

William E. Parker, Lecture at Visual Studies Workshop, April 1971 reel 7

Parker comments made during the reading of texts are set in ().

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Transcribed by Bob Martin

I extend that as you can see quite liberally, whether we have an electronic medium or matter, or what have you, that the way it affects us is basically what is communicated, not so much the content thereof, so therefore we have another need to draw matter back close to, not back into psyche, but actually to where it has been dismissed to bring it back to where psyche and matter can combine or integrate. Frankly, the majority of concerns in terms of Jungian psychology are very unmanageable because many of them depend upon felt truth...and we find that unacceptable. That is why Jung was at one time...demanded statistical measurement, and even in his essay on *Synchronicity* you have the evidence of his various tests with husbands, wives, varied dimensions of how they were affected by astrological experiences and so on...and in his early work he set up very controlled data systems, but he began to doubt this because he said all we have is what we might call statistical sets of proof. We do not have a measure of how people respond differently to these proofs. And of course this led him essentially to the discarding of statistical methodology or statistical proofs to deal with the variables of psychological types: thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation. His comments on education... is another example of his vehement denial of, written in the late 20s, and in some cases 36 to 40, a continuing concern with education of the attitude that we assume that the body, the student body, is basically thinking oriented. And generally the person who has a high degree of sensation orientation to intelligence gets eventually sent to the 600 school in New York or to the technical school where he is supposed to be able to realize something by working on the automobile...And Jung says we have these archaisms where we project people into experiences that we think will let them use their hands because they can't do anything else. Whereas we don't have avenues where they might arrive at the same content that thinking would orient to, through sensation functions, not necessarily putting together an automobile but creating a work of art or whatever it may be...It is basically unmanageable because the fields of evidence are basically empirical evidences, not empiricism in terms of clinical testing as we associate with scientific empiricism, but the sort of felt truth, the sensed truth, even the truth that might be thought as a hypothesis but not yet proved...It is an interesting thing in Jung's *Undiscovered Self*, he will not accept the possibility that there can ever be cultural or collective improvement. He says that the only improvement possible is within the individual, but no one will believe in the power of the individual...If our history is constantly identified with the idea of the great leader, the great individual, we do the same thing by identifying masters of experience, whether that is in art or science...genius, etc. We constantly talk about the person who has become elevated above the norm of experience. Jung would say, on the contrary, these people are not necessarily unique in terms of what he calls anything but their individuality and the fact that they have gone through a high degree of individuation. They have cultivated an access to all four typologies, or all four mental functions. He says that it is our tragedy that we do not

realize that we ourselves could cultivate a greater dimension or access to those functions independent of the need to see them reflected through the great individual. And as a result culture cannot hope through institutional improvements or social action or revolutions... to ever have any effect upon itself. That ultimately collective action is always destructive. Individual action can affect collective action. And that perhaps we have reached a point now where instead of seeking, projecting possibility upon the great leader we need to introject it, bring it back to ourselves and that one unit does have a transformative effect on another unit and then another unit to another. And so he insists that ultimately collective health will be dependent upon the collection of healthy individuals. For what that's worth. You might be interested in the extensions of Jungian thought and many of you are quite aware of them, but Maud Bodkin and Northrup Frye in literature. Heisenberg, Pauli in physics, Lancelot Law White in physics. Direct relationships to Jungian thought with full credits and sometimes cooperation... In the field of comparative mythology we have Heinrich Zimmer and Joseph Campbell, and in social thought... the name of the book is *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, {Ira Progoff, 1953} and he has written a number of volumes since and his totally name escapes me... The book was out of print for a number of years but it has suddenly sprung back up again, Ira Progoff: an excellent introductory statement of Jung's psychological theories and a first interpretation of its significance for the social sciences, and he really gets involved in social behavior based upon archetypal provocations... He talks about this problem of the great individual. There is Harold Rugg, educationist at Columbia University before his death, posthumously his book on imagination. Again, not necessarily the scholarly book in the sense that the information is too diverse to now put into a systemic, to systematize...

Student: Could I ask you how you feel about your own involvement with photography? You've used these ideas to deal provocatively with Uelsmann and yesterday with Les Krims. Do you feel that they are expandable to every photographer or are some inaccessible to that kind of treatment? Or would modifications have to be made, and if so, how? How could you deal with Walker Evans?

Right, right, I could not at this point. I don't find it necessary to indicate a relationship to individual photographers. I chose Uelsmann primarily because of the literary aspect. In other words it makes it convenient and I mean that on just that level: a visual presentation of highly literary and anecdotal ideas. And so comparative mythologies emerge and literary forms for visual media. On the other hand my interest is really in the medium: the aspect of the medium as reflective of nature. And I feel that there are possibilities of being able to identify the so-called straight photograph with archetypal ideas, just by virtue of that concept: that there is no intrusion upon the form, etc., etc.

Student: Which was your concern at the Eastman House, wasn't it?

Yes it was, absolutely. I wish I had brought it with me, Bob Sobieszek sent me a whole commentary from this book... It is called *Newton's Optics*, do any of you know this book... It is a re-presentation of that Locke comment with an absolute definition of the whole thesis: the internalization of nature into mind and so on. And it is obviously the

case that this has to be explored further. Out of my interests, I was interested more on levels in art, allusions, not so much in literary works but literary documents by authors: their concerns with nature, how they responded to it. Romanticism as opposed to Classicism and so on. Perhaps I am more interested in the idea than I am in the immediate application to an individual photographer. But I don't think that the access to the interest comes through the fact that photography offers a convenient vehicle for expressing these ideas. I think it is the only vehicle in which these ideas can be expressed relative to media usage. Whereas painting, sculpture and so on the archetypal foundations are always based upon the illusionary idea, the literary idea, the written word; painted thought. There is no way to talk about the archetype, I shouldn't say no way that is too limiting. I can't find any evidence in the discussion of the archetype that can deal with the material foundations of the artwork relative to sculpture, which is a natural form, painting, or what have you. But photography seems to have this potential for suggesting the most unique physical form that is related most immediately to psychic activity. In my undergraduate...I took a course in beginning photography, intermediate and advanced...and never photographed anymore but just remained interested in the photography medium. But also with the interest in Jungian psychology I was also wanting to confirm in a contemporary idiom the presence of literary or anecdotal ideas beyond painting and where they had come about. I am interested in the fact that I know that Yoxall Jones has done the study of Rejlander, whether it will ever be published or if we'll get to see it in its totality, it is a fascinating biographical reconstruction and perhaps we have to look at *Two Ways of Life* and particularly the dream sequence. Who is the gentleman who has equated the Dickens image with the *Hard Times* photograph? Do any of you know?...Where is it, Stonybrook? Somewhere, someone has found that perhaps Rejlander was deeply influenced by a certain Dickensian image, or vice versa. I am not sure which it is. Ask Bob Sobieszek or Harold Jones, fascinating idea anyway. But it might be highly illustrative but that can't be said about the second photograph that uses the overlay montage effect. Not montage, what would you call it? Yes, montage. And the dream sequence using the mannequins and the hoop: regardless of the kind of social interest in that kind of imagery we can't escape the fact that it shows a high degree of interest in the dream and the idea of sponsoring an interest in what happens intrapsychically. I wouldn't even deny that as being as important in purpose as the one with the lady with the salon type angelic-like figures appearing on the screen. It is quite possible that this is just a hint towards the idea of becoming aware of the psychological, or in reverse, the psychological becoming manifest in the spiritistic photograph. That is it exists in matter outside again.

Student: You chose two photographers with a concern for fictions of a kind...but I suppose for a non-fiction type, an obvious person to go to do this kind of thing would be Siskind, wouldn't it?

Yes.

Student: Or Walker Evans.

What about the Walker Evans, did you see the exhibition?

Student: Yes.

All right, now talk just for a moment about your response to that exhibition. What do you sense is happening? I think it is quite possible to, I mean I think I'd be quite projecting an archetypal foundation upon it because I haven't analyzed it on that level, but I think in order to do so we have to talk about the kind of responses that are cultivated. I find a complete absence of emotional identity.

Student: Yes.

Even in the subway portraits. I cannot see them as reflective of any dimension of personality.

Student: I think there is a high degree of aestheticism, an aristocratic aestheticism.

Severity plus.

And hence the surrealism: the ability to recognize that. I think the emotional detachment allows one to perceive surrealistic elements. Perhaps if one were more involved...

Well I suspect that might be because of the hyper-concentration upon objective portrayal that constellates rather fantastic constellations of emotion. Now you see there would be an example, and I couldn't call it an archetype, but it is as though the almost (laughs) super conscious concentration upon the architectural form, or the figures standing in front of the building or what have you, is that we begin to almost find our mental attention exhausted on that level and begin to fantasize.

Student: Exactly.

Now you see that is enantiodromia but I don't know whether I can apply an archetype to Walker Evans' work because I don't think I can apply an archetype to Jerry's. I just thought, like in my one concentration upon it, I don't quite understand where I presuppose the archetype as existing just in Jerry, or in that kind of work. I have talked about images of flux, of change. The idea of plenitude within a motif. And Jerry became the vehicle to show its evidence in the photographic medium. If anything, if there was a contribution, I think he is absolutely the one major contribution is he wiped out the potential for us to enjoy painted fantasy any longer. And that has been appearing in any number of comments...that perhaps we can no longer be convinced by Magritte, since Uelsmann.

Student: Do you think Wynn Bullock has this aspect in his work?

Which aspect?

Student: Fantasy aspect.

Yes, I do. But also, and again, a highly unexpected form. There is a kind of balancing principle there. Where one can move either way. What about, we mentioned this the other day...I find extraordinary emotional effects in Emmet Gowin's work. And not just the fact of sentiment and feeling. I discussed it in terms of psychological...Is there not, maybe a re-engagement of some kind of archetypal level in Emmet's work. And if so, obviously, what is it? Well I find that it may have to do with the concept of limited environment and finding within that environment a high degree of affect emanating from the most unimportant or unnecessarily attractive object...The difference in someone like Les Krims and Emmet: you know the portrait of the child with his arms behind his back, isn't that remarkable? There is not the slightest degree of grotesqueness that could be potential in another setting. I think there is where we couldn't dismiss also technical controls, they are so gorgeously printed, we are ensnared by virtue of the convincing nature of those forms. From my mind his photographs represent the highest degree of the importance of the medium: that part of the convention comes through the extraordinary tonal range, treatment of detail, just the control factor that is introduced. I am working on something on Emmet's work, it certainly will not be anecdotal, and I can't discuss anything about people and chickens, that kind of thing, I can't deal with it on the level of imagery.

Student: You mean like the fact that that woman happens to be his wife?

Exactly. I have to almost dismiss that from the field of attention, and to a degree I can't really discuss it relative to his biography. I can only discuss it relative to a set of re-constellations of what I'll call for want of a term because I have never heard of this archetype before, I rather heard it as a function, the feeling archetype. Well we will wait until that gets finished (laughs).

Student: What does he think about that attitude toward the fact that it is his wife, have you discussed that with him?

Yes I did. Basically I don't think he even distinguishes any particular feelings or what have you. It is almost like an inner cooperation: nobody does in the family, including grandmother or the next door neighbors. It was born out of a highly interesting summer visit to a compound where there is a high degree of social integration. And therefore people accept, not as bizarre, what one might wish to express as their identity. He did talk about this...We got involved with how does Les get these people to perform, Emmet doesn't ask that question, they are just all there.

Student: It would seem important in understanding his work to know who these people are...

Student: I don't think so, I don't think so. But the pictures don't even make you want you to ask that question.

I don't feel any necessity. I think that is an extraordinarily exquisite image, where he has taken the curtains and tied them up and she stands in front of the bed, it is one of the most moving and powerful image but if I ask myself why I respond that way and start using these personal expressions of 'extraordinary, wondrous beauty'...I know it is just one, I realize that, it is one, but I am saying that I do not feel the necessity to wonder why, or who, or what have you.

Student: Just going through a stack like this, of his prints as I have on occasion, that the particular presence of her and his understanding of another human being is modified by knowing who it is, their relationship, for me.

It may go back to what...Alex was saying. Did Alex leave already? Well Alex, good lord, you just de-substantiated {inaudible, laughter}

Alex: What, what?

Do you remember this morning we were talking about that Arnheim disaster and including the remainder, the idea that Taoistic philosophy is perfectly expressed by that motif? I would suspect that one could construct Emmet's personality from the photographs if they wanted to. Aren't you making the equation that it is only natural that they have that quality by virtue of his wife and himself and so on? Or are you, I don't know.

Student: What you say makes sense but I am not sure that was exactly the point I was getting at...but that makes sense, yes.

I think a more interesting level of discussion would be to look for the things he is interested in. He has shown you, I am sure, the photographs he collects from old albums and so on. Have you looked at some of those recent ones? Who has? I want someone to reconfirm this for me...I don't know whether Harold still has some of them or not...but one night Harold Jones was talking...and one of the really remarkable things is out of the number of things he could have purchased or bought or collected or found, he has definitely selected, and then he reprints them, often by taking another photograph of them. There are a series of nudes, particularly male nudes that are, the selections are based upon an attitude of the figure as it stands within an environment: it is not like 'figure in the landscape', it has nothing to do with that, but you don't feel any identity of, you find that you begin to ponder the remarkable nature of how a group of

men would go out on a Saturday afternoon to go swimming in the lake and unabashedly stand before the camera with no sense of any kind of association with moral identity or what have you. Almost overt shucking off of personal inhibition and just visual presence and they become extremely classical in nature. There is a series of female nudes, again, in collected groups, and it is extraordinary where, when the experience was natural and not posed. That is why I think maybe there is a need sometimes to re-experience certain images that weren't conditioned by the environment: that is upon the event and how people felt in the event. And these are the most relaxed and natural and thus become virtually ideal. We cannot attain that experience of uninhibited presence...And these images of people simply standing in front of their house with no interest in distortion of size or monumentality... but they all seem to be struck by an element of tenderness, of great warmth, of great feeling. And I think to discuss that has to require something relative back to even the printing itself... I can't necessarily connect it with his intention or biography. It may well be an important aspect.

Student: I can see it doesn't find fertile ground in this context, but it is just something that had struck me. I remember at one point finding this picture of her smiling, it was just...

Yes, or some of those images of the hair going back... but you don't think of hair as defining a field-force or...Space in Emmet's work is often highly suggestive of, and when I use feeling I am not talking about transferring into sensation but how we value space, and the idea of, that marvelous photograph of the girl with the hair extended out...Well is just isn't the brush, she holds the brush, but you also get a feeling that some action has taken place and you are seeing the residual effect of the action but you also experience the atmosphere around where the action is taking place is entirely different, it is not just space around or back of the figure or what have you. It seems highly energized, or affected, as though it was felt. Maybe the only parallelism I can think of there, and I am making a comparison to the kind of attention those photographs, to the attitude toward space and setting that appear in the art of Van Eyck. Not to make a historical parallelism but I want to talk about the idea of the inspection of detail and the importance of atomistic or literally microscopic identity, and the importance of being able to not only view the object in its physical entirety but to find an interest in even going down to the detail and then beyond that to the inspection of the material itself. Any other?

Student: Would you touch on your feelings about Weston any more than you had in that one day.

Student: Yes, that was a curious statement.

Which one? (Laughs)

Student: You said that Weston...wasn't dealing with the real reality of the object that he was photographing.

Why does that strike you as peculiar? I am just curious to know what, even the *Daybooks* would seem to confirm...

Student: To photograph a rock and make it more than a rock, is that the...

Yes, basically, and everything is subject to metamorphic identity. I am not saying that they're not photographs...

Student: But he expressly denied it, I guess that was the thing that jarred in my head, that anytime that was brought up to him he dismissed it, as I understand it.

Well, yes that is the literature, and I think it is highly selective, we do not have in the *Daybooks*, and we do not have in the recorded statements of Weston a number of very subliminal concerns. And I constellate it because it is a fact that Weston and Stieglitz had a highly erotic interest. And it has nothing to do with their sexuality Alone: it is a psychological eroticism, causes them to metamorphosize and identify with form as not necessarily substantial but highly ambiguous and capable of being metamorphosed into virtually...

Student: I thought that was the strength of his work was that he was able to present a rock, a pepper, an object, on its own ground as it was as well as giving it, you knew what you were transforming, there was no problem with that, you were very very sure...

Oh yes, but I am not denying that aspect, but the point is that he does present it: the pepper is a pepper, right? But in the ultimate experience of it, it transcends its pepper-ness. Now Minor sums this up by saying Weston was quite aware of the erotic associations with the artichoke, the pepper, take your choice, whichever one you think is erotic. I am simply saying that it is interesting how what we would expect to be a very physical, almost documentary identification of a form, and it has a hell of a lot to do with format and presentation, frame and lighting, and so on, eventually becomes a metaphor for something other than what it is. He certainly combines both, that is to me their remarkable dimension. That the thing in itself is there and then it becomes something else.

Student: What is that something else it becomes?

Basically a psychic metaphor. I don't think it becomes in essence, breast or a part of the feminine anatomy. I don't think we make the one to one connection. It becomes a metaphor for some kind of highly sensory state, sensual as well as sensory state. This is the animism based upon this principle of investing the inanimate form with identity that is not unique to the form. There is now being serious consideration, that in certain examples of Pop Art in the early development, particularly the frontal Campbell Soup Cans, or the Jasper Johns Two Balancing Beer Cans: we may know the origins, I can take a beer can and make art out of it, and thus DeKooning speaks and Jasper Johns runs home and casts them in bronze and paints them. That the very nature of our need to identify with, this is hard to explain, take Mircea Eliade in a book called *The Sacred and the Profane*: he talks about a continual crisis or conflict between our need to invest objects with some kind of spiritual identity. In our time we have a let's say a total loss of any fundamental, whether collectively held or individually believed, motifs that carry great spiritual meaning. Again, following Eliade, he doesn't discuss Pop Art, he was discussing strains of spiritual belief, he says that man often turns to the utterly inconsequential object and invests it with a high degree of emotive and spiritual significance.

Student: But isn't that significance, like in Weston's case, the pepper fulfilling its pepper-ness rather than transcending its existence as a pepper?

Well I think not. I mean I think it is pepper *plus*.

{laughter}

I mean that.

Student: It is transcending its pepper-azzi.

Pepper-azzi!

{laughter}

It sure ain't Doctor Pepper. The only thing is that, to follow that thought through, what happens when a Campbell's soup can appears in our field of vision in painting? We begin to project upon it the necessity for it to mean something other than the shelf in the grocery store or the taste of the soup or what have you. It isn't necessarily just a return to figuration. It is a return to the idea of investing the least expected object, the hidden

thing, with some kind of emotive significance, almost as though we wish it to become a carrier of some kind of projection. There are innumerable spiritual exercises that say do not start with the, the alchemists talked about, where do we begin our great experiments, we begin with the *massa confusia*, the confused material that is undifferentiated. What do we start with, we start with the *negredo*, the thing least respected, often the idea of starting with defecatory material: the negative product and transforming it into something remarkably spiritual.

Student: Isn't that an element in photography, that one dignifies the thing photographed by photographing it? Or somehow elevates it.

I don't know Dennis, are you referring to something specific?

Student: I am referring to Stanley Kaufman's review of the movie *Trash* in which he says that these people gathered together to make this film have somehow been made greater than they are by the simple act that they are in a movie. That the photographing, that the photographic process has endowed them with a significance they wouldn't have in the real world.

I believe that, yes, and the irony of it is that it is the photographic idiom that gives them the identity. I can't say whether I know that ultimately to be true, whether people feel that things are endowed with dignity...

Student: That is a tricky process, because you are saying it gives them their identity, or does it make it possible for them to reveal their identity...

I know it is tricky. Remember we were saying today, is it possible that maybe the photograph is an absolute necessity for us to experience reality? Is it possible to at least suggest that as something to consider? I cannot separate the psychological need in the history of human consciousness from the advent of certain media developments. They occur as natural necessities. I cannot say photography emerges simply because of the great strain of centuries of varied experimentations, or the idea of discovering the inverted image. (laughs) I'll never forget when I was a child, I don't know why this just popped into my mind, (laughs) my brother and I decided we would make a fast buck, and our sisters who were quite dogmatic, and of course we were very young, and my mother was away, everyone was away, so we literally transformed our garage apartment into a zoo. We got every neighborhood dog and cat, even a couple of strange ducks...you can imagine the problem that we created. My brother also had a great act, it was called the flaming figure. He would put lighter fluid on and light it, then of course it would psyche up all the little kids who were very naive. We had taken some fiber board,

homasote board, and we put it down the steps that led down to the front door, and we just sort of through it against and it made a perfect slide...And we weren't paying any attention to that, where we had thrown, discarded this material in just three or four sheets of this stuff and we made a perfect slide, and there was a door that was locked and a hallway that was quite dark and there was a keyhole. Anyway, we invited these kids in and charged them two cents per head, and we were really drawing in a crowd but they were utterly bored. The fire act didn't succeed, (laughter) why did you take my duck and put him in here, (laughter) and that kind of stuff, and crying and so on, and then one kid happened to walk out the wrong door and slid down this slide and began screaming with delight. I was, I think, five and a half, my brother was seven, or something like that. But the big scene, and we found out that we had the wrong plans for making money: was that the image of the next door neighbor's house was coming through the keyhole, and the way this plane was disposed, it was inverted and then we had a perfect camera-obscura image. Well we insisted that we had done that...Shut up kid, you went out the wrong door, yes, that is our final act! We had them flocking in droves! To see this magic, can you imagine children of the twentieth century and at least at that age, who had seen photographs, constant illustrations, billboards, etc, who did not even know the effect of light emitting and then manifesting on a plane? Why did I bring that up? Because it suggests that the power of photography, or the power of this kind of manifestation is effective in dimensions that are totally profound. Now that is a very bad denouement in my little illustration, but it is the kind of thing that there is in initial discovery a great sense of wonder, and there is also in the application of the medium a constant, let's say like reality is more important as it is reflected to us through the photographic idiom than it may be by actually touching it, sensing it, experiencing it. And again I use the parallelism, if not, then we have a peculiar crisis in our time of a need to get back to our body's senses and rediscover matter, and I mean my god, the whole therapy situation is incredible: how to return to sensory experience. I don't know if photography will continue to serve that function, but I think it has done so for a very long period of time...Hey Nate. {laughs}

Nathan: It is an active agreement.

Oh mercy me.

End reel 7.

