

*Reflecting, Registering,  
Recording & Representing*

From Light Image to Photographic Picture

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## Section 2:

### Single- and Multi-stage Accounts of Photography



The preliminary step:

Light from a scene is channeled and focused to form an optical light image inside the camera.

A light image reacts to real-time changes in the scene.



‘Fixing upon paper the image formed by the Camera  
Obscura; or rather, I should say, causing it *to fix itself*.’

Henry Fox Talbot

‘A new method consisting in the spontaneous reproduction  
of the images of nature received in a camera obscura.’

Partnership agreement between  
Niépce and Daguerre

M. Daguerre has discovered a method to fix the images that are represented at the back of a camera obscura; so that those images are not the temporary reflection of the object but their fixed and durable impress, which may be removed from the presence of those objects like a picture or engraving.

Hippolyte Gaucheraud (1839)

The image of immobile objects becomes perfectly imprinted on the plate although this image is yet invisible [...].

Before application of mercury there does not exist any distinct image, although these images have already been set down and set down forever.

Isid B. (1839)



## Single-stage Account

- During an exposure, the photographic image is produced.
- The photographic image is developed, printed or screened.

## Multi-stage Account

- During a photographic event, there is causal registration of light that forms the optical light image. A register is produced.
- The photographic register is rendered to produce a photographic image.



## Section 3:

# Photographic Recording and Reproducing – The Fundamental View



The camera obscura image reproduces itself.

The photographic image has produced itself autonomously.

The ephemeral camera obscura image reproduces itself by forming a stable photographic image.

The photographic image autonomously creates itself in the action of a camera obscura image spontaneously reproducing itself.

‘This building, I believe, to be the first that was ever yet known to have drawn its own picture.’ (Henry Fox Talbot)

‘The fundamental peculiarity of the photographic medium’ is the fact that ‘the physical objects themselves print their image by means of the optical and chemical action of light.’ (Rudolph Arnheim)

‘The idea of allowing the world to form its own image by a process of imprinting is central to photography’s self-conception.’ (Robert Hopkins)

The 'ideal photograph' has a merely causal relation to its subject, so it is a 'record of how an actual object looked.'

Roger Scruton

'A camera records what is in front of it, not what the photographer thinks is in front of it.'

Gregory Currie

Section 4:

Recording, Reproducing  
and Representing



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‘While representations have an intentional character, recordings are *relational*. The relation between a recording and what it records is *witless*, and it allows for *playback*.’

‘Witless’ means that ‘the process is causal, and as long as everything is working properly, no wits are required. [...] Wits might be pre-requisite to making such machines, but recording processes don’t require those wits.’

‘Playback is a witless process whereby that which is recorded can be reproduced.’

John Kulvicki (2017)

‘Recording and Representing, Analog and Digital’

‘In Daguerreotypes, the pattern burned into a sheet of silver records a pattern of light and dark, and also serves as a playback of that pattern, because it *is* the pattern of light and dark that was recorded. Just look, and you see, reproduced, the pattern that caused it.’

John Kulvicki (2017)  
‘Recording and Representing, Analog and Digital’



## Section 5:

# Photographic Recording and Reproducing – The Functional View



- i. Witless registration followed by witless rendering
- ii. Witless registration followed by witty rendering.
- iii. Witty registration followed by witless rendering.
- iv. Witty registration followed by witty rendering.



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For Gjon Mili's Light Drawings with Pablo Picasso visit  
[https://www.life.com/arts-entertainment/behind-the-  
picture-picasso-draws-with-light/](https://www.life.com/arts-entertainment/behind-the-picture-picasso-draws-with-light/)

Gjon Mili 1949 © Time & Life Pictures/Getty images

Section 5:

Conclusion: Exposing the  
'Photo in the Machine'



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I am grateful to to Thomas Skrlj/[@tskrlj](#) and Vincent Duault for permission to use their images.

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