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Photography and Fossils

Hiroshi Sugimoto's "History of History" show (Japan Society, 2006-06) centers on five of Sugimoto's own photographs but includes several other kinds of artifacts (like wood sculptures and hanging scrolls) and begins with objects that are neither photographs nor artifacts (at least not artifacts in the way that sculptures and hanging scrolls are) – a set of fossils of trilobites, ammonites and sea lilies. What sets these objects apart from the others in the show is that, as Sugimoto says, they “date to a time well before the rise of humanity” and thus before the creation of “the concept of ‘art.’”¹ For precisely this reason, it might seem that, made by nature rather than humans, they not only predate art but have nothing to do with it. The fossils Sugimoto has chosen are, it's true, very beautiful but then some sunsets are very beautiful and some rocks are and some mountains are. We don't think of sunsets as belonging to the history of art. But Sugimoto says that fossils do; in fact, he says, they are “the oldest form of art.” And they are particularly relevant to his show, he thinks, because they provide a kind of genealogy for his own art, photography: fossils, he says, are a kind of “pre-photography.” So even though photography “is a novel medium of artistic expression, far newer than painting and sculpture, which date back to the early days of humanity,” it is also far older than painting and sculpture and older even than “humanity.” Photography is the first art, pre-historic, pre-human.

There is an obvious sense in which this view is a little implausible – how can there be art without people to make it? How can there be photographs without

photographers? But there is an even more obvious sense in which – at least to the readers of this volume – it’s won’t seem at all implausible. For fossils – like footprints, like shadows, like reflections – are a standard example of indexicality, a topic with which the contributors to this volume are deeply (and, in my view, appropriately) obsessed. Indeed, insofar as the other main subjects both of the transcribed conversation and of the responses to it are medium specificity and Roland Barthes’s idea of the *punctum*, there is an interesting sense in which this volume is all indexicality all the time since, as we’ll see, the *punctum* is just another way of talking about indexicality, and indexicality – if only in the form a problem – is central to both the medium specificity of the photograph and, at least in the last 20 years, to what Abigail Solomon-Godeau calls the other topic of interest and controversy in this volume, “photography’s relation to art historical discourse.”²

So Sugimoto’s fossils make sense both as an emblem of the photograph and, as the readers of the Seminar will already have noticed, as a problem for photography. They make sense as an emblem of the photograph because if you have the fossil of a Sea Lily Colony, then you know that the Colony played the same causal role in the making of the fossil that the fossil itself would play in the making of a photograph of the fossil. The thing the photograph is of is causally indispensable to the photograph in a way that the thing a painting is of need not be. That’s why Sugimoto thinks of his photographs of fossils as “another set of fossils,” as, in effect, fossils of fossils. And that’s why although there are paintings of unicorns, there are no fossils of unicorns and there are no photographs of them either. But the fossils also make sense as a problem for photography, and for the same reason. The painting of a Sea Lily Colony is a

representation of it, a picture of it. The fossil of a Sea Lily Colony is neither. The footprint isn't a representation of the foot that made it; the smoke may be a sign of fire but it isn't a picture of it. So when Joel Snyder says that what he "fears" about the "causal stuff" (i.e. indexicality) is that "it stops you from seeing the photographs as pictures," his fear isn't entirely misplaced. In fact, both as fear and as hope, the idea that the photograph is not a picture is central to the history of recent photography and to the history of recent art more generally.

That idea is most frequently associated in this discussion with Roland Barthes and with the opening sentences of *Camera Lucida*: "One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.'" ³ The point of the remark depends, of course, on the implicit comparison with painting. And the distinctive character of the amazement is a function of the fact that it has nothing to do with the kinds of amazement – at the skill of the artist, the brilliance of her conception, etc. – that might plausibly be produced by a painting. If paintings could show you the eyes of the Emperor, then Barthes himself could have looked at him. But paintings can't. That's why Kendall Walton, coming from a different theoretical tradition, nevertheless makes the same point: "We do not see Henry VIII when we look at his portrait; we see only a representation of him." ⁴ To say that you're seeing eyes that looked at the Emperor is thus to say that you're not seeing a representation of eyes that looked at the Emperor. This is what Walton calls the "sharp break...between painting and photography" (253). The break is sharp because it is a break not between two different technologies of representation but between something

that is a technology of representation and something that isn't. The photograph, for both Barthes and Walton, isn't.

For some writers this represents what James Elkins calls a "hope" and what Geoffrey Batchen calls a "desire"; the hope is "about the real world" and the desire is for some kind of access to it, "a real outside of representation." Elkins himself doesn't think this hope has much to do with photography and Batchen is hardly endorsing the desire; indeed, insofar as Abigail Solomon-Godeau is right and we are supposedly all post-structuralists now, almost no one in this volume shares it. But it's not hard to see (or at least remember) what it is. Barthes reminds us when he distinguishes between "the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers" and the "*necessarily* real thing" that is "the 'photographic referent'" (76). It's this distinction that makes it possible for photographs to count as evidence in ways that paintings don't. I can hardly, say, accuse you of stealing my wallet and then offer as proof a little water color I've just made of you sneaking into my room. The water color would count more as a repetition of the accusation than as evidence of its truth, precisely because the reality of the referent – you entering my room – would be optional rather than necessary. And this would be true even if the drawing were remarkably realistic – entirely accurate in its depiction of your features, my room, etc. The photograph necessarily shows what was in front of the camera; the painting only shows what was in front of the canvas optionally – and the option is the painter's.⁵

Barthes makes this point by saying that "Painting can feign reality without having seen it" (76); Kendall Walton makes it by saying that "Photographs are counterfactually dependent on the photographed scene even if the beliefs (and other intentional attitudes)

of the photographer are held fixed” (264).⁶ His point is that paintings are “based on the beliefs” (again, or other intentional attitudes) “of their maker”; photographs are not. So my photograph of you stealing my wallet is evidence of you stealing my wallet whether or not I believe that you stole my wallet. My water color is evidence not that you stole it but evidence of my intentional attitudes about your stealing it -- perhaps that I believe you stole it or perhaps that I want others (feigning, other intentional attitudes) to believe that you stole it.

To say the photograph is not a representation, in other words, is to say that it doesn't represent either the thing it's a photograph of or the intentional attitudes of the person who made it. The fossil is neither a likeness of the trilobite nor an expression of the trilobite's beliefs. But it is good evidence of the existence of trilobites, and the photograph of an event is good evidence that the event took place. It's not, however, definitive evidence. Even leaving digitality out of it for the moment, we all know that the realism of the photograph – its ability to show us what really happened, its ability to tell us the truth – is problematic. Photographs, as Margaret Olin puts it, “distort (4). And even photographs that don't seem to us distortions may nonetheless not help us in determining what really happened. For while our account of what the photograph shows us may not depend on the beliefs and desires of the photographer, it does (as Solomon-Godeau invokes the Rodney King story to suggest) depend on *our* beliefs and desires, the beliefs and desires of the interpreter.

It's not really that question, however (not really the question of whether photographs can tell the truth), that makes indexicality controversial in this volume, and that produces both what David Green calls “indexophobia” in writers like Snyder and a

corresponding indexophilia in writers like Krauss. What's at stake instead is first the photograph's status as art and, second, the status of art itself. The first question, in other words, is about photography as an art – can the photograph be a work of art? The second question is about art, irrespective of the photograph. The issue here is not what a photograph must be in order for it to count as art but what art must be if the photograph does count as art. And if the first question emerged as a kind of challenge to the photograph, contesting its claim to be a work of art, the second has emerged as a challenge not to photography but to art and to the very idea of a work of art.

Scepticism about photography as an art started early and was based from the start on Barthesian doubts about the causal contribution of the photographer. As Patrick Maynard summarizes them, the issues have centered on whether the photograph “sufficiently expresses or manifests intentional states of people, rather than other formative factors” like the “photochemical/electronic marking process.”⁷ Thus, as he puts it, “there will be effects in successful photos that one does not know how to attribute” (305), by which he means one doesn't know whether or not they're there on purpose. The standard example here is the profusion of detail in the photograph, the way in which the photograph shows things the eye did not see. And it is such details, Maynard says, that raise “the question of the kinds and proportion of controlled features relative to uncontrolled ones, as compared with drawing and painting.” (305). On this account, the difference between the painting and the photograph that Barthes understands as the difference between a representation and what he will call an “emanation” is at the same time a difference between the kind of control available (and necessary) to the maker of representations and the kind of control neither available nor necessary to the maker of

emanations – which is why Barthes calls photography “a *magic* not an art” (88). What this actually means is that it’s a technology not an art, and so what’s described in the seminar as the “automaticity” of the photograph is its indexicality approached from another angle: the more you see the photograph as made by the world, the less you see it as made by the photographer.

For Barthes, of course, that’s the attraction – both the guarantee of “reality” (88) that counts as indexicality with respect to the referent and the limitations on the photographer’s control that derive from that reality and that therefore count as indexicality with respect to the agent. If Kertesz wants, as Barthes imagines, to take a picture of a violinist, he must also – whether he wants to or not -- take a picture of the dirt road the violinist is walking on. The point here is that the indexicality of the photograph – its status as a trace of what was there – is identified with the critique of the photographer’s intentionality – his inability to control what the photograph shows. In a painting, the road would be dusty because the painter made it dusty; in the photograph, it’s dusty because it was dusty in the world. And if the “detail” that interests Barthes in the photograph turns out precisely to be the dirt road, it does so not despite the fact that it was unintended by the photographer but rather *because* it was unintended, because Kertesz couldn’t help but include it. The “inevitable and delightful” detail “does not necessarily attest to the photographer’s art; it says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object (how could Kertesz have “separated” the dirt road from the violinist walking on it?)” (47). It is, in other words, delightful only because it is inevitable. The details that “prick” do so only because they are not supposed to, they are

not even supposed to be there. And if they don't prick, "it is doubtless because the photographer has put them there intentionally."

The *punctum* is thus essentially (not merely in practice but in principle) the unintentional. And it is this principled unintentionality that Michael Fried has insisted on in his recent essay on Barthes,⁸ where the commitment to the *punctum* is read as the mark of Barthes's anti-theatricality and where the fact that the *punctum* is (indeed, must be) unintended appears as the essential guarantee of the photograph's absorptive status. To the extent that it hasn't been produced on purpose it can't count as a performance. For Fried, Barthes thus emerges as a champion of absorption; more importantly, photography itself (as both the essay on Barthes and an even more recent piece on Thomas Demand argue) emerges in the last thirty years as the site of the response to what Fried attacked in "Art and Objecthood" -- what he called literalism, or what we might more generally call postmodernism.

What identifies the unintentional with the anti-theatrical is in a certain sense pretty straightforward: if you don't (consciously or unconsciously) mean to be doing something, you can't possibly be doing it for someone. The idea here is not just that the subject of the photograph isn't posing, that the person in the photograph isn't seeking to produce an effect on the beholder of the photograph. Indeed, part of what Fried calls Barthes's originality is that photographs of absorbed subjects -- photographs taken, say, when the subject not only is not posing but is completely unaware of being photographed -- seem, to him "quintessentially theatrical" (552). Why? Because in these photographs, it's the photographer who's performing. So what Barthes requires is a radicalization of absorption; he transforms the insistence that the subject of the photograph not be seen as

seeking to produce an effect into the insistence that the photographer not be seen as seeking to produce an effect. Actually, this is too weak a way to put it. The effects Barthes is interested in are not merely ones that seem to be unintended; they're ones that really are unintended. And while this insistence on the unintended makes Barthes, as we have seen, a crucial figure for Fried and the critique of the postmodern, it also makes him a crucial figure for writers like Krauss and Solomon-Godeau, who are committed to defending the postmodern. Indeed, what I have just described as the radicalization of absorption (the radicalization of the refusal of performance) turns out in Barthes to be dialectical: it turns the antitheatrical into pure theatricality; it turns what Fried called absorption into what was supposed to be its opposite: literalism.

The reason for this is obvious and is already suggested by Fried when he notes that the *punctum* exists only "through a particular viewer's subjective experience" and that the theatricality of literalist work consists above all in its dependence on "the experiencing subject" (56?). The intended effect of a photograph does not depend on the beholder's experience – it is what it is whether or not any viewer actually experiences it. But once the effect the photograph is supposed to have on the beholder (what the photographer intended) gets relegated to the *studium*, the only thing that can matter (the only thing left) is the effect the photograph actually has on the beholder. And this effect must of necessity be entirely a function of who the beholder is. No *punctum* for us in the photo of Barthes's mother, "at most" only "*studium*" (73). And, of course, no *punctum* for Barthes in the photograph of somebody else's mother. The repudiation of the photographer's intentions is in itself the appeal to the beholder's experience. Once the structural (or theoretical) indifference to the beholder that Fried identified as absorption

appears as indifference not just to the performance of the person being photographed but to the performance of the photographer, its meaning is completely inverted. Instead of being irrelevant, the beholder is the only one who matters.

It's for this reason that the *punctum* seems to produce the problem of subjectivity described by Elkin in the Seminar; it's "by definition, private" because it's by definition dependent on the response of the individual beholder. At the same time, however, it's important to see that privacy isn't really the central issue here. What about the photograph of Jerome and the eyes that looked at the Emperor? You don't have to be Barthes, you don't even have to be French, to feel the prick of Napoleon's mortality. The *punctum*, in other words, is not intrinsically private, it can be shared with millions of others. What's intrinsic to it is not its subjectivity but its independence of the intention of the photographer; it's the thing that produces an effect even though it's not supposed to produce an effect. Margaret Iversen makes this point when she refers to Benjamin's discussion of the "double portrait of Dauthendey and his wife," where Benjamin says you "search the picture to find a flaw" which, as Iversen points out, "you can only do retrospectively, after the tragedy." The point is that the photographer did not know that the wife would commit suicide and thus the effect the photograph has on you after the tragedy could not have been intended by the photographer (and if it somehow *was* intended by the photographer, it would belong to the *stadium* rather than the *punctum*). But you don't have to be related to the Dauthendeys to feel the effect, you don't even have to know them – you just have to know about them.

The real point of the *punctum* is thus that it turns the photograph from a representation – something made by someone to produce a certain effect – into an object

– something that may well produce any number of effects, or none at all, depending on the beholder. We may find fossils beautiful or we may not; we may find the painting of a fossil beautiful, or not. The difference between them is that the painting is meant to be beautiful and we don't (whether or not we find it beautiful) understand it as a work of art unless we recognize the intention. Whereas the fossil isn't intended to be anything and there's nothing about it as a work of art to understand; it's not a representation. Insisting on the *punctum*, Barthes insists that the photograph is more like the fossil than it is like the painting of the fossil. Thus the photograph's *punctum* does (by way of its relation to the beholder) what its indexicality does (by way of its relation to the referent). In suspending the question (or denying the relevance) of the photographer's intentionality, they both make the photograph as a work of art – or as what Joel Snyder calls a picture – invisible.

But if the disappearance of the work of art makes Snyder sad, it makes some of his colleagues happy. When in "Photography's Discursive Spaces," Rosalind Krauss criticized efforts to treat the photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan as works of "Art," displaying "aesthetic values" and belonging to "aesthetic discourse," the object of her critique was Art not O'Sullivan.⁹ Her point, made also in "Notes on the Index," was that the indexicality of the photograph was indeed an obstacle to seeing it as a picture and that indexicality more generally was an obstacle to seeing things as representations, and that this was a good thing. It was precisely because there was an important sense in which photographs were not pictures that they could play such a central role in the critique of modernism, here understood as crucially the critique of representation, of the picture and of the categories associated with it: "aesthetic intention," "work of art," "authorship," etc.

(4). So if Snyder's claim that the photograph is not indexical is an effort to hang on to it as a work of art, Krauss's claim that it is indexical is an effort not to criticize the photograph but to criticize the very category of the work of art.

In this way, the medium specificity of the photograph was always crucial even when what it was crucial to was an attack on medium specificity. For inasmuch as the idea of the medium is a fundamentally art historical one, what defines the medium specificity of the photograph – its indexicality, its automaticity, the *punctum*, in short, the bypassing of the artist's intentionality -- is what calls into question its capacity to count as an art. Fried, in "Art and Objecthood," argued that theatricality (of the kind that I have identified here with the *punctum*) was not merely a wrong turn in the history of art, not merely a threat to good art but a threat to "art as such,"¹⁰ and, especially if we bracket the advocacy that is otherwise so central to the essay (if, in other words, we stop trying to keep art from coming to an end and just focus on the difference between art and non-art), we can see how right he is. For the whole idea of the *punctum* is that it undoes the opposition between good art and bad art by treating all photographs as if they weren't art and so assessing them instead in terms of their effect. Again, the point is not that evaluation is rendered subjective; it's not that the Winter Garden photograph is from Barthes's point of view a great photograph but not so great from yours or mine. The point is rather that for Barthes it's deeply moving (because it's his mother) and for the rest of us, it isn't. The difference here is not, in other words, in our beliefs about which photographs are great; it is instead in the kinds of affect produced in us by photographs of people we know and care about as opposed to the kinds of affect produced by photos of people we don't know or care about. Indeed, we could have the same kind of difference

without the photographs; if (before her death) Barthes's mother herself had walked into the room: he might have been thrilled, I might have been merely pleased. What's being registered here is not the subjectivity of aesthetic judgment but its irrelevance. The fact that I respond to your mother differently from the way that you respond to your mother has nothing to do with the aesthetic.

If, then, the conflict in painting of the late 60s was "whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or objects" (151),¹¹ the point of the photograph in the years since 1967 is that it has become the site on which this conflict takes place. As long as we're concerned about the *punctum*, the question about any photograph must be not whether it is good art or bad but whether it can be art at all. And it is this replacement of the opposition between good art and bad art with the opposition between art and not-art that places photography at the center of art history in the last half century. For the imbrication of photography's specificity as a medium for art and of the ontological doubts about whether photography can be an art produces a situation in which the effort to answer the modernist question – what is distinctive about photography as an art? What is it that makes it different from, say, painting? – produces as one possible answer the critique of modernism itself. There's an important sense, in other words, in which the question about the painting – is it a painting or an object – has become the question about the photograph. Not so much because the photograph can somehow be taken as the object it's a photograph of (even if we think of the image of Barthes's mother as an "emanation" of her body we don't exactly think that the photograph *is* her body), but because it can't simply be taken as a picture of the object it's a photograph of. That's the point, again, of the fossil. We don't experience the fossil of

the trilobite as a trilobite but we don't experience it as the picture of a trilobite either. And if we understand photographs on the model of fossils, we cannot take for granted their status as works of art.

To put it that way, however (to say that we cannot take for granted their status as works of art) is to refuse both the indexophobic and the indexophilic, to refuse the idea that because indexicality is a false issue photographs can of course be works of art and to refuse also the idea that because photographs are essentially indexical they can't be works of art (or "Art"). Indeed, the fact that Fried is now writing a book on recent photography gets noticed several times in this volume precisely because the mid-20th century obligation of the painter to secure or assert the status of the painting as art and not (only) object has, for all the reasons suggested above, devolved upon the photographer. Hence, as Fried himself says in the piece on Demand, the importance of photographers like Gursky, Struth, Hofer and Wall (not to mention Sugimoto, Welling and Demand himself) can only be understood in terms of their more or less implicit (in Wall, it's pretty explicit) commitment to *establishing* (since it can't be taken for granted) the photograph as a representation.

Fried's own reading of Demand as committed above all to providing in his photographs "images of *sheer authorial intention*"¹² makes this clear. Why, if Fried is right, does Demand not only build his models to guarantee that the referent of his photographs is itself a product of his own intentions but also strip them of the details they would in reality inevitably have (the titles on the book bindings, the names on the ballots) in order to guarantee that they bear *only* the marks of his own intentions? Diarmuid Costello's observation that the conversation in the seminar "just dies" "whenever we

begin to talk about photography outside the art historical frame of reference” (53) is helpful here, especially if it’s juxtaposed with Joel Snyder’s doubt about whether people (either the photographers themselves or their audience) are interested in the post-Becher photographers *as photographers*. For Demand’s insistence on intentionality – or, more precisely, his desire to thematize his own authorial intentionality -- wouldn’t make much sense if he were, say, a figurative painter from the Leipzig school. That’s the difference between the photograph of Barthes’s mother and a painting of her. No one doubts the relevance of the portrait painter’s intentionality to the portrait – everything on that canvas has been put there by him. But, as the Kertsez example in Barthes insists and as David Company’s entirely on-target citation of Friedlander on the “generosity” of photography makes clear, that’s obviously and importantly not true of the photographer. “I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new car (a Hudson) on a clear day,” Friedlander says, “I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary’s laundry, and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and 78 trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It’s a generous medium, photography.”

And the generosity of photography is not only that you get more than you want but that you can sometimes get what you want just by wanting it. What Friedlander had to do to get those 78 trees into the picture is radically unlike what a painter would have to do – the painter has to place them there, the photographer has only to decide to include them. The painter has represented 78 trees; the photographer has allowed them to appear. And it’s only in the context of this difference that one can explain why Demand photographs an artificial lawn about which the salient fact is that every blade of fake grass captured in the photograph has been put there by the photographer. The point here

is to overcome the generosity of the medium, a point that cannot be understood (that is actually inconceivable) except by reference to the medium. So Demand's insistence on the photographer's intentionality – his effort, as Fried calls it, to make photographs that are “manifestly the bearers of no intentions other than the artist's own” (203) – is an effort that makes sense only as part of the history of art photography and of art. The conversation dies when it gets outside art history because the meaning of the photograph's indexicality is constituted within art history. Outside that history, as several participants remark, indexicality is cheap. And the fact that Demand, Gursky et al are making photographs is central because the fact that the photographs *are* photographs is part of their meaning.

The centrality of the photograph thus emerges out of a certain crisis of the picture because it is understood already to embody that crisis. So while Snyder is right to insist that what is at stake is our ability to see photographs as pictures, it obviously won't work just to insist that they are pictures and to urge people to stop talking in ways that might distract us from this fact. Any more than it works to say that photographs just aren't pictures and that we've gotten beyond pictures. (The only thing more regressive than the insistence on the photograph as just another form of representation is the insistence that, as the photograph has shown us, we can achieve an art without representation.) It's precisely because there are ways in which photographs *aren't* just representations that photography and the theory of photography has been so important. Indeed, we might say that it's precisely the photograph's complicated status as a theoretical object that has made it so important in art. And it's precisely the efforts of photographers to establish them as pictures that has made photography so crucial.

Another way to put this would be to say that the theory of photography is, at this moment, of particular interest because it is playing a crucial role in the history not just of art photography but of art. The question of whether or in what sense photographs are representations is a question in the theory of photography;¹³ but it mattered in one way (not so much and only to photographers) when it was asked at the end of the 19th century and it matters in a different way (more and to more people) when it is asked at the beginning of the 21st. The question raised by the ontology of the photograph – what did it take for something to count as a work art? – is a question that may always have mattered to photographers but that only mattered to the history of art when modernism made it matter. Perhaps we could describe this as the moment when a theoretical question also became an important art historical question. And we can turn the process around by noting the way in which what had been (as it were, merely) art historical questions got redescribed as theoretical ones. Thus, for example, we could describe the conflict between the absorptive and the theatrical as Jeff Wall does when he says that they are both “modes of performance.”¹⁴ The point here is that absorption, as Fried deploys it, involves the effort to produce certain kinds of effects as opposed to certain other kinds of effects, and by calling absorption an art historical concept, I mean to emphasize that it involves understanding a certain set of acts – it involves understanding what certain artists were doing, or trying to do. But it’s one thing to value the effect of unintendedness, it’s a different thing to value unintendedness itself; (paraphrasing Wall) it’s one thing to value absorption as a mode of performance, it’s another thing to value it as the refusal or rather the absence of performance. And this, of course, is what happens when Barthes requires that the photographer as well as (or instead of) the subject not be

seeking to produce an effect, when he transfers the burden of absorption from the subject to the artist.

Absorption here becomes a theoretical concept. The historical question of which intentions any given photographer had becomes the theoretical question of whether photographers have any intentions that matter, and, more generally, of what relation there is between the meaning of a work of art and the causal account of how it was produced. And this question now becomes crucial to the making of photographs. The project of establishing the intentionality of the photograph – a project made both possible and necessary only by the recognition that it needs to be established, that it's not just there – becomes crucial to the making of it. Sugimoto's invocation of the fossil is emblematic here. On the one hand, it signifies the impossibility (and the undesirability) of simply denying the indexicality of the photograph. On the other hand, insisting on the photographic fossil as an intentional object ("By photographing these fossils... I was making another set of fossils"), it marks the transformation of the natural object into the intentional one, of the trace into the representation. Not exactly a representation of the referent but rather of the making of the photograph. You don't need a fossil to make a painting of a fossil; you do need one to make a photograph of it. That reminder of the indexicality of the photograph and of the irrelevance of the photographer's intentionality is here turned into an assertion of his intentionality. Just as the painter uses paint, the photographer uses the fossil. And with the referent redescribed as the medium, the causal stuff that gets in the way of seeing the photograph as a picture is here deployed to make it possible for the photograph to be a picture.

¹ Hiroshi Sugimoto, *History of History* (New York 2005). This brochure accompanied the exhibition at the Japan Society Gallery (September 23, 2005 though February 19, 2006). Its pages are unnumbered.

² Indexicality is, but Peirce probably isn't. We ought to disconnect the claim that the distinctive causal connection between the referent of a photograph and the photograph itself is important to the theory of photography from the claim that Peirce's semiotics is similarly important. The latter claim might be true but it doesn't follow from the former

³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 3.

⁴ Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (December 1984), 253. In this context, it might also be worth noting that Sugimoto has produced photographs of portraits (including one of Henry VIII) and that part of the point of them is no doubt that you're *not* looking at the eyes of the historical figure in question, or at eyes that did look at him.

⁵ It's important to acknowledge here that this distinction is one that can be troubled in lots of ways. Most obviously, the photograph can be doctored, or can in various ways be misleading. Almost as obviously, there are contexts in which the water color might also count as evidence. Suppose you had purchased special clothes in which to perform the theft and had disposed of them immediately afterwards – the fact that I was able to depict them accurately would count as evidence that I had been there and seen you, how else would I know about them? It's this kind of point that Snyder is making when he reminds us that his mother would have a causal relation to a portrait of her. Her causal connection to her portrait doesn't make us worry at all about whether the portrait is a representation of her – obviously it is. So why should the causal connection of a photograph to the thing it's a photograph of make us worry about whether it's a picture? On the other hand, we wouldn't think for a minute that a reflection in the pond of Snyder's mother was a picture of her. So what's the difference between the reflection and the portrait? The answer is that the portrait requires a painter, the reflection doesn't. Hence there are all kinds of questions we can ask about the portrait – is it meant to bring out the specificity of her personality, or to allude to a general maternal function, or perhaps a distinctively middle-class maternity? – that we can't ask about the reflection. And the reason we can ask these questions about the portrait is that they are about what the painter was trying to do, whereas in the case of the reflection there is no painter, no one to ask them about. What makes the photograph interesting, of course, is that there is a photographer, and yet there are important things about the photograph that are like the reflection – it shows things that the photographer need not have intended, that have no connection to what the photographer was trying to show. In Barthes, in fact, the things the photographer was trying to show get relegated to the *stadium*. More generally, as we will see below, the question of the artist's intentions and of their relation to the meaning of the work of art is at the center of the current debate.

⁶ Walton's point is made in Gricean rather than Peircean terms: it involves the distinction between "natural" and "nonnatural" meaning: "Spots meanN (mean naturally) measles... and the ringing of a bell on a bus means NN (means nonnaturally) that the bus is full" (265). The point again is that the photograph is more like the spots than like the ringing bell, and the way of making the point is to say that our sense of what the photograph shows is not dependent on our sense of what the photographer meant it to show. Diagnosing the patient with spots is not a matter of figuring out what he means by them (he doesn't have measles because he intends to). Of course, the question of the reliability of the evidence, of which is better evidence, etc, is irrelevant here. The point is only that the painting is routed through the painter in a way that the photograph is not routed through the photographer.

⁷ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1997), 284.

⁸ The essay, "Barthes's *Punctum*," appeared in *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Spring 2005) and was subsequently responded to by James Elkin, the editor of this volume. Furthermore, the book on photography that Fried is now writing (and of which the essay will be a chapter) is referred to several times in both the Seminar and the comments. One way to characterize my own work in this essay would be as an effort to explain exactly why this is so – why, in other words, the continuing debate about the photograph's indexicality is a version of the debate about the ontology of the work of art decisively inaugurated in Fried's 1967 "Art and Objecthood." One could put this point more generally by saying that it is in photography rather than in painting (and rather than – for somewhat different reasons – video) that the most fundamental questions about the limits of representation and the limits of the critique of representation have been raised. And, of course, all the issues that in this volume get mobilized around indexicality (the photograph's relation to the real, the automaticity of the photographic process, the problematic status of the photographer's intentionality, the relevance of the beholder's subjectivity) are artifacts of positions taken on the critique of representation. (On the connection between these positions in literary as well as art theory and for an account of the politics produced by that connection, see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2004).)

⁹ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (The MIT Press: Cambridge 1986), 133-34.

¹⁰ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (U. of Chicago Press: Chicago 1998), 163.

¹¹ We might just as easily say, in connection with Barthes, as works of art or as persons, a way of putting it that reminds us of the relevance of the debate over anthropomorphism also at work in "Art and Objecthood."

¹² Michael Fried, "Without a Trace." *Artforum* (March 2005), 202.

¹³ Periodically in this volume, people talk about the difficulty or impossibility of theorizing photography; I'm not quite sure what that means. I take the theory of photography to be a set of questions involving the different processes by which photographs are made and hence their relations both to the things they are of and to the people who make them, as well as their relations to the people who look at them or otherwise use them, etc. It seems pretty clear that there isn't now and never has been some definitive list of these questions much less some definitive set of answers to them. So if that's what's meant by the difficulty of theorizing photography, then I agree that it's difficult. But inasmuch as the same could be said of the theory of literature, or of painting or music or any art, it's hard to see why the point seems to be worth making as if it were a point about the distinctive nature of photography. Perhaps, as some think, the real problem is with the notion of theory. I myself doubt this, but that's a different topic.

¹⁴ Jeff Wall, "Restoration: Interview with Martin Schwander," cited in Fried, "Barthes's *Punctum*," 551. Wall is discussing his *Adrian Walker* and its relation to Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*.