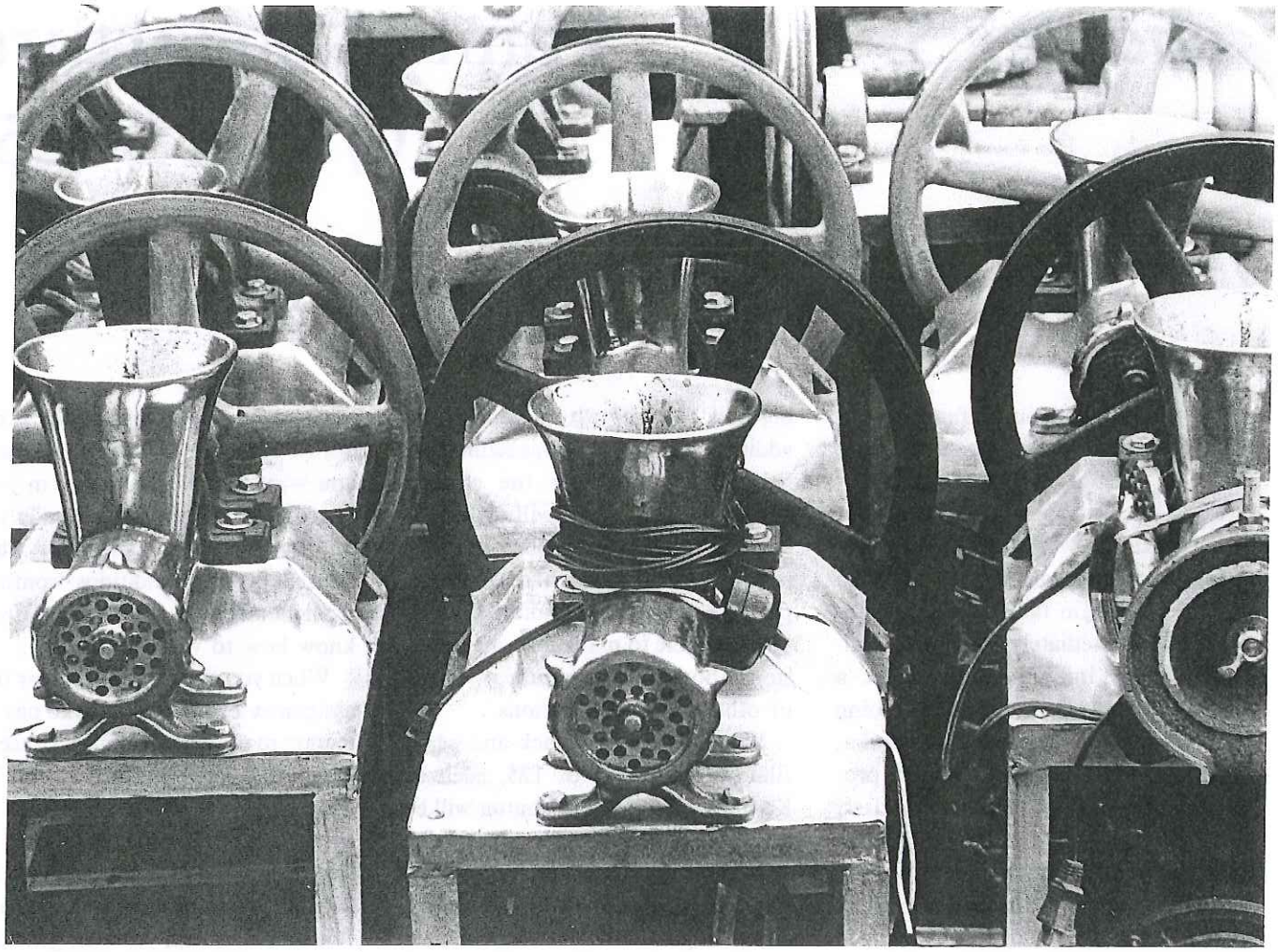


Used correctly, the "point of departure" setting will produce consistently good results in bright sunlight. (Student photograph.)

chapter 5 Point of Departure (f/16 at 1/125)

Now that you are familiar with your camera, and have begun to evaluate composition, it's time to start putting your knowledge to work—by actually taking some photographs. In order to help you begin taking good photographs immediately, technical concerns will initially be kept to a minimum. At first, you will be doing little more than aiming your camera, focusing and shooting. As you proceed through the various exercises, however, you will gradually add on new techniques, learning new ways to express your own vision. By the time you reach the end of this book, you will have a solid foundation of skill and the beginnings of a personal style. Later, as you continue to progress on your own, you'll be able to push your skill and style to the limit. But for now, we'll stick to the basics.

STARTING SIMPLY

Your first assignments will be based on a "point of departure" that will enable you to produce technically successful photographs without getting bogged down in details. You will be using a standard aperture and shutter-speed setting: f/16 at 1/125 of a second.

By using one standard setting, you'll be able to concentrate on learning how to "see" with a camera. In addition, starting with this setting will help you learn how the camera works. This, in turn, will provide a basis for all your future photography. Once you've had some experience with the standard setting, you'll be able to make informed decisions about how to handle a variety of other lighting situations.

You will be using black-and-white film with an ISO of 125, such as Kodak's Plus-X. Your shutter will be set at 1/125 of a second, fast enough to "freeze" most action. Your aperture will be small—f/16—so almost everything will be in focus. After loading the film, you'll adjust your camera controls to these settings—and leave them there.

You may find yourself tempted to change the settings if your light meter disagrees with them. (After all, that's what the light meter is for, right?) But for now, just pretend the light meter isn't there.

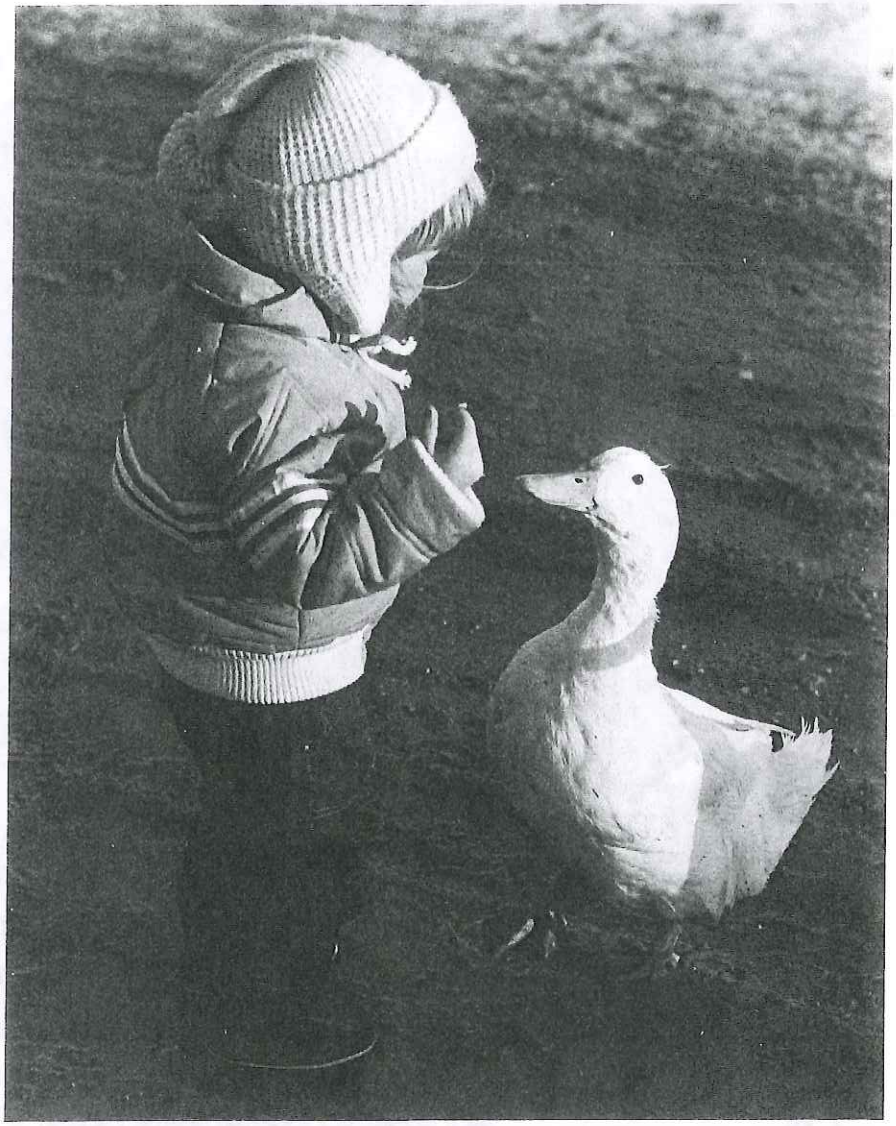
There are several good reasons not to rely on your light meter at the beginning. First, if you learn to shoot without it, you'll be better equipped to do so when necessary—such as when your batteries die on you, 100 miles from the nearest camera shop. (Many cameras can be used manually without batteries, though some modern ones cannot.) A second good reason is that your light meter is not always accurate. Light meters assume you want the average value in your photograph to be gray. Usually you do. But when you don't, or when unusual lighting conditions "confuse" the light meter, then it's vital that you know how to work without it.

When you start shooting your first assignments, you will need to pay attention to only one technical concern: make sure your subject is well lit. This means that you will need to shoot outdoors in sunny weather. A day with some clouds is okay, but a heavily overcast or rainy day is not. It also means that you will generally want the sun to be behind you—so it is shining on your subject, not in your lens.

So long as your subject is well lit, and you stick to f/16 at 125, you will produce correctly exposed photographs. That's a promise. Try it.

DOING IT RIGHT

The need for good light brings up another important point: Don't wait till the last minute. For each of your assignments, take the time to locate interesting subjects and to shoot them well. Keep an eye on the weather, and be ready to make use of it when it's good. (Bear in mind that overcast skies, rain and snow can be "good,"



Student photograph by Linda Haymond.

once you've learned how to use them.) Do some exploring before you start shooting. Don't just step into your back yard and grab a few quick shots. Sometimes you will find a great subject there, but even so, give yourself enough time to really see it.

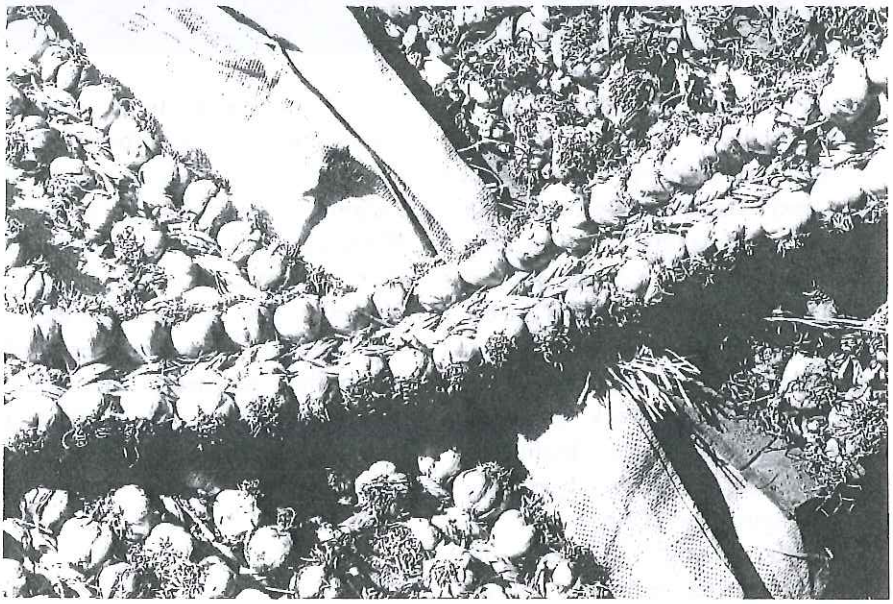
Every time you photograph a subject, try to take several shots of it from several completely different angles. Use your camera to explore the subject, to learn about it, to discover how it interacts with other objects, with light, with space. Never allow yourself to take just one shot and call it quits. Who knows what you might have missed?

Though it is important to reserve time to devote to your photography assignments, try to keep them in mind at other times as well. When you're out walking, shopping in town, travelling—anytime you're doing anything—keep your eyes open for photographic possibilities. Even if you don't have a camera with you, or never go back to make use of those possibilities, it's good practice to look for them. Photography is essentially a way of seeing, a way of sorting through all the images that rush past you every day and noticing the special ones. The more you train yourself to see in this way, the better you'll do when you set out to capture some of those special images on film.

On a more practical level, you'll find that you enjoy your assignments more if you've already compiled a mental list of interesting places to explore with your camera. You may even want to write that list down, so you'll have a ready source of inspiration when you need it. If you do, you won't waste time later wandering around in search of something to photograph.

Great shots are very rarely quick and easy. Usually, they require patience and imagination. The more time you devote to each assignment, the more you will learn—and the better your results will be. There's a special sense of accomplishment that only comes from working slowly, carefully and creatively. Making that your goal, from the very beginning, is well worth the effort.

Finally, as you're shooting each assignment, keep reminding yourself of its theme. It's easy to get so caught up in a subject that you forget to look for line or texture or whatever else the assignment is supposed to be about. While such enthusiasm is commendable, it is important to stick to the themes of the assignments, and to seek out subjects that are specifically appropriate to them. Once you've done that, you can always take a little more time to just shoot whatever interests you.



Student photograph by Jon Ginsberg.

Student photograph by Kenneth Griggs.

chapter 6 Line

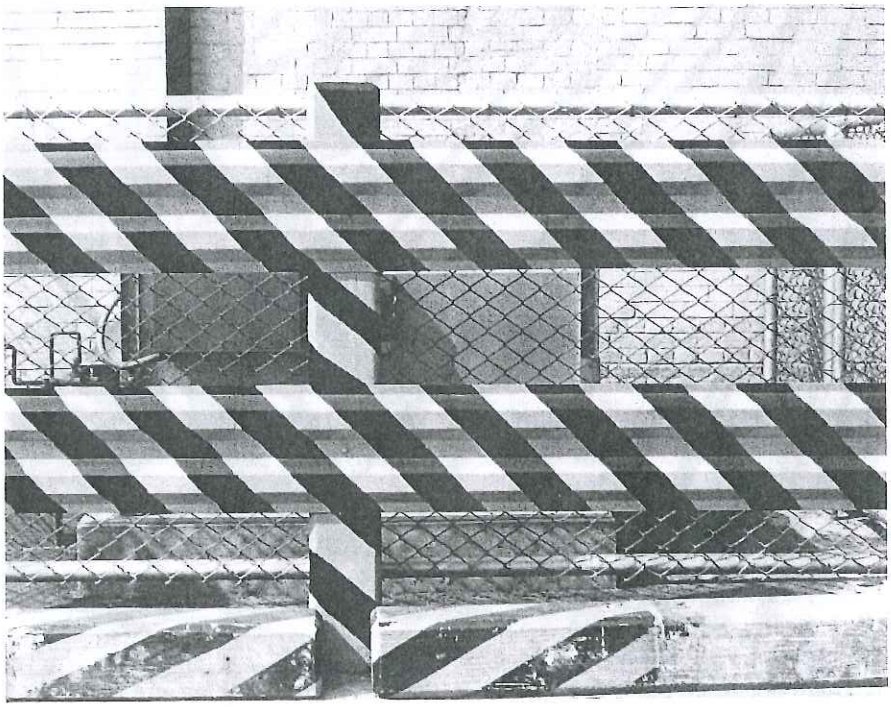
The "point of departure" camera setting (f/16 at 125 of a second) provides an uncomplicated introduction to the mechanics of photography. We'll now do the same thing with composition. The first subject in photographic theory is, quite simply, line.

PATTERN, STRUCTURE, DIRECTION

You may recall that in geometry a line is a one-dimensional series of points. Several lines are required to define a three-dimensional shape.

You could say that a line is an edge, a border between one thing and another. It can also be the connection between two things, like a clothesline tied between two trees. Straight, curved, bent or zig-zagged, it goes from one place to another.

Understanding lines is one of the primary requirements of photography. Virtually every photograph, of course, has lines in it. Some of these lines do more than merely divide or connect objects. They may also suggest moods and rhythm, create patterns, indicate directions and structure. The various *qualities* of the lines in a photograph combine to produce an overall impression, called **line.**

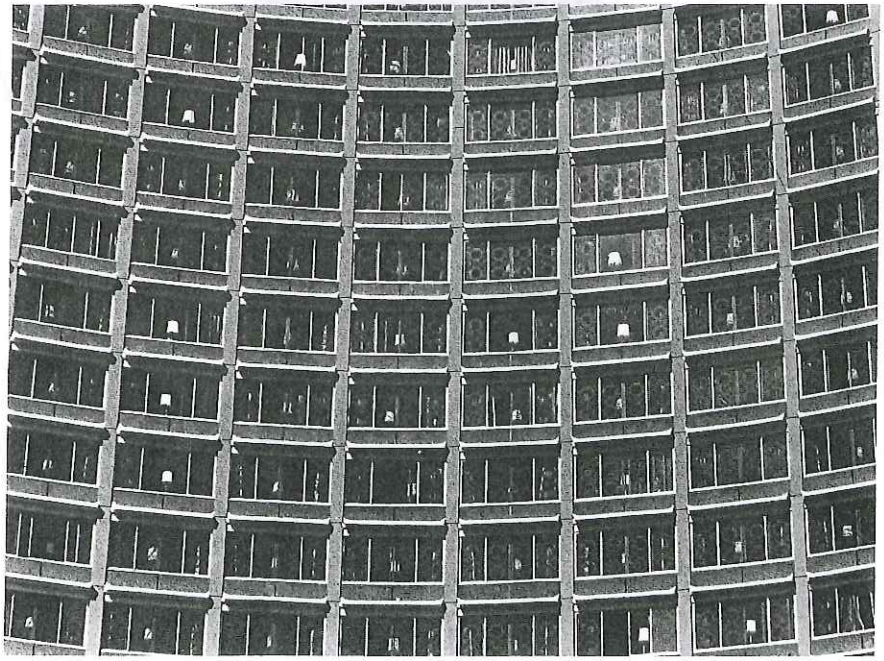


How do your eyes react to this highly linear shot? Does it hold their interest? If so, why? (Student photograph by Jean Ann Hall.)

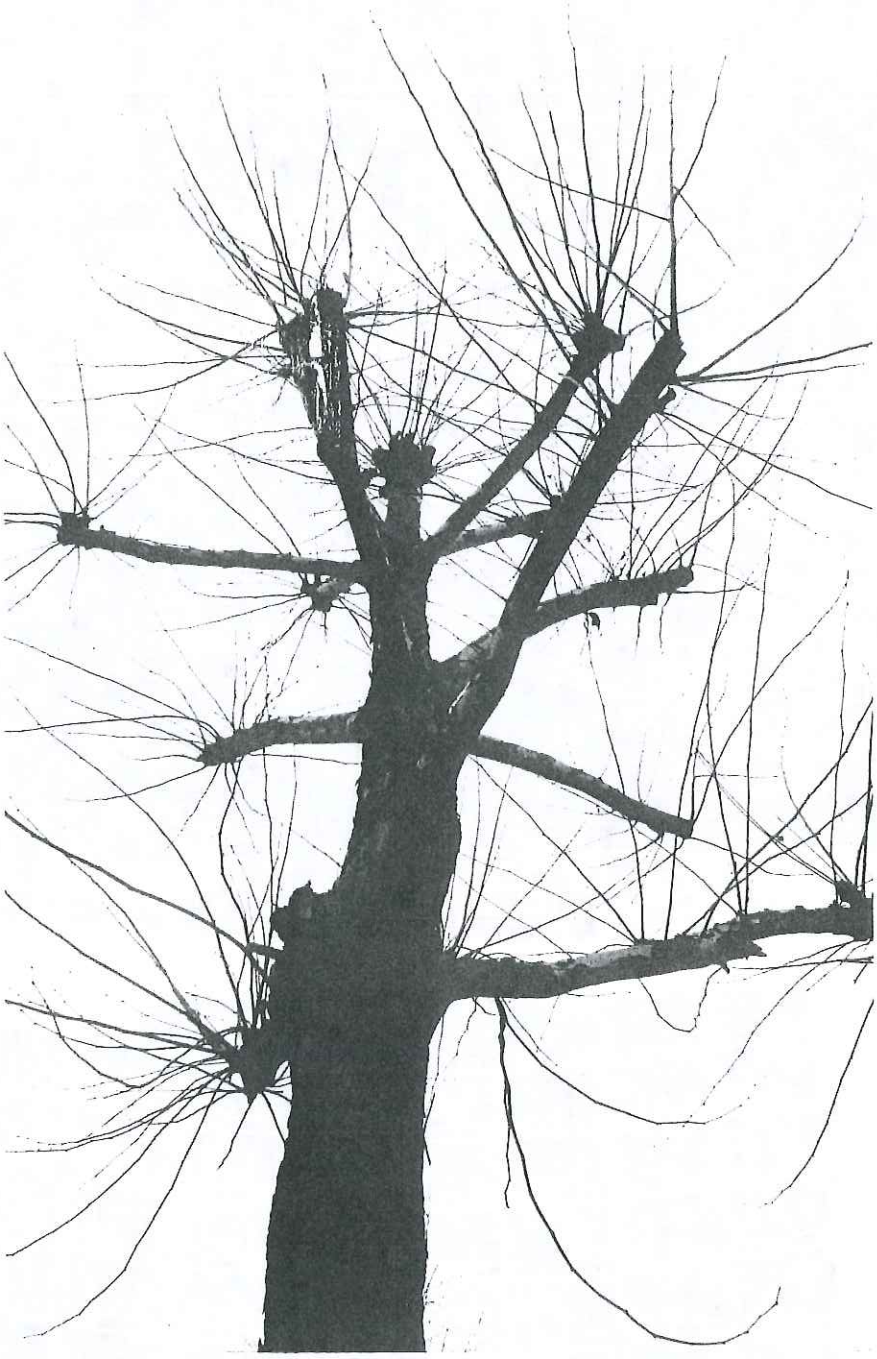
Line is not passive. Instead, it is a strong visual force that pulls the viewer's eye around in a picture. Used well, it suggests movement, conveys impact and helps to focus attention on the key points of the composition. Used poorly, it distracts attention and weakens the composition's effect. It may be simple, but is also powerful. It is a bit like electricity. And like electricity, it must be controlled to be useful.

Line may be a subject in itself (as it will be in your first assignment), or it can play a supporting role for another subject. Lines may be connected in a larger pattern or isolated from each other, evenly distributed across the frame in an orderly manner, or scattered at random. A photograph may be dominated by just one line or packed with many. A line need not be "real" to have its effect. Objects of the same height (such as a

How many basic line effects are in this photograph? (Student photograph by Robert Muller.)



How many basic line effects are there in this photograph? Notice how the lampshades and the several open windows add "punctuation" to the overall pattern. (Student photograph by John Pang.)



What "instructions" do these lines give to your eye? How does your eye move around the photograph? Where, if anywhere, does your eye come to rest? (Student photograph by William Roche.)

row of fence posts) and the border between a building and the sky both produce an *implied* line that works just as well.

All of these possibilities boil down to three basic functions: pattern, direction and structure.

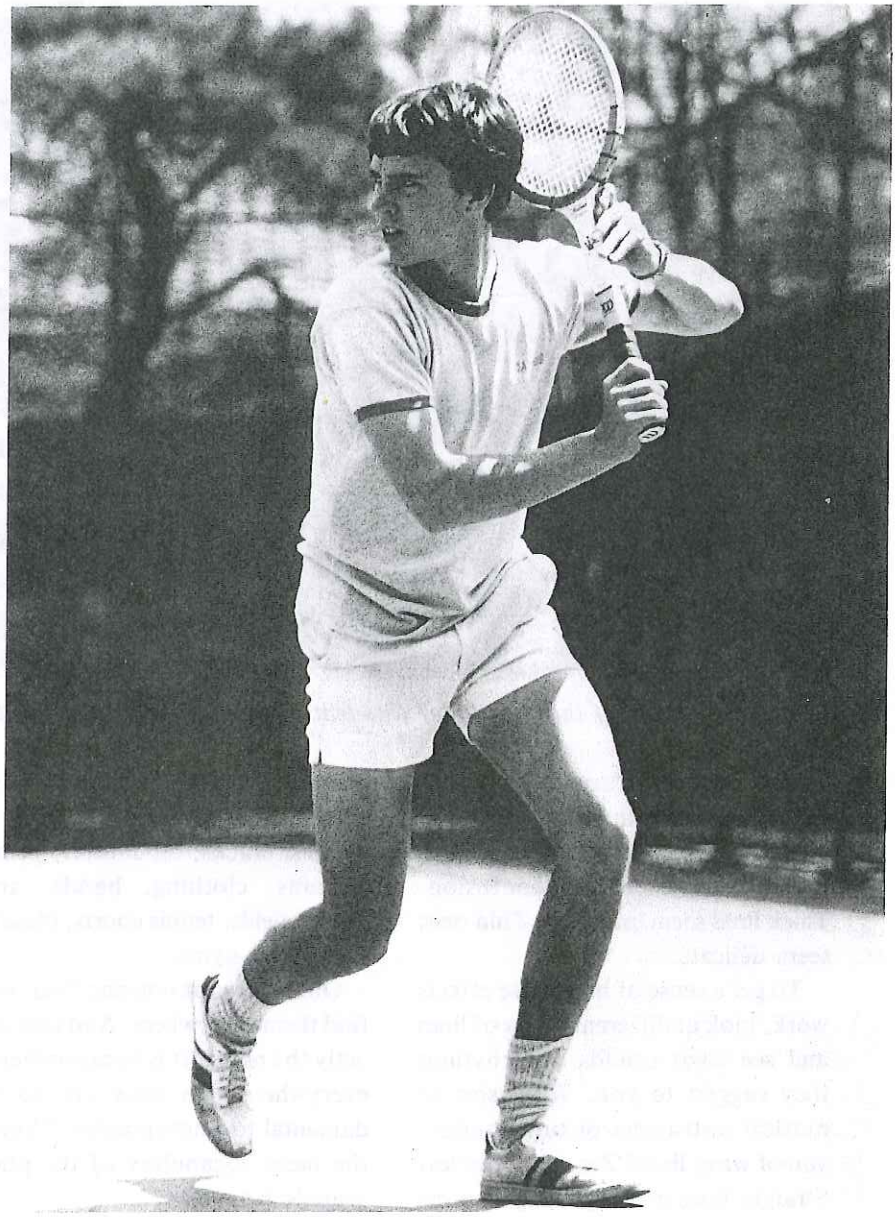
As **pattern,** line is often a photograph's primary element. The lines themselves interact in some interesting way that is more important than any other elements within the frame. A photograph of buildings or cornfields or blades of grass is likely to emphasize pattern.

As **direction,** line helps the viewer's eye travel around the picture. Visually, the lines say, "Go here. Look at that. Stop. Move on." A photograph with many different kinds of objects especially needs strong directions to help the viewer understand it. Without directing lines, the overall image can simply seem like chaos (which, of course, may be the photographer's intention).

As **structure,** line divides a photograph into smaller areas, providing a skeleton to support the other elements and link them together. A strongly structured photograph will often seem to be several photographs in one. A photograph of several faces peeking out of windows is one example of this.

Line also conveys movement, or the lack of it. A rigid grid of straight lines tends to make an image appear static, flat, immobile. Lines that converge (that are closer together at one end than at the other) or that shoot off toward the corners of the frame tend to suggest motion. Straight lines suggest the full-speed-ahead motion of a train, or the up-and-down of a piston. Curves tend to suggest movement that is more like dance.

Similarly, lines can increase or

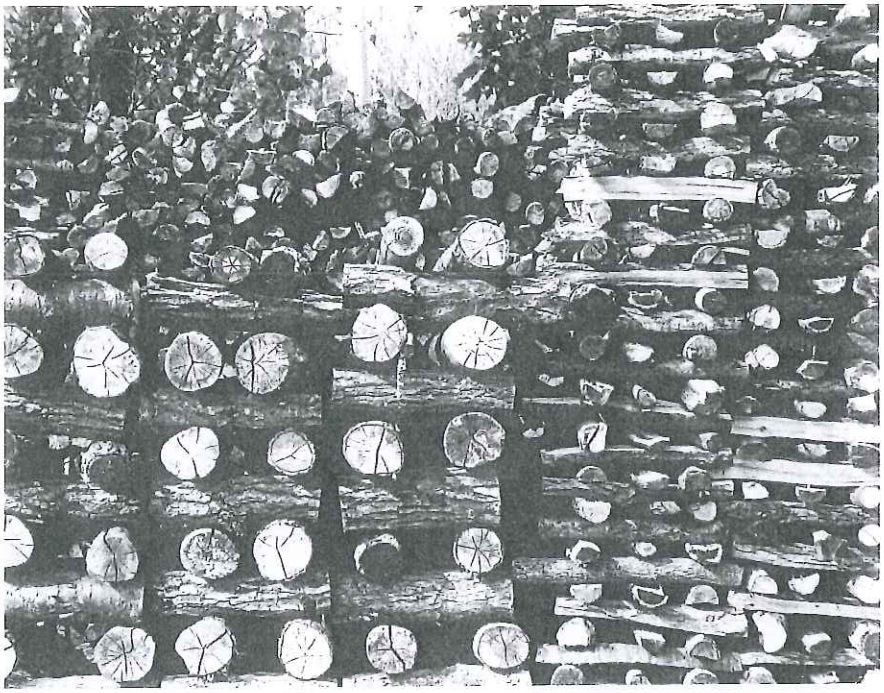


Notice the soft-focus lines behind the tennis player. What instructions do they give to your eye? What effect do they have on the photograph's composition? On its impact? (Student photograph by Jon Portis.)

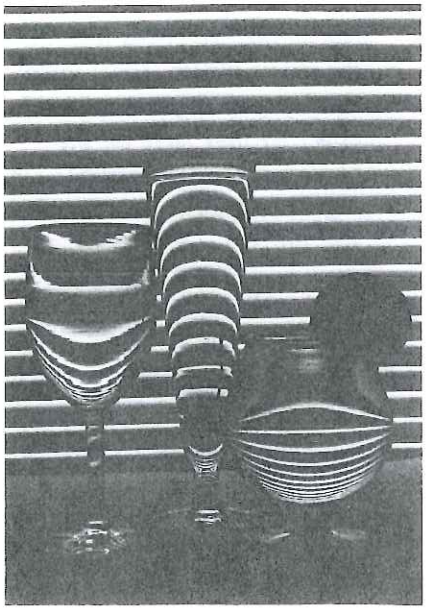
decrease the apparent depth of an image. If you shoot a flat surface from an angle, the lines in it will be closest together at the point where the subject is furthest away from you. This creates the illusion of three-dimensional space, or depth. If you shoot it straight on, so the lines remain parallel, you reinforce the impression of flatness. You decide which effect you want.

You can even make a round object appear flat by shooting it straight on, right at its exact center, and using a small aperture. Any lines that would normally indicate its roundness will appear straight and flat. This appearance will be strengthened by the extreme depth of field (almost everything in focus) provided by the small aperture.

Finally, different kinds of lines express different moods or emotions. Straight lines tend to seem rigid,



What's the "tune" of this woodpile? (Student photograph by Frank Hall.)



What sort of musical sounds do the bent lines in each of the glasses suggest? What about the background lines? What instrument might play them? (Student photograph by Tyler Smith.)

harsh, intense. Curved lines and circles are more inviting, calm and soothing. Zig-zags seem busy, conveying excitement or confusion. Thick lines seem imposing. Thin ones seem delicate.

To get a sense of how these effects work, look at different kinds of lines and see what sounds and rhythms they suggest to you. What sort of musical instrument or tune reminds you of wavy lines? Zig-zags? Circles? Straight lines in a row? It may seem odd to think of listening to lines, but with a little experimentation you'll probably discover that it comes very naturally. Different kinds of lines do have different characters.

The key point is that lines are expressive tools. As a photographer, you'll need to learn to use them effectively.

Before you can use them, however, you have to find them. Where should you look? Well, just about anywhere. Here's a short list: sidewalks, streets, telephone poles, buildings, bowls, wheels, trees, grass, rivers, forks and spoons, cracks, mountains, pencils, curtains, clothing, hands, arms, chairs, fields, tennis courts, bleachers and jungle-gyms.

Once you start noticing lines, you'll find them everywhere. And that is exactly the point. It is because they *are* everywhere that lines are so fundamental to photography. They are the basic vocabulary of the photographic language.

It may seem odd to think of photography as a language. But that's exactly what it is. Both a sentence and a photograph ought to have a subject. And just as a sentence may have verbs, adverbs, objectives and prepositions, a photograph may have movement, mood, perspective and relation. Understanding line is the first step toward learning to express yourself in the photographic language.

EXERCISE

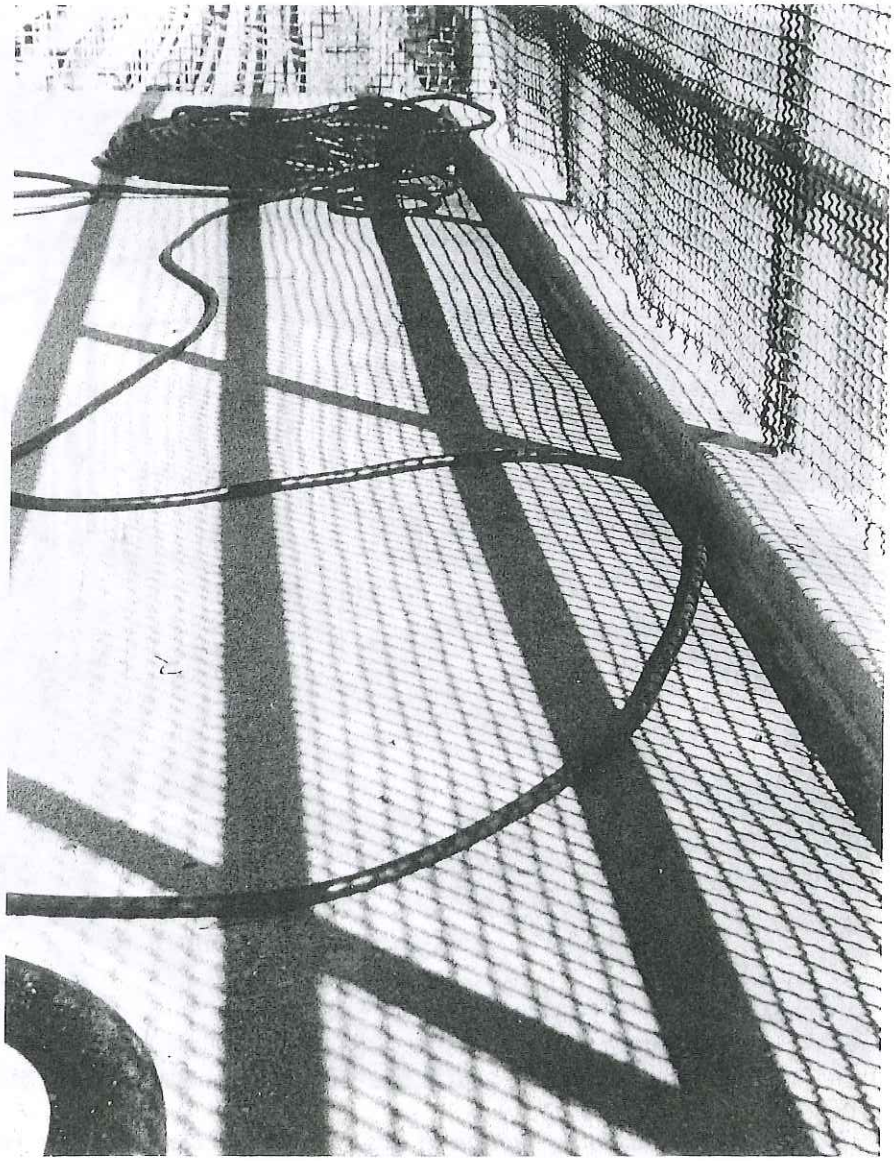
Pattern

Your assignment is to find and shoot patterns. Any series of lines creates a pattern.

Look above your head, down at the ground, as well as straight ahead. Try to find subjects that are primarily patterns, not just ones that have some pattern in them. So far as possible, have the pattern fill the frame of the photograph. Try to have nothing in the photograph except pattern.

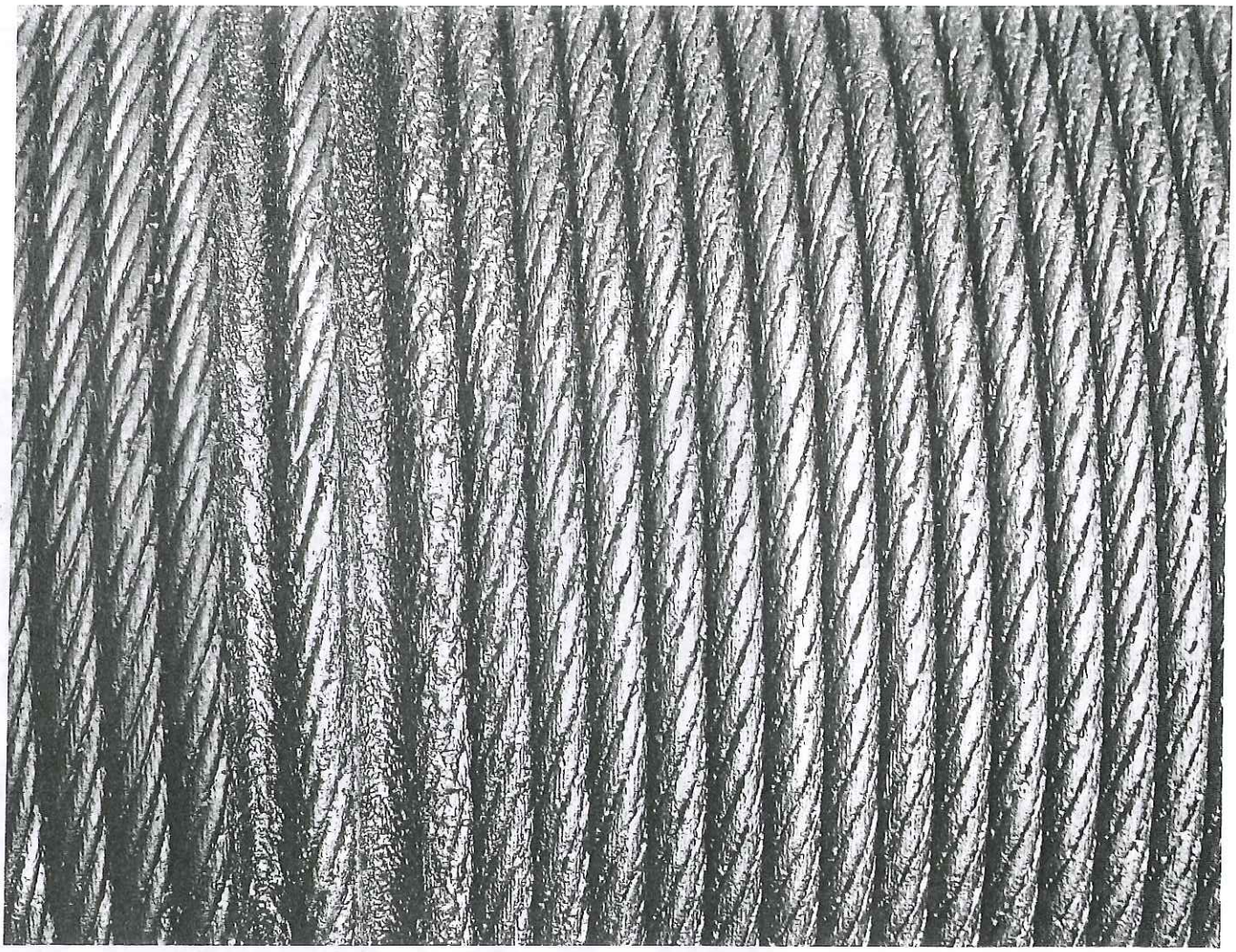
Though your assignment is to shoot pattern, you may want to consider some of the other qualities of line as well, such as direction or structure. See if you can add them into a photograph without losing sight of your primary goal. Use these other qualities to strengthen the pattern, not to detract from it. For example, you may want to use perspective so your pattern recedes into the distance, suggesting direction. Or you may find a series of small patterns contained in a large one, creating structure.

Remember to keep your camera on the point of departure setting (f16 at 1/125 of a second), and to shoot in open sunlight. The rest is up to you.



Student photograph by Allison Page.

Experience the illusion of motion in this vivid image, created by the vertical lines of fences and their horizontal shadows. Do you get a sense of overlapping fences pumping up and down? Can you feel how the shadows and stairs produce a nearly circular sweep, up to our left and back down on the right? (Student photograph.)



Can you distinguish line from texture in this shot? (Student photograph by Han June Bae.)