

IMAGE REVERSAL

AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

There is an advantage and a disadvantage to this two step, positive to negative, negative to positive process. The disadvantage is that you do not see your images immediately. Photography is not direct. A painter picks up a brush and makes a mark on a canvas. There is a direct and immediate result of a physical activity. Photography is more of a cerebral type of imagemaking. You push the shutter and then you carry the imagined picture around with you. You have to wait until you finish shooting the entire roll of film, and then you have to process it. Then you make a contact sheet so you can look at a collection of very small images from which you have to choose. And then, after a couple of hours in the darkroom, you may have a print that you like. The advantage is that through the course of all these steps, you have numerous opportunities to screw it up. Yes, advantage. You have the option to alter the look of the negative. Now you have the power to change the world! You can sit down and try to accurately represent the real world if you like, but that is not necessarily what is interesting.

You owe no obligation to the real world to try to replicate it. It is there for you to use as raw material, as a resource. Photography puts the world through a similar set of machinations. You begin with a real world changing through time, moving always. The size is infinite, or at least beyond our imagination. It is in full color, and smells and tastes and feels. And then we freeze it, shrink it, flatten it, take all the color out, and put it on this little dippy piece of paper and then demand that people look at it and see the whole world. That's asking quite a lot, ne? Yet we look at photographs all the time and still seem to get a lot from them. Well, its the good ones that we look at, and that is because they take the real world and transform it into something it is not. They use light and space and time to create an illusion of the world that is not readily available to us with our normal perceptions. And they incorporate our imaginations as well.

A Disk Jockey over-enunciates his words to create a voice that sounds dynamic after being processed through microphones, condensers, filters, reverberators; squashed and smashed through those tiny wires and then turned into electrical impulses that are then turned into radio waves and sent through the air, which ultimately come out of that little 4" speaker in your friend's Volkswagen. Phew!

It is your job to take the world and use it, to pump it up, to take it out to whatever extreme you can. That is what this course is all about. You will learn what things you can do, both technically and aesthetically to make images that will inspire a viewer to look and feel and think about whatever it is that is important enough to you to make an image about. This course will lay out a number of strategies for you to adapt to your needs and then follow. We will guide you, but you do have to apply yourself. You have to define what interests you, find a way to capture it in your box of light, and then build a visual vocabulary to communicate that interest. Then you can use all these tools to make the images that will evoke a meaningful response from your viewers. Now you are having fun, and improving the world as you go. What more could you ask for?

INFORMATION and COMMUNICATION

PHOTOGRAPHS & INFORMATION

	SNAP	PRESS	MUSEUM
information			
where is it ?	photographer	photograph	photographer - photo - perceiver
what is it ?	personal	public	philosophical
communication			
	nonologue no communication	monologue one way	dialogue an exchange of information

SNAP shots are images that trigger personal memory. If the viewer has no connection to the content of the image then no impact is made. The photograph is not interesting. Some snap shot style photographers use this "look", but put things that are universal into their pictures that which are accessible to most people.

PRESS shots are most interested in providing as much information as possible in as direct a way as possible. They do not want you to have to stop and ponder. These images provide answers to questions.

MUSEUM shots ask questions. They want you to stop and think and feel how they relate to your life.

Successful images make you reach into your personal experience and compare your life with that in the image. The photograph is not an end in itself, but rather, serves as linkage to connect the viewer and the artist.

IMAGEMAKING

philosophy - to establish a personal point of view, to have something to say

 problem - to define a particular set of points that can be discussed through images

 process - to create a language, both aesthetic and technical, to discuss the problem

 product - to present a body of work that articulates the artist's philosophy

THE FOUR DISCIPLINES

the Discipline of the Hand - PHYSICAL (VISUAL)

 the Discipline of the Heart - EMOTIONAL

 the Discipline of the Head - CONCEPTUAL

 the Discipline of the Whole - SPIRITUAL

Images which present only the visual do not go far enough. If your photographs look nice and do nothing else, then you are decorating the world, and that will not suffice. The point is to evoke a meaningful response from a viewer. That evolves emotions and ideas. You have to feel something, think something, and then try to get this into the photograph. It does not have to be something pretentiously monumental. It just has to be honest. The visual is necessary to get you to this point, because it serves as the platform from which the content is presented.

RESPONSIBILITY

ENTERTAINMENT vs. EDUCATION

Entertainment is something that relieves you of the responsibility of participation. It is something you do to relax. Kick off your shoes and guzzle down a beer as the ball heads for the goal post / basket / left field fence, and that is fine. It is different from education, however, which involves learning, which involves teaching, which involves thinking. It is nice if your photographic images make someone feel good, but nice is not enough. Decorating the world is not enough. A successful image is one that engages its viewers in conversation and returns some of the energy they invest.

CONSUMING vs. PRODUCING

The mere fact that you are alive and here on this planet means that you have a certain obligation - an obligation to make this a better place. If you are just being here and not producing anything to improve the world, then you are consuming. You are using up the world and not replenishing it. You are destroying the world! You are consuming our home just as maggots consume a corpse.

On a more immediate level you have to be aware of what the people around you are doing. You have to think about what the other person needs and wants. This is called consideration. How many times have you been cut out, not even because the other guys were jerks, but simply because they just were not thinking about anything or anyone else but themselves. For that matter, how many times have you watched the car next to you drive right up to the stopped mail truck before they realize it isn't moving? Maybe it is just that they are not thinking at all. The point is that you have to be considerate if you are going to live in a society. Hey! The "me" generation is over. It is a matter of cooperation not competition.

This is something they should teach everyone in school starting at a very young age. Unfortunately educators say this is one of those topics that should be taught by the family and is part of the religious domain. Well guess who ain't pulling their weight! We've got a society full of very selfish people, ne?

INSPIRATION and EVOCATION

The images which are the most "successful" in the world are the ones that have inspired large numbers of people for many years. They touch the subconscious of our society and evoke a response of significant proportions. Many times we cannot describe the feeling in words, but that is why it is visual art. If you can manage to make an image that touches just one person and change their life, then you have improved the world. Then that improved person has a better chance of going out and doing the same thing to someone else. And so on, and so on... This is the personal revolution. We cannot have the political revolution if the people do not have the capacity to appreciate the new order. Both need each other. So go out and look and learn and realize that the world is here to make you better so you can make the world better.

BASIC VISUAL TOOLKIT

MYSTERY -- photographs that ask questions

If a photograph only tells you about what is there and the viewer can look at it and say. "Okay. That's what it is." Then there is no need for them to look any longer. The communication is only one way. It is necessary for an image to engage the viewer in conversation. The content of that interchange has to be relevant to both the artist and their audience. The more emotive the image is the more you creep into their psyche and become part of their life.

Your job this semester is to make images with MYSTERY, images that evoke meaningful responses.

FRAGMENTATION closeness

SPACE

perceptual cues projection of 2D -> 3D

perspective

spatial illusion

juxtaposition

alignment

scale

split frames

visual considerations

edges and corners

balance / asymmetry

grain / focus

ANGLE ofVIEW

TIME

projection of 4D ->2D

temporal illusion

movement

event rather than object

"the feeling of"

direction

repetition

OBSTACLES

occlusion

inclusion / exclusion

multiple layers

organic / geometric form

props

themes

repetition

humor

nostalgia

words

pictures of pictures

crowds / herds

ambiguity

DRAMATIC LIGHTING

shadows

reflections

translucence

overexposure

flash

light painting

infrared film

textures

direction of light source

shapes / forms

light / dark

positive / negative

SHOOTING

PROXIMITY excludes extraneous information [fragmentation]

A 50 mm lens takes in about the same amount of information as your eye. That is a lot of stuff. Stop and check out the periphery of your vision. There is a lot of visual information that your brain is editing out because you do not really need it to get done what you are trying to do. Our intellect then assigns names to the most important items in our field of vision and we deal with those. This use of symbolic identification greatly increases our productivity, yet greatly reduces how carefully we really look at things. (Try cutting off your beard and watch how long it takes for most people to ask you if maybe you got a haircut.)

The point is to get close to eliminate all unnecessary elements from your photographs. Set up to shoot. Then look at what is at the edges of your picture. Do you really want all that? Take two steps closer and look again. Isn't that better? Take two more steps closer. Keep going until you have just the essential information in your viewfinder. If you have removed things and you do not miss them, then you have automatically made a better photograph.

ANGLE OF VIEW presents new vistas [bird's eye / worm's eye]

Most of the time we are looking at the world from five foot something or other off the ground. This therefore is probably the worst place from which to take a picture. What we are trying to do is make something people will be drawn toward. If you give them what they are already used to looking at then why should they look at all. You have to make your photograph more interesting.

Stand on a chair and look down onto things. Lie on the ground and look up at things. Make the world a more interesting place.

PROJECTION OF 3D -> 2D creates an illusion of space [juxtaposition]

The projection of three dimensional space onto a two dimensional surface greatly alters the appearance of the space being viewed. This is the essence of using world and its reflection of light to paint images of silver onto paper. In an indirect way you are painting with light. You have to learn to control the way the light falls into the camera by putting yourself in the right place at just the right time. Everything else is illusion. Eventually you will learn to define the illusion to communicate just what you want.

There are numerous basic considerations as to how the image can obtain a dynamic visual sense: ALIGNMENT designates priority [occlusion]

The placement of items in the frame can alter their relative importance in the image. You can change the world by altering your positioning. You can bring things together or move them apart by shifting left or right, or move them forward or backward in space by moving closer or further away.

This can be a subtle yet significant change. We are not talking about jumping around, but carefully examining the way things line up in your viewfinder by moving an inch or two this way or that. **This is why it is important not to crop your images. Other wise it becomes too easy to approximate your vision and say to yourself, "Oh, that's good enough. I'll crop it later." If you depend on fixing things when you get to the darkroom it is probably too late. It is a matter of discipline, and of really looking.

SHOOTING, cont'd

SCALE compares relative size [perspective]

Extreme juxtaposition can make items appear considerably different in size that they really are. Again, it is possible to exploit the projection of the real world onto that little piece of paper. We all know that you can make the Empire State Building disappear behind your thumb.

FRAMES define boundaries [inclusion / exclusion]

John Szarkowski, the first Curator of Photography at MOMA, used the frame of the photograph to describe the difference between Mirrors and Windows in his famous exhibition at MOMA. The frame is created by the edges of the viewfinder of your camera and acts as the cutting-edge (no pun intended) of the subtractive nature of photography. It can contain the content or it can indicate another reality beyond the photograph's boundary.

EDGES have power [tension / release]

Placing a visual element close to an edge of a photo draws attention to that area of the photo. It can be the very subtle difference between having something come up to the edge or break the boundary and move outside the image. Having a horizontal or vertical element run parallel to an edge can create a vibration that stimulates a viewer. The tension created by each of these situations is quite desirable. It is the resolution of this tension (if at all desired) that becomes an additional interesting aesthetic decision.

CORNERS have more focused power [source / target]

Corners have an added power of defining a vector that uses that location as either its source or the target. Energy can bounce around within the frame or the corner can direct its energy to an implied world beyond the actual photograph.

DIAGONALS invite comparisons [division / interaction]

Dividing the picture into halves by a diagonal from corner to corner generates an comparison of the two halves. This can be a balanced or more dynamically asymmetrical relationship of space and tonality.

SYMMETRY / ASYMMETRY creates internal movement [balanced / off balance]

Symmetry between spaces or tonalities distributes weight and thus importance. A balanced image presents stability. Asymmetrical and off-balance images are just as interesting, depending on the type of tension/ dynamic you are trying to present, and whether you wish that to resolve.

SPLIT FRAMES interlocking landscapes [separation / integration]

A special case of placing incongruent objects or landscapes adjacent to each other can create the illusion of two disconnected photographs having been joined. Looking at slides of split frame images is the best way to explain this device.

IMAGE EVALUATION - the four C's

CAPTURE

The first thing any image must do is capture the attention of its potential audience. This happens on a visual level. The trick is to create a hook which will catch someone's attention even if they were not specifically looking for your piece. If one walks into a gallery or museum with numerous pieces on the wall, yours must elicit a response. Otherwise all the effort that has been put into the work will be to no avail, because no one will even get to see it.

CONTROL

Once you have their attention you can control the way a person's eye will move through the picture space. This term is used loosely to include sculptural space or even acoustic space. At this point you are ordering a viewer's experience, and by doing so you can now control how they feel about things and think about things. You have now moved beyond the formal considerations of art and are dealing with content.

COMMUNICATE

The dictionary definition of communicate has two sides. One deals with the presentation of information as a monologue, the other includes a response to the information as a dialogue.

Monologue -

This is the primary medium of the commercial image, be it the front page photo in the New York Times or the Dewar's ad on the back page of your favorite magazine. The point is to inject the desired message directly into the viewer's consciousness, no questions asked. The ideal is to make your pitch as clean and concise as possible and create bonding between the audience and your product. This is the result of psychology.

Dialogue -

Fine art is more interested in raising questions. In the long run the image becomes the link between artist and audience to create a conversation between the two. If the image is compelling enough, it will cause the viewer to compare his personal experiences with those the artist is presenting. An exchange of personal energy is created. This is the result of passion.

CHANGE

The ultimate measure of the success of an image is how long it will stay with your audience after they have finished looking at your work. If your image has a profound enough effect you have changed someone's life. You have changed the way they look, feel or think about the world. Your image has become part of their experience and will be considered in their next conversation with an image. The pieces that are the most famous are the ones that have changed the most people. The Mona Lisa is so powerful an image, it has affected many people who have never even seen it.

t h e F U N C T I O N o f D I S C I P L I N E

"Discipline is never an end in itself, only a means to an end."

There are three basic aspects of the human endeavor -

perceptual, emotional, conceptual.

Expressed for the field of photography -

seeing, feeling, thinking.

The disciplines associated with each of these have been called the disciplines of the

hand, heart, head.

The function of discipline is to provide a conduit through which the heart can directly communicate with the hand without the overt intercession of the head. The point being to avoid the contrivance that the socially conditioned logical mind can impose. One practices using the camera, or playing scales on the piano, so that one can respond, without thinking about it too much, to an emotionally inspiring situation. It's like learning to dance, the dance you do with your instrument -- your feet, your guitar, your camera. Once you learn the basic steps you are free to perform many variations without being bogged down by having to consider it all first. You can now be free and intuitive. At this point discipline has served its function. And you always thought discipline was a device of restriction. No, no, discipline is what makes you free. So here you are being taught how to think about all these things that go into making a good photograph so that you can forget thinking about all these things that go into making a good photograph.

This does not, however, mean we abandon thought. With the task of supervision removed, the head can then act as an introspective device, watching objectively. In the long run we must draw some conclusions about both the source and result of the evocation. If all this happens smoothly the product is an uncontrived experience that you learn from. The learning then becomes part of your resources, enriching your life, and becomes part of the source for the next evocative experience. This then generates an even greater response the next time around and you learn even more. If you follow the course of this experiential spiral upward, you just may reach enlightenment.

This brings us to the fourth aspect called the spiritual, and it involves the discipline of the whole. Is this the fourth A (aspect) or the fourth D (discipline) or the fourth H (whole begins with an H?). No matter: The mechanics of this discipline vary greatly with ethnic background, and people are willing to die for a rather narrow system of beliefs or practices. When the writings of all the world's cultures are examined as poetry the bottom line seems to be how and why to live a good life. We get into trouble when the stories are taken too literally and the metaphors disappear. Points of view then become fixed, defining boundaries between "right" and "wrong", and people find differences where we are all essentially the same. But this is another topic altogether..

IMAGEMAKING - the four P's

PHILOSOPHY

This is something that goes way beyond the scope of any class and takes a lifetime to develop. It is something you do for yourself because you are driven to. It is the quest to understand, to make some sense of the world. If you are going to grow up to become a visual artist, you have to be a philosopher. If not you become an interior decorator.

PROBLEM

Particular aesthetic problems are defined by examining how your conceptual, emotional and perceptual components evaluate the world around you, and noting what is fascinating enough to look into further. You must then focus your attention on specific aspects of these interests. This is a matter of ideas, which come from opinions, which come from experience. If you do not yet have opinions, borrow some, try them on and see how they feel. If they do not fit, you can always get others.

PROCESS

The investigation of the problems at hand is the heart of imagemaking. This is a matter of collecting information and learning as much as possible. Eventually you establish a point of view and build a language to discuss it. This process should teach you how to see better, feel better, and think better about the world around you.

PRODUCT

The images you construct enable you to communicate your thoughts, feelings, and visions in such a way as to change the life of someone who may one day look at your work. If your work has no profound effect on anyone then either you are not getting your guts onto the piece of paper, or you have nothing to say, in which case you are merely decorating the world.

EVALUATION

In the long run it is the teacher's job to see that the images a student produces are consistent with that student's personal philosophy. In more immediate terms, the teacher must assist the student in:

- defining a philosophy that is relevant to their life,
- distilling meaningful aesthetic problems from that philosophy,
- working on the process of making images and the construction of a visual vocabulary,

and finally,

- evaluating the products so they effectively communicate with a viewer.

ATTITUDE -

Motivation is a major factor in your grade. This is University not High School. You are here because you want to know about art. You are, therefore, expected to be self motivated. In fact, if you think it is fine to do just what the assignment requires you to do, then you do not have the personality to be an artist. You are expected to do work Beyond the Call of Duty. This is the only way you will learn what you need to know.

PRODUCTIVITY -

This term is used in its most general sense to include the Four P's described on the previous page. This requires a responsible attempt by the student to clarify the nature of their investigation and results in the collection and organization of personal information and the completion of enough quality work to articulate the ideals at hand.

ASSIGNMENTS -

The camera is capable of becoming many machines. Due to the extreme range of its abilities and applications photography is a most difficult subject to deal with. It is impossible for the instructor alone to cover it all. It is, therefore, expected that the students will come up with as many variations as possible to a given assignment. These lessons are seeds designed to extend your vision not limit it. The further away from the instructor's intention you can get while still offering a solution to the original problem, the more we will all learn. Take it out as far as you can. This is called creativity.

PARTICIPATION -

It is expected that you challenge your classmates as well as yourself. There are as many points of view as there are people in the classroom, and they should all be considered. No one should be offended by a good fight. It is all done to get the most out of what is being considered. Otherwise you will never be pushed far enough to learn what you really can be.

ATTENDANCE -

Attendance goes without saying. You are responsible for knowing what is expected and when. The ubiquitous whine, "I didn't know...", will not get you through this class, let alone real life. Critiques are taken seriously here. If you have no work to show at one it is equivalent to flunking an exam. If you miss a crit altogether it is equivalent to flunking twice. It is obviously better to at least show up empty handed and learn from what others have done than to disappear. Try telling the editor why you missed the deadline!

STAGES of DEVELOPMENT

OBJECT - visual images

Photographs that are basic, simple pictures of objects, give us the ability to see the way light shapes our vision. They tend to be singular and static. The "**visual toolbox**" outlined in the first slide lecture will give you a running head start. It is especially important to use the concepts of fragmentation and angle of view to remove any unwanted elements from your images.

PLACE - spacial images

The point here is to step back and include the environment of those well lit objects. This gives us the opportunity to deal with perceptual cues that describe a three dimensional space on a two dimensional piece of paper. There are some photographers who deliberately distort the system to creatively question the way we see the world. Ultimately if the space is evocative our images can present a sense of place have the potential for the something to happen.

SITUATION - temporal images

When time is included in an image it can depict something actually happening. The camera's unique ability to capture changes through time can generate images which convey the feeling of the doing. A meaningful image can reach back into our memory, perhaps creating a sense of nostalgia, or it can indicate the potential of the future, engaging our imagination. This is where content starts to be a major consideration.

RELATIONSHIP - personal images

This is a matter of interaction and interrelationships. A successful photograph asks you to compare your life's experience with that being presented. This brings us to the point where the photograph acts as the fulcrum, the linkage between artist and viewer, allowing dialogues, rather than monologues to happen. see: *Image Evaluation - The Four C's page*
percepts - discipline of the hand
emotions - discipline of the heart
concepts - discipline of the head

MULTIPLICITY

Complex images, as opposed to complicated, include several photographs worth of content, and foster the comparison of these inherent aspects, resulting in photographs which can be contemplated for a long time. If the image is truly working, the viewer will continue to think of it long after it has been viewed.

SOPHISTICATION

Don't ever lose the tools that are picked up while working on each one of these stages while developing you picture making. Each level depends on finding solutions to the aesthetic problems posed in the previous level. It is a matter of stacking the devices you have created to deal with one stage onto the next stage. When you have successfully moved through the considerations needed to make successful images for all levels outlined above you will automatically arrive at the last multiple planes plane.