An

A. D. Coleman Reader

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"Photography as a fad is well-nigh on its last legs, thanks principally to the bicycle craze," wrote Alfred Stieglitz in an 1897 manifesto. Time has proven his sardonic optimism wrong; however -- and this at least would have pleased Stieglitz -- the ranks of serious, dedicated photographers have also swelled slowly but surely (though hardly proportionately). Much of that is attributable to the impetus given this new medium by Stieglitz and his apostles; certainly the acceptance of photography as a legitimate art form is directly traceable to his lifelong battle on its behalf. Yet equally responsible, though often disclaimed, are the popular uses of photography -- journalism, advertising, even family album snapshots. Aesthetically "impure" as these may be, they served to educate an entire society to the value and uniqueness of photography as a medium for recording events, communicating ideas, and transmitting information; thus, paradoxically, the same "photography as a fad" despised by Stieglitz bred a generation for whom the camera is a natural and instinctive creative tool.

In its current manifestation, popular interest in photography is at best a mixed blessing. The very familiarity which results brings with it not only acceptance but, perhaps inevitably, a curious form of contempt. The importance of photography in our lives is so frequently acknowledged that we have become numb from repetition, while the increasing technical sophistication of modern cameras (coupled with our escape from formal visual inhibitions) has made it easier to take good (though not great) pictures. Despite or because of all this, the significance of an original photograph -- as a statement, a work of art, a *Ding an sich* -- is usually overlooked, along with the intellectual and emotional factors involved in the process of making one.

Still prevalent among the public is the attitude that if you've seen a photograph once -- in any form: reduced or enlarged, as a newspaper halftone or a gravure plate or an actual print from the negative -- you've seen it all. An otherwise discerning audience, which would never dream of judging Ad Reinhardt's paintings by their reproductions in *Life* magazine, will unhesitatingly

presume reproductions of Marie Cosindas's subtle color portraits (in the samepublication, May 1968) to be identical to the originals.

Photography may be recognized as a valid art, and part of the public may be sensitive to the superficial differences between good and bad pictures, but, with the exception of a small band of devotees, the general level of interest -- to say nothing of self-education -- goes no further. Questions of technique and aesthetics are discussed only in the pages of photography magazines. Such perversely unhelpful shows as the Museum of Modern Art's recent "Photography as Printmaking" merely perpetuate the mystique that photographic methods involve arcane necromancy beyond the comprehension of the uninitiated. Collectors with modest budgets pay no attention to original photographs, though they are surely the best buy in our over-inflated art market. Photography exhibits (by which I do not mean the annual Coliseum extravaganzas) are notoriously ill-attended. The mortality rate for galleries specializing in photographs is staggering. Books of photographs -- even the greatest, such as Weston's *My Camera on Point Lobos* -- are too often remaindered. Somehow, photography always seems to get the short end of the stick.

This column will be a continuing attempt, on a small scale, to change that situation by giving to photography the serious critical consideration it merits. It will be (I hope) a means for turning a sizeable potential audience on to photography as a creative medium, affirming the importance of original photographs as significant objects, and providing a dialogue between photographers and their public.

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Toward Some Future History of Photography, 1965-2000:
Part I

When I try to explain to others the transformation that the photography scene has undergone during the past thirty-odd years, the aspect that strikes me immediately but proves hardest to convey to newcomers is the exponential shift in scale.

To pick up any listing of photography exhibits nowadays in any major urban art center here or abroad -- such as the bi-monthly gallery guide *Photography in New York*, which presently indicates roughly a hundred photo shows ongoing at any given time in this metropolitan area -- or to attend the not infrequently jam-packed, celebrity-dotted openings, auctions and other photo-related events, one would think that it was ever thus. That it wasn't, and not all that long ago, seems almost inconceivable to those who come anew to the medium (especially the young), while the current state of affairs was simply unimaginable to anyone active in photography, or merely observing it, in the mid- to late 1960s, and -- at least periodically -- absolutely boggles the mind of those who have watched it unfold.

The thorough history of this period in photography has yet to be written, understandably; we're only now achieving sufficient critical distance to move beyond the basic chronicling of it and the inevitable nostalgia. Yet we've had our first academic conference on the subject.[1] A considerable amount of oral history about the period has already been gathered, if not coordinated and synthesized. Several written histories surveying the period as a whole, or aspects of it, have been published so far.[2] Much of the primary research material still exists, some of

[1] "American Photography, Culture and Society in the '60s: the Transformations of a Medium," held at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House November 14-18, 1990. Organized by Carl Chiarenza. For a first-hand account, see my "Letter from: Rochester, No. 20," *Photo Metro* 9:86 (February 1991), pp. 18-19.

[2] For example, Jonathan Green's *American Photography: A Critical History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984); *American Images: Photography 1945-1980*, edited by Peter Turner (New York/London: Viking/Barbican Art Gallery, 1985); and Naomi Rosenblum's *A World History of*

it already conserved and archived.[3] And photography's critical tradition -- "a continuum of understanding, early commenced"[4] -- unquestionably starts here, so there's a wide paper trail to follow and an extensive if not absolutely comprehensive written chronicle to refer to, far more substantial than the medium has ever previously enjoyed.

What follows constitutes an addendum to all that, a personal and professional reminiscence about the events leading up to the present situation, intended for the bemusement of those who were there, the edification of those who weren't, and the use of those who will eventually produce the received version of this recent past we will come to call its history.

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I started looking seriously at and writing about photographs in 1967; my first essay on the subject was published on June 20th, 1968,[5] almost exactly three decades from the moment at which I write this. In retrospect, I see that -- fortuitously and not by plan (at least not my own) or foresight, mostly by sheer coincidence -- I stepped into the field of photography at the very end of the calm before the storm.

My point of entry was New York City, where I'd grown up and -- after a brief west coast interlude -- was once again based. Because I came to the situation young (I was twenty-four in '67) and from outside the medium (a writer, not a photographer), I'd missed some of what now seem obvious harbingers in New York of what was soon to come. Helen Gee's Limelight had already been there and gone; this coffee house, between 1954 and 1961, functioned not only as the

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Photography (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), all deal with this period, the first two at considerable length.

[3] At the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY, and the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, AZ, for example.

[4] This wonderfully succinct locution is Hugh Kenner's: "There is no substitute for critical tradition: a continuum of understanding, early commenced. ... Precisely because William Blake's contemporaries did not know what to make of him, we do not know either, though critic after critic appeases our sense of obligation to his genius by reinventing him. ... In the 1920s, on the other hand, *something* was immediately made of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, and our comfort with both works after 50 years, including our ease at allowing for their age, seems derivable from the fact that they have never been ignored." -- Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 415.

[5] "Photography." *Village Voice* 13:6 (20 June 1968), p. 14.

city's first photo-specific gallery but also as a central meeting place for photographers, curators, picture editors and others involved with or interested in the medium.[6]

I'd known of its existence, in a vague way; yet while I'd popped in and out of it during my aspiring-Beat Greenwich Village adolescence I must confess I'd never once looked at the pictures on the walls. Roy DeCarava had long since closed his short-lived, pioneering little gallery,[7] which also preceded by a decade my interest in the medium. And, more recently, the Association of Heliographers had imploded in early 1966, taking with it their germinal midtown gallery space.[8] I'd been away from New York, doing graduate work in literature and creative writing in northern California, during that group's brief heyday, but probably wouldn't have encountered them even if I'd stayed put. Before 1967 I wasn't paying much mind to photography, and after that I was.

So what did I find when I started attending to photographs in 1967?

The public perception of photography as a creative medium just then had been largely shaped -- not only in the U.S. but internationally -- by Edward Steichen's blockbuster survey, *The Family of Man* (1955), still traveling world-wide at that juncture, its catalogue version already esconced as the most popular photography book of all time. Leaving aside the complex debate over that exhibition's flaws and virtues (except to point out that it was hugely controversial within the field at the time of its birth and thereafter), let us simply note that it placed its emphasis on stylistically traditional, extroverted, denotative and subject-dominated imagery, for the most part setting aside experimental tendencies, the

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[6] For a first-hand account, see Helen Gee's memoir, *Limelight* (University of New Mexico Press, 1997), and my review thereof, "Visual Literacy,"*Photography in New York* 10:1 (September/October 1997), p. 30.

[7] At A Photographer's Gallery on West 84th Street, between 1955 and 1957, DeCarava showed (among others) Berenice Abbott, Minor White, David Vestal, Jay Maisel, Scott Hyde, Ruth Bernhard, Leon Levinstein, Harry Callahan, Ralph Eugene Meatyard and Van Deren Coke. For a brief account of this little-known venture, see *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), p. 269.

[8] See my essay "'For what else they might be': The Association of Heliographers, 1963-1966," in the forthcoming catalogue for the retrospective exhibition of the group's work at the Hugo De Pagano gallery, New York City, Winter 1998.

medium's relation to abstraction, and the photographer's inner life. That there were photographers of other, indeed opposite inclinations -- and that some of the very images in that show had been drastically recontextualized from their bodies of work -- remained a relatively well-kept secret.

In New York -- even at that time the acknowledged photography center of the world -- only one institution, the Museum of Modern Art, exhibited photographs continuously and maintained on public display an elementary survey of the medium's history.The Modern also had a department devoted to the medium, as did the Brooklyn Museum (the latter's department, in fact, was founded shortly before the Modern's, and had accumulated a notable collection, but did not make such active use of its holdings as did MoMA's). John Szarkowski, a dark-horse candidate for the job, headed the well-established and world-famous MoMA department, having taken over for Steichen in 1963; he'd already mounted several key shows that began to define his curatorial aesthetic, perhaps most notably "The Photographer's Eye" of 1966, a formalist rationale for camera vision that, especially in its book form, would influence a generation or two of photographers.

The next year, 1967, Szarkowski put up the "New Documents" show that first brought serious attention to Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus; in many ways, those two exhibits set the course of photography for the next ten years.[9] Due to the international clout of the Modern in all media, to Szarkowski's own growing power in the field, and in no small part to the enduring impact of *The Family of Man*, at that point -- and for at least the next decade -- the MoMA Department of Photography was the medium's 800-pound gorilla: as I put it in an essay written years later, "The directorship of that department is unquestionably the single most influential sponsorial position in contemporary creative photography."[10]

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[9] See my essay "The Impact on Photography: 'No Other Institution Even Comes Close,'" in *ARTnews* 78:8 (October 1979), pp. 102-5; reprinted in my book *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom, Essays and Lectures 1979-1989* (Midmarch Arts Press, 1996), under the title "Photography at MoMA: A Brief History."

[10] See my essay "On the Subject of John Szarkowski: An Open Letter To the Directors and

The Metropolitan Museum of Art had its magnificent Alfred Stieglitz collection, and assorted other important materials, including a good bit of essential 19th-century work -- much of it gathered foresightfully by William M. Ivins, who'd been the Met's first curator of prints from 1916-46 -- and other significant bits and pieces that had trickled in erratically. But that material lay there neglected, available to researchers yet all but buried. The late John McKendry, then the Met's curator of prints and drawings (and the man who, with evident delight, first introduced me to a young leather boy named Robert Mapplethorpe), had little interest in the medium, and mounted only the most haphazard and desultory exhibits thereof -- largely, it seemed to me after a few years of writing about this situation, as a result of my public goading.[11]

In those days neither the Guggenheim Museum nor the Whitney ever mounted anything photographic, or collected photographic work of any kind -- regrettable decisions, surely, since they'll now pay millions for material with which to build their recently initiated collections, material they could have had for mere thousands of dollars as recently as 1980. Some of the city's other museums (such as the Museum of the City of New York) had photography collections, a few of them even somewhat thematic or otherwise rationalized. But they mounted photography shows only sporadically, if at all. Most of them generated their own infrequent exhibits; few photo exhibitions then traveled -- there was no established "circuit" for such shows -- and few of those that did go on the road made it to this city. The now-defunct Riverside Museum had a working relationship with Cornell Capa, and mounted some valuable surveys of "concerned photography," but the International Center of Photography was not yet a visible gleam in Capa's eye.

No commercial gallery devoted itself exclusively or even primarily to photography; hardly any art galleries included photographers in their stables, and

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Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art," first published in *Picture Magazine* 2:2 (Issue #8, 1978), n.p.; reprinted in the Appendix to *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-1978* (second edition, University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

[11] E.g., "The Skeleton in the Met Closet," *New York Times* 119:41,014 (10 May 1970), p. D20; reprinted under the title "Inside the Museum, Infinity Goes Up on Trial" in *Light Readings.*

very few showed any photography at all -- save for a handful specializing in avant-garde art, in which "conceptual" artists were beginning to show photo-documentation of their works and ideas (not to be considered as or in relation to photography, they insisted almost universally). The era of not-for-profit venues and/or "artists' spaces" had just begun, fueled in part by National Endowment for the Arts and (in this state) New York State Council On the Arts funding; photo-specific showcases of both sorts would emerge within the next few years, but none were yet extant.

The best and most sought-after regular showcase for photography outside MoMA's small gallery for rotating shows was Norbert Kleber's Underground Gallery, at 51 East 10th Street -- right in the heart of the East Village. This run-down, newly hip, ethnically diverse neighborhood had considerable art-world history (from the Abstract Expressionist and Pop Art years) and much '50s and '60s jazz action (at the Five Spot on St. Mark's Place and elsewhere) to its credit, and a goodly amount of literary history as well, most notably the poetry and theater events at St. Mark's in the Bouwerie Church and a coffee house called Les Deux Mégots -- both of them, coincidentally, also on 10th Street -- where experimental poets like Jackson MacLow read.[12]

In fact, it was New York's center for what was beginning to be called "the counter-culture." The Fillmore East and other rock venues were up and running there; off-off-Broadway theater -- Sam Shepard *et al* -- was virtually birthed in its basements; the *East Village Other* and Al Goldstein's *Screw* were edited and published nearby, along with various other underground papers; the Fugs, Tuli Kupferberg's and Ed Sanders's radical rock group, headquartered there (Sanders's Peace Eye Book Store was located there as well). Alternative lifestyles and experimental media were thriving in those buildings and storefronts and parks and streets. Certainly the area had the right Big Apple karma as the seedbed for a revolution in the arts, one that would include photography as a matter of course.

[12] I read at Les Deux Mégots once or twice myself, in my salad days as a young poet. The better-known of those poets, such as John Harriman, actually constituted themselves as the Tenth Street School, publishing at least one anthology under that rubric.

Kleber worked out of (and, as I recall, perhaps mistakenly, even lived in) a brownstone apartment you entered by walking through the building's front gate, under the stoop, and down a few steps -- hence his gallery's name. Norbert made his living renting high-end photo equipment to professional photographers for commercial shoots out of the apartment's back end, but he'd turned the long, low-ceilinged front room of his apartment into a clean, spare, handsome display space, complete with white walls and track lights.[13] One could hang several dozen prints there, in a single row around the walls, and give them room to breathe. It wasn't exactly the hushed chapel of Stieglitz's "291" or "An American Place," nor did it have quite the pristine spaciousness of that archetypal venue Brian O'Doherty dubbed "the white cube,"[14] a style of art environment already widely available to artists in other media, but it came close: the work received serious, respectful treatment on the walls, and there were press releases, announcement cards, perhaps even an occasional poster, and wine-and-cheese openings.[15]

Aside from that, there were various less amenable and desirable options, mainly the anterooms of many of the city's camera stores, commercial labs and custom-processing houses, some of which regularly mounted exhibitions: Portogallo, Modernage, Willoughby's, The Darkroom. Then came the public libraries with glass-covered wall-mounted display cases and/or vitrines; a few college and university or community-center "galleries" (commonly the entrance area, or some long, hard-to-locate hallway); bank and other institutional lobbies; and the occasional restaurant or coffee-house that put photos on the walls behind the tables (usually unviewable in ambient light during normal business hours) or, more rarely, following the Limelight model, set aside a better-designed and more functional viewing space for them.

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[13] In those days, photographers complained consistently about inferior or inadequate lighting, much as jazz pianists chronically griped about the keyboards in the clubs.

[14] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1986).

[15] I suspect the photographers picked up some of the tab for all that, perhaps even paid some of the overhead and rental for the space during the run of their shows. I'm sure Norbert didn't sell much work; there were no collectors to speak of.

And outside New York? Up in Boston there was the Carl Siembab Gallery, and out in San Francisco Helen Johnston's Focus Gallery -- neither one significantly profitable, both labors of love, then known to me only by report. The George Eastman House (not yet the International Museum of Photography) mounted exhibits, maintained a major collection, and published a small journal, at that point the only English-language periodical devoted to the medium's history and conservation; but the GEH was remote, located in Rochester, in upstate New York, and had little direct impact on the New York City scene. Beaumont Newhall had retreated there after his departure from the MoMA department -- a transition forced by the museum's appointment of Edward Steichen over him as the head of that department in 1947, an event that had proven schismatic in the small, tight world of creative photography, and whose consequent atmosphere of betrayal and allegiance still festered in the local and national scenes.[16]

Fact was, however, that -- Steichen's machinations aside -- Newhall, as evidenced by his subsequent activities, had little interest in post- World War II photography (aside from tracking the later work of Group f.64's members), and was probably ill-suited to head either a department or a museum obligated to address the full spectrum of post-war photographic picture-making; the final edition of his *History*, published in 1982, treats the '60's and '70s summarily and unenthusiastically. Whatever attention to younger and/or more experimental practitioners Eastman House manifested during his tenure, and whatever influence on the then-current field of ideas it exercised, came less from his inclinations than from the survey exhibitions and (even more important, because they circulated much more widely) the accompanying catalogues that Nathan Lyons organized for that institution: *Toward A Social Landscape, The Persistence of Vision, Vision and Expression, Photography in the Twentieth Century*. These, along with the germinal anthology Lyons edited during that same period, *Photographers on Photography*, constituted a goodly chunk of the in-print literature of photography at that juncture, and provided more than an inkling that

[16] See "The Impact on Photography: 'No Other Institution Even Comes Close,'" previously cited.

the medium's current practitioners represented a far greater diversity of approaches to praxis than was commonly understood.

Speaking of that literature: The plethora of serious books on photography that overwhelms all of us in the field today stands in starkest contrast to what one could find in bookstores or order from publishers circa 1967. Newhall's perennially in-print *History* -- the "revised and enlarged" 1964 edition -- was firmly entrenched as the standard narrative of the medium's origins, evolution and acculturation, though Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's more Eurocentric version of that history was findable (between editions, at that particular moment; the first came out in 1955, the second in 1969). Peter Pollack's idiosyncratic tome,*The Picture History of Photography* of 1958, was out of print too (its second edition would also appear in '69). Available from Dover Press, a New York reprint house, were Robert Taft's 1942 *Photography and the American Scene* and Heinrich Schwarz's superb critical biography of David Octavius Hill -- the first such for the field. That was about it for the history of photography in English.

New monographs trickled out erratically, most of them thematic and/or subject-dominated. Grossman, now long gone, was a major player in photography publishing back then, oriented mainly toward photojournalism, documentary and "concerned photography." Though the Aperture Foundation had managed to publish a few fine, small monographs -- on Stieglitz and Weston -- that operation hadn't yet entered book publishing in a major way. Publicity for such books in all cases was minimal, just your basic press release; I actually can't recall attending a launching party or book-signing event for a photo project until the early 1970s.

As the public face of the photo scene, just about all of this fell through the cracks of art criticism, and even art journalism, at the time. Photography's critical tradition, as I noted in my opening paragraphs, had barely begun. No such professional as a photography critic existed; it was a function that I invented, pretty much out of whole cloth, when I premiered my *Village Voice* column, "Latent Image," in mid-1968. The journal *aperture*, then well-established and under the editorship of Minor White, was one of the medium's few "little"

magazines, a dependable vehicle (though at best a small-circulation, putatively quarterly one that actually came out much less frequently) for serious, intelligent writing on photography, some of which entered the territory of the critical. *Contemporary Photographer*, a short-lived alternative to it, also contained some notable commentary. Occasionally, *Infinity*, the journal of the American Society of Magazine Photographers, included thoughtful prose. From time to time, the *Saturday Review of Literature* ran a knowledgeable essay. But here in Photo Central, New York City, the closest thing to regular critical discourse was Jacob Deschin's column in the Arts & Leisure section of the Sunday *New York Times*.

Jack always made a point of saying, in conversation and in public situations, "I'm a reporter, not a critic." For decades, under his editorship, the "Camera" page of the *Times* offered a consistent reportorial mix of trade and product news, photo tips, exhibition and book announcements, notes on the photo scene (awards, etc.) -- and, occasionally, brief comments on an exhibition or book. Jack's own published books, without exception, were how-to texts aimed at the amateur market. This was the output not of a working critic, but of a working reporter and competent professional photographer with some strongly held opinions about certain photographic styles and picture-makers. Jack knew the difference, and made no bones about it.

There's no question that Jack's short comments and opinions on this or that book or show had some impact on the photographers mentioned, and -- especially with the clout of the *Times* behind them -- carried some weight in the field; serious, extended critical commentary on photography in mass-audience publications was just about unheard of, and, until I started my work at the *Voice*, Jack's column was the only game in town. Those little snippets do provide some useful trace of events that otherwise might have gone entirely unnoticed. But they didn't constitute a contribution to the critical literature then, and they don't now; that's probably why no one (including Jack himself) ever gathered them together in book form. Jack would never have billed himself as the paper's photography critic, whereas that was the only possible job description for Gene Thornton (my

colleague in the *Times* slot, more on which anon) and myself. Jack's perception of himself is neatly summed up in the title of the little journal he started up after he left the *Times*: *The Photo Reporter*.[17]

This is not to demean Jack himself, his work, or his memory. He did what he did very well. I like to think I do also. Our activities and concerns differed greatly. Back when he was alive, if I wanted to know what some upper-echelon power shift at Kodak meant, Jack would be the first person I'd call. But I wouldn't have dreamt for a moment of putting Jack on a panel with John Russell, Hilton Kramer and Peter Schjeldahl -- the main art critics for the *Times* during the '60s -- to discuss current critical theory in photography, photography's impact on contemporary art, Marshall McLuhan's ideas about photography and mass media, or any other such subject.[18] He didn't belong in that company, and wouldn't have felt at ease there.

Aside from Jack's column, the only other regular writing on photography of that period appeared in the camera magazines -- then as now industry-driven and industry-financed, devoted principally to an amateur/hobbyist readership, but providing some editorial space for interviews and profiles, portfolios of halfway-decent reproductions of images, articles on one or another aspect of photo history, and considered if not learned commentary on various aspects of photography. It came without footnotes, bibliographies, thorough fact-checking and other scholarly apparatus, and its production depended more on its authors' whims and tastes (and their publishers' preferences) than on any attempt at a systematic overview of the literature and identification of the gaps therein. Still, it has a not inconsiderable value today as elementary chronicling and raw research,

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[17] This publication was sponsored for some years by Modernage, a custom-processing house in Manhattan, and made available as a free handout or inexpensively by subscription.

[18] I think we do justice and honor to Jack's service to the field best by accepting him as he saw himself: a thoughtful, feisty reporter for a major newspaper whose beat was photography -- with an emphasis on the industry, the technical/product end of things and the hobbyist market, but also an ongoing interest in books, shows and related matters, working in the period just before a true critical dialogue in photography began to emerge. Trying to make him into something he never tried to be doesn't help us put him in perspective; moreover, it muddies the waters around the necessary distinctions between criticism and reportage. See his *New York Times* obituary, "Jacob Deschin, Camera Editor," June 21, 1983.

and is often the only extant trace of its subjects from that period; we should be grateful for its very existence, and the effort that went into its making, without discounting our frustration at its lacunae and shortcomings.

People like David Vestal, Margery Mann, and Ralph Hattersley (all three of them accomplished photographers and respected teachers), Harvey Zucker (a historian and collector of antique photographica who'd recuperated the daguerreotype process, made dags himself, and wrote about early tools and techniques and what we now call "alternative processes"),[19] and numerous others generated lively, informed reportage, frequently useful tutorial texts, accessible and unpedantic history, and what we might call proto-theory and proto-criticism for a wide if specialized audience, one with a hands-on involvement in photography. Even if unaware of the fact, all of us writing about photography today stand on their shoulders and profit from their example.

One limitation of that writing's usefulness was that it appeared where it did, in publications such as *Popular Photography* and *Modern Photography*, read exclusively by amateur and professional photographers; I never met anyone (aside from myself) who didn't make photographs but bought those magazines. Another, a corollary of the first, was that these writers -- to whom I'd add Jack Deschin, who certainly felt himself one of their company and also published regularly in those periodicals -- had become so habituated to addressing that readership, with its limited range of interests and reference points, that they rarely engaged with the larger field of ideas in contemporary art, or wrote in a language and style aimed at the medium's already sizeable general audience.[20]

Which is where I came in.

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My introduction to photography as a subject worthy of serious

[19] Harvey's now the proprietor of A Photographers Place, the apostrophe-challenged but otherwise wonderful, long-lived photo-specific bookstore in Manhattan's SoHo.

[20] I should add that I too wrote briefly for *Popular Photography*, the most widely circulated of these. For some comments on my experiences in that role, see "Because It Feels So Good When I Stop: Concerning a Continuing Personal Encounter with Photographic Criticism," *Camera 35* 19:7 (October 1975), pp. 26-29,64. Reprinted in *Light Readings*.

consideration took place during a brief hiatus between my completing graduate studies in late 1966 and my launching myself into full-time free-lancing in mid-1968.

During that interim phase, I worked an an assistant editor at Da Capo Press, a division of Plenum Publishing Corporation, a scientific-technical publishing house founded by my parents, Earl and Frances Coleman. Da Capo had started as a reprint project specializing in works on music, had then branched out into the other arts, and was beginning to generate original titles as well. Alan J. Marks, the editor under whom I worked there, was a knowledgeable collector of rare books and prints, and had begun to turn his attention -- and the press's -- to photography. Through Da Capo and Alan, I came to know and love William M. Ivins's classic *Prints and Visual Communication*, of which Da Capo produced the first reprint edition; got to watch aspects of the production of the second edition of Paul Strand's *The Mexican Portfolio*, co-published by Da Capo and the Aperture Foundation, and the creation of a facsimile edition of Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, with a new introduction by Beaumont Newhall; familiarized myself with *aperture* magazine and the ideas of Minor White and others; and met a number of photographers working in different ways -- including Benedict J. Fernandez, whose first monograph was then in the press's pipeline.

One day in 1967, Alan walked into the office with a Paul Caponigro print he'd just purchased -- a wonderful rendering of "Untitled, West Hartford, Connecticut," a 1959 study of the vertical face of a rock quarry. He plunked it down on a shelf in front of me, with a simple admonition: "Look at that. It's a miracle of seeing."[21]

I learned some crucial lessons about my own habits of looking and the nature of photographic seeing from that picture of Caponigro's. Long attention to that image, and that print, introduced me to the transformative potential of camera vision -- its ability to help me look at things "not only for what they are, but for

[21] Neither he nor I had any idea that he was changing my life, opening a door I would step through to begin a journey that would last for at least the next thirty-one years. For that revelation I will forever be in his debt, and Caponigro's too.

what else they might be," as Minor White said. It taught me, too, just how literalized and habitual my own perceptual tendencies had become, how important it was to be aware of my seeing, to achieve some critical distance from it. Over a few week's time I came to understand what Alan meant and what Caponigro had achieved. In some ways, that's where these efforts of mine found their initial spark.

That encounter led to other engagements -- both during office hours and on my own -- with the photographic print as an object and the photographic image as an interpretative artifact. The research I did for the press on its photographic projects during that year, my office dialogues on the subject with Alan, and the faltering first conversations I had with photographers during that time (as well as the discussions on which I was privileged to eavesdrop in the office), constituted a significant aspect of my introduction to the medium. The urge to learn more made itself felt, but was immediately frustrated, at least along the traditional channels of my educational experience: In 1967 there was no history of photography course being taught anywhere in the metropolitan New York area -- not even a course in art history that addressed photography at length. Courses in art criticism remain rare today; a course in photography criticism was unheard of at that time.[22] Short of interning at MoMA or the GEH, autodidacticism was the only choice.

So I began ferreting out photography shows, books and periodicals -- making use of Deschin's column, the listings and reviews in *Pop Photo* and *Modern Photography*; familiarizing myself with the collections at MoMA, the Met, and the New York Public Library (where you could still call up from the stacks a complete set of *Camera Work* in the main reading room); and haunting the city's many used-book stores to build a reference library for myself. (The stretch bounded by Broadway and Fourth Avenue between 13th and 8th Street was very heaven, though on the wane, and still full of treasures; now only Strand Books remains.) As the above account suggests, tracking this stuff down was a challenge; at the same time, the scene was still compact enough that, once one

[22] To the best of my knowledge, I taught the first such seminar in New York, perhaps anywhere, at the New School for Social Research in 1970-71.

found one's way in, it proved manageable, and -- unlike the situation today -- in no way daunting.

Because writing has always served as one of my primary means for coming to terms with my experience, the hankering to write about photography soon began to manifest itself. Michael Hoffman of *aperture*, who headed that journal's New York office, was the first to encourage me to start putting my thoughts down on paper. The two earliest pieces of writing on photography I ever produced, in 1967, were a review of a new book-length collaboration between Arthur Rothstein and William Saroyan and another of Wright Morris's just-published *God's Country and My People*.[23]

Who was I writing for? Myself, to start with; as Thoreau once put it, "How can I know what I think till I see what I say?" In all the media with which I'd engaged up till then -- branches of contemporary literature and music, primarily -- as either a creator or an involved, informed audience member, the active presence of a thriving critical dialogue was a given, the imperative of establishing a critical tradition (in Kenner's sense of the term) understood by all concerned. So it was perplexing to engage with a medium in which the absence of such a dialogue seemed troubling to so few.

Not that this void went entirely unnoticed. Minor White, for one, issued periodic calls for critics of photography in the pages of *aperture*, and I took him seriously. The thought of making some small contribution toward the development of such a "continuum of understanding" appealed to me. Not only did that critical tradition not then exist, however, but hardly any predecessors even exemplified its possibilities. The closest thing I had to a role model at the time was James Agee. Certainly I admired his few writings about photography, his well-known appreciations of Walker Evans and Helen Levitt (though I found them a bit

[23] Hoffman didn't publish either of those early efforts, but that push started me off; I thank him for nudging me at what proved to be an auspicious moment. I can't recall which of the two pieces came first. The Morris review eventually made its way into *Camera 35*, and from there to my first book of essays, *Light Readings*. The Saroyan-Rothstein review will be published for the first time in a bibliography of my writings on photography during the years 1968-1995, forthcoming from the Center for Creative Photography.

overwrought and mystical). But his extensive critical commentary on a parallel medium, film, written from the perspective of a lay member of the general audience, achieved exactly the mix of accessibility, provocation and insight toward which I set out to work my way.

Coincidentally, in 1967 I'd begun freelancing for the weekly *Village Voice*, primarily as a third-string theater critic -- not a slot I'd trained for or sought out, simply a job that needed doing for which I had some appropriate background. Though I didn't know it, the *Voice* had run a few pieces on photography from time to time, mostly by George Wright (including a piece on Moholy-Nagy in the very first issue of October 26, 1955). Nothing on the subject was appearing in those pages at the time, however.

With great trepidation, as well as what in retrospect seems like enormous temerity, in the early spring of 1968 I broached the idea of initiating a regular column on photography to my *Voice* editor, Diane Fisher. It seemed a reasonable proposal. This upstart paper, still comparatively new and controversial, billed itself as a "writer's newspaper"; novelist Norman Mailer had been one of its founders. It prided itself on serving as a hotbed of first-person cultural reportage (what was then being called "personal journalism" or "the new journalism") and critical writing -- some of it accessible, some of it esoteric, all of it stylistically distinctive -- about many marginal, cutting-edge art forms: jazz, rock, various other alternative musics, experimental film and video, avant-garde dance, off-off-Broadway theater, happenings and "performance art," new painting and sculpture and mixed-media hybrids. Many of these had audiences about as minute as the crowd of two dozen or so I'd discovered in regular attendance at photo openings and the occasional photo lecture. Why not add photography to that roster?

Having none, I never offered Diane any credentials to support my bid for this role, aside from my obvious interest in the project; and she never asked me for any.[24] She did request a written proposal, to run past the paper's upper

[24] I realize how implausible it seems that one could have attained such a position with no string-pulling or other help from any connections in the field, no track record whatsoever as a writer on the visual arts generally or photography specifically, and no qualifications beyond skill as a writer

editorial echelons for discussion, suggestions, and possible approval. I drafted it around the time my son Edward was born, in May of '68. She promised to get back to me shortly with a yes or no.[25]

A few weeks later I opened the new issue of the *Voice* to find my proposal published as I'd written it, with no advance notice to me or time to prepare myself for this new venture. Sink or swim. I decided to swim.

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and a demonstrated ability to meet deadlines. I can only report this as it happened. Yet, though today many of my colleagues do come into the field with substantial academic credentials, this remains -- to the benefit of all -- a discourse open to the deeply interested but largely self-educated.

[25] I had a plan. As a putative critic, I felt weakest in the area of 19th- and early 20th-century photo history, due in part to the scattered and spotty resources in New York City for hands-on engagement with those materials and the shortage of knowledgeable curators and conservators here willing to spend time informing me on that score. So, if the *Voice* approved the column, I intended -- after we got into our parental routine with our son -- to drive us up to Rochester, spend a month immersing myself in the holdings of the George Eastman House and talking with its staff, and then initiate the column in September.

Toward the Empty Place:
On the Spiritual in Teaching

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to express my thanks to Tom Braswell and the planning committee in charge of this Southeast Regional SPE Conference for inviting me to participate, and for honoring me with the request that I deliver this keynote address tonight.

When he first contacted me concerning this talk, Tom told me that the theme for this conference was something decidedly unfashionable -- "The Spiritual in Art" -- and asked me if I would speak to that subject. Foolishly, perhaps, though not deceitfully, I agreed. And I did try, repeatedly, to draft something on that subject suitable to the occasion, but it all came out sounding either archaic or pompous, sometimes both at once.

Eventually I realized that I'm not a working artist in any medium now, and haven't been for several decades. Nor am I a teaching artist, as are many of you here. I'm an ex-musician who at best aspired to mediocrity in that medium, nowadays a sometime poet and fiction writer and an occasional amateur picture-maker. Frankly, were I you I wouldn't listen to myself, with those minimal credentials, opine on the spiritual in art.

What I am now, and have been for almost thirty years, is a professional wordsmith, a prose craftsman, a working critic with twenty-seven years of university-level teaching experience. If I have anything to offer you of substance and usefulness, it will be on the subject of teaching the history and criticism of photography in a photo-education context, our common ground. What I have to say on that score will address not generalities but the specifics of my own spiritual crisis as a teacher.

So I have taken the liberty of redefining my topic tonight as "Toward the Empty Place: On the Spiritual in Teaching." Some of this, I think, pertains to the making of art as well as the teaching of it. I hope you'll find something germane to the conference theme in my remarks -- and, if you don't, I hope to prove sufficiently entertaining that you'll forgive my straying from the point.

I should add here that this is the first SPE conference, regional or national, that I've attended since 1986, when I resigned formally from the organization, sending to the SPE's then Board of Directors and the editors of its several publications an open letter explaining my departure, which they decided not to make public. I'm here this weekend to see what, if anything, has changed for the better since then, but I haven't renewed my membership to date. So this is my first address to any component of the SPE as a non-member.

For the purposes of this talk tonight, suffice it to say that I left because I no longer found the organization and its activities conducive to the kinds of dialogue with my colleagues in teaching that I'd discovered there when I joined a decade earlier, circa 1976. I'd been missing that interaction for awhile before I left, so, practically speaking, my departure changed little. I know I'm not alone in having severed those ties. I can name dozens more who've fallen away from this organization and stopped coming to its meetings -- senior figures, people from whom I felt I had something to learn as a teacher, whose absence from these conferences made it easier for me to leave. But that's another discussion.

A few years later, toward the end of the 1980s, I found myself growing increasingly disheartened with the progressive deterioration in the quality of education offered by the university department in which I taught, and the concurrent decline in the energies and involvement of its students. My experiences as a doctoral candidate in Media Studies in another division of that university made it plain that the problem was systemic, not just restricted to undergraduate courses or fine-arts programs. My colleagues elsewhere in that institution -- and, indeed, in photography programs and other courses of study across the country -- reported similar observations, which, though reassuring in a way, hardly proved cheering.

To make a long story short, by the spring of 1993 I found myself walking unenthusiastically, even reluctantly, into classrooms full of students who seemed to have no particular reason to be there, and no real desire to be in weekly contact with me. I'd vowed years earlier to stop teaching if ever I felt I had nothing to give, and there I was, dispirited. So I finished out the semester as best I could,

made a last futile gesture to provoke the university administration into changing course, and left.

Well, it's four and a half years later. During that interval I've guest-lectured in some classes, and taught a few workshops here and abroad, both within and without the academic environment. I find the same conditions everywhere I go. Indeed, the only vital, enthusiastic and aggressive students I've encountered anywhere in recent years are those I met last winter in the advanced classes taught at Arizona State University in Tempe by Bill Jay, the *bête noire* of one faction of this organization. That doesn't surprise me, though it may give you pause for thought.

So, since 1993, I haven't taught a full course anywhere. What I've found out is that I miss it, terribly, like the best parts of a failed or exhausted marriage. Teaching lies at the core of just about everything I do professionally, so I have other outlets -- especially my writing -- for some of those urges and energies. But the theater of the classroom offers something unavailable elsewhere, and I want to find a role for myself in it once more.

It didn't take me long to realize I'd teach again -- one academic year of letting go, to be precise, during which I spent most of my time in residencies here and abroad, writing and researching, getting some distance on things. When I came to that understanding, I knew I had to start from scratch -- which, for me, meant looking at my own history as a student, and at the models of teaching I'd absorbed and, perhaps uncritically, reflected in my own practice.

By my own lights, though my grades were generally better than average, considerably more so in subjects that interested me, I was a lousy student right up through graduate school in the mid-1960s. Fundamentally, though I'd figured out how to get through school, I didn't know how to learn from other people. This was due more to family-based emotional problems irrelevant here than to any principled commitment to the activity that educator Herbert Kohl calls "not-learning," about which I'll say more in a few minutes. Indeed, I didn't even know yet how to learn from myself.

Somehow, in the years between 1967, when I left graduate school, and the late '70s, I learned how to learn -- first from myself, then from others -- and began to learn how to pass it along to others of my cohort, how to teach. I began my teaching career, such as it's been, in 1970, in an adult-education seminar on the criticism of photography at the New School for Social Research in New York City, a seminar that ran for several years and through which perhaps a hundred people passed, some of whom subsequently entered the field, Sally Stein among them. Photography had not yet been fully academicized, or museumized. It was still an outsider art form, and it drew outsiders like myself to it -- loners, rebels, oppositional types, political activists, eccentrics -- whose weird energies gave photo studies in that period a distinct crackle and charge.

After that I taught here and there, on one-semester or one-year appointments -- art institute and university (graduate and undergraduate), independent workshop, all the variants -- until I landed at New York University in the late '70s, where I taught steadily but (by my own choice) part-time on every level from undergraduate to doctoral until my aforementioned departure in 1993. In 1982 I entered a doctoral program there myself and discovered, to my delight, that at the age of 39 I had indeed learned how to learn -- that I could enter any educational context, extract from the faculty and my fellow students everything of use to me (including ideas they didn't know they had, and others I hadn't known I needed), and could also return that energy in kind, in ways that furthered the work of my teachers as well as my classmates. Call me a late bloomer, but at least I did blossom.

During those same years, I also received substantial feedback that told me I'd learned how to teach. How had that happened? I'd never had a single course of formal study in educational methodology. Obviously, then, it had come from independent study, practice, observation of others, and reflection on my own experience -- especially thinking about those who'd taught me, in particular the two teachers I'd truly loved.

The first was Miss Gloria Salimondo: P.S. 41, Greenwich Village, 1954, sixth grade, age 11. She was young compared to the school's standard

complement of intimidating battle-axes (probably in her late twenties), and kind, and soft-voiced, and I thought she was beautiful. I was in love, obviously, puppy love, so I hung on her every word uncritically -- to such an extent that more than forty years later I still overcook what little pork I eat in order to kill those dreadful trichina worms she drew nestling into our layers of muscle tissue. And it took me twenty years to discover that I'd unlearned the habit of crossing my legs because I'd devotedly memorized her schematic of the circulation system, along with her warning about the dire consequences of closing off sections thereof with pressure -- she sketched little trapdoors to illustrate the serious health problems that could result, culminating, if I recall correctly, in gangrene. Delightful memories, clearly, but not much to carry into the classroom as a teacher: If you want your students' love, or need it in order to communicate with them, you're in deep shit from the git-go.

The second teacher who mattered was Professor Leonard Albert: Hunter College in the Bronx (now Lehman College), fall 1960, age 16, my first college English class, required of all entering freshmen, English Lit 101. I was already widely if eccentrically read for my age, and had been writing -- poetry, fiction, political speeches -- since starting high school. Much of that I owed to my parents' gifts to me: a love of words and books, a respect for writers generally, the examples of themselves as readers and writers and editors and publishers. But when I stepped into Prof. Albert's classroom he handed out to all of us a clear understanding of the origins and evolution of the very language we spoke and wrote yet in so many ways took for granted, and in doing so changed my life.

He didn't hand this out as a mimeographed schematic or cheat sheet. He made us internalize it by forcing us to hear it and feel it coming up out of our own chests, through our own mouths, off our own tongues. Let me interrupt my tale here to note that I use that terminology deliberately. Yes, he *made* us do this work, and the *force*, if implicit, was no less real. We were given no choice in the matter, were offered no alternative assignments, did not have our preferences consulted or considered, could not have inquired why we had to learn this stuff whose relevance to our lives was less than apparent. In that theater of education

we constituted a captive audience, in every sense of that term, and our only option was to leave it entirely -- which, at least for the males of draft age, was no choice at all.

He started us off on "Beowulf," the impenetrable original alongside a respected translation, and then gave us Chaucer. No translation or "modernization." Chaucer in the original Middle English, all that weird spelling and guttural Saxon and vaguely familiar but strangely accented words with the stresses on the most unlikely syllables. He helped us decode its meaning, laid out the basic rules of grammar, syntax, spelling and pronunciation over a few class sessions, then gave the two dozen or so of us a weekend in which to memorize the first twenty lines of the "Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*.

The following Monday morning, in alphabetical order according to last name, we began reciting, and Prof. Albert began patiently correcting. I was up early on, obviously. Some of us got it down better than others, but none of our efforts were less than embarrassing. Our teacher said nothing to shame anyone who'd clearly made the effort to fulfill the assignment. When we weren't reciting, we listened to each other, and to him. The next morning the recitals from memory continued, with the first day's slackers retested. Thursday he put Tuesday's slackers to the test, and we began collectively working our way, in class and out loud, through the "Prologue" and into the tales.

A few people dropped out -- pointless, really, except as teacher-shopping, since the course was mandatory and the curriculum fixed by the department. By mid-semester the remaining twenty or so of us could read any passage selected at random in passable if halting Middle English, and explicate what it meant, more or less, without Prof. Albert's help and with only the glossary to guide us. Without realizing it, I'd learned something about how to learn, had even sniffed something about how *I* learned. And, as a writer and speaker, I'd been given an insight into the DNA of my medium, a gift that, though I can't speak for all my classmates, was received in that room by others as well.

Finally, of course, I had twenty lines of Chaucer engraved in my brain. Over a third of a century later they're still there, and I can launch into them at the

drop of a hat, as I've done in tandem with old friends at class reunions and even here at past SPE conferences with colleagues -- yes, photographers and photo teachers and curators and historians -- who went through the City University system during the same era. Did none of us any harm, so far as I can tell.[26]

Bear with me, please. I'm not making some E. D. Hirsch or Allan Bloom stand here in favor of DWEM -- dead white European males -- or a fixed canon or rote learning. I'm just trying to convey something about the context in which I found myself, for the first time I could remember, cheerfully and eagerly setting out to learn something unfamiliar and difficult whose beneficial value to me I had to take on trust.

So I must also tell you something about the setting, and the teacher. By today's standards, the City University of New York (of which Hunter was one division) was appallingly regimented. Jeans and T-shirts were not permitted anywhere on campus. Women who wore slacks instead of skirts or dresses to school on any day the thermometer did not read 30 degrees Fahrenheit or below at 8 a.m. according to the city's official radio station were refused admission to the campus. (My cohort successfully fought for an end to that particular idiocy, I'm proud to say.) Three full absences from class meant an automatic failure; a lateness of ten minutes counted as half an absence. Of course we addressed all our faculty, and the administration and staff, by their titles and last names. We, in turn, were Mr., Miss (this was pre-Ms.), or, infrequently, Mrs.

I couldn't tell you if Prof. Albert was likeable as a person; though I took every course with him the curriculum allowed, we never had a private conversation. Teachers and students then never socialized off-campus, and hardly ever on -- no departmental holiday or birthday or farewell parties, no coffee klatches, no bulletin boards with postcards from old grads, no counseling from faculty on your love life, fights with parents, drug usage. I seem to recall there was a school psychiatrist -- one -- and I never met anyone, no matter how troubled, who visited him or her.

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[26] To my amazement and delight, after I gave this talk no fewer than four of the teachers in attendance came up to me to recite those same lines -- in passable Middle English -- from memory.

Prof. Albert clearly didn't care whether any of us liked him, and made it just as clear that he wasn't concerned with liking us. He played no favorites, though his pleasure in those who put effort into the class was discernible, along with his irritation with those who did only the bare minimum to get by. He wasn't by any means sour or bitter, but I never heard him laugh and rarely saw him smile; his humor was dry, manifesting itself in occasional puns and oblique references mostly available to those who kept up with the readings.

So far as I could detect in four years of studying with him, he had no hidden agenda in relation to us as individuals or as a group -- only the overt, declared intention of helping us achieve an adequate grasp of the material and the broader subject. Some people then -- and certainly most people in the academic system today -- would probably consider him overly formal, if not cold. I found that enormously liberating. He himself knew the material forward and backward, could recite most of it -- all of *Othello*, for instance -- from memory, knew the critical literature inside and out as well. I saw in him a major resource, and greedily took from him everything I could, which he freely gave to all who asked; like one of Chaucer's characters (I'll translate here), "gladly would he learn, and gladly teach."

I don't say this to wax nostalgic about the old days and the old ways. I'm trying to describe a theater of teaching and learning that had enormous impact on me and in some important ways shaped my own sense of the dramaturgy of the classroom, though I never taught like Prof. Albert did, my own style having turned out much more improvisational and informal.[27] And when I speculate that no English department today would hire this man or his equivalent, I don't mean it accusatorily; he'd simply seem like a superbly trained Edwardian actor plunked down awkwardly in a Living Theater production.[28] My main point is that I

[27] There were, however, many things I'd learned from him and his colleagues; and, in their honor, throughout my entire teaching stint at New York University I always wore a tie to work -- though loosely knotted, and often paired with jeans.

[28] I did run into a brilliant younger version of him during my doctoral studies -- Prof. Philip Hosay of New York University -- who taught in much the same way and offered a superb course for doctoral candidates on the methodologies of historical research. The students he found himself stuck with were, for the most part, unqualified to study with him, and I predicted to myself that he'd take early

internalized that version of the classroom as theater just before a series of major stylistic changes in education began -- changes which generated new kinds of teachers and students as well.

I saw that as soon as I entered the graduate Creative Writing program at San Francisco State College -- the Bay Area, January 1965, just turned 21. Jeans were permissible, slacks for women anytime. Smoking was allowed in the corridors (we didn't know any better). Both graduate and undergraduate classes were much more dialogic. Everything was more casual. In quonset huts thrown up on campus as an "alternative university," anyone who could draw five students could teach a course on any subject -- rock and roll, comic books, Maoism, Black history. I thought a lot of those changes were for the better, still do, and when I started teaching I incorporated many of them -- including the very idea of teaching a previously untaught subject -- into my own work.

However, what I'm calling the dramaturgy of the classroom continued to change fairly steadily from then till now. And I stopped keeping up with the changes. Not consciously; I just fell into what felt like a viable form for me and worked for my students, until one day I looked up to find that it wasn't working at all for any of us. At first I blamed poor administration, lackadaisical students, careerist faculty, lowered standards, television, all the usual suspects, and there's doubtless some truth to that. But, though the students no longer knew how to behave in the classrooms we shared, nor had much of an idea as to why they were there in the first place, I see now that I didn't either, had fallen asleep at the wheel only to awaken in unfamiliar territory. Among other things, photography is now an insider art, and there's money to be made in it, and, as Cindi Lauper sang, "Money changes everything."

So here I am, coming back to teaching this fall; I'm conducting a seminar for undergraduate seniors at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, and offering a private adult-ed seminar and several short workshops in New York City. And I find myself with no appealing model for how the job is to be done -- little from my experience of being taught, and little from my years of teaching, that I

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retirement.

can identify as aspects of a viable methodology. That being the case, I've decided to invent from the bottom up a new way of proceeding, in collaboration with my students. To prepare myself for that, I'm reconsidering my own history as a learner and as a teacher, and also as an observer of both those activities. Furthermore, I'm reading and, in some cases, re-reading a variety of commentators on education and art whose writings seem resonant and pertinent to the present moment. I thought I'd take a bit of time to tell what I'm finding there as nourishing food for thought.

I began by returning to what -- at the risk of implicating him in a position not at all his own -- I've long taken as an eloquent defense of what you might think of as the Albertian position, in honor of my former teacher. This is the 1972 diatribe *Fellow Teachers*[29] by Philip Rieff -- yes, father of the writer David Rieff, and former husband of Susan Sontag. Unapologetically mandarin in his position, Rieff in this text prefigures by several decades the polemics of Hirsch, Bloom and others, denouncing the spread in academe of the lowering of the basketball hoops that he attributes to the embrace of an uncritical feel-goodism, a tendency he'd already excoriated in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*,[30] his savage attack on Jung, Reich, and those others he saw as betrayers of Freud's discipline.

Rieff willfully takes positions that were already unpopular a quarter-century ago. "If the university is not the temple of the intellect, then it is not a university," he writes. "In the temple, as its servants know, there are no students' rights, except the right to be well-taught. A university is neither a political democracy nor an oligarchy; it is an intellectual aristocracy."[31] And "Fighting attitudes do not mix well with analytic. ... Our duty is to hang back, always a little behind the times."[32] And "We cannot be advertising men for any movement. Herald nothing."[33]

Yet he surely echoes many of us in the field when he laments that today "few students know how to read a book and fewer come out of families still

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[29] Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers* (New York: Delta Books, 1975).
[30] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
[31] *Fellow Teachers*, p. 6.
[32] Ibid., p. 4.
[33] Ibid., p. 4.

blessed with oral traditions, upon which abilities to read build up. ... How do you teach totally unprepared students? The American universities are now producing tens of thousands of failed intellectuals and artists of life; this mass production may lead to the destruction of culture in any received sense."[34]

Yet his authoritarianism and conservatism are (in my opinion) far from malign, and surely neither absolute nor unself-critical. In the same chapter Rieff also writes, of the classroom, "To preside is not to rule; here is the hairline that makes all the difference in the world between culture and politics."[35] And "Messages and positions are the death of teaching. As scholars and teachers, we have a duty to fight against our own positions."[36] And "Denial, the discipline of double-crossing your own position, is an ancient tactic of exegetical teaching."[37]

From Reiff I went -- for counterpoint from within the university system -- to a lesser-known but no less insightful thinker, New York University's Henry J. Perkinson, with whom I had the honor of studying in the 1980s. In a small but wonderfully argued treatise, *The Possibilities of Error*,[38] Perkinson -- deeply concerned, as I know from his classes and private conversations, with the deteriorating quality of education everywhere in this country -- speaks eloquently of the problems inherent in a teacher's "masking" the authoritarian premises of most teacher-student relationships with kind, considerate, and loving mannerisms. (Ah, Miss Salimondo.) Instead, he encourages teachers to "minimize the fears that adults cause in the young," to "try to avoid or minimize those behaviors or situations that pressure, confuse, bore, alienate, manipulate, and victimize the young."

"Yet it is not just the teachers who frighten the young," he continues; "it's the whole educational enterprise that has institutionalized moral and intellectual authoritarianism through policies and procedures that threaten and control pupils. ... Through dialogue," he concludes, "critics and educators both can come to an

[34] Ibid., p. 15.
[35] Ibid., p. 14.
[36] Ibid., p. 6.
[37] Ibid., p. 16.
[38] Henry J. Perkinson, *The Possibilities of Error: an Approach to Education* (New York: David McKay Co., 1971).

increased consciousness of what educators are doing to the young -- an awareness of the ways teachers and schools do frighten them."[39]

Some of which is not much different from what I found when I revisited the thought of the Brazilian Paolo Freire, extracting from his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*[40] the understanding that an oppressive educational system hobbles everyone within it, the rulers and the ruled alike. Furthermore, Freire's ideas pushed me to consider the possibility that, if I truly believed myself operative in an osmotically totalitarian culture, perhaps I needed to broaden my definition of "the oppressed" to include all of my students, regardless of economic class, and myself as well. In that light, I think I may have done my students at New York University a disservice in my final years there, coming to see them as pampered rich kids (which they were, with few exceptions) without also recognizing that even wealth and privilege did not protect them any longer from the stupefying tendencies of the system, which now runs so amok that it appears hellbent on dumbing down everything and everyone, even the offspring of the ruling class presumably groomed to inherit power.

That led me into Freire's wonderful "dialogues on transforming education" with Ira Shor, gathered under the title *A Pedagogy for Liberation*[41] and published in 1987. To my relief, these two educators agreed wholeheartedly that as an educational tool the prepared lecture -- a form I sometimes utilize, as on this occasion -- was not inherently oppressive, but could appropriately be used in tandem with the dialogic method, so long as one employed it for purposes of challenge rather than as a presumed vehicle for some imagined, inoculative "transfer of knowledge." On another level, one important section of the book concerns the imperative of liberating "first-world" students, which begins with the recognition that what the authors identify as a "culture of silence" and a "culture of sabotage" among first-world students are symptomatic of the sometimes obvious but often subtle oppressions that permeate those societies. "The sad reality,"

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[39] Ibid., pp. 53-55.

[40] Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970, 1993).

[41] _____, with Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987).

Shor says at one point, "is that students are largely alienated, bored and uncooperative, even when they are 'well-behaved.' Who can celebrate their silent boredom or their passivity?"[42]

Because that described precisely the majority of the students I've encountered over the past decade, I decided I needed to know more about it. Fortuitously, I happened across Herbert Kohl's 1994 collection of essays, *I Won't Learn from You*[43] -- in which he distinguishes learning disabilities from the willful activity he calls "not-learning," and proposes the latter as an intuitive response and a personal strategy for survival in an educational environment that a student perceives as hostile to his or her integrity and autonomy. Since I consider the corrupt, decaying culture I and my students inhabit as hostile to the integrity and autonomy of all of us, I found myself prompted by Kohl's concept to rethink the responses of many of my students to the ostensible educational "opportunities" and "privileges" available to them -- asking myself if their disinterest and seeming apathy might not disguise a deeper and not inappropriate resistance to everything and everyone (myself included) implicated in a system whose unhealth they sensed, however inarticulately.

As Kohl, who as a teacher works mostly with grade-schoolers, puts it at one point, "children in school act in ways that are shaped by the institution; therefore it is essential never to judge a child by his or her school behavior."[44] Kohl also speaks for the necessity of what he calls "creative maladjustment" as an adaptive strategy for surviving within an unhealthy context, and urges teachers to encourage it, even when that means bucking the system alongside one's students.[45]

And that led me back to Lewis Hyde's astonishing meditation, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*,[46] a book that has meant much to me and, I know, to many others as well. The luminous comments of this poet and

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[42] Op. cit., p. 129.
[43] Herbert Kohl, *I Won't Learn from You* (New York: The New Press, 1994).
[44] Ibid., p. 133.
[45] Ibid., pp. 127-153.
[46] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

essayist on the differences between a gift economy and a market economy must surely resonate for both artists and teachers in this country and elsewhere who nowadays find their fields of activity entirely and unapologetically market-driven, increasingly populated and dominated by bean-counters, number-crunchers, desk jockeys, career bureaucrats, and MBAs.

The entirety of Hyde's intricate argument pertains to the issues at hand, and I recommend it to you highly. I find it particularly valuable because it confronts, names and explores at length the frustration and despair that I, and many others, feel at this present moment:

"[E]very modern artist who has chosen to labor with a gift must sooner or later wonder how he or she is to survive in a society dominated by market exchange. And if the fruits of a gift are gifts themselves, how is the artist to nourish himself, spiritually as well as materially, in an age whose values are market values and whose commerce consists almost exclusively in the purchase and sale of commodities?"

"Every culture offers its citizens an image of what it is to be a man or woman of substance. ... [A] disquieting sense of triviality, of worthlessness even, will nag the man or woman who labors in the service of a gift and whose products are not adequately described as commodities. ...

"Moreover," Hyde continues, "... a gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift. The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation. If this is the case, then the gifts of the inner world must be accepted as gifts in the outer world if they are to retain their vitality. Where gifts have no public currency, therefore, where the gift as a form of property is neither recognized nor honored, our inner gifts will find themselves excluded from the very commerce which is their nourishment."[47]

Yet his is not a despairing book, if only because Hyde knows that the world's need for the gifts of its teachers and artists endures, inexhaustible. "If the commodity moves to turn a profit," Hyde asks, "where does the gift move?" His answer: "The gift moves toward the empty place. As it turns in its circle it turns

[47] Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.

toward him who has been empty-handed the longest, and if someone appears elsewhere whose need is greater it leaves its old channel and moves toward him. ... The gift finds that man attractive who stands with an empty bowl he does not own."[48]

The task, then, for those of us who think we have gifts, is that of seeking "the empty place" and finding those who have "been empty-handed the longest," of whom there is never any shortage, and who may walk into our exhibitions and classrooms or find our words on a page at any moment -- who may in fact prove to be our next-door neighbors or our best friends' children, because we live in a system that impoverishes all and actively generates a pervasive, debilitating sense of futility.

It is that sense of futility that I see as the true enemy of all creative activity, including art-making and teaching, and it shames me to confess, as I've done tonight, that I surrendered to it for a time. For I believe that a poet of my acquaintance, Carolyn Forché, speaks the deepest of truths when she says, to people like ourselves, "It is/not your right to feel powerless. Better/people than you were powerless."[49]

The obligation, then, is the imperative of action, and the struggle against nihilism, and the nurturance of hope. I would call all the authors I've cited for you tonight realists, even pragmatists; yet I find all their work permeated with what I'd describe as hope. Herbert Kohl, indeed, is an active advocate of hope -- of being hopeful oneself, and of seeking to instill hope in one's students and to evoke it from them. From his argument I would suspect that his definition of that concept would coincide with the one proposed by the Czech saxophonist, playwright, essayist and President Vaclav Havel, who wrote, in his book *Disturbing the Peace*:

> Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul, and it's not essentially dependent on some particular observation of

[48] Ibid., p. 23.

[49] Carolyn Forché, "Return," in *The Country Between Us* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 20.

the world or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. ...

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. ...

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. ... It is also this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live and continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.[50]

Well, that's what I've been chewing on lately. And it's this undigested stew that I'm bringing into my classrooms this semester. I can't yet say how it'll turn out, of course, nor can I even tell you how it's going so far. The adult-ed seminars haven't started yet. The first session in Philly was every teacher's nightmare: twenty college seniors who sat on their hands and volunteered not a word, all of us looking ugly under glaring fluorescents in a cramped, overcrowded, underventilated room set up with traditional formica-and-tubular-steel student seats facing one of those hideous gun-metal gray office desks -- the classic "I talk, you listen" configuration. None of them had any familiarity with my work, or with the critical dialogue around photography in general. They manifested no interest in anything. The most significant question they asked me all day was what they should call me. I replied that that was up to them.

I indulged myself in feeling disheartened for a day or so; in fact, I came close to quitting. Then I asked my department chair to shift us to another venue -- a long, narrow seminar room overlooking the library. Last Tuesday we all sat

[50] Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvizdala* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 181. English translation by Paul Wilson. Originally published underground in Prague in 1986.

around the polished wood table, a bit more like collaborators. (As does Rex Stout's plump detective, Nero Wolfe, I "prefer eyes at a level.")

I avoided the *paterfamilias* seat at the head of the table, and plan to move myself around from place to place over the coming months. For whatever reasons -- change of stage set, a bit of familiarity with me -- they talked more, so I got to start to know them and see where we might go as a collective. Some of them had decided to call me Allan, some Mr. Coleman, and one insisted on addressing me as Professor Coleman, all of which are fine with me. I'd given them a few of my essays to read the week before, so we discussed Diane Arbus, and Cindy Sherman, and hermeneutics and exegetics, and text and context, and we all enjoyed watching the videotape of "spectacular implosions" -- you know, those explosive deconstructions in which buildings are levelled without disturbing the ones next to them -- that I brought along to serve as an example of critics at work.

So we've started to loosen up and enjoy ourselves. At the very least, the lighting's better, the acoustics too, and it's more spacious. There's even wall-to-wall carpet. I move around a lot when I teach, and I'm thinking of taking my shoes off next time. If I do, they'll get to take theirs off too, of course. I'm trying to decide if that means I should require the wearing of socks. It seems to me that, whether I take the authoritarian or the permissive position on that, there's a real possibility that some teaching and learning may go on in there. That's my hope, anyhow.

Thank you.

(This is the complete text of the keynote address delivered to the annual Southeast Regional Conference of the Society for Photographic Education on September 19th, 1997, at the Penland School of Arts, Penland, North Carolina.)

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Definitions of Terms

The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition

Within the century and a half of photography's history, two recurrent controversies have had strong influence on its evolution into a graphic medium with a full range of expressive potential. These conflicts, centering around issues which have masqueraded as debates over style and even technique, are, in fact, philosophical clashes. The first -- which for all intents and purposes is finally over -- was the fight to legitimize photographic imagery *per se* as a suitable vehicle for meaningful creative activity.

The initial stage of this fight had more to do with the art establishment's defensive antagonism toward photography than with the practitioners' attitudes toward the medium, or the public's. The general public has always been interested in looking at photographs, even (perhaps especially) at photographs which were not certified as Art. The problem has never been the lack of an audience, but rather the withholding of certain kinds of incentives: prestige, power, and money.

The morphology of photography would have been vastly different had photographers resisted the urge to acquire the credentials of aesthetic respectability for their medium, and instead simple pursued it as a way of producing evidence of intelligent life on earth. However, photographers -- some of them, at least -- have chosen to enter the "artistic" arena. So there have been cyclical confrontations between the dominant public definitions of art at various times and photography's concurrent definition of itself.

Though he was neither the first nor the last to take up these cudgels, the key figure in our century was that decidedly bourgeois gentleman with aristocratic tendencies, Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz desired -- *noblesse oblige* -- to lead a crusade; his was for the acceptance of photography as High (Salon) Art. At the time he embarked on his quest, the most rampant forms of High Art were recognizable via adherence to conventions of subject matter and style, among them livestock in rural settings, sturdy peasants, fuzziness, and orientalia.

Initially, it appears, what Stieglitz meant by Art Photography was imagery resembling Whistler prints or genre paintings, or both -- at least to judge by his own early work and the photographs by others which he presented in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, the major critical organs which he edited (and, in the case of the latter, published). He and his cohorts successfully addressed these accepted themes and evoked the requisite mannerisms from their medium, which is, in fact, adaptable enough to almost any end to make even that possible. The final result, however, was an attenuated school of photography based on imitation of the surface qualities of a nostalgic, enervated school of painting.

That this definition of both High Art and High Art Photography was a creative dead end eventually became apparent. (Indeed, it becomes increasingly apparent that the battle for the acceptance of photography as Art was not only counter-productive but counter-revolutionary. The most important photography is most emphatically not Art.) And whereas Stieglitz began by advocating and sponsoring a brand of photography which still exists in the antiquated and slightly debased form of camera-club pictorialism, he subsequently became aware of -- and, to his credit, embraced -- that ferment in which post-impressionist seeing and camera vision commingled to generate radical new forms of visual expression. So he ended up proselytizing for a way of working in photography which was diametrically opposed to what he had initially propounded; the last issues of *Camera Work* were devoted to the blunt, harsh, Cubist-influenced early images of the young Paul Strand.

Strand and others, both here and abroad, were persuaded that different media were much like sects, to whose dogma practitioners should hew closely, and that a medium was best defined by its inherent and unique characteristics -- those aspects which were shared by no other. Curiously, they did not consider photography's almost infinite adaptability to any style of expression as such a characteristic, but settled instead on the related (though not identical) qualities of sharpness of focus and realism. And, as purists tend to do, they made of these qualities not merely stylistic choices but moral imperatives.

This was an approach to photography which found corollaries in many art and design movements around the world; its connections with no-frills utilitarianism, form-following-function theories, and the general mechanophile tendencies in literature and the arts are self-evident. Coincidentally, it also happened that at the same time photographic historiography was beginning to evolve from the purely technical to the chronological and aesthetic. (The next stage, the morphological, is only now beginning to be reached.)

Photography, being a hybrid medium, looked at askance by the art establishment almost everywhere except the Bauhaus, received remarkably little attention as a field of scholarly and critical inquiry, a situation which persisted until the beginning of this decade. So, incredible as it seems in retrospect, during the 1930s the historiography of the most radical innovation in communication since the invention of the printing press and the most democratically accessible image-making tool since the pencil was vested in a mere handful of people -- somewhere between six and twelve, depending on how you count.

Inevitably infected with the aesthetic *Zeitgeist*, these historians were understandably anxious to prove that their medium was distinct from its predecessors in the graphic arts and yet directed toward the same field of ideas as was the vanguard of the arts in general at that point. Naturally, then, they explicated the development of photography as apostles of realism. The rest, one might say, is history -- though what they wrote, in most cases, more nearly approaches theology.

People believe photographs.

Whatever their response may be to sculptures, etchings, oil paintings, or wood-block prints, and regardless of the level of sophistication they bring to encounters with such works, people do not think them credible in the way they do photographs.

Their credence is based on many factors. These are a few:

1. Photography institutionalizes Renaissance perspective, reifying scientifically and mechanistically that acquired way of perceiving which William

Ivins called "the rationalization of sight." Thus photography reassures us constantly that our often arbitrary procedures for making intellectual sense out of the chaos of visual experience "work."

2. Although in its physical form the photographic print is nothing more than a thin deposit of (most commonly) silver particles on paper, the image composed thereby does encode a unique optical/chemical relationship with a specific instant of "reality." Remote and equivocal it may be, but undeniable. A certain lack of aesthetic distance is virtually built into the medium.

3. The mechanical, non-manual aspects of the process combine with the verisimilitude of the rendering to create the illusion of the medium's transparency, or, as Ivins put it, its lack of "syntax."

After all, infants, lower primates, and even servo-mechanisms can take photographs that display the qualities just cited. Photographing appears to be nothing more than concretized seeing, and seeing is believing.

These and other factors have, from its inception, created an atmosphere around photography within which the medium's credibility is not to be questioned -- not lightly, at any rate. The assumption has been that the photograph is, and should properly remain, an accurate, reliable transcription. This, of course, is restrictive and inhibiting to some image-makers, who have refused to accept love-it-or-leave-it dicta from the medium's purists. So photography's second major struggle has been to free itself from the imperative of realism.

Viewing this crucial philosophical relationship to photography (and, implicitly, to reality) in terms of a continuum, we can say that at one end there is a branch of photography concerned with justifying the medium's credibility. It operates as an essentially religious discourse between image-maker and viewer. It involves an act of faith on both parts, requiring as it does the conviction that the image-maker has not significantly intervened in the translation of event into image. In responding, the viewer is not supposed to consider the image-maker's identity, but only the original event depicted in the image. The photographer's choice as to which (and what sort of) events to address is the only personal, subjective evaluation permitted in this mode. All other aspects of presentation are

supposed to be neutral; a high degree of technical bravura is acceptable in some circles, but anathema in others.

We have long attached to images in this mode -- and must now laboriously disengage from them -- two misleading labels: *documentary* and *straight/pure*. The former is generally applied to images depicting human social situations, the latter to formal, studied images of traditional graphic-arts subject matter -- nudes, still lifes, landscapes, portraits. I would tentatively suggest that we consider the terms *informational* and *contemplative/representational*, respectively, as somewhat more accurate replacements.

In its relationship to the photograph's credibility, this latter mode might be described as theistic. Another, an agnostic one, permits a more active intermediation between the *Ding an sich* and the image. Here there is no great leap of faith required; the image-maker openly interprets the objects, beings, and events in front of the lens. The subjectivity of these perceptions is a given, as is their fleetingness. A certain amount of chance and accident is also accepted in this method, sometimes even courted; for photographers, like politicians, tend to take credit for anything praiseworthy that happens during their administrations.

The viewer's engagement with these images usually involves a conscious interaction with the photographer's sensibility. However, the photographer is still presumed not to interfere with the actual event going on, though in some situations -- especially if the event in question is taking place within the photographer's personal/private life, rather than in the "outside world" -- that line is hard to draw. In theory, such a photographer is simply free to impose his/her understandings of -- and feelings about -- the "real" event onto the image thereof; the viewer is made equally aware of both.

We have no labels specifically attached to this mode; its practitioners have been categorized according to other systems. Among them I would include Robert Frank, Dave Heath, Brassaï, André Kertész, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Sid Grossman, W. Eugene Smith -- quite a mixed lot in terms of subject matter and style, but attudinally related. William Messer has proposed the use of the term "responsive" to define this mode.

A third, atheistic branch of photography stands at the far end of this continuum. Here the photographer consciously and intentionally *creates* events for the express purpose of making images thereof. This may be achieved by intervening in ongoing "real" events or by staging tableaux -- in either case, by causing something to take place which would not have occurred had the photographer not made it happen.

Here the "authenticity" of the original event is not an issue, nor the photographer's fidelity to it, and the viewer would be expected to raise those questions only ironically. Such images use photography's overt veracity against the viewer, exploiting that initial assumption of credibility by evoking it for events and relationships generated by the photographer's deliberate structuring of what takes place in front of the lens as well as of the resulting image. There is an inherent ambiguity at work in such images, for even though what they purport to describe as "slices of life" would not have occurred except for the photographer's instigation, nonetheless those events (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) did actually take place, as the photographs demonstrate.

Such falsified "documents" may at first glance evoke the same act of faith as those at the opposite end of this scale, but they don't require the permanent sustaining of it; all they ask for is the suspension of disbelief. This mode I would define as the *directorial*.

There is an extensive tradition of directorial photography as such. But directorial activity also plays a part in other modes as well. I would suggest that the arranging of objects and/or people in front of the lens is essentially directorial. Thus I would include most studio work, still lifes, and posed nudes, as well as formal portraiture, among the varieties of photographic imagery which contain directorial elements. Edward Weston was not functioning directorially when he photographed a dead pelican in the tidepools of Point Lobos, but he surely was when he placed a green pepper inside a tin funnel in his studio; and he was doing so consciously when he made his wartime satires (such as "Dynamic Symmetry") or the 1931 image which he felt it necessary to title "Shell and Rock (Arrangement)."

When -- as evidence from other photographs indicates -- Alexander Gardner moved the body of a Confederate soldier for compositional effect to make his famous image "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter," he was functioning directorially. So was Arthur Rothstein when, by his own testimony, he told the little boy in his classic Dust Bowl photograph to drop back behind his father. So was the late Paul Strand when -- according to reports -- he "cast" his book on an Italian village, *Un Paese*, by having the mayor of the town line up the residents and picking from them those he considered most picturesque.

The substantial distinction, then, is between treating the external world as a given, to be altered only through photographic means (point of view, framing, printing, etc.) en route to the final image, or rather as raw material, to be itself manipulated as much as desired prior to the exposure of the negative.

It should be obvious from the above example -- and many more could be cited -- that directorial elements have entered the work of a vast number of photographic image-makers, including many who have been taken for or represented themselves as champions of documentary/straight/pure photography. Things are not always as they seem; as Buckminster Fuller says, "Seeing-is-believing is a blind spot in man's vision."

The problematic aspect of straight photography's relationship to directorial activity is not the viability of either stance; both are equal in the length of their traditions and the population densities of their pantheons. Rather, it is the presumption of moral righteousness which has accrued to purism, above and beyond its obvious legitimacy as a creative choice. This posture is not only irrelevant and -- as the above examples indicate -- often hypocritical, but baseless. Even if all purists adhered strictly to the tenet that any tampering with reality taints their imagery's innocence and saps its vital bodily fluids, the difference between that passive approach and a more aggressive, initiatory participation in the *mise en image* is -- though highly significant within the medium -- still only one of degree. We must recognize that the interruption of a fluidly and ceaselessly moving three-dimensional Gestalt and its reduction to a static two-

dimensional abstraction is a tampering with reality of such magnitude that the only virginity one could claim for any instance of it would be strictly technical at best.

I am not a Historian, I create History. These images are anti-decisive movement. It is possible to create any image one thinks of; this possibility, of course, is contingent on being able to think and create. The greatest potential source of photographic imagery is the mind.

This statement was made by Les Krims in 1969.[51] Krims has been working in the directorial mode (he refers to his works as "fictions") for over a decade. He has explored it thoroughly and prolifically, enough so that the above quotation could serve as a succinct credo for all those who use the camera in this fashion.

Krims is by no means the first photographer to take this position, nor is he the only one of his generation to do so. Yet it is apparent that, both inside and outside photographic circles, there is little recognition that there does exist a tradition of directorial photography. Certainly you would not know it from reading any of the existing histories of the medium. This widespread unawareness is traceable to two sources: the biases and politics of photographic historiography to date, and the ignorance about photography of most of the art critics who have dealt with the medium. The consequences have been that photographers with a predilection for this approach to image-making have had to undertake it in the face of outright hostility from a purist-oriented photography establishment, with no sense of precedent to sustain their endeavors; and that the current crop of conceptual artists employing photography directorially are on the whole even less informed in this regard than their contemporaries in photography, and thus have no concern about and no accountability for the frequency with which they duplicate and plagiarize previous achievements in this mode.

Perhaps the first large-scale flowering of directorial photography -- the point at which such work entered the average Western home and became an intrinsic part of our cultural experience of the medium -- came with the

[51] In a letter published in *Camera Mainichi*, no. 8 (Japan), 1970.

introduction of the stereopticon viewer and the stereographic image, circa 1850. Stereo photographs of all kinds, mass produced by the millions, became a commonplace form of entertainment and education during the next three decades, and survived as such well into the twentieth century. Among the standard genres of stereo imagery was the staged tableau, often presented sequentially and narratively; the scenarios ranged from Biblical episodes and classics of literature to domestic comedies and schoolboy pranks.

Through the stereograph, Western culture received its first wide exposure to fictionalized photographs. This initial experience has been followed by many others: erotic, fashion, and advertising photography are only a few of the forms which have been, by and large, explicitly directorial from their inception. Most of these, however, are not considered "serious" usages of the medium; their commercial function and/or popular appeal presumably render them insignificant, even though they reach and influence a vast audience. (As I noted before, the public has never been unwilling to look at photographs.)

Within the more self-conscious arena of Art Photography, whose audience has always been comparatively scant, the advent of directorial photography as an active mode and an acknowledged alternative to realism dates back to the same period -- the 1850s -- and the work of two men: O. G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson.[52] Both staged events for the purpose of making images thereof -- mostly genre scenes and religious allegories; both used the process of combination printing, involving the superimposition of one negative on another, which fictionalized the resulting print even further. Their work was the subject of heated debate from all sources -- photographers, artists, art critics, and the public as well. Until recently, the sentimentality of the most popular of their images (Rejlander's "Two Ways of Life" and Robinson's "Fading Away") was used by photo-historians as a basis for dismissing their entire oeuvres and their way of working as well. (Re-examination of their output turns up some astonishing, little-

[52] Strangely, in 1888 a public controversy between Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson began over these same issues. Emerson advocated a purist approach to the medium: no interference with the external event, no multiple negatives, no retouching (though, inconsistently, he allowed for the "burning in" of fake clouds, since the real ones would not register on the slow films of the day). Emerson's position was called "naturalism"; Robinson's was called *realism*!

seen imagery; in Rejlander's case, for instance, "The Dream," "The Juggler," and "Woman Holding a Pair of Feet.")

Beginning in 1864, the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron also produced an extended body of directorial work in which she blended, for better or worse, current literary themes and attitudes with the visual conventions of Pre-Raphaelite painting. Some of her images were studio portraits of famous artists and *literati*; others were enactments of scenes from literature. Also sentimental, for which they too have been often dismissed, they are nonetheless powerful images whose illusions are effective despite -- and perhaps even because of -- the viewers knowledge of what was "really happening" at the time.

Subsequently, there rose and flourished the photographic movement generally known as *pictorialism*. That word itself is problematic, even though the dictionary definition is non-judgmental. (Certainly as a term it is less absolute, and therefore less enticing to true believers, than its ostensible opposite in photography, *purism*.)

At different times *pictorialism* has had different meanings and implications in photography. Presently it is employed to describe bland, pretty, technically expert executions of such clichés as peasants tilling the fields, fisherfolk mending nets, and sailboats in the sunset, still being cranked out by mentally superannuated hobbyists. As such, it is essentially derogatory. Initially, however, it had quite a different import; it indicated adherence to a set of conventions -- prescribing styles and subject matter -- which were thought to be essential to any work of fine art, not just art photographs.

That it became trapped within those conventions is regrettable, though doubtless inevitable. However, an attitude toward the medium of photography underlay the pictorial impulse, and that attitude is of great importance. It could be summarized thus: photography is only a means. Whatever tools or methods are required for the full realization of the image as conceived should be at the disposal of the imagemaker, and should not be withheld on the basis of abstract principle. Man Ray said much the same thing: "A certain amount of contempt for

the material employed to express an idea indispensible to the purest realization of this idea."

Pictorialism, then, was the first photographic movement to oppose the imposition of realism as a moral imperative. The pictorialists felt free to exercise full control over the appearance of the final image/object and, equally, over the event it described. Practitioners staged events -- often elaborate ones -- for their cameras, and resorted to every device from specially made soft-focus lenses to handwork on the negative in order to produce a final print that matched their vision. Much of the imagery they created was, and is, extremely silly; much of it was, and is still, beautiful and strong. For all their excesses, Anne Brigman, Clarence White, F. Holland Day, Gertrude Käsebier, and many others produced some remarkable and durable work.

Creatively, the kind of photography we now call pictorialism reached its peak during and shortly after the Photo-Secession era -- from the turn of the century through the erly 1920s. Then it began to come up against the purist attitude. The clash between these two opposing camps came to a head in the pages of *Camera Craft*, a West Coast magazine, in the early thirties, in the form of a heated exchange of letters between various members and sympathizers of the f.64 movement (among them Ansel Adams and Willard Van Dyke) and William Mortensen.

Mortensen was a practitioner of and articulate spokesman for pictorialism, though by the time he achieved recognition the form was already in decline. In the minds of most, the purist-pictorialist schism was simplistically conceptualized as hard sharp prints on glossy paper versus soft blurry prints on matte paper. The actual issue at stake was far more complex: it concerned the right of the image-maker to generate every aspect of a photographic image, even to create a "false" reality if required. (Mortensen himself worked almost entirely in the studio, creating elaborate symbolist allegories filled with demons, grotesques, and women both ravishing and ravaged.)

The debate was a draw, at least in retrospect, but second-stage Hegelianism won the day: the aesthetic pendulum swung to purism, and

pictorialism fell into disrepute. Mortensen -- who, in addition to this debate, was widely published in photography magazines and authored a series of how-to books which are to pictorialism what Ansel Adams's instructional volumes are to purism -- was actually purged from the history of photography in what seems a deliberate attempt to break the movement's back.[53]

For the next three decades -- until the late 1960s, in fact -- there were commercial outlets for certain kinds of directorial images, but any photographers working directorially in a non-commercial context did so over the vociferous opposition of most of their peers and of the aesthetic-economic establishment which controls the medium's access to the public and to money. Still, some persevered: Clarence John Laughlin, making his Southern Gothic image-text pieces in New Orleans; Edmund Teske, pouring out his passionate homoerotic lyrics in Los Angeles; Ralph Eugene Meatyard photographing the ghoulish masked charades of his family and friends in Lexington, Kentucky; Jerry Uelsmann resurrecting lost techniques in Florida. There were others too, hoeing that hard row.

The 1960s were a time of ferment in photography, as in most other media. Old attitudes and assumptions were put to the test. Purism, it was found by a sizable new generation of photographers, was still viable as a chosen approach but restrictive as an absolute. Even so, old attitudes die hard, and these younger photographers found themselves facing an establishment and a public that was so accustomed to equating creative photography with purism that it was (and still is) considerably perplexed by anything else.

But they too have persevered. It would be difficult to compile a complete list of those working in this mode at this time -- there are a great many, and the

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[53] From the first one in 1937 to the most recent of 1964, no edition of Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day* -- the standard reference in the field -- so much as mentions the name of William Mortensen. It will be instructive to see whether the forthcoming edition -- a major revision supported by the Guggenheim Foundation -- rectifies this omission.

In fact, none of the books on the history of twentieth-century photography refers to Mortensen. If this could be considered even an oversight, the only questions it would raise would concern standards of scholarship. Since it cannot be construed as anything less than a conscious choice, however, the issue is not only competence but professional ethicality.

number is increasing rapidly. Les Krims and Duane Michals must certainly be counted among the pioneers of their generation in this form; both are prolific, both have published and exhibited widely, both are reference points for the current generation of younger photographers and are obvious sources for much of the mediocre directorial photography which passes for "conceptual art" nowadays.

John Pfahl, Ken Josephson, and Joseph Jachna have all produced extended series in which they enter into or visibly alter the landscape, with related hermeneutic inquiries into the illusionism of the medium. Lee Friedlander (in *Self-Portrait*), Lucas Samaras, and the late Pierre Molinier have all used the camera as a dramatic device, in front of which their fantasies and obsessions are acted out. Eikoh Hosoe, Richard Kirstel, Arthur Tress, Adál Maldonado, Ed Sievers, Doug Stewart, Paul Diamond, Ralph Gibson, Irina Ionesco, Mike Mandel, Ed Ruscha, William Wegman, Robert Cumming, and Bruce Nauman (among others) also have things in common.

This article was conceived as an examination of those connections, with a historical prologue to set current ideas in their full context. The prologue has grown to engulf the main text and is still too summary. But, to conclude: willingly or no, whether or not they consider themselves "photographers" or "artists" or whatever, these individuals and many others are exploring the same field of ideas. That field of ideas is built into and springs from the medium of photography itself; it has a history and tradition of its own which is operative on many levels of our culture. There is no direct equation between ignorance of history and originality. Disclaiming one's ancestry does not eliminate it. It is regrettable that in most cases these creative intelligences are not aware of their lineage; it seems foolish that in many cases they attempt to deny it. The moment would seem to be ripe for them to acknowledge their common sources and mutual concerns; their real differences will make themselves apparent in due time.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition." Artforum 15:1. Sep. 1976. pp. 55-61.

On Redaction: Heaps and Wholes,
or, Who Empties the Circular File?

It's been said (and I can testify to the truth of this) that professional writers are those who find writing more difficult than the average person. I've a close colleague, a photographer, who finds photography more difficult than the average person. Because I value his penchant for close readings of texts, last year I burdened him with a collection of my essays from the past decade for analysis and comment. One of his responses was to demand clarification of a motif recurrent in several of the essays. I'll quote to you the relevant passages. The first is from "Silverplating the Dandelion," a review of a duotone-printed monograph and traveling exhibit valorizing a set of relentlessly banal snapshots by Father James Harold Flye, the mentor of James Agee:

> Photography is, in its relation to the casual camera user, an inordinately generous medium. Most anyone who exposes a goodly amount of film (or even a small amount, regularly, over a long period of time) ends up with a certain proportion of negatives which, appropriately rendered in print form, could provide images of at least passing interest.
>
> Many snapshots do not transcend the closed network of private reference points for which they're made. Yet if their subjects are clearly stated, and if the equipment employed in their making is not so "hopelessly sophisticated" (Minor White's wonderful phrase) that it confounds the user, then images which articulate the commonness -- the mutuality -- of some fundamental human experiences sometimes result. Virtually everyone who makes snapshots will have a few. Think of them as dandelions: nice, bright little things, easily propagated, hard to distinguish from each other, plentiful, growing everywhere. ...
>
> Working ... without commitment to craft or deep interest in the process, Flye functioned like any casual snapshooter. And photography, in its generosity, rewarded him as it does most snapshooters -- by not interfering with the laws of statistical probability. Like every "sporadic"

photographer, Flye lucked into an occasional image of mild attractiveness. And -- time and nostalgia operating as is their wont -- four decades later some of those pictures have acquired a faintly enjoyable patina as relics of another era.

They do not, however, constitute a "body of work," an *oeuvre*. Erratic, technically inept, lacking any true hermeneutic underpinnings, addressing no photographic issue at length, they are only what they are -- a random assortment of occasionally charming snapshots by a dilettante. In short, a small handful of dandelions.

... Any competent and well-educated young photographer should be able to take any readable negative and render therefrom a tonally attractive and visually structured print. Certainly any photographer with a grounding in current modes of photographic practice could go through anyone's negative file and find a selection which, strategically printed, might appear to be at least tangentially relevant to some of the serious work done in photography over the past half-century.[54]

The second passage is from "Slim Pickings in Hog Heaven," a critique of Garry Winogrand's book, *Stock Photographs*.

... Winogrand once said, "You see something happening and you bang away at it. Either you get what you saw or you get something else, and whichever is better you print." But statistical probability is on the side of the small-camera photographer who "bangs away at it" -- this is a very generous medium insofar as accident is concerned, surely the most generous of all the visual arts in that regard. And working a livestock show and rodeo is -- for a grab-shooter like Winogrand -- hog heaven; in such territory, potential "art photographs" are as plentiful as flies. Anyone who

[54] "Silverplating the Dandelion: The Canonization of Father Flye's Snapshots" was first published in *VIEWS: A New England Journal of Photography*, Vol. 2, no. 2, Winter 1981, pp. 31-32. Reprinted in Coleman, *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996).

> exposes as much film under such circumstances as has Winogrand, only to come up with such slim pickings, is hardly dependent on (or even touched by) luck... . Editing and sequencing are the only means by which Winogrand could give meaningful shape to the amorphous by-product of his omnivorous image-mongering, but he has cheerfully abdicated any control over those procedures.[55]

There's what my colleague asked me to elaborate: What did I mean by referring to photography as "generous"? And, if the medium *was* generous, how was serious activity therein defined? This is a first stab at an answer.

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As a medium of artistic production photography is unique in many ways. One of these is that, at least in many of its forms, the medium encourages large-scale production and even over-production. (Consider that you cannot see a single exposure on a roll of film without developing the entire roll. No graphic artist has to draw thirty-five additional sketches -- or waste an otherwise blank pad of paper -- in order to see the first sketch from any session.)

For most workers, the ratio of potential images (negatives) to actualized images (prints) is low, as is the ratio of images actualized minimally (as contact and/or work prints) to images approved by the maker for public presentation via exhibition, publication, or other vehicle.

The question of *redaction* -- of "putting in shape for publication" -- is therefore a crucial one. To use a distinction from general systems theory, redaction is what transforms a quantity of images from a *heap* to a *whole*. The ability to redact is a hallmark of artistic maturity. As the photographer Lonny Shavelson has said, "Photography is about editing. If you don't edit your own

[55] "Slim Pickings in Hog Heaven" was originally published in *Camera 35*, Vol. 26, no. 8, August 1981, pp. 20-21, 80. Reprinted in Coleman, *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996), pp. 94-98. I had the Winogrand quote slightly wrong; it goes, "You respond to something you see, 'bang away at it,' and either it happens or something else happens, and whichever is better you blow up." Quoted in Jonathan Brand, "[Critic's Choice:] The Most Sophisticated Seeing That Ever Came Out Of A Zoo," *Popular Photography* Vol. 63, no. 6 (December 1968): 139.

work, you're not a photographer."[56] But photography has a peculiar attraction for artists who are incapable of confronting the challenge of redaction. There are surely more mulch heaps of imagery unredacted by their makers in photography than in any other visual art medium. And the unredacted heap has a peculiar attraction to certain types of curatorial and critical temperaments.

Let us take a case in point. Suppose I were to tell you that you were about to have slightly over a third of a million 35-mm. black & white negatives -- negatives whose maker had never even seen them, much less edited them -- dropped in your lap, to do with as you will. Would you consider that a blessing or a curse?

Some consider such bequests a bounty. Here is a passage from a Museum of Modern Art press release:

> When the photographer Garry Winogrand died at the age of fifty-five in 1984 he left more than 2,500 rolls of film -- much of his last three years of shooting -- that had been exposed but not processed. Because of a $14,000.00 grant from Springs Industries to the Museum of Modern Art, this film has now been developed. Walter Elisha, chairman and chief executive officer of Springs Industries, said: "Springs' previous commitments to photography have supported existing work of known quality. In this case we felt it was important, in light of Winogrand's prior record, to rescue this last of his work for study and evaluation. We felt the

[56] Lecture, New York University, Fall 1986. Shavelson is hardly alone in his belief in this regard. Consider the following comment from photographer Thomas Roma:

"As a photographer, I understand just how crucial a role in photography editing plays. After pictures are taken, a photographer must make a series of critical decisions, starting with looking at contact sheets and choosing which images to make into 'proof prints.' (A proof print is a kind of rough draft of the final, finished photograph.) The next decisions are even more important: Which of the proof prints should be made into final prints, and thereby become part of one's body of work? The photographs must meet self-imposed standards. Most photographers agonize over these choices.

"The question is not simply whether a picture is 'good,' in some formal, technical sense, but, Does it mean what I need it to mean? Writers can edit sentences that may be well-crafted but that don't express an intended thought. But in photography, there are no revisions: A photograph is in or it's out, and the photographer must live with the consequences of his or her choices."

See his review, "Looking Into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears Through Photographs." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 31, 1997): B11. I'd disagree with his assumption that the making of a "final print" automatically qualifies an image for inclusion in the body of work, however.

photography community would not want to risk losing what Garry Winogrand's last work might say to all of us."

John Szarkowski, director of the Department of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art, stated, "Some of the film that Winogrand left undeveloped was presumably close to the point of deterioration. If those pictures were to be preserved, it was essential to develop the film without much further delay. Winogrand was, in his first years as a photographer, an exceptionally prolific worker. In his last years his shooting became voracious -- perhaps five rolls a day, seven days a week. We will soon be able to see whether this last work added something of consequence to his extremely influential earlier achievement."

... In addition to the film developed posthumously, approximately 7,000 additional rolls were developed by Winogrand late in his life, but not proofed. Winogrand's associate, Tom Consilvio, who during the past decade produced most of Winogrand's finished prints, was entrusted ... with the job of developing (by inspection) the film that the photographer left unprocessed.

John Szarkowski said that "the Museum will mount a retrospective exhibition of Winogrand's photography, with an accompanying publication, after completing the very large job of studying the contribution of this extraordinarily fecund and original artist."[57]

Given 342,000 negatives (that's Winogrand's 9500 rolls at 36 exposures each), it would be editorially possible to make dozens, perhaps even hundreds of radically different photographers out of this magpie's nest of negatives. Certainly it will be possible for Szarkowski and his co-workers to concoct any of a dozen Winogrands therefrom. Will it be a Winogrand who took off in dramatically new

[57] Press release No. 17, February 1986, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

directions, or one who reverted to the concerns of his younger days, or one who hewed to his "mature" style, or one who tunnelled deeper into one specific area of concern? Why, that's what we'll call "curator's choice" -- one of the privileges of playing Maxwell Perkins to Winogrand's Thomas Wolfe. (Perkins, Wolfe's famous editor, hacked self-contained chunks out of Wolfe's endless, undifferentiated manuscript production.)

What, then, are we to do with such midden heaps? Told about this Winogrand material, the same colleague whose query instigated these ruminations had a simple answer: "Pitch 'em out." A less drastic solution would be to paper the walls with randomly-selected contact sheets. But in the case of Winogrand, I tend to concur with my colleague. How seriously are we to take the droppings of a gluttonous voyeur who spent the last seven years of his life producing a third of a million negatives without bothering to look at any of them, much less analyze them critically? This was not a photographer; this was a *shooter*, afflicted with a textbook case of terminal distraction, the quintessence if not the prototype of the dreaded "Hand With Five Fingers" you may have seen in Nikon camera ads on TV.[58]

Is it accident that Szarkowski has been the most corporately sponsored curator in the history of photography? Or that his protegé, Winogrand, was surely one of the medium's most corporately sponsored workers as both a commercial hack and a gallery artist? Or that both shared a commitment to a model of photography that venerates the single image over the various extended forms, the unresolved mulch heap of the posthumous negative file over the thoughtfully redacted body of work?

There is a connection here. The power structure has something to gain by the discreditation of the sustained narrative that is embedded in a carefully redacted *oeuvre*, by a disregard for the authorial autonomy of a work's maker, by the promulgation of the fragmented and incoherent, by what Richard Kirstel has

[58] For my critique of the eventual MoMA production involving this material, see "At Modern, Winogrand 'Unedited,'" *New York Observer,* Vol. 2, no. 28, August 1, 1988, p. 10. Reprinted in Coleman, A. D., *Critical Focus: Photography in the International Image Community* (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1995), pp. 8-10.

called "reverence for the intensity of the glimpse."[59]

The power structure profits from our distraction. If we can be seduced into voluntarily interrupting our concentration frequently -- say, 342,000 times in seven years -- how much careful attention will we be able to pay to anything, especially the actions, patterns, and systems of that structure itself? Preoccupy us with a steady flood of data and we will lose our ability to organize it into information -- and never have time to digest it into the coherent structure of narrative, which is the first step toward understanding. Yield the prerogative of redaction to management -- whether management takes the form of picture editor, curator, critic, or historian -- and you fundamentally disenfranchise labor, as Walter Benjamin argued so eloquently in his essay, "Author as Producer."[60]

Szarkowski is particularly prone to curatorial situations that enable him to arrogate the power of redaction to himself; thus he can serve as a paradigm of this curatorial tendency. Consider his relation to the work of Winogrand, as demonstrated above, alongside his relation to the work of Diane Arbus (whose own stringent redaction was posthumously violated by her MoMA retrospective), E. J. Bellocq, Eugène Atget -- and, most recently, Josef Albers.

A particular scent distinguishes the curator who lusts after the unredacted. You had a whiff of it in the press release I just cited. Perhaps you can sniff it in the following passage, describing Szarkowski's first encounter with a group of imagistically tedious and technically mediocre photographic prints that Albers had never exhibited, but instead had squirrelled away in his workroom:

> Shortly after finding the treasure trove of photographs, I [Nicholas Fox Weber, Executive Director of the Joseph Albers Foundation] informed John Szarkowski of what we had. Baited by the idea of portraits of Klee and Kandinsky, as well as by the studies of breaking waves and trees in winter and other such work, Mr. Szarkowski made the journey to New Haven. It took little time for his scholarly demeanor to be softened by a broad smile. "These are not just a painter's photographs," he explained. "They are the

[59] In conversation with the author, variously.
[60] Reprinted in Burgin, Victor, *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 15-31.

works of a first-rate photographer." It was occasion for a martini at lunch, "to celebrate a major achievement and a great body of work."[61]

There you have it -- the spoor of the sensibility whose impulse is to *own* whatever work it can -- to be in a position to define and aggrandize it with no contradiction from either the maker or the work itself.

But Szarkowski is hardly alone in this predilection. One can see it in Julia Scully and those others who worked on the Michael Disfarmer "Heber Springs Portraits" project, and those who have tried to make the Staten Island hobbyist Alice Austen into a seminal documentarian. One can surely find it in the writings of Michael Lesy (most problematically, in his case, in the section on the amateur Angelo Rizzuto in his book *Visible Light*);[62] Lesy's redeeming quality is that he both recognizes and acknowledges this inclination, thus making it a deliberate aspect of his work. At its most macabre, one can witness it in the machinations of that gaggle of ghoulish exegetes who, feeding off understandable parental grief over a suicided adolescent, have taken a not-untypical accumulation of student work and converted it into an ideological cottage industry: the putatively crypto-feminist "*oeuvre*" of Francesca Woodman. This is one of the few instances I know of where the cradle and the grave have been robbed simultaneously.[63]

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[61] Nicholas Fox Weber, "Preface," *The Photographs of Josef Albers: A Selection from the Collection of the Josef Albers Foundation* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1987), p. 10. As this example suggests, such terminal hyperbole tends to metastasize with frightening speed. Here's further evidence: by 1995, less than a decade later, photography had become "a lesser-known but fundamental aspect of Albers's creative output. ... Far from being a hobby or a means for considering problems he would solve in other mediums, Albers's photographs speak with an authority found only in the most celebrated voices of twentieth-century photography." ("SURVEY OF JOSEF ALBERS'S WORK IN GLASS, PAINTING, AND PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM," Press release #685, May 10, 1995, Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

[62] Lesy, Michael, *Visible Light: Four Creative Biographies* (New York: Times Books, 1985), pp. 3-36.

[63] See the essays by Ann Gabhart, Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau in the catalogue *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work* (Massachusetts and New York: Wellesley College Museum and Hunter College Art Gallery, 1986).

The generic quality of Woodman's juvenilia is readily apparent to anyone who taught photography on the college level between 1970 and the present. For one of many possible illustrations of parallel graduate-student inquiry into the issues of self-scrutiny and female identity predating Woodman's efforts in this vein, see Caren Sturmer's sequence, "The Scream," in the catalogue of the exhibit "Extended Realism" (Baltimore: University of Maryland Baltimore County

What am I suggesting here? Should all anonymous photographs be automatically discarded? Should all unredacted work by identified photographers be destroyed, or left unexamined? Obviously not.

What I propose is that a commitment to taking photography seriously -- whether one is a photographer, critic, curator, historian, archivist, or simple looker at picures -- begins with the recognition that the terms *body of work* and/or *oeuvre* in photography are to be reserved for those segments of a maker's output that have been *prepared for public presentation by the maker him/herself, or at least under his/her supervision*. (Please note that they need not have *achieved* public presentation; an unpublished book dummy is nonetheless a redacted body of work.) Those redacted segments constitute the whole of a photographer's body of work; the rest -- no matter how much it may attract us -- is merely part of the heap.

How are we to determine that portion of a photographer's output that might constitute a *body of work*? By scholarship, simple scholarship. Any image published, exhibited, or sold under the maker's name during his or her lifetime must be considered a part of the *oeuvre*; so, too, should be any images that did not reach the public but were clearly intended to -- because they exist as finished, approved, exhibition-quality prints, or are included in book dummies or magazine layouts, or because the photographer's papers and notes make it evident that public presentation of a particular image was intended, or at least hoped for. Furthermore, categorization and/or compartmentalization established or adhered to by the photographer (for example, distinctions between "personal work" and commercial, applied, commissioned or otherwise bespoke imagery) are to be respected through scrupulous annotation and clear labelling.

We have no difficulty, for example, in determining the contents of the

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Library, 1976). My comments thereon can be found in the catalogue essay for that group show.

The valorizing of Woodman's work and the enshrining of its unfortunate maker have obscured the larger sociological phenomenon of which it is merely one instance: the emergence, in the early 1970s, of this genre of work as a recurrent exploration among the women -- mostly young, mostly white, mostly middle- and upper-class -- who were part of the nascent "art photography" education system.

oeuvres of Edward Weston, Aaron Siskind, Berenice Abbott and Imogen Cunningham. These are redacted bodies of work. We will never be able to identify as an *oeuvre* any portion of the recently-published work of "Itinerant Photographer," who passed through Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1934.[64] And we have avoided for the past twenty-five years the necessary and relatively simple task of identifying the *oeuvre* of Diane Arbus.

At the time of her death, Arbus had exhibited and published very sparingly (aside from her so-called "magazine work"). No more than four or five dozen of her personal images had been validated by her for public presentation. That is what constitutes her *oeuvre*, that and nothing else (save for the "magazine work," if one is to consider her full career in photography). All those shows and publications are known; her contributions to them would be easy to identify. Why is it that no one -- not even her biographer -- has taken the trouble to do so? Could it be because, as a total *oeuvre*, sixty images is hardly enough to support a major international reputation? Would that explain why her work-print and negative files were rifled after her death, in search of images she'd never approved, to bulk up and thereby validate a major retrospective and monograph? That is appropriation with a vengeance, whose purpose can only be to leave the photographer entirely out of the picture.

Hand in hand with such scholarship, we should require annotation in all exhibitions and publications (and on all prints made and distributed after a photographer's death) distinguishing between images redacted by the photographer and those selected by others. This would permit scrutiny and even display of a photographer's "sketches" -- even his/her contact sheets -- without conflating them with those images that the photographer considered to be resolved, finished works. (Examples of the responsible handling of such material are the Lustrum Press book *Contact: Theory* and the Da Capo Press volume reproducing all of Walker Evans's Farm Security Administration images.) Certainly, if a negative has never been seen by a photographer -- as is the case

[64] See Sybil Miller, *Itinerant Photographer, Corpus Christi, 1934* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

with much of the Winogrand material, some of the Arbus material (at least according to rumor), and much work by photojournalists and press photographers -- that fact should be indicated. Finally, the photographer's own distinctions (if any) between personal imagery and applied or commercial work must be honored through careful labelling and annotation.

The lack of clear policy and standard practice in this area seriously muddies the water for scholarship, historiography, and criticism. Estates -- and the ambitious entrepreneurs who serve them (including not only galleries and private dealers but often curators, critics, scholars and historians) -- have a vested interest in inflating the *oeuvre*; the larger it is, the more they have to hype and to vend. So long as the current lax practice is permitted to reign, it will be understandable that uninformed pundits like Susan Sontag will feel free to opine that -- except when defined as "all photographs taken by the same photographer" -- there is no such thing as a body of work in photography.[65]

Critics, scholars, historians must make these distinctions -- and must protest, publicly, when they are not made by others. We must be ready to guard against this impulse in ourselves, and to identify and denounce such conflation of the heap with the whole, particularly when it involves the attribution of *intent* to any part of the heap. Intentionalism is always a fallacy, but nowhere more corrupting to critical thought than when, lacking any evidence, it is premised solely on the intuition of the image's reader. Here, if nowhere else, the line between the facile act of reading into photographs and the more arduous task of reading out of them must be drawn by any responsible critic.

It follows from this that photographers, and their estates, should give serious thought to placing restrictions on the publication and/or exhibition of unredacted material; such display, without scrupulous annotation, does a serious disservice to any artist's true *oeuvre*, and impeaches subsequent criticism and scholarship thereof.[66] It also follows, I think, that photographers themselves

[65] *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 137. Sontag's entire discussion of this issue (pp. 131-38) is remarkable for its confusion.

[66] This becomes even more crucial an issue now that the U.S. Supreme Court, in its wisdom, has declared that the privilege of privacy does not pertain to one's garbage; anything discarded in the

should be paying more attention to redaction, making clear -- through preparation and annotation -- what is discarded/unrealized.[67]

Until some minimal qualifications for entry are established -- until we have identified guidelines for discriminating between a *body of work* and any old batch of photographs -- there will be no true canon in photography to be taken seriously. There will only be what we have now: a monstrous, constantly growing heap, a veritable heap of heaps. If we truly aspire to make of it a whole, I have this to say to you, my friends and colleagues: Wishing will not make it so. The time for major amputation is upon us.[68]

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "On Redaction: Heaps and Wholes, or, Who Empties the Circular File?" *Photo Communiqué*, 10:2, June 1988 pp. 6-10.

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trash, even if sealed in bags or cans, thereby enters the public domain. Thus paper shredders are now essential equipment in photographers' darkrooms and offices. See Uviller, H. Richard, "The 4th Amendment: Does It Protect Your Garbage?" *The Nation*, October 10, 1988, Vol. 247, no. 9, pp. 302-304.

[67] Brett Weston set a remarkable example when, on the occasion of his 80th birthday in late 1992, he burned all his negatives at his home in Carmel, California -- a redactive act significant enough that it was covered by the Associated Press, among others. For a report on this bold gesture, see the *British Journal of Photography*, No. 6853, Vol. 139, January 2, 1992, p. 6.

[68] This is a slightly revised version of the text of a lecture delivered during the panel "Creating the Canon: Writing History," on Saturday, October 17, 1987 at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, Canada, as part of the "Talking Pictures" conference sponsored by Toronto Image Works Ltd., *Photo Communiqué* magazine and the Holocene Foundation.

Counting the Teeth:
Photography for Philosophers

For Vilém Flusser, 1920-1991

I lay no claim to the status of philosopher. I function professionally on a much less lofty and far more mundane plane, working primarily as a critic, historian, and (lately) curator of photography, which puts me in a territory triangulated roughly by media studies, visual culture, and art history. This leads me at times to address theoretical issues related to photography.

That I don't consider myself a philosopher doesn't mean that I don't read philosophy, both for my own enrichment and because some of the ideas therein deepen my understanding of the evolution of photography. Thomas Kuhn's analysis of the growth of knowledge in the physical sciences, and his concepts of the paradigm and the paradigm shift, pertain usefully to any discipline (even though Kuhn has disavowed responsibility for the application of his ideas to any field beyond the hard sciences). Karl Popper's discussion of "objective knowledge" -- by which he means *objectified* knowledge, knowledge encoded in durable, transmissible physical forms -- illuminates the cultural function of the photograph as a communicative artifact.

For obvious reasons, I pay special attention to philosophical writings directly related to my own field. So I'm familiar with pre-photographic commentaries from philosophers on imagery and visual perception going back to the Chinese philosopher Mo Ti's observations on the camera obscura from the 5th century BCE, as well as the contemporary work of Nelson Goodman and W. J. T. Mitchell, not to mention Richard Rorty's meditation on photography. Of course Croce referred to photography intriguingly, albeit briefly, in his *Aesthetic*, as did Peirce and Bergson around the same time. Locke, well before them, offered a discourse on the camera obscura. All food for thought, surely.[69]

[69] In fact, in an ongoing project of mine, a cultural history of the pre-photographic impact of the lens as a technology, I examine the influence of the lens on philosophy prior to the invention of

Because I have taught surveys of photography criticism, in which I attempt to lay out the full spectrum of thinking about the medium, I've spent time with the 20th-century contributions of André Bazin, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Krakauer, Stanley Cavell, and Vilém Flusser -- and, it should go without saying, with the pertinent work of Barthes, and other contemporaries (as much of it as I can find in English and the several other languages that I read).[70]

Both out of interest and as a professional necessity I engage with my colleagues in criticism, of course -- especially those who write about photography and/or "photo-based art" by "artists using photography." Since such activity has virtually taken over the contemporary art world, most art critics nowadays have to grapple with photography willy-nilly, and their visible discomfort with it much resembles that of philosophers forced to the same challenge. For example, the U.S. philosopher Arthur C. Danto has written periodically on photography in his role as a critic of contemporary art (I'm not sure he's addressed the medium formally in his role as philosopher). Though I respect his insights into other forms of art, Danto turns inexplicably simplistic and literal-minded whenever he discusses photography, apparently unable to address anything save the literal subject matter of the photographs in question -- roughly equivalent to assessing a Cézanne still life on the basis of your attitudes toward fruit.

So I come to the project of others' philosophizing about photography with an outsider's perspective and a critic's predilection: that is, with the goal of putting that project in crisis, by finding ways to perturb the philosophers' frequently ill-informed assumptions and mindless consensus. In short, I'm inclined to make trouble, and I hope to achieve that here.

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photography. See "Lentil Soup: A Meditation on Lens Culture," *Impact of Science on Society*, No. 142 (Fall 1986), pp. 213–22, reprinted in Coleman, *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media and Lens Culture* (University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 113-131; and "Rationalism and the Lens," *Impact of Science on Society*, No. 154/39:2 (1989), pp. 101–12.

[70] To my surprise, with the exception of predictably frequent citation of the semiologists, structuralists, and postmodernists, I find few of the figures I've just cited even referenced in what many of my colleagues refer to as "the discourse." I must assume they've all been discredited without my becoming aware of it. Shows you how much out of the loop I am.

In reading philosophy, I consider it always useful to keep in mind that Aristotle's reasoning led him to conclude that adult women had fewer teeth than adult men, and that his hermeneutics never required him to test this hypothesis by looking into a human female's mouth and counting. I also think it helpful to ask myself the significant question articulated by the American pragmatist philosopher William James: What is the experiential life return of holding (and living by) this or that belief? And, like the U.S. poet William Carlos Williams, I find myself drawn to operate according to the proposition "No ideas but in things " -- in other words, I choose to work under the assumption that, once I have enunciated my hypothesis, I'm obligated to look into a woman's mouth and count. With those three guideposts at hand, let me use this opportunity to sketch the following:

1. What I would hope to discover in either an individual or collective "philosophy of photography."

2. If we consider this set of essays now in your hands as a collectively generated scholarly dissertation on its chosen theme, "the weight of photography," what I would expect to find in an imaginary concluding section devoted to "questions meriting further study."

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Appropriately or not, my expectations of a hermeneutically coherent "philosophy of photography" include the following:

* I would require such a philosophy to begin by offering working definitions of the terms *photograph* (in both its noun and verb forms) and *photography*.

* I would expect such a philosophy of photography to discriminate among and assess in turn different primary classes of photographs as objects. One such distinction would distinguish between the direct-positive image vs. the image made by the negative-positive process. A second would separate lens-derived imagery from such lensless forms as pinhole-camera images and photograms. Another would involve the differences between representational and non-representational but light-generated photographs (examples of the latter would include Frederick Sommer's prints from smoke traceries caught on glass, or Lotte Jacobi's "photogenic drawings"). Yet another would distinguish between images

like those just mentioned and images produced by such means as painting on photographic paper with developing chemicals or burying photographic paper in the earth, allowing heat and life forms and the elements and time to alter it, and developing the results. Any objective scientific analysis would classify all of the objects just listed as photographs. Yet they have radically different relationships to both reality and actuality. Since semiotics claims scientific (and not scientistic) status for itself, it must acknowledge scientific evidence and incorporate it into its methodology, while at the same time engaging with these substantive differences among types of photographic objects.

* I would require a philosophy of photography to address the profound epistemological differences between a photograph made with a direct-positive process (e.g., daguerreotype, ambrotype, tintype, Polaroid) and one made via any of the negative-to-positive processes (e.g., calotype, platinum or silver-gelatin print), since the first kind constitutes an interpretation while the second constitutes an interpretation of an interpretation -- surely a noteworthy distinction, from a philosophical standpoint.

* I would demand of a philosophy of photography that it recognize the profound implications of the different orders of knowledge embedded in the negative and any subsequent print positive, considering both the interpretive bias inherent in the act of negative exposure and development and the interpretive bias implicit in any positive derived therefrom. This would also require questioning the issue of the substrate in any negative or positive and its relation -- neutral or interferential -- to the superstrate.[71]

* Since there already exists an extensive body of research into what is called the "philosophy of science," it seems to me that anything aspiring to the status of philosophy while addressing a technology (such as photography) rooted in science and operating at least in part according to scientific principles has

[71] Indeed, the negative — heretofore treated by historians, critics, photographers, and philosophers primarily as a mere necessary functional step toward the positive — constitutes an extremely fertile ground for investigation of the relationship of such a photograph to both fact and truth. I would expect philosophers to find it particularly attractive and rewarding in that regard; it surprises me that no philosopher has addressed this issue.

some obligation both to engage with the philosophy of science and to address itself to the scientific aspects of the medium of photography itself.

* This strikes me as particularly the case when the discipline that many contemporary philosophers of photography consider as their bedrock, semiotics, defines itself as a "science of signs."[72] Laying claim to the status of a science carries with it a burden of proof -- proof of acceptance of the rigors of scientific procedure. Thus I'd look to a philosophy of photography for evidence that those promulgating it (at least those who subscribe to a semiotic approach) have a clear understanding of the differences that scientists in all fields have established between hypothesis, theory, and law, and that they hold themselves rigorously accountable to those distinctions.[73]

* I assume any informed philosophy of photography would reject and actively contradict any assumption of the photograph as a neutral and uninflected object, understanding and positioning it instead as an artifact generated via a culturally loaded technology -- in short, as an utterance of the individual who produced it, as a manifestation of that individual's particular culture, and as evidence of the culture(s) from which sprang both that that individual and the technology employed. Thus this philosophy would construe the photograph never as transcription but always as description, with bias inherent at and inevitable in each of the three levels just cited.[74]

* I would envisage such a philosophy as eager to engage with the various tendencies, morphological shifts, and formal movements in photography -- such

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[72] This claim, famously, comes from the founder of semiotics, Roland Barthes himself. The "scientific" qualifications of postmodern theorists of course has come into question as a consequence of the Alan Sokal/*Social Text* scandal that erupted in 1996 and has continued since then. See Jean Bricmont and Alan Sokal, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998), and Sokal's homepage, http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/, for more on this matter. Perhaps significantly, I know of no teacher offering classes in the "theory of photography" who assigns Bricmont and Sokal as required reading.

[73] One can find these differentiated clearly in W. I. B. Beveridge's classic text, *The Art of Scientific Investigation* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957). Based on Beveridge's definitions, it appears that most of those non-scientists who claim to be "doing theory" are in fact still at an earlier stage, that of "doing hypothesis." The latter, I must admit, does not sound nearly as impressive as the former.

[74] For more on this, see my essay "The Image in Question: Further Notes on the Directorial Mode," in *Depth of Field*, pp. 56-57.

as (in the nineteenth century) the contest between realism and naturalism, and (in the twentieth) that between pictorialism and purism or straight photography -- instead of restricting itself narrowly to the development of postmodernism from modernism. As each of these earlier phases and approaches has a different epistemological (and, in some cases, ontological) set of premises, the differences among them demand assessment.

* This means that I would expect any philosophy of photography to come to terms with the observations and insights and beliefs of the medium's practitioners, from Talbot to Nadar to Man Ray to Edward Weston to Diane Arbus to Hollis Frampton and on into the immediate present. Should a philosopher in considering photography not have to grapple, just for example, with the photographer and filmmaker Frampton's assertion in regard to photographic print-making that "to a mind committed to the paradoxical illusions of the photographic image, the least discernible modification (from a conventionalized norm) of contrast or tonality must be violently charged with significance, for it implies a changed view of the universe, and a suitably adjusted theory of knowledge"?[75]

* I find it noteworthy in this regard that the only photographer whose voice is heard at any length in the present collection is Lynne Cohen. Most photographers do not qualify as philosophers, though they certainly think, and in many cases read philosophy and derive understandings therefrom that they apply to their creative work. By the same token, most philosophers do not qualify as photographers, though they use their eyes to look at world and at photographs, and sometimes even make photographs themselves.[76] While it may seem a bitter

[75] Frampton, Hollis, "Meditations around Paul Strand," in *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video, Texts 1968-1980* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), p. 133. This text was originally published in 1972, on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of Strand's work.

[76] I include in this category the late Jean Baudrillard. That a philosopher makes snapshots, and even exhibits and publishes them, no more makes him a photographer than my writing down and publishing these thoughts makes me a philosopher. Notably, in an essay published in 1999, Baudrillard put forward a way of thinking about the photographic act that almost exactly paraphrases the approach proposed from the 1950s through the mid-1970s by the late photographer, teacher, editor, and curator Minor White in his workshops and tutorial writings. I assume that Baudrillard didn't know he was paraphrasing White almost word for word, since if he knew White's teachings I'm sure he'd have provided the obligatory footnote acknowledging his predecessor's thinking and teaching. See Jean Baudrillard, "La Photographie ou l'Ecriture de la Lumiere: Litteralité de l'Image," in *L'Echange Impossible (The Impossible Exchange)*. Paris:

pill to swallow, philosophers need to consider the possibility that those who actually practice a given craft or discipline on a professional level may have understandings of and insights into it -- including its philosophical ramifications -- unavailable to the non-practitioner or the casual amateur.

* Which is to say that just as any self-respecting "philosophy of poetry" would have to contend with at least the variant poetics enunciated by literature's major schools, an authentic and thoroughly researched philosophy of photography would consider seriously and at length -- rather than dismissively or derisively -- the full range of beliefs and ideas actually held by experienced practitioners of that medium, as reflected in their published theories, credos, manifestos, critical and historical writings, and tutorial texts, as well as their ruminations in their journals and correspondence. The goal, logically, would be to extract any potentially valuable insights and concepts from those whose ideas are grounded in the actual full-time engagement with praxis.

* This implies, as I see it, the possible existence of something I call the hermeneutics of performance: those understandings of a medium that derive explicitly and exclusively from the feel of craft as absorbed by a medium's committed performers.[77] It also implies -- and I recognize the temerity in this proposition -- that philosophers need to have an awareness of the actual issues of performance in any communicative or creative medium about which they opine, and that the glaring absence of such awareness inevitably weakens their work.[78]

* Beyond addressing those writings by performers in the medium, philosophers of photography -- if they seek credibility amongst any but other philosophers -- need to familiarize themselves with the writings of the medium's

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Galilee, 1999: pp. 175-84. An English translation thereof, "Photography, or The Writing Of Light" (translated by François Debrix) appears online at http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-photography-or-the-writing-of-light.html.

[77] To give just one example, every working photographer knows — and every tutorial text in photography teaches as one of its first lessons — that the photographer's raw material is not the stuff of the physical world but the light that reflects from it. Does this percept, with its obvious evocation of the parable of Plato's cave, not merit some philosophical acknowledgement and investigation?

[78] I do not intend here to suggest that philosophers — or historians, or critics — of a medium have an obligation to acquire craft experience therein. A knowledgeable observer of film can identify a tracking shot, and distinguish a virtuoso and/or inventive one from a journeyman effort, without ever having handled a movie camera.

various historians, critics, theorists, and other close observers, past and present, on the assumption that, even when not officially certified by any academy as philosophers, those who pay close attention to a medium for decades may have something to offer the discourse. Aside from what are now a small handful of the mandatory "usual suspects" in academic-paper footnoting -- Barthes, Burgin, Sekula, Berger, Sontag -- it's rare to find such a commentator even referenced, much less addressed at length. One would not know from this that photography has a rich and diverse literature whose almost complete absence from "the discourse" suggests that it's considered entirely irrelevant to philosophical scholarship. If that's the case, then philosophers should have the courage and honesty to assert and defend that claim forthrightly. If this gap results from ignorance of that literature, then of course that too requires enunciation -- and explanation.

Next, some questions that I would put to philosophers regarding their considerations to date of photography:

* I note with interest that, although you take great pains to define most of your terms, none of you feel any obligation to define the words *photograph*, *photography*, or *photographing*. The absence of any definition of your basic subjects seems to me fundamental, to the extent that it could be considered to impeach all your commentaries. Can you explain and justify this curious lacuna?

* I feel sure that, as trained and certified philosophers, you are not so naïve as to assume that there is only one kind of photographic object, one form of photography, and one way of photographing. Yet the tacit definitions of the above concepts commonly assumed in your texts apply only to lens-derived imagery of recognizable objects as represented in negatives encoding only a single short exposure and subsequently rendered uninterpretively[79] in a print embodying only that lone exposure (or a comparable direct positive, such as an SX-70 or

[79] By this I mean without any deliberate nuancing of the print intended to affect the viewer's understanding of the image. Any act of printing from a negative is by definition interpretive behavior.

daguerreotype).[80] Thus the notions you put forward, by and large, do not engage with or even pertain to much or all of the photographic work of Man Ray, Ellen Carey, Minor White, Michal Rovner, Andreas Gursky, Barbara Kruger, Marcel Breuer, Joel-Peter Witkin, and a host of other photographic picture-makers past and present. In effect, your thinking is almost entirely irrelevant to much historic praxis in photography and a wide spectrum of contemporary praxis -- especially postmodernist praxis. I assume this is purposeful, not an oversight. If purposeful, should its premises not be articulated and explained?

* Perhaps this situation results in part from the fact that in his well-known 1961 essay "The Photographic Message" Roland Barthes addresses photography only in its photojournalistic and advertising usages. This makes Barthes's essay, and any discourse premised on it, roughly equivalent to one addressing written and spoken language that considers exclusively the language of advertising and mass-media reportage. But that's a radical delimitation, since of course there are dozens if not hundreds of other uses of the word. Similarly, there are many other kinds of photograph, many other forms of photography, and many other ways of photographing than those singled out by Barthes. Nonetheless, it becomes clear from countless citations in postmodernist texts on photography that this essay by Barthes functions as a cornerstone of postmodern discourse on photography in general. Do you not feel that the limited sphere of his concern -- and of subsequent citations of his text -- excludes a great deal of photographic activity worldwide? And should those who cite him not be obligated to point out the restrictions of his concept, i.e., that Barthes meant his ideas to apply only to

[80] The term "slice" or "cut" is often applied to all photographs — you'll find it used thus generically in this volume — but I think it was originally intended to refer to such photographs as I've described in the previous sentence. I find myself increasingly uncomfortable with that metaphor, implying as it does a surgical exactitude, deliberation, and precision that might fit some picture-making approaches in photography (that of Edward Weston and the Group f/64, for example, or of the studio still-life photographer), but simply don't engage other forms of praxis: long time exposures, in-camera multiple exposures, photomontage, photocollage, images during the exposure of which the camera is moved deliberately, images not sharply focused, small-camera sociological observation, etc. I prefer nowadays to think of the photograph not as a *slice* or *cut* but as a *scoop*, with the imprecision and accidental gathering of unexpected (and even unwanted) elements implied by that coarser extractive tool. This concept also serves as a useful positioning device, allowing me to identify certain photographic and critical tendencies as *scoopophiliac*, others as *scoopophobic*, and my own as *scooposkeptical*.

advertising photography and photojournalism? After all, a philosophical consideration of either "language" or "speech" that concerned only commercial and media uses of either would have to at least acknowledge and demarcate the vast areas of linguistic activity left out as a result of that arbitrary decision, since -- in the present instance -- this means that Barthes's methodology is self-confessedly useless as an analytical tool applied to (just one example) any photographs intended to function as art.

Which brings us to the unbearable lightness of seeing. John Berger has written, "What we habitually see confirms us. Yet it can happen, suddenly, unexpectedly, and most frequently in the half-light of glimpses, that we catch sight of another visible order which intersects with ours and has nothing to do with it." This statement comes from a gentle, affectionate meditation on the work of the Finnish photographer Pentti Sammallahti, an elegant little appreciation in which Berger considers at length the dogs who appear as protagonists in so many of Sammallahti's images -- always, miraculously, in exactly the right place at the right time. Berger proposes that "It was probably a dog that led Sammallahti to the moment and place for taking each picture."[81]

As it happens, I can speak with some authority here and say that Berger is precisely wrong on that score. Perhaps the following anecdote will help to explain what one can learn about photography when one deigns to speak about it with actual practicing photographers, and how that's useful to critics (conceivably to philosophers too).

Having visited the Nordic countries often, I'd known and respected Sammallahti's photographs for some years -- and of course I'd noticed those dogs: chance does favor the prepared mind (and eye), but nobody gets that lucky that often. When I finally met this photographer for the first time at Houston FotoFest in spring 2000, he was one of the discoveries of that Texas biennial

[81] John Berger, "Dog Days," in Pentti Sammallahti, *The Russian Way*, Opus 31 (Helsinki, 1996). This is a self-published limited-edition portfolio of prints by Sammallahti. Berger's essay appears online at http://www.finlit.fi/booksfromfinland/bff/398/berger.htm.

festival, besieged by new admirers. However, at his opening in a downtown warehouse we found a moment to chat quietly just between ourselves.

I may have spent more time speaking with more photographers than Berger has, or may have a less imaginative and poetical nature than he. Possibly I'm not so philosophically inclined, or merely more suspicious, because after exchanging a few pleasantries I asked bluntly, "How do you manage the dogs?"

Sammallahti gave me a slow, sidelong, evaluative glance, decided I merited a straight answer, lowered his voice, then replied, "Sardine oil."

Turns out that Sammallahti does a lot of his photographing on long field trips, bringing along a supply of canned sardines and crackers for quick meals. The smell of sardine oil, he's discovered, fascinates dogs; they will nose into and linger around it for some time. So this documentary photographer saves in a bottle the sardine oil left over from his snacks. Whenever he's framed a scene in the viewfinder to his satisfaction and needs a dog in the image as an actor or a visual nexus of arrest, he pours some of the oil on the ground exactly where he wants the dog to appear in the frame and whistles up the nearest canines. Dogs -- *pace* Berger -- don't necessarily lead Sammallahti to his vistas or his images; rather, at least some of the time, he entices dogs into his frames, for the purpose of ensuring their presence in his pictures.

In announcing this I take full responsibility for changing forever the reader's perception of those pictures of Sammallahti's, and I choose to make us all pay that price in order to put a finer point on a core conundrum:

No photograph transcribes the actual world. Photographs -- at least of the kinds that we generally refer to when we use that word -- *describe*. Of those photographers who use cameras, some seek to describe in their images the ways in which the world performs itself before their eyes and lenses. Some actively evoke performances from the world.[82] We cannot necessarily tell which is which in any given image, or even in an entire body of work.

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[82] See the essay "The Image in Question," loc. cit., and its predecessor, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," *Artforum*, 15:1 (September 1976), pp. 55–61, reprinted in Coleman, *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-1978* (Oxford University Press, 1979; second edition, University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 246-57.

Thus the relation of the photograph to both truth and fact is slippery, and equivocal at best. Therein lies the ultimate challenge to photographer, audience member/average viewer, critic, and philosopher alike. No ideas but in things. Requiring that one look into the woman's mouth and count her teeth represents photography's gift to philosophy. Philosophy's gift to photography awaits its unveiling.

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Photography Education

No Future For You?
Speculations on the Next Decade in Photography Education

In the past decade, the membership of the Society for Photographic Education has increased dramatically: from a small handful to a list of hundreds, enough to fill a sizeable directory. No doubt this organization will continue to grow, that being in the nature of such bodies. Parallelling this numerical growth is the expansion of this organization's sphere of influence: it is safe to say that much of what we loosely refer to as "photographic education" is promulgated by members of this society, and will be increasingly so transmitted as time goes on.

Collectively, then, we form the main channel through which many of the photographers-to-be of the near future -- and most of the best-educated ones -- will have to pass. Channel, of course, is only one of several possible metaphors describing our functioning. Funnel is another; so is filter; so is bottleneck. Our shaping of the future will determine which of these possible self-descriptions is most appropriate.

A look at that future seems a fitting way to open this conference, particularly since it may provide some contrast to the lap of luxury in which we're sitting at the moment. Let us consider the ten years ahead of us and what they are likely to bring. Ater all, at the end of that decade we will be four years past 1984, and only twelve years from the millennium. What we achieve between now and then, therefore, will be our groundwork for the year 2000.

At present we are witnessing a unique confluence of events in the evolution of photography. The medium has won a number of its battles along various fronts simultaneously. It has pervaded the field of visual communication so thoroughly that its elimination is unthinkable. It has proved itself, on a virtually global level, to be the most democratically accessible tool for personal expression of all the visual media. And, in less than a century and a half, it has effectively achieved the status of a "high" art while forcing all the other visual arts to redefine themselves radically. Indeed, it is even engendering a fundamental re-examination of the prevalent aesthetic hierarchy itself.

These are not overnight developments; they are the cumulative result of the medium's maturing and the consequent manifestation of its inherent nature. What is significantly new is not the existence of these phenomena per se, but the comparatively sudden, concurrent, and widespread recognition of them.

To a considerable extent, that recognition can be traced to the efforts of the members of the Society for Photographic Education. Certainly, in the past decade, we have done nuch to develop public awareness of the medium's history and its influence on our culture. Photography teachers across thecountry have also successfully established and elevated those standards of craft which are the gauges for all who work in the medium. Nor have those been our only accomplishments. We have entrenched ourselves firmly -- perhaps irrevocably -- in the groves of academe. And we have, in record time, glutted the market for career art photographers and for teachers of art photography.

This suggests, to me at least, that we have been a mixed blessing in relation to our medium and our culture. Is this the true flowering of photography education? Is this where all our efforts were leading? To the establishment of photography as yet another academic discipline? To the self-perpetuation of art photography? To the creation of a caste of visual idiot-savants monitored by a professional elite tightly controlling the outlets and the sinecures? To an ever more massive annual rendezvous at some posh hotel or chic spa?

Is this where we were heading all along? If so, why? And if not, what are we doing here?

Let us consider the next decade through a series of speculations. These projections are based on actual events and current data, not on extra-sensory perception. They are not prophecies; they are safe predictions.

The medium of photography is in the midst of a technological upheaval unmatched since the fruits of World War Two military research were declassified and madeavailable to the post-war public.

We are witnessing the rapid disappearance of silver as the primary vehicle for photographic imagery. The current generation of students is probably the last

which will take the availability of silver-based materials for granted. Since much of the tradition of photography -- in educational, historical, and critical terms -- is based upon the silver negative and the silver print, extensive revision of our premises in these regards will be necessary, as will the development of comparable understandings of such likely replacements as magnetic and/or electronic films and papers.

Such a change will leave those involved with two-dimensional non-electronic or non-magnetic imagery even more at the mercy of the major photographic manufacturing corporations, which already are far too influential in determining which materials shall be made available to photographers. Thus it might be advisable for us to take steps towards creating a generation of students educated to be alert consumers of photographic materials, trained to make active and effective demands on the suppliers of those materials.

We are also on the verge of major breakthroughs in three-dimensional imagery, with holography by far the most likely candidate for the dominant process in that area. The introduction of holographic equipment and materials which are economically and technically accessible to the popular market may well take place during this coming decade. I see no reason not to believe that such a process will replace two-dimensional imagery as the primary vernacular photographic medium as surely as color replaced black and white in that same field.

This will have the inevitable result of rapidly rendering two-dimensional imagery -- especially in black and white, and most particularly in silver -- obsolescent and archaic. In the minds of many, that will automatically make such imagery more "artistic" by rendering it non-functional in the everyday traffic of visual communication. It will certainly create a schism among photography students in their attempts to determine which of these major branchings merits their personal and/or professional commitment. It will probably create a similar schism among photography educators, and even those who manage to develop an educational methodology encompassing both forms had best be prepared for the divisiveness this evolution will generate.

There is another aspect of this technological upheaval which merits our serious attention. As I have noted previously, we have already entered an era in which the forgery of photographically credible imagery is eminently feasible. I am not speaking here of the expressively-oriented work of such image-makers as Jerry Uelsmann or Clarence John Laughlin, though their techniques are readily adaptable to the production of imagery with other intentions. Rather, I am speaking of recent developments in the technology of image generation.

It is now possible, by a computerized process developed for police use, to reconstruct from even the blurriest film or still photograph a sharper, more focused image of anything depicted therein. This is achieved by the application of statistical probability factors to the various possible resolutions of such out-of-focus images. It is also possible, by another computerized technique, to take a still image of anything -- including such an artificially resolved photograph as described above -- and from it generate still or kinetic video images in which the subject of the original image can be made to perform any desired action realistically in convincingly dimensional space. What this means is that our visual communications hardware has reached the point where photographically credible imagery, both still and motion, can be manufactured with little or no recourse to actual photographs.

The existence of such technology within a culture which has been convinced for almost one hundred and fifty years of the scientific accuracy and evidentiary unimpeachability of photographs as documents should be cause for alarm. The visual technology for population surveillance and for the manipulation of news, fact, and history which buttresses the totalitarian futures projected in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and George Orwell's *1984* are all in existence at this moment. Certainly as photography educators we must begin to work towards increasing the sophistication of the citizenry at large inthe interpretation of photographic imagery and its manipulative potential; we must also work towards the establishment of professional codes of ethics, effective detection methods and legislative controls to counteract that potential.

Let us now turn our attention to "the academy," that hypothetical construct within one or another of whose physical manifestations most of us transmit such knowledge and (o vanitas!) wisdom as we have managed to acquire.

I think it not unreasonable to assume that for most of those in this organization -- except for the present student membership -- the coming of age of their relationship to photography and photography education occurred during the moneyed 1960s and early 1970s. That was a time of wondrous -- or, from another standpoint, ghastly -- innocence for all those involved in so-called creative photography. At least for a time, it was possible to believe that colleges, universities and art institutes would never cease to open and expand departments of photography, thus providing an endless source of teaching positions to degreed young photographers trained only in personal self-expression. It was possible to believe that the government-run and privately-subsidized foundations would continue to pump ever-increasing numbers of grants into the veins of art photography, that we could nurse at that teat forever without fear of it drying up and without preparing to be weaned. It was possible to believe thatmuseum and gallery exhibition spaces would continue to open up, that more and more photography books would be published and photography magazines founded -- that, in short, it would be possible for a virtually infinite number of career art photographers to live reasonably well merely by "doing their own work" and, if absolutely necessary, supplementing that by teaching others to do the same.

In the past few years we have learned -- to the dismay of many though hardly unpredictably -- that our culture's need for career art photographers is limited and that we may well have oversupplied the demand for the remainder of this century. As the population of career art photographers swells, the ratio of available grants, teaching positions, traditional exhibition spaces and publishing outlets necessarily diminishes. This basic mathematical formulation is a piece of hard news which it is our task to break to the current generation of photography students. It is also our responsibility to make ourselves accountable to their immediate predecessors, those whom -- in our foolishness and naïveté -- we

deluded into thinking otherwise. I am speaking of those lost souls one encounters in increasing numbers, wandering the corridors of such meat markets as the College Art Association and SPE gatherings, desperate for someone, anyone, to look at their portfolios and take their resumés. They are competing frantically for a pitiful handful of jobs teaching others to make art photographs -- since, at best, that is all they have been trained to teach -- and the ratio of these applicants to available positions is unspeakable. Those educators who brought them to this pass owe them much, much more than an apology.

Declining enrollments in many degree-granting photography programs whose emphasis is entirely on self-expressive imagery bear out the suspicion that fewer and fewer students are willing to commit thenselves to being career artists in photography. We have seen the end of the era of the open pocketbook among the institutions housing photography departments; I believe we are now seeing the end of that era among the students who enter such departments. More and more, we will be facing a demand for the economic self-justification of all courses of study, photography among them. Profiles of the current generation of college students show them to be far more conservative in choosing their field of specialization, and more deeply concerned with the relationship between their education and their future in the job market, than were the students of ten years ago -- among whom many of those present could no doubt number themselves. We must confront in ourselves that clash of attitudes. We will do these students a profound disservice by failing to alert them to the imperatives of their times and instead substituting our charming but outdated assumptions for the realistic assessments they require of us.

Such realistic assessments, even when we learn to make and provide them for our students, will hardly serve as adequate alternatives to meaningful goals within the medium. Nor will it be anything more than a stopgap measure to divert the energies of the more practical among them to such related areas as curatorship, historiography, criticism, and conservation, since those are ultimately no less self-limiting as employable skills than the professional exploration of one's own visual psyche.

I would suggest that we can direct these students along either of two broad courses. Those who wish to photograph along purely self-expressive lines should be clearly informed of the severe limitations of career options in that field, and should be urged to develop other means of economic self-support. They should also receive extensive instruction in those skills which are essential to professional art photography -- exhibition design, book layout and production, and teaching. And they should be prodded into the exploration of alternatives to the museum/gallery/monograph circuit in which so much art photography is presently trapped.

Those who wish to earn their living through their craft should be urged to develop an involvement with and expertise in one or more other fields of study in which photography plays a significant role. I am speaking here -- as I have elsewhere -- of the concept of interdisciplinary studies. It is a concept that appears to threaten many of those involved in photography education. I say this because I have seen precious little dialogue on this subject over the past ten years despite the fact that an increasing number of other disciplines -- sociology, anthropology, psychology, andhistory among them -- are becoming increasingly aware of their involvement with and frequent dependence on photography.

I presume the resistance to this concept arises because it undermines the widely-held and much-cherished assumption that elevation to the rank of Art Photographer relieves one of any obligation to develop and broaden one's world view, renders unnecessary any demonstrable connection between one's images and other modes of understanding or communicating, and entirely eliminates the tedious necessity of reading. I assume further thut the concept is maligned because fewer and fewer of those in photography seem to know much about anything other than photography, yet take it for granted that that is all they need to know. When such conceptual blinders are added to an already monocular vision, the doors of perception begin to close.

Facing up to the challenge of interdisciplinary studies in photography will require much painstaking reassessment of our educational assumptions, priorities, and methodologies. It will also require drastic, even brutal, upgrading of

the minimal and mediocre standards of research, preparation, thinking and articulation to which students of photography are presently held. No part of that process will make anyone involved in it happy. But there is no way of avoiding that challenge without becoming irrelevant to the medium's future.

Concurrently, an increase in what is called "leisure time" is beginning to take place. This is happening partly as the result of a frozen job market in which there is not enough full-time work to go around, and partly as the result of voluntary changes in our national work patterns. The consequence will be that more people than ever before will be turning to the creative/expressive/communicative media as outlets for their energies. Photography will certainly be among these.

A dramatic increase in coherent and effective adult-education programming in photography will be needed to match this surge of interest and its remarkable potential. I see that potential as at least two-fold. It will accelerate the breakdown of the traditional distinction between amateur and serious photographers -- a we-they construct which unproductively pits plebes against elitists. The distinction between well-educated amateur photographers and well-educated career photographers will become an increasingly narrow one, probably no wider than the ersatz sheepskin on which the latter's diplomas are printed. This change may also enable us to influence a constantly growing core of people from all walks of life and assist them in becoming active rather than passive in their relation to visual communication. We can do this by teaching them photography as a means of self-expression, as a tool with which to probe into their world and into the nature of vision itself. This, in turn, is likely to lead to an increased interest in integrating photography into the educational process at progressively earlier stages, which will bring with it the need for trained teachers with a solid grounding in visual education from childhood through adolescence.

In such a context, photography education is likely to find itself serving purposes linked quite directly to the medium's inherent nature as a democratic tool for expression and communication. We should keep in mind that any true

democratizing of creativity does not necessitate the equalizing of all creative activity and its reduction to the level of mediocrity of the lowest common denominator. It does involve offering each and every individual the opportunity to have his or her creative abilities respected, nourished, and amplified as an ongoing function within the larger structures of life.

That is a difficult path to tread. It involves fundamental reformulations of our concepts of creativity and education, and requires the abandonment of our stereotypes as to what being an artist is all about. So far, we have tended to take the easier road -- and have thereby created an already overcrowded class of specialists in self-expression who feed on sinecures in the profession of teaching, to which they have no commitment and in which they have no training; who feed on patronage from the privileged wealthy with their institutional fronts; who feed on public grant monies extracted from other human beings whom our culture has turned into worker drones.

Are those the unique understandings to be drawn from the medium of photography? Is it possible that we have subverted that medium by ignoring its essences and conforming it to the shape of the "high" arts? What meaningful structures can we truly expect to erect upon such decadent and self-defeating premises? Have we been building towards the future, or away from it?

Finally, let me say -- as, again, I have said on many previous occasions -- that there is little purpose in encouraging people to express articulately their emotions, perceptions and understandings through photography if their ability to do so is societally and/or governmentally restricted. The right to what I have elsewhere termed "freedom of vision" has never been legally established as an accepted corollary to freedom of speech, and even the latter freedom is all too often embattled. Currently there are a considerable number of lawsuits and other incidents which revolve around the right to make, publish, and disseminate photographic imagery of various kinds.

The issue is censorship, in one form or another. As a rule, these incidents are directly traceable to the Burger Supreme Court's decision which established

"local community standards" as the basis for obscenity prosecution. As I predicted on the occasion of that decision, it has begun to have its inhibiting effect not only on literature but on photography as well. I believe that the situation will get worse, not better.

So I suggest that it would be in the best interests of this organization and its constituency to establish a task force centered around the issue of freedom of vision. This task force should be charged with studying existing statutes pertinent to freedom of vision; with compiling a history of censorship cases which bear on photography and the other visual media; with keeping track of present-day incidents and reporting on them regularly to the membership; with recommending appropriate legislation to protect the right of image-makers to make and present their work without political or legal repression, and legislation to protect the right of the public to freely view and purchase such work; and with recommending specific test cases in which the SPE might take on the role of amicus curiae.

In short, I am proposing that we become the most effective possible lobby for freedom of vision. I suggest further that, as educators in a visual medium, we accept as part of our responsibility to our students and our medium the inculcation of that right. The delusion that photography -- or, at least, "pure" photography -- was somehow exempt and disconnected from politics should have been cast aside when the Nazis stopped August Sander from completing his life's work and directed him towards landscape photography. Indeed, that delusion should never have arisen. It is time to dispel it, and it is both natural and appropriate that the task falls to us.

Surely these are not the only problems ahead for those involved with education in photography. No doubt there are others already visible, and still more which have yet to surface. But I believe that these will be among the central issues of the next decade for all of us.

I did not come here with ready-made solutions to these problems -- this speech is not a test. But the decade ahead certainly is. The answers to it, right or wrong, lie within us and the courses of action we choose. I hope that what I have

said here tonight provokes some discussion of these issues among us. And I hope that in 1988 I will be able to read over these words and discover that they were not entirely irrelevant to the decade they anticipate.

Thank you.

(This is the complete text of the keynote address delivered to the National Conference of the Society for Photographic Education, Asilomar Conference Center, Pacific Grove, California on March 22, 1978.)

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D., "No Future for You?" *Exposure* 16:2, June 1978, pp. 20-23.

Trope: The Well-Made Photograph (3)

I got stuck indoors in the air-conditioning during the heat wave that began shortly after I returned from China (but is definitely *not* caused by global warming, as the Angel Moroni recently told Mitt Romney in a dream, according to the latest rumor out of Salt Lake City). Adrift in the doldrums until that hot spell ended last Monday, I spent my off-hours contemplating the monotonous sameness of so many of the individual photographs and photography projects I see, deciding that the main culprit is the international post-secondary photo-education system.

You can dispute that conclusion, of course, and you're welcome to do so -- right here in this space, conveniently, via the "Leave a Reply" box below (so long as you sign your real name to your comment and provide a verifiable email address). I'm intrigued by the fact that such a critique has drawn an accusation of "anti-academic" tendencies on my part, as if that were automatically a bad thing. Even if it were, there's surely a difference between a broadly anti-academic attitude and targeted suspicion of the value of academic training in the fine arts.

By coincidence, the rise of post-secondary studio photography programs runs roughly concurrently with the rise of post-secondary creative writing programs. (Full disclosure: I went through one of those, at San Francisco State in the '60s, for my own MA. In the intervening years, those degrees somehow morphed into MFAs at the schools granting them.) There's a long-running, widespread, healthy debate in that field over the impact on and consequences to contemporary literary production of the academicization of creative writing. The subject comes up regularly in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, which periodically has devoted entire issues to it. It's a discussion in which teachers of creative writing, administrators of such programs, writers both schooled and unschooled, literary critics and historians, editors, publishers, literary agents, and others join, blessedly free (for the most part) of the pro-institutional faction accusing those who disagree with them of bad faith.

No such expansive, sustained public dialogue has ever taken place in the field of post-secondary photo education. No single issue of *Exposure*, the official journal of the Society for Photographic Education, and none of the organization's regional or national conferences, has ever addressed from multiple perspectives the basic question "Is Post-Secondary Photo Education Necessary?" (Or, less drastically, "What Went Wrong with Post-Secondary Photo Education, and Can We Fix It?")

The Visual Studies Workshop journal *Afterimage*, the only other periodical in which photo-ed pedagogy gets considered regularly, has sniped periodically at the SPE for various failures, real and imagined, but -- perhaps because it's umbilically attached to an institution purveying post-secondary photo-ed, and its editors and writers have mostly been VSW students and faculty -- that publication has never challenged the premise of photo-ed itself. Indeed, I can't recall a single article ever in either publication that did.

Nor do I expect that discussion to begin. The current generation of those who teach BFA/MFA photography studied with the first large cohort of photographers who went directly from life as photo students to life as photo teachers. Those now teaching in post-secondary studio photography programs who are under the age of 50 thus represent the second generation of photography teachers who essentially never left school once they entered kindergarten. Their cheerleading for "criticality" notwithstanding, with that heritage one should not expect from them a critical relationship to the system that has welcomed and sheltered them for so long and on which they rely for their livelihoods, nor even assume them to be aware of the manifold ways in which this institutionalization has shaped their thinking. As Marshall McLuhan was fond of saying, "Whoever discovered water, it wasn't a fish.

And, despite all the claims of all the photo-ed programs that they "nurture creativity" and "foster diversity," the work of their grads, cumulatively and collectively, has an overwhelming similarity and predictability. I anticipated this homogenizing effect back in 1975, at a time when the post-secondary photo-ed

system in North America was entrenching itself and consolidating the gains of the previous decade. In an essay commissioned by the editors of the *Creative Camera Yearbook 1975* (UK) and titled "My Camera in the Olive Grove: Prolegomena to the Legitimization of Photography by the Academy," I wrote:

> *What differentiates an academy from a guild or union is that the academy concerns itself with transmitting not just craft competence but ideas as well. It is precisely in this regard that an academy always poses a threat to the medium it nominally represents. ... Conventions, like standards, are embodiments of competence. But creativity and competence are often incompatible with each other. ...*
>
> *Conservative by nature, devoted (like all institutions) to stability out of self-preservation, an academy seeks to maintain the past in the present by molding the present with the past. Such an organism, whose phase is predominantly entropic, is automatically at loggerheads with its medium's avant-garde. ... Historically, an academy's relationship to the living pioneers in its medium has usually been an antagonistic one, since academies are bastions of conventionalism while subversion of the established order -- emotional, aesthetic, political, philosophical, and cultural -- lies close to the heart of the creative impulse. Academies tend to be the mausoleums of tradition, as museums tend to be the graveyards of art.*

In short, there's a relationship between the emulsifying effect of post-secondary photo-ed programs and the "One Great Vat Theory" of wonton soup proposed by Roz Chast in a *New Yorker* cartoon from 1991. In both cases, it all comes out of the same subterranean pot.

Of late I've spent many pleasant hours browsing my way through *The Glenn Gould Reader*, a compendium of the elegantly wrought prose generated, more or less in his spare time, by this polymathic pianist, composer, and pioneering explorer of radio as an art form. I've done this while listening to his peerless recordings of Bach and his multilayered, multivocal works for radio, the

so-called "Solitude Trilogy."

These essays date from the mid-1950s through the early '80s. Then as now, all classical musicians went through academic training. In one of those essays, originally published in 1966, Gould writes about the kinds of contests in which young musicians vied against each other before panels of judges in search of prizes that would lead to performance offers, recording contracts, and other opportunities. (His jumping-off point in this case was one in Canada for violinists.) In a broader sense, though, his subject was the filtration system through which young musicians were forced to pass en route to professional careers in classical music, which included not just those contests but the conservatory training that preceded them. In it, I came across this passage:

> *Competitions ... rarely benefit the supreme artist whose career would come to pass regardless. ... Most frequently, ... competitions merely befriend the artist whose vision, though perceptive, falls short of the ecstatic, whose merits, though unexceptionable, fail to attain the transcendental. ... It would be foolish to discriminate against a level of competence without which our musical life would be the poorer. But while it is entirely proper to speak of competent electricians and plumbers, and hazardous -- if not indeed in contravention of civic maintenance bylaws -- to bargain for ecstatic ones, the notion of ecstasy as the only proper quest for the artist assumes competence as an inclusive component. The menace of the competitive idea is that through its emphasis on consensus, it extracts that mean, indisputable, readily certifiable core of competence and leaves its eager, ill-advised suppliants forever stunted, victims of a spiritual lobotomy.* ("We Who Are About to be Disqualified Salute You!" in Page, Tim, ed., *The Glenn Gould Reader*, Vintage Books, 1990, pp. 254-55.)

Gould's insight applies just as accurately to the post-secondary photo-education environment. The formal photo-ed system has evolved into a series of contests adjudicated mostly by consensus -- a groupthink environment. Applicants compete for the approval of faculty committees to get into BFA and

MFA programs, then compete for the approval of faculty committees to win various departmental scholarships and awards, compete for grades, compete for the attention of the collectors who now troll their studios.

Then, entering a "real world" that increasingly mirrors the microcosm in which they pursued their academic "careers," they flock to portfolio-review situations, paying for 20-minute cold-call encounters to compete with each other for the attention of movers and shakers, and/or send in slides and money to juried contests, in the hope of getting one image selected for an ensuing group show or (the golden grail) acquired via a purchase award -- a credit that no self-respecting professional would have listed on a resumé thirty years ago -- in which case they'll send out an email blast notifying the world of that achievement. (I cannot convey the pathos of those emails, at least a thousand of which find their way to my inbox annually.)

And the single most formative of these competitions, the one I hold accountable for the cascade of well-made photo projects filled with well-made photographs that inundates us now, the young photographers' first active engagement with the process of soliciting approbative consensus, the gauntlet they must run and survive by conforming their own inclinations to the taste patterns and ideologies of others, is the one in which they must perforce obtain their thesis committees' approval -- first for their thesis proposals, of course, and then for their completed thesis projects.

So let me put a finer point on it: *The reason that photographs and photo projects based on these over-used, exhausted tropes surround and engulf us is that, for strategic reasons, their academically indoctrinated makers model them on what's proven to be the time-honored, unimpeachable, failure-proof BFA and MFA thesis project.*

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Trope: The Well-Made Photograph (3)." Photocritic International, July 12, 2012, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2012/07/12/trope-the-well-made-photograph-3/, accessed July 15, 2018.

Trope: The Well-Made Photograph (4)

I wound up the preceding post in this series by pinpointing the process through which BFA/MFA thesis project proposals, and the ensuing thesis projects themselves, get generated as the source of the sameness afflicting so many images and so many projects today. Let me expand on that diagnosis.

Insofar as thesis proposals go, as the one doing the proposing, in the student's unenviable yet inevitable position as supplicant before those in power, one rationally seeks a proposal to which one's thesis advisors can't say no, and that provides a quick and reliable path to a completed thesis project that the advisory committee must automatically approve. That's the most efficient way to acquire the BFA/MFA degree, which, most would agree, is the primary reason for entering a program that grants same.

Fortuitously for those involved on both sides, there's a symbiosis here. Because what overworked and underpaid faculty thesis advisors want in that thankless role are proposals that self-justify and need little or no defense, and that, furthermore, provide their proposers with such clear and simple guidelines toward a satisfactorily resolved end result that they'll require minimal actual advisement along the way. The outcome, entirely predictable from the project's inception, can thus get ceremonially but rapidly rubber-stamped by the thesis committee without any contention, leaving them free to move on to more important matters.

Projects that involve the pursuit of anything idiosyncratic to the student -- quirky ideas that may (but may not) lead to something, investigations of aspects of photographic seeing as a mindset -- tend to get discarded in favor of concepts (I use the term advisedly) on which advisor and advisee can count. You don't want to have to start again from scratch at the beginning of the spring semester of your final year, now do you? Are you ready to take a chance on having the academic equivalent of the Flying Spaghetti Monster refuse to touch you with His Noodly Appendage?

No, what works best is something socially themed, manageable in size, its

end product previsualized, with the chance factors severely restricted. Such concepts slide through the approval-to-review process like shit through a goose because, regardless of ethnicity, those who teach in and administer post-secondary photo-ed programs are for the most part white liberals attitudinally. This leaves them exceedingly vulnerable to the charge levelled against me here by one commenter, that concern about such trivia as formal values signals that I don't "care about the subjects" of these projects. An array of projects manifesting the attitude once dubbed "concerned photography" (to borrow a fatuous term from the late Cornell Capa), ostensibly initiated spontaneously by students, effectively insulates a department and its individual faculty members from charges of insufficient commitment to the social issues *du jour*.

(Heaven forfend that I should stand accused of "not caring" about any of the infinity of microcultures susceptible to photographic documentation, apparently. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn; I'm reasonably confident in the health of my social conscience and the muscle tone of my sense of active citizenship. But I don't make my living in academe, where any accusation of insensitivity to issues of "diversity," "marginality," etc., no matter how specious or frivolous, can land you in a world of hurt.)

Post-secondary photo education ain't rocket science. In fact, it ain't science at all. Once upon a time it involved learning some science (basic optics, densitometry, sensitometry, photo chemistry, all that toe-and-shoulder, D log E curve stuff). But that got largely discarded from the curriculum of fine-art photo departments in the 1970s as troublesome interference in the otherwise pleasurable work of making images, and became obviated entirely by the advent of digital imaging.

Also, because such thesis projects are system-based from the outset, with a clear methodology spelled out in the proposal, they do not run the risks inherent in free-range projects that evolve organically: strange alluring bypaths and offshoots, unexpected dead ends, even eventual but instructive failure. Unless you're unable to to find 40 veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder willing to

sit for their portraits and talk about their experiences, how can such a project go wrong?

Projects of this type prove especially reassuring to the outside advisors and thesis-committee members from other disciplines that many degree-granting programs require, precisely because they eschew the unquantifiable (the development of a personal way of seeing) in favor of the reassuringly taxonomic. Why, they're almost ... *scientific*, the status to which all academic disciplines aspire. (In truth, they're about as scientific as *soi-disant* "scientific socialism," but that's another discussion.)

Indeed, post-secondary photo education is notoriously one big gut course, evidenced by the facts that nobody flunks photography and a GPA below A-minus has become unusual in most such programs. Social promotion, grade inflation, the overall lowering of the basketball hoops, are the norm. (Like the children of Lake Wobegon, all post-secondary photo students are above average.) Over the past decade I've guest-taught at two schools -- one a BFA program in a university, the other an MFA program in an art school -- that tacitly required me to grade all my students between A-plus and A-minus, lest they lose tuition remission and other financial perks, an imperative not disclosed to me until I turned in my initial grade sheets.

Given that condition, which does not pass unnoticed by faculty in other disciplines, anything suggesting that the study of photography in a studio arts program has its rigors is welcome. Aside from the thesis project, BFA/MFA photo education has nothing along those lines to offer. Hence the evolution of the thesis project from what functioned as a senior-year challenge in the 1960s and '70s into the version on steroids that dominates post-secondary photo education today. ...

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Trope: The Well-Made Photograph (4)." Photocritic International, July 15, 2012, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2012/07/15/trope-the-well-made-photograph-4/, accessed July 15, 2018.

Photography in Culture

Lentil Soup:
A Meditation on Lens Culture

Historians of photography have generally neglected the centrality to our culture of its ongoing relationship with the lens, particularly in their address to the prehistory of photography. That the western world was deeply involved with lens-derived information and imagery for several centuries before the invention of photography as we know it goes largely undiscussed and even unmentioned in their chronicles. This essay is an attempt to begin rectifying that oversight. By examining the evolution of the lens, its impact on our culture, and its effect on abstract thought, I hope to establish a context in which the emergence and evolution of photography can be understood as a logical stage in humankind's ongoing involvement with the imperatives of visual communication.

It is my argument that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the lens became what J. David Bolter calls a "defining technology," which he describes (and, simultaneously, illustrates) as follows:

> A defining technology develops links, metaphorical or otherwise, with a culture's science, philosophy, or literature; it is always available to serve as a metaphor, example, model, or symbol. A defining technology resembles a magnifying glass, which collects and focuses seemingly disparate ideas in a culture into one bright, sometimes piercing ray. Technology does not call forth major cultural changes by itself, but it does bring ideas into a new focus by explaining or exemplifying them in new ways to larger audiences.[83]

In addition to pointing out Bolter's use of the lens as his own prime metaphor, I want to stress my agreement with his last sentence. I am not a technological determinist. As Lynn White, Jr., says, "a new device merely opens a door; it does not compel one to enter. The acceptance or rejection of an invention, or the extent to which its implications are realized if it is accepted, depends quite as much upon the condition of a society, and upon the imagination of its leaders, as upon the nature of the technological item itself."[84]

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Most communication technologies are "invisible," in the sense that we as communicators are prone to paying attention to the content of our messages rather than to the media through which we transmit them. As an instrument of visual communication, the lens is unique in that, for all practical purposes. it is literally as well as metaphorically invisible. Made (most commonly) of glass, or some other transparent substance, it is not in itself *seen* during the process of image encoding, transmission, and decoding; rather, it is *seen through*.

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83 Bolter, J. David, *Turing's Man: Western Culture in the Computer Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 11.

84 White, Lynn, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 28.

Encouraged perhaps by its invisibility, we pay little attention to this technology -- to its workings and its effects on our lives -- even as we ingest massive amounts of its output on a daily basis, produced for our consumption by ourselves and others. (According to a Kodak press release, there were "more than eight billion color negative exposures -- another record -- made in the U.S. [in 1982]." Most of these were amateur-made; the total of all such "traditional exposures, including black-and-white film and color slides," was about *10 1/2 billion*.[85]) On the whole, the members of this culture are demonstrably unconscious of the formal syntax of the visual language that informs them and which they themselves employ to communicate with each other.

There is always much to learn from what we take for granted; the problem, of course, lies in identifying those tacit assumptions. The French word for lens -- *objectif* -- is one indication of a continuing belief on the part of the majority of the population that lenses are objective, neutral artifacts. Certainly it is stating the obvious to say that most people who use cameras, telescopes, binoculars and other lens instruments give no active thought to the lenses integral thereto. It is also eminently reasonable to suggest that, when looking at lens-derived imagery -- film, video, and still photography -- few of us consider the lenses involved in producing it. No news in this, surely.

Thus it should have been no surprise to me when a popular literary critic for the *Village Voice* (apparently intending to display his own knowledgeability, if not to suggest technical expertise) wrote in a 1983 review of a book of Civil War photographs that their makers were "intrepids, correspondents really, who lugged their awkward cameras across those wretched battlefields to report, *through an upside-down lens*, history in spasm."[86] (Emphasis mine.)

Yet it *was* startling to come across such a genuinely anachronistic ignorance of basics. Here was a highly literate, college-educated, middle-aged North American, unaware that there is no "right side up" to a lens.[87] This was

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85 Eastman Kodak Co., press release CP18357NR (Rochester, NY, January 25, 1983), p. 1.
86 Fremont-Smith, Eliot, "Making Book for Santa," *Village Voice*, December 20, 1983, p. 62.
87 After all, as far back as 1846 -- less than a decade after the introduction of photography --

startling because the western world is, arguably, the most visually sophisticated culture in recorded history.

Most of that sophistication is comparatively recent, specifically attributable to photography: directly, through what camera vision[88] and photographs have taught us about the appearance of things, optics, and the phenomenon of visual perception; and indirectly, through the proliferation and repetition of imagery that photography makes possible. Though the theoretical grounding for most members of this culture is skimpy at best, the direct experience with lens systems and lens imagery is extensive. Thus, to borrow a concept from Noam Chomsky, the visual equivalent of *linguistic competence* in the language of lens imagery is now commonplace in Western society and, increasingly, to be found world-wide.

Consider, for instance, the two cartoons reproduced here. Not only were they both disseminated through photographically-generated reproductions, but they are both *sight gags*, in more than one sense. They are meant to be apprehended visually (i.e., Gahan Wilson's caption is essentially gratuitous, and the humor of neither translates effectively into verbal form); and their subject matter -- aside from the surreal improbability of Wilson's sitter and the sexist silliness of Ronson's sitcom[89] -- is human vision and its relation to camera optics.

Marx and Engels understood the principle involved. They wrote, "If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process." *The German Ideology*, ed. by C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1984), p. 47.

88 The term -- or, at least, the particular usage of it for these purposes -- is Walter Chappell's. See his credo, simply titled "Walter Chappell," in Lyons, Nathan, Syl Labrot and Walter Chappell, *Under the Sun: The Abstract Art of Camera Vision* (New York: Aperture, 1972), unpaginated.

89 In that regard it is worth mentioning that while Ronson's boy has indisputably caught the bigger fish, the girl is demonstrably more visually astute.

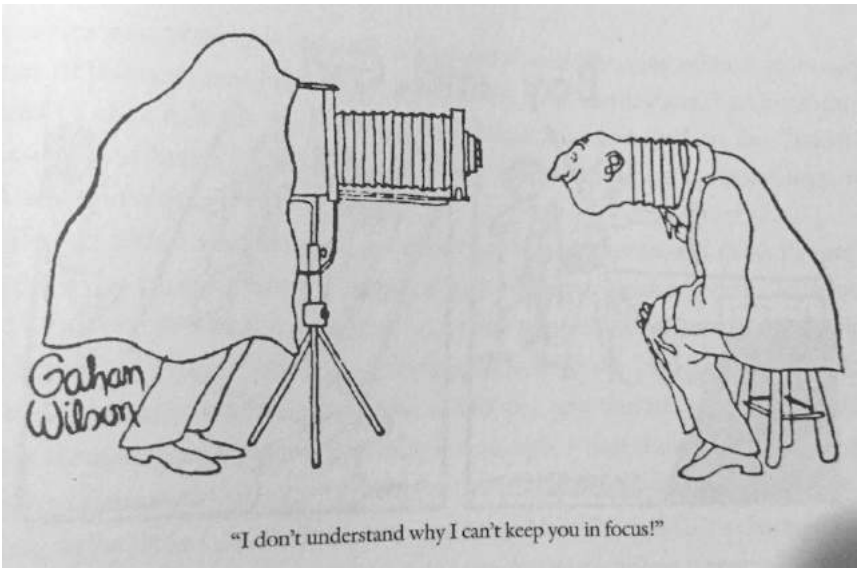

Figure 1.

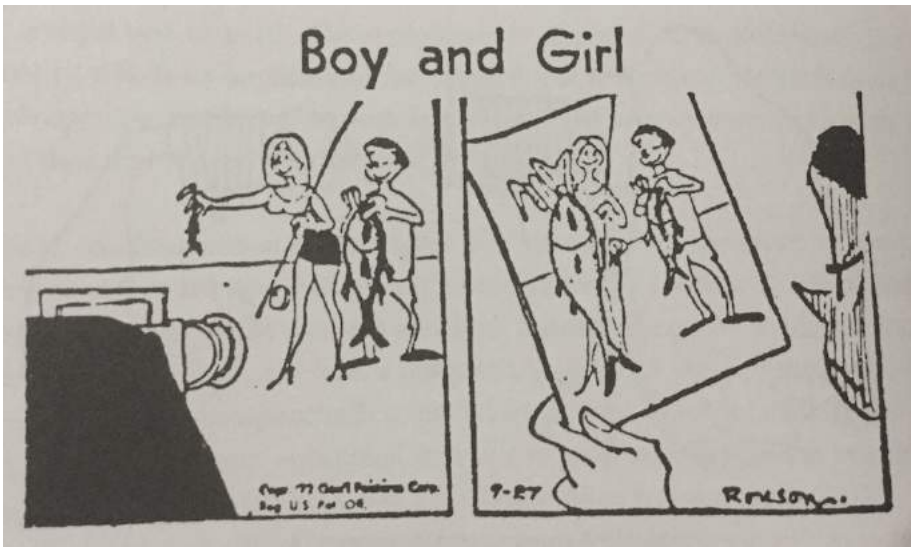

Figure 2.

The implications of these two images are highly significant. Both appeared in widely distributed periodicals: Wilson's in *Playboy*, Ronson's in hundreds of newspapers to which it is syndicated. The demographics of *Playboy*'s readership no doubt differ from those of Ronson's newspapers, but clearly both these cartoonists assumed that the optical principles which are operative in these two jokes could be easily recognized by the average person in a matter of seconds.

Yet three hundred and fifty years ago there would have been few people in the world capable of interpreting these images in terms of the understandings of visual perception and lens optics implicit in them.

The perceptual revolution engendered by the lens and consolidated by photography, as epitomized in these two cartoons, has been profound, and so pervasive that we tend to take it for granted in large part. We do seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that over the past century and a half we in the West have become a *photographic culture*, aware too that a photographic culture is radically different in quality and in kind from a non-photographic culture.[90]

But we do not seem to understand that photography was not thrust *sui generis* upon Western culture (as it has been, subsequently, on so many societies that were in no way prepared for it). Photography took root in already-fertile and well-tilled soil: a *pre*-photographic culture deeply involved with lens instruments, lens-derived information, optics, vision, and representation. Western European culture and its outposts, including the United States, developed into a photographic culture as a consequence of first becoming a *lens culture* -- that is, a culture in which the lens was well-established as a defining technology. Optical principles and concepts, as well as attitudes and theories related to broader issues of information-gathering, observation, and verification, had been introduced to that culture via the lens, had become entrenched in the "scientific method," and had come to form the groundwork for a new epistemology, well before the invention of photography.

Historians date that invention somewhere between 1826 and 1839, the period in which the processes for "fixing" or making permanent a specific lens image were discovered. Yet the imagination of the general public in Western culture had been fired by the lens and its consequences for the previous two centuries, via the cameras obscura/lucida, the telescope, and the microscope. Although the precious-object aspect of the still photograph -- first the

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[90] William M. Ivins, Jr.: "From many points of view the histories of techniques, of art, of science and of thought, can be quite properly and cogently divided into their pre- and post-photographic periods." *Prints and Visual Communication*, London, Routledge & Kegan Ltd., 1953 (reprinted by Da Capo Press, New York, 1969), p. 116.

daguerreotype, then the paper calotype -- was certainly instrumental in attracting popular interest to photography, it is evident from the literature that the public's primary fascination was with the encoding of lens imagery in a permanent, retrievable physical form. (Had the public interest been in photography as, literally, *light drawing*, then the photogram -- that early, elementary, accessible form of light drawing that requires neither camera nor lens -- should have enjoyed a major vogue. It never did.)

It seems logical to propose, then, that the "invention of photography" in (for convenience's sake) 1839 was only one event, though a predictable one, in the morphology of the lens as a cultural tool for information management.

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The first lens employed by human beings was that of the eye. In his book *The Intelligent Eye*, perceptual psychologist R. L. Gregory offers the provocative postulate that "eyes freed the nervous system from the tyranny of reflexes, leading to strategic planned behaviour and *ultimately to abstract thinking*."[91] (Emphasis mine.) His argument is that the perception of things at a distance, and their optical identification, made advance planning possible. Obviously the key here, in optical terms, is not mere retinal sensitivity but depth perception, which is made possible by the fovea, those "rods and cones" found only in the eye of primates and birds.

The eye, then, extends the reach of the hand, enabling us not only to flee and survive but to perceive, to imagine grasping, and to plan to grasp that which is beyond our immediate physical reach. Similarly, the artificial lens as a tool extends the reach of the eye. In an eccentric extrapolation from the work of the founder of general semantics, Count Alfred Korzybski, novelist and theorist William Burroughs has suggested that we developed speech in order to achieve writing -- i.e., that the concept of the written word is inherent in the spoken word, effectively preceding it, even if on an unconscious level.[92] Art historian William Parker, apparently thinking along parallel lines, has insinuated that we evolved

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91 Gregory, R. L., *The Intelligent Eye* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1970), pp. 12-13.

92 Burroughs, William, *The Book of Breeething* (Berkeley, CA: Blue Wind Press: first edition, 1976; second edition, 1980), unpaginated.

eyes in order to be able to photograph.[93] This is a deliberately extreme formulation containing a germ of truth: having evolved an eye, it was natural for a toolmaking creature to develop an instrument with which to enhance its scope. That tool is the lens, in all its diverse manifestations.

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What is a *lens culture*, and when did we become one?

It's my belief that we became a lens culture in the years 1550-1553, and that we became formally committed to that new status some sixty years later -- on the night of January 7, 1610. In order to make a supporting argument for such an ostensibly lunatic proposition, it will be necessary to establish a few reference points.

We could say that the evolution of the lens as a tool is implicit in the human eye itself, embedded as a potential even back in the dim recesses of biological evolution. But that's not what made us a lens culture. Nor was it the fascination with the phenomenon of vision, though awareness of and interest in the sense of sight goes back to such early theorists as Democritus and Euclid, centuries before the birth of Christ. Sight as a subject of contemplation and inquiry evoked the theoretical investigation of Ptolemy, followed centuries later by those luminaries of the Arabian Age of optics, Alkindi and his successor, Alhazen; and it has continued to be a primary concern of philosophy and theology through the work of St. Augustine, Roger Bacon, Descartes, and many other central figures in the cultural history of the West. As Bolter has suggested, what makes a tool into a defining aspect of the culture in which it functions is not merely its presence, but its integration into the conceptual assumptions of the culture and the derivation from it of understandings that become fundamental to the culture's world view.

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More than two thousand years ago, an early form of lens had been developed: a spherical bottle filled with water, used as a fire-starting device,

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93 Lecture, Society for Photographic Education National Conference, Asilomar, California, March 1978. Unpublished.

known as a *burning glass*. By the tenth century A.D., simple magnifiers had been produced; and, circa 1285, eyeglasses -- or "spectacles," as they were then known -- had been introduced in Italy. Though all of these had an impact on culture (eyeglasses, in particular, added decades to the useful life of people, serving as perhaps the first prosthetic device), they did not transform our understanding of the *world* in any essential way.

By the year 1500, visual images in multiples -- produced by the woodblock printing technique -- were circulating throughout Europe. It is not coincidental that this was the historic moment of the rise of mercantile capitalism, whose lifeblood is *information*. The photographer and theorist M. Richard Kirstel has proposed that, with the surge of manufacture and trading that followed the recession of the Black Death in 1398, the resolution of the Hundred Years' War in 1453, and the consolidation of alliances around the Hanseatic League through the various Wars of the Herring during the early sixteenth century, an information-based culture was established for the first time in history.[94] And visual information was becoming as invaluable as verbal or written information: books on such subjects as engineering, architecture, archaeology, astronomy, machinery and techniques of labor and production, anatomy, biology and zoology -- books illustrated with printed images -- would flood Europe during the sixteenth century.

At this juncture, the system of representation known as Renaissance perspective had already been devised and was in use; this is an essentially arbitrary method for what William M. Ivins, Jr., called "the rationalization of sight"[95] -- a means for ordering the depiction of objects and their relations in space. (By "arbitrary" I mean to indicate that other cultures have developed other systems; for example, in some the relative size of objects in pictorial descriptions is determined by their significance rather than by either their actual size or their proximity to the picture plane.)

Thus, by the time Albrecht Durer's treatise on perspective was published in 1523, the fundamental understanding of the relation between seeing and

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94 In conversation with the author, January 1984.

95 Ivins, William M. Jr., *On the Rationalization of Sight* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975).

picturing had been transformed and standardized, while a means for reproducing pictures cheaply and disseminating them widely had been introduced.

Between the years 1550-1553, several concepts and components came together to create the framework on which lens culture has been constructed. In 1550, Girolamo Cardano was the first to mount a lens in the light-admitting aperture of the camera obscura. This lens was made of "crown" or plate glass; it was of biconvex form (the shape of the lentil seed, from which the lens derives its name). There being at that time no known means for the chemical recording of camera obscura/lucida images, whether or not produced with the aid of a lens, such images were simply viewed on a screen, often a polished marble table-top.[96]

Three years later, in a treatise called the *Diaphana* (1553), Franciscus Maurolycus, an Italian professor of mathematics, became (in the words of one historian) "the first optician who thought of employing the theory of glass lenses to explain the action of the crystalline lens [of the eye],"[97] a hypothetical correlation later verified by Johannes Kepler.

At roughly the same time -- circa 1550 -- the compound lens was invented, possibly by the British mathematicians Leonard and Thomas Digges, though there is endless dispute over its actual originator, suggesting that the idea may have emerged simultaneously from several sources.[98]

I would propose that it is within this three-year period, from 1550-1553, that Europe became a *lens culture*. Though Cardano, Maurolycus, and (for convenience's sake) Digges were working independently of each other, their separate ideas combine, when viewed in retrospect, to form the necessary infrastructure of a lens culture:

* Cardano's lensing of the camera obscura allowed one for the first time to study the *lens image* without one's own eye being, in Simon Henry Gage's terms,

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96 See Habell, K. J., "Lens History," in *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971), p. 836.

97 Disney, Alfred N., Hill, Cyril F. and Baker, Wilfred E. Watson, editors, *Origin and Development of the Microscope* (London: Royal Microscopical Society, 1928), p. 34.

98 Nicolson, Marjorie, "The Telescope and Imagination," *Modern Philology*, XXXII (1935), pp. 241-242.

"an integral part of the optical train"[99] -- as it is, for example, in its relation to eyeglasses, magnifying glasses, and telescopes. This crucial displacement provides us with critical distance in relation to visual perception: it permits us to see the imaging process itself -- to contemplate that process, abstract ideas from it, and metacommunicate about it (*metacommunication* being *communication about communication*). As a device, Cardano's tool is the prototype of the contemporary photographic camera; I would go so far as to posit that the photograph -- i.e., the permanent version of that lens image -- is implicit in Cardano's invention, an inevitable consequence of it, since the reproduction and dissemination of visual images was already a century-and-a-half old.

* Maurolycus's analogizing of the eye to the lens provided, for the first time, a working model of the process of visual perception itself. Thus the culture could begin to study the act of visual perception through the use of that model -- thereby beginning to understand the principles of perception, to think abstractly about the process, and to metacommunicate about it.

* The compound lens -- which is, in essence, a system of two or more lenses in a (usually adjustable) fixed relation to each other -- transcended by far the mere supplementation of human vision that spectacles represented. The compound lens embodied a radically different, far more aggressive relation to the cosmos, the microcosmos, and the process of the acquisition of knowledge through perceptual inquiry; it was the first optical tool that had as its sole function the *generation* of information. Digges was a telescopist, but the complex microscope was implicit within the compound lens -- as was the assumption that the reach of the eye is potentially infinite.

In short, in that three-year span, using materials and ideas already at hand, Western culture created an interlocking set of instruments and paradigms that permits the endless reframing of humankind as perceiver, the world as perceived, and the lens image as both vehicle and repository for that transaction.

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[99] Gage, Simon Henry, *The Microscope*, 17th edition, revised (Ithaca, New York: Comstock Pub. Co., 1947), p. 554.

This made Europe (and its colonies in North America) a lens culture, though a pre-photographic one, still lacking the means for permanent encoding of lens images, the invention of which would take almost three full centuries more. Then it should not be difficult to explain why I think our status as a lens culture was confirmed on a particular evening early in 1610. That was the occasion on which Galileo Galilei did something with a compound lens in a telescope which no one before him had done (or, if they had, had failed to report). What Galileo did seems ridiculously simple: He looked up at night. The evening on which he chose to do so is considered a turning point in intellectual history.[100]

It was Galileo's looking up into the night sky through a compound lens (and, more to the point, the meaning he ascribed to the information he acquired in that fashion) that transformed the world view of Western society, demolished Ptolemy's geocentric model of the solar system, and made of Galileo the patron saint (though hardly the father) of telescopy.

When Galileo saw what he saw -- which included four "new" planets, the satellites of Jupiter among them, none of which had been accounted for in either Ptolemy's or Copernicus's visual models of the universe -- he was confronted with a choice that symbolizes the differences between lens culture and pre-lens culture. He could believe his theology, which was based on a shaky interpretation of the evidence provided by the unaided eye; or he could believe the information that the lens had provided. Galileo took the latter path, embracing and amending the Copernican version of the universe. (Understandings of fixed-point perspective surely affected Galileo's interpretations of the lens-driven information he had acquired through these observations. Those rules governing the relations of objects in space had already revolutionized pictorial depiction and mathematics; they had been studied and absorbed by Galileo.[101])

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100 "We may perhaps date the beginning of modern thought from the night of January 7, 1610, when Galileo, by means of the instrument which he had developed with such labor [sic], actually perceived new planets and new worlds. ... Galileo's *Siderius Nuncius* [of] 1610 [is] the most important single publication, it seems to me, of the seventeenth century, so far as its effects upon imagination is concerned." Nicolson, "Telescope," p. 235.

101 See Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr.'s essays, "The Relations Between Representations in Art and Science: Galileo's Observations of the Moon -- A Case Study," in Callebaut *et al*, *George Sarton*

This was the first time that our culture's fundamental beliefs were permanently reshaped on the basis of lens-derived understandings. Galileo's act reverberated for a century and more: the trauma and upheaval that followed give the measure of the gulf between lens culture and pre-lens culture. Deny people their fixed notion of heaven and all hell breaks loose. Yet though many, especially in the corridors of power in the institutions of church and state, could not accept the news that Galileo brought, there were others who were quick to sse where it led and rejoiced at the doors it opened for the mind.

For example, within a few months of Galileo's publication of his findings under the title *Siderius Nuncius* (*The Starry Messenger*), the philosopher Tommaso Campanella realized fully the implications of this discovery. Campanella, then in jail for his unorthodox opinions, wrote to Galileo on January 13, 1611. In his letter, which praises the *Siderius*, Campanella "raises for the first time the question which was to tear the seventeenth century asunder: the question of a plurality of worlds and of the possible inhabitants of these [four] new planets."[102]

Campanella was not alone in recognizing the expansiveness of Galileo's revelation. Inspired by the *Siderius*, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler produced in 1611 his *Dioptrice*, a treatise which laid the groundwork for modern telescopic instruments.[103] He was also the first to discover that vision is due to an image focused upon the retina by the lens of the eye, which verified Maurolycus's hypothesis.[104]

Beyond these pragmatic extrapolations, however, Kepler proved himself a prophetic dreamer. His last work, published posthumously in 1634, was the *Somnium*, a romance of travel to the moon. It is often credited as the origin of

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Centennial (Ghent, Belgium: Communications & Cognition, 1984), pp. 55-56; and "Galileo, Florentine `Disegno,' and the `Strange Spottednesse' of the Moon," *Art Journal*, Fall 1984, pp. 225-232. Edgerton makes a persuasive case for the proposition that it was the high quality of Italian art education (which included perspectival study) that enabled him to recognize the moon's "spots" as shadows on a sphere, whereas a contemporaneous British astronomer, unschooled in perspective, saw the phenomenon merely as inexplicable marks.

102 Nicolson, "Telescope," pp. 255-256.

103 *Ibid*., pp. 257-258.

104 Disney *et al*., p. 64.

modern science fiction -- a form of lens-inspired theory which was to develop during the seventeenth century and continue through our own day.

Other theorists followed suit. In 1630, Christophorus Scheiner noted in his *Rosa Ursina sive Sol* the conceptual relativitism that the microscope encouraged, speaking of it as an instrument "by which a fly was made as large as an elephant and a flea to the size of a camel."[105] By 1663, the philosopher Henry Power had prophesied that as a result of the telescope and microscope men would come to consider themselves "but middle proportionals (as it were), 'twixt the greatest and smallest Bodies in Nature, which two Extremes lye equally beyond the reach of human sensation."[106]

The impact of the lens and its implications did not only affect scholars, scientists, and philosophers. It spread to artists and writers and, through all of these, to the population at large. As Marjorie Nicolson indicates, the telescope brought with it the shocking concept of the existence of a "plurality of worlds." Yet, she points out, "the seventeenth century, as it becomes conscious of indefinite space, became aware also that in the little world a new microcosm reflected the new macrocosm."[107] She suggests that there was in this a degree of comfort and reassurance, in part because the *microcosmic* aspect of the new model of the universe was not entirely unexpected:

> The proof of the actual existence of such an universe of minute life came as no surprise or shock to man; man's reason had anticipated it; his instruments offered proof of its existence. ... [B]ecause the instrument was more easily used by the amateur and because the world of minutiae was more intelligible to him, [the microscope] had more "popular" appeal.[108]
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> Before the telescopic vision of the cosmos, even a brave man might shrink back, appalled at immensity. lonely before infinity. But the

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105 Gage, pp. 561-562.

106 Power, Henry, *Experimental Philosophy in three Books* (London: 1663-1664). Cited in Nicolson, Marjorie, "The Microscope and English Imagination," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, Vol. XVI, no. 4, July 1935, p. 10.

107 Nicolson, "Telescope," p. 234.

108 Nicolson, "Microscope," p. 2.

material of the microscopists was at once intelligible and flattering to man's sense of superiority.[109]

References to the microscope and telescope began to enter literature at this point; the lens and its effects were becoming cultural reference points. There is mention of these instruments in the writings of Samuel Pepys, Andrew Marvell, Samuel Butler, and many other writers, both major and minor. The microscope, for the reasons suggested above, was the first lens instrument to enjoy an actual vogue; it was a fad in England from the mid-seventeenth century all the way through the eighteenth. "[T]he microscope becomes the toy of ladies," writes Nicolson, "and the familiar theme of the 'learned lady' enlarges to include the 'scientific girl.'"[110] Thus the compound-lens instruments -- particularly the microscope -- were perhaps the first entry points into science and natural philosophy for women.

Though he certainly was not the inventor of the microscope, Anthony von Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) did discover bacteria, in 1676. In a telling passage, Nicolson argues for the tremendous shaping effect of this lens-derived understanding, along with Galileo's, on literature:

> As Milton in *Paradise Lost* [1668] produced a new kind of cosmic poetry, a drama of interstellar space, which could not have been written before the telescope opened to a generation of men a new vision of the universe, so *Gulliver's Travels* [1776] could not have been written before the period of microscopic observation, nor by a man who had not felt at once the fascination and repulsion of the Nature which that instrument displayed.[111]

Once again, as in Henry Power's metaphor of humans as "middle proportionals," a relativistic view of the human position in the natural order had been extrapolated from lens understandings, this time by Jonathan Swift.

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109 *Ibid*., p. 90.
110 *Ibid*., p. 3.
111 *Ibid*., p. 50.

At the end of the seventeenth century, heated debate arose in the sciences between those followers of the classical scientists, or "ancients," and the "moderns." The latter were Baconians, anti-hypothetical in their attitude, insistent on the primacy of observation, experiment, verification. "The telescope and the microscope came to be the most powerful weapons of the 'moderns,' and the arguments drawn from them proved more embarrassing to the supporters of the 'ancients' than any others which they were forced to answer."[112]

These debates were actively followed by the educated sector of the public -- a sector which, it should be remembered, had enjoyed access for much of that century to compound-lens instruments, as well as to the concepts derived therefrom. Swift's *Battle of the Books* (1697), for example, was in part a refutation of the "modern" attitude, as manifested in William Wotton's *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, the second edition of which was published also in 1697. According to Wotton, "the most important contribution of the new instruments is the coherence and intelligibility which they have shown to exist in the universe."[113] The telescope diminished humankind; the microscope revealed humankind's similarity to many other forms of life.

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If, as I'm arguing, the lens is a central human invention, equivalent in importance to the bow and arrow, then some recording process for lens imagery was virtually inevitable once a full-fledged lens culture had emerged.

The preconditions for the invention of photography were two-fold. One was the availability of the necessary materials, tools, and processes. With Johann Heinrich Schulze's discovery of 1727, that the tarnishing of silver could be employed as an image-making technique, these were all in place.

The second precondition was the imperative within a lens culture to develop the essential instrument that would make culture-wide metacommunication about lens imagery possible. That instrument was some

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112 *Ibid*., p. 61.
113 *Ibid*., p. 61.

permanent, reproducible form of lens-image encoding. The impulse toward such an instrument came from two sources: art and science.

It has been argued by some that photography was a direct consequence of the Industrial Age, unimaginable without it. For instance, Heinrich Schwarz reasons thus:

> The invention was not haphazard. ... [P]hotography came into being as the logical outcome of its intellectual premises, the product of the needs and tendencies of the time, of an ethical and an artistic compulsion. The practically simultaneous, and at first independent, efforts towards it as an end bear witness that the time was ripe; and they refer the individual act of invention back to some motive power greater than the personal, to an impulse that was strictly determined by historical forces.
>
> In essence the discovery depended upon a changed social order, upon an aesthetic attitude of man to his environment which was new and based on scientific assumptions.[114]

The socio-cultural context in which photography finally emerged has already been indicated to some extent. Among its salient features were: a mercantile-manufacturing economic system that placed a premium upon information; a growing and increasingly educated middle class accustomed to ideas derived from lens-based understandings; centuries of cultural experience with images reproduced in large multiples; and widespread contact with lenses and lens images. If this is the agar-agar in which photography grew, then the needs of artists and scientists were the spores.

The issue is not whether the lens influenced art, but rather to what extent and in what ways it did so. By 1558, eight years after Cardano added a lens to it, the camera obscura had gone beyond its function as a solar observatory to serve as a drawing-tool for artists, which is how it was defined in G.B.Porta's *Magiae Naturalis* (1558).[115] In addition to such direct influence, there was the more

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[114] Schwarz, Heinrich, *David Octavius Hill* (New York: Viking Press, 1931), p. 3.

[115] Gernsheim, Helmut, in collaboration with Gernsheim, Alison, *The History of Photography*

pervasive conceptual impact. Nicolson has pointed out that "As in the period of the telescope one is aware -- whether by coincidence or influence -- of a new interest in perspective or for views, so in the period of the microscope there is found a delight in the depiction of the small and the exquisite."[116] Oswald Spengler may well have intuited the pervasive cultural impact of the lens when he wrote that "between the space-perspective of Western oil-painting and the conquest of space by railroad ... are deep uniformities."[117] A fixed-point perspective, and the symbolic compression of space via the telescope, together constitute the link between the two.

Yet there is a more specific reason for the imperative of photography in the context of Western art during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Philosophers, scientists, artists, and the educated sector of the citizenry had become accustomed to contemplating the physical world as seen through bits of glass. The ability to observe the world through the lens had come to fascinate the public; and microscopic observation, in particular, had profoundly affected the public attitude toward and respect for art. In a culture that placed progressively less emphasis on imagination and more on reason, the extraordinary complexity and delicacy of the world seen under the microscope led to a denigration of visual art as such. God was reconceived as the Divine Artist; compared to His handiwork, in even something so small as the shell of a snail, humanly produced works of art seemed necessarily cruder, less detailed, incomplete.

The thrust of art, then, began to turn toward that which was culturally approved: realism, description, the documentary attitude. God and/or Nature having been defined as the epitome of creativity,[118] the only proper function of art could be the observation and recording of that cosmic *oeuvre*. The cameras obscura and lucida (the latter invented in 1806 by William Hyde Wollaston) came

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(London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 5-6.

116 Nicolson, "Microscope," p. 57. This was, of course, the age of the miniature in painting -- a kind of object that the daguerreotype would quickly replace.

117 Spengler, Oswald, *The Decline of the West* (New York: A. Knopf, 1939), p. 7.

118 Nicolson, "Microscope," pp. 62-66.

into common use by artists, for exactly that reason. The urge to arrest their images would have been widespread, the frustration at the tedious manual method thereof endemic.[119]

In science, a parallel need was being felt. With the discarding of the "reasoned" science of the "ancients," the Baconian ideal of directly observed and verified fact became the watchword of "modern" science, with the lens as one of its primary tools. Yet the problem there (especially given the erratic quality of available lenses) was in the *verification* of observation, i.e., independent corroboration of perception. Though not restricted to microscopy and the sciences built around it, this problem manifested itself there most emphatically. In the words of G. L'Estrange Turner:

> Without photographic emulsions a great part of modern science could not exist... The scientist is indebted, therefore, to the great developmental driving force brought about by the popular appeal of photography during the Victorian period. This popularity also considerably widened the market for optical glass and lenses, which were made in the same factories as microscopes and telescopes.[120]

Thus we might say that when Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833) produced the first permanently encoded lens image in 1826, he himself was the instrument of a cultural urge that had been building steam for some three centuries. And when, in 1839, the daguerreotype process and the calotype (positive-negative process) were announced -- invented, respectively, by an artist-showman and a gentleman scientist -- lens culture had at last completed its first cycle. The capacity for rendering a lens image in static two-dimensional form in large multiples permitted the widespread cultural dissemination of such images, thus making them available for study and introducing them as a form of

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119 That frustration was the professed motive for the experiments of William Henry Fox Talbot, among others. See his "Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art," in *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1844), unpaginated.

120 Turner, Gerard L'Estrange, "The History of Optical Instruments," in his *Essays on the History of the Microscope* (Oxford: Senecio Pub. Co., 1980), p. 20.

cultural currency, as reference points. Lens culture thereby had the means for time-binding its visual perceptions and understandings, making possible their transmission through time as well as across space.

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It is important to understand that photography as we know it is one extension of lens-image consciousness. But it is no less important to realize that the spaceship is another. On November 16, 1974, the United States broadcast a message to the cosmos via the Arecibo radio telescope -- the world's largest radio telescope, located in Puerto Rico. Transmitted in binary code, the message when reconstituted forms a series of images, the first of which (at the bottom) is an image of the telescope itself. The reasoning? "Advanced civilizations may use radio telescopes to talk to one another," Carl Sagan writes in *Murmurs of Earth*, a book that documents these initiatives in intergalactic communication. "This picture shows that Earth is ready to enter the conversation."[121] As noted elsewhere in the book, "Thus, we described the state of advancement of our technology"[122] -- first by depicting ourselves as a lens culture, then by portraying and demonstrating our most highly evolved version of lens instrumentation.[123] Perhaps we have been a lens culture long enough that we have become *lentocentric* -- unable to conceive of a scientific, "advanced" culture that lacks the lens. Only the future can confirm or disabuse us of this conviction, but there's no denying that, consciously or not, we now all share it.[124]

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121 Sagan, Carl, *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 119.

122 *Ibid*., p. 63.

123 The radio telescope is, in fact, what might be called a post-lens optical instrument: it beams sound waves at its subject and reconstitutes them not as aural messages but as visual images, in a genuinely synaesthetic process. It is one manifestation of our entry into an era in which we may obtain data in ways that do not involve lens instruments, but transform that data into images that read as if they were lens-derived -- images of a kind to which we have now become habituated. For more on this subject, see Cartwright, Lisa and Brian Goldfarb, "Radiography, Cinematography and the Decline of the Lens," *Zone*, No. 6, 1992, pp. 190-201.

124 It is my hope that this essay may stimulate further inquiry into the impact of lens-based communication systems -- including, but hardly restricted to, photography -- on non-European cultures. Correlation of such information with other socio-cultural developments should prove fruitful, perhaps especially in cultures in which the lens was introduced forcibly. This would also make possible cross-cultural comparisons.

Thus, to bring this argument full circle, it would seem to be vital to our advancement as a culture that we come to understand the extent to which lenses shape, filter, and otherwise alter the data that passes through them -- the extreme degree to which the lens itself *informs* our information. This influence, though radical in many cases, often manifests itself subtly. Yet even the most blatant distortions tend to be taken for granted, as a result of the enduring cultural confidence in the essential trustworthiness and impartiality of what is in fact a technology resonant with cultural bias and highly susceptible to manipulation. The very derivation of its name -- from the Latin *lentil*, due to the resemblance of the double convex lens to the lentil seed -- suggests the humble and the bland. The lens is neither, though many things may be said to have sprouted from it. Western society's daily diet now includes a hefty serving of "lentil soup" -- that stock of lens imagery, perpetually simmering, that is also lens culture's primary export to the rest of the world.[125]

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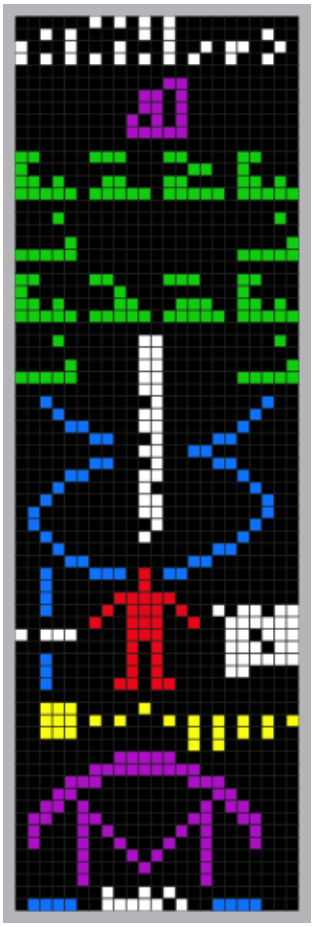
[125] The initial research on which this essay is based, and an earlier version of it, were undertaken during the course of a seminar in Media Ecology conducted by Christine L. Nystrom and Neil Postman in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at New York University. It was first presented at the Media Ecology Conference held at Sacks Lodge, Saugerties, New York on October 27, 1984, and published in *Et cetera: A Review of General Semantics*, Vol. 42, no. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 19-31.

Extracts from this essay were subsequently used as the theme statement for a conference on the history of photography sponsored by the French government, "Les Multiples Inventions de la Photographie," Cerisy la Salle, France, September 1988. At that conference I presented a second paper on this subject, "Rationalism and the Lens", extending this argument further. See "Le Rationalisme et Les Lentilles," in the volume of proceedings, *Les Multiples Inventions De La Photographie* (Paris: Ministere de la Culture de la Communication des Grands Travaux et du Bicentenaire, 1989), pp. 31-38. A version of it in English subsequently appeared in *Impact of Science on Society* #154, Vol. 39, no. 2 (1989), pp. 101-112.



Arecibo message, 1974. Note radio telescope (in purple) at bottom of image.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Lentil Soup." Et Cetera: A Review of General Semantics 42:1. Mar. 1985, pp. 19-31.

Lt. John Pike Goes Viral (3)

When members of the Los Angeles Police Department brutalized Rodney King on March 3, 1991, they did so at night, in a dark stretch of Foothill Boulevard with no pedestrians about. They had no way of knowing that a bystander, George Holliday, drawn by the noise, was videotaping much of the incident from the balcony of his apartment a short distance away. Certainly they could not have anticipated that this amateur documentation would make its way to the mass media and go as viral as "citizen journalism" could go in the pre-World Wide Web era. Nor could they have predicted the massive consequences to themselves, to the LA Police department, and to the city of Los Angeles itself.

2011 isn't 1991, and much has changed in the intervening two decades. By contrast, as I noted in my first post about this event, Lt. John Pike of the UC Davis Police Department had to have known that he and his comrades in arms had multiple cameras trained on them in broad daylight during their hardass pepper-spray-and-baton smackdown of the peaceful protesters on the UC Davis quad on November 18. Every video I've viewed of this lamentable police attack on students shows dozens of cameras visibly pointed at the scene.

Consider, too, the ages of the police personnel involved. Pike, at 39, is a senior figure among them -- meaning that all these men and women grew up with the web, computers, digital cameras, cellphones. They're not old fogies who don't grasp the workings of the internet or don't understand how digital-imaging tools work. They use them every day, on the job and in their private lives. They've also had countless situations to study, from the photographs of the Civil Rights movement through the videotaped beating of King on to Abu Ghraib and Arab Spring, as high-profile examples of how rapidly and widely images of uniformed authority figures behaving abusively can spread, and the damage such images can do to those figures and the institutions that hire them to do their strongarm work.

There's no ambiguity in these images from UC Davis. This is a purposeful individual in uniform, demonstrating what happens to anyone who refuses to

obey his commands and challenges the powerful institution he represents. You're watching a man knowingly craft a public image of himself in his official role. And those are his fellow officers, in full riot gear (body armor, helmets with facemasks, Tasers, batons, teargas grenade guns, zip ties), staunchly backing up his every move in their supporting roles in this drama as they face a crowd of unarmed college students. They all understand exactly what they're doing; their sense of entitlement to act as they do is palpable.

In short, there's no plausible deniability here; Pike and his accomplices can't plead either innocence or ignorance. Indeed, they've invited this scrutiny, the speed of which can't have surprised them either. No reason, then, to feel any sympathy for any of them if society weighs them in the balance and finds them wanting -- nor if juries find them civilly or criminally liable. When Pike waves his can at the observers before starting to spray, he's telling them to bring it on.

If you want to read some truly repellent claptrap -- of the variety, and pungency, that puts the words "bleeding-heart liberal" in bad odor -- spend a few minutes with "Why I Feel Bad for the Pepper-Spraying Policeman, Lt. John Pike," by Alexis Madrigal, a senior editor at *The Atlantic*. Madrigal writes, "A regular guy named John Pike has become the new face of evil among people following the Occupy protests around the country. ... I see John Pike as a casualty of the system, too. ... And while it's his finger pulling the trigger, the police system is what put him in the position to be standing in front of those students. I am sure that he is a man like me, and he didn't become a cop to shoot history majors with pepper spray. But the current policing paradigm requires that students get shot in the eyes with a chemical weapon if they resist, however peaceably. Someone has to do it. And while the kids may cough up blood and writhe in pain, what happens to the man who does it is in some ways much, much worse."

This constitutes an updated version of Ronald Reagan's rationale for his presidential visit to the Kolmeshöhe Cemetery near Bitburg, Germany in 1985. He laid a wreath at the memorial for the men buried there, who were part of Hitler's Waffen-SS, of whom Reagan said: "These [SS troops] were the villains, as we know, that conducted the persecutions and all. But there are 2,000 graves

there, and most of those, the average age is about 18. I think that there's nothing wrong with visiting that cemetery where those young men are victims of Nazism also, even though they were fighting in the German uniform, drafted into service to carry out the hateful wishes of the Nazis. They were victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps."

Spare me both these facile attempts to make victims out of persecutors. I'm not equating Pike and the troopers under him with the SS, mind you, nor the Occupy protesters at UC Davis with the European Jews. But let's not pretend that armed police dressed like storm troopers attacking unarmed and unresisting citizens don't bear comparison with their fascist counterparts, past and present, here and in other countries -- or that they have the same claims on our sympathies as those they oppress.

Apologists for sadism, like Madrigal, like Reagan, propose that systemic ideological corruption trumps individual choice and excuses amoral behavior in general, including obeying inhumane commands from superiors. Stuff and nonsense. The Nuremberg trials of 1945-49 put that lie to rest; the subsequent and ongoing trials at the International Criminal Court in The Hague represent the moral and legal consensus that we cannot hide from responsibility for our actions behind the rationale of following orders that come from "the system," as Madrigal would have it. Pike and his ilk profit, financially and otherwise, from wielding power in the ways that they do; they choose their paths because they benefit from doing so, and because they enjoy exercising their power. You can bet that, in the brief period post-sprayfest before the shit hit the fan at UC Davis, there wasn't a session of soul-searching and prayer for forgiveness in the wardroom, but high-fives all around and shouts of praise for Pike's spraymeister panache.

Madrigal can't know -- none of us can -- the long-term impact of that experience on Pike's victims: not just the medical effects but the psychological and spiritual ones. Madrigal's proposal that the moral and/or spiritual consequences to Pike will outweigh all of that suffering by several dozen people I find disgusting. True, many bad things are about to happen to Pike; already suspended (albeit with full pay),he'll almost certainly get fired, lose his pension,

get sued, and perhaps get arrested, possibly convicted, conceivably jailed. Most of that was predictable, based on the law of the land and his chosen course of action. I would applaud any and all of those outcomes for him. Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

What plump, stately John Pike can't have imagined, of course, was how, lightning-quick, he'd get transmogrified into a mocking meme, pepper-spraying everyone from Gandhi to the baby Jesus. Save perhaps for comedians and the paranoid, few among us visualize ourselves achieving the status of internationally recognizable buffoons within a few hours of some public action. Yet that's exactly what happened to Pike. The videos of the attack hit the internet just minutes after it happened, going viral within hours. The photocollages started coming shortly thereafter -- and while the videos, though plentiful, are necessarily limited in number, the collages breed as quickly as people can think of other images to use in spreading this meme. I've seen estimates ranging as high as 1000 Pike images as of this writing. (Eventually a book's worth will get gathered and published, mark my words. Pike can browse it with his grandkids.) Indeed, NYC-based film director Ryan Gielen has now created a blog called PikesCorner, in which a simulacrum of the brave lieutenant dispenses advice on a diversity of subjects. And Jon Stewart's had his say on this as well.

I consider the derision to which this photocollage meme holds Pike up to be well-deserved, and I encourage its continuance. Surely someone's already working on an app that will make possible what Squirrelizer enabled for another viral portrait subject several years back. (You'll find a version of Squirrelizer here, called "Crasher Squirrel.") This app -- let's call it Pikeizer -- will effect the simple online insertion of this bold cavalier's likeness into any image. In anticipation of that, here they both are, John Pike and Anonymous the Squirrel, together again for the first time, in my own contribution to the genre. Particularly apt since the just-mentioned PikesCorner advice column has Pike recommending "Try pepper spraying the squirrel until his eyes bleed" as a solution to the problem of a squirrel stealing birdfeed. Give Pike a dose of his own medicine, I say. (For the DIY types among you, click here for a Photoshop template of Pike in action.)

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Lt. John Pike Goes Viral (3)." Photocritic International, November 30, 2011, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2011/11/30/lt-john-pike-goes-viral-3/, accessed July 15, 2018.

Alternate History: The Robert Capa D-Day Project

"Wondering why people haven't questioned the story of Capa's D-Day film … Why bother? People like the story. And it's a better story than that Capa bugged out after snapping only 11 frames, if that's what happened."[126] -- John Loengard, ex-*Life* staff photographer turned author and *Life* historian

The standard narrative of Robert Capa's actions on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and the subsequent fate of his negatives constitutes photojournalism's most potent and durable myth. From it springs the image of the intrepid photojournalist as heroic loner, risking all to bear witness for humanity, yet at the mercy of corporate forces that, by cynical choice or sheer ineptitude, can in an instant erase from the historical record the only traces of a crucial passage in world events.

Moreover, it represents, arguably, the most widely familiar bit of folklore in the history of the medium of photography -- one that appears not only in monographs on Capa and other books on photography but in novels, movies, *bandes dessinée*, and the autobiographies of famous people,[127] not to mention countless retellings in the mass media. That this legend went unexamined for seven decades serves as a measure of its appeal not just to photojournalists, to others involved professionally with photography, and to the medium's growing audience, but to the general public.

In that fable, created by Capa and John G. Morris, Capa arrived at the "Easy Red" sector of the invasion site code-named "Omaha Beach" in Normandy at 6:30 on the morning of June 6, 1944, with the first wave of invading U.S. troops; faced horrific enemy fire; stayed nonetheless for 90 minutes, managing to use up his entire supply of black & white 35mm film; and successfully exposed

[126] Quoted in Bruce Young, "The Fog of War: D-Day and Robert Capa," *News Photographer* 70:1 (January 2015), p. 56; online at https://nppa.org/magazinearchive/jan15/#?page=50.
[127] E.g., Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, *My Story* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), pp. 146-47, and Sam Fuller with Christa Fuller and Jerome Rudes, *A Third Face: My Tale of Writing, Fighting and Filmmaking* (New York: Knopf, 2002), pp. 170-73.

somewhere between two and four rolls thereof (72-144 negatives) during that time -- only to have all but eleven of those historic frames accidentally destroyed in *Life*'s London darkroom on the night of June 7.

For the past three years, a team of volunteer researchers who do not share John Loengard's cavalier attitude toward truth and fact -- led by myself, in collaboration with photojournalist J. Ross Baughman, photo historian Rob McElroy, and combat veteran and military historian Charles Herrick -- has probed this now established and indeed memetic account of Capa's time on Omaha Beach and the purported loss of most of his D-Day negatives.[128]

Ironically, two celebrations of the 70th anniversary of Capa's D-Day images provoked our investigation. The first came as a flattering profile of John Morris, written by Marie Brenner.[129] Morris served as assistant picture editor in *Life*'s London bureau for that magazine's D-Day coverage. In this feature article Morris and Brenner retell at length that familiar version of Capa's D-Day adventures and the supposed calamity that befell his negatives, as promulgated first by Capa in his 1947 memoir *Slightly Out of Focus*[130] and subsequently by Morris in countless iterations, including his own 1998 memoir *Get the Picture*.[131] Brenner's article questions no single claim by either Morris or Capa, whose narratives she merely parrots. Her status as a noted investigative journalist tacitly endorses their fictions.[132]

The second reverential treatment of Capa's Omaha Beach photographs and the events surrounding them took the form of a short video posted online on May 29, 2014 at the website of *Time* magazine.[133] Commissioned and published

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[128] An index page with links to all the posts for our project appears at http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/major-stories/major-series-2014/robert-capa-on-d-day/. It can be accessed easily using the URL forwarder capadday.com.
[129] Marie Brenner, "Robert Capa's Longest Day," *Vanity Fair* 56:6 (June 2014), pp. 78-84; online at http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/06/photographer-robert-capa-d-day.
[130] Robert Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947), pp. 140-151; second ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 133-152. All citations henceforth use the second edition for reference.
[131] John Morris, *Get the Picture: A Personal History of Photojournalism* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 3-7, 73-76, 79.
[132] Brenner has published exposés of the tobacco industry and the sugar industry, among other serious reportage.
[133] Adrian Kelterborn, *Behind the Photo: Robert Capa's D-Day*, TIME.com, May 29, 2014,

by Time, Inc. (parent company of *Life* magazine, the first magazine to publish those D-Day images[134]); produced by Magnum in Motion (the multimedia division of the picture agency Magnum Photos, the picture agency conceived and co-founded by Capa); authorized by the International Center of Photography (ICP), the institution founded by Capa's younger brother Cornell; and featuring a voiceover by John Morris, this video involved the combined energies of the individual and institutional forces I came to define as the Capa Consortium. (It included digitally forged examples of Capa's presumably destroyed negatives; revelation of this fakery by Rob McElroy[135] forced Time, Inc. to make a public acknowledgment of the fakery and a hasty revision of the video.[136])

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Assorted elements of these two virtually identical versions of the standard story struck J. Ross Baughman as illogical and implausible. The youngest photojournalist ever to win a Pulitzer Prize (in 1978, at the age of 24), Baughman is an experienced combat photographer who has worked in war zones in the Middle East, El Salvador, Rhodesia, and elsewhere. As the founder of the picture agency Visions, which specialized in such work, he's also an experienced picture editor. Consequently, when in late May of 2014 Baughman offered me the opportunity to publish his ruminations on the Capa D-Day narrative at my blog,

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http://time.com/120751/robert-capa-dday-photos/.

[134] Some of Capa's images, transmitted by the London-based press pool to subscribers via wirephoto, appeared in daily newspapers prior to *Life*'s D-Day issue, datelined June 19, 1944 but on newsstands as of June 12. See Patrick Peccatte, "Les premières publications des photos de Robert Capa sur le débarquement en Normandie," Déjà Vu, August 16, 2013, http://dejavu.hypotheses.org/1463.

[135] Rob McElroy, "Guest Post 12: Rob McElroy on Robert Capa," Photocritic International, June 26, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/06/26/guest-post-12-rob-mcelroy-on-robert-capa/.

[136] Kristen Hare, "Time clarifies: Ruined images in D-Day video were photo illustration," Poynter Institute, June 30, 2014, http://www.poynter.org/news/mediawire/257384/time-clarifies-ruined-images-in-d-day-video-were-photo-illustration/. Last fall, Time, Inc. published online a new commentary on Capa's "The Face in the Surf." This web page includes a re-edited version of that 2014 video -- with the original digitally created forgeries of Capa's supposedly "ruined" images replaced by new digital fakes, presented on-screen without any disclaimer. See unsigned, "D-Day 1944: Photograph by Robert Capa," Time.com, October 1, 2016, http://100photos.time.com/photos/robert-capa-d-day. For my commentary thereon, see A. D. Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (30)," Photocritic International, January 25, 2017, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2017/01/25/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-30/.

Photocritic International,[137] I accepted gladly, publishing it in two parts, the first appearing at the blog on June 6, 2014.[138] In the process of preparing it for publication, I realized that it raised more questions than it answered, requiring more research and writing than I could reasonably request from Baughman. I decided to pursue these issues further myself.

This editorial work immersed me in the Capa literature for the first time. Speaking as a scholar, that came as a rude awakening. The most immediate shock hit as I read through a half-dozen print and web versions of Morris's account of those events -- in Brenner's 2014 puff piece, in Morris's 1998 memoir, and in various interviews, profiles, and articles -- and watched at least as many online videos and films featuring Morris rehashing this tale (including the then most recent one from Time, Inc.).[139] I realized that the only portion of this story that Morris claims to have witnessed firsthand, the loss of Capa's films in *Life*'s London darkroom, could not possibly have happened the way he said it did.

In retrospect, I cannot understand how so many people in the field, working photographers among them, accepted uncritically the unlikely, unprecedented story, concocted by Morris, of Capa's 35mm Kodak Super-XX film emulsion melting in a film-drying cabinet on the night of June 7, 1944. Here's the version he offers in his memoir:

> Braddy [H. C. "Braddy" Bradshaw], our lab chief, gave the film to young Dennis Banks[140] to develop. Photographer Hans Wild looked at it wet and

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[137] The blog's homepage: https://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/. It can be accessed easily using the URL forwarder photocritic.com.

[138] J. Ross Baughman, "Guest Post 11: J. Ross Baughman on Robert Capa (a)," Photocritic International, June 6, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/06/06/guest-post-11-j-ross-baughman-on-robert-capa/, and "Guest Post 11: J. Ross Baughman on Robert Capa (b)," Photocritic International, June 6, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/06/08/guest-post-11-j-ross-baughman-on-robert-capa-b/.

[139] E.g., Douglas J. Sloan, *John G. Morris: Eleven Frames*, 2010. In this 9-minute film, copyrighted by the International Center of Photography, Morris, on-screen, repeats his standard narrative of the loss of Capa's negatives in *Life*'s London darkroom, starting at timestamp 01:58. Online at Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/22657303.

[140] Banks is a mysterious figure in this saga. Originally and through the early 1980s he appears as an unnamed teenage “darkroom lad.” Circa 1983 Morris identified him as Dennis Sanders in his interview with Richard Whelan. See Whelan's *Robert Capa: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 214. In a 1994 version of his tale, Morris names him only as “Dennis.” See John

> called up to me to say that the 35-millimeter, though grainy, looked "fabulous!" I replied, "We need contacts -- rush, rush, rush!" ... A few minutes later Dennis came bounding up the stairs and into my office, sobbing. "They're ruined! Ruined! Capa's films are all ruined!" Incredulous, I rushed down to the darkroom with him, where he explained that he had hung the films, as usual, in the wooden locker that served as a drying cabinet, heated by a coil on the floor. Because of my order to rush, he had closed the doors. Without ventilation the emulsion had melted.[141]

Anyone familiar with analog photographic materials and normal darkroom practice worldwide must consider this fabulation incredible on its face. Coil heaters in wooden film-drying cabinets circa 1944 did not ever produce high levels of heat; black & white film emulsions of that time did not melt even after brief exposure to high heat; and the doors of film-drying cabinets are normally kept closed, not open, since the primary function of such cabinets is to prevent dust from adhering to the sticky emulsion of wet film. No one with darkroom experience could have come up with this notion; only someone entirely ignorant of photographic materials -- like Morris -- could have imagined it.[142] Embarrassingly, none of that set my own alarm bells ringing until I started to fact-check the article by Baughman that initiated this project, close to fifty years after I first read that fable in Capa's memoir.

This is one of several big lies permeating the literature on Robert Capa. Certainly Capa knew it was untrue when he published it in his memoir; he had gotten his start in photography as a darkroom assistant in Simon Guttmann's Dephot photo agency in Berlin. And Cornell Capa also knew that; he had cut his

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G. Morris, “A Record Nearly Lost in the Rush,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 3, 1994, p. 7. In Morris's 1998 memoir he becomes, for the first time, Dennis Banks. Bruce Young's article, "The Fog of War," makes one small contribution to the research on Capa's D-Day; he verifies the existence of Banks and the correct spelling of his first name as Denis. See Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55. My efforts to trace Banks further have proved unsuccessful.

[141] Morris, *Get the Picture*, p. 6.

[142] Morris has asserted repeatedly that he knows nothing about darkroom procedures. E.g., Young, "The Fog of War," p. 55, and John G. Morris, "The A. D. Coleman Attack," January 5, 2015 (self-published), unpaginated. Online as a pdf file at Photocritic International, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/John_Morris_TheADColemanAffair_1-5-15.pdf.

eyeteeth in the medium first by developing the films of his brother, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and David Seymour in Paris, then by working in the darkroom of the Pix photo agency in New York, then by moving on to fill the same role at *Life* magazine before becoming a photographer in his own right. My belated recognition of that fact led me to ask the obvious next question: If that didn't happen to Capa's 35mm D-Day films, what did? And if all these people were willing to lie about this, what were they covering up?

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Aside from Capa's published photographs themselves, and the articles and books in which they appeared during his lifetime, the principal reference works on which all Capa research and commentary to date have drawn are these:

* Capa's 1947 memoir *Slightly Out of Focus*.[143] Capa intended this book as the treatment for a feature film; "hope of a sale to Hollywood was the primary incentive for writing the book in the first place."[144] He dictated much of it from memory, with no fact-checking, under extreme deadline pressure from his publisher.[145] His official biographer, Richard Whelan, refers to it as Capa's "autobiographical novel,"[146] frequently pointing out and rationalizing one or another of its exaggerations and inaccuracies, many of them gross.[147] ICP has echoed Whelan's description of it as an "autobiographical novel."[148] John Morris calls it Capa's "memoir-novel."[149] Capa himself stated about this book, "Writing the truth being obviously so difficult, I have in the interests of it allowed myself to go sometimes slightly beyond and slightly this side of it. All events and persons in

[143] *Op. cit.*
[144] Richard Whelan, *This is War! Robert Capa at Work* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl/ICP, 2007), p. 223.
[145] Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 249.
[146] Whelan, *This is War!*, p. 222-23.
[147] Whelan, *This is War!*, p. 223.
[148] Unsigned, "Capa at 100: Robert Capa Centenary," Internet Archive/Wayback Machine, October 22, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20150316000205/http://www.icp.org/robert-capa-100.
[149] Morris, *Get the Picture*, p. 5.

this book are accidental and have something to do with the truth."[150] As historical evidence, therefore, it has all the reliability of a Tinseltown screenplay.

* Whelan's *Robert Capa: A Biography*,[151] published in 1985, and hailed by ICP's second executive director, Willis Hartshorn, as "magisterial ... a landmark in the history of photography."[152] Authorized and subsidized by the Capa estate, with final editorial control exercised by Cornell Capa, lacking footnotes (making it impossible to verify many of Whelan's assertions), and professedly drawing on primary materials kept unavailable to any other scholar to this day,[153] this book fails to meet even the most elementary tests of reliability and credibility.

* John Morris's 1998 memoir, *Get the Picture*.[154] In this autobiography Morris provides what we should consider his definitive version of the events surrounding Capa's D-Day images, though he had told this tale on the record numerous times previously[155] and would do so numerous times thereafter.[156]

* Alex Kershaw's unauthorized 2003 biography, *Blood and Champagne*.[157] Though denied access to the Capa material held by ICP and the Capa estate,[158]

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[150] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus*, front dustjacket flap, first edition, *op. cit*. Whelan includes this statement in his "Introduction" to the second edition, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.
[151] \Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*.
[152] Willis Hartshorn, "Director's Foreword," in Whelan, *This Is War!*, p. 7.
[153] This book relies heavily on materials held privately at that time by the Capa Estate, to which no other scholar has ever had access, even though transfer of them to ICP's Robert Capa and Cornell Capa Archive began circa 1999.
[154] Morris, *op. cit.*
[155] E.g., Morris, "A Record Nearly Lost in the Rush," p. 7.
[156] E.g., Brenner, *op. cit.*, and Kelterborn, *op. cit.*.
[157] Alex Kershaw, *Blood and Champagne: The Life and Times of Robert Capa* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books;/St. Martin's Press, 2003).
[158] For some indication of the difficulties Kershaw experienced in accessing Capa materials and information through ICP, see the Acknowledgements in his book, esp. p. xv, and Matthew Carson, "Blood and Champagne -- an interview with Alex Kershaw," Monsters & Madonnas: The International Center of Photography Library Blog, October 22, 2013, https://icplibrary.wordpress.com/2013/10/22/blood-and-champagne-an-interview-with-alex-kershaw/. Carson was Librarian & Archivist at ICP.
Others besides Kershaw experienced Cornell Capa's censorious tendencies. In 2002 Cornell Capa, in tandem with Richard Whelan, John Morris, ICP, and Magnum, threatened French filmmaker Patrick Jeudy with legal action if he continued with his unauthorized film *Robert Capa, l'homme qui voulait croire à sa légende* (*Robert Capa: The Man Who Believed His Own Legend*). When Jeudy went ahead with the project, which premiered in 2004, Morris sued him in a French court, forcing Jeudy to remove from the film an excerpt from an interview he had conducted with Morris. See A. D. Coleman, "Guest Post 21: Q&A with Patrick Jeudy (a)," Photocritic International, November 15, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/11/15/guest-post-21-qa-with-patrick-jeudy-a/, and "Guest Post 21: Q&A with Patrick Jeudy (b)," Photocritic International, November

Kershaw developed sources of his own, thereby adding substantively to the research on Capa. Most of Kershaw's published work falls into the category of military history, specializing in World War II.[159] Curiously, however, he did not apply his skills in military research to any of Capa's claims regarding his combat experiences, instead accepting them all at face value. This includes Capa's version of his D-Day landing on Omaha Beach, which Kershaw merely repeats.[160]

* Whelan's 2007 catalog for the ICP exhibition *This is War! Robert Capa at Work*.[161] Whelan took his own life on May 22, 2007, soon after completing work on this project and shortly before its publication in fall 2007. Though not a true second edition of his 1985 Capa biography, as ICP Director Willis Hartshorn noted in his introduction, "This book represents a dramatic revision of some sections of his Capa biography, representing major new perspectives."[162] These changes include a substantial rewriting of Whelan's earlier version of Capa's D-Day experiences.[163] Though footnoted, this volume, like its predecessor, relies heavily on primary materials still inaccessible to other scholars for confirmation.

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In my opinion, the bulk of the published writing and presentations in other formats (films, videos, exhibitions) devoted to the life and work of photojournalist Robert Capa qualifies as hagiography, not scholarship. Capa's own account of his World War II experiences, *Slightly Out of Focus*, consistently proves itself inaccurate and unreliable, masking its sly self-aggrandizement with wry humor and self-deprecation. Morris's memoir repeats Capa's combat stories unquestioningly, adding to those his own dubious saga of the "ruined" negatives. Whelan's books, widely considered the key reference works on Capa, were sponsored, subsidized, published, and endorsed most prominently and extensively by the estate of Robert Capa and the Fund for Concerned

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18, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/11/18/guest-post-21-qa-with-patrick-jeudy-b/.

[159] For a list of Kershaw's works on this subject, see his website, http://www.alexkershaw.com/.

[160] Kershaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-131.

[161] Whelan, *op. cit*.

[162] Hartshorn, *op. cit*, p. 7.

[163] Whelan, *This is War!*, pp. 207-250.

Photography (both controlled by Capa's younger brother Cornell) and the International Center of Photography, founded by Cornell, who also served as ICP's first director.

Produced in most other cases under Cornell's watchful eye or the supervision of one or another participant in the Capa Consortium, the remainder of the serious, scholarly literature on Robert Capa has almost all been subject to Cornell's approval and reliant on either the problematic principal reference works listed above, on Robert Capa materials stored (until the end of the twentieth century and the first years of this one) in Cornell's private home in Manhattan, with access dependent on his consent, or on both. Consequently, it constitutes an inherently limited corpus of contaminated research, fatally corrupted by its unswerving allegiance to both its patron and its patron saint. Such bespoke scholarship becomes automatically suspect.

The second failing of this heap of compromised materials resides in its reliance on untrustworthy and far from neutral sources: Robert Capa himself, with a demonstrated penchant for self-mythification; his younger brother Cornell, a classic "art widow" with every reason to enhance his brother's reputation;[164] and Robert's close friend and picture editor at *Life* and *Ladies Home Journal*, John Morris, also a friend and collaborator of Cornell's, whose own stature in the field premises itself on the Capa D-Day legend. Only Kershaw's tome maintains its independence from Cornell's influence, but at the cost of losing access to the primary research materials and consequently reiterating the erroneous information in the accounts of Capa, Morris, and Whelan. Virtually everything else published about Capa, including those stories in the mass media that appear predictably every five years along with celebrations of D-Day, unquestioningly presents the prevailing myth.

This Capa literature suffers from a third fundamental flaw: Those generating it (with the exception of Capa himself and his brother Cornell), have

[164] I use this term categorically to identify a class that, in my experience, includes any relative or significant other of a deceased creative person who felt a deep emotional connection to the departed. Such individuals have a tendency to protect not only the physical materials left behind, and the intellectual property involved, but the cherished and often sacred memory of their source. For obvious reasons, this poses a problem for any serious scholarship.

no direct, hands-on knowledge of photographic production, no military background (significant in that Robert Capa's most important work falls under the heading of combat photography),[165] and no forensic skills pertinent to the analysis of photographic materials. Nor were they encouraged by their patron to make up for those deficiencies by involving others with those competencies in their projects. Instead, their privileged relationship to the primary materials, along with the availability of a prominent and well-funded platform, enabled them to effectively invent whatever suited them, pleased their benefactor, and served their purposes.

Responsible Capa scholarship, therefore, must begin by distrusting the extant literature, turning instead to the photographs themselves and relevant documents that the Capa estate and ICP do not control and to which they therefore cannot prohibit access. Those materials lie at the core of our research project.

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Let us move, step by step, through the timeline of Capa's D-Day assignment and the preparation of his images for transmission to the head offices of *Life* magazine in New York, asking and answering the questions to which our team addressed themselves. Where pertinent, I will refer to Capa's 35mm Omaha Beach images in the way that we have designated them in our published research, first by their numbers in the contact-sheet sequence -- CS -- followed by the negative numbers imprinted on their borders, e.g., CS frame 1/neg. 29.)

When did Capa set out on his D-Day assignment for Life*?*

At the request of the chief of the London Bureau of Time & Life, Walter Graebner, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) had approved Capa as one of two of the magazine's photographers authorized to accompany the U.S. troops for the amphibious assault and landing on the morning of the first day of the invasion. Capa had requested assignment to the 16th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, First Infantry Division of the U.S. Army; he had

[165] The exception, as previously noted: Alex Kershaw, who, though never having served in the military, has become a recognized expert on World War II.

folowed them during the Sicilian campaign of the previous year, so he already had friends and acquaintances there.[166] Capa got the call on either May 28 or 29, according to his biographers,[167] leaving London for a press-corps briefing at First Division headquarters on a country estate in the county of Dorset[168] before transport to the embarkation point of Weymouth, on the English coast.

On what ship did he sail to Normandy?

By Capa's own account,[169] corroborated by officers and journalists who played cards with him at night on the ship,[170] in Weymouth he boarded the U.S.S. *Samuel Chase*, a U.S. Coast Guard attack transport. He would have done so by June 4, if not sooner, because that evening parts of the armada (though not the *Chase*) set out on an aborted crossing, then returned to harbor to await better weather. The channel crossing that succeeded began the next evening, June 5.

In his 1985 Capa biography, Whelan deployed some semantic sleight of hand to imply that, after boarding the U.S.S. *Chase*, Capa transferred to the U.S.S. *Henrico*.[171] In the 2007 catalog *This is War!* he makes that claim explicitly.[172] Whelan does so for reasons I'll explain shortly. He adduces no hard evidence to support this assertion. There is no reason to doubt Capa's assertion that he crossed the channel in both directions on the *Chase*.

Did Capa have any contact with his colleague at Life*, staff photographer David Scherman, during the crossing?*

Capa and Scherman, assigned to different U.S. Army divisions and different vessels, would have gone their separate ways upon getting the call and leaving London. All contact with the outside world ceased for them upon arrival at

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[166] Just as importantly, these were men with extensive combat experience, whereas the vast majority of the U.S. troops on D-Day were headed to their very first battle. Capa understandably felt safer among veterans than amidst raw recruits.
[167] Capa reported for his assignment on either May 28 (Kershaw, p. 120) or May 29 (Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, p. 210).
[168] Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, p. 210.
[169] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 136.
[170] These witnesses included Captain Oscar Rich of the 1st Division's 5th Field Artillery Battalion and *New York Times* correspondent Don Whitehead. See Kershaw, p. 122.
[171] Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, pp. 210-11.
[172] Whelan, *This is War!*, p. 222.

their respective divisions" headquarters, and only then would they have learned the specific ships to which SHAEF had assigned them. Capa, as noted, sailed on the *Chase*.[173] Scherman made his crossing of the channel on a U.S. Navy ship, LST 317, a much smaller vessel.[174]

Whelan would eventually claim that Capa somehow got his pre-invasion films to Morris, sending them off on June 5, and that Morris not only had those films processed but somehow got his selection therefrom approved for distribution and publication by the censors on D-Day, before confirmation of the outcome of the landing.[175] And Morris would revise that fantastic notion even further, asserting that Capa somehow got his pre-invasion films to David Scherman before transferring to the U.S.S. *Henrico*, and that Scherman somehow got those films -- plus his own pre-invasion films -- delivered to Morris on June 7, in an "advance packet" whose receipt Morris neglected to mention for 70 years.[176] Capa would have had no logical reason to transmit his films to Scherman, even if he could have done so.[177] Moreover, this new narrative contradicts every previous account of those events by Capa, Morris, and Whelan.

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[173] In 2009 Morris would tell an interviewer that "We knew that Capa had secretly reported to the headquarters of the 1st Infantry Division's Regiment on a country state near Weymouth and was given permission to board the U.S Coast Guard transport *Samuel Chase*, and there he had found officers studying a giant model of a French beach codenamed 'Omaha,' but we didn't know whether he had landed or not." This is obviously false; they could have known none of that at the time, as it remained top secret. See José Manuel Serrano Esparza, "John G. Morris: An Interview with the Most Influential and Experienced Photo Editor in History," elrectanguloenlamano, November 28, 2009, http://elrectanguloenlamano.blogspot.com/2009/11/john-g-morris-interview-with-most.html.

[174] LST stands for Landing Ship Tank; as the designation suggests, these vessels were typically used to transport combat vehicles and supplies, plus up to 150 troops. For D-Day, however, some -- including LST 317 -- were repurposed to deliver medics, medical supplies, and ambulances to the beach and then evacuate the wounded. In the case of LST 317, its cargo included the 500th Medical Collecting Company (the 60th Medical Battalion), which numbered 120 men plus five (5) Jeep-Ambulances. For images and brief descriptions of this and other vessels used to transport troops, vehicles, and matériel for the Normandy invasion, see Unsigned, "Landing Craft: LIFE prints a catalog of the wonderful vessels helping the Allies win this amphibious war," *Life*, Vol. 15, no. 25, December 20, 1943, pp. 47-50.

[175] Whelan, *This is War!*, p. 224.

[176] "I now regret that I had forgotten and therefore did not make it clear long ago that there had been another June 7 delivery to the London office containing the pre-invasion *Chase* films by Scherman [sic] ... and Capa's *Chase* films." Morris, "The A. D. Coleman Attack," unpaginated.

[177] The logistics involved in Capa's transferring a packet of films from the *Chase* (or the *Henrico*) to Morris sometime on June 4-5, for arrival in London on June 6, defy probability. And this assumes that the military and censors would have cooperated in expediting the transport and clearance for publication of press photographs depicting an ongoing top-secret operation.

Clearly, Whelan concocted it because, in both the exhibition *This is War!* and its catalog, he included examples of Capa's pre-invasion 35mm images. Though he had certainly become aware of their existence while working on his Capa biography in the early 1980s, this marked the first publication of those images in a project bearing both Whelan's name and ICP's. The existence of these films and their caption notes, hitherto unknown to anyone save himself, his assistant Cynthia Young, John Morris, and Cornell Capa, demanded justification. The most logical explanation -- that they were part of Capa's sole June 7 shipment to Morris -- undercut Morris's insistence that he had received only four rolls of 35mm film from Capa that night, all of them images of combat on Easy Red, and that all but a small part of one of those rolls had been destroyed.

Thus a second shipment of film from Capa, preceding the legendary June 7 package, required invention -- a fabulation that Whelan dutifully delivered. John Morris, in desperate need of some rationale for the pre-invasion 35mm films and caption sheets in the ICP Capa Archive, would put his own stamp of approval on this tortured tale of an "advance packet" from Capa and Scherman in his January 2015 response to our investigation.[178]

With which troops did Capa embed himself for the landing on the section of the Normandy coast code-named "Omaha Beach"?

In his memoir, Capa claimed, famously, "Colonel [George] Taylor, commander of the 16th Infantry Regiment, of the 1st Division, tipped me off that regimental headquarters would follow close behind the first wave of infantry. This sounded like the real favorite -- an even-money bet -- two to one to be alive in the evening. ... [But] I am a gambler. I decided to go in with Company E in the first wave."[179] E Company (nicknamed "Easy Company") was part of the 16th

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The logistics involved in Capa's transferring a packet of films from the *Chase* (or the *Henrico*) to LST 317, and Scherman then transmitting Capa's films, plus films of his own, from LST 317 back to Morris in London for arrival early on June 7, would have been equally daunting; both were afloat in a vast armada of 5000 vessels, under radio silence and blackout conditions.

[178] Morris, "The A. D. Coleman Attack," unpaginated.

[179] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 137. SHAEF plans for the June 6 invasion involved 22 waves altogether, launched at intervals between 2 and 12 minutes. The number of waves launched from a given vessel, the starting times thereof, and the intervals between them, depended of course on that ship's size, the number of troops it carried, and the destination and purpose of that wave, among other factors. All this fit into an intricate plan devised over a period

Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Division (nicknamed "The Big Red One"). E Company crossed the channel on the U.S.S. *Henrico*, with some of its troops going in as part of the first wave -- hence Whelan's contortions to place Capa with them.

In fact, however, Operation Overlord (as the invasion was known), planned to the last detail, had no tolerance for prima donnas. Even accredited, respected, and famous press correspondents did not get to decide for themselves which ship they rode, much less which waves they would accompany. The U.S.S. *Chase*, which supported the attack on Easy Red, also served as command center for the 1st Division. Capa landed with the commander (Colonel Taylor) and headquarters staff of the 16th, to which SHAEF had assigned him.

With what "wave" did Capa approach the beach?

According to the official history of the U.S. Coast Guard, 15 waves of LCVPs (commonly called Higgins boats) carrying troops left the U.S.S. *Samuel Chase* for Omaha Beach that morning. The first wave consisted of assault battalions, the second -- arriving just two minutes later -- of "Gap Assault Teams": demolition specialists, engineers tasked with destroying the obstacles impeding access to the beach, while the first wave provided them with covering fire. The schedule allowed these engineers 30 minutes to accomplish that task as best they could, after which waves of assault troops and various forms of support would arrive at 10-minute intervals, the last one leaving the *Chase* at 8:30.[180]

In Capa's first cluster of Omaha Beach photos (CS frame 1/neg. 29-CS frame 5/neg. 33), all made from the front of the Higgins boat before Capa stepped off, we see at least four distinct layers of troops ahead of him and the soldiers with whom he landed. Some have even reached the middle of the dry beach. We also see four and possibly five assault vehicles ahead of them (CS frame 3/neg. 31), indicating that one or more demolition teams had already cleared enough obstacles that these vehicles could make their way through the

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of several years.

[180] See Scott T. Price, "The U. S. Coast Guard at Normandy" (undated), United States Coast Guard, https://www.uscg.mil/history/articles/h_normandy.asp.

obstacles, some even to the shoreline. Finally, we see Capa's traveling companions carrying not small-arms assault weapons but bulky oilskin-wrapped bundles, most likely radios and other supplies for the command post they meant to establish.

In two images from Capa's second group (CS frame 7/neg. 35 and CS frame 8/neg. 36) we see a demolition team at work, preparing to blow up a cluster of obstacles. Since those engineers constituted the second wave, and Capa arrived behind them after their work was well underway, he could not possibly have landed with the first wave.[181]

When did Capa arrive at the section of Omaha Beach code-named "Easy Red'?

According to the official history of the U.S. Coast Guard,[182] LCVPs carrying troops left the U.S.S. *Samuel Chase* for Omaha Beach beginning at 5:30 on D-Day. These boats had a top speed of 12 miles per hour, less in the heavy seas that prevailed that morning. The *Chase*'s mooring point lay 11 miles from the beach. The trip thus took at least an hour, usually more, putting the first wave there at 6:30 or later, the second wave some minutes thereafter. Capa therefore could not possibly have arrived any earlier than 7:20.

However, in his very first account of his experiences on June 6, dictated on June 9 to Charles Christian Wertenbaker (*Time* senior correspondent and head of Time and Life's European staff), Capa stated, "[J]ust before 6 o'clock we were lowered in our LCVP and we started for the beach.'[183] This too places Capa

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[181] Capa's failure to provide caption notes for these exposures resulted in 70 years of misidentification of these heroic engineers -- members of Gap Assault Team 10 -- as terrified assault troops pinned down and hiding behind those "hedgehogs." See Charles Herrick, "Guest Post 17: Charles Herrick on Capa's D-Day (a)," Photocritic International, June 6, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/06/06/guest-post-17-charles-herrick-on-capas-d-day/, and "Guest Post 17: Charles Herrick on Capa's D-Day (b)," Photocritic International, June 8, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/06/08/guest-post-17-charles-herrick-on-capas-d-day-b/.

[182] See Price, *op. cit*.

[183] Robert Capa, "LIFE's Reports: War Photographers' Stories," *Life* 16:26, June 26, 1944, p. 13. On or about June 9 Capa dictated this account to *Time* senior correspondent Charles Wertenbaker, who transcribed it verbatim for this *Life* story, which includes brief comments on their invasion experiences by seven of the magazine's photographers. This account appeared later, in the same form, in Charles Christian Wertenbaker, *Invasion!* (New York: D. Appleton

well behind the first and second waves from the *Chase*. In fact, he almost certainly rode in with Col. Taylor and his staff in the thirteenth wave, which left the *Chase* just before 6:00 and, due to some delays, landed on Easy Red at 8:15,[184] a half hour after the last of the 16th Infantry Regiment's nine rifle companies.

Exactly where did Capa land on Easy Red?

Using distinctive landmarks visible in Capa's photos (CS frame 2/neg. 30-CS frame 5/neg. 33), Charles Herrick has pinpointed this: the beach at Colleville-sur-Mer.[185] Gap Assault Team 10 had charge of the obstacles in that sector. An existing exit off this sector made it possible to reach the top of the bluffs with relative ease. Col. Taylor would become famous for announcing to the hesitant troops he found there, "Two kinds of people are staying on this beach, the dead and those who are going to die -- now let's get the hell out of here," and urging them up the Colleville-sur-Mer draw to the bluffs.

Not incidentally, both the time and place of Capa's arrival on Easy Red contradict the current identification of Huston "Hu" Riley as "The Face in the Surf" in Capa's penultimate exposure on Easy Red (CS frame 9/neg. 37). Pfc. Riley came in with Section 2, Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, which landed at 0640, 10 minutes behind schedule, on the eastern part of Fox Green Beach. [186] (It also contradicts the earlier identification of "The Face in the Surf" as Pfc. Edward J. Regan of King Company, 3rd Battalion, 116th Regiment,

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Century Co., 1944), pp. 42-44; this was a "quickie" book, published on September 18, 1944 -- just three and a half months after the invasion -- with illustrations by Capa.

184 See Albert H. Smith, Jr., "Operation Overlord and D-Day, 6 June 1944," transcript of an unpublished lecture by this retired U.S. Army general, discussing the events on Omaha Beach on D-Day, to which he was an eyewitness. He delivered this lecture at The Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky, on April 18, 1985. In a footnote on p. 12, Smith indicates that Col. Taylor landed on Easy Red at 8:15. Available online at http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a165441.pdf.

185 See Charles Herrick, "Guest Post 20: Charles Herrick on Capa's D-Day (c)," Photocritic International, September 20, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/09/20/guest-post-20-charles-herrick-on-capas-d-day-c/, and "Guest Post 20: Charles Herrick on Capa's D-Day (d)," Photocritic International, September 23, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/09/23/guest-post-20-charles-herrick-on-capas-d-day-d/.

186 Lowell L. Getz, "The Face in the Surf," IDEALS: the Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship, October 2007, https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/2443/FaceInTheSurf.html.

29th Infantry Division, which came ashore in the second wave at 0725, landing on the east-central part of Easy Green Beach.)

What conditions greeted Capa and the troops with whom he traveled when they arrived at Colleville-sur-Mer?

Fortuitously, that stretch of Easy Red represented a seam in the German defenses, a weak point at the far end of the effective range of two widely separated German blockhouses. Both cannon fire and small-arms fire there proved relatively light -- one reason for the success of Gap Assault Team 10 in clearing obstacles in that area.[187] This also explains why, contrary to Capa's narrative, his images show no carnage, no floating bodies and body parts, no discarded equipment, and no bullet or shell splashes. This also explains why the Allies broke through early at that very point.

How far did Capa progress while on Easy Red?

Though his pictures indicate that he had a clear path all the way to the beach, no evidence indicates that Capa got further than Armored Assault Vehicle 10, which appears on the left-hand side of several of his images (most clearly in CS frame 4/neg. 32). Capa described this as "one of our half-burnt amphibious tanks."[188] In fact, it was a modified American tank, a "wading Sherman," not amphibious (merely waterproofed to the top of its treads) and not burnt out; later images of that stretch of Easy Red show this tank undamaged, closer to the dry beach, and apparently in action. Taken in conjunction with the known presence at that point of Gap Assault Team 10, the large numeral 10 on this vehicle's rear vent suggests that it was a so-called "tank dozer," one of which landed with each demolition team that morning. The U.S. Army had modified these tanks by adding detachable bulldozer "blades," so that they could clear the debris after the engineers blew up the obstacles.

How many 35mm exposures did Capa make while on Easy Red?

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[187] See Herrick, “Guest Post 20."

[188] The amphibious or "DD" tanks, of British make and design, were part of a cluster of specialized vehicles collectively known as "Hobart's Funnies," after their inventor, Major General Sir Percy Cleghorn Stanley Hobart. Several of these can be seen, albeit dimly, near the shoreline in some of Capa's images -- further evidence that he arrived well after the first wave.

In his memoir, Capa implies that he exposed at most two full rolls of 35mm film -- one roll in each of his two Contax II rangefinder cameras, 72 frames in all -- at Omaha Beach. By the end of that chapter, this has grown to "one hundred and six pictures in all, [of which] only eight were salvaged."[189] We find no reason to believe that Capa made more than the ten 35mm images of which we have physical evidence.

Why did Capa leave the battlefield?

In his first account of that morning's events, he wrote, "[A]fter an hour and a half my film was all used up."[190] This makes no sense, since no photojournalist goes into a major battle such as that without an ample supply of film -- surely more than the mere three rolls of 35mm that Capa claimed to have exposed or the four rolls that Morris eventually claimed for him. In his memoir, Capa acknowledges succumbing to a panic attack, but indicates that he did so only when he had reached the dry beach and made photographs from that vantage point, "frantically [shooting] frame after frame," after which he found himself too distraught to reload his camera.[191]

According to one of his biographers, when he accepted the *Life* assignment for the Normandy invasion and sailed from Italy (where he had covered the battle for Anzio) to London in February 1944, "Capa left the [Italian] front badly shaken."[192] We must consider the possibility that he suffered from what they then called "shell shock" and we now call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As he wrote in *Slightly Out of Focus*, "The war correspondent gets more drinks, more girls, better pay, and greater freedom than the soldier, but ... having the freedom to choose his spot and being allowed to be a coward and not be executed for it is his torture."[193]

How long did Capa stay on Easy Red before fleeing to the relative safety of a landing craft?

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[189] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), pp. 133-52.
[190] Capa, "LIFE's Reports: War Photographers' Stories," *loc. cit*.
[191] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 148.
[192] Kershaw, p. 115.
[193] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 137.

Even if he had gone in with the third wave, Capa would have landed on Easy Red certainly no earlier than 7:20. By his own account, he boarded an outgoing landing craft sometime around 7:50. So, in that version, he had his boots on the ground for no more than 30 minutes. If, as the military documentation suggests, he went in with Taylor and regimental HQ in the thirteenth wave, he landed at 8:15 at the earliest, and would have boarded that outgoing landing craft by 8:37, when it left the beach. Either scenario would explain the small number of exposures he made during that time.

What landing craft did he wade to, and how long did he rest and recover on it before its departure from the beach?

Capa left Easy Red aboard LCI(L)-94, a landing craft that brought medics in to Easy Red and evacuated the wounded. No fewer than three witnesses place Capa on this vessel: crew members Charles Jarreau, Clifford W. Lewis, and Victor Haboush.[194] According to Capa, once he reached LCI(L)-94 he put away his Contax II, working thenceforth only with his Rolleiflex. One of the images he made while aboard this vessel, published in the D-Day feature story in *Life*, shows Haboush assisting a medic treating a casualty.[195]

LCI(L)-94 reached Easy Red at 0830, according to an aalyses of the documents by Charles Herrick. Capa claimed to have clambered aboard immediately after this vessel disembarked its passengers (a group of medics),[196] which would put him there sometime around 0840. This boat would have left the beach immediately, but one of its lines became tangled with a nearby LCVP, preventing its departure, and while the crew struggled to disengage that line

[194] For details of their accounts and links thereto, see A. D. Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (10)," Photocritic International, July 6, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/07/06/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-10/, and “Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (25),” Photocritic International, August 2, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/08/02/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-25/. U.S. Coast Guard Chief Photographer's Mate David T. Ruley, covering the invasion from his assigned position on board LCI(L)-94, filmed Capa as he left the beach, thus becoming the fourth eyewitness to Capa's presence on that vessel. Charles Herrick, who recently found Ruley's film and identified Capa therein, will write about this discovery in upcoming posts at my blog.

[195] Unsigned, "Beachheads of Normandy," *Life* 16:25, June 19, 1944, p. 30.

[196] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 148.

three enemy shells hit the vessel at 0850, killing one of the crew, injuring another, and delaying its departure further.

Capa claimed to have just come aboard when that happened; whether that was true, or whether he simply folded those events into his narrative for added drama, remains unclear. Most likely, he ran to LCI(L)-94 just minutes after he arrived, and shortly before it pulled out.

Unfouling the line, coping with the damage, and caring for the wounded took some time; LCI(L)-94 did not leave Easy Red until around 0900, meaning that if Capa did indeed clamber aboard at 0840 he then stayed there -- still on the edge of the beach -- for an additional 20 minutes, giving him time to pull himself together and return to fulfilling his assignment had he so chosen.

In his account, Capa conflates LCI(L)-94 with LCI(L)-85;[197] the latter, irreparably damaged by enemy fire, managed to return to the *Chase* and offload its wounded and crew before sinking. Again, he may have incorporated that event into his own narrative to embroider the storyline. Less glamorously, despite the damage it had sustained LCI(L)-94 remained in action until decommissioned on April 19, 1946.[198]

When did that landing craft reach the U.S.S. Chase*?*

Given the damage to the craft, and the fact that, although lightened of its load, it was moving against the incoming tide, it seems reasonable to assume that LCI(L)-94 took 90 minutes or more to return to the *Chase*. That would put it there sometime around 10:30. Capa noted that "On the *Chase*, the last wave of the 16th Infantry was just being lowered" when they arrived.[199] Given the schedule of waves leaving from the *Chase*, this seems doubtful at best -- they would all have departed by 8:30.[200]

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[197] "Our boat was listing and we slowly pulled away from the beach to try and reach the mother ship before we sank. ... An invasion barge came alongside and took us off the sinking boat." Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), pp. 148-49. Richard Whelan uses this passage to make the convoluted argument that Capa actually left the beach twice -- first on LCI(L)-85 and then, after returning to the beach to make more photographs, on LCI(L)-94. Neither Capa's narrative nor any logic or evidence supports this theory. See Whelan, *This is War!*, pp. 235-37.
[198] See Unsigned, "USS LCI(L)-94" (undated), NavSource Naval History: Photographic History of the U.S. Navy, http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/15/150094.htm.
[199] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 149.
[200] See Price, "The U. S. Coast Guard at Normandy."

When did Capa land back in England, and where?

At 0536 on the morning of June 7, the U.S.S. *Samuel Chase* dropped anchor in Portland Harbour, outside Weymouth. According to Charles Herrick,

> "The first boat that came alongside was the tug HMS *Queen Empress*, at 1045 hours, there to take off casualties, survivors and dead. The tug was logged as leaving the *Chase* at 1245 hours, so it took two hours to transfer the living and the dead. This means that Capa (technically a "straggler" in the eyes of the military) could not have reached shore before 1300 hours, or 7-plus hours after the ship dropped anchor. This reduces considerably the time gap between his reaching shore and the arrival of his films in London circa 2100 hours that night."[201]

Who met him there?

David Scherman. Scherman, as previously noted, had made the crossing aboard LST 317. Rather than landing in Normandy with those medics and their ambulances, he elected to remain on the same vessel as it took on casualties, photographing medics tending to the wounded while en route to a transport ship, which would carry those injured troops back to England. Scherman transferred from LST 317 to that ship with them; his assignment had him following the wounded to a British hospital.

Scherman's original account[202] has Capa already on the dock as Scherman's ship pulled in; Whelan's version has Scherman, much later,

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[201] See Charles Herrick, "Guest Post 24: Charles Herrick on Capa's D-Day (f)," Photocritic International, May 17, 2017, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2017/05/17/guest-post-24-charles-herrick-on-capas-d-day-f/. For background on this harbor, see Ashley Smith, "Portland Harbour" (undated), The Encyclopedia of Portland History, http://www.portland-port.co.uk/history: "On 1 May 1944 the harbour was commissioned as USNAAB Portland-Weymouth. ... The harbour itself, along with Weymouth, was a major embarkation point for American troops during D-Day, particularly the US 1st Division who embarked for 'Omaha Beach' in June 1944." This may explain David Scherman's confused claim that he and Capa met that morning in Portsmouth, as reported in Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, p. 213*n*. Scherman also claims therein that the *Chase* arrived on the evening of June 6, not the next morning. Whelan inexplicably endorses both of Scherman's claims, though this means that Capa's and Scherman's films took 24 hours to reach Morris in London. Military records refute both claims; see Unsigned, "The Coast Guard at War Transports & Escorts Vol. II--Transports," May 1, 1949, HyperWar, http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USCG/V2-Transports/.

[202] Scherman, David, "LIFE's Reports: War Photographers' Stories," *loc. cit*.

indicating that it happened the other way around.[203] In any case, Scherman made a now-famous portrait of Capa that morning, on some vessel presumably docked at Weymouth, possibly the tugboat on which he came in from the *Chase*.

How did Capa's film get to London?

Capa's primary professional responsibility at that moment was to deliver his films to John Morris in London, to ensure meeting the impending deadline of 9 a.m. on June 8. Had Scherman planned to return to London, Capa would most likely have entrusted his films to his colleague's care. However, Scherman intended to follow the wounded with whom he'd made the return trip to the hospital where medical staff awaited them, thus rounding out his coverage for *Life*.

So, instead of taking charge of Scherman's films and carrying them both to *Life* himself, Capa -- who claimed that he was immediately offered a plane ride to London,[204] which would have put him there within a few hours -- turned his films over to a courier. Scherman presumably did the same. For reasons still unknown, it took that courier 8 hours to put those films in Morris's hands, creating a crisis situation in relation to the deadline. Capa caught the next ship heading back to Normandy.

What of Capa's claim that, upon landing back in Normandy and rejoining his correspondent colleagues early on the morning of June 8, he found them holding a wake in his honor, consequent to a press release announcing his death on Easy Red?

Capa wrote, "I had been reported dead by a sergeant who had seen my body floating on the water with my cameras around my neck. I had been missing for forty-eight hours, my death had become official, and my obituaries had just been released by the censor."[205] No correspondent has ever corroborated that story. No such obituary ever saw print (as it surely would have), no copy thereof has ever surfaced, and no record of it exists in the censors' logs. Purest fiction, meant for the silver screen.

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[203] Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, p. 213.
[204] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 152.
[205] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 162.

What films did Capa's share of that shipment to Morris include?

In addition to the eight surviving negatives from the partial roll of 35mm Kodak Super-XX on which Capa's ten Easy Red images appeared, ICP's Capa Archive holds partial rolls of four additional rolls of 36-exposure 35mm Kodak film (2 rolls of Plus-X, 2 rolls of Super-XX). They are described in Capa's handwritten notes on small pre-printed sheets of caption notes bearing the *Life* logo.[206] These show troops boarding at Weymouth; troops relaxing on deck in daytime (gambling, reading, napping, writing letters); and officers attending a briefing and studying a relief map of the Normandy coast in the gymnasium of the *Chase*.

The archive also holds an additional sheet of Capa's caption notes for a roll of 35mm exposures (presumably on Super-XX film) that he indicates he made at twilight on deck on the evening of June 5, with the armada en route to Normandy; the archive contains no examples of negatives from that roll. Conceivably, those images, now apparently lost, comprised the first two-thirds of the roll at the end of which the ten Omaha Beach exposures appear. Possibly, however, they occupied an entire fifth roll. Capa thus sent Morris a minumum of five rolls of 35mm film, and perhaps a sixth, on the morning of June 7.[207]

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[206] See my reports on my examination of these negatives and their contact sheets: A. D. Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (13)," Photocritic International, October 12, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/10/12/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-13/, and "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (14)," Photocritic International, October 19, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/10/19/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-14/.

[207] No sheet of caption notes for Capa's ten Omaha Beach images in Capa's own hand exists in the International Center of Photography's Robert Capa and Cornell Capa Archive. Presumably he provided none. Morris himself must have provided some -- drafted hastily on the night of June 7 -- for both the set that he sent to *Life* and the set that he provided to the press pool; that was required of him by his employer and by the pool.

As for the captions that appeared with Capa's pictures in the June 19 issue, Richard Whelan writes,

> "Dennis Flanagan, the assistant associate editor who wrote the captions and text that accompanied Capa's images in *Life*, recalls that he depended on the *New York Times* for background information, and *for specifics he interpreted what he saw in the photographs*. [Emphasis added.] Some information about Capa given in the issue appears in a dispatch from Charles Wertenbaker dated June 13, but New York obviously received the information in an earlier dispatch that has since been lost. *Life* -- with the seven lead pages of the news section devoted to Capa's photographs -- hit the newsstands on Moday, June 12." (*This Is War!*, p. 248.)

Thus the wildly inaccurate captions that (to use Roland Barthes's term) "anchor" Capa's images in *Life*'s D-Day issue either got revised from John Morris's last-minute inventions in London or written entirely from scratch by someone in the New York office, even further removed

The archive also holds 15 Kodak 120mm-film exposures, made with Capa's Rolleiflex. Some of these repeat in larger format the same pre-landing scenes Capa also photographed with his Contax II. Others he made on LCI(L)-94 as it departed Easy Red, and aboard the *Chase* as it headed back to England. Nothing else appears to remain of the six rolls of 120mm film that John Morris claims Capa sent to London from Weymouth -- no negatives for any of the Capa 120mm-film images reproduced in the D-Day issue of *Life*.[208]

Finally, the archive holds five 4x5 exposures on Kodak film of officers studying the relief map of the coast in the gymnasium of the Chase, presumably made by Capa with a borrowed Speed Graphic. (Capa did not normally carry a Speed Graphic in combat situations.)[209]

What is the condition of these negatives?

The remaining eight of Capa's Easy Red negatives all have semicircular notches clipped from their borders. This was done (presumably by John Morris) with an editor's edge notcher, a hand-held device used to indicate those frames that the editor wanted the darkroom to print. Additionally, the borders of those negatives show some crimping, the predictable result of less than archival handling over the years. The very last, CS frame 10/neg. 38, appears slightly stretched along its left edge, most likely the result of not getting completely cut free of its neighbor before the two were separated by hand. All the other negatives appear in excellent shape, especially given their age.

What of the claims that -- with the exception of the few surviving Omaha Beach negatives -- four rolls of Capa's 35mm films were accidentally destroyed by heat after development?

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from the action.

The caption from which Capa claimed to derive his memoir's title he paraphrases thus: "The captions under the heat-blurred pictures read that Capa's hands were badly shaking." In fact, the caption under the image known as "The Face in the Surf" reads, with apparent accuracy, "Immense excitement of moment made photographer Capa move his camera and blur picture." See Unsigned, "Beachheads of Normandy," p. 27. The phrase "slightly out of focus" does not appear in the *Life* story.

[208] See Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (14)."

[209] *Ibid*.

None of the 35mm negatives described above show any visible sign of damage by heat. Though the eight 35mm Omaha Beach negatives are "thin" (slightly underexposed) compared to the other rolls of 35mm in the same group, all these films appear to have undergone successful standard processing in *Life*'s London darkroom on the night of June 7, 1944.

Since Capa did not witness the avowed ruination of his work, this far-fetched yarn had to originate with John Morris, the only person from whom Capa could have heard it. For decades, Morris claimed to have seen those "ruined" negatives. Subsequent to our investigation, he has changed that to "I simply quoted what Dennis [sic] Banks said to me on the night of June 7, 1944."[210] The likelihood of *Life* darkroom chief "Braddy" Bradshaw approving his underling's misinforming Morris in this way seems nil. The Occam's-razor explanation for Morris himself making it up? He needed to justify to his boss and Capa's -- executive editor Wilson Hicks, in the New York office[211] -- the paltry number of images of actual combat that Capa had submitted on this high-profile assignment.[212]

The public claim of catastrophic darkroom damage to additional negatives of the landing originated with Capa.[213] It appeared first in Charles Christian

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[210] Young, Bruce, *op. cit.,* p. 52.

[211] Hicks was one of *Life*'s two "executive editors" at the time (Daniel Longwell was the other). Ed Thompson, its chief picture editor when they hired Morris, had taken a leave of absence starting in January 1943 to create and edit the U.S. Air Force magazine *Impact*, headquartered at the Pentagon in Washington DC. Presumably Hicks oversaw picture-editing duties in his absence, with help from Bart Sheridan, listed alongside Morris as "assistant picture editor" on that D-Day issue's masthead. In his role as editor-in-chief of *Impact*, Thompson was in London for D-Day. See Morris, *Get the Picture*, p. 74. But he had no input into *Life*'s coverage of the invasion.

[212] Richard Whelan claims that a subsequent congratulatory telegram to Capa from *Life* picture editor Wilson Hicks attributed the purported loss of his other D-Day negatives to seawater damage. (Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography*, p. 214.) I have not verified this. If so, and Hicks had in fact received a letter from Morris attributing this to a darkroom accident, he was then attempting to shift the blame for the loss from *Life* to chance -- not softening the blow for Capa but dodging the magazine's responsibility in the situation as he understood it.

[213] The *Life* "Beachheads of Normandy" story made no mention of any damage to Capa's negatives, though an unsigned editor's note asserted (wrongly) that "As he waded out to get aboard [an LCT], his cameras were thoroughly soaked." (Cameras thus damaged would require repair; Capa continued to use them when he returned to Normandy the next day.)
Notably, Morris's most recently published comment on the matter, a response to an article of mine published at the website iMediaEthics, revives this notion:

> "The only thing I have changed in my story is that I became convinced that Dennis [sic] Banks was mistaken when he said that three of Capa's four rolls of 35mm film that he

Wertenbaker's *Invasion!,* published in September 1944, but told in Wertenbaker's words, not Capa's ("A careless dark-room assistant ruined all but seven of them.")[214] It appeared next, later that fall, in John McNamara's book for young adults, *Extra! U.S. War Correspondents in Action*, this time in McNamara's words, but with Cornell Capa credited as the source.[215] As previously noted, Robert Capa put his imprimatur on it in *Slightly Out of Focus*:

> "Seven days later, I learned that the pictures I had taken on 'Easy Red' were the best of the invasion. But the excited darkroom assistant, while drying the negatives, had turned on too much heat and the emulsions had melted and run down before the eyes of the London office. Out of one hundred and six pictures in all, only eight were salvaged. The captions under the heat-blurred pictures read that Capa's hands were badly shaking."[216]

Slowly but steadily thereafter, that fiction worked its way into the lore of the medium, and the lore of D-Day.

I should add that ICP has declined to undertake any non-invasive forensic analysis of any of those negatives[217] in order to verify or impeach that institution's steadfast assertion over the past four decades that these negatives underwent and miraculously survived some disastrous post-development "emulsion melt" in *Life*'s London darkroom on the night of June 7, 1944.

What of the claim by Richard Whelan and Cynthia Young that Capa's surviving Omaha Beach negatives show that the supposedly melted emulsion

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> developed had been ruined by too much heat. I think we shall never know what ruined them -- *perhaps sea water*. [Emphasis added.] I know that I personally inspected them in the *Life* darkroom that night and threw them away as there was nothing on them -- just like Dennis [sic] Banks had said."

See A. D. Coleman, "Conflict of Interest, Cubed: Robert Capa's D-Day Photos, John Morris, and the NPPA," iMediaEthics, February 27, 2017, http://www.imediaethics.org/conflict-interest-cubed-robert-capas-d-day-photos-john-morris-nppa/.

[214] Wertenbaker, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

[215] "The man in the darkroom in London, by using, in his haste, developing fluids of improper temperature, had ruined all the rest." John McNamara, "Front-Line Photographer," in *Extra! U.S. War Correspondents in Action* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1945), pp. 212-13, 215. McNamara credits Cornell Capa as his source for this.

[216] Capa, *Slightly Out of Focus* (second ed.), p. 152.

[217] The simple expedient of microscopic examination could easily determine whether the distribution pattern of the silver particles in the emulsion of those negatives had undergone any physical disruption.

thereon actually slid horizontally while suspended in the film-drying cabinet, as evidenced by the image areas of those negatives overlapping the sprocket holes on the film?

Whelan made this claim for the first time in the 2007 catalog *This Is War!*[218] On June 6, 2013, Cynthia Young, who succeeded Whelan as Curator of the Capa Archive, not only repeated this claim but plagiarized its language in a statement about Capa's D-Day images posted at the ICP website.[219]

Plagiarism aside, this is an outright lie. As Rob McElroy has demonstrated inarguably, the overlapping of the sprocket holes resulted from a mechanical problem -- a minor misalignment caused by Kodak's 1934 reconfiguration of its 35mm film cassettes, which eventually became the industry standard.[220] This affected not only Capa's Contax II cameras but also Leicas and other makes of camera whose manufacturers did not rapidly adapt their products to Kodak's new cassette design. Thus this same effect appears on negatives exposed by numerous other photographers of the period, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Ruth Orkin among them. It is not unique to Capa, and certainly not unique to his D-Day films.

Unquestionably, both Whelan and Young knew this. As I discovered during my research in the ICP Capa Archive, the three-ring looseleaf binder that holds the contact sheets for Capa's D-Day coverage also holds contact sheets going back to February 10, 1944, most of which show that same sprocket-hole

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[218] Whelan, *This is War!*, p. 239.

[219] Cynthia Young, "The Story Behind Robert Capa's Pictures of D-Day," ICPHOTO, June 6, 2013, http://icphoto.tumblr.com/post/52321591872/the-story-behind-robert-capas-pictures-of-d-day. This appeared originally bearing the credit line "Written by Cynthia Young, ICP Curator of the Capa Archives." It has since been revised to credit Whelan with the text. A screenshot of this plagiarized passage, with Young's byline, appears at A. D. Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (15)," Photocritic International, October 26, 2014, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2014/10/26/alternate-history-robert-capa-on-d-day-15/. I have retained a pdf file of the entire page for verification.

[220] See Rob McElroy, "Guest Post 16: Rob McElroy on Robert Capa, 2 (a)," Photocritic International, May 17, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/05/17/guest-post-16-rob-mcelroy-on-robert-capa-2-a/, and “Guest Post 16: Rob McElroy on Robert Capa, 2 (b),” Photocritic International, May 20, 2015, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2015/05/20/guest-post-16-rob-mcelroy-on-robert-capa-2-b/.

overlap.[221] The contents of this binder, readily accessible and surely familiar to both Whelan and Young in their positions as Capa Archive curators, immediately impeaches their claim that this effect serves as evidence of damage to Capa's D-Day films.

Given the official position that first Whelan and now Young have occupied at ICP, they are de facto the world's foremost authorities on Robert Capa. As such they represent, with regrettable accuracy, the deplorable condition of Capa scholarship in our time.

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The myth of Capa's D-Day and the fate of his Omaha Beach negatives falls apart as soon as one compares its narrative to the military documentation of that epic battle. It collapses entirely when one examines closely the physical evidence -- those photographs and their negatives.

The promulgation of that myth by the Capa Consortium, all of whose members have a vested financial and public-relations interest in furthering the myth, has proved itself calculated, systematic, duplicitous, and self-serving. Its voluntary dissemination by others, including reputable scholars and journalists, has shown those authors as lazy, careless, and professionally irresponsible.

As I write this, our investigation draws to a close. I would like to think we have made a sufficiently convincing case that no one can credibly tell the standard Capa D-Day story again, at least not without acknowledging our contrary narrative. After all, our investigation forced John Morris, the most energetic and vocal proponent of the legend, to recant its central components on Christiane Amanpour's CNN show in the fall of 2014[222] and elsewhere -- most recently in the *New York Times*.[223] He has admitted that he'd never actually seen any heat-damaged 35mm negatives; that Capa may have only made the ten

[221] See Coleman, "Alternate History: Robert Capa on D-Day (15)."
[222] Christiane Amanpour, "Mystery deepens over D-Day pictures," CNN/Amanpour, November 11, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2014/11/11/intv-amanpour-john-morris-robert-capa-war.cnn.
[223] See James Estrin, "As He Turns 100, John Morris Recalls a Century in Photojournalism," Lensblog, *New York Times*, December 6, 2016, http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/as-he-turns-100-john-morris-recalls-a-century-in-photojournalism/.

surviving images; and that he may have stayed on Omaha Beach only long enough to make them. So the revisionism has begun.

But then, on January 5, 2015, Morris issued a lengthy denunciation, "The A. D. Coleman Attack," in which he proposed an absurd "new theory" riddled with discrepancies, aimed primarily at exonerating himself from all responsibility for originating any part of this myth.[224] And on June 6, 2016, ICP published this post on the institution's Facebook page: "During the D-Day landing at Omaha beach [sic], Robert Capa shot four rolls of 35mm film -- only 11 frames survived. By accident, a darkroom worker in London ruined the majority of the film."[225]

It took 70 years and the collaborative energies of powerful institutions and individuals to embed this fable in our cultural consciousness. Clearly, we still have much work to do if we hope to dismantle this fiction and dislodge it from the mythology of photojournalism and photo history -- not to mention the larger D-Day myth into which it has become so thoroughly woven. But at least that process has begun.[226]

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Une autre histoire : Les photos du Débarquement de Robert Capa." Études Photographiques 35. Apr. 2017. pp. 26-59, 173-74. (French translation. This unpublished English-language version is forthcoming in *Exposure*, fall 2018.)

[224] Morris, "The A. D. Coleman Attack," unpaginated. For more recidivism on Morris's part, see also note 85.
[225] ICP Facebook page, Facebook, June 6, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/internationalcenterofphotography/posts/10154225867033622.
[226] For my consideration of the ethical implications of this episode, see A. D. Coleman, "Ethics in Photojournalism, Then and Now: The Case of Robert Capa," *Media Ethics* 27:2, March 2016, http://mediaethicsmagazine.com/index.php/browse-back-issues/201-spring-2016-vol-27-no-2/3999107-ethics-in-photojournalism-then-and-now-the-case-of-robert-capa.

Photography and the Art Market

Where's the Money?

There are several ways of looking at the recent symposium, "Collecting the Photograph," which took place on September 20th under the sponsorship of *Art in America*. Its symbolic implications, its political ramifications, and its actual proceedings merit consideration, and the viewpoints from which it might be studied include those of the collector of photographs, the scholar/historian/curator, and the photographer.

For obvious reasons, all of these aspects are going to receive short shrift in this account, but I hope to touch on a number of the important issues it raised from all those standpoints.

First, some basics. The symposium was, as noted, sponsored by *Art in America*, a widely-read magazine which has paid very little serious attention to photography (much less than its closest rival, *Artforum*). Embarrassingly little attention, in fact; so this symposium was obviously an attempt to make a big plunge into the now hot medium of photography before this failure of editorial judgment became any more ludicrous.

"Collecting the Photograph" was widely advertised. There were mailings from the magazine and ads in the *New York Times*; I even received a gratuitous announcement of the event from *Aperture*. This push was no doubt considered necessary because the tickets were priced at a hefty $50 apiece.

The symposium was not presented at any of the numerous educational institutions in the city, but at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center -- one of the poshest showcases in New York. Since nothing in the program necessitated that auditorium's excellent acoustics or lavish appointments (or exorbitant rental fee), it was obviously selected to apply the bourgeois veneer of high culture and wealth to the proceedings.

The participants in the panel were Peter Bunnell, now Director of the Princeton University Art Museum; John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography; Nathan Lyons, Director of the

Visual Studies Workshop; Weston Naef, Assistant Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; E. John Bullard, Director of the New Orleans Museum of Art; Harry Lunn of the Lunn Gallery in Washington, D.C.; and Sam Wagstaff, a private collector. The moderator was Eugenia Parry Janis, Assistant Professor of Art at Wellesley College.

Breaking down the lineup, then, we have the overlapping imprimaturs of four major museums, two famous institutions of higher learning, the best-known independent photography workshop, a major art periodical, an active new gallery, and eight individuals of considerable (though varying) personal reputability stamped onto the notion of the collectibility of the photograph as a rare and precious object. (I will leave to the determination of others the question of whether or not it is self-serving or even unethical for representatives of museums -- many of whom are also private collectors of photographs -- to place their institutions' weight behind the marketing of photographs as art commodities.)

So, in terms of its ticket price, its publicity, and its participants, this event was self-evidently meant to promote and capitalize on the current surge of public awareness of photography as a "new" art form and the search by art collectors for something new in which to invest their money for fun and profit. (The very first paragraph of the press release issued by *Art in America* referred to photographs as "the hottest collectibles on the market" and waxed ecstatic about photographs which have brought "unheard-of-sums" and "skyrocketed in price.")

Now to the event. Against all odds, it was on every level (save the symbolic and political) boring and uninformative. It was also poorly planned and poorly run. The advertised schedule had the morning devoted to individual talks by the panelists, with the afternoon reserved for an open forum. While that would have restricted the speakers perhaps too severely in the duration of their prepared statements (the morning session ran from 10:00 to 12:30), it would have made possible some discussion among the

speakers and some active interchange between them and the audience during the afternoon session.

As it turned out, however, the prepared talks consumed virtually all the time of both sessions. The morning session started late, questions were not permitted at the end of the individual speeches, and by the time John Szarkowski finished it was 3:30, which left only half an hour for questions. Whether this was intentional or not I could not tell; it was certainly infuriating.

From the outset, it was obvious that little forethought and coordination had gone into the program. Weston Naef, the first speaker, had prepared a not overly elaborate presentation which simply required the simultaneous appearance of two slides (in different projectors) on the hall's large screen. This was apparently beyond the ability of the hall's projectionist, who was not only unable to synchronize most of the slides but could not even make them fit together on the screen. Nor, for that matter, had anyone had the forethought to provide the speakers with a remote control device with a reverse as well as a forward button, so that once they passed a slide it was gone for good.

Naef's talk depended on the visual referents he had brought, so much of what he had to say was incomprehensible. It was also mostly inaudible, since he tended to talk to the screen rather than to the audience and the microphone levels were not nearly high enough. (This also plagued Nathan Lyons during his talk.) Naef's main theme was the analogy between the various "states" of other graphic works, such as etchings and engravings, and the diverse forms in which a photograph might appear -- a potentially useful analogy, regrettably lost in technical difficulties.

Lyons, looking and acting like a fish out of water, spoke about collecting photographs for visual research, as is being done at the Visual Studies Workshop. He was the only one present who indicated any discomfort with or distaste for the obviously money-oriented tone of the proceedings and their setting. He was also the only panelist who could be --

and quite pointedly asked to be -- considered as a photographer. He has a policy, which I admire and share, of willingness to talk to almost anybody anywhere about the things he believes in. Thus he runs the risks of irrelevance and/or co-option for the chance -- and frequently, as in this case, the off-chance -- that someone will hear his message. Nonetheless, it was refreshing to hear someone talk about collecting without the acquisitive instinct being implicit in the concept. At the end of his speech a Visual Studies Workshop award -- carried to the stage by Les Krims -- was presented to Szarkowski for persuading the Museum of Modern Art to acquire the Eugene Atget archives from Berenice Abbottt.

John Bullard's spot was devoted to the development of the New Orleans Museum's photographic collection, which was begun in 1973. Bullard and his trustees felt that photography was an area where a museum could still build a major collection from scratch on a low budget, and they proceeded to do so. As he indicated in his text and slides, they have centered the collection around Louisiana artists (Laughlin, Bellocq) and photographers who have done some work in the state, such as Genthe and Hine. This regional core has been augmented with strong holdings in other American and European photographers -- Sander, F.H. Evans, Doisneau, Weston, and Cunningham among them. The choices of images have been surprisingly intelligent and often unusual, as will probably be evident from the exhibit and catalogue the museum intends to publish next year. Bullard himself was an enthusiastic and engaging speaker who roused the audience somewhat from the lethargy (stupefaction would be even more accurate) into which it had sunk.

After a lunch of bland sandwiches and mediocre wine, the second session began. Peter Bunnell energetically rattled off a collection of disconnected snippets having to do with his experiences at Princeton and elsewhere. My notes indicate that at one point he referred to the Princeton collection as "my collection." Two pertinent thoughts that he threw out but did not elaborate on sufficiently were (1) that the best way for a university to

start its own photographic collection is to locate and catalogue (and, ideally, centralize for preservation's sake) its own holdings, which are frequently extensive but often scattered and hidden away in the departments of architecture, history, archaeology, etc.; (2) that the real challenge to a museum director would be to start a collection dating from 1946 onward -- post-war photography.

As Eugenia Janis said of the next speaker, Harry Lunn, "He brings us news of the market." Indeed he did. Lots of talk about people buying photographs for lots of money. Lunn, according to rumor, was the instigator of this symposium. Among the news and notes in his pep talk I learned that AT&T has started buying photographs for decoration of its offices. Whoopee, I'm sure.

John Szarkowski topped off the proceedings by defining briefly the various stances a curator can take toward a medium, dismissing most of them as beneath his consideration, and announcing that the highest and most rigorous form of curatorship was autocratic, elitist, and appropriately limited by the curator's own ideas and taste patterns, the narrower the better. As most every MoMA-watcher knows by now, this is a most accurate description of Mr. Szarkowski himself. There are, however, other equally legitimate approaches to curatorship. It is also worth noting that this perambulation was entirely irrelevant to Mr. Szarkowski's announced topic, "The Function of a Photographic Collection in an Art Museum."

There was little time left for questions, but the next half-hour was the most dynamic of the day. It was astonishing to find out how much anger this symposium had touched off in its audience. People strode up to the microphones to denounce *Art in America* for the exorbitant price of tickets (the hall, by the way, was no more than two-thirds full), the badly-planned presentation, and the general irrelevance of many of the talks. No one from the magazine or the panel gave any answer. Dru Shipman of the Society for Photographic Education asked if there were not something antithetical to photography's nature as a democratic and reproducible image-making

medium in the panelists' reverence for the photograph as a precious object. She got a most flippant and cavalier answer ("Sure!") from Szarkowski. Someone else asked why there had been no mention of work subsequent to the Photo-Secession. They got no answer at all. I asked Harry Lunn to state his position on the persistent rumors of cartels, price-fixing, and other such chicanery, practices which have been rampant among some dealers in vintage photographic material for quite a while now. Mr. Lunn would only say that such things happen. I also asked the panelists to enunciate some bare minimum ethics that photographers and photography collectors could expect from dealers and museums. Not one panelist was willing to do so.

In fact, none of the significant issues involved in "collecting the photograph" was explored, save by Nathan Lyons. There are many questions which might have been addressed; these questions were not only unacknowledged and unanswered, but were avoided by the panelists. The symposium did not live up to its own promises, and at 50 dollars a ticket was in fact a blatant rip-off. *Art in America* must certainly be held accountable for this; some apology and explanation is owed by the magazine to the photography community.

But the anger which seethed in that hall was generated by more than the triviality and ineptitude of this particular fiasco. It was only a hint of the long-suppressed sense of outrage and injustice the photography community feels toward the art establishment, which has ignored photography for so many years and is now sniffing around the medium only because there's something to be had from it. It was grotesque to hear Ms. Janis, in her opening remarks, apply the terms "heroic" and "passionate" to collectors rather than to artists. It was painful to hear Peter Bunnell talk peevishly about the problems of preservation with which curators have to deal because photographers now frequently use unorthodox combinations of materials in their works. Janis apparently has no sense of proportion; Bunnell appears to be losing his.

There, I think, is the crux of the matter. Photography as a creative medium and a communicative vehicle is no more (or less) diverse, vital, and important than ever. Yet the medium's public image is going through a major transition, from bastardy to legitimacy. With legitimacy comes certain kinds of attention, prestige, money, and power. And so the photography community now has the chance to observe and make note of the art world's carpetbaggers, who are all too willing to forget their recent disdain for the medium. And the photography community also has a chance to discover who within its own ranks is truly committed to the medium and who can be bought. It already seems that, in too many cases, as George Bernard Shaw once said, all we are arguing about is the price.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Where's the Money?" Camera 35 19:10. Jan. 1976, pp. 29, 66-67.

What Makes One Photographic Print Worth USD $2.9 Million?

A recent article on the developing market for photographs as collectible objects in China starts by asking, "How much could a photo be worth? Now the highest record is USD $2.928 million. What makes Edward Steichen's 1904 print 'The Pond -- Moonlight' so valuable?" (Liu You Yang, "How Much Should One Photograph be Worth?", *Shenzhen Economic Daily*, December 29, 2006, Culture & Arts section, page C1.) This print, which sold at Sotheby's in New York for USD$2.92 million on February 14, 2006, set a world record for the highest price paid at auction to date for a single photograph.

What makes this print worth USD $2.9 million? That's certainly a good question, and it deserves a good answer. It's true that in a market economy prices are established by what people are willing to pay, and those decisions are sometimes irrational and often unpredictable. But the inherent value of the Steichen print does not stem from chance, nor from arbitrary issues of taste or fashionable passing trends in art.

Consider the following:

* This print is an exquisitely beautiful handmade object in its own right. Printed by the photographer himself, it was exposed in the darkroom at least twice, using two or more separate manual coatings of emulsion. The result is a dark, subtle, luminous blue-green nocturne, a prime example of what in the west are now called photography's "alternative processes." The print is in perfect condition, and bears Steichen's signature.

* The print came from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which deaccessioned it to raise funds. So it is, by definition, a museum-quality work.

* The print is one of only three known prints of this work, each a significant variant. One is held by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where Steichen concluded his career in photography by serving as Director of the Department of Photography. The other remains in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum.

Though we could therefore consider it part of a set of three multiples of the same image based on the same negative, it is also a unique, one-of-a-kind work, since the printmaking process Steichen used for all three versions was not exactly repeatable. (Because many western and Chinese dealers -- including those quoted in the above-mentioned article -- eagerly promote the idea of limited-edition production and persuade beginning collectors to accept that concept, it's worth pointing out that none of these Steichen prints are part of a formal "limited edition," and none are even numbered.)

* The print comes with impeccable provenance. It was a gift from Steichen to Alfred Stieglitz, a figure of central importance in the history of 20th-century photography and art, who subsequently donated it to the Metropolitan Museum along with other works (thereby creating the first museum collection of creative photography in the world). Exhibited at the influential Photo-Secession galleries in New York City and elsewhere after its creation but before that donation, reproduced soon after its creation in the journal *Camera Work*, written about in the critical literature of the period, it was a reference point for many in its own time.

* This image is thus a noteworthy image in the history of photography, certainly one of the defining images of the Pictorialist movement. The champions of Pictorialism as a photographic tendency -- especially the U.S. version thereof -- fought successfully for the acceptance of photography as a creative medium, worthy of consideration alongside painting, sculpture, and the other visual media. Many of the foremost figures of 20th-century photography -- including Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and Edward S. Curtis -- began their careers in photography as pictorialists. (Though out of fashion for half a century, pictorialism has experienced a resurgence since 1970.)

* Steichen was a high-profile figure in the Pictorialist movement. He co-founded (with Alfred Stieglitz) the U.S.-based coalition called the Photo-Secession, which spearheaded the Pictorialist movement in the States, and he served as an important go-between linking the U.S. pictorialists with their European counterparts.

* Steichen designed the cover and logo for the journal *Camera Work*, house organ of the Photo-Secession and arguably the most influential critical journal in photography of all time.

* Steichen also designed the "Little Galleries" of the Photo-Secession that Stieglitz ran for many years -- a design that broke with the then-current fashion in art galleries for velvet and brocade and ornate decor in favor of plain, clean lines, white walls interspersed with burlap-covered panels in earth tones, and simple, unobtrusive framing, lighting, and presentation of photography and other works of art. Indeed, those galleries constituted the unacknowledged prototype of what U.S. art critic Brian O'Doherty named "the white cube," which many consider the definitive contextualizing space of modern and postmodern art.

* In addition to his efforts linking photographers from Europe with their U.S. colleagues, Steichen -- who was also a painter -- scouted European art and helped to introduce the work of Rodin, Matisse, Cézanne, Picasso, Brancusi, and numerous other notable figures to the United States, through exhibitions he arranged at the Photo-Secession galleries in New York. To a considerable extent, what we call "modern art" first came to the U.S. as a result of his efforts.

* Parting company with Stieglitz and the Photo-Secessionists, starting circa 1911 Steichen pioneered new forms of fashion, portrait, and product photography for the Condé Nast magazine company and other outlets, becoming the first high-profile photographer to exemplify the option of crossover activity between creative and applied forms of the medium.

* At approximately the same time, in the years just before World War I, Steichen's own photography moved toward a more hard-edged approach that addressed a broader range of subject matter and rejected post-exposure handwork in printmaking. This would come to be called modernism or (by some in the U.S.) "straight" or "pure" photography. Steichen was one of the first to embrace this photographic tendency, which dominated photography internationally for half a century and is still widely practiced. He applied it to his commercial work as well as his own creative efforts.

* In World War I Steichen helped develop techniques of aerial photography for the U.S. military. In World War II he volunteered again for service, heading a photographic unit for the U.S. Navy in the Pacific theater. Potent photographic imagery (both still and film) produced by that unit turned into influential traveling exhibitions, books, and a documentary film.

* Upon returning to the U.S. at the end of that war Steichen became the director of the Department of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, at that time unquestionably the single most influential sponsorial position in contemporary creative photography. There he masterminded the 1955 exhibition "The Family of Man" -- a massive survey of mostly photojournalism and documentary photography that traveled internationally for years. This show, containing 503 pictures by 273 photographers from 68 countries, is arguably the single most influential photo exhibit of all time; its accompanying catalogue (still in print half a century later) is demonstrably the best-selling photo book of all time, and has spread the project's influence even further.

* "The Family of Man" proved to museum directors and curators everywhere the popular appeal of photojournalism and documentary photography when presented in a museum setting, thus encouraging museums around the world to show such work. It also premiered the concept of the large-scale international traveling museum exhibition -- a phenomenon now commonplace in the museum world but virtually unknown in the 1950s.

In short, many readily identifiable factors make "The Pond -- Moonlight" an unusually collectible work of 20th-century art. Denise Bethel, head of Sotheby's photography division and the auctioneer who handled the sale of "The Pond," has described it as a "perfect storm" of a print -- meaning one in which all the necessary elements coincided: the scarcity of the object, its quality and condition, its provenance, the notable and extensive body of work from which it comes, the international stature and influence of its maker, and more. It achieved the price it did because connoisseurship made its inherent value obvious, after which the law of supply and demand went into effect.

Of course it helped that the art market -- including the market for photographs -- has reached an all-time high, and that four decades of research and writing and education in the west have resulted in an awareness of the history of photography that enables knowledgeable collectors to position a work like this in the medium's evolution and understand and appreciate its significance. This is not, after all, just a stereotypical image with mere sentimental appeal made recognizable and popular by widespread circulation. Indeed, the Steichen image itself was not well-known outside of photography circles before this sale. It commanded its record price because educated bidders understood the cultural and creative importance of what they saw in front of them on the auction block, knew its crucial role within the history of photography, and had the capital to compete with each other to own it.

Liu's article raises other important questions, including differences in the market response to creative/conceptual photography versus documentary photography and the function of limited editions as a marketing device for photographs. These are serious issues, meriting more discussion that this space allows. What's notable is that Liu has raised them, and that the *Shenzhen Economic Daily* has brought them forward. These are positive signs, indicating that the audience and market for photography in China have reached a new level of sophistication and are ready to achieve a new level of understanding.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "What Makes One Photographic Print Worth USD $2.9 Million?/Interview with A. D. Coleman." Shenzhen Economic Daily. 29 Jan. 2007, pp. C1-C3. (In Chinese.)

Twenty Ways of Looking at an AIPAD

(with apologies to Wallace Stevens)

[*Back when I regularly reviewed exhibitions, I made it a habit to steer clear of group shows unless they had, at a minimum, some organizing principles. If they didn't, I found I had little to say about them.*

That holds true in spades for "art fairs" -- gallery-dealer expos. You can turn gossip columnist and treat them as celebrity-spotting occasions, as many writers do. You can bring a deep knowledge of the market to them (as does my esteemed colleague Stephen Perloff at The Photograph Collector*) and delve into what sold and what didn't, the highest-ticket items, overall sales and what that might indicate about the condition of the market, gallerist/dealer perspectives on the event, etc. -- for which I confess myself both unqualified and uninterested. Or, in the absence of any clear curatorial diegesis, you can go window-shopping, cherry-picking this or that item to single out for attention.*

Having tried my hand at all of those strategies over the years with varying degrees of success, but in the mood for none of them this time around, I cast about for a different approach to The Photography Show 2016, hosted yet again at the Park Avenue Armory by the Association of International Photography Art Dealers (AIPAD). I settled on the poetic. -- A. D. C.]

I. Like most, you can approach an event on the order of AIPAD's annual "Photography Show" as simply a marketing event and social occasion. Participating in it with that mindset has much in common with browsing a multi-family yard sale. A high-end yard sale, to be sure, definitely more Princeton than Spanish Harlem, but still a collectively compiled jumble drawn from whatever's in inventory, priced to sell.

II. You could also imagine it as a gigantic beehive occupying a full city block, one in which the worker bees guard neither eggs nor nectar but, instead, safeguard precious time capsules, each of them containing one or more specific moments.

III. Or you can consider AIPAD as a (if not *the*) materialization of the ever-accumulating wreckage of the past on which what German philosopher Walter Benjamin called "the angel of history" looks back as he gets blown inexorably into the future.

IV. Speaking of whom, you can view AIPAD as a (mostly) non-verbal version of the book that Benjamin planned to produce, comprised entirely of quotations from other sources. Benjamin structured his "Arcades Project" -- first conceived in 1927 and unfinished when he died in 1940 -- after the glass-roofed shopping malls of 19th-century Paris, epitomizing that "commodification of things" which he saw as the defining characteristic of modernity. With its high, vaulted ceiling and honeycomb of ground-level booths, the Park Avenue Armory -- built in 1880 -- evokes the atmosphere of the Parisian arcades, though instead of offering wildly different types of artifacts it presents a wide variety of a single class of object.

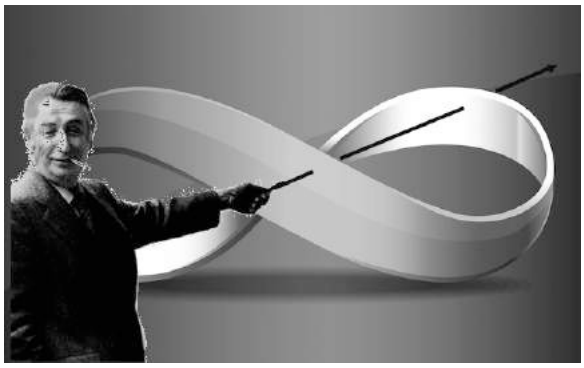
V. Benjamin found in these formally organized, carefully designed souks a model for his own memory palace, perfectly suited for the storage of quotations that he divided into 36 categories with such headings as "Fashion," "Boredom," "Dream City," "Catacombs," "Advertising," "Prostitution," "Baudelaire," "Theory of Progress" -- and, tellingly, "Photography." Notably, photographs pertinent to all of Benjamin's themes can be found in one or another booth at AIPAD.

VI. As an alternative, you can visualize AIPAD as an introduction to the history of photography. Considered as such, it serves a useful pedagogical function while also confirming Einstein's theory of relativity and the extrapolation therefrom developed by his former college teacher in mathematics, Hermann Minkowski.

VII. Imagine, if you will, a cross-section of the space-time continuum, in the shape of a moebius strip. This resembles Einsteinian-Minkowskian space-time (and history as it manifests itself therein), as opposed to the straight-line concept of time with the past at one end, the future at the other, and the now somewhere in the middle.

VIII. In this continuum version of photo history, represented in microcosm by AIPAD's "Photography Show," all points in time are accessible from any one point, coexisting in a constant now. Photo history thereby forms in effect an endless loop -- but a permeable one, into which new elements get introduced while others fade from sight.

IX. Think here of the visitor (yourself, if you will) pushing a pin through that moebius strip, simultaneously transfixing two separate moments in time. Better yet, think of Roland Barthes extracting from his consciousness his famous *punctum* -- that which "shoots out of [the photograph] like an arrow and pierces me" -- turning it around, and pushing it through two layers of the loop, thus touching four moments in time at once.



Roland Barthes with punctum and moebius strip. Photo-illustration by A. D. Coleman, 2016.

X. Superficially, a few things endure as fixtures in this landscape; there will be a Weston pepper or nude, a Weegee street scene, an Adams "Moonrise," a Lange

"Migrant Mother." But this ostensible familiarity masks a deeper instability, because these will almost never be the identical Weston, Weegee, Adams, or Lange one encountered there previously, but variants thereon, their idiosyncratic differences painstakingly annotated on small, neatly printed wall labels.

XI. Or they will be related but different images by those photographers. Or similar images by photographers they influenced. Or deconstructions of those iconic works -- reenactments of them, imitations of them (perhaps in Play-Doh), altered versions of them, collages made from them, and other offspring derived from them. All self-consciously commenting on their progenitors while feeding vampirically on the very "aura" for which Walter Benjamin predicted (incorrectly) that photography would function as a purgative.

XII. Ranging alongside these illusory fixtures you will find a dizzying array of lesser-known works by picture-makers both better-known than those just named and less famous, even anonymous, some born well before the medium's inception and some as young as millennials. These images come from around the world, exemplifying every known genre. Though made after 1830, many of them depict people and things much older than that, while others address quite recent subject matter. In any case, these images emerge haphazardly: many only once, never to reappear; others intermittently; and a few to work their way gradually toward the recurrent status of icons.

XIII. Benjamin and Barthes would recognize many of the objects on view as photographs, though aspects of their style and subject matter might surprise and even shock them. But more than a few would bewilder them -- indeed, they bewilder even contemporary onlookers -- by employing production methods involving curious chemical solutions or burying photographic materials in the ground for weeks before processing, pursuing non-representational strategies, or combining the static with the kinetic. These experiments undercut whatever confidence the viewer might feel in any working definition of the terms

photograph and *photography*, suggesting that at most what the works share consists of some relation to what one might call *the photographic*.

XIV. The organizational structure, therefore, qualifies, at the very least, as willfully achronological if not in fact anti-chronological. Works made just last month hang side by side with works made 175 years ago, the interval between them entirely collapsed. Moreover, unlike museum shows in which curatorial exegeses argue for connective threads that bind such different expressions together, here they get left largely to their own devices, as if at a come-one-come-all open-house event whose host has gone to solve some sudden problem in the kitchen, leaving the works on view to make friends with and sense of each other unaided, without even the social benefit of a brief introduction.

XV. Paradoxically, then, AIPAD communicates tacitly that you can't step in the same history of photography twice while leaving the returning visitor with the impression that he or she has been there forever.

XVI. Speaking of whom, this scape, fluid in its own way even when the lights are out and no one is around, becomes animated when populated by the archaeologists and ushers in charge of these artifacts, intent on helping visitors to position themselves properly in relation to the objects. Along with the variegated attendees, most but not all of them human, these persons create a curious visual effect, whereby the walls of images appear sometimes as theatrical backdrops against which action take place, but then become changing dioramic scenes against which static figures pose. Do you move past time, or does time move past you?

XVII. This gets exacerbated by a visitor's path crossing the paths of others. You might encounter, in no fixed or predictable order, a former student who remembers you as a "kind and generous" teacher; a millionaire who has never offered you any sort of support, instead retelling each time you meet in public

how your 1969 review of an important British photographer started him collecting; a former curator at a major institution who, off the record, feeds you valuable inside information and advice pertinent to your latest project; a British gallerist whose eponymous gallery's name sounds like a cash register in operation, and who greets you as "that wonderful writer on photography" but forgets your name, forgetting also that she wrote dismissively of you and your work in a popular online forum four years ago; a Chinese gallerist who considers you her mentor; the director of a prominent photo agency who spoke dismissively of you in a lecture live-streamed by a major institution last spring; etc.

XVIII. Meanwhile, most of the figures populating this scene carry and use assorted cameras, making images that could end up in some subsequent stretch of this space-time continuum, creating a vertiginous infinite-regression effect, but in reverse -- a self-perpetuating process.

XIX. Oddly, given all that, and adding in their propensity for documentation and typological cataloguing, no photographers have undertaken either short-term or longitudinal sociological projects based on the annual population of this 5-day event.

XX. Such an archive would automatically end up on the walls here, in a perfectly self-reflexive cycle. And should anyone generate images of this sort, now and then one would leave the wall, become a package under someone's arm, and disappear, perhaps forever -- as some images always do, adding to the confusion (if not chaos) lurking beneath the seeming order.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Twenty Ways of Looking at an AIPAD." Photocritic International, April 24th, 2016, http://www.nearbycafe.com/artandphoto/photocritic/2016/04/24/aipad-2016/, accessed July 15, 2018.

Institutional Critiques

Christmas Gift: "Harlem on My Mind"

"Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968," the mixed-media photo show which opened to the public Saturday at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is such a ghastly mistake -- on every conceivable level -- that I am left awestruck at the monumentality of its failure.

In Museum Director Thomas P. F. Hoving's preface to the book version of the exhibit a number of amazing statements are made, the general thrust of which is that "Harlem On My Mind" will probably be attacked as too daring and too gutsy, but damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead. This self-laudatory paean reaches its pinnacle with Hoving's proclamation that "`Harlem On My Mind' is Humanism." (Note that capital H.)

"Harlem On My Mind" may be Humanism to Hoving, but to me it's a staggering display of honky chutzpah. Blacks who have lived in Harlem are entitled -- though assuredly not prone -- to sentimentalize this ghetto. The white cultural establishment and its individual members -- none of whom have lived there, and few of whom have even visited the area -- are not. That hasn't stopped them from trying, though, nor has it prevented them from spending a quarter of a million dollars in the attempt.

A visual version of slumming, this show skims the surface of life in Harlem (at great length, it must be admitted) without ever probing to the horror beneath. To be sure, a previously uninformed viewer will emerge from the exhibit with the impression that life, recognizable human life, goes on in Harlem pretty much as it does elsewhere, with the exception of a few details. Perhaps that is an accomplishment of sorts. But it is those details which are of the greatest importance. How come -- in this entire exhibit, 13 huge rooms of it -- not a single photograph of a cockroach or a rat?

Now that would have been a radical achievement -- a room devoted to the vermin of Harlem, with still photos, slides, and films of roaches, lice,

and rats crawling over babies, adults, food, toothbrushes, to the accompaniment of a tape playing, over and over, the obscene scuttling noises of rodents in the walls. But that might be a little too strong, even for the Met's capital-H Humanists.

So, safe as milk, the show avoids those particular residents of the slums. Oh, you see poverty all right, but not much from the present day, mostly from the past (militancy is the theme of the present-day room; poverty comes two or three rooms earlier, implying that the poverty is no longer there.) If I were that uninformed viewer mentioned above, I'd walk away from this show asking "What do these people want?" The show itself certainly gives no indication.

But I am making it sound as though "Harlem On My Mind" is a piece of deliberate, insidious propaganda. It isn't. It's the Met's Christmas gift to its sponsors' faithful retainers everywhere, a patronizing but well-meant handout. If the show had been intended as malicious propaganda, it might at least have been, like *Triumph of the Will*, intellectually challenging. However, the exhibit's obviously unconscious, off-handed racism -- such as the title, taken from, of all sources, an Irving Berlin song -- makes it merely dull.

Representatives of the black community are picketing the show, claiming (correctly) that it gives a totally false picture of Harlem. They should be joined in their protest by all the photographers whose work is included in the show, since, on purely aesthetic and technical grounds, "Harlem On My Mind" violates photography repeatedly.

There is evidence aplenty that Allon Schoener, coordinator of this exhibit, and his fellow workers have read Marshall McLuhan and really tried to do something original and avant-garde. There are photos all over -- on towering columns, on walls, on ceilings, on tv screens, everywhere photographs, more than you can shake a stick at. But one can look at just so many photographs on any subject unaccompanied by informative text before they all begin to look the same. Here they are lumped together, in no

order save chronology, hung in clumps on the walls, grouped in fives and sixes for no apparent reason, certainly without any visual harmonies or correlations. What a waste of so many fine photographers -- Aaron Siskind, Todd Webb, Gordon Parks, Ken Heyman, Lee Friedlander, and Bruce Davidson among them. Schoener's omnipresent lack of real imagination permits him to hide in a dim corner a Helen Levitt photograph which should have been the opening shot -- a chalk-drawn picture of a push-button scrawled on a Harlem wall, with these words beside it: "Button to Secret Passage -- Press." That same lack of imagination forces him to resort to fatuous self-defeating gimmicks for impact. For instance, there is a huge (14x52-foot) photo-mural of the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., with his Sunday school class, of which the Met's press releases are inordinately proud. The room in which this print is on exhibit, however, is so filled with other clutter -- plywood pillars and constructions covered with photographs -- that it is impossible to view the entire mural, or even an uninterrupted major portion of it, from any point in the room, which negates the purpose of the blow-up.

Examples of this pointless and rampant exhibitionism are plentiful. There is a brief film portrait/interview featuring Harlem's oldest living resident, shown via closed-circuit tv -- but the sound track is inaudible (a recurrent problem throughout the exhibit). In one gallery -- the next to last, covering the 1960s -- two banks of slide projectors shoot images onto two long facing walls, four or five pictures per wall simultaneously, high above the audience's head, so greatly enlarged that no one can see more than one slide at a time--which destroys the effect of simultaneous projection. In the final room, dozens of full-face portraits are suspended overhead, parallel to the ceiling but just below it; what this is intended to accomplish, aside from giving those few people who notice them up there a collective crick in the neck, is anybody's guess.

For all its good intentions ("'Harlem On My Mind' is a discussion. It is a confrontation. It is education. It is a dialogue," writes Hoving), "Harlem On

My Mind" is so predictable and perfect a statement of the white-liberal attitude as to be a grotesquely funny (that's black humor, friend) self-parody. I'm sure that some of the Met's officials, looking out at the picket lines, will think to themselves, "What do these people want?" I really don't have any answer for them, except to point out that at the press preview last Tuesday the bartenders were white, but the waiters who scurried around collecting empty glasses were black.

That's still where it's at, isn't it?

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Christmas Gift." Village Voice 14:15. 23 Jan. 1969. pp. 15-16.

On the Subject of John Szarkowski:
An Open Letter
to the Directors and Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art

When the word *perfect* begins to appear regularly in a curator's vocabulary, the age of retirement is at hand.

The search for perfection may be intrinsic to creative activity, and thus implicit in the secondary but supportive functions of curatorial sponsorship and criticism. But the belief that it is attainable -- and the assurance that one can recognize instances in which it has been achieved, especially in the form of new works by living artists -- is clear evidence that a state of terminal hyperbole has been reached.

John Szarkowski, director of your museum's department of photography, has been ascribing perfection to an increasing array of photographs lately -- most notably (and arguably) to the erratic, ramshackle color imagery of William Eggleston, who Szarkowski has claimed is "inventing color photography." Perhaps it is not coincidental that, simultaneously, perfection is being ascribed to the curator himself by a handful of commentators.

The sources of these paeans are varied. One writer -- also a photographer -- proclaimed Szarkowski to be photography's T. S. Eliot. John Gruen, in a recent issue of *Artnews*, reported with obvious credulity the ludicrous conceit that "Szarkowski does not consider himself to be an influential force -- a tastemaker or a leader able to shape esthetic values through personal preference."[227] In an *Artforum* review of Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, Colin Westerbeck, Jr., went out of his way to lavish similar encomiums on the curator: "[H]e does not make judgments... . As I interpret it, the purpose of Szarkowski's curatorial policy is to give photography an opportunity to develop its own tradition, whose polemics and exclusive choices Szarkowski rightly leaves to others. He approaches his own work

[227] "The Reasonably Risky Life of John Szarkowski," *ARTnews*, Vol. 77, no. 4 (April 1978), p. 68.

with the most catholic tastes possible ..."[228] And Sean Callahan, in a fawning puff piece which has now made at least two appearances (first in the *Village Voice* and more recently in *American Photographer*), has gone so far as to declare that "it is hard to find anybody with a bad word to say about John Szarkowski."[229]

Szarkowski has created no body of photographic work of Eliotic durability or breadth; thus that comparison is presumptuous at best, and dimissable as sycophancy. But the other statements are simply and indefensibly false. They misrepresent Szarkowski's role and posture so completely that they must be -- at least in a minor way -- embarrassing to him. Certainly they should embarrass their authors, since they are either gross errors or outright fabrications.

I have had ample opportunity to observe John Szarkowski as a public figure and a representative of the Museum of Modern Art over the past decade. I have heard him speak on a number of occasions; I've moderated a panel of which he was a member. I've read most of what he's written, from wall labels to books. I've seen most of the exhibits he has sponsored and/or curated. I have witnessed the effect of his support on the careers of these photographers he has singled out for approval. I have seen the impact of his choices (and of the esthetic for which they're the building blocks) on other photographers, as well as on other curators, critics, students, and the general public. And I've spoken with a great many people who have strong opinions about the man and his work.

Thus I can testify with some degree of knowledgeability that the range of response to Szarkowski's stewardship of the department of photography is far broader than the above set of quotations would suggest. Callahan, in his piece, asserts that carping voices are few, belonging to failed photographers suffering from the sour-grapes syndrome. In fact, I

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[228] "Susan Sontag: On Photography," *Artforum*, Vol. XVI, no. 8, April 1978, p. 57.
[229] "John Szarkowski Surprises Even Himself," *The Village Voice* (December 8, 1975), pp. 77-79, and "The First Viceroy of Photography," *American Photographer*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1978), pp. 24-31.

have encountered strenuous opposition to Szarkowski's curatorial practices, exercise of power, and limited esthetic from countless sources. To be sure, these include an array of photographers -- many of them gifted, prolific, and influential -- whose work has been inexplicably but systematically excluded from the museum. But also included are photographers whose work has found its way into the museum -- as well as curators, historians, critics, educators, and others with no career axes to grind. In short, serious and widespread reservations about Szarkowski's performance in office have been voiced within the photography community for years. I believe you should be made aware of the grounds for these.

Certainly, you do not need to be told that the Museum of Modern Art is internationally regarded as an authority in its field of specialization. Curators across the country and around the world look to MoMA for guidance. Since it was the first contemporary art museum to incorporate a department of photography, its primacy in that particular area rests virtually unchallenged. The directorship of that department is unquestionably the single most influential sponsorial position in contemporary creative photography.

There are still only a handful of art museums whose curators have any specific training in photography; most photography exhibits in museums are assembled by people with backgrounds in art history. Almost all curators of art -- like most art critics and historians -- are woefully, indeed shamefully ignorant of photography, particularly its contemporary manifestations. Consequently, they are prone to treating the Modern's interpretation of the medium as gospel. What, after all, could be more unimpeachable for a smaller institution to present than work which already bears the Modern's imprimatur?

As a critic, I have found the weight of that imprimatur discernible in countless exhibits, national and international. Even if this were the total extent of the department's influence on the medium, the force of its clout would be unmistakable. But in fact it is only the tip of the iceberg.

Gallery exhibitions, print sales, and publications invariably follow close on the heels of MoMA approval. So do the "perks" of visiting lectureships and teaching positions. So do grants of public and private monies.[230] In addition, a rapidly increasing volume of corporate money is entering the territory of creative photography. Much of it is gravitating to your institution. In recent years, MoMA photography exhibitions and publications have been financed by Vivitar, Seagram's, SCM, and Philip Morris, among others. You have just announced "a major, long-term program for support of exhibitions" which will be conceived and mounted by the department of photography but funded by Spring Mills, Inc. And various photographic projects not specifically under the aegis of MoMA -- such as Seagram's mammoth bicentennial American courthouse documentation -- have lucratively employed many members of the MoMA stable; the results tend to find their way, predictably, to MoMA's walls.

Thus a considerable sum of money -- conceivably as much as one million dollars per year -- devolves to photographers as a direct or indirect result of the department's endorsement. That may be small potatoes compared to the money afloat in, say, painting or sculpture, but it is a sizeable percentage of what's available for creative photography.

So the question is hardly whether or not John Szarkowski chooses to "consider himself to be an influential force." He *is* one, *de facto* and *de jure*. He knows he is one; to believe otherwise is to impute to him a naiveté

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[230] The National Endowment for the Arts, of whose selection committee Szarkowski was a member for three years, has awarded one or more grants to virtually all the photographers who have been given one-person shows at MoMA over the past decade. The NEA, additionally, has funded many exhibitions, catalogues, and other presentations of their work.
The pattern of influence is equally clear in the Guggenheim Foundation fellowships in photography. That foundation's Committee of Selection includes no one knowledgeable in photography. Whether, as rumor has it, the committee goes directly to Szarkowski for suggestions and recommendations, or whether it simply looks to his curatorial choices as guidelines, an uncanny number of one and even two-time Guggenheim fellows in photography have come from MoMA's roster.
[Postscript, August 1984: In the 1979 Guggenheim Foundation Annual Report, p. x, Szarkowski's name appears for the first time as a member of the Foundation's Educational Advisory Board. Significantly, he had himself identified as "Mr. John Szarkowski, *Photographer*; Director, Department of Photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York City." (Italics mine.) He served in that capacity through 1983.]

bordering on the moronic. And he exercises his influence regularly and consistently, in a variety of ways, to support the photographers he favors.[231] I have no desire to castigate individuals who have benefitted from his largesse, but it cannot be denied that he is dispensing it.

This in itself is a major issue. It is compounded by the rigidity and narrowness of Szarkowski's esthetic. The strictures of his vision of photography are so pronounced and self-reflexive that they can be readily summed up. As I wrote in 1973, "It is restricted almost entirely to the documentary genre, centered around Walker Evans as the first conscious articulator thereof."[232] Szarkowski has made no bones about this. He has enunciated it clearly in his writings and lectures, in addition to upholding it consistently in his curatorial leanings. He has been notably unsympathetic to: imagery subjected to visible handwork or post-exposure manipulation; color imagery, whether "straight" or applied; directorial imagery; mixed-media work; and serial imagery, among other forms and modes.

What he has sponsored to date offers, in aggregate, a severely reductivist formalism as the essence of creative photography. This has been so steadfastly dependable and deliberate that Westerbeck's characterization of the curator as a man of "catholic tastes" who "does not make judgments" is insupportable, indeed laughable -- rather like praising Thomas Wolfe for taciturnity.

Reporting on a talk Szarkowski gave in late 1975, I noted that he "defined briefly the various stances a curator can take toward a medium, dismissed most of them as beneath his consideration, and announced that the highest and most rigorous form of curatorship was autocratic, elitist, and

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[231] For example, one young photographer [Tod Papageorge] managed to get a photograph not only purchased for the museum's collection but hung in the department's permanent display -- before he had presented a major one-person show, before any significant publication of his work, before he had demonstrated any influence of his own on the field, and before any extended critical response to his work had appeared in print.

[232] In Coleman, A. D., "Photography: Recent Acquisitions," *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-1978* (Oxford University Press, 1979; second edition, University of New Mexico Press, 1998), p. 159.

appropriately limited by the curator's own ideas and taste patterns, the narrower the better."[233]

This is not in itself objectionable. The medium is diverse, vital, and energetic enough to sustain a wide span of critical and curatorial stances, including Szarkowski's. Were he the director of photography at any other contemporary art museum, I would not be writing this letter, and indeed might be looking forward to the recurrent challenge of severing the bonds with which his esthetic inhibits the medium's full development.

But that is not the situation at all. In this case, the curator exercising those prerogatives in that fashion is, in essence, the sole hand on the helm of the most powerful institution in the world of contemporary photography. There is a great deal of work -- much of it important, even seminal -- which he has rejected out of hand (or ignored, which amounts to the same thing). He has discriminated not only qualitatively but generically. And the decisions made on the basis of such prejudice have demonstrable, long-term, substantial effects on the medium's evolution. Those effects are detrimental (I would go so far as to call them deadening); they extend far beyond the walls of the museum itself.

Therefore let us not pretend that we are merely discussing the philosophical ramifications of "one man's opinion" in a democratic context. We are in fact dealing with an unhealthy concentration of power, wielded by a man whose approach to the responsibility thereof is a coy denial of its existence.

That denial is, in effect, an abdication of that responsibility. It epitomizes Szarkowski's inadequacy to the task at hand, but it also forces us to acknowledge that the problem goes beyond the specifics of his shortcomings. The ailment we have diagnosed is that very concentration of power itself, power which would exist to be used and abused by anyone who headed your department of photography. That power is an instrument of policy for which the museum itself must be held accountable.

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[233] In Coleman, A. D., "Where's The Money?" *Light Readings*, p. 219.

The ailment, then, is the museum's. So, consequently, is the problem; and so, presumably, is the solution. In that regard, I would offer the following proposal.

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The time has come for a fundamental restructuring of your department of photography.

The first step in that process should be the dividing up of the department's power and responsibility between at least two full-time curators of approximately equal rank. Such a situation did exist, during Peter Bunnell's tenure (1966-1972), when the department was at its most dynamic. Bunnell surely had his blind spots, no less than Szarkowski, but their approaches differed radically. The result was a more generous and far-sighted overview of the medium than the department has manifested before or since.

In addition to dividing up the department's stewardship in this fashion, I would recommend the initiation of a regular program of guest curatorships, to diversify further the department's presentations and to provide alternate ways of perceiving the medium.

The second step should be the museum's insistence that the department take its power, influence, and responsibility seriously. This will require a new set of ground rules. The proper premise of these, I believe, is that it is incumbent upon the department to present to the public the broadest possible spectrum of creative work being done in all areas of the medium, rather than to "follow" (which means, in effect, to endorse) one particular track.

This would mean more survey shows, and would thus mandate a decrease in one-person exhibits. That shift in emphasis would be all to the good. The department would have to be far more careful in selecting candidates for solo shows; this, inevitably, would mean a rise in the level of age and accomplishment of those so featured. As a result, we would be spared the premature exposure of photographers still in their creative

adolescence. Over the past decade the department has given a great many one and two-person shows to people in their late twenties and early thirties. In most of these cases, the photographers had neither established bodies of work nor major critical reputations to validate this spotlighting. Such king-making is dangerous all around -- for the artists, for the department, for the museum, for the public, and for the medium itself.

Another ground rule should be a clear policy of disengagement of all departmental personnel from formal and informal advisory functions in relation to othe institutions, particularly when grants, jobs, and other economic aspects of photographers' lives are involved. The museum's stamp of approval, transmitted through the department's exhibition, purchase, and publication of work, is ample testimony to its regard for a photographer's achievement. Any further career assistance to individuals, especially when rendered *sub rosa*, is a form of power-brokering. It severely undercuts the department's credibility and integrity; it compromises not only the department but the museum as a whole.

I realize this implies that it is incumbent upon the department to examine and evaluate carefully all the powers which accrue to it, and that the department should actually turn away from many of them. I believe that to be the only sound policy. The crisis confronting the department -- and, through it, the museum -- is precisely that too much power is now vested in it, so much too much that not even a curator who was uninfluential, catholic in his tastes, and universally respected could exercise it well and judiciously.

John Szarkowski is not that curator. But, whatever one might feel about him, it is apparent that his retirement is not the curative needed for the department's well-being. Yet it must also be said that Szarkowski's patronage practices tread ever closer to cronyism, in effect if not by intent. His esthetic, insufficient to the medium's current stage of evolution, verges on stagnation. His tenure at MoMA, which has been distinguished in many ways, now runs the risk of ending in increasingly acrimonious confrontation

with practitioners of that very medium to which he has committed so much of his life.

To retire under such circumstances would be ignominious. To stonewall this situation to the bitter end would be unnecessarily ugly and painful for all concerned. Those are the predictable alternatives if the status quo is maintained.[234] Restructuring the department along the lines proposed above would revitalize it, and make it more fully responsive to the living medium for which the department serves as a main link to the larger art community and to the general public. It would be salutory for John Szarkowski too: it would challenge him as an administrator and as a curator. And it would honor him, rightly, by acknowledging that he has been instrumental in creating something much, much larger than himself.[235]

Sincerely yours,
/s/ A. D. Coleman
Staten Island, New York
July 1978

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "On the Subject of John Szarkowski: An Open Letter to the Directors and Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art." *Picture Magazine*, no. 8, January 1978, no page.

[234] John Szarkowski retired as Director of the Department of Photography on July 1, 1991. After a widely publicized one-year search he was replaced, from within, by Peter Galassi.
[235] Let me express my thanks here to Don Owens, then publisher and editor of *Picture Magazine*, for providing me with the opportunity to make this statement. I should also add that, entering into the spirit of the piece, Owens sent copies of the issue to MoMA's Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, and the entire curatorial staff. He received no answers to the letter, nor even acknowledgement of receipt of the issues, from anyone.

Censorship at the Corcoran

Although the censorship of photography is a frequent occurrence, this has been a rare year to date insofar as it's already brought us three widely-publicized incidents of such suppression -- the most recent being the Corcoran Gallery of Art's cancellation of the Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective that was scheduled to open there on July 1.

Having been the founder and chair of the Committee on Censorship and Freedom of Vision of the Society for Photographic Education (the nation's only professional organization of post-secondary photography teachers), I'm in a position to testify to the regularity of such suppression around the country. I can also certify that the grounds are common and the issues recurrent. What is different -- and, potentially, valuable -- about these recent cases is the amount of public attention they've garnered and their consequent usefulness as springboards for a long-overdue debate on the subject of public subsidization of the arts.

First, a synopsis of the three cases. To begin with, the New Year rang in with a brouhaha over an issue of "Nueva Luz," a small-circulation publication which features imagery by minority photographers. This journal is issued by En Foco, Inc., a Bronx-based non-profit organization. The offending issue contained some black and white nude studies of his family -- including his children -- by Brazilian-born Ricardo T. Barros. Brooklyn Assemblyman Dov Hivkind made political hay out of these, persuading the Bronx D.A.'s office to investigate them as "kiddie porn." His claim to particular concern is that En Foco is publicly funded -- to the tune of $20,000 this year -- by the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Bureau of Cultural Affairs. So far, there's been no resolution to this "case."

Then there's the ongoing uproar over Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ," a color photograph of a crucified Christ submerged in a yellow liquid, purportedly the artist's own urine. Mr. Serrano has been the recipient, in

1985, of an Artist's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts; this particular work was chosen by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts for a touring exhibition subsidized by further NEA funds; in that context it has been seen at such venues as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery in Pittsburgh. It's also been shown at the Stux Gallery here in New York. No death threats have been reported, but 150 members of Congress have written to the NEA on this subject, and both Jesse Helms and Al D'Amato (strange bedfellows) are up in arms over the government subsidizing of this artist and of his work's public presentation.

Now there's the Mapplethorpe show, containing a selection of sexually explicitly, homoerotic images by the photographer who died of AIDS this spring at the age of 42. Anticipating Congressional outrage over a presentation of this show (whose tour and catalogue have been supported in part by $30,000 in NEA funds) at the Corcoran (which last year received almost $300,000 in Federal funds), the Gallery's Director, Dr. Christina Orr-Cahall, in mid-June courageously decided to cancel the exhibition's planned July 1 opening. Her decision was supported by the Corcoran's board, whose chairman, David Lloyd Kreeger, said with equal courage, "It was a close call. If you went ahead, I suppose you could say you were upholding freedom of artistic expression against possible political pressure. But you have to consider the larger picture ..."

As indeed you do. The decision to get involved in sponsoring this show would have been made in 1986. So you have to wonder about the competence of a museum director who, deep in the heart of the Reagan Era, couldn't foresee this problem. Staying off the bandwagon in the first place would have done nowhere near the damage to the principle of freedom of expression that this craven leap from the moving vehicle has inflicted. For what it has provided is a clear demonstration of the Corcoran's willingness to sacrifice freedom of artistic expression in order to avoid possible political pressure. It is an act of self-censorship, plain and simple.

As it happens, I'm no great fan of Mapplethorpe's work. He was an artist of sensibility, not an innovator; I do not see his work as presently influential, and do not expect it to prove to be so in the future. But that's not the question here. The issue in this case is the Corcoran's surrender before the battle was even joined. That capitulation is despicable.

It is also understandable, however, because we have as a nation failed to articulate any principles concerning government subsidy of the arts. We have instead a bizarrely veried assortment of practices on the municipal, state, regional and federal levels, coupled with an even more demented and byzantine legal code in which the boundaries of the permissible are arbitrarily and unclearly drawn. Consequently, arts bureaucrats like Dr. Orr-Cahall have no established precedents on which to rely. True to the survival instincts of their species, therefore, they tend to play things safe.

So, in light of these current cases, we might ask ourselves a few questions -- in fact, we might urge such figures as Ted Koppel and Phil Donahue (sure, even Mad Mort Downey, Jr.) to ask them of us in public forums:

* What are the differences between (a) commissioning the creation of specific works of art for public ownership and/or presentation in public places, (b) funding arts institutions involved in the publication and/or exhibition of existing works of art, and (c) awarding grants of public monies to artists to support their pursuit of their own artistic ends?

* What obligation, if any, does the public have to support the artistic avant-garde, however defined -- or, for that matter, to support any work that any member of the public might find disturbing or offensive?

* What obligations, if any, do artists and arts organizations have to the government institutions and/or the taxpayers from whom they solicit financial support?

* What obligations do tax-subsidized arts-patronage institutions -- like the various arts councils -- have to defend vigorously the artists and

artwork they subsidize, so that artists are not punished for sponsorial decisions that prove unpopular?

* What public policies of government spending on the arts do we want, who shall administer them, and who shall we entrust with the assessment of the results?

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Canceled Mapplethorpe Exhibit Raises Questions About Arts Subsidies." New York Observer 3:26. 3 July 1989. p. 17.

Individual Critiques

Conspicuous By His Absence:
Concerning the Mysterious Disappearance of William Mortensen

Let us begin with a context, and a time frame. It is January of 1934. We are in a conceptual terrain whose boundaries are defined by the readership and editorial staff of a magazine called *Camera Craft*. Published out of San Francisco, *Camera Craft* (hereinafter referred to as *CC*) is at this time the official organ of the Pacific International Photographers' Association, an organization whose aesthetic tendencies are what is generally understood to be "Pictorialist."[236]

CC's editorial torch has just recently changed hands. Departing is Sigismund Blumann; replacing him is George Allen Young. The reasons for this transition are not made clear within the pages of the magazine -- no swan songs, no heralding trumpets. Yet, though there is no reason to suspect that a revolution has taken place, there's no avoiding a feeling of the changing of the guard, and no denying a sense that Blumann is -- in the several meanings of the word -- *relieved* by his own departure.

Something has been happening in West Coast photography of late. It is of obvious significance, and Blumann takes his editorial responsibilities seriously enough that he's not only given it space in the magazine[237] but has even spoken out in defense of its right to exist. Yet he has little sympathy for it as imagery; it goes against his taste patterns, which by now are firmly entrenched. He's tried to write about this internal schism in his column, "Under the Editor's Lamp," but it doesn't emerge too clearly. On the one hand, he is capable of generosity:

> This man [Edward Weston] has evolved a photographic art of his own. It is not greater, it is not less than the pictorialism which deals with other forms of beauty. He is a poet who tiring of songs to gods and fancies in stars and skies determines to make his epics of

[236] At the end of the period we are exploring -- in April of 1942 -- *CC* will merge with, and be subsumed under the logo of, another publication, *American Photography*.
[237] Edward Weston, "Photography -- Not Pictorial," Vol. 37, no. 7, July 1930, pp. 313-320.

> cosmic stars and the material of which heavens are made. A Materialist who belies crass materialism by extracting the beauty, the poesy, out of realities.[238]

On the other hand, he can be driven to sarcasm by the same stimuli:

> ... do not be discouraged when you see a photograph of a dissected cabbage or a distorted gourd, or the sexual organs of a flower, or a landscape as black as interstellar space. You may not understand it. Neither do the ultramodernists. They shun understanding. They merely feel. ... There may be beauty and inspiration in the heart of a cabbage, in fact there is when it is properly pickled and cooked. There may be ecstacy [*sic*] in the stamen and pistils of a flower with the petals chopped off. Your coarse sensibilities may not respond to them but do not despair ...[239]

His ambivalence finds its fullest manifestation in a review of the work which provokes it. This essay is, perhaps consciously, Blumann's valedictory. Certainly it is a poignant confession by a man painfully aware that the world is passing him by. Its emotional and intellectual complexities reveal themselves best in the reading of the full text. But consider these excerpts:

> We went [to the f.64 Group exhibit] with a determined and preconceived intention of being amused and, if need be, adversely critical. We came away with several ideals badly bent and not a few opinions wholly destroyed. We were not amused, we could not criticize adversely. ... classic forms of beauty have been, to us, inalienable from the pursuit of art. The f.64 Group have shown that there is something to say in a 1933 way that still may react on the cultivated senses as expressive of the beautiful. ... Sentimentalists

[238] Blumann, Sigismund, "Edward Weston in Three Paragraphs," Vol. 38, no. 1, January 1931, p. 34.
[239] Blumann, Sigismund, "Art and the Camera," Vol. 39, no. 9, September 1932, p. 390.

> that we are, we shall never forgive these fellows for shattering out pet traditions. On the other hand, we are grateful to them for chastening our over-sure spirit. The Group is creating a place for photographic freedom. They are in a position to do so for *not one of them but has made a place for himself in the hitherto accepted Salon field and not one of them but could make real pictures again if he wished. In fact we are certain that outside of the wholly legitimate showmanship that actuates and entertains their mood in this f.64 business, they are still making real pictures, surreptitiously if not openly*. [Italics mine.] For us the destruction of an older taste will be like unto a surgical operation. So thick-headed are our sort. ... Now, right now, we will concede Weston's greatness in his field. We consider the field small. We estimate lowly the highest achievement in portraiture of Gourds and Peppers.[240]

Self-evidently, these are the words of a man who has no heart for refereeing the battle-royal which is brewing. But his successor, George Allen Young, formerly the book review editor, takes on that task with gusto. First, he remodels the arena: Volume 40, no. 9 (September, 1933), wherein he assumes the editorship, is radically redesigned: a sparser, cleaner layout, more "modernistic" in tone, is established. Aside from this, there is only one hint of what is to come -- a brief notice that one member of the f.64 Group, Ansel Adams, is offering in "his new gallery at 166 Geary St., San Francisco," a series of classes and "General lectures in which Mr. Adams will trace the development of photography with the idea of establishing an aesthetic rational [*sic*] as the basis for future progress ..."[241]

Yet shortly thereafter -- and, unquestionably, at Young's instigation -- the battle is joined. Within the next few issues of *CC*, Young introduces his readership to the two principal combatants. One of these is the aforementioned

[240] Blumann, Sigismund, "The F.64 Group Exhibition," Vol. 40, no. 5, May 1933, pp. 199-200.
[241] Volume 40, no. 10, October 1933, p. 437.

Ansel Adams, at that time a comparative unknown. The other, already a photographer of international reputation, is William Mortensen.

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Who is William Mortensen? You might well ask. And, until quite recently, you could have searched all the standard histories of photography in vain for an answer.[242] William Mortensen (1897-1965) is -- among many other things -- one of photography's object lessons in how individuals become lost to history.

History -- which is, after all, a highly subjective human systematization of coincidence, a Monday-morning-quarterbacking of chaos -- often disposes of its protagonists arbitrarily and uncharitably. For centuries after his death Shakespeare was treated as a minor Elizabethan playwright. Charles Ives was, until quite recently, pigeonholed as an uninfluential eccentric. *Moby Dick* was for decades dismissed as an obscure novel about the whaling industry. There are cultural cycles of appreciation and disregard under which all creative works are subsumed.

There are also those creators who shun the spotlight, choosing to work reclusively; those who fail to find it, never gaining recognition during their lifetimes; and those -- the true naifs -- who have no concern that fame or fortune might in any way be connected with their obsessive endeavors.

But one of the most curious aspects of the mysterious disappearance of William Mortensen is that he vanished not after his death, nor as a consequence of his own reticence or failure to find an audience. Rather, he disappeared from

[242] In fact, as of 1979 it was only in Arnold Gassan's blessedly unstandard and long since out of print out-of-print *A Chronology of Photography* (Athens, Ohio: Handbook Co., 1972) that I was able to track down any direct reference to Mortensen. Gassan wrote, "*Camera Craft*, a west coast magazine, also supported this new aesthetic movement [f.64] in photography, and published a long dialogue of letters between Weston and William Mortensen, the last of the great manipulators of the pictorial tradition."(P. 95.) And, further on: "The last protagonist of the gum print and manipulated image was the photographer William Mortensen, whose marvelous and horrible combination prints were published from the early 1930's late into the 1940's. A vivid dialogue between Mortensen and Weston was published at length in the editorial columns of *Camera Craft*, a magazine published in Los Angeles." (Pp. 190-191.) Unfortunately, there's quite a bit of factual inaccuracy even in these brief statements: the magazine was not based in Los Angeles, Weston was only one of the f.64 spokesmen, and the main body of the dialogue took the form of articles, not letters. (For more recent appearances by Mortensen in history texts, see the Postscript to this essay.)

photographic history at the peak of his creative life and the height of his fame and influence, and certainly not by his own volition.

Even a cursory look at the man's career makes it clear that the photographic historians of his time -- among whom, in English, we must number primarily the husband-wife teams of Helmut and Alison Gernsheim and Beaumont and Nancy Newhall -- could not possibly have been unaware of Mortensen's photography, his writings, or his influence on the field. Born in Utah, Mortensen studied painting with George Bridgman, Robert Henri and George Bellows at the Art Students League in New York City after World War I. In the early 1920s he moved to Hollywood and turned to photography, rapidly earning an international reputation as both a picture-maker and a writer. Between 1932 and 1955 he founded and ran the Mortensen School of Photography in Laguna Beach, California, where approximately three thousand students passed through his courses; his images were exhibited and reproduced widely, both here and abroad; and he published a total of twelve books, scores of magazine articles, and a steady stream of letters to the editors of various photography periodicals.

Those books included his magnum opus, *Monsters and Madonnas: A Book of Methods*, an oversize volume with excellent reproductions of many of his images accompanied by explanations of his aesthetic and his techniques. *The Command to Look*, a more compactly sized but not dissimilar monograph, went through several printings. There was also a series of smaller "how-to" treatises: *Projection Control*, *The Model*, *Pictorial Lighting*, *Flash in Modern Photography*, *Mortensen on the Negative*, and others. This series of instructional books was, from the standpoint of contemporary pictorialism, what Ansel Adams's volumes on craft were in relation to the so-called "purist" aesthetic: the invaluable codification and clear exposition of hermeneutic principles.[243]

[243] The influence of Mortensen's approach to craft -- including his impact on photographers who worked in other than pictorialist modes -- has never been effectively traced. For example, W. Eugene Smith certainly knew of Mortensen's printmaking strategies; four of Mortensen's instructional volumes on technique, plus copies of his two monographs, *Monsters and Madonnas* and *The Command to Look*, were in Smith's personal library when he donated his materials to the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona. It seems entirely possible that Smith was affected by aspects of Mortensen's understanding of the relationship between negative and print, perhaps even by the look of Mortensen's prints themselves.

Mortensen's books reached a large audience. Most of them were serialized first in *CC*; during the course of any such serialization the magazine almost invariably sold out its press run, as proudly apologetic notes from the editor indicate. The book versions sold equally well, usually going into multiple printings and/or revised editions. Many of the books were published under the imprint of the Camera Craft Publishing Co., and there is reason to believe that the financial survival of *CC* during this period was largely attributable to Mortensen's writings. This in turn suggests that the availability of *CC*'s editorial columns as a forum for the imagery and ideas of the f.64 Group also might have been due to Mortensen -- that, in effect, he provided the staging ground on which their verbal and visual duels took place.

On the basis of these facts alone, Mortensen's place in the contemporary history of photography would seem to be assured, his right to that place secure and inarguable. When we add to that his eloquent, elegant and indefatigable championing of the pictorialist stance -- under the constant fire of such "purist" big guns as Adams, Weston, Willard Van Dyke, Roi Partridge, John Paul Edwards and Nancy Newhall -- in a controversial public debate which stretched over a decade, his absence from the history books reveals itself to be the consequence not of inadvertent oversight but of deliberate omission. As such, it is a serious breach of the responsibilities and ethics of historianship.

The frequently-proferred justification for Mortensen's erasure is that purism was waxing and pictorialism on the wane during this period. That is true, but insufficient as an explanation -- and considerably disingenuous as well. In fact, though nominally pledged to the impartiality of scholarship, both the Gernsheims and the Newhalls were highly biased in their approach to photography's history. They shared an intense attitudinal and aesthetic commitment to advocacy of the "straight/purist" stance; their distaste for any form of "manipulated" imagery was repeatedly made clear. (The Newhalls, in addition,

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Nor was that influence restricted to photographers of Mortensen's generation and the generation afer that. Even a younger documentarian like Henry Gordillo has spoken of the impact of Mortensen's prints on his own way of seeing. See Coleman, A. D., "Outsider, Insider: Henry Gordillo," *Review: Latin American Arts And Literature*, No. 38, July-December 1987, p. 76.

were already becoming entangled in elaborate personal and professional relationships with members of the f.64 Group, particularly Weston and Adams.[244] To their discredit, they allowed their prejudices and allegiances to overrule their obligations to the discipline of historianship.

Mortensen must have seen it coming. As an isolated occurrence, he might have been able to discount Ansel Adams's omission of his work -- and, indeed, of all contemporary pictorialist work and most earlier pictorialist achievement -- from "The Pageant of Photography," a large traveling exhibit which Adams curated in 1939-1940. After all, "Purism" as such was relatively new as a movement, and its historical roots had never yet been traced in exhibition form. Also, Adams was a practitioner, and from practitioners of a medium one expects credos and grinding axes, not overviews and eclecticism.[245]

Adams's rationale for this exclusion of the pictorialists was dispassionate in tone.[246] However, Adams's antipathy to Mortensen ran deep, with an extremely personal undercurrent. Briefly put, he wanted him dead, and said as much on several occasions. In a recently-unearthed, previously unpublished letter to Mortensen -- apparently intended as part of their debate, but not printed at the time -- Adams waxed positively vitriolic, concluding that "How soon photography achieves the position of a great social and aesthetic instrument of expression depends on how soon you and your co-workers of shallow vision negotiate oblivion."[247] In 1937, replying to a letter from Edward Weston in which Weston notes, "Got a beautiful negative of a fresh corpse," Adams in his autobiography

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[244] See the interviews with Gernsheim and Newhall in Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper's *Dialogue with Photography* (New York: Farrar/Straus/Giroux, 1979). See also my essay, "Making History," *Camera 35*, Vol. 24, no. 9, September 1979, pp. 14-15; reprinted in my book *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996, pp. 108-112.

[245] The problematics of f.64-style "purism" -- including the frequent contradictions between theory and praxis -- are sketched nicely in Michel Oren's "On the 'Impurity' of Group f/64 Photography," *History of Photography*, Vol. 15, no. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 119-27.

[246] Adams, Ansel, "The Pageant of Photography," *CC*, Vol. 47, no. 9, September 1940, pp. 437-446.

[247] The letter was first published in *Obscura*, Vol. 1, no. 2, November-December 1980, pp. 17-21. Although that magazine dated it "ca. 1933," it is a direct response to articles published by Mortensen in *CC* in June and July of 1934; thus it was most likely written in August or September of 1934. It was subsequently reprinted in *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1985), pp. 113-15.

proudly indicated that he wrote back, "It was swell to hear from you -- and I look forward to the picture of the corpse. My only regret is that the identity of said corpse is not our Laguna Beach colleague [William Mortensen]. I am convinced there are several stages of decay."[248] Years later, he would describe Mortensen as "the anti-Christ."[249]

Indeed, Adams's vendetta pursued Mortensen even beyond the grave, and well into the terrain of outright censorship and blackmail. In correspondence with this author, Therese Thau Heyman, Senior Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Oakland Museum in California, confirmed that in December of 1980 Adams -- then at the height of his fame and financiancial success -- had demanded that a small Mortensen exhibit scheduled to run concurrently with Adams's traveling retrospective at the Oakland Museum be closed to the public during his opening; otherwise he would withdraw his own exhibit. "Ansel Adams had his own list of 'enemies,'" wrote Heyman, "and Mortensen was still there and not to be removed by time and his own very evident successes."[250]

But the handwriting was already on the wall by 1940. Mortensen's work and name -- and the works and names of virtually all pictorialists -- had already been conspicuous by their absence from the mammoth exhibit, "Photography 1839-1937," curated by Beaumont Newhall for the Museum of Modern Art in 1937. Mortensen was not even mentioned in the catalogue to that show,[251] nor in

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[248] *Op. cit.*, p. 244.

[249] Teiser, Ruth and Catherine Harround, *Conversations with Ansel Adams* (Berkeley, Calif.: The Bancroft Library), p. 181. Adams also used this term to describe Edward Steichen during the uproar surrounding Steichen's post-World War Two supplanting of Beaumont Newhall at the helm of the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography. The implication that there was something Christ-like about practicing "straight" photography surely merits some analysis.

[250] Letter to the author, June 5, 1984. Heyman subsequently organized the fine traveling exhibition "Seeing Straight: the f.64 Revolution in Photography," whose catalogue texts touch briefly but accurately on the interaction between the f.64 group and Mortensen. (Berkeley, Calif.: The Oakland Museum, 1992.)

Typically, Adams dodged considerably in rendering his own account of this act. In the brief passage of his autobiography in which he discusses Mortensen specifically, he describes their exchange of opinions in *Camera Craft* as "one of the fiercest verbal battles in photographic history." He then goes on to say, presumably describing the Oakland Museum incident, "A few years ago I was not overjoyed to find an important museum showing a major retrospective of my work in their main gallery simultaneously with a Mortensen retrospective on an upper floor. Caveat emptor!" (*Op. cit.*, p. 112-13.) Indeed.

[251] *Photography 1839-1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937).

any of its subsequent versions as it developed into the infrastructure for Newhall's *History of Photography*. Mortensen's elimination from Adams's survey was part and parcel of this purist purge, therefore; and the announcement (also in 1940) of the foundation of the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Photography, with Newhall as its director and Adams as its consultant, made that purge the official policy of the contemporary art establishment. With the publication of Nancy Newhall's 1941 diatribe, "What is Pictorialism?" -- a baby-with-the-bathwater dismissal of all pictorialist images, techniques, and theories -- one hardly needed a weatherperson to know which way the wind blew.[252]

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If I have not yet addressed Mortensen's imagery directly, it is not out of equivocation over its significance but rather out of ignorance.

I have seen, all told, perhaps one hundred and fifty of Mortensen's images. I've encountered no more than seventy-five in the form of original prints (many of these from a portfolio which sold, upon issuance, at the price of $10 for twenty-five signed prints!). The others I've experienced in the form of reproductions: fine ones from *Monsters and Madonnas*, mediocre halftones from *CC* and the technical book series, and slides. Given both his prolificity and his concern with the expressive quality of the original print as a crafted object, this slight acquaintance hardly qualifies as the basis for a balanced and thorough assessment of Mortensen's *oeuvre*. My impressions, at this point, run as follows:

The level of craft -- that is, Mortensen's ability as a printmaker -- was consistently high and frequently virtuosic. If one accepts the stylistic parameters, techniques and materials which he elected to utilize (among them gum, bromoil and bromide prints; the use of paper negatives; combination printing, easel tilting; and the inclusion of hand-drawn elements in the final image), one must acknowledge that his mastery of these is self-evident. On the level of craft alone he was the model for his generation of pictorialists; and the current generation's pictorialists, who are busily reinventing these methods, could save themselves

[252] *CC*, Vol. 42, no. 11, November 1935, pp. 653-663.

much time and trouble by looking to a man who quite literally wrote the book on this branch of photographic printmaking.

Mortensen worked exclusively in the directorial mode, staging the events he photographed (mostly in the studio), creating *tableaux vivants* that involved scenarios, actors, props, costumes, makeup, careful posing and controlled lighting. Perhaps this came out of his early professional background -- he began his career as a still photographer on Hollywood sets. (His credits include heading the still units for *King Kong* and Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings*.) Certainly it was his predilection, and he was aware of it as an issue for any photographer who works with human subjects. "The posing of a model," he once wrote, "involves delicate psychological problems. The status of the photographer is somewhat that of a stage director ..."[253]

Given a penchant for the staged event and the flair for the *mise en image*, joined to a romantic sensibility, it seems inevitable that his energies were concentrated on the creation of symbolist allegories. This in itself should not be too problematic for contemporary audiences; we have, after all, managed somehow to come to terms with such diverse romantics and symbolists as Minor White, W. Eugene Smith and Duane Michals in our own day.

The images of Mortensen's which appear to be least accessible to today's audience -- and to which I find I have most resistance -- are those whose subject matter predates photography itself: those based on Greco-Roman myth and medieval history. I'm not sure why that should be so. Contemporaries of Mortensen's -- not only in literature (Pound, Eliot, Joyce, O'Neill, Graves) but in dance (Graham), sculpture (Moore), and the other media -- could use those same subjects as resonant, evocative reference points.

That may be because, for Mortensen's generation, education generally included an exposure to what were called "the classics." Thus, if only because they had cultural currency, those symbols still had potency. But that does not hold true for my generation, nor for the ones immediately preceding and following

[253] "Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism, Part III: Selection and the Function of Control," *CC* 41, no. 5 (May 1934): 206-207.

it. Perhaps it's that they were never formally transmitted to us as culturally essential parables and archetypes. Perhaps World War Two forcibly imposed new myths of Europe over the old. Or perhaps the temporality of the photographic image, and our cultural commitment to it as documentation, will simply not submit to such willful and flagrant anachronism.

In any case, these images of Mortensen's are the most difficult for me to integrate into my relationship with his work. They comprise a considerable segment of his *oeuvre*. Among these I find the comedic ones least effective. But, along with his romanticism and his classicism, Mortensen has a Gothic mood: an obsession with the grotesque and, I suspect, a belief in evil as an actual presence in the world.

It is this turn of mind and eye which, for me, redeems much of his most classicist imagery: "Johan the Mad," "Lucii Ferraris" and "Death of Hypatia," for example, have no trouble standing by themselves as images, stripped of titular connotations. They are highly stylized, to be sure -- declaredly and emphatically so, like all Mortensen's work. Here, however, the decadence of his visual style amplifies the grimness of his themes.

Madness, death, corruption, torture and occultism are recurrent motifs in Mortensen's *oeuvre*, so much so that I'm led to believe his attraction to historical milieux stemmed more from those concerns than from any longing for the past. Those motifs persist even as his settings become more contemporary; thus the ominous "Caprice Vennois" shares with "The Kiss" an Art Deco angularity in composition which heightens the erotic suggestiveness of both.

When Mortensen addressed the attitudes and issues of his own time, his satire -- no doubt because it was more pertinent -- became more pointed and more effective. At the peak of the debate in *CC*, for example, he offered up a wonderfully sarcastic image, "The Quest of Pure Form," a visual spoof of the f.64 philosophy. (Apparently no print of this is known to exist, but a reproduction

accompanies Mortensen's acid rebuttal[254] of Roi Partridge's pretentiously-titled and inadequately-argued credo, "What is Good Photography?"[255]

A number of Mortensen's images are blunt and enormously powerful political statements. "Human Relations 1932" and "Steel Stocks Advance" are excellent examples of his polemics. I believe they deserve to stand with the work of John Heartfield and Miecyslaw Berman. Like Heartfield and Berman -- though not as single-mindedly political as they -- Mortensen was not afraid of making images whose frank purpose was persuasion. Indeed, the differences between Mortensen's attitude toward the concept of propaganda and Adams's -- as illustrated in the following quotes -- seem paradigmatic of their conflict, and speak eloquently of the distance between their positions.

These two statements were made in 1934, shortly after the debate began. Coincidentally, both came in the April issue of *CC*. Appearing simultaneously in the magazine at that point were the contestants' opening arguments, in the form of two series of articles. Adams's were collectively entitled "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," while Mortensen's were portions of "Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism."

Adams's comments on the issue of "Propaganda" come in a discussion of "The Photo-Document." After predicting that this will be "one of the most important phases [sic] of photography," and particularly praising the work of Dorothea Lange, Adams cautions:

> One danger confronts the development of the photo-document -- the danger of it becoming a tool of obvious propaganda. All art is delicate propaganda of some sort, but I do not feel that direct propaganda succeeds except in the injury to the aesthetic potentials. Perhaps one might say that the objective attitude admits delicate and suggestive propaganda which does not intrude on the aesthetic aspects, while the uncontrolled subjective attitude, without the vital check of taste, admits blatant and obvious propaganda. Comment is legitimate in art, but

[254] "Come Now, Professor," *CC* 47, no. 2 (February 1940): 68-72.
[255] *CC* 46, no. 11 (November 1939): 503-510 *ff*.

comment, motivated by reform or personal advantages, blends dubiously with aesthetic purpose. Art interprets; it cannot attempt prophecy, or motivate the social aspects of the world and still preserve its aesthetic integrity. In the social-constructive sense it is of immense value through subtle and significant comment on the contemporary scene.[256]

Mortensen -- who, no less than Adams, appreciated the work of such "documentarians" as Lange and Atget[257] -- responded in a different vein to this subject. In speaking of different kinds of "picture minds," he came to what he called "the didactic, propagandizing type," of which he wrote:

> Ideas, not sensations, are its basic materials, and the art-form is strictly subordinated to them. Two things mark the propagandist -- the fact that he is obsessed by an opinion, and that he wishes to persuade you to a course of action. How shall he persuade you? Quiet speaking and subtle reasoning are of no avail. Paradoxically enough, propaganda, though dealing with ideas, must express itself in terms of action and emotion. Because of their direct sensory appeal, pictures are perhaps the most effective form that propaganda can take. Propaganda of this type impinges upon our minds at every waking hour ... But provinces less limited than [advertising and political cartoons] are open to the propagandist. The whole human comedy is his. Joining with the sardonic amusement of the ironist or the moral indignation of the satirist, he may castigate human absurdities, obscenities and brutalities, and seek the reform of humanity by revealing to it its own depravities. Goya's *Disasters of War* and *Caprichos* belong to this high type of propaganda. So do Daumier's drawings of the law courts. Pictures such as these are not purely "pictorial" in their appeal, and frequently carry a literary appendage in the form of an ironic title. But considerations of pictorial purity did not deter Daumier and

[256] *CC* 41, no. 4 (April 1934): 180.
[257] "Notes on the Miniature Camera: Part III, Outdoor Portraiture," *CC* 42, no. 1 (January 1935): 3.

Goya, nor will it discourage any modern propagandist with an idea worth expressing.[258]

Here we have the essences of the differences between the two men, and between the two photographic attitudes they embody. For Adams, propaganda -- the active attempt to persuade -- is close to sin, a taint tolerable only if "delicate and suggestive," requiring even then the presumably objective "vital check of taste" (whatever that might be). For Mortensen, propaganda is assumed to be forceful, and is merely another of the options open to the picture-maker. The purist posture is inhibitive and exclusionary; it narrows the range of choices. The pictorialist stance is embracive and inclusionary; it encourages enlargement of the vocabulary.

Which of these two positions has more relevance to the questions facing photographic image-makers today? Which of these two approaches to craft is more contemporaneous? Which of these two men made images more in touch with their own time -- a time when this country was in a state of economic collapse, Hitler had come to power in Germany and World War Two was imminent?

Adams -- who, aside for the perfunctory images of the Manzanar interment camp for Japanese-Americans, never addressed what Oliver Wendell Holmes called "the actions and passions of his own time" -- is usually thought of as the more "modern" of the two; whereas Mortensen, who often directed his imagery toward socio-political issues, has been largely dismissed as antiquated. Within a formalist frame, Adams can perhaps be thought of as the more contemporary; within a humanist frame, Mortensen might well emerge as "more in touch with his time."

But there are no easy answers to these questions. There may be no answers at all. Our individual tastes and sensibilities may pull us in one direction or another, but it would be foolish to dismiss either of these photographic philosophies as insignificant or inferior, since they represent one of the

[258] "Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism, Part II: Sources and Uses of Material," *CC* 41, no. 4 (April 1934): 160-162.

quintessential dichotomies of photographic theory and practice, and are most meaningful when considered dialectically, in relation to each other. For that reason alone it seems clear that the injustice done to the work and memory of William Mortensen has also been a profound disservice to all involved in the study of photography's history. To rectify this, we need the following:

First, a definitive exhibit and monograph on Mortensen's imagery, to establish its scope, its volume, its issues and its relevance to the field today;[259]

Second, a critical biography tracing the man's development as a photographer and connecting his work, his teachings, his life and his times;

Third, a reassessment, by practitioners, of his principles of craft, to determine their pertinence to contemporary photographic image-making;

Fourth, the republication of the complete purist-pictorialist debate from *Camera Craft*, accompanied by analyses and discussions of the theories and attitudes represented therein, reconsidered from a variety of standpoints.

Fifth, the republication of all of Mortensen's tutorial texts.[260]

Without these, the history of photography in our century will assuredly be incomplete.[261] But worse than that, we will have lost a teacher who wrote, in 1934, that "Photography, like any other art, is a form of communication. The artist is not blowing bubbles for his own gratification, but is speaking a language, is *telling somebody something*. Three corollaries are derived from this proposition.

"a. As a language, art fails unless it is clear and unequivocal in saying what it means.

"b. Ideas may be communicated, not things.

"c. Art expresses itself, as all languages do, in terms of symbols."[262]

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[259] Such a retrospective project, I'd propose, should include not only a presentation of Mortensen's own images expansive enough to encompass his *oeuvre* but also a survey of work by those who considered themselves his disciples, such as the Spanish master Jose Ortiz Echague.

[260] As of this writing, none are listed as available in *Books in Print*.

[261] I do not mean to imply by any means that Mortensen's inclusion alone would complete that history. His exclusion is emblematic of longstanding prejudice against those who've chosen to work directorially and/or to explore so-called "alternative processes." The absence of Blacks and the under-representation of women are among other the systemic biases that still demand corrective scholarship.

[262] "Venus and Vulcan 5. A Manifesto and a Prophecy," Vol. 41, no. 6, July 1934, pp. 310-312.

And, perhaps even worse, we will have lost an open-minded thinker who, prophetically, urged photographers to "take unto themselves soapboxes and proclaim their opinions. Let verbal brickbats fly freely and sound body blows be given and taken. Perhaps the resultant tumult will serve to rouse the art of photography from its drowsy contemplation of its own umbilicus, and persuade it to get up and go places. Perhaps the salons may be inspired to seek other meat than a monotonous succession of safe and sound banalities. Perhaps photographic degrees may come to be given on the basis of merit -- and no other."[263]

It's been fifty years since William Mortensen was exiled from the history of his own medium. Isn't it time we welcomed this black sheep back?

Postscript: History of a Footnote

My awareness of the elimination of William Mortensen from the history of photography began in the late 1960s. Reading my predecessors and colleagues, I found frequent reference -- usually brief and superficial -- made to the "purist-pictorialist debates" of the 1930s and '40s. But, while the "purists" were identified and quoted (often at length) as a matter of course, the "pictorialists" involved were never allowed to speak for themselves; invariably, their positions were synopsized and paraphrased. Even more significantly, they were never even named. The battlefield smelled of scorched earth; salt crystals crunched underfoot. I was intrigued.

The issue was not merely the accuracy or inaccuracy of the historical record in regard to a closed chapter. As a working critic, I found myself observing and discussing the emergence of a generation of photographers and artists who were busily resurrecting and/or reinventing the pictorialist approaches to praxis. If I could uncover no discussion of the accompanying theory, presumably they couldn't either, which meant that none of us had a dependable sense of lineage

[263] *Ibid*., p. 310.

or precedent for what was being generated. This seemed unhealthy for all concerned.

So, somewhere around 1974, I hied myself to the annex of the New York Public Library on West 43rd Street, where back issues of old periodicals like *Camera Craft* are stored. The Annex is one of those repositories whose dust motes are imbued with mysteriously soporific qualities. There I dug out, traced, read and photocopied the entire published debate between Mortensen and his adversaries. It opened my eyes and kept me awake.

I didn't consider myself a scholar at that juncture, much less an historian. However, I'd always been a close reader of footnotes, having learned early on in my encounter with scholarship that they're often where the real action is. So, in an essay that I published in 1976 in which I made reference to Mortensen and this debate, I stated that Mortensen "was actually purged from the history of photography in what seems a deliberate attempt to break the [pictorialist] movement's back."[264] A footnote to this passage read as follows:

> From the first one in 1937 to the most recent of 1964, no edition of Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day* -- the standard reference in the field -- so much as mentions the name of William Mortensen. It will be instructive to see whether the forthcoming edition -- a major revision supported by the Guggenheim Foundation -- rectifies this omission.
>
> In fact, none of the books on the history of twentieth-century photography refers to Mortensen. If this could be considered even an oversight, the only questions it would raise would concern standards of scholarship. Since it cannot be construed as anything less than a conscious choice, however, the issue is not only competence but professional ethicality.[265]

The essay was well-received, as was a book-length critical survey I published the following year in which I discussed Mortensen's work at somewhat

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[264] "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition," *Artforum*, Vol. XV, no. 1, September 1976, pp. 55-61. Reprinted in A. D. Coleman, *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; University of New Mexico Press, 1997). For this footnote, see *Artforum*, p. 59 and/or *Light Readings*, p. 256.

[265] *Ibid*., *Artforum*, p. 61; *Light Readings*, p. 256.

greater length and reproduced a number of his images.[266] But when after a few years I could discern no effect traceable to these efforts on the field's attention to Mortensen, I began to feel an obligation to undertake the task of setting the record straight myself. So, upon being asked in 1978 to provide an essay on Edward Steichen for a multi-author critical anthology, I used the opportunity to pressure the project editor into commissioning a piece on Mortensen as well. Once he agreed, I dusted off my photocopies and notes and set to work.

The original version of this essay was drafted in 1978-79. But the anthology never appeared, because its putative publisher went broke. However, while that version of this essay was in the making I was contacted by Deborah Irmas, who informed me that a Mortensen retrospective exhibition, co-curated by Irmas and Suda House, was just then being assembled; supported in part by the National Endowment of the Arts, it would travel around the country, beginning in 1980.[267] I was particularly gratified that, in conversation and correspondence with me, as well as in subsequent public lectures, Irmas credited that footnote of mine from 1976 with sparking her initial interest in pursuing her investigation.[268]

My own argument's first public presentation came when, frustrated by my inability to find an editor willing to publish it, I used it as the text for a lecture under the auspices of the Friends of Photography at the Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, California, on July 12, 1981. This was an act of deliberate provocation: aside from the "master workshop" that I was teaching there, the occasion was a fully orchestrated f.64 hagiography, including a Beaumont Newhall workshop, pilgrimages to the sacred shrines at Point Lobos and visits from Charis and Cole Weston.

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[266] *The Grotesque in Photography* (New York: Ridge Press/Summit Books, 1977), pp. 149-50, 162-65.

[267] Titled "The Photographic Magic of William Mortensen," this exhibit of some 72 prints -- the same show to which Ansel Adams objected so vehemently, as indicated in note 15, above -- toured for several years under the aegis of the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies. This project also included a small but handsomely produced catalogue of the exhibit. Further information about the making of this exhibit and its reception can be found in the issue of *Obscura* cited previously.

[268] I would like to thank Ms. Irmas for sharing with me some of the imagery and information she uncovered in her researches, which included lengthy interviews with Mortensen's widow, Myrdith.

Newhall, who was in attendance at the Asilomar presentation of this text, understandably took exception to much of it. In an animated dialogue between us that took place during the subsequent question-and-answer period (videotaped for posterity by the staff of the Friends), Newhall announced, unbidden, that he was well aware of my 1976 footnote. He went on to indicate that he found Mortensen's work to be "perverse," and that it was *his* history of photography and he could disinvite whoever he pleased. Then he noted that he was in the midst of the Guggenheim-funded revision of his history; therein, he stated with typical generosity, he was at last going to mention Mortensen -- "but only to dismiss him!"[269]

> Indeed, close reading of that edition discloses the following passage:
>
> The charter members [of Group f.64] formulated an aesthetic that in retrospect now appears dogmatic in its strict specifications: any photograph not sharply focused in every detail, not printed by contact on glossy black-and-white paper, not mounted on a white card, and betraying any handwork or avoidance of reality in choice of subject was "impure." It was a violent reaction to the weak, sentimental style then popular with pictorial photographers in California, as seen particularly in the anecdotal, highly sentimental, mildly erotic hand-colored prints of William Mortensen.[270]

Mortensen's work goes unillustrated in that volume, and none of his books are listed in Newhall's bibliography.

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[269] In conversation with me after the session broke up, Newhall told me that Adams's how-to books "owed a debt to Mortensen that had never been acknowledged," and suggested that I look into it. I put the thought aside until, in conversation with the researcher Matt Cook in November 1993, I learned that Adams's technical treatises, and the "zone system" in particular, drew heavily on several articles published in *U.S. Camera Annual* in the early 1940s, on the subjects of "Constant Quality Prints" and "Constant Quality Negatives." The author of those articles was one John L. Davenport -- who, in turn, apparently learned much from Mortensen. In a letter to Mortensen dated November 16, 1935 that's in the archives at the Center for Creative Photography, Davenport, after asking Mortensen's advice on a number of technical questions regarding development and other issues, concludes by saying, "Congratulations on your book. [Either *Projection Control* or *Pictorial Lighting*, given the letter's date.] It will be a landmark in photography."

[270] Newhall, Beaumont, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 188-192.

And since then, what? A version of the 1981 incarnation of my essay -- revised, cut, and retitled without consultation with the author -- subsequently appeared in *Camera Arts*, in early 1982.[271] More recently, Mortensen received shrift that's just as short and not much more sympathetic than Newhall's from Naomi Rosenblum's 1984 entry into the lists of single-volume histories of the medium.[272] A year before his death in 1993, Newhall would repeat almost verbatim that slightly inaccurate description (Mortensen did not hand-color all his prints), from the 1982 edition of his *History*, in his prefatory note to the catalogue for the "Seeing Straight" exhibit.[273] As for Helmut Gernsheim, the volume of his revised history covering the period in question has yet to be published.

As I write this, in the fall of 1993, none of the projects I proposed have been undertaken.[274] I suspect it will require a generation of historians of photography who are not emotionally committed to the purist approach to praxis to realize them; and it will take a full-scale reassessment of the international pictorialist movement from 1925-1950 to establish the true scope of Mortensen's influence on world photography.[275] But I would like to think that, however grudgingly, he's been allowed to return to the fold.[276]

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[271] Coleman, A. D., "Disappearing Act," *Camera Arts*, January/February 1982, pp. 30-38, 108. A short but useful essay by Irmas accompanied this version of my own text.

[272] Rosenblum, Naomi, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 565. Rosenblum does include one illustration, a reproduction of "L'Amour" (p. 568).

[273] *Op. cit*., p. viii. Aside from that, the catalogue's text deals evenhandedly and accurately (though not extensively) with Mortensen.

[274] However, the Center for Creative Photography -- initially created at the instigation of Adams, as an archive fit to house his own work -- has augmented its not inconsiderable holdings of Mortensen material with Deborah Irmas's donation of her own material on the subject. This includes virtually the entire Mortensen estate, which Irmas acquired from Mortensen's widow, Myrdith. Research of the kind I've described is certainly now feasible. And Mortensen's *oeuvre* is thus preserved in an institution sparked by Adams; indeed, it sits in the same temperature- and humidity-controlled storeroom, breathing the same air. Wherever he may be, I suspect that Adams is "not overjoyed" by this clearly poetic justice.

[275] I know of no such study now underway. But microstudies such as "California Pictorialism," a substantial survey (with accompanying catalogue) curated in 1977 for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art by the late Margery Mann, are laying the groundwork for it. Meanwhile, an unpublished Master's Thesis by Edward Montgomery Clift, "The Manner of Mortensen: Aesthetic Communication and The Construction of Metaphysical Realities" (The Aaenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1992), explores the issues from a somewhat different perspective. Clift is a former student of this author.

[276] This is this essay's first publication in its full intended form. Some necessary updating has been incorporated into both the body of the text and these footnotes. The reader interested in pursuing these matters further is advised to see also my essay “Beyond Recall: In the William

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Disappearing Act: Photographs by William Mortensen." Camera Arts 2:1. Jan. 1982. pp. 30–38, 108–109. Revised and expanded version from: Coleman, A. D. Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media and Lens Culture. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998, pp. 91-112.

Mortensen Archive," forthcoming in a special 1998 Mortensen issue of *The Archive*, the journal of the Center for Creative Photography. This issue contains considerable other significant Mortensen-related material.

Why I'm Saying No To This New Arbus Book

I herewith declare my refusal to review *Untitled*, the new book featuring previously unpublished and unexhibited photographs by Diane Arbus, which has just been issued by Aperture ($50 hardbound). My reasons for this decision:

First, I believe that public presentation of this imagery -- a set of pictures of developmentally disabled people made during the period 1969-71, the years just before the photographer's suicide -- exploits its human subjects in ways that I find morally reprehensible. I refuse to contribute to that process in any way.

Second, I believe that there is no way we can consider this set of pictures an authenticated, full-fledged component of Arbus's *oeuvre* -- and this publication drastically misrepresents her body of work in that regard. Moreover, it seems designed to further mythologize her and inappropriately inflate her body of work.

In making this stand, I realize that I risk sounding like an Arlene Croce wannabe. Ms. Croce, the *New Yorker*'s dance critic, recently raised a furore by publicly refusing to review a work by dancer-choreographer Bill T. Jones that incorporated people with AIDS as performers, on the grounds that such "victim art" fell outside critical discourse. While I sympathize with her sense of her dilemma, I don't agree with her solution in that case. But the issues at hand here are entirely different.

Given that the subjects of these photographs were all residents in institutions for what were then known as the "mentally retarded," few if any of them had the capacity to give informed, meaningful consent regarding either the initial making of images of themselves or the subsequent public display of those images in publications or exhibitions.

According to the Arbus estate, "Diane Arbus made arrangements to photograph at several residential institutions for the mentally retarded" in 1969, and "With the authorization of the institutions and the cooperation of everyone involved, she made periodic return visits on a number of occasions." The locations of those institutions are unspecified in the book; the estate will say only

that they were all "on the East Coast." Neither the publisher nor the estate would answer my questions as to what releases, if any, Arbus obtained at the time for subsequent use of these images -- nor would they say whether her estate obtained such releases after her death.

According to state officials and lawyers specializing in protection of and advocacy for the developmentally disabled in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, people housed in such institutions in the late 1960s were considered to have few if any rights. It is possible, these experts said, that blanket authorizations to photograph "wards of the state" (those without individual legal guardians) might have been granted to Arbus by the administrators of some institutions.

However, they noted, our understanding of developmental disability and our sense of the rights of those born to face that challenge have changed dramatically since then; it is unlikely that a photographer today would be allowed into such an institution to pursue a project like Arbus's. And some advocates for the developmentally disabled said that those very pictures that Aperture has published in *Untitled* probably could not have been legally authorized after 1973.

"Absent meaningful consent from the individuals today, the answer would almost undoubtedly be No," said Lawrence Berliner, director of the Legal Services Division of Connecticut's Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. "We're dealing with dignity issues, privacy issues, and the basic right to keep personal information confidential." He added that any of Arbus's subjects who are still alive would have more legal rights today than they did then -- and would have some legal say over the use of those photographs. Both the Arbus estate and Aperture refused to say whether any of the subjects of these pictures are still alive.

So what we have here is a group of pictures of comparatively helpless people -- unable to care for themselves, medically and legally incompetent to a significant degree -- made by dint of Arbus's taking advantage of what everyone in the field of patient rights now considers a benighted, outdated, practically medieval set of regulations and assumptions about the rights of the mentally

challenged. They are pictures that no responsible administrator of such a facility would or could permit to be made today. And they are being presented, a quarter-century after their making, as if those changes of attitude and law had not taken place; the issue isn't even mentioned in the book. I consider that an inexcusable invasion of privacy and a fundamental violation of human rights.

In Arbus's defense, I should note that none of these images were ever exhibited or published during her lifetime. The estate asserts that Arbus considered producing a book of these pictures, but she never went so far as the creation of a maquette for such a publication. From all reports, Arbus gauged her own work not only in terms of its success as powerful imagery but in regard to its fulfillment of a moral contract she felt existed between her subjects and herself. Would she ultimately have felt that any or all of these images lived up to those terms? We'll never know. Since (according to the estate) she showed samples of them only to "friends, colleagues and a few museum curators," I do not think she breached that contract herself. But her estate has breached it for her. And since she left these photographs in the hands of others, rather than destroying them or ordering them destroyed, she bears some responsibility for their emergence in public.

Yet the bulk of that responsibility falls on Arbus's daughter, Doon Arbus, who heads the estate, and Michael Hoffman, executive director of Aperture. That financial profit played a motivational role in all this seems inarguable. According to Michael Sand, the editor at that publishing house, "Michael [Hoffman] has been after Doon to do this book for almost 20 years." With good reason: Aperture's press release makes a point of noting that the Arbus monograph it published shortly after her death has now sold more than 300,000 copies -- making it one of the best-selling photography books of all time.

There is another point to this project: the continued heroicizing and mythologizing of Arbus. Her daughter's afterword to *Untitled* makes this clear. In the opening sentence of the second paragraph, she writes of Arbus: "When she made [these photographs], she had already staked out her territory as a photographer and there was no retreat." That's just for starters. Arbus herself

was fond of such breathless military metaphors for her way of working. For Doon Arbus to reiterate them -- or, rather, amplify them deliriously -- does not persuade me that Arbus was so noble that she could do no wrong, and that her motives, or those of her inheritors and merchandisers, should go unquestioned.

Related to all this is the further inflating of Arbus's *oeuvre*. A commitment to taking photography seriously begins with the recognition that the terms *body of work* or *oeuvre* are to be reserved for those segments of a maker's output that have been *prepared for public presentation by the maker himself or herself, or at least under his or her supervision*. Those segments of the output constitute the integrated, organic "whole" of a photographer's *oeuvre*. The rest, no matter how much it may attract us, is (to use a distinction from general systems theory) merely part of the undifferentiated "heap."

How are we to determine that portion of a photographer's output that might constitute a *body of work*? By scholarship, simple scholarship. Any image published, exhibited, or sold under the maker's name during his or her lifetime must be considered a part of the *oeuvre*; so, too, should be any images that did not reach the public but were clearly intended to -- because they exist as finished, approved, exhibition-quality prints, or are included in book dummies or magazine layouts, or because the photographer's papers and notes make it evident that public presentation of a particular image was intended, or at least desired.

We have no difficulty, for example, in determining the contents of the *oeuvres* of Edward Weston, Aaron Siskind, Berenice Abbott and Imogen Cunningham. These are redacted bodies of work. But we have avoided for the past twenty-five years the necessary and relatively simple task of identifying the *oeuvre* of Diane Arbus.

At the time of her death, Arbus had exhibited and published very sparingly (aside from her commissioned free-lance pictures, the so-called "magazine work"). No more than four or five dozen of her images had been validated by her for public presentation. That is what constitutes her *oeuvre*, that and nothing else. All those shows and publications are known; her contributions to them

would be easy to identify. Why is it that no one has taken the trouble to do so? Could it be because, as a total *oeuvre*, sixty images is hardly enough to support a major international reputation? Would that explain why her work-print and negative files were rifled after her death, in search of images she'd never approved (including about a dozen from this project), to bulk up and thereby validate a major retrospective and monograph?

Certainly that's what's happened in the case of these "untitled" images. According to the estate, Arbus "developed and contacted [contact-printed] nearly 200 rolls of film in connection with this project. She also made rough 8-by-10-inch proof prints of a great many individual images from the series ... Doon Arbus, in consultation with the publisher [Mr. Hoffman] and the designer [Yolanda Cuomo], selected the images included in the book from among the proof prints originally made by the artist herself."

All that a proof print tells us is that the photographer wanted to consider an image at greater length -- that is, that he or she thought it had possibilities, or found it interesting for one reason or another. In no way does it represent a stamp of approval or a final decision on the image's place within or outside of the body of work. And it cannot be claimed that the selection of images in this book represents the redactive decisions of Arbus herself.[277]

On that basis, I reject out of hand their incorporation into whatever might be determined to be Arbus's true *oeuvre*, and will voice no opinion about the images themselves, now or in the future. Furthermore, I propose that presentation of them as part of her *oeuvre* -- in this book, in other publications and in exhibitions -- deliberately misleads all who see them; and that marketing

[277] In her book *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), Patricia Bosworth traces this project from its inception circa 1969-70, when Arbus began "concentrating on photographing retardates -- middle-aged retardates at a home in Vineland, New Jersey." Initially, according to the biographer, she was "delighted and moved" by the experience (pp. 299-300). But she felt "ambivalent" about doing a book of these images (p. 306). And in June of 1971, just weeks before she took her own life, she called her mentor and former teacher Lisette Model "to tell her that she'd reversed her opinion about the retardate pictures -- she hated them now, hated them because she couldn't control them! ... Their world ... was a world she could never know, could never enter, and this frustrated her, depressed her" (p. 312). Bosworth also indicates repeatedly that Arbus had an almost pathological fear of publishing a book of her own work. See, for example, the footnote on p. 292.

them as such, in the form of this book and prints made from those negatives, constitutes false and deceptive advertising, and an act of fraud.

The publication and/or exhibition of unredacted material such as this does a serious disservice to any artist's true *oeuvre*, and impeaches subsequent criticism and scholarship thereof. Until we establish and maintain guidelines for discriminating between a *body of work* and any old batch of photographs, there will be no true canon in photography, only what we have now: a monstrous, constantly growing heap, a heap of heaps. If we truly aspire to make of it a whole, the time for major amputation is upon us. This is as good a place as any to begin applying the scalpel.

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Why I'm Saying No To This New Arbus Book." New York Observer 9:37. 2 Oct. 1995. p. 25.

"Cindy Sherman: Untitled Film Stills"

Photography drew my critical attention in the late 1960s for a variety of reasons. As a vehicle for basic visual communication, it was democratically accessible and widely if not universally practiced. As a mass medium, it was pervasive, omnipresent. And as a medium for creative expression it functioned, almost by definition, as a form of what some now call "outsider" art.

No more. In the mid-'60s, driven by student demand, the integration of photography into art-department and art-school curricula in this country began in earnest. Consequently, in the 1970s photography shifted status more abruptly and dramatically than had any previous medium, moving with breath-taking speed from "outsider" status to what must be the logical converse: "insider" art. And the Museum of Modern Art's acquisition last year of a complete set of Cindy Sherman's black & white 69-print "Untitled Film Stills" series for a reported $1 million, and its presentation of that body of work now, must be understood as a sociological event: the apotheosis of photography as "insider" art.

I often speak to my students about what I call the "empty vessel" concept of art -- the notion that a work of art is merely a convenient receptacle into which we're free to pour whatever ideas, attitudes and feelings we happen to have on hand at the moment. That's a fallacy in the viewer, in my opinion. All responses to a work of art do not carry equal weight; all interpretations are not equally valid. Distinctive works of art, in my experience, resist and confound certain reactions, encourage others. (Responding to a Cézanne still life by discussing your personal preferences in fresh fruit misses the point.) This assumes, of course, that the work embodies some specific content the maker sought to transmit or make available.

But suppose the artist in fact sets out to craft an empty vessel, designs it to accept whatever one wants to dump there? How does one judge such a work? Surely not by the same gauge one would apply to a Cézanne. Seems to me that the number of people it enticed into depositing their baggage therein would serve

as the only possible measuring device. And by that standard it appears to me that Ms. Sherman's project constitutes a genuine triumph.

And here is the crux of the matter, as I see it*: That was the plan.*The goal was not to generate and record convincing performances; what she set out to imitate were usually marginally skilled actresses in poorly limned roles. Nor was the purpose to make memorable images; these are, after all, deliberately mediocre imitations of hack work, film stills from B movies. Nor was the goal to make distinctive objects; film stills are mass-produced for distribution, casually crafted as artifacts, and a good reproduction suffices as an encounter with any of them -- no one actually needs to see or study these prints in order to understand the work.

Indeed, I'll go a step further: No one needs to even see any of these pictures, in the original or in reproduction, in order to opine about them knowledgeably and use them as a reference point. That embodies their true genius. A simple verbal formulation of their premise -- "a series of simulated film stills in which a single young woman stages and acts out the different stereotypical roles of 1950s B-movie actresses" -- functions as a fully adequate substitute for the actual experience of the works themselves.

In short, we have here a canny aspiring insider's strategy, the quintessence of work consciously tailored to be written about, custom-built to serve the needs and desires of a specific generation of critics. Picasso once said, "I don't want there to be three or four thousand possibilities of interpreting my canvas. I want there to be only one. ... Otherwise a painting is just an old grab bag for everyone to reach into and pull out what himself has put in. I want my paintings to be able to defend themselves, to resist the invader, just as though there were razor blades on all the surfaces ..." Well, no razor blades here. To the contrary, here's Ms. Sherman's message to those three or four thousand hungry opinionators: Lunch is served.

Fact is, there's no theory -- of culture, of gender politics, of psychoanalysis, of "visuality," of the simulacrum -- that these images cannot be used to illustrate, no notion, trendy or otherwise, that anything obdurate in them

will contradict or refute. We have here, after all, images of a woman playing the role of a woman playing the role of a woman. In the recursiveness of that infinity of mirrors, Ms. Sherman becomes the lady from Shanghai, with no disillusioned Orson Welles determined to break the spell. Or, to put it another way, this is the one-size-fits-all of contemporary photography, with Ms. Sherman as the art world's equivalent to Woody Allen's Zelig or Jerzy Kosinzki's Chauncey Gardiner, all things to all people. Form follows function: woman as perfect and passive vessel, receptive to whatever one cares to project, shape-shifter (extra)ordinaire.

As I said, writing about this does not require close attention to the pictures themselves, only minimal knowledge of the concept on which they're based. One can read the voluminous commentary for which Ms. Sherman's work has served as springboard and find many things: discussions of various feminisms, the "male gaze," mimesis, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault. Here's what you won't find, no matter how hard you search: any discussion of her picture-making strategies, the ways in which individual scenarios are constructed and their renditions crafted, choices of point of view, the strengths and weaknesses of particular pictures, actual formal relationships between her works, close comparisons to generic film stills.

In fact, when paid such attention certain unmentionable issues become foregrounded. A number of these images reveal technical and/or stylistic flaws and inconsistencies that would make them unusable as film stills. Half a dozen are severely reticulated (a visible puckering of the emulsion that results from careless processing of the film). One is drastically overexposed. Several are so out of focus that they come closer to mid-century pictorialism than anything Hollywood would tolerate. A significant percentage more resemble *paparazzo* reportage than on-set coverage. And so on.

I wouldn't claim familiarity with the complete critical literature now barnacling this body of work, but I've nowhere found even a mention of such matters. This speaks of various tendencies among my colleagues -- an avoidance of the real spadework of scholarship (by which I don't mean re-reading Lyotard); an ongoing ignorance of the basics of photography; an actual aversion

to discussing the specifics of works of art. Instead, as Peter Galassi, MoMA's Chief Curator of Photography, says in an accompanying handout, since these pictures were made "everyone [has been] telling us what she meant. The sheer volume of verbiage -- the banal and bombastic along with the thoughtful and perceptive -- is a symptom of the nature of Sherman's achievement (and now part of its meaning)."

He could not speak more plainly: regardless of quality, the physical amount of commentary evoked by Ms. Sherman's project establishes its significance -- and (tacitly) justifies the Department of Photography's acquisition of a full set thereof for a market-making price.

Now this will shock many of my readers: I agree with him. I don't think my opinion of these pictures, or the larger project they constitute, matters. In the two decades since their maker undertook their production, they've become an international reference point not only for critics and other art-world types but for a large segment of the general public. The art world working as it does, they're in forever -- even if, like Bougereau, Ms. Sherman eventually falls out of critical favor. So they've earned a *de facto* importance, and Mr. Galassi's acquisition of them signals most visibly his ongoing efforts to stretch his department's parameters beyond the rigid modernism of his mentor and predecessor, John Szarkowski.

Ultimately, one must admire the carefully plotted trajectory of this work. Commenced in 1977, when Ms. Sherman was only 23, shortly after she received her B.A. from the State University at Buffalo (where she studied with one of the masters of directorial photography, Les Krims), it made its debut at the Center for Exploratory and Perceptual Arts/Hallwalls, a not-for-profit artist-run outfit in Buffalo that her cohort used as a showcase. (Now there's a *real* subject for art-historical research, though I fear Mr. Galassi is right in prophesying that, instead, "Eventually a small army of cinema scholars will map Sherman's *Stills* against film history.") A mere year later it had made its way to New York City. It was initially positioned as exemplifying a kind of post-modern anti-photography -- and certainly challenged MoMA's then-current position on that subject; Ms. Sherman

consistently resisted identification as a photographer, despite her choice of medium.

Today, just twenty years on, that same body of work has found a permanent home in the very bastion of modernism, and in its department of photography to boot, at a record price; it, and its maker's name, are on everyone's lips; it has become an acknowledged part of art history. To whatever Ms. Sherman sets her hand from now on -- even the recently completed feature film her dissatisfied producers have withheld from distribution[278] -- attention must and will be paid. What arc of triumph from insider-aspirant to insider-queen could be more perfect and -- for those who admire such things, however grudgingly -- more admirable?

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Cindy Sherman at MoMA: The Apotheosis of an Insider." *New York Observer*, 21 July 1997, p. 33.

[278] See "Art Diary: ??" by Jeffrey Hogrefe, *The New York Observer*, Vol. ??, no. ?? ??, 1997), p. ??

The Condition of Photo Criticism

Because It Feels So Good When I Stop:
Concerning a Continuing
Personal Encounter With Photography Criticism

I am not a photographer. I am a writer. And the impulse which has led me to spend the past six years writing about photography can best be characterized as paranoia.

Certain conjunctions which occurred in 1967 -- among them my reading of William Ivins's *Prints and Visual Communication* and Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* -- forced me to the realization that photography was as omnipresent a mode of communication as was my own chosen medium. The recognition that photography shaped me, my culture, my world, and my understanding of all three came as a considerable shock, particularly when accompanied by the admission that I paid it little conscious attention and had no comprehension of its *modus operandi*.

To alter the conditions of powerlessness generated by this ignorance, I began paying close attention to the medium in its various manifestations throughout my daily life. I also began educating myself, largely through books, in the history and evolution of photography as a mode of visual communication. The material I was ingesting along these lines was supplemented with exposure to as many monographs and exhibits of creative work as I could find; these imagemakers, the artist-photographers, were those searching for the means of controlling and personalizing this encoding system, and their explorations had obvious pertinence to my own.

In the course of this autodidactic activity, I came in contact with a diversity of contemporary writing about photography. Such of it as proved most useful to my researches tended, paradoxically, to come from outside the medium; most photography commentators seemed to be writing exclusively for photographers, rather than for a general audience. Then, as now, my interest in becoming a photographic imagemaker was minimal. Such writing was therefore irrelevant to

my needs. I came to feel that there might be others in my position, curious about the medium without being performers therein. I also came to feel that there might be some value to threshing out, in public and in print, some understandings of the medium's role in our lives. And the undertaking of an ongoing engagement with photography, from the specific and declared stance of a member of the audience, contained a challenge which I enjoyed taking up.

So, early in 1968, I began writing a weekly column from that perspective for the *Village Voice*, a weekly New York newspaper. (Titled "Latent Image," the column ran until the spring of 1973, when I resigned in a censorship dispute.) In 1969, I was invited to write for *Popular Photography* and subsequently, in 1970, for the *New York Times*, to which I contributed on a bi-weekly basis through October of 1974.

I am providing this information for several reasons. One is to give those who may well be unfamiliar with my writing some background data to indicate what I'm about and where I'm coming from. The other is to make it clear that I am not being coy, flippant, or refractory when I say that I have absolutely no formal training in photography or in being a photography critic and no fixed idea of what photography criticism is. I do have a working definition of my own activity: the intersecting of photographic images with words. Sometimes I feel I succeed at this; usually, by my own lights, to a greater or lesser degree I fail. It is the process of trying which engrosses me, and though I cannot explain adequately the impulse behind it, this continues to seem to me to be worth doing.

What follows is not the enunciation of a formal aesthetic; I do not have one. Nor is it a distilled methodology for evaluating photographs; from my standpoint, I merely look closely at and into all sorts of photographic images and attempt to pinpoint in words what they provoke me to feel and think and understand. This article, then, is simply one man's state-of-the-craft report, an account of what I have uncovered in a continuing investigation of what photography criticism may finally prove to be.

Among the most distressing problems of photography criticism is the serious shortage of people with whom to discuss them.

Photography criticism is by no means a crowded field. In New York City, which in terms of the number of gallery and museum exhibitions and book and magazine publishers is surely the photography center of the world, the number of writers regularly responding in print to this flood of material can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Another way of illustrating the scarcity might be to indicate that there are currently a grand total of four books in print which are acts of photography criticism. These are the *Camera Work* anthology published by *Aperture*, Charles Caffin's *Photography as a Fine Art*, John Ward's *The Criticism of Photography as Art*, and Volume 1 of *The Photographic Notebooks of D. H. Moore*. The first two are collections of early twentieth-century material; Ward's book is useful but the author is not and never has been a functioning critic in the public arena; Moore's book is self-published and hard to come by. All in all, hardly an abundant cornucopia with which to entice a potential audience or widen one's circle of peers.

In part, this situation may exist because, as an activity, photography criticism is problematic in itself. Though the vast majority of people in our culture may not engage regularly with criticism in such fields as literature, art, and music, and though these forms of cognitive inquiry may serve no valuable purpose in the context of their lives, the validity of the activity itself has long been established and goes largely unquestioned. We all know, or at least think we know, what an art critic or a music critic does, and share a widespread if somewhat vague faith in the ultimate usefulness of their labors.

In the minds of many, however, there seem to be vast doubts as to whether photography criticism is actually fit work for a grown man. With photography itself an only-recently legitimized medium in the eyes of the tastemakers and the academicians, photography criticism is still viewed as something akin to an obscure form of perversion, worthy at best of nothing more than passing interest. As a creative medium and a major mode of communication, photography has attracted the brief attention of many

commentators, from Charles Baudelaire to James Agee, but has evoked the enduring passion of very few. (Susan Sontag's recent articles in the *New York Review of Books* comprise a good case in point. Initially, it appears, Sontag felt that she could say everything worth saying about photography in two pieces, but subsequently felt impelled to flesh out her statement by adding a third, and now a fourth.)

A surprising number of people have written intelligently about photography in the past 135 years. Oliver Wendell Holmes, George Bernard Shaw, Walter Benjamin, Lincoln Kirstein, Roland Barthes (the uncredited source of several of Sontag's constructs), George P. Elliott, Marshall McLuhan -- all are among those whom one could cite as authors of cogent writing about photography. But their contributions to the literature of the medium, however high in quality, are quantitatively scant. Shaw, with perhaps two dozen essays on the subject to his credit, is more prolific than most of the rest put together. However much one might cherish what these writers have had to say about photography, their interaction with the medium has not been extensive enough (Shaw being perhaps a borderline case, and his contemporary Sadakichi Hartmann as well) to qualify them specifically as photography critics rather than critics-at-large. They have nourished the literature considerably, but they are not central to its tradition.

There are other writers with a far less tangential relationship to photography. Both Minor White and Ralph Hattersley have published numerous invaluable essays on the "reading" or interpretation of photographs, and have returned to this subject again and again. White's approach is drawn largely from metaphysics, Hattersley's from psychology. Currently they appear to be finding a common ground of gestalt mysticism which, to my way of thinking is proving more obfuscatory than fruitful. Both of them, however, have been pioneers in demonstrating that photographs are not transcriptions but descriptions.

At the same time, it must be noted that both White and Hattersley are photographers and teachers, and that in their writing they speak from those positions. Only rarely has either of them brought his analytical/evaluative

approach to bear on a publicly presented body of work to which the maker has, in Emmet Gowin's pregnant phrase, "given his consent." The imagery discussed by both has usually been student work, whose status is transitional and thereby protected.

Moving to another group, it must also be said that Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, John Szarkowski, Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, and Van Deren Coke have all written extensively about photography over a period not just of years but of decades, and that each of them has made large contributions to the literature of the medium. But their stances have been those of curator and/or historian, positions which involve a tacit rather than an overt form of criticism.

This is not an insignificant distinction. Curators and historians do act as *de facto* critics; they select the imagery that the critics will write about and the audience will see. However, the writings of curators tend to be appreciations of work with whose presentation they are directly involved in their sponsorial role. Thus they rarely are obligated to come to terms, in print at least, with imagery to which they feel antagonistic or which does not fit comfortably into their aesthetic. Historians, on the other hand, concern themselves with the chronology (and ideally, though this stage of photography historianship is only beginning to be reached, with the morphology) of a medium's development. Consequently, the images and imagemakers with whom historians must grapple are generally established ones whose fundamental significance does not need definition or defense, but rather elaboration and placement in context.

Historians and curators, therefore, write from privileged positions. The historian's privilege is the detachment and hindsight created by distance in time from the work's public birth; the curator's is the closeness and privity which accrues to those with the power of patronage. Neither of these privileges is available to the critic, and their absence distinguishes the critical function from the curatorial and historical.

Critics do, of course, sometimes write appreciations as well as exegeses, and often concern themselves with work from the past. The boundaries are not

always clearly marked. For the purposes of this discussion, however, let us establish the following parameters:

> *A critic should be independent of the artists and institutions about which he/she writes. His/her writing should appear regularly in a magazine, newspaper, or other forum of opinion. The work considered within that writing should be publicly accessible, and at least in part should represent the output of the critic's contemporaries and/or younger, established artists in all their diversity. And he/she should be willing to adopt openly that skeptic's posture which is necessary to serious criticism. (This last requirement includes, implicitly, a willingness to bear the resentments which are evoked by anyone adopting that posture. The word skeptic is used advisedly. Critical activity is not enmity, nor hostility. But the critic is not, and should not become, anyone's mouthpiece; and we must keep in mind the important differences between constructive, affirmative criticism and the awarding of gold watches. The greatest abuses of a critic's role stem from the hunger for power and the need to be liked.)*

Given the guidelines above, we can safely say that there are virtually no photography critics at work in this country outside of those individuals who write for a small handful of newspapers and photographic magazines. No general-interest publication, no radio or TV station, and no major art periodical presents anything resembling running critical commentary devoted to photography.

A recent survey of the field, published as part of the book *Photography: Source & Resource* (Lewis, McQuaid, & Tait; Turnip Press, 1973), listed some 30 writers nationwide whose work could at least in part be defined -- according to the survey's qualifications -- as photography criticism. Many of these were columnists writing for a variety of regional newspapers, whose work I cannot evaluate because I am unfamiliar with it. Indeed, I had heard of and read work by less than one-third of those included. However valuable the writing of the others may be for their local readers, it is not part of a larger critical dialogue, for it is not even circulating among other critics.

That is a moot point, however, since there is in fact nothing yet approaching a true critical dialogue taking place within photography, even in the pages of the more widely disseminated publications. Few exhibits and books are discussed by more than one commentator, and it's a rare issue which is examined from more than one angle. In photography, we are at a stage best described as pre-critical mass, and though an explosion seems imminent it has not yet come to pass.

Thus it is impossible to discuss the "problems of photography criticism" as though they were clearly formulated and widely agreed-upon issues, consciously faced by a diversity of critics familiar with each other's relative positions, and known to an audience engaged in active observation of critical interactions and the concepts emerging therefrom.

This is very far indeed from being the case. Excepting the recent "debate" between Minor White and myself in *Camera 35*, the last open controversy in print over photographic ideas and methodologies was the purist-pictorialist battle royal in the pages of *Camera Craft* three decades ago. That's a long time between rounds.

Therefore, rather than attempting to predict what some of the "problems of photography criticism" may turn out to be, it seems more practical under the circumstances to address ourselves to the three interlocking hurdles which will have to be surmounted in order for a provocative critical dialogue in photography to begin.

To start with, there is the necessity for creating a network of appropriate forums for critical commentary.

Criticism, by its nature, is a public activity. Its purpose, as a process, is to establish, develop and share a set of ideas and definitions intended to enable a group of disparate people -- the critics, the audience and the artists as well -- to find in the work under discussion a common ground, a unifying metaphor for their mutual experiencing of the world and their understanding of that experience.

This makes it virtually impossible to become a critic in private. The public role is inherent in the activity; the position does not become official (one might

also say that the circuit is not complete) until the aspirant begins to publish and thus throws his/her hat into the ring.

Consequently, the existence of adequate training grounds is a prerequisite for the evolution of a generation of full-fledged critics. There simply must be places for beginning critics to cut their eyeteeth, work out their ideas and test their attitudes regarding the medium. Most other media have well-established structures within which this maturation can take place: college and university workshops and publications in which to debut, "little magazines" in which to learn and grow, and thence to the larger critical journals or to more diversified, general-interest publications. Such systems not only permit critics to evolve and operate at their own organic pace but also -- nature abhorring a vacuum -- encourage people to engage in critical activity.

No such system exists in photography at present. Even though formal photography education on the undergraduate and graduate levels has multiplied dramatically over the past decade, the number of schools whose photography departments and publications pay any attention whatsoever to photography criticism as a field of inquiry is minuscule. The rarity of "little magazines" is still noteworthy, and until quite recently those few extant devoted more space to reproductions of imagery than they provided for response to same. (Presently, one can point to *Aperture*, *Afterimage*, and *Exposure* as outlets for critical writing; there are few others at this level.)

There exist no "larger critical journals" in photography -- nothing at all approximating *Artforum* or even *Art in America*, although a few art magazines (including those two) do give periodic space to the medium. And, as noted before, no general-interest magazines and only a few newspapers devote space to writing which concerns imagery rather than hardware.

This brings us to a group of publications which I have not discussed so far because they are unique to photography and anomalous in the history of criticism. These are the large-circulation photographic monthlies -- *Popular Photography*, *Modern Photography*, *Camera 35* et al -- and the various annual and semi-annual spinoffs therefrom. With the possible exception of writing, there

is no other medium with as many amateur practitioners as photography can claim. And any comparison ends when one adds in the equipment involved in producing photographic images. Writing, painting, dance, music — none of these incorporate the acquisition of so much machinery and the consumption of so much material as does photography.

Like most hobbyists, amateur photographers get into the equipment at least as much as they involve themselves in image-making, if not more so. The primary function of the big photo magazines is to bring these hobbyists together with that technology -- to marry the consumers and the products, or to be more blunt about it, to flog the goods unmercifully. Muchof the writing they contain, consequently, is what we in the trade call "nuts and bolts" articles: equipment ratings, explanations of techniques, lists of tricks to assist in making something that looks meaningful, and the like.

Presumably these publications feel some slight obligation to inform their readership of developments in the medium of photography as a creative and communicative force. This presumption is based on the regular appearance within their pages of writing which considers exhibitions and book presentations of photographs. For what it's worth, these publications have provided more consistent coverage of such material than any other.

Unfortunately, it's not worth very much. The problem is not merely that these magazines, the major extant vehicles for photography criticism, are seriously if not entirely compromised by their absolute dependence on the billion-dollar photo-merchandising industry for ad revenue and thus for life. Intelligent, honest writing is often capable of redeeming the triviality of its vehicle. The deeper flaw is that much of what appears in those publications is at best a facsimile of criticism, written primarily by photographers who too often fail to comprehend or acknowledge the significant distinction between meaningful criticism and the exercise of one's personal taste patterns.

One prominent writer/photographer, for example, gives over goodly portions of his book reviews to numerical counts of how many layouts fit into his categories of Good, Bad and Indifferent. He never specifies which are which, nor

has he ever presented an extended statement on layout which would make interpretation of his statistics possible. When he comes to speak more specifically to images, he tends to the other extreme of over-conciseness. ("The photographs, which show wild areas near towns, are all sharp. For me, the one on page 73 is extremely beautiful.")

Another babbles in embarrassing veneration of his idols or, alternately, concocts snappy two-word epithets which he attaches to large lists of photographers whose work often shares no ostensible similarity, neither stylistic nor contentual. The intent of this labelling (which might be paraphrased as "Dynamic Obsolescence vs. Morbid Introspection") would seem to be the division of the photography community into armed and antagonistic camps. He uses his categories judgmentally, to separate those artists whose sensibilities he appreciates from those he dislikes. The latter are lumped together and dismissed en masse, without their individual crimes ever being specified -- a form of aesthetic Stalinism.

That such taste-mongering passes for photography criticism is bad enough. Most of what is published under that guise deals even less extensively with the imagery and its messages, concentrating instead on the photographer's choices of equipment and materials, as though a photograph were a demonstration of the lens employed in its making rather than a description of its maker's vision of the world.

This is photography criticism's actual "tradition," its working definition of itself. The consequences of this genre of pseudo-criticism have been little short of disastrous. It has disseminated widely a totally counterproductive definition of photography criticism; the necessary contradiction thereof drains off time and energy which could be much better spent in other ways. It has discredited the large-circulation magazines as serious critical organs, and has rendered them almost entirely useless by establishing an atmosphere of inanity and irrelevance which absorbs almost any work presented in that context. And it has grossly deluded and miseducated a large segment of the potential audience for serious

photography and serious photography criticism by centering attention on equipment and technique rather than on image, idea and content.

This misdirected audience is the second of the interlocking hurdles directly ahead. Most of its members are camera owners. Although possession of two hundred dollars' worth of toe shoes and leotards doesn't, as we all know, make you a dancer, these people have been propagandized by the hardware industry, by the photo magazines, and by our consumerist culture into believing that their ownership of cameras makes them photographers. And, although it has long been recognized in regard to the other media that the biases and jealousies endemic to being a performer within a medium tend to vitiate any performer's usefulness as a critic of his peers, these amateurs have been led to believe that no one outside the medium should say anything at all about photographs.

I find many indicators of this audience's vision of my role as critic in the correspondence I receive. I can count on a regular flow of letters asking me which single-lens reflex in the $300-$350 prirce range I would recommend. Others want my darkroom secrets, or the address of my favorite color-processing house. One gentleman actually named me his last hope in his search for a new case for a camera two decades old. His hope was dashed, needless to say, but you can be sure that Judith Crist and Clive Barnes and Barbara Rose receive no missives along equivalent lines, for there are not equivalent lines in their media.

It is evident from such correspondence that a sizeable portion of my readership assumes me to be a practicing photographer, and one cognizant of and interested in all the latest hardware innovations. It is also evident that they feel entitled to demand that I function as a consumer guide to photographic merchandise -- this despite the fact that in six years of writing I have given no indication whatsoever that this is an area of my critical concern or expertise.

That I am not a photographer is a fact which distresses another element of my readership. "Why don't you get a *photographer* to review photography" (italics theirs) is a complaint often received by my editors. I find it is elicited most dependably when I disregard a photographer's craft competence and instead discuss the mediocrity of his/her imagery. For example, in a piece of mine on

Yousuf Karsh which appeared recently in *Popular Photography*, two simple statements -- that Karsh's work has evidenced no growth or change in several decades, and that his much-vaunted style appears to be a trap from which he is incapable of escaping even momentarily -- generated a barrage of violently indignant letters. The main objections seemed to be that I was arguing with success and that, because I couldn't produce such work myself, I had no right to comment on its inadequacies. One correspondent informed me that I was unworthy to kiss the ground on which Karsh walks; another transcribed his anger onto toilet paper.

All this is comical, to be sure, and would be exclusively so if it represented what might be considered the lunatic fringe of the photography audience. Regrettably, however, it is instead emblematic of widely held beliefs and deeply cherished attitudes common to much of the audience for photography. Many people are simply not accustomed to considering photographs as anything other than craft exercises or displays of technical virtuosity; discussions of how or what a photograph communicates appear to discomfit them hugely.

That such a situation exists, and has existed for so long, is attributable primarily to the lack of a functional vocabulary for the criticism of photography. The language currently applied to photographs as distinct from other kinds of images is derived entirely from the jargon of technique; it is a form of shop talk which pertains to the manufacturing of photographs as objects rather than to their workings or effects as images. In essence, it deals not with the creative/intellectual problems of the photographer as artist and communicator, but with the practical difficulties faced by the photographer as craftsman. For any consideration of the former, one must fall back on the terminologies of the other graphic arts or traditional aesthetics, which are occasionally useful in approaching certain sorts of photographic imagery but bear absolutely no relationship to others and which fail to come to grips with some of the unique and essential qualities of any photograph, such as its factuality, its temporality, and its equivocal relation to what Edward Weston called "the thing itself."

The development of such a vocabulary is as necessary to the evolution of vital photography criticism as is the creation of vehicles for critical writing and the education/reeducation of what Minor White calls a "creative audience." The sources for such a vocabulary will doubtless be diverse, including such disciplines as psychology, sociology, and structural linguistics. These, at any rate, are some of the areas into which I and others concerned with the absence of a vocabulary are currently nosing around for useful tools and constructs. Wherever the terminology eventually comes from, it must now be found, organized, and shared. Without a common language we all -- photographic image-makers, critics, and audience alike -- are doomed to remain strangers to each other, disconnected components of a generator with the capacity to enlighten us and illuminate our world.

(This is the complete text of a speech delivered at New York University on December 10, 1974. It was presented as part of N.Y.U.'s 4th Annual Art-Critics-in-Residence Program, which is sponsored in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. A few minor revisions, additions and updatings were made subsequently, but the statement stands essentially unaltered.)

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D. "Because It Feels So Good When I Stop: Concerning a Continuing Personal Encounter with Photographic Criticism." *Camera 35* 19:7. Oct. 1975, pp. 26-29, 64.

The Destruction Business:
Some Thoughts on the Function of Criticism

Hellhound on my trail, my muse refused to let this essay rest. You didn't know that critics were supervised by muses? Nor did I, though I assumed some oblique connection to Mnemosyne, fount of memory, and through her to Clio, overseer of history. Yet there's no question but that critics, like artists, draw on wellsprings of energy and (for want of a better word) inspiration, though who or what breathes into us may be nothing identified by the Greeks. Indeed, I often suspect an older origin for mine, something from the Hindu perhaps: Shiva, Destroyer of Worlds.

In any event, for three years now this voice has obstinately refused to allow me to publish this essay in the form in which it was initially drafted for this book -- which, of course, meant that the book has been stalled for as long. During that period I have managed to publish three other books; and I have taken care of all other pre-production details on this one, in the hope that she might step out for a beer and let me slip this one past her. No such luck; if her attention flagged, I never caught her napping.

Lest you think me mad, let me assure you that this guiding spirit has a current incarnation: a forty-something woman whose level of intelligence (in my estimation) far exceeds my own, an artist and art historian and arts administrator herself, profoundly frustrated because life keeps getting in the way of her exercise of her many gifts, talents, and hard-earned skills. Part of her problem is that she keeps a keener watch on others (myself included) than she does on herself, to their benefit and her own detriment. In any case, she has loomed ominously over this essay, demanding that I push it to extremes that I had until now, for whatever reasons, avoided.

In response, I employed an assortment of my procrastination techniques, the full repertoire of which would probably astonish those who think me prolific. And, needless to say, life interfered in various ways with my plans, as it does with hers, providing endless rationales for whatever needs excusing. (For example, in

the midst of this very paragraph my computer went on the blink and lost some earlier version of the past several sentences; shortly thereafter, it evaporated an entire working draft of these prefatory comments.) But, in hindsight, I must 'fess up: the real reason this essay's taken so long is that I wasn't in the mood.

What mood, you ask? Simply put, the labor of destruction (which is, as I will argue, the core of my profession) is best undertaken in a certain mood: a readiness, indeed an eagerness, to lay about one with a will and watch things shatter. As Karl Marx wrote, "The essential sentiment of criticism is *indignation*; its essential activity is *denunciation*."[279] (Perhaps this is why the Greek novelist and poet Nikos Kazantzakis once said, "One of man's greatest obligations is anger."[280])

And what, might you ask, did it take finally to get me in the mood? A combination of circumstances. To start with, I've spent some time in recent years pondering and savoring the word *citizenship*. This began when my muse, reading the typescript for this very book, on which I'd solicited her commentary, pressed me in conversation to define the public function of criticism more precisely. To my considerable surprise, I heard myself say, "It's the activity of responsible citizenship within a given community." Though I've worked as a professional critic for close to thirty years, I hadn't known I believed that. (As Thoreau once put it, "How can I know what I think till I see what I say?")

But that hardly responded to her primary concern: her conviction that, at least within the confines of this essay as it then stood, I'd let my tender-hearted aspect override my capacity for tough-mindedness. Indeed, she wanted me to go over the top, into berserker fury, hang-'em-high bloody-mindedness, suspecting I'd lost my heart for the battle. In retrospect, it seems to me my thoughts were simply elsewhere at the time. Nonetheless, I couldn't deny she had a point; every

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[279] "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" *(1843*-1844); reprinted in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Pubishers, 1975), p. 177.

[280] From my notebooks, source unknown. An apology for the absence of full citations for the sources of some of the quotes in this essay. Some come from notebooks I kept at the outset of my work as a critic, which began shortly after I left graduate school, expecting never again to write a footnoted essay; others have been passed along to me by correspondents, colleagues and students who failed to annotate their origin. I would welcome their identification, confirmation and/or correction.

month or so I'd re-read that version of the essay, note its excessive kindnesses and nice-guyisms, sigh, and put it aside, returning to my brooding on the nature of citizenship.

Eventually, that led me to assessing my fellow citizens in this particular polity, by weighing both the quality and the quantity of the public discourse on photography stimulated by my writings and those of my colleagues. Those of us who publish regularly on this subject do read and, in various ways, respond in print to each other's ideas, of course. But our broader readership persists in an astonishing and disheartening muteness on just about all issues. Rereading such letters to the editor as my own writing had evoked over the past twenty-eight years left me dejected, wondering why I even bothered.

During those three decades, my editors published virtually every letter written to them in response to my essays.[281] Available for my review, therefore, I had almost everything readers had cared to offer as responsive dialogue in the public forums in which I've done my work. Judging from that, the average baseball fan -- who cheers on his or her favorite team in public, wears its colors at the ballpark or in the sports bar, and actively debates its strengths and weaknesses with all and sundry, including the sports columnists in the newspapers -- shows more articulacy and gumption in this regard than all but a tiny handful of my readers.

Indeed, toward the end of my scrutiny of this slim file of missives I found myself so tired of hearing privately from readers who lacked the elementary sense of civic responsibility required to enter the public debate on any issue that I drafted a form letter intended to discourage any further such communication with me -- unless and until they first wrote something to some editor about some issue I raised, the equivalent within this community of voting in a local referendum.[282]

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[281] The only exception of which I'm aware was the *Village Voice*, whose editors -- on the occasion of my forced departure from its pages -- censored dozens of letters that were written in relation to my final column in those pages, and in expression of concern and indignation over the censorship that resulted in my resignation.

[282] Dear X: I appreciate your taking the time to write to me. However, I have to say "Thanks, but no thanks." After twenty-eight years in the field, I remain astonished at the fact that no one in photography seems to understand the difference between appreciation and support. The former without the latter constitutes nothing more than lip service. One of my mottos is, "Lip service is

But what brought all this to a head, finally, was the response I received to my fall 1996 commentary on the posthumous publication of a set of photographs of developmentally disabled people made in the last years of her life by the late Diane Arbus.[283] My approach to this project was a version of what the Germans call *ausstellungskritik* -- "exhibition critique," aimed primarily at addressing the presentational project, in this case a publication rather than a show. I realized as I researched and wrote this critique that it mattered to me, on some very deep levels, contained something that seemed crucial. Not only did it evolve into a defining structure of thought and function as an important position paper for me,

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better than no service at all," but the utility to me of lip service has diminished considerably over time.

I'm well aware that there are numerous folks out there reading me, putting my reviews of their projects on their vitae and including them in their press kits, photocopying my work and using it in classes, and so forth. And I wouldn't at all mind hearing from them, might even reply to their private letters to me from time to time, did they actually constitute a genuine base of support. Unfortunately, they don't.

If everyone who's ever written to me like you, or spoken to me privately in this vein -- to tell me how much they enjoy my writing, how useful they and their students find it, how important to them was my support of their work (or their way of working, or of some cause in which they believe, or freedom of expression in general), etc. -- had in return taken the trouble just *once* over the years to write a letter to the editor of any publication to which I contribute, in order to add their voices to the dialogue on any subject and indicate that they read me with respect and interest, my life as a professional critic and a working writer would have been and would now be radically different. (I'm sure the same holds true for many of my colleagues.) I wouldn't expect that from the casual or occasional reader of my work, but it seems not unreasonable to look for it from the core of my readership, my fellow toilers in the vineyard.

Since I see such public feedback and debate in just about every periodical I read devoted to other subjects -- politics, music, art, literature -- I'm forced to conclude that the sophisticated audience for photography is uniquely *irresponsible:* in the fundamental sense of the word, *unable to respond*. I've begun to speculate, darkly, that perhaps something in the very nature of the medium itself actually attracts the irresponsible, and feeds that incapacity in them. Even enlightened self-interest appears insufficient to overcome this basic inertia. I find it noteworthy -- perhaps you will as well -- that not even any of those to whose defense I've rallied publicly over the years when they were under censorious or other attack have ever bothered to send an open letter to the publication involved expressing thanks for that support.

Surely it was not your intent -- which I have no doubt was just the opposite -- but, at this stage of my professional life, I find backstage go-get-'em-kid encouragement like yours actually disheartening, just further proof that I take all my public stands alone; and I would prefer that you spare me any more of it. I'd propose to you the following as an appropriate rule of thumb: Don't presume to take up to a single minute of any public commentator's time with unsolicited private correspondence -- no matter how flattering -- until you have taken a public stand, at least once, pro or con something that person has published or said in a public forum, or have otherwise actively involved yourself in the public discourse to which he or she devotes such energies.

If you have something to say about my work henceforth, pro or con, the pages of just about every publication for which I write are, as a matter of policy, open to your comments. Sincerely, /s/ A. D. Coleman

[283] Coleman, A. D., "Why I'm Saying No To This New Arbus Book," *New York Observer*, Vol. 9, no. 37, October 2, 1995, p. 25.

but -- since it broached two substantive cans of worms -- it seemed likely to stir up some controversy. So I forewarned my supportive editors of that, refined my argument, checked my facts, verified my sources and let 'er rip.

What resulted was nothing like I'd expected. This painstakingly crafted provocation was met, publicly, with dead silence for four months. Exactly one brief letter to the editor -- not a particularly cogent one, unfortunately -- came in to the *Observer*. Some commentary on the issues I'd raised made its way into an on-line discussion group's discourse, not exactly the public arena; and a message board I created for that purpose at my own Website, where I'd posted the original article, began filling up with unilluminating monologues that had everything to do with their authors' feelings and nothing much to do with the matters of principle, both moral and scholarly, on which I'd based my arguments.

Meanwhile, a MacArthur fellow I ran into at a conference indicated full agreement with the principles I'd enunciated but declined my invitation to say so in the *Observer*'s pages or anywhere else. So did a prominent specialist in photography at a major auction house, who felt that my points "were very important, and need to be discussed." The editor of a periodical aimed at collectors e-mailed me a note saying that I was "on the side of the angels" with this piece, but did not even mention it in his publication, though one of the issues I raised in the essay pertains directly to the definition of the authentic body of work in photography, and thus to the collecting of photographs. At the same time, a literacy-challenged gent from the Bay Area (where the piece had been reprinted, in my column in *Photo Metro*) decided that my encouragement of reader response meant that I was seeking pen pals, and began bombarding me at home with lengthy private letters, castigating me for my positions and instructing me on the responsibilities of the critic, while adamantly refusing my repeated invitations to put himself on the record by sending his letters to the editor and debating me in public.

Shortly thereafter, I found myself hissed at in passing by Janet Malcolm, of all people, in the pages of the house organ of Random House, *The New York*

Review of Books.[284] And someone I once mistakenly considered both a colleague and a friend displayed not only a professional animus of which I'd been unaware but, more disturbingly, some previously unsuspected fascist tendencies -- lambasting me in public for my temerity, his counter-arguments incorporating the frightening assertion that "Human rights pale beside the necessity of seeing that great art sees the light of day."[285]

And that was it, the sum total a full year after the piece first appeared. Nothing of either the quality or quantity of response I'd assumed my provocation would evoke. Instead, insults, unreasoned hysteria, behind-the-scenes pep talks, amateur psychoanalysis, aimless chatter. Disheartening, to say the least. I found myself variously bored, discouraged, and offended by the low level of the discourse; moreover, I found no nugget of provocation for myself, no substantial challenge that made me rethink my argument, nothing to chew on. The degree of vituperation surprised me, but most of it rolled off, mere *ad hominem* stuff. Except for one: a sneering dismissal of me, in passing, by Mark Power, as "photography's professional scold."[286]

Clearly meant as an insult, that stung. For weeks it smarted. At my muse's urging I pulled the barb out to examine it, turned it over and over in my mind, word by word, separately and together, until I accepted them all as the unintended compliment they were, grappled them to me with hooks of steel, slid that precious amulet into my medicine pouch, and (my muse nodding and smiling now, nodding and smiling) wrote, in rebuttal, "Damn straight, pal. I can live with

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[284] For an analysis of this publication's umbilical tie to Random House (not coincidentally, Malcolm's publisher on several book projects), see Richard Kostelanetz's investigative 1974 essay, "The Leverages of Collaboration," reprinted in his recent collection, *Crimes of Culture: Three Decades of Citizen's Arrests* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995), pp. 89-106. Malcolm's comments appear in her review of the Arbus book, titled "Aristocrats," *New York Review of Books* XLIII, no. 2 (February 1, 1996): 7-8. it's reprinted in the second edition of her collection of essays, *Diana & Nikon: Essays on the Aesthetic of Photography* (New York: Aperture, 1997).

[285] Mark Power wrote that remarkable statement in a response to my essay that he circulated privately. In the published version of his reaction, he modified it somewhat, to "the right of privacy pales beside the necessity of ensuring that great art sees the light of day." See Mark Power, "Wielding the Scalpel," *The Photo Review*, Vol. 19, no. 2, Spring 1996, pp. 5, 7-11. As I write this, I remain the only person who found either version of that position sufficiently objectionable to warrant refutation in print. A commentary by Anthony Georgieff -- taking a position quite similar to Power's -- eventually appeared: "Dead Woman Seeing," *European Photography* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 74.

[286] Power, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

all three of those terms, separately and in tandem. Carve 'em on my tombstone."[287]

And then, finding myself at long last in the mood, nodding and smiling along with her, sat down under my muse's eye to put this essay into its final form.

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Nobody much likes criticism. For that matter, nobody much likes critics -- an unfortunate fact demonstrated by countless historical events, the forced suicide of Socrates only one of them.

Artists, in particular, often have an antipathy to critics. Here's Philip Wylie, one of my favorite neglected novelists:

" . . . when and if we reach the state of cannibalism, I shall try to eat a critic. There should be good crackling around fat heads."[288]

And Pablo Picasso:

"People who try to explain pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree."[289]

And the painter Max Beckmann:

"Of all the dim-witted enterprises doomed to failure from the start, talking and writing about art is surely the worst."[290]

More sympathetically, there's this insightful comment on the peculiar plight of critics of the non-literary arts, from the sculptor Henry Moore:

> "[Art critics] are at a rather serious disadvantage, you know, relative to literary critics, for they are obliged to express their responses to an art work in a medium altogether different from that of the work they are responding to. The literary critic is after all trained to use the same expressive tool -- language -- as the poet or novelist he writes about. Not

[287] For my full response to Power's diatribe, see "Diane Arbus: Untitled, Part II -- The Responses," *The Photo Review*, Vol. 19, no. 3, Summer 1996, pp. 9-12.
[288] Wylie, Philip, *Opus 21* (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1949), p. 198.
[289] Source unknown. From my notebooks.
[290] Source unknown. From my notebooks. Beckmann also said, " . . . words are too insignificant to define the problems of art." The latter is quoted in Lackner, Stephan, *Max Beckmann: Memories of a Friendship* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1969), p. 50.

so with art critics. It seems to me they struggle with a heavy burden of translation."[291]

If all of that is true (and I must confess I do not disagree with any of those four opinions), then why would anyone in his or her right mind bother to read criticism -- or, even worse, to write it?

The basic answer comes, for me, from the hemlock drinker himself, Socrates, who enunciated the fundamental tenet of what was once called the life of the mind: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Anyone who values intellectualism -- that is, anyone committed to being truly thoughtful -- knows the truth of this, and knows that he or she is therefore already a critic.

Many years ago, during an undergraduate class in literature at the Bronx campus of my alma mater, Hunter College in New York, Professor Leonard Albert was trying to explain to us the meaning of a key concept: *critical distance*, that ability to step back from even the most engrossing work of art or emotionally embroiling situation in order to observe and assess it disinterestedly.

"There was a traveling Shakesperian troupe in the Old West," he recounted by way of example (perhaps, I now think, a purely fanciful one), "that came into Dodge City for a performance of *Othello*. In the middle of the fourth act, a cowboy in the balcony got so upset that he stood up, pulled out his six-shooter, and killed the actor who was playing Iago." He paused for a moment, then added, "Now *that* man lacked critical distance."

I was reminded of this a quarter of a century later, when, while browsing through an issue of the *Village Voice*, I came to the advertisements for various psychiatrists, therapists and new-age health practitioners. The headline on one ad caught my eye. "DO YOU SUFFER FROM CRITICAL DISTANCE?" it read, then went on (approximately) thus: "Do you experience moments of detachment from your feelings? Are you unwilling or unable to be up-close and personal every single minute of your waking life? Our one-on-one treatments and

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[291] Schulze, Franz, "Henry Moore at 80: 'an artist must remain a mystery to himself,'" *ARTnews*, Vol. 77, no. 6, Summer 1978, pp. 68-73. Not that Moore thought critics of much value; "Art critics have taught me next to nothing," this statement, to be found on p. 68, begins.

encounter groups can help you!" How about that, I mused . . . a capacity I've worked hard all my life to attain is now defined as a disease.

Obviously, in a culture that's historically demonstrated itself to be anti-intellectual, where the therapeutic model prevails and our relation to art is almost terminally contaminated with the deadly mix of gossip and intentionalism, the forces dominating that culture will do their level best to discredit critical thinking. Trivializing it by defining it as a neurosis seems a clever strategy, and will probably work with many. Resisting that tendency -- maintaining the ability to think critically about anything, even one's most cherished beliefs -- remains a genuine triumph, even if it goes unrecognized and unacclaimed.

The music critic Robert Commanday speaks of the "active listener or everyman critic," insisting that "properly, everybody should be one." He adds, "Considering the value of an experience is simply part of experiencing it and fixing it in the mind. . . . When the listener, no matter how imperfectly, acts on the need to establish the meaning, the value or just the nature of the music heard, . . . the circuit of the artistic experience is completed."[292]

And, lest you think that it's presumptuous to take as true the folk wisdom "everyone's a critic," consider what the film scholar P. Adams Sitney says: "Criticism is not a profession, it's a disposition of the soul at certain moments."[293] If we agree with him -- and I do -- then it follows that the people we identify as critics are simply those who have made this disposition into a calling, or at least a profession; the working critic is someone who chooses to live the examined life continually, and in the public eye.

When you leave the jazz club, the concert hall, the quadplex, the theater, the gallery or museum, concerned only with whether or not you enjoyed yourself, you have simply passed your time. But once you not only acknowledge your pleasures and displeasures but exercise that "disposition of the soul," you have

[292] "Everybody Should Be a Critic," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Review, September 12, 1982, p. 14.
[293] In conversation with the author, summer 1985.

stepped into the territory of critical thinking, and must elucidate your responses.[294]

Entering this terrain is risky business. The personal hazard is implied by something else that Sitney said: "Criticism, like biography, is the process of falling out of love with your subject."[295] Now, falling out of love (by which I take Sitney to mean relinquishing one's infatuations or unanalyzed emotional responses) can be sobering and painful. It certainly doesn't mean not loving anything; it means not loving blindly, but instead learning to truly see things for what they are -- and then loving them, if one still chooses to, warts and all. As the photographer Robert Frank has said, "[C]riticism can come out of love."[296]

But to love someone or something is also to take the risk of hating it -- or at least hating aspects of it. After all, hate is only the obverse of love, its flip side. The true opposite of love is not hatred but indifference. You can love something and hate it simultaneously, but you cannot do either (or both) and also be indifferent to the subject of your attention.

One does not need to establish critical distance in relation to something one finds affectless or irrelevant; only if one has been gripped by it does one have to find a way to disengage. Critics do not write well or usefully about works or issues to which they truly feel indifferent. Only that which evokes passion merits attention. Passion comes, of course, in two basic flavors. And while writing about work one loves is one of the most pleasurable aspects of a critic's work, I've come to the conclusion that such acts of appreciation are not the essence of the critic's task.

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[294] "When we say 'It was great,' we are actually saying 'I liked it.' And 'I liked it' (or its antithesis, 'I disliked it') may, depending on its context, become the first step in the critical act. In any case, it remains a very small one, since unless the question 'Why did I like it?' follows, an act of criticism has not been initiated. 'I like it,' when it stands alone, is only a grunt of approval and while one has every right to grunt, let us not mistake it for other than it is. 'Why did I like it?' demands development and will invariably lead to further questions about one's self as well as to those about the celluloid strip. Since these are the two ingredients of film, film criticism has begun." Boyum, Joy Gould and Adrienne Scott, "The Critical Act or I Just Saw Barbarella: It Was Great," *Film as Film: Critical Responses to Film* Art (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), p. 9.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Frank, Robert, "A Statement," *U.S. Camera Annual 1958* (New York: U. S. Camera, 1957), p. 115.

Critics in our time and culture wear many hats. Sometimes they're also reviewers, providing quick-take consumer-guide reactions to the available artistic "merchandise." Sometimes they take on the role of interviewer, biographer, historian, appreciator, theorist, eulogist. All of these are valuable functions; they fulfill necessary tasks. But, after twenty-eight years as a working critic, having tried my hand at all of the above, I must report that none of them is at the core of what I do.

The fundamental truth is that I and my colleagues in criticism -- at least those of us who do our jobs right -- are in the destruction business.

Many people, including many of those same colleagues, are fond of disguising this difficult truth from others and even hiding it from themselves by evoking the notion of something they call "constructive criticism." To me, that's an oxymoron; there ain't no such animal. Man Ray was right: "All criticism is destructive, most of all self-criticism."[297]

The root of the word *criticism* is the word *crisis*. As Roland Barthes reminds us, "To criticize means to call into crisis."[298] The job of the critic is *calling into crisis* the subject of the critique. My own metaphor for this is the metallurgical process known as *stress analysis*. Calling something into crisis, subjecting it to stress analysis, not only exposes its structure but accentuates its flaws. Stress analysis exacts a toll: The thing under scrutiny may shatter and collapses -- or else, seeing it for what it truly is, with all its inadequacies and weaknesses laid bare, we may "fall out of love with it."

Why on earth would anyone want to chance that? I can think of two reasons. The first, simply, is curiosity: to understand how the thing was made, what ideas and decisions went into it, how the work that embodies them holds up under pressure. The second is growth: to learn from those flaws so that a better one can be built next time. (Keep in mind here the Chinese ideogram for *crisis*, whose components are *danger* and *opportunity*.)

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[297] Ray, Man, "To Be Continued Unnoticed," exhibition portfolio, Copley Galleries, Beverly Hills, CA, 1948. Reprinted in *Man Ray* (Los Angelese: Los Angeles County Museum of Art/Lytton Gallery, 1966), pp. 23-24.
[298] Barthes, Roland, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 25-26.

But building a better one next time is not the task of the critic. Nor is it incumbent upon him or her to instruct the artist on how to go about doing so. The critic's chore ends when the stress analysis test is complete and the destruction, if any (for some work survives even the most rigorous challeneges), is over. The rest -- including the cleaning up -- is left to others.[299]

Another way of thinking about this is to recognize that the critic functions as a *radical*, in the original meaning of the word -- which comes from the Latin word for root, *radix*. The radical is one who insists on examining things from the roots up. Such a diagnostician is not likely to be popular among true-believer types, whose blind faiths insulate them from self-doubt and justify all deeds. Critics who take their obligations seriously plant themselves as roadblocks on the highways of groupthink, obstacles in the path of mindless majority rule. They are not unlike the "free radicals" about which I've read in contemporary biophysics, molecules containing unpaired atoms. In a stable, healthy biosystem -- a well body, for example -- it seems the free radical can attract atoms from other molecules, upsetting the organism's ecological balance and causing illness. Notably, though, in a sick body the immune system actually produces free radicals to combat infection from bacteria and viruses.

If we take this as a metaphor, we might propose that the critic-as-free-radical destabilizes his or her sphere of influence by pulling individuals away from stasis and consensus, from the easy conformism embedded in that epitome of *argumentum ad populum*, the locution "As we all know." Does this do a service to one's culture, or an injury? Obviously, the answer depends on whether one believes one's own culture to be healthy or sick.

My view is that, however nostalgic we may be for a past in which things remained stable and static for long periods of time (or so we like to imagine), we live in an age of flux in which stasis proves fatal, for, as Bob Dylan wrote years ago, "He not busy being born is busy dying." In such an environment, the very

[299] Several years ago, when I was using this metaphor of stress analysis during a lecture on criticism, I was greeted after my talk by a man who told me that his profession actually *was* stress analysis. Well, I asked him, did he think my analogy was apropos? "You may not believe this," he replied with a grin, "but when we joke around at the lab, do you know what we call our work? *Art criticism*."

presence of the magnetic tug of the free radical, the persistent nay-saying of the critic, keeps us healthy by forcing us to remain always aware of the full range of perspectival options, the availability -- and utility -- of different points of view, the unlikelihood that we are absolutely right about anything.

Yet there, in a nutshell, is why critics are unpopular. It's their job to be fault-finders, spoilers and contrarians: to break spells, ruin moods, poop parties, rain on parades, disrupt consensus, point out the emperor's nakedness, resist seduction and speak truth to power. Power rarely likes to hear the truth. In fact, since truth makes a habit of unpleasantness, most of us, powerful or not, are loath to hear it with any frequency. Critics, when they set about their fundamental task, are generally the bearers of bad tidings; and the inclination to kill the messenger runs deep in the human psyche.

Obviously, one does not engage in these actions and emotions lightheartedly. They spring from intellectual passion, and, when effective, they evoke the passions of others. As a critic, you must be willing to stand by your words or be prepared to eat them. Because criticism in its most highly realized manifestation -- as commentary in the agora -- demands recognition as a public act.

There may be artists who genuinely make art "for themselves," whom I would define as amateurs by virtue of that choice. (More on that anon.) There are certainly professional artists who for various reasons -- painful shyness, for example, or a distaste for the dominant trends of their time -- have kept their work largely to themselves: Emily Dickinson and Franz Kafka are instances. But I guarantee you that there are no naif, "outsider" or undiscovered critics, no folks posting critical commentaries on billboards in their front gardens, no trunksful of great unpublished critical essays moldering in someone's attic. To function as a working critic is by definition to publish, in order to participate in a public dialogue centering around various but necessary reference points (among them, centrally, the works of artists).

And that means to risk stress analysis yourself, to be constantly calling yourself into crisis and putting yourself in the way of finding yourself in that state.

For if you publish, you will be read -- by your fellow critics, by artists, by others in the field and by the general public. And if you're read, you will be disputed, sometimes even reviled. Peculiarly, critics not only expect that, they usually delight in it. I have yet to meet any critics worth their salt who aren't surprised and disappointed when people widely or entirely agree with them (or merely remain silent), and who don't turn gleeful when sparks start to fly. Malcontents and troublemakers, the lot of us.

However, you can't upset those not yet conceived -- or at least they're not prone to writing argumentative, denunciatory letters to the editor. So critics work for the audience of their own time, not for readers to come. The bonus value of doing so is that one may thereby sometimes contribute to the establishment and continuity of a critical tradition. The function this serves for the future, for history, for the ongoing life of a medium, the literary critic Hugh Kenner described in these words:

> "There is no substitute for critical tradition: a continuum of understanding, early commenced. . . . Precisely because William Blake's contemporaries did not know what to make of him, we do not know either, though critic after critic appeases our sense of obligation to his genius by reinventing him. . . . In the 1920s, on the other hand, *something* was immediately made of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, and our comfort with both works after 50 years, including our ease at allowing for their age, seems derivable from the fact that they have never been ignored."[300]

Becoming part of such a "continuum of understanding" is all the reward from the future a critic could ask.

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That's what's in it for the critic. This brings me to several additional questions: Why should the public read criticism? And why should artists pay any attention to it?

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[300] Kenner, Hugh, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 415.

In answer to the first, John Perrault has said, "There is a need to read about art as well as to look at it. The timid read art criticism to have their opinions and their investments confirmed; the brave to have them challenged."[301] In fact, a regrettably large number of people are so timid that they cannot even formulate independent opinions in the first place, and instead treat criticism as a source of ready-made substitutes for ideas and opinions of their own, doing what was once called "copping an attitude." This is perhaps the worst use to which criticism can be put by its readers; unfortunately, it's one that no critic can protect against.

Conversely, as Perrault suggests, the best reason to read critics is to call your own responses and opinions into crisis. Criticism can be said to begin at the point where we set aside or move beyond our simplest reactive patterns, unsatisfied with mere declarations of taste. Nothing closes off a discussion of a work of art so completely as the assertion, "I like it." For, as we so commonly aver, you can't argue with taste; criticism, on the other hand, is for arguing with. And one of the main stimuli for some of our most heated and productive arguments about art is the curious fact that many images important to us do not appeal to our "taste."

I do not consider the taste patterns of critics to be of paramount importance. Certainly I don't assume that my own interest anyone but me. More significant by far are our lines of reasoning, the methods by which we approach and interact with the works that draw our attention, the variety of ways in which we ask the four questions that define intellectual activity: *Why? Why not? What if? Suppose I'm wrong?* It's for those experiments in inquiry that we still read long-dead critics, writing about works long exhausted and forgotten.

For the audience, then, the critic functions as a stimulus to involvement and a sounding board off which the audience can bounce its own reactions to the works. After all, the excitement of becoming a member of what the late Minor White referred to as "the educated audience" goes beyond the pleasure of one's initial direct experience of the work, and also past one's later reflective reconsideration of it. Art, if it matters, is also a manifestation of our culture, our

[301] Perrault, John, "Power Critics," *Village Voice*, Vol. XXVIII, no. 42, October 18, 1983, p. 81.

time. Criticism, John Berger suggests, "is always a form of intervention: intervention between the work of art and its public."[302] Actively engaging with the critical dialogue that emerges around a medium is a way of using art as a positioning device, a means for exploring yourself in relation to the field of ideas in your own day, of finding out what your culture has gotten up to and where you stand within it.

Moreover, the critic serves the audience as living proof that one can say no: no to specific works or entire bodies of work, no to one or another tendency in art, no to the spin put on the work by this or that functionary, no to the biases of institutional emphasis and exclusion. In a globalized art economy increasingly modeled after and intertwined with multinational capital, whose art-related products and presentations thereof spring less and less organically from within the cultural environments in which they appear, such exemplification of and permission for individual nay-saying has an empowering effect, to which I'll return shortly.

As for artists -- well, I'd hardly presume to tell artists that they *should* read critics, especially critics of their own work. But I'm more than willing to suggest why they *might*.

Artists of course share membership in the audience for art. Though they approach the field as performers in it, criticism of work other than their own, or in entirely different media, presumably has a usefulness to them not unrelated to its function for other members of that audience.

Whether appreciative or caustic, commentary on their own work can carry a potent emotional charge. After all, a profound connection exists between what we do and who we are. Jesus reportedly said, "the tree is known by his fruit." To the extent that our deeds, our actions in the world, have an integral relationship to our central sense of identity, we feel ourselves inseparable from the work that we do, the things that we make -- and criticism of that work, those things, seems necessarily and inarguably criticism of us.

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[302] Berger, John, *Art and Revolution: Ernest Neizvestny and the role of the artist in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), p. 9.

The critic has an obligation to walk a fine line in this regard, recognizing the artist's sense of oneness with and inseparability from his or her art without ever slipping into a critique of the private person, whose precise, authentic relation to the work the critic cannot (and should not) pretend to know. The correlation between an artist's personality and life and his or her creative output remains always slippery and inexact; delightful people sometimes make dreadful work, while genius may well appear in appalling characters.

It strikes me as less that useful to transform the critical arena into a killing ground on which to parade one's hostilities toward individuals (though it remains appropriate to view critical discourse as not only a marketplace of ideas but a battlefield on which they contend, sometimes to the death). The critic -- at least as I envision the role -- is properly restricted to addressing only the deeds, the works themselves and the lives those live in the world, regardless of his or her response to the works' makers. Responsibly undertaken, that challenge validates Nietzsche's comparison of the critic to the mosquito who bites not because he wants to but because he must, who "wants our blood, not our pain."[303]

In that light, artists certainly should feel free to pick and choose among those who respond to their work, and are entitled to dismiss or bypass entirely anyone whose reaction is clearly the product of personal animus. Beyond that, not all critics prove themselves equally substantive and useful. As Man Ray noted, "Taste and opinion cannot replace intelligence and knowledge."[304] Far too many critics function only as tastemongers and starmakers.[305] This does no service to anyone. John Berger points in the right direction, I think, when he writes, "I have come to see that the arranging of artists in a hierarchy of merit is

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[303] "#164 -- IN FAVOUR OF CRITICS -- Insects sting, not from malice, but because they too want to live. It is the same with our critics - they desire our blood, not our pain." From "Human, All-Too-Human: part I, Miscellaneous Maxims and opinions," in Dr. Oscar Levy, ed., *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Gordon Press, 1974), vol. 2, p. 82.

[304] Man Ray, from an artist's statement in a limited-edition portfolio of prints, *les voies lactees* (Turin: Il Fauno, 1974).

[305] For more on this issue, see the essay "Interesting Conflicts" in my book *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996).

an idle and essentially dilettante process. What matters are the needs which art answers."[306]

It is in the short- and long-term response of the audience that the artist will discover what the needs are -- beyond private satisfaction -- that his or her own work answers. As a rule, the artist can only guess at this.[307] Perhaps it would be ideal if the artist could interrogate the receivers, the audience, ourselves. This could be done; someone may well have already attempted such an experiment. The utterances of all those who've commented publicly on a particular work could be scanned and correlated for recurrent mentions of particular aspects, similarities of interpretation, and such. Polls could be taken of gallery visitors and museum-goers, interviews recorded with owners of prints. Perhaps we would learn something of value by this.[308]

But the effort would be enormous (not to mention the expenditure). As things stand, the most efficient, accessible and dependable source of that response (at least for artists who don't perform their works in front of live audiences) will be critics -- those atypical members of the audience, willing to work at the difficult and thankless task of articulating their reactions and perceptions and putting them out on the table.

Those "needs which art answers" that John Berger speaks of are, of course, the needs not only of artists but of the culture in which they live. He appears to assume, as do I, that we are speaking of artists concerned not merely with self-expression but with communication -- because criticism is irrelevant to

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[306] Berger, *op. cit*., *loc. cit*.

[307] My muse argues with this, proposing that artists, inherently informed by their connection to what C. G. Jung called "the collective unconscious," intuitively and always correctly perceive these needs and automatically produce in response to it -- that, virtually by definition, the needs they feel and those of the culture are identical. Though of the Jungian persuasion myself, and willing to accept my muse's formulation as it might apply to previous eras, I am not convinced by what strikes me as both grandiosity and oversimplification in its relation to our own quite different times. Specifically, I find problematic its equating of, say, the work of a medieval sculptor of cathedral gargoyles -- or that of a Van Gogh, obsessed but critically disregarded in his own lifetime -- with the output of a typical graduate of our current academic-art context who produces work in which no audience or market or circle of practitioners shows the slightest interest, intending primarily to persuade doubtful parents that the money spent on expensive art-school education was not wasted.

[308] The recent experiments by the Russian expatriate team Komar and Melamid suggest that such experiments are not impossible.

self-expression. And most art-making up until the Renaissance in European culture, at least, and through the present day in many cultures, does not prioritize self-expression. Quite the opposite, in fact. From cave painting through Egyptian statuary and African sculpture to the rock concert and Mai Lin's Vietnam memorial, the concerns of the individual psyche of the maker have played second fiddle to the communal functions of art.

I consider self-expression an act or function whose effectiveness has only one judge -- the person doing the expressing; as I have no training in psychoanalysis, it lies outside the parameters of my expertise. It's my opinion that the statement "You're not expressing yourself well" is semantic nonsense. If a relative dies and I opt to manifest my response by (a) wearing black for a year, (b) throwing a party and tying one on, or (c) going about as if nothing had happened, no one but I can tell whether I've expressed my reaction effectively.

Self-expression, then, is fundamentally both narcissistic and solipsistic as a final goal; intentionally, it serves no one but the person doing the expressing. For that reason, as I pointed out previously, it is the primary concern of only those artists who work "for themselves" -- that is, those who, in my opinion, are thereby self-defined as amateurs.[309]

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[309] I do not seek here to ennoble professionals by denigrating amateurs; instead, I hope only to reverse a peculiar tendency in the visual arts generally and photography circles in particular to treat amateur standing as something for which one should strive, and professional status as an embarrassment. Tracing its origins among visual artists goes beyond the scope of this essay; in photography, we can track it back at least to the posturing of Alfred Stieglitz, and some of his disputes with Edward Steichen, though even today the medium has its ardent advocates of perpetual amateurism, such as David Vestal. Interestingly, outside the visual arts no serious practitioner feels honored by description as an amateur: imagine Merce Cunningham taking pride in maintaining amateur status as a dancer and choreographer, Wynton Marsalis doing so as a musician, Meryl Streep as an actress, Richard Meier as an architect. The very notion is comical.

Nonetheless, these definitions should not be mistaken for value judgments. The substantive issue is the distinction between vocation and avocation, between one's job and one's hobby. One's hobby is always enjoyable; anytime it stops being fun, one can disengage from it. One's job is not necessarily fun -- often, in fact, it is frustrating, boring, and genuinely unpleasant -- but one performs it anyway. The amateur is free to perform whenever he or she feels like it; the professional puts in a full work week, regardless of mood or whim.

Financial success is not the gauge; Jackson Pollock was no less a professional painter when he was starving in a Greenwich Village loft than he was a decade later when his paintings were selling in the five figures. The point is that painting is what he did for a living, even if the living he made from it was lousy for quite a while; it was his occupation, the epicenter of his life, and whatever else he did to generate income was done strictly to enable him to paint. When Pollock got out of bed to go to work, his workplace was in front of his canvas.

Here, by the way, my muse and I part company; she insists that serious artists, even those we would classify as professional, have no obligation to take their audiences into account, no conscious relation to the process of communication, only the imperative to answer the felt urge toward self-expression. By no means does she find herself alone in this belief; many artists in all media issue such disclaimers.[310] Curiously, however, quite a few of them (my muse among those) speak nonetheless about critical misinterpretation of their own work and the work of others, the audience's failure to "get it," and so on. If one can misinterpret work, then, presumably, one can interpret it correctly (or, at least, more correctly in some cases than in others). Which means it has identifiable content that allows for a range of more or less accurate reading by others, whose responses are solicited by the work's public presentation. Like so many artists, my muse here wants both to have and to eat her cake, claiming indifference to any audience while at the same time aspiring to find one.

Professional standing *per se* does not guarantee work that is better or more devotedly made. There are good professional artists and bad ones, just as some amateur artists are better than others. Many amateur artists have made a piece or two of work that's of professional caliber, and some amateur artists are consistently superior to some professional ones. Yet the obdurate fact remains: In art, as in every other field of human activity, amateurs and professionals play before different audiences, in different leagues, by different rules, for different motives, and for different stakes.

Artists take on all kinds of work to support themselves, of course, and -- as recent polls have reiterated -- few make enough to live on from their creative activity. Sometimes the borderlines between the professional artist, the part-time artist, and the amateur or hobbyist are blurred, to be sure. Surely there's no need to muddy the waters any further.

These comments on this subject found an earlier manifestation in "Expression and Communication," my introduction to the exhibition catalog for "Photographers Dialogue," curated by Steven Carothers and Gail Roberts (Boca Museum of Art, Boca Raton FL, October 19-November 26, 1989). That essay turned into a series of three pieces for *Darkroom Photography*: "Amateur Standing vs. Professional Stature," Vol. 12, no. 3 (March 1990); "Check Your Focus: Is Your Artistic Expression Directed Inwardly or Outwardly?" Vol. 12, no. 4 (April 1990); and "Vox Populi," Vol. 12, no. 5 (May 1990).

[310] Andres Serrano, for one; see my report on a panel discussion in which he and I participated, in my book *Critical Focus: Photography in the International Image Community* (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1995), pp. 38-40.

From my standpoint, to place one's work into the public sphere, before the polity, is by definition a political act, and an active solicitation of response. Even if the origins of that work lie in the self-expressive impulses of the maker, one cannot take its presentation to others as anything but an effort to communicate. I consider that among the defining acts of the professional artist (and, for that reason, I restrict my critical attention to work that appears in public).

In addressing work that's publicly presented, a critic has every right to assume that (unless informed otherwise by the maker or the presenter) he or she engages with the work of a professional artist. The professional artist may begin with the urge toward self-expression, but is eventually concerned with something beyond that: communication. That commitment to communication involves acknowledging the existence of the Other -- embodied in some audience, whether actual or hypothetical, identifiable or imagined. This acknowledgment is signalled by accepting the imperative of a shared symbol system, the first requisite of communicative activity. (If I wish to convey to some Other that my relative's passing has caused me grief, I'd best employ the cultural rituals of mourning; drunken revels, however much they might salve my wounds, are not widely equated with tears.)

This does not mean that all communications must be reduced to the literal or simplistic; states of mind and feeling are among the transmissions we receive from artists. Nor does it mandate any artist's uncritical adoption of some extant symbol system lock, stock and barrel; one of the functions of professional artistic activity is the generation of new symbols and the redefinition of older ones. But it does imply that the professional artist is producing not mnemonics for him/herself but articulated ideas, communications, *messages* -- intended to be received, open to interpretation, and subject to evaluation.

Unlike self-expression, the effectiveness of communication can be evaluated, and its substantiality and usefulness can be judged. Failure to communicate is a frequent phenomenon, due to either some flaw in the message and/or transmission process or the absence of a shared symbol system. Sometimes, too, of course, the problem lies with the receiver. However, if the

audience laughs at the object with which you sought to make them gasp in fright, you the maker have probably failed to manipulate the symbolic structure effectively so as to evoke the psychoids of fear. The audience thus serves the artist not only as a target for the communication but as a tool for refining its delivery.

This suggests that the meanings of a particular work of art, however complex and ambiguous they might be, are to some extent specific and determinable -- at least within their own culture in the era of their making. Certainly some artists believe this to be true. Let's go back to Picasso for a moment. Here's something else he said:

> [Paul] Valery used to say, "I write half the poem. The reader writes the other half." That's all right for him, maybe, but I don't want there to be three or four thousand possibilities of interpreting my canvas. *I want there to be only one*. . . . Otherwise a painting is just an old grab bag for everyone to reach into and *pull out what he himself has put in*. I want my paintings to be able to defend themselves, to resist the invader, just as though there were razor blades on all the surfaces so no one could touch them without cutting his hands. A painting isn't a market basket or a woman's handbag, full of combs, hairpins, lipstick, old love letters and keys to the garage" [emphasis in the original].[311]

Now it's true that no meaningful work of art is merely an empty vessel into which one is free to pour whatever emotions and ideas one happens to have on hand at the moment. The artist isn't obligated to lead us by the nose to his or her meanings. But -- unless he or she is satisfied with any old response any of us might make, regardless of its appropriateness -- it is the artist's job to point the audience towards some territory of interpretation, an arena in which possible likely meanings battle it out for dominance.

At the same time, there are always aspects of a work of which its maker is unaware. And, while an artist can certainly have conscious intentions in regard to

[311] Quoted without citation of source in Worth, Sol, "Man is not a Bird," *Camera Lucida* 5, 1982, p. 32.

the work, we must beware the intentionalist fallacy. "Between the intention and the act falls the shadow," wrote T. S. Eliot. Any work's actual effect is at least partly determined by the audience, as I. A. Richards has argued.[312] And, as communications theory assumes, there is always a difference between the message sent and the message received.

When an artist pays attention to it, the audience's response to his or her work functions as what the founder of cybernetics, Norbert Weiner, first defined as the "feedback loop."[313] In communication theory, the feedback loop is any device used to measure performance so as to narrow that gap between intention and effect. Certainly one of the useful functions audience response in general and criticism in particular can provide to the artist is its service as feedback, as *information*. Used as a gauge of the differences between the message sent and the message received, such information enables the artist to use past performance to improve future performance.

If we agree that art is a manifestation of the cultural *zeitgeist*, the "spirit of the times," then one role of the critic in society is to serve as one of the culture's feedback mechanisms. Performance evaluations, if honest and thorough, are often less than favorable, and no one is ever expected to like the bearer of bad tidings. But no culture (and no individual psyche) has ever remained healthy that acquired the habit of disregarding its feedback and killing its messengers. Culturally and individually, giving and receiving criticism can easily bring out the worst in us; yet it is the only sure path to the discovery of what our best might be.

With all of that said and done, I come at last to that bullet my muse demands I not only bite but savor, the function of nay-saying as such, the moral necessity of it. Let me then get to it.

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[312] See, for example, Richards, I. A., *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961, a reprint of the original 1929 edition). Elder Olson's comments on related matters in the concluding "Metacriticism" section of his *On Value Judgments in the Arts and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) are also pertinent.

[313] See Weiner, Norbert, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Avon Books, 1967), pp. 36-39.

Whether or not it was ever so, what we call culture in our time -- including art, of course -- has to a considerable extent turned into something constructed by and/or under the direct supervision of power, and foisted pre-fab onto the populace. The international marketing system for art can serve as sufficient example for this top-down imposition of culture on the general public. A great many critics play far too complicitous a role in that structure, when they should instead be redressing the imbalance of power therein, providing a countervailing resistance, operating in the public interest, articulating the legitimate concerns of the public at large in this manufacturing of culture.

The opinions of the citizenry in this regard are rarely solicited by curators, museum directors, grants panelists, arts administrators and the assorted other gatekeepers who serve as functionaries of this complex, extensive merchandising and indoctrination system. On the contrary, let the average citizen raise his or her voice in anything but blind, wholehearted worship of the entire contemporary enterprise of art and the howl of indignation and scorn becomes instantly deafening. (Witness the disdain for the working class manifested in the supportive art-world testimony about and editorial commentary on the Richard Serra "Tilted Arc" controversy.) If thoughts could kill, as in Shirley Jackson's grim parable "The Lottery," then much of the midwest would be scorched earth right now, torched by the disdain for its inhabitants concentrated in New York's SoHo and related art ghettos in Los Angeles, Chicago, and a few other cities.

A century ago, Robert Louis Stevenson noted that "Enthusiasm about art is become a function of the average female being, which she performs with precision and a sort of haunting sprightliness, like an ingenious and well-regulated machine."[314] This condition -- its symptoms most prominently visible among docent lecturers and hyperventilating press-release writers at museums -- has spread widely during the intervening years, across genders and gender persuasions, so pervasively that even those who have not succumbed to it feel obligated to defer to the earnestness of its sufferers. As Harold Rosenberg pointed out in the early 1970s,

[314] *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881).

> [I]t is inconceivable that any exhibition can be mounted that would cause people to guffaw or howl. What has vanished is not advanced art, as the Nazis planned, but the independent and unruly spectator -- the inexpert citizen who laughs when a picture (as of two dressed-up men conducting a debate with a naked lady on the grass beside them) strikes him as funny and who is irritated when works are boring. The outstanding fact about art in the past fifteen years is the restoration of public piety toward works under official auspices; it extends to anything, from pre-Columbian potsherds to big-edition prints, that has entered the precincts of art history. While avant-garde art was pulling down the pillars of the Salon, art theory was already toiling to restore them.[315]

Someone -- the critic, I propose -- must step into the role of unruly spectator, since the situation has only gotten worse since Rosenberg penned that observation, with the signal exceptions of such recent debates as the Serra case and the Mapplethorpe/Serrano/NEA flap, which suggest that unruly spectatorship may be making a comeback. Though the orchestration by the fundamentalist right of the latter uproar cannot go unconsidered, the fact remains that informed and knowledgeable opposition to government and corporate subsidy of these works and their imposition on the audience prompts the same hysterical art-world defensiveness as does ignorant knee-jerk reaction. The necessity for uncritical support of the arts, which of course serves all those who toil in the urban vineyards of art marketing and presentation, has spread as an article of faith throughout the brainwashed audience for contemporary art.

So cowed has that audience become by high-financed art-world propaganda that many of them have taken to parading around wearing on their heads, their handbags, their chests and backs -- in the form of buttons and T-shirts and stickers -- one of the most idiotic slogans I've ever come across. It emerged in the early '90s, during the NEA flap just previously mentioned, and it reads, in its entirety, "Fear No Art."

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[315] "The Art World: The Big Show -- Art and the Crowd," *The New Yorker* 49, no. 11 (May 5, 1973): 103.

The fatuousness of this notion steals the breath away. It implies, nonsensically, that all art is good (and, presumably, good for you!) -- and, at the same time, that art as a phenomenon is powerless, incapable of doing you harm. All of these insinuations are lies.

Let me speak briefly, then about what so few of my colleagues seem willing to mention, much less identify: *bad art*.

To begin with, let me distinguish between what I'll call *bad art* and what we might consider mere *failed art*. Please note that I'm not speaking here, under either rubric, of the derivative picture-postcard floral studies of your local camera club, the amiable beachscapes produced by the amateur watercolorists in your community, the well-made macramé and pottery in your neighborhood art fair, or any of the thousand varieties of similar ersatz generated by people sincerely if ineptly trying to locate and externalize their own modest creative impulses in professionally unambitious, basically harmless ways. Such work, grounded in a notion of art-making as primarily therapeutic and hobbyist, rarely solicits and even more rarely attracts serious critical attention, and hardly ever requires it, save when the occasional eccentric curator mounts a show of "thrift-store paintings."

So, excluding all that, the terrain I'm outlining encloses work produced by serious, craft-competent, working professional artists seeking to have (or succeeding in having) their works entered as reference points into the field of ideas for art activity in their own time, and the critical discourse around those works and ideas.

Much of that art, inevitably, doesn't make the grade -- that is, doesn't prove provocative, resonant, or durable for any audience, even the most knowledgeable, even one composed of astute fellow practitioners. This is *failed art*, a large quantity of which gets generated in the production system for the art of western culture nowadays. (It seems unlikely that the same statistics applied during the Gothic period, for example, or in African art at any time.)

Except to the extent that our encounter with it can exhaust our capacity to attend to art that in some way succeeds, or can even preclude our coming across

the latter, failed art is not to be feared (only dreaded, perhaps by the overburdened working critic).[316] Indeed, contemplating it critically often proves instructive, for the lessons it offers that only failure teaches. Nonetheless, to quote my colleague at the *New York Observer*, Hilton Kramer, "Failed art is no less a failure even when all the conditions of failure have been accounted for."[317] Such work must be dealt with ruthlessly, if only to clear the decks. Someone has to put the art that pulls up lame out of its misery, and the critic is the only one likely to do so in public and on the record. This may discourage its producers, which is well and good; in a culture that, unprecedentedly, now produces far more art than it can consume, those who can be discouraged should be.

Beyond such art -- art that proves itself tendentious, overwrought, less than fully realized, imaginatively limited, excessively derivative, vapid, too facile, merely clever, etcetera -- we must come to terms with art that's problematic on deeper levels and in more pernicious ways. I refer to art (and art-related activities, such as its institutional presentation, for example) that, regardless of the presence therein of manifest genius, critical analysis reveals as deceitful, hypocritical, bullying, venal, in service to totalitarian forces, pandering to our worst prejudices, vicious, even sometimes murderous in its impulses.

Does such art exist? In my opinion, yes; surely each of us can name some loathsome, reprehensible, vile masterpiece. I'd cite Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, and anti-Semitic aspects of the writings of Pound, Eliot, and Céline as evidence. They bring to fruition or contain the seeds at least of something that, beyond the explanations of even the most expert and cogent psychoanalysis, I believe one must judge to be *bad* -- morally, ethically, philosophically flawed, with some degree of severity. (I would go so far as to describe some such work as evil; but that term discomfits many nowadays, so for the purposes of this argument I substitute its milder version.)

If we agree that some art, past and present, fits that description, then pretending otherwise serves no useful purpose. Nor should we mistake the

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[316] For more on this issue, see "The Vanishing Borderline," elsewhere in this volume.
[317] "Schnabel Go Home! MoMA's Latin Mess," *New York Observer* 7, no. 23 (June 14, 1993): 1, 23. Even a stopped clock, I remind you, is right twice a day.

censuring of such work for censorship thereof, and flinch from the former in order not to appear to propose the latter, out of some misguided protective impulse. "[W]e do art no honor and no justice," wrote Jacques Barzun, "when we represent it as invariably humane, heroic and disinterested in its intentions, exclusively good in its effects, and thus not subject to reproach and accountability."[318]

Precisely because its creators used their considerable craft expertise, artistic abilities, and access to inspiration to render those ideas palatable by making their works persuasive, credible and seductive, such art proves *fearsome*. It must meet opposition, as must such related sins as the willful misreading and/or misrepresentation of works of art for the purpose of serving various agendas. Opposing such malevolence falls to the critic as an unavoidable responsibility.

Identifying it as such, and attaching that identification to it in the marketplace of ideas, becomes the obligation of all who recognize its insidiousness and its potency, for art in all media has demonstrated extraordinary powers of persuasion. (Why else, as my muse insistently points out, would every dictator in our century have made absolute control of art a key element of totalitarian strategy?) And, as the analysts and explicators of the applications of those ideas and those powers, critics either stand against them or assist in their dissemination. The regimes of our century have all had their house critics along with their pet artists, and dissident critics of art have joined dissident artists in concentration camps and gulags, faced firing squads and had their heads too thrust to the chopping block.

I do not mean to imply that the uncovering of evil -- or, if you prefer, of the morally wrong -- in works of art can be achieved unerringly, and that these determinations by any single critic or group thereof can (or should) stand undisputed. Nor do I suggest that only one standard for gauging good and evil (mine) exists or deserves priority. Of course those evaluations remain open to debate; but, for that to be true, the debate must be opened in the first place. I

[318] From my notebooks; source unknown.

mean rather that, in the words of Heinz Lubasz, "moral problems are real, irreducible and vital even when they are insoluble,"[319] and critics of art must find the courage to grapple with them in the arena of public discourse about art.

Finally, I do not want to appear to promulgate the belief that the only fearsome art is that which I adjudicate (my own choice of adjective here) as evil. I have encountered other art that I've found terrifying, though for different reasons -- for its shattering insight into our individual and collective psyches, for example. The visual art of Francis Bacon and Francisco Goya, the writings of Marilyn French and Carolyn Forché, the photographs of Robert Frank and Joel-Peter Witkin, the lyrics and melodies of Bob Dylan, have generated profound tectonic shifts in my life, permanently altered my ways of thinking, feeling, seeing. While ultimately their effect proved nourishing to me (or I found nourishment in them, not always the same thing), their initial effect on me was enormously disruptive.

These works, and works by many other artists in all media, have persuaded total strangers to rethink their fundamental assumptions, challenge the received norms of their acculturation, overcome their inhibitions, and otherwise change their lives. Though those changes were not always expected, or welcome, we -- myself among them -- learned to accommodate ourselves to them, for they left us little choice. That too is power, great power, fearsome in its own way.

Whether or not we share similar tastes and susceptibilities, there is work like that in my life, and I expect there's work like that in yours; if there weren't, I doubt that we'd bother looking for more of the same, and reading and writing about the process. Proposing that art at its most potent poses no genuine threat to anyone or anything resembles nothing so much as telling your houseguests that your growling dog is toothless and can do them no worse harm than pissing on their shoes. I have a higher respect for the impact of art on culture than that. Were I given to button-wearing, in fact, mine on this subject would read thus:

Fearsome Art!

(and more of it)

[319] From my notebooks; source unknown.

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Some of this I know my muse wanted to hear: that I accepted fully my involvement in the destruction business, my role as professional scold, the critic's position as "the disciplinarian of the arts" whose "function is to FRY the artists in kettles of boiling oil." (Her words, those. But you'd like her, really you would. Trust me.) She no doubt will not find all her reservations overcome by this last draft, however. I have revised it primarily to get it, and not her, off my back (where I expect her to stay, periodically thumping my shoulder, urging me to string 'em up by the short hairs). Still, I hope it will both mollify and chasten her, at least for a while.

Perhaps it is my nature to act more bloody-mindedly in practice than in theory. On the bench, I've demonstrated (I think) my willingness to impose life sentences, even without parole. Yet I believe in the possibility of redemption, so I hesitate, where my muse clearly does not, to mandate the death penalty. Do I see myself as more merciful than I appear to those whose work comes to stand before me, and those who read my decisions? Could be. Perhaps, even if I fill the role of "hanging judge," I just admire and model myself after those who maintain a certain dignity, and see to it that the ropes are properly adjusted, the defendant treated courteously, the rules of evidence scrupulously observed. Some like their executioners blunt, callous and brutal. That's not my style. A matter of taste, in the last analysis; unlike criticism, nothing you can argue with.[320]

MLA citation: Coleman, A. D., *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media and Lens Culture* (University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 1-24.

[320] This essay is based on the text of a lecture that was first delivered at Loyola College, Baltimore, Maryland, on December 7, 1989.

Dinosaur Bones:
The End (and Ends) of Photo Criticism

Thank you for coming out for this event tonight.

Before I begin, let me also thank Colin Finley, Melissa DeWitt, and Miranda Gavin of Hotshoe International and Rui Cepeda of Viewfinder Photography Gallery, as well as Roberto Muffoletto of the VASA Project, for bringing me here today. I especially commend them for engaging in a synergistic collaboration on this program that can serve as a model for other arts organizations in these fiscally challenging times.

And I want to dedicate this talk to the memory of the late Chris Dickie, publisher and editor of *Ag: The International Quarterly Journal of Photographic Art & Practice*. In his role at *Ag*, and before that in his editorial position at the *British Journal of Photography*, Chris was the first to put my work regularly before the UK audience, offering me platforms I valued enormously. I got to meet him only once, last fall, at a Royal Photographic Society event, just months before his passing, but our fruitful collaboration lasted almost twenty years, and I miss him very much.

In this talk I plan to explore the evolution and (alas) devolution of photography criticism over the past four decades. Argumentatively, as is my wont, I will sketch what I saw as the potential of this discipline when I began my own work in the late 1960s, what did -- and didn't -- materialize over the next decades for myself and my colleagues, the current state of this form, and the various reasons (editorial, financial, technological, social) for what I project as its demise.

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As someone who believes in the social value of the public shaming of miscreants, I find the web useful as a virtual substitute for the physical pillory. This past summer, in a pair of posts at my blog, *Photocritic International*, I identified and took to task a photographer who'd stolen an essay of mine from its

licensed appearance at another website and posted it without permission or notification at his own blog. In early August, in response to these posts, one Kyle Newberry wrote -- not in a public comment at my blog, but in a private email to me -- "You're dinosaur bones"; just those three words, not even a period.

I realize that this is what passes for thoughtful opinionation, nuanced argument, and scathing rebuttal amongst the cohort I think of as Generation Tweetie -- GenTweet for short. (Indeed, by the emerging standards of brevity in communication Newberry probably qualifies as verbose.) Easy enough to dismiss, of course -- my initial inclination. To quote Leonard Cohen, who, during his 2008 London concert, was quoting his 102-year-old zen teacher, "Excuse me for not dying."

But then I asked myself, suppose he's right?

As it happens, I've pondered that question on my own in recent years, intermittently. This past spring I got interviewed at length for two different projects in progress: one organized by Carol McCusker on the "photo boom" that began in the late 1960s, and another on Garry Winogrand, organized by Leo Rubinfien and Susan Kismaric. These recorded dialogues took me into a reflective mode, reconsidering with hindsight my particular project as a critic of photography and the roles played by those I consider my colleagues in that discipline from the late '60s on: Ben Lifson, Shelley Rice, Andy Grundberg, Vicki Goldberg, Carol Squiers, Charles Hagen, Vince Aletti, and then more recently David Levi-Strauss, Geoff Dyer, and some others.

And in both those conversations, which took place months prior to Newberry's dorky email, I came to the same conclusion: I'm dinosaur bones. I even used the word dinosaur to refer to myself at least once in those conversations, as I recall. And I went further, suggesting that the very discipline I practice, photo criticism, had become Jurassic as well.

The question, then, echoes that which Yahweh poses to Ezekiel in the Old Testament: "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel, I remind you, answers, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."[321] You can count on "God knows" as a safe

[321] Ezekiel 37:3.

answer to just about any question. But, with no hubristic intent, let me voice what Ezekiel was likely thinking in his situation, and what I think in mine: I doubt it very much.

No, I'm not planning to shuffle off into the gloaming to lay myself down in some bog for eventual resurrection, perhaps as some latter-day Piltdown Man my detractors might anticipate, skull of a chimp and jawbone of an ass. My own project's not nearly done, though I accept the possibility that it may get interrupted. Nor do I propose that writing about photography by others will cease. But a certain kind of writing about photography in certain kinds of forums, that which I and some others have practiced over the past four decades plus, has become obsolescent. This talk constitutes a vote of no confidence in the possibility of its revival any time soon.

Let me explain, first, what I mean by my own praxis and that of some of my peers, and then describe the situation that enabled it versus the situation we find ourselves in today.

The medium in which I work is ratiocinative prose. My preferred form is the prose essay, my preferred length between 1200 and 5000 words. I've published over 2000 such essays since 1967. As a professional writer I've defined myself from the outset through the present as a photography critic. Not, to use variants of the trendy locutions, an art critic using photography or a photo-based art critic. Just a photography critic, though according to others some of my writing qualifies me as a historian, some as a theorist, and the broader field I'm in has become known generically as cultural journalism.

What does a working photography critic do? Based on my engagement as a reader with criticism of literature, jazz, rock, and some other arts, the working critic develops an awareness of the particular medium's full field of ideas, as articulated by performers, other critics, historians, and theorists; evolves positions in relation thereto; and engages with that field of ideas by addressing a reasonable cross-section of past and current work in the medium.

At least that's how I've always understood it. How does that manifest itself in practice -- my practice, to be precise? It means spending time with exhibitions, books, periodicals, and other vehicles through which photographers disseminate their output. Nothing arcane about it, at least from my perspective. Mostly, like the Rowan Atkinson character in the 1997 comedy *Bean: The Ultimate Disaster Movie*, "I sit and look at the pictures." Actually, not to get too technical about it, usually I stand when I'm looking at the pictures, because museums and galleries don't offer seating opportunities as often as they once did. Then I go home, where I sit down to write about them. I've done this since 1967, and while I've gotten old doing it, the doing of it hasn't gotten old. But the context that enabled me to earn my livelihood doing it has all but evaporated.

When I began publishing my commentaries on photography in 1968, I did so in large part because it seemed a matter of some urgency to jump-start a critical tradition for the medium, something that, inexplicably, it had lacked up till then. In his 1971 book *The Pound Era* the literary critic Hugh Kenner described the function this serves for the future, for history, for the ongoing life of a medium, in these words:

> "There is no substitute for critical tradition: a continuum of understanding, early commenced. ... Precisely because William Blake's contemporaries did not know what to make of him, we do not know either, though critic after critic appeases our sense of obligation to his genius by reinventing him. ... In the 1920s, on the other hand, *something* was immediately made of *Ulysses* and 'The Waste Land,' and our comfort with both works after 50 years, including our ease at allowing for their age, seems derivable from the fact that they have never been ignored."[322]

Photography had been pretty much ignored by critics up through the 1960s; the work of only a few of its major figures, and fewer of its minor ones, existed within "a continuum of understanding, early commenced." Beyond the poetics of photography, its then-disputed status as a medium for creative activity,

[322] Kenner, Hugh, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 415.

there lay the much larger questions of its functions as a culture-wide visual communication system. Except for Marshall McLuhan and, before him, William M. Ivins, Jr., and before them Walter Benjamin, hardly anyone had thought those matters worthy of contemplation. All this struck me as fertile ground for inquiry, which I believed should take place before the broadest possible audience. Having become a freelance contributor to the *Village Voice*, a weekly forum for commentary on the arts, politics, and cultural issues, that seemed the logical place to start. So I did. My role models were my older colleagues at the *Voice*, as well as the art critic Sadakichi Hartmann, before me the most assiduous and consistent critic of photography, and James Agee in his work as a film critic for *The Nation*.

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Some 40 years later, in August 2010, I found myself in the historic city of Dali, near Kunming in the province of Yunnan, southwest China, serving in the role of international advisor to the second edition of a small festival there, the Dali International Photography Exhibition. In that role I got interviewed by local, regional, and national press on several occasions. During one such discussion, which went into my background and early experience as a critic, the interviewer asked if -- based on what added up then to five years of exposure on my part to the mainland Chinese photo and art scene -- I thought an independent critic such as myself, and a critical scene such as the western one I'd described to this reporter, could emerge in China.

As a matter of blunt fact, I doubt very much whether in my lifetime that military dictatorship will move sufficiently toward the model of an open society that any critic will find it possible to voice his or her honest opinion without fear or favor. However, I'm diplomatic enough not to make that explicit in the Chinese press, especially since, as a consequence of my current marriage, I have extensive family in China, where reprisal against relatives of anyone disfavored by the government enjoys a tradition stretching back for millennia.

So, to quote Brian Eno, I chose a more oblique strategy for my response. For a true critical dialogue to emerge around any medium at any time or place, I

explained to my interviewer, certain conditions must exist. It requires, at a minimum, the following:

• A cultural and editorial environment that encourages the free public exchange of ideas.

• A publishing industry in which critics can function independently in relation to the individuals and institutions about which they write.

• A creative medium that's energized and in a state of ferment. That will attract attention from individuals interested in the medium who have a critical bent.

• An audience for that medium, even if only a small but devoted one, to serve as an initial readership and sounding board for critical response.

• Some publishers and editors of periodicals who see a value in serving that audience, and that medium, by providing editorial space for the critics.

• Sufficient compensation for those critics' editorial services to enable them at least to scrape together a modest living.

I didn't yet know enough about the art scene and photo scene in China, or the broader cultural scene there, I told him, to voice an opinion on the presence or absence of those necessary conditions. I added that while I'd found those ingredients available in sufficient quantity to enable me to sustain my own work during my start-up period, there had never been an abundance, and the supply had thinned drastically in recent years, in the States and elsewhere. So, I concluded with an attempt at tact, if China lacked an active critical dialogue about photography, it had company.

If the role of working photography critic has entered its Jurassic phase, then, one reason, certainly, has to do with the disappearance of anything resembling a support system for that enterprise.

This has never been a high-paying occupation; no one gets into it for the money earned by writing critical essays. As I recall, when I left the *Village Voice* in 1973 I got $60 for each weekly column. The closest I've ever come to job security was the 1970 offer of a staff position at the *New York Times*, which I

turned down in order to remain freelance for the *Times*, the *Voice*, and other publications.

The freelance life, precarious in the best of times, isn't for everyone. But I started out as such at a moment when you could still live *la vie bohême* on a bohemian income in a major art and photography center like New York, especially if, like me, your luxury of choice was free time and you were willing to reside in the most remote of the so-called outer boroughs. Growing up in the heart of that city from the early 1940s through the middle 1960s I'd known many people in the arts and creative professions who managed to thrive in the cracks, so I assumed I could do the same, and did, for a while. But then they started tuck-pointing the cracks and raising the rents, till now it's become at best *faux* boho, a facsimile of bohemia. When people have to pay $5000 monthly for their living and working spaces, they won't have much time for the life of the mind.

The fees I and my colleagues received for our articles, low at best, didn't keep pace with inflation or the cost of living. Nor did spaces open up for photo criticism at newspapers and general-audience periodicals to the extent that I anticipated as the "photo boom" of the 1970s began. I pieced together a living from a mix of writing revenues (including what I earned from my first two books), freelance teaching, and lecturing. Hand-to-mouth existence didn't appeal to me; I simply got used to it, but certainly understood when colleagues like Andy Grundberg and Shelley Rice left it behind to take full-time teaching jobs or executive positions in institutions that provided regular salaries, paid vacations, health benefits, and retirement plans, though they inevitably became only occasional writers with that decision.

Mind you, this was still the heyday of the print periodical. I've always believed that the cultural weight of serious discourse about any medium depends in part on the presence of that discourse in general-audience publications: newspapers and weekly or fortnightly or monthly magazines aimed at a broad educated readership with an interest in the arts. I also value the frequency of a readership's encounter with a regular contributor to a given publication's pages. That weekly, biweekly, monthly contact can achieve something akin to ongoing

conversation, rather than the occasional chance encounter. But unless that conversation takes place in the same agora as discussion of politics, economics, film, television, and the events of the day, it's inherently ancillary, a side dish on the cultural menu.

And it only becomes the equivalent of a conversation when readers interact energetically and publicly with the critics of a medium, via the "letters to the editor" pages of the periodicals in which the critics publish. I've written at length about the unresponsiveness of the audience for photography,[323] so let me just say that the widespread absence of such feedback on the record provides no correctives for photo critics' errors and excesses, nor any tangible encouragement for their production. It also makes those readers, no matter how numerous, invisible to editors and publishers, leading them to conclude, not unreasonably, that the dedication of editorial space to photo criticism does not benefit the circulation of their periodicals in any way. Criticism of any medium in general-audience publications, when not subsidized by extensive advertising, is particularly vulnerable to the consequences of a mute and passive readership.

Don't get me wrong. I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to get published in small-circulation magazines like *Ag* and *Hotshoe*. As a writer I never know when or where my ideas will reach and resonate usefully with some reader who may not have access to my work in more widely distributed periodicals. And my numerous contributions to the medium's "little" magazines have enabled me to get certain ideas into print. Still, any dialogue that takes place only in the pages of small-circulation academic journals or specialized publications like art and photo magazines defines itself automatically as marginal in relation to the larger culture. So I aspire to get read by thoughtful fellow citizens of the world who may have an interest in the subjects I explore without any professional connection to the field. Hence my stints at the *Voice*, the *Times*, much later the *New York Observer*, and most recently a handful of pieces for newspapers in mainland China.

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[323] See "The Destruction Business: Some Thoughts on the Function of Criticism," in Coleman, A. D., *Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media and Lens Culture* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), esp. pp. 2-4 and 21-22.

As you probably know, the entire publishing industry entered crisis mode with the advent of the World Wide Web in 1993. Publishers of books and periodicals, having hung on to 19th-century models far too long, found themselves in deep trouble. They began hemorrhaging revenue and readers, both of which migrated to the internet. That led to their demanding that writers donate online rights to them for no additional payment -- the cause of my departure from the *New York Observer*, as I'm insistent on retaining my copyright and subsidiary-rights licensing options. Compensation for online usage of work like mine has never risen to the painfully low level of payment for print usages, so, whatever its virtues, and they're many, the web did not represent a new revenue stream for myself or my photo-critical colleagues.

To the contrary, the web killed off many small, specialized print publications. Loss of circulation at larger publications led to loss of advertising, reducing the available budget for editorial content. That in turn has led them to a more reader-driven relationship to content, with the result that, in a steadily dumbed-down culture, Amy Winehouse, Kim Kardashian, Bruce Willis, Ashton Kutcher, and Demi Moore share front-page headline space with Arab Spring and the European financial crisis.

Should I go along to get along? Forinstance, I feel confident that I could find an editor at a major magazine who'd commission a feature on celebrities who photograph -- people like Jeff Bridges, Dennis Hopper, Diane Keaton, Karl Lagerfeld, Richard Gere. Some of them aren't half-bad. If I'd started upright in my bed one midnight yearning to write that piece, I'd have done so. Instead, I cooked it up in a brainstorming session, half-heartedly trying to figure out what would sell instead of what I thought I should write next to make things hot for myself and my readers. That celebrities-as-photographers piece could turn into a lucrative book, even a traveling show, but it feels to me too much like sucking up to the rich and famous, or sucking up to the public's appetite for news of same, and my heart's never been in that.

On top of which, that assignment doesn't require a photo critic, who may look at those images and decide -- as I did recently with the paintings of Bob

Dylan -- that they're competent and amiable but irrelevant to the medium's field of ideas. I guarantee you that's not what the editor who would commission such a feature would want to hear. No, that's a job for a cultural journalist. Specialized critics like myself, not just in photography but in all the arts, have begun to give way to "cultural journalists" -- jacks of all trades who know a little about many things and not much about anything in particular. They write as naïfs. A prime recent example would be Jane O'Brien's story, "Gertrude Stein celebrated at two Washington DC museums," posted at BBC News Online on October 14, 2011, which opens forthrightly as follows:

> "I've often wondered whether approaching a subject from a standpoint of total ignorance sharpens my investigative powers, or whether it simply leads to inevitable embarrassment from which I'll never recover. That thought was uppermost when the National Portrait Gallery announced the opening of an exhibition on Gertrude Stein. Of course I'd heard of her -- wasn't she that famous feminist who burned her bra in the 1960s? -- But beyond that I really had no idea who she actually was."[324]

There you have cultural journalism in a nutshell, atypical only in the candidness with which its author confesses her incompetence for the task at hand and her editors' and publishers' willingness to lay on the table her lack of qualification for this assignment. To put it in our crude ex-colonial vernacular, O'Brien doesn't know shit from Shinola, crows about it in her news story, and gets paid for doing so by the BBC. Whatever its entertainment value for equally uninformed readers, paraded ignorance such as this adds nothing to the critical dialogue about Stein specifically or modernism generally.

I've chosen this example to demonstrate that the problem doesn't restrict itself to us bumpkins in the United States, knowing full well that doing so rubs salt into the wounds of residents of the sceptered isle, already smarting under the humiliating global scrutiny of its much grosser Fleet Street excesses. But that's another discussion. More to the point, are you prepared for features, reviews, and interviews on subjects photographic -- postmodernist practice, street

[324] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15314287.

photography, Victor Burgin, Jo Spence, Julia Margaret Cameron, Bill Brandt, you name it -- by cultural journalists who readily declare themselves tabula rasa but eager to learn? Because, ready or not, that's what you'll get henceforth in the mainstream press.

So one of the cluster of meteors that struck my little world to send up a smothering cloud of ash has begun to eliminate the editorial support system for what I do professionally as a writer, by substituting cultural journalism's one-size-fits-all daytrippers for staff or freelance specialized critics. Additionally, there's another change in the market that results from a change in their readerships. The *USA Today* model has permeated the industry. Editors now ask for short, punchy pieces, the shorter and punchier the better -- 250 words (roughly one double-spaced typewritten page) is great, 500 words okay, 750 words ample, 1000 words windy, and anything much over that longer than one can expect today's average readers to stay with to the end.

This is due partly to the widespread erosion of the ability to pay close and prolonged attention, for which we can hold the entirety of mass media and digital technology responsible, partly to the reading and writing habits of people who put in way too much time immersed in social media. Did you know that the average college student in the States today spends more than three hours a day doing email, instant messaging, and cellphone texting, plus another three hours surfing the web -- and that's the demographic publishers hope to reach?

The problem is that, given as I am to thorough disputation, I can't easily make the transition from essay form to the snippet, the text equivalent of the soundbite. I can extract substantive 250-word chunks from longer pieces much more easily than I can conceive and write them at that length by plan. Yet even when I do, I hear those fragments calling out to be reunited with the context from which I've severed them, like lost kittens mewing for their mother.

How does a critic compete with the claim on people's attention today of social media? I have a Facebook page to which I pay absolutely no attention. I'm not on Twitter. My idea of blogging, as you know if you've visited me at *Photocritic International*, involves writing at my preferred length and dividing it

into parts for posting if an essay runs much over 1200 words. So I genuinely have no idea how to do what I do in a much more condensed way. I do, however, give it thought. For example:

• Suppose I reconceptualize the 140-character "tweet" as a version of the form Allen Ginsberg named the "American sentence," a 17-syllable prose counterpart to the 17-syllable Japanese haiku?

• Should I try my hand at incorporating "lolspeak" or "kitty pidgin" into my writings -- for example, taking on the role of Ceiling Cat, benevolently declaring that "Edwurd Westin can haz negatif spayse"?

How about simply making my ideas more accessible to the current generation by converting them from texts into other formats?

• Turn my essays into spoken podcasts and/or YouTube videos.

• Turn them into comics, and my collections thereof into graphic novels, or fotonovelas: *A. D. Coleman for Beginners*.

• Shift to a different model for my books: *Postmodern Photography for Dummies*, *The Complete Idiot's Guide To Group f/64*, *Photo-Based Art in 90 Minutes*. With lots of highlighted sections, bullet points, and tips.

This probably sounds facetious, but I have in fact considered all of the above, and may well try my hand at a few. As I told some colleagues during a lecture last week in Bratislava, 2011 is not 1960, and the college-age audience today is made up of people young enough to be my grandchildren. I and the cohort of students to which I belonged in 1960 resembled the 20-something cohort that walks into my classroom or surfs to my blog today only in their physiology and basic psychological and emotional structure. Socially, culturally, and especially in their relation to information technology, they're radically different from me, and from anyone born before the emergence of the internet and the World Wide Web.

On top of the texting and IM and chat I mentioned previously, they spend additional hours each day surfing online, then more time absorbing audio, video, and multimedia content -- on their computers, via their iPods and iPhones and Androids and Kindles and other electronic devices. These are their habitual

relationships with technology. The abilities necessary to utilize these media also constitute skillsets, at which they are in most cases more adroit than I. Expecting them to set all this aside in order to work with my ideas in the form of printed texts exclusively, or even primarily, is simply unrealistic. So either I recognize and engage this cohort's technological skillsets and media preferences or else I lose them (or, at the very least, lose all but that small percentage who've come to enjoy substantive ratiocinative prose). Which would leave me preaching not only to the converted but to a graying and dwindling subset thereof. Not an appealing prospect.

At the same time, they're also habituated to obtaining the content they consume for free. If I go to the trouble of developing new skills so that I can multipurpose my content in forms they enjoy more, they'll just swipe it -- and, like Kyle Newberry, diss me when I object. So why bother? Lately the theme song running in my head is Gillian Welch's "Everything is Free." You probably know its wry commentary on IP theft, which strikes a chord with me. However, her solution -- to sing privately, at home, for herself and those she loves -- doesn't really work for a critic, whose activity is either public or pointless.

Let's see if this old dog can learn some new tricks, while finding ways of making it pay for itself. Of course, I could use some help at this. I understand you can hire people to manage your social-media life for you, and it may come to that. But I've already created a video for YouTube, in my performance-art alter ego as The Derrière Garde; podcasting doesn't seem all that hard; I'm reading Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and Barbara Slate's *You Can Do a Graphic Novel*; and a lolspeak post at my blog isn't out of the question. Adapt or die, right?

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Let me return to considering the state of the discourse. Due to an unfortunate combination of circumstances, I parted company with the *Village Voice* in 1973 and the *New York Times* in 1974, published in assorted comparatively small-circulation or targeted periodicals for the next 14 years, and didn't establish a platform at another general-audience publication until I

commenced my column in the *New York Observer* in 1988. So, as a working critic, I was sidelined during much of the photo boom that brought the medium to center stage in the art world and the wider culture.

Still, I felt heartened to watch photography start to get some of the attention it deserved, and photographers -- including some who'd paid a lot of dues -- start to get some respect. But then two things happened unexpectedly. First, in 1977 Susan Sontag published the one book on the medium that we can now expect a culturally literate person to have read. She titled it *On Photography*, though she subsequently confessed that "[*On Photography*] *is not about photography!* [Emphasis in the original.] ... Now you've got me. I said it, and I didn't mean to say it. It's not about photography, it's about the consumer society, it's about advanced industrial society ... [and] about photography as the exemplary activity of this society. I don't want to say it's not about photography, but it's true ... I'm not a photography critic. I don't know how to be one."[325]

Well, silly me -- and perhaps silly us -- for taking her book's title at face value, instead of sussing out that she'd simply chosen photography as a convenient whipping boy. Among the things that disturbed me about Sontag's treatise were its "case closed" tone, which discouraged its readers from inquiring further into the medium's field of ideas by suggesting that it had none, and the fact that nowhere in it (indeed, nowhere in any of her subsequent writings on the medium) does Sontag pay close, careful attention to even a single photograph, verifying her assertion that she didn't know how to be a photography critic.

A quarter-century later, in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2002), Sontag recanted many of her positions on the grounds that they were "now fast approaching the status of platitudes" -- as if they hadn't been such when first uttered. But the impact of the first book has far exceeded any counterbalancing effect of the much less influential follow-up. Certainly no one who has used her original aphorisms and *aperçus* as substantiation for their own positions has felt any need to revise their stands drastically because Sontag did so with hers.

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[325] These statements appear in Victor Bockris's interview, "Susan Sontag: The Dark Lady of Pop Philosophy," *High Times*, March 1978, p. 36.

Sontag's book was written in accessible language; even the passages plagiarized from Roland Barthes came from his newspaper columns, not his denser treatises. But *On Photography* served in part to popularize the set of ideas concerning photography and its relation to culture that was coming to be known as postmodernism. The usefulness of some of those ideas notwithstanding, the advent of postmodernist criticism precipitated a breathtakingly rapid descent into highly jargonized discourse with a patently gatekeeping subtext. Most of those producing it showed no interest in mainstreaming their theories via general-audience publications;[326] they published in (and often founded for that purpose) small-circulation journals like *October* and *Afterimage*.

A few advocates for the movement, like Andy Grundberg at the *New York Times* and Ingrid Sischy at the *New Yorker*, achieved a more penetrable style in which to propound postmodern notions. But their writing made it clear that one purpose of this approach was to valorize a certain defined set of practitioners and, to use one of their favorite locutions, "discredit" others (Minor White, W. Eugene Smith, Sebastião Salgado among the "discredited"). These elevations and dismissals were based not on the power of the photographers' work but on assessment of the correctness of their politics. All of this reminiscent, if you know your music history, of the Stalinist Ewan McColl organizing the members of the UK's folk-music clubs to disrupt Bob Dylan's pioneering rock & roll concerts during his 1966 tour.

Whatever our respective relationships to postmodernism, I'd hope we could agree that in practice postmodern theory does not encourage close scrutiny of individual images as such, nor concern itself with their facture or the physical characteristics of them as crafted objects. One can read the entirety of the critical literature on Cindy Sherman, for example, without encountering much in the way of detailed description of any of her images or prints. To whatever extent Sontag, and the postmodern critics addressing photography from the

[326] For an unintentionally hilarious exemplification of the problems involved in translating pomo jargon into comprehensible English, see Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt's deliriously impenetrable *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1995).

1970s on, prompted people to think about photography and photographers in the abstract, they didn't do much to make them feel it might be important to "sit and look at the pictures." Nor to make them feel that engaging critically with photography could be done by the average citizen, in everyday language, without benefit of clergy.

The decade following the publication of Sontag's book saw an enormous investment in projects and activities devoted to the sesquicentennial of photography, the designated 150th anniversary of the medium's public birth. New museums of photography, new departments of photography in art museums, new photo festivals in dozens of countries; new histories of photography and other monographs in dozens of languages -- these and more made a wealth of images and information about them available to a rapidly widening audience for the medium.

We missed that boat. For a year or more the world regularly turned its eyes to the medium. We did not have a cohort of critics ready, willing, and able to take advantage of that teaching moment and convert it to a permanent, multi-levelled, polyvocal public debate about photography, its practitioners, their images, and the many issues relating to all those. With all the hooplah attendant on the sesquicentennial, you'd have thought that by the end of 1989 every major newspaper and general-audience magazine, and many minor ones, would have a knowledgeable writer on photography on call, if not on staff, and contributing regularly. That never happened, perhaps because so many of my colleagues were busying themselves distinguishing the signifier from the signified, a distinction that, incomprehensibly, has never gripped the public imagination.

By dint of perseverance and good fortune, in mid-1988 I'd managed to establish myself at the *New York Observer*, a weekly newspaper, as their official photography critic, producing a weekly column. By then art magazines worldwide had opened themselves up to coverage of photography, and a whole slew of "little" photo magazines had sprung up. I multipurposed and self-syndicated that *Observer* material, and more, to publications across North America, in Europe, and in the U.K., for close to a decade. Some I converted to broadcasts for

National Public Radio. It felt as if, in tandem with my colleagues, we were all right on the cusp of something huge, the field of photography simultaneously consolidating and expanding.

Then the tsunami of the World Wide Web hit, as previously mentioned, rapidly changing the publishing industry in ways that certainly didn't benefit writers as professional content providers. And the web represents an even larger, epochal change: the cultural shift from analog to digital information at every level -- production, storage, retrieval, transmission. Suddenly it became possible to create an image, or a text, without having to create an object -- the dematerialization of communication.

As a result, the medium of photography itself has morphed into something so new and different that we begin to call it by other, provisional names. Post-secondary former departments of photography scramble to rename themselves: digital imaging, multimedia, media arts. Museums of photography, photo festivals, and photography magazines face the same challenge. And so, certainly, do those few of us self-identified as photography critics. If the terms *photographer* and *photography* now inch toward the archaic, photo criticism as a descriptor can't lag far behind.

I've deliberately defined my territory widely, from the start. I continue to believe, as I always have, that there's a value to having someone grounded in the history and evolution of lens-based imagery addressing the broadest spectrum of work related to that medium, from classic 19th-century photography through photo-based art to photorealist painting to holography. Increasingly, however, I see work at photo festivals, in photo galleries and museums, at the websites of artists self-defined as photographers, that includes kinetic as well as still imagery, incorporates sound or animation or computer graphics, presents itself in installation format. At what point does the rubric "photography" cease to function as an accurate way of identifying such projects, and when does it become unproductive, indeed inaccurate, to call someone who writes about such works a photography critic?

Were I setting out today on an updated version of the enterprise I initiated in 1968, even one in which critical attention to 19th- and 20th-century photography played a central role, I wouldn't present myself to editors as a photography critic, out of concern that they'd find that not just overly narrowcast but even esoteric. I don't know what I'd substitute, but that designation has now outlived its usefulness, though a few of us who mined that vein when it ran rich may end up stuck with it for life.

Mind you, though I'm technoskeptical I'm not technophobic. I've written about electronic communication and the emergence of digital forms since the late 1960s. As a professional writer, I've worked on a computer since the late 1980s. I started publishing my first website, and my first blog (though we didn't have that term then) in 1995, making me an early adapter of the World Wide Web. Nowadays I publish and edit four sites. I also write reviews of computer software and hardware for Mac Edition Radio, a website. So I'm comfortable in the digital environment.

And I want to make it clear that I'm not mourning the passing of print per se as the vehicle for a critical dialogue about photography. Conceivably that dialogue could take place in cyberspace. To date, and to my surprise, I'm alone among my colleagues in establishing a substantial presence on the web via a site of my own. And while some photography magazines have gone online, such as *Viewfinder* and *Hotshoe*, they emphasize presentation of photographers' projects rather than critical discourse.

Yet even if dozens of my colleagues start blogging and one or more online journals devoted to photography criticism emerge, as I hope they will, that won't have much more impact on the broader culture than would the publication of several more equivalent specialized print journals. The effect won't be the same as it would be if, say, the *International Herald Tribune* and *Newsweek* added photo critics to their rosters for the first time, and the *New York Times* returned such a designated hitter to its staff -- even if those publications were to terminate their print editions and become entirely web-based. Because that coverage, in such forums, in print or online, signals that a medium has achieved a level of

cultural gravitas. Recall, if you're old enough, the pivotal moments when criticism of jazz and then rock & roll moved beyond such magazines as *Down Beat*, *Metronome*, and *Crawdaddy* in the States, or *Melody Maker* here in the U.K., and started showing up in the pages of the London *Times*, and you'll know what I mean.

Whatever the condition of the discipline of photography criticism, the still photograph remains much more than an obsolescing historical artifact. Over the past several decades we've had a number of teaching moments, occasions on which commentary from prominent, articulate critics knowledgeable about the medium should have formed part of the public debate over situations involving the medium:

• the so-called "culture wars," of course, in which much of the attack from the right centered around controversial photographs;

• the ongoing U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" war with Iraq, which began in 2003, premised itself in part on energetic misinterpretation of aerial photographs, ostensibly showing manufacturing sites for weapons of mass destruction that did not in fact exist;

• the Abu Ghraib scandal of 2006 that discredited the U.S. in much of the Middle East and elsewhere resulted from the release of snapshots of torture of prisoners, images made by unidentified U.S. military personnel;

• and the resignation in 2011 of Democratic U.S. Congressman Anthony Weiner over the "Weinergate" photos started with the disclosure of self-portraits he'd used in "sexting" a 21-year-old woman via the social media website Twitter, images he suggested had been "doctored" before 'fessing up and leaving office.

These particular instances highlight the fact that the still photograph has not lost its potency as a cultural artifact. To the contrary, photographs made and presented within the contexts of vernacular photography, news photography, evidentiary photography, and contemporary art activity have provoked extraordinary response in our time. Meanwhile, digital imaging has unleashed a flood of altered still images, as well as an upsurge in claims that verifiably unaltered images have somehow been falsified. We can't afford a citizenry

unsophisticated in its relation to such images and unequipped to question and challenge manipulative public presentations thereof. Such a discourse requires exemplars and guides, roles in which dedicated critics serve the public. But they can only provide that service when they speak from platforms that make them publicly visible. Such platforms, never plentiful, have dwindled in number and seem likely to disappear altogether.

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Allow me to sum up what I'm proposing as the symptoms and causes of the demise of photography criticism as a substantial public discourse.

• Unlike criticism of most of the other creative media -- literature, music, film, theater, dance, the visual arts -- photo criticism never established more than a tenuous toehold in widely distributed general-audience publications, such as newspapers and magazines devoted to coverage of cultural issues. Thus it never became a mainstream form of criticism, remaining a peripheral or minor one at best.

• The limited opportunity to do such work for adequate compensation made the discipline of photo criticism less than attractive to potential practitioners of this craft. This enabled only a few people to pursue it vocationally; most engage with it avocationally.

• The lack of any financial support for photo criticism (in the form of advertising) from the institutions and industries that sponsor the public presentation of photography -- museums, galleries, book publishers -- made the inclusion of photo criticism in such periodicals optional and thus dispensable, from a financial point of view. The current international financial crisis ensures that this situation will only get worse.

• The absence of a responsive audience for photo criticism -- an audience ready, willing, and able to interact energetically and publicly with photo critics via letters to the editor -- not only delimits the dialogue to infrequent public exchanges between critics but means that editors and publishers remain unaware of the existence of any readership for any photo criticism that they put into print.

• Postmodern theory has dominated critical writing about photography since the late 1970s. The writing style of many critics of the postmodernist tendency is off-putting to the average reader (and thus to the editors of large-circulation periodicals). Most such writers thus restrict their writing to specialized, small-circulation journals and their audiences to the readership thereof.

• Concentration by many postmodernist critics on a small roster of photographers and artists using photography -- Jeff Wall, the Bechers and their students, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Andres Serrano, Alfredo Jaar, Laurie Simmons, Robert Mapplethorpe -- has in fact ensured the existence of a "continuum of understanding, early commenced" that constitutes the early phase of a critical tradition for their work. But there's a much wider range of significant work, past and present, that has received insufficient critical attention, and that gap widens instead of shrinking.

• An opportunity to mainstream photo criticism presented itself in the 1980s, in connection with the energy and activity surrounding the upcoming sesquicentennial of photography in 1989. While that period resulted in the establishment of new photography museums and festivals, other new photo-related institutions and organizations, new magazines of photography, and other ventures, it did not lead to an increased presence of photo critics in the mainstream media -- due in part to the shortage of critics able to communicate effectively in such forums, and interested in so doing.

• The crisis of the print publishing industry generated by the advent of digital formats and the World Wide Web has led to the drastic cutting down of editorial space available for perceived "boutique" content such as photo criticism.

• The replacement of critics specialized in one or another of the arts with generalist "cultural journalists" has radically reduced the opportunities for knowledgeable photo critics to establish platforms for their work in large-circulation general-audience periodicals, whether in print or online.

• The shortened attention span of the contemporary audience is not compatible with the standard form for critical writing: the substantial, carefully argued prose essay.

• The transformation of the medium of photography itself, the transition from analog to digital for most of the primary forms of vernacular and quotidian photography and even many of its specialized uses, has redefined the medium to such an extent that defining the activity under consideration as photography criticism may not effectively outline the territory such a commentator would explore.

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For all those reasons, then, I think the heyday of photography criticism has passed. I don't mean to suggest that no one will write passionately, critically, and well about photography ever again, and I can state as a certainty that numerous others have done so to date. But as a variant of the cultural function sometimes called the public intellectual, the photography critic per se made it out of the minor leagues only briefly, and photo criticism as the form in which such an individual would cast his or work has rarely escaped its microbrew status. I don't say this to castigate anyone else, nor to fault myself. Though I think it might have gone differently, I can't prove that.

So yes, Kyle, I'm dinosaur bones -- and Andy Grundberg, Vicki Goldberg, Anthony Bannon, Vince Aletti, and a small bunch of others along with me. Hope springing eternal, as it tends to do, I'll close by saying that perhaps time will convert us into a fossil fuel that can drive the engine of some future ongoing high-profile international public debate over lens-derived imagery of all kinds and their implications, facilitated by informed provocateurs. I don't care whether they call themselves photo critics, or define their work as photo criticism. Critical writing about photography is, in any case, a subset of critical writing in general, which in turn forms a category (though not often enough acknowledged as such) of literature. And I feel toward my little corner of that territory as Jean Rhys felt about hers: "All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. And there are trickles like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must keep feeding the lake."

(This is the complete text of a lecture delivered on November 8, 2011 at Hotshoe Gallery, London, co-sponsored by Hotshoe International, Viewfinder Photography gallery, and the VASA Project.)

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A. D. Coleman has published 8 books and more than 2500 essays on photography and related subjects. Formerly a columnist for the *Village Voice*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Observer*, Coleman has contributed to such periodicals as *ARTnews*, *Art On Paper*, and *Technology Review*. His syndicated essays on mass media, new communication technologies, art, and photography have been featured in such periodicals as *Juliet Art Magazine* (Italy), *European Photography* (Germany), and *Art Today* (China). His work has been translated into 21 languages and published in 31 countries.

Since 1995, Coleman has served as Publisher and Executive Director of The Nearby Café (nearbycafe.com), a multi-subject electronic magazine where his widely read blog on photography, "Photocritic International," appears (photocritic.com). He also founded and directs the Photography Criticism CyberArchive (photocriticism.com), the most extensive online database ever created of writing about photography by authors past and present. With John Alley, he co-directs The New Eyes Project, an online resource for everyone teaching photography to young people.

Coleman -- who lectures, teaches and publishes widely both here and abroad -- has appeared on NPR, PBS, CBS and the BBC. A Getty Museum Guest Scholar and a Fulbright Senior Scholar, and a recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Hasselblad Foundation, he was honored in 1996 as the Ansel and Virginia Adams Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the Center for Creative Photography.

American Photo named Coleman one of "the 100 most important people in photography in 1998." In 2002 he received the Culture Prize of the German Photographic Society -- the first critic of photography ever so honored. In 2010 he received the J Dudley Johnston Award for "lifetime achievement in writing about photography," from the Royal Photographic Society (UK). In 2014 he received the Insight Award from the Society for Photographic Education. In 2015 he received the Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi (SDX) Award for Research About Journalism, as well as The Photo Review Award for Outstanding Contributions to Photography.

Coleman's first major curatorial effort, "Saga: the Journey of Arno Rafael Minkkinen," made its debut in both book and exhibition form in September 2005 and now tours internationally. A second museum-scale curatorial project, "China: Insights," premiered in spring 2008 and continues to tour the U.S. He also curates smaller exhibitions for such venues as See+ Art Space/Gallery in Beijing and the Dali International Photography Exhibition in Dali, China. Since 2005, exhibitions that Coleman has curated have opened at museums and galleries in Canada, China, Finland, Italy, Rumania, Slovakia, and the U.S.

Coleman's books include *The Grotesque in Photography*; *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968-1978*; *Critical Focus: Photography in the International Image Community*; *Tarnished Silver: After the Photo Boom*; *Looking at Photographs: Animals*, a work for children; *Depth Of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media and Lens Culture*; and *The Digital Evolution: Visual Communication in the Electronic Age, Essays, Lectures And Interviews 1967-1998*.

Critical Focus received the International Center of Photography's Infinity Award for Writing on Photography in 1995. *Wired* magazine called *The Digital Evolution* "required reading for today's media-savvy or information-obsessed artist."

In 2018 Coleman will celebrate 50 years of continuous production as a working critic, historian, and theorist.