Perfect Yin, perfect Yang: The Tao of photography

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PERFECT YIN, PERFECT YANG:
THE TAO OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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> *Perfect Yin is stern and frigid;*
> *Perfect Yang is bright and glittering.*
> *The sternness and frigidity come forth from heaven,*
> *the brightness and glitter emerge from the earth;*
> *the two mingle, penetrate, come together, harmonize,*
> *and all things are born therefrom.*
>
> —The *Chuang-tzu*
> (Watson, 1968, p. 225)

Photography has been an integral part of my life since childhood—a creative outlet at first, it evolved into a means of emotional healing and therapy, before finally taking on the dimensions of a spiritual practice. The study of classical Asian psychologies of the mind—the Taoist philosophy of the *Chuang-tzu* in particular—has developed into an equally engrossing pursuit over the course of the past several years. It never occurred to me that there might be any connection between these two passions until, one day, quite recently, I sensed that like the perfect Yin and the perfect Yang above, photography and Taoism could "mingle, penetrate, come together, harmonize"—that a blend of these disciplines could cast a different light on the art of seeing and the art of living. What follows is a look back on the birth of this pair and how the ensuing development of this union of photography and the wisdom of the *Chuang-tzu* unfolded for me.

INITIATION INTO PHOTOGRAPHY

When I was eight years old, my parents gave me a Kodak Instamatic camera. To my young, impressionable mind, it certainly lived up to its marketing slogan of 1888: "You press the button and we do the rest" (in Berner, 1975, p. 12)—it was pure magic! This gift was tremendously empowering because, armed with this magic wand, just a little downward pressure of my finger allowed me to freeze any subject or event—forever; I was transformed into a powerful sorcerer. This sense of magic was at the core of my initial attraction to photography. My initiation into photography, however, was not always positive. Sometimes it brought out my inner tyrant. The images are still fixed in my memory: adults trying to please me with exaggerated smiles; others attempting to protect their faces by frantically thrusting their hands in front of my lens. My infatuation with this newly found magic intensified at the photoshop when I retrieved the processed photographs. How absolutely marvelous to see my dog drooling on my grandmother's new Sunday dress, or the unflattering, frozen expressions of my friends devouring dessert! Finally I held in my hands proof that my magic wand could indeed fix fragments of the past forever.

Once in secondary school, after seven undisciplined years of attempting to teach myself photography with my Instamatic, I borrowed a friend's Canon AE (a reflex camera) and enrolled in one of only two photography classes I would ever take. In this class, I was initiated into the arcane deep mysteries of the darkroom and seeing pictures materialize in the developer was such a rush-experience that I

became an instant darkroom addict. I can still remember my teacher having to physically remove me from the darkroom at the end of the class because I wanted to do a sixth or seventh "last print." Now that I was able to develop my own prints, my "magical powers" grew and so did my commitment to photography. Winning first prize in the annual school photography contest was yet another deciding factor; it motivated the purchase of my first reflex camera and the installation, with a friend, of our own darkroom in my basement.

Developments in the darkroom

Having the convenience of my own private darkroom, I resumed studying the practice of photography on my own. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one, most of my photographic activities consisted of experimenting with a variety of darkroom techniques and trying out various kinds of photographic equipment. Although I was secretly hoping to create some instant eternal masterpieces, the darkroom manipulations were primarily an exercise in immediate visual excitement. At the time, my formal schooling in Switzerland discouraged individual expression, and photography became all the more precious as a creative outlet.

Lacking an understanding of visual design, my approach to photography during this stage was rather chaotic. Eventually, I became bored with all the unstructured trials and temporarily abandoned my darkroom experimentation. Instead, I swing to the other extreme, and processed all my black and white work mechanically, in a single, routine fashion, following a previously successful formula, ignoring the individual needs of the prints. Inevitably, this mechanical approach took much of the excitement out of darkroom work, and I became less and less involved with it, shifting my attention to shooting with color slides.

It wasn't until some five years later, that I felt drawn to the darkroom and to black and white work again. I began to understand and appreciate photography as a language of symbols. My earlier experimentation in the darkroom (e.g., reframing, burning and dodging, contrast grade selection, and over- and underdevelopment) began to take on new meaning. I rediscovered these techniques and, as I began to create more successful pictures, my enthusiasm for darkroom work was rejuvenated.

The Hasselblad experience

As I already mentioned, in 1979, when I was taking my first baby steps on the path, photography was no more than a game of magic, with the camera as a magic wand. When I read about photographers or looked at great pictures, my attention was captivated by the details of the equipment that had been used. No doubt alluring advertisements contributed to my obsession with this relatively unimportant aspect of photography, but at the time, I deduced, quite simplistically, that the better the wand, the more powerful the magic.

This obsession with equipment led me to purchase a second-hand Hasselblad 500 EL (similar to the model used in the Apollo mission of 1969) which, I believed, would perform miracles. The delusion was painfully short-lived as my first shots with the Hasselblad were worse than most of the pictures I had ever made with the Kodak Instamatic. However, due to the considerable amount of money and dreams I had invested in the purchase, this turned out to be but a minor setback. Many, many rolls of film later, I realized that it was indeed possible to produce pictures of high quality. In order for this to happen though, I first had to realize that I was the one who had to do all the work, thus abandoning my magic wand theory. I was also forced to acknowledge that the legendary Hasselblad camera was substantially more difficult to use than a conventional 35mm reflex camera with a built-in metering system. If I wanted to succeed with this renowned camera, I had to not only shift away from my

entrenched perspective and adjust my vision to the perspective built into the camera, but I would need to adapt myself to the camera's exigencies.

My Hasselblad 500 EL was a heavy, cumbersome, medium format camera with a noisy built-in motor drive which required two rechargeable batteries, each the size of a 35mm film container. The square image on the focusing screen was inverted, and, because it had a top viewfinder, the camera had to be held level with my belly rather than in front of my eyes. The worst drawback to this behemoth for me, however, was its lack of a built-in light meter. The Hasselblad is one of the best cameras ever made. However, because I did not have enough money to all the accessories which would have transformed my camera into a more flexible and easy-to-use piece of equipment, I had to make do with its most basic features. As a result, this was probably one of the worst possible choices for a camera to use for candid street shots—one of my favorite photographic activities. Ironically, each of these inconveniences became a valuable opportunity for me to develop certain essential photographic skills.

To begin with, the Hasselblad's inverted image finder taught me a new way of seeing. I was able to avoid a common error that many beginners make when they attempt to evaluate a scene in terms of the human eye and then try to capture that human vision with the camera. Because the image was inverted, my usual clues were unavailable, and I was obliged to compose an image within the viewfinder by directly thinking of the scene as it would look as a final print.

Having to look through a viewfinder at belly height provided me with a fresh, new perspective which invited me to explore my subjects from unconventional angles. Also, the square format of the viewfinder encouraged me to think about and compose my shots differently from the familiar rectangular shape of most published photographs that I was accustomed to seeing.

The absence of a light meter was to become yet another boon, as I was forced to become more aware of the intensity of the light on my subjects and had to learn to translate this intensity into a workable exposure value (EV). I profited from my increased awareness and gained a better appreciation of shadows and other contrasting elements. Further, this provoked me to experiment with bracketing—photographing the same subject at variable diaphragm settings or shutter speeds in order to create the most suitable picture. The prints resulting from these attempts at bracketing also served to make me more intuitively aware of how the emotional content of a picture can be made to vary with the slightest variations in the exposure value. At the time, I was not yet aware of the relationship between visual design and emotion in a picture; I was only aware of the superficial components of a picture and whether it "felt right or wrong." The hand-held light meter I would acquire later on only served to further increase my awareness of the significance of even the most minute gradations of light.

Finally, the built-in motor drive of my camera was so noisy that I could take only one candid shot before being heard and discovered. This constraint forced me to be keenly aware of subject, composition, and camera settings beforehand in order to insure capturing the image I intended on the first shot.

In the final analysis, the Hasselblad taught me to think in photographic terms and forced me to develop necessary technical skills. Perhaps, if it had been a less professional camera, my pride would have permitted me to blame my initial poor results on the equipment, but the famous Hasselblad name on the camera ensured my persistence through a long trial and error apprenticeship as I felt challenged to live up to the standards its reputation demanded of me. Also, psychologically, I abandoned my magic wand theory, and began to choose equipment based on genuine photographic considerations rather than responding to commercial ads or the equipment of famous photographers.

Contemplative aesthetic awareness . . . is not merely a
creative pastime for the sensitive lover of beauty,
but a return to the soul-making birthright . . . .

—Jeff Berner (1975, p. 52)

As I became more experienced, the technical aspects of photography, while still important, became less of a preoccupation. Once again, I was drawn to the experiential aspects of photography. I began to feel that my practice of photography could do more than just provide beautiful pictures—it was a way to connect more deeply and more spiritually with the world. Such connective experiences, however, were difficult to express because, at the time, I did not know how to translate them into words.

An unhappy teenager, I had instinctively turned to photography as a solace from my preoccupation with the hows and whys of existence. Especially attractive because it was not a required course of study—the only activity I did that wasn't imposed upon me—photography would become my chief creative outlet and a source of healing for me. The few times I wasn't obsessed with the insistent existential questions of youth clamoring for answers were generally when I was shooting pictures or developing in the darkroom. In those precious, joyful times I felt totally "in the present."

In my late teens, I felt inexplicably drawn to meditation and became interested in psychology. It was not until years later however that, thanks to my formal training in psychology, I discovered a variety of theoretical approaches that were helpful in adequately characterizing these early compelling experiences for me, as well as their implications for psychological health.

Among the psychological approaches I would study, the most relevant and inspiring was the psychology of liberation expounded in the philosophy of the ancient Taoist wisdom text, the *Chuang-tzu* (circa fourth to second century B.C.E.). There were also two approaches dating from my earlier studies of Western psychology which I found especially relevant and useful in helping me gain an understanding of some of my personal experiences—Maslow's (1980) hierarchy of needs theory and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) work on the flow experience.

Fulfilling higher needs

When unpleasant thoughts persistently cloud my mind or disturbing emotions drain away my vital strength, I sometimes feel compelled to grab my camera and roam the streets or go out in nature. Soon after embarking upon such wandering, the unpleasant state yields to a lightheartedness and a sense of being grounded—as if the oppressing feeling of being trapped in a constricted self has escaped through a sudden opening into the surrounding world. Although this remedy for doing away with disagreeable thoughts and emotions might be misconstrued as an escape from life's problems, I now view it in a positive light; I regard the discomfort as a warning sign which indicates I might have a need for quenching some of what Maslow termed "meta-needs" (Maslow, 1980).

Maslow (1980) propounds that a fully healthy human being is one who has satisfied the whole spectrum of needs which ranges from the biological needs to the need for transcendence. He also maintains that deprivation of some of the meta-needs (e.g., needs for esthetic fulfillment, self-actualization, and transcendence) can cause metapathologies which Maslow (1980) defines as "the 'illnesses' resulting from deprivation of intrinsic values (meta-needs)" (p. 123). In other words, just as biological death will ultimately result from failure to satisfy the hunger of the physical organism, "spiritual death" (e.g., existential depression or even suicide) can result from failure to satisfy certain

of the meta-needs. My personal experience with photography, including esthetic fulfillment and transcendence of the sense of self (e.g., when becoming attuned to the surrounding environment) accords well with Maslow's characterization, and it is from this perspective that I have experienced photography as a valuable therapeutic practice.

Initiating a flow experience

Another therapeutic side effect or benefit of photography is the opportunity it offers to experience being fully alive, present, and attuned to one's surroundings. Ideally it should be possible to experience such feelings in any situation, however, I have noticed that, for myself, simply having a camera around my neck functions like a "built-in" awareness reminder. It is a way for me to stay attuned to my surroundings to remain in the here and now as opposed to being constantly swept away by an unceasing stream of mental chatter.

This experience of being fully alive, present, and in tune with one's surroundings when involved in photographic work seems similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) "flow experience," which he describes as: "joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life" (p. xi). Csikszentmihalyi suggests that flow experiences usually occur when an individual is involved in an activity which is not too difficult (resulting in anxiety) and not too easy (resulting in boredom). Between these two states lies what he calls the "flow channel" (p. 74). Perhaps, because photographic practice is broad enough to accommodate a wide range of individual skills, it can be a potential way to trigger a flow experience for a variety of individuals.

<div align="center">THE TAOIST CONNECTION</div>

After several years of immersing myself in a study of the *Chuang-tzu*, which provided the groundwork for my master's thesis on the characteristics of the Sage (Gross, 1992), I came to the realization that the Taoist perspective espoused in the *Chuang-tzu* could help me more clearly understand the valuable lessons I learned through my working with photography, as well as some of the accounts reported by other photographers. Two Taoist themes that immediately caught my attention because of their close resemblance to my experiences with photography are the constructive nature of reality and seeing the sacred in the ordinary. Other Taoist themes such as freedom from the sense of self, receptivity, *wu-wei* (effortless effort), spontaneity, acceptance, nonattachment, resourcefulness, free and easy wandering, and *te* (virtue/power) may also have particular relevance to the art of photography, and I hope to take up this correspondence in subsequent study.

The construction of reality

What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning.

—Werner Heisenberg (1962, p. 58)

I photograph to see what things look like photographed.

—Garry Winogrand (1989, p. 96)

To see truth, contemplate all phenomena as a lie.

—Thaganapa (In Nisker, 1990, p. 3)

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*The sage embraces things. Ordinary men discriminate among them and parade
their discriminations before others. So I say, those who discriminate fail to see.*

—The *Chuang-tzu*
(Watson, 1968, p. 44)

In the 20th century—in large part because of photography—our awareness of the multidimensionality of the world has increased at a striking pace. Photojournalism, nature photography, and scientific imaging (with its use of sophisticated instruments such as telescopes, scanning electron microscopes, magnetic resonance imaging, CAT scans, PET scans, X-rays, ultrasound, radioisotope tracers, lasers, and DNA sequencers), have produced images that have helped us expand awareness of our universe into hitherto unimaginable dimensions. The outcome of these diverse photographic explorations have led to significant social, political, cultural, scientific, and technological reforms (see Goldberg, 1993). But most importantly, for psychology, the creation of these new levels of realities have further demonstrated what the consciousness disciplines and the perennial philosophies have proclaimed for centuries: our ordinary seeing is limited, and our conventional, consensus of reality is just one version of the world among many. The following discussion on photography combined with excerpts from the Chuang-tzu will serve to better appreciate the process of constructing reality.

In photography, the camera usually records an event on film without any apparent interference from the photographer. It is therefore tempting to believe that photographs are an unbiased way to capture reality. Such a view is rather naive, however, as Peter Henry Emerson (1989) has suggested:

> "A photograph," it has been said, "shows the art of nature rather than the art of the artist." This is mere nonsense, as the same remark might be applied equally well to all the fine arts. Nature does not jump into the camera, focus itself, expose itself, develop itself, and print itself. On the contrary, the artist, using photography as a medium, chooses his subject, selects his details, generalizes the whole in the way we have shown, and thus gives his view of nature. This is not copying or imitating nature, but interpreting her, and this is all any artist can do . . . . (p. 24)

Another way to highlight the constructive nature of photographs is to reflect upon the many tools and approaches photographers exploit to create countless images of the same subject: lenses (wide, normal, tele, and macro lenses); filters; format of the negative; depth of field; shutter speed; lighting (natural, artificial, or both); direction of light; film (black and white, color, slides, brand, speed); film processing; and, composition (framing, angles, focus, use of foreground or background). All these components, inherent in the craft of photography, impart meaning to the final print.

Thus, although a photograph is partly based on an "authentic rendition of a subject or event at the moment the picture was made" (Feininger, 1978, p. 223), it is also transformed by other factors intrinsic to the medium of photography. To be aware of these transformations, however, is not always an easy matter. Consider, for example, the following anecdote about Pablo Picasso: While the painter was creating the portrait of a woman in the presence of her husband—Picasso noticed that the husband was becoming increasingly agitated, and inquired about his uneasiness. The husband responded that the painting did not look like his wife. To which Picasso replied: "So tell me, what does your wife look like?" The man took a picture out of his wallet and said: "That's how she looks!" And Picasso, carefully looking at the picture, commented: "Oh, really! Small isn't she?!"

The Picasso anecdote, although focused upon the size of a representation, also illustrates how most of us have learned to read and translate photographs in a way that maintains the illusion that they are somehow true, untransformed representations of reality. The film director, Luis Buñuel (1984), makes the point this way:

It's hard to imagine today, but when the cinema was in its infancy, it was such a new and unusual narrative form that most spectators had difficulty understanding what was happening. Now we're so used to film language, to the elements of montage, to both simultaneous and successive action, to flashbacks, that our comprehension is automatic; but in the early years, the public had a hard time deciphering this new pictorial grammar. They needed an *explicador* to guide them from scene to scene.

I'll never forget, for example, everyone's terror when we saw our first zoom. There on the screen was a head coming closer and closer, growing larger and larger. We simply couldn't understand that the camera was moving nearer to the head, or that because of trick photography (as in Méliès's films), the head only appeared to grow larger. All we saw was a head coming toward us, swelling hideously out of all proportion. Like Saint Thomas the Apostle, we believed in the reality of what we saw. (p. 33)

This anecdote about cinematography also has a compelling relevance to still photography. We have learned to interpret physical images in a way that fits our pre-established view of reality. Recognizing this premise leads to the conclusion that not only are photographs biased or constructed, but so is our perception of them. The constructive nature of a photograph is therefore twofold: it is first constructed by a photographer, and then reconstructed by a viewer.

Let us suppose that it was somehow possible to capture a true slice of time—that is a three-dimensional block in which size, color, texture, and shape would be the exact replicate of an actual past event. Such a perfect replication, however, would still have to be exposed to the subjective interpretation of a viewer. Although the following anecdote involves painting, and addresses moral issues, it can also serve to illustrate the nature of the reconstructive process an individual engages in when viewing a photograph:

Toulouse-Lautrec once exhibited a painting of a man in an overcoat and hat standing in a room with a half-dressed woman. A *grande dame* took one look and cried, "Obscenity! A woman undressing in front of a stranger!" Whereupon the artist replied, "Ma-da-me, the woman in my picture is not undressing, she is dressing, and the man is not a stranger, he is her husband. Obscenity is in the eye of the beholder, and I'll thank you to stop looking at my painting!" (Berner, 1975, p. 50)

Furthermore, the reconstructive process is not only influenced by individual biases but also by the context in which a photograph is seen. As Sontag (1989) points out:

Smith's Minamata photographs[1] will seem different on a contact sheet, in a gallery, in a political demonstration, in a police file, in a photographic magazine, in a general news magazine, in a book, on a living-room wall. Each of these situations suggests a different use for the photographs but none can secure their meaning. (p. 106)

The notion that photographs are a construction rather than a representation of nature, and that viewers reconstruct photographs in ways that are individually meaningful to themselves, intimates, in a way, the view expounded in the *Chuang-tzu* that our entire understanding of the world is based upon mental constructions rather than on a veridical representation of the world:

What is acceptable we call acceptable; what is unacceptable we call unacceptable. A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so because they are called so. What makes

them not so? Making them not so makes them not so. Things all must have that which is so; things all must have that which is acceptable. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable. (Watson, 1968, p. 40)

The constructive nature of reality does not only lie in pictorial designs but, according to the *Chuang-tzu*, is an inherent characteristic of what the *Chuang-tzu* calls "little understanding" (Watson, 1968, p. 37)—that is, the process and product of constantly making discriminations. When one intuitively grasps this, the *Chuang-tzu* says, one becomes free from the entanglement of the discriminatory mind and can "wander in the Great Void." The *Chuang-tzu* calls such intuitive grasping "great understanding" (Watson, 1968, p. 37). The following passage from the *Chuang-tzu* again illustrates the unreliability of the discriminatory mind to understand the Way[2] of life:

No-Beginning said, "The Way cannot be heard; heard, it is not the Way. The Way cannot be seen; seen, it is not the Way. The Way cannot be described; described, it is not the Way. That which gives form to the formed is itself formless—can you understand that? There is no name that fits the Way."

No-Beginning continued, "He who, when asked about the Way, gives an answer does not understand the Way; and he who asked about the Way has not really heard the Way explained. The Way is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer. To ask about what cannot be asked about is to ask for the sky. To answer what cannot be answered is to try to split hairs. If the hair-splitter waits for the sky-asker, then neither will ever perceive the time and space that surround them on the outside, or understand the Great Beginning that is within. Such men can never trek across the K'un-lun, can never wander in the Great Void!" (pp. 243-244)

In freeing oneself from the entanglement of the discriminatory mind—that is, giving up wanting to understand the Way (the Tao) in terms of pre-established distinctions or categories—an individual is freed to "wander in the Great Void." To translate great understanding in terms of photographic practice, when a photographer realizes the constructive nature of photography, he or she becomes open to freely explore new visions; ultimately, the photographer, too, may "wander in the Great Void." In the words of the photographer, Andreas Feininger (1978):

Once a photographer is convinced that the camera can lie and that, strictly speaking, the vast majority of photographs are "camera lies," inasmuch as they tell only part of a story or tell it in distorted form, half the battle is won. Once he has conceded that photography is not a "naturalistic" medium of rendition and that striving for "naturalism" in a photograph is futile, he can turn his attention to using a camera to make more effective pictures. (p. 224)

Thus, when a photographer becomes aware of the constructive nature of images, he or she may become free from the belief that there exists a unique or ultimate way to photograph a subject. The photographer may then become more open to new visual avenues in photography and possibly to a more open appreciation of the world in general.

Similarly, as suggested in the *Chuang-tzu*, an awareness of the constructive nature of reality facilitates the recognition that there is no ultimate, fixed method to the art of living. This recognition frees a person to live creatively and harmoniously rather than rigidly and mechanically. The realization of the constructive nature of reality in photography and in the *Chuang-tzu* both allow for a more adaptable and liberating life, an approach captured in the following story from the *Chuang-tzu*:

Confucius was seeing the sights at Lü-liang, where the water falls from a height of thirty fathoms and races and boils along for forty li, so swift that no fish or other water creature can swim in it. He saw a man dive into the water and, supposing that the man was in some kind of trouble and intended to end his life, he ordered his disciples to line up on the bank and pull the man out. But after the man had gone a couple of hundred paces, he came out of the water and began strolling along the base of the embankment, his hair streaming down, singing a song. Confucius ran after him and said, "At first I thought you were a ghost, but now I see you're a man. May I ask if you have some special way of staying afloat in the water?"

"I have no way, I began with what I was used to, grew up with my nature, and let things come to completion with fate. I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself. That's how I can stay afloat." (Watson, 1968, pp. 204-205)

Although the man "wandering in the water" says he has "no way," one could argue that he does have a way—the way of adapting to the situation as it develops: "I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies." What the story also suggests, however, is that the man forgets himself, forgets methods, and becomes one with the water. Not entangled in the rigidity of a prescribed methodical way of representing the world or responding to it, he is able to creatively and spontaneously respond to life as it flows. The analogy also applies to the art of photography. When a photographer is not entangled in the rigidity of a set methodical way of representing the world, he or she is able to creatively and spontaneously construct more effective, insightful, and artistic pictures.

Seeing the sacred in the ordinary

The secret of the Tao is found in the smallest detail of the ordinary day.

—Lao-tzu
(Hoff, 1981, p. 49)

When I began my interest in photography, I unconsciously adopted the belief that some subjects deserved to be photographed more than others. Although I never attempted to produce a list of what I thought was and was not acceptable, after awhile I noticed that I would always photograph a narrow cluster of subjects such as sports events, animals, landscapes, friends, or family. One day, however, someone who had taken a picture of a door won the first prize in a photography contest. I could not believe that such a trivial subject could be judged worthy of a prize! Of course, that was before I tried to photograph a door. I had no idea how difficult it would be to construct an image that would make an ordinary door interesting. But the incident was a provocative and educational invitation to pay closer attention to the ordinary . . . and the sacred therein.

The following earthy dialogue from the *Chuang-tzu* calls attention to the inherent sacredness of all of nature's manifestations:

Master Tung-kuo asked Chuang Tzu, "This thing called the Way—where does it exist?"
Chuang Tzu said, "There's no place it does not exist."
"Come," said Master Tung-kuo, "you must be more specific!"
"It is in the ant."
"As low a thing as that?"
"It is in the panic grass."
"But that's lower still!"
"It is in the tiles and shards."

"How can it be so low?"
"It is in the piss and shit!"
Master Tung-kuo made no reply.
(Watson, 1968, pp. 240-241)

For those who *see*, according to the *Chuang-tzu*, the ceaseless process of nature—the Tao—is everywhere, enriching everything. Entering the Tao . . . the stream of life . . . photographers too can enrich their vision, their art, their lives.

CONCLUSION

> Lord Yüan of Sung wanted to have some pictures painted. The crowd of court clerks all gathered in his presence, received their drawing panels, and took their places in line, licking their brushes, mixing their inks, so many of them that there were more outside the room than inside it. There was one clerk who arrived late, sauntering in without the slightest haste. When he received his drawing panel, he did not look for a place in line, but went straight to his own quarters. The ruler sent someone to see what he was doing, and it was found that he had taken off his robes, stretched out his legs, and was sitting there naked. "Very good," said the ruler. "This is a true artist!"

—The *Chuang-tzu*
(Watson, 1968, p. 228)

Here the *Chuang-tzu* suggests that the "true artist" is one who unconstricts himself or herself from the entanglement of received ideas and rules. The true artist in the *Chuang-tzu* removed his robes and stretched out his legs before starting his creative work, despite being in the court of the Lord—perhaps an analogy for freeing oneself from the entanglement of little understanding.

The various themes discussed in this paper may initially seem disparate, but in reflecting on them over time, an underlying commonality slowly emerged for me which I would call "unconstricted awareness." Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine someone with a constricted awareness able to play, experience flow, perceive the constructive nature of reality, wander freely, or see the sacred in the ordinary. Like the true artist in the previous passage, a true photographer is one who can free himself or herself from conventional ways of seeing and thinking . . . free to "leap into the boundless and make it . . . home" (The *Chuang-tzu*, Watson, 1968, p. 49).

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NOTES

1. Sontag is referring to the famous photographs by W. Eugene Smith of the Japanese village of Minamata where mercury poisoning from industrial wastes reached epidemic proportions and caused deformities in children.

2. Watts (1975) defines the Way (or Tao) as follows: "Tao is the flowing course of nature and the universe." As the preceding passage from the *Chuang-tzu* indicates, however, the Way cannot be solidified into words without diminishing its untold manifestations.