

Foreword 1

The Editor to the Reader

I understand photography as the concrete manifestation of cultural, interpersonal and technological conditions: it is not a matter of representation, documentation or abstraction. It exemplifies an approach to contemporary life that is as vast and ungraspable as the processes of globalization – of which it is an important factor due to the propagation of the image as commodity – and the textures of personal relations, which it increasingly facilitates.

In short, it is not about you and me, but ‘we’. The way we live now, no matter where; the food we eat; the money we trade for goods, and the desire we build for both. It deals with aspirations to ‘real life’ and the lack of definition we have for this. In fact, photography is better discussed in terms of what it is not. It is not about commerce, art, journalism, law or history. It transcends all this. The way we are embedded in photography on a daily basis, as agents or receivers, willing or reluctant, is astonishing. You, I and we cannot avoid it, like we can’t avoid economics, politics, conventions or laws. Written or spoken, imagined or applied, or refused, photography embodies what it is to live today.

Photography constitutes itself as it takes place, over and over, in every corner of the planet, so perhaps there is little sense in identifying photographic genres. It is, quite

simply and endlessly complexly, the common substrata of our daily experience. *Critical Photography* embraces this idea and aims to enter into a mutual relationship with other systems of our existence. The written world, for example, is not only a language but also a way of constituting ourselves and our communities, as are all the images we produce and consume through cameras. Photography and critical writing are placed in proximity. Occasionally they intersect – and when they approach a common topic this is obvious and productive – while elsewhere they may be tangential or even totally divergent. That is fine. Paraphrasing John Dewey, one learns not only by doing, but also by forming and elaborating the idea of what he or she does. This is an important aspect of photography, as it affects our very existence through ideas and practices. We may be enriched or disempowered but never unaltered. And the reception of both photography and writing, too, is a condition of their production, the potential to intervene in and alter life.

The first volume of *Critical Photography* has developed from this consideration, and deals with the life in the city. It is concerned with the living in and acting out of that which is designated urban; it examines the ongoing interactions between cognitive perception, physical wanderings, organic inhabitation and cold examination. It dissects the content that is in fact form, which turns out to be context. Particular to the urban environment, photography marks constant acts of translation between the multiple narratives in which we are entangled. So let us start from here.

Alfredo Cramerotti, Editor