

Aria

"THE KISS IN FRONT OF CITY HALL"

HANS-MICHAEL KOETZLE ON ROBERT DOISNEAU'S FAMOUS PICTURE

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"It's superficial, easy to sell, one image puts a prostituted picture."

— Robert Doisneau

According to unofficial statistics, *The Kiss in Front of City Hall* has been sold more than two and a half million times as a postcard alone. In addition, around half a million posters bearing the same motif have

why does this comparatively simply constructed and relatively unspectacular photograph still fascinate the public today.

At the exact center of the

street. The man has placed his right arm around the girl's shoulder. Spontaneously - so the picture suggests - he pulls her toward himself and kisses her on the mouth. None of the other pedestrians visible in the



picture seem to have noticed the sudden testimony of love. At most the observer in the foreground witnesses the little scene. The consciously chosen 'over-the-shoulder' shot, to borrow a term from filmmaking, suggests this at least.

...What is probably his most famous picture, *The Kiss in Front of City Hall*, was, as we now know, the result of a scene staged with the help of a hired actor and actress. But what does this fact mean for the reception and understanding of a photograph that functions as a 'popular icon' and is one of the most well-known photographic creations of its century?

found buyers. The picture decorates pillows, handkerchiefs, wall and table calendars, greeting cards, and fold-out picture series. Furthermore, it is a staple of every Doisneau retrospective, and not accidentally adorns the cover of the artist's most important publication to date, *Three Seconds from Eternity*. Visitors to Paris come across some form or another of this image on almost every street corner. The question arises:

square photograph is a young couple, about twenty years old. Quite frankly, there is nothing at all striking about them. They are decently dressed - appropriately for the street. At most, the bright scarf tucked into the neck of the man's double-breasted suit is the only item lending a bohemian flavor to the Right Bank of the Seine. Approaching from the left, the couple is moseying its way down the busily populated

As paradoxical as it may sound, the discussion over whether the picture was set up or not did very little damage to the incriminated *The Kiss in Front of City Hall* itself: the image had long since left all concern with documentation behind. The photograph became a symbol - and symbols possess a truth of their own.