

LINE

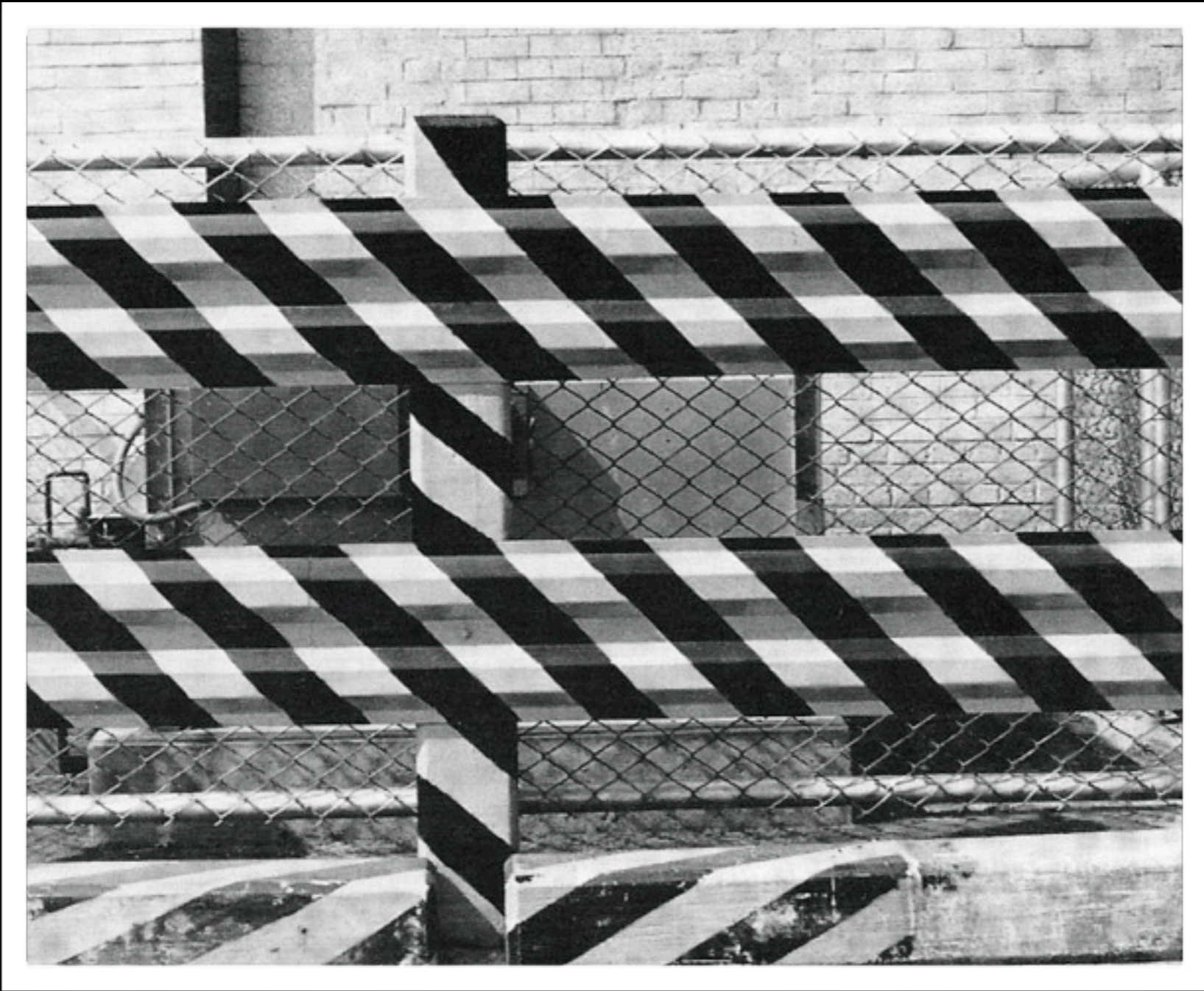
IN PHOTOGRAPHY

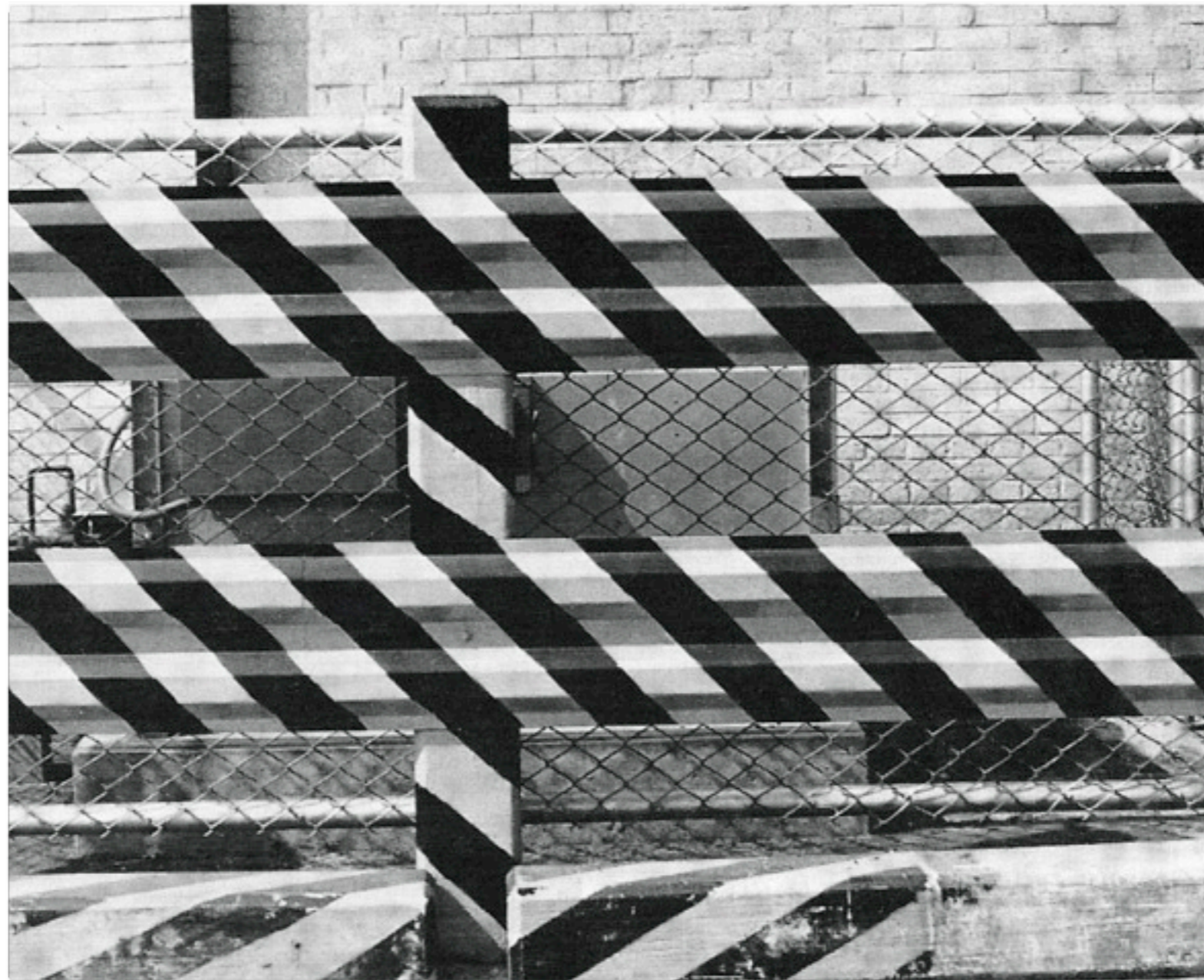
PATTERN, STRUCTURE, DIRECTION

Understanding lines is one of the primary requirements of photography. Virtually every photograph has lines in it. Some of these lines do more than just divide or connect objects. They may also suggest moods and rhythm, create patterns, indicate directions and structure.

These 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 your interest? Why?

Line is not passive, it is a strong visual force that pulls the viewer's eye around in a picture.

Used well, it suggests movement, 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.



With photography, line can define itself by three basic functions:

**PATTERN, DIRECTION & STRUCTURE**



## PATTERN

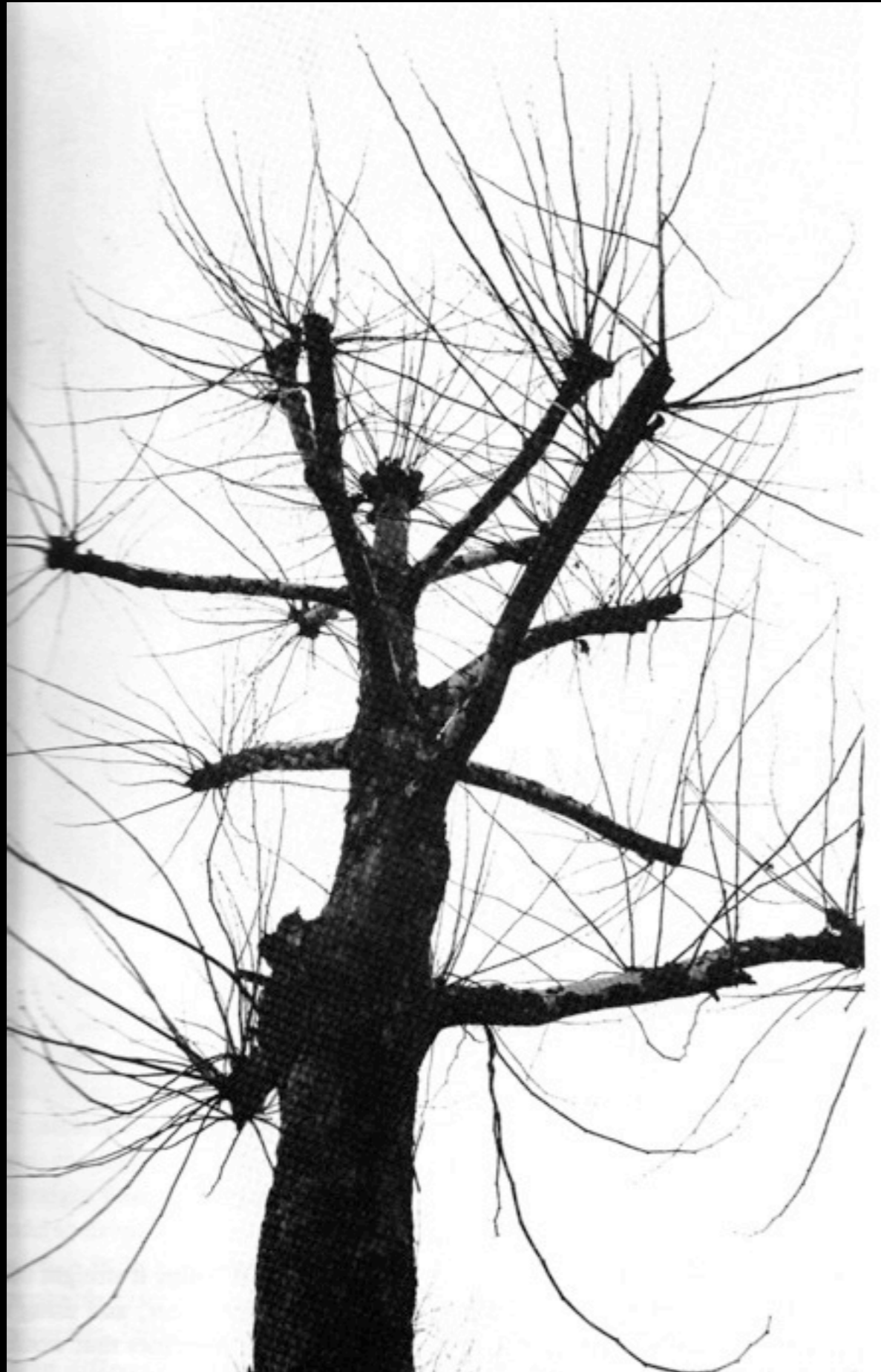
As pattern, line is often a photograph's primary element. The lines themselves interact in some interesting way that is more important than any other elements within the frame.

A photograph of buildings or cornfields or blades of grass are likely to emphasize pattern.



# DIRECTION

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, might be the photographer's intention.)



What “instructions” do these lines give your eye?

How does your eye move around the photograph?

Where does your eye come to rest?

# STRUCTURE

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 lack of it. A rigid grid of straight lines tends to make an image appear static, flat, immobile. Lines that converge (are closer together at one end than at the other) or that shoot off towards 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.

Different kinds of line express different moods or emotions, straight lines tend to seem rigid, harsh, intense. Curved lines and circles are more inviting, calm and soothing. Zig-zags seem busy, conveying excitement or confusion. Thick lines seem imposing and thin lines seem delicate.

Photography is an art, and like any other art, it communicates to the viewer. Understanding line is the first step toward learning to express yourself in the photographic language.