

### Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis

This text only version of Mark Wheeler's plenary address to the International to the 2008 First International Phototherapy Symposium held at University of Turku, Finland, is prepared as introductory reading for the *Introduction to phototherapy theory and practice*, 28<sup>th</sup> February – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009, University of Derby, presented by Mark Wheeler and Nick Stein.

*"Forget what it looks like. How does it feel?"*

Ansel Adams, 1927 (Booth, 1983, p10)

Over 80 years ago, Ansel Adams invited us to contemplate photography beyond ideas of content and explicit form. He invited questions that can now be considered as '*psychological aesthetics*'.

*"Psychological Aesthetics refers to the relation between the actual (aesthetic) qualities of painting, such as line, colour, handling, composition and so on and the inner (psychological) effects that these have on the spectator"*

Maclagan (2002) p7

The psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs are considered here in the contexts of phototherapy and therapeutic photography informed by those dimensions in other contexts where photographs are made and viewed. Created objects and artisan pieces that artists are driven to create and healthy minds are driven to consume all engender responses or processes that might be described within the term '*psychological aesthetics*'.

The psychological aesthetics of all photographs, be they digital or wet processes, in the therapeutic contexts of photography, are specifically:

Photo - Refers to light, to the syntax of photography, to the individual photon striking the film, the CMOS sensor or the retina.

Psycho – Refers to the psychology of the aesthetic experience, the phenomenology of every encounter with a photographic image.

Praxis – Describes the practice of making, viewing and thinking.

### The Domestic Context of Photography and Psychological Aesthetics

Outsider Art Analyst and Author David MacLagan, Regular contributor to Raw Vision Magazine, writes of psychological aesthetics:

*"Aesthetic' in this sense is grounded in the material properties of painting [or photography in phototherapy], rather than referring to some disembodied realm of judgements about beauty or truth."*

MacLagan, D (2002) page 7

The psychological aesthetics of making & viewing photographs lies in the interzone of all types of therapeutic encounter with photography including PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography. The psychological aesthetics of making & viewing photographs also

© Mark Wheeler 2008-2009: Wheeler, M (2008), *Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis: the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs*, University of Derby 2009 workshop reader overlaps the making and viewing of photographic originals such as fine-art photography made for, and displayed, in galleries and on collectors' walls.

All these encounters with photography in therapy or in galleries do emerge from our primary experience of original photographs: domestic photography. Thus any understanding of the psychological processes involved in making & viewing photographs are the nodal point of the interzone between Therapeutic Photography, PhotoTherapy, fine-art photography and domestic photography. The term David Maclagan (2002, pp5-142) coined to describe the psychological dimensions of acts of artistic and visual creativity is “*psychological aesthetics*”.

Domestic photography is the ubiquitous context from which many of these practices emerge and provides as illusory a meta-context as the illusory *reality-trap*, or even *reality-gap*, of photographs and photography itself. The domestic photographic likeness has a cultural history as long and embedded as the public media image in advertising and editorial. Initially domestic photography was professionally conducted, for example the popular nineteenth century cartes-de-visite, before the advent of the popular Eastman “Kodak” camera allowed amateurs without great wealth and technical expertise to participate. Cost reduction democratised & expanded the use of photo-reproduction & coincided with the development of psychoanalysis and other modern psychological theories. The rapid evolution of the industrial world was, for most people who rarely had any opportunity or means to travel great distances, mediated through the medium of photography. Hence, for many the world outside our own town was an entirely photographic world. Hence generations have grown up familiarised with a connection between the external world and photographed subjects, leading to the *reality trap*.

Hence our visual experience of the modern world and its wonders have more often than not been mediated photographically, leading to a mythology of photographic truth and hence a *reality gap*. We are more likely to have seen photographs of people and places of interest than to have seen the people or places in person. Thus more of our individual knowledge of the world has for over 150 years been mediated more photographically than experienced directly.

Domestic photography has inspired numerous authors, most recently Jonathon Coe in *The Rain Before It Falls*.

“*Our entire surviving family history consists of photographs... it's all photographs*”  
Coe (2008)

Explains Coe, describing his personal relationship with domestic photography. It is the depth and intensity of this relationship that inspired his writing of *The Rain before it falls*, and he continues with his family album story and a detailed account of the writing process.

“*These family pictures kick in round about the mid-1940s, so that's partly why I decided to set the early part of The Rain Before it Falls in that era.*”  
Coe (2008)

Using examples from *The Rain Before It Falls*, Coe demonstrates how the photographs are essential to the verbal descriptions in the book, and the mechanisms by which the images are catalysts to the narrative and to the words. The book does not reproduce any of the photographs, except in the description and hence in the mind of the reader.

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“The descriptions of Warden Farm in the book are taken from family photographs; so is the family picnic (p.43); the kitchen in Shropshire (p. 87); the beach hut in Milford on Sea (p. 177 - although I was here describing a much more recent photograph, taken just a couple of years ago); and the family Christmas (p. 195).”

Coe (2008)

Coe offers insight into the writing process. The phenomenology of the encounter with each photograph is thus embedded in the text.

*“I would scan them into my computer, then split the screen, so that the photograph was on one side, and the chapter I was writing was on the other.”*

Coe (2008)

*“I couldn't have written the descriptions without having the relevant photograph constantly in front of me.”*

Coe (2008)

In the novel itself, Coe illustrates the similarity between the ideas stimulated by photographs that would be familiar to the dialogue between phototherapy practitioners and their clients. Coe's context is domestic as he describes the scene but the context enlarges beyond the domestic as the novel is published.

*“ ‘Can you see her, Ruth, and me and Grandma?’*

*‘Yes. Where's Grandpa?’*

*‘He must have taken the picture. We'll go and ask him in a minute, see if he remembers’ ”*

Coe (2007, p38)

The description in the novel mirrors Coe's personal account of his own familial relationship with the family album, as he describes how family photographs act as catalysts to storytelling to his own children.

Jonathon Coe: *“As soon as we [my daughters and I] start looking at them together, I find myself starting to contextualise them - explaining, first of all, who the people are, and then talking about the places where the pictures were taken. Immediately, and seamlessly, this leads me into telling them stories about my family: so the relationship between photography and narrative becomes very fluid and direct.”*

Coe (2008)

David Lodge in *Consciousness and the Novel* proposed the argument that literature is able to provide more insights into psychology than psychology has offered to literature, so these arguments have been well rehearsed recently among the arts. Perhaps the simultaneous presence in bookstores of David Lodge's *Consciousness and the Novel* alongside Jonathon Coe's *The Rain Before It Falls* conveniently reinforces this point about the *psychological aesthetics* of photography and that the narrative engagement with a family album in the latter novel informs us about our relationship with photography at least as well as any overt psychological analysis offered.

Perhaps it is possible that, just as art may tell us more about psychology than psychology could ever tell us about art (which has been suggested at various times by Ehrenzweig, 1967; MacLagan, 2002, among others) photography may uniquely inform us about psychology. The psychological aesthetics of domestic photography offer the possibility that domestic photography is the most widely practiced *Outsider Art* form and the terms

© Mark Wheeler 2008-2009: Wheeler, M (2008), *Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis: the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs*, University of Derby 2009 workshop reader could be even be interchangeable. This practice of domestic *outsider art* photography overlaps, in our everyday experience of photography, those areas of media reproduced photography, fine-art photography and traditional family narrative domestic photography.

Now *the* most widely practiced *Outsider Art* form and the most widely practiced domestic photography is probably the mobile telephone (cellphone) with inbuilt camera. Clients in therapy are more likely to present photographs at Child & Family Therapy on the small screen of their mobile phone than in the old shoebox of prints that would have featured at the end of the twentieth century. This alters the dynamic with the psychotherapist, as they now have to sit side by side peering at a little screen, instead of passing a single print at a time across the therapy room.

The familiarity and frequent practice of the mobile phone photographer engenders in them a familiarity with the tool of their artistic expression, the cellphone camera, perhaps approaching that of many professional photographers with any of their camera bodies and lenses.

#### Photography: mediator and mediated

Photographs appear in many different contexts all around us. How might photographic prints and images contain or mediate an emotional or psychological process?

If photographs do somehow contain or mediate any emotional or psychological processes, questions arise whether this is primarily a matter of content, whether denoted or connoted, or does form have any significance? If the latter applies, there would be a significant role for abstraction beyond that of the rational modernist experiment.

The denotation – connotation distinction of semiotic analysis would need re-writing thus:

Denote;  
Connote;  
Emote;

That photographs have the capacity to invite or stimulate emotions has been proposed by photographers since the mid-nineteenth century, whether pictorialists or montage exponents, but the most succinct photographer's summary of this aspect of the photograph that is so relevant to psychotherapeutic contexts comes from documentary photographer Gene Smith:

*"Photo is a small voice, at best, but sometimes - just sometimes - one photograph or a group of them can lure our senses into awareness. Much depends upon the viewer; in some, photographs can summon enough emotion to be a catalyst to thought."*

W. Eugene Smith, Magnum Photos 1955

As a child I began to make photographs with a Kodak Instamatic25 camera given to me for my tenth birthday. I took great care over how I composed the elements in the square viewfinder. I soon became aware of how they would look in the final photograph, for example how the frame edges would cut through objects in the visual field.

My interest in photography as a child had much to do with my poor eyesight. At eight years old my depth of reasonable focus ranged from about 20cm to 2m. I was prescribed spectacles, but my new sharp picture of the world lacked any straight lines except those that intersected the centre of my spectacles' lenses so the photographs that I made provided me with a different story. They enabled me to construct my own reality through my camera and I have been busy doing so ever since.

I made transparencies with inexpensive process-paid Eastern European brands like Perutz and Orwo, so abundant and cheap. I would insert my slides into my father's family slide shows, which were a significant family ritual. My slides were often humorous or faked or out of context and I was intrigued by the reactions of others when these images appeared. Max Kozloff has considered this aspect of the impact of encounters with photographs:

*"Because still photography happens to be neither a temporal medium nor a freely created one, we remain far less physically and imaginatively omniscient as viewers when we see a photograph than when we consider a painting or look at a film."*

Max Kozloff (1978, p99)

People don't react to photographs in such a knowing way as drawings or paintings. They seem to be caught off guard. Having noticed this as a child, I saw it again working in a child and adolescent therapeutic community. The staff would look at the young people's photographs and react completely differently from their reactions to their paintings. As suggested by Kozloff, their cultural filters seemed to be out of circuit as if they were responding to the very screen of their memory. The lack of cultural filters is evidenced in our language; remarks like "This is our..." rather than "This is a photograph of our..." exemplify this point. Two case studies of very different established photographers in the 'fine-art' tradition illustrate the myths of photographic truths and illusions of near-perfect gestalts in photographs. These case studies also lead to ideas of emotional responses in making and viewing photographs.

#### Photographic truth mythologies; case studies: *Edwin Zwakman* and *John Blakemore*

Photographs made for public exhibition shed light on these particularly effectively. The viewer is not expected to have any privileged knowledge of the manufacture of these images; it might be anticipated that the viewer brings their own experience of previous encounters with photographs including those elsewhere in the gallery. This enables a less directed encounter than with a photograph in a newspaper where text proposes how the photograph is to be viewed, or with a domestic photograph where temporal continuity before and after the image is known rather than assumed.

Dutch artist Edwin Zwakman produces large-scale photographs by painstakingly reconstructing objects and landscapes from memory. The pylon in one of his pictures displays the majesty and grandeur of electrical pylons celebrated by the Futurists. However, the pylon in Zwakman's picture is 50cm tall, made from approximately 400 pieces of copper soldered together, the cables are made from vinyl and cotton wool is used in background: *"Fake but accurate"*, as Zwakman (2008) describes.

*"As I reconstruct the world, I work entirely from memory,"* Zwakman explains. *"I never use photographs or other reference material. All the places, objects and buildings I have seen morph into new variations. Scale and perspective change as well: the images do not show what one could photograph in such situations, but how one experiences and remembers them."*

Edwin Zwakman 2008

John Blakemore, whose monochrome landscape photography became famous from the 1970s onwards and is therefore from a superficially different tradition, reinforces this notion.

*"Truth is limited and is governed by the photographer's intentions"*

Both Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography draw attention to some of the underlying mechanics of our responses that enable both activities to be so powerful, but arise from the nature of the photographic medium and the context of our cultural history with photography. As a photography undergraduate I experimented with images that were emotive, using self-portraits, “*Equivalents*”, and reconstructed dreamscapes. These last led me into exploration of the idea of photography itself and what photographs mean to many of us. Some viewers responded uncomfortably, but unrelated to the apparent content. It was the commonplace items that claimed a kind of ‘reality trap’ (especially when photographed on Polaroid film).

This *reality trap*, or perhaps *reality gap* is one of the great strengths of photography as an expressive medium. In a college studio workshop I constructed room-sets of dreams and photographed them as though movie stills. I became fascinated about the strength of reaction to these dream photographs. Even students and staff who had already seen my sketch book drawings in preparation to the making of the photographs, who had also watched the evolution of the constructions in the studio and who were familiar with what I was trying to achieve, reacted unexpectedly strongly to the final prints. Some described them as uncomfortable to look at, even though they were only the familiar bits of coated paper marked by blackened silver halides.

As a student I asked myself whether it was the nature of the photographic image that allows it to bypass our personal filters, which we would routinely apply to other human made artefacts? At this time I met Jo Spence, who was showing her work that concentrated on her experience of breast cancer, and her emotional responses and experiences of treatment. Jo suggested that the strength of viewer’s responses reinforce the validity of photographs, whether emotionally laden like hers or merely ambiguous like mine.

The photograph is present in mass communication, private experience and as an art form. It has been analysed extensively from cultural & anthropological perspectives. However, despite its ubiquity, little has been published about the unconscious processes involved in photography and its consumption, apart from by a few photographers themselves. Such analysis lies in an interzone that is more than mere overlap between two or more parameters; analysis in the interzone creates resonances that may only occur in the interzone.

The illusion of near perfect gestalts of the photograph appeals to the conscious intellect. The illusion is explored by Wheeler (2004 pp27-65) in the context of all photography, but its importance in the therapeutic domain is in a superficial idea that a photograph is thus less threatening than other media. In therapeutic contexts it may therefore be more possible to engage some clients with photographs than more explicitly plastic art media, secure in the therapist’s knowledge that photography can sometimes be more powerful than paint or clay.

The illusory veracity of the two-dimensional paper borne photographic representations is a culturally reinforced thread that repeatedly surfaces in discourse as an often-unnoticed self-reinforcing hegemony:

*“A photograph is a poor thing, really. It can only capture one moment, out of millions of moments, in the life of a person, or the life of a house. As for these photographs I have in front of me now, the ones I intend to describe to you... they are of value, I think, insofar as*

© Mark Wheeler 2008-2009: Wheeler, M (2008), *Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis: the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs*, University of Derby 2009 workshop reader *they corroborate my failing memory. They are the proof that the things I remember – some of the things I remember – really happened, and are not phantom memories, or fantasies, imaginings”.*

Coe (2007, p38-39)

### Photographs and mind-brain

Developments in neuroscience and the emerging neuro-psychoanalysis are seeking possible connections between activities of the autonomic nervous system with art and music activity.

Curiously neuroscientists seem happy to use photographs unquestioningly, not in their research on these artefacts themselves, but as though they're unmediated connections with the content depicted on their surface, such as the use of photographs of mothers or infants and then interpreting the results as though those mothers or infants themselves had been present with the experimental subject as they passed through the big donut of the fMRI scanner.

Dr. Helen Fisher (2002), an anthropologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey, explored the biological basis for romantic attachment: *“Fisher's group is analyzing more than 3,000 brain scans of 18 recently smitten college students, taken while they looked at a picture of their beloved.”*

*Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 2002

Bartels & Zeki (2000 and 2004) performed similar research at UCL (University College London). They showed subjects a picture of their romantic partner for one study and their child for another, and observed subjects' brain activity by MRI scan. They concluded that the pattern was markedly different from when they looked at a picture of a close friend.

*“During the scan, photos of these socially and emotionally defined persons were displayed along with a grey baseline. The sequence also contained photos that are of less relevance for the current report; these included the volunteers' partners, a disliked person, an unknown child and adult”.*

Bartels & Zeki (2004) p1156

For Phototherapy, it is not that researchers like Fisher, Bartels & Zeki observed repeatable and predictable differences in fMRI scans of people viewing photos of lovers to photos of other people or things, it is that these researchers (and many others using fMRI, PET and other brain imaging technology) anticipated that photographs would serve as 100% effective substitutes for real people and objects.

Furthermore, these and other researchers before and after have discovered that photographs do indeed excite the responses from subjects that they would have anticipated had the things represented in those photographs actually been present in the scanner.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that the electro-chemical routes, stimulated by photographs, of neural pathways through areas of the physical brain, seem to parallel the metaphorical traffic through metaphorical areas which resemble them in the psychoanalytic mind models, proposed to result from more 3-dimensional stimuli from the external world. Both analyses have developed alongside photography over the past 150 years, and the neuroscientific model has depended on photography both as subject stimulus and measurement tool.

Trends towards rapprochement between neuroscience and psychoanalysis depend on data derived from such neuroscientific investigation, e.g. Schore (1994); Panksepp (1999); Kaplan-Solms & Solms (2002); Cozolino (2002); Wilkinson (2006). Many of the research results published about the effects of various relationships on the brain, supporting or stimulating these ideas, are actually describing the effects of photographs on the brain.

The limbic system is that cluster of brain areas increasingly associated with immediate emotional affect in response to external stimuli, hence highly relevant to phototherapy. We continue to desire to make and experience photographs as art, as well as experiencing photographs in domestic and therapeutic settings precisely because photographs have this gamut of psychological features unique to the medium and possible capacity to excite the limbic system.

### Psychological Aesthetics of photographs

An examination of the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs makes us all more sophisticated consumers of photographs and photography in every context. Any exploration of the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs will therefore be valuable in our understanding of PhotoTherapy techniques and in the practice of Therapeutic Photography.

*“...-all such talismanic uses of photographs express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality.”*

Sontag (1977, p16)

An image whose monochrome tonality is principally warm brown, whose content is of mountains and simple cottages, invites a particular response in most viewers. Perhaps a nostalgic pining for lost simpler times, or perhaps the pleasure of recognising our century of progress from short lives blighted by hard labour and disease. The illusion of age arises from our ingrained belief that we have learned to decode the clues in photographic images, that we have become sophisticated consumers of advertising images and news media images. It is an illusion based on our knowledge of apparent form despite clues in the content that should point our attention to more recent times, a tiny structure attached to a distant chimney that might be a satellite dish or television aerial. It is a delusion, not a deception. The difference between reality and affect is that brought by the viewer to the encounter with the image.

There is an inherent pathos to the photographic image that propels such a delusion. That pathos is invited by the knowledge that the moment (a brief 1/125<sup>th</sup> second moment) has passed. That moment is never to be reclaimed, even if that moment was just seconds ago before the camera-phone was turned to show the image on its tiny screen. However, the photograph invites, vicariously through the psychology of one's encounter with the photograph itself, the idea that the moment ought to be able to be reclaimed. The reclamation is of course illusory, especially when the viewer was not the photographer and even more so when the viewer may not have been present when the original negative or file was created. Sontag reinforces this:

*“All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.”*

Sontag (1977, p15)

There may be occasions that contradict this notion if there is evidence for moments when conscious intellectual photographic activity is overridden by unconscious process and emotion.

That unconscious forces might be at work became apparent to me while printing the *Stourbridge Lion* in 1983. The 35mm negative was made in my familiar SLR loaded with Ilford HP5 film in full sun in Pennsylvania in June. The roll comprised mixed contrast images developed in stale D76 in a makeshift darkroom with no temperature control and was very overdeveloped. To make the negative I revisited the scene at a time that would get full shadow under a canopy at the centre of the scene, shading The Stourbridge Lion and I had climbed onto fences and objects to get the right relationship of elements on the focusing-screen of the viewfinder.

Back in the UK three months later, I began printing the negative one October day just after lunch in a shared darkroom. Several hours passed without conscious knowledge, while I printed just this image. I only realised how much time had passed when I broke for a cigarette while the final print washed and saw had it become dark outside. However, although what emerged after several hours is not what was anticipated on the baseboard at lunchtime; now it had deeper less detailed shadows, but it brought into mind what I had previsualised when I had made the negative. The final print is no longer as I thought I recalled consciously previsualising as I began printing. The tonal emphasis gradually changed, unconsciously, during the afternoon. The composition remained fixed by the decision to print full-frame with visible bleed of the negative edges; only the tonality appears mutable. The final print evokes in me a rush of similar emotional experience to that I recall from the day of exposing the negative. Somehow in the printmaking experience I have unconsciously reclaimed the moment. Other viewers sometimes describe similar affect to that which I had reclaimed.

Thus photography can contain elements or dimensions of which we are not consciously aware but which we unconsciously invest in the making of images. Becoming very familiar with one's technique enables this to happen, as much to a mobile phone (cellphone) camera user as to a zone system monochrome worker.

*"In that sense any photograph, by implication, involves a set of questions and ambiguities endemic to its nature as an act of representation."*

Clarke (1997, p7)

Ehrenzweig (1967) defines stages of creative process for "minimum content":

The first stage he defines as "*PROJECTION*", of fragmentary and dis-integrated psychological elements out onto the canvas, a kind of chaos, equating with the *Paranoid Schizoid Position* of Object Relations theory. In photography this might equate with projection into the scene by the photographer as the three-dimensional world of colours and shapes forms slightly different images on each retina. The photographer looks through the viewfinder or under the focusing hood to see these elements desaturated and reduced to two dimensions visible now by saccadic eye movements. As the photographer seeks to be overwhelmed by the sensory data on the viewfinder, they tend to exclude sounds and other sensations from their conscious experience, entering the second phase.

The second stage Ehrenzweig termed "*MANIC OCEANIC*", which is ecstatic comprehension of the elements, simultaneously comprehensive and integrative he describes as almost magic '*at one-ness*' with their work. "*we feel our individual existence*

© Mark Wheeler 2008-2009: Wheeler, M (2008), *Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis: the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs*, University of Derby 2009 workshop reader *lost in mystic union with the universe*". At moments like these the artist/photographer may develop heightened awareness of the image and their surroundings, which has been described by photographer's in contexts ranging from war-zone coverage to tabletop still life photography.

Photographer John Blakemore (2008) describes, "*When I worked in the landscape I used to have certain sort of rituals to put myself in a receptive state of mind; so I had rituals; I always went out before sunrise so I experienced the birth of the light. I had particular routes I took to places; I practised what I called "silent sitting" which was to sit in a space where I was working, close my eyes and really just listen to the sounds and through that become more attuned to the space.*" (Extract from the full interview below) This phase is also notable in traditional darkroom work as the smudger concentrates on tiny local adjustments to micro-contrast or density while keeping in mind unconsciously the appearance of the final print as yet unseen, until the third stage.

The third stage in the creative process leading to the creation of an object embodying minimum content is the "*COMPROMISE PHASE*". At this stage the artist is adapting for the image to become digestible or accessible to view to some degree (equating with the *Depressive Position*). Only at this stage does deliberate aesthetic editing take place.

All three are embodied in the structure of the final work of art, such embodiment made possible by familiarity with the machinery, not taught technique, so as likely with a well practiced cellphone photographer as a gallery icon.

*"It is practice and experience, rather than journeyman training, which enables the unthought instinctual investment of unconscious activity and emotion in the print"*

Ansel Adams (Booth, 1983, 9-21)

*"the plastic reality of our external perceptions is directly related to the wealth of unconscious phantasy."*

Ehrenzweig (1967, p11)

While the existence of photography could liberate painting from some representational demands and invite comment and analysis of its form, and was pressed into service for this purpose by painters including Gauguin (Scharf, 1968, p272), abstraction also exists in the most representational of paintings, perhaps in the painterly folds in clothes worn by a portrait sitter. Abstraction exists in every photograph too, conveyed in the inarticulate form of the marks of the maker.

#### Case Study: Interview with John Blakemore, photographer, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Mark: *"Have you observed or been told of viewers emotional responses to any of your work?"*

John: *"Yes, I know people have very strong emotional responses to my photographs. It's difficult to quantify those though and they are of often quite different to my intentions of making the image but I find this intriguing because it's an extra richness because one's made an image which one thinks of in a particular way and then someone looks at it and thinks of it quite differently then this is an enrichment of what the image means."*

*"I've always been an image maker so I spent my childhood drawing and painting I never considered photography and then I was doing my National Service in North Africa and my mother sent me copies of... of a magazine which had photographs of the "Family of Man"*

© Mark Wheeler 2008-2009: Wheeler, M (2008), *Turku plenary lecture: Photo-Psycho-Praxis: the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs*, University of Derby 2009 workshop reader in it. *I wrote back and asked her to send me the catalogue and I decided I'd be a photographer. I've been a photographer ever since.*"

*"The recent work that I've done has been for me. I mean in a sense all photography is for oneself but this has been, I make photographs in my living room and then I make handmade books, one offs, so they are definitely for me."*

*"I've had viewers who've made very strong responses to images. Some people have told me that some of their images are very fitting to them in times of stress. I've had viewers who've said that the images are very painful to look at, not necessarily the same images."*

*"There's one of my series of tulip photographs where people have responded in terms of, I had a period when a couple of psychiatrists who came on my workshops and a couple of those responded to some of the tulip series and said they couldn't really talk about them, they felt strongly that there were sort of feelings of death within the photograph I've had people respond saying that in periods of stress a lot of my images they have found very comforting and I've had people give titles and meanings to work which are totally different from the way I've thought about them."*

*"One of my early studio tulip photographs I was very interested in the sort of gesture, the leaves and the stems of the tulips were dying so they weren't recognisably tulips and I saw this as being very much within very the tradition of the botanical drawing but I gave a print to a friend who was feeling rather depressed at the time and she later referred to it as her flames of devils."*

*"5x4 black and white; with the 5x4 one has a particular way of photo-graphing relating to the subject really it's comparatively slow compared to other cameras, it has a more meditative quality."*

*"Aah, these are very difficult questions [sigh]. One can say yes perhaps occasionally because one does get immersed in the activity of photographing but the cumulative work of photography I think is different because a painter changes a piece of, one piece of work through a period of time; for me the equivalent of that with photographs is working on the same subject for a long period of time so the cumulative effect comes through an accumulation of images and through that accumulation finding new ways of seeing and new ways of working. So I can see there might be parallels but I think that photography is a bit different."*

Mark: *So when working to make an image on the ground glass screen, or view finder, have you ever experienced that sort of loss of time or an altered state of concentration while actually making the image to the negative?*

John: *"Aha-ha-ha-haa, I don't know. When I worked in the landscape I used to have certain sort of rituals to put myself in a receptive state of mind; so I had rituals I very always went out before sunrise so I experienced the birth of the light. I had particular routes so I took to places; I practised what I called "silent sitting" which was to sit in a space where I was working, close my eyes and really just listen to the sounds and through that become more attuned to the space."*

*"Well the recent work that I've done has been for me. I mean in a sense all photography is for oneself but this has been, I make photographs in my living room and then I make handmade books, one offs, so they are definitely for me."*

John Blakemore has returned to the domestic, coming full-circle in the context of these ideas. The psychological aesthetics of all photography is deeply rooted in the domestic, and to some extent always drawn to orbit the domestic by the gravitational pull of domestic photography's great cultural mass.

Photographs in psychotherapy have to capacity to embody and convey simultaneously all of the processes considered in this paper. These processes are also simulations with our ingurgitation of the image content.

### Conclusion

The psychological complexity of our everyday encounters with photographs simultaneously draws together dimensions from a number of contexts beginning with the domestic but encompassing newsmedia, documentary, art-historical and cultural-historical aspects. To describe this in words, mutually agreed discrete packets of meaning, demands separating the simultaneous strands and threads and laying them bare. Thus each begin to look like separate narratives. However, it is the simultaneous presence of these different narratives that endows the photograph with its momentum and power, especially in the context of psychotherapy.

Photographs contain a reality trap that is both a cultural contextual force but also, by its lifelong repetition, a personal implicative force. It is from the practice of photography and the encounters with photographs in the therapy room that these ideas have emerged. The photographs themselves and our experiences of them are the most powerful evidence to support these arguments, as Jonathon Coe made clear in his description of writing *The Rain Before It Falls* quoted earlier.

Some photographs mediate, unconsciously the emotional state of their making. This is not to say that photographs may imbue an identical experience as though one were at the photographer's shoulder at the time of making the image. To view a photograph is to invite a phenomenology unique to that encounter additional to that investment in form and content. These processes are all extant in making and viewing photographs.

This offers the suggestion that one's photographic apparatus extends far beyond the camera and explicit contents, especially in the context of PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography. The cultural and personal contexts of every encounter with photographs may be influential, but not exclusive.

The practice of psychotherapists who conduct conversations with clients, prompted by photographs, whether present or not, is informed by the psychological aesthetics of making and viewing photographs: Photo-Psycho-Praxis.

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