

Tree trunks at Waimea Canyon, Kauai.

Photography as Communication

Francis Haar

Communication is presented in influential circles as the solution to most of our problems today. In our fast-moving, technological society, the visual-means is becoming one of the most effective ways of communication. Photography, a product of this machine age, is being utilized in many important fields. Science, for example, uses cameras as technical devices because its lenses have the quality of "objective recording" required for scientific studies.

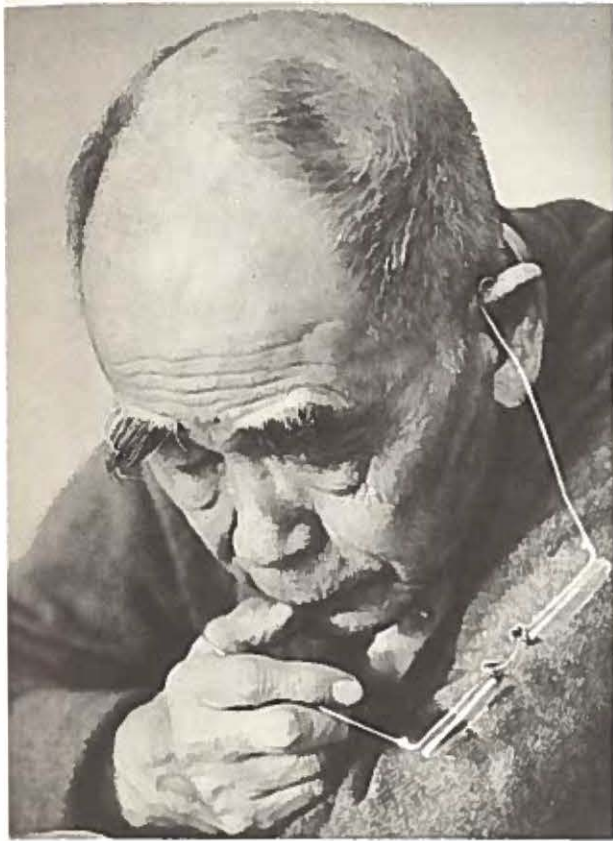
Communicating by visual-means has three basic characteristics. The first is speed. We use visual symbols; traffic lights, signals on the roads, to communicate fast messages. We use pictures in newspapers so the man of today, who has hardly enough time to read, can grab information by sight. The second is the convincing power of an image. "Seeing is believing," they say. The picture gives us a direct sense-experience, in contrast with an approximate verbal description. Thirdly, an image can give us a unique perception of the world, stopping the fleeting moment, that no other media can.

We realize today, that only the literary meaning of the subject-matter of a picture can be given in words, like the caption of a photograph. The essential message,

conceived by and communicated through the eye is visual; using a language of forms, space, lines, tonal values, etc. These are related to each other, and are organized into the rectangular format of the photographic image. This way the photographer transmits the nuances of facial expression, atmosphere in the locality, the rhythm of light and shade, the gravity or drama in visual factors, in a convincing, direct experience, unexpressible by the means of words.

We are becoming increasingly sensitive to visual stimuli in communication. In addition to safety signals, we are constantly bombarded by fast-moving provocative images in television commercials, newspaper advertisements and motion pictures. These help us to appreciate more, those cultures which place more emphasis upon the visual.

The effectiveness of a picture in communication depends not only on its technical, but on its humanistic qualities as well. A good photograph is a carefully-selected, personal interpretation of a visual concept of the photographer. The camera is only a recording device; the impact and quality of a picture depends on the perception, the honesty of interpretation, and the photographer's power and ability to communicate



Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki, Zen Buddhist scholar.



Fishing village, decorated for New Year, Japan.

visually. "The photographer's eye is perpetually evaluating," says H. Cartier-Bresson, the prominent photo-journalist. "A balance must be established between the two worlds, the one inside us and the one outside. As a result of a constant reciprocal process, both of these worlds come to form a single one. And this world we must communicate." His main interest is the human-being and his constantly changing and moving life. This demands great concentration and spontaneous decision; what Cartier-Bresson calls "the decisive moment." His photographs, conceived sometimes in a split second, are still not accidental. He utilizes all the chances and coincidences intuitively, for a maximum final result.

Dorothea Lange is another outstanding representative of humanistic-documentary photography. She focuses her camera on man with a deep sympathy and understanding. Her aim is to present life faithfully and realistically. There are a great number of present-day photographers following a similar approach who are devoted to one purpose: to communicate reality.

There is another effort in photography-as-communication today, the concentrating on the aesthetic to create abstract images not limited to the external, visible world. We have learned, by experience, that the visual components of a picture; namely, the shapes,

rhythms, balance, symmetry, or tones can have a psychological effect on the viewer, who consciously or unconsciously reacts to these visual stimuli. This new endeavor is aiming to liberate photography from the limitation of an impersonal rendering towards a more subjective, personal, and imaginative world. The aim is to communicate feelings, aesthetic qualities, humor and drama.

In addition to the camera technique, the darkroom processes are important components of the craftsmanship resulting in a quality photograph. Experiments are conducted with light, solarization, photogram, negative-print, superimposing, etc. The well-exposed negative serves just as a starting-point, from where the creative imagination of the photographer can evolve and unfold unexpected results.

Depending on our temperament, human interest or a desire for search and adventure, our activity could extend to more than one segment in photography. To do so, it will help us to become more articulate in this "visual language", the popular field of contemporary communication.



Light Show, superimposition of two negatives.

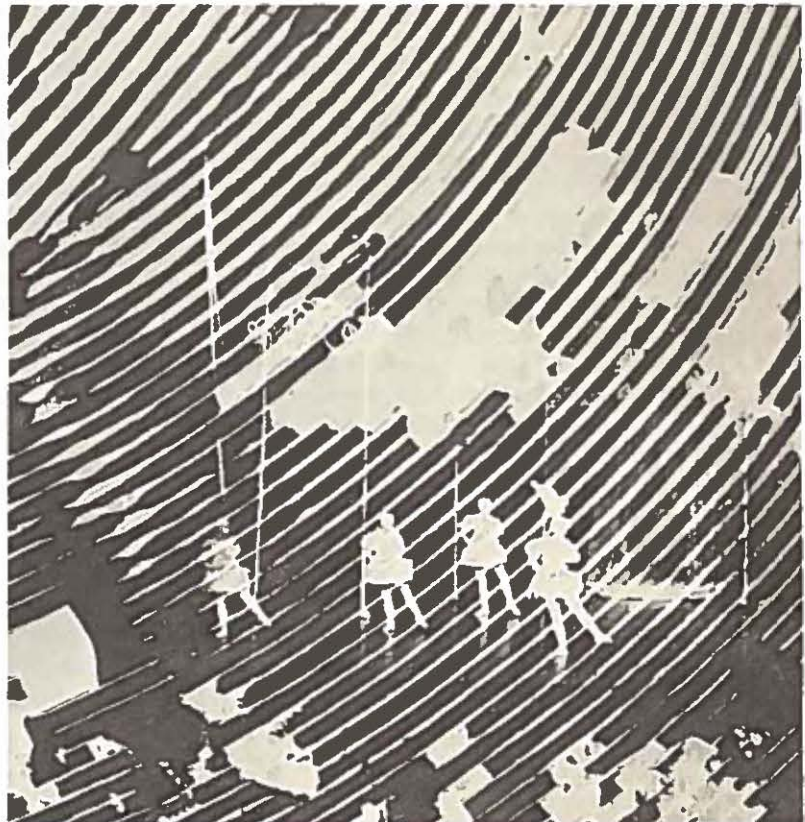
Superimposing two images, (water puddle and dancer).



Francis Haar, is a distinguished photographer whose films include, Pineapple Country Hawaii, Arts and Crafts of Japan, and Tenno, a film made for Japanese Television. All photography in this article and "The Old Story Teller" by Francis Haar.



Superimposed, dancer and close-up.



uperimposing two images, old wall and dancers.