

I FEEL IT FIRST IN MY STOMACH
AN ILLOGICAL ARCHIVE
AND A WAY TO MAKE IMAGES

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BENJAMIN LEE SPERRY

Abby Donovan

Lance Winn

Peter Williams

Greg Shelnutt

Offshore, Moving

run a hand over your face

then once through your hair

like passing cars or pieces of dreams

it only gets vague when you stare

let it come back to you

the past is there whether you were or not

only time separates you now

remember how to do something you've never done before

then you can do anything

that's what Michael says

but you don't know him

If you get good at cheating
You'll never have to get good at anything else.

We were in Seattle. It was around 9 or 10 at night and we were visiting some guy's studio space. Both of us were lit up on the positive vibes of the evening. As we were walking through the hall I recall hitting the stairwell and stopping mid stride. Will and I both heard it. Someone was playing a violin through a guitar amp in one of the rooms. Hearing that sound seemed to signify what we were already feeling.

Infinite potential.

I remember taking a poetry class with Thom and explaining to him that I didn't understand what poetry was or how to do it correctly.

Then he told me that he couldn't imagine something that I would write and turn in that he couldn't accept as poetry.

I remember thinking, "I don't know if you realize what you've just given me, but you've definitely given me a license to kill if I want."

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It was a similar feeling when I first met Jeffrey. I'd made up a lie to conceal the fact that I was there with the sole intention of meeting him. But by the end of the conversation he had given me his mailing address and we agreed to send each other images. I remember thinking "you have no idea what you just invited me to do."

I think I sent things to Jeffrey for two or three years.

He never really sent anything back but we did become friends.

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Mariel said that to me once.

That I gave them permission to do things as an artist.

I think of all the times someone has given me permission. And maybe what that means to me now.

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Floodgates.

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Came in like hail stones.

Items of a certain color go into one pile, and the interest of the day leads me to make a separate pile over here, then I find a collection of light-bursts that I think should stay together so I do my best to make that happen, a separate group could be made based on their movement, or perhaps by who's in the frame, or where I remember being when the images were generated.

But no matter what the logic is, it always ends up broken.

There are always outliers to any group or pile and others just float around aimlessly.

There are always images that actually belong in another group but never seem to get there. They are lost sheep that have strayed from the herd and lack a caring shepherd to guide them home.

To some degree I actually enjoy scattering them around. It provides new possibilities within what one feels they already know.

That process began in photo school when most of the photographers would keep their negatives in organized binders. They had sleeves of film strips with complete rolls of film. Some individuals meticulously label every roll, while others, even the most disorganized, kept them in binders that were separated by year. I on the other hand would intermix the sleeves and even pull individual negatives from their home to group with the day's workload. Never again would they find their proper resting place. With this I developed a working method. Wherein I have an image in mind that I wanted to work from, but in order to locate it, I would literally have to look through every negative I had ever produced to try and find it. Sometimes I would, but many times in the process of looking I would stumble upon another image (or several) that seemed more pressing to explore.

Ambient lights are both subjects and sources of illumination for other subjects.

Everything is about something, even if it's nothing.

Photographs at night are about walking around.

Photographs on the porch are about smoking.

Photographs of street lamps are about the freedom to stay up late because I no longer have a bedtime.

Photographs of the ground are about the grass.

Photographs of your feet are about being somewhere.

Photographs from the car are about moving.

Photographs of your hand are about being the creator and the participant.

Photographs of doorways are about potential

And moving on.

Photographs of snow fall caught by the flash is about reflection and not having the ability to really notice light in the present tense.

The same with rain.

Photographs of driveways are about being there.

Photographs of legs are about intrigue.

Photographs of the sky are about something greater.

And wonder.

Photographs of parking lots are about wandering.

Photographs of chairs are about absence.

And vacancy.

Photographs of the ocean are about big and small.

And space

And the power of nature

And contemplation

And maybe nothing

Photographs from up high are about looking down.

Photographs of lovers are about remembering.

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Photographs of the moon are about disappointment.

Photographs of rain on the ground are about enjoying sadness.
Photographs of people in the rain are about joy.
Or perhaps desperation
Photographs of a blowing rain are about trying to understand force.
Photographs of rain on a car windshield are about security.
And comfort.
Photographs of windshield wipers in the rain are about sound.

Photographs of someone sleeping are about watching.

Photographs of birds flying are about the inevitability of death.

Photographs of houses are about home.
Photographs of your home are about change.
Photographs of a house you know are about wishing.

Photographs of you on your birthday are about counting.

You never swim in the same river twice

I love hearing the clock towers chime the hour.

I've lived in several towns where that happens

and it always feels like home.

Like the trains passing¹, and their whistles².

But which always make you want to go somewhere else.

Theirs a comfortability to it³.

I know it.

And it's mine.

¹ In Oklahoma Grandma woke up with every train, said they sounded like they were coming through the front door.

² Dad just said he thought someone was drunk and blowing the car horn.

³ Like staying at Julia's where the "J" and the "M" run all night and wake you up every 17 minutes. It's always just enough time for you to start to fall asleep again.

I love the towns that have a bank clock that displays the time and temperature.

Juniata had it.

And it was a big deal when it broke 100.

It would make the paper.

In Perry it would only make the paper when it broke 110⁴.

But it's a dry heat there.

⁴ I remember going to the library at 2 in the morning to sit in my car and use the Wi-Fi that they would leave on and looking at the bank clock (Exchange Bank) that read 109 and thinking "man the sun has been down for over 5 hours and it's still one hundred and nine degrees out. I loved it. We had a wall unit AC, but never turned it on once until Grandma came to visit. "Embrace the heat" I would tell Case. The corn did wilt and die while we were away once. When we were there I would water the gardens in the middle of the night to counteract the steam that would happen if you did it during the day.

I have this attraction towards places that allow me to wander around at night, parking lots and the spaces behind gas stations, or at rest stops, any place that has ambient light but is also pretty dark and doesn't really have anyone around.

I'm sure that this is a result of my mother's overprotectiveness when I was younger and the fact that I always had to account for where I was at any given time.

At some point I started to really get off on this notion of not having anyone know where I was at.

I once rode the Greyhounds to Florida to visit a friend and I remember wandering around all the shady bus stops in every city that I had to connect in. And then after arriving and having a place to stay and everything, I would wander off by myself so that even my buddy didn't know where I was at, I didn't want the one person I knew in the state of Florida to know where I was. All with the attempt to satisfy this feeling of really being on my own or by myself. To know that no one knew where I was and that in fact no one I knew even knew where this place was.

I went out on this deserted fishing pier at night. Knowing that if something happened, no one would have a clue where to even look for me. I loved that.

That was always the concern when I was younger.

'something could happen'

Notions of freedom aside, the attraction to these places and wandering around at night is in part connected to the logistics of the lighting.

I come from a photo background, and having available light is essential and necessary if you want to be out at night and generate images beyond flash.

There's a bit of a trick to it. It's a specific type of lighting that people are vaguely familiar with. It's very suburban and small town.

You need street lights and the energy to waste by lighting spaces that don't really need to be.

It's a setup that is both unforgiving and foolproof at the same time.

It's easy to blow things out with the light or lose it to darkness altogether.

But once you figure out how to compensate for it, there's a reduction of detail and color and a compression of light that works like a filter.

It's similar to stage lighting, everything looks dramatic.

There's a quasi-chiaroscuro effect.

The Rembrandt lighting of my youth.

I walked with Shannon all night one time. Those are still my favorite photos of her.

It might have been Ocean City.

I feel a strong connection to a story that I read about Richard Prince when he went to Woodstock in 1969. He had taken his camera with the intention of documenting his experience and capturing the event, but when he got to the festival he realized that he only had a single frame left in the camera. And he didn't want to spend the festival with the pressure of trying to take this one perfect picture. So instead, he simply spun around in a circle and clicked the frame. With this he knew that it was done and that he wouldn't waste the next several days worrying about what picture to take but rather live the experience. I remember seeing the image he produced, and it was kind of exactly what you would expect, it's a bunch of hippies sitting in a field and there's a stage or something in the background, I remember thinking it's probably the most perfect image if you had gone to Woodstock and wanted a visual for whatever experience you might have had there. I realized that he had most likely captured a perfect image to trigger memory and allow one to reflect on the experience. Sure, the frame is crooked, and it's not quite composed, and it may look a bit random, but in essence it's a very genuine moment at the festival. What would have been a better use of that single frame? Would it really have meant more if he had gotten Jimi Hendrix burning the guitar or something or like that?

I relate this to my own making of images. Where it isn't that I believe the content of the image doesn't matter or that the formal aspects are not important, but that rather it's more about generating a feeling that reads through within the image.

That the act of making a photograph can be, and often time is, more important than the photograph itself.

Every time I go to the ocean, I stand in front of it and just crack off an entire roll of film or blast 50 frames from the cell phone.

It's an odd thing, irrational even. But it must be done. And I always look at those images. Despite the fact that I have countless from before and in no way am trying to 'make a better image' than I have previously done.

The visual components are important, and I've argued many a times from a formalist perspective about photography, even consider myself to be one really. But I always come back to the notion, that the need to generate an image, and that moment where an image becomes an object, far outweighs the potential that any specific image could hold.

In that same way I think I've always held the act of driving to be sacred. And I never get tired of shooting frames out the car window.

I remember when I lived in Oklahoma, driving was always one of my favorite pastimes. If I had nothing else going on that night I would just take a drive, burn it up Interstate 35 and when the moment was right you could cut off the lights and just coast. Watching the moon lit landscape pass by in shadowy glory. Then Case would get scared and make me turn them back on.

I had one particular turn around I would drive to, a specific exit I don't even remember now, but I would drive to it, turn around and drive back, and it would satisfy my desire every single time.

There's a song lyric that talks about letting the landscape enter your body as it passes by. It was probably written to be metaphoric, but to me it's a very realistic notion to let the scenery enter your body.

I think you can take from it, that the environment can impress something upon you.

And there's something about being in motion through it at a rate of speed that makes it impossible to comprehend all at once. Rather you can only see it as a whole or take it in as something larger. I think that is a powerful way to perceive it. The only real example I can think to give is when riding the train and looking out the window. If you look at any one place outside of the window, it never seems like it would be all that fun or intriguing to stop there and be in that one particular spot. It seems rather insignificant, but as a whole, as a passing through the space, the whole thing seems majestic and awe inspiring.

In that same sense, I think about landscape as a power that we have access to.

This dawned on me when I lived in Oklahoma.

I was struck by the flatness of the land.

And it contributed to the mindset of those living there in a very palpable way.

There was a low-grade paranoia that persisted most of the time.

There was always a slight fear that permeated the landscape. At any given time, you really were vulnerable to the elements.⁵ This was mostly due to the possibility of extreme weather, but the realization eventually set in that one actually couldn't elevate themselves by means of the landscape.

I realized that I had always lived in an area that had mountains and large hills, and that one of the great natural advantages of that is when one ascends the hills, they gain the power of the landscape by proximity.

The simple fact that you couldn't obtain a high vantage point lent a certain amount of vulnerability to the observer in any situation. I was reminded of military positioning and why it's always better to take the high ground.

⁵ I distinctly remember the first time the siren's went off and we went to the center of the house where three small door frames met and put the mattress on top of us.

Colorization is the tinting of a scene.

Like a memory - colored by regret or the wearing of sunglasses while stoned
The hue of everything is slightly off and reads a little bit differently.

So much of what I do comes out of what I've experienced within other Art

I take something from everything – And then it is mine. A part of what I want. – or will utilize- or will let go and come back to.

It all means something to me. or meant something. And now I do the making.

A SHORT LIST:

Sarah Sze – Organization, but that's maybe not immediately logical, use of the maximum. – some of the early images you see from grad school, twisting up little bits of paper towels and spreading them out – working with thumb tacks and plastic cups. – where the studio is the work. Not much difference between the working and the work.

Jill Magid – The Books, giving the work over to a system – admire the ability to place trust outside oneself and let the work happen. - Depending on other people – Using people – ending up being about her. - How the books goes back to her and not smoking – there's a form of narcissism that's attractive. – “The kiss mask”- “the Shoe Camera”- “the postcards”- taking over the MIT screen- The fact that within one day she sent me her thesis and has responded to every email – Really respect that.

Gerhard Richter – the blur, the photograph to be considered outside of being a photograph, investment in image, admire his ability to actually paint. – Slippage between photograph and painting. Admire the ability to truly carry on. – Why paint the 12th school book portrait.

Damien Stamer - Image, paintings that lend themselves to being like photographs visually, landscape to evoke feeling. – Polaroid process- a drag on the surface- scraping – emulsion

Robert Rauschenberg – The combines, process, printing, the use of an easy aesthetic, meaning there's nothing that's presented in a difficult way, -straight forward. – repetition and using this collected image base. Working “digitally” in a pre-digital way.

Tracey Emin – personal experience as the pretext to image-making. Color. The titles being a key element. – I use to do that more. Why have I gotten lazy about it. – That book with her and a beer on the cover. – The studio shots from grad school before it all.

Sally Mann – “Immediate Family” as a first introduction of mine. – Remember thinking we would get in trouble. – Don't buy the naiveté act but think it's just as great anyway. Really really was moved by “Deep South”. – Saw her at one of her openings and loved her hair. – Too shy to say something though.

Emmet Gowin – Those heavenly blacks, the family, what is close to you. Composition – intimacy – being a really good printer- Haven't given the aerial stuff much time.

Danica Phelps - Having most of grad school land on you several years later. And putting yourself through a second grad school. A drawing for all money spent. "Full financial disclosure" – but that's Chris Burden. – The reselling and recording each of the resales on the next iteration of the drawing. – A 30-dollar meal but that was a bad drawing so it's only worth 7.

Dawn Kasper – The stuff you keep and generate naturally, the art is in there. The way she organized bandages in a frame to create a series with them. Very orderly, straight forward and to the point- making it into image – not stressing over the material needs or validation of "art making" – Nomadic Studio Practice - getting annoyed with me being there. – Feeling a responsibly to not just watch a movie in the studio, but still taking a walk as it's a nice day out.

Mark Borthwick- color as memory – color as feeling- color as nostalgia – and the installation – using the wall as a frame and adding elements within. – Washed out – more visually attractive than interesting maybe. Is totally enough – the page. – organization within

Hank Williams – His personal struggles being the undercurrent of the song. A Biography. – Old Hank don't drink just one beer.

Pearl Jam - "If I close my eyes, where am I" – generating a feeling. Single Video Theory.

Duane Michaels – The Tableaus were a big deal to me. Always so curious about the corporate portraiture though. - Geoff use to have stories about that. - Saw him at P.P.O.W. as an older man. A conscious decision not to say anything. He was getting swarmed.

Francesca Woodman – Removing herself. Yet always being there.

Connor Oberst – the rejection of the way he was raised – story as the medium – carrying on in the tradition - a yearning for a genuine experience. - The hope that there is more to this life that we live. Expectation. – And knowing when to hold back. Restraint.

Andy Warhol – The production- The factory setup – the multiple. - the collection of ideas that are not your own. The Shadow Paintings are never at Dia when I go.

Robert Frank – Travel – the hope of America – "developing a negative in a pan of water in the backseat floorboard of a car". Looking in from an outside point of view. – The contact sheets being a mess, but the final images glowing with glory and making high-pitched angel noises. And the story that he did it all in an apartment in Brooklyn. – Or maybe just laid it all out.

Krissi Strump – First to believe and gave me a lot of shit. Only 100 I knew of. And really loved going back there with my wife and Will years later.

Thomas Meguane – the short story, an elevation of the everyday. – an attraction to a person's bad side.

Joseph Beuys – the lie within art, making something out of nothing, - belief is enough- Organization – his glass and metal framed pieces at dia beacon

Gorden Matta Clark – Running test's. The elements of the photographic frame becoming what the subject of the photograph is – Sprocket holes

Bas Jan Ader – Travel – documenting an experience – the “what happens to you “ is the work

David Hockney – the personal study – relationship – art as a record of an event (even if that event was not significant) – Prints as objects that are malleable. – Paper Pools – the small pencil writing below the photo compilations.

David Foster Wallace – way more intrigued with him as a creator than the work itself. – That Rolling stone interview after he died. – Really love “A supposedly fun thing I'll never do again” (Shipping out) and the tennis one. Still have never finished “Infinite Jest” despite three tries and two copies of the book. Why End Notes vs. Footnotes?

The National – Playing for six hours. ‘cause I don't want to get over you’ – A lot of sorrow. And in those suits. To really make art. As told by Greg and Isabel, should read through that notebook again. And what I've learned from it.

Hunter S. Thompson – The artist is the subject while observing the subject. – All those letters- read them all while working the night shift at the gas station- Gambling. – hustling up the assignment.

Zoe Leonard – Those Postcards. Wow. How to take that notion of putting together.

William Eggleston- “Stranded in Canton” – a prime lens- “Let's get down”- So frank about being an everyday person and flat-out normal. – A window into what all he was actually into and yet what the mass public picks up.

Steve Rogenbuck – an appreciation for the privilege of being alive. The absurd around us – and its humor. Possibility. “1,2,3 FUCK THE BOURGEOISIE, 4,5,6, FUCK THE BOURGEOISIE” – At the bottom of everything.

Sara Magenheimer – 25 reasons you like edges- and really getting me going on “the heavy lifting of why you do what you do” – and really liked that talk she gave. Reasons to be an artist. Notes on Art and Resistance A-Z. The dismantling of work- as said by S. – Is this a sculpture? – My job can be to stand on the street and look at something.

Felice Brothers – ‘Frankie’s Gun’ recorded on a portable cassette player. Got drunk with D.A.R. when seeing them in Beacon. Drove to the train with one-minute left. Always wondering what those last songs were. That first song, and searching for it for days. - How those guys kept leaving the stage.

Damien Hirst – The production – the commitment to pushing an idea through completion (spots) – making an enclosed system (cow head and flies) - experience of the exhibition (butterflies hatching)

Ray Johnson – The mail, correspondence, tape.

Durga Chew Bose – The way I heard her talk about working – having a longer passion project and being able to command yourself to work quickly on projects that are less personal. - Observer – really funny- Heard her say “Stuck behind a lampshade at a party” as I crossed the room. – Her stack of books online – I keep going back to that interview for inspiration.

Ken Weathersby – obsession or maybe just obsessive – compulsion – Positioning Image against other elements. And Painting. – His “sketchbooks” – the notecards. – willingness to show everything in the studio. – Great time with Hayley there.

Z.L. Smith – Turned me onto Kerouac and many others. Was influential at that time. – The speedway assignment we did together. With him down in the pitts. – Still looking to read that screenplay. – Billy The Kid.

Caroline Woolard- Just really smart. Can Intellectualize the formal. – a bent to research – “history of the 5-point star” – pushes me in that way. - Fluxus archive, books, ask her about that. – Kind of making fun of the functional ability of J.M. book. “what you got it at the museum gift shop or something?”

Douglas Witmer – I like the black and the grey. His use of liquid- “I never know what it’s going to look like until it dries” – a reliance on painting. – the found papers drawings – School Papers- Filling an entire notebook with markers in one setting.

Jeffrey Cortland Jones – Misalignment – Edges – Intentional at being off- Also getting lucky – looking. Layers. Titles. “She’ll dance to anything” - The nothing image.

Johnny Abrahams – “the paintings vibrate with your heartbeat” – a working method – a breaking of the straight. – the weird edge. – mechanical by hand. -I said, “ok, I have to meet this guy, where is the artist, he must be here.”

Larry Clark- That interview with “MM”- being a door to door portrait guy. Knowing what he needed when he went back to finish the book.

Suzanne Joelson – Finding likeness – “which one doesn’t belong” – The stripes she showed me. -from the magazine and the painting and the garment.. Surprised herself with that – Auto Intuitive- Her piles. – the way she stacked in thinking succession and could go back to the pile and let it instruct her where to go and what to do with the piece- like she left herself directions. – really wonderful to watch that. - I never liked the intellectualizing though – or the explaining done around her- It was fine as it was. – her saying about outgrowing work. - She once almost let me make the call on where the pieces should be cut. Was so close in that regard. Always wonder what that might have led to.

Meir Gal- “Benjamin it’s 2017” - You might actually be wasting your life.- I don’t think how did you come up with it, but rather where did you get it.

Geoff Scott – the titles “a long drive with too few cigarette breaks” – The half-tone screens. Still haven’t returned them- a very selfish move. And feel shitty about it. Apologized once by email. Still not sure if I’m *done* with them yet though or that’s what I said for years.- High Key – or dark – but not afraid to embrace the flatness- a fondness for the days of graded paper- “and no matter where you point the damn thing it always ends up in the middle” – Line Shot- “but you kind of have to decide that you like it”

Kenny Rivero – Nothing dies on the vine- stuff that you know wasn’t planned / obsessive planning – “I think he plans his ass off” (said “M”) - getting a piece of dirt in the paint then building everything else around it – funneling everything in to this one magic moment. – hyper paranoia about missing a moment that was right there in front of you. – If only you’d seen it - Not believing in an underpainting – or wanting to have a complete notion of where a painting is going before it’s resolved. – Directing the conversation about what is said about your work – “no that’s not actually what I said, so can you call everyone back and correct it” – “It’s shit talking time” – Coming to my place for open studios.- “You can’t just ask yourself what would make the painting better, you have to also think what would destroy it, then don’t be afraid to make a drastic move like that” – critiquing the fridge in front of you.

Caitlin ladd – the stand in– houses, chairs – color as driving the whole thing. “Oh, I’m painting that shit right out”

Ron Talbott – “Whoa he’s in the developer... and now he’s in the fixer..” – Representation is never enough. Color is metaphor - The Lineage of Stieglitz, to Steichen, to Ron, and then to me.

Carroll and Lena Dunham – You don’t have to be flamboyant to be flamboyant in your work. – Always appreciated the way the both talk about what they do. Probably better than what they do. Makes me really look twice. And I’m envious

Jeff Edwards – Treating your characters like little wind-up cars. Where you develop them, then put them in a scenario and watch what happens. “I didn’t know she was going to react like that”. Now I want you to write this same piece for the next four days from memory.

Garrick Dorsett – printing – the one-off – a one shot deal- “I never really go back and work on anything again” “Until later if I draw on it.” - but not really working things out or getting them right. – “the materials change but the rules stay the same”- but any rule could be overlooked- “I know it when I see it.” And every new piece comes from excess of the last piece. – the spirit of the proletariat – letting your father pick up the check and no longer arguing about it- leaving more for those when you’re gone. - Knowing yellow and having a 2” flat brush. - Carrying a good knife. And all those loaded pistols around the house. The Colt on top of the fridge, and the one in the truck “that one will bite you” - Thinking he was going to murder us the first time he drove us back to the lodge at Stoney Creek. – “Spending time with Uncle Dan” – “I will wait my own fucking turn” – learned my lesson on that one. You should always take them when they’re offered. Still haven’t gotten those prints. – Spending time with him down at the glassblowing facility. – Never identified with the work, but always got along with the people there. They were all burnt up and listening to loud music and lighting cigarettes off the red-hot poles. – laying down the grey and then pounding the contrast on top- “Presentation is everything. It’s the last thing you say about your work and the first thing anyone else notices”

Man Ray – egotism – naming – The Photogram – “rayogram” interacting physically with image and light and paper.

Gregory Coates – The studio visit and taking it like a crime scene to figure out. – What if it was called the school of visual research? Or exploration? – The need to be social because as artists we often work alone. – Dancing in the studio as a completely valid representation of one’s artwork. That time with my brothers and crawling out of the performance.

Ansel Adams – printer – drying prints in the microwave to check the whites- would love to have hung out with him- he’s got the grin of a drinker – how to get those blacks? – Seeing those original prints up close in Missoula.

Lucas Samaras - The Polaroids – just wanting to be in the picture himself. – The cutting of the images – hand / mechanical – manipulation – learning through self-analyzation – Been told I need to investigate the paintings.

Walter Robinson – Him purposefully saying things to get the crowd all wound up during that talk with Amy. – “you have to be working towards an exhibition at all times”

Matthew Barney – Drawing Restraints

No matter how I'm feeling

I look at that little Pooka

And feel so privileged to be a part of it.

Our love is bigger than Space and Time

It will always be there.

I whisper that to her.

I close my eyes.

And hear that music playing loud.

I'm attracted to the camera as one of the greatest versions of an unreliable narrator.

You just can't trust it.

And yet it so often thought of as a reproducer of reality.

Even the phrase, 'the camera doesn't lie' is something that most people have come to accept as a fiction of sorts or perhaps a false proclamation, and yet when we're presented with a photograph there actually *is* the inherent notion of truth.

This was once explained to me as the nature of photography as an evidence-based, data-capturing device.

That by the nature of how the machine works, i.e. it reproduces light that is reflected off real surfaces, we then read the images a camera produces as 'real'.

And yet anyone who knows even a little about photography realizes that this is an incredibly inaccurate notion. But we still trust it. It holds real weight in eyes of a viewer.

For example, a photograph can and often is used as evidence of an event.

One could never do this with a painting.

A painting can only serve as evidence of a painting being made, even if it's being made as a record of an event.

Jason told me that.

And what is it about a photographic image that would make a viewer sense that it was warm?

Or cold?

And how does an image convey the fact that it was muggy out?

Because I sense these sensations when I see images, and I never know the specifics of where that translation occurs.

To go from that which was felt in real time and space, to that which can be perceived visually in an image.

These are some of the questions keep me up at night.

Half-truths
or truths that leave a little out.

There's a part of the picture I just don't want you to see.

And I'm all about the lie in art.

No one gets the full story.

I'll give you part of it and if you want more, I'll give you a little of the other side too.

To be unwilling or perhaps incapable of adequately telling the tale.

I'm always telling a heroic tale that ends with the realization that the characters are really just pathetic.

I mean what would it actually take for one to change their life.

--

doubt

I've worked in far too many restaurants to not believe in process. The structure is always there. There's a system at play that dictates all the moves

The ratios are always more important than any specific measurement
Presentation is half the battle.

The details are what separate the ok from the really good.

And in the end, it's really only the experience of the individual that means anything at all.

I fucking hate working in restaurants. And yet at the same time I've always sort of loved it.

There's something to being a part of a machine.

And something magical about the way it makes your body move.

Unnatural movements done at top speed. You need grace to do it.

There's a structure you can follow and if you get it right, it's instant gratification for all parties included, and when it falls apart, only those who are unwaveringly polite will accept it.

For Sam.

Process.

In Brevity.

And only addressing the processes that are on my mind right now.

--

"S" once told me she plays with banana peels in her studio until they start to become something, then she can work.

"K" Just has to sweep up.

I rely on process as a way to get the hands and the mind producing and from there I'm able to make and then am able to look.

Markers.

For a while I've had the practice of using a straight edge and a Sharpie and systematically drawing lines across a photographic surface. I simply start on one side and work my way across the plane making vertical lines that cover the entire surface. This not only places a transparent color shield on the image, but also creates a smearing affect where the marker lines blur and create new abstract forms on top of the image. Essentially creating a new image as well as distorting or altering the previous one.

As a by-product of this, I've found that I tend to like the scrap paper that was placed under the object image as much as I like the new, worked image.

I've played with attempts at scaling up the marker process (which is usually only done on a 4 x 6 photograph) by attaching markers to a large wooden stick and using a large straight edge taped to my left foot. This takes considerably longer and has yet to be only partially successful. I think the markers themselves would need to grow in scale to truly work in the same way as it does with the 4 X 6.

The Incidental Mark.

My bag once got run over by a Pepsi-Cola truck, I lost my computer, but a photograph became imprinted with the texture of the bag. (see section devoted to Incidental Mark)

The cutting of images.

An action that displaces the camera.

It's unspecific and a sort of last-ditch effort to try and understand something in the image or see the material in a new way.

I want something out of nothing.

I tend to believe in the deconstruction of images as a way of opening up rather than closing down.

It usually doesn't work though and I generally regret it.

Still I do it all the time.

The Printer.

The desktop home-version inkjet is what I like.

I don't know the specifics of what I'm trying to print generally. But I know the effort is in search of something.

The system of printing is a means of mediation between me and something I've already processed at least once.

I'm looking for a new physical presence to that which I can already see.

And I generally just try to keep the printer running.

I mostly just try to avoid down time where nothing is coming out of the machine.

Which is actually harder than one might think.

I used to always try to keep two printers running at one time, but that can be a full-time job.

The hope is that something that comes out will be of value to me.

I also try to alter the material I'm sending through the printer, but you got to know the limits. Otherwise the printer stops printing and I just get frustrated.

The 4x6.

I've had an affinity for the 4x6 since childhood.

I got my first camera as a Christmas gift at Darryl's. I had to be pretty young, and I remember thinking about taking a picture of myself peeing but was quick enough to realize that I'd get in trouble when the photos came back. I spent the rest of the evening walking around shooting photographs of the floor. People kept saying things like "Ben don't waste all your film."

My relationship with the machine is still very much the same.

I'm still just as curious as to what those floor photos will look like.

4 x 6's are generally associated with the snapshot and sometimes talked about in the context of "the difference between a picture and a photograph". The type of shit I disagree with on principle alone. Show me a picture that's interesting and I could care less if it's a photograph. That's the kind of logic that says if you buy a better camera you'll take a better photograph.

"Jesse Owens would beat you in army boots"- That's what dad would say.

Rectangles. And delineation.

I like the frame.

I like the 4" x 6"

I like the classic 1 to 1 ½ ratio that is standard for photography.

I also like my own sizes

I like the 25" x 34"

I like that it's close to the normal ratio, but it isn't

I like that it looks familiar, but it feels slightly off.

I like that rectangles are all around us.

I like that we live in them.

I like that houses are rectangles.

and cars

and windows

and doors

and cereal boxes

and the TV

and the mailbox

and the cabinets

and the drawers

and the desks

I like that the orientation of books is a rectangle.

I like that rectangles can be modular.

I like that two squares on top of one another *becomes* a rectangle.

I like a 31"x31" square, that is my preferred size of square to build rectangles.

I like that the parking lot is full of rectangles.

I like that those rectangles are there for you to park your other rectangles in.

And then I can look at both the rectangles through my rectangles from here.

I like that.

Reasons I like edges: (21 shy of 25 – but I'll get there Sara)

Edges divide the frames.

Edges are the no man's land where form is divorced from content.

When content slips into the edge it alters meaning with a greater voracity

I like edges the way I like tree lines. As hazy demarcations between one semi-defined area and another.

To Jake.

Pages on the *Incidental Mark*

The incidental mark is not intentional.
or direct.

It's the result of an activity.

At times the activity is intentional.

The incidental mark is about noticing.
or responding. And accepting.

I look for them
I hope for them

I even put images in a position to increase the likelihood of them happening.

The incidental mark is when the squeegee smears the ink.

It's when the film tears at the sprocket holes because I've wound past the advance point.

It's taking the camera with me into the ocean and wondering what salt water does to film.

The incidental mark is because I never clean the printer heads.

It's the peel-edge of the polaroid where the emulsion moves.

It's when the rollers are dirty, and the drag marks happen.

It's when you don't pull straight out from the land camera.

It's when you shake the 600 film in a misguided attempt at faster development.

It's a dent in the bellows and the resulting hollow black arc that follows.

The incidental mark is the sunlight fading only the outer edges of a stack.

It's me finding a panel with overspray on it
Someone else's mark, but I'll just go with it..

It's the circle of rust from when the photograph was pinned on my wall.

It's when the double-sided tape rips the emulsion as I pull the images apart.

It's when those little foam-mounting-strips end up on the front and the back of the pictures.

The incidental mark is a single grain of sand that leaves one continuous scratch across an entire roll of film.

It's the fold-lines of a thing that needed folded.

It's the water ring left from my warming beer.

It's that thin orange barcode that all postcards get while being processed.

The incidental mark is the postmaster's stamp that cancels all postage.

It's the impression of the rollers.

And the way rollers tear little strips and remove emulsion

Leaving white marks that read as additive rather than subtractive.

An absence that becomes the subject.

A removal that is now the main focal point.

The incidental mark is the Unidentified Flying Object of the photographic world.

A bogie with no flight plan that just got picked up by the tower.

It is not the product of an algorithm, light ratio, or properly-functioning Contact Image Sensor.

Something has gone awry.

The incidental mark is when only part of the screen comes through.

Or the ink drips.

Or the scan bar stops moving.

It's what happens when the pages stick together, and two go through instead of one.

It's when the Photo-Flo doesn't prevent the water spots.

It's a footprint. Or a fingerprint. Or the touch marks where you tried to hold the edge.

It's because you forgot to wrap the tank.

Or dropped the brush.

Or why only half of the popsicle stick is red.

The incidental mark is action-based and happens 'as a result of.'

It contains history.

It shows something.

Even when the something means nothing.

The incidental mark is bleed-through.

It is uncalculated even if it is anticipated.

You should finish your beer before your cigarette.

You'll need those extra two hits.

I like the mechanics of the camera a lot more than the optics.

I think the main reason I became an artist who used photography rather than *a photographer* is simply because I didn't want to deal with all the gear. It's exhausting. And you have to lug the shit around and update it every few years. I knew fairly quickly in photo school that that was not for me. I'm much more attracted to the cameras you find on the Goodwill shelf than anything 34th St. has to offer.⁶

I like the cranks and the springs and the mechanisms you want to make work.

I don't use good cameras really. I like the cheap ones.

The ones that put photography in the hands of poor people. (My own family photographs start at this point in history, where for the first time those without the means to hire a photographer could obtain the materials themselves and shoot portraits.)

I actually like the ones that mimic the really nice cameras. They have names that try to sound like that of a good one. They look like they could be a Leica, but that actually cost next to nothing and don't focus.

I mainly just use the ones I want to shoot with and mostly don't worry about the image making. I think about that later. Or I use my phone.

These days using a film camera is definitely about wanting to make the machine work.

I use the Point and Shoot's

Or cheap Range Finders

Disposables

Or

Kid's cameras

The occasional Single Lens Reflex but that's pretty rare for me.

For the most part I'm Fixed Focal Length kind of guy.

I also really like broken cameras

Or ones that you can tell people have altered.

I like the sounds cameras make when you advance the frame.

The sounds of when you work them.

⁶ I actually hate that place, but it is fun to watch. When I took my mom and grandma to NY for the first time I took them there just to see the conveyer belt system. And I really love the candy buckets they have around. That cheap weird taffy that's not really a taffy but more of a soft-chew I guess. I've always respected that they offered that and *usually* don't give dirty looks if you take a whole hand full.

Camera list. (The ones I could find today.)

Disposables

My all-time most used cameras. I still have a bag of undeveloped ones.

They have that high-pitched annoying click wheel you do in short bursts with your right thumb. It's almost like a squeak and you always want to keep winding.

The Argus

Known as *The Brick*

My favorite camera of all time.

Have purchased many.

Film winds with a slow tightening drag that sometimes cramps your left thumb and forefinger.

You hold the release pin and hear every inch of the film as it drags across the focal plane.

You never know if you're moving the film or ripping it to shreds.

Theirs an equal mix of latitude within control and restriction.

The focus is wide ranging but inaccurate. Bulb the shit out of everything.

The Riken Ricoh

My little popper.

Has that sexy swoop with the bottom left-hand advance. It drops down and you work it with your left middle finger. It's graceful, goes out smooth and steady then comes with a quick snap-back.

Japanese Made.

Kodak

Brownie Hawkeye

The most fun all the little box cameras.

Bulb setting

Can load it with 120 if you trim the reels.

Best little top strap you've ever seen.

Flash attachment that makes you feel like you're photographing Chicago Mob Bosses.

A real Blaster.

The Minolta SRT

201

Have had a number of these in my day. One of the best feeling SLR's you could get your hands on. And I don't even like SLR's. But if you shoot with one of these you really do *feel like a photographer*. Like the type who has a leather jacket and a fedora and is *on assignment*.

But seriously, they're pretty great. They have the classic thumb advance that snaps back with sturdy reliability. The body's thin. Heavy but not too heavy. It's like a Winchester 30/30.

Always reminds me of the action on a brush gun. -Lever Action -real practicality.

With a needle-based light meter that swings with intensity. Aperture and shutter move eye-hook but only shutter moves the bottom slider.

Bell and Howell
T30 XL
Flip out pistol-grip
Runs quick
And great for still frames.

Olympus
Stylus Zoom Epic
A terrible camera that I love.
A real *Grandma Camera*
Automation and zoom

Model A-7 16mm
Keystone MFG company
With the wine-key hand crank. Like an old watch, very easy to overwind.
Sounds like a runaway slot machine when you cut it loose.

Olympus
Trip X B 4K
Old electronics camera with the slide open lens cover that automatically readies the flash.
AutoFlash. No turning it off. With the high pitch ready sound. And the battery-operated film advance that sounds like takes just a little too long.
Why have I not shot with this thing lately.

S 100 Series
EF
No Brand on it and it's all locked up. But I bought it anyways.

AnSCO
Ready Flash
620 film – but you can fill it with whatever.
Looks like something out of a WWII movie. With a literal wing- nut advance and a swing-pin open lever on the bottom.
Major light leaks and a super satisfying plastic handle.
Shutter has never worked at all for me, but I still try with it.
It either doesn't open at all, or it gets stuck and stays open.

Voigtlander
BRILLIANT
Twin lens.
Folding top viewer never stays shut. Springs open like a Jack in The Box Mouse Trap. It's one of the few cameras where it actually sounds surprised.
I can never remember where I got it. Either Josh gave it to me, or I stole it from Garrick.

Polaroid Colorpack II

Land Camera

I used to have 5 or 6 of these, but they inevitably break. That molded plastic body is sleek and light, but one trip falling down the stairs and it's gone. ⁷ I *really* like the pull handle that's on these things. And it's so much more fun to use than the fancy land cameras. With their collapsing bellows and heavy boxes, that stupid fucking leather case that the camera never comes out of, it just hangs on your neck all the time. No Thanks. The color pack II is so much better.

It makes a hollow plastic snap when you fire it.

Takes a spinning flash-cube off the side and is SO worth investing in if you can get them.

Comes equipped with "slider bars" instead of "rollers" solely to make the camera cheaper.

They're definitely way worse for image making, but I've always loved them. It's a challenge to pull through and you can very easily end up with streaky images. The resistance factor is very visible.

Pinhole Camera

Made from a Mickey Mouse cookie box.

I made it in Missoula Montana while sitting in on a photo one course at the local college after giving a talk.

I don't really care for pinholes, but it did prove useful for shooting straight to high contrast positive film to screen-print from. And I like the way it looks on the shelf. We also had a fun time making them. A bunch of flirty undergrads running outside to photograph each other then back to the darkroom to see what it did and so on and so forth.

Polaroid

Sun Autofocus 660

This is truly and old friend. I bought it for 2.97\$ at Goodwill and used it for years.⁸ Even after it broke I tried to repair it. And replaced it with several others, but none were ever the same. It's like a first love, you only get one. And it was definitely time to move on.

⁷ I find most of my camera's die this way. By Throwing them down a flight of stairs. I think it's a subconscious cleansing act, where it's just time to move on from that machine. That and the fact that I am adamantly against neck-straps and carrying cases.

⁸ Yet another casualty of the stairs.

Brownie Reflex
Eastman Kodak Co.
Rochester N.Y.

This was always a favorite of mine. It fits into that category of camera that's meant to look like a good camera but it's really not. It's meant to look like a twin lens reflex, but it's actually a fixed focal length point and shoot with a top viewer. Set shutter speed, set aperture, and the lens is plastic. It can however be put on a bulb setting, which totally resurrects its functionality in my mind. I also really like that it's a side-to-side winder for medium format verses the top-to-bottom. It's meant to take 127 film, but if you alter the pin you can fit 120 in it, or my favorite is to take 35mm out of its casing and wind that shit through with a paperclip. You end up shooting over the sprocket holes and the pre-exposed number system. And it won't stay straight to a film plane. Everything ends up looking like an artifact. Like it was documented by mistake.

It's got a loose-pin-slide-release for the shutter.
Hold from the bottom and push with your right thumb.

PENTAX
IQZoomEZY
38mm – 70mm

That shit doesn't even work, but Josh gave it to me, so I hold onto it for a rainy day.

Kewpie
No 2A
USE FILM
No.116 Eastman
No.232 Vulcan
CONLEY CAMERA CO

A box camera. Slides in from the side. Not my jam at all, but when one comes your way you got to take it.

2 viewfinders – one for vertical, one for horizontal.

Aperture is *actually* several different size holes that swivel in front of the lens. Like the fitting for the front of a classroom grade pencil sharpener.

Shutter is a one-up-one-down mechanism that sounds like the cylinder of a lock turning in your front door.

Kodak Instamatic M4
Movie Camera
8mm point and shoot.

Runs off AA batteries that *always* overheat and burn out.

Sounds like an electric pencil sharpener. Looks similar.

Film loads as slide that sounds like a Nerf gun for launching arrows at your brother.

Kodak
Brownie Fiesta
127 Back Loader
With the fast action single shot.
No Bulb

Imperial
Birdseye
Instant Load 126
With the spinning top cube and the Front-side push-button release.

Kodak
Folding-Roller camera with bellows
Use Autographic No A-116 film
Wind-key still intact.

Olympus Trip
AF S-2
Standard Grandma Camera

Kodak Brownie
Starmite Camera
Bottom Loader
With the pop-out Flashbulbs. (Sylvania M3 Blue Dot's, the little ones)

Kodak
PLEASER
Instant Camera
Never had a lot of luck with these. But keep it as great one to maybe mess with.

Delta
Imperial
127 – 4 x 4
Chicago made. Super flimsy. Sounds like a wind-up toy. Always loved it.

Kodak
Duaflex II with a Kodet lens.
Still with film in it that I just exposed by accident. Ignored the layers of masking tape.
Rookie Mistake.

The 3 Black Plastic cameras

I bought in that gas station on the way back from Seattle

No markings on them

Like disposables, but that you can put your own film in it.

One has a green upside-down heart sticker on it.

That one is my favorite.

Kodak Jiffy

Six -16

Given to me by Casey's mom.

Really fun camera.

Nice bellows but folds flat to 2" thick.

Has a Twindar lens with only two settings – 5 to 10 feet and Beyond 10 feet.

Paper clip rigged film advance.

Polaroid ProPack

Not my favorite of the peel-apart machines,

But there is a single pull left in the chamber.

Just waiting.

I want to make work that feels like Adrienne Lenker singing

woo

baby

take me.

An illogical archive and why I can never find anything.

I believe you could technically classify my collection of images an archive, because as I understand it, any collection of images or documents is somewhat of an archive even if it's a really bad one.

Mine is a really bad one, but I love it that way.

I don't really build my archive with any purpose or direction rather it's a byproduct of the fact that I'm always working, and I hold on to images that I produce as part of that.

It's not really organized in any particular fashion at any given time.
But it's always in groups.

Quasi-organization happens by default.

The digital version of my archive is even more scattered.

Anyone who has seen my desktop knows this.

I have a massive number of folders across numerous platforms that bear titles like:

“the folder you’re always looking for”, or “Printing for tonight”, or “images to consider”, “the blue and pink wall”, “first images”, “rain”, “reference thought”, “stuff” “today and only today”.

All of which are so relative that the labeling means next to nothing just shortly after it’s been assigned.

So, as I mentioned before,
I simply have to start looking through everything.

Continually going “oh, yes, that’s where those are, I should remember that”.

An Interrupted System

I've grown more and more superstitious about when I re-find images and what that means to my working.

And perhaps I'm just lucky with it. But I always seem to find the images I need when I need them.

Many a time I've held onto images, for years even, not knowing when they would be useful, but sure enough, the day comes when I think "yes, remember those blue and pink's that you tucked away, where are they? Those are what I need now"

Archive and decay. A thought about images

Images change with time. .

My archive is constant disintegration. Which I guess is true about all archives, but mine has various rates of decay that I'm actively influencing.

Everything is on the decline, but certain items or groups are really kept well, to the best of my ability, while others are completely neglected, almost purposefully mistreated or put in scenarios where damage is inevitable.

I'm always setting coffee cups and beers on images like they're coasters.

In a way I think I'm daring them to get just a little bit worse so that maybe I'll get rid of them.

That happens all the time, especially if I start to cut the image apart. That's a short cycle.

Once in a while though, it isn't until the final hour that something shows new life in it.

I remember being in Dawn Kasper's studio during the Whitney Biennial. It was part of her Nomadic studio tour and one of the first real times where I had access to an artist's studio. I didn't live in NY at the time and drove into the city specifically to visit her there.

I remember staying most of the day.

I feel as if that visit had special meaning to me then, but that it has some sort of new meaning to me now.

I remember asking her about how it felt for the audience to be able to witness all of her failures in real time. She laughed and said, "well when you put it that way."

I felt a weird agency over the studio, I felt I had the permission to stay all day, why? Because the Whitney was open? Because I bought a ticket? That feels so curious to me now.

Looking back on it I think it's funny, she obviously got annoyed with the fact that I was hanging around for so long. At one point she even gave me a copy of David Foster Wallace's 'This is water' speech to distract me long enough to move on and actually work in the studio.

She showed me her proposal to the biennial, that seemed pretty big then, but really even bigger now, the actual way in which she asked for the opportunity that she was granted. I remember being surprised at how unofficial it looked. And how much it was really for her. She included a long list of 'key words' that were meant to paint a picture of what she was after, but it also read like a way to not elaborate on what she was planning to actually do there.

At one point I stood over her shoulder as she unboxed a series of images that had just come from her printer in Los Angeles. And funnily enough, I felt as if they were my photographs we were unboxing for the first time, or perhaps not mine but maybe that of a close friend, like that of Garrick's or something. Certainly not someone whom I had just met.

We discussed the photographs and the printing quality at length.

That experience made it palpable in my mind that this could in fact be the inter-workings of what an artist's day was supposed to look like. Yes, now we will open the prints we've been waiting for. What else would an artist do with their day? Of course, they open new print boxes. Why should I have a hard time justifying that as way to spend an afternoon and call it 'MY JOB'?

It made it seem valid for one to be in the studio, as a serious notion as to what one was supposed to be doing with their life.

Permission

Beauty.

There is no criteria for Beauty.

What is it?
Specifically?

I know it, but I cannot define it.

It simply is there.

“I know it when I see it” they say.

The way people talk of racehorses or exceptional young athletes.

I can only tell you characteristics

It has light
It has composition
It has color

But that is not criteria for being beautiful

If this bird goes down, I'm in the best possible spot for survival.

I feel it first in my stomach
Then it moves to the center of the shoulders

My movements get a little bit faster

My vision tightens, and I can feel the quickness in my hands.

I can feel it before it happens

And that's the power of it

I'm a step ahead and I'm holding on to it.

"Steady at the helm Ben"

“There’s magic in this world, you can choose not to see it, but it’s there.”

Ron tells me that.

And I believe him.

The winds of any beach town make me want to stay up and ward off sleep

Then I question everything that I believe in.

I'm a bit too cavalier with what I attempt. Too pressed by outside forces.

Everything ends up being reactionary in some way. Whether it's against me and my own actions, or simply the materials and the task at hand.

I'm always thinking about the distinction between reacting and responding.

A response is always better than a reaction.

But I react much more than I respond.

Today I listened to *Songs for Joe*
and just fucking wept.

I think about the grass by the side of the road

I think about any field in Oklahoma at sunrise

I think about the dampness in your clothes when you sleep by the ocean

I think about Sarah twisting up those little pieces of paper in the same studios as me but twenty years before.

I wake up and it's still dark out

I move through the world anyway

“It’s mind over matter boys!”

“it ain’t mine so it don’t matter”

Ron told us that.

But that’s a different Ron altogether.

And the sushi bar only plays *Acceptance* on repeat.

I watched my grandfather crawl on the hallway carpet and tell my mother that he wanted to die.

I remember deciding right then and there, that if this was how it was going to end up anyways, I sure as shit wasn't going to play by the rules.

I think I was 12.