

**Santayana's Missing Pages:  
Learning by Recollecting How We Use Photographs**

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## **Santayana's Missing Pages: Learning by Recollecting How We Use Photographs**

To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle.

George Orwell (1946)<sup>1</sup>

... if cinema is committed to communicate only by way of what is real, it becomes all the more important to discern those elements in filming which confirm our sense of natural reality and those which destroy that feeling.

Andre Bazin (1951)<sup>2</sup>

No other medium of expression has the cinema's original and innate capacity for showing things, that we believe worth showing, as they happen day by day ... .

Cesare Zavattini (1967)<sup>3</sup>

... you can't make films about things, you can only make films with things, with people, with light, with flowers, with mirrors, with blood ...

Douglas Sirk [?]<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, 'In Front of Your Nose', *Tribune*, 22 March 1946, as cited by Michael Sheldon on page 51 of his *Orwell: the Authorised Biography* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd. (1991). Sheldon took the quotation from Volume IV of the *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968; New York, Harcourt, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Andre Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema, Part Two", pages 95-124 of *What is Cinema, Volume 1*, translated by Hugh Grey (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1967), page 110.

<sup>3</sup> Cesare Zavattini, *Sequences from a Cinematic Life*, translated and introduced by William Weaver (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1970 [original Italian edition, 1967]), page 220.

<sup>4</sup> As recalled in 1971 by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Cited within an article entitled "'Douglas Sirk: From the Archives' by Manuel Betancourt, December 22, 2015" as reproduced on the website of *Film Comment* on 03 March 2019 [<https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/sirk-from-the-archives/>]. Betancourt says that ... "the 1972 edition of the Edinburgh Film Festival programmed a 20-film retrospective, which Sirk attended as a guest. ... [The retrospective] led to the publication of a book of essays edited by Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday. Featuring mostly new materials, the collection also reprinted a translated version of Fassbinder's 1971 tribute to

### Prologue

In 1895 Louis Lumière stood on a quay within the railway station near his family home in La Ciotat in southern France awaiting the arrival of a train. Beside him stood a curious machine of his own construction, one of the first motion picture cameras. As the train pulled into the station, Lumière aimed his camera and turned the crank. The train rolled to a stop and the passengers disembarked, walking past the camera on their way into the depot. Finally, having exhausted his reel of film, Lumière stopped cranking the camera.

Several months later, on 28 December 1895, thirty-five persons gathered in the basement of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris having purchased tickets to the first paid public screening of films within a 'cinema'. A roll of film printed in part from the strip exposed at the train station was placed inside the machine that had now been converted into a projector. The lights were dimmed, the projector's lamp was lit, the spectators gazed at a screen hung at the front of the room as a pianist begun to play, and the projectionist began to crank the projector.

Within moments, the members of the audience, as the brothers Lumière had wished, were sharing what John Dewey would later celebrate as the kind of intensified experience that is symptomatic of artistic encounters. But how ought we to talk of their encounter? More precisely,

What verb ought we to use when speaking of how the members of the audience encountered whatever they encountered that evening?

After the screening, they spoke uniformly of having *seen* a train arriving at a quay within a station and passengers disembarking from it. How astonishing! For they had at the time been seated in a room in the basement of a Parisian café far from trains, quays, stations and passengers.

Perhaps, then, they spoke inaccurately of their encounter having seen instead something in the room distinct from trains, quays, stations and passengers – the variably and intermittently illuminated surface of the screen suspended at the front of the room – and having, while seeing it, been induced into imagining, supposing, believing or otherwise thinking mistakenly that they were seeing a train arriving at a station. Had each of them, then, upon seeing the screen hanging before them,

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the German director whom he'd admired and emulated throughout his own work." The quoted phrase is from a paragraph in translation of Fassbinder's tribute that follows.

constructed unwittingly within themselves some kind of day dream, mirage, illusion, chimera, apparition or other fantasy, misconstruing its shimmering surface for a train, quay, station and passengers? How astonishing! For, if so, the members of the audience had fantasized with miraculous coincidence, as if a god had intervened to align their misapprehensions within a pre-established harmony sufficiently exact to enable them to converse thereafter about an event encompassing a train, quay, station and disembarking passengers that they had seemingly witnessed in common. Inexplicably, their fantasies could as well and in lock-step be re-induced simply by re-screening the film. And even more strangely, as the brothers Lumière recognised, the event of which they spoke of having seen with its train, quay, station and passengers was identical to the event that Louis Lumière had seen occurring before him as he cranked his camera months before in La Ciotat, as if the same god, discontented with aligning only the fantasies, had chosen to align them as well with an event within the world itself.

How could the members of Lumière's audience have been so misled, many of them technical adepts who, having heard of his invention, were keen to witness its effects and all of them competent speakers of a language within which they were accustomed to distinguishing the seeing of things such as trains, quays, stations and passengers from the imagining of them?

With the advent of filmmaking, a gap widened that had for more than half-a-century divided those encountering things by means of photographs, separating photographers and their audiences who spoke in common of seeing things by means of photographs that could have otherwise been seen in the world (seeing them, but differently) from thinkers who believed themselves to be more attuned to the requisite resonances of philosophical discourse. How astonishing, yet again, that so many of the latter were to slip unwittingly down the slope of logical pretension into murky philosophical waters, sinking far over their heads, by begging the very questions they were supposedly addressing and especially so when the problems were methodological.<sup>5</sup>

How, then, ought we to adjudicate between these multiple astonishments? How, that is, nearly two and a half millennia after Aristotle paved the way toward understanding the constraints upon philosophical method exemplified later by Collingwood, Austin and Wittgenstein, ought we to acknowledge the commonplace account of photographic encounters presumed by audiences and photographers (including filmmakers) then and now? Or are we called upon instead to replace it with an account of some other kind warranted – how?

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<sup>5</sup> For more of this story, curious readers may wish to consult my essay "Filmmaking, Logic and the Historical Reconstruction of the World", *Film & Philosophy* II (1995), pages 88-104.

Working from within the historical saga of that query into method and its challenge to the scope and nature of philosophical enquiry itself, I wish to introduce you to a prescient example of how better to approach those problems – a commentary upon how and why we speak of having seen things by means of photographs made soon after the Lumière's screening by one of the most intriguing philosophers of the past century.

### **The Story of Santayana's Story**

Sometime between 1900 and 1907 George Santayana gave an invited address to the Harvard Camera Club on the nature of photography. The talk was extraordinary even as measured against his encompassing interests and competences.<sup>6</sup>

Although Santayana was already at work upon the first of the two multi-volume treatises of comprehensive philosophy that were to provoke later commentators to include him among the 'systematic philosophers', his address was intended to be understandable independently of them.<sup>7</sup> For Santayana, unique among professional philosophers in being an accomplished poet, dramatist, essayist and (later) novelist and autobiographer was here speaking of the scope and limits of 'photography', an artistic endeavour of which he had by his own admission only an amateur's appreciation and that he assessed quite correctly as being as yet of only minimal artistic importance.

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<sup>6</sup> No date appears on Santayana's handwritten copy of the address. Since the Harvard Camera Club existed only from 1900 to 1907, however, we can be assured that it was presented during the interval and probably earlier rather than later within it, for Santayana was the kind of luminary who might well have been invited to speak early on, and in the way he did, to a young club seeking in part to legitimate its activities. I am indebted to Irving Singer for having secured from the researchers of the Harvard University Archives the dates of the club's existence and for an e-mail to me of 8 February 2000 confirming them.

The manuscript of Santayana's address, entitled "The Photograph and the Mental Image", Columbia Manuscript Collection, XIV:5:a., was eventually published in an edition prepared by his literary executor, Daniel Cory, copyright 1967, as pages 391-403 of the anthology *Animal Faith and Spiritual Life: Previously Unpublished and Uncollected Writings by George Santayana*, edited by John Lachs (New York, New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1967). Excerpts from this edition of his talk, never reissued, have been appended below.

<sup>7</sup> *The Life of Reason* was to be published in five volumes between 1905 and 1906; *The Realms of Being* was to appear in four volumes, the first published in 1927, the last in 1940. Santayana was to be counted among the 'systematic philosophers', for example, by Stuart Brown, Diané Collinson and Robert Wilkinson, editors of *One Hundred Twentieth-Century Philosophers* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), page 178, in their categorisation preceding the short essay about him Robert Wilkinson.

Never again was he to address the subject of photography, and the text of his talk was to remain unpublished during his lifetime.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, as Santayana suggested to his audience at the beginning of his talk, he considered the remarks that he was about to make to be "not without importance", a verdict confirmed by his having written them out beforehand in a "relatively polished" manuscript that he retained to be deposited among his papers at Columbia University, intact but for four concluding pages.<sup>9</sup>

Santayana's estimation of the peculiar merit of what he had to say within his address was just, for it marked the first time that a significant philosopher, accomplished in other arts, was to distinguish photography from them. His talk was to consist of a commentary upon the simple yet astonishing fact that we use photographs and films and speak usefully of them as if we could by means of them see the objects and events that had occurred before the camera as the exposures were made. He was to conclude in consequence that working photographers and filmmakers, unlike other artists, ought to attend primarily to how the objects and events occurring before the camera look as exposure is made of them rather than to themselves or to their tools, for that is what we shall later encounter by means of them.

Both the observation and the inference had served photographers as the fundamental working axiom of their craft for over half a century and were to remain so ever after as the craft of cinematography distinguished itself within the discipline. Santayana had articulated the primary constraint that must be understood if the distinctive power of the photographic arts are themselves to be understood two decades before Pudovkin was to build upon it the general theory of film design and nearly half a century before the echoes of Panofsky, Bazin, Kracauer and Cavell were to be heard.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 'Photography' encompassed for Santayana the photographing of movies as well, as the second sentence of his talk confirms: "They fill our rooms, shops and journals; they even take the place of actors upon the stage, and repeat for us with the movement of life whatever interesting scenes are being enacted in any part of the world." (See page 13 of the Appendix to this essay.) I shall speak hereafter only of 'photography', as he did, avoiding the cumbersome interpolation of 'and filmmaking' wherever it might properly have been placed.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase "relatively polished" is an assessment of the editor, John Lachs, in his "Introduction" to the work as published. See page 3 of the volume cited in footnote 6..

<sup>10</sup> See Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, translated and edited by Ivor Montagu (New York, New York: Bonanza Books, 1949). [Original of *Film Technique* published in Russian in 1926-27; English translation published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. (London, England) in October, 1929]. Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures"; revision published in *Critique*, Vol. 1, No. 3, January – February 1947; original published in the *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology* (Princeton University, 1934). Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?*,

Santayana's address would have been remarkable if only for its conclusions. I wish to concentrate here, however, upon a broader aspect of it – perhaps the most extraordinary of all – namely *how* Santayana approached the task of distinguishing photography from other arts, for how he did so anticipated how the least pretentious of later philosophers would reconstrue the task of philosophy itself, exemplifying indeed a profound correction of it.

### Santayana's Story

Santayana, before pondering photography, had spent years learning by doing how to solve the kinds of problems that artists in other arts confront. Upon attending to photography, he was able therefore to sense a gap between the way in which photographers were working and the ways within which those working within other arts, himself included, had to work. How then, he asked himself, do the concerns of working photographers differ from those of other artists? How, indeed, ought they to differ?

Many thinkers after Plato have presumed that such questions can be answered only after having determined how the kinds of things of which we are speaking are distinguished from other kinds of things ontologically or epistemologically. We must, they think, decide what kinds of things photographs are as distinct from others, or how we come distinctly to know of them, before we can begin to enquire after how we ought to think about making them.

Santayana, however, wasted no time with such fanciful preliminaries. How, he asked instead, were photographs *used*? Coming from a member of the department of philosophy at Harvard within which pragmatism took root (planted by Peirce, over-watered by James), his question might at first glance seem to have been a commonplace rejection of the biases toward ontological and epistemological enquiry prevailing elsewhere. Santayana, however, was to subject his pragmatic query to a two-fold historical refinement anticipating not only how Austin and Wittgenstein would later

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essays selected and translated by Hugh Grey (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1967). [Originally published in French as essays: 1958-1965]. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947). Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979). [Originally published in 1971.]

recommend that philosophers constrain themselves when trying to answer the questions they ask but going beyond even Collingwood's correction of it.

Santayana, recognising that we can both use and misuse tools, narrowed the question historically, rendering it philosophically enlightening. Rather than asking how connoisseurs of photography had tried of late to adapt its tools to 'artistic' purposes, Santayana asked how cameras and photographs had been used early on before makers and users became self-conscious about it – how, that is, had common folk used cameras and photographs to achieve the commonplace ends to which those tools were naturally suited?

His answer, of course, was that the tools of photography had in the first instance been used, as they are even now most commonly used, to create portraits of family and friends that enable us 'to see how they had looked'. Unlike creative artistic objects used to help us to *remember* how things had looked or to *imagine* how they might or could have looked, photographs have always been used principally as 'substitutes for the mental image' enabling us to *see* how things had looked in the past without having to remember or imagine them, just as we see how things around us look without having to remember or imagine them.

Santayana was aware that most photographers then and thereafter would wish to produce beautiful photographs, and he applauded their ambition. He indeed urged his listeners to welcome whatever technological advances might someday enable us by means of photographs to see even more beautifully how things look (the invention of colour film stocks, for example), for the refinements might well permit unprecedented artistic achievements.<sup>11</sup>

Santayana coupled his encouragement of photographic artistry, however, with a stringent warning. If photographers, when searching for beauty, were to avoid aping impotently how other artists worked, they would have to ensure that they were using their distinctive tools distinctively – using them, that is, as a means to the ends natural to them. Beauty in photography, unlike in painting, for example, would forever be linked by the nature of the photographic tools to the beauty of the objects photographed and hence predominantly to the selection and arrangement of them, for how beautiful

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<sup>11</sup> Filmmakers in particular will appreciate how sensitive Santayana was to the working scope and nature of the tools of photography, and hence how historically apt his admonitions were to prove, unlike the counsels to the contrary of his colleague Münsterberg a decade or so later when insisting that filmmakers, to work 'artistically', must show things as 'unrealistically' as possible. See Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York, New York: D. Appleton, 1916).



objects looked before the camera would continue to determine how beautiful they appeared to us by means of the photograph.<sup>12</sup>

Santayana was insisting to his listeners that they could come to understand how photographs might better to be made only by acknowledging how they had once been made – only, that is, by recollecting how working photographers had once made photographs for ordinary use before the sensitivities of some of them had become blunted by the temptation to misconstrue their art as 'creative' rather than 'imitative'.<sup>13</sup>

To ascertain how things were once used, however, requires, as Collingwood would later insist, estimations of intent.<sup>14</sup> Intentions with respect to photographs, however, as with all things, can only be recaptured from within a precise description of how we speak of them when putting them to use, as Austin and Wittgenstein would later affirm. Had Santayana gone on to construe how we speak ordinarily of photographs as symptomatic of how we use them uniquely, he would have prefigured the later programme of "linguistic phenomenology" (Austin's phrase).<sup>15</sup>

Santayana avoided doing so, however, and he was right to avoid it, for, besides wishing to return the attention of his audience to the working uses of things as the pragmatists

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<sup>12</sup> Artists wishing their works to last must work hard to ensure that they merit *revisiting*, and mastering the craft of the art consists in larger part of learning how to do it. We reattend to works of the non-photographical arts by revisiting the works themselves. As Santayana sensed, however, we reattend to photographic works by revisiting not only the photographs themselves but the objects photographed that *reappear* to us by means of them. Experiencing works of photographic art entails a 'two-fold revisitation' distinguishing it from how we experience works of art of other kinds.

<sup>13</sup> Two decades later, René Clair would caution filmmakers against the same temptation, reminding them that "The principal task of the present generation should be to restore the cinema to what it was at the outset and, in order to do that, to rid it of all the false art that is smothering it." (Clair was referring specifically to the loss of *motion* in films, but the sentiment applies beyond it.) René Clair. *Cinema: Yesterday and Today*, translated by Stanley Appelbaum and edited with an Introduction and Annotations by R. C. Dale (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), page 35. [French edition, 1970.] Reprint in part of unidentified text, probably from "Conférence de Monsieur René Clair", *Cinémagazine* 4 (05 December 1924), pages 420-422.

<sup>14</sup> R. G. Collingwood says so most succinctly and provocatively in his *An Autobiography* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1939]), notably within Chapter V, "Question and Answer", pages 29-43.

<sup>15</sup> "For this reason I think it might be better to use, for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name than those given above – for instance, 'linguistic phenomenology', only that is rather a mouthful." J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses". Reprinted from the *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, 1956-57, as Chapter 6, pages 123-152 of *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, England: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1961). The quotation is from page 130.

would have done, he had a broader historical claim to make whose especial relevance to philosophical enquiry only Austin, with his respect for the Darwinian evolution of language, might have sensed.<sup>16</sup> And he staked his claim up front!

### **... at the Very Beginning**

Santayana began his address by reminding his audience, through an extended Darwinian recounting of the evolutionary trajectory of living things within the encompassing history of the world, of the crucial importance of our having become able to remember things (able, that is, to retain and reuse what he called 'mental images' of them). He recognised how odd this opening would seem to an audience having come to hear him speak of photography and remarked upon it.

Why, then, did he begin his talk with a short lecture on remembering in the context of the long history of evolution? Because he was convinced that the remarks that he was to make about photography, contrasting its earlier with its later uses, would be useful only if understood historically. Santayana recognised, as Collingwood would later affirm, that affirmations are meaningful only when construed as answers to questions, that questions can be understood only as asked within their historical (working) context and that coming to understand anything within its historical context is a never-ending, open-ended task.

To comprehend the photographic arts, one had therefore to register in historical context how photographs had once been used before the temptation to employ the tools of photography 'creatively' had cluttered their distinctively 'imitative' use, recalling in particular how before photography one could only remember how things had 'looked' by invoking 'mental images' of them, whereas afterwards one could *see* again and again how they had 'looked' by using photographs naturally as substitutes for the 'mental images' no longer required.

Santayana's excursion into the vistas of prehistory was therefore an apt introduction not only to what he had to say but to how he had to say it and hence exemplary of how philosophy could better to be done. Consequently, we may learn from his address not only how better to think about photography, as did his audience on that evening so long

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<sup>16</sup> "... our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon – the most favoured alternative method." Ibid, page 130.

ago, but, in keeping with his anticipatory broadening of Collingwood's implicit correction of the ahistorical programme of Austin and Wittgenstein, how better to think of that programme itself.

### Conclusion

Santayana's story was, as he suggested, "not without importance". It remains for me, indeed, among the most important stories that he ever told. Why, then, did he refrain from publishing it? When did he delete its final four pages? Why did he find them unsatisfactory?

To ask these questions, of course, is to play an historical game of cards with a half-empty deck. Publication could easily have been precluded for reasons and causes no longer traceable, and ready avenues of publication for remarks about a subject so seemingly unimportant yet so intensively addressed would long remain unavailable. Besides, Santayana had other things on his mind, working as he was upon the first of two four-volume sets of philosophical ponderings that would eventually earn him the sobriquet of having been a 'systematic philosopher'.<sup>17</sup>

It seems likely to me, however, that reasons more complex compound the picture, and that the missing four pages of his otherwise intact manuscript point toward them.

Santayana prided himself on having 'never read a logic book in his life'. Unlike many who have read a good many of them, however, he remained throughout his life unusually sensitive to gaps in arguments that others had failed to sense or in bluster disregarded. I suspect, therefore that Santayana, incapable of pretense with respect to his own works as well, sensed upon rethinking his remarks about the use of photography and its consequences that what he had said and how he had said it resonated far more deeply than he had realised, rendering the 'conclusion' of his text inappropriate and requiring a significant rethinking of the philosophical implications of prior pages were they to fit within the more encompassing accounts of ourselves and our world upon which he was working.<sup>18</sup> Convinced of the 'importance' of what he had said before concluding his remarks, he cleaved off the final four pages of the manuscript while preserving the remainder, hoping at some later date to see his way over, under or around the logical perplexity that he sensed within respect to it.

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<sup>17</sup> See page 5, footnote 7, above.

<sup>18</sup> How in particular could the matter and method of his remarks on photography be reconciled with those upon which he was working with respect to the notions of 'essence' 'matter', 'truth' and 'spirit' that would later be published as *Realms of Being*?

If so, Santayana's unfinished manuscript may well signal a growing awareness on his part that his remarks had been so sweeping in form and substance that no summary of their consequences could be given; for, despite his lack of expertise as a photographer, he had sensed and affirmed within his address the fundamental difference between the photographic and other arts that many in his audience, though more expert photographically, had forgotten.

The photographic arts are arts of *reappearance*.

Photographers can enable viewers of a photograph to *see* the objects that stood before the camera during 'the act of creation' that produced it – a *seeing* that viewers can no more doubt credibly than they can doubt seeing the photograph or other objects about

Even more striking, however, is how *differently* Santayana drew attention to the distinction – a difference as prescient as what he said of it.

Rather than arguing for the merits of his claim, he instead rendered the distinction obvious to his listeners by reminding them through examples of what they already knew but were in danger of forgetting, namely how photographs had been *used* before photographers became self-conscious about the making of them.

Santayana's 'method' of provoking his audience to 'recollect' through 'examples' what they already knew of photography is of a piece with Austin and Wittgenstein's later insistence with respect to philosophy that we can learn of it only by reminding ourselves and others through examples of how words are used.<sup>19</sup> Small wonder that his address

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Wittgenstein's remarks that "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose." and "Learning philosophy is really recollecting. We remember that we really did use words that way." Quotations from section 89 of "Philosophy", sections 86-93 of The Big Typescript TS213: German-Scholars' Edition [from original typescripts 1933-1937], edited and translated by C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pages 306e and 309e. See also Austin's remarks, page 10, footnote 16, above. Santayana and Wittgenstein were each in his own way and perhaps unwittingly echoing Socrates (see Plato's *Meno*). A decade or so after Santayana's address on photography, he was to suggest as well that "Logic is a refined form of grammar", hinting again how attuned he was with 'his mind's ear', though with earlier equipment, to the same philosophical frequencies that Austin and Wittgenstein would later amplify. See George Santayana, *Realms of Being* ['One Volume Edition with a New Introduction by the Author'] (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942 [incorporating material published as early as 1927]), page 439.

with its 'method of examples' was to prove beyond comprehension to the few philosophers known to me who have bothered to ponder it, a response comparable in kind to the puzzlement provoked later within many of them by the 'method' of Austin and Wittgenstein – and of Collingwood in particular, insisting to almost total disregard that 'examples', even when philosophical, must be rooted historically before they can be registered as significant.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Even as I write, commentators lacking a working acquaintance with the constraints within which photographers and filmmakers must work, and hence attuned insufficiently to the logical niceties of them, continue to presuppose that Santayana's remarks and 'method' when addressing the Harvard Camera Club were imprecise, careless or worse, among them Irving Singer, an otherwise sympathetic reader of his works and the only author known to me to have remarked at length thereafter them (see his "Santayana and the Ontology of the Photographic Image", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Fall, 1977), pages 39-43, and his later reformulation of its argument in Part 1, Chapter 1, pages 30f, of his *Reality Transformed: Film as Meaning and Technique*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998).

Robin Collingwood himself wrote the best introduction to how the 'method of examples' must be construed to be viable. See his *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

## Appendix

### Excerpts from George Santayana's "The Photograph and the Mental Image" [1900-1907]<sup>21</sup>

I hardly know if I have done right in coming to address you here, where in my ignorance of photography I ought rather to be a listener: yet however little one may know of photography, no one can now-a-days be ignorant of photographs. They fill our rooms, shops and journals; they even take the place of actors upon the stage, and repeat for us with the movement of life whatever interesting scenes are being enacted in any part of the world. And people in their travels now carry a double sensorium about with them, and a double memory, one in their heads and another in a little black box slung over the shoulder. It is of this increase in human faculty, and of the way in which this artificial eye and memory fill out our natural experience, that I wish to speak to you this evening: and it seems to me a subject not without importance. (page 391)

There are not wanting other animals, however [higher on the evolutionary scale than 'the microbes and the sponges'; added EWC], for whom a shock strong enough to be felt is not necessarily strong enough to be fatal; the shock can then serve to call forth during life that prophetic power of intelligence which, as we fancied, might be aroused even in the dullest animals by the conflict with death. A shock may impress without quite destroying, and the accompanying sense of something external may endure for a while and furnish a wholly new element to the contents of the mind.

This new element is perception – the consciousness of objects among which we move and on which we react with various degrees of pleasure and profit. Perception gives the mind the picture of a world, at the same time that it denotes an adjustment of the body to its real environment. The mental image is at once the sign of a practical adaptation to things and the spiritual reward of that adaptation. Our ideas are symbols of a more far-reaching sensitiveness in our organism – of its better protection against surprise and death – and they have value also on their own account, because they are an interesting and not insignificant development of consciousness, which by them comes to build up a

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<sup>21</sup> I append these excerpts from Santayana's manuscript of his address to enable readers to catch firsthand something of the extraordinary scope and manner of his achievement within it. See page 5, footnote 6, above for the citation to the only published edition of his talk, never reissued, from which these excerpts are drawn. Bracketed interpolations, unless otherwise noted, are Santayana's own.

world of discourse and to escape ideally (by interest in the forms it evokes) from brutish absorption in nutritive and individual processes. For the form of an idea can appear in one mind after another and is essentially eternal, just as the matter of bodies passes from one body to another and survives them all.

The mental image already carries us, therefore, from the animal to the spiritual sphere – to the sphere of practical wisdom and free speculation. But perception, however useful and enlightening for the moment, would not do us much service if it could not be revived upon occasion ... The organism must not only react upon objects, it must react upon them regularly. Reflex action must settle down into instinct. So too the mental image becomes important chiefly by becoming permanent. To acquire conscious experience we must be able to retain past images and compare them with their successors, just as to attain practical skill we must keep open those cerebral paths which were cut and cleared by our first training. (pages 393 and 394)

Now, it happens that the body's memory is better than the mind's. The paths between act and act, the paths of habit and reflex action are better preserved than the paths between idea and idea; or rather, the connections between associated excitements are easier to revive than are the complete excitements themselves. ... We can accordingly act in virtue of much experience which we have forgotten, and the fruits of learning are not so ephemeral as learning itself. The upper strata of the brain, on which our thoughts and images are grafted, would seem to be of an inconceivably subtle texture, and the thousand vibrations that constantly sweep through that gossamer web, tear and tangle the threads into a mesh, from which it is hard to pull out anything whole. Nothing can be repeated with exactness in the fancy, nothing accepted with literalness, nothing retained without accretion. The new is coloured by the old, the old overlaid and distorted by the new. And, what is worse, the greater part of the experiences which fill a life are lost irretrievably – although their lesson and influence may remain – because the brain, in spite of its prodigious complexity, has no room for so many impressions, has not signals and wires and energy enough for so many successive messages, for so many exact revivals of experience, as a perfect memory would require. Therefore, although everything in the physical world seems to us at times to change quickly enough, everything physical is stable in comparison with the absolute instability of images in the mind. They cannot be retained unchanged for an instant, nor recalled unchanged at any subsequent time.

This absolute flux of mental images is annoying in life and melancholy in reflection. To be sure, those images do not make up the best part of the mind nor the kernel of our individuality: if they did, we should not be able to lament their flight, which we should ourselves accompany. There is something comparatively permanent in us that takes note of mutation and is the standard of celerity. There are instincts and ideals and intelligible truths which make a

background for that flux of sensibility. ... But just because we and our interests endure, we lament the lapse of those vivid perceptions which have been the filling of our lives, the material, as it were, of our being. We survive them with a certain sense of emptiness and futility, as if we were surviving ourselves. ... Hence we are glad when some chance encounter rekindles old memories, and makes Richard himself again. We are grateful to any art which restores that sensuous filling of experience, which was its most lively and substantial part in passing, but which now is so hopelessly past.

And this – for I come at last to our main subject – precisely this is the function of photography. The eye has only one retina, the brain a limited capacity for storage; but the camera can receive any number of plates, and the new need never blur nor crowd out the old. Here is a new and accurate visual memory, a perfect record of that the brain must necessarily forget or confuse. Here is an art that truly imitates the given nature, in the proper meaning of this much-abused phrase, – an art that carries on in the spirit of nature, but with another organ, functions which the given nature imperfectly performs. Photography imitates memory, so that its product, the photograph, carries out the function imperfectly fulfilled by the mental image. The virtue of photography is to preserve the visible semblance of interesting things so that the memory of them may be fixed or accurately restored. (pages 394 and 396)

... those ancient and magnificent inventions of speech and writing helped human memory to retain only those things which the understanding had already worked over: they recorded and transmitted the intelligible, the describable, what had passed through the processes of abstraction and verbal expression: our humbler art of photography has come to help us in the weakest part of our endowment, to rescue from oblivion the most fleeting portion of our experience – the momentary vision, the irrevocable mental image.

That this is the function of photography is made clear by the use to which it was first put. Photography was first employed in portraiture; that is, it was first employed to preserve those mental images which we most dislike to lose, the images of familiar faces. (page 396)

Portraits are no longer the only product of photography. The technique of the art has of late so much improved that it can be turned to many other uses. It now renders for us not only monuments and works of other arts, but every aspect of life in its instantaneous truth. ... I do not how you may feel, but I confess that in cutting the pages of a magazine – and I never cut them unless they are illustrated – it is only the photographs that really interest me: the drawings are seldom the work of a hand that, in Michael Angelo's phrase, obeys an intellect; they are usually feeble and sketchy representatives of the fact and still more feeble representatives of the ideal. The photographs, on the other hand, are truly graphic; there is the unalloyed fact; there is what you would go



to see if you had wings and an infinite circle of acquaintance; there is the proof that all they tell us about China or South Africa is no myth, but that men on two legs walk about there, looking quite recognisably human, caught in the act and gesture of life, in spite of their strange surroundings and peculiar gear. With such objects before me, I open my eyes. I look with the same inevitable interests as if the whole procession of life were passing under my windows. The sophisticated concern about art sinks before the spontaneous love of reality, and I thank the photography for being so transparent a vehicle for things and sparing me, in my acquaintance with remote fact, the [untrustworthy and] impertinent medium of a reporting mind.

Henceforth history need not be a prosy tome in fine print without illustrations: posterity will know of us not merely what we did and thought, but how we looked and what we saw. The reportable outline of events will be filled in with the material of sense, faithfully preserved and easily communicated. Even as it is, the remnants of graphic arts of antiquity give us the most vivid notion we can have of those times; yet those works betray rather than depict the age that produced them, for they were meant for objects of worship or were at any rate largely predetermined by traditional mannerisms, by symbolic conventions, and by the love of absolute beauty. If such ideal works, surviving by accident and in small numbers, yet vivify for us the records of past time, how much more illuminating will be those innumerable reproductions of everything that surrounds and interests us, direct reproductions uninfluenced by any human bias other than that shown in the selection of their subjects! As students of zoology put on their slides infinitely fine and numerous sections of the specimens they study, so the photographer can furnish for the instruction of posterity infinitely fine and numerous cross-sections of the present world of men. (pages 397 and 398)

But perhaps I am not saying what you expected to hear; and it may seem that in my praises of photography I miss the main point, and say nothing about its latest successes and its highest ambitions. Cannot photographs be beautiful? Is not photography a branch of fine art? Cannot the impression of a sunset, snapped at the right moment on the right day and printed on the right paper with reagents of the right variety, have all the sweep and subtlety of a Turner? Cannot a model's head be so posed and lighted that the result will wonderfully resemble a Rembrandt or a Holbein? Yes, and there is no limit that I know of to the progress which photography may make in these directions. ... Natural science may find in the processes of photography applications no less brilliant than it finds in mechanical arts: and I fully expect to find colour and permanence and many unthought of perfections soon added to those which good photographs already have. And while the processes of the art are being perfected, the experience and taste of photographers may also grow: the more they are masters of their art the better they will know what objects gain most by photography, what lights and what poses are permanently pleasing, and

what treatment and retouching can be occasionally helpful. The resources of invention in arranging models can increase indefinitely, and also the tact in catching the beautiful aspects of cloud, mountain and sea. But when we speak of coordinating photography with the fine arts, we must beware of confusion. There is no occasion to be niggardly in the use of pleasant words, and since the word art has in some circles a sacramental value, we may gladly use it to describe any ingenious process by which man produces things which by their use or beauty are delightful to him. And, in a genuine sense, the taking and developing of a photograph requires art; and this art, being governed by a desire for beauty and being productive of beautiful things, may well be called a fine art. For fine art is usually said to be distinguished from useful art by having beauty for its chief aim and the love of beauty of its chief inspiration.

But a wide use of words, legitimate if it is inevitable or if it gives anybody pleasure, should not be allowed to blind us to important distinctions in things: and while photography is surely an art and its products are often beautiful, there remains a deep and quite unbridgeable chasm between it and that other kind of art whose essence is not so much to mirror or reproduce the outer aspect of things, however bewitching, as to create in imitation of the processes of Nature, but in different materials, things analogous to the natural. These products of creative art are shadows rather than replicas of reality and present things as they could never have actually existed: men of stone, passions that obey the rules of prosody, heart-throbs that keep time with an orchestra, tragedies that unravel themselves in five acts without irrelevant incidents – in a word, substitutes for reality that transform it into the materially impossible, in order to bring it within the sphere of the persuasive and the divine. (pages 398-399)

In order to touch creative art of this sort, it is not enough to produce beautiful things, else the gardener no less than the photographer would be a creative artist; the gardener also watches his opportunity, training and guiding his natural engine, the plant, to desirable issues. And the gardener, too, is no utilitarian, but exists wholly in the service of beauty. Indeed, if some voluptuary should walk about the earth choosing none but the pleasant places and refusing to lift his eyes on anything but the beautiful, and should studiously keep in his mind's album nothing but images of beautiful things – he would not be a creative artist; his art of opportune perception and enchanted memory would have weakened his energies without producing anything of spiritual value to himself or to the world. And what would have been lacking in that luxurious passivity? Surely the humane reaction, the selective glance that neglects what it despises in order to extricate and remodel what it loves. What constitutes ideal art, then, is the making of something over under the guidance of a human interest. What issues from any process not guided by a human impulse cannot have ideal value, even if that process went on in the *camera obscura* of a passive and indolent brain. (pages 399 and 400)

"Now a photograph is produced by a machine, just as the images of fancy and memory are reproduced by a machine; both the camera and the brain transform their impressions in many ways, but not as a moral and conscious interest would transform them. The accidental transformations of the image in photography and memory are consequently defects and imperfections, while the intentional transformations of ideal art are beauties. For the function of photographs and of mental images is to revive experience, but the function of creative art is to interpret experience. Creative art must transform the object, in order to tell us something more about it. For an interpretation that merely repeated the identical terms of its text would be a laughable and stupid thing. Yet just this literal repetition makes the success of an art whose function is revival. Why you ask a man to explain his words, it is an insult if he merely repeats them; when you ask him to repeat his words, he is a fool if he sets about to explain them. So when I ask a photograph to come to the succour of my weak memory and visual imagination, and to tell me how things look, I do not want that photograph to be retouched or blurred or idealized; and when I ask a poet to tell me what his passions meant, I do not wish him to inform me of the time of day or of the colours of the rainbow. There is one art to focus and revive experience, there is another art to digest and absorb it. There is an artificial memory, the other a petrified intelligence. (page 400)

Accordingly it seems to me that a profound misunderstanding lurks in the criticism often made of photography, that it is crude and literal. Its defects are the exact opposite: namely, that as yet it cannot reproduce our visual sensations without subtracting something from their colour and motion, without dropping something of their stimulating and instructive power. When photography becomes perfect, all our visual experience will be revivable at will – and this would be a truly miraculous triumph over mortal limitations, won, as all triumphs are won, by docility to the facts and laws of the real world. To complain of a photograph for being literal and merciless, is like complaining of a good memory that will not suffer you to forget your sins. A good memory is a good thing for a good man, and to admit all the facts is the beginning of salvation. So with the contemplation of Nature and man; a genuine love of mere perception, a clear vision of things as they are, is the necessary condition of artistic power or of critical capacity. Photography is useful to the artist because it helps him to see and to keep seeing, and helpful to every intelligent man because it enables him to see much that from his station in space and time, is naturally invisible. To be accurate and complete is therefore the ideal of photography, as of memory: an ideal which is not the less genuine because it is not absolutely realisable and not the less worth because, even if it could be realised, it would still leave room for other and higher things. For a virtue of subordinate things, when they are genuine, is to remain subordinate. If memory were perfectly developed it would not prevent us from imagining all sorts of possible and yet unrealized things: on the contrary it would furnish the mind

with clearer and more numerous analogies for its invention to follow, and keep its ideals from being childish and irrelevant. So too the prevalence of photography will not tend to kill the impulse to design, but rather stimulate and train it by focussing attention on that natural structure of things by which all beautiful design is inspired. (page 401)

The same misunderstanding which occasions this reproach of literalness addressed to photography, is the cause also of a mistaken ambition on its part – the ambition to be ideal [a very different thing, I need hardly say, from the ambition to be beautiful]. For good photographs will be beautiful when their object is beautiful and poetical when their object is poetical; but to be ideal they would have to transform the object so as to make it a clearer response to the observer's predetermined interests. The camera cannot have a human bias, it cannot exercise a selective attention or be guided by an imaginative impulse: it will do its honest work in an honest way. Therefore the sentimental photographer is driven to manipulate the model, to try to give it an interesting expression, to make it smile or bend or dress up to resemble something ideal which he has seen upon the stage or in the works of the old masters. The art of photography is thus superposed, as it were, on the art of posing, and the new interest which the photograph acquires is the somewhat meretricious interest of the living picture it represents. No, that is a false ambition; and whoever is seriously tempted by it ought to abandon photography altogether, take pen or pencil in hand, and train himself to the production of things not seen by the retina not transferable to a plate, but visible only to the imagination and not to be rendered except by a hand miraculously obedient to the intellect. (pages 401 and 402)

Yet, while we may fail to see any genuine affinity between photography and creative art, we need not share that supercilious attitude towards reality and its photographic image, which is affected by some votaries of the imagination. Imagination is a good thing, but it is a substitute for vision which would be better. And while photography can never have the spiritual value, the pathetic and humane meaning of creative art, that real world and that natural beauty which photography reproduces have always been, are now, and ever will be the ultimate object of human interest. The real world is the subject of creative art; it is what the true artist is himself in love with. If you meet a poet who is more interested in his own verses – or in any verses – than in what inspired them; if you meet a painter who cares more for his art than for his perceptions, or a sculpture who delights more in statues than in moving and living forms – set him down without hesitation for a sham. Art is secondary, life and perception are primary; since it is only the fascination exercised over us by real things that can suggest to us the possibility of their ideal perfection: and if we hasten to render this ideal perfection in some artificial medium, and are enraptured even by the dead suggestion of a complete beauty, how much more must we desire

that complete beauty itself, as Nature or a better life might some day actually produce it! (page 402)

... we must not think that it [creative art] excels in potential dignity that reality which it transmutes into an appearance, in order to reduce it more easily to a human scale. We should rather admit creative art as the best mediator between our half-lighted minds and our half-tamed environment – as a medium through which these two can communicate in their primitive estrangement. Yet, to help us bridge that chasm, we should welcome any mechanical arts which, like photography, improve and extend our perceptions, helping us to see and to remember; for by such means the real world may be made clearer and more familiar to us – that real world from which all beauty is derived and in which all beautiful forms, if they could have their way, would be ultimately embodied. (page 403)