

March 31, 1975

Dear Laura Gilpin,

Several weeks have passed since our unanticipated and spontaneous meeting arranged by Anne Noggle. I have described my visit to your home, your personal warmth, grace and quiet authority warmly to close friends. So you see, I treasure my memory of our brief visit. I remember with pleasure the thoughtfulness with which you looked at my prints and I continue to covet your beautiful platinum print of the three women musicians.

I wish you a productive year filled with fine new photographic prints and much warm recognition for your exhibition filled with years of beautiful prints.

Jacqueline Thurston

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PRESTIDIGITATION, EYESIGHT AND HINDSIGHT

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THESIS

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The uncommon grace of it
the bulk and the throb
Flashing in light
we coat the sky with streamers
unrolling vapors of graffiti
in mock insolence.

I watch the high
playful
arc of sunlight
dance
across the canopy of my mind
I sense that there is something
to be known.

We fly search patterns
it is there
but
unfound
perhaps it fell out of my pocket
an amulet
to be looked at
later.

There is movement
I look up at myself
under the helmet
over the mask
through the goggles
Look at me
I say
Look at me
Riding through eternity.

The photograph has become, for me, the visual equivalent of poetry. During those moments of poetic creativity I still feel a state of grace when word-formed pictures tumble out of my mind's eye and sing in my ears, while I stand for one slight moment at the pivot-center of harmony with all that I don't know but comprehend anyway. It would be unnatural to separate the poetry from the photograph within myself, and so it is that a poem is the introduction to my credo.

Bouquets and influences.

I am indebted to the poet, Robert Creeley, for helping me realize that earthshaking events, although they appear to be the sum total of man's nature, don't have the significance or the reality inherent in the multitude of seemingly insignificant events taking place everywhere, all the time.

I am indebted to the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who so overwhelmed me with his control of form that I actually could not photograph for days after seeing his retrospective show. His structuring of content in the midst of chaos altered the way in which I approach a picture. That is when I changed from a picture-taker to a picture-maker.

I am indebted to the photographer and teacher, Van Deren Coke, my critic and taskmaster, for helping me see what I could not see for myself in my own photographs. He showed me how to see, not what to see. Through him I came to realize that there is,

in visual infancy, a vast gulf between what we think we see and what is actually there. The mind's eye is a fine poetic perch, but there is a lens/eye/mind discipline to be learned if you are to be more than a snapshot artist.

I owe a passing kiss to photographic historian and curator Peter Bunnell for widening my horizons with an overall view of my work and for his incisive criticism.

That I have had so few real influences in photography I attribute to the fact that I leapt full-grown into the field with a full bag of experiences and a well developed philosophy. What did influence me was mainly visual.

Hindsights.

Sophocles once said: "One must wait till evening to see how splendid the day has been." We can't see clearly where we are heading but only where we have been. Direction in one's work comes mainly from hindsight and intuition. Direction implies movement and progression as a continuum. The search never ends for ways to articulate visually one's own visceral and intellectual identity in terms of self-expression.

There can be no rigid framework of photographic means. The fulfillment of visual creativity is the only criterion. It should transcend all the artificial boundries of method, medium and technique. The image-maker must exercise a conscious control over these

means in order that they may serve the image rather than compete with it. Further, he must avoid the guru role in which ritual takes precedent over result.

After the fact, the photographer assumes the role of the prestidigitator, the catalyst. The photograph becomes the protagonist. It is self-assertive and independent. Other people give it other lives. It should no longer need the photographer. Pigeons without wings cannot carry messages. So each creation is a spasm of giving, of recognition, of letting go.

Concerns.

I am not a researcher or an objective documentarian. I relate to people, I empathize. I have social concerns. Part of these concerns have to do with the technological and sociological subversion of our culture.

I would like to dust off the image of middle-class America--particularly that segment encompassing the genteel, turn-of-the-century-born ladies whose own sub-culture is now a way of life divorced from the mainstream of our chaotic society.

I am concerned with the fabric of our individual lives, especially the wrap-around environment that is often the only stable reality in a mobile and restless world. Environment is definitive. It reflects an individual, a society, an era. Environment is

identification. We constantly refer to environment in such commonplace remarks as "I can't place him" and "I feel out of place." Nomadic and displaced people carry bits and scraps of their home places with them for their own sense of security and identity. I recall one of Danny Lyon's prison photographs of a young man behind cell bars with a pitiful remnant of identity in the form of a few snapshots and mementoes that gave real meaning to the grim quality of his existence.

I am concerned with the sometimes surreal quality of certain moments, captured and isolated from their normal time or space sequence, creating strange new relationships and contexts. It is the clarity of the image coupled with the unexplained and unknowable reality that becomes the substance of a new and different reality.

I am concerned with the concept of simultaneity and the myriad possibilities in juxtaposing diverse and dissociated happenings related only by time. The truth of life is that we are making love in one room while we are dying in the next. We are sitting in the tub while a few feet away we are bidding three no-trump. These events, individual and complete in themselves, become visually, psychologically, and even philosophically related within a space correlation, creating another way of seeing, conceptually complex and multilayered. Normally, we cut a swath through life uniquely our own, extremely private in

its self-containment. When a number of these mundane happenings are juxtaposed, the significance of the whole becomes a sort of song of life.

I sense images all about me. I try to photograph those images that I relate to, that I am comfortable with. My photographs have, for the most part, to do with people. I don't mind them being aware of the camera and the photographer. Rather I care about their attitude toward us, and I try to exert an amount of control over their reaction to our presence.

The gesture, the stance, the facial expression are of paramount importance to the meaning of the photograph. Instinctive pantomime is present in everyone. It is the keystone of basic human expression. This lexicon of non-vocal communication presents the photographer with a means totally visual, intuitively universal.

When I photograph, I am not resolving a conflict nor conducting an inquiry. I am not searching for reality but for meaning. Everything that I am about is also that which I am not about. I am about becoming wise-eyed. I am about heightened sensitivity and comprehension. To take a photograph is an Ode to the Machine; to make a photograph implies a commitment by the photographer to create something uniquely his own--to show through his eyes what he wants to be seen. This is what I am about.

Addenda

The Machine.

My choice of camera has been affected by my concerns. The compatibility of one's vision with a particular format ultimately brings to fruition that vision that has been affected by my concerns. First a camera is a mechanical extension of the arm, then an extension of the eye and mind.

I like the thirty-five millimeter camera because it can be used quickly and unobtrusively and readily accommodates wide-angle lenses. I have gradually moved from normal to shorter than normal focal length lenses. I do not want distortion as an intruder in my imagery. I limit myself to a twenty millimeter lens and try to use it in such a manner that its wide-angle characteristics are least noticeable. However, I often feel visually repressed by the restricted format of the length of the frame of thirty-five millimeter film. I have an over-developed peripheral vision due to the self-preservation syndrome acquired during five thousand hours of flight time.

A year ago I discovered the Panon Widelux camera. Its one hundred and forty degree coverage allows me to photograph people/environments as I see them. It allows me to reveal relationships of complex imagery as they are experienced. The length of time the shutter is open is important to me when using the Panon. I make most photographs at one

fifteenth of a second. As the lens sweeps my eye pivots, watching what is taking place before me. I like to sense the flux of the happenings as they occur.

I feel free to move about while the photograph is being made. This is the only distortion I accept. It is a wholly time/space distortion and it is completely natural when one is physically moving through time and space.

I do not want the print to recall the camera or to become limited by a stylistic manner. I want the image to stand free on its own terms.