

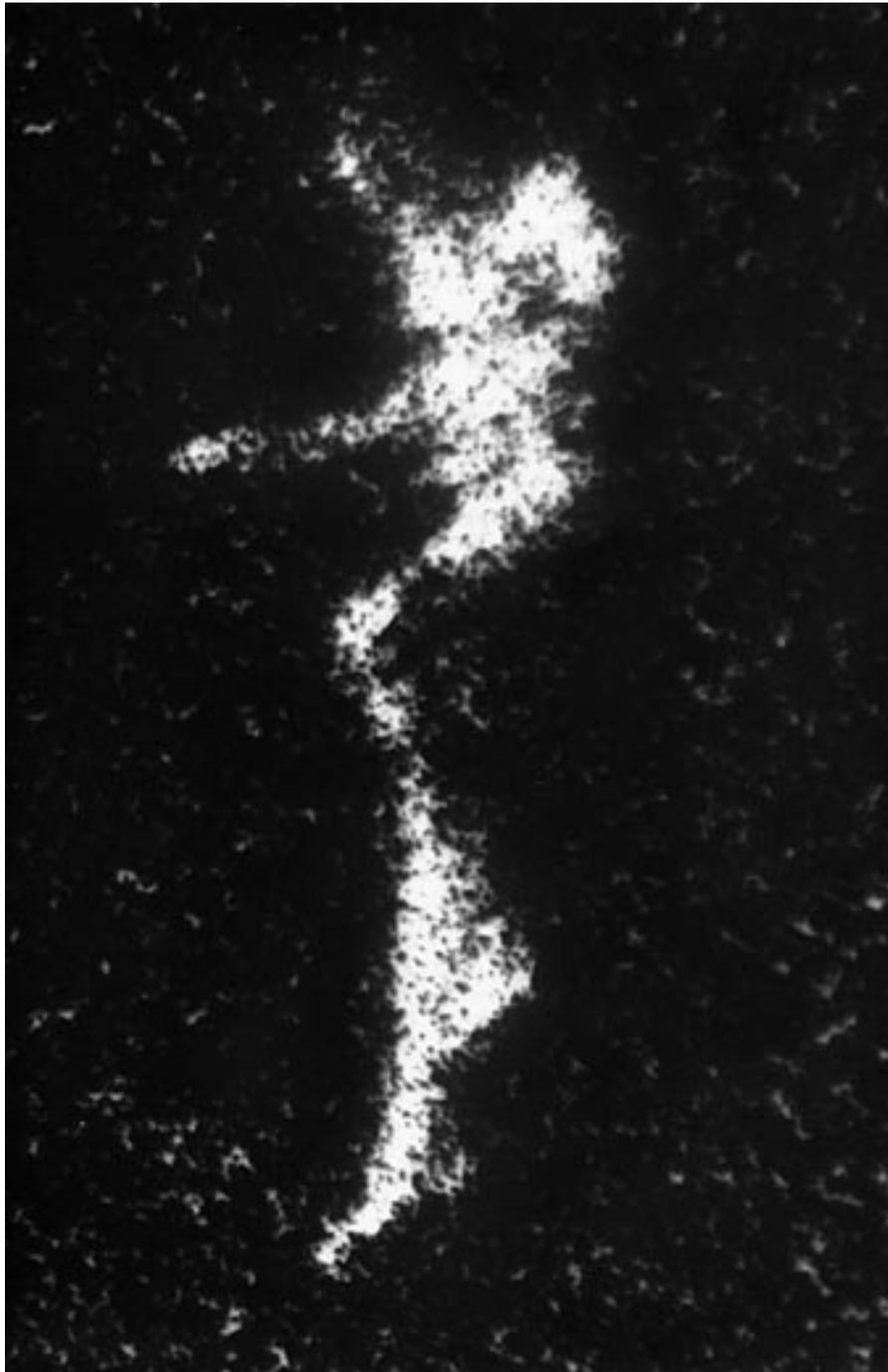
HOW THE WORLD LOOKS

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Jerry Spagnoli

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# HOW THE WORLD LOOKS

J e r r y   S p a g n o l i

The following was originally presented in a talk,  
“Why Daguerreotypes? Why Now?”  
at the Art Institute of Chicago  
on August 26 2003 .



I was just looking at the daguerreotypes in the exhibition which is just outside the doors of this hall and have been reminded just how brilliant some of these early photographers were. The images in that gallery are among the best ever made by any photographer but they have something extra, they are daguerreotypes.

What is special about the daguerreotype is inherent in its physical structure. The daguerreotype plate, being a sheet of polished silver, has an invisible substrate, it permits the viewer to directly engage the subject. What I mean by that is, when you look at a conventional photograph from the 1850's on, printed on paper or some other surface, you are always looking at a chemical stain of some sort, usually silver, on a textured surface, however subtly textured, it is textured and therefore present. With a daguerreotype the substrate is a mirror and the subject is suspended in this optical medium.

Clarity is an essential aspect of the camera's relationship to the world, daguerreotypes are uniquely capable of rendering images with that purity. It is unquestionably the ideal material if your interest in photography is the relationship of the camera and lens to the world, and that is the reason that I use it.

There is the impression that because the daguerreotype is an old medium that it is antiquated, that there is a nostalgic aspect to it. I've never been attracted to it because it's old. I use it because it's perfect.

The first time I saw a daguerreotype was in a flea market ( I suspect most people have been introduced to them in that way, they have rarely been presented in a formal setting ), I picked it up and I was amazed by the quality of the image and also dumb struck by the fact that the medium was extinct. That is where my interest in trying to make them began.

I'm going to present a rambling talk about my work and you will have to connect the dots to some degree but I hope to make a few coherent points here and there about how I incorporate the material and formal aspect of photography into the meaning of my work. I think that the best approach is to show you the work and explain how it progressed, how my thinking about the medium developed, and how I think the daguerreotype might fit into contemporary art practice.



When I began making photographs I was very interested in the spontaneity of the 35mm camera, and in particular the odd relationship that developed between what you saw in the world, the camera, and the images





that came out of this collaboration. I was fascinated by the fact that you could go out and aimlessly wander the streets and over the course of a year or two end up with a series of images which formed a coherent body of work. When I work on the street I don't exercise any control over situations other than noticing what is in front of me and hoping that the camera records it in some way. It seems amazing that a story could emerge from these random events. I

began thinking that the camera is the fundamental issue in photography, rather than the image. This point is essential to understanding what I do and a fruitful approach to understanding photography in general. I think art that deals exclusively with the pictorial rhetoric of the image is missing a substantial portion of the medium's potential to communicate ideas. In order for the viewer and the maker to be fully engaged with the work there has to be a complete, symmetrical relationship between the image made and the means chosen to make it. A photograph can be read by examining all of the elements that brought it into being. The choices an artist makes- whether to use black and white or color film, a large format or a 35mm camera, film or digital output- all create resonances in the finished image. Historical and social references are built into these materials and important subliminal reactions are triggered in the audience by them. Making casual choices about these things is to make images with one eye blind.

These images were made with a 5 x 7 view camera, in New York City between 1979 and 1982. I had seen the show "Era of Exploration" at the Metropolitan Museum and it featured photographs by the great western landscape photographers of the 1860's and 70's, and the essays in the book that accompanied the exhibition made some very interesting points about how the work reflected the intellectual climate of the period. I decided that I would apply some of the strategies of those photographers to the urban landscape. I began treating the city as if it were ancient, sublime and full of secret meaning. The ideas here were still based on pictorial rhetoric but I was acknowledging the camera's ideosyncratic participation by shooting the project with a view camera, the traditional tool of the landscape photographer. Ultimately it was about the transcendentalist view of nature as embodied in the landscape photography of the nineteenth century and the transposing of it onto an urban environment.



After I completed this body of work I took some time off. I rethought what it was I wanted to accomplish and how to go about it. I decided that I would produce images which highlighted the materiality of the medium. I wanted to make a point, that photography is a highly mediated experience and through that to allude to the mediated nature of our everyday experience of the world. The easy transparency of the medium could be dissembled and through that operation suggest the precarious nature of other systems of knowledge that we take for granted.



I had seen the Carravagio show at the Met and going through the show I was very impressed by the way he used hand gestures to tell stories. He took these gestures to an extreme as a communication device. They were melodramatic, emphatic, and they compelled the viewers attention. Staging these philosophical and religious tableau in contemporary settings gave them an immediacy for the viewers of his time, giving life to arcane tales. I realized that I was doing the inverse. In a culture devoid of mythological tales I was discovering stories just beneath the surface by using the technology of fact. This subversive use of objectivity gave the images the ring of truth while isolating the subject stripped it free of a larger context.



In looking at books that analyzed the details of great paintings in order to unravel their meaning. I realized that there was a well developed vocabulary which could be exploited and built upon to tell the tales that interested me. The openness of analyzing the particulars of a scene was very liberating. I decided that I should make the image more illusive so that people were really forced to bring themselves to the work. I wanted to create a puzzle, not to be obscure, but because I was interested in engaging each individual's personal resources to create meaning in the work.

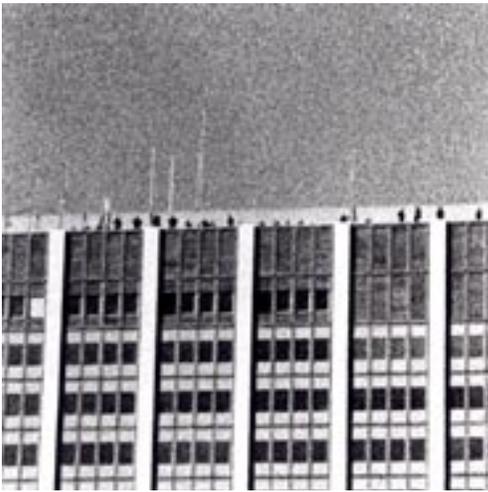
I did a whole series... these were all shot around the time of the first Gulf War, there was a certain atmosphere... This is interesting. When I shot this series I assembled it into a book, sequenced it, and I had it ready and then Bill Clinton got into office and it all seemed irrelevant. I don't know why. Now Bush is back in office and it suddenly seems important to me again. This has become the Bush series.



The idea of the gesture as a communicative element... I've always preferred looking at Renaissance drawings and studies rather than the finished paintings. The drawings are so beautifully rendered and there's a feeling of intimate communication. I was thinking about that work as I did this project. The attempt to use anatomy as communication and physiology to produce emotional expression, it goes to our deepest interpretive resources.

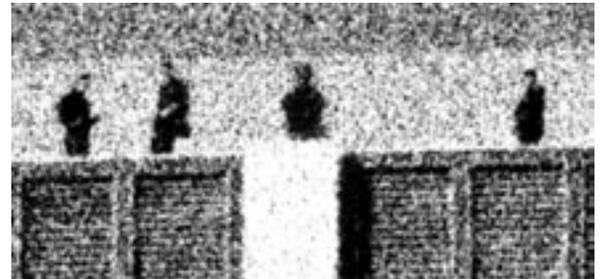


I like work that is open. I have no interest in forcing a particular issue in a very direct way. I want viewers to be able to bring themselves to the work, in their own way and at their own pace.

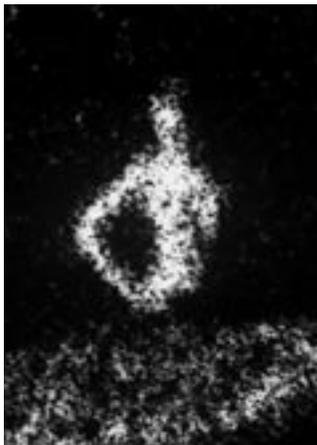


Now this one... I was at an anti-war rally in San Francisco and somebody pointed up at the Federal Building and said, "Look up at the roof", so I just clicked off a frame. When I got back to the studio I developed it and looked at it and I thought it was interesting so I made a print. When I looked at the enlargement I noticed the figures on the top of the building. I was fascinated by the fact that they are clearly recognizable. They are made up of maybe a hundred little grains of silver. There's a minute amount of actual, practical information but the gestures of power, surveillance, authority and contempt are

so thoroughly communicated that I began to wonder about where the limits of information and knowledge were, what is it that allows you know things in images.



The previous images were made by raising my enlarger up to about twelve feet, I was enlarging very small portions of the negative, perhaps 1/4 inch square. I pushed the limits of a conventional enlarging lens as far as it could go without producing optical aberrations, which I wouldn't accept. If I wanted to use even smaller portions of the original negative I would have to use a microscope. It allowed me to enlarge very small areas of the negative onto another piece of film and make prints from that enlarged negative, without compromising the optical integrity of the original. I was deliberately emulating scientific methodology to insure that I didn't introduce any flaws because of my instruments. I wanted the breakdown of the image to be the natural result of a neutral examination. I wanted the photographs to be fairly described as objective documents.





I began photographing people at a considerable distance. The first images were shot at a baseball stadium, I'd shoot from the other side of the stands, maybe a quarter mile away. I'd wait until a home run was hit and then I'd shoot so that I could get people being emotional.

Like this guy is obviously happy. You can see that, right? If you'd seen the image enough you'd recognize that he has a big smile. Now I was interested in this because it's a face and then it's not a face. When I was printing it I'd look at it in the tray I'd think maybe I'd gone too far. When I was framing it on the easel I had no idea where the head stopped and the background began.

When I looked at the images at a smaller degree of enlargement... I'd make a 16x20 with maybe a thousand people in it, I'd go searching through it for the most clear and distinct faces, the ones that had all off the information you'd ever want. Everything was there. I'd blow it up and it would look like this and I'd wonder, "well what was I seeing at that smaller scale?" I was presuming all of this information because of habits and experiences. I suspect most of our everyday lives fall into that trap. It's disconcerting to examine anything too closely.

My interest in cameras is based on their reputation as a reliable collector of information. The camera as an objectivity machine, completely truthful. This faith in vision goes back to the Age of Enlightenment when to see something was to know it, clarity of vision was an ideal. It's not the truth, cameras lie, photographs don't even resemble natural vision. If you think about it, the way you see organically is extremely different from the way the world is presented by a camera. Perspective is a completely constructed system. We've gotten so used to thinking in perspective, we're surrounded by architecture that enhances it, and images which emphasize it, that we just assume it's a natural way of seeing. It isn't. You don't actually see the things that the rules of perspective describe. The subversion of the integrity of the camera's view of the world is a fundamental formal issue for me.

These images were taken in Hawaii. There was a rock and quite conveniently there was a cliff about a half mile away overlooking it. I spend a couple of days photographing people jumping off and otherwise cavorting on this rock. After I processed the film and examined the negatives under the microscope I began recognizing classical postures occurring spontaneously in this group of people who were just hanging out. When I was working on the street with the previous project I was thinking about the timelessness of certain gestures. It's as if the whole history of the world is flowing just beneath the surface and by looking closely you could catch flickering traces, visual resonances of this eternal condition. Now that I was working with even smaller pieces, looking even more closely, I was finding more ancient poses. I was amazed at how these archetypal postures came up out of this dynamic of a rock, the ocean and people hurling themselves into the void.

This brings up the issue of my interest in the surface of the film. The obvious fact of photography is that it is uniquely talented at rendering surfaces. It is also strictly limited to depicting *only* the surface of things. Human beings are similarly limited. You can know a great deal about what is going inside yourself but the world outside can only be guessed at, from hints gleaned from the surfaces of others. One of the allusions contained in the photomicrographs refers to this issue. They are photographs of the film surface, that's why they are called photomicrographs. There are people occupying the images but all you can know about them is the pattern rendered on the screen of grain, the pattern left on the surface which separates you from the subject. That's a good metaphor for interpersonal relations in my experience.



The falling figures were shown at the Edwynn Houk Gallery. I made the images life size, they are approximately five and a half to six feet tall. I hung them around the gallery so that the viewer could approach them and they would be full size but they break up, so you had information and you had oblivion. In this show I also presented a series of daguerreotypes of gestures which were similar to the street images that I had made. I shot them one to one also so I had these grainy one to one images of full figures falling through space and these super sharp daguerreotype images... What you have with daguerreotypes is a hyper-reality effect at the focal plane and then a very rapid falling away of focus ... this conflict... this push and pull of objective and subjective, information and oblivion was highlighted by both the daguerreotypes and the photomicrographs. There is something else about daguerreotypes which I hadn't realized until I made these images, particularly with hands and fingernails. Daguerreotypes emphasize the perishability of flesh. The parts

of the body where blood flows close to the surface are rendered darker than the surrounding skin because of the peculiar color sensitivity of the plate. This darkening at the surface where contact between the inside of the body and the outside occurs is an unsettling reminder of our physical vulnerability, our mortality



You can see where I stole poses from paintings, which is entirely appropriate given that the Renaissance is where photography was invented. I should say it is the moment where the ambition which resulted in photography was born. They just didn't have the means, the chemicals weren't available, some of the mechanical apparatus wasn't ready but clearly the desire to depict the world that animated the interests of all of the Renaissance was a photographic vision. One of the thoughts in the back of my mind while working on this project was, "What if Leonardo had the daguerreotype at his disposal?"

Now I'll show you some earlier work I did with daguerreotypes. As I said before when I started photography I was working with color print materials, paper photographs. When I began making daguerreotypes I was getting boring, tedious images. The problem was that I had trained myself to deal with paper photography.





Paper photography's agenda was defined in the early twentieth century by the availability of halftone reproduction. If you go out and look at any of the great photographers from about 1900 to 1960 they're all dealing with issues which are fundamentally graphic design problems. Their work is about things like the compression or expansion of space, patterns of light and shadow, the lines produced by reducing the three dimensional world to two dimensions. The Museum of Modern Art's historical perspective, which I have tremendous respect for, and is a perfectly reasonable analysis of the history of photography in the twentieth century, is based on the graphic design potential of the medium. Having studied that tradition I began shooting daguerreotypes with those same ideas in the back of my mind and they wouldn't work. You couldn't use any of those tricks.

The strength of the daguerreotype lay in its ability to render "the thing itself" as Oliver Wendell Holmes noted in the 1850's. All of the gimmicks are useless when making daguerreotypes. A good daguerreotype is the subject simply presented. As with Atget, it's simply a matter of knowing where to stand, that's the only issue, and knowing when to take the lens cap off.

When I was struggling with the process I tried to figure out what it was that had charmed me the first time I saw a daguerreotype. You look at a portrait and it is an artifact. You are holding in your hand a silver plate which has the image of a person on it and that person sat opposite that plate at the moment of exposure. In case you don't know, the daguerreotype plate is placed inside the camera and faces the sitter during exposure. The light that fell on the subject was projected by the camera lens onto the plate. It was processed. And that is the image. This directness is one of the most striking features of a daguerreotype. When you are holding that plate in your hand you are holding something that is very close to the sitter, in a real physical way. To magnify that effect, sometimes you will find a lock of hair, or something personal like a poem written inside the case.



In this particular case you could look at the daguerreotype and say, "Well, that's a charming image of this girl," and then you'd look at the other side and think, "I wonder why that bit of fabric is there?" and then if you looked closely you'd realize that it's a swatch of the fabric the girl's dress is made out of. When that dawns on you there's an electric jolt of recognition. All of a sudden the piece becomes complete. It becomes an event preserved, and now present. It's a transcendence of time. I think there is something inherent to the daguerreotype which engages time in a very immediate way. I can't explain it concisely enough to discuss it here but it is common to hear people remark on the immediacy of the image when people see their first daguerreotype.

I began to think about how I could deal with these features so I made a box. I took a sunflower and I made an image. Then I took the sunflower itself and I placed it into the top of the box. The box has a ground glass window, you can't see through it but light can enter the box and there's a peephole in the front of the box which looks into a chamber which contains the remains of the sun-



flower which had been the subject of the daguerreotype. That sunflower will continue to decay, it's basically a tomb. I then placed the sunflower's image into a case and placed the case into the drawer at the base of the box, creating a kind of reliquary.

Thinking further about the issues of artifacts and ephemeral issues like life and death I got this idea to ... Well, I made this box and I sensitized a daguerreotype plate and I put it up on top of the box. I put a firecracker on top of the daguerreotype plate, and put a sheet of anodized aluminum on top of the firecracker, and I set it off. It blew a hole in the sheet of aluminum, and I got a photogram of the explosion on the plate. I put the photogram in a case and put that inside of the box. I took the drawer out and I threw the spent firecracker in the base of the box.

I make a half a pack of firecrackers at a time. My goal is to eventually make a gross of firecrackers. Someday I'll have a hundred and forty four of these and I'll do an installation somewhere.

Daguerreotypes of cities are just as potent as the more familiar portraits. This is a daguerreotype of San Francisco in the 1850's. The daguerreotypist went to a lot



of trouble to make it. When you are actually in the presence of a daguerreotype like this, you have a palpable sense of the of these buildings, there, on a hillside, on a sunny day, one hundred and fifty years ago. Now combine that with this figure in the foreground who is practically the subject of the image, and there is an enigma placed into the most straightforward document imaginable. What is this person doing there? I can't even tell if he's facing forward or backwards. And who's hat is that? It's San Francisco so anything is possible, even in the nineteenth century, but this is clearly some sort of ornate private joke that we are not privy to.



What is important to remember when looking at daguerreotypes is that daguerreotypes were not made gratuitously. They weren't snapshots. People had very specific reasons for having their image made, and they had very particular receivers in mind. When you look at a daguerreotype and someone is looking back at you, and you are engaged with that sitter... the reason it works, the reason it feels the way it does is because you are standing in the place that they intended some particular person to stand. You are receiving a communication from them. Whether it is humorous, serious or affectionate, you are reading somebody's visual letter.

I think that every daguerreotype has to be understood that way. They were meaningful and I think knowing that helps you to engage them more directly.



I shoot on the street and I'm fascinated by the kinds of things that happen there. So now with the daguerreotype I have undertaken a project modestly titled "The Last Great Daguerreian Survey of the Twentieth Century." I try to find events or situations that may contribute to that series. This is an early piece, taken in San Francisco. It's a pretty straight forward image. It's a UPS truck parked on the sidewalk in front of the Pacific Stock Exchange. Somebody might wonder "why is the truck parked there?" if they had an enquiring mind.

The reason is that there is too much traffic on the street. In order to not inconvenience the bumper to bumper, rush hour traffic the driver has gotten out of the way. Because of the length of the exposure, which is about four minutes, the traffic vanishes, but you would never know that unless you went that extra step of wondering, and perhaps examined the clock at the left edge of the image which, under magnification clearly shows the time, a hint. I really like that. The image is good, it will reward the casual viewer,, but if anybody bothers to think about it there's a little extra thing that ... You can get that from a daguerreotype.

This is Bill Clinton arriving at the opera house for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations. This was an interesting situation. It was the first time I actually managed to get a press credential, so I was in the press pit with all these video crews and I had a 5x7 Deardorf racked out with a 450mm lens on it. Everyone kept asking me, "Who are you shooting this for?" So I told them that I was shooting it for fun and they all seemed relieved.



This is a paint factory fire. There was this enormous fire and it was a little bit of a news event, it made the front page of the news the next day and of course there was the aerial view of the scene, the fireman hosing down the fire, and the firemen carrying someone out of the building. So I thought, "Why do they bother to send photographers to news events like this, the formula is set, why don't they just photoshop a stock photo and save a lot of trouble, eliminate the middle man?" This is actually how it looked from where I stood, and how the daguerreotype saw it, a vantage point of no interest to the editors of daily newspapers. Just as a favor to the future I took the front page and folded it up and put it into the case, behind the



image.

From the audience. "Could you say something about the chromatic effects on the daguerreotype plate?"

Sure, daguerreotypes are orthochromatic, they are very insensitive to warm colors. Reds, oranges and yellows come out unnaturally dark, and blues come out very light. On the street you don't have much trouble with it, but with people it can be a problem if they have suntans. It can actually take three stops more exposure to do a portrait of someone with a tan. As a matter of fact in the early days when exposure times were many minutes it was suggested that people should powder their faces with flour in order to be photographed.

This is Tiffany's on Fifth Avenue. Views can vanish as easily as the people in my daguerreotypes. I went back last winter, I love the light you get on Fifth Avenue in the winter, the way it comes down the street. The light is at sunset height in the middle of the afternoon, and it comes raking across the faces of these buildings. So I wanted to get a whole plate view of this facade, because now I'm working with whole plates and I've got the technology down so I can do a pretty good job. When I went back there they had placed a



new set of cement planters directly in front of the doors, I guess to prevent someone from crashing a car through the doors in order to steal something. So this is an image which can no longer be made, at least not satisfactorily.

Things change. You don't notice how much the sun moves from day to day. There was one occasion in San Francisco when I was shooting these rocks out in the water ... I had built a box that had a square foot of the sand from this beach inside the box, I had the latitude and longitude on a brass plate on the face of the box. You'd open the lid and there'd be a square foot of sand from the position I shot from and you'd pull out the drawer and there'd be a daguerreotype of the view from that location. It's a very simple idea but as it turned out it was not very simple to get the daguerreotype. I'd go back day after day trying to make it. I was having a technical problem with the plates. Driving one and a half hours to get there and one and a half hours to get back. It took me so long trying to make this image that the sun had completely changed position, or rather the earth had tilted on its axis sufficiently so that I could no longer get the effect I wanted. I had to wait until the next year before I could go back and reshoot it. You'd never think about that if you were just going out and having a picnic on the beach. The things you notice making daguerreotypes.

This is Fifth Avenue in the winter. Crowds of people. For me it's just an ideal situation. Earlier I mentioned the eternal gestures that surface in the day to day world and how they can be detected and extracted by using the camera's dispassionate gaze. In a different way you can find the references to historical motifs on the surface of the architecture of cities. In this case the effect is not the spontaneous manifestation of something essentially human. It is an attempt to embellish the present with the prestige of the past. These embellishments suggest seriousness and dignity but



are actually a meaningless pastiche and are actually the symptom of cultural exhaustion. For the photographer it's as though an enormous stage set has been built with the history of Western Civilization as its back drop. With the low winter sun raking across these facades you have an elegiac effect which is perfect for my survey.



(Detail)

From the audience: "Is the blue natural?"

The blue is the result of overexposing a daguerreotype. What happens is the silver particles build up in a chaotic mass and refract light in a blue wavelength. So

when the sky is blue in a daguerreotype it's blue for exactly the same reason that the sky itself is blue. I think that's a fabulous analogue.

Daguerreotypes are quite small for the most part, and there is always an interest in looking closely at them. I think because of the sparkly quality of them, they are so engaging. You notice things in small daguerreotypes that you'd overlook in large prints. Even when they are projected large you don't look as closely as when you have the daguerreotype in your hand.

This is the vigil outside JFK Jr.'s loft in Manhattan. This is a very

good example of how daguerreotypes operate differently from conventional photographs. You never lose the habit of trying to make a good photograph. So you go to a place and you look for a place to stand that will make a good photograph, and there wasn't any way to make this situation work. The dynamics were all wrong. But I realized that there was a closed loading dock door and there was a narrow ledge that I could just about get my tripod set on. I did that so at least I would be shooting over the crowd and get the scene laid out. So I shoot one plate and just as I'm ready to shoot the second the cameramen all tear their video cameras off their tripods and go rushing across the street and there's this big commotion. So I'm thinking, "Oh jeez!" and I was all set up so I just shot it because that's what was there.

I'm not going to wait for them to come back, they could all go home for all I know. That night on the evening news there's the video that was being shot while I made this daguerreotype and it was a sergeant announcing that they had found the bodies. So again this is one of those situations where there's the event and then there's another event, the event that I watched, and the event that the daguerreotype saw.

Working with materials that keep you from doing what you want usually result in more interesting images than you might have made if you could have your way. I rely on difficulties to make my work interesting. If I could actually control everything my work would be so incredibly boring I wouldn't be here showing it to you. So the daguerreotype is perfect for me.

This is a New York Yankees tickertape parade. This is about as close as you can get to a parade without a press credential. Here again the limitations worked for me. If I had been able to photograph the parade itself I don't think it would have been nearly as interesting. In fact this image is about something which has nothing to do with the parade, and it demonstrates the rewards of working with a medium which likes to see the world in it's own way.

This is Wall Street at Christmas time. This image combines all sorts of symbols, the Greek temple columns, the tree, this pagan symbol of the fertility, and the celestial light streaming down the street.

The Renaissance was the start of the modern city, and it was also the beginning of the idea of individual striving, and genius and... the modern world was generated by the notion that a person could go to the city and make themselves into anything that they had the wit to be. I think that might be an historical period which is coming to an end. With digital technologies and other issues coming up cities will be dissipated. It might take a couple of hundred years... so something that I keep in the back of my mind is that these documents will last ... My intention is that the real effect of these images will be on the audience of the future who will not have direct



experiences with these situations. These will seem like remote ancestral events, strange antediluvian images. That's why I like crowds in the city, I don't think it's an environment that's going to last. Cities will ultimately be seen as inefficient. I could get into a series of reasons why digital technology will cause that but I will save that for another time.

Signs are always great. By the way, daguerreotypes are always backwards, laterally reversed. With a conventional photographic process you view the original negative or transparency through the base material but with a daguerreotype the base is a sheet of metal so you have to flip it around to view the subject. I've been asked why I don't use mirrors to correct the image but I like things backwards. You have this extremely realistic image and this completely strange depiction.

This is New Years Eve in Times Square in 2000. I can remember being 12 years old and thinking to myself, "Oh, wow, I'm going to be alive when 2000 happens. It's going to be amazing! If the world doesn't end." Because everyone thought the world

was going to end in the year 2000 when I was a kid. So as it turned out I had this project and I needed to end up on the top of this platform to make this image. I didn't need to, it's not like my life depended on it, but it would be really important to do that. Through the intercession of some very helpful people and their very helpful friends I actually managed to



do it. So I got a position at the top of this scaffold, about forty feet high, with about 20 or 30 video crews from around the world with live feeds everywhere. And I'm up there for about five hours and because I'm just being done a favor, I have to hold my position. I can't go anywhere. I can't do anything. I have to stand in this one spot and basically keep my legs spread where the tripod legs are and fight off encroachers. And of course it's winter time. So I'm waiting and I'm shooting. Every time they had midnight in some time zone there would be a mini celebration so I'd shoot a plate and then wait for an hour and shoot a plate. The big moment comes and I start the exposure about two minutes before midnight because I calculated a four minute exposure. When midnight strikes all hell breaks loose. Balloons rise from the ground, and confetti drops from the sky in such profusion that you can't see twenty feet. The entire structure of Times Square suddenly became a bowl filled with noodles. Not only that but, of course everyone on the platform is getting real excited and we're forty feet high and it's made of some kind of structural aluminum so it's starting to sway. There's a nine year old girl standing next to me who is jumping up and down screaming, "I can't believe it's happening, I can't believe it's happening!" and she's jumping up and down as hard as she can right next to my tripod. The tripod is swinging in an arc, back and forth. So I figured, "OK, What's this going to look like? What can you do?" So after all that I get my stuff together, pack it up, go back to the studio.

I developed all of the plates. I had about 12 plates. I didn't clear them. I figured that I could do that later because by now it was two or three in the morning. I get up the next morning and I go over and I feel that one of the holders still has a plate in it. Now it's been thirteen hours and I figure this one is not going to work out. Latent



image keeping is very poor in daguerreotypes, maybe a few hours. I figured what the hell, and I process it. And ... it's this image, and it came out perfectly. The daguerreian gods decided this image needed to exist. My abilities had nothing to do with it. I basically carried the equipment there and carried it back. I cannot take any responsibility for the fact that this looks the way it does. It's an absolute miracle.

There was a brilliant daguerreotypist, Thomas Easterly, who had photographed a bolt of lightening and was very proud of it so I've made it my task to try to do bolts of lightening. Actually it's more complicated than that, that's just my short explanation. This one in particular is interesting to me because it was made with the help of the internet. The way I arranged for this to happen was by monitoring the Doppler radar on the weather channel site. I could follow the storm as it approached and when I heard a bolt strike on the north side of my building ( I knew it was coming from the north ), I uncapped the lens and gave it a nine minute exposure. I was doing something else and I heard this Crack, Boom! so I turned around and of course it was gone so I thought, "I hope that was in the frame." I'm really pleased with this image.

These are some things from a new project I'm working on. I want to give a brief description of my thinking about this. It will illustrate how I integrate the camera into the meaning of the work.

I had been thinking about some of the recent photography coming out of Germany. It has a lot of references to the German Romantic landscape tradition. This started me thinking about the painters in America working at about





the same time who were dealing with the sublime landscape. This led me to develop a project which required large color prints and some unusual optics. In trying to visualize the look of the images I realized the only way it would work would be to use pinhole lenses. I built two cameras, one with a super wide angle view and the other with a super telephoto lens. I'll deal with the super wide images here.

There's an ancient cosmology, I think it's of Mediterranean origins, and it proposes that the sun isn't actually an object in the sky but is in fact an aperture in the dome of the sky and the dome is protecting the earth from the radiance beyond. Without this protection humanity would be incinerated. I believe that's

the premise for the design of the Pantheon in Rome. I began thinking of the pinhole camera as a model of this universe. The camera is a box with an aperture that lets in light, and the sun is an aperture letting light into the world we inhabit, and there is larger space beyond the sun / aperture. So there is a series of receding spaces in this system, with the camera operating as the microcosm. I think that's very interesting. There's something beautiful about the symmetry of it. So the idea developed that I would shoot a series with the sun as the primary component of the image, the central motif. Just the other day I was looking at a book called "Real Spaces" by David Summers and he discusses the idea of the sublime suggesting that photography is funda-



mentally engaged with that subject because light is its object and light is a force, something with a direct connection to the infinite, which is the singular issue of the sublime. The pinhole aperture enhances the relationship between the photographic medium and light by allowing the film to confront a scene unimpeded by optical manipulations. The natural behavior of photons is what makes a pinhole lens work, an inherent physical property of light is utilized to render the image. In an interesting way this returns to the earliest days of the daguerreotype when the characteristic notion of the medium was that photography allows nature to paint itself, without the intervention of the artist. There was a very common illustration of this from the daguerreian era.





Using a pinhole lens has a number of advantages when shooting directly into the sun. You don't have lens flare or any of the other aberrations created by the glass elements of a conventional lens. The artifacts that you do get are actually quite interesting, for example the streaks that you get, those rays ... What's interesting about them is that the rays are actually occurring inside the box. So again there are layers of image planes. You've got the sun out there, showing the light beyond, and then you've got the world, and then you've got the light inside the box, the ring you see is actually inside the box. So the image actually depicts three layers of the universe.

I guess that's enough for the time being...

... Any questions?

