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Guest Editorial: Synthetic Color in Photography

Judy Seigel

When I told people I was moderating a synthetic color panel, they said, "That's nice, what's synthetic color?" Except for a few items that come to us direct from Mother Nature, like blue sky or green grass, most of the color in our lives is synthetic. The food we eat is, everyone knows, color added, from the gas attack used to make oranges oranger to the red spray used on formerly grey beef patties. Clothing is dyed or printed, cars and houses are painted, and everything in the cars and houses is painted, stained, slipcovered or laminated.

Synthetic itself means, "patently produced or maintained by special effort and therefore often forced, distorted, constrained or simulated; not natural or spontaneous." That's a definition many artists would call their own, irrespective of color. When you mix pigments with a medium and arrange them on a surface to represent something else, that is obviously synthetic. But when you hide dyes in an emulsion, where, after a series of complex exertions, they become partly visible and readable as "pictures" of real things, that is not "natural" either.

Here's how a professional color printer and photographer, Curt Rowell, makes a photograph. He underexposes a chrome to saturate the colors, then makes color separations, each with one or more masks which are overexposed, partly intensified, burned in, underexposed or dodged in a process taking up to 60 hours and 15 masks before the finished print, which, with the bluest sky and the reddest brick ever met by human eye, is so super "real" it's surreal. There is, of course, additional fine tuning by filter, lens, polarizer and flash, all proving that the more "realistic" the photo, the less *spontaneous* it is likely to be. I should add that when he gave me these particulars, Curt began, then interrupted himself. "I'll tell you, Judy," he said, "all color is synthetic." Not to mention that the film itself has been pre-souped up at the factory. Real "realism" is a myth.

Having shown that "realistic" color, at least in photography, is forced, simulated and constrained, hence synthetic, I could now claim that "synthetic" or non-realistic color, which can be all *too* spontaneous, is natural!

The beginning photographer puts her film into the wrong bath in the wrong order or uses the wrong chemistry or the wrong temperature. She gets strange color. We call it a mistake. When the photographic "artist" does these things or other improvised or formulaic manipulations intentionally, like re-exposing to colored light during development, posterizing or "density slicing" into arbitrarily assigned colors, rotating matrices, and so on, s/he is making "synthetic color." This will be considered either corny or innovative, depending on when and how it's done and who the audience is.

Which leads me to a definition: synthetic color is color in a work of representational art that deliberately changes the "real" color of the subject depicted and *intends* the discrepancy to be noticed. That is, the change is for purposes other than hyper-realism. However, in both synthetic color and hyper-realistic color the color has an expressive charge. (While the color in art book reproductions and art slides is often synthetic and often has a greater expressive charge than the original art, this is not meant to be noticed. Hence it would be a form of hyper-realism.)

There is also a hybrid form of synthetic color that should be mentioned. Photomicroscopy, astrophotography, x-ray photography and other imaging systems of science use color enhancement or pseudo color to add information. Images like the NASA photographs are often stunning to look at, and their colors, while frankly fake, follow a pre-determined scheme, which can either raise or lower the expressive charge.

Painters of course have always used non-literal color to heighten effects. The Old Masters washed a green glaze over a red ground for "lifelike" flesh tones, or pushed blue paint into pink paint for vibrating highlights. The Impressionists actually put primary colors side by side to mix in the eye, although their intention was to represent or evoke "real" color and light. Then, in 1885, Van Gogh said, "Color expresses something by itself." Artists like Gauguin, Cézanne and Maurice Dennis and their contemporaries also took up color as both form and expression. What art historians have called the "emancipation of color" ensued. By 1905 Matisse, Vlaminck, Marquette and company had so dumbfounded the public as to be called Fauves, or wild beasts. Pure, intense, and more or less arbitrary color became an end in itself and part (or all) of the content of a work of art. Thus freed from the labor of depiction, color had the time and energy for self-expression, sensation, innovation, and of course, perversity—all the concomitants of leisure.

But while color was being emancipated in painting, this had not yet become an option in photography. "Realistic" color was so difficult to obtain and so uncertain in results that a photographer would hardly undertake a deliberate distortion. Only recently has "mature" color photography, with its relative ease and accessibility, emancipated photographic color and allowed our, so to speak, photographic Fauves.

Today synthetic color is a given in both painting and photography. What does it give? It gives an expressive form that alters ordinary reality in the same way that song or poetry alters ordinary speech. And, as song or poetry refers to and extends human dialogue, so synthetic color refers to and extends literal or "realistic" color—that is, "vision." The reference and extension are the point and meaning of the exercise.

John Dewey described the viewer's response to art as the mental recreation of the artist's activity. In the case of, say, a robin's egg blue leopard, or a purple cow, the viewer makes a quick mental flash to the regular ochre and black leopard, or regular brown cow, notes them as pedestrian, relishes (or deplores) the surprise of the new hues, or the new math of light waves doing their optical number on the retina and the nanometer numbers coming up different, all in a flash of course, while registering shape, line, texture and plot in the 1/8 of a second they say is the average time spent by museum-goers in front of one picture.

Without that flash to the real leopard or cow, blue or purple would mean and do little. But note that the opposite flash occurs with reality. For instance, a spectacular sunset, with its demented or acid or improbable colors, is seen as synthetic or unreal. We say, "It's just like a picture."

Many developments in art are fueled by our craving for novelty, although critics use terms like innovation or avant-garde instead of novelty, which smacks of pet rocks and neon necklaces. The function of art, according to the Russian Formalists, is to "defamiliarize" or "make strange" the world, to overcome the deadening effects of habit on our perceptions. Today, instantaneous world-wide dissemination of images deadens our perceptions at an ever-faster pace. Synthetic color may not feed this craving forever, but it does cook up sensations that are, at least initially, new and strange. More complex than a bowl of super oranges, more prestigious than a pet rock, synthetic color adds the hit of surprise to the thrill of recognition. It also functions in the sensuous, or, arguably, the art part of art, insofar as that area is, these days, still functional.

This paper was originally presented at a conference on color photography hosted by the Pratt Institute, November 1985. Panelists were Scott Hyde, Barbara Kasten, Rosamond Purcell, Sandy Skoglund, and D. Jack Solomon.

An Ironic Distance

Ben Maddow

A proof sheet of self-portraits by W. Eugene Smith taken at the Schweitzer Colony, Lambarene. Courtesy of the W. Eugene Smith Estate and the Center for Creative Photography.

Every artist is programmed to perish twice: the first is their natural departure, the second is the oblivion of their name and work, though often enough the second comes first. Lucky for us, there are people appointed by fate to resurrect the treasures we neglect. We are grateful to Felix Mendelssohn, if for nothing else, that he freed the manuscript scores of J. S. Bach from imprisonment in the obscure library of a German count, and then only by chance that he was the precocious pupil of a pupil of Bach himself. Vasari, though he may have invented facts, did so in pursuit of the truth; and so we remain acquainted, as if with friends, with a whole society of 14th, 15th, and 16th century Italian painters. And Boswell, great Boswell, poet of the anecdote, took an overweight lexicographer and made him into the Falstaff of English literature. For that matter, what is Shakespeare's Richard III but a biography: vivid, harsh, alive—even if partly false; out of an obscure king he made a seductive and tragic hero.

The purpose of a biographer, then, is to perform a miracle like that of Christ upon Lazarus; to bring up out of an archival grave in an alphabetical cemetery, the corpus of an artist surrounded by his work as if by angels; and then to blow breath into his character, so that when we open the pages of his biography, he lifts up and speaks to us again; he shows us his numerous talents, his genius perhaps, and does not neglect to display his wounds and his vices. What makes Achilles walk and talk to us in the verses of the *Iliad* is not only his heroism but his weakness: his heel.

For one of the few rules by which a biographer can guide himself is to seek out not only the consistency, but the contradiction; for the artist comes alive not only in his work but in the opposites, the tension of his character. But what, precisely, do we mean by character? There is only one good general rule: that character, by analogy with a geometric solid, is defined by at least four points: four qualities. But that's only the minimum; think of anyone you know, family or friend, or think of yourself: and you can see a score of characteristics, some of which alter and even cancel one another. Edward Weston was, by the contradictions and compulsions of his work and character, at once egotistical, sweet, sad, obsessive, sociable, irritable, narrow-minded, intelligent, quiet, merry, generous, and ruthless—and yet that is all too brief a summary.

And another photographer, with whom I am more recently acquainted, was a passionate and tender human being, and a slave driver with a whip of love; gregarious, witty, even jolly; generous to everyone but those who lent him money; compassionate but capable of real physical abuse; intense, charming, seductive to women, impatient of all authority but his own; egotistical and humble at precisely the same time; an idealist; a perfectionist with sloppy professional habits; disorderly; fanatically altruistic, and quite willing to lie to make himself so; perpetually awash in guilt; an expert in self-pity; suicidal but never a suicide;—is that enough?—no, there is more: the person I'm describing was also capable of sustained feats of superb creation, yet subject to years of brooding stagnation and frantic triviality; a strong body ruined by repeated accident, by neglect, by ingested poisons; and with all this clashing machinery of character, a tough-minded genius. Who was this monster of contradictions? It happens to have been the photojournalist W. Eugene Smith, but in its pattern of entangled opposites, it could, in some measure, be any one of us.

You are probably not (and I know I am not) likely to be the subject of a biography. Not that we are not worthy; there is no one of my acquaintance who does not have a marvelous, complex story, if only we had the time to truly listen. My neighbor across the street owns a beauty parlor, dives a hundred feet down every weekend, drives a small, plain car with the sign: *I Brake for Lobsters*, has traveled everywhere in the world, and is a Catholic who still challenges God to explain why his 19-year-old son died on a motorcycle. My neighbor next door is a sweet and peaceable man with a passion for growing giant bamboos against my fence, who, with an inherited income and two beautiful children, desires only to be a painter, and who draws grotesque imaginary beasts with wings and hideous teeth, the tyrants of his own childhood. A third neighbor, further down, a recent widower who loves football and camping in the desert met a young pretty girl in a cafeteria, and sheltered her overnight, though she had a police record as long as your arm. And that's only the beginning of these three unwritten biographies; for I know next to nothing about their loves, their defeats, and their secret ambitions. Think what a great collection it would be if we had tapes of, say, a million such American lives; what a treasure for the anthropology of the future!

But it's unlikely ever to be done. We are enchanted by the famous, and not only because we are snobs, but because we are social animals, each of us living in a mental village of our own subculture, or at most, in two or three of them at the same time. We can define our village by our address book: these 50 to 300 people are all our attention can enclose. And our little group, like a claque of monkeys or a posse of coyotes, groups with whom we share the common trait of sociability, has its leaders, which means its decision makers, its activists, its criminals—in short, its celebrities. For these few outstanding individuals, we have a spicy mixture of admiration and envy. The news about them makes wonderful food; we devour the smallest detail. This human need, projected on the larger screen of the arts, government, or crime

and punishment, becomes enlarged into biography.

But what sort of biography? It is governed by fashion as surely as the length of a skirt or the cut of a shoulder, and so the fashion has passed of writing gilded pages of untempered praise. But there are still biographies, almost as poisonous to the reader, that chronicle every bill, every weather, every sneeze and every orgasm; they are castles of 3x5 cards that imprison the poor subject in three massive volumes bristling with footnotes. Yet each sort is valuable, the hagiography and the catalogue, for at least we have in these volumes a useful simulacrum of the person, if lacking a soul.

And then there are certain biographies, plodding along in chapter after early chapter, which suddenly come alive; the person himself seems to grow inside the book, whether it is Madame Blavatsky or James Agee or Emily Dickinson or Diane Arbus, and like the great golem of medieval cabbala, rises into view and walks and talks, and dominates even the biographer who had thought, in his pride of conception, that he was, at the very least, a minor god. Lazarus, after all, makes a somewhat frightening miracle; yet this resurrection of the dead must be the first object of the biographer.

In so great a labor, the character of the biographer himself is what makes the difference between a living and a dull account. He ought to be at once an obsessive organizer, a workaholic, a psychiatrist, sociologist, critic, voyeur, confidence man, snitch, and on occasion, borderline thief. And it is a great help if the biographer is not too keen a dresser, and this by nature and habit, not by pretense: an amiable listener, morally neutral; something, in fact, like an old comfortable shoe, with a phantom tape recorder hidden in its heel. And he should, to be really effective, have a profound, and even pathological curiosity, about human character. The discovery of the world inside somebody else's head and body: that is the journey a biographer must take, and expect, along the way, to be shaken and admiring and awed and frequently appalled. Because the biographer must climb the formidable mountain of the past, and climb boldly through debris left as if by a glacier, of letters, diaries, bills, documents of marriage and divorce, of rumors looming closer in the mist, some false, some painfully true; and most difficult of all, he must ascend the giant face of the peak itself, the many-headed character of the subject.

How lucky, then, if many of the man's or woman's friends, lovers, employers, landlords, children and wives are still alive and willing at least to talk. To go from one such person on Tuesday, and on Wednesday to another, is like reading two successive chapters in a novel of suspense, in which the biographer himself is a character. To spend hours or days with someone who knew intimately some aspect of the man or woman who is your subject, is itself an emotional crisis. There may be tears and laughter, but mostly there is a charged, electric wonder that the incidents of the past could have been so powerful, so odd, so true, so alive. And sometimes, not infrequently, a strange warm friendship, felt equally on both sides of the little notebook, develops during the contact. You and the witness have reentered the past together; and often, at parting, feel regret at leaving one another, and rise and even embrace, each now a veteran of what you together have discovered. And that is true whether the subject has been hated or loved, or, what is more characteristic, the two together. And it is for both of you a confession, a purge, a discharge of long secret energy.

It is obvious, then, that the biographer is not an empty intellect for gathering and sorting information. The whole sum of such information, cleverly organized by time or by topic, will not give us a biography, nor even a readable book. Yet the sin is not mere addition, for the two works by Professor Jay Leyda, on Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson, each a gigantic act of scholarship, are not really biographies but immensely rich museums in which one can only spend an afternoon at a time; from such a book, one must construct one's own biography: a not unpleasurable task.

This, in a similar way, is what the biographer does anyway: cutting bits out of a mass of documents and making them into the true mosaic of a life. Letters, for example, are rich with evasions, misconceptions, and sometimes plain lies; but they contain the truth, too, in almost indigestible quantity. This is even more true of diaries and journals, which, since they are written within hours or days of the event, do not lie so adeptly, because their author does not yet know what to lie about.

One of the great delights of the biographer is the lovely innocence of most diaries. Let me quote from the journal of a druggist in Florence, Italy; he kept it from the year 1450 to 1516, and there is perhaps no astonishment in the fact that in those 66 years there is no mention of the discovery of America. Because this humble man is concerned with what is really important: the local truth. For example, here is his entry for the 25th of December, 1498.

> **The following infamy was committed by God's people here in Florence, in Santa Maria del Fiore: at night, while the first Midnight Mass was being said, certain persons, I do not know whether to call them men or demons, brought in an old horse, and made him run about the church, with much shouting....They slashed at him and wounded him with their weapons and poked at him with sticks, resorting to every kind of cruelty till he fell bleeding to the ground, desecrating the temple of the Lord. And the said horse, ruined and tortured in this way... remained the whole day for everyone to see, torn to pieces and dying....And it was said that the crown had been taken off our Lady of San Marco, and given to a whore: I cannot vouch for the truth of this but it was said by many. And on the night of the Nativity there was put in the censers, in many churches, assafetida instead of incense, and goats were let loose in Santa Maria Novella....**

What mere writer can equal this description of the moral tumult of Florence in the time of the Borgias and Father Savonarola? We have wonderful examples from our own country; the account, from the point of view of the Confederate elite, and kept faithfully day by excruciating day, of our own Civil War, by a cultured lady named Mary Boykin Chesnut:

> **Dr. Gibbes says the faces of the dead on the battlefield have grown as black as charcoal, and they shine in the sun....**

That was on July 24, 1861. A little earlier, on April 12, during the fateful attack on Fort Sumter:

> **Not by one word or look can we detect any change in the demeanor of these Negro servants. Lawrence sits at our door, as sleepy and as respectful and as profoundly indifferent. So are they all. They carry it too far. You could not tell that they even hear the awful noise that is going on in the bay, though it is dinning in their ears night and day. And people talk before them as if they were chairs and tables, and they make no sign. Are they stolidly stupid, or wiser than we are, silent and strong, biding their time....**

Or, from the northern side, one of the letters Walt Whitman wrote to his mother, on June 30, 1863:

> **Mr. Lincoln passes here (14th Street) every evening on his way out—I noticed him last evening about one-half past six, he was in his barouche, two horses, guarded by about 30 cavalry. The barouche comes first under a slow trot, driven by one man in the box, no servant or footman beside—the cavalry all follow closely after with a lieutenant at their head—I had a good view of the President last evening—he looks more careworn even than usual—his face with deep cut lines, seams, and his complexion gray, through very dark skin, a curious looking man, very sad—I said to a lady who was looking with me, 'Who can see that man without losing all wish to be sharp upon him personally? Who can say he has not a good soul?' The lady assented, although she is almost vindictive on the course of the administration....**

And I can't forget the simple diary of a seventeen-year-old New York girl who came on a visit to Washington in 1865, went to the Ford Theatre to see a play called *An American Cousin*, and recorded in her diary that Lincoln's blood had stained her new white dress. In reading such accounts, one despairs of writing biography half as vivid. Such documents have the naive, blinding truth of contemporaneity. They are the acute material aspect of life, but they must be cited with caution. Because there is, I continue to believe, such a thing as the truth of the matter, which is congruent with, but not identical to,

all the minute facts. The truth is in the spirit of the thing—whether it's the man or the event. But how to get at it? That's the constant question.

In the case of W. Eugene Smith, the truth and the self-deception are thoroughly entangled, and as they were in his life, so they are in his immense single-spaced letters. An interesting sample was written by him from Tokyo, December 6, 1971, during his second stay in Japan. Smith kept not only up to a thousand carbons of his own letters, but also every rough draft; yet this particular letter is not in his archive. It was sent to me by a man named Harry Harlem—beautiful name—who was Smith's pawnbroker. Let me quote, if you will, and you will hear not only Smith's authentic voice, but the way he thinks and the way he persuades:

> **Dear Mr. Harlem,**
>
> **I wonder if I am really so out of place as I usually believe I am (and seem to be) in a maladjusted business world. For perhaps my place is really as an antibiotic—or perhaps as a spiritualization force... In that kind of a business world I think perhaps I am essential for I work as a conscience and I also often work as an inspiration. But I must admit I am terribly tired of being poor in a world that mainly shows me so much respect and appreciation and seems to gain so much from the work I do after it is done which gives me so little help....**

Smith's mixture of ego and modesty is nowhere so well expressed as by himself; and he was that year at the height of his literary powers:

> **I have been given so much appreciation I am beginning to feel as I felt about Dr. Schweitzer—such elevation is a horrible curse to put upon any man. Mortal stature is not so capable. All that and poverty too. I no longer endeavor to explain why I have so much fame and so little money. And especially since I do need money and equipment to continue work that is truly important....**

I have given you quotes from the entire first page of this appeal to his pawnbroker—and Smith has not yet got to the point. On page 3 of his letter, he goes into a discussion of his quarrel with *Life*, which occurred about sixteen years before:

> **I warned them they would die if they did not arouse to a greater responsibility....I fully believe I could (as I offered to) save *Life* magazine....**

And now, on the same page, a bit of self-flagellation:

> **I am irresponsible and near to criminal that I owe money even as I endeavor to cause responsibility among those who cause pollutional death. Yes, I am given the almost overwhelming honor of real respect by a great many human beings. I often am told I give them a renewed belief in humanity—a renewed belief in living... even a belief in love....**

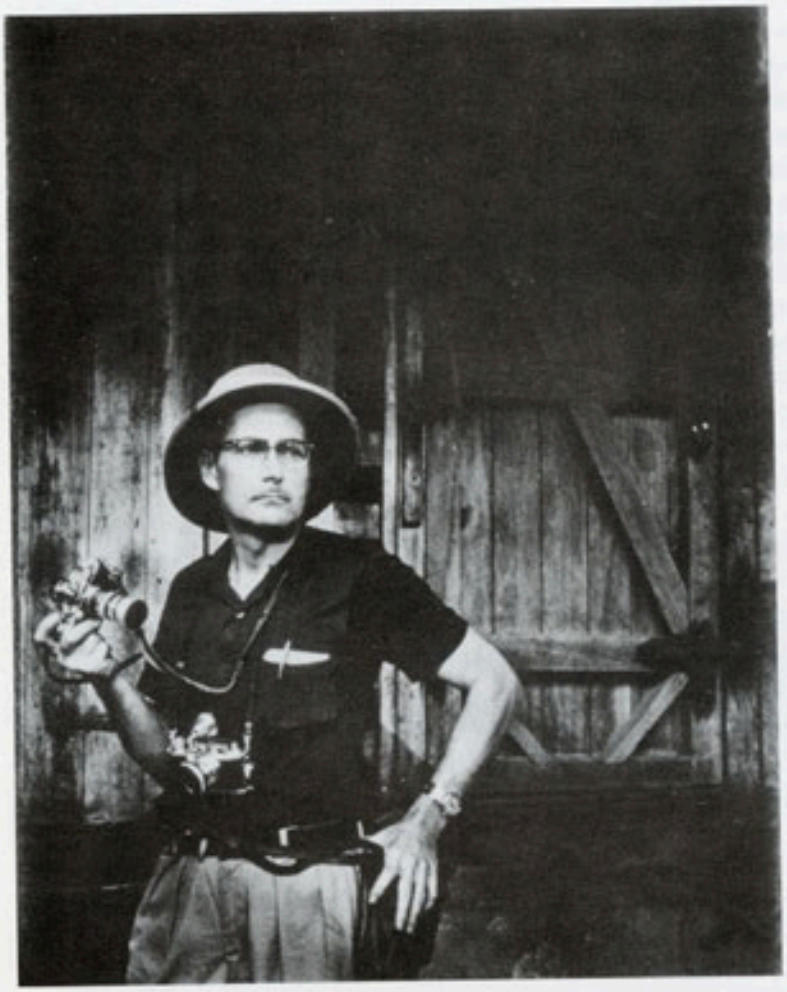
On page 5, he forces himself at last to come to the point:

> **I don't know how it can work but I need to have the mainly Leica set of cameras as listed on a separate sheet. Above all I need the Leica with the Zeiss finder and the Angulon 21mm F3.4 lens....**

The happy end to this story is what Mr. Harlem wrote me:

> **...You will be pleased to know that Gene lost none of his possessions. In fact upon receipt of the letter the articles he desired were sent to him and were paid for upon his return to the States. I like to believe that he took those great pictures with the Leica....Gene was just a wonderful human being.**

Looking backward, I realize that Smith's letters, in all their innocent profusion, are of two different sorts. Most are like our own these days, written to suit an occasion: they were either brilliant and extensive moral arguments calculated to shape the consciences of his editors at *Life*; or immense begging letters to



Self-portrait of W. Eugene Smith. Courtesy of the W. Eugene Smith Estate and the Center for Creative Photography.

prospective lenders—that approached, again on the last page, the painful questions of money; or letters of twisted apology to his extraordinary first wife, Carmen; or, to the unmarried mother of one of his sons, and written from the leper village of Dr. Schweitzer in Africa, a recital dripping with guilt of all the standard male excuses that every woman in this audience will recognize: "I'm not a 9 to 5 man, I'm not good enough for you, I'm very poor, you deserve a lot better, etc." But quite another sort of letter, far more valuable to the biographer, is a narrative series which Smith wrote to his formidable mother between 1939, when he came to New York City from Wichita, Kansas, and 1954, when she died, grossly overweight and in forced exile from her son. They give us a history of an artist being born, as if from the baby's point of view; they are frank, astonished, innocent, boastful, and true.

His mother wrote him, too, and though many of these letters have disappeared, there remains a remarkable two pages, certainly meant for her son, but perhaps better called a testament. It was written on October 22, 1946, when Smith had lately recovered from his war wounds, was working steadily and had bought a new house. The document was found in his mother's safe deposit box after her death, and it is the expression, among other things, of such pure mother-in-law-hood that even at this distance, it frightens the reader; and not with curses, but with detail: precisely what every biographer longs to have. I gingerly quote:

> **Today I am told that 'God damn it I am going to have my way about Marissa putting on overalls (temperature outdoors 70 and I thought she could wear a wool skirt under her raincoat). You have your way all the rest of the time.' If I had my way I would have told her to go to the hot place and take her way with her.**

You can see that, like a character in a Chekhov monologue, beyond the irritation and the triviality, there is a deep, fundamental hurt:

> **Am choked up inside all the time. I dislike living away from Gene but think that again that is what she wants but if I do she is going to pay and so are they all and plenty. And may God pay her back in the same coin. And she has three to do it too. I certainly am paying heavily for the few hours I spend with Gene.**

And this strangely disturbing two-page, single-spaced document ends with a fiat, like the Sanskrit phrase in Eliot's "Wasteland," a judgment as plain as thunder: *That is that*.

It was after reading this document aloud to myself that I experienced one of those insights that come out of a personal emotion. All of Smith's friends had described his mother as a square-jawed tyrant who dominated her son; indeed, her face in Smith's portrait is frightening in its rectangularity. In the early years of his career, she went everywhere with him, even on photographic assignments, and serviced his debts, cooked his dinner, baked his favorite cake, and carried his equipment. Ah, but that is the whole point: she was not just his tyrant, but simultaneously his slave. Smith had true compassion for the miseries of the world, for the marines dying in a foreign landscape slashed with mortar fire, for a country doctor and his patients, for a midwife laboring to bring children alive in the segregated South, for the miners in Wales up from the night shift with faces as black as coal dust, for the peasants in a Spanish village winnowing grain as they did when they were serfs in the Middle Ages, for the insane in a wooden barracks in Haiti, for the giant leprous carpenter in Africa. Pity was half his profession and its results were profound, dark, and moving documents, whose climax was Minamata: the crippled child in her mother's arms. But in pursuit of that compassion, he made slaves of those who loved him. And once I saw that to be true, the pattern of Smith's passionate relationships was no longer so obscure: they began with charm and intensity, and ended with the burden of loving servitude; and year after year, till they grew too heavy to be endured, and the relationship fell apart.

The contrast between an artist's critical standards for his own work, and his lack, all too often, of simple humanity—is not a contrast but a perfectly consistent plan of life. Work comes first; get out of the way. It's like the famous potter of Japanese folklore, who tore down his house to feed three days of fire in his kiln. It's a master pattern: you will find it in Beethoven's life; in Richard Wagner; certainly in Edward Weston's life, who according to Nancy Newhall, the first Weston scholar, stated his own priorities: first his work, then his sons, and finally his love affairs.

Such patterns are the hidden treasure that every biographer longs to find; mostly they are the work of his own unconscious, responding, in a human way, to the deep currents of the unconscious in the heart of his subject. The emotion the biographer feels is not only love and admiration, but, as the work goes on, hatred and disgust as well. Because the private life of a genius is sometimes appalling. And then, luckily, these opposing emotions become more reasonable; they negotiate with one another; love and hate join hands and become pages of sober judgment. The biographer learns to stand apart, no longer haunted, and is able to write a measured account, for he has placed himself, not too far and not too near, at a firm ironic distance.

But that does not mean that he can lose sight of the drama. A biography is a sort of novel; but compounded of fact; not a heap of facts, but a construction of facts; and novels, as any practicing novelist will admit, are themselves a reconstruction of cleverly disguised facts. But what counts in the end are not facts, but the illumination of insights.

Sadly, the best ideas come along only after the work has been written and published. In the case of Weston, material I had not seen before publication put a new light on his entire career. I knew that when

Weston lived in a suburb of Los Angeles, then called, characteristically, "Tropico," his neighbor was the abstract sculptor Peter Krasnow; but until I was lately shown a whole folder of his postcards to Krasnow, I had not realized how influential this connection was.

What Weston did with Krasnow's work—and there are a number of little-known photographs in that folder to prove it, and from very early in his career—was to make portraits of the sculpture itself. I saw then that Weston, all his life—with certain superb exceptions—was essentially a portraitist. The aesthetics of isolating a powerful subject so that it dominates the plane, physically and emotionally, so that it is the center and the source of a magnetic field, the psychic energy that forces our willing attention—this, whether a person or an object, is the essence of Weston's portraiture. It was a view I wished I had had ten years ago.

Weston borrowed—or stole if you like—ideas from everywhere. He was rarely, except in a far deeper sense, an innovator. He looked for whatever was aesthetically promising, seized upon it, and made it his own. His intimate portraits of vegetables, photographed between 1927 and 1934, the twisted peppers, the radial symmetry of the squash, the monumental mushrooms, the luminous artichoke halved, the cycle of shells, the mountain of a single cabbage leaf, are the classic center of his career. Yet he borrowed this idea from a painter named Henrietta Shore. Generally photographed from slightly below center, and bathed in a kind of universal glow with a lens opening as tiny as possible and exposures as long as four and five hours, they overwhelm us with the sheer pleasure of seeing. They have the power to change forever the way we look at what was, up to then, just stuff to be boiled and mangled for dinner.

And when I first studied Weston's complicated nudes, I was too taken by their beauty to realize, as I do now, that they fall into two quite different categories: the abstract and the personal; and I've come to prefer the latter. The nudes that Weston made of Tina Modotti in Mexico are moving because Weston was himself deeply moved; they are photographs made by a man in love—and jealous and bitterly disappointed in love, because Modotti was capable of warmth, even heat, but not fidelity. The few nudes of the folklorist and anthropologist Anita Brenner are, by contrast, severely formal and depersonalized. That is not true of the fine nudes, done between trips in 1925, of his youngest son Neil: they are wistful, tender, and loving, and have some of the sinuous inner grace of his Pictorialist period.

He chose one famous solution to this problem in 1925 while still in Mexico:

> **I have been photographing our toilet—that glossy enameled receptacle of extraordinary beauty—it might be suspicioned that I am in a cynical mood to approach such subject matter when I might be doing beautiful women or 'God's out-of-doors,' or even considered that my mind holds lecherous images from restraint of appetite....but no!—My excitement was absolute aesthetic response to form....Here was every sensuous curve of the 'human form divine' but minus imperfections....It somehow reminded me, in the glory of its chaste convolutions and its swelling, sweeping, forward movement of finely progressive contours—of the 'Victory of Samothrace.'**

Some people have taken this passage seriously; there's some truth to that, too. But its underlying bitterness is proved, if proof were needed, by a letter to his close friend, Johann Hagemeyer, in which he cited the Mexican toilet as proof of his depression and cynicism at the end of his affair with Modotti. Yet this fact does not change the curious circumstance that in the 60 years since it was done, Weston's photograph of the toilet has become an icon of formal beauty. Has it therefore lost its association with the nether parts of human nature? Isn't it still an obscene image? Or does it not, more precisely, combine both beauty and obscenity—a reflection of Weston's feelings that critical year?

The issue is a deeper one, and affects our attitude toward all his famous images, particularly those after 1927. Weston said he sought the essence, the Kantian *ding-an sich*—the thing-in-itself—of the objects he photographed. Whether there is such a thingness does not alter the fact that he sought it. He wrote, in a formal statement from Carmel, November 1, 1930:

> **Life is a coherent whole: rocks, clouds, trees, shells, torsos, smokestacks, peppers are**

interrelated, interdependent parts of the whole. Rhythms from one, become symbols of all.

This search leads to abstract form, but where is the purity to be found? What else can one photograph but a piece of reality? Worse yet, reality has its own inertia, a stubborn particularity of time and place. The famous cabbage leaf has a defect: the rot of entropy has begun its work. His peppers have their intrinsic form, true, but they are hardly free of human associations. Not newly born do we come to a Weston image. We are complicated viewers; the circuits of our brain are crowded with messages, and so we see (along with everyone else) the erotic curves of the human body in a humble vegetable. Weston absolutely denied any such intent; and, as creator, of course, he was right; but, as viewers, so are we. Reality with all its imperfections haunts Weston's work, and fact gives it a marvelous tension between the abstract and the particular: such is its inner drama.

Did I have such a delayed reappraisal of W. Eugene Smith? A year has passed since publication of *Let Truth Be The Prejudice*, and the only real new idea was one pointed out to me by a clever friend: that Smith's curious combination of not quite suicidal depression and manic enthusiasm might be the symptoms of a bipolar illness where low and high alternate in violent aberrations of feeling—down, up, and down again, a common form of insanity. The trouble with such a diagnosis is that although it is probably true, especially after his years of double addiction, it really explains nothing.

Genius and insanity are often associated in the popular view; but there are millions of certified schizophrenics and paranoids who never have and never will create a work of art. Further, I suspect—without proof—that genius is identifiable by a kind of super-sanity, which lets the artist see the world with more than common clarity, and order it into superb and novel design; that this extra sanity is what makes great mathematicians and great novelists and great photographers.

Paul Dirac, the physicist who got the Nobel Prize for his proof that if there is matter, there must be anti-matter, rather late in his life decided he had neglected the great cultural works of man. He went to Eugene Wigener, who recommended a brief reading list; and he dutifully read the first of them, *Crime and Punishment*. His only comment—this after a lifetime of superb theoretical reasoning—was that, in Chapter III, the sun rose twice in the same day. He was correct, of course.

That there is a contradiction between creative people's excessive sanity at their work, and their erratic and often cruel or crazy or simply deaf behavior to other people, remains no longer a puzzle, but simply an irreducible fact. It applies, in some measure, to all of us; which may be the source of the fascination that the life of a genius has upon our minds, and certainly upon mine. In the case of W. Eugene Smith, this photographer, dead of a second stroke in 1978, came alive as I worked, and possessed me, as he had possessed his friends and his lovers. I could think or speak of nothing else for months. So great and so pathological was this possession by the demon of a dead man, that when I came to write the final chapter of this biography, I could not work at all for almost four days; it was as if, by writing of his final illness and death, I was killing the hero all over again; such was the power of his egotism: the combined force of his work and his persona. And much the same is true of any final chapter, the ending to that fierce silent dialogue between the biographer and his subject—each, in a strange way, the object of obsession to the other.

If there is any moral to these contradictions in the human character, it is this: that the summary truths of a whole lifetime are sometimes splendid, and sometimes not. But thus we may pity, admire, and comprehend, through the travails of Edward Weston and W. Eugene Smith, and inspite of their particularities, our own marvelous, tragic, and ridiculous selves.

This essay is adapted from a paper delivered at a symposium on W. Eugene Smith hosted by the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, in January, 1987. The other panelists were Edward K. Thompson and David L. Jacobs.

A Quiet Message, Strangely Told: The Photograph as Communication

by Philip Stokes

Nothing is wrought but by his proper cause:
Wherefore that Practise falleth farr behinde
Wher Knowledge of the cause is not in minde:
Therefore remember ever more wisely,
That you woorke nothing but you know how and whie.

Thomas Norton, *Alchemist*
Fifteenth Century

The photograph is a curious creature. It is a most prosaic, most mechanical thing, a metallic shadow produced by the strict application of a set of physical and chemical phenomena. Yet it is also the most magical, the most subtle of the image making systems, and is nearest of all to meeting the requirements of classic alchemy; achieving as it does the transmutation of light into the substance of the lunar metal. But the magic goes beyond the metaphysics of the physical into the area where one sees something far less tangible and yet infinitely more compelling wafting out, from time to time, to enchant or disturb us.

We are inclined to wonder whether we are actually in the presence of our humble servant or of some variety of trickster, lying in wait to lull and then delude us about the world, depriving us of its seemingly secure ordinariness.

We speak of the language of the image in the full knowledge that it is mute, flat and inanimate. We persist in our folly while recognising that it is not really a folly because we do hear a quiet, persistent voice—not the voice of reason, nor even a voice with words, but persuasive and demanding for all that.

Where does this spring from? To begin with, the photograph is the reification of idea. When we examine the photograph we do not look at the shifting perspective of the objects of the world, but at the constant dimensions and relations of material before us on the mind's screen. It is as real as anything we might imagine, and entirely lacking in the signs or knowledge of construction implicit in the very existence of painting or drawing—signs which keep them in proper, safe relationship to their audience. The waking dream, the thought passing right in front of our eyes in the photograph has all the irrationality of its kind, and sometimes it is combined with a wildness, the desperation of the fugitive. That is quite a charge to be carrying, for an insignificant

bit of paper.

J.M. Heaton, writing in *The Eye* about the concept of the visual world, by chance helps us greatly towards understanding the interaction between viewer and photographer. He distinguishes two aspects of perception, the visual world and the visual field. The visual world is essentially our internal model of reality; we are in and integrated with this visual world, and are aware of the orientation of our bodies with respect to its contents. It has no boundaries, and what we perceive of it, including the forms perceived as objects there, depends upon our purpose in perceiving, rather than our relative location or viewpoint. As Heaton puts it:

> **My 'thatness-thereness' perception of the sideboard behind me is as concrete and specific as that of my pen, which I am directly looking at. Both types of perception have the same operational function, namely, I can as readily lean back and get a bottle of claret from the sideboard without looking at it as I can write down words without looking. Finally, the significance of both types of perception are equally 'real', i.e., the bottle of claret in the sideboard is as 'real' to me as my pen.**[1]

The visual field is that which is seen, that which is as close as we can perceptually come to the image of the world as projected on the retina. Shifting according to the point on which our eyes are fixed, its relation to the observer is unstable, whereas that of the visual world is not. Again unlike the visual world, the visual field has sharp central definition, decreasing toward the periphery which, however imprecisely, marks its limit. And the objects appearing in the visual field change in appearance with angle and distance of view.

In normal life both visual world and visual field are perceived together. Neither could exist without the other, even though once in being, they are separable through the accidents of violence or pathology.[2] Perhaps we can see a clue in this to something of the specialness of photographs, to the feelings about them which are so hard to cope with when we move from the phenomenon in experience, and try and try again to equate it with the objectifying thought created by us in our subsequent introspection.

When we confront a photograph, it is of necessity present in our visual field. Yet the objects of which it is an inventory do not behave in accordance with some of the more significant rules which normally apply to those objects. Notably, because of their two dimensionality, these objects change far less with shifts of viewpoint than do other, three dimensional objects in the visual field. They thus approximate very closely to objects perceived in the visual world. The photograph is virtually a hole in the visual field, opening onto the visual world. That it is the photograph, rather than the depicted objects, which is orientated with relation to the perceiver's body, that the photograph has defined boundaries, and that both these features are characteristic of the visual field rather than the visual world, does little to break its authority. One might indeed conjecture that photographic authority, like many other authorities, gains its ultimate force through the concealment of its roots in paradox.

The combination of the photograph's visual worldliness with those qualities of optical projection shared between natural and photographic vision has from time to time been approximated by painting, but earliest reactions to photographic images tend to support the view that the new process brought something different in kind, as well as in power, to the perceptual experience. Painting's acceptance of mutation as the means of its survival is an obvious result of photography's impact, and may have served to draw attention away from the fact that it is really the whole perceptual world which has mutated since 1839.

Another toil of paradox and displacement exists within the dimension of photographic time, distinct from the more obvious and better rehearsed considerations of the differences between the times involved in the making of an image, and those involved for its viewing. Strange and taxing as these have been, their challenge is less fundamental than that offered by the innocuous- seeming opportunity to pick through a drift of photographs accumulated over many autumns. This challenge may not be particularly evident in a mass of landscapes, or even of motor car photographs. But when we look attentively

at our family album, we may suddenly understand that the meaning of the phenomenon of infinite retrievability is not merely that we have bound ourselves to work the treadmills of storage and access; but that without looking for it, or if we are regular historians, necessarily liking it, we have undergone a total shift in our concept of history.

No longer do we deal with our past solely through ordered words and artefacts; we now experience a direct re-presentation of previous worlds of humanity through photographs, which on the rare occasions when they remain in chronological order, still present us with this and that momentary illumination rather than a continuous flow. This illumination embodies both idea and shadow of reality, turning time around, showing in the family album ourselves in our grandparents, and the pleasures and struggles of both in their grandparents, via cycles repeated across the stage of recognisably similar streets, through the doorways and in the rooms of touchable buildings. The descent of the tribe, the myth of the heroic ancestor sensed in the descendant's bones: did they cut the trees in 1890? or was it in 1850 that the wagons scarred the field? and do those furrows really go back before the time of tractors? We are back into the thought modes of legend.

16th-century engraving of the green lion devouring the sun. In the complicated alchemical symbolism, this can be translated as meaning that *aqua regia* (royal water)—a mixture of nitric and hydrochloric acids—dissolved gold, represented by the sun. The engraving can be seen as a vivid description of a straightforward chemical process.

We see ourselves across the generations in their brevity and suddenly the reincarnations, the passages between gods and mortals do not seems so inaccessible after all.

Yet the photograph has its ordinary time-bound existence. Like any other object of the world it travels from making to dissolution, constantly changing with attrition, shedding specifics, acquiring generalities, evoking new responses from new people who, weaving the physical mundanities across the re-experience of lost time, create new orders out of the old material. It is the weave of this linearity against that myth which so perplexingly embeds a further dimension of strangeness into our encounter with the photograph.

Let Vilem Flusser sum up:

> **Such space-time as reconstructed from images is proper to magic, where everything repeats itself and where everything partakes of meaningful context. The world of magic is structurally different from the world of historical linearity, where nothing ever repeats itself, where everything is an effect of causes and will become a cause of further effects. For example, in the historical world, sunrise is the cause of the cock's crowing; in the magical world, sunrise means crowing and crowing means sunrise. Images have magical meaning.**[3]

We assume, in part because of the discourse surrounding photographs, that the photograph itself embodies some sort of linguistic communication. Through accepting this proposal, and then seeking to support it, our first goal must be the establishment of some idea of a coherent syntax for the medium. This point is of primary importance also in the sense that the notion of a syntax being possible at all is the first article of scepticism in the critical orthodoxy, and has been so since Talbot's day. In modern times this sceptical view has been largely based upon the views of W.C. Ivins,[4] which were popularised, surprisingly for one who considered himself to be a media person, by Marshall McLuhan, and utterly demolished, so far as concerns the making process, by Estelle Jussim.[5] Even so, the wider argument is yet tentative and incomplete, for it still begs ques-

tions as to how making may be said to match with reading, and I would not wish to promote its current state as an adequate foundation from which to make unreserved and sweeping claims on behalf of photographic language. On the way to speculating further along these lines, it is necessary that I dispute an aspect of the case put by Roland Barthes to the effect that:

> **Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without a code;* from which proposition an important corollary must immediately be drawn: the photographic message is a continuous message.**[6]

Barthes goes on to contrast this situation with that obtaining in other media, which offer 'analogical reproductions of reality.' He refers to a 'supplementary message,' a 'second meaning' [7] produced out of the treatment of the image by its creator: the visual style of the painter, draughtsman, film director or whoever. It might be noted in passing that Barthes seems to diverge here from McLuhan in saying that he does not take up questions of subliminality inherited by McLuhan from Ivins.[8] 'The photographic paradox' lies for Barthes in the fact that the denotative component, by virtue of its springing from the *analogon,* is free of code. The connotative component, on the other hand, affected by the photographer's style, and thus comprising 'a plane of expression and a plane of content,'[9] demands investigation by means of semiotic analysis. Barthes characterises connotative procedures in a number of ways. The categories of 'trick effects' (in practice, montage) and 'pose' are not strictly photographic, in that they lie outside the optical/chemical process, and if accounted for as a part of the causal chain, are so admitted as events newly intervening, rather than from any logical connection with the proximate cause. 'Aestheticism' is seen by Barthes as a category of references to painting, and 'syntax' is used by him to describe connotative effects from the juxtaposition of images, a much later point for the introduction of this term than I would choose.

One of the alchemical symbols from Edward Kelley's book *Theater of Terrestrial Alchemy,* showing the Philosopher's Egg. It was titled "Of the Exaltation of Mercurial Water" which was an essential element of his process.

'Objects' for Barthes seem to coincide only up to a point with my concept of inventory, the list of things readable within the image, since he emphasises arrangement by the photographer, rather than selection by a viewer from within the photograph, and adds confusion by including editorial selection of photographs under the same heading.

Barthes offers 'photogenia' [10] as a category more or less equivalent to my own concept of syntax, with the disconcerting difference that he chooses to distinguish signifying from aesthetic effects. I believe that it is in this area that the problems of equating Barthes' views with photographic experience are located, for the maintenance of his position depends upon the virgin innocence of his *analogon,* that it is perceivable uncoupled from photogenia, dissected clear of the syntactic body. His language has tucked away inside itself a feeling that the photographic ladder of perfection leads, even if it never attains it, to an ideal point where *analogon* and subject become one.

In Barthes' own words:

> **It is as if the photograph always carries its referent in itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by**

limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet) which navigate in convoy, as though united by eternal coitus. The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both: the windowpane and the landscape, and why not: Good and Evil, desire and its object: dualities we can conceive but not perceive.[11]

Yet the breadth, the all pervading reach of the syntactic operation, from microstructure to the level of the whole photograph, ensure that none of this ever occurs. Even decisions on what is to be the content of the inventory may be shaped by choices in process, and certainly the observable properties and relationships of objects within the frame are in practice as much likely to be drawn out of the syntax as they are to be found in a quest for an *analogon*, re-presenting the world in supposedly naked candour. The *analogon*, after all, is not naked, nor can it be candid, for there are no gaps in its encoded cover; but, as they might be persuaded by the sight of a dancer in fleshings, there are many, like Barthes, who do see the *analogon* as revealing all, even though later, as does Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, they admit to the essences still withheld.

The paradox, then, lies not as Barthes would have it, in the coexistence of the uncoded *analogon* with the rhetorical codes of photographic treatment, but in the apparent innocence of the *analogon* having diverted attention from its fully coded reality. The seemingly transparent photograph is indeed barely translucent, densely inscribed as it is with the syntax of its making. That it is possible for any of the elements in the syntactic operation to be introduced as a matter of choice, as an act towards the establishment of a desired order in the photograph, requires of a viewer the presupposition that all are so chosen. The only occasion where this might not apply is in the making and reading of the genuinely naive image, such as the family snapshot, where the syntax is traditionally outside the process, residing exclusively in the arrangement of the subject and the mode of display of the results.

It follows that the appositeness of syntactic choice is crucial. Whether the decisions are taken in harmonious succession, or with the desire in mind to create discord and discontinuity, they achieve much more than service or hindrance towards the analogical recording of a subject. They offer, indeed, a substantial part of the framework in which a viewer may create the photographic message.

Having spoken again of message, of communication, it is time to speculate on what this might mean in regard to the possibility of reading the photograph as a document. The primary difference between it and verbal documents is that the photograph does not offer the reader a progress along an agreed succession of lines, taking in a determinate sequence of words, and establishing the syntagmatic chain presupposed in classic syntax.

At the most fundamental level, there is the matter of visual dynamics to be considered. That is to say, the photographic frame is scanned by its perceiver, and in certain cases, such as Stieglitz' equivalents, the act of running the eye back and forth in the rhythms determined by the proportions along the way, results in a perceptual interplay that induces connotative activities of an abstract, even musical nature.

I would be the last to claim that this is a purely photographic phenomenon, standing as it does with effects achieved by long lines of visual artists over the centuries, including practitioners as different as Whistler and Kandinsky. And self-conscious photographic practice in this mode has contained plenty of schmaltz, as does the heavily Romantic music to which equivalence is claimed, but these are failings to be laid at the feet of the photographers, not of the phenomenon.[12] It is a case where elements of cultural determination have tended to obscure the fundamental nature of the dynamic component of visual perception, and the linking from the visual field not only to the visual world, but to the worlds of the other senses also.

On a higher level, the isomorphic properties of an image, those properties of form which have their equivalent in evoked emotion, and lie only just below the surface of inventory, are very much bonded into denotative perception. I refer to the way

in which the very shape of an object may appear imbued with emotion precisely because of its form. Thus a person recorded in a posture firmly and clearly triangular is seen as possessing all the strength of that simple figure. A subject shown as a low, more or less amorphous form, whether animate or not, is likely to induce echoes of depression or tiredness in its viewers. It is the seeming naturalness of such conjunctions that bears a correspondence with what Barthes sees as the unmediated nature of the *analogon*, despite its presentation to the viewer via the intractable codings of process.

When we arrive at the point of reading the inventory of an image, whether simultaneously with, or previously, or subsequently to the perception of its dynamics and forms, we are left with the question of how any of this can relate to the syntagmatic spine of verbal language. Where is the slightest evidence for the reader of an image being confined to the sequential progressions of the verbal text? Is it not just a matter of recognising the total assembly, and deciding what intentions may be inferred, or meanings conferred, according to the set of the reader's predispositions about the world?

Thus far we have pointed to an incorporation of meaning common to all visual communication, and closely analogous to that sensible in the style and macrostructure of certain literary works.[14] However, when we attempt to be more specific, difficulties are less easily gainsaid. Research in psychology shows that preliminary features analysis of an image may be seen to occur in sequence, to the extent that certain features are consistently perceived and identified before or instead of others,[15] thus proposing a tentative order for the reading of its maker's encodings. But that is not to say we have identified some form of visual sentence. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that we have no directing force at all; though in any given case the probability of its effectiveness depends upon the loosest coalition of perceptual mechanisms and shared cultural assumptions to achieve what can be no better than limited predictability.

Yet on the other hand, the syntagmatic chain of the verbal sentence is not the ineluctable shaper of signification that the denigrators of the notion of photographic language imply. When we look at the subtleties of meaning embedded in relations between non-contiguous items in the same verbal chain —between remote phrases, between this block of text and previous blocks, and of the whole with blocks—then the process of photographic perception begins by comparison to look not that much less ordered than literary reading, with its jungles ambiguously commingling behind a facade of syntagmatic rectitude.

There is, I believe, a further factor under and overlying the isomorphisms and syntaxes, and I propose it as crucial both as to them and in its own right. If we accept that the operations of generating and interpreting language are strategically and tactically analogous to mental operations in general, of which they are a class, then the encoding of a photograph will be subject to rules similar to those applicable to other human communications. The principle (and its assumptions) remain the same, whether we choose to describe these rules in terms of Freud's dreamwork or Chomsky's transformational linguistics. The parallels proposed by Leonard Bernstein in his Harvard Lectures[16] offer ample fuel towards speculation in this direction, and allow us to sense complex coherences between content, form, process and context of the photographic image. That the displacements, substitutions and deletions present themselves in more dimensions than language can readily cope with, is in itself no more than a reflection of the conditions apprehended for mental operations generally. It may be that the simultaneous density and uncertainty of relational patterns in the photographic image offer us a metaphor for the paradoxical sense that its wholly determined inventory of evidence is yet full of shifting ambiguities.

Finally, the maker and reader of the photograph do not, as it were, stand side by side in front of a fully determined syntax, as with a verbal text, but confront it from opposite sides of a looking glass, whose surface may obscure or manoeuvre emphases. The maker shares Alice's privilege of passing through the surface to become the reader, and joining the players in a different dream.

As we consider the supposedly self-evident nature of the received notions of photographic truth, we find ourselves confirming what ought to be the obvious—that these are situational truths, truths of

events, and so far as they are truths of relationships, are bound to events as both progenitors and artefacts. In other words, all these assumptions have built into them the dimension of time, within which spatial evolutions may occur.

The photograph is indeed the only medium of communication which in its very being constitutes a precisely logical record of time's passing; but there is no escaping that the individual photograph cannot possibly embrace time and the evolution of situations in the same way as the written text, because however absolute its record of the time involved in its making, that time is inevitably minute in relation to any scale of time relevant to human affairs. The single photograph is like a lamp which picks out from the darkness a few objects, lets us see a snippet of an action, and leaves us wondering just what these signs relate to. Because we can never know that connection, it allows us to construct our own worlds to populate the darkness beyond the lamp's beams. The single image, unsupported, can stand as no more than a proposition about what a state of affairs might have been, never a narrative of how it was and changed. Even a set of images presented serially is only a group of flickering illuminations, or to use a different metaphor, discrete packages of information requiring us to shift ourselves from the micro scale of the single image to the macro scale of the series before we may speak of the material narrating anything. But unlike the situation in information technology, these are packages so rich in material, even the grainiest and softest of them, that there is no way they may be dismissed in a cavalier gesture. Indeed, so great is the pressure of information that we find ourselves fairly steaming with language, creating a dense cloud of thought and apprehension of the images' signification to float, as it were, above the series as we scan it. This is close to the experience of the realist novel, in the best of which emotions grow, seemingly autonomously, out of the data and description, making up their texts within compositional forms that are the more powerful for being subtle to the point of invisibility. Comparisons, though, are hazardous. Transpositions between the visual and the verbal, attempts to match locations of meaning, to repeat hierarchies of transformation as between image or series, and phrase or sentence, demonstrate the incommensurability of media in any strict sense.

These are factors bound to reflect upon the issue of the position of the author, and any questions of intention flowing from that. In many ways photography was the first arena in which the author was observed to die. Talbot seems to have had some doubt as to whether his drawing was being done for him by Nature, with her own pencil—the camera, which 'chronicles what it sees, and certainly would delineate a chimney-pot or a chimney-sweeper with the same impartiality as it would the Apollo of Belvedere.' [17] Talbot must have been sure that the skill couldn't possibly be his: his own efforts were a painful assurance of that. Such thoughts are altogether a first rate precedent for the no-code faction, and if indeed there were proved to be no code, and thus no authorial activity, then the field would be clear for those who would like to lie back and let the message inscribe itself. Critics, abandoning the last decencies of logical constraint, would have an even bigger ball.

The consequences of such stances would depend upon whether the viewer felt like a puritan or a hedonist. A puritan, limited perhaps to the precepts of logical positivism, and racked by a determination not to cheat, would have very little to say about a photograph. Even to construct an inventory of what was shown there would be almost impossible without admitting some implications of relationships to space beyond the frame, and dimensions in time, unless of course one were satisfied with the most brutal, decerebrate levels of perception which would hardly serve the needs of a mouse.

On the other hand, a hedonist, knowing no constraints and sanctifying his abandonment by putting the responsibility for whatever was the outcome upon the photograph itself, would have a whale of a time; or rather, one would expect him to. Listening to critics of this persuasion, and remembering that the text here, in the no-code version, is no more than an infinitely shufflable set of reflections of the world, one might look for the spontaneous erection of splendid significatory edifices.

However, to judge by Minor White's (hedonistic) exercises in free association and in photographic reading in the late 1950s, such uncon-

strained interpretations tend towards the diffusely idiosyncratic, with the only shores to an oceanic experience provided by the boundaries of myth. Perhaps White's wisest remark was that:

> **They will not 'read' but react as if the photograph was a mirror of themselves. Looking at a photograph they will hear themselves talk, and hear nothing of what the photograph says or what the photographer is trying to say.**[18]

To put it slightly differently, the hedonists' lapse into solipsism amounted to a surrender of the potential for understanding offered by the photograph's origin from and intimate connection with the outside world.

I will turn aside from these artificially uncomfortable extremes, and move back towards the center of the arguments advanced here. If viewers proceed without recognising that perception of a photographic image involves not only an understanding of what is being represented in it, but also of the significance of the codes of selection and making, they will lose their way. If they fail to take into account the significance of context and do not allow a sense of the dialectic between the photographer's intention and the viewer's experience, then there is little or no chance of their apprehending the potential communicative power of the medium, and its effects will either be achieved unrecognised, which is dangerous, or lost, which is a great waste. The authors are alive and well, though kept always from touching their fingers to ours by the impenetrable surface of the photographic looking glass. The many artists who have tried to break this down by writing or painting on the photographic surface are not included here, because theirs is a different game.

It is cheering to be reassured as to the author's health, and to be easy in the presence of code and syntax after all, and to welcome the potential for sophistication of the photographic message which their interactions propose; but, alas, there is a further problem. For all the struggle and teasing out of the means of embodying messages, however these matters are understood by those whose work it is to understand them, there is no escaping the experience that when photographs and text appear together, it is the text which has the primary force, and the photograph which subserves. When photographs are hung in a gallery, it is the ethos of the place which first comes across in them, with the photographer's intention to be divined from it, if attended to at all.

Compared to a book, which must be written, or to a gallery, which is a theatre, or even to a painting, which must after all be painted, the photograph is natural-seeming, quite lacking in artifice; an orphan who maybe never even had a parent, other than the overworked, shutter-tripping monkey of legend. Resting beside grand works by known progenitors, and in places of illustrious pedigree, the modest orphan may be patted on the head, but will never be listened to seriously. Unless, that is, the presentation is such as to make it clear that casual impressions will not do, that what is being shown is a thoughtfully produced visual structure, neither illustrative of something else, or existing only as a *tour de force* of photographic craft.

Perhaps the best potential for meeting this challenge lies with the photographic series, in the understanding of how worthwhile it is to light our world with a number of lamps, placed so that the relations between moments and places may be established. Propositions about the world may be incorporated into these relationships by the photographer, and not simply left to the hit and miss self-indulgence of a viewer. Yet there is much more involved than mere seriality, for just as relativities within the single image form part of syntax on that level, so the determination of size, and positioning of images relative to one another and to their ground, is crucial to developing syntax in the context of a series. And there are other relevant questions as to whether the series will be presented in a book, as slides, or by some other means. Woven in with all this there might be verbal texts to reinforce, or if the maker were not careful, take over as the evident bearer of the primary message.

In the end, when studying photographic work, one becomes aware that whatever the hazards and difficulties, and however strongly the subject claims the message, it is possible to make remarkable achievements in communication through the medium. The source of photography's effectiveness lies largely in the complex coexistence of precision

and ambiguity within the photograph, and between the photograph and the world surrounding it.

Equally, the attainment can remain elusive, vanish as surprisingly as it appeared in a layout of photographs, and one may be left like the alchemical philosopher, staring into his cloudy alembic, searching for the Stone which formed and dissolved again in the blinking of an eye. Most of the time, though, the world fills up, not so much with the perfected results of great works, but with piles of often prettily designed philosophers' pebbles, which nevertheless serve to instruct, to keep doors open, and to break a few windows along the way.

Endnotes

[1] J.M. Heaton, *The Eye* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1968), p.37.

[2] This is enlarged upon by Heaton who points out the schizoid nature of perceptions which, in the absence of connection between the visual field and the visual world, can encompass only a series of unrelated presents; allowing of no understanding and permitting no action (p.299). Jorge Luis Borges' story 'Funes the Memorious' from his collection *Labyrinths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), is a fiction dealing with exactly that situation.

[3] V. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Gottingen: European Photography, 1984), p.6.

[4] W.M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1953), especially p.122.

[5] E. Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts* (London: R.R Bowker, 1974).

[6] R. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fortuna/Collins, 1977), p.17.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] M. McLuhan *Understanding Media* (London: Sphere, 1967), p.202.

[9] R. Barthes, 1977, p. 20.

[10] Ibid., p.23. And Barthes' view was that: "It will suffice to define photogenia in terms of informational structure. In photogenia the connoted message is the image itself, 'embellished' (which is to say in general sublimated) by techniques of lighting, exposure and printing. An inventory needs to be made of these techniques, but only insofar as each of them has a corresponding signified of connotation sufficiently constant to allow its incorporation in a cultural lexicon of technical 'effects' (as for instance the 'blurring of movement' or 'flowingness' launched by Dr. Steinert and his team to signify space-time)."

[11] R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, R. Howard, tr., (London: Cape, 1982).

[12] S.D. Lowe, *Stieglitz: a Memoir/Biography* (London: Quartet, 1983). On p. 64 the author writes: "He could open the bound volumes of sheet music where he chose, plunge with voluptuous sentimentality into piano adaptations of tragic arias from the major operas of Wagner, Strauss and Verdi or a 'Potpourri pour piano' that included themes from Gounod's *Faust* and even enjoy the latest music hall serenades of the kind my pianist grandmother (Elizabeth Stieffel Stieglitz) referred to as *Schmierkase*."

[13] A classic approach to this question is made by Rudolph Arnheim, in *Art and Visual Perception*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1956 and 1967).

[14] Virginia Woolf, in *The Waves*, achieves a powerful isomorphism of her words with the rise and breaking of waves, and the ebb and flow of tides, in her account of the incidents and patterns in the lives of her protagonists.

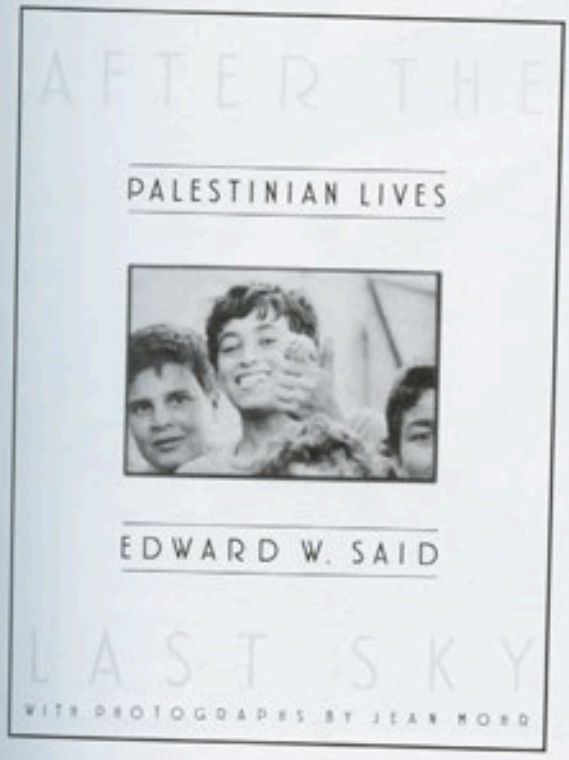
[15] A.L. Yarbus, *Eye Movements and Vision* (New York: Plenum Press, 1967), especially pp. 171-196, regarding eye movements during perception of complex objects.

[16] L. Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976).

[17] W.H.F. Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: 1844; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1968), III, np.

[18] *Aperture*, 1957, Volume 5 No. 2, p. 56, "An Experiment in Reading Photographs."

Book Review



After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives
Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr
Pantheon, 1986.

How does one *represent* other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the "other")? Do cultural, religious, and racial differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico-historical ones?

With these and other crucial questions concluding his critical work *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said sought to characterize the challenge and complexity of the scholar's role in representing the forces, currents and ideas that make up any particular culture. The force of representation, he argued, resides as much in the method and language of analysis as in the actual material presented. Reflecting this concern, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* offers a view of Palestinian life, but also deals in a fundamental way with the process of representation, both through words and pictures.

Intended on the one hand as a counterbalance to the oversimplification and frequency of prevalent Palestinian stereotypes in the Western media—pitiable refugees or bloodthirsty, irrational "terrorists"—this effort is a fervent attempt to delineate a Palestinian "identity" not by articulating one "authoritative" view, but through a multiplicity of versions to somehow encompass the experience of a diverse and scattered people.

Said, a Christian Palestinian whose family fled Jerusalem in 1947, grew up in Egypt and now lives in New York and teaches at Columbia University. He openly cites his middle-class background and professional status as potential filters through which his view is constructed. Such self-probing attention to the problematic of representation recurs throughout the text, and ultimately belies the straightforward clarity of Mohr's black and white photographs, which present many diverse views of Palestinians: men, women and children, at home, at work in the fields, in the office, factory or market, and at play.

Mohr's camerawork, drawn from a series of extended visits to the region since 1967, implies a careful attentiveness both to the many people he met and to the accumulated detail of personal artifact. Consistent with his previous collaborations with John Berger, Mohr strove to place the subject in clear connection with his or her surroundings.

While not unmindful of formal pictorial elements, Mohr did not seek out harsh light and shadows or extreme camera angles to view people as exotic objects in a "strange" land, techniques that have become staples of the rather vague genre sometimes labeled "street photography." People are not used as pictorial elements, but rather are seen as actors within their surroundings, so that the primary force of the pictures stems from the gestures of the subjects themselves.

In a produce market in the old city of Jerusalem, for example, we see a man in turban behind large containers of vegetables which are, in turn,

Amman, 1983. Baqa'a camp.

being looked over by a passerby carrying a briefcase. While employing the graphic elements of the arched hallway as a frame and taking note of the repetitions of the produce as a visual detail, Mohr foregrounds the process of work in delivering produce, as well as a certain tension between seller and buyer.

In many of the photographs, and especially the family portraits, there seems to be an open awareness of the photographer and a cautious willingness to take part in the documentation process. Seated around a plain meal in a simple tent dwelling, we see a man and four children. The various family members either look away deferentially, smile nervously or stare with curiosity directly into the camera. In some cases the awareness of Mohr's presence takes the form of open confrontation or playfulness, as when a young boy throws a stone in his direction, or when a pair of young girls in the street peer up at him expectantly, one pointing a camera.

On the whole, though, one could say that the pictures, if viewed without reading the concurrent text, make no clear departure from accepted photo-documentary practice. And the captions are also conventional, listing place and date, with perhaps a brief phrase of description that seldom refers to the particular individuals involved.

A casual viewer could, in fact, come away from looking solely at the pictures with a comfortable feeling of having "understood" what this book is about. Upon reading the text, however, any such casual impression is shattered. Certainly, the visual evidence is important in showing certain physical qualities and situations. But as Said explores the various states of Palestinian life, the pictures are transformed from apparently conclusive declarations into pointed questions. The process by which this relationship between text and image unfolds is perhaps the book's most radical departure from conventional modes of cultural representation.

Said's text is a multi-directional patchwork, with personal anecdote from a range of sources interwoven with political/historical events and social or economic observations. Ranging from time of crisis to everyday activity, from clinical detail to metaphoric imaginings, from deep, irony-laced anger to carefully humanistic assertions of a nationalist spirit, Said consciously strives to reflect the splintered, disconnected nature of Palestinian experience, however remotely shared.

This manner of revealing and counterposing various insights is integral to the meaning of the text—a point returned to repeatedly in various formulations. Noting the formal instability of Palestinian prose and prose fiction, Said writes:

> **Our literature in a certain very narrow sense *is* the elusive, resistant reality it tries so hard to represent....the struggle to achieve form expresses the writer's efforts to construct a coherent scene, a narrative that might overcome the almost metaphysical impossibility of representing the present.**

This "present" for Palestinians includes a tangible absence of any shared national space, and the realities of dispossession, dispersal and discrimination, whether as persistent memory or future danger. It encompasses, as well, a people living variously in Israel, in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, or scattered through the region and world, most with little or no capacity to communicate or act cohesively with one another.

While not denying the value Zionism has held for many Jews in Israel, both in a restorative as well as in a concrete, material sense, Said consistently indicates how these gains have often come at the heavy expense of Palestinians—Muslim or Christian Arabs who, along with Jews, were natives of former Palestine. He traces some Israeli policies back to the traditional European colonialist view of the "Orient" as either a pristine space waiting to be filled with "civilization" or as a territory peopled by an undeveloped, and essentially inconsequential native population.

Though his stance toward Israeli policies and actions is clear, Said is very careful not to fall into a simplistic adversarial role. He does not attempt to project some monolithic malevolence upon Zionism, nor does he create a reductive view of the "oppressor" to mirror that of the "terrorist." He argues, instead, for the extremely fragile possibility of shared dialogue and greater cultural awareness in the face of enormous political and historical forces that all but preclude any role other than enemy between Arab and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian.

Yet Said's goal here is not to present inclusive analysis of Palestinian complexities; that task he has taken up at length in *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*. This is, rather, a complex inner view, whether of the state of exile or statelessness, or the stubborn effort to maintain a presence as Palestinians. It is above all an assertion of emergence that, the author maintains, will evolve with or without the existence of inter-cultural dialogue or understanding.

It is for this reason, then, that the processes of telling and self-definition are so central. Citing the particular difficulty of any attempt at self-definition contrary to conventional stereotypes, Said writes:

> **We ourselves provide not enough of a presence to force the untidiness of life into a coherent pattern of our own making. At best...we can read ourselves against another people's pattern, but since it is not ours—even though we are its designated enemy—we emerge as its errata, its counternegatives. Whenever we try to narrate ourselves, we appear as dislocations in *their* discourse.**

On one level, Mohr's pictures are used effectively in presenting an alternative view of Palestinians, simply by virtue of their obvious diversity. Beyond this, Said sees in Mohr's portraits of Palestinians an energy and adaptability, qualities he feels they share due to necessity. Mohr's willingness to show the people he photographed addressing the camera gives added weight to Said's view of self that is active, and not simply acted upon.

Gaza, 1979. Farm using refugee labor.

At the same time, Said's approach encourages the viewer to consider the photograph as something other than just a documentary vehicle. As the text evolves its own particular dynamic, it weaves in and out of reference to the accompanying photographs in an unpredictable way. Sometimes there is a literal correspondence in subject matter, while at other times the connection Said makes is more figurative or metaphorical. Writing, for example, of the cycles of dislocation and rebuilding experienced by many Palestinians, he points to the visual appearance of the often chaotic, semi-permanent dwellings. And in a different manner, Said uses a picture of a primitive scarecrow, made up of scraps of clothing and an old shoe for a head, to echo the fragmented nature and instability of place of Palestinian life. The scarecrow itself is never mentioned, and as an object it has nothing literally to do with Palestinians at all. This creates both a startling incongruence and a peculiar resonance, as the features of a very mundane artifact are employed as a metaphor—and nothing else.

In presenting a common theme viewed from a variety of angles, Said prevents the possibility of viewing the pictures—and by extention Palestinians in general—in only one way. This approach is reflected in five main sections of the book, which are shaped around general themes such as "States," "Emergence," and "Interiors," none of which is viewed with a

Damascus, 1983. The camp at Sayida Zeinab: refugees from wars of 1948, 1967, 1973.

single meaning. In the latter, for example, the inside of the home, the interior thoughts and feelings of a people, and the sense of living in the "interior" of Israel all intersect to illuminate a number of aspects of Palestinian life simultaneously.

Said makes an eloquent argument for the form and method of his presentation, but how well does it really function? The book will probably take on different meanings for different readers, but two general points can be raised. Although his self-reflexive approach is essential to the work, at times Said's insistent return to its fragmented or "dislocated" nature is overly burdened with post-structural jargon. A larger number of actual "fragmented narratives" and fewer references to them might have been more useful. And while we know the subjects in the photographs remain "without voice" due to the author's lack of access to them, any sign of reflection on the part of the photographer is virtually absent as well. One can't help but wonder what substantial contributions Mohr, an old hand at questioning the documentary process himself, might have made. On the whole, though, the text functions as a provocative array in which the questions and uncertainties, rather than simply being frustrating, have the effect of impelling the reader to explore further the Palestinian issue.

Observing Said observing Mohr's photographs is fascinating in itself. There are times when we are almost listening in on Said's inner thought processes as he peruses photographs of people and places he feels tied to, but with few exceptions does not know. He makes a conscious effort to remind us that we are, along with him, looking at pictures, rather than trying to create the illusion of "being there." In the process, Said recognizes what Berger in *Another Way of Telling* termed the "ambiguity of the photograph": that photographs can "quote from appearances" but cannot interpret meaning on their own. Said writes:

Jerusalem, 1979. The photographer photographed.

> **But in themselves these pictures are silent. They seem saturated with a kind of inert being that outweighs anything they express; consequently, they invite the embroidery of explanatory words.**

And embroider he does, at times in ways that create some revealing contradictions. On the one hand, Said skillfully uses background information to challenge the aura of familiarity summoned by "typical scenes." In one photograph, a group, mostly children, in a dusty shaded alley is seen wrapping and packing lush eggplants. The children view the photographer with apparent curiosity. The sight triggers in Said a nostalgia and longing for a longtime favorite food, which at the same time reminds him of a lost home. The less sentimental fact intrudes, that such a product, destined largely for export to European markets, is predominantly harvested using Palestinian labor.

Said further pierces the calm familiarity of the picture, citing the simple detail of a law governing Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, who must get:

> **...written permission from the military governor before planting either a new vegetable—for example an eggplant—or a fruit tree. Failure to get permission risks one the destruction of the tree or vegetable plus one year's imprisonment.**

A facet of economic domination in the occupied territories collides with the viewer's desire to attach a warm, sentimental aura to the scene.

And yet, while recognizing the "silence" of photographs and the need to place them in context, Said will at other times attribute enormous weight to particular meanings he sees them capable of making. In talking about a terraced landscape with stone buildings, walls, some trees and bushes he writes:

> **The dense mass of leaves, right and left, lend their bulk to the frame, but they too impinge on the slender life they surround, like a memory or a history too complex to be sorted out, bigger than its subject, richer than any consciousness one might have of it.**

Or of a portrait of a smiling elderly man wearing glasses with one lens cracked he comments:

> **What the photograph tells us is nothing so simple as a contradiction in the man's attitude to life...there is always going to be some interference in vision, as well as some disturbance for whoever looks at him. What is good and whole is never so good and whole as to overrule the bad, and vice versa....The effect...one realizes, is an imbalance in consciousness, as if having taken on our Palestinian identity in the world we have not completely brought into harmony the wildness and disorganization of our history with our declared and apparently coherent political, social and cultural personality.**

In cases like these, Said's observations, although useful in the larger context of the work, seem far-fetched and too extensive to be sustained by the picture in question. At one point he states:

> **Mohr's photographs here are evidence of a Palestinian ecology that is neither symbolic nor representative in some hokey, nationalistic way; rather, we are presented addressing the world as a secular place, without nostalgia for a lost transcendance.**

Well, saying so doesn't make it so. The status of "authentic voice" does not automatically confer the authority to mandate pictorial meaning. Said's occasional desire to do just this, to have pictures symbolize or "say" what he wants them to, clashes with his otherwise questioning treatment of the photograph as document.

But at the same time, Said's willingness to risk revealing his personal, subjective responses to the pictures, and his willingness to argue passionately in an openly partisan way is what gives this work its strength. There is never an attempt to pass off pictures either as "objective" fact or validation of one dominant reality. The photograph becomes, in effect, a locus of contention by virtue of the author's manner of presentation. The photograph can then not be reduced to a singular rhetorical tool or stereotype. In any effort at cultural representation this is a crucial achievement. In the end, it is the many-layered text that defines the thrust of this book, with the photographs used essentially as points of reference. This is not to belittle the skill in their making. They serve primarily as an integral component of Said's regarding his people's past, present and potential identity.

In this context, the photographs, when overlaid with the author's observations, remain more as a demarcation of distance and mystery: the distance of a people widely separated from one another, and a certain mystery, not in the conventional sense of an exotic "other" culture, but rather a more tangible mystery of a specific human existence, arrayed as brief fragments from an implied larger whole.

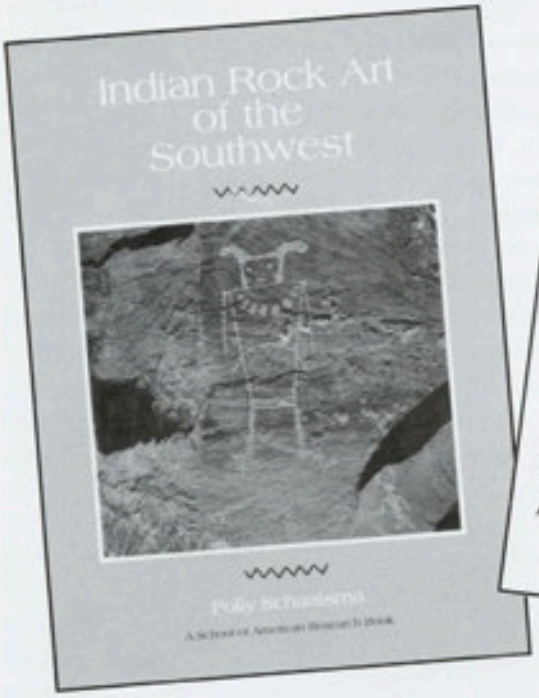
Instead of relatively comfortable documents of certain types of people in "recognizable" circumstances, the pictures are pointed reminders of lived experiences that we do not and to some extent cannot know—experiences which the author, and many like him, cannot return to, and about which the subjects themselves are largely unable to speak of. The captions serve to underscore this distance and mystery, echoing the voiceless silence of an unaccompanied photo exhibition. By crafting visual associations that lead the viewer to re-examine the photographs and question their potential meanings, Said calls on the viewer to consider the conditions of Palestinian life, and by extension to consider the potential realities and ramifications of U.S. involvement in the region.

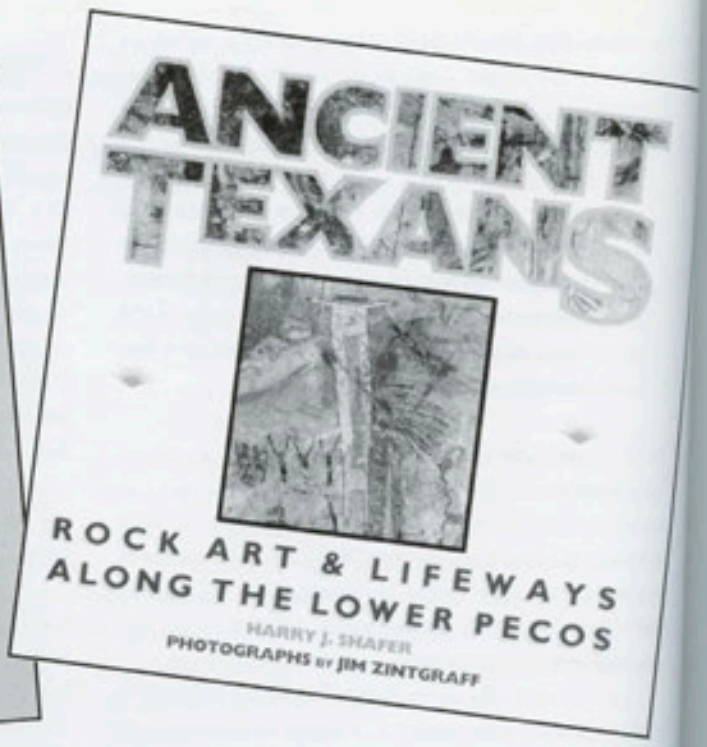
This is not the book it could have been. Had Said been able to accompany Mohr, as they had hoped to do, there might have been a wider range of more immediate voices and perspectives from Palestinians. Yet the very fact of separation which resulted in the book's form constitutes a major element of the author's view, becoming a metaphor simultaneously of dislocation and hope which reflects the inner mechanics of exile as well as self-assertion.

There could be many stories, facts and impressions which could be attached to these pictures, many potential versions of this book, a possibility Said leaves ample space for; a possibility moreover which is essential in any honest attempt at cultural representation or communication.

—David Haas

Book Review





Indian Rock Art of the Southwest

by Polly Schaafsma, with photographs by Karl Kernberger (School of American Research and University of New Mexico Press, 1980.)

Ancient Texans: Rock Art and Lifeways along the Lower Pecos

by Harry J. Shafer, with photographs by Jim Zintgraff (Texas Monthly Press, 1986.)

For years, common tourist lore has made much of the Indian rock art of the southwestern United States. State tourism agencies and their magazines have popularized the most accessible of the sites and thousands of visitors have walked behind the chain link fences to view the petroglyphs and paintings in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and elsewhere.

The curious tourists who puzzled about the meaning of the intriguing images out of the American past and wanted to know more, however, drew almost a complete blank when they got home to the local library. These two volumes are responses to that blank. In *Ancient Texans,* Harry Shafer, working with a number of other scholars, has produced a book aimed at a popular audience of ex-tourists to the Pecos River region of far West Texas where there is a large concentration of spectacular paintings, while Polly Schaafsma's 1986 volume, a softcover reprint of her 1980 book, is a more scholarly discussion of the petroglyphs and paintings in a six-state area.

The books are interesting to photographers from several angles. First, both volumes struggle with the problem of representing this unexpected and impressive art to the readers. Both depend largely on photographs of the images, and because of the failings, lapses and weaknesses of the medium, both find it necessary to supplement the photographs with tracings of the images, as well as imaginative sketches, photographs and drawings of artifacts. In these volumes photography serves its most utilitarian function—illustration—and together the two books provide a commentary on such weaknesses in photographic illustration as problems of scale, framing and emphasis. However, they also demonstrate the pressing necessity of illustration and the considerable virtues of the medium for illustration. Ultimately,

the strengths of the photograph here derive precisely from their utilitarian function, from their attempt (in the face of all epistemological commentary to the contrary) to make photography a transparent medium functioning solely in the service of accurate transmission of other images.

There is something else about these books which makes the photographer keep going: they are both fundamentally about the uses of graphic art in culture. The paintings and engravings which are the topic here were THE means of graphic expression for ancient Americans before written language. The scholars represented in these volumes have much to say about the rhetoric of graphic arts in non-literate culture, all of which raises interesting questions and points towards suggestive parallels in our own culture. Reading about archaic American rock art turns out to be a way of thinking about all the reasons why modern American point black boxes at things and click away.

Polly Schaafsma's *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest* defines major rock art styles and periods over a region reaching from Utah and Nevada south to the Mexican border and from California to far western Texas. She establishes seven major styles which represent cultural groupings from the archaic period (pre 500 BC) to Navajo and Apache art (post 1700 AD). The undertaking is more complex than it may seem; many rock sites display art from not only several historical periods, but sometimes several distant cultural groupings. The task of identifying historical evolutions is made even more complex by the fact that archaeological and anthropological information is scanty or absent for many of these times and places.

Schaafsma is careful to make explicit her assumption that different styles reflect differences in culture. She views each art work as a record of "the ideological component of a prehistoric social system." Moreover, she is concerned with establishing the function of various styles and sites; some she identifies as sacred shrines, some as community bulletin boards. Archaeologists have, until recently, been so exclusively concerned with art as a means of establishing chronological sequences that Schaafsma's seems an almost radical approach. But

White Shaman. Majestic costumed ghostly human figures accompanied by abstract symbols painted in red, yellow, orange, black, and sometimes white pigments are characteristic of the Pecos River Area. Original in color.

Detail of anthropomorphic figures, Great Gallery. Photograph, Karl Kernberger.

the tide of interpretation seems to have turned when anthropologists as diverse as Schaafsma, Shafer, and John and Malcolm Collier (in *Visual Anthrolopology*) all are proceeding on the assumption that images reflect the cultures which produce them.

The volume is illustrated with more than 250 photographs, including 32 color plates, most of them by Karl Kernberger. It is a book which is impossible to read in the ordinary sense. Instead, you read, then stop, hunt up the illustrations, look, then read some more. Throughout, the photographs counter the text. Schaafsma describes the identifying characteristics of a style; but you do not fully understand until you see the photographs. The looking frequently takes longer than the reading, and that alone is testimony to one of the real strengths of this volume: Schaafsma was aiming at comprehensive coverage of the southwest, and Kernberger has indeed comprehensively photographed a representative selection of the rock art of that area. That alone is a formidable achievement.

But formidable may seem too strong a word. After all, these are not great photographs. What they are is serviceable illustrations. But this book is a strong testament to the humble strength and plain necessity of "mere" illustration. Karl Kerberger has hauled camera and equipment over thousands of miles of trackless desert, climbed cliffs and slipped down canyons— not to create great images or individually memorable impressions, but simply in an attempt to use photography as a neutral means of transmission for an image created by someone else. And we are all in his debt that he has done so. For without photographers like Kernberger and Jim Zintgraff of *Ancient Texans* the indigenous art of southwestern America would be unknown to us, and (given the rate at which it is being destroyed) largely unrecorded and irretrievable.

The photographs, of course, have their problems as illustrations; they do not completely capture the images they represent. They present in small, discrete squares art works which sprawl, creep and explode in a continuous barrage over sometimes hundreds of yards of rock. They present flattened images of works which are inscribed or painted on curved, cracked, projecting rock surfaces. They reduce to a

San Juan Anthropomorphic Style petroglyphs, San Juan River at Butler Wash, Utah. Largest figure is between 4 and 5 feet tall. Photograph, Philip Hobler.

3x3 rectangle a shaman figure which in the cave towers seven feet tall and looms forward over you because of the projecting curve of the rock. And, by recording primarily the darkest of the paintings, the deepest of the carvings, the photographs simplify the swirling palimpsest, the accretion (in some sites) of thousands of art works put one on top of the other.

And there are the limitations and interpretations imposed by the composing eye of the photographer who stands constantly between us and the reality of the original. This is particularly so in the case of some of the sites where the visitor is faced with a rock surface 40 yards long and 20 feet high covered with layer upon layer of superimposed images. The photographer must not only select from this, but will usually select what seems to be a grouping. Choosing and framing inevitably composes groupings for the viewer which certainly influence the way we consider that "example." Clearly, photography profoundly mediates our perception of this art work.

The authors of these two books are aware of the weaknesses of photography as an illustrating medium. Schaafsma has supplemented the photographic representations with numerous line drawings, and Shafer has used line drawings and watercolors. Terence Greider in *Ancient Texans* talks explicitly about the technological problems of recording the artwork in various ways—through copies, full scale tracings on clear acetate, and photography.

In spite of the difficulties and weaknesses of photography as a medium of illustration, however, both of these books depend on photography as the primary means to inform us about the art. We stand reminded that photography is a means of transmis-

sion of graphic information about the world. What's more, though imperfect, it is consistently superior to any other means commonly available. And knowledge of the world, albeit imperfect knowledge, is a worthy master to serve. Without the photography of "mere" representation, we would not in any way *know* this body of art work, a collection which is compelling and intriguing.

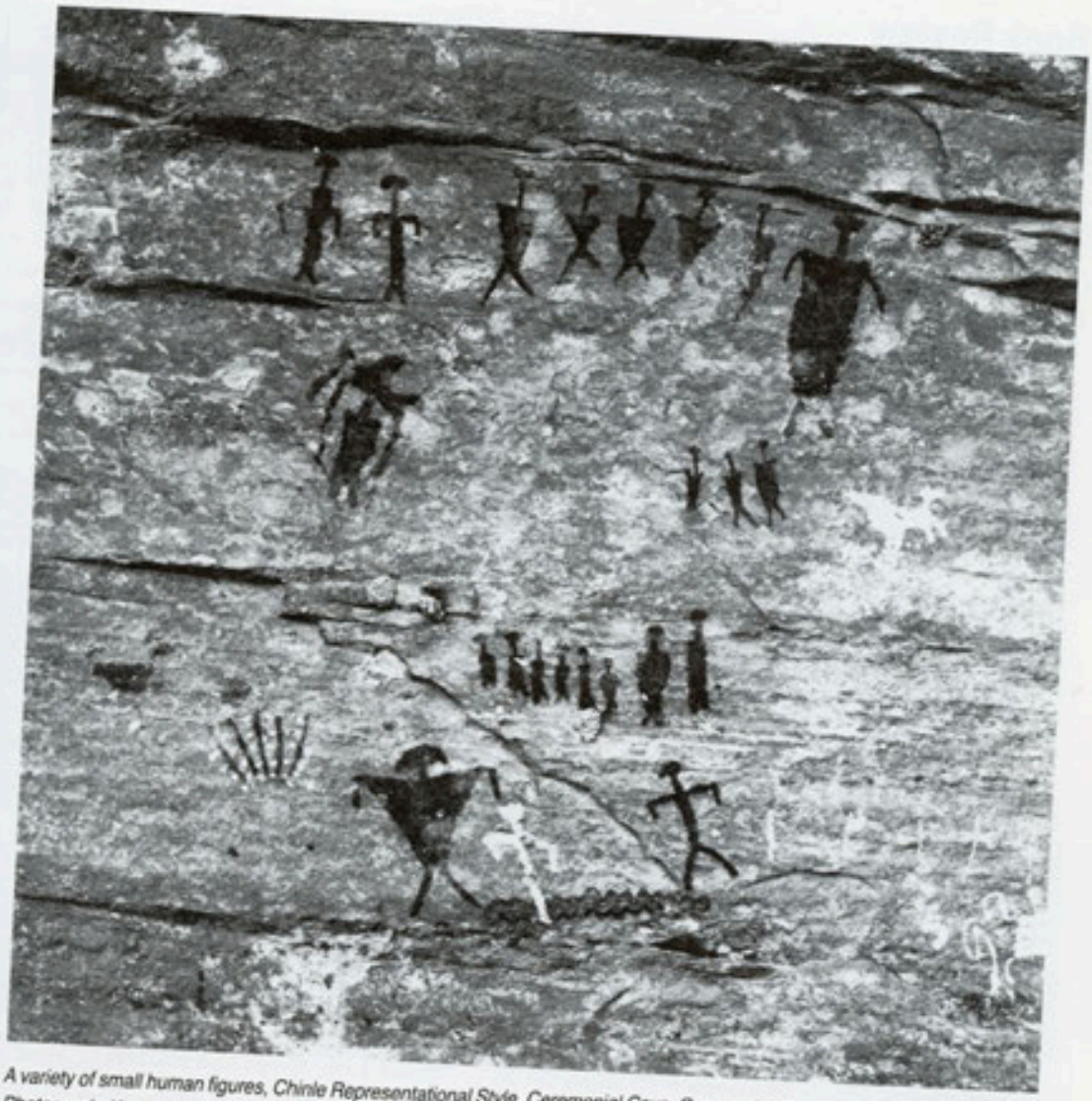
Ancient Texans is both narrower and deeper than Schaafsma's volume. It focuses entirely on a limited geographic region along the Pecos River in southwest Texas (outside the region covered by Schaafsma) where startling rock paintings are found in many caves and rock shelters. The book attempts a multi- disciplinary description of the culture which produced this art. Although different painting styles are found in the area and there are other material remains such as painted pebbles, one stable and very slow-changing culture gave rise to all of these; hence the task of description is simplified. The volume begins with an imaginative recreation of a year in the life of the hunter-gatherers who were the Pecos people from 8,000 BC until approximately 1,000 AD, and continues with articles by various authors on the environment, the archaeological record, and the diet and likely communication techniques of the people.

The centerpiece is a segment of their artistic production, anchored by a group of 42 color plates of the rock paintings, taken by Jim Zintgraff. The volume concludes with sections on the functions of rock art for modern hunter-gatherers in Australia and Africa, and on shamanism. Since Newcombe and Kirkland's first work on these paintings in the 1930s there has been general agreement that many of the bizarre figures portrayed may be shamans. Shamans were ritual specialists, masters of insight and wisdom, who practiced altered states of consciousness frequently by using hallucinogens. The presence of hallucinogenic mescal beans at many levels of several archaeological sites has since reinforced this opinion.

The volume is lavishly illustrated throughout—by line drawings, watercolors which recreate scenes from the daily life of these archaic Indians, maps, tables, charts and color photographs of everything from excavations to fossilized excrement. But, as with Schaafsma's book, the photographs of the paintings are what make the book live. Only archaeologists would be interested in this culture had they not left such paintings, and Zintgraff's color plates are as close to the originals as anyone could want. Their size and detail make them superior to anything in Schaafsma's volume. But then they are the result of twenty-five years of effort by one photographer, who returned to the same sites again and again as equipment and technique evolved. The scenes they portray are startling and compelling—enormous shaman figures with lavish detail and sophisticated use of color, combined with animal figures of great size and power, and unidentifiable, almost surreal images—the "pregnant flea" and "the TV"—which occupy positions of such importance that a viewer cannot help but conjecture about their meaning.

Ancient Texans focuses as much on the culture as it does on the paintings. The volume discusses from many points of view the function of graphic designs for these hunter-gatherers. Clearly, these paintings were not "art" for the Indians who created them. In only a very few is there any sense of play or of sheer decoration. Instead, they served a spectrum of cultural needs—some of them essential to the cultural identity and continuation of the groups. Though we cannot know precisely what a given painting means, we can be relatively sure that the paintings in general served the following functions: (a) to claim territory; (b) to assert identity—that a particular band had lived in a certain shelter; (c) to celebrate and or record critical liminal events—births, puberty rites, wars; and, (d) to assist in the memorization of critical information which was transmitted during important rituals.

No photographer can read these essays without realizing how parallel these uses are to the uses of photography for our culture. My insurance agent tells me I can't prove I own any object unless I provide him with a picture; the identity of almost every social group is cemented with group pictures—from soccer teams to class reunions. Even people who rarely take snapshots are moved to do so when there's a new baby, a prom, a wedding or a birthday. Only remem-



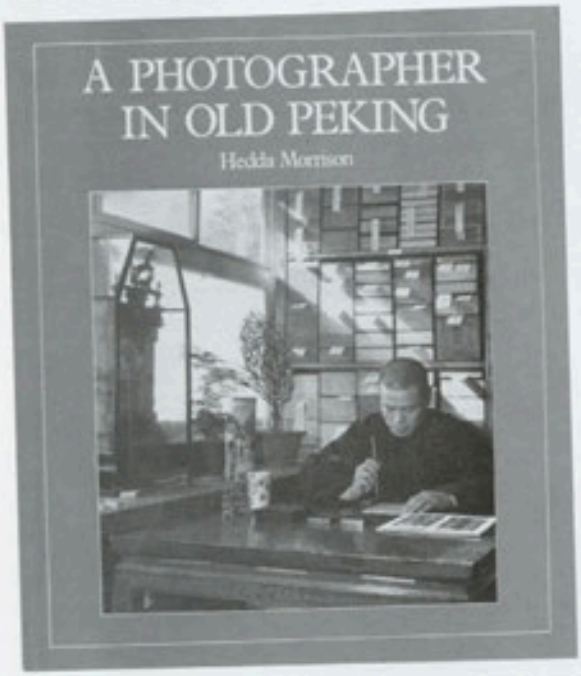
A variety of small human figures, Chinle Representational Style, Ceremonial Cave, Canyon del Muerto. Photograph, Karl Kernberger.

bering culturally significant information seems to have no obvious parallel in our society, where photography is too often confined to the surfaces of our lives. But the parallel does exist, as a Walker Evans or a Gene Smith shows. Even for us, photographs may occasionally serve as reminders of moral imperatives and social injustice.

These two volumes, then, explain these images in a way that tourists with their instamatics can readily understand: these works are equivalent to the family's photo gallery. What's more, it is partly through the efforts of photographers like Kernberger and Zintgraff that we are enabled to know, study, and in some fashion preserve their albums. Were it not for photographic illustration, we should know far less of such exotic fields as archaic Indian rock painting and be denied the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which we reflect them, and they us.

—*Stephenie Yearwood*

Book Review



A Photographer in Old Peking
by Hedda Morrison
Oxford University Press, 1985

Images of China have long had a grip on the Western imagination; thus, as China has opened up in the last ten years, we have eagerly welcomed the new images of it which have appeared. In the midst of this influx of new photos, Hedda Morrion's *A Photographer in Old Peking* emerges from the past, specifically from 1933 to 1946, to bring us a record of places, events, customs, and people in pre-liberation China. It is a remarkable book, both for the quality and depth of its images and also for its refusal to provide political or social commentary about a country which was in the midst of turmoil and change. Instead, Morrison creates through her photographs a study of harmonious elements in Chinese culture still present today.

Morrison, eager to leave the political climate of 1930s Germany, went to Peking in 1933 to become the head of a major photographic studio staffed by seventeen male Chinese employees. She had trained as a professional photographer, but she called these years in China her "formative" years. A number of her photographs from those years, including ones of furniture, buildings, theatrical performances, and crafts had appeared in such books as George Kates' on Chinese furniture; but the more than two hundred in this collection have waited 40 years to appear. It is as though they have been in a time capsule, brought out only now to give us a vivid contrast between the old and new Chinas, made especially eloquent by the quality of the prints. Older texts, such as Kwok Ying Fung's *China*, were printed on wartime paper and cannot compete with the quality of Morrison's reproductions. Her work is, furthermore, more personal and intimate than other recent texts such as Burton Beers' *China in Old Photographs 1860-1910* (Scribner, Museum of the America China Trade, 1978). Moreover, her work was often done under trying circumstances: supplies were difficult to obtain; she had no reliable or safe flash equipment; her subjects often had to pose and remain quite still in order to create clear images. Interior shots were frequently out of the question. One murky image of a dust storm in winter makes us realize how often conditions were not good for the sharp images that constitute the collection.

The book is elegantly produced on quality paper, painstakingly designed, and carefully documented. Morrison has ordered the images by dividing them into categories and introducing each category with a brief essay. The sections range wide: "Walls, Palaces and Parks," "Temples and *P'ai-lou*," "Street Life, Shops and Markets," "Food and Entertainment," "Arts and Crafts." In addition, there are maps so the reader can locate street names and landmarks in order to envision geographical details. Such devices, however, are most meaningful to those who have seen modern Beijing, and want to imagine former street patterns. The text is often separated by several pages from the photo itself, a design which leaves the photos uncluttered by excessive text, but also taxes the viewer/reader to remember and connect sometimes distant points which have a number of textual and visual interruptions between them. Another minor irritation is some repetition in the text: we are told, for example, several times about the custom of burning symbolic paper coins at funerals

Buddhist nuns in the West City with musical instruments. They were very devout followers of the Buddha and offered to provide me with a refuge if ever I needed it.

and festivals. But other information, especially about Chinese theatrical conventions and how song birds are trained as pets, is vividly described and enriches the images.

Seen in terms of a personal vision, Morrison's photographs are loving, sensitive, probing. But as a social or political document, it is limited—shaped by a vision that focused on the cultural history of the country and the cheerfulness and fortitude of the Chinese rather than the difficult conditions of their lives and the political ferment of those times. Her text comments only briefly on the Japanese invasion, and she acknowledges in one paragraph the "hardship and grinding poverty" which were a part of everyday life during those years in China. Instead of social commentary, she provides a personal reminiscence of the conditions of her stay in Peking and reveals her love of the people and of the city. She gives details about religious practices, climate, festivals, her association with Chinese theater, and the foreign community in Peking at the time. Both the text and the images record the old China just as it was on the brink of enormous upheaval, but both include only a hint of the forces

Beggar woman and her child. Over the years I often saw her and she was nearly always pregnant.

present then which were to bring irrevocable change.

The heart of the introductory essay is an explanation of the blending of the major ideologies which have shaped Chinese culture and belief—Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Morrison thoroughly understands these elements and how they have merged or conjoined to form the foundations underlying Chinese thought even today. Her understanding of that synthesis informs her selection of photographs in the collection. Morrison saw the "uncomplaining and cheerful fortitude" of the people, the harmony in their lives and culture; her book, by piling image upon image, recreates that harmony for the reader—even though we know that in the 1930s and 1940s China was racked by war and fermenting with revolution.

In a postscript she discusses her return to China in 1979, and again in 1982 when she realized how completely "her" China was gone forever—making her photos of those days even more precious. She recognizes that the Chinese are better off now than in the 1930s, but her nostalgia for what has disappeared is the strongest impression in the postscript. Her selection of the images for this text, after having returned to China forty years later, reflects both her sense of loss for what is gone and a recognition of elements which she saw again on her return. One can only wonder about the larger oeuvre from which these images were selected, her selection process, and her internal monitors and criteria which emphasized the positive elements in Chinese culture. Since she makes no mention of censorship or limitations on the subjects she could photograph, the monitoring is evidently her own.

While the quality of all the photographs is impeccable, several sections of images deserve individual comment. The two which struck me most are "Temples and *P'ai-lou*" and "Arts and Crafts." The former provides a wide-ranging survey of temples, altars and other religious structures from Buddhist, Taoist and Lamaist traditions. The *P'ai-lou* (archways) in this section are records of now lost structures. The images of traditional structures reinforce the atmosphere of peace which pervades the volume; there is no disturbance in this society. Sometimes the structures themselves are the heart of the image, but one remarkable photograph captured both a spiritual and a human moment. Nine Buddhist nuns are gathered for their devotions, each with musical instruments, heads shaven, robes severe. The older nuns in front are lost in their meditations, but two younger nuns at the back look boldly at the eye of the camera—not fully bound by their spiritual duties and understandably distracted by the foreign woman who is photographing them.

"Street Life, Shops and Markets" is the liveliest section, full of people, activity, action and the texture of life in Peking. It also illustrates that as much as China has changed, customs and national character are tenacious. There is still harmony and happiness in China. In today's China small children still enjoy the freedom of the "no-diaper" fashion, wearing split crotch trousers just like those in Morrison's grouping. Toy sellers still fringe the market area; women sit in the winter sun to sew; outdoor barbers still shave heads in the crisp autumn air; scrolls of calligraphy and traditional paintings hang outside craft shops. The animation and pleasure of street life in China are still integral to both the Chinese and to the images which visitors bring back from a stay there. Of course, there are contrasts between the new and the old. The rickshaws are gone today; there are no camels in the streets of Beijing; elaborate funerals are not allowed. The rare images of social distress in the collection are clouded by her text. The image of the woman beggar with her child carries the caption, "Over the years I often saw her and she was nearly always pregnant," a comment which shifts the blame to the victim rather than to social conditions. The photograph of the "derelict actor" and his son in a opium den is coupled with the comment that the actor died but "the people of the opium den cared for the little boy." The caption's focus on the humanitarian act of the people in the opium den deflects the emphasis from the social problem.

"Walls, Palaces and Parks," like "Temples and *P'ai-lou*," is the most static section. Snow and bare trees highlight the lines, the shadows, and the permanence of the walls and palaces and parks. There

Another popular pastime was skating. This veteran skater used to perform on Pei Hai, and in his younger days had performed for the Empress Dowager.

is a quietness to these buildings that fixes the elements of China's past which we recognize in China's present. Still, the images which may linger the longest with the viewer are those of individuals: the ice skater, the antiquities dealer, the nun, the young player of a moon guitar and the older flute player, especially the weathered old palace eunuch. These loving portraits of the Chinese people are testimonials to Morrison's attachment to China and to her understanding of Chinese culture. Thus, the book expands our vision of those positive elements from China's past. When we are immersed in Morrison's images of China, our own mental images (from other sources) of starving, suffering, war-torn China in the 1930s and 1940s fade, at least temporarily.

—Mary Lee Field, Wayne State University
with Li-hua Yu, Bowling Green State University

Essay Review

Images of Individuation: Archetypes in *'Veruschka' Trans-figurations*

Rae Blakeney

Iron door barred to the River Elbe. Dye transfer, 40.5 x 40 cm (16 x 15¾ in), edition of 29. Original in color.

"Our work has nothing to do...with the surrender to the laws of the unconscious," declares Holger Trülzsch in his artist's statement for *'Veruschka' Trans-figurations* (Little, Brown and Company, 1986). Yet, the collaborative work of Vera Lehndorff and Trülzsch demands an accounting of its psychological dimension. A significant portion of its content is the depiction of a great psychological drama: the struggle of the self toward definition, the dialectical process of the self mediating between its inherently opposing tendencies of destruction and creation. Moreover, the social and aesthetic issues attending this work have a psychological side as well. What is so intriguing is that the "unconscious" aspect, rather than confirming what is conveyed at the surface, instead denies the immediate "conscious"

impression. Contradiction and paradox define the internal dynamics of the Lehndorff-Trülzsch images. It appears, in fact, that one of the work's greatest strengths is its capacity, not to provide answers, but to provoke questions.

Vera Lehndorff is central to every image, visually and conceptually, and the contradictions generated by the work are also focused on her. Lehndorff was a top fashion model in the sixties and used the name, Veruschka, in that context. She was an immensely successful model and also made films during this period. Veruschka played the model in Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. But today she says, "My only interest is in fusing into a background." It is true that in most of the photographs Lehndorff is made to "disappear." What the artists do is paint her body to blend into and become barely discernible from its surroundings. Then they photograph it. But one of the first questions to arise is, if Lehndorff's only concern is with disappearing, why is the book containing a decade of her art photography titled with the name she used in her modelling career? If the purpose of their work is to "dissolve" her, why was the most atypical photograph of the entire collection, the one which focuses maximum attention on her nude body, selected for the cover photograph? Is she using her body to sell her art? Or are we simply to dismiss the connections and apparent references to a commercial context because the nude body is an accepted art convention? Another troubling feminist question: why is it that only Lehndorff's body is painted and in that sense "manipulated" when, in fact, she has a male partner who presumably could also be painted? Is this a continuation of exploitation begun earlier?

The artists and Susan Sontag in her introduction do not deal convincingly with these difficult questions. They gloss quickly over the feminist and merchandizing issues and offer instead innumerable diversionary rationalizations for the work. Indeed, it is virtually impossible with this volume to resolve the disparity between the texts about the work and the work itself, nor can absolutely conclusive answers be found to any of the questions just posed. The only way to progress toward an understanding of this perplexing work is to completely disregard that which is usually an important component of contemporary criticism: the *word* of the artist. Even though statements of living artists are valuable as primary source material, even though they may illuminate an aspect of working methodology or of the actual creative process that otherwise could not be known, in this instance Trülzsch's statement is an outright rejection of content that is visually obvious, Lehndorff's is misleading if applied to the surface issues.

The texts aside, on the basis of the photography itself there still are no easy answers. That, in fact, is just another of its contradictions: initially the work appears to be *too* easy. In photograph after photograph we are presented with an environment in which the figure of Veruschka is hidden. Time and again she must be found. It is irritating, frustrating, but there is no choice. To look is to resurrect her. Veruschka's reclamation appears to be the sole reason for the work. It is as if the process were deliberately contrived to fulfill a fashion model's revenge: if Veruschka ever thought she functioned secondarily to the clothes she was showing, she has overcome this in her art photography. In the end, she emerges as the center focus of every image. The once-manipulated fashion model, it now appears, has managed to control completely the viewer of her art.

A consideration of the deeper levels of the work transforms altogether our view of it, even if it adds considerably to the complexity of the problems. The unconscious psychological content, on the one hand, lends an authority to this work that it might otherwise not convey, and on the other hand, is responsible for preventing us from conclusively answering any of the vexing questions confronting our preliminary assessments of the work. The photographs of Vera Lehndorff and Holger Trülzsch reproduce archetypal images of the self, and it is their involvement with these archetypes that both accounts for the durability of their work and exposes its shortcomings. From the standpoint of ordinary critical judgment it could appear that their work lacks conceptual force. Their working methodology—painting Lehndorff's body, concealing it in a landscape—and the game they insist we play, "find the hidden Veruschka," by themselves do not account for the capacity of the images to enchant us. But the urgency of the psychological drama, the drama of the self in the process of becoming, speaks to us from deep within. The arche-

Private detective in brown suit.
Cibachrome, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in), edition of 6. Original in color.

typal content, not the artists' technique, empowers their work to haunt our psyche. Trülzsch's public disavowal of a concern for these issues is unfortunate because it reveals that he or they are unwitting participants in the drama, simply drawn like moths to the flame. This is the case, no doubt, for if the artists were fully in command, fully aware of employing psychological archetypes in their work, they would not "get burned" by them as they sometimes do.

If Lehndorff and Trülzsch were really cognizant of the archetypes that sustain the work they would have seen, for example, that it was not necessary to treat the provocative series of androgyne images in such a heavy-handed manner. The impact of these photographs in which Lehndorff is painted in male attire is significantly diminished by their use of facile, often tasteless, symbolic devices to create visual sexual allusions. In most, she brandishes a revolver or rifle or holds suggestively a lighted cigarette or large cigar. What they do not comprehend or wish to acknowledge is that painted as a male, she does read convincingly as male. At the same time, however, her very visible breasts cause these figures to read as equally feminine. The very best of the androgyne images avoid the use of props to force their message and thereby strike and hold that powerful balance which characterizes the essential self in each of us: the archetypal self, the androgyne. The primary self, according to Jung's description, is equally male and female. Thus, paradoxically, the archetypal self is both sexual and beyond specific sexuality in that it derives its "steam" from the interaction of its dual personae. Lehndorff-Trülzsch's *Gangster in Red Vest* and *Private Detective* are deeply unsettling and, at the same time, enormously compelling images because they give expression to the tension contained in the archetypal self. We could say that the self recognizes the truth of these images because they accord with its own essential nature.

Jung's definition of the archetypal self is one of his most difficult concepts; indeed, he did not himself seem fully to understand it or grasp its implications. To embrace the notion we accept that, in spite of biological chromosomes and societal encoding, we possess the psychological attributes of both sexes. The repercussions of such an idea are far-reaching and revolutionary. We have not yet placed, with unbiased motives, the issues of sexual

Stone head, Rome 1969 (photographed by Rubartelli). Original in color.

identity and social equality under the lens of psychological identity and equality. Doing so would obviously render racial hierarchies obsolete, however subtle, and stigmas attaching to sexual preferences. But consequences of Jung's theory could also be extended to include as inappropriate the pressuring of women into fulfilling a biological "destiny." It would mean acknowledging that men also possess the "feminine" capacities to be "nourishing" and "connected." What the Lehndorff and Trülzsch androgyne images do in a social sense is serve as disquieting reminders of our residual reticence to acknowledge the fundamentally similar identity of the self in each of us. Jung's theory is truly difficult because to embrace it nearly all of us would have to relinquish some remnant of past dogmas we still cling to.

In terms of the work, the androgyne images serve as the touchstone to understanding its deeper psychological dimensions. In these photographs Lehndorff finds her way to her own essential self and meets the "Great Catalyst" to personal transformation, the alchemical Mercurius. Jung recalls Dorn's description of Mercurius as the true hermaphrodite:

> **This Mercurius is composed of body, spirit, and soul, and has assumed the nature and quality of all the elements....they also called their (Mercurius) Adam, who bore his invisible Eve hidden in his body....there is nothing more wonderful in the world, for it begets itself, conceives itself and gives birth to itself (*CW*, vol. 12, par. 426).**

Through this encounter with the Begetter within herself Lehndorff unleashes the transformation processes of her psyche and co-creates with Trülzsch the mysterious and haunting images of transfiguration. It is precisely because these images visualize, in a manner rarely seen, the psychological processes of self-individuation that they cannot be casually dismissed. Even if their creators unknowingly manifest the process, these images cannot be brushed aside because they contain essential and universal psychological truth.

That the images of individuation are universal to human psychological development is a fact copiously documented by Jung. In building his case he worked principally with the texts and images of the alchemists, recognizing in them a poetic and allegorical expression of the psychological processes of self-creation and definition. The process of individuation, simply stated, is the process of becoming a "whole," integrated personality. To Jung the alchemist's images were universal because they appeared in dreams and frequently occurred in instances of active imagination as well as in visual art. Alchemical images, in fact, may arise spontaneously in the psyche of any person who is undergoing significant psychological transformation, regardless of culture, time, or place. These images then, once depicted, can be regarded

as projections of the inner work of the psyche.

Since alchemy records a process of change we would expect it to have several phases. It does, but the process does not occur in the same order every time; it may occur only incompletely, and a single alchemical image may express several phases of the operation at once. The stages of the alchemical process roughly parallel the major events of religious ritual. For example, if taken in the order of religious ritual, the first step is a fire-operation known as the *calcinatio*. This is a reduction process in which the psyche, the alchemical *materia*, is prepared for its transformation by burning and reduced to its simplest components. In psychological analysis a problem must "burn" in the psyche; its energy must be consumed before a change can occur. In religious terms, an attitude of humility (reduction of ego) must precede conversion.

Similarly, the other stages of the alchemical process give poetic expression to the natural process of problem solving. The *solutio* is a water-operation, a baptism which cleanses the psyche. The purification is followed by sacrifice and death. The alchemical *mortificatio* is usually by fire, by water or by dismemberment. Psychologically, the significance of this death is that the old self must die in order for the new to emerge. The concluding phases of the alchemical process conjure images of creation, procreation *(coniunctio)*, and rebirth (*sublimatio*). In these final stages the conflicting oppositions within the self are united and the issue of this union is the new self.

The goal of the work of alchemy is to release the spirit which is imprisoned and sleeping in matter. Of this spirit in nature Jung says,

> **This is...an *anima mundi*, the feminine Physis who longs for the embrace of the One....She is 'the divine soul imprisoned in the elements,' whom it is the task of alchemy to redeem....The substance that harbours the divine secret is everywhere, including the human body. It can be had for the asking and can be found anywhere, even in the most loathsome filth (*CW*, vol. 12, par. 414, 421).**

The idea of the *anima mundi*, the sleeping, hidden or imprisoned spirit in matter, provides a general context for understanding the psychological basis of the Lehndorff-Trülzsch work, especially Lehndorff's early *Stone Head* from 1969, which set the stage for the subsequent work, and the photographs documenting a performance in 1971, grouped under the title, *Horzing Grotto*. Each of these photographs is startling in its portrayal of a feminine figure seeming to exist as a virtual captive of inert matter. Clearly, the *mysterium* that permeates the best of the nature pieces arises from the illusion they create of the *anima mundi*. At times the idea of "spirit in matter" is expressed, not as something bound in stone, but as something ethereal and elusive. Some of the photographs reproduce the experience of memory and projection as one might, in a fleeting recollection, "catch a glimpse" of a person who perhaps once inhabited a space. Several of the doorway pieces suggest this, particularly, *Inner Door, Black Door to the Garden*, and *Window Door*.

One of the most subtle but significant aspects of the work of Lehndorff-Trülzsch is the tension it maintains between inner and outer reality. The realism of the photograph is pitted against a subject matter that can only be described as metaphorical or even mystical. What is "actually" seen as an objective reality mirrors an inner process. Although the artists have concentrated on Lehndorff's physical body as the ground for the painted elements and the focus of the image, it is not simply her body that functions as the canvas for this work. It is her very "ground of being" that is portrayed.

On that panoramic ground of being, a ritual enactment of the love-death is carried out. This ancient theme, recurrent in mythology and literature, and which is also central to the psychological process of alchemy, animates all the works of the final section of the book, the *Oxydation* series. The love-death is the mystical process by which the universe psychologically comes into being. It is through the interaction of the male principle (in Jungian terms, *animus*) with the female principle (*anima*) that the "world" is repeatedly destroyed and renewed, recreated. In the neo-Platonic symbolism of the Renaissance it was held that this world-creating process was recapitulated in the act of love, that every climax was also a "little death."

The love-death in alchemical terms is the

coniunctio-solutio. While the *coniunctio* is usually symbolized visually as the male and female principle joined in conjugal embrace, the meaning of the *coniunctio* epitomizes the entire alchemical drama. Hence, it has the power symbolically to refer to other phases of the alchemical process, to collect the meaning of other phases, some of which are quite violent (whereas, the *coniunctio* does not itself signify violence or destruction but, rather, creation).

Many of the *Oxydation* photographs are forcefully violent, and simultaneously they are imbued with an unmistakable eroticism. The setting for the photographs is an abandoned, decaying fish market located on the bank of the Elbe river, a huge, open warehouse space with brick and iron surfaces that bear the cumulative effects of moisture and time. The choice of location may appear arbitrary, but in psychological terms it can hardly be seen as accidental. Water is a universal symbol for the unconscious. The position of the structure at the river's edge is a symbolic equivalent for the "edge of consciousness" and the river bed is an archetypal signifier for the current along which the psychic life flows (*CW*, vol. 5, par. 337). The choice of the site—a market for the creatures of the sea (the contents of the unconscious)—was ironic but altogether apt.

Echoing the *solutio* process, Lehndorff's body disintegrates with the paint peeling from brick. It is stained blood red against iron doors, dismembered with fissures in walls, riveted with bolts, electrified by dangling wires exposed to skin. That the *solutio* occurs at times apparently against her will gives rise to the association of it with acts of sacrifice. Jung uses the analogy from religious symbolism of a lamb led to slaughter. He quotes a portion of the Greek Mass in which "The lamb of God is sacrificed" [a loaf of bread is pierced at this point with a small lance (and the text continues)] "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water (*CW*, vol. 12, par. 417)." Overlaying the symbolism of the *solutio* (death, sacrifice) onto the *coniunctio* (union) inevitably calls to mind the idea of forcible violation. In *Pipe Driven Through Head* the connotation of a violent rape is unavoidable. In this photograph Lehndorff is leaning against a metal girder and her body is painted to imitate its flaking paint. Alongside a pipe is descending. At her head level the pipe angles sharply, and Lehndorff's face is painted so that the pipe appears to have penetrated her mouth. The area surrounding it is "blood" bespattered. That is, the metal girder behind her figure has oxydized, and the rust effect painted on her body is unmistakably rendered as blood.

Yet not all of the *Oxydation* images portray a victim. *Iron Door Barred to the River Elbe* depicts the feminine figure constrained under an iron bar bolt against two massive doors. Her head is placed on the doors at the convergence of a strong pattern of diagonal lines as if pierced by them. Even so, any suggestion of violence is offset and transformed by the visual richness of the overall surface of the doors. The overwhelming impression conveyed in this photograph is one of astonishing sensuality, of a bound but not unwilling captive, supine on possibly a golden oriental carpet. The uptilted head and closed eyes further underscore the idea of surrender, a welcomed surrender leading to release. In every sense a love-death is enacted in this piece, and the viewer participates. Through our changing perception we assist and become part of the process of change. What we see initially as violence changes before our eyes into an image of beauty. We ressurect that which is dying and restore it; we convert an image of destruction into a vision of sensual beauty.

In their collaboration Lehndorff performs the role of the archetypal *anima*, while Trülzsch assumes the role of surrogate-*animus*, for it is her drama that is staged. Together they orchestrate the production which leads ultimately to the *coniunctio*, the grand conjoining (psychologically, the resolution of oppositions within the self) culminating in the instant that light meets film inside the camera. The issue of this union, of course, is their visual work which further functions as a process documentation of the psychological operations.

In addition, the artists apparently want us to consider their preparatory process as an element in the "performance" because they include, at the end of the book, several photos documenting their methods in creating the *Oxydation* photographs. Indeed, given the love-death theme for this series it is impossible not to see their careful preparation of her body as a kind of foreplay. Their sensitive recording of every subtle nuance of light and color, casting, molding and painting her body to conform to its surroundings involves a heightened awareness, a heightened sensuality that is

essentially erotic and not altogether unlike that experienced in the act and art of making love. But most curious of all in this regard are the "after shots": Lehndorff outside the fish market encased in paint, bearing the weight of a heavy leather jacket. Another shot captures her in the car leaving the scene, stolid and mummy-like. The elusive spirit is again entrapped in matter, Lehndorff/Veruschka once more imprisoned in the contradictions of her identity. Again it will be necessary to descend the *solutio*, join in *coniunctio*, ascend in *sublimatio*. The work of alchemy, of individuation, of artistic creation is never completed, never perfected. It must always be taken up again—just as repetition in *circulatio* returns us to the questions of the beginning.

Accounting for the psychoanalytic aspects of this work has the effect of inverting and reversing our preliminary determinations about it. What appears as gimmickry on aesthetic grounds (their device of "painting her out") takes on profound significance at deeper levels of interpretation. Lehndorff's dissolution signifies the alchemical *solutio*, our recognition of her image constitutes the *sublimatio*. Similarly, what appears to reflect a carelessness about self with respect to social issues is also reversed by the depth analysis. Vera Lehndorff is not simply "worked upon," she is an active participant. She, too, prepares her body by painting it, and it was she who conceived the original idea for this work before she met her partner Trülzsch. The ideas for the sites and situations still are hers. If we take this information into consideration as we confront the psychological implications of the love-death in the *Oxydation* photographs, it is possible to argue that Lehndorff, far from taking a subservient or passive position, is assuming a role in this work traditionally reserved only for men. When we account for the unconscious content, she takes on the mantle of the archetypal Hero. Only the Hero has the courage to face the great unknown of the unconscious, to make the treacherous journey to the depths of the self, to encounter the monster and dissemble it. Only the Hero can meet all these dangers and survive. In every photograph Lehndorff is reclaimed from extinction, restored to the light of consciousness and accorded the victorious return that distinguishes the rebirth of the Hero.

We must contemplate, again and again, the enigma of the Lehndorff-Trülzsch photographs before a pattern becomes visible. Just as individuation eventually produces a new image of the self, we perceive at last the metaphor that enfolds the entire body of work. The theme is whispered from every image: the work is a record of passage, the passage from bondage to liberation. Even in the opening *Unveiling of a Woman* series and *Striptease*, Lehndorff depicts her release as she peals away and zips out of stereotypic roles. The *Flash* and animal series convey the experience and exhilaration of natural freedom. Then once her escape from convention is complete, we are presented the wondrous and compelling documentary of Lehndorff's journey into her personal underworld, to the region where liberation is secured for the deepest stratum of her being.

Book Review

Margaret Bourke-White, A Biography

by Vicki Goldberg

In the 1940s, there were a few women's names (besides those of movie stars and singers and Eleanor Roosevelt) well known to the general public: Sonja Henie, Babe Didrikson Zaharias, and Margaret Bourke-White. While Sonja twirled on ice, and the "Babe" smashed tennis and golf balls, Margaret Bourke-White hung out of airplanes with a camera in her hands. That kind of life, like the open cockpit airplane and the Speed Graphic, is now an artifact of American culture, but parts of the myth are still with us.

Vicki Goldberg, in *Margaret Bourke-White, A Biography*, did not set out to write cultural or photographic criticism, and that was probably a wise choice. The facts and fantasies of Bourke-White's life provide Ms. Goldberg with more than enough material for this one volume. Biographers inevitably face questions of selection, and with Bourke-White as subject these problems are enormous. The gossip and rumors about her were and are as numerous as the reports that exist in print and manuscript. All these sources, plus Bourke-White's many contemporaries who are still alive and very talkative, no doubt made Goldberg's task most complex.

The book straddles two biographical worlds: the mass market world of such books as Sara Davidson's *Rock Hudson*, and academic biographies like Arthur and Barbara Gelb's *O'Neill* or Leon Edel's work on Henry James. While *Margaret Bourke-White* contains too much scholarship and detail to make it a supermarket check-out rack favorite, the intended audience is clearly a general rather than an academic one. Whether this decision was Goldberg's or her publisher's is not clear, but her presentation of serious scholarship in a popular format and style is often disconcerting.

Goldberg presents her materials in a narrative format. She works at making Bourke-White's story interesting, which is odd since Margaret Bourke-White was a most interesting person. Goldberg holds back bits of information and reveals them later as surprises. For example, following several chapters on Bourke-White's rise to fame and, presumably, fortune, Goldberg tells us that she was broke. The author also avoids the frequent use of dates (several times I found myself trying to figure out when something happened). The book deserves a detailed chronology and, given the complexities of Bourke-White's life, this is a serious omission.

■ ■ ■

In a biography one searches for reasons and explanations, but the complexities of Margaret Bourke-White's personality are not easily solved. She was regarded by many people as an unpleasant person: arrogant, self-centered, and careerist. Goldberg hypothesizes that her unconventional and idiosyncratic upbringing left her deficient in the everyday social graces. Kindness and generosity were not normal responses for her. As an adult, Bourke-White consciously taught herself to be charming and kind, if the situation demanded. Colleagues complained of the disjunction between her demanding perfectionism during the working day and her ability to turn on the charm at night.

Much of this is explained by her upbringing. Joseph White, her father, was an inventor in the printing industry, obsessed with his work. Both parents were dedicated to a life of reason and self-improvement. As a child, Margaret was expected to achieve. Goldberg tells of the very young Margaret being trained to overcome her fear of the dark. Her mother initiated an after-dark game in which she and the child would run around the outside of the house in different directions to finally meet each other. The first night her mother ran quickly around three sides of the house, meeting the tiny Margaret after she had haltingly completed only one side. Each night Margaret's distance was lengthened until, eventually, she was happy to play outside alone after dark and, later, to remain in the house with her slightly older sister after bedtime while her parents took evening walks. Margaret's parents felt this regimen taught independence and fearlessness, and Goldberg suggests it accounts for Bourke-White's love of solitude and her courage. But most psychological thinking today

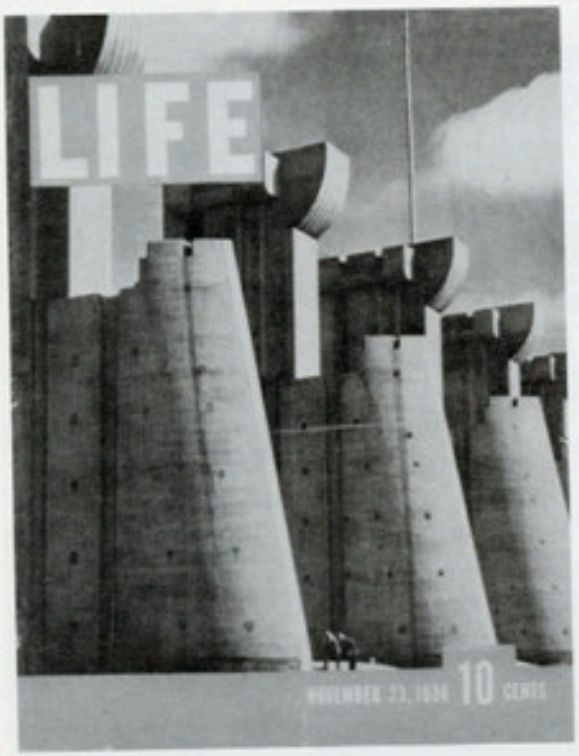
Flood victims, Louisville, Kentucky, 1937

would say such "training" is bound to leave scars—indeed, Bourke-White's many years in and out of analysis suggest that her upbringing of rigorous perfectionism had its negative as well as positive effects.

While few of us pass through our teens and twenties with grace and wisdom, this period was especially hard for Bourke-White. She was more awkward than the typical adolescent, and attempted to make friends with attention-getting performances such as wearing pet snakes around her neck.

Her father died while she was in college, and she married early. After two miserable years, she separated from her husband, finished college, and began her photographic career. Goldberg sees this failed early marriage as central to Margaret Bourke-White's need to achieve personal success and her reluctance to make longstanding personal commitments to men. But while this marriage no doubt shook Bourke-White's self-confidence deeply, my own feeling is that her relationship to her father and mother, her unusual upbringing, and her status as a middle child are probably more accountable for these deep-seated needs.

During her early years as a professional photographer in Cleveland, Margaret Bourke-White was not yet the worldly adult we associate with the image she (and *Fortune* and *Life* magazine) had created by the mid-1930s and '40s. She dressed for work in color coordinated suits, hats, high heels, gloves, and photographic dark-cloths. Her presentation of self was completely thought out, but she knew that to earn a living she had to make good photographs as well. She over-shot extravagantly, as she continued



First issue of Life, *cover by Margaret Bourke-White, November 23, 1936*

to do throughout her career, and she began producing the work which would eventually make her a success and, later, a "star."

During her twenties she was influenced by whatever social circles surrounded her at a given time. While photographing for the captains of industry, they were "the people that counted." At this time also, she rarely read newspapers and didn't follow current events at all. She was photographing the interior of a Boston bank during the evening after Black Thursday, October, 1929, and couldn't figure out why all the staff had stayed late at the bank, thus interfering with her work.

Bourke-White does not seem a very sympathetic heroine or a genuine person until she begins to travel and gain some cultural and political sophistication. It is interesting to speculate what sort of person might have emerged had she not come under the influence of, among others, Maurice Hindus, "a foremost Russian expert, a famous, even a heroic liberal." Would she have made her crucial first trip to Russia? Would her political education have had it's leftist bias?

But a person of considerable substance and very real dedication and ability does emerge from this youthful superficiality. Her life illustrates the human potential for growth and change. She never gave up trying to improve her work, even during her twenty-year struggle with Parkinson's syndrome. And she never gave up trying to improve herself either. But an element remains, throughout her life, of that young girl over-willing to please, trying too hard to please.

In the early fifties she was attacked by the red-baiting newspaper columnist Westbrook Pegler for her history of leftist alliances (the Film and Photo League, the League of Women Shoppers, the American Youth Congress, etc.), for her marriage to a playwright with leftist alliances, Erskine Caldwell, and for her books and films about Russia. In the midst of the HUAC frenzy it seemed as if her career might be ruined. But Margaret Bourke-White asked *Life* to let her cover the Korean conflict, and she produced a photo essay about a Communist guerrilla's defection to the government forces and his reunion with his family. After the publication of the photo essay, and a year-long lecture tour which followed it, her loyalty could hardly be questioned. But what can be questioned here is the depth of her political thinking and commitments.

Whether Margaret Bourke-White became a more likable person as she matured is hard to say. People's reactions to her continued to be strongly positive or negative throughout her life. Whole factories, from workers to executives, apparently "fell in love" with her. But others were quick to say, "everyone was her messenger boy."

Bourke-White was also frequently criticised for behavior that would go unnoticed in a male. In her twenties, she consciously flaunted the double standard, presuming that doing a man's work allowed her a man's sexual prerogatives:

Early in Margaret's career she was so successful she was rumored to be a front for a man; now [during World War II] men gave her credit solely for being female, and around *Life* she was soon

Margaret Bourke-White (from Life Magazine, © 1943, Time Incorporated)

labelled 'the general's mattress....' The world being what it is, some women certainly used sex for advancement, but whether they did or not many of the women who went to war as correspondents were accused of it.

While Margaret Bourke-White was hardly a conscious feminist, and while Vicki Goldberg's presentation is not ideologically feminist, there is much illuminating material about the contradictions, difficulties and ambiguities of Bourke-White's trek through the male dominated world of photography and news reporting. The question of *how* a woman ought to achieve success in a male dominated culture is one which feminists continue to debate. So, while Margaret Bourke-White's life is fascinating and

possibly instructive, there are many women for whom she could hardly be a role model.

The attitudes Bourke-White was most frequently criticized for—aggressiveness, determination, perfectionism, ruthlessness, strong sexuality—were seen as virtues in her male colleagues. Nobody demanded that men be "nice" and successful as well. But the mature Margaret Bourke-White seems to have been fairly immune to gossip and basically unaware of how much she was disliked around *Life*. For her, the work counted most.

Opting for work, and not family and personal life, is a choice few women have made on so conscious a level. While both men and women may question this choice, Bourke-White's honesty in this area (particularly her decision not to bear children) spared her much of the painful dilemma of family versus career. (Dorothea Lange boarded out her two sons at an early age to concentrate on her photography, and there was a great deal of suffering by all three.)

For all the information concerning Bourke-White's life that Vicki Goldberg provides, many interesting questions about that life remain unanswered. Why did America elevate Margaret Bourke-White to star status? Was it part of the *Life* magazine phenomenon and orchestrated by Time-Life or something deeper in the culture? What role did photography and femaleness play in her star status? Did she create the myth of the crusading photojournalist or merely bring it to its zenith? What has been the legacy from the tens of thousands of women she lectured to in the forties and fifties and the many women who emulated her?

And what about the work that Margaret Bourke-White valued above all else? Only a thorough critical assessment will guarantee her photography its place (or lack of it), in photographic history. While this sort of evaluation is beginning on the photographic work which has come out of the 1930s and 1940s, much remains to be done in analysing the area of cultural iconography—why did her images speak to the American public with such immediacy? What dreams, fantasies, and realities did her photographs fulfill?

An artist's production must necessarily be seen in terms of his or her social reality. To separate Bourke-White's photographs from the context of the times and approach them from a formal or aesthetic perspective would surely be a mistake. One study that comes to mind as a possible model for future work is Karin Becker Ohrn's *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*. Indeed, Bourke-White's situation is interesting for studying the questions which pertain to photographing for mass media distribution and for the questions of personal versus professional expression and ethics—questions which seem to be very much in the air given the proliferation of such films as *Salvador, Under Fire*, and *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

That Vicki Goldberg hasn't given us all of the answers only suggests the breadth and complexity of the questions Margaret Bourke-White's life and work raise. But, obtaining the biographical facts is always the first step, and Vicki Goldberg has done substantial ground work for future students and critics.

—Aneta Sperber

Society for Photographic Education 25th National Conference

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The SPE National Conference will be held in conjunction with the Houston Foto Fest and the Association of International Photography Dealers Conference.

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Edward Said, Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, will discuss *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives,* a photographic essay on the lives of the Palestinian people by Mr. Said and Jean Mohr, a Swiss photojournalist.

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Helen Hughes, an American photojournalist known for her work in the area of human rights in Chile, and **Chuck Kleinhans,** Professor of Radio, T.V. and Film at Northwestern University, and Co-editor of *Jump Cut*, will also speak.

Additional panels will address: Personal Expression in Contemporary Art-Making, Economic Survival, Women in Photography, History and Theory.
(Programming subject to change without notice.)

Conference fees, until January 30, 1988: SPE members, $65; non-members, $85. After January 30, 1988: SPE members, $75; non-members, $95. Please send check to: SPE 25th National Conference Committee, P.O. Box BBB, Albuquerque, NM 87197. Phone 505-268-4073.

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