

Does that Arugula Look Too Threatening?

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It was like peering down a long, dim hallway into my past. A man at the far end held a mirror that reflected me, but in his mirror I was younger by about 25 years. The man had come to take a class at the Santa Fe Photo Workshop. I was the teacher, and the class was of professional photographers, except for the man with the mirror. He was a lawyer. But years before Peter had been a student at Yale with a passion for photography. At that same time I was living in New Haven and trying to figure out how I might be a photographer. We must have come within a few yards, a few seconds of meeting any number of times.

Now we had. He was there to seek out his old love of photography, and he worked very hard during the class (as bright lawyers do), leaving with a few answers and some new questions. A week after class I emailed him a final thought.

The thought was this: Peter had set photography aside twenty five years ago, and if he wanted to find it again, he'd see that it hadn't stayed where he'd put it down. And if he went looking for what he'd loved about it, it might be gone. My note was pungent, as you can see, and final. After all, as the teacher I get to end with sonorous last words.

But Peter volleyed. "Where did photography go?" he asked.

That's the problem with students, of course, and his question sent me right to my own question: Where did I go? It's a question raised by my glimpse of my younger self, and I hear the same thought from so many others, people in photography, design--and law, and everything else, for that matter. It seems like the Universal Question of boomers like me. Back in the 70s Peter was swimming in the roiling waters of student life. Photography was ad hoc a part of his personal curriculum. "My original interest in it come from the same source that later led me to law school. The photography path led to the *New Journal*, a magazine, where I was one of the original photographers and ultimately photo editor," he wrote. Photography seemed to offer a way to address the dislocations that were going on around him. "Thinking youth regarded concern over social and political issues as paramount to leading a meaningful life."

The same upheaval was all around us both--marches, occupations, riots, tanks in the streets. But if I had a talent it was simply for presence, for being where I was and photographing it. I had no thoughts about doing anything meaningful. My interest was in what my photographs of things might look like. It sounds rather callow doesn't it? If Peter was a thinking youth, I think I was not .

There were no early hints that I'd be any good at photography at all. In the beginning I took all the same crappy pictures that anyone else does--overexposed, obvious, done too soon. Really, I was just wandering around with a camera because doing so put me into a

kind of relationship with things. It let me take impressions into myself and craft an image out of them, something that came out of me. In the beginning this was enough.

I still recall the first picture I took that was at all interesting. One day I was wandering through an old abandoned house, and I took a photo of a window with a blowing, tattered curtain. It was not original, but it was somehow alive, given life by the force of my gaze. My picture was lonelier than the house had been, spookier. By some alchemy the photo had a meaning that the window itself did not. And I knew that the alchemy must be in me. This was a hint. And for someone with the natural attention span of a gnat this was great. "I could do this," I thought.

That did it. I was ready to breach the world of forlorn windows.

Of course, there was no such world. And the window wasn't the point. The point was my seeing, taking the imprint of things on me, then getting the impression onto my film. Once I had thought that I might express things by writing or in theater, but the immediacy of photography caught me up completely. Quick intuition, no revision, and that was it. Click, click.

I was in love. Photography, photography. "I'm a photographer," I tried it on. So I looked around at what real photographers were doing. Very prominent was Cartier-Bresson. He seemed to just wander around--France, China, India. That'd be fun. He was called a photojournalist, though he swore he was a Surrealist.

There was also Gene Smith, another photojournalist, but he was clearly an artist too. And there was Irving Penn. He got to wander around in Morocco and Cuzco and Africa and photograph the affecting, anonymous people he met there.

Then I heard that my college friend Mary Ellen Mark was photographing. That did it. I'd try it too, I'd be a photojournalist, but one of the arty ones.

It didn't happen. I scammed up an assignment from Look magazine (long before I was qualified), then they folded. I did a shoot for Life. They folded. One by one the outlets for picture stories shriveled and disappeared, and the ones that were left wanted a single photo to illustrate a story, not a weeks-long exploration of a situation. Soon there were all these terrific photographers out on the street chasing not quite enough work. And there was me.

I did my best and started building a modest reputation as an up-and-coming in this field that was distinctly down-and-going. Fortunately, someone from an ad agency called me and asked me to do a shoot for them. (I now know it was because I was cheap.) It came out well enough that I got other calls and did other ad jobs while waiting for the big break in magazines that never came

All during this time I kept taking pictures for the same reason I'd started taking them, just to see what they'd reveal to me. Photography slowed me down and let me see the subtle things I would have missed without it. The more I did it, the more I saw.

So I assigned myself photo projects to pursue. First I traveled around on freight trains and did a series on railroad men. When it was finished an editor published it, giving me a sense of hope and the impetus to go out and do some more.

I did a tough, ugly little series on bullfighting in Spain. I made several visits to some prisons in the South, where for some reason I was given complete freedom to wander around without guards. I lived in Tibetan monasteries in Darjeeling, Ladakh and Sikkim, woken by the sound of drums and chants in the dark, frigid dawns. I set up little studios in small towns in Mexico and made portraits. I never made a living from this work. The only reason to do it was to be there, just be there, just see. It was a way to mine what I knew was the purest vein of my existence.

End of chapter.

Somewhere in here, after about 6 or 7 years of working, I took myself off to the great photographer and teacher Lisette Model. She was coy, blunt, cranky, and brilliant. She said my work was good. I said I thought it was oka-a-a-ay but there was something lacking. "Yes, LIFE!" she practically yelled. In the next fifteen minutes she gave me such a huge dose of criticism that I could barely choke it down. But over time I digested it, and it served me well. As I left she said, "You should do well in advertising." I was offended. Advertising was slick and shallow, so did she mean I was slick and shallow? I had more important work to do.

Didn't I?

Really, I was just putting one foot in front of the other, doing whatever jobs fell in front of me, and on my own time making the pictures I wanted to. Everything about doing photography moved me—the sound of the cameras, even the darkroom and the smells. My pictures wound up in magazines or little shows, and I was pleased. Having people see the work closed a circuit.

I went on with this kind of on-purpose floundering, evolving a career in which I did self-assigned, self-funded projects for my soul and chased commercial work because I had to live. (And as it turned out Lisette was right, I was fairly good at it.)

I also began to teach, because it was a wonderful way to give others this means of being more alive, and also because I liked being around the students awareness and creativity. Their splashing landed on me and kept me awake and invigorated.

So this was my life by the late 70's. A bit flaky, but on the whole not bad.

End of chapter.

All during this time photography itself was changing. Art and photography, which had been drifting toward each other for years, went into a clinch in the 70's. It was hot, and it was great while it lasted.

Yes, photography had been an art all along, at least when it was in the hands of artists. Still, I think it was (and is) a minor form in which some major artists work. I don't think it compares with the novel, orchestral music, painting or film at its best.

But in the mid-70s the art world grew a rash of photography museums, galleries, journals, criticism. The ferment invigorated all photographers, not just the artists among them. More of them began exploring their imaginations, their inner responses to things, less like reporters, more like artists. And the subject matter went from stuff that was found out there in the world--exotic places, the angles and planes that things formed, the majesty of the physical landscape, the moods of the social landscape--to things that were intuitive, impressionistic, interior.

The new photographs were more like fictions, like poems. Photographers began to manipulate what they found. They felt free to paint drops, dress people up in costumes, paint the photos. They didn't have to wait 'til the clouds were just right over the Panamint Range, like Ansel did. They could get their friends to act out their visions. (Paradoxically, it was close to the way commercial photographers had been working all along, gathering things, arranging them in a particular way to tell a particular story. But how different the stories were!)

Advertising influenced photography, because a lot of photographers commuted back and forth to advertising to earn a living. But the growing influence of the art world was more important. In any case, photography looked deeper, got more, got better. The line between the commercial and the artistic, in photography always a bit of an open border, became even more porous. People who wanted to make art had to make a living too, and compared to print sales, commercial work was easy money. The commercial work fed the art, or at least the artist. Was there a secret cost to this? There surely was. There was a worm in this apple, as we'll see.

But while new ways to use the medium grew, the change didn't really free me. I was caught up elsewhere. The more commercial work I did, the better it came out and the more I was asked to do. I moved from an apartment to a loft in downtown Manhattan because I had accumulated so much stuff and needed so much space to work on bigger projects. And I needed help. So I hired assistants. And I didn't much like making the rounds, so I made an arrangement with an agent. And in time just keeping things going became a full time job, so I hired a studio manager.

And (compressing the story a bit here) I moved out of New York and bought a house in the country and a share in an old schoolhouse that became my studio. In the space of what seemed like just a few years I went from being the guy in the beat-up Volkswagen

with the beat-up cameras to being an entity, a studio, actually a corporation, another legal me.

I wasn't duped into this. It was a series of choices subtly influenced by the fact that something in me just wanted to be as good as I could at whatever I did, and it turned out I was good at this commercial stuff. I chose at it. I promoted, I shot work for the portfolio, I made sure people saw it. And it paid off. I was busy, a competent, modestly successful commercial photographer.

End of Chapter.

But I had I set aside the notion of doing the photographic work for myself that carried me along so swiftly at the beginning. After all, who wants at the end of nine hours of photography to grab a camera and run out to shoot pictures in the fading light? Not me.

Some sort of creative germ stayed alive in me, though, and I made the rather odd choice to study Chinese calligraphy. I loved the way it made abstracts and rhythms of words, loved how the empty space was as concrete as the lines. I set up a traditional "scholars desk" in my living room and worked at night on ancient texts like the Thousand Character Classic, under the tutelage of a great Chinese calligrapher. I even carved my own seals, and in time my teacher declared me her "second best student." It was a fantastic way to work directly with visual energy, but while I came to view calligraphy as one of the highest art forms, I never came to view it as fully my form. Just as well, because opportunities for Foreign Devil calligraphers are pretty limited.

There it was, then. Photography as a Way had been displaced from my life. Calligraphy was a kind of pilot light, but I was not really making artwork that came out of myself. Whenever I took a little time and tried to "do my own work," as we all called it, I found myself imitating what I'd done before. The pictures lacked fire.

But while I lost interest in what other photographers were doing, even the good ones, I found myself drawn to other arts. I looked at what painters were up to, and it seemed interesting, lively...unconstrained. Conceptual art was stimulating. Next to the way that these things could stretch the mind, photography seemed so small and gray, so 8x10. Somewhere I came across a book of the work of Andy Goldsworthy. He called himself a sculptor, though the term hardly seemed to cover what he did. He was a mind, an awareness that used what he found in nature to make works that might last only a few hours, weeks at most. He'd press red leaves into the cracks in tree bark and it looked like the tree was burning up in the middle of the woods. You could plainly see what he'd done, but the act of imagination was so great that seeing the mechanism didn't diminish the effect. He'd break off icicles and stick them horizontally to a rock. He'd lay down when it began to rain, then jump up and photograph his rain shadow, quickly, before the continuing rain obliterated it.

This fast-decaying work persisted only in the photos he made of it, and the photos weren't at all the point. The point--at least to me--was his getting in a state where he was

free enough to even see such things. I had inched into that state a few times for a few minutes. He seemed to live there.

Well then, photography had changed. Photography had become freer, had fully taken its place among the arts. And I hadn't followed.

End of chapter.

Art continued to change the realm of commercial photography. The pictures became the principal message carrier, full of implications and overtones. Recent example; clothed young man and nude young woman lying on a couch, murky lighting a mix of fluorescent green and dim end-of-the-world daylight. At the bottom a single word, the name of a clothing designer who designed...what? The clothes the girl has removed?

Things not said or shown are at the heart of this ad. If one were to ask a writer to write a one page story based on this image, the results could be rich, varied, possibly lewd, possibly hilarious, possibly sad, all based on the image, on implication, on a language in which "Like, y'know" has meaning. And that is the change in commercial photography--it goes past ideas, directly to the desires and works there.

The change parallels an earlier change in painting. Recall that famous remark, "From today forward painting is dead." In fact the only thing that died when photography was born was the requirement that painters represent physical reality. Now painting could deal directly with impressions, with color and line and energy. It slipped right through the optic nerve, past the intellect and right to the core. It was like music for the eye.

Photography took up the labor of physical description. The power of old photos, a lot of it, comes from the notion that they show just the way the Sphinx looked in 1848, just what Abraham Lincoln looked like, warts, wrinkles, ugliness and humanity. It showed reality, not interpretation--Brady's Lincoln looks nothing like Gilbert Stuart's Olympian Washington.

Showing what things looked like had become photography's job, and thanks to a combination of influences like the Farm Security Administration, the Leica, WW II, and Life Magazine, photojournalism took the place at the head of the photographic table. And it was this kind of work--powerful, pervasive, and hugely popular--that reigned when I arrived in photography.

Peter, then a pre-law student, was arriving too. He says, "I identified discrete strands of photography that interested me. Social documentary photography, photojournalism; urban photography; portraiture So far as I was concerned the Greats were Edward Weston, Walker Evans and Cartier-Bresson. I thought of them as the icons of art photography as defined by my particular interests. But, for example I never took any serious interest in Andy Warhol."

Warhol was one of the influences that made photographers restive, made them want to stop being so depictive and slip into something looser. And though it was in the air when both Peter and I were coming into photography, it seems that we both missed it at first. For my part, photographic work I admired was work that made me think about particular things--war, social justice, visions of the American landscape and its inhabitants--by showing me them. Even the great Robert Frank took pictures of things, though they were enormously poetic.

But at some point I did notice the work of Duane Michals. He wasn't Warhol, but he was a paisan of his, and his pictures made me think about how I thought about reality. Perception itself was his subject, as in a story by Jorge Luis Borges. Duane's work--the sequences (in a few of which I appear as a blur), his portraits, even some of the early street work were about the way in which they shifted your perception to an unexpected point. They asked the question, "If things aren't what they seem, what are they?" and then left one to mull over one's own answer.

(When I finally met him I asked him whose work he admired, he said, "My own. I'm the only one dealing with the things that interest me." Whew, I thought, I'd never say that. But I came to understand better what he meant when I clarified my own working direction.)

Duane succeeded in the art world, but he was always quite active commercially. Sometimes his advertising projects were the sequences for which he was famous, and sometimes they were single images, vignettes full of hints and wit. Always they were well seen and well crafted. (Though not always admired. One social realist photographer referred to "Duane Michals' little fables.")

So Duane bridged the worlds of commercial photography and fine art. My work looked nothing like his, but he loosened the bonds of my photographic thinking and let me peer out beyond my medium. There were other influences, but I'll let Duane carry the flag for now.

End of chapter.

When I began photographing I was all questions, and photography was the way I tried to answer them. But as I slid into the commercial arena, questioning was pushed aside. I was given both questions and answers by my clients. All conclusions were foregone.

But the compulsion to ask questions never died (thank God) and the certainties of commercial photography kept irking the questioning part of my mind. That others felt this same conflict became clear when I began to have the same conversation over and over with various of my contemporaries--designers, illustrators, photographers, people who had achieved more or less what it was they'd set out to in our business or in another. They had their own agencies now, employees, health plans, had bought a bigger house, a Land Rover or a boat, or taken a long-delayed long vacation. They had filled all the

places in their working lives, but still they heard that little voice inside that said, "What about meeee?", and they knew very well who was speaking.

That voice in me had only been quieted when I did what the artist does--not the showing of work, but the making of it.

And the hard truth is that that voice simply cannot be stilled by working in the commercial realm. The fact is that the media life must be flawless, even when it purports to be edgy. And those who make this work (me, you) are commissioned to make "visual solutions" that resolve all questions, and leave behind a no-seam surface. In contrast, the concrete of real life is filled with bits of straw and cheap materials and things that stick out. It's shaky but it's lively. And it's the way things are.

The trick to invoking this life in art involves keeping the elements up in the air as long as possible, only letting them let them come down and drop into place at the last minute, so that they land in front of both artist and audience as a surprise, something that is both new and completely recognizable. The process leaves strings of implication dangling all around for the viewer to grasp and integrate. It's like a kit with poor instructions and several pieces missing, and by assembling it the viewer has his encounter with the magic of art. To climb the long stairs at the Uffizzi in Florence and encounter Uccello's incredible battle scene is to bring the awareness to life again of the energy of perspective that surprised even him. His thoughts disturb the air, right there where you stand, and you get to relive them, you have to. Same with Jackson Pollock.

By contrast, commercial work cuts off the possibilities and brings the conclusion to the front at once. You see it, you're done.

I was at an awards show recently, walking around looking at the winning work. It was high-quality stuff, all of it well conceived, well written, beautifully produced. And the message of all this work--even the hardest-hitting public service ads, the most in-your-face commercials--was, "It's all oka-a-ay!" It was like marketing Muzak.

Is it bad for the media to promise all this good? Let's not be naive. Advertising is one piston of the economic engine of the world. We know its selling us and we even like it when it does. We just discount a certain proportion of what it says. Don't you?

In any event we certainly don't expect it to really reflect reality

But I don't want to be sold and entertained all the time. I really want to know what's going on in life, even when it's not benign. So I read novels or see movies or plays with complex characters and conclusions that illuminate the difficult truths of life. I know that this ambiguity and difficulty is what that first spoke back to me through my own pictures. And when I turned to commercial work, the part that liked doing that didn't have anything to do on the job. So it wound up saying dumb things like, "Does that arugula look too threatening?" It wanted to say something profound and, really, in the commercial context there's nothing all that profound to say.

The impulse to know is central and deep. It prompts us to put things in our mouths and pull things off the table when we're babies. It fuels our learning to speak, to read, to grasp math and experience music and art. It also makes us drive too fast and do things that are stupid. It's part of what makes us alive! It is nothing less, and it doesn't ever die. And if we don't exercise it in some way, it festers and starts to hurt. For those who are inhabited by what Robert Henri called "the art spirit," it must be used.

So now here's the toughest question in this article: if we neglect this spirit to do our commercial work, do we lose it? You'll have to answer for yourself.

If we do, can we revive it? I think that the answer is that we can. But if we try we will come up really hard against the possibility that we've eroded our ability to make anything other than superficial work. When a commercial photographer returns to art, or an illustrator tries to really paint, he will almost certainly find that he wants to grasp for the solutions that have worked for him daily in commercial work. Early tries can tend to look rather like ads for something or other. Drop a marble on a smooth floor and the marble rolls the easy way.

So how can you cut a new groove? There's a conceptual trick one can begin with. Imagine your creativity as being a vast space, full of all possibilities, with several doors into it. If a photographer approaches the door into this space marked Photography he is liable to find it clogged with all kinds of detritus—unexamined ideas, outdated techniques, "looks", dead habits. But if he simply walks around to some other door which he has never invested with his own need, he often finds that it opens to the slightest push and admits him inside, where the air is full of possibilities for music, images, colors, sounds and chants.

At this point he is back in where he wants to be, and he has the choice to simply see what's there, or to wail, "Yes, but where are my photographs?" If he does that, he instantly finds himself outside again. He must learn to hang out in that space of just being aware and not doing what it is that he always does, doing nothing if need be.

For many years I have assigned the members of my classes to go out after the first lecture, look around, find someone interesting and write a one or two page biography of the person. "You mean talk to them?" they ask. I say, "No, just look at them and see what you know."

And they come back with the most extraordinary biographies, pungent, intelligent, insightful—and often extremely well written in spite of my saying that they should not be. At once the undeniable point is made that they have within them the insight to really plumb a person, intuitively and subtly. That's crucial knowledge and a great affirmation. Once that's clear it becomes possible to be on the move again.

(Of course if it were a class of writers I'd send them out photographing.)

So how does this technique of looking elsewhere help us to recover our first impulses? I wrote elsewhere in these pages about how I stumbled into writing, and how it revived me. Briefly, I took a class at just the right time, when I was ripe with need. And out of that class came an idea that might become a novel. "Should I pursue this?" I asked the teacher. She looked at me, astonished. "How can you not?" she said.

Working on it has brought back into my life such art-related things as difficulty in beginning, uncertainty about outcome, and so forth. But when something works there's an exhilaration that's just wild.

My first draft was interesting, but the protagonist was dull. He had potential, but he lacked something crucial. (Yes, LIFE! calls Lisette from beyond the grave.) Still, an agent saw the book and encouraged me to look further for the life of the character, so I dug back in. The second draft had lost 100 pages of fat and picked up pace. Agent liked it better, but the guy was still doing what I, acting as Dr. Plot, wanted him to. God, this was hard!

This story isn't over. At present I'm working up to doing the next (the final?) round of hard work which I think know center on breaking the pervasive benignity that I've learned in making advertising. This, it seems, is where I will make my stand.

But habit must die. I spend so much of my work time looking for the perfect light, the perfect model, the perfect apple, the perfect look. I have trained myself to make things that are untroubled. And yet last week I was in New York, watching all of these perfect mid-town types walking around, and suddenly this odd looking man approached, almost dancing down the street toward me, a crazy dance, disheveled, disturbed, energy crackling all around him. I thought, "You're interesting. I want to go with you." In the end, if this book is to work, I have to follow people like that, follow the part of myself that is like that (and there is one). And working on it gives me the chance to learn to hover in the place where good and bad and everything between combine to make up life and art. Then I just have to see it.

And it is the hardest thing one can do. A designer friend who is also an artist and I were talking about the difficulty of doing art work, and I asked him if, when he began a project, he found himself reverting to plodding around the shaft like an old commercial mill horse. All he could say was, "Oh, ahh...ahh..."

My own answer is hopeful. I think that ideas and impressions are an effervescence that pervades consciousness, individual and perhaps collective, what some Tibetans call "luminosity." The stuff of art is always coming up in our minds, and it's infinite, and we can get our connection with it back whenever we're ready to go after it. Domenico Scarlatti's work really took off when he moved to Spain in his fifties, thinking himself at the end of a career that had gone nowhere. James Dickey wrote advertising copy for years, then turned to his real work of poetry.

Time, on the other hand is another matter. It's not coming, it's going (pace Einstein). And if ideas are not our capital, time is, and we really do have to face that dead on. (And if the question doesn't seem pressing to you...stick around.)

Of course I need to say here that there are lots of people who are perfectly content doing commercial work, who are not flagellating themselves with the idea that they should have stuck to painting and to hell with the mortgage. Our profession is an honorable one, and not everyone in the art department is pissing and moaning about their lost life. But it does seem to be a theme in a way I suspect it is not in farming or banking. So if you're not thinking about what might have been, be grateful.

Another reason not to return to making art, if you need one, is that it is so incredibly damned hard. It's inner rooms don't yield to plans or goals. You have to literally leave the gravitational field of your own life, and let your mind travel beyond the polarities of hard/easy, up/down, good/bad. In an article about the German artist Dieter Schwartz, in Artforum, the writer described fear as one of the artist's chief motivators, with art giving a place of distance and safety from it. And if you've got that fear, I suppose you might as well put it in harness.

Why do this, then, if it is so hard? For one thing, there is the matter of the pleasures of craft, of laying down a perfect line of words, color, or sound. On a deeper level, perhaps one needs do it because it is hard, and because doing what is hard makes you work better, and working better makes you more awake in this world. Speaking for myself, this work is as exhilarating as anything I've ever done. It has the power to make me gasp at the huge energies I catch in my words, images that no one has ever seen, pulled right out of my own being like some cosmic spider web. Imagine discovering a whole other person, several people, an entire cast hiding right there in your own life!

Writing has the power to take me from my smaller self and immerse me naked in the stream of the world. I nearly shake apart when I see the breadth of the possibilities right there inside me, at the very same time that I am struck with fear that I will dissolve in it. And that fracturing, that breaking apart, reveals the ore, the material for the next work. To me, the experience is holy, and the doing is a sacrament. It's a place where my little world meets the divine.

So you do art--and have to do art--to keep yourself awake, to fight off the narcosis of ignoring your own being, to be fully alive in the world. Coincidentally, you can wake up others too. It is a work of transformation, and it is this, a possibility to participate in the process of life, that draws me back to art.

And if you scratch this itch, it gets stronger. Be warned!

Now, I have to say that I get a little self conscious when I talk as though I really were an artist. Sometimes I feel as though I slipped into the category under the photography quota. But in fact I'm talking about what I do, not what people think about it. In fact, I

fear I will never will be a really good artist. There, I've said it. But "good" is a critical or an egotistical qualifier. The doing is what makes me an artist.

I've never heard anyone say that the doing is fun. By every report it's almost always lonely and anxious and alarming. That's been my experience. It is like entering an atom smasher, where huge forces are slammed together to release particles that have a tiny life span and that I hope I can catch before they fade.

Excruciating and exhilarating and otherworldly and glorious all at once. So should one do it? Well..."How can you not?"

I think the true model for the commercial artist doing artwork in the commercial world is a circular one, in which one expands the entire circumference of one's being. I may have favored the business of making a living and succeeding for years, and thus made of my life a lopsided circle. By doing creative work I am rounding it again, and round is what it wants to be.

As the circle expands and becomes truer things redistribute themselves along its periphery in surprising ways. I find that my creative impulse has entered my commercial work. Because of my return to writing I'm probably the best photographer, commercial or otherwise, I've ever been right now because of it.

End of chapter.

Photography has changed. Peter wrote to me, "It seems that photographic culture --the practice of art as well as the business--has proliferated and become much more a part of the culture in general. A lot of important photography seems to be done by non-photographers. Peter Beard comes to mind. Producers of new media come to mind. Photography is now a kind of drawing!"

I confess there's a part of me that still thinks photography is a Leica and a Guggenheim. But in fact the medium keeps evolving and breaking out of a concentric series of eggs. For example, the dealer in New York who handles my photographic work shows painting and sculpture as well. I like this, I like the integration of forms to the point where the processes become simple and transparent and the importance of this medium or that diminishes.

Consider the following image, from Wallace Stevens. "Among twenty snowy mountains, nothing is moving but the eye of the blackbird." Fantastic! A wide vista, stark and white. Silence is palpable, almost a sound itself. Then the mind moves in to the still, black creature on the bent-wire branch, with its flicking eye looking for...what? What does the blackbird see? It sees what you imagine it sees.

How was this image made? Film? Paint? Video? How transmitted, digitally or analog? Ink on the page? Very simple. It appeared in Stevens' mind. He spoke it. And since then it has appeared in the mind of anyone who hears it.

It is a simple wonder. Who wouldn't want to do this?

Peter called me the other day to tell me he is leaving law to explore photography. He's not thinking of making a living there. He's just decided that it is not too late to take the road not taken, to resume an idealistic search for mysteries--not a sense of mystery but the actual mysteries themselves, the real thing, up above the images and words and stories and colors and sounds, up where they live.

New Chapter.

- Sean Kernan