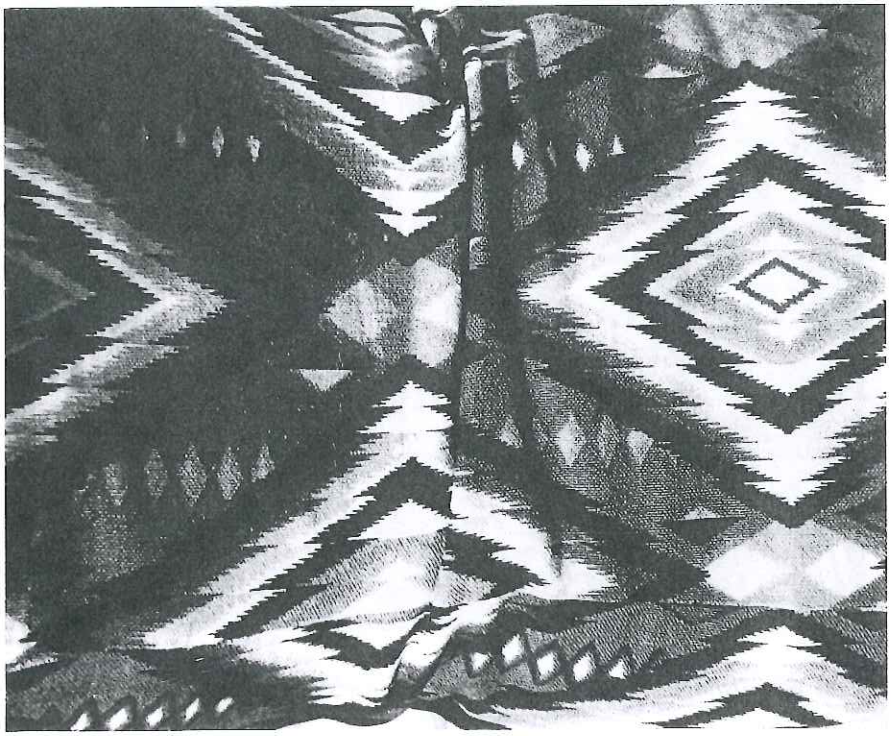
chapter 7 Texture

Now that you've begun to develop an eye for line, it's time to complicate things a bit by adding **texture**. Actually, you've probably already done this on your own. The photographs you shot for the pattern exercise almost certainly included texture as well. Like line, texture is hard to avoid. Almost everything has some texture: rough or smooth, patterned or irregular, dramatic or subtle.

One thing you'll begin to notice is that the various elements of photography tend to overlap. Though you will be exploring them separately, it is often difficult, even impossible, to separate one element from another. You may not always be able to say, for example, "This is line; that is texture."

Don't worry about this lack of precise categories. The important point is to recognize and understand all the different elements. It is far less important to always be able to tell them apart. Learning to notice them separately, however, will help you learn to combine them effectively.



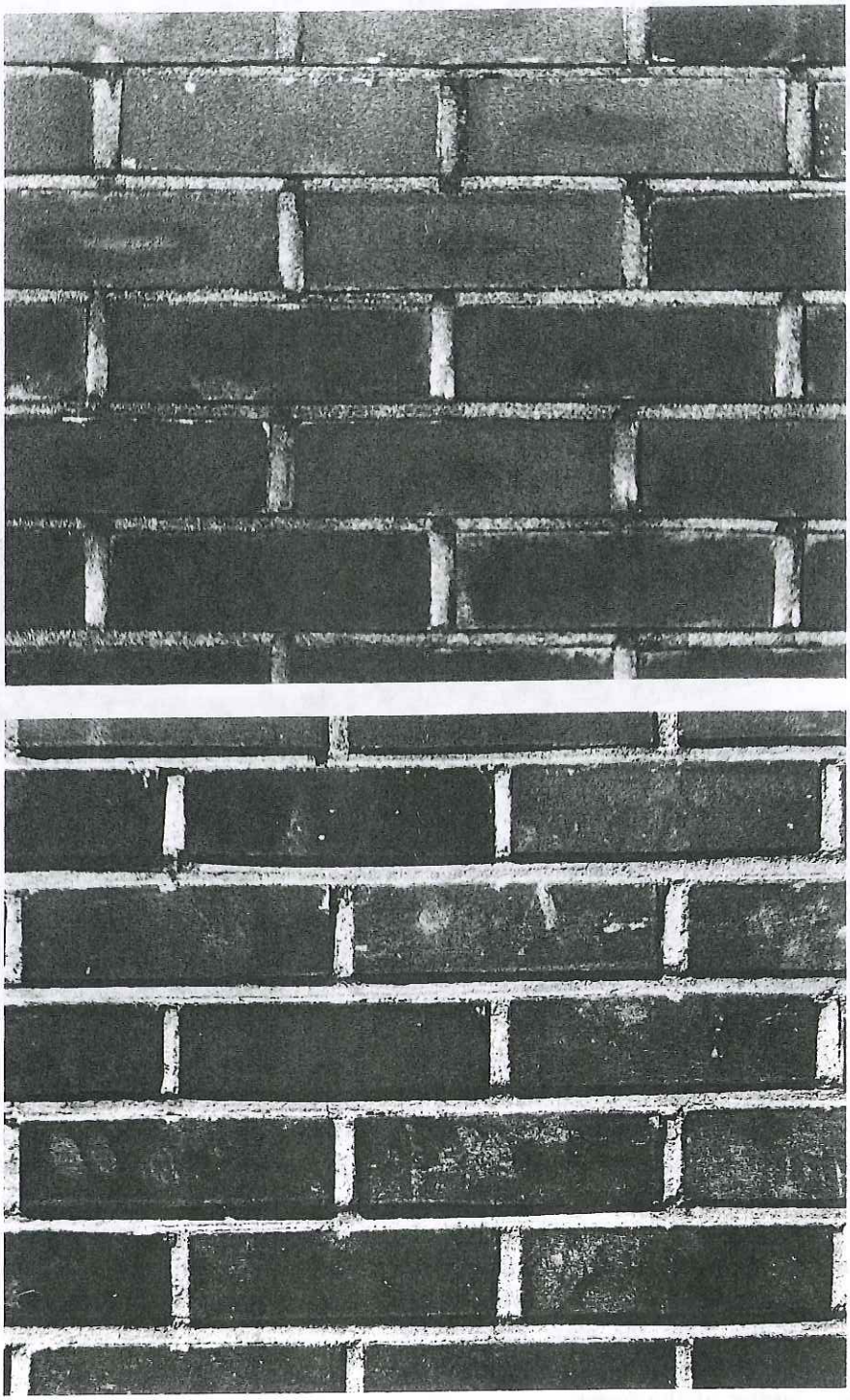
Many photographs have more than one "level" of texture. The undulating surface of the cloth is one level of texture. The smaller variations in the weave of the cloth is another. (Student photograph by Evelyn Wight.)

EXPRESSING THE "FEEL"

Texture mainly concerns the surfaces of things. In the previous section, we saw how line can convey the impression of three-dimensional realism by suggesting depth or height. Texture strengthens that impression by providing visual clues to the "feel" of a subject. In a sense, texture enables the eye to "touch" the subject.

A photograph, like a painting, is two-dimensional. It reproduces a three-dimensional image on a flat surface. To break through the limitations of that flat surface, a photographer, like a painter, has to employ visual "tricks." These tricks create the illusion of three-dimensional space.

Depending on the angle from which you take a photograph, you can use line to represent an object three-dimensionally, or to flatten it. With texture, however, you are always working in three dimensions. Flattened texture is simply pattern,



Student photograph by Marc McCoy.

and pattern is simply a combination of lines.

Look at the photographs of a brick wall on this page. The first thing you're likely to observe is the *pattern* produced by the lines between the bricks. If you look more closely, however, you'll see that the bricks stick out beyond the lines. This creates one kind of *texture.* If you look even more closely, you'll notice variations in the surface of the bricks. That's another texture.

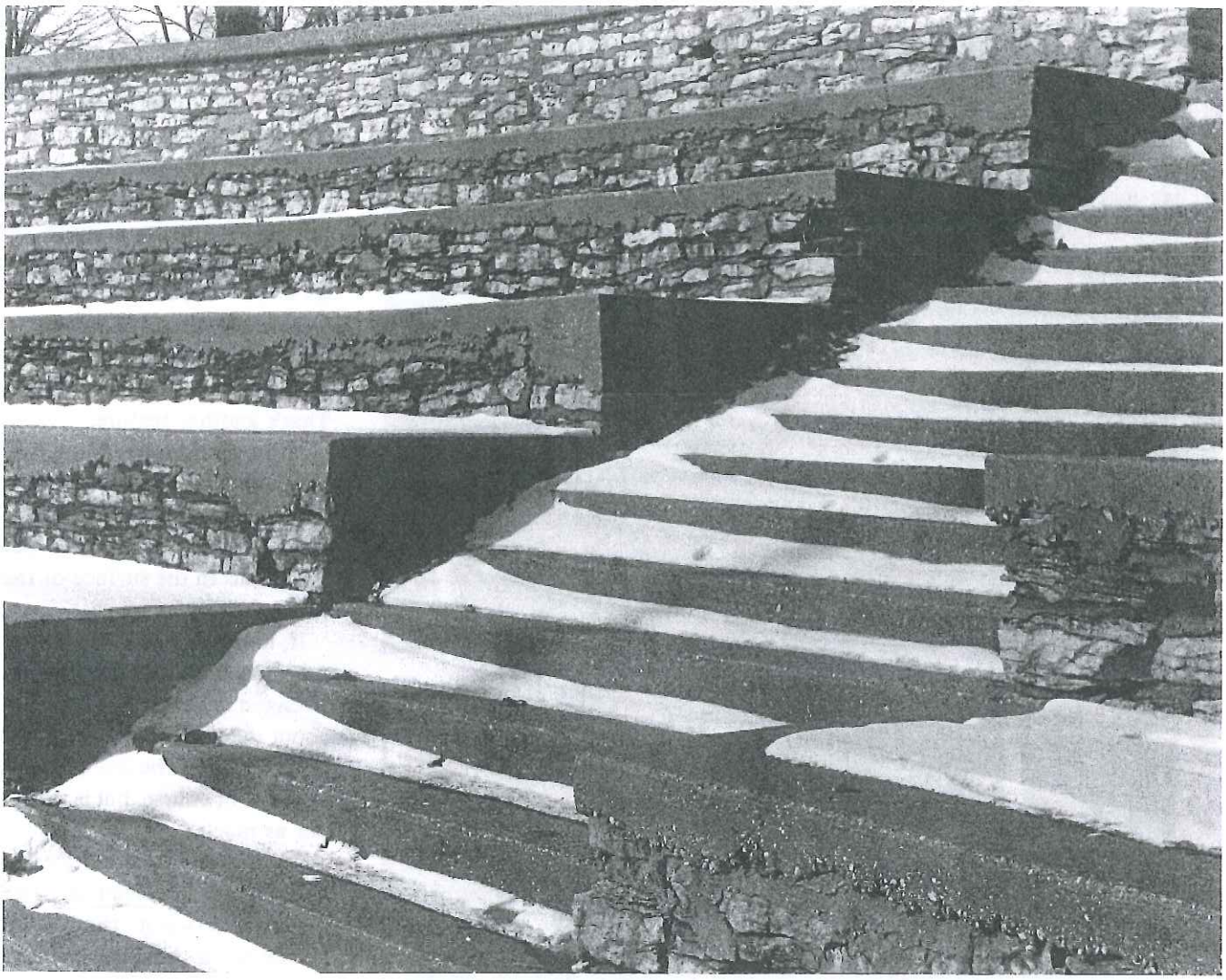
If the wall is evenly lit from the front, the strongest element will be line. The wall will look like a flat surface, divided into a grid pattern. Variations in the surface of the wall will not show as much.

If, however, the wall is lit from one side, the element of texture will be strongest. The most noticeable thing about the wall will be the variations in its surface. The line grid will still be there, of course, but it won't stand out as much.

Once again, you'll notice that line and texture are similar. The difference between them depends primarily on the angle of light.

Texture is far more sensitive than line to shifts in lighting. If you continued to look at that brick wall throughout the day, you would see the texture constantly changing as the sun passed over it. It would be most dramatic early and late in the day, when the sunlight strikes it at a low angle. This has the effect of stretching out all the small shadows created by variations in the surface of the wall. As the shadows get longer and more exaggerated, they appear more dramatic.

One of the most important tasks for a photographer is to observe and make use of changing light. This is especially vital when shooting for



Contrasting patterns of white snow against dark steps creates a sort of zigzag motion aimed at the upper left corner of the image. Notice how your eyes move as they look at this picture. Do they settle at any one point? How does this feel? (Student photograph by Amy Ferrais.)

texture, which depends on light.

In addition to enhancing the impression of reality in a photograph, texture adds visual interest. Pure line or pattern can be very impressive, but may fail to hold the viewer's interest. Texture, particularly if it is irregular or complex, gives the viewer's eye more to play with. It creates little nooks and crannies for the eye to explore. It invites the viewer to linger a while and look around. It also provides information about the subject—its age, condition and other qualities.

The photograph of a building on this page is a good example of the different effects produced by line and texture, and of how they can be combined to increase impact. The first thing you're likely to notice about this photograph is the strong lines of the building. As you look more closely, however, your eye will probably be caught by the complex texture of the foreground. Finally, you might notice how the glass distorts the reflection of another building, in the center of the frame.

The first impression, then, is line. The second is texture. The third is shape, which we'll cover in greater depth in the next section. Each provokes a different kind of interest.

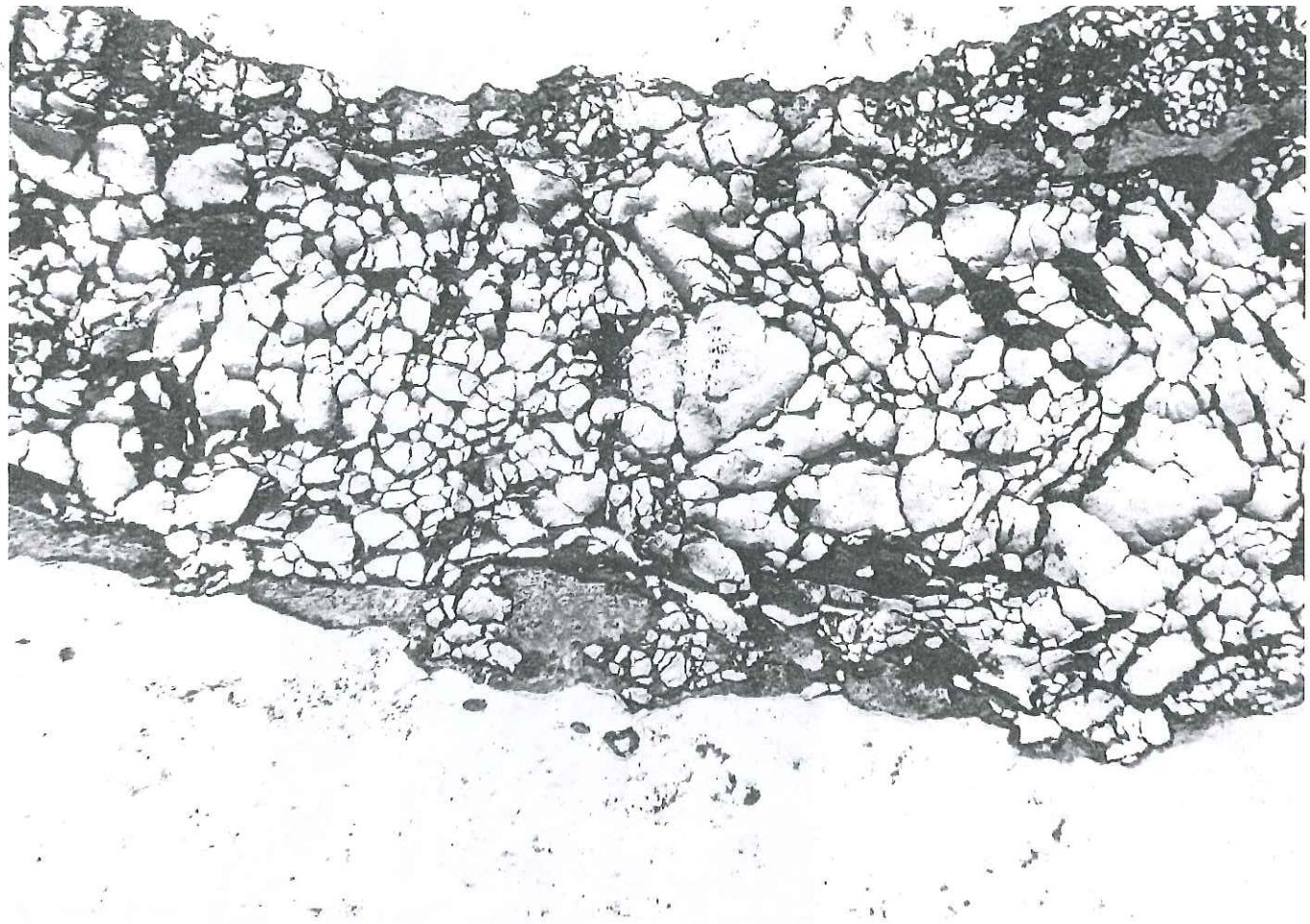
As you continue to examine the

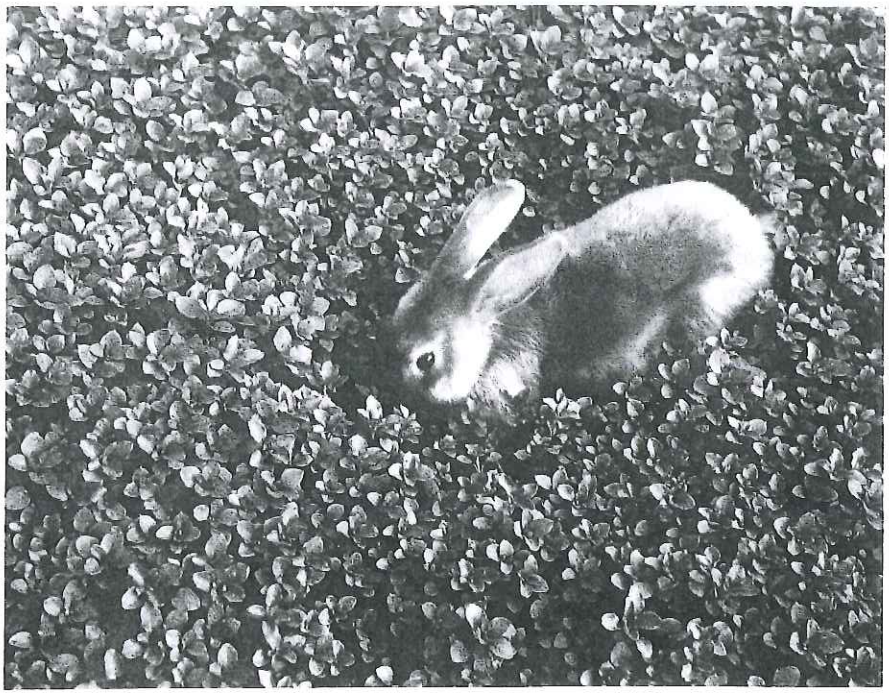
photograph, your attention may also focus on the small wedge in the lower lefthand corner: line again. By combining several elements, and contrasting two linear effects, the photograph gains interest that would be lost if it had concentrated only on line.

You can test this idea yourself, by covering up the foreground so only the lines are visible. How does that affect your interest in the image? How does it change your impression of the building?

This does not mean that texture necessarily improves a photograph. How you use it, and whether you use it at all, is strictly a personal choice. It is, however, one of your basic tools as a photographer. Learning to notice it is one step toward mastering technique.

Used creatively, texture can provide enough information so that even a very abstract photograph makes perfect sense. Do you have any trouble recognizing the subject of this one? (Student photograph by Lynne Mattielli.)





Texture itself can be an effective subject for a photograph. (Student photograph by Bjorn Goldis.)

Texture can be very effective as a context for another subject. Notice how the highly textured vegetation sets off the shape and the soft fur of the rabbit. (Student photograph by Craig Hurst.)

EXERCISE

Leaves

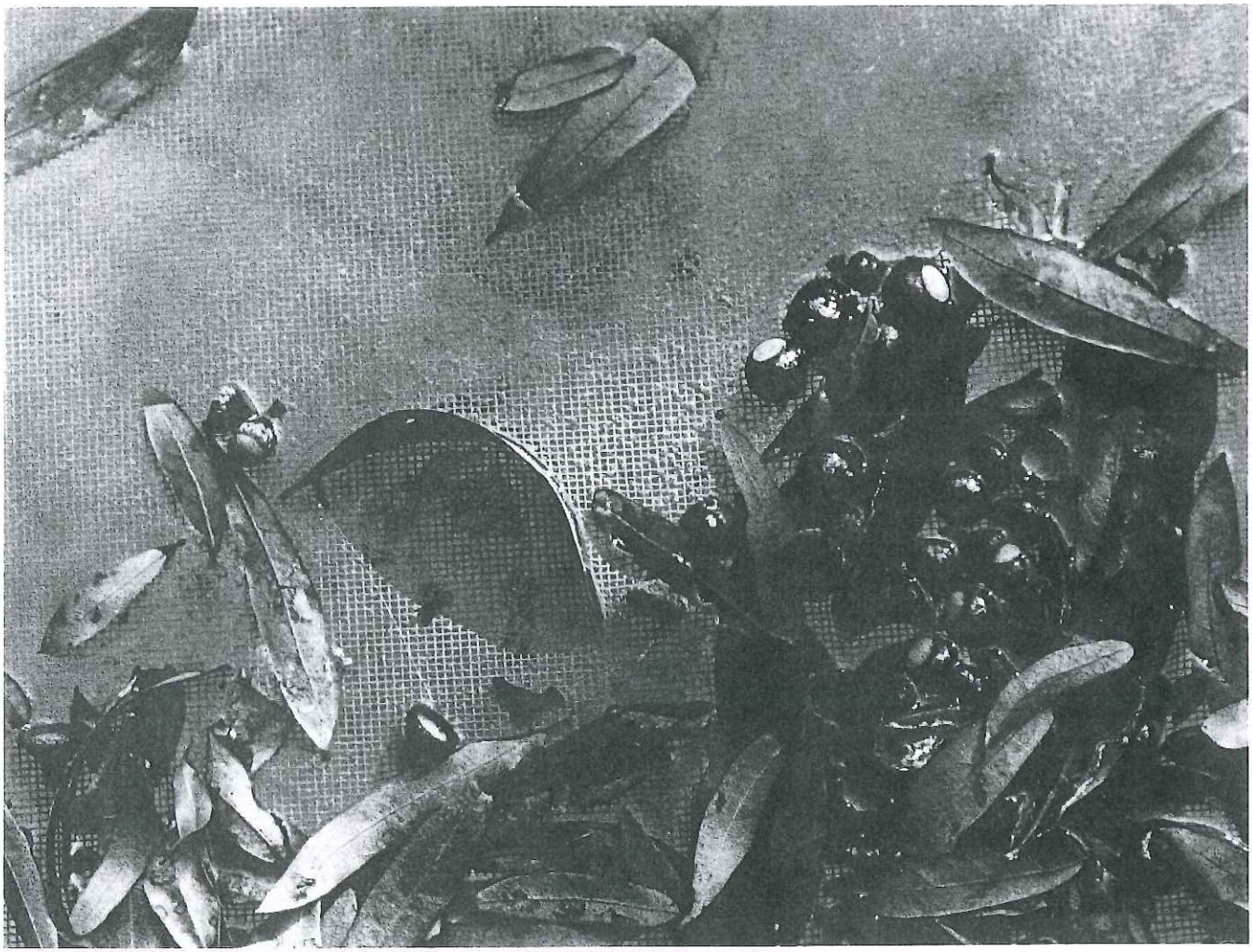
Your next assignment is to shoot leaves. Not just any leaves, but leaves with texture. As noted previously, it is important to keep the theme of the assignment in mind, as well as the subject.

Look for as many kinds of leaves as you can find. Leaves on trees, or on the ground. Even pine needles are officially acceptable, though they are not strictly leaves.

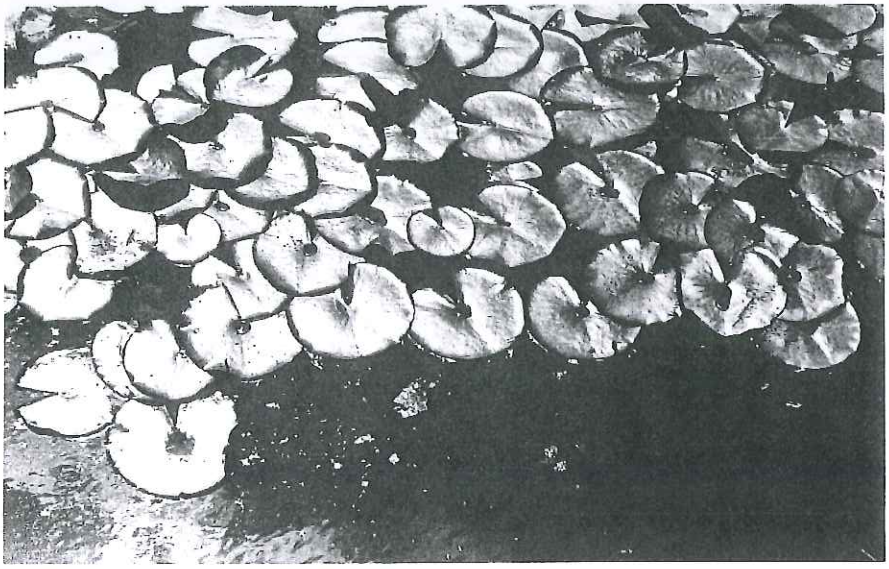
In order to fulfill the texture requirement, you'll want a good amount of contrast. This means that the leaves should be in open sunlight. Try to do your shooting in the morning or afternoon, not in the middle of the day. That will ensure that the light is striking your leaves at an angle, enhancing their texture. Once again, use the point of departure setting f/16 at 125.

Keep an eye out for interesting effects of light and shadow: one leaf casting a shadow on another, or on the ground or branch beneath it. Finally, unless you're lucky enough to find a single leaf of extraordinary interest, you'll probably do better shooting several together. Notice how they interact with each other and with the frame of the picture. Crop in close enough so there's no wasted space, but don't forget that space can be a useful compositional tool.

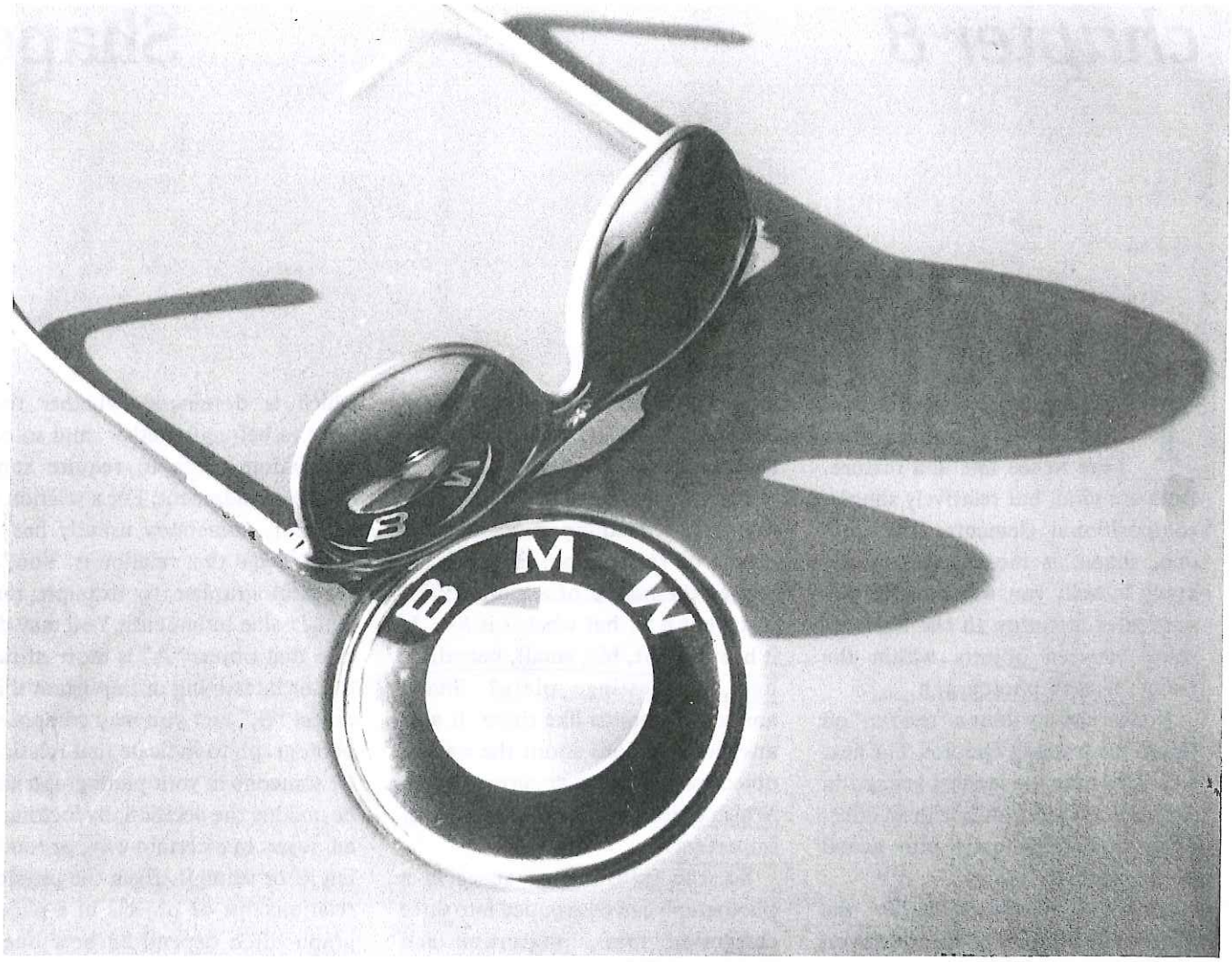
Student photograph by David Kleinfelt.



Student photograph by Alexandra Berg.



Student photograph by William Roche.



A series of similar curves, an interesting juxtaposition of two objects (the sunglasses and the BMW hood ornament) and effective use of negative space all lend impact to this simple still life. (Student photograph by Trevor Bredenkamp.)