

Approaching Invisibility

**Experiencing the Photographs and Writings
of Minor White**

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of Minor White**

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for Clare

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

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Abstract

Within his published writings on photography Minor White (1908-1976) makes frequent use of the term 'invisible'. While his use of this term is always suggestive, often provocative, and sometimes allusive, his meaning is rarely made clear. Nonetheless, White appears to refer to *intangible aspects of photography that go beyond the visible elements of photographs themselves*. This thesis aims to elucidate White's use of the term 'invisible' by determining (i) precisely what he is referring to in his use of this word, (ii) where the 'invisible' resides, and (iii) how it is encountered.

In order to achieve these objectives a close examination and analysis of the writings of White is made, with particular emphasis being given to fifteen identified uses of the term 'invisible'. Since White's use of this term is always open to interpretation it is first necessary, however, to establish a comprehensive foundation from which explanations can be made. Hence, the first chapter of the thesis provides a brief overview of the formative years of White's life up until 1946. On the basis that six of the fifteen uses of the term 'invisible' refer directly to Alfred Stieglitz and/or his theory of 'equivalence', an analysis of 'equivalence' from the perspectives of Stieglitz and White respectively will be given in chapters two and three. The theory of 'equivalence' invests a photograph with an ability to express more than its literal representation, in doing so the viewer's subjective experience is paramount. In addition to analysis of the writings of Stieglitz and White the writings of post-Stieglitz photographic critics and commentators such as Peter Bunnell, Joel Eisinger, Allan Sekula and John Szarkowski are also examined.

The thesis then assigns each of White's uses of this term to one of three categories developed in my research and reflection that I have named 'extra-invisibility' 'intra-invisibility' and 'inter-invisibility'. Thus it will be shown that the majority of the occasions on which White uses the term 'invisible' pertain both to the viewer's experience of photographs and to the affective qualities of the photograph. While the meaning of White's term 'invisible' is not always the same, the thesis concludes that the usage that dominates within his writing, pertains to feeling states that are evoked within a viewer's internal world via his or her interaction with a photograph. How such experiences of invisibility are encountered is thus determined by the viewer's personal background and approach to the photograph, by the social context in which the image is seen, and, to some extent, by the visible elements of the photograph itself.

Introduction

Some photographs are better than others, for reasons that we do not understand.¹

There are many explanations for why the quality of one photograph is superior to another. Some of these reasons are more easily grasped than others because they pertain to the tangible and material elements of photographs, such as lighting, composition, camera angle and print quality. Sometimes one photograph is better than another simply due to its subject matter. Yet beyond all of these tangible attributes of photographs there is occasionally another sense, something less tangible, which cannot be understood via formal visual analysis. These intangible qualities are not 'visible' in the surface of photograph itself. If they exist anywhere, they exist within the viewer, and they are part of that person's experience of the photograph. Thus the photograph functions as a foundation for potential experience. It triggers something within the viewer. While it is not possible to measure the potential experiences that a photograph might generate, I propose that some photographs are stronger than others because they have a greater evocative potential. They suggest more than they depict.

As a practicing photographer and a teacher of photography, the intangible aspects of why some photographs are better than others have been a constant source of wonder, indeed, they have provided the starting point for this thesis and its research. To explore these intangible qualities of photographs, and more importantly to understand them, I will examine the photographs and writings of Minor White.

Minor White (1908-1976) is more than an important post-war, American photographer. He contributed significantly to the photographic community as a writer, curator, editor, educator, champion of photography as a fine art and, to some, as a spiritual guru. While White is not as well known or celebrated as Alfred Stieglitz or Edward Weston – two key photographic influences on White – what he brought to photography was both substantial and unique. Similarly, White's name may not be as familiar to readers of photography as others of his generation, such as Ansel Adams or Henri Cartier-Bresson. White's impact on American photography from the 1950s to the 1970s is thus difficult to ignore, as is his influence on other photographers of this era such as Paul Caponigro, Jerry Uelsmann, Peter C. Bunnell, Peter Turner and Nathan Lyons.²

White's major works are both keenly observed and brilliantly crafted. As with many modern

¹ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p. 21.

² See Ansel Adams et al *Minor White, A Living Remembrance*, (*Aperture 95, Summer 1984*), New York: Aperture, 1984; and Jonathan Green *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984.

photographs, *what* is photographed is often of less interest than the actual photograph and its affective qualities. Most of us are familiar with photography's documentary power, that is, its ability to record what is before the camera with immediacy, clarity and an arguably high degree of objectivity. Yet while being aware of the camera's documentary power, White is often more concerned with its non-literal expressive power, or what he refers to as its "transforming power".³ This is not to say that what is physically photographed is unimportant but rather that White is more concerned with what can be conveyed or evoked in the viewer's experience. As will be shown, White's approach to photography is unique in many ways. This is due in part to his background as a poet, to which he owes his lyrical usage of both words and photographs, and to the many influences that are evident in his writings. Such influences include theatre, psychology, Catholicism, Buddhism and Taoism.

In looking at White's photographs, some viewers may be baffled or bemused as to the significance of and/or identification of what was actually in front of the camera, while others may respond to the aesthetic elements of the image, such as its qualities of lighting and composition. Yet there is frequently more to White's photographs than what is visible on the surface of the image, quite apart from either the subject matter or the visual aesthetics of the image. While this trait is not unique to White as a photographer, nor to photography as a medium, White's particular approach to photography is the focus of this thesis. Beyond the visible elements of White's photographs, viewers may encounter in their experience of his images something which transcends reason, verbal language and, indeed, the photograph itself. Certainly, such experiences depend on the subjective position of the viewer of the image and what he or she expects or wishes to obtain from a photograph. These intangible experiences which go beyond the photograph's visibility I will refer to as the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'; the exploration of such experiences is the central objective of this thesis.

Any viewer may experience such intangible or invisible qualities in any photograph, not only White's. However, the capacity for such experiences is stronger with some photographs than others. While many of White's photographs may possess a powerful potential to evoke experiences of 'invisibility' within a viewer, the work of other photographers such as an identity photograph of an unknown subject may have little affect. White has been chosen as the subject of this thesis not only due to the potential for experiences of 'invisibility' via engagement with his photographs but also because much of what he wrote centred around his belief in transcending the visible aspects of photography, and educating both photographers and viewers in ways of approaching 'invisibility'. In one of White's most provocative uses of the term 'invisible' within his writings he proposes, "The function of camera work, when treated as a treasure, is to invoke the invisible with the visible." White frequently refers to 'photography' as "camera work" or "camerawork" in order to distinguish his approach to photography from

³ Minor White, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 170. Originally published in *Photographic Society of America Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 7 (July 1963), pp 17-21.

more conventional approaches.⁴

To explore this notion of 'invisibility' and photography a close examination will be made of White's photographs and writings, with due emphasis given to the latter. Within the context of these two parameters this investigation has seven central aims: to understand and clearly express what this quality of 'invisibility' is; to articulate exactly what is 'invisible', for White, in the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'; to determine whether White's notion of the 'invisible' resides within the photograph, the photographer, or the viewer; to assess why some photographs provide a greater potential for experiences of 'invisibility' than others; to ascertain how factors such as the context in which the photograph is seen, the viewer's approach to the image, the individual viewer, the subject matter of the photograph and the visual aesthetics of the image are significant in triggering or guiding the viewer's experience of a photograph; to examine the influence of Stieglitz and his theory of Equivalence on White's own photographs and writings; and finally to provide both an understanding and an approach to White's work, which will increase the reader's awareness and appreciation of both White's photographs and his writings.

Having demonstrated that particular approaches to White's photographs will evoke personal experiences of 'invisibility' within individual viewers, the reader of this thesis should then be able to apply this approach to all photographs – identity photographs included. In order to achieve the seven objectives outlined above detailed analyses of each use of the term 'invisible' in White's writings will be provided along with explanations of the varying contexts in which he employs this word. While White's use of this term is always suggestive – and often provocative – it is frequently open to interpretation. Hence it will be necessary to refer to other texts by White in order to come to a less equivocal understanding of White's usage of the term 'invisible'. Reference to the texts of other commentators and critics on White, and to theorists on photography in general, will also support this investigation. Once the various occasions of White's usage of the term 'invisible' have been noted and examined, a stronger and more coherent understanding of both White's writing and of his photography will be formulated.

While a large number of White's writings were published during his lifetime in a variety of books and journals, many important documents, such as White's personal journal entries, letters and interviews, were only published posthumously. Of the writings published during White's lifetime most appeared in *Aperture*, the journal which White co-founded in 1952 with Ansel Adams, Milton Ferris, Dorothea Lange, Ernest Louis, Barbara Morgan, Beaumont Newhall, Nancy Newhall and Dody Morgan.⁵ Subsequent to its foundation White was the editor of *Aperture* for twenty three years. During this period White's editorial control held a strong sway over the fine art photography community. At the time of completing this thesis, five books have

⁴ Minor White, 'The Way Through Camera Work', *Aperture*, 7: 2, 1959, p. 73. White's use of the terms "camera work" or "camera work" throughout his writings are also an overt allusion to Stieglitz's journal *Camera Work* and his approach to photography.

⁵ R. H. Cravens, 'Visions & Voices: A Celebration of Genius in Photography' in Harris, Melissa (ed.), *Photography Past Forward: Aperture at 50*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2002, pp 9-10.

been published on White. Of these the most important is White's own *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, published by Aperture in 1969. Along with White's photographs, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* collects both earlier and, at that time, recent writings by White, most of which were previously unpublished. This book was published during White's lifetime. Four publications appeared after White's death: *Minor White: Rites and Passages* in 1978; *Minor White: A Living Remembrance* in 1984; *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes* in 1989; and *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts* in 2006.

In the last year of White's life he worked on a collaborative production with James Baker Hall and Michael E. Hoffman which became the book *Minor White: Rites and Passages*⁶ first published in 1978, two years after White's death. As with *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* this is a collection of White's photographs that includes selections from White's previously published writings. It also includes previously unpublished letters by White and a biographical essay by Hall. *Minor White: A Living Remembrance*⁷, first published in 1984, contains both photographs and previously published writings by White, along with photographs and written commemorative recollections of White by his various colleagues and students. The most significant critical monograph is Bunnell's *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes* which includes photographs by White, both previously published and unpublished writings by White, and indispensable biographical information on the photographer. Along with *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* this book is a vital source for any scholar of White. The most recently published book on White is *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts*⁸ which focuses on White's teaching years at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA). It includes photographs by White, and other teaching staff and students at CSFA, and writings by White both previously published and unpublished. In addition to these five books, and despite White's relative fame, there is only a limited number of publications by other commentators and critics available that include texts on White.⁹

For the purpose of pursuing this investigation into White's uses of the term 'invisible' an overview of White's life and work will be given up until 1946, to provide the necessary background information and events of key significance. As White states, "That one year, 1946, was a very crucial one."¹⁰ By this stage he had met all of the relevant people who had significant influences in forming White as a photographer. This survey will constitute the first

⁶ *Minor White & James Baker Hall, Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978.

⁷ Adams et al, *op. cit.*

⁸ Stephanie Comer & Deborah Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of the Arts*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006

⁹ See, for example, A. D Coleman *Light Readings*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998; Joel Eisinger's *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999; Melissa Harris (ed.), *Photography Past Forward: Aperture at 50*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2002; Andy Grundberg *Crisis of the Real: Writings in Photography, 1974-1989*, New York: Aperture, 1990; Estelle Jussim & Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock *Landscape as Photograph*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985; Roger Lipsey *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988; and Szarkowski *Mirrors and Windows* *op. cit.*

¹⁰ *Minor White* quoted in 'Minor White' in Paul Hill & Thomas Cooper, *Dialogue With Photography*, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1994, p. 270.

chapter of this thesis, 'The Visible Man'. This chapter will briefly explore White's formative years as a student of botany and Romantic poetry, his entry into the world of photography, both as a photographer and as a teacher. Additionally, it will examine the time White served as a USA infantryman in the Pacific islands during the Second World War and the impact this had on White's life. Important as this background is, the majority of White's work as a photographer, writer, curator, editor and educator was accomplished after the Second World War. The most critical part of the first chapter is devoted to explicating the many significant events in White's life during this post-war period, including his meetings with Stieglitz and Weston in 1946; the impact of Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence on White; White's curatorial and teaching positions in various educational institutions; and his previously mentioned position as the editor of Aperture.

In order to understand and appreciate White's use of the term 'invisible' it is essential to comprehend both Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence and the concept of the Equivalent, since the majority of White's uses of this term relate directly to Equivalence.¹¹ As Joel Eisinger notes:

An equivalent is a straight photograph, precisely representational, but it stands for more than what it represents in that it serves as a metaphor for subjective experience, or inter-subjective experience, or even mystical experience.¹²

Given that Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence both preceded and strongly influenced White's theory of Equivalence, it is important to examine Stieglitz's writings on the issue; this will be done in the second chapter, 'Stieglitz and Equivalence'. With reference to the writings of the photography historians Eisinger and Sarah Greenough¹³, this chapter will also examine the influence of both music and Wassily Kandinsky on Stieglitz and on his theory of Equivalence. Most notably, this chapter will also discuss and analyse Allan Sekula's critical 1975 essay 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', which examines the work of both Stieglitz and White and utilises a significant term for this thesis, namely the "affective" power of photographs.¹⁴

Unlike Stieglitz, whose writings on Equivalence are limited, White wrote about Equivalence on

¹¹ I have adopted the use of capital letters for the terms 'Equivalence' and 'Equivalents' because this is what White himself does in his major article on this topic, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend'. Stieglitz never actually used the term 'Equivalence' in any of his writings or accounts of conversations with Stieglitz by other writers. However, he did use the term 'Equivalent' on many occasions as a title for his photographs of clouds.

¹² Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation* op. cit. p. 7.

¹³ Sarah Greenough, 'Alfred Stieglitz and "The Idea of Photography"', in Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings*, U.S.A.: Bullfinch Press, 1999.

¹⁴ Allan Sekula, 'On The Invention of Photographic Meaning', in *Photography Against the Grain*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, pp 3-21. Originally published in *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 5, 1975.



1. Minor White *The Grande Ronde Valley - Oregon 1941*

On *The Grande Ronde Valley*

Let the subject generate its own photograph. Become a camera.¹

The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon is one of Minor White's first four published photographs, appearing in *Fair is Our Land* in 1942.² This image is also reproduced in *Minor White: Rites & Passages* but with a different title, *Ranch, Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon, 1941*. The key differences in the titles are that the later title gives the image a date, and denotes the buildings in the background. There is also a difference in the aspect ratio of these two reproductions. Where *The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon* is almost square in its format 'Ranch, Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon 1941' is more rectangular, that is, the latter image has more space to the left of the farm vehicle and the building on the right is wider. Given that White's photographs of Oregon made during 1940 and 1941 were made with a 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 Speed Graphic camera it seems that *The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon* is a cropped print from the negative.

The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon is similar to White's later photographs, in that it features a rural landscape and it celebrates nature. However, it is different to much of White's later work because it features what Jonathan Green refers to as "long view" rather than "detail".³ Hence there is little doubt about the scale of the scene depicted and the viewer has no difficulty in identifying the subject of the photograph. It is perhaps for this reason that *The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon* is not immediately recognisable as a White photograph. Indeed, it looks like a photograph that could have easily been made by another contemporary photographer. Most notably, it is strikingly similar to Edward Weston's *Tomato Field, 1937* in its subject matter and its composition.⁴

As reproduced in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, this image is accompanied by a lyrical piece of White's writing: "Let the subject generate its own photograph. Become a camera." Of all the photographs reproduced in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, why did White decide to put these words on the same page as this photograph, with two photographs of other farm buildings on the facing page? Clearly this statement does not directly concern rural architecture. What this statement supports is White's decision to fill most of the frame with the ploughed field, because

¹ White in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p.117. This text accompanies a reproduction of White's *Ranch, Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon, 1941*, which is a variation of his *The Grande Ronde Valley, Oregon*, in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*.

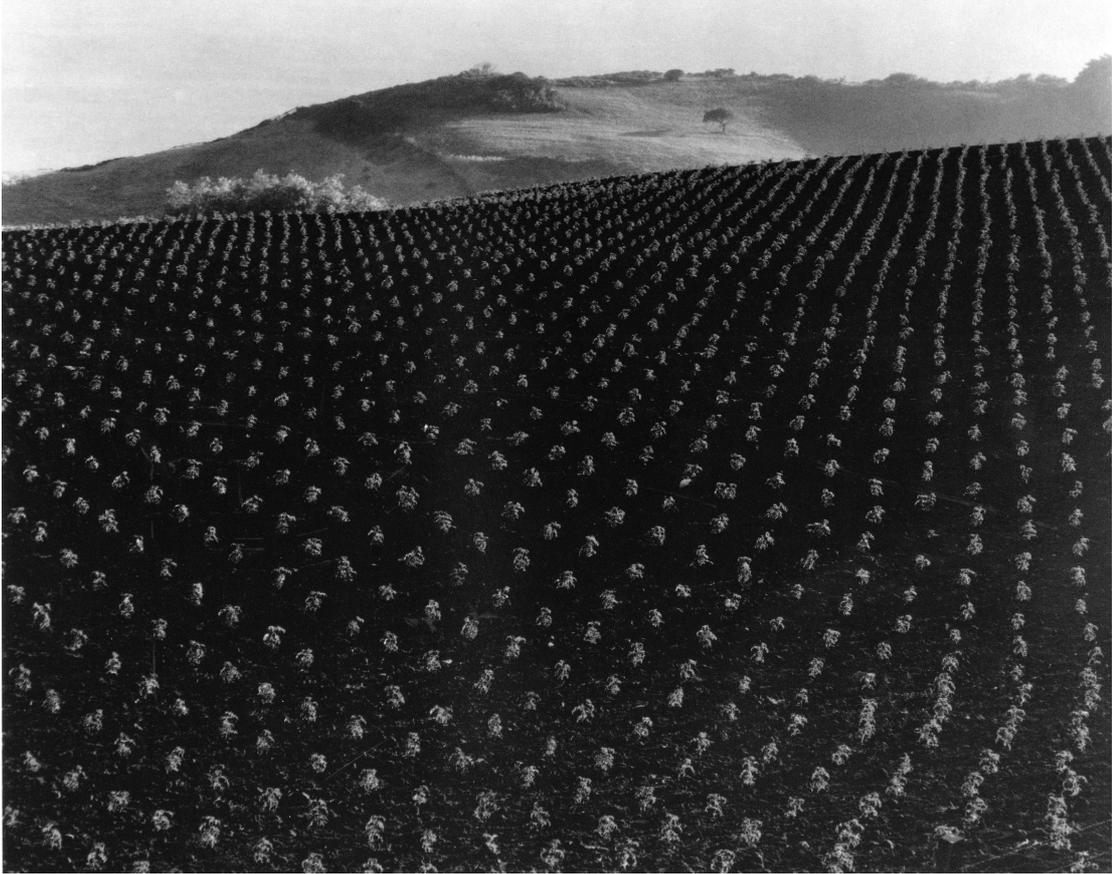
² Chamberlain, Samuel (ed), *Fair is Our Land*, New York: Hastings House, 1942, p. 59

³ Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984, p. 58.

⁴ Edward Weston's *Tomato Field, 1937* appears in Estelle Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, Elizabeth, *Landscape as Photograph*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 88.

of its rhythm and repetition. Thus he maximised the formal and expressive qualities of the subject, or he allowed the subject to suggest to him how to compose its photograph. On further contemplation, the dominance of the recently ploughed field in the image also suggests the hope of new growth, or yet to be harvested experiences. It is potentially mystical.

This early photograph by White shows the potential of a young photographer. It demonstrates technical proficiency and a creative use of composition. Unlike his later work it is firmly attached to the literal realm of description. It looks like a documentary photograph. It does not really suggest anything to me other than what I can see on the surface of the photograph. In short, it is more of an effective photograph rather than an affective photograph.



2. Edward Weston *Tomato Field*, 1937

The Visible Man

An Overview to 1946

In examining both Minor White's writings and his approach to photography it is often necessary to understand his personal life. While it may be deemed irrelevant to consider an artist's private life in any interpretation of his or her public work, particular events in White's personal life frequently formed the basis of his practice as a photographer. Furthermore, in the forthcoming analysis of White's usage of the term 'invisible', his personal journals will be discussed. Before investigating White's writing a survey of his life up until 1946 will be provided. The aim of this chapter is not so much to explore White's personal life but rather the contextual factors of his life that impact on his approach to photography. An indispensable source of biographical information on White's life, which will be utilised extensively in this chapter, is Peter C. Bunnell's 'Biographical Chronology 1908-1976' in his book *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*. In general, these biographical facts will simply be restated except on those occasions where other sources provide anomalous information.

Minor Martin White was born on 9 July 1908, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A., the only child of Charles Henry White and Florence May White. His unusual first name comes from either his great-great grandfather or great-grandfather.¹ For the first seven years of his life White lived with his parents "on the east side of Lake Calhoun, in a suburban area of southwest Minneapolis".² At the age of six he began his public school education at the Calhoun School. As Bunnell explains, White's family life was not altogether harmonious due to the wavering relationship between his parents – in 1916, when White was eight years old, his parents separated. For the next six years he lived with his mother and her parents, George and Amelia Martin, in Minneapolis.

White's grandparents play a significant part in his life, as White himself recalls: "They had a profound influence on me – in some ways more than my parents."³ It was through them that he developed his early interests in nature and photography. His grandfather was an amateur

¹ Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, Princeton, New Jersey: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, p. 1. Bunnell claims that White's first name comes from "his great, great grandfather on the White family side."

James Baker Hall in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978. Hall claims in his biographical essay in *Minor White: Rites & Passages* that White's first name also "belonged to his great grandfather."

² Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 1.

³ White in White & Hall, *Minor White*, op. cit. p. 19.

photographer and gave White his first camera, a box Brownie, at an early age.⁴ His grandmother's garden played an important part in his life. It was due to White's interests in nature, instilled in him by his grandmother, and the influence of a teacher at West High School that White decided to study botany at college.⁵ White's parents got back together again, in 1922, in one of their numerous reconciliations. Once again he was living with his parents and would do so until 1929 when his parents divorced and he moved into his own apartment at the age of twenty one.

Under the Microscope

In 1927 White graduated from high school and commenced studying at the University of Minnesota, majoring in Botany and minoring in English. While at the university White also learnt the "rudiments of photography": how to process films and make prints.⁶ His work "was with photomicrographs of algae and various other plant forms. It was all done on glass plates."⁷ As both James Baker Hall and Mary Christine Goodwin have commented, these photographs that White made as a botany student presaged his interest in images of nature, of subjects that were difficult to identify and ambiguous in scale.⁸ As White recalls:

A lot of times people would show various strange forms in art, modern art, when it came along in the thirties and forties, and I'd say, hell, I've seen all that under a microscope. That wasn't true of all of it, by any means, but there was a familiarity in a lot of it for me where others found strangeness.⁹

As a university student White also became interested in writing, studying English as part of his graduate degree under the "influential professor and critic" Joseph Warren Beach.¹⁰ During this

⁴ Different sources give conflicting ages for when White received his first camera:

Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 1. Bunnell states that in 1915 - 1916, when White was aged seven or eight, "George Martin, his grandfather, gives him a Brownie camera."

Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., pp. 20, 134. Hall states that White was seven, eight, nine or ten years old: "White got his first camera when he was nine or ten years old" and later "Given hand camera at seven or eight".

White in Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper, *Dialogue With Photography*, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1994, p. 262. In an interview with Hill and Cooper, in November, 1975, White recalls "I was given a box Brownie at about nine or ten."

White in James Danziger and Barnaby Conrad III, 'Minor White' in *Interviews with Master Photographers*, USA: Paddington Press Ltd, 1977, p. 17. In an interview, four months before his death, with Danziger and Conrad White states "I suspect it was on a birthday. Seventh, eighth, ninth... I don't recall."

⁵ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 263.

⁶ White in Stephanie Comer & Deborah Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of the Arts*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006, p. 26. This is an extract from White's own 'Biographical Sketch of Minor White' provided for the California School of Fine Arts in 1948.

⁷ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 263.

⁸ Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 20.

Mary Christine Goodwin, *Minor White: The Silence of Seeing. Teaching Photography's Visible Language*, Ph.D., Boston University Graduate School, 1990, p. 11.

⁹ White in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁰ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 2.

time White frequently worked as a tutor and, as he stated in an interview with Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper in 1975, he “always expected to go into teaching”¹¹. In 1934 he graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.A. degree.¹²

Although White did not go on to pursue a career as a botanist his interest in nature stayed with him throughout his life. He did, however, go on to pursue writing; while he would not publish anything until 1940¹³ he did keep journals, the earliest surviving entry from White’s journal, titled ‘Memorable Fancies’, being dated January 10, 1931.¹⁴

The Five Year Plans

White’s graduation from high school and his entry into the University of Minnesota also marks the point at which, or so Bunnell claims, he “recognizes his homosexual leanings and also discovers that his family has read his diary in which he has recorded his feelings.”¹⁵ White’s sexuality is significant here because in 1932 White set himself a five year plan to write poetry which culminated in a one hundred verse sonnet sequence on homosexual love, which he began in 1936 and completed in 1937. As White himself observes:

A love affair of short duration, Spring of ‘33 probably, left an indelible mark. The sonnet sequence written during the winter of ‘36-‘37 covers the dawn, noon, dusk and long black night strewn with the barbed wire and thistles of loving a man instead of a woman.¹⁶

Although White’s five year plan to write poetry may not have been a success, it was nonetheless significant in terms of his future focus:

I’d tried poetry for five years and that didn’t get me anywhere so I tried photography. I realised that I could shift over to photography, although it would probably take me five years to do it; I felt that there was an essence of something that I knew I would do in photography, but I didn’t know how. While I was writing verse, I’d get hold of the feeling of poetry. It was very strange – even spiritual. I’d done a lot of reading on what poetry was all about and I thought that all I had to do was just change the medium. I

¹¹ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 265.

¹² Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 2.

Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., pp. 20,134. Hall provides different information to Bunnell, claiming White graduated from university in 1933 with a B.Sc. degree in botany, minor in English.

¹³ White’s first published writings were art reviews and they appeared in *La Grande Evening Observer*.

¹⁴ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 2. ‘Memorable Fancies’ is “a phrase derived from the writing of William Blake, and [White] continues this journal throughout his life. The entries include poetry, excerpts from letters, photographic field notes, itineraries, and most importantly expositions of ideas and meditations on the self.”

¹⁵ Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶ White, ‘Memorable Fancies’, entry of July 1958, quoted in Goodwin, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

knew what I wanted to say.¹⁷

White's practice as a poet played a critical role in his development as an artist. The skills he developed in the poetic use of written language would later be transferred into his poetic use of the visual language of photography, not only in how he photographed and his choice of subject matter but in the way he would sequence his photographs. He also went on to combine poetry with photography. Since White pursued a career in poetry, prior to pursuing a career in photography, his writing on photography is often more expressive than it is academic. Indeed, as John Szarkowski remarks on White's writings on photography:

It would be gratuitous and evasive to judge White's contribution on the basis of the logic of his philosophical writings. The force of his work and thought was based on the recognition and the acceptance of a simple and indisputable truth: some photographs are better than others, for reasons that we do not understand.¹⁸

Szarkowski's comments on the lack of logic that is occasionally evident in White's writing clearly suggest that well-formulated arguments are not White's forte. Furthermore, Szarkowski addresses one of this thesis' key areas of interest in White's writing: why are "some photographs [...] better than others" or rather why are some photographs better than others in evoking feeling states within viewers? While this thesis does not aim to explore why some photographs are superior to others it is certainly concerned with why some photographs have greater potential for triggering emotions within viewers than others.

What White's writing lacks in logic and clarity of meaning it gains in its quality of expression and power of suggestion – a comment that may also be applied to many of White's photographs. White expressed the significance of both poetry and photography, for himself, most clearly when he noted: "The essential core of both verse and photography is poetry."¹⁹

White moved from Minnesota to Portland, Oregon, in 1937. Beyond what Jeff Gunderson describes as "White's desire to travel" it seems there was no particular reason for his choosing Portland.²⁰ He left Minnesota with very little but a recently purchased Argus 35 mm camera and a new five year plan:

I gave myself a five year plan for photography, and in two and a half years or less, I was having one-man shows that later traveled, and I made a name for myself in Portland in that short time because I knew what I was after.²¹

¹⁷ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 265.

¹⁸ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p. 21.

¹⁹ White, 'Memorable Fancies', 1937, quoted in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁰ Jeff Gunderson 'The Moment of Seeing: Photography at the California School of Fine Arts', in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 26

²¹White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 21.

Portland Projects

For the next two and a half years White lived at the local YMCA. Soon after his arrival in Portland White joined the Oregon Camera Club, the favoured style of its members being late salon Pictorialism.²² White, as Bunnell reports, “does not share this group’s aesthetics but joins the club primarily to use its facilities, including a library.”²³ A significant influence on White at that time was the work of Edward Weston. As White recalls:

The Oregon Camera Club subscribed to every publication in the world, I think. [...] That was when I ran into Edward Weston’s first book. That bowled me over – that was about the best stuff I’d ever seen in my whole life.”²⁴

Weston’s first book, *The Art of Edward Weston*, was originally published in 1932.²⁵ Other significantly influential photographers known to White through publications included Ansel Adams, Berenice Abbott and Alfred Stieglitz.²⁶ As Bunnell states, Stieglitz and Weston “exerted the most significant influence” upon White early in his photographic career “and later, to a lesser extent” Adams and Paul Strand also had an affect.²⁷ Weston’s influence can be seen primarily in the subjects White was attracted to and in both his technical and compositional approaches to photography (see illustrations 1 and 2). Stieglitz’s affect on White is fundamentally conceptual and contributed strongly to White’s methodological approach to both making and viewing photographs. In 1938 White organised a photography club at the YMCA, which featured an exhibition program that frequently included White’s own photographs. White also organised an education program at the YMCA, thus launching his photographic teaching career.²⁸ In addition to teaching at the YMCA, White was also teaching composition at another Portland camera club.²⁹

White began photographically documenting the historic architecture of Portland in 1937, and in 1938 he became a creative photographer for the Works Program Administration (WPA)³⁰. As Danziger and Conrad explain, the WPA was “a program established by Franklin Roosevelt to help artists caught without funds by the Depression.”³¹ It was similar to the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in that it was a government agency that funded photographic projects, but the WPA projects tended to be centred around cities rather than rural areas. Other creative

²² Pictorialism was a late nineteenth-century movement that promoted the photograph as art object. Alfred Stieglitz’s early photographs, particularly when compared with his later works, are perhaps the best examples of Pictorialism.

²³ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 2.

²⁴ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 265.

²⁵ Manfred Heiting (ed.), *Edward Weston: 1886-1958*, Cologne: Taschen, 2001, p. 187.

²⁶ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.; White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

²⁷ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 15

²⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p. 2.; White in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 26

²⁹ Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 134.

³⁰ Danziger & Conrad, op. cit. p. 14.

³¹ Danziger & Conrad, *ibid.* p. 14.

photographers supported by the WPA included Weston, Abbott, Clarence John Laughlin and Helen Levitt.³² White's first project for the WPA was to photograph the nineteenth-century cast iron facades and buildings in Portland, prior to their demolition. In 1939, while he was still documenting the iron-front buildings, White commenced work on a second WPA project, to photograph Portland's commercial waterfront.

Although the subject matter and documentary nature of the WPA photographs are not typical of White's later work, they must have been important to him for several reasons. Firstly, his work for the WPA presumably would have given him a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and validated his recent decision to become a photographer. Secondly, White was being supported by the same government agency that was also assisting photographers such as Weston and Abbott, who, as already noted, were significant influences on White. Finally, the WPA photographs were "circulated to various national WPA centers until 1942"³³, thus White's work was distributed across the country and seeds were sown for future opportunities. In addition to the WPA photographs in 1939 White was also making publicity photographs for the YMCA and the Portland Civic Theater and character portraits of actors and actresses.³⁴ White's interest in theatre, as Bunnell explains, began at West High School where White worked as an assistant stage manager and carpenter.³⁵ In the same interview with Hill and Cooper, referred to earlier, White states that he was never interested in becoming an actor or a director, only in backstage production.³⁶

In 1940 White left Portland to teach photography, three nights a week, at La Grande Art Center, a small WPA centre in east Oregon. Within three months of his arrival White became the permanent manager of the centre. In addition to teaching photography, White was also lecturing on topics such as children's art and Paul Cezanne, reviewing exhibitions by Oregon artists in the local newspaper, and making regular fifteen-minute broadcasts for the La Grande radio station on activities at La Grande Art Center.³⁷ On weekends and holidays White photographed the landscape and rural architecture of eastern Oregon, with a 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 Speed Graphic camera.³⁸ This led to the production of a group of seventy-five photographs made in the Grande Ronde-Wallowa Mountain area. As Mary Christine Goodwin comments, these photographs by White "were to prove vital for public exposure during his early career" and "were seminal to White's subsequent body of work".³⁹ They were exhibited in 1940-41, in a La Grande bookstore, and in 1942, as White's first museum show at the Portland Art Museum. Four of these images became White's first published photographs, appearing in Samuel

³² Colin Westerbeck & Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1994, p. 263.

³³ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁴ Bunnell, *Minor White*, ibid., p. 3.; White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 266.; Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁵ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 1.

³⁶ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 267.

³⁷ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, ibid., Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 134.

³⁹ Goodwin, op. cit., p. 16.

Chamberlain's book *Fair is Our Land*, in 1942 (see illustration 1).⁴⁰ Some were also included in later photographic sequences made by White.⁴¹

Unlike White's WPA photographs, the subject matter and treatment of the Grande Ronde Valley photographs were more typical of White's later work because they feature rural locations and a romantic approach towards the natural environment. White had held an interest in Romanticism from an early age – "about fifteen" – as evident in his reading about writers and their "profound religious experiences with their outdoor life".⁴² Writers such as William Wordsworth and William Blake "who wrote emotionally about the spiritual manifestations and the esoteric manifestations in the great outdoors" particularly appealed to White.⁴³ White's first published article on photography 'When is Photography Creative?' was written during 1940, although it was not published until January 1943 in *American Photography*.⁴⁴ In 1976, White described 'When is Photography Creative?' as "a pretty naive little article."⁴⁵

In 1941 White resigned from the La Grande Art Center and returned to Portland with the intention of starting his own commercial photography business.⁴⁶ Back in Portland, White took on various photographic jobs including a continuation of his theatre photographs for the Portland Civic Theater.⁴⁷ In 1941 White also earned the significant accolade of having three photographs exhibited and subsequently purchased by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in their 'Image of Freedom' exhibition.⁴⁸

An important part of White's photographic practice and impact was his grouping of images into sequences. White produced his first sequence of photographs in 1942, based on a YMCA ski trip to Mount Saint Helens, Washington, in the winter of 1941. Regrettably neither the prints nor the negatives of these photographs survive.⁴⁹ As Goodwin notes, this sequence was more of "a picture-story, based on a chronologically narrative story-line" rather than a series of images that was controlled by "the contextual arrangement of formal relationships, and a natural and cultural symbolism" as evident in later photographs such as the 1947 sequence *Song Without*

⁴⁰ Samuel Chamberlain (ed), *Fair is Our Land*, New York: Hastings House, 1942. The titles of these four photographs are: 'The Grande Ronde Valley - Oregon', 'North Powder Valley Farm - Oregon', 'Grande Ronde Valley - Oregon' and 'Wallowa Mountains - Oregon'.

⁴¹ Goodwin, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴² White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴³ White in Danziger & Conrad, *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁵ White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 23. White is responding here to Danziger's question: "When was the first time you felt ready to write about photography and your own feelings about photography?" White replies with: "I started writing an article called 'When is Photography Creative?' which was published a few months after I wrote it in *American Photography*. That was about 1941. It was a pretty naive little article." The dates in White's response conflict with those given by Bunnell. Although there is doubt as to when White wrote this article, it was certainly first published in 1943.

⁴⁶ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁷ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 266.

⁴⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁹ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 267.; Goodwin, op. cit., p. 55.

Words.⁵⁰ Within White's post-war sequences of photographs the cumulative impact of the edited images is often greater than the sum of its parts. The implications of White's uses of sequencing will be discussed in detail in chapters four and five.

White's photographs were now being shown in important museums. In addition to the 1941 MOMA exhibition, White had his first solo museum exhibition at the Portland Art Museum in 1942. The Portland Art Museum exhibition consisted of four series of photographs, 72 images in total, made in eastern Oregon.⁵¹ In the same year, the Portland Art Museum commissioned White to photograph two historical houses; these photographs were also exhibited and briefly circulated.⁵² With the exhibitions at the Portland Art Museum and the YMCA, as White wrote in his journal, "a period came to a close."⁵³ Furthermore, as White recalled in his interview with Hill and Cooper:

When I look back at the time when the war started, I realise that I had touched on practically everything I have ever done since. From then on it was a case of moving in on one part or another and continuing it.⁵⁴

Three years, five months bored stiff, one month scared stiff.⁵⁵

In April 1942, during World War Two, White was drafted into the United States army. Up until the time White was discharged in September 1945 he "never actually got into combat."⁵⁶ White served his time within the army as a member of the Intelligence Corps, in various parts of the Pacific region.

As part of the 24th Infantry Division White was sent to the island of Oahu, Hawaii, where he underwent basic training and became a clerk in the Intelligence Section(S-2) of the 21st Infantry Regiment. The Division remained at Brigade Woods, Oahu, for fourteen months until being repositioned to Australia, at Camp Caves, near Rockhampton, in July 1943. After five months White's Division entered the New Guinea Campaign, in January 1944, on Goodenough Island and then Hollandia. In October the Division was once again relocated, this time to the Philippines, where White remained with the 24th Infantry Division until he was discharged. Initially the Division was located in Leyte in the southern Philippines and later in Mindoro and Mindanao. It was in Leyte that White and the Division became involved in an assault campaign. Although White was not directly exposed to combat he was, in his words, "scared

⁵⁰ Goodwin, *ibid.*, pp. 32-32.

⁵¹ Goodwin, *ibid.*, p. 19.; Bunnell, *Minor White*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. The four series of photographs were: *Anthony Lakes, Grande Ronde Valley, Union and Baker Counties*, and *Wallowa Mountains*.

⁵² Bunnell, *Minor White*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵³ White in White & Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ White in Hill & Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

⁵⁵ White in White & Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 21. White on his experiences as a soldier in the army during World War Two.

⁵⁶ White in Hill & Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

stiff”⁵⁷. While in the Philippines White received a “Bronze star for meritorious achievements in the army” and was promoted to a master sergeant.⁵⁸

In 1940, prior to being drafted into the United States Army, White had met Isabel Kane who was influential in directing him towards Roman Catholicism.⁵⁹ White established a lifelong friendship with Kane and corresponded with her throughout his life. Hall’s biographical essay in *Minor White: Rites and Passages* quotes at length from nine letters written by White during his time in the army.⁶⁰ As Hall comments:

The preoccupations that we see in these letters, with transcendental experience, with the relationships among love, work and God, are the preoccupations that he would sustain and be sustained by for the rest of his life; and the habits of mind, not *what* he thought about but *how*, are even more revealing.⁶¹

Although Hall never states to whom these letters were addressed, it seems possible, given their subject matter, that they were written to Kane. White also mentions in interviews having a girlfriend who was Catholic, during the time he was living in Oregon and was drafted, with whom he discussed Catholicism.⁶² As White recounts:

... I’d take her to church, and then I’d go out photographing while I was waiting. As far as I could tell, we were both doing the same thing. She couldn’t perceive it that way, but that didn’t change my habits. I went right on photographing while she went to mass.⁶³

The name of this girl friend is not given but again it would seem to be Isabel Kane. White’s spiritual approach to photography, as if the practice of photography is similar to the practice of religion, is clearly apparent at this stage of his life, as further evidenced by an entry into his journal, dated 1942: “... prayer uses the same energies that creativeness and photographing [do].”⁶⁴ Indeed, White’s perceived relationship between photography and prayer continued throughout his life. As will be shown in chapter four, White’s views on the spiritual similarities between prayer and photography, most notably the experience of viewing photographs, will develop and resurface thirty years later in his catalogue essay for ‘Octave of Prayer’.⁶⁵

On Easter Sunday 1943 White was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church by an army chaplain in Oahu Hawaii. Although White was not a practising Catholic for all his life, and

⁵⁷ White in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 21. White on his experiences as a soldier in the army during World War Two.

⁵⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁹ Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p. 3. Isabel Kane was a “physical education instructor at Eastern Oregon State College”.

⁶⁰ Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., pp. 41-57.

⁶¹ Hall in White & Hall, *ibid.* p. 41.

⁶² White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 267.; White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 18-19

⁶³ White in Danziger & Conrad, *ibid.* p. 18.

⁶⁴ White ‘Memorable Fancies’, 1942, quoted in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Minor White*, ‘Octave of Prayer’, *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972.

stopped attending church soon after his return to America, his baptism is an important milestone in his life as a religious man. His decision to become baptised suggests that he experienced a spiritual hunger during his time in the army that he was unable to satisfy by any other means. As White explains, he chose Catholicism rather than another faith because it was “the most complicated and the most authentic, from my view point”⁶⁶ and for its ritualistic aspects:

What I was trying to learn with Catholicism was how this particular religion functioned, and its custom. Learning about it in a war theater at the time, the rituals were pared down to essentials. The chaplain would find a stump somewhere and lay a couple of things on it, and the first thing you knew, he had his altar. In that area, I could function with it. But when I got home, I went to a Catholic church, and there was a whole array of this stuff, and I kind of wondered what happened to what’s supposed to go on here. I couldn’t make contact with the essence of it. So I just stopped going.⁶⁷

Throughout the duration of his military service White had little time, or occasion, to practise photography. However, while White was in Hawaii he had “the opportunity to photograph for several months right out of basic training”:

I had a very sympathetic captain and he saw to it that I had the opportunity to photograph – mostly portraits of officers and soldiers. I ran a little studio down in one of the towns in Hawaii. I processed there and I was practically out of the war for some time doing that.⁶⁸

These portraits, along with the writings White produced during this time, would become an important part of White’s work upon his return to the USA. In particular they would form the basis of *Amputations*, his 1947 sequence of photographs and text.

Most of White’s creative energy, while in the army, was spent on writing. In addition to his letter writing White was still keeping a journal – “Mostly a series of aphorisms and long poems.”⁶⁹ These poems, or “extended verse cycles”, as Bunnell refers to them, include three works: ‘Elegies’, ‘Free Verse for the Freedom of Speech’ and ‘Minor Testament’.⁷⁰ Bunnell further notes:

These poems relate to [White’s] experiences in the army and his attitudes about military and political bureaucracy and censorship, war and killing, and the bonds between men under such extreme circumstances.⁷¹

⁶⁶ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

⁶⁷ White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

⁶⁸ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 267.

⁶⁹ White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 20.

⁷⁰ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁷¹ Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p. 4.

In addition, White was working on a book length manuscript, 'Eight Lessons in Photography', inspired by Richard Boleslavsky's *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (1933),⁷² which he completed in 1945. White had been introduced to Boleslavsky's book in 1942 by a member of the Portland Civic Theater group, Sue Marden.⁷³ Although this manuscript was never published it was, as Bunnell explains, "a pivotal source book for him and his students for the next three decades."⁷⁴ 'Eight Lessons in Photography' was also "incorporated into later writings" by White.⁷⁵ Given that Boleslavsky's *Acting: The First Six Lessons* prepares actors for performance, not photographers for photographing, it is a curious prototype for a text on photography. However, White's use of references outside of photography, as an aid for teaching or discussing photography, is not uncommon; this process of cross fertilisation continues throughout his life. As Bunnell states:

Minor White felt no hesitation in casting a wide net in choosing the books he read, selecting the philosophies he embraced, the artists he admired, or the students and colleagues with whom he would share his inquiry. He took from each of his sources only that portion of the conception of method that he considered pertinent to his needs [...] above all, it is in White's pictorial artistry that one can see the evidence of his rapport and eclecticism.⁷⁶

Post-War Years

After being discharged from the United States army in September 1945 White moved to New York where he met Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, who, as White states, "already recognised [him] as a photographer" from his "travelling shows at the W.P.A."⁷⁷ Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, husband and wife, were an influential couple in the American photography world. At this time Beaumont Newhall was the Curator of Department of Photography at MOMA. Both Beaumont and Nancy Newhall were to publish significant writings on the history of photography that included writings on White.⁷⁸ When White met the Newhalls, Beaumont Newhall had also recently returned from the war, and while Beaumont Newhall was away, Nancy Newhall filled his position at MOMA as Acting Curator.⁷⁹ In addition to forming a friendship with the Newhalls, particularly Nancy, White found employment at MOMA as a photographer. As White recounts, "they took me under their wing immediately and we got

⁷² Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, London: Dobson Books Ltd., 1966. First published in 1933.

⁷³ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁷⁴ Bunnell, *Minor White*, ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁵ Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 134.

⁷⁶ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁷⁷ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 268.

⁷⁸ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1932 to the present*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982. First published in 1964 by the MOMA. Nancy Newhall, *From Adams to Stieglitz: Pioneers of Modern Photography*, USA: Aperture, 1989.

⁷⁹ Goodwin, op. cit., p. 22.

along really well from the start.”⁸⁰ Through White’s friendship with the Newhalls he also came into personal contact with photographers he admired, such as Abbott, Weston, Harry Callahan, Edward Steichen and Paul Strand.⁸¹ While there is little information available about the majority of these meetings, White’s encounters with Weston have been documented and will be discussed shortly.

Throughout White’s life the Newhalls played a significant role. Nancy Newhall was an important influence on White in fostering his talent as a photographer, developing his interests as a curator of photographs, and furthering his curiosity in sequencing photographs. As Goodwin notes, White learnt from Nancy Newhall how to “combine images for an emotional response, rather than for their formal resonations alone.”⁸² This dual emphasis on both the emotional and formal elements of combining images, played an important role in White’s later sequences of photographs. Through Beaumont Newhall’s connection with Ansel Adams, White would be invited by Adams to work with him at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) in 1946. And in 1953 Beaumont Newhall, now the curator of photography at George Eastman House (GEH), invited White to join the staff at GEH, in Rochester, New York, where White stayed for three years and curated four exhibitions.⁸³

Along with many returned servicemen from World War Two, encouraged and supported by the GI bill, White enrolled as a university student upon his return to the USA. As a student at Columbia University’s Extension Division White took classes in “Art History, Modern Art and Sculpture, Philosophy of Art etc.”⁸⁴ In recently published excerpts from White’s own ‘Biographical Sketch of Minor White’, which he provided for the CSFA in 1948, he states that he “gathered” from his studies at Columbia University “the foundations of the course he now taught at the CSFA Photo Department.”⁸⁵ An important influence on White here was one of his teachers, Meyer Schapiro. Schapiro was an influential advocate of modern art who focused on the formal qualities of images and got White interested in the psychological aspects of photography. Under Schapiro’s tutelage White wrote three papers, one of which was on a recent Weston retrospective exhibition at MOMA. As Bunnell reports, White’s paper on Weston uses analytical tools for reading photographs which White adapted from Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History* (1915)⁸⁶. Although White’s paper on Weston has never been published, we may surmise from reading Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History*, which is largely concerned with the formal and stylistic elements of an image, that in this paper White may have been similarly concerned with the tangible elements of Weston’s images rather than any notions of ‘invisibility’. However, Schapiro’s psychological approach to viewing images may well have influenced White in other ways, towards experiencing less tangible aspects of photographs. On

⁸⁰ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 268.

⁸¹ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸² Goodwin, op. cit., pp 46-47.

⁸³ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸⁴ White in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 26 & 79

⁸⁵ White in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 26 & 79

⁸⁶ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 4.; Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles in Art History*, New York: Dover Publications, 1932. First published in German in 1915.

returning to the U.S.A. White also began a project photographing facades on 53rd street, New York city, which Bunnell states were “inspired by Alfred Stieglitz’s photographs”⁸⁷.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) was a major influence on White, particularly through his theory of Equivalence which White developed and adapted throughout his lifetime. Stieglitz’s impact on White significantly influenced the latter’s approach to photography, as both a photographer and as a viewer. Stieglitz’s theory of Equivalence deals, in essence, with the treatment of the photographic image as a symbolic representation of an emotional or psychological state, whereby viewers are encouraged to go beyond what is literally presented to them and to use their subjective, imaginative and interpretative skills. Since the theory of Equivalence played a major role in White’s practice as a photographer and is frequently referred to in his writings it will be dealt with in detail in the following two chapters.

Stieglitz is a key figure not only in the history of American photography but also in the history of twentieth-century American art. Beyond being a photographer he was the editor of the now legendary magazine ‘Camera Work’ and the director of several influential New York art galleries. Given Stieglitz’s significance and White’s admiration of Stieglitz’s work, it is not surprising that White made a pilgrimage to visit Stieglitz in 1946.

Undeterred by an unsuccessful attempt to meet Stieglitz in January 1946 White succeeded in meeting Stieglitz, at Stieglitz’s art gallery, *An American Place*, in February 1946. As White recounts:

I went to see Stieglitz in his little gallery and I had three or four conversations with him. Within a five month period Stieglitz got me moving again. I had always had this sensation that while in the Army something had died, or at least gone underground. Stieglitz came along and reactivated something.⁸⁸

What exactly had “died” within White and was “reactivated” by Stieglitz is uncertain. As a soldier who had recently returned from war this “something” could be a wide variety of things. However, it is safe to assume that White is referring to photography and perhaps his inspiration and motivation to make photographs. There is minimal information about what occurred during these meetings; what is known is that Stieglitz and White did talk about photography and Equivalence and “they looked at prints”⁸⁹. Presumably they looked at photographic prints, whether or not they looked at Stieglitz’s or White’s prints, or both, is unclear. White also refers to his initial meetings with Stieglitz in his journal, ‘Memorable Fancies’, where his first recorded use of the term ‘invisible’ is made:

Stieglitz said something or other about photography that makes visible the invisible, and

⁸⁷ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁸⁸ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., pp 268-269.

⁸⁹ Hall in White & Hall, op. cit., p. 16.

something about true things being able to talk to each other.⁹⁰

Since both White's meetings with Stieglitz and this notion of "photography that makes visible the invisible" are referred to on several occasions throughout White's life it can be inferred that they made an indelible impression on him. I will return to this use of the term 'invisible' and others in later chapters. White's meetings with Stieglitz evidently made a larger impact on White than they did on Stieglitz, because they are referred to only in writings on or by White and not in any of the available writings on or by Stieglitz. Arguably, at this time, White was also more aware of Stieglitz than Stieglitz was of White. As White states:

I had read *America and Alfred Stieglitz* when I was in Oregon and the idea of the equivalent really hit me very hard; and one other phrase of his – "You can imitate everything in art except spirit". Those two ideas were what I took from him.⁹¹

As already mentioned, White was in Oregon between 1940-1941. Some years earlier, during the late 1930s, while he was living in Portland, White recounts an earlier memory of Stieglitz and his theory of Equivalence in an interview with James Danziger:

Equivalence was learned bit by bit over twenty years. I had encountered it when I was still in Portland through the books of Alfred Stieglitz, and I was very much involved in it. I read that part very carefully, but only six years later in San Francisco did I start to photograph equivalents.⁹²

White's reference here to "six years later in San Francisco" refers to his move to San Francisco in July 1946, where he accepted an offer from Ansel Adams to assist him in teaching photography at Adams' recently established Photography Department at the CSFA (now known as the San Francisco Art Institute). Through White's teaching with Adams, and since White lived in the same house as Adams in San Francisco, the two photographers soon formed a lifelong friendship, even though their approaches to photography were not always in agreement. As soon as White started teaching at the CSFA, on the week of his thirty-eighth birthday,⁹³ he was both learning and teaching Adams' zone system⁹⁴. Prior to working at the CSFA, White was not familiar with the zone system but, as he states, it was very beneficial technically: "my problems with exposure cleared up, pronto! [...] From then on the only

⁹⁰ Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, New York: Aperture, 1969, p. 41. This extract from White's journal, as it appears in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, is dated February, 1946.

⁹¹ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 270. White's reference to *America and Alfred Stieglitz* appears to refer to: Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfield and Harold Rugg, (editors), *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*. New York; Literary Guild, 1934.

⁹² White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

⁹³ Gunderson in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 24.

⁹⁴ The zone system attempts to previsualize the tonal range of the final photographic print, by measuring and controlling film exposure, film processing and print developing values. White published a book on the zone system in 1956; this book is a technical manual on photography rather than a book on White's conceptual approach to photography. Minor White, *Exposure With the Zone System*, New York: Morgan and Morgan, 1956.

problems were with execution.”⁹⁵ In addition to teaching Adam’s zone system, within White’s first week at CSFA he was also instructing students in Stieglitz’s theory of Equivalence.⁹⁶ Owing to Adams’ personal photography projects, his second Guggenheim grant received in 1948, and his consequential absences from CSFA, White replaced Adams as the director of the CSFA in 1949.⁹⁷

1946 was an important year for White because he met many of his respected contemporaries. In addition to his meetings with Stieglitz and Adams, those with Weston were a critical influence on White as a photographer. Although there are not as many parallels between Whites’ life and Weston’s life as there are between those of White and Stieglitz, Weston’s influence is nevertheless significant. Indeed, Bunnell asserts that Weston had “the most profound influence on White of any artist”⁹⁸. What White and Weston did share was a passion for beautifully crafted photographs of the natural landscape. Beyond this there were many differences, the most notable being that, where Weston spoke about photography in a relatively simple, down to earth and understated manner, White was frequently mystical, poetic and fanciful. In support of Bunnell’s claim that Weston held “the most profound influence” on White it is worth noting that during the same year that White sought out Stieglitz he also made a pilgrimage to see Weston. The first of these visits to Carmel and Point Lobos, where Weston respectively lived and photographed in the later years of his life, was in November or December 1946.⁹⁹ As Bunnell states, at this time Weston develops “a strong rapport with the younger photographer, and they meet many times before Weston’s death in 1958.”¹⁰⁰ After White’s initial meeting with Weston at Point Lobos, he would often return with students from the CSFA, trips which White considered to be the “climax of every year”¹⁰¹. As White recounts:

I used to take classes down to him at least once a year, although he was pretty frail. We went down there three weeks in a row and talked and looked at his photography. That was also the time I started photographing Point Lobos. I was fascinated by it.¹⁰²

White also refers to his visits to Weston in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* where he again uses the term ‘invisible’ in relation not only to Stieglitz but also to Point Lobos:

⁹⁵ White in Danziger & Conrad, op. cit., p. 22.

⁹⁶ Gunderson in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 24.

⁹⁷ Gunderson in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 5. The parallels between White and Stieglitz will be discussed in the following chapter ‘Stieglitz on Equivalence’.

⁹⁹ Bunnell and Gunderson give conflicting dates for when White first visited Weston.

Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p. 5. Bunnell claims that the two photographers first met in November, 1946: “In November Minor White visits Edward Weston for the first time at Point Lobos.”

Gunderson in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 28. Gunderson contends: “In December, Minor White made his way south from his residence at Adams’s house near Baker Beach in San Francisco to Carmel and Point Lobos, where he met Weston for the first time.”

¹⁰⁰ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Minor White ‘A Unique Experience in Teaching Photography’ in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., p. 101.

Originally published in *Aperture* 4: 4, 1956.

¹⁰² White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 270.

When Edward Weston opened the door, one glance told him a wish had been granted ... his smile was an affirmation; his handshake a toast to the invisible Lobos ... a connection to the invisible Stieglitz.¹⁰³

These uses of the term 'invisible' will be examined in detail in chapters four and five. White photographed Point Lobos on numerous occasions and these images appeared in early sequences such as *Amputations* and *Sequence 8*. As previously noted, White's 1947 sequence *Amputations* also utilised portraits of fellow officers and soldiers, and White's writings from the war period.

1946 was not only a critical year for White but also for this thesis because in addition to his initial meetings with his contemporaries and people who held dominating influences over his life and work, the theory of Equivalence was now playing a major role in White's use of photography, and his first recorded use of the term 'invisible' is made. As White himself states:

That one year, 1946, was a very crucial one. It solidified the idea of the equivalent for me. I became very much closer to the Newhalls and that is when my curatorial career began to get underway. Strand, Stieglitz, Weston and Ansel all gave me exactly what I needed at that time. I took one thing from each: technique from Ansel, the love of nature from Weston and from Stieglitz the affirmation that I was alive and I could photograph. Those three things were very intense. And I also got an interest in the psychology of art from Meyer Schapiro.¹⁰⁴

While White's career continued for a further thirty years – until his death from a heart attack on June 24 1976 – little need be added here by way of biography since the essential issues pertaining to this thesis are now established. In pursuing the issue of 'invisibility', however, it is will become necessary to examine in more detail both Stieglitz's and White's writings on Equivalence.

¹⁰³ Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁰⁴ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 270.



3. Minor White, *Vicinity of Georgetown, 1962*

On Vicinity of Georgetown, 1962

The major sources of equivalent and metaphoric images in photography are the great forces of erosion that shape and reshape the world. Camera has a positive genius for turning the effects of weathering into beauty and equivalence: wood, stone, faces, ice. It grandly celebrates the forces themselves: light, snow, wind, space, water, fire, earthquake, bulldozer, dynamite. In turn, man's artifacts on reverting to nature provide the photographer with many expressive abstract equivalents. Auto graveyards, crumbling buildings, rusting machinery, peeling paint offer camera rich, ambiguous, ambivalent images that may help the photographer evoke the sense of prayer.¹

In this photograph White utilises the recording power of the camera to document his observation of an anthropomorphic eye on a tree trunk. The subject of this photograph is unequivocally a tree trunk. But is the eye form a knot in the tree or a scar? Are the four dark, horizontal cuts natural or man made? What is interesting about this image is not so much what it is a photograph of but what it suggests.

For me, there are two different non-literal readings of this image. Firstly, the four horizontal lines suggest that the eye, or the tree, is crying and thus this photograph evokes a feeling of sadness. Secondly, the four horizontal lines suggest cuts or scars, and since one of these lines goes through the eye it is an aggressive image that evokes feeling of anger and pain. With this interpretation in mind it recalls the close up image of a knife cutting a human eye in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali's film *Un Chien Andalou* (1928).

My experience of this image is very much connected to the actual subject matter and less concerned with the way in which White photographed this tree. Unlike some of his other photographs it is not the transformation of the subject that counts but rather the documentation of it and its potential for poetic interpretation.

¹ Minor White, 'Octave of Prayer', *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972, p. 25.

Stieglitz and Equivalence

I look up into the sky, wondering if I'll catch a glimpse of kindness there, but I don't. All I see are indifferent summer clouds drifting over the Pacific. And they have nothing to say to me. Clouds are always taciturn. I probably should not be looking up at them. What I should be looking at is inside of me. Like staring down into a well. Can I see kindness there? No, all I see is my own nature.¹

While Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Meyer Schapiro, Nancy Newhall and Beaumont Newhall, along with White's spiritual beliefs and his interests in poetry, all constituted important influences on White's approach to photography, the most profound influence came from Alfred Stieglitz. A clear account of Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence is critical to an understanding of White's work, particularly in order to appreciate the significance of White's use of the term 'invisible'. This chapter will therefore examine Stieglitz's influential theory by investigating and analysing Stieglitz's writings on Equivalence. At the same time, the writings of later cultural critics Sarah Greenough², Joel Eisinger³ and Roger Lipsey⁴, and Allan Sekula⁵ will also be explored. In the following chapter 'White on Equivalence', White's continuation and adaptation of this theory, along with White's writings on this subject, will be examined in detail.

As James Baker Hall notes in his untitled biographical essay in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, there are various "parallels between Stieglitz and White"⁶. Both Stieglitz and White had a significant impact on twentieth-century American photography. An important part of Stieglitz's and White's influence came through the journals they edited, *Camera Work* and *Aperture* respectively. Both photographers employed the theory of Equivalence in their approaches to making and viewing photographs, and both were sought after by younger photographers making their "pilgrimage"⁷ to respected elders of their community. Stieglitz and

¹ Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, Trans. Philip Gabriel, London: Harvill Secker, 2008, p. 150.

² Sarah Greenough, 'Alfred Stieglitz and "The Idea of Photography"', in Alfred Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings*, U.S.A.: Bullfinch Press, 1999, pp. 12 - 32.

³ Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.

⁴ Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988.

⁵ Allan Sekula, 'On The Invention of Photographic Meaning', in *Photography Against the Grain*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, pp 3-21. Originally published in *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 5, 1975.

⁶ James Baker Hall in *Minor White & James Baker Hall, Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p. 18.

⁷ Hall in White & Hall, *ibid.*, p. 16.

White also shared an enthusiastic passion for the medium of photography and championed it as an art form. As Mary Christine Goodwin comments, “Stieglitz’s dedication to art and public defense of misunderstood aesthetics became lifetime models for White.”⁸ Many of these parallels reflect not only the similarities between these two photographers but also Stieglitz’s influence on White. Ironically, Stieglitz himself wrote little on his theory of Equivalence. Nonetheless, his photographs of clouds to which he gave the name *Equivalent*s and his dialogues recorded by various other writers have resonated throughout the history of twentieth-century photography.

How Stieglitz Came to Photograph Clouds

The key source for Stieglitz’s writing on Equivalence is his essay ‘How I Came to Photograph Clouds’, originally written as a private letter to English photographer Ward Muir and not intended for publication. ‘How I Came to Photograph Clouds’ first appeared in print in 1923 and has been republished several times since.⁹ Although ‘Clouds’ does not use the terms Equivalent or Equivalence, as the title suggests, it does refer directly to Stieglitz’s cloud photographs, which, from 1925, he titled *Equivalent*.

Stieglitz began photographing clouds in 1922, the best of these images being grouped together and entitled *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs*. He continued photographing clouds throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, including a group of cloud images made in 1923 titled *Songs of the Sky*. While Stieglitz’s earlier cloud photographs include horizons and may well be viewed as landscapes, his later cloud images, particularly those made after 1925 and titled ‘Equivalent’, tend to feature no other visual reference points, at times making it difficult to determine which edge of the photograph is the top edge. Indeed, one of Stieglitz’s cloud photographs titled *Equivalent, 1926* appears to be deliberately turned upside down and then re-titled as *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930* (illustrations 4 and 5).¹⁰ It is almost certain that both *Equivalent, 1926* and *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930* are printed from the same negative, although the latter has been rotated 180 degrees for presentation. Is this one image that has simply been reoriented, re-titled and re-dated or are these two different images? These questions will be returned to later in this chapter.

⁸ Mary Christine Goodwin, *Minor White: The Silence of Seeing, Teaching Photography’s Visible Language*, Boston University Graduate School, 1990, p. 29.

⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, ‘How I Came To Photograph Clouds’, reproduced in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, pp.111-112. Originally published in *The Amateur Photographer and Photography*, Vol. 56, No. 1819, September 19, 1923, p. 255.

¹⁰ *Equivalent, 1926* is reproduced in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, from the ‘Aperture Masters of photography’ series, New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1989, p.79.

Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930 is reproduced in Time Life Books editors, *Great Photographers*, from the ‘Life Library of Photography’ series, U.S.A.: Time Inc., 1973, p. 130. These differences in image orientation, titles and dates do not appear to be due to neglect by the publishers but rather to be deliberately intended by Stieglitz.

In 'Clouds' Stieglitz explains that he decided he would "make a series of cloud pictures"¹¹ in reaction to comments made by two people, firstly, his brother-in-law and, secondly, the American writer Waldo Frank. Stieglitz writes that his brother-in-law, one morning, "announced to me that he couldn't understand how one as supposedly musical as I could have entirely given up playing the piano."¹² On that same morning, Stieglitz read an article written by Waldo Frank in a special edition of the magazine *MSS* devoted to photography, in which Frank asserts, as Stieglitz states, that "he believed that the secret power in my photography was due to the power of hypnotism I had over my sitters etc."¹³ In Frank's article, entitled 'A Thought Hazarded', he did not actually write that Stieglitz 'hypnotised' his subjects but rather that he 'moulded' them:

By talk, suggestion and the momentum of a personal relationship, Stieglitz lifts the features and body of his subject into a unitary design that his plate records. His work in thus moulding material is analogous to the work of any good portraitist, who does his moulding with his eye and with his hand on canvas.¹⁴

Although Frank's comments about Stieglitz's ability as a portraitist are favourable, Stieglitz's reaction was to point his camera to the sky, rather than the more familiar subject matter of people. In doing so it seems that Stieglitz wanted to demonstrate that, as an artist who used a camera, he was capable of producing art works for reasons beyond his rapport with human subjects.

Within 'Clouds' Stieglitz states his desire to make photographs with the expressive powers and qualities of music:

I wanted a series of photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch (the great composer) he would exclaim: Music! Music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? [...] And when finally I had my series of ten photographs printed, and Bloch saw them - what I said I wanted happened *verbatim*.¹⁵

Worth noting here is the similarity between Stieglitz's stated desire to create music through photographs and Walter Pater's famous dictum: "All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music."¹⁶ This relationship between photography and music, which emerges out of late nineteenth-century symbolism, is made further evident by Stieglitz's decisions to title his first and second sequences of cloud photographs, respectively, *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud*

¹¹ Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, op. cit., p.111.

¹² Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.111.

¹³ Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁴ Waldo Frank 'A Thought Hazarded', reproduced in Alfred Stieglitz, *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, Annotated and Compiled by Richard Whelan, New York: Aperture, 2000, p.238. Originally appeared in *MSS*, no. 4, December 1922, p.5.

¹⁵ Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, op. cit., p.112.

¹⁶ Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', reproduced in *Essays on Literature and Art*, Jennifer Uglow (ed.), London: Everyman's Library, 1990, p.51. Originally published in the *Fortnightly Review*, October 1877.

Photographs and Songs of the Sky.¹⁷ As Rosalind Krauss notes, in calling his photographs *Equivalents* “Stieglitz is obviously invoking the language of symbolism, with its notions of correspondence and hieroglyph.”¹⁸

Although Stieglitz had experimented with photographing clouds over thirty-five years before he wrote ‘Clouds’, and had contemplated exploring this subject matter further, it was not until he was vexed by comments made by his brother-in-law and Frank that he pursued clouds further:

So I made up my mind I’d answer Mr. Frank and my brother-in-law. I’d finally do something I had in my mind for years. I’d make a series of cloud pictures. [...] Through clouds to put down my philosophy of life – to show that my photographs were due not to subject matter – not to special trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges – clouds were there for everyone – no tax was on them – free.¹⁹

It is worth drawing attention here to Stieglitz’s statement “to show that my photographs were due not to subject matter”. This declaration may be interpreted in a number of ways. If subject matter is the visible material from which light reflects, to record onto a light sensitive emulsion and thus make a photographic image, then to what do Stieglitz’s photographs owe their existence? If the visible subject does not matter, then what is significant? Perhaps Stieglitz is suggesting that he is only interested in the formal qualities of the subject matter – shapes, contours, space, tones etc. – and how they appear within the frame of a two dimensional black and white image. Stieglitz may also be suggesting that he is more interested in what the subject matter refers to or represents, beyond itself. Or is Stieglitz saying more than this? Is Stieglitz hoping to convey something more profound, something that occurs deeply within either the photographer or the viewer, or both? When Stieglitz writes “to show that my photographs were due not to subject matter” he appears to be more concerned with the impact or effect produced by his photographs on viewers, rather than what his photographs document or depict of the real world. He also seems to suggest that photography is not simply mimetic, it is capable of greater things.

From the following statement recorded by one of Stieglitz’s many biographers, Dorothea Norman, in *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, it appears that Stieglitz was concerned with more than the formal qualities of the subject matter, such as shapes, contours, space, tones etc.: “Shapes, as such, do not interest me unless they happen to be an outer equivalent of something already taking form within me.”²⁰ When exactly Stieglitz made this statement is difficult to determine. Norman writes in the unnumbered pages following the title page of *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*: “The reflections by Stieglitz included in this volume are directly quoted from

¹⁷ Stieglitz’s alternative title for *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* was *Clouds in Ten Movements*.

¹⁸ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Stieglitz/Equivalents’ in *October*, Vol. 11(Winter 11979), p. 140.

¹⁹ Stieglitz, ‘Clouds’, in Lyons, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

²⁰ Stieglitz quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, New York: Aperture, 1990, p. 135.

conversations we had between 1927 and 1946, unless otherwise noted.”²¹

While all photographs, including Stieglitz’s, possess formal qualities Stieglitz is clearly interested in qualities other than these, as he states above. When selecting a subject matter to photograph, in order to make an Equivalent, Stieglitz is more concerned with how it equates to “something already taking form within”²² himself. In other words Stieglitz is more concerned with what photographs of clouds may *suggest or represent* on a personal or subjective level, beyond the subject matter itself.

Stieglitz chose to photograph clouds for one other significant reason apart from those already noted in 'Clouds':

I have found that the use of clouds in my photographs has made people less aware of clouds as clouds in the pictures than when I have portrayed trees or houses or wood or any other objects. In looking at photographs of clouds, people seem freer to think about the relationships in the pictures than about the subject matter for its own sake.²³

Again Stieglitz states that his photographs are not *due* to subject matter alone. Stieglitz chose clouds as a subject matter largely because of their universality and neutrality: “clouds were there for everyone”.²⁴ He did not necessarily want people to become more aware and/or appreciative of “clouds as clouds”. It appears here that he is pleased with the idea that the viewer of his cloud photographs or Equivalents is “freer to think about the relationships in the pictures”. As already noted, these relationships are not always formal relationships or “shapes, as such” but something beyond this: “an outer equivalent of something already taking form within”.²⁵

With his Equivalents, Stieglitz is interested in what photographs of clouds can portray or describe beyond “clouds as clouds”, beyond a mere depiction of the real world. He is more concerned with what *else* photographs of clouds can evoke or conjure within both himself and the individual viewer. To employ a Minor White statement, offered as a guideline for his

²¹ Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, New York: Aperture, 1990.

²² Stieglitz quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 135. Once again, it is difficult to determine when this statement was made, as with all Stieglitz quotations from this source, unless otherwise noted.

²³ Stieglitz in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁴ Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112. Presumably Stieglitz was aware of paintings of clouds by artists such as John Constable and J. M. W. Turner but no mention of these are made in either his writings on Equivalence or his recorded dialogues.

²⁵ Stieglitz in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

students – “To photograph things for what they are for what else they are”²⁶ – Stieglitz, with his *Equivalents*, was clearly more interested in photographing things “for what else they are” as opposed to “things for what they are”. He was not interested in “clouds as clouds” but rather what else they could suggest to the viewer. This is not to say that clouds as the subject matter of his *Equivalents* were irrelevant or chosen arbitrarily; he chose them because they are freely available to everyone and no one needs “special privileges” to access them. Furthermore, we are all familiar with the custom of identifying other suggested forms within the shapes and tones of clouds, for example finding the form of a human face or an animal within a cloud. To progress from this position to identifying feeling states within ourselves, as suggested by clouds, is a relatively simple progression, a step which does not require an incredible leap of faith or reason, assuming of course that the viewer is accustomed to such practices of experiencing images. Although it does not appear in his writing, Stieglitz was surely familiar with this custom of identifying other visual forms within clouds. Similarly, Stieglitz was no doubt aware of the symbolic and spiritual values associated with clouds, due to their elevated, heavenly position above our everyday lives and their eminently changeable and mutable physical states.

Simplistically, a Stieglitz *Equivalent* can be considered as metaphor, yet not as a metaphor for another object but rather as a metaphor for an internal, personal experience. If Stieglitz’s *Equivalents* are to be viewed as metaphors, however, it is important to make the distinction that, unlike conventional usage of metaphor, Stieglitz uses *Equivalents* to evoke rather than explain. Alternatively, if a Stieglitz *Equivalent* explains anything it does so by evoking an otherwise inexplicable inner personal experience; it brings to the surface of the viewer’s awareness something present within him or her self. With his *Equivalents* Stieglitz intends to communicate something profound, something that occurs deep within the photographer, as suggested by his assertion that: “My cloud photographs are equivalents of my most profound life experience, my basic philosophy of life.”²⁷

Clearly an *Equivalent* evokes, for Stieglitz, an intensely personal experience. Does Stieglitz only want to communicate *his* experience to the viewer, or does he also want an *Equivalent* to produce within viewers *their* equivalent of *their* “most profound life experience”? Stieglitz seems to suggest the latter, that is, that he not only intends to communicate something deep-

²⁶ Minor White in Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, USA: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, p. 34. As White remarks in a letter to John Upton, dated January 19, 1957: “The boys at school have printed up my statement “To photograph things for what they are for what else they are.”” Various permutations of this statement exist throughout White’s writing, the earliest published example comes from his 1951 article ‘Your Concepts are Showing: How to Judge your Own Photographs’, see

Minor White in ‘Your Concepts are Showing: How to Judge your Own Photographs’, in Stephanie Comer & Deborah Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006, pp.88- 94. Various permutations of this statement exist throughout White’s writing, the earliest published example comes from his 1951 article ‘Your Concepts are Showing’ which was originally published in *American Photography*, Vol 45. No. 5 (May 1951).

Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, p. 106. Another variation of this creed appears in which White alludes to yet another version, though this time unpublished, from 1950.

Minor White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 32. Yet another version can be found in White’s journal ‘Memorable Fancies’, dated 1956.

²⁷ Stieglitz in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, op. cit., p. 132.

felt that occurred within him, but also to evoke something profound within viewers, hence his assertion that “What is of greatest importance is to hold a moment, to record something so completely that those who see it will relive an equivalent of what has been expressed.”²⁸

What exactly is evoked within viewers may be triggered by Stieglitz’s experience and his Equivalent but it is essentially determined by the individual viewer. Should a viewer experience an Equivalent only on the literal level, that is, he or she sees the photograph as only an image of a cloud and the Equivalent does not evoke anything within, then clearly the metaphorical attributes of Equivalents, as discussed above, do not apply. Furthermore, from an early stage, Stieglitz appears to be aware that the viewer’s experience of his cloud photographs will invariably be different to his experience. As he states in letter to Hart Crane, dated 10 December 1923:

... I’m most curious to see what the “Clouds” will do to you. About six people have seen them – Men, Women, Girls & young fellows, artists & laymen – all are affected greatly & forget photography entirely –. Several people feel I have photographed God. May be. – At any rate I say nothing. They are merely shown the pictures.²⁹

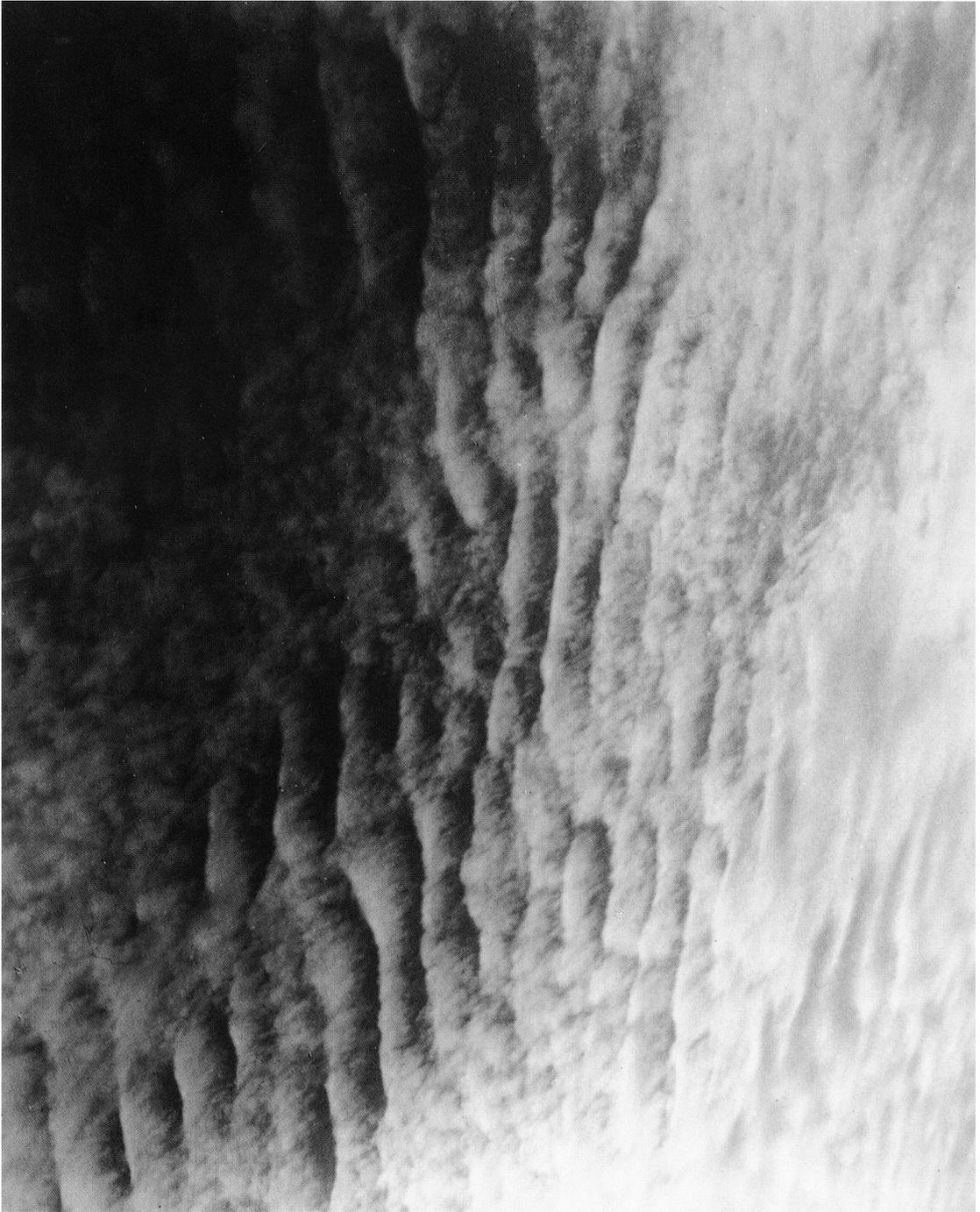
While Stieglitz was concerned with the spiritual well-being of his fellow Americans, unlike White, he was not a religious man. Hence it is unlikely that Stieglitz believed he saw God when he photographed clouds or when he viewed his photographs of clouds but others certainly did and may well still do so.

Important to note here is Stieglitz’s use of the term “affected”, particularly as it pertains to the emotional or spiritual impact of his Equivalents on viewers, rather than any derogatory notions of artifice or pretence concerning viewers’ behaviour. Further evidence of people being emotionally or spiritually “affected” by a Stieglitz Equivalent is provided in a letter from Adams to Stieglitz, dated 25 December 1944, in which Adams recounts that a participant in a lecture at CSFA had “tears in her eyes” while experiencing a Stieglitz Equivalent. Adams continues this account by reporting that the same viewer remarked “Now I know what you are talking about!”³⁰ This affective quality of Stieglitz’s Equivalents, whether it exists in his photographs or is bestowed upon his images by viewers, is at the centre of Stieglitz’s theory of Equivalence. This notion of the affective aspects of photographs is also at the heart of this thesis and will be dealt with in full in chapter five, ‘Illuminating the Invisible’. Before moving on to discuss the writings of other commentators and critics on both Stieglitz and his theory of Equivalence I will return to questions that arose earlier concerning his two photographs *Equivalent*, 1926 and *Equivalent*, *The Eternal Bride*, 1930 and then to the influence of Wassily Kandinsky’s writings on Stieglitz and in turn his Equivalents.

²⁸ Stieglitz in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁹ Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz*, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

³⁰ Ansel Adams quoted in Jeff Gunderson, ‘The Moment of Seeing: Photography at the California School of Fine Arts’, in Comer & Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing*, *op. cit.*, p 12.



4. Alfred Stieglitz *Equivalent*, 1926



5. Alfred Stieglitz *Equivalent*, *The Eternal Bride*, 1930

Two Equivalentents

As noted earlier, Stieglitz's *Equivalent, 1926* and *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930*, appear to be printed from the same negative. The key difference between these two images, apart from their titles, is that the latter has been rotated 180 degrees for viewing. In the reproductions viewed by this writer there are also differences in both the size and tonal qualities of the two images. *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930* not only appears in a separate publication but the reproduction is smaller, darker and has more tonal contrast than *Equivalent, 1926*. All of these elements combine to create an image that not only looks different but also evokes a different subjective viewing response. While many of these differences cannot be directly attributed to Stieglitz – particularly the variations of scale, darkness and contrast – I can say with a stronger degree of certainty that the different titles and image orientations can be attributed to Stieglitz. Nonetheless, the question remains: is this one image that has simply been reoriented, re-titled and re-dated or are these two different images? To answer this question we might ask: do *Equivalent, 1926* and *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930* evoke different responses? If the response is yes, then we may decide that the answer to the first question is also yes, that is, *Equivalent, 1926* and *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930* are two different images, despite the fact that they appear to be printed from the same negative, *because they evoke different viewing responses*.

One image given two different titles – assuming the viewer reads the titles – may not only evoke a different viewing response but may also lead the viewer to interpret the image in a different way. Similarly, one image turned upside down may also evoke a different response or interpretation. Furthermore, one image viewed in different physical contexts or on separate occasions where the viewer's emotional or intellectual state is altered, may also produce a different evocation or interpretation. And finally, one image seen in isolation – or alternatively in the context of other images in a sequence of images – may also evoke a different response or reading. Since Stieglitz presented his first and second groups of photographs, *Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs* and *Songs of the Sky*, as sequences, it is likely that he was aware of the ramifications of this later form of presentation.

Ansel Adams' analogy between music and photography is also useful in answering this question, and given Stieglitz's desire to create music with his Equivalentents it is also pertinent. Adams proposes that a negative is similar to a musical score in that it may be interpreted in different ways. Thus, for example, just as variations in performance quality, decided upon by the musician, whether consciously or intuitively, may evoke different listening responses and possibly different interpretations by the listener, so variations in print quality decided upon by the photographer may evoke different viewing responses and possibly different interpretations by the viewer. To extend this analogy further, it may also be said that performing a musical score backwards, or at varying tempi, produces different music in the same way that viewing a photograph upside down produces different music within the viewer. While this utilisation and extension of Adams' analogy may seem tenuous, a photograph viewed upside down certainly has a different visual emphasis to the same image viewed in its original orientation –

particularly when the photographer allows for such reorientations. While there may be some uncertainty as to why Stieglitz printed two images from the same negative, turned one upside down, and gave each print a different title there is no doubt that such practices of reorienting images were familiar to Stieglitz. As Bunnell reports:

One of Stieglitz's most famous pictures of [Georgia] O'Keeffe's hands, made in 1920, carries the instruction that the photograph may be hung or oriented in any of the four cardinal points. In the cloud photographs, this altered orientation was sometimes used to create and enliven the dynamics of the forms and their space.¹

So why did Stieglitz, after printing *Equivalent, 1926*, then decide to print from the same negative *Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930*? Bunnell proposes that it is part of "a modernist strategy in which a traditional representation was consciously rejected".² Certainly Stieglitz was interested in more than "traditional" representations of clouds, or "clouds as clouds", but not only to "create and enliven the dynamics of the forms and their space". The answer to this question possibly lies in the fact that he felt that the second interpretation or performance of this negative, reoriented 180 degrees, evoked different affective responses from the first and it was therefore, for him, an expression of a different experience. Or perhaps Stieglitz was reinforcing the position noted earlier "that my photographs were due not to subject matter"³, even if the subject matter is identical to a previously used subject matter for a different *Equivalent*.

Concerning Kandinsky's Influence on Stieglitz

Given the impact of Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence on White, it is useful to explore in turn the influences on Stieglitz that might have contributed to this theory. In this respect various writers have commented on the affect of Wassily Kandinsky's ideas and writings on Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence. In order to understand the significance of this influence, and to appreciate Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence more fully, relevant sections of Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911)⁴, along with the writings of Sarah Greenough, Joel Eisinger and Roger Lipsey, will now be discussed and analysed.

Wassily Kandinsky was a pioneer of pure abstract painting, an art form in which the painting itself does not represent or describe anything in the material or external world but rather represents or describes something in the immaterial or internal world of the viewer or the painter. As Kandinsky states, an abstract painter or an artist who is concerned with the

¹ Peter C. Bunnell, 'Three by Stieglitz', in *Inside the Photograph: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*, New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 2006, p. 26. Originally published in *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs from the Collection of Georgia O'Keeffe*, New York, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, 1993. Bunnell does not provide the title of the photograph of O'Keeffe's hands, it appears to come from collection of Georgia O'Keeffe.

² Bunnell, 'Three by Stieglitz', *ibid.*, p. 26

³ Stieglitz, 'Clouds', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

⁴ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Trans. M. T. H. Sadler, New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

spiritual in art seeks “to express in their work only internal truths, renouncing all consideration of external form.”⁵ Although these are Kandinsky’s words they could easily be mistaken for Stieglitz’s, or indeed White’s, because each artist was more concerned with the invisibility of the viewer’s inner experience than the visibility of the image itself.

Sarah Greenough, in her essay titled ‘Alfred Stieglitz and “The Idea of Photography”’, which accompanied a retrospective exhibition of Stieglitz’s photographs at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1983, states that Stieglitz “had been strongly influenced by Kandinsky’s writings and paintings.”⁶ As Greenough reports, Stieglitz printed extracts from *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in *Camera Work* in 1912, “only eight months after it was published in Munich and two years before it was translated into English. And he bought the only work by Kandinsky in the Armory show”.⁷ Greenough argues that Stieglitz, influenced by Kandinsky, attempted with his Equivalents to pursue the aims and objectives of abstraction in painting, that is, to express abstract thoughts and sensations through “the outward expression of the inner meaning” and to create “a more spiritual, less materialist, art”.⁸ Greenough’s use of the terms “outward expression” and “inner meaning” are worth noting here because they relate directly to this thesis’ notions of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’: the visible “outward expression” of the photograph and the invisible “inner meaning” experienced by the photographer or the viewer.

Joel Eisinger, in his book *Trace and Transformation*, also writes of the influence of Kandinsky on Stieglitz, suggesting that, for Stieglitz, Kandinsky’s ideas:

meant that the visible aspects of the material world are linked to a deeper and truer reality that can only be felt. He believed that he could use photographs and their formal properties as conduits between the material world and his experience of this intuited level of reality.⁹

Eisinger’s concepts of “a deeper and truer reality that can only be felt” and an “intuited level of reality” that are both connected to “the visible aspects of the material world” again relate strongly to notions of ‘invisibility’ and ‘visibility’. The ‘invisible’ here is an immaterial “reality, a reality that can only be felt” or “intuited”, while the ‘visible’ comprises “the material world” and the “formal properties” of the actual photograph.

With direct reference to Kandinsky, and again critical to this thesis’ notions of ‘invisibility’ and ‘visibility’, Eisinger notes that “Kandinsky wrote of the capacity of the formal properties of art to bypass the intellect and affect the soul directly.”¹⁰ Once again, Eisinger uses the phrase “formal properties” as a referent to the ‘visible’ elements of a photograph. Whereas the ‘invisible’ is further qualified here as a reality that is not only “intuited” but a reality in which

⁵ Kandinsky, *ibid.*, p. 1

⁶ Greenough, in Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁷ Greenough, in Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz*, *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸ Greenough, in Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz*, *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹ Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p.60.

¹⁰ Eisinger, *ibid.*, p.60.

the “intellect” is bypassed and the viewer’s soul is affected “directly”. Although Eisinger is writing here about Kandinsky, not Stieglitz or White, we may apply these qualities of ‘invisibility’ and ‘visibility’ to both Stieglitz’s and White’s photographs and to their approaches to photography. In addition, Eisinger’s use of the term “affect” is worth noting, because it reverberates with Stieglitz’s previously discussed use of this term and relates to my notion of ‘invisibility’.

Another author who writes about Kandinsky with pertinence to this thesis is Roger Lipsey. In his book *An Art of Our Time: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* Lipsey states that Kandinsky “intuited two universes in one – the visible universe of matter, space, and time, and an invisible universe of spiritual energies.”¹¹ While Lipsey is discussing Kandinsky here without any direct connection to Stieglitz or White, his reference to “an invisible universe of spiritual energies” certainly may be related to both of these photographers and to what they wished to convey or evoke through their photographs of “the visible universe”.

According to Kandinsky, one of the “formal properties” of an image that affects the soul directly, is colour. As he writes in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

Colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.¹²

Although it may not be appropriate to discuss the use of colour in the photographs of either Stieglitz or White, this often quoted passage by Kandinsky clearly illustrates a significant component of Kandinsky’s approach to painting and its relation to this thesis’ notion of ‘invisibility’. In Kandinsky’s metaphorical use of the piano, colour is the ‘visible’ formal property, while the viewer’s soul, which is affected by colour, is ‘invisible’. Kandinsky’s choice of the piano as a metaphor, resonates with the previously noted desire of Stieglitz to create images with the expressive powers of music.

In a letter to J. Dudley Johnston dated 3 April, 1925, Stieglitz again echoes Kandinsky when he writes about his inspiration and motivation to make photographs. As Stieglitz states: “My photographs are ever born of an inner need – an Experience of Spirit.”¹³ Throughout *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* Kandinsky frequently uses the term “inner need”, as Stieglitz does here. As Kandinsky’s translator, M. T. H. Sadler, states “inner need” primarily means “the impulse felt by the artist for spiritual expression”. Sadler also notes that Kandinsky sometimes uses this phrase to refer to “the actual expression itself”.¹⁴

Having briefly discussed Kandinsky and analysed his influence on Stieglitz, and in turn how

¹¹ Lipsey, op. cit., p. 1.

¹² Kandinsky, op. cit., p. 25.

¹³ Stieglitz, *Alfred Stieglitz*, op. cit, p. 208

¹⁴ M. T. H. Sadler, translator of Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, op. cit., p. 26.

this pertains to White, a notably different approach to examining Stieglitz provided by Allan Sekula will now be considered. Where the previously noted commentaries on the interpretation of meaning in Stieglitz's photographs are clearly focused on the individual viewer's subjective response, Sekula's critique offers an alternative, social constructivist point of view, in which meaning is determined by social context.

Sekula, Photographic Meaning and Affect

Along with Stieglitz and Eisinger, Allan Sekula also employs the term 'affect' to discuss the experience of viewing photographs. Before examining Sekula's use of this term within 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning'¹⁵ it will be both necessary and beneficial to give an overview of his essay since it contains many compelling arguments which directly concern Stieglitz, White and this thesis. As Geoffrey Batchen explains, Sekula considers the photograph as "a mobile, contingent, and inherently social entity" that is "always caught between the ideological demands of aestheticism (or subjectivism) and scientism (objectivism)."¹⁶

Sekula's 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' argues that photographs have no "intrinsic or universal meaning" and that the meaning of a photograph is essentially invented.¹⁷ Photographic literacy or the ability to read a photograph and determine meaning, Sekula claims, is an ability that is not innate within us but rather one that is learned. Thus, as Sekula states, "the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context determined", that is, the meaning of a photograph is determined by the discourse between the image, the viewer and the cultural context in which this exchange takes place.¹⁸ To convey his argument Sekula closely examines two specific photographs and the cultural contexts in which these images first appeared. The photographs chosen by Sekula are *The Steerage, 1907*, by Stieglitz and *Immigrants Going Down Gangplank, New York, 1905*, by Lewis Hine. These two photographs are not chosen arbitrarily: they were made within two years of each other and they feature similar subject matters. As Sekula notes, "Gangplanks and immigrants in middle-European dress feature significantly in both."¹⁹ In order to understand the meaning of these two images, in relation to the intentions of their respective photographers, Sekula examines the social and historical contexts of both photographers to determine what was "the *original* rhetorical function of the Stieglitz and the Hine".²⁰ In discerning differences and similarities between Stieglitz and Hine, Sekula identifies various attributes to each photograph(er). Although Sekula focuses on the differences between Stieglitz and Hine – and the differences he attributes to each tend to be polar opposites – these attributes provide useful reference points for examining Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence.

¹⁵ Sekula, op. cit., pp 3-21.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997, p. 8

¹⁷ Sekula, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁸ Sekula, ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹ Sekula, ibid., p. 6.

²⁰ Sekula, ibid., p. 8.

While *The Steerage, 1907* is not, strictly speaking, one of Stieglitz's Equivalents, Sekula notes that it "prefigures the later, explicitly metaphorical works, the *Equivalents*."²¹ *The Steerage*, Sekula reports, "first appeared in *Camera Work*, in 1911."²² As with White's editorial role in *Aperture*, Stieglitz was in a unique position with *Camera Work* because he was not only able to publish his own work but was also able to control, to a large degree, the context in which it appeared. As Sekula observes, Stieglitz "was able to shape an entire discourse situation" through *Camera Work*, in which he "outlined the terms under which photography could be considered art".²³ While I would argue that Stieglitz's efforts towards promoting photography as a fine art are commendable Sekula finds them contentious. As Eisinger notes, Sekula "sees art photography as an attempt to transcend social reality", and, as such, "it is an endorsement of the social status quo."²⁴ Thus Sekula sees Stieglitz as a Romanticist and an aesthete. Certainly, it may be said that Sekula regards Stieglitz as an upholder of the status quo; however, in his own way, Stieglitz tried to challenge how things stood by changing peoples' attitudes towards photography. Given that Stieglitz and White were both champions of photography as fine art and editors of influential photographic journals, *Camera Work* and *Aperture* respectively, Sekula's opinions may well be applied to White also.

For Sekula, one of the key elements within Stieglitz's *Camera Work* discourse is the notion of photographs "as precious objects, as products of extraordinary craftsmanship."²⁵ This preciousness of photographs, as unique objects rather than reproducible images, leads Sekula into a discussion on daguerreotypes and the notion of photographs achieving a "semantic status as fetish objects *and* as documents."²⁶ Sekula is opposed to the very idea of photographs as "precious objects" or "fetish objects". He rejects the idea – prominent, he would assert, in the belief of photographers such as Stieglitz – that a photograph is "invested with a magical power to penetrate appearances and thus to transcend the visible; to reveal, for example secrets of human character."²⁷ Where Sekula is sceptical, to say the least, of a photograph's power to "transcend the visible", Stieglitz and White certainly were not. Whether or not Stieglitz believed that a photograph's power to transcend 'visibility' into 'invisibility' was "magical" or not is difficult to determine. If, as Sekula suggests, photographers such as Stieglitz invest the photograph with a power to "transcend the visible", is it not also possible that the individual viewer, depending on his or her approach to the photograph, may also invest the photograph with an 'invisible' power?

While I acknowledge Sekula's point that the interpretation of the meaning of a photograph is always "context determined" and thus that photographic meaning is, to a large extent,

²¹ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 15.

²² Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 8.

²³ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 8. In discussing the "discourse situation" of *Camera Work* Sekula also makes an unfavourable comparison between Stieglitz's *Camera Work* and Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*.

²⁴ Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

²⁵ Sekula, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁶ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁷ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 10.

invented, Sekula nevertheless appears to give too little credit to the viewer's own powers of interpretation. This is not to propose, that in order for a person to experience 'invisibility' while looking at a photograph, he or she needs to either be a magician, believe in magic or be fetishistic, but rather to suggest that Sekula gives insufficient acknowledgement to the individual viewer's powers of creativity and subjectivity. Since the context in which a photograph is viewed might determine the meaning of an image, so too might the cultural context of the actual viewer. But, at the same time, individual viewers from the same cultural group may determine different meanings, as no two viewers will have identical cultural backgrounds. Photographic meaning, in this sense, is not culturally agreed upon; individual viewers may approach the same photograph differently and thus each will experience it in a different way.

Connected to Sekula's notion of photographs as "precious" or "fetish" objects that are "invested with a magical power to penetrate appearances and thus to transcend the visible" is what Sekula calls the photograph's "affective" power. In Sekula's argument Stieglitz's *The Steerage* is invested with an "affective" power. In contrast, Hine's *Immigrants Going Down Gangplank*, Sekula posits, is invested with an "informative" power. Sekula has reservations about both powers, the "affective" and the "informative", due to what he calls "the mythical truth value of the photograph". As Sekula states:

The photograph is imagined to have, depending on its context, a power that is primarily affective or a power that is primarily informative. Both powers reside in the mythical truth value of the photograph. But this folklore unknowingly distinguishes two separate truths: the truth of magic and the truth of science.²⁸

It is not immediately clear here whether Sekula believes it is the photographer or the viewer who imagines the photograph to have these powers. However, since the focus of Sekula's essay is on the "original rhetorical function of the Stieglitz and the Hine" photographs – as determined by Stieglitz and the Hine rather than the subjective responses of their viewers – we can safely assume that Sekula is referring to the photographer. Nonetheless, it may equally be the individual viewer who imagines that the photograph has "affective" or "informative" powers. The validity of these "imagined" powers, which are for Sekula evident in the original intentions of Stieglitz and Hine respectively, is certainly questioned by Sekula. He is particularly opposed to Stieglitz's assumptions about his own photographs, because they are invested with, as Sekula states, "a power that transcends the perceptual into the realm of affect" and because Stieglitz denies "the iconic level of the image"²⁹. In other words, Sekula rejects Stieglitz's subjective, mystical and unscientific approach to photography because Stieglitz invests photographs with a power that is "primarily affective" rather than "informative". But how and why, beyond its supposedly "original rhetorical function", is *The Steerage* "primarily affective"? For some viewers the image may be "primarily informative", just as a Stieglitz Equivalent may be seen to be nothing more than a photograph of clouds.

²⁸ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 14.

The affect of a photograph on a viewer, in relation to Sekula's, Eisinger's and Kandinsky's previously noted uses of the term "affect", may best be described as the photograph's ability to move or touch the viewer emotionally, or to produce or influence a feeling within the viewer. In this sense the photograph goes beyond being "informative". While Sekula acknowledges that photographs do have such "affective" powers he attributes this to the individual and private nature of the viewer's experience, as opposed to the publicly available "informative" power of the photograph, of which Sekula clearly approves. As Sekula states, "While theories of affect regard the photograph as a unique and privately engaged object, informative value is typically coupled to the mass reproduction of the image."³⁰

In contrast to the "affective" function of a photograph, "the other pole" of Sekula's position, is the "informative" function, "that by which it has the legal power of proof; this function is grounded in empiricism."³¹ But if Sekula is sceptical about a photograph's affective power, so too he has reservations about a photograph's "informative power". It is important to remember that for Sekula, the powers that we invest in photographs and the meanings we determine are essentially "context determined" and invented. As Sekula argues, a photograph's supposed informative power, particularly in the case of individual human identification, is often misused and abused politically and socially.

This being said, Sekula certainly favours the 'informative' function of the photograph over the 'affective' function, and while a photograph – via the individual viewer – may have either or both of these powers, it is the 'affective' function, or power, of the photograph that most concerns this thesis. Sekula actively distrusts the 'affective' power Stieglitz invests in photographs, particularly in his *Equivalents*. As Eisinger observes, Sekula is "suspicious of the visual nature of photography and the values offered by its visual qualities, such as beauty, a full range of unarticulated feeling, free association."³² With reference to Stieglitz's text 'How I Came to Photograph Clouds', in particular the previously quoted passage referring to Ernest Bloch and music, Sekula states that Stieglitz's "compulsion" to make photographs with the expressive powers and qualities of music is: "a desire to abandon all contextual reference and to convey meaning by virtue of a metaphorical substitution. In photography this compulsion requires an incredible denial of the image's status as report."³³

Note here that even though Sekula is suspicious of both the 'affective' and 'informative' powers that are invested in photographs – because both of these functions, as discussed earlier, "reside in the mythical truth value of the photograph" – he is nevertheless emotionally committed to the 'informative', that is the image's power to report. While Sekula would presumably accede to the view that some photographs have little or no 'affective' power, he is clearly incredulous here that some photographs, such as Stieglitz's *Equivalents*, have little or no 'informative' power.

³⁰ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 10.

³² Eisinger, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

³³ Sekula, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Yet Stieglitz would never deny such 'informative' power; his photographs of clouds can be read as simply photographs of clouds. In his own *Equivalents*, Stieglitz is simply not concerned with the 'informative' function of the photograph but in something quite different; he is interested in greater things than "clouds as clouds". Although Stieglitz may have denied what, for Sekula, is "the image's status as report" of the visible external world, he does not deny the image's ability to "report" his "most profound life experience" or his "basic philosophy of life."³⁴ Similarly, while Sekula also notes that, with Stieglitz's *Equivalents*, "the suggestion of narrative had been dropped entirely from the image", Stieglitz was not interested in narrative with his *Equivalents*.³⁵ If Stieglitz was interested in narrative it was not in a conventional narrative but rather a narrative of mood or emotion, since his *Equivalents* were frequently presented to the viewer as sequences of images.

In concluding 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' Sekula summarises the various attributes he applies to photography. As Sekula reiterates:

Every photograph tends, at any given moment of reading in any given context, toward one of these two poles of meaning. The opposites between these poles are as follows: photographer as seer vs. photographer as witness, photography as expression vs. photography as reportage, theories of imagination (and inner truth) vs. theories of empirical truth, affective value vs. informative value [...]³⁶

To refer again to Batchen's comments on Sekula, these ideological opposites might also be described as 'aestheticism' vs. 'scientism', and 'subjectivism' vs. 'objectivism'. These attributes are applicable to the functions and powers of photographs and the specific intentions of the photographer who made the image, they may also be applied to the viewer's experience of the photograph. It is also important to note that all of these attributes are dependent on cultural context. Where these terms and definitions have been useful in this examination of Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence, they will also prove to be helpful in the following examinations on White's writings on Equivalence and his use of the term 'invisible'.

If Sekula is critical of Stieglitz's *Equivalents* for their use of "metaphorical substitution" and their "incredible denial of the image's status as report", then he is even more critical of White's work, where such denial of the photograph's "informative" function clearly reaches, for Sekula, its most extreme expression. As Sekula states, "The final outcome of this denial is the discourse situation represented by Minor White and *Aperture* magazine."³⁷ This assertion and subsequent references to White and *Aperture* in 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁴ Stieglitz in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 1990, op. cit., p. 132.

³⁵ Sekula, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁶ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁷ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 15.



6. Minor White, *Moencopi Strata, Capital Reef, Utah*, 1962

On Moencopi Strata, Capital Reef, Utah, 1962

The spring-tight line between reality and photograph has been stretched relentlessly, but it has not been broken. These abstractions of nature have not left the world of appearances; for to do so is to break the camera's strongest point – its authenticity.¹

It appears to be a photograph of rocks or is it, as John Szarkowski observes, “stone, ice, ancient bones, desiccated leaves, fossilized wood”². While I may not be able to easily identify the subject matter of this image what is clear is that this image fills me with awe. The precision with which this photograph has been recorded is razor sharp and it has a remarkably fine tonal range. As an image it is hyperreal, it seems to be too real to be credible, yet there is nothing in this image to suggest that it is not a ‘straight’ photograph. The “recording power” and the “transforming power” of the camera are working together in harmony.

Perhaps the feeling of awe that this image generates within me has as much to do with the face that is formed in the top right hand corner as the exactitude with which it has been recorded. There is something sinister about the expression of these anthropomorphic rocks and the black spaces that are dispersed throughout this image. My sense of wonder can also be attributed to the image's balanced composition, ambiguity of space and scale, and flatness.

¹ Minor White in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p. 10.

² John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, New York: The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, 1976, p. 174

White and Equivalence

Man relies on the reflection to construct his own truth. The mirror opens up a space of play between the visible and the invisible, between dream and reality, with which the subject takes account of himself by projecting himself into images and fictions, having mastered their unfolding.¹

Throughout Minor White's writings the occasions on which he discusses Equivalence are many and varied. The strategy of this chapter will be to focus analysis and discussion on one particular article, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', White's most extensive piece of writing on this subject. Although White does not use the term 'invisible' in this article, what he writes about Equivalence will be of great assistance in understanding and appreciating his use and adaptation of this theory derived, in part, from Alfred Stieglitz. In my next chapter, 'The Invisible Man', I will pursue other references to Equivalence in White's writing on Equivalence, particularly those that use the term 'invisible' in relation to Stieglitz and/or Equivalence.

Equivalence: The Perennial Trend

White's essay 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' was first published in 1963 in the *Photographic Society of America Journal*². In this article White acknowledges Stieglitz as the father of Equivalence, dating it back to the early 1920s. Prior to the 1920s, White suggests, the concept of Equivalence "was rather vague in the work and writings of the Photo-Secession group around Stieglitz and Edward Steichen, in New York".³ In addition to himself White also notes that others, such as Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind, continued working with this theory.⁴

White begins 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' with a discussion of the nature of trends. Trends, White states, are "peripheral" and concerned with changes in style. In contrast to these shifts and changes is what White calls "eternal significance" or "Spirit". Although fashions and styles may change they are, as White notes, "but clothes for the *raison d'être* of any art [...] a gateway to the central significance of the aesthetic experience if the individual persists."⁵ White continues by arguing that with the theory of Equivalence "any style, fashion or trend may be

¹ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 184.

² Minor White, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons, (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, pp 168-175. Originally published in *Photographic Society of America Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 7 (July 1963), pp 17-21.

³ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 172.

⁴ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168.

worked *through* to something beyond the conformism of competition.”⁶ Equivalence, for White, is fundamental to the practice of “photography as a medium of creation-expression.”⁷

To outline what he understands to be the theory of Equivalence, White refers to three different levels. These three levels refer to the *viewer's* experience of a photograph, but do not appear to be in a hierarchical order. While, at times, White also refers to the *photographer's* experience of a photograph, and to his or her intention in making the photograph, his emphasis here is on the viewer's response.

The first level of Equivalence White refers to as “the graphic level” which concerns “the photograph itself”⁸, the starting point of the viewer's experience. The second level of Equivalence involves the viewer's internal experience of the photograph; as White states, it “relates to what goes on in the viewer's mind as he looks at a photograph”.⁹ White's third level of Equivalence pertains to what he calls the “remembered image” and the viewer's experience of recalling his or her “mental image” of the photograph.¹⁰ In both the second and third levels of Equivalence the viewer's imagination and subjective response to the photograph play a vital role. These two levels might also be seen to deal with what Allan Sekula calls the photograph's “affective” power, as opposed to the photograph's “informative” power. Thus White's writing on the creative process and the interpretative approach to photography signalled the concerns that would be pursued by later theorists.

The First Level of Equivalence

I will now look at each of these levels of Equivalence in detail, beginning with the first level. As White states:

At one level, the graphic level, the word “Equivalence” pertains to the photograph itself, the visible foundations of any potential experience with the photograph itself. Oddly enough, this does not mean that a photograph which functions as an Equivalent has a certain appearance, or style, or trend, or fashion. Equivalence is a function, an experience, not a thing.¹¹

It is worth noting here White's uses of the terms ‘Equivalent’ and ‘Equivalence’. For White, an Equivalent is an actual photograph, and Equivalence pertains to the viewing experience of an Equivalent. Where an Equivalent is a physical object, or thing, Equivalence is “not a thing” but rather an experience or function of a photograph. An Equivalent is a visual reference point from which the experience of Equivalence commences. “Any photograph”, says White, “might

⁶ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁰ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹¹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 168-169.

function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace.”¹² In order for a viewer to experience Equivalence there must, in the beginning, be a photograph. While the “graphic level” is the first level of Equivalence, it would appear that, unless the viewer moves beyond this level, that is, beyond “the photograph itself”, there is no experience of Equivalence. Equivalence functions within a viewer, in response to a photograph; it concerns the viewer’s experience of the photograph, not “the photograph itself”. A photographer who is working with the theory of Equivalence may also call a photograph an Equivalent, although the viewer might not necessarily experience the image on any other level than the “graphic level”. Whether or not a photograph functions as an Equivalent is entirely dependent on the viewer.

White’s use of the phrase “any potential experience” is also worth noting. It suggests not that a single photograph offers the possibility of a single, unequivocal experience but rather that each photograph may prompt both different experiences within separate viewers and a wide variety of responses within an individual viewer. White’s description of “the photograph itself” as “the visible foundations of any potential experience” suggests that the viewer’s experience itself goes beyond this “visible foundation”. The inference here may be that such “potential experience” is latent within the photograph, waiting to be experienced by a viewer, and that it is therefore invisible within the photograph. However, given that the response is significantly determined by the viewer, it might be suggested that such latency, rather than residing in the photograph, stems more from what the viewer brings to the photograph. White’s statement above, that “Equivalence is a function, an experience, not a thing” thus appears to suggest that “any potential experience” is invisible within the viewer rather than within the photograph.

When a photographer intends a photograph to function as an Equivalent and a viewer of the Equivalent does not experience Equivalence (that is, the viewer does not experience the Equivalent beyond the “graphic level”) then we may say that the photographer’s intended “potential experience” is mute within the photograph to that viewer. Similarly, if one viewer undergoes an experience of Equivalence and another viewer does not, then the “potential experience” remains closed to the second viewer. The reason for this is that, where White’s first level of Equivalence, the “graphic level”, relates to the “photograph itself”, as the foundation of the viewer’s experience, the second level of Equivalence is concerned with the viewer’s actual experience of the photograph. As White states: “At the next level the word “Equivalence” relates to what goes on in the viewer’s mind as he looks at a photograph that arouses in him a special sense of correspondence to something that he knows about himself.”¹³

The Second Level of Equivalence

In White’s second level of Equivalence, then, the viewer’s experience of the photograph arouses something within his or her mind. Due to this inner activity on the part of the viewer the photograph as simply a graphic image (in the first level of Equivalence) becomes an Equivalent

¹² White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹³ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

in the second level. As the viewer engages with the photograph – as the photograph awakens “a special sense of correspondence” within the viewer – then the viewer may be understood to engage with him or her self via the photograph. There is a progression here from the visible external reality of the photograph itself to the invisible inner reality of the viewer because the photograph arouses or stimulates something within the viewer. What exactly “goes on in the viewer’s mind as he looks at a photograph” is difficult to determine, but, for White, it certainly relates to the viewer’s experience of the photograph, his or her “special sense of correspondence”, and, as will be shown, the viewer’s ‘mental image’ of the photograph.

As noted in the previous chapter, this notion of personal correspondence has its foundation in symbolism. Correspondence is clearly important to White’s concept of Equivalence, as it arises again when he observes that “If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself – that is, the photograph mirrors something within himself – then his experience is some degree of Equivalence.”¹⁴

For White, when viewers of an Equivalent experience a “special sense of correspondence” then there is something in the photograph they identify with, and through this identification they are personally connected with the Equivalent. The photograph acts here as a catalyst for viewers. Viewers who experience this “correspondence” recognise something of themselves in the photograph, or the photograph leads them to reflect upon themselves, and to recognise or realise something about themselves. Here the photograph functions as a trigger for self reflection, or, as White calls, it a “mirror”. This idea of the photograph as a mirror is frequently used throughout White’s writing, and often referred to in ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’. For White, an Equivalent not only mirrors the visible, external world but more importantly it offers to viewers a mirror to their own invisible, internal world. Through reflection on the Equivalent viewers come to understand something about themselves. In this sense, each viewer’s self awareness increases through his or her engagement with an Equivalent, or at least the viewer discovers something in the photograph that connects with him or her personally and goes beyond the photograph itself.

White’s concept of the photograph as mirror was later utilised extensively in John Szarkowski’s book *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*. This book was first published in 1978 as a catalogue to accompany an exhibition of photographs at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York, and its subsequent tour around the United States of America. At the time of its first publication Szarkowski was the Director of the Department of Photography at the MOMA, and in it Szarkowski investigates what he calls “a fundamental dichotomy in contemporary photography between those who think of photography as a means of self-expression and those who think of it as a method of exploration.”¹⁵

In analysing this dichotomy, and to assist in putting forward his argument, Szarkowski

¹⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁵ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p. 11.

proposes a theoretical “single axis with two poles” and arranges the illustrations, most of which are reproductions of photographs, into two sections. At one end of this continuum are photographers who conceive their photographs, through “self-expression”, as “a mirror, reflecting the artist who made it”; at the other end are those who conceive their photographs, through “exploration”, as “a window, through which one might better know the world”.¹⁶ For Szarkowski, the two photographers that epitomise these two extremes are respectively Minor White and Robert Frank. Szarkowski’s focus, as he articulates it, is with the “photographer’s definition of his function”¹⁷ not with how viewers interpret or experience photographs. Thus Szarkowski’s analytical focus on the intended function of a photograph is similar to Sekula’s, that is, both are concerned with the original “rhetorical function” of photographs.¹⁸ Furthermore, Szarkowski, like Sekula, appears to disregard the role of viewers in determining the meaning of photographs, and the influence of viewers’ approaches to photographs on their experience of photographs. Indeed, by dividing the images in *Mirrors and Windows* into two separate sections, Szarkowski may well be accused of attempting to control, or at least direct, the viewer’s experiences of the photographs. Similar charges also may be against White due to his editorial control over *Aperture* and his curatorial control over the various photographic exhibitions he assembled throughout his life.

Certainly White frequently refers to his own photographs as ‘mirrors’ of his own experiences, but he also intended them as ‘mirrors’ for other viewers, ‘mirrors’ in which viewers could reflect upon themselves. Assuming that only one person is looking at a photograph at any given moment, the photograph as ‘mirrors’ functions in the same way as a conventional mirror, that is, it reflects whoever is looking at it. It is also interesting to compare Szarkowski’s categorisation of photographs as either ‘mirrors’ or ‘windows’ with Sekula’s notions of the ‘affective’ and ‘informative’ powers of photographs. Where the photograph as a ‘mirrors’ is clearly invested with an ‘affective’ power, the photograph as “window” is endowed with an ‘informative’ power.

In addition to Equivalents functioning as ‘mirrors’ for viewers, for which the viewer experiences a “special sense of correspondence”, White also describes an Equivalent as functioning, “for any given person”, as a “metaphor” or “symbol”. Any “given person” here may be the viewer or the photographer. As White states:

When any photograph functions for any given person as an Equivalent we can say that at that moment and for that person the photograph acts as a symbol or plays the role of a metaphor for something that is beyond the subject of the photograph.¹⁹

White’s interest in progressing “beyond the subject of the photograph”, beyond a literal depiction of the real world, resonates strongly with Stieglitz’s previously noted interest in what

¹⁶ Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows*, op.cit., p. 25.

¹⁷ Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows*, ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸ Allan Sekula, ‘On The Invention of Photographic Meaning’, in *Photography Against the Grain*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, p. 8.

¹⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, op. cit., p. 169.

photographs of clouds can express beyond “clouds as clouds”²⁰ and his conviction that his photographs “were due not to subject matter”.²¹ While this thesis would argue that the success of both Stieglitz’s and White’s Equivalents is due *in part* to their subject matter, it is not due to subject matter *alone*. To refer again to White’s previously noted statement, both Stieglitz and White photographed “things for what they are for what else they are”. Although Stieglitz and White were both more concerned with what could be expressed via things “for what else they are” rather than “things for what they are” (or subject matter alone) the former is intrinsically linked to the latter.²²

In White’s assertion that an Equivalent “acts as a symbol or plays the role of a metaphor for something that is beyond the subject of the photograph” he is clearly interested in the viewer moving beyond the literal subject of the image, beyond “things for what they are” and towards things “for what else they are”. As viewers move away from the literal subject of the photograph, visible in the photograph itself, they move further into their own internal experience of the image. A significant aspect of this non-literal, inner experience, in which a photograph “plays the role of a metaphor”, is the viewer’s ‘mental image’ of the photograph. As White states, “only in the mental image held is there any possibility of a metaphorical functioning occurring.”²³ I will return to White’s concept of the ‘mental image’ and how this relates to Equivalence shortly.

The viewer’s experience of the photograph here not only goes beyond the ‘photograph itself’ but also beyond the *subject* of the photograph. This movement may also be described as a movement from visibility to invisibility of the subject; from the visibility of the subject of the photograph, in addition to the visibility of the photograph itself, to the invisibility of the viewer’s experience of the photograph and its subject. As the viewer’s experience of the photograph transcends the subject of the photograph, both the subject itself and the photograph itself become less significant and less visible to the viewer. This is not to say that the subject becomes irrelevant, but rather that the viewer’s response to it is subjective rather than objective; the subject of the photograph is always visible in the photograph itself.

In addition to being a consequence of the viewer’s experience of the photograph this progression “beyond the subject of the photograph”, as a function of Equivalence, may also be the photographer’s intention. This is particularly so if that photographer is White or Stieglitz or, indeed, any other photographer in the practice of making Equivalents. As White states:

When a photographer presents us with what to him is an Equivalent, he is telling us in effect, “I had a feeling about something and here is my metaphor of that feeling.” The

²⁰ Alfred Stieglitz quoted in Norman, Dorothy, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, New York: Aperture, 1990, p. 132.

²¹ Alfred Stieglitz, ‘How I Came To Photograph Clouds’, in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, pp. 111-112.

²² Minor White in Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, USA: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, p. 34.

²³ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, op. cit., p. 171.

significant difference here is that what he had a feeling about was *not for the subject he photographed, but for something else*. [my italics]²⁴

For White, an Equivalent is “in effect” a metaphor of a photographer’s feeling, that is, it is a non-literal representation or evocation of a feeling state. Here the subject of the photograph becomes a vehicle, a conduit through which the photographer is able to convey how and what he or she was feeling at a particular time. While the subject of the photograph was visible to the photographer at the moment in which the film was exposed, the photographer’s feelings at that moment were *invisible*. It is White’s intention – and the intention of other photographers who make Equivalents – to implicitly express these invisible feelings through the subject photographed and the photograph itself. In this sense the visible subject of the photograph is always pertinent. Whether or not the photographer’s private feelings are ‘readable’ within the photograph is almost impossible to say. Nonetheless, it is the photographer’s intention that his or her experiences or feelings are either within the photograph or expressed by the photograph, even though they may not necessarily be conveyed or communicated to the viewer of the photograph.

In his essay 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', White elaborates on this idea of photographers who manifest their inner feelings or experiences through Equivalents via an example of a photographer who photographs clouds, a clear allusion to Stieglitz. If the viewer experiences the same or a similar feeling to that which the photographer experienced and wished to convey, then the photographer, White claims, “has aroused in us what was to him a known feeling.”²⁵ White rephrases this point when he writes that, for the photographer, the Equivalent has “specific suggestive powers that can direct the viewer into a specific and known feeling, state or place within himself.”²⁶ White appears here to deviate from the previously noted viewer’s experience of an Equivalent as *any* “potential experience”, towards a more specific viewing experience, not merely based on, but in some sense the same as, the photographer’s experience of Equivalence. Despite this, “a specific and known feeling, state or place” within a viewer is still part of “any potential experience” and it is still part of the invisibility of the viewer’s experience of a photograph.

Also worth noting is White’s use of the phrase “specific suggestive powers” to describe the effect of an Equivalent on a viewer. If we define the word ‘suggest’ as “to bring before a person’s mind indirectly or without plain expression” or “to call up in the mind (another thing) through association or natural connection of ideas”,²⁷ then we have an important descriptive term in defining both Equivalents and Equivalence. Thus, in the context of the phrase “specific suggestive powers”, an Equivalent can be understood to indirectly place before a viewer’s mind or call up in a viewer’s mind something specific, other than that which is visible in the photograph.

²⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

²⁶ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170. I will return to this quote, in particular to Sekula’s comments on it, later in this chapter.

²⁷ A. Delbridge & J. R. L. Bernard (General Editors), *The Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, NSW: The Macquarie Library, 1994, p.1004.

Although White's use of the word "suggestive" above refers to "a specific and known feeling, state or place" within viewers (in their experience of Equivalence) White also utilises the concept of suggestiveness with reference to less specific experiences within the viewer. As White states:

Suggestibility is a part of the foundations of human nature. Most of our lives depend on suggestibility, the arts especially. The documentarian in photography may communicate considerable information with his camera; the pictorialist conscious of design and its power of suggestion depends heavily on that quality in us that makes the Rorschach blot useful in therapy. The theory of Equivalence is a way for the photographer to deal with human suggestibility in a conscious and responsible way.²⁸

Suggestibility, for White, is a fundamental part of our being. As such it can be used by photographers to make Equivalent in much the same way as a psychologist uses human susceptibility to suggestion in a Rorschach ink-blot test.²⁹ A Rorschach ink-blot test is a psychological test involving the presentation of ink-blot to a viewer, the viewer being required to respond by stating what the ink-blot suggests to him or her. The viewer's statements are then analysed by the person giving the test. The similarity between a Rorschach ink-blot test and an Equivalent is that both are primarily concerned with what is suggested to a viewer by an image that holds no fixed meaning. The difference is that a Rorschach test is used by a psychologist as a diagnostic procedure for mental disorders, where one person analyses the other, while an Equivalent is used by either a photographer or a viewer – deliberately or otherwise – as a trigger for a private, internal experience and for self-analysis. For White, to think of an Equivalent as a Rorschach ink-blot "is not detrimental to either medium because suggestibility is the very gate to the perennial trend in art."³⁰

White's use of the concept of suggestiveness in the above quote relates to "human nature", human dependence and a quality within us that makes us open to the "power of suggestion", especially through our visual sense, and which reveals something about our selves. This concept of suggestiveness is different to that noted earlier, particularly as it no longer deals with a specific suggestion that is experienced by a viewer. The point of a Rorschach test is not to "direct the viewer into a specific and known feeling, state or place within himself"³¹ that is similar to that which was experienced by the person who made the ink-blot. Likewise, although an Equivalent *may* direct a viewer into "a specific and known feeling, state or place", which is similar to that which was experienced by the photographer, it might also suggest an experience for the viewer that is dissimilar to the photographer's and that was unknown to the photographer. Thus an Equivalent does not have a fixed meaning: the individual viewer and his or her approach to the image determines the meaning.

²⁸ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁹ Hermann Rorschach created the eponymous inkblot test in 1921, it is still used as a method of psychological evaluation today.

³⁰ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 174.

³¹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

White also appears here to separate the function of documentary photography and pictorialist photography. Where the documentary photograph seems only to be concerned with imparting information, and thus to exist only in White's first level of Equivalence, the pictorialist photograph is more concerned with "design and its power of suggestion" and going beyond White's first level of Equivalence. The formal aspects of a photograph, or its qualities of design, are clearly linked here to the photograph's "power of suggestion".

Although White believes that any photograph might function as an Equivalent, it appears that some photographs, due to their design qualities and "power of suggestion", are more likely to function as Equivalents than others. For White such photographs arise not only through the image's design but also, as will be shown soon, through the suggestive qualities of certain subject matter and particular ways of rendering any subject matter. The suggestive powers of an Equivalent, and whether or not a viewer is open to suggestion, are important factors in White's theory of Equivalence, and will be explored later in this chapter.

Before moving on to discuss, in detail, White's third level of Equivalence I will examine the significance of the mental image of a photograph to White's theory of Equivalence. The viewer's mental image of a photograph is, for White, more than just a reproduction of the photograph in the viewer's mind. Rather, each individual creates his or her own unique mental image. More significantly, however, and as White states, "the mental image in a viewer's mind is more important than the photograph itself."³² The transition from the photograph itself to the mental image sees the image change from being literal to non-literal, due to the previously noted "metaphorical functioning" of the viewer's mind and the involvement of the viewer's imagination and creativity. As discussed earlier, for any "metaphorical functioning" to occur or for the photograph to play "the role of a metaphor", the viewer must not only go beyond the photograph itself but also "beyond the subject of the photograph."³³ Since the mental image is created by the viewer's mind, it belongs to, and can only be experienced by, the viewer. While the mental image is visible to the viewer, within the viewer's mind, it is invisible outside of him or her self as a physical image. In this sense we can say that the mental image is invisible and – along with anything else that occurs in the viewer's mind as part of his or her response to a photograph – it is part of the viewer's experience of invisibility. This transition from a literal to a non-literal image may also be seen as a transition from visible to invisible; from the visibility of the literal physical image in front of the viewer and its potential experience to the invisibility of the non-literal mental image inside the viewer and the realm of real experience.

White again emphasises the vital role of the viewer and his or her mental image of a photograph, in determining if a photograph is to function as an Equivalent when he proposes the following equation:

Equivalency, while it depends entirely on the photograph itself for the source of stimulation functions in the mind of the viewer. Equivalency functions on the

³² White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 174.

³³ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

assumption that the following equation is factual:

$$\text{Photograph} + \text{Person Looking} \leftrightarrow \text{Mental Image}^{34}$$

This two-way equation contains White's first and second levels of Equivalence. At the first level of Equivalence is the photograph itself as a "source of stimulation". At the second level of Equivalence the viewer becomes involved, the photograph stimulates or arouses the viewer's mind and a "mental image" is formed.

The Third Level of Equivalence

The third level of Equivalence, as White states, "refers to the inner experience a person has while he is remembering his mental image after the photograph in question is not in sight."³⁵ Thus the viewer remembers his or her "mental image" of a photograph here, rather than "the photograph itself". That is, where viewers respond to a photograph that is physically present before them in the second level of Equivalence, in the third level they respond to their "mental image" of the photograph, which exists only within themselves. It is important to note that the viewer's response to the "mental image" here, for White, is the viewer's *experience of remembering* rather than simply his or her memory of the "mental image".

In White's third level of experience, then, everything occurs in the viewer's mind. The "inner experience" a viewer has while remembering his or her mental image of a photograph is clearly an invisible experience, since it occurs entirely within the viewer. Insofar as they both relate "to what goes on in the viewer's mind", and the viewer's experience of 'invisibility', White's third and second levels of Equivalence are similar.³⁶ However, in White's third level of Equivalence viewers experience, via memory, an image imagined within themselves, as they remember it, rather than a photograph that is physically present outside of themselves, as in the second level. Between White's second and third levels of Equivalence, then, there is a distinct difference in the nature of the viewer's experience of invisibility. In the second level viewers respond to a photograph that is visible *outside* of themselves, while in the third level they remember a "mental image" of a photograph that is only visible *inside* themselves. In this sense the viewer's experience of invisibility has a dual basis or it is twice removed from the visible foundation of the photograph itself. It is at this point, White's third level of Equivalence, that White's theory of Equivalence is uniquely different from Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence.

However, the remembered image, as White states, "pertains to Equivalence only when a certain feeling of correspondence is present."³⁷ This "feeling of correspondence" clearly relates to the viewer's personal connection with an image in White's second level of Equivalence. Since a "feeling of correspondence" is significant for White in both the second and third levels of

³⁴ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

³⁵ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

³⁶ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

³⁷ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

Equivalence, viewers remembering their “mental image” of a photograph in the third level would also appear to remember and re-experience their “feeling of correspondence” with the Equivalent from the second level.

We remember a photograph, White claims, for varying reasons:

The reason why we remember an image varies: because we simply “love it,” or dislike it so intensely that it becomes compulsive, or because it has made us realize something about ourselves, or has brought some slight change in us.³⁸

We also remember images, as White notes, for personal reasons. The individual nature of these reasons is significant in determining each viewer’s unique experience of ‘invisibility’. As White states:

What a man remembers of vision, is always peculiarly his own because various distortions occur and change his recall image after the original stimulation has gone. These alterations from the original can only come from the individual himself.³⁹

The “various distortions” that occur in the viewer’s “recall image” appear to relate to the viewer’s experience of remembering his or her “mental image” and “feeling of correspondence”. Each time a person remembers a photograph, not only is his or her “mental image” and “feeling of correspondence” relived and re-experienced, but both are also slightly altered. For White, the experience of remembering a “mental image” in the present is a different experience to any past experience of that “mental image” or any past experience of “the photograph itself”. Therefore, such remembering simultaneously recalls (brings back to mind) and recasts (modifies or changes) that “mental image”.

As viewers move from the first level to the third level of experience they move further away from “the photograph itself”. They become – or so White implies – increasingly introspective and more aware of their inner experiences. Furthermore, viewers’ responses to a photograph, through their “feeling of correspondence” and their “mental image”, become more profoundly personal and individual. These progressions in awareness, into deeper personal and individual experience are, for White, very important; they also help to further explain the differences in the nature of the viewer’s experience of invisibility between White’s second and third levels of Equivalence.

In further examining the third level of Equivalence White again utilises the idea of the photograph as a mirror:

The moment when a photograph transforms into a mirror that can be walked into, either when one is looking at it, or remembering it, must always remain secret because the

³⁸ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

³⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

experience is entirely within the individual. It is personal, his own private experience, ineffable, and untranslatable.⁴⁰

Again White emphasises the importance of the individual and personal nature of the viewer's inner experience. However, because it lies "entirely" within the viewer, such experience – at least according to White – cannot be expressed in words. Thus the viewer's experience, because it is "ineffable" and "untranslatable", is not only invisible but also silent.

The "moment when a photograph transforms into a mirror" exists for White not only as part of the viewer's experience but also as part of the *photographer's* experience, when the photograph is conceived. As White states:

To select this moment for which to make photographs hardly seems a likely area for productive camerawork, yet secret as this moment is, a few photographers are working today who deliberately try to start from their own known feeling states to make photographs which will arouse similar feeling states in others.⁴¹

As the viewer's experience is silent or ineffable so too may be the photographer's experience. The Equivalent here is a vehicle through which photographers are able to convey silent yet "known feeling states" to viewers of their photographs. Although viewers may not experience the *same* "known feeling states" as the photographer, the Equivalent may arouse "similar feeling states" in viewers. White appears to acknowledge here that, while the viewer's experience of an Equivalent is an internal experience that is both personal and individual, the viewer's experience may nevertheless be a variation of the photographer's experience, at the moment that the film was exposed.

Just as the viewer's experience may be silent or ineffable, then so too may the photographer's. However, if the Equivalent succeeds in arousing "similar feeling states" in a viewer, then it is not an "untranslatable" experience. In this context we may think of the Equivalent as a translation of the photographer's experience; a visible translation of an invisible experience, from the ineffable language of inner experience via the visual language of photography.

Four Equivalents by White

'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', as published in the *Photographic Society of America Journal* (*PSA Journal*), includes reproductions of four photographs by White (illustrations 3, 7, 10 and 11). These illustrations do not include captions or titles, perhaps in order, as Robert McIntyre

⁴⁰ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴¹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 172. In addition to the earlier mentioned photographers who make photographs that function as Equivalents, Stieglitz, Callahan and Siskind, White also mentions here Frederick Sommer, Paul Caponigro, Walter Chappell, Gerald Robinson and Arnold Gassan.

states, “to leave you free to find what you can of yourself in them”.⁴² These photographs are, however, reproduced in other later publications and in this thesis *with* titles.⁴³

Of these four photographs White claims that they show “something of himself” and they “originate in a known feeling state”⁴⁴ to himself as the photographer. The “known feeling state” of each image is alluded to but not made clear. As White explains:

It will not be pointed out which of the images knows happiness, the one that knows anger, or the one that knows sadness because viewers of photographs need the opportunity to learn faith in their own feelings.⁴⁵

Although White provides three examples of the emotions that might constitute the “feeling state” of these photographs – happiness, anger and sadness – it would seem that he does not do so in order to create a guessing game for viewers to name the photographer’s “known feeling state”. Rather, White is clearly inviting viewers to *experience these Equivalents for themselves* and thus to discover their *own* feeling states. What is of significance here is that White recommends that viewers need to learn to have “faith in their own feelings”, that is, to trust what they ‘get’ from the images, rather than searching for what the photographer colloquially ‘put there’. It is for this reason that White asserts of these photographs that “what you get from them is *yours*” [my italics].⁴⁶ Hence, for White, such photographs “are not self-expressive, or self searching; they are self-found.”⁴⁷ Through his Equivalents, White’s priority is not to express himself to viewers of his photographs, nor is he searching for himself. Rather, in the four photographs used as illustrations, he has found in these images his “happiness”, his “anger” and his “sadness”, and he encourages viewers to find their own feelings. Continuing from the previous quote, White states: “Communication is of no importance, evocation of little significance, competition non-existent.”⁴⁸ White is not concerned with communicating to the viewer his “known feeling state” of each photograph, nor is he greatly concerned with evoking these same feelings in the viewer. What White is interested in is what individual viewers find for themselves in such photographs or what is suggested by these photographs. Certainly, if one viewer finds something different in

⁴² Robert McIntyre (ed), *Photographic Society of America Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 7 (July 1963), p. 17.

⁴³ Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., plates 142, 44, 146, 168. All four photographs appear in *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, in the order that they are reproduced in the *PSA Journal*, with the following titles: ‘Beginnings, 1962’, ‘Windowsill Daydreaming, 1958’, ‘Vicinity of Georgetown, Colorado, 1962’ and ‘Easter Sunday, 1963’.

Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, pp. 13, 101, 168. Three of these photographs are also reproduced in *Rites & Passages*. ‘Vicinity of Georgetown, Colorado, 1962’ is not reproduced in *Rites & Passages*. ‘Beginnings, 1962’ is reproduced with a different title and a different date as ‘Frosted Window, Rochester, New York, 1952’. Given the subject matter and manner of rendering of this photograph 1962 would seem to be the correct date. ‘Windowsill Daydreaming, 1958’ and ‘Easter Sunday, 1963’ are reproduced with the longer and more informative titles of: ‘Windowsill Daydreaming, Rochester, New York, 1958’ and ‘Easter Sunday, Stony Brook State Park, New York, 1963’.

⁴⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, op. cit., p.175.

⁴⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.175.

⁴⁶ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.175.

⁴⁷ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.175.

⁴⁸ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.175.

a photograph to another viewer there is no “competition” involved since there is no correct response to what is found by each self, as long as each viewer is true to his or her self. As White states, of his own four photographs:

They are shown as an event out of which Equivalence might occur. The possibility of the reader’s being confronted with something of himself is their only reason for being reproduced.⁴⁹

Some Visible Qualities of Equivalentents

So far I have discussed the significance of both the photographer’s and the viewer’s experience in White’s three levels of Equivalence, with emphasis given to the intangible aspects of these experiences. I will now begin to look at the more tangible qualities of a photograph – qualities that, for White, encourage the potential experience of Equivalence – and the relation between these visible qualities and the invisibility of experience. In addition, White’s references to psychology and their relevance to his theory of Equivalence will also be examined.

Although, as noted earlier, White states that an Equivalent does not have “a certain appearance, or style, or trend, or fashion” he does propose that some subjects are more suitable for making Equivalentents than others:

With constantly metamorphosing materials such as water, or clouds or ice, or light on cellophane and similar materials, the infinity of forms and shapes, reflections and colors suggest all sorts and manners of emotions and tactile encounters and intellectual speculations that are supported by and formed by the material but which maintain an independent identity from which the photographer can choose what he wishes to express.⁵⁰

Two of the White photographs that accompany 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', namely *Beginnings, 1962* and *Easter Sunday, 1963*, both feature “constantly metamorphosing materials”, that is, water and ice respectively (see illustrations 7 and 11, and my accompanying readings of these images). While White claims that the photographer may “choose what he wishes to express” we cannot say, with any degree of certainty, that the viewer will experience what the photographer intended, particularly when the subject matter ‘suggests’ such a variety of “emotions and tactile encounters and intellectual speculations”. What is important here, then, is the variety of *potential* experiences available to the viewer, and White’s contention that some subjects are better suited for making Equivalentents than others. In White’s ‘Octave of Prayer’⁵¹ first published nine years after ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’ he proposes that other subjects, beyond “constantly metamorphosing materials”, are also appropriate for

⁴⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁰ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵¹ Minor White, ‘Octave of Prayer’, *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972.

making Equivalents. As White states:

The major sources of equivalent and metaphoric images in photography are the great forces of erosion that shape and reshape the world. Camera has a positive genius for turning the effects of weathering into beauty and equivalence: wood, stone, faces, ice. It grandly celebrates the forces themselves: light, snow, wind, space, water, fire, earthquake, bulldozer, dynamite. In turn, man's artifacts on reverting to nature provide the photographer with many expressive abstract equivalents. Auto graveyards, crumbling buildings, rusting machinery, peeling paint offer camera rich, ambiguous, ambivalent images that may help the photographer evoke the sense of prayer.⁵²

White's *Easter Sunday, 1963* is a strong example of a "camera rich, ambiguous" image (see illustration 10). Given its title it would also seem that White believed it had a strong potential to "evoke the sense of prayer". I will return to White's desire to "evoke the sense of prayer" within the experience of viewing a photograph in the following chapter. Worth noting here is White's notion that some subjects, in this instance eroded materials, offer "ambiguous" images that assist the photographer in making Equivalents and evoking the immaterial. While some photographers such as documentary photojournalists may consider qualities of ambiguity to be negative aspects of a photograph, White appears here to favour them for their evocative attributes. White's photograph *Vicinity of Georgetown, 1962*, which is also used as an illustration for 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', provides a good example of "the effects of weathering" on wood (see illustration 3)

Although White suggests that some subjects are better suited for making Equivalents than others this does not mean that all photographs of eroding or "constantly metamorphosing" materials are Equivalents. As always when dealing with Equivalence the emphasis should not be placed on the visible subject itself, nor indeed on the photograph visible to the viewer, but rather on that which the visible 'suggests', 'supports' and 'forms'; the viewer's potential experience of the photograph, which remains individual and intangible.

This distinction between the visibility of the photograph itself and the intangible, or invisible aspects, of the viewer's experience of the photograph are again alluded to by White in the following passage:

The power of the equivalent, so far as the expressive-creative photographer is concerned, lies in the fact that he can convey and evoke feelings about things and situations and events which for some reason or other can not be photographed. The secret, the catch and the power lies in being able to use the forms and shapes of objects in front of the camera for their expressive qualities. Or to say this another way, in practice Equivalency is the ability to use the visual world as the plastic material for the photographer's expressive purposes.⁵³

⁵² White, 'Octave of Prayer', *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵³ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

Invisible here are the feelings that are evoked within the viewer and conveyed via the visible photograph. Since these feelings that “can not be photographed” are both conveyed and evoked by the Equivalent, they relate to both the photographer’s and the viewer’s experience of the image. As previously noted, White’s four photographs that accompany ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’ are, for him, manifestations of his own feelings of ‘happiness’, ‘anger’ and ‘sadness’. Without physically photographing himself these are feelings that cannot be photographed directly. Also worth noting here is the similarity between such feelings and the previously discussed silent and ineffable experiences of both the photographer and the viewer. That is, unphotographable “feelings about situations and events” may well include the photographer’s or the viewer’s personal, unutterable emotions that cannot be directly photographed but, for White, can be conveyed or evoked by a photograph.

Through the subject photographed and the photograph itself, the visible world becomes both the source and the vehicle by which photographers express their emotional or spiritual world. As White asserts, the photographer’s use of the “expressive qualities” of the forms and shapes of the visible world are critical. Since the photographer is unable to *directly* photograph his or her “feelings about things and situations and events”, the photographer utilises these “expressive qualities” to *indirectly* “convey and evoke” his or her feelings. To utilise the “expressive qualities” of the visible world the photographer, as White proposes, “may wish to employ the recording power of the medium” or its “transforming power”.⁵⁴ This distinction between the “recording power” and the “transforming power” of photography appears to relate to White’s previously mentioned separation between documentary and pictorialist photography; it also relates to Sekula’s notions of the ‘informative’ and ‘affective’ powers of photography and to Szarkowski’s notions of photographs as ‘windows’ or ‘mirrors’. The “recording power of the medium” thus relates to documentary photography and invests the image with a primarily ‘informative’ value, while the medium’s “transforming power” relates to pictorialist photography and the theory of Equivalence, and endows the image with a primarily ‘affective’ value. It is thus evident that White clearly favours the “transforming” or ‘affective’ power of the medium as a means to “convey and evoke” the invisible.

In returning to the example of the photographer who photographs a cloud White refers to the feeling or emotion expressed by the photographer as “his direct feeling” and the expression of this feeling or emotion, through an Equivalent, as “his outward manifestation of it via a photograph.”⁵⁵ In continuing, White states that the “photograph of a cloud at one level is simply a record”.⁵⁶ This attribute of the photograph of the a cloud as being “simply a record” White also refers to as the “factual side” of the photograph and clearly exists within the domain of White’s first level of Equivalence.⁵⁷ As White explains, at this level the photograph is a factual record, in which the “recording power” of the medium is utilised, or, as Sekula might

⁵⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁶ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁷ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

explain, the photograph functions as an informative document. As the viewer's experience of the photograph moves beyond this "factual" or graphic level into the second level of Equivalence the photograph "may function to arouse certain planned sensations and emotions."⁵⁸ To utilise Sekula's terminology again, in the first level of Equivalence the viewer invests the photograph with an informative power, and in the second level the photograph is invested with an affective power.

As White continues to discuss the progression from the "factual" first level of Equivalence to what is aroused in the second level, he concedes "the arousable implications are possible only when the viewer is looking at it sympathetically."⁵⁹ While White does not expand here on what he means by looking at a photograph "sympathetically" he appears to be claiming that the viewer's approach to a photograph, through his or her emotional sensibility and possibly educational or cultural background, is critical if a photograph is to function as an Equivalent. In the context of White's previously noted "suggestive powers" of an Equivalent, a viewer who looks at a photograph "sympathetically" may also be a viewer who is open to suggestion, or familiar with modernist viewing practices and sensibilities. In addition to those factors that determine whether a viewer approaches a photograph "sympathetically", the context in which the photograph appears, or what Sekula refers to as the "rhetorical function" of the image, may also influence the viewer's approach.

In further discussing the visible expressive qualities of a photograph and the significance of the viewer's "mental image" White states:

The mechanisms by which a photograph functions as an Equivalent in a viewer's psyche are the familiar ones which the psychologists call "projection" and "empathy". In the art world the corresponding phenomenon is referred to as "expressive forms and shapes."⁶⁰

The connections White makes here between the worlds of psychology and the visual arts are not immediately apparent. However, they later become clearer when White again uses the terms "projection" and "empathy" in the context of people seeing something of themselves in a photograph. As White explains, "projection and empathy, natural attributes in man, lead us to see something of ourselves almost automatically in anything that we look at long enough to be aware of it."⁶¹ What White appears to be saying here is that when a viewer 'projects' him or her self into, and 'empathises' with, a photograph the image functions as a mirror for that viewer. As noted earlier, an important function of Equivalence is, as White states, when a "photograph mirrors something within" the viewer.⁶² In the context of this discussion on "projection" and "empathy" White adds: "we can say that the photograph invariably functions as a mirror of at

⁵⁸ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁰ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶¹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

⁶² White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 169.

least some part of the viewer.”⁶³ White does not elaborate on the source of the psychological terms, “projection” and “empathy”, which he employs. However, when he later states that “the photograph is a function instead of a thing” he also notes that this “idea of the Equivalent” is “interesting because it reflects a certain potential change in the Freudian, Jungian and Adlerian effect on the popular ideas of psychology.”⁶⁴ Such claims will not be explored here. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the conditions of psychology had a profound effect on the visual arts in the twentieth-century and White was clearly not immune to these.

White’s additional comments on “expressive forms and shapes” in photography, however, are easily understood and his observations here are insightful:

In the world of photography the vast majority of viewers remain so subject-identification bound that they stay ignorant of the “expressive” qualities of shapes and forms or are unable to overcome their fear of letting themselves go and responding to “expressive” shapes or colors, that is, the design side of the pictorial experience.⁶⁵

Essentially, this a plea for a modernist viewing practice and sensibility. As such, White is no doubt speaking here from his personal experience as a photographer, teacher and editor. In being “subject-identification bound” some viewers do not progress beyond White’s first level of Equivalence: by focussing their concerns on being able to recognise the external visible world of the subject depicted, viewers are unable to move into the realm of White’s second level of Equivalence, recognising and experiencing the internal invisible world of themselves. In other words, “subject-identification bound” viewers are overly concerned with that which they believe the camera has objectively recorded, rather than what the photographer intends to convey subjectively via the photograph or, more importantly, what the photograph evokes within themselves. In short, they are mentally focussed on the visible rather than the invisible. Being able to, or letting yourself, respond to the “expressive forms and shapes” in a photograph, and anything they might suggest within yourself is, for White, an essential part of enabling yourself to experience a photograph as an Equivalent. This is not to suggest that some people are superior viewers, they are simply more attuned or sympathetic to White’s approach to photography.

Outside of the realm of art photography, the conventional usage of photography is often primarily concerned with depicting or documenting a subject. Here the viewer’s task is simply to recognise or identify the subject of the photograph rather than respond to its expressive or affective qualities. The function of a passport photograph, for example, is for the viewer to be able to identify the subject depicted; the viewer is not required here to respond to the “expressive forms and shapes” of the photograph. Although all photographs are not made for the sole purpose of subject identification, a great number are, so it is not altogether surprising that many viewers of photographs are “subject-identification bound”, even when the

⁶³ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.173.

⁶⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

photograph is made as an Equivalent. As noted earlier, White is aware that it takes a sympathetic viewer to go beyond the subject identification concerns of the 'graphic' or 'factual' of a photograph.

In continuing to discuss the viewer's response to the formal qualities of a photograph White suggests that "the contemporary viewer of photographs nearly always responds subconsciously to the design embedded in the photographs."⁶⁶ White does not elaborate here on the reasons for this subconscious response but he does state that it is a phenomenon that "the world of advertising exploits constantly and expertly" and "a knowledgeable photographer can use the same aspect of design for more enlightened aesthetic purposes."⁶⁷

White makes further references to the visible qualities of a photograph that make it more conducive to functioning as a mirror and an Equivalent when he proposes:

Some degree of mirroring happens with any photograph, but it is especially strong with photographs rendered in a stylized or non-literal way. Mirroring is also strong in photographs in which the presence of design is equal to or supersedes the sense of the presence of the subject in front of the camera.⁶⁸

Thus, for White, all photographs function as mirrors to some extent, but some are more powerful than others. Where White earlier referred to the visible qualities of particular subject matters that make them more suitable for producing Equivalents, he refers here to the formal qualities of the actual photograph. Photographs that are "rendered in a stylized or non-literal way" or where "the presence of design" is powerful may be more likely to function as mirrors or Equivalents because the subject becomes less significant and the viewer becomes less "subject-identification bound". As the identification of the subject visible in the photograph becomes less of a concern the potential for the viewer's experience of invisibility becomes stronger. White's use of the term "non-literal" is worth noting because it suggests that the "subject in front of the camera" *becomes something else*. As previously stated, in White's first level of Equivalence (the graphic level) the photograph is a factual document. I would add here that – also in the first level – the viewer's experience of the photograph is a literal experience. As the viewer moves into the second level of experience, this experience becomes a non-literal experience. A powerful example of a photograph in which the "presence of design is equal to or supersedes the sense of the presence of the subject" is White's *Moencopi Strata, Capital Reef, 1962* (illustration 6).

To enhance this non-literal experience, and to assist further in the creation of photographs as Equivalents by enabling the viewer to become less "subject-identification bound", White suggests:

⁶⁶ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁷ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁸ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.173.

When the subject matter is rendered in such a way as that it is obscure, ambiguous or impossible to identify, the response to the image takes on a completely different aspect. Since most of us have no experience of similar images except what we see in abstract or non-objective painting, we will tend to react to such photographs as if they were paintings and look for the same qualities or value relationships and all the rest of the attributes of design long familiar to us from the world of painting and sculpture.⁶⁹

Given that subject matter that appears in photographs as “obscure, ambiguous or impossible to identify” makes up a large proportion of White’s photographs, White offers here a revealing rationale for his predilection for such photographs and his practice as a photographer. A strong example of such an image is White’s *Beginnings*, 1962 (illustration 7). White’s preferences for the rendering of subject matter into obscurity, ambiguity or anonymity is not only a way of confounding the viewer’s logic but also of positioning himself as a modernist photographer. Once the “subject-identification bound” viewer’s logic has been confounded and the viewer continues to engage with the photograph he or she is more freely enabled or encouraged to respond to the photograph in less logical ways. These less logical viewing approaches to a photograph may be more emotional, intuitive, spiritual, imaginative and creative responses; or as White would put it, viewers are more able “to overcome their fear of letting themselves go”⁷⁰ and to respond to the photograph’s expressive qualities.

White does not expand on what he means by the “qualities or value relationships” of painting and sculpture. However, it may be inferred that he is referring to modernist aesthetics and the already mentioned “expressive forms and shapes” of an image and the role of “projection and empathy”⁷¹ in experiencing an image.

White also offers here further definition of what he means by the previously mentioned sympathetic viewer, that is, a person who is familiar with experiencing “abstract or non-objective painting”. White provides more information on his idea of a sympathetic viewer, elsewhere in ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’, when he suggests that photographers who make Equivalents “must be able to get their work before those persons in the world who are sensitized intellectually, emotionally and kinesthetically”.⁷²

Although photographs with subject matter that is difficult to identify may have a similar appearance to abstract paintings, rather than call them “abstractions” White asserts that they are “extractions” or “isolations” from the world of appearances”.⁷³ White makes a point of stating that the viewer’s experience of a photograph that is extracted or isolated from “the world of appearances” is different to his or her experience of a “painted “abstraction.”⁷⁴ Thus White claims that the practice of photography occupies a different space to the practice of

⁶⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.173.

⁷⁰ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.171.

⁷¹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, pp. 171 & 172.

⁷² White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.172.

⁷³ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.173.

⁷⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p..173.

photography within modernism. Having made these points White continues:

our usual tendency, if we take the attempt to engage, rather than reject, the ambiguous rendering of a subject in a photograph, *is to invent a subject for it*. What we invent is out of the stuff and substance of ourselves. When we invent a subject we turn the photograph into a mirror of some part of ourselves.⁷⁵

This notion of viewers inventing a subject, drawn from their own world of experience, adds significant depth to this thesis' notion of the viewer's experience of invisibility. Stimulated or aroused by the visible photograph viewers invent their own subjects, which are visible within themselves but invisible to others. The invention of a subject by viewers is more of a significant departure from the original photograph than their mental image of a photograph, since it involves more creative engagement with the photograph from each individual viewer and takes each viewer more deeply into his or her personal and individual experience of invisibility.

It is also worth noting that as the subject rendered in the photograph becomes more ambiguous or difficult to identify, we may also say that it becomes less visible, particularly as it is more likely to stimulate or arouse an invisible experience or invented subject within the viewer. In this sense we can state that invisibility, as well as being within a viewer, may also be within a photograph.

In emphasising the visible qualities of a photograph, whether through subject matter such as the previously noted "wood, stone,"⁷⁶ "water, or clouds or ice"⁷⁷ or through the rendering of subject matter into obscurity, ambiguity or anonymity, we have seen how, for White, the visible world may be utilised to express or access the invisible world of the photographer or the viewer. The visible world, as either the subject of the photograph or the photograph itself, is part of White's first level of Equivalence. It is through White's second and third levels of Equivalence that the photographer or viewer enters the world of invisibility and spirituality. As White states: "When both subject matter and manner of rendering are transcended, by whatever means, that which seems to matter becomes what seems to be spirit."⁷⁸

As shown, White proposes particular subject matter, such as "constantly metamorphosing"⁷⁹ or eroding materials⁸⁰ and varying ways of rendering such matter so that the potential viewing experience of Equivalence is enhanced. While both "subject matter and manner of rendering" are significant, for White they are a means to an end, the end being "spirit" or, at least, "what seems to be spirit." Despite his previously noted religious convictions it would seem that White refers here to the viewer's spirit, that is, "the animating or vital principle"⁸¹ of that person and

⁷⁵ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.173.

⁷⁶ White, 'Octave of Prayer', *opcit.*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁷⁸ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p.171.

⁷⁹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁸⁰ White, 'Octave of Prayer', *opcit.*, p. 25.

⁸¹ J. B. Sykes, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 1023.

his or her experience of Equivalence, rather than a deity. Thus the viewer's experience of the visible elements of an Equivalent transcends both the subject of the photograph and the photograph itself, and the image mirrors the viewer's own spirit.

Sekula on White

As noted in the previous chapter, Sekula, in his essay 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', is highly critical of White when he asserts that the end result of both White's and Stieglitz's rejection of the photograph's "informative" function is "the discourse situation represented by Minor White and *Aperture* magazine."⁸² While White's input and control over *Aperture*, during the years that he edited the journal, were very influential, at times it is difficult to separate Sekula's opinions on White from those that he has on *Aperture*. For Sekula, *Aperture*'s "discourse situation" is epitomised not only by its shared desire with Stieglitz's *Camera Work* to promote photography as a fine art but also for the appearance of Eric Johnson's article 'The Composer's Vision: Photographs of Ernest Bloch within its pages'.⁸³ Within 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' Sekula quotes a passage from Johnson's article, in which Johnson suggests similarities between the grey scale of a photographic print and the tonal scale of music. The selected Johnson quote celebrates the 'affective' power of a photograph over its 'informative' power and treats the experience of a photograph as a sensual rather than an intellectual experience. While Johnson is writing about photographs made by a music composer, Sekula finds Johnson's suggested parallels between photography and music contentious. As he states: "The photograph is reduced to an arrangement of tones. The grey scale, ranging from full white to full black, stands as a sort of phonological carrier system for a vague prelinguistic scale of affect."⁸⁴ Johnson's article – or so Sekula claims – echoes "Baudelaire's celebration of synesthesia, of the correspondence of the senses".⁸⁵ Sekula's parting shots at *Aperture* are that it "proposes a community of mystics united in the exchange of fetishes" and that the photograph is "restored to its primitive status as "cult object." "⁸⁶

Sekula also refers directly to White's writing, in particular to 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', when he cites White's previously quoted passage on a photograph's "specific suggestive powers".⁸⁷ As Sekula states, "Minor White, true to Baudelaire, couples correspondence to affect; an interior state is expressed by means of the image".⁸⁸ Exactly how White is "true" to Charles Baudelaire is not made clear, presumably Sekula is referring generally to Baudelaire as a Symbolist poet and not specifically to his "celebration of synesthesia". Given that Sekula is simply reiterating the importance of the viewer's feeling of correspondence with a photograph,

⁸² Sekula, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸³ Eric Johnson, 'The Composer's Vision: Photographs of Ernest Bloch', in *Aperture*, 16: 3, 1972, Minor White (ed), pp 23-37. The same Ernest Bloch referred to by Stieglitz in the previous chapter.

⁸⁴ Sekula, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸⁵ Sekula, ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁶ Sekula, ibid., p. 16.

⁸⁷ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 170.

⁸⁸ Sekula, op. cit., p. 15.

when it functions as an Equivalent, the parallels he draws between Baudelaire and White are favourable. But of course Sekula would oppose the notion that any photograph can express an “interior state”, or, at least, the belief that photographs have such expressive powers. For Sekula, photographs themselves hold no inherent meaning and any belief that photographs possess such expressive powers is a social construction that is invested in the image by the viewer or the photographer. Nonetheless, Sekula’s position on White is made very clear when he states, “With White the denial of iconography is complete”⁸⁹. The denial of “iconography” or “the image’s status as report”⁹⁰ or, more simply, the photograph’s conventional informative meaning are clearly, for Sekula, an unforgivable transgression. It is also clear, however, that if White did deny these aspects of photography, that he was interested in other aspects. What White was attentive to was the affective qualities of photographs for individual viewers and the immediacy of sensation, this does not necessarily mean a denial of the ‘informative’ function of photographs; if anything it means that he valued the affective factors of photographs over the informative factors. It is through the viewer’s non-literal or subjective experience of the photograph and the image’s affective, suggestive and expressive qualities that this is achieved. Critical to such experiences of photographs is the viewer’s “sympathetic” approach to the image and his or her creative ability to transcend the “subject-identification” mode of experiencing “things for what they are” and to experience things “for what else they are”.

Having now closely analysed both White’s and Stieglitz’s approaches to Equivalence and their implications to this thesis’ notions of ‘invisibility’ I will now contextualise and examine each occasion on which White uses the term ‘invisible’ in his writing.

⁸⁹ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹⁰ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 16.



7. Minor White, *Beginnings*, 1962
also known as *Frosted Window*, Rochester, New York, 1952

On *Beginnings*, 1962

With constantly metamorphosing materials such as water, or clouds or ice, or light on cellophane and similar materials, the infinity of forms and shapes, reflections and colors suggest all sorts and manners of emotions and tactile encounters and intellectual speculations that are supported by and formed by the material but which maintain an independent identity from which the photographer can choose what he wishes to express.¹

This photograph is known by two different titles *Beginnings*, 1962² and *Frosted Window, Rochester, New York, 1952*³. Given its subject matter and the fact that from 1953 to 1963 White lived in Rochester, 1962 would seem to be the correct date. This image is very similar to other photographs of frost on glass in White's 1960 sequence *Sound of One Hand Clapping*. It has comparable formal and expressive qualities that would make it coherent within this sequence. Since this image is as strong, if not as strong, as White's other photographs of frost on glass, dating it as being made in 1962 rather than 1952 explains why it was not included in his sequence *Sound of One Hand Clapping*. The other significant difference between this image and White's other images of frost on glass is that it has more spatial depth, in other words it is not as flat. When White exposed the film it appears that the film plane of the camera was not parallel to the window plane, hence the image has shallow depth of field. There is an illusion that the image plane is tilting away from the viewer, or at least three quarters of the image appears to be on a diagonal tilt while the right hand quarter seems to be perpendicular.

It may be argued that the year this photograph was made in has little influence on its viewing experience. But the title is a different matter, if it is known to the viewer the title of this image might have a significant impact on its experiential qualities. *Frosted Window* is very much an informative title, it describes the subject of the image at a factual level. Conversely, *Beginnings* is an evocative or poetic title, it does not describe the subject matter but rather suggests a way of approaching or interpreting the photograph. Where "subject-identification bound"⁴ viewers are assisted by the title *Frosted Window* the title *Beginnings* will be of little use to them, if any. Nonetheless, knowing the subject matter of this photograph does not decrease its affective qualities.

¹ Minor White, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 170.

² Reproduced in Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, USA: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, plate 142.

³ Reproduced in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p. 13.

⁴ White, 'Equivalence', op. cit. p. 171.

The Invisible Man

Amongst Minor White's many published writings the term 'invisible' appears in fifteen instances. The majority of White's uses of this term refer to intangible or immaterial aspects of photography, particularly to the experience of viewing photographs. While nine of these texts in which White used the word 'invisible' were first published within a year of being written, the remaining five were first published many years after he wrote them. The sources and dates of these documents are wide and varied. The period under investigation here, during which White first wrote these texts, dates from 1946-1972 and covers most of White's career as both a writer and photographer. White's uses of the term 'invisible' will be addressed here in the chronological order of their composition rather than their publication date. However, I will occasionally digress from this flow in order to compare similar uses of this term. Beyond noting each instance in which White uses the term 'invisible', and providing comprehensive contextual information, each use of this term will be closely examined. Reference will also be made to other critical writers who address White's usage of 'invisible', namely Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock. In the following chapter, each use of the term 'invisible' as identified here will be returned to for further analysis and classification. While analysis of White's usage of the term 'invisible' will be necessary in order to give the context of each use, the aim of this chapter is to identify and contextualise each instance as opposed to classifying them.

A key source for White's writings is his first monograph *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*(1969).¹ This is particularly so for this thesis, since the greater part of White's published uses of the term 'invisible' are contained here. This book brings together, for the first time, 243 of White's photographs along with excerpts from his journals and other writings. Published during White's lifetime it was not only an important source for White's writings and photographs but an opportunity to display his editorial skills in the form of a book. White commenced work on *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* in December 1966. By 1968 the work was completed and in 1969 it was published by Aperture.²

Photography that Makes Visible the Invisible

As noted in chapter one, the earliest evidence of White's use of the term 'invisible' was made in his journal 'Memorable Fancies', in February 1946. Although it remained unpublished until its appearance in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* in 1969, this extract from White's journal makes reference to his first meeting with Alfred Stieglitz and to Stieglitz's theory of the Equivalent:

Sitting on the radiator in the little back room of the American Place six months after

¹ Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, New York: Aperture, 1969.

² Aperture is both the name of a journal, *Aperture*, and the name of a publishing house.

World War II, we talked about *to make* photographs, spoke about the *Equivalent*. Stieglitz said something or other about photography that makes visible the invisible, and something about true things being able to talk to each other. His talk itself was a kind of equivalent; that is, his words were not related to the sense he was making. If anyone had ever talked to me like that before, I certainly had not heard him. In a few moments he broke open the lump of poured concrete that had sunk me to the bottom of Leyte Gulf. "Have you ever been in love? ... Then you can photograph."

*New York, February 1946*³

As previously discussed, Stieglitz's influence on White was critical to White's practice as both a photographer and a writer. White's use of the title of Stieglitz's journal *Camera Work*, variously as 'camerawork' and 'camera work', to characterise his own photographic practice throughout his writings, is a further indicator of this influence. To *make* photographs, as opposed to taking photographs, is another important part of White's vocabulary, as it was for many modernist photographers such as Ansel Adams.

White's statement concerning "the lump of poured concrete that had sunk [him] to the bottom of Leyte Gulf" which Stieglitz "broke open" clearly refers to his own World War Two experiences as a soldier in the Pacific islands. As noted in chapter one, "something had died, or at least gone underground" within White while he was in the Army, something which "Stieglitz came along and reactivated"⁴. While it remains unclear what this "something" was, beyond a metaphorical "lump of poured concrete", there is little doubt that both White's meetings with Stieglitz and Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence helped liberate White from this inner burden. Possibly, this lumpen matter refers to aspects of White's life that he felt could only be expressed or broken up through photography.

As James Baker Hall argues, "what made the deepest impression" on White during his various meetings with Stieglitz was the latter's question "Have you ever been in love?"⁵ Indeed, some twenty-eight to thirty years after the above journal entry, when White was questioned by Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper as to whether Stieglitz said anything "crucial" to him to reactivate him during their meetings, he reiterates Stieglitz's question verbatim:

I asked if I could be a photographer and Stieglitz said: Well, have you ever been in love?" and I said: "yes" and he said: "Then you can be a photographer."⁶

While it may be difficult to judge exactly how crucial and how much of an impression Stieglitz's question made on White, it is certainly a provocative question. How does one know whether or

³ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

⁴ Minor White in 'Minor White', in Paul Hill & Thomas Cooper, *Dialogue With Photography*, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1994, p. 269.

⁵ James Baker Hall, in Minor White and James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p. 16.

⁶ White in Hill & Cooper, op. cit., p. 269. As previously noted, the precise date of Hill and Cooper's interview with White is not given, it took place some time between 1974 and 1976.

not you have been in love, and how does this relate to whether or not one can make photographs? Exactly why Stieglitz asked White this question we will never know but he was certainly being enigmatic. However, given Eisinger's previously noted comment that, for Stieglitz, "the visible aspects of the material world are linked to a deeper and truer reality that can only be felt" or "intuited" and that photographs may act as a conduit between these two realities, I propose that, in addition to addressing the issue of love, Stieglitz's question also addresses intuition. Firstly, it is through intuitive knowledge rather than intellectual knowledge that you know when you are love. While you may not be able to logically explain why you are in love, to anyone else but the person with whom you are in love, intuitively you know. Secondly, if you have encountered the depth of emotion experienced when being in love, then you might make photographs that will evoke similarly profound emotion in others. Certainly it was Stieglitz's desire to invoke emotion through his photographs; and it is through subjectivity, intuitive knowledge and imagination, rather than objectivity, logical knowledge and the intellect, that this can be achieved. This desire was also shared by White.

Although White attributes the phrase "photography that makes visible the invisible" to Stieglitz, it is difficult to determine whether or not these are Stieglitz's actual words or White's restatement of them.⁷ This quibble aside, it is undeniable that Stieglitz plays a major role in the selection and usage of the term 'invisible' in this particular instance.⁸ It is worth noting here that if the term 'invisible' pertains to an experience of a photograph then it is not clear to whom the "invisible" is made "visible". Since this statement does not specify whether the "invisible" is made "visible" to the photographer or the viewer it could equally concern both.

Also worth noting is White's statement that Stieglitz's "talk itself was a kind of equivalent; that is, his words were not related to the sense he was making." The sense of meaning that White gained from Stieglitz's talk, it may be inferred, came through White's non-literal understanding of Stieglitz's words, and what they suggested to White, rather than his literal understanding. Since the meaning of an Equivalent also comes through an individual's non-literal understanding of an image rather than a literal understanding Stieglitz's talk, for White, "was a kind of equivalent".

That his meetings with Stieglitz definitely made a lasting impression on White is clear from his interview with Hill and Cooper. Furthermore, these encounters with Stieglitz are referred to more than once in White's writings. In 1970 and 1972, respectively twenty-four and twenty-six years after White's previously noted 1946 journal entry, White still refers to both Stieglitz and the phrase that he attributes to Stieglitz – "photography that makes visible the invisible" – in his writing, as will be shown later in this chapter.

⁷ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸ It appears that Stieglitz makes no direct reference to the 'invisible' in his writings.

Invisible Resonance

The above account of White's meeting with Stieglitz is an excerpt from White's journal 'Memorable Fancies' and it appears in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* on a page of text also titled 'Memorable Fancies'. The rest of this page includes three other extracts from White's journal, two of which were also written in 1946, the fourth being written in 1966. Both of the other 1946 excerpts relate to incidents in White's life previously discussed in chapter one. Firstly, White's initial experiences of teaching Ansel Adams' zone system at the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA). Secondly, White's experience of touring Point Lobos with Edward Weston, in that same year. White's 1966 excerpt from 'Memorable Fancies' is worth quoting here in full because it relates in further detail to White's exploration of Stieglitz's theory of the Equivalent:

Exploring the depth and breadth of the words *Equivalent* and *Equivalence* I have found a craftsmanship of feeling, a technique, an art, a psychology of feeling, and, best of all, freedom from the tyranny of ecstasy.

*Monhegan Island 1966*⁹

Finally at the bottom right hand corner of the same page, set in italics, White writes:

<i>Not equal to</i>	<i>equivalent to</i>
<i>Not metaphor</i>	<i>equivalence</i>
<i>Not standing for</i>	<i>but being also</i>
<i>Not sign</i>	<i>but direct connection</i>
	<i>to invisible resonance</i> ¹⁰

This is unlike the other passages of text, not only in its font style but also in its deliberate layout. Furthermore, it does not state when or where it was written, as the other passages of text do. White's use of language is often vague, abstract and/or poetic, here more so than usual. White's writing here is itself a kind of equivalent as he himself comments on Stieglitz's conversation - "his words were not related to the sense he was making."¹¹ With respect to the previously quoted passage, is White stating that these terms and phrases are subtly different or are they completely different? Is the difference between equivalence and metaphor slight or is the emphasis on the 'not'? Either way White appears to be offering a series of instructions to both viewers and photographers.

In considering my earlier examination of White's essay 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' (1963), then, perhaps the emphasis should be placed on the 'not' in each of the above instances. As noted in chapter three, White states in this essay that an Equivalent is "in effect" a

⁹ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁰ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 41.

“metaphor” of a “feeling” that a photographer had “for something else”¹² (beyond the subject of the photograph). Yet, it would appear that some years later, when White wrote about ‘invisible resonance’, he chose to steer viewers of photographs away from this over simplistic understanding of an Equivalent as a metaphor, into something that is both more elaborate and more profound. If an Equivalent is to be understood as a metaphor then it is “in effect” a metaphor of a feeling rather than a conventional metaphor. Put another way, an Equivalent plays the role of metaphor in experience rather than that of a photograph as a physical metaphor. Furthermore, if an Equivalent is only considered as metaphor then it suggests to viewers that it is their role to ‘translate’ the metaphorical meaning of the image, as intended by the photographer. Such an approach to an Equivalent, would discourage viewers from experiencing an image for themselves and, as argued in the previous chapter, discovering their own feeling states or emotional responses.

The final lines in the earlier quote:

<i>Not standing for</i>	<i>but being also</i>
<i>Not sign</i>	<i>but direct connection</i>
	<i>to invisible resonance</i> ¹³

suggest that an Equivalent does not *stand for* or *signify* something else but rather *it is* something else. In the light of my earlier examination of White’s essay ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’ this something else would appear to be the viewer’s internal experience of the photograph as the image “arouses in him a special sense of correspondence to something that he knows about himself”¹⁴ or, as White states here, the viewer’s “*direct connection to invisible resonance*”.

Invisible Lobos and Invisible Stieglitz

In *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* and with specific reference to Weston, White makes further references to ‘the invisible’:

When Edward Weston opened the door, one glance told him a wish had been granted ... his smile was an affirmation; his handshake a toast to the invisible Lobos ... a connection to the invisible Stieglitz.¹⁵

This quotation is the final paragraph of two pages of text following a sequence of White’s photographs titled *Sequence 8*. The photographs and text are clearly linked. Most of the images in this sequence were photographed at Point Lobos, on the Californian coast, between 1950-1952. This visit to Point Lobos is different to the earlier mentioned 1946 pilgrimage in chapter one. The “invisible Lobos” refers not only to Point Lobos, the visible subject of many of Weston’s photographs, where Weston lived the later years of his life but also, one may

¹² Minor White, ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’, in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 169.

¹³ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁴ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, op. cit., p. 169.

¹⁵ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 81.

speculate, to the spirit of the landscape and indeed Weston's photographs, images capable of arousing the invisible within a viewer. The text that precedes the above quotation thus relates to White's experiences at Point Lobos; photographing the landscape and discussing photography with Weston. The text is undated and is extracted from White's journal 'Memorable Fancies'. Since most of the photographs in *Sequence 8* were made between 1950-1952, the above quotation was probably written during that same period. In addition White again uses the term 'invisible' in relation to Stieglitz, and again it might be inferred that this is in relation to the spirit of Stieglitz's work and not simply to the person not present.¹⁶

While White makes further use of the term 'invisible' with specific reference to Equivalence within *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* I will put these aside for now. In following the chronological flow of White's writing the next texts to be examined relate more generally to conceptual approaches to photography and the function of photography.

Invisible Alterations to Visual Reality

In an article published in *American Photography* entitled 'Your Concepts are Showing: How to Judge your Own Photographs' (1951) White identifies two broad conceptual approaches to photography, which he names the "camera-as-brush" and the "camera-as-extension-of-vision" models.¹⁷ For White, a concept is "a kind of central philosophy man uses in his creative work."¹⁸ As White explains, the "camera-as-brush" concept is held by photographers, including pictorialists and experimentalists who use the camera as a paintbrush to produce photographs that imitate paintings, or are at least inspired by paintings or a painterly vision. Photographers who use the "camera-as-extension-of-vision" concept, such as 'straight' photographers, purists and documentarians, "look at nature with little or no knowledge of painting" and "remember only how a lens sees."¹⁹ In an attempt to encapsulate these two concepts White writes:

we need to produce a phrase which will serve to sum up each concept. "Things as they become" sums up the camera-as-brush concept. "Love of things as they are" is a tight symbol of the camera-as-extension-of-vision concept. It can be seen from these phrases that the point of comparison – reality and the literal – carries the most weight. (We should note that "reality" is considered through the article to be the tactile-visual perception of objects which to human beings is generally considered the most "real".)²⁰

¹⁶ Since Stieglitz died in 1946 it is also possible that "the invisible Stieglitz" is the deceased Stieglitz.

¹⁷ Minor White, 'Your Concepts are Showing: How to Judge your Own Photographs' in Stephanie Comer & Deborah Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006, pp. 88- 94. Originally published in *American Photography*, Vol. 45, No. 5, May 1951, pp. 290-297.

¹⁸ White, 'Your Concepts ...', in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁹ White, 'Your Concepts ...', in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 89. The term 'straight' is used here by White, as it is by many photography critics, to describe a purist approach to photography in which manipulation of the image is reduced to a minimum. While this word is frequently used today to refer to heterosexuals, as opposed to homosexuals, any allusions to sexuality here appear to be unintentional.

²⁰ White, 'Your Concepts ...', in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 89.

These two phrases, “Things as they become” and “Love of things as they are”, are White’s first published permutation of his previously noted statement: “To photograph things for what they are for what else they are”²¹. In further elaborating on these two phrases White argues that photographers with a “Love of things as they are” embrace and accept “reality and the literal” and in doing so they are able to penetrate through to its “other side”.²² On the other hand, photographers who photograph things for what they become, or “for what else they are”, avoid “reality and the literal” and attempt to alter it. As White notes, the “camera-as-brush” and the “camera-as-extension-of-vision” concepts are not mutually exclusive approaches to photography. This is certainly the case with White’s own work because at times both approaches are evident in his own work.

As White explains, the “camera-as-brush” and the “camera-as-extension-of-vision” concepts can be distinguished in photographs by “comparing things that can be seen in the prints with established criteria of some kind.”²³ White claims there are five of these criteria, which demonstrate a photographer’s attitude or conceptual approach to making photographs: attitude toward surface, attitude toward the hand or handwork, attitude toward composition, attitude toward visual reality, and attitude toward creative continuity.

In elaborating on photographers’ attitudes towards visual reality, as evident in their photographs, White states: “if the spectator feels that the print is faithful to the original, no matter what alterations have taken place – then alteration, for him, is invisible.”²⁴ White’s use of the term ‘invisible’ here refers to the surface of the photograph and whether the viewer notices any deliberate alterations to the visual reality of the world it depicts. Thus, if a viewer believes that a photograph faithfully represents its subject with minimal or unnoticeable modifications to how the human eye perceives it then any alterations are invisible, and the photographer has adopted the “camera-as-extension-of-vision” concept. While all photographs – particularly black and white photographs – are alterations of visual reality, White clearly believes that the degree to which reality is modified is stronger in some photographs than it is in others.

White’s use of the term ‘invisible’ in the above quote simply refers to that which is unnoticed by the viewer, as opposed to the intangible or immaterial aspects of the viewer’s inner experience of a photograph. In this sense, this particular use of the word ‘invisible’ is distinctly different from those previously identified.

²¹ Minor White in Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, USA: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, p. 34. From a previously unpublished letter addressed to John Upton, dated January 19, 1957.

²² White, ‘Your Concepts ...’, in Comer & Klochko, op. cit., pp. 88 & 92.

²³ White, ‘Your Concepts ...’, in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁴ White, ‘Your Concepts ...’, in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 92.

Making Manifest the Invisible

In *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, on a page of text under the general heading of 'Nourishment', White reasserts the affective power of photography in making the visible invisible. Although White is questioning photography's expressive power here, he is not asking whether or not it exists but rather to what extent it can be utilised:

How far can camerawork go toward making manifest the invisible? That is its work, but how far can it go? How much can camera [sic] bring to others of my own experiences of light or darkness, Christ or Lucifer? How much can I consciously, deliberately, conscientiously *find* or *invent* that will provide nourishment for others. This will be my field of study for a while.

Rochester 1956 ²⁵

This paragraph is included with two other quotations, written before White commenced compiling *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*. The above quotation is preceded by three paragraphs from a Cleveland Workshop in photography in 1956 – "Let's look at photographs as food [...] what is being nourished?" – and is followed by another paragraph from Rochester, December 1955, about photography and transformation. Within this page of text, however, no further reference to the invisible is made.

In questioning the affective power of photography in "making manifest the invisible" White's references to the invisible are his "own experiences of light or darkness, Christ or Lucifer". Since White refers to his "own experiences" as that which are made manifest, it appears that White is speaking, albeit indirectly, about Equivalence. Can photography "manifest the invisible" through other means than the theory of Equivalence?

While White refers to the 'invisible' as his experiences of "light or darkness, Christ or Lucifer" it is unclear whether the invisible is restricted to these particular experiences or it encompasses the complex gamut of all experiences, all emotions and all states of being. Alternatively, White's "own experiences" may only be one referent to the invisible. In which case the invisible may involve much more than the photographer's "own experiences": it may also include the viewer's

²⁵ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 128.

This quotation displays White's idiosyncratic use of language, particularly his use of the term "camera". Where White writes 'camera' or 'camerawork' one may well substitute photography. However, this idiosyncrasy appears to be deliberate, in order to distinguish White's photographic practice from the more familiar practices of others.

Minor White in 'Minor White', in James Danziger & Barnaby Conrad III *Interviews with Master Photographers*, USA: Paddington Press Ltd, 1977, p. 32.

In an interview with James Danziger & Barnaby Conrad III, when questioned about his frequent use of the term 'Camera' in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* White explains: "Well that simply means the practice of Camera, the idea of Camera, which of course grows out of cameras. It's a generalization. Sometimes you find yourself speaking of Camera, not having any particular camera in mind at all, but just the action one goes through in using a camera - and also the results, the photographs themselves and their relationship to people. It's an abstraction that includes a lot."

“own experiences” or it may refer to an unutterable quality, beyond the realm of experience, that can only be expressed through an image but cannot be explained through visual or intellectual analysis.

White’s use here of the phrase “making manifest the invisible” is very similar to the previously noted phrase, which White attributed to Stieglitz in 1946, “photography that makes visible the invisible”. Where there was some doubt earlier as to whether the invisible in the 1946 phrase refers only to the photographer’s experience of a photograph and not the viewer’s, there is similar doubt here, ten years later. Nonetheless, since the viewer is ‘nourished’ by White’s manifestation of the invisible rather than informed about this manifestation, it would seem that the invisible here refers to both the photographer’s and the viewer’s experience of the photograph.

Invoking the Invisible

In an article titled 'The Way Through Camera Work' published in *Aperture* in 1959, during the period that White was the editor of this journal, White again uses the term ‘invisible’ in relation to the function of photography or, as White states, “camera work”:

Paintings for contemplation and photographs for contemplation consistently offer something different – and there seems no way at the moment of clearly distinguishing what is different. The following comparison is offered for what it is worth. Mai-Mai Sze says this, “Brushwork is thus the direct expression of the mind in action. Its function is to make visible the invisible.” The function of camera work, when treated as a treasure, is to invoke the invisible with the visible.²⁶

Along with White’s own writing and reproductions of his photographs, this article includes both a wide variety of quotes from other writers and reproductions of images from other artists. As Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock note, in their book *Landscape as Photograph* (1985), the title 'The Way Through Camera Work' “refers not to Stieglitz directly but to Tao achievable through photography”²⁷. In this article White suggests “conceptual” connections “between camera work and certain periods of Oriental art, notably Taoist painting in China and Sumiye in Japan”.²⁸ Affiliations between eastern and western art were certainly not uncommon for modern artists, nonetheless, they played an important role in White’s approach to photography. In selecting sources to quote White draws from a wide field, including western writers such as Laurence Binyon and Alfred Korzybski, photographers such as Stieglitz and Weston, and eastern writers, most significantly Mai-Mai Sze, the author of *The Tao of Painting*

²⁶ Minor White, ‘The Way Through Camera Work’, *Aperture*, 7: 2, 1959, p. 73.

²⁷ Estelle Jussim & Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, *Landscape as Photograph*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 76. However, the allusion to Stieglitz, as always, is present in White’s use of the term “Camera Work”.

²⁸ White, ‘The Way ...’, op. cit., p. 62.

(1956).²⁹ Within 'The Way Through Camera Work' White cites Sze's *The Tao of Painting* on four occasions, the previous quotation being one example.

The text of 'The Way Through Camera Work' is divided into various sections with different headings such as 'The Tao (Way) of Painting' and 'Articulation'. The above quotation appears under the heading of 'Anonymity'. While quotations from Sze and Weston that immediately follow this heading clearly relate to the absence of self-expression in the creation of art works by artists, in this quote White does not appear to directly address this notion of anonymity but rather, more generally, the function of photography. However, I will shortly examine another use of the term 'invisible' by White which does directly relate to this idea of anonymity.

While White's usage of the term 'invisible' in his 1959 article – "to invoke the invisible with the visible" – is clearly a response to Sze's use of the same term, it also clearly echoes White's previous usage, that is "photography that makes visible the invisible" (1946) and "making manifest the invisible" (1956). Since *The Tao of Painting* was first published in 1956 it is not possible that either Stieglitz or White had read this book back in 1946, however, White may have read it in the year that it was published. It is more probable that White read *The Tao of Painting* some time between 1956-1959 and found that Mai-Mai Sze's voice resonated strongly with both Stieglitz's voice and his own. I would also propose that the concept that art's function is to make visible the invisible is, so to speak, 'up for grabs' and always has been. While this case may be argued, the subject of this thesis is White's use of the term 'invisible' rather than the first noted use of this term, or indeed the starting point of the concept of 'invisibility' in the visual arts.

Despite the similarities between White's uses of the term 'invisible' in 1946, 1956 and 1959, there is one notable difference; namely, his use of the verb "invoke" in 1959 rather than "makes" or "making manifest". Photography that "invokes the invisible", as opposed to photography that "makes visible the invisible", or "making manifest the invisible" through photography, suggests that the viewer plays a more definite and vital role, that is, the invisible occurs within the viewer rather than within the photographer only or within the photograph itself. Where there may have been some reservations earlier as to whether or not White's previously noted uses of the term 'invisible' refer to both the photographer's and the viewer's experience of a photograph, here there is none. It is also worth noting that White uses the verb "invoke" in the above quote, while Mai-Mai Sze uses "make"; suggesting that this transition from *making* visible the invisible to *invoking* the invisible with the visible, is an evolution in White's use of this term, an evolution that acknowledges and involves the viewer as a more active participant. Furthermore, in the previous quote, White does not specifically use the term 'invisible' as a referent to his experiences, which may suggest that what is invoked goes beyond the realm of known experience. This is not to say that the invisible is not invoked within a viewer as a consequence of his or her experience of, or engagement with, a photograph; but rather that the invisible itself may exceed the limits of known human experience.

²⁹ Mai-Mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting: A Study of the Ritual Disposition of Chinese Painting*, New York: Pantheon, 1956.

Jussim and Lindquist-Cock refer directly to White's previous quote from in 'The Way Through Camera Work':

If, as Minor White would decree, "The function of camera work, when treated as a treasure, is to invoke the invisible with the visible," how, exactly, was this to be done? The symbolists had resorted to metaphor, simile, mythic figures, and classical analogies, sometimes so arcane as to be unintelligible. Was there any other way except blurring reality by soft-focus techniques? If the object was no longer to be the guest of honor in the house of Art, what was to take its place? What *could* take its place?³⁰

Presumably, "the object" for Jussim and Lindquist-Cock is that which I have previously defined as the subject of the photograph, that is, the visible object before the camera at the moment of exposure. For White, the "guest of honor in the house of Art" is not always "the object" photographed but rather *what can be conveyed via "the object"*. Thus, while "the object" is always visibly depicted in a photograph and can never really be replaced, it may nevertheless invoke something else, something beyond itself. Jussim and Lindquist-Cock suggest that this something else, which is invisible, is emotion and it is invoked by the formal qualities of the photograph. The quest to "invoke the invisible with the visible", or to invoke emotion with a photograph dates back – as Jussim and Lindquist-Cock argue, and White would agree – to pictorialist photographers such as Stieglitz and Edward Steichen. As Jussim and Lindquist-Cock state, pictorialist photographs were "more about the expressing of emotion than about the impressionistic rendering of the transitory passage of light."³¹ And for the pictorialists and their followers such as White, the problem with this endeavour of expressing emotion through photographs was "that photography seemed wedded to "nature." "³² To put this argument another way, the camera was, and many would agree still is, better suited to attempts at objectively describing the world rather than subjectively expressing or invoking emotion. As Jussim and Lindquist-Cock state:

How, then, could ideas be expressed, particulars be generalized, truths be expounded, through a medium which, in one way or the other, recorded the phenomenological world? ³³

Jussim and Lindquist-Cock put forward a number of provocative questions in *Landscape as Photograph*, many of which they answer with other questions. While I may accept that the answer to the question of *what* could take the place of the visible subject of the photograph in White's decree "to invoke the invisible with the visible" is emotion, the more interesting question is *how*? In attempting to answer this latter question Jussim and Lindquist-Cock take the reader on an interesting and thoroughly researched journey, through four pages of text, to arrive:

³⁰ Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, op. cit., p. 80.

³¹ Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, *ibid.*, p. 80.

³² Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, *ibid.* p. 80.

³³ Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, *ibid.* p. 80.

full circle to the question: How does form stimulate the response of emotion? How can pure form express emotion or thought? In what ways does pure form act on us – by resemblance? by metaphor? by kinesthetic imitation? by mathematical vibrations akin to Nature’s vibrations? ³⁴

The journey that Jussim and Lindquist-Cock embark on to return to these questions travels through the worlds of: Pythagoras and mathematics; Ludwig van Beethoven, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgard Varese and music; William Blake and astronomy; Madame Helen Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Charles Leadbetter and Theosophy; Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Georgia O’Keeffe and painting; Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky; Maurice Maeterlinck, Stephane Mallarmé, Walter Pater, T. S. Eliot and literature; Alvin Langdon Coburn, John Szarkowski, and of course, Stieglitz, Weston, White and photography!

In addressing White’s use of the term invisible in his proclamation “to invoke the invisible with the visible” Jussim and Lindquist-Cock correctly refer to emotion as that which is invisible. However, as shown in the previous chapter, “the invisible” may also have other referents: the viewer’s mental image formed in response to a photograph; the viewer’s experience of remembering his or her mental image; the viewer’s ‘invented subject’ created for a photograph that has a visually ambiguous or difficult to identify subject; or that which is suggested by the photograph within the viewer, beyond emotion. In their examination of that which White refers to as “the visible”, Jussim and Lindquist-Cock search beyond the subject of the photograph – and rightly so – to explore that which can be invoked by the “pure form” of the photograph itself and how it can be invoked. Again as shown in the previous chapter, White was more than aware of the formal qualities of a photograph and what could be expressed both through them and by them; certainly within both his photographs and his writings on photography the role played by the subject itself was not always of primary importance. Nonetheless, for White the subject of a photograph does play a role in invoking the invisible. This being the case Jussim and Lindquist-Cock place too much emphasis on the formal qualities of an image and fail to address the role of the actual subject of the photograph.

When discussing any experience of a photograph and what contributes to this, it is difficult to separate the formal qualities of the photograph from the actual subject of the photograph, just as it is difficult to ignore the viewer’s approach to the image and the context in which it is seen. To isolate any of these qualities or aspects of photography as a determining factor in the viewer’s experience of a photograph is highly problematic. Yet this is precisely what Jussim and Lindquist-Cock do when they assign “pure form” as the referent to “the visible” in White’s statement “to invoke the invisible with the visible”. Leaving aside the question of the viewer’s approach to the photograph and the context in which the image is seen, the subject of the photograph is always visible in the photograph, even when it is difficult to identify, as it often is in White’s photographs.

³⁴ Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, *ibid.* p. 85.

While the formal qualities of a photograph may certainly assist in invoking the invisible, invisibility may also be invoked by the viewer's feeling of correspondence with an image, which may equally concern the actual subject of the photograph as well as the "pure form" of the photograph. Similarly, when a photograph functions as a mirror, the viewer might be triggered by the subject of the photograph, no less than by the aesthetics of the image. Furthermore, the actual subject of the photograph may suggest something else to the viewer beyond that which is visually depicted. Finally, the viewer's mental image of a photograph may be formed in response to the subject itself. All of these aspects of the viewer's experience of a photograph, and indeed his or her experience of invisibility, may thus be attributed to the *subject* of the photograph as well as to the "pure form" of the photograph.

Invisible Personal Life

Setting aside the views of Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, I will return now to identifying and contextualising other uses of the term 'invisible' in White's writing. In particular his previously mentioned use of this term as it might relate to White's own desire for 'anonymity'. As White states:

... It is not surprising I have discovered camera is both a way of life and not enough to live by ... I find that my photographs are reflecting my frustrations, the loneliness, the search for intimacy without embarrassment and not much more. I am merely letting the camera visualize my inner wishes – a lazy way of working. Thus I have not really made it a way of life. The challenge has only been recognized, not tried. It still remains to make it a way of creating what I want to happen to both myself and others. I hardly expect the impossible of creating so that my personal life is invisible – but let the mirror be clouded ... or two mirror images away at least.³⁵

This excerpt from White's journal appears in James Baker Hall's biographical essay in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*. Although there is no exact date given for when White wrote this journal entry its placement within Hall's essay suggests it was written in 1952, the year in which *Aperture* was founded and the second last year of White's teaching period at CSFA. White's use of the term 'invisible' here clearly refers to his desire to create photographs that do not reflect his "personal life". White's personal life at the time when this extract from 'Memorable Fancies' was written was, as Hall describes:

long full of confusions, misunderstandings and heartaches of unrequited love, aggravated by society's disapproval of his homosexuality, [it] weighed more heavily all the time now with its accumulated frustrations.³⁶

With reference to White's 1956 use of the term 'invisible' – "How far can camerawork go

³⁵ White in White & Hall, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 89.

³⁶ Hall in White & Hall, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 89.

toward making manifest the invisible?" – it can be said that here, in this 1952 use of the same term, and quite contrary to White's stated wishes, the invisible is a manifestation of White's "personal life", of his "own experiences of light or darkness, Christ or Lucifer".³⁷ With the exception of White's use of the term 'invisible' in 'Your Concepts are Showing' (as a referent to unnoticed alterations to visual reality), all the previously noted instances of White's usage of this term, and indeed in all but one of those occasions that will be noted henceforth, White uses this word in a positive way. That is, the invisible is an affirmation of what the photographer intended to be made manifest in the photograph or evoked by the photograph, or that which White believes can be conveyed or evoked by a photograph. Yet for White this was not always the case, some manifestations or evocations of the invisible were undesirable. This is, however, a unique instance, and, apart from this unintended embodiment of the invisible, White strives for all other possible materializations of the invisible.

Invisible Organic and Invisible Spirit

I will examine now another use of the term 'invisible', by White, that directly relates to Equivalence. This will then lead into an analysis of White's use of the term 'invisible' in relation to the sequencing of photographs. Further instances of White's usage of this term that directly relate to Equivalence will follow.

The next text from White to be examined appears in Peter C. Bunnell's monograph *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, published in 1989, some thirteen years after White's death.³⁸ This book was published to accompany a travelling exhibition of White's photographs; along with reproductions of White's photographs it also includes a chapter titled 'Unpublished Writings', a valuable source of previously unpublished letters, journal entries and other writings by White. Within these 'Unpublished Writings' is the intriguingly titled ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript', written by White in 1964, in Rochester. In it White refers to "three modalities" of photography: "Possession", "Equivalence" and "Sequence".³⁹ 'Possession', as a modality of photography, is for White: "A greed [...] which the recording power of camera fulfilled to my joy".⁴⁰ White's use of 'Possession' here should be familiar to anyone who has used a camera; but since it is outside the scope of this thesis it will not be examined further. However, what White has to say about 'Equivalence' and 'Sequence' is pertinent. In writing about Equivalence, White again refers to the 'invisible' and his memories of past experiences:

Equivalence 2. Recollections of the past with love balanced the greed. And I have blessed the metamorphosing power of camera because it thereby yields images corresponding to my memories of things past. Equivalence grew out of this. Equivalence in camera whereby the invisible is made visible to

³⁷ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 128.

³⁸ Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit.

³⁹ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p.41.

⁴⁰ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

intuition, the invisible organic, the invisible spirit.⁴¹

Here White goes beyond his earlier noted views that “The function of camera work [...] is to invoke the invisible with the visible”⁴² or that “Stieglitz said something or other about photography that makes visible the invisible”⁴³ to say *what the invisible is made visible to*, namely to “intuition”. What exactly White means by ‘intuition’ at this point is not certain. Nevertheless, it can certainly be said that intuition is neither logical nor intellectual and that, for White, the experience of invisibility is a sensual or emotional experience, rather than an intellectual experience, which utilises the viewer’s intuitive powers over his or her powers of reason. White’s reference to “the invisible organic” and “the invisible spirit” do not appear to be synonyms for ‘intuition’ but rather qualifications of that which will be rendered visible. In this sense, it may be inferred that the photograph – or in White’s terms ‘camera’ – might reveal spirit to intuition, for example.

It is also worth noting here White’s awareness of the transformative power of ‘camera’ – “I have blessed the metamorphosing power of camera” – particularly as this pertains to Equivalence and to how the invisible may be made visible. Where the “the recording power of camera” satisfied White’s possessive “joy” in his first modality of photography, here in his second modality, Equivalence, he blesses the “metamorphosing power of camera”.⁴⁴ White’s use here of the phrase “metamorphosing power” appears to be synonymous with his previously noted phrase “transforming power”, in ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’, particularly as both of these phrases are employed in conjunction with the “recording power” of camera.⁴⁵ White clearly favours the “metamorphosing power” rather than the “recording power” of photography here, as a means for making Equivalents and making visible the invisible. If Stieglitz’s question put to White – “Have you ever been in love?”⁴⁶ – did indeed address the role of intuition in making Equivalents, as proposed in chapter two, it is now clearly evident that White understood.

Another aspect of Equivalence, addressed by White in the above quote, is photography’s capability of yielding images that correspond to his “memories of things past”. As previously noted, the photograph’s ability to arouse a special sense of correspondence within a viewer is an important component of Equivalence. In view of this significant relationship between correspondence and Equivalence, White’s above use of the term ‘invisible’ may be understood as referring to his “memories of things past”. However, White also states that Equivalence “grew” out of this correspondence. Thus, while the ‘invisible’ here may be understood as meaning White’s “memories of things past”, it also goes beyond this, that is, beyond the photographer’s experience.

⁴¹ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

⁴² White, ‘The Way ...’, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴³ White, *Mirrors ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁴ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *op. cit.*, p.41.

⁴⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁴⁶ White, *Mirrors ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

White's third modality of photography is 'Sequence':

Sequence 3. The choice of the individual image extended with juxtaposing images and superimposing them and surrounding them with words.

The same "yes" by which one recognizes the individual image, occurs when one sees a superimposing "click in", or two pictures juxtaposed, and one says "yes" to the mental image that occurs in the space between the two. It is the same "yes" that is heard when a phrase in a series works, or a whole sequence, or a whole exhibition no matter how large. This moment of "yes" is the only creativity that I know...⁴⁷

As discussed in chapter one, the sequencing of images is an important part of White's photographic practice, due not only to the cumulative effect of grouping photographs together but also, as White explains here, to "the mental image that occurs in the space between" two images within a sequence of photographs. Although White's use here of the term "mental image" relates to sequencing and not to Equivalence, it shares similarities with his use of this same term, one year earlier, in 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend'. As noted in the previous chapter the viewer's mental image is an essential element in White's two way equation of Equivalence: "Photograph + Person Looking ↔ Mental Image".⁴⁸

Before further examining the importance of sequencing and its relationship to White's use of the term 'invisible' – not only in his practice as a photographer but also in both his editorial and curatorial roles – I will return to his writing in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*; in particular to a text which addresses similar topics to those noted in ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript'.

The Present Invisible

I will now examine further extracts from White's journal 'Memorable Fancies', as published in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*. While the first excerpt, as noted in the opening page of this chapter, was written in 1946, I will now look at an entry from White's journal, dated 1968. The journal entry to be discussed here deals with what White refers to as "four modes" or "four branches of awareness".⁴⁹ These "four branches" address similar concerns to White's above mentioned "three modalities of photography" in ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript'. In these two texts the similarities are most apparent between White's first two branches and his first two modalities, since they both concern possession and Equivalence respectively. White's third branch, as with his third modality, relates to sequencing but beyond this it also deals with photographic portraiture. The major difference, however, is that where there are three modalities of photography in 'Preface' there are four branches of awareness in *Mirrors Messages*

⁴⁷ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p.41.

⁴⁸ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 171.

⁴⁹ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 194. To avoid confusion between White's "four modes" and his "three modalities of photography in ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript', I will refer to these "four modes" as "four branches of awareness" since this is what White himself does throughout the rest of this journal entry.

Manifestations, as White explains, the fourth branch is concerned with “the pursuit of consciousness.”⁵⁰

White’s text on the “four branches of awareness” was written in 1968, the same year he completed work on *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* and four years after he wrote 'Preface'. Within this text White makes two distinctly different references to the “invisible’. White begins by writing: “FOUR MODES. I seem to have photographed in four branches of awareness; while the branches appeared in succession, all four continue to live.”⁵¹

The first branch of awareness, as with the first modality in 'Preface', deals with possession. Similar issues with greed are continued: “The first branch is a possessive one, a greed for all visible”.⁵²

In White’s second branch of awareness, he continues to connect, as he does in his second modality of photography in 'Preface', his memories of things past to Stieglitz’s theory of the Equivalent:

The second branch has to do with a memory of things passed and the present invisible. I am still unable to understand a dream until I have either a diagram or a photograph of it. I became aware of this during World War II when my camera was taken away from me. I stopped seeing. Consequently, impressions and experiences by the thousands piled up ... they had to be materialized before I could move on to seeing anything else. Verse was not enough. When camera was available again, Stieglitz’s concept of the Equivalent opened the way to materialize these impressions and thus “release” myself from their tight grasp. For this long term effort the *metamorphosing* power of camera was ideal.⁵³

As previously noted, during White’s World War Two active service period “something had died, or at least gone underground”⁵⁴ within him, something which he also refers to as “the lump of poured concrete”⁵⁵. While it was previously unclear what this “something” was, his reference here to the “impressions and experiences” which “piled up” within him during this period, help now to elucidate what this “something” was. Since White rarely had an opportunity to make photographs while he was in the army, he was unable to find a creative outlet for the multitudes of “impressions and experiences” that accumulated within him, not even through writing poetry. These accumulations were held “underground” within White as a “lump of poured concrete”. It was not until after World War Two, when White returned to the USA, met Stieglitz and started to photograph again, that White found an abstract outlet for these concrete amassments. This outlet was of course Equivalence.

⁵⁰ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵¹ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵² White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵³ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁴ White in Hill & Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp 262-290.

⁵⁵ White, *Mirrors ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

In both White's second modality of photography and his second branch of awareness he uses the term 'invisible' in connection with Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence and White's own memories of things past. Where previously White used this term to refer to "the invisible organic", "the invisible spirit" or more generally "the invisible" as that which is made visible to intuition, he now refers to "the present invisible".⁵⁶ It is not altogether clear what White means by "the present invisible" but by comparing his second modality of photography with his second branch of awareness, and through further examination of the latter, I propose that "the present invisible" has two possible meanings.

Firstly, since both White's second modality and his second branch of awareness share many similarities, including their direct relationship to Equivalence and White's memories of past events, it might be inferred that White's use of the term 'invisible' in both texts is synonymous. That is, "the present invisible" refers to that which is made visible to intuition.

Secondly, "the present invisible" may also refer to a memory from the past, brought into and existing in the present, voluntarily or involuntarily, via a photograph. In this sense, "impressions and experiences" of past events are triggered or "materialized" by a photograph. For White then, such memories are buried within the individual and can only be brought to the surface and into the present – and thus explained or understood – by camerawork. In this way the holder of the memory is released from its "tight grasp". Although White refers only to *his* memories when discussing the second branch of awareness, other viewers apart from White might also experience similar encounters with their *own* memories through *their* engagement with a photograph.

It is also worth noting that both White's second modality of photography and his second branch of awareness use the phrase "the metamorphosing power of camera" in direct connection to Equivalence, as a means by which the invisible is evoked by the visible.⁵⁷

The Invisible Third Picture

White's third branch of awareness introduces a unique use of the term 'invisible', it concerns the sequencing of photographs. As White states, the third modality of awareness "pertains to the simple matter of creativity in respect to things, person, or Spirit."⁵⁸ This branch, as with White's third modality in his 'Preface', deals with sequencing and White's recognitory 'yes' in his creative process. It also deals with photographic portraiture and the rapport between subject and photographer. In this third branch a new use of the term 'invisible' emerges:

In picture editing when a chance juxtaposition shocks a new Yes! out of me, it is as if I

⁵⁶ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p.41.

⁵⁷ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit.,

⁵⁸ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 194.

see an invisible third picture in a space between two images.⁵⁹

While it may have been inferred that White was in control of the editing process in his third modality in 'Preface', it appears that here, in his third branch of awareness, it is not so much through control but rather due to experimentation and chance that his sequencing decisions are made. The "invisible third picture" is similar to "the mental image that occurs in the space between" two images within a sequence, as previously noted, in White's 'Preface'.⁶⁰ White refers here to an image visualised by the viewer of a sequence of photographs, different to the mental image formed in the viewer's mind in response to an Equivalent, as discussed in my examination of 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' in the previous chapter.⁶¹ The "invisible third picture" is a mental image created by the viewer, based upon both the images that precede and follow it, or the space between them; whereas the mental image that exists within a viewer's mind while experiencing an Equivalent is formed in response to one actual photograph. White might well argue that since the "invisible third picture" is formed in response to the imaginary space that occurs between two physical photographs, rather than one tangible image, the viewer plays a more actively inventive role in his or her engagement with the image. This greater participatory role undertaken by the viewer is similar to that which was discussed in the previous chapter, where the viewer invents a subject for a photograph when the subject is otherwise rendered ambiguously. As previously noted, for White: "What we invent is out of the stuff and substance of ourselves. When we invent a subject we turn the photograph into a mirror of some part of ourselves."⁶²

Again, as shown earlier, the invention of a subject by a viewer takes the viewer deeply into his or her personal and individual experience of invisibility. However, in creating an "invisible third picture", the viewer not only invents the subject of the image but the image itself. Thus the viewer's experience of invisibility when inventing an "invisible third picture" is both more personal and individual than that which is experienced when inventing a subject for a photograph or when forming a mental image of an actual photograph.

The fourth branch refers to consciousness, both the photographer's and the viewer's, or as White describes it, "Camerawork in the pursuit of consciousness."⁶³ For White, consciousness means more than simply awareness, or a state of knowing, but also the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings. Consciousness refers not only to the visible world that surrounds an individual but also the invisible world that exists within that person. Although White does not use the term 'invisible' within his fourth branch of awareness, what he writes is worth examining because it relates to his previously noted uses of this term and to this thesis' notion of invisibility. The bulk of this text concerns a series of cautions or pieces of advice, required by both photographers and viewers in the pursuit of consciousness. These admonitions relate to four key aspects: "communicating", "equivalence", "self-expression" and "creativity". As White

⁵⁹ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁶⁰ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *op. cit.*, p.41.

⁶¹ 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' was published six years before *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*

⁶² White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p.173.

⁶³ White, *Mirrors ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

states:

become conscious that *communicating* is limited to those factual matters that the reason can grasp visually; that evocation of feeling states requires a willing audience; that *equivalence* is only for the metaphor-minded who can cope with the abstract level of any image; *self-expression* is for the young and must be worked through to “expression of Self,” or degenerate into pure egotism; *creativity* in photography relates to the realization that the ultimate medium of any artist is the mind and the psyche of those eating his images; *creativity* also stands for the introduction of small changes in other people ...⁶⁴

For White, “*communicating*” via a photograph is an intellectual process, as opposed to an intuitive process, whereby meaning is both determined and restricted by reason and as such it is only concerned with visual facts, that is the visible. White’s concerns here with the limitations of “factual matters” are similar to those noted in the previous chapter, when discussing White’s first level of Equivalence, since both the photographer and the viewer are only concerned with the factual or informative elements of the photograph itself. Communication as a means of pursuing consciousness, for White, is restricted both by visual facts and reason. It is not until both the photographer and the viewer move beyond the world of visual facts and reason, as happens in White’s second level of Equivalence, that the path to consciousness is open. Clearly White is not overly interested in communication as such, indeed, as he states in ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’: “Communication is of no importance”.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, White is certainly interested in evocation.

It is not simply the Equivalent that can evoke invisible “feeling states”: a “willing audience” is also required, preferably an audience that is “metaphor-minded who can cope with the abstract level of any image”. As previously noted, for White “the arousable implications” of an Equivalent “are possible only when the viewer is looking at it sympathetically.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, and again as previously stated, White’s “willing audience” would consist of viewers who are not “subject-identification bound”, who are open to suggestion, and who are able to “overcome their fear of letting themselves go” and to respond to a photograph’s formal expressive qualities. Such viewer’s might also be “sensitized intellectually, emotionally and kinesthetically” and acquainted with “abstract or non-objective painting”.⁶⁷ While particular photographs may be more conducive to the viewer’s potential experience of invisibility, both the viewer’s approach to the photograph and the context in which the image is seen also play a significant role in determining the viewer’s experience of invisibility.

White’s comments on “*self-expression*”, in his fourth branch of awareness, resonate strongly with

⁶⁴ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶⁵ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p.175.

⁶⁶ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁷ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, *ibid.*, pp. 171-173.

his previously noted desire to create photographs “so that my personal life is invisible”.⁶⁸ While this desire was first expressed in 1952 his statement here, sixteen years later, that “*self-expression* is for the young and must be worked through to “expression of Self,” or degenerate into pure egotism”, appears to suggest that his personal life is no longer visible in his photographs. Important to note here is the difference between “self-expression” and “expression of Self”. It may be inferred that “self-expression”, for White, is the expression of the photographer’s personality whether it is intentional or unintentional, presumably the latter given the tone of White’s writing. Whereas “expression of Self”, for White, is that which is expressed by the photographer; while it may have been experienced by the photographer it is not about the photographer. Put another way, a photograph that is self-expressive may be seen as an image which merely ‘communicates’ something *about* the person who made it and as such does not evoke anything personal within the viewer, whereas a photograph that is an “expression of Self” conveys something *from* the photographer, which the viewer may empathise or correspond with and thus something intimate to the viewer might be evoked within him or her self. To further clarify the difference between “self-expression” and “expression of Self”, it may be useful to return to White’s previously noted views in ‘Equivalence: The Perennial Trend’, in which he states that his Equivalents “are not self-expressive, or self searching” but rather “they are self-found.”⁶⁹ That is, while White finds his own emotional states when viewing his own photographs, he encourages other viewers to find *their* own feeling states.

Although “*creativity*” and “*communicating*” may appear to be related – that is, through creativity something may be communicated – for White they are two very different things. As I have shown, White is more interested in evocation than communication. Through “*creativity*” White’s desire is to bypass reason and, presumably via intuition, to transcend the visible universe of facts and the photograph itself, in order to reach the invisible worlds within other viewers. As White states, “*creativity* in photography relates to the realization that the ultimate medium of any artist is the mind and the psyche of those eating his images”. White’s reference to “those eating his images” clearly refers to viewers being ‘nourished’ by photographs, as previously discussed. Creativity, unlike communication, goes beyond the visible and ultimately occurs within the invisible realm of the viewer’s “mind and psyche”. Thus White’s idea of creativity and his second level of Equivalence are clearly linked, since they both concern what goes on in the viewer’s mind, that is the viewer’s experience of invisibility. Furthermore, upon reaching the invisible worlds within other viewers, it is White’s wish, as he himself expresses, to introduce “small changes in other people”. Even though White does not specify whether creativity occurs via the viewer’s sense of reason or intuition, it can be inferred that it is the latter, particularly as he refers to the viewer’s psyche as well as the viewer’s mind and because he links reason with “*communicating*” rather than “*creativity*”.

⁶⁸ White in White & Hall, *Minor White*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁶⁹ White, ‘Equivalence’, in Lyons, op. cit., p.175.

Invisible Disincarnate Friend

Beyond White's four branches of awareness and those writings which I have already examined, there is one further instance of White's use of the term 'invisible' to be identified here from *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*. The opening pages of text in *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* include excerpts of writings by White from various unidentified sources. These excerpts appear under the general heading of 'Promises'. The following quotation appears to come from White's journal. It is preceded by White's comments on *taking* photographs as an act of possession (similar to those which have already been noted in both White's first modality of photography and his first branch or awareness) and White's less avaricious and more preferable act of *making* photographs:

Ownership seems to be the force that opens all the other doors. Yet possession is not all. As I become more in harmony with the world around, through, and in me, the varieties of time weave together. Chronological time, the time my psyche takes, and creative time were always at odds with each other. Less so now that the manifestations of inner growth are seen to be set in my path as by an invisible disincarnate friend. When I have sensed his presence, the photographs, afterwards, seem like footprints ... his or mine is the question!

[...] *Arlington 1968* ⁷⁰

Here White's "invisible disincarnate friend" would appear to be a spiritual entity or deity such as God. Although White's use of the term 'invisible' here is a more familiar usage, it is worth noting his ongoing concern with spiritual matters, as further evidenced by the following excerpt which also appears under the heading of 'Promises':

Contemplation of Deity in all manifestations is the true work of the soul. The work of the body is to provide:

the means to keep alive

the means to see all manifestations.

Minneapolis 1934 ⁷¹

Manifesting the Invisible/Invisible Photographs

The next two instances of White's usage of the term 'invisible' that I will now identify come from 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould: An Experiment in Fiction' (1970).⁷² In this text on a fictional photographer, Peter Rasun Gould, White again uses the word 'invisible' with direct reference to Stieglitz. White's second use of the term 'invisible' in this article occurs when he

⁷⁰ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 15.

⁷¹ White, *Mirrors ...*, ibid., p. 15.

⁷² Minor White, 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould: An Experiment in Fiction', in *Aperture 15: 2*, 1970, pp. 34-45.

discusses the 'energy' of photographs. Furthermore, this article also elaborates on White's previously discussed notions of: intuition, nourishment, transformation, metamorphosis, resonance, mirrors, memories of things past, 'things for what they are' and 'things for what else they are'.

'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' was published in the journal *Aperture* in 1970, it has not been republished or reprinted since then. It discusses a photographer with the mystical sounding name of Peter Rasun Gould and includes thirteen untitled, small reproductions of photographs. The manner in which the opening paragraph is written and the context in which this article is presented leads the reader to believe that Gould is a real photographer and the accompanying photographs are made by him. Yet in my extensive research into this 'real' photographer I could find no supporting evidence of his existence.⁷³ What I have been able to find, through close examination of the photographs that accompany this article, is a very strong indication that one of these images was in fact made by White.

In a Sotheby's catalogue of photographs auctioned in New York in 1990, five Minor White photographs are featured. One of these photographs is a double exposure (see illustration 8). The catalogue entry for this image states, "signed by the photographer in pencil in the margin, mounted matted, 1950's, printed later"⁷⁴. The title given to this image by Sotheby's is 'Fantastic Landscape'. One of the exposures in this double exposure depicts an out of focus landscape photographed at twilight or night. The other exposure, which is similar to a Max Ernst frottage, appears to show a detail of a knotted piece of wood; this knot and the grain of the timber suggests the head of a bird. The out of focus landscape exposure is virtually identical to one of the illustrations that accompanies 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' (see illustration 9).⁷⁵ The only difference between these two exposures is that the image attributed to Gould is a mirror image of the exposure in 'Fantastic Landscape'; that is, the negative has been turned upside down. While this proves that only one of the images credited to Gould was made by White, it would seem likely that all of the illustrations that accompany 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' are made by White, particularly since Gould is a fictional creation of White's who is either based on White or his ideal of what a photographer should be. This is not to say that Gould's photographs are exemplary but rather that his approach to photography is, at least it is for White. If anything, Gould's photographs are 'second rate' White photographs. Assuming that Gould's photographs are White's, this was not the first time that White had published his work under a pseudonym or adopted an altar ego. White also published his writings under the names of Myron Martin and Sam Wung Tu.⁷⁶

⁷³ This research included reading books and journal articles on White and photography, and internet searches.

⁷⁴ *Photographs, October 16 and 17*, New York: Sotheby's, 1990, lot 611, pages unnumbered.

⁷⁵ White, 'The Tale ...', op. cit., p. 39.

⁷⁶ Using these pseudonyms White published two articles with each name and one article that was written by both, all of which appeared in *Aperture*. See for example: Myron Martin [Minor White pseudonym], 'Of People and for People', *Aperture* 4: 4, 1956, pp. 134-141; and Sam Wung Tu [Minor White pseudonym], Review of the exhibition 'The Family of Man', *Aperture* 3: 2, 1955, p. 34.

Before identifying White's uses of the term 'invisible' in 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' it is beneficial to examine the name of White's fictional photographer. The most significant aspect of the name Peter Rasun Gould is not the names themselves but the fact that this consists of three names. Each of these names represents an attribute of the one person, or alternatively three different characters within the one narrative. As White explains, Peter is "the photographer", Gould is "the man" and Rasun is "the myth":

the connection of Peter, the photographer, to the growth of awareness in Gould, the man, is essentially wordless. And to his growing delight, the connection of Rasun, the myth, to the deepening awareness of Gould, the man, is ultimately imageless⁷⁷

Within this trinity of beings Rasun is the most mystical and idealised. For White, the name Rasun "connects with light" it is the "splinter of divinity" and the "beginnings of a mythic landscape".⁷⁸ I will return to White's notions of "wordless" and "imageless" connections shortly. What is worth noting here is the idea of growing awareness and its relationship to White's previously noted four branches of awareness, particularly his fourth branch "Camerawork in the pursuit of consciousness". While White does not make it clear what Gould, the man, is made aware of, it is clear that photography heightens his awareness. Perhaps he is more aware of the world around him, or is it world within him? For White, it would appear to be the latter, because the camera can transform the literal into "some wondrous inner landscape" that cannot be pre-visualized.⁷⁹ Yet this transformation eludes Gould and when it occurs he realises that "neither Gould nor Peter had made the magic photographs. They were gifts."⁸⁰ Gifts that White's writing suggests were given by his previously noted "invisible disincarnate friend".

'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' is broken into thirteen sections, each with a subheading. One of these subheadings is titled 'Any and All Images'. It gives the account of what seems to be a tutorial, where Gould explains that visual experiences cannot be translated into words. He does this with the aid of "a circle drawn on a piece of paper and [four] coloured dots".⁸¹ The circle represents visual experience and with each dot Gould marks on its circumference, the viewing experience deepens, becoming further removed from the actual photograph and its subject.

Gould's first dot is grey and it represents photographs that are easily talked about, essentially because they are still firmly rooted in the realm of verbal language and the literal. As Gould remarks, such photographs are "useful to show someone who honestly does not know how to see what to look for."⁸² The next dot is red; it indicates photographs that "seem born to arouse instant associations and memories of past experiences far removed from the subject of the

⁷⁷ White, 'The Tale ...', op. cit., p. 34.

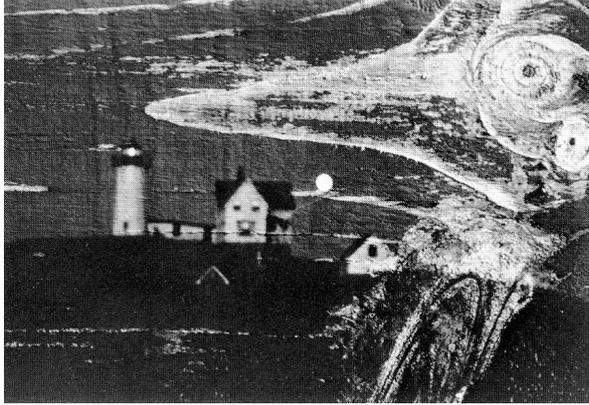
⁷⁸ White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, pp. 35, 39.

⁷⁹ White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸⁰ White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸¹ White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸² White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, p. 42.



8. Minor White,
Untitled, ca 1950s



9. Peter Rasun Gould or Minor White?
Untitled, ca 1970

photograph.”¹ Here the photograph clearly functions as an Equivalent, within White’s second level of Equivalence; and while the viewing experience is disconnected from the photograph’s subject it is still tied to it, albeit remotely. It is also worth noting that both White’s previously noted second modality of photography and second branch of awareness – and in turn his phrase “the present invisible” – both pertain to the viewer’s “memories of past experiences”, as does his second dot of visual experience here. Thus there are strong similarities between all three.

Where White’s third modality of photography and his second branch of awareness concerned sequencing his third level of visual experience does not. It relates to silent viewing experiences, in which you wait “until the photograph speaks to you before you speak to it.”² As Gould explains while drawing a blue dot, his third mark on the circle of visual experience: “Some images will reveal their secret only if you sit quietly with them until they speak to you. If you think intuition will be of any help use it ...”³ Although intuition played a critical role in White’s second modality of photography, because invisibility is made visible to intuition, here White does not appear to give it the same value. Nevertheless, he does not suggest anything else for revealing, or making visible, the secret of an image. It is also worth commenting on Gould’s use of the term ‘secret’ because it makes this level of visual experience seem very esoteric. Is there only one secret to an image that only those who are colloquially ‘in the know’ can experience? Or will each viewer who sits in silence with an image find his or her own secret?

It is Gould’s fourth dot on the circle of visual experience that is most pertinent to this thesis because it rephrases and brings to the surface again White’s first use of the term ‘invisible’, and leads into a new use of this term. Gould makes a white dot and then proclaims: “Sit with these until the images disappear in your eyes.”⁴ Anticipating the reader’s bewilderment with this highly mystical statement, White has those who are watching Gould make dots on the circumference of a circle ask him to elaborate:

We questioned Gould about what, for heaven’s sake, he meant? Smiling, “Just as the meaning of poetry is wordless, so is the meaning of the “poetic” photograph, imageless.”

One of us asked, “Any relation here to Stieglitz when he spoke of manifesting the invisible with photographs?” Gould answered “Glory be, you are on the edge of understanding something – keep talking – keep exposing film and heart”⁵

How can the meaning of poetry be wordless when poems are inextricably linked to words? Perhaps what White is saying here, via Gould, is that it is difficult to translate the experience of reading a poem, or hearing it being read to you, into verbal language. Particularly when you are

¹ White, ‘The Tale ...’, *ibid.*, p. 42.

² White, ‘The Tale ...’, *ibid.*, p. 41.

³ White, ‘The Tale ...’, *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴ White, ‘The Tale ...’, *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵ White, ‘The Tale ...’, *ibid.*, p. 42.

greatly affected by a poem written by someone who has a mastery over the expressive potential of combining words in an imaginative, innovative and evocative way. Similarly, one might ask how can the meaning of a photograph be imageless, no matter how 'poetic' it is? And perhaps the answer to this question depends on whether the image has an affective power for you, or how the photographer utilised the expressive potential of the medium, or how difficult it is to verbally articulate the impact a particular image has on you personally. In linking these questions about the "wordless" meaning of poems and the "imageless" meaning of photographs to Stieglitz, and his notion of photography that makes visible the invisible, White's meetings with Stieglitz in 1946 clearly had an enduring impact.

Immediately following the previous quote from 'The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould' White begins a new section with a new subheading, 'Invisible Photographs'. Here White as the narrator of this experiment in fiction, as opposed to Gould the protagonist, expands on Gould's statement concerning the disappearance of the photographic image in the viewer's experience of that image.

I understood his point much later. Allow me to relate my own experience on these difficult matters, then at least I will be speaking from firsthand knowledge, not hearsay. I find that some time passes after a photographic image "disappears" in my eyes before something returns bearing gifts. When the photographic image disappears, there is a kind of void. I would be fearful of this void if the invisible energy of the image did not give substance to the void. When I am not fearful, the image energy is a guide unseen and unseeable at my side. When hard pressed for names, as at present, I will call this something bearing gifts, the mythic ... or Rasun. I have been nourished by this something. It satisfies the hunger that Gould's images unearth in me.⁶

What White writes here about "Invisible Photographs" clearly relates to the viewer's experience of a photograph rather than photographs that cannot be seen. As such, White's concept of photographs that are invisible is clearly different to that of Roland Barthes as articulated in *Camera Lucida* (1980).⁷ For Barthes, all photographs are invisible not only those that viewers are engaged with on a heightened level, as in White's fourth level of visual experience. As Barthes explains, "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see. In short the referent adheres."⁸ Thus, for Barthes, a photograph is invisible because when we are looking at it we see the subject of the photograph, or its "referent", not the actual photograph. Whereas for White, a photograph becomes invisible when a viewer enters deeply into his or her experience of it, not simply because he or she is only aware of the subject or referent of the photograph. While a photograph is a visual source that triggers profound experiences in White's fourth level of visual experience, in the end the viewing experience goes beyond its visible source; that is, beyond both the referent and the subject of the

⁶ White, 'The Tale ...', *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Trans. R. Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984. Originally published as *La Chambre Claire* by Editions du Seuil in 1980.

⁸ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

photograph, and beyond the photograph itself.

For White, the “photographic image disappears” *in* the viewer’s eyes not before them. White also appears to be talking about the viewer’s mental image and its relationship to an actual image. As previously discussed, the viewer’s mental image of a photograph is an intangible image and as such it is part of the viewer’s experience of invisibility. In White’s fourth level of visual experience, it seems that along with the actual image the viewer’s mental image also disappears, thus making the viewer’s experience of invisibility a step further removed from the original visual source of this experience. As a mental image disappears “in your eyes” you enter more deeply into your experience of the image – beyond the photograph itself and your image of it. Neither images are no longer significant. They have served their function as catalysts of intangible experience.

After the “photographic image disappears” nothing remains but the “invisible energy of the image”, which guides the viewer. Where the viewer is guided to is not made clear, perhaps into “some wonderous inner landscape”, but is given a name, Rasun. The “invisible energy of the image” also nourishes the viewer. It satisfies the viewer’s hunger for visual experience, it also appears to fulfil the viewer’s spiritual hunger and his or her appetite for self discovery and awareness.

Photographing Invisible States/Understanding the Invisible

With similar concerns given to those spiritual matters previously discussed in my examination of White’s “invisible disincarnate friend, the final two instances of White’s use of the term ‘invisible’ to be identified here appear in his ‘Octave of Prayer’.⁹ This title refers to both a 1972 exhibition at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) curated by White and the catalogue of this exhibition which appeared as an issue of *Aperture*. Between 1968 and 1974 White organised four exhibitions at MIT, each of which had their own particular theme and featured an issue of *Aperture* as the catalogue. The other three exhibitions apart from ‘Octave of Prayer’ were: ‘Light’ (1968), ‘Be-ing Without Clothes’ (1970) and ‘Celebrations’ (1974)¹⁰.

The theme of ‘Octave of Prayer’, as White explains:

comes from my personal realization that at times photography and prayer sometimes overlap. I first noticed this intersecting of the two while I was a mid-century soldier¹¹

As discussed in chapter one, similarities between photography and prayer had been realised by White well before he wrote ‘Octave of Prayer’ and date back to 1942. Thus White’s long held

⁹ Minor White, ‘Octave of Prayer’, *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972.

¹⁰ Minor White, ‘Light’, *Aperture 14: 1*, 1968.

Minor White, ‘Be-ing Without Clothes’, *Aperture 15: 3*, 1970.

Minor White, ‘Celebrations’, *Aperture 18: 2*, 1974.

¹¹ Minor White, ‘Octave of Prayer’, *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972, p. 18.

belief that photography and prayer “sometimes overlap” is the foundation of his ‘Octave of Prayer’.

For White prayer is more than a petition to God to fulfil our wishes and desires. More importantly it is also “meditation” through which “union” with either God or the universe, or both, is achieved. The fundamental basis of prayer is, as White states, “intensified” or “heightened concentration” on an object or an idea, through which a state of meditation is reached.¹² If the focus of concentration is a religious object or idea, then the individual is engaged in prayer. If the focus of concentration is a secular object such as a photograph “the viewing state might be experienced as meditation”¹³. For White, since a photograph is a “manifestation” or “aspect” of God, intense concentration on an image can lead not only to meditation but also to prayer.¹⁴

While White believes that there are areas where photography and prayer “overlap” he is also aware that at times they do not intersect. Indeed, White distinguishes eight different levels of prayer, which he refers to as prayer¹ - prayer⁸, thus forming an ‘Octave of Prayer’. The differences between each level of prayer are clearly hierarchical. As White explains, where prayer¹ is merely a “petition” to God, prayer⁸ involves direct union with God, “Beatific Union of Eternity”.¹⁵

Photographs, as White explains, “are ineffectual above the level of prayer³”.¹⁶ At the level of prayer³ the photographer or the viewer “make union with some manifestation of Father or Son, for example, a flower or photograph of one” and through this union a state of meditation is attained.¹⁷ Beyond prayer³ and meditation the individual enters a selfless or ego-less “void”, into which “a third force enters”, and they ascend into a state of “contemplation”.¹⁸ As White explains:

WHEN TWO FORCES (original subject or its image and a person in meditation) ARE INTERACTING (coming together with a light degree of resonance), A THIRD FORCE MAY ENTER.¹⁹

This “third force” is described by White as “grace” or “God the Holy Ghost perhaps”.²⁰ White’s “third force” also appears to relate to what he refers to as Rasun , or “something bearing gifts”, in his previously discussed ‘The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould’.²¹ Although interaction with a

¹² White, ‘Octave ...’, op. cit., p. 15.

¹³ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., pp. 15, 22.

¹⁵ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., p. 20. For further information on White’s definitions of each level of prayer see his table ‘The Full Octave of Prayer’ in Appendix One.

¹⁶ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., 1972, p. 21.

¹⁷ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., 1972, p. 20.

¹⁸ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., 1972, p. 20.

¹⁹ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., p. 21.

²⁰ White, ‘Octave ...’, ibid., pp. 20, 21.

²¹ White, ‘The Tale ...’, op. cit., p. 43.

photograph is limited to prayer³, when a “third force” enters, an image may serve as a “catalyst” for higher levels of prayer such as prayer⁶ in which the realm of “contemplation” is reached.²² White’s use of the term ‘contemplation’ in ‘Octave of Prayer’ does not appear to refer to self-contemplation but rather to the contemplation of God. As previously noted, for White, “Contemplation of Deity in all manifestations is the true work of the soul”.²³ If ‘Octave of Prayer’ concerns the true work of one thing, it is the soul and its union with God; whether it be union with a manifestation of God, such as photograph, in prayer³, or direct union with God in prayer⁸. In my previous discussion of White’s third level of visual experience in ‘The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould’ I stated that White may have had some reservations about the role of intuition in discovering a photograph’s secret. While White did not suggest an alternative to intuition for accessing a photograph’s secret it would seem that he now proposes meditation. Furthermore, if it was not clear in ‘The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould’ where the “invisible energy” of photograph guided a viewer it could now be inferred that it could potentially lead the viewer into contemplation of, or direct union with, God.

It is important to note that when a photograph functions as a catalyst for contemplation, it no longer invokes or evokes other experiences or feeling states, as may happen with an Equivalent, nor does it suggest anything else. On this matter White is very clear:

we must remember that no image can give us a mental picture, or even an intuitive picture, which resembles the experience of the higher states of prayer. No image is in any way a handle on God.²⁴

For White, contemplation and “the higher states of prayer” go beyond any experience of invisibility I have discussed so far with relation to photography. Indeed, although photographs might help some individuals to reach these “higher states” they are not at all necessary; they are, as White says, “no more than catalysts, *something to be left behind without regrets.*”²⁵ Thus the photograph itself, and both its subject and referent, become invisible, as they do in White’s fourth level of visual experience. Furthermore, photographers who have experienced prayer⁶ and contemplation could, as White explains, “stop photographing! They could continue their search without camera or camerawork!”²⁶

There are many reasons why one may decide to make photographs. However, for White and photographers who are interested in ‘camerawork’, rather than more popular or conventional notions of photography, these reasons are atypical. White is not particularly interested in the informative power of a photograph, that is, camerawork is not concerned with documenting the visible world that surrounds us for the sake of prosperity. What White is especially interested in is the affective power of a photograph, that is, he is concerned with what can be expressed or conveyed by a photograph about the photographer’s or the viewer’s invisible internal world

²² White, ‘Octave ...’, op. cit., p. 21.

²³ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁴ White, ‘Octave ...’, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁵ White, ‘Octave ...’, *ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶ White, ‘Octave ...’, *ibid.*, p. 22.

and the consequences of such experiences. Within 'Octave of Prayer' the primary reason given for making photographs is to achieve a union with the world, or as White states, camerawork allows photographers "a consciousness of things, places and people, a union with certain visual, auditory and sensory events in the world."²⁷ Through this union a state of meditation or prayer may be reached. Photographers who have experienced these states at higher levels such as prayer⁶, through the acts of making and viewing photographs, may eventually decide to "stop photographing" since camerawork has equipped them with the ability to achieve direct union with the world without the need to actually photograph it.

In discussing the photographs in the 'Octave of Prayer' exhibition White explains that "only two categories seem relevant to prayer³, photographs *about* prayer and photographs *for* meditation."²⁸ Photographs "*about* prayer" are "images of churches, altars, candles, folded hands and so on", as such they are "usually prayer seen by an observer who never gets involved."²⁹ While a photograph "*about* prayer" is visually related to prayer, the photograph only exists within the realm of prayer² unless a viewer enters a state of meditation. Similarly a photograph "*for* meditation" may only exist in the level of prayer², however, for White at least, its function is to enable the viewer to enter into the level of prayer³, that is, a state of meditation. In further discussing the relationship between photographs "*about* prayer" and photographs "*for* meditation" White introduces a new usage of the term 'invisible':

Though pictures *about* prayer are a view from the outside, the second category, photographs *for* meditation, are not prayer seen from the inside. That is impossible. We cannot photograph invisible states *directly*. This does not mean that Stieglitz was wrong when he said that camerawork was "making visible the invisible." He understood the use of the "equivalent image," and realized the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence when that is going on in a human being. We would not be taking his name in vain to say that union at high levels of art, poetry, or camerawork, even within prayer³, is characterized by being both wordless and imageless.³⁰

In asserting that "We cannot photograph invisible states *directly*" White clearly refers here to prayer as an "invisible state". Although it is possible to photograph directly people praying or objects such as churches and altars that are related to prayer, it is not possible to photograph prayer itself as it is experienced within the person praying. However, it is White's belief that through intensified concentration on a photograph a viewer can achieve a state of spiritual union and meditation, which is a level of prayer, namely prayer³. Further to this, White's also believes that a photograph can serve as a catalyst for higher levels of prayer, beyond prayer³.

In acknowledging that "invisible states" cannot be "*directly*" photographed White also clearly asserts that this recognition "does not mean that Stieglitz was wrong when he said that

²⁷ White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁸ White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁹ White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁰ White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 25.

camerawork was “making visible the invisible.” “ Once again, White refers to his previously noted meetings with Stieglitz and the phrase “photography that makes visible the invisible”.³¹ The key difference between being able to “photograph invisible states *directly*” and “photography that makes visible the invisible” – apart from White’s belief that one is possible and the other is impossible – is that the former attempts *directly* to make visible the invisible *to* the viewer, while the latter attempts *indirectly* to make visible the invisible *within* the viewer. Any invisible state such as “prayer seen from the inside” cannot be made physically visible within the external world, that is, we cannot see them within the material state of a photograph. This is not only because “invisible states” have no physical presence within the material world but also because, as White notes, “camera never makes the mistake of trying to turn from the material to the immaterial in hope of conveying “spirituality.” “³² For White, attempting to convey spirituality or to “transcend” prayer³ is no mistake.³³ The mistake lies in imagining that the photograph alone is able to; whether or not a photograph is able to convey “spirituality” or function as a catalyst for higher levels of prayer is entirely dependent on the viewer and, as White might well argue, the grace of God.

Although it is not clear whether or not a photograph that exists within the level of prayer³ is an Equivalent, both certainly function in similar ways and are dependent on the viewer’s approach to the image and the affect of the image on the viewer. In further discussing camerawork and “making visible the invisible” White states that Stieglitz “realized the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence when that is going on in a human being.” It is worth noting here White’s phrase “the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence” since it directly relates to my notion of the viewer’s experience of invisibility. While an Equivalent is itself an image, and a viewer who engages with an Equivalent may form his or her own mental image, ultimately the viewer’s response to an the Equivalent is an emotional or spiritual experience in which an invisible feeling state is evoked within the viewer, thus the viewer’s experience of Equivalence is ultimately an “imageless” experience. Furthermore, this notion of “the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence” clearly relates to White’s fourth level of visual experience in ‘The Tale of Peter Rasun Gould’ where “images disappear in your eyes.”

It is also worth noting that White again uses the term “imageless”, though this time coupled with the term “wordless” and more clearly connected with prayer³, when he states, “We would not be taking [Stieglitz’s] name in vain to say that union at high levels of art, poetry, or camerawork, even within prayer³, is characterized by being both wordless and imageless.” White’s repeated use of the term “imageless” here clearly relates to Stieglitz, Equivalence, prayer³, White’s fourth level of visual experience and his use of the term ‘invisible’ within the phrase “making visible the invisible”. It may even be argued that White’s uses of the terms ‘imageless’ and ‘invisible’ here are synonymous. This assertion is strengthened by White’s second of use the term ‘invisible’ in ‘Octave of Prayer’, when he offers thanks to the medium of photography. Where White previously coupled the term ‘wordless’ with ‘imageless’, here he

³¹ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 41.

³² White, ‘Octave ...’, op. cit., p. 24.

³³ White, ‘Octave ...’, *ibid.*, p. 24.

pairs 'wordless' and 'invisible' together:

We could offer thanks to the medium for putting our feet on the Way of Search, thanks to the medium that let us continue to affirm the option of prayer for those who follow. We could offer thanks to this visual way of understanding the invisible and the wordless, thanks for the consciousness that converts our unconscious servitude to spirit into willing service of the One. All these gratitudes may bring us to work without fear!³⁴

The "visual way of understanding the invisible and the wordless" is, of course, camerawork. This is not achieved by attempting to photograph "the invisible and the wordless" directly but rather by *evoking these states within the viewer* so that they may be comprehended. While it may be argued that it is possible to photograph "the wordless", or that which cannot be spoken, directly, it appears that "the invisible and the wordless" are not two separate things for White but rather part of the same thing. Thus wordlessness is a quality of invisibility and vice versa. This notion of 'camerawork' as a way of "understanding the invisible and the wordless" is similar to White's previously noted views on the "ineffable" and the "untranslatable", as expressed in 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend'.³⁵ As previously discussed, when a photograph functions as a mirror viewers recognise something about themselves through their engagement with the photograph and the viewing experience offers viewers a silent opportunity to reflect on their invisible internal world. This experience of self-reflection is part of the viewer's experience of invisibility and it occurs, as White states, "entirely within the individual" and as such it is not only both personal and private but it is also both "ineffable" and the "untranslatable".³⁶

This concludes my identification and examination of the fifteen occasions in which White's uses the term 'invisible', which were written between 1946 and 1972. Although White continued to write for the four remaining years of his life, no further usage of this term or an analogous term can be found in his later writings. The following chapter will propose and substantiate that White utilises this term within three distinct categories.

³⁴ White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁵ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³⁶ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 172.



10. Minor White, *Easter Sunday, 1963*

On Easter Sunday, 1963

Like the bell broken from its boat drops upon a ledge where its rope is rotted away, then is swept off into the endless ocean, loses the light of day, sinking deep forever, sounding its drowned note deeper and deeper ... it sinks away into new water ... ¹

This is one of White's more obscure and mystical images. It presents the viewer with a subject matter that is very difficult to identify, coupled with an overtly religious title. The title may simply be interpreted as a date for the image, but given White's affiliation with Roman Catholicism he is clearly using this title for its spiritual connotations. In the same way that many people may find the idea that Jesus Christ was resurrected on Easter Sunday perplexing, or unbelievable, the "subject-identification bound"² viewer will no doubt find this a confounding image.

The text which accompanies this image in *Minor White: Rites & Passages* suggests that this is a photograph made from an aerial vantage point of water flowing over a ledge. This is the literal or factual level of the image but there is much more to this image than this. What else is there? There are the expressive qualities of the water, the image's composition, its darkness and light. The composition is dominated by a black body of water which appears to be stagnate and lifeless until it flows over the edge, resurrecting from the darkness. The black pool of water literally functions as a mirror that reflects curved lines of light. As with White's *Windowsill Daydreaming* (illustration 11) the source of light is not shown. Is the source of this light White's "invisible disincarnate friend"³ who like White's camera looks down on this scene from above? Of course the dark body of water can also function as a mirror for the viewer.

The aspect ratio of this image is also worth noting. In many ways it looks like an oriental image, or more specifically a Buddhist image, due to its scroll like format and the calligraphic shape of the reflected light at the top of the image.

¹ This is the complete text by White on the page that faces the reproduction of his *Easter Sunday, 1963* in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978, p. 142

² Minor White, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', in *Photographers on Photography*, Nathan Lyons (ed), New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 171.

³ Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, New York: Aperture, 1969, p. 15.

ILLUMINATING THE INVISIBLE

In the previous chapter fifteen occasions on which Minor White utilised the term 'invisible' within his writings were identified and examined, along with the context in which each use of this term occurred. For White, the word 'invisible' holds different meanings and is used to relate to varying aspects of photography, from both the photographer's and the viewer's perspective. White's use of written language is frequently unclear and ambiguous; this is particularly evident in his use of the term 'invisible'. Nevertheless, in the previous chapter I attempted to resolve this lack of clarity. Furthermore, on the basis of my previous analysis of White's usage of the word 'invisible', it will be proposed here that White's various uses of this term may be grouped into three different categories. In distinguishing the differences between these categories the viewing experience of a photograph is paramount. These three categories I refer to as 'extra-invisibility', 'intra-invisibility' and 'inter-invisibility'.

Close examination and analysis of the occasions on which White uses the term 'invisible' reveal a clear division between those instances which refer to the affective power of the viewing experience of a photograph, and those which do not. It is primarily on the basis of this division that White's use of this term has been categorised here. Thus within the category of 'extra-invisibility' I will position White's uses of the term 'invisible' that do not pertain to the affective aspects of a viewer's experience of a photograph. By way of contrast, White's uses of the term 'invisible' that are pertinent to the affective qualities of the viewing experience will be located in the categories of 'intra-invisibility' and 'inter-invisibility'. While the categories of 'intra-invisibility' and 'inter-invisibility' both concern the affective qualities of the viewing experience the former relates to the experience of a single photograph and the latter relates to the experience of a sequence of photographs.

The objective in creating these three categories for White's usage of the term 'invisible' is to demonstrate that the majority of occasions on which he uses this term pertain to the viewer's experience of a photograph, particularly to the affective power of a photograph. The intended outcomes of this objective are twofold: first, to facilitate a complete understanding and appreciation of both White's usage of this term and, more generally, his particular approach to photography; and second, to demonstrate how such an understanding might be applied to White's photographs and potentially to other photographs. Moreover, this chapter will also further postulate what exactly White means by the 'invisible'; whether the idea of the 'invisible' resides in the photographer, the photograph or the viewer; and how the 'invisible' is conveyed or evoked by a photograph.

The key criterion in deciding to which category each of White's uses of the term 'invisible' should be assigned is whether or not its usage concerns the affective power of a photograph for a viewer. Another criterion for deciding in which category White's use of the term 'invisible' is

placed is whether or not that which White refers to as the 'invisible' exists inside or outside the viewer. The affective power of a photograph is experiential and as such it exists within the viewer rather than outside.

As previously discussed in chapter two, with reference to both Joel Eisinger and Allan Sekula, the affective power of a photograph concerns the viewer's subjective response to an image and the emotional state that is experienced by that viewer as part of his or her engagement with the image. As Sekula argues, both the affective power and the informative power of a photograph are qualities that are invested in photographs by both photographers and viewers. For Sekula, such powers do not exist in photographs themselves; they are a consequence of the viewer's approach to a photograph and the context in which the photograph is seen. By comparison, Eisinger is certainly less sceptical about the affective powers of images, and he is more willing to concede that intuition and spirit play vital roles in viewing experiences. While White may have been wrong in believing that affective powers do reside in photographs themselves, he clearly understood that the ability of a photograph to move or touch something within a viewer was largely dependent on the viewer's approach to an image. Viewers that respond to photographs intuitively, sensually or subjectively, rather than intellectually, scientifically or objectively, will experience the affective aspects of a photograph more profoundly. Such approaches transcend the visible or perceptual elements of a photograph and constitute what I refer to as the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'. It is also important to remember the influence that Alfred Stieglitz had on White and that both photographers held similar beliefs and invested similar energies in the affective power of photographs.¹ Furthermore, Stieglitz was influenced by Wassily Kandinsky and as Eisinger has observed, White, Stieglitz and Kandinsky held similar beliefs in the affective power of images and the capability of the visible elements of an image to "bypass the intellect and affect the soul directly."²

A significant contributing factor to the potential viewing experience of any photograph is the affective power of the image. This is particularly the case with White's approach to photography and the majority of his uses of the term 'invisible', or the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'. However, it is not only the viewer's emotional or sensual responses that form such experiences. Viewers may also experience invisibility by utilising their creative or interpretative faculties. Moreover, in analysing White's actual use of the term 'invisible' it is evident that he is mostly concerned with the viewer's affective responses to photographs, and it is through examining these responses that an understanding of his use of this term can be most clearly articulated.

To further outline the differences between these three proposed categories I will now elaborate on the intra-invisibility category, since it is the most significant and it includes the majority of

¹ From White's era, other photographers who share these beliefs include Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Frederick Sommer.

² Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999, p.60. This romantic belief in the transcendent strength of images and their ability to directly affect the soul comes from a modernist position. Many post-modernists, Sekula included, would not agree with it.

White's uses of this term. Additionally, it is through an understanding of this category that an explanation of the other two categories can be most clearly comprehended. White's uses of the term 'invisible' that will be assigned to intra-invisibility concern the affective power of a photograph to evoke or invoke a feeling, emotion or past experience within a viewer. Here the visible elements of the photograph itself produce an affect (feeling or emotion) or trigger a memory, that is experienced within the viewer, namely the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'. Central to White's usage of the term 'invisible' within this category is the theory of Equivalence and the viewer's personal connection with a photograph.

In contrast, the extra-invisibility category includes White's uses of the term 'invisible' that do not concern the affective power of a photograph for viewers, through their engagement with a photograph. While this category does concern White's experience of his own photographs or what might be conveyed by his photographs about his personal life to the viewer, it does not contribute significantly to the 'viewer's experience of invisibility'. The photograph here does not function as a mirror for the viewer but rather as a mirror for White or a window for the viewer in which White may be revealed.³ Furthermore, White's uses of the term 'invisible' in the extra-invisibility category also refer to states within a viewer for which a photograph can only act as a catalyst and which cannot be directly reached via engagement with a photograph.

To further clarify the division between these three categories of invisibility it is helpful to consider where the referent to the 'invisible' resides. Does it exist within the viewer's experience of a photograph or outside of it? Can it be found within a photograph or the the space between two photographs? Thus within the category of intra-invisibility, which concerns the affective power of photograph for a viewer, I will also place White's uses of the term 'invisible' that refer to aspects of the viewing experience that are inside the viewer. For example, a memory that is evoked by a photograph. By contrast, White's uses of this term that pertain to things that are outside the viewer's experience of a photograph I will position in extra-invisibility category. But where does this leave White's usage of the word 'invisible' that deals with the viewing experience of a sequence of images? For these occasions I have created the inter-invisibility category

The third category, inter-invisibility, exists as an addendum to the intra-invisibility category. Analysis of White's single use of this term in relation to the sequencing of photographs suggests a unique permutation of the term 'invisible'. Although the intra-invisibility and inter-invisibility categories are equally concerned with the affect that is evoked or invoked within a viewer, the latter category concerns the viewer's affective response to the space *between two images in a sequence of photographs*, rather than a single image. As previously argued, invisibility here has two referents, both the space between two images and the viewer's experience of this space. Thus White's use of the term 'invisible' when discussing sequencing warrants a special case and its own category, owing to the unique nature of experiencing the viewing spaces between images

³ Although White seems to believe that photographs are able to reveal something about their 'maker' I find such a belief difficult to agree with, particularly since the codes for interpreting such meaning are easily misread.

rather than the images themselves. Where the viewer's experience of invisibility in the extra-invisibility and intra-invisibility categories concern that which is respectively *outside* or *inside* the beholder's experience of a photograph, the inter-invisibility category concerns the viewer's experience of the space *between* two photographs. I will now revisit each occasion on which White uses the term 'invisible', as identified in the previous chapter, and assign them to one of these three categories.

extra-invisibility	intra-invisibility	inter-invisibility
non-affective	affective	affective
outside the viewer	inside the viewer	between two images

Table 1 Classifying White's usage of the term 'invisible' in relation to the viewer's experience of a photograph

Extra-Invisibility

There are four instances in which White's use of the term 'invisible' does not concern the affective power of a photograph on a viewer. These four occasions relate to: the photograph itself, rather than the viewer's experience of it; experiences that are either outside the viewer's experience of a photograph or which largely concern White's experience of a photograph and do not contribute significantly to the viewer's experience of invisibility. Metaphorically speaking these four uses of the term 'invisible', as will be demonstrated now, are dead ends in the viewer's experience of invisibility: they do not provide internal pathways for the viewer to explore. Nonetheless, they will be pursued here, if only to clarify this thesis' notion of invisibility by means of exclusion.

White's most unequivocal use of the term 'invisible' appears in 'Octave of Prayer' where he states "We cannot photograph invisible states *directly*."⁴ As previously shown, White is referring here to prayer "seen from the inside" as that which cannot be photographed directly; that is, the spiritual state within individuals engaged in prayer rather than their physical or 'outside' appearance. This statement is true for all invisible states, such as feelings or emotions as experienced within an individual; we cannot photograph *any* invisible states directly. Nevertheless, we may photograph invisible states indirectly or at least evoke or invoke them within others, particularly when the theory of Equivalence is employed. (For an example of one of White's equivalents that I believe succeeds in indirectly evoking an invisible state see illustration 10, *Easter Sunday*, 1963.)

In the same way that it is possible to photograph the physical act of praying, an individual's feelings or emotions as revealed by their facial expressions or body language may also be directly photographed. However, it is not possible to directly photograph invisible conditions such as inner prayer or the feeling of loss. Yet it is White's belief that these intangible states can

⁴ Minor White, 'Octave of Prayer', *Aperture 17: 1*, 1972, p. 25.

be evoked or invoked within a viewer by a photograph. In this sense invisible states can be photographed indirectly. Thus White contributes to modernist attempts to represent or convey emotional and spiritual states in visual art.

White's endeavours to convey intangible states via photographs are reliant on his belief in the affective power of photographs. This belief is also at the core of the theory of Equivalence, and White ensures that he makes this clear when he follows his statement about the impossibility of directly photographing invisible states immediately with: "This does not mean that Stieglitz was wrong when he said that camerawork was "making visible the invisible." "⁵ In this instance, Stieglitz was not wrong because he did not say that camerawork *directly* makes visible the invisible, nor does he anywhere else in his writings. Certainly, Stieglitz shared with White a belief that photographs can *indirectly* make visible the invisible, and such photographs are called Equivalents not because they directly depict invisible states but rather they indirectly evoke or invoke such states. It is also important to remember that these invisible states are accessed via the viewer's intuitive or emotive faculties. I will return to this assertion regarding Stieglitz later, when discussing the second category of White's use of the term 'invisible', intra-invisibility.

White's use of the term 'invisible' within his statement about the impossibility of directly photographing invisible states is not only his least ambiguous but also his most literal use of this term. This is the voice of White the scientist rather than White the poet, since he uses here the term 'invisible' to mean simply that which cannot be seen by the eye because of its immaterial state. While the majority of White's uses of the term 'invisible' are less literal and more poetic, here White utilises the most literal or prosaic sense of meaning for this word. Clearly White is saying no more than we cannot directly photograph that which cannot be seen either by the human eye or a camera. Thus in this particular instance his use of the term 'invisible' does not in anyway concern the affective power of a photograph on a viewer.



With similar spiritual concerns to those expressed in 'Octave of Prayer', within *Mirrors Messages Manifestations* White again uses the term 'invisible' without any significant reference to either the affective power of a photograph or the viewer's experience of a photograph. As previously argued, White's use of the term 'invisible' within his phrase "an invisible disincarnate friend"⁶ refers to an unseen spiritual entity who may or may not have been involved in White's practice of making photographs. White's use of the word 'invisible' here is a familiar usage, as with his use of this same term when discussing photographing inner spiritual states directly, its sense of meaning is literal rather than metaphorical. That is, White's "disincarnate friend" is invisible simply because he is an incorporeal entity that cannot be seen. While it may be argued that due to its immaterial state a "disincarnate friend" may be present within White, White's photographs and viewers of White's photograph, and thus part of a viewer's experience of invisibility, this is not suggested by this particular use of the term 'invisible' by White.

⁵ White, White, 'Octave ...', *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶ Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, New York: Aperture, 1969, p. 15.

Clearly White's use of the term 'invisible' within the phrase "an invisible disincarnate friend" refers to his own experience of making photographs. Even though a viewer of a photograph by White might similarly question the involvement of an invisible deity in the making of that photograph, White does not address the viewer's experience of his photographs here. Furthermore, within the context of this particular use of the term 'invisible', White does not address the affective power of a photograph for either himself or for viewers of his photographs. What White is speaking about here is a phenomenon that has no doubt been experienced by many photographers: sometimes another force seems to be involved when one is making photographs, particularly when the resulting photograph exceeds the expectations of the photographer. This force, depending on the outlook of the photographer, may be called good luck, serendipity, a moment of grace, or an act of god. Although White's use of the term 'invisible' here relates to his experiences as a photographer, and perhaps to the experiences of other photographers, it does not directly relate to the viewer's experience.



The third instance of White use of the term 'invisible', which belongs in my category of extra-invisibility, appears in an extract from his journal that is published in James Baker Hall's biographical essay in *Minor White: Rites & Passages*. As previously discussed, White's use of the term 'invisible' within his statement "I hardly expect the impossible of creating so that my personal life is invisible" refers to White's desire to create photographs that do not reflect his "personal life".⁷ While White may have used photography early in his career as a means of self-expression, as his photographic practice matured and his approach to photography became more distinct he grew less concerned with self-expression and "pure egotism"⁸. As previously argued, within White's later writings he is more concerned with the viewer's experience of photographs and with the viewer identifying his or her own invisible states rather than those of the photographer.

Although a photograph that White believes unintentionally reflects his own personal life may lead viewers into their own unique experiences of invisibility, White's use of the term 'invisible' here clearly relates to his own negative experiences of his photographs rather than other viewers' experiences. The photograph functions here as a mirror for White, reflecting aspects of his life that he would prefer not to be visible, or as a window for viewers into White's personal life, not as a mirror for viewers to reflect upon their own inner selves. As such White's use of the term 'invisible' in this instance does not address the affective power of a photograph, neither for himself nor for any other viewer, but simply his desire that certain aspects of his personal life are not present within his photographs.



Finally, the fourth instance in which White uses the term 'invisible', which belongs in my

⁷ Minor White in Minor White & James Baker Hall, *Minor White: Rites & Passages*, New York: Aperture, 1978. p. 89.

⁸ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 195.

category of extra-invisibility, appears in 'Your Concepts Are Showing: How to Judge Your Own Photographs'⁹. Within this article White's usage of the term 'invisible' is one of his least ambiguous. When discussing how the viewer of a photograph can determine whether its photographer has used either the "camera-as-brush" or the "camera-as-extension-of-vision" concept White establishes five criteria. One of these criterion involves examining the photographer's attitude toward visual reality, as evident in the the surface of his or her photograph. In White's elaboration of this criterion, with particular emphasis to the "camera-as-extension-of-vision" model, he explains: "if the spectator feels that the print is faithful to the original, no matter what alterations have taken place – then alteration, for him, is invisible."¹⁰ As previously noted, White uses the term 'invisible' here as a synonym for something within a photograph that is simply unnoticed or unseen by the viewer – rather than an experience that takes place within the viewer, which is triggered by the viewer's creative engagement with the photograph. In this sense White's referent to the 'invisible' exists outside of the viewer and it does not involve his or her affective response to a photograph but rather a cognitive or perceptive response. Hence this use of the term 'invisible' clearly belongs in the extra-invisibility category.

These four occasions on which White uses the term 'invisible' relate to experiences of photographs that are outside the viewer's experience of invisibility and are thus placed in the category of extra-invisibility. Firstly, because the 'invisible' relates to invisible states that cannot be photographed directly. Secondly, the 'invisible' concerns only the photographer's experience of making photographs and not the experience of the viewer. Thirdly, the 'invisible' refers to photographs that reflect aspects of the photographer's life and not the viewer's life. Fourthly, the 'invisible' refers to an aspect of a photographic print that is not noticed or perceived by its viewer.

I will now re-examine each of the eleven previously discussed uses of the term 'invisible', by White, which do relate to the viewer's experience of invisibility and consequently are placed in the categories or intra-invisibility and inter-invisibility. These two categories, by way of contrast with the category of extra-invisibility, include White's usage of the term 'invisible' that relate to: how experiences or invisible states can be photographed indirectly as opposed to directly; the viewer's experience of photographs as well as the photographer's experience; photographs that reflect the viewer's personal life as well as the photographers; and photographs were the referent to the 'invisible' exists within the viewer rather than within a photograph. Most significantly the categories of intra-invisibility and inter-invisibility concern the affective power of photographs within viewers.

⁹ Minor White in Stephanie Comer & Deborah Klochko, *The Moment of Seeing: Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006, pp. 88-94. 'Your Concepts Are Showing: How to Judge Your Own Photographs' was originally published in *American Photography*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (May 1951) pp. 290-297.

¹⁰ White, 'Your Concepts ...', in Comer & Klochko, *ibid.*, p. 92.

Intra-Invisibility

In one of White's most provocative uses of the term 'invisible' he proposes: "The function of camera work, when treated as a treasure, is to invoke the invisible with the visible."¹¹ While this statement may be understood or interpreted in a wide variety of ways, when placed within the context of White's other texts, and Stieglitz's, the meaning of this statement becomes significantly clearer.¹² The visible here refers to the photograph itself, that is, both the aesthetic qualities of the image and the actual subject of the photograph. Beyond the visible photograph itself is the invisible, that which is invoked by the photograph. White's use of the verb 'invoke' here is critical as it suggests that the invisible occurs within the viewer of the photograph, rather than the photograph itself or the photographer, and as such the viewer is an active participant in any experience of invisibility resulting from a photograph. What is not clear in this statement is exactly how 'camerawork' invokes the invisible. Certainly the viewer plays an essential role, and the viewer's approach to his or her engagement with the photograph is as important as the photograph itself, in determining whether or not anything is invoked by the photograph. The term 'camerawork' may be seen here as being more than an idiosyncratic synonym for photography utilised by both Stieglitz and White, I propose that it may also be understood as a particular approach to photography in which the photograph is granted an affective power.

With reference to various other writings by White dealing with the viewer's experience of a photograph, particularly in his writings on Equivalence after 1959, the invisible can be determined to have a variety of referents: the viewer's emotional or internal state; the viewer's feeling of correspondence with an image; the viewer's mental image formed in response to a photograph; the viewer's experience of remembering his or her mental image; the viewer's memory of other past events; the viewer's reflection upon him or her self when the photograph functions as a mirror; and anything else that is suggested by the photograph within the viewer.¹³ The viewer's experience of invisibility may be based on his or her past known experiences but it may also go beyond the realm of any known experience.



Three years prior to publishing the above statement on the function of camerawork White questioned: "How far can camerawork go toward making manifest the invisible?"¹⁴ White does not query here whether or not camerawork can make manifest the invisible but rather to what extent it can. Where White's use of the verb 'invoke' in the previous statement suggests a variety of responses in the viewer's engagement with a photograph, his use here of the phrase "making

¹¹ Minor White, 'The Way Through Camera Work', *Aperture*, 7: 2, 1959, p. 73.

¹² See Stieglitz's texts on Equivalence, particularly 'How I Came To Photograph Clouds', reproduced in Nathan Lyons (ed), *Photographers on Photography*, New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, pp. 111-112. Originally published in *The Amateur Photographer and Photography*, Vol. 56, No. 1819, September 19, 1923, p. 255.

¹³ See Minor White's 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend' and my examination of this in chapter three. Minor White, 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', in Nathan Lyons (ed), *Photographers on Photography*, New Jersey, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, pp 168-175. Originally published in *Photographic Society of America Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 7 (July 1963), pp 17-21.

¹⁴ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 128.

manifest” may suggest less diversity since he appears to refer only to his own experiences as that which is made manifest. However, while White refers to “making manifest” his own experiences he also aims to provide “nourishment” for viewers via these manifestations.¹⁵ Since the viewer is nourished by White’s manifestation of his experience rather than White’s actual experience, the viewer’s response to a particular photograph is not necessarily predetermined by White’s own experience, nor does it necessarily need to be the same as White’s experience. Although White appears to be more concerned here with his own experiences as the referent to the invisible rather than the viewer’s, any belief that photographers can make manifest within photographs their own experiences invests the image with affective attributes.



Given the influence that Stieglitz had on White, and that many of the occasions on which White uses the term ‘invisible’ relate directly to Equivalence, it is not surprising that White’s first recorded use of this term coincides with his first meeting with Stieglitz in 1946. As previously proposed, an understanding of the theory of Equivalence is indispensable to a complete appreciation or analysis of White’s varying uses of the term ‘invisible’. Furthermore, if ‘camerawork’ refers to a way of approaching photographs that endows images with an affective power, it also refers to Equivalence. As previously noted, in White’s account of his meetings with Stieglitz he wrote about Stieglitz’s theory of Equivalence and “photography that makes visible the invisible”¹⁶. This statement both predates and shares many similarities between White’s previously discussed statements on the function of camerawork: “to invoke the invisible with the visible” and “making manifest the invisible”. It is particularly similar to the latter since both might appear to be equally concerned with the photographer’s experience as being the referent to the invisible; the significant difference is that White’s earliest recorded use of the term ‘invisible’ relates directly to Stieglitz and Stieglitz’s theory of Equivalence. Nevertheless, the invisible may also be understood as referring to the viewer’s experience of a photograph. If an invisible feeling state cannot be directly photographed then it can only be made visible within a viewer as a consequence of his or her experience of a photograph, and if that viewer feels that the photograph has an affective power. Since White did not make photographs for himself alone his use here of the term ‘invisible’ refers to both his own and to other viewer’s experiences of a photograph.

In White’s account of his meeting with Stieglitz he refers to Stieglitz’s talk itself as “a kind of equivalent” because the sense of its meaning came through a non-literal understanding rather than a literal understanding.¹⁷ It is also important to remember within this account Stieglitz’s question to White: “Have you ever been in love?” and the significance of this question for White. While the relationship between being in love and being a photographer may seem obtuse, for Stieglitz and consequently White, both are strongly connected to intuition and affect. As previously argued, the significance of this question is that it implies that the emotional memory of the experience of being in love is an essential component of being a photographer who wishes

¹⁵ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁶ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 41.

to make Equivalents and thus make visible the invisible; the reason being that if you have not experienced the emotional depth of being in love and if you are not familiar with exercising your intuitive faculties over your sense of reason, then you will have difficulties in making Equivalents with any degree of emotional depth. Additionally, it may be argued that these abilities are equally necessary for other viewers of either Stieglitz's or White's photographs (apart from Stieglitz or White themselves) if they wish to experience either the photographer's invisibility or their own invisibility. In short, if a person has not experienced the emotional power of love for another person then he or she may have difficulty experiencing the affective power of a photograph. This is not to say that if you have never been in love you cannot experience the affective power of a photograph, but rather, for White and Stieglitz, the emotional experience of being in love enhances the viewer's affective response to a photograph.



Six or eight years after White's first recorded use of the term 'invisible', in his previously noted account of a meeting with Edward Weston, he again uses this term in relation to Stieglitz, when he refers to "the invisible Stieglitz"¹⁸. In addition, White refers to Point Lobos, the subject of many of Weston's and some of White's photographs, as "the invisible Lobos".¹⁹ In this account of White's visit to Point Lobos, he offers acknowledgements to both Weston and Stieglitz as not only significant influences on White but also in recognition that their photographs, for White at least, have an affective power to either invoke the invisible or make visible the invisible. While White's usage here of the term 'invisible' does not necessarily assist in my endeavour to elucidate what the 'invisible' is, where it resides or how it is invoked, it does provide two useful reference points of other photographer's work that White believed held affective powers.



In a posthumously published manuscript titled ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript', White again uses the term 'invisible' when discussing three modalities of photography, the second of which is Equivalence. White's use of the term 'invisible' here is particularly valuable since it not only indicates what the 'invisible' is but also how the invisible is made visible and what it is made visible to. As White states: "Equivalence in camera whereby the invisible is made visible to intuition, the invisible organic, the invisible spirit."²⁰

Where there may have been some doubt earlier concerning the relevance of intuition in White's desire to make visible the invisible, there is no doubt here in White's second modality of photography. Clearly, for White, "the invisible is made visible to intuition" and it is through the viewer's intuitive faculty rather than his or her sense of logic that this is achieved. The "invisible organic" and the "invisible spirit" provide clues as to what is invisible and thus made visible, though what exactly they mean remains unclear, particularly the former phrase. White's use of the phrase "invisible spirit" certainly resonates with his interests in spiritual matters and it may be inferred that a spirit is made visible, or at least felt, within the viewer. Exactly what type of

¹⁸ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁹ White, *Mirrors ...*, *ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁰ Minor White, "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript' is published in Peter C. Bunnell, *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*, USA: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989, p.41.

spirit is made visible is not clear it may refer to the spirit of the viewer, another person, a location or a 'disincarnate friend'. Given White's predilection for viewers discovering something of themselves in their experiences of photographs, and his views on photographs as mirrors, the "invisible spirit" may well refer to the viewer's own spirit, that is the core of his or her inner being. Similarly, the meaning of the "invisible organic" is equivocal; however, when applied to the individual viewer it may refer to the invisible aspects of the viewer as a living organism that are inherently connected to the natural world, and it is these incorporeal, universal or archetypal aspects of the viewer that are made visible or experienced by the same viewer. Furthermore, within White's second modality photography he also speaks of his "memories of things past" as a referent to the invisible; but since Equivalence, for White, grew out of "the metamorphosing power of camera" and the yielding of images that relate to his memories, White also alludes to the invisible as being something else beyond this, that is beyond his own experiences and self-expression.²¹

On more than one occasion in White's writings, he speaks of the "the metamorphosing power of camera" as opposed to "the recording power of camera", with a clear preference for the former. White's reference to "the metamorphosing power of camera" in his second modality photography and its role in making visible the invisible, relates to similar terminology utilised by Sekula in 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning'.²² White's phrases "the metamorphosing power of camera" and the "recording power of camera" are worth comparing, respectively, to Sekula's "affective power" and "informative power" of photography. What White refers to as "the metamorphosing power of camera" is similar to Sekula's notion of the "affective power" of photography, since it is through the camera's ability to transform the reality from which it abstracts, and the photographer's use of this metamorphosis, that the photographer is able to express that which is otherwise invisible, in this instance White's memories; and in order to do so the photograph is invested with an affective power. Where Sekula's notions of the "affective power" and "informative power" of photography oppose each other, so to do White's ideas of "the metamorphosing power of camera" and the "the recording power of camera". Thus White's "recording power of camera" is comparable to Sekula's "informative power" of photography, since they both treat the photograph as an objective document that offers a faithful depiction of the visible reality of the world, as it was at the moment of exposure. The terms that Sekula and White use to describe similar phenomena, share the same axis and are not mutually exclusive. That is, Sekula's creed states that a photograph which possesses an "affective power" for a viewer may also hold an "informative power" for the same viewer, and similarly White believes that a photograph which displays "the transforming power of camera" may also show "the recording power of camera".

Although Sekula and White may utilise similar terms that share the same axis, they clearly favour opposing ends of this axis: Sekula leans toward the "informative power" or "recording power" side, while White leans toward the "affective power" or "metamorphosing power" end.

²² Allan Sekula, "On The Invention of Photographic Meaning", in *Photography Against the Grain*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, pp 3-21.

From Sekula's point of view, on the other side of this axis, White, along with Stieglitz, completely denies the "informative power" of photography over its "affective power". While White is clearly more interested in the "affective power" of photography, this does not necessarily mean that he denies or ignores the "informative power" of photography; he is simply interested in feeding viewers with images that nourish their creativity, intuition and knowledge of self, rather than their intellect and knowledge of the external world.

The most important insight to be gained from White's use of the term 'invisible' in his second modality of photography, in ' "Preface" to an Unknown Manuscript', is that unlike his other uses of this term it offers information on how the invisible is made invisible and what it is made visible to. That is, the invisible is made visible via the viewer's intuitive faculty and it is made visible to intuition rather than reason. Furthermore, it is due to the "metamorphosing power of camera", rather than the "recording power of camera", that the invisible is made visible, or to use Sekula's terminology it is due to the camera's "affective power" rather than its "informative power". Thus White takes an anti-documentary stance to photography.



Within White's second branch of his four branches of awareness he again uses the term 'invisible', when he states: "The second branch has to do with a memory of things passed and the present invisible. I am still unable to understand a dream until I have either a diagram or a photograph of it."²³ As previously shown, White's second branch of awareness is similar to his second modality of photography because they both discuss Equivalence, his memories of things past and the metamorphosing power of camera. Where White's second modality of photography refers to the invisible as that which is "made visible to intuition, the invisible organic, the invisible spirit"²⁴, in his second branch of awareness he refers to "the present invisible".

Exactly what White means by the phrase "the present invisible" is difficult to determine; the predicament here is similar to that posed when attempting to clarify the meaning of White's phrase the "invisible organic". Nonetheless, with reference to his other writings, including those that use the term 'invisible', the meanings of these two phrases becomes clearer. As previously argued, "the present invisible" holds two possible meanings. Firstly, it has the same meaning as "the invisible" in White's second modality of photography, that is, "the present invisible" refers to that which is made visible to intuition. Secondly, it refers to a memory that is brought into and exists in the present while viewing a photograph, as opposed to a memory that existed in the past and is carried into the present. Given that White wrote about his four branches of awareness four years after his three modalities of photography it is quite possible that both meanings are true, and that the second meaning is simply a development of the first. It is with this understanding that I will now discuss White's phrase "the present invisible" in relation to the affective power of photographs and the viewer's experience of invisibility.

²³ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 194.

²⁴ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, op. cit., p.41.

In White's use of the term "present invisible" the relationship between photographs and memory is particularly interesting. The viewing experience is a profoundly personal encounter where the photograph triggers a memory that is not directly related to either the photograph itself or its subject. For White, a photograph may remind him of an event or person that is not directly related to the subject of a photograph, or, indeed, to the time in which the photograph was made. A White photograph of a rock at Point Lobos, made in 1951, for example, may remind White of his experiences as a soldier during World War Two rather than his time spent at Point Lobos. Such viewing experiences White refers to as the "present invisible". By way of contrast, I propose that the viewing experience of a photograph that invokes a memory that directly corresponds with the subject of the image should be called the 'past visible'.

For White, the "present invisible" is clearly connected to *his* memories of the past. Although White only refers to his memories and his photographs, in his fourth branch of awareness, what he says may equally apply to the images of other photographers and to any viewer. That is, a photograph may trigger a previously buried memory within a viewer that does not directly correspond with the subject of the photograph. For White, some past experiences that are covered in shadow within an individual can only be brought into the present and the clear light of day through camerawork. Certainly there are other ways of understanding our experiences of the past that are buried deep within ourselves, and White would not have believed there is no other way, but, for White, Camerawork was his way.

The notion of the "present invisible" as a past experience that is evoked from deep within a viewer via his or her engagement with a photograph, and thus understood in the present, certainly attributes an affective power to photographs. As with White's use of the term 'invisible' in his second modality of photography, in his second branch of awareness he also refers to the "metamorphosing power of camera" as a means by which this affective power is realised and the invisible is made visible. Where the "metamorphosing power of camera" was "blessed"²⁵ in the former, it is considered "ideal"²⁶ in the latter. The "present invisible", whether perceived as that which is made visible to intuition or the viewer's experience of uncovering and understanding a past experience, resides within the viewer when the photograph functions as a trigger for the viewer's conscious understanding of past experiences.



Mirrors Messages Manifestations contains a series of admonitions on what the theory of Equivalence both is and is not. White once more uses the term 'invisible' in relation to this dominant theory within his writings. For White, an Equivalent is not a "sign" that stands in for something else but rather *it is* something else, namely "direct connection to invisible resonance".²⁷ What exactly White means by "invisible resonance" may not be certain but as

²⁵ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁶ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁷ White in Bunnell, *Minor White*, *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁷ White, *Mirrors ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

previously argued, for White at least, it does not to the theory of semiotics.²⁸ However, with reference to his text 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', "invisible resonance" appears to refer to the viewer's experience of an Equivalent. It awakens within that viewer a personal connection with something about him or her self, or as White states, the image "arouses in [the viewer] a special sense of correspondence to something that he knows about himself"²⁹. This concept of correspondence carries within it the Symbolist notion of creating meaning through the bringing together of images and ideas that appear to be dissimilar. When a viewer experiences this nineteenth-century notion of correspondence or personal connection, the photograph becomes what White calls a mirror. As previously noted and as Sekula observes, "White couples correspondence to affect; an interior state is expressed by means of the image"³⁰. Thus when a viewer experiences "invisible resonance" with a photograph, the image is invested with an affective power and it mirrors the viewer's internal self.

For the viewer, there is certainly a clear distinction between a photograph that functions as a sign and a photograph that functions as a mirror. In both instances the photograph is a non-literal image: the meaning of the image goes beyond the actual subject of the photograph. However, it is in the way that this other non-literal meaning is determined that the difference between a photograph as a sign and a photograph as a mirror is most apparent. In short, the difference between these two determining modes of meaning for a photograph is the difference between an informative image and an affective image. A photograph that functions as a sign exists more or less as an informative image: it draws from the viewer's worldly knowledge and its meaning is publicly agreed upon. Whereas a photograph that functions as a mirror operates as an affective image: it corresponds with an aspect of the viewer's inner self and its meaning is both privately and personally agreed upon. In determining the meaning of an image within these two different photographic functions the viewer asks one of two questions: What is the photograph supposed to mean? or What does the photograph mean to me? In referring to an Equivalent as a "direct connection to invisible resonance" that echoes or corresponds with something within the viewer, White positions the invisible within the viewer. Its meaning is determined by the viewer's personal, creative and non-literal approach to the image, and it is through the affective power of the image and the viewer's correspondence with that image that the invisible resonates. The invisible here refers to an aspect of the viewer's inner self that is internally activated while he or she engages with a photograph.



As previously shown, the importance of both White's meetings with Stieglitz and the idea of photographs that make visible the invisible arises several times within White's writings and in interviews, between 1952 - 1972. The fact that both White's first and last uses of the term 'invisible' refer to his post-war meetings with Stieglitz and Stieglitz's notion of photography that makes visible the invisible, indicates that Stieglitz was a seminal and resounding influence on White's usage of this term. As noted in the previous chapter, White's final two references to

²⁸ While it may be argued that everything is related to signs and semiotics, there is no evidence within White's writing that he held any interest in the theory of semiotics.

²⁹ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 169.

³⁰ Sekula, op. cit., p. 15.

the 'invisible' occur in his 'Octave of Prayer' when he discusses the impossibility of directly photographing invisible states such as internal prayer, and when he offers thanks to camerawork as a way of understanding "the invisible and the wordless".³¹

I will never know what Stieglitz meant by photography that makes visible the invisible but it definitely involved the theory of Equivalence. Nevertheless, I am now in a position to understand what it meant to White and how it influenced White's use of the term 'invisible'. Although invisible states cannot be photographed directly, by utilising the theory of Equivalence they may be evoked, invoked or conveyed by a photograph indirectly. Both of these attempts at making the invisible visible, whether directly or indirectly, assign an affective power to the photograph. The important difference between attempting to photograph invisible states directly and indirectly is where the 'invisible' resides. In the former the photographer tries to contain the invisible within the photograph, in the latter the photographer endeavours to invoke or evoke the invisible within a viewer. As White states, and he certainly agrees with Stieglitz here, Stieglitz "understood the use of the "equivalent image," and realized the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence when that is going on in a human being."³² While an Equivalent is a visible image and it presents to the viewer the starting point for the phenomenon of Equivalence, ultimately this experience is an imageless experience that occurs within the viewer. Whether or not this notion of "the ultimate imageless nature of equivalence" discounts White's idea of the mental image within his Equivalence equation is uncertain (Photograph + Person Looking ↔ Mental Image)³³. Nonetheless, the viewer's mental image is invisible outside of the viewer and thus may be understood as being externally imageless. The key point to remember is that Equivalence does not concern the direct depiction of invisible states in a photograph, because that is impossible. Ultimately, Equivalence functions in the mind of the viewer and its endpoint is an invisible or imageless experience within the viewer. Indeed, as White proposes in his third level of Equivalence in 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend', for a viewer to experience Equivalence a physical image is not always required but only the viewer's remembered mental image of a previously seen Equivalent.

White's second use of the term 'invisible' within 'Octave of Prayer' couples "the invisible" with "the wordless" as that which is visually understood by the viewer through camerawork. White's description of camerawork as "a visual way of understanding the invisible and the wordless"³⁴ rather than camerawork that 'makes visible the invisible', 'makes manifest the invisible' or 'invokes the invisible with the visible' provides a new emphasis to the relationship between the invisible and camerawork – a new perspective to approaching the invisible. As with White's use of the term 'invisible' in his phrase "the present invisible", it is not enough to make, manifest or invoke the invisible but the invisible must also be understood by the viewer personally. That is, in addition to viewers being aware of the invisible within themselves they should also become more self aware, or understand themselves better. Furthermore, the invisible

³¹ White, 'Octave ...', op. cit., p. 27.

³² White, 'Octave ...', ibid., p. 25.

³³ White, 'Equivalence', in Lyons, op. cit., p. 171.

³⁴ White, 'Octave ...', op. cit., p. 27.

is not only a feeling state that cannot be either seen or experienced outside of the viewer it is also a “wordless” state which is ineffable or unexplainable through verbal language. Arguably one could utilise and thank other visual media, apart from photography, for providing “a visual way of understanding the invisible and the wordless”; but for White camerawork is the way and the medium he offers thanks to in ‘Octave of Prayer’ is photography.

‘The invisible and the wordless’ is experienced and thus understood within the viewer as a consequence of his or her approach to the photograph. It does not exist within the photograph itself but rather it is aroused or triggered, by the photograph, within the beholder of the photograph. As beauty proverbially exists in the eye of the beholder, the invisible exists in the mind and soul of the viewer. This is achieved by the affective power of the photograph bestowed upon the image by the viewer, particularly when the viewer experiences an ‘invisible resonance’ with the image or when the photograph corresponds to something that the viewer knows about him or her self. Viewers experience ‘the invisible and wordless’ via their intuitive faculty rather than their intellectual faculty; it is sensed rather than thought about. Thus camerawork is a visual or intuitive way of experiencing and understanding ‘the invisible and the wordless’ rather than an intellectual way.

Viewers play an active role in their individual experiences of ‘the invisible and the wordless’, since that which is evoked or invoked by the photograph comes from within the viewer rather than the photograph itself, which is merely a stimulant. Equally, viewers play a decisive role in determining their personal understanding of ‘the invisible and the wordless’, once it has been brought into the present and awakened their consciousness. Ultimately this understanding depends on the individual viewer and the depth of his or her self reflection. This is because camerawork, for White, is “a visual way of understanding the invisible and the wordless” as it is experienced by each viewer, rather than what it might mean for others.

Such endeavours to further one’s self knowledge may certainly be labelled as solipsistic, and this may well offer the strongest defence for Sekula’s preference for investing photographs with informative powers rather than affective powers. If photography is a democratic medium, as Sekula would argue, then it is better suited to utilitarian or altruistic purposes rather than individual purposes; it is better to inform the public and increase viewers’ knowledge of each other rather themselves. Nonetheless, White was a solipsist; he was interested in the individual viewer and his or her self knowledge; he was interested in photographing the visible only in so far as it was a way of understanding ‘the invisible and the wordless’; he was interested in words because they enabled him to express his approach to photography, his idea of camerawork, which in turn enabled himself and others to understand the wordless and the invisible.

Inter-Invisibility

Having re-examined White's uses of the term 'invisible' as they relate to the affective power of single photographs, I will now revisit White's use of this term as it relates to the space between photographs within a sequence of images, and the affective power of sequences. As White observes: "In picture editing when a chance juxtaposition shocks a new Yes! out of me, it is as if I see an invisible third picture in a space between two images."³⁵ As previously discussed, White is concerned here with his experience in editing photographs to form a sequence of images. Although White is referring to his own experience, what he writes about the "invisible third picture" may equally apply to the viewer's experience of the "space between two images". Clearly the viewer is not involved in White's editing process when White creates a sequence of photographs; nonetheless, in utilising his or her creativity and imagination the viewer may also see an "invisible third picture" within him or her self.

The invisible third image is a mental image created by the viewer, based upon both the images that precede and follow it in a sequence. It is similar to the earlier discussed mental image formed in the viewer's mind in response to an Equivalent, since both exist within the viewer and cannot be seen outside of the viewer. However, these two mental images are also different because the "invisible third picture" is formed in response to the imaginary space between two actual photographs or Equivalents while the other is formed in response to one actual Equivalent. Furthermore, in creating an "invisible third picture" the viewer invents both the subject of the image and the picture itself, as opposed to creating a mental image in response to a pre-existing subject and a photograph of that subject. As previously argued, in inventing an "invisible third picture" the viewer's experience of invisibility has a dual basis: the imaginary or imageless space between two visible images and the "invisible third picture" itself, which is formed within the viewer in response to this imageless space. In forming the "invisible third picture" the viewer draws not only from the images that precede or follow this imaginary space but also, more importantly, from his or her inner self. Consequently the viewer's experience of invisibility here is profoundly personal and individual, and thus uniquely different to other experiences of invisibility encountered by the same viewer.

Clearly the "invisible third picture" resides within the viewer, and although White does not discuss this image's affect on himself or other viewers it certainly relates to my notion of the viewer's experience of invisibility. The viewer's imagination and creativity surely play an active role in forming an "invisible third picture" and whether or not this third image has an affective power on its creator is determined by the individual viewer. What is certain is that this image has no informative power because it cannot be seen outside of the viewer. If, however, the viewer is emotionally moved by this image or it leads the viewer into some form of self reflection, then it does have an affective power for that person as both the creator and viewer of the "invisible third picture". White would argue that since the viewer draws from his or her inner self when inventing an "invisible third picture" this image functions as a mirror and thus possesses affective powers. Certainly if the inventor of the "invisible third picture" comes to

³⁵ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 194.

understand the invisible and the wordless within him or her self as a consequence of this creative act, then this image has affective powers.

As previously discussed in chapter one, White learnt from Nancy Newhall how to combine photographs in sequence form “for an emotional response, rather than for their formal resonations alone.”³⁶ That is, while many of White’s sequences include photographs with visible and formal similarities he was also interested in the viewer’s emotional reaction. In creating sequences of photographs White was able to control the context in which individual photographs are seen and thus direct or encourage the viewer towards particular approaches or responses to his images. Furthermore, due to the cumulative impact of a sequence of photographs White was not only able to emphasise the formal and affective qualities of individual images but he was also able to enhance the viewer’s emotional response. Whether or not the viewer’s invention of an “invisible third picture” is part of his or her affective response to a sequence of photographs, White’s practice of presenting his photographs in sequence form is clearly engineered to enhance the viewer’s potential experience of invisibility. A strong example of White’s sequencing of photographs for both formal and affective resonance is his 1960 sequence *Sound of One Hand Clapping*.³⁷

In positioning White’s various uses of the term ‘invisible’ into one of three categories – extra-invisibility, intra-invisibility or inter-invisibility – I have shown the vital roles of both the affective power and the viewing experience of photographs in understanding White’s usage of this term in the two latter categories. Furthermore, in re-examining each occasion in which White uses the term ‘invisible’ I know have a clearer comprehension of what he means by this term, or at least how it pertains to this thesis’ notion of invisibility.

³⁶ Mary Christine Goodwin, *Minor White: The Silence of Seeing, Teaching Photography’s Visible Language*, Boston University Graduate School, 1990. pp 46-47.

³⁷ This sequence of ten photographs is reproduced in White & Hall, *Minor White*, op. cit., pp. 97-109.



11. Minor White, *Windowsill Daydreaming*, Rochester, New York, July, 1958

On *Windowsill Daydreaming*, 1958

The past beats inside me like a second heart beat.¹

It is made of a light tightly woven fabric,
it asks you to slow down,
its impact is not immediate,
you can flick through the pages and not notice it.

I am remembering an image, it is reproduced in my mind's eye, in "the present invisible", it becomes more vivid if I close my eyes.² It is a black and white photograph of a seemingly ordinary subject: the corner of a window with a curtain hanging over it, viewed from the inside of the room. But the photograph is something else, the subject has been transformed through the play of light. Things are no longer what they were.

As I am recalling, I am seeing the image superimposed in front of me. It appears as an oblong ghost in the centre of my field of vision, between me and a wall of books. If I focus on the image it appears a little less ghostly. When I close my eyes I can see it more clearly and more solidly – surrounded by total blackness, or I can make it white if I choose. Any distractions or wandering thoughts become superimpositions running through the image.

The image I am remembering is a photograph by Minor White, its title is *Windowsill Daydreaming, Rochester, New York, July, 1958*. It is one of the first photographs by White that I came to know, about twenty years ago. As far as I recall I have never seen an actual print of this image, I know it only through reproductions and memory.

The photograph is framed vertically. The window fills about half the frame, from the top right hand corner. The rest of the frame is filled with a white wall, that is, the left and bottom sides. The curtain is made of a plain, pale, tightly woven fabric, it doesn't cover all of the window, the bottom left corner of the window is uncovered. I can see part of a white wooden windowsill, it looks like most windowsills in most pre-World War II houses. In fact all the parts of the room that have been photographed look quite ordinary. It is a photograph that could have been made anywhere. There is nothing particularly significant about this room, or this window, or this curtain, nor is there anything special about the view through the window. There is something else going on.

¹ John Banville, *The Sea*, London: Picador, 2005, p. 13.

² Minor White, *Mirrors Messages Manifestations*, New York: Aperture, 1969, p. 194.

Through the window little is revealed, anything that is is out of focus. I look between the curtain and the windowsill and I see a horizontal rectangle of light, split in half by a diagonal shadow. All that I can be certain of by looking through the window is that it opens up to the outside of the house and it is daytime. Whatever is going on outside is of no importance to the photograph, all the visual action occurs inside. I could extend this further and say all the action takes place inside me. It would certainly be an appropriate thing to say about a photograph by White. Its definitely an apt thing to say about this image, at this time, for two reasons.

Firstly, I am remembering the image, through visual recall and memory of emotion . I see the image but no one else can. I remember the image but no one else knows what or how I remember it. Is this image visible or invisible? How many people need to see something for it to be visible? As I am remembering the image it alters. While I am recalling different aspects of the photograph the image in my mind accommodates the changes, it is rarely in stasis. The files download, melt, dissipate and merge to form the image I see now, with my eyes closed.

Secondly, when I see the photograph before me, in a book, it evokes various feeling states within me. To experience these emotions there are a few things I need to do; I put my intellect on the back burner to simmer, while imagination, intuition and emotion are brought to boil, thus I provide myself with spiritual nourishment.

The feeling states *Windowsill Daydreaming* evoke in me, or have evoked in me, are: lightness, intimacy, happiness, rejuvenation, oneness, awe, at homeness, reverie, timelessness, wonder, lucidity and vagueness. These feelings are activated by something within the photograph, not so much by the window, the curtain or the room, but by the light in the photograph and the moment the photograph was made in.

There is clearly more light outside the room than there is inside. This can be seen by the light radiating through the curtain from outside, and by comparing the highlight tones outside with those inside. The tones in the backlight areas of the curtain are some of the lightest in the photograph and give the curtain, as it emerges out of the shadows, a dominance within the photograph.

Directly below the curtain there is a mysterious orb of light, covering most of the windowsill and overlapping with the rectangle of light viewed through the window. This enigmatic orb of light fills most of the bottom half of the photograph. It dominates the photograph, though perhaps not at the initial viewing. You can flick through the pages and not notice it. It dominates the photograph not so much visually, but rather because it is a point of intrigue. It is made all the more interesting because the source of this patch of light is not revealed, it becomes a source of curiosity and mystery. There is nothing else in the photograph to indicate where it comes from.

Analysis of the orb of light offers few clues as to how it came to be. It is shaped like a horizontal ellipse, or a squashed ball, at the bottom of the frame. It covers the bottom left hand corner of the windowsill, part of the curtain's hem and some of the wall. Apart from the outside light shining through the curtain and this ellipse of light, the rest of the photograph is in mid-gray shadows. The centre of the ellipse is almost aligned with the windowsill corner, it is lower and further to the right. Within the ball of light there are intermingling shadows. These shadows are arced lines which intersect and cross over the ellipse. They share the same tone as the shadow surrounding the ellipse, they seem to be painted out of the surrounding shadow. There is no separation between the shadow tones inside the ellipse and the tones outside, there is, however, great variation in the highlight tones. Is it White's silver palette of tones, revealed?

How do the shadows and light that make up the mysterious orb of light come to be where they are? Where do they come from? What is their source? Usually these are not questions one asks about a photograph or when one does they are quickly answered. Asking these questions of *Windowsill Daydreaming* I do not receive any quick answers, but I do receive an invitation to slow down. Slowness is a virtue, it says ... and so too is reverie. Further study of the elliptical patch of light, increases the mystery and intrigue, because there is no rational reason, visible within the photograph as to how it came to be. There is, however, plenty of rhyme.

It seems to be the only part of the photograph that was made in a decisive moment. White's decisive moment is decided by the quality of light at a particular time, unlike Cartier-Bresson's – man jumping over a puddle – decisive moment. Had this photograph been made at a different time of day, without the mysterious patch of light projected onto the windowsill, the photograph would be completely different and more than likely less successful.

Asking the question, 'What is the source of the the elliptical patch of light in *Windowsill Daydreaming*?' is something I imagine that a zen buddhist master might ask a student. Questions not too dissimilar to this, called koans, are used in zen buddhism in the training of young monks. A well known zen koan is "In clapping both hands a sound is heard; what is the sound of the one hand?"³. White refers directly to this koan in the title of a sequence of ten photographs, *Sound of One Hand Clapping*. One of these images is *Windowsill Daydreaming*. In responding to a koan there is no logical or correct response. In the loop between the question and the answer there is no reason, information or logic that is useful, or in the case of *Windowsill Daydreaming*, visible. So one must turn to alternatives, if not to thought then to intuition, or creative intelligence, if not to sense then spirit, if not logic then reverie, if not communication then contemplation and communion, if not for what it is then what else it is, if not for what is visible then what is invisible.

³ Yoel Hoffmann, *The Sound of the One Hand*, Great Britain: Paladin, 1977, p. 38.

Windows and Mirrors & Windows as Mirrors

When the image mirrors the man
And the man mirrors the subject
Something might take over.⁴

Photographs are often referred to as windows, because both offer a view of the world cut, framed and contained in a rectangle. However, the distinct difference remains that one is two dimensional and static while the other is three dimensional and ever changing. When I view the world directly, through my eyes, the edges of my vision are round and soft rather than linear and sharp, and if I try to focus on the edges they move aside.

John Szarkowski uses the photograph as window analogy in his book *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (1978). To “illustrate a critical thesis”, Szarkowski divides photographers into two categories to “illustrate a critical thesis”:

This thesis suggests that there is a fundamental dichotomy in contemporary photography between those who think of photography as a means of self expression and those who think of it as a method of exploration.⁵

These two approaches produce two different images, photographs as mirrors and photographs as windows. Mirrors offer the viewer an opportunity for self reflection, subjectivity and romanticism; windows offer the viewer an opening to view into reality, objectivity and realism. To illustrate this division in American photography, Szarkowski uses two photographers, Minor White and Robert Frank. White is one of “those who think of photography as a means of self expression” and the photograph as a personal mirror. As White states, “Almost any of my images that I study now turns into a mirror of my self, revealing fresh observations that introspection has covered up!”⁶

The viewer while looking at the mirror that is a photograph becomes aware of him or her self. Not only aware of him or her self engaged in the act of looking at a photograph, but aware of something about him or her self. This something is not always visible in the image, because it comes from the inner self of the viewer. Something in the photograph triggers something in the viewer’s inner self. Something might take over.

⁴ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 145.

⁵ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p.11.

⁶ White, *Mirrors ...*, op. cit., p. 188.

There are many ways a viewer might become aware of him or her self by looking at a photograph: through memory, insight, discovery, intuition, understanding, acceptance, realisation and physical reaction.

Alfred Stieglitz is an influential and inspirational source for White's use of the photograph as mirror analogy, particularly through his *Equivalents*. The *Equivalents* were photographs of clouds, that were not about clouds as such, but the feeling states they expressed or evoked, through the emotional interplay of light and form. Stieglitz's approach to the *Equivalent* was an important contribution to American twentieth-century photography, particularly to photographers such as Minor White. As Goodwin explains:

White encouraged classes to regard the photograph as a psychological mirror. He followed the lead of Alfred Stieglitz, who early in the century photographed clouds with the intention that they be read not as clouds, 'but as feeling states.' Stieglitz used the term "equivalent" to indicate the presentation of emotional content through visual analogy.⁷

Closing and Opening the Curtains

I am sitting in a room, I see the corner of a partly open window, which is mostly covered by a curtain. A rectangular glimpse between the curtain and the window looks into the outside world where nothing is discernible but an out of focus patch of light, transected by a diagonal shadow. Light from outside shines through the curtain. There is another patch of light projected onto the bottom corner of the window and the wall, the source of this light is not shown in the photograph. The only other information received is that the window is made of wood and its painted in a light tone and that the curtain is made of a pale tightly woven fabric, possibly cotton. White wasn't really trying to be informative when he made this image. The title is *Windowsill Daydreaming* not 'Windowsill Document', or even 'Windowsill'. If I view *Windowsill Daydreaming* as an informative document, little is revealed, the curtain is closed.

Simple questions one may typically ask when looking at a photograph, such as where and when the photograph was made, are not easily answered by viewing this image. The only inferences I can make by looking at the photograph on a factual level are that it was made inside a room, probably in the daytime, nothing more specific. Little is learnt even about what decade or country the photograph is made, or anything about the social situation the subject was found in. One

⁷ Mary Christine Goodwin, *Minor White: The Silence of Seeing, Teaching Photography's Visible Language*, Boston University Graduate School, 1990, p. 89.

begins to ask why the photograph was made? What meaning does the image have? What is its function? The meaning is within the viewer and it is a consequence of his or her response to the image. The question to ask is not “What am I being shown ?” or “What am I being told ?” but rather “What am I feeling?”

A photograph will always document something and contain some information. What *Windowsill Daydreaming* is significantly documenting is a mysterious patch of light. It says look, here is an strange patch of light in a room that appears only at a certain time of day. It is fleetingly magical, it is part of the unsuspected beauty of everyday life, it is something to be more aware and appreciative of. However, it is not very significant socially, it is not showing you the face of an infamous criminal, it isn't going to be used for an insurance claim, or against you in a law suit, and its unlikely to appear on the front page of a newspaper (unless the photograph sells at a sensational price). *Windowsill Daydreaming* has little significance as a social documentary photograph, if any. If it holds any significance it is on a personal, experiential level.

The power of an image to produce a change in the viewer's feeling state may be a significant factor in determining an image's quality, this is certainly the case with most of White's work. However, Allan Sekula proposes that the informative meaning of a photograph is more important than its emotional meaning, because it holds more social significance. This is due to the photographic medium itself, it has more power as an informative medium than an affective meaning, particularly when compared with other visual media. For Sekula the mystical path of affection leads to a dead end or closure. As Sekula states:

I would argue that the devolution of photographic art into mystical trivia is the result of a fundamental act of closure. This closure was effected in the first place in order to establish photography *as an art*. A clear boundary has been drawn between photography and its social character. In other words the ills of photography are the ills of estheticism. Estheticism must be superseded, in its entirety, for a meaningful art, of any sort to emerge.⁸

To demonstrate his argument Sekula analyses the work of Lewis Hine against Stieglitz, the latter being a key figure in establishing “photography *as an art* “. Following from Stieglitz's “desire to abandon all contextual reference and to convey meaning by virtue of a metaphorical substitution” in his *Equivalents*, Sekula traces the much drawn line towards White and his adoption and adaptation Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence and the “discourse situation represented by Minor White and *Aperture* magazine”⁹ . Ultimately, says Sekula, “With White the denial of iconography is complete”.¹⁰

⁸ Allan Sekula, ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, in *Photography Against the Grain*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, pp 3-21. Originally published in *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 5, 1975, p. 16.

⁹ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Sekula, *ibid.*, p. 16.

To return again to *Windowsill Daydreaming* is the curtain half closed or half open? Sekula would argue that it is half closed. I would argue that it is half opened. I believe, when viewing a White photograph, that its affective quality is more significant than its informative quality. The fact that the image is inadequate as an informative document, as many of White's photographs seem to be, provides scope for the image's affective qualities and invites the viewer to engage with the image in a different way.

Another point of non-closure is that the image holds enigmatic qualities, its puzzles are never completely solved. Each time I return to view the image, and each time I leave, I do so with a sense of mystery and a feeling of lightness, and I remain intrigued. The meaning of the image remains enigmatic and elusive. Even if once, in a sartorial experience, I once completely understood *Windowsill Daydreaming* – when I was one with the image and my inner self, when I was nothing else – I cannot relive that experience.

It is important, when considering the original rhetoric functions of White's work, to view a White photograph as an Equivalent, to experience its feeling state, to respond Intuitively, emotionally or physically and ultimately to become aware of your inner self.

When I approach a White photograph and ask "How does the image affect me?", something usually happens and I don't need to ask any more questions. Something about the image responds to something within my inner self, it recalls, refires or defines something experienced in my everyday reality yet beyond everyday reality; this experience, like the experience of looking at the photograph, is invariably inexplicable. It is always invisible.

Your Conclusion

As both a reader of this thesis and a viewer of photographs, you will now have a stronger awareness and appreciation of Minor White's photographs and writings. But do you also have a fuller understanding of why some photographs are better than others, or at least why White thought some photographs are superior to others? To begin, you must acknowledge that it is your response to a photograph that determines the quality of the image. To a certain degree, this has been my motive in writing this thesis.

Objectively, we can explain with some degree of certainty that one photograph is superior to another because of its visible design elements such as the subject matter, lighting, composition, tonal range, contrast and texture. White refers to these formal elements as the expressive qualities of a photograph or 'things for what they are'. Ultimately, it is what is conveyed or evoked by these elements that determines the quality of a photograph; that is, what these things become or suggest within your experience of a photograph will be as important as the image itself. As White would put it, what matters is not only 'things for what they are' but also 'things for what else they are' (for you).

In chapter one, 'The Visible Man', an overview of White's formative years was presented to provide context for the biographical elements of White's life. This also highlighted the 'spring-tight line' between White's personal and public lives. As argued, White's ongoing interests in photography, nature, poetry and writing were present at an early age. Critical to White's development as an artist was his belief that photography and poetry shared the same essence. Although White had established himself as a photographic artist prior to World War Two, it was not until the end of the war that his career flourished. The key aspects of this development were White's experiences as a soldier during the war, his creative need to express these via photography, and his meetings with Alfred Stieglitz in 1946. During this year of his return to civilian life, White also made a pilgrimage to meet another photographer, Edward Weston. Stieglitz and Weston were both significant influences on White, but for this thesis Stieglitz is by far the most important factor. Stieglitz's effect on White is most evident in White's use and adaptation of the theory of Equivalence, but also in White's use of the term 'invisible'. Other people who had a critical effect on White and his approach to photography include Ansel Adams, Meyer Schapiro, and Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, but my focus here is Stieglitz.

In chapter two, 'Stieglitz and Equivalence', your attention was drawn to two significant texts; Stieglitz's 'How I Came to Photograph Clouds' (1923) and Allan Sekula's 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' (1975). Through close analysis, synthesis and reflection on these and other writings, I articulated my notions of invisibility and its defining qualities. I also introduced a key term for this thesis – 'affect' – and discussed how it relates to your experience of photographs. In exploring the influence of the painter Wassily Kandinsky on Stieglitz, and in

turn on White, you were also introduced to some of the defining aspects of invisibility. The experience of invisibility is an intangible, immaterial and internal response to a photograph. It can only be felt or intuited, and for each viewer it is both private and unique. It is essentially a spiritual or emotional response rather than an intellectual or logical response. As such, the invisible aspects of your experience of a photograph are not as easily understood as the visible.

As shown in chapter two, Stieglitz's theory of Equivalence is centred around a belief that photographs not only hold an informative power, but also, and more importantly, an affective power. Both Stieglitz and his theory of Equivalence made significant contributions to Modernist approaches to photography, and drew on theories of Symbolism, Romanticism, Aestheticism, Subjectivism, and abstract painting. For Stieglitz, an Equivalent possessed the expressive qualities of music, the ultimate form of abstraction. As such, the subject matter of his Equivalents, clouds, did not matter as much as what could be conveyed or expressed by his photographs of them. This is not to say that the subject matter, or the title of an image, is irrelevant in triggering or guiding your experience of a photograph. As discussed in my examination of *Equivalent, 1926, Equivalent, The Eternal Bride, 1930*, if Stieglitz felt that two prints made from the same negative evoked different viewing responses then these images were different photographs. Although Stieglitz did not deny that his Equivalents had informative aspects, he was clearly more concerned with their affective aspects. In short, Stieglitz was not interested in depicting 'clouds as clouds' but rather in evoking your subjective response.

While Sekula focuses on social context and how society constructs the meaning of photographs, rather than individuals such as your self, his approach to photography has assisted in strengthening my position on the significance of the individual viewer. Using Sekula's dialectic between affective and informative aspects of photography has assisted in developing many of the arguments for this thesis, and in ascertaining how the context in which a photograph is seen, your approach to the image, and your individuality determines your response to a photograph. Thus, although many aspects of the meaning of a photograph are determined by its social context, your individual powers of interpretation, creativity and subjectivity are also important. In short, it is not only the context of the image and the society that you live in that is important but also your personal context of viewing.

In chapter three, 'White on Equivalence', I continued my exploration into the theory of Equivalence. This was done through a detailed, reflective analysis of White's essay 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend'(1963). In this chapter you were introduced to many key terms and concepts that are critical to White's theory of Equivalence and this thesis' notion of invisibility: correspondence, suggestion, mental image, photograph as a mirror, 'subject-identification bound' viewer and sympathetic audience. White identified three levels of Equivalence in 'Equivalence: The Perennial Trend'. Where the first level of Equivalence pertains to the photograph itself, the second and third levels concern your experience of the photograph. In the third level of Equivalence, which involves your experience of remembering your mental image of a photograph, White's approach to Equivalence is uniquely different to that of Stieglitz.

Your feeling of correspondence with a photograph is important because it connects you with your invisible inner world. When you recognise this connection the photograph functions as an external mirror of your inner reality, or as trigger for self reflection. In addition to the role that the expressive qualities of a photograph have in determining your experience of a photograph the image's suggestive qualities are also significant, particularly because they engage your imaginative, creative and interpretative faculties. The suggestive qualities of a photograph allow it to become something else, something personal. Similarly, the mental image that forms in your mind as you are viewing a photograph is an important part of your experience of invisibility because it exists within yourself and it can be seen by no one else.

Since Equivalence is a function rather than a thing, we cannot necessarily say that some Equivalents are superior to others. However, we can say that some photographs have more potential to function as Equivalents than others. There are many intangible reasons for this but White also proposes some visible qualities. Subjects that constantly change their form, such as clouds, water, and ice are, or weathered materials, like wood or stone, are well suited to making Equivalents. For White, these subjects suggest and evoke a variety of viewing responses. White also proposes that particular ways of rendering a subject in a photograph so that it becomes ambiguous, obscure or impossible to identify may also facilitate the function of Equivalence. When the photograph's subject is rendered in such a way that it becomes difficult to identify this encourages less literal readings of the image, or at least makes such approaches difficult by confounding your logic. If you cannot identify the subject of an image then you are more likely to invent your own, and this takes you more deeply into your creative experience of invisibility. Thus White suggests that particular subjects, whether you recognise them or not, and obfuscating aesthetic treatments of these promote the experience of Equivalence.

White also proposes that particular viewers with particular approaches to an image are more likely to experience Equivalence. Such viewers are referred to as sympathetic viewers, or a sympathetic audience. If you are familiar with experiencing abstract or non-representational paintings and you can apply this practice to photographs then you are sympathetic. If you are not primarily concerned with identifying the subject of a photograph but rather the way the image makes you feel you are also sympathetic. If you are open to the suggestive qualities of a photograph and allow your self to respond to it emotionally, spiritually, intuitively and/or subjectively then you are a member of White's sympathetic audience.

In chapter four, 'The Invisible Man' I identified and contextualised fifteen occasions in which White used the term 'invisible' between 1946 and 1972. As shown, both Stieglitz and Equivalence play a major role in White's use of this term. During this period there was also a distinct evolution in the role this word played in White's writing. Where there is some doubt in White's early usage whether the 'invisible' resides within the photographer or the viewer, in his later usage the 'invisible' clearly exists within you, the viewer. Moreover, within this evolution you become a more active participant in determining your experience of a photograph, and your experience becomes more profound and further removed from the photograph itself. So much

so, that in White's final chronological use of the term 'invisible', in 'Octave of Prayer' (1972), the photograph becomes invisible as you enter further into your experience of it.

In examining and comparing White's varied uses of the term invisible I determined that the invisible is essentially your emotional or spiritual response to a photograph. This response is influenced not only by the photograph, and its context, but more importantly by your approach to viewing and experiencing it. Your experience of the invisible is also determined by: your mental image of a photograph; your experience of remembering your mental image; any part of your inner world that a photograph evokes or suggests to you; your 'invented' subject formed in response to a visually ambiguous or difficult to identify subject matter; your hunger for nourishment; or the image that you create in the imaginary space between two photographs in a sequence. White's usage of the term 'invisible' also explains that it is made visible to intuition. Thus your intuitive skills rather than your intellectual abilities are an indispensable faculty for experiencing invisibility. Furthermore, the quality of your past emotional and spiritual experiences is also a significant factor in determining the depth of your experience.

In chapter five, *Illuminating the Invisible*, I assigned each of White's uses of the term 'invisible' into one of three categories, 'extra-invisibility', 'intra-invisibility' or 'inter-invisibility'. These assignments were determined by whether White's use of the term 'invisible' pertained to your viewing experience of a photograph, the affective power of the image, and where the 'invisible' resided. As shown, in the majority of White's uses of this term, the 'invisible' exists within you and your experience of a photograph or a sequence of photographs. In order for this experience of invisibility to occur your belief in the affective power of the photograph is paramount

Your role as a viewer of a photograph is not to decipher the photographer's intended meaning but rather to be willing to experience the image for yourself. What is important is that you discover your own feeling state within your experience of the image. There is no right or wrong response. Critical to this process are the affective qualities of the photograph and your sense of correspondence with the image. In this sense, the photograph is not a sign but a trigger for a subjective emotional response.

While it is hard to translate the experiential qualities of viewing photographs into words, particularly the affective aspects, this is what I have attempted to do. Where I had previously thought that many of these qualities were ineffable I now believe that they can be articulated, albeit difficultly. Hopefully, I have provided you with an approach to viewing photographs that is both enjoyable and enlightening, and the realisation that some photographs are better than others because they offer to you more potential viewing experiences.

Appendix

THE FULL OCTAVE OF PRAYER

Limits of Poets	A	Ordinary Prayer—union due largely to our own industry.		
		Prayer ¹	We speak to God the Father	Petition, Verbal or Mental
Limits of Images	B	Prayer ²	We make love to God the Son	Affective Prayer
		Prayer ³	We make union with some manifesta- tion of Father or Son, for example, a flower or photograph of one.	MEDITATION
		Prayer ⁴	We lose sight of affection, forget words, stop action and enter a Void.	Prayer of Quiet or Simplicity
		Extra-Ordinary Prayer—mystic union due to “entry” of a third force.		
		Prayer ⁵	Something begins to fill that Void. God the Holy Ghost perhaps.	Naked Orison or Incomplete Ecstasy
		Prayer ⁶	Union with the All	CONTEMPLATION
		Prayer ⁷	Spiritual Marriage of the Soul with God. Ecstasy	Deifying Union
		Prayer ⁸	Beatific Union of Eternity The beginning of the next octave	

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