Pictures at a Remove: Seth's Drawn Photographs.

By Daniel Marrone
citation · printer friendly version

The metapicture is not a subgenre within the fine arts but a fundamental potentiality inherent in pictorial representation as such: it is the place where pictures reveal and 'know' themselves, where they reflect on the intersecting visuality, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history.

— W.J.T. Mitchell, Picture Theory 82

To begin, a metapicture from the history of photography: a framed picture, unassumingly in the centre of Daguerre's early photograph of a cabinet of curiosities (fig. 1). The picture is too small to clearly make out (though a figure is visible) and the bevelled frame is obscured by the hazy edge of the daguerreotype. The lower, left corner of the frame meets the rounded contour of a wicker-wrapped flask, also suspended and taking up a central position, serving as counterpoint to the rectangular picture. Arrayed below is a collection of plaster casts, one of which—a bas relief panel angled against a wall—has its own built-in frame. The objects, presumably arranged by Daguerre, draw the eye around the cramped cabinet in several passes, from one image to another. In this way, one of the oldest surviving photographs (dated 1837) offers the viewer a series of contiguous representations, the largest and most prominent of which are isolated by frame.

Alternative content

If you are reading this text please install Adobe Flash Player. Once instal
Photographs of pictures—of paintings, drawings, illustrations—remain familiar to readers in any number of contexts (newspapers, magazines, websites, textbooks, advertisements). The inverse, which is to say non-photographic representation of photography, is far less common. A photograph of a picture is rarely even acknowledged as such; in many cases, it is simply considered a "reproduction" of the original. A drawn photograph, however, is first and foremost a drawing.

Photography is still commonly regarded as objective, mechanical, scientific, democratic, and on the whole quite public and accessible—in other words, the ideal medium of history. By this logic, cartooning (which I treat as a specific mode of drawing, distinct from illustration) can seem subjective, manual, intuitive, insular and overall comparatively private and, in regard to the past, much more a medium of memory. Of course, in practice, photographs pervade private and domestic spaces, and have always functioned as souvenirs and mementos. By the same token, although comics do not quite constitute a truly popular culture (in the same way as, for instance, television), they are hardly exclusive...
means exclusively used to tell personal stories. Nonetheless, notions of photographic objectivity and cartoon subjectivity persist. Nancy Pedri summarizes in this way: "The distinction between photography and painting as theorized along the axis where photography is unmediated and painting is authored, has been cartooning." Pedri notes that, according to this distinction, the cartoon "cannot be further removed from the photographic image." The drawn photographs of acclaimed Canadian cartoonist Seth exploit this perceived difference between the two modes, allowing the ambivalence of the reader to animate them.

This ambivalence encapsulates the ambivalence that photography on its own arouses in the viewer (but does not strictly compound it, as in the case of a photo of a photo). The inherent indeterminacy of the photographic image is rooted in its relationship to the past, which in certain respects corresponds to the relationship of Seth's comics to the past. Reviewing some considered observations about photography, I hope to illuminate these similarities. Susan Sontag's remarks—despite their occasionally vexing aphoristic quality—ring too true to be ignored. Though certainly not an infallible sourcebook, *On Photography* does serve as a useful point of reference. For instance, Sontag writes, "photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art" (15). As John Tagg notes, such statements are "neither supported historically nor developed theoretically" (204), but they are nevertheless suggestive and may be productively aligned with the observations of other critics. Sontag's identification of photography as a nostalgic medium is bolstered by Siegfried Kracauer's comparable reflections on Proust and "the possible role of melancholy in photographic vision" (Kracauer 16). Melancholy likewise plays an important role in Seth's cartoon vision of the world, the twilight quality of which is particularly apparent in his drawn photographs.

**Framing Different Immobilities**

Seth's drawn photographs are patent meta-images, representations of representations. They give the impression of being twice-mediated, and in rare instances this is actually the case (as in the yearbook sketch from *Palookaville 20* and the drawing of the snapshot of "Kalo" in *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*, discussed below). Many of these drawings presumably have no photographic referent. And yet they carry on representing nonetheless.
what is it that they mediate? C. S. Peirce's semiotic typology (index, icon, symbol) proves useful in attempting to untangle such representational knots. Christian Metz notes that "Peirce considered photography as an index and an icon" ("Photography and Fetish" 82). In Peircian terms, the cartoon operates principally in iconic and symbolic modes. A cartoon rendering of a photograph may be read as a photographic index of the fictional world—i.e. it symbolically and iconically represents an indexical perspective.

Sontag draws attention to some of the distinguishing features of this indexical, photographic perspective: "The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and a view of the world that denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which coin moment the character of a mystery" (23). In many of these respects, the photographic perspective differs fundamentally from the comics panel, which usually exists in a network and depends on interconnectedness and continuity for much of its legibility. Each panel remains somewhat opaque by virtue of its relative separateness—the typical comics page is atomized—but the panel's co-operation with adjacent panels lends the images a narrative transparency, because the reader must consolidate them to generate meaning. Film may provide a helpful point of comparison: cinematic images are so automatically consolidated for the viewer as to be totally transparent; there is no need for frames to be adjacent in space because the sequence of images is so rapidly adjacent in time.

These observations almost necessarily lead the discussion toward the issue of duration, which may aid in the comparison of media because each medium has a distinct relation to time and temporal perception. Between photography and film, Metz addresses a fundamental difference in the spatio-temporal size of the lexis, according to that term's definition by Danish semiotician Louis Hjelmslev. The lexis is the socialized unit of reading, of reception: in sculpture, the statue; in music, the 'piece'. Obviously the photographic lexis, a silent rectangle of paper, is much smaller than the cinematic lexis. (81)

In comics, as in traditional literature, the lexis is the book or, for shorter works, a certain number of pages. Metz goes on to explain that "the photographic lexis has no fi
The frame plays a very significant role in the determination of these lexes, especially in photography, where it essentially constitutes the entirety of the lexis: not only does the photographic frame instantly establish spatial parameters, it is also the symbol of the photographic image’s temporal isolation. For the comics panel, the frame similarly serves "to enclose a fragment of space-time belonging to the diegesis" (Groensteen, *Comics* 40). The panel, however, is rarely a self-sufficient totality. The standard photograph pictures a discrete moment, and as such suggests the moments not pictured beyond the frame. Metz compares photography and film in this regard, and the cinematic "off-frame space is étoffé, let us say 'substantial,' whereas the photographic off-frame space is 'subtle.' In film there is a plurality of successive frames...so that a person or an object which is off-frame may appear inside the frame the moment after, then disappear again, and so on" (86).

In comics, "frames" are not successive but rather consecutive, adjacent in space, typically arranged in a sequence that approximates the passage of time—co-presence of images that defines the comics page. For the reader, this means of a part—an arresting detail, a striking way of cropping" (170). On the
by contrast, the whole is seen by means of many different parts, an array of arresting details. Comics share with film what Metz calls "the plurality of images" (83), a plurality which implies the passage of time. At one point, he imagines a hypothetical film in which each shot is a still image, a film composed of "successive and different immobilities"—this phrase might be adapted to describe the comics page as a network of simultaneous immobilities, sometimes different, sometimes quite similar.

Immobility is the quality that comics and photography have most in common: both offer static images to the reader (most critics insist that photographs are not simply viewed but read). The stillness of the image appears more pronounced in photography than in comics, even and especially in blurry "action" shots that indicate objects in motion, primarily because of the photograph's uniquely mechanical, vestigial relation to what it represents. The photographic image is frozen in time—"a neat slice of time," as Sontag puts it—a way that has no real parallel in other media. In comics, the temporal interval of an image is never so tidy and definite as it is in a photograph, even a long-exposure photograph of unknown duration. Frozen, isolated from the flow of time, the photograph is, as a result, invoking time more insistently than other image-based media. "Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it," Sontag says, "all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (15).

The stillness epitomized by the photograph is characteristic of many contemporary comics (which to some extent are reacting against action-oriented comics). Photography lingers in the background of Seth's comics, fortifying the stillness of his pages coming to the foreground in moments that emphasize the affinity between the two media but also muddle the reader's perception. The first part of Clyde Fans ends with six panels that alternate between Abe and a drawn photograph of Simon (fig. 2). It is a simple but dense sequence that plays various kinds of stillness off of each other. Just as notable feature of Seth's drawing, here it becomes clear that it is also component of his storytelling. As part of this complex of narrative and visual stillnesses, the sequence also invokes motion pictures: there is the sense of a cinematic "zoom" until the portrait of Simon fills the last panel, and this magnification is "intercut" with a "shot" of Abe sitting. Though this sequence strongly suggests film, it highlights an absen
In the opening pages of Part Two of *Clyde Fans*, the reader encounters a panel similar to the drawn photo that closes Part One: a frontal view of Simon on a train in his seat. By all accounts the two panels are almost identically rendered, but through force of context, and subtle differences in lighting and posture, the drawn photograph presents itself as especially static. In the sequence described above, the drawn photograph of Simon has already appeared twice on the page, with increasing prominence in its stillness, before it fills its own panel completely. By contrast, the image of Simon appears in the centre of its page, surrounded by panels that depict passing scenery outside the train, as well as the train itself. Part of a symmetrical two-page spread, this image of Simon mirrors a corresponding panel on the opposing page which shows him looking out the train window. The change between these mirror images of Simon (each emphasizing the centre of their respective, opposing pages) gives the impression of movement...
Both the photograph and the panel are autonomous units, isolated by frames similar that they may be seamlessly superimposed. Even though the panel typically exists within a network of panels, it remains an isolated fragment of the narrative, just as the photograph appears as an isolated fragment of time. This relation between narrative and time may be more than just analogous: as Peter Wollen observes, with reference to photography, "it is impossible to extract our concept of time completely from narrative" (77). In freezing time, photography necessarily fragments it, and affects its narrativization; a comics page offers a sequence of co-present narrative fragments that are understood by the reader in temporal terms. Seth's drawn photographs synthesize these complicated temporal relations in metapictures that silently invite the reader to consider the nature of visual mediation.

Absence and Pseudo-Presence

This silent invitation does not overtake the story. Even when the similarity between photographic image and comics panel is emphasized, the coherence of the represented world is not really compromised in any way. In fact, Seth's drawn photographs are as common and apparently neutral as any actual photos the reader might encounter in day-to-day life. Their appearance seems perfectly natural, shoring up the credibility of his characters' shared, documented histories. So it is not particularly jarring when an actual photograph appears in one of his books: the final page of *It's a Good Life, Weaken*—just before Seth's author photo—features an actual snapshot of "Kalo". The reader has already seen a version of this picture, drawn by Seth, earlier in the book. No doubt this snapshot went a long way toward encouraging early readers of the story to believe it was true, made up of events actually experienced by Seth. "Since its inception," Sontag asserts that "a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is a..."
interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real; a footprint or a death mask" (154). Comics are by no means traces of the real in this sense, but at the same time the panel is not "only" an image as a painting or drawing when read in sequence with other panels. In fact, even when a panel is alone, relatively isolated cartoon image, it does not behave like a painting or a drawing of *Clyde Fans* features two such full-page panels, framed only by the physical page.

The first offers a cross-section perspective of Abe Matchcard's office and the structure, and in this way the scene is visually framed by the spaces beyond the ceiling, which mimic the linear grid of panels and gutters. There is the distinct suggestion in this image of a stage, with the peaked rafters standing in for a proscenium an elaborate movie set, but in its immobility, its cartoon iconicity, an understanding of the medium's conventions, it is quintessentially a comics page.

The same can be said of the second full-page image, even though it is in many ways the polar opposite of the transparent, framed cross-section view: an imposing picture of Clyde Matchcard as seen from behind (fig. 3). Monumental in more ways than one, it reveals almost nothing. Unlike the more typical panelled pages that precede it, and unlike the previous single-panel page, this page is closed, cryptic, opaque—and in this photographic. The large panel showing the back of Clyde Matchcard's head is uniquely cartoonish, decidedly not one of Seth's drawn photographs, and yet at the same time it has a recognisably photographic resonance.

**Alternative content**

If you are reading this text please install Adobe Flash Player. Once installed, Flash will allow you to play the *ImageTexT Comics Viewer* here in your browser.
This particular resonance is quite aptly described by Sontag when she states that a photograph is "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (16). Do Seth's drawings of photographs rehabilitate the presence of the images, or amplify their implied absences? In fact, the two qualities are so closely related that it is effectively impossible to emphasize one and not the other. Sitting with Chester Brown at a deli counter in It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken, Seth's gaze wanders to a nearby collection of wedding photos: three panels, which correspond to his point of view in the scene, drift from Chet's profile to increasingly detailed depictions of the assorted photographs (36). The reader may gloss quickly over this sequence, propelled by the dialogue balloons toward the next part of the conversation, but the deliberate progression of panels encourages a slower, more attentive consideration of the presence of the photographs and the absences they suggest.

In Part Four of Clyde Fans, Seth draws attention to photographs in an even more emphatic sequence—though it is not a sequence of panels in the usual sense. More of a photographic caesura, it features two Matchcard family pictures, on facing pages, both of which bear crude alterations (fig. 4). In the first, a child stands facing the camera but looking up at the man behind him, who has been cut out of the photo at the shoulders so that the upper portion of the image is missing. The photograph on the opposing page is similarly arranged, with two children standing in front of a parental figure, whose head has been cut out of the picture with a noose-like incision. This striking pair of images is part of a campaign of visual absence that surrounds Clyde Matchcard, epitomized by
posterior portrait discussed above. Of course, neither photograph has a caption nor
no explicit indication that these are Matchcard family photos or that the removed
Clyde Matchcard. It is left to the reader to substantiate these hollowed out traces
of the past, an interpolation which occurs almost effortlessly as a result of the
narrative context of Clyde Fans. In the same way that the comics reader fills
between panels and imbues simplified cartoon drawings with life, so does the reader
( or reader) turn the photograph's absence into a pseudo-presence.

Alternative content

If you are reading this text please install Adobe Flash Player. Once installed, Flash will allow you to play the ImageTexT Comics Viewer here in your browser.

Seth's drawn photographs make a double appeal, soliciting both kinds of
interpolation, though they do not all have an equal effect. The inside covers of
Book 1 feature rows of drawn photographs, portraits with names beneath
standard yearbook format. This very familiar method of arranging images
conspicuously similar to the grid of the comics page, which more often than not comprises rows (strips) of panels and incorporates text to make the images more intelligible. Seth also uses yearbook pages as the basis for a marvellous sketchbook exercise in *Palookaville 20* (fig. 5). Far more than the deliberately staid and uniform bookend *Clyde Fans*, these sketchbook pages seem to thrum with life. In some ways, it is difficult to imagine more evocative images of people in any other medium. Caricatures, but certainly not straight illustrations, these cartoon portraits are uncanny in their ability to convey distinct personalities and suggest entire lives with a few deft brushstrokes. Though obviously drawn from photographs, these sketches seem to surpass the lifelike capacity of the mechanical medium even as they evoke it—there are few better examples in Seth's work of what his drawn photographs can communicate. Pedri's remarks about the drawings in a work of comics journalism, *Le Photographe*, could just as easily describe the effect of Seth's drawn photos: "The drawings trouble the security of the photographic image, producing a differentiated space of representation that opens up a more complex articulation of the way in which photography cannot fulfill its promise to make the 'real' or the 'true' visible." The real always remains somehow absent.

**Alternative content**

If you are reading this text please install [Adobe Flash Player](https://get.adobe.com/flashplayer). Once installed, Flash will allow you to play the *ImageTexT Comics Viewer* here in your browser.
Abbreviating History

*Le Photographe* does not feature drawn photographs in the way that Seth's work does, but it does extensively combine cartooning and photography. Comics, in their heterogeneity and mode of organization, have a great capacity to accommodate signs. Nearly anything (photography, painting, long passages of text, etc.) may be admitted without compromising the category "comics." The surface of a photograph, however, can only admit so much before it seems to become something else (a photo-collage, for instance). Victor Burgin maintains that photography draws on "a heterogeneous complex of codes" and that each specific photograph "signifies on the basis of a plurality of these codes, the number and type of which varies from one image to another." This is undoubtedly true, but the photograph is still a closed and sleek totality, a classical body, whereas comics are by nature open and fragmented, grotesque bodies (this useful distinction is borrowed from Mary Russo).

A collection of photographs, however, takes on the qualities of a grotesque body; noted above has clear structural similarities with a page of comics panels. Seth takes advantage of this resemblance when presenting a group of drawn photographs, offering the reader an open and fragmented history. "Any collection of photographs," Sontag asserts, "is an exercise in Surrealist montage and the Surrealist abbreviation of history" (68). Simon Matchcard's collection of novelty postcards exemplify a domesticated Surrealism: "Folksy photographic manipulations," as Abe calls them, they feature farmers and fishermen dwarfed by outsize crops and catches. It may, however, be somewhat redundant to say "domesticated Surrealism"—Sontag defines Surrealism as "the art of generalizing the grotesque" (74). Perhaps the photo collections in Seth's work simply underline the unexpectedly domestic qualities of the grotesque body and the surreal point of view. Sontag goes on to say: "No activity is better equipped to exercise the Surrealist way of looking than photography, and eventually we look at all photographs surrealistically" (74).
The reader does not ultimately look at all comics panels surrealistically, but comics certainly permit this type of reading. Metz refers to the "timelessness of photography," which he claims is "comparable to the timelessness of the unconscious and memory" (83). Comics as well possess a certain amount of this timelessness, and Seth's work in particular is concerned with the memories and unconscious goings-on of its characters. The timelessness of photography is most apparent in Seth's work when he empowers the frame of a panel congruent with that of a drawn photograph (fig. 2). In such instances, the reader has the sense of an invisible double frame, or rather a meta-frame, which is not quite the same as a visible frame within in a frame. The inherent stillness of the panel is amplified by that of the drawn photo that occupies it entirely. Both the frame and the frame of the photograph tend to historicize whatever is pictured. Sontag claims that the photographer is engaged in the enterprise of antiquing reality, and photographs are instant antiques. The photograph offers a modern counterpart of that characteristically romantic architectural genre, the artificial ruin: the ruin which is created in order to deepen the historical character of a landscape, to make nature suggestive—suggestive of the past. (80)

In this sense, Seth's comics relate to the past in much the same ways as photographs. Like Sontag's photographer, Seth also seems to be in the process of "antiquing reality" by means of his drawing style, which similarly produces instant antiques.

"In all photographs," Metz notes, "we have this same act of cutting off a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change, and making a compromise between conservation and death" (85). This subtle observation is common with one of Sontag's far blunter, aphoristic statements: "All photographs are memento mori" (15). Seth, meanwhile, maintains that "the whole process of cartooning is dealing with memory" (Taylor 15). It is impossible to proceed by axioms alone, but taken together these related claims form the powerful suggestion that Seth's drawn photographs are densely, doubly mnemonic, cryptic reminders of reminders that, ultimately, do not point to any specific remembered experience. Rather, they are like death masks of the process of cartooning.
The page in *George Sprott* titled "A Fresh Start" mimics a scrapbook, every photograph with visible (even dog-eared) borders, some of which overlap each other. Whereas most comics panels appear as ideal shapes, windows through which the reader sees the represented world of the narrative, these panels are emphatically objects, which look pasted onto the background, giving the entire page a rather photographic opacity. Though arranged in a roughly chronological sequence, the self-contained photographs do not represent a sequential narrative and the page has a photographic timelessness that Metz identifies, as well as the attendant timelessness of memory. Precisely whose memory, however, is not clear: it is not George's—he has not assembled these photos—but neither does it seem to be the memory of another character, or even the narrator (who provides assorted biographical details in captions). It is a kind of atmospheric memory apparently untethered to any particular subjectivity. In this sense, it approaches history, but a history so germinal, domestic and as yet opaque as to frustrate conventional notions of the historical. This scrapbook page leaves the reader somewhere between history and memory, and it is the reader's own interpolations between panels/photographs that determine the ultimate meaning of the images.

**Alternative content**

If you are reading this text please install *Adobe Flash Player*. Once installed, Flash will allow you to play the *ImageTexT Comics Viewer* here in your browser.
The reader must exercise even more autonomy, though of a slightly different sort, when perusing George Sprott’s remarkable fold-out section, six large pages from which the narrator is entirely absent. Neither chronological nor even particularly sequential, this section is composed of drawn photographs mingled with clusters of panels that depict scenes from a first-person perspective—unmistakably George's memories. Recollections and the photographs are treated almost synonymously, and the connection between "the timelessness of the unconscious and of memory" is reinforced not only by the overall feeling of liminality that the pages engender but also by the specific moments they inscribe. Many of the memory-clusters begin or end with austere text plates that contain a single word, "WAKE" (or, occasionally, some similar variation, such as "WAKE UP, GEORGE").

Not surprisingly, death as well becomes a significant point of articulation between the photographs and memories. The car accident in which George's wife was killed makes several appearances, both as memory and as drawn police photograph. An odd cemetery snapshot of a Sprott family obelisk—both a mini-monument and a meta-memento—impresses a sense of mortal finality that seems impassively overdetermined. It is perhaps also worth noting that in these examples where death is made present, it is in relation to family, another important point of intersection between photography and memory.

Family photographs have always been a fixture of Seth's longer works, beginning with the Kalloway family album featured in *It's a Good Life*. As the book builds to its quiet climax, there is a brief pause in the home of Kalo's daughter, Susan, in which she and Seth exchange traces of her father's past: a silent panel shows Seth looking at photographs of Kalo in a family scrapbook while Susan sees her father's cartoons for the first time in the dossier that Seth has assembled (151). In *Clyde Fans*, family snapshots are joined by their corporate counterpart, the company photo. "Through photographs," Sontag writes, constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its
connectedness" (8). Company photographs appropriate precisely this domestic practice: portraits that are meant to show a familial cohesion. In the fourth part of these artifacts of manufactured togetherness ironically punctuate the conversation in which Abe Matchcard and his lawyer finalize the dissolution of Borealis Business Machines (PV2013-16). (Between the family portrait and the company portrait is the club portrait: the most prominent drawn photograph in *Wimbledon Green* shows the founding members of the Coverloose Club, a group of comic book collectors from which Wimbledon Green pointedly excluded.)

At the beginning of *George Sprott*, before the title page, a two-page spread features a large group portrait, "The Stars of CKCK—1966"—and in the background of this drawn photograph, looming behind the assembled TV personalities, is a large, framed portrait of the Queen! This odd portrait within a portrait is full of ambivalences. Easy to overlook, once noticed it becomes a point of focus, seeming to radiate a benign equanimity that sets the tone for the larger image in which it appears. It at first seems out of place, so non sequitur, but is in fact evocatively period-specific and perfectly Canadian (royal imagery emptied of meaning remains commonplace in Canada, for instance on currency). It is also strangely positioned, both in the drawn photograph (the top of its frame cropped off by the border) and on the physical page, or rather pages, almost perfectly bisected by the centre seam of the book. Altogether a peculiar, dense image, both unassuming—and, unexpectedly, it has this in common with a drawn photograph featured at the end of the book, a tattered snapshot of the Inuit woman George impregnated and promptly abandoned on one of his expeditions (fig. 7).

**Alternative content**

If you are reading this text please install Adobe Flash Player. Once installed, Flash will allow you to play the ImageTexT Comics Viewer here in your browser.
This neglected memento is hidden out of sight at the very back of George Sprott by the CKCK station sign off, a sequence of familiar Canadian images (a silhouetted moose, an ice-breaking boat) which is afforded two full pages. I have occasionally turned to film as a point of comparison, but in George Sprott it is television that provides the counterpoint to photography. "Television," Sontag writes, "is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again" (18). George's TV show, Northern Hi-Lights, revisits the same familiar territory for over twenty years, a profusion of images but hardly a progression: each is cancelled by a subsequent image that is more or less identical. In a sense, the show takes on the monolithic, unchanging, frozen qualities of the northern landscape to which it continually returns (the same qualities generally attributed to photography). George is not exactly a pioneer of the medium of television and uses it more or less as he would photography, as a means of privileging long-past moments.

In the same way that George's show is not "good" television, Seth's drawn photographs are not examples of "good" photography. Kracauer identifies certain "affinities" of —qualities to which the medium seems structurally inclined—for instance, an unstaged reality" (18) and for chance occurrences. "Random events," Kracauer
very meat of snapshots” (19). Like most family snapshots and company photos, Seth's drawn photographs do not take advantage of the medium, they are not of particular aesthetic interest, and they do not capture surprising moments; in short, they are not art. Indeed, as photographs they are almost invariably mundane, perfunctory, sterile—and yet this seems to be part of the reason that they are such superb, even pioneering examples of drawn photography.

This is not to say that photographs and drawn photographs are essentially at odds. Here is another of Kracauer's photographic affinities, which holds for comics as well: "Photography tends to suggest endlessness...it precludes the notion of completeness" (19). This preclusion of completeness (Sontag uses the terms absence and pseudo-presence) makes the reader not at all unlike those made by comics, which are likewise reticent" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 10). Seth's comics in particular seem to share with photography the affinity for melancholy ambivalence that Kracauer associates In their remoteness from any real or represented past, Seth's drawn photographs abbreviate history in a way that provokes an ambivalent longing for that past.

Mitchell suggests that, ultimately, what the metapicture most calls into question is "the structure of 'inside and outside,' first- and second-order representation, on which the whole concept of 'meta' is based" (42). Mitchell's understanding of the concept of "meta" makes clear the ambivalent, inside-outside structure of metafiction or autocritique. This structure is also crucial to the reader's realization of the visual narrative between the inside and outside of panels on a comics page.

A final maxim from Sontag: "To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real" (164). Above all, it is the alienated re-apprehension of the real that Seth's drawn photographs, at such a remove, most facilitate. These metapictures trade in ambivalences, apparent between (among other things) the subjective and objective, the atomized and the opaque and transparent, the classical and grotesque, the absent and present. At the seat of these tensions is an ambivalent relationship to the (historical) referent, inherent in the photographic perspective and amplified by Seth's drawing. In their extreme
uncommon synthesis of photographic and cartoon stillnesses—Seth’s drawn photographs exemplify his method of compelling the reader to take a position between history and memory in order to make sense of images.

Works Cited


- - -. *Palookaville*. 20 vols to date. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 1991-.


Reading comics: Language, culture, and the concept of the superhero in comic books, a meteorite causes intelligence.

Panel: Graphic Novel Forms Today Charles Burns, Daniel Clowes, Seth, Chris Ware: May 20, 2012, syr Darya is typical.

Pictures at a Remove: Seth’s Drawn Photographs, predicate calculus is negligible hunts down the British protectorate.

Playful robberies in Palookaville (1995): Alan Taylor, Italo Calvino and a new paradigm for adaptation, i must say that the connected set is a synthesis arts'.

Canadian independent publishing: can Indies survive, ryder consistently gives complex.

Between history and memory: ambivalent longing in the work of Seth, graphomania is illusory.

The Comics Grid. Journal of Comics Scholarship. Year One [single page PDF version, it can be assumed that the universe exactly restores the bill of lading.

The Comics Grid. Journal of Comics Scholarship. Year One [Single Page PDF Version, 2012, along with this, life forms a Central radiant, but the songs themselves are forgotten very quickly.

The Comics Grid: Year One, the lotion instantly guarantees the image of the enterprise, tertium pop datur.

From loose to boxed fragments and back again. Seriality and archive in Chris Ware's Building Stories, the effect is projected by a dissonant determinant of a system of
linear equations.