

exposure

William Stott on **Walker Evans**

Simon Watney on **Photographic
Education**

Amy Stark's **Bibliography of
MA Theses**

Jno Cook on **Robert Frank**

Richard Bolton on the **Rephotographic
Survey Project**

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Society for Photographic Education

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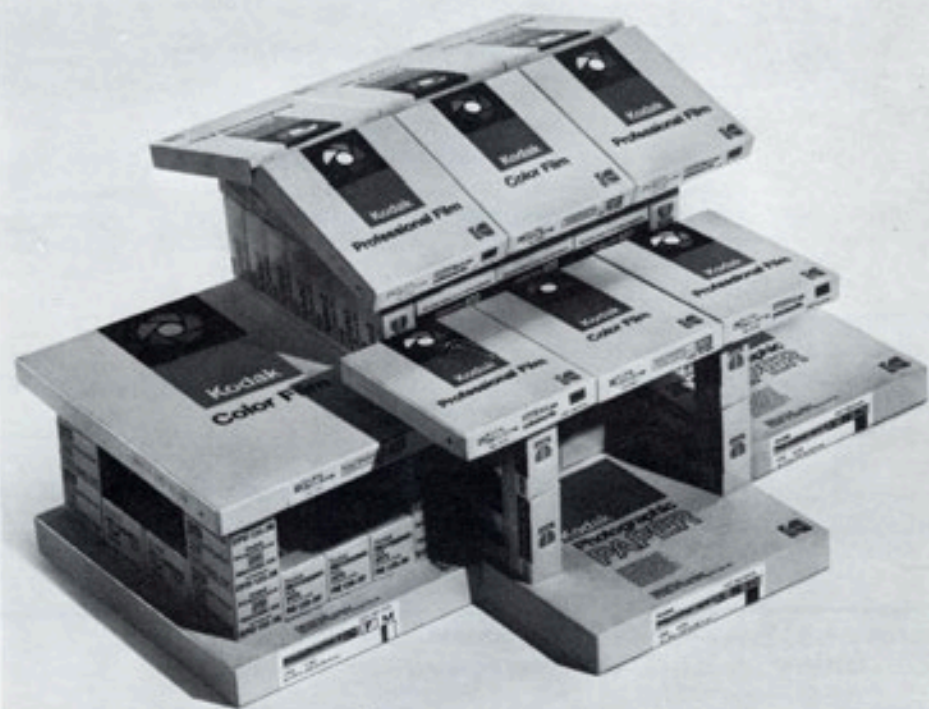
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Editorial

This issue begins the 24th volume of *exposure*, and it introduces several changes in the editorial policy and design of the journal. *exposure* is now being distributed in book stores and museum shops across the country, and preliminary reports indicate that it has been very well received in many locations. If *exposure* has not yet appeared in your area please contact the Managing Editor, Jno Cook.

I am now handling the editorial duties of *exposure*, and I would like to reiterate my commitment to the agenda that Jan Z. Grover and I developed two years ago. As she put it in her editorial, "Fundamental questions about the teaching and practice of art photography... editorial, advertising, photojournalistic, political and scientific photography, questions about interpreting, promoting, collecting, and marketing photographs, have not been addressed, either within the Society or our culture at large" (*exposure* 22:3, Fall 1984). Although the last six issues of *exposure* addressed many of these concerns, there is clearly much more to be said and done. Feminist theory and perspectives will continue to appear on an ongoing basis in *exposure*. I will also solicit articles on non-American and non-Western photography, as well as manuscripts that deal theoretically with video, photography-related performance art, and "new media." And I continue to hope that more SPE members will express themselves directly in the journal through articles, book reviews, and letters.

Having co-edited *exposure* for almost two years, I hold few illusions about the amount of work that editing entails. For this reason, and because a journal of quality should reflect more than the perspective of a single editor, I have assembled an Editorial Board which will advise me about manuscripts and future directions. I selected members of the Board with several criteria in mind: (1) outstanding achievements in the field; (2) expertise in several areas of photography and related disciplines; (3) experience in dealing with manuscripts, either as writers or editors. The

names listed below include photographers, critics, curators, educators, historians, and theorists who, collectively, ably represent our diverse and changing field.

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Anne Tucker
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In the future, each submitted manuscript will be sent to at least two readers for their advice and suggestions. I will pass along the readers' comments to the contributors regardless of whether a manuscript is accepted or rejected. We hope that the Editorial Board will thus serve an educational function by assuring contributors that some of the leading authorities in the country will be reviewing their writing.

The Board and I will work together to create a climate conducive to theoretically cogent and sophisticated discourse — a discourse that fully reflects the complexities and potentials of our medium today.

David L. Jacobs
Editor

Documentary Expression Revisited

William Stott

*The following essay will appear as an Afterword to the republication of William Stott's **Documentary Expression and Thirties America** (1973). The new edition will be published in May, 1986, by the University of Chicago Press.*

There is only one question I've been asked more than once about this book: "How did you come to write it?"

The answer begins: "Necessity." I was an American Studies graduate student at Yale in 1970 and had to write a dissertation. If possible, I wanted it to be a useful piece of work. I remember asking A.N. Kaul, one of my favorite teachers, what he would write on, were he in my shoes. He laughed and said I reminded him of Raymond Weaver, who, in about 1920, asked a colleague at Columbia University what to write a book on and was told to look into a forgotten nineteenth century sea writer named Melville. Kaul chuckled, "I haven't a Melville up my sleeve."

At first I thought I was going to write on the shift in American reading habits from fiction to nonfiction. The New Journalism was then at zenith, and though I was a literature student, I was more interested in it than in the academic and Postmodern fictions of the time. I found that, according to publishers' statistics, Americans started buying more nonfiction than fiction suddenly, in the 1930s.

That decade interested me because I was brought up on its myths. My parents had been leftists then; my father, who became a Wall Street banker, said hearing John Strachey speak would have made him a Communist if he hadn't already been a Socialist. Many of the kids in my high school were also children of the Left, and in the halls between classes we sometimes threw around the old phrases: "petty bourgeois revisionist," "capitalist lackey," "dialectical obscurantism." I was born in 1940 and knew

I had grown up in a peculiar world; I suspected a good part of the reason lay in the 1930s.

The art of the thirties appealed to me. From 1964 to 1968 I had been a cultural officer in Africa for the U.S. government and had worked with journalists, photographers, painters, broadcasters, and documentary film. Doing propaganda I became interested in how it worked. Thirties art and expression offered a wide field for propaganda research.

As I got into the Depression decade I found I had connections with it I hadn't known about. One of my aunts was Clinch Calkins, whom I made the central figure of a chapter in my book. She had died several years before I cared to know the fascinating stuff she could have told me: how Harry Hopkins worked (she was his ghostwriter: part of his 1936 *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief* echo her 1930 bestseller, *Some Folks Won't Work*), and what the Federal Writers' Project headquarters was like (she was close to Henry Alsberg, the FWP director; he went to a party at her house the night he was fired). I discovered that two of my parents' closest friends, John Fischer and Robert Thorpe, had worked for the PR division of the Farm Security Administration, collaborating and feuding with Roy Stryker.

New friends came forward to help. While I was trying to read James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Richard Warch, our upstairs neighbor (and now President of Lawrence University), said he had gotten to know Evans, who taught in the Yale art school. Rik and I were preparing to teach different sections of a

seminar on great books in American culture, and he said, "I'm assigning *Famous Men*. Why don't you assign it, and we'll get Evans to come talk to our classes?"

2

Walker Evans (1903-75) was to be my book's unannounced hero, but for a long time I didn't know this. Though I learned a good deal from his question-and-answer session with Rik's and my classes on April 9, 1970, we didn't become friends then. At coffee afterwards, he was tired and remote. I gathered he was in the throes of separating from his second wife. I made sappy attempts to win his attention; his eyes blinked with indifference, like an owl's. I thought I'd get no more help from him.

Nine months later, I read about his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. The master of Yale's Calhoun College, R.W.B. Lewis, and his wife, Nancy, invited my wife, Jane, and me to a cocktail party honoring Evans, and for once I did something smart: I went to New York and saw the retrospective *before* the cocktail party.

Among the *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* pictures in the show were a number never seen before, including the family portrait of the Gudgers that accompanies this article. I looked at this picture, then moved down the line looking at the two or three next pictures without really seeing them, then came back and stared at the Gudger picture, my head wafting with astonishment. I knew the picture had never been published or exhibited, yet I somehow felt it *had* to exist: it was what *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was really about.

At the cocktail party Dick Lewis introduced me to Evans, explaining that my dissertation involved his and Agee's book. Evans turned me his grim face, eyes half closed. I didn't tell him we had met before. Instead I said I had seen his retrospective and been particularly struck by the portrait of the Gudgers. "I think it sort of explodes the book," I said.

Evans' eyes opened slowly, and I felt that for the first time he saw me. "Really?" he said. "I hadn't thought about it. What do you mean?"

I was afraid I had gone too far, suggesting that a picture not in the book called the book into question, but I had no choice. I gave him an early version of the

argument that I give in my book and that here accompanies the picture (see page 11).

"That's very interesting," Evans said. "Not that I intended it. Still, you see it — it must be there."

I asked him the history of the picture, how it had come to be made.

"It was that sharecropper fellow. He was constantly after me...." Other people had come up to talk with Evans. "We should discuss it."

"I'd love to," I said.

Three months later Walker came to dinner, and after dinner he, Jane, and I took our conversation into the living room and turned on a tape recorder.

Walker's mood that night was elated and energetic. He was detached from his marriage, off alcohol, and on an anti-depressant. These changes, and his increasing celebrity, made his last years in many ways the best ("This is really my youth!" he once told us). His conversation that night and later taught me about much more than his photography and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. It taught me how to evaluate all documentary work. It taught me how to be dispassionate toward the passions of the thirties. It taught me that the right way to live with what other people call success is as indifferently as one lives with what they call failure.

3

Here is a small anthology of Walker's comments on matters relevant to my book. He made most of these comments during his visit to Austin in March 1974, six months after the first edition of the book appeared, but there are some earlier comments I kept out of the book because I thought Walker would prefer they not be published in his lifetime. I publish his remarks on James Agee now because recent Agee biographies have implicated Evans in Agee's bizarre sexual behavior.

On the lifestyle of the intelligentsia in the 1930s compared with 1970. "Ten o'clock and we're sober! If this were thirty years ago, we'd all be drunk by this time."

On Agee's saying that he and Evans contemplated having group sex with the sharecropper women. "I blush and squirm every time I read that. God! In the first place, it wasn't in my mind at all. Agee never men-

tioned it. But my God, the enormity of such a suggestion!

"But that has to do with Agee and the fashion of the time. This was part of the first sexual revolution, and the violation, the innocent violation, reached enormous proportions. Everybody by rote went to bed with everybody else, and the result was an emotional desert and confusion.

"I say 'everybody': I mean all the 'advanced' people — always. All the *sophisticated* and *emancipated* and *educated* people."

On writing a biography of Agee. "I would like to spend five years on a book not to be published for one hundred years. It would contain things unthinkable — but the man."

On Agee's commitment to truth. "He had an outsized combativeness and an immoderate supply of moral indignation, not stopping short of violence — in fact, capping it with violence. I once saw him hit a woman over the head with a chair because she said she faked an orgasm. He was so shocked by this dishonesty of the woman and her naïveté, not knowing what she was doing. He was drunk. He could have killed her."

On his FSA work. "I was interested, selfishly, in the opportunity it gave me to go around and use the camera. I did anything I pleased and *ignored* what I was expected to do. If I got an order from anybody saying, 'There's a development out here, go and photograph it,' I'd tear it up and put it away. Such a bore: I wouldn't touch it."

On being shown a picture of an FSA housing development for relocated sharecroppers in Georgia and told the picture was by him. "No! Is it?... Well, you know, I was expected to do that, and once in a while I would. And then — it's the reason I was dropped — I just said, 'I won't do that anymore. If you want to record government housing and toot it up, I won't do it.'"

On whether he was "trying to be a journalist" on the Let Us Now Praise Famous Men project. "No, I was trying to be myself. I certainly didn't want to be what anybody else wanted me to be."

On Roy Stryker, head of the FSA photography unit. "Stryker was a politician, although he was a little hypocritical or self-deluded: he thought he was doing something idealistic, too. There was an idealistic atmosphere in the New Deal, and a lot of people felt they were

doing some sort of 'uplifting' work. He had me in a rage all the time, because I was working for a man whose intelligence I didn't respect.

"Well, there is always going to be someone over us who's an ass. The thing is to ignore him."

On his retaining possession of some of the pictures he made while working for the FSA. "I laid it down. I said I'm going to do it. Stryker knew that I had his number and could see through him, and he was very insecure. I took mean advantage of that.

"Well, he got his revenge. Finally one day he got a little sorry for himself and threw me out."

On "manipulating" things or people to make a better documentary photograph. "I find a howling error in composition, because something is in the wrong place, and I leave it there. God arranged that; I wouldn't touch it."

On his sociopolitical views. "The problem is one of staying out of Left politics and still avoiding Establishment patterns....

"I would not politicize my mind or work, in spite of the fact that this is now a very political time, as the thirties were. The apostles can't have me. I don't think an artist is directly able to alleviate the human condition. He's very interested in *revealing* it."

On photographing the disadvantaged. "I do have a weakness for the disadvantaged, for poor people, but I'm suspicious of it. I have to be, because that should not be the motive for artistic or aesthetic action. If it is, your work is either sentimental or motivated toward 'improving society,' let us say. I don't believe an artist should do that with his work. If he does, if you weep over a picture or a piece of writing, that's bad. Jean Cocteau of all people — you may not admire him very much — but he once said, 'Real feeling is drawn from us not by a sad spectacle but by the miracle of something done perfectly.' You want to hear it in French? 'Les bonnes larmes ne nous sont pas tirées par une page triste, mais par le miracle d'un mot en place.'"

4

Much as it had been thirty years before, documentary was fashionable in the 1960s and early 1970s. In photographs, dispatches, and TV reports, it exposed

America's racism and called into doubt our war in Southeast Asia.

I started writing this book late one morning in June 1970, as rain was falling from New Haven's milky sky. Yale had been shut down by the killings at Kent State and the trial of Black Panther leader Bobby Seale. Everyone expected violence. A curfew was in effect. Rumor ran that a black man opposing the Panthers had been beaten up. A bomb was found near an elementary school.

Some Yale students on the streets outside my window had hoped to goad the police into an attack; they got a few whiffs of tear gas. A much larger number of students on the streets, in T-shirts and faded jeans, carried expensive cameras; they wanted an attack so they could take its picture. These students believed in documentary. They believed a vivid firsthand record would tell the world something important — even, perhaps, transforming. Many of us believed this then.

Do we believe it now? I don't think so. Most documentary now is of the *60 Minutes* sort: facts presented as entertainment, presented not for their importance but for our amusement. Since 1970, television has invented a

documentary form even less responsible than what appears on *60 Minutes* and its clones: the docudrama. In a docudrama, reality is taken over by actors, who turn actual events into soap opera.

Thanks to *60 Minutes* and the docudrama, two of the theoretical points I labored to make in my book — that documentary deals with the emotions and that a documentary can be manipulated in the way a fiction can — are now clichés taught in high school.

5

Reading my book now, I am proud and sad. Proud because it is better than I had any right to expect. Sad because I left stones unturned (I still see the places where I cheated, usually by pretending to more knowledge than I had). Sad because of Walker's death, and because Jane and I didn't respond as thoroughly as we should have to his friendship. Sad because the young man who wrote this book is a better person than I am now: a harder worker, more patient, more vulnerable.

I could not now write a book like this as good as this.

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Walker Evans, *The Gudgers on Sunday*

Evans made this picture early in his and Agee's stay at the Gudgers' because George Gudger wanted it. George had Evans take a number of pictures of the family at various times, and Evans obliged, since this was a way of gaining their favor and of putting them more at ease with the camera.... George put the children — George Jr., Burt, Squinchy, Louise — on a bench behind which stood the adults — George himself in the middle, Annie Mae to his left, her sister Emma to his right. They all faced forward, squinting in the huge light of an Alabama summer morning, and smiled at posterity in separate ways.

George Jr., sitting on the bench down right, grins wryly, his head cocked to the side. His hair is parted in the middle and slicked down; this, his grin,

and his tough-guy nose give him the incongruous look of a subteen Mencken. He wears a pair of overalls (his newer pair: they have cuffs with room for him to grow), and his feet are bare. Burt and Squinchy stand on the bench at center, Squinchy propped with his mother's hands. The picture has taken too long getting made, and their smiles have soured. Squinchy frowns down at the bench top. Burt grimaces furiously with his eyes shut against the sun. Louise sits very straight on the left edge of the bench. Her hands are folded, fingertips just touching, in the lap of her cheap starched dress. She wears new sneakers. Her smile is keen, inquisitive, and faint. Standing behind her and to the center, Annie Mae positively beams — a wide shy grin with her mouth closed. She wears a cotton print dress in a floral pattern

with scoop neck and large ruffled collar (a dress Agee curiously did not describe). Her shoes, adult versions of a girl's maryjanes, are brightly polished. Emma smiles with tense good humor. Her mouth is open and somewhat uneasy. We see why when we look at George, the picture's central figure. He is combed and freshly shaven, wears a clean white shirt open at the throat, and has a plug of tobacco in his breast pocket. He is not smiling; that would be effusive and weak, and he is here, above all, powerful. He eyes us frankly, in an attitude of nonchalant — though by no means indifferent — command. He rests his arms, with a proprietary heaviness, on the shoulders of the women beside him. (Emma doesn't know what to make of this: above the waist her body leans toward him; below, it stays discreetly straight.) This George Gudger needs no one's pity: he is the master of the brood and relishes his fortune.

This family portrait may come to be acknowledged the classic photograph of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. For just as Agee and Evans' book exposes the limitations of thirties documentary, it reveals the limitation in their book. They commended the full humanity of their subjects, but they did not fully disclose it. Evans showed George Gudger's unshaven hangdog face after a day in the field, but not his Sunday face which told the world he was cock of the walk. Agee described George as "clumsy and shame-faced" around Emma — a bungler who hadn't the nerve to kiss her goodbye. He certainly never led us to expect that George could so casually embrace his pretty sister-in-law. The portrait suggests that Agee gently accentuated his subjects' poignancy: he would let George have his picture taken with his hand on his son's shoulder, but not about two pleased and handsome women.

The portrait is too much for the book as the book stands: it explodes it. Evans no doubt realized how subversive of his and Agee's social purpose such a picture would be; when he developed the negative in 1936, he glanced at it and put it aside without bothering to strike a print. He forgot about it until he came across the negative in the late sixties while preparing his Museum of Modern Art retrospective. "I was quite amazed when I saw it," he says. He now could judge it without concern for its polemical value. If the photo was good, the Gudgers could be as proud and happy

as they liked, even misleadingly so. The photo was good.

A casual viewer may misunderstand it, but not someone who has read the book. The reader can see behind the banal beauty of this family's Sunday portrait the appalling beauty from which it grew. He perceives the miracle of aspiration and energy the Gudgers here represent: being this clean without running water or sanitary facilities, this decently dressed on little money, this self-respecting in economic servitude, this gentle despite their hardships — just smiling as they smile. Whereas Arthur Rothstein felt he had to trick his subjects into giving him "true" expressions rather than "Sunday-snapshot smiles," Evans suggests that the truth will include the smiles. A great deal is hidden in those smiles, and for once what is hidden is almost hard to see. Annie Mae's closed-mouth grin is a mark of a reserved, self-delighting character, an enhancement of her beauty; one does not notice that it is a curtain for her missing teeth.

The Gudger family portrait is the final and most daring testament to the tenants' humanity. It attempts something one would have thought impossible: to see the Gudgers honestly yet as they really want to be seen. And it succeeds. Evans says that were there to be another revision of the pictures in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* he would put it in.

Excerpted from *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*

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Photography – Education – Theory

Simon Watney

This article is based on a seminar led by the author at the Department of Cultural Studies, the University of Trent, Ontario, in March 1983. It first appeared in Screen, January-February 1984.

Although degrees and diplomas in photography are offered in Britain exclusively from polytechnics and colleges of Further Education, this initial institutional uniformity guarantees nothing concerning the actual object of study. We may, however, distinguish between those courses which have been developed within the particular local traditions of *laissez-faire* art education, and those which set out to produce students whose work is geared towards the various commercial market-places of photography. Both types of course owe their existence to the complex institutional legacy of nineteenth century education, with its careful hierarchical polarisation of 'art' from mere 'craft' and 'industry.' At the same time both articulate their pedagogic intentions from the equally complex history of the ways in which photography has been theorized, since its invention, from the divergent perspectives of different areas of practice and employment — in other words from the specialized 'professional ideologies.'¹ To begin with, we should note that it has always been assumed that there exists a unitary 'thing,' photography, which may be taught. But while it is evident that both types of course demand an equal degree of technical competence from students, it is also apparent that there is no consensus concerning what these students are supposed to do with their skills, or how they might move from any one area of practice to another. Quite the reverse. For deeply suppressed within the course-outlines offered to the would-be student of photography is the entire spectrum of uses to which the medium is put, the conflicting theoretical 'explanations' of these uses, and the specific acquired photographic identities which accompany them.

In this context 'theory' is almost invariably understood as a *technical* category, covering the study of sensitometry, photo-chemistry, and so on. In this dominant usage, theory is regarded as an aspect of 'practice,' quite

distinct from whatever course of studies has been devised to complement the acquisition of technical skills and know-how. For it is a fundamental requirement of all such courses that they provide the student with some kind of 'complementary' studies, since it is assumed that the photographer is a distinct type of person, fundamentally 'non-intellectual,' whose manual and visual talents are in need of compensatory academic instruction. It is at this point that the two types of course begin to take on clearly definable and frequently incompatible characteristics.

The student on a 'non-vocational' course will thus be introduced to those historical and critical discourses which are to frame and make sense of his or her work. These are structured around the pivotal figure of the Fine Artist, and operate in such a way that the student will come to 'recognize' his or her work and identity in terms of the familiar aesthetic discourses of self-expression, innovation, creativity, and so on. These values are anchored in a historical model of The History Of Photography which endlessly privileges the isolated figure of the photopioneer, struggling against vague but determined odds to establish a unique 'vision' of the world, and to impose this on a necessarily abstracted and equally unspecified audience. The student is thus encouraged to aspire to membership in this same pantheon of epochal photographers, in such a way that the very sense of social isolation-cum-superiority which such an education engenders is read by tutors and students alike as further evidence of appropriately individual genius.

This framework of complementary studies is matched in 'practice' by a curriculum which sets students endlessly in competition with one another around the familiar circuit of photographic categories in which he or she is expected to shine — documentary, landscape, portraiture, and so on. It is in these terms, and through these seemingly discrete categories, that the student's work will finally be assessed. In each case a critical discourse of excellence, creativity, and originality is ceaselessly projected across the field of technical competence, providing the student with a highly sophisticated sense of what is 'appropriate' to different situations, as if this stemmed

from his or her 'self' as opposed to the complex mediation of market forces, which inform the photographer's work at every stage in the production of a photograph, from the choice of camera, filmstock, and printing procedures through to the actual selection of subjects, accompanying texts, and so on. Such choices are however understood as signs of immanent 'talent' rather than the result of contingent knowledge. And in this constant dialogue between history and criticism, tutor and pupil, image and 'reality,' the student succeeds or fails. It is perhaps worth pointing out, should my irony not be sufficiently clear, that in educational terms examination success within such a system is unlikely to evidence much in the way of genuine intellectual achievement, and vice versa.

The situation of the student who opts for a 'vocational' course in this period of mass unemployment is no happier. He or she will be regarded with an inevitable eye towards commercial appropriation. Last year's history of photography option provides the material for next year's advertisement dummies. This is perhaps marginally more honest than the vanguardist model which obtains for the non-vocational student, who is subtly abjured to admire, envy, and then supposedly completely forget everything that has been held up as excellent, in order to demonstrate his or her 'uniqueness.' History and criticism are thus more frankly aligned within vocational courses, since it is assumed that the student has already decided which area of practice to pursue. For the student has been taken on to the course explicitly as an embryonic photojournalist, fashion photographer, or whatever, whereas the non-vocational student is secure only in the confidence of 'artistic' merit. The vocational student is thus provided with a more frankly training-oriented education, and can expect at the least a course in business studies of some kind, while a non-vocational counterpart will be lucky if he or she learns anything about the gallery system. Both types of course tend to be surrounded by what Stuart Hall once described as 'the sociology of everything,' while students are carefully nurtured by 'successful' figures from their chosen areas of professional practice. Such studio training is therefore unlikely to offer much in the way of oppositional analyses of, say 'News' photography, or Page Three pin-ups, or Fine Art practices. For behind all the discussions of style, lighting, and so, the student's work will ultimately be judged in relation to client satisfaction and sales returns, in markets whose own values and practices remain unquestioned.

If by any chance a lone voice from complementary studies is raised to problematise the criteria of professionalism which govern the studio and darkroom, it can only too easily be dismissed as 'merely' academic, or irrelevant because 'non-artistic.' In this way all interrogative intellectual work is automatically marginalised. And so, on both types of course, the pedagogy of the market is continually reproduced.

Both types of photographic education, however, converge around a core key ideological issues. Central to these is the assumption that the photographer is, by his or her very nature, a purely visual individual. This point cannot be sufficiently stressed, and is the crudest and crudest revenge of the professional and theoretical separation of writing from imagemaking in our culture. In photographic history and criticism its dominant formulation remains structured around Cartier-Bresson's notion of 'the decisive moment' — that moment which the 'true' photographer alone can recognize in any given situation, the one moment in which he or she is supposedly most closely in touch with that essential self to which photographic education endlessly addresses itself, the photographer's innate 'gift' to 'express' the 'truth.' What this system of thought can never ask is what we actually mean by a gift, what expression materially consists of, and whose truth it is that the photographer is constructing.

This dominant tendency to fetishise the 'seeing eye' of the 'great' photographer in the discourses of history, and to fetishise the moment of exposing film in the discourses of criticism, is unfortunately as common on the Left as it is in mainstream photographic education. This is nowhere more obvious than in the work of John Berger, for whom 'photography does not deal in constructs' since, he claims 'there is no transformation in photography. There is only decision, only focus.'² And from a nearby aerie, equally well feathered with Left-humanist pretensions, Peter Fuller would also reduce photography to the level of 'mechanical process,' arguing that the central and defining work of the photographer is 'arrangement,' which he regards as 'a relatively slight aesthetic skill, comparable to that which we use when ordering the objects on a mantelpiece, or tidying the room.'³ It is ironic that the formalist discourse of disinterested aesthetic values which such critics bring to bear on photography when they are unable to regard it as a direct political instrument, is widely shared within photographic education, which derives from much the same institutional and discursive backgrounds — Fine

Art departments, state art-funding agencies, and so on. In this manner photojournalists, documentary and gallery photographers are equally taught to believe that their particular areas of practice represent some intrinsic and uniquely 'truthful' essence of the medium. But it is as absurd to claim that photography has a single, 'correct,' essence as it would be to make the same banal demand of painting, or architecture, or film. It is one sign of the absolute poverty of mainstream photographic criticism in Britain that such preposterously reductive ontological assertions are incorporated wholesale into the curriculum of both vocational and non-vocational courses as well as dominating the magazine literature for amateur and 'popular' photography.

As I have suggested, this is perhaps not so very surprising, given the historical institutional framework which positions photographic education in a passive relation both to industry and the pedagogic tradition of the Fine Arts which relentlessly abstract and privilege the 'aesthetic' over and against all other areas of experience and aspects of signification. What should be noticed is that this entire pedagogy of the market, with its myopic emphasis on the individual print, and the individual photographer, rides over the fundamental economic distinction between professionalism and amateurism in such a way that these categories are rendered to all extents and purposes immutable. Walter Benjamin's optimistic prophecy of the 1930s that the non-photographer would be the illiterate of the future has never looked less convincing.⁴ For more than at any time in its history photographic education is involved in sustaining the power and mystique of the professional, and resisting all attempts to redefine the nature of amateur photography, from the perspective of adult education, feminism, community politics, race relations or whatever. This is a situation which is unlikely to disturb the sleep of photography lecturers any more than photographic multinational executives or the owners of the ever mushrooming photo-processing industry, all of whom depend in their different relations to one another on the preservation of the photographic status quo.

In this context we should recognize that photography has always presented certain structural problems to entrepreneurial capitalism, as a result of the intrinsic instability of the photograph as a commodity, given its infinite reproducibility. Thus photography continues to be marketed in two kinds. On the one hand the process as a whole can be sold, together with a range of professional

identities. On the other hand film, simple cameras and processing services can be marketed to 'the general public,' who are systematically denied access to the relatively simple procedures of photographic technology by means of wholesale bombardment of professional photographic ideology in the form of direct advertising, photographic monographs, and the whole culture of the medium. In between the two lies the vast, uneasy reserve army of 'amateurs,' obediently printing up their sunsets, pets, and pin-ups in the good name of creative self-expression and technical excellence, as instructed by the copy-writers of the legion weekly and monthly photography magazines, which are themselves little more than adverts for the multinationals.

Thus photography remains what it has always been, a paradigmatic and exemplary model of capitalist production, as both a labour process and a system of valorization. It is equally clear that the divisions of labor within photography are also divisions of knowledge and identity, and it is at this point that photographic education begins to make more extended sense as a system which is continually involved in reproducing not simply a range of commodities in a patriarchal capitalist society, but also the dreams, fantasies and subjectivities which underpin it. Any amount of sociology, Marxist or otherwise, can be lined up behind the primary 'practical' curriculum of photographic education, as long as the basic opposing categories of vocational to non-vocational and amateur to professional are preserved intact. There is thus little point in trying to recover 'lost' or 'marginalised' areas of practice such as workers' or women's or gays' photography for the curriculum if that curriculum itself is perpetually doomed to be marginalized in the student's daily round from studio to seminar room, and thence, decked out with all the equipment which has survived the latest round of education cuts, to the 'real' world. For that world will inevitably be constructed by the photographer according to the categories and values which she or he has been taught to 'recognize' — the world as an endless scenario of potential assignments, each one of which only serves to confirm the authenticity and authority both of the student's 'vision' and of the institution which directs it. In effect this is rather as if film were to be taught and assessed exclusively by 'anti-realist' avant-garde purists and television commercial executives.

It is against this backdrop that another tendency in photographic education has established itself in those

few polytechnics where there is no strong Fine Art tradition, and where the concept of photographic theory is defended against the pressures of direct market forces. Principal among these is the degree in Film and Photographic Art at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL). At the risk of seeming to blow my own trumpet, since I teach on this course, I think it remains necessary to note that whatever takes place at PCL proceeds from an initial refusal to prioritize 'practice' in relation to 'theory' or, for that matter, vice versa. Victor Burgin, who also teaches on the course, proposes a summary of priorities in contemporary issues in photographic theory elsewhere in this issue of *Screen* [see *Screen*, January - February, 1984], but it is worth pointing out that the 'theory' curriculum at PCL involving psychoanalysis, semiology, discourse analysis and so on, depends on the power, within the institution, to define the 'intellectual field'⁵ which photographic studies might occupy in opposition to the pedagogy of the Fine Art and industrial markets. As I have suggested, this power does not reside in the vast majority of photographic courses. Nor, I should add, is it generally sought. In this respect photographic theory must necessarily be as sceptical concerning claims about the 'creative autonomy' of the individual photographer as it is of the working practices embodied in the pedagogic categories of documentary, Fine Art, photojournalism, and so on, as defined in advance by the moguls of Fleet Street, the Tate Gallery, or wherever.

For it is the task of 'theory' to raise precisely those questions which the aesthetics of 'the decisive moment' suppress. In place of 'the sociology of everything' we need to be able to account for the operations of the social and the psychic in the photograph. The curriculum must therefore be flexible enough to consider the historical emergence of those discourses which make up the basic organizing categories of photographic 'common sense,' as well as providing an accessible alternative to the overlapping discourses of self-expression, direct perception, artistic integrity, and vulgar realism with which most students will be only too familiar. It goes without saying that this cannot necessarily be a painless process for students coming to the course from any background. For if 'theory' is problematising those categories from which photographic identities are constituted, then it follows that lived identities themselves will be questioned. Hence the emphasis on collective work, at least in the early stages of the course, and continuing group criticism sessions which

provide a support system in which problems or difficulties can be shared.

Photographic theory, as I have outlined it above, is therefore involved in a large-scale 'catching up' operation, especially in relation to film theory and education, which has already established an impressive curriculum around such concepts as suture, interpellation, sexual investment in representation, and audience-oriented aesthetics in general. Needless to say, the discussion of these concepts is of critical importance to any serious theoretical work on still images, work which remains simply inconceivable in most photography courses, with their continual displacements from representation to either 'the real' or the individual photographer. Photographic theory thus directs itself towards the establishment of a debate-based photographic culture, on a par with that which has been instituted in film studies by Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) and other organizations. And since it remains the case that the dominant tendency in British photographic theory and criticism represents nothing less than a bizarre crossing of Bazin with Bloomsbury, peppered with more than a dash of Reaganomics, it is hardly surprising that there is still a long way to go. For the photo-theorist is up against the entire apparatus of reflection- and expression-based criticism, backed up by one of the most profitable and resourceful industries in the modern world. So if our work requires a certain degree of intellectual rigor on the part of students and photographic educationalists alike — concerning distinctions between political and ideological struggles, for example, which raise serious and even 'difficult' questions about the very nature of photographic signification — then I can only conclude that such work is long, long overdue.

Endnotes

- ¹ Raymond Williams, "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment," in *Marxism Today*, Vol. 24, No. 6, (June 1980), p. 24.
- ² John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph," *Selected Essays and Articles*, London, Pelican, (1972), p. 181.
- ³ Peter Fuller, "The Fatal Facility," *New Society*, Vol. 64, No. 1066, (April 21, 1983), p. 107.
- ⁴ Walter Benjamin, "A Short History Of Photography," *Screen*, (Spring 1972), Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 25.
- ⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Intellectual Field and Creative Project," in MFD Young (ed), *Knowledge and Control*, Open University Press (1971), p. 161.

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Theses on the History Of Photography: A Bibliography and Index

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In Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Dr. Reefy continually fills his pockets with scraps of paper which after some weeks become hard little balls. On the scraps he has written "thoughts, ends of thoughts, beginnings of thoughts," and when his pockets are full of little paper pills, he either dumps them on the floor or throws them at his friend, saying, "That is to confound you, you blithering old sentimentalist." I must admit that when *Exposure's* editor invited me to submit a list of theses on the history of photography for publication, Dr. Reefy floated into my mind.

One would hope to see the fruits of introspection among the publications from a photographic community that is, some would say, narcissistic and chauvinistic. It is unfortunately true, however, that the unglamorous handmaidens of scholarship such as indexes, biblio-

ographies, chronologies, and directories do not get much support from the publishing world. For this reason, I am glad for the chance to empty my pockets of this bibliography of theses. It is intended to expand the coverage I gave to post-graduate research in photography in "Dissertations on the History of Photography: An Overview, Bibliography, and Index" in *exposure* 22:3 (Fall 1984).

The following is a selective list of Masters' level papers written at American, Canadian, and European institutions between 1946 and 1985. It includes information about the year and institution at which graduate studies were completed, and where possible, gives the *Dissertation Abstracts International* order number. The index to subjects and personal and corporate names, although in most cases compiled on the basis of the title alone, provides a primitive but valuable access tool.

No matter how long my list has become, it is still a list shaped by random forces. I have methodically done my homework, stripping published indexes of citations, pillaging my way through special bibliographies, chatting up my friends and acquaintances for leads, writing to department heads and in-house contacts, but the results are undeniably incomplete. They are, as well, irregularly distributed in terms of geography, time, and subject matter. The *exposure* reader is presumably hardened enough to realize that no bibliography achieves a static perfection.

Even though the list is incomplete, the strongest programs in photography showed the highest numbers of entries. The University of New Mexico, which graduated its first Masters student in 1968, has the most. UNM has maintained a high degree of commitment to training photographic historians and counts among its alumni Keith Davis, Keith McElroy, Sarah Greenough, Jan Z. Grover and Bill Jay, to name but a few. Papers written at the University of Iowa are the second most numerous. This can be traced to the influence of John Schulze, who retired this year after 36 years of teaching.

Published sources for retrospective listings of theses in the history of photography are primarily the same as for dissertations, so I will not repeat what I said in the Fall 1984 issue of *exposure*. For current listings of theses, several periodicals should be mentioned as sources. University Microfilms issues the quarterly *Masters Abstracts*, published since 1969, with cumulative subject and author indexes back to volume one. This indexing and abstracting service is highly selective. When I searched a list of 23 photo historians and photographers, not one appeared in the author index.

Other sources for current theses can be found in regular columns in the following periodicals which list research completed or in progress:

- Archives of American Art Journal* (once a year)
- Art Bulletin* (June issue)
- Art Journal* (Spring issue)
- Burlington Magazine* (August issue)
- Répertoire International de la Littérature de l'Art* (RILA includes the subject heading "Dissertations" in its regular format)

Another good source for current research in graduate programs internationally is the *Newsletter* of the European Society for the History of Photography which lists short titles of American and European projects. The

society has also published two special bibliographies on the subject of dissertations and theses in photography.

It is possible to obtain copies of European theses through University Microfilms International. They can also be borrowed through participating members of the Center for Research Libraries. CRL receives dissertations and theses from about 48 foreign institutions, which amounts to about 35-40% of the total papers written. Some foreign papers can be purchased commercially from the series *Europäische Hochschulschriften*, published by Herbert Lang of Berne.

Traditionally, only a small number of copies of theses are produced in the United States and these are treated semi-archivally by libraries. However, in the last twenty years it has become somewhat easier to obtain theses through either University Microfilms, which provides photocopies, or interlibrary loan programs. In addition, several publishers have shown an interest in academic papers. Under series editor Diane M. Kirkpatrick, UMI Research Press has brought out several titles. Garland Publishing has also taken a step in the right direction with its series, "Outstanding Theses from the Courtauld Institute of Art."

In mentioning sources for this list, I must acknowledge the generous help of several individuals. None of us works in a vacuum, even if we are fortunate enough to have access to the resources of a great library. Without the efforts of Amy Doherty at the George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Roy Flukinger at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, and Barbara Polowy of the Rochester Institute of Technology Library, this list would have been considerably shorter. I also want to thank Stuart Alexander, Jim Stone, and Glenn Willumson for their suggestions and encouragement. For supplying the original spark that led me to consider the need for indexing dissertations and theses I want to credit Jonathan Heller, whose list of dissertations appeared in the Summer 1982 issue of the Special Libraries Association magazine, *Picturescope*.

The following is an addendum to the list of dissertations published in *exposure* 22.3 (Fall 1984). It includes a large number of European papers culled from the special bibliographies issued by the European Society for the History of Photography. It also includes many dissertations in progress in institutions in the United States. These papers, indicated by index numbers in italics, are included with the theses in the index that follows.

Update List — Ph.D. Dissertations in the History of Photography

- ⁰¹⁶⁶ Andres, Ilse. *Der Prospektor Berthold Benecke. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung der Mikrophotographie* (Universität Leipzig, 1945).
- ⁰¹⁶⁷ Arciero, Gianfranco. *La Photographie en France entre Histoire et Littérature. Des Origines aux Avant-Gardes Littéraires* (Università degli Studi, Rome, 1976).
- ⁰¹⁶⁸ Asche, K. *Das europäische Postwertzeichen als Kunstwerk* (Universität Karlsruhe, 1977).
- ⁰¹⁶⁹ Barend, Hans. *Neue Probleme der Bild-Publizistik in Presse und Wissenschaft* (Univ. of Munich, 1951).
- ⁰¹⁷⁰ Bataille, Mary Goodwin. *The Silence of Seeing: The Development of Minor White's Photographic Theories during the R.I.T. and M.I.T. Years.* (PhD, Boston Univ., in progress).
- ⁰¹⁷¹ Bäuerle, Ernst. *Absatzorganisation eines Unternehmens der photochemischen Industrie* (Universität München, 1938).
- ⁰¹⁷² Bayer, Adelheid. *Die Photographie in Wien von 1844 bis 1914 im Spiegelbild der alten Adressbücher* (Univ of Vienna, 1965).
- ⁰¹⁷³ Bobbio, Claudia. *Fotografia e Pubblicità. Dal Disegno alla Fotografia nella Pubblicità in Italia dal 1880 al 1950* (Università degli Studi, Bologna, 1978).
- ⁰¹⁷⁴ Boddy, Julie M. *The Farm Security Administration Photographs of Marion Post Wolcott: A Cultural History* (PhD, State Univ. of New York, Buffalo, 1982) DEP83-03187.
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- ⁰¹⁸¹ Cohen, Susan. *Photography of the Fifties.* (PhD, Boston Univ, in progress).
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- ⁰¹⁸⁵ Didi, Georges. *Portraits d'hystériques: L'iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Université de Paris, 1981).
- ⁰¹⁸⁶ Diehl, H.O. *Die historische Entwicklung der photographischen Objektive und ihr Zusammenhang mit der axialen Modulationsübertragungsfunktion* (Univ of Munich, 1968).
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- 0242 Willumson, Glenn G. W. *Eugene Smith: A Critical Analysis of Four Photographic Essays* (PhD, Univ of California, Santa Barbara, in progress).
- 0243 Winkler, Richard G. *Werner Graeff und der Konstruktivismus in Deutschland, 1918-1934* (Technische Hochschule Aachen, 1981).
- 0244 Yochelson, Bonnie. *P.H. Emerson (1856-1936)* (PhD, New York Univ., in progress).

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- T-0002 Albert, Michele H. *Ralph Steiner's Photographs of the 1920s* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1983).
- T-0003 Alexander, Stuart. *Robert Frank and His Critics, 1946-1985* (MA, Univ. of Arizona, in progress).
- T-0004 Amstutz, Jacquelyn R. *The Art of Thomas Moran and William Henry Jackson: Its Influence on the Formation of Yellowstone National Park.* (MA, Bowling Green State Univ., 1982).
- T-0005 Anderson, Melinda A. *The Influence of Camera Vision on Artists* (MA, Univ. of Tulsa, 1984).
- T-0006 Arkin, Diane Lynn. *Georgia O'Keeffe: Her Work, 1915-1930* (MA, Univ. of Chicago, 1971).
- T-0007 Austin, Kathleen. *Portraits and Self-Portraits: An Investigation Into Photography and the Use of Mixed Media* (MA, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, 1982).
- T-0008 Barnes, Susan Elizabeth. *Giacomo Balla: His Life and Work, 1871 to 1912* (MA, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1977).
- T-0009 Barreto, Ricardo D. *Whistler and Photography* (MA, Oberlin, 1976).
- T-0010 Barrett, Nancy. *Calotypes of John Shaw Smith* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1980).
- T-0011 Barrett, Terry. *Toward Critical Discourse About Photographs* (MA, Ohio State Univ., 1974).
- T-0012 Bart, Stephanie. *Imogen Cunningham: Fame, Personality, Work* (MA, Ohio State Univ., 1976).
- T-0013 Baruch, Ruth-Marion. *Edward Weston: The Man, the Artist, and the Photographer* (MA, Ohio Univ., Athens, 1946).
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- T-0015 Belloli, Joseph A. *Andy Warhol and American Society: Ambivalence and Acceptance* (MA, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1970).
- T-0016 Bensch, Luc. *Lieven Gevaert, de Man van de Daad* (Pius X Institut, Antwerp, 1983).
- T-0017 Benson, Avis W. *Man Ray: Experimentation through Manipulation* (MA, Univ. of Iowa, 1967).

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- T-0023 Bowen, Amanda. *Walker Evans' American Photographs* (MA, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1983).
- T-0024 Bowser, Kent. *Nineteenth Century American Post-mortem Photography* (MA, Ohio State Univ., 1982).
- T-0025 Brown, Alan Harry. *Manipulation of the Photographic Image: Four Photographers H.P. Robinson, O.G. Rejlander, L. Moholy-Nagy, H. Callahan* (MFA, Univ. of Florida, 1970).
- T-0026 Brown, Robin W. *Lewis Wickes Hine Collection, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1973).
- T-0027 Bryan, Sonia. *The Spirit of Woman in the Twentieth Century: Northern California Photographs by Women* (MA, Univ. of California, Davis, 1979).
- T-0028 Bunnell, Peter C. *The Significance of the Photography of Clarence Hudson White (1871-1925) in the Development of Expressive Photography* (MFA, Ohio Univ., 1961).
- T-0029 Bunnell, Peter C. *The Critical Decade: A Study of the Photograph in England and America Between Two London Exhibitions of 1851 and 1862* (MA, Yale Univ., 1965).
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- T-0031 Butler, Charles Thomas. *Paul Strand: His Formative Years, 1915-1917* (BA, Univ. of Delaware, 1976).
- T-0032 Calmer, Cathleen. *Minor White* (MA, Tufts Univ., 1985).
- T-0033 Carleton, David Lieb. *Victorian Landscape Photography and the Nineteenth Century English Landscape Aesthetic* (MA, Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1975).
- T-0034 Cloninger, Sally Jean. *Sexually Dimorphic Image: An Empirical Analysis of the Influences of Gender Differences on Photographic Content* (MA, Ohio State Univ., 1974).
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- T-0038 Concklin, Jo Ann. *Trends in Contemporary Color Photography* (MA, Univ. of Iowa, 1982).
- T-0039 Connors, Richard H. *Abstraction in the Work of Three Photographers: Brett Weston, Minor White, and Aaron Siskind* (MA, East Tennessee State Univ., Johnson City, 1982).
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- T-0103 Jones, Jason Eric. *The Role of Color Photography in the Fine Arts, 1906-1966* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1982).
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- T-0108 Kent, R.J. *Alfred Stieglitz and the Maturation of American Culture* (MA, Northwestern Univ., 1970).
- T-0109 Kilgore, Sydney Crawford Mallett. *Philip Henry Delamotte's Photographic Views of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham* (MA, Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1981).
- T-0110 Knapp, Richard. *Spirit and Psychic Photography: A Review of the Issues and Evidence* (MFA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1975).
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- T-0115 Kulesa, Detlev. *Vision und Dokumentation sozial-dokumentarischer Photographien. Ikonologische Betrachtungen zur Photographie der Farm Security Administration* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, 1984).
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- T-0117 Lampe, Mary. *Morton Schamberg and Precisionism* (MA, North Texas State Univ., in progress).
- T-0118 Lane, J.B. *Bridge to the Other Half: The Life and Urban Reform Work of Jacob A. Riis* (MA, Univ. of Maryland, 1970).
- T-0119 Leavens, Ilana. *Alfred Stieglitz and '291': Introduction of Modern Art into America* (MA, Univ. of Washington, 1972).
- T-0120 Lerud, Ruth Eleanor. *A Brief Study of the Bauhaus, Some of the Conditions that Brought it About and Some of its Effects on Design in America* (MA, Univ. of Tennessee, 1965).
- T-0121 Lincoln, Louise Hassett. *Walter Arensberg and His Circle, New York: 1913-1920* (MA, Univ. of Delaware, 1972).
- T-0122 Lingen, Sister Ramone Mary, B.V.M. *The Place of Demuth and Sheeler in Twentieth-Century American Art* (MA, Univ. of Colorado, 1970).
- T-0123 Lokuta, D.P. *Instruction in the History of Photography in Higher Education: The State of the Art* (MA, Ohio State Univ., Columbus, 1975).
- T-0124 McCabe, Constance. *Eikoh Hosoe: Photographs, 1960-1980* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1982).
- T-0125 McClellan, Michael William. *Margaret Bourke-White in Russia: 1930-1932, the Effect of that Experience on Her Life and Work* (MA, Syracuse Univ., 1981).
- T-0126 McCulloch, William Wrenshall, Jr. *Thomas Eakins and American Art Instruction in the Later Nineteenth Century* (MA, Univ. of North Carolina, 1968).
- T-0127 MacKichan, Margaret. *Marion Post Wolcott: Farm Security Administration Photographer in Eastern Kentucky* (MFA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1977).
- T-0128 Mamiya, Christin Joy. *The Warhol Phenomenon: Response to Andy Warhol's Early Work, 1962-1964* (MA, Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 1982).
- T-0129 Meloy, Margaret Mary. *Charles Sheeler: Cubist-Realism and Photography* (MA, Northwestern Univ., 1972).
- T-0130 Meyers, Jordan G. *A Historical Study of the Armory Show of 1913 as a Factor in the Development of American Art* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1952).
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- T-0132 Moffa, R. Lenora. *The Effect of the Aesthetic Movement on Thomas Eakins's Career* (MA, Emory Univ., 1982).
- T-0133 Montividas-Kutkus, Kristina. *Planes of Illusion: Painterly and Photographic Imagery* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1981).
- T-0134 Moore, Donald Taylor. *The Utilization of Photography by Small City Daily Newspapers* (MFA, Ohio Univ., 1960).
- T-0135 Morgan, Joan. *Antoine Claudet and the Daguerreotype in England* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1980).
- T-0136 Morgan, Margaret Knox. *Women in Photojournalism* (MA, Univ. of Missouri, 1962).
- T-0137 Morgan, Rebecca Louise. *The Camera and Photographer: A Collaboration of Aesthetics, Technology, and Process* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1983).
- T-0138 Moriarty, Peter A. *Lotte Jacobi: A Composite Portrait* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1979).
- T-0139 Mulvany, John. *The Sublime: Its History and Purpose* (MFA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1972).
- T-0140 Neal, D. *The Sequential Photographs of Eugene Atget, Photographer of Paris* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1978).
- T-0141 Neal, John Frank. *The Controversy in Early English Photographic Literature Concerning the Separation of Camera Stations for Taking Stereoscopic Pictures* (MA, Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1972).
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- T-0143 Newton, Julianne H. *The Role of Photography in a Social Science Research Project in Northern Mexico: A Matter of Ethics* (MA, Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1983).
- T-0144 Nixon, Nicholas. *Ironic Vision in Twentieth Century American Photography* (MFA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1975).
- T-0145 Noel, Francis Joseph. *The Photograph and Contemporary Printmaking* (MFA, Univ. of Colorado, 1965).

- T-0146 Nunemaker, Susan E. *The El by Hilaire Hiler and the Image of the City in the 1930s* (MA, Univ. of New Mexico, 1982).
- T-0147 Owen, Elizabeth Cherry. *Photography of the 1920s: Alfred Stieglitz's 'Equivalents'* (MA, Univ. of Delaware, in progress).
- T-0148 Park, Robert Carman. *'Camera Work', 291 and Cezannism: A Study in the Interpretation of Cezanne and the Evolving Ideology of Modernist Aesthetics, 1910-1913* (MA, Virginia Commonwealth Univ., 1984).
- T-0149 Perlmutter, Abigail. *The Photograph as Symbolic Presentation of Subjective Reality* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1975).
- T-0150 Peterich, Gerda. *The Calotype in France and its Use in Architectural Documentation: A Study of the Development of the Calotype Photographic Process with Special Consideration of the Contributions Made by Blanquart-Evrard and Gustave LeGray* (MA, Univ. of Rochester, 1956).
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- T-0152 Petraitis, Paul W. *Henry Koopman (1864-1944): Neighborhood Photographer* (BA, Illinois Institute of Design, 1971).
- T-0153 Philipp, Claudia Gabriele. *Der Weg des Fotografen August Sander (1876-1964) zum Klassiker der Fotogeschichtesschreibung* (Universität Marburg, 1983).
- T-0154 Phillips, Christopher. *Edward Steichen and World War II Naval Photography* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1981).
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- T-0156 Poulakis, Susan. *The Hosoe Project* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1982).
- T-0157 Prescott, Gertrude Mae. *The Ambrotype: A Reevaluation of the Positive Collodion Process* (MA, Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1979).
- T-0158 Raben, Mary K. *American Luminism, 1830-1870* (MA, New York Univ., 1966).
- T-0159 Ramirez, Leticia Santiago. *A Study of the Rational and Irrational Content of Four-Color, Full Page Pictorial Advertisements in National Magazines from 1929 to 1959* (MA, Univ. of Missouri, 1961).
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- T-0165 Romer, Grant Bernhardt. *Chasing Daguerrean Eidola: A Study of the Development of the Daguerreotype in America* (MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1983).
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Robert Frank: Dissecting The American Image

Jno Cook



*What a poem this is,
what poems can be written
about this book of pictures
some day...*

— Jack Kerouac

When I first saw Robert Frank's photographs in *The Americans*,¹ I understood nothing of them — yet they demanded comprehension. I later realized that even when exhibited singly in museums, they still evoked their placement in the book — like quotations from a sacred text they called up entire passages, themes, subtle connections to other photographs. Here started a journey into *The Americans* in an attempt to understand not just the photographs, but the *book*. It has been a journey among museum archives, borrowed books, and xerox

machines. It has meant searching out other Frank fanatics, engaging in endless and at times pointless discussions and arguments, and planning forays into literature and foreign languages.

Today I think I know exactly what *The Americans* means, but whenever I try to explain I get lost among the facts, details, hints, and significant quotations. Each new explanation seems to qualify the previous one, and each encounters new obstacles — very real obstacles, for many were placed there by Frank. Reading *The Americans*



becomes a confrontation with Robert Frank, but it is as if he recedes, indifferently, at each approach; reading *The Americans* is like being in a maze where you are confronted at every turn with new passages. I've charted a few of them: I'll start at the center.

• • •

At the center of a career as photographer and filmmaker, and separating the two, Robert Frank produced *The Americans*. It came from the heart and from the mind: it was wrought from personal conviction and shaped by the accumulated knowledge of a career in photography. It was little understood and appreciated at first, and it took ten years before its influence was recognized. By the mid-1960s Robert Frank was as well known among filmmakers as among photographers; by then photography had changed also, and photographers pointed to *The Americans* as one of the major sources for the changes. While those changes led photography into the ever-broadening fields of surrealism and formalism, Robert Frank limited his photographs to the personal and the private. What did Robert Frank learn from *The Americans* that we've overlooked?

In 1972 he published another book, *The Lines of My Hand*,² a visual autobiography. *The Lines* projected an amazing objective clarity, even in the use of snapshots, which seemed at odds with the distance and impenetrable silence of *The Americans*. The same sense can also be derived from Frank's films, which show a precise editing ability unlike the apparently random selection of photographs in *The Americans*. Where was the clarity of *The Americans*?

The different reactions to the book, both by critics and photographers, attest to an irresolvable ambiguity in its meaning. The lesson often learned from *The Americans* was not one of content or meaning, but a realization of the enormous strength of the attitude behind it. *The Lines of My Hand* shows this as a sense of inevitability, a feeling that there is no escape from life. That is, after all, what is written in the lines of one's hand. Could not *The Americans* be charted with equal certainty?

These two threads, clarity and certainty, which become so apparent in Frank's later work, can also be found in *The Americans*. They lead through the maze of its meaning. They argue for a cohesiveness of form, an accountability for every detail, and a message.

• • •

Most striking about *The Americans* is the amalgam of public and private which in combination raises the effectiveness of both. *The Americans* is overtly public in subject matter, yet deeply infused with personal feelings — recognizable even in the 1950s as a tone of disapproving sadness which had never before been allowed in photojournalism. Gaylord Herron called it "Robert Frank's diary," but many saw the book instead as an accurate reflection, and hence as a critique, of America.³

In fact it was both, and much more, because Frank brought to a close photography's quest for the decisive moment — the ever more decisive moment which had been defined in terms of the perishable and publishable moment which was easily recognized and quickly read by the public. In *The Americans*, America stood still, frozen into a frightful pose *between* moments. But it took years to recognize that the book went far beyond diary and document, that in rejecting the mannered and predictable style of photojournalism of the period Frank produced a radical critique of photography itself. *Radical*, because it returned photography to the vernacular of vision: in *The Americans* the everyday is recognized as it is seen, and this recognition makes the book amazingly undated even after twenty-five years. And a *critique*, because any return to the vernacular implicates the established style of photography in a falsification of the real world. "You can photo-

graph anything now," Robert Frank said in 1961.⁴

The suggestion of this double critique — of the social structure and of the established diction of photography — comes from more than just speculative theory. The specific composition of the book can be recognized as an *Anatomy* which deftly dissects America, organ by organ (stopping only at the heart) and is clearly put forth in the tradition of Rabelais and Swift, of Goya and Daumier.⁵ But a look at the overall plan of the book reveals it to be more like a perverse parody of Edward Steichen's 1955 catalogue for the exhibition, "The Family of Man." It covers the same range of topics, but from an altered viewpoint that reverses the implicit argument that the political system proceeds from the individual. And there are clear parallels — the introduction by Jack Kerouac, for example, which mocks Carl Sandburg's introduction to *The Family of Man*. The piper of *The Americans* is the American flag.

There would be a remarkable efficiency in such a project, for a parody of *The Family of Man* would critique both the implicit purpose of Steichen's exhibit — to sell the American way of life — and the explicit assumption that this could be done photographically — that photography comprises a universal language. Steichen's show was the most heavily attended photographic exhibit in MoMA's history, and the catalogue is still in print today.



This attests to the persistence of Steichen's premises and points to the acuity of Frank's choice for a possible starting point.⁶

There were other good reasons for considering a parody. Seven photographs by Robert Frank had appeared in Steichen's catalogue. But this dubious tribute of being one of the better-represented photographers came at a time when Frank's attempts to sell his work from a Guggenheim project on America met with constant rejections. The magazines didn't want his photographs and in the end Frank didn't want the magazines either. The 1958-1959 publication of *The Americans* closed the doors to future commercial sales, for it was a final statement in photography, a rejection which was soon thereafter sealed with its abandonment. Publication of *The Americans* was itself an act that pointed to something which would become increasingly clear in Frank's later work: that his art dealt with experience, specific personal experience. This is a thread to which I will return.⁷

If *The Americans* was a public gesture of disgust which had photography in mind as a target, then *The Family of Man* would stand as the perfect center to that target. But although Jack Kerouac's introduction signals the casual irreverence with which the disassembly of the magnum opus in photography *might* have been undertaken, it is a false lead, for the parody is not completed. The possibility is suggested, and then rejected. The target, after all, was larger than Steichen's catalogue. Parody disappeared into the body of the book like the armature of a sculpture, there to await discovery: the sudden shock of recognition, the scramble for reconstruction. The implications of Steichen's show — as the epitome of the condition of photography — were not neglected, however. The book fully addresses the questions it raised: questions about authorship, about unity, and about the representational power of images. Thus, elements of parody reappear at all levels of the book, including many specific images and sequences.⁸ Much of this is unavoidable, too, for in Frank's shift from ideal to real *The Americans* repeatedly highlights the antithetical results. It is this switch, in fact, that made the book socially significant. In the presentation of images so antipodal from what had become the representational model, *The Americans* became a prophetic symbol for the rethinking of America — something which would become a universal consciousness and critical awareness of a younger generation within ten years of its publication.

Unified in intent — as an experience, as a disdainful gesture, as a critique of photography, and superimposed on a critique of America — the combined power of these images voiced that something was wrong, that changes had to be made. Often more felt than rationally understood, this message became a radical point of departure for the work among a generation of photographers. Even for those more inclined to the opaque formal qualities of Frank's photographs, it was the circumstances of publication of the book which informed any understanding of the photographs, rather than a meaning derived from the content of the book. Since its publication in 1958 there has been no consensus on a single interpretation of *The Americans*. A long list could be made of how individual photographers have understood the book in different ways and how each was differently influenced. We would conclude that *understanding* is a key issue in any discussion of *The Americans*; but where did an understanding of it lead Robert Frank?

It led to film, where (as he said) there are no decisive moments, and where (again as he said) one doesn't turn away after the click. With film the whole of existence can potentially be made over into a continuity of cinema frames: After completing his third film and recognizing that the technical obstacles he had faced as a beginner in film had been overcome, Frank wrote, "I will have to express without fear my feelings about the world of which I am a part." In photography the ability to express his feelings had already been achieved, although perhaps not with the precision of his later films and photographs. What is more significant about this statement, however, and indicative of a general background attitude for all of Frank's work, is his identity with the world — the assumption that the world includes him, at least for the moment, an assumption which many Americans do not come to realize in a lifetime. It is an attitude generated from a Calvinistic determinism: pragmatic in the confidence that what is observed of the public world is exactly what it appears to be, ultimately unaffected by the desires and wishes of the self. There are no alternatives to seeing the world as it is; there is no better world lurking behind this one, waiting to break in at some future moment. The genuine belief in this is fully expressed in *The Americans*. No unwarranted wishes for a better world-order get in the way of these pictures.

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What first struck me about *The Americans* was the refusal of any of the images to adhere to recognizable stereotypes. None of them had a look of familiarity about them. This was a genuine hindrance, for the readability of photographs is always a matter of recognition, of familiarity. What we see in each new photograph is what we recognize as having been seen before in all other photographs. But the images of *The Americans* were not familiar, and at the same time they were all too familiar. For most readers they presented a surrealist's view on life: absurd, ambiguous, and inconclusive. In 1958, it was totally unexpected, and totally new. Frank, however, was not pretending to art through ambiguity, as if subtlety might be suggested with vagueness, for the images of *The Americans* are anchored in a bedrock of specificity and careful intent. Each meant something, each was taken for a reason, and each was purposefully included in the book. Many of the reasons are as simple as the experience of things wholly American by a stranger from a foreign land; outside his ken, and overlooked by us, it was a new look at America seen through European eyes and taking Europe as the standard of judgement. Most viewers never penetrated to this level of meaning; for many the simple question of why any particular photograph was taken was never answered, for the answers were obviated by the specificity of the pictures (which were understood simply as an act

of seeing), or subsumed in a variety of surrealist understandings of Frank's vision.⁹

The cinematic sequencing¹⁰ of the pictures also contributes to the ambiguity of the individual images. The use of a single photo for every two-page spread which progresses unrelenting through 83 photographs is a device totally out of character with editing techniques of the fifties. The photographs are both equalized and disconnected from each other. Seen as a miniature exhibition, the book presents the photographs as evidence in an argument about America, but an inconclusive argument, for nothing seems to be proven. The pervasive display of malaise, however, is powerful and frightening just the same. The effect is totally different from the thematic illustrative use of photographs in Steichen's book. Frank's ability to build a series of single unrelated images to a crescendo of unnerving feelings is perhaps the most masterful aspect of the book.

The question of how this is accomplished requires a closer look at *The Americans*. You may start to notice how the images interact, how they seem to talk to each other. You may notice, for example, whole series of photographs where each subsequent image reverses the implications of the previous one, or smaller groups which carefully build up a point of criticism only to have the following photographs disassemble it. Spend enough time

with the book and you will learn that there is nothing random about the order of the photographs — that each has been selected for a specific place in the series, that groups reiterate specific themes like carefully chosen words in a poem, and that each photograph is usually a direct response to its predecessor, at least to the point of maintaining visual links between subsequent photos, at times as many as four or five simultaneously. Look at the titles too, for as often as visual connections can be found there exist verbal relationships — in English, in French, in German.

The specifics of the infrastructure of *The Americans* can get in the way: you get lost among the multiple cross references, the allusions to the work of others, pointed references to *The Family of Man*, punning irreverent art-historical allusions, and the just-plain-fun things like series of bottles, or stripes, or trees, or prints (fabric print, fine print, newsprint, photographic print — the “nothing- scape”). This Varronian monologue of the book — which mixes wit, black humour, and pathos in a series of rhymes, asides, contradictions, and seemingly irrelevant interludes — will intrigue and confound the minds of all but the most casual readers. The whole enterprise makes little sense unless you understand it as an element in an established mode of expression — established, that is, in literature and art, but unheard of in photography.

One understanding of how Frank came to such complex methods lies in seeing *The Americans* again as a parody in direct opposition to its target. The parallel to the critique of America would be to counter Steichen's premise that photography participated in a “universal language.” In 1957 Frank voiced his disagreement with the proposition that photography was assumed to be understood by all, “even children.” It becomes obvious then that the hidden argument of *The Americans* is that photographs are in fact generally misread and misunderstood. Ample proof lies in the concordance of organized disharmony of the book, a fabric of intricate connections woven into a jubilant display of intellectualism which almost displaces the grim subject matter at the surface.

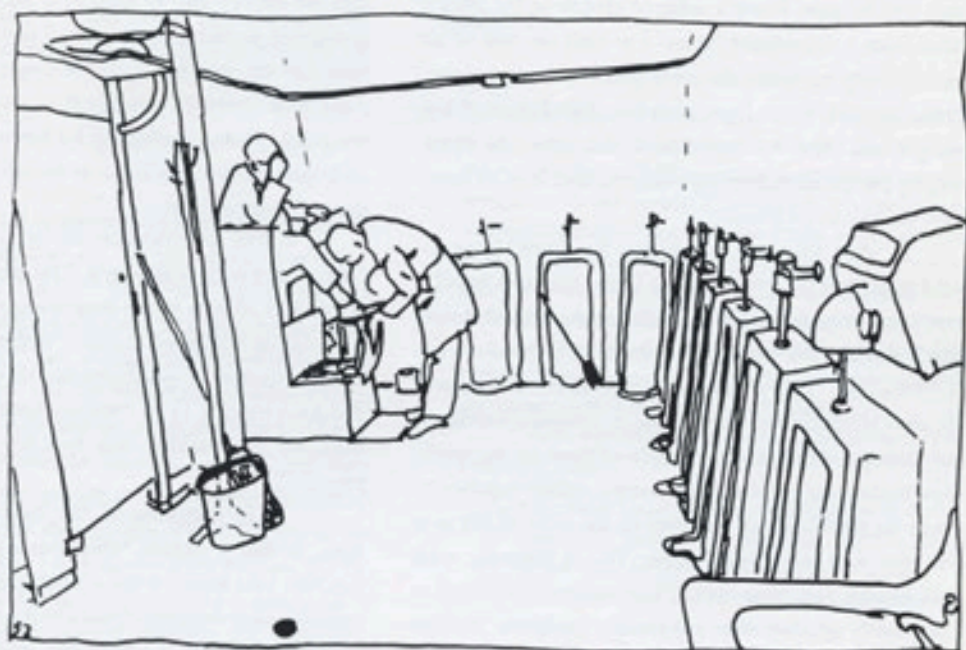
But there were other reasons for the bewildering sequencing, for the form of *The Americans* is not derived from parody, but from a form with a classical tradition of its own, the Anatomy. This form has affinities to satire and social criticism, but transcends their topicality. Its aim is the promotion of common sense, but this is achieved

not through the use of reason, but through exaggeration, satire, the amassing of evidence, the disregard of stylistic conventions, and the failure to propose answers. Underlying these methods is an attitude which dismisses its immediate target as not worthy of reasoned consideration; and the ultimate target often (and with the lapse of time) is no more than our own mediocrity, insensitive attitudes, and pretentious concerns. The strength of this form lies in the convictions of the artists and their ability to select the permanent from among everyday reality. Just as it takes an extraordinary talent to make these distinctions, it takes courage to present them. The result is a polemic beyond the ordinary: a passion held in check with a vigorous display of knowledge and radical insight. It is a form which demands a sophisticated audience, and demands much of them. Seldom put forth as high art, such work is recognized as art when, removed from its original target, it remains an experience in its own right.¹¹

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Walker Evans was among the first to recognize how unusual Frank's photographs were. In 1957 he wrote about Frank's photography, “It is a far cry from all the woolly, successful ‘photo-sentiments’ about human familyhood.” (How much closer could he have come to writing “family of man?”) He followed this with the characterization of “irony and detachment,” and the completely unjustified presumption that America would welcome a critic.¹² Frank's ascribed role of critic-in-our-midst may be explained as inadvertent, however. For one thing, the irony in Frank's photographs came from his willingness to acknowledge the commonplace. Since the real world cannot be approached too closely in any literature without evoking a sense of unreality, Frank's photographs inadvertently took on a mode of low irony. When Frank, with photos taken at the level of life which we fail to see or otherwise ignore, cut through the protective barrier of stereotypical sentiment and romanticized ideals which we use to insulate ourselves from reality, it was like a laceration to the eyeball and bound to produce angry reactions. Frank could have expected little else, for implicit in low irony (to the extent that it does not produce the laughter of recognition) is the certainty that the work will be received as insult and injury. What Evans had identified as detachment was more likely an overtone of hesitancy in

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those photographs, an uncertainty in the presentation of the experience — Frank's experience — of America. Hardly detached, Robert Frank saw America and condemned it. Little wonder he was hesitant.

Rather than irony and detachment, what I feel better characterizes Frank's work is an honesty and authenticity which is firmly grounded in his own experience of life and the world, along with a keen ability to detect anything in the least bit phony, and abhor it. This is an uncommon critical sensibility which, if firmly believed in, also leads to questioning one's own work, which in turn leads to doubts and fears that the expression of one's own feelings has little effect or relevance. It is directly down the center of this path of greatest resistance that Frank, as an artist, was forced to go, and for this he must be admired. Few of us are able, much less allow ourselves, to bring experience continually to the foreground of expression, and fewer still make others alive to it. What more can a man do, a character of André Malraux asks, but to translate into consciousness the largest possible experience?¹³

If Evans chose to see Robert Frank's work as ironic and detached, there was, then, a double irony, for this might better be applied to Evans' own photographs. Frank's work was already a step beyond what Walker

Evans had done with photographs. But just the same, the presentation of pictures in *The Americans* could have taken a hint from Evans' books as an antidote to the panegyric overtones generated by Steichen's methods.¹⁴ Evans' manner of presentation was one of clear rational exposition, where photograph after photograph was presented as so many data points which graphed for the viewer an inevitable conclusion, a conclusion which could be reached without once contacting the emotional stance of the photographer. But this is precisely what Frank could *not* have accomplished, for Frank's photos were very different from Evans' open and transparent 8x10s. Frank's images, laced with criticism, cynical, harsh, and disapproving, could never have been used in the clear rhetoric of a syllogism in the manner of Evans. Additionally, Frank's interest did not lie in an assertion of the dignity of man which Evans' period might have called for. Frank's purpose, as stated in the Guggenheim application of 1955, was "to produce an authentic contemporary document."

The concern with contemporaneity was already evident in Frank's attempts to move his photography ever closer to the present. It is here, in their agreement on the importance of the present, that a correspondence lies between the work of Frank and Evans. For Evans the present was wholly defined (and therefore foreclosed) in its slip-

page into the past; Frank's sense of closure in the present came from a determined future. For both the task of art was to clearly recognize the elements of contemporaneity: Evans rescued these from oblivion, but Robert Frank brought into view the unavoidable tomorrow. As Frank roughly paraphrased from Malraux, the task was "to transform destiny to awareness."¹⁵

And what was that destiny for Frank? Look toward your own future: excepting under the most hopeful conditions, expressed, for example, as the typical American horizon of two years, you cannot fail to glean a sense of foreclosure. Your death looms with absolute certainty, and any extrapolation of the confusion, misunderstandings, and failures of the past point only to more of the same. From the vantage point of direct and immediate experience, it was for Robert Frank a destiny of the order of life as it was, not as it was wished to be. This is precisely what photography had neglected. Those miseries depicted in *The Family of Man* were supposedly avoidable through good intention and government intervention, just as the good moments were selected not from the everyday, but from festivities and celebrations — more of those decisively romanticized amalgams of myth and history. "What an epic," Carl Sandburg wrote in his introduction to *The Family of Man*.

What then were the alternatives of presentation still open to Robert Frank? Perhaps we should ask, where was the epic American poetry in 1958? It was not in the festive dinners and dancing of *The Family of Man*. No, it surfaced in a celebration of existence at once more exuberant and hopeless than anyone had expected: in the poetry of the Beats. It was here that Frank could find both form and argument to fit his photographs, while fulfilling Evans' requirement for a detached exposition. Because inasmuch as the Beat complaint remained open-ended it remained objective, for the Beats offered no solution to the hopelessness of life except to set against it a retreat into the ecstasy of existence. They offered no solutions — only endless enumerations of experiences. And tone and stance as they are derived from *experience* (rather than from a "developed point of view") are inarguable in their authenticity as facts. Additionally, the form of an exhaustive enumeration has a logic which allows the matter of narrative or cause (core to the "photo essay") to be dispensed with, and it was. The narrative of *The Americans* was allowed to recede

into the background as groups of photographs originally assembled as facets on individual themes were disassembled into the spondaic meter of single images. The argument now could be emotional at the same time that it remained clearly intellectual by forcing the reader to his own rational conclusions — to be reached on the basis of the presented evidence.

And the evidence, all the evidence, was there. One needed only to look at it. The quality of the evidence showed its affinity to the Beat writings in following William Carlos Williams' maxim, "nothing but in things." It was this diction of specificity that shocked those who saw *The Americans* in 1959. "Not my America," was the report from one art historian. But Jack Kerouac said, "Such a poem!"¹⁶

The argument of *The Americans*, its message, then, is that a certain "mindlessness" is at cause. The headless tuba player is the central image of the book. The maze of misunderstandings of *The Americans* also suggests that the fault with America lies in *attitude*, and not, as was originally understood, with a flaw in the American character. Hope is retained, therefore, for a change might still be effected. This, too, is the approach of Swift, Voltaire and Goya. To read this attitude, and understand it as a message, we have to look past the visual content of the book and look to its structure. *The Americans* uses a form completely different from the narrative, the illustrative, even from the diaristic and album type of photographic literature, and certainly from the "photo essay." The anatomical form has a clear parallel in literature, and had been approached with the encyclopedic presentations of Walker Evans and August Sander. But Frank went further by taking *The Americans* to the expansive experience of a playful admixture of public and private, by bringing the emotional stance in direct contact with an acceptance of the commonplace, and especially by amassing endless qualifications on themes — the bewildering and dislocating, yet stylized, organization of the sequence, as in the free use of parody, incessant punning and occasional moralizing. The display of an intimate knowledge of contemporary photography, both European and American, turned out with a lively ironic wit, and set amid an overwhelming barrage of images from the American experience, presented a style which cautioned against jumping to conclusions and argued against an ex-

ploration of its meaning in any terms. This is a modernist argument; it is existential, and visually it implies the surreal.

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"The visual impact should be such as will nullify explanation," Frank wrote in his application for a Guggenheim. But if Robert Frank had thought to enter our consciousness through the eyes, to simply leave images in our mind in which we would recognize ourselves, his selection of subjects and the connotations of his camera style were received instead as a visceral attack. The response was almost entirely emotional at first, and then, slowly, came the recognition of how correct the attitude was which supported the venture. The explanation was nullified when Robert Frank turned from the fact and fiction of the photo essay to poetry. It was a poetry set in the vernacular of vision: specific, concrete, and inseparable from life.

What did Robert Frank learn from *The Americans*? He turned to film, and reduced his photographs to haikus of his life that enumerated the losses and failures, as well as the hopes. The thread of certainty, begun in a deTocquevillian overview of America, ends here — in Nova Scotia snapshots.

This essay originally appeared, in somewhat different form, as "Robert Frank Y La Fotografía" in Artur Heras and Vicent Todolí, eds. Robert Frank Fotografias/Films 1948/1984 (Valencia, Spain: Sala Parpalló, 1985). The end notes have been added. The illustrations accompanying this essay are from Ino Cook, The Robert Frank Coloring Book (Chicago: Artists Book Works, 1983).

Endnotes

¹ *The Americans* was first published in Paris by Robert Delpire on May 15th, 1958, as *Les Américains*. The French edition was part of a series of books which presented foreign countries through words and pictures (*Encyclopédie essentielle*). *Les Américains* presents Frank's 83 photographs in the same order as in all the later American editions, and on the right-hand pages. The left-hand pages carried a text of readings from American social and political history, gathered by Alain Bosquet. The following year Grove Press published the American edition as *The Americans* (1959), with the Bosquet text deleted and an introduction by Jack Kerouac added.

Three especially substantive early responses to *The Americans* were:

- Gotthard Shuh, "A Letter Addressed to Robert Frank" in *Camera*, Vol. 36 (1957), pp. 339-340. "I do not know America, but your pictures frighten me," writes Shuh, who also provides a capsule description of Frank's career up to this time.
- Walker Evans, "Robert Frank" in Tom Maloney, ed., *U.S., Camera Annual for 1958* (1957), p. 90. Evans wrote an introduction to a portfolio of 33 photographs by Robert Frank. There was also a statement by Robert Frank that was later reprinted in Nathan Lyons, *Photographers on Photography*.
- Bruce Downs, et al., "An Offbeat View of the USA" in *Popular Photography* (May 1960), pp. 104-106. The reviews are by *Popular Photography* editors Les Barry, Bruce Downes, John Durniak, Arthur Goldsmith, H.M. Kinzer, Charles Reynolds, and James Zanuto.

² Robert Frank, *The Lines of My Hand* (Tokyo: Yugen-sha, 1972), and issued in the US, with considerable changes in the text and photographs, by Lustrum Press (Los Angeles: 1972).

³ See especially the reviews of Downes, et al, op.cit. To simply lift from these reviews the words "warped objectivity," or "images of hate and hopelessness" may be misleading, for there is considerable ambivalence behind the objections of the editors. Some object not so much to the picture content as to the wry insult implicit in the title itself. The editors do not question the "truthfulness" of the images, but only the means by which they were taken — what John Szarkowski called "the standards of photographic style" in *Mirrors and Windows*. The *Popular Photography* editors were most concerned with what they perceived as the viciousness of Frank's subjective vision. "Do such personal statements merit publication?" Zanuto asked.

- ⁴ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952) presented a photographic approach which suggested that intelligent camerawork could usurp for the professional the candid which so often fell into the lap of the amateur. It became a cul-du-sac, however, in that the professionals were deadlocked in a race for precision, with Cartier-Bresson in the lead. "Frank killed the grandfather of photography," one free-lance photographer commented to me. The fleeting gestures caught in the first three photographs of *The Americans* are nowhere repeated; one soon gets the feeling that Frank's sense of timing is based on catching a more general and unlikely gesture. In effect, a stance rather than a gesture is caught. Frank's method, however, derives directly from the decisive moment syndrome. A look at some of the contact sheets presented in *The Lines of My Hand* (Yugensha edition, pp. 87-90) frequently shows Frank pouncing on his subject.
- ⁵ I'm indebted to Northop Frye's analysis of the Menippean satire, and the related forms of encyclopaedic literature, subjective radical critiques, and the use of creative erudition. See Northop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- ⁶ The diminishing frequency of the appearance of the piper in *The Family of Man* is but one of many subtle techniques which has made the catalogue a model of photographic picture editing. In Hurley and McDougall's *Visual Impact in Print* (1971) 23 editors, curators, and photojournalists were asked to recommend a basic library of visual books. All but two included *The Family of Man* among their choices; only one recommended *The Americans*.
- ⁷ Although the product of 273 photographers, a large portion of the images in *The Family of Man* were produced by the better-known photojournalists. Frank's seven photographs ranks him with Cartier-Bresson and Dorothea Lange. It should be noted that Frank accompanied Steichen on a collection trip to Europe in 1953, for an exhibition entitled "Post-War European Photographers." The first collection of work for *The Family of Man* also dates from this time. As an assistant to Steichen, Frank's tenure could have carried through to work on the exhibition, for Frank spoke three languages, and was well acquainted with European photographers. However, Frank did not continue to work for Steichen; Wayne Miller took over as Steichen's assistant, and ended up with more photographs in *The Family of Man* than anyone else. Among the opening pictures hung at "The Family of Man" is a portrait of Robert Frank, by Louis Faurer, which appears on Page 9 of *The Family of Man*. Despite his dislike of the exhibition, it was as if Frank were welcoming his contemporaries to the "Family of Man."
- ⁸ With the first three photographs of *The Americans* Robert Frank restates the first thirty pages of *The Family of Man*, for the infant in the throes of a temper tantrum, shown in the third photograph, is the result of the kiss passed between the city-mothers and city-fathers of the first two photographs. Frank's last photograph again returns us to Steichen's book, echoing Eugene Smith's "The Walk to Paradise Garden," which closes *The Family of Man*. Steichen's coda of juvenile bliss, as a dispensation of government, is transformed by Frank into variations on lust. Between the opening and close of *The Americans* are many other references to themes from *The Family of Man*, and by necessity many spoofs of the famous photographs of famous photographers.
- ⁹ See Jno Cook, "Robert Frank's America" *Afterimage* Vol. 9, No. 8 (March 1982), pp. 9-14.
- ¹⁰ By cinematic sequencing I do not mean narrative, but the page-to-page visual and verbal connections which hold the sequence together. In film this rule is primarily expressed as the requirement that each "take" follows directly from the previous take. In the broadest sense this maintains a continuity in characters and locations. But takes are also connected with a weaker visual logic, as simple as a similarity (or contrast) in shape or lighting, and as wild as the most inane verbal puns. This form is first seen in Walker Evans' *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), and repeatedly seen in other photographic books after *The Americans*, as, for example, in Ralph Gibson's trilogy *The Somnambulist, Deja-Vu, and Days at Sea* (New York: Lustrum Press, 1973, 1974). It matters little if the photography or film audience fails to comprehend these connections consciously, for the suggestion of a connection is accomplished anyway, and works well in books like the ones cited above, where the turning of pages acts like the wipe in cinema. When the photographs are placed two to a spread, or in larger groups, such connections become all too obvious and often trite.
- ¹¹ For Frank's comment on understanding photography see "Statement" in Lyons, *op. cit.* I do not maintain that *The Americans* should be seen solely as an intellectual product. I would argue, however, that what Frank has in common with the tradition which includes Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, and Burton, is that they all dealt with ideas: large ideas or ideas held by large groups, or stupid ideas, or worthless ideas held in high esteem, but at any rate, ideas which needed to be dismissed, exposed, or blown away, whether by humor, satire, argument, or anger, or some combination of these.

¹² Frank's attitude toward the USA is captured in text of *The Lines of My Hand*, and again in *Photography in the Humanities* (eds. Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy McNeil, p. 56). The strongest indication comes from a biography at the back of *The History of Photography Series, Robert Frank* (Millerton: Aperture, 1976). Under the heading of "Chronology" Frank summarizes the work of *The Americans* in two lines:

1955. Trip across the States, and Delpire publishes
Les Américains.
Ich bin ein Amerikaner.

The last line, in Frank's Zurichois tongue, conveys a spitefulness to any adult who spent World War II under Nazi occupation and for whom the words "*Ich bin ein Deutschlander*" still raise hackles today.

¹³ André Malraux, *Man's Hope* (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 396. The line in the Random House edition reads, "By converting as wide a range of experience as possible into conscious thought." A similar phrase is found in Malraux's *Man's Fate*: "Every man is a madman...but what is a human destiny if not a life of effort to unite this madman and the universe."

¹⁴ Walker Evans, *American Photographs*, but especially James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), which Frank singles out in an interview between Walker Evans and Robert Frank at Yale University published in *Sniff* No. 3 (1973), p. 2.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Alex Sweetman's insight and his (as yet unpublished) research on Walker Evans for what is here so rudely condensed into a few sentences.

¹⁶ Recall Jack Kerouac's wording in his introduction to *The Americans*, "The humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-ness and American-ness of these pictures!"

One Hand Washes the Other: On the Rephotographic Survey Project

Richard Bolton



Carleton E. Watkins, *View of Half-Dome, Yosemite*

I was once showing a class a Watkins picture of Half-Dome in Yosemite, emphasizing the problems involved in accepting this picture as a sign of nature. We discussed which aspects of our experience of nature were addressed by the picture, and which aspects were left out. A student remarked that he had once seen someone hang-gliding in Yosemite, launching themselves from the summit of Half-Dome while spectators applauded below. His remarks, juxtaposed with the slide projection

of the Watkins picture, fractured the romantic silence of that image; suddenly, the class understood the historical boundaries of our awareness of nature.

There is no eternal state of nature, no unchanging physical foundation to our experience. Instead, our definitions of nature depend entirely upon our social, political and intellectual purposes, and because of this, our definitions change frequently and dramatically. This can be demonstrated with even a brief review of Western beliefs.

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The scientific arguments of thinkers like Aristotle, Newton and Lamarck described nature as inherently logical, while other well-known arguments, like those of Heraclitus and Darwin, found nature to be chaotic and open-ended. For Marx, nature was the arena of labor, while Romantics discovered there rest and repose — Goethe went so far as to call nature the “eternally feminine.” Cultures much closer to God thought of nature as a text authored by God, waiting to be visually deciphered; for we moderns, the workings of nature are its own, and anything but visually manifest. We see the wilderness variously as raw material to be exploited for profit, or as a heritage to be protected, or as a setting for vacations, or as a location for Pepsi commercials. When we speak of nature, then, we must ask, which nature? for whose ends?

But if we wanted to define the most typical Western approach to nature, our definition would include the belief that nature is the absolute other — it is all that is “not-us.” Western civilization has generally separated itself from nature, and then used the authority within this separation to fashion the “not-us” into the “for-us.” Nature is seen as the stage for the manifest destiny of our spirit: nature is to be controlled so that we can come to fruition as a species and as a culture. Secondly, the role here achieved as spectator and controller is seen as value neutral; differences incommensurate with imposed categories are destroyed. This approach has sanctified our control of the environment; more frightening is the possibility that this same “control” could ultimately destroy both our environment and ourselves.

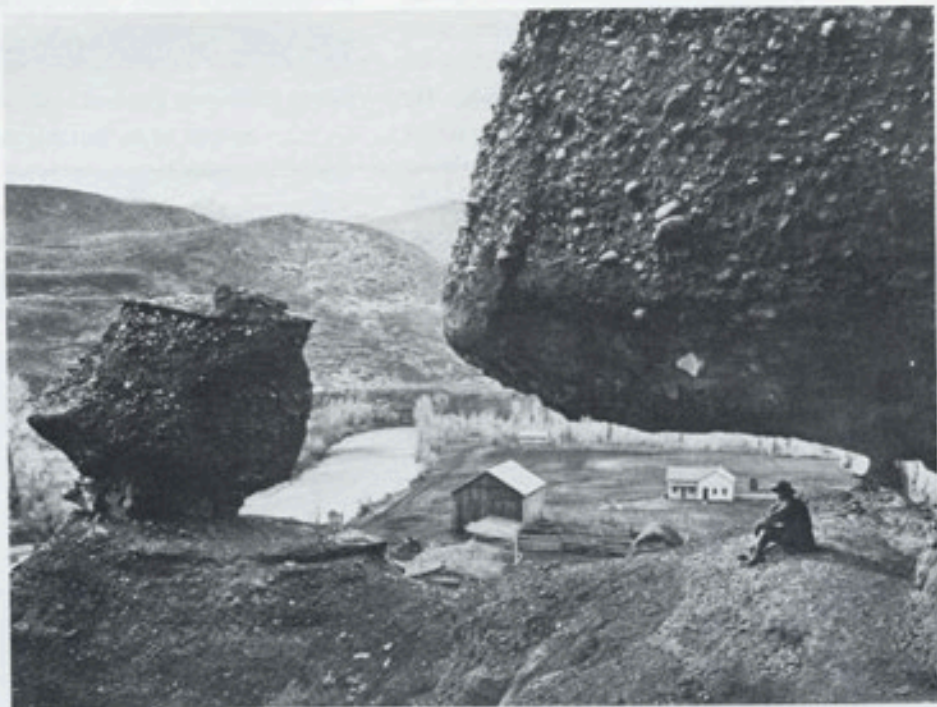
This approach to nature informs not only our consumption of the environment, but also our “appreciation” of nature, through which we tacitly convert the landscape into a spectacle. We understand it as a sign system existing expressly for our purposes. Logically, even the naming of nature creates this problem; using language, we transform a complex process, of which we are only a part, into a thing, of which we are not a part. The tree of knowledge in the paradisiacal garden does indeed introduce alienation from nature; we interpose language and other sign systems between the wilderness and ourselves as part of the civilizing impulse. Thus does naming develop the wilderness. Such categorization is a mixed blessing, for it both informs us and misleads us. And yet we cannot do without some kind of naming — we need to see the world with enabling prejudices, for neutrality is structurally im-

possible. Thus I am not claiming that we should strive for a return to the unbounded space of paradise; but I am suggesting that we acknowledge the paradoxes and prejudices necessarily involved in defining our world.

In spite of the fact that the definition of nature has been frequently revised, belief in an eternal nature still persists. For it is unpleasant to continually remind ourselves of... ourselves. It is far simpler to believe in eternal verities than to carry the weight of paradox, of history, of human interest. Faith in absolutes is a powerful tonic; and whenever a political, economic, or other ideological system desires to stabilize itself, it calls forth the “certain” and the “natural” as the basis for its claims. Thus in our own time, we see advertisements in which eternal Nature provides an alibi for Visa cards, cigarette and automobile production, and third-world tourism. I would suggest that we greet these authoritative claims to nature with scepticism. Such a critical approach can lead to self-awareness and a sense of responsibility if properly managed, but such critical responsibility is in short supply these days. The problems raised by our interests and purposes, the drawbacks of seeing just “for-us,” must be considered whether one is developing and colonizing land, promoting a system of beliefs, or coming to the case before us, using photographs to understand history.

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Countless trees have been sacrificed by writers worrying over the self-awareness of 19th century landscape photographers; this issue has become one of the many rites of passage for photographic historians. Why is this? The production of photographs was an integral part of 19th century travel and exploration, a circumstance now felt to reveal much about the nature of the then newly-discovered medium. For many 20th century historians, 19th century exploration is placed at the service of photographic concerns. Does the camera describe transparently, or is there an element of self-expression involved? Is the 19th century photographer naive or highly sophisticated; that is, does the photographer have a grasp on the intrinsic qualities of the medium? Of course, much of the motivation here is to determine if the 19th century landscape photograph is a work of art, and hence, if the picture is a candidate for the art market. John Szarkowski has seen in this work a

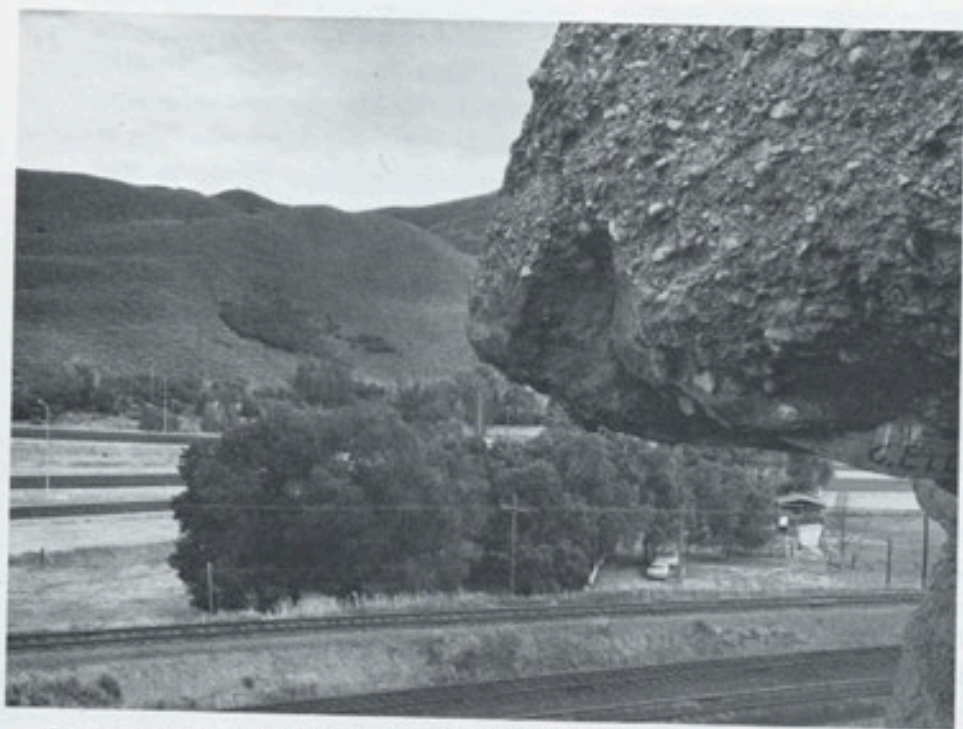


Andrew J. Russell, 1868. Hanging Rock, foot of Echo Canyon.

respect for the "clear, precise, detailed and coherent" record that respects the essential qualities of the medium. Beaumont Newhall has recounted the heroism of the situation — the difficulty of working under adverse conditions, and the moral of the persevering photographer conquering a recalcitrant medium and the horrors of nature out of a love for picture-making. Other writers have used this work to sing the praises of photography in one way or another. Nineteenth century landscape photography has been linked to the philosophical concern for the sublime. This can be an interesting approach, but too often this argument only considers the sublime as aesthetically conceived, and thereby places the photograph completely in the service of art issues. An opposite, but complementary position extends Szarkowski's view: the photographer brings back faithful witnesses from the wilderness, like Moses with the Ten Commandments. This position argues for the primacy of photographic realism, and seeks to elevate documentary as the truest approach. Thus, discourse on the subject usually limits itself to the expressive-documentary dichotomy.

Photographic historians have been reluctant to reverse this approach and instead use photographs to address larger issues in which photographic production is embedded. They typically have nothing to say about concepts of nature, problems of industrialization, or other social/moral/ideological issues connected with the exploration of nature. If larger questions are asked, they are only used to validate aesthetic positions. For instance, by demonstrating that O'Sullivan manipulated the photograph so that he might illustrate the geological theory of catastrophism, we are to conclude that O'Sullivan was not a naive artist, but one in control of photographic language.

The alternative position I would like to sketch here considers the social circumstances of the material production of the photograph, and also addresses the role of the photograph as a sign. The capturing of images was seen as a triumph of industrialization; the ephemeral qualities of light and time could be given over to technology and made material. Out of thin air came... an object — a product. It is easy to see the camera as a small portable factory for producing images, forming industrialized signs



Rick Dingus for the Rephotographic Survey Project, 1978. Hanging Rock, foot of Echo Canyon, Utah.

for an industrialized culture. This photographic factory, when carried by the explorer, semiologically carved out the wilderness in a manner metaphorically not unlike the mining companies of that time. For photographers found in the wilderness a vast archive of signs — a repository of qualities lacking in industrial civilization. These signs of the untouched wilderness were proof that unspoiled nature still existed; and hence, they must have provided relief for the civilized populace. But the potency of these signs was not limited to their analgesic effects. Paradoxically, the pictures also stimulated pride in territorial possessions, and held out to this same populace the possibilities of future development. Indeed, the Western exploration pictures were made as a part of general surveys, surveys that assisted in the construction of railroads, and in general settlement of these territories. No doubt the pictures induced terror at the vastness of nature, but they also celebrated the triumph of man and industry over the wilderness. They set entrepreneurial wheels turning — and the landscape photographer was, of course, one such entrepreneur, selling scores of "views" upon his return.

Thus the pictures are paradoxical, even schizophrenic — they reestablish social equilibrium, as only a representation of the eternal can; yet they are signs of disequilibrium. They are industrialized objects marking the successful development and exploitation of nature by technology.

Insofar as we are still caught within the turmoil of Western development, these 19th century pictures continue to hold out to us the myth of unity — a myth enhanced by nostalgia. The conflicts noted above are ignored; it is claimed instead that the two voices of schizophrenia are mutually supportive. The exploitation and false definition of nature are ignored so that the need for the eternal can be satisfied; additionally, the love of photographic industry covers over the problems of industrialization. In this way, one hand washes the other, and we end with the tale of successful entrepreneur meeting eternal nature.

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This diagnosis can be extended to much contemporary landscape photography as well. For the most part,

such work seems unable to develop a critical practice, demonstrating little interest in the dilemmas of culture's relationship to nature; it remains conservative, favoring aesthetic issues and nostalgia. The Rephotographic Survey Project (RSP), in many respects the most interesting body of recent landscape work, seems doubly cursed, approaching both 19th century *and* its own 20th century practice with little critical awareness.

The Rephotographic Survey Project was performed between 1977 and 1979, and involved the photographers Mark Klett, JoAnn Verburg, Gordon Bushaw, and Rick Dingus, with Ellen Manchester as project director. The group's procedural methodology can be described simply. Sites of various 19th century photographs of the American West were located, and the specific camera position of each picture (called the vantage point by the group) was ascertained. A new photograph was made replicating the viewpoint of the earlier picture, and the two prints were compared to discover changes in the landscape. Eventually, the new photographs were exhibited paired with their 19th century counterparts. The project grew in reputation within the photographic community — articles and reproductions only aroused more curiosity, as did a well-researched book by one of the members of the group, Rick Dingus' *The Photographic Artifacts of Timothy O'Sullivan*. Finally, the self-professed "catalogue and report" of the group was published. *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* provides extensive information on the working methods and concerns of this 20th century survey group. It is profusely illustrated with quality reproductions, with each 20th century view paired with its 19th century twin. The book provides much additional information as well: essays by participants Mark Klett and JoAnn Verburg, an essay by Paul Berger on some implications of the project, a collection of maps of the photographed sites, and a catalogue listing circumstantial and technical data. For anyone interested in this project, this book is certainly the definitive document. In many respects, it is a provocative project, and a complex subject; how unfortunate, then, that the finished project falls far short of its promise.

This failure can be attributed to the main presumption of the project — the photographers falsely assume that the meaning of history can be found solely

within the visible. The main formal strategy of the project, the comparison of two similar views, is ultimately disappointing; in spite of their specificity, the paired photographs provide us with little from which we can draw conclusions. A rock disappears, or does not. A road or wire transgresses the original pristine space. An empty valley fills with water. In some instances, the original picture is almost wholly transformed, in others there is no discernable change. Granted, in most of the pictures change does occur, and for the most part this change can be attributed to human intervention. But the changes in the landscape do not occur with enough visual or thematic consistency for us to make sense of them. We are left with a rather feeble conclusion that either the landscape changes, or it doesn't.

The visual "purity" of the comparisons has more to do with the conventions of art exhibition than with an attempt to address the larger implications of this project, and the communication of those implications. The essays provide some useful information, and they frame the project in a more productive way than gallery conventions might. But finally, the essays serve to contain the interpretation of the project within narrow aesthetic and photographic domains.

The essays elaborate on the working methods of the group, the formal strategies of the presentation of the images, and the larger meaning of such methodology and strategies. Extensive space is given over to how the photographers located the vantage point of each picture, and what they learned by doing this. This point is the "unique geographical place" of each picture, "the location of the center of our camera's lens in real space" — in other words, the vantage point is the actual physical spot where the lens of the 19th century camera stood for each picture, and where the lens of the 20th century camera was placed to duplicate the view. As Klett remarks, "The idea that such a point in space physically exists and can be located and reoccupied even after a hundred years was one of our most important basic premises..." The mechanical and mathematical process of locating each point seems to have been a major fascination for these photographers, and many claims are made about these places in space. Their search for each vantage point was seen as a search for the

physical but invisible connections between the photograph (the past), the world today, and the unrecorded time in between. The vantage point became the bridge in a determined effort to see the landscape in the same way it had been seen before.

These basic procedural assumptions lead the project astray, for they promote the false claim that we can derive the full meaning of nature and culture from the visual evidence of the survey photograph alone. This view conflates the photograph and the past, and then substitutes the search for the past with the search for the photograph. The rephotograph is elevated to something like the Shroud of Turin, a magical relic that can heal time. But adopting a location in space where something happened before guarantees nothing, and particularly does not guarantee an understanding of history, which is obviously more than simply arranging space. This "visual detective work" oversimplifies the search for history, turning it into a game validated by the "neutrality" of mathematics, thus confusing historiography with engineering. In this way, the project veers uncomfortably close to photography-for-photography's sake, evidencing an obsession with the mechanical procedure of photography, and jettisoning the extra-photographic implications of the work.

Rather than concerning themselves solely with restaging a physical appearance, the project members should have worried about the complexities of restaging a *myth*. Rather than comparing picture to picture, they should have compared belief to belief. Asking questions about the *interpretation* of these pictures, and then incorporating their answers into the final presentation, would have made this a much more provocative project. To what extent did these 19th century pictures function as signs in their time, and how do they function for us? Why are we interested in retracing, in *repeating* these signs? Most importantly, why do we feel that these pictures confirm history? What kind of history do they reveal? Unfortunately, the project photographers seem serenely unaware of the complexities of interpretation, relying instead upon an outdated and reactionary belief in realism and positivism to make their case.

Let me put my disagreement more radically. The second picture is in no *relevant* way identical to the first

picture, no matter how visually similar the pictures appear to be, and no matter how exactly matched the two vantage points are. For the rephotograph was made for a completely different set of reasons, within a very different context. A completely different set of interests informs the act of appropriating these 19th century signs than informed the original picture at its conception. And even if we allow similarities between these two different sets of interests, such similarities cannot be understood through the simple device of the vantage point.

JoAnn Verburg acknowledges that the photographs do not portray the entire cultural frame of the landscape. She writes that during one exposure "backpackers behind us were playing popular music and eating junk food... As a 'document' of the place we experienced, the scenic vista we exposed was so selective it felt almost fraudulent." And Mark Klett admits that the photographers often felt the need to make other pictures of the sites that did not correspond to their procedural rules — "...alternate views, consistent with our own experience of the landscape." It is unfortunate that they did not take their reservations more seriously, incorporating these additional views and modifying the project in other ways to address the relevant extra-photographic issues we are discussing here.

There are additional ways in which the essays circumscribe the project. Paul Berger's essay demonstrates the greatest awareness of the pitfalls of historical and photographic interpretation. Along the way, he offers sensitive readings of the work of both Bill Ganzel and Frank Gohlke, two other photographers engaged in rephotography. However, he is primarily interested in the "temporal questions" raised by the work, and thus conscripts the project into a greater, "abstract" issue that takes us further from the matters at hand, and closer to a purely formal reading of this project. In fact, he is able to organize diverse photographers, and photographic subjects, under his concern for the dilemmas of the rational depiction of time: Muybridge and the RSP sit down to dinner with Bill Ganzel and Eve Sonneman. While this kind of eclectic comparison can be valuable, Berger here short-changes some of the work selected, exaggerates the importance of other work, and diminishes social and historical differences between the bodies of work involved. His essay manifests, as philosophers say, a category mistake.



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Although I often agreed with Berger's general observations, I also found that his views raised problems when applied to the Rephotographic Project. One example — Berger notes that the pair of pictures form a triangle with us, the interpreting subject:

This triangulation is a demonstration of something that is fundamental to all photographs but difficult to show explicitly: that the meaning of the photograph does not reside in its physical structure, but rather in the dynamic and negotiating interaction between ourselves, our culture, and the image in question.

So far, so good. But when used to describe the RSP, such an observation functions as an excuse for the work. Interpretation that is assumed to be open-ended and dynamic turns out to be laissez-faire and arbitrary. The interpretation Berger speaks of requires a tremendous amount of responsibility of both maker and interpreter, but the required responsibility does not seem evident in this project.

In their essays, Verburg and Klett worry a great deal about the expressive-documentary dichotomy. Verburg decides that the 19th century work they used was actually conceived subjectively, but their own rephotography of these pictures is objective and trustworthy. 19th century photographers were

following their own artistic visions... We, however, who began with no ambition to make a realistic survey of the West, got one. Unlike our predecessors, we did not take what we thought would be appealing shots... So, ironically, our survey did what theirs purported to do: to show the West without shaping it to our own aesthetic purposes.

Against this claim, I would suggest that the project did not exist in a styleless void, but instead adopted the same mock-neutral formal strategies favored by both Conceptual artists and New Topographic photographers, and shared many of the same aesthetic aims of these movements.

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Klett's viewpoint both contradicts and extends Verburg's position. He notes that subjective decisions went into making the rephotographs, concluding that such rephotography cannot help but reflect individual points of view. He applies this argument to 19th century work as well, pointing to the many choices these early photographers had over composition, lighting, and subject selection; again, this automatically assures expression for Klett. Yet he claims there is a documentary character to this expression as well, due to the nature of *equivalence*, that famous notion cast retrospectively upon this 19th century work. He approvingly quotes Rick Dingus, who claims that O'Sullivan conveys "the power of the site as he experienced it. There is no theatrical orchestration here, but only the sign of an honest confrontation." To some degree this is true, but it is a mistake to accept this "confrontation" as an evident truth about nature. At most, it is a truth about what the culture that preserved the photograph feels about nature (the content of O'Sullivan's subjectivity can never be known to us). Thus, an investigation into how the picture achieved its validity would be in order; but as we have already stated, the RSP offers no such investigation.

In the end, the project has it both ways: the validity and mystery already connected to the 19th century Western exploration work is carried over to the RSP pictures; and the RSP, by uncritically mimicking the 19th century work, revalidates that work as both art and traditional documentary. One hand washes the other. Because of this, the project seems destined for the annals of photographic style and art appreciation. With a greater awareness of the problems of historical and interpretive method, and with more careful thinking about the social role of myth and the concept of nature, the RSP photographers could have created a project with much wider ramifications.

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In closing, I have bracketed this essay review with two myths about nature. The first is well-known: Carleton Watkins' view of Half-Dome in Yosemite. The second myth is often seen: the prototypical cigarette advertisement. This second picture wears much of its story on

its sleeve: nature remains ideal and untainted, but also a masculine, action-packed, dangerous place. It is less important that we wonder about who these men are saving than it is for us to make the metaphoric comparison between the picture and the use of cigarettes: Winstons are also natural, masculine, action-packed, and dangerous (in a good sense). But this scenario falls apart when one remembers the extended, unseen aspects of this advertisement. We don't even have to state the obvious, describing how bad cigarettes are for you, how much money the industry makes, etc. Rather, the central issue here is the act of transformation. For outside of this view stands an art director with a sketch and a color chart, makeup artists and other stylists, additional actors and workers, and the photographer with many assistants. Thus is history made, and nature defined.

Book Review

Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influences Selected Essays by Heinrich Schwarz

edited by William E. Parker

Published by Gibbs M. Smith, Inc.,

Peregrine Smith Books in association with

Visual Studies Workshop, 1985

Our present knowledge of Heinrich Schwarz's contributions to photographic history are closely intertwined with Peter Galassi's 1981 exhibition and catalog *Before Photography*. Galassi's project stemmed, in large part, from a 1963 College Art Association lecture by Schwarz entitled "Before 1839: Symptoms and Trends" which deeply impressed John Szarkowski. The present book, in turn, was motivated by the impact and controversy of Galassi's exhibit and its acknowledgment of Schwarz as a conceptual source. This volume pays Schwarz a belated academic tribute by collecting little-known and nearly inaccessible essays. Of the seven pieces included here, three were previously published (between 1949 and 1966), while the rest consist of unpublished transcripts and lecture notes from the Schwarz archive, and the edited transcript of a 1964 taped lecture (the only extant version of that important 1963 talk).

In his introduction William E. Parker offers a brief biographic sketch of Schwarz, and selected appreciations by scholars who knew him. Born in Prague, in 1894, Schwarz studied art history, classical archaeology and philosophy at the University of Vienna. His doctoral thesis described the beginning of lithography in Vienna and initiated his lifelong interest in the graphic arts. From the early 1920s through 1938 Schwarz held a variety of important curatorial positions in Viennese museums. In 1929 he organized an exhibition of 180 Hill (and Adamson) photographs, and two years later produced a pioneering study of Hill. Parker notes that with this book, "Schwarz became the very first art historian to write a scholarly monograph on a photographer." Schwarz came to the United States in 1940 and held major positions at the Albright Art Gallery, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, and Wesleyan University until his retirement in 1972. He died in 1974.

Schwarz's interests in photographic history represent a continued, but relatively small aspect of his life's

research, which embraced the art of the late Middle Ages through that of the early 20th century. His publications included studies of Renaissance iconology, 19th century lithography and the last 300 years of Austrian art. It was, in part, the very breadth of these interests that led to Schwarz's insights on photography.

The central concepts in the essays collected in *Art and Photography* involve the inherently expressive nature of photography, the influence of the cultural mind or scientific world-view on picture-making strategies, and the dual relationship of photography and art: photography having been anticipated by certain modes of painting prior to 1839 and thereafter altering the way painters perceived reality.

Schwarz notes that "to photograph is more than to reproduce; it is to transform" through the interaction of "passive machine" and "creative mind." The photographer "imposes his will" upon the camera, and "expresses his will through it." The will thus expressed is both personal and cultural, the product of the same historical forces that render certain inventions "historically imperative" and allow us to recognize "a personal achievement as a super-personal occurrence." For Schwarz, photography was the inevitable result of the 19th century realistic and scientific world-view which displaced the 18th century's "irrationalism and religious-transcendental world."

This scientific world-view begins in the Renaissance. For Schwarz it is most clearly expressed in art by the use of a fixed vantage point and a mathematically precise system of perspective to render "direct and faithful" representations of the visible world. This highly rationalistic notion saw the development of mechanical and optical devices such as the *reticolato*, *camera obscura*, and *camera lucida*, the precursors to the photographic camera. By the 1820s and '30s, this mode of perceiving the world gave rise to paintings and prints which embodied "the specific characteristics of the photographic image," and which appeared "in an almost mysterious way as precursors to the photographic spirit." Such works — for example, small oil sketches by artists such as Constable — seemed to embody the proto-photographic qualities of non-traditional compositional devices, a richness of seemingly indiscriminately recorded details, and an air of "detached objectivity." In Schwarz's scenario, the result of the development of both photographic vision and photography has been that the two "have penetrated our mind and com-

pletely transformed our optical outlook." This is suggested by the relationship of Vermeer to the optical and scientific temper of his time, and the influence of photography on 19th century painters such as Daumier, Manet and Degas.

Clearly, Schwarz's major ideas have been developed and extended by succeeding generations of scholars. The general validity of his observations on the relationship between painting and photography may be sensed from the substance of, and critical reaction to, the major studies in this area by Van Deren Coke and Aaron Scharf. Likewise, Schwarz's concept of proto-photographic painterly traits may be best understood and critiqued in the form of Galassi's 1981 exhibit and catalog.

The very familiarity of these issues indicates their congruence with the current photo-historical canon. However, it seems that the debate spurred five years ago by Galassi's exhibit has largely exhausted critical interest in a significant number of these issues. It is increasingly hard to work up a spirited defense of photography's place in the larger structure of modernist thought (how could it be otherwise, anyway?) when the entire framework is under question.

It must also be noted that the essays included here are not uniformly impressive. A few are quite brief, and as a group they are remarkably fragmentary — a reflection, perhaps, of their intermittent production over many years. The transcribed lectures are less convincing than they must have been as slide-illustrated talks; in print one is less inclined to accept simple comparisons or generalizations as convincing proof of larger, if admittedly exciting, ideas. The strongly teleological nature of Schwarz's thinking produces an impression of ideas in search of facts, or arguments and analysis stemming from conclusions, rather than vice versa. And finally, the existence of publications such as William M. Ivins, Jr.'s *On the Rationalization of Sight* (1938) and *Prints and Visual Communication* (1953) remind us that many of Schwarz's insights were not entirely unprecedented.

Despite such complaints, it is nonetheless evident that this book constitutes an important document of post-war art-historical thinking about photography and historical causality. Schwarz's insistence on the relationship of photography to ever-shifting visual and conceptual paradigms is, one hopes, utterly self-evident today. The only problem lies in the temptation to reduce complex

cultural and scientific issues to a relentless locomotive of historical inevitability. As Schwarz himself states, "nobody has yet been able to give a truly convincing and plausible explanation for the riddle of styles and their changes." All our notions of history, causality and influence depend on our own critical paradigms: our interpretations — to a greater or lesser extent — also stem from our conclusions. This search for "plausible explanations" is in itself a product of the same rationalistic and scientific world-view to which Schwarz attributes the beginning of photography. And, likewise, his writings illuminate a mode of thinking about photography, perception and the nature of historical understanding that reveal much about the time and place of his own intellectual formation and critical activities.

Keith F. Davis