PHOTOGRAPHY IN PRINT

Edited by Vicki Goldberg
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Writings from 1816 to the Present
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endless process, one whose product is a species of fiction, like the Avedon family album. To rid oneself of all falsifications, poses, self-dramatizations is a Utopian ideal, very likely left over from the Romantic striving for naturalness. Today, self-exposure goes hand in hand with make-up and mannerism.

In the early days of photography, sitters for photo portraits were posed in the same way as for paintings. Educated photographers depended on canvases they had seen for compositional ideas. In turn, painters depended on photographs for more accurate likenesses. In most of the painted and photographed portraits I have compared, the photograph is superior in credibility and depth and in uniqueness of expression. The often-reproduced daguerreotype of Poe is far more mysterious and intriguing than the etching by Manet, which subsumes the poet under the type of a successful French papa; and a similar superiority marks the photos taken of Baudelaire, with the possible exception of the lithograph by Rouault.

Serious painters might in the long run have abandoned portraiture because of the competition of the camera, although there are qualities that can be achieved by painting that no photograph can match; for example, the rendering of emotion through color, as in a portrait by van Gogh or Matisse. The most decisive revolutionary impact of photography came, however, not through its ability to surpass in accuracy the posed likenesses of the portrait painter. The genuinely momentous transformation in capturing the human physiognomy was wrought by the snapshot, which put an end to the need for posing, since poses could by found by the photographer and did not require to be staged. The unpremeditated postures, including those of children, snared by the rapid shutter and increasingly fast films brought about an immeasurable expansion in the variety of human gesture—and in human self-consciousness. No doubt it was the snapshot that made people more appreciative of the richness that lay in being natural. Artists, first among them the Impressionists, discovered the aesthetic possibilities of random arrangement in contrast to constructed order. Things, people were found to attain their maximum authenticity when they were present without presenting themselves.

All portraits surprise their subjects in some degree. Individuals have a general notion of what they look like, and this notion tends to be jarred by any particular likeness, almost as if there were a double exposure. "It's a good picture," is the usual verdict, "but the resemblance is off." Portraits are probably most convincing to people who are unfamiliar with the persons portrayed. The snapshot multiplies the quantity of fragmentary or inexact likenesses of each individual to the
point where he is assimilable into a universe of light and shadow. Whatever remains recognizable of the photographed object has been rescued from anonymity either by chance or by the skill and discipline of the photographer. "We photographers," said Cartier-Bresson, "deal in things which are continually vanishing." This consciousness can lead logically to abandoning as hopeless the demand for affirmation of individual identity in portraits. The situation is symbolized by Magritte's painting of a gentleman with a huge apple directly in front of his face—which is a companion piece to a photograph of J. P. Morgan with his head completely blocked out by his silk hat.

Optical phenomena are infinite in quantity and each is susceptible to being recorded in countless variations and refractions. Within the endless flood of visual arrangements and rearrangements, the painter seeks an effect of coherence, if only one derived from the habitual reflexes of the hand. Lacking the inhibitions of a nervous system, the camera holds the threat of a mindless accumulation of data, without limit and without purpose, like the accumulation of profit in the economic system in which photography originated. One-man exhibitions of photographs occasionally display the stylistic consistency and formal subtlety of the individual craftsman. Such accomplishments do not, however, alter the fundamental fact that, in the photographic medium, finding can be substituted for making. It is undeniably a factor in the vast popularity of snap shooting that no concept of the subject is needed to take pictures—the thing pictured can be found and refound with each click of the shutter. One can make aesthetic choices from a roll of film shot without a single insight, the way one chooses among pebbles on a beach.

The inauguration by photography of the aesthetics of finding has exerted an incalculable influence on the culture of our time, from the apparently insatiable popular demand for collecting to the innovations in painting and sculpture brought about by incorporating ready-made and found materials.

Finding includes combining. Collage, perhaps the most radical departure in this century from traditional assumptions in painting, arose directly out of the technology of reproduction, which includes photography. Collage was stimulated by the cameraman's bent toward foraging for subjects. In the collage, "finds" consisting of photographic likenesses, real objects, and passages created by the artist are mixed and united in a single dimension. Collage realizes in art the principle cited by Invis and Szarkowski that the photo is equal in reality to the object or event. In the collage, and in its sculptured equivalent, the assemblage, things are transformed into images and derive their mean-

ing from the new context in which they are set. The visible world is thus conceived as susceptible to unlimited manipulation and readjustment. A Cubist portrait, such as Picasso's of Kahnweiler, symbolizes this liberation from objective solidity, or "things as everyone sees them" (Gertrude Stein), by translating its subject into a complex coordination of physical fragments and abstract shapes. A political equivalent of this domination of external reality by the reconstituting will is to be found in societies governed by revolutionary ideologies.

Finding involves recognition—of particulars that arouse feeling directly (a familiar figure glimpsed in a crowd) or through association (a fruit that resembles a detail of the female anatomy). Theoreticians of photography stress its reliance on selection or choice. Effective photographers know in advance what they are seeking, though this will not prevent them from appropriating images other than those they expect to find. Aaron Siskind found Abstract Expressionist art everywhere—on barns, on rock formations, on stretches of sand. Selection is as vital—and for the same reason—in photography as it is in paintings based on chance, whether composed of found materials, such as collages by Arp or Schwitters, or through automatic drawing or processing, as by Ernst or Masson, or by the thrown paint of Pollock. All these artists find, and only selecting can prevent them from bringing in everything.

Recently, experiments have been made in art consisting of randomly thrown matter in which selection has been abandoned, as in the aleatory music of John Cage, in "scatter" sculpture, and in films made by allowing camera to record whatever occurs in front of the lens. Finding without selection, however, undermines the concept of finding, which implies the realization of some sort of seeking. The extreme in finding is the flea market and the garbage dump, where something desirable may appear by chance, but which only a dogmatist would present as realizing the logic of collage.

In addition to accident and selection, there is what might be called inspired finding, the advent of transcendental or magical objects or persons, such as the momentous talismans and encounters in legends and in the lives of heroes. Occurrences of this order, sought but not planned, presumably transpire only among those who have psychically prepared the way for them by the search itself, as in the adventures of the Holy Grail. The Surrealists, combing the streets and shop windows of Paris in search of what they called "objective hazards," stumbled over an unusually high frequency of significant "correspondences." There is such a thing as training oneself to be lucky. The shots in the dark of Breton, Arp, and Miró almost always hit a valid mark. "To produce an accident of this sort," said Hans
Hofmann of one of his great blot paintings, "one must be in a certain state." There are, in sum, more advanced forms of finding than to bag what is available and choose what one likes. The findings of exceptional photographers occur as the result of exceptional preparations.

Every art has its own moral principle, without which its creations are mere stimulants of sensation. There is nothing to prevent photography from operating on the moral level of the beachcomber, the brothelkeeper, or the second-story man. It is nothing new for the camera to deal with people in public places as potential salvage, to be a source of supply for peddlers of touched-up nudes, to be used to collect testimony in hotel rooms. Lately, it has been argued in court that photographers may appropriate human likenesses as a matter of right. The story of portraits extracted by force is not restricted to mug shots in police stations.

The moral principle of photographic portraiture is respect for the identity of the subject. Such respect does not come naturally in a medium that can without effort produce countless unrelated likenesses of the same object. Light, of which photographs are made, can endow people and scenes with emotional associations that are completely irrelevant to them—a half-lighted face transforms every girl reading into a pensive madonna. To achieve truth, the photographer needs to curtail his resources, which means he must make photography more difficult.

Avedon is a difficult photographer, in the sense that Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still are difficult painters. Like them, Avedon is a "reductionist," that is, one who purges his art of inessential or meretricious elements. Photo portraits of artists, writers, intellectuals, and leaders generally endow them with nobility and thoughtfulness by steeping their features in deepening layers of shadow or catching them in meaningful attitudes. "Personality" is added by drawing on the photographer's repertory of staging devices; the subject is shown with his paintings as background, or peeping around or through a sculpture, or cuddling a cat.

Avedon's camera refuses to confer poetry or distinction on his painters, writers, and other famous personages. It meets each individual head-on; he is allowed only such graces as may come through the vacant stare of the lens. With Avedon the camera seems less a tool of presentation than a source of self-enlightenment. "The photographs," he has said, "have a reality for me that the people don't. It's through the photographs that I know them." He has returned to the posed picture, but only to the extent that his "sitters" (they usually stand) face the lens with an expression of their choice. No snapshots. No
A. D. Coleman

"The Directorial Mode:
Notes toward a Definition"
1976

A. D. Coleman was regularly reviewing photography in The Village Voice and The New York Times by the late sixties, when photography was all but ignored by most critics and publications. In 1979 he published a collection of ten years of his photographic criticism; circumstances being what they are, there are not many around who have ten years worth of writing to collect. The following article attempts to define a mode or type of photograph which Coleman calls directorial. The issue here is not whether the photographer manipulated the print but the subject.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

People believe photographs.
Whatever their response may be to sculptures, etchings, oil paint-

lings, or wood-block prints, and regardless of the level of sophistication they bring to encounters with such works, people do not think them credible in the way they do photographs.

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

1. Photography institutionalizes Renaissance perspective, reifying scientifically and mechanistically that acquired way of perceiving which William Ivins called "the rationalization of sight." Thus photography reassures us constantly that our often arbitrary procedures for making intellectual sense out of the chaos of visual experience "work."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perhaps the first large-scale flowering of directorial photography—the point at which such work entered the average Western home and became an intrinsic part of our cultural experience of the medium—came with the introduction of the stereopticon viewer and the stereographic image, circa 1856. Stereo photographs of all kinds, mass produced by the millions, became a commonplace form of entertainment and education during the next three decades, and survived as such well into the twentieth century. Among the standard genres of stereographic imagery was the staged tableau, often presented sequentially and narratively; the scenarios ranged from Biblical episodes and classics of literature to domestic comedies and schoolboy pranks.

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

Within the more self-conscious arena of Art Photography, whose audience has always been comparatively scant, the advent of directorial photography as an active mode and an acknowledged alternative to realism dates back to the same period—the 1850s—and the work of two men: O. G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson. Both staged events for the purpose of making images thereof—mostly genre scenes and religious allegories; both used the process of combination printing, involving the superimposition of one negative on another, which fic-

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1. In a letter published in Camera Mainichi (Japan), 1970.

2. Strangely, in 1888 a public controversy between Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson began over these same issues. Emerson advocated a purist approach to the medium: no interference with the external event, no multiple negatives, no retouching (though, inconsistently, he allowed for the “burning in” of fake clouds, since the real ones would not register on the slow films of the day). Emerson’s position was called “naturalism”; Robinson’s was called realism.
tionalized the resulting print even further. Their work was the subject of heated debate from all sources—photographers, artists, art critics, and the public as well. Until recently, the sentimentality of the most popular of their images (Rejlander’s “Two Ways of Life” and Robinson’s “Fading Away”) was used by photo-historians as a basis for dismissing their entire œuvres and their way of working as well. (Re-examination of their output turns up some astonishing, little-seen imagery; in Rejlander’s case, for instance, “The Dream,” “The Juggler,” and “Woman Holding a Pair of Feet.”)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The debate was a draw, at least in retrospect, but second-stage Hegelianism won the day: the aesthetic pendulum swung to purism, and pictorialism fell into disrepute. Mortensen—who, in addition to this debate, was widely published in photography magazines and authored a series of how-to books which are to pictorialism what Ansel Adams’s instructional volumes are to purism—was actually purged from the history of photography in what seems a deliberate attempt to break the movement’s back.3

3. From the first one in 1937 to the most recent of 1964, no edition of Beaumont Newhall’s The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day—the standard reference in the field—so much as mentions the name of William Mortensen. It
For the next three decades—until the late 1960s, in fact—there were commercial outlets for certain kinds of directorial images, but any photographers working directorially in a non-commercial context did so over the vociferous opposition of most of their peers and of the aesthetic-economic establishment which controls the medium's access to the public and to money. Still, some persevered: Clarence John Laughlin, making his Southern Gothic image-text pieces in New Orleans; Edmund Teske, pouring out his passionate homoerotic lyrics in Los Angeles; Ralph Eugene Meatyard photographing the ghoulish masked charades of his family and friends in Lexington, Kentucky; Jerry Uelsmann resurrecting lost techniques in Florida. There were others too, hoeing that hard row.

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

But they too have persevered. It would be difficult to compile a complete list of those working in this mode at this time—there are a great many, and the number is increasing rapidly. Les Krims and Duane Michals must certainly be counted among the pioneers of their generation in this form; both are prolific, both have published and exhibited widely, both are reference points for the current generation of younger photographers and are obvious sources for much of the mediocere directorial photography which passes for "conceptual art" nowadays.

John Pfahl, Ken Josephson, and Joseph Jachna have all produced extended series in which they enter into or visibly alter the landscape, with related hermeneutic inquiries into the illusionism of the medium. Lee Friedlander (in Self-Portrait), Lucas Samaras, and the late Pierre Molinier have all used the camera as a dramatic device, in front of which their fantasies and obsessions are acted out. Eikoh Hosoe, Richard Kirschel, Arthur Tress, Adal Maldonado, Ed Sievers, Doug Stew-

art, Paul Diamond, Ralph Gibson, Irina Ionesco, Mike Mandel, Ed Ruscha, William Wegman, Robert Cumming, and Bruce Nauman (among others) also have things in common.

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


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