

SOME QUESTIONS TO OFFER A SERIOUS WITNESS OF POST-DARKROOM-ALTERED PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS

A photographic print may be altered after the fact of its darkroom generation by scarification, cutting, tearing, folding, bending, creasing, marking, painting, scribing, scoring, weaving; by adding to or subtracting from the original print through lamination, by division and redistribution or reassembling of parts; by effecting surface relief; by embedment of the print or its parts in compatible or unrelated substances; by attachment of things to the print or the print to things; by making the print bear traces of gently or violently applied or naturally occurrent forces; by transforming its color or other elements of its form and imagery through the use of dry, moist, transparent, translucent, opaque, granulated, viscous, reflective, non-reflective, polymerized or particle-suspended media applied to the print by pouring, stamping, staining, brushing, stippling, stenciling, transfer printing, rubbing, spraying, and a host of other methods. Does any or every evidence of post-darkroom-alteration of a photographic print reveal an attempt to deny the *past-tense* implications of the original photographic image? For those who use photographs as primary forms from which and on which altering work evolves, do acts of alteration, whether poignantly reserved or aggressively emphatic, betray attempts to project upon the original print a residual proof of a picture-maker's once active presentness and progression *in time* before becoming, like the subjects of normative photographs, *out of time*? Does the picture-maker resubmit the past-tense image, even—as *if*—its very subject, to further erosions and embellishments, to further changes defined by newly conditioning causes and effects in time, thereby enabling the altered print to become a physical confirmation of *élan vital*, not a visual *memento mori*? Do the signals of alteration ensure that the past-tense image has indeed been subjected to an activity in time? Is this activity evidenced in the apparent transformations that obviously had a beginning and progressed toward a future pictorial conclusion? Does the altered print still offer traces of past, present and future by virtue of the alterations having been accumulatively defined over an extended, not instantaneous, period of time? Are those accumulated transformations reconstructed in time by the print's beholding audience?

In the post-darkroom-altering of a photographic print, does the photographer as picture-maker seek to deny identification as picture-taker? Does the process of alteration reflect an urgency to separate oneself and one's work from the production of photographic images achieved without any remarkable intervention of the human hand? Is the sense of touch, as an avenue toward perception, considered more influential than that of vision in the deliberately *inventing* mode of picturing by alteration? By acts of alteration is there an intent to disclaim interest in the generation of photographs through non-interfering dependence on *itself-reflexive* camerawork; to express distaste for using photography's primary instrument as the "ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood" as Susan Sontag identifies the camera in *On Photography* (1977)? In the operations of alteration, in transforming an accomplished print by often peculiarly-called "doctoring" processes, is there projected a belief that one must deliver photographic works from association with images that "do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" as declared by Sontag to be primary signals of typical photographs?

Does the picture-maker believe that most photographers guardedly reserve overt syntactical evidence that their pictorial forms or images emerged from determinations of human will, from visual-perceptual biases or interpretations? Is the very exercise of print alteration a renouncement of the conventionally generated photograph which seems, no matter how naive the presumption, to have evolved more from mechanistic determinants and nonhuman energies than from constructional acts of consciousness? Does the altered print itself counter the prospect of considering the typical photograph as born from "an alertness *without mind*," identified as an inherent "determining element of the medium" by Max Kozloff in his essay, "The Territory of Photographs" (*Artforum*, November, 1974)? Does the *coniunctio* of camerawork and handwork ensure the presentation of art in which the claims of nonhuman and human energies, nature and mind, both play a decisive generative part? In an altered print, is the dualism between *intending* mind and *tending* matter dismissed? Does the contemporary altered print, more often than not born of psychic motives and physical transformations left unabashedly extroverted in the final pictorial form, give new meaning and purpose to Henry Peach Robinson's words written in 1892: *Photography gives us the means of a nearer imitation of nature than any other art, yet has sufficient elasticity to show the directing mind, and therefore is the most perfect art of all?*

Is the new purpose and meaning of the contemporary altered print implied by Robert Heinecken's statements that many photographs today "are conceived not as a *picture of* something, but as an *object about* something," an "attempt to create an intrinsic reality in the picture or object itself," such views expressed by this leading innovator in current photography in an unpublished typescript of 1966? In the introduction to a Philadelphia College of Art exhibition catalogue, *The Hand Colored Photograph* (1979), Paula Marincola offers statements from a letter to her by the contemporary photographer Harold Jones, including the fragments declaring: "The first hand colored photograph of my own I remember was one of people waiting for the bus...I colored (with ordinary food dye and spit) each person...The color animated the people...It re-realized them." Did Jones' use of his own saliva to disperse the dyes over and into the surface of the print betray, beyond simple color mediation, a subtler attempt to transfer, virtually exude, an aspect of his own physical reality onto and into the images of the multiply exposed figures defined by the print? When, in the same letter, Jones links his process to that of ancestral procedures which involved hand coloring the daguerreotype "by gently brushing on dry pigment and BREATHING warmly on it," further stating he "loved the whole idea of breathing on the color," did the loved *idea* evolve into a magical attempt to bring back to *life* the people who once upon a time waited for a bus, to *re-animate* the stilled past tense presences of their figures and their environment pictured in the print?

Was the bogus claim in 1851 by the Westkill, New York, Baptist preacher, Reverend Levi L. Hill, that he had discovered a sure method of directly obtaining the colors of nature on the daguerreotype plate but one among many early wishes to automatically record the chromatic magnitude of the world, wishes extended to the present day which still can only be fulfilled by the *implications* of dyes or pigments? Considering early methods of hand coloring daguerreotypes or later

paper prints—such as drop-gilding of jewelry worn by portrait sitters to make them appear affluent in fact, the use of powdered pigments, oil, crayon, inks and pencils to force cheeks to blush, to chromatically render the texture and patterns of garments, to make pictured vegetation express a season, to amplify or deny the historical moment and original appearance of particular persons, places, things, to confirm or disparage through coloration a pictured subject's hierarchical import—did such methods not satisfy the nagging public need for an autoreflexive, *naturally* achieved, direct color photography?

A direct process of color photography was actually accomplished in 1891 by Gabriel Lippmann, whose light interference method remained an impractical and limitedly applied scientific curiosity despite its having earned the French physicist a Nobel Prize in 1908. Did Lippmann's innovation and all subsequent practical, but indirect, color processes set the stage for greater wishes in photography today: to bring not only colors of the world to vision, but also the world's material capacity to demand our sense of touch; to urge in the experience of pictures, as do some contemporary altered prints, the reengagement of aural, olfactory and tasting senses? Earlier than Lippmann's process, in 1861, an image of a tartan ribbon was projected on a screen at the Royal Institution of London during a demonstration by the Scots physicist, James Clerk-Maxwell, to prove aspects of developing theories of color vision, that bit of fabric born to seem fact of three value-structured and transparent lantern slides of the original ribbon projected to overlap through red, green and blue glass-cell liquid filters: Was that projection not just the laying of a foundation for all practical, indirect, methods of color photography, but an admission that at least one major aspect of photography's purported pictorial credibility is dependent on *additive*, and eventually *subtractive*, media processes as such? If this basic dependency is admitted, then why would one ever have reason to wince at the hand polychroming of an existent print; why prattle on about violence to the purity of the medium; why consider the altered print a bastardization of pictorial authenticity?

Is any committed observer of pictures so naive to presume that post-darkroom altered photographic prints were fostered by the twentieth-century painter's collage devices or forms, not being aware of the *photomonteurs* of the 1920s and the evidence of persistent alteration of photographic images since the 1850s? What serious observer of photographic picture-making has not reviewed Moholy-Nagy's *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (1927), his listing of photographic "varieties" in *Vision in Motion* (1947); has not read the texts and seen the radical forms located in the context of the *Film und Foto* exhibition at Stuttgart in 1929, without recognizing the more pertinent traditions informing contemporary alterations of photographic prints? On reading Franz Roh's introduction to *Foto Auge/Oeil et Photo/Photo Eve* (1929), the famed essay entitled "Mechanism and expression: the essence and value of photography," and arriving at the advisement that "there is...the combination of photography with graphic art or painting to point to" and that "to maintain that here is a mingling of *heterogeneous elements* that can never combine is but an empty doctrine," is not one who insists upon the beautiful or the expressive form or subject having to have been cast by light in the so-called *straight* print embarrassed by Roh's implication that such an attitude reveals a restrictive, limitingly selective experience of vision, much less thought?

Do scarifying, layering, painting, writing upon, dissecting, adding to and subtracting from, and any other method of altering existent photographic prints seem like practices that should belong to the lost world of the primitive? Or, are such practices, like primitive body art, serving to convey messages about an individual's or a group's social and aesthetic outlook about relationships between psychic and physical forms, linkages between the imaginal and the factual; about bringing overt traces of human gesture and of mind having acted upon matter, back to the temporally dead allusions to persons, places and things figured in the typical photographic print?

Does one need a more reflective condition to discover that the post-darkroom altering of a photographic print is but one among many modes of picture making in the panoply of art viewed from the perspective of an integrated history of visual consciousness? Are we prepared to believe that altered prints, such as those in this issue, may mirror:

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11/19/82