Reflections from a Soul of Glass

Mills Lyon

REFLECTIONS FROM A SOUL OF GLASS

Spencer Mills Lyon

B.S. in Ed., Secondary Art

Southeast Missouri State University, 1975

A Digest Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the Lindenwood Colleges in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Art

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I have long had a "love-affair" with photography. As a teach-

er of photography and a "semi-professional" photographer, I desired

to further my study of photography by seeking a master's degree in

this field. In so doing, I have had many opportunities to examine

my feelings toward this subject and my relationship with it.

The purpose of this paper is to explore both my technical and

aesthetic relationships with photography. In examining these two

areas, I have also looked at my photographic past as well as the

photographic involvement in my present way of living.

In Chapter One I examine what photography has meant to me in

the past, what my life would have been like had I not taken an in-

terest in photography, and conclude by determining what photography

means to me now.

Chapter Two examines my approach to making photographs, how

the camera and I relate to one another, and concludes by examining

photographic style in the work of other photographers as well as in

my own work.

The third chapter looks at the advantages and disadvantages of

the medium, and I have stated my preferences and reasons for using

certain photographic methods.

I have not directly addressed the photographic work accompany-

ing this paper because it embodies only a small part of my overall

photographic endeavor. Furthermore, as one who works in a visual

art form, I feel that any work produced must succeed or fail on its

visual merits alone. Any attempt to explain, define, or analyze it

places it within a verbal perimeter which would be detrimental to

its visual freedom.

REFLECTIONS FROM A SOUL OF GLASS

Spencer Mills Lyon

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A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
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Chapter 1

SHOULDERING A PHOTOGRAPHIC CROSS

F-Stops Along the Aperture Way

I was introduced to photography by a boyhood friend when I was thirteen years old. The year was 1956, and for Christmas my friend received a basic darkroom set (no enlarger) and a Sears twin-lens camera. We set up the darkroom under the stairs leading into the basement (two army blankets made it dark enough to print; however, since the film was tray-developed, it could only be done at night). We spent many happy hours there, processing and contact printing two-and-a-quarter film. My friend's pet Chihuahua and my cousin Ina Ray were our most photographed subjects (but not necessarily in that order).

It was not until my senior year in high school that I acquired my first darkroom. By then, I had owned a couple of 35mm rangefinders and was a member of the school's newspaper and yearbook staffs. Through the work I did for the school I met and befriended a young woman whose father owned one of the town's largest studios. She worked for her father and took all of my high school's group pictures. From her I learned a great deal about developing and printing.

After high school I shot an occasional wedding and did all of the photography for one of the local realtors. In 1967 I was drafted into the Army where I was awarded a photographer's m.o.s. (military occupational status). In October of 1967 I graduated from the Army's thirteen-week school of photography at Fort Mon-

mouth, New Jersey. From there I was assigned to the Third Special Forces Group (Green Berets) at the J.F.K. Center for Special Warfare, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. There I underwent jungle warfare training as well as combat photographer's training. After twelve weeks at Fort Bragg, much to my surprise, I came down on orders for Europe.

My first European duty station was with the 139th Engineer Group in Karlshrue, Germany. Aside from general public relations work (promotions, re-enlistments, etc.), I also photographed Army-related news and feature events for the European editions of Army Times and Stars and Stripes.

Karlshrue was a large city (roughly 200,000 at that time) located near the German-French border. During World War II the city's core had been totally destroyed by Allied bombing, but for whatever reason, the outer limits of the city had escaped virtually unharmed. The places where these two styles of old and new met made for some interesting visual studies.

While stationed in Karlshrue I became close friends with a German national who taught photography for the Army through Special Services. She held a Master's degree in photography and through long and enjoyable conversations with her, my limited knowledge of photographic history was greatly expanded. I learned in detail of Niepce, Fox Talbot, Nejlander, Atget, Brassai, Kertesz, and Cartier-Bresson. She talked of these individuals with such reverence that I took it upon myself to personally experience as much of their past as possible. Thus I spent most of my free time

researching these pioneers and masters of photography; and when I could obtain a pass, I would explore where they had lived and worked, spending as much time there as possible. I never made it to Niepce's home at Chalon-Sur-Saone in France, but I did spend many afternoons walking and photographing some of the same Paris streets that Atget, Brassai, Kertesz, and Rejlander walked and photographed (Rejlander, of course, was in Paris for only a short time). While on leave to England, I saw the result of one of Fox Talbot's first successful experiments with the positive-negative system. It was a paper negative roughly the size of a baseball card and was part of the historical photographic collection at the London Museum of Science.

After an eight-month stay at Karlshrue, I was transferred to Kaiserslaughtern, Germany, where I was put in charge of a battalion photo lab. While in Kaiserslaughtern I won second place in an All-Army Europe photo contest sponsored by Army Times newspaper. My stay in Kaiserslaughtern was brief as I was shortly transferred to Baumholder, Germany, where again I was put in charge of a battalion photo lab. The remainder of my hitch was spent there, and in May of 1970 I was rotated back to the States and discharged.

In the fall of 1970 I entered Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in pursuit of a degree in secondary art education. During this period I helped finance my way by working as a freelance photographer. This included frequent assignments from the two local newspapers, The Bulletin

Journal and the Southeast Missourian, and commercial jobs from
the town's only advertising agency (Caxton Advertising). As an
undergraduate I had work appear in two of the nationally distri-
buted photography magazines, Peterson's Photographic (September
1972) and Camera 35 (July 1974). In my senior year, in partner-
ship with Caxton Advertising, I began publishing a monthly en-
tertainment and leisure tabloid entitled River City Revue. In
addition to working as editor, I also did all of the photography.
At one time, circulation reached a peak of 22,000 copies monthly.

In 1975 I completed my secondary education degree in art at
Southeast Missouri State University. Upon being offered a teach-
ing position at Clearwater High School in Piedmont, Missouri, I
sold my half of the River City Revue and moved to Piedmont. Here
I have lived and taught for the past ten years. During this per-
iod of time I have had work in the following national magazines:
Photo Artist (February 1977), Photography Today (Fall 1978), Am-
erican Photographer (January 1979), Today's Photographer (Decem-
ber 1980), Darkroom Techniques (March 1982 and December 1982),
Lens (January/February 1983), Photographer's Forum (Volume 6,
Number 1), and in the Best Photographs of the Year Annual 1982,
1983, 1984, and 1985. In national publications other that photog-
raphy magazines, I have had work in The New Orleans Review (Volume
7, Number 2) and Penthouse Forum (March 1983). During 1978 to 1980
I published and edited Lightwaves, Missouri's only photography
magazine, on a quarterly basis. In the spring of 1982 I enrolled
in the L.C.I.E. Graduate Program at Lindenwood College in St.

Charles, Missouri.

Is There Life After Photography?

I have known for many years that I have a severe attachment to photography. The greatest testament as to how deeply rooted this attachment has grown is evidenced by how long it has taken me to realize the strength of its influence. I have been actively involved in photography since 1956, but it was not until recently that I understood the degree to which photography has affected my life.

Not long ago one of my students asked me if I had ever wondered how my life might have turned out had I never taken an interest in photography. That I answered in the negative did not seem to surprise her. That I had never asked myself the same question did surprise me. Had photography become so much a part of me that I couldn't imagine a life without it? If so, how had one facet of my personal makeup come to dominate all others?

To find answers to these questions I set about envisioning what my life probably would have been like had photography never entered it. I began by dividing my interests and activities into two categories--personal and professional. I then examined each category in terms of substances that were either unrelated to photography or could exist on their own should the photography connection be severed.

Starting with personal interests, I quickly determined that my appetite for reading (as soon as I finish one book, I pick up

another) would continue to flourish even without mass dosages of photo books and magazines. My enjoyment of music was not photo-related, nor was the pleasure I received from a good movie. Thus my involvement with these activities would not diminish. My participation in and appreciation of painting, drawing, and sculpture would not lessen as they were not dependent upon photography. The same was true of my interest and involvement in sports (I coach high school softball). I like to write feature articles and critical reviews (I even get one published occasionally), and although I usually use photos with the former, they could be done without pictures.

After careful consideration I concluded that these six areas--reading, music, movies, fine arts, sports, and writing--make up the main interests and activities of my personal daily experience sans photography. Not that I take part in each of these activities everyday, but on a day-in, day-out basis these activities would be the ones most often repeated. I do indeed have other personal endeavors, but they are not participated in often enough to be considered part of my daily routine.

Looking at professional pursuits, I discovered I had but a few, and all of them centered around my vocation as a teacher. In this area there were two activities directly linked to photography. Had I never taken an interest in photography, I would not be teaching a high school photography class, nor would I be teaching an evening photography course for the University of Missouri. If, however, I had never taught these two classes, or suddenly had to

stop, I would still enjoy teaching as a profession.

Having examined these major components of my life, it seemed accurate to describe my non-photography self as an apolitical high school teacher whose primary interests and activities are art, reading, writing, sports, music, and movies. So, one of my questions had been answered. Not only could I imagine a life without photography, but I could also pretty well define it. And although there was nothing wrong with this non-photographic way of living, it was pallid indeed when compared to my life with photography. My second question, however, was still unanswered, for I had not yet come to understand how one element could grow so paramount to all others. To find this answer I once again examined my life, but this time from the viewpoint of how photography had influenced me, and what it had come to mean to me.

Because it happened gradually and when I was quite young, I'm not certain as to when photography started exerting an influence on me. I do remember when I first sensed the "power" of photography. It was during my junior year in high school while I was working as a photographer on the school's newspaper and yearbook staffs. As a sophomore I had been somewhat on the reserved side, but as a junior with one of the school's cameras hanging from my neck, I exhibited no signs of shyness. The camera set me apart while at the same time allowed me to get involved. This involvement was not initiated by me as an individual, but rather by me acting in the capacity of a photographer. What I did while working in this capacity could not be held against me personally; thus

the camera became not only a mask but also a crutch. With camera in hand, I was always the center of someone's attention, as fellow students would continually "mug" for me and ask for their picture to be taken. The decision to make a picture, and the actual act of doing so, was in my ultimate control. Of course, as a junior in high school, I had not rationalized the situation to this degree, but I was aware that something special was happening. By the middle of that year I had been so "seduced" by photography that I was going against the behavorial norm of my peers. Instead of spending Saturday nights running around with friends, or on a date, I sat at home leafing through Popular Photography magazines and saving my money for my first really good 35 millimeter camera.

After high school I was drafted by the Army and given the option of going into the infantry for two years, or enlisting for another year and being guaranteed Army photography school. It was 1967, and the United States was embroiled in one of the bloodiest wars it has ever fought. The prospect of being given a ringside seat as a "groud pounder" (foot soldier) was, to say the least, not too appealing. On the other hand, combat photographers had a combat life expectancy rate only slightly higher than riflemen, and to increase my service time by half would certainly do the same to my chances of going to Vietnam. Furthermore, there was the possibility that if I went with the draft, the Army would send me to photography school anyway, because of my background in photography. In the end, however, nothing seemed to matter but that I attend photo school, so I took the additional year of service in or-

der to obtain guaranteed admission.

It was during my time in the service that I stopped thinking of myself as one who liked to take pictures and started thinking of myself as a photographer. I no longer looked upon photography as a hobby, but instead I began to view it professionally--at least in terms of photographic standards. As I became more proficient, my self-confidence grew, and this, in turn, boosted my willingness to use photography as a means of self-expression.

Looking back now I can see that just about everything I did while in the service was photo-related. I sought and fostered friendships with those individuals who had more than passing interests in photography. My leave time was spent going to places and events I wanted to photograph. Passes were arranged so that I could attend exhibits in Paris, London, Amsterdam, and Zurich. Also, a disproportionately large amount of what little money I had was spent on cameras and equipment. Photography, which for years had been an enjoyable pastime, was dominating all my time. In uniform I photographed everything from autopsies to landing zones. Out of uniform (on my own time) I photographed everything from the Alps to the Paris zoo. It was as though I had gotten hooked on a powerful drug, and when I wasn't experiencing it directly, preparing to experience it, or making long term plans to experience it, I suffered withdrawal pains.

Upon leaving the activity of the Army and the stimulation of Europe, I was fearful that photography would never again be as exciting for me. I didn't know if military life and the European

location had made photography exciting, or if photography had made Europe and my time in the Army exciting. However, it didn't take but a short time after being back home to find that it was the latter.

While I was an undergraduate at Southeast Missouri State University, photography continued to be the major controlling factor in my life. By this time I had become conscious of photography's influence on me, although I was still not completely aware of how deeply it ran. Initially I had wanted to attend Missouri University at Columbia because of their degreed program in photojournalism. But having done so much documentary-style photography in the Army, I knew that this was not really the way I wanted to use a camera. Southeast Missouri, which did not have a photography major (few schools did in 1970), did offer a diversified selection of photo courses in their art department. Since I had always been interested in (and somewhat talented at) painting and drawing, I became an art major. Through the photography courses I received my first in-depth look as to how photography could be used as an art medium. For the last decade or so, I had watched as photography fought to be accepted an as art form, so the concept of using the camera as a creative tool was not new to me. What was new was the guidance I was receiving in this area. It recharged and rechanneled my involvement in photography, for I had come to understand how someone using a camera could be considered as much of an artist as someone using a pencil or a brush. My time as an undergraduate was the "formative" period of my photographic development,

and my work will always bear some imprinting from this era.

Photography was responsible for the job I now have. In 1975
there was no shortage of art teachers. There were, nevertheless,
few art teachers who could also teach photography. Since I
could, I was hired to fill a position vacated by a retiring
teacher at Clearwater High School in Piedmont, Missouri.

My photography students and I do all the school's photography.
This constitutes a wide range of work, for in addition to shooting
all the pictures that go into the student newspaper and the school
yearbook, we also shoot press releases and do a great deal of copy
work for in-classroom slide presentation. We do all of our own
black-and-white developing and printing, and we hope someday to be
equipped to do our own color. The job is a time-consuming one, in
which most of my evenings and weekends during the school year are
spent either behind a camera or in front of an enlarger.

In the summer of 1982 I enrolled in the L.C.I.E. program at
Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri, in pursuit of a Mas-
ter's degree in photography.

Having brought my "photographic" life up-to-date, it was easy
to see what a dominating role photography had played. From the
middle of my high school years to the present, it has been the
strongest consideration in all my major decisions. It has become
a guiding, shaping force whose presence has made all aspects of
living meaningful, while at the same time providing purpose and de-
finition to my life. Little wonder, then, that it overshadows all
other elements in my personal makeup.

Matter Into Spirit

Within the past ten years photography has moved into a deeper,
richer realm of experience for me. I first noticed this feeling
while working in the darkroom. I have always enjoyed this side of
photography, primarily because of its theraputic value. After a
particularly trying day, I can lock myself in the darkroom, and
after a couple of hours of developing and printing, I feel human
again. Gradually, however, my efforts in the darkroom began provid-
ing something more than a means for a release of tension. Somehow
the sensation I had experienced while taking pictures was re-exper-
ienced, even intensified, while producing a tangible image of my
initial sensation. This "double" experience had the effect of
closing the distance in time between the image of the subject and
my original perception of the subject. The produced image took on
an immediacy equal to that of reality, and in this sense the photo-
graph was timeless, regardless of how much time had elapsed between
the "taking" of the picture and the "making" of the picture. By a
means which I did not understand, I had become the medium between
the recording of the image and the producing of a likeness of that
image. This mystifying process had the ability to arrest time,
make it flow again, and then turn it back into reality. I did not
fully understand what was happening, but I did know it was a most
enjoyable sensation.

Years later, after making a prolonged effort to see why other
photographers took pictures, I began to understand why I had this

feeling. After reading everything I could find on the photogra-
phers who seemed to have more than a passing influence on me, I
began to notice a pattern in their collective thinking. At one
point or another they would relate their photographic endeavors
to that of a religious, mystical, or divine experience. The more
I read, the more apparent it became that there was a connection be-
tween photography and the spiritual qualities of religion and
prayer. The association of photography with religion and prayer
was not that of petition (prayer for something) but rather that of
meditation (union with something). This realization brought to
mind something that Henri Cartier-Bresson had said concerning Zen.
The essence of his statement dealt with his debt to Zen, which he
claimed helped make him a better photographer. His remarks started
me looking for other photographers who acknowledged a connection be-
tween Zen and their photography.

My interest in Zen and Eastern philosophies was heightened
even more when, at about this time, I ran across an article in a
major photography magazine about the great art director, Alexey
Brodovitch. In the article Brodovitch is described as a Western
counterpart of a Zen master. The article went on to say that the
goal of a Zen master's teaching was not simply the mastery of a
skill, but the mastery of a technique through the total mastery of
oneself, and through this mastery comes the self-knowledge and the
awareness that all things are connected. The crucial factor in
this organic connection was to keep the intellect from playing a
dominate role.

This process of awakening self-knowledge that all things are connected was essentially what was happening to me. Now I understood the tranquil enjoyment I felt while taking and producing pictures. My involvement with both ends of the photographic "process" had become so intense that in effect I had reached, slight though it may have been, a plane of "abstract meditation." For the moment I was unaffected by everyday trials and tribulations and became one, so to speak, with the surroundings and my activities. Furthermore, I understood that my attempts to explain this enjoyment were really attempts by my ego to dominate the situation.

This realization about my photographic "self" sent me in search of a greater understanding of Zen. I widened my search to include Taoism after learning that Chinese and Japanese arts require a spiritual attitude that is deeply rooted in this philosophy.

Taoism and Zen are expressions of an intelligence that does not see any appreciable difference between man and his environment. Human mentality is viewed as only one aspect of the natural order of things. The way--or Tao--by which the normal world works is shown in the dynamic balance of the Yang and Yin principle. Yang is positive and Yin is negative, and although they are opposites, they co-exist harmoniously because they are mutually interdependent. Could this principle of dynamic balance be applied to photography? Indeed there is a negative, and if one wanted to think of it as such, it could be the opposite of the positive--the print. Certainly the print depended on the negative for its existence, but is the reverse true? How is the negative dependent upon the print? With-

out the desire on the part of the photographer to make the picture
and thus obtain the print, the negative would not be necessary. In
black and white photography there is an immediate Yin-Yang concept
--the black and white of the photograph itself. The white depends
on the black for existence, for without it, the white would not be
noticed, and the same is true of the black. The light outside the
camera needs the dark inside the camera, and vice-versa, or both
are worthless to photography. To carry the parallel a step further,
one can attribute to the camera the essence of Yin or "matter" and
to the photographer the essence of Yang or "spirit." One without
the other has no photographic meaning.

Yin and Yang do not always have to operate as opposites. They
can also act in complementary fashion. Soft focus emphasizes sharp
focus. The depiction of blurred motion can complement a stationary
object, and open space stresses occupied space.

Yin and Yang, whether functioning as opposites or complements,
produce experience. In Zen, one of the key components is experience
--experience through practice. That may sound simple, but it isn't;
for Zen is practiced as a means to an end and as the end result it-
self. Pure, genuine, personal experience is both the aim and meth-
od of Zen. To purge the mind of self-centered thoughts brought a-
bout by a "willful will" is one of the main reasons for practicing
Zen. What the practitioner strives to obtain is a state of "begin-
ner's mind"--a mind that is open, empty (of the push and pull of
the self), and capable of spontaneity. In this state of contempla-
tion, the mind is not caught in a conflict between the natural ele-

ment of chance and the human element of control and, therefore, is totally receptive to the creative process.

As a photographer, then, I had experienced contemplation. My awareness of, and attention to, the subject had become so intense that I was no longer looking at it from the outside. There was no longer a division between "seeing," the camera (or enlarger), and myself. Seeing and photography had become one, and I felt as one with all that I photographed--what the Taoist called "wholeness." I had entered the subject and the subject had entered me.

The Taoist master Fa-tsang illustrated this process through his experiment of placing a small statue of Buddha inside a circle of mirrors. The mirrors re-cast and re-doubled multiple reflections of the statue--demonstrating the idea of unification and multiplicity. The one statue became many, yet remained one. This is the Taoist creative process. Everything is a part of the "whole"-- one is all, and all is one. When a mirror reflects the image of the Buddha, it keeps its own image, while at the same time creates a second image. There are now two reflections although the image itself is still the same. They are different but the same. When this reflection process takes place in all ten mirrors, an infinite number of images are created from the one. Could this be why the re-experience of the image was heightened for me in the darkroom? In a sense, I as a photographer had done this same thing, only I had used lenses instead of mirrors to produce my reflections (photographs).

Zen is not photography, nor is photography Zen. However,

through the union of mind, equipment, and environment, the photo-

grapher can acquire a clear view of events which by themselves are

not understandable. In Zen there is no split between a man's being,

his art, and his reverence of reality, unless there is a split in

the man. Photography for me, in an esoterical sense, prevents that

split.

PLAYING A TUNE IN THE EYE

A Sharing of Visions

Before I got my first camera I used to play a little game. While walking down the street (I must have been eleven or twelve at the time), I would search for activities and surroundings that I thought would make for good pictures. When I found something suitable, I would "photograph" it with a deliberate blinking of my eyes. Since then I have read many books and articles on how to develop a sense of photographic seeing, examined hundreds of photographs, and attended numerous photography classes--all of which, I am sure, have helped me make photographs that are more communicative. However, these things by themselves are not enough, for I eventually discovered that there are no pat methods when it comes to the development of a photographic way of seeing. More often than not, the approach that works best for me is one in which there is a kind of collaboration involving the subject, the camera, and myself. This convergence of visions is, at its best, no better than the quality of exchanges taking place among the three of us.

Seeing is the most important ingredient that the camera and I share. For my part I must learn to see as the camera sees. By this I mean I must learn to appreciate all the camera's little idiosyncracies that make its vision unique. Starting with the lens

I must take into account the fact that the camera's vision is mon-
ocular, whereas mine is binocular. What results is that while I
see in three dimensions, the camera will see in only two. The
loss of this one dimension will eliminate considerable depth, so
that objects that are well-separated in reality will appear closer
to each other in the photograph. This phenomenon is minimized or
maximized by the focal length of the lens.

Concerning the lens there are two other visual factors with
which I must contend. One is the degree to which wide angle
lenses distort along their perimeters. Such distortion can be
held to a minimum by keeping the lens as parallel to the subject
as possible. The second factor is point of view. What the lens
sees is entirely dependent upon where I position myself and how I
hold the camera. Once camera placement has been determined, point
of view then becomes a process of selecting the most appropriate
lens for a given picture situation.

Another mannerism of the camera that I must learn to visual-
ize is the shutter's way of expressing time. With my unaided eyes
I cannot arrest the flow of time. But, through the use of the
camera, I can not only freeze motion, I can also show movement
over a span of time.

A feature of the camera that is certainly related to seeing
is the frame. The greatest difference between how the camera
sees and how I see is the shape of our respective fields of vision.
My field of vision is not a geometrical shape and is neither ver-
tical nor horizontal. On the other hand, the camera's field of

vision can be circular, rectangular, or square, as well as vertical and horizontal. One of the hardest things I have had to overcome is my inability to use all of the camera's frame when compositionally appropriate.

The last visually oriented function of the camera is the aperture. It works like the pupil of the eye in that as it alters its opening, it regulates the amount of light passing through it. This control allows me to better understand how the light will affect the film. An additional characteristic of the aperture is selective focus. This technique permits me to either isolate the subject from, or integrate it with, surrounding objects. Selective focus is accomplished through the choice of f-stop.

The camera, in turn, must be receptive of my needs. Controls have to be manually operative, lenses have to be interchangeable, and automation should be kept to a bare minimum, if present at all. Only with this kind of camera am I capable of completely expressing myself.

There is, however, much more to the development of photographic vision than becoming compatible with one's camera. The type of seeing I do through the camera is not the same as the kind of seeing I do with unassisted eyes. Seeing through the camera is very personal because it is concerned not only with what I see and how I see it, but also with when I see it. It is an act in which my personality, background, knowledge, and mood of the moment all play a part in the interpretation of a particular scene. I see surface values such as mass, shape, and texture, but I must see

meaning and content as well, or I do not have a picture. When I examine a subject I am, in part, examining how I feel about that subject. In a sense, then, this way of seeing involves looking inward as much as looking outward.

But without a subject the camera, and the ability to use it, are of little value. Since every photograph is a response to something, that something becomes very important. At one time I relied too heavily on pre-visualizing the finished picture with the result that the subject became just another prop. It took me a while to figure out why my photographs never turned out the way I had envisioned them. The subject would almost always appear as though it had been put into the picture as an afterthought. Gradually I realized that my problem stemmed from the way I was relating, or more precisely not relating, to the subject. Regardless of with whom or what I was working, the process had become one based on "taking" photographs instead of "making" photographs. The distinction is that with the latter the subject is considered to be just as important to the picture as the photographer is. With this understanding, I was able to react and interact with the subject.

A Coherence of Relationships

Because I concentrated my early efforts on mastering the technical side of photography, I was slow in acquiring photography's compositional aspects. In the middle Sixties I made a dedicated attempt at correcting the error of my ways by pouring over all

available material on the subject. Unfortunately, most of what I found treated composition in one of two ways--either they would analyze paintings of the masters and evolve a series of oversimplified explanations based on the pyramid, S curve, L shape, etc., which had little to do with reality, or they would examine well-composed photographs and urge the reader to duplicate the same settings and conditions so as to obtain the same result. Neither treatment contributed much to my understanding of composition, and it was not until I was in the Army's photography school that composition began to make sense to me. There I realized that composition was essentially the structuring of one's personal view of the world and how best to present such a viewpoint within the confines of a two-dimensional format. I was taught the basic factors that govern good composition, and how to effectively utilize these guidelines for pleasing visual results. Later, as an undergraduate majoring in art, I worked out a personalized approach to composition that allowed me to manipulate these basic guidelines in such a way as to further the impact of my particular point of view.

The most successful way for me to work with composition is to keep it as fundemental as possible. I do this by simplfying my selection of the minimum number of picture components needed to complete the picture. Once I have trimmed a subject to its essential details, the finding of an effective arrangement becomes much easier. What is left to work with after this paring process becomes the basic compositional components of my photograph. The following components are the ones with which I most often find my-

self using.

Balance. Balance in a picture is easy if one remembers the
days when one used to see-saw (teeter-totter, some say) in the
school yard. Formal balance is see-sawing with your twin brother.
Weight is equally distributed, and attraction is equidistant from
the center. Informal balance results when the schoolyard bully
sits on your brother's side of the board. Here some experimenting
is needed as the heavier boy will have to sit closer to the center
than you. This arrangement has unequal weight and attraction ad-
justed to the center. That is, the greater weight should be near-
er the center than its counterpart so as to avoid a lopsided ap-
pearance. A little "trick" I use to check a selected viewpoint
for balance is to squint my eyes so that all detail is obliterated.
This not only helps me check for mass inbalance, but it also helps
determine tonal value. Determining tonal value is important be-
cause viewers often interpret mass as tone, and their eyes are
more drawn to lighter areas than to darker ones.

Line. Lines of some sort are usually present in every pic-
ture situation. The simplest and most often used line is the
ground line (some call it the horizon line). In dealing with this
line I look at it in terms of the effect I wish to achieve.
Should I wish to accent spaciousness, I will place it in the lower
third of the picture, leaving ample space in the remaining two-
thirds. Conversely, if I am after a feeling of closeness, I will
put the ground line in the upper third of the picture area. When
working with vertical lines, I let them divide the picture uneven-

ly. Often, vertical lines can be used as a framing device to main-
tain the viewer's attention on the center of interest by blocking
an easy exit from the photograph. Diagonal lines possess a dra-
matic and emotional appeal and are very suitable for creating the
illusion of depth. Generally I try to position my camera so as to
have lines entering the picture from left to right.

Emphasis. Emphasis is the means by which the viewer's atten-
tion is directed to the center of interest. One of my favorite
ways of doing this is through the use of line. A primary line,
either curved or straight, tends to conduct the viewer's eyes along
its path and toward the area of greatest discharge. Since actual
lines (to me as an artist, actual lines are those produced by pen-
cil, pen, or brush) never appear in nature, I look for such items
as tree limbs, railroad tracks, fence railings, ropes, and power
cables. These are but a few of the simpler lead-in lines. Other
less obvious devices exist that also have good directional quali-
ties. Angles, contours, and the meeting of planes can be used as
well as technical features of the camera such as selective focus,
depth-of-field, and shutter speeds. In the darkroom, tonality can
be employed as a guiding device via burning-in and dodging. Nor-
mally I try to have the lighter areas near the center of interest
and the darker areas toward the edges of the picture. To insure
this I often burn-in the outer perimeters or dodge-out the center
area.

Subject placement. When possible I follow the rule of thirds
for the placement of my subject. This is applied by mentally di-

viding the picture space into thirds, both horizontally and verti-
cally.   What results is a grid of nine equal blocks with four in-
tersections.   The four intersections are called focal points and
represent areas in the picture plane most conducive to subject
placement.   While I normally avoid the use of more than one focal
point, a secondary subject presents no problem as long as it does-
n't detract from the primary subject.   If a secondary subject is
to be included, balance then becomes very important.

Center of interest.   For a photograph to be really good, it
needs a strong center of interest.   In reality, however, this is
one of those things that is more easily said than done.   Many of
my photographs could have been made better had I more clearly dif-
ferentiated between the center of interest and the subject matter.
The center of interest is the most important piece of visual in-
formation the picture contains, and as such it should be clearly
discernible from the subject matter.   For example, if one were
shooting a still life consisting of a vase of flowers, all of which
but one were fresh, the subject matter would be the vase of flowers
and the center of interest the wilted one.   The process of differ-
entiation is one of time and control.   Control is necessary for the
acquisition of time, and time is always needed for a viable inter-
pretation between the overall picture idea and the center of in-
terest.   Unfortunately, many picture situations do not provide
enough of either.

Unity.   Unity is what results when some or all of the composi-
tional components are brought together in such a way as to create

visual impact.

Individualism of Styles

I must confess that a photographic style is something I have
not pursued with a great deal of vigor. There are two reasons for
this. First, as an evolving photographer, I had perfected my craft
by playing the field. I photographed what I could when I could
with little regard to doing so from a distinctively individual
point of view. There seemed to always be other areas of photogra-
phy in greater need of my attention than style. Secondly, after
years of examining the work of many photographers--from the great
to the obscure--and comparing their work to the work produced by
other visual artists, I concluded that style in photography is an
elusive element at best.

The many years of viewing photographs and other art work has
made it possible for me to separate style into three distinct cate-
gories: inherent, conspicuous, and inconspicuous. Inherent style
is that produced by a painter, sculptor, or anyone in an area of
the visual arts other than photography. It is the only "genuine"
style of the three. Conspicuous and inconspicuous are "synthetic"
styles that to greater or lesser degrees represent attempts to af-
fect "genuine" style.

Inherent Style. Inherent style is largely genetic. Whatever
the amount of formal training someone in the non-photographic visu-
al arts receives, he must always "filter" it through his genetic
makeup. A painter, for example, is in direct physical contact with

his ultimate image. His intrinsic motor-muscle control will auto-
matically impose his personality on the raw materials being used.
This is style in the purest sense of the word, for no two people
will draw, paint, or sculpt exactly alike. The photographer, on
the other hand, is separated from his image by a mechanical and op-
tical instrument through which he must penetrate if he is to im-
press any uniqueness on his work. For unlike the painter, the
photographer does not create his image by direct contact, but
rather causes it to be produced by indirect contact. One might
easily recognize a painting that one sees for the first time as the
work of Picasso, but would one as easily identify an unfamiliar
photograph by, say, W. Eugene Smith? The odds would be against it
unless Smith used a camera that had an image recording characteris-
tic uniquely its own. Of course, if this type of camera did exist,
the style that resulted would belong to it and not the photographer.
However, since a camera does not have such individuality, the photo-
grapher must deliberately add individuality if the work he produces
is to be recognized as his. How the photographer goes about apply-
ing this element determines whether his photographic style is con-
spicuous or inconspicuous.

Conspicuous Style. Conspicuous style--that is, the easiest to
recognize--has its source in technical devices and/or mannerisms
that are produced in the studio, the darkroom, or in the camera
itself. Photographers employing this style strive for a more di-
rect control of the photographic image. By so doing, they hope to
obtain an identifiable and lasting style. Ironically, the accom-

plishment of the former leads to the loss of the latter.

Yousuf Karsh is a good example. Early in his career he initiated a posing mannerism for his portraits that always included the hands of the subject. This posing method became so popular that it is now included in the portfolio of every studio photographer. In the final analysis, Karsh did not establish a style, but rather spearheaded a trend.

Jerry Uelsmann is another noteworthy example. He set the photographic world on its collective ear when he introduced his technique of multiple printing. Of course, multiple printing had been around for years, but when Uelsmann combined it with ortho film, it became something fresh with a style--momentarily. All too soon other photographers were using the same procedure, and the trend grew until it smothered Uelsmann's chances of having a style uniquely his own.

Every photographer has the right to gain distinction by using any and all of the many technical means and mannerisms available to him. They are part and parcel of the medium and are there to be used. They can produce striking--even spectacular--effects, but because these effects can be duplicated, they will never provide any photographer the status of a legitimate, durable style.

Inconspicuous Style. Inconspicuous style--that is, the least recognizable--is based more or less on realistic images. Photographers working in this style are not interested in technical or manipulative effects, and their photographic individuality is thus harder to discern. The work of Henri Cartier-Bresson makes for a

good illustration. Many of Cartier-Bresson's pictures are indistinguishable from those of other competent photographers, but nevertheless, a style reveals itself in an examination of a large body of his work. His ability to capture the relationship of people to each other and to their environment during a moment of peaked reaction was what made his work unique. However, he didn't achieve this "decisive moment" everytime he took a picture. In fact, he accomplished it a small fraction of the time, which is to say that his style is not as evident in all his work as it is in the work of photographers who rely on technical and manipulative applications.

For Edward Weston there were no "decisive moments" to record on film. Instead, he sought the clarity of an image that represented all that was magnificient about photography. He worked with a large negative and a view camera, and he was meticulous in the darkroom. He never compromised his lens, from which he extracted the highest degree of resolution possible. His style was strong and clear and reflected the way he envisioned his world. Yet, even with such a firm grasp on how he wanted his images to look, he was unable to sustain his style in everything he photographed.

Photography for people like Cartier-Bresson and Edward Weston, among others, was a reflex response to a way of seeing, and style is the evidence of that vision over a period of time. This kind of style is subtle and difficult to discern, but it is there. As a photographer, I will never have an inherent style, and I have yet to progress to an inconspicuous style.

Chapter 3

MEDIUM, TECHNIQUE, AND ANALYSIS

Medium

There is no doubt that this is the age of color. I can't re-
call when I last saw a black-and-white movie or a magazine using a
black-and-white cover photo. So why do I, at least on a personal
level, choose to work in black and white only? The fact that the
time during which I was cutting my photographic teeth was a black-
and-white era may have something to do with it. Not only were most
of the movies and magazine covers in black and white, but all news-
paper pictures and every television screen were also. Later, when
it was feasible for me to work in color, I found that it was not
personally suitable as a form of self-expression. Nor do I like
the color work done by other photographers. Color just does not
reach deep inside me the way a fine black-and-white print can. The
extra abstraction of black and white leaves me more free to explore
light and shadow, as well as line and form, in a more graphic and
intense way.

In terms of film size, I am a roll film user. Initially I be-
came a roll film user because I couldn't afford to work in sheet
film. Although that is no longer the case, I still work only in
roll film (primarily 35 millimeter). Over the years I have found
that there is very little I could do in a larger format that I
can't accomplish in 35 or 120.

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Exposure, Processing, and Printing

Unfortunately for 35mm users, Oskar Barnack included far too
many exposures on the same meter-and-a-half of movie film. All of
these back-to-back exposures rule out the possibility of processing
each frame individually. And, even if this were possible, very
little would be accomplished, since frames that have to be enlarged
at least six times won't accept the same versatile treatment that
works so well with larger sized sheet film. The inherent inability
of 35mm and paper-backed roll film to accept custom doses of expo-
sure and development puts them outside the realm of any realistic
"zone system."

This is fine with me, for I am not a proponent of the zone
system. If I can't previsualize subject tonal values into "zones"
in the final print, I can still produce photographs of acceptable
standards. I do this by exploiting the latitude of the film and
putting to use that old maxim: "Expose for the shadows; develop
for the highlights." I get density with the camera and contrast
with the developer. This yields a print that has deep, rich blacks;
clean, white highlights; and a long scale of gray tones in between.

I started using Tri-X film way-back-when, and it's still my
film of choice today. It has good latitude (two stops either
side of correct exposure) and versatile grain (depending on devel-
oper, I can either emphasize grain or hold it to minimum visibili-
ty). It is fast enough for most low light situations, yet slow e-
nough for sunlight. It is also very compatible with strobe light.

I rate it a stop less than manufacturer's recommendations.

The developer that works best for me with Tri-X is Microdol-X. This slow-working developer, which I use diluted 1:3, requires a lengthy development time (13 minutes) at a temperature of 75 degrees.

For printing I prefer a double-weight fiber-based paper which I soup in Dektol 1:2. I like the working solution to be at or about 65 degrees. I have found that at this slightly lower than recommended temperature a crisper, more brilliant print is produced.

Analysis

Critically appraising one's own work is perhaps the most important thing in learning to improve one's photographic ability. Unfortunately, it is one of the most difficult attributes to acquire. I make pictures and, all to often, I regard them as children of my own creation in which there can be no flaws. Over the years I have learned to accept, to some degree, the judgment of others; but the final step of becoming critically analytical of my work has been a difficult one for me to take.

Self-appraisal should apply to all phases of picture-making. It is important when the subject is selected, when the exposure is made, when the test print is examined, and in all the stages of printing. It applies to the aesthetic, compositional, and technical sides of photography. Several years ago I developed a method of analyzing my work (as well as the work of others) that makes it easier for me to think in critically-oriented terms. The system is

made up of fifteen questions which give me a systematic approach to picture "reading."

1) What is the purpose of the photograph? Was I trying to reveal relationships between people or objects, to create a mood, to report an event, to evoke an emotion, to portray character, to make a social, political, or psychological statement? What was I trying to do, and why?

2) Is the picture effective because of treatment or subject matter? Sometimes a picture is valuable because the subject matter is newsworthy, unusual, or spectacular. On the other hand, a commonplace subject can be transformed into a good photograph through the imaginative interpretation of the photographer. And sometimes both subject and treatment play a role. To what extent does each contribute here?

3) Can the viewer tell if the picture is spontaneous or contrived? Some photographs are purely spontaneous and look it by catching life on the wing. Others are carefully planned, with every element arranged to give exactly the effect desired. Any many pictures are somewhere in between--planned to some extent, but designed to look natural and spontaneous. Can the viewer tell which approach was used and, if so, does this hinder the effect of the picture?

4) How important was luck in getting the picture? Luck plays a decisive but incalculable role in many kinds of photography-- especially sports, action, candid, and photojournalistic. However, I believe a good photographer helps make his own luck if he is ex-

perienced enough to know what may happen, and he is skilled and a-
lert enough to seize the opportunity when it occurs. Can the view-
er evaluate these elements here?

5) How effective is the composition? Are all the components
organized into a coherent relationship with one another, and does
this arrangement satisfy my desire for order and design? Does the
composition enhance what the picture is saying? Hinder it? Why?

6) What is the source, direction, and quality of the lighting?
What is the main source of light, and from where is it coming? Is
it direct and harsh with sharp shadows, or is it indirect and soft
with indistinct shadows? Can the viewer tell what light source was
used? Is the lighting too obvious? How does the lighting help or
hinder the composition, mood, subject?

7) Does exposure and development fit the content of the pic-
ture? If not, why not?

8) Is the picture sharp? Did I want the picture to be sharp?
Does sharpness comply with the content of the picture?

9) If fast or slow shutter speeds were used, did they achieve
the desired effect? If the picture records motion, is the action
stopped and the image sharp? Is some blur evident? Or is the ac-
tion recorded as extreme blur by use of a slow shutter? Does my
choice appear deliberate to the viewer? Does the amount of blur
(or lack of it) help the picture? Would the results have been more
or less effective had a different shutter speed been used?

10) Was my sense of timing precise? Was my timing slightly
off? Would the picture be better if the exposure had been made

sooner? Later?

11) <u>Is print contrast and tonality good?</u> Does the print meet
the conventional requirements of good technical quality? Can the
viewer find evidence of local control--dodging and burning-in?
Would the picture be improved if printed lighter? Darker? With
more contrast? With less?

12) <u>If the picture is cropped, is it done so in the most ef-
fective way?</u> Would a different or more severe cropping make the
picture better? Would it look better as a horizontal? A vertical?

13) <u>Were any special effects used, and if so, were they needed?</u>
If special effects were applied, do they fit the picture content?
Would the picture be better without them? Do they dominate subject
matter and picture content?

14) <u>How similar is the picture to others I've taken and/or
seen?</u> Is it a cliche? Does it show signs of trite, superficial
seeing and thinking? Does it remind me of the work of any other
photographer? Any obvious signs of my personality in the picture?
If I like it, would I like it just as much if it had been taken by
some other photographer?

15) <u>How well did I accomplish my purpose?</u> The answer to this
depends largely on the answers given to the above fourteen ques-
tions.

Chapter 4

THE GREEKS HAD WORDS FOR IT

The word photography comes from two Greek words, graphein--
"to write," and photos--"light." As one who "writes with light,"

my eyes behind the camera are far more important than the lens in

front of it. This not very original thought is merely another way

of saying that the most important ingredients in this process that

is photography are sensitivity and enlightened perception on the

part of the photographer. To be sure, equipment and technique are

important, but neither will replace the photographer's ability to

think.

The Greeks had another word that I believe goes with graphein

and photos, and that word is kainos which means "new beginning."

Consequently, every time I make an exposure, I create a new begin-

ning.

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