacobson wore in the first half of the roll of film. There are technical reasons for the inclusion of Connell—in body—in these frames. The presence of another person ensures the accurate positioning of the hand—in fact in some photographs in the series, Connell’s hand remains in the final composite. The light playing across Jacobson’s face and arms would be different if Connell were not
present when the image was shot. The pillow in the intermediate frames on the contact sheet most likely serves a similar purpose. Connell’s actual physical presence in these process photographs acts as visible evidence of the way she sees herself in the images.

Figure 8.3 Connell, K. (2006). The Valley Contact Sheet [chromogenic contact print]. © Kelli Connell. Used with permission courtesy: Catherine Edelman Gallery.
Though the final photograph only includes Jacobson, the series is about Connell’s vision. The final photograph aspires to show a confluence of seeing and being. It attempts to present Connell’s vision of herself un-fettered by the technical necessity of an external vantage point. The invisible visual presence of Connell in the finished work is recorded in the process photographs. Connell’s inquiry into the concept of self remains, even though the pixels that show her body have been covered over or removed from the final photograph.

The questions she generates with this line of visual inquiry are multiple. The work is not intended to be read as Cartesian—as an accurate representation. Neither is the vision evidenced in these images entirely postmodern in nature. Connell is not dominated by the gaze established in these images; she is not cast into a role in which she appears powerless. Instead she is empowered by these visualizations. Similarly, the viewer is empowered as a subject to question the duality of self, the inside-outside subject-object binary of Cartesianism. Connell’s work makes visible Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmus where the distance between the viewer and the viewed in not narrowed, but non-existent. The viewer-object is a singular self in Connell’s images. It is an image that gives visual flesh to the enigma of the seeing body described by Merleau-Ponty.

It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is a self, not by transparency, like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought—but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the see-er in the
seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1993, p. 124)

When looking at the photographs, the viewer is invited to participate in the line of questioning concerning self and self identity, to consider the subject depicted in the photographs as one, and as multiple. The Cartesian way of seeing is disrupted, as Jacobsen presents as both noema and noesis to herself in one photograph.

The distance between the photographer as viewer and the object on view is also strikingly compressed in this work—Connell is simultaneously behind and in front of the camera. This bi-location instigates a reflection upon the possibility of simultaneously looking into the Sartrean keyhole, and standing in the hall catching sight of the voyeuristic moment. Rather than presenting a fragmented and de-centered self, Connell is capable and empowered in each location. There is no Sartrean figure looking for cover or cowering in the shadows in the corner of the hallway in Connell’s work. Instead the viewer is invited into this equation not in order to pass judgment, as Sartre would have us fear, but instead to accept and embrace both the productive and the receptive side of the power of the gaze. Seen as a phenomenological form of image-making, Connell’s work blurs the discrete Cartesian boundaries between seeing and being and engages with Sartre’s model of vision in an ontologically empowering way. She creates the vision of herself that she wants to see.

A phenomenological approach to the photographic act is not reserved for accomplished artists such as Connell though. In the following example, a student’s approach toward the photographic act of vision, and the way in which he works through a
phenomenological approach will be discussed. The student also used digital photography to make his picture. The digital techniques are different and what the photograph depicts is different, but the act of seeing involved is similar.

**Visual depth and breadth.**

*Figure 8.4* is a panoramic photograph one of my students made by combining twenty-five separate exposures into one image. The student used the large number of images in order to expand both the width of the photograph—the picture is five-frames wide—but also to increase the tonal depth of the image through the use of a technique called HDR.

*Figure 8.4* Student photograph (2009). *Untitled* [digital composite photograph]. Used with permission.

In this photograph, each segment of the panoramic scene was photographed five times using five different exposure settings to record the *High Dynamic Range*—the
extended range of brightness in the scene from the darkest shadows to the brightest highlights. Each five-deep image sandwich was then flattened into a single image using specialized software that combines the exposures and accentuates detail, color and contrast in the layered-up image. Each of these compacted images was then painstakingly stitched to the panoramic segment adjoining it on the left or the right using Adobe Photoshop.

What the process involved for the student was more than the making of a single visually descriptive photograph. The student, a new arrival to the city of Columbus, Ohio, was deeply involved in the practice of skateboarding and found the location depicted in this photograph to be particularly significant. On one level it offered an ideal place for skateboarding with its wide sweeps of smooth concrete and long rails for performing various rail-based tricks. “It was such a cool place to skate” (personal communication, April 4, 2011). At the same time, the space engaged the student visually. “I had shot the location many times before in HDR and began to get a feeling of a peaceful oasis in an urban landscape” (personal communication, April 4, 2011). The practice of photographing this space was not the form of distancing between viewer and experience described by Sontag (1977) in relation to the tourist photographer. Neither was it the visually detached act of vision described in the Cartesian model of sight. Instead, the act of photographing the space that the student describes is an ontologically immersive and socially significant visual engagement catalyzed by the photographic process. He writes, “I had just moved to Columbus and wanted to show my family and friends how gorgeous
the city was. I tried for months with single images and panoramas,” (personal communication, April 4, 2011).

It was the introduction of an inexpensive fisheye lens\textsuperscript{38} coupled with the labor-intensive compositing process described above that allowed for the realization of the visually engaged experience for the student. When panoramas are created by photographers experienced with the process, the compositing process is mostly automated. Through the use of carefully chosen equipment, and a good deal of overlap in the images, the software is generally capable of combining the images with a minimum of operator effort. This was not the case for the student producing this image. It was his first attempt to composite an image of this complexity using a lens that introduced this degree of distortion in the individual images. As a result, the photograph required hours of extremely detailed work hand-stitching the images together, and correcting tonal variations in specific areas of the photograph using the burn and dodge tools. In the case of the building in the center of the photograph, the student manufactured a large section of the structure using the clone-stamp tool in Adobe Photoshop in order to make it look complete. The result of this process is a phenomenologically engaged look at this plaza through the ontological perspective of a skateboarder. The level of visual engagement involved in the production of this single image mirrors the depth of engagement over time experienced by the student. “This photo was a result of months of trial and error trying to shoot this location,” (personal communication, April 4, 2011).

\textsuperscript{38} Pictures made with fisheye lenses characteristically include a very wide-angle of view, a rounded frame edge, and considerable optical distortion. Straight objects photographed near the edge of the picture frame appear curved.
The photograph is non-Cartesian. It doesn’t adhere to the single-point laws of linear perspective codified by Alberti and made to stand-in for all of rational thought through Cartesian visual epistemology. The photograph doesn’t adhere to the planar logic of the camera based on these ideologies either. Instead it flows, and the lines curve like the slide of a skateboard down the long curving rail. Even the buildings, curve and bend as if they are in motion. The photograph represents, a different way of looking—a different way of seeing the space. It is governed by the student’s sense of being, by his extensive engagement with the place and with the image, not by the rules of linear perspective. It is the visualization of an embodied way of knowing the space.

It represents an honest attempt to approach the plaza, a phenomenon encountered in the world by the student in a manner that is deeply engaged, non-linguistic, and in fact pre-theoretical. The space for this student is not an abstract concept of the plaza; it is instead a world within which the work of skateboarding was ideally situated. Just as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty employ philosophical writing in an effort to uncover approaches to describe a pre-theoretical contact with the world, this student employs the expressive tool that he is comfortable with—the camera and digital editing software—to express a similar embodied, pre-theoretical, ontological engagement with his world.

**In Summary**

Not only is the discourse of vision useful for understanding existing photographs, it offers insight into the acts of vision involved in making photographs. But photography
itself and the subjectivity of the photographer must also be understood as constituent elements of—described in and created within the discourses of vision and photography.

Phenomenology offers a vision of photography and the subjective position of the photographer that differs markedly from the dominant modern and postmodern ways of seeing. It is an existentially productive way of seeing that rejects the nihilism of postmodernism and seeks to overcome the subjective isolationism described by Cartesianism. Phenomenology offers a productive, though historically marginalized, way to see photography as an ontologically productive visual act, one that acknowledges the importance of cultural context, but does not conceptualize making photographs as a mindless cultural condition.

Phenomenology is essential in this regard for re-examining photography curriculum based on Cartesian ways of seeing, and for conceptualizing the potential offered by digital photography as ontologically productive—a way of seeing that allows an expansive and meaningful engagement with the world through vision.
Chapter 9: Conclusion and Implications for Photography Education

Understanding photography can be a complicated prospect sometimes. Even a photograph that appears to be direct and transcriptive can be complicated. Numerous cultural and technological mechanisms are involved in the creation of even the most innocuous photographs. Photography can sometimes fool the eye. Contemporary art photography, such as the work of Thomas Demand, might appear simple at first glance, but actually involve a complex creative process, both in how it is made, and in how it is looked at. Photographs often involve more than what they show on the surface. Even an intentionally direct photograph such as Jobard’s (1994) picture of the soldiers’ landing in Haiti may be found to be part of a much larger social, political, and visual event when examined from a different perspective. An innocent photograph such as Catalano’s picture of a sink full of unwashed dishes harbors the possibility of expansive interpretation when carefully examined. Though the technological transition from film to digital in the field of photography is not the cause of these complications, it has made some of them more evident. Understanding photography today involves more than just looking, and more than just knowing how to take a picture and make a print. Understanding means taking into account how one looks as well as what one sees.
Analyzing Photography and Vision

Acts of vision bracket nearly every photograph on all sides. When the emergent photograph is noticed or planned or staged, an act of vision is involved. When the photographer frames the shot, and chooses the moment to release the shutter, vision is involved. When the viewer of the completed photograph looks at it, another act of vision takes place. Understanding photography requires an understanding of the complex interchanges involved in these acts of vision. The discourse of vision, that vast collection of theories and philosophies that critically examine the social, cultural, political and physiological implications of vision offers the potential to more fully understand photography and the forms of seeing that it involves.

The relationships between vision and understanding described in the discourse of vision and the ways in which they impact photography lie at the heart of this investigation. Discourse analysis is the methodology employed to examine these interactions. This analysis included an extensive literature review to historically situate contemporary understandings of photography within the discourse of vision. The discourse itself is examined not only as a body of literature that describes vision, but as a productive social force that makes possible certain visualities and marginalizes others. Visuality involves vision, a viewing subject, discourse, and the manner in which all three are discursively co-constructed.

The discourse of vision is a complex interweave of three major discourse strands—and numerous other minor threads that are beyond the scope of this research. Modernist vision is the oldest and historically hegemonic strand. It has its roots in ancient
Greek philosophy. It links vision with knowledge, praises sight as the “noblest of the senses” (Descartes, 1637/1965, p. 65). It draws upon the rationalization of vision offered both by linear perspective and Descartes’ camera-obscura model of vision. There is within the modernist vision an implicit separation of subject and object, and a faith in the transparency of representation. Compelling arguments run throughout the discourse insisting that the Cartesian approach toward vision has long been the dominant paradigm of Western thought, that Ocularcentrism shapes the way the world is seen, and that this way of seeing is so dominant that it is nearly invisible.

The philosophy of phenomenology offers alternatives to modernist vision. The modest distance between subject and object retained in Husserl’s early phenomenology is entirely eliminated in later phenomenologies of vision. Rather than emphasizing the rationality of vision as Cartesianism does, existential phenomenology—found in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies—describes the visual experience as a confluence of subject and world. At its most fully realized, phenomenology posits an ontological model of vision considerably different from the reifying and isolating experience of vision found in Cartesianism.

Serious theoretical inquiries into the connection between phenomenological vision and photography are few and far between. Several very recent texts though have either called for or begun the task of connecting the two. A significant focus of this research project has been answering that call, and phenomenology has been found to offer a unique and productive philosophical vantage point for examining photography.
Phenomenology—along with other theories critical of Cartesian vision—opened the door for the sustained critique of enlightenment vision. Sartre’s (1943/1992) essay *The Look* bridges phenomenology and postmodernism and describes vision in a postmodern light. The power of the gaze, in his estimation, is capable of radically dislocating the concept of self contained with the subjective viewer in Cartesianism. Components of Lacan’s theories—though different from Sartre’s—characterize a similar de-centered subject. Concepts from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory—the mirror stage, desire and the gaze, and anamorphosis are also found to be significant theories backgrounding photography, vision, and understandings of how images affect consciousness. Michel Foucault’s (1972, 1977/1991) approach toward the gaze is sharply critical of the cultural impact and implications of modernist vision. The power of surveillance enforced through social structures forces the subject of modern society to be “caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201). Connections between visual theory, photography and consumer culture are a central part of Debord’s critique of contemporary culture. Though Foucault and Debord disagree bitterly about the source of visual control, both find it to be nearly all-encompassing and inescapable in contemporary culture.

The nineteenth-century shift in the way images are given validity is the focus of Baudrillard’s early inquiry, and his discussion of the postmodern situation in *Simulation and Simulacra* (Baudrillard, 1981/2001) finds the connection between reality and the image completely severed. Representation—the modernist notion that images may accurately and completely stand-in for objects in the real world—has rotted away on all
sides in postmodern culture leaving only a false reality constructed as images that reference other images.

Troubling the relationship between vision, culture and the viewing subject is a fundamental part of postmodern visual theory, and there is considerable evidence, as Jay (1993, 1995, 1999) and Levin (1993, 1999) indicate, that the widely disparate postmodern understandings of vision are united by their critique of Ocularcentrism and their deep distrust of vision. This distrust of vision and the existential crisis of being that it creates for photography are in large part responsible for the focus on phenomenology in this research. Postmodernism eviscerates the misplaced—and often misunderstood—Cartesian faith in vision, and replaces it with a wary and nihilistic gaze. Phenomenology offers an alternative vision and a different outcome from looking at photographs.

**Connecting theory to photography.**

The discourse of vision is like light in some ways—practically intangible until it hits something. In other words, applying the discourse of vision to actual photographs allows it to manifest in a visible way. Photographs themselves are quite often invisible, too. One would likely not think it strange if a friend showed a picture and said ‘these are my kids’ without giving any thought to the substrate upon which the image is carried. We are surrounded on all sides in contemporary culture by images that invite us to look though them as if they were not there. This, according to Heidegger’s logic, is the natural approach toward phenomena in the world. In a modernist interpretation, this invisibility is mistaken for transparency. Calling this invisibility into question is what examining
photography through the discourse of vision is all about. It allows the photograph to be seen in multiple ways. It also allows the acts of vision that constitute the photograph to become visible.

Viewing Jobard’s photograph or the picture of Catalano’s sink through the modernist strand describes the photograph as representation—the rational product of a visual act that is transparent and authoritative. A postmodern reading of either of these photographs emphasizes the external power of the gaze—wrapped up in politics, culture and text—to shape the photograph and the viewer. A phenomenological perspective finds the photograph to be a constitutive part of consciousness. A useful thing inextricably intertwined with the other useful things that constitute the viewer’s field of concern. The way the gaze is conceptualized—and by extension photography—varies profoundly based upon the theoretical platform from which it is viewed.

**Photography and phenomenological vision**

Though photographs are practically invisible when approached in the usual—the natural—ready to hand manner, when the hammer breaks in Heidegger’s example, or when it comes up missing, something different happens. The tool becomes un-handly. It is no longer useful for the task at hand. “When we discover its unusability, the thing becomes conspicuous,” (Heidegger 1926/1996, p. 68). Indeed the more urgent the task at hand, the more obtrusive the lack of a working hammer becomes. In this circumstance, not only do we become more acutely aware of the hammer, but the broken hammer also more clearly elucidates the connections made through it to the surrounding world.
Day after day, hour by hour we cast our eyes upon photographs and never see them. We don’t pay attention to the photography. So when we encounter a photograph that doesn’t work normally, a broken photograph, such as the work of Thomas Demand, we suddenly encounter “a breach in the context of references” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 70). Our vision “comes up with emptiness and now sees for the first time what the missing thing was at hand for and at hand with” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 70).

Demand’s photographs, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, approach the condition of being broken photographs. They obstinately refuse to work the way conventional photographs naturally work. By failing to engage invisibly with the work—the way a photograph normally does—his pictures force the viewer to become aware of the inner-worldly connections made with and through photography. This makes Demand’s photographs a prime example of phenomenology in photography. They may be understood both through the use of phenomenology, and as forms of phenomenological inquiry in their own right.

**Phenomenological vision and photography education**

The example of the broken hammer is only one way that the ontology of vision is conceptualized in the literature. Heidegger’s (1926/1996; 1977a) discussion of *alētheia*, his re-working of the concept of *Dasein* in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936/1977b), and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of vision and the flesh of the world, as well as other essays not examined here, all work to describe a form of vision different from both modern and
postmodern ways of seeing. Phenomenology is just as effective when directed toward forms of photographic vision involved in making photographs too.

When directed toward understanding a photographic project intentionally positioned as non-Cartesian, the language of phenomenology offers new insights. It generates significant world-connected readings of student photography, and also offers insight into how the project diverges from Cartesianism and is thereby likely to produce different ways of seeing.

When phenomenological vision is finally turned toward the unique engagement offered by digital photographic techniques it is found to mesh well. The work of Kelli Connell, and the efforts of a photography student, to envision—to bring into being through vision—are found to be capable of producing—of expressing, a deeply engaged form of seeing. One in which vision and photography are admitted as constituent players in the construction of subjective consciousness. In the case of Connell—the concept of self identity is taken on and constructed in the visual. In the case of the student—the space that became a constituent part of his identity as a skateboarder is brought into view through a phenomenological approach to photography.

A Dynamic Discourse

Photography is a form of visual practice. As such, it is more fully understood when examined through the discourse of vision. Each of the three major strands in the discourse posits a difference in the way vision functions, and each produces a different picture of vision. Each strand represents an important component in the way vision is
conceptualized, considering each in relation to photography is an important part of the process. No single strand is necessarily the ‘correct’ discourse for understanding photography. In fact, photography is best understood as a dialogue involving multiple contesting visualities. Each discourse makes specific claims about what photography is and what it does. Often this “construction of claims to truth” (Rose 2007, p. 138) happens in tension with one or more of the other discourses. The struggle for primacy, as one discourse seeks to marginalize another is an important part of the way discourses function. The discourse of photography is not a fixed or permanently defined set of texts pictures and practices. It is instead a dynamic landscape where the shifting and overlapping of multiple competing discourses inform the way photographs are created and understood.

**Implications for Photography Education**

Conceptualizing photography education within the context of a shifting discursive dynamic requires reflection upon the way teaching photographic picture making, describing and interpreting finished pictures, and the very purpose of photography education are visualized. Teaching and learning about photography looks different when viewed through each of the discourse lenses, just as photographs may be understood in remarkably different ways when viewed from the different philosophical standpoints.

A Cartesian approach to photography education—whether actively chosen or tacitly accepted by taking a technologically focused approach—generates a detached relationship between the photographer and the object on view. The contemporary
photographic apparatus—the digital camera—is not constructed with a phenomenological or a postmodern approach in mind. The tool more closely resembles the camera obscura of Cartesianism. It offers a single-point perspective, and adheres to the logic of modernist metaphysics. It transforms the complex and fluid experience of vision into static rational flat planes. Because of this, the camera almost effortlessly reproduces modernist vision. It produces pictures peeled off from the continuum of visual experience and held up for cognitive examination. The camera—both digital and traditional—by its very nature conceals the way it structures the world it shows, obscures the mechanisms by which the photograph is made (Barthes, 1977). The analysis of Jobard’s photograph, *Figure 6.1* examined through Webb’s image offers a trenchant description of this effect. Webb’s photograph reveals the way in which Jobard’s picture rationally re-orders the complex and confusing events of the day. The comparison shows the surrounding, enveloping experience that the camera reduces—presenting a narrow slice of vision as a complete visual experience.

This is not the only way that photographs may be created or viewed though. There are ways of making photographs that forefront the methodologies rather than concealing them. These approaches bring into view the forms of visuality involved in the picture-making process. The black border surrounding the student photograph *Sailor’s Boots*, *Figure 8.1* is one—once radical but now very conventional—approach toward emphasizing the phenomenological connections involved in making the photograph. The description of digital panoramic image, *Figure 8.4*, created by another student, provides a number of indications of how the phenomenology of photography may be emphasized.
though the use of digital techniques. In creating this photograph, the student became
deeply invested in the experience of visually engaging with the space. He skated and
photographed there extensively and visualized sharing the space with family and friends
from his hometown. In creating the final image, he carefully layered and hand-stitched
multiple photographs to achieve the final result. The work of Demand and Kelli Connell
offers additional visual connections between phenomenology and photography. Examples
and analyses too numerous to detail exist that describe a postmodern approach toward
image making—approaches that must also be considered a complete understanding of
photography education informed by visuality. The discourse of vision is a useful
framework for examining the practice of making photographs, the way pictures are used
as examples, how photographs are understood, and the status of the photographic image
in contemporary use—all within the context of contemporary photographic education.

**Visuality & Teaching Technique:**

Before conducting this research, the intent of photography education as I
understood it was the mastery of picture-making technique. A focus on learning the
intricate functions of the camera, and best practices for processing, correcting and
manipulating images was the essence of this approach. Advanced classes might focus on
more precise techniques for creating light, managing exposure, correcting color balance,
framing, composition, and controlling the final image outcome, but the philosophical bias
likely remains the same. The shift from film to digital does not necessarily produce or
require a change in this approach, but it does offer the opportunity to re-examine the theoretical basis of this form of photography education.

The approach to photographic technology described above tacitly ascribes to the instrumental definition of technology that Heidegger (1977a) critically examines. Viewing the technology of photography in the classroom as neutral—as only a means to an end—turns a blind eye to the essence of photography and technology. It also perpetuates the blindness by passing it on to students taught to conceptualize photography in this manner. The essence of the technology of photography resides in its ability to structure and enframe the way the world is seen. A technological approach to photography education perpetuates *The Age of the World Picture* without questioning or troubling the way that the technology frames the world.

Teaching photography as an act of vision, conceptualized through the discourse of vision, offers the opportunity to examine the technologies of photographic vision as part of the process of creating and viewing images. It offers an approach to photography that does not necessarily ignore the technical aspects of picture making, but places the emphasis on vision and visuality first.

**Choosing examples**

An ideal place to begin re-visioning photography education through the discourse of vision is with the way photographic examples shown in class are selected, utilized and contextualized. In my experience, when teaching using the instrumental model of photography, I located examples that illustrated technique without considering in depth
the content, context, or social implications of the images. For example a photograph that showed the smoking tip of a cigarette sharp and clear against the out-of-focus background of a woman’s face would be used to illustrate shallow depth-of-field and aperture control but nothing more. The instrumental definition of photographic technology as a value-neutral means-to-an-end structured the selection process and functionally delimited the understandings of the photograph. Discussions concerning the habit of smoking, the gender of the smoker, or the potential interpretations of the gesture were beside the point—and in no way invited into the conversation surrounding the photograph.

A revealing example of the potential problems of this approach is to be found in the discussion of Paula Magagna’s shoes, Figure 2.3, in Chapter 2. The picture shows a woman—most likely in a police station or courtroom—displaying small shoes, socks and a short piece of rope. These artifacts were the only clothes found on the body of an eight-year old girl raped and strangled to death with the drape cord in a Brooklyn basement. Presenting this photograph as an example of flash photography—a technique used by the press which formally flattens and emphasizes things close to the camera—passes over the necessity of discussing the much more socially significant and phenomenologically engaging connections that the photograph elicits.

Choosing examples informed by the discourse of vision could involve a different focus. Images would be selected for the way in which vision is conceptualized in and around them. Understandings would focus on how the images construct, interpret or reveal the world, rather than just the ways in which photographic technique makes them
look the way they do. Context, understood in postmodern and phenomenological terms would play a more important role in how images are selected, presented, and discussed.

The photographs Eadweard Muybridge made of a galloping horse, Figure 9.1, provide an example of how these differing approaches might appear. Framed in the context of an introductory-level technologically-focused class discussion, Figure 9.1 could be used to illustrate the effect of shutter speed. The relatively fast shutter freezes the galloping horse, but the hooves move faster than the horse herself, and in frames 2, 4, 10, and 11 of this example they appear much more blurry. Additional examples that show more pronounced shutter speed blur and camera panning could also be provided.
Approaching the Muybridge example with the phenomenological discourse strand in mind would produce a different set of conceptual connections. The discussion might focus on the way in which the photographs represent the animal’s locomotion in a uniquely photographic manner. The pictures, in other words, contradict the sense of the horse’s gait as seen by the naked eye, and as depicted in paintings made before the invention of photography. A picture of Théodore Géricault’s painting *Le Derby D’Epsom* (1821) in which the horses’ legs appear stretched out in front of and behind them could be offered as a comparison to the Muybridge photographs. Comparison of these two images might include descriptions of the camera settings used to make the Muybridge pictures, but it could also include examinations of the visuality evidenced in each of these pictures. In fact, this example is one of the few cases where photography is dealt with directly by one of the major phenomenological philosophers.

Merleau-Ponty was critical of the vision that photographs such as this offered up. Géricault’s painted horses more fully captured the essence of sight for Merleau-Ponty. “When a horse is photographed…with his legs folded under him—an instant, therefore when he must be moving—why does he look as if he were leaping in place” (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1993, p. 145). The photograph destroys the continuity and the fluidity of the act of vision.

The photograph keeps open the instants which the onrush of time closes up forthwith; it destroys the overtaking, the overlapping, the ‘metamorphosis’ [Rodin] of time. This is what painting, in contrast makes visible, because the horses have in them that ‘leaving here, going there,’
because they have a foot in each instant. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1993, p. 145)

A contextualization of the Muybridge photographs in terms of visuality opens up a much broader range of possible understandings than one what focuses exclusively on the technological aspects of the picture.

**Teaching picture making through the discourse of vision**

Cartesian, postmodern, and phenomenological approaches each describe vision differently, and the act of making photographs may be predicated upon each of these different ways of seeing. As described in the discussion of the Lacuna assignment in the previous chapter, the manner in which a photographic assignment is structured can profoundly influence the visuality employed by students in completing the project. The Lacuna assignment invited students to photograph a space where something was missing or omitted—an absence. Cartesian photographic practice typically focuses on directly and frontally examining the object on view. This approach invited students to engage with the invisible aspects of seeing.

Teaching picture making through the discourse of vision, one might assign projects critically focused on Cartesian visuality in order to actively examine the potential and the limitations of photography for accurately recording the scene on view. The challenges would be different when different subjects were approached. An accurate record of the landscape calls for different technique than a high-fidelity photograph of an insect or an accurate likeness of a person. The selection of subject matter and technique that each of these cases implies is traditional: landscape, close-up, and portrait, but the
philosophical approach toward the project is not based in the instrumental-technological
definition of photography. This becomes more evident when similar subjects are
considered again with a postmodern or a phenomenological visuality in mind.

Rather than focusing on the accuracy of representation when approaching these
traditional subjects, a postmodern approach might examine the social conventions
associated with each of these types of images. What forms of visual normalization dictate
what makes a good landscape photograph? What techniques are used to create
conventional portraits, and what are the possible outcomes of adhering to or deviating
from these formal conventions? A postmodern approach toward photographing these
subjects might also look toward the ways in which the presence of the camera—and the
power of the gaze associated with it—influences the objects photographed.

Shifting the focus to a phenomenological way of seeing would expand awareness
of the visual experience involved in the making of photographs. As the analysis of
Jobard’s picture from a phenomenological standpoint shows, the vision involved in the
act of photographing is more expansive than the glimpse of the world offered through the
camera viewfinder. An awareness of the world on either side of the framed image, above,
below and even behind the photographer informs the picture making process. As Jobard’s
photograph illustrates, the camera nearly always eliminates or greatly minimizes these
other forms of vision presenting only the narrow framed view that the single lens takes in.
A photographic assignment developed to explore this broader phenomenological vision
and way the camera delimits that vision could take a number of different forms. It might
also involve a picture making methodology that breaks down the traditional ready to
hand relationship of viewer and object photographed such as that practiced by Demand and Casebere. This mechanism could allow the student photograph to approach the status of a ‘broken’ photograph and thereby light up the greater phenomenological engagement that photography often invisibly engenders.

The extended experiential engagement with the subject over time exhibited by the student who created the twenty-five frame panorama described in the previous chapter is another example. It is approach that involves a phenomenological engagement with the scene photographed both in terms of personal presence in the scene over time and deep visual engagement in the process of creating the final image.

An assignment geared toward a phenomenological approach might also include the use of a second camera—such as Webb provided for Jobard’s photograph—to offer a tangible alternate vantage point. The process used by photographer Barbara Probst in her Exposure series employs this approach and offers an ideal classroom example. Her photography makes visible the particular way the camera frames-out the greater phenomenological experience involved in making photographs.

For each of the pieces in the Exposure series, Probst makes several photographs using multiple cameras aimed at the subject and triggered simultaneously. Each camera offers a different viewpoint. The other cameras show up in many of the pictures. Probst’s Exposure #46 (2006) for example is a triptych. The first image is color, and shows Probst in a red dress using her hand to block the view of the camera lens. Her hand obscures her face in this picture. The middle photograph in the triptych is black and white. It is taken from much further back and this vantage point shows her lying on a white studio floor.
with five cameras—including the one that took the first picture—on tripods shooting
down at her. Her arm and hand are extended up toward the first camera’s lens. The view
offered by the third photograph—also a black and white—is partially blocked by one of
the other camera bodies. The camera that made this photograph must have been behind
one of the other cameras on tripods. The picture offers a glimpse of Probst’s eye in the
upper right corner of the frame. This one un-obscured eye looks directly back at the
camera and out toward the viewer. Viewing the three image set involves looking back
and forth from picture to picture in order to figure out which camera made which image.
The process produces understandings of photographic vision similar to the dynamic
established between Webb and Jobard’s photographs. Probst’s work offers a tangible
focal point for discussing the phenomenological experience of making pictures and being
the subject of the photographic look. It shows what photographing and being
photographed looks like; it makes visible the act of vision. It is also ripe for a postmodern
discussion of the power of the photographic gaze.

Examples such as these can be used in several ways in photography education
informed by the discourse of vision. They may be used to promote reflection concerning
the nature of photographic vision. These examples might also be presented as exemplary
approaches that visually critique the way photography frames the world. They may also
serve as examples of photographic practice directed by an ontologically-based
phenomenological sensibility—examples that students could examine, modify and use to
direct their own picture-making practice.
Photographic methodologies can be geared either to reveal or conceal the process by which pictures are made. Creating an awareness of these potentialities is possible when the discourse of vision provides the philosophical basis for the teaching of photography.

**Teaching Picture Viewing**

Acknowledging the existence of multiple visualities is a critical part of developing a photography education informed by the discourse of vision. Practices of looking are an integral part of how meaning is derived from and created in photographs. One of the goals of photography education is to teach students how to understand photographs—to read, interpret and decode them. Because of this the differing approaches toward sight described in the discourse of vision must be at the very core of the photographic curriculum.

Looking at the artworks of Demand and Casebere is particularly useful in this regard. The way in which these photographs call into question the reliability of photographic seeing opens the possibility for critique of the traditional Cartesian relationship between vision and photography. The comparisons generated by Jobard and Webb’s photographs—as they are discussed in *Chapter 6: Photography and the Discourse of Vision*—are useful for introducing all three strands of the discourse of vision. Kelli Connell’s photography and the student examples discussed in the previous chapter offer the possibility of conceptualizing the photographic act around a phenomenological approach toward vision.
It is important to note that in the context of this research, the examples are all situated within a discussion of visuality. The photographic examples are employed to explain and are in turn explained through theories drawn from the discourse of vision. This relationship should be retained in an educational context. Examples should be chosen for their connection to visual theory, but must be supported with connections to the theories involved in looking at the photographs.

One finding of this research which has direct implications for the practice of photography education is that when it comes to understanding photographs, just looking is not enough. Simply staring at the work of Demand, Casebere, Connell or even the apparently innocent photograph created by Catalano is insufficient to divine the meaning of the work in the absence of a theoretical visual framework. Presenting images—either simple or complex ones—with the intention of teaching understanding requires a clear description of the visual-theoretical framework within which the work might be conceptualized. The failure to see these two aspects of photographic vision as inextricably intertwined is to fall once again into the ocularcentric trap of believing that vision is an isolated sense capable of unilaterally generating complete understandings.

Reflecting on visuality in photography education

Perhaps the most important component of structuring photography education with the discourse of vision in mind is the emphasis on visual awareness itself. Understanding the ways in which a philosophical mindset affects the experience of sight is critical to understanding the multiple ways in which photographs may be understood.
One of the most productive aspects of the phenomenological and postmodern strands of the discourse of vision is the ways in which they look back at vision itself and critically examine the relationship between sight and knowledge held fast in the Ocularcentrism of Western thought. Phenomenology in particular describes an alternative to the subject-object divide associated with Cartesianism. Photographic teaching practice informed by these theories similarly has the potential to expand the way photography is conceptualized.

When the discourse of vision—instead of a focus on technical expertise or a narrow band of conventionalized photographic practices—structures the understanding of photography, the whole field of contemporary photographic practice opens up to critical and theoretical examination. The multitude of ways photographs are produced in contemporary culture—on traditional film, by digital cameras, on scanners, or even in three-dimensional computer rendering software packages—all involve acts of vision. Each may therefore be examined through the discourse of vision. Image editing software such as Adobe Photoshop decried by Mitchell (1992) for its propensity to undermine the photograph’s Cartesian credibility may be re-examined through each of the other discourse lenses to re-consider the ways in which it relates to and constructs new forms of vision and visuality.

There are multitudes of ways in which contemporary digital photographs are viewable in contemporary culture: on social networking websites such as Facebook, Flickr®, and Tumblr; and viewed on digital devices such as camera phones, iPads, laptop or desktop monitors. More traditional physical manifestations also persist such as self-
published books created online or with free downloadable software, and digital prints made with inkjet printers. Each of these potential manifestations or all of them in concert may be examined through each strand of the discourse of vision to develop deep and rich understandings of what it means to make and view photographs in the contemporary digital context.

An essential component of moving beyond the instrumental approach toward photography education through the application of the discourse of vision is self-reflection upon the forms of visuality that tacitly structure the technologically-focused way of teaching photography. In my personal experience, it was only after becoming aware of the forms of visuality described in the discourse of vision that I identified a pronounced Cartesian bias in a number of the courses I teach. Establishing that awareness has made it possible to question where a technological approach is appropriate and logical, and where such thinking is counter-productive and obfuscates the essence of photographic vision.

It is essential if we continually strive for awareness of—and always question the implications of—the ways in which technology structures and shapes the way we see the world. The technology of photography is particularly powerful in this regard, and most fully requires the critical vigilance advocated so earnestly by Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

**Final Thoughts**

During the late stages of researching for this dissertation, one of my friends on Facebook [a social-networking site] posted a link to an article in the *New York Times*. It
was about a pilgrimage of sorts that photographers from all over the United States and a few from Europe were making to a small town in Kansas. The destination was not—as often is the case with photographers—an event or a sight to be photographed. It was Dwayne’s Photo, the last processing lab in the world to develop Kodachrome slide film. In 2009, Kodak decided to discontinue production of the film and the chemicals needed to process it. On December 30th 2010, they ran the last roll at Dwayne’s.

It is worthwhile to consider this event in phenomenological terms. If consciousness of the world, as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty assert, is attained through contact with phenomena in the world, then it stands to reason that if the phenomenon changes, then consciousness also changes. The disappearance of Kodachrome—or to be more precise, the loss of the experience of making pictures with Kodachrome—constitutes a change, a loss of one small aspect of the world of photography. It stands to reason then, that as photographers—as subjects who see—we have become slightly world-poor because of this change.

On the other hand, Heidegger is clear in his theorem concerning the hammer, that when the tool is broken or missing, our consciousness becomes suddenly attuned to the range of associations that the missing tool connects to in the world. Though we are no longer capable of performing the task that the particular tool was meant for, we experience a sudden clarity. “Again, the surrounding world makes itself known,” (Heidegger 1926/1996, p. 70).

The disappearance of Kodachrome from the world represents a momentary opportunity to catch sight of its place in the world. A similar statement may be made
concerning the more expansive change in photography from traditional silver-based materials to digital technologies. The moment is coming—if it has not already passed—to catch a glimpse of the world which these tools connect up to before they entirely pass out of view. This presents a unique opportunity to consider what photography was, what it is, and what we need it to be.

Photography is an integral part of the discourse of vision. It can be a powerful tool for showing us distant planets, microscopic organisms and infinitesimally small slices of time. It is also entangled with the visual culture shaping our picture of self—in presenting through the constant stream of images that is contemporary life a disturbingly narrow vision of ‘normal.’ Photographic vision is an integral part of who we are, how we see, and how we locate our place in the world. The changes that the transitions from film to digital bring to photography are therefore best understood not as epistemological concerns, but as changes that influence the essence of our visual ontology.


Crowther, P. (2009). *Phenomenology of the visual arts (even the frame).* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.


http://www.monocle.com/sections/culture/Web-Articles/Thomas-Demand/


http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/artnow/thomasdemand/default.shtm


Appendix A

Student Participant Recruitment Letter

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (Advisor)
Walker, Sydney, R.
CO-INVESTIGATOR:
William J. Nieberding

PROJECT TITLE:
Between photographic seeing and being: toward an understanding of photography through three philosophical lenses.

Recruitment script (or e-mail)

Hi (Name),
As you might recall, I am working on my writing my dissertation at The Ohio State University, and I am writing about photography and photography education. I think one of the photographs that you made would be a very good example to include in my paper because it involves an approach to picture-making that I want to write about.

(describe photograph until student recalls the picture)

I’m calling (or e-mailing) to ask your permission to include the picture in my dissertation, and to write about how it looks and how it was made. I will also send you a brief questionnaire about how you made the picture and the thought processes involved in making it. The purpose of this questionnaire is to help me understand how the photograph was made, and to give the opportunity to include your voice in describing the process. Completing the questionnaire should require approximately 15 minutes of your time. I’ll ask you to return the questionnaire by e-mail or U.S. mail. Be advised that e-mail is not a secure form of communication and if you choose to e-mail your responses they may be read by others. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

When it is complete, the dissertation will be published and publicly available. If you agree to participate, I’ll send you a consent form to sign and send back to me along with the questionnaire. I could also bring the form to you if that is more convenient for you.
Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the researchers or Columbus State Community College. Your name will not be published in connection with the information you provide. The information obtained in the questionnaire may be published in reports or presented at meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University at 1-800-678-6251.

Please take some time, about a week if you like, to think about it, and let me know.

Thanks,

Bill Nieberding
Appendix B

Informed Consent & Permission to Publish

Informed consent

March 22, 2011

William J. Nieberding
276 E. Lincoln Ave.
Columbus, OH 43214
nieberding.10@buckeyemail.osu.edu
Sydney Walker, Ph.D.
Professor of Art Education
The Ohio State University

Dear __________

This informed consent is for permission to publish one or more of your photographs and information you have provided about them.

Sydney Walker, Ph.D., is William Nieberding’s advisor at The Ohio State University in the Art Education Department and is the co-director for this research project.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the project investigators or Columbus State Community College.

If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying William Nieberding. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you do choose to participate, all information you provide will remain confidential and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the College. Your name will not be published in connection with the photographs or with information you provide. The information obtained in the questionnaire may be published in reports or presented at meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University at 1-800-678-6251.
Informed consent & permission to publish

To the student: Please read the above information concerning this study, and your choice to participate. Please fill out this form and sign it. Print legibly or type your name and sign below.

Name__________________________________Age____

Address:________________________________________

City/State/Zip:___________________________________

I hereby grant permission to William J. Nieberding to publish my artwork or photography and comments as quoted or derived from information I have submitted and any material I have provided. I understand my rights associated with this consent.

Signature_________________________     Date__________

Thank you for your time.

William J. Nieberding
Photography Instructor
Columbus State Community College
Ph.D. Candidate Art Education
The Ohio State University
Appendix C

Questionnaire

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (Advisor)
Walker, Sydney, R.
CO-INVESTIGATOR:
William J. Nieberding

PROJECT TITLE:
*Between photographic seeing and being: toward an understanding of photography through three philosophical lenses.*

**Questionnaire**

Please complete following questionnaire concerning how you made your photograph:
_____________________________ (insert title or description of photograph).

You may attach additional sheets of paper as necessary. Upon completion, please return the questionnaire to William Nieberding along with the signed informed consent. Thank you for your time and participation.

Could you describe in detail for me please the steps you took-the process you used-to make this photograph?

What made you choose this subject to photograph?
Will you describe in detail why you photographed it the way you did?

How did your awareness of the subject change as you worked on the picture?

Which details in the picture are particularly important to look at?
Appendix D

Photography Permissions
Dear Bill,

Thank you for your email of May 4, 2011 requesting permission to reproduce Thomas Demand’s Poll, 2001 and Kuche/Kitchen, 2004 on the ProQuest UMI Dissertation Publishing website in conjunction with your forthcoming dissertation titled Between Photographic Seeing and Being: Toward an Understanding of Photography Vision and Visuality. Permission is hereby granted for the print and online uses as detailed in your email. Specifically, for the use of the work in the context of a dissertation only, available for download as a locked digital file on the UMI password protected website, http://www.proquest.com. No rights fees shall be attendant to this usage. Please note that in the event that any additional uses of the work are planned such as further print or online publication, permission must be obtained in advance from ARS and a permissions fee may apply.

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Best,
Chelsea Rhadigan
Permissions Assistant

ARS
Artists Rights Society . 536 Broadway . Fifth Floor . New York, NY 10012
tel. 212.420.9160 x 203 fax. 212.420.9286
www.arsny.com
Dear Chelsea,
Thank you for your rapid response! I really appreciate your assistance.
Can you let me know what the status is of my request for the other two images (Tavern I, 2006 and Room, 1994)?
Thank you,
Bill Nieberding

Dear Bill,

These works can be included in the same permission outlined below. Please include the same credit line for all 4 works. Thank you!

Best,
Chelsea Rhadigan

Permissions Assistant

ARS

Artists Rights Society . 536 Broadway . Fifth Floor . New York, NY 10012
tel. 212.420.9160 x 203 fax. 212.420.9286
www.arsny.com
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To James Casebere ("Licensor"): I am writing to you to request permission to use the following material.

Licensor Information
Title of Works (the "Selections"): Yellow Hallway #2
Author/Artist: James Casebere
Source publication (or product from which it came): Casebere, J. (2001). Yellow Hallway #2 [digital chromogenic print, 72"x 90"]

If from a book, the ISBN: 
If from the Internet, the entire URL: Please see attached file
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The Selections will appear in the following publication(s) (the "Work"): Working Title: Between Photographic Seeing and Being: Toward an Understanding of Photography Vision and Visuality (dissertation).

Name of publisher or sponsor ("Licensee"): The Ohio State University
Author(s): William J. Nieberding
Projected publishing date: June 2011
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Courtesy: Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

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Permission Granted By: [Signature]
Signed by Licensor: [Signature]
Name: Maureen Bray
Title: Director, Sean Kelly Gallery
Address: 520 W. 29th St, NYC 10001
Date: 5/16/11

Please return this signed agreement to:
Attn: William J. Nieberding
276 E. Lincoln Ave.
Columbus OH 43214
614-499-0116
BillNieberding@gmail.com

*The additional criteria parameters that we supplied must be followed.*
Permission Letter Agreement

To __SIPA Press____ (_"Licensor"_): I am writing to you to request permission to use the following material.

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Author/Artist: ___Olivier Jobard___

Source publication (or product from which it came): _© Olivier Jobard/SIPA_

http://parmenides.wnyc.org/media/wp-images/lehrer/files/2010/02/fig34a-1024x771.jpg

_Thursday, October 14, 2010_

Image ID: __No. 252234.01_____________

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**Licensee Publication Information**

The Selections will appear in the following publication(s) (the "Work"):

Working Title: Between Photographic Seeing and Being: Toward an Understanding of Photography Vision and Visuality(dissertation).

Name of publisher or sponsor (_"Licensee"_): _The Ohio State University_

Author(s): __William J. Nieberding_____________

Projected publishing date: __June 2011_____________

Rights needed: print, electronic, English language, World territory
Credit
A standard credit line including your company name will appear where the
Selection is used. If you have a special credit line you would prefer, indicate it
below:

olivier Jobard / Sign Press

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I warrant that I am the owner of rights for the Selection and have the right to
grant the permission to republish the materials as specified above. I grant to
Licensee and Licensee's successors, licensees and assigns, the nonexclusive
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Signed by Licensor: Guillaume Delpal
Name: Guillaume Delpal
Title: News Photo Editor
Address: 307 7th Ave, Suite 807 New York, NY 10001
Date: 05/23/11

Please return this signed agreement to:
Attn: William J. Nieberding
276 E. Lincoln Ave.
Columbus OH 43214
614-499-0116
BillNieberding@gmail.com
Dear Bill, 

May 3

Here's a low res unwatermarked file that you can use as long as proper credit (c) Alex Webb/Magnum Photos is given.

Best,
Michael

Michael Shulman
Director, Publishing, Broadcast and Film
Magnum Photos
151 West 25th Street
New York, NY 10001
Telephone 212-929-6000 x107
Fax 212-929-9325
www.magnumphotos.com
Hi Bill,

Well, you have certainly piqued my interest! I had to think where to find that photo, then remembered it might be on my blog.

You certainly do have my permission to use the photo. No problem. I appreciate you taking the effort to ask!

Kae Catalano
Photographer wannabe!
Hello Ms. Edelman,

I am a doctoral candidate in Art Education writing my dissertation about photography and vision.
I recall seeing images on your website when the 'proof' exhibition was up which offered great
insight into Kelli Connell's image-making process. I am hoping to include Kelli Connell's work in
my discussion.

I am wondering if, and how I might secure permission from you to publish those images in my
dissertation.

Thank you for your time.

William J. Nieberding
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Art Education
The Ohio State University

From: Juli Lowe <juli@edelmangallery.com>
To: William Nieberding <nieberding.10@buckeyemail.osu.edu>
Sent: Fri, March 25, 2011 10:03:05 AM
Subject: Re: Fwd: permission to use images from your website?

Dear William:

I have spoken with Kelli Connell and she gives you permission to use her images for your
dissertation. Best of luck! With thanks, Juli

Juli Lowe, Assistant Director
Catherine Edelman Gallery
300 W. Superior Street
Chicago, IL 60654
p: [312] 266-2350
f: [312] 266-1967
juli@edelmangallery.com