

The feedback factor

Left to right:

On May 7th, courtesy of Fuji Professional, Adrian Flowers, one of London's longest standing advertising photographers and a member of The Association since its inception, delighted the membership with a slide show and talk at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford. The 6-projector visual feast and lecture encompassed his 45-year career and provided a rare glimpse into the evolution of advertising in Britain. Michelle Demers muses on his lecture and asks whether the computer will eradicate the feedback factor...

his pocket a small instant camera and proceeded...to expose us! Our reactions were varied, from delight to confusion, and as such they exemplified what Adrian terms the 'feedback factor' in photography: "Any kind of reaction to an event or happening...a term originally used in the field of electronics, 'inverse' when opposing or 'regenerative' when aiding the input."

It is the regenerative aspect of the feedback factor which seems to embody for Adrian that which is at the heart of photography, that "ultimate moment, the correct click...when your heart is beating more strongly than usual, but your hands are cool, dry and still, Clint Eastwood style." That moment when you know you've got it, when the light or the expression or the composition is just perfect, and your finger drops to begin the process of immortality. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty once said, "the photograph keeps open the instant moments which the onrush of time closes up; it destroys the overtaking, the overlapping of time."

But "good ideas are short lived as never before," and those who sing the

praises of Photo-Shop insist the thrill of creating on the computer can replace the thrill of capturing the moment at that moment, in that place. But how so? Virtual reality is just that, virtual, and seeing is not necessarily feeling. Creating a pixel desert is not crossing the Jordan, is not standing knee-deep in another's history and making it a part of your own. As Adrian pointed out in his lecture, "sacrosanct situations that used to be not intended for any alteration, are now stored as images waiting to be manipulated into ILLUSTRATIONS by 'applied artists' or computer technicians," and this has repercussions for photographers. Yes, the computer will solve all those problems of bad weather and bad film, the job will be done on schedule and to budget, but will the passion still linger, the adrenalin still flow? Will photographers, as Adrian argues, become "illustrators by default"?

And yet perhaps the purists are kidding themselves. Are we to agree with Adrian that "the golden period of 'straight photography' in advertising" ended in 1985; that "taking" a picture

Ad for Peninsula

Hotels (1991):

Illustrators by

default?

Adrian's beloved

Sarah (1961):

Keeping open

the moment...

Le Creuset ad

(1988): 'Taking'

has become

'making'...

Stillness can be a catalyst for expectancy. Under a dark-cloth one can hide but, at the same time, become an object of ridicule....

Adrian Flowers sat before his audience and covered himself with a dark-cloth and waited. Murmurs of nervous laughter crawled along the carpet towards the man who we expected to reveal his secrets, to risk exposure, but instead who drew from



has become 'making' and unashamedly 'creating' imagery, which in turn demands attention, appreciation, and success in the marketplace!?" If the primary aim of a professional photographer is to earn a living, does the origin of the image matter, or just the success of it?

My own fear regarding the invasion by the computer is that photographers, already isolated creatures, will lock themselves to the terminal and forfeit their last remaining vestiges of artistic interaction. Like those musicians who can easily create an entire symphony on a synthesizer by their lonesome but who know the importance of jamming, who surround themselves with those

who bring out their talents, who are pushed to excel, who fuse their unique sounds with another to create an even greater whole, those photographers who wish to exceed their own expectations need co-conspirators in the mystery of art. The problem with a computer is that it does exactly what you tell it to do, and it never objects when you're out of tune. What potentiality will be lost? Will technopop photography fill our spaces? Will we need Ecstasy to make it bearable?

I think Adrian would agree with me when I say that most photographers need more, not less, regenerative feedback, and as such should put the computer in its proper place:

somewhere between the microwave and the electric print dryer. Go high-tech for the fun and convenience, but don't forget to bring the band! "Photography may be the product of complete alienation" according to Proust, but does this mean the photographer has to be as well?

Left to right:

'Circus Clowns'
(1958): The
Ultimate
Moment, The
Correct Click

Bald Rex (1963):
Stillness can be a
catalyst for
expectancy.

