UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHS: Example #1

VISUAL

Repetition of jumping figures - man & woman on poster (both **reflected**). **Repeated** grid **pattern** of railings/scaffolding and ladder treads. Strong **contrast** and **wide tonal range** - deep blacks and bright highlights. Some mid tones mainly in the background. **Wide angle** lens - most of the image **in focus**. **Silhouettes** caused by shooting into the light. **Negative space** of puddle in the foreground. **Rule of Thirds** used to organise **shapes/forms**. **Balance** of jumping figures anchored by static figure in background. **Strong vertical and horizontal lines** creates stability. **Contrast** with frozen **movement** of the jumping figures. **Movement** of ladder and jumping man in opposite directions. Implied movement of acrobat.

TECHNICAL

Image taken with **35mm handheld camera** (Leica) - lightweight, easy to operate, quick response time. **Standard 50mm lens** (closest to the viewpoint of the human eye). **Fast film** (400 ISO?) copes with relatively **low light** - creates **grainy** image. **Available light** - grey, overcast, early evening? **Shutter speed** (1/125?) captures slight **motion blur** in the jumping man. However, fast enough to prevent the need for a tripod. Image printed to reveal some **shadow detail** and range of tones. **Un-cropped**.

CONTEXTUAL

Cartier-Bresson influenced by **Surrealism** (chance, serendipity, the subconscious, strange juxtapositions, the **marvellous in the everyday**). Trained as a painter. Adopted **35mm cameras** (Leica). Worked as a **photo journalist** - established Magnum agency - and pioneered distinctive style of **candid street photography**. Humanitarian approach. Published '**The Decisive Moment**' (1952) - "To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression." Huge influence on later photographers e.g. Robert Frank

CONCEPTUAL

- Photograph as a "decisive" or significant moment - how does this influence the way the photographer behaves and looks at the world?
- Chance - what role does this play in the creation of all photographic images?
- The city as a type of theatre - pedestrians as actors in a mysterious drama revealed or interpreted by the photographer
- Photographs as historical documents - what can we tell about pre-war Paris from this image?
- Photograph as work of art. Later prints of this image are valued in excess of $20,000
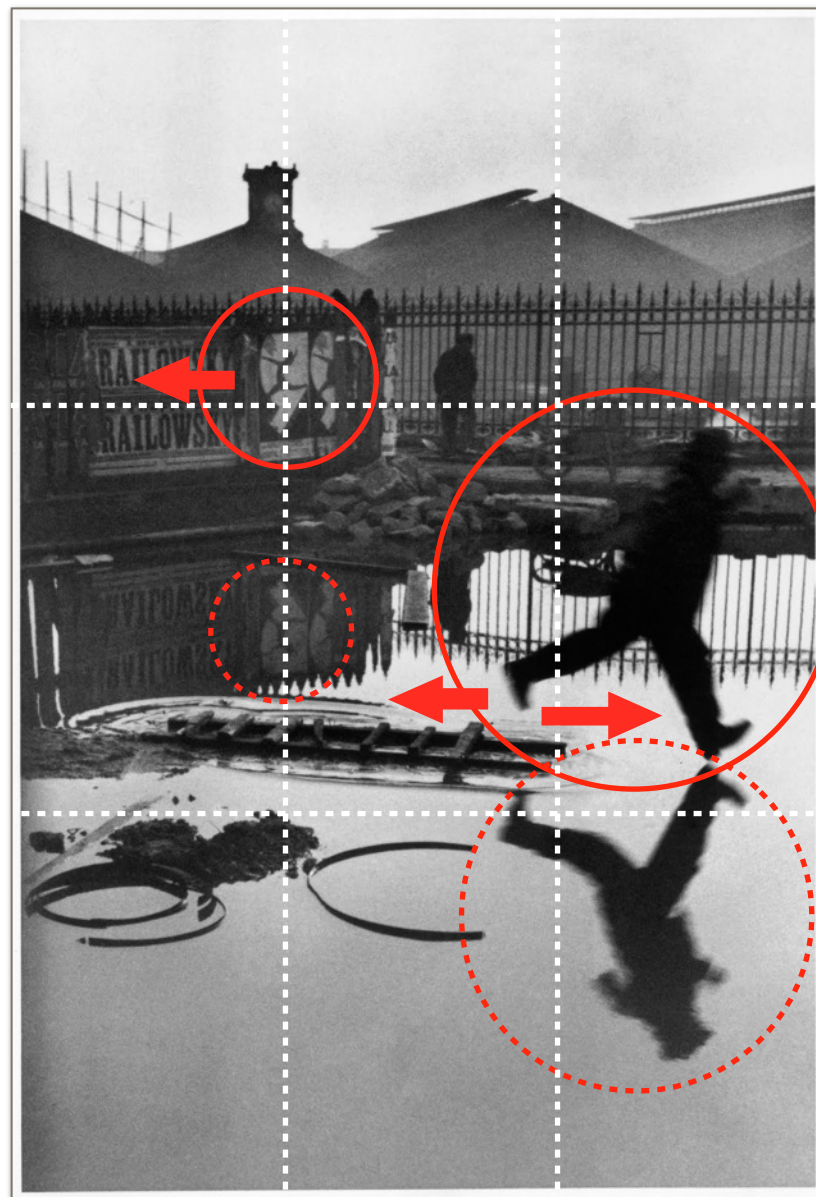
Henri Cartier-Bresson *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1932