

Reviews and Discussion

Victor Masayesva, Jr., and Erin Younger, eds. *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images*. Tucson: Suntracks and the University of Arizona Press, 1983. 111 pp.; 90 black-and-white photographs, 6 color photographs. \$25.00 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper).

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It is ironic that Native Americans are among the least understood of the world's peoples by Euro-Americans. Centuries of strife and divergent values have erected barriers to understanding which both groups are only now beginning to surmount. One pervasive misconception held by Whites is the romantic reverie of the Noble and Eternal Red Man, the Child of Nature. We view the Native American as locked into an unyielding embrace with nature, in that same promised land to which we yearn to return some day but which only seems to recede from our view. Despite our projections of Indians as bastions of traditionalism (which to a great degree they are), Native American societies are also clearly dynamic systems. While holding on to old and profound traditions, Native Americans are at the same time constantly making conscious, evolutionary decisions that affect one another's lives and those of their descendants.

In this regard Victor Masayesva, Jr., and Erin Younger's *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of contemporary Hopi Indian values and modes of visual perception and expression. It stands as the first forum, in volume form, by which Hopi photographers are enabled to reach a national audience. In the process we gain valuable insight into the ways by which seven Hopi view reality.

Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images consists of two main sections. The first contains essays by Masayesva, whose photographs are also featured in this volume, and a second, longer essay by his collaborator, Younger. Section Two consists of brief statements of purpose by each of the seven featured photographers and biographical sketches of each, followed by a selection of their photographs from the exhibition upon which this volume is based.

That this is a collaborative effort between an articulate member of the Hopi Tribe and a Euro-American scholar is both right and timely, for their efforts contribute substantively to a balanced view of the Hopi Way by invoking a bicultural model of presentation. Such an approach is valuable because it combines two cultural methods of social documentation. The

first is the Euro-American view of cultural reality, which we call anthropology. It is predicated upon having an observer standing slightly apart from a culture in order to acquire insights into facts and patterns which equally perceptive individuals from within it may miss by their very proximity to it. In the second approach we see that the corollary is also true, that the observer from another society may be handicapped by his or her own cultural projections and brief and serendipitous exposure to the complexities of the culture under scrutiny. Thus, in bicultural documentation, anthropological inquiry and personalized observations by insightful members of the society combine to form as full and balanced a picture of the culture as may be possible.

Masayesva's introductory essay, "*Kwikwilyaqa*: Hopi Photography," likens the doing of photography to the manifesting of the qualities of the personality of the *kadcina Kwikwilyaqa*, a comical spiritual entity (*kadcina* literally means "respected spirit") who occasionally makes an appearance at *kadcina* dances in the role of a mimic. Masayesva weaves a case for the photographer being just that: "*Kwikwilyaqa* is a living commentary on what photographers are and what photography is; implicating us in turn, revealing what people do to people" (p. 12). In the process he utilizes language which is candid, replete with affective and subjective allusions, and with a perspective that is certainly not formularized or objectified (in the Euro-American sense of the terms), but distinctively Masayesva and, very likely, typically Hopi.

Yet his commentary is fully universal. Highly self-aware individuals such as Masayesva are capable of effectively stepping outside their cultural conditioning to see what the *kadcina Kwikwilyaqa* cannot—their own place in the dynamic flow of ideas and actions comprising their own culture. In his commentary on the social impact of photography, for instance, Masayesva recognizes that photography can become a weapon, not only in the hands of outsiders but also in the hands of Hopi photographers when used to "violate the silences and secrets so essential to our group survival" (p. 10). He goes on to observe that this dangerous time of interface between positive and negative change in which Hopi photographers find themselves may result in the possibility of the camera's being used as a missionary: "one which intrudes itself within group-oriented values so central to the Hopi way, by reinforcing in the photographer his individuality" (p. 11). Likewise, the camera can become equally as obtrusive in the hands of a Hopi as in those of a White tourist, prompting Masayesva's observation that an equal desire to photograph non-*kadcina* religious events, such as the Snake and Flute dances, is expressed by many Hopi. But for the Hopi the injunctions against doing so are not embodied in the warning signs enforcing the ban on photography,

posted at the entrance to each village, but in the reinforcement of the awareness of its possible contribution to the advent of "the dangerous time prophesized by the old people. Refraining from photographing certain subjects has become a kind of worship" (p. 10).

Complementing Masayesva's insightful and expressive essay is Younger's study, "Changing Images: A Century of Photography on the Hopi Indian Reservation." This essay could not differ more organically from that of Masayesva in terms of orientation and style. Yet it is excellent in its own right, reflecting as it does the historical/cultural posture of the Western scholar concerning a subject whose continuum can be profitably traced across several generations of human time.

In this respect the reader is presented with a Euro-American complement to the Hopi viewpoint, and together the two provide the groundwork for what at this point in the reading promises to be a well-rounded, bicultural exposition on Hopi life and thought. But for one glaring incongruity (discussed below) Younger's essay provides a useful background compendium on the history of White photographic activity among the Hopi and the eventual advent of the Hopi photographing themselves.

Younger observes that early Anglo photographers were motivated to document the alien cultural ways of Native peoples whose homelands lay in the path of the railroad rights of way and of White settlement, to enable the government to achieve "better administration of Indian affairs" (p. 16). The resultant photographs and documentation were produced within the context of scientific field research by such individuals as the photographer John K. Hillers and the ethnologist/archaeologist Jesse Walter Fewkes.

Later, during the latter years of the nineteenth century, photographers such as Adam C. Vroman and Edward S. Curtis set out to record (as did *bona fide* ethnologists) the remaining tatters of the "vanishing race." That their work would help stimulate the tourist trade (not to mention the Noble Red Man reverie) is also significant. In the process they derived varying degrees of personal acclaim and financial reward from their endeavors as "art-documentary" photographers.

Younger goes on to discuss the work of subsequent photographers who frequently placed Hopi people in formulaic poses or in unauthentic settings in order to suit their own personal aesthetics or their White public's tastes. And we learn of sordid intrusions into the *kiva*, the sacrosanct Hopi ceremonial chamber, by photographers such as George Wharton James and the Reverend Heinrich Voth.

All this activity would ultimately lead to the banning of public photography at the Hopi mesas by the year 1915. Younger then introduces us to the White response to the restriction on photography, leading to

scenes depicting arts and crafts production, subsistence activities and manifestations of "modernization" (read "Americanization"). We are brought up to the present era with a discussion of contemporary treatments of Hopi life through the work of such photographers as Jerry Jacka and John Running and the dissemination of these through a parade of periodicals led by *Arizona Highways*.

Finally, Younger provides us with an introduction to the work of Hopi photographers. We are informed of the evolution from family snapshot photography to the active use of conventional visual genres: "Beginning in the late 1960's, Hopi photography expanded to encompass portraiture, documentary sequences, photojournalism and interpretive or 'art' photography" (p. 35). She ends her exposition with a brief general introduction to the types of images and genres which each of the represented Hopi photographers utilizes in his or her work.

Marring an otherwise unblemished introductory essay is Younger's treatment of the controversy surrounding the issue of whether Curtis had "lied" with his camera. This is the proverbial can of worms of Native American documentary photography, made doubly difficult by our contemporary misgivings over what was a total acceptance of the "art-documentary" genre during Curtis's time. Thus, was it lying or was it artistic license?

On page 18 Younger refers to the overzealous muckraking of Curtis's work by Christopher Lyman: "In taking pictures of the Snake Dance, for example, he [Curtis] used a wide-angle lens that not only froze the action of the dance but blurred the [predominantly White] audience in the background" (Lyman 1982). There appear to be two serious flaws in the reasoning. First, as any photographer will explain, using extremely insensitive film such as was available during Curtis's time (anywhere from 100 to 1000 times less sensitive than film in use today) will create the difficult problem of an inherent lack of depth of field. Depth of field refers to that area within the image which will be in focus in any given shot. The lack of depth of field is particularly aggravated when one wishes to shoot the picture with a fast shutter speed, such as 1/100 of a second or shorter in duration, in order to freeze rapid movement, such as dancing, without blurring. In this context, the aperture of the lens, even in brightest sunlight, must be opened very wide in order to admit sufficient light and compensate for the fast shutter speed. The larger the aperture, the more limited the depth of field. Accordingly, while the dancers are in focus, most of the background and foreground are necessarily blurred. To assume that by this means Curtis purposely planned to eliminate the White onlookers situated on the rooftops well beyond the dancers (which nevertheless could be the case) is simply circumstantial.

Second, to assert that Curtis used a wide-angle lens to freeze the dance action and blur the audience in the background is equally inaccurate. Indeed, a wide-angle lens would necessarily bring more of the background (and foreground as well) *into* focus. Telephoto lenses reduce the depth of field.

However, these are minor points in comparison with the lamentable conceptual omission characterizing the second part of the work, the section presenting the photographers and their photographs. Before commenting on this subject, however, let me observe the more notable qualities of this portion of the book.

The black-and-white photographs are well reproduced, while the color photographs retain a wide range of polychromatic tonalities. The printers have avoided the problems in contrast and registration which can occur in color reproduction. The images are economically sized yet large enough to allow for efficient discernment of detail and effective internalization of the images.

The biographical sketches of the individual photographers are adequate, as are the personal statements by the photographers. Adequate, that is, had the following pages of photographs been consistent with the gestalt laid down by the preceding essays, that of a bicultural exploration of the work of contemporary Hopi photographers.

I had received the impression from the preceding essays that the photographs themselves would be dealt with through collaborative in-depth annotation. This is supplied, alas, only too briefly by means of the photographers' statements and biographies. Indeed, the very meat of the book, the material toward which both essays were leading, is presented to the reader unannotated, undocumented.

At this point in the reading a critical question arose: for whom were this exhibition and book produced? The essays suggested a broad audience of both Euro-Americans and Native Americans having an interest in the cultural dynamics and artistic perceptions of the Hopi. Yet the almost total lack of documentation of the images suggested vacillation by the compilers between presenting the images in the cultural-documentary mode or in the fine arts mode. The latter seems to have been the major operant here given the lack of documentation. Yet had the "art for art's sake" orientation been orthodoxly followed, there would still have been some documentation given for each image. This might have included title; year taken; format of negative; and lens, film, and camera used. If the intent of the book was indeed cultural (actually bicultural), as the essays strongly suggested, then the almost total absence of documentation is even less understandable. This absence is uniform throughout with the exception of several of Masayesva's photographs. These are associated with poetry and poetically reworked traditional narratives

(associated with the images by, one would assume, the photographer himself).

The texts and images work together well, much as they did in the exhibition upon which the book is based. Poetry and narrative passages, in conjunction with conventional descriptive labeling, enhance and elucidate the focal objects (photographs and artifacts) in the exhibition (Gold 1978). This careful attention to the selective perception and varied predilections of a varied population of exhibitgoers—and of book readers as well—is critical for successful communication, especially of cross-cultural values and perceptions. If the visual integrity of the images were, as they seem to have been, paramount in the compilers' minds, then the annotations could have been discreetly placed at the back of the book along with the notes and bibliographic references.

Had these annotations been made, one would have liked to have seen them reflect a unification of the perspectives of the two essays. A bicultural annotation of the images might have taken the form of a historical/cultural inventory of the contents of each of these extremely varied images from the Euro-American perspective, in partnership with an orally delivered or self-written contribution by the appropriate photographer or by Masayesva. The Hopi contribution might have included the artist's commentary on the meaning and content of the image, his or her motivations for taking it, and, where possible, commentary by subjects of the photographs. In my experience at the Hopi mesas, documenting seventy-year-old photographs from the Wanamaker Collection (Gold 1983), I found that the Hopi people had a great deal of valuable information to share concerning the images. And here, in this book (and exhibition) was a golden opportunity to provide an entirely new dimension of information on Hopi thought and creativity through bicultural documentation of a collection of otherwise lovely images.

The presence of documentation cannot be overemphasized where cross-cultural communication through photography is concerned. The images are pregnant with meaning for both the photographers and the Hopi in general. But for those who have little or no understanding of Hopi culture—comprising most Euro-Americans—the photographs cannot begin to convey the meaning they contain (regardless of how compelling they may be aesthetically) without the assistance of documentation. The partnership of the image's frozen moment and bicultural documentation constitutes the mediation so critical to bridging the gap between the two cultures.

Yet the problem may be in good part the result of the reduction of the exhibition into the medium of the book. In the exhibition, the lack of documentation was not nearly so apparent. The photographic prints were much larger than those in this publication, making

them more effective in involving the viewer. One became immersed in them; one became carried away. Also, given the lack of time available in which one could ponder the images' meaning (as the result of pressure from the flow of others viewing the exhibit), the unannotated photographs worked acceptably within the context of the exhibit. Within the context of the book and all its trappings, however, the photographs command less of one's total available attention. Combine this with expectations laid for bicultural documentation, and I suspect that the circumstance of translation into a new medium lies at the root of the problem.

We nevertheless must commend the authors for an otherwise valuable publication and exhibition. They have provided us with our first glimpse into how contemporary Hopi Indians visualize themselves and their place within the scheme of things, through the medium of the photograph. They also deserve our recognition for the less overt message this book brings. We are reminded once again that Native Americans are not fossilized artifacts on a museum shelf. Like their Euro-American sisters and brothers, Hopi are expressive people living dynamic lives. And their visualizations and motivations sensitively captured on the photographic emulsion reflect their many ways of living in the face of the winds of time and change, which blow incessantly over their austere beautiful homeland.

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Frank Webster. *The New Photography*. London: John Calder, 1980. 262 pp. \$22.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper).

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Webster has written an introductory textbook on the relationship of culture and photographic communication. The purposes of the book are to describe the theory, objectives, and practice of the "new photography" and to redirect photographic education away from perspectives grounded in technology, aesthetics, and artistic creativity toward an appreciation of sociological, political, cultural, and ideological dimensions of pictorial representation. The applied context is introduced as follows: "My intent . . . [is] to convince the visual communicator to reflect upon his culture, to question meanings frequently taken for granted and to research assiduously into the complexity of his society's ways of seeing. This should be a prerequisite to intellectual and effective communication" (p. 67). As such, the book could be used in undergraduate courses on photographic education, visual communication, sociological photography, or visual anthropology.

Webster initially criticizes the weaknesses of certain "technicist" approaches used by educators who tend to ignore the social, political, and cultural components of visual communication. Criticizing the technicist ethos as a myopic, self-indulgent view of photographic practice, the author argues for a genuinely accepted realization that "all photography is an attempt at capturing, recording and projecting *meaning*. . . . Photography as an attempt at communicating, as a practice centrally involved with meaning, was ignored in favour of a science which aimed for a grasp of chemical and optical skills and little else" (p. 12). "We should avoid working with notions of a set of techniques which supply a vocabulary for photography" (p. 16).

These objectives set the stage for Webster's description of the "new photography." Described as a way of thinking that emerged in the late sixties and early seventies, Webster says, "The 'old' photography was and is an *unreflective* view . . . [T]he new photography believes its predecessors overlooked a whole series of questions which nowadays can be seen as axiomatic to the visual communicator (p. 4). . . . [T]he new photography insists that we recognize image creation as an attempt at communication. . . . Necessarily this requires coming to terms with the *social* in photography. In turn it insists that the photographer recognizes his role in society. . . . What is