

Documentary and The Evidentiary

*Photographs do more than redefine
the stuff of ordinary experience.
...Reality as such is redefined.*
Susan Sontag

The work challenges the myth within the documentary tradition, that knowledge of the world is somehow transparently revealed by the photographic image and that the photographer exposes some reality that is evidential, unmediated, and ahistoric. And more generally, the realist's epistemological assumptions of representation, that the image imparts some epistemological truth of a pre-imaged reality, and the metaphysical certainties of that representation.

The 'measuring device' employed in the work is not an attempt to reform photographic language or to present some kind of evidentiary truth. Rather, it is a tactic to take photographic practice out of the epistemological speculations of a realism that sees the pre-photographic 'real' as something that is given and neutral, to its uses within the discursive practices of that mode of representation; to situate its use within a system of representation. It functions as a self-reflexive mechanism to interfere with, impede, frustrate the viewer's desire to perceive what is imaged as some truth unknown to them, that is somehow 'artistically' revealed by the photographer.

Although meaning is there, as in the "Packaged Health" series where the packaging of 'health' is evidenced, the interference of the 'measuring device' shifts meaning from an interpretive, idealist conceptualization of the image to a more explanitive, realist conceptualization of the image, in other words, a less metaphysical conceptualization. And by not resorting to the interpretive, mystified view of meaning it interferes with the viewer's search for new 'meanings'; for a new mode of representation, which in turn induces a more explanitive, realist view of representation. It becomes not a question of how is 'knowledge of the world' acquired by the photographic image, but how is 'knowledge of the world' produced, and transmitted, by the photographic image.

Chuck Sillery