

## Afterword

. . . a sense of menace.

*My wished end is, by gentle concussion,  
the emulsion of truth.*

J. Robinson, 1658

I looked at Michelangelo's *David* standing serenely in the yellow light of the rotunda of the Accademia in Florence, and, like many of those around him, took his picture. It was almost a helpless gesture, a kind of *defeat* in the face of perfection. The more I took his picture, the more I understood Susan Sontag's accusation that the photographer *appropriates* reality, making it one's own, without permission. By some odd reversal, I became tiny David conquering this Goliath of immaculate perfection. Capturing him from every angle, I was making him my own; yet I felt my obsessive gestures were also covering over a deepening anxiety about something *not done*. After all, Michelangelo created this statue, brought forth his image *into the world*, in stone. I was reduced to taking a picture, making an image of an image, an uneasy dependency on his creation. The more I clicked, the more I felt something *inappropriate* in what I was doing. I recognized too the rising envy underlying all Philistine neglect of art and culture. What I was not feeling was love.

It was in this mixture of victory and defeat that I finally saw Michelangelo's incomplete stone sculptures lining the halls of the Accademia. I was transfixed to the point of forgetting, forgetting to capture them with my camera. I took those statues home with me only in memory, remembering now my tearing eyes when I saw those rough figures struggling for existence, trying to escape their stone prison. Ignoring the crowd, I sat next to one of the sculptures and

touched it, realizing with a shudder what I had not with my shutter, that I was touching something Michelangelo had touched but not finished, had *not* brought to perfection. I guess the crowd did hold me back from what I felt like doing. I wanted to kiss that figure. I was feeling love.

At home, I took the best color slide of *David*, put it in my enlarger, and created a large black and white print. I named this image *Black David*, maybe to spite my second-grade teacher for punishing my liking black best! This photograph has captivated me for years, particularly the radiating auras of light I didn't see when I was there. I've loved this image in ways I never loved Michelangelo's masterpiece. But this furtive inversion proved costly, for after making this *Black David*, my intense involvement in photography—born in childhood with making box cameras, taking pictures of insects, making telescopes, taking pictures of the heavens, and publishing all these with commentary and explanation in a mimeographed magazine sold to parents and neighbors—all this enthusiasm *died*.

It was a bit of lore from my childhood that my great, great grandfather, Nathaniel Howard Talbot, was not only a commanding officer in the Union Army during the Civil War, but also a photographer and related to, as my mother told me, "the man who invented the camera." The former story proved true enough, as I won a four-year college scholarship from the Ladies Auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic. I've never questioned the second tale, this possible relation to "the man who invented the camera." Oh, I know that William Henry Fox Talbot did not invent the camera. I also know that I've repeated to others, as I do now, this mythology from my childhood without the least bit of evidence for its truth

—except for those mysterious photographs in my possession of the Indian tribes of New Mexico so obviously taken more than a century ago. The truth is, I've not wanted to lose this piece of my childhood. I've had the fantasy that, cocoonlike, it carries my future connection to photography. So I've left it unexplored, accepting Freud's dictum that what a child *believes* is more crucial than raw facts; it is this *personal* mythology that becomes the chief architect of one's interior reality and one's relation to and desire for the world.

I could have become a photographer. Instead, I became a psychologist and then a psychoanalyst in the Jungian tradition. The startling invitation to write an essay for Jeff Jacobson's *My Fellow Americans* . . . , and the unsettling experiences with his excruciating photographs, reawakened my desire for photography and for my great, great grandfather. And while Jacobson's photographs have returned my passion for the photographic arts to me, I realize with a certain sadness that I am no photographer and never will be. As I look at *My Fellow Americans* . . . , that paralyzing *viewer's* envy I felt at *David's* feet eats at me again.

Still, whatever muse informs this most democratic of arts has put the camera in my hand again and, with no more skill than enthusiasm, allows me to capture the world. When I first saw Kodak's new disposable camera, I raged at this display of consumer waste, vowing never to buy one. But as I looked and looked at Jacobson's photographs, my eye hunger increased and began devouring such things as photo books and magazines. My eye grabbed a piece by Alfred Blaker in which he told of keeping these disposables and learning to *reuse* them. So, vow broken, I bought one—a Kodak "Stretch"—and rushed home to my pond to take a bunch of pictures, just so I could reuse this disposable, to revel in revenge. As I framed the first image of the rock wall I had built on the lip of my pond, about to trip the shutter, into the viewfinder *came* a heron, landing in the center of my picture! The shutter clicked with the heron's wings spread wide, stretched just like my film. I was astonished at this image, stunned at this amazing intrusion on my intention. My reawakened fascination had become animated indeed!

Spontaneously, I imagined the heron *wanted* to be in my photograph. That's crazy. But I couldn't deny a rising tide of feeling in response to this curious event that here was not just a "lucky accident," and certainly not my waiting for the "decisive moment," but something of the world responding *autonomously*, confirming in some strange, mysteriously synchronous way my reawakened photographic desire so obviously engendered by *My Fellow Americans* . . . . I hurriedly finished the roll and rushed down to the instant photo place so I could have my pictures in an hour. "Speed and instant aren't so bad after all," I said to myself. Later, I was told that the stretch film had to be sent to a special place for processing and it would be three to four *weeks* before I would have my pictures. No speed, no instant after all. Crestfallen and deflated, enthusiasm waning, I sensed gradually that in this series of events, if I could plumb them sufficiently, I might find the key to what *wanted* to be said in writing about *My Fellow Americans* . . . .

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But why should a psychologist be asked to write about a photographer's art? There is a well-entrenched tradition for other photographers to take on this responsibility or for writers and poets to do so. Recall Jack Kerouac's introduction to Robert Frank's *The Americans*, or Carl Sandburg's introduction to *The Family of Man*, or James Agee's more elaborate work in Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. As far as I can tell, there is no precedent for a psychologist to carry out this task. Why all these words from an analyst after looking at photographs? This unfamiliar responsibility has troubled me deeply. Am I to write through my professional lens and report on what is seen through the analyst's eye? Am I to treat these photographs as if they were my patient, to develop a therapy for the pathology of images? Am I to psychoanalyze Jeff Jacobson based on these images, as if, like dreams, they were a subjective confession of his personal demons, a shadow projection on the world of his own pathologies and prejudices, a catharsis of his pain? Am I to explain his art by interpreting the revelations of personal history he makes in his introduction? Am I to be therapist and soften the sense of menace

in these images? Are these the *appropriate* ways to help the viewer in witnessing *My Fellow Americans* . . . ? Are these my tasks?

If so, I refuse them. Not because I could not do so. I have learned well how to do these things. But ever since I saw Orozco's mural on the wall in Dartmouth Library—that image of the “gods of the modern world” in academic costume, with the background showing the world in flames and the foreground showing stillborn knowledge being delivered from a skeleton lying upon a bed of books — “dead things giving birth to dead things”—I have lost all heart to treat art with the tools of my trade. Better that such births be aborted early. I yearn for something *else*, some more fruitful conception.

To step outside the refuge of professional objectivity, to yield to this voice of yearning, exposes an embarrassing cacophony which simultaneously rouses shrouds of timidity and promptings to break out in loud shouting. It's the familiar state of the patient on the couch. Is this the key to discussing *My Fellow Americans* . . . ? To abandon explanation and interpretation. To couch myself, associating freely, letting go of ego. To open myself to these photographs as . . . *other*. To *tell* what happens there. If so, I find courage in Havelock Ellis' hint that this *is* the artist's method, whereby *reason and will are left aside; you trust to “an influx” and the faculties of mind are directed to ends they know not of*. Like a nervous, untrusting patient, there are initial resistances, rather like prejudices. These must be spoken first, clearing the way.

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Art, probably earlier than any other human activity—excepting dreaming—reveals something of the nature of a new spirit of the time. Any period is characterized by a peculiar mixture of new spirits, aging spirits, ghostly spirits. One senses a new spirit loose in the world today. In the world of art it has been named “postmodern” because its intention and manifestation—most spectacularly the dissolution of *all* borders—contrasts so sharply with the highly bordered spirit of purity (no contamination by tradition, authority, or other influences) that was the virginal (sufficient unto itself) ideal of

modernism. But clearly, all human activity, not just art, is subject now to the pervading wave of the postmodern impulse. Except in <sup>m</sup> *pre* *m* *esis*, this impulse is not the result of some conscious activity subject to willful decision, nor originated by powerful critics, or politicians, or the dynamics of money. Like all dramatic shifts in human consciousness, it arises from a deeper source.

What springs forth in images expressing something not yet known to the conscious mind, always carries something of the *future*. Perhaps the primary significance of a work of art—as well as of a dream—is what it engenders in response, what is enacted in return. This is why psychologizing art in terms of personal biography necessarily must fail. When psychology sees only through eyes of the past, and seeks out only the personal history, it impoverishes itself, does not open itself to the current of life emanating from the objective psyche. What is psychology's future?

Is it possible that *changes* in categories of psychological interpretation and therapy are being hinted at even now by what is showing itself in art? Can a work of art embody or engender a deeper revelation of the human psyche than psychology itself? Can psychology make itself vulnerable to the erotic spirit, in the sense imagined by H.G. Baynes: *The essential character of Eros is the divine (i.e., creative) shaft which leaps across the guarded frontier of the subject in order to reach the object. The creative shaft is the impregnating phallus, the impressive, fertilizing image, the creative word, the idea which gets home, the divine leap by which the individual subject is able to transcend his own subjectivity and take effective part in the work of creation. This is Eros, the god which bringeth twain together in the service of life. Eros is a generative spirit crossing all borders, and when one welcomes this, opens oneself to it, as the artist does, one will take “effective part in the work of creation.” Thus does eros give birth to the future.*

Interpretation so often yields nothing except the momentary relief of frustration—that frustration of “not knowing” what a work of art or a dream means. So often nothing is born of interpretation except a stultifying dependency upon it. The god of interpretation is not Eros.

We use this word 'interpretation' so quickly; we are carried along by an illusion of understanding. Paul Valéry said, "... we understand ourselves thanks only to the *speed of our passages past words*." Valéry's idea applies as well to dreams, to images, to photographs. This suggests that slowing down, taking time, dwelling, with word or image provides the fertile ground upon which to be affected by the *other*. Silencing the ego's demands for interpretation, understanding, and meaning, coupled with slowing down, taking time, dwelling with: these are the crucial elements, all the introduction one needs, to prepare oneself for the eros of viewing when face to face with a word, an image, a dream, a photograph.

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Photography began when the image of light could be held, held still, held indefinitely, remembered. *Photography is an art of exterior memory*. The camera as memory machine allows us to document and record events in the natural history of the world, in reality, the outer aspects of our experience. The camera remembers things we do not know because it can see things we cannot or did not see. But seen or not, sought or not, the camera remembers everything that touches that place of memory, that place we call *emulsion*—a technical photographic term, defined in the dictionary as "a light-sensitive coating, usually of silver halide salts in a thin gelatin layer." We clearly understand. But this understanding does not invite reverie, is not a stimulus to imagination, creates no desire to stop, to take time, to dwell with this word. Is there any eros in this word? How can we find the erotics of this word, its *intimacy*? One way is to unveil it, undress it, open the word's *memory* to view, find out what images lie hidden beneath the shell of this word. We do this by being curious about, caring for, attending to the word's origin, its ancestors, its story. To do this we must not just use the word. This habit leads to the abuse of the word. Instead, we must stop and listen for the word's history to echo to us. In this we become vulnerable to the word, led by the word. There is eros in that.

When we learn that the parent of emulsion is *melge*, meaning "to milk," a reverie begins, resonating with sensibilities we did not have before. Emulsion is photography's milk-place, the source of nourishment, the mother-layer within the camera darkness. What is born there requiring milk? Does light suckle on silver there? This milky layer, this feminine film, is where light and silver dwell. They have intercourse there. The camera is not all male after all ("load," "aim," "shoot"). Does photography just pleasure itself there indiscriminately, a kind of prostitution where generation is not the aim? Or is something to be born there, nourished there? Or, more darkly, one cannot help noticing that "to milk" has come to mean "to exploit" and "to get money out of" and aren't these the characteristics of photography that so aroused Sontag's ire? When we photograph we milk reality for its truth. The photograph by its very nature is tied umbilically to *out there*—the real world of light—a cord that cannot be cut without losing itself and its privilege among the arts. Perhaps photography has the task of keeping "out there" before our eyes, to counteract in some crucial way our perdurable tendency to blind ourselves to what needs to be seen. Exploitation is not the only way to imagine what takes place there. Spending time with the words of photography, seeking out their etymology ("truth speaking"), letting the images released penetrate and evoke, is one way to respond to the impoverished language of photography.

Psychoanalysis, like photography, also began with memory, in the recovery of memories forgotten through the agencies of repression. *Psychology is an art of internal memory*. Psychology too needed to "fix" the image, to keep it in mind, to keep it in the emulsion of awareness. Analysts seized upon the dream, if it could be remembered, as the royal road to the unconscious, in much the same way as photographers seized upon the camera as the "royal road to reality." The dream, embodying an interior world, presents itself to the conscious mind in much the same way a photograph presents an embodied external world. There is a curious symmetry between dream and photographs, but these similarities have yet to be essayed fully. Like the photograph, the dream is a kind of frozen moment, and almost

always is treated as if it is to be understood only by reference to the past.

Barthes says that *whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe*. There is no doubt that death lurks in every photograph, and it is this flight from death, so prominent in our time, that causes our fascination with and preference for images that *move*. In contrast, the *stillness* of the photographic image, its *silence*, its *suspension*, all contribute to an awareness of finality. We must, however, consider this: The moment frozen and preserved in the photographic image points as well to the *future*. The moment captured on film was, always is, and ever will be *mother* to what followed. More than this: Every photograph is a progenitor, always birthing a future. Its eros lies there. In what comes next. But where is this *next*?

It has been argued that photographs do not tell a story, do not narrate. Because of this, *next* is frequently the next image, the next photographs, the flight from image to image. It is unimportant that photographs fail to narrate. They do not. But there is a more critical *next* that is frequently unattended. It is the spontaneous manifestations of the psyche. The psyche does respond to the image narratively, particularly if this spontaneity is not blocked or constrained or bordered by the ego's too ready need for interpretation. Even so, ego understanding is only one narrative among many, and more inclined toward repetition and habit than is the *spontaneous* response of the psyche to the *shock* of a photograph. It may be important that the photograph catch hold of a truth, or represent a truth. But true as well, and perhaps more interesting, is the question of what lies in the narrative response of the spontaneous psyche.

Go back and view the photographs in *My Fellow Americans* . . . , forget about meaning, forget about Jacobson's intentions, forget about art. Let the image seep into you. Look at the first picture. Look for an hour. Resist turning the page. Resist movement. Stay there. Look deeply. Let the image in. All of it. See what rises up in you. What does the image want you to do? Will you do it? What fantasies come? Is this a mirror? Don't just preen or shiver with recognition: step

*through* it, like Alice. Is this a window? Climb in, or climb out. Keep going. Fantasies are brewing; memories are coming. The image is alive in you now, generating, weaving stories. Tell the story out loud. Never mind if no one's there. Watch what you dream tonight.

To set aside the demand for interpretation, to slow down, to take time to dwell with the image—in photograph, in dream—to suffer the hunger for instant resolution to the problem of meaning, to quiet the noisy ego, to open oneself to the spontaneity of the psyche, to let eros as *other* in. These are some of the sensibilities that seem to me essential for the ritual of viewing a dream or a photograph.

I find Barthes' distinction between *studium*—as the result of the photographer's conscious intention—and *punctum*—as that element in the photograph which triggers an entailing narrative that catches him up in *its* spin, *its* weaving, to be very helpful. This is not something that results from interpretation of the photograph; it results from some element in the photograph breaking through the conscious borders and uniting with something in the realm beyond one's consciousness. This is eros, and, as Baynes said, it leads to an effective participation in the work of creation. A story is born. Stories must be told. So part of the work of creation, part of the work that helps to bring the future in, is to tell the stories induced in us. It is this telling of stories engendered by art and dream that becomes the erotic basis for enactment in the world, the continuing work for creation.

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The silent solitude of the still image sets loose a roaring cascade! The photograph is *psychoactive*. I forget to inquire after its meaning. I fail to notice the caption. I seem not to care where this piece of reality took place, for now it's taking place in me. Some critic, or my analyst, shouts, "Narcissism! Why muck about in your own images? What has that to do with the photographer's intentions, what he's created, the meaning of his art?" For a moment, I'm caught by this, try to hold back the rush of images and feelings, make a dike; but hands are useless against a wave. There goes an image of that book

I'll write on the symmetry of the photograph and dream (will I do it?) and in the middle of my resolve lands that heron again, wings wide, looking at me intently. Is he (or is he she?) wondering if I get the hint? I look at Jeff's photograph of the old couple holding a photograph; I'll be in that scene, holding photographs, too, not too long from now. That doesn't disturb me; I look forward to then.

What disturbs me is that *rope*, that's what punctures me. My eyes are fascinated by that rope hanging down from the tree ("remnant of a hanging rope," some voices chorus), like the hearing aid dangling from the old man's ear. Is the tree hard of hearing? Is it my own failure to hear, projected there on that rope? Will I be hung there on a tree hard of hearing? Or is that the first line of a poem I'll never write, like lots of poems never written, just like Jack Kerouac's imagined poet writing from the pictures of Robert Frank's *The Americans*, the poet still trapped there in Jack's imagination, more tightly imprisoned than before. Wait! There's a door, it's opening, poets are streaming out, like Michelangelo's strugglers coming out of stone. Stop! This is crazy. Quick, look at another picture.

In my reverie, *My Fellow Americans* . . . becomes a dream, the impossible dream, an open letter to us from a *truth-telling* president. A letter without words, because words have become as empty and untrue as our cherished forms and rituals. Instead, he opens the masks that cover our last sanctuary—everyday life—invites us to peer in, lets the high horror see us directly, lets us stare back though we have become transfixed, paralyzed, not knowing what to do. Everyone grasps for the black and white of certainty, but this reach is obliterated continually by a carnival of color, where nothing can be seen as it was meant to be seen, seen instead, now, how it *must* be seen: the smiling mask unveiled revealing what no one dare say. I'm witness to a president filled with daring showing his people the true sickness of soul pervading the land, showing his people in whose servitude they are employed, showing his people that he and they still lust after *Moby Dick*, while the soulfood for a whole nation has become but a single dead pigeon. I'm amazed to hear our president say that as a people we are shrinking, as the gods we pursue, dressed brightly as colored

tins, grow larger and larger. He asks us to question their godly status. Amazing! Our president confesses that his superman which we believed in is mask only, tomorrow it comes off; no more poses, no more pretend. But tonight he is preoccupied, looking at her . . . I see him show the curtain's come down, the play's over, the bench sags. He cannot promise if America will hold. In my vision I see millions of us with hands to our ears, hands to our eyes, hands to our mouths. One by one this changes. Each now looks with eyes open. We are looking together at *My Fellow Americans* . . . , watching there all the hands, all the eyes. Looking at the mouths of babes. I'm not alone. Others see the menace, too.

"Is there any hope?" we plead. The dream president shows us that salvation lies with the children yet pictures us devouring our children, starving them, sacrificing them to feed the plastic of the cabbage patch. More menace in that. Still, that last image . . . that child . . . the grandfather . . . the love there . . . something now about another grandpa. . . yes—or maybe I'll go Southwest, follow the trail of my great, great grandfather, maybe.

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Wake up America. Take a look. Jeff Jacobson has taken our picture when we weren't looking. In a time when "know thyself" has been replaced by "be known by others," we search frantically for our self, for our soul in the eyes of others. Well, here we are, revealed. We're running on empty. Our common ruin.

At first I thought all the red so striking in these photographs might be the blood that photography extracts from reality—fifty million photographs a day—making the image more alive than reality itself. But that's not it. Then I thought it might be the rocket's red glare of our national anthem of self-destruction. But that's not it, either. Then, I dreamed *My Fellow Americans* . . . was a "prayer book." The dream wants us to see all this red as the rubricating consecration of a new common missal—a prayer book for our time. In time?

Russell Lockhart