REAL REVIEW 10

First there was panic. Then our stress gave way to boredom (and even a placid enjoyment). Now we feel a confusing mix of frustration, optimism, exhaustion, vitality, disbelief, acceptance, and sadness. We are mourning our lost futures, struggling to locate personal grief within the universal trauma of our species. We are adrift, unsure how to navigate a fluid landscape that seems ad hoc, disordered and dangerous. The unpredictability of our daily lives is also distracting us from deeper structural changes taking place. Even as we bear witness to the greatest civil rights struggle of a generation, the public sphere is imploding. We are floating in a civic vacuum. Democracies generate political agency through debate, protest, discussion and freedoms (of movement and association). These are all being suppressed. Often for good reasons, we are acclimatising to unprecedented levels of surveillance, control and precarity.

The pandemic is only a reminder that our societies were already unsustainable: plagued by disequilibria, inequalities and injustices. We can't go back, but we don't want to. Nor can we go on like this much longer. What will emerge from such a transitional phase, when the civic body is so lacking in health (physical, moral, political and economic)? There is much talk of combatting the novel virus with other forms of newness: new beginnings, new deals, new normals, clean slates, rebirths and fresh starts. Yet many of these visions do not account for the violence of fragile power, or the sheer magnitude of change required. Meaningful renewal certainly entails several centuries of pain, imagination, sacrifice, and dedication.

The Renaissance was just such a period. From the 14th to 17th centuries, cultural figures (more than scientists, politicians or economists) consciously tried to redirect history. They were not trying to invent a new future, but recover one perceived as accidentally lost. The Renaissance acknowledged wrong turns, restored forgotten knowledge, and reconstructed alternatives. It put the past to work in service of the future. The Renaissance was not its own end, but a bridge from feudalism to modernity.

We do not need newness to cut short capitalist realism, to restore a degraded nature, to achieve greater equality. We only need to remember what it means to be radical: to act, speak and think as if we are ready to die with our next breath.
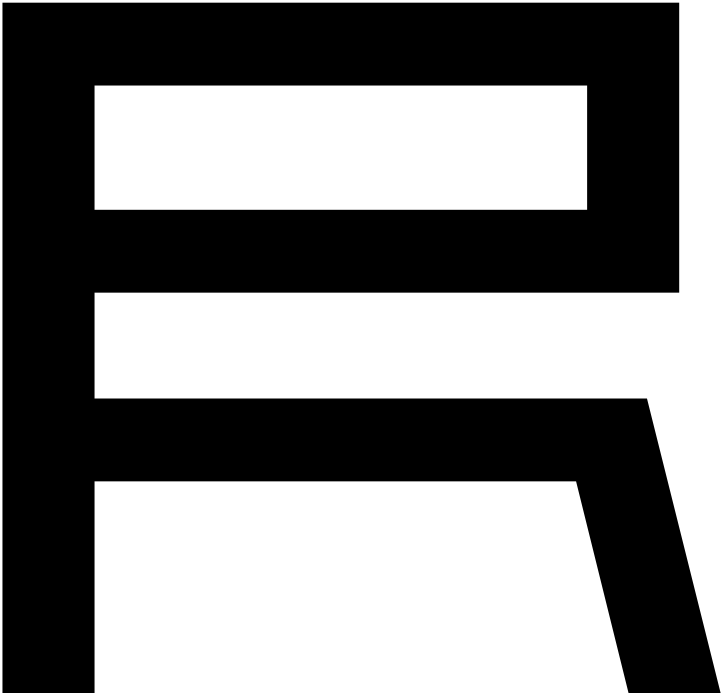
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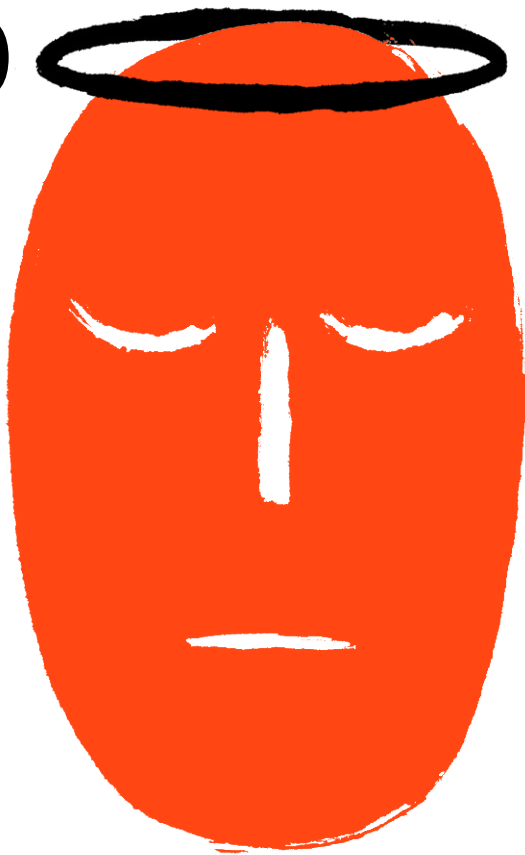
ANOTHER DIRECTION
Jack Self

What's new? Nothing much. There is news, but not the new. We've seen it all before. When it comes to contemporary life, the absence of newness has not surprised us for some time. We were aware that predictive algorithms were serving us what we already wanted. Creatives and curators release cultural and commercial products – we instantly recognise them, understand what they are, why they exist, and where they came from. They are relatable concepts in familiar forms. They are obvious, and they draw attention to our obvious needs and deficiencies (which we already knew we possessed, if only subconsciously). If we are shocked, it is not by newness, but by an uncanny prediction; the advert that is a little too unbelievably accurate. How did it know about that thing we were discussing last night? Is it always recording us?

We now expect a certain kind of personally-curated reality, which is both responsive to our existing beliefs, and anticipatory of our future preferences. Because these realities are self-reinforcing, we voluntarily cultivate a lacuna that excludes otherness. From this perspective, the problem is not so much that we only engage with people who are like us. The problem, which terrifies and enrages us, is that some people are not like us at all. These others live in other realities, insulated from our own. That's the problem. We are cut off from each other. We would like to find a way to reach these others, to destroy them or assimilate them. If they refuse, we would like to force them. Meanwhile, the others are equally terrified and enraged by our existence, and they would also like to destroy us (in their own ways).

How long these many mutually-exclusive realities can coexist is not a trivial question; the battle to restore civil society and a common public sphere is as much a struggle for our own sanity as it is the pursuit of pluralistic modernity. Unfortunately, the algorithms are indifferent to progressive pleas. Their operations simply channel and reproduce sameness.

This problem of otherness is first of all a problem of self-similarity – we feel increasingly estranged from others because we feel increasingly constrained by the image of ourselves. It is not just our social media feeds and inboxes that are stale; in current affairs, conversations with friends, global events, fashion, design and music, we experience the same comforting familiarity (or crushing banality). It makes our particular realities quite boring, precisely because everything we encounter has been preselected and filtered to correspond with our previous actions. The past, present and future are indistinguishable. This immersive homogeneity accentuates our fundamental fear of the other, which manifests as intolerance of uncertainty, suspicion of difference, and anxiety about threats to our power or agency.

In order to reconcile with the others, we first have to grapple with whatever is generating all this sameness.

At the start of this century, the popularisation of new communication technologies led to an internet that was increasingly centralised, corporate-dominated and media-rich. The economic model of Web 2.0 (particularly after 2004) was free-to-use proprietary platforms funded by advertising. Over the next decade, digital media corporations (Google, Blogspot, Wordpress, Livejournal, Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, and later Instagram and others) invested heavily in complex, targeted analytics. Their aim was to develop predictive promotional capabilities – personalised adverts that would have better chances of converting to purchases. They did this by turning audiences into commodities, mining human data as if it were a natural resource, and using it to create high-precision statistical associations. One name for this process is "surveillance capitalism".

The dominant extractive model was, and remains, social communication. These platforms compel users to endlessly "share" (produce and disseminate) "content" (diverse types of information, images, audio, videos and texts). The definition of content is suspiciously vague. For simplicity, let's call all the various file formats and exchange protocols "media objects". Surveillance capitalism has since become obsessed with expanding the proportion of social life open to data collection.

We needed little encouragement to upload vast quantities of content. As the volume of material became incomprehensible and unnavigable, some users gained status as thematic data managers. If you've ever used Tumblr or Instagram, you will understand the attraction of a "well-curated" feed made up entirely of reposts. This relationship with digital media is very recent: before 1999, there were no public platforms capable of hosting shareable content and almost no content to share (legally or practically). To describe this novel kind of creative uncreativity, the word "curation" was ported into the digital realm, due to its association with cultural figures that generate meaning from other artist's works, rather than making their own. Curation demands "an eye for" arranging media objects. It is an attitude towards compiling data. Learning to use the internet means first of all learning how to see differently. This transformation of vision, once learned, cannot be unlearned. The consequence has been an irreversible shift in our relationship with the real, which appears subordinate to the virtual. As evidence: when you first joined Instagram, you began to see everything and everyone around you through the lens of potential posts. You altered your behaviour to maximise impact. Maybe you still do. The mental image of your feed precedes your lived experience. With this eye, things appear as their own abstractions: as signs, as icons, as assets. Such vision aligns your soul with the machinic system of content production. Communication becomes another form of labour – a joyless, economic necessity. There is no difference between real objects and media objects. Everything is a form of curation. Everyone is a curator.

OUR ASSUMPTIONS
DETERMINE EVERYTHING

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Content platforms divide their populations into the active and passive; the influencer and the follower; those accumulating social capital, and those bleeding it away. The division is between those who understand how to make relevant content and those who do not; those who can see through the machine, and the blind. The active population contains three classes of individuals: the user-as-content-creator, who produces original objects; the user-as-content-curator, who only recombines existing objects; the user-as-content-creative-director, who repurposes curated content, injecting a minimum of originality. Virgil Abloh's "3% rule" sets the benchmark rate for innovation over existing objects. This is an austere, ruthlessly economic preservation of creative energy.

Initially, users engaged in digital curation for social prestige. Now it is propelled by a darker desire: the American Dream of surveillance capitalism is for a user to learn machine vision, build network influence, then parlay clout into cash. Social media platforms rely on networked engagement as a data multiplier. Their ambition is to encourage all users into the active population, and reward content that stimulates engagement of any kind. This is why the machine is not especially interested in creativity or originality, which would raise barriers to universal participation. It operates by facilitating the recontextualisation of what already exists. Its objective is smoothness. The machine demands relevance, but not newness. Relevance means familiarity, building on conventions, power norms and codes of conduct (as with TikTok trends). Maximum relevance posits a language of signs exchanged at extreme high-speed. To do this, such a language must operate at a pre-personal, pre-cognitive and preverbal level: directly engaging our perception, affects and emotions. Surprisingly, the universal language of content is not visual. There are too many semiotic complications that arise from image exchange. Instead, it rests on an object's ability to convey concepts: mental constructs, states of mind, abstract notions.

Our "profiles" are now inseparable from our identities. Like grains of sand in the hourglass, relentlessly piling on top of each other, they have accumulated irreversible errors. It feels too late to start again; to delete everything and build new profiles. There is no escape from this ever-growing pile, from our own aggregated self-similarity.

The polarisation of our societies is not caused by media organisations, political parties or demographic trends. It is a product of the business model of surveillance capitalists – companies whose profit depends on the generation of infinitely personalised immersive homogeneity. Unless we find a way to curb their power (unlikely in the near future), our societies will remain locked into these parallel lanes. If we want to rebuild the public sphere, we will have to work out how to run democracies based on this affective language, or curatorial vision.

To reconcile with those who are not like us, we must first circumvent our own feeds, break from the lubricated flow, and find another direction.

PICTURES OF THE PRESENT
Stephen Shore
in conversation with Jack Self

To be contemporary requires being both deeply implicated within your own epoch, while simultaneously cultivating a critical distance from the chaos of the present. This is how I framed the discussion with Stephen Shore, and I began by asking him about what he understands by contemporaneity. Does he recognise this double sense, of needing to belong in, and yet be removed from, a time? And in his own work, how does he negotiate between ideas of being both present and detached?

STEPHEN SHORE
When I was quite young, I spent a couple of years in Warhol's studio. I didn't do this as a learning experience, I did it because it was the most exciting place to be in New York at the time. If I look back at that period, one of the things I learned from Andy was a kind of remove, a kind of distanced delight. This was not simply a cynical attitude, but a consideration of the world from a distance. Andy would see something that could be thought of as commonplace or banal, but his reaction was to say, "Isn't that amazing?" or "Oh, wow!" Behind that "wow" is a kind of distance, a surprise or astonishment. Although, it's not exactly what you would call a critical distance. I used to get a lot of questions in the 1970s because if I photographed, say, a gas station, it was automati-cally interpreted to mean I was critical of car culture, or critical of gas stations... But the reason I was thinking about them is related to Andy's pure amazement or fascina-tion with how things have somehow turned out. How amazing that this is the way things should look, and that this is the way people behave. It's more nuanced than simply being at a critical distance of the present. It is not rejecting, nor is it buying into anything.

I've spent a lot of time at home in the past four months, as most of us have, and it has probably led to too much thinking. I realised, I'm going to be 73 years old in October. The period of time between now and when I shot the pictures for *Uncommon Places* is more than forty years. That is a decade longer than the period in time between when I photographed *Uncommon Places* and when Walker Evans photographed scenes of the Great Depression for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. In the 1970s, when I looked at *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* it seemed to depict a very distant world. The cars seemed so much older, the archi-tecture, the signage... it seemed so

very different, almost a different culture. If I look at my pictures from the 1970s today, well, some things look a bit funky, but, actually, surprisingly little has changed. When I drive around the US, when I get off the highways, it really looks very much the same.

There are a number of reasons this might be the case. But specifically, there is something about the pictures themselves. I've begun to think that if I'm actually in the moment when I'm taking the picture...do you know the term "flow", in the psychological sense?

JS   You mean being in the zone, that kind of mental state in which you're fully immersed in an activity, and time seems to slow down?

SS   Yes. If I take a picture as a "flow" experience, then perhaps the picture is of the present. So even though the subject matter may be forty-five years old, there's something about the experience – something in the taking of the picture – that feels like the present, because the present is an ongoing phenomena.

JS   One thing you've said about your work before is that "the thinking is in the doing". That very neatly ties into what you just said about flow. In a sense, I'm interested in how this flow is cultivated, and what role – if any – intuition plays in it.

SS   When I'm working, of course I have many things on my mind before I take the picture. But when the process starts, and it's the same today as it was almost fifty years ago, I'm just in the middle of the process. The significant change is — Wait, do you mind if I give you a long answer?

JS   Please.

SS   Malcolm Gladwell wrote his book *Outliers* about how 10,000 hours of practice leads to a kind of mastery. There's something very simplistic about that thesis, since there are clearly different degrees of mastery. Take music: I remember, when I was young, people telling me with amazement that Beethoven was deaf when he composed the late quartets. I don't think that's amazing at all; it's almost rudimentary that a composer wouldn't have to physically hear the notes. With photography: I pick up a camera and I don't have to look through it. I know where the frame is going to go, because I know each of my lenses. If I'm shooting in black and white, I know the tonality of a particular film and developer combination. That's what I would

call a technical mastery. You don't have to think about the technicalities, because once you've put in your 10,000 hours it's all second nature. Of course, when Kodak comes out with a new colour film, as they did in 1976, I had to learn a new palette, and my work changed. After a short time, I became able to see as if my eyes were replaced by this colour film – I could switch to seeing the world the way the film sees it. That's a kind of technical mastery, but there are at least several others: formal mastery, mental mastery…

During the time I was working on *Uncommon Places*, I tried to completely dissect every formal element of photography. Sometimes, there were specific questions on my mind. For instance, if I'm photographing down the street, do I have the curb land exactly in the corner of the frame, or go a little above or below it? What difference does it make, perceptually? I experimented with these kind of matter-of-fact formalities for the decade of the 1970s. At first, it would take me 15, 20, maybe 30 minutes to take a picture. I'd walk around and move a little forward and a little back, and try to figure out exactly where to stand. But by the end of the decade, I could just walk to the spot. And I would say that I put in about 10,000 hours dealing with formal problems… I don't know if it was literally that much, but to use it as a metaphor. Now, I don't think about any formal questions. This type of mastery has become ingrained, or, I guess, not so much instinctive, but intuitive.

JS Now that I have begun to achieve this mythical 10,000 hour mark in various activities, I find that I've come to trust my intuition a lot more than I did before. I've found that to ignore my intuition, or fail to acknowledge it, rarely leads to a good outcome on a project. I realise my instinct is no longer based on the same types of emotional reactions I had when I was less experienced; it's not a random response, but a kind of subconscious synthesis of the various skills and knowledge that I have acquired. It's a shortcut, in many ways. That is why I was curious whether, in your work, you had reached the kind of state you just described – a kind of flow or automatic process. I'm still curious what that might mean for your photography today.

SS What it means is that now I don't think about any of it. I kind of know what I want to photograph when I see it, and I know where I want to stand.

JS Does that absence of anxiety give you a sense of tranquillity, of silence or peace while you're working?

SS I would say silence, but it actually now happens so quickly, that I'm not sure anything else goes on.

JS When you were working on the formalities of photography, you must have been concerned with convention, either reinforcing it or subverting it. You've spoken before about trying to find forms of picture, such as the snapshot or the postcard, that resisted photographic convention or tradition. If today you have largely resolved the fundamental formal questions, I imagine you think a lot less about these aspects. What understanding of convention have you come to develop, and what is its relevance to your current work?

SS You're right, I don't think about conventions much now. I am here in rural Montana, and I'm sitting by the edge of a field, looking at mountains. I'll take beautiful landscape pictures, which can be kind of conventional. But conventions did play a role for a while, because I think of them as a filter. For a long time, I've been interested in a photograph that expresses or embodies a sense of immediacy. And I mean immediacy in an almost literal, etymological meaning of the word: "without mediation". And conventions are a mediation. I would see it in some snapshots, because snapshots have their own conventions. But every now and again there'd be a snapshot that just felt like raw experience. I wanted to capture that. And so, in the late 1960s I thought I would try to learn from mistakes, and I would look at snapshots, and I'd look at pictures that were taken accidentally, and see what mistakes looked like, and try to do it consciously. That attempt wasn't quite the success I had hoped.

Then in '72, when I began the series *American Surfaces*, I had a different idea, which was that I would try to take pictures that were an expression of what it's like to see a photography, rather than what it's like to take a photograph. And this is where convention comes in. I wanted to throw out the conventions of how to compose a picture. What I did was, at various times during the day, whenever I thought of it, I would take a mental screenshot of my field of vision. And when I took this screenshot, I would see what it was like to see, and use that as the basis of the pictures. What does seeing look like? And so I saw convention as something that interfered with that experience of

immediacy. And now, whenever I recognise that I'm doing something that has become habitual, rather than intuitive – as soon as I notice it, I question it.

For example, for years all my pictures were horizontal. Every *American Surfaces* picture is horizontal. In *Uncommon Places*, there are maybe, in the whole series, twenty or thirty vertical pictures, out of several hundred. And some of that was for very particular reasons: if I'm doing a street scene, and I want to photograph an intersection, it just makes sense to do it horizontally. Now, I question that.

For the past couple of years, I've only been photographing with an iPhone, and making square pictures. Or I have been working with a Hasselblad, and making vertical pictures. Part of the reason I'm doing this is just because it runs completely counter to my own automatic responses, and I want to question those.

JS In 2013, you were interviewed by David Campany – it was really quite a comprehensive conversation and pretty much covers your entire relationship with cameras and photography from the age of six to that moment. In the transcript, you mention that "you see more now than when you were young". I'm very interested by what it means to see, and how this differs from sight or vision. If seeing can be thought of as a type of recognition or construction of a worldview, there is also the opposite that can occur. As we age, do we also learn to unsee as much as see differently? I don't only mean this in relation to deconstructing the conventions of an activity like photography, or perhaps to challenging the traditions of professions or disciplines… I'm also referring to unseeing some of the deeper, structural and cultural assumptions that might have been passed down to us in our youth by previous generations, and which we only learn to really interrogate as we get older and build up our own body of experience.

SS First of all, let me say something more about what I meant by "seeing". I haven't read the Campany interview in quite a while, but I was probably referring to something I often encounter when I am teaching. I have ten people in a class, and my goal is to help each of them find their own voice as an artist. To do that I have to think, "what would be the next important step in the growth of this person?". And then, should I push them in a certain direction that might speed it up, or do I stand back and let them find their own path for a while? In a

way, to do this I have to think like each of these ten people. I don't want to push them to take pictures that are like my pictures, I want to push them to take pictures that are like their pictures – even though, at this point, they don't really know what their pictures are like yet. Doing this, trying to anticipate and inhabit their minds, year after year, I wind up seeing more photographic possibilities, simply because it's exercising my own vision, and getting me out of my own head – because I have to think like all of my students at the same time.

Now, to get to the real answer to your question. Something that I recognised – actually when I was about your age ([laughs] I'm sorry to say that, I sound like an old person), was that as people got older, there seemed to be a bifurcation. Some people became calcified, kind of caricatures of themselves. Other people became freer, and this was a continuing divergence. I think that may really be what's behind your question. For the people who get freer as they get older, there are just less rules.

We are currently in the very disastrous situation of witnessing a country run by a person who has calcified into a monster. Not everyone gets that bad, but this is what happens. He's doing things that are even against his own political interests, because he has totally calcified into a grotesque human being.

JS Yes, I can recognise that many people do calcify into their own grotesque caricatures as they get older. Fortunately, the majority of these objectionable people don't end up becoming the leader of the free world. Although I guess it only takes one…In essence, I would agree with you. That said, I don't think we can pin it on age in such a straightforward manner. A person's attitude or natural direction towards either freedom or calcification is probably formed very early in their life, far before they hit their thirties. A certain inclination towards freedom is also closely tied up in this concept of developing "flow" – or being in the continuous present in the way you were describing. If you can embrace that idea of flow, then you're always moving towards a state of potential openness, and lack of judgement about the world around you. I think that wards off small-mindedness – a reduction and simplification of one's worldview that is associated with calcification. To become like this, you have to kind of refuse to see any things that might contradict your existing expectations, beliefs or notions about the world and about the structure of reality.

SS Yes, I do think you're right that it starts early.

JS I'd like to come back to this idea of an eternal present. I feel very deeply in your work a desire to see things as they are, and so to present things very much as they are. And yet, to return to the question of detachment that I began with, it also seems like a lot of your work has almost been made for an audience that wasn't born at the time you made the picture. Your pictures sometimes assume the qualities of time capsules, or acts of intergenerational communication. I am interested by an idea of documenting the present as it is, when it's for a future that cannot know the reality it describes. Maybe I'm projecting; this is my own relationship to your work from the 1970s – in the pictures I can see a material world that feels familiar to me. I have the emotional sensation of having been there, at that point, and in that time, even though of course it's a world that I could not and cannot ever know.

SS I've always been attracted to everyday subjects, rather than things that are dramatic. I think that is perhaps a more fertile field for communicating a sense of heightened awareness, because the picture doesn't become overwhelmed by the drama. It's about looking… looking with self-awareness.

JS As a magazine, Real Review has always been interested in material culture. As its founder, and perhaps given that I'm an architect, our editorial agenda was originally based in architecture. This was never in a formal way, but more from an understanding of architecture as a spatial and material practice (even perhaps par excellence). I've always been fascinated by the construction of everyday life, of domestic life, and how buildings emerge as physical precipitations, formed by compromise and negotiation between conflicting interests – every object, every building, every construct is the result of conflict between different power relations, between class relations, between capital relations, between political relations, and between cultural and aesthetic relations. In that sense, your way of presenting everyday subjects gives me the impression sometimes that you may not, in fact, be photographing what things look like per se. Instead, these subjects stand in as almost the traces of these invisible forces.

SS You're exactly right. Let me answer that question, and maybe expand on your previous question too.

The photographer who had the most influence on me was Walker Evans. It was partially by great fortune that a neighbour in the apartment building I lived in as a child bought me a copy of *American Photographs* for my tenth birthday. It was the first photography book I owned. But I feel something deeper, like a kind of spiritual kinship to Evans, like we have a similar kind of restrained classicism in the way we approach things – so he's had a great influence on me. I spent many hours looking at his pictures from the 1930s; I learned a lot about architecture from his work, and I learned about what you described as a time capsule.

Regarding photographing invisible forces, that's something I got from Evans too. Photography is very bad at explaining things. I have students who have very strong political views. They want to take pictures in order to express those views. But you could express their views in one sentence, and so much more clearly than with a picture. What photography can do is see where the forces behind a culture become manifest visually. For me, one of those places has always been architecture. What you're saying is almost exactly the words I would use. That material culture is the precipitate of aesthetic, cultural, economic forces… I look at a main street, and I see all of that at play, along with the passage of time and the effects of weather. When the ground floor of a building becomes modernised or renovated, this is the moment when these various types of forces become accessible to a photographer.

JS I had an architecture professor at university called Pier Vittorio Aureli, who once said to me than in architecture there can be no metaphors. My response was, what about the work of people like Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown – who I know you worked with early on in your career. We had a discussion about the role of metaphor, and our conclusion was that the built environment is unusual, maybe even unique, in that many of its spatial and visual conditions are both literal and metaphorical simultaneously. The example that I often give is the head of the dining table: if it's an oblong table, this position is both the literal head of the table and the metaphorical seat of the family. To change the shape or size of the table, or the relationships between the diners, is to alter the dynamic of the family and its power relation. There isn't a name for this condition of being real and representation that I am aware of. It's not a spatial metaphor per se, but certainly a state in which the

social projection of meaning onto objects is inseparable from the physical relations of those objects. That's a long-winded way of getting round to how I understand what you're describing. Against this, those other types of photography you were describing, which try to capture an overt cultural or political message, work in an entirely different way, at the level of blunt illustration or visual metaphor.

This type of communication in photography has definitely become more popular and prolific, and not just amongst professionals. It's fair to say that Instagram runs on these illustrative, metaphorical pictures. Instagram instrumentalises photography in a very unusual way. It kind of reduces photographs to their own symbols. They are basically what I think of as cartoons. Often they have very little photographic quality, even if they are photos, and they don't seem to have very much real about them. Your work on Instagram is quite unlike these other pictures. Your work on Instagram seems, somehow strangely, very real.

SS About three or four days ago, I posted a picture of a big black cow in the middle of the frame with hills receding in almost Scotland-like fashion behind her. And someone wrote to me and said "I took the identical picture", and their picture is also a picture of a cow, but the frame cuts off one of its legs and part of its face. The only similar thing about them is that they are both represented by the word "cow". How they think that they took an identical picture is befuddling.

JS This is what I was trying to get to, in describing the way these images work as symbols. It's almost functioning like an overcomplicated emoji. People reduce the concept of a "cow", a "field", and then they cross-reference these terms in their own mental space against any other pictures of cows in a field. If they hit a match, they assume that the two images are comparable in some way without assessing the content. I'm not sure whether this type of linguistic, data confusion has existed for a long time, or whether it's a product of the logic of the internet itself. Nonetheless, that icon comparison in the absence of context is the significant error cropping up in a lot of digital photography, I think.

SS Yes, and I can point out a verbal equivalent of that phenomenon. Right after 9/11, when you flew on planes you would get a plastic knife, even if you were in business class. Maybe in economy you would

get plastic everything, in business you would get a stainless steel fork and spoon but a plastic knife. It was because of the word "knife", which sounds dangerous. But if you were to think of which is a more volatile weapon, a dinner knife or a fork, then a fork is far more dangerous. But the word "fork" doesn't have any connotations of violence. So the ban was on the word "knife", while giving me a great big stainless steel dinner fork.

JS You began taking photographs at a very young age, and in the same Campany interview I mentioned before, you describe how you, "arrived at a medium without any baggage, which can be liberating if you have ambition." My last question is really about ambition, and this drive to be active and do something. We tend to project ambition onto the individual, and say they want to transform themselves, or "make" something of themselves. We could also say that ambition is a desire to transform the world, as a projection of agency. In any case, ambition is closely linked to the basic idea of will and desire to be present in the world. Given everything we've said, do you still think of yourself as ambitious, as manifesting a type of ambition, or is this quality more an energy located in youth?

SS Sometimes the word ambition gets a bad rap in our culture. After teaching for a long time, I've seen lots of people who have more talent than they know they have – they're just blessed with talent, yet they have no ambition. I know that when they graduate they will never take another picture. And they don't. I've never been surprised. So I think a certain kind of…not an avaricious ambition…it easily can go too far… but a certain kind of wanting to make something of yourself is necessary. Otherwise, your work won't get published, it won't get shown, it won't even get made, that is what it really comes down to.

Personally, I don't ever recall feeling a desire to transform the world. I'm a little wary of that. I've always felt a little hesitant about people who want to transform the world, because, well, what if they're wrong? What if they're imposing something on others, even if they have good intentions? There's a Jewish concept called *tikkun olam*, which means to "repair the world". I think it means that different people find themselves in different life circumstances – by geography, by culture, by family circumstance, by innate talents or inclinations – and you do what you can.

What I can do is I can teach and I can take pictures.

REAL
REAL
REAL
REAL

CONTRIBUTION SPACE