

TOC

PATH:

Ways-of-working in Photography

By Jim Beecher

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<http://www.photokaboom.com/>

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Reflecting how everyone’s way-of-working is different, the topics in this book are loosely organized.

Therefore, you can dip into the book according to your interests and whims of the moment. You can, but you need not read the book from front-to-back.

Then, set the book aside for a time. Return to it for inspiration and energy, periodically.

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Getting Started

Why This Book?

Most photography books are about the tools and techniques of photography.

This book is about the most important factor: **you**.

For example, a student commented on a presentation of the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson that was narrated by this famous French photojournalist/surrealist.

She said:

He didn't talk about his camera—once.

Cartier-Bresson talked about what he liked about being photographer.

He spoke about how he goes about getting more of what he liked.

Cartier-Bresson described his *way-of-working*.

His way-of-working was his *raison d'être* for photography:

Actually, I'm not all that interested in the subject of photography. Once the picture is in the box, I'm not all that interested in what happens next. Hunters, after all, aren't cooks.¹

Unlike Cartier-Bresson, we may photograph for the photographs.

But we also photograph, perhaps more so, because of our way-of-working in photography.

Paul Strand wrote:

And if you can find out something about the laws of your own growth and vision as well as those of photography you may be able to relate the two, create an object that has a life of its own, which transcends craftsmanship.

¹ Source unknown.

That is a long road, and because it must be your own road nobody can teach it to you or find it for you.

There are no shortcuts, no rules.²

PATH can help you become a better photographer—however you define better.

Energy to do great photography doesn't come from cameras and technique.

It comes from you.

Work on you for an hour with PATH, and you'll become an even better photographer.

What's a *Way-of-working*?

The big answer encompasses the entirety of PATH.

To get started, though, let's limit the answer to a short period of time.

Let's compare what's going on when two photographers, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Ansel Adams, press the shutter release.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

At the moment that Henri Cartier-Bresson pressed the shutter release on his Leica, he was a part of a decisive moment.

Cartier-Bresson experienced the moment as a "sensual pleasure," as a "yes, yes, yes."³

And part of the sensuality was wonderment of a beautiful geometry that had come into being for just a moment:

² Paragraphs added. From an address delivered at the Clarence White School of Photography in 1923. Originally published in Strand, P. (1923). The art motive in photography. *The British Journal of Photography*, 70, 612-615. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

³ Cartier-Bresson, H. (Interviewed). (1972). *The decisive moment* [Narrated slide show]. New York: Scholastic Achievement Series.

The simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.⁴

Ansel Adams

So, for Cartier-Bresson, when he pressed the shutter release, the experience was most important.

In contrast, when Ansel Adams pressed the shutter release on his view camera, he was creating a photograph that he had pre-visualized:

My basic approach to photography depends on the visualization of the final print before the exposure is made.

It is not only a matter of seeing it in the mind's eye, but it's also and primarily a matter of feeling it — feeling the various qualities that you wish to obtain in the final print. The shutter is opened and then the negative is developed.

The negative can now be compared to a musical score. It's ready for its performance — the print. If the negative is properly composed, technically and aesthetically, it can be performed so as to recreate the original visualized intention. So that finally I can say that I visualize the essence of the photograph to be.⁵

Cartier-Bresson's shutter-release moment was his presence at that moment.

For Ansel Adams, it was the photographic print that he would later produce.

Neither photographer's way-of-working is better than the other.

The best way-of-working is the one that suits you and your project.

Way-of-working: So What?

⁴ Cartier-Bresson, H. (1952). *The decisive moment (Images à la sauvette)*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁵ Adams, A. (1943). A personal credo. *The American Annual of Photography 1944*, 58, pp. 7-16. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Why is it important to look at your way-of-working?

The examples of ways-of-working in the last section were somewhat philosophical or intellectual.

Let's see how being a bit philosophical or intellectual can be practical.

You'll buy the right camera, for example, if you think about your way-of-working.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

In the last section, Cartier-Bresson's way-of-working at the moment he pressed the shutter was being present at that moment.

As mentioned, he used a Leica.

It's a small, quiet camera, that can be focused quickly even though it's manual focus.

Cartier-Bresson's Leica fit his way-of-working:

Always like a cat, tip toeing ...⁶[../././././Teaching/My Webs/websilversilicon/PATH/book1b.htm](http://www.photokaboom.com/PATH/book1b.htm) - ftn1# ftn1

Ansel Adams

For Ansel Adams, his way-of-working was more methodological, and not at all instantaneous like Cartier-Bresson's way-of-working.

Therefore, Adams used a view camera. As he set up his tripod, screwed on the camera, and placed a film holder in the back of the camera, he was thinking about the print he would be making later.

The sheet film used in view cameras is 4x5 or 8x10 inches. The sheets are most often developed individually. Adams could give each negative the best possible development for the lighting at the time of exposure, and for the print that he had pre-visualized at the time he pressed the shutter release.

⁶ Cartier-Bresson, H. (Interview). (1972). *The decisive moment* [Narrated slide show]. New York: Scholastic Achievement Series.

A view camera fit well with his way-of-working—pre-visualization.

Travel Guide for This Book

Non-linear

The topics in this book are loosely organized.

This reflects how everyone's way-of-working is different.

You can dip into the book according to your interests and whims of the moment.

You need not read the book from front-to-back.
Set the book aside for a time.

Return to it for inspiration and energy, periodically.

Creative Energy Questionnaire

Go to <http://www.photokaboom.com/> for the Creative Energy Questionnaire.

Use the Creative Energy Questionnaire to find out more about yourself as a photographer, and where you want to go next.

A Nag

Photographers often spend hours selecting a camera to buy.

In contrast, they may have difficulty finding one hour for the Creative Energy Questionnaire.

Yes, looking at the features on cameras is easier than delving into our own photographic "features."

But, do the Creative Energy Questionnaire. Your photography will benefit.

The Creative Energy Questionnaire and PATH will make you a better photographer more than any new camera.

Notes

Take two kinds of notes as you use the book.

Written Notes

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Jot down your thoughts in the margins, a notebook, or on your PDA.

Visual Notes

Place some of your photographs in a 3-ring binder with pages for your prints.

You can also have a folder, called Visual Notes, on your computer.

The photographs will remind you what to do more of, and what to do less of.

Review your visual notes occasionally before you pick up your camera.

You and Photography

Not Been a Student for Awhile?

Many of my students haven't been students for some time.

I warn them that they may not be used to being confused.

They have a mastery of everything they do—and suddenly they're taking a class where they don't know how everything works.

It takes time and effort to understand photography.

A New Identity

We all have many identities.

An easy illustration is the many roles we move through in a single day: significant other, parent/caregiver, worker, bon vivant, and/or ?

Saying I'm a photographer is a statement of an identity.

When college students saw the identity of the photographer protagonist in the film *Blow Up*,⁷ enrollment in college photography programs increased.

⁷ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060176>.

The Blow-Up photographer's work is indistinguishable from his leisure; his utopian pad is at once boutique, laboratory, harem, and house beautiful.⁸

What's your photography identity?

The answer is in every chapter of PATH.

Remember how self-conscious you may have been as an adolescent?

Many adolescents report feeling that they're in front of an audience.

This is due largely to a healthy narcissism that's required for their growth into adulthood.

In part, the being-in-the-spotlight feeling is because they're trying on new identities.

Many of my students are moving from being snap shooters to being photographers.

They often report feeling self-conscious on the street when they're doing their first assignment.

Their thoughts and feelings, such as Who am I as a photographer? and Can I do this? put them on stage.

The self-consciousness passes quickly as they button up their photographer identities.

Later in the book, we'll discuss how you may now have two audiences for your photography and your photographer identity:

- 1) The lay audience, snap shooters
- 2) Those who are applying their visual aptitudes with more awareness and effort.

Magic Pills

⁸ Originally published in the *Village Voice* in 1991: Hoberman, J. (1995). Blow-Up at 25: After the orgy. In P. Keough (Ed.), *Flesh and blood* (pp. 31-36). San Francisco: Mercury House.

We know that magic pills don't exist, but we often hold out hope that they do.

That said, this book is not a magic pill.

This writer can't promise that the book will make photography easier for you.

In fact, the book makes photography harder, as described in the *Harder and Harder* section below.

Little Magic Pills

As mentioned, this book is not a magic pill.

On the other hand, the book may contain a little magic pill.

Little magic pills do exist.

They're ordinary words for most everyone.

Simple words can become transformative when they complete a puzzle for a photographer.

Harder and Harder

Edward Steichen wrote:

Photography is a medium of formidable contradictions. It is ridiculously easy and almost impossibly difficult.⁹

Photography is **not** easy.

We expect it to be easy, however.

Kodak

Kodak said it was back in the 1800s:

Just press the button – we do the rest.

⁹ " . . . and almost impossibly difficult. It is difficult because, while the artist working with any other medium begins with a blank surface and gradually brings his conception into being, the photographer is the only image-maker who begins with the picture completed. His emotions, his knowledge, and the native talent are brought into focus and fixed beyond recall the moment the shutter of his camera has closed."

The camera ads today describe how easy digital technology has made photography.

Yes and no.

A top-of-the-film camera had a forty-some page instruction manual with lots of white space.

Digital camera instruction manuals are much longer and denser.

Ouch.

Gorilla

Anyone can take a photograph, even a gorilla.

The start-up costs, or entry costs, of photography, are low. Just buy a camera off the peg hook at the supermarket checkout line, and press the shutter release.

The photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia wrote:

Photography is the foreign language that everyone thinks they can speak.

As you explore photography, you're continually becoming aware of more to learn.

For example, proficient photographers often become dissatisfied with the prints they're getting from labs.

The quality is poor, or the cost of well-done prints is high.

They buy a printer.

Then, the color is off.

They have to learn about color management, and have to spend more money on software and equipment.

They become disheartened, but only for a moment.

Then, they get going.

Photography is like learning any foreign language.

Fluency requires a lot of effort.

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Boredom, for anyone not an adolescent, is when there isn't a new challenge out there.

Yes?

Hierarchy of Dissatisfaction

Jay Maisel, a well-known commercial photographer, gave a class at the Maine Photographic Workshops. He discussed how photography has three levels of dissatisfaction:

On the first level, you notice the flaws in your pictures [after you've taken them].

On the second level, you see them when you're shooting.

On the third level, you don't even put the camera up to your eye.^{10 11}

A student asked this writer, "You mean, sometimes, you don't take the picture?"

Yup.

For example, if the light isn't right and you can't improve it, don't bother with the photograph.

Do Think More

Think as you bring your camera to your eye.

I imagine a Rolodex flipping in my mind.

A Rolodex is a file of small cards mounted on an axle.

One spins a knob on the side to flip from one card to another.

¹⁰ Brown, S. L. (1986, February). Jay Maisel color workshop. *Popular Photography Magazine*, 32-90.

¹¹ The construction of the above quote appears to be based on work by Oscar Wilde. Cecil Adams, in his column *The Straight Dope* quotes Wilde talking about drinking absinthe: "After the first glass you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally you see things as they really are, and this is the most horrible thing in the world." (*New York Press*, 2001, October 24-30)



Rolodex

Each card in the file is a choice I must consider.

First, you have visceral response to what's in front of you.

Then, you've got to flip through a mental Rolodex of photographic choices to be considered.

The Rolodex becomes mostly intuitive, eventually.

Sort of like when you're driving, and you suddenly realize that you don't remember the last mile of your trip.

The driving was automatic.

The photographic choices become more automatic the more you experiment and practice.

Don't Think So Much

When we're thinking about our photography, it's like we have a kitten sitting on our shoulders, saying:

That's a great picture.

The kitten can become a gremlin, however, saying:

Your photography sucks.

The constant use of the judgment parts of our brains can deactivate the creative parts.

We can become too self-critical.

We can hit the *Hierarchy-of-Dissatisfaction wall*.

Our creative wings weaken, and we spiral down into courtroom dramas about the achievement of perfection, how we rate compared to other photographers, and the like.

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We need to stop thinking so much about our photography, at times.

This can be hard.

Try the following until some of the self-criticism diminishes.

Do Quantity, Not Quality

Susan Shaw said:

Think of film as being like junk food—it's like a bowl of popcorn—shoot—shoot.

You can turn off judgment by setting goals that are not about excellence.

Rather, have quantity goals, such as doing a certain number of photographs, during a certain time span.

David Bayles and Ted Orland, in their book, *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, describe how a pottery teacher divided a class into two groups: *quantity-oriented* potters and *quality-oriented* potters.¹²

To get an A:

- The quality-makers were asked to make a single, perfect, pot.
- The quantity-makers were asked to create as much work as possible.

You know where this is heading.

The quantity group produced the highest quality pottery.

While the quality group was *thinking*, parsing out what perfection was, the quantity group was *doing*.

Here's a quantity goal to emulate.

When street photographer Garry Winogrand died, he left behind 2,500 rolls of exposed but undeveloped film, and 6,500 developed rolls without contact sheets.¹³

¹² (2001) Image Continuum Press.

¹³ Grundberg, A. (1990). *Crisis of the real: Writings on photography, 1974-1989*. New York: Aperture.

Novelty

Use the romance, the distraction, of novelty.

Try something new.

Chance & Luck

Doing quantity, or using novelty, both encourage chance and luck.

Merce Cunningham, the choreographer, creates dances with the flip of a coin at each decision point.

John Cage, the composer, used chance as well.

James Agee wrote:

Many people, even some good photographers, talk of the "luck" of photography, as if that were a disparagement. And it is true that luck is constantly at work. It is one of the cardinal creative forces in the universe, one which a photographer has unique equipment for collaborating with.¹⁴

Even Edward Weston, a proponent of pre-visualizing the final print before he pressed the shutter release, acknowledged the contribution of chance to his work.

I say that chance enters into all branches of art: a chance word or phrase starts a trend of thought in a writer, a chance sound may bring new melody to a musician, a chance combination of lines, new composition to a painter. I take advantage of chance—which in reality not chance—by being ready, attuned to one's surroundings—and grasp my opportunity in a way which no other medium can equal in spontaneity, while the impulse is fresh, the excitement strong.¹⁵

[Chapter 13, in the online version of this book, has an article by Minor White about accidents in photography, called *Found Photographs*.]

Change Your Camera

¹⁴ Agee, J. (Essay). (1965). *A way of seeing: Photographs of Harlem*, by Helen Levitt, New York: Viking.

¹⁵ Newhall, N. (Ed.). (2 vol., 1961–66). *The daybooks of Edward Weston*. Rochester, NY: George Eastman House.

Another detour from judgment is to use a simpler camera.

Your camera can become identified with the attainment of excellence.

Use a toy camera, get pinhole camera kit, see if your grandmother's camera works, or ?

BTW, photographers often find that they take fewer and fewer family pictures, and the like.

Why, if the light isn't good, why take the photograph?

Right?

Wrong.

Do take the photograph.

You want to get the photograph of your nephew sticking a French fry up his nose, even if the light is boring.

No?

Sometimes, photographers get a point-and-shoot camera, along with their "big" camera.

The point-and-shoot camera doesn't have the aura of excellence of their more expensive cameras.

Pursue Several Projects

. . . at the same time.

When one project becomes aggravating/stilted/frustrating, you can shift to another, fresh, project.

Time Delay

Delay the evaluation of your efforts.

Your judgment may be more helpful and accurate.

Photography editor Mason Resnick took a workshop with the street photographer Garry Winogrand:

He [Garry Winogrand] never developed film right after shooting it. He deliberately waited a year or two, so he would have virtually no memory of the act of taking an individual photograph. This, he claimed made it easier for

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him to approach his contact sheets more critically. "If I was in a good mood when I was shooting one day, then developed the film right away," he told us, I might choose a picture because I remember how good I felt when I took it, not necessarily because it was a great shot. You make better choices if you approach your contact sheets cold, separating the editing from the picture taking as much as possible.¹⁶

While delaying looking at your work for a year or two is not for everyone, some delay can be beneficial.

The Above Two Pathways

Do Think More is a cognitive pathway.

It's about the now.

But it's also retrospective, such as evaluation of what you've done before.

It's also about opportunity and the future.

You may plan a project, for example.

Cognitive implies that affect is absent.

Our emotions are present, but are experienced verbally, rather than more directly via the body.

Don't Think So Much is a dual pathway:

This pathway is experienced more directly, more in the now, with less filtering through the cognitive, the verbal.

It can be about using your intuition, your store of previous experiences with photography.

It can be about the permutations of chance, including luck, serendipity, stumbling upon, accidents, mistakes, and so forth.

Why?

Because judgment is turned down, there is a loss of control, allowing the above to happen.

¹⁶ Resnick, M. (1988, July). Coffee and workprints: A workshop with Garry Winogrand. *Modern Photography*, <http://www.photogs.com/bwworld/winogrand.html>.

Which of the two pathways is better?

Which is better for you?

Argh!

Black-and-white thinking!

When I was a adolescent, I described myself as being a cynical, optimistic, existentialist.

(Ah, those days of reading the *Sand County Almanac*, Herman Hesse, Rimbaud)

Anyways, adults would look askance, perhaps thinking I didn't understand my collection of seemingly opposite ways-of-being.

We're not one or the other, all the time.

We're shades of gray.

We use both pathways.

Andy Grunberg wrote of how Henri Cartier-Bresson and Helen Levitt constructed their photographs:

Helen Levitt was the first American photographer to fully understand the essence of Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographic message and put it into practice.

Like Cartier-Bresson, she understood how to combine intuition and intellect to forge sophisticated, lyrical compositions from commonplace events.¹⁷

Mistakes

Take risks so you can make lots of mistakes.

Mistakes are good, as long as you're not photographing your best friend's wedding.

In a *New Yorker* profile of a jazz musician, it was written:

Mistakes can swing you off into a wholly new direction, and often it is better than the one you were going in.¹⁸

¹⁷ Grundberg, A. (1990). *Crisis of the real: Writings on photography, 1974-1989*. New York: Aperture.

I often take beginning students on a night photography excursion.

One reason for doing so is that night photography is a genre some of them may want to pursue.

The more important reason is to model risk-taking.

They're doing something new, photography, in a challenging environment, night.

They expect their photographs will be terrible.

Many are duds, while there are a couple that are amazing.

The risk was worth it.

Make mistakes.

They're good.

The artist Milton Glaser spoke about the need for risk in the arts. He calls it, *continuous transgression*:

Early in my career I couldn't wait to become a professional.

That was my complete aspiration in my early life because professionals seemed to know everything - not to mention they got paid well for it.

Later I discovered after working for a while that professionalism itself was a limitation.

After all, what professionalism means in most cases is limiting risks.

So if you want to get your car fixed you go to a mechanic who knows how to deal with transmission problems in the same way each time.

I suppose if you needed brain surgery you wouldn't want the doctor to fool around and invent a new way of connecting your nerve endings.

Please doc, do it in the way that has worked in the past.

¹⁸ *New Yorker*

Unfortunately in our field, in a so-called creative activity – I’ve begun to hate that word.

I especially hate when it is used as a noun. I shudder when I hear someone called a creative.

Anyhow, when you are doing something in a recurring way to diminish risk or doing it in the same way as you have done it before, it is clear why professionalism is not enough.

After all, what is desirable in our field, is continuous transgression.

Professionalism does not allow for that because transgression has to encompass the possibility of failure and if you are professional your instinct is not to fail, it is to repeat success.

Professionalism as a lifetime aspiration is a limited goal.¹⁹

Mistake Analysis

How do you figure out the benefit of a mistake—knowing what to do the next time?

- Do an experiment.
- Do it where it’s comfortable.
- Do it so there’s no need for artistry.
- Do a little experiment.

Break a larger issue down into smaller pieces.

- Document what you did.

Take written notes, of course.

And, take visual notes.

For example, if you're experimenting with lights, step back and take a picture of the scene of your experiment.

Then you'll know where the lights were placed.

¹⁹ Glaser, M. (2002, March 23). *10 Things I Have Learned* [Speech at AIGA Voice Conference]. <http://miltonglaser.com/pages/milton/essays/es3.html>.

- Limit the variables.

You can determine what's happening, or not happening, more easily.

- Let it rest for a day or two.

When you come back to the mistake, you may have figured it out in the meantime.

Down Time Equals Objectivity and Insight

The last statement above, about the setting aside of mistakes to allow solutions to percolate into consciousness, brings up the power of down time elsewhere in photography.

E. B. White was a:

. . . demanding worker.

He rewrote the first page of "Charlotte's Web" eight times, and put the early manuscript away for several months, "to let the body heat out of it."²⁰

Editing

Yes, do edit out the obvious clinkers, and set aside those that are clearly keepers.

And, do keep the in-between photographs for a time.

You may see one of them in a different light a month later.

Garry Winogrand often waited years to develop film.

He wanted to separate the photographing experience, especially his emotions, from the editing experience.

If I was in a good mood when I was shooting one day, then developed the film right away.

²⁰ Angell, R. (2005, February 14 & 21). Andy. *New Yorker*, 132-148.

I might choose a picture because I remember how good I felt when I took it.²¹

After Winogrand's death, the Museum of Modern Art obtained a grant to process 2,500 undeveloped rolls and 6,500 developed rolls without contact sheets.

Projects

When you're doing a project, stop doing the project for a time.

I call it *going on miscellaneous*.

You'll return to your project refreshed.

Sometimes a project can become oppressive.

Author Joseph Epstein described this phenomenon in regard to writing.

After describing how fewer than 500 people earn a living completely from writing in the United States, he writes:

Things get worse.

Mordecai Richler, the Canadian novelist, once said that he divided his life between the time before he decided to become a writer and the time after—and the time before was better.

What I believe Richler meant was that once one determines to write, one no longer confronts experience directly; it becomes "copy," recyclable in stories, articles, essays, poems.

True, nothing in a skilled writer's life is wasted. But there is something mildly—and sometimes more than mildly—gruesome about collecting experience for one's work the way a certain kind of person collects grievances.

I, for one, would never make the mistake my wife did of marrying a writer.²²

²¹ Van Riper, F. (2003, January 31). Garry Winogrand: Huge Influence, Early Exit. Washington Post, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/photo/essays/vanRiper/030131.htm>.

A photographer can't recycle everything into his or her photographs, as can a writer into text.

Yet, a project can become visually impairing—much more than you want to see is the project.

Photography Can Get in the Way

Photography can connect you to yourself, to others, and to the world.

Having the identity, photographer, being occupied doing a project, as in I need this picture, and the camera itself, physically, can form a needed barrier between you and surroundings that are unsafe, distressing, and so forth.

However, sometimes, photography gets in the way.

Colin Fletcher was hiking from one end of the Grand Canyon to the other end.

But as I moved into position a gust of wind sent camera and tripod crashing over.

And afterward the shutter refused to function.

I had brought only this one camera down into the Canyon, and at first I simmered with frustration.

But within an hour I discovered a new fact of life.

I recognized, quite clearly, that photography is not really compatible with contemplation.

Its details are too insistent.

They are always buzzing around your mind and clouding the fine focus of appreciation.

You rarely detect this interference at the time, and cannot do much about it even if you do.

But that morning of the Serpentine reconnaissance, after the camera had broken, I found myself freed from an impediment I had not known existed.²³

²² Epstein, J. (2004, April). Writing on the Brain. *Commentary*.

²³ Fletcher, C. (1968). *The man who walked through time*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

I had escaped the tyranny of film.

Recently, I arrived at a trail head and suddenly felt something was missing.

My camera bag was still in the car.

When I reached the top of the mountain, five hawks were riding the thermals a few feet below my perch.

Instead of photographs, the scientist in me wondered if the hawks had etiquette for how close they would fly near each other, especially when flying toward each other.

The memoirist in me surmised that if I had played "hawk" with my brothers, we would have eventually had to crash into each other, unlike the hawks.

If I had my camera, I wouldn't have had those thoughts.

So, occasionally, don't reach for your camera.

Sunset example #1

Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig drew *Television Sunset*, in which a parent and child watch a sunset on TV, as the same sun sets outside their window.



Sunset example #2

Minor White wrote:

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Often while traveling with a camera we arrive just as the sun slips over the horizon of a moment, too late to expose film, only time enough to expose our hearts.

Dashed Expectations

Just like mistakes, dashed expectations can be problems or problem-solving opportunities.

When I give a portrait assignment to beginning students, I ask them to arrange a portrait *sitting* with their model.

Rather than a spur of the moment portrait, I ask them to plan ahead.

Who? Why that person? What kind of light?

Etc., etc., etc.

They have to think more about the photograph than they normally would.

They can't just grab somebody, snap away, and be done.

Example

Marge scheduled her elderly mother, Isadora, for a portrait session.

Marge wanted to take a picture of Isadora with a mountain behind her mother.

For forty years Isadora has awakened and had her coffee while looking at the mountain.

On the day of the session it was raining.

But, Marge didn't cancel the session.

She posed Isadora under the eave of her home to keep her out of the rain.

There was a reflection of the mountain in the window behind her mother.

Marge got Isadora, the mountain, and her mother's beloved home, in the picture.

The portrait session, under the duress of rain, made for a better portrait.

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Collaborate with problems.

Credit

Failure: 100% my fault

Success: 100% luck or accident

Photographers often attribute success to anything but themselves, and readily take responsibility for failures.

Take credit for both your successes and failures.

Sole Authorship?

We're not the sole author of our photographs.

Who has influenced you?

The "who else is in the room" includes people, of course, and may include events in your life, and so forth.

Use them.

Collaborate with them.

Then, you can kick them out, when necessary.

Otherwise, you may be tripping over something and wondering what's waylaying you.

Composer John Cage, in a conversation with painter, Philip Guston, said:

When you are working everybody is in your studio--your past, your friends, the art world and above all, your own ideas--all are there.

But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one and you are left completely alone.

Then, if you are lucky, you leave.

Paul Strand wrote:

The point I want to make is that there is no such thing as The Way; there is only for each individual, his or her way

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which in the last analysis, each one must find for himself in photography and in living.

As a matter of fact, your photography is a record of your living, for anyone who really sees.

You may see and be affected by other people's ways, you may even use them to find your own, but will have eventually to free yourself of them.

That is what Nietzsche meant when he said, "I have just read Schopenhauer, now I have to get rid of him."²⁴

Also, don't isolate yourself within photography.

Be influenced by the other arts:

Jazz

Trumpet player Clark Terry, who worked with Charlie Barnet, Count Basie, Bessie Smith, and Duke Ellington, summarized his way-of-working as being "imitate, assimilate, innovate."

That's good advice for photographers, too.

Painting

Piet Mondrian charged a surface with his love of boogie-woogie music and the motion of New York City: Broadway Boogie Woogie.²⁵

Photographers can do the same with music.

Different Audiences for Your Photographs

There are two main audiences for your work.

There's the audience of fellow photographers and other visually-oriented people.

²⁴ From an address delivered at the Clarence White School of Photography in 1923. Originally published in Strand, P. (1923). The art motive in photography. *The British Journal of Photography*, 70, 612-615. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

²⁵

http://www.moma.org/collection/depts/paint_sculpt/blowups/paint_sculpt_018.html.

Then, there's the *lay* audience.

Each audience is valuable, but each will respond differently to your work.

The visually-oriented audience will see more in the photograph besides the subject, such as how it was made, how it's being used, and so forth.

The lay audience will likely only respond to the subject of a photograph.

And, those subjects not within the genre of family photography may only engender polite comments.

Maarten van Nierop, in an article, *Aspects of Ugliness*, compares two areas in Tuscany.²⁶

The first is what we see in our mind's eye when we think of Tuscany.

It's beautiful.

The second is an ugly industrial zone.

Nierop suggests that both are beautiful: the sublime landscape as well as the ugly landscape.

Photographers do take pictures of beautiful ugly things.

The Photograph and You

What's a Good Photograph?

You may say:

This book is about me, the photographer.

Why is there a section on photographs, our product?

²⁶ Maarten van Nierop, *Aspects of Ugliness*, *Jaarboek voor esthetica 2001* (<http://www.nge.nl/Jaarboek2001/>), Frans van Peperstraten (red.), Nederlands Genootschap voor Esthetica, <http://www.nge.nl/Jaarboek2001/Nierop.pdf> (Link no longer active).

Let's just define what we're working toward, as we go about doing our ways-of-working.

And, suggest that a primary reason for a photograph being good, is that it was produced by a good way-of-working.

Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams wrote:

I have been asked many times, "What is a great photograph?" I can answer best by showing a great photograph, not by talking about one.

However, as word definitions are required more often than not, I would say this: A great photograph is a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense, and is, thereby, a full expression of what one feels about life in its entirety.

And the expression of what one feels should be set forth in terms of simple devotion to the medium—a statement of the utmost clarity and perfection possible under the conditions of creation and production.

Henry Geldzahler

Henry Geldzahler was the first director of the National Endowment for the Arts, was a curator at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, and was commissioner of cultural affairs during the Koch administration.

In an article in the Village Voice years ago, Richard Goldstein quotes Geldzahler.

"One question I'm often asked," the commish writes, "is, 'How can you determine quality?' That there is no short answer to this question is axiomatic; 150 years of aesthetic philosophizing has left us without formulas for divining 'quality.' I do, however, find two criteria to be of some use in measuring my own feelings."

"The first is memorability; if you remember a work, if its forms cohere in your memory, or better still, if the work calls itself to mind like a melody in an opera, and you feel you must return to view it again, it might well be good."

"Second, if there is a narrative, an unfolding in your relation to the work; if, on subsequent viewings, it reveals more,

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suggests more, it is a work that you will continue to live with, whether or not ownership is a practical possibility.”

Can a photograph that has an immediate, but fleeting, impact, be good?

Other Things

Here are some other things that make for a good photograph.

The photograph:

- Grabs your attention.
- Does what you want it to do.
- Communicates.
- Transports the viewer elsewhere.
- Transforms the viewer elsewhere.
- Elicits a thought/emotion within the viewer.
- Uses all of the tools of photography effectively

How Often Do Good Photographs Occur?

Henri Cartier-Bresson said:

It’s seldom you make a great picture. You have to milk the cow quite a lot and get plenty of milk to make a little cheese.²⁷

The photographer Norma Holt photographed painter Raphael Soyler, not long before he died.

Soyler, standing in his studio, said:

I go to my studio everyday and put my canvas on the easel, and I say to myself, maybe today I’ll really paint a good painting--finally do a good one.²⁸

²⁷ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, Scholastic Achievement Series (slide show of his work, with comments by the photographer), 1972.

²⁸ Smith, R. (1999, February). Photography through the ages: Norma Holt. *ShutterBug Magazine*, http://www.shutterbug.net/features/0299sb_norma/.

8 More Reasons for Good Photographs

Here are eight more reasons for good photographs.

1: A Good Subject Equals a Good Photograph?

Beginning photographers often concentrate on the subjects in their photographs.

A good subject, obviously, makes for a good photograph.

Yes and no.

Sometimes.

Depends.

More important than the subject, often, is the surprise and the light in the photograph.

We'll look at both further down.

2: Equipment

For some photographers, their equipment is the most important part of their way-of-working.

That's okay.

For others, equipment is not as important as beginning photographers often think.

Martin Guitar

Yes, a great tool in one's hands is powerful.

As a boy, I played classical guitar.

I had saved money, and was able to purchase the least expensive guitar from a fine maker of guitars (Martin).

I didn't understand what I held in my hands until I was at a biology club meeting at a classmate's home.

I borrowed his guitar, and played some Fernando Sor.

The guitar felt dead.

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I loved my own guitar more.

Cardboard Boxes

Yet, great tools are also cardboard boxes.

Marcia C. Sheer was a great friend.

We met when she became my teaching assistant.

In her sixties, she had been a fabric designer, painter, and was now a photographer.

She photographed and exhibited all over the world with her cardboard-box pinhole cameras.

I remember meeting her at a Chinatown (NYC) restaurant for lunch.

Marcia arrived before me, and was almost kicked out of the establishment.

They had thought she was a homeless woman because of the cardboard boxes in her shopping cart.

She had to show them that she was a photographer.

Adapt

Photographers can adjust to what they have available to them, at the moment.

Frederick Sommer had an 8x10 inch view camera, but the lens was for a 4x5 camera.

The light from the lens did not reach to the edges of the 8x10 inch negatives.

Unless, that is, Sommer did close-ups.

So he photographed still lifes, and nature, up close.²⁹

Fun

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http://www.fredericksommer.org/index.php?category_id=11&gallery_id=125&piece_id=1043

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A photographer brought along a photograph when she went to a friend's dinner party. Her friend accepted the gift and admired the photograph, adding:

You must have such a nice camera.

The photographer, at the end of the evening, said to her friend:

Thanks so much. That was a lovely meal. Your pots and pans must be very nice.

Summary

In his blog, Hugh MacLeod wrote a list of creativity tips:

10. The more talented somebody is, the less they need the props.

Meeting a person who wrote a masterpiece on the back of a deli menu would not surprise me.

Meeting a person who wrote a masterpiece with a silver Cartier fountain pen on an antique writing table in an airy SoHo loft would SERIOUSLY surprise me.³⁰

3: Technique

As with equipment, for some photographers, technique is the most important part of their way-of-working.

That's okay.

Zen and the Art of Photographic Technique?

For others, such as Man Ray:

Of course, there will always be those who look only at technique and ask "how," while others of a more curious nature will ask "why."

Personally, I have always preferred inspiration to information.

Walker Evans responded to a question about the need for the latest photography equipment:

³⁰ MacLeod, H. (2004, July 25). *How to be creative*. http://www.gapingvoid.com/Moveable_Type/archives/000876.html.

As in typography and printing, photography shouldn't arrest you.

Something should be said through it, not by it.

Your mood and message and the point have to come through as well as possible.

Your technique should be made to serve that, kept in place, as a servant to that purpose.

That does require skill, knowledge and technical ability, and you have to have done the work in order to make it not show.³¹

In an interview by Dean Brierly, the photographer Gilbert Fastenaekens spoke about technique:

One should always remember that technique is only a tool, an auxiliary, a partner.

It's important, yes, and should not be overlooked.

But it's absolutely not the essential thing.

It's like when you start bicycling.

At some point, you have to stop looking at yourself pedaling, otherwise you are not going to get anywhere.

Photography, like bicycling, is a vehicle for discovering new worlds and horizons.

For me, photographic technique is the same type of auxiliary aid as a bicycle.

That is to say, it is necessary to be able to master the technique, but only so that you can more easily detach yourself from it in order to explore new horizons.³²

³¹ [../../../Teaching/My Webs/websilversilicon/PATH/book24b.htm](http://www.photokaboom.com/PATH/book24b.htm) - [ftn1# ftn1../../../Teaching/My Webs/websilversilicon/PATH/book24b.htm](http://www.photokaboom.com/PATH/book24b.htm) - [ftn1# ftn1](http://www.photokaboom.com/PATH/book24b.htm)Katz, L. (1971, March-April). An interview with Walker Evans. *Art in America*. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

³² Dean Brierly, *Gilbert Fastenaekens Interview*, Camera & Darkroom, August 1995.

4: Form

Victor Hugo wrote:

Form is simply content brought to the surface.

Form is the set of cognitive items in a photograph that aid in the presentation or communication of the content of the photograph.

These items, as a whole, may give the viewer a sense of cognitive visual pleasure, whether the items create a visual harmony or discord according to the requirements of the content.

Form includes:

- The use of light, color, tone, surface, such as texture, and volume, any of which may be repeated or contrasted
- Spatial relationships, such as foreground and background, flatness and depth, passage and impenetrableness
- Control of the viewer's eye movement on the surface of the photograph, such as focal point, as well as the movement of the viewer's consciousness into the photograph, including clarity and ambiguity, impenetrableness and passage
- What's in the frame, near the edges, in the corners, and what's outside the frame
- Geometric relationships, such as lines, shapes, patterns, repetitions, contrasts, and flow

Note how Cartier-Bresson, above, and Paul Strand and Brassai, below, place great importance on form.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

The simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise

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organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.³³

Paul Strand

[Strand] believes in human values, in social ideals, in decency and in truth.

These are not clichés to him.

That is why his people, whether Bowery derelict, Mexican peon, New England framer, Italian peasant, French artisan, Breton or Hebrides fisherman, Egyptian fellahin, the village idiot, or the great Picasso, are all touched by the same heroic quality—humanity.

To a great extent this is a reflection of Strand's personal sympathy and respect for his subjects.

But it is just as much the result of his acuteness of perception which finds in the person a core of human virtue and his unerring sense of photographic values that transmits that quality to us.

It is all part of a artistic process in which the conception of form, the just balance of mass and space and pattern to frame, the richness of texture and detail transform a moment of intuition into an immutable monument.³⁴

Braissai

I don't like snapshots.

I like to seize hold of things, and the form is very important for this.

Of course, all photography presents chances to relate things of interest, but it lacks often a sense of form.

Form is very important not only in order to create art, but because only through form can the image enter into our memory.

It's like the aerodynamics of a car, don't you see?

³³ Cartier-Bresson, H. (Interviewed). (1972). *The Decisive Moment* [Narrated slide show]. New York: Scholastic Achievement Series.

³⁴ Brown, M. (1971). *Paul Strand: A retrospective monograph, the years 1915-1968*. Millerton, NY: Aperture.

For me, form is the only criterion of a good photograph.

One doesn't forget such a photograph and wants to see it again.³⁵

Cartier-Bresson, Strand, and Brassai, all used form to convey thoughts and feelings about the content of their photographs.

The content was intended to engender our emotional responses to the changes in China in 1949 (Cartier-Bresson), a blind woman on the street (Strand), and people in Montmartre cafes (Brassai).

For other photographers, there is no content except that of formalism.

For example, Jan Groover created still lifes from kitchen items.

She wrote:

I don't know why I chose forks—I just took my camera to the kitchen sink ... Actually, I have the notion that everything can be pictured, that content is not that relevant.

I think it's lovely that a knife can be pink.

Its shape can be molded by light, the silver surface picks up and reflects bits of color—it's all very liquid.

And the kind of information that is possible in a small space, like that created by the borders of these pictures, can be so crystal clear and appropriate—the issue is really about pushing some thing, some form, into a space that it seems to belong in.

In the real world, these forks and kitchen implements can have many associations and functions; it doesn't matter.

Formalism is everything.

In her early work, Groover placed kitchen objects within her frame, but then they cease being themselves, and become vehicles for formal notions.

³⁵ Westerbeck, C. L. (1976, December). Night light: Brassai and Weegee. *Art Forum*, 15, 34-35. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

5: Knowledge of Subject

Brian Lamb, on *C-Span*, and Terri Gross, on *Fresh Air* on NPR, read the books of the people they interview.

Their questions are better because they've read the books.

And, the author's respond with more enthusiasm than they do with other interviewers.

If you want to photograph a reclusive animal, such as wild Turkeys, you have to learn something about turkey behavior.

Otherwise, you won't get close enough for photography.

Obviously.

Needing to know about many other subjects is less obvious, but is needed for better photographs.

Ask the journalistic five-W's about your photographic projects: who, what, where, when, and why.

Find out the answers to the 5-W's in regard to your subject.

And, don't forget to ask yourself the same questions.

6: Knowledge of Self

Henry Ward Beecher wrote:

Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures.³⁶

7: Surprise

Surprise, defined broadly, is often present in good photographs.

Read more about surprise further down, after the following two sections about light.

³⁶ Henry Ward Beecher, *Proverbs from Plymouth Pulpit*, compiled by William Drysdale, 1887. Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) was a Brooklyn Congregational minister, orator, writer, and abolitionist. He was exonerated in the Tilton scandal concerning adultery.

8: Light

Good light is the most important ingredient in a photograph.

This seems obvious, but perhaps not.

Manu Smith-Palomeque asked, on an online forum, the following question:

Q. Key To A Photograph In ONE word.....no more..! What makes an excellent photograph?³⁷

There were seventy-one responses.

Only four people mentioned light.

Of these, none snuck in an extra word by adding adjectives such as *good* light or *great* light.

Example

Let's say you're photographing a rose bush in bloom.

The rose was grown from a cutting you made from your great-grandmother's garden.

Her mansion and garden have since become a condominium development.

The light is poor, but you photograph anyways.

You could have waited for the light to change, but you didn't.

A few weeks latter, at the K-Mart garden center, you photograph another rose.

The plant needs to be watered, and it's a common rose.

Yet, sentiment aside, the photograph is better than the one using poor light.

Top 16 Reasons for Bad Photography

I'm a *glass-is-half-full* kind of guy.

But, let's do some *glass-is-half-empty* kind of thinking.

³⁷ Oct 10, 2003,
http://www.usefilm.com/photo_forum/11/4265/.

Here are sixteen reasons for bad photographs.

#1: Saying, "I Don't Have Enough Time"

I do a mental eye roll when I hear someone say they don't have enough time.

Of course, whenever **I** say the same phrase, it's valid!

I had a student who was newly married.

She and her husband were renovating a townhouse.

And, to top it all off, she was taking care of two toddlers.

Ginger I don't have enough time.

Me Are you in a cab a lot, taking the kids from school, to activities, and to appointments?

Ginger Yes.

Me Take pictures out of the window. See what you get.

#2: Busy Doing Nothing While Waiting for the Muse

It was once thought that creativity could not be willed.

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote:

A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry."

The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.³⁸ [../../../Teaching/My Webs/websilverlicon/PATH/book25a.htm - ftn1# ftn1](http://www.thomaslovepeacock.net/defence.html)

³⁸ In *A Defence of Poetry*

(<http://www.thomaslovepeacock.net/defence.html>), written in response to an article, *The Four Ages of Poetry*, by Thomas Love Peacock.

While I like the metaphor of a burning coal, I believe that photographers can breathe on their coal/creativity to make it happen, as does John Cage

He wrote:

I think people who are not artists often feel that artists are inspired. But if you work at your art you don't have time to be inspired.

Can't find or make a photograph?

Don't feel like finding or making a photograph?

Pick up your camera, and take a photograph of anything to get something.

#3: Not Having a Camera

If you have a large camera that you don't always take with you, consider getting a small point-and-shoot camera to carry all of the time.

#4: Having a Camera Buried in Your Bag

I take fewer pictures when my camera is tucked away in its case and buried in my backpack.

My camera is now readily accessible.

My [Crumpler](#) bag can be both an easily accessible shoulder bag, and a backpack when I'm hiking or pedaling along.

All I have to do is pull open a hook-and-loop secured flap, and my camera is waiting for me to grab.

#5: Taking Pictures Only of Trips & Family

Our photography skills need exercise.

In many years of teaching, I've found that most people take pictures only of trips and family.

That's fine, but what about the other 300 or more days of the year?

Your trip and family photographs will improve if you also do self-assignments and projects.

#6: Jumping From One-Thing-to-Another

It's good to do various self-assignments.

But, stay with each self-assignment for awhile.

Do an assignment.

Then, do some more based on your first results.

Refine what worked.

Fix what didn't work.

#7: Not Doing a Larger Project

Eventually, most photographers come across a project.

A project can reveal itself when you:

- Look through your past work.
- Look at other photographer's work.
- Explore the Tips section:
[http://www.photokaboom.com/ htm_menus/tips_menu.htm](http://www.photokaboom.com/htm_menus/tips_menu.htm)
- Connect with your feelings and thoughts.

#8: Paying Attention to the Subject Only

As mentioned above, many beginning photographers think about the subject only.

They think:

That looks great.

I'll take a picture.

Click.

But, what about the lighting, background, depth-of-field, and so forth?

The next two sections are about WYS Is Not WYG: What you see is not what you get.

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The way *we* see is not the way a *camera* sees.

#9: Camera Vision v. Human Vision: Part One

The photograph will look different than reality

This is because:

- The contrast is increased.
- The color of the light may appear differently.
- A photograph is flat and static.
- The original context may be absent or changed.
- The photograph can be held, contemplated, shared, and retained.

Ansel Adams described how photographers must *previsualize* how the scene before their eyes will appear as a photograph.

#10: Camera Vision v. Human Vision: Part Two

Human vision is selective.

We don't see everything.

Cameras do.

If we're photographing someone, we're apt to be concentrating on his or her expression.

We are less likely to notice an ugly background.

However, our cameras will record the ugly background.

Practice becoming aware of everything in your viewfinder.

Working on a tripod makes this practice easier.

Make a written list of things to look for in your viewfinder.

For example, if you're doing portraits, you've got to check if the nose shadow is distracting.

You can even put it on the back of your camera.

Soon, the written list will become a mental list that you'll automatically check.

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#11: Using Program All the Time

Program exposure mode is great, but not all of the time.

Aperture Priority

Use aperture-priority exposure mode, A or Av, when depth-of-field may be important.

Use a wide aperture, say f/4.0, when you want the background blurry.

Use a smaller aperture, say f/16, to make the background sharper.

Shutter Priority

Use shutter-priority exposure mode, S or Tv, when photographing motion.

Decide whether you want the motion to be frozen or a blur.

What shutter speed should you try if you want to blur motion?

1/8th of a second works well for many situations.

Experiment.

The next two sections discuss how viewfinders can be deceptive.

#12: Your Viewfinder Can Lie, Part One

When you're looking through your viewfinder, the aperture is wide open (say f/4).

The background will probably be out-of-focus, because there is little depth-of-field at f/4.

Therefore, you won't pay much attention to the background.

When you press the shutter release, the aperture will change to the one needed for a good exposure.

The aperture will probably get smaller, and more will be in focus, due to greater depth-of-field.

Later, when looking at the photograph, you may ask,

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Why didn't I see that telephone pole coming out of Uncle Fenster's head?

You didn't see the telephone pole.

It was out-of-focus, because the image in the viewfinder had little depth-of-field.

Use the depth-of-field preview button if your camera has this feature.

When first trying this feature, students often say they can't see anything.

The image is too dark.

Keep using the feature, and you'll learn how to see what's in focus, despite the darkness.

#13: Your Viewfinder Can Lie, Part Two

Your viewfinder is probably not accurate.

You'll probably get more of a scene in your photograph than what you saw through the viewfinder.

The only cameras with 100% accurate viewfinders are the top-of-the-line models.

To see the inaccuracy, take a picture of a rectangular object, like a painting hanging on the wall.

Carefully line the edges of the painting up with the top and sides of the viewfinder.

Remember where the bottom of the frame crosses the scene.

When you look at the photograph you took of the painting, you'll see where you're getting more than what you see through your viewfinder.

You may get more on the left, the right, or the top, etc.

When composition is critical, you'll be able to adjust for viewfinder inaccuracy.

#14: Bad Prints

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Don't assume a bad looking print looks the way it looks because you did something wrong.

Printing machines can make bad prints because they're poorly maintained and operated.

Also, some photographs are hard for the printing machines to interpret.

For example, photographs taken at night are often printed too light.

They appear grayish and grainy.

You can take prints back to your lab to be reprinted.

Try it.

Most labs are happy to redo their work.

A few labs will automatically blame you.

If so, go to another lab.

Consider purchasing a printer.

One of the biggest advantages of digital photography is the ability to easily print your photographs.

#15: Photographs that Got Away

Hervé Guibert wrote:

This picture has been lost and I will never again feel that same emotion . . . I suspect that [a] recomposed image will no longer please me in the same way, or with as much force, since it will have had time to make its way to my head, there to crystallize into a perfect image, and the photographic abstraction will happen by itself on the sensitized surface of memory, to be developed and fixed by writing, which I resorted only to free myself of my photographic regret.³⁹

³⁹ Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, translated by Robert Bononno, 1998, (*L'image fantôme*, 1982), <http://www.greeninteger.com/catbook.cfm?CFID=282291&CFTOKEN=44626487&BookID=9>. Guibert (1955–1991) was a French writer and photography critic at *Le Monde*. Guibert is best known for *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* (*To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*).

If you're photographing things that appear quickly, and are gone forever unless you get them rapidly, you're going to be disappointed.

You have to be able to avoid, or walk away from, any doldrums about the photographs that get away.

#16: Lack of Sensitivity to Light

This was discussed above.

When we're asking ourselves, "Should I take my camera with me," we probably are thinking mostly about the photography subjects we may encounter.

Say we're going to the store for milk.

We probably won't take our cameras.

However, we should ask ourselves, "Is the light going to be good?"

Good light can make humdrum subjects into great ones.

Ansel Adams was driving along when he saw his famous photograph, *Moonrise over Hernandez*.

He had his camera along

Adams wrote:

I'm driving along and looked up and saw this rather incredible sight of the moon about two-and-a-half to three days from full, rising up over this little village with white crosses.

And I nearly ditched the car and kept yelling at all my friends to get me this and get me that ... I made the exposure with the "G" filter on an 8x10 film and I knew I had something good and I wanted to make a duplicate.

I turned the film holder around and as I pulled the slide, the light went off the crosses.

It was a very discouraging moment.

I had just this one picture of what I knew was quite a considerable thing.

The light then was late in the fall—the quality was extremely beautiful.

And brilliant wind clouds over the mountains ... And the crosses were very brilliant.

It was just one of those incredible fortunate accidents that do happen sometimes.

And I often wonder just how many pictures have been lost because the accident happened to go the wrong way.

You could get a great photograph on your way to buy milk, especially if the light is good, *Foggy Sunrise over the 7-11*.

More about Light

This section is the most basic section—you need light for your photography.

This section is also the most advanced—light is a huge topic.

And, of all the sections, this is the one you'll want to refer back to often.

Why?

First, what's in this section can't be absorbed in one sitting, and a few photographs.

Second, light is the most important ingredient in a photograph.

The subject in front of your camera is less important than the light illuminating the subject.

For example, a scruffy dog in great light can look better than a dog-show champion in poor light.

William Henry Fox Talbot published a book of photographs between 1844 and 1846 called *The Pencil of Nature*.

Light is our pencil.

For example, in 1923 Ansel Adams wrote:

I was climbing a long ridge west of Mt. Clark.

I was suddenly arrested in the long crunching push up the ridge by an exceedingly pointed awareness of the light.

The moment I paused, the full impact of the mood was upon me.

I saw more clearly than I have ever seen before or since the minute detail of the grasses, the clusters of sand shifting in the wind, the small flotsam of the forest, the motion of the high clouds streaming above the peaks. There are no words to convey the moods of those moments.

Snow Analogy

If you live where it snows, imagine stepping outside after the first snowfall of winter.

The snow makes your neighborhood look different.

You'll notice different things than you would have the day before.

The snow on the rock below changes how it looks.



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The snow, the "light," makes the surface of rock more apparent.

Sunlight, coming from the side, would do the same, by creating shadows.

But, we wouldn't notice the affect of that particular type of lighting, as much as we would the affect of a dusting of snow.

Why?

Sensitivity to Light

Photographers need to have sensitivity to light.

Learning how to use light is difficult.

Light is hard to observe because:

- We're immersed in light most of the time, so we don't pay much attention to light.
- The qualities of light often change gradually, so the changes are hard to notice.
- The light that we see with our eyes is often different in a photograph.

There are "light sensitivity training" exercises below.

You may feel that the pay off from the exercises will be low.

You're not alone.

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My students often feel this way.

The need for sensitivity to light is not visceral, and thus, is not compelling.

However, after doing one of the exercises, my students have become enthusiastic.

They've improved their photography.

Light “Sensitivity Training” Exercises

Take a Picture Out of Your Window

Imagine if you could click a remote control and change the time of day.

You could click back-and-forth from *10 A.M. light* to *4 P.M. light*, for example.

You could easily see how the color of the light and shadows change.

Monet did this exercise.

He painted a series of paintings of Rouen Cathedral at different times of day.

The National Gallery in Washington DC has two of them.

Open up these two links, and compare the paintings side-by-side.

[Rouen Cathedral, West Façade, 1894](http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg85/gg85-46241.0.html)

(<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg85/gg85-46241.0.html>)

[Rouen Cathedral, West Façade, Sunlight, 1894](http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg85/gg85-46371.0.html)

(<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg85/gg85-46371.0.html>)

As you look at them, you can approximate the time of day by the color of the light, and the angle of the shadows.

You can't click a remote, but you can take a picture out of your window once every hour.

Set a timer.

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Or, photograph something repeatedly, over a period of weeks or months.

Compare the photographs to learn about light.

Take a Picture of a Newspaper

In the last exercise, you we're asked to use daylight.

In this exercise, you'll use artificial light.

Simply walk around photographing a newspaper with different types of artificial lights—incandescent, florescent, neon, and so forth.

The newspaper will look the same to you—white.

In the photographs, the newspaper will have different colors.

This also occurs outdoors.

The light on an overcast day is blue.

On a sunny day, shade is cyan (blue/green).

For the best color, set the white balance on your camera to match the color of the light in the scene.

Play with Light

1) Get a light with an EBW bulb.

Or, use your flash if you have one that's separate from your camera.

Purchase an extension cord for the flash, so you can use the flash off the camera.

2) Set up a still life.

3) Experiment

Place the light in different locations.

Place it near the camera, to one side, and above the camera, as well as behind the still life (backlighting).

Photograph each change in lighting.

4) After each picture, step back, and take a picture of the entire scene—the light and the still life.

By doing so, you'll have "notes" about how each lighting setup was done.

5) Compare the photographs side-by-side.

For example, shadows will make your still life look more three-dimensional.

Summary

Direction	Effect	Because
From the side	Shows texture and volume	The shadows cue the viewer to texture and volume.
From the camera	Flattens the subject	Without shadows, the viewer cannot see texture and volume as well.
From behind the subject	Makes the subject stand out from the background- more separation	Dark subject against a bright background and edge lighting on the subject

Watch an Old B&W Film

Turn the sound off on a favorite 1930s or 40s black-and-white film.

Then, watch the lighting, not the film.

Pause the film occasionally, and study the lighting.

Shadows and Direction of the Light

Look at the shadows.

In the last exercise, you learned about how the direction of the light changes a scene.

Try to determine where the lights were placed in the scenes by looking for the shadows they create.

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Shadows and Contrast

You can also look at the shadows to study contrast.

If the shadows are dark, with sharp edges, a small light source was used, such as a spotlight.

The lighting is *high contrast*.

If the shadows are bright, with indistinct edges, then a large light source was used, such as a light passing through a scrim.

The lighting is *low contrast*.

For example, female leads were often lighted with lower contrast lighting. Contrasty lighting was often used for male leads.

Watch as the film cuts between a male and female lead. The lighting often changes depending on the sex of the actor.

Highlights

Highlights, especially on faces, will also reveal the lighting design to you.

A small light source produces small highlights.

For example, on-camera flash produces small highlights on your subjects nose tip, forehead, and cheeks.

If you photograph the subject in the shade on a sunny day, or under a cloudy sky, the highlights will be much broader.

Catch Lights

Catch lights are the reflections of lights in the eyes.

Catch lights often add vitality to a portrait.

Where they're located in the eye tells you the location of the light. If there are more than one catch light, there was more than one light.

The shape of a catch light can hint at what sort of light was used.

For example, a circular catch light may be from a white photography umbrella. If window light was used, the catch light may be rectangular, with window dividers showing as well.

Summary

Light Size	Contrast	Shadows
Small, like the sun	More contrast	Darker shadows with sharp edges
Large, like an overcast sky	Less contrast	Brighter shadows with soft edges, or shadowless

What You See Is NOT What You Get

What you see is ~~not always~~ never what you get in your photograph.

Shadows are always darker on photographs than they were when you were looking at the subject with your eyes.

1) Photograph a still life with a bright light to one side.

2) Take a second picture after you've placed a reflector (piece of white cardboard, newspaper, etc.) on the side of the still life opposite from the light.

Reflect the light from your light back onto the still life.

The shadows will appear brighter by using the reflector.

Or, rather than using a reflector to brighten the shadow, pop up the flash on your camera.

This is called *fill-in flash*.

You're filling in the shadows with additional light.

3) Compare the still life with your two photographs of the still life.

The photograph with the reflector (or flash) will be more similar to the way the still life looks with your eyes.

Good or Bad

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As described, shadows are always darker in photographs.

This increase in contrast can be beneficial or detrimental.

For example, when you want to emphasize the weathered face of a veteran lobster fisherman, the shadows created by sidelighting will be good.

The increase in contrast will be detrimental if you're photographing a baseball team on a sunny day.

You won't be able to see the eyes of the players in the dark shadows created by their hats.

Use fill-in flash.

More about Surprise

Garry Winogrand said, "I photograph something to see what it will look like photographed."

Surprise is another essential ingredient in a photograph.

Humans love surprise, from our earliest encounters with it while playing peek-a-boo, to looking at photographs.

The term encompasses the many types of surprise, including the following.

- Great light
- Movement or stasis
- Harmony/order/stability/balance, or the opposite, such as [Koyaanisqatsi](#), a film about life out of balance
- Formalism, geometry, composition, tone, color
- Seeing something in a photograph that would cause a PET scan of our brain to light up with our own memory, commonality, anti-ness, fear, lust, or ?
- Seeing something that we would ordinarily have passed by without notice
- Being taken to a place/mood/context that we wouldn't ever encounter otherwise, such as an emergency room floor after the treatment of a gunshot wound (Eugene Smith), or "Skips First Shot [of heroin]" (Larry Clark).

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- Time is frozen, sequenced, squandered, and ?
- Knowledge that a person made the photograph, while at great risk.
- In the case of a daguerreotype, that the plate was present, in the camera, and the light from the subject touched the plate that is before you.

Gesture

My first photography teacher, Susan Shaw, was superb.

She gave an assignment: photograph *gesture*.

Huh?

There are two types of gesture.

Human Gesture

Gesture is human non-verbal communication, both with our bodies and faces.

Compare the body language of a guilty child, who later, is proud.

Compare the face of someone who is smiling, truly, and the same person who is faking a smile.⁴⁰

Non-human

There is gesture in photographs that isn't human.

It's the arrangement of, or interaction of, contrast, repetition, geometry, tone, color, depth, volume, light, and surprise.

5% & 50%

⁴⁰ Guillaume Duchenne (1806-1875), a French neurologist identified one-hundred facial muscles in 1862. He observed that false smiles involved only muscles of the mouth. Only true smiles, "the sweet emotions of the soul," activate the pars lateralis muscle around the eyes. A true smile has the *Duchenne marker*: a crinkling of crows-feet of the corner of our eyes. For current research on facial expression, start with the work of Paul Ekman (<http://www.paulekman.com/>).

Gesture comprises, say, five percent a photograph.

Yet, this gesture contributes, say, fifty percent to the photograph.

D. W. Griffith regretted the loss of "the wind in the trees" when filmmakers shifted from filming in the "plein air" to studios:

[He] missed a certain beauty he thought had disappeared from film, from the way people saw life -- "the beauty of the moving wind in the trees, the little movement in a beautiful blowing on the blossoms in the trees.

That they have forgotten entirely. . . We have lost beauty."

On that note, Griffith fell silent.

On that note, if one were directing the scene, one would begin a slow pullback.⁴¹

A Place for Your Project

A Place

Create a place to keep a project on which you're working.

⁴¹ Schickel, Richard, *D. W. Griffith: An American Life*, Limelight Editions, 2004, p. 603. The rest of the text is poignant: "Whatever had become of him, whatever had become (or would become) of the medium that he had been the first to conceive of as an art, that fragile essence of his sensibility, at its best, and of one of cinema's potentials at its most generous, he had now fleetingly evoked one last time. The problem was not merely that pictures now talked. Or that they had become big business. Or that a new age of anxiety was upon the movies as television . . . destroyed everyone's confidence. No, it was more than that. It was, really, that everyone had now arrived where Griffith had arrived perhaps two decades earlier -- at a place where innocence was lost, and with it the capacity to wonder at the miracle of a medium that could, if it would, show us, in the flicker of a ten-frame cut, something of our inward life, or, if you will, find in the trembling of a leaf, the symbol of an unknown yearning, an unspoken dream. In all the long years of wandering and confusion, in all the long years when his own peculiar demons drove him down strange paths, in all the long years when, being the product of his bustling times and this often vulgar place, he had lost touch with his best self, his best and simplest hopes for this thing he had made. But now, at the end, he remembered."

The place could be a digital frame, shelf, box, folder, folder on your computer, or ?

Why?

It's good to be able to see what you've accomplished.

You can easily see what to.

You can easily share your efforts with others.

Shelf as Studio

The place for your work, perhaps only a shelf, can also energize your way-of-working.

Most photographers do photography in many places, not just in a studio setting.

A painter is more likely to paint only in a studio.

Reasons may include good light, ventilation, and the ability to drip and spill without remorse.

However, the most important reason may be that the space puts one in the mood for work.

While creativity may occur when daydreaming for a moment in an elevator, it's also encouraged by our history of creativity in a certain place.

A place for your work, even a shelf, may give you some of the creative benefits of a work space.

A Safe Place

Be sure to consider the permanency of the materials you're using.

Your work should be stored and displayed archivally.

The dyes in CD and DVD discs fade, so files should be transferred onto new discs periodically.

And, migrate files from obsolete software and hardware to the new.

Add Text

Do caption or tag your photographs.

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Roland Barthes wrote:

What is it that will be done away with when that person who can testify to this photograph is gone?

It is love-as-treasure which is going to disappear forever.⁴²

When I sort through a box of abandoned photographs at a flea market, most have no writing on them.

I enjoy finding the ones with a name, an age, a date, location, and so forth.

A few words make the photograph more meaningful, to me, a stranger to the photograph.

What we easily remember about a file today may be less clear in a few years, and unknown to those who follow us.

Susan Sontag wrote:

A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings become unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading.⁴³

Write or type a few words.

Display Your Work

For Your Current Work

You need to have a bulletin board or picture rail near where you can gaze at your work.

When you can look at your work while talking on the phone, you'll learn more about it, and where you want to go with the work.

For Completed Work

You need to have a bulletin board or picture rail near where you can gaze at your work.

⁴² Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography*. (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.

⁴³ Sontag, S. (1977). *On photography*. London: Penguin Books.s

For completed work, get it framed and on a wall or on your website.

Classic Themes in Photography

What's Art?

What is art? is a big question.

I was surprised, though, when Google came up with only 91,100 listings for the question.

Here are two listings of note.

What Is Art and Why Does It Matter?, from the Yale University Art Gallery⁴⁴

Excerpts from Leo Tolstoy's 1896 essay, *What is Art?*, posted courtesy of Julie Van Camp, a philosophy professor⁴⁵

Here, we'll answer the question, briefly, by confining our answer to why art is important for our ways-of-working and our photographs.

Even "Family Documentary" Photographers Need Art

Many of my students are not interested in art photography.

They want to do better photographs of their families, for example.

Yet, better photographs, in general, have aspects of art photography in them.

Let's say you have children or nieces and nephews.

Julia Margaret Cameron wrote:

... I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied.

Its difficulty enhanced the value of the pursuit.

⁴⁴ <http://artgallery.yale.edu/pages/whatisart/whatisart.html>.

⁴⁵ <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361r14.html>.

I began with no knowledge of the art.

I did not know where to place my dark box, how to focus my sitter, and my first picture I effaced to my consternation by rubbing my hand over the filmy side of the glass.

It was a portrait of a farmer of Freshwater, who, to my fancy, resembled Bolingbroke.

Having succeeded with one farmer, I next tried two children ... and I now produced a picture which I called "My First Success."

Personal sympathy has helped me on very much.

My husband from first to last has watched every picture with delight, and it is my daily habit to run to him with every glass upon which a fresh glory is newly stamped, and to listen to his enthusiastic applause.

This habit of running into the dining room with my wet pictures has stained an immense quantity of table linen with nitrate of silver, indelible stains, that I should have been banished from any less indulgent household.⁴⁶

When you learn from Julia Margaret Cameron, your photographs of children will be better.

How?

By learning how she worked, along with looking at her photographs.

Often, we only look at the photographs, the product, rather than the ways-of-working, the process.

That's the reason for this book.

The discussion about what is art often is often mostly about the objects:

Which objects have an aura called art and which don't?

⁴⁶ Cameron, J. M. (1996/1874). Annals of my glass house. Reprinted in L. Heron & V. Williams (Eds.), *Illuminations: Women writing on photography from the 1850s to the present*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Also reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

What makes them good art, bad art, or nothing at all.

The discussion often turns to function, and asked what these objects are for, what they can do.

The above threads appear when the question is answered from the perspective of the viewer.

Odd, isn't it, that it's the viewer of art who is often its final arbiter, not the artist.

The answer to the question, from the perspective of the photographer, is different.

For photographers, art is the doing of art, our ways-of-working, along with the photographs.

For many photographers, the picking up of a camera is more important than the resulting photographs.

The Photographer Perspective: Warhol

Years ago I photographed some graffiti on a wall in Washington, DC.

Art is anything you can get away with.

The graffiti writer attributed the quote to Andy Warhol.

I add the following to Warhol's statement.

As long as you don't hurt anyone.

If you're working in branches of photography that are less about personal expression, such as photojournalism, forensic photography, medical photography, and advertising, photographers must follow the ethical principles of each area.

The Photographer Perspective: Value, as in Money

Do you want to sell your work?

If a collector buys a print, is your work art?

The Photographer Perspective: Value, as in Recognition

Recognition is a great motivator.

Photographers need to join groups, whether it be in person or online, and to submit to contests, and to get shows in our local public libraries, and so forth.

The Photographer Perspective: Value, as in Ways-of-working

It's art if you like your way-of-working.

Is Photography Art?

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), as art critic, wrote about the "invasion" of the photography into art. He described the photography industry as:

... the refuge of every would-be painter, every painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies.⁴⁷

Henri de la Blanchère (1821-1880), a French critic, wrote in 1859:

The less machine, the more art.⁴⁸

Photography uses a machine.

At the time, during the Industrial Revolution, *machine* may have been as prominent in 19th-century minds as is *Internet* today.

Perhaps because of the camera machine, Baudelaire writes how photography is soulless.

But if it [photography] be allowed to encroach on the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary [art], upon anything whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man's soul, then it will be so much the worse for us!

⁴⁷ Originally published in 1859. Baudelaire, C. (1955). *Charles Baudelaire: The mirror of art.* (J. Mayne, Trans.). London: Phaidon Press Limited. Also: Baudelaire, C. (1980). *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Robert Laffont. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

⁴⁸ De la Blanchère, Henri. (1859). *L'Art du photographe*. Paris: Amyot Editeur. Reprinted in Marien, M. W. (2002). *Photography: A cultural history*. New York: Harry M. Abrams.

At the time, photography was seen as being part of art and science. Reflecting this notion, Baudelaire closes his essay by writing:

Are we to suppose that a people whose eyes are growing used to considering the results of a material science as though they were the products of the beautiful, will not in the course of time have singularly diminished its faculties of judging and feeling what are among the most ethereal and immaterial aspects of creation?

Paul Strand (1890-1976) responded to the criticisms of photography, of his day, succinctly.

... the twaddle about the limitations of photography has been answered by Stieglitz and a few others of us here in America, by work done.⁴⁹

Edward Weston (1886-1958) quoted J. Nilsen Laurvik, director of the San Francisco Museum of Art.

The most valuable medium through which our present age can be portrayed—Photography—that wonderful extension of our own vision.⁵⁰

Laurvik saw the camera as a conduit for the photographer's vision, just like the hand of an artist.

This artist's hand canard reappeared when Edward Weston (1886-1958) responded to the question of whether photography is art.

The controversy reminds me of one which took place in the 16th century: painting was on the defensive – the intelligentsia of the day had placed it among the mechanical arts because it was done with the hand, not the mind.

Ironically, a similar attitude is now held by the painters toward photography, – the hand, finally accepted as a means to an end, after a fight in which Leonardo da Vinci rose to defend painting, – the painters now assume the

⁴⁹ Strand, P. (1922, April). Photography and the new god. *Broom: An International Magazine of the Arts*, 3.

⁵⁰ Newhall, N. (1973). *The daybooks of Edward Weston, vol. 1, Mexico*. Millerton, NY: Aperture. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

hand omnipotent, and label photography mechanical because it is done with a machine.

First of all, the weighty discussion might have been ended by the very obvious, visual proof in my own exhibition, – for, standing at one point where my oldest work, 1914, met my latest, 1931, there was exposed work so different in technique, and conception, that it was as though two radically different persons were exhibiting together: but the same camera was used by "both" individuals.

So the camera is only a means to an end, it can see only, or whatever the user sees.

Carry on this thought: give the same camera and subject matter, say an apple on dish, to ten photographers, tell them to do what they will with it, and it will promise ten results as widely varying, not only in arrangement and lighting, but in quality in feeling for the thing, as any ten painters might produce.

But, someone objects, the camera, used in the field, where one can't "arrange," takes in everything, – a painter can eliminate.

So can the photographer, by change of viewpoint, or change to a different focal length lens: and if this does not solve the difficulty he can find another subject "around the corner."

Ever see a painter search for the right viewpoint! Each medium has its own limitations.

The whole controversy seems to be concerned with the painter's hand as a means to self-expression, his ability to add to, leave out, or change nature at will (this includes the most abstract art done in a room with blinds down: for we cannot conceive of a form not already known in nature) while the photographer uses a machine which reproduces exactly, everything toward which it is pointed.

But does it!

I will even go so far as to say that the camera is not mechanical unless the photographer's attitude be mechanical.

Lenses of a dozen different focal lengths can be used, completely altering the viewpoint of perspective, changing, even distorting nature at will, or revealing so much more

than the average eye sees that photography has opened the blinds to a new world vision.

Then carry on the possibilities of personal choice into the selection of films and printing papers, dozens of manufacturers each making dozens of varieties of films of different color or speed, sensitivity to be used with or without filters which can actually cut out certain colors entirely, and as many papers of infinite surface textures, and grades of contrast, to shorten, lengthen or render exactly the scale of gradation in the original view: add to these, chemicals of widest possible choice, and one has far greater opportunity for self-expression through material opportunity than is granted the painter.

The trouble has been with photographers, not photography!⁵¹

Years later, Walker Evans responded to a question in which the interviewer compared photography, a "medium that is basically a mechanism," to the hand of the artist and the mind of the writer.

The secret of photography is, the camera takes on the character and the personality of the handler.

The mind works on the machine—through it, rather.⁵²

It's odd how the minds of the artist or photographer are not discussed, instead of the artist's hand and the photographer's camera.

Perhaps if singers banded together in sufficient numbers, they could convince musicians that the sounds they produced through their machines could not be art because of the essentially mechanical nature of their instruments.⁵³

[../../../Teaching/My
Webs/websilversilicon/PATH/book26a.htm](http://www.websilversilicon.com/PATH/book26a.htm) - [ftn1# ftn1](#)

Today, the question of whether photography is art has receded.

⁵¹ [../../../Teaching/My
Webs/websilversilicon/PATH/book34.htm](http://www.websilversilicon.com/PATH/book34.htm) - [ftn3# ftn3](#)Source not identified.

⁵² Katz, L. (1971, March-April). An interview with Walker Evans. *Art in America*. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵³ Weston, E. (1943). Seeing photographically. *The Complete Photographer*, 9(49), 3200-3206.

Far fewer art critics and historians write essays about the question today.

But, you'll bump into the question occasionally.

When looking at an outstanding photograph, a common response from a non-photographer is, "You must have a great camera."

When looking at a painting, the same person would never say, "You must have a great brush."

Not long ago, I was at an open house for prospective students at the 92nd St. Y in New York City.

A fellow faculty member was impolite enough, and ignorant enough, to bring up the old canard that photographs are machine made with no hand of an artist.

I mentioned that I often ask my students to photograph a green pepper.

And, if their photographs were made by machines, then all of their photographs would look the same.

Why, the photographs should all look like Edward Weston's *Pepper, 1930*.

Nope. They don't.

A camera is a brush, nothing more, nothing less.

What's before the lens is just paint.

We live in the *garden* and in the *machine*.⁵⁴

Photographing Reality?

If you look at a Daguerreotype, you can realize the plate was present in the camera, and the light reflected off of the subject onto the plate. The photograph was literally *there*.

⁵⁴ Marx, L. (2000, 1964). *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. (rev. ed.) New York: Oxford University Press. See Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* by Jeffrey L. Meikle, http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/technology_and_culture/v044/44.1/meikle.html.

In 1839, photography began to take over the task that painting had had until then, representing reality.

Later, the invention of the tintype process made the representation of reality affordable to all.

Photography allowed painting to go off and do other things, such as impressionism, abstract expressionism, and so forth.

Picasso said, to Brassai:

When you see what you can express through photography, you realize all the things that can no longer be the objective of painting.

Why should the artist persist in treating subjects that can be established so clearly with the lens of a camera?

It would be absurd, wouldn't it? Photography has arrived at a point where it is capable of liberating painting from all literature, from the anecdote, and even from the subject.

In any case, a certain aspect of the subject now belongs to the domain of photography.

So shouldn't painters profit from their newly acquired liberty, and make use of it to do other things?⁵⁵

Even before Photoshop, photographs were manipulated.

Manipulation can carry an insidious charge.

However, it can be done to solve a technical deficiency.

Gustave Le Gray, in the 1850s, in photographs such as *Mediterranean at Sète* (1856-59), combined two negatives to make his seascape photographs.

He used a negative of the sky, and one of the sea, because a single negative could not properly expose both areas of the scene at the same time.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Brassai. (1966). *Picasso and company* (F. Price, Trans.). New York: Doubleday & Co. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵⁶ Marien, M. W. ((2002). *Photography: A cultural history*. New York: Harry M. Abrams.

Manipulation can also be done to improve a photograph, without changing its meaning.

In 1851, in a photograph called *The Chimney Sweeps Walking*, Charles Nègre posed the youths as if they were frozen in mid-step, and retouched the background to eliminate distracting buildings.⁵⁷

Manipulation can be insidious, of course.

There's a photograph of Hitler with several other Nazi officials.

A few months later, the same photograph was published, with one of the officials expunged.

This was done mechanically, with some effort.

Even a photograph that has not been manipulated may be untruthful.

The absent truth may be in the context outside the frame that's not depicted, or in a context that cannot be depicted visually.

The untruth may be in what accompanies a photograph, such as a caption, text, and other photographs.

Today, even though we know that photographs can be manipulated, we still have a feeling of authenticity when looking at a photograph.

Viewer beware!

Diane Arbus wrote:

A photograph is a secret about a secret.

The more it tells you the less you know.

Taking v. Making Photographs

First, to set the stage, some posit that humankind has gradually withdrawn from nature (as if we're not part of nature).

⁵⁷ Marien, M. W. ((2002). *Photography: A cultural history*. New York: Harry M. Abrams.
http://cybermuseum.gallery.ca/cybermuseum/search/artwork_e.jsp?mkey=26120.

Outhouses.

Yea.

Indoor plumbing.

Hip, hip, hooray!

Yet, there is regret. There is a loss of being more out of nature, along with the gain, of err, indoor plumbing.

And, not so much the art that they do, but artists are thought to be more in contact with nature.

And the definition of nature can be expanded to include what's inside ourselves, as well as the birds in the trees.

Photographers go into nature to take photographs.

Even still lifes, were most often nature taken indoors and put on a table near a window.

They're not making photographs.

They're in the "plein air."

Besides landscape photographers, taking photographs is epitomized by the work of documentary and street photographers, such as Bruce Davidson, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Garry Winogrand, and Helen Levitt.

They may search for a long time for everything to fall into place within the frame of their cameras, and then, snap.

Snapshot was originally a hunting term, after all.

They try not to add anything to the scene by their presence, whether directly or indirectly.

An aside . . .

We're disappointed when a photograph that has purported to be found, was actually made.

Consternation ensued when it was discovered that Robert Doisneau's signature image, *The Kiss*, of a couple on a Parisian street, was staged.⁵⁸

Likewise, Ruth Orkin photographed a young woman walking down a Roman street, while being ogled by numerous, demonstrative, men.

The woman was a friend, and the men were enlisted in their task by Orkin.

The above examples were *misrepresentations*.

There's also *cheating* that's not really cheating.

Paul Strand used a camera with two lenses—the working lens was unobtrusive—and the prominent lens was a fake.

That was the problem: to make candid photographs long before there were any candid cameras.

For the solution, I worked with the Ensign camera, and put a false lens on the side of the camera, and screwed it onto the side of the camera's very shiny brass barrel, and then shot with the brass barrel at right angles to the person I was going to photograph; but the other lens, the real lens, came out under my arm because it was a long extension.⁵⁹

Of course, as Strand said, there were no unobtrusive cameras at the time.

A favorite photographer is Helen Levitt.

She photographed children and others on the streets of Harlem.

I was disappointed when I found that she used a device that allowed her to be facing one direction, while photography in another direction.

Back to our story . . .

Surrealism took photography into the unconscious, away from outside nature.

Modernism removed parts of nature from nature.

⁵⁸ The photograph was made on the Rue de Rivoli outside of the main entrance of BHV, a department store.

⁵⁹ Tompkins, C. (1976). *Paul Strand: Sixty years of photographs*. Millerton, NY: Aperture.

The context of a part of nature was removed.

For example, Richard Avedon photographed people with a white paper background, with the similar lighting.

Irving Penn photographed people around the world. However, he took out of their environments and placed them in a tent.

In some quarters, the taking of photographs is thought/felt to be somehow better than the making of photographs.

What do you think?

Similarly to the discussion in the *Above Two Pathways* section, taking and making overlap.

The street photographer deciding whether to use a 24mm wide-angle lens, or a 105mm telephoto lens, is *making* the photograph that he's about to *take*.

Ansel Adams is often thought to be a *taker* of photographs.

However, when he discovered how to make his photographs of the Sierras have *gesture* (see the next section), it wasn't anything metaphysical.

Adams simply discovered how a red filter darkens skies and shadows, rendering the clouds and mountains more dramatically.

Photographers often assume that early photographing was composed of the takers of photographs, rather than makers.

However, because film was insensitive to light, landscape photographers had to use shields inside their camera, or make prints using two negative (one for the sky, and one for the landscape).

Allegorical photographs were also popular, such as those by Oscar Gustave Rejlander. In 1857, he exhibited *The Two Ways of Life*, which was made from combining thirty negatives.

James Nasmyth and James Carpenter wanted to photograph the moon.

This was not possible in the 1870s, because the wet collodion emulsion would dry out during the long exposures required.

Yet, they published *The Moon: Considered as a Planet, A World, and a Satellite* in 1874.

They made plaster models of the moon, and simulated the light from the sun.

Purity

Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrote:

We believe that labels are important, but mostly for bottles of wine.⁶⁰

You may discover that you're in some sort of photographic group.

There are all kinds of groups within photography.

I was coming off a trail when a man and woman, with cameras around their necks, approached me.

Conversation was made about their cameras.

Mine was still in my bag.

After a few words, the woman surprisingly, if you believe the stereotype that men are more interested in equipment than are women, asked me what brand camera I used.

I received a label of being a Nikon photographer.

They were Canon photographers.

I didn't care, but I sensed that they did.

They placed me in a camera-brand group, a not very important group to me.

You may not have thought much of being in the group, or may even not have known you were in the group, until you read or heard something disparaging about your group.

We place some people into our group, the in-group.

Everyone else goes onto the out-group.

In-group/out group status is a basic human consideration.

⁶⁰ <http://christojeanneclaude.net/errors.html>.

This cognitive categorization often has an emotional valence of being clean or unclean.

Those in the out-group are felt to be unclean in some fundamental way.

In the last section, the taking of photographs was contrasted with the making of photographs.

As described, there is a considerable overlap of the two groups.

For example, Ansel Adams, known for seemingly recording what was before his camera, a taker of photographs, described himself as being a maker of photographs.

You don't take a photograph, you make it.⁶¹

Adams would pre-visualize the final print, as he was preparing to make the photograph.

The taker and maker groups were primal in art photography, and still have memberships today.

The painter Sir William Newton, in 1853, suggested that photographs would be more like works of art if they were out-of-focus and retouched.⁶²

In the 1800s and into the twentieth-century, the pictorialists were the popular group.

Their photographs were often out-of-focus and retouched.

O. G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson used *combination printing* to create allegorical photographs from many negatives.

Their most famous photographs are *Two Ways of Life* and *Fading Away*.

They sought to do what painting was doing.

The *photo-secessionists*, or *straight* photographers, sought to do what cameras naturally do.

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20040312172602/http://www.haywardeducation.org.uk/assets/teachpacks/HG-adamspdf.pdf>.

⁶² Newton, William. (1853, March 3). *Journal of the Photographic Society*, 1, 6.

Cameras can record great detail, with objectivity.

Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944), a poet and critic, wrote in 1904:

Why then should not a photographic print look like a photographic print?⁶³

The photo-secessionist were led by Alfred Stieglitz, who published a magazine called *Camera Work*, and had a gallery called 291.

Paul Strand was featured in the last two issues of 1916 and 1917, and in the gallery in 1916.

Steiglitz wrote that Strand's work was:

... brutally direct.

Devoid of all flim-flam; devoid of trickery and of any "ism"; devoid of any attempt to mystify an ignorant public, including the photographers themselves. These photographs are the direct expression of today!.⁶⁴

Along with Stieglitz, the photographers in the f/64 Group, including Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Imogen Cunningham, also left pictorialism behind.

Adams wrote:

Group f/64 became synonymous with the renewed interest in the philosophy of straight photography: that is, photographs that looked like photographs, not imitations of other art forms.

The simple straight print is a fact of life—the natural and predominant style for most of photography's history—but in 1932 it had few active proponents.⁶⁵

The photography historian, Beaumont Newhall, wrote:

⁶³ Hartmann, Sadakichi. (1904, March). A Plea for Straight Photography. *American Amateur Photographer* 16, 101-109. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

⁶⁴ Stieglitz, A. (1917, June). *Camera Work*, 49/50, p. 36. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

⁶⁵ <http://www.haywardeducation.org.uk/assets/teachpacks/HG-adampdf.pdf>.

Their aesthetic of straight photography: any photograph not sharply focused in every detail, not printed by contact on glossy black and white paper, not mounted on a white card, and betraying any handwork or avoidance of reality in choice of subject was "impure."⁶⁶

Don't let anyone, even a straight photographer, tell you that your photography is not pure (with a few exceptions).

Photography is a big tent.

Back to You

Why Do Photography?

What motivates us to do photography?

If we know, we can do better photography with more fun.

Some answers are described below under two headings: structure and reward.

Then, we'll look at two examples.

To explore why you do photography, do the Creative Energy Questionnaire.

Go to <http://www.photokaboom.com/>.

Structure

The next section discusses the rewards of photography.

Rewards may be why we **do** photography.

This section is about structure.

Structure is more about the **doing** of photography, than it is about why we do photography, the rewards.

But, if you don't do photography, there are no rewards.

⁶⁶ Newhall, B. (1982) *A history of photography*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.

Structure Only, No Content

Hans Ulrich Obrist is an author, editor, curator, and head of the Programme Migrateurs at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

According to Bruce Mau in his article about creativity, *Incomplete Manifesto*, Obrist organized a conference without content—no speakers, panel discussions, and so forth.⁶⁷

The structure was present—events for people to meet and talk.

Mau reports:

... it was hugely successful and spawned many ongoing collaborations.

What structures encourage your way-of-working?

Class as Model

A photography class is a model for what we need to create on our own, unless we suffer serial-photography-class disorder.

Specifically, being given an assignment in a class, is structure.

You're given the frame, the narrowing of possibilities with limits and constraints, which reveals opportunities, along with an implied direction to follow.

You're given a destination, the time frame, a deadline.

There are several social structures that fuel your efforts in a class:

1) Support

The teacher, and your classmates, can energize you with more confidence.

As a teacher, this is fifty percent of my job.

You also have the support of class materials, such as handouts.

2) Expectations, including shame and recognition

When thinking about the destination, the deadline, the completion of your assignment, we have expectations.

⁶⁷ <http://www.brucemaudesign.com/manifesto.html>

a) If you don't do the assignment, you may expect to feel shame in the eyes of your teacher and classmates, so you get going.

b) You can also visual those same eyes admiring your efforts, recognition, so you get going.

When We're Not in a Class . . .

When we're not in a class, we need a trigger, a tickle, to get ourselves started.

A student said:

I buy something new once a month.

Devise a trigger that's as effective for you by making it easy: mechanical and automatic.

We also need a routine, which is discussed in the *Woody Allen and the Six P's* section.

We all have to use triggers and routines to fit photography into our busy lives.

More about recognition, and other rewards . . .

Pleasures, Not Rewards

Most often, a reward is thought to occur at the **end** of work, and it's deserved.

For most photographers, the greatest reward is **during** photography, during our way-of-working.

So, I switched from rewards to pleasures.

But, pleasures, in this culture imbued with Calvinism, can carry some negative connotations.

Here are some of the pleasures that can fuel your way-of-working.

Recognition from Others

I learned a great lesson from Douglas McGregor's *Human Side of Enterprise*.

PATH: Ways-of-working in Photography by Jim Beecher
<http://www.photokaboom.com/>

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If you recognize people for what they do well, they'll do more of it, and do it even better.

Recognition of what is working is a far better motivator than is the pointing out of what's not working.

But, if you're not taking a class, where's the possibility for recognition?

Go to Meet Other Photographers in section 47 of the online version of PATH.

That Feeling of Accomplishment

Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote:

Sometimes it happens that you stall, delay, wait for something to happen.

Sometimes you have the feeling that here are all the makings of a picture—except for just one thing that seems to be missing.

But what one thing? Perhaps someone suddenly walks into your range of view.

You follow his progress through the view-finder.

You wait and wait, and then finally you press the button—and you depart with the feeling (though you don't know why) that you've really got something.⁶⁸

Freeze Time

When one's house is on fire—and everyone and every living thing is safe—they say people often grab their photo albums before anything else.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to a friend about how much she valued a photograph:

It is not only the likeness that is valuable in these cases but the idea and feeling of proximity which are present there ... the fact that the very shadow of a

⁶⁸ Cartier-Bresson, H. (1952). *The Decisive Moment (Images à la sauvette)*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

certain person which felt there was recorded there forever.

I think that this truly hallows the portrait and I think it no exaggeration to say something with which my brother disagrees so passionately ... that I would rather keep a memory of the one I dearly loved than to have the most noble work an artist has ever made.⁶⁹

- Record a chronicle, diary, or other narratives and sequences
- See/experience the world/people in a unique/better perspective
- Be able to use multiple talents, such as science, art, social, marketing, and so forth
- Have more tangible accomplishments than from one's other endeavors
- Social reasons, such as sharing photographs with others
- Expression, for all, and a creative outlet for those who are largely involved in non-creative pursuits

Duane Michals said:

The keyword is having something to express. When you look at my photographs you are looking into my mind.⁷⁰

- Feels good, especially the aha experience of connecting with a person, feeling, idea, memory, getting the picture before it disappeared, and transformation.

Photography is about transforming the world by selecting a portion of it, at a certain time, and putting it onto a two-dimensional surface, that can be held, contemplated, shared, and tipped into an album or hung on a wall.

Edward Weston wrote in his journal:

⁶⁹ Miller, B. (Ed.). (1954). *Elisabeth Barrett to Miss Mitfordi*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁷⁰ Rosalind Smith, *Duane Michals: Getting to the Heart of a Wry Eye*, Shutterbug Magazine, December 2003, http://www.shutterbug.net/features/1203sb_duane/.

April 24.

To see *The Thing Itself* is essential: the quintessence revealed direct without the fog of impressionism—the casual noting of a superficial phase, or transitory mood.

This then: to photograph a rock, have it look like a rock, but be more than a rock.

April 26.

I want the *greater mystery of things revealed more clearly than the eye can see*, at least more than a layman—the causal observer notes.⁷¹

In a response to a question about the roles of accident and intention in photography, Walker Evans responded:

It's all done instinctively, as far as I can see, not consciously. But after having made it instinctively, unless I feel that the product is a *transcendence* of the thing, of the moment in reality, then I haven't done anything, and I throw it away.⁷²

Minor White wrote about his making of equivalents, photographs that represent emotions that are not intrinsically part of the object photographed:

... I learned to make chance moments occur by looking at anything until I see what else it is. Such looking leads below surfaces, so far below, indeed, that once I claimed "creative photography hangs on the faith that outsides reveal insides." Then I meant that photographed surfaces must reveal the essences of objects, places, persons and situations. Since then I know the opposite also to be true: photographs of rocks, water, hands, peeling paint or

⁷¹ Newhall, N. (Ed.). (2 vol., 1961–66). *The daybooks of Edward Weston*. Rochester, NY: George Eastman House. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁷² Katz, L. (1971, March-April). An interview with Walker Evans. *Art in America*. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

weathered fences consent to mirror my own inner occasions.⁷³

White was following Alfred Stieglitz, who in the early 1920s challenged himself to make photographs of clouds that would create music in viewer:

My cloud photographs are *equivalents* of my most profound life experience, my basic philosophy of life.⁷⁴

Stieglitz completed a series of clouds, Songs of the Skies, and one of trees, Songs of Trees.

There are many other rewards, more idiosyncratic to the individual.

Here are two in detail.

Reward: Takes You Away From Your Usual . . .

. . . place, way of being, rapid pace, and so forth.

A doctor, Mary, was in the middle of her residency. She called me up before class started. Mary asked if it was okay if she missed classes and assignments.

"Sure," I said.

The busy doctor attended every class, and even found the time to go with us to galleries on a Saturday.

Mary reported that she needed that walk around the block with her camera.

She didn't give in to her supervisor's criticism of her taking a few hours out for a class. Mary knew she was a better doctor to her patients if she was able to pick up a camera.

Reward: Has Her Mother's Eye

⁷³ White, M. (1959, August). Statement from the journal, *Memorable Fancies. Camera*, 38(8). Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁷⁴ Norman, D. (1960). *Alfred Stieglitz: An American seer*. New York: Aperture. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

As will be described, below, photographers should have a way to look at their photographs.

A student, Ruth, was going through an old family album. Her late mother had taken the pictures.

Ruth had some of her own pictures sitting on a picture rail. She looked from her mother's pictures to her own, and noticed a similarity.

Ruth realized she had inherited her mother's eye.

In the next section, we'll explore how you can answer the question, *Why Do Photography?*, by writing an artist statement.

Write an Artist Statement

The last section discussed reasons why people do photography.

You can answer the question by writing an artist statement.

Many photographers write an artist statement, manifesto, or credo.

One of the main topics in such statements is why the photographer does photography.

Alfred Stieglitz wrote:

I was born in Hoboken.

I am an American.

Photography is my passion.

The search for truth my obsession.⁷⁵

Ansel Adams wrote:

My approach to photography is based on my belief in the vigor and values of the world in nature—in the aspects of grandeur and of the minutiae all about us.

I believe in growing things, and in things which have grown and died magnificently.

⁷⁵ From the catalogue for a Stieglitz exhibition at the Anderson Galleries, in New York, during 1921.

I believe in people and in the simple aspects of human life, and in the relation of man to nature.

I believe that man must be free, both in spirit and society, that he must build strength into himself, affirming the "enormous beauty of the world" and acquiring the confidence to see and to express his vision.

And I believe in photography as one means of expressing this affirmation, and of achieving an ultimate happiness and faith.⁷⁶

Section 39, in the online version of PATH, has the following artist statements: J. G. Ballard: *What I Believe*, Julia Margaret Cameron, Robert Frank: *A Statement*, and the Group f/64 Manifesto.

What's **your** approach?

Have a look at other photographer's artist statements by using these search terms on Google: "artist statement" photographer photography.

Begin by collecting your thoughts with the *Creative Energy Questionnaire*.

Go to <http://www.photokaboom.com/> for the *Creative Energy Questionnaire*.

Then, write an artist statement.

Write about the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why*.

The *who* includes yourself, of course, and others, such as a teacher who influenced your work.

The *when* includes what you're doing now, where you've been, and future goals.

Keep it clear and concise.

Let it rest for awhile.

It will evolve over time.

⁷⁶ Adams, A. (1943). A personal credo. *The American Annual of Photography 1944*, 58, pp. 7-16. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Be sure to have other people check the spelling, grammar, content, and the style/personality of the voice with which you're writing.

Reasons for Good Photography

That's photography, above, not photographs.

As mentioned, having a way-of-working that suits you, makes for good photography.

The ways-of-working for many photographers include the following traits.

Tolerance for Ambiguity

Two earlier sections, *Do Think More* and *Don't Think So Much*, are at odds with each other.

Ways-of-working in photography involve being able to move between various ambiguities.

Henri Cartier-Bresson said:

Photography can create great anxiety. You know too much—and you know too little.⁷⁷

Here are two more ambiguous poles that photographers must move between.

Ability to Be Solitary

Photographers have to be solitary at times, and connected at other times.

Being with a group of people often interferes with your doing your photography.

Connections with Other Photographers

While photography is often a solitary experience, photographers must interact with others.

The best part of a photography class is not what you learn from the teacher.

⁷⁷ Cartier-Bresson, H. (Interviewed). (1972). *The decisive moment* [Narrated slide show]. New York: Scholastic Achievement Series.

It's the feedback you get from fellow photographers.

Once a class ends, many photographers feel diminished.

They no longer have as much energy for their photography.

There are ways to connect with other photographers.

Go to Meet Other Photographers in section 47 of the online version of PATH.

If there's no gathering place for photographers in your locality, make one.

Woody Allen and the Six P's

To the traits in the last section, we add a Woody Allen quip and six more traits.

The quip, and the traits, are common to all flourishing endeavors.

They're here because, as discussed above, the idea that photography is easy lingers.

It's not.

Woody Allen

Picasso said:

I don't know when genius will happen, but I'm always in front of a canvas when it does.

Woody Allen said?:

90% of life is showing up.

For photography to work, whichever way you want it to work for you, you have to be there, behind a camera.

The other 10% of photography is the 6 P's.

The 6 P's

- **P**assion

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Bernice Abbott (1898-1991) met and photographed French photographer, Eugène Atget (1857-1927).

Before she could show him her work, Atget died.

Abbott purchased his negatives and prints.

She wrote of Atget's passion.
Atget was not "aesthetic."

His was a dominating passion that drove him to fix life.

With the marvelous lens of dream and surprise, he "saw" (that is to say, photographed) practically everything before him, in and outside Paris, with the vision of a poet.

As an artist, he saw abstractly, and I believe he succeeded in making us feel what he saw.

Photographing, recording life, dominating his subjects, was as essential to him as writing to James Joyce or flying to Lindberg.⁷⁸

What do you value?

What are your values?

What are your strengths?

There are extrinsic motivators for our photography, such as recognition.

Passion is our intrinsic fuel.

- **Pliny wrote:**

An object in possession seldom retains the same charm that it had in pursuit.

Don't just take photographs on trips and at family events.

⁷⁸ Abbott, B. (1929, September). Eugène Atget. *Creative Art*, 5, pp.651-656. Reprinted in Newhall, B. (1980). *Photography: Essays & images*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Do self-assignments.

Do long-term projects.

Stay challenged.

- **Practice**

Practice, as in Doing

You learn to see by practicing.

The more you look around at things, the more you see.

The more you photograph, the more you realize what can be photographed, and what can't be photographed.

The more you photograph, the more your way-of-working will become evident, so you can refine it more.

Practice, as in Habit, Routine, Discipline

Before I have breakfast, I go for a walk and take pictures.

That's my practice/habit/routine/discipline.

A regular pattern of photography behavior can fire your photography.

But, don't go overboard:

Every day for years, Trollope reported in his "Autobiography," he woke in darkness and wrote from 5:30 A.M. to 8:30 A.M., with his watch in front of him.

He required of himself two hundred and fifty words every quarter of an hour.

If he finished one novel before eight-thirty, he took out a fresh piece of paper and started the next.⁷⁹

- **Persistence**

You just have to keep doing.

⁷⁹ Acocella, J. (2004, June 14 & 21). Blocked : Why do writers stop writing? *New Yorker*, 110-129.

Weegee said:

F/8 and be there.

Calvin Coolidge (?!) said:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination are omnipotent.

The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

Harry Callahan, in an interview by Charles Hagen:

Mr. Callahan's success in in many ways based on sheer persistence.

Through constant application, he [Callahan] notes, "you get rid of that damned familiarity and get closer to where you should be.

To me this is the super-meaningful part—to get up in the morning and go out and keep working."⁸⁰

- **P**atience

Sometimes there's no photograph.

- **P**resentation

See the *Presentation* section below.

Satan v. Venus

⁸⁰ Hagen, C. (1991, December 15) The Man Who Learns Anew From Each Picture. *New York Times*, pp. H35, H38.

Idleness is bliss.

Bertrand Russell begins his famous 1932 essay, *In Praise of Idleness*, with:

Like most of my generation, I was brought up on the saying: "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

Being a highly virtuous child, I believed all that I was told, and acquired a conscience which has kept me working hard down to the present moment.

But although my conscience has controlled my actions, my opinions have undergone a revolution.

I think that there is far too much work done in the world, that immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous, and that what needs to be preached in modern industrial countries is quite different from what always has been preached.

Russell continues with a story about twelve beggars and a traveler.

I propose that photographers have to be, at times, like the twelfth beggar.

Everyone knows the story of the traveler in Naples who saw twelve beggars lying in the sun (it was before the days of Mussolini), and offered a lira to the laziest of them.

Eleven of them jumped up to claim it, so he gave it to the twelfth.

This traveler was on the right lines.

But in countries which do not enjoy Mediterranean sunshine idleness is more difficult, and a great public propaganda will be required to inaugurate it.

I hope that, after reading the following pages, the leaders of the Y.M.C.A. will start a campaign to induce good young men to do nothing.

If so, I shall not have lived in vain.

Just the other day as I was driving into the post office, I realized that they were closed for lunch.

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What would I do for forty-five minutes?

I went to a nearby park where I used to walk my dog every Sunday morning on the way to buying the paper.

My expectations were small.

However, the light was cooperative and I had the freedom of idleness.

I found one definite keeper, I came upon a second photograph of a possible ongoing series, and took a photograph for the Photo 101 section of the website.

I'm glad I arrived at the post office at 12:06 and not at 11:55.

I became like the twelfth beggar.

My idleness gave my eyes a rest from errands.

If you take away idleness, Cupid's bow's unstrung,
his torch is dark and held to scorn.
As plane trees like wine, as poplar trees like water,
as muddy reeds like the marshy ground,
so Venus loves idleness: you who seek to end love,
love gives way to business: be busy, you'll be safe.

Cures for Love (Remedia Amoris), by Ovid
(<http://www.tonykline.co.uk/Browsepages/Latin/CuresforLove.htm>)

Be busy, don't take pictures.

Be idle, take pictures.

Venus exists; Satan does not.

Presentation

Presentation is important.

The sculptor Brancusi understood. He designed the pedestals for his work. His work was not just the bronze, it was the column of the pedestal and the bronze.

My class critiqued an exhibit of student work that was in the process of being hung in the education gallery at the International Center of Photography.

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The exhibit was the culmination of their first year at the school.

I cautioned my students that we were not seeing the final presentation of each photographer's work.

My class was impressed with only a few of the photographs.

The following week the class saw the exhibit as intended.

The prints were perfect, and were displayed as per the wishes of each photographer.

I asked my students if their opinions had changed.

They were now impressed by many more of the photographs.

So, start thinking about how you'll present a project, even before the project gets underway.

Why?

How the project will be presented can influence the course of the project.

For example, let's say a photographer wants to photograph her hometown, a small town in Virginia.

How might she present the photographs?

She could decide to display her photographs in an album, in keeping with a return to childhood theme that she may pursue, inspired by the thought of using an album format.

The album, began a theme, and the theme, could in turn, beget the idea of using a camera, just like the camera she used as a kid.

Presentation, the ending, can influence the project at its beginnings.

Fame, Guru-hood, Sales of Prints

Introduction

It's hard to become a well-known actor or musician.

It's probably easier to become a successful actor or musician than it is to become a famous photographer.

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And, if you become famous, it may be for but an instant.

That said, do the following to increase your chances of fame, guru-hood, and prints sales, if they're desired.

Age

Be young, as in *emerging artist*, or old, as in *wise guru*.

Education

Get a degree from a well-known photography program.

Upon graduation, you'll have a mentor or two, and a network of other photographers.

The aura of the mentors and the institution, and your commitment to the art, will be apparent in your résumé.

Size and Quantity

Bigger is usually better.

Prolific is often better than restraint.

For example, Spencer Tunick photographs large numbers of nude people.⁸¹

Effort

Use a technology, equipment, or process, that require uncommon knowledge (such as resurrecting old technology), immense expertise, and great effort, such as large format photography.

For example, Michael Fallon wrote about the photographer Alec Soth:

Soth's process of photographing is almost unnecessarily complicated, and reliant both on fortuity and the artist's control-freak nature.

This may simply follow the complicated and nebulous process of using the large-format camera, a device that must be reconstructed anew on each use from a variety of parts, and that uses large and expensive negatives that slide into the back.

⁸¹ <http://www.spencertunick.com/>.

Further, the camera's lens is particularly sensitive to variations in light and has a shallow field of focus that causes much fussiness in the artist.

Soth says he's lucky if he manages to make one or two exposures on a given day of shooting. This is, of course, very different from the photographic norm in the load-and-shoot era of 35mm and digital cameras.⁸²

Thomas Demand recreates scenes using paper and cardboard, and then he photographs the construction.

The scenes were often first seen in photographs.

The subjects appear to be mundane, until one learns where the scene was, or what happened there, in reality.

For example, *Bathroom* (1997) is a reconstruction of an seemingly ordinary bathroom.

However, the work was based on a 1988 photograph of Uwe Barschel, a German politician. She was found dead in a hotel bathroom in Geneva.

Anyways, back to *effort*.

Demand's work requires great effort.

This is always featured in articles and reviews about him.

Would you cut out 270,000 leaves from paper to create a forest?

Demand did, for *Clearing* (2003), a recreation of a location in the Public Gardens in Venice.

Risk

Do your photography in a milieu or location that puts you (and the viewer, vicariously) at risk, physical or emotional.

Time and Money

Devote a sizeable amount of time to the project, and perhaps, substantial monetary expense as well.

⁸² Michael Fallon, *Alec Soth's Manipulating Eye*, interReview.org, Winter issue, <http://www.interreview.org/02/02fallon.html>.

Good Creation Story

Have had, or purport to have had, a transcendental experience, especially one after a trying period in one's life, a horrendous event, season-in-hell, or a solitary trip to the "desert."

For example, Deborah Wye, chief curator of prints and illustrated books at the Museum of Modern art, describes an experience she had in a class about modern art.

I saw Andy's soup cans and Oldenburgh's hamburgers flash on the screen and couldn't believe my eyes.

That was art?

The art bug suddenly bit me.

Carl [Carl Belz, the professor of the class] would take us to galleries in New York.

We went to Leo Castelli's gallery, where Ivan Karp worked.

Ivan sent us straight over to Andy Warhol's studio.

That was how it was in those days.⁸³

Innovate

Nadar

Nadar (Gaspar Félix Tournachon, 1820-1910), a French photographer, innovated.

Besides portraiture, he also took the first photographs from a balloon in 1858.

Nadar was among the first photographers who used artificial light, in 1860, when he photographed the catacombs and sewers of Paris.

John Perrault

Art critic John Perrault recounted ways to be innovative.

⁸³ Kimmelman, Michael, New York Times, *For a Cinderella Art, A Fairy Godmother*, January 7, 2005, p. B37.

His remarks were aimed at those using pigments and the like. You can adapt his thoughts to your way-of-working with photography:

Use a new methodology or way of making. Dripping, screen-printing, gnawing, lathering: Pollock, Warhol.

Use a new material. How about chocolate (Antoni) or toothpaste (Perreault)?

Copy something: Gorky copying Miró and Picasso, Pop artists copying comic strips, Malcolm Morley copying calendars or Vermeer; Mike Bidlo copying everybody. Copy yourself.

Put together two or more things that have not been joined before: obviously painting and sculpture (Robert Rauschenberg), art and theater (Rauschenberg), sound and vision, autobiography and abstraction.

Find a source outside art, or at least outside orthodox art. Cubism looked to African Art; Surrealism looked to South Pacific Art and North West Indian Art; Duchamp looked to alchemy and to the writing techniques of Raymond Roussel. Jean Dubuffet looked to the art of the insane, which he then called Art Brut.

Make it old. When painting is dead, surprise people by going back to painting; when abstract art is in the winning position, make realist art (Chuck Close).

Subtract something from art: representation, form, color, meaning. Is there anything else we can subtract? Conceptual art tried to remove even the physical, leaving only language (visible and in some cases oral). Can we then subtract language?

Add something to art: politics, feminism, personal narrative, objects. When it seemed as if art was just going to be empty colorless grids, a certain group of artists added color and decoration (Joyce Kozloff, Miriam Shapiro, Robert Zakanitch).

Redefine art. Duchamp said he was creating nonretinal art. Related to this is the following: try to make something that looks as little like art as possible.

Innovate out of ignorance. You can make something new simply because you don't know any better. Many Outsider

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Artists fall into this category. People such as Henry Darger don't break the rules; they don't even know the rules.

Break the rules, or create new rules.

But best of all, find a new way to innovate.⁸⁴

Philip-Lorca diCorcia

Philip-Lorca diCorcia innovated within the genre of street photography.

For his *Heads* series, he set up a flash in the street scene before his camera.

The flash acts like a spotlight on one individual among the many on the street.

diCorcia's spotlight is subtle.

The flash light stands out because, often, its color is different than, and its direction is not consistent with, the ambient light.

Bodies of Work

Create bodies of work.

A body of work has a shared subject, theme, or story, and a unified style of photography and presentation.

Be Popular

Catch the zeitgeist, and stay on it.

Leo Rubinfien wrote:

As a photographer, Garry Winogrand owns the 1960s, in the special sense in which it is commonly said that Robert Frank owns the 1950s, and Walker Evans the 1930s.

These artists' photographs are distinguished by the extraordinary conjunction of a form that comes to mirror,

⁸⁴ Perreault, J. (2005, February 2 & 3) How to Innovate. Lecture given at Cochise College, Sierra Vista, AZ, <http://www.artsjournal.com/artopia/archives20050201.shtml#96125> (Link no longer active).

and stand for, the dominant sensibility of a time with subjects that are the era's main symbols and events.⁸⁵

More recently, Anne Higonnet wrote:

When Sally Mann started contradicting stereotypes of childhood in the late 1980s, she was like a one-woman force and everyone rightly focused on her as someone who was breaking all the rules about the representation of childhood.

As it turns out, a decade later, she is completely vindicated; she turns out to have been announcing a kind of widespread change in how people think about childhood.

Her work belongs to a very particular and crucial moment. There are many people working in that field now, but one of the things Sally Mann was up against was the claim that not only that her images were wrong, but that the subject was trivial.⁸⁶

Be an Artist

Even though, as discussed elsewhere, photography is considered an art nowadays, pigment artists still have more status than photographers.

So, call yourself an artist who uses photography.

And, try to get into the stable of an artist gallery that shows photography, rather than a photography-only gallery.

Ego

Have a big ego.

For example, Hans Hoffman said to fellow-painter Jackson Pollock, according to Lee Krasner (Pollack's girlfriend), that if he didn't paint from nature he would repeat himself.

Pollock replied:

⁸⁵ Rubinien, L. (1977, December). The Man in the Crowd. *Art Forum*. Reprinted in Goldberg, V. (1981). *Photography in print: Essays from 1816 to present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁸⁶ Sina Najafi, *Picturing Innocence: An Interview with Anne Higonnet*, Cabinet Magazine, Issue 9, Winter 2002/03, http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/9/picturing_innocence.php.

I am nature.⁸⁷

Bulls - - t Happens

Photographer beware!

Years ago I was preparing for an exhibit and I was discussing it with my brother.

At that time, he was working at the Library of Congress in the Prints and Photographs Division.

He said that they had a woman that wrote great *blurbs* for their exhibits.

I said, "I'll send some slides."

Only half in jest, my brother said, "She doesn't have to see your work."

Here's a more illustrious example.

The writer Amy Tan was waiting to speak at a bookstore.

She saw a CliffNotes for her book, *The Joy Luck Club*, and had a look.

I always had this question when I was in high school or college: Did the writer really mean everything that was said in the CliffsNotes?

In school, you are supposed to analyze symbols, themes, structure to the nth degree.

You, the student, have to weed these things out and you have to ask yourself, did the writer really intend this?

I found the answer when I read my own CliffsNotes.

There I am reading things about all these wonderful intentions I had and all these great symbols I put in my book, and I got to one of them – the phrase "invisible strength."

⁸⁷ Recalled by Lee Krasner in the BBC documentary, *Jackson Pollock: Love and Death on Long Island*, produced by Teresa Griffiths in 1999.

This is a quality that I gave to a character named Waverly Jong, who is a Chinese chess champion.

Her mother is so proud of her. She feels her mother is her ally and her adversary, and her mother has given her this invisible strength.

According to Cliff, invisible strength referred to something like the power of foreigners and women under some kind of suppression – and about three or four other things.

I read that and I thought, Wow, really impressive.

You read this and you think, God, she's brilliant.

But I just had to chuckle to myself, because the truth of that phrase invisible strength referred to something my mother often said to me.

It was a Chinese saying, and she would say it in Chinese whenever I was whining or complaining, and it meant roughly, No one wants to hear you make a big stink over nothing, so shut up.

The actual word-for-word translation goes like this:

Loud farts don't smell, the really smelly ones are deadly silent.

So that is what invisible strength was.

Cliff did not get that at all.⁸⁸

It – Why You're a Photographer

Vincent van Gogh wrote:

Mauve [an artist] takes it amiss that I said, "I am an artist," which I won't take back, because it's self-evident that what that word implies is looking for something all the time without ever finding it in full.

It is the opposite of saying, "I know all about it.

I've already found it."

⁸⁸ Amy Tan, author of *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Opposite of Fate*, at the Commonwealth Club of California, October 7, 2004 (<http://www.commonwealthclub.org/archive/04/04-10tan-speech.html>).

As far as I'm concerned, the word means, "I am looking. I am hunting for it, I am deeply involved."⁸⁹

Anton Mauve (1838-1888) was a Dutch realist painter, whose wife was van Gogh's cousin.

Other Sources

Go to Back to You > 47 - More Resources in the online version of PATH.

Most Importantly . . .

Have fun!

⁸⁹ From Letter 122, to Theo van Gogh, May 3 – 12, 1882, http://www.vangoghgallery.com/letters/218_V-T_192.pdf, © 2001 R. G. Harrison.