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Small Woods Where I Met Myself

Jerry Uelsmann's departure from straight photography

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Bild och natur

TIO KONSTVETENSKAPLIGA BETRAKTELSER

LUND STUDIES IN ARTS AND CULTURAL SCIENCES 16

Ordet "natur" sägs vara språkets mest mångtydiga begrepp. Det står för det vilda – skogarna, haven, bergen, djuren. Men det är också genomsyrat av mänsklig historia, en spegelbild av människans föreställningar om sig själv, sitt samhälle och världen utanför samhället.

I antologin *Bild och natur* visar tio konstvetare från Lunds universitet hur naturen har gestaltats i bilder genom historien. Från medeltida kyrkomåleri till nutidens datorspel och street art, från konstfotografi till genetiska diagram – i dessa mångtydiga och fascinerande bilder får naturen ett synligt ansikte, blir konkret. Bokens essäer tar sig an dessa olika naturbilder och visar att de samtidigt är mångfacetterade porträtt av oss själva.

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2. Small Woods Where I Met Myself[1]
Jerry Uelsmann's departure from straight photography

Moa Petersén

In 1974, the Loch Haven Art Centre in Orlando, Florida booked photography icon Ansel Adams to give a lecture. Because of the great interest in Adams, the lecture was held at the Great Southern Dance Hall in Winter Park, Orlando. Since he was good friends with Adams, rising star photog-

Figure 2.1: The Great Southern Dance Hall some hours before Ansel Adams' lecture. Photograph © Jerry N. Uelsmann, 1974.

1 This chapter is based on research that has been generously supported by The Gyllenstierna Krapperup's Foundation.

rapher Jerry Uelsmann had been asked to come and introduce Adams to the audience. Uelsmann presented Adams as the "Dektol in the tray of fine art photography",[2] and when Adams came up to thank him for his introduction he said: "God created the earth in six days, and on the seventh day he looked down on the earth and thought 'Maybe some things need to be changed'. So he created Jerry Uelsmann".[3]

The relation between Jerry Uelsmann (b. 1934) and Ansel Adams (1902–1984) is interesting to photo history in several ways. While they were cordial friends and taught together at Adams' workshops in Yosemite National Park, Uelsmann launched his signature methods and approach to photography in opposition to Adams' ideals for art photography. Uelsmann's step away from the modernist ideals advocated by Adams heralded the onset of American post-modern photography.

Uelsmann is well known for his surreal photo montages, and for the dark room method he launched in 1967 as *post-visualization.* By using a variety of darkroom montage techniques including multiple negatives that are exposed through several enlargers, he created, and still creates, images that today would be associated with the enhancements made possible in Photoshop.[4] Uelsmann has always worked exclusively using analogue processes. Initially, Uelsmann created profound tumult with his unconventional methods of and approaches to making photo art within the American art photography world. His work was considered disrespectful towards the essential values of art photography which had been identified and proclaimed by the straight photographers, with Ansel Adams as their dominant voice.[5] Uelsmann not only departed from Adams' way of making photography in a methodological sense, but also addressed Adams' depictions of nature on a motif level. The most common motif within straight photography, as well as in Uelsmann's photography, is undoubt-

2 Kodak Dektol Paper Developer is a standard black and white developer used by, for example, both Uelsmann and Adams.

3 Author's interview with Uelsmann, 2017.

4 Russell Brown, Senior Creative Director at Adobe Systems Incorporated and one of the developers of Adobe Photoshop, attributes Uelsmann as the main inspiration for the software. See *2015 Lucie Honoree, Jerry Uelsmann*, http://www.lucie.tv, 2015.

5 Author's interview with Uelsmann, 2016.

Figure 2.2: *Untitled 1969*. Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

edly nature. Adams' straight photographic ideals are reflected in his well-known, technically flawless depictions of scenes or objects he found in the American West Coast environment, especially in the national parks.

The overall problem this text aims to address is how Uelsmann's and Adams' differences can be understood from their use of nature in their image making. What role did nature play in Uelsmann breaking away from the American art photography tradition? Along the way, this investigation grows to a deeper uncovering of Uelsmann's and Adams' visual quests since it also touches upon the two photographers' relationships with their cameras, conceptualizes their creativity, and examines their belief in access to the world by photographic means.

The movement that Uelsmann started within American art photography in the late 1960s was famously described in 1978 as "a pendulum movement from photography functioning as a window onto the outer world, to being a mirror where the photographer can watch himself" by

Figure 2.3: *The Tetons and the Snake River, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, 1942*, Photograph by Ansel Adams, Collection Centre for Creative Photography © The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust.

John Szarkowski.[6] This pendulum movement metaphor is applicable to the transition from Adams' exact, romantic yet realist and preserving ideal to Uelsmann's expressive, fantasmatic, and self-reflecting imagery. Adams and his colleagues had defined nature photography to the American audience: beautiful, full-tone scale landscape panoramas made to be viewed from a distance. Uelsmann served them something totally unexpected. In Uelsmann's images, man and nature had been symbiotically merged, the boundaries between nature and human beings was eradicated, and natural elements had become metaphors for human psychological

6 J. Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1978. Szarkowski made this statement in the catalogue to the exhibition titled *Mirrors and Windows* shown at MoMA in 1978. The brochure promoting the exhibition featured a Uelsmann photo.

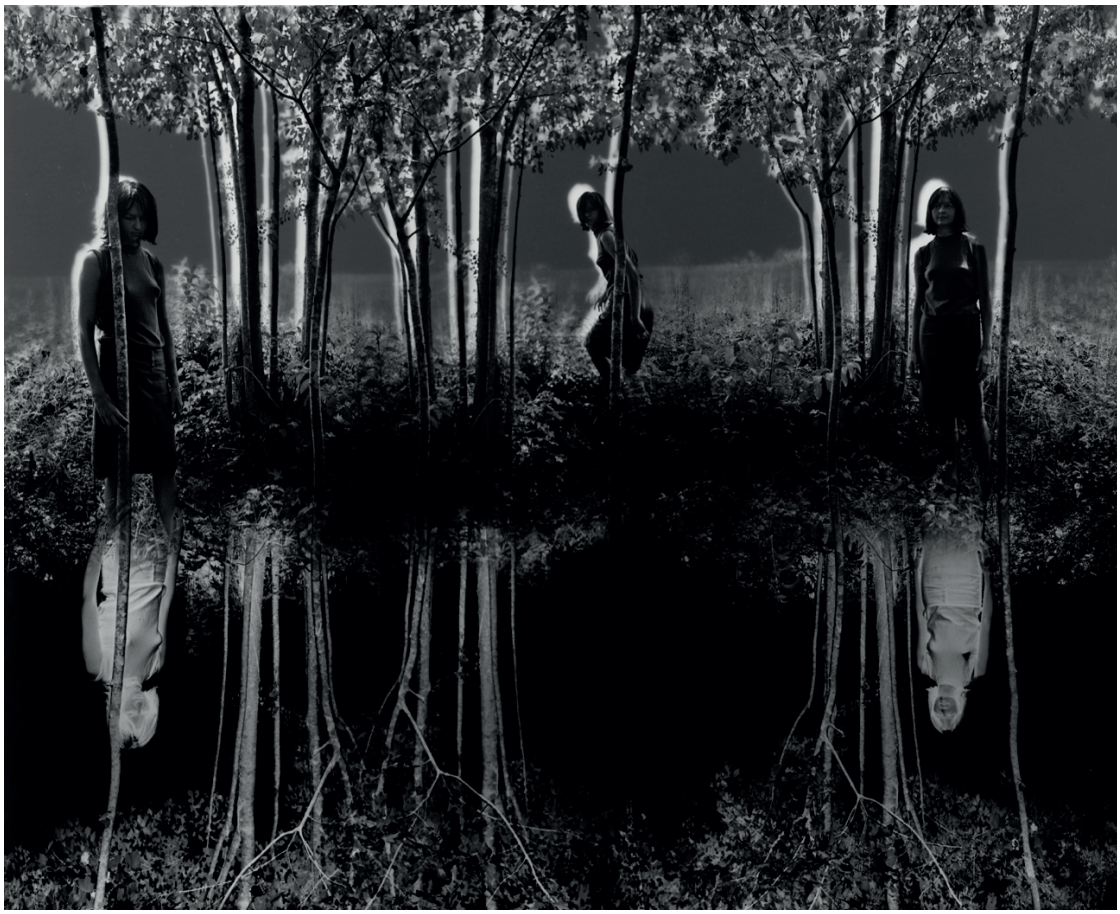

Figure 2.4: *Small Woods Where I Met Myself*, 1967, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

thickets, our barren stoniness, and brittle nerve threads.

Uelsmann's teacher Henry Holmes Smith declared in a written statement pasted to the wall as some of Uelsmann's images were exhibited at the student union in the late 1960s that: "Jerry's generation admits freely that all photographs are autobiographical, faces up to the capricious, morbid, lost, nonlogical, totally selfish inner ape, whereas the older generation would rather die than look in a glass not pinkly clouded".[7] *Small Woods Where I Met Myself* (1967) (Figure 2.4) could be seen as an illustration of Holmes Smith's statement. The psychedelic solarization effect that dissim-

7 H. Holmes Smith, "Jerry Uelsmann", written and printed statement for an exhibition of Uelsmann's work in the late 1960s. Unpublished and owned by the author. "A glass not pinkly clouded" here refers to the pink filter, or Skylight-filter, that is used to make the sky a little darker and other details a little brighter when photographing landscape scenes.

ilates the boundaries between the human figures and the landscape, the I-centred title, and the non-symmetry coming from the lack of the middle mirror image in the lower half of the image all suggest the scene depicted is made up to match a landscape within the photographer's mind. In Adams' *The Tetons and the Snake River* (1942), the sharp optics and the light that plays between the objects and causes well-defined contours and textures, portray a landscape that seems peacefully unaware of human subjective problems. The exact geographical location that emerges from the title contrasts with Uelsmann's cryptic title, in which location is left out and of no meaning. It seems as if the two photographers have looked at nature with contrasting intentions: whereas Adams has gone out and met nature, Uelsmann has gone out into nature and met himself. As such, the representatives of the two generations explore different realities through both nature and photography.

Uelsmann revisits an abandoned path

The pendulum movement or generation shift is often referred to as the shift between modernism and post-modernism. Uelsmann is best known for being a non-traditionalist and is usually referred to as "a pioneer" in textbooks on art and photography history.[8] In retrospect, Uelsmann's – at the time – shocking photographic methods that he launched in the late 1960s are placed right in between the two large photo currents: *straight photography* (modernism) that dominated the American photo scene from the 1920s to the late 1960s, and *staged photography* (post-modernism) that replaced the former current from the early 1970s onwards. Before I dive into the methods of the two photographers, I will describe the American photographic modernist scene in a little more in detail, say something about the label *modernism* in an American photographic context, and briefly contextualize Adams' depictions of the American national parks.

8 See for example D.E.W. Fenner, *Art in Context: Understanding Aesthetic Value*, Athens Oh., Ohio University Press, 2008, p. 48 and L. Warren, *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, 3-Volume Set, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 730.

The dominating trend within American so-called modernist photo art is usually referred to as straight photography. This trend held American art photography in a tight grip from the late 1920s until the late 1960s. Straight photography was instituted and maintained by a group of West Coast photographers – among them Ansel Adams, Imogene Cunningham and Edward Weston – who called themselves Group f/64. In their 1932 manifesto, they announced that the group welcomed only photographers who sought "to define photography as an art form by a simple and direct presentation through purely photographic methods".[9] A photograph was not considered "pure" if it showed qualities of technique, composition or idea derivative of other art forms. The manifesto describes straight photography as being opposed to *pictorialism,* which had been the prevailing ideal for art photographers until the 1920s. Influenced by techniques and methods from theatre, painting, and graphic art, the pictorialists photographed staged narratives and post-processed their images to give them the aura of oil paintings. In pictorialism, photomontage was frequently used, as it had been ever since photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813–1875) made the technique accepted as art in the 1850s under the name of *combination prints*. However, when straight photography quickly gained ground in the late 1920s, a paradigm shift took place. The aesthetics, methods and attitude of pictorialism were abandoned and almost completely erased. American photographic modernism had thus defined itself.

This development contrasts strongly to the European photographic scene where parallel photo artistic paths run through modernism. The Bragaglia brothers' futurist photodynamism starting in 1911, Man Ray's Dadaist photogrammes from the 1920s, and John Heartfield's political anti-Nazi photomontages from the 1930s are examples of a photographic art scene that mirrored the general development of modernist art. The photographic school related to *New Objectivity* that in the 1920s produced sharp, high contrast images that look like scientific illustrations (e.g. the photography of Karl Blossfeld and Albert Renger-Patzsch) is perhaps the closest we come to American straight photography in a European context. If European modernist photo history is characterized by diverse smaller

9 A. Adams, *An Autobiography,* London, Thames & Hudson, 1986, pp. 111–112.

paths, American modernist photo history is best compared to a highway where only one paradigm, straight photography, was commonly accepted.

As pictorialism was abandoned, art photography became increasingly medium-specific. The new ideal for photography was to distance itself from painting and other art forms as much as possible. The first book on the history of photography was Beaumont Newhall's 1938 *Photography: A Short Critical History*. Newhall was, as the first curator of MoMA's photography department from 1940, and from 1958 director of the George Eastman House, the world-leading authority on photography history for decades. His books on the history of photography thus had an enormous and long-lasting impact on the attitude towards photography. In his writings, Newhall advocates a *pure* use of the medium, just as Group f/64 had done some years previously in their manifesto, and dismisses Man Ray's experimental photography and the pictorialist narratives as "non-photographic".[10] In an interview, Uelsmann tells me how the audience would react in a similar manner as they saw his work being exhibited in the New York galleries in the late 1960s: "'This is interesting, but it's not photography.' Photography somehow had to replicate. It had to replicate something that you could literally see. It was the window on the world".[11]

On a methodological level, straight photography's approach to photography was medium-specific in that the optical and technical qualities of the camera were hailed as essential to the photographic art form. Within straight photography, the camera was used as the optical instrument through which the photographer predicted the image outcome through the technical calibrations that are made at the time of exposure. Adams called this method *pre-visualization*. With pre-visualization, the photographer's creativity, and the final outcome, was thus delimited to alterations of calibrations of the optical and technical qualities of the camera. Most often, the photographer was considered a good artist if he or she possessed enough technical skill to make sharp images with a wide tonal range and a great depth of field. Images were not allowed to be manipulated after the

10 B. Newhall, *Photography: A Short Critical History*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1938, p. x.

11 Author's interview with Uelsmann 2017.

exposure, and the creative part of image making was considered to be over once the shutter had been released.[12] Adams included details in his books on photography of every technical step for total transparency on how to achieve a final result. Another methodological concept Adams developed that helped convey transparency was *the zone system*. The zone system was a technique for determining optimal film exposure and development, and was a part of successful *pre-visualization.*

Pre-visualization would become a very important concept for Uelsmann in his departure from the straight photographic ideals. As a reaction to this concept of controlled creativity, Uelsmann inverted *pre-visualization* into *post-visualization*. In contrast to pre-visualization's limited possibilities for the photographer to affect the outcome once the shutter had been released, Uelsmann's concept implied "the willingness on the part of the photographer to revisualize the final image at any point in the entire photographic process".[13] To reduce post-visualisation to *a method* is not fair, since it is also *an approach* to the photographic image, and to the creative process. The method and the approach are intimately connected, and cannot easily be separated (as is often the case in art photography). Post-visualization is thus better described as a combined approach to photography and an actual image making technique. Uelsmann was concerned with the stagnation of photography as an art form, and that it was not keeping pace with the developments of other arts movements. In his 1967 pamphlet *Post-visualization*, Uelsmann called for a more open attitude towards photography to prevent it from experiencing aesthetic stagnation:

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12 See for example M. Köhler, "Arranged Constructed and Staged – From Taking to Making Pictures", in M. Köhler (ed.), *Constructed Realities. The Art of Staged Photography*, Munich, Kunstverein München, 1995, p. 18 and M. Goysdotter, *Impure Vision: American Staged Photography of the 1970s,* Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2013, p. 40. Note that in the manifesto 'manipulate' means to alter the clarity or content of the photographed subject matter. The use of the zone system, burning and dodging are, of course, also ways to manipulate images, but these techniques were both accepted and used by the straight photographers. For more on this topic see: M. Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop,* New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.

13 J.N. Uelsmann, "Post-visualization", *Florida Quarterly* I, 1967; Reprinted in *Contemporary Photographer*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1967; *Creative Camera*, vol. 60, 1969; Excerpted in *Camera*, vol. 46, 1967.

Figure 2.5: Uelsmann is aware of his legacy in a t-shirt with "Rejlander lives" printed on it. Photograph © Moa Petersén, 2016.

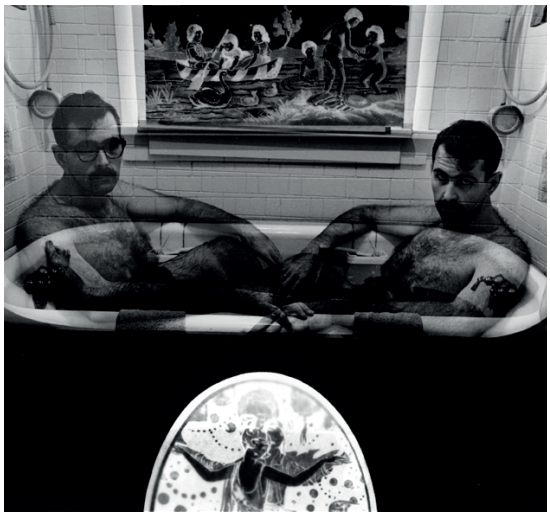

Figure 2.6: *Self-portrait as Robinson and Rejlander*, 1964, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

> The criterion for art is no longer just the visual world. One of the major changes evidenced in modern art is the transition from what was basically an outer directed art form in the nineteenth century to the inner directed art of today. The contemporary artist draws upon new levels of consciousness, creating a span of aesthetic that is without precedent. To date, photography has played a minor role in this liberation.[14]

Just like the pictorialists, Uelsmann relies to a high extent on ideals from modern visual arts movements other than the photographic. This was reinforced early on by the fact that Uelsmann was employed in 1960 at the Arts Department at the University of Florida as the only professor working with, and teaching, photography. Surrounded by colleagues representative of the other arts, the climate stimulated photography-making that was not medium-specific.[15]

Though Uelsmann is often described as a pioneer in American art photography in literature on photo history, it would be fairer to say that he is a bold resurrector of photographic methods that had been rejected in the closed American photographic climate of the 1960s.

14 Uelsmann, "Post-visualization".

15 Author's interview with Uelsmann, 2017.

Unsimple truths and analytic and synthetic creativity

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus. Schizophrenia and Capitalism*, Deleuze and Guattari argue how the traditional way of thinking within science has been logically linear and rationally vertical. To illustrate this, they use the metaphor of a tree trunk *that* grows along a vertical, framed and isolated axis with a clearly distinguishable direction.[16] In the metaphor, the trunk symbolizes the traditional scientific thought process and the *twigs* branching out from the trunk are ideas that all have the same *source* of energy supply. Deleuze and Guattari suggest, however, that a rhizomatic network model of thought is challenging the traditional rational logical way of scientific thinking. The rhizomatic model is decentralized, horizontal and unpredictable in its growth, and is impossible to control by logical means.[17] In contemporary society, we see the rhizomatic network model permeate society at every level, giving rise to possible reformulations of profound concepts such as truth, fact and rationality.

Enhanced by the vast amount of data collected, a rhizomatic approach to drawing conclusions within science has come to challenge the traditionally linear cause and effect model. In their accounts of what has been happening within biological science within recent years, philosophers Sandra Mitchell and John Dupré have pointed out, for example, the discovery of lateral gene transfer, that is a variant of traditional vertical reproduction. Mitchell calls for an openness towards biological changes and phenomena that can have many different explanations and that can all be "true".[18] In the same way, the rhizomatic network is formed by other involved organisms and symbiotic relationships that cannot be predicted or controlled in advance. In recent biological science, this approach threatens the traditional "tree of life" metaphor, as it suggests that "the web of life" is a more accurate description. Dupré argues that our understanding of evolution as

16 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013 (1988), Introduction, n.p.

17 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

18 S.D. Mitchell, *Unsimple Truths: Science, Complexity, and Policy*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2009.

the tree of life "(…) traditionally understood as branching in a unidirectional, always divergent, pattern from a single origin needs to be reconceived as a web of relations with no uniquely privileged origin or direction".[19]

If transferred to a creativity context, Deleuze and Guattari's dichotomy offers a way to understand the difference between Adams' and Uelsmann's creative approaches. What connects Uelsmann's departure from Adams' approach and methodology and the discrepancy between the two systems described by Deleuze and Guattari is the transition from a more logical chain of thought, high transparency in the process, and an analytical way of arriving at a single agreed upon "truth". One of Uelsmann's well-known quotes states: "In the arts there are many right answers". Uelsmann's suggestive and multi-interpretational work supports this statement. Yet, there is also something in this argument that separates Uelsmann's way of producing images from the technically pre-calibrated, and in a sense logical, method of Adams. Uelsmann's creative process, as well as the finalized images, are rhizomatic. They rely on symbiotic relationships that cannot be predicted or controlled in advance. The idea of an open-ended outcome that is expressed through Uelsmann's *post-visualization* is true for his image-making during the development of his creative process, as well as for how we interpret his images. Uelsmann is determined that the viewer has to complete the image, and usually avoids titles that might point the viewer in one direction or another. *Palimpsestic* is one way to describe Uelsmann's process and his pictures. A palimpsest is an object that consists of separate and diverse layers placed on top of each other. When you scrape away at a palimpsest, a new surface appears that can give the object a completely different meaning. Uelsmann's images can be approached as palimpsests made up of layers of different memories and visual impressions. Through the darkroom process, these layers are combined and fused onto the surface of the image. They may represent a thought, a feeling, or the prevailing mood of the artist at the moment of production. If you start scraping away at the different layers of one of Uelsmann's images, a psy-

19 J. Dupré, *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 6.

chologically complex weaving of biographical circumstances and experiences will emerge.

Uelsmann's approach to photography could further be contrasted with Adams' view of photography as an "analytic medium".[20] To explain what he means by "analytic medium", Adams contrasts photography to painting, which he describes as a "synthetic medium".[21] where the painter is free to use the world around him "in any way he likes".[22] According to Adams, the photographer, on the other hand, has to depart from the essential element within photography – that is the particular technological procedures that are necessary in order to make the photographer's pre-visualization valid and effective.[23] The only way in which a photographer might change his view on the world, declares Adams, is by changing the perspective or the depth of field from which he approaches his object.[24] Here we can see how Adams' way of thinking about the photographic practice as analytical rests on the modernist medium specificity. Adams is out to create and motivate an analytic chain throughout the photographic process from the photographer's first visualization of the image to the final result as an essential element of the photographic medium. This chain should be transparent and scientifically motivated. If the photographer were to step away from the media-specific methods, the borders of the analytical approach would also burst. This brings us back to Uelsmann's method that in Adams' syntax would be labelled "synthetic".

The principal that acts as the backbone of Adams' medium-specific, analytic idea at the camera is, again, the concept of *pre-visualization.*[25] As part of the creative process, pre-visualization can be described as the very moment the entire analytical chain of technical calibrations surfaces in the photographer's mind in front of an object or a scene. At this very moment,

20 A. Adams, *Camera and Lens – the Creative Approach: Studio, Laboratory and Operation*, Hastings-on-Hudson, Morgan and Morgan, 1970, p. 13.

21 Adams, *Camera and Lens*, p. 13.

22 Adams, *Camera and Lens*, p. 13.

23 Adams, *Camera and Lens*, p. 13.

24 Adams, *Camera and Lens*, p. 13.

25 Visualization was actually a concept originally presented by Edward Weston, Adams' co-founder of the *f/64* group that, from its establishment in 1932, connected American straight photographers.

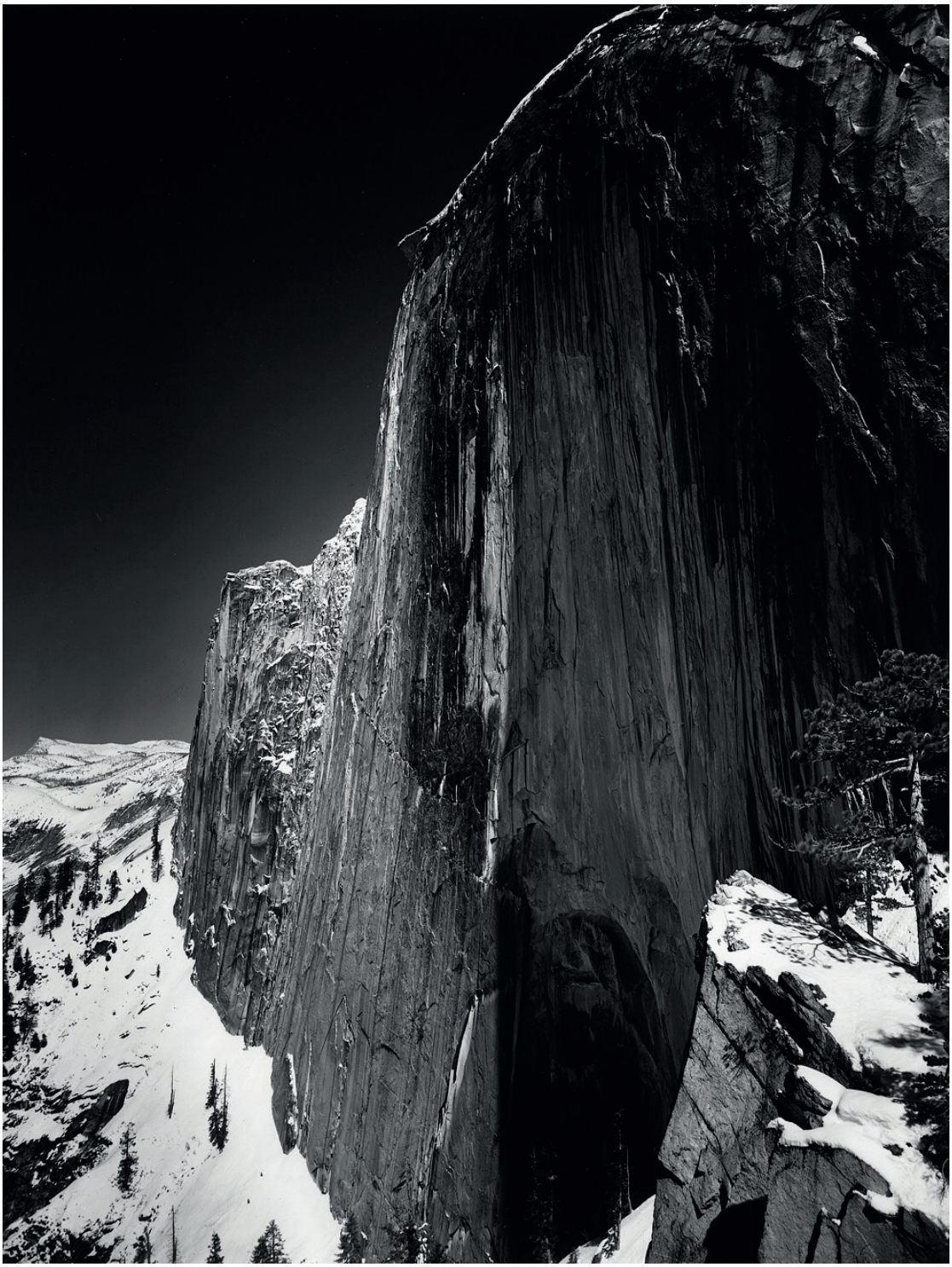

Figure 2.7: *Monolith; The Face of Half Dome*, ca. 1927, Photograph by Ansel Adams © The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust.

the photographer can visualize the end product, and knows then how to make the pre-visualized image. Adams himself described the moment of pre-visualization as: "(…) when something is seen it's a vivid experience – sudden, compelling, inevitable. The visualization is complete – the seemingly instant review of all the mental and imaginative resources called forth by some miracle of the mind computer that we do not comprehend".[26] Visualization is thus a praxis that is cemented in a technical equilibrium, while at the same time bearing traces of a magical revelation or epiphany. This paradox within Adams' use of the concept of pre-visualization, where it is clearly anchored in both instrumental and optical science (what I have above called logic or the analytical chain) and at the same time harbours magic and incalculability, makes the concept very interesting. Adams describes the photographic equipment as if it were located in his skull, and maybe even as a part of his brain, at the moment of visualization. In his technical handbook *Examples: The Making of 40 Photographs* (1983), Adams tries to explain what happened at his first visualization moment in front of a mountain in Yosemite that would result in one of his best-known images *Monolith; The Face of Half Dome*: "This image represents my first conscious visualization; in my mind's eye I saw (…) the final image as made with the red filter".[27]

Adams was a dedicated environmentalist, and used his images in his quest to preserve the American wilderness in the form of national parks. His many texts on the subject of nature and photography deal mostly with his experiences in Yosemite National Park.[28] The American national parks

26 M.E. Mark, "Ansel Adams' Last Interview", *Art News*, 1984, p. 76. http://www.maryellenmark.com/text/magazines/art%20news/905N-000-001.html, (accessed 17 November 2017).

27 A. Adams, *Examples: the making of 40 photographs*, Boston, Little Brown, 1983, p. 4.

28 See A. Adams and R. Baker, *The Camera*, Boston, Little Brown, 2003 (1980); A. Adams, *Examples: the making of 40 photographs* and A. Adams, *My Camera in Yosemite Valley: 24 photographs and an essay on mountain photography*, Yosemite National Park, V. Adams, 1949. Uelsmann also photographed extensively in Yosemite from the mid-1970s onwards. He first visited the park in 1974 as one of the "back up-singers" in one of Ansel Adams' yearly photographic workshops. Adams appreciated Uelsmann as a teacher, and had him come back to teach together with him for nearly 10 years (Author's interview with Uelsmann 2016). In 1996, Uelsmann published a book called *Yosemite*, where he included

Figure 2.8: *Magritte's touchstone*, 1965, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

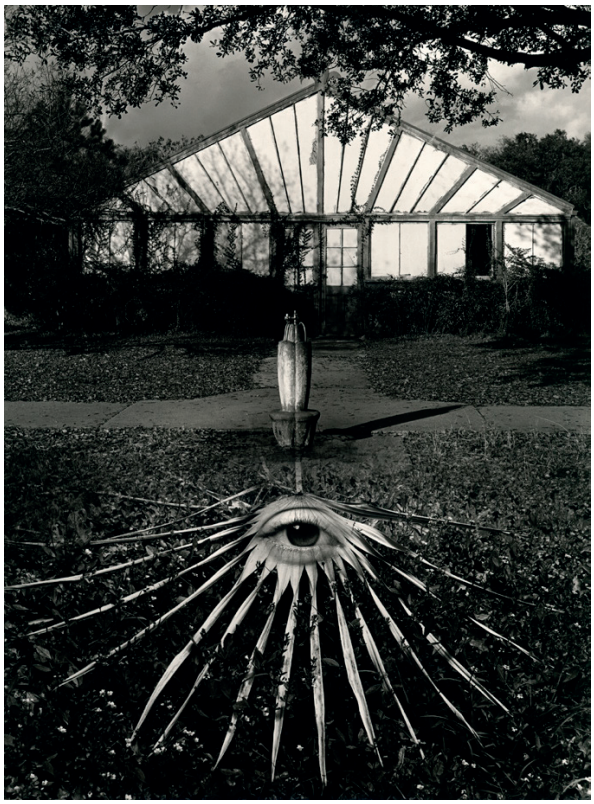

Figure 2.9.: *Untitled*, 1975, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

are deeply rooted in American photographic history, and vice versa. Sceneries from what would later be established as the American national parks were, during the 19th century, one of the more common motifs of photographic postcards. The photographs of Carleton Watkins and William Henry Jackson also played a huge role in the actual establishment of the American parks system in the 1870s, as they were used as visual arguments for the preservation of the nature they showed.[29] Adams' images were also used as lobbying material. As a member of the Sierra Club, he was sent to

several images that depict the nature of the park. Some of the images openly allude to Adams' narratives (J.N. Uelsmann, *Yosemite*, Florida University Press, 1996). Uelsmann's 1996 book will be omitted from this investigation but will be dealt with in my forthcoming biography on Uelsmann.

29 R. Cahn and R.G. Ketchum, *American Photographers and the National Parks*, New York, Viking press, 1981; J.M. Allen, *Picturing America's National Parks*, New York, Aperture Foundation, 2016.

Washington in 1938 with his photo book *Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail* to persuade Congress to institute Kings Canyon National Park. Both President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his secretary Harold L. Ickes were deeply impressed by the beauty of the photographs, and the John Muir National Park in the Kings Canyon area became a legal entity. In a letter, Ickes wrote to Adams: "Then we can be sure that your descendants and mine will be able to take as beautiful pictures as you have taken – that is, provided they have your skill and artistry".[30] The motivation behind Adams' images was to a large extent the preservation of the natural beauty of the national parks.[31] To be able to display the beauty, and force the argument, the images had to mirror the beauty Adams experienced in front of the sceneries. Yet, it could not be a totally subjective reflection in order to work as a rational argument. The method of pre-visulization acted as a guarantee for a certain amount of objectivity.

For making a good image, pre-visualization assimilates other concepts expressed through photo history. The time aspect of the sudden moment brings it close to Henri Cartier-Bresson's famous concept of the *decisive moment*. Cartier-Bresson himself explained the act of photography as: "(…) the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression".[32] In both Cartier-Bresson's and Adams' concepts, the essential image is finalized at a moment that occurs just before the shutter is released. Here is also where the creative process is stopped. Compared to Bresson's and Adams' creative processes, Uelsmann's creative process is more extended. According to Uelsmann, there could be several decisive moments along a process, and the decisive moment could therefore also occur in the dark room.[33] Just as in the approach to rhizomatic lateral gene transfer, Uelsmann's approach to photography calls for

30 V. Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1991, p. 47.

31 Adams, *My Camera in Yosemite Valley*.

32 H. Cartier-Bresson, The Decisive Moment" in H. Cartier-Bresson and M.L. Sand (ed.), *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers*, New York, Aperture, 1999, p. 42.

33 Author's interview with Uelsmann 2016.

openness towards interpretations, phenomena and creative steps that can have many different explanations and that can all be "true". The transparency of the process of making a good image that Adams so eagerly wanted to advocate in his books resembles a methodological quest for scientific reproducibility. In contrast, Uelsmann wants his creative process to be untraceable and impossible to understand logically.

Uelsmann often refers to the fact that he is making his images from the fringes of his own understanding, and that he finds it hard to discuss his work in words. Critics have frequently mentioned the difficulties in describing them verbally.[34] The mystical and irrational driving forces behind Uelsmann's image-making create a multivalent concept of time – as in a dream, where several elements can occur at once instead of along linear timescales.[35] In this aspect, Uelsmann comes close to surrealism, and his work is usually described as "surrealist". But rather than thinking of surrealism as a certain style, it could better be described as a certain sensitivity.[36] In Uelsmann's case, this sensitivity makes him open to chance, which is a conceptual force behind his creative process. The intentional irrationality of chance stands in stark contrast to Adams' rational aims for a calibrated and transparent process, where the relationships between cause and effect are rationally displayed – including in the form of written manuals. Instead, Uelsmann intentionally wants to obscure the methodological chain, the interpretational chain, and gives no clues to the meaning of the image content. The rhizome is allowed to keep its mysterious functionality, and this mystery is an important element of Uelsmann's image-making process as well as of his finalized images.

Enclosing nature

Uelsmann was trained in a straight photographic tradition and studied under Adams' disciple Minor White and Beumont Newhall at Rochester

34 A.D. Coleman, "Foreword", in J.N. Uelsmann, *Photo-Synthesis*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, p. xi.

35 G. Garner, *Disappearing Witness: Change in Twentieth-century American Photography*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, p. 115.

36 Fineman, *Faking it*, p. 159.

Figure 2.10: *Bloomington, Indiana*, 1958, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.
Figure 2.11: *Untitled*, 1959. Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann. This is Uelsmann's first post-visualized image.

Institute of Technology in New York. But inspired by both Minor White's spiritual approach to photography and the experimental photographer and photography teacher Henry Holmes Smith's unconventional and experimental image-making methods, Uelsmann began his journey away from the traditional methodological "truthful" registrations of the outer world as early as 1959. Instead, he started to use camera-collected visual material as fragments to synthesize surreal landscapes, which alluded to a dreamlike logic of the inner world.

Uelsmann recalls the point of origin when his post-visualization began. When enrolling for graduate school at Indiana University, Uelsmann was still working in the documentary tradition. He and a friend would explore

Figure 2.12: *Untitled*, 1977, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

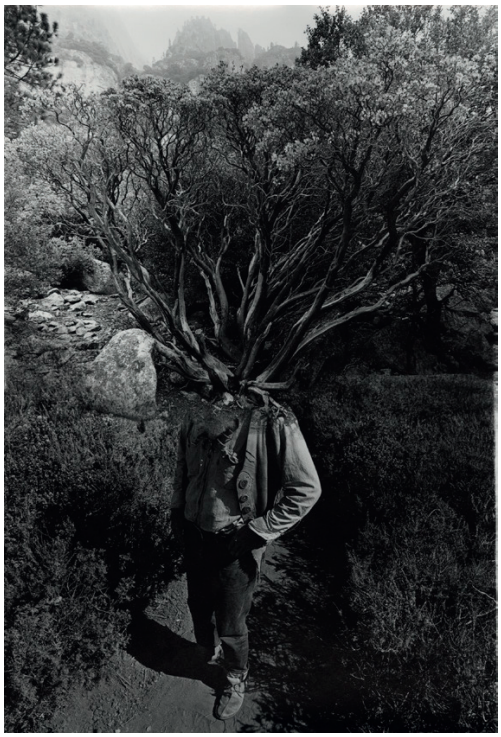

Figure 2.13: *Untitled (Brother Antonius)*, 1975, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

some of the nearby small towns on a regular basis to take pictures of the rural inhabitants. During one of these trips, Uelsmann came upon a boy who had just shot a bird with his BB gun (Figure 2.10). At about the same time, he had visited the research area of a friend working on a PhD in phsycho-acoustics. He photographed an owl that was used in this research. At some point, parallel to his documentary, socially concerned image-making, he decided to combine the negative of the owl and a negative of the dirty feet of the boy holding the dead bird (Figure 2.11). While studying history of photography under Beumont Newhall at RIT in 1955, Uelsmann remember himself responding personally to Rejlander's and Robinson's combination printing techniques. Although Newhall presented their creative approach to photography as the wrong path, the impression of it lasted in the young Uelsmann and made him experiment with two enlargers in the darkroom one afternoon in 1959.[37]

37 Author's interview with Uelsmann 2017.

Since that day, Uelsmann continued not only to create photomontages, but also to combine human bodies and natural elements (Figures 2.12 and 2.13). Uelsmann almost always uses human figures in his images. They are often merged symbiotically with the landscape or natural objects, disrupting the limit between nature and man that is stressed in Adams' images.

The results are images that portray the human condition. The symbiotic creatures that appear in the images become metaphors for psychological patterns, emotions and feelings that are hard to describe in words. Because of the expressive forms nature offers, and the porous meaning of the concept of nature[38], the possible interpretations of the juxtapositions between the human body and nature are endless and depend on the subjective experiences of the individual viewer. Uelsmann's rhizomatic or synthetic mode of creativity echoes in the image compositions, as well as in their reception.

The unpredictability, the uncontrollability and the slightly menacing undertone that can be found in many of Uelsmann's nature depictions stand in bright contrast to Adams' controlled, well-calibrated, peaceful panoramas. Unlike Adams' landscape portraits that are made to be viewed from a distance, the nature in Uelsmann's images is an enclosing, unpredictable, associative and sometimes ominous place to be in, to engage with, and to be a part of. The "be a part of" element is crucial to understanding the difference between Uelsmann's and Adams' use of nature. One day, Uelsmann and I had a conversation in front of a large print of an Ansel Adams photograph hanging in Uelsmann's hallway. The image showed giant boulders lying amid barren surroundings. Divine rays of light seemed to be filtering through clouds above the boulders.

I asked Uelsmann if he would agree that Adams' preservationist concerns are reflected in his images of nature. Uelsmann answered as follows: "Yes, but he wants to show the landscape almost in a romanticized way. He wants to show it like it was 1,000 years ago. He doesn't want evidence of man as a part of it". The pristine and timeless aura of Adams' landscape images are partly possible to explain considering the straight photographic aesthetic

38 See the introductory text to this anthology where the concept of nature as a porous concept, and what implications this has for its use in art, is further elaborated.

Figure 2.14: *Mount Williamson, The Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar, California, 1945*, Photograph by Ansel Adams, Collection Center for Creative Photography © The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust.

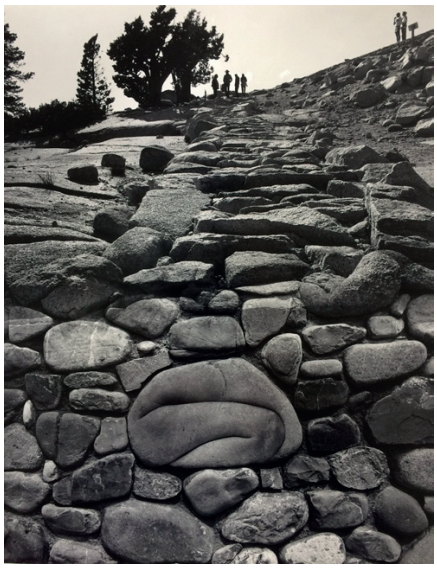

Figure 2.15: *Untitled*, 1976, Photograph by Jerry N. Uelsmann © Jerry N. Uelsmann.

ideals. Straight photographic images of nature often appear romantically shimmering even if the photographers did not use any soft filters. The long exposures and the great depth of field bring out a certain smoothness of the natural, organic forms and landscapes accentuated by the smooth, full-range silver scale. Time markers of any kind are very seldom present in straight photographic images, and the timelessness – together with the smooth organic silver – gives the objects and landscapes depicted an aura of soft untouchedness. Adams almost never used human figures in his compositions. The straight photographic aesthetic ideal, in combination with his preservationist intentions, creates a certain impression of nature separated from mankind that is significant to Adams' images.

In art photography, method, approach and motif are interwoven in an intrinsic way. The purpose of this text has been to investigate Uelsmann's departure from straight photography by analyzing what role nature played in his breaking away, and how the contrasts between Adams' and Uelsmann's differences could be understood by looking at their use of motifs from nature. I have thus cast light on the different layers of the weave by using nature as a focal point. The Uelsmann-Adams relationship is also

multi-layered. While the two photographers were cordial friends and Adams invited Uelsmann to teach at his workshops in Yosemite for many years, Uelsmann constructed his significant style and approach to photography in opposition to Adams' ideals, methods and concepts. On a motif level, nature played an important role in Uelsmann's departure since it was used in contrasting ways and thereby enhanced the methods and approaches of the two photographers.

In order to highlight the differences between the two photographers' approaches to the camera as a creative medium, I have compared the analytic creativity of Adams to Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the tree trunk, whereas Uelsmann's synthetic creative approach was compared to their concept of the rhizome. The rhizomatic expression of Uelsmann's nature can be followed into the (non-)structure of his creative process that is (non-)structured like a web of associations and chance. Again, this can be contrasted to Adams' analytic approach to photography, where a calculable and transparent methodological chain is part of the quality of the final image. The straight photographers, who wanted to define photography as an art form through what they considered to be the media-specific qualities of the camera, worked in a transparent, rational, and pre-calibrated way. This approach led them to produce romantically shimmering, yet optically sharp, portraits of a nature that seemed distant, peacefully pristine, and untouched by mankind. This blended in well with Adams' preservationist and environmentalist intentions. In contrast, Uelsmann's non-transparent creative process that invites moments of chance gave rise to depictions where nature became a mirror of the human mind. The images can be seen as metaphors for psychological patterns, experienced emotions and feelings. In Uelsmann's images, nature is an uncontrolled, menacing and unpredictable place that intervenes in the human subjective mind. Uelsmann thus uses natural elements to give visual shape to psychological circumstances, feelings and relations.

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