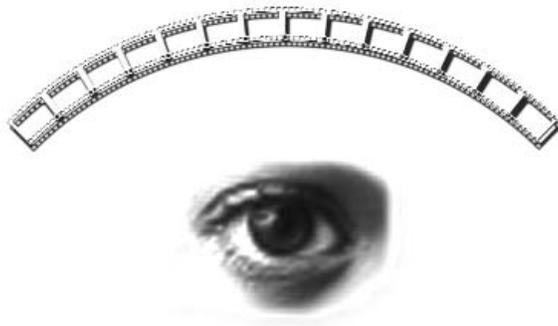


The effect of Photographic Monochromacy on Human perception.



THE CONTRIBUTION OF MONOCHROME PHOTOGRAPHY TO THE "CREEPINESS" PERCEPTION OF PAST IMAGES.

I have seen many images and have taken a lot of photographs in my life and recently I have decided to write about what I call the; the "creepiness factor" of *black and white* photographs.

Let's start a long time ago; in the 1800's. Picture Nr. 1 is a photo of a woman standing in front of a house wall, seems like just an old picture of a quainter time, but the woman is suspected parent killer Lizzie Borden. There is something very disturbing about this image that has nothing to do with the crime connection.

The second photo is not a Victorian-era actor but Billy the Kid, outlaw-killer of the wild west. This photo was done by using tin and silver in a process that preceded celluloid film.

Photo Nr.3 was suspected of being "Jack the Ripper" the murderer of prostitutes in London UK (he could be *indirectly responsible*, being a member of the Royal Family that ignored the conditions that led to the need to turn to prostitution). Notice that image Nr.3a looks less creepy due to the application of color.



Nr. 1



Nr. 2



Nr. 3



Nr. 3a

Let's look at another era; the 1900's starting with one half of a murdering duo Nr.4, convicted of killing a school "chum". This photo has that 1920's newspaper look that reminds one of the "Roaring Twenties", prohibition, mobsters and Chicago dead everywhere; as does Nr.5 a picture of a mob hit attributed to Al Capone. Even though Nr. 5 is more horrific I find it not as creepy as Nr. 4 or Nr.1 for that matter!



Nr. 4



Nr. 5

Okay so far we have examined these images from the early 50 years of photography and you can tell when, approximately they were taken because of the difference in contrast, clarity and their unreal presentation. You will also notice that the addition of color (sepia) to image Nr.3a lessens the starkness of the subject, I think that people *wanted* to make their mementoes more like "real life" and reduce the creepiness factor! In the early days they would also hand tint photos to make them more realistic but this was very expensive.

Color film was available and it was expensive maybe too expensive to warrant using on mugshots and crime scene photos, most of these images were taken by newspaper photogs and newspapers used B&W halftone printing so why use color. The police dept's seemed to not need color to record the crime and its perpetrators they only need a record of locations, room contents, position of bodies and articles etc. If we had color pictures of these people and places we would have a different feeling about their eras; also a B&W picture makes the past look really impoverished.

Let's go on.....to the 50's: Nr.6 is Charles Starkweather mass murderer and traveling dude, he was guilty but you almost don't need a jury to convict, just look at his picture! If we colorize the photo he looks more real and less creepy? It is pretty much subjective on the observers' part.

Nr.7 is a man accused of killing his wife but now that he's dead they've found evidence that he didn't. Even the police officer looks like a criminal in comparison. The image in Nr.8 is the daybed where he says he was sleeping when she was killed, this man was a prominent doctor who lived in a large and richly furnished house but from this photo it looks like a cheap basement apartment.



Nr. 6

Nr. 6a

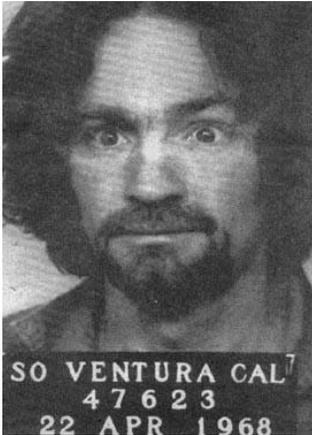


Nr. 7



Nr. 8

A last look at some old photos from the 60's and you will see more "creepiness".....the Manson family! To me these *recent* pictures look like bad high school photos rather than the images of notorious killers, you can see how much the film stock and papers have changed in 100 years. In photos 11,12 (two pictures of the same scene) you will notice that although taken at the same time the B&W image almost captures the blandness of the 1950's pictures.



Nr. 9



Nr. 10



Nr. 11



Nr. 12

One of these girls was killed in the 40's and one in the 60's, even though photo Nr.14 is taken from a newspaper the girl looks less creepy than Nr.13 "The Black Dahlia (and her killer) in Nr.15.



Nr. 13



Nr. 14



Nr. 15

To refresh the premise of this essay, B&W photography over the last 100 years has given us the impression that people in the past are living in creepiness that they appear to be in a moldy-smelling world of drabness and poverty. This can't be true because a lot of new buildings, roads etc. were built during this time. Most of these photos were taken in a world that was pretty basic, go to work, listen to the radio, maybe go to the movies long before mega-commercialization filled the home with hi-tech gadgets and thinking. So what is it, the subject or the technical process?

To extend this thesis watch a silent movie or listen to a 78 record from 1920 and if you don't get the same surreal feeling as from an old photograph, look deeper.