Nature and abstraction in twentieth-century photography

In much twentieth-century art, it could be argued that the desire for transcendence finds its voice in abstraction. Vassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Agnes Martin are only a few of the major twentieth-century abstract painters whose art can be related to an expression of the sublime. Novak's characterizations of baroque versus classical modes of expression can also be extended to the twentieth century. Painters like Kandinsky and Pollock, with their active, organic forms may be seen on the side of the baroque, across from the reductive, often architectonic, classicizing tendencies of Malevich, Rothko, Newman, and Martin.

Tendencies towards abstraction are also present in much twentieth-century photography, including work touching on the spiritual in nature. In an absolute sense, little photography deviates from the representational, being based as it is on an image of the real derived through the optics of the camera. Certainly it is possible to produce a photograph whose subject is unrecognizable. The earliest examples are probably the "Vortographs" of Alvin Langton Coburn from 1916, followed by considerable experimentation with abstraction by numerous "New Vision" photographers of the 1920s and 1930s such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. However, for many photographers a more interesting problem has been a tension or reconciliation between the medium's descriptive and abstract possibilities.

We can find subjective and objective approaches to the relationship of representation and abstraction. Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, the subjective (sometimes termed romantic) approach emphasizes the inner state of the artist, while the objective (or realist) approach appears to confine itself to a description of external reality. To some extent the subjective approach seems to align itself with more active baroque forms, while the objective approach is often more classical and reductive. Within twentieth-century photography Alfred Stieglitz, Minor White, Aaron Siskind, Harry Callahan, and Thomas Joshua Cooper all seem to fall within the subjective mode, while Wilson Bentley, Karl Blossfeldt, Walker Evans, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Richard Misrach appear more objective.

The expression of the descriptive yet abstracted photograph as a subjective metaphor probably has its origins in the work of Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), perhaps "the central figure in the development of early twentieth-century photography." Stieglitz had many important roles, not only as a photographer but as a theorizer, writer, publisher, and gallery director. Through his periodical publications, Camera Notes (1897-1902) and Camera Work (1903-1917), he played a major role in the fight for recognition of photography as an art form. Central to his thinking was the modernist conviction that photography needed to be appreciated for its

own particular qualities as a medium, and that these qualities could best be illuminated by comparison with the most avant-garde art of the time. Through his gallery, 291, he was the first to introduce modernist art to America, exhibiting from 1908-1916 the work of Europeans such as Matisse, Cezanne, Picasso, Picabia, Brancusi, and Braque, and American abstractionists including John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

Stieglitz was first introduced to photography through his studies as an engineering student in Berlin in the 1880s under the scientist Hermann Wilhelm Vogel. His photographs in Europe from this time, and in the early years after his return to America in 1890, were decidedly in the vein of the picturesque: quaint genre studies in the mode of earlier English artistic photographers such as Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson. Influenced by the Symbolist movement to explore the subjective possibilities of photography as an expressive medium, by 1902, he had gathered together a group of similarly minded Pictorialist photographers, including Edward Steichen, Frank Eugene, Gertrude Kasebier, and Clarence White, to form the so-called Photo-Secession.

Softening of detail is probably the one technique that unites almost all Pictorialist photography, in a legacy passed down from earlier artistic photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron. Characteristics associated with objective description, such as sharp focus, seemed in their minds to mitigate against the possibility for the medium to express an inner reality - for them a necessary attribute of legitimate artistic expression. Turning away from the factual character of most nineteenth-century photography, Pictorialists including the photographers of the Photo-Secession investigated the hand manipulative possibilities of photographic processes including gum bichromate, carbon, and platinum printing, to produce self-consciously subjective images which emulated the paintings which they admired. Richly evocative photographs like those of Edward Steichen used a reductive, tonally moody, soft-focus technique to produce images that look more like drawings or etchings than conventional photographs.

Although Stieglitz actively promoted the work of the Photo-Secessionists in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, perhaps due to his exposure to modernist art, his own photographs largely turned away from the Pictorialist approach. While the abstract art of the early twentieth century which Stieglitz exhibited at 291 deviated from the representational in what was termed the "anti-photographic", Stieglitz, in both his writings and his own photography, increasingly came to reject the painterly approach of the Pictorialists. Instead he embraced the formal values of abstract art within a search for the purely photographic, while still retaining the subjective aspirations of Symbolist art. Recounting the making of his celebrated 1907 image *The Steerage*, years later, Stieglitz stressed both the formal geometry of the picture and its metaphysical yearnings: 27

"A round straw hat, the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right, the white draw-bridge with its railings made of circular chains below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape. I stood spellbound for awhile, looking and looking. Could I photograph what I felt, looking and looking and still looking? I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life."

Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, photogravure, 32.0 x 26.7 cm.

By the twenties Stieglitz also began to see possibilities for photography in the series rather than the individual picture, most notably in his extended composite portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe taken over several decades. While many nineteenth-century photographers published their images as series, each photograph was seen as individual. The Pictorialists also emphasized the individual image. The O'Keeffe portraits stem from Stieglitz's conviction that the human personality was far too complex to be described in a single photograph taken in one instant, and a more fruitful approach to representing this complexity was to build an extended portrait through a series of photographs capturing many moments and aspects of the person over a long period of time.

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This serial approach is also evident in the various groups of cloud photographs Stieglitz made in the twenties. Stieglitz titled the first series of 1922 "Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs", and the 1924 series "Songs of the Sky". Rather than being factual meteorological records, the cloud photographs, like much early abstract painting, take music as their model of an ideal abstract art. "I wanted a series of cloud photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch (the great composer) he would exclaim: Music! music! Man, why that is music!"28 Most of these earlier sky pictures still retain a link to traditional landscape photography though, with the horizon often retained within the view and sometimes as much as one third of the picture area showing the earth.

With the 1927-29 "Equivalents", however, the horizon has generally been completely eliminated from the images, leaving the viewer floating in a space which has no sense of time, place, direction, gravity, or means of orientation. Detached from any obvious point of reference, the clouds function as abstracted forms. The "musical" mood of the images is set by their generally dark tones and compositional reliance on rhythmic formal patterns.

Alfred Stieglitz, Equivalent, 1931, gelatin silver photograph, 11.8 x 9.2 cm.

While the "Equivalents" were always grouped as series when he exhibited them, they in no way reflect the passage of real time, but rather the changing nuances of Stieglitz's subjective inner state. The "Equivalents" are perhaps Stieglitz's most eloquent expression of the possibility of photography being simultaneously abstract and descriptive, and reflecting both the inner and outer manifestations of reality.

28 Alfred Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds" (1923), reprinted in Photographers on Photography, p. 112.
While in no way altering the objective reality before his camera lens (other than its translation into black and white tones), it was Stieglitz's belief that these pictures would function as "equivalents" for his own subjective emotional states, and "through clouds to put down my philosophy of life." 29

Roughly contemporaneous with the serial photographs of Stieglitz but based on less subjective intentions are the equally abstract but far more objective serial images of his fellow American Wilson Alwyn Bentley and the German Karl Blossfeldt. Like Stieglitz in his "Equivalents", both photographers used nature as their source, but with a highly descriptive approach that depended exclusively on the formal characteristics of the object represented. Their work is in some respects the culmination of a tradition of naturalist photography, often of botanical specimens, that begins with William Henry Fox-Talbot's "photogenic drawings" of the late 1830s and includes the cyanotype photograms of Anna Atkins and Bertha E. Jaques and the platinum prints of Edwin Hale Lincoln.

W. A. Bentley was an eccentric Vermont farmer and amateur photographer, who over the long winters used his spare time to conduct a life-long fascination with snowflakes. Beginning in 1885 and continuing until his death forty-six years later, Bentley made many thousands of photomicrographs of the infinite variations on these tiny crystalline forms, and of the related dewdrops, raindrops, and frost formations. In 1931 the American Meteorological Society published a book of over 2000 of these images 30, which are notable for their clarity of detail and regularity of pictorial approach.

By painstakingly scraping away from the photographic plate the emulsion surrounding the snowflake image, the symmetrical geometric shapes, all based on the hexagon, float on a black background. Arranged in grids of twenty-four to a page spread, in order of increasing complexity, these photographs represent an obsessive typology of the formal possibilities of the snowflake, and a compelling meditation on the limitless mystery and beauty of nature.

29 Ibid.

The 1928 publication of Karl Blossfeldt's *Art Forms in Nature* immediately established him as an important photographer of the early twentieth century, invited by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to participate in the important 1929 Stuttgart exhibition "Film und Foto". Blossfeldt trained as an artist-craftsman designer, steeped in the conservative values of Jugendstil's desire for a return to a tradition of art based in nature. Beginning in about 1898 he systematically photographed details of plants as a teaching aid for a course he taught in "Live Plant Modeling" at the Academy of the Konigliche Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, and by his death in 1932 he had made over 6000 of these botanical studies.

Being intended as a pedagogical tool and having no pretensions as artworks in themselves, these photographs used the most economical pictorial means of isolating the plant parts on a grey or white background. Thus despite his essentially conservative values, Blossfeldt's photographs avoided the derivative and self-conscious approach of much Pictorialist photography, and their reductive factuality placed them at the forefront of the avant-garde photography associated with "The New Objectivity", along with the roughly contemporary portraits of August Sander published in his *Antlitz der Zeit (Face of Our Time,)* and the photographs of Albert Renger Patzsch in his *Die Welt ist schon, (The World is Beautiful).*

Like Stieglitz's "Equivalents", the photographs of Bentley and Blossfeldt use the device of an abstracting isolation of the fragment from its context as a means of recontextualisation of meaning. Unlike the "Equivalents", their images reflect no urge towards "self-expression", but look exclusively to nature itself as a source of wonder and knowledge. And unlike the work of Edward Weston or Renger-Patzsch, two other photographers associated with an emphasis on "the thing itself", the photographs of Bentley and Blossfeldt are usually acompositional, with the object simply centered on a neutral background, resulting in a pictorial emphasis on the object's form rather than the artist's dynamics of composition. So despite their lack of artistic pretensions, and their essentially conservative backgrounds, the "cool" factual approach of Blossfeldt and the lesser-known Bentley has provided a model for the distanced objectifying tendencies in much contemporary photography from the Bechers and Thomas Ruff to Hiroshi Sugimoto.
Much American photography of the twentieth century can be seen as moving between these two polarities: factual records which emphasize seeing over feeling, a position going back to the nineteenth-century union of photography and truth; and the subjective purism of Stieglitz that, despite a realist aesthetic, finds symbols for the emotional life of the artist in the external world. The objective approach is evident in the understated work of Walker Evans, who began his photographic career in the late 1920s, at about the time of publication of books of photographs by Atget, Blossfeldt, Sander, Renger-Patzsch, and Bentley. In a review (Hound and Horn, 1929) Evans dismissed Renger-Patzsch's Die Welt ist schon, but applauded the work of Atget, and Sander's monumental project in visual sociology, Antlitz der Zeit. Frontality, symmetry, and the use of the fragment are a few recurrent elements of the cool, dispassionate approach of Evans, who eschewed the "self-expression" and "artiness" which he detested in Stieglitz. Although formally rigorous, Evans's photographs, like those of Atget and Sander, point to the relationship between the subject and the contextualising fabric of culture.

By the 1940s and 50s in America, the social realism of Evans and other Depression era photographers was challenged by an increasing emphasis on more formal and subjective concerns. It is interesting to compare a classic photograph by Evans of a detail of the peeling surface of a wall, with a photograph of a similar subject made by Aaron Siskind two decades later. While both images use an exceedingly flat pictorial space to describe the passage of time in a narrative of decay, the Evans photograph also evokes metaphorically the decay of a particular element of society -the antebellum South- through the recognisability of the black performers in the peeling minstrel show poster.

In contrast, the Siskind image is a much closer detail, unrecognizable in its particularities, which emphasizes the abstract formal values of the shapes and tones rendered in the black and white print. Its visual rhythms have more in common with a Stieglitz equivalent than with the Evans photograph.

Walker Evans, Minstrel Showbill, 1936, gelatin silver photograph, 25 x 20 cm.

Aaron Siskind, Chicago, 1957, gelatin silver photograph, 20 x 25cm.
Siskind's early attachment to the subjective was evident by 1945 when he spoke of his photographs being "essentially...psychological in character". A decade later, he emphasized a formalist approach, stating that "when I make a photograph I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained, whose basic condition is order." And that "(the object) is often unrecognizable; for it has been removed from its usual context, disassociated from its customary neighbors and forced into new relationships." Siskind was closely associated with the Abstract Expressionist painters in New York, being friends with Gottlieb, Newman, Rothko, and Kline. Carl Chiarenza, Siskind's biographer, contended that many of Siskind's photographs of the 1940s "anticipate the later configurations of the Abstract Expressionist painters." Despite the small scale of the Siskind photograph, his essentially subjective and formalist abstraction is more closely related in effect and intent to the paintings of the New York School than to the cultural records of Evans.

To the formalist fulcrum of realism and romanticism can be added another influence: the experimental attitudes characteristic of the European "New Vision" photography of the 1920s and 30s, promoted by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus in Berlin. When Moholy-Nagy was brought to Chicago to found the New Bauhaus in 1937 (later becoming the Institute of Design) his experimental approach to the medium was continued by the photographers he brought to teach at the school, including Gyorgy Kepes, who headed the school's Light and Color Workshop, Henry Holmes Smith, Harry Callahan, and later Aaron Siskind.

Callahan's photographs represent a unique mix of these basic ingredients of seeing, feeling, and experimentation with the medium. After exposure to the modernist ideas of Moholy-Nagy through his friend Arthur Siegel, a week long workshop with Ansel Adams inspired the self-taught Callahan to devote himself to photography. In 1946 Callahan wrote:

"Photography is an adventure just as life is an adventure. If man wants to express himself photographically, he must understand, surely to some extent, his relationship to life. I am interested in relating the problems that affect me to some set of values that I am trying to discover and establish as being my life. I want to discover and establish them through photography."  

Although Callahan's themes varied widely, ranging from nature to the city to his family, his photographs consistently allied an exploration of the

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31 Aaron Siskind, "The Drama of Objects" (1945), reprinted in Photographers on Photography, p. 97.  
32 Aaron Siskind, "Credo" (1956), Ibid, p. 98.  
technical capabilities of the medium with a extraordinarily elegant sensibility. Using various formats and approaches including multiple exposure, high contrast, composite printing, and collage, Callahan's often highly reductive vision found its subjects in the commonplace and everyday. Images of weeds or power lines silhouetted against the white background of sky or snow made in the 1940s evoke Zen drawings in their stark simplicity.

Harry Callahan, Weed against sky, Detroit, 1948, gelatin silver photograph.

Harry Callahan, Telephone Wires, 1945, gelatin silver photograph.

Harry Callahan, La Salle Street, Chicago, 1953, gelatin silver photograph.

Harry Callahan, Cape Cod, 1972, gelatin silver photograph.

His multiple exposures of buildings seen against a white sky use the simple results of the doubling and masking of the inverted images in the camera, to create strange new solids hovering weightlessly in a white void. And his photographs of the beach at Cape Cod in the early 1970s reduce the landscape space to surface textures separated by the single line of the horizon, anticipating the seascapes of Hiroshi Sugimoto a decade later. Callahan's unique approach has affinities with the tendencies

Conceptual art embraced the functional mode of the evidential photograph, however, which seemed to bypass some of the artistic conceits of Expressionism in its various guises. Many artists of the 1960s used the camera as an apparently uninflected recording device, with notable examples being found in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Smithson, Sol Lewitt, and Ed Ruscha. Smithson's 1967 essay in *Artforum*, "The Monuments of Passaic", took the reader on an archaeological walking tour of the industrial city of Passaic, NJ, illustrating with snapshot photographs the "monuments" of industrial society such as bridges, waste pipes, and parking lots. Like most "earth art", Smithson's best known work, *Spiral Jetty*, a monumental restatement of an ancient symbol in the Utah desert, was widely disseminated to an art audience through photographic documentation. Ed Ruscha's curious photographic books of the late sixties were also widely influential. Banal photographs of commonplace subjects reflected the artificial landscape and dominance of car culture in his native California, and were presented in a deadpan manner in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), the panoramic concertina *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), and *Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967).

By the 1970s, many photographers had also turned away from the natural landscapes of Weston, Adams and their followers promoted by Minor White in *Aperture*. This tendency was highlighted by the 1975 exhibition "New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape" at George
Eastman House\textsuperscript{35}, which showcased the work of the German team Bernd and Hilla Becher, and a number of American photographers including Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz. Baltz’s formally reductive and austerely neutral photographs somewhat in the style of Walker Evans recorded recent architectural developments, in the influential series “The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California” (1974-75). These images were characterized by extreme frontality and a reductive elegance which flattened the architectural mass of the buildings into planar geometries.

Lewis Baltz, from the series “The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California”, 1974, gelatin silver photograph, 15 x 23 cm.

Beginning in the late sixties, Robert Adams created more impassioned elegies of the conversion of the sublime American West into endless tracts of suburban housing, with his understated images sometimes contextualized with informative titles in books like \textit{The New West} (1974). In an image titled \textit{The center of Denver, ten miles distant}, we look across a vast expanse of countless identical tract houses to the skyscrapers of the distant city center.

Starting in 1957, the Bechers had adopted the systematic typological approach of Blossfeldt in their exhaustive documentation of industrial architecture. By the 1960s the Bechers' work began to be exhibited in America, where its absolutely objective approach was admired by Conceptual and Minimalist artists. As Keith Davis points out, "the Bechers' work epitomizes the idea of the photograph as evidence rather than expression."36

Their highly regular pictorial approach eliminates distracting differences of lighting, background, or composition. Often exhibited in grids related by subject, the Bechers' photographs emphasize the formal variations on a particular type of structure. While highly descriptive, the photographs detach their subjects from a location in the real world and regroup them in series as examples of a type, with a rigorous regularity which creates a curiously abstracted formal structure.

Bernd and Hilla Becher, Water Tower, gelatin silver photograph, 50 x 40 cm.


All of these "New Topographers" took a highly descriptive realist approach to their representations of the complex relationships between culture and nature in the landscape, reflecting a range of precedents.

including the enduring value of the factual approach of the "old topographies" of nineteenth-century exploratory photography, systematic strategies like Blossfeldt's, and the fascinating array of evidential photographs resulting from the "space race" of the post-war years.

The wonderful composite images from unmanned probes used to map the surface of the Moon and Mars in the late 1960s, with their extension of nineteenth century panoramic strategies, were echoed by a range of artistic composite photographs in the following decades. The Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets experimented extensively with composite panoramas beginning in the late 1960s, exploring aspects of camera vision and perception. In images like Dutch Mountain, Dibbets reconfigured the flat topography of the Netherlands by tilting the axis of the panoramic rotation.

In later composite works, Dibbets reconstructed architectural space to create strange apertures to the sky. In the late 1980s he also produced singular images of architectural cupolas, photographed from oblique angles to emphasize their spatial depth, and then mounted as in his other works on flat monochromatic painted surfaces. This highlights the photographic illusion of depth, which appears as a "hole" in the painted surround.
Among the most prominent artists working with the panoramic composite was the English painter turned photographer David Hockney, whose elaborate color snapshot and Polaroid "joiners", as he termed them, were widely published in the 1980s. Works such as You make the picture, Zion Canyon Utah, Oct. 1982 combine many sequential views in a complex collage of overlapping frames of time and space, which in this case reflect on the process of picture-making itself. Hockney compared his assemblages to the multiple viewpoints of Cubism, and at their best the sequential moments recorded in his photographs create a fascinating narrative of event and artistic construction.

The panoramic strategy has also been effectively utilized to convey a sense of space and time by landscape artists like Hamish Fulton and Mark Klett. Fulton's work beginning in the 1960s follows a long tradition of Romantic English landscape art going back to Turner, and like his friend the sculptor Richard Long, uses walking through the landscape as the subject of his art. Fulton combines evocative texts with his photographs, which are sometimes panoramic composites, to evoke the passage through time and space that is experienced in the walk. The panorama not only conveys
the visual expanse of the landscape, but also underlines the scope of Fulton's physical movement through space.


Mark Klett was involved in the "Rephotographic Survey Project" in 1977-79, which repeated the views of nineteenth-century American expeditionary photographers like O'Sullivan and Russell, revealing the changes wrought on the Western landscape in a century. In his later personal projects, Klett brings much of the sensibility of the old topographic photographers to his lyrical vision of the West. Like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Klett sometimes applies the form of the composite panorama to describe the expansive space of the American West. In *Around Toroweap Point just before and after sundown, beginning and ending with view used by J.K. Hillers over one hundred years earlier, Grand Canyon, 8/17/86*, the separate frames of the panorama, the placement of personal elements like Klett's hat in the picture, and his signature handwritten title notations, all emphasize elements of subjective experience as well as the various time-frames referenced.

Mark Klett, *Around Toroweap Point just before and after sundown, beginning and ending with view used by J.K. Hillers over one hundred years earlier, Grand Canyon, 8/17/86*, 1986, gelatin silver photographs, 50.8 x 203.2 cm.
Stieglitz’s concept of the photograph as metaphor has continued to have an impact on late twentieth-century photography, its heritage visible in the highly romantic landscape work of contemporary artists like Thomas Joshua Cooper. In his book *Dreaming the Gokstad*, Cooper, like Fulton and Klett, uses text with his richly evocative large format photographs to bring a metaphoric reading to the image.

Objective realist styles of representation dominate much recent photography, avoiding the subjective gestures of Hockney, Fulton, Klett, and Cooper. The repetitive seriality evident in the Bechers is characteristic of the numerous series of the Japanese born photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, who believes his work evokes “the interrelated disciplines of art, science, and religion.” In Sugimoto’s black and white series “Seascapes”, begun in 1980, a perfectly detailed horizon of sea and sky exactly bisects each picture. Individually titled by their worldwide locations, each photograph differs subtly due to weather and time of day, and their effects on light and space.

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For Sugimoto these pictures have "to do with the idea of ancient man, facing the sea and giving a name to it. Naming things has something to do with human awareness, with the separation of the entire world from you." Sugimoto's photographs of old movie theatres, begun in 1978, are exposed by the entire duration of a projected film to create a central rectangular void of white light, darkly framed by the decorative variations of classic movie theatre interiors from the 20s and 30s. This empty window in the architectural framework suggests both a sense of spiritual longing, and a reflexive meditation on photography, time, and representation, which has continued in more recent serial works, such as his images of dioramas and figures in wax museums.

Issues of photographic representation were also explored in Germany, where the factual, large-format realism of the Bechers led to a "Dusseldorf School" in the late 1980s - former students of Bernd Becher including Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Thomas Ruff. Struth's immaculate urban photographs of large apartment blocks retain the realism and sense of monumentality of the Bechers, while being far less systematic and suggesting an unexpected quality of inhabitation. His interiors of art galleries and churches, such as Pantheon, Rome, lushly record the flux of human passage through these timeless cultural spaces.

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Thomas Ruff, in his "Portraits" and "Buildings" of the late 1980s, at first appeared to follow the systematic "distanced" realist approach of the Bechers. His scientific "Stars" pictures of the same period extend photographic perception to astronomical images from the Southern European Observatory- selected, cropped, and titled by Ruff. Ruff is apparently an enthusiastic amateur astronomer, but these images do not seem to reflect any ongoing interest in the sublime. Indeed, subsequent excursions into stereoscopy, newspaper reproductions, and digital manipulation suggest that Ruff is more interested in exploring the logic of variations on the photographic apparatus than any fixed notions of "objectivity".
In the years since "New Topographies", environmental interest has continued to sustain a wide ongoing field of high-quality realist American landscape photography, documented in exhibitions and books such as *Between Home and Heaven: Contemporary American Landscape Photography* 40.

Notable among the many accomplished photographers in this group, Richard Misrach with "Desert Cantos" has created a multi-part epic which frequently touches on the sometimes human-ravaged, sublime beauty of its subjects. An approach of reductive abstraction is evident in a number of the sub-series, most notably his various sets of sky images made during the day, at night, and at dawn. A foil to the abstracted beauty of the color images, Misrach's titles record not only place but the exact time of the exposure. The "objective" exactitude of the title also paradoxically denotes a narrative of the photographer's presence while making the image, in a manner related to Fulton and Klett. So although Misrach titled the first series of his color skies "Clouds (not equivalents)", perhaps Stieglitz's subjective specter continues to haunt landscape photography.

This concludes my discussion of the field of artists and works which provide a context for my own practice as a photographer. I have by no means mentioned every artist of relevance to the representation of the sublime. My selection of work which has been included is admittedly limited and idiosyncratic, and has been chosen to provide specific reference points to my own studio-based research in the field of photography. These investigations will now be detailed in Part 3, which describes the development of my photographic work over the eighteen year period from 1982 to 2000.