

2014

Gelang: A Photography of Belonging

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GELANG: A PHOTOGRAPHY OF BELONGING

by

Chase M. Clow

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of California Institute of Integral Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Transformative Studies

California Institute of Integral Studies

San Francisco, CA
2014

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I certify that I have read GELANG: A PHOTOGRAPHY OF BELONGING by Chase M. Clow, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

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GELANG: A PHOTOGRAPHY OF BELONGING

ABSTRACT

Gelang: A Photography of Belonging proposes a new category of landscape photography, one that moves away from emphasis upon imagery of particular kinds of landscape (such as wilderness, topographical, or wasteland) and also away from genres of photography (art, documentary, or scientific) and instead investigates the shared values and ethics among landscape and nature photographers and the kinds of awareness and knowledge that arise through outdoor, field-based photographic practice. An analysis of the writings of photographers and their published interviews, as well as the author's own photographic experiences in the field, reveals a common core of life-affirming values predicated on a heightened sense of belonging to the land and a corresponding sense of communication with and responsibility toward the other-than-human beings, forces and forms that together with humans co-create our shared world. The work argues for photography as phronesis—knowledge acquired through practice that leads to wise, practical reasoning—and the importance of photography as a highly mobile, poly-sensual, and immersive experience of place that leads to increased ecological knowledge; expanded

understanding of the relationship between human action and environmental response; heightened awareness of cyclical changes and patterns; a better understanding of oneself in relation to others, both human and other-than-human; a sense of connection with the Cosmos; expanded self-awareness; and an increased respect for all of life. Four kinds of photographic vision are explored in this work—looking, seeing, witnessing, and reflecting—all of which foster different types of awareness and responsibility.

Keywords: photography, landscape, art-based research

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One cannot undertake such sustained work without the encouragement and help of many. I especially wish to thank: Dr. Ali Kianfar and Dr. Nahid Angha, without whose kind prodding I would not have dreamed of pursuing doctoral studies. Susan Merwin, whose love and enthusiastic support of my intellectual and artistic goals has been unwavering throughout my life and whose willingness to think with me through this project has been indispensable. Lorin Spaulding, who has listened patiently and graciously to my ideas and whose willingness to give up weekend hikes and vacations has been essential. Rabea and Ameneh McCullough, whose sweet affection sustains me. Dr. Harlan Stelmach and Dr. Philip Novak, who as my early academic mentors gently pushed and guided me toward sustained intellectual pursuit. Dr. Leili First, whose advice throughout this process has been invaluable. Dr. Nicola Pitchford, who has unwaveringly supported my research goals. Finally, my students, whose love of learning is palpable and who therefore inspire me to continuously improve my knowledge.

I am especially grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. David Peat, whose exploration of the interrelation of art, science and the sacred inspires me to pursue a similar interdisciplinary inquiry; Dr. Daniel Deslauriers, whose creative academic spirit and interest in arts-based research opened the doors to this dissertation; and Dr. Judy Halebsky, whose ever-upbeat manner and no-nonsense, practical advice kept me firmly grounded and on track.

DEDICATION

To my mothers and daughters

Susan B. Merwin, my biological mother

Nahid Angha, Ph. D., my spiritual mother

Rabea McCullough

Ameneh McCullough

Your keen intellects and compassionate hearts are pure inspiration to me.

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INTRODUCING

In the summer of 2013 I joined an international group of landscape and nature photographers on a web site called *Why Take*. All in all, this was an engaging way to share my work with a community of individuals who, like me, enjoy among other photographic enterprises photographing the land and the creatures upon it. However, since I had just completed an extensive reading of Ansel Adams, I found myself especially puzzled by the choice of the title for this site. Why, I had to ask, would the founders of a site specifically intended for those of us who love to interact with and photograph the land name the site *Why Take*, particularly when the guru and dare I say father of contemporary landscape and nature photography, Adams, was quite insistent upon using the verb “to make” rather than “to take” when referring to the photographic act?

There are miles of values and significance lying between taking and making, a fact that did not escape Adams’ highly thoughtful notice. He found the idea of taking aggressive and unseemly, especially when the photographic subject is nature. Nature was alive for Adams, full of subjects he did not wish to violate but rather wished to approach with respect (Teiser and Harroun). Taking is hardly a verb befitting such a goal. At its worst, it implies among other things: catching, grabbing, hauling, acquiring, amassing, bagging, hooking, commandeering, stealing, pilfering, filching, capturing, seizing, claiming, appropriating, confiscating, and gaining, to name only a few of the less savory synonyms. The list of negative connotations is long and grim indeed. While there is certainly evidence to suggest that these more odious aspects of taking often come into play

in the big business of landscape photography, there are nevertheless a host of individuals who approach their photographic practice with humility and with a genuine desire for meaningful connection. For them “taking” aligns more closely with taking in, welcoming, accepting, agreeing, assenting, yielding, accessing, borrowing, adopting, gathering, and receiving, all of which imply a rather more self-effacing and respectful set of motivations and values. The goal of my research has been to uncover these more positive, life-affirming dimensions of outdoor photographic practice.

Adams, craftsman and technician, whose accomplishments include developing the highly precise zone system for achieving the widest tonal range in an image, also favored the verb “to make” because photography is a creative act (*Examples: The Making*). We exercise full control and need to visualize the end result before tripping the camera’s shutter. This is not a simple matter of the “grab and go” of snapshot photography. Adams and the many other photographers who are addressed in this study also favor the verb “to make” because in addition to being a creative act, photography is a medium of artistic expression. Conveying ones feelings and impressions of a subject, as well as ideas about their significance and value of the subject, is just as important if not more so than documenting it.

For the sake of argument let us assume that the verb “to take” in the title is innocent, e.g., that it has been employed simply and solely because the expression “to take a photograph” is deeply embedded in the common vernacular. Granting this assumption, the title nevertheless remains problematic yet also intriguing.

Why take *what*? We can reasonably assume the subject is “photographs” or “images,” given the purpose of the site. Let us go one step further. Why take photographs of *what*? Given the fact that only images without any evidence of humans may be posted on this site, we can also assume the object is what many refer to as “landscape” and “nature.” (We must bear in mind that these terms are highly contested and have multiple meanings, which will be explored later.)

Setting aside for the moment the complications presented by the false dichotomy of human on the one hand and nature on the other that is overtly reinforced on this and other nature-based photography sites, the title begs an interesting and rather important question: Why take photographs of landscape and nature? Or, invoking Adams, since he serves as a quintessential exemplar of the approach to landscape and nature photography I wish to explore, let us rephrase the question as: Why make landscape and nature photographs? Why engage in this outdoor, place-based creative activity? What drives this behavior, what values guide it, what are its ethics, and what kinds of awareness and knowledge might arise through sustained field-based, outdoor photographic practice? How might we categorize photographers who share life-affirming values? My research inquiry seeks to do just that.

Unpacking Terms and Photographic Genres

As a number of terms used throughout this work have varied and contested meanings, this section clarifies and defines them.

Nature and Landscape

Both “nature” and “landscape” have multiple, contested meanings. Nature

can mean not of human creation or something outside of human culture or raw materials or the inherent essence of something. It is outside of the parameter of this study to address all of the contested meanings of this term. However, since the word “nature” is used throughout this dissertation it is important to define it. Nature, as used herein, draws on indigenous ideas and refers to humans together with the other-than-human beings, forms and forces of this planet that co-create an animated world of flux and change and who together form a relational web of action and reaction (Cordova; Harvey; Ingold). As interconnected subjects, we are in constant flux and exchange with one another, shaping each other in turn. My personal experience suggests this process takes place whether consciously realized or not and that both sentient beings and non-sentient objects and forces seem to have a role in shaping us. As with any system, this web of relations and exchanges is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Capra; Harding).

The terms outdoor photography, landscape photography and nature photography, which are used variously throughout this paper, also have multiple and contested meanings. In this work, I define them all as any images taken out-of-doors that are inclusive of the overarching definition of nature provided above. Thus, images that focus on a small detail, such as a leaf or the pattern on a rock, which are often referred to as either an “abstract” or an “extract” of nature, as well as images of the broad surround, which are commonly referred to as “landscape” and may not include evidence of human beings, are included in these definitions.

Before discussing landscape photographs more thoroughly it is valuable to briefly examine the term “landscape” as well. Like nature it has a wide range of

contested meanings, only a few of which will be considered here. Depending upon the context, landscape variously means the shaping of a given area based on aesthetic principles or the movement of natural materials or a small area visually selected out of the whole surround and framed as an image (DeLue and Elkins). This later definition is typically what we draw upon when discussing landscape photography. Within the world of photography, landscape can refer to two types of images. The first solely focus upon other-than-human beings and forms that shape our world and are often taken in wilderness areas or mountain ranges. This limited and rather exclusive focus of landscape has been interrogated by a number of scholars, including Rachel Ziadi DeLue and James Elkins who describe it as “a fantasy of not belonging to the totality of life of a terrestrial expanse” (204), a fantasy that imagines human enterprise as somehow separate from and independent of the entire surround. Other ideas and criticisms of landscape will be addressed later in this chapter in the literature review.

More broadly, landscape photography refers to any photograph or image of land that includes the horizon (R. Adams, *Beauty*). This land may or may not be inhabited by humans and the photograph may or may not show evidence of human presence. This second definition of landscape photography shapes my inquiry, as it more closely allies with a broad definition of nature that includes rather than excludes human beings. Thus landscape photography throughout this paper refers to any photographic images that include the horizon, whether containing evidence of human presence or not. It should be noted, though, that some of the photographers mentioned herein focus exclusively upon areas that fall

into the first, narrower definition. Additionally, I should note that photographers who exclusively focus on some other types of landscape imagery have been excluded from my inquiry, as outlined later in this chapter under delimitations.

As with the noun “landscape” it is helpful to briefly examine the verb “to landscape.” More commonly referring to the act of intentionally shaping a given piece of land, the verb more recently has been used to refer to the act of careful attention paid to sensory awareness while in a place as well as to acts of mobility within a given space or through a given place (DeLue and Elkins; Dewsbury and Cloke; Merriman, Revill, and Cresswell). To landscape, accordingly, would be to get to know a particular area by moving through it with senses on high alert. Although this paper does not use the verb “to landscape,” this idea of careful attention to place and awareness of mobility informs my theory of a photography of belonging. This will be more fully explained later in this chapter under the section, *Gelang*.

I have found Geographer Donald W. Meinig’s theory of landscape particularly helpful. Meinig notes how our experience of and ideas about a given piece of land are always at least partially a matter of perception. Thus, although we may point to or be embedded within a given area of land, “landscape” is not simply the physical place and the beings who shape it, but is also a mental construct predicated on an ideological perspective and a corresponding set of values. The same bit of land, Meinig therefore suggests, can be viewed from at least ten different ideological perspectives. These are

- 1) Nature: with roots in Romanticism, where land is perceived as pure and

humans as its destroyers;

- 2) Habitat: with roots in sustainability, where land is perceived as home and humans as caretakers;
- 3) Artifact: with roots in imperialism, where land is perceived as the stage for humankind's works;
- 4) System: with roots in ecological science, where land is perceived as networks, flows, and interactions;
- 5) Problem: with roots in humanism and social activism, where land is perceived as in need of repair and where humans are saviors;
- 6) Wealth: with roots in capitalism, where land is perceived as prospect and opportunity;
- 7) Ideology: with roots in philosophy, where land is perceived as emblematic of values, cultural norms, and political ideologies;
- 8) History: with roots in scholarship and story telling, where land is perceived as a cumulative record of both ongoing geological and human processes;
- 9) Place: with roots in geography, where land is perceived as a series of individual locales, each unique and worthy of study; and
- 10) Aesthetic: with roots in art theory, where land is perceived as an abstraction—with emphasis upon the shapes, forms, textures, symmetries, balance—and also as a source of beauty and mystery, one that inspires humans to reflect, and potentially even genuflect while searching for cosmic significance (Meinig).

Throughout its history, landscape and nature photographs have been

created according to at least one these perspectives and usually more than one. Sometimes but not always drawing upon the aesthetic, landscape images are often mixed with at least one other perspective depending upon the motive and intent of the photographer and the ultimate purpose of the image produced. Thus these perceptual categories are useful to keep in mind as we consider the work of landscape and nature photographers.

Photographic Classifications

Within the world of art criticism, photographers are frequently classified according to the subject or subjects they most often photograph. Those whose primary imagery is of the out-of-doors might be variously classified into the genres of nature, landscape, botanical, or wildlife, for example, depending on the focus of their work. If they mostly focus upon animals they are generally classified as wildlife photographers. Or, if they mostly focus upon broad images of the surround they are classified as landscape photographers. And so on. This classification system proves to be problematic for my purposes for several reasons. The first is that many photographers create images that fall within multiple genres, even though they may feel pressured by the art world to specialize in only one genre. The second is that these genres, and the sub-genres of landscape listed below, obscure the commonalities among these photographers, something my study seeks to explore. In this paper, I am more interested in the types of experiences photographers have in the field than I am in their area of specialization. Thus, for example, I bring together the insights of Ansel Adams and Robert Adams, not biologically related, who are normally classified into two

very different genres of landscape. Ansel Adams is best known for his images of nature and wilderness, while Robert Adams is known for “new topographical” images of suburbia.

As mentioned above, within the broader genres there are also sub-genres. Frequently within the genres of landscape, for example, photographers are classified according to the areas where they most often focus their photographic attention, such as wilderness, topographic, pastoral, or toxic sublime. Or, they might be classified according to the intended purpose of the photograph, such as environmental or conservationist. Different scholars and different photographers use these same terms variously, making these categories muddy and thus not particularly helpful. Additionally, photographers are often categorized according to style and intention and thus generally are placed into very broad and equally contested categories – “art” or “documentary” or “science.” These terms are especially problematic because the line between a document and a work of art can be very thin indeed and photographers and philosophers have engaged in an ongoing debate about this fine line since the invention of the camera. Some of their concerns are briefly addressed in the chapter *Introducing*.

In this research inquiry, I move away from the above classification systems. I turn more toward photographic desire or intent. That said, the goal of this inquiry is not to develop a system for categorizing various kinds of photographic desire, intents, motivations or goals, despite the fact that several scholars have suggested doing so (Bunnell xiii-xiv; Evernden; Wells). Nevertheless it is helpful to briefly outline some of the more common motivations

and goals, since they serve as generative impulses for the photographic act and may affect the kinds of knowledge and awareness that arise in photographic practice.

We can categorize photographic intent into five broad areas, bearing in mind that the motivation and goal of photographic practice vary considerably from photographer to photographer as well as from project to project; and any one photographer may experience a mixture of these desires and intentions or may move between them (R. Adams, *Beauty* 54; Gohlke 70). It is also worth noting that photographers may not always know what desires motivate their practice. They may simply experience photography as a yearning to connect with the world around them or to record the changes taking place therein.

Beyond the desire for commercial success shared by many photographers, photography practiced out-of-doors, particularly in places with the other-than-human has a strong presence, is often motivated by a desire to achieve:

- Equivalence - To have an immersive experience in a place and share the feelings and emotions the place evokes with others, such as wonder, delight, rapture, peace, terror, awe, dread. The photograph is not meant to be an exact description of a place or subject, but rather seeks to convey the emotion felt by the photographer and to provoke that feeling in others (*Ansel Adams: Letters*).
- Description: To describe the world as clearly as possible, calling attention to what is healthy and whole as well as what is ill and broken. The photograph is as close to external reality as possible. The photographer

might even strive to leave his emotion out of the photograph altogether, while knowing that the choices of location, angle of site, and perspective are always subjective (R. Adams, *Beauty* 15).

- Pure Aesthetics: To convey delight and intrigue in the forms and shapes of the world as created by light and shadow. To explore texture and pattern, composition and tone, and possibly to abstract or extract a tiny piece out of the whole. The photograph calls attention to the intricate and the intimate details within a place, the kinds of details that might go unnoticed without careful attention but that nevertheless shape our experience of a landscape (Gohlke).
- World Witness: To explore the places where humankind's impact on the other-than-human agents in our living world is unsustainable and to call attention to the cultural values and ethics that shape our behaviors ("Gary Braasch"). The photograph may be expressive of equivalence or may be descriptive based on what the photographer feels will best elicit social response.
- Contemplation: To experience oneself in connection and communion with all of life, with the life force, whether conceived as solely biological or also transcendent – in remote, "exotic" locations or in the backyard – and to draw others into an experience of contemplation and inner awareness (P. Caponigro, "Paul Caponigro" Conversation; White, *Rites and Passages*).

Each one of these desires and intentions is revealed within the following chapters. However, my primary emphasis is upon the values that guide a photography of belonging and the kinds of awareness and knowledge that arise through sustained attention to landscape and nature.

Review of Critical Literature

Although speaking of all forms of photographic practice, Susan Sontag sets the stage for many of the current critical debates about nature and landscape photography, declaring photographic practice to be “an acute manifestation of the individualized ‘I,’ the homeless private self astray in an overwhelming world—mastering reality by a fast visual anthologizing of it” (119). Photography is, she contends, “a means of finding a place in the world (still experienced as overwhelming, alien) by being able to relate to it with detachment” (119). In contrast, but along the same lines of inquiry, Alicia Bright notes that no matter the photographer’s individual vision and experience, his or her work, particularly if of landscape, always reveals the larger philosophical, political, economic and social influences of a given era. Agreeing with her, Liz Wells argues: “even formal and personal choices do not emerge *sui generis*” (16).

Given the long and close association of photographers with land surveys and speculation, as well as to the formation of state and national parks and wilderness areas – a history I briefly cover in the chapter, Introducing, landscape photographers can be seen as agents of empire and capitalism as well as purveyors of images that reinforce the nature/human dichotomy. Environmental historian William Cronon, for example, believes nineteenth- and early twentieth-

century landscape photographers helped to create and perpetuate entrenched and ultimately damaging American myths: the myth of the frontier as a source of freedom and that of the wilderness as “the last bastion of rugged individualism” (77). He believes this fostered within the American public a sense of nostalgia that remains today, one that fuels our desire to experience the wilds for ourselves, as tourists, reinforcing the false dichotomy between society on the one hand and nature on the other. With ecotourism, Cronon posits, there emerges a sense of wilderness as spectacle, which ultimately has led to the domestication of the sublime (75) and to the commonly held misconception that wilderness is the best place to seek renewal and, therefore, is land most worthy of our care and protection.

Landscape imagery can reinforce the idea of “the human . . . entirely outside the natural,” Cronon asserts (80), and other scholars share his concerns with good reason. They worry about the effects of “turning the wilderness into an ‘Eden under glass’” (Dunaway 230), pointing out how photographic images can reinforce the perception that society is not dependent upon natural ecosystems. Others worry that wilderness imagery, often devoid of human figures, implies that human strife and struggle are unimportant (Jussim and Lindquist-Cock) or that it reinforces the false idea of nature as timeless and outside the sphere of human influence (Bright). Rebecca Solnit echoes such concerns, acknowledging how “evacuation” of the human figure in nature images “excises people and other markers of mortality or the temporal [and] yields an image of the world entirely outside of human agency” (DeLue and Elkins 98). The defense of wilderness

begun by John Muir and later taken up by Ansel Adams and others, she therefore believes, has a “sinister” dimension (DeLue and Elkins 98). Lucy Lippard has a slightly different concern. She wonders what effect landscape images might have on eroding our sense of a whole, integrated Earth. For landscape images, she asserts, “offer the manipulated fragment in what might be seen as a metaphor for the way ‘nature’ itself has been drawn and quartered” (60). These concerns have merit, particularly because they emphasize how photographs shape public perceptions.

As will be more fully explored in the chapter, Emerging, photography has an long, ongoing, and intimate association with leisure, recreation, adventure, and ecotourism (Adler), a relationship for which it has been criticized as everything from an expression of colonial fantasy (Franklin), an act of disengagement (Peeler), an act of power (Bower), a predatory practice and a means of taking possession (Sontag), or as a spiritual imagery designed for leisure consumption (Bright). Images intended to feed the tourist imagination seem closely linked with imperialism for they appear to represent “the imperial eye,” the one that “names and dominates” (Giblett and Tolonen 54). Tourism, the privilege of the upper and middle classes made possible only when a country has sufficient wealth, leads to the idea of the gazing spectator, a person who comes, often only briefly, to consume the view, a person who is not of that place but is passing through, who does not work the land but is merely a temporary visitor (DeLue and Elkins). This suggests the idea of landscape as “landscape,” e.g. a bounded, viewable area to be surveyed or gazed upon (DeLue and Elkins 94). Landscape as landscape is

reinforced by train, car and airline travel where land or sky, framed by a window, is viewed from a fast moving vehicle. Such a landscape has no felt, sensual reality other than that of sight (Jussim and Lindquist-Cock). It is simply a view.

Unfortunately, photographers can appear to be simply a more privileged class of tourist. They own expensive equipment, travel great distances to exotic locales and remote areas, spend a week to several months photographing the area, return home to process their images, and then leave again on another expedition.

Landscape photography, asserts Lucy Lippard, “is conventionally used to seduce and entertain” (60). It is, W. J. T. Mitchell points out, “a marketable commodity to be presented and re-presented in ‘packaged tours,’ an object to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums” (15). As such, he notes, it “represents fetishistic practice” (15). Landscape is “one of the most popular photographic subjects of them all,” says Terry Hope, author of numerous popular books on photography. It is “big business,” because “landscape images are used to sell everything from cars to washing powder” (9). Such use of landscape imagery has been labeled by some critics as “ecoporn,” a term coined by Deep Ecologist Jerry Mander in 1972 to refer to green washing, the use of images of nature to sell products that have nothing to do with the natural world or with preserving or protecting the other-than-human or of creating sustainable societies (Welling). Others take this idea of ecoporn even further, suggesting as Bart Welling does, that nature images frequently mask “sordid agendas with illusions of beauty and perfection” (54). Reinforcing the idea of the imperial eye, Welling observes how both pornography

and nature images “can code the viewer’s eye . . . in deeply interrelated ways”

where the photographer, and by extension the viewer, stands

as a solitary, central but remote, omniscient, all-powerful, potentially violent, pleasure taking, commodifying, and all-seeing but simultaneously invisible male *subject* to its marginalized, decontextualized, powerless, speechless, unknowing, endangered, pleasure giving, commodified, consumable female *object*.” (53)

“Big business” ecopornographic images, which include both landscape and intimate images of fauna are, in addition to their use by advertising agencies, frequently commissioned or purchased by environmentally-focused organizations whose mission statements include educating the public about the natural world with the hope of persuading the public to care about humankind’s impact on the other-than-human. Such images are frequently used in fund-raising calendars, websites, and documentaries because of their great appeal to the public. While these organizations’ efforts are noble, and the photographers themselves may be allied with environmentalism, these same organizations may be unwittingly reinforcing an imperialist, ecopornographic, objectifying gaze, in part because the images they feature are increasingly hyper realistic, deeply saturated clichéd perceptions of a now fully tamed and easily accessible previously wild planet (Chianese) and some are slick images evocative of real estate advertisements (Solnit in DeLue and Elkins). Lydia Millet refers to such images as “tarted-up,” arguing that at best they “elicit a regretful nostalgia for a never-known past of unspoiled landscapes; at worst, they reassure us disingenuously that the last great places are safe and sound” (par. 7). An anonymous, and insightful, comment posted in response to Millet’s article in *Utne Reader Online* says, “it is one thing

for voyeurs to look at pictures of naked nature” but the problem is that such images also sanction ecotourism. The comment is worth quoting:

I think today people have an overblown sense of entitlement to go forth into ‘nature’ and actually see with their own eyes and touch and feel it, where perhaps in the past the indigenous populations would not have dreamed of doing so. . . . [Now] you can get a helicopter to drop you off in the back country of the rockies [sic] where no man or woman has ever gone before. it’s [sic] our inalienable right, apparently, to see it all, and to ‘kiss a fish’ literally. . . . Having grown up in the 1950s in central British Columbia, we actually had respect for the ‘back country’ and considered people who insisted on going into it a bit loonie [sic]. The ‘back country’ is wild for a reason, you know? (dorrie_2)

Clearly, the other-than-human has become objectified, packaged, commercialized, and commoditized and the desire to connect with its beauty as purveyed through images is compelling for many. Of course, photography is not alone in fueling our desire to mingle with the other-than-human and exotic “other.” Travel writing and nature writing also have played a central role.

Conversation, Community, and Embodiment

Landscape photography, and by extension outdoor, wildlife, and nature photography, clearly has garnered considerable academic interest. Yet, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the ways photographers themselves describe their experiences of the land or to the kinds of awareness and knowledge, as well as values and ethics, that arise through their highly embodied, mobile, poly-sensual journeys within a given landscape. It is time to do so, as current research in the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of landscape studies demonstrates increasing interest in finding ways to move beyond the visitor and tourist mentality of landscape and wilderness as spectacle toward a genuine,

lasting and respectful connection with the ecosystems we each inhabit. What I am labeling as Gelang photographic practice has much to contribute to this effort, as my research hopes to disclose.

Much of the recent scholarship in landscape studies explores the interrelation of sentience, perception, and communication. The field includes artists and performers who seek to understand how we might intuit a moral connection with nature (Brydon) as well as philosophers who seek to refigure our ontological understanding of ‘landscape’ by exploring ideas of perception (Abram, *Spell*; Haldane; Waage). It also includes ecologists, geographers, landscape architects, and land managers interested in how aesthetics shape our experience of and ethical behavior toward nature (Dakin; Jóhannesdóttir) including “unscenic” land (McQuillan; Saito). All of these thinkers are pushing beyond the human/nature dichotomy and expanding the notion of landscape and nature to include the interrelation of all beings, including humans. Their ideas closely parallel the experiences of some outdoor photographers.

Some recent research investigates the relationship humans have with landscape through the metaphor of conversation (Benediktsson and Lund), suggesting the possibility of communication between humans and the land where “landscape implies a more-than-human materiality; a constellation of natural forms that are independent of humans, yet part and parcel of the processes by which humans make their living and understand their own place in the world” (Benediktsson and Lund 1). There is also a turn toward the spiritual as well as toward the phenomenological where, as mentioned earlier, landscape is used as

verb rather than a noun and does not refer to the act of shaping a given area according to human will but rather refers to embodiment and presence with all senses alert and with an openness to be affected by the land (Dewsbury and Cloke). Conversation is predicated on what aesthetic theorist Jessica Dubow describes as the phenomenological encounter – “a founding relationship of self to object . . . a reciprocity, a kind of mutual entwinement” (DeLue and Elkins 104). She continues, “Landscape experience then is not just how a given view comes to be represented, but how its viewer stakes a claim to perception and presence” (DeLue and Elkins 104). Others take this one step further, suggesting that conversation is not about a subject-to-object relationship at all but is rather “a lived experience or process” (DeLue and Elkins 105), implying a state of unity with the whole. Still others are examining the value of mobility, of walking within an all-encompassing land, because “space and time get brought together within movement in a way that always crosses boundaries” (Merriman, Revill, and Cresswell 205) and such boundary crossing leads to an increasing sense of connection and reciprocity.

These ideas have close parallels with animistic conceptions where humans and nonhuman “persons” and/or “the land” are said to be in an ongoing communicative exchange (Armstrong; Bird-David; Burton-Christie; Shotter; Stuckey; Waage) and are together co-creating the world along with animated elements like wind and water (Cordova; Harvey; Ingold; Norton-Smith; Peat). There is a reciprocal exchange, whether cooperative or competitive, taking place between all parts of nature and each series of exchanges brings about and

transforms everything else. Thus even our presence in a place changes the place, just as the place and all who are within it change us.

Theories of perception and sentient-imbued matter also help to break down the human/nature dichotomy. Stephen Harding, drawing on the work of Spinoza, Leibniz and Whitehead, argues for sentience in nature because it is “inconceivable that sentience could evolve from wholly insentient matter” (22). Merleau-Ponty terms this sentience “flesh,” which he describes as the voice of the living Earth speaking within us and through us because “there really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being” every where, at all times, and in everything (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible* 247) David Abram, building on the work of Merleau-Ponty has described “flesh” as “the inherence of the sentient in the sensible and the sensible in the sentient” (Abram, “Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth” 9). In such a scenario, the photographer and the subject photographed are together wrapped in an intersubjective sentience. They are each unique and individual, but there is a possibility for exchange between them, whether consciously or subconsciously experienced. This, too, parallels indigenous epistemological and ontological descriptions of a world filled with a diversity of interrelated “persons,” only some of whom are human, who transform one another through their interactions and who are thus in reciprocal communicative exchange (Cordova; Harvey; Hogan; Ingold).

Although the aforementioned ideas may be shared by only some of the photographers whose voices contribute to this study, nevertheless these

conceptions of landscape, conversation, phenomenology, and animism help to frame my conception of photographic belonging.

Defining Gelang

My research explores *the experience of the photographer* and seeks to reveal the kinds of knowledge, awareness, wisdom, and ethical sense of responsibility that frequently arise through immersive experiences in outdoor places and through years of photographic practice. It is concerned with a *practice* of observation and intentional aesthetic response as it occurs *at the time of immersion*, while bearing in mind that the decisions one makes to best “capture” light at the moment of exposure comprise only one half of the photographic gesture. The other half takes place when the resulting exposures are processed, whether in a chemical or digital darkroom. Gretchen Garner labels these two phases of the photographic gesture as “camera vision” and “printing” (“The Photographic Gesture”). Since the advent of computers and the internet, printing onto a surface may never actually occur, though. Nevertheless, for serious photographers the processing phase of the photographic gesture always occurs, taking place in either a chemical or digital darkroom. This inquiry focuses exclusively upon the camera vision phase of the photographic gesture, for it seeks to disclose the embodied wisdom and relational exchange that arises while the photographer is in the field.

Despite all of the various classification systems within photography, there appears to be no category emphasizing the values guiding photographic practice and the experience of awareness and knowledge that arise from sustained inquiry

out-of-doors. The photographers themselves, however, are extremely articulate on these dimensions of their work. My study, which brings together photographers from various genres, focuses on their subjective experiences and their thoughtful insights as to the ethical value of photographic practice. Their practice is guided by compassion and often even love. I have chosen to call this group “Gelang.”

I invoke the Old English and contemporary Dutch word, *Gelang*, because it variously means dependent on, attainable from, present in, belonging to, and along with. This suggests a photography of belonging and an approach toward land/place/subject as one of openness to intimacy and not of a stranger toward the objectified “other.” It is an approach undertaken with a respect and openness and it frequently results in an experience of connection and sometimes even of dialogic exchange. *Gelang* photographers share a set of values and speak of profound moments of deep connection and deep commitment to land and the beings who occupy it, whether that place is a mountain, a cornfield, a swamp, a dam, a sanitation filtration pond or their own backyard.

My research focuses upon a respectful, ethical, wisdom-based, and life-affirming photographic practice, one that seeks to reveal the subjectivity of a subject. I am not alone calling attention to these more positive dimensions of photography. Neil Evernden and Philip Richter are similarly engaged. We aim to distinguish a respectful practice from an invasive or greedy practice that might intentionally or inadvertently objectify the “other.” The second way is often *solely* motivated by the desire for fame or material gain, whereas the first is motivated by a desire for connection. This is not to suggest that many *Gelang* photographers

do not make a living as photographers. Many do. Nor is to suggest that all commercial photography is rapacious, although much of it is.

Question and Method

What kind of knowledge and awareness does Gelang photography as I have defined it—a poly-sensual, yet highly visual respectful practice of journeying, negotiating and communicating with a living place—necessitate and generate? What values guide this photographic practice? What do photographers relate about their experiences in the field and what wisdom and knowledge do they glean from their photographic practice?

My research explores although does not necessarily fully answer such questions. It draws on written and spoken accounts by photographers, as documented in books or articulated on their web sites or in interviews, in print or on film. It is also based on my own photographic practice. It should be noted that as can be expected photographers, as a whole, spend more time photographing and less time writing. Within the broad band of photographers who work primarily out-of-doors there are only a few who have written extensively. These include luminaries such as Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Minor White, Frank Gohlke, and Robert Adams. Thus, this inquiry draws heavily on their words. However, many photographers have published books, which include at least a brief personal essay; insights from these essays have been included. I also have included published interviews with photographers as well as articles featuring narratives and direct quotations. Additionally, I have drawn from a number of Web sites, as most contemporary photographers have a site with at least an artist

statement. Many also have corresponding blogs containing written reflections. These, too, have been considered. This research, therefore, also includes the voices of a number of photographers beyond those listed above, both men and women, who hail from around the world.

While textual interpretation greatly shapes this inquiry, my own photographic practice has played a vital role. My inquiry is not simply informed by the intellectual endeavor of hermeneutical inquiry. It is informed by the careful attention I have paid to the kinds of knowledge and awareness that arises through my own photographic practice. This research represents a hermeneutic circle of inquiry where my practice informs my research and my research informs my practice; it is a synthesis of this iterative and reflective process.

My writing, my photographic practice, and the practice of other photographers can be classified as productive knowledge, one that is based on *phronesis* and that arises through artistry. Eliot Eisner, professor of art in the School of Education at Stanford University distinguishes *phronesis*, “wise practical reasoning,” from epistemic knowledge, “true and certain knowledge” (375). In contrast to epistemic knowledge, which Greek philosophers believed to be universal and complete and thus always true in every case and in all instances, the practice-based wisdom of *phronesis* arises through individual experience in the messy, practical domain of daily living. It necessitates a form of reasoning that is deliberative, Eisner says, and “it takes into account local circumstances, it weighs tradeoffs, it is riddled with uncertainties, it depends on judgment, profits from wisdom, addresses particulars, it deals with contingencies, is iterative and

shifts aims in process when necessary” (375). This is a perfect description of photographic practice and, I might add, of writing, both of which are a form of productive knowledge. Productive knowledge, the making of something new from what is experienced, typically draws upon artistry, which Eisner points out “requires sensibility, imagination, technique, and the ability to make judgments about the feel and significance of the particular” (382). It is a kind of knowledge that also extends beyond “the making of physical objects to the making of ideas and to the way they are expressed” (383).

This conception of productive knowledge, of phronesis combined with artistry leading to the making of objects and ideas, guides this dissertation. Knowledge, as used throughout this document, is therefore defined as wise, practical reasoning based on sensory experience and thoughtful judgments that result as one navigates a place, ponders its significance, and chooses to expressively respond to what is experienced there. Since photography practiced in the field is an intentional aesthetic response to a particular subject as experienced in any number of conditions, some of which might be quite adverse, it demands the very sensitivity, trade-off and imagination Eisner mentions.

The photographers addressed in this work are a highly reflective and articulate group of individuals. They are quite coherent about their feelings and ideas as well as about the techniques they use to aesthetically express their experiences. As evidenced by their writings and in their images, they are avid observers of place with deep curiosity motivated by a compelling desire to move through, explore, and connect with land. It should be noted, though, that

categorizing *outdoor photographic practice* as something other than simply *photographic practice* is a necessary, but false, distinction. That is to say photographers as a whole train their practiced eye upon anything that calls their attention and which they find meaningful, interesting, beautiful, compelling, or are paid to photograph. Thus, for example, Ansel Adams, made famous for his popular images of wilderness areas and national parks, also enjoyed photographing cityscapes, people, and human-made objects and was frustrated by the fact that he was lauded primarily as a nature photographer (*Ansel Adams: Letters*). He was also a commercial photographer, which in his early life was a source of great anxiety because he felt it conflicted with his desire to connect with living spirit, yet he reconciled himself to commercial photography eventually and even produced an advertisement for Datsun.

Few outdoor photographers make a living as outdoor photographers. Those who do are usually hired or commissioned by institutions such as *National Geographic* or else sell their images to stock photo agencies; many also supplement their incomes by leading travel-based photography workshops. Their success drives many others to try to secure an income in similar ways, which leads to a perpetual trophy hunt in pursuit of new and interesting marketable images of more and more remote locations. The desire to secure an income as a nature photographer can lead to a frenetic pace and motivation that forestalls the experience of an immersive, meaningful exchange with a living place. Nevertheless, the pursuit of that golden image has resulted in a greater sense of connection with the living world and a higher quality of immersive experience for

some photographers. For example, Guy Tal, a photographer who practices primarily in Utah, describes how rushing around to get images, like a possessed collector, “did not feel like the real thing, because it was not. . . . I still worked in the same rushed mode, favoring images over experiences.” However, “gradually the barrier came down, the rush gave way to quiet contemplation. . . . Being in these places that inspire me stopped being about sunrises or sunsets or ‘secret’ spots and became about living and feeling” (par. 5). Wilderness photographer Marc Adamus describes a similar moment of conversion from trophy hunter, recognizing that “this mentality works to diminish the essence of the fusion between one’s self and the natural world” because the bond with nature “grows deeper with time and the understanding you obtain only through exploration, not going to a specific point [seeking a specific image]” (par. 48).

Delimitations

In an effort to focus on the kinds of knowledge and awareness that photographers experience not only outdoors, but in connection with the other-than-human agents in this living world, I exclude consideration of photographers whose experience is limited to cityscapes and street photography. This is not to privilege one location or subject over another. However, excluding those whose primary work takes place in highly human-populated areas allows this research inquiry to focus more intently on the kinds of awareness and knowledge that arise in places where human population density is less and, consequently, where the other-than-human is likely to have a stronger presence and clearer agency. Such places offer a greater possibility of exchange, communication or dialogue with the

other-than-human. Although this exchange may be experienced in large cities it is more readily experienced on the margins of urban and suburban areas, as well as in exurbia, ranches and farmlands, state and national parks, recreational areas, national forest, wilderness areas and, surprisingly, in some abused landscapes too.

This study is also limited by scope. I cannot possibly include consideration of all photographers who fall into the category of Gelang. The field of outdoor practitioners is vast and extends back to the advent of photography. Many photographers approach the world with respect and a desire for connection with the land. I have drawn from relatively small selection of twentieth- and twenty-first century photographers, some who are very well known and some who are relatively unknown. I have included professional photographers as well as amateurs, like myself.

Additionally, my study has been narrowed to the experience of the photographic practitioner. Therefore, I do not address at any length the equally important role the photograph itself has in shaping the experience of others. This is a critically important area of study well covered by others.

Theory and Intention

As I develop my theory of a photography of belonging I bring together a wide array of photographers whose photographic practice is hardly homogeneous. Each photographer considered here has his or her own intentions, goals, and unique individualized experiences, ones that even may vary from place to place; and each has various experiences of making a photographic exposure while immersed within these places. Nevertheless, these individuals have enough in

common in terms of their approach to photographic practice for me to be able to group them together and to formulate a theory. At the same time I regret the universalizing dimension that the development of a theory necessitates. The tendency to universalize seems reflective of a Western, linear mindset, as Apache scholar V. F. Cordova points out, one that tends to weaken rather than promote diverse perspectives and one that, if we are not careful, negates the value of individual experiences as well as the subtle differences of feeling inspired by particular places.

Despite my concerns about the universalizing and thus homogenizing dimension of theory I nevertheless wish to assert that the practice of photography in the field and out-of-doors leads to an expanded understanding of our relation with the world, heightens our self-awareness, and enriches our spiritual life, all of which leads to a profound sense of connection and belonging as well as an increased sense of responsibility to honor and protect life. As I proceed to demonstrate this in the following chapters I do my best to honor the diverse perspectives held by the various photographers.

Etymologically, ‘theory’ derives from the Greek word *theoria*: contemplation, speculation, a looking at, things looked at. All of these various meanings inform my inquiry. My research practice synthesizes contemplation (a purview of heart) with informed speculation, originally meaning “view, contemplate” (a purview of active intellect). I hold closely and seek to honor the root meaning of ‘observation,’ which derives from the Proto-Indo-European word *ser* and means not simply “to see” but simultaneously “to guard and protect” and

is therefore predicated on the assumption that when we truly see something we recognize its value and might therefore wish to protect it. These two dimensions of *ser* are very relevant to the practice of Gelang photography.

My development of theory—what I understand to be the results of a unified triumvirate of contemplation, speculation, and observation—includes a commitment to the welfare of that which I apprehend as well as an obligation to be as true as possible to the living phenomena informing my inquiry, which includes the photographers and the places and beings we photograph. I join Arthur Zajonc (“Love and Knowledge”), Valerie Bentz and Jeremy Shapiro (*Mindful Inquiry*), and Four Arrows (*The Authentic Dissertation*) in their efforts to use mindful, compassionate inquiry to produce authentic knowledge that—in addition to revealing something about our world, our place within it, and the ways in which we know it—seeks to heal what is broken and fractured.

I approach my research with the understanding that an over-emphasis in the academy upon analysis and critique—the heritage of modernity—has led to an exceptional ability to take the world apart but has not provided a particularly viable means through which to hold it holistically together. I hope my research helps reverse this trend as Arthur Zajonc, Amherst College Emeritus Professor of Physics and President of the Mind and Life Institute, urges us to do. He believes one way to put the world back together is by learning to balance “the sharpening of our intellects with the systematic cultivation of our hearts” (3). This describes my own photographic practice and that of other Gelang photographers. Zajonc and others have labeled this approach “contemplative.” Zajonc distinguishes an

“epistemology of separation” from an “epistemology of love.” This involves, he suggests, an empathic approach and a “calm Eros that animates our interest” (8) as well as a willingness to acquiesce “to that which breathes through the forms of nature”(9). This sentiment is echoed by many of the photographers included in this study and also by ecologist Stephen Harding who urges us to be

open to the subjective agency at the heart of every “thing” in the world so that we can speak and act appropriately in their presence and on their behalf... allowing a strange kind of intimacy to develop in which the urge to control is replaced by the quickening awe at the astonishing intelligence that lies at the heart of all things. (37)

With this in mind, I approach my research with the understanding that this study is by, about, and for humans as well as the other-than-humans who form our natural world. My hope is to foster and nourish through my photographic practice and my scholarly research a thriving, life-affirming interconnected and interdependent world that recognizes and respects a diversity of experiences, cultures and ecologies.

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter, *Emerging*, provides a foundational overview of the history of photography and of landscape imagery, synthesizing these two fields of study into one interconnected overview. It situates this inquiry within the interdisciplinary field of landscape studies and highlights some of the ongoing debates in both landscape studies and photography, particularly but not exclusively as related to the evolution of landscape imagery.

The next chapter, *Journeying*, focuses on the phenomenological dimensions of the photographic experience and the creation of the photograph as a

“journey-fragment” and a crystallization of experience. Drawing primarily upon the theory of “art as experience,” as advanced by pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, it delves into the various dimensions of phenomenological encounter, the confluence of inner and outer immensity, and the corresponding emergence of a work of art. It seeks to disclose how creative expression emerges in response to a given place, especially one perceived as beautiful. It clarifies and defines the conception of “beauty” and also briefly explores the possibility of the artist as an expressive medium or conduit of nature, whereby the other-than-human uses humans to make itself known.

The following chapters—Looking, Seeing, Witnessing, and Reflecting—are personal essays exploring the approach of Gelang photography and the kinds of knowledge, awareness, wisdom and sense of responsibility that arise through Gelang photographic practice. Highlighting my direct experience and featuring my own photographs, these essays enter into a conversation with other scholars, brushing against and grappling with some salient critiques, as well as with other photographers, drawing on their insights and ideas and revealing the depth, breadth, and wisdom of their photographic practice.

These chapters are divided according to four dimensions of photographic vision: *looking*, *seeing*, *witnessing*, and *reflecting*. I do not mean to imply a progression of looking to seeing to witnessing to reflecting. Photographic vision is not nearly so neatly severed and differentiated, as these chapters reveal. Several concepts are explored from different points of view in each of these chapters, as I wish to emphasize the point that photographic experience is multi-dimensional

and recursive. For the photographer, all four dimensions of vision may be active simultaneously or, depending on the photographer's mood or motivation, one dimension may be primary at one point in time and in one particular place while another will be so at a different time or place. This is especially so because the land itself also shapes the photographer's experience and there is always some form of exchange.

The final chapter, *Belonging*, concludes the research with a comprehensive definition of "a photography of belonging." It then addresses some of the most salient critical theory from a Gelang perspective. Finally, it summarizes the types of awareness and knowledge that arise through landscape and nature photographic inquiry as explored in the prior chapters and suggests several areas for continued research.

EMERGING

The genesis and evolution of photography remains an ongoing study, as does the genesis and evolution of landscape imagery. There is an interesting history of the intersection between the impulse to record the world and the impulse to contain it and shape it. This chapter provides a brief overview of the intersecting histories of photography and landscape.

There is little debate that the invention of the camera arose at the height of Europe's imperialism and empiricism. Photography is therefore deeply linked to modernity's epistemological and ontological conceptions of the natural world and our understanding of the meaning and purpose of light. Similarly, as will be recounted in short order, there is ample evidence to suggest that the concept of "landscape" is linked to the power structures of imperialism and the corresponding fragmentation of land into nations, counties, principalities, cities, farms, and parklands through both colonization and hegemony. What also seems clear is that the desire to permanently fix light onto a surface was set in motion long before it culminated in the invention of the camera (Batchen). Similarly, the use of landscape imagery was well in place before the camera's invention.

Photography has no singular identity (Batchen; Maynard; Tagg). A photograph is generally understood to be an image reflecting a moment in time, or moments as in the case of a long exposure, at a certain place, or several places as in the case of a multiple-exposure, rendered onto a surface through a device capable of permanently fixing light. The intentions driving a photograph's creation, the methods used to render it, and the uses to which the photograph is

employed are not uniform. To speak of photography is to speak of many things: chemistry and optics; computers and pixels; technique; conception and perception; aesthetics and artistry; voyeurism, power and authority; cultural construction, capitalism and imperialism. In addition to being a scientific tool and artistic medium, uses for both of which are multivariate, photography is also a highly popular social practice, something Pierre Bourdieu labeled *art moyen* or a practice of the average man (qtd. in Krauss), making photography even more difficult to define due to its sheer ubiquity (Sontag).

Historian Geoffrey Batchen recommends regarding photography as a “dispersed and dynamic field of technologies, practices and images” without any single origin or intent (5). However, Batchen traces the *desire* to fix a scene rendered onto a surface by light to at least a century prior to the announcement of Talbot and Daguerre’s competing camera inventions in 1839. Batchen only focuses on the experimenters of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who he labels “protophotographers.” Yet, the desire for camera technology likely arose long before, since the propensity to systematically classify and document the natural world via careful observation and notation was set firmly in motion in the sixteenth century by natural theologian Francis Bacon. Bacon himself was only one in a long chain of natural theologians who had been debating the best means of ascertaining the secrets of creation and of verifying Biblical accounts believed to be the source of sacred knowledge about our world and our place within it. Achievement of that goal, Bacon believed, rested in “revealing the concealed or of making the invisible world visible” (qtd. in Peterfreund 1) and it was founded

on the premise that understanding the nature of light as well as the perception of light by the human eye was the key to unlocking the secrets of creation. Knowledge, said Bacon, “may be obtained by the light of nature and the contemplation of his creatures” (qtd. in Peterfreund 48) and light, he understood, “is the mediator between higher knowledge and natural knowledge” (qtd. in Peterfreund 62). Bacon urged natural theologians and, later, natural scientists to ascertain the properties of light in order to better observe the workings of entelechy, the actualization of form-giving cause. As Stuart Peterfreund points out, the human eye, as the receiver of light, was central to this objective and the privileging of the sense of sight was therefore assured.

Peterfreund traces Bacon’s ideas to the second creation story of Genesis where classification of the natural world is commanded. Adam’s sacred task is to first visually identify and then to name the animals. Bacon, who by many accounts is one of the progenitors of the modern scientific method, advocated a renewal of this god-given right of observation and classification and his approach to ascertaining knowledge of the creator via inspection of the creation was especially systematic. He prompted natural theologians to build a better classification system and artists to better document what they observed, prophesying “the empire of man over things depends wholly on the arts and sciences. For we cannot command nature except by obeying her” (qtd. in Peterfreund 35). Very likely, then, Bacon’s urgings helped initiate what art historian Henrich Schwarz refers to as the camera’s use to penetrate into “nature’s secrets by an objective recording of visible phenomena, and the cooperation of the

artistic will and the scientific thirst for knowledge” (89). The camera’s invention proved to be of great value in this enterprise particularly because photographs permanently “froze” a moment in time, allowing for longer and more intensive inspection of details. The fact that a photograph created a permanent record of nature, a record early inventors felt might actually be *created by* nature itself via the camera, also proved invaluable both for aiding memory and for documenting the processes of change.

Two optic devices led up to the camera’s invention. The first is the camera obscura, which dates back to at least 400 BCE. Functioning like a pinhole camera, a tiny hole in one wall projects light and shadow from an outside scene upside down and backward onto the opposing wall of a darkened room. Used through the centuries, the camera obscura may have been employed by such investigators and artists as Aristotle, da Vinci, Kepler, Vermeer and even Bacon himself (Hammond, “The Camera Obscura”). The second optic device, the camera lucida, was patented in 1807; yet Kepler described it nearly two hundred years earlier. It served as a popular portable aid to drawing and painting in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The scene, reflected via a series of mirrors onto a piece of paper, could with skill and care be traced by hand with great accuracy (Hammond and Austin, “The Camera Lucida”). This device was particularly handy for rendering landscape scenes. In fact, one of the camera’s inventors, Henry Fox Talbot, used the camera lucida to draw scenes on his leisure trips as a way to record and remember what he had encountered there (Talbot).

According to Batchen, the early inventors and proto-photographers saw everything as part of “a divine nature, orderly and harmonious, and originally set in motion by none other than the Great Creator himself” (58). Whether this is certain for all early experimenters, one thing is certain: the writings of Talbot indicate a belief that humans are part of the natural world and that Nature utilizes humans, and thus human creations, towards its own ends. In *The Pencil of Nature*, wherein Talbot describes the years of experimentation by which he figured out the chemical means of fixing a photographic image, he makes no distinction between photographs of a shelf of china, lace, buildings, and his backyard as anything other than products of Nature, which he capitalizes. Nature encompasses them all, and all are made visible by light and have been fixed via the camera by nature’s own hand (Talbot). As such, the camera was understood to be a medium of Nature’s mind, or by extension God’s mind, rather than of the mind of the photographer (Novak).

The fact that the camera seemed to allow Nature to draw “herself” made it particularly attractive to those engaged in scientific study, for by this point philosophers—such as Descartes, and later Hobbs, Boyle, Locke, and Berkeley who had long been debating the role and agency of the human mind (Macauley)—had worked to “unsettle any assurance of an external world whose existence and qualities are exactly as the senses report” (Wasserman 18). As such, the perceptual human mind was suspect and the artist’s hand, by extension, was equally untrustworthy. Artists could not be counted upon to precisely perceive the ontological fact of the physical world nor could they be counted upon to record

what they perceived with complete accuracy; therefore their drawings could only ever represent a partial truth. Since the goal of natural science was truth, a better way was needed. The camera seemed to promise such a way. Both Talbot and his rival inventor Louis Daguerre seem to have been equally driven by the desire for scientific truth as they were with aesthetics. Talbot was most interested in letting nature draw for him because he was unsatisfied with his drawing abilities (Talbot) and Daguerre was particularly interested in technology that would allow him to create large dioramas for use in the theater (Daguerre). Nevertheless, both Daguerre and Talbot heavily promoted the scientific value of their rivaling instruments and both saw the camera as a means to circumvent human subjectivity in order to objectively render the natural scene.

Art theorist Sir Herbert Read believes the making of images, photographic or not, arose out of the desire to stop the flux of time long enough to be able study the world (Jussim and Lindquist-Cock). The camera has been both lauded and condemned for its ability to do just that. The realist properties of photography, Liz Wells writes, seemed to have a “*revelatory capacity*.” The image, she notes, “remarks more than that which might at first be perceived and facilitates detailed analysis and contemplation” (39). This, she contends, made it a “useful fact-based tool for the imperialist expansion” (38). Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock note how quickly the camera was “set on the track of ‘proving’ or ‘disproving’ theories of evolution and catastrophe as evidence of geological manifestations” (5). Susan Sontag notes how the history of photography can be “recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification,

which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling . . . a legacy of the sciences” (86), although such a distinction seems artificial given the long and close association of art with science. Artists, travelling the world as members of science explorations had been serving “as recorders of the expanding world” (Wells 38) long before photographers eventually replaced them. However, as historian John Szarkowski points out, the use of photography in these and other capacities became a “source of new sensibility” in both art and science for it provided “an expanded sense of the unexpected nooks and crannies in which the seeds of a new visual truth might lie” (Maynard 208).

At the time of its invention the camera also was appreciated for its ability to accurately render perspective, a technique that had been used for centuries by artists and draftsman to create the illusion of three dimensional space on a two dimensional surface. However, this ability to accurately render perspective has recently made the camera, and by extension photographers, suspect in the eyes of some critics, since the invention of perspective appears to them to be an expression of empire and anthropocentrism. Perspective, as a way of seeing and thinking that arose in fifteenth-century Renaissance humanism, creates the perception of a world that “appears organized in relation to the viewer” argues Liz Wells (24). Philip Richter notes how it therefore “offered humanity accommodation at the center of its world” for everything is organized from the point of view of the individual. The centrality of the human eye may have in turn reinforced individualism (198).

The use of perspective in drafting and painting appears to have arisen in concert with Europe's imperialist mission, as it was used extensively in mapping and surveying. Denis Cosgrove suggests therefore that perspective is "closely bound up with the appropriation of space" (46). Similarly, as Richter points out, perspective also made the world *seem* visually ordered and harmonious even though disrupted landscapes and social spheres were hardly so (198). Landscape paintings, which were often commissioned by landed gentry for documentation of their land holdings, relied upon the "truth-telling" capacity of perspective, even though, as Cosgrove notes, these images often suppressed "evidence of tension and conflict between social groups and within human relations in the environment" (58). This is true, he writes, not only "for the villa landscapes painted by Paolo Veronese in the strife-ridden Venetian countryside of the later sixteenth century, it was equally true for the Arcadian image of English landscape parks in the Georgian period of rural conflict and transformation" (58). Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen liken land holding paintings to corpses laid out on display and reinforce Cosgrove's view, arguing that "the landscape painter and the photographer are concerned with depicting pleasing prospects and picturesque scenes that legitimate the property rights and practices of the landed gentry and obscure the labour of the other classes that made the land into landscape and the earthly processes that made the land" (58). While this is not exclusively the case—since many landscape artists and, later, photographers, turned toward documenting the life of the working classes in the middle to late nineteenth century—it draws attention to the idea of landscape as a metaphor for power.

In “Imperial Landscape,” W. J. T. Mitchell theorizes that images of landscape, as made both prior to and after the invention of the camera, have tended to arise in tandem with a empire’s expansion as a means of highlighting and celebrating the growth of a nation, as a means of defense against the influx and strangeness of the Other, and as an anti-imperial and anti-colonial statement by artists. Since its inception, photography has certainly aided nation-building, nowhere more so than in the United States after the Civil War when both camera technology and the nation were undergoing tremendous growth and change, and again after the Second World War, when the nation was once again undergoing significant development and camera technology was even more advanced and portable.

Early American landscape photographers, such as Henry Jackson, Timothy O’Sullivan, and Carleton Watkins were contracted by the U.S. government for survey expeditions or were hired by private companies, such as railroad firms and logging agencies, to survey land and document the stages of a company’s progress (Palmquist). Ian Jeffrey claims that unlike the illustrators who preceded them on science explorations and surveys, early photographers learned their artistic craft in the field. The technology was quite new and they were the early experimenters. Similarly, while they accompanied scientists, they themselves were rarely scientifically trained. Instead, Jeffrey claims, they were “instructed to record particularly interesting vegetation or rock formations, and lacking special interests, they concentrated on the largeness of the land and on its most spectacular features” (12). Jussim and Lindquist-Cock wonder if this

combined with “the pressure for information from ‘back East’” may have encouraged both the survey photographers of the nineteenth century and the wilderness photographers of the twentieth century “to seek only the new, the undiscovered, the dramatically monumental?” (6). This aesthetic, also informed by ideas of the romantic sublime, is repeated in much landscape photography today.

Pressure from “back East” also included that created by railroad companies who purchased or commissioned scenic photographs of “exotic” destinations such as Yellowstone and Yosemite as a way to fuel tourism and encourage ridership. Photographic imagery of interesting locales designed to cater to the visual desires of tourists, both armchair and traveling, made commercial success as an outdoor photographer possible, and thus began a lucrative practice that continues today (Snyder).

Enterprising photographers, desirous of making a living doing that which they enjoy – scouting places, dodging weather, fording streams, sitting quietly by a lake, breathing less polluted air, sleeping in a tent, spending time alone – often set up shops near tourist destinations like Niagara Falls and Yellowstone to sell their imagery. In the mid-late nineteenth century these shops appeared across the country and cooperated with one another by selling each other’s images. This may have lead to a narrowing of landscape imagery, and by extension, creative vision, since photographers noted which images sold best as they increasingly competed with one another for sales (Snyder).

While landscape and nature photography has deep roots in government funded land surveys and the rising tourist trade, it also has a long association with hunting (Bower; Dunaway). Many of the earliest nature preserves and parklands, frequent subjects of outdoor photographs, were conceived of and backed by hunters; President Theodore Roosevelt serves as a classic example. As the first “environmental president,” his love of recreating in nature and of hunting proved inspirational as he set aside treasured plots of land, particularly the scenically beautiful, in order to preserve and protect them from mining, logging, and similar industrial practices and to keep them open for hunting. Finis Dunaway highlights how late nineteenth-century issues of the magazine *Forest and Stream* recommend the camera as a humane hunting tool to be preferred over a gun when possible. Thus the shared terminology between hunting and photography is not coincidental. To photograph is to “shoot” or “capture” and a photographic image is a “shot,” “snapshot” and “capture.” Of course, to photograph is also to “expose,” which references the exposure of a surface to light but may also refer to the way wildlife photographers, frequently behaving as hunters, hide behind blinds or lure birds and animals into their line of sight with bait (Bower) thereby exposing their “prey.” Scholars also note the fact that many photographers “hunt” for trophy images, a double entendre eliciting images of both the trophies one receives in competitions as well as the taxidermied head or photograph one mounts on a wall after “bagging” the choicest game (Bower; Dunaway; Sontag).

However, it should be borne in mind that a generation before the survey photographers and long before modernist photographers, travel writers such as

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) had captured the American imagination with visions of a continent that when approached with leisure and a dose of romanticism offered a place of solace and recreation, one waiting to renew and restore the weary human soul

Those rare moments in life when physical well-being prepares the way for calm of soul, and the universe seems before your eyes to have reached a perfect equilibrium; then the soul, half asleep, hovers between the present and the future, between the real and the possible, while with natural beauty all around and the air tranquil and mild, at peace with himself in the midst of universal peace, man listens to the even beating of his arteries that seems to him to mark the passage of time flowing drop by drop through eternity. (qtd. in Novak 398)

His words and those of other travel writers, coupled with the urgings of Henry David Thoreau to keep the wild alive in the human by walking *a la Sainte Terre*, as a holy-lander, likely fueled poetic sentiments of the sublime. Images of nature, whether written or visual, proved to be spiritual inspiration and increased the sense of wonder, awe, terror and, thus, humility many felt in the face of immensity. The writings and images together, particularly in the hands of railroad company marketers, helped fuel the desire in the public for recreation and renewal. Those who could afford to do so traveled, and still do, to remote locations to connect with the wild power of nature, both invigorating and re-creating. Many, and now most, did so with a camera in tow.

Early Western Landscape Photographers

“American artists and writers of the nineteenth century repeatedly turned to the landscape for subject matter and inspiration because it was the only fact big enough for the stories they had to tell,” writes contemporary landscape

photographer Frank Gohlke, who focuses his work primarily on the Mid-west. “One could not understand the nation or the century without confronting the immensity of America . . . It seemed inexhaustible, like time itself” (95). The immensity and expansiveness of an “untamed” and “uninhabited” frontier that was measured not in acres but in the hundreds of square miles seems to have planted in the American mind a sense of having few to no boundaries (Jussim and Lindquist-Cock). The open frontier, as yet unspoiled by the industrialization already well in place on the East Coast, inspired perceptive fantasies falling into all ten of Meinig’s categories. The land was open for interpretation. Explorer and naturalist Alexander Humboldt (1769-1859) discusses the allure of the land

It may be a rash attempt to endeavor to separate into different elements the magic power exercised upon our minds by the physical world, since the character of landscape, and of every imposing scene in nature, depends so materially upon the mutual relation of the ideas and sentiments simultaneously excited in the mind of the observer. (qtd. in Jussim and Lindquist-Cock 41)

The land, open land and empty of but a few humans, seemed pure, untouched, and even god-given. Geologist Clarence King (1842-1901) led the scouting and survey expedition along the fortieth parallel accompanied by photographer Timothy O’Sullivan and seems to have felt divinely inspired, describing nature as “a veil drawn before man’s eyes, gross enough to render bearable the intense light shining from the godhead” (45). Photographer W. H. Jackson, who accompanied the Hayden Geological Survey expedition in Wyoming in 1871, among other expeditions, relates the thrill and privilege of being the first to photograph Yellowstone’s “enchanted” bubbling cauldrons and

other features, as well as of the satisfaction of overcoming the significant photographic challenges he faced while there. Each plate took anywhere from 45-90 minutes to create and often required vigorous and numerous climbs up and down canyon walls (W.H. Jackson). The goal was to describe the terrain; the thrill was in encountering and relating to an unknown land and of experiencing a “new sense of scale between man and earth” (Szarkowski 3). These early landscape photographers, John Szarkowski writes, were a “new kind of picture maker: part scientist, part reporter, and part artist . . . challenged by the wild and incredible landscape, inaccessible to the anthropocentric tradition of landscape painting.” They were “simultaneously exploring a new subject and a new medium” and their pictures were “objective, non-anecdotal, and radically photographic” (3). These photographers helped define a nation and a distinctly American imagery.

Art Photography, Pictorialism, and Modernist Landscape

While the inventors of camera technology saw the camera as an instrument of the mind of Nature or God—as a device essentially free of human perception and thus a recorder of what is exactly as it is—such an idea now seems naïve. If nothing else, there are always intentions and values guiding the photographic gesture, whether consciously recognized or not and no matter the subject of the photograph or its intended use (Benjamin; Bright; Flusser; Krauss; Sontag). This fact became increasingly evident as photographers with artistic intent explored the creative and expressive potentials of the camera and began writing about their insights. For example, artist-photographer Peter Henry Emerson countered Talbot by focusing upon the role of the photographer’s

perception and interpretation. “Nature,” he writes, “does not jump into the camera, focus itself, expose itself, develop and print itself. . . . When an artist uses photography to interpret nature, his work will always have individuality and the strength of his individuality will, of course, vary in proportion to his capacity” (qtd. in Jussim and Lindquist-Cock 46). The camera’s accuracy of representation helped free painters from the task of serving as scientific recorders of nature and they turned increasingly toward experimental expression of individual perception (Benjamin). At the same time many artists turned to the camera for artistic experimentation and a different mode of truth telling than that of science. They were interested in the human spirit and the urge toward affective meaning and beauty. The addition of photography to realms traditionally explored by art thus served both to disrupt cultural perceptions (Benjamin) as well as traditional formal aesthetics (Thompson).

Photographers, some of whom were also painters, explored the story-telling capacity of photography and turned to documentary, while others turned toward pictorialism. With close ties to the aesthetics and ideas of painting, pictorialism shares a belief in the value of human subjectivity and artistic expression. It also relies upon symbolism and metaphor. Many budding artist photographers, hoping to have their work taken seriously by the art world, not only adopted the metaphorical intention of painting but also began experimenting with painterly techniques by using soft focus diffuser lenses as well as pencils and brushes applied to a wet plate to achieve the look of a painting. In the late nineteenth century camera clubs, especially for amateur photographers, became

increasingly popular and photographic exhibits of their art began springing up throughout Europe and the United States.

In reaction to the increasing use of photography for scientific and nationalist purposes as well as advertising purposes, amateur photographers also began making a case for the benefits of photographic practice done solely for the love of the craft, believing that when “money was accepted for work, it was probably inferior” (Naef 18). The first magazine dedicated to the amateur photographer was published in 1884 in London (Naef 16) and Alfred Stieglitz, a first generation American and a tireless proponent of the photographic arts, contributed photographs and essays there and, later, to the *American Amateur Photographer* magazine begun a year later. Stieglitz became increasingly involved in the photographic art scene in Europe and in the U. S. and opened the first gallery dedicated to photography in New York in 1905. He also founded and published the art magazine, *Camera Work* (Naef) wherein numerous photographers, artists and art theorists debated the photographic medium. Later, along with others, including Ansel Adams, he began the decades-long process of convincing the Museum of Modern Art to accept photography into its collections. Throughout this time, and within these and other magazines and journals as well as within camera clubs, photographers and artists hotly debated the fundamental nature of the photographic medium and whether it could or even should be classified as fine art. They also grappled with whether photography could ever be truly objective.

Szarkowski sees this time in landscape photography, the turn of the twentieth century and the thirty to forty years that followed, as an “inward turn toward the soul” (3), one where the primary emphasis shifted from objectivity to subjectivity and from describing the terrain to revealing the photographer’s experience of the terrain. Perhaps this distinction of a new era of photographic intent in landscape and nature imagery is artificial, though, as the use of landscape photography in science and commerce continued unabated and the exploration of photography as an expressive art tool had existed since the camera’s invention. Nevertheless, Szarkowski sees this as a time, exemplified by Alfred Stieglitz, where many landscape photographers sought to “transcend ego” and to “touch and amplify the basic rhythms of life” (4). Photographic truth for photographers like Stieglitz lay with affective equivalence. Equivalence for Stieglitz meant creating an image that matched as closely as possible the photographer’s affective response to a place, person, or object while also rendering the subject as accurately as possible. They turned away from pictorial painterly techniques and emphasized instead a pure photographic art that relied on full command of a camera’s settings and that limited the use of techniques in the darkroom to dodging and burning.

The goal of the “modernist” era of photographic equivalence was to render one’s felt connection and emotional response so well that viewers might feel, through the photographer, the cosmic or essential significance of the subject. In a poetic, impassioned description, Stieglitz relates a three-week long effort to adequately capture clouds

I knew exactly what I was after. . . . I wanted a series of photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch (the great composer) he would exclaim: Music! music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? And he would point to violins, and flutes, and oboes, and brass, full of enthusiasm, and would say, he'd have to write symphony called 'Clouds!' Not like Debussy's but *much, much more*. (271)

He clarifies, "My cloud photographs are *equivalents* of my most profound life experience, my basic philosophy of life" (272), a philosophy clearly guided by a desire to deeply feel and creatively respond to life and to render the ordinary extraordinary and poetic. Modernist photographers under Stieglitz's influence, such as Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Minor White followed suit, each with their own interpretation of equivalence but all with a deep passion for seeing into the heart of a subject, of honoring the soul as well as human perception, and of affirming a cosmic connection to life. They believed they could uncover a deeper truth of nature, the significance of creation for the human being, by searching beyond its surface to reveal the "truth beyond the fact of the object" (Bunnell 2).

A good photograph should be just as alive as the subject photographed, many of these photographers believed. For example Paul Strand felt you must look carefully at what is around you and respond to it with your whole being and with the "meaningness" you find in it. The photograph will then become an "organism" with a life of its own (287). For Ansel Adams that "meaningness" was best to be found in wild landscapes. He felt humanity as a whole was too wrapped up in human dramas to perceive the cosmic significance of life. In a letter to Stieglitz, he hints at his irritation with the criticism he faced for focusing his

photographic attention upon wilderness areas: “I find myself brooding over rocks and clouds and Things of No Value that would make good pictures . . . why is it that Things of No Value make the best pictures . . . ?” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 60).

Gretchen Garner captures well the overarching philosophy guiding modernist photography. She writes, it was “grounded in and energized by ideas from Western spiritual traditions – speaking truth, bearing witness, human compassion, and personal humility—as well as Eastern spiritual ideas such as living in the moment and quieting the mind to a state of contemplation in order to identify with, and clearly see, the world around it” (*Disappearing Witness* 100). While some pictorialist photographers also may have shared these philosophies and values, what most differentiates modernists from pictorialists is photographic technique and the idea that the truth of the world, the inner essence of a subject, could best be revealed by close adherence to the visual truth of the subject. Believing that the medium of photography was nothing like painting or drawing, modernists sought to define the practice of photography as its own artistic medium. They practiced “straight” photography. No gimmicks with diffusers, no alterations with brushes, just photography (Bunnell). As Edward Weston relates, such techniques as use of a diffuser “cloud and befog the real issue—and prevent you from telling the truth about the life towards which your lens is pointing” (*The Daybooks* 9).

Although art photographers worked extensively to convince other artists that theirs was a fine art, their charge was difficult. In general photography appeared to be at most a highly valuable mechanical art rather than a fine art, one

that clarified our relationship to the earth by extending our perceptions and increasing our capacity for recall, as art philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) indicates

We should rather admit creative art as the best mediator between our half-lighted minds and our half-tamed environment – as a medium through which these two can communicate in the primitive estrangement . . . to help us bridge that chasm, we should welcome any mechanical arts which, like photography, improve and extend our perceptions, helping us to see and to remember; for by such means the world may be made clearer and more familiar to us – that real world from which all beauty has derived and in which all beautiful forms, if they could have their way, would be ultimately embodied. (266)

Yet some believed photography could be practiced as an art and artist, gallery owner and writer Marius de Zayas (1880-1961) sought to clarify the difference between a photographer and an artist-photographer, writing

The artist photographer uses nature to express his individuality, the photographer puts himself in front of nature, and without preconceptions, with the free mind of an investigator, with the method of an experimentalist, tries to get out of her a true state of conditions.

The artist photographer in his work envelops objectivity with idea, veils the object with the subject. The photographer expresses, so far as he is able to, pure objectivity. The aim of the first is pleasure; the aim of the second, knowledge. The one does not destroy the other. (267)

However, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and others disagreed with this distinction, believing it was possible to approach nature as an artist and do so without preconceptions. In fact, letting go of preconceptions allowed on to reveal the very essence of the subject. In his photographic journal Weston writes that aside from its purely scientific and commercial use, photography works for the “recording of *life*, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the *thing* itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh” (*The Daybooks* 55).

Despite the artistry of his photographs and the sensitivity with which he approached a subject, Weston believed photography to be “an objective means to an end” (*The Daybooks* 9). What that end is, even within the genres of outdoor, landscape, nature and wildlife photography still remains hotly debated.

Twentieth Century American Landscape

While nineteenth century landscape photographers gave the population “a fresh quota of reality and fact, informed, on the one hand by a sensitivity to geological science, and on the other by the authentic understanding of the spiritual response, which, in America, was inseparable from natural fact” (Novak 171), early to mid-twentieth century landscape photographers instead “tried to restore an image of landscape as a whole, as constituted of earth, water, air and sky” (Jeffrey 20). Theirs was a holistic vision of a redeemable land, one that held out “hopes for re-creation” after the destruction of hope following the two World Wars. Ian Jeffrey sees Ansel Adams’ artistic vision, in particular, as “a refutation of the world of wire and corrugated iron” (20) in the development that boomed after World War II. Yet Adams claims to have been a bit less concerned with refuting rising development and rather more concerned with bucking the trend he witnessed in photography of focusing upon the ugly and broken aspects of society, as exemplified by documentary work begun in the Depression era. He wanted instead to record the “positive potentials of America” and to restore and revive the “Walt Whitman spirit – the acceptance of the WHOLE of humanity” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 290), which depended, he believed in concert with

Thoreau, upon a thriving wild world. He mentioned this in a letter written to his friend Cedric Wright in 1940

Both Edward Weston and I have certain feelings about the National Scene – which we both arrived at independently, and which we express differently. The whole world is, to me, very much ‘alive’ – all the little growing things, even the rocks. I can’t look at a swell bit of grass and earth, for instance, without feeling the essential life – the things going on – within them. The same goes for a mountain, or a bit of the ocean, or a magnificent piece of old wood. (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 125-126)

This love of the positive potentials of America and an alive world coupled with Adams’ long and intimate association with the Sierra Club eventually led to the wide distribution of landscape, wilderness, and nature photographs for environmental purposes. Adams, a member of the Sierra Club Board of Directors, along with Sierra Club President, David Brower, believed the publication of photographic images, particularly but not exclusively as distributed through high quality coffee table books, would help make the principles of conservation more accessible to the public and would increase participation in conservation efforts and, later, wilderness preservation efforts (*Conversations*). Their hunch was indeed correct. Artistic images of the natural scene proved to be incredibly persuasive at eliciting support for the Sierra Club’s conservationist and preservationist efforts.

The publication of large format photography books followed on the heels of a collaborative and very successful photography exhibit conceived of and executed by Nancy Newhall, Brower and Adams, *This is the American Earth*, images which the Sierra Club later published as a book. The exhibit, which included a variety of genres of photographs from a number of photographers,

traveled to college campuses across the nation and, according to Adams, made a great impact on the youth who were able to recognize, via the compelling imagery and accompanying text, the essential value of conservation (*Conversations*). Text from the flier announcing the exhibit is worth reviewing, as it clarifies the Sierra Club's conservation goals and also sets the stage for all the publications that followed, as well as for the unabated use of photographic imagery by environmental organizations to this day

The purpose of this exhibit *This American Earth* is not only to present the natural scene in terms of National Parks and wilderness areas, but also to give perspective to the whole vast pattern of conservation. . . . the exhibit suggests the enormous inspirational potential of the natural scene, and pleads for wise forest protection and use, for the cautious building of dams, for understanding of management of the soil, and for the protection of wildlife. It strives for continuation of the wilderness mood, the spiritual experience of young and old in the presence of nature.

A great obligation of our age is to protect and wisely use our natural resources. Both the material and intangible resources of our land are constantly threatened by men who would exploit them for short-term gain. Much of the tangible wealth of the earth - the timber, grass, oil, minerals, and watershed - is gone. And the intangible wealth of nature - as expressed through the National Parks and Monuments and the great scenic areas - is continuously imperiled. The vigilance of individuals and organizations dedicated to an ordered progress of civilization, in our time [sic] and in the time of our descendents, has done much to curb the destructive influences. It is a continuing vigil. (Newhall)

Numerous books published by the Sierra Club followed on the heels of *This is the American Earth*. Some focused on specific areas needing protection from development, such as *The Last Redwoods: Photographs and Story of a Vanishing Scenic Resource* with photographs by Philip Hyde. Others focused on the documentation of areas soon to be lost forever to development, such as *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado* (a misnomer, since the

canyon was full of Anasazi ruins) with photographs by science-trained photographer Eliot Porter. Still others focused on raising awareness about and appreciation of areas less understood and appreciated by the greater public, such as *Navajo Wildlands: As Long as The Rivers Shall Run*, with photographs by Philip Hyde. As the environmental movement matured and professionalized, with increasing emphasis on science and law, fewer written appeals were made to the spiritual value of nature within these books while greater emphasis was placed on educating the public about the ecological value of rare and not so rare bioregions. Nevertheless the most effective images for soliciting social response were, and remain, those that according to conservation photographer Cristina Mittermeir “touch people’s hearts and change their minds” (13), something that can best be done, she argues, by ethically-minded “gifted professionals” whose knowledge of photographic artistry can “inspire and enrich our soul” with images that are “the equivalent of poetry” (10).

Conservation-inspired landscape photography is a kind of social inquiry and a type of photographic inquiry guided by values and “intended to have effects in raising affective-cognitive awareness of individuals . . . [and] . . . to clarify social-political-spiritual questions” (Quan 4). Conservation-minded photographers, notes Robert Chianese, “often put photography to the political task of helping save the subjects they photograph” (par. 3). This may be so whether such an intention guides the photographic inquiry from the beginning or whether, instead, a particular photograph made for another purpose is later lent (donated or sold) to an organization with an environmental cause. Ansel Adams, for example,

claims never to have made a photograph with a political or activist agenda in mind (*Examples: The Making*), yet he recognized the persuasive communicative value of his photographs, which along with the work of other photographers were highly instrumental in helping to secure the Sierra Club's prominence as a reputable conservationist and environmentalist organization.

As the U. S. environmental movement gained traction and images of the wildest of wild nature became increasingly popular in concert with highly successful wilderness preservation efforts, several other trends emerged in landscape in the 1970s, among them New Topographics and Toxic Sublime. Both of these were in reaction to what photographer Richard Misrach describes as a saturation of imagery “deflecting us from reality with the commitment to beauty.” He continues, “My main problem with Adams’ perfect unsullied pearls of wilderness, and with the Sierra Club and the Ansel Adams clones, is that they are perpetuating a myth that keeps people from looking at the truth about what we have done to the wilderness” (qtd. in Chianese par. 14). Truth in photography, then, for this group of photographers is the revelation of the ways in which we treat and alter the land, often to its detriment. In addition to “ordinary landscapes,” such as farmlands and suburbia, these photographers often focus a frank, unaffected eye upon forgotten and forsaken lands, or highly toxic industrialized landscapes, believing that by calling attention to what we willfully choose to ignore we might begin to change our behavior. This idea runs directly counter to the generation before, as exemplified by Ansel Adams, who believed instead that creating a deep longing in the soul for a whole and beautiful natural

world might convince us to treat all life with greater respect. Clearly both ideas have merit.

Garner sees the goal of landscape work from the 1970s onward as one of trying to represent “the real America” without sentiment (*Disappearing Witness* 166). Given how little land has been designated as wilderness or set aside as parkland or even national forest in the United States in proportion to the whole of the land mass, it is fair to suggest that images of wilderness and national parks indeed are not representative of the majority of the American landscape. As New Topographics photographer Robert Adams suggests, we need imagery that includes all of the American land and “encompasses our mistakes” even if it is hard to bear. For, he says, “in order to endure our age of apocalypse, we have to be reconciled not only to avalanche and earthquake, but to ourselves” (“Inhabited Nature” 32). Such ideas have a Jungian feel, a sense that the shadow must be recognized and explored in order to be integrated and overcome.

Today, photographers approach landscape and nature from anyone of the above perspectives. Some focus on wild and untrammeled areas and hope to kindle our love for what is alien to us. Some focus on what is broken and hope to kindle our compassion. Some focus on local areas and hope to kindle our capacity to see what is familiar with a new eye. Some focus on what is beautiful and hope to kindle our longing. Some focus on what is ugly and hope to kindle our outrage. Whatever approach they take and whatever they hope to achieve, the photographers mentioned in the following pages all demonstrate a deep and

sustained concern for the all of the inhabitants of this planet and they all feel a keen sense of responsibility for what they witness.

JOURNEYING



Fig. 1 Summer storm approaching, Southeastern Colorado, 2011, Chase M. Clow

Whatever the intention or motivating desire, the photographer faces the world with “an inner readiness to limit the visible world and to change it in some way” writes art historian Heinrich Schwarz (92). The limiting and changing of the visible world, the transforming of “the original material into camera reality” (White, *Rites and Passages* 14) is exciting and satisfying but can also be accompanied by a mild regret or a sense of loss. As David Crouch suggests in *Flirting in Space: Journeys and Creativity*, “living holds a felt possibility of connection, meaning, change. To fix may be assurance, certainty or entrapment, closure or a mix of these things” (1). Photographers often rue the moment of exposure or the loss implied in “capturing” a moment. Charles Pratt expresses the feeling of inconsequence after the image is made: “A photograph is a celebration of a momentary experience of something. The moment passes and the image

remains on film, but what we have visited, seen and photographed remains for all the moments of its existence, and we are nothing to it” (qtd. in Dunaway 91).

Frank Gohlke also feels the loss inherent in the moment of exposure, the loss of an alive moment of possibilities: “The instant of the exposure is the present, the neck of the hourglass through which the infinite possibilities of the future pass into seemingly immutable facts of history; and all photographs mourn that loss, some more explicitly than others” (14). The fact that making an exposure can result in a feeling of loss suggests something about how the immediacy, aliveness and inter-dimensionality of the moment of experience in the field is the far more meaningful moment, more so than making a fixed and flattened object—no matter how beautiful and significant the resulting photograph.

The photograph is an expression of our experience of immersion and contact. Crouch’s idea of ‘journey-fragments’ holds promise as a way to uncover the function of the photograph in relation to immersive experience. He writes

We live in journeys. . . . journeys of experience, emotion, of different spaces, of different times. Each moment of our lives is a journey-fragment in flows, a movement, a gesture working uncertainly with other fragments and with time and in time. Events happen and change the way we grasp the world; feel and engage it; make sense and give meaning to aspects of our lives and things. (6)

Outdoor photographic practice (landscape, urban, nature, floral, insect, and wildlife photography) is an act of creative expression in response to journeys out-of-doors through and within land. The photographs, fixed evidence of journey-fragments, emerge in response to poly-sensual stimuli with a heightened awareness of the visual. The response arises while we are immersed within,

moving through, and resting within a particular place, a place that is alive with other creatures, including humans. The place is also alive with weather, with forms that result through cyclical ecological and geological processes, and with human-made machines, buildings and constructed spaces. Even when photographers set up cameras in a location to automatically trip the shutter in timed sequences, getting to a location, scouting a line of sight, and setting up the camera is a poly-sensual immersive experience of journey through and within a particular alive place.

Within this poly-sensual immersive experience the photographer is aware of his or her body moving through and within a place. She feels the heat of the summer sun, the frigid air of winter, or the eager wind of spring and fall. He seeks shelter from rain, hail, snow, or pounding sun. She navigates around boulders, carefully steps over cacti, watches for snakes and nesting ground birds, slaps away insects, crawls through fences, walks down cornrows, or navigates city streets careful not to be struck by a car. He hears the polyphonic sounds of the creek, the river, the waterfall, the susurrus trees, the melodic or staccato birdcalls, the droning tractor, the grind of the grain elevator, the rushing cars, or complete silence. She sees her limbs as she moves through this place, her hands, her feet; she might even catch a glimpse of her nose or her cheeks, and very likely her hair, as she turns her head, looks down and up, her senses alert to all around her. He feels the texture of the ground, the rough edges of the rock he rests upon, the sharp meadow grasses that scratch his face, or the bark of a tree under which he seeks shelter. Both are aware of their bodies as they move within and through this

land, their observation keen as they journey within a place alive with active agents and with the meaning they each make of their experience. With senses on high alert and response to stimuli guaranteed, the photographic moment is vital and infused with meaning, as pragmatic philosopher John Dewey indicates

To grasp the sources of esthetic experience it is . . . necessary to have recourse to animal life below the human scale . . . The live animal is fully present, all there, in all of its actions . . . he is active through his whole being. (18)

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey speculates that art objects are embodied experience distilled and crystallized into material form. His work therefore suggests that the photographic gesture (Flusser; Garner, *Disappearing Witness*) or photographic moment, i.e. the act of making an exposure and the decisions that go into it is not necessarily first prompted by an idea or concept, but rather is a felt response. The moment of exposure when the photographer decides to trip the shutter involves the coordination of commingling sensory impulse, intuition, and idea arising together. In other words, visual artists *think in images* and our images are a crystallization of our felt experience and our active consideration of and reflection upon the significance of place. Dewey believes this is a human response to our very animal senses

What is distinctive in man makes it possible for him to carry to new and unprecedented heights that unity of sense and impulse, of brain and eye and ear, that is exemplified in animal life; saturating it with the conscious meanings derived from communication and deliberate expression. (23)

The journey-fragment signified by the photograph is the result of movement within space. Space serves an important function, as Crouch suggests. It is, he writes, a “vehicle through which the world can emerge and offer

stimulation” (2). Thus, space is not an empty, dead vacuum, he posits, but rather is “constituted in energy, living, doing, thinking and feeling” (2). Space is the medium of movement and it allows perception to occur as we are immersed in a place. More important, Crouch continues, in the “commingling of energies: in the feeling and the thinking that individuals do . . . space is affected and affects, affects us” (2). Space, therefore, is itself an active agent in both the creation and manifestation of a living world as well as in the photographic expression of it. Photographer Frank Gohlke, who primarily practices in the American Mid-west from Ohio to Texas, arrived at this same conclusion after years of movement through and within relatively flat, open land: “I realized that space out there was not a passive container of objects but an active force in the landscape” (66). Wide open space, for Gohlke not only causes his eyes to work harder, he says, but shapes his mood and his expressive capacities. “I’m a landscape photographer,” he writes, “and what that means to me is that the mother tongue of my emotions is space. Differences in the shape of space mean differences in feeling for me” (179).

As we each move through space within a place, we adjust our bodies accordingly. Art philosopher Paul Crowther refers to this adjustment as a “human perceptual situation” wherein we “are compelled to change our bodily orientation in response to what the world thrusts upon us” (25). This involves a constant negotiation, a relationship of a sensing body and reflective mind with the active human and other-than-human agents—flora, fauna, insects, fungus, lichen, bacteria, weather, form, wind, water, and space—within a living place that we, all

of us, including “them,” comprise together. Through adjustment to one another we all co-create our shared world (Cordova; Harvey; Ingold; Norton-Smith; Peat).



Fig. 2. Sacramento River, Redding, 2012, Chase M. Clow

Through the photographer’s creative response, the making of her fixed journey-fragment, she expresses her felt connection with this living world and represents the knowledge she acquires in this immersive, reflective exchange. Ansel Adams, like Dewey, refers to this creative expression of a felt connection and active commerce with the place as a crystallization of perception. “Life for me is creative action,” he writes,

I am unsatisfied with simply existing. I can’t help it. It’s part of my make-up. I want to know every moment how I can refine and intensify my relation with the world, and every moment make some definite contribution—some crystallization of perception—some actual golden experience. (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 38)

Gelang photography begins with the experience of immersion in land, of being in a place with keenly observing heightened senses and with a desire to

crystallize this relationship into an expressive form. Place is alive, and maybe only partially biologically. It is alive with significance. The photographer travels through and within place and as a part of place. His presence there resonates with his values. We can turn once again to Ansel Adams for a clear articulation of the beliefs and values underlying this practice, as he seems to express the feeling of many Gelang photographers, although many are not as verbally expressive as he.

My approach to photography is based on my belief in the vigor and values of the world of nature – in the aspects of grandeur and of the minutiae all about us. I believe in growing things, and in the things which have grown and died magnificently. I believe in people and in the simple aspects of human life, and in the relation of man to nature. I believe man must be free, both in spirit and society, that he must build strength into himself, affirming the ‘enormous beauty of the world’ and acquiring the confidence to see and to express his vision. And I believe in photography as one means of expressing this affirmation, and of achieving an ultimate happiness and faith. (“A Personal Credo” 380)

The Gelang photographer is humbly aware of his interconnection with an alive place, a place he experiences as a unitary whole, one that includes both grandeur and minutiae. He does not experience it, as Kant’s and Burke’s theories of aesthetics imagine, as divided into zones of the sublime and the beautiful, where the sublime—powerful, masculine, large and inspiring fear or awe, such as mountains and waterfalls—is somehow severed from the beautiful—fragile, feminine and inspiring tenderness, such as flowers and fawns (Scarry; Wells). While dividing aesthetic perception into two distinct modes might be helpful for theoretical purposes and may come in handy for art criticism, experience in the field is not so divided. Instead, the photographer moves through a place in a state of open receptivity and with a readiness to respond to *any* “object” of intense

admiration, especially one that, in the words of Dewey, “intensifies the sense of immediate living” (5). “Photographers share animation,” says Robert Adams.

“They may or may not make a living by it, but they are alive by it” (*Beauty* 15).

What kindles them may be as seemingly delicate as a fern growing out of the trunk of a Redwood or as rough as a mountain of tailings beside a coalmine.

The longer one is within a place, the more one notices both the intimate and the sublime, as Eliot Porter describes of Glen Canyon

. . . the first canyon experience is too overwhelming to let you take in more than the broadest features and boldest strokes. The eye is numbed by the vastness and magnificence, and passes over the fine details, ignoring them in a defense against surfeit. The big features, the massive walls and towers, the shimmering vistas, the enveloping light, are all hypnotizing, shutting out awareness of the particular.

Later you begin to focus on the smaller, more familiar, more comprehensible objects, which when finally seen in the context of the whole, are endowed with a wonder no less than the total. It is from them that the greatest rewards come. Then you see for the first time the velvety lawns of young tamarisks sprouting on the wet sandbars just vacated by the retreating flood, or notice how the swirling surface of the green, opaque river converts light reflected from rocks and trees and sky into a moiré of interlacing lines and coils of color, or observe the festooned, evocative designs etched into the walls by water and lichens. (*The Place* 11)

The more years one spends in a place, the more likely to have an experience of unity, wholeness and connection. In a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams describes his unitary experience of the Sierra Nevada

It is all very beautiful and magical here – a quality which cannot be described. You have to live it and breath it, let the sun bake it into you. The skies and land are so enormous, and the details so precise and exquisite that wherever you are you are isolated in a glowing world between the macro – and the micro --, where everything is sidewise under you and over you. (*Ansel Adams: Letters*, N. pag.)

The act of moving through place is akin to “roaming about in readiness . . . in a state of high alertness and sensitivity. Something triggers a response, and the photographer is engaged,” suggests photographer and professor Gretchen Garner (*Disappearing Witness* 11) and in this sense the movement through a place may indeed be like stalking. However, unlike hunting, which has its definitive end in sight, this is a state of receptivity often unattached to outcome and one that is open to beauty however it comes (Richmond). Crouch refers to the artist’s movement through land as “flirtitive and embodied” (7). This may lead to a sense of communion, as it has for photographer Paul Caponigro (“Paul Caponigro” Anchell), as well as to an experience of intense rapture, as Minor White describes

The path my feet took was lined with images, whole gardens of pictures. With exposures I picked bouquets, each more vivid than the previous...finally a gathering of gem-like flames in the low tide. . . I thought I had forgotten how to use my camera, so I counted each step of the process aloud. . . shutter speed, aperture, cock the shutter. . . though I feared to lose the sense of beauty, no loss occurred; the sense of rapport was strong beyond belief. (12)

The sublime and beautiful, the macro and micro are all of a piece. There is no separation. We might call this a heightened sense of beauty, although beauty here does not refer to classical aesthetics but instead to the feeling of connection and the apprehension of significance. Thus, even places and landscapes often considered ugly by conventional aesthetic standards can be experienced as beautiful. Gohlke remarks that his “affection for the North Texas landscape is neither blind nor perverse; I know that by conventional standards of scenic beauty it is an unlovely place,” but he points out, it “provides good hiding spots for the Muse” (124). The muse, the experience of inspiration, then, is the key.



Fig. 3. Morning light on the roadside, Cayonlands, 2013, Chase M. Clow

Beauty, says photographer Alfred Stieglitz, is nothing less than “the universe seen” (qtd. in R. Adams, *Beauty* 36), the totality of being. Our expressive response to this seen universe is our crystallized journey-fragment, which represents an “affirmation of life. And life, all its eternal evidence, is everywhere.” (*Ansel Adams: Photographer* Np). Beauty is a “source of pleasure and well-being that we cannot help wanting” writes philosopher of art education Stuart Richmond, it is as Plato suggests “the only visible quality that inspires love” (204). Richmond calls the photograph an expression of love and believes it arises as an “artful use of form to illuminate truth, and celebrate reality” (84).

This idea resonates with that of philosopher Elaine Scarry. “Something beautiful,” she postulates,

... fills the mind yet invites the search for something beyond itself, something larger or something of the same scale with which it needs to be brought into relation. Beauty, according to its critics, causes us to gape and suspend all thought. ... simultaneously what is beautiful prompts the

mind to move chronologically back in the search for precedents and parallels, to move forward into new acts of creation, to move conceptually over, to bring things into relation, and does all this with a kind of urgency as though one's life depended on it. . . . One can see why beauty . . . has been perceived to be bound up with the immortal, for it prompts a search for precedent, which in turn prompts a search for a still earlier precedent, and the mind keeps tripping backward until it at last reaches something that has no precedent, which may very well be the immortal." (30)

Beauty, Scarry further suggests, "quickens" and "adrenalizes. It makes the heart beat faster. It makes life more vivid, animated, living, worth living" (24).

Many photographers relay visceral experiences, such as Karen Hutton who says of the photographic moment: "One of my own indicators that I'm on to something is that I get a feeling in my stomach . . . almost like butterflies. It's quite physical and kind of a rush. My eyes get clearer, sometimes I'll hear music" (4). Gohlke, too, describes a somatic experience, "As different as these places are from one another, they have at least one thing in common: being there made my pulse speed up, and the making of a picture seemed the only appropriate response" (196).

Susan Sontag worries that "poignant longings for beauty" lead to compulsive behavior where "having an experience become[s] identical with taking a photograph of it" (24), suggesting that eventually the image replaces the experience and leads to an increasingly superficial culture. Ansel Adams counters Sontag by suggesting that while a photograph seems only to reveal the surface, the photographer's experience is one of depth. "To photograph truthfully and effectively," he writes, "is to see beneath the surfaces and record the qualities of nature and humanity which live or are latent in all things" (*The Portfolios* N.

pag.). That depth resides in all Gelang photography, which is respectful, ethical, holistic and based in love. Photographer Philip Hyde writes the following of his photographic intention, “I am interested primarily in what Emerson called, ‘the integrity of natural objects.’ They express wholeness and individuality, and it is this sense of place that is the foundation of my work. . . . It has been a labor of love” (169). In a similar vein Galen Rowell sees his photographic practice allied with Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, stating that it “urges humans to adapt to conditions as they are and focuses on keeping in tune with the existing rhythms of the earth” (34). Gelang photography is, fundamentally, about recognizing ourselves as belonging to a community that extends beyond the simply human. Again, this is a heightened sense of beauty in its life-affirming sense. “That feeling of beauty is not a reflection of two- or three-dimensional form, but a human sense of what feels right – what belongs” (Pike N. pag.).

In line with the thinking of eighteenth-century proto-photographers and inventors, Scarry suggests that beauty, the life-affirming feeling of connection, is the genesis of art. The photographer, then, in a very real sense, cannot help but to make a photograph. For, as Scarry indicates,

Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people. Sometimes it gives rise to exact replication and other times to resemblances and still other times to things whose connection to the original site of inspiration is unrecognizable. (3)

How might beauty use the photographer to bring copies of itself into being? As mentioned earlier, the aesthetic moment for any artist happens, according to Dewey, when “ideas cease to be mere ideas and become the

corporate meaning of objects” (15). The creative act is therefore that moment when our ideas and thoughts, combined with our felt response, flow toward the creation of a new material object and, as Dewey suggests, “merge directly into it” (15). The resulting object, the photographic image, serves a mediator between our perception of a beauty and the place itself. The photograph signifies “something ‘out there’ in space and time” which renders the world “comprehensible to us as abstractions” (Flusser 8), just as it simultaneously points inward, signifying something in here. At this moment of aesthetic awareness “subject and object are brought together into a harmonious and constructive relationship” (Richmond 79).

When we stand or sit still we are said to occupy space. That is, we have created a place out of space with our presence, a space we previously perceived as empty (of solid form, but not of meaning or energy). Yet our presence, the materiality of our being, contains its own vast space. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes this as immersion in the inchoate inner immensity of thought and feeling. We are simultaneously immersed in this inner immensity while we are immersed in the outer immensity of the material world and the living beings who together form it. The point of connection between our inner immensity and the outer immensity, between our felt inner space and the co-constituted outer space in which we are immersed, is consciousness. Only a thin veil of flesh separates the two commingling, interrelated spaces, a flesh that does not stop at the skin but extends both outward and inward (Merleau-Ponty). The insubstantiality and porous quality of this flesh has been likened to a tent by Sufi poet Omar Khayyam (Angha 31). There is a constant flow between and within

these immensities, between the thin tent walls.

A creative act is the intentional shaping of a new material form from the circulating flux of energies and materials within and between these two immensities. Rather than simply focusing an “*objectifying* gaze” upon an object, the aesthetic experience is, as philosopher Neil Evernden asserts, “an awareness of the self *with* the object, a conscious merging of subject and object, rather than perception *of* an object. It is the subjective disposition which gives its unique character to aesthetic perception. The merging of the self with its object is usually referred to as a feeling” (84). Dewey agrees

Experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up with one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events. (15)

Perhaps the merging of perceptive feeling with an alive place is one way to make sense of a letter written by Ansel Adams to Edward Weston. At the time of this letter, 1937, both had been criticized for directing their photographic attention upon the natural world rather than upon the social crisis of the time. Trying to cheer up Weston and point out the significance of his work, Adams indicates a merging between Weston and the Carmel coast, “You have crystallized your work in Carmel; the sea, rocks, trees, and the mood of that coast has grown into you and you into it” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 72). This may also be why Ansel Adams, in a letter to his friend Cedric Wright, wrote: “Remember, you ARE a redwood” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 29).



Fig. 4. Young black tailed buck, Novato, 2011, Chase M. Clow

We are aware, to one degree or another, of our inner processes, just as we are of our bodies moving through place; and we feel compelled to make something of the intermingling of these two immensities, to bring copies of beauty into being. We also are in relation with the other active agents within a place. That is, the outer space is not static, but is alive with others. In this sense, every thing is engaged in and contributes to the creative act. Creativity arises as our inner aliveness meets and merges with the living world in which we are immersed and of which we are a part, suggest anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Timothy Ingold

creativity is a process that living beings undergo as they make their ways through the world . . . this process is going on, all the time, in the circulation and fluxes of the materials that surround us and indeed of which we are made – of the earth we stand on, the water that allows it to bear fruit, the air we breath. (2)

Their words reinforce those of Dewey, who reminds us,

life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it, but because of it, through interaction with it. . . . the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way (12)

These exchanges with the environment take place via simultaneous perception, a heightened form of awareness that independent scholar Tony Hiss indicates “broadens and diffuses the beam of attention even handedly across the senses so we can take in whatever is around us – which means sensations of touch and balance . . . in addition to all sights, sounds, and smells” (41). Polish photographer Magda Wasiczek, whose images of meadow flowers bubble and vibrate with color and form and capture a sense of the energy and movement, describes how she draws on simultaneous perception, even while her sense of sight is most keen

When I go into the meadow or garden, I look around. I often sit there to sharpen my eyes. . . . I soak up the smells of the meadow, its sounds, its light, and I wait. Maybe a butterfly will flap by, or I’ll notice a ladybug climbing a leaf, or drops of dew will sparkle in a shaft of light. (par. 6)

This heightened and full sensory awareness, Hiss posits, allows “a direct sense of continuing membership in our communities, regions, and the fellowship of all living creatures” (41) just as Hyde describes awareness of community while on a long-term photography project in the desert

The moon is rising early now, giving us light to eat dinner by. We hear much beaver tail slapping on the river before nodding off. We awake to a cardinal’s call. Turkey vultures frequent the bluffs and bars at every camp. Are they trying to tell us something? Bats and swallows swarm the sky. (160)

Photographer ReD Ognita’s description of his approach to photography as one of a “simple and calm dialogue” with the land suggests an experience of

reciprocal exchange with members of a community. He views his landscape photographs as a form of portraiture and says, “as it is in portraiture, the more you know of a person, the more the landscape reveals itself to you” (par. 2).

Photographer Marc Adamus experiences a profound sense of humility in this community, “I find relationship with everything around me that runs deep and purposeful. . . . you realize your place in it all and that is profoundly humbling” (par. 9). Such an experience of connection and bonding can also happen in sites of human-construction. For example, John Sexton writes

Looking back over the past thirteen years of photographic explorations with these four subjects [Anasazi ruins, Hoover Dam, power plants, space shuttle], I find that a bond has formed with these ‘inanimate’ objects. The primary attraction I feel is not to the stone, metal, plastic, or other material that forms the outer skeleton of these objects, but rather to the soul of human creativity and ingenuity that lives in the form of these functional structures. In effectively fulfilling their technological purpose, a timeless spirit of inventiveness and artistry shines through as beauty (*Places of Power* N. pag.).

Life itself is flux, a creative process, a continual process of emergence into relationship, response through negotiation, and of transformation. In this sense every living being and every moving force including wind and water, since they enact transformation on apparently inert surfaces, are creating and communicating in the world. This suggests a possibility of reciprocity as well as communicative exchange among all active agents in a place. Not surprisingly, some Gelang photographers describe moments of such profound connection and communication with other-than-human actors they feel as though they are being spoken through and their work represents the desires of something beyond their own limited ego-self. This will be further explored in the chapter, Reflecting.



Fig. 5. Sotol, Eastern Utah, 2013, Chase M. Clow

The photograph, which points outward as well as inward, signifies the photographer's perception of the meaning of place and in this sense the image is an assertion. It claims and declares: "I was here. I witnessed and experienced this. I found this meaningful." It is not only an assertion but is an affirmation, from the Latin *ad* – "to" + *formare* – "strengthen or make firm." What exactly is being strengthened? For the Gelang photographer it is that this place, right here, where I stand, sit, move, contemplate right now. This is a place we feel, as Gohlke says, is "worthy of our attention" (127). This is so whether the place is an alpine meadow or an oil refinery and whether or not any other person also believes such a place to be worthy of attention.

The image is not only an assertion and an affirmation. It also is a statement of conviction and of faith, but not necessarily of certitude. It is not: this is true, but rather: I experience this as true. There is a fundamental difference

between these two ideas of truth. And it is important to bear this in mind because debates about the veracity of photography have been roiling since its inception. The camera appears to be a perfect means of documenting external reality, indeed far more accurate and therefore trustworthy than an artist's hand or even the human eye itself (Talbot). A group of people can look at a photograph and say, "yes, when I look at that same object/scene/person I see those details, too. In fact, the more I look at this photograph the more I realize how many more details it renders than I tend notice. I can see that this is not a product of fancy or imagination. It clearly renders what is out there." It is the camera's tie to an apparently accurate rendering of material reality that leads to debates about how much a photograph might reveal the truth of that reality. Ansel Adams writes of his famous image of the Aspen Grove that "The majority of viewers of the horizontal image think it was a sunlit scene. When I explain that it represented diffused lighting from the sky and also reflected light from distant clouds, some rejoin, 'Then why does it *look* the way it does? Such questions remind me that many viewers expect a photograph to be a literal simulation of reality" (*Examples: The Making* 64).

Yet, while the expectation for the *viewer* of the photograph may be one of certitude, the experience for the photographer as he makes the exposure is rarely so. He knows how many choices he is making in the moment and is conscious of the need to manipulate the variables in order to achieve a quality exposure, one that works as an interesting composition, draws on effective lighting, and captures a full range of tone, which Sexton makes clear

It has been said that a photograph never lies. Whoever said that must not have been a photographer! I would like to propose that there has likely never been a photograph that wasn't at least a bit of a fib. Photographers constantly make personal decisions about what to include in the frame, and continue to editorialize throughout the process by selecting a particular point of view and lighting situation. Sometimes we camouflage things by camera position, hiding an unwanted element behind a foreground object. Sometimes we lighten or darken an object to enhance its prominence in the photograph, or obscure its visibility. Our attempts at recreating reality are folly from the onset. We live in a color-filled, three-dimensional world, while a black-and-white photograph exists in a monochromatic two dimensional setting. Photography is an *illusion* rather than a replication of reality – an illusion I often prefer over reality. (*Places of Power* N. pag.)

The fact that a photograph is a two-dimensional rendering of a five-dimensional experience (adding time as well as the consciousness or inner space of the photographer to the three dimensions of immersive place) is problematic on many levels, not the least of which is the fact that a photograph is the closest means we have of documenting the world around us *as it is*, not simply as we *imagine* it to be. As Robert Adams makes clear “the pictures themselves are human compositions” yet they point toward a physical place and “refer to a design that is independent of us” (*Why People Photograph* 54). Yet a photograph also points back to the photographer, a problem of confluence that has engaged philosophers of photography for over a century.

The photographer knows the camera lies not simply because the light bouncing around in a place and reflecting off of some aspect of the place isn't rendered one hundred percent accurately on the sensitized surface in her camera. More important, she knows it lies because she is in that place adjusting her body and negotiating the space, feeling the breeze, hearing the cicadas or crickets or

frogs, sensing a presence bigger than herself, knowing herself to be immersed within a meaningful place and feeling the urge to respond to her felt connection to a place which is likewise responding to her and perhaps even urging her. She knows the exposure can point to but never fully capture this felt reality. He, too, is fully aware that the image does not and, in fact, cannot, represent the totality of his immersive, polysensual experience, as Bruce Heinemann indicates

A photographic image is a two dimensional abstraction of three-dimensional reality. There are no sounds or smells or physical sensations in a sheet of photographic paper with ink or chemicals on them. A photographic image by its very nature is not real; it is an abstract, selective interpretation by the photographer who took the image. It is only later, in the darkroom or at the computer screen, that the photographer sets about to manipulate and shape the abstract elements captured on film in such a way to effectively visually express the experience of capturing that image and the emotional response elicited. (par. 4)

Stephen Johnson has a similar understanding: “The act of making a photograph has always been much like taking the big scene of the real world, in all its majesty, and funneling it into what the photographic medium could capture. Photography has always been reductive of the original experience” (par. 33).

Photography is magic. It blends the alchemy of photographic craft with the creativity that lives within each of us. When those two elements merge in a synergistic fashion, successful photographs are made. (Sexton, *Places of Power* N. pag.)

The point of artistry is to strive to make the photograph a more accurate reflection of *somatic experience* and perceptual reality, whether it is to honor the subject ‘as it is,’ or to honor ones emotional response to the subject, or to honor the affective bond with a place. As mentioned earlier, her manipulation of the exposure, and later the print or digital file, lays her open to criticism from those

who believe that a photograph, pointing outward as it does, always should be as close to a literal document of the external scene as possible. But the act of transforming felt connection to place into art, trying to convey the depth of feeling and value one holds about a place is, as Robert Adams says, the point. It “has never been to make something synonymous with life . . . but to make something of reduced complexity that is nonetheless analogous to life and can thereby clarify it” (*Beauty* 68). What does it clarify? Our humanity. Our affection. Our sense of connection with the places we inhabit and travel within; our sense of relationship with the beings and forces with whom we co-create our shared world; our experience of intimately belonging to and of being dependent upon this planet; our sense of responsibility toward the planet which we both intuit and observe is equally dependent upon us.

LOOKING

These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedge, such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass today might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and grass of far-off years, which still live in us and transform our perception into love. (Eliot 17)



Fig. 6. Marijke #1, Miwok Park, Novato, 2013, Chase M. Clow

“I love taking pictures,” observed Marijke, age 13, soon after receiving her first digital SLR (single-lens reflex camera) from her mother. She had just graduated from owning an automatic to having a “real” camera, one in which a photographer can exercise full control over the camera’s mechanisms—shutter, aperture, “film speed,” white balance and the like—and one where you can change lenses, all to suit photographic and artistic intent. I was happy she had

received this gift, as Marijke has a deep interest in photography and the urge was growing increasingly strong in her. Only a few months before making this statement to me she and I had shared a wonderful day together in Miwok Park in Novato, California, when I gave her the chance to try her hand at using my daughter's SLR. That day had been magical for both of us – her for the chance to see what a “real” camera could do and me for the chance to observe the photographic gestures of a young person so actively engaging with her environment. One minute she was standing in the middle of the trees, focusing the camera skyward, examining the intersection of treetops and sky; the next she was groundward in yoga-like postures focusing upon delicate plants and the grasses that sprouted through the scattered leaves.



Fig. 7. Marijke #2, Miwok Park, Novato, 2013, Chase M. Clow



Fig. 8. Marijke #3, Miwok Park, Novato, 2013, Chase M. Clow

I would walk away to make some of my own exposures and would return to find her by the creek focused upon the swirling patterns, or, later, leaning over a bench to survey the ground beneath.



Fig. 9. Marijke #4, Miwok Park, Novato, 2013, Chase M. Clow

This is the stuff of childhood: exploration, adventure, wonder, discovery, delight. This is the genesis of Gelang photography, including my own and that of others. Describing his first photographic experience, Guy Tal writes of borrowing a Minolta from his father and going outside

The joy of seeking photographic subjects was intoxicating. My memories of that day include colorful beetles, the scent of wildflowers, warm sunshine on my face, watching a tortoise slowly chewing fragrant clover leaves, stalking large swallowtail and large monarch butterflies, the diffraction of later afternoon sunlight through wild thistle heads, and the occasional pause, setting down the camera and just soaking in the experience of being in a quiet place, away from the din of the human hive with all my senses on high alert and savoring the magnificence of a perfect spring day. (par 1)

Like me and Marijke, who live near open space, Tal grew up in a small town with access to fields and orchards where he was free to roam. Art Wolfe experienced the same. Others describe spending considerable time in national parks as children and learning to love the other-than-human there (A. Adams; Calverley; Neill) or they found themselves contemplating wide open spaces while in a car on family trips (Gohlke), or while “lying on the floor in [the] living room reading maps and dreaming of far away places” (Olwick). Whatever the generating moment, photography remains an adventure of “unending discovery of infinite variety and beauty in the universe” (Hyde 169) where “the art becomes an adventure and vice versa” (Rowell 11).

Given this adventure, and after having watched Marijke engaging in an immersive, highly physical and embodied experience where she delighted in all that called her attention (as well as in previewing her images in the camera’s

built-in monitor) and after enjoying not only time spent with her doing something we both love but, most important for me, doing it in a place vibrating with the other-than-human life forms, I was particularly intrigued to hear her follow up the unequivocal statement of her photographic desire “I love taking pictures” with this: “because it makes the world *seem so much more beautiful than it really is.*”

This simple, ingenuous statement from an adolescent relatively new to photography distills in a few quick words the heart of numerous philosophical debates. The first, among the English Empiricists concerns the difference between sight and perception: can we ever really see something as it is or is our seeing always tainted with an overlay of psychologically or culturally constructed perception? From this perspective, we might read Marijke’s statement as: I think I see something beautiful, but I’m not happy so it must not be beautiful after all. Or, I think I see something beautiful but my primary cultural memes suggest that the world is mostly ugly and fraught with problems so perhaps it is not as beautiful as it seems.

The second philosophical debate, closely allied with the first, concerns the veracity of an image: is a photograph a document of something ‘out there’ or is it always really just a chimera? In this case, we might interpret Marijke’s statement as: I make something beautiful even though the world itself isn’t. My photographs are lies.

The third debate concerns the camera: does it serve as an extension of our sight, like eyeglasses, and is it also thus an extension of our minds (Maynard). That is, can Marijke trust what she sees through the camera because the camera is

an extension of her eyes as well as of her ability to imagine, e.g. to make an image of what she sees? Less evident in Marijke's comment but nevertheless implied, a related question is whether photographers are themselves extensions of the camera rather than the other way around. Does the camera's programming somehow gain the upper hand and actually drive her behavior, shaping the way she sees, perceives, and behaves while in the field, as Flusser suggests? Does Marijke get excited about viewing the image in the camera's monitor and of adjusting the settings on the camera in response to what she sees because the camera's programming compels her to do so?

A similar question goes like this: does the act of looking at the world through a viewfinder and also at photographs slice and dissect a greater whole into disconnected bits and "pluck its subject out of the distracting matrix in which we are all, in fact, embedded" (Elkins 91)? Might Marijke find her images, little objects neatly extracted from the large real world, more attractive and contained and, therefore, reassuring than the messy real world? Does the photographic gesture and all that it entails—choosing a location and line of sight, framing the shot, choosing which lens to use—give us some sense of control over a world that seems to be perpetually out of control?

The fourth philosophical debate, which given the literature appears to concern philosophically minded photographers more often than it does cultural philosophers is this: is the world as interesting and meaningful as it seems to those of us who feel compelled to explore it, connect with it, engage it, and make something of our impressions of it? Or are we running a fools errand, imagining

beauty, connection and meaning where none exists? And if the world is as beautiful as we find it, how do we make sense of everything there that isn't as obviously beautiful, but is instead rather ugly, like death and dying, nuclear test sites, islands made of plastic bags gyrating in the ocean, and the fact that we are in the sixth major wave of ecological collapse at this very moment, a condition if not precipitated by then certainly exacerbated by our consumerist addictions and our reliance upon technology, of which the camera itself is a prime example.

With full knowledge of that which is broken and therefore not apparently beautiful, and the ways in which we are all complicit, photographers as a whole would join in my reply to Marijke, "The world *is* as beautiful as we see when making photos. It's just that most of the time we don't notice how beautiful it is. We are too caught up in personal or national dramas to pay attention to what is around us." Steve Coleman echoes this sentiment: "It never ceases to amaze me how beautiful the world is . . . yet it's so easy to miss that beauty when our lives are so busy. Photography is my way of slowing down, getting away and watching the world move more slowly" ("My Story" par. 3). Slowing down feels out of sync with our highly fast-paced, active culture and perhaps, this too, is one of the reasons Marijke does not think of the world as beautiful. The "world" is fast-paced and comprised of human institutions and constructions, technologies and entertainments, politics and human relationships. Trees, grasses, rain, insects seem to exist independent of such a world. Yet slowing down helps us to eventually arrive at an understanding that we are in fact interconnected—humans

and the other-than-human who together make this world—and the camera helps to highlight this fact, as John Paul Caponigro suggests

The natural world is the matrix we arise from, that sustains us, and that we return to. It is us. I make no separation between us and it, though that pattern of thought is deeply embedded in our culture, so deeply embedded that we don't even possess language to describe the larger phenomenon of us/it. Through my work I hope to deconstruct this false duality and suggest a more holistic way of relating. If we treat the environment (anything really) as a part of ourselves, our actions towards it will automatically become more conscientious and we will be happier, healthier, and more complete." (par. 11)

Magda Wasiczek reports learning to see "things invisible, to enjoy a million small details, which previous did not pay attention [sic]" and how doing so has become a "cure for all evils" because through the process of looking at this mysterious earth she discovered "every smallest detail is a miracle" ("Dreamy and Surreal" par. 7). She hopes her work will "wake up the child inside" of her viewers, "because the world in the eyes of children is always more colorfull [sic], fascinating, mysterious, and full of surprises" ("Dreamy and Surreal" par. 9). Perhaps Marijke, as an early teen, stands on that edge between wonder and loss of innocence. Her camera helps her see this mysterious world vibrating with life but her teenage drama forecloses it much of the time.

I consider my own photographic creations of the day. What did I notice and why? What beauty do these images possess? Are they an affirmation of life? What kinds of awareness/knowledge do they reveal?

Consider this image of a fence along the perimeter of the park:



Fig. 10. Fence, Miwok Park, Novato, 2103, Chase M. Clow

What prompted me to make this exposure? Was it the allure of the light that, drifting like a smoky fire across the surface of the fence, seemed to have previously also ignited the vine? Was it the contrast of textures—wood, vine, and leaf detritus? Was it evidence of stages of plant life—a living plant spilling over wooden planks toward recently shed leaves—cycles of life and death? Or, more cynically, was it the reminder that plants, despite their own agency, are mostly pawns in the hands of humans? The tree served as a producer of oxygen and now serves as a fence. The vine serves as an ornament for one homeowner, likely to be pulled by the next. Or was it simply that I found the random confluence of elements in that precise moment in that particular place to be an aesthetically interesting composition—the way the bottom of the vine swings toward the wispy light and how its curve echoes a faint circle that was etched into the fence at some point by someone for some reason I do not know?

Clearly, my motivation for making the exposure was mixed and, I might add, not really evident to me at the time. I am not alone in not always knowing why I make an exposure. Regardless, I was enjoying the experience of exploration and of discovery, the delight in finding aesthetically interesting scenes, and the increasing intimacy I experienced as I moved through and within the park.

Consider this next photograph, a “classic” landscape image:



Fig. 11. Sunlit bench, Miwok Park, Novato, 2013, Chase M. Clow

The photograph seems to imply a removed observer standing back and surveying a scene. The image, a shaft of light penetrating the forest canopy and lighting up a solitary bench, is nearly, if not completely, a cliché. I have to ask myself now, is James Elkins right? He asks, “I’d like to know if any of us has the capacity to imagine landscape outside of our experience of painting, photography, film, and other arts” (135). Have I seen too many photographs of other sunlit parks to actually see with fresh eyes? As Roland Barthes remarked in 1980, prior to the

widespread use of the Internet and social media, “we live according to a generalized image-repertoire” (118). Thus am I conditioned by other images to find such a scene beautiful? Have I been too heavily influenced by Romantic photographers? I wonder about such things only now.

It seems as if the mind is constantly churning facts, moments, relationships, and concepts, and reverberating to the input of information and the flowering of emotion. It is essential that the artist trust the mechanisms of both intellect and creative vision. The conscious introspective critical attitude has no place in the luminous moments of creative expression, but should be reserved for later, when the work is complete. (A. Adams, *Examples: The Making* 93)

At the time of the exposure, my experience was, as Ansel Adams suggests, a luminous moment. Far from being a removed observer I rather felt I belonged as a member of a community of life forms in a place that seemed to have significance not only for me, but also for many others, both human and other-than-human. I felt completely embraced by the trees, the light, and the calling birds. I was comforted by the evidence of more gentle human occupation: a quiet preserve of native trees and a solitary bench next to a creek inviting one to sit, alone or with a friend, to reflect, contemplate, or enjoy a good conversation. This may be a cliché, but it is only so for the fact that enjoying such a moment is an authentic human desire.

The photograph affirms that particular place as well as the sense of peace and connection I felt at that moment, a feeling of being wrapped in beauty and magic. It serves as a mnemonic or what Liz Wells refers to as a “trans-historical afterimage” (51). Yes, I was within this place at this time. As Gohlke writes, photography is an act of “trying to rescue certain fragments of experience from

time” (115). Yes, this moment existed for me. Seeing the photograph during processing and again later when I revisit the photograph also serves as a salve. Yes, I was with these beautiful active agents who co-create our shared world and I enjoyed that experience. Interestingly, philosopher Roland Barthes questions the idea of a photograph as an aid to memory. He writes, “Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory . . . but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes counter memory” (91). This is so, he says, because the photograph is not, itself, a polysensual experience. I can no longer smell the Bay leaves, hear the birds, and touch the bark; I am only looking at a photograph. Photographer John Paul Caponigro, son of photographer Paul Caponigro, also questions how well an image serves as an aid to memory, wondering about how the act of fixing a moment in space and time might create memory distortion

I’m fascinated and troubled by time in photographs. On the one hand, the photograph is able to arrest time enabling us to consider and reconsider at length fleeting and ephemeral phenomena. The photograph extends our perceptual faculties allowing us to see and experience (second hand) more. On the other hand, there is a temptation to think that art immortalizes a subject and that by making records we can hold onto things - permanence is illusory. Then there’s memory, the primary container of our experience. It’s fallible and becomes more so with the passage of time. Many times we are tempted to defer to the documents we create, which always distort, rather than the direct experiences we have. That applies to memory, which changes, and documents seek to fix memory - again, permanence is illusory. (par. 39)

While I cannot smell the Bay leaves, hear the birds and touch the bark again when I defer to the document, nevertheless I can imagine myself there again. The fact that I can do so lies closer to something else Barthes writes, “photographs of landscape (urban or country) must be *habitable*, not visitable.

This longing to inhabit is . . . fantasmatic, deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me back to somewhere in myself . . . as if *I were certain* of having been there or of going there” (40). In this case, as the photographer, I am certain of having been there and I am indeed *re-inhabiting* that place in my imagination.

Patrick Maynard, expanding upon Barthes, writes that the camera, one of many imaging technologies which function as “generic imagining enhancers,” serves as a “prescription of imagining” – that is, viewers of the image are prompted to imagine. He writes, “We look at the surface in order to imagine, and immediately imagine about that very looking as well. That is, we imagine it to be the act of looking” (106). The viewer believes herself to be there, to be looking not at a photograph but at the scene, to be *in* the scene. This ability to provoke a sense of imagined presence, also known as “virtual witnessing,” is not unique to photographs, as it is shared by fiction, poetry, film, and theater. Any of these imagining enhancers, according to literary theorist John Bender, is a form of “demi-illusion,” a word coined by Marmontel in the 1800s that indicates a state of being absorbed into an experience such that one feels to be in two places at once (Bender). For example, in the theater we might lose ourselves in the film even though we are simultaneously aware of the fact that we are sitting in the theater and are hearing our neighbor rustling through the popcorn bag.

Douglas Nickel makes an interesting point about the value of the photographer’s absent presence in the work, which ties in to theories of virtual witness. Speaking of the landscape survey work of Carleton Watkins, he writes

Watkins had the propensity for making pictures that were immediate, lush in detail, visually coherent, and psychologically compelling. These photographs function like mobile windows onto the world, where the viewer's presence in the scene is purchased with the photographer's corresponding absence. (21)

Nickel's observation suggests that we can better imagine ourselves in an image when no other person occupies the photograph, since not knowing a person in the image means we definitely were not there. More important, though, we can imaginatively inhabit a photographic scene because the photographer, although rarely visible in the image, *did* inhabit the scene. The more attuned she is at the time to the details and to her psychological response to the place, the more her photographs invite others to imaginatively inhabit the place with her. We are invited to step into her felt experience. Despite this, as Wells and others point out, a photograph is not an adequate or even suitable substitute for direct experience. They are surrogates at best. "Photographs substitute for direct encounter; they act as surrogates, mediating that which was seen through the camera viewfinder" (Wells 6). As we all know, a surrogate can never replace the real thing.

Let us consider two additional exposures of my day in Miwok Park with Marijke: one of a millipede as it navigates the bark of a Coast Redwood and the other of a Coast Redwood leaf, just beginning to flower at the time it drifted from its branch, now embedded in the trunk of the tree:



Fig. 12. Millipede and coast redwood leaf, Miwok Park, 2013, Chase M. Clow

Here, my motivation was clear. I wanted to get close to this tree. Not just physically close, but psychically close. I was pulled in by its magnificence and I wanted to get to know it. I wished it could also get to know me. I felt compelled to touch it, to rest my hand against it and lean in, trying to connect with its slow but urgent bulk, to feel its weight and its years. As I did so, I began to notice details – the form and various colors of the bark, the pattern of branches as they extended from the trunk, the shape of its leaves. My eyes scanned up, down, in and around the tree. As I circled it, hand trailing along bark, I began to notice other life forms: ants, a moth, and the millipede. I paused to look more closely at each. I observed their behavior and then felt the urge to make a portrait of each of them as they journeyed with and upon this tree. I felt a profound respect for each one and wanted to honor them, as I would a person. I am not alone in wanting to honor these other-than-human “persons,” of feeling a sense of connection and of

ascribing a certain personhood to them. Consider this statement from Athena

Carey

I find myself drawn to the silence and serenity of wide open, empty spaces . . . As I looked around, enjoying the beauty of my solitude, I realized that I was in fact never alone in these places. Scattered throughout these frigid landscapes I found exceptionally strong personalities – not in other people, but in trees. Silent and strong in the hard winter cold, these leaders, troops, teachers, students, guardians, enemies, families and lovers showed me their power as well as their vulnerability. I felt compelled to capture this beautiful other-reality to share visually my belief that we are never truly alone. (24)

While other photographers describe similar conceptions of nonhuman others, such as James Balog, some other photographers avoid imparting personal qualities to nature. Ansel Adams, for example, claims to have avoided the pathetic fallacy and to also have shied away from pantheism (*Conversations*).

As I continued around the trunk, I discovered the embedded leaf. After paying such close attention to the insects I was struck by its form and the way it paralleled the shape of the millipede. I was also fascinated by the mystery of its story. How did it become lodged in the bark? How did it land so perfectly upright? Was this a serendipitous act of wind or was it placed there by another human who loved the juxtaposition of its slender, spiny form against the rough, thick bark and did she think the dark crevice of bark made a fitting home for this leaf?

The leaf hidden in a dark crevice of a tree reminds me of photographer Brad Cole, who likes to work in what he calls a minor key. In an interview with John Paul Caponigro, Cole contrasts his desire to connect with the dark, mysterious quality of earth with many other photographers who seek out the light.

“Most of the traditional photography I observed,” he says, “seemed very up, to the light, very patriarchal, instead of being down, into the darkness, into the mother”

(par. 66). He clarifies this sentiment as their conversation continues

BC . . . It’s not that I’m against the light. I just want more in the minor key. I do see the land as the thing that saved my life. Not that I was going to die, but in the fact that I got reconnected. I feel a real gift in the land. I’m very fortunate to live here and be that close to nature all the time. I need it. I need to get out and walk. In the beginning I had a hard time taking pictures. I was so into the moment if I had to think about taking pictures I would feel bad about not being more in the moment. I learned I could turn it on and off. It’s an appreciation of the world, the elements, every day being different. Sometimes the ocean is full of waves that could kill you, other times it’s as smooth as glass. It’s fantastic to be there.

JPC I find it hard not to think of the ocean as a living prescence [sic].

BC Yes, exactly, a life force. In *Last Dream* I use the word numina which means to me a spiritual force or power emanating from a place or object. You get a feeling of a place or the mood of a place or a person. That’s the muse that you try to follow. (par. 71-73)

Caponigro calls this “a primal way of relating,” and Cole agrees, describing a very visceral feeling of connection with a place: “For me it has an atmosphere. It’s almost like a sound wave. It has this ringing to it, like you just struck a bell. It’s got a lot of stuff in there for me. That ‘other’ dimension is in there” (par. 41).

That “other” dimension, the atmosphere or energy of a place, should not be confused as a projection of the photographer’s mood upon the land. This is not a matter of believing the land reflects our mood, as Romantic-era poets described, but rather a matter of trying to remain open and receptive to differences of felt experience in a given place. That said our moods do often sync with the “mood” of a place, for we are shaped by the places we occupy. Light, of course, has a huge impact, and light is usually predicated on weather.

When we carefully reflect upon the places we are drawn to and the photographs we create we begin to see our own predilections more clearly. Just as our photographs point outward, they also serve as mirrors into our inner landscapes. They force us to take note of what we notice. While immersed in a place we may not stop to analyze what is calling our attention. However, our photographs later invite reflective analysis. Sometimes we discover dimensions of ourselves we had not previously noticed. New Zealand photographer, Declan O'Neill, is a good example. In *New Zealand's Mystical Landscape* he describes how he began his photography project of the landscape with the intention of learning to make better photographs. Yet, his journey resulted in a form of self-discovery he had not anticipated. He articulates this discovery well

What began simply as a journey into the landscape became a journey to a place I had never intended to go. . . . when I came back from my journey I discovered that the photographs I had taken spoke of things other than the landscape in front of the lens. . . . They allowed me to describe not only my feelings about depression but also, in a wider sense, to use photography as a language to describe complex emotion that we so often fail to voice through words. (4)

I reflect upon my own photographic tendencies and upon the images I made that day in the park with Marijke. I see that they simultaneously reveal multiple dimensions of my exterior and interior landscapes. I had an increasing sense of intimacy in the space and felt a peaceful, harmonious connection with other humans and with other life forms. My close attention to the tree, for example, increased my awareness of the myriad life forms in the park and enhanced my sense of connection with them. I observed interconnection and interdependence among species. Yet I also became aware of my propensity for

cynicism and discontent with social norms, as evidenced by response to the fence.

A human construction, the fence presents a barrier to open exchange. It cordons off a private area and keeps neighbors apart, just as my tendency to feel cynical often presents a barrier to trusting other human beings. Perhaps I should start looking for fences with holes in them.

SEEING

“See beyond looking.” (Rowell 93)



Fig. 13. Dark eyed junco, Pacheco Valle, Novato, 2103, Chase M. Clow

We learn landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it – like between the sparrow and the twig. (Lopez 54-55)

In *Landscape Theory*, a transcript of a conversation among scholars from a variety of disciplines, Jacob Wamburg makes the following observation while discussing the evolution of landscape imagery throughout the centuries. This observation represents a long-held traditional view of the aesthetic appreciation of the land, a view that makes a sharp distinction between working and duty-free experiences

There is a tension in what we have been saying between walking free, observing a landscape, and being involved in a worked countryside—the shaped side of landscape, the idea of landscape as shaped by human hands. The famous essay by Joachim Ritter on the concept of landscape argues that landscape is aesthetic experience par excellence. For Ritter, the

landscape experience is marked by freedom from duties: it is a disinterested experience. This duty-free view of nature is specifically urban and is invoked when the city dweller goes to the countryside, wishing there to atone for his otherwise industrial exploiting of nature. (DeLue and Elkins 95)

I contemplate my own formative experiences as the daughter of a cattle rancher, a man who worked the land day-in and day-out but who nevertheless loved to camp when he had a chance. Of course, he rarely had a chance given that ranch life is particularly intensive in the summer, the only months warm enough to camp and enjoy extended leisure time lakeside in a national forest. He walked the land extensively and daily, while irrigating, and loved the pleasure of being alone in the quiet morning light listening to birds, watching the sun rise, and feeling connected to a greater whole. Yet, he rarely had time or energy to walk “duty-free.” I, too, had ranch duties, which variously included mucking stalls, painting or digging fence post holes or doing laundry and cooking for the small cadre of young ranch hands, primarily male college students who had been hired for the summer. Yet when I had completed my duties, or when I had a stretch of several hours that were “duty-free,” I would steal away, usually on horseback, to explore the land.

My father had three ranches during his lifetime, one high in the mountains of Colorado, from which we had to move due to his heart issues when I was still too young to explore far on my own. The second, the ranch I think of as home, was in Northern Wyoming, a three thousand acre spread bordering the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) property that swept up into the Big Horn Mountains and joined national forest. The third came later when the mercurial beef market

was at its lowest ebb and my father “lost” the ranch and moved an hour south to a much smaller spread. This is where he died. I never formed an attachment to his third ranch, mostly because I was already involved in my own life by that point and I did not make time to form a relationship with that land.

I extensively explored the second ranch and BLM property, and occasionally national forest, while alone with my horse, quietly and carefully observing. I was particularly interested in the flora and fauna, water and weather, and I learned a great deal about the land just by gently moving through it. I learned, as Barry Lopez says, not the names of things but to see the “relationship between the sparrow and the twig.” I learned to tell time by the angle of the sun and to differentiate east, west, north and south by the sun’s position. I learned to pay careful attention to everything around me, first to make sure my horse and I were safe and second to make sure I could find my way home. I also learned a great deal about the land from my father – whose anxious eye on the weather, especially eager when freshly cut hay was drying but had not yet been baled – taught me to pay close attention to the direction of wind, the shape of clouds, emerging smells, and subtle changes in humidity.

My strolls through the land were indeed often duty-free. They were different from the times when I was working because I could experience the land at a different pace. However, they were not wholly different from times when I was working. Whatever the activity, whether painting a fence, mucking a stall, or carrying lunch out to my father, I still remained actively aware of my surroundings. When we moved cattle up into the high mountain ranges I might

not have had as much time to contemplate relationships in the land, since much of my attention was on chasing stray cattle out of thickets, nevertheless I enjoyed the immersive experience.

The idea of a duality between interested and disinterested relations with land might be false, as my experience of ranch life indicates and as the work Gelang photographers implies. While the position Ritter articulates through Wamburg suggests that my working moments were interested and my duty-free moments were disinterested, my exploratory strolls hardly can be classified as “disinterested.” I was deeply interested, highly attentive, and greatly informed, just as I am while practicing photography. I will explore alternative meanings of “interest” momentarily. I was learning to read the land and, I might even suggest, the land was learning to read me. We must bear in mind that “land” is not a singular entity, but rather a complex of relationships among a host of active agents, including humans, animals, birds, plants, streams, bodies of water, rock formations, stands of trees, etc. Animals, both wild and domesticated, sensed my presence and if I were particularly quiet would often linger. Birds would announce my arrival as I entered the forest. Trees would “feel” the touch of my hand or the weight of my body pressed against them when I dismounted to give my horse a chance to rest. This same experience of connection holds true when I am on foot with camera in hand.

Significant time spent with land, whether while shaping it, like my father and I, or whether navigating through it duty-free, as I often did and as other photographers do, leads to a sense of humility and connection. You know you are

at the mercy of forces much larger than yourself and this creates within you a sense of keen reliance upon others, whether human or other-than-human. The land shapes and tempers you, as Ansel Adams writes in a letter

I animal-packed and back-packed over unimaginable miles of rocks and roughness and pointed at amazed landscapes. The results, photographically, were terrible, but the life tempered something that I can never unbend and untemper in this existence – even if I wanted to. There is too much clear sky and clear rock in my memory to wholly fall into self-illusion . . . I wonder if I can bring anything of that absolute honesty to my work. (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 61)

Extended experience with the land also teaches respect and elicits a desire to learn from it rather than impose upon it, as photographer Paul Caponigro remarks in an interview with Steve Anchell

I go for a teaching. I don't go *merely* to impose, or even humbly ask for a picture. And in order to get the teaching, which is a voice from the essence of the subject, I have to be available. And sometimes I even have to apologize for my mood. Hope that it will change so I can be available to my subject. (par. 25)

Is landscape photographic practice work or duty-free? It is decidedly work, but not simply for the fact that we refer to the body of images created by a photographer as his or her body of work. Photography is work because it represents a stake or interest in the land. However, this form of “interest” might not be valued by anyone who falls within the six anthropocentric ideological perceptions of landscape as identified by Meinig (see *Introducing*). These include landscape as artifact, habitat, problem, wealth, ideology and history. Although there are differences among these perceptions, all six are predicated on the assumption that humankind's primary position on this earth involves tending or transforming land. “Interest,” therefore, implies actively changing the land for the

ultimate benefit of humankind. The remaining categories of land perception – nature, system, place, and aesthetic – are therefore *seemingly* disinterested because they do not involve direct transformation of land and are thus less anthropocentric or not at all so.

The ethical and experienced photographer rarely actively shapes the land while photographing—other than to move aside a branch or leave a trail of footprints, for example—even though his photographs might inform the shaping of land by others. Yet he is interested in the land and this means he is working the land, where “work” can be defined as close observation and intentional acquisition of knowledge. To understand ecological systems, for example, one must be present physically in a given land, observing and actively making sense of what is observed. To understand place, one must once again be physically present, actively observing, and intentionally seeking to uncover significance. In a somewhat ironic twist, when a photographer, artist, or scientist is in the field the *land* is actually doing the greater share of the work, e.g. affecting transformation in the human, rather than the other way around. The human’s primary work in this case is to make meaning of the experience.

The photographer learns to seek the essential qualities of the environment, wherever he might be. By this I mean that he should be tuned to respond to every situation. It is not enough to like or dislike; he must make an effort to understand what he is experiencing. (A. Adams, *Examples: The Making* 80)

The kinds of knowledge and understanding that arise through “tuning” to respond, an understanding of the relationships existing with a place and of oneself within that relationship, calls into question the criticism of Susan Sontag, whose

classic work, *On Photography*, remains one of the foremost critiques of photographic practice and her ideas have been advanced extensively by others. Several of her thoughts in particular are worth considering, for they run directly counter to my own experience, as well as to that reported by other Gelang photographers. Sontag writes

To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power. (8)

And:

There is a peculiar heroism abroad in the world since the invention of cameras: the heroism of vision. Photography opened a new model of freelance activity—allowing each person to display a certain unique, avid sensibility. . . . They would entrap the world, whatever the cost in patience and discomfort, by this active, acquisitive, evaluating, gratuitous modality of vision. (90)

It is true that landscape photography, in which I include outdoor, nature, wildlife photography, requires great patience and a willingness to suffer considerable discomfort. Terry Hope writes in his introduction to *Landscape of the challenges* facing photographers including “weather that only rarely cooperates . . . long working hours [and] . . . having routinely to rise at ungodly hours” (9) and, as David Plowden shares, making a compositionally interesting photograph is often thwarted by rapidly changing light and shifting shadows, as well as by moving people, cows and other animals, moving contrails, and the sudden appearance of rain or wind (Plowden and Jeffrey). Joel Sartore, who frequently contributes work to *National Geographic*, also notes the less than

pleasant reality of being outdoors, particularly in areas where bugs are not systematically destroyed

You have to be really patient. If I weren't a Type A and very obsessive-compulsive, there's no way I would do this. Most shoots I'm covered with bugs . . . Most of the time it's physically miserable, and if you weren't wound tight like me . . . why in the world would you ever do something like this? I don't think you could stand it! (par. 8)

Despite these conditions, photographers persist. Is it because we are heroes with avid sensibility eager to entrap the world, as Sontag claims? Or is the matter something altogether different? It seems rather more to be about relationship and connection, about humility and respect. Let us consider in addition to my own descriptions, as well as the comments above by Adams and Caponigro, this artist statement by landscape photographer David Ward, "Rather than having a specific goal in mind I travel in expectation and with a receptive outlook. My aim is to connect with my subject rather than to acquire images" ("Gallery" par. 2). Or advice by the late Sierra Club photographer, Philip Hyde, who reminds us to "recognize the right of other creatures . . . We do not know enough any of them to fully understand why they are here" (116). Or this by science-trained photographer James Balog, who ends his book, *Tree: A New Vision of the American Forest*, by saying the trees "were an eerily powerful presence throughout the project" and, after acknowledging their "accord," he says with gratitude, "for their acquiescence, for their dignity, and for giving me safe passage, I thank them" (181). Or this of Brad Cole, who muses about the earth's energy and the voice of the land, "These things have a life of their own and one wants to participate in that lively spirit" (par. 74), echoing Ansel Adams' feeling

that the other-than-human is not only very much alive but highly communicative.

“The great rocks of Yosemite,” Adams said, “are the very heart of the earth speaking to us” (*Ansel Adams: Photographer* Np).

As art educator Roy Quan suggests, respectful and reciprocal understandings such as these arise through an intentional act of de-centering, of letting go and of being open and fully present. This is an act of vulnerability, not of power as Sontag suggests. Quan writes

The heart of any photographic inquiry involves a de-centering process that enables the perception, and the creation of relationships between the corporeal and the incorporeal events in one’s universe. This process counteracts impoverished vision which results when we confront life without reflection and synthesis. . . . the photographic medium . . . enables us to analyze and re-conceptualize our experiences to better understand the layers of reality that lie between the phenomenon and the idea. In short, photographic inquiry is a means of contemplating the world, of producing harmony and order which is the creation of meaning. (9)

This sense of openness and vulnerability, the process of de-centering, is crucial to the shift in awareness from *looking at* something to *seeing* something. A look can indeed often be simply a disinterested gaze, one more akin to spectatorship or voyeurism. In contrast, seeing, as photographers and other artists or scientists describe it, lies in perceiving relationships as well as significance. Not all ‘photographic seeing’ is guided by an objective, voyeuristic, imperial gaze, and the role of ‘stranger’ isn’t inevitable. It is particularly unlikely in the case of art photography, for the artist is *responding* to the subject and the resulting photograph is an expression of that response. As Neil Evernden points out, the “defense against objectification is the assertion, through speech and action, of subjectivity. Such assertion is part of what we would normally regard as

interpersonal communication, and is obviously vital in the maintenance of relationships between subjects” (74).

We are talking about a photographic practice of dialogue and exchange, as well as one of reciprocity. Steve Gosling describes how he tries to “remove as much of my ‘personal baggage’ as I can.” However, he acknowledges, “my own mood comes into play and the photographs I produce are always a dialogue between me and the landscape. I . . . try to ensure that the landscape has the loudest voice” (par. 5). Gohlke reflects, “As a photographer my relationship to the landscape I photograph is one of dialogue. I am not simply the interrogator of a passive subject; I, too, am being questioned” (192). And Balog, is concerned with achieving “reciprocity in the visual exchange.” This happens, he says, even when the photographic subject does not have eyes. He relates, “When I’m in the presence of trees like this oak . . . I can’t help wonder who truly is the observer and who is the observed” (*Tree* 124).

Dorothea Lange, primarily categorized as a documentary photographer but a Gelang photographer nevertheless, eloquently reinforces these sentiments. Suggesting that photographic practice is, when engaged with respect, one of intimacy rather than estrangement, she advises, “Among the familiar [the photographer’s] behavior is that of the intimate rather than of the stranger. Rather than acknowledge, he embraces; rather than perform, he responds” (qtd. in Evernden 81). The difference lies in behavior and attitude, something Ansel Adams makes clear in the introduction to his first portfolio

Some photographers take reality as the sculptors take wood and stone and upon it impose the dominations of their own thought and spirit. Others come before reality more tenderly and a photograph to them is an instrument of love and revelation. Expressions without doctrine, my photographs are presented here as ends in themselves, images of endless moments of the world. (*The Portfolios* N. Pag.)

It should be borne in mind that landscape includes the whole of reality, human and other-than-human, artificial and natural, human-constructed or not. Adams describes an expanded understanding of landscape arising in concert with his increasing command of the camera leading to a unitary understanding of “nature,” one very similar to that expressed a century before by camera inventor Henry Fox Talbot. Adams says

Most of my photographs taken before 1930 were of distant grandeurs. But as I learned the inherent properties of the camera, lens, filters and exposure, I also gained the freedom to see with more sensitive eyes the full landscape of our environment, a landscape that included scissors and thread, grains of sand, leaf details, the human face and a single rose. (A. Adams, *Examples: The Making* 34-5)

As for achieving intimacy with land, Gohlke clarifies the understanding that arises through close and careful attention

It is not physically difficult to be on terms of real intimacy with a river like the Sudbury. With little more than the effort required to walk out your back door, you can initiate a continuing conversation with a place for which our civilization at large seems to have such little use, yet which more and more people are realizing is essential to their well-being. Paying careful attention to a place like the Sudbury teaches us how harmful the notion of ‘ordinary’ is, because it stops the conversation. For all the people who have loved this river, stretching back to Henry Thoreau of Concord and beyond to the native peoples who used it more wisely than we have, the conversation was and is the work and the joy of a lifetime. The substance of the exchange, I imagine, is something like this: It is a sufficient wonder to be a part of the unbelievably rich web of relationships that is life. Don’t try to control what you’ll never fully understand. Look, listen, take care of what you’re given. (171)



Fig. 14. Drake's beach, Point Reyes National Seashore, 2013, Chase M. Clow

What, then, do we make of Sontag's further complaint: "A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir" (9)? Is our use of the camera—a tool Flusser says is designed to "tear objects from the natural world in order to bring them into the place where the human being is" (23)—simply an objectifying act? And is it one where, as Robert Chianese describes it, "We capture a shot, shoot an image, thus metaphorically 'kill' it by freezing it in time. We train our controlling eye and magisterial gaze on a scene and own it by snapping it. We hold it still, forever—in fact, a still life" (par. 20).

Yes, on the one hand it is. But, as Ansel Adams counsels, our goal is to "make" a photograph, not "take" one. Neil Evernden posits that the objectifying attitude "occurs only when communication—the revelation of subjectivity—is

denied in some way.” He labels this denial as an “obstruction of reciprocity” and believes it results when the photographer “assumes the role of a stranger” (74).

Gelang photographers, in contrast, approach their journey within a place as an intimate exchange, as one of belonging to the land, rather than the land belonging to them. Marc Adamus explains

I find a relationship with everything around me that runs deep and purposeful. . . . You cannot treat it like a roadside attraction or playground because you miss completely the communication it offers. . . . you must absorb it until you are lost, until it breaks through your defenses, until the walls you built in your daily life come down and you see the world anew, until you realize your place in it all and that is profoundly humbling. (par. 9)

Balog, speaking of a Coast Redwood, describes a similar kind of intimacy

No longer were they nameless monuments of biology lost in an amorphous forest. They had become individual characters, each possessed of a unique texture, color, shape, and personality. Just as with people, appreciating them had been a matter of time: the time to slow down, the time to look, the time to listen to what they said. It doesn’t come quickly or easily, this awareness. One doesn’t’ jump out of a car, snap a few photographs, then race off. Quiet, deliberate engagement is essential. The redwoods have been embedded for a long, long while, and their secrets take time to hear. (*Tree* 103)

He reports having concluded the same about animals (16) and, as mentioned in another chapter, glaciers. That such awareness has arisen within Balog has everything to do with the profound respect with which he approaches all of his subjects. He describes photography as a *ritual* wherein one sees with a receptive attitude and thus “the generalized becomes particular and intimate, alive with meaning and memory” (80).

Pace has a great deal to do with establishing an intimate, reciprocal relationship and thus of moving beyond an objectifying gaze and into one of

clear sight. This is akin to the difference between long-time lovers gently exploring one another and strangers grinding it out in a one-night stand. Thus, as Adamus and Balog indicate, this is not about jumping out of a car, snapping, and then racing away. Although Gelang landscape photographers may indeed use a vehicle to cover extensive stretches of land, of more importance is the pace and time spent once out of the vehicle. Walking the land, and resting within it, leads to a clearer understanding of the other-than-human. Edward Weston also reminds us, "Time is required for a new land to sink deep into one's consciousness" (*The Daybooks* 86). Robert Adams agrees and asks "how can we hope, after all, to see a tree or rock or clear north sky if we do not adopt a little of their mode of life, a little of their time?" (*Beauty* 136). He also makes an important point about the value of walking, for only by walking can we encompass the size of the earth and comprehend its full reality. He writes

if we consider the difference between William Henry Jackson packing his cameras by mule, and the person stepping for a moment from his car to take a picture with an instamatic, it becomes clear how some of our space has vanished; if the time it takes to cross space is a way by which we define it, then to arrive at a view of space 'in now time' is to have denied its reality.

Only at the speed of walking is America the size Whitman believed it. (*Beauty* 136)

Most of us are familiar with Whitman's contemporary, Henry David Thoreau, and his invitation to walk. It is a reflective and ruminative activity that, he posited, keeps us connected to our wild, innate selves, the part of ourselves able to experience reciprocal exchange with the other-than-human and the part

that perceives connection with a cosmic unity. His call to wildness, which some mistakenly read as wilderness, is a call to walk the land, any land—wilderness or domesticated—as though traversing holy ground. It is a call to a quality of attention and of mobility with intention, one that poet Mary Oliver expresses well

Daily I walk out across my landscape, the same fields, the same woods, and the same pale beaches; I stand beside the same blue and restive sea where the invisible winds, on later summer afternoons, are wound into huge tense coils, and the waves put on their white feathers and begin to leap shoreward, to their last screaming and throbbing landfall. Times beyond remembering I have seen such moments: summer falling to fall, to be followed by what will follow: winter again: count on it. Opulent and ornate world, because at its root and its axis, and its ocean bed, it swings through the universe *quietly* and *certainly*. It is: fun, and familiar, and healthful, and unbelievably refreshing, and lovely. And it is the theater of the spiritual; it is the multiform utterly obedient to a mystery. (23-25)

This is not to suggest that all landscape photographers follow in Thoreau's and Oliver's footsteps, seeing land as holy and their actions as potentially sacred, although indeed some do and this will be further explored in the chapter, Reflecting. It is to suggest, however, that walking with attention and with the intention of remaining open to exchange means recognizing and valuing what Robert Adams refers to as "the whole landscape, primordial and man-made" ("Inhabited Nature" 32). It removes the duality, so often fretted over by critics, of nature versus worked land or sacred wilderness versus sullied ordinary land. In fact, this dichotomy seems to more readily reflect the experience of a reviewer looking at and evaluating photographs than that of a photographer, a fact of which I am keenly aware as I spend day after day holed up in my office in front of my computer watching the world outside my window while I think, read, and type. There is a wall and a sound piece of glass between the outdoors and me and it is

now, more than ever, I feel a sense of separation. “Oh, not to be cut off,” writes the poet Rainer Marie Rilke, “not through the slightest partition shut out from the law of the stars” (191). Shut out. Yet, he continues, the inner—consciousness, thought, emotion—is itself flung through with birds and wind. We are wild through and through.

The mention of windows leads me to reflect on the difference between looking through a window and looking through the lens of a camera. A window often invites gazing, a soft, unfocused attention, sometimes more inward looking than outward. Details can easily merge and mingle into an amorphous whole as we simultaneously ponder both the tree and the conversation we had over breakfast. A camera lens, in contrast, generally invites active acuity. Details are enhanced, everything in the surround has its own identity, and our breakfast conversation recedes as we focus intently on the individual in front of us. We are seeing in order to know that thing, that being, the one right here with us sharing this same space and embraced by the very same air.

There can be a difference of attention also between walking with a camera and walking without one. For some, like Weston, it is the difference between drifting mechanically or instead becoming interested “in something definite – concrete” (*The Daybooks* 3). Similarly, David Ward imagines “I would probably have walked through this world seeing what I expected to see, never really noticing the fall of light or the seemingly insignificant detail. Photography has taught me to truly appreciate how beautiful and awe-inspiring reality is and it has enriched my experiences beyond measure” (“Am I” par. 11). I notice how, with

camera in hand, I am often more acutely aware of details, much more so than when I am without a camera. The camera invites inspection. Ethically, this can be either good or bad, depending upon how one approaches a subject. It is all too easy with a camera to feel a sense of entitlement and to get hooked on the “rush” of creating a compelling image, falling into the very trap Sontag notes. This blinds us to the subjectivity of the subject and forecloses reciprocal exchange, respect, and bonding. It is all too easy to step on the rights of other beings, to pry into their lives without regard for the discomfort this may cause them.

Gelang photographers find a way to temper their desire, to slow down and ask permission, as Paul Caponigro describes “I must first commune with the subject in order to grasp its essentials, *then* position the camera, my psyche, and the very fluid *materials* of the photographic process – put them at the subject’s disposal” (“Paul Caponigro” Anchell par. 17). For seeing, he reminds us, involves recognizing and respecting another’s essence and this can only happen when we give our full, unbiased, desire-free attention. We must adopt a *discipline of seeing*, as Minor White suggests, and by doing so we put ourselves “where photographs can find themselves” (*Found Photographs* 308). If we feel it is inappropriate to make a photograph, we must listen to and respect this feeling. This takes great restraint and wisdom. We must move beyond ego. “Art is the expression of inner attainment,” advised Weston (qtd. in Bunnell 119). He also advised

The camera controlled by wisdom goes beyond obvious, statistical recording, -- sublimating things *seen* into things *known*.

“Self expression” is usually an egotistical approach, a willful distortion, resulting in an over or understatement. The direction should be toward a clearer understanding through intentional emphasis of the

fundamental reality of things, so that the presentation becomes a synthesis of their essence. (“f.64 Artist's Statement” 53)

Nor all photographic seeing is so intensive and deeply reflective, though.

Sometimes it is just a matter of being enthralled by the way something looks.

Frank Gohlke is hardly alone in the sentiment he expresses below

I think that for me certainly one of the reasons that I’m a photographer is just a simple, totally unreflective love for the way things look. I just love the way things look, all things, even if they’re awful things. You know, the necessity to make moral judgments about whether this or that thing is desirable comes later, but what I’m motivated by, first of all, is just a fascination, a love for the fact that things exist in the world; they have a certain appearance and that it’s possible with a camera to create a picture out of appearances, and if you do it right, even to suggest that those appearances might have certain meanings or implications for us. (88)

I think of a recent photograph I made. I had gone onto the patio and while bending down to move a chair I discovered this female Coastal Quail:



Fig. 15. Female coastal quail #1, Pacheco Valle, 2014, Chase M. Clow

Simultaneously I felt fascination and sorrow, as well as a very great urge to photograph. I had been watching this quail and her mate for weeks. They were

skittish and shy, she especially. I had felt so honored to have them nesting near my home. I had longed to make portraits of them, but did not want to disturb them. I was deeply saddened to discover her lifeless form on my patio. The mystery of her death was compelling, but just as compelling was the aesthetic dimension of her body. I appreciated the marked contrast of her rounded form against the linear tiles. I noted the difference in hardness and rigidity between these two forms, one “natural” the other “synthetic,” and the tiny spot of blood just below her belly. I loved her exquisite shape, the pattern of her feathers, her large, strong feet.



Fig. 16. Female coastal quail #2, Pacheco Valle, 2014, Chase M. Clow

After photographing her I moved her into the woods a few yards away. I felt she should rest there, although I also knew she was likely to be carried off in the night by some hungry animal. After moving her, I again felt the urge to photograph, this time because her resting place now seemed more fitting and

natural; she was in her element. How strange, I thought, that perception of death changes with its location.



Fig. 17. Female coastal quail #3, Pacheco Valle, 2014, Chase M. Clow

Are these photographs documents or are they art? Was it appropriate for me to make them? Did I have a right to photograph her passing? Did I rob her of a dignified death? I do not know. As Gohlke indicates, sometimes these moral judgments only come later. Is Sontag right? Is there “something predatory in the act of taking a picture” (14)? We violate others, she believes, by “seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have (14). And, although she is referring to humans, her sentiments can be easily applied to any being we respect and value. By seeing them in such a way we can turn them into “objects that can be symbolically possessed” (14). Yet, perhaps instead or in addition these photographs represent the desire to permanently fix a loved one who has just departed making my act more akin to photographing a

recently deceased family member, a common practice in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (Jeffrey, *Photography*). I am not sure which is right. I only know the quail was indeed carried off in the night.

I also know that the photographs I made are not the quail herself but instead are something new. They are organisms, as Paul Strand said, with a life of their own. These photographs are the quail plus, as Weston says. He wonders what exactly a photograph is

just the trunk of a palm towering up into the sky; not even a real one – a palm on a piece of paper, a reproduction of nature: I wonder why it should affect one emotionally – and I wonder what prompted me to record it. Many photographs might have been done of this palm, and they would be just a photograph of a palm – yet this picture *is* but a photograph of a palm, plus something – something – and I cannot quite say what that something is – and who is there to tell me? (*The Daybooks* 91)

In a letter to Ansel Adams, Weston wonders what the “plus” is that the photographer adds. He notes how his inner sight plus the object make the object more than what it is and says it involves “seeing it more definitely than does the casual observer, presenting it so that the importance of form and texture is intensified” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 49). “Photography as a creative expression – or what you will,” he continues “must be ‘seeing’ plus: seeing alone would mean factual recording . . . the ‘plus’ is the basis of all arguments on ‘what is art’” (49).

So far this discussion has focused on the ways photographers’ attitudes and approaches affect their ability to perceive an alive landscape. Seeing in this sense might best be defined as having an understanding of the relationships inherent in any given place as well as a feeling of connection with that place and some kind of reciprocal exchange with the others who inhabit it. Seeing with a

camera is a particular kind of seeing, though, as Ansel Adams indicated earlier in this chapter. *Photographic seeing* requires knowledge of the technicalities of a camera, since greater mastery of the camera yields expanded vision. When we know our instrument well we can pay greater attention to the subject and use the camera to express the essence beyond the form, as he, Weston and others have sought to do.

I think about my own growth as a photographer over these past six years when I picked up the camera again in earnest after a long hiatus while raising children and securing a profession. My early efforts were frustrated attempts to remember the ratio of aperture to shutter to film, especially as I now had a digital single-lens reflex (SLR), a slightly different beast than a film camera. It took a while to remember how to convert what I was seeing with my eyes and perceiving with mind into what the camera “sees.” I had forgotten about the inherent problem of contrast. Bright light means deep shadows and the camera has a very difficult time capturing subtle tonal variations in both these areas simultaneously. Our eyes see these tonal variations, but the camera does not. Often we have to sacrifice one area for another and we find ourselves asking such questions as: Is capturing full detail in the clouds more important than in the shady spot under the tree? I remembered through trial and error the value of filters. I remembered with practice the ratios of aperture and shutter. I also remembered why so much outdoor photography is undertaken in the very early morning hours before the sun has grown strong or late evening when contrasts mellow and recede, allowing detail to emerge once again in the darkest and lightest areas. With time and

practice my already acute sensibility was further intensified and I began to notice very subtle variations in light.

This attention to the camera and to the light is required of good photographic craft. Being able to read the light also means being able to better hear the voice of the land, Declan O'Neill believes. He offers

The land takes time to read and understand. . . . For so long I failed to see that light makes landscape speak with its own voice. Light gives mood and emotion to landscape. The land is a huge canvas on which light paints a complex and deep picture. (8)

Is it any wonder, then, that photographers seem obsessed with the light?

To see photographically also means learning to recognize what will make a strong and compelling *photograph*. Not everything we notice and certainly not everything we photograph makes a strong image. It will not stand the test of time nor stand up to close scrutiny. To create a compelling photograph means learning to see beyond the eyes and beyond the surface into the significance of what is seen. The significance may lie in human relationships, society, politics, as Sebastião Salgado suggests

If you believe that you are a photographer, you must have some tools — without them it would be very complicated — and those tools are anthropology, sociology, economics, politics. These things you must learn a little bit and situate yourself inside the society that you live in, in order for your photography to become a real language of your society. This is the story that you are living. This is the most important thing. (“The Language” par. 17)

Or it may lie in recognizing relationships, as Gohlke urges

To see landscape as a tissue of relationships is a natural consequence of the assumption that landscape is a human creation, even when the only action involved is the act of perception. (140)

Or it may lie in scientific and historical study, as Eliot Porter writes

To know and understand this vast region, some familiarity with its history is essential. This includes geologic change, . . . and in more recent times, the evolution of its living garment, an abundant fauna and flora, . . . It is, however, the history of the human species, especially our contemporary history and the profound changes we have wrought in the past two centuries, that concerns us most deeply. (*The West* 5)

Or, it may simply lie in the fact of that everything has its own “being-ness,” in the fact that something exists other than what is human and this something is equally meaningful and worth noting. As Weston says, seeing “is not ‘seeing’ literally, it is done with a reason, with creative imagination. No—I don’t want just seeing—but presentation of the significance of facts, so that they are transformed from things (factually) *seen*, to things *known*: a revelation, so presented—wisdom controlling the means, the camera” (*Ansel Adams, Letters* 49).

In fact, seeing is all of the above. It is wisdom. It is knowledge. It is experience. And the work is the work of seeing, the act of slowing down and taking notice, which results in the recognition of significance and the desire to create something of significance. This is a kind of seeing, a kind of work, grounded in awareness of others as well as in self-awareness, as Paul Caponigro describes

Self awareness is a *very* important part of the overall creative process – part of the *living* process. I’m not merely out to get a photograph that I can hang on a wall to share with people. I’m not going to last that long on earth, I don’t want merely a temporal thing, I want the greater spaces, the greater dimensions that surround these objects. What’s important is *how I was while I was here*. That is primary. Secondly it is reflected in the photographs. ‘By their works you shall know them.’ So, those, now or in

the future, who can *read* that kind of imagery will understand. (“Paul Caponigro” Anchell par. 32)



Fig. 18. Bumblebee, Cortez, Colorado, 2012, Chase M. Clow

WITNESSING



Fig. 19. Creekside, Pacheco Valle, 2012, Chase M. Clow

Robert Adams and Edward Burtynsky both began their forays into landscape photography by focusing on what is beautiful and whole in the natural world, ecosystems that given their health feel hopeful and life affirming. Yet, at some point along the way each of them began noticing what was not as beautiful and whole due to either large-scale development or unsustainable and abusive practices toward the land. Instead of turning away from what they were witnessing, they each found themselves turning their photographic attention upon these “broken” landscapes and confronting what Adams refers to as “evidence against hope.” He continues,

In common with many photographers, I began making pictures because I wanted to record what supports hope: the untranslatable mystery and beauty of the world. Along the way, however, the camera also caught evidence against hope, and I eventually concluded that this too belongs in

pictures if they were to be truthful and thus useful. (*What Can We Believe?* N. Pag.)

Unlike these two, I first noticed “evidence against hope” and then turned to photography as means by which to process my feelings. In fact, I returned to photography specifically because hopelessness was so strong and disheartening I felt compelled to make something with my growing sorrow.

As with many mighty things, this story begins with an acorn, in fact, an abundance of acorns that in 2008 were strewn below a Coast Live Oak that used to reside just outside my home. Or, it is more accurate to say it was an oak my family and I resided next to for a decade because our home, now almost fifty years old, was built next to it. When our home was built the tree was likely a centenarian twice over. My family moved into *its* neighborhood. We, the tree and us, co-habitated quite peacefully until it was cut down due to illness.

The sheer number of acorns puzzled me that year. They were everywhere “littering” sidewalks and streets, yards and patios around my home and throughout the neighborhood. I had never noticed this level of abundance. Intrigued by this, and believing that native peoples might provide an answer since they inhabited this area for many millennia before my arrival and had utilized these trees quite heavily, I conducted a search of indigenous ideas regarding oaks. I found several discussions about how oaks produce in abundance when a hard winter is coming. Unfortunately, this idea of predictive ability did not bear out, as the winter was no more severe than the preceding years.

Regardless, my research into indigenous knowledge of oaks led to a renewed interest in foraging, foraging led to acorn flour, and acorn flour led to pancakes. This led to a search for the best species of oaks, of which there are twelve in Marin County, for the best acorn flour, which in turn prompted increased research into how to identify oaks, which eventually led to my discovery of the California Oak Mortality Taskforce (COMT), situated in Marin County several miles from my home, a non-profit research group affiliated with a number of universities. Through COMT I learned of the ravages of *P. ramorum*, a water mold that infects oaks, as well as other plant species, and leads to what is referred to as Sudden Oak Death, a slight misnomer given that it affects many other tree and plant species as well. Once infected the plant jettisons first leaves and then branches. Often, the final demise of the plant results in its toppling over. *P. Ramorum* is spreading around the world and especially wreaking havoc on native species up and down the West Coast, including the small Woody Oak and Bay Laurel forest just outside my back door. The more I learn about *P. Ramorum*, the sadder I become. Our globalized trade system is highly implicated in the spread of this disease. The trees, *my neighbors*, are dying because, as some scientists believe, the spore was carried here inadvertently from another land in the soil of ornamental plants used for landscaping and, once in the water system, began spreading (“About Sudden Oak Death”). I am a witness to the slow death of the trees I cohabitate with and I worry about the fate of the native forests throughout California.

The best way to manage my sorrow has been to transform it into beauty—to affirm my living connection to this planet and to these trees by facing head on both my sorrow as well as the disease I have now closely witnessed swirling around me. Thus, six years ago I began photographing “my forest” regularly. (In reality, this is a city-owned park, a small reserve of trees that used to extend throughout the valley in which I reside. It is, for the most part, left to its own devices, and thus retains a relatively wild quality.) Turning to photography to process and express my sorrow has greatly expanded my awareness of my “own backyard” and reignited my love of photography, an art form I had not practiced in earnest for over twenty years. Focusing sustained and close attention upon my local forest has also increased my knowledge of trees and expanded my concern for the welfare of forests around the world.

I have not undertaken my journey alone.

On most days sweet Bootsie accompanied me, although she, too, has now gone the way of the trees, as we all must. In this image, she walks upon the remains of a Bay Laurel that fell on its own volition, from what it is not entirely clear, and then was neatly cleaved by city workers and left for firewood for those who wished to collect it:



Fig. 20. Bootsie on the log, Pacheco Valle, 2013, Chase M. Clow

I also do not walk alone because the trees themselves accompany me:



Fig. 21. Morning light, Pacheco Valle, 2012, Chase M. Clow

As do other members of my community, some of whom are pictured here:



Fig. 22. Image composite of community members, Chase M. Clow
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This is a story about mourning and hope and of community, and of how these go hand-in-hand, prompting some Gelang photographers to undertake long-term projects to not only raise their own awareness but that of others. More than anything this is a story of the type of knowledge that emerges when we pay careful, sustained attention to a place and do so with care, compassion and a sense of responsibility for what we witness.

Sustained photographic attention to a place is a form of deep inquiry given that we note the day-to-day and year-to-year changes evolving there. In this regard, it is closely allied with natural science. We note natural patterns – the cyclical movement of weather, animals, birds, insects. Thus through this project I have gained a modicum of Western ecological knowledge as well as traditional ecological knowledge, since the more I photograph the more I want to understand what is going on and the more I understand the more curious I become. I have no training in science, thus I have merely gleaned what I can from the sources I consult. I have also twice taken leaf samples to scientists who specialize in Sudden Oak Death for analysis in order to better understand what I am seeing.

Throughout this project I also have gained increased technical mastery over a camera (actually two, since I upgraded during this project) and an expanded understanding of artistic expression, since rendering what I am witnessing in a way that pleases me turns out to be rather challenging and I must turn to exemplars and guides. Thus, sustained photographic attention also leads to a better understanding of art and technology.

Robert Adams believes that “art begins in unhappiness . . . in the more common experiences of pain” (*Beauty* 60) and that photographers are courageous because they must withstand “the psychic battering that comes from what they see” (*Beauty* 18). This battering does not arise with the simple experience of looking, but rather arises in the process of a thoughtful artistic response. As explored in the previous chapter, the photographer looks with the intent to *see*—to observe, understand, and make meaning—rather than simply to gaze with curiosity, wonder, or disinterest. The acting of seeing, which arises in tandem with the creative response, leaves us vulnerable, Adams suggests, because we make an effort “to affirm life without lying about it” (*Beauty* N. Pag.) and such an effort is often exhausting. We cannot escape what we see. It haunts us because we care about what we are seeing. We feel connected to the land and the community of beings who shape it. Yet the act of seeing also prompts us. It leads us into mystery and it invites study. This helps to expand our awareness. As Adams also points out our inquiry, while expanding awareness, cannot prove fact or even prove significance. Instead, he says, “the picture is only a record of the artist’s witness to it” and, if we are lucky, the photographer can be “a convincing witness” (*Beauty* 147).

Etymologically, “witness” comes to us through the Old English wit/gewit with various meanings: “understanding, intellect, sense; knowledge, consciousness, conscience” (Harper Np). A photography of witness extends beyond the interrogative uses of photographs as factual testimony and into realms

of care and affect, intentionally nourishing and igniting both individual and social conscience. It often begins with a desire for care giving and it hopes to elicit feelings of care in those who view the work and to awaken within them new understandings about themselves in relation to our shared world. Frank Gohlke expresses this well

I feel that ultimately the photograph ought to contribute somehow to caring for the places that I photograph. It has to do with caring and caregiving [sic]. Knowledge is part of that, because acquiring knowledge demands attention to something, the devotion of your attention to something and the exercise of all of your faculties, not just you [sic] emotions. It requires you to bring all of yourself to it. For me that means learning a lot about what I'm photographing. (159)

Within Gelang practice, a photography of witness is propelled by the desire to understand our place within the more-than-human world and to elicit a caring response. It might include seeking to better understand how the natural world functions, as Balog exemplifies: "My entire adult life has, in one way or another, been driven by a desire to bear witness to the forces of nature" (*Tree* 18). Or it might be to better understand human/nature dynamics and to reveal our cultural values, as Gohlke exemplifies: "photographs bear witness to the facts, be they visible or existential, and it is a fact that our relationship with the natural world is a troubled one that can never be otherwise under the present cultural dispensation" (196). Similarly, it might be to reveal the story of our treatment of the rest of the natural world and take the form of environmental advocacy, as exemplified by Jack Dykinga, who relies on the power of images to provoke

social response (Hope), as does Robert Ketchum, who is very concerned about environmental issues and wants his work to impact political decisions (Rohrbach).

Likewise, Moose Peterson seeks to encourage others to “embrace our world heritage” and change a predominant attitude of conquest to one of respect (“Moose Peterson” par. 23). The desire of witness might be to record that which is disappearing, as exemplified by Joel Sartore who focuses on species and landscapes on the brink of extinction. He rues the fact that what he is photographing is “mainly ghosts. It’s all ghosts. Just little remnants. Just little bitty pockets of wildlife . . . little scraps of what used to be” (“At Close Range” par. 15). Or it might be to call our attention to our most destructive behaviors, as exemplified by “wastelandscape photographers” (Giblett and Tolonen) such as Edward Burtynsky and Chris Jordon. Jordon, a conceptual photographer who sees himself walking the thin line between artist and activist, says his work is meant “to evoke a whole bunch of different layers of discord between the attraction and repulsion we feel toward our consumer habits and our consumer lives” (“Photographic Artist” par. 5).

Photographs of witness can be painful for the viewer, although as Elkins writes, such pain might not be very acute but rather “a more continuous, duller, less personal kind of pain.” This may be especially so in the digital age where the barrage of images is unrelenting. Such photographs, Elkins continues, “force viewers to see the world as they had not needed or wanted to see it” (xi). As mentioned in other chapters, the photograph is necessarily of something out there

as well as something in here; it points to a photographer's sensitivity to a place in as much as it points to the place itself (Gosling). Thus, through the eyes of photographers, the rest of us like it or not are compelled to join in their witness.

If the audience does not wish to experience pain, imagine how the photographer feels who spends many years documenting the slow death of a place to which she is intimately connected. Imagine how she feels when the once lush and vibrant *evergreen* forest slowly withers, not in response to cyclical weather patterns, but in response to a ravaging disease, one that gained hold through unwise environmental practices, specifically the importation of flora from one continent to another ("About Sudden Oak Death"). She watches as the spore causing the disease, so tiny it can easily lurk undetected in the soil of nursery plants and then wend its way into the water stream once planted in people's yards, not only impacts the trees, but all who depend upon them – a community of beings who are biologically adapted to them for shelter and food.

Photographer and art theorist, Alan Sekula, believes every photograph, depending on context, represents apparently irreconcilable dualities

Every photograph tends, at any given moment of reading in any given context, towards one of two poles of meaning, the opposition of which is: photographer as seer vs. photographer as witness; photography as expression vs. photography as reportage; the onus of imagination (and inner truth) vs. theories of empirical truth; affective vs. informative value; metaphoric vs. significations. (472)

I suspect these seeming oppositions are reflective of the photographer's own liminality, standing as she does in the threshold between inner and outer immensities, between inner truth and outer truth. What appears to be in

opposition—fact and emotion, reporting and expression, science and art—only increases a photographer’s sense of wonder and mystery, since both poles are experienced as equally true. A perfectly human emotional response to a perfectly factual natural occurrence is not the antithesis of objectivity. Through experiencing and processing our emotions we come to terms with the world and find our tenuous but nevertheless strong relationship to place.

Keeping Elkins in mind, do the following photographs cause us to feel something like repulsion, aversion, horror, or disgust? Do we wish to turn away?



Fig. 23. Shriveled live oak leaves, Pacheco Valle, 2011, Chase M. Clow



Fig. 24. Sooty mold and *P. Ramorum*, Pacheco Valle, 2014, Chase M. Clow

My own feelings of disgust and horror are magnified many times over when I step back from this particular tree and move to the next and the next and the next again to discover that almost *every* leaf on every tree is either dead, dying, or has some degree of mold growing upon it. Why do I feel disgust and horror? Because I care. I feel connected. I feel as though I belong, as I do to a family and a community, and I feel compassion for the suffering of another. Does it make sense, then, in light of such caring to distinguish between seer and witness? Am I a seer with expressive imagination seeking to illicit emotional responses in my viewers and are my photographs therefore necessarily lyrical and metaphorical? Or am I reporting the truth in order to provide information and point out the significance of that which I witness? Sekula, by drawing our attention to these two poles, asks us to reconsider their apparent opposition. Consider the following two images:



Fig. 25. Yellowing bay laurel, 2011, and Live Oak, 2009, Chase M. Clow

Although the image on the left might be construed as lyrical, does it not also highlight empirical truth? And while the one on the right appears to be more literal, does it not also evoke an affective response?

When we face the discomfort of witnessing the pain of another about whom we care, we often feel prompted to seek answers about their suffering. We begin researching. As my forest goes I wish to know: What is this mold? Where has it come from? What is causing it? What is it doing to the tree? Is it connected in some way to *P. Ramorum* and, if yes, how exactly? What is my role in this? What impact do I have on this forest? What might be the connection between my cultural lifeways and the fate of this forest? How does my presence in this forest affect it? What do these trees have to do with me? And, most mysterious of all, why do I wish to photograph their demise? Such questions blur the lines between art and science, between subjectivity and objectivity, affect and fact, visceral

response and research. These are false dichotomies. Nothing is so neatly severed when it arises from attention and caring and, maybe, even love.

Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, one of the foremost living social documentary photographers, awarded many times over for his various series on the working and living conditions of some of the poorest humans in the world, describes the motivation for his latest project, “Genesis,” in an interview on *UCTV*

I had an idea to go and have a look at the planet and try to understand through this process – through pictures – the landscapes and how alive they are. To understand the vegetation of the planet, the trees; to understand the other animals. (“The Photographer as Activist” N. pag.)

He calls this project a “love letter to the Earth and to the resilience of nature” (“A God’s” par. 11). In a different interview he comments upon how through this project, “I fell in love with my planet. This work is not about landscapes. It is about love” (“In Love” par. 27). Salgado is unabashedly clear about the value of subjective response, saying “Photography is not objective . . . it is deeply subjective – my photography is consistent ideologically and ethically with the person I am” (“A God’s” par. 2). For Ansel Adams, too, photography is an expression of love and a reflection of a deep ethical regard for life, as Wallace Stegner indicates in the introduction to *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images 1916-1984*

The man who made unforgettable images out of the grandeur and mystery of nature did so because he could not help doing so, because he loved what he saw. The man who spent his energy defending nature against the careless and greedy also worked from love. His environmentalism was not

a side issue, something done with the left hand in spare time. It sprang from the same source as his art, and involved him wholly. (ix)

Robert Adams invites photographers to cultivate and nourish affection in our lives (*Beauty* 51). Affection connects us to a place, holds us there, and nourishes our sense of responsibility. R. Adams' affection is clearly evident in his sustained attention to the changing landscape on the Colorado Plateau. His comment about Eliot Porter's elegy to Glen Canyon is as telling of Porter as it is of his own experience of watching an open land morph into subdivisions. "How commendable," he writes, "to have known this geography well enough to make hundreds of pictures there—to have loved it that much—and then to go on working without it" (*Beauty* 18). I feel this daily as I walk through my forest, where in the summer leaves fall like rain and branches soon follow. I acknowledge this is a natural process, this dying of a forest, but I nevertheless feel the loss.



Fig.26. Leaf strewn hillside, Pacheco Valle, 2012, Chase M. Clow



Fig. 27. Pacheco creek, Pacheco Valle, 2013, Chase M. Clow



Fig. 28. Hillside, Pacheco Valle, 2011, Chase M. Clow

Getting to know a place can mean getting to love it. However, we may not always have affection for what we photograph. However, sustained attention can create conscientiousness even when all that prods us is an attempt to make sense of our experience, as Gohlke notes

I don't always love the places I photograph, in the sense that I love places that we associate with outdoor pleasures. But the particularities of things never fail to draw me in. For a moment all of my vagrant impulses are drawn together, and whatever sense I can make of the experience is crystallized in the photograph. (196)

In fact, sometimes a land feels incredibly foreign to us, particularly when we did not grow up there. We are strangers at first, the land and us. We must get to know one another. When we first encounter a new land we might even find it horrifying, as Misrach notes of his childhood experience of the desert (par. 48). Yet time spent paying close attention while moving within a land can lead to understanding and affection, even if we do not find it beautiful in the way we find

the familiar beautiful, as Misrach further notes after his move to the desert. “Once you fall in love with it that’s it. The light, the space, the solitude, the silence. Oh my god. It’s a really powerful place to be. . . . It’s ugly. And yet it is a remarkable place” (par. 48). Philip Hyde speaks of a similar transformation of awareness and affection toward the desert. “The ease I feel now,” he writes, “is the product of many experiences, not all pleasant, but all valued for what they taught. Nor did the ease come without struggle, but as the result of an effort to understand, to penetrate the discomforts, to clear away the debris of prejudice and preconception that can so distort one’s view of a natural environment” (16). This clearing away of debris is a process of inner growth and development, Hyde suggests, as he draws upon the words of ecologist and forester Aldo Leopold: “Development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind” (qtd. in Hyde, 16).

With all of the above in mind it is hard to make sense of the fact that many landscape photographers from Ansel Adams onward, particularly those who photograph in places where the other-than-human dominates, have been judged as not caring about the plight of human beings. Jussim and Lindquist-Cock point out how “exclusive emphasis on scenic studies can be construed as a disregard for immediate social problems involving not only an artistic idea of nature but the survival of the planet itself” (16). One has to wonder if the issue lies more with the viewers of the photographs than with the photographers. Art creates a responsibility in the viewer to look behind the surface for the significance of the

image *as the photographer seeks to convey it*. Yet the analysis of photographs is often based on preconceived theories of photographic communication.

Take, for example, a body of work comprised of images of sunrises and sunsets. If a scholar of religion were to analyze them they might conceive as attempt to communicate ideas of transcendence or enlightenment. A scholar of culture, on the other hand, might interrogate these same as a desire to escape social responsibility. Yet, for the photographer, the images might very well be evidence of pollution, as Misrach, who has undertaken several projects focused upon the sky, indicates

there's no way we can look at them instantly and see beautiful abstractions and forms of light, because . . . those sunsets, those beautiful reds are coming out of the pollution. Some of the clouds out there are completely man made. (par. 57)

The problem of misinterpretation is magnified for the average member of the audience who might not analyze the photograph at all. This is especially true if the viewer does not have the same level of experience and expertise regarding environmental issues as the photographer or simply hasn't taken the same time to carefully observe his or her surroundings. For such individuals, any classically beautiful image may simply be construed as further evidence of the "pleasant backdrop of nature" (Abram, *Spell* 9). Although perceived as beautiful, this backdrop, effectively, remains unseen by such a person. They might be aware of trees and clouds, for example, but these instances of the other-than-human remain "other."

For example, my neighbor walks in the neighborhood daily. She and I stood one day looking into the forested park outside our back doors. I commented upon my concern for the trees. She asked me what I was talking about. I said they were sick. She said she had no idea what I meant. I pointed out the denuded branches and the yellowed leaves. She still could not see. Apparently she thought that was normal. In ten years of living here she had not noticed that this forest was comprised of evergreen trees. Nor had she noticed that the forest had thinned considerably since her arrival. She spends plenty of time outdoors, yet she doesn't "see" what is taking place in the other-than-human community around her. Sadly, she represents a huge slice of the population. We cannot blame her, though. It takes intention, time, and experience to really see.

My neighbor might easily misconstrue the work of environmental photojournalist Gary Braasch. His work could be viewed as just more beautiful pictures of nature. Yet Braasch's lifelong work has been to document biodiversity and highlight issues of global warming. He speaks of the pain of being a first hand witness to effects of the changing climate upon both the human and the other-than-human and of the value photographs can have in drawing attention to these issues. "I was a witness to what otherwise were just numbers or facts in news stories," says Braasch, who describes in detail what he has witnessed

I have stood in the empty rookeries of displaced Adelie penguins and photographed huge icebergs separated from an ice shelf in Antarctica. I have seen the jagged fronts of receding Greenland glaciers and observed subtle changes on the tundra. I have tracked down Alpine glaciers depicted in 150-year-old images and rephotographed them to show them wasting away. In the woods of eastern North America I have walked among spring

wildflowers and watched for migrant songbirds, which are arriving earlier each season than in decades past. Along the coasts I have seen rising tides and heavy storms erode beaches. I have heard the anguish in the voices of native Alaskans as they describe their village being washed away, of Chinese farmers facing famine caused by drought, and of Pacific Islanders driven from their homes by increasingly high tides. Photographing this subject presents a great challenge. Changes have been unfolding for fifty years or more, with most effects being incremental, or invisible. (“Gary Braash” par. 16).

Salgado is also deeply concerned about the interrelation of human and the other-than-human although his work, too, upon quick inspection can appear to be simply beautiful art. He is an exceptionally gifted artist and therefore aesthetics dominate in his images. Yet, as he acknowledges in an interview for University of California Television, his beautiful images are deeply significant. He seeks to uncover the correlation between poverty and environmental destruction. “I was photographing just one animal all of my life” he says, “that was the human animal. I take a decision to photograph the others, to bring the others inside. . . . I take this project to . . . provoke this discussion again because I believe we live in a moment when we are breaking the equilibrium for the planet where we are living” (“The Photographer as Activist” N. pag.).

Chris Jordan sees, literally, a deep connection between our consumerist life style and the death of many seabirds in the Pacific Ocean. On his blog he writes about how these birds ingest bits and pieces of the “millions of tons of our petroleum products that have poured into the ocean via our collective negligence” and, unable to digest this plastic, they die (“Blog post” par. 1). His photographs of the contents of their stomachs are highly provocative. Jordan calls us to lead

ethical lives and to experience connection. He writes, “My friend the artist Richard Lang says the opposite of beauty is not ugliness, but indifference. For me this means that to live ethical lives, we are called to turn toward the staggering enormity of human-caused catastrophes” (“Blog Post” par. 2).

Sontag claimed that “nobody exclaims, ‘Isn’t that ugly! I must take a photograph of it.’ Even if someone did say that, all it would mean is: ‘I find that ugly thing . . . beautiful” (85). Yet Jordan is very clear about the ugliness of what he is photographing. “There’s a contrast between the beauty in the images and the underlying grotesqueness of the subjects,” he notes. “And it is something I put there intentionally because I was using beauty as a seduction to draw the viewer long enough that the underlying message might seep in. It was frustrating because I would show my work . . . and they would tell me how beautiful it was. But, they wouldn’t get that it was about consumerism. Then, I think, okay, I can go further. I wanna make an image that is affirmatively ugly” (“Interview” Np).

Perhaps beauty must always serve as a seduction in the realm of photography. Robert Adams, in *Beauty in Photography*, contemplates whether a photograph can ever be a successful medium for communicating what he terms “evil.” How, he wonders, can it be the right tool for social, economic, and political condemnation when *as a photograph* it must employ at least a few conventions of formal aesthetics? The very formal aesthetic elements that make the image successful as a work of art render it ineffective for social critique, he believes. Adams wonders whether novels and film might be more effective at

communicating evil because they include an element of time. Through time, he says, one can see the consequences of actions. A single static image cannot convey this element of time and consequence except when the audience is as aware of the depth of the issues as the photographer.

Many photographers try to work around this problem, though, by creating a series of photographs and by printing their images at a very large scale. Edward Burtynsky, for example, who focuses much of his photographic attention on sublime landscapes of consumerist and industrial waste – acres of tire mounds, mountains of crushed cars, cliffs of mined marble, lakes of toxic waste – seeks to overwhelm the audience with many images so large and insistent that they cannot escape a sense of responsibility. Yet, I have found with my students, even more effective than his images for conveying the depth of the consequence of industrialization is his film *Manufactured Landscapes*, which chronicles his photographic journey through China. In the film we see Burtynsky setting up shots, negotiating with Chinese officials, and traveling to the areas of greatest environmental devastation. There we observe impoverished workers combing through the trash, watch children pose in front of mounds of toxic metal, watch an elderly woman pound away at toxic computer boards without any form of protection. Simultaneously as we watch their body language we hear their chatter and their laughter. The landscape is humanized and the devastating consequences of our consumer lifestyles are more readily apparent.

Nevertheless, photographers continue in their quest. Their willingness to confront what is broken combined with affection or love, or at least a sense of conscience, often leads to an enhanced sense of responsibility. While the act of photographing itself can be an act of compassion, some photographers also go a step further and become involved in communities and organizations to work together for a more sustainable relationship with the planet. Braasch, for instance, is “an active contributor to environmental efforts ranging from forest preservation in his home state of Oregon to international conservation campaigns” (“About Gary Braasch” par. 10). Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer, Jack Dykinga, has worked for many years to help secure the creation of a bi-national park along the U.S./Mexico border (58). Moving beyond the act of providing photographs to organizations to actually working with them is critical, believes Salgado

When you go to photograph and just to take the picture to bring to magazines, it is finished. But when you work with institutions. You are there, it is your life, you are integrated, the pictures are provoking debate, discussions, and raising funds . . . I believe there is a kind of dynamic inside of this; that photography is just a slice of this dynamic. And for me, what sometimes is bug me a little bit is to take photography outside of this context and to show that this is . . . that is just a small slice . . . In this sense I am not an activist. I am just a small slice of what is going on. (“The Photographer as Activist” Np)

“It is not enough,” he continues, “to just show what is going on, but the actual work has to be integrated into the solution. You have to solve it simultaneously, because otherwise you are being irresponsible” (“The Photographer as Activist” Np). Ansel Adams agrees. “Whatever mess we observe is our own responsibility” he warns (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 210).

Not all Gelang photographers become actively involved in seeking solutions to the problems they witness. Nevertheless, they feel compassion and care, as well as satisfaction for contributing meaningfully to society. “Making a difference in the world with your photography,” claims Moose Peterson, “is the greatest addiction known to man” (par. 21). Aerial landscape photographer George Gerster, whose work includes documenting farming practices from the air, notes how his “land art” images helped conservation efforts being undertaken by farmers in the Palouse area of Washington (85). He recognizes the difference between making a photograph and taking action, yet he appreciates his role. “At times I have mixed emotions about chasing beauty from above while farms are in the grip of prolonged drought and severe economic conditions. Being aloft does not mean being aloof. I’m thrilled that my visions of this beautiful land can inspire those who are responsible for it” (85).

John Paul Caponigro takes a slightly different path. He sees his work as an invitation to look closely at our unique ways of relating to the world and to acknowledge the fact of change, recognizing that we are all involved in environmental changes whether we realize it or not. He writes,

There are many artists who have documented the changing conditions of our natural environment with the hope of inspiring greater success for preservation efforts. I thank each and every one of them. And I hope my work can inspire similar acts of conscientiousness and compassion. I make my contribution not by documenting what has passed in an attempt to slow or stop this process. Instead, my work suggests ways of relating to the natural world. It asks people to look closely at what’s outside, what’s inside, and how deeply involved in the process we all are. It’s not an invitation to get involved, we’re already involved. It’s an invitation to clarify our involvement, to reinvigorate our participation, and to empower

and celebrate our highly personal and unique contributions to this process. Change happens. Do we accept change in ways we don't want or do we work towards change we do want. ("John Paul Caponigro" Conversations par. 11)

He simultaneously urges me to make peace with my dying forest and to work toward a change I want to see. I wonder what that might look like? As the trees go, so too goes the community of beings who depend upon them. How might this community be preserved? Should it be? What will come in its place? There is much to contemplate as I walk these woods, camera in hand, noting the evolution of illness and striving to make something beautiful and lasting out of my sorrow.



Fig. 29. Fallen limb, Pacheco Valle, 2014, Chase M. Clow

REFLECTING

You become you, the camera, the person you photograph; the same thing (Salgado, “The Photographer as Activist” Np).



Fig. 30. Inside a lily, 2011, Chase M. Clow

To look deep into a flower and discover a mist enshrouded backlit mountaintop is to discover the macrocosm in the microcosm and to know that life is expansive and mysterious. To look into a photograph one has made of a landscape hidden in a flower is to discover something about the terrain of one's mind and heart and to know the internal landscape, too, is expansive and mysterious. To contemplate these landscapes and reflect upon their correspondences—the flower to the field, the mind and heart to the flower as well as the field, the mist and light to the power of mystery, the self to the cosmos—is a joyful obsession made more compelling with a camera, at least for those of us

who feel called to this craft and who have a yen for exploring both the apparent and hidden dimensions of the natural world.

The more one photographs with awareness, with the intention to plumb the depths of mystery while being as fully present to a place as possible, the greater the self-discovery and the more extensive the mystery and wonder of the world. “The exterior spectacle helps intimate grandeur unfold,” writes philosopher Gaston Bachelard (192). Conversely, and just as true, intimate grandeur makes us more pliable and receptive to the wonder and significance of the exterior spectacle. “One of the greatest things the arts offers us is a renewed sense of wonder, that there is life beyond our established boundaries, and it is all miraculous,” reflects John Paul Caponigro (“Craig Stevens” par. 40). His father, Paul Caponigro, traces wonder to the moment of conception: “The first and foremost influence on any artist,” he muses “is the sperm and the egg. Suddenly one becomes a being and that is a mystery. The influence of mystery is the greatest influence” (“Paul Caponigro” par. 2). Like the Caponigros, a number of other Gelang photographers feel called to explore this mystery and, as Ansel Adams expresses it, thus have “a glimmer of an intense spiritual and emotional life” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 207). As Adams continues, perhaps the “search is as important—or more so—than the realization. I don’t know” (207).

It is not surprising Adams felt a glimmer of spiritual intensity, embraced as he was much of his life by the majestic sublime of Yosemite National Park. My journey there last fall reminded me of the visionary dimension of a place where

all of the elements conspire to turn the world upside down and inside out. What do I mean by this? Take for example several photographs I made while there:



Fig. 31. Merced river #1, Yosemite Valley, 2013, Chase M. Clow

In this first image clouds, water, cliff face, leaves, soil, pines, and rocks all coalesce onto a single plane. Where does one begin and the other end? Where is up? Where is down? The clouds, normally above, float below. The granite cliffs and multi-storied conifers are likewise descending. It is easy to feel a bit disoriented here, easy to question the “established boundaries” of which J.P. Caponigro spoke.

Lifting my gaze from the river toward the horizon, I find the mystery deepens. I see I occupy a transition zone, one where sky stretches deep into the still waters and trees rooted in reflections stretch toward my feet. The granite walls tower above me, their mica-flecked surface nearly blinding.



Fig. 32. Merced river #2, Yosemite Valley, 2013, Chase M. Clow

In the evening, when my husband and I climb above the valley floor to the top of Sentinel Dome, I find this:



Fig. 33. El Capitan from Sentinel Dome, 2013, Chase M. Clow

The land opens into a mighty chasm of light as the breath of the earth mingles with the sky's exhalation. Inspiration meets with my labored respiration. The cliff face, reflected earlier in the river, recedes now in lighted mist. I feel dizzy. My senses are tricked and it is hard to know where I end and the sky begins. At any moment I might plummet to the valley floor below. I take comfort in the tree rooted on this precarious edge of splendor. It is possible to be grounded in this place of mist and light after all. I note Adams' thoughts on the resonance of being, as experienced in twilight one morning

The sunrise in the canyon the other morning – a great surge of visual song. Before sunrise there was a comet in the clear pre-dawn sky. A beautiful thing, but also a bit terrifying to me . . . To me it is a portent of the exceptional Something that comes from Somewhere else, Something enormous and unexpected. Someday the earth may meet with the Exceptional. The comet in the sky, the fossils at my feet; gigantic span of distance and gigantic span of time. At such moments I can be transported to another resonance of being. (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 207)

“Our ancestors were far more attuned to the processes of the visionary wilderness than we are today, but there are still shamans among us who know how to escape the limited world of sight that Plato once called a prison house” contemplates Galen Rowell (19). Rowell likens wilderness photography to “wild imagery scratched on a rock or described in a trance” and believes some photographers belong to the tradition of “chosen ones who see most deeply” (19). Of himself, he says, “I am devoting my life to the visionary path because, among other things, it has a . . . track record of success in human history” (19). What is the success of which he speaks and what is gleaned from the visionary photographic path? Gleanings include heightened awareness, self-discovery, self-

development, and an increased sense of connection with the greater cosmos. They also include, as A. Adams says, the fact that “the more of beauty in the mind, the more of peace in the spirit” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 21), although peace in the spirit is not guaranteed. Success includes something J.P. Caponigro describes of his own photographic inquiry, that of “an opportunity for communion with and expansion into something greater than myself” (“John Paul Caponigro” Q&A par. 4). For many a seeker, success is *communion*, e.g., intimate exchange with that which is sought. But what indeed can we mean by intimate exchange when the subject is a landscape, a rock, lake, cloud, or tree?

For some Gelang photographers, intimate exchange is experienced as an invitation to photograph, one that is predicated on receptivity to exchange with the other-than-human. They feel called by the subject to make a photograph and maybe even to serve as a vessel to carry its voice forth into human society. Philip Hyde describes instances of “brilliantly blooming bushes that demanded to be photographed” and canyons that “all seemed to beckon” (142). These may be figures of speech, but they nevertheless convey the felt experience of exchange between the photographer and the subject. Similarly, speaking of a Redbud tree, James Balog says: “its charm grew too strong to resist. One day, I gave in and made its portrait” (*Tree* 82). Frank Gohlke narrates that when he first traveled to Mount St. Helens he spent a week circling around the mountain before focusing his photographic attention directly upon it. “I didn’t feel I had earned the right to get close to it yet,” he muses. “I felt I had to spiral in on it slowly” (159), as

though the mountain had first to consent to his presence and his photographic intent. Brad Cole, in a conversation with J. P. Caponigro reflects how “the land seemed to be influencing me to be the voice for the land. Channeling. However you want to put that. I dislike some of these terms” (“Brad Cole” par. 63).

Caponigro responds

The new age has laid claim to them [these terms] but they are not new. The Greek had muses, who were very popular in the Romantic tradition. Paleolithic art shares in a similar impulse, it’s been with us all along. It’s a very interesting question to ask, is the work in the service of something else, is it personal expression, or is it a strange commingling of the two? (“Brad Cole” par. 64)

J. P. Caponigro’s father describes how his favorite photographic moments are those where “you might say I was taken in. . . . I have always felt after such experiences that there was more than myself involved. It is not chance. It happens often. . . . I have no other way to express what I mean, other than to say that more than myself was present” (qtd. in “Moments of Grace” 2).

For Gelang photographers the presence of “more than myself” can assume many labels. It might be labeled as spirit or power. “No matter how slow the film,” relates Minor White, “spirit always stands still long enough for the photograph it has chosen” (*Rites and Passages* 108). White strives to put his act of photographing “at the service of an outside power. So that when I photograph an outside (or inside) power may leave its thumbprint” (“Found Photographs” 309). Others label this experience of a presence “more than myself” as God or the Creator. “I believe God speaks to us through his Creation,” conveys Ken Duncan when narrating a photographic moment with Uluru, the sandstone formation also

known as Ayers Rock in Australia. “How can anyone deny a Creator when they are faced with such awesome wonder?” (55). Similarly, Michael Fatali describes coming upon a sandstone structure in the American southwest, a “temple of stone” that prompted him to “drop to my knees and bow in prayer, grateful to witness such incredible beauty and mystery from the Creator. I knew I had discovered something which deserved to be represented in all its power and glory” (75).

Alternatively, the presence of “more than myself” might be labeled as a grand artist, as Rowell does in this passage

Life forms shaped by adversity in the rugged mountain environments seem to show recognizable brush strokes of the same grand artist. I saw a hidden sameness in the curl of an ibex horn, the twisting grain of a timberline juniper, the lines of an old Baltic face, and the giant arcs in the path of a living glacier. (36)

Finally, the “more than myself” might not be labeled at all. Speaking of the work of Wayne Gudmundson, Gohlke writes: “The landscape was clearly something that engaged him for reasons he couldn’t entirely identify—probably none of us ever can. . . . The connection to the landscape was as intimately and unconsciously felt as the pull of gravity” (251).

The editors of the photography journal *Aperture 150*, a volume dedicated to “moments of grace” in the American landscape, point out how photographers speak of key times when an image of lasting meaning and revelation comes into being. These moments, although “evoked by time and place,” the editors assert, “nevertheless transcend the immediate and the personal, bringing to light a

timeless and universal awareness which previously may have been only a dim shadow” (2). Such moments, they claim, are “not necessarily confined to the religious” (2). They may be experienced as awareness of the greater whole or could simply be a matter of being in the right place at the right time and being receptive enough to recognize the significance of a moment of exchange. Balog believes such moments are a matter of fate. “Only the pictures that are meant to be come into existence,” he writes. “How fate decides such things is impossible to know” (*Tree* 120). He further reflects when discussing a particular photograph, “it seemed as if the image already existed and was just waiting for us to come along and record it” (151). Of course, the image exists for Balog because he can recognize the value of the exchange.

Balog, and the other Gelang photographers mentioned above, could be said to be engaged in an act of “re-enchantment of the world,” which James Elkins describes as “a phrase that has been used since Max Weber to name the way transcendence seems to exist quietly and tentatively, far from the trumpets of religion or the heavy machinery of symbolism” (84). These moments of grace and enchantment, of wonder and mystery, experienced far from said trumpets and machinery have happened for me not only in such obviously transformational places as Yosemite, but rather more surprisingly on the shores of the humble and oft-smelly bayside wastewater treatment ponds of the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District. This is a place where many diverse species of bird, from Great Herons to Northern Pintails, spend either summers or winters resting and nesting.

Here, walking around these ponds with camera in hand and looking out across miles of marshland to power poles in one direction, suburbia and Mt. Tamalpais in another, farmland in another, and, on clear days, the Chevron Richmond Refinery across the bay in another, I experience the photographic act as one that Paul Caponigro describes as “meditation in action” (“Paul Caponigro” Conversation par. 26). These are moments when, whether with a human companion or alone, I experience a deep stillness, receptivity and silence within me, a silence from which, as Minor White says, “we are given to see from a sacred place” (*Rites and Passages* N Pag.). From silence, he continues, “the sacredness of *everything* [emphasis added] can be seen” (N Pag.)

Meditation in action can be understood as a state of mind where one is open to exchange, a kind of ‘being in the world’ that seeks to understand the essence of what is perceived and to let go of cultural constructs and preconceived ideas as much as possible in order to be fully present to the place. P. Caponigro describes his photographic practice as one of reversing culture’s influences. He writes, “I strive to undo my reactions to civilization’s syncopated demands and hope that inner peace, quiet, and lack of concern for specific results may enable a stance of gratitude and balance—a receptiveness that will allow the participation of grace” (qtd. in Garner, *Disappearing Witness* 14). Gretchen Garner classifies this kind of attention as “spontaneous witness,” which she defines as “more than an aesthetic position [but] . . . a way of being in the world, with a quality of attention all its own, that might even be termed a metaphysical path”

(*Disappearing Witness* 5). She describes how this includes “an open-ended ambivalence” and “a belief that one can penetrate the moment and uncover a mystery . . . one goes out into the world knowing only vaguely what will happen” (*Disappearing Witness* 10).

Garner theorizes that this approach to photography was central from the 1920s – 1970s but was eventually replaced by a more conceptual and intellectual approach to the medium, which has dominated ever since. This may be particularly true in other genres of photography. However, many of the landscape photographers addressed throughout this work, no matter their era, speak of an intention to be fully present wherever they are and to be open therefore to the communicative possibilities of the land. Likely, contemporary photographers are especially inspired by the early-mid twentieth century photographers A. Adams, Weston, and White, who remain quintessential exemplars of the spontaneous witness approach. For example, in the “f.64 Artist’s Statement for Museum of Fine Arts” Weston describes how he and the other members of f.64 start the photographic process without any preconceived ideas; the camera fixes the conception instead (53). Weston describes looking intently and discovering something of beauty and lasting significance. Like Caponigro and A. Adams, he attempts to turn from civilization’s influence in order to see more clearly the fact of nature and “the fundamental reality of things” (53). Weston continues, “In a civilization severed from its roots in the soil, —cluttered with nonessentials, blinded by abortive desires, the camera can be a way of self-development, a

means to rediscover and identify oneself with all manifestations of basic form,—with nature, the source” (53). A photograph made in this spirit is, he then claims, a “*revelation*,—an absolute, impersonal recognition of the *significance of facts*” (53). Self-development is not to be confused with self-expression, though, which as he further suggests is “an egotistical approach, a willful distortion, resulting in an over or understatement” (53). Self-development is instead an expansion of the limited ego-mind into the greater reality, a visionary experience.

Both Caponigro’s idea of meditation in action and Weston’s idea of self-development spring from a “contemplative frame of mind,” which photographer and art professor Stuart Richmond says includes receptiveness as well as detachment. “In order to attend fully to the being of something outside of ourselves, to lose ourselves in the very experience of it so to speak,” he writes, “we need to let go of selfish desires” (83). However, he cautions, this is not necessarily a state of transcendence, but rather simply a grounded “willingness to attend to something for its own sake . . . which involves being fully present to a given moment with an open awareness” (83).

I note how every time I visit the sanitary district it is never the same place. Every time I visit I notice something new. It changes with my level of awareness as well as my mood and the land’s mood. A. Adams remarks on the changeability of the subject: “I have photographed Half Dome innumerable times,” he exclaims, “but it is never the *same* Half Dome, never the same light or the same mood. . . . [there are] endless variations of lighting and sky situations and seasonal

characteristics” (*Examples: The Making* 135). These endless variations can cast a magical spell on landscape, as Balog describes of walking in the woods

Magic seems to lie around every meander in my trail. Magic in the unending discovery of new forms of natural aesthetics and grace. Magic in the bird-twittering dawn and the hushed twilight. Magic in the personality of substance that is supposedly mute and insensible. (*A Fine Obsession* 48)

Balog’s feeling is similar to that of photographer Michael Jackson who concentrates his photographic vision almost exclusively upon one particular beach. By focusing on one place day after day, he says, he is increasingly drawn to the complexity and mystery of the universe

The beach has infinite complexity—it is constantly changing. Why would I ever tire of trying to understand and record the infinite? . . . The beach always changes—everything in the universe changes, but the beach does so in a human’s time scale, giving us the opportunity to return to it and catch the tiniest glimpse of what it is doing—what the world is up to. (par. 1)

The sanitary district, too, displays infinite complexity as well as numerous moods:



Fig. 34. Dusk, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District, 2011, Chase M. Clow



Fig. 35. Pond, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District, 2010, Chase M. Clow

I experience this humble place as sacred; it is, for me, a spiritual landscape despite its purpose, of which this sign reminds me:



Fig. 36. Warning, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District, 2009, Chase M. Clow

How can I experience both Yosemite and the sanitary district, two very different landscapes, as spiritual landscapes? How can both equate to a vision quest? Art critic Lucy Lippard provides one answer, reflecting the insights of many Gelang photographers

I understand the spiritual as a way of living the ordinary while sensing the extraordinary. The spiritual landscape is part of the one we live in and also lies beyond it. . . . The vision quest is a journey through the outer landscape to find the inner landscape, which in turn reveals the path to take when returning to the outer landscape. Photographer, child of light, lends itself to such evocations. (61)

Despite this insight, Lippard remains highly critical of landscape photography, especially when it arises through intentional soul-searching. She believes it to be a highly androcentric form of spirituality, one “looking less to ‘nature’ itself than to ancient human responses to it that offer some guidelines, or lifelines, to the lost unbeliever” (61). She may have a point, but as a woman I am not so sure. My experience of the landscape is very much akin to that of these men. I also note how difficult it is to distinguish “nature” from “human response.” We can only experience the exterior landscape through our consciousness and our visceral, sensory inputs. Yet some of us experience land as what Bachelard refers to as *topophilia*, “the space we love” which includes “felicitous space” and “eulogized space” (xxxv). Bachelard theorizes that a “space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measure and estimates of the surveyor.” Instead, he continues, this space has “nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within the limits that protect” (xxxvi). I understand him to

mean that our love of a place is so overwhelming an attraction that we cannot help but have an imaginative response, e.g. make an image of it. Bachelard contrasts this poetic imaginative response with rationalism and scientific thinking. In the poetic imagination, he writes, “the cultural past doesn’t count . . . one must be receptive, receptive to the image as it appears” (xv). “The poetic image,” he continues, “is a sudden silence on the surface of the psyche” (xv). Of course, the land upon which the image is based inspires the silence.

James Baker Hall, Minor White’s biographer, relays how Alfred Stieglitz, Whites’ mentor, said that because White had experienced being in love he therefore could photograph (*Rites and Passages*). A poetic passage from White’s diary captures the rapture he experienced for love of both land and another human

Do you remember the night we climbed out on a rock in Hurricane Creek? There was a fragrant moon and the water coursed by with inexhaustible fervor, cold and clear and full of white, lapping at the low sweeping pine boughs and often dragging them under. In the uncertain light you remember that eerie spirit came eddying up the stream and caught up the white stuff of our souls in its whirlpool of air, and the three of us ascended the stream to the high valleys above where snow lay beneath the scattered trees and lined the waterfalls, and where we ascended the air over the peaks like a thick white flame so in love with the world it danced and danced out of sight? . . . Now do you remember the kiss that broke one spell with another? (*Rites and Passages* 46)

Hall distills White’s approach to photography as this: “The essence of what he was saying is this: that the profane is also sacred, that the Creation is being reenacted every moment everywhere, and that salvation lies in the exacting

task of keeping those facts alive in one's daily life" (qtd. in White, *Rites and Passages* 19).

Contemplation of nature, write Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, "serves to console, divert, to offer a realm apart from human struggle, something holy and untouchable except through poetic rapport" (141). I reflect on my experience of the sanitary district. Are the wastewater treatment ponds natural or solely human artifice? Are they a realm apart? These ponds, made by humans, serve human needs and lie on the edge of a large community; they also serve the needs of many species of plants and birds as well as the coyotes, foxes and various raptors who feed upon them. Is my silent contemplation of these ponds a diversion and a consolation? Yes. I walk here at leisure in the evenings after work to unwind and to forget about the dramas unfolding there. Yet, this place is hardly a world apart from human struggle, for it serves as the liver and kidneys of our community. I am comforted here and am aware of this landscape's sacred dimension, despite its seemingly "unholy" function. Perhaps my experience is akin to John Sexton's experience of dams, power plants, and the space shuttle manufacturing plant, as mentioned in an earlier chapter. In contemplating these various structures he recognizes the underlying essence of creativity, the timeless and inventive spirit behind all manifested forms, whether that spirit arises through human, bird, plant, wind or some unnamable immaterial energy.

How do we recognize this spirit moving through all forms? Paul Caponigro, whose work has been likened to visual poetry by photographer

Virginia Khuri, provides one answer. “Keep alive the fact that a mystery has come into existence,” he advises, “and that a physical being serves as a house for this mystery” (“Paul Caponigro” Conversation par. 2). Khuri, who participated in one of his workshops, writes of the kind of attention necessary to experience this mystery, as taught by Caponigro

I have been drawn to the idea that the living spirit of things, of even dense stone, may be somehow revealed, through a photograph, but this involves more than a literal seeing. Caponigro speaks of ‘seeing’ which is not done with eyes alone, but also with the heart in conscious, contemplative seeking to ‘see’, and to know. In such a poetic vision, pursued over a lifetime, his images demonstrate through modern day alchemy that a photograph can combine literal seeing with a more intuitive approach, thus nourishing the power of our imaginations to draw us into more profound meaning. (par. 14)

To be open and receptive to the mystery that lies within both the interior and exterior landscapes, to pay close attention to how they merge and diverge, intersect and parallel, shape and are shaped by one another is to be in a state of what art philosopher Paul Crowther refers to as “two-foldness” (29), an awareness of the relationship between the conscious self and the surround. The camera often acts as a two-way mirror, exposing both the internal and external landscapes and revealing some dimension of the fact of our being or presence. As Sebastião Salgado says of photography, “You are a parabola, you come inside; you travel with; and the way that you travel is with pictures. . . . You must be inside and you must be happy to be inside” (“The Photographer as Activist” Np). Declan O’Neill expresses it this way, “in that moment of holding a camera to our eye we seek to find the truth about ourselves and the relationship we have with the overall world

that surrounds us” (44). That relationship may be one of connection or alienation. It may vary from day to day and place to place. At any given time and in any given place the relationship shifts since both the internal and external landscapes are in flux and each of us has our own moods.

To go one step further and experience a merging of the internal and external worlds—of “intimate space” with “exterior space”—is to experience what Bachelard refers to as “space-blend” (201). Space-blend, Bachelard asserts, is “communion with the universe,” and he defines universe as “the invisible space that . . . surrounds [the human being] with countless presences” (203). Referring to the ideas of Rainer Maria Rilke, Bachelard states communion with this surround of countless presences requires “unlimited solitude that makes a lifetime of each day” (203).

Landscape photography can indeed be a solitary and lonely path, as A. Adams indicates

I have learned to take nourishment from loneliness . . . I used to worry about what people said and felt about my work. I do so no longer because I know I am closer to some respects of reality than most. The responsibility lies heavy with me. (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 207)

It is not a surprise, therefore, that Trappist Monk Thomas Merton turned late in his life to photography. In fact, he took up photographic practice when he went into permanent solitary retreat (Richter). Previously critical of photography, Merton began to appreciate its awareness-heightening qualities, for “reminding me” he says, “of things I have overlooked, and cooperating in the creation of new worlds” (qtd. in Richter 195). Philip Richter notes how Merton “had a mystical,

poetic spirituality, a ‘sense of total kinship’ with nature, ‘as if that nature were nothing but love’” (as qtd. Richter 201). This reflects the experience of A. Adams, who reminds us: “the soul hungers for expression and ceaselessly strives for an understanding of all that comprises the cosmos” (*Ansel Adams: Letters* 21).

Photographer Jan Phillips, who trained as a novice in a convent in her early twenties but who did not remain there, describes her experience of photography as pure presence. She distinguishes the desire for public recognition from the direct experience of the photographic act, which she terms the “real thing”

The real thing is that sweet joy you feel when you’re in the midst of it. The real thing is how present you are to life when you’re working, as attuned to the light as the lion is to the scent; a hawk to a movement in the meadow below. The real thing about photography is that it brings you home to yourself, connects you to those things that fulfill your deepest longings. (77)

J.P. Caponigro also synthesizes the value of reflective photographic practice, mirroring and expanding upon the insights of Weston

When I make images I looking for revelation [sic]. I want to be changed by my work. I don’t think we talk enough about how what we create influences our lives. While our work is a reflection of us, doing the work also changes who we are. The first stance treats work as a symptom of a condition. The second stance suggests we have a choice in what we do and what we become. I want to open my eyes again and again. I want to consider issues that matter deeply to me. I’m a human being so it’s likely that the issues that matter to me will matter to other people. I’m as surprised by my work as anybody. . . . Images have dimensions that words cannot describe, just as the world has dimensions our images can’t describe. (“John Paul Caponigro” *Conversations* par. 43)

For those inclined to explore the interior landscape as ardently as the exterior landscape, photography provides a highly reflective surface. It heightens

our awareness, increases our exchange with the other-than-human, and as with all experiences of love it calls us to the things of this world, to borrow a phrase from St. Augustine.



Fig. 37. Tigger in the morning fog, 2010, Chase M. Clow

BELONGING



Fig.38. Crow on a wire, San Rafael, 2011, Chase M. Clow

My goal throughout this work has been to demonstrate that the practice of Gelang photography, a photography of belonging, is highly transformative for the individual practitioner and leads to increasing levels of awareness and knowledge about the self, the self-in-relation, and the land and those who reside there. As such, it is my contention that this practice represents a viable and valuable means of achieving conscious, embodied relations with the land and thus can inform inquiries into how better to relate to the landscapes/places in which we are enmeshed and embedded. Gelang photography crosses normally segregated areas of landscape and nature photographic genres, uniting photographers who focus on wilderness and parklands with those who focus on industrial waste landscapes, farmlands, and suburban margins as well as those who focus on the more intimate dimensions of nature such as flora and fauna. By doing so, it helps us to move

beyond debates about what types of ecological environments or kinds of species are more worthy of our care and attention and focuses instead on the values and ethics we all might hope to adopt if we wish to engage in respectful relations with the other-than-human beings with whom we shape and co-create this world.

What is a photography of belonging? The various meanings of *Gelang* help inform the approach: to go along with, be dependent upon, be present in, be attainable from, to belong to. These can be further clarified. To go along implies approaching in a like manner, going together with and assenting to. It means being in sync, remaining adaptable, flexible, sympathetic, and companionable. It implies a partnership and a need for cooperation. It values affinity and affiliation. To be dependent upon means recognizing one's vulnerability and limitations, approaching with a sense humility, recognizing the influence of another and feeling grateful for their influence and aid. Presence implies being fully alive to a place, aware, available, accessible, open, embodied, and pliable. It means remaining for the duration and maintaining a sustained attention. To be attainable from means to be realized through, reaped through, acquired through, and endowed by and, accordingly, *Gelang* is a practice that fully acknowledges the fact that landscape/nature provides the grounds for knowledge and self-development. To belong to something is to submit to the power of another. In the case of the *Gelang* photographer, to belong is to submit to spirit of life that animates and sustains all of nature, however we wish to define that spirit. Altogether, belonging is relational, adaptable, and accordant.

With this in mind, then, when we talk about Gelang photographers we are talking about a highly aware and reflective group of individuals whose photographic practice is thoughtful, conscientious, respectful, and contemplative. Gelang photographers value and respect the other-than-human beings, forces and materials that together with humans shape landscapes and comprise the natural world. They seek knowledge, intimacy, and connection and wish to learn from nonhumans and humans alike rather than to dominate and exploit them. They are open to self-discovery and are committed to self-development.

We are talking about photographic inquiry grounded in ethics and framed by wisdom, where the intention is to make lasting and significant photographs that call attention to what is healthy and whole or what is sick and broken in the places we inhabit as well as the places we have set aside for the primary benefit of nonhuman species. These include places loved or unloved, ordinary or exotic, attractive or homely, preserved or abused. We are talking about bodies of work that are subject-affirming, life-affirming, and community-affirming, where community is understood to include both humans and nonhumans who together form a web of relations of which we all are a part.

As with any practice undertaken with serious intent, outdoor photography transforms the practitioner, allowing new knowledge to arise. As such, it also carries with it the potential to transform others. Because significant observational and immersive time spent in a particular area often leads to increased knowledge of the land, its processes and the life within it, photographs carry the potential to

expand social environmental knowledge. Since the photographer often experiences a connection to life as well as either joy or sorrow in witnessing the growth or destruction of life, the photograph carries within it the potential to bring joy or deep reflection to others. And since photographic practice, like any art practice, also “mines a seam in our conscious and unconscious” (O’Neill 8) it often leads the photographer to increased self-awareness, increased affirmation of life, and possibly even spiritual transformation. Photographs made with such awareness have the potential to induce a similar experience in the viewer.

This is a photographic practice that seeks not to take but to make; seeks not to seize and claim but to gather and reciprocate. This is a holistic and healthy intention. However, it is unlikely that the above description applies fully to any one photographer and it is also clear that, as with any practice, intentions no matter how noble are rarely fully achieved. It can be expected that Gelang photographers will intentionally or unwittingly participate in many of the less savory dimensions of landscape and nature photography at some point or another. For instance, there is great temptation to compromise values when under tight deadlines or our incomes are low. Rushing around, we may begin to objectify the subject and may trample and trod unconsciously upon one bit of the landscape in order to get the spot we have been commissioned to focus upon or believe will create a saleable image. This invites us to slow down. Or, we may compromise our self-discipline when our lives are complicated, forgetting to approach the land as a subject capable of eliciting reciprocal exchange. This invites us to focus and

let go. Or we compromise our sense of humility as we become better known, getting drawn into a human-constructed world so far removed from the other-than-human that we forget the land is alive and has agency and that our lives and our art are utterly and completely dependent upon this community of beings. This invites us to temper our egos.

Those in the academic community who have raised concerns about landscape and nature photography have done so for good reason. Photographers have raised similar concerns and debated similar issues. Broadly and in general, landscape and nature photographers are indeed deserving of such labels as rugged individual and frontiersman (Cronon) or an acutely individualized I (Sontag), for we tend to be solitary, remote and pleasure-seeking (Welling) and we often prefer the company of plants or animals to that of humans and a starlit sky to a neon-lit sky. As a whole we are adventurers and explorers intrigued by the margins, enchanted by details, full of wonder, entranced by beauty, and willing to subject ourselves to great discomfort in order to touch the edge of mystery. Our desire to photograph indeed represents a need to find our place in the world and sometimes we may relate to it with a certain detachment or with a desire to partially master it (Sontag). We can easily get caught up in the trophy hunt (Bower; Dunaway) and we can certainly inflame tourist passions and cater to tourist desires (Mitchell), even if that is not our primary motivation.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that opportunism and lack of ethics is problematic in the world of “big business” landscape and nature imagery

(Hope). The production and consumption of nature and landscape imagery, where “nature” is frequently presented in idealized visualizations, could indeed be counter-productive to informing the public about the real plight of the ecosystems (Welling). Some photographic communities, however, such as the Nature Photographers Network, tackle these concerns head on. Members of these communities care deeply about the environments wherein they photograph and they frequently debate how best to interact with the other-than-human and how best to pursue photography as connective experience rather than as a trophy hunt. And while many of their images, and those of others, are indeed “tarted-up” (Millet)—something that includes artistically rendered and heavily saturated with color—this aesthetic has more to do with what appeals to a purchasing audience, both individuals and organizations, as well as to the conventions of the time. This aesthetic may belie the photographer’s concern for the health of the land and her sense of very real connection with the other-than-humans who shape it. The same urge to “tart up” an image exists for those whose work falls into the category of the toxic sublime, which is hardly idealized nature. Landscape images of industrial waste, such as those by Edward Burtynsky, are stunningly beautiful, formally ideal artistic compositions. A related but opposite issue is that although art critics and museums might especially appreciate the plain, unaffected style of those who work falls into new topographic, such as that of Robert Adams and Robert Mischke, their work has limited appeal in the broader population. This reduces their reach and ability to sway the American public. All of these issues

make the domain of landscape and nature photography complex indeed and present major challenges to the Gelang photographer.

Yet, as the photographers included in this work demonstrate, it is possible to approach both the land and photographic practice responsibly, wisely, and with a desire for genuine connection and communication. Doing so opens one up to a whole world of relationships and transformative possibilities, as delineated in the previous chapters. The meaning the photographer draws from her experience, the productive knowledge that arises from her inquiry, and the wisdom she garners in the process of journeying within a place might vary according to each particular experience and might shift according to motivation, intent, mood, or feeling. Nevertheless, each immersion in the field can lead to increased ecological knowledge; expanded understanding of the relationship between human action and environmental response; heightened awareness of cyclical changes and patterns of weather; a better understanding of oneself in relation to others, human and other-than-human; a sense of connection with the Cosmos; and an increased respect for all of life. While none of these is guaranteed, nevertheless every experience in the field offers a possibility for connection and an affirmation of the value of life.

As is common practice, I would like to end by suggesting possible avenues for future research. There is great merit in continued examination and analysis of the extant literature of first person accounts of photographers, not only to further clarify and categorize the desires and values that guide photographic

practice but also to better assess the role of the photographer in society. Any one of us, photographer or no, to one degree or another aids and abets power structures, nationalism, imperialism, and colonization (Bower; Giblett and Tolonen; Mitchell; Sontag). We are all similarly enmeshed in a cultural milieu and participate in its construction, even though some of us try our best to lead authentic, self-determined lives and to create new cultural memes and possibilities or to return to traditional ways of knowing and living. Similarly all of our “works,” from those of an accountant to a teacher to a photographer reveal to one extent or another the philosophical, political, economic and social influences of our own given era (Bright; Wells). Thus, it would be valuable to look extensively into the journals and writings of photographers to ascertain how each has personally grappled with and possibly overcome such influences no matter the era.

Likewise, since the role of the photograph in shaping public perceptions, attitudes and behaviors is so critical, it would also be valuable to explore how a photograph (or any visual image) initiates imagination in a viewer. Concerns about how landscape and nature imagery reinforces wilderness as spectacle and the domestication of the sublime (Cronon), presents an Eden under glass (Dunaway), limits landscape to landscape (DeLue and Elkins), reinforces human/nature dichotomies (Bright; Cronon; DeLue and Elkins; Jussim and Lindquist-Cock), and perpetuates Ecoporn (Chianese; Millet; Welling) all point as much to the ignorance of an audience as to the communicative potential of a

photograph or the stance of the photographer. That is, if an audience, unlike the photographer, does not have any direct experience of a particular environment, has not been inclined to methodically and carefully observe the environment they are in, or has not been trained in environmental issues and has only ever encountered the more-than-human as a snapshot tourist, then that audience is more likely to fantasize about landscape/nature and to construct an artificial ideal that matches their already held ideological perspectives. Whatever images they view might only reinforce their misinformed stereotypes. It would be highly valuable to ascertain whether or not this is true, as Gelang photographers in particular feel a great sense of responsibility for what they create and are deeply concerned about what values they perpetuate. They wish to invite others to develop their own authentic relationship with land, whether that land is a backyard, an empty lot, a local park, or countywide open space. They do not want their work to further sever the connective bond between humans and nonhuman-others or to sanction unconscious behaviors that disregard or violate the more-than-human community.

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