

INTRODUCTION

Charles Traub

What will come? What will the future bring? I do not know. I have no presentiment. When a spider plunges from a fixed point to its consequences, it always sees before it an empty space where it can never set foot, no matter how it wriggles. It is that way with me: before me always an empty space; what drives me forward is a consequence that lies behind me.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD, *EITHER/OR*, 1843

The camera is everywhere. Almost nothing in the web of human endeavor goes unrecorded and therefore unseen. Thus the conscious makers and consumers of imagery must embrace the complication of messages brought by the always-omnipotent lens. Like Kierkegaard, we dare not go back.

To understand our relationship to the entangled ecosystem of never-ending strings of imagery, we have to reconsider who or what generates this imagery—and why. The present generation of digitally savvy networkers has created a new literacy, but one that is often lacking in critical understanding. Lens imagery constitutes a central part of our communication, yet even schools of art and media studies give little attention to the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic concerns of lens practices. For students, teachers, and inquiring people, this collection of essays, interviews, and manifestos prescribes, navigates, and projects what we call a *Vision Anew*. The young and adept hardly question the ease of their social exchanges. (I text, therefore I am! I am a camera. And so on.) So assuming there is something in the saying “If youth but knew what age could tell,” herein are the musings of venerable artists, writers, scholars, and the like about our present camera culture.

Although the individual writers in this volume make distinctions among photography, video, film, and digital recording, this volume treats all these forms as equally valuable and important. As creative users and receivers, we need to understand the procedures and protocols, as well as the aesthetic differences and similarities of the many products that constitute the lens arts. We can become dummies very fast: social

networks evolve rapidly, then morph, and often become obsolete. It is easy to become fully engaged in a system of exchange and then quickly overwhelmed or disinterested. Such is the concern of our intellectually adept contributors.

The photographer Alec Soth cultivated a number of digital strategies for his creative expressions, and our interview (chapter 27) reflects his return to the simple delights of looking and why too many options overwhelmed his muse. Such examples may help us to decipher what has changed, what was lost, and what is gained. The lens is the tool of human observation extended by both art and science. Our perspectives rapidly change with new technologies, and by who, what, where, and why they are used. The invention in the mid-nineteenth century of the stereopticon and 3-D vision underlines the fact that we function in a world of multiple perspectives. The “magic lantern” popularized visual storytelling and projected realistic pictures into the realms of history, science, and travel. Historian and critic David Company’s article (chapter 10) investigates the significance for today’s digital practice through the interconnections of moving and still images and their narratives, which have existed since Muybridge invented the Zoopraxiscope in 1879.

Robert Bowen (chapter 6) and Grahame Weinbren (chapter 15) each delve into the historical evolution of optical perspective. The latter underlines the futurist William Gibson’s notion that motion, not stillness, is the foundation of the information we gather from the world through our sense of vision. Weinbren references the films of Pat O’Neill, Jennifer Reeves, and Stan Brakhage in which these artists re-prescribe the viewer’s physical place in the world. Likewise, Bowen concludes that the study of vision and the development of a seamless, plastic imagery extend our neural processing. This proposition furthers our call for more investigation of a new visual literacy.

In *Vision Anew*, time is of the essence. When we talk of the photograph, we talk of memory, the past, the decisive moment, and the arresting motion. Something of reality is caught in time, leaving us to believe there is some truth in the image. Likewise in film, compounded sequences lead us to suspend disbelief. (As Godard stated, “Cinema is truth at twenty-four frames per second.”) With video we talk about seamless time. In experimental video we are often aware of a riff between the still and the moving, as many video makers shift our attention from one to the other. Watching the screen, we can be fully engaged in the presence of movement and at the same time observing the stillness of an object changing imperceptibly from frame to frame. Bill Viola’s prescient epigraph after chapter 21 expresses the cutting edge of this idea.

Time has mutability in the new experiments of pliable cameras and their menus. In his article “Moving Away from the Index” (chapter 17), Tom Gunning thus argues that the new media of the digital motion arts have trajectories that require study and understanding that differ from those of analog cinema or photography. In reframing the world on the virtual screen, we have created another time frame for our existence, so proven by critic Amy Taubin’s interview with Christian Marclay (chapter 22). His twenty-four-hour moving-image installation *The Clock* is clearly one of the masterpieces

of editing and appropriation—a new experience of time. Amid the many conceptions that artists, philosophers, and scientists posit about time, one thing is true: time passes and, with it, so do our ideas of truth and reality.

The near real-time experience of photography and video sharing often disguises the politic imbedded in the exchange. Whether in agreement or critique, conflict or contradiction, grafted to the image is an exchange of values in the pursuit of *communitas* and the pursuit or restriction of liberty and happiness. In a controlled and politically charged image culture, we must ask ourselves which side we are on and how we respond. Fred Ritchin reframes the issue in a recent interview (chapter 30): “The digital age is about environment. . . . Being surrounded by digital media is accelerating a reconceptualization of a worldview.”¹ Ritchin is echoed by Ken Schles (chapter 3). In *A New History of Photography*, he says that the lens is engaged in an ongoing experiment, projecting the image of what has been and what it is to be. What is to be included and what is to be removed are the big questions that drive the discovery and creation of meaning. This lesson should not be lost on the viewer, whether looking at the continuous frame or the single one.

The former authoritarian structures have been replaced with networked webs, woven by many for many. Too often the complicated interweaving within the communities we view hides these new structures. Just think of the visual clutter in our ever-growing social networks. All is recorded, sent, and commented upon—but with what thought for cause and effect? The narcissism through which we see our world can be overcome by the cultivation of thoughtful looking and recording. In “A Little History of Photography Criticism” (chapter 7), Susie Linfield chronicles the critic’s loss of ability to think and feel. She reminds the captious of the need to respond as citizens seeking to learn. There is a lot of freedom of expression, but is there consideration in a global network of imagery, sound, and text that has been reduced to the same common denominator of the digit? Is there dynamic unity or just dissociative disorder? Is there a structure that can be trusted? Such are the questions addressed in the dialogue of Claudine Boeglin and Paul Pangaro (chapter 31) as they consider the constraints of contemporary journalism. Are we not all citizen journalists?

The apocryphal adage that “one image is worth a thousand words” has nevertheless driven the efficacy and popularity of the camera image. Yet, a good picture, still or moving, can ironically stand in its indexical gesture for something our conscious mind could not heretofore conceive or put to words. The record of the lens and its implied connection to reality or our own need for verification seduces us, but there is no real fact. Most often the camera’s recording is just a representation of an idea or an experience that is perhaps out of context, maybe manipulated by the maker or someone presenting it, selectively delivered or biased by preconception. In “Photography and the Future” (chapter 23), Tom Huhn reveals his fear that the camera may disinherit us from images that have their sole origin with the human hand, thus positing a loss of some fundamental humanism, and indeed truth. The camera product is plastic and malleable for

anyone and everyone's politic. Or, as Trevor Paglen quips in this volume (chapter 24), an image is worth one thousand lies.

For me, the real humanism lies with the *creative interlocutor*—the individual who facilitates others' engagement in the web of media that is a constant of our world. He or she provides structure. This person is the programmer, gatekeeper, curator, teacher, facilitator, or conductor. In the essay from *A Blink of an Eye* (chapter 18), Walter Murch, one of the greatest film editors, describes such a person, the film editor, as an ombudsman for the audience. Content has to be framed by editing. The creative interlocutor discovers strings, makes cuts or additions, and manages content, allowing us the further means of making our own. Therein is the art, in channeling understanding through the creation of new frames of reference. In "There Is Only Software" (chapter 25), Lev Manovich stresses the need to look past the products of our creation and see how the tools shape and limit our vision and allow it to take form. As Douglas Rushkoff warns in the epigraph after chapter 25, one must program, or be programmed.

The best artist allows the imagination to enter the frame on its own terms. In the essay "On " (chapter 28), Charlie White defines the contemporary image as a codified operation for a new form of discourse. In so doing, the social networks of our spider's web can be embraced not only as channels of communications but also as forms of both vernacular and high visual art. Making art can be the choice of the sender as well as that of the receiver. Throughout *Vision Anew* it becomes evident that the lens arts and their multimedia interchange create a new discourse that crosses the boundaries of the sciences, humanities, and the arts. What is made for one reason may find a place in another domain, revealing if nothing else new data for analysis.

If one picture is not worth a thousand words and if indeed one thousand words tell us little, one thousand pictures do tell us something. Many events of our very recent past evidence the point, whether it is the depiction of 9/11, Abu Ghraib, the Arab Spring, or the recent Atlantic storms. The accumulative images—videos, telecasts, and stills—collectively relate something that a single frame or clip could not fairly illustrate. When an event is experienced from diverse vantage points and by a multitude of citizens from multiple perspectives in a given time frame, the witness of the many bears some truth of what took place. In this case, more is more—more images to edit and sort through. I, for one, would rather have too many choices than a limited number selected by an omnipotent authority for whom there is no recall. Perhaps our real humanism is in our collective ability to more readily engage the digital means that are at hand.

The means of interpreting events are enhanced by the proliferation of cameras displayed throughout all of our networks. How do we filter and negotiate all of the digital stimuli with which we are bombarded from countless media sources? In "Google Street View: The World Is Our Studio" (chapter 26), Lisa Kereszi makes it clear that part of being human involves using our hand to select, view, or take, and thus manage for our own use all that is out there. Doug Rickard's appropriated pictures from Google Street View reveal a commonality of issues regarding the disenfranchised caught randomly

throughout our nation. The lens threads the spider's web and creates unpredictable patterns into spaces unavailable to the unaided human eye. Observations snapped, appropriated, or made by anonymous or authorless creators need human intervention for structure.

The visual recording of the human experience is constant but always in flux, making all that we can now see require vigilance and discernment, as well as willingness to dispense with perceived boundaries. We've organized this book under three loose headings: "From the Lens," "Vision and Motion," and "Old Medium/New Forms." Dialogues and interviews are mixed with critical and historical essays, and many are illustrated with photographs. Aphorisms and quotes are spread throughout to spark the reader to think outside conventional paradigms.

"From the Lens" discusses the evolution and history of the camera recording. We open with Arthur Siegel's poem "Photography Is" from 1961 (chapter 1). One of the central figures in the New Bauhaus, Siegel points to the lens's multiple roles and possibilities, which still exist today, over fifty years later. Although the lure of the new is great, the act of taking and making a good picture still holds great importance. In his text, Gerry Badger reminds us of the complexity of making a straight photograph (chapter 2). Ken Schles looks at the future of photography as a reflection of language and culture (chapter 3), and Adam Bell explores current debates about abstraction, modernism, and materiality (chapter 4). Our interview with Ofer Wolberger and Jason Fulford looks at photobooks and self-publishing and addresses the challenge of matching form and content in this digital age (chapter 5). Robert Bowen looks back at the contribution of science in the early 1800s to the development of photography (chapter 6), and Susie Linfield considers the history of photography criticism (chapter 7). Marvin Heiferman concludes this part with a call for visual literacy in this digital age (chapter 8).

"Vision and Motion" discusses the intrinsic connection between still and moving images and their relationship to the meaning of time and space. In chapter 9, László Moholy-Nagy enumerates the photographic techniques that enhance the power of sight and issues his famous proclamation that the literacy of the future will require knowledge of the camera as well as the pen. David Company meditates on motion and stillness in photography and the cinema from Muybridge to the Hollywood freeze frame (chapter 10), while Rebecca Solnit takes a closer look at Muybridge, the man who "split the second" (chapter 11). Wolf Koenig considers the influence of Cartier-Bresson's photographs on his films and the importance of structure (chapter 12). Ai Weiwei compares Chinese cinema from his youth with today's and pays homage to Andrei Tarkovsky, who was able to "unify individual faith, literature, poetry, and the cinematic language" (chapter 13). For Hollis Frampton, "the art of making films consists in devising things to put into our projector" (chapter 14). Grahame Weinbren uses the theories of Erwin Panofsky and J. J. Gibson to explore perspective and perception in contemporary photography and film (chapter 15). Our discussion with Bob Giraldi, Christopher Walters, and Ethan David Kent parses the impact of technology on filmmaking (chapter 16). Tom Gunning's essay

focuses on the complexities of “indexical realism” in relation to motion in cinema (chapter 17). Oscar-winner Walter Murch explains the challenges of film editing (chapter 18), while film historian Scott MacDonald explores the making of two documentaries from Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab (chapter 19). The section ends with interviews with several contemporary artists who work with the moving image. Pipilotti Rist converses with Doug Aitken about the challenges and joys of video installation art (chapter 20). Claire Barliant interviews Shelly Silver about narrative, genre, and “watching” in the construction of Silver’s films (chapter 21), and Christopher Marclay talks with Amy Taubin about both his music and his art, especially *The Clock* (chapter 22).

The third part, “Old Medium/New Forms” explores how camera-based creators cannot escape the expectations of the past as they grapple with the changes of their medium. It starts with Tom Huhn’s provocative challenge that “photography is now the largest impediment to human advancement” (chapter 23). For artist/geographer Trevor Paglen, interviewed by the photographer Aaron Schuman, the key issue is how “cameras” such as spy satellites and drones sculpt society (chapter 24). Lev Manovich’s argument that “there is no such thing as ‘digital media.’ There is only software” (chapter 25) is followed by Lisa Kereszi’s look at works created with Google Street View, especially the use and authorship of these new images (chapter 26). Alec Soth and I talk about Soth’s work and the challenge of sustaining one’s curiosity in an evolving image culture (chapter 27). Charlie White analyzes authorless and authored online images through the lens of linguistics (chapter 28), and Barry Salzman explores the effect of social media networks on photography (chapter 29). Fred Ritchin and Brian Palmer dialogue about media literacy in the twenty-first century (chapter 30), and Claudine Boeglin and Paul Pangaro discuss journalism in the digital age, including photojournalism and data journalism (chapter 31). This volume concludes with four manifestos: Joan Fontcuberta’s post-photographic manifesto (chapter 32), David Joselit’s *Feedback* manifesto (chapter 33), Katja Stuke’s and Oliver Sieber’s graphic *Antifoto Manifesto* (chapter 34), and my own 1997 manifesto, “Creative Interlocutors” (chapter 35).

Given the broad and diverse field of the lens and screen arts and their dominance over our visual landscape, there is an infinite range of discourse for a book like this to engage. As artists, we are concerned with posing the relevant questions. As daunting as the possibilities may be for selecting that which is telling for our humanity, we are limited only by how we spin the strings about us. I do not know exactly what it is I want or should want to find or see, but I am reasonably sure that everything is out there being recorded by everyone, anyone, any device, everywhere and anywhere. With unknown consequence, it is up to me to gaze anew.