



Photography and society in the Victorian Era - based on Jens Jäger's book 'Gesellschaft und Photographie - Formen und Funktionen der Photographie in Deutschland und England 1839- 1860'

Monika Rusek

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This essay mainly refers to the society in which photography arose. We shall look at the economic and social situation when photography appeared and how photography was perceived by the Victorians. Also some aspects of the problematic discussion if photography can become an art are considered in this essay. These aspects are concerning only the nineteenth century and what people thought in that time about this topic. The first chapter tells the history of photography. It covers an overview how photography developed and what advantages each development involved.

The second chapter deals with the initial situation when photography was first publicly announced in 1839. We will come across cultural and scientific institutions and the infrastructure of the means of communication in that time. This is important for an understanding of the context in which the invention of photography took place. And therefore to see why photography developed so fast and powerfully in that century.

The third section is about photography as a business, concerning its economical and technical expansion. It illuminates the fact that photography was on the way to become a mass media but was still too expensive to reach all social strata. Moreover, we will have a look at the middle class which is held responsible for supporting photography the most, being the bearer-class and upholder of photography.

The fourth chapter highlights the functions photography had. It explains which social requirements and conventions photography had to obey to survive. Furthermore, we will pay attention to some reactions that were written down in newspapers and magazines about the new phenomenon. This section, concentrates on the thesis Jens Jäger had formulated in his book *Gesellschaft und Photographie* (Opladen 1996), namely that photography's function was steered and defined by the people's views and values. The question we will look at is: Which objects were considered to be worth to take a photo of and why?

The fifth chapter concerns itself with the artistic status of photography and with its discussions and debates that were led in the Victorian time when photography was classified mainly as a scientific (mechanical and optical) process. In this section I will write, as well, about some photographers who are said to have been artists and to have produced some important artistic works.

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