

DEPARTURE POINT

In order to get somewhere you must first know where you are. The purpose of a Departure Point is to first determine your starting place through an evaluation of your current work. Then you must postulate where you think you want to be by the end of the semester.

DISCIPLINE

One good way of evaluating work is by examining the balance of the three disciplines. These disciplines are the physical, the emotional, and the conceptual, the disciplines of the hand, heart, and head. There is the input phase and the output phase for each of these. The first is how *you* see, feel, and think about the subject. The second is how your *audience* will see, feel, and think about the subject.

INSPIRATION: Start with the Input Phase

Look at the content and ask yourself, "What was my motivation for taking these pictures?" The subject or content of the pictures must inspire the artists. If the artist does not get excited about their subject, how can they expect anyone else to get excited? The point is to find out what inspires you and then transmit that to inspire someone else. This is one way of improving the world. (If you are not actively involved in improving the world, you are using up resources, and thereby making the world a worse place. Knock it off!)

EVALUATING the INSPIRATION

Sit down with your work and figure out what the strongest points and the weakest points of the **techniques** are. That is the easiest part. Don't be self-demeaning. Just figure out what you know and what you don't.

Then look at the content and ask yourself, "How was I feeling about the subject?" How were the subjects in the pictures feeling about the other subjects in the pictures? (This only works if you make pictures that are more complex than a singular subject.) Determine the source and intensity of the **emotions** behind the work.

Finally see if there are any ideas in the pictures - concepts that go beyond the look and feel of the work. Write down the strengths and weaknesses of any of the **concepts** behind the pictures.

COMMUNICATION: Then look at the Output Phase

The audience's understanding of the work must come somewhat close to the artist's intentions, otherwise there is little or no communication. This will never be absolute, but it should be close. An artist is responsible for guiding their audience in comprehending their work. The Hollywood image of an artist saying, "It is up to the viewer to interpret the work in their own way." is ridiculous. If the audience does not understand the artist's intention, then there is no communication, and therefore, no art. The artist who says, "I do this for myself and I don't care if anyone ever sees this or understands it." is also not making art because they do not finish the cycle of communication. They are hobbyists. The person who claims to make art and all it does is look nice, is missing the emotional and conceptual parts of the equation. They are decorators at best. And the artist who says, "I do not know how or why I do what I do. I just do it." has not learned anything from their work, and is going nowhere, and thus is not making art in the true sense of the word.

DEPARTURE POINT, *cont'd.*

EVALUATING the COMMUNICATION

Ask yourself how an informed audience has responded to your work. Did they understand what you were trying to say; how you were seeing, what you were feeling, what you were thinking, when you took these pictures. Do you know yourself? (If not, it is only because you have not examined your work, let alone yourself. A photograph is just as much a recording of the viewer as of the viewed. You have a recording of your intuitive response to the world right there in black & white. Now use it.)

Does the look of the work attract someone's attention and then hold it? Write down the strengths and weakness of the visual/ technical/ **physical** aspects of the work.

How does your passion for the subject manifest itself in your pictures? Does your audience ever say "Wow!" similar to the way you said "Wow!" when you took the shot? Write down the strengths and weakness of the **emotional** aspects of the work.

Do you give your viewer access to the information while keeping them mystified? Write down the strengths and weakness of the **conceptual** aspects.

PROJECTION

Having written down all of these observations down, then extrapolate to where you want to be by the end of the semester. What techniques do you want to develop, what emotions do you want to embrace, what thoughts do you wish to ponder? Your goals can shift during the semester, so you will not be held to these definitions too tightly. But this is the first step in moving forward. Through the course of the semester your photographs will tell you where to go. You will have to be sensitive enough to follow.

ORGANIZATION

Type up all of your answers to these questions in an organized way. First, begin the Departure Point statement with your name, course name, the words "Departure Point", the semester, and the year.

e.g. Steven Berkowitz, Intermediate Darkroom Photography 3813, Departure Point, Fall '11

Then write down the name of any subject of any group of pictures. Write down the word Physical and then explain the strengths and weaknesses. Write down the word Emotional and follow that with a list of those strengths and weaknesses. Do the same with the word Conceptual. Do this for all the main groups of pictures that you have been making. (A handwritten document is unacceptable - this is University.)

THREE RIFFS

It is recommended that you begin working on at least three riffs. One will be the new work and consume your nervous energy. One will be the finishing work and will require your focus. The other will be somewhere in the middle. If one group falls apart and a crit comes up, then you will have the other two to show. Failed experiments, however, are as valid as successful ones, so there should always be three riffs worth of pictures on the wall. If you are stuck creatively, bring the work, good or bad, into critique anyway and let the class help you work it out. That is what family is for.

Don't make work for crits. Make work because you want to make photographs. Whenever the crit comes up show whatever you have, in whatever state it is. Don't show only 'finished' pieces. Then there is nowhere to go, and the crit loses its value. There is no such thing as late for a crit. You either have work or you don't. If you don't have the pictures for this Sunday's edition of the Inquirer, you get fired. Crits here are just the same as the real world. Try missing a shift at the restaurant!