

*Weston goes on to declare, wisely, that photography is "seeing plus: seeing alone would mean factual recording -- the illustrator of catalogues does that." That inexplicable "plus" is what elevates Weston's work into the realm of eroticism and sensuality that gives it the breath of life. "But after all, Ansel," Weston wrote, "I do not fear logic, I dare to be irrational."*

1. The special claim that photographers make is that they can see. Not simply in a literal sense but as Weston implies in a way that translates the imagined or mental image to a reality so that others might enjoy too this special vision. The reviewer claims that this special seeing is inexplicable. In this paper I shall offer some possible explanations as to why special ways of seeing help form images for creative photographers.
2. Seeing the image, before it is made, involves understanding a complex pattern of perceptual skills and implies an advanced stage of mastery of the medium – its technical data - base, its technology and the array of processes available.
3. Seeing assumes such mastery since "seeing plus" means that the inspiration for the image comes from the photographer and not its techniques, processes or technological tools. In other words, seeing means I want to say such and such and not, "well, now that I have Photoshop CS3 or a Leica what-you-may-call it I shall create an image of something..."
4. Seeing precedes the technique and the technology. Seeing comes from within. It is purposeful even though its initial moments might well be based on reflection, introspection, analysis or related intellectual responses to some form of sensory stimulation. Ultimately, whatever the source of stimulation it takes the form we know it as imagination. Imaginative acts belong closely to those behaviours we associate with childhood and the world of make believe. We can be child like without being childish.
5. Seeing for the photographic artist is quite different to that of the commercial photographer who is expected to make images to suit client expectations. Thus, the illustrative photographer usually is required to create an image that is as accurate, as possible, representation of the product. After all, the image is going to be used to promote sales and so it is reasonable that it might resemble closely that which is intended for the market. Similarly, the scientific and forensic photographer must use scientific rationale and methodologies for their work, as accuracy of reproduction is a critical expectation. Thus, their task is to "see" what are the impediments to accurate depiction and make decisions accordingly. So technical themes such as capture, the nature of light, lens choice, use of perspective, scale, aesthetics all interplay to inform the process. At its conclusion the degree of 'seeing" by the photographer whilst present to guide and shape the outcome is constrained by the demands and expectations to produce an image that is literal - a document or record.
6. Such constraints do not apply to the world of photographic art where camera club photography should be located. The literal and documentary character of the scientific and technical photographer, the architectural and industrial or commercial photographer can be subverted or replaced by a freer and more expressive approach emphasising divergence and creativity of interpretations. One has to ask then why is it that the photography of the camera club movement is dominated by a pervasive emphasis upon "literal" subject matter and its rendition.

Exhibitions and club competitions are overwhelmingly centred on accurate depictions of landscape, people, places, exotic environments and cultures, natural and urban settings. All are carefully made and presented in ways that document or record photographs that closely resemble family records, holiday snaps and documentary experiences. These images are literal - that is, they simply show what the camera saw...they are based on "camera seeing" not "imagined seeing" where the latter is enhanced by imaginative and expressive input from the "mind's eye" of the photographer.

7. Literal images are not all that demanding of the photographer or the viewer. Frequently, little can be said about them. They require little deconstruction by audience other than to ask, "Where was that?", "How did you get there?" "Who went with you?" "Did you enjoy your time away?" and, the ultimate insult, "What camera did you use?" (I usually answer this by saying, "my own camera"). Non-literal images are expressive, creative as they are based on not a "photo copy" of the world or subject matter but rather a version of the reality that is formed, shaped, structured and derived from the imagined world of the photographer. The seeing photographer works from the abstract to the concrete and not from the concrete to concrete!
8. Literal images rarely require the audience to ask, "What is this about?", "What is being said?", "What triggered this image to be made?" These questions are essentially redundant as the image is simply a record, a document, a literal statement requiring no interpretation and no need for speculation. After all, it is just another Opera House, sand dune, sweeping panorama of rocks or yet another sunset with silhouette on the thirds. Some images are saved by their exoticism in as much as the author has travelled to the far flung reaches of the world and found subject matter that is "new" and so they can record this for friends back home so they in turn and can journey forth. These images have some documentary value in they do extend one's vision of the world and its cultures and so echo the wonderfully evocative work of the nineteenth century European traveller and early National Geographic workers whose mission it was to go forth and "capture" by various means including the camera, new lands, climes, cultures and wealth! Images from far-flung parts of the world are no serious substitute for images from the far-flung corners of one's mind. The latter is the birthplace of seeing the image and it is little used.
9. When a photographer stumbles across this rich vein of image stimulation, their work is transformed. They are no longer blind. They are doing what Weston calls, "seeing plus" and what the Taoists 2,300 years ago called, "seeing beyond seeing".
10. Why is there so much blindness in camera club photography? The answer is simple. There are people within these organizations that will blind you. They do so unwittingly but nevertheless it happens and you must prevent this if ever you are going to see images - YOUR images.
11. In the Workshop, you will hear more about the people that blind and what you might do to avoid them.
12. Seeing in photography means visualising things NOT as they are but as they will appear in picture form. The process has been encapsulated in notions such as pre-visualisation. In essence, you can, with experience and hard work develop the capacity to anticipate how an image will appear.
13. Seeing depends on imagination-your mind's eye. This is a **creative** process-hence we call it an art. Fundamentally, seeing is determining what can be made of a "real" subject as it goes through the photographic processes of reduction, or simplification and/or abstraction to ultimately end in a pictorial form.

14. Seeing in photography means using one's imagination to anticipate how a real world subject can be depicted using the "language" of photography. There is an important distinction here. We are concerned with the language of photography and not its tools or techniques. The latter are merely devices employed to convey our imagination-our thoughts. The tools are useless unless we have something to say with them. The key photo language and imagery approaches include use of:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Abstraction</li><li>• Reduction</li><li>• Simplification</li><li>• Simulation</li><li>• Implication</li><li>• Metaphor</li><li>• Trope</li><li>• Symbolism</li><li>• Dissonance</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emotion</li><li>• Confrontation</li><li>• Narrative</li><li>• Discordance</li><li>• Text</li><li>• Ambiguity</li><li>• Omission</li><li>• Reference</li><li>• Atmosphere</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allusion</li><li>• Sensation</li><li>• Association</li><li>• Proximity</li><li>• Similarity</li><li>• Space</li><li>• Colour</li><li>• Contour</li><li>• Illusion</li></ul> |
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There are many more imagery devices (cf. Zakia, R.D, Perception and Imaging, Focal Press, 1997)

15. The relationship between imagination and reality is vexatious. It has dominated discourse in areas of philosophy, religion, science and the creative and expressive arts.

The eye that is penetrating sees clearly  
the ear that is penetrating hears clearly,  
the nose that is  
penetrating distinguishes odours,  
the mouth that is penetrating  
distinguishes flavours, the mind that is  
penetrating has understanding  
and the understanding that is  
penetrating has virtue  
-Chunag-Tzu

16. The Tao speak of the unliberated mind with its constricted awareness because our minds are taught to be discriminating or have little understanding. They pursue a different way of knowing where greater understanding comes from awareness that has no limits, no boundaries, no externally imposed expectations.

17. The art of seeing is the art of living

18. Photography is essentially a means of communication of conveying what we "see" and what we want to say. It is not what the tools are or the techniques used. They are a means to an end.

19. Camera clubs often have audiences when looking at images ask:

- What film did you use?
- What was the lens?
- What filter did you use?

20. Rarely do you hear:

- I like what you have said.
- What are you saying?
- How did you feel when making this exposure?
- What were your thoughts?
- Did you achieve what you wanted to say?

21. So, if you operate at the level of "little understanding" taking comfort in rules, principles, and paradigms then for you the art of seeing is about manipulation. Most photographs do not conform to the facts, to the reality our constricted vision has been taught to accept. For example: they are two dimensional; monochromatic; inaccurate or false colours; have frozen movements, and so on. Again, every photograph that did not succeed in conveying that which the photographer intended is to some extent also false. Paradoxically, every photograph in one sense is also truthful and authentic. It will render an authentic rendition of everything visible whether it is dull, weak, graphic, complex, or confusing. The photograph however may not always record the intangible quality of neither a subject nor its emotional content. This requires the intervention of the photographer.
22. Once we accept that a camera can and does lie-that it is a tool with limitations- we are able to get beyond striving for "the natural" for the "documentary" for the "record" and to make more effective pictures. We can turn the way a camera sees, distorts, selects, records and turn this into a positive experience making images that are arresting and reliant on what we want the camera to say rather than the reverse. The camera will still tell lies, but the resulting images are our lies!

### SEEING THE IMAGE AND ITS EVALUATION

Seeing the image means that you are also prepared to examine your work critically once you "believe" it is created and ready for viewing. Your self-appraisal is an important part of the 'seeing process". Here are the criteria I recommend for any serious appraisal of the success of your seeing either as the maker of an image or, better still as a sophisticated audience for the examination of images made by others.

Successful photographs will address and resolve the following and you will "see" these attributes accordingly.

**Ideation:** involves the idea and or influence that informed the creation of the photograph. This concept, at its core, is concerned with original thought, with the use of an imaginative way of seeing the subject that is neither contrived nor an artifice.

**Creativity:** the test here is whether the interpretation made by the photographer is a new and an original statement. Are we seeing something that is distinctive because it offers a fresh, insightful depiction? Is the image "familiar"? Is the image fresh, vital, and demands the viewer's attention.

**Aesthetics:** here we are concerned with the visual properties of the image established by a use of compositional principles and range of design elements. The aesthetics of an image are used to convey the idea, the interpretation. They are, with "light", the building blocks of creativity.

**Image quality:** refers to the technical competency of the image's creation. Thus, we assess whether matters of sharpness, tonal control, colour purity and so re-enforce the purpose of the image.

**Presentation:** this is the effectiveness of the craft used to enhance the display of the image. Matters of mounting, matting, spotting, labelling, nomenclature, spacing, panel relationships are assessed under this category.

**Communication:** do we see, feel, "hear" or relate to what we are viewing? Does the image convey a narrative, a symbol, a mood, an idea, a message, or a fact? Is our photograph poetry or is it prose? Is it a parody, a metaphor, an analogy? Does it convey something that has meaning for us, that we can relate to, enjoy, condemn or does it simply convey a level of dissonance-perplexity? Does the image leave us indifferent or bored?

**Evocation:** refers not simply to eliciting a response from the viewer but also the scope and nature of that response. Does the image spark debate, some incisive questioning, a level of provocation, and a spark of discontent, anger, humour, despair or pleasure? That is, do we have some emotional engagement with the image, its content, and its message? If not, why?

**Image effectiveness:** here we are concerned with the relationship between the idea(s) and the techniques used to convey or communicate. So matters of internal consistency between the art, the science and the craft of photography are addressed.

**Influences:** can we see in the image evidence of influences drawn from our visual heritage. These influences when present must be respectful of the traditions and conventions of photography but never at the expense of innovation. In short, we have an image that is a true photograph in that it works within traditions, precepts, principles we know to be 'photographic'. The ultimate goal is to blend convention and tradition with innovation, experimentation and creative expression.

**Enhancement:** does the image present in a form or style that suggests some features remain unresolved or incomplete? Is there scope for change, for improvement, for modification, advancement or growth? Images like many other art forms evolve. One's initial attempts are rarely complete or final. Most photographs can be finessed and the degree to which an image looks "right" signals whether some additional treatment is warranted.

**Application:** here we are looking for evidence of a work ethic, some commitment to excellence, some indication as to the personal attributes of the photographer. Issues of substance, of style, a personal philosophy might be relevant. Certainly, we seek evidence in what we see that the photographer's self is invested in the image. The photograph will be biographical in some way that is manifestly clear to the viewer. Effective seeing is about self-revelation.

**Autonomy:** refers to two intersecting notions. Firstly, does the image convey a sense that it can stand alone? That it does not require elaboration, explanation, some level of supplementation or additional input in order to communicate. Secondly, has the image reached a level of maturity that merits its dissemination? That it can be published, displayed, exhibited and or reproduced and no matter the context remains whole, complete, and intact.

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