

## **SILENCE OF SEEING**

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The pages are numbered 170 thru 173.

Since, it was such a treat for me to read and consider this work, I'll retype it for you.

On a personal note, he comes close to being a photographic hero.

Here is the article in its entirety. I claim responsibility for all the typos!

The silence of seeing formulated in these pages has a contemplative-experimental basis. So with a pun in mind, if *still* photography represents a silence of seeing then it could be practiced in cinema, television, still photography, or any other form of optically originated images. Silence of seeing may be applied to the totality of photography: its photographers, its camera work, its audiences, its critics.

Here the formulation and application of silence is restricted to camera work because that small segment of photography centers around creativity. The present formulation differs from that given and encouraged by Alfred Stieglitz. Steiglitz thought of camera work as the "art of" because it aspired higher. Compared with a church spire in a village, it stands higher than necessary. He favored art and "I" consciousness. I prefer this formulation: a camera is employed and work necessary to use photography for intensified consciousness. Possibly we each mean something beyond either art or consciousness.

The present writing was also done in a state of heightened silence. Hence writing in the first person seems the more appropriate. The word "I" will be used as a child says it unaware of self; also as an old man says "I" who constantly remembers how young he is compared with the universe. Speaking thus my experiences may be generalized in relation to myself without implying universality. I write for the pleasure of those who will recognize the experience in themselves. For such people "I" will mean collectivity instead of uniqueness or aloneness.

To experience anything in the here-and-now I usually have to shut out multimedia dreams and thoughts twittering like cuckoos at dawn. Such a noise! So it seems logical to locate a way of silence before attempting to experience a photograph, or the subject of one I am about to photograph. In the search for a way of quieting the twittering machine, meditation was encountered; so was the Zen way of just sitting. Ultimately I found that a self-induced quietness was best for me. That way allows all my scattered parts to reassemble. I become present. Sometimes I think I center in the Solar Plexus, at other times I cannot locate any special area. Wherever located, once felt I can give all my attention to the photograph at hand, or to the subject I am

about to take a silver tracing of.

I feel doubtful of my attempts to describe induction of stillness for the purposes of camera work. There is an object, for example an ice crystal, or its silver image on the other side of my stillness. That condition satisfies part of the definition of the word "contemplation" - the object part. But few of the objects of my attention are sacred, as the full formulation requires. Christ and Buddha figures are scarce, handwriting on the wall is a little more plentiful (graffiti). Unless, of course, I make subjects sacred by the quality of my concentration.

In various experiments with stillness I went so far as to play that I was a member of photographer Anyone's audience of viewers. I looked at his pictures in my silence and my stillness. I saw more - deeply and sooner. My experiences of his image was intensified, became a journey. It did not become a psychedelic trip because of the nature of his image. That was enacted on a stage of war. The inner journey through an emotional ambience led to a sense of injustice. That journey over, I spent some enjoyment analyzing the photodynamics; you know, how this line meets that one in a smash, how this form constricts the space behind it. In this photo all of the subtle and obvious pleasures of visual tactility and structure led to a powerful sense of the inevitability of war. By way of association the main thesis of the Bhagavad-Gita entered: inevitability without injustice. That was my final understanding of Anyone's image.

Seeing in silence ordinarily leads to an understanding, which in turn closes the event of seeing in a satisfying way. The journey through Anyone's picture was neither comfortable nor pleasant-nor the understanding cause a welcome relief-nor the closure in any way aesthetic. The satisfaction was one of revelation surfacing in consciousness.

At another time a different relation may dominate between Anyone, his image and me. If my understanding of his image is not the same as Anyone's, I do not protest to him, or contradict him because his experience is different than mine. On the contrary I cherish his experience because it may give me a glimpse of an unfamiliar Anyone. I may like that part of him. Whenever I hear a man object to another man's response to the same photograph I get the shudders. They are both right and, when honest, beautiful. Whenever they treat honest experience as contradictions the barriers rise higher than ever between them. And blindness is heard as the sound of seeing.

By means of people's responses and reactions to photographs, I have met many stranger and wonderful, peculiar and haunting, angels and demons in my friends and my strangers. Sometimes in the process of cherishing my responses I find that strangers are friends- and friends enemies in disguise. Seeing in silence leans me over a high cliff onto a different view of the commonplace. Through the Looking Glass, through the camera, through perception, through vision to what's behind! I only wish

I could make such vision occur more often and last longer. So I induce this kind of silence in myself frequently. I also take those moments when it happens spontaneously as evidence of grace.

Along about the middle of my life I came upon quiet and stillness as a preparation for seeing. Before that I went as seeing negatively, that is criticizing before I even had a chance to know the photograph. In that turbulent way I acquired a certain taste by which to measure excellence. That measure was a blend of many sides - book devouring, gallery hopping, personal biases, prejudice, lying to myself, and imposing a grid of assumptions instead of waiting until a photograph, or subject about to be photographed, spoke to me. Half of all this raucous activity was useful; to this day I am not sure which half. Since I assumed that a measurement for excellence was required I had to go through all the uproar to devise a yardstick. The building part of it was useful. The error was in unconsciously coming to believe the measurement, which I accidentally called "Spirit," was an absolute, or close to that. At the same time something like *seeing* was deflating my confidence, and making me think that I did not know one iota of what Spirit meant.

Then I discovered how to be quiet with myself before photographing anything. Seeing in stillness stripped of all baggage, I began to find such deeper experiencing as left no need to criticize. My experiences were more rewarding when I did not apply any standard of quality. When I neglected to judge, vision was richer. Thus for several years I sought experiences at the expense of criticism.

During these joyful years of growth as a beholder, I became convinced that it really does cost creative effort to give words to journeys through photographs. If I described the experience, the recital would be a minus-feeling travelogue. It was not criticism that was missing but something real out of my deeper self. So I sought to give more of myself. Had I been a painter I would probably have invented drawings or sketches of the essence feeling of my journey. Or if a dancer, I would have improvised choreography. Being wordy I tried to create a written poetic equivalent of the essence of my experience. I hoped to create something that would be a special kind of mirror, so if the photographer looked into it, he would see a hank of myself and a bone of himself in mutual understanding. I wanted to give back some of the energy that his image stirred in me.

Poems do not always come out to order, or on time. Speechless, I would resort to expressive silence, eye contact, a handshake, or an embrace. Imagine my delight when a friend, somewhat self-consciously, communicated his response to my photograph by describing his experience with his hands on my bare back. I was surprised by the forcefulness of the communication. And grateful, very grateful to learn how far an image out of my camera had moved him.

I had felt all along that the simultaneous meeting of picture, photographer, and beholder was and is a rare opportunity. But all previous encounters had been fearful. And strangely enough fearful of love surfacing in an embarrassing way. With his hands on my back, our private psychological hours synchronized, a moment of recognition flared. We recognized the energy of the genitals and watched it take the direction of respect and wonder. We stood in awe of the radiance encountered. Of evaluation there was none, unless a moment of being together exceeds all judgments of unions. An experience as full and open as the flight of swallows in the circle encompassing friend, photograph, and maker urge me to wish the same for all people.

Such encounters multiplied. Along the way I observed that if I make but one step toward evaluation I become the critic. At once I am whirled outside the circle of friend, photograph, and maker. Two steps and outside of the circle of three I remain.

Evaluation, or criticism at its most positive, however, cannot be postponed forever. I questioned *how to evaluate from within* the circle of friend, image, and photographer. I would try, I thought, to evaluate during the silence of seeing an image that had been experienced in contemplation. Slowly, a few years in fact passed. Now I can say that when I go with myself together in silence before an image, I go as if before an altar. Just as I listen for the photograph to speak, I look to the altar for judgment. From many such experiences I have come to believe that, though we generally think of camera work as images and photographs, camera work includes the office of the critic. The temptation arises to qualify with such words as "positive" and "enlightened." but a capital C is as far as I want to go.

Photographers these days shun the critic, want no part of him, indeed they would exclude his office if they could find a way. But they cannot because the critic is a part of the photographer, part of every member of his audience, part of humankind. The critic is ourselves in the role of a stranger-outside, hence an enemy.

The flesh-and-blood critic has an advantage that the photographer cannot possibly have. He is not burdened with the disadvantage of having been present when the exposure was made. *This puts him on the side of the beholders.* He could be the one member of our viewing audience with both a professional knowledge of the mechanics and familiarity with the store of camera work images in the world. This puts him on the side of the photographers. On my side he can give me, in my role of photographer, a consciously expressed, perceptive experience-response to my image - something my lay audiences can never do consistently, some days on, most days off.

We could further elaborate on the qualities of the Critic. He would be familiar with his personal foibles. He would be able to discriminate his opinions from his knowledge, and prefer, "considered judgments" to ego trips. He would have a breadth of knowledge of camera work to compare my photographs with others like it. If I could become so aware of myself, my hangups, and impartialities that I could commit myself objectively to isolate nourishing photographic contributions to potential viewers, or to the totality of camera work, I might try to perform the critic's task. I, however, do not hanker to recognize my deficiencies. I want to remain a subjective photographer. To do that I feel that I must

defend and cultivate my personal idiosyncrasies, enlarge my ego to the size of a colossal olive. I would rather leave objectivity to the critic and damn him for misunderstanding my images and me whenever I feel like blowing off steam.

Continuing on my ego trip in the role of cameraman, I would expect, if not demand, that the Critic would turn his poetic force in my direction now and then to sustain my energy and at times renew it. A rebuff often has more energy packed in it than an affirmation. Simple affirmation is needed only when needed, not every minute. Occasionally I hunger only for that *bit of the man himself* in response to my image. That packs the kind of energy that regenerates. I take from him the energy *only*, not directions or orders. The energy from an enlightened Critic would have a consistently higher energy charge than that from anyone else-except that from the passing remark of a child.

The Critic's moment of understanding of my image, when communicated to me, has the power to release me from the long commitment to a photographic image-if I am ready to let go. By the action in me of his objective response I can let go and start the search for the next photograph with seed-hunting force. The seed is in me already-the germinating sun comes from the outside-the heat of the sun comes from the *honest* responses of my friends and the still more objective responses of a stranger-critic. The heat of the sun is as essential to the turning of the creative cycle as it is to the growth cycle of plants. Without the critic, or his function activated somehow, the creative cycle of camera work slows down and comes to a halt.

I don't know any critics in photography who work like this. I do know that they have never been encouraged in photography to take the time to become fully qualified. We have critics who seem never to have heard of the silence of seeing or George Eastman House. Yet contemplation in preparation for seeing and evaluating images might lead them to enlightenment. Anything less than understanding weakens me, dries me up. Enlightenment awakens me. Less than fully qualified critics notwithstanding, I have only lacked rain. Something in me forces me to seek rain by letting my images out among strangers until one of them, a child sometimes, a passing remark, releases me from my photography. At times I have waited years before something out of the passing scene or parade of students responding to my images pierces my blindness with understanding.

Outwardly, photographic images made while in contemplation rarely look much different from those made in a bustle of activity and noise. This is true until the images are looked at in silence, in a state of intensified perception. *Then the difference shows.*

All of the above must seem quite simple and ordinary. To make sure that the reader is left with a conviction, if not an experience, that rather extraordinary states of consciousness are being pointed at, I will further say that when I look at something in contemplation, that something changes-or I change-or we both see differently. It is as if one eye sees outwardly, the other inwardly, through my heart and out to the potential viewer. Energy enters and when I have given that energy a shape, it moves out to others.

I am viewer, photographer, critic and image at various times and in random sequence. Nevertheless the larger creative cycle turns within relentlessly, though not evenly: inception, the waxing upturn, the full flowering of the idea-feeling force in the image, the waning

downturn showing images to friends and benefiting by their responses until the seed-energy brings the wheel full circle and the upturn begins again. All the phases have characteristic and emotional rises and falls. Still for me the most magic moment of all is that blank period when one image is over and the next is about to start. There is an anguish of waiting-will it ever really start again? The tension of that moment can never be released until a bit of energy from an *honest response* pierces - like rain, like son, like love.

In the role of photographer I rarely can observe in myself the currents and cycles of all these forces working, beyond an intuitive recognition of rapport with livingness. In a state of heightened awareness an intuitive recognition of living energy accelerates work on an image. My energy is expended in the rite of exposure. but things go differently in the role of the viewer. I can see the whole inner-outer action that results in response. At this stage I become aware of what was going on during the exposure ritual. Long years have given me faith that the photograph made in a peculiar kind of half-seeing and half-sensing its importance it will reveal to me later the whole of the experience. I can make the journey in leisure. To be sure sometimes I am surprised at what the journey reveals that I had no inkling of during exposure.

In the role of the critic (enlightened and knowledgeable viewer) I am saddened when I feel obliged to pass judgement. Hence I feel that I dare not make evaluations from anything less than the total experience of the image in a state of concentration and contemplation. I feel compelled to give out of my deepest self, response, and out of God knows where, judgement.

No matter what role we are in - photographer, beholder, critic - inducing silence in seeing in ourselves, we are given to see from a sacred place. From that place the sacredness of everything may be seen."