ANSEL ADAMS. *Courthouse, Bridgeport, California.* 1933. Gelatin-silver print. Courtesy of the photographer.

10 · STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

At the beginning of the twentieth century, progressive artists were groping for a new aesthetic based upon the unique properties and characteristics of their chosen medium. "Form follows function" became their slogan. Architects were designing skyscrapers that expressed the nature of the steel skeleton rather than imitating in design and ornamentation classical masonry structures. Sculptors were now respecting the texture of chiseled marble for its own sake; no longer were they working it over to simulate the soft smoothness of flesh or the very weave of textiles. Progressive painters found photography a liberation. They now felt free of the need to produce representational pictures: Cubism and abstract art were born.

This functional aesthetic also influenced photography. Critics began to praise "photographs that look like photographs," those devoid of the manipulation so prevalent in the work of pictorialists who strove to force photography to emulate the surface textures of pictures made by other media. Articles began to appear in the photographic press in praise of "pure photography." Art critic Sadakichi Hartmann, in an otherwise highly laudatory review of the Photo-Secession exhibition at the Carnegie Institute in 1904, condemned gum printing, the glycerine process, and handwork on negatives and prints. He called upon pictorialists "to work straight:"

"And what do I call straight photography," they may ask, "can you define it?" Well, that's easy enough. Rely on your camera, on your eye, on your good taste and your knowledge of composition, consider every fluctuation of color, light and shade, study lines and values and space division, patiently wait until the scene or object of your pictured vision reveals itself in its supremest moment of beauty, in short, compose the picture which you intend to take so well that the negative will be absolutely perfect and in need of no or but slight manipulation. I do not object to retouching, dodging or accentuation as long as they do not interfere with the natural qualities of photographic technique. Brush marks and lines, on the other hand, are not natural to photography, and I object and always will object to the use of the brush, to finger daubs, to scrawling, scratching and scribbling on the plate, and to the gum and glycerine process, if they are used for nothing else but to produce blurred effects.

Do not mistake my words. I do not want the photographic worker to cling to prescribed methods and academic standards. I do not want him to be less artistic than he is to-day, on the contrary I want him to be *more artistic*, but only in legitimate ways. . . . I want pictorial photography to be recognized as a fine art. It is an ideal that I cherish, . . . and I have fought for it for years, but I am equally convinced that it can only be accomplished by straight photography.[1]

Straight photography, of course, has a tradition as old as the medium. The daguerreotype image was so fragile that retouching was impractical and, while the densities of calotype negatives were frequently reinforced by applying opaque pigments to the back of the paper, the camera image was seldom radically altered. Retouching portraits became common practice in the collodion era, but for purposes more cosmetic than aesthetic: to please the customer by removing facial blemishes and softening the marks of time. What was new in the opening years of the twentieth century was the acceptance of the straight photograph as a "legitimate" art medium. In a later article Hartmann noted that

The composition of the Old Masters, used for centuries, has passed through its first decadence and by constant application has degraded into conventionalism. It grew more and more stereotyped, until impressionist composition—which explores obscure corners of modern life, which delights in strangeness of observation and novel view points (strongly influenced by Japanese art and snapshot photography)—gave it a new stimulant.

In photography, pictorial expression has become infinitely vast and varied, popular, vulgar, common and yet unforeseen; it is crowded with lawlessness, imperfection and failure, but at the same time offers a singular richness in startling individual observation and sentiments of many kinds. . . . The painter composes by an effort of imagination. The photographer interprets by spontaneity of judgment. He practices *composition by the eye*.[2]

Although Alfred Stieglitz championed many photographers who manipulated negative and prints, and experimented with gum printing and the glycerine process, in his mature years he preferred to stick closely to the basic properties of camera, lens, and emulsion. Charles H. Caffin said in 1901 that Stieglitz was

by conviction and instinct an exponent of the "straight photograph," working chiefly in the open air, with rapid

exposures, leaving his models to pose themselves, and relying for results upon means strictly photographic. He is to be counted among the Impressionists; fully conceiving his picture before he attempts to take it, seeking for effects of vivid actuality and reducing the final record to its simplest form of expression.[3]

In 1907 Stieglitz photographed *The Steerage*, a picture that in later life he considered his finest. He recollected that while he was promenading the first-class deck of the luxury liner *Kaiser Wilhelm II* on an eastbound voyage to Europe, he saw

A round straw hat, the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right, the white drawbridge with its railings made of circular chains—white suspenders crossing on the back of a man in the steerage below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape. . . . I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life.[4]

Hurriedly he rushed to his cabin for his Graflex camera, hoping that the figures would not move in the meantime. He returned to find all as he had left it and quickly released the shutter. The picture was the result of instant recognition of subject and form—"spontaneity of judgment" and "composition by the eye," as his friend Hartmann put it. No longer, as in his *Winter on Fifth Avenue,* did he find an environment and patiently wait until "everything was in balance." Now he instantly, without hesitation or even conscious thought, put a frame around the subject. Furthermore, he printed the full negative, without cropping.

Stieglitz was elated that Pablo Picasso liked *The Steerage*. The father of Cubism was at that time painting his *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the canvas that was to mark a turning point in the style of the century.

It was also at this time that Stieglitz, at the instigation of Steichen and with his enthusiastic help, began to champion the most progressive painting and sculpture, as well as photography. The original announcement of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York, proclaimed that future exhibitions were to be arranged, not only of photographs, but also of "such other art productions as the Council will from time to time secure." Stieglitz began in 1907 with an exhibition of drawings by Pamela Coleman Smith, in a style reminiscent of the late nineteenth-century German Romantic painters he so appreciated.

The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession consisted of only three rooms. The largest was 15 by 17 feet, the second was 15 feet square, and the third was only 15 by 8 feet. Yet in this confined space Stieglitz, with the enthusiastic aid of Steichen, introduced the most avant-garde painting and sculpture that America had seen: drawings by Auguste Rodin, watercolors and lithographs

by Paul Cézanne, drawings and sculpture by Henri Matisse and Constantin Brancusi, Cubist paintings by Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Francis Picabia. Soon paintings by Americans were shown as well as those of European origin, including work by John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Max Weber, Arthur Dove, and later, Georgia O'Keeffe. Photographers were bewildered, often angry, that the Photo-Secession should place such emphasis on nonphotographic works of art. *Camera Work* explained editorially that "291," as the Little Galleries came to be familiarly called, was " a laboratory, an experimental station, and must not be looked upon as an Art Gallery, in the ordinary sense of that term."[5]

When the Association of American Painters and Sculptors decided to hold a great international exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture in the Armory of the 69th Regiment in New York in 1913, the organizing committee consulted Stieglitz. He did not actively participate, but wrote a challenging preview article in the Sunday New York *American* titled "The First Great Clinic to Revitalize Art,"[6] exhorting the public to see the show. And he put on the walls of "291" the first one-man exhibition of his own photographs in fourteen years. To him this was a demonstration of what photography is and painting is not; and the "Armory Show" was a demonstration of what painting is and photography is not.

Stieglitz's exhibition included recent work done in New York: the railroad yards, the skyscrapers, the harbor, with buildings rising sheer from the waterfront, ferry boats, ocean liners. He was now making many portraits, which formed a pictorial record of the artists and friends who participated in the activities of "291." The painter Konrad Cramer has described sitting for him in 1912:

His equipment was extremely simple, almost primitive. He used an 8 x 10 view camera, its sagging bellows held up by pieces of string and adhesive tape. The lens was a Steinheil, no shutter. The portraits were made in the smaller of the two rooms at "291" beneath a small skylight. He used Hammer plates with about three-second exposures.
During the exposure, Stieglitz manipulated a large white reflector to balance the overhead light. He made about nine such exposures and we then retired to the washroom which doubled as a darkroom. The plates were developed singly in a tray. From the two best negatives he made four platinum contact prints, exposing the frame on the fire escape. He would tend his prints with more care than a cook does her biscuits. The finished print finally received a coat of wax for added gloss and brilliance.[7]

Note that Stieglitz waxed the print "for added gloss and brilliance." A glossy surface had been considered "inartistic" only a few years earlier. So too were tintypes—yet in 1913 Stieglitz could write, "A smudge in 'gum' has
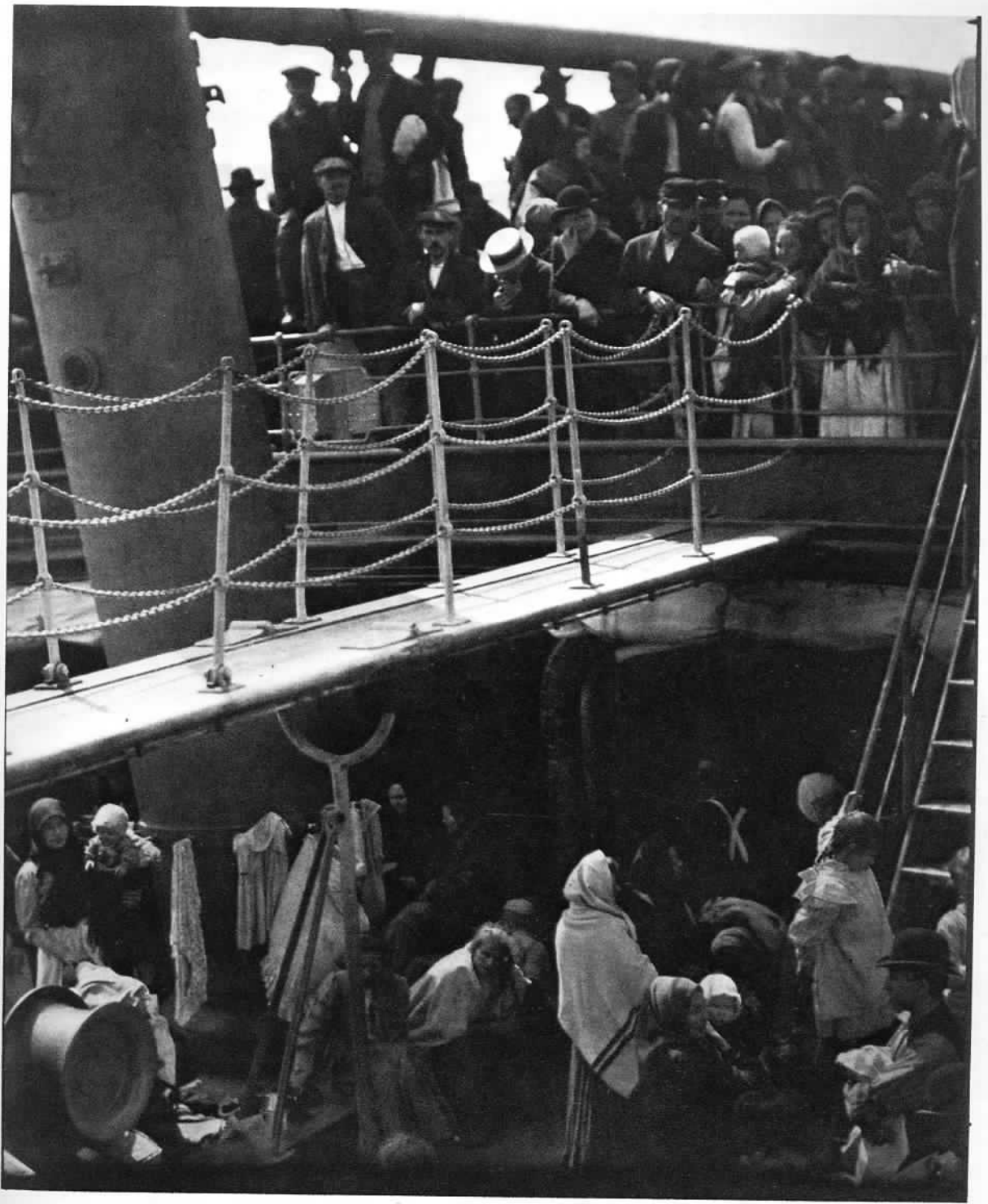
ALFRED STIEGLITZ. *The Steerage*. 1907. Photogravure in *291*, no. 7-8 (1915). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

ALFRED STIEGLITZ. *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe.* 1922. Palladium print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

less value from an aesthetic point of view than an ordinary tintype."[8]

In 1917 the Photo-Secession and "291" came to an end, when the building was torn down. Many of the members had already drifted away. Steichen joined the United States Army. Clarence H. White opened a highly influential School of Photography, and with Gertrude Käsebier and Alvin Langdon Coburn founded in 1916 a new organization, The Pictorial Photographers of America.

During the immediate postwar years Stieglitz brought his photography to a new intensity.[9] In 1921 he arranged an exhibition of both old and new work at the Anderson Galleries in New York. Every one of the photographs was startlingly direct, and the effect upon the public was electric. John A. Tennant, editor and publisher of *The Photo-Miniature*, reviewed the exhibition:

Never was there such a hubbub about a one-man show. What sort of photographs were these prints, which caused so much commotion? Just plain, straightforward photographs. But such photographs! Different from the photographs usually seen at the exhibitions? Yes. How different? There's the rub. If you could see them for yourself, you would at once appreciate their difference. One might venture the comparison that in the average exhibition print we have beauty, design, or tonal scheme deliberately set forth, with the subject as motive or material merely, the subject as the photographer saw it or felt it, an interpretation, a phase; whereas, in the Stieglitz prints, you have the subject itself in its own substance or personality, as revealed by the natural play of light and shade about it, without disguise or attempt at interpretation, simply set forth with perfect technique—and so on, multiplying words. There were portraits, some of them of men whom I knew fairly well. Sometimes it was a single print, at other times several prints side by side, giving different aspects of the subject but grouped as "one Portrait." Well, they were just portraits of those men, compellingly intimate, betrayals (if I may so use the word) of personality, satisfying in likeness, convincing in characterization, instinct with the illusion of life. They gave one the impression of being in the presence of the men whom they portrayed. They offered no hint of the photographer or his mannerisms, showed no effort at interpretation or artificiality of effect; there were no tricks of lens or lighting. I cannot describe them better or more completely than as plain straightforward photographs. . . . They made me want to forget all the photographs I had seen before, and I have been impatient in the face of all photographs I have seen since, so perfect were these prints in their technique, so satisfying in those subtler qualities which constitute what we commonly call "works of art."[10]

In the catalog Stieglitz wrote that the exhibition was "the sharp focusing of an idea. . . . My teachers have been life—work—continuous experiment. . . . Every print I make, even from one negative, is a new experience, a new problem. . . . Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession."

ALFRED STIEGLITZ. *Equivalent.* 1927. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Those who knew Stieglitz knew the force of his personality, and they attributed his success in portraiture to a kind of hypnotic power over his sitters. To show that this was not so, Stieglitz chose subject matter over which he could not possibly have any control: the sky and clouds.

I wanted to photograph clouds to find out what I had learned in forty years about photography. Through clouds to put down my philosophy of life—to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter—nor to special privileges, clouds were there for everyone—no tax on them yet—free.[11]

He produced hundreds of these pictures of sun and clouds, mostly made with a 4 x 5-inch Graflex camera. He processed them by means within the reach of any amateur, printing by contact on gelatin-silver paper. He called these pictures "equivalents," and he put them in series with other pictures of expressive, often evocative, content and handling—a meadow glistening with raindrops, a woman's hands pressed palm to palm between her knees. He found them to be equivalents to his thoughts, to his hopes and aspirations, to his despairs and fears. Viewed objectively, many of these rich prints with deep blacks and shimmering grays and incandescent whites delight us for their sheer beauty of form. They are photographic abstractions, for in them form is abstracted from its illustrative significance. Yet paradoxically the

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Left: ALFRED STIEG-LITZ. *New York—Night.* 1931. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
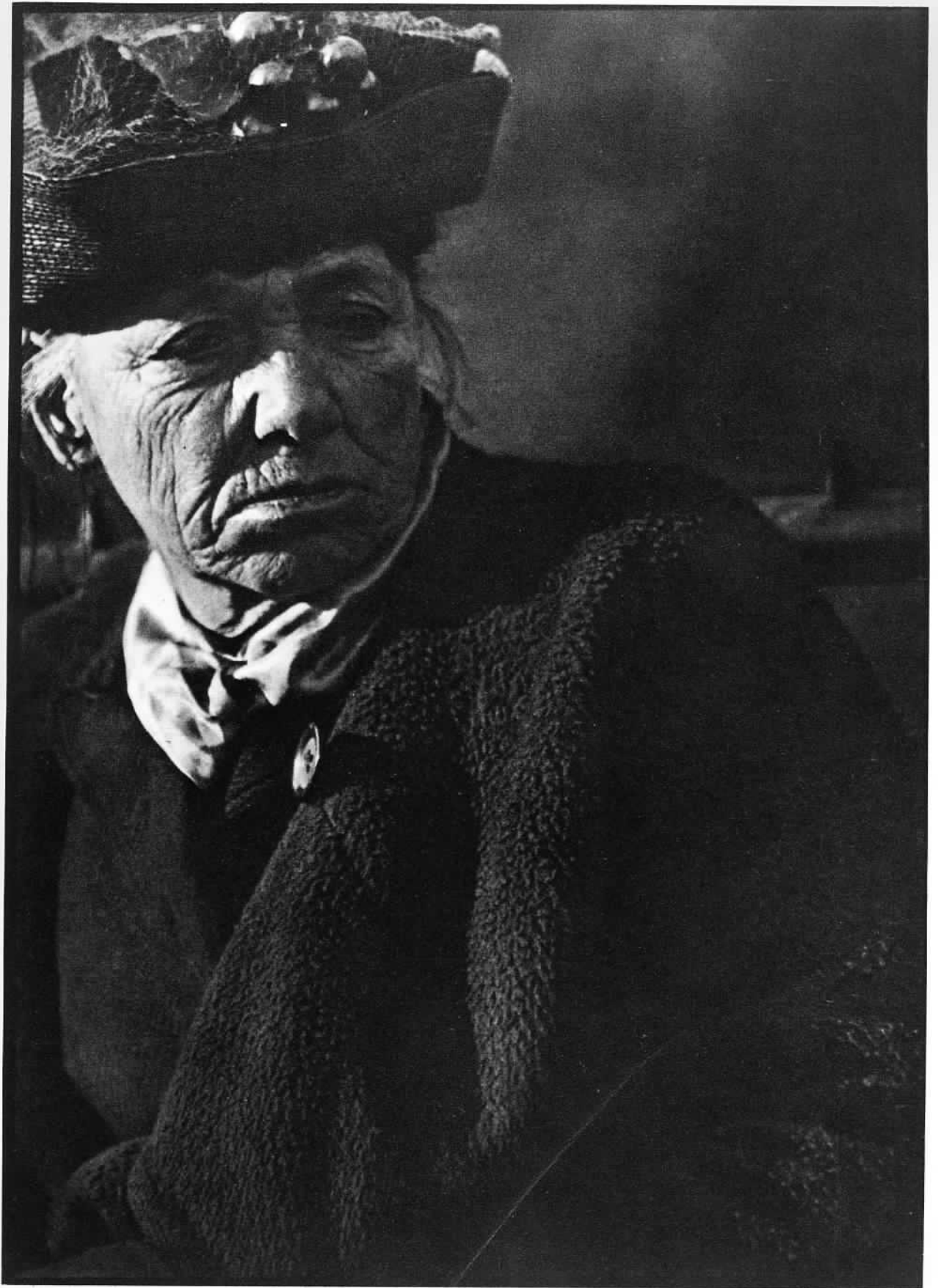
Right: PAUL STRAND. *Portrait—Washington Square, New York.* 1916. Photogravure in *Camera Work*, no. 49-50 (1917). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

spectator is not for an instant left unaware of what has been photographed. With the shock of recognition one realizes almost at once that the form that delights the eye is significant, and one marvels that such beauty can be discovered in what is commonplace. For this is the power of the camera: it can seize upon the familiar and endow it with new meanings, with special significance, with the imprint of a personality.

Among the last photographs Stieglitz made (poor health forced him to abandon using the camera around 1937) were pictures of New York taken from high windows, and the meadows and trees around the old family house at Lake George, where he spent his summers. He continued all the while to champion modern art: at An

American Place, his New York gallery, he continued the series of painting exhibitions, along with occasional photographic shows, up until his death in 1946. Stieglitz was always there, and from him many a young person found counsel and direction.

In the last two issues of *Camera Work*, dated 1916 and 1917, Stieglitz reproduced photographs by a newcomer, Paul Strand. They included a forceful series of portraits taken unawares in the streets with a Graflex camera, and pictures in which form and design were emphasized—a semiabstraction of bowls, a view looking down from a viaduct, an architectural scene dominated by the vertical accents of a white picket fence. As Stieglitz wrote, the work was "brutally direct, pure and devoid of trickery." It
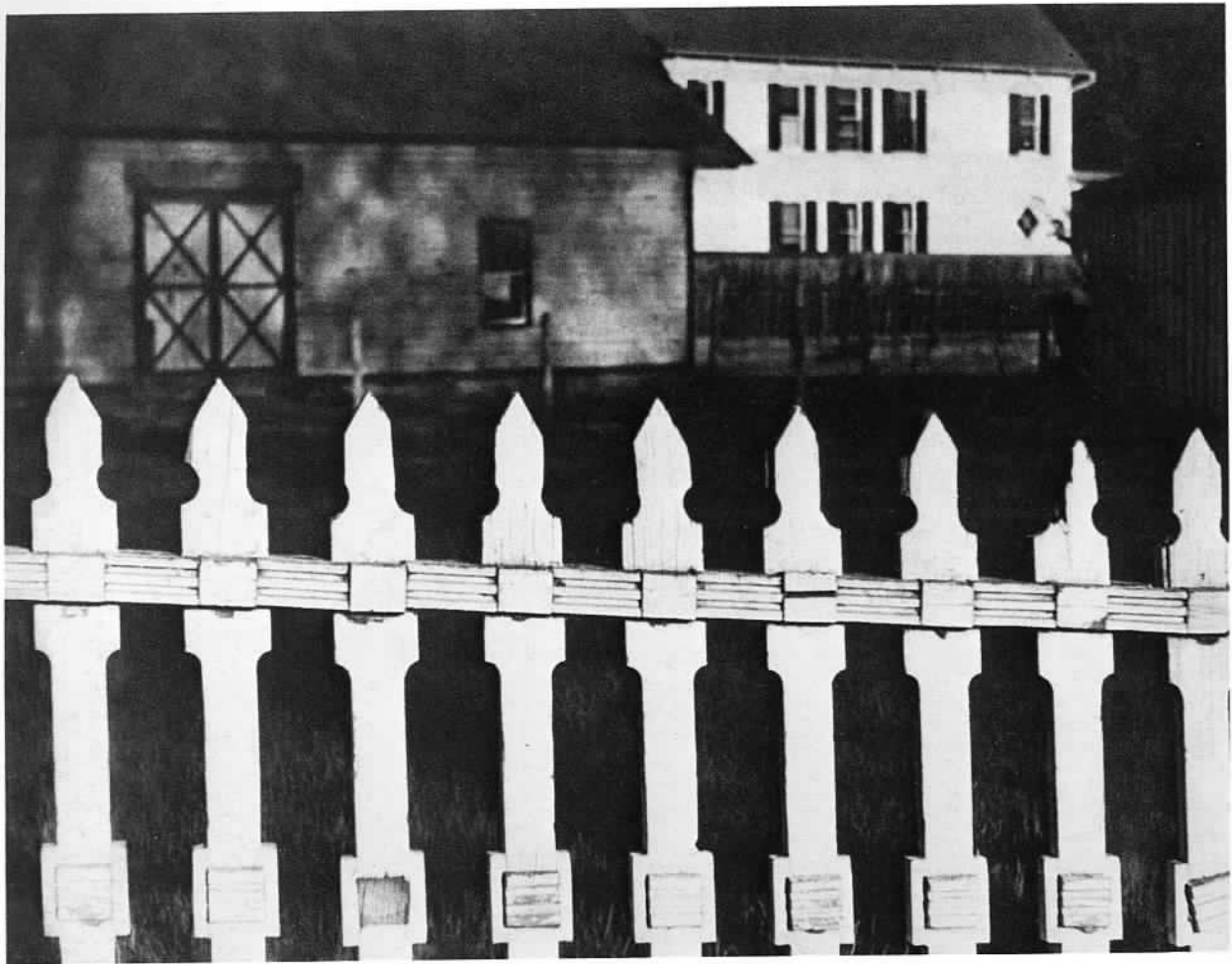
PAUL STRAND. *The White Fence, Port Kent, New York.* 1916. Photogravure in *Camera Work,* no. 49-50 (1917). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

was in striking contrast to much of the work produced by members of the Photo-Secession. It was prophetic of the reorientation in photographic aesthetics and of the return to the traditions of straight photography, which was to gain strength in the years after the war. Strand wrote in 1917:

The photographer's problem is to see clearly the limitations and at the same time the potential qualities of his medium, for it is precisely here that honesty no less than intensity of vision is the prequisite of a living expression. This means a real respect for the thing in front of him expressed in terms of chiaroscuro . . . through a range of almost infinite tonal values which lie beyond the skill of human hand. The fullest realization of this is accomplished without tricks of process or manipulation through the use of straight photographic methods.[12]

Strand was among the first to discover the photographic beauty of precision machines. He made a series of extreme close-ups of his Akeley motion picture camera (he was earning his living making films) and of power lathes. On a trip to Maine he discovered the beauty of large-scale details of driftwood, cobwebs, plants, and other natural objects. In 1923, lecturing to the students of the Clarence H. White School of Photography, he made a strong plea for the revival of craftsmanship and told them of the need to free photography from the domination of painting, and to recognize that the camera had its own aesthetic.
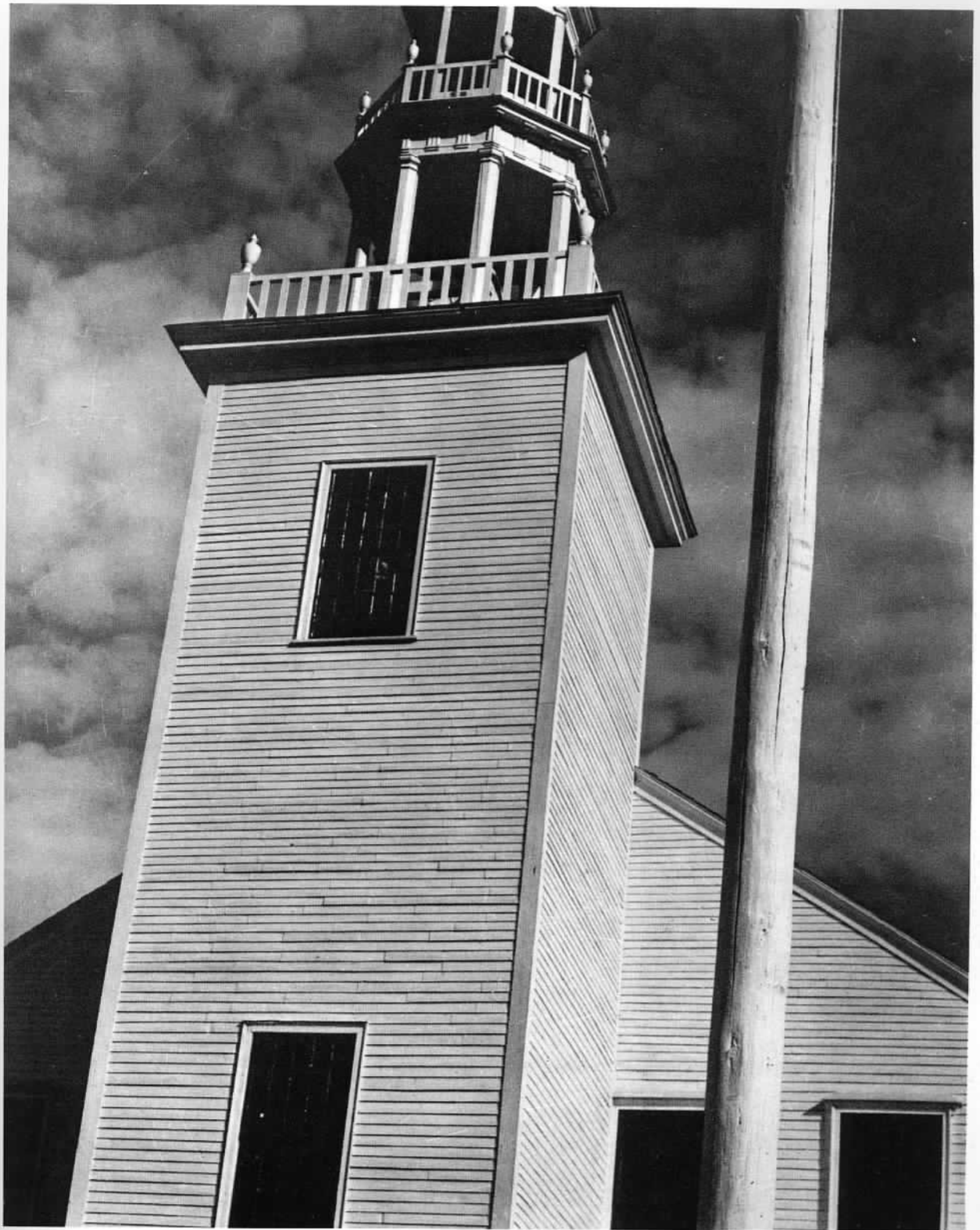
Strand's negatives were seen with intensity and sureness; his work has a quality rarely found in photography, a quality that can only be described as lyrical. He con-
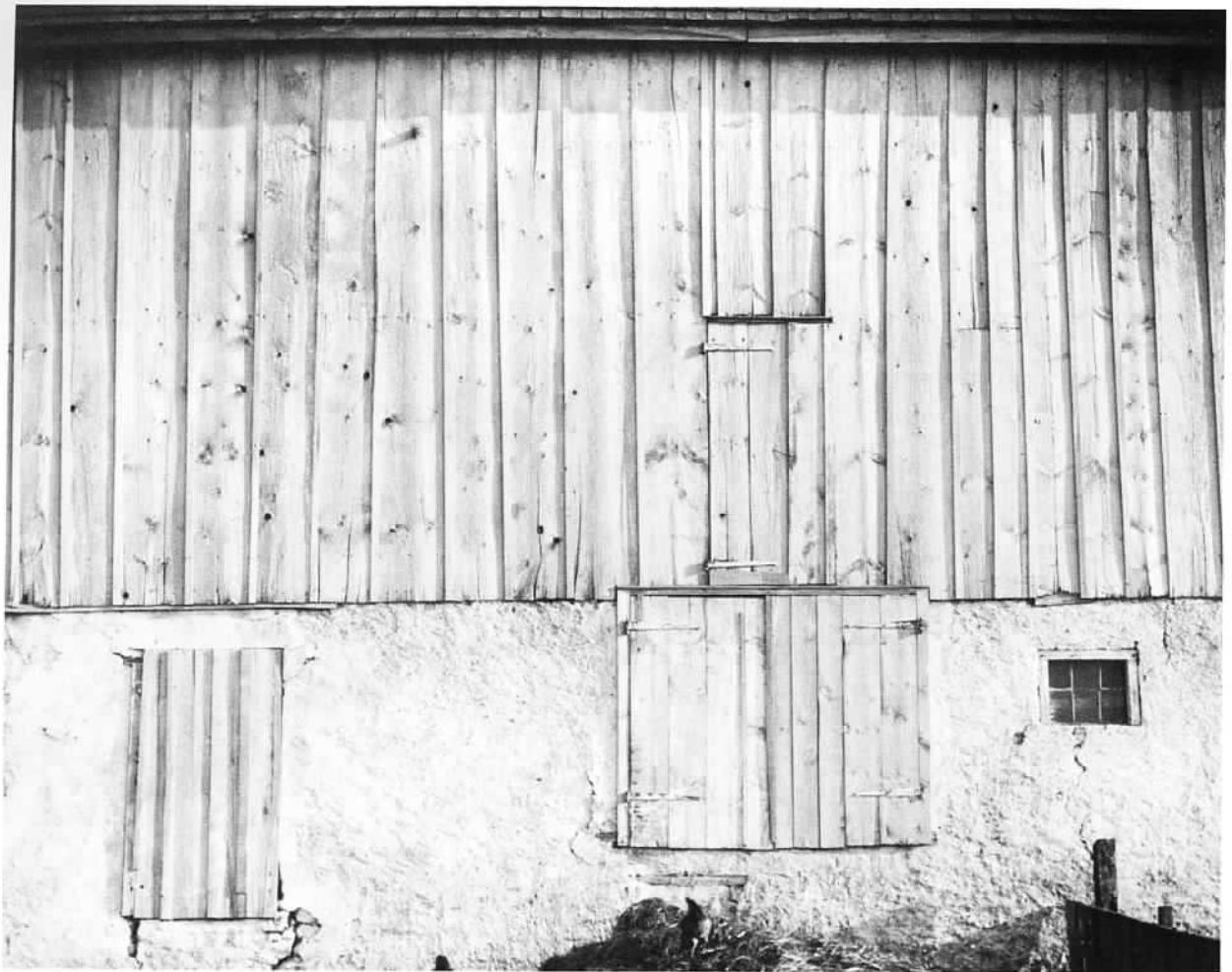
PAUL STRAND. *Rock, Porte Lorne, Nova Scotia.* 1919. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
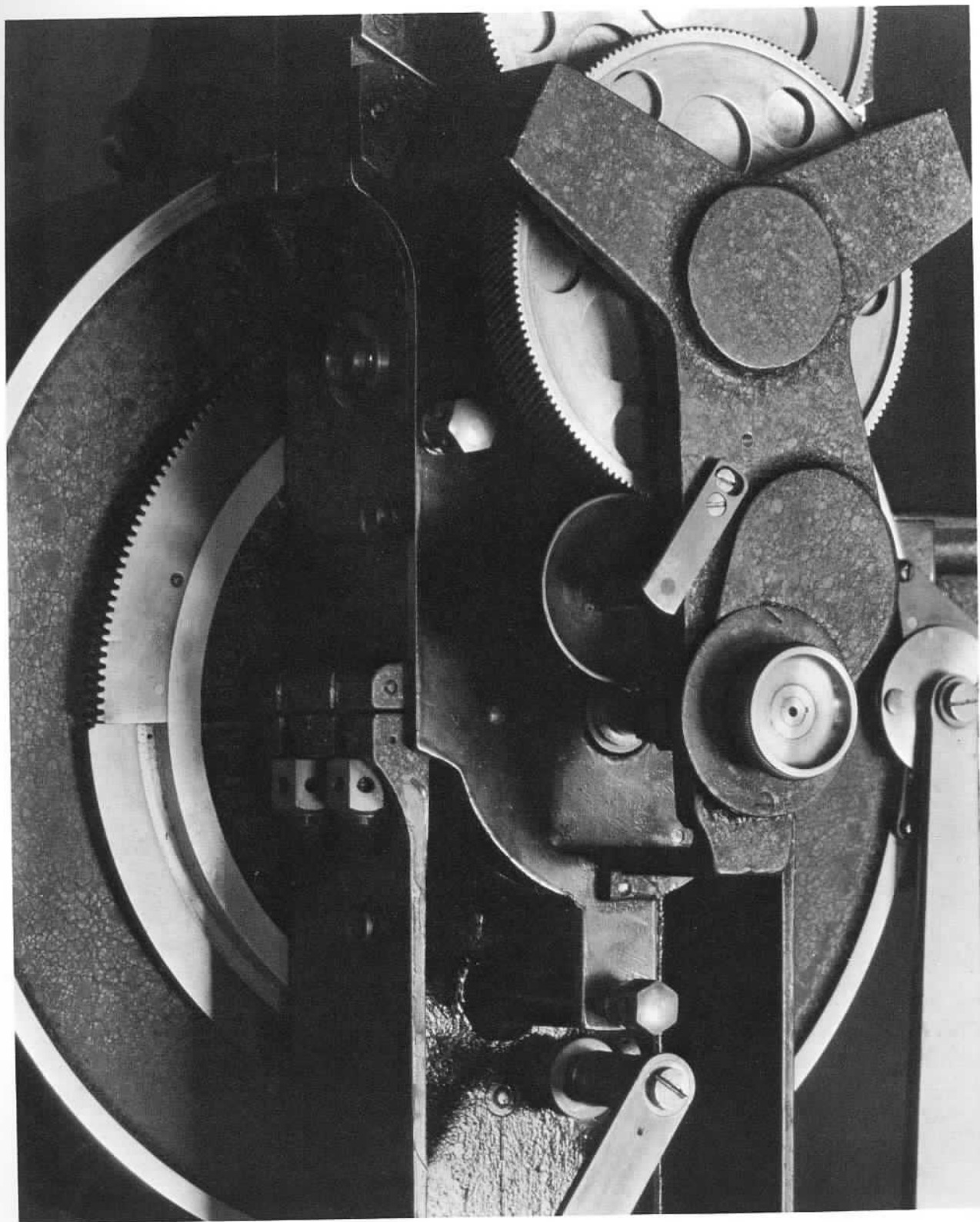
PAUL STRAND. *Double Akeley, New York.* 1922. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

PAUL STRAND. *Town Hall, Vermont.* 1946. Gelatin-silver print. The Paul Strand Foundation, Millerton, N.Y.

CHARLES SHEELER. *Bucks County Barn*. 1916. Gelatin-silver print. Collection Beaumont Newhall, Santa Fe.

sistently photographed people and the landscape, seeking always the feeling of place, the land, and the inhabitants. He did a series of books beginning with *Time in New England* (1950), edited by Nancy Newhall, who selected New England writings from the seventeenth century to the present to accompany the photographs.[13] Words and pictures reinforce and illuminate one another with synergistic effect. For *La France de profil* (1952) Strand found a collaborator in Claude Roy, who used a somewhat similar editing technique.[14] The Italian scenarist and film-maker Cesare Zavattini wrote the text for *Un Paese* (1955) to accompany photographs taken in his native village of Luzzara.[15] Strand's later books explore a wide range of countries, from the Hebrides to Egypt and Ghana. He died in the village of Orgeval, France, in 1976.

In 1914 Charles Sheeler began to discover with his camera the beauty of indigenous American architecture, photographing with honest directness the texture of white painted and weathered wood, and the beautifully proportioned rectangular forms of Pennsylvania barns. First and foremost a painter, Sheeler had a keen appreciation of the photograph as a distinct medium. He told his biographer, Constance Rourke,

I have come to value photography more and more for those things which it alone can accomplish, rather than to discredit it for the things which can only be achieved through another medium. In painting I have had a continued interest in natural forms and have sought the best use of them for the enhancement of design. In photography I have strived to enhance my technical equipment for the best statement of the immediate facts.[16]

Charles Sheeler's contribution to photography has been his sensitive interpretation of the form and texture of man's work in precise, clean photographs of African Negro masks (1918), the industrial architecture of the Ford plant at River Rouge (1927), the Cathedral of Chartres, seen in a series of details (1929), and in the photographs of ancient sculpture that he did for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1942-45).

Edward Steichen, placed in charge of aerial photog-

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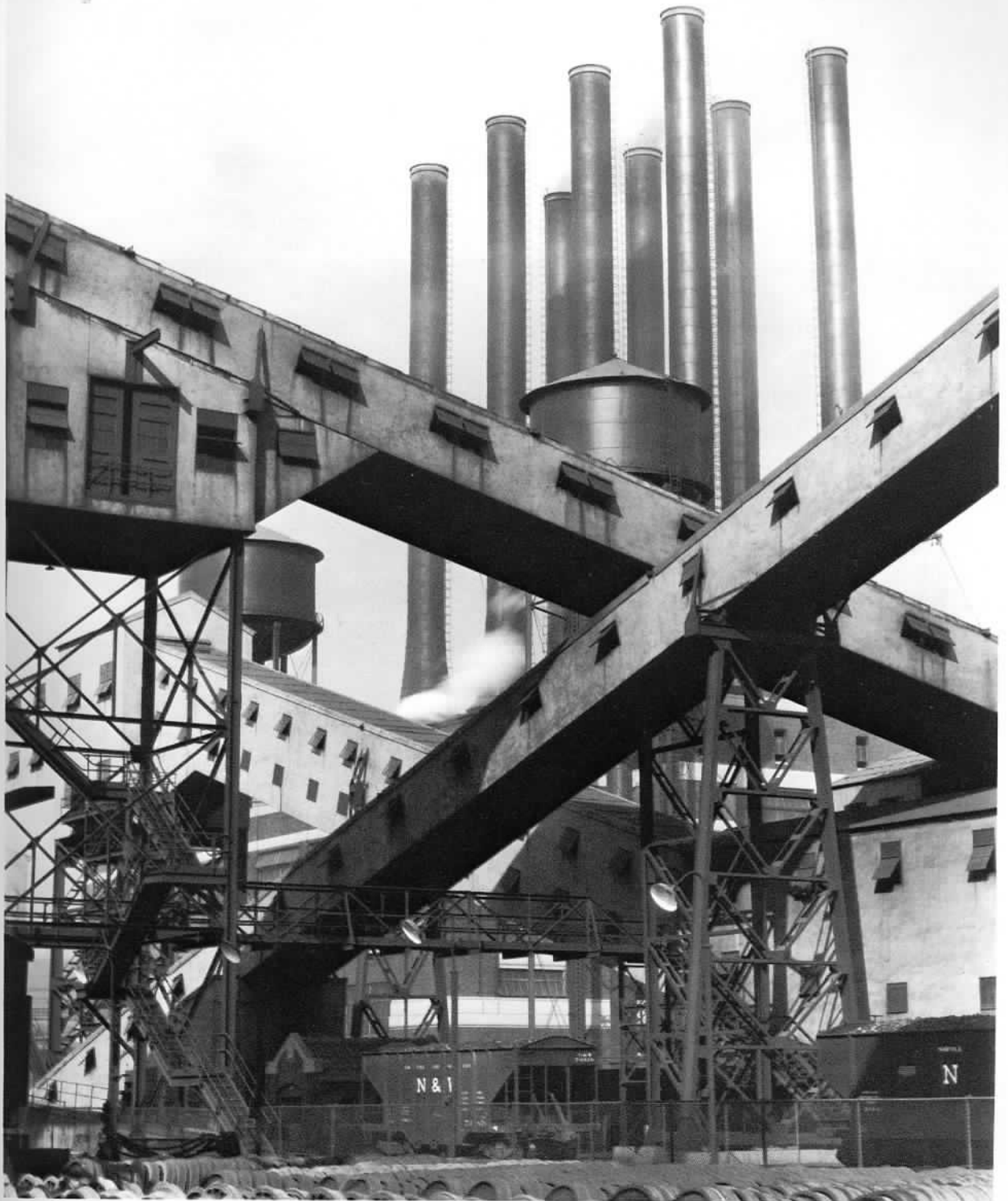
CHARLES SHEELER. *Ford Plant, Detroit.* 1927. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
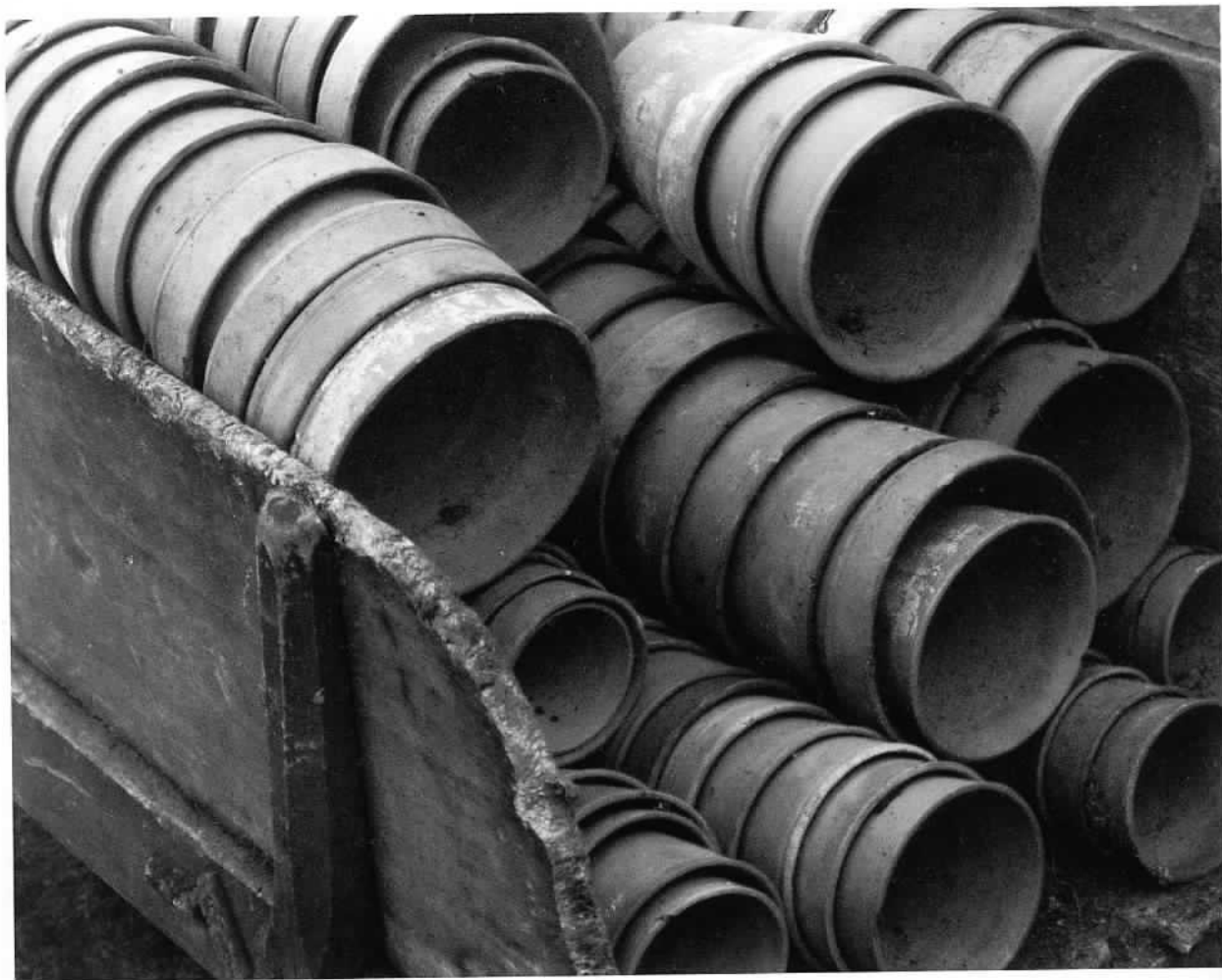
EDWARD STEICHEN. *Wheelbarrow with Flower Pots*. 1920. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EDWARD STEICHEN. *Backbone and Ribs of a Sunflower.* ca. 1920. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
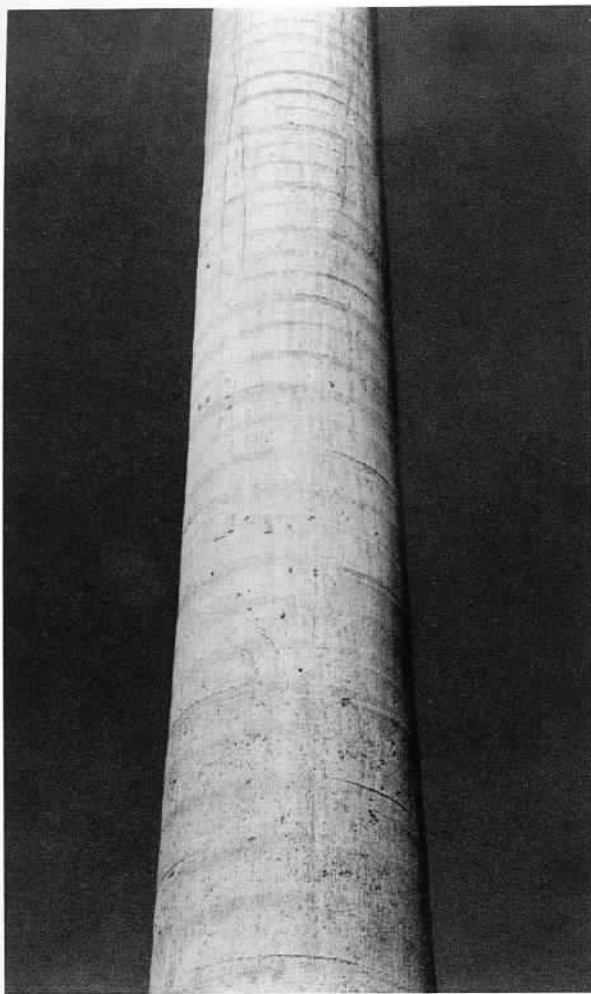
PAUL OUTERBRIDGE, JR. *Piano*. 1922. Platinum print. Courtesy of G. Ray Hawkins Gallery, Los Angeles.

RALPH STEINER. *American Rural Baroque.* 1930. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

WALKER EVANS. *Maine Pump.* 1933. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EDWARD WESTON. *Palma Cuernavaca II*. 1925. Platinum print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

"The weather having favored me at last with printing days, I had ready to show a print of the new palm. Why should a few yards of white tree trunk, exactly centered, cutting across an empty sky, cause such real response? And why did I spend my hours doing it? One question is simply answered—I had to!"
—Edward Weston, *The Daybooks*, December 1925.

Opposite top: EDWARD WESTON. *Clouds—Mexico*. 1926. Platinum print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

Opposite bottom: EDWARD WESTON. *Nude*. 1925. Platinum print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

raphy of the American Air Service during the second Battle of the Marne, was faced with the problem of securing photographs with a maximum of detail, definition, and brilliance. He found such beauty in these straight photographs that in 1920 he repudiated his gum prints, abandoned painting, and set out to master pure photographic processes almost as if he were a beginner, setting himself such extreme problems as the rendition of the brilliant contrasts of a white teacup on black velvet. Armed with this mastery of technique, and with his brilliant sense of design and ability to grasp in an image the personality of a sitter, he began to raise magazine illustration to a creative level. (See Chapter 14.)

Younger photographers in New York, particularly Paul Outerbridge, Jr., Ralph Steiner, and Walker Evans, were quick to recognize in the early 1920s the new aesthetic of straight photography. Outerbridge's precise still-life studies and Steiner's photographs of the strident forms of skyscrapers and vernacular buildings won international recognition. Evans became preoccupied with the American scene: he photographed architecture, the folk art of signs and billboards, and people in the streets with a sensitivity that lifted the images above records. He is best known for later work with the Farm Security Administration and was instrumental in forming the documentary style of that government project. (See Chapter 13.)

In California, around 1920, Edward Weston, who had been honored by election to the London Salon of Photography (successor to The Linked Ring), began a critical reexamination of his work, which up to that time had been soft in focus, but always done with a sense of light and form. He experimented with semiabstractions: *R.S. —A Portrait* is a bold, unconventional placing of the upper half of the sitter's head at the very bottom of a composition of triangles and diagonals. A detail of a nude woman—circle of breast and diagonal of arm—was equally abstract. On a trip to New York in 1922 he met Alfred Stieglitz, who received him courteously, but without the affirmation he had hoped for. From 1923 to 1926 Weston lived in Mexico and became a friend of many of the artists of the Mexican Renaissance. It was for him a period of transition, of self-analysis and self-discipline, which he recorded with unusual frankness in his *Daybooks*.[17] He wrote that of the two directions he saw in his most recent work—abstraction and realism—the latter was the stronger and offered the greatest potential for creative expression, and commented:

The camera should be used for a recording of *life,* for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the *thing itself,* whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh . . . I shall let no chance pass to record interesting
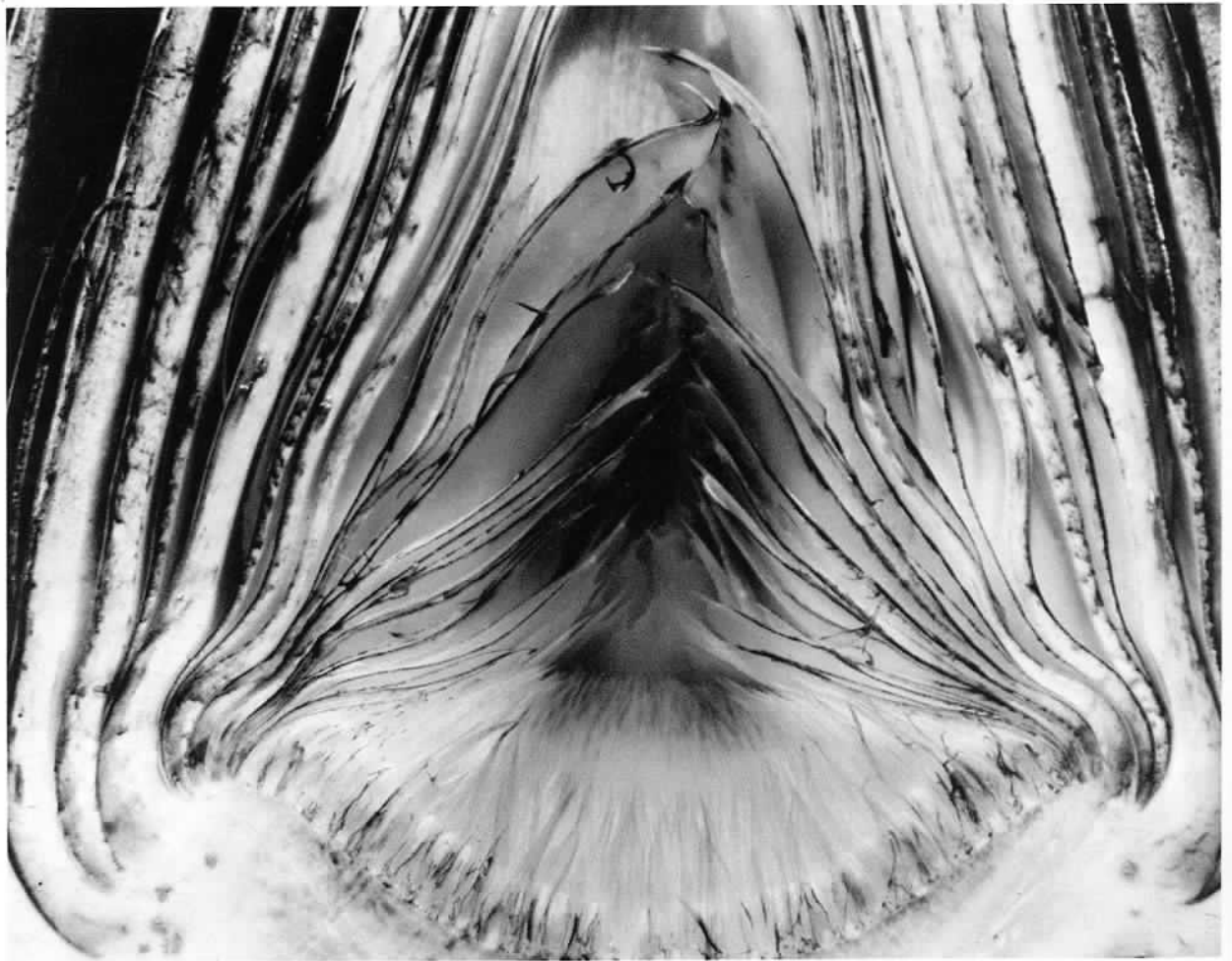
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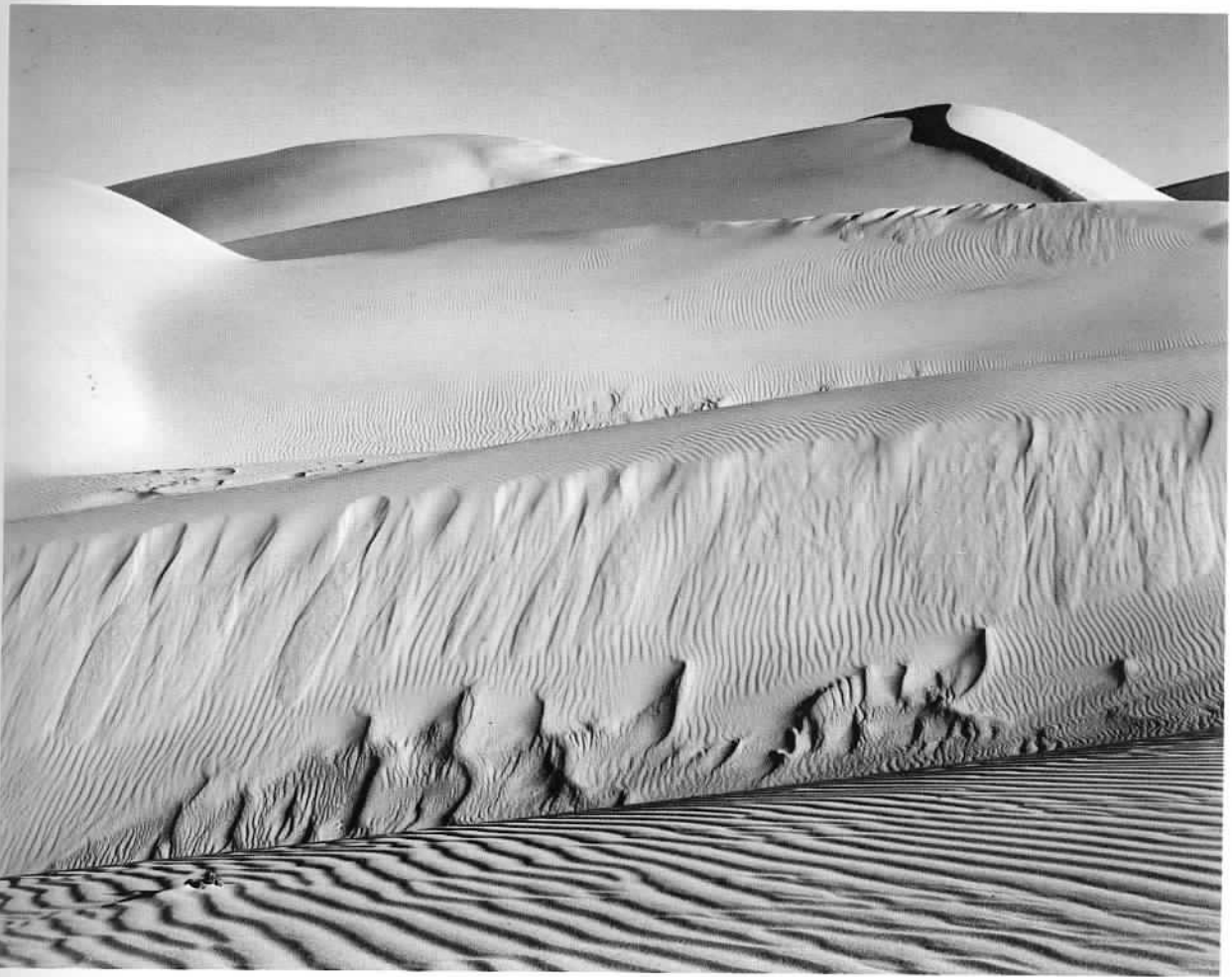meri-
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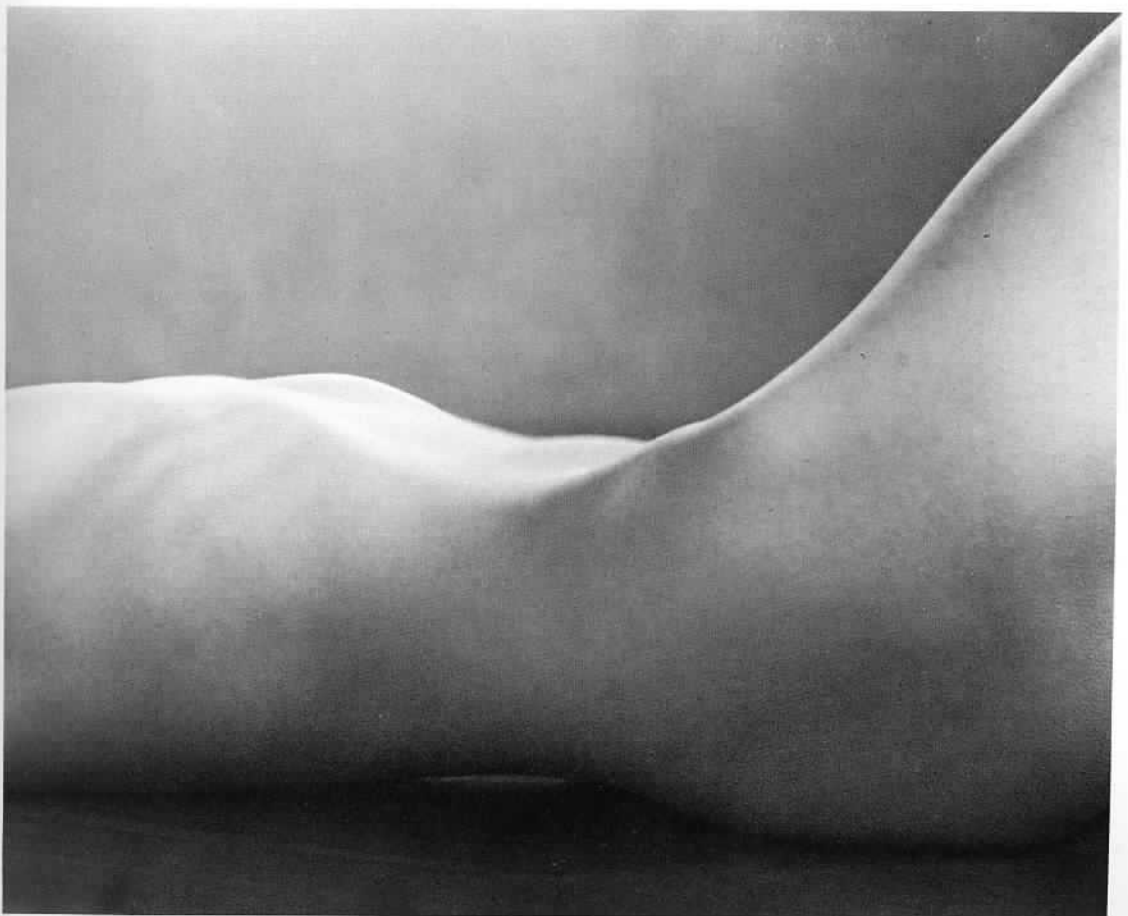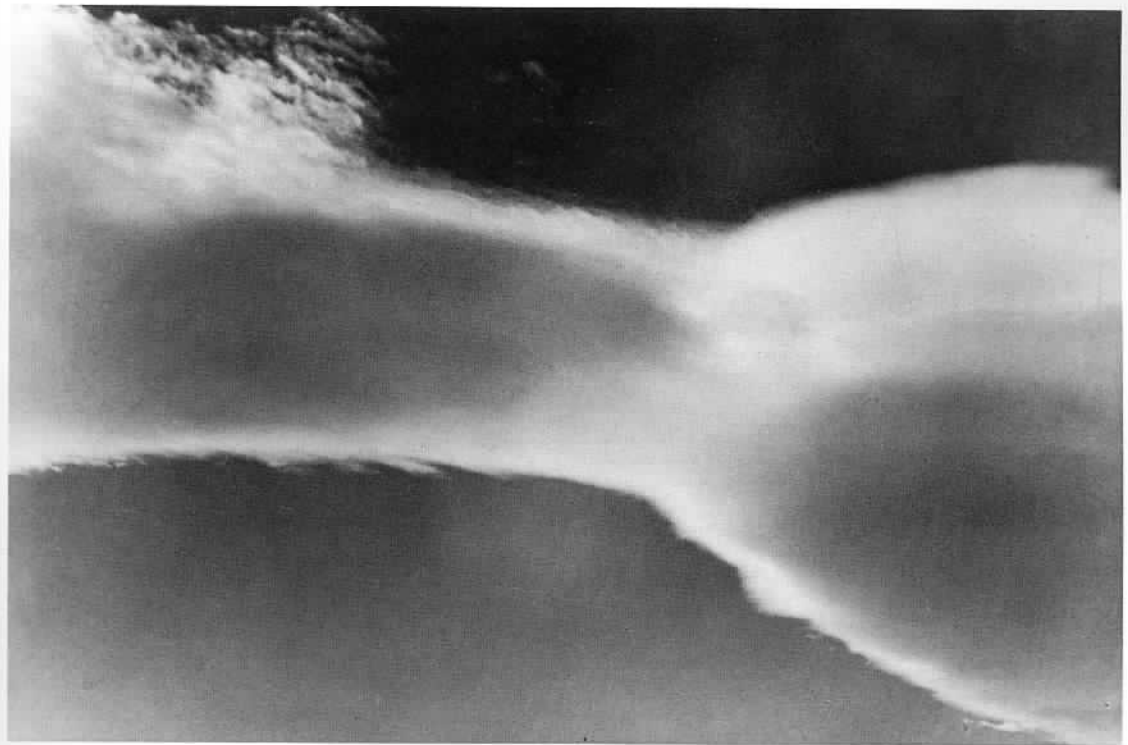
EDWARD WESTON. *Artichoke Halved.* 1930. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EDWARD WESTON. *White Dunes, Oceano, California.* 1936. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

EDWARD WESTON. *Point Lobos, California.* 1946. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

abstraction, but I feel definite in my belief that the approach to photography is through realism.[18]

His technique and aesthetic became one: "Unless I pull a technically fine negative, the emotional or intellectual value of the photograph is for me almost negated."[19] He simplified his working method, preferring contact prints to enlargements, gelatin-silver paper to the softer platinotype. He replaced his expensive soft-focus lens with an inexpensive, sharply cutting rapid rectilinear lens. "The shutter stops down to 256," he noted. "This should satisfy my craving for depth of focus."[20]

The most important part of Edward Weston's approach was his insistence that the photographer should previsualize the final result. As early as 1922 he wrote: "The real test of not only technical proficiency, but intelligent conception, is not in the use of some indifferent negative as a basis to work from, but in the ability to see one's finished print on the ground glass in all its desired qualities and values before exposure."[21]
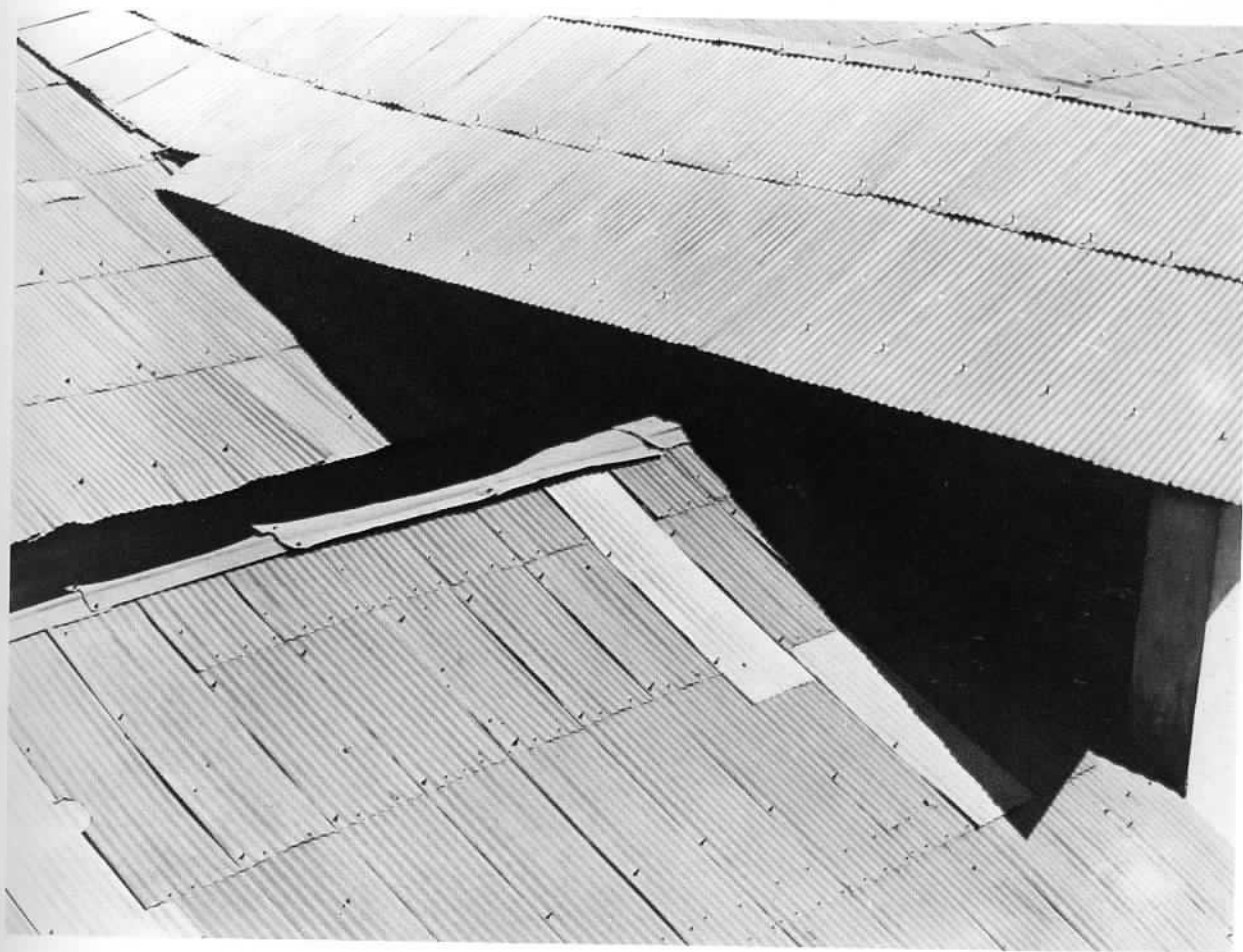
Weston developed this approach to the point of virtuosity. He demanded clarity of form, he wanted every area of his picture clear-cut, with the substances and textures of things appreciable to the point of illusion. The fact that the camera can see more than the unaided eye he long regarded as one of the great miracles of photography. In a Weston landscape, everything is sharp from the immediate foreground to the extreme distance:

looking at the same scene in nature our eyes take in one detail after another. Constantly roving, jumping from spot to spot, they scan the panorama and send to the brain a series of reports from which a composite image is mentally created. In Weston's photographs the details are so compressed and reduced that the scanning process requires far less muscular effort on the part of the beholder, who unconsciously feels a physiological release. In 1909 Willi Warstat, in his *Allgemeine Ästhetik der photographischen Kunst,* a book that is perhaps the earliest systematic examination of photographic aesthetics from the standpoint of modern psychological and physiological theories of vision, succinctly analyzed this aspect of the mechanics of seeing.[22] He found that the compression of all-over detail was something to be avoided by the photographer in his "battle with realism." Weston had no quarrel with realism. His vision led him to a straight, often brutally direct approach that made use of the phenomenon with powerful effects. It must be noted, however, that the rendering of detail alone was not his criterion; it was governed by his taste, imagination, and feeling for form.

In 1937 Edward Weston was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship—the first photographer to be so honored. His style expanded, the variety of subject matter increased, and a rich human quality pervaded his later work. His last photographs, intricately organized and of great force, were made in 1948 on his beloved Point Lobos on the California coast not far from his home in Carmel. Tragically, he was stricken with Parkinson's disease, and could no longer photograph. He died in Carmel, California, on New Year's Day, 1958.

Brett Weston began to photograph in 1925, when he was thirteen years old and living with his father in Mexico. Even his early photographs had an individual style, one marked by a strong appreciation of shadow forms and textures, as in his *Tin Roof* of 1925. It was Brett who discovered the richness of Point Lobos, the area that he and his father were to photograph so often. His more recent work is on a larger scale, with bolder compositions producing powerful abstraction, yet always with recognizable subjects.

In 1932 a number of younger photographers, greatly impressed by Edward Weston and his work, formed a society to which they gave the name "Group f/64."[23] They chose an optical term because they habitually set their lenses to that aperture to secure maximum image sharpness of both foreground and distance. The charter members—Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke, and Edward Weston—formulated an aesthetic

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BRETT WESTON. *Tin Roof.* 1925. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM. *Leaf Pattern,* ca. 1929. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
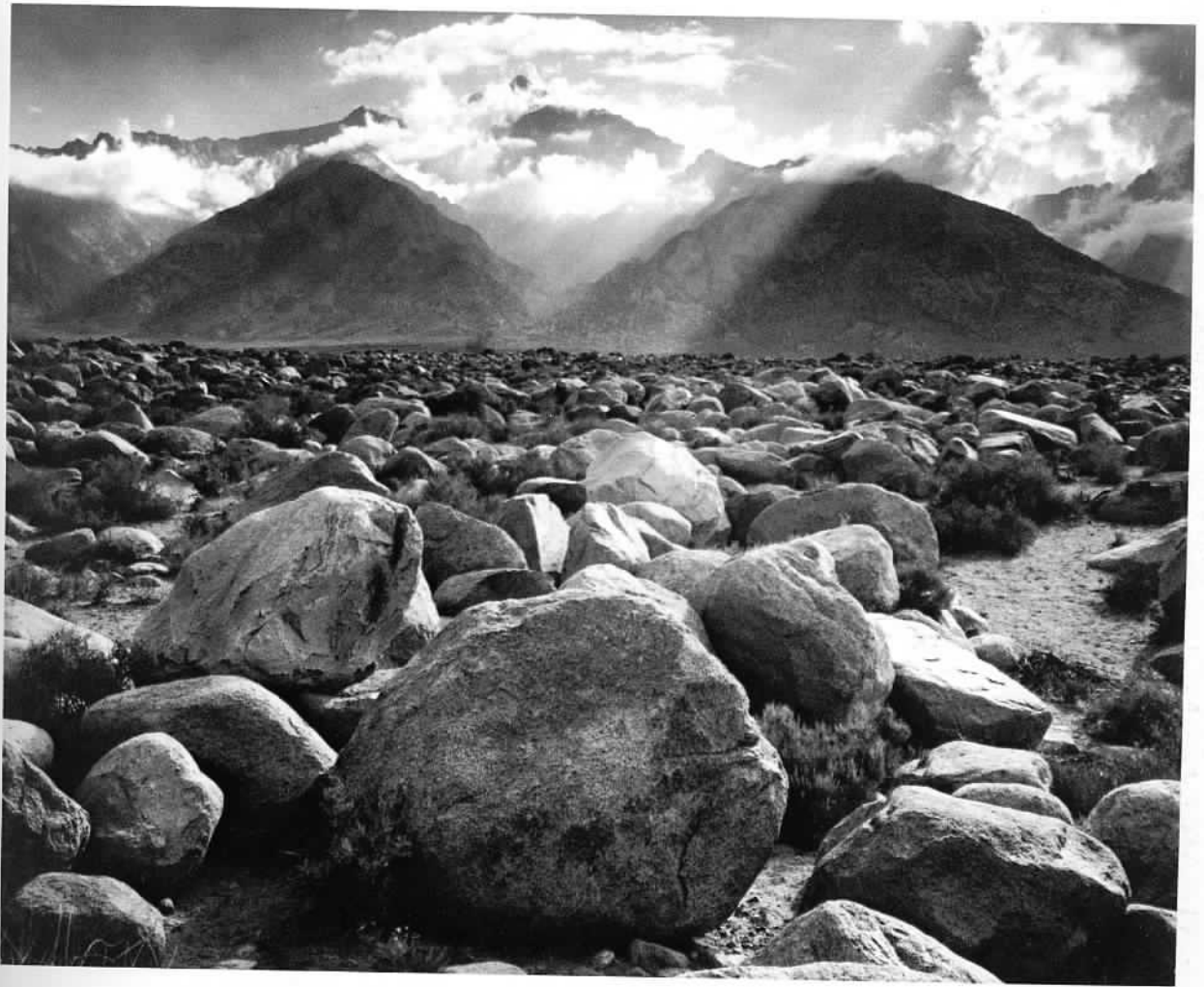
ANSEL ADAMS. *Mount Williamson—Clearing Storm*. 1945. Gelatin-silver print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

that in retrospect now appears dogmatic in its strict specifications: any photograph not sharply focused in every detail, not printed by contact on glossy black-and-white paper, not mounted on a white card, and betraying any handwork or avoidance of reality in choice of subject was "impure." It was a violent reaction to the weak, sentimental style then popular with pictorial photographers in California, as seen particularly in the anecdotal, highly sentimental, mildly erotic hand-colored prints of William Mortensen. The M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco presented the group's inaugural exhibition in 1932. For a few years the informal society was the most progressive in America. Even after they disbanded, their influence persisted; "f/64" came to be a convenient label for straight photography, and was applied to photographers who had nothing to do with the original group.

Ansel Adams, in his photography, his writing, and his teaching, has brilliantly demonstrated the capabilities of straight photography as a medium of expression.[24] Trained as a musician, he began to photograph as an avocation under the strong influence of pictorialism. In 1930 he met Paul Strand, whose negatives so impressed him that he realized the validity of the straight approach and began to devote all of his time to photography. His new work received international recognition in 1935 when the London Studio published his *Making a Photograph,* an instruction manual distinguished for its illustrations, which are such faithful reproductions that they have more than once been mistaken for actual photographic prints. When the book appeared it seemed as if the substance of weathered stone, glass, and flesh had never been so brilliantly rendered. His work was shown by Stieglitz at An American Place in 1936; it had a sensitivity and direct, honest integrity that were rare. Conservationist, mountaineer, lover of the wilderness, he specialized in the interpretation of the natural scene. His spectacular photographs have appeared in many books produced under his direct supervision. Like Strand, and in the tradition of Emerson, Stieglitz, and Coburn, he learned the complexities of photomechanical reproduction. He produces prints specifically for the platemaker's camera and checks proofs on the printing press itself, so that the results will be as close to his original concept as possible. *This Is the American Earth* (1960) is a magnificent poem by Nancy Newhall of the land and man's relation to it, with photographs by Adams and others.[25]

Adams uses all types of cameras and constantly experiments with new techniques. With his "zone system" he has worked out a highly ingenious and practical rationale for determining exposure and development, based upon sensitometric principles, which gives the photographer

precise control over his materials. Adams first teaches the photographer to master the characteristic of the photographic emulsion by determining—not by laboratory test, but with the photographer's own working equipment—the interrelation of the four principal variables:

sensitivity of the negative material
amount of exposure
subject luminances (i.e. brightness)
development

From this data he can obtain in his negative any one tone and will know exactly the tones that other subject luminances will produce. The infinite gradation of light and shade found in nature Adams divides into ten zones. Zone O is black, Zone IX is white. Between these extremes are eight tones of gray, Zone V being the "middle" tone—not by objective measurement, but by subjective judgment—and next to it, marked VI, the value that conveys to the photographer the feeling of the tone of average, well-lighted skin. Using a photoelectric exposure meter Adams measures the luminances of the various parts of the scene he is photographing. These measurements are correlated with exposure and development procedures, so that the photographer can visualize the entire gamut of values that will appear in the final print. The control is comparable to that which a musician has over his instrument. Guesswork is eliminated, and the photographer can concentrate upon aesthetic problems, secure in the knowledge that his results will not only be of technical excellence, but will embody his subjective interpretation of the scene. With this mastery of technique, coupled with his lifelong deep spiritual resonance with the wilderness areas of the earth, Adams has produced magnificent landscapes of the American West and Alaska. *Mount Williamson—Clearing Storm* is epic, primeval, and truly cosmogonic.

In Europe a somewhat similar respect for straight photography is found in the work of the German photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch. His book, *Die Welt ist schön* ("The World is Beautiful"), published in 1928, was hailed as the photographic counterpart of the *New Objectivity* (Neue Sachlichkeit) movement in painting.[26] The pictures were strong and direct: extreme close-ups of plants and animals, lonely city streets, bold forms of industrial buildings, details of machinery, and still-life studies of their products. The freshness of Renger-Patzsch's vision was impressive. Thomas Mann found his photographs "exact statements drawn from the whole—and that's the way it usually is with this man who is, in his way, impassioned. The detail, the objective, is removed from the world of appearances, isolated, sharpened, made meaningful, animated. What more, I would like to ask, has art or the artist done?"[27] Renger-Patzsch
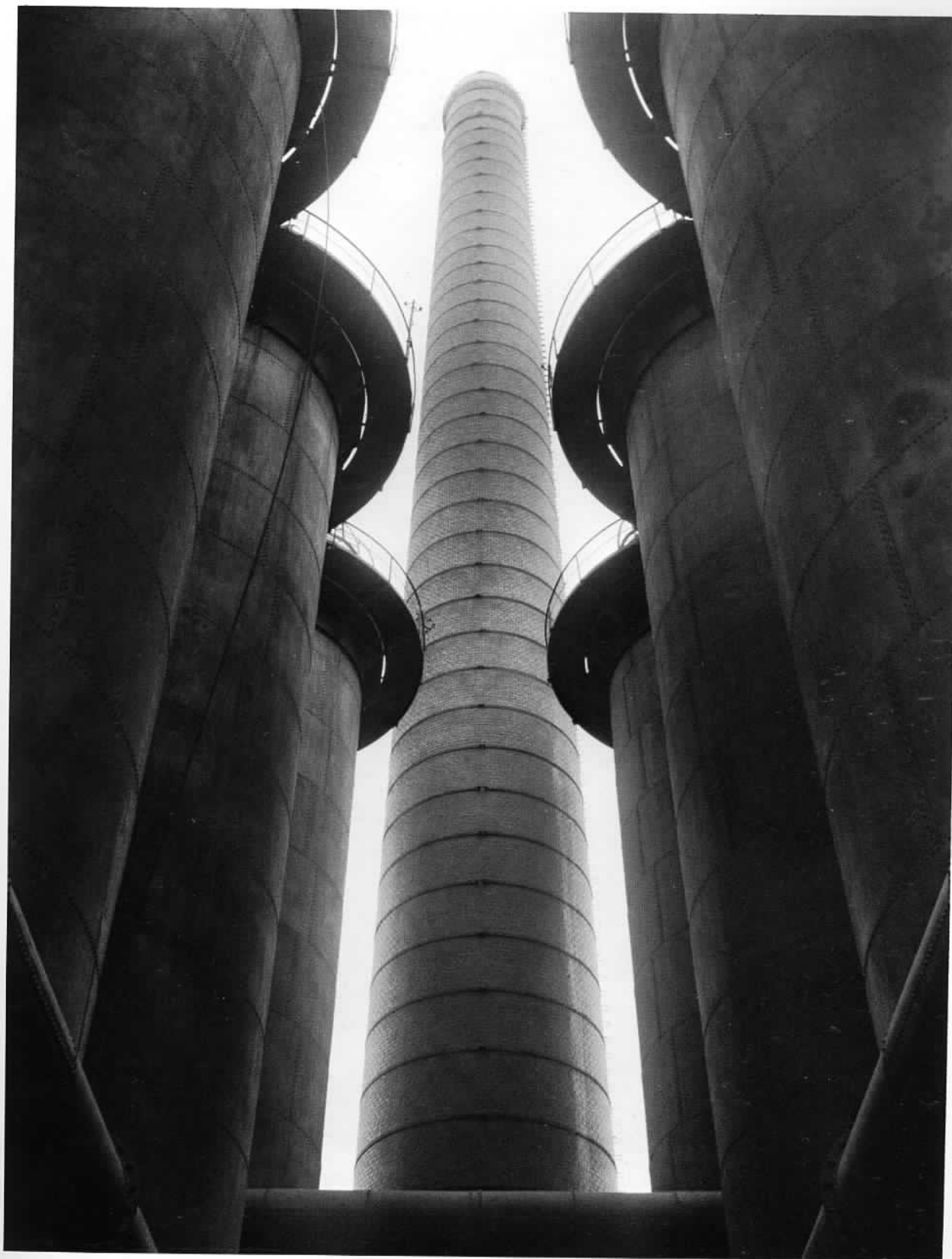
ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH. *Blast Furnaces, Herrenwick, near Lübeck, Germany.* 1927. Gelatin-silver print. Galerie Wilde, Cologne.

EUGENE ATGET. *Hotel Fleselle, rue de Sévigné 52, Paris.* 1898 Aristotype print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

himself said, quite simply, "Let us leave art to the artist, and let us try—with photographic means—to create photographs which can stand alone because of their very *photographic* character—without borrowing from art."[28]

The growing appreciation of straight photography brought about the recognition in the late 1920s of photographers of the older generation whose work had been overlooked by the pictorialists. Jean Eugène Auguste Atget was virtually unknown when he died in 1927. He never showed in a salon. Not a single one of the thousands of photographs he had taken since 1898 of his beloved Paris had been reproduced in a photographic magazine. Painters had found his street scenes helpful documents, and the Surrealist artists, ever sensitive to the melancholy that a good photograph can so powerfully evoke, reproduced a few of his pictures in 1926 in their magazine *La Revolution surréaliste*. He was born near Bordeaux in 1857, lost his parents when very young, was reared by an uncle, and sent to sea as a cabin boy. He then became an actor in the provinces, but not a particularly successful one, and around 1898 he decided, after trying his hand at painting, to become a photographer. "For some time he had had the ambition to create a collection of all that which both in Paris and its surroundings was artistic and picturesque," wrote his friend André Calmettes.[29] *Photographe d'art*, photographer of works of art, he called himself, and he hand lettered the sign "Documents pour artistes" for the door of his fifth-floor apartment-darkroom at 31 rue Campagne Première. A great deal of his work was photographing the historic buildings of Paris in detail. He made a series of photographs of iron grill work, another of the fountains of Paris. He photographed the statues in the park at Versailles, and statues on the medieval churches in Paris. These he sold to the Parisian museums. But he did not limit himself to works of art and historic monuments: he photographed the face of Paris in all its aspects: shop fronts and carriages of all sorts, the little people who earn their living peddling umbrellas or lampshades, delivering bread or wheeling pushcarts. He photographed inside palaces, bourgeois homes, and ragpickers' hovels. He photographed trees and flowers and fallen autumn leaves. Each of these categories is a series comprising hundreds of photographs. For Atget was in truth, as Calmettes wrote, a collector. He was, too, a picture maker, *un imagier,* in the words of his friend.

His technique was of the simplest: a view camera—always used on a tripod—for plates 18 x 24 centimeters (7⅛ x 9⅜ inches) in size. His lens was a rapid rectilinear, used well stopped down. Its focal length is not known—it was discarded after his death—but it must have been fairly short, for so many of his pictures show

EUGENE ATGET. *Ragpicker, Paris.* 1899-1900. Aristotype print. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

steep perspective and the tops of many of the negatives show bare glass where the image fell off. He printed the glass plates by daylight on aristotype printing-out paper, toning the prints with gold chloride. Atget's technical approach was, therefore, that of the nineteenth century and, looking at his prints, it is often hard to believe that he did most of his work after 1900. He seldom made an exposure that could be called a snapshot: moving objects are often blurred, and when he photographed people it is obvious that he asked them to pose. In an Atget photograph every detail stands forth with a clarity that is remarkable.

Among the thousands of photographs Atget took, there are those that reach beyond the record and approach the lyric, for he had a remarkable vision. He could find a human quality where no human being appears. His interiors lead one to feel that the people whose home he is photographing have just stepped behind the camera while he focuses and makes his exposure and will return the moment the lens is closed. Out-of-doors he worked early in the morning to avoid being disturbed by the curious, and his pictures have the atmosphere of early light. His work has no references to any graphic medium other than photography.

There is a curious parallel between Atget's photographs of Paris and the Berlin scenes taken by his contemporary,

EUGENE ATGET. *Avenue des Gobelins, Paris.* 1925. Aristotype print. The Musuem of Modern Art, New York.

HEINRICH ZILLE. *Pelts and Fur Pieces, Berlin.* ca. 1910. Gelatin-silver print. Courtesy Schirmer/Mosel, Munich.

Heinrich Zille. Both chose the same type of subjects—the streets, shops fronts, peddlers, street fairs, of the poorer quarters of each city. Zille's photographs, for all their feeling for the urban environment and sympathy toward the working class, are slices of life, taken mostly with a hand camera for a specific purpose: to provide documentation for his drawings, which appeared as illustrations in popular magazines. The very immobility of Atget's tripod camera, and the long exposures that his slow plates and slow lens required, seem to have fairly forced delib-

eration upon him. But the process was, of course, Atget's choice; it was his preferred way of working. He was no primitive. His approach to technique was far from naive. It was deliberate.

Julien Levy, proprietor of an avant-garde art gallery in New York and a friend of the Surrealists, recollected that Man Ray offered to lend Atget a small hand camera. But Atget would have none of it: he complained that "le snapshot" went faster than he could think. . . . *"Trop vite, enfin!* Too fast."[30]

THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Beaumont Newhall