

JUDGES MANUAL



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
COUNCIL OF CAMERA CLUBS
PROMOTING PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPRESSION AND EDUCATION

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The following website contains other information for your perusal.
<http://www.studiolo.org/Photography/Judging/Judging01.htm>

LOOKING FOR PROPERLY TITLED IMAGES

by ELEANOR WEBSTER

A good title can add a great deal to the viewing of an image. With Pictorial Projected Images, and Color and Monochrome Prints the title may not be as important as it is for the Special Divisions: Nature, Journalism, Travel and Creative.

NATURE

In the Nature Division a maker should present a title, which adds to the story shown in the image. The use of "cutesy" titles, such as "Mommy Duck with Babies Looking for Dinner" is not a good Nature title. Much better would be "Female Mallard Duck with Ducklings Search for Food". The maker should always include where the image was taken and although not required, it would be informative for the maker to have included the scientific name as well.

JOURNALISM & TRAVEL

In both Journalism and Travel the maker should, as in nature, give a title, which adds to the story in the image. In Journalism it is important for the maker to have included the name of the event and/or place where it was taken. In Travel the maker must not assume the viewer knows where the Coliseum, Big Ben or Taj Mahal are and therefore should always state the place and country where the image was taken.

CREATIVE

In the Creative Division the maker should try and be as creative with his/her title as he/she is with the making of the image.

SOME THOUGHTS ON JUDGING

by JO-ANN ORDANO

The judge can make the difference between a camera club meeting that is enjoyable, informative and stimulating and one that is dreary and boring, where people leave with a feeling of having wasted their time. In short, the judge is almost always the deciding factor in whether the evening is a positive or negative experience for the club members. This places a heavy responsibility on the judge. And those unwilling to accept this responsibility should consider carefully whether they want to take up the challenge.

Judging is, if nothing else, challenging. Above all, the judge needs to be articulate, imaginative, knowledgeable and open-minded. It is often very difficult to find something different to say about each slide or print shown during a meeting. Nevertheless, the effort needs to be made. Nothing turns off an audience like repeating the same comments over and over again. The judge needs to have a good vocabulary and know how to speak the Queen's English.

The judge also needs to have something to say. It's not enough to just say "good composition," "good exposure," and "next." Imagination is required to be able to see and express the strong and weak points in a particular image. The judge needs to be tactful but positive and try to find something good to say about each image. Sometimes this requires considerable imagination indeed. All too often, judges pass over an image

with just a word or two. This leaves the photographer feeling shortchanged; that his or her image has not been fairly considered.

Perhaps most important of all, the judge needs to be knowledgeable about photography and about the competition category to be judged. An evening of judging photography in a camera club should be educational and instructive for members. The judge's grasp of photographic technique and subject at hand quickly become apparent. No one can be expected to be an expert in all fields, but some basic knowledge is expected and required.

It's OK to admit to not knowing about a particularly travel locale or subject. In fact, it makes a better impression to admit one's lack of knowledge than to try to bluff one's way through a subject that is unfamiliar. This is a minefield waiting to trap a hapless judge.

Nowhere is this more important than when judging nature competitions, where a basic knowledge of natural history subjects is absolutely essential. The judge needs to know when the subject being portrayed is an appropriate nature subject and needs to know when it is not. Frequently judges do not know the difference between wild plants and animals and domesticated species. Anyone planning to judge nature competitions should make the effort to learn these things, for his or her own edification and to avoid appearing un-

informed to others.

Please do not call animal species of any kind "critters" or "suckers!" This is insulting to the intelligence of the audience and doesn't speak very well of the judge's own I.Q. Photographers take their work seriously so don't poke fun at anyone's images. Humor is fine but don't try to be a comedian. Save that for Open Mike night at the local pub.

On Judging Photographs

By Kipp Baker

Have you ever felt our judging lacked something? Could it be that “my pride and joy” didn’t make it? Or was it, the judge that “didn’t get it”? It seems that there are always those comments and jokes about a judge, but why? This explores that dynamic, seeks insight and salves not only my own wounds, but perhaps others, whose work I respect. Issues like this always seem to surround art, but for me, that’s part of the attraction. Finally, this is a plea for more of our members to contribute to show work (in competitions?) to learn more from our submissions and about ourselves. What we learn from seeing “that which otherwise would not have been seen” is the essence of art’s meaningfulness.

In a recent conversation I was reminded that the arts are ultimately about language, and any language has elements - a vocabulary. That vocabulary has a usage, or its grammar. We do not comprehend, or judge, a poem the same way we do a news article, a novel or a food order from a menu to our waiter. In each of these, the use of language has elements that are quite different one from the other.

The vocabulary of visual art includes concrete elements of line, shape and form. The grammar includes principles of design that refer to pattern, rhythm, balance, texture and value (lights or darks) and color. Expanded discussion of these structures of language (and art) is beyond this scope. However, the demonstration by an artist or photographer using this language goes a long way in determining the value inherent in the poetic phrasing of his work. We see it almost immediately.

Articulation about any values we perceive differs altogether. Too often we slough off the tough debate about how art affects us with the misdirection of “Oh, it’s so subjective”. Comments like this say, with

a verbal slight of hand, “Quick! Look over there!,” and when we do, we lose insight to further the discussion To grow and learn, we must learn how to articulate about the visual. So must our judges.

What makes a good image? Criteria may differ by name, but how we perceive each of these values (listed next,) determine how we – and a judge - assesses quality. The following percentages of valuation are debatable criteria that help determine ultimate worth to the viewer:

1. Craft or Execution (12%) - most often touted or rebuked in qualifying a photograph, and yet it is the least important of all the criteria. “It’s soooo sharp!” (or not), “it’s incredibly detailed”, (or not) or “there’s wonderful tonality!” (or not) are the most common expressions of attention to – or lack of - craft. The lesser talented debate endlessly about what equipment yields the best photographs. They blithely ignore some of the most compelling photographs ever made used no lenses whatsoever; had deliberately increased grain or a very limited tonal scale or have used no traditional camera at all (pinhole cameras, photograms and scans.)

More to the point, pure craft, is no guarantee of a great photograph, but without it, you reduce the chances tremendously that another will view the work with respect. By the same token, when a judge makes no mention of, or misses the craft in execution, it is a certain tip-off to their (lack of) qualifications, no matter what his resumé said.

2. Production Values – (13%) These are the most difficult for an untrained, inexperienced, or non-photographer person to recognize, but they are the bedrock foundation of the best photographs. Often, they are completely ignored, because – unless you

were present at the making of the photograph, they are difficult to understand. Production values are everything that brings the photograph to one's eyes. It conceivably includes all the other criteria, but in this context, it is much more liberal in its consideration of craft, execution, subject matter, and composition due to its inclusion of creative context.

Knowing how to see the production values inherent in a photograph is arguably the single most important factor in judging a photograph. How was the shot made? What effort was put into making the photo? Is it apparent what film and camera combinations were used? Where was the photographer positioned? Where does the light come from? What is the quality of light and how did it get that way? What skill (or deficiency) is revealed by these values and observations? Is it obvious that it was Photoshopped, perhaps to compensate for a shortcoming somewhere else?

The shot of an underbelly of a shark revealing its deathly grin, no matter how otherwise poorly crafted, will certainly get our attention because the production values of execution are so high. Few of us could ever hope to get under the sea and so well equipped as to successfully generate that shot. In this case, the production values are obvious, but other times, production values may be just as gut-wrenching or just as difficult to assemble, but not so obviously dramatic as the full submersion aqueous environment of denizens of the deep. We appreciate that and value the photo for it.

3. Subject Matter / Content (11%) This is the most obvious, most basic, most historical and most over-rated of all the elements of photography. A documentary-style photograph of a beautiful woman, reasonably rendered, will win out over other just as exquisitely executed photographs 9 times out of 10. This is especially true where a male judge is in the position. Primal urges are hard to ignore.

Photographs were invented because they could render – and hold - an object or scene in perfect harmony with its dimension, scale and proportion. This is something artists have desired since the beginnings of cave paintings. All too often, perfection in rendering was touted as art, when nothing was further from the truth. Even today, competitions everywhere have photographs rated higher than they should be, simply on the basis of their subject alone.

It's true.

4. Composition – (13%) Arguably the single most important element of all the criteria, next to production values, composition first tells the story the photographer wants to convey. Composition both leads us in and escorts the eye to its divine conclusion, or, it leaves us waiting for a punch line, standing in blinded befuddlement - hoping somehow to understand the joke. It's no laughing matter when the composition fails. The ancient Greeks knew this, that's why they invented "phi" – or the golden mean. It's all math and physics, guys. Matter, energy - and art – they are neither created nor destroyed, they just change form (composition.)

5. It "speaks to me" – (51%) Last but not least, this is where the art of a photograph loses out or wins you over. Science be damned. All other factors are moot, hence the 51% rating. Like all art, it is, without exception, entirely dependent upon the world experience, consequent visual sophistication (how well do they understand the language?) and tastes of the viewer – not necessarily the artistic craftsmanship of the artist or photographer.

No matter the intent, the craft demonstrated, the production values touted and displayed, nor the subject matter revealed by superb composition – if it "doesn't speak to you," you don't hear, much less see, what the artist is trying to say. Too, if one is unfamiliar with historic and cultural context, no reference, however blatant in the title (mythological, ancient or otherwise,) will improve the image in the eyes of the judge. "Speaking to us" is usually an all-or-nothing proposition. This is especially true as the photograph approaches non-standard or non-traditional techniques. Rare is the photo of the avant-garde that speaks to us all - or the judge-du-jour.

What must a good judge understand about judging open photo competitions? From the NY Times website – the Daily Lesson Plan, (9th –12th graders are leaning these things) 8/6/2004, "The Decisive Moment" (<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20040806friday.html>)

I would suggest the following:

"A good judge:

- Knows the language of the visual - what makes a photograph interesting - considers foreground, back-

ground, subject matter, lighting, framing, etc. (Not just what may be “distracting”)

- Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.
- Understands how visual, spatial, temporal, and functional values of artworks are tempered by culture and history
- Understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture.
- Understands relationships among works of art in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture
- Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.
- Identifies intentions of those creating artworks;
- Understands some of the implications of intention and purpose in particular works of art;
- Understands how various interpretations can be used to understand and evaluate works of visual art”

Art is - at the very least - a reflection of our culture, and it is many things in today's global cultural climate. History sorts out what has staying power or is significant in its contribution to humanity or simply faddish fashion. Artists inadvertently - or by design - become part of movements in the art world. For painters we have a well-documented history. There are recent movements of Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Cubism, Sur-

realism, Abstract Art, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Dada School, Op Art – the list goes on. For photographers, it is less well documented but the list includes all of these and more – (“the New Topographers” is one that comes to mind. Again – the movement is not so well defined - but it is out there, nonetheless.)

In conclusion, if the judge shows a diminished capacity in any of these areas of understanding – then their critiques lose credibility. To render their critiques in a tactful and helpful manner of humility – this boosts credibility immeasurably. To offer vulgar or denegrating comments about our work as a group (as one judge was recently rumored to say,) is the height of arrogance, insecurity and mean-spiritedness. It completely devalues that person's worth as a judge and good-riddance to that opinionated photo bigot.

We can try to find them, seek out these guides - these knowledgeable judges, but at the end of the day we can only hope that those we empower as judges are just as directed and enlightened as we are. If they are not, then we must continue the search, as best we can, on our own. We must continue to seek what makes good photography interesting. Ultimately we realize the worth of our search as photographers or artists in continuing our explorations of the medium, blessed by judges or not. Good shooting to you.

P-Essay
An Analysis of Judging - Part One
by Dr. E.R. Sethna

Introduction

The importance of judging, or what some would call selecting, cannot be denied. Where would club photography and the RPS be without competitions, exhibitions and the granting of distinctions? And yet, judges are almost invariably the object of criticism and denigration and rarely of praise. The subject never fails to arouse great passion and controversy. Knocking of judges by lecturers and writers has become endemic but few have tried to study the subject and improve it.

Talks and articles on judging usually amount to individuals stating how they judge, and then seeking to justify their method as the best, without making any effort to compare their own techniques with those of others and without trying to evolve, from observations, credible principles of judging.

When I took up photography seriously some years ago, the subject of judging fascinated me, as it bore great resemblance to some aspects of my professional work as a psychiatrist in which I dealt with abstract subjects which are difficult to measure or quantify. You cannot, for instance, measure the severity of depression by an instrument as you can with blood pressure. In psychiatry, we have developed sophisticated ways of dealing with such abstract subjects by use of "scales" and statistics, and I wondered whether I could apply my training in psychiatry to the study of judging in photography.

I knew from the outset that as so little established literature existed on the subject, anything other than systematic observations on judging would be inappropriate. I, therefore, set about making my own observations on judging at all levels from club competitions to international exhibitions and salons. I did this intensively over a period of two to three years and have continued making these observations less rigorously ever since. With my training in observing people and how they function and analyzing the underlying reasons and motives for their behavior, it proved to be an interesting and rewarding exercise.

I did not publicize my project, so the judging sessions I attended were in no way affected by my presence. Whenever I got the opportunity, I talked to the judges without giving them any indication of my

study. I can categorically say that we have some excellent judges and I am greatly indebted to them for providing me with the opportunity to analyze their methods, thus helping me to conceptualize better methods of judging.

Those not particularly interested in the subject of judging need not be put off from continuing to read this article, as it could equally be regarded as one on photography as an art form.

I have tried to categorize my observations into those which might be described as negative aspects and those which are positive, and these are considered in turn.

A - Negative Aspects of Judging

I have observed many negative approaches adopted within the judging process but will restrict my comments to four of the most significant ones, which are:

- i) "Overvalued ideas"
- ii) Failure to see the picture as a whole
- iii) Critical rather than constructive approach
- iv) Consideration given to effort put into getting or making the picture. -

i) "Overvalued Idea"

This term, borrowed from psychiatry, describes well a common failing which arises as a consequence of a judge having an idea which he currently wishes to promote as being very important in picture-making. Invariably the idea is valid, but when held with great fervor, the judge becomes so preoccupied with it that he neglects all other aspects of the picture.

The best way to illustrate this failing is to state actual examples observed during the study.

1. A judge was of the opinion that obliques in composition are preferable to verticals and horizontals. He spent most of his time looking for obliques to make his point instead of getting on with the task of judging. This conclusion was justified by the fact that he used the term "oblique" over seventy times in the session.

2. Importance of background was stressed by another judge who then set about spending most of the time judging the background rather than the subject matter.

3. Importance of a full range of tones from pure

black to white in monochrome prints was stressed by a judge. Some prints, which conveyed a great deal of mood or which reflected a misty atmosphere, were rejected for not displaying a full tonal range, even though their feeling would have been destroyed if they had fulfilled this criteria.

4. It was the belief of another judge that most pictures should be light at the top and dark at the bottom, as that is what normally occurs in natural lighting. Any picture bright at the base was marked down, including a stunning picture of a street scene where "contrajour" lighting was reflected by the footpath.

5. More than one judge expressed the view that monochrome is more creative than color as the world is in color and it would require some creativity to translate it into black and white. This implied that color pictures only depict reality and lack creativity. This is obviously not true, as colors can be, and have been, manipulated for creativity. The judges who have held this view were, in fact, those who favored monochrome to color prints, and that showed in their marking and giving of awards.

6. Several judges held the view that unless a picture was "creative" it was not worth entering. In consequence only a small proportion of the total entry was fully assessed and commented upon. One of those judges gave the top award to a very gimmicky picture to the surprise of the club members. When the judge was asked for his reasons, he remarked, "I am sorry if you cannot understand such a picture."

7. A couple of judges felt that pictures portraying movement by use of slow shutter speed, should have something sharp within the picture. However good such pictures were, they were marked down if they did not contain this element. It would be true to say that no such rule is followed by most judges and some famous and well-known pictures of this kind do not satisfy this criteria.

8. Some judges were sticklers for "print quality" by their own individual criteria. In such cases it meant that they gave little attention to the content of the picture or what it communicated, but only judged the picture on the quality of the printing.

9. Some judges emphasized the importance of presentation, particularly the mounts used for prints. At times it appeared that assessment of presentation superseded that of the picture.

10. In a natural history competition a judge ex-

pressed his view that unless a picture is taken in the wild, it is not a natural history picture, although no such rule was stipulated by the club. The judge spent an inordinate amount of time guessing which pictures were taken in the wild and which were not, often reaching the wrong conclusion. This concentration prevented him from properly evaluating the pictures for their own merit.

11. In another natural history competition the judge stated the view that mammals are neglected by natural history photographers. It was obvious from the outset that photographs of mammals would be treated favorably even though some of the pictures of birds, insects and flowers were better, and that is what in fact happened.

12. Early in a session of judging, a judge said that he did not like studio portraits, and he proceeded to pass over several pictures of this type without judging them at all. Many other judges expressed dislike of a particular subject and openly admitted that it was no use putting such pictures in front of them.

As a psychiatrist, I often dislike patients referred to me. It would be inconceivable for me to not deal with them or not treat them as fairly as any other patient. Shouldn't the photographic judge be professional enough to assess categories of pictures of which they are not fond, and at least compare them with other pictures in the same category?

From the above examples it can be seen that however valid an idea is, if it is "overvalued" by a judge, he restricts his judging to a single issue and neglects the rest. Overvalued ideas can also lead to judges' making their own rules which are exclusive to them and applied indiscriminately.

ii) Failure to See the Picture as a Whole

A fundamental principle established by Gestalt theory is that "The whole is not the sum of its parts." This is best explained by a couple of examples. When one appreciates the beauty of a building the architectural qualities it possesses are not there in the individual bricks. It is only when they are put together as a structure that the building acquires aesthetic qualities of its own, which do not exist in its components. Similarly, a tune is not just a sequence of notes. When played together they produce a tune, the quality of which is not present in the individual notes. It is invariably the case that the qualities of the whole transcend the attributes of its components.

The same principle should apply to a photograph. When seen as a whole, as an entity in itself, it has qualities which far transcend the parts of which it is made. Regrettably, in photographic judging realization of this fact is sadly lacking. It appears that judges look upon pictures as if they are just a collection of areas of different tones or colors. From their comments they seem to dissect the picture, closely scrutinizing the different areas rather than responding to the picture as a whole.

So common and widespread is this practice that we have all learned to accept it as an established way of judging. How often one hears judges comment at great length on "a bright area at the edge of the picture," "the position of a tree," or "the placement of the hands in a portrait." These comments would be quite acceptable, valid, and useful to the audience in improving their work, but they must not be the sole criteria of judging.

They can only be secondary comments after the judge has evaluated the picture as a whole. If a picture is an object of art, it is a creation of an artist through which he or she tries to communicate, and that is the main and the primary thing the judge should look for. That can only be done if the judge sees the picture as a whole, as an entity in itself, and not as a collection of areas of different tones and colors.

There is another way of looking at the same issue which gives it a different slant. In all art forms, there is a medium used for production of a piece of art. In painting it is the canvas, paints and brushes, in music it is either the voice or a musical instrument, and in dance it is the use of the body and dress; but they are just the media which the artist uses to express himself. What the artist conveys could be described as the "message." It is obvious that the true value of an artistic work is the "message" and the medium is no more than the vehicle employed to convey the "message."

Photographic judging seems to be too preoccupied with the "medium" as if a photograph is just a technical exercise rather than an artistic expression. One accepts that probably the medium in photography is more technical than say in painting and that premise warrants some consideration, but if the medium is wholly or largely what is judged, with little attention to the artistic expression, then the whole point of judging is missed.

The realization of this fact first came to me when I saw a lady judge at a club competition by placing a strong emphasis on artistic expression in the picture as a whole rather than technical details, precisely as advocated above. When I complimented her on her method she was rather surprised as she had not realized that her method was different from that of the other judges.

Repeatedly, I found that many good judges worked intuitively and they never analyzed their method or developed a system of judging. Unfortunately, intuitive behavior is not transferable or capable of further development by rational thought.

iii) Critical Rather Than

Constructive Approach

The modern view of testing in education is to find out what a candidate knows rather than what he does not. If a similar approach is taken in photographic judging, the test should be to find out what is good in the picture and not what is wrong. Many judges work on the premise that judging means finding out what is wrong and the best picture is the one with the least faults. Comments from such judges can hardly be constructive.

The most important belief in psychology is that people learn, or change their behavior, only when rewarded; and if that be the case, emphasis must be on identifying good features and on constructive advice on how to overcome shortcomings. The carrot will always remain more effective than the stick.

I have been reliably informed that judges in flower arranging all have training before they start judging and are instructed to evaluate the good that they find in the flower arrangements and not what is wrong, nor are they to make harsh or nasty comments. If a constructive approach is followed there is certainly never any room for nastiness, sarcasm and rudeness in judging.

Even on rare occasions when criticism is warranted it could be done very politely and in a constructive manner. I am sure that many potentially good photographers have been lost to club photography because of ill-advised comments of judges. Judging should be looked upon as an agreeable exercise in which the judge's sole function is appreciation of the work he is asked to evaluate.

I can well understand that some judges would say that at some clubs the work entered is so poor that they are hard put to find something good to say. I well know the feeling. At one club judging I attended, the work was

not only poor but the total entry was SO small that I could have finished the session in less than half an hour! got the permission of the club to show some of my work, strictly for the purpose of illustrating the points I was going to make on their pictures, and not to make a talk on my work. It proved to be a most enjoyable evening, not only for the club, but for me. The only trouble was that they asked me to do the same again next year.

iv) Effort Put Into Getting and Making of the Picture

Many judges feel that in their marking they should include the effort on the part of the photographer in either getting the picture or the making of it. It is hard to justify this approach. If effort put in by the photographer is included in judging, then why not a host of other considerations which would affect the picture-making such as: the equipment a photographer can afford, the amount of travel he can manage or even his

height which might be an advantage to him in taking pictures. It would be best if judging was restricted to what is put in front of the judge and had nothing to do with how it was made, what effort went into it or the advantages or disadvantages of the photographer.

This is part one of a two-part treatise on photography judging, from a psychological perspective. Dr. Sethna is a psychiatrist and vice president of the Royal Photographic Society of the United Kingdom. He has been a member of PSA since February 1993.

"An Analysis of Judging" (in two parts) was first published in the Royal Photographic Society Journal.

Please hold your responses to part one until after reading part two next month. Many issues raised in part one are dealt with further in part two.

The following analysis by Dr. ER. Sethna, as well as

P-Essay
An Analysis of Judging Part Two
by Dr. E.R. Sethna

Part One published last month, was first published in the Royal Photographic Society Journal. It is reprinted here with permission.

B - The Positive Aspects of Judging

Having dealt with the four main ways in which negative attitudes manifest themselves in judging, I will now turn my attention to the positive aspects.

In good judging, I found that three attributes of the pictures were taken into consideration. These in order of importance were as follows:

A) What the picture communicates the "message" with a weighting of 50-60 percent.

B) The content of the picture and how it is dealt with, with a weighting of 30-35 percent.

C) The technical aspects of the picture-the "medium" with a weighting of 10-15 percent.

A) What the Picture Communicates - The "Message"

Appreciation of all art, including a photograph, is not primarily an intellectual exercise but an emotional one, which may be pleasurable, depressing, moving

or frightening. The mood that a picture conveys is the core of the "message" and should form the basis of evaluation of a picture. Good judging is done more by the heart than the head, and the ability to feel a picture and not just visualize it. It is the buzz and tingle which one experiences on seeing a good picture which is at the heart of judging.

More often than not it is difficult to verbalize feelings and emotions that a picture conveys, a fact which assumes greater proportions in the case of judges not blessed with a verbal facility. A judge who finds it difficult to express feelings and emotions of a picture should not feel he is alone but rather should realize that almost all people find difficulty in this area. Like all abilities this one increases with practice, and once acquired, adds so much value to a judge's comments that all should strive to achieve it.

It is neither essential nor important for a judge to find out what the author of the picture was trying to communicate. What matters is what feelings and thoughts it engenders in the viewer- the judge. More often than not a good picture conveys different things to different people and credit should be given to a picture that manages to do that. Ambiguity of a picture

could be its greatest charm by providing an image on which viewers can project their own thoughts, feelings and imaginations.

Besides the feelings, emotions and mood, there are three other things that a picture may convey and they are:

- i) A statement or a story
- ii) An idea or inventiveness
- iii) Interpretation of the beauty or any other quality of the subject.

i) A Picture May Convey a Statement or a Story as in photojournalism or documentary photography, but again the best pictures in this field are also laden with emotion. Pictures of refugees such as the Vietnamese boat people would fail if they did not convey their plight and suffering. This would be true of all forms of documentary photography such as that of social upheaval, war, famine or celebration.

ii) A Picture Could Convey an Idea or Inventiveness. This would be true of much of what one would call "creative" photography where the photographer's creative input, whether achieved at the taking stage or by subsequent manipulation, is far more important than the recorded image. This does not imply that photographs must be manipulated to be creative, but rather that they must reflect the personal input of the photographer by providing an image onto which the viewer can project his own thoughts, fantasies and imaginations aroused by the image.

iii) The Photographer Can Add Meaning to a Picture by His Ability to "Interpret" the beauty or otherwise of the subject he chooses to photograph. The results are often referred to as "pictorial" or even "record" photography. There is a tendency at present that anything that is not considered as "creative" or "contemporary" has no place in photography. It would be a mistake to take this extreme view. How often judges say that what is good in a photograph existed in the subject matter and that the photographer only recorded it. That is a very narrow view. Different photographers interpret the same subject differently and some better than others and good judging requires taking that into consideration.

To give an analogy; if a musician plays a classical masterpiece one could not say that he only played what was composed by someone else. We give full credit to how he has interpreted the composer's work.

Similarly, a good photographer interprets in his own inimitable way the favorable attributes in the subject he photographs.

However, one has to admit that what could be described as a "record" photograph and what I would call an "interpretive" photograph would have to be of a very high standard to evoke as much response as the "creative" work in which there is a greater input of the photographer's creativity.

B) Content of the Picture and How It Is Dealt With

This is where the ability of the photographer to see what subject would lend itself to a good photograph is judged. What appears good to the eye does not necessarily make a good photograph. Different subjects have different degrees of being photogenic. How often one sees a really good photograph of a subject many of us would not have dreamt of taking. Even when the subject matter is quite commonly selected for photography, like a portrait or a landscape, it is the choice of the person or the scene that the photographer makes which will determine success or failure of a picture. Often it is the uniqueness or rarity of the subject which will make it interesting and worthy of high marking.

Equally important to the choice of the subject is how it is dealt with and that includes:

- a) The choice and control of lighting; one of the most important aspects in picture making.
- b) What is included and what is not in the picture.
- c) The choice of background, setting or environment for the chosen subject.
- d) Sharpness or lack of it in the picture as a whole or in different parts of the picture.
- e) The interpretation of movement.
 - 1) The juxtaposition of tones and colors.
- g) Exploitation of perspective.
- h) The critical timing of taking the picture.
 - i) The arrangement of the different components of the picture—the composition.
 - j) Exploitation of pattern and texture.
 - k) The choice of format-horizontal or vertical and the shape and dimension of the picture.

C) The Technical Aspect of the Picture--The "Medium"

The following should be considered in assessing the technical merits of the picture:

- 1) Handling of tonal range and color rendition.
- 2) Correct exposure.
- 3) Sharpness of the picture—depending upon its appropriateness to the subject.
- 4) Quality of processing.
- 5) Retouching.
- 6) Appropriateness of choice of black and white or color.
- 7) Presentation of the picture—mounts in prints and cropping in projected images.

It can be argued that technical merit of the picture should be a prerequisite to assessment of artistic qualities which have been so strongly emphasized up till now. In a sense this is true, but in reality it does not present difficulties. Technical ability is acquired far more easily than aesthetic. In consequence, experience shows that those capable of great artistic expression are rarely lacking in technical ability. What is more often seen is that those lacking in technical ability are also unable to excel in artistic interpretation. It is only on exceptional occasions when a picture outstandingly good artistically has to be rejected because of very poor technique.

A weighting to the above three aspects of judging has been suggested at the beginning of the section, and in most cases, what is suggested would be appropriate. However, good judging would require some flexibility in the weighting. If a picture reveals an exceptionally high standard in one of the above three features it would be entirely appropriate to modify the weighting beyond that suggested in the given range. A photograph which by its very nature did not have a strong emotional message but which was a superb example of timing of taking the picture would deserve an extra weighting in B and lower in A.

Conclusion

Though the three aspects of pictures to be taken into consideration in good judging have been stressed, it is by no means suggested that there should be rules for what judges should like or dislike. Judging is, and will remain, a subjective exercise. This is why we have three or more judges in major exhibitions and salons so that different tastes and interests are fully represented. However, what is suggested is the need for agreement on what judges should take into considera-

tion in judging and the above three parameters could form the basis for it.

A good example of what should be taken into consideration in judging does exist in ice skating we so often see on television. Judges are asked to mark on "technical merit" and "artistic interpretation." If like in photography the judges were allowed to mark on any aspect of ice skating they considered important then it is possible that one judge who believed in the choice of music as the most important thing would mark wholly or largely on the music chosen. Another judge who considers the choice of dress by the skaters as the most important will mark on this entirely different issue. Even more absurdly, if a judge believed that the difference in height of the skating pair was the most important thing he would mark only on that issue.

This is what is happening in photographic judging where marking is done according to rules made by the individual judge and which are entirely personal and exclusive to them, or where the marking is based on the judges' current fads, prejudices and overvalued ideas.

If there was a consensus on what should be taken into consideration in marking and the weighting given to each attribute chosen, it would help entrants to competitions and exhibitions to know what was expected of them and the results of judging would be more consistent and fair. This does not imply rules on what the judges should select but agreement on what aspects of the picture they should be taking into consideration in judging. It would in fact mean less rules than at present since individual judges are currently making rules based entirely on their own way of thinking.

It is only when standards of judging are improved and based on sound principles of what constitutes a good picture that photography will attract the status and recognition of other arts.

Remaining Issues on Judging

Finally there are a few remaining issues which need to be considered They are:

I. Difficulties in Giving Awards.

This difficulty particularly arises in major exhibitions and salons where the total entry runs into thousands. If it is an open exhibition covering every kind of subject and type of photography, it would appear to be a very difficult, if not an impossible task to pick

one image as the best of the lot. If the judges pick a landscape there will be a score of other landscape pictures which could be considered as equally as good and why choose a landscape when there are scores of equally good pictures on other subjects?

To overcome this dilemma, I have found that judges on some occasions have chosen a totally way out image for the top award which more often than not does not represent the total entry nor has the highest artistic merit. Again, the lame excuse by judges-that it is we who are incapable of understanding the image of their choice-would not do. It is in my opinion the most arrogant statement that one could make. If a judge cannot explain the reasons for his choice it is more than likely that it is the judge who has not fully understood what is a good photograph and how to assess its artistic and technical merit.

I believe that judges sometimes feel that they will be judged by the awards they give and on some occasions to appear "with it" they choose a "way out" or an outrageous image for an award. However, it has to be admitted that it is a formidable, if not an impossible, task to choose one image as the best from an entry of thousands.

The solution may be to give the top award to the most successful entrant rather than the so-called best picture. This can be done by giving an award to the entrant who has the highest total score from the customary four prints or slides entered by that individual. It is more than likely that the highest total score is shared by several entrants. In which case, the judges would see each of these entrants' four pictures together and decide which set of four is the best. In practice this is much easier than picking just one image.

This also keeps the top award from going to a picture which was produced by chance or fluke by not such a competent photographer, as it is most unlikely that any photographer would produce our outstanding pictures by chance. The principles of giving awards should be based on awarding the most competent and artistic photographer rather than the picture.

2. Should Print Workers Only Be Chosen as Judges for Prints and Slide Workers for Slides (PIs)?

Theoretically, it should make no difference as a good judge can appreciate and evaluate a good picture whether it be a print or a slide (PI). But having said

that, as photography is relatively more technical than other art forms, it might be preferable, though not essential, to have a judge who does the type of work he is asked to judge. Quite often judges who have never done print work make comments which show their lack of knowledge in that medium, and that greatly diminishes the credibility of the judge.

3. Should the Judges Be Practicing Photographers and Current Exhibitors?

If we wish to improve the standard of judging it would be best if such a stipulation was made. If judges who are not practicing photographers and current exhibitors continue to act as judges for years to come they might adopt outdated ideas when photography has moved on since they were exhibitors. I would think many judges would not find this view acceptable and that has been expressed to me strongly on many occasions, but my observations certainly support this view.

4. How Can Judges Be Made to Improve Their Standards?

The only way judges will change their ways and methods would be for us to reward them for their effort and expertise. This implies some form of recognition or some other form of reward, including payment by the standard attained. If judges are to be rewarded in some way, a system of monitoring would become a necessity and the way to do that would be a subject in itself.

In conclusion, I would not like to claim that this study is the last word on judging or that it has answered all or most of the questions on this difficult subject. My only wish is that this study proves to be thought-provoking and leads to further studies, conferences, dialogue and correspondence so that in the future, preferably in the near future, we establish good and sound principles of judging.

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Raising The Bar By Anthony Mckee

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The author analyses what is wrong with the state of camera club judging and offers some suggestions on how to fix it.

Camera clubs are a popular forum for recreational photographers; like car clubs, wine societies and sporting organisations they're a place where people can get together and share common passions. Most camera clubs provide their members the opportunity to listen to guest speakers, share workshop evenings and occasionally get on the road for a field trip. For many photographers in clubs though, the most important aspect of club life is the competitions; they are a chance to put up one's best photographs before the club, get them appraised by a judge and with luck, claim a trophy or two at the end-of-year prize giving.

Club competitions are considered by many to be a learning forum; an opportunity for photographers of all levels to show their work and have it critiqued by a judge. The competition trophies are also considered to be an incentive for photographers to put extra effort into their image making. However, while these reasons may appeal to some photographers the reality could be that photography competitions at club level are actually having a detrimental effect on recreational photography. The very nature of the competition could be turning recreational photography from a creative art form into a 'sport' where the winning of trophies is considered more important than personal direction and vision.

To qualify this argument you only have to spend time looking through the archives of most camera clubs or browsing through some old amateur photography magazines and journals. It doesn't take too long to realise that over the past 20 or 30 years there have been no great progressions in the style or vision of recreational photographers. Most recreational shooters are still using the same landscape, portrait, natural history and photojournalism ideas that our predecessors were shooting back in the days when cameras still had wind-on levers. While most other arts have progressed, recreational photography seems to have become stuck at a roundabout, content to reuse winning formulas from past years to win today's compe-

titions rather than risk failure with new ideas. Creativity has taken a back seat to safe bets.

In reality almost everything about us in life is underpinned by competition in one form or another. From the day we start school until the day we retire the pressure is on to do better than the person next to us, whether it's getting better marks in an exam, getting a promotion at work or just winning a social game of golf. Competition can be good for us; at a base level the knowledge our work or performance is better than someone else's improves our self esteem (and any doctor will tell you this is good for a healthy mind and body). Competition can also have adverse effects on people though; the desire to win can sometimes overrule rational thought and cloud vision. This is not to say that camera club competitions turn people into irrational beings, but it cannot be ignored that for some people the desire to win is perhaps more important than the photography itself.

My own experience of club competitions began 20 years ago when I joined a club in New Zealand. Like most, the one I joined featured a mix of guest speakers, workshops, field trips and plenty of competitions; aside from six open print and six open slide competitions every year, there were landscape, portrait, photojournalism, natural history and C-grade (novice) competitions. Within months of joining the club I was involved in the culture of the competitions and was soon learning from judges the importance of depth of field, bright colours and the all-important rule of thirds. With time I also learnt that most photographers within the club realised what the different judges were looking for in a good image and they would essentially manufacture photographs that would meet the common judging criteria. I probably became guilty of this behaviour too; as I listened to judges talk every other week I slowly established a set of 'do's and don'ts' to apply to my image making and soon I, like many others, was making photographs to a set of camera club guidelines that would help me win awards in club competition.

The one individual within the club who was content to make his own original images was another young

black and white composite images that were always interesting and often challenging. John's images were created using a mix of negatives manipulated together in a conventional black and white darkroom (these were the days before home computers and scanners) and while most people in the club were intrigued by the work few ever set about to match the level of effort put into creating each image. John's work was successful in club competitions because it was not only technically good (which often seemed to be the main criteria in judging) but it was also very original and convincing.

(I have deleted a section on competitions in professional photography. Editor)

Competitions do not have to be a problem to the growth of photography as an art. Within professional photography they provide an annual forum for photographers to get together and appreciate each other's work and talents; most professional photographers are happy the awards only occur once a year though. Coming up with new ideas, putting time aside to get to the awards and watching the APPA committee go through struggle of making the event work is not a process everyone wants to go through too often. **By comparison, camera club competitions may be occurring too regularly; chances are they have gone beyond being an interesting forum and instead are becoming production lines for clichés.**

If camera clubs started placing less emphasis on regular competitions and more emphasis on non-competitive forums then here's a chance recreational photographers could start helping each other to move forward gain to realise the expanding potential of the medium. Camera club environments should perhaps become "creative collectives" where photographers work together to improve each other's abilities rather than competing against each other for club honours. The results of each year's efforts could then be really put to the test the annual national and interclub competitions: such a move could see an overall improvement within recreational photography that could easily rival the APPAs (Australian Professional Photographers Association).

To be fair on all concerned, everyone has to learn from the beginning and all of us through the course of learning photography have taken our share of the clichéd images. While it's easy to compare the dif-

ferences between visual trends in professional and recreational photography it's also worth noting that many top professional photographers began their photography careers in a camera club. All of us however, are ultimately responsible for our own directions within the art of photography: we have to choose as individuals whether we want to follow or lead in the search for new photographic ideas. The only thing limiting our ability as photographers is our imagination; it's time for people to realise that creating a uniquely original image can be just as satisfying as winning a club competition with a familiar idea. Photography is not a race; we do not have to head in the same direction as everyone else in order to be at the front of our game. Ultimately the very best and most memorable images have been made by photographers willing to create a new path across pastures rather than staying on the well-trodden path travelled by the countless others before them.

Five Pointers for Judges

Know the potential of the medium:

Spend time looking at photographs beyond the realm of club photography; look at the trends within professional and fine-art photography both locally and overseas and realise the different techniques and processes in use. Encourage your audience to look at these influences and work towards involving some of the ideas within their image making.

Expect good technique:

Don't feel obliged to reward a photograph simply because it's well exposed and in focus. Reward fresh ideas, reward interesting risks, reward creativity.

Encourage progression within new ideas:

If a photograph is too traditional or clichéd try offering the photographer some creative options that can be applied to the idea within a similar situation. Discuss the composition, lighting and emotional elements and then consider the analogue or digital techniques that can be applied to the image to raise it beyond the ordinary.

Look for conviction within an image:

No matter whether an image is purely analogue or digitally manipulated there is one question worth asking as you judge it: Are you convinced by what you see? Most people have a built-in baloney meter and if you don't believe in the image you're looking at, whether it be a simple portrait or a digital created image of flying pigs, then it has failed in its function.

Ask around and you will discover that the most popular judges are not the ones who hand out the most certificates on the night; they're the ones who are honest in their opinions and who provide interesting enlightenment combined with a little entertainment

during the course of the evening. Don't give them the same lines about the rules of thirds and depth of field, get the audience thinking beyond the square, challenge them, and chances are they will thank you for it.

Criticizing Photography in a Camera Club from One to Ten

by Claudia Bodmer

(The concepts in this paper are drawn from a wonderful book called *Criticizing Photography* by Terry Barrett. It is recommended reading for anyone interested in the subject.)

A camera club meeting is a communal experience and is most successful when the group is engaged and the judgments are reasoned and respected. However, effective criticism can be as challenging and as rewarding as effective photography itself. The following ten points are offered for discussion among camera club members and the judges who evaluate their work.

1. It's a process. The best judges know intuitively that something more is required than simply ruling on an image ("I like it.") and adding a word or two on what the judge would have done differently ("Crop a little off the left."). They take time to describe what they see. Even the strongest judges may struggle a bit with interpretation, but they rally with evaluation, careful that the positives outweigh the negatives. Still, the respectful but glazed eyes of the group and the predictable comments of judges suggest the process could be more compelling. Criticizing photography is not simply judging. It is a whole interactive process of describing, interpreting and then evaluating an image.

2. Describe what you see. Sure, everyone is looking at the same image, but everyone sees it differently. Learning to be observant is a skill in itself. Remember, it's not just the subject matter ("a nude female, her face hidden") but also the form ("at a downward angle, crouched in a subservient position at the bottom of an otherwise blank frame") and the style ("the photographer looks down on an isolated, anonymous..."). A judge is ideally an astute and

practiced observer.

3. You don't have to go it alone. Because description is factual, it is easy and helpful to involve others in describing what they see. The group becomes actively involved, and the judge is not burdened with being the all-seeing eye. The trade-off is time, but perhaps taking a minute to ask even one person what he sees that the judge did not mention can add richness to the discussion. If the photographer is present, he should listen to what is seen rather than share what he intended to communicate.

4. Take what you observe and interpret it. Ah, but this is where many say, "Art is subjective and my opinion is only one among many." Not necessarily so. If we take time to truly see an image and describe it, then it becomes apparent that any interpretation must be rooted in the description. As such, it will not be true or false but it must be demonstrably plausible. The judge takes what she sees and explains what it connotes. ("The spare forms and soft colors in this landscape convey tranquility and simplicity.") Her interpretation of an image should be consistent, coherent and comprehensive; defensible and not simply a matter of opinion. The interpretation needn't be lengthy. Referring to an image as a good "record shot" suggests in few words that there is not much there to interpret, as long as the description supports this interpretation. Here too, it is possible to involve the group in the discussion.

5. Whether you "like" an image is simply not relevant. It is better to keep the words "like" and "dislike" out of the conversation entirely. Much better to say, "This photograph is successful because..." The image is the center of attention not the preferences of the judge who is there to enlighten the group about

the image. It is nothing short of irresponsible to render a judgment without justifying it objectively. The audience will be at best bored and at worst demeaned.

6. Keep your own biases at bay. Judgments are different from preferences. The first step in rendering an unbiased critique is to understand what our biases are. Many people think to be successful art should be representational and beautiful. Some consider digitally altered images not to be real photography. Others consider them creatively superior. Some are put off by certain subjects or even certain colors. Others favor images that do not challenge them. Some think the higher a subject is on the evolutionary ladder, the stronger the Nature image. It can be liberating to judge the image on its own terms. It is a commentary on our biases that many museum quality images would not pass muster at camera clubs.

7. Your judgment must be defensible. Evaluation of an image must be rooted in an interpretation of the image which in turn must be based on the description of the image. Arguably, the winning images, which a judge selects in secret, should not be a surprise to the group who heard his critique. Since camera clubs have implied standards in the category definitions, it could be useful to reflect on what makes an image superior in a particular category. For example, is the best Creative image the most unusual one, the most altered one, the strongest one?

8. Don't be afraid of silence. The photographer spent time, perhaps considerable time, creating the image. It is respectful to take a minute to look at the

image before speaking about it. This also allows others to study the image independently and the judge to take a breath. Break the silence with "I see..." rather than "I like..." Competitive club members might try to appreciate the image and not to rush to judgment by immediately assessing an image as better or worse than their own.

9. Be kind. Critiques do not have to be negative. As unsolicited advice is rarely treasured by any of us, it is not optimal for the judge to pepper his comments with what he thinks the photographer should have done ("sharper focus, tighter cropping, another angle..."). If instead he describes what he sees, interprets what he describes and then evaluates the image on its own terms, the maker will infer what she might have done differently to create a different or stronger impression. This makes her an active rather than passive participant in the critique.

10. Be humble. A judge is not there to impress everyone with her intelligence ("I think your depth of field..."). Nor should she be on a power trip setting herself above the group ("I've seen a hundred images like this one..." or "I've been there many times..."). Besides being ungracious, this ego-involvement compromises her ability to do a good job. If she has "one eye on the mirror", she is only half attending to the images and the audience.

This last point seems essential: Humility. Just as it is personally risky for a photographer to offer a creation up for review, it is risky for a judge to drop the protective armor of superiority and focus on the image. For the photographer and the judge, learning to truly see can be a reward well worth the risk.

RUMINATIONS ON JUDGING PICTORIAL IMAGES by Trenkins I. McClain

ABOUT THE INFORMATION

Please note the following opinions are strictly that-opinion, and it is my PERSONAL APPROACH to the subject.

ON THE CATEGORY

The first thing you have to realize when judging Pictorial, is that anything, ANYTHING, can be presented. Anything found in any other category can end up in Pictorial - nature, abstracts, travel, journalism. You can't dismiss something because it "doesn't fit."

MY PERSONAL APPROACH TO JUDGING

I try to educate as well as critique, and see the advance of each image as a chance to give a little mini-lesson in photography. This satisfies my teacher's soul. So I take the teacher's approach rather than a true judge's approach (which is more criticism than analysis and critique). And a teacher always, and I mean ALWAYS, finds something positive to say about each image, no matter how awful he may think it. You've heard that beauty is in the eye of the beholder? It is also, in the case of photography, in the eye of the one who beheld it first. And as a judge, you have to remember that.

WHERE TO START ON A PERSONAL LEVEL THE CREATIVE STUFF

You probably win awards for your photography. But are you an instinctive photographer, finding compositions automatically, or do you really know why you make certain choices, and can you verbalize and defend those choices? It would be a good idea to ground yourself in the basics of composition and creative choices, learning the vocabulary and concepts so you can be articulate when an image is projected on the screen.

You know about DOF and shutter speed in relation to exposure, but can you describe what DOF controls creatively and what shutter speed controls creatively? These are NOT just exposure modes; they are creative choices, and you choose one or the other, depending on the effect you want. Learn how to recognize hyperfocal distance problems, and find a easy way to explain it to someone (after the meeting!). In relation to this, explain what a DOF preview button is, and have them see if their camera has one.

For composition, you need to ground yourself in the elements of design and be able to explain how they are all used to direct the eye through the image to the main subject. A quick, abbreviated review:

1. Simplify your image by isolating a subject. This can be done by filling the frame, and by using a shallow DOF so there is nothing in the foreground or background sharp enough to draw attention. Learn to guess what lenses were used (but don't verbalize it), and if a different lens will give a greater impact, know which lenses to suggest and why.
2. If attention is drawn by something else, make sure it SUPPORTS the subject rather than detracting from it.
3. Use line to bring attention to the subject (lead-in line).
4. Use accent color on or near the subject, or have the subject itself be an attracting color.
5. If something is monochromatic, it is a good idea to have strong lines or texture to give composition.
6. If using pattern (repetition of line, shape, or color), try to make a break in the repetition. This becomes the focal point, or point of interest.
7. All patterns should be sharp throughout.
8. Placement of subject: convention leads to the Rule of Thirds. This guideline is worth considering, but keep an open mind. There can be merit in symmetry.
9. Format. Remember that cameras can go vertically, and many shots that have great foregrounds should at least be tried this way.
10. Point of View (POV)-suggest other views besides straight eye level (if appropriate).

11. Beware of subject-background merges; distracting light colored elements anywhere in image, but especially along edges; unintentional out of focus foregrounds; crooked horizons; over/under exposure; inappropriate color cast; telephone wires in scenics.

HOW TO GET THE GROUNDING NEEDED

A quick way to get your review is through books. A good book to start with is John Shaw's *Field Guide True*, the emphasis is on nature, but it is publication

nature-ie, nature with a very strong pictorial element. He talks basic camera technique as well as basic composition. Not only does he give a good grounding, but he does it simply and has wonderful images you can evaluate.

Lisl Dennis also has a book. *The Essential Image*. True, she's known as a travel photographer, but believe me, the book is all composition. The plus side is that the overall shot is shown, then she shows you several approaches she took and why she likes one over the other. Do you agree with all her choices? I didn't. Did I have a reason to back up my choice? Yes. So should you.

Freeman Patterson has published a series of excellent books, starting with *Photography for the Joy of It*. He makes many good suggestions for composition.

Another way is to observe and evaluate other judges. As an image comes up, quickly evaluate it yourself, then listen to the judge. Did you pick the same things? Did you make similar suggestions? What style judging did he use? Did you like the way he presented his ideas. If not, how would you change it?

Discretely listen to the comments from other club members (or ask them). Did they like the judge, and if so, why.

As you look through magazines, calendars, and photo books, critique every image you see. You'll learn a lot. Get these kinds of materials together, and ask a judge you like and respect listen to you critique them.

Once you start judging, ask a judge you like to mentor you - go to several (or more) meetings with you and perhaps listen to you verbalize as you make selections of the winners and then evaluate your remarks after the meeting. They might make suggestions as to how to soften your approach, or other phrases you might use, etc.

ONE APPROACH TO JUDGING DIFFERENT LEVELS

Remember that there are several levels within Pictorial, from B through Masters. You should be more forgiving at the B level and more demanding at the Masters level. At the lower levels, choose the more glaring of errors. It's too demoralizing if you keep on and on about every single error. These are some of the things you might focus on:

1. Usually the B workers are having technical problems. You might comment (if appropriate) on exposure, focus, DOF. Help with basic composition problems: straight horizons, filling the frame with the subject to isolate it, glaring distractions, border problems.

2. The Intermediate level (I) is having some technical problems, but mostly composition problems. You might comment on DOF and lack of foreground sharpness (if appropriate); isolation of subject, filling frame, lead-in lines that lead out of picture, two pictures in one, border distractions, use of light (wrong time of day and harsh or flat light), vignetting (because they are experimenting with filters and lens hoods).

3. Advanced (A) workers should be technically correct and be doing OK compositionally. Their main problems will probably be border distractions, not using ND filters and polarizing filters when needed, not paying attention to that special kiss of light, not using the right lens for the greatest impact (usually they have a favorite and don't deviate from it), not moving around their subject enough to get the best angle of light.

4. Masters workers should have "mastered" their craft. They should be creating relationships between each of the elements on the image. There should be nothing extraneous. There should be many positive comments that lower levels can learn from.

ON THE MONITOR AND LIGHTBOX

Remember that the color and detail on a monitor may be better than in the projection. Sometimes these things will be the deciding factor between equal images.

Remember that ANYTHING can be presented in Pictorial and you may be looking at apples and oranges. So what do you do on a lightbox or monitor with a perfect landscape, a perfect bird on a limb, a perfect abstract, and a perfect action shot - all breathtaking, all with gorgeous light, all with vibrant-or appropriately subdued color, all with perfect technical choices for DOF and speed, all perfectly executed. DEEP DOWN IN YOUR SOUL OF SOULS, what do you do? There they are, and you not only have to decide which ones will win and which ones won't, but you also have to place the winning ones in an order of hierarchy!

CHOOSE WHAT TOUCHES YOUR HEART for

whatever reason—a reminder of childhood, a beach you wish you were at, a fall mosaic of trees so vibrantly colored it makes your breath catch in your throat. **FOR WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY BUT COMMUNICATION** from the lens and the heart of the photographer to the eye and heart of the beholder?

WHEN YOU ARE CONTACTED TO JUDGE

Eventually your name will be placed on a list and you will be called. The caller will tell you what club he is from and what he wants you to judge and when he wants it done. **BE UP FRONT** with them. Frequently clubs meet only once a month, and they judge all categories in the one night. I have had no Photoshop experience, so if I am asked to judge prints, say, I tell them that I will be willing to do it, but that I must judge the prints on composition and presentation only, that my knowledge about various kinds of correction is nil. If you are confident in three of the areas, but weak in one, say so. Usually they are glad to give you a chance.

Ask how the judging is conducted, if you comment and then judge from the lightbox/monitor, or if you need to give numerical scores, or if you will be using judging boxes (an electronic numerical scoring system) with other judges.

Write down the name, number, and camera club affiliation of the person who contacted you on your calendar. Ask them to send you a map from whatever freeway system you would take to get over into their area. If it is a different council ask them to send you guidelines that they use for their competitions. Find out starting and ending times. Ask about how long the breaks and business take. Ask for a reminder call the day before if you need that kind of thing. Or better yet, call a few days before the date and confirm. If the Judges Chair is not going to be there, be sure you get an alternate number to contact. If some dire emergency comes up, don't leave them in the lurch. If at all possible, have another judge you are friends with as a back up and call the club, tell them what has happened and say you can get XYZ judge, would that be acceptable. (They'll probably kiss your feet!)

THE REAL THING—JUDGING STEP ONE

You're grounded in basics, you've been practicing, you know the vocabulary, the concepts, and the buzz words. Now what?

Remember the thing I told you to **ALWAYS** do? You may be looking at the most godawful image you have ever seen; you can't imagine how anyone could ever put it in competition, but **THERE IT IS**. And guess what? You have to find something **POSITIVE** to say about it. And not only do you have to find something positive, but you have to sincerely mean it. This is why you have to ground yourself in the basics and learn the buzz words. You can say: I really like..

1. the way you've isolated the subject. You've done a really good job on that.

2. the way you've handled the background—to accentuate the subject—to be unobtrusive.

3. the way you've chosen your lead-in lines. They really...

4. the way you've handled the light, the sharpness of the subject, the wonderful texture, the placement of the horizon, the balance that tree gives to the rest of the shot, the interesting foreground, the rich color, the superb sharpness, the wonderful pattern, the nice touch of detail. You get the idea.

WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO ACCENTUATE, DO IT TRUTHFULLY AND WITH SINCERITY.

JUDGING STEP TWO

Now, try to gently critique the image. Don't go on and on—pick one or two things that to your eye are major. Then say something **CONSTRUCTIVE**: "I like the inclusion of that rock in the foreground, but its lack of sharpness is distracting. Use more **DOF** and your **DOF** preview button, if you have one, or ask one of your advanced club members about hyperfocal distance techniques."

AVOID DOING THESE THINGS

1. Don't drone on about your own personal experience in that place

2. Don't drone on about how you shot that same shot

3. Don't tell them how to 'correct' the shot by suggesting "your" shot—a completely different image.

4. Don't describe minutely the slide on the screen. "A lighthouse, rocks. Shoreline, ocean. Very nice." Use description to support a point of critique: "The rocks are a very effective lead-in line to the lighthouse. Nicely composed and well thought out."

5. Don't dismiss someone's efforts in a shot you

have seen a million times before (and don't mention the fact of frequency, either, or that fact that you never want to see another shot like that again). It may be their first time experiencing the subject. Evaluate it on its own merits.

6. Don't try to guess what the subject is if it is abstracted, and don't assume that you know. It doesn't matter. Judge it on its compositional strengths and impact, like anything else.

7. Don't try to guess at how they made the image-techniques you "think" you know or that you are unfamiliar with (posterization, filters, etc.). It doesn't matter how it was done-don't be so consumed by the "effect" that you forget to evaluate the over-all image, or how the effect fits with the subject matter itself.

8. Don't try to be a "nice guy" judge and make non-comments (that's nice, that's interesting, etc.). These comments tell nothing about improving the image, nor are they positive enough to say what in particular you find interesting.

9. Don't relate anecdotal comments unrelated to the image (and don't even do it about the image).

10. Don't mention that a particular subject is your favorite. Those who keep track of judges' prejudices will forever present those images for you consideration on nights when you judge. It puts you on the hot spot for several reasons: you have to prove that you don't favor one kind of image over another, and you have to be careful how you judge something you are specialized in, that you don't judge it too critically.

11. Don't accept a judging engagement if you have trouble with your sight. Unfortunately, these things can creep up on us, and we are not even aware that it is happening. Sometimes the problem can be solved by keeping current with your annual eye exams, and a change of prescription. Sometimes it can't. Don't drop out; just serve your council in other directions.

WHEN YOU GO TO JUDGE

Bring a laser pointer. Bring cropping Ls if you

think you can manage them: (I stopped because I found I was trying to hold a clicker, a pointer, and a microphone, and it was getting a little difficult to manage it all.) Bring a brief bio about yourself. Sometimes they ask you to bring a sample of your work. I usually don't, because I have enough trouble getting through their images, much less taking up time with mine. It does, however, give a club who is not familiar with you a way to evaluate your competence to judge their work.

Leave early enough so that an accident on one of the bridges or freeways won't make you impossibly late. Carry the Judge Chair's cell phone number with you. Many of us leave early and have dinner in the area where we are to judge. Sometimes a club hosts the judge for dinner with some of its members.

Introduce yourself to person who called. Give them the bio. Review the times and the club routine. Ask about the judging routine. Sometimes you go to the lightbox/monitor after every level (a very slow process). Sometimes you do each category all at once.

Try to end at the requested time. Sometimes this is impossible because you have a million images to do, and sometimes, unfortunately, it is because the club is lax in their starting time, and starts 10-15 minutes late. If you know there are a large number of images and that it doesn't look like the president is on the ball, express your concern to the Judges Chair. Perhaps he can shivvy the President along.

If there is a break, ask how many images are left to judge. When caught with short time, your only choice is to hurry along with very brisk comments. "I like this. The neon signs and graffiti on the wall identify the place well, and the distinctive sky line seals it." On to the next image.

Occasionally you might get asked why you chose one image over another. If there were flaws in the ones under consideration, I'm honest about it, and say that XYZ bothered me less than RST. If it was a coin toss because of perfection, I say that I loved them both, but that the impact of X was greater than that of V. Sometimes it's just not an easy job

Cash the check on a timely basis so they can keep their records straight.

*Please contact the author for permission to reprint.
Trenkins I. McClain - seesmacro@yahoo.com; Subject: Judging*

Become a Travel Judge--Have More Fun, Improve Your Photography

by Donald Lyon

Why would anyone want to become a camera club judge? You are called out of your home in the dark of night to drive to the far reaches of the Bay Area--usually during commute hours. It is a given that the clubs that call you to judge will be on the opposite of the Bay from where you live. You'll probably miss your dinner and munch store-bought cookies and sip instant coffee in Styrofoam cups to keep up your strength while hunched over a light box in some church kitchen. You know you could be editing your own slides back home sipping a great Chardonnay. With driving and judging, you'll spend five hours to judge a club and your financial reward will range from \$20 to \$50--hardly covers the gas. That's the bad news, but,

If you love travel and photography, eventually, you'll find that club competition is not enough for you. You'll want to see what a wider range of people are doing with their photography and you'll want to lead the discussion about how to do better and better travel photography. It was a revelation for me to realize that being a travel judge was improving my understanding of travel while sharpening my philosophy of photography. It was also improving my ability to capture truly meaningful travel images in a big way. All of a sudden I was asking myself--what is my intention here. What do I want to say?

The personal motive should be enough, but there is also the altruistic. We've learned a great deal from an earlier generation of judges--both positive and negative--and now it's time to give back to the community that we have benefited from.

I've been judging for about 20 years--at first I had little to say other than timid platitudes but now they can't shut me up. My reward is when people come up to me afterwards and say how much they enjoyed my comments. And of course there is the occasional homemade brownie, refreshing apple juice and the honorarium that comes close to matching my out of pocket expenses. I've picked up a few tips I'd like to share now that I've convinced you to become a judge.

Let's put camera club judging in it's proper perspective. This is not the Supreme Court determining the fate of millions. Its OK--in fact it is mandatory have a good time--and I mean to give a good time. If you have an understanding of the definition of a travel

image, have a progressive philosophy of the purpose of travel and a passable knowledge of photographic techniques, then you can rank order the images and most people will agree with you--most people other than those who didn't get first, I should say.

The current definition of a travel image works just fine. The most challenging thing is to provide constructive criticism while you are viewing the images on the screen. You see, being a good travel judge is really very much like teaching a workshop in travel photography. Every image that pops up on the screen is an opportunity for the audience to learn what works and what doesn't.

If you are dismissive of the novice's efforts--they might give up on camera clubs. So the first rule is to be constructive in your criticism. Refer to the definition often, point out where the image makes the grade and where it falls behind. Often the image has PJ or Pictorial qualities, even if it is not a good travel slide--this can be mentioned to good effect.

You only have a moment or two to talk about each image, so give the bulk of your time to commenting on the B and I groups--you can be sure they, for one, are paying attention. The A and Master's Group already think they know it all--but they don't. Don't be afraid to criticize images in the upper levels when you see sloppy work. Yesssss!--there is justice in the world.

You need not be a world traveler to be a good travel judge. It may even be an impediment as one is always comparing another's work to one's own. More important is to love all that travel stands for. Travel is an opportunity to learn about others and yourself. Travel is a euphemism for life. If you are interested in the world--take pains to be informed about what is happening in the world--if you read National Geographic from cover to cover every month and study the images, trying to determine the aperture, shutter speed and focal length of the lens--then you will have no trouble giving a great time as a travel judge.

Every time an image pops up on the screen, pretend like you are holding up a camera with a zoom lens. Would you zoom in or out? Would you move closer or get further away? Where is the composition? Where is the travel story?

I find it extremely helpful to have some props--a laser pointer let's you direct the audience's attention where you want it. Carry a couple of strips of cardboard and you can reframe the image if you are sitting in front of the projector--this really makes the point if you are suggesting that the image might have been framed differently.

Learn the basic rules of Composition. Time honored techniques that artists have developed over the centuries hold true for photographers, too. Be comfortable repeating ideas like diagonal lines add dynamic tension while horizontal lines are static, s-curves lead the viewer into the picture, and the beloved "rule of thirds" may be a real breakthrough for the novice. Look in an art supply store for a book on basic composition.

The above is all advice for the pictorial as well as the travel photographer. To be a travel image, a true travel image, however, and not just a Pictorial image taken while on a trip, an image must tell a travel story. How does it do that?

There must be that little bit more that expresses the feeling of time and place. We must begin to understand a land, or its people or their culture through this image. Remember the caveats, too, that ultra close-ups which really don't have a sense of place, studio-type model shots or photographic manipulations which misrepresent the true situation are not really acceptable. Sometimes these are close calls, but the stunning portrait of a Thai Hill Tribe woman shot with a fast lens wide open so that the background is blurred beyond recognition probably should not be given high marks in travel competition. We want to see elements of her everyday life in the background--elements that place her firmly in a Hmong, Lahu or Ahka village and not at a Asian Pride Rally in Oakland's Chinatown.

Studio-type model shots don't come up so often these days, but in the last year I have seen a few examples that gave me pause to go back and reread the definition. On the Great Wall of China, a man poses for the tourists wearing the costume of a medieval soldier. On a bleak Scottish moor, a splendid chap in kilts of Dress Stewart, plays the bagpipes. Does the photographer have a time machine or isn't this man posing for tourists stopped along the road? Both are superb images, but are these people "in a natural state"? Not really. Technically they don't qualify but

you'll have to use your own judgment. The important thing is to bring up the issue and let people know that borderline images will be rejected in favor of those that clearly fit the definition.

What about cultural performances performed almost exclusively for tourists? These are tricky. I would probably be enthusiastic about an image of elephants being bathed by their mahouts north of Chiang Mai, Thailand--even though it is a show performed for tourists. I probably would not accept an image of flamenco dancers on a stage blinded by a full power flash bouncing off the acoustical tiles on the nightclub's ceiling. Get the picture? It's a matter of aesthetics.

Just a note on flash. As a judge you are in a wonderful position to be an arbiter of good taste. Encourage your audience to learn to use fill flash so that their images look natural instead of some exposé captured for the *National Inquirer*.

What about camera toting, leisure suit wearing coach tour participants filling the foreground of that otherwise nice shot of The Forbidden City? I think they are a distraction and if not an outright disqualification, they at least lessen the image's chances of being chosen--these are fair comments to make to the audience-- it encourages them to think before they press the shutter release. They should be going through the process of thinking--this image is to share with the other tour members and that image, without the tourists, is for travel competition.

I've said something about what a travel image is not, now let me describe an example of what a travel image is. I lead a lot of trips to Thailand, Burma, Turkey--places where there is a travel image in every direction. So how does the photographer create an image that really works in competition?

Let's say we're in Turkey. You find a traditionally dressed person who is doing something that is a part of their life that maybe is being done a bit differently than we are used to in this country. You notice that they are surrounded by their home or the unique environment where they live. The image that comes to mind is of an old lady clothed in scarf and voluminous neck to toe dress spinning wool with a simple timeless dirndl. The background includes sacks of wool. The photographer attaches his trusty 28mm, checks to see if any exposure compensation needs to be made, then gets down to eye level, or lower, so has to give this

matriarch the respect she deserves, fixes her with a steady smile, raises the camera and shoots. The result was travel slide of the year last time I competed in the Berkeley Camera Club.

Now, a very similar composition might be made in a Bay Area Park of a blond haired, blue eyed kid in a t-shirt and baseball cap, squatting down with his skateboard with a skateboard ramp in the background--slightly out of focus, but still recognizable. What the two images have in common is that they show a representative member of the community en-

gaged in a task that is typical of the region. The background provides a sense of place and helps explain the person's behavior.

Final tips: Have a full set of current Bay Area AAA maps--locate your destination in advance. Start with a full tank of gas. Allow for commute traffic--go early and have a bite to eat near your destination. Carry the N4C definitions with you--ask that they be read, or read them yourself to the group in advance of judging. Be sure to thank the judge chairman who provides you with good directions and parking information, as well as a courteous and accurate introduction.

Judging Nature by Fran Cox

In addition to the usual criterion for judging, the nature judge has the added burden of considering the following aspects, ones particularly pertinent to nature images:

Good nature photographs should be informative -- like those in textbooks, field guides, etc. --not just pretty pictures seen in a coffee table book. They're not always pretty to look at. Ex: A grisly photo of a snake devouring a small mammal is not pretty but it's good nature!

Nature photographers cannot ignore the basic elements of composition & the principles of design. They cannot always control the composition, especially with wildlife, but when they can improve the composition, they should. When a nature shot is well composed in addition to its nature story, so much the better!

The "nature story" (the visual message) should take precedence over all other aspects. It should be faithful to the subject -- color fidelity, natural habitat, etc. Remember that nature images are intended to be informative not just pictorial. The viewers should learn something about the subject.

Subjects removed from their natural habitat to be photographed must be depicted in the proper environment. Ex: desert species should not be seen on a green lawn! They are not eligible for "Wildlife" honors.

Zoo shots are acceptable if the zoo setting is not evident, but they are not eligible for "Wildlife" honors.

Neither are animals photographed at any of the game farms. Banding of birds or other scientific tagging of wildlife is allowed.

The "hand of man" has played a role in the hybridizing of plants or the breeding of domestic animals hence those types of subjects are ineligible, as are mounted specimens & obvious set-ups. Such things as roads, buildings, telephone poles, etc. are no-no's but there is sometimes a fine line of distinction. When a human element is present it must contribute to the nature story & not overpower the scene. Ex: barn swallows at a nest under building eaves or a woodpecker at its hole in a telephone pole.

A single subject - a wildflower, a mushroom or a posing animal - may not appear to tell a nature story but a good one will convey its identifying characteristics a sense of its size, color, texture, shape or habitat, etc. Ex: A photograph of a bobcat which doesn't show his tail is an incomplete nature presentation!

A wildlife subject doing something is a stronger message. Ex: an animal chasing its prey, a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. With two or more animals their interaction makes a stronger statement than if they're just standing around. Ex: the sparring of elk during the rut, a heron bringing nesting material to its mate.

A judge must understand the circumstances under which a photo was made & take it into account. He should consider the difficulty in getting the picture. When faced with selecting one photograph over an-

other of equal quality, you might consider placing the one which was the more difficult to obtain.

Few of us are knowledgeable zoologists, botanists, ornithologists, so we cannot know all there is to know in the natural world. We need to educate ourselves

about as many subjects as we can. Read up on nature -- books, magazine articles, TV programs, study the international salon entries, learning what other judges consider good nature work.

Nature Judging by Joe Galkowski

I. The key to being a successful judge: remember why people join N4C clubs. A. To learn how to be better photographers. B. To share their work with others. C. To have fun. D. Lastly, for the competition.

II. Commenting during judging - Try to help people improve their photography

A. Always start with what is "Right" about an image.

1. Be specific.

2. Use strong words if they are warranted (stunning, powerful, beautifully handled, expert use of light) but, don't gush.

B. Then address what you believe would have made the image stronger.

1. Let the maker know these are your opinions - You may be wrong!

2. Example: An image of an egret (1/4 frame) at the water's edge: You may want the bird larger in the frame because you think it is the subject and, as such, needs to be at least one half frame. Actually the image was meant as a habitat shot and the bird needs to be smaller so that the environment is what a viewer concentrates on and learns about. Just because you are the judge don't assume you know the intent of the maker.

3. Be clear on what specifically would help and why: Never say a negative comment unless you can follow it with a reason and a solution. Example: A bright highlight on the edge of the image frame.

"This highlight (indicate where) distracts me from looking at the subject, which is where you want me to focus my attention". Crop this out using the shadow of a sheet of paper to demonstrate how much more the subject stands out. "You could crop the image, move in tighter next time, move to the side more. Remind the audience that you must look for this problem when setting up to take the shot.

C. Before moving on to the next image, briefly re-inforce the good things about the image.

D. Remember, not everyone has the same sense of what makes a strong image.

E. You should silently practice making commentaries, use your own images, any you see in magazines, or any you find in other sources.

III. Nature judging is different than pictorial judging. A. You must judge both the photographic elements and the nature story.

1. Look for how the photographers used their skills first.

a. Is the image sharp? Reserve judgement until you are at a monitor or light table with a loupe. Grainy images, out of focus images, camera vibration blurring, and subject blurring (unless done on purpose) all are common problems.

b. Is the exposure good?

c. Was a proper depth-of-field used?

d. Was a proper shutter speed used?

2. Secondly: look at the aesthetics.

a. Is the composition strong (different rules than for pictorial)? Is the subject prominent in the frame? Is there anything that distracts you from concentrating on the subject? Is the subject well positioned in the frame? If the subject is cropped into, has it been done appropriately? Is the foreground distracting? Is the background handled well? Does the composition help tell the story, or confuse the viewer?

b. Is the use of light good? Was the image taken at a "good angle"? The right time of day? Did the maker make the most of the lighting conditions present?

B. The nature story of the image must teach the viewer something.

1. At the least, the viewer should be now able to

identify the subject if they bumped into one.

2. Strong nature stories have greater impact. a. Examples: Red-tailed hawk attacking gopher snake, glacier calving, fawn getting milk from doe, crab spider with fly prey,... b. Usually action is present but extremely good descriptive images count.

IV. Some rules of thumb for successful nature photographs.

1. Good composition

a. Simple image - anything that doesn't add to the impact takes away from it. Show just enough of the subject's surroundings so we know where it was photographed but no more - unless it is a habitat shot. People look at areas of the highest contrast - watch out for highlights. Pay special attention to the borders of your image.

b. Subject should be large but not cramped in frame.

c. If a subject is cropped into, it must be done enough so we know it was intentional: Watch for tails and feet touching the edge of the frame. Even though grass or water or whatever hides part of the subject, leave room where we could see that part if it wasn't hidden.

d. Position the subject in the frame where there is more room in front of it than behind it. Avoid bulls-eye compositions and the subject staring at the border.

e. For animals, usually the photograph should be taken at the subject's eye level. Looking down diminishes the subject. Looking up makes it look more grandiose.

2. Good lighting

a. Catch light should be present unless backlighting is used.

b. Backlight should be used primarily to focus attention on form. For pictorial, backlight is a powerful tool. For nature, it usually dulls the nature story.

V. To be a good judge (this will also help your own photography). A. Remember your job is to help others improve. B. Remember that the photographer may have had a totally different idea in mind. C. Start with positive comments, then suggest ways to improve the images, and finally finish with a brief positive comment. D. Become a nature photographer.

1. One cannot be a great judge without understanding what it takes to get good nature photographs.

2. Practice being able to verbalize why you like or don't like an image. This is harder than it seems. Take your time - sometimes just pausing a moment will help you see the problem with an "awkward" image.

3. Learn about nature.

i. You should know what you are looking at.

ii. You will need to help people with titles.

E. Remember what it is like to have your own work judged

SOME THOUGHTS ON JUDGING PHOTOJOURNALISM

by Jo-Ann Ordano

The category of Photojournalism portrays the whole range of the human condition. It is not just limited to hard news such as violence, natural disasters or sports. A burning building alone does not a great P.J. picture make. But a grimy firefighter carrying a rescued child, pet or even teddy bear does. It is the human being interacting with the tragic event that makes the image memorable.

In photojournalism, more than anywhere else, the camera club judge needs to be open minded and receptive to the ideas of others. Besides the obvious "hard news" subjects, there are "soft news" stories of all sorts that are valid photojournalism subjects.

These can include the unusual, bizarre, unique, humorous, shocking, touching, exciting and even the mundane events of the world around us.

The photojournalism judge should bring to the camera club competition both an open mind and a good knowledge of current events. There have been many embarrassing moments in camera club competition when a judge has failed to recognize the name and or/face of a prominent celebrity or political figure portrayed in a photo of a particular event.

A Photojournalism competition is not a Pictorial competition and should not be judged that way. The story telling ability of the image is the key factor to be

considered; the composition and design of the image is secondary at best. What should be considered is the angle of view and the moment in time. If the photographer does not move in close enough or if only the backs of people's heads are shown, the photographer has failed to capture the important element of the story and should be evaluated accordingly. And if the "decisive moment" has come and gone then that needs to be commented on also.

The Photojournalism category in camera club competition is too often a catchall, or dumping ground for images that don't quite fit into other categories, particularly for snapshot family photos of children

and relatives. If an image doesn't make it in other categories it probably won't fare any better in PJ. Still, the judge needs to consider all entries equitably, the great with the not-so-great and use tact and discretion at all times.

Judging at camera clubs can be a thankless job. Occasionally a judge will be taken to task by a photographer for some imagined or real failure. But for the most part it is a rewarding experience and one that is greatly appreciated by the club at large and by the individual members you've informed, educated, entertained and recognized for their photographic achievement.

Photo Journalism - An Emotional Subject

by Don Sowar

Our N4C definition for Journalism refers us to the news media and periodicals, and it suggests a wide variety of ideas for subject matter. "Journalism may include documentary, advertising, spot news, sports, human interest, humor, and the portrayal of our contemporary way of life." It looks like most anything goes - just hope the judge likes it.

But what does the judge like? How does the judge interpret such a broad definition? Does he memorize all those names in order to see if a picture fits into one of the categories? Surely there is more than just fitting into a specified category. Would a photo of a baseball player standing at the plate waiting for the pitch be a better Journalism subject than a photo of an irate batter arguing nose-to-nose with the umpire? Why not? Does a picture of an animal running from the fire make better Journalism than a picture of the fire itself? What makes it better? Would you pick a photo of three band members in colorful uniforms marching in a parade on Main Street over a shot of just the face of the tuba player with cheeks puffed out so wide they look like they might pop? I wouldn't either, but what's the reason?

Study some of the entries in Photo Journalism contests. What is it that separates the winners from the losers? Or better, what is the common element of the winners? If I could try to sum it up in one word, I would say it is EMOTION. But the emotion is from the viewer.

The pictures that do well in Photo Journalism seem to me to be those that elicit an emotional re-

sponse from the viewer. We don't respond alike, but to some degree we all put ourselves into the picture. When I view the picture of the drunk on the park bench, I'm either moved with pity for the poor guy or else disgusted at such conditions. I feel some of the grief of the victims of the raging fire and maybe even a twinge of fear at the thought of the same thing happening to my house. I might be awed by the grace or strength of the athlete as he crosses the bar; and if I can see the strain on his face, I will probably even try to urge him over with an internal effort of my own. I share some of the joy and even smile with those who were photographed just as they heard the good news. I'm nearly petrified in fear for the cowboy bull rider at the rodeo who is already tossed off the bull but can't free his hand from the tightly wound rope as he is spun through the air by the bull. And, there is a tug at my heart as I view the picture of the child trying to get a drink from the fountain that is just a little too high.

One of my favorite Journalism photos showed a delivery man trying to wheel a few too many boxes into the store on a dolly. He had them stacked about 8 feet high and couldn't quite lean them back far enough to get them through the door. The boxes hadn't fallen yet, but I was sure they were going to topple. How could they possibly stay up at that angle? The moment was tense, the delivery man looked worried, and the photographer clicked the shutter at the absolute best time.

So, what pictures make the best PJ photos? People

pictures. Emotion is easily transferred by way of people. But good PJ pictures are spontaneous, unanticipated, not contrived. That's why the picture of the artist painting a mural on the side of the building rarely does well in competition. The photographer could have come back an hour or two later to get essentially the same picture. The photo of the welder at work may look interesting with all the sparks flying, but somehow I view the situation as being under control and figure that he'll be doing the same thing tomorrow. But if the work involves upside down contortion while holding countless breakable plates, I cringe a little when I think of doing the same thing to my body and paying for all the plates I'd break, and I tend to think more highly of that photo in Journalism competition. The big old steam locomotive at the park might look impressive in size, but it hasn't moved in years, and any nostalgia of bygone days that it may drum up with the photographer does not automatically translate to the viewer. And the almost still-life photo of the clown with the painted face, though very colorful, has a tough time being selected ahead of the forlorn face of the little boy who was just told he cannot go to the park with his friends. The clown's sadness is painted on; the boy's is real.

People are not essential to good Journalism. They just make it easier. When people are not present, the

emotional response could still be there. The photo of unkind graffiti could readily stir up anger, while a simple flag in an unexpected place may bring a spark of patriotism to the heart of the viewer. I still get a chuckle looking at the picture of a bird trying to steal a complete bag of potato chips twice his size - imagining what might happen if he took flight with it. I find that I worry for the owner of the house as I look at a picture of the floodwaters that extend half way up the building. And it's easy to identify with the monkey at the zoo.

Through several failed attempts, I discovered a way to get better Journalism pictures. When I go out to photograph Journalism subjects, I really need to think Journalism. If I just think about coming home with good quality pictures, my pictures tend to fit only into the Pictorial category. So when it comes to Photo Journalism, I try to take home images that will make them laugh and slap their knees or wipe away tears and hug their neighbors. I want pictures that cause them to squirm in their chairs, bite their nails, drop their jaws, raise their eyebrows, or grit their teeth. Those are the photos I want. I'm looking to find scenes that will stir their souls and cause them to think twice. If I think about finding images like that, I have much better success in Journalism competitions.

JUDGING CREATIVE PRINTS AND PROJECTED IMAGES

Joan Field, FN4C

"Creative photography is producing an image through the use of imaginative skill or originality of thought including the altering of reality. No image should be eliminated from competition simply because it looks realistic, provided it shows originality of concept. This includes modifications in the dark-room, on the computer, or in the camera, as well as unusual points of view, imaginative use of subject matter or lighting or any other presentation that begins with the maker's photograph or a collection of photographs."

There have been two changes in this category over the last several years. The first was changing the name from "Contemporary" to "Creative". The second was placing an emphasis on the word "CREATIVE" rather than on abstraction. The PSA definition still begins with "Creative photography is

the altering of reality."

The definition above was produced with N4C Board approval. Because creativity had often been constrained by PSA standards to the use of techniques, because creativity in camera clubs generally needed a boost, because the Creative category had perceived restrictions leaning towards the abstract, it was felt that a new definition was needed that threw nothing out except commonplace.

Before going any further, it should be said loud and clear:

THE CREATIVE CATEGORY IS THE MOST SUBJECTIVE OF ALL THE N4C COMPETITION CATEGORIES.

Often the judge is comparing apples and oranges, oranges and orangutans, abstract with a realistic but creative concept. It is the most difficult category to

judge because there are no set rules. This latter, of course, is GOOD! That's exactly why the new definition was created.

So How Does the Judge Judge Creative?

Let's start with your background. Some of you are just starting out, so will be at some disadvantage to judges who have had plenty of time to have seen not only thousands of photographs, but thousands of paintings, sculptures, and have read many photographic books and magazines, especially those that display a wide range of interpretations. The recommendation is to clearly make it your business to become a good judge, which you do for love, not money. Although it helps to have innate artistic ability, more rests on your making the effort to go to the local museums, the galleries, and read great books. Such as Ernst Haas's *Creation*, the collection of books by Freeman Patterson and Sabastiao Salgado, *Aperture Magazine*, *My Waking Dream*, *Photography First Century*, and *Art & Visual Perception* by Rudolf Arnheim. Good judging can be related to something like Edison's claim that "Genius is 2% inspiration and 98% perspiration."

Now for creativity. You will quickly note whether the image before you made use of imagination or innovation. Does it tell a story? For instance, a photo of the Delicate Arch with a totally different background such as fish swimming behind it certainly shows imagination. Yet, the whole photo is realistically presented. Another example is the San Francisco ferry building being dislodged by the roots of a giant tree that surround it. And yet another, The Land of Pisa, where every element in the composite is tipped in the same direction as the Leaning Tower. You've seen these kind of examples over the years; with the new definition they should be accepted as some of the best images in the creative category. Of course, just with any photo, all general rules of composition, technique, interest and impact apply. In these ingenious examples, impact is foremost.

Not so creative examples are the simple use of a single Photoshop filter to achieve a different look. These can be very impressive until you've seen dozens of them. The outcome is recognizable to those familiar with the program that produced it. However, they can be very beautiful if well done and for that reason should be judged fairly in this category. As part of your training, you should be relatively familiar with Photoshop and some of its most

common filters. In my opinion, these images should not be given as high a rating as the truly creative entry.

In this same category are the images of everyday objects that may utilize a different viewpoint and lighting. They often fail to achieve the kind of dynamism a judge is seeking and simultaneously lack innovation. They are usually failed attempts at the abstract.

Abstracts

The majority of "creative" images you will see will fall in the abstract category, not because they better meet the definition, but because they have held sway for so long under "contemporary." There have been judges who have simply thrown out anything that was not abstract. Hopefully, no longer!

To judge abstracts requires at least some knowledge of art.

Predominant in judging an abstract are composition and the use of color.

(1) Composition:

Many rules have been defined and are attributed to good composition. Predominant among them is the Rule of Thirds or the Golden Mean. Many photographers think that if they use this rule they are "golden" with the judge. According to Richard Martin, "The simple fact is, most subject matter cannot be forced to fit into such predetermined proportions. The rule of thirds also impedes creativity preventing the photographer from exploring more exciting design possibilities." Another rule that lives to be broken is that no diagonal line can originate exactly in the corner.

As a judge, you should look at the composition as a whole, using your intuitive abilities. As stated previously, these can be enhanced by the study of other artwork, extensive reading, and by attending workshops. One technique you can try when assaying an abstract is to squint your eyes so that everything becomes blurred. You can then more easily see the primary components of the composition. Is it static? Does it have movement? Does it achieve a dynamism from a diagonal thrust? Is there a balance between two or more components? Talk about it.

a) Lines

The lines in a composition may be straight, curved, bent or jagged. They form the boundary be-

tween two elements in the image, e.g. the horizon line is the boundary between sky and land. In more abstract images, lines exist created by the touching of adjacent but different colors. Their direction can give a sense of sadness (drooping lines of a willow tree's branches), happiness (lines that curve up, perhaps like a smile), or dynamism (strong diagonals). Crossing lines can create tension. Are the lines pleasing to the eye? Do they lead your eye along forms and shapes creating movement? Do they invoke a rhythm? How do they affect your emotions? Talk about it.

b) Shapes

What about shapes? With your eyes half-closed determine the primary shapes in the composition and decide whether they provide balance to the whole. The primary shapes: squares and rectangles (stability when horizontal or vertical), triangles (unstable, dynamic), and especially circles and ovals (envelopment, warmth) usually have the most impact. Perhaps because they are recognizable. Do specific shapes recur in the image and do they balance one another? Talk about it.

c) Minor Element (Often provides Center of Interest)

Patterns, when really strong compositionally, may be able to stand on their own. The judge can run his/her eye about the whole image and enjoy the colors or textures or mood it creates. It becomes a tapestry. In some cases, another object to provide a center of interest would help. The judge should be careful before recommending this in every instance, because it is another PSA truism, like the Golden Means. However, there are some images where the pattern alone cannot provide sufficient interest. In this case, the judge can suggest that another element or series of elements be included to strengthen the picture. The additional element(s) should have some harmonious relationship to the background. For instance, a single lupine (or a few lupine) in a field of poppies, well placed, of course.

d) Negative Space:

It is often defined as the remaining parts of an image not filled with objects or elements. In general, the more contrast between the unused portions of the image and the contents, the better. To achieve balance you must weigh the relative

weights of the negative and positive spaces in the photo and the positioning, another compositional challenge.

(e) Cropping:

It is the rare photograph that is most perfect in a 2:3 ratio as found on our 35 mm film. Therefore a photo often becomes more compelling by cropping out distractions and wasted areas. Even with abstracts, this may often be the case and should be pointed out. Sometimes the most beautiful part of an abstract is only a small portion of the original.

Color:

The second and equally important element in any image is the use of color. It can provide the WOW! factor to even poor compositions. Naturally, we would like to have both great color and great composition present.

A single color, when properly placed, can give impact simply by being the only color present in an otherwise monochromatic image.

Yellows, reds and oranges are always the most predominant colors and will immediately bring your eye to them over the more subdued blues, violets, and greens. Colors exude temperatures, if only by perception - the reds and yellows being hot and exciting, while the blues and greens are cold and soothing.

But the most important theme in working with a color is the relationship between it and the other colors in the composition.

If primary colors are used (red, yellow, blue), they should stand in irregular weight to each other (think Mondrian). Complementary colors (green & magenta; blue and yellow; and cyan and red) make whiz-bang color impressions. What the judge should look for is the preponderance of one over the other and how the color composition works. More subtle, quasi-monochromatic photos emphasize harmonizing colors close to each other on the color wheel and can be very pleasing to view. They usually also require a good tonal range including blacks or near blacks as balance. Pastels or high color key also work well when the proper balance is achieved. What is the proper balance? You must use, to some extent, an innate visual sense when judging compositions that are predominantly color dependent. Reiterating, this can be improved by studying the artwork of masters and reading books like Jim Zuckerman's *Secrets of Color in Photography*.

Other Considerations:

Texture: This can give a tactile feel to an image. The

textures of all objects included can range from smooth & shiny, to rough and scaly. Texture can impart a sense of three-dimensionality.

Techniques:

Briefly, there are as many special techniques as the creative mind has conceived. To name a few: sandwiching, kodaliths, diazochromes, processing in the wrong developer, IR, multiple exposures, soft & sharp double exposures, panning, zooming, rotating your lens on a long exposure, and, of course, the now common usage of the computer to emulate any or all of these and produce com-

posites that previously took weeks of special masking to achieve.

As a judge, you will see most of them in your travels. (Watch out for sandwiches that are too dark. You can always suggest that the maker overexpose each part of the sandwich by a least one stop.) Because of this plethora of possibilities, it is restated that the Creative Category is the most difficult to judge. You can be of most help if you can describe what is good about the photo, what needs to change and how to change it.

I hope some of the ideas above will give you something to discuss with the maker. Good luck!

CLUBS' CRITIQUES ON JUDGING

PROS

We like a judge:

who is consistent. Who sets a standard and judges to that standard throughout the evening, whether strict or lenient.

who articulates his/her reaction and feelings about the image, either positive or negative

who gives both positive and negative comments, but has more positive things to say than negative.

who makes the evening a teaching/learning experience.

who uses a touch of humor along the way and refrains from taking him/herself too seriously.

who gives tactful criticism.

who comments constructively, ie., composition, exposure, impact, focus, format, cropping etc.

who gives suggestions for other ways of viewing,

who is succinct, concise.

who judges the picture rather than the matting.

who considers the matting as important, too.

who spends more time on the beginners pictures, Classes B & I.

who uses the definitions of each of the five divisions as a guideline when commenting and judging.

who tells us why they like or dislike a picture, being specific.

who ranks the "story telling" picture above the "portrait" and "there it is" picture when judging Nature or Travel.

who is enthusiastic and has a good speaking voice and does not use voice crutches, ie., ah, umm, you know, etc.

who speaks clearly and loudly enough for all to hear easily. who can comment without using cliches. who leaves his/her biases at home. who has an open mind. Is open to innovation.

who understands the "rules", but knows that they can sometimes get in the way of creativity.

CONS

We dislike a judge:

Who uses too many platitudes, ie., "It's nice" "That's pretty" "I like it".

who relates his/her own experiences. who brags about him/herself & his/her photos.

who gives vague, noncommittal comments.

who makes nasty, unnecessary comments, ie., "Now on to better pictures" "This is a bad picture" "Next (only comment made)" or inappropriate language or sexist & racist comments.

who second guesses what or where photo was taken.

who describes photo in detail.

who overemphasizes matting.

who overlooks matting when they are dirty, poorly presented or colors clash.

who judges a Nature picture by Pictorial standards, ignores Nature definition guidelines.

who does not distinguish between the different Divisions.

who has a monotone and is boring to listen to.

who refuses to put biases aside, "I'm allergic to red", etc.

who is a faithful follower of the rules, "it can't be in the middle", "It's not sharp" (when the maker deliberately wanted it that way), "Three is ok but two is not", etc.

who applies the "hand of man" rule to creatures which have adapted extremely well to man's things", ie, barn owls, pelicans, gulls, house sparrows and finches ... to name a few.

who as a professional photographer wastes our time by explaining at length how the subject is best set up for titles if submitted for publication.

And the professional who does not use the definitions as a guideline for judging.

who overlooks printing expertise of the maker.

A GOOD JUDGE should be enthusiastic, clear and concise. S/he must be able to articulate his/her reactions and feelings about an image, but must, also, tactfully and constructively comment on the maker's creativity and technical skills. The judge should use a touch of humor along the way and at the same time make this a meaningful learning experience for the listeners. S/he always adheres to the "definitions", and only uses the "rules of composition" if they do not get in the way of creativity. S/he never uses cliches and never talks about him/herself or his/her experiences. The judge is always careful to not let his/her biases get in the way of his/her judgment. A good judge has a trained speaking voice as well as being very knowledgeable and an expert in all areas of photography.

JUDGING & ANALYSIS

Beyond the rules

A workshop



A photographic Society of America workshop.

Presented By

Jon Fishback FPPW, LRPS

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The Pain and Pleasure of Critical Analysis

One of the most difficult moments in the life of any photographer is hearing an analysis of his/her work. The few minutes leading up to the analysis may seem like an eternity. The event itself may feel like watching your first-born perform in her first Christmas pageant. This feeling is difficult to shake and may be around for years for those who continue to exhibit. I call this Analysis-Paralysis, (AP) for those of you who love acronyms.

One of the most critical elements in reducing this anxiety is the proper analysis by whoever is doing it. Properly done, the analysis can reduce the stress of the moment, and go a long way toward making future events much easier for the maker.

New members of camera clubs, PSA, or any group, whose aim is viewing graphic art, may be especially vulnerable to AP. If part of the group's goal is to keep new members and make them old members, AP may need to be addressed at every level.

Analysis is much more complicated than just saying something nice about a photograph and then explaining how it could have been made better. This has been the popular belief in clubs for years. Persons who are successful in exhibiting are many times ill prepared to conduct analysis. Knowing how an image can be made better through experience is only part of the skill needed in proper analysis. Saying something nice about the image may do more harm than good.

Kind words regarding a photograph may seem condescending if they have no substance. Simply saying that the subject is pretty, is saying something about the photograph over which the photographer may have little control, and is probably obvious to everyone. Comments pro or con must have substance. Most makers will recognize superficial comments and Analysis-Paralysis may set-in. "I really like this photograph" may make YOU feel good; however it does not help the maker unless you can articulate why you like it.

Many times the person doing the analysis leaves out the most obvious. After all is said and done regarding rules and regulations about composition, lighting, and impact, how does the photograph make you feel? Sometimes the photograph will evoke a certain feeling and step beyond the rules. This gives the analyst another positive tool to set up the help the maker needs.

Often, when confronted with a photograph that has a myriad of obvious flaws, the knowledgeable photographer as analyst may be so anxious to help he or she may not even be able to see the positive aspects of the image. A type of tunnel vision sets in and the positive comments are rushed and many times shallow. It takes patience and understanding to ignore what needs to be done and comment intelligently on what was done properly.

Many times it is not what is said that is painful, but the way it is said. Positive comments regarding a photograph have no business in the same paragraph or breath with assistance in what can be done better. An example might be: "The foreground is well handled, however is slightly out of focus." The maker may only hear the out of focus part, and worse than that hasn't a clue as to how the foreground was well handled. A better approach is to discuss the foreground in a substantive manner. "To me, the foreground is well handled. Notice how the dark band of the foreground steps your eye into the lighter middle ground and then to the darker background. This layering of hues, in my opinion, adds dimension and impact to the image."

Notice also the use of the personal terms TO ME, IN MY OPINION. These terms anchor the analysis to the analyst's personal opinion, which, after all, is what it is.

Never use the connecting words, 'however' or 'but' or any word that ostensible "drops the other shoe." This technique doesn't work; the receiver may only retain the negative comment.

After finishing with what was done properly, a short pause may allow the maker to relax and even reflect on the fact that this process is not so bad after all. When writing the analysis always separate the good from the help area by placing them in separate paragraphs. The tendency may be to re-address previous positive comments, to emphasize the help part. Do not do this. The positive reinforcement has been done and can only be degraded by further comment. Make the help comments as succinct as possible and above all make them pertinent.

In the previous example one might say, "The foreground appears to be slightly out of focus to me. I think a sharper foreground may have given this photograph a bit more impact." Then stop, and go on to any other help that can be rendered. Never belabor an obvious flaw, saying it two different ways is redundant at best and only adds to the makers AP.

One of the most difficult things in analysis is the need, many times, to completely alter the way one speaks or writes. The use of decisive terms such as 'always', 'never', 'must', 'should', are usually not the best words to use to analyze photography. Substituting indecisive words such as "may", "might" or 'consider', may go a long way toward making AP easier to handle, and leave the analyst room to be wrong.

Analysis is not designed to find something wrong. It is designed to see something right, and then see things that may be improved upon. Analysis is not designed to correct what is wrong, but to suggest what may be done to improve in the future. The maker must always be left with the impression that the improvement is their choice.

Image Analysis, what is it all about?

Image analysis is very subjective. Film critiques analyze and criticize film based on years of watching the movies. Their analysis is nothing more than their opinion of the film with an emphasis on making an interesting discussion around the analysis. Part of their interest is self-serving, in that they need their audience to continue to read and listen to their articles and/or television show. Their opinion may or may not be for the purpose of helping the filmmaker do it differently the next time. The fact is the film industry may ignore the analysis of their work.

The American film industry is largely in it for the money, so their reason to do it correctly has to do with pleasing the masses. The masses enjoy certain things and if the film industry provides this it may be successful. This does not mean the success is something everyone enjoys; it just means they made money. Making money is their reason to exist, their purpose.

Still photography is much like this. There must be a reason for the image to exist. If the photographer creates only for self-gratification, then he or she should do the analysis. For a second party to dare to comment on this type image would be a mistake. It is when the image is created for competition that image analysis becomes a very valuable tool for the maker. Images sent for competition have, by default, been sent in for the express reason of competing. If the photographer wishes to be successful in dealing with salon judges, there are certain norms that may apply.

Rules and regulations, or norms, have been passed down through the centuries in art, and through decades of judging in Photographic Society of America and Camera Club (PSA/CC) competition. If you show three landscape photographs to random members of PSA/CC, more times than not they will pick the one, as the best, that follow the most norms.. They may not know why and when asked why may not be able to articulate it. They have been bombarded by images that meet certain criteria and have been told this is good and will compete well.

These norms may have little relevance in the larger photographic environment. Much of the massive photographic community may not subscribe to norms of any kind. Relevance of images in this environment may have a much broader acceptance, and analysis takes on a much different role, one that may be more esoteric or cerebral

It is the phenomenon of rules or norms that causes the analysis to be a valuable tool in the PSA/CC environment. The photographer must be aware of the norms that cause judges to react favorably to their images, if she or he is to be successful in exhibiting. Sure, one can just muddle along and see what gets accepted, then make more just like that. This is a very slow process and one that can stifle the creative juices as well as being very costly. Knowing the norms leaves the photographer open to all types of experimentation. Norms can be applied or not in a myriad of ways.

The photographer that knows what is considered normal for a specific purpose and then works outside that, will know why the images was or was not successful, and will intelligently accept that outcome. The sensitive analyst may recognize fine images by persons working outside the norms and reward them for doing so. This may, in time, cause a reduction of the use of the hackneyed rules and norms, and broaden the spectrum of acceptable images.

Photographers must be emotionally prepared for critical analysis of their images. Analysis can be one of the most painful aspects of a photographer's life. Most images are not finished to the point of showing them unless the maker has an emotional attachment to them. Seldom have I heard someone say about their image, "I just hate this image, can you tell me why?" In almost every case the photographer is looking for reinforcement of his/her reason for making the image. Some times the maker is looking for additional reasons for the image to exist. Seldom is anyone prepared for reasons the image could have been made better, and worst of all, reasons it should not have been made at all. This is part of the reason the image must have a purpose. The purpose opens up the discussion to specifics regarding how the image does or does not fit that purpose. It allows photographers to distance themselves from the emotional attachment to the image and focus on the way to make it successful based on this purpose. The analyst's role at this point is a simple matter of a discussion regarding what norms have been broken, applied or not, and make a recommendation based on this.

Forethoughts

Show your work to 100 different people and you will get
100 different opinions,
all of them valid.

Brooks Jenson.

No one can tell you what to think. Thinking is as natural as breathing. In the PSA/Camera Club (PSA/CC) environment there is much subtle teaching happening on **what** to think. There is a reason for this, whether or not it is a good reason I will leave to you.

In any organization there are rules. Rules designed for safety or ones to make the organization run more smoothly and efficiently. More importantly the rules may be designed to make the individual more successful. The PSA/CC environment is no different than any organization. The competitive environment has fostered rules over the years to help members be more successful within this framework. Rest assured it is a closed environment just like any organization, and outside that environment, the organizations rules may not exist in the same form or in any form.

What these rules have done is attempt to teach judges **what** to think, and it has succeeded to a degree. In teaching composition and balance we say use the rule of thirds. If something does not feel right we are taught that the natural world reads from left to right. The rules would have us believe that the natural world presents itself with one center of interest. The list goes on.

Rules learned for the sake of making ones own photographs, may very well make you more successful in the PSA/CC environment. When it comes to analysis there may be some additional worries when the rules are applied arbitrarily.

In this workshop I will be careful and try not to tell you **what** to think or say. I will spend most of the time on **how** to say what you think and say. This too can be a slippery slope, as makers perceive analysis in different ways. I will try to give you general ways to formulate words so that when the rules came up in your conversation it might appear as your own thoughts. In this way, the analysis becomes something between you and the maker and not something that is a universal truth, as there are no universal truths. Image analysis is subjective let me be very clear on this point. There are those who will say that the process can be objective, and certain truths fit all situations. This is just not possible, as people see things so differently.

I say again; preface you comments, positive and negative with personal terms that make them your opinion only. Terms such as , In my opinion, To me, To my eye, I think, I believe, etc.,

To complain of a photograph for being literal and merciless, is like complaining of a good memory that will not suffer you to forget your sins.

George Santayana

Photography is nature seen from the eyes outward, painting from the eyes inward.

Charles Sheeler.

Image Analysis Is it Objective or Subjective?

The following two definitions are from the New World Dictionary.

Objective:

Being, or regarded as something outside the mind of the subject or person thinking.
Being independent of the mind; real; actual.

Subjective:

Of or resulting from the feelings or temperament of the subject, or person thinking; not objective; personal.

It has been loosely interpreted that the judging process may be the act of placing a numeric score on an image to determine its worth within the process, and the analysis may be explaining or defending that score.

Using the two dictionary definitions above, the nature of the process might appear to be SUBJECTIVE. Although the image itself may be OBJECTIVE or tangible, the thoughts of one analyzing it may not be. The tools one uses in their mind to analyze a photograph may also be SUBJECTIVE. A rule such as the Rule of Thirds, may very well be OBJECTIVE, as it is real, can be drawn on paper and made to reside outside the mind.

When a rule is applied in the mind of the analyst and then communicated it may very well become quite SUBJECTIVE. Here it becomes a feeling and part of the temperament of the analyst. It becomes personal and therefore SUBJECTIVE.

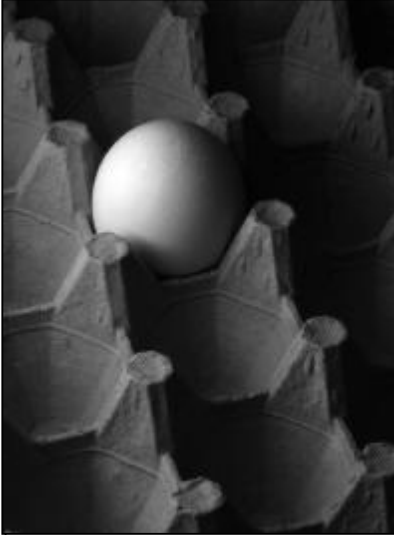
In an attempt to shed some light on just how subjective the process may be, we may use images and examples of real life analysis by students in the Image Analysis Course.

The students in this course run the gamut from the very experienced judge to the aspiring one. In most cases they are good photographers who have been in the camera club environment for some time, and in many cases are the members who are looked up to when it comes to analysis.

I must say, in most cases the comments are extremely good. The student sees well, communicates feelings and their comments are well thought out and follow the prescribed rules that have been handed down for decades in the Camera Club (CC) environment. The disparity of their comments in no way reflects on their perceived relevance.

The following is in no way a condemnation of the student's comments, but given here to show the subjectivity of the process. The next time your images are judged in competition remember each analyst sees them through their own filter. You may need to have many opinions before anything concrete may appear regarding the worth of your image. And then sadly there may never be consensus.

Let's start with one of the more controversial images in the course.



For the sake of brevity student's comments will be paraphrased and short bulleted statements will be used.

- The image is over exposed.
- The image is under exposed.
- The depth of field is off.
- The depth of field is right on.
- The center of interest is placed well.
- The center of interest is off, use the rule of thirds.
- The black and white is a good choice. I think it should be in color. (What color, I have no idea, since the egg carton is grey and the egg is white.)
- The highlights are blown out.
- The highlight has good detail.
- The shadows are too dark, need detail.
- The shadows are good and balance the image well.
- The leading line should not come from the corner.
- The composition is excellent.
- The image should be flipped.
- The diagonal lines are just right from right to left.

And the winner is: I didn't know what it was so I can't judge it.



Here is another:

- The background is too black.
- I love the black background.
- There is too much negative space.
- The composition is impeccable.
- Not enough detail in the shadows.
- The shadow detail is good.
- The highlights are blown out.
- The edge highlight is perfect, with detail.
- I like the vertical stem, it balances nicely.
- The vertical stem should be cropped out.
- The composition is good.
- The subject is ill placed, crop the bottom.
- I like the back lit leaf.
- Too much light on the leaf, detracts from the interest area.

Another of the more controversial images shown below is an image by Imogen Cunningham. The title is "The Unmade Bed."

Some forty years ago if you were able to scrape together the \$1200 you may have been able to buy this print. Today the vintage print of this image will sell retail upwards of \$10,000.00. The point made here is that the image is well respected as one of the finer photographs of history. As you might expect there have been many fine comments about the image, and some well thought out criticism. What you might not expect is the hostility generated by it. There have been students that felt the maker should not have made the image. There were those that said it made no sense to them therefore they were unable to view it in a positive manner. Who wants to look at an unmade bed?

So, the next time your image is judged and some judge says, he or she cannot relate to it, remember you are in good company.



One of the most difficult things for the student to analyze is the abstract image. Several are included in the course as a teaching tool. There are those that see abstraction as something to ponder over and to analyze based on the image as a photograph. There are others whose anger at not knowing what it is prevents them from making rational comments. The greatest disparity in the comments comes from the abstract image. So it might appear that if one were to compete with the abstract form, one might expect mixed scores in judging.

Suffice it to say there are wide variances in the comments from every image in the course. The images have been arbitrarily changed from time to time to see if the content of the course might be the reason everything seems so subjective. Prize winning images and ones from beginning photographers have been used. It does not seem to matter; the comments pro and con are so disparate overall that the only conclusion one might come to is that the process itself is subjective beyond what you could have imagined.

Now, all this said, this may not be a bad thing. On the contrary, it may keep things in equilibrium. If the process was objective and the images could be judged and analyzed by a computer, things might get boring very fast. Winners would be the ones who mechanically followed the hackneyed rules programmed into the computer.

The trick for student/camera club members who may be asked to judge and analyze, is to recognize this subjective process and try not to arbitrarily apply objective rules like a computer might.

It may be important to utilize objectivity in your own work. You can even make a transparent mask to hold up in front of the camera with the rule of thirds scribed on it. This may be the height of objectivity as it is tangible, and you can see it, it is real. Here you will be applying an objective tool to your photography.

The thing you may want to avoid in analysis is arbitrarily applying that objectivity to the work of others.



I am hopeful that you will learn to recognize the pitfalls in an analysis such as the one below, regarding the image to the left.

This has beautiful color, nice work on the flesh tones, and great focus on the eyes.

The image is out of balance. The rule of thirds is violated. The eyes are right in the middle. The top is heavy thus the composition is bad. The scarf at the top sticks up in an unnatural way and creates a dark hole, eye trap, distraction. The image can be partially saved by cropping at the top to eliminate the distractions which move the eyes up.

Of course this is a painfully subjective and poorly worded analysis and may, in fact, be total crap. Even if it is all true to the person doing the analysis, I am sure you can see that the analysis was insensitive, boorish, egotistical, down right nasty, and maybe the most damaging thing is that it is not in a personal voice and may sound to the maker as if the entire world see it this way. This could not be farther from the truth as we all know it is a well accepted image.

If you learn anything from this workshop, I am hopeful you will learn this:

Let me again repeat; no one can tell you **what** to think, so when you analyze a photograph ask yourself two questions. (1) Is what I am saying about the image actually what I think, or am I saying something that someone taught me to think? (2) Is the comment I am making sensitive and personal?

Notes on viewing a photograph.

Growing up in the Photographic Society of America and Camera Club (PSA/CC) environment one may be taught certain rules that make the exercise of competition or salon entry more successful. This is fine as long as that is the goal of presenting the image. Analyzing images produced for that purpose are then discussed with these rules in mind.

One study conducted on eye motion and control may shed some light on some of the rules and why certain of these may not hold up under scrutiny, namely split interest areas and distracting objects.

Viewing a photograph is goal oriented. [Mackworth and Morandi, 1967, Underwood and Radach, 1998, Henderson and Hollingworth, 1998]. Given a task to view a photograph the viewer will spend time looking at relevant portions of the image based on the task. As an example if a person was given a photograph, and nothing was said, they might randomly scan the image based solely on their personal preferences or better yet their prejudices. The same person given a verbal task in viewing the image may see something entirely different although looking at the same image. An example of a task that may be pertinent is the task of the analyst. If the analyst is given an image with the task of evaluation, he or she may start out looking for something perceived as right or wrong with the image.

Some perceived wrong may come from a subset of rules, some of which have been passed down through generations of art appreciation. Some are nothing more than arbitrary rules that exist within the framework of a closed environment, two of which I will discuss.

These rules that may not have basis in history or science are the rule of distracting elements and split interest areas.

This perceived problem has been studied and these studies may shed some light on why the rule may be something to question. Kowler, 1990, says that information in guiding the eye movement around an image must come from the scene. The process of selecting a new location to view must be guided in part by low frequency information gathered from the periphery during earlier fixations.

Low frequency information may be considered areas of high contrast or junctions, or more commonly, light areas. These are sometimes thought to be significant information outside the fixation point. The fixation point or the Point Of Regard (POR) is the narrow angle of the human eye that will render a cognitive image. It is usually considered to be about 1.3 degrees. Outside the fixation point low level stimulation may or may not play an important part in eye movement. This is a highly debatable topic in the scientific community, although widely held as a truth in the PSA/CC environment.

So if one were given a task to evaluate a photograph the eye might travel around the image in a discursive manner attempting to fulfill the task given, in this example, to find something good or bad within the image. Nowhere in the research was there any discussion of the fact that this eye movement was anything more than the mind fulfilling the task. In fact I find no mention of any psychological factor that might allude to this movement being a distraction or something bad.

So it might appear that distraction through eye movement, perceived, might very well be quite subjective and in fact be a very personal thing, difficult to quantify.

Moving on to split interest areas, one might need to describe interest area. Using the research of Yarbus 1967, the interest area might very well be where the eye stops its fixation on one small area of the image. Since this movement is task oriented, and our discussion revolves around the very broad task of image analysis, it could be correlated that there is no primary interest area to begin with. After scanning the image the analyst may make an arbitrary decision as to the interest area.

Some of these arbitrary decisions may be easy. An example might be, subjects isolated in some way so as to remove reasons for additional fixation of the eye or saccades.

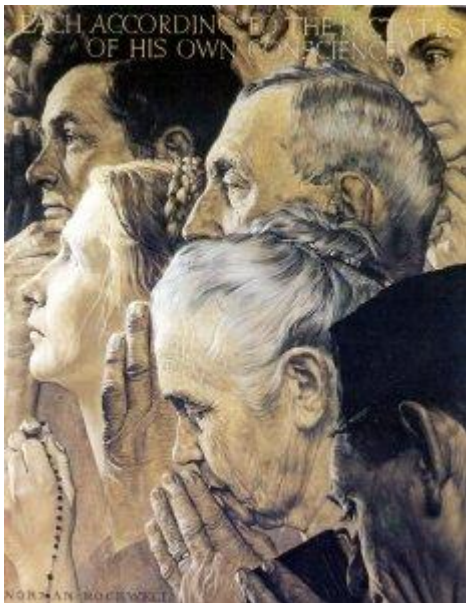
Saccades are the rapid movements of the eye from fixation point to fixation point. They are usually involuntary but can be voluntary. They are what cause the analyst's eye to move from interest area to interest area. Since the decision is made by the analyst as to the primary interest area, the perception and popular belief is that the image can hold no more than one.

This belief is usually articulated by the analyst by saying that his or her eye moves back and forth, thus making the image confusing. The fact may be that the eye and its saccades, in most cases, is involuntary so movement of the eye is perfectly normal. Stopping to fixate on two or more areas of an image may only be confusing if the analyst perceives it to be so. Reducing the photograph to one interest area may be a disservice, as life itself seldom has one interest area.

There may be no rule in art history that precludes an image from having multiple interest areas or in fact having multiple subjects outside a perceived interest area. There also may be no rule that says the eye must not travel in a discursive manner about the image.

If one were to study the work of 16th and 17th century masters you will find that the two rules mentioned here are broken over and over along with a host of others which will be left for another discussion.

This image may be a perfect one to illustrate what has been said.



There does not appear to be one interest area, the old woman with clasped hands looking down may capture the interest of many. The young woman with her raised eyes and highlighted face will appeal to another. The dark hair of the person in the foreground may draw the eye of yet another viewer, and yet the dark haired man in the background seems to be the sharpest with the most contrast and will probably draw the eye of someone else.

The eye movement around the image, from interest area to interest area is as natural as breathing. The power of the image may, in fact, be its lack of a central interest area. The movement of the eye around and around is simply enjoying each interest area.

Outside the present discussion there are other portions of this image that may need analysis. Notice how the elderly woman's head cuts the elderly man's face just below the nose. There may be those that will see that as distracting. The partial face of the man in the foreground will be seen by others as a fault, although if this were a photograph that is how the scene might have appeared. The fact is Norman Rockwell could have painted it any way he wished. He did not see it as not having a central interest area, or with distracting elements. He simply saw it as interesting, and one might hesitate to say he did it wrong.

Notice also the artist did not paint selective focus, the image is sharp front to back.

Distractions

We have all encountered distractions, a whiney child when concentrating on reading a novel, the ringing of the cell phone while driving, may all be examples of physical distractions. Visual distractions may be somewhat different.

A visual distraction may not have an auditory component. That is, if you were watching a pigeon walking around eating bread crumbs you just threw, and a jogger ran between you and the pigeon, you might be distracted. This real world example, of course, is in the third dimension, and has the added component of movement.

A static image such as a photograph may also have a distraction. My theory is that this distraction may not be as common as judges would have us believe.

Consider if you will the following possible definition of a visual distraction when it is associated with a photograph.

A visual distraction may very well be something that is not recognizable. This type of distraction is one that causes your eye to stop its natural movement around the image and wonder what it is. It will sometimes stop your eye movement for an inordinate amount of time. Now, if this object has no relevance to the overall image and it has caused you to spend way too much time trying to figure out what it is, it might be a distraction because it is keeping you from enjoying the image.

A visual distraction might be something recognizable. A pastoral scene with a mountain in the background and three sheep grazing in a nice triangular composition in the middle ground, with a large, empty, white, plastic, grocery bag in the foreground. The bag might be a distraction.

Now consider what might not be a distraction.

Natural, recognizable, relevant objects within the image may not be distractions. One example may be a rock. It is natural, you recognize it and it is relevant if it is in the sheep scene described above replacing the plastic bag. The fact that the rock breaks up the odd number of sheep from three objects to four, and the fact that the rock may be light in color and insignificantly small, may not make it a distraction. It may simply be another natural object in the scene. The movement of your eye to the rock and then around the scene and back to the rock, may not make it a distraction, simply something to see.

Judges may misinterpret natural eye movement as a distraction. Many times it is said that eye movement to relevant recognizable subjects, splits the interest area. A consideration might be that it does not split anything, only allows a more complete appreciation of the presentation or what was there.

So the next time you see something in a photograph that appears to be a distraction, ask yourself if what you are seeing really is spoiling your experience with the image, or is it simply something you happen to see. Ask yourself if it is something that truly distracts your mind or is it something you have been taught should distract your mind.



An example of what might be a distracting element. Even though we may know what it is, (dowel) it is not relevant and the viewer may spend too much time trying to decide what it is and why it is there.



An example of something that may not be distracting: The price tag may be relevant, recognizable, and natural. It tells the cost of the golf clubs. The eye is drawn back to the white price tag, over and over, however may not spoil the overall experience with the clubs. There may not be two interest areas although the eye moves back and forth between the clubs and the tag. In fact one might venture to guess that the viewer will spend a lot of time trying to see how much the clubs cost, however the tag may not be of primary interest.

Split Interest Areas

Split interest areas might be a subset of Distractions. If the distraction holds your interest, by definition it could be a split interest. A distraction as defined previously may be something that is recognizable yet so far from relevant it may be considered a distraction and a split interest. The problem arises when the analyst interprets something natural and relevant as a split interest area, or in fact considers split interest as a problem. It may not be, the following may be an example:

Here we have a classic painting by the 17th century painter Vermeer. It serves as a good example of what may be seen, by some, to be distractions and split interest areas.



The small light colored triangle above the door might be perceived as a distraction. The small bright white window middle left also might be seen the same way. The entire doorway leading to the next room with its interesting objects may be seen as a completely different interest area.

The fact is that none of these perceptions may be bad, only taught to be so.

Consider for a moment, the scene before you may be exactly the way it was. This room and the other are inextricably linked. They go together because that is the way the house was built. The windows and objects are a part of these people's life.

The fact that your eye travels around the image fixating on elements of the scene, then goes around again, may be nothing

more than your eye and mind doing what is natural. The fact you stop to look at the two people, then move over and examine the room beyond, may not be a problem, it may just be your mind needing to take in the entire story.

Life and the natural environment are not made up of single interest areas. In the first place, one cannot fixate on the mother and child at the same time. Try it; fixate on the mother's face. The child will be out of your point of regard unless you move your eyes. Then to enjoy their relationship one must continually move one's eyes back and forth between the woman and the child. I believe this eye

movement between the woman and the child constitutes a split interest area, but not something bad. With this in mind, split interest then might be a natural phenomenon and something to be embraced. Movement of the eye from the mother and child then over to the door and what is beyond might be as natural as standing where you are and looking at the scene. How can this possibly be a problem?

Center of Interest



What exactly is a center of interest? Previously we have discussed split interest areas. In that discussion it was pointed out that there may be many interest areas within the boundaries of the image. If one were to assume that all images must have only one single interest area, what would the image look like? Let me see if I can find an example.

Short of a lump of coal on a snow bank, it is difficult to find an image with only one center of interest. Here is a photograph of a single subject, so the interest might be considered, the leaf. There is, however, many interest areas within the frame. You may argue that the lines of the leaf all point to the interest area. If the interest area, then, is the stem where the lines come together, how does one explain the interest one feels to get to that point? Or when there, how can the interest area stretch so far?

Going back, for a moment, to the previous beautiful image of the mother and daughter, one would be hard pressed to determine the center of interest.

Strangely enough the center of interest will probably be determined by each viewer. One person will be taken by the relationship of the mother and child, while another may be very interested in the floor and how it was made, while a third may be very interested in the chair in the other room, or the portrait on the wall.

Use the center of interest rule in your own work, be very careful in applying it to the work of others.

Rule of Thirds

Although this rule can be a very powerful tool in building a composition, it is by no means something that should totally influence the analyst in judging the impact of the image.

Here we have a classic image by Norman Rockwell. Notice that the rule of thirds does not seem to be a consideration in his composition. If it had been, wouldn't we see some crucial part of the image in one of the intersecting points?

In fact, if we digress for a moment you may notice what could be perceived as distractions and split interest areas. The items on the floor, however important they are in telling the story, may be misinterpreted as distracting from a perceived interest area. The girls face and posture in the mirror may appear to hold ones interest, however the large mass of her back occupies a majority of the frame. One might easily be distracted into thinking this is a split interest area to be shunned.



The doll with the cut-off head may also hold ones interest as it is relevant and very natural to this story. The movement of the eyes around this image might easily be interpreted as confusion or chaotic.

It is at this point the analyst may want to relax, take a deep breath and ask a few personal questions: Am I being confused by this image or am I excited? Are the elements within the frame relevant, recognizable? Does what I am seeing make sense to me in the overall? Are the rules I perceive as being broken, ones I think detract from the image, or are they rules I have been taught to apply arbitrarily?

Right to Left/Left to Right

The popular phrase is; “We read from left to right.” Ok, one may ask, “So what?” A better question might be, “Does the world align itself from left to right?” I think the answer to this may be no. One of the problems in this rule is to identify just what should be moving from left to right. There are those that will say the eye movement needs to adhere to this rule. There are others that will say the subject should be facing that direction. It is all very confusing, let's use an example:

In the image on the next page, by Jamie Wyeth, it may be difficult to determine how the composition flows. The bathtub appears to be facing right to left, while the shadow may be facing from lower left to right. More importantly the hilltop with the dark mass of trees on the left may move the eye from left to right. As you can see, the subject in the foreground, the bathtub, facing from right to left violates the rule. If the image were reversed to accommodate the rule for the bathtub, the remainder of the image may then be in violation.

This rule must be very carefully and very rarely discussed. Unfortunately it is widely discussed and used in analysis with little regard to common sense.

From what you have read above, what else do you see about this image that may violate hackneyed rules?



Abstract/Unrecognizable Work

It has been said, by both critics and advocates of the photograph, that the photographic image describes everything and explains nothing. This is a neat little compact phrase designed, I think, by the critique, to put photography in its place, and by the advocate, to find a niche for photography in the broad spectrum of communications. I imagine this might be said of all the graphic arts, those that don't actually speak out loud either by voice or the written word.

I will submit that this is the true strength of the graphic arts, especially the photograph. Explanation may, in fact, be overrated when speaking of the creative as well as the viewing process.

All our lives we have been bombarded with explanations of things both tangible and intangible. Twelve or sixteen years of school have taught us to get our explanation of things from the written or the spoken word. Much of what is taught has, as a consequence, a right or wrong answer based on what someone has told us, or what we have gleaned from books, pamphlets or the Internet. This works well in learning the who, what, why, where and how. A photograph of someone driving a car may not get you started on the right track if you are actually trying to learn to drive. If, on the other

hand, you have no interest in learning how to drive, or already know how, the power of this same photograph's inability to explain comes in to play.

Photographers learn, early on, the viewer will interpret their work. Giving up the right of interpretation is also central to the creative as well as the viewing process. Photographers are released from the burden of explanation by virtue of the fact they may not be there during the viewing. The viewer is allowed the freedom of understanding based on a personal connection to the photograph.

Those who find interpretation difficult will attribute a weakness to the statement "*Photographs describe everything and explain nothing.*" The need for explanation in life may be a cultural phenomenon bred from years of being spoon fed explanations of everything. Those who find visual interpretation easy and emotionally fulfilling will subscribe to the fact that the power of the photograph is in a personal connection, its lack of explanation, and find joy in the fact that "*Photographs describe everything and explain nothing.*"

It is possible you will be confronted with images you do not understand. There is no way you can understand what every maker has in mind. You can, however discuss the work from the standpoint of a photograph. It is unlikely that the image will have no characteristics of a photograph. Therefore using the tools at your disposal it is possible to discuss aspects of something you do not understand.



shape and pattern.

One of the worst things that can happen is for an analyst to judge down because of her/his lack of understanding. It is better to disqualify oneself than analyze on a prejudice or the inability to understand the underlying story of the image. It is not possible and not necessary.

We may use this as an example: There may be no actual meaning. The maker is not available to ask, and there are few if any clues for the analyst.

It may not even be a photograph, but if you are judging a PSA/CC competition there is a very good chance that it is.

The analysis may, therefore, be based strictly on a graphic design and whether or not it appears successful to the analyst.

Movement can be discussed, graphic impact, lines of force, composition, feelings, and

With all the elements of a photograph to discuss, if the analyst still is unable to get beyond the prejudice of not knowing what it is, as I said before, it may be better to disqualify oneself.

Analysis of Abstract Images

It is my experience that one of the most difficult things for some people is analyzing an abstract image. Inevitably the old rule regarding whether or not the maker was successful, rears its ugly head.

Somewhere, someplace, sometime, it was said that one of the criteria for judging an image is; *has the maker succeeded in the task at hand*. Now, I am not sure, but I might speculate that what is meant by this is whether or not this particular butterfly on the flower measures up to all the other butterflies on flowers that may have been deemed good. Success in this context may seem self evident. You have either successfully created the good butterfly or you have not.

The problem with this criterion is that analysts carry it forward into the analysis of other types of work. Specifically I will discuss the abstract form. Many images just don't fit into a category that will allow the analyst to recognize the subject of an image. Now, if you cannot identify the subject, it might be difficult to decide whether or not the maker was successful in creating it.

This hackneyed rule, *has the maker succeeded in the task at hand*, causes additional problems with some analysts. Since there is no way to apply the rule, as the image is not recognizable, a sort of blindness may set in. Confronted with a non-recognizable image, the analyst may reject it out of hand. I have heard it said more times than I care to, "I can't analyze this because I do not know what it is."

Knowing what it is cannot be one of the criteria for analyzing photography. The maker has released all rights regarding what it is over to the viewer. The viewer/analyst then must accept the burden of creating a personal meaning. Then it should be a simple matter of using the elements of a good photograph to analyze the work. If the analyst cannot create any meaning for the image, it should still be a simple matter to just analyze it using all the elements. Most everything photographic will have, or not, composition, lighting, impact, emotion, balance, etc. Understanding what it is, or being able to create a meaning may just be a bonus, not imperative.

Some photographers are drawn to the abstract form. I am not sure if many of them can articulate the reason for this fascination. The fact remains that these same individuals will compete in Photographic Society of America and Camera Club (PSA/CC) competitions. Judges may be called upon to comment on these same images, and do a disservice to these people by not understanding how to make relevant comments.

An Analysis Dilemma



This is one of the photographs, at one time, used in an online analysis course.

A student's partial analysis went like this?

This picture is difficult to judge because you really are judging the figures of art which is someone else's art work. I would say that a picture like this type should not be in a contest, but the art work itself can be entered. I guess what I'm trying to say is, if the artwork is the work of the photographer then it could be acceptable.

I returned this partial critique of her analysis:

Be very careful in making assumptions. It is best to discuss what you know. What you know may be only what is in front of you. If the work is there it needs intelligent analysis. The only reality you have is that the work has been presented for analysis. You may need to analyze it as a photograph.

The student returned this explanation of her analysis:

I once entered a picture in a contest. It's a picture of crazy horse and I tried to capture the sculpture in the background within the frame of the statue. The judge told me that because it was someone else's art he didn't think it was good to enter it in a contest and judge someone else's work.

The student had been influenced by the words of a judge. This is largely how judges/ analysts are trained in the PSA/CC environment

I returned the following advice to the student.

And did that make any sense to you? Your comment to the judge might well have gone something like this: "Since this is a photograph, I don't expect you to judge it on the merits of the sculpture, I am sure the maker has already received the analysis needed on that. What I would expect is that the photograph be judged on its own merits, as a photograph. In a photograph of the great sphinx, one does not judge the work of the artisans that created it, rather it is hoped that the analysis of the photograph of that sculpture would be judged on its own merits."

It is disturbing to me to think that there are judges out there that actually think along those lines. I can only hope that you are above all this.

Analysis and Technology

In the middle 1970's there was published, a fine book, "One Hundred Years of Photographic History." It was essays honoring Beaumont Newhall. The last essay in the book was by Minor White. Mr. White's wonderful essay finished up discussing the photographer's relationship to the *enlightened critique*.

This essay started me thinking as to how that relationship may have changed over the years. The enlightened critique, (I prefer the term analyst) has always been one who is able to get past personal prejudice in favor of a rational approach to analysis. The enlightened analyst has studied the history of photography and *has seen and examined a large number of images in every category*. This experience should allow the analyst the tools necessary to discuss photographs by comparing what is being seen, with other work that has been and is being done in that same category.

Photography analysts might be considered in at least two different camps. There are those fine art analysts that work generally with images seen in galleries, museums, or fine art publications. Their job has not changed much over the years. They are generally focused on the cerebral aspects of the image. That is, they are concerned very little as to how the image was made, or why, but rather focus on the image itself, the social and or societal ramification, and the artist. The second analyst is concerned with how the image was made and possibly how it could have been made better. This critique/analyst may be working with images in such places as the Photographic Society of America (PSA), camera clubs, or the many professional photography associations worldwide. Let's call this second critique **judge**, simply because that is the name frequently applied to these analysts.

The headlong race toward technology may enter into the judge & photographer mix of things. The bold italic words above are worth repeating here, with regard to what an analyst should be. (*....has seen and examined a large number of images in every category*) I will use one example; the wonderful high tech. tool called High Dynamic Range (HDR). For those of you not familiar with this term, it is a term used in graphics art computer software that allows combining multiple images of over and under exposure into one, thus extending the range of exposure. One might think of it as a high tech. Zone System. It may be possible that the judge of today has not been exposed to enough work that has been subjected to this technique, to recognize it and fairly discuss its merits. This headlong race toward tools to make photography easier and better has made the job of the judge much harder. It may take some time for the judge of today, to come abreast of a single new technology and as soon as it happens there is a new one.

The analyst not being aware of the high tech tools may be one problem. Being aware of them may be as much or more of a problem. It is very easy today to look at all images with a jaded eye. Let's call this eye the high tech filter. As analysts we tend to see modern work through this filter. Something well done may be suspect as the technique used to create it may very well be a high tech computer manipulation, or not.

One may pose the question, so what? So what indeed, the image is what it is and how it was created should have no bearing on the issue. This statement of fact holds true outside the realm of PSA and camera clubs only. There are places in competition with these groups, for heavily manipulated work such as the Electronic Imaging Divisions (EID) of PSA and there are other divisions where it is not allowed. The high tech. filter of the judge's mind may see manipulation when it is not there and not see it when it is well done.

Today we are seeing analysis done where the maker is faulted for not using a particular high tech tool just because it is available. As an example we hear comments regularly regarding the fact there is no detail in the shadow area, no matter that the naked eye would have seen no detail there. Because we have the tool to put detail where it may not exist, many feel it should be done despite the fact that there may be no need. Consequently makes use HDR when it is not needed.

Opinion in Photography Analysis

The difference between fact and opinion is that a fact is something that is empirically true and can be supported by evidence while an opinion is a belief that may or may not be backed up with some type of evidence. An opinion is normally a subjective statement that can be the result of an emotion or an individual interpretation of a fact. For example, a photograph is good or bad

Although the differences between facts and opinions usually rest on whether they are objective or subjective respectively, a fact can, in some cases, be subjective. A subjective fact can communicate why someone likes a photograph. If you tell someone that you really like a particular image that is a subjective fact about your emotional state. On the other hand if I tell you that you should not like it, this statement would qualify only as my opinion regardless that I may think it to be true.

Discerning fact from opinion is often difficult, and for centuries philosophers have been trying to discover what can actually qualify as a fact rather than an opinion. This branch of philosophy is called epistemology, the study of the limits of what human beings can know for fact. Additionally, all of the modern sciences rest on the foundation of discerning fact from opinion and methodically aim to find true knowledge or fact.

It is difficult to claim that something is a fact when it is not clearly obvious, such as biological differences in gender, because facts are often proven to be wrong. For example, centuries ago the world was thought to be flat and this was held as fact by the majority of people. As we now know, the world is in fact round so the former statement is demoted to an outdated opinion. From this example we can see that those who thought that the earth was not flat were initially communicating an opinion that was eventually found to be true, which shows that a fact can almost always be challenged. **

I think we are born with few opinions. The brain, at that time, may be a blank canvas, an unexposed roll of film, an empty compact flash card. To fill up the media of our mind we must be subjected to some form of stimulation, auditory, visual, tactile, or olfactory, sometimes combinations of all four.

Early in our lives we soak up things around us and when we become old enough to understand, we are fed information about things. We may hear from our parents; “that smells bad,” or “isn’t that pretty.” This auditory information is stored along with the smell and the sight so later in life we may smell or see this or a similar thing and verbalize its existence in the same manner.

If we are lucky, an appreciation of photography becomes a part of our lives. In the beginning there may be little understanding of the esthetics. We may have been subjected to beautiful images in magazines and books. We have been told what is pretty and may try to emulate through our photography, that which we have been told is good, or what we have seen that appeals to us.

At this point it may be difficult to articulate why a particular image appeals to us, we just know that it does. It may be the color, or the fact it reminds us of a past experience. It may simply be something someone influential in our lives has told us appeals to them.

Eventually photography may become so important to us we seek out the fellowship of others who have similar interests. We join a camera club, or a society such as PSA. At this point, through competition, we may start to hear the opinions, of those we perceive as knowledgeable, regarding our work and the work of others. We may find that what was visually pleasing to us is not held in that same regard by others. Through years of competition we may begin to learn what wins, and begin to change our opinion about what is pretty. The early teaching of our parents and experience may give way to a more adult learning based on the opinion of others.

At some point we may decide that we wish to become a judge and analyst passing judgment on the work of others based on what we have learned.

What we have learned are the opinions of others. The empirical fact at this time may be that certain types of work are more readily accepted in competition within a particular environment. This may very well be a subjective fact, as opinions change, and sure enough the world may be round.

**WiseGeek <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-difference-between-fact-and-opinion.htm>

Impact

Impact is a word that is used profusely throughout the Photographic Society of America/Camera Club (PSA/CC) environment. It is, many times, used to describe an objective truth about an image. It might be said; “To me, the photograph lacks impact.” Or, “To me this image has great impact.” OK, that’s great, at least the person said “to me,” which makes it their opinion. However the statement may need further explanation as it may be one of the most subjective elements.

This is where trouble sets in. Many analyst/judges may not be able to articulate why, to them, there is or is not impact and may go off on a tangent describing composition, tonal range, color, and a myriad of elements that may play a role in impact, but may not be their real reason for making the statement.

The fact is, IMPACT, may be the most subjective of all the hackneyed rules passed down through generations of judging in the PSA/CC world and may have its roots in prejudice.

Loosely translated IMPACT is that thing that grabs you when you look at something. It may be the WOW factor, that thing that makes you want to show it to someone else. It may be something you wish you had done or it may not be something you can describe at all. It may be pure emotion and it may raise your blood pressure, respiration and the hair on your arms. What you are seeing may, in fact, violate many hackneyed rules and you don’t care.

If one were looking for words that may describe IMPACT, one need not go farther than Henry Holmes Smith. Mr. Smith taught art at Indiana University and in an article, *Models for Critics*, in a book titled *Photography History*, has given us the following thoughts on photographs.

Photographs (With Impact) are able to:

1. Challenge our complacency.
2. Activate and exercise our imagination.
3. Mold and direct our vision (or sense of sight)
4. Guide and release our emotions (and how this makes us look sometimes)
5. Release our inhibitions
6. Direct us to our essential set of signs and symbols.
7. Chasten or sentimentalities.
8. Provide us with some of our life force.
9. Restore our spirit.

IMPACT may very well be different things to different people. Some people are turned on by cats, others by flowers, etc. Some may be turned off by these same subjects. When an analyst encounters an image which contains elements that are of no interest to him/her, the tendency may be to say that impact is lacking. This is the prejudicial factor.

We all know that these prejudices must play no part in our analysis. So, one would never say, “I hate cats,” and subsequently discuss why cats have little impact. What might be said, however, is, “I don’t believe the photograph has IMPACT, and you would be correct, as it is what you believe and may be a prejudice. The subject of the photograph does not excite you and in fact may bore you despite the fact that it might very well excite a cat lover.

So, when you need to discuss impact, and it is a very large part of the judging process, be sure that you are not speaking from a prejudice and are able to explain why the image may or may not have impact within the PSA/CC judging process. It is at this point that the elements of a fine photograph should be discussed and how they may be put together to aid in creating an impact beyond what might be a personal bias. Maybe you should remember Mr. Holmes’ list.

A Final Note

By now I hope you have discovered how to phrase your comments to reflect just how subjective the process really is. That is about all that can be hoped for in a workshop such as this. Beyond that I hope you read this booklet carefully. You may not agree with it, but I am hopeful you will at least understand the information.

Most of the images that you have seen in this workshop, and in any judging, will have either been applauded or maligned. There is usually no consensus. The only thing that might be construed as consensus is a quality here and there that is obvious. However, there may never be universal analysis of any image.

The fact is, the author has had the opportunity in an online course based on this document, to alter the images analyzed to try to repair faults seen by students. It made no difference at all, students just found new faults.

Several of the images that you have seen, and will see, have been done by masters of the medium. They were picked because they are considered, by the fine art community to be some of their finest work. They came no closer to consensus than any other.

Many of the things admired by some students in the online analysis course are the very thing despised by others. I would say that the issue is about split 50 – 50. Knowing this, I think you may see how very subjective analysis can be.

Many students, who have been in the Camera Club environment for years, have picked up the hackneyed rules that may make images more successful in that environment. This is not a bad thing, if one wishes to compete one must follow the rules. It does, however, perpetuates image making by formula. **S + C = A** Subject plus Compliance equals Acceptance

Subject being those subjects most popular in competition, birds, flowers, landscapes, frogs, etc.

Compliance being those elements of the photograph understood by judges to be proper and passed down from generation to generation in judging. Then **A**cceptance being the goal of competition, the realization that the image has solved the equation.

I can only hope that you will re-read this booklet, and even share it with some of your fellow camera club members. This material is not designed to cast aspersions on any method of analyzing images, but rather to get people thinking that there may be other ways to analyze photographs, one that might alter the formula just a bit.

APPENDIX A

Thanks goes out to the Museum of Photographic Art, <http://www.mopa.org/>, for this list below.

Study this list of photographic terms, and the next time you are thinking there is nothing to say about a photograph, remember what you studied here.

General Vocabulary:

abstract: an image that emphasizes formal elements (line, shape, etc) rather than specific, recognizable objects.

content: the subject, topic or information captured in a photograph.

direct approach: confronting a scene in a straight-forward manner, without using unusual angles or distortion.

documentary photography: photographs whose main purpose is to record a place, person(s) or event.

expressive: concerned with communicating emotion.

geometric shape: simple rectilinear or curvilinear shapes found in geometry, such as circles, squares, triangles, etc.

intention: reason(s) why the artist made a work of art.

landscape: an image that portrays the natural environment.

objective: a point of view free from personal bias, which attempts to consider all available information with equal regard and fairness.

organic shape: shapes based on natural objects such as trees, mountains, leaves, etc.

representational: an image which shows recognizable objects.

subject: the main object or person(s) in a photograph.

theme: a unifying or dominant idea in one work of art or in a collection of works.

Visual Elements:

focus: what areas appear clearest or sharpest in the photograph? What do not?

light: what areas of the photograph are most highlighted? Are there any shadows? Does the photograph allow you to guess the time of day? Is the light natural or artificial? Harsh or soft? Reflected or direct?

line: are there objects in the photograph that act as lines? Are they straight, curvy, thin, thick? Do the lines create direction in the photograph? Do they outline? Do the lines show movement or energy?

repetition: are there any objects, shapes or lines which repeat and create a pattern?

shape²⁷: do you see geometric or organic shapes? What are they?

space: is there depth to the photograph or does it seem shallow? What creates this appearance? Are there important negative spaces in addition to positive spaces? Is there depth created by spatial illusions?

texture: if you could touch the surface of the photograph how would it feel? How do the objects in the picture look like they would feel?

value: is there a range of tones from dark to light? Where is the darkest value? Where is the lightest?

Composition of the Photograph

angle: the vantage point from which the photograph was taken; generally used when discussing a photograph taken from an unusual or exaggerated vantage point.

background: the part of a scene or picture that is or seems to be toward the back.

balance: the distribution of visual elements in a photograph. *Symmetrical* balance distributes visual elements evenly in an image. *Asymmetrical* balance is found when visual elements are not evenly distributed in an image.

central focus: the object(s) which appears most prominently and/or most clearly focused in a photograph.

composition: the arrangement or structure of the formal elements that make up an image.

contour: the outline of an object or shape.

contrast: strong visual differences between light and dark, varying textures, sizes, etc.

framing: what the photographer has placed within the boundaries of the photograph.

setting: actual physical surroundings or scenery whether real or artificial.

vantage point: the place from which a photographer takes a photograph.

APPENDIX B

The following are comments by students in the analysis class. There are two in each group, one from the first lesson in the course and one from the twelfth. Read a few and see if you can tell the difference in the feeling between the first and last lesson. What else do you notice about the difference if any between the two?

Positive Comments

Lesson 1

There are several elements that come together well for me in this photo. First the lighting is well done, with the strong back light and a touch of fill to see the detail on the front of the petals/leaves.

The completely dark background accentuates the back-lighted leaves. The close-up view point and fill the frame approach gives me a central area to view.

The positioning and flow of the leaves allows my viewing to find the areas of interest naturally, my eyes do not wander aimlessly.

The supporting details of the leaves below, add interest to the overall effect of a large plant.

Lesson 12

I really like the color treatment in this photo. The lighting supports the subjects well in my opinion. I like the use of darkened background, bringing out the brilliance of the stars of the scene. In my opinion the lighting effect, both direction and intensity add impact to this photo. I personally like the close up approach to the photo, the simple inclusion of only a few objects.

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#### Lesson 1

I like the dramatic perspective and impact. This image captures a very creative blend of lines, and the composition/balance emphasizes "looking up." The close cropping in the upper right edge also emphasizes "looking up" and being a bit uncomfortable, which adds to the dramatic tension. I like the use of natural light – it adds a bit of mystery to the image. Black and white (rather than color) is a good choice for this subject.

#### Lesson 12

I think this image uses light, depth of field, composition and color very effectively. To me, the framing also helps define the center of interest and guide the eye movement.

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Lesson 1

Looking at this image I feel I am in a dark wooden building, maybe a barn, looking up to an unreachable window light in the roof. There is nothing to see through the window - it is just "outside".

The window area shows strong lines and patterns. The varied angles of the supporting wooden beams guide the eye nicely round the window. I like the angle of view, avoiding a square on format and creating interesting shapes and angles.

The difficult exposure with the bright light in the window and the dark interior is well handled. The decision to allow the sky to blow out was a good one. The dark areas do not show excessive noise.

Lesson 12

I like the variety of shapes and patterns in the image, especially those in the central area.. I think the lighting defines the patterns well. while also showing the roundness of the larger elements.

Lesson 1

I see this photograph as another invitation for everybody to try the challenge of shooting modern architecture, because the author was deeply thoughtful on every detail. The original positioning of camera, from a relatively low, normal vantage point, offers the viewers very interesting angles of visual exploration, throughout a captivating and intricate, radial, off-centered composition, in which symmetry although surely exists, is not at all obvious. My eyes seem to be invited to enter the picture at the bottom right corner, at an intelligently placed dark zone. Then, naturally, they climb the space along the alternate diagonal lines, jumping and resting on differently oriented spatial planes, finally plunging out into the highly-placed, white zone, the sky, perhaps to imaginatively never return. The choice of well balanced black and white confirms the straightforward abstractization intent. I think the photograph has a remarkable DOF, in spite of the obviously challenging illumination conditions and everything is well kept in sharpness fully sustaining the depth of the perspective.

Lesson 12

I see this image as an original idea of a portrait of nature, adopting a creative and high impact vantage point. For the most part, technically (noise and granulation, clarity and DOF, illumination) I find the picture very well done. Compositionally it gives me a soothing, natural perspective and a well balanced feel, because the way it presents the vertical straight linear curtain of water fall in harmony with the horizontal curves of the rocks, which resemble a smiley face, making the image a good choice for a screensaver

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## Lesson 1

The subject is very unique. The lines of the egg carton will lead you to the egg. The side lighting lends to the photo a quiet mood.

## Lesson 12

I think this portrait has great contrast. The white of her dress and in the background really brings out this lady's beautiful coloring. The white also shows off the many shades in her hair, enticing me to look closer. This great framing also brings attention to the subject's pretty skin. I feel this makes her a great subject to photograph. I like the catch light in her eyes. It helps me appreciate their color and detail.

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Lesson 1

The concept of one egg in a carton missing others is original and I get that lone feeling while viewing. The detail lines and texture of the egg carton show well in contrast with the surface of the egg and show good focus. There is a positive lack of noise and grain which is brought out by your work being well focused. The composition does follow the rule of thirds.

Lesson 12

In my opinion this work fits comfortably within the frame, each element is an extension of the others. The composition is enhanced by the directional flow of the colors which direct my eye movement completely throughout the whole image. To me the range of colors from the deepest browns is balanced so well with the color of the brightest of clouds as well as the reflections in the waters. I think that the focus and the depth of field are both such a plus for this work. The impact of nature's lighting is captured so creatively in this photograph. This image holds my attention so well.

Lesson 1

The image is well composed with effective use of diagonal leading lines and placing the subject in the upper left third of the image. The foreground is sharp demonstrating effective use of depth of field. The highlights have adequate detail. The image makes me feel hungry because one egg is not enough.

Lesson 12

When I view the image as a whole I feel it makes an impactful colorful impression. I think it demonstrates effective composition by the way it leads the eye through the whole image. I feel the photographer demonstrated his creativity by choosing the best light in which to make an exposure which creates a wide tonal range. The image makes me feel peaceful and relaxed. To me the elements within the frame feel natural and comfortable. I think the photographer has made good use of repetitive curved lines creating a mild diagonal construction. This construction corrects what could have been an image of much less interest.



Lesson 1

I THINK The maker of the image did a nice job of establishing exposure, no blown out highlights and no blocking-up in the shadows, which allowed for a nice range of tonality. TO ME The image has nice depth both horizontally and vertically, enhanced by alternating bands of shadow, light in both dimensions.

Lesson 12

To me this is a straightforward, uncluttered image of a young girl, which is nicely exposed, has good detail, natural color, and smooth tonality. I particularly notice the nice skin tones and good hair detail. The catch light in the eyes, to me, gives the girl a look of engaging interest. Even though the background is pure white the subject has a feeling of warmth and depth, which I believe is the result of subtle, and effective lighting, well planed and well executed.



Lesson 1

What great use of light to draw the eye to the focal point of the image. TO ME, The composition using diagonal lines draws your attention to the full vertical range of the picture. I THINK The contrast between smooth egg and rough texture of the carton adds excellent interest to the image.

Lesson 12

I think the flow of water looks as great as sunrays; you certainly did capture it at an effective shutter speed. I like the vertical lines of the water and the horizontal line of the ledge and the earth formation below the overhang. You have nice, lush green tones. The overall impact is striking and you are to be commended for your resourcefulness in finding a very effective scene to photograph.