

## MODES OF APPREHENSION

BY GEOFFREY BATCHEN

This paper addresses the problem of writing a history for photography. French scholar Michel Frizot has proposed that any such history should begin from a technical definition of the production of photographs. Wary of the exclusions this approach is designed to ensure, I argue for a deconstructive history that contests the separation of production and reception, among other oppositions; a type of history already implied by Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*.

## WRITING A HISTORY

Let's face it: those of us interested in providing an appropriate historical framework for photography are faced with a veritable mountain of methodological problems. Photography's distinctive qualities – its compliant replication of what it sees, its simultaneous articulation of past, present and future, its capacity for endless reproduction and shifting of shape, the infinite number of its products – represent a seemingly insoluble historiographic challenge. That challenge begins with the difficulty of defining our object of study. Imploding reality and representation, time and space, photography is so unique a phenomenon that it has even been described by Roland Barthes as: 'an anthropological revolution in man's history', as a: 'truly unprecedented type of consciousness.' How then should we go about writing a history for photography?

As Michel Frizot has made plain in his various writings on the topic, the difficulty before us is as much philosophical as it is practical. This is because it requires us to address ourselves to questions of identity in general and in particular to a questioning of the identities of both 'history' and 'photography'. In his massive 1994 anthology *A New History of Photography*, Frizot insisted that: 'photographic history cannot be a chronological continuum arbitrarily attached to the medium and its technique. It can result only from taking into account that which is peculiar to photography.'<sup>2</sup> As befits a former physicist, Frizot's more recent efforts to define photography's 'peculiarities' concentrate on a methodical, meticulous analysis of the technical production of the photographic image itself. As he argues: 'I think that the fundamental question we should be raising for all the photographs we look at and study is, "What is a photograph?"' He then goes on to answer his own question: 'A photograph is an image produced by the impact of light (or more precisely, photons) on a photosensitive surface.' This, he says, is the 'fundamental principle' of all photography. As a consequence, he argues: 'I would... maintain that the first methodological determinant is the primacy of the technical imperative.' A



little later he goes even further: 'I think what we call the "history of photography" is in fact guided by the development and possibilities of photographic instruments.'

It should quickly be conceded that his analysis also seeks to include other aspects of the photographic experience – he talks briefly in a 2007 essay titled 'Who's Afraid of Photons?', for example, about the photograph's 'power to attest'<sup>4</sup> and his latest version includes, as its 'fourth determinant': 'the way we perceive the photograph, how we relate to it.' I have to confess, however, that I am one of those who is still a little afraid of photons, or at least of histories of photography that want to begin from this kind of detailed definition of 'the' photograph.

Why? Well, for a start, such definitions have traditionally been used as a means of exclusion, rather than inclusion. Definitions of any sort provide historians with a way of keeping the impure out; in this case, of deciding what is proper to photography and what is not. And we've already inherited an art historical framework for photography that has actively excluded large parts of photographic practice (for example: ordinary photographs, hybrid photographic objects, bad photographs, commercial photographs, photographs produced by women, photographs produced outside the world's urban centers, photographs produced in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, and so on).<sup>5</sup> An effort to define the photograph as something determined by the technology of its production also recalls the 'medium discourse' of the 1960s, dedicated to identifying and valorising those formal attributes considered to represent the essence of the photographic medium.<sup>6</sup> Both these approaches have fallen into disrepute in recent years. Why revive them now?

As it happens, Frizot's definition-based methodology is intended to exclude not just impure photographs, but also discus-

sions of photography that he regards as insufficiently pure (that are not, to use his own word 'legitimate').<sup>7</sup> He complains about researchers who have: 'come from art history or the history of representations, the history of images', and who are using approaches to photography that are 'not adapted to it.' But he is especially opposed to the approach to photographs taken by: 'the semioticians, who merely looked at the image without asking how it was made.' In short, his preferred methodology is designed to draw boundaries around the study of photography and to turn them into borders (apparently these boundaries need to be defended).

## ORIGIN AND INNOVATION

But this urge to narrow the field and exclude outsiders is not the only reason to be wary of Frizot's suggested methodology. Basing a history of photography on a technical definition of the photograph makes a past moment of *production* the central motivation of that history ('an operation of production which is at the origin of the image', as he puts it). This leads such an historical narrative down a familiar path; one that we have in fact been down before, throughout the nineteenth century, when the story of photography's technical evolution was the dominant mode of historicising it.<sup>8</sup> Then, as now, this kind of story lends itself to a linear chronology in which one photographic technology periodically gives way to another, inevitably implying our culture's progress towards an ideal present. Similarly, each individual photographic image is traced back to an original moment of production, privileging this moment over all subsequent ones. This version of history is therefore devoted above all to origins and innovation, with the camera apparatus and its limits and creative possibilities becoming photography's central narrative.

Convenient as this may be as an historical model, it bears little relation to our actual experience of photography as a social and cultural phenomenon. In normal life, we frequently see photographic images that are far removed from their moment of origin and come to us mediated by a variety of technological means. Indeed, the vast majority of the world's photographic images – those reproduced in newspapers or magazines – come to us in this displaced form. And yet most viewers treat these photomechanical reproductions as if they are photographs, without regard for the truth of their process of production. Similarly, very few people who encounter photographs understand or care about the technology of the camera, even of the one they are using at that moment, and almost none of them have ever developed and printed a photograph themselves. This ignorance doesn't prevent them from making photographs, and participating in and taking a very real interest in photography and its rituals. What happens to their experience of photography in a history focused on the 'technical imperative' and the moment of origin?

Having said all this, one wouldn't want to pretend that technical knowledge is of no importance. Frizot himself provides a good example of the application of that knowledge in a discussion of Pierre Bonnard's photographs, showing how information about the technical capabilities of a camera can tell historians useful things about the formal qualities (even if not the cultural, social or political meanings) of the image that results. Similarly, there are significant differences between, say, a daguerreotype and an albumen print from a glass negative; not just in the look and feel of the image (for many photographs involve more senses than sight alone) but in their range of possible functions and in their economies of production and consumption. As historians we need to be attuned to these differences. I would say the same, incidentally, for any discussion of the photography of the present. The continuous electronic flow of photographic images, the collapse of any distinction between moving and still images, the instantaneous editing that is now part of the photographic experience, the linkage of image production and communication devices, the global economy that makes any of this possible; all these elements make a difference to our understanding of what photography is today and all of them need to be considered in our historical accounts of the contemporary photographic experience.

However this still doesn't get to the heart of my disquiet with Frizot's suggested 'common methodology', or at least with his phrasing of it. He argues that: 'the first methodological determinant is the primacy of the technical imperative', before positing what he regards as: 'the fundamental question we should be raising for all the photographs we look at.' Perhaps my disquiet is triggered most powerfully by the insistent stress he places here on 'first' and 'primacy' and 'fundamental'. These words are again all synonyms for 'origin'. Photography, he says, starts with, has its origin in, is in essence, the photograph, and so that is where we too must start. Every other aspect of photography is a derivative of, is secondary to, this moment. In Frizot's methodology, photography has been reduced to the ontology (the 'what is') of just one of its components, a photograph (as if there could be just one, the ur-photograph that stands in for all of them).

Frizot's attempt to establish a definitive origin story for photography is, as Jacques Derrida has reminded us: 'not just one metaphysical gesture among others, it is the metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent.'<sup>9</sup> Such a gesture allows Frizot to join the many other tellers of this myth, all of whom seek to return, as Derrida says: "strategically", ideally, to an origin or to a "priority" held to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc.<sup>10</sup> The problem with such efforts is that they enact evaluative judgments based on this same gesture; that is, on something's distance or difference from an imagined

origin point. As a consequence, distance and difference are equated with inferiority. How are we to address ourselves to the meanings and implications of the photographic experience if our mode of discussion is always already reproducing the very political infrastructure of prejudice and exclusion we might elsewhere want to contest?

#### WHERE TO BEGIN?

We could, of course, consider beginning our history of photography from the exact opposite side of Frizot's equation. We could, in other words, offer a history driven by the reception of photographs rather than by their production. That history would have the benefit of engaging the social dimensions of looking at photographs, becoming a story about how all photographs constantly change in meaning as they move through space and time. It would, in short, be a history of photographic differentiation.

It's an interesting proposition, but there's no need to simply go from one side of this equation (production and sameness) to the other (reception and difference), and stop there. After all, a mere reversal of terms doesn't get us very far, especially if it leaves the equation itself intact. Why not instead attempt a history that contests both the equation and its key terms, a history attuned to the dynamic generated within and between image and viewer, production and reception, sameness and difference, and thus to that mutually constitutive exchange Barthes conjures with the word 'consciousness'? Perhaps a history of this exchange – a history *as* this exchange – might in fact enable us to break altogether with the 'either/or' logic of Frizot's basic methodological formula.

Let's think about that for a moment. It has been said often enough that the photograph is an indexical trace of the presence of its subject in space and time, a trace that both confirms the reality of our existence and remembers it, potentially surviving as a fragile talisman of that existence even after its subject has passed on. It is the desire to provide witness to this existence – to declare: 'I was here!' in visual terms – that surely drives us to keep on photographing, rather than the intrinsic qualities of the picture that results (consider the number of digital photographs taken, versus the number actually printed and retained for posterity). In other words, the subject of every photograph is always us – whether we are the literal subject, its photographer, or a photograph's subsequent observer. As experienced photographic citizens, we appreciate that a photograph represents a truth-to-presence – it certifies that something was once there before the camera, in some past moment in time and space – even if not a truth-to-appearance. As a consequence, our relationship to photography hinges, not on truth, but on desire (on our own desire to transcend time and space by means of the magic of the photograph; to, as it were, cheat death).

In this context, the constant reference made by the photo-

graphic faithful to photography's indexicality as the key to its essential character should be regarded as theologically, rather than philosophically, motivated. Even within the scholarly community, not many people have actually read Charles Sanders Peirce's account of indexicality too closely, and few engage with any rigour with its extensive and complexly hermetic system of terms and relationships. Among other things, an index is, Peirce says: 'in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses of memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other. . . . Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity.'<sup>11</sup> Peirce's notion of indexical semiosis therefore collapses any sharp distinction between a referent, a sign, and the psychological associations a viewer brings to it.

#### THE LOGIC OF THE SUPPLEMENT

Roland Barthes – no doubt the principal 'semiotician' that Frizot warns us against – reiterates both this collapse and this 'psychological' aspect of indexicality in the 'casual phenomenology' of photography he offers in his influential 1980 book *Camera Lucida*. Barthes says that: 'I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was "in itself", by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images.'<sup>12</sup> But whereas Frizot pursues this quest through a technical explanation of the production of photographs, Barthes instead takes himself, and especially his own bodily responses to certain images (a sensation he calls *punctum*), as the measure of photographic knowledge. He thus seems to confine his study to the realm of the spectator, ignoring the question of how photographs are produced in favor of an extended exploration of their reception. But it is the way that he undertakes this exploration that is worthy of further study, for he quickly manages to undo all the oppositions on which Frizot's account depends.

Consider, for example, the way Barthes discusses *punctum* in his book. Late in Part One, Barthes comes to what he calls his 'last thing about the punctum': 'Whether or not it is triggered', he says, 'it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there.'<sup>13</sup> In fact, in the original French edition Barthes calls *punctum* a '*supplément*' rather than simply an addition.<sup>14</sup> This is surely a significant choice of word. Consigning *punctum*, and hence the photographic experience in general, to the logic of the supplement is to displace it from certainty, to put it in motion, to turn it in on itself. Difference is here made different even from itself, endlessly displacing any and all fixed definitions and points of origin. But supplementary logic also implies, as I've already suggested, that something's function as photography is determined, in part at least, by the beholder, or at least by a dynamic exchange, a back and forth, between beholder and image. On this basis, Barthes implies that photography is best thought of, not as something determined by a specific technological process, but rather as a particular set

of meanings and expectations – a mode of apprehension, if you like – brought by users to certain culturally-coded images, irrespective of how they have actually been produced.

I have argued elsewhere that *Camera Lucida*, with its carefully calibrated choice of illustrations, its peculiar temporal convolutions, its supplementary logic, binary terms and inverted layout (a layout in fact borrowed from Walter Benjamin's 1931 *Little History of Photography*), offers an historical view of photography that is deliberately structured like a photograph.<sup>15</sup> The book seeks to tell us certain things about photography by itself becoming photographic, by giving us a specifically photographic experience. By this means Barthes's little book is able to directly engage photography's dissemination and reception as well as its production, encompassing all of its many aspects, whether visible (images and practices) or invisible (effects and experiences). Abandoning chronology as an organising principle, he looks primarily at ordinary photographs, rather than masterworks, opening up the entire field of photography for examination and eschewing any reliance on art historical prejudices. Aiming only to be representative, rather than comprehensive, Barthes even proffers the possibility of a history based on just one (unseen) photograph. *Camera Lucida* is a book about photography built on the absence of precisely what Frizot takes to be photography's most fundamental and essential element.

Michel Frizot's essays rightly remind us of the necessity of continually asking about the identity of this thing we still too complacently call simply 'photography'. Nevertheless, the technological determinism that he proposes as an interpretive method is even more restrictive than the approaches he wants to displace. Precisely because it is fraught with differences and contradictions, and refuses to adhere even to its own binary reasoning, I believe *Camera Lucida* offers a more productive method of analysis. Indeed, for these same reasons it remains the account that comes closest to emulating the fascinatingly undecidable 'peculiarity' of the photographic experience.

- 1 Barthes, Roland, 'Rhetoric of the Image', 1964, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, 44.
- 2 Frizot, Michel, ed. *A New History of Photography*. Cologne: Könemann, 1998, 11.
- 3 Frizot, Michel, 'Developing a Methodology Specific to Photography Studies,' in Ekeberg, Jonas, ed., *Technology & Aesthetics*. Horten, Norway: Preus Museum, 2009, forthcoming.
- 4 Frizot, Michel 'Who's Afraid of Photons?' in Elkins, James, ed. *Photography Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2007, 278.
- 5 See, for example, Batchen, Geoffrey, 'Vernacular Photographies,' *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001, 56-80, 199-204.
- 6 *The Photographer's Eye*, John Szarkowski's 1964 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, attempted to present the 'visual and pictorial concepts which are peculiar to the photographic medium' and the 'characteristics and problems that have seemed inherent in the medium', nominating five such characteristics: 'The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, Vantage Point.' See both Szarkowski's catalogue and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's savage critique of this proposition: Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, 'Mandarin Modernism: "Photography Until Now"', *Art in America*, December 1990, 140-149, 183.
- 7 Ironically, definitions of the sort recommended by Frizot inevitably attract, almost produce, pedantic responses in return, with inquirers wanting to know why, for example, a manicured lawn or sunburned skin don't count as photographs under his definition. Fostering debate of this kind doesn't seem very productive.
- 8 See, for example, Gasser, Martin, 'Histories of Photography, 1839-1939', *History of Photography*, 16: 2, Spring 1992, 50-60, and McCauley, Anne 'Writing Photography's History Before Newhall', *History of Photography*, 21: 2, Summer 1997, 87-101.
- 9 Derrida, Jacques, 'LIMITED INC.abc', *Glyph*, 2, 1977, 236.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Charles Sanders Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' c.1897-1910, in Buchler, Justus ed. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover, 1955, 107-108.
- 12 Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, 3.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 55
- 14 Barthes, Roland, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie*. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma Gallimard Seuil, 1980, 89.
- 15 See my 'Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography,' in Batchen, Geoffrey, ed. *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Camera Lucida*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009, forthcoming.

# Forståelsens former

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Denne artikel undersøger det problematiske ved at skrive en fotografihistorie. Den franske forsker Michel Frizot har foreslægt, at enhver sådan historieskrivning bør begynde med en teknisk definition af selve fotografiets fremstilling. Opmærksom på de udelukkelser, som denne tilgang er dømt til at forårsage, vil jeg tale for en dekonstruktivistisk historieskrivning, som udfordrer adskillelsen af fotografiets produktion og reception samt en række andre modsætninger. Det er en historieskrivning, som allerede er blevet antydet af Roland Barthes i bogen *Det lyse kammer*.

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## At bedrive historieskrivning

Lad os være ærlige. De af os, der ønsker at tilvejebringe en egnet historisk ramme for beskrivelsen af fotografiets, står i bogstaveligste forstand over for et bjerg af metodiske problemer. Fotografiets særlige kvaliteter – dets føjelige gengivelse af det, som befinner sig foran kameralinsen, dets simultane artikulation af fortid, nutid og fremtid, dets kapacitet til endeløs reproduktion og formvariation, dets frembringelsers uendelige antal – repræsenterer en tilsyneladende uoverkommelig historiografisk udfordring. Og udfordringen starter med den vanskelighed, det er at definere selve undersøgelsens genstand. I dets måde at implodere virkelighed og repræsentation, tid og rum udgør fotografiет et så særegent fænomen, at Roland Barthes har beskrevet det som “en antropologisk revolution i den menneskelige historie”, og som “en i sandhed hidtil uset form for bevidsthed.” Hvordan skal vi så gå til den opgave, det er at skrive fotografiets historie?

Som den franske fotohistoriker Michel Frizot har tydeliggjort i sine mange tekster om dette emne, er det problem, vi står overfor, i lige så høj grad filosofisk, som det er praktisk. Det skyldes, at vi er nødsaget til at reflektere over spørgsmål om identitet generelt set og til mere specifikt at spørge til beskaffenheten af størrelserne ‘historie’ og ‘fotografi’. I sin omfattende antologi *A New History of Photography* fra 1994 hævdede Frizot, at “fotografiets historie ikke kan være et kronologisk forløb, der på vilkårlig vis er knyttet til mediet og dets teknik. Den kan udelukkende baseres på det, der er særligt for fotografiет.”<sup>2</sup> Som det sørmer sig for en tidligere fysiker, koncentrerer Frizots nyere forsøg på at definere fotografiets særegenheder sig om en omhyggelig, metodisk analyse af selve den tekniske fremstilling af det fotografiske billede. For som han siger: “Jeg tror, det afgørende spørgsmål, vi bør stille for hvert enkelt fotografi, vi betragter og undersøger, må være: Hvad er et fotografi?” Han fortsætter og besvarer sit eget spørgsmål: “Et fotografi er et billede skabt ved hjælp af lyssets indvirkning (eller mere præcist, fotoners indvirkning) på en foto-sensitiv overflade.” Dette er ifølge ham det “fundamentale princip” for al fotografi, og som en konsekvens heraf skriver han: “Jeg vil fastholde, at den primære metodiske bestemmelsersfaktor består i den forrang, som fotografiets tekniske imperativ indtager.” Senere går han endda videre og siger: “Jeg tror, at det, vi kalder ‘fotografiets historie’, i bund og grund er styret af de fotografiske instrumenters udvikling og muligheder.”<sup>3</sup>

Det skal dog tilføjes, at Frizots analyse også søger at indbefatte andre aspekter af den fotografiske oplevelse – i et essay fra 2007 med titlen “Who’s Afraid of Photons?” taler han for eksempel kort om fotografiets “evne til at bevidne”<sup>4</sup>, og hans seneste udgave medregner “måden vi opfatter og forholder os til et fotografi” som “den fjerde bestemmelsersfaktor.” Jeg må ikke desto mindre inddrage, at jeg er en af dem, der stadig er en smule bange for fotoner eller i det mindste for historieskrivninger, der ønsker at begynde med en sådan detaljeret definition af ‘fotografi’.

Hvorfor? For det første er sådanne definitioner ofte blevet brugt til at ekskludere end til at inkludere. Definitioner af enhver art forsyner historikere med muligheden for at udelukke alt, hvad der forekommer urent. I dette tilfælde ved at afgøre hvad der er et rigtigt fotografi, og hvad der ikke er det. Desuden har vi allerede arvet en kunsthistorisk tilgang til fotografi, der aktivt har ekskluderet store dele af den fotografiske praksis (for eksempel hverdagsfotografier, hybride fotografiske objekter, dårlige fotografier, kommercielle fotografier, fotografier taget af kvinder, fotografier fra områder uden for verdens urbane centre, fotografier fra Afrika, Asien, Latin Amerika, Stillehavsgionen og så videre).<sup>5</sup> Bestræbelsen på at definere fotografiet som noget, der er bestemt af den teknologi, hvormed det er produceret, bringer også mindelser om 1960’ernes “mediale diskurs”, der søgte at identificere og valorisere de formelle egenskaber, som man mente udgjorde essensen af det fotografiske medium.<sup>6</sup> Begge disse tilgange er i de senere år kommet i miskredit. Hvorfor nu gå i gang med at genoplive dem?

Frizots definitionsforankrede metode forsøger forresten ikke bare at ekskludere det urene fotografi, men også de diskussioner om fotografiet han ikke mener er tilstrækkeligt klart afgrænsede (diskussioner der – for at bruge hans egne ord – ikke er “legitime”).<sup>7</sup> Han beklager sig over forskere, “der kommer fra kunsthistorie, repræ-

sentionshistorie og visuel kultur”, og som benytter sig af tilgange, der “ikke er tilpasset” fotografi. Men han er især imod den tilgang til fotografi, som “semiotikerne benytter, da de kun forholder sig til fotografiets billedkarakter og ikke interesserer sig for, hvordan det er blevet til.” Kort sagt er den metode, som Frizot foretrækker, designet til at optegne skarpe grænser for forskningen af fotografiet og gøre disse grænser til deciderede fronter (det er åbenbart nødvendigt at forsvare dette forskningsfelts grænser).

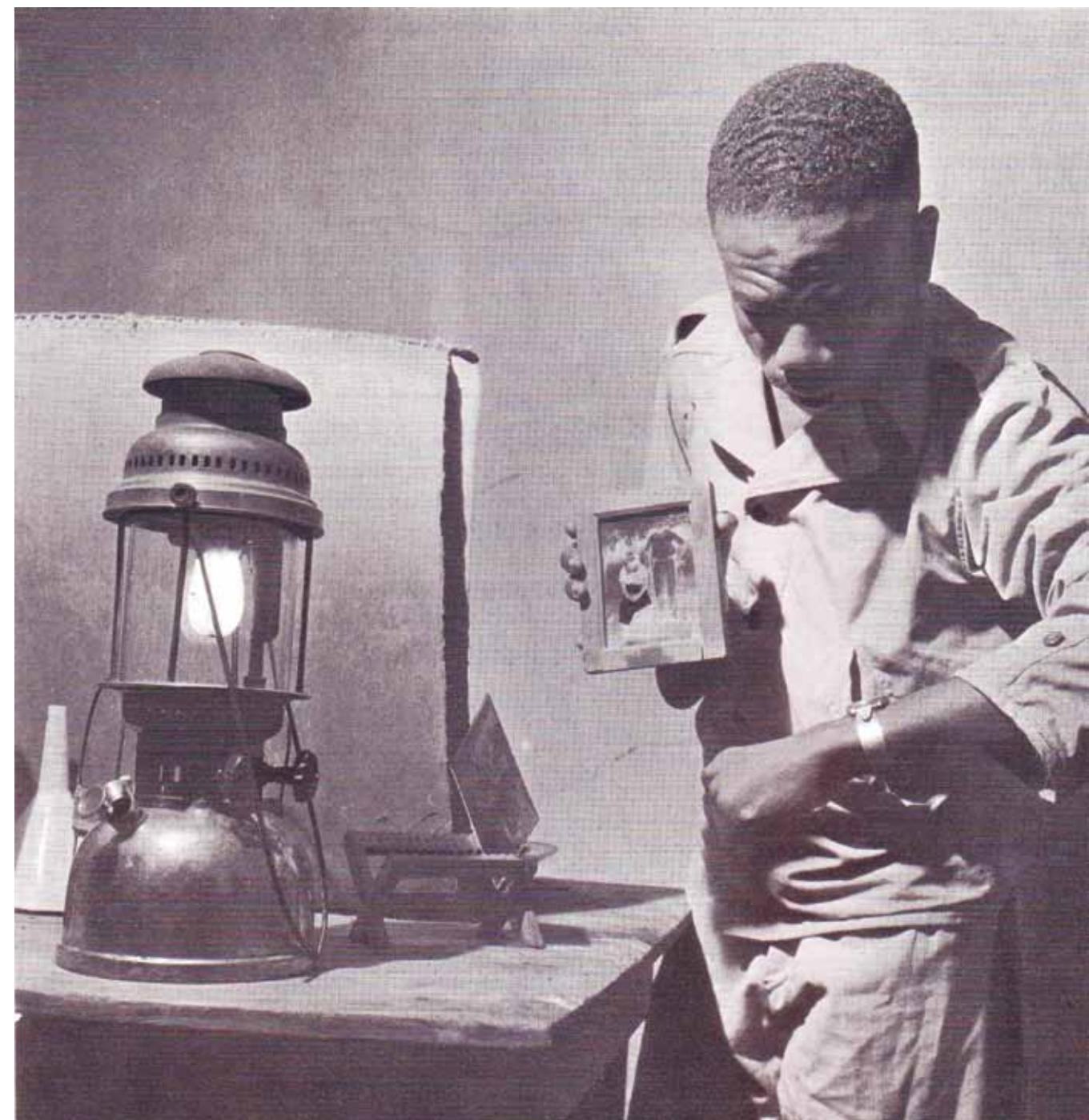


## Oprindelse og nyskabelse

Men trangen til at indsnævre undersøgelsens felt og ekscludere udenforstående er ikke den eneste grund til at være på vagt over for den metode, Frizot foreslår. Ved at base re fotografiets historie på en teknisk definition af fotografiet bliver et fortidigt *produktionstidspunkt* denne historieskrivnings centrale motivation ("et produktionstidspunkt, der udgør billedets oprindelse", som Frizot formulerer det). Denne opfattelse fører historieskrivningen ned ad en velkendt vej, en vej som vi faktisk har været nede ad tidligere – nemlig gennem hele det 19. århundrede, da fortællingen om fotografiets tekniske udvikling var den fremherskende måde at gå til fotografiets historieskrivning på.<sup>8</sup> Dengang som nu læner en sådan historieskrivning sig op ad en lineær kronologi, i hvilken den ene fotografiteknologiske periode giver plads til den efterfølgende og dermed uundgåeligt forudsætter vores kulturs fremskridt hen imod en ideal nutid. På samme måde spores hvert eneste fotografiske billede tilbage til det originale produktionstidspunkt, der dermed gøres vigtigere end alle de efterfølgende. Denne type historieskrivning heller sig derfor frem for alt andet forestillingen om oprindelse og nyskabelse, hvor kameraapparatet med dets grænser og kreative muligheder udgør den røde tråd i fortællingen om fotografiet.

Hvor bekvem denne historiske model end kan forekomme, så har den ikke meget at gøre med vores faktiske oplevelse af fotografiet som et socialt og kulturelt fænomen. Til hverdag ser vi ofte fotografiske billeder, som er langt fra deres oprindelystidspunkt, og som møder os i en form, der er medieret ved hjælp af en række forskellige tekniske redskaber. Ja, faktisk møder vi klart den største del af verdens fotografiske billeder – alle dem der reproduceres i aviser og magasiner – i en sådan forskudt form. Ikke desto mindre opfatter de fleste mennesker disse fotomekaniske reproduktioner, som om de var fotografier uden hensyntagen til den egentlige produktionsproces, der ligger bag. På samme måde er det kun ganske få af alle dem, som ser på fotografier, der forstår eller interesserer sig for den teknologi, kameraet rummer. Det gælder sågar for det kamera, de selv står og bruger. Der er næsten heller ingen af dem, der selv har prøvet at fremkalde fotografierne. Dette manglende kendskab forhindrer dem hverken i at tage fotografier eller at deltage i og levende interesser sig for fotografiet og dets ritualer. Hvad sker der med deres oplevelse af fotografiet i en historieskrivning, der fokuserer på det "tekniske imperativ" og oprindelystidspunktet?

Når alt dette er sagt, så skal man ikke lade som om, den tekniske viden ikke betyder noget. Netop Frizot er et godt eksempel på måden at drage nytte af en sådan viden i en diskussion af Pierre Bonnards fotografier. Her viser han, hvordan informationer om kameraets tekniske muligheder kan fortælle historikerne nytte ting om de formelle kvaliteter i det billede, som man i sidst ende får som resultat (også selv om det ikke siger noget om de kulturelle, sociale og politiske sammenhænge). Ligeledes er der betydelige forskelle på eksempelvis et daguerreotypi og et albumprint fra et glasnegativ, ikke bare hvad angår udseende og den følelse, billedet kaster af sig (for der er mange fotografier, som aktiverer andre sanser end bare synssansen), men også på omfanget af deres mulige funktioner og på den økonomi, der knytter sig til deres produktion og reception. Vi er som historikere nødt til at være opmærksomme på disse forskelle. Jeg ville for øvrigt hævde det samme, hvis diskussionen gik på fotografiet i dag. Den fort-



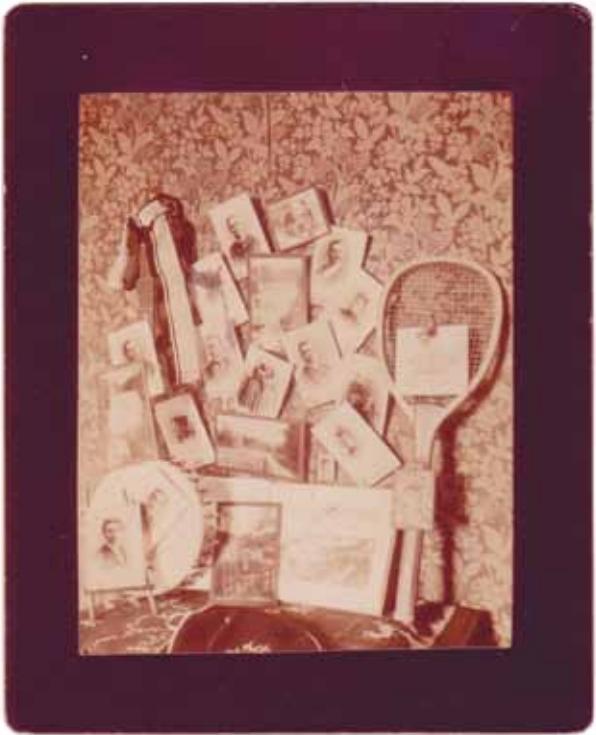
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**Djunglefotografen,**  
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Courtesy:  
Lennart Nilsson

satte elektroniske strøm af fotografiske billeder, kollapset af enhver distinktion mellem levende billeder og stillbilleder, den øjeblikkelige redigering, som i dag er en del af den fotografiske oplevelse, sammenkoblingen af billedproduktion og kommunikationsplatforme og den globale økonomi, som muliggør alt dette – alle disse elementer har en betydning for den måde, vi forstår fotografiet på i dag. De må alle indgå i vores historiske forklaringer på samtidens fotografiske oplevelse.

Trods disse indvendinger er der dog stadig noget foruroligende ved den “almenne metodologi”, som Frizot foreslår, eller i det mindste ved den måde han vælger at beskrive den på. Han hævder, “at det afgørende metodologiske element er det tekniske imperativs forrang”, hvorefter han fremsætter, hvad han anser for at være “det fundamentale spørgsmål, vi bør stille, hver gang vi kigger på et fotografi.” Det, der mest af alt foranlediger min bekymring, er den insisterende betoning, som Frizot lægger på ordene “afgørende”, “forrang” og “fundamental”. Disse ord er alle synonymer for forestillingen om “oprindelse”. Han hævder, at fotografiet som fænomen starter med, har sin oprindelse i, i sin essens er det enkelte, konkrete fotografi. Derfor er det her, vi må begynde. Ethvert andet aspekt af fotografiet er afledt af, er sekundært i forhold til dette oprindelystidspunkt. I Frizots metodologi reduceres fotografiet som fænomen til en ontologi, der kun gælder et enkelt af dets komponenter – nemlig selve fotografiet (som om der kun fandtes ét enkelt, et ur-fotografi, der repræsenterede alle andre). Frizots forsøg



på at etablere fotografiets indiskutable oprindelseshistorie er, som Jacques Derrida har husket os på, “ikke bare én metaphysisk gestus blandt mange andre, det udtrykker selve den metaphysiske nødvendighed, som har været mest konstant, mest dybdegående og mest potent.”<sup>9</sup> Denne gestus gør det muligt for Frizot at slutte sig til de mange andre, der har fortalt denne myte. Alle dem, som ifølge Derrida “på strategisk, idealistisk vis søger at vende tilbage til en oprindelse eller til en “tidlige tilstand”, der er ukompliceret, intakt, normal, ren, mørnstergivende, identisk med sig selv, for at tænke ud fra begreber som afledning, stigende komplikation, forringelse og tilfældighed, m.m.”<sup>10</sup> Problemet ved sådanne bestræbelser er, at de udfolder en valoriserende bedømmelse, der baserer sig på den samme gestus. De baserer sig på forestillingen om en genstands afstand til eller forskellighed fra et tænkt oprindelystidspunkt. Konsekvensen er, at afstand og forskellighed bliver lig med underlegenhed. Hvordan kan vi forholde os til de betydninger og implikationer, som den fotografiske oplevelse fører med sig, hvis vores tilgang altid allerede reproducerer den samme politiske infrastruktur fuld af fordomme og udelukkelser, som vi på andre områder forsøger at komme til livs?



### Hvor skal man begynde?

Man kunne selvfølgelig overveje at starte fotografiets historieskrivning fra den eksakt modsatte side af Frizots ligning. Med andre ord kunne man fremsætte en historie forankret i fotografiernes *reception* i stedet for i deres produktion. Denne historieskrivning ville have den fordel, at den ville inddrage den sociale dimension, der indgår som en del af det at kigge på fotografier. Den ville derved blive en historie om, hvordan alle fotografier på deres vej gennem rum og tid konstant forandrer deres betydning. Det ville kort sagt blive en historie om fotografisk forskellighed.

Selvom det er et interessant forslag, er der dog ingen grund til at hoppe fra den ene side af ligningen (produktion og lighed) til den anden (*reception* og forskellighed) for så at stoppe der. Når alt kommer til alt, så når vi ikke særlig langt ved slet og ret at vende begreberne på hovedet – især ikke, hvis selve ligningen forbliver uforandret. Hvorfor ikke i stedet forsøge en historieskrivning, der rejser tvivl om såvel ligningen som dens nøglebegreber – en historieskrivning, der er afstemt efter den dynamik, som skabes mellem billede og beskuer, produktion og reception, mellem lighed og forskellighed, og på denne måde være lydhør over for den gensidige, konstituerende udveksling, som Barthes fremmaner med begrebet “bevidsthed”? Måske kan en historieskrivning om denne udveksling – en historieskrivning, som *udfolder* en sådan udveksling – sætte os i stand til at gøre op med den enten/eller-logik, som findes i Frizots grundlæggende metodologiske formel.

Lad os dvæle ved dette et øjeblik. Det er tit nok blevet fremført, at fotografiet er et indeksikalt spor efter en genstands tilstedeværelse i tid og rum. Et spor, som både bekræfter realiteten af vores eksistens og husker den, i og med at fotografiet potentelt