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Writing A211

6 April 2025

### Unmoored Certainties

The photograph captures two weathered fishing boats resting side by side in the vast expanse of Bristol Bay. Their outlines, etched in sharp contrast against the softly rippling water, exude an air of quiet determination. The monochrome palette distills the scene to its raw essence, allowing shadows to stretch like whispers of stories untold, while the light dances gently on the hulls. Stripped of color, the image feels unmoored from time—a suspended moment, both fleeting and eternal, where nature and human craftsmanship exist in harmonious stillness. This photo deconstructs conventional narratives of simplicity, resilience, and human interaction with nature. By interrogating its aesthetic choices and symbolic elements, we uncover the hidden complexities, exclusions, and interdependencies that challenge surface-level interpretations, offering a deeper understanding of both the image and the themes it represents. The absence of vibrant hues evokes a feeling of permanence, as if the boats, the bay, and their relationship with one another are frozen in a moment unbound by time or change. This aesthetic fosters an impression of clarity and purity, inviting contemplation of the deeper, often overlooked nuances that lie beneath the surface.

From a deconstructionist perspective, the absence of color in the photograph, while contributing to its perceived timelessness and simplicity, might simultaneously obscure the

dynamic and multifaceted realities of the scene. The monochrome palette reduces the richness of Bristol Bay to shades of black, white, and gray, potentially erasing the vibrant hues of the water, the weathered textures of the boats, and the surrounding natural environment. This reduction imposes a sense of order on what is likely a chaotic, vibrant, and living ecosystem, favoring abstraction over authenticity.

By privileging stark contrasts and uniformity, the monochrome aesthetic could overshadow elements that convey life, movement, and context. For instance, the vivid colors of fish, the rust on the boats, or the changing hues of the sky may contain critical traces of the bay's cultural, ecological, and economic significance. Through this lens, the photograph's black-and-white format reflects a constructed narrative—one that simplifies and universalizes—leaving room to question whose stories are being told and whose perspectives are left unseen. In doing so, the absence of color becomes a metaphor for exclusion and absence in the representation itself.

In a traditional interpretation, the fishing boats in the photograph are powerful symbols of human perseverance and connection to the natural world. The boats, weathered and resilient, represent the enduring struggle and adaptability of those who work the waters, relying on the sea as both a livelihood and a source of sustenance. Their presence in Bristol Bay signifies humanity's age-old relationship with nature and the balance between dependence on its resources and respect for its unpredictable forces.

The photograph's stark aesthetic further emphasizes these themes. The monochrome palette strips away distractions, allowing the focus to remain on the boats and their surroundings as a timeless scene of human endeavor. The calmness of the water might suggest harmony, while

the boats' solidity embodies determination and resilience in the face of challenges. Through this lens, the image suggests a narrative of strength, tradition, and a profound bond with the natural environment. It tells a story of individuals navigating the relationship between human craftsmanship and the raw, unyielding beauty of the world.

The romanticized depiction of boats may primarily serve the interests of certain groups, such as those who profit from the fishing industry or seek to portray it as a harmonious relationship with nature. By focusing on the timeless aesthetic of the scene, the photograph might gloss over environmental concerns, the exploitation of labor, or the socio-economic disparities within the fishing industry. Those who benefit from promoting the image of the fishing boats as resilient symbols might include industrial stakeholders, policymakers, or even cultural institutions that seek to preserve an idealized vision of maritime heritage.

Through this deconstruction, the photograph emerges not as a neutral depiction but as a constructed narrative shaped by choices about what to include, exclude, and emphasize. By unpacking these layers, we gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics and silences embedded within the image.

The image's portrayal of the boats as symbols of human resilience and connection to nature reflects a traditional narrative. Yet, a deconstructionist perspective challenges this interpretation by unpacking the hidden hierarchies and absences, such as whose labor is represented or excluded and who benefits from this romanticized depiction. Furthermore, the binary of simplicity versus complexity, reinforced by the monochrome aesthetic, is revealed to be a constructed framework that favors abstraction over authenticity. Ultimately, the photograph does not merely depict a scene but constructs a narrative shaped by choices about what is

emphasized and excluded. Through deconstruction, it becomes a lens to explore the interplay of presence and absence, stability and contradiction, prompting viewers to engage critically with the layered meanings it holds.



#### Work Cited

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This project was completed with the assistance of Grammarly, which was used to brainstorm and develop the outline for the essay. Additionally, Grammarly provided support by identifying and correcting spelling and grammatical errors, ensuring clarity and accuracy in the final text. The content reflects the original ideas and direction provided by the author.