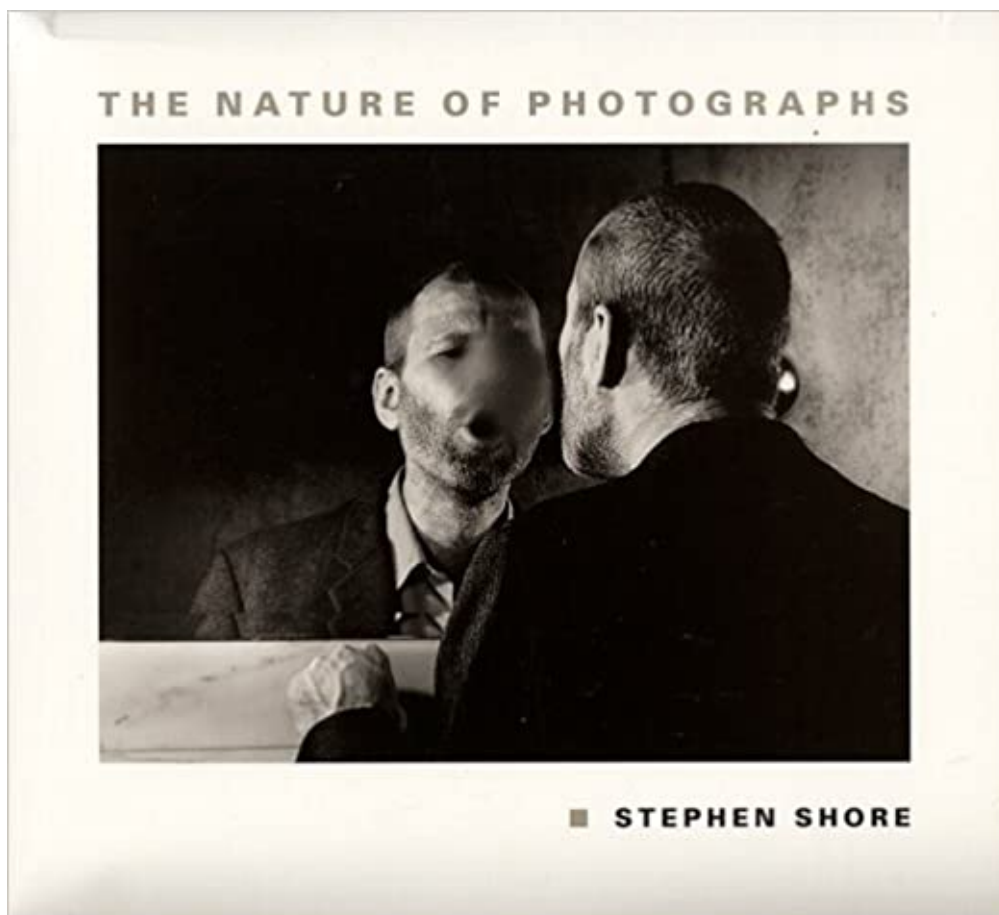


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# The Nature Of Photographs



## Synopsis

How does a photograph "work"? In this book, internationally acclaimed photographer Stephen Shore brings together more than fifty images (by such photographers as Walker Evans, Eugène Atget, Robert Adams, Diane Arbus, Frank Gohlke, Lee Friedlander, Edward Weston, Robert Frank, William Eggleston, and Jan Groover) to illustrate a process of looking at and understanding photography. He traces the process by which the world in front of the camera is transformed into a photograph -- and how that photograph, in turn, is transformed into a mental image. A photograph, Shore explains, can be viewed on several levels. First, it is a physical object, a print. On this print is an image, an illusion of a window onto the world. It is at this level that we "read" a picture and discover its content: a souvenir of an exotic land, the face of a lover, a wet rock, a landscape at night. This is the depictive level, in which the world is transformed into a photograph through qualities of flatness, frame, time, and focus. On a final level is the mental apprehension of the image, which joins the focus of lens, eye, attention, and mind. Using these levels of seeing, Shore reveals how the qualities of a photograph create tension and meaning -- as the collapsing of depth creates new relationships, as lines and shapes in the image play against the frame, as focus creates barriers in the depth of an image, as the duration of exposure variously transforms the fluid world into a static piece of film. As the visual image continues to grow in importance as a medium of global communication, the skills and insights conveyed by this book will become increasingly relevant both to those who take photographs and those who view them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is obvious from the book's very precision, its compact yet evocative statements, that Shore has spent years thinking through what he discusses in the book... In my roughly twenty years of writing about photography, I don't think I've come across a book that has implied so much with so few words, a book that raises so many important questions with so little fanfare and with such precision. Shore's humility is always evident, as is his fascination with things photographic, as are his credentials as a photographer. Given all this, it makes sense to listen carefully to what he has to say in *The Nature of Photographs*." -- James Kaufmann, Photographer's Forum

""Shore's text is written so clearly and the ideas presented so aptly through the photographs of the major photographers he has selected for reproduction that students, artists, and arts advocates will benefit from it as both an artist's book and as a primary tool for critical analysis and understanding of photography in general." -- James L. Enyeart, College of Santa Fe and former director, George Eastman House

The narrative is sparse, but attempts to describe different ideas of framing such as "active framing". However, the photographs that are selected as examples do not seem to be well matched, and numerous photos are presented as representative without ever explaining why. I long for a photography photo book that is both analytical and visually pleasing. This is not it.

Stephen Shore, the well known photographer (and teacher; who, among other things, was the first living photographer to have a one-man show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY) has recently updated his classic meditation on the *Nature of Photographs*. Recommended to all aspiring (and working) photographers, the beauty of this book is the density of its distilled wisdom. You will not find anything here on f-stops, film speeds and lenses, nothing on the darkroom (analog or digital), nothing on the raging "debate" whether to pick up an 8 megapixel DSLR or a 10, and no instructions - at least explicit ones - on how to take "better" pictures. What you will find is the crystalline essence of Shore's lifetime's worth of thinking about the nature of the photograph. His short, Zen-like prose-poem musings pierce the proverbial bullseye like an archer's arrow; and leave the reader both enchanted and haunted by their eloquence and wisdom. Shore reminds us that amidst the infinity of potential images, both real and imagined, the photographer has four - and only four - formal tools for defining a picture's content and organization: vantage point, frame, focus and time. Stop and think about that for a moment. With all the wonderful technology underneath our thumb as

we prepare to press the shutter, with all the different ways in which we can image ourselves "taking" a shot, and all the different images that can conceivably exist, the photographer really only has these four fundamental "creative dimensions" with which to work, and no more! Where do I position myself; what do I put in the picture and what do I leave out; where should I focus my attention; and how much of a slice of time do I want to include? Every picture that has ever been taken, and every photograph yet to be captured - from Adams' shots of Yosemite, to Cartier-Bresson's visual etudes on the "Decisive Moment," to visual realities created by some future technologies - is "reality" as aesthetically transformed by the four-dimensional human creative filter! Yet somehow, miraculously even, this suffices to provide (however brief) glimpses of an infinite dimensional world of meaning and beauty. That is the magic of photography! For those of you who have the first edition of this book...I have both versions of this book. The new book roughly doubles the number of accompanying images (including color photos) and adds quite a bit of commentary. It is written (thankfully!) in essentially the same style, which I find almost meditative in its quality and depth of vision. If you have enjoyed the first edition, you will likely treasure this one.

This slim book provides insight on what your photography instructor probably thinks. I thought the most insightful commentary was the nature of space in each photograph. While Shore's own photos of cars in parking lots remain cars in parking lots to me --neutron bomb idiom? There is some good work by the masters, Frank, Levitt, Winograd and anonymous.

It met my expectations. It also arrived timely.

In this short essay, Shore manages to communicate some deep truths about photography in a refreshingly clear and accessible style. The arguments are simple, profound and convincing. Together with the photographs, the result is a thought-provoking and almost meditative book. It has become one of my favorites.

The Nature of Photographs is sparsely worded and consist of selected photographs. The author takes the reader through a guided tour of the nature of photographs. This starts with the physical level, then the depictive and finally the mental level. By the time that the reader has completed this journey, you most likely will have a new way of perceiving photographs and possibly a new way of thinking about photography.

I had to buy this book for class but I ended up really enjoying it. The images are fun to look at in context to the three different levels of the photograph.

I read the reviews. I got the book. I read the book. Then I went and reread through the reviews again to see if I had missed the point of what people must have been saying. I'm left wondering if I even have the same book. First off, this book has great photos magnificently reproduced. I appreciate when an author lets the images speak for themselves and this book had great potential to do just that, seeing that the entire text of the book would scarcely fill a dozen or so 3x5 file cards. Then the author opened his mouth and I was no longer sure what I was looking at. Only about 10% of the text made any sense to me. I do not question his mastery of photography, but I got the feeling I was being talked down to because I didn't have a doctorate in philosophy. I will agree with one reviewer statement that it seemed a bit pretentious. He really needs to work on his communication skills. Education should be used to help others learn, not show off how educated you are. Personally, I didn't get a lot out of it. Not just because there wasn't a lot in it, but because what little there was seemed to go right over my head. I was left with the possible conclusion that maybe I'm too dumb to be a photographer. A good book should make seemingly complex topics simple, not do what this book does and make the very simple act of looking at a photograph complex.

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