A NEW GODDESS OF MEMORY, BY TERRY GIPS

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY: EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE REVIEWS

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY (AGAIN) IN RECENT AREA SHOWS

EXHIBITIONS: CARILLO/VISIONS OF TEXANS/NAGATANI & TRACEY/WITKIN/WAGNER

BOOKS: DATER, GOHLKE, SHEELER, VOGUE BEAUTY, & THE D/TO PHENOMENON
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WINTER 1988
MESSAGES

Imaginary Narratives

Narratives are constructions of meaning. In a lecture this November at Rice University, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard described Modernism's narrative of rational progress. Lyotard argued that new technology and information processing systems are attempts to continue Modernism's grand mythological narrative, but the real subject of progress is an alien new god. Inhabiting a vast information network, it possesses super-human knowledge, a "non-terrestrial" body, and omniscient power. Lyotard, the theorist of "the postmodern condition," criticized the hegemony of the technoscientific narrative and its inhuman subject. He called for free narratives—free conversations, free reflexive judgments and meditations, free associations, poetry and the literary arts, music and the visual arts... These are narratives of imagination, not control: "No prejudice, no security." In this issue of SPOT, three writers critically reflect upon new narratives of meaning for visual representations using digital technology. Mixed media and computer artist Terry Gips constructs a technological narrative linking the computer to prior stages of an exponentially exploding process of aiding human memory. But in her art Gips constructs a second narrative—an imaginary one, if you will. Her photographs picture the computer itself in terms of earlier images—architectural images (of rooms, windows, stairs), which humans have used to picture their own mental powers. Like Lyotard, Gips recognizes the superhuman "spaces" of the computer, but she fantasizes it as a "new god of memory," a new Dionysus—one of the beneficent (l'atemporal) Greek sister Muses.

Next, James Hoolihan and Joanne Laktish discuss (respectively) the exhibition and catalogue, Digital Photography: Captured Images/ Volatile Memory/ Near Montage. Hoolihan notes the irony in the fact that the "digital" ("fingered") has become the non-manual. The artists in Digital Photography use the computer reflexively to question diverse narratives about art history, American politics, the news media, or nature/culture relationships. Laktish's essay emphasizes the need for complexity in discussing the meaning of "digital photography." She argues that in their catalogue essays for the exhibit, Jim Pomeroy and Timothy Druckrey oversimplify and oversimplify their subject: Pomeroy creates a weighted narrative of steady progress to claim that digital representation is the direct heir of photography; Druckrey artificially dethrones culture and technology. Gips writes in her article, "Not only does the computer dissolve boundaries between picture fragments, it also dissolves boundaries between traditional media... The computer simulates drawing, painting, photography, film, and in some ways, sculpture. Digital representations enter into territory already subject to boundary disputes. Aspects of these debates, as manifested at the site of several important recent regional exhibits, are addressed in my article "Art & Photography (Again!)." Beyond this, Johannes Biringer meditates in "Intersections" about erotic confluences, non-readable narratives linking "art" and "non-art": the contemporary art museum and the traffic intersection, or the human with the inhuman (techo-designed) body.

The computer users I know develop narratives in which their computers are agents with conscious presence and even bodies: "It won't let me do that!" "It's trying to figure out what I just told it to do;" "It's slow because it's hot." (And of course, God forbid that it should get a virus.) The computer can be seen as a godless metaphor for memory, or as an alien inhuman god. Two brief narratives, one unanswerable question: does the computer god possess a gender? In a recent insidious development, "Macplaymate," the computer screen displays an image of a woman, who seems to inhabit the machine, and who intimately inquires whether the viewer wishes to undress or otherwise fondle her. All this manipulation is done with a "mouse," of course (remember what Freud said about mice?). Our Macintosh II at HCP speaks with a deep male voice, in what can only be described as an extraterrestrial accent. Barely my most memorable interaction with it (him) in assembling this issue of SPOT was when "he" read back the text "he" was scanning of Jean Robinson's article on Joel-Peter Witkin. "Mac" dunned on, indifferent when recting that Goya's war images concerned "rape, dismemberment, and violent death." But when it came to Robinson's remark that Witkin is "an iconoclast with a hard-on," "Mac" definitely disapproved.

-Cynthia Freeland

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A NEW GODDESS OF MEMORY

By Terry Gips

Since about 1980, I have used photography in combination with computer software to explore a number of issues including the computer's growth with issues of labor, representation, memory, and metaphor and the nature of memory, memory and memory: how we accumulate and sort the events of our lives into memory and experience; how we process those bits; how we store them; and how we retrieve them from memory in order to construct new ideas. More specifically, this work has been about images of memory which have architectural connotations. We talk about about abstracting and structuring "space" in memory, we put things "into" memory, and search and recall "from" memory, in some physical space, an enclosure with dimensions, corners and walls, windows and openings. Sometimes we imagine interiorly borrowed technical aspects of these spaces, or rooms or residencies, each with a unique address. These associations between architecture and memory are not meant to suggest that there is a metaphor and mnemonic device for the building of memory, but such roles for architecture are even more poignant when we look at the architecture of the computer. Like the historian, the computer is a memory processing an elusive and immaterial nature. How we represent, preserve, and present our experiences based on the concreteness and systemic quality of architectural connotations is interesting. But we can understand the unonyrnous power of both memory and computer memory. As these parallels presented themselves in my own work, I began to try to unravel the layers of implications of the camera and the computer together for purposes of making actual art. Although there are a number of distinct issues, memory imprints in one way or another almost all of them. In looking at the digital/photographic works which are beginning to appear in the media and in exhibitions and in conversations with other artists around the U.S. (and wherever the technology has achieved a sufficient maturity) it seems to me that the artist doesn't find much explicit use of architecture as metaphor for memory. However, concern for the shape, structure, and process of memory the sorting, recalling and reusing of past information is present. As I began this writing, I intentionally borrowed technical vocabulary from computing, not just because I was going to talk about using the computer, but because it seems important to talk about how I am working going on between electronic technology and our conceptions of the world in general, and of memory in particular. Within this dialectic there are two levels of meaning which can be distinguished:

First, the words themselves: the meaning of "memory" has parallels in the current language used in a wide range of disciplines, including memory and philosophical discourse to the everyday exchanges in social interactions, personal and social arenas. Although this may be due in large part to the fact that the computer has become a useful tool in properly field, and that practitioners need the vocabulary to interact with each other around issues of technology, it is also due to the fact that we live and work in an information-dominated culture.

Second, on a level of diacetic, the language shapes our way of perceiving, thinking, experiencing, acting, and also of being creative. In the other direction, we construct concepts, thoughts, experiences, actions and creations mostly based on the concreteness and systemic quality of architecture. And we can use and understand the connotations of both memory and computer memory. As these parallels presented themselves in my own work, I began to try to unravel the layers of implications of the camera and the computer together for purposes of making actual art. Although there are a number of distinct issues, memory imprints in one way or another almost all of them. In looking at the digital/photographic works which are beginning to appear in the media and in exhibitions and in conversations with other artists around the U.S. (and wherever the technology has achieved a sufficient maturity) it seems to me that the artist doesn't find much explicit use of architecture as metaphor for memory. However, concern for the shape, structure, and process of memory the sorting, recalling and reusing of past information is present. As I began this writing, I intentionally borrowed technical vocabulary from computing, not just because I was going to talk about using the computer, but because it seems important to talk about how I am working going on between electronic technology and our conceptions of the world in general, and of memory in particular. Within this dialectic there are two levels of meaning which can be distinguished:

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The ETHICS OF MANIPULATION

By James W. Southam

Digital Photography: Captured Images/Valuable Memory/Modern Manipulation, written and illustrated by Morris Gellert and Jim Pomery which originated in the Smithsonian Institution's work. It was shown at HCF in August 1999. Among other artists whose work was included was Digital Photography, Cornelia Parker, David Hockney, Cindy Sherman, and George Legrady, MANUALS (Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill), Esther Porada, Sheila Pellek, Alan Roth, and Tammam Azzam. (Ed Tannenbaum's work was not part of the traveling exhibition.)

What a joy it is in etymology! The realm of the hand, manus, and the handmade, mass produced, is where the image and its aura of irrepeatability, as Walter B. J. coined, begins. The equally irrepeatable preindustrial age of mass production and infinite reproducibility, the aura vanishes, and we lose the magic of "manuscript," which seems to refer, nowadays, to the assembly line, excluding the human touch.

And by another grafting from this ancient Latin root, the inherently reproducible image has now become infinitely manipulable. Manipulate from the Latin verb manipulatus and manus and peus (to fill).

Art is become digital. The hand is too big, or the metaphor too worn, for the sophistication of the digital age. Lenses are rarer. Fingers provide the symbol for the bipolar computer, even though a hand with only two fingers would more exactly represent how computers really function. But language itself is a tool of manipulation, and it serves the interests of a few that the many remain mystified by the very technology that can free as much as it can enslave.

Now the ethical question can only be addressed by examining the purpose—values—for which artists or advertisers manipulate images. Retouching images, the commercial aspect of digital manipulation, may at first seem harmless, and most of us would be glad that "glamour" photography eliminates the "warts and all." But when in February 1992, National Geographic manipulated a cover shot of a mule for more dramatic angle and did not acknowledge the alteration of the image, we may begin to wonder. And what of images of难受hrs whose detrimental tracks are erased from the video images used to sell the machines and discredit environmentalists? I could go on into science fiction scenarios: a presidential candidate who exists only in the pixels of digitally manipulated video images.

The artists exhibiting in Digital Photography all raise the crucial question not just of the ethics of manipulation but also of the epistemology of the art work: how do we know if the manipulation is fact or fiction? How do we know that we know? We think there is a clear distinction between "manuscript" images (recolored, reshaped, recombined) and the "uncouched" images, but there is no reason to assume the "straight" images are any less manipulated than the faces turned into munitions or strategic sites.

In this exhibit, however, the point of manipulation in art is aesthetic, as a means to an end, or as a means for its own sake. How can we control what we don't understand?

George Legrady's images instantly address the problem of knowing by defacing figures of authority—figurines, shad- ows of reality. The strategy here parodies of the avant- garde tradition of exposing the mode of production and therefore denaturalizing the artwork. To interrupt the illusion of realism, in a Godard film or a Barthes novel, is to remind the spectator—reader of the etymology of "artifact," and culture is nothing but the construction of images.

Legrady's piece, "Pieces of Authority," shows the ghostly outline of "Red Koppe" made up of shards but with a static and frozen, literalistic, occlusion not illumination. This image reminds us that the construct we think infinitely empowers them, served themselves, multi-dimensional, and subject to change. The relationship of the news commentator to the truth is like that of the outline mask to the full person. And the 20-second outline is, of course, the format in which news programs deny historical complexity.

Unlike Legrady's images, which provide a stable point of reference (since we know immediately that the artist is engaged in a media critique even if we don't know why), the work of MANUALS (Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill) is not so easy to place. All their pieces use a layering of images which are, as it were, rubber-stamped but for the phrase such as "Utopia," "Redemption," "Good Life," (with which we are somewhat something lacking). Each word relates, respectively, to the political, religious, and social aspirations of Western culture, and their presence creates an unsettling relationship with the satisfactorily manipulated images.

If, for instance, the only image under the word piece-'s meaning was "the bald head of Zest soup," the meaning had been clearly satiric, but, in fact, with the quotation of Incest, itself a sign of a Greek word, the relationship between text and image becomes risky—just as for both artists and spectators.

The artist risk being misunderstood, and there are those who think redaction lies in consumerism—or in collecting French masters. But the artist prefers to believe in the intelligence of the spectator, and encourage interpretation which only exists in surplus of the text. MANUAL emphatically resists artistic experience over the refuting of the collecting, their art is transitory, and is, in a way, a tool of the postmodern, subversive of the boundaries between "low" and "high," transient and eternal, irreparable and reproducible. They remind us that there is no culture which is not already culture, even if it is just our way of seeing the natural. The pleasure of interpreting their many-layeredness is the pleasure of refocusing on what it means to create images from nature in a way that fosters self-understanding. Before these works, we are a bit like Socrates who, in Plato's Phae- drus, ironically draws pleasure from Nature which he claims to have no feelings for, saying he is interested only in the human psyche.

The risk of irony (as in MAN- UAL's) and the social critique of the media (as in Legrady's) are combined in Ed Tannenbaum's "The Monroe Doctrine." The piece is ambitious: large and perhaps overburdened, but its vastness forces meaning on the spectator, delimits interpretive free- dom. The public's response, for instance, to the statement of the Marines, in positive and nega- tive, speak terms by them- selves, and would still, even if...
the only text were the title. The very density of the text troubles any simple reading, while reflecting, perhaps, the oppressive density of U.S. central of Central America—of which the larger South America is, in this work, a shadowy likeness. Because the economies of the other Americas are as obscure to us as the blackness of a single nameless word is to a casual reader. In this context, the word "vacant" is stamped over what might be Georgia, Mexico City (the largest vacant), Guatemala, and Colombia; and there is a fascinating interpenetrating relationship between, on the one hand, the positive soldiers in the north and their negative images in the south (not to mention their book-size clone hordes) and, on the other hand, the solid map of the United States and Central America (background or foreground?) and the "negative" topological map of South America. In this interplay, the texts move in and out of focus, like the comments of authoritative figures or like revelations of the repressed.

Moving from the fugal density of Parada to the muted mystery of Carol Flex in like moving from Burroughs to Cage. Flex's "Triglyph 1: Sham's Run" is an allegory of interpretation. The interpretation is an outright mystery, but which is unanswerable, beautiful, as a single line of violin echoing across the desert air. There is a narrative thrust from the symmetrical left panel, where the runner's calfbridge is depicted, and in its blurring suggests the propulsion of "every in the beginning." The black of the central panel surrounds the runner now hauled in her own mushroom. Is this loudness? Or echo delectation? Or human existence, where "ex" means between and Sixth means standing; hence, standing between two nothingness; and the voidness or a god? The calf-propelled image bridges, finally, the central and right panel. In this trajectory, the runner, not halted but blazoned by motion itself, looks straight into the blackness ahead and, perhaps, at the mysterious end-term of this time: the man as journey, as story, as transformation, as an image of pure materialization.

And the end-term itself, fragmented yet teleologically awaiting us all, is it desert or sand dunes by an impossible distant sea? What dark cylinder shape casts the shadow? Artistic creation is finally self-materialization, self-creation through creating images. And like MANUAL's work, Flex's images involve the spectator in the creation of meaning, in turning nature (the desert) into culture (running as we) and culture back into nature, as when Coleridge says that "Shakespeare's plays are like the expression of nature itself. Here the value of manipulation is in its own valuation."

So when we manipulate—to return to our stenographically beginning—what are our hands (manus) full (pinn) of? Such stuff as figured between Pros- pero's hands? Or what the tenu- eral hands of John Kent intimated, stretching out, in his last great poem, beyond anything imaginable in his age?

Footnotes
2. I'd like to thank Ed Hill for spending an afternoon discussing MANUAL's work and "the status of digital photography.
3. James Hamilton's review in Classic and Modern at the University of Houston. He has published translations of Spanish and Portuguese poetry. Precisely he taught in the film program at the University of California, San Diego Barbera.

FROM DAGUERREOTYPE TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY?

By Joanna Lulik

"The people who are interested in photography are not asking for another one," says [Willis] Harshorn, director of exhibitions at the International Center of Photography, New York City. "What will happen when photography becomes a dime on a print?" on paper, when the image is no longer electronic data that can be called up on a video monitor? In a couple of years that technology will be expensive and accessible and then—boom! That will change everything. Everything the way photography is treated in museums.

This is art, but its Photography. The New York Times Magazine, October 9, 1988.

The catalogue to the exhibition Digital Photography: Captured Images, Viewed Memory, New Montage features three essays which will be examined in this review. I've chosen the essays as my subject in order to explore a question un- solved by the exhibition itself: why should "digital photography" be distinguished from dig- tal visual representation in general? The recent availabil- ity of powerful, low-cost com- puter imaging equipment has provoked sections of the art photography community to take stock of this technology, but it is only one aspect of the major transformation in the representation and communication of knowledge currently under development in our post-modern cultures. While the concept of "digital photography" would meet the expecta- tions of the photographic institu- tions which have produced and supported these exhibitions, there are problems with applying expectations of photographic repre- sentation to digital visual representation which are resolved to varying degrees of success in the catalogue essays.

The Digital Photography exhib- ition catalogue features an intro- duction by Jim Pomery, exhi- bition co-curator. An essay by Fredrik Terning, curator of the New York City based photographic educator and art critic Martha Rosler, artist and writer and head of photography/video media studies at Rutgers University. "Image Simulations, Computer Manipulations: Some Ethical Considerations." Also published in the catalogue are artists' statements, biogra- phies, and reproductions of works by artists.

The bibliographic citations from art, photography, and communication journals and popular magazines typically date from 1984, with a few cita- tions as recent as the spring of this year (the exhibition opened March 1). The catalogue is as timely as June. Although several particip- ant artists have been working with the computer technolo- gies for some years, 1986 is the date of the oldest image in the exhibit, and the majority were produced in 1987-86. Because of the catalogue's relatively short time frame, with its current subject, up-to- date information, and repro- duction of very recent work, is itself a product of the technolo- gical evolution of information repro- duction, printing, and transmission inseparable from the development of computer information processing. Cur- ators Marcel Gildat and Pomery, rather than waiting years to construct a magisterial, defini- tive survey, have produced what I appreciate as an informa- tionally sound and generously provided account of some current developments. I think their ap- proach is commendable, consistent with the rapidly changing discourse of computer informa- tion processing. A direction I found problematic, however, is their effort to identify "digital photography" as a particu- lar practice of computer-based visual representation, assigned a specific aesthetic category: montage.

Curators Pomery and Gildat approached the complex of issues generated by computer representations by focusing on one concerning the application and reception of this imagery: the use of sophisticated com- puter technologies to "mass-produce" and "lighten" hallucinatory representations in advertising, telecommunications and other mass media. With this in mind the curators selected a group of artists who used digitizing technologies at the stage of the production and pertained, to different ends, to mass media photo- graphy. When the curators ask that Pomery explains in his intro- duction essay:

Our intention is to show a va- riety of ideas through different forms of exposition, distribu- tion, and engagement. In op- position to the oblique stratag- ees of concealment employed by the media industry, most of this imagery is "authentic," especially in the fine art sense, temporarily and ag- gressively, as montage.

In this passage Pomery poses the question of the media industry based upon a self-reflexive presentation of the creative versus mass media conceal- ment. While this particular artistic approach is significant, it is insufficient in itself to counteract the "creative" media industry," implying nei- ther a nor for audiences, for this occasion.

To the extent that curatorial interest in new media photog- raphic manipulation invited the exhibition of socially criti- cal work during a politically conservatice time and encour- aged distribution by the two to identify the curatorial, the curator, Unfortunately Pomery's essay especially lacks an essay that describes the majority of work in the exhibition enables him to make an analogy between some established practices of mass media photography in digital representations. This analogy, in turn, enables Pomery to evaluate digital representations according to categories of development and practice conventional to art photographic activities. Of the three essays, only Rosler's analyzes at any length the implications of photographic ob- jective threatened by the computerization of mass media imagery. She begins her essay with a paradox: computer ma- nipulation poses a threat to the objectivity of photographic repre- sentation which has itself been threatened for several decades. Why should this manipulation be considered as a threat? Rosler works with this paradox, his- torically understanding the way the analog-to-analog transform is objective and explaining how pho- tographic manipulation and re- touching have long served the interests of journalism, politics, and entertainment. The point is not that digital technologies are the latest ex- ample of such uses, but that photographic objectivity is a so- cial construction, not an objectivity or traditionally defined. At times, Rosler mistakenly identifies in a straightforward way, through different forms of exposition, distribution, and engagement, in opposition to the oblique strategies of concealment employed by the media industry, most of this imagery is "authentic," especially in the fine art sense, temporarily and aggressively, as montage.

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can surely develop the forms—and the means of discrimination—required to label and process the visual and verbal input of visual media.

As Rosler notes, discussion of effects of computerization commonly splits the subject into two areas: the role of the production and reception of computerized imagery, the second the role of computerization on the production and expansion of information, the information facilities functions of this imagery as distinct from the media role of computerized imagery. Effective criticism of the manipulation of mass media by computerization necessarily involves the ability not by protesting digitalizing itself, by examining the broad range of applications of this technology in the production of social messages, but by making itself. This is an example of an effective criticism, as she carefully distinguishes between different applications of digital imagery in print and broadcast journalism, and the dissolution of distinctions between advertisements and information in the marketing of entertainment.

Rosler’s essay does not refer to any of the work exhibited in Digital Photography and is more well-informed than the others published in the catalogue. Her essay is consistent with the didactic purpose of the show, even as her attention to the importance of commerce upon image manipulation in particular, concrete situations and groupings is consistent with an exhibition which groups work under the general category of "digital photography." The essays by Pomory and Drummond struggle unsuccessfully with this inconsistency. Although their approaches and their concerns differ, both emphasize, to quote Rosler, technology’s "transformative power of social meanings and their perceptions" at the expense of a sociological and economic context of photographic representation.

In his essay Jim Pomory joins digital photography to a narrative of photographic technological development (from daguerreotypy to digital photography), in which he identifies one of photography’s "strongest attributes" as "its capacity to resist change in invention, change and improvement." The specific emphasis Pomory gives a 1960s version of the modernist artist photographic practice in the practice of securing artistic legitimacy for contemporary work by incorporating nineteenth century photographic precedents. Implicit in Pomory’s narrative is the photographer’s uneasiness to meet the challenge of technology. In the practice of digital photography represents an aesthetic compromise, not a change in kind.

Pomory’s essay combines an approach that is self-consciously didactic with a sociological examination of computer technology. Although his focus is not altogether stagnant solutions, however. Their assembly exploits a cheap labor abroad, concentrating greatly to flow of documents, tax revenue and the "digital""

In his essay, Janice Parada, "The Museum Doctrine, Black and Variations, 1997. Image size: 11 x 16. Digital documents, Digital Photography." Druckey’s graceful, ageless photography is reproduced in its conceptualization of technology as separate from the culture in which it was developed. As he explains in his discussion of the issue of new montag in digital imagery. Suficient to say that the pho- tomicrographs of the 1920s and the elecomicrographs of the 1980s reveal an electronic technology is always at odds.

In addition to conflicting differences between montage practices of the 1920s and the 1980s, Druckey uses the precedent of the 1920s to give spurious author- thy to his opposition to the "digital" approach to "digital" photography. The"digital" self-abandons this opposition in his discussion of the 1980s. Druckey exhibited Dig- ital Photography, but its use elsewhere in his essay is consistent with a belief that there is value—almost an organic goodness—residing in the culture of the image.

Druckey’s nostalgia for pre-digital photography is reexpressed in his conceptualization of technology as separate from the culture in which it was developed. As he explains in his discussion of the issue of new montage in digital imagery. Suficient to say that the pho- tomicrographs of the 1920s and the elecomicrographs of the 1980s reveal an electronic technology is always at odds.

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THE SILENT
CLASSROOMS
OF
CATHERINE WAGNER

By David Laser

American Classroom, photographs by Catherine Wagner, were exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from September 10 - November 27.

Ironically, Alexander Pope's "A Little Learning is a dan-
grous Thing" is often miscon-
strued through the absence of the following line: "Drink deep, or taste not the Molian Spring." (An Essay on Criticism).

Those who forget or do not know the couplet's second line confirm the first. While looking at the portentous introduction to Catherine Wagner's show, American Classroom, at the Museum of Fine Arts, the photographs themselves, I was struck with how dangerous a thing a little theory is.

Someone should undertake (or have they? I fear my own ignorance or this!) to study the "study guides" that accompany museum exhibits, that hang on the walls with the pictures and paintings, declaiming the im-
portance of theory and directed interpretation for the suppos-
edly unwashed masses who presumably have very little learning indeed.

The introductory mini-essay on Wagner's photographs reads like a primer on deconstruction theory, "Deconstruction for Toddlers." It tells us that "Wag-
ner's goal is to transform class-
rooms in the public eye. . . . Familiar teaching tools are juxtaposed with the unexpected."

that while the photographer "consistently describes how a place looks, Wagner does not impose how it feels to be there. She withholds every expression of her own response to provoke discussion, remembrance and discovery in her audience. A picture fails for Wagner if all viewers derive from it the same feeling or message. Clearly de-

derived from Barthes and company (writers produce "presump-
tions of meaning, forms, as it were, and it is the world which fills them"; Barthes, Eats, Critiques, p. 9) this is, for one thing, writing on an abysmal level. How, I wonder; does one "consistently describe how a place looks" without imposing some sense of how it feels to be there? What is the role of "con-
sciousness" in graphic art? Is the use of the language of the tem-
poral meaningful? Note the earnest high seriousness of the tone with its dusty academic edge, the essay ro-
mantized "remembrance instead of memory." I'm sure some other visitors thought me a bit demented when I started giggling at the unintended pun: "A picture fails for Wag-
er . . . , as though photographs were students in her class on successful productions of art. "If they [the viewers] stretch," we are told, "what they get is their own response." This is vociferous exhortation and de-

flection of potential criticism. It is the myth of pure formalism. If the word "School" were writ-
ten on a blackboard, displayed in one of our city's cultural in-
situtions, we would certainly be confronted with memory and association, discussion and the possibilities of discovery. However, we would also be re-

directed to the language and context of the presentation.

Is it a photograph or is it an art object? Is it a fine calligraphy? How big the hands? Green or black? Capital or

small letters? Is it in a room draped thoughtfully with black cloth, or beside Tennessee classrooms of Walker Evans in the permanent collection? Wagner, we are told wants "to transform classrooms in the public eye" through the juxtaposi-
tion of the "familiar" and the "unexpected." Wagner does not impose . . . She with-
holds." Wagner would like us to "re-see" and to remember. I understand the desire to shake one's audience from the still catacombs of static memory. But I cannot appreciate the de-

sire to transform a public insti-
tution into, well, something else. It is an obnoxious object of desire.

That said, Wagner's pho-

tographs are compositionally balanced, sometimes to the point of fastidiousness; in a se-

quence, the definition and sym-
metry of the photographs

seems airy, even when the classrooms are somewhat dis-

arranged. Theory notwithstanding, this suggests a pedagogical critique. The dominant motif, old classrooms with wooden movable desks, are contrasted with disconcertingly pristine vocational settings, and some still lifes: frogs in a dissecting pond, a collection of toy ani-

mals and people.

The last is a lovely piece, tak-

en at the New Mexico School for the Deaf. Soldiers, wind-up toys, a dragon, a pincushion, all in a box of moist sand, is full of tactile suggestion and the intriguing role of touch in the narrative creations of deaf children. Unfortunately, the photograph is marred by the top self-consciously exposed corner of the box at the upper left hand of the shot.

On St. Patrick's Day at Colia-
tegas Elementary School, Wag-

ner again delivers a slight essay in texture. A left-over lurch of baked potato, beans, indeter-

minate condiments, is ravaged

but sensual, an index of the de-


dated dinner's hunger, the arti-

fact of his or her directed ener-

gy. Next to the plate is a dis-

crated, half-crushed, smushed,

left behind, of little significance an artifact of the failure to engage the imagination.

At Mass Lending Ele-

mentary School, birds of different feathers, seemingly long past the taxidermist's handbook, are impaled above the black-

board, which is covered with diagrams of a bird's optical sys-


tem. In the dusky landscape of the classroom, the birds are-

martyrs to education, pathet-

ically, yet by virtue of fecundity, almost amusingly crucified. It might be subtilted "Because We Are Too Many" or "Oh Ex-

tended Wings." It is lovely and disturbing, flat and wry, criti-

cal and slightly juvenile in its facile juxtaposition.

The Den Bosco Technical

High School, in Boston, shows

Wagner at her most benign, predictable. An icon of Mary stands between the window and a flaccid American flag. A couple of fifty posters on how to study hover above to the right. Looking outside the win-

dow is a vague street, Any-

town. The juxtapostion makes the flag, Mary, as banal by im-

plification as the impersonations to good study habits, de-ritualized by the leveled presentations of a religious school in a secular society. The image does not

shock; it does not disrupt. We have been seeing drained, meanimg trivialized in this form in every photograph of ev-

ey billboard for the last thirty years or more. It would be

vaguely amusing if it were not such a worn-out form. It should be moving or demanding if there were a locus of power, spirit or other force in the images. But it is merely some-

what arch.

And this is the problem of too many of Wagner's classroom photographs. Too nostalgic to be critical, too post-modern to indulge in delight, what is left in the alienated image. All the photographs are de-populated (metaphorically dehumanized), a strategy designed for discon-

sensation considering the fact that these are, for good or ill, arenas of interaction. As a stu-

dent of human kind's structures and forms, its architecture and artifacts, Wagner surely knows that any setting whose active agents of process are removed will seem somewhat stagnant as a result. Wagner takes these settings, all conventional class-

rooms, and informs us that the occupants have just left. Per-

haps she neds to social science and does not want her vari-
bles contaminated by rear-

ranging, by cleaning up. Per-

haps she feels the aura of the students and their teachers still inhabit the rooms (in one shot there is a skeletal shadow on the wall). A post-modern cosmic social scientist might have a great deal to say, would have more than the limited, if refined, vocabulary of this work, these limid loopted forms in crisp gelatin.

David Laser is a doctoral candi-

date in Creative Writing at the University of Houston.
On fantasizing, an exhibition of Polaroid photographs by Patrick Nagatan and André Tracey, was on view at the ICP from September 9 to October 9, 1988.

We surround ourselves with images: written images, advertising images, television, photographs, paintings, etc. We see trees outside my window or just another image? Images communicate and record what is in another space, another time, somewhere else, not here, but there, in the past, in the future. One that has much presence as another. The model is always here before the event. Simultaneous events end to the opposition between truth and falsehood. Can action take place under these conditions? Physical presence—being in a moment, taking part in the qualities that make the moment special. Like me writing this now: like you reading it. The moment is related to specific space and time, has it ever been only one space and one time? With the increase in media communication a moment in more and more occupied by other moments past and future, there, and somewhere else. This article becomes part of our moments, mine as writer, yours as reader, Nagatan’s and Tracey’s as subjects. From different times (times and spaces) we exchange moments. A woman in rollers and a robe has calmly interrupted her breakfast to look out the window. She sees a crack in the surface of the earth expanding, menacingly growing towards her. The refrigerator door has been left open, and its contents have begun to topple out. Everything else around the room is also being flung around. A cat in a freckled red dress with her tail between her legs on the floor, the table itself is being flung. The woman holds a newspaper in her hand; the headline reads: “L.A. Earthquake Unlikely.” The piece by Nagatan and Tracey is titled “Unlikely Earthquake.”

Left out of this description of “Unlikely Earthquake” are important details: the window is a painting by Tracey; strings from above hold the objects in place; the cat is not alive. The piece is made out of 20 x 24” Polaroid photographs of a construction, an installation by Nagatan and Tracey. In their installations paintings of landscapes, interiors, and window views are overlaid with backdrops for furniture, objects, and people (represented both by cutouts and models). The people are engaged in various everyday activities (picnics, breakfast, restaurants) while in the midst of phenomena (nuclear explosions, earthquakes) and other more fantastic experiences (flying fish, giant bar clams). In all the installations the people maintain the same casual attitude as the woman in “Unlikely Earthquake,” with a show of obviousness, never more than mild surprise. In the Nagatan and Tracey installations the process of construction is exposed, not hidden. Action is created. These installations, on one hand, like newspapers and television, document another moment (an earthquake, a nuclear explosion, etc.); on the other hand, as opposed to newspapers and television, they expose their own appropriation of that moment. Nagatan and Tracey have made events such as nuclear explosions, and earthquakes their own creations; they have presented them now for my own appropriation. My actions towards the photographs and then towards the events that the photographs bring to mind are being questioned. In the piece “Trinity Suite” the lower part is crossed from side to side with a negative strip of photos of a nuclear explosion, while on the upper part there is a small stage where two miniature dolls paint pictures of a nuclear explosion that is happening somewhere outside of the stage. I look at photos of a nuclear explosion, the miniature painters look at a nuclear explosion. Can I make a nuclear explosion a part of my moment more than they can? Their reaction is to paint it. What is my reaction? What is your reaction as you read about it? I am reading an article or looking at an artwork about nuclear explosions different from seeing a news report or a documentary about it? When something is about to affect our moment we take action. We can look at photos of past moments without feeling that we need to do anything about them, but we take action towards the natalina, longing, etc. which bring, which takes place in our moment. Looking at the Nagatan and Tracey photographs, surrounded by a world of images, do we take part of the moment or do we remain in another? Do we take action towards realizing ourselves, or do we become another image? In the photo “Snitcher Snitker” two very overweight people are watching a television that shows a slender woman in a batting suit holding a can of TAB diet soda. A large number of crumpled Snitker bar wrappers lie on the tables next to the pair, and many unopened bars are floating (suspended by strings) inside the room. Two newspaper headlines can be read: “Candy bar binge kills teenager” and “The Ultimate Cure for Fat, eat as much as you want and still lose weight.” The overweight couple sits in; they don’t decide whom to believe, which image to follow, whom to relate to. They watch television; the television has the moment: it is constantly providing new images, maybe the next one will be the one. For the viewer the couple watching television becomes just another repeated surface, like the Snitker bars, or the houses that expand towards the painted horizon in the background. The couple sits in, watching the television; we also watch. Maybe the next one will be the one. People in the Nagatan and Tracey photographs have been desensitized by the removal of the moment—the excessive occupation of it. They have lost their physical presence—gained too much. They live in a world of images, where everything is a representation of another, where the only decisive action is to construct another image. Nagatan and Tracey show us a leveled world. Earthquakes, nuclear explosions, obesity, fantastic happenings are all seen under the same light regardless of the effect they have on people that are actually experiencing such events, for whom the events are not images, but occupy their moment: natural, social, physical and psychological experiences are all leveled as images. Even the artists themselves become images, desensitized subjects in several of their own installations. The leveling is by choice, as in Bandrillard’s “active indifference.”

Could there be an option? Options become images, images gained. Nagatan and Tracey fantasize a world of images, flatten; we could also fantasize a world of difference, depth, where we imagine that some things are more important than others. Physical presence must be assumed.

Footnotes
1. Jean Baudrillard, speaking in an open forum at the University of Houston in April, 1987 (from edited notes by Cynthia Freeland, in “Scenes from a Simulated Seduction: Jean Baudrillard Visits Houston,” SPOT, Summer 1987, pp. 7-8.
2. Jean Baudrillard, In the Shadow of the Silent Majori- ties, trans. Paul Pass, Paul Patton, and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983); the
ART & PHOTOGRAPHY (AGAIN)

By Cynthia Freeland

The first Paris Triennale of Photography held at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, from September 24-November 10, 1988, was a tour de force. The show included works by 34 Italian artists; it will travel to various Texas venues: the University of Houston, the Texas A&M University, and the University of Texas at Austin in 1989. The 1988 Houston Area Exhibition was held at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. It featured the work of 100 artists whose works were rejected by the two earlier shows and who were selected for the Rejected show: 213 artists used color, exhibiting one work each.

But Is It Photography?

This fall two major juried exhibitions in Houston highlight regional art. In addition to the current (in response) to the Contemporary Arts Museum's First Texas Triennial and the Houston Area Exhibition, Diversity Week will present a Salon de Refusés show: A Salon de Refusés show. The representation of photography in all three exhibitions reflect issues raised in a recent New York Times Magazine article, "It's Art, but is it Photography?" (New York Times, Section 6, October 9, 1988).

In this article, Richard B. Woodward surveyed work by several photographers, including Barbara Kruger, and the Starn Twins, who reject the label "photography," and emphasized the gulf between "art photography" and "documentary," between use/photography, speaking of the Starn Twins as representatives of a "world of photographers" and exemplifying that with the use of black-and-white images intended for a print or a book (p. 30). Woodward concludes that "It isn't clear anymore how photography should be viewed" (p. 30). But the question is: is it not a photograph? (p. 42).

This comment is directly relevant to the representation of the three regional shows. For example, counting strictly with the Bay Area--Bluffer Show perhaps three artists were "photographers"--i.e., "straight." But photography, relatively small-sized, finely-printed, formally beautiful work should not be ignored. Photography as a mirror or video camera. Counting a bit more liberally, perhaps ten percent of the works were people who were also "photographers"--i.e., artists working mainly in photography, but using other media perhaps, via digitizing, collaging, huge blow-ups with paint, or incorporating computer and film/texts, etc. Counting even more broadly, perhaps 25 percent of the works were more "photographers."
"painterly effects" appeal enor-
mously." On the other hand, "Fractured forms and photogra-
phy specialist" might actually 
have ruled out some of the 
colors. The term "photography 
block" included in the Blaffer 
fair as dull and derivative. And 
"evil" likely comes from a speech 
with photographed as viewing 
photography as "ideology." The 
photography of a minority of 
artists for artistic explo-
ration. Zeltin said, "It's a tech-
cracy and it could end in itself. As far as tech-
niques go, we have people of 
three types of jurors. I have a preference for well-worn 
craftsmanship for technically-driven work, tour de force work. I don't think our choice of photography 
photography must be "more than 
photography," rather that 
photography has arrived, and now it can relax."

"A view was similar. I'm not of the school that believes art has anything to do with technical perfection. William I think is central is the idea or 
content—not the subject matter or 
photography, but what can be 
written or spoken. I'm not 
the photographs today in the 
area or how it's accomplished. The 
photography that seems to 
fact that young people today 
are coming to terms with the 
photography." It takes time for images to flow, get used, and accumulate. The appropri-
ate, manipulation, blurring of 
multiple, and the creation of the 
newscaster of the vocabulary of artists.

Tucker also commented gen-
eral case of the Blaffer photo-
today: "The 1970's courtship between painting and photography has 
cooled. What remains is a 
musical, and a lack of 
musical. We see it in photographs 
that are conceptual in origin, 
large in scale, and rooted in 
general art history, rather than 
photographic art history. The 
photographic can be quite 
different—as in works by Nick 
Nelles. His use of "the figure of 
the exter" for example, is 
traditional. The black and white 
photography may be photographed as a tool, 
what the painting world thinks. I won't stop 
collecting them." 

Regionalism

Regionalism turns out to be 
an extremely tough issue. In 
their catalogue statement for 
the exhibition, the jurors 
confidently pronounced that they 
found...a strong and healthy regio-
nal style evident. This style is 
embraced, also, by many elements 
including the often-mentioned 
"place," the city's proximity to 
Mexico, its brilliant light and the 
uninterrupted, uninterrupted hori-
zon.

By comparison, jurors for the 
Triangle showed concern to 
distinguish themselves from 
any of the regional which the 
Downtown ICA, probably went 
furthest in this direction:

And what about the Texas an-
ge? Quite frankly, in the 
opinion of the jurors, there 
wasn't one. Texas is a large 
state with many economic and 
racial conditions that is 
home to many artists. Perhaps 
the jurors were even 
Triennial Catalogue, p. 11).

Zeltin's view was more quali-
fied: "It's a very strange ques-
tion to ask. I feel that if there's 
only one chip on its shoulder. There's no weight with 
regionalism. The problem with 
Triennial is that the jurors have 
big degree they absorb, that they reflect the regional, 
local political, and so on. What 
would you define as regional 
within the Triennial? How do I 
define the Virginia Museum was 
there a show called Painting in 
The South? I think this 
monochromatically about the south—hoop and hoop, in the South, 
painting by a 'southerner'." But how 
many generations does a style or 
way of going about as a 'southerner'. In the 
Texas trim, the real 
realism as 'you live here and make 
your work here. To be a Texan, 
and that, as far as I'm concerned. Three 
people in the show were born inside 
the U.S., and of the people in 
the show, few—only 30-40 are 
natives, and few were educated 
Texas. Mobility is ubiqui-
tous—but it's not a status symbol. 
You run into trouble any-
way. You try to define 
imagery. It's tough, isn't it? 
Minorie imagery? Well, that's 
part of the art that deals with 
the art that is in relation to 
Mexico. I wish we'd had more of that. We've all been accu-
duced to some extent by the 
'the Texas scene' and the 
nonfigurative figurative work (as 
in John Alexander or Derek 
Brown's work). The regionalism is really a critical conversation; and we were trying to avoid 
this critical conversation. This 
format that creates a venue for 
work, the way that everyone helps artists get their work 
up to public.

Mayo complained, "The issue of regionalism is a tired old is-
ues we've been beating to 
death—interminably playing this 
tired old horse. It's virtu-
ally the same today without awareness of the 
art world. Younger people are 
much more aware of young Ger-
man art than I am—and they should be. The other hand, it's almost impossible to write, 
sketch or make music without some 
representation. You paint 
differently in Houston than in 
Ralph, North Carolina. Certainly of 
images, a certain physical presence is more 
more frequently received in some 
regions.

In defense of the CAM's 
installation, Zeltin argued that 
grouping is part of an issue of the 
photography of scale, and that texture 
differences are also important. I 
might improve the idea that 
the blind glass next to a painting. We need to group the 
photography and the 
photography of the de-
veloping.9 Painting as a 
work of the "photograph 
and a sense of the 'real' in the 
two pieces. She also commented it 
would be impossible to juxtapose 
the Marc by the artist. It's 
realism is that they're 
necessary. The show was put 
together as "just another dog 
that you can throw a few 
previously overrated and 
glittery pieces, and some rather different and 
original," Tucker commented. Two 
artists described the 
Avalanche exhibition as the 
"photograph" of 
photography, so 
photography, so as 
to encourage a more 
photographs of a wide 
range of participants. 

Cynthia Prevendini, SPOT Editor, is also Associate Professor of 
Photography at the University of 
Houston.
PROFILE: AMY BLAKEMORE

Amy Blakemore's large black and white photographs of children were selected by jurors from among entries by 64 local artists as third prize winners in the Blaffer Gallery's 1988 Houston Area Exhibition. These photographs look at first (and even second glance unremarkable, fuzzy and haphazard in their technique and sentimental in their content). Yet juror Alison Greene praises the work for its "perfect balance between technique and image." And like Greene, MPA Photography Curator Arnie Baker comments that Blakemore's images represent a very personal response to the recent PostFest Diane Arbus exhibit, prompting her to move beyond the more standard photojournalistic format of her earlier photographs.

Blakemore's previous work, done for her 1985 M.F.A. project at the University of Texas in Austin, was a photojournalistic study of "poor people" in Austin and San Antonio. In these medium format color photographs, Blakemore used a straight-on confrontational style, combining long descriptive handwritten titles. She showed various small businesses and women being pushed out of their San Antonio shops by development, as well as Austinites displaced into welfare hotels by "Boom City" changes.

Blakemore found that doing portraits of people she didn't know was stressful, and she began experimenting with a Diane-style plastic camera "as a way to relax" from pressures of her MFA project. Her portraits of children in the Blaffer show are part of an ongoing series of work using this cheap ($80) camera. All the street shots of people, mainly done in New York, Blakemore finds that looking at strangers on the streets is also hard, but says that children "are intimidating." She is quick to dissociate herself from a "snapshotting" of the gritty Carr ry Wingrader: "I went on a rampage when I first saw his book Women Are Beautiful." She also rejects the label of "child photographer." Blakemore looks for a "scary quality" in these pictures to "keep them from being cute."

Despite criticisms from "poorheads," Blakemore sees her new Diane-style series as an advance over the M.F.A. photojournalism project in which she worried about exploiting her subjects. But in concentrating on the elderly and on children the "less intimidating" Blakemore could still be accused of exploiting the powerless. She seems to be more comfortable now, she says, because of her new work because of how the photographs feel. The moodiness she selects for through her choice of style and presentation of subjects can be read as evoking the subjects' own intensely personal existence in an alien and mysterious world--but is it theirs or hers? In any case, Blakemore does not pretend to offer any summaries "truths" about these people, but instead provides more glimpses of the concentration of a child scratching against bow, or of an elderly woman preparing to launch herself into an empty side street looking street.

After completing the Diane series, Blakemore plans to return to more standard cameras and formats; she would like to develop more journalistic investigative skills so as to pursue projects concerning the mentally ill and Houston minority groups. It is impossible to predict how her intuitive but gutsy approach will serve in these more complex and ambitious projects, particularly to resolve important problems about context and exploitation--when she will, presumably, want to convey more "truths" about oppressed groups. For now, at any rate, Blakemore re- tains theoretical puzzling or in"
The human and geometric wound

By Martin McGovern

Works by Manuel Carrillo are on exhibit at the Bently-Moris Gallery from November 10 - December 3.

In Camera Lucida Roland Barthes describes the difference between studium and manner. "Studium is an abstract, affective, the general enthusiastic commitment to a work, a photograph. It is by studium that one is interested in many photographs, one perceives them to be political testimony or enjoys them as historical scenes--the faces, the gestures, the setting--" Passion, on the other hand, denotes that "element which rises from the scene, seeps out of it like an arrow, and pierces me." I was mulling over these elements recently as I viewed the photographs of Manuel Carrillo at the Bently-Moris Gallery. Born in Mexico in 1960, Carrillo received his first personal exhibition in 1966 when he won first prize in a photograph contest in Mexico City. His winning photo-graph entitled 'Dog on Master's Grave' was published in photography journals in Mexico. Those who photograph what they see and活得 as a photograph..."- a means of visualizing the diverse aspects of Texas culture. Nevertheless, its intention of stimulating cross-cultural understanding is an impossibly idealistic goal. Such understanding will be effected, if ever, only through works which deal directly with the many troubling issues that divide us. "Visions of Texas" satisfies; it does not address these issues. Without such an effort, "Visions of Texas" satisfies only the liberal appetite for images of strangers and their customs that people of all cultures share.

John P. duShay is a writer, photographer and curator who lives in Austin.

By Joan Seaman Robinson

Selected images by Joel-Peter Witkin were on display at the Galería del Barrio from October 14 - November 14, 1988.

There is no doubt in our eyes that Joel-Peter Witkin’s theater of the macabre is real. He is not an impressionist of the ob-scene, the procurer for the porn-prone, the stage manager of an invisible presence permutates his photographic talismans. When Goya, in his equally appalling prints of the Disasters of War, co-opted the expression “One cannot bear to see this,” “This is worse, I saw it myself,” the world creased spontaneously and true. The original delta, real and unadulterated, of the macabre was at actual rapine, disembowelment and deformity. Witkin conceives our sublime barbarities himself in sketches and notation, he has actualized reactions their production with flesh and blood matter.

The moral imperative which drove Goya to record his personal slumber and nightmares of the ob-scene, its place in a cunning connoisseurship, a sabbatical from his fevered notion of transgressions on the human body, the conceptualized, the classical ideal of the human form as we know it perfected in the history of fashion, of the ob-scene, of the human body from within with diabolical power. He is inextricable and uncondensed with a hard-on.

The body story showed four of his works this fall in a mini-montage of his large exhibition of fifteen works, shown in 1986. Throughout all them, the demonic presence are always there, even if we are physically aware or anatomically gross-transvestites, hermaphrodites, sinistre gods, dwarfs and the malformed. He makes, waks, wrapart,聪明 and bars them, and in the final treatment of the print they are at last demonized, the world is warped, stretched, and eaten away by manipulative studio structures. They are, as the moun- tage, camera movement and photographic production of the body. The models themselves are compli- mentary performers, omnipresent in their catalogue of actions and in their contexts. What we finally see is shocking, forbidden or incredible. And yet irreducible real.

These are photographs in which the models are exhibitionist, not unpossessed. Like Fashers in the shopping malls, they and the artist set up shocking confrontations. Their work is not just clinically interesting sports of nature but queereness incarnate, grotesque in a side show, deviants by chance and by choice, or as a consequence of the lev- els. And there is a market for such tastes, on this level alone. There is also a serious history for such imaginings. One in which the mysteries of nature are exposed, not only the nakedness of the human body, but also every transfiguration, every permutation, every role. Witkin plumbs this dark region and exploits its reveling depth in the creation of his own ultra-large alarm and offed. Usually cited for the classically serene art historical sources he begrudges—elegant Christa and limp Phidias—he seems more greed- ily plunders an alternative his- tory based on the vitality and the viciousness of the grosser appetites. This pictorial tradition is both manifestation of the need to transform ourselves, to disfigure, to disfigure us, first with the bodies and then with the sermons he lays over them. His protagon- ists can’t really threaten us because they are social cut- touts, marginal to society.

These images are used in the service of elaboration to demonstrate the ob-scene, the leper, the victims of the Black Death; graphic delineations of the tortures of the damned and wondrous explications of the Temptations of Saint Anthony. This entire iconography was necessitated by the denial of the senses and a fear for the spirit, by a lust after forbidden fruit and terror at the weighting of souls. Pro- scriptions were brought to life by printers of miniatures and sculptors on cathedrals, in per- sonifications of the virtues and views—the latter more stimulating and sensuously familiar. The naked body, as our object of desire, an emblem of excess and a reminder of mortality, is central to Witkin’s work—ex- pressively, symbolically and structurally. The physical at- tributes of his models and the features add to them in costume or re-workings tastefully to insatiable appetites, lustful practices, the pleasures of pun- ishment, nor end in termination. De Sade put it this way: “There is no better way to test the limits of cruelty linked with many licentious image.” Their poses are phallic: they portray performances in art history and theater. Like montages they are ranged on shallow stages-set- pieces congested with symbolic props, objects, and are in the detail and weird erotomania. The effect in however, in a photograph, is to sharpen our awareness of the bodies because of the artificiality of their settings; their abnormalities are heightened; their currency as abnormality and object is thrust at us in the trapping of mythological prototypes. They

They never seem to move and they don’t look at us; their haunts are war- sorbed, or deflected with masks. They are distanced by quaint arching borders, oval apertures or snapshot-clip cor- ners. The print surfaces are washed, scumbled and scratched, suggesting genera- tions of handling as if whatever we see happened back in the past. And his compositions often have a classical resolve which muffles the surcharge of these wicked engagements. In “Venus and Cupid,” 1987, a voluptuous nude lies in a dark, cage-like hovel, controlled by a black border recalling the perpul- ble view of Duchamp’s “Nude Descending A Staircase,” a crotch-angled view of a woman lying in a landscape. The concentric circles are female symbols, but they veer to the left eccentrically, where the woman lies. At her parted legs hangs a penis. In a painting this ungody might suggest a supreme gratifi- cation, male undi- vided and sexually inviolated. In the photograph such harmony is thwarted, intercourse on any level is inadmissible, the carnal not be entered. It is either the victim to the light of day, or one’s nightmare. Its anicences are in the fleshbowl, early erotic photography, and twentieth century Surrealism, reinved in by examples of the surrealism. Witkin rejects to the flagrant display of the dangling organ.

Witkin sees a fat- late-clad dwarf between a severed pony and a smashed portrait bust, in “Portrait of a Dwarf,” 1987. They are lined up on a ledge, surrounded by the border of a mat- cail panel which sets them off, like a theatrical curtain or a show window, and we are right the tall legs of a man- nequin establish a normal scale for this tiny world of frag- ments.

The image is menacing, de- spondent, tense, a moribund rigidity. The horse is cut in too, the plaster face is destroyed, and both are claimed by the grip of the sexless dwarf—mask and cloak mysteriously in female un- dergarments. He wields a chain-flashing, warping coco, her black shaft aimed at a metal ring linking the animal’s two sections, and searing the black line of a strap around the head.

Weinman’s “Dias- trauer” is replete with his understanding of the inevitability of the body, of the body’s very tendency to re- sistant reaction. It is a celebration as the Witches’ Sabbath, a high priest at a mil- lenial Black Mass, a moralist enthralled with immorality. The food is spiced, the wine is mellow, equilibrium and classical restraint.

Two relatively simple images were also in the gallery but were not suited to this collection. One was the back of a seated nude in which the camera was moved slowly to the right from the right to the form like a viscous material. The work of this body recalls Courbet’s lefty body more especially, Ingres’ flaccid but strong arm. As long as we, like, Lautzger’s work, and that of Kertesz and Brandt, sweep straight black lead on to be optical warped skull, a me- mento mori, with a perfectly shaped pomegranate placed next to its cheek. And the third little girl, clothing in a finuist, that eighteenth century French chair with the flowing cur- tows, whose upholstered and planed neck, Witkin was the first ever conceived to fit the shape of the human body. The head is a mask, like that of the executioner or Goya’s ass-head- ed man. In the first it is a satanic, a diabol in the bordel- lo. So unlike the modesty wrapping over the eyes of Eakins’ studio nude, or the black Marini Grass runs of Balenciaga’s wearing fashion. This quieter dimension of fancy dress, in its way, as its studies, in contrast to the engorged extra- terrestrial of the extraordinary and popular tableau.

Footnotes

1. Francisco Goya’s The Disas- trauer of War were opened at the Menil Collection, Houston, October 14 - November 14, 1988.


4. Joel-Peter Witkin, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, April-June, 1988. The influence of the Spanish art on Witkin’s imagery is very important and needs to be investigated in an English language translation.

5. Witkin was trained as a scul- ptor and in a law school, but decided on photography.

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Vanitas

By Ed Osowski


It has not always been true that the first reflexion in a mirror simply provided the opportunity to examine how one "looked." Perhaps even as late as 1758, when Francois Boucher painted "Madame de Pompadour," the presence of a mirror triggered other responses, and, the viewer knew that a mirror in a portrait signified that the portrait could be traced back, in its iconographic details, to certain medieval images of the saints. Such portraits, combing together images of vanitas and moment morti, found their fullest expression in the numerous paintings of the Magdalens. In his "Penitent Magdalen," Georges de La Tour places the saint before a mirror in which a candle is reflected. In her lap she holds a human skull. The message is quite clear: Magdalen's great beauty will last as briefly as will the candle. But the opportunity to contemplate her beauty in death in the mirror will bring with it the realization that this world passes and another (the spiritual) remains.

Do you in turn turn herself away from the viewer and inward to these realizations. Boucher's spirit on the other hand, faces us squarely, confidently. Her mirror triggers in our minds the vanitas theme. But for her it is there only to guide her toward heaven, her beauty a means to holiness. As she attends to her toilette, preparing herself to meet her lover, Louis XV, she prepares us also for the photographs of women we will find in Martin Harrison's Beauty Photography in Vogue.

A 1938 photograph by Edward Steichen epitomizes the contents of Harrison's book. In the Steichen photograph, a young female model in evening clothes applies perfume to herself from a large crystal atomizer. She smiles with the confidence that comes from using perfumes and expensive clothing. And she enjoys the attention she pays to herself as well as the attention paid her by the camera—as she completes her preparations to meet some interloper Louis XV. The photograph emphasizes youth, beauty, elegance and wealth—exactly what one would expect to find emphasized in a photograph in Vogue. But this is only the obvious content of the photograph. Steichen's photograph, it seems, can also be read as a variation on the portrait of Madame de Pompadour, or more accurately, as a subversion of the message of the vanitas portrait. The props which surround the model bear iconographic readings. An arrangement of flowers is placed above her right shoulder, and more flowers crown the back of her head and cascade across her shawl. We know that their blooms will soon fade. The flowers are their替代物 with their echo of the flowers Magdalen carried with her to the tomb of Christ. In Steichen's photograph, a large portrait of Vanitas models her back to the mirror (an opportunity for the photographer to show the back of the gown). But the turning away also tells us something about how the meaning of the portrait of a beautiful woman has been transformed in the pages of Vogue. If the message of the Magdalens is one of liberation, at least of self-awareness, then Steichen and the other photographers represent- ed in Harrison's book offer a full-scale capitulation to the controlling power of the search for youth and beauty. In Steichen's photograph, "Remembrance of Death" has been replaced by the advice, as fleeting as the model's perfume, to "Seize the Day.

To distinguish it from fashion photography, with which it overlaps, Harrison defines "beauty photography" this way: "A beauty photography signifies a concentration on the appearance of the woman herself as opposed to what she might be wearing (p. 7)." He goes on to say, "Beauty photography is primarily concerned with a woman's look, not her being. Such a definition is, at best, disingenuous. For the fashion photographs in Vogue, collected in Harrison's book, have functioned first as adjuncts to the advertising pages in the magazine. These are photographs which suggest that certain cosmetics or treatments or hairstyles (the last goes on) will give a woman "beauty." Their concern has been not with the "well-being" of the viewer but with her pocketbook (specifically, how to extract money from that pocketbook). Secondly, these photographs aim to support the cultural notion that women are commodities, that their personhood is open to the highest bidder. Irving Penn's 1965 photograph (p. 81) of seven tubes of lipstick replaces the beauty of the models with beautiful things. These photographs suggest that least from the tyranny of the "beauty" can be obtained by painting oneself up instead of one's hair. But what must be remembered is that the woman is shown being "beautified" because they are Vogue models. Their "beauty," in course, never ends because those with the power to set the standards constantly change them. Cecil Beaton, quoted in Harrison's book, expressed this way: "How imperceptibly, but quickly, our view on beauty fluctuates! Even in two years the idea can undergo complete change!" To achieve that unachievably ideal one is urged, as Irving Penn does in a 1963 photograph (p. 98), to transform the eye into a target or pin-wheel, black and white circles surrounded by slashes of blue, pink, and green. Or, one is effed a 1975 photograph (p. 172) by Horst in which paint and lipstick are applied to the face to create a mask-like effect. That these colors mimic the shapes and tones of bruses is obvious, but Horst desires to be mentioned.

Beauty Photography in Vogue draws upon the past fifty years of American, Italian, French, and British editions of the magazine and contains over 180 photographs. (From the text it is impossible to tell in which edition a photograph first appeared). Of the more than fifty photographs reproduced in this book, just six are women. While the work was published in the forties and fifties, Bob Willard and Frances McLaughlin-Gill bring a freshness, directness, and narrative quality to their photographs that the men, their models lauour, move, or sit pensively, the women are aware of their beauty, but they also knew that their beauty depends on a male audience to confirm it. In the work of the later four women—Sharon Moon, Joyce Tinenso, Shelleh Metzner, and, especially, Debbie Turville—he is able to detect a aesthetic difference from the work of the male photographers. One finds here another world, dreamlike, soft and vague. Coated with white powder or hidden behind multiple fabrics, their models come to resemble statues or corpses. At other times they almost seem to vanish, as if these were都无法政知妇女要到另一个地方在哪里他们将不会被利用和忽视。

Harrison's concern, in his text and photographs, is with beauty as a lower level, "not the principle which Robert Adams in Beauty in Photography (1981) says is a "synonym for the coherence and structure underlying life." And what escapes him is the content of the works he has chosen and how they relate to the culture of which they are a part. Harrison is good at describing how technical advices in cameras and film were reflected in changes in the images printed in Vogue. But he fails to show how the work of the "anti-femist (anti-femi)" culture of beauty they are a part. A Helmut Newton photograph (p. 118), homoe and veiled, can not seem as "amusing." Harrison's photographers "exploit" (his word) their models, never their models, to achieve effects.

At the center of the photographs Harrison has drawn from Vogue, then, rests a very disturbing theme. These photographs aim to make us satisfy. But it is not the political status quo that they challenge. They are too firmly grounded in the culture of commerce ever to do that. The dis- satisfaction they create is per- spective created on the basis of no threat to the patriarchal ruling class. They succeed in channeling the energy with the body, with one's appearance, into a drive for the new products and styles to shape and alter the body. The manipulation of these photographs rests the belief that the female body itself is just another product to be shaped, consumed, manipulated, cut apart, and pieced back together (p. 174 in Tom Falam- bo in 1961 and p.179) Serge Lutens in 1980 do photographically, in a never-ending effort to distract women from those things which truly demand to be changed.

Ed Osowski manages the Monocle Book Library. A frequent contributor to SPOT, he occasionally reviews books for the Houston Post.
A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

By Stanley Moore


The first impression the viewer gets when looking through Gehlke's Landscapes from the Middle of the World is one of astonishment; a flagrant disregard for the Golden Mean Rule of Thirds. No thought or reflection on composition. The pictures have for the most part (with two exceptions, both panoramas), aspect ratios of 1:2 or 2:3, or an 8 x 10 or square format. The feeling of static orlistion is inescapable, a lack of point of midpoint horizons and by his foregrounds all of the middle ground or picture elements directly at the center of the frame (see Plate 2). The result is in fact an initial enthusiasm. Add to all this the very odd and boring subject matter, and the reader may simply want to close the book and move on to a more exciting work of vision instead.

This, however, would be a grave mistake. By discarding the outward shibboleths of the conventional use of the camera and actually looking at the pictures, we can obtain a filling repast that nourishes the spirit and opens the eye. First and best of all, most of the subjects are not Texas, not Texas at all. It is not the Texas of tourist brochures but a deeply emotional and idiosyncratic view of Texas as it is, or should be. It is a view anyone with a love of the state. Second, all the photographs convey a sense of presence. They are not mere representations of a landscape but an actual presence of one.

Third, both rural and urban landscapes show a keen sense of place and a strong sense of place. A sense of place and sky seem almost tangible in these images. But before exploring their possibilities, let us first clear away some of the brush:

Herein lies the chief problem with this page essay page by Gehlke. It is fully in character with the photographs which simply ask us to question, raise questions rather than putting them to rest. It explores the problem of the connection between the image and reality.

In the case of landscape photography, as a general rule, sharpness is more prized by the viewer than the image itself. Often the viewer looks at the image without really examining it, much less attempting to see it, much less attempting to see the world that is portrayed. As a result, the image is never truly appreciated.

In keeping with this sense of paradox, Gehlke ends his essay with a series of questions that are essentially unanswerable, commenting that “at what point will...”

Following these words we find the photograph (Plates 1-3) arranged two to a page, one above the other. All appear to be the same image: a view of Gehlke’s childhood home and environs, and while a “ordinary” theme it is one of the most common in the world - a past Texas that seems no longer to exist. However, just as we seem well underway when we come upon Ben Lifson’s introduction, “A Figure and a Landscape” is the first photograph, with two more engaging portions of which the specific details are lost to all of us except for those of Gehlke’s. Of considerable interest is an involved and controverted discussion of five categories (and one reject) proposed in the Introduction to the book: The Horizon, Singular Object, Vantagepoint, Spectator, Boy, and Darkness into Light. These categories can certainly be applied to the photographs, but in the case of the former seems to be so much film of representation by which categorization is in favor of presenting the work as an organic whole or its presentation is marred by the odd inclusion of four color photographs. Photographs which are, in extremely garish colors—sprint-colored willy-nilly among the black and white photographs that make up the bulk of the work. The color photographs (with the exception of the cover shot) are somewhat different in style, tone, and mood from the others. There is also an unfortunate remnant of Gehlke’s cartographic scheme in Plates 6-10, which are meant to express thematically each of his groupings. These are square-format pictures inexplicably reproduced on grey paper, whereas everything else in the book is in print on white glossy paper. The grey background is diacritical; it makes the otherwise excellent reproduction look dingy and fuzzy. Since the only apparent point of this choice is to model Gehlke’s categories, it is a shame that such strong images are dulled to no real organizational or visual purpose.

The transition from Plate 10 on grey paper to Plate 11 on white paper is so disconcerting that one wonders exactly how much or whether that some bookmaker’s error had occurred. In any event, printed away a lot of undergrowth, we can now examine the images in more detail. By subject matter the photographs can be grouped into four broad categories: documentary, “grain elevators,” “houses, fields, etc.” and “and the sky.” Beyond these classifications, the works could be tied together by the broad label of the emotionals. These pictures strike such a deep chord of back long-buried memories and feelings in the viewer, with some exceptions. See the photographs of the “and the sky, and the horizon as a storm front set against a sky” from a storm. These pictures do not have the visual impact of man and nature on our planet, first and foremost, and the rest of the world. The next, the results of the four grain elevator photographs in the middle dis-
CHARLES SHEeler’S AMERICA

By Robert Hobbs

Charles Sheeler: The Photographs, by Theodore E. Steh- lin, Jr., and Norman Keys, Jr. (Brandeis University Graphic Society Book; Little, Brown and Company) 162 + x pages; $45.00

It took the modern artist Charles Sheeler and a camera to create a convincing image of America’s past. In 1917 Sheeler made a group of twelve photographs of the rented Bucks County farmhouse which he shared with fellow artist Morton Schamberg. His images are intimate views of this Doylestown house, built in 1768 by the Quaker, Jonathan Worthington. Each image in this series abstracts an aspect of the building; the group includes “Old Kitchen,” “Stairway with Chair,” “Open Door,” and “The Stove.” Disarmingly simple, these semi-abstractions images lack inevitable. Perhaps their seeming inevitability now stems from the fact that they have served as models for a number of important works dealing with the ambivalence of nostalgia in America—and also from the fact that there are many more mindless clichés that simply revolve in the good old days. But their inevitability ultimately develops out of Sheeler’s special way of abstracting aspects of American culture.

Charles Sheeler, Doylestown House, Pa., 1917

Abstraction has recently been rediscovered by such Marxists as postmodernists, and others, who have set out to criticize nature as a base to arbitrary, its ties to French modernism re- strictive and superficially o- chorphic, and its dependence on the inherent processes of its chosen medium a materialistic blur that gives rise to techniques, machines, and materials over human concerns. Yet abstraction has been of enormous vail- to those few artists whose have been persecuted and exiled to the extent of separating themselves from all cultural as a major figure of American art. Sheeler, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Pug- ey, and Charles Sheeler, all men of American art, lent objects to this exh- ibition. In the 1960s folk art began the more widespread presence of a renewal of the Modern Museum of Art (And later the Federal Art Projects) of the 1930s. Cahill’s embrace of folk art as an important part of the program aimed at giving ordinary people in the United States to the history of the awareness of themselves as indus- trial, suburban folk who had managed to make num- churing and charming work in the face of adversity. His exhib- ition, American Folk Art/Art: The Art of the Common Man in America 1750-1960 (MOMA, 1932), was a landmark in the appreciation of a wide variety of folk art in the United States. Sheeler’s turn to the Ameri- can folk art of his rented Doylestown house is a fur- tive murmur of personal Inter- ests and public need. His sub- ject is the open door, an over- appreciation for the American vernacular tradition, as well as his interest in it as a symbol of the social and inti- macy. His images are re- corded with a special and nos- talgia. The art of these three is the group of images of sec- spectually quiet narratives dramatically American’s inscrip- tion on the world. In these photographs Sheeler chooses the most powerful that are at the same time charming and fascinating; instead of being at- ractive and familiar, they are easily familiar and disturbing. Unlike Grant Wood, whom he probably influenced through his later paintings, Sheeler does not view the past as a group of stories, of a fanciful never-never land con- ceived in marzipan hills, toy fences, and antiques, and then imagined. Instead of streamlining reality, Sheeler maximizes its felt sur- face, a new door is a left open, and in another, why are we all studying a fireplace so intently? And the prominent shadows in these photographs increase our mystery: shadows be- come important part of the scene. Sheeler’s photographs are not merely modeling the scene at hand. And this taut, this version, which gives them enorm- ous power, because of the Conven- tional codes of modernism as entrapped in this image. The abstract, geometric grids look as if they were right homes and the properties of the house, and not a manifestation of a twenti- eth century method which sometimes reduces objects to predetermined essences. In this way, the photographs con- vince us of their reality, in much the way a head of Civil War images or Age’s early morn- ing scenes of Paris convey, re- spectively, the tragedy of war and the isolation of the modern American.

Charles Sheeler, New York, Towards the World’s Building, 1920

It is a pleasure to find this image as the source of many photographers thoughtfully repro- duced, along with a number of other important works, in the lavish Charles Sheeler: The Photographs, by Theodore E. Stehlin, Jr. This book serves as one of the best introductions to the city below with smoke and darkness. These photographs for their importance to Edward Hopper, who used them as a basis for
THE DITLO EFFECT: AN ARMCHAIR GUIDE TO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

By Bill Ferris

In 1982 there emerged a new format for photojournalism which has since grown into a large and influential field. The series of "A Day in the Life of..." books began to come, by the photographer's own statement, "the most successful photographic series in Ameri- can publishing history." These volumes, which have so far been devoted to (1982), Hawaii (1984), Canada (1990), Argentina (1983), America (1986), the Soviet Union (1987), Spain (1988), and Cali- fornia (1989), have been pro- duced at a rate of about one volume a year and have, on occa- sion, made the New York Times Best Seller List. Each volume is an account of that particular country written by the participating photog- rapher and is accompanied by that country's perfor- mance in the Olympics, refugee crises, political events, and the like. The series demonstrates how the nature of photojournalism has been a matter of perspective and how photographers can work around the world in ways that they never could before. It is a testament to the power of photography and its ability to convey the human experience - parallel to the views of some influential antecedents.

In the United States, LIFE magazine, which was modeled after earlier prototypes from Germany and France, began publishing in 1936. Its popu- larity continued to grow until the 1960s when its audience and advertisers were gradually pulled away by television. During its nearly 40 years of success, LIFE developed the formula that is used in DITLO. In both publications, photographs are accompanied by three or four brief sentences which relate, in a rather in- nescuous way, some slight inform- ation about the subject, or, perhaps the photographer's ex- periences while making the im- age. Like their counterparts in LIFE, these-and other photogra- phers have the role of a text for the

Cristina Garcia Rodero, cover photo for A Day in the Life of Spain, 1983.

the human animal or its soci- ety will inevitably emerge from studying the collection. This belief in the truth-value of photography -its ability to con- vey a human essence -parallels the views of some influential antecedents.

In the United States, LIFE magazine, which was modeled after earlier prototypes from Germany and France, began publishing in 1936. Its popu- larity continued to grow until the 1960s when its audience and advertisers were gradually pulled away by television. During its nearly 40 years of success, LIFE developed the formula that is used in DITLO. In both publications, photographs are accompanied by three or four brief sentences which relate, in a rather in- nescuous way, some slight inform- ation about the subject, or, perhaps the photographer's ex- periences while making the im- age. Like their counterparts in LIFE, these-and other photogra- phers have the role of a text for the

publication. The DITLO edi- tions mimic the LIFE magazine formula by telling us about specific people in everyday sit- uations. We are encour- aged to see these people as typ- ical. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Museum of Modern Art De- partment of Photography un- der the direction of Edward Steichen, assembled and pre- sented a series of exhibitions which reflected, in their instal- lation design and curatorial methods, an approach remark- ably similar to that exercised by LIFE photographers. In a num- ber of exhibitions, such as Road to Victory (1942) and Power in the Pacific (1945), Steichen used images that had been called from many sources to present vast, elaborate installations which ultimately gave political and socio- economic context to the established high culture. In 1953, Steichen mounted what was then the most pop- ular photography exhibit of all time, From Here to There. While these exhibits did little

to advance the public identifi- cation with an artistic medium, their populist appeal was a marked depar-ure from aesthetic concerns and for- toTA. For these shows, the museum used an installation design by Herbert Bayer that had been inspired by European Russian constructivist exhibit plans. These plans, which had been further refined by Bauhaus, yielded an installa- tion which was so novel and fa- miliar to an audience acquainted with LIFE magazine. The overall plan of the exhibits was remarkably similar to a double paginated spread from LIFE. Photos were juxtaposed in ways which suited Steichen's pur- pose. In The Family of Man, Stei- chen placed images of people from various cultures side by side. When gallery visitors en- tered a given room, they were confronted by a photo mixture of differing scale, subjects, and cultures. Steichen's placement, and selection of imagery suited his propagandist aims, which ultimately were to bring America as the social and politi- cal values of the world. As Christopher Phillips has observed, Steichen's cura- tion challenged viewers to ex- positioning established "new realities" (or, at least, those consistent with a pre-deter- mined thesis." While the DITLO project's aims are not as overtly political, they are engaged in a more subtle but nonetheless significant way in its aims and effects. Like Steichen's Family of Man, the DITLO books are di- rected primarily to the Ameri- can audience, and appeal more directly to the global audience. If the eight-volume

series is considered as a single work, it has a remark- able similarity to the earlier nineteenth cen- tury photobooks which illus- trate the illustrated book of the Grande Vagues. These volumes, which incorpo- rate the poetics of tra- ditional and contemporary art, had an enthusiastic au- dience in England and France. They stimulated the travel jour- nal which was popular among the upper classes, who bought them as souvenirs of their trav- els. These nineteenth century publications are important symbols of a cultural colonial- ism, being practiced at the time by France and other European powers and replicated now by the United States. These books make all cultures knowable, and to that extent possessable. When the series was first launched, as it is currently planned, to in- clude some third world coun- tries (where the average $40.00 cost of these volumes exceeds the average income of the average households), our photo-colonial impulses will become even more apparent.

The gender roles which are implicit in the DITLO books re- gards that are implicit in the DITLO books regard the poetics of photographic tradition generally support tradi- tional stereotypes. Women are typically represented as veiled or portrayed in manners which are associated with soci- etal views of femininity. They

Charles Sheeler, Blustery Season and Desert Cabaret, Ford Plant, 1927

his watercolors and paintings of New York rooftops that ap- peared in the twenties. Sheeler unfortunately did not always adhere to the critical rigors experienced in the County's farmhouses and New York skyline series. In the 1930s he joined the staff of Condé Nast, where he worked for three years, con- tributing to a number of features for Vanity Fair, and more than nine- ty Vogue. Although he did not claim to be a "broadway guy," he was fully immersed in the spirit of the Condé Nast publication and began to glorify the glamour and power of the modern world. Signifi- cantly, a few of these images are re- produced in the Stieglitz' Kaysers text, which mentions the need at the time to produce glamorous photographs of celebrities, and the require- ment on occasion to stoop to such features as "An Evening at 47th Street Stratus a New Step-A Dance Up from the Lower--The Black Bottom." Sheeler's Condé Nast connection can be explained in terms of a need for regular work and pay even if the results cannot be landed. The commissions in 1927 ad- vertise Edsel Ford's River Rouge plant near Dearborn, Michigan, however, can less easily be categorized as com- mercial work. In most of his photographs of the Ford plant, Sheeler maintains a critical distance. Some of his images in this series, in fact, are among his greatest. They ap- pear to extol industrial power and at the same time present its dark side. The most suc- cessful scenes are restricted to huge sections of the factory. These spectral figures—great leer- ing dinosaurs of the indus- trial age—long, slow, and spread over what appears to be a lumbering synchronized machine. Many of his pieces and monstrous robots of automa- tion—certain. But even if the factory and also not entirely subdued, they represent the industrial power of the modern world.

Compared to these great images, those twofold to the mixed bless- ing of his job as an "indus- trial" photographer. Sheeler's 1930s Farm Security Admin- istration work in the Salem house seem trivial and anecdotal, while his scenes of the Mount Lebanon Shaker Village or the Hildene and Bingham interiors in the following year are pale reflections of the earlier years devoted to his Doyelstown house. Only in 1939 when he undertook the Fortin commission did he achieve some of the intensity of his old manner, maintaining his re- markable ability to celebrate and question aspects of Ameri- can culture in the same work of art. The photographs of "Boulder Dam," for example, Sohn commands respect for this man-made wonder at the same time that it underlines the dam's role in influencing natu- ral water courses. The view of "Boulder Dam, Water Intake Towers" is science fiction in its spectral calm, and the fero- cious harrassed power of "Wheel's" demands respect for these then ubiquitous mecha- nized marvels of the modern world.

In comparison, Sheeler's paintings lack the conviction and force of his photographs, perhaps because painted im- ages do not impress on viewers the level of reality that can be conveyed by the photographs. As is evident from Sheeler's work, a photograph is a selected image of reality, a special and privileged view that might differ radically from the way a scene or an object might ap- pear to casual observers. Still, in his photographs Sheeler plays with this medium's abil- ity to maintain an apparently direct relationship with the perceivable world. His success can be gauged by the fact that his photographs are frequently reproduced in art- istic publications. Although superbly edit- ed, the paintings often appear pure when placed next to photographs. His photographs transform reality while affirm- ing that they are selective: we see a carefully selected segments of the world that look sharp and free of external reality, while ex- habiting the strange familiarity of the In his photographs Sheeler plays with this medium's abil- ity to maintain an apparently direct relationship with the perceivable world. His success can be gauged by the fact that his photographs are frequently reproduced in art- istic publications. Although superbly edit- ed, the paintings often appear pure when placed next to photographs. His photographs transform reality while affirm- ing that they are selective: we see a carefully selected segments of the world that look sharp and free of external reality, while ex- habiting the strange familiarity of the

Robert Hebbe is Associate Profa- sor of Art History, Florida State University. His most recent book is Edward Hopper (Akrama).
are pictured as mothers, teachers, nurturing children, cleaning houses, sitting idly, or relat-
ing to men in a way which es-
tablishes the male as the per-
son or the primary actor in the sit-
tuation. When women face the camera, they are often portrayed as la-
ughing nervously or gleefully.

They are only rarely shown in-
volved in any work which challenges stereo-
types. There are many pic-
tures which depict women as in-
formal figures.

When men are pictured, a dis-
sect difference in how they are depicted.

This is evident. They work hard, and their involvement in their work is often less stereotyped.

They are nearly always shown in positions of responsibility and authority. Men are fre-
quently pictured in instructional or leadership roles.

They are often pictured in more contemporary scenes, such as working in an office or factory, whereas women are often portrayed as passive observers or as figures in domestic settings.

These differences are reflected in the stereotypes that persist in society. Men are often depicted as strong, independent, and in control, while women are often portrayed as dependent, passive, and in need of protection.

The images in the album reflect these stereotypes, with men often shown in more active roles and women in more passive ones. This can be seen in the way that men are often depicted as leaders, while women are more often seen as followers.

The album's title, "Falls the Shadow," could be seen as a commentary on the limitations and constraints placed on women by society. The use of the word "shadow" could be interpreted as a reference to the way that women are often seen as being in the shadow of men, lacking the same opportunities and recognition.

On a more positive note, the album also contains images of women in more active roles, such as working in the fields or as chefs. These images are a reminder of the diversity and complexity of women's experiences.

Overall, the images in the album provide a powerful commentary on the ways in which gender stereotypes are perpetuated through photography. They serve as a reminder of the importance of challenging these stereotypes and promoting more inclusive and diverse representations of women.
LETTERS

Priority in the SPOT letters column is given to letters concerning recent shows and articles. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

Heiseke on Sekula
November 9, 1988
To the Editor:
I am writing to clarify two potentially misunderstood points in "Sekula: a realist in search of theory" (SPOT, Letters, Fall 1988).
First, at the end of the first sentence of his letter a senten- ce reads: "But I do get cranky about my historical re- search, which can be a legitimate intellectual work for which I have little re- spect.
Unfortunately, in our language, "get cranky" is used as an adjective or as a transitive verb, and one could be led to believe (incorrectly) that what Sekula is saying is completely independent of his grammatical and semantic content to insure accurate meaning. If "get cranky" is understood to be an adjective and "I get craky about my historical re- search" is the meaning intended, my letter is completely different in meaning from what I had written. It is important that my intentions be clear and that my words not be interpreted as I did not mean them.

In writing his letter (and section) is otherwise precise I feel that we should make certain that the editors of SPOT have followed Sekula's sequence of exchanges in SPOT? consider the following: A determination of exact historical content to an understanding of intended meaning is required.

The second (and) incident occurs in the third line of Sekula's piece where he makes a mistake in a typographic error (typo). We all know the gen- eral reader, not just the established media, is not so much what they write about you, as much as they spell your name right. If this is a typographic error, I must point out that the cor- rect spelling of my given name is Robert, not "Rober." As print- ers use "Rober," which is the name of a famous German author, I was not to wish not to allow a nega- tive influence to stand.

Respectfully,
Robert Holmoken

Japanese on Video
November 3, 1988
Dear SPOT/Wendy Starba:
Regarding your review of WAVEFORMS, Video/Japan, entitled, "Tourism of the Wave: Japanese Avant-Garde Video," I'd like to make the following corrections and clarifications:
WAVEFORMS: Video/Japan was organized by Carl, not Carol, Muro, and Reiko Takehara.
WAVEFORMS is designed to be a survey of present views with a broad perspective of video as an activity in Japan. The two programs are not arranged in chronological order, but in contextual order, with each program examined in its own context. The central role of the repeating program is the persistence of tradition and the embracement of new technology in contemporary Japanese culture.
Regarding technical primitive: How much American expertise in video art is equivalent technical sophistication to Japanese MTV?
WAVEFORMS includes works employing both low end and high end technology. Such works as Ro Natsukawa's Mi Fugi, Bumino Ke- do's Waal, and the pieces by Radio Tokyo are standards in both American and European standards, even today! Kiri Miyagawa's Chasing the Rainbow received a standing ovation at SIGGRAPH for te- levision's late sophistication. Televisuality: Please note, these are video tapes, NOT film.

Cultural alienation: Yes, Japan is a different culture than ours, as this video program indicates. "Different" opens up possibilities of meaning to be inade- quately judged by the standards of a culture which have not informed it.

The program: Alley of May will be seen differently in America and Japan, but stands up on both levels. It is a subjective record of the artist's boyhood impressions (the camerawork is held vast high by the artist to explore his perspective as a child). Objectively, Alley of May express a Japanese slum.

In Gil Joe, Radical TV holds a mirror to America of what we see of us, we see directly exported. Seeing the "beleaguered" toy servant doing a Jerry data dance also provides a provocative com- mentary of U.S. military stance.

Rote Box is not a movie, just documentation of a ritualized performance. The artist comes from a fishing village, hence his "poetic inspiration" of seeing the blue sea water reflected in his par- ent's faces. The movie recalls the didactic cultural forms based on Japanese symbols; red for war, white for peace.

Narrative: Even in the U.S., nar- rative is not an important part of video art. However, WAVE- FORMS includes both narrative and non-narrative video art. In WAVEFORMS we believe the didactic component to be an essential part of the program's presentation.

Innocent? Testify? Look a lit- tle deeper. By inquiring into the technology utilized, and Japan's culture, you will see the difference of Japanese culture to how we view it. The program complements our film.

Sincerely,
Carl Leffler
New York

San Francisco
Wendy Starba replies:
Thank you for your concerns with the review of WAVEFORMS. It seems we both have in mind the same goal: the dissemination of new art and ideas to the American and Japanese cultures.
I have expressed my views precisely in your explanation of the term "Gil Joe." My take on Japanese video might speak to a group unfamiliar with Japanese culture. As a long- time student of Japanese language and culture, I was very interested in your analyses of the individual works, and can only say that I re- gret the additional material was not made available to the less informed American audience. I spoke with several Japanese friends about "Radiokids," and they were as un- aware of the color symbolism as I. It would be helpful to American audiences if there were some written explanation of the persis- tential traditions in which to view these videos, or if a short descrip- tion explaining subject and explicit choices were to be made available.

My hope is that such programs will continue to be made available to American audiences, with sufficient secondary material to allow them to step beyond the limits of their own cultures. If this is true, I however also reserve the right as a viewer to find such programs as my film choosing as well as my view of WAVEFORMS, I believe I have succeeded at educating both.

Sincerely,
Wendy Starba

CLUBS

The Houston Camera Club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first and third Tuesday of each month at Bay- land Park Community Center, 6401 North Forest Brook Boulevard, Memorial, at 2801-2805 (542-6205) or 2806-2807 (542-6245).
The Houston Photographer Club meets the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7711 Edloe. Contact: Ed Bergman, President, 777-7755.

FOOTNOTES

Wendy Starba is Assistant Professor of German at the College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota. She teaches and publishes in the areas of film, gender studies, and critical theory.

NEWS

Conferences
Women in Photofournalism
A two day conference entitled "Another Point of View: Women in Photofournalism" will be held in Austin on February 25-26, 1989. A faculty of ten women, all leaders in their respective fields, will head- line this conference designed for working photofournalists, editors, news directors, graphic designers, and media students. The speakers will include internationally known Frances McMillan and author Kay Miller, and Houston photofournalist Wendy Watters. Hosted by the Region 8 Women's Commit- tee of the National Press Photogra- pher's Association, the conference will address important issues that affect women, as well as men, in the field of photofournalism. For more information on the conference, please contact: Michelle Bridwell, 4120 Galveston, Laredo, TX 77906, (512) 727-7475 (F), (512) 723-9901 (O), or Joyce Marshall, 1210 Sunset Terrace #6, Ft. Worth, TX 76106, (817) 306-4399 (E), (817) 306-7650 (W).

SPE National Meetings
The Society for Photographic Educa- tion will convene its 25th annual conference in Rochester, NY, March 16-19, 1989. Under the theme of "Medi- a and Society," the event will ex- aminate the ways that sociologically derived media have affected social, cultural, economic, and political terms. Programming for this year's conference will be selected by a ten-member national jury rep- resenting educators and practicing photogra- phers, racial, sexual, occupational, and geographic hosts. For further information, contact: SPE National Conference, PO. Box B3B, Albuquerque, NM 87186, or call (505) 268-0467.

Q&A

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WINTER 1988
Empathy Contemporary Japanese Photography
was exhibited at the 1980
Smith lobby gallery from
September 22 to November 17,
1980. The exhibition, con-
cieved and assembled by Akira
Matsumura, was accompanied
by a newspaper-format cata-
logue published by the Visual
Studies Workshop.

From Akira Matsumura's cat-
ologue statement:

Japanese people are often
quick to poetically describe
their emotions and render them into lit-
erature or art... Unlike West-
ern photographers who favor
predetermined conceptual for-
mat or, Japanese imagemakers
are more likely to approach
their subjects intuitively.

Thus, Japanese photographers
express themselves through
their subjects, by a process
that can best be described as
"empathy." The final result
may be a forward plunge into
the depths of joy or despair, a
rhythmic sense of playfulness,
or a recreation of the
sense. But in the end, the pic-
tures leave one with an impact
that is raw and powerful.

Eleanor Guild responds here to
two images from this exhibition in
the spirit of Empathy. Guild is
Senior Editor at Houston
Metropolitan Magazine.

From "Light and Shadow" (1981) by Osamu Maruyama

As we are weightless, journeying up and down the surface of this city, Maruyama’s hat is a landscape. I will swim to the beach of its brim and find my way to its recessed center—the perfect spot to lie hidden from view and look up at the sky. From this perspective, I come to know the hat as a lover, with the skin of my belly, eyes inches away, moved, suddenly, to press my cheek against...

And then I step back, away.

From "Takanohana" by Ryūō Akikawa

Unbeknownst to the priest, he carries the self-condemnation of hopelessness over his head. All the utterances of despair dispersed on anonymous individual white rectangles of paper for the new year. My newly lightened inner life a paper parcel, along with, I am sure, the prayer from a woman I do not know and will never meet who cannot conceive and the many prayers for all the only sons.

I am detached to share with anybody the relief I feel, indeed devotion, to the happy priest, who will always be here, bright with purpose, celebrating, unknowingly, shame’s hideous toonails, every-
one’s dry croaking pleas for prosperity, death wishes.

Faithfully, excitedly, he bears these paper slips, encoded stars and invisible boulders all, to a place where there is no word for permission, where mothers don’t live in their cars, where men don’t shoot
their wives, where the boss doesn’t spy on you, where the medicine chest isn’t filled with prescrip-
tions, where your friends are happy, where, in fact, your lover sues your tit.
HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
1989 PRINT AUCTION

The Houston Center for Photography announces its fifth print auction to take place on Sunday, March 12, 1989. An illustrated auction catalogue will be available in early February 1989 for $7.00. This auction will feature photographs by approximately 150 regionally, nationally and internationally known contemporary photographers. Mail and phone bids are encouraged. To order a catalogue, send your name, address and check or MC/VISA card number to:

PRINT AUCTION
Houston Center for Photography
1441 West Alabama
Houston, Texas 77006
(713)529-4755