

The first 30 years of my photographic life has been a journey from isolation to integration, from subject oriented formal close-ups of individual flower blossoms to techniques that blur identities and transcend subjects. The journey has also been a movement from personal search to attempts to communicate.

Because the tools you use subtly and not-so-subtly influence what you create and are entwined with the development of a style or approach, especially in an equipment-dependent art form like photography I'll talk a little about how my tools have evolved.

Tools. I got my first camera with controls—a fixed lens, rangefinder Konica—in early 1969. I remember having a brown Bakelite Brownie earlier but no photos taken with that camera have survived. I used the Konica to record family, friends, my room and immediate environs. I was shy and inhibited photographing other people but had the urge to record what was around me, what made up my life. That initial urge was an attempt to create order and find meaning and identity. Many photos from that time are self-portraits, not just because I was a cooperative and available subject, but because I was exploring myself and my identity.

I used the Konica for my first serious photographic project. A couple of friends and I shot a couple dozen rolls of slide film and developed and mounted it ourselves to create a multi-media presentation for a highschool class. The film contrasted commuters getting to work in Chicago with children walking to and from school. It involved a good bit of sanctioned truancy and many trips into the big city. We stole the soundtrack from Miles Davis. The film, however cliched a subject, was an organized attempt to communicate something personal. It also pointed up some of the limitations of my equipment.

Within a few months I had acquired an SLR. The SLR with its interchangeable lenses, each offering a different point of view, was a revelation of new worlds—though bulky, conspicuous and needing to be held at eye level. In addition to family and friends, I began to shoot close-ups and soon accumulated a variety of close-up equipment—bellows, tubes and so on. My photos were very deliberate compositions using a tripod—mostly natural subjects presented literally— though some more abstract forms. I was still searching for order and meaning but now looking for them in the details.

I was also, at this time, reading the Time-Life Library of Photography as it was being published. The images were quite influential—especially the great street photographers of the 60s—though I was still far too inhibited to freely photograph people. And the technical material was daunting and light-years beyond me.

In the mid-70s came a long hiatus. In the late 80s I began again with my twenty-year-old SLR. It was a time when I was looking for creative outlets, for a life beyond my ostensible career as an editor and writer. Again the photographs were mostly environmental work, aspects of the world around me, though the subjects had become more personal and intimate.

After a year or so I graduated to a modern autofocus SLR, began to use zooms and wide-angles (moving closer to my human subjects) and started a professional interest in photography. A photo of mine taken at the agency where I held an editorial position was used by a Fortune 500 client for a national campaign. I read more about photography. I was published in a fine art photography magazine. People began to pay me to

take photographs.

As I became more serious I began to experiment; photography's technological nature invites experimentation. At first, experimentation was very practical. But at the same time I was probing the expressive possibilities in every way I could think of. One of the things I learned is that combining too many formats or effects—however seductive it might be—muddles the image as well as the intent of the image-maker.

I began to be more interested in what equipment could do to aid my image-making. I bought a tiny, light, pocket-sized, autoexposure camera with scale focusing. I began using it without looking through the viewfinder, pre-focusing and shooting—setting it on tables, shooting from waist-level or held overhead—and liking the less deliberate compositions that often seemed to capture a moment or a scene in a fresh way. This was a camera I could carry everywhere all the time, and I did. I began recording social events with an almost street photography approach. Some of the techniques I was using and enjoying with the pocket camera transferred to other cameras.

Holding a camera to your eye, in front of your face, between you and your subject influences your art making. The laterally reversed view you see looking down into the ground glass screen of a twin lens reflex held at waist level has a different effect on what you see and how you see it. I found that the unchanging view of the rangefinder frame led naturally to relaxing my dependence on the viewfinder and increased my ability to respond to situations with the camera away from the eye. The other aspect where tools affect the image-making is in the level of technology you must contend with. After using state-of-the-art electronic cameras I had been increasingly drawn back to simpler cameras and had used everything from view cameras to plastic cameras, to pinhole, zone plate and antique box cameras.

Single-use cameras. These are simple box cameras that harken back to the very first Kodaks. A friend doing research for a film and camera manufacturer gave me a box of assorted single-use cameras, and I decided to reload them with more interesting film stock. He also told me that one of the panoramics had surprisingly good optics--a 2-element 17mm plastic lens!

As I had been moving closer to my human subjects I began to effectively use wide-angle lenses. I routinely used a 20mm lens, sometimes rented a 16mm lens and had a 17mm pinhole lens on a 60 year-old Leica. A 17mm plastic camera sounded pretty good to me and this was the camera I played with.

At first I just reloaded the cameras with different films. Then I removed the panoramic masking to create a full frame 17mm box camera. Next I began boring out the aperture plate, each stop producing different effects. Increasing the aperture not only changes the hyperfocal setting of the lens but it uncorrects it, allowing all sorts of interesting aberrations to surface in the images, color fringing, ghosting, etc. Next I began putting the lens on other cameras. The images I was producing with this simplest of cameras were exciting and felt very close to communicating something important to me.

The Images. When I began photographing I looked, identified and photographed. My work was subject-oriented. Even though my inclination was less cerebral or deliberate it still bothered me if I didn't know the name of a flower I photographed. I thought my choices had to be fully conscious and that you ought to be able to clearly articulate why you made a particular photograph not to mention having pre-visualized the end result. Although some of the my earliest successful images were the least

deliberate.

The altered lens of the plastic camera detaches the image from the subject, makes life look better than it is. Transcends specifics, hard edges are removed, identities are softened and fluid, objects flow into each other. All of the above are aspects of what the plastic camera images seem to do. The images often seem mysterious, to partake of the mystery around us. We are in the midst of mystery at all times every day. Because the mysteries—life, death, time, consciousness—are so profound, and present so insoluble and awesome a set of problems, we have armored ourselves against them, creating a bubble or shell of existence that is almost entirely sensate, material and temporal. The profound which we all need seems to have vanished before our eyes, and its absence is the motivating force behind many familiar cultural currents.

A search for the profound in everyday life is, or has been, a constant theme in human existence. Why build a cathedral? Is it just reaching for certainty and order in the face of fear and chaos? The profound doesn't seem very comforting or comfortable. Maybe if it is comfortable it isn't profound. The ocean is profound because it is unknowable, subject to its own internal laws and rhythms, seems to have no beginning or end and the human world must accommodate it rather than impose upon it. But the ocean is purely physical and subject to a set of physical laws. Yet it appears profound or to partake in the profound.

The world has always seemed full of mystery to me, as a child sometimes almost terrifyingly so—adults, houses, half-heard conversations, dark woods and deep water, half-curtained windows seen from a moving train. I think that a key to the present anomie may be recognizing that mystery fills and permeates not only us but everything around us. In the mystery is the meaning, the spiritual. Things that seem static are actually in constant motion. If we could see with less conditioned eyes perhaps we might be able to move down the road to integration. Annie Dillard spoke about seeing “the tree with lights in it.” Don Juan kept forcing Carlos Castaneda to see the world in a less-conditioned way. I would like my photos to strip some of the accustomed reality away from the world we inhabit.

The blurs and flares in the photos create an effect that transcends the specific subject and blurs identities. The image is detached from the subject in a way that forces an altered view or way of looking, a way that is impossible with a sharply focused photograph. An Ansel Adams landscape, for instance, gives us an enhanced or hyper reality by showing a level of detail impossible to capture with a single glance. I suppose the hyper-reality of an Adam's photograph can force transcendence on some viewers, perhaps if god *is* in the details.

Instead of freezing an instant of time, the plastic camera photos seem to capture the movement of bodies through space without the artificial look of rear-synch flash trailing blurs, the stop action Muybridge effect, or the freeze-flash of Harold Edgerton. Even Kirlian photography is too literal with its quasi-scientific attempt to make energy visible. To be too representational is to be too material. To move away from the material is not to renounce its importance but to reaffirm the mystery, the existence of the unseen forces and mechanisms operating within us and around us at all times. I want to place these photographs at the intersection of the seen and unseen.

Our visual vocabulary is surfeit, glutted with images. Media are so literal, nothing is suggested, everything is explicit, there is no mystery. Our senses are so

jaded that the evocative power of the visual has almost been lost. And the ante is always being upped with another set of special effects. Bombarded with images and responding to the mind's own need to label, classify and capture, we are lost to the power of the world around us.

To see beneath the surface. To see beyond classifications. To see with a different part of the brain, an older, less sophisticated part of the brain. To see intuitively. To have the feeling grow out of the looking rather than in response to the articulation of the symbol. When the feelings attached to seeing come before rather than after the automatic classification. That is what I aspire to in my photographs.

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