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EDITOR’S NOTE
This issue of SPOT focuses on some of the areas of life touched by photography today. One means of doing this is through reviewing many of the shows that were up during Fotofest ’96. Our reviews will put the social trends encapsulated in the exhibitions associated with this event into context through essays and critiques. Among the areas covered are directions in landscape photography, an historical perspective on fashion photography and the impact of the work of the Magnum photographers, and the approaches to dealing with the issues of women.

We will also seek to contextualize the work of visual and performance artist Dorit Cypis through her own words. In Anita Doughty’s interview with Cypis we read in the artist’s words the motivations for her work and her thoughts on her progress as an artist working in a variety of intertwined media.

Another essential aspect of photography we will examine in SPOT is the ease with which photographic adapts to the multicultural perspective. It is a willing tool for those who want to tell their story while documenting the shared journey of life. Points of Entry by Antonella Pelizzari looks at the experience of the immigrant as told through photographs.

Also included in this issue is Henry Horenstein’s review of Gaza, a photographic and journalistic examination of that war torn area by Houston photographer Dick Doughty. Peter Brown assesses two biographies of Alfred Steiglitz—Alfred Steiglitz, A Biography by Richard Whelan and Alfred Steiglitz at Lake George—and sifts through the differing approaches of recounting this photographer’s life and the respective merits of each.

Karen Gillen Allen

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“Before the land there is nothing and before us there is the land.”

Pierre Menard, *La sapience de les indiesques de l’Amérique*

Before the Land

**Mexican Landscapes 1858–1920**
Houston Community College,
March 1–31, 1996;
**Great Plains 1885–1895**
by Peter Brown, Harris Gallery,
March 1–30, 1996;
**Long Views by Rick Dingus, James Gallery, March 1–April 13, 1996:**
**La Toma Del Paisaje: Fotgrafas De Enrique Caro y Alfredo De Stefano, Institute of Hispanic Culture, March 1–30, 1996**

**Fernando Castro**

Depicting the land seems to be one of those human acts as natural and fundamental as symbolizing and yet, it is not. The land is implicit but invisible in the prehistoric cave paintings of Altamira, Lascaux, or even the recently found, Chauvet. Rather, it is the things in the land that were of interest to prehistori- cal humans and that they chose to represent. Perhaps only a human who sows the land and understands that her very survival depends on the land regards it as something fertile, prior, and even sacred. In photography, of course, depicting the land was one of its first exercises—if only because it is less mobile than the creatures it sus- tains. In fact, it was clearly William Henry Fox Talbot’s aim to improve upon the camera lucida’s tedious demands for depicting the Italian land- scape that prompted him to search for a way to fix its image. In the second part of the nineteenth century, the mature medium of photography copi- ously depicted landscapes around the world with intentions that are not simple but have been extensively scruti- nized; among them, the desire to exert a physical and conceptual dominion over the land. More recent landscape photography, however, has become less transparent perhaps because the clues are no longer provided by the optimis- mation of a now dwindling modernity.

Several exhibits of landscape photo- graphy were shown during Fotofest 1996. In this essay I would like to comment on the following: “Great Plains 1885–1995” by Peter Brown, “Mexican Landscapes (1858–1920)” curated by José Antonio Rodríguez, “Long Views” by Rick Dingus, and “The Taking of the Landscape” by Enrique Caro and Alfredo De Stefano.

Starting with the exhibit “Mexican Landscapes (1858–1920),” it is advan- tageous because it allows us to deal with some issues related to the history of the genre. Its curator, José Antonio Rodríguez, has succinctly spelled out some of the major moments in the evolution of landscapes according to evolving intentions. Rodríguez points out on the one hand, that “Dozens of traveling photographers came from Europe and the United States to docu- ment these territories [i.e., Mexico], fascinated with the notions that they were still conquerable.” The implica- tion is that landscapes were done to show Europeans and Euro-Americans a land that could be possessed. Désiré Charnay, a Frenchman whose work is included in the exhibit (and which strictly speaking is not landscapes), focuses on the ruins of pre-Columbian buildings that continue even today to suggest that there are still undiscovered treasures to be had by exploration of remote lands. But one must not regard the project of traveling photographers so cynically as to lose sight that al- though some viewers no doubt regarded their images covering the lands they depicted, others considered them an addition to their knowledge of the world and/or a prop for envisioning Utopian ideals. Charnay was indeed an agent of Napoleon III in Mexico in 1851, but he also shared the encyclo- pedic goals of the Enlightenment. He wrote, “these ruins fixed my resolve to make archaeology the business of my life.”

Charnay’s images, where mostly desolate ruins are populated only by the usual native indispensable for estimation of relative size, are in sharp contrast with Rick Dingus’ contempo- rary images of Chichen Itza showing ancient pyramids overrun with tour- ists. The Disney-size crowd in Dingus’ hand-painted color photograph shat- ters our yearning for exotic, “un- touched” places that we inherited from the Romantic literature of Charnay’s contemporaries.

*Enrique Caro, Fictional Prehavel Sculptures (original in color)*

*Rick Dingus, Equinox Sunset, Blue Mesa, Down, Chichen Itza, Mexico, 1995–96 (original in color)*
Rodriguez adds that “Little by little, though, the natural landscape began to acquire its own expressive strength as a subject.” We join the curator in wondering why such aesthetic improvement in the depiction of landscape occurred. Was it simply due to a new wave of photographers more conscious about composition? Was it the early nineteenth century discovery of the intrinsic value of depicting landscape for itself—even when no momentous human event had occurred there? Was it the Romantic adjuration of lofty meanings to the commonplace? Was it a by-product of the encyclopedic quest of the Enlightenment to neatly compaginate the “book of nature”? Or, was it perhaps the late eighteenth century discovery of the sublime as a kind of non-canonical experience in which we are overwhelmed by nature? In one of Kant’s accounts: “Nature is therefore sublime in those of its phenomena whose intuition brings with it the idea of its infinity.”

The appreciation of landscapes in the nineteenth century is the aesthetic equivalent of our postmodern belief in nature and animals as proper objects of moral concern. The nineteenth century mind is so deceptively similar to ours that we often fail to realize how very recent it was for its notions to assume ancient.

Nationalism was another such notion and in a third moment, Rodriguez correctly points out that “Others created panoramic landscapes that documented the development of the vast territories.” In this case, the intention was to show the right viewer the opportunity for exploitation and/or investment in the infant nations. On the other hand, in An American Vision: Far Western Landscapes and Nacional Culture, 1830-1920, author Anne Farrar Hyde argues that “In the first half of the nineteenth century, landscape provided an iconography of nationalism.” So in the age of emerging nations, the United States found in nature what it could not find in culture or history as a basis for national identity. Perhaps herein lies an explanation why such a strong tradition of landscape photography—almost without parallel in the rest of the world—has developed in the United States. Landscape became part of its national culture.

A fourth moment was facilitated by the technology of mass reproduction of postcards and the improvement of transportation. Photographs were intended for people who collected “views” of exotic places for private or social purposes, or for inspiration to travel to distant lands. In all of the above, it was important for the viewer to know that the depictions were made in the “truthful” medium of photography, for it implied that each landscape had been known about, conquered, invested in, included within national frontiers, visited, or dreamed about.

The premodern landscapes were done in the style of more “artistic” media like lithographs, drawings and paintings without regard to truth. Although the pictorialistic aesthetic was tainted with a Romanticism that twelfth-century modern photographers found indefensible, insofar as it hid itself of the strict demands for veracity, it over the span of a decade by Peter Brown in the land where the buffalo once roamed. By “hidden” I mean that his images and those of many of the photographers in the “Mexican Landscapes” exhibit have been spared an overkill of interpretation by the photographers’ hand. Except for careful attention to composition Brown’s work is far removed from the pictorialist project and shares instead in that great American landscape photography tradition of Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, and Richard Misrach, as well as in the documentary traditions of Walker Evans and Joel Sternfeld. Having said that, we do not mean to claim that placing Browne’s work within Browne’s diagram as others explain it; only that it eludes us into its ideological and iconographic lineage. In fact, the nuances that distinguish Brown’s work from those other others are helpful in our understanding. To that end, it is important to establish for the purpose of analysis that his project includes works that are strictly landscape, as well as “cityscapes” (for lack of a more elegant word), architectural photography, and commercial portraits. It is Brown’s intention, however, to have us consider the different groups as part of a whole: “This simple idea [of a trip] has allowed me to cover much that I’ve found of interest in the landscape, from open grassland to agriculture and ranching, to crosstrees towns, to the roads themselves, to the entrances to the small cities, to strips, main streets, signs, churches, schools, theaters, neighborhood, and people.” It would be to misinterpret Brown’s work not to take into account his intentions, because what he is asking us to do is to consider the landscape as the substance that endures the accidents of time and human intervention. To put a Hegelian hyperbole to his landscape is thus the horizon in which things-in-the-world show themselves to us, or hide.

Some of Brown’s strictly landscape imagery is deceptively simple: fieldland, horizon and sky. However, the minimalism of the image, although conscious, is not some sort of art-historical echo, rather it is an appreciation of the nature of the land he is depicting where vast distances and an austere ecosystem are the rule. The merely informative nature of his titles notwithstanding, the beauty and poetry of the vernacular songs through them. In Ported Field, Levelland, Texas, 1992, Brown presents us with a patterned land of brown hues to rich one can almost smell the soil in the image. On the one hand, the image delights us synesthetically, while on the other, it documents the transformation of the natural landscape. Unlike the overly partisan photographers of the FSA and more recent ecological photographers, Brown maintains a neutral—though not detached—position with regard to the treatment of people and nature. In Portad Lake, Sand Hills, Nebraska, 1983 captures us with its delicate, almost impressionistic color, but an unassuming carefully placed barbed wire fence stands like a Barbican punctum. Even in images like Red Water, near Dalhart, Texas, 1990 that one may be inclined to interpret as ecological in the ecological vein of another desert photographer, one must refrain in adjudicating a denunciatory stance because Brown is more interested in examining the

Continued on page 25
By Holly Hildebrand

When Eve Arnold showed her portfolio to Robert Capa, he said, “Your work, metaphorically, of course, falls between Marlene Dietrich’s legs and the litter box of a retriever.”

And, as if to drive home the point, the curators of “Eve Arnold: In Retrospect,” shown at the Menil Collection as part of a Dietrich retrospective, Dieter Buchhart and Baby and mother’s hands five minutes after birth, both taken in Port Jefferson, Long Island, in 1959, hang in the same room as an exquisite portrait of the beautiful Baby girl in a brooch, Havana, 1954 and the disturbing Mutilated infant, the Philippines, 1955.

Throughout the retrospective, the viewer sees Arnold tackling projects that are polar opposites of each other: the mystical, quietly join the Children and Baby and mother’s hands five minutes after birth, both taken in Port Jefferson, Long Island, in 1959, hang in the same room as an exquisite portrait of the beautiful Baby girl in a brooch, Havana, 1954 and the disturbing Mutilated infant, the Philippines, 1955.

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Impossible to find a truly joyous picture. Two stand out: a laughing Marilyn Monroe, 1960; by Dennis Stock and Wayne Miller’s Anees Gujjar in a car behind steering wheel in On the Beach, 1959—a series of three in which a junya, devil may care actress throws her hair and everything else to the winds that the photographer sees of the loneliness, even the torment of the cinema’s stars prevail: there’s Arnold’s isolated Marlene Dietrich in the studio of Columbia Hazards, New York City, 1952 her head averted from the camera; Stock’s shot of James Dean strolling through a rainy Times Square in 1958, with the legend: “In many ways, James felt more at home in New York than in Los Angeles.”

Arnold’s Elizabeth Taylor with children on the set of Becket, starring Richard Burton, 1965, with the star enveloped in darkness and misery. If the separateness of the artist is a major theme of this exhibition, so is the illusion of the cinema. A great many of the pictures use mirrors to make their statements and create their effects. In Raymond Depardon’s Jean-Paul Belmondo in Robert Ennals’s Hot!, the star surveys himself in a slim, damaged mirror on which is taped a headline that reads, translated from French, “The most beautiful of the century.”

Old women are reflected in an antique mirror as star and director play chess in Erich Lessing’s Anatomy Quinn with Michael Cacoyannis—the director of Zorba the Greek, 1964, and an old fashioned mirror hanging over the star and director captures the activities on the set in Stock’s Stella Stevens and Dennis Hopper, actor and director of the Last Movie, 1970. As if to make absolutely clear the importance of mirrors in the cinema, cars of film stacks are reflected in the foreground of Martine Franck’s Portrait of Agnes Varoul at her home in the rue Duguesne, Paris, 1983. The cinema could not exist without its directors, and with wit and feeling, the Magnum photographers looked through their lenses to show others in the process of looking through their own. Two levels of reality are portrayed in four scenes of Connie Mariano’s Elia Kazan to the left of the iron gesticulating, filming America America, 1962 and Rene Burri captures the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa at the camera, 1961. There are even camera taking pictures of cameras whose pictures are being taken, as in DonMcCullin’s shot of David Hemmings in Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow Up, 1966.

But if cinema is about illusion, perhaps no series of photographs in this show better illustrates it than Rene Burri’s Ingigrid Bergman and Mel Ferrer in Elvis et les Him, 1957. A series of three photographs shows the stars being coached in one of the most intimate of human scenes, a kiss. They seem ill at ease, chewing gum as they listen to their director. But a fourth, larger picture shows the scene: perfect, convincing, utterly human. A lens shows up another lens. When Frank Horvat began his photography career in the 1940s and 1950s, his aim was to create “photoreportage” and “seize spontaneity.” It was as a fashion photographer that Horvat became famous, however, and his interest in setting up is apparent both inside and outside the studio and into the real world was his trademark. Yet for all his emphasis on spontaneity, his models still seemed elevated beyond the real world that the Magnum “marmitequin”—French for model—for a living, breathing world. It is this tension between the profane and the sacred, the exquisite and the everyday that makes Horvat a true original.

Many of Horvat’s pictures are masterpieces of the juxtaposition between the real and the unreal, the take, in Stanley, Rome (for Harper’s Bazaar New York) Deborah Dixon (model) with Annie Piliotes (writer), 1969. Half of Piliote’s face eyes us as he scoops up a forkful of Linguine; Dixon wears such an elaborate, heavy veil that no linguine can enjoy a bite.

Lorna, (for Elle) with Michael Horvat, 1958 the photographer’s young son tidles the model with a feather. Yet she keeps her composure as well as any guard at the Tower of London; she is a model of a model beyond the sensations of ordinary women. Even when Horvat takes his models out into the streets, he likes to maintain their other-worldliness. In Paris au Chen qui Fume (for L’Audion des Modes, 1956) two models strike humorous poses while they are perfectly posed in the window of a clothing store. Off to the right, however, a man of the ordinary world looks out of a window himself, in a perfectly natural, current manner. In his model moving through the streets wears an impeccable suit and a far-off look even as men crowd here and gape at her; in an accompanying picture, a man creates a shadow of a smile when the shadow of man passes over her body.

Yet the man she created as formal a shot as the two models sitting on pillars and pulling elegantly on slim cigars (Lauders, for English Vogue, 1959) could also create the performer of an actual picture of two women unabashedly and naturally enjoying their cigarettes (Paris, for Harper’s Bazaar New York, 1959). Burri would write: “I want to talk about the wonderful world of fashions, the magazines, the models; that’s literature.”

Contrast, Veiled woman in burqa, Abu Dhabi, Arab Emirates, 1970 is scarily beautiful in her spangled elegance, and there is an eerie passivity to Bride’s portrait by a photographer never seen (Afghanistan), 1969. While Arnold was inspired by these women forced to bow to the wishes of a patriarchal society, she was also intrigued by women who purposely cut themselves off from the society of men. The result was a project in which she photographed the cloistered world of of the Brides of Christ in Goldening, England, in 1965. After two years of work designed to see if they are suited to the man’s life, the postulants of this order dress as brides, complete with long dresses, veils, and orange blossoms. A look of their hair is cut, and a wedding cake is served. They work and pray for three more years, then are ready to take final vows. In a series of almost ethereal black-and-white photographs that also capture the earthy joy of the Brides of Christ, Arnold depicts their rituals: five brides happily watching another creating their three-tier wedding cake; a severe-faced young woman praying as the lock of hair is cut from her head; four brides brushing almost excitedly at their wedding. How in contrast they are with Arnold’s portrait, hanging across the room, of a veiled Indira Gandhi, power personified, speaking in Uttar Pradesh in 1974. Eve Arnold’s work spilled over into another Fotofest exhibit, “Magnum and the Cinema, 50 Years of Filmmaking.” Magnum was a group of photographers founded in 1947 by Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger, David Seymour and Robert Capa. Capa’s friendship with director and actor John Huston was crucial to not only Magnum but the film industry, providing the link that resulted in many images of the makers and machinations of the cinema. Arnold was one of the prestigious photographers invited to join Magnum Photos, and some of the photographs shown in her retrospective also appeared in the Magnum exhibit. One of the most moving was Marilyn Monroe staring at Bernardo, Illinois, where she spent a publicity tour, 1956; both lovely and lonely and as she sleeps, the picture seems a premonition for Monroe’s sad death seven years later. In a series of pictures shown in the retrospective, Arnold captures the actress in a passive, rather exhusted mood as Monroe thinks through lines on the set of The Misfits in 1960. Indeed, sadness and loneliness fill the images of cinema celebrated in this show to such an extent that it is almost
B A R B I E ,  B A R D O T ,  and Reclaiming Woman’s Body

In an era when activist women are vigorously reclaiming a wholeness, an integrity, lost under patriarchal domination, the visual and verbal representation of woman as a sexu ally maternal body part, at the most a peculiar assemblage or dissemination of such parts on a male-owned site, just as vigorously continues. Facing the threat to its privileged position of control over the female body and, of course, the cultural perceptions of it, patriarchy has intensified its practice of mutilating, abjecting, and fetishing the female body, which becomes the mutilation, abjection, and fetishizing of woman herself. Facing the threat to a passive role with which they have become familiar and for which they are familiarly rewarded, passivist women continue to collude and to accept plasticity. In toy departments, “Barbie” doll has made her reappearance in life-size form as the visual and tactile testimony to what woman has become.

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The Work of Matuschka
The Firehouse Gallery
March 1–April 22, 1996

PATRICIA YONGE

Despite their claims to political, intellectual, and technical radicalness, mainstream literature and the arts remain indirectly conservative in their treatment and positioning of women. Often they operate on the female no differently from lurid productions and hence cannot make claim to authentic rejection of oppression. Seldom naming or picturing the penis or textiles, they have always felt free to dismember and bisect the female in their texts and depictions, to name and use distinctly female body parts as objects of male lust, desire, aggression, and play. Current examples are not difficult to locate. Philip Roth’s The Breast immediately comes to mind. The latest edition of William Gass’s 1968 book, Willie Masters’ Love Story, yet has as its front and back covers full size photographic images of female breasts and buttocks, respectively. The short text itself is liberally supplied with erotic photos of a nude young woman (often, just parts of her) and also with verbal images foregrounding a woman to a partial existence as a bodily part and the playing of the man (not to mention of the text). During a plenary session at a recent scholarly literary conference I attended, the audience, at least half of it women, was treated to several minutes of one man reading, from another man’s new novel, that singular passage describing a woman’s buttocks. Nowhere at the conference is/was man’s body so featured.

Since, in the dominating strains of Western philosophy, the female is but a fraction of the male to start with—because she lacks the significant and signifying male part—to be a part/ apart from the male in a secondary way is her acceptable destiny and identity. The parts she has—rather, the parts that “count”—likewise define her. Either way, she loses. Without them she is the object of revaluation. She is unfemale. She is unfully. Invisible. With them, however, she is simultaneously the pliable, plastic goddess and the devouring monster. Venus (without arms). Medusa. Medusa. Many post-structuralist theorists trace this oppressive practice to a culturally-man dated passage through the pre-ecdypal, mirror, and oedipal stages of psychological development—in Lacanian theory, the stages crucial to language and perception, thus to the production of textual and visual images. In “1/2 of a 1/2 of a 1/2,” the artist Matuschka, whose body has been mutilated, organically by breast (photographic subject) of her camera lens and artistic, ideological eye. Despite the loss of breast, there is no minimizing or objectifying of the body. It is there, it is local, it is hers. Matuschka’s exhibitions of photographic images and connective text—"1/2 of a 1/2 of a 1/2," have been outrightly called exhibitionism. Viewers have suggested that her work is largely insensitive to women who have mastectomies. I agree with neither reaction, although I suspect that most of the images, separately and as a unified body, do not have mass audience appeal, even among those who have had mastectomies. Matuschka’s combination of overt and often flamboyant portrayal of the mutilated and made female body with covert (her "veiled") foldings and unfoldings of postmodernist theory and technique would be generally intimidating, not to mention misconstrued. She neither emphasizes the tendency to ashamedness or self-disgust, feelings which women are culturally induced to emphasize, nor does she valorize mutilation, illness, or secondaryness.

In technique as well as theory, Matuschka ruptures traditional lines of thinking and seeing. She may, with the
hospital with breast cancer two days after she brought her newborn son home, strikes an immediate sentimental note, and we are told (Matuschka’s mother died at forty-one; Matuschka herself was operated on for breast cancer in 1991, at thirty-seven). But then it is all Matuschka, and, save for two images that are superficially, parodically traditional (Madonna and The New Daisy), where she is holding a baby at the place that cannot provide milk, there is no old sentiment. Some of the poses are solemn and elegant (Pink Lady Classic Nude), some are whimsical (Mermaid), some are, shall we say, avant-garde (Arms Around You). All challenge the binary system and symmetrical discipline breached by the woman without breast(s).

The central site of most of the images is the site of Matuschka’s missing breast. Three images, light-orientated series adjacent to the mother’s photograph and to the viewer’s left, entitled Two Weeks After the Mastectomy, depict Matuschka holding her hand over the place where the breast once was. On her left and positioned between her knees and ankles, is a ragged hole in the wall. The hole in the wall and the hand over the hole in the chest are veiled or revealed by a peculiar light depending upon the order in which the images are viewed. The wall symbolizes the barrier to her sense of wholeness created by real loss and construction, worsened, by societal devaluation of the breastless woman. The hole, as much a womb image as it literally fusing the separated skin and tissue after the excision of the breast, represents the scar that is the “scars of Matuschka’s one-eighth existence as a woman without a breast. That woman is virtually a non-human, in terms of how she is culturally perceived, and treated and how she is taught to perceive herself. The scar is man’s mark on her.”

This monstrousizing makes Matuschka unapologetically angry. Her anger appears most strikingly in her larger poster and collage style images and in the conditional humor of her Hitler mask (I Am One Woman). At the same time, in her Foucauldian schema, where she resolves some of her anger, that seam makes her whole, not merely because a surgical incision has been sutured, but because now she repre-

especially Two Weeks After This Is Two Days Before My Mastectomy, which leaves the woman viewer no option but to observe, as if she were observing herself in a mirror and experiencing what it must feel like to know that one of those two spirited, full breasts that are an authentic part of her and yet the part society inauthentically deems the most desirable was going to be cut off to save her life. Like myself, most of the women viewers I observed got very close to the image, dorer than to any of the others. When we did, we saw the embroiling, the blurring, the mourning of the edge, the theater where the biopsy was performed, the blueprint showing where the distinctive scar would be.

Technology, its narrative and negative dimension, is a repeated theme. Matuschka shows and tells of the purti-
tioning, immobilizing, and silencing of woman throughout the instrument of the camera—in ads, fashion photography, porn, film, illustrations, etc.—untill she herself is nothing more than another piece of technology (like Barbied and earlier Barted women) aimed to destroy other women, a concept poet Emily Dickinson expresses stunningly in “My Life had stood a Loaded Gun.” Matuschka knows she walks a fine line in using the camera both to parody her own paradigm of technological insensitiveness, violation, and objectification of the person/female and to redress a grievance done to women. But she does it, adventurously.

In The New Deal, one of her more obviously political and I think successful images, Matuschka stands in a rural, vaguely ethnic setting, holding an infant who is grasping at the breast scar, hands forming a roundness where there is now only a jagged line. It is a deceptively poignant scene—the simple, beautiful peasant mother who cannot nurse, the baby who is unhappy—whose poignancy bears much from the implicit threat to the environment, the woman, and the infant posed by the very chemicals, including these from half and usually in breast milk, technologies that decimated the original “new deal,” that may have been the carcinogens at the root of the breast cancer. The ubiquitousness of mother and child, and the use of even more chem- icals and technology to remove the cancer and the breast.

In the spirit of environmental and personal health, Matuschka says she moved to the use of electronic reproduction of earlier images and of digital photography of more recent images. She feels the distancing, since a neutral third party (re)produces the images, but she feels that by avoiding exposure to chemicals she is expressing and doing something obviously consistent with the themes of her work. With wry humor, she says she also likes the clearer resolution of an image digitally reduced or enlarged. For her the cam-
era and the computer provide a kind of in-between illumination than the marmozz sergeant and texts which failed to detect her cancer, prominence in sufficient time to prevent the radical surgery, and therefore, her only option for survival. They enable a breast reconstruction of the only sort she will allow.

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"Points of Entry" on a Straight Line

MARIA ANTONELLA PELIZZARI

"The man [the woman] who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong, but only the man for whom the whole world is as a foreign country is perfect." I am borrowing this challenging quotation from Tzvetan Todorov’s masterful essay "The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other" while trying to reflect on the contemporary dilemma between cultural exile and multi-culturalism, between displacement and cosmopolitanism. This reflection rises from my personal questioning about the relationship to a country that is not as “sweet” as the original one I left, that is not “my own” yet, and that is still far from being “the whole world.” Like most immigrants/exiles in the United States, I have my own niche: I am a critical observer, a passionate participant, and an enigmatic voyeur of a foreign life. Photography relates to the immigrant’s experience in an exceptional way: it functions as a documentary means, as a diaristic notepad, and as a secret relic of the immigrant’s cultural past.

Three major institutions of photography in the American West—the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, and The Friends of Photography in San Francisco—have brought these issues to the fore with the orchestration of three exhibitions titled “Points of Entry.” The exhibitions study the binomial of photography and immigration in their relationship to the United States. The choice made by the three institutions is very meaningful, and quite unique. Indeed, the United States represent a model for the assemblage of ethnic groups throughout the centuries. Furthermore, they have carefully kept and archived the records of this process. Photography has been—and still is—an indispensable index to point out specific patterns inside the American pluralist cultural magma.

The individual curators have confronted a huge amount of work, and they have made their own selections—chronologically and thematically. I applauded the project, I enjoyed the vast range of work exhibited, but I remained somewhat puzzled, and not fully satisfied, by the conceptual premises, and the conclusions, offered to the theme of photography and immigration. I wonder whether we can really speak of “entries” in a new country. How are their deep manifestations revealed? What are the most poignant photographic indexes for this process? And what are the organizers’ “points,” or individual agendas, in exhibiting specific indexes?

Chronologically, the exhibition “A Nation of Strangers” takes the first position in this discussion. Arthur Ollman and Vicky Goldberg co-curated the exhibition at the Museum of Photographic Arts: they assembled more than two hundred pictures—mostly photographs, but also a few engravings, magazines, and advertisements—which illustrate the immigrants’ strenuous passage to the United States, from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth-century. Terry Pitts’ exhibition at the Center for Creative Photography, “Reframing America,” surveyed the work of European photographers landed in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s: Andy Grundberg’s exhibition at The Friends of Photography, “Tracing Cultures,” focused on the subjective vision of contemporary naturalized American artists, dwelling between their imaginary homeland and their visual construct of the new country.

The chronological order of the exhibitions does not help to trace a linear pattern inside the complex montage of immigration. The three exhibitions frequently overlap and create their own montages, while the curators formulate their individual credos concerning the large theme. Ollman-Goldberg’s exhi-
inion proclaims with pride the beautiful cultural complexity of the United States. This "nation of strangers" has some overtones of an earlier "nation" in the American 1950s, in specific, of the disenfranchised "family of man." The American nation contains a universal essence: as Ollman writes, it holds "the tale of all of us together." *Stranger is good!" it's America's strength. But is it, really? Terry Potts overcomes the question. He does not proclaim: he admires and enjoys the foreigners' "new vision." The work on display seems to suggest that we can learn something from the strangers' "innocent eye": they "see" things we (natives) cannot see anymore. Estrangement helps us "see" better. But, I wonder, is what the prize for the loss of our original roots and our innocence? Andy Grunberg raises these questions, yet he does not fully answer them; he chooses to give them voice through subjective and autobiographical work. Curiously enough, the spokesman of postmodernism in photography traces back a subjective vision, and values the strangers' "true" experiences. Todorov's notions of "perfection," "strength," and "sweetness" are all contained in these "points of entry." But let's have some glimpses.

From its first page, the cover-jacket of the catalogue, Ollman-Goldberg's "family of man" exhibits photographs of children: Ollman points out that the face of Pok Chi Lau's newborn baby is American, rather than Asian. Naturalization is not such a malleable and sweet process, writes Ollman. Goldberg's photographs at Ellis Island insist on the young immigrants' beauty, innocence, and expectation. Sweetness and kindness are part of the "American enterprise" which aims at perfection. Grim poverty certainly goes with it, as one is reminded by Jacob Riis' "other babies." In Ollman-Goldberg's exhibition photography works as a proof, as a statement, and as a social inquiry: a chronological thread links these documents, and a turn that goes beyond the objective record. As Duane Michals would remind us, there are many things not seen in these photographs.

One 1874 photograph made in Utica Township, Dane County, Wisconsin, reveals the slow process of European acculturation: a family of Norwegian newcomers is portrayed having a cup of tea in front of their new house, while a man stands precariously on the roof, spreading the sheets of their belonging, the Norwegian flag. Against this symbolic background, the Norwegian sitters look like characters in a play by Samuel Beckett, their thoughts traveling back and forth from the old to the new world. We can only imagine what takes place before and after the picture was taken, and thus reconstruct our personal narrative about this Norwegian family. The photograph does not reveal the shiver of the departure and the arrival; the endless moments of waiting on the steamer; the pride of sending this picture to the relatives remaining in, who Norway; and the overall process of staging a dream (the American dream, of course). The process of acculturation is not instantaneously recognizable, and photography can only do so much to retrieve its memory. One snapshot from the turn of the century shows the thrill of the passage from the old to the new world: it captures the immigrants' departure from the steamer of the S.S. Patricia, just as the ship arrives at the "promised land." This anonymous Epinalist suggests the sense of wonder, the excitement, and fear, which all foreigners have experienced. The dream of a "perfect country" is foretold inside the invisible leap of these dancers on the steamer, and thus an extension to connect to the unknown territory.

A sample of other photographs in the show reveal the foreigners' attempt to penetrate through the American borders, both East and West, North and South. Don Bartlett documented the Latin American people trying to touch the California highway, or dangerously running through the highway, and crossing the border. David McNew documented Chinese people trying to touch the American coast, seeking bread and freedom. A series of color photographs by James Noonse and Audre Gardner illustrates the immigrants inside their local working and religious communities: they have settled like the nineteenth century Norwegians far away, and they have attempted to recreate their original country within foreign walls. But which type of "family" is this really?

A family of outsiders, spies, and voyeurs. Trinh T. Minh-Ha reminds me that "in principle a foreigner is already a spy," and that, as a foreigner, we have to know how to compose yourself to be admitted in the heart of the system. If you learn that lesson, you may succeed in "Reframing America." The issue is complex, neither black nor white. The photographers selected by Terry Potts succeeded in making America their own country: their vision became composed by the new territory, while their individual drives helped them find specific visual strategies. The process is reversed when naturalized Americans look at these photographs: they become the voyeurs "learning" from a foreign strategy. Noiseless is "innocent." In one way or another, Alexander Alland, Roberto Frank, John Gutmann, Otto Hagel, Hannel Miethe, Marlen Paul, Louise Mould (and many others not included here), were all "spies," or intruders, who embraced a certain dream of America, and became part of the dream. Roberto Frank is the quintessential case for this story, soon transformed into a romantic fairy-tale. America was his utopia and became his country, the place which he needed to depict: this need gave him the impulse to see with "fresh eyes," or rather, with the spontaneity of his greatings. Frank became the unobtrusive observer of his beloved country. A spy and a lover.

Many foreign European eyes encountered the United States during the time span chosen by this exhibition. Louise Model, another "lover" (of the snapshot, as she said), re-composed her vision when she arrived in New York, in 1938: overwhelmed by the city's vitality, she reflected her excitement and unease into the surfaces of store windows. Once again, the American territory acted on her as an impulse to find visual strategies, and orient herself. All photographers grouped in "Reframing America" are apprentices to the new world, as they are all searching for particular signs to interpret the unfamiliar culture. They are involved in a slow process of apprenticeship and in the translation from a foreign language. As Gilles Deleuze explains, every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs. Thus, a variety of signs and visual patterns of orientation become interpretable in this show: the flag, Frank's cipher for multi-racial "America," recurs, together with the portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, in many other pictures. Otto Hagel, escaped from fascist Germany to San Francisco in 1928, continued on page 26.
The View from the Head of the Table

The Kitchen Table Series
by Carrie Mae Weems, Contemporary Arts Museum, March 2-April 20, 1995

Bennie Flores Ansell

Judy Chicago’s unveiling of The Dinner Party in 1979 was a turning point in art made by women. Reflecting on this piece, the artist concluded that “the general lack of knowledge of our heritage as women was pivotal to our oppression.” Chicago’s statement broadcast broadened with the code text in “The Kitchen Table Series.” Carrie Mae Weems writes, “I tell you that I sided with men so long I forgot women had a side.”

Until recently, women in the world of art possessed a side or a history of their own that remained on a personal level and was not available for mass consumption. Some believe Chicago’s work turned the tables on this code of silence and made women aware of a history, some “most under our feet,” ground to stand on and grow. Since 1979 an increasing amount of art by women dealing with deeply feminine issues has been exhibited. Weems is an artist in this tradition who also brings an African American perspective to her image making—something the main doctrines of feminism often overlook. The often muted voices of African American feminism today emerge from “a long tradition of structural silence” of women of color within the sphere of the production of knowledge worldwide.

The status of black women is distorted for the issues are left silent and unaddressed by mainstream and radical feminists. As Michele Wallace writes about the silencing of the true African American female voice, “It is mass media that promises to offer the main attraction, that always seems to determine our image, our absence of critical voice; as in a silent movie, we are always pictures without words, or music without lyrics.” In answer to this, Weems writes accompanying text for some of her images. In the bell hooks tradition Weems “talks back” with her images and text and breaks this code of silence, impeding fact or history of black women. This body of work gives African American women a voice and an account of their history which has long been held under the table.

The black-and-white narrative photographs in series depict the complexities and relationships of the main character, played by Weems, with her man, friends, child and most importantly self. All of these interactions take place around a rectangular wood- en table where the viewer of the photo sits at the head of the table and the interactions occur at the opposite end. Hanging above the table is a light fixture that leaves the bulb and all of its emanating light exposed giving the images a musty feel of a pool room where a high stakes game may soon take place. However, the showdown of this image is placed in 1975, linking the photographs leaving the tensions unresolved and laying on the table.

The most successful of the fourteen pieces in the exhibitions are the three triptychs, favorite format of Weems, which added another layer of narrative to the works. One piece that stands out among the rest is titled “Hurt.” It shows the tension of the main character and her daughter. In the first image the daughter appears cải ing from the out of the darkness at her mother reading what seems to be a book of great importance. “The next image shows the third piece in equal as important as what takes place when the camera is not focused. The accompanying text reads: “Oh yeah, she loved the kid, she was responsible, but took no deep plea sure in motherhood, it caused defec tion from her own immediate desires, which pissed off her. [A woman’s diary!] A punishment for Eve’s sin is more like it.”

Her blunt account of motherhood is one instance where Weems shows the complexities of this character whose love of her child is a “duty” that takes away from her individuality.

Throughout the series it is a constant struggle for the main character to do what is expected of her as an African American woman within the context of others and her flight to have a voice and stand of her own. Weems takes the bold step in the questioning and re- writing of the most sacred women’s blessings, child-bearing—“Hah!”

The use of text is necessary for this body of work, for through her art Weems fabricates a new reality within the African American female voice. She uses a mix of image and text that relates to the photographs stabilize meanings, confirm and disrupt her subject positions. She invites the viewer to re-learn and rethink an African American female’s experience: “...like momma said there’d be days like this, like heat on the table in a bug, like she needed a little tenderness. Like maybe get herself a white man, see what he’d do.”

Weems again writes the prose, and dares to test the will of her man and her ex- perience, as if to take control of her situation, one which her mom ma would have easily accepted, without question. Weems’ photographs and text revise feminine hierarchy and call into question Laura Mulvey’s “The Male Gaze: Pleasure and Nar- rative Cinema,” asking, “Who does the African American female fit in this picture?”

Does her double sense of otherness render her invisible, without mention? Weems’ essay, published in 1975, links the pleasures of film and, by extension, much of modern art, to a repressive social structure. Mulvey writes, “In a world ordered by hierarchy and in which pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”

Weems masterfully shows the active working with the passive in that she embodies both the active and passive roles. She is both the creator and the created in these images and has control over how the character is represented and to an extent, how she is viewed. Her main character in these images embodies vulnerability and strength, with her friends she can let her guard down and cry, with her husband and child she must hold her own for her own self respect and sanity. She creates a palimpsest, creating the erased history and leaving a place for the African American feminist voice to be rewritten and heard as history and truth.

This palimpsest is replaced by text that accompanies most of the images. Weems claims that the text is not there to explain the images but to act as a companion narrative to the theme. Yet, it is difficult to separate the two forms of expression for their side-by-side pre- sentations couple them. At best, the text will expand the image. Such is the case with the image of Weems and daughter with friends playing cards... The kid had seen their parents loving and fighting and had started playing house herself. She felt like HOT spilled more than hot, like she was little Sally Waker, and not Mary with a lonely sheep, like she wanted to wipe her weeping eyes... like Mother May... It was too real to be a game, like step on a crack break your momma’s back could be a plan, like red light green light was the song to the key of life... Weems eloquently uses childhood rhymes and games and plays the words together with the loss of innocence of the daughter. In excerpt form text flows with a hypnotic rhythm and provides the viewer with more than the image allows. Although the text is fascinating for the viewer who takes the time to read it, the photographs gain universal meaning without the third person voice and allow the viewer to apply it directly to their own lives. These images alone have the power to cross over racial boundaries where they can provide meanings to all women of color. One such image shows Weems’ charac- ter and her male companion eating a lobster dinner. In the background a caged bird lurks in the shadows while the two sit at the table where “the man” sacks the remaining meat from his lobster. Weems’ lobster remains uneaten on a white plate in his hand, still on its claws. Her glass of wine is full. His almost empty glass sits next to two, supposedly empty, cans of beer. There is a framed deck of cards on the table surrounded by the three hearts singled out. As the male character eats his lobster he turns his head lovingly on his head and says shhh... The intense feel- ings and symbols portrayed in this tender image are more than words can tell. Weems’ text is vital to this piece yet the photographs at the same time are powerful enough to make the reader create a multitude of meanings to the viewers without the restrictive frame of the text.

Accompanying “The Kitchen Table Series” and following table theme were Weems’ commemorative plates placed on a plain black tablecloth. These, white, gold trimmed Lenox plates are once again reminiscent of the place set- tings in Chicago’s “The Dinner Party” that featured Weems’ case she is honoring her “brothers and sisters.” Weems makes the text on these plates highly appropriate by adding a poem with words such as: “FOR ANY BLACK MAN WHO MAKES IT TO THE AGE OF 21.” This leaves one to contemplate the oppressive condi- tions for most African American males in the inner-city. Weems also honors other African Americans such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Thurgood Marshall. Another plate reads **COMMEMORATING ADAM CLAY- TON POWELL, JR. FOR DEFFING EVERY EXPECTATION OF WHAT A BLACK MAN SHOULD BE AND WANTS!**

This plate rings through in the true voice. With the exchange of few words Carrie Mae Weems’ work as an artist defies every expectation of what an African American female should be and wasn’t—silent. Weems excurses herself from the “Dinner Table” and tells her own story, which is fact and history. Bennie Flores Ansell is an artist living in Houston.

**Footnotes:***
2. 111.

**Houston Center for Photography**
Precursor to Light

Hidden Mechanisms
by Heidi Kamoo, Houston Center for Photography, March 1-31, 1996

PETER HARVEY

One of the many questions raised by Heidi Kamoo's recent exhibition in "What is a zoetrope?" Baumrind Nechall, in his History of Photography, describes the zoetrope as a toy popular in the last decades of the 19th century. "...a precursor to motion pictures. It was an open drum with slits in its side, mounted horizontally on a spindle so it could be twirled. Drawings showing successive phases of action placed inside the drum and viewed through the slits were seen one after the other, so quickly that the images merged in the mind to produce the illusion of motion."

The principles of the zoetrope are effectively employed in the elegant "low-tech" work of Heidi Kamoo. Entering the gallery through a black curtain, one has the feeling of walking into a movie theater in the middle of the show. The environment inside the curtain is dark, and while the eyes adjust to the dimness, the flickering of light dancing across the walls becomes apparent. Immediately to the left of the door, one of the many sources of the lighting dance emanates from inside what appears to be a modified bird cage. Squeezed inside the cage like a ship in a bottle there is an electric turntable which had been dissected from an old mono phonograph. Spinning around on top of an old 78 rpm record is a handcrafted craved machine with one of the transparencies. A light source, located outside the open door of the bird cage shines on the mirrors and as they spin they reflect light back out through the photos and onto a paper screen approximately five feet away. Just as in the case of the zoetrope, the mixing of these separate illuminations has been calculated to create a perception of motion. I stood observing the wondrous spinning contraption and attempted to interpret its meaning for a long while before I realized that the device was a projector of sorts and I needed to look at the screen to complete the experience of viewing the piece. I turned around and saw a paper screen, about six or seven feet long, suspended against the wall. A transparency resembling the transparencies on the turntable, except the image on the screen appeared animated with the jerky motion of an old cartoon or the passing pages in a flip book. The image is a silhouetted small human wearing a conical "dance" cap being fed hop-skip-scoot-splashing of something. The image is looped so that just as one spoonful leaves the mouth the next is on the way in with another ample mouthful. The title of the piece, Childhood Ritual: Consumerism (1991-93), adds one more element to its expanding synthetic meaning.

The show consisted of eight individ- ual pieces, each employing at least one of Kamoo's animation devices. Defense Mechanisms: A Marriage (1985) includes two of the turntable zoetropes and two screens measuring about 8 x 10 inches perched on an "antique" table. The screens are actually set into what look like family portrait picture frames. The image on the left shows two slipped foot in the act of tight rope walking. Opposite the tightrope scene is another rope being pulled by a word made up by Peter Harvey to refer to the zoetrope, photograp- hography-projection devices created by Heidi Kamoo. The feeling of entering a performance in progress is certainly evident in this piece. The color image being surveyed by the empty chairs depicts a pair of dancing/shuffling legs from the knees down in front of a red drapery which is reminiscent of a school house stage perhaps a talent show is in progress. The artist points out that little girls are taught to seek approval through partaking on a good show and giving family members and other validators something to praise. This type of gender-specific training is a key element to the artist's work and is at the core of many of the hidden mechanisms referred to in the show's title. One of the things that makes her critique effective is its subtlety and lack of dogma. The situation does not overly suggest an injustice or abuse of power and yet there is a tension which calls out for interpretation. One may wonder what all these elements have in common and come to a completely different conclusion to the meaning of Adore than the one Kamoo had originally conceived.

The most successful pieces in the scraps of paper along the edge of the box sliding in to smother her if she ever ceased swinging her broom. De- tails are arranged to the viewer's con- crete moments as she becomes more closely involved in the piece both in terms of technique and content. From a distance, one doesn't see the projected image at all because it is confined within the walls of the box. In the center of this table is a symbol of uncovering each element consecutively, instead of seeing everything at once and then dissecting it, clues the viewer to the active process involved in the evolution of the works.

To paraphrase Kamoo, the pieces are created over whatever span of time is required to assemble the right images for animation along with the rest of the props in the piece. Catch (1986) is a work Kamoo had been mulling over for some time, but for various reasons it was not completed. She had wanted to make a long table and place projects- torpes at the end as a symbol of the boss and another as secretary. In the finished product, the two "characters" face each other from opposing ends of a table. The interactions transact on a screen measuring about 2 1/2 by 3 feet which hangs just above the table, roughly bisecting its length. Since the projected images can be seen from either side of the screen, one can see the hand of the "boss" tossing a bone to the hand of the "secretary." The looped action stops and restarts before the bone actually completes the trip between the hands. As the bone halts just above the outstretched fingers of the "secretary," Catch reminded me of another childhood game called keep-away which may be an apt subtitle. The possibility of multiple mean- ings and interpretations is one of the strengths of a type of work which is not self- Referential, but of course every ex- treme requires an apparatus of discrete elements to formulate meaning. The very process of interpreting this work requires the viewer to remain involved in the creation of the meaning. Although they involve mechanical electronic devices, the pieces have a genuine poignancy and sometimes autobiographical feel. The process of their creation becomes something to consider in the interpreta- tion of their meaning. Which came first the images or the screens? Are the turning devices the art or is it the image they project or must each part be weighed in the derivation of meaning? Why did the chicken cross the road? The experience of viewing these works involves more than an individual consideration of a message. Just as they were assembled over time in an evolu- tionary process, they can be viewed from many different many facets. The idea for an animation, the shooting of the sequence, the decision to make the images black-and-white or color, even the name of the piece can be incorporated in the viewing experi- ence. Heidi Kamoo's multi-layered approach to creating art builds a syn- ergistic matrix that is very exciting for the viewer who is willing to invest the time, curiosity and imagina- tion in the experience.

Peter Harvey is a writer/living in Houston.
INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Some feel the current political and economic climate in the United States offers little encouragement to artists, particularly those engaged in experimental art. This atmosphere demands new survival tactics. A growing number of artists have proven themselves to be amazingly resilient. They have reinvented and diversified their activities, often by interacting with communities beyond the art world." Ironically, in many cases, these are the very artists who only a few years ago enjoyed considerable public and marketplace support for their progressive, interdisciplinary art activities. Such transformations have not come easily, and have often involved difficult reassessments and huge leaps of faith.

One artist whose life embodies such a process is Dorit Cypis, a well-respected visual artist, performance artist and educator. The following interview takes the artist from reevaluation and progression over a five year period. She discusses the threads linking her work in photography, performance, and alternative education. This interview took place in her Minneapolis home in September, 1995.

ANITA DOUThAT

Douthat: What first brought you to Minneapolis and why do you think you’re staying here now?

Cypis: I first came here in 1981 from Los Angeles for a teaching job at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where I taught until 1988 when they asked me to leave. I had serious doubts about staying here after that and I actually left for about half a year, but I came back. I returned because I needed a place that would support a kind of reflection in my life—self-reflection and a way for me to stay grounded as I went on to all kinds of extreme pathways, particularly with my work. Often people would say to me about the work where I was in performance or in photograph—"God, Don’t work is like watching somebody on a tightrope without a net." I know what they were talking about now, but I didn’t know back then. In hindsight, I see that Minneapolis was my net. It wasn’t in the work, and there was not much of a net in the art world sponsoring my work. It wasn’t deeply inside me, so it must have been in Minneapolis. I don’t think I could have done that same work, and remained sane, if I were living in L.A. or New York. Minneapolis has really afforded me a kind of self-supported support. When I first got here from L.A. I started working with dancers, partly because I have always been fascinated, by movement, movement as a philosophy. Philosophy moving. But I also learned that the dancers I got involved with here, were in their own ways, deconstructing the body and how the body/mind functions or interrelates. I took that information into my work and put it into my questions about the body, how does identity live with and through the body and how is identity produced through the body, by culture.

Douthat: Were you reading a lot of theory at the time about the body, a lot of feminist theory?

Cypis: A lot of the theory that I was reading was actually during the 1970s and it was mostly about deconstructing culture and social bodies. It never occurred to the people that I was studying with at Cal Arts or to me that I could take those same questions into my own physical body. Then it was all social construction. The 1970s were quite split between nature and culture, so there were problems in taking those same questions into the biological body. Here, I was released from that because the people I was working with were not interested in nature or culture. They weren’t philosophers. They hadn’t studied theory. They were just moving in the body. I started to read extensively about the body when I began teaching at MCAD. The classes I began to teach were about the questions I was asking. I read a lot of anthropology, biology and psychology. I was also reading Michel Foucault, on sexuality and a lot of different people on desire. The more I lived with myself, my own questions about myself, the more I realized that it all lies in the body. Everything that I read, I process through my life. I never take things at face value. To me theory is a tool. If I can’t identify with the theory and bring it into the process of my life, I forget it.

Douthat: You spoke a little bit about being asked to perform, but I think you once told me that for a long time you were not even present in your performances. You were doing performance pieces, but you weren’t on stage. Other people were speaking or dancing. When did the transition occur? Wasn’t a lot of the early pieces performance in which there might not necessarily have been performers?

Cypis: Right. A lot of the earlier works (1979-1984) were performative, but the audience had to perform the projections. So there were more like multimedia installations. I did some pieces where I was the projectionist and the director, but there were other characters moving in the images. In the mid-1980s I designed projection systems for other dancers to move inside. I taught them how to work with moving the images and projection, but it was their content that I was structuring.

Douthat: Were you using the technique where the performer would move in front of one image, cut it off and blend into the next image? Were you doing that early?

Cypis: Yes, that started doing that in 1981. I was doing things that were site specific that called for interaction. Then in 1988, for the Whitney Museum of American Art, I created "X-rayed," where I photographed another woman naked/nude and asked her the question: "Can a woman who knows she is being looked at, allow the gaze and at the same time remain present within her own body? (To not separate herself from the other’s gaze?)." It was the first time that I designed a multi-link computerized projection that involved eight or ten projectors, 300 images, three projectors and lots of props. It wasn’t a performance. It performed itself on timed tape. But the woman I photographed, investigating her own body as I photographed her, was enraged at the Whitney. Even though she understood the nature of the project and our collaboration, seeing the finished piece in public was extremely upsetting for her.

Douthat: Was that when you began to enter the performances?

Cypis: Awhile after that, I realized there was something about being looked at that I did not understand and that’s when I realized I had to put myself in the position of being looked at and ask the same questions that I asked of the model, but of myself, in the performance, called "The Naked Nude" at International Center of Photography. It was a multimedia installation and another part was a performance.

Douthat: Were my Father’s Haters, "in which your father sent you photographs he took at the Louvre of famous reclining nudes from the history of art, in this installation?"

Cypis: Yes. In the performance, my sister Johanna played the nightingale singer, singing about her desire in jazz and blues. I designed this into the ICP’s period architecture. I came out of a painting frame as the nude and on stage talked with the audience about turning from nude to naked and gave them permission to look. At Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago in 1990, I completed a project called "A Sacred Prostitute (One Within Herself)" which was another complex, computerized multimedia projection. It also had a performance aspect. I played the role of the Venus of Willendorf dressed in a puppet shell over my naked...
make the papers. It wasn’t Maplethorpe, but videotapes of The Devil in Miss Jones and Deep Throat taken to a fundamentalist group called The Human League, known in the Twin Cities for trying to stop gay ordnance rights. They were testing obscenity codes right after the Maplethorpe situation. I was called by the First Amendment lawyer from L.A. who was defending the video store owner, to testify on behalf of the defense. Supposedly, I was an expert on representation of nudity and sexuality from an artistic point of view. They asked me to testify through deconstructing the films, that they had artistic merit, and, if so, they could not be obscene, based on the Miller vs. California ruling of 1972. I did. It was an extraordinary experience. There was only one other defense witness called, a nun. A nun and an artist defended these two films. The nun, a wonderful woman, Margaretta Dyer, one of the directors of the Human Sexuality Program at the University of Minnesota working with sexual offenders, defended the films on educational and scientific grounds because the program uses them in their studies. I based “The Inquisition” on a real case and a lot of it felt very abusive. In “The Inquisition,” my sister Johanna played an extraordinary Miss Jones who fell from the grace of God. I was the inquisitor, her defense attorney trying to get her and the jury to question from where did she learn her desire. What constituted the social construction that led her to ask for desire through lust?

Douthat: What happened in the court case?

Cypis: Initially the defense lost. This was in Winona, a Catholic community. The judge was a woman, the person being accused was a female manager of the video store, the prosecutor was a woman, the chief attorney was a woman and the two witnesses were women, a nun and an artist. The jury was probably 60 to 40 women to men. The prosecutor called no witnesses. All she needed to do was show the tape to the jury on a big TV screen. In a way, she resuscitated the concept… video is for private use. She showed it in a public context. She transgressed an important aspect of how the average person receives that content. Every time there was a sexual scene, she would point it out to the jury and say: “Is this not prurient? Or is this not offensive?” What is a Catholic jury going to do? Right after the court case, I found a book published by the University of California, Irvine, called Humana. It is an academic book deconstructing pornographic films from a feminist point of view and it talks extensively about these two films. I sent a memo and a booklet down to the judge. I said: "Look, these are being studied academically. How can you censor something that the culture is really trying to investigate?" The decision was overturned. Not just because of my actions, but the case was overturned.

Douthat: Did you have any support from feminists against censorship? Or weren’t there any around to help support you?

Cypis: Not really. Is the left really there? Well certainly the case of “The Inquisition” was supportive. Eight of the fourteen were women who had taken my workshop on sexuality and representation and decided to work on this project with me and became witnesses in the trial. Their autobiographies were their testimonies, their autodidactic story of growing up and learning about their sexualities. They were not performers, but a university professor, a marketing consultant, bankers, artists and a psychologist. They formed an incredible network around my being able to do this piece. There was not much public support for it.

Douthat: So when you emerged as a more effective artist, what happened in your work?

Cypis: It is the same question that I had to ask myself after the Whitney. Did you know what you were doing? Literally, I had the floor taken out from under me. I designed a project that I’ve been involved with since 1991, since “The Inquisition,” called “The Body in the Picture,” which is a series of what I call episodic portraits. There are 36 or more of them. I have exhibited eighteen at a time. I worked with individuals, and with their autobiographical and public domain, cultural images. These they chose to reflect on their own identities. I adapted the strategy that I have used many times since 1981, in my photo projects, to reflect the portrait, to layer photographic projections, for these portraits. I layered their photographs in projection. I still have a formal eye and I am still an author, but more and more I want to look at how other people construct how they look at their identities. I photographed these individuals using the movement of their bodies inside these multiple projections of their chosen images so that their shadows interacted with the projections. I set up my camera behind the projector while they continued to move. When I saw a frame that really caught my eye, I called out “freeze” and they held their position while I photographed them and the screen of projections.

Douthat: They couldn’t really tell what was happening visually because there were inside the projections?

Cypis: What they could see was their shadow intersecting and mutual psych perceptions on the screen. What I could see behind them was another layer, which was their body and how they interacted with the screen. So they were only interacting with the projections and their shadow, I was seeing them doing it.

Douthat: How were you selecting people to work with? Were they coming to you?

Cypis: Initially they were people who came to me and put out public notice that I was teaching these classes called “The Body in the Picture” deconstructing identity through representation. Individuals signed up for these classes from all walks of life.

Douthat: Where were you teaching these up?
INTERVIEW

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Cypis: I had a studio, just a big room, a screen, three projectors, that's it. I was also teaching at Randolph Street Gallery. Then I worked at a neighborhood clinic with a group of young clairvoyants, male and female incest and rape victims, who wanted to do this work with a psychologist present. That was fascinating. In hindsight, I realized that a lot of the people who came to me were also involved in some other form of psychiatric counseling. I heard from some of the psychologists, psychiatrists, that I should call asking: “What are you doing? These people are moving through their material in three months in which they would take two years for an average person. What are you doing with them?” I said that I was giving them the opportunity to really move inside their projections.

Douthat: They brought in visual images from their lives and psychotherapy doesn’t usually include images?

Cypis: Yes, you’re based on what I started to understand in doing this portraiture work. I was constantly coming back to seven pathways of looking at life and this is true I think with all the work I have ever done: myth, memory, history, fantasy, dream, family, desire. It occurred to me that these are all interrelated, they are all aspects of each other and they are really different. I can take an image and track it mythologically. I can track it through how it stimulates my memory, my dreams, how my family has socialized me. There are many ways you can represent things which reflect on your identity. I coined these seven and I have used them mostly for teaching and just to map... see I am very analytical. I constantly need to come back to a map, in the “Personae” project I used these seven as pathways to digitally track...

Douthat: Through HyperCard or Hyperерт?

Cypis: Right. “Personae” would be a template for creating a sexual personal history. I proposed to work with one individual along these seven tracks, through images and text that she would bring to me. I would create a HyperCard interactive system where the player could move through any of these seven tracks into a presentation of her identity and then they could layer it in a way that they understood her. Whatever they did would be projected publicly so that someone going into the gallery could see how a player interprets somebody else’s identity, a private act made public. That is the conceptual structure for “Personae.”

Douthat: So the template or the projections that are programmed have to be information about people who will allow you to do this with their existing portraits.

Cypis: Right, and the woman I have chosen is someone who participated in “The Inquisition.” I worked with her over a period of three years. She’s also an artist, an historian, so she has quite an interest in deciphering life through images. But the suggestion would be that anybody could do this.

Douthat: Also, in recent years you’ve been working on what sounds like very innovative education projects and some of them obviously must be tributaries from these portraits. How did some of this happen and how does it relate to your personal work or does it?

Cypis: “The Body and the Picture” became an educational tool. It didn’t always end up in portraits. Sometimes it was a process I taught under the title “Photo Bodies” for photo students to enter their own images. It really became a strategy for asking deeper questions about looking. I am fascinated by projections, the psyche and the shadow, what’s not revealed, dream time and all these different characters living inside us that don’t always get a voice.

Sometimes after “The Inquisitions,” on my way to my studio, I passed a storefront drop-in center for homeless kids called Project Off-Squares. I was first attracted to the name. I walked in one day and felt very compelled to work with these kids. I had no idea how. I looked at why. Why did I want to work with these kids? It had to do with identity, adolescence is like a stage between tadspole and frog. It’s where the private meets public, the family, the city, the street meets adult and where a lot of distortion takes place between the two. We were who we are and who we want to be. I was still interested in how notions of sexuality and desire are formed. I walked in as a volunteer in the summer of 1992 thinking I would offer to teach “The Body in the Picture.” I realized very quickly that it was a little too missionary, a little too white liberal desire to come into another land and offer my goods for their benefit. I had no idea who these kids were. Some of them were in jail and out of jail, had experiences as prostitutes, chemical dependency, eating out of dumpsters. Some were runaways because of abuse in their families, or they were kicked out because of dysfunctional parents, or on and on and on. I was totally overwhelmed. I didn’t realize until a couple of years later that I felt like I was a homeless artist in this culture. I felt like I had been betrayed and abandoned. Also, my own family background as Jewish surviving 20th century Eu rope, displaced from Russia to Poland, from Poland to Russia, from Russia to Poland, from Poland to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Canada and finally to the United States experienced homelessness. Witnessing the problems of the kids at Project Off-Squares became an exaggerated projection of my own struggle and I, as a artist at the time, totally identified with their loss identities.

I hung out with them for six months. I went there once a week for about three hours in the evening and just talked with them. They started to trust me. They don’t trust adults easily because they have been abused by adults, in the family, but also in the culture. There is no place for a sixteen or seven year old who doesn’t belong to a family in this culture. They are not adults yet, they don’t have legal signatures. For example, I took one of them to the hospital. She was very ill with walking pneumonia. It was after 10:00 at night. She had been walking around this way for weeks as a lot of them did. I took her through the administration. We went through all the procedural red tape and they finally asked her how old she was, and she said 16 and they said, “Oh, I’m sorry we can’t take you in.” You have to go to another department.” So it’s an edge that most of us don’t have access to, of how the bureaucracy works and it’s really hard for an adolescent, I felt like they were falling through the cracks of the way the world is run in this country, these artists fall through. I thought, well hell, if the culture doesn’t want me to know them, they don’t want these kids, then I’m going to help these kids be somehow useful in this society.

I never for once thought that I was going in there with anything else but the mind of an artist. It wasn’t like sociol ogy or social work. I realized that Project Off-Squares, which is an amazing organization, helps them with getting off the street, getting off drugs, counseling and health, with teen pregnancy and sexuality and tries to get them jobs and get them through school. It’s all survival stuff, but absolutely no energy or resource is left to inspire them, to massage their imaginations, to give them anything beyond survival. I thought, how can they live with only survival? It was the same question I was asking the culture. How can this culture not offer anything that inspires in life?

I realized that there was something really simple that I could do. I was an established artist in this city, I had contacts at all the theaters and all the art spaces, and with artists, I arranged to take them once a week to a cultural event. I scapled tickets, I got artists to come in and do presentations, I brought them to artists’ studios, I took them to places where they could see that adults were not just there to beat them down, that there were some creative individuals out there, that they could also have some creativity in their lives and it wasn’t just about getting through. One day, I must have had imagination, that day, they did have imaginations and that was what was going to help them survive in the end, beyond the physical. It worked. Kids were amazed and the staff realized it was working! In the beginning it was really easy for me because I could call up my friends at the Walker or at Guthrie Theater or the MCA and they could get seats. I took them to events that weren’t just about entertainment, they were about working in this culture with issues of identity, reflecting aspects of myth, memory, history, fantasy, dream, family, desire, and you were taking small groups of 16 or 17 year olds, was it under 17? What was the age limit?

Cypis: Thirteen to 19 was the age group. Most of the kids who came to Kulub were older, 15 to 19 or 16 to 19. They were kids who could sit still long enough and had some more mature interests. Then I started to call the art foundations who had very generously supported me for years locally over the years and told them I was working with homeless kids... could I get financial support through their funding? This was a year for me to realize again how the art world, the art systems, was set up to support artists living in the world. It was only set up to support artists who want to
Interview: That's how they knew you.

Cypis: And I told them, it's my work. This is where I am putting my work right now. It is the same energy, it's the same person, it's the same background that's informing this work as informs my gallery and performance work. They are the same questions, the same ideologies. The product looks different. I'm not signing my name to it any more. But I've always asked questions about authorship anyway, so what's the problem? They replied that it wasn't in their guidelines. I finally convinced The McKnight Foundation to pilot us. They funded me as an artist going into a social service organization and initiating a project from outside. I have a partner on the inside, a staff member from OffSides, who works with the kids and works with me. I'm from the outside and he's from the inside. Last year we went to over 60 events, including them doing a performance at the Southern Theater. They're starting to do their own work. This year I've curated seven projects directed by seven different artists. Over the next half year the kids will learn different strategies and tools in the arts and creativity, work with an architect to make maps of how they inhabit the city, make symbols out of their own words, photography, music etc. Kulture Klub is a tiny part of Project OffSides, but it's the most consistently amazing part of it. It has become a networker between homeless kids, artists, cultural institutions, funding agencies, social service organizations. It's like layering the projections.

Douthat: That's interesting to me that at first it was so difficult for foundations. I thought that so much of the funding in the arts these days was going towards educational projects.


Douthat: So you were just a little ahead of the curve here? Even now, when institutions talk about putting more funding into educational projects, is it this kind of innovation or is it much more traditional outreach programming in museums education departments? Are you still on some kind of margin, or not?

Cypis: I feel like I am. I feel like a margin because I'm working with such an at risk population group and again, for me, the support:

Douthat: Are any of them visual artists? Is there any way for them to physically produce work?

Cypis: To me it's really more about inspiring them in their decision making in their attitudes toward making creative choices in their lives. We're doing a photojournalism class right now. They're using cameras, but it will really be about how to look, not so much the final product. It's very important that I'm interested in the final product. It always has to reflect the inner questioning more than a formal academic, although form definitely plays a part. I've also had to let go of a lot of my personal theoretical judgment about art and aesthetics because that's not their background.

Douthat: Maybe this is just a physical question about how they see. Do they have a darkroom. Are they shooting slides or is somebody providing a lab donation for them?

Cypis: That's a good question. We're looking for donations. I'm working with Kate Maxwell Williams, a local photojournalist, who works part-time at the Star Tribune. She got the newspaper to donate 40 rolls of film and processing and when I put in requests to different labs for printing. Target Center is donating some of the costs of the classes because it's a piece together. I piece together my own work. It's the same thing except I call Kulture Klub social design—art of social design. I don't know what else to call it because it doesn't fit into "art" or "human services." (A mixed media installation I presented at the Kranert Art Museum in 1995, that plays on the contrast between a classic arch of scintillating and mottled building, the backdrop for the collection, one of Sigmar Polke, one of Andy Warhol. They were all on policy so they could be pulled open and shut. There were three tiers of them so you could layer them.)

Douthat: What do the kids in Kulture Klub think of you? How do they see you? Do you have any idea?

Cypis: I don't fit in at Project OffSides, I'm not a social worker and I'm not a client. I think the kids also don't know what they are getting into. They don't know what's happening. They trust me more as the gatekeeper than as a "famous artist." Often, I don't talk about my other work, but... I want them to know that artists also live in community and can interact in their world. We're not just on white gallery walls. I really want to affect the notion that people have about artists. I'm just trying to live it. It's how I work. It's not theoretical.

Douthat: Because your earlier pieces were projections and more temporal.

Cypis: Yes, art is much more temporal. So we'll see if the next opportunity comes for doing something like that again. I have several large interactive computer projects that I would like to do besides "Personae" that might generate a lot of interest. But my emphasis is working in space and time and movement. The Kulture Klub really is about space and time and movement. It's just that the players are different.

Douthat: Your recent project at the Walker Art Center was sponsored by the education department and we called it "Backstage at the Walker; an Archaelogy of the Permanent Collection." I was commissioned by the Walker last year to design an interactive room in their education lab for school kids, K through 12. There, an art teacher works with them for hours a week. I was asked to design an interactive installation for that space based on the Walker's permanent collection. I turned the lab into the wings and the backstage of a theater where all the props, images, lights, sound, and backdrops were exposed and made possible for use. I spent several weeks photographing the collection and I accumulated slides of glimpses of paintings and sculptures, spaces in between and how they were installed in the galleries. I commissioned a scenic designer to work with me. We built a theatrical grid for lighting and for hanging frames of scintillations and curmines—some opaque, that were huge backdrops. From the collection, one of Sigmar Polke, one of Andy Warhol. They were all on policy so they could be pulled open and shut. There were three tiers of them so you could layer them.

Cypis: To me, it is a sad cultural statement that we would expect all "art" to fit within one agenda. That seems quite fascistic and full of fear. Expression is as varied as life itself. When we still express, we still love. At the same time, artists must find ways to more fluidly integrate with other aspects of the culture. We must not fear each other.
A Quiet Vision

The Poetics of Vision by John Dugdale
Houston Center for Photography,
May 17–June 30, 1996

Don Bacigalupi

In 1987 I wrote a review of an exhibition of paintings and called it "The Triumph of Beauty," signaling the painter's obsession with creating beautiful images in the wake of his lover's death from AIDS. The work seemed victorious at the time, and thus the title of my review was meant in earnest, without irony.

In 1996 I find myself stunned by the beauty of John Dugdale's photographs, and yet it is hard for me to think of them as triumphant. They seem quieter, subtler, almost in retreat. It is difficult for me to recall a moment in which art touched by AIDS could be thought of as "winning" or even "doing battle." Perhaps another metaphor is needed at this late date.

"John Dugdale: The Poetics of Vision" provided a fine opportunity to view Dugdale's recent projects. The exhibition included two galleries of the New York artist's exquisite cyanotypes—still lifes, interiors, nudes, landscapes and portraits. The first room contained a number of Dugdale's lush cyanotypes—which, in their washed-out wooden frames with rippled blown-glass glazing, were resplendent in their nostalgia. Although in hushed tones, they seemed lively and almost musical. In one, a mantel strong with celebratory garlands—at once gaudy and elegiac—spoke of music silenced and good times past.

Gallery X contained a much quieter series of rosy, brown-toned cyanotypes—these a more somber and coherent body of work. One entered the darkened space through a gauze drape, the only illumination emanating from bare Victorian bulbs hanging from high, distributed evenly between the ordered pictures. One's eyes were required to make adjustments for the light. Everything slowed. Time itself momentarily seemed sluggish, the air stillled, and all sound evaporated.

Dugdale's installation effectively forced the viewer to enter not only his pictures (for one had to lean in close to see), but the very world (or situation) in which they were made. The reflective states of a man facing his mortality, losing his health, relishing the beauty of life and its moments. These were apparent in the photographs. An astonishing cloudscape, equal parts misty abstraction and luminous landscape, slowly revealed the minute figure of the photographer on the distant horizon with an umbrella. The sublimity of one man's reckoning with the sheer weight of nature, life, and art history was contained in the tiny image.

Dugdale's photographs are more than merely beautiful. They are indeed all about beauty its fleetingness, its timeless ness, its silence, our inability to notice it, and our inability to hold on to it.

The artist's cyanotypes have an immediacy that belies their Modern references. There are familiar compositions—familiar from the history of art, from beautifully illustrated books, from moments of beauty experienced and remembered by each of us. And they are about memory. All photographs memorialize. But Dugdale's photographs are, of late, memorials to his eyesight. As he has struggled and lost his sight to CMV (an AIDS-related illness), the photographer has had to rely on assistants to help produce his work.

According to Dugdale, this loss has, however, clarified for him the difference between sight (the mechanical process that he has lost) and vision (the artist's ability to know and to create a picture). He has continued to make his work, despite not being able to see, by constantly directing his assistants' movements (most family members). The division of labor between a film cinematographer and director comes to mind, a distinction our culture easily accepts.

Dugdale states that in his art he has tried to "unlearn" the rules of composition, to divorce himself from the burdens of artistic tradition and aesthetics. He has tried to make images that are akin to the naive photographs of farmers' catalogs. He has removed the electricity and plumbing from the house in upstate New York where he prefers to work, as if the very accoutrements of modern life might corrupt this vision. Dugdale wants to produce something unaffected and quite simple.

He has not succeeded. His works are flawlessly constructed and composed, and informed by a wealth of historical notions of beauty. They may even appear somewhat affected because of their methods of presentation: nautical poses and poses captured in an old-fashioned medium, framed in antique glass and wood, illuminated by obsolescent lights. But none of this reduces their impact, their ability to affect the viewer. They may not be called triumphant, but they do speak eloquently, if quietly, about the fragility of beauty and of life itself.

AIDS and aesthetics, beauty and death, vision and illusion, photography and music. These things swirled through my mind as I looked. And reflect.

Don Bacigalupi is director of the University of Houston Blaffer Gallery.

REFERENCES
2. The metaphor of her abandoning the discourse of AIDS—first discussed by Susan Sontag in her book AIDS and Its Denials—has sometimes been misapplied to the artistic disci pline of Dugdale.
3. Including those by Martha Stewart, to whom the photographer has worked.
4. This is the methods of producing art while living in the style of another period has been practiced by several others, David McDermott and Peter Weirhage, for whom Dugdale has printed photographs.
Art That Is Not Just Photography

Whether interpreted as modern day icons on the cutting edge of medically and psychologically distressing ailments, the portraits of AIDS patients and families, children with AIDS, and those who have already succumbed to the disease, are a powerful testament to the human spirit. The images are haunting, yet dignified, capturing the full spectrum of emotion and pain. Each portrait is a reminder of the vulnerability and strength of the human condition. The work of Mapplethorpe and Price is a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.
Rewriting Stiglitz
Alfred Stiglitz, A Biography
by Richard Whelan,
Little, Brown, 1985, 662 pages and
Alfred Stiglitz at Lake George
by John Szarkowski,
The Museum of Modern Art, 1995, 112 pages

Peter Brown

It is well known that the energy and talents of Alfred Stiglitz helped launch a number of things—compelling photographs, the eventual acceptance of photography as an art form, modernism in America and with the help of Georgia O’Keeffe, one of the more successful art marriages in history. It is perhaps less known that these energies also launched factions, feuds, disciples, enemies, and, as John Szarkowski writes in his recent essay on Stiglitz, a million words and more photographs than we know.

Two books, Richard Whelan’s Alfred Stiglitz, A Biography and Szarkowski’s Alfred Stiglitz at Lake George (which serves as the catalogue for a similarly named exhibition from MOMA) contribute to a new understanding of this multi-talented, charismatic, generous and often irascible man. A page of adjectives could, and have been used to describe him, and most would, for particular moments in his eventful life, be ringingly accurate. A few: he was at times brilliant, moody, stubborn, spicetal, dogged, romantic, cold, lecherous, bombastic, kind, ingratiating, vague, self-effacing, monomaniacal, pitiable, self-congratulatory, and of course contradictory. Each of these could to a degree, describe most of us, but Stiglitz, unlike most of us, seems to have played each facet to an extreme and often in very public arenas. Unlike the imperially reticent Walker Evans, of whom a biography has also recently been published, with Stiglitz it seems safe to assume that whoever was in his presence knew exactly where Stiglitz stood—although a year later, an opposing argument might be hammered out with equal conviction.

He was clearly a gigantic presence—utterly self-assured until physical collapse would repeatedly catch him—and Whelan has written a gigantic book, a historical biography that is laden with fact—a book running more than 650 pages, necessarily broken into sixty-nine short chapters covering the eighty-two years of Stiglitz’s life (1864-1946). Surprisingly it is the first full life biography published.

It is, apart from a painstakingly thorough biography of Stiglitz himself, a fascinating cultural history (particularly of his early years in and around New York); a blow-by-blow account of the absurd (from our removed vantage point) factionalism in which the various turn-of-the-century photo groups, clubs, rings, societies, secessions were engaged. It is also a history of the rise of Modernism in America as seen through the prism of artists that Stiglitz championed and it is a look into his private life: the extended Stiglitz family, the sad first marriage to Emmy (of which Whelan is strangely dismissive), and of course the meeting of O’Keeffe and the bumptious dance of that marriage.

The strengths of Whelan’s biography are many—but primary for me—and an indicator of one of the book’s successes, is the well rounded and well founded sense one comes away with for Stiglitz himself. Out of a muck of genetics, family life and social interaction, emerges a portrait that becomes believable by virtue of Whelan’s careful compilation of fact. It’s a bit like a Chuck Close painting that from a few inches away is overwhelming, but from a considered distance pops into focus. The detail in this book can, at times seem too much—but the creature contradictory Stiglitz became struggles out—anguished, excited, gesticulating, making his points, maroon around the room in quite a lively fashion. And Whelan’s writing is, for the most part, lively as well, pulling us from one altercation to the next.

Stiglitz was a welter of seemingly unrecognized contradictions. He was an independently wealthy man, who from a position of relative financial security, rallied against professionalism and commerce; a committed and conscientious artist who yet seemed to take each criticism of his work to heart—often engaging a critic on the other’s suggested turf, by using say, the “more democratic” Kodak postcard paper for his disdain photographs, after being accused of being “elitist” in his choice of palladium; he was the confidently devoted lover of Georgia O’Keeffe, who yet allowed himself, through an idealized vision of what universal love should be, to fall in love with Dorothy Norman and others, expecting all parties to live peacefully in a harem. Eden of his own design; and he was a man capable of changing his thought on the meaning of photography in the most basic ways without a backward glance or sense of inner contradiction (a point Szarkowski makes strongly as well).

The mass of detail and stories that Whelan has uncovered and ordered are impressive. Much was new for me. A few quick sketches: the young Stiglitz, as confident in his powers as a student, as he would become as an arbiter of national taste, doing complex mathematical problems in his head to the consternation of his teachers; the love-orn romantic youth, rebellious and rejecting of convention, holding a detailed and fairly narrow definition of idealized “Woman,” yet marrying a woman he clearly despised for reasons of social propriety; the young, competitive athlete and aimless student passionately riding each late nineteenth centuryfad to boredom: walking, running, biking, until photography finally latches...
hold of him for good; the technical prodigy—perhaps the first university trained "art photographer"—outdoing himself and his fellow students in his obsessive technical experimentation (subject matter be damned!), growing into a man whose ostensible reason for existence becomes the visual representation of the human soul; the impotent, a world absolutism, an inde-
fatigable creator of societies, movements, exhibitions, magazines, galleries—a man in constant motion—giving up his own photography for years, in a confusion of art and politics; and the family man at Lake George neglecting his wife and daughter as he slowly changes his sailing into a nonstop ride into a workplace for art. And Whelan is superb on all this—balancing personalities, major events and the everyday in energetic, compelling ways.

The book is far more fact of life, than analysis of work and when Whelan does address the photographs, it is generally in the form of description. How-
ever, when he plunges into more than descriptive depth, his thought on the work often seems sexist to me. It takes a tone from O'Keefe’s painting that I don’t think is nearly as applicable to Steiglitz. There is an erotic charge to many of his photographs of course, but to limit them in the way that Whelan often does, I think con-
tenues their true power. Sandra, for example, his thought on a few hanging apples and the peak of a house, Apple and Guirdel—a lyrical image, rife with possible interpretations which is need-
ed, and be bowed over by his certainty that an apple phallic is about to pene-
trate a vaginal window. Alternately, in the portraits, the readings often seem overlaid, the image used too much as evidence to buttress thought on the subjective relationship to Steiglitz. In some instances, these are, after all, only split seconds of peoples’ lives, and much more is made out of expression, body in the image, background coincidental than seems warranted.

Yet finally, in the context of the book, these criticisms are relatively unimport-
ant. Whelan does not set out to write a critical biography, but a historical one, and this has been accomplished. To my mind, the main things lacking in the book are the Steiglitz photographs themselves. A set of reference pictures, twenty pages say, two or three images to a page would have made a tremendous difference in the experience of the book. It seems self evident that such a selection should exist in any photographer’s bio-
ography—and it seldom is the case.

If Whelan’s book leaves few historical stones untorn, Szarkowski’s essay crys-
tallizes fifty years of thought on both the work, and the man, and as such, the two books complement each other in interest-
izing ways. Szarkowski, as always, is a pleasure to read. He is clear, forceful and stylishly good natured. There is a wink behind the meticulous scholarship and cracking prose—a reference to some two-headed dog or other idiosyncrasy that reminds one that Szarkowski was and is a photographer as well as a cura-
tor. His rousing eye and intelligence are always at play as well as at work, much like, it might be said, the photographs he has discovered from Lake Georgia.

As he points out, “Steiglitz is famous, but his work is little known. No other major figure of photographic

photography’s modern era is known by so short a list of pictures... Steiglitz, whose life embraced more than fifty years, has too often been anthologized from a standardized list of half a dozen pictures, none of which was made during the last half of his working life.”

This situation came about as a result of protective controls that O’Keefe instituted over Steiglitz’s estate, the unfortunate effect of which has been to greatly limit the audience that Steiglitz had.

In the publication of this book and accompanying exhibition, Szarkowski and Senna begin to rectify the situa-

tion. Half of the twenty-one photographs have never before been published—and

And it is finally comforting, in an almost familial way to encounter these “art filled” sky images check by check, with the truly erotic unplanned photog-

raphs of Ellen Roenterngt climbing out of the frigid waters of Lake George, glowing with life and vitality. The visual music one might make of this variety (which occurs throughout the book), finally seems to me far more authentic and of the twentieth century than Steiglitz’s romantic attempt to dis-cover Bach in the sky, as he of course professed to do.

In the book we encounter a mix of head, heart and visceral response that in its openness has the cumulative effect of humilitating a photographer who for too long has been kept alive in the narrowest and greiest corridors of art. The photographs extend the available warmth of the everyday, with even the campy pic-
tures of O’Keefe and friends evoking it up, becoming, in overall context, quite important: funny shots of shoes and group shots, fun and games, high and low, head in the clouds, feet on the ground—serious fun. Steiglitz obviously enjoyed making these photographs; it shows. It occurs to me that these two ambitious books may represent the beginning of a revision, in the truest sense of the word, of one thought on Steiglitz. If so, I think it’s appropriate. Even at this late date, there is more to be seen from him, and despite the million plus words now written, there is more still to be said.

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REFERENCES

Alfred Steiglitz, Lake George, 1902
SCHAMA'S REPRESENTATIONS

Landscape and Memory by Simon Schama, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, 552 pages

TERRANCE DOODY

Simon Schama's sketch of aby Warburg is as representative of Landscape and Memory as any single story can be of a book so long and copious. Warburg was an art historian and iconographer who played Dionysius to Sir James Frazer's Apollo. Frazer believed that the stories he gathered in The Golden Bough (1890) proved that the European Enlightenment had triumphed over the superstitious and irrationality in early religious systems. Warburg, who was also a student of anthropology and social psychology, realized that the "primitive" wasn't primitive at all and was in fact more modern, he said, in nature myths that constituted a "social memory." When Germany collapsed in defeat at the end of World War I, Warburg himself collapsed into a depression that hospitalized him for five years. The irrational that he recognized as symptomatically prevalent had grown violent-ly active, and he feared the destruction of civilization's ability to contain the Apollonian and Dionysian both. The sign that he had regained his mental health, in 1923, was a lecture he gave to the staff and other patients of the hospital on the Greek sacred ritual he had studied years before in New Mexico. "The lecture," Schama writes, "must have been an astonishing moment: an affirmation of his Orthodoxy presupposed the incommensurability of reason and unreason that they were, in fact, culturally inseparable."

And this is a deceptively simple, perhaps even misleading title for this vast collection of stories which, like Warburg's, have only a loose thematic relationship to each other and the kind of Wordsworthian memory landscape usually suggests. Warburg's story is moving, and Warburg is important to Schama himself, but he is obviously not a landscape. "Landscapes," Schama writes, "are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water, and rock and bay. But once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in the actual place, it has a peculiar way of melding categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents: of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery." Schama divides his book into four sections, Wood, Water, Rock, and a final that deals with pastoral utopias, which he calls Place: Water, Rock. But he could have divided it into sections entitled Writers, Painters, Sculptor, and Characters because Landscape and Memory is a study of the representation of the natural world more than it is a history of specific places. Writers like Warburg, therefore, and sculptors like Rodin (who was important only because they have articulated the myths and metaphors for their time and place, but also because they represent in themselves the tensions between Warburg and the ideas Schama wishes to treat. One of the most interesting of these artist-characters Schama discusses is Henry Hawthorne, a keeper of the New Hampshire. Hawthorne drew only in green broadcloth and entertained visitors in a creaky old barn at the foot of a large oak tree. In the great hall of his residence, Woodlands, he kept hunting dogs and live birds, cats, falconry paraphernalia, and version aging for future diners. The odor of the place was overpower- ing, of course, but to parson William Gilpin, who wrote Remarks at Furness Scenery and formulated the principles of "the picturesque," Hawthorne was the very embodiment of the English greenwood, a kind of Arcadian prince. In actuality, Schama writes, he was as bloody, rebuttable, and incorrigible as Fielding's Square Winter morning. To Schama, the English social imagination needed a kind of aestheticized Robin Hood to represent its dream of the pastoral past, so it elevated Hawthorne's conception of himself toward the mythic.

Hawthorne did not shape his envi- ronment so much as he took it up on himself and became its meta- phor. Claude François Deneuvre, on the other hand, was an Arcadian figure who took shape in the environment he inhabited and then opened it to the public. Deneuvre developed the forest of Fontainebleau, which had been the scene of royal hunts under the Valois and Bour- bon monarchies before it became, under the gaze of the Baroque painters, the omniorn of a bohemian Arcadia and then a great playground of participatory Romanticism. "How had he done this? Why, by an extraordinary invention, all his own: the woodland trail. For Claude François Sépuhr... had a claim to immortality. He was The Man Who Invented Hiking." He was also the man who invented the theme park.

Grete Boorman was the woman who carved Mount Rushmore. Her Mormon father had married two sisters; Borglum himself studied in Paris with Rodin; he deeply admired D.W. Griffiths, the Wright Brothers, and the similar "masculine magnitude" of Theodore Roosevelt. By the time he was carving Roosevelt's face into the mountain, he was also a member of the Ku Klux Klan. "A native fascio," Schama calls him. It is Borglum's own interpretation of the American Romance that joins Roosevelt to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln; another sculptor may have voted simply for the triumvirate. In fact, the way in which Schama presents what difference to our "social memory" would her prescience have made? What difference does Mount Rushmore itself make? Is it more implicated in our political mythology than the Hudson River Valley and the school of painters who developed its imagery into the American sublime? Have more people seen Mount Rushmore than have seen the paintings of Thomas Cole? Or of George Caleb Bingham, who gave the sublime its prairie latitude?

In 1864, Lincoln signed a bill creat- ing the "world's first wilderness park" in California's Yosemite Valley. It gave the state the right to hold the giant trees "inalienable for all time." The Big Trees, Schama writes, were "sacred America's own natural temple." They were "some sort of living monument, or botanical pantheon," which many Americans who had never been to California saw in the heroic photogra- phs of Carleton Watkins. The trees were a symbol of both American spiritu- ality and the manifest destiny that constituted heroic nationalism; they represented, in other words, in 1864, all that the Civil War did not. And water. Fewer stories, perhaps, in more self-reflexive detail, but they may also have made Schama's argument easier to hold in mind. This is not a theme-driven book—narrow, insistent, repetitive—and one of its pleasures comes from the pleasure Schama himself takes in his own prose, in its energy and embrace. This allows him to make rapid connec- tions and to dazzle us sometimes with their results, as he does in the story of how William Rush's sculptural Allegory of the Solomonic River is transformed into Eakins's painting of William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Snake River and their relation to Cruikshank's The Printer's Model and his images of erotic grotesques. But this rush also means there are few places in the book where we any single part of it might lose sense of what it means overall.

One of these places, however, is in the book's first two chapters, in which Schama tells the story of the sugar forest of Lithuania. The royal bison of Białowieza and the meaning of the forest itself are political stories of great complexity, but they can be epitomized in two quotations. The first

Mount Rushmore National Monument, National Park Service (single-crop color)

Borglum's story is by embedding it in the story of Rene Arnold Powell, who was not a sculptor, but who campaigned all her life for the inclusion of Susan B. Anthony on Rushmore's face. By securing women's suffrage, Anthony has had a far greater impact on American politics than Teddy Roosevelt has had. And her exclusion from the mountain, as well as the eccentricity of Borglum's vision, raises this question:

How much do our "social memories" differ from our "natural memories"? Would her prescience have made more? What difference does Mount Rushmore itself make? Is it more implicated in our political mythology than the Hudson River Valley and the school of painters who developed its imagery into the American sublime? Have more people seen Mount Rushmore than have seen the paintings of Thomas Cole? Or of George Caleb Bingham, who gave the sublime its prairie latitude?
comes at the conclusion of Scharn's account of the friendship between James Fenimore Cooper and the Romantic-nationalist Pole, the poet Adam Mickiewicz, who across considerable distance recognized each other in the love of Sir Walter Scott "as kindred spirits."

"Both the Leather-Stocking Tales and Paul Tadeusz celebrates worlds whose authors knew to be already extinct. But they also both hoped that the spirit embodied in their works of communion with the landscapes and codes of brotherhood, of wrongs redressed through selfless action, might somehow be transmitted to the national future. Even if the wild woods were reduced to dreary rows of obedient saplings,

Once its humans had been made docile, the forest could be prepared by dependable German foresters for its proper role as the Greater Reich's most splendid hunting ground. With its Polish-Lithuanian coasts completely wiped out, it could be presented as a great, living laboratory of purely Teutonic species: eagles, elk, and wolves. And since a painting on a blissful hunt on Göring's wall at the Chancellery, the most famous of the forest animals could, at last, be definitely reclassified as zoologically, 'Aryan.'

Scharma himself never says that the "social memory" Warburg describes is a passive, enduring presence in the undercurrent of the folk. He illustrates in this passage, and in the Mount Rushmore story, that "social memory" is often a history of appropriation and violence. It is nonetheless possible to read Landscape and Memory and think, for long stretches, that it is proposing an analysis of the idea, that interpretations of the landscape amount to little more than a reordering of aesthetic conceptions. Scharma dares him to make an ecological argument in this book, against extremists like Thoreau who believe "history...[is] irreconcilable with nature. But by consistently proposing that the frontiers between "the wild and the cultivated," like those between past and present, are difficult to define and fit, he does not make this ecologically vacuous claim very clearly, just as he does not explore very aggressively the differences between different kinds of representation. These decisions make the book more convivial than polemic, but it means in the end that Landscape and Memory makes a great deal of sense for himself in Özesen, when he says "Art is History's nostalgia."

Nostalgia is the motif of the final section, Andreas, which is the other section of the book that feels like its scope and our comprehension fit. This is also the most literary section of the book because Andreas is still like a state of mind rather than a historical place. It's not a literary theme I'm usually drawn to, but in being drawn to it here, I realized I also like this section because it is so familiarly conventional. I'm a real sucker for all of Scharma's stories of recorded graves, Northern tree worship, and vegetable spirituality. In the great outdoors of my real life, I prefer the mountains to the woods any day and the savannah to either of them, but I am more used to reading pastoral and greenworlds. It's proof of his point that representative metaphorical metaphors can become more real than their referents.

Reading in the library, I think, which is the best place to read this book, in a straight hard chair, in a room chilly enough to keep you alert, that the Landscape and Memory isn't a picnic.

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**BOOKS RECEIVED**


Wetko, Eudora, One Time. One Place. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1996.


Compiled by Juan Garcia and Terry Trullio
A Mussy Garment


REBECCA F. STERN

Pleasure, performance, sexuality, loss: the title of this book by feminist theorist Carol Mavor staggers a bit under the weight of theoretical connotation. Over the past two decades, each of these terms has acquired critical significance far beyond the ken of Webster’s. For example, refer us to Roland Barthes, whose work on the erotics of reading is largely responsible for the birth of reader-response theory; to Jacques Lacan, the deconstructionist psychoanalyst whose notion of jouissance became central for a decade of French feminist thought; to Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and other French women’s writers and critics in the post-structuralist patriarchal language and culture by calling upon, amongst other conceptions, a uniquely feminine category of pleasure. Pleasures Taken is a collection of critical essays in which Mavor’s title area is signified by the book under discussion.

As the book begins, with an essay titled “Pleasures Taken: Pleasures Taken, a book worth looking at. From Lewis Carroll’s photographic mavericks, Mavor’s sections include a period photograph of a man holding a camera, a photograph of a young woman, and a photograph of a group of people. The book begins with an essay titled “Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs” by Carol Mavor. Mavor reads the book under discussion.

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Before The Land

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search for meaning in nature. Wind-
cerated monoliths the world over have
fascinated dreamers and even experts.
Some rocks appear so sculptural that
noted sculptors and archaeologists have
gone to speculate that the hands that sculpted them. Once
again the unique print for
dozens of such rocks, Carbo finds,
produces, and reproduces these sculp-
tures, placing his own marks, not on
the image itself but on its supports.
Thus he separates the marks with in-
tentionality from those marks of causal
significance. However, the marks (x's,
handprints and circles) are himself
makes on the support margins, occa-
sionally bear some resemblance to
marks found on rocks—their being double as to the symbolic
potential of natural objects. Carbo
does present these cyclopean mid
with a certain degree of reverence—as
if suggesting that even if they are not
intentional, they may still be symbolic.
Some take that to be the parado
of the straightforward photographic
image. In spite of his Italian surname, Al-
freedo De Stefano is a Mexican photog-
rapher from Coahuila, the Mexican
state to which Texan once belonged.
His current work on exhibit is from
the series "Vestiges of Paradise." The
intervention marks of De Stefano on
his huge color prints made from black-
and-white negatives are less consci-
ous than those in Carbo’s work. Al-
though his images are all of the north-
ern deserts of Mexico, his titles do not,
make more specific the exact place, but
rather establish the photographer’s re-
sponse to the landscape. Viento (Wind),
for example, conveys by small vectorial
arrows the sound and directions of the
wind not visible in the image. In a land-
scape of sky, clouds, faraway mountains,
and sand dunes titled Tiempo (which
in Spanish means both “weather” and
“time”), arrows in the image indicate the reflection of the photographer up-
on the forces that move sand to shape
it into familiar rhythms. The photogra-
pher portrays the desert as a place
intimately coexisting with it and not as
more traveler.

The images of “Vestiges of Paradise”
are sublime in that late Eighteenth cen-
tury sense that came to play such
an important role in describing the West
and in displacing beauty from twelfth
century art. De Stefano’s landscapes are
awe-inspiring and even ominous in a
way beautiful things are not (Unless,
forgetting that beauty is canonical, as
is customarily the case, one applies
the term kitsch). Moreover, De Stefano’s
scribed marks are at times scratched
out of the negative itself—in Las
redondas (‘‘Tumble’’). In this ironic
image of ephemeral passing carved
out of a permanently damaged negative,
nestless migratory plants glide through
the desert surface. Certainly, such a
sacred scarring of the negative would
have upset more than one 764 photog-
raper’s aesthetic and even moral sense.
For the latter, the impeccable radiance
of the print goes hand-in-hand with the
desire for pristine nature and is evi-
dence of the intrinsic beauty of the
natural world. Whereas in De Stefano’s
work, beauty is a distraction and aims, rather, at what is extrinsic to nature,
abstractly, the concepts with which we
respond to it. Damage to things is,
afterall, less morally repulsive than
damage to desert dwellers. Occasionally,
the concepts are blatantly thrown at
us not only in the titles but by writ-
ing them in the image itself as in the
Case with Arena (Sand), written, in,
fact, where some weeds are depicted.
Morally, if you will, Rick Dingus’s
markings on his panoramic color prints
in “Long Views” are much more con-
servative, because he does preserve the

The work of Enrique Carbo and Alfredo De Stefano in “La Tierra del Paisaje: (The Taking of the Landscape)” exhibit, acknowledges the legacy of Amiel Adams somewhat inevitably. “Taking” in the tile oscillates ambigu-
ously between “the act of photograph-
ing,” “appropriating” and “handling.” Carbo, who—as a professor of the
University of Barcelona—lectures on the
history of landscape photography, shows images from three series evoking two
types of relationship with the landscape. In the series “A Forest to Last a Lifetime” (Un bosque para toda la vida), Carbo presents the 40’s prints, forest vignettes reminiscent of Adam’s X except that they are not of particular beauty but of spectacular nature. Irreverently and metacritically, Carbo
paints upon the image gilded code bars and numbers that give the geographic
coordinates of each loci. The viewer, by
the way, unless he is a psychic, has
no way of knowing what the sym-
bol mean unless the photographer or
an extremely observant cartographer
tells him/her. Thus, Carbo lays over a
Romantic perception of the forest, its
perceived commercial identity as inex-
quasitable forest. Carbo never reprim-
ies all the images are unique for every
forest locus with different coordinates. In
this work the layer of straight landscape
photography has been anced to the
layer of manipulated image, yet both
manage to coexist. Once again, we
find the tendency to separate the literal from
this work that we found in Brown’s.
A different kind of relationship with the landscape is expressed by the other series, "Leyes de las Statues." If in the other series he alluded
to the reductionist numerical identi-
fy a locus in the planet has for its
exploitative mind, in the later series Carbo confronts the inquisitive mind’s

the references provided by the places that
I photograph, I’m interested in both
in looking at natural objects and observing
the phenomenon of change by setting up
a dialogue between inner experiences and
outer reality.”

Dingus so called “color photodraw-
ings” look painterly and “artistic” in the
way some pictorialists meant. The
pale-like strokes on his works often
resemble those of that Nineteenth
century painter of battles, so revered
by Dali, Jean Louis-Enrret Meissounier,
in their ability to animate the images of
battlegrounds and to organize the
image by adding chaos. By adding
an alien medium to the surface of the
color print, this act is termed the
“Rock, NM, Dingus adds movement
and mood, conceals, reveals, and camou-
flages. His darkened side in his views of
Field House near Snyder, Texas have
the effect of making the house glow
in the midst of an artificial darkness;
Dingus makes it appear wispy and
obscuring. The texture that stops the paper
debris is a metaphor for the photo-
graphic print with one side towards
the light while the other towards
Field House near Snyder, Texas shows a
land whose horizon bears the curvatures of a globe. The conjunction is eloquent, the
world looks small.

At the end of the Twentieth centu-
y, conceivably, we have grown more
intelligent but also less capable than
a hundred years ago. More intelligence
may not be always worth rejoicing
about, whereas being less capable of
anything sometimes may. Perhaps a
hundred years from now people will
not be able to determine recognitions
and the distinction between kinds of
photography will be determined only
stylistically or by association with other
photographic techniques for the same
stratum deep under the land.

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Houston Center for Photography
Points of Entry
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framed the portrait of Washington between the American and Nazi flag, during a meeting of the German American Bund in 1938. The falsity of the American nation is once again the silent witness whose portrait is hanging on the wall of a classroom of Turkish-American high school kids, as photographed by Alexander Alland in 1942. The blackboard shows Turkish sentences, while the kids raise their hands and strain their attention towards their instructor. We don’t see the teacher, but the portrait of Washington functions like a visual trait d’union between the Turk and the American language. This image raises further questions related to the complexity involved into the cultural translation. Which role does language play in the mutual understanding of culture? Obviously an essential one.

A new language is like a new body, a new citizenship, and a new facial expression: the immigrant experiences this dichotomy, “bearing within [himself/herself] like a secret vault, or like an animal interior—child—cheerless and useless—that language of the past that withers without ever leaving [him, her].” —Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytical reading of the stranger’s language can help decipher the work of Gutmann, Paltt, and Alland: they all seem to find a cultural orientation in the language of the American vernacular. Their pictures remind one of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and most FPS photography from the 1930s; one can trace a similar sharpness in their vision, and the indication of a difficult social condition. Yet, the immigrant adopts the language in a way that shows awareness of his/her own interpretation. Oftentimes the written text grounds a context which the foreigner cannot interpret otherwise: the photograph becomes the ultimate sign of this process of semiosis. Marion Paltt in particular speaks about the school uniforms and visual signs, as she tries to point to social contradictions. As one of her books’ titles indicates, Signs of Discrimination (1991). In a similar light, the back of a car, in public buses, and in the streets of Washington, DC. One finds similar “signs of discrimination” in Paul’s other works on the streets of Washing-
ton. In one image from Surgery Little Children [1946-49], she photographed black kids in the foreground, and the white children played, danced, and played stopped, and looked suspiciously towards the camera, indicating, through their gaze, a contextual ambiguity.

An attempt to deeply understand and search for one’s own identity is the leitmotif of “Tracing Cultures.” The twelve art works grouped in the exhibition create a kaleidoscopic and attractive montage: the resulting effect does not necessarily trace anybody’s culture, but rather a subjective and individual state of mind. This show is about the traumatic experience of cultural dislocation. The fragments of one’s culture are collected by a way of nostalgia transcended in the Alland’s work, from Chinese and African descent, creates autobiographical reflections of an irrevocable cultural past, framing family bonds and ancestral imagery inside large copper masts, onto which he writes short stories about his father and mother. The L.O.O (Shigeki Ito), uses food as a sign to retrieve his cultural memory. In his mixed media installation from the series “Interculturalism,” 1990-95 a series of fake sushi avenge themselves against the American infrastructure by rotating in faux of appropriated seventeenth century portraits of American generals.

The cultural signs cover a larger span in this exhibition: almost in a Procesian vein, taste becomes part of someone’s memory. Sound too. The sound is not physically incorporated into the room, but it becomes tangible in the work of Carolee Mae Weems. In her series “Africa,”1993 I can hear the violent drumming of millions of Africa shipped from Greece Island to the United States. Canga Ilo Mandoza Tiga creates a rhythmic sound, while architectural details photographed in the same island become symbolic fragments of African bodies. Once again, cultural signs are stretched into larger visual metaphors.

Sound and silence are evoked inside this exhibition. In a piece by Kim Yasuda, two drawers are decontextualized from her original installation “Hereditary Memories,” 1991. When one opens the drawers one reads two words: “inmate and appropriate.” In this minimal (or minimal) installation Yasuda reflects on that “fluid” state of cultural identity which is “(in)visible” and “appropriate.” Her piece highly autobiographical, and deals with the absence of her own family, and her sense of adoption. The piece becomes reconceptualized in the exhibition’s larger theme of cultural memory. Yasuda’s existential condition of living in between two families—one absent but innate, the other one present but inappropriate—is shared by all photographers in the show: Rubén Ortiz Torres, a Mexican living in Los Angeles, Mario Martinez-Carús, a Cuban living in Florida, Romar & Melamid, two Russians living in New York City, Young Kim, a Korean living in San Francisco. These artists, and a few more (the American Lewis De Soto, Gavín Lee, and the Vietnamese Dinh Q.Lé), cherish the richness of their multi-cultural origins. While the goal of the early immigrant to the United States was to be “assimilated,” and accepted by the natives, the experience of the contemporary immigrant dictates creative potential for its fluid state in-between two cultures. Yasuda is aware of this potential when she writes that the foreigner “without an allegiance to known origins [has] the privilege of embracing a temporal heritage, one that is in a constant state of redefinition.”

Can we then consider the contemporary rami in-between as close to “perfection” after all, these artists seem to share the entire world, while distancing themselves from their ancestors. Or may be they have not quite settled in the new world: they are suspended in its distant regions, while they are looking back at their past, and they are searching for an imaginary space where they can belong. As Kristeva’s essay may suggest one more time, these foreigner are “ready to flee,” as they are seeking “that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that [they] hear in [their] dreams, and that must indeed be called beyond.”

Young Kim’s narrative installation poetically illustrates what Kristeva calls the stranger’s “beyond.” Kim built her narrative with the sequence of twelve pieces. Each piece consists of a large plywood frame containing a small family snapshot and Kim’s personal writing inscribed on the plywood. The installation is titled Distant. 1992. The last piece of this installation shows the Ozan. This unpretentious snapshot is cherished like a personal relic, encased into a warm plywood frame underneath this picture Kim inscribes: “Leaving my country was not a simple task. I now realize that I never really left nor really arrived.”

These words suggest that the history of immigration is like an endless loop: starting from the immigrants’ early settlments and their acquired sense of pride, the story flows into the subjective experience of modern photography, and it reaches the personal recol- lection of contemporary artists. At the end of this process, the immigrants look back at their original “points of entry.” Thus, the “entries” become the exit to the immigrants’ memories, and the “points” becomes the infinite parts of a continuous line. This line of exile can ultimately hold “the whole world,” as indicated by Todosev. The whole story is extremely rich, but we are still far from “perfection” in witnessing it.

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FOOTNOTES
Parting Shots

The photographs of Marie Theresa Hernandez and Fernando Castro were featured in the show at the O’Kane Gallery (University of Houston, Downtown Campus) August 28-October 13, 1995, although to be fair, it was the Spanish-speaking students at Poe Elementary School who were the true focus of “The Fragile Thread: Lives of Spanish-Speaking Children in Houston.”

A teacher at Poe, Castro photographed each of his students at the beginning and at the close of the school year. The kids appear individually and assume informal poses in front of a neutral backdrop. If young people are notoriously photogenic, this group is especially—but refreshingly—so. And yet, situated as they are before the camera with the teacher positioned behind it, the resultant photographs also raise questions about power and vulnerability in the relationships of teacher-student and photographer-sitter. What, in theory and in practice, are the real or imagined limits of friendship and trust in these relationships? Castro seems to hold strong convictions about such matters, but I was disappointed that he did not more thoroughly acknowledge or map the complexities of these (power) relations in his images.

Hernandez was also a faculty member at Poe Elementary when her images and relationships with students developed. Even more than Castro, she unsettles conventional boundaries between teacher and student, and between the personal and the political by photographing her students in their extracurricular and home environments. Capturing her subjects in moments of interaction, Hernandez yields her camera to describe perceived emotional and psychological relationships between her subjects and their family and friends; some of these were overtly didactic. As with Castro’s works, what I found most interesting about Hernandez’s prints were the fissures where the relationship between subject and photographer were accidentally glimpsed. Although some might have found the sheer number of images included in “The Fragile Thread” overwhelming, I found it inspiring and affirming. And yet, as rich and extensive as it was, I left this exhibit wondering what the images would have looked like had the photographer-sitter and teacher-student positions been reversed. These photographs we might hang on the walls next year—or better yet, next semester.

Jo Oster is a writer living in Wisconsin.

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