

BEFORE THE CAPTURE

A Brief Outline of Pre-Capture Judgment in Photographic Practice

WHAT IS PRE-CAPTURE?

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This outline considers not the moment of taking a photograph itself, but the judgments that arise immediately before it.

In the author's photographic practice, a photograph does not begin at the moment the shutter is released. Rather, it begins to emerge through a process of judgment already forming before that moment. When multiple conditions—subject, space, distance, light, movement, silence, and a sense of time—begin to shift, photographic judgment is already taking shape.

This outline does not treat photography merely as a matter of camera operation or compositional choice. Instead, it understands photography as a form of practice-based knowledge: how the photographer perceives changes in the field, at what stage they respond, and how they eventually arrive at the shutter.

It presents a brief overview of what the author calls the judgment structure of the “pre-capture” moment.

1. THREE PROPOSITIONS

Proposition 1

The photographer sees not the subject itself, but a field of conditions.

Photographic judgment is not formed by a single subject or by visual information alone. Distance, light, movement, silence, the tension of the subject, and the photographer's bodily sense come into temporary relation. When these conditions begin to connect, photographic possibility begins to emerge.

Proposition 2

The shutter is not the starting point of judgment, but a point of convergence.

The shutter is not where photographic judgment begins. The photographer finds the subject, measures distance, waits, approaches, withdraws, and decides whether to take or not take the photograph. The shutter is released at the point where these multiple judgments temporarily converge.

Proposition 3

Photographic technique is the technique of responding to a state through distance.

Photographic technique does not consist only of operating the camera. The photographer perceives the state of the field and decides whether to approach, wait, intervene, or refrain from photographing. The photographer seeks a distance that changes the subject and the field, but does not change them too much.

2. KEY CONCEPTS

Pre-Capture

Pre-Capture does not simply mean the time before the shutter is released. It refers to the entire process through which the photographer perceives changes in the subject or space and moves toward the act of photographing. It is the stage in which the conditions for a photograph are already forming, even before the photograph exists.

Judgment Structure

Judgment Structure refers to the framework through which the photographer integrates multiple conditions—whether to photograph or not, whether to approach or wait, whether to speak or remain silent—and recognizes a photographable state. It is not a fixed procedure, but a structure embodied through repeated practice.

Perception of State

Perception of State is the ability to sense tension or signs that a field is moving toward a photographable state before that change becomes a clear event. It may occur before the subject moves, before the landscape settles, or before the moment becomes visible.

Practice-Based Knowledge

Practice-Based Knowledge is not knowledge that exists first as theory. It is tacit knowledge formed through repeated practice. This outline does not treat such knowledge as mere intuition or coincidence, but as something that can be described structurally after the fact.

3. OBSERVATIONS FROM PRACTICE

Signs Before Animal Movement

When photographing animals, judgment does not begin at the moment a clear movement occurs. The direction of the ears, a shift in weight, breathing, and muscular tension are received as signs before movement, as changes in the overall state of the field.

Relational Distance in Portrait Photography

When photographing people, expression is not the only matter. If the photographer comes too close, the subject may close off. If the photographer remains too far, no relation emerges. Between these distances, the photographer judges silence, words, tension, and the state of the relationship.

Convergence in Spatial Photography

In landscapes and spaces, light, shadow, wind, the passage of people, and the temporal atmosphere of a place may temporarily overlap. The photographer responds not only to an event itself, but to the process through which a state is beginning to converge.

4. POSITION

This outline does not claim academic universality. It is a structural essay that describes forms of judgment repeatedly appearing in the author's photographic practice as a form of practice-based knowledge.

A photograph is not only the result of a released shutter. It is also a trace of judgments formed before that moment. To consider what kind of judgment structure existed before the image came into being—and how the field was perceived before the photograph was made—is to understand photography not merely as a result, but as a trace of practice.

Full essay: Before the Capture (Practice-Based Structural Essay 01, 2026)

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