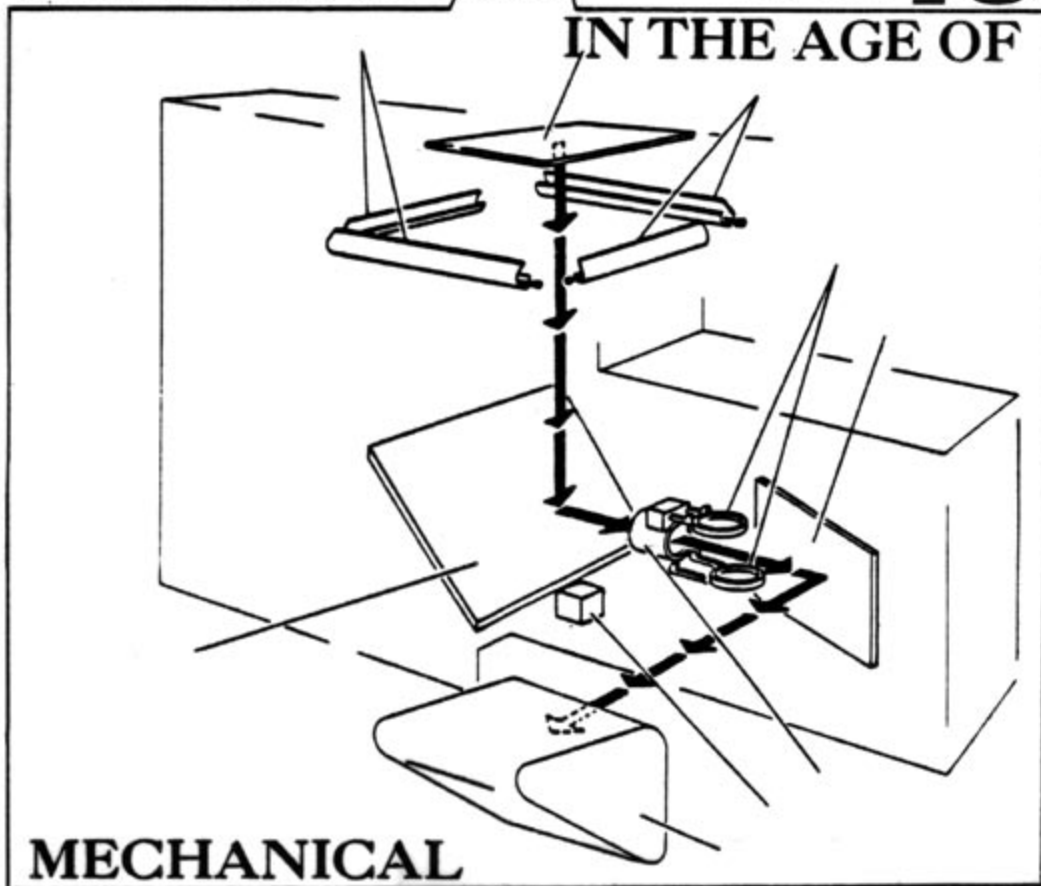


p h o t o  
S T A T I C

THE WORK OF ART

no 19  
July 1986

IN THE AGE OF



MECHANICAL

REPRODUCTION

This issue of PhotoSTATIC has a specific referent in mind, and this is Walter Benjamin's 1935 article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Although the article deals most specifically with motion pictures, it seems apparent that it could easily be extended to deal with (the title implies this) machine-based arts generally, such as xerography, photography, video, and computer-related imaging systems.

PhotoSTATIC is a not-for-profit bimonthly periodical which is edited by Lloyd Dunn. This issue of PhotoSTATIC and others like it are funded in part by a grant from the University of Iowa Fine Arts Council (thank you). Your comments on this or any other PhotoSTATIC projects are welcome at 330 S Linn St #7, Iowa City USA 52240.

This issue contains art by Stephen Perkins, 135 Cole St, San Francisco CA 94117 (ppg 549, 553); Yrizarry, 22 Belvedere, San Francisco CA 94117 (p 550); Joel Lipman, 2720 Winsted, Toledo OH 43606 (p 551); Marc Pira, B.P. 44, 33031 Bordeaux Cedex France (p 557); Miekal And, 1341 Williamson, Madison WI 53703 (ppg 556-9); Steve Harp, 550 W Aldene #35 Chicago IL 60657 (ppg 560-1); Warren Ong, 330 S Linn #7, Iowa City IA 52240 (ppg 563, 570); Mary Disney, 526 N Governor, Iowa City IA 52240 (ppg 564-5, 568-9); Bonnie Sparling, Iowa City (p 567 reprinted from pS#9); the long article is by Ll. Dunn in response to the theme.

## **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction and the Ontology of the Xerographic Image**

Xerox machines are usually thought of as a kind of press, when in fact they are a type of camera. Xerography is a kind of, or extension of the, photographic process. Although it is non-silver, xerox still uses the basic photographic principles of exposure to light by means of a lens, development of the latent image so formed, and the production of a print from that developed image. The steps fall neatly in place as if they were the paradigm of western logic.

Xerox of course is not the supple seductive medium that gelatin silver photography has become. It may be that xerographic technology, following photographic technology by a century, hasn't had the time to become so refined, although I am struck that neither has it had the inclination to become 'refined' in the same ways. Just as people were hesitant at first to accept the photographic image as anything but a mechanical contrivance capable of cherish-able but vernacular images, they are still more than a little hesitant to embrace xerography as an expressive medium. Copy artists, as they some-

Add Text to Your Picture

Multiple Pictures

Shadow

Align Left

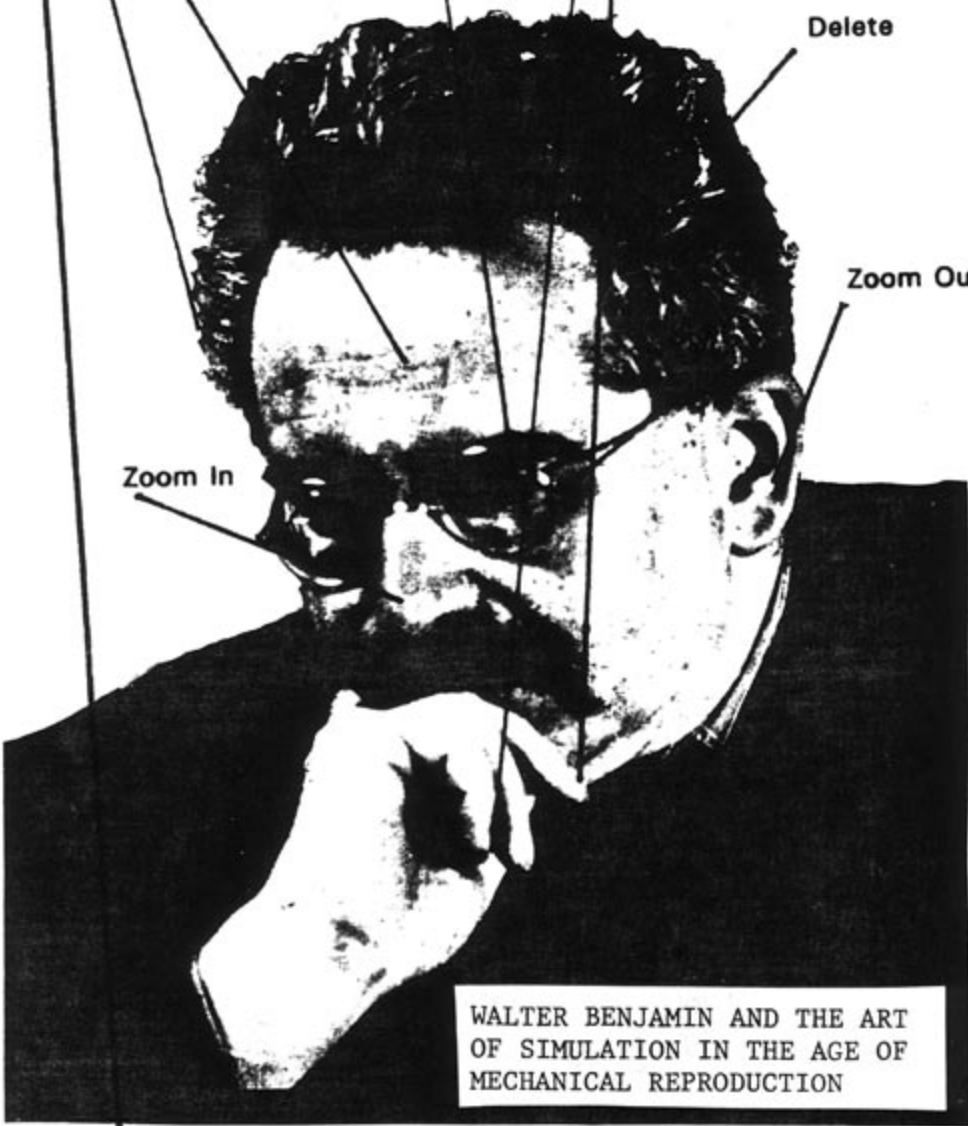
Pointing Finger Icon

Duplicate

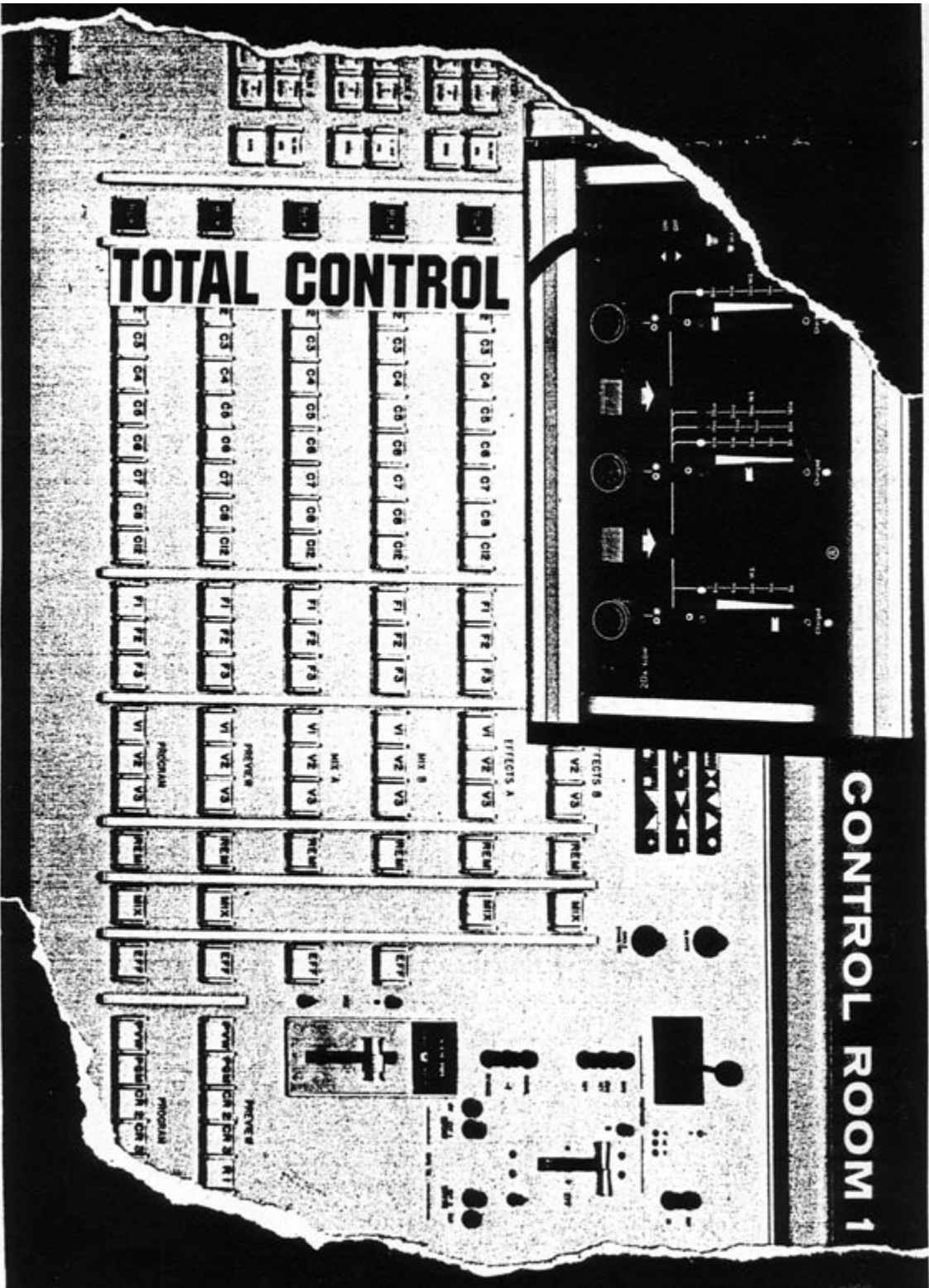
Delete

Zoom Out

Zoom In



WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE ART OF SIMULATION IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION



CONTROL ROOM 1

HOUSE PAINTING METHODS



Plate 86-A.—Method of Rigging Fall Ropes for Swing Stage

LADDERS, SCAFFOLDS AND SWING STAGES

off the ground and level for testing. The free end of the fall rope should be tied securely to the upper end of the metal stirrup rod, using a knot which is both secure and easily untied. Plate 86 illustrates various knots used for this and other scaffold rigging purposes.

Place on the scaffold the full load of men and materials and proceed to test it by springing it up and down. Then, examine the cornice hooks and if all is well you are ready to raise the stage to the top level and begin work.

Before going up place the guard rail in its iron supports which are a part of the metal scrubs.

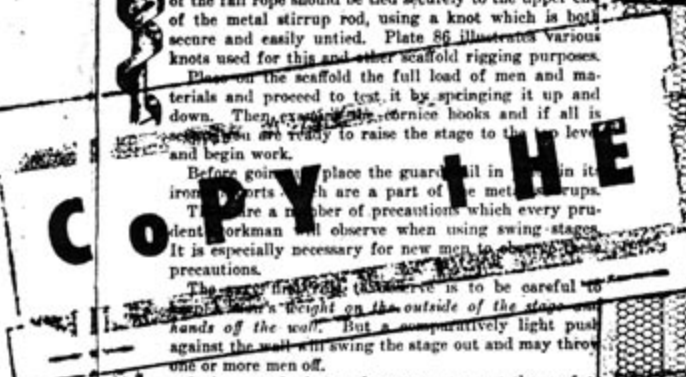
There are a number of precautions which every prudent workman will observe when using swing stages. It is especially necessary for new men to observe these precautions.

The first precaution to observe is to be careful to keep the weight on the outside of the stage, not on the hands of the wall. But a comparatively light push against the wall will swing the stage out and may throw one or more men off.

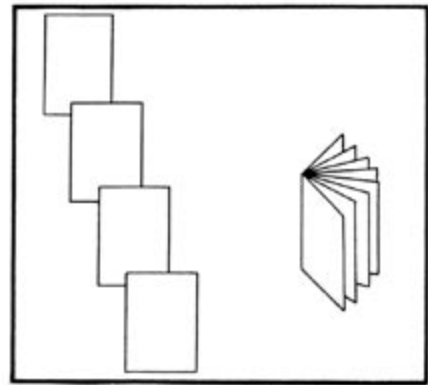
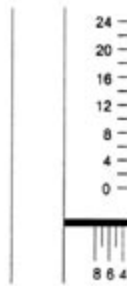
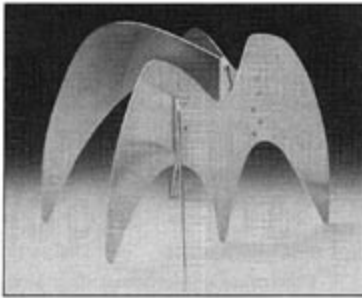
It is a good plan to have one man on the roof to observe the action of cornice hooks when the first test is made of the stage. Sometimes the hooks squirm around and need to be secured. Keep in mind also that the strain pulls outward more as the stage is raised nearer the roof.

Cornice hooks ought never to be located with the upper ends of the metal gutters; a block of wood under each point makes a safer hold, but even then there is some doubt.

There are other ways to secure the upper tackle block to the roof or cornice, but none is so good as the use of cornice hooks. Some of the older painters simply throw the looped end of a double rope over the capstone of a brick wall or over a cornice as noted in Plate 84. The ends of the rope are carried back and secured



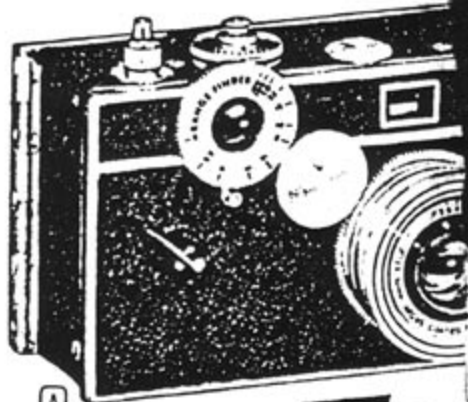
Lipman: 86



times call themselves, do not normally bemoan this fact. They are well aware of the charms of their chosen medium and do not ache to have it accepted by a mass audience.

Roland Barthes says in his book *Camera Lucida* that the unique quality that photographs share with no other art medium is their undeniable fact-hood. A photograph, no matter how manipulated it is or what the intent of the photographer, is on at least some level a document of a specific set of light rays. This is the most completely objective analysis of any photograph. It is scientific and makes no attempt at analysis beneath the surface. The same is true of any xerograph because, like a photograph, at the base is an exposure, a modulated set of light rays which place the image on the photosensitive surface.

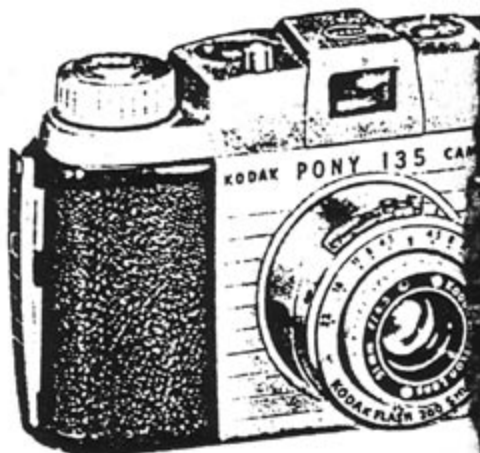
Because gelatin silver photography is more sensitive to subtle grades of tonality and contrast, that is to say, light modulation, it is more difficult to cover up your tracks in the making of manipulated images. This is especially true with photo-montage and multi negative combination printing. Jerry Uelsman is currently the superb craftsman of this genre, but unfortunately, his images are trivial. It would seem that all his energies are divested on issues of craftsmanship, and meaningfulness thus suffers. I prefer to point to such practitioners as Hannah Hoch, who seems to celebrate the seams which are created by her juxtapositions. Or Barbara Kruger, who puts together images and texts in socially observant ways with something that approaches poetry. It is perhaps because of this difficulty that the majority of serious photographers have elected to engage the viewer with largely "straight" photography, with an emphasis on making the single image speak loudly without the aid of other images or words. Frequently, these photographers talk about such things as



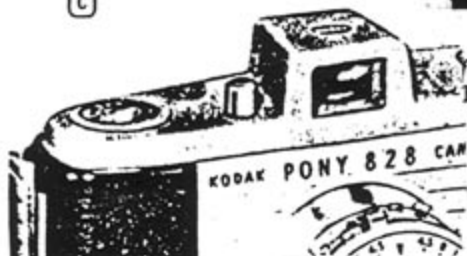
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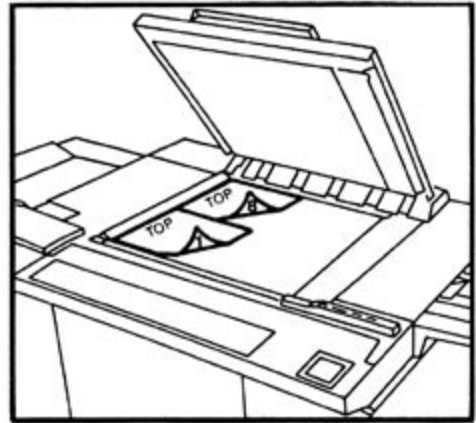
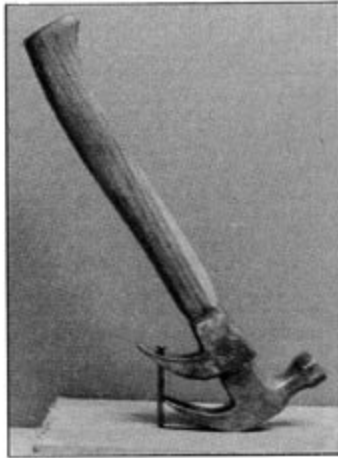
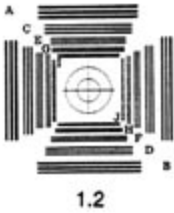
B



C



the Mongolfier balloon seen from the Do-  
 Berlin, Staats Museum (photo Fiorentini,

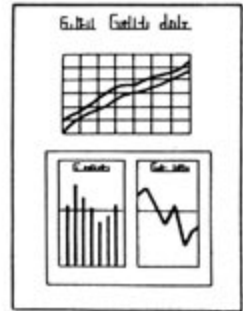
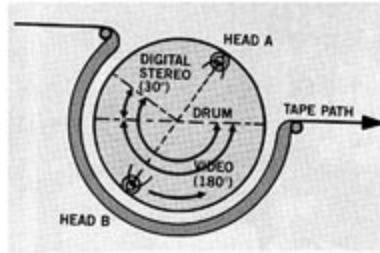
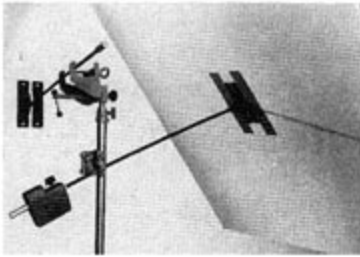


“the quality of light” and “the photographer’s vision” in dealing with works of this type.

In xerox, paste-ups are the essence of the process. Xerox machines of all makes and models are designed to produce very high contrast images well, and lower contrast images not so well. The reason for this is simple: xerox machines are not manufactured to make art, they are manufactured to make duplicates of typographic information cheaply and efficiently. It is to an extent in spite of the process that xerox has caught the eye of some artists. They admire the ease with which images and texts can be combined, manipulated, and recombined, to create novel juxtapositions, most of which simply were not possible before xerox became accessible.

Xerographic manipulation extends in another significant direction as well. This arises from the inherent quality of xerox as a diapositive process, which is to say that there is no negative intermediary between the original and the print. Therefore, the direct use and application of any xerox copy to the process again is an obvious capability. Every xerograph is a potential original in a way that every photograph is not. The piece of xerox art you just made can be made into a new piece of xerox art, and so on.

If a photograph is, as Barthes states, an undeniable fact, then a xerograph is undeniably a fiction. A xerograph of a photograph or another xerograph can only be seen as manipulation. This is a very curious thing. A reproduction is, on at least some level, supposed to have enough of the qualities of the original to serve a purpose that the original cannot. As Walter Benjamin states in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” an original can only be one place at a time. Xeroxes are excellent replications of the typed page but



poor, in the strictest sense, at replicating continuous-tone photographs. Xeroxed photographs result in distorted gray scales with black, detail-less whites and frequently gray flat blacks. (Although it must be noted that each manufacturer's machine has its idiosyncrasies in this regard.)

Not only does this limitation of xerox help determine what type of work formally can be undertaken, in my opinion it actually governs the type of content that meaningful xerox work addresses. The artist, in choosing to work in xerox, makes a political statement ("The Medium is the Massage") just by that fact. Xerox is inherently democratic and accessible and the weight of capitalist machinery is never behind such work. This is not to say that xerographic artwork is inherently socialist in thrust. But it does imply a certain populism which may or may not be directed outside of the "art world".

Xerox artists circumvent the gallery system by putting their work out for practically nothing. The xerox artist is not someone who makes a living at it. He trades his work for the work of others, and often gives it away for free. Most xerox artists speak of free exchange of ideas and communications through their artworks. They prefer to exchange subscriptions to each other's magazine works, rather than purchasing a subscription outright.

Occasionally, you hear someone complain that the size of xerox work is too much of a limiting factor. True, only a limited number of standard paper sizes are available for the vast majority of machines. To these people, one could reasonably contend that the scope of xerox work lies not in the physical size of the sheet of paper it's printed on, but rather in the number of copies the artist chooses to make and distribute. This notion of scope is tightly in line with what it means to be working in xerox. Ultimately, many small can have





characters and new symbols  
for sound groups



qEAP

SARP



FORMEJ




hink

constitut





tENSin

darka




defghi

q q  
h h

Before  
a painting

will  
sacrifice

public  
sound  
ballistics

the film  
conscious

What  
aura  
the  
poem

persuasive  
contemplation

asocial  
behavior

works of  
outrage  
structure  
an alluring

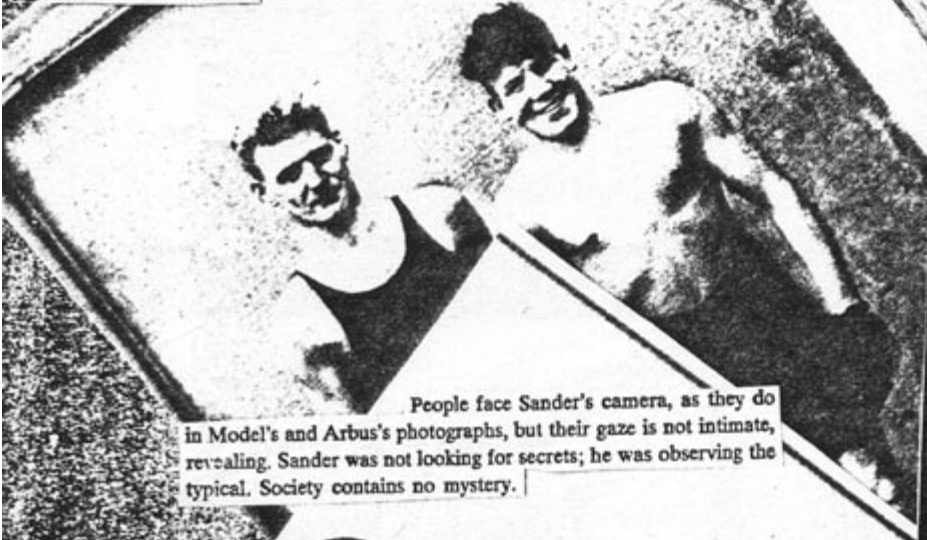
paintings  
intended  
their  
distraction

ists became  
instrument  
"word salad"

The greatest reputation to emerge from the 1920s was that of August Sander, a portraitist and industrial photographer.

What Sander brought with him from the nineteenth century was an idea that portraiture ought to be decorous and formal, and that sitters should be seen in full or three-quarter length.

"It is not my intention either to criticize or describe these people," Sander said.



People face Sander's camera, as they do in Model's and Arbus's photographs, but their gaze is not intimate, revealing. Sander was not looking for secrets; he was observing the typical. Society contains no mystery.



The Photograph of the... fact critical enough to disturb (in 1934, the N... sored Sander because his "faces of the period" did correspond to the Nazi archetype of the race), but it is also too discreet (or too "distinguished") to constitute an authentic and effective social critique, at least according to the exigencies of militantism: what committed science would acknowledge the interest of Physiognomy? Is not the very capacity to perceive the political or moral meaning of a face a class deviation?



171 Affectus Magnus D... Kompanis. P.H.: (The Composer Paul Hindemith) Coloc. 1 Illustration No. 29 in *Analyse der Zeit* (Face of Our Time).

An analysis of art in justice to these relations insight for the first time emancipates the work



SANDER: NOTARY



...the age of mechanical reproduction must do  
 ...ships, for they lead us to an all-important  
 ...in world history, mechanical reproduction  
 ...of art from its parasitical dependence on

In his essay of 1931 'A Short History of Photography' Walter Benjamin considered Sander's book of 1929 and judged it to be 'an atlas of instruction' or training manual in front of which contemporaries should sharpen their 'physiognomic awareness' to deal with increasingly dangerous times.

Sander starts with the peasant, the earth-bound man, and takes the reader through all the strata and occupations, up to on the one hand the highest representatives of civilisation and on the other down to imbeciles'. It was not as a scholar, advised by race theorists or social researchers, that the author undertook his enormous task, but, in the publisher's words, 'as the result of immediate observation'.

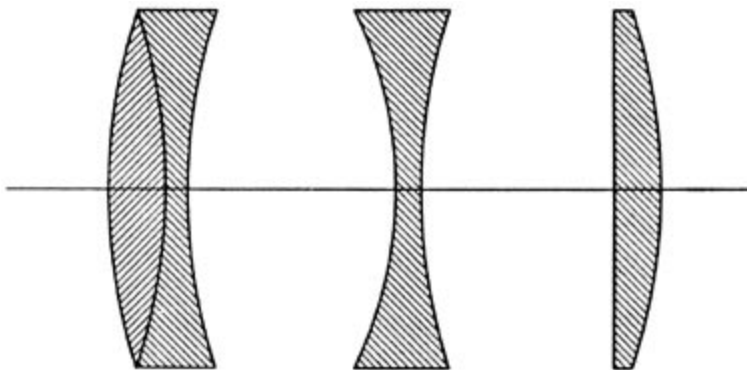
Sander's work is more than a picture-book, it is an atlas of instruction.

'In our age there is no work of art which is regarded with as much attention as a photograph of oneself, one's closest relatives and friends, one's sweetheart'



*"The Nazis censured Sander because his 'faces of the period' did not correspond to the aesthetic of the Nazi race."*

It is a mistake to associate Photography, by reason of its technical origins, with the notion of a dark passage (*camera obscura*). It is *camera lucida* that we should say (such was the name of that apparatus, anterior to Photography, which permitted drawing an object through a prism, one eye on the model, the other on the paper); for, from the eye's viewpoint, "the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and the fascination of the Sirens" (Blanchot).



more impact than one large.

Because it is so easy to make a xerox, technique as such is nearly nonexistent. Only the machine need be competent. Obviously this ease of production puts the requirement on the artist that his ideas be strong. Xerox has certain material qualities that are beautiful to be sure, but the range of effects which xerox is capable of is clearly limited. This makes idea-oriented work more suited to the medium. It further adds the requirement that these effects be used in support of the ideas and not simply as effects. The distribution capabilities of xerox are emphasized in the best of xerox work. Xerox is an inexpensive, highly mobile medium in which verbal and pictorial ideas are exchanged readily and freely.

Xerox shares many of these distributional aspects with offset lithography. Although a piece of offset is not precious by any means (especially as it is used in commercial applications), it is proper to see offset as having a certain weight that xerox can never have. It is not improper to ask, in looking at a xerox, "How many others of these are there, one, two, perhaps forty?" Xerox is accessible to nearly everyone with an income and it is just as easy to make one copy as it is to make a thousand. Every xerox run is cost-effective. This is not true with offset. Preproduction is labor-intensive; there is preparation of originals, the camera work, layout and stripping, then imposition and processing of plates. Small runs are normally unfeasible, as setting up the press requires time and effort. It takes several hundred impressions wasted just to get the machine running consistently. This is more the entire run of many xerox magazines currently in operation (PhotoSTATIC included.)

All this is to maintain that xerox has none of the gravity of offset. When we see the offset work, we automatically assume that there are many more



the ways we use our eyes

use our eyes

to take place in the way we use our eyes

The eye of the spectator needs only to expect

It is impoverished

a fluxing of consciousness

and of technology occur simultaneously

collects data

understands

distributes

moves slowly

material  
spiritual

image

it may seem strange

a heart.

an oil can

interact

see impulses speaking

by obscure instrumenta

And jaded big brown eyes

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The smile has, even yet, that original effect.

*Dated Big Brown Eyes*

Response to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" W. Benjamin



out there like it. Further, we feel that there is a virtual industry out there supporting that image because of this. Nearly all the offset which we come in contact with is produced by big companies with lots of money. We intuit this when we see the offset image, and this influences how we interpret it.

A work of xerox is not carved in stone. Things fall together as easily as snip and tape; revisions are easy and natural; revisions of revisions are just as easy. Xerox works become the raw material for new xerox works. Xerox artists are continually appropriating their own past work and the work of others to work it into their new work. They do this to refer to the community of xerox images "out there" and they do it to improve a work to make it better suit their vision.

Photographic vision as it is referred to here is a part of the work of the xerographer as well. Xerox is photography inherently one generation removed. The raw material for most xerox work are standard gelatin silver photographs and offset lithographs derived from silver photographs. The photographer takes images from "out there" in the 'real world" and the xerographer no less so. The phrases in quotes refer to slightly different things however, in that it is the stance of the xerographic artist to produce in reproducing. But what makes the image of the photographer more his than anyone else's? The photographer reveals his discovery, the xerox artist as I have painted him analyzes the discovery of the photographer.

I treat xerox as the ideal adhesive. This is to say that images go in in a certain form and come out very much changed, of a surface, equalized in terms of timbre and nuance of black. Because they are so obvious (just as in film editing) all the seams end up missing and all the edges are suppressed. The xerox machine for me is a way of moving around disembodied images and applying them to the surface of my choice. It is a way of dismembering one image and using other images and words as cement to put it back together. Collage is collision and the success of the piece is gauged by the number of casualties among onlookers. •



# Conspicuous

Conspicuous

Conspicuous

Conspicuous

Conspicuous

Conspicuous

*Obviously*

**camouflage**

**camouflage**

**camouflage**

**camouflage**

**camouflage**

Hides

The original  
turns and sees  
it-

self,  
improved in



.62



the

The  
reproduction  
goes out and  
does things



1.4

original  
never  
could.

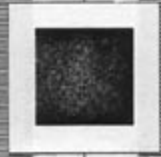
.62 MAG



2.3

the

.71



2.2

XEROX TEST PATTERN  
82P504

The  
"original"



1.4

begins to  
be put in  
quotes.

570



form of a  
reproduction.

MAG

MAG

MAG

3.2

1.3



1.3

3.2



MAG

MAG

50% MAG



MAG



XEROX TEST PATTERN  
82P504

1.7

# Mail Review

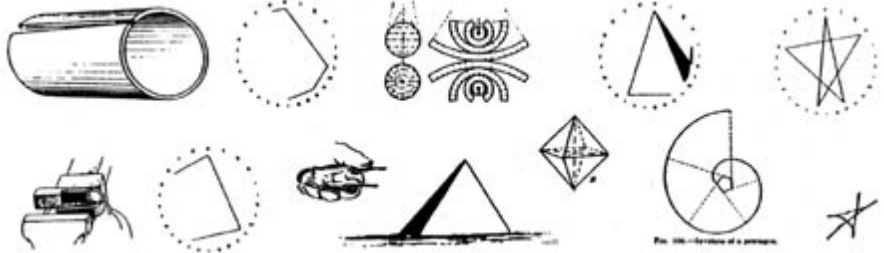
PhotoSTATIC's editor reviews recent mail



Gizzards by J.L. Kercheval, design by D.H. Fuller. 3.75x5", 16 ppg, offset. Narrative noteworthy for its being told in the second person. This confrontational tone does much to create involving tension. Themes of violence, uncertainty and hatred are dealt with in a manner that is really quite amazing in its intensity. The graphics are compelling echoes of the text in blue-gray full-spread bleeds xeroxy in nature. I highly recommend this one. Send 1\$ to Dan Fuller, 601 E Washington #3, Greencastle IN 46135. Ask about Dan's world-famous Iowa theme postcards.



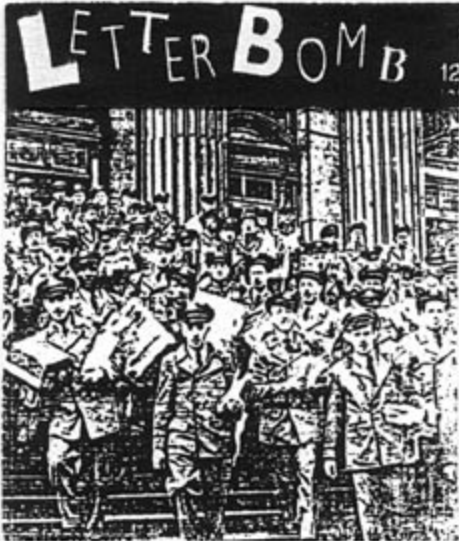
Word Art/Art Words by Michael Winkler. 3x11", 26 ppg, offset. Sequencing bookwork which works from combined images and texts taken out of context to purposely create a new sense. Words are from various art reviews and articles & are transformed into images through use of an applied formal system in which "...each letter of the alphabet is associated with a specific point on the perimeter of a circle; lines are drawn to interconnect these letterpoints according to the spelling of the words..." I spoke some about this in the review of Score #7 which appeared in PhotoSTATIC #17. Write Michael Winkler, 331 Columbia Aye, Jersey City NJ 07307 for details.



The Network Times: Special Green Issue, Early 1986. 8.5x11", 18 ppg, xerox. I found this one to be a really good read. Articles on Merce Cunningham, Lesbianism in Film (not what I thought the title implied) and more. Largely focused on performance art. Featured a sort of xerox adaptation of a performance piece called "Language" which I'd like to see. Edited by Shauna & Zack, 537 Broadway #3, New York NY 10012.



Couch Potato Magazine April 1986. 8.5x11", 11 ppg, xerox. Not xerox art as such, rather a collection of simple and occasionally striking drawings by OMAHaHa's Dazar. Mostly the drawings depict blobs interacting in sexually suggestive ways with belts and/or geometric shapes. (Isn't it about time the English language got a single word that meant 'and/or'? Tune in next issue for my proposal.) A bit steep at 3\$ but offer to trade artwork to OMAHaHa, 5305 5 122nd St. Omaha NE 68137.



Letter Bomb 12. 8.5x11", 74 ppg, xerox. A magazine devoted to mailart of all descriptions. This massive 'zine contains a mishmash of work by mail artists many of whose names will be familiar to anyone who's been involved in the network for any length of time. 5\$ and probly worth it. Norman Conquest, P.O. Box 1049, Bridgehampton NY 11932.



Or 102 by Uncle Don Milliken. 5.5x8.5", 12 ppg, xerox. "You walk down the street and everyone knows yr lying." Believe it or not, another good one from Uncle Don. Orworks, P.O. Box 868, Amherst MA 01004.

Beside Myself edited by Burnt Raisins. 4.5x8", 12 ppg, offset. Spooky demisurreal social strife collages by Burnt Raisins, Phlegm Pets, and others. Sparse use of color intensifies some of them. Well produced. Ask for it from C. D., P.O. Box 95455, Seattle WA 98145.



Truisms Vol. I by Kathleen M. Brophy and N.G. Yrizarry, with works by Stephen Perkins and Janet Janet. 8.5x11", 21 ppg one-sided unbound, xerox. Portfolio of xerox prints loose-leaf, so you can hang them up to look at them, a feature I quite liked. The best pieces here rely on xerographic effects on single images, which is interesting as most xerox work seems to focus on effects of collage and montage (I like to say xerage, from the French xerer to xerox paste-ups). The work generally is pretty dire and humorless, with industrial and satanic overtones. 3\$ US or 4\$ overseas from Yrizarry, 22 Belvedere, San Francisco CA 94117 or Brophy 661 Clayton, San Francisco CA 94117.

# The Persistence of Vision

by LI. Dunn



All we seem to see is something moving on the screen.

A new book following the classic example of the Phi Phenomenon and flying in the face of the new theory of "Flicker Fusion." Esoteric, but with a sense of humor.

5¼x5¼", 48 ppg., multicolor offset.

pS#14½ finally available, \$3.00 postage paid.

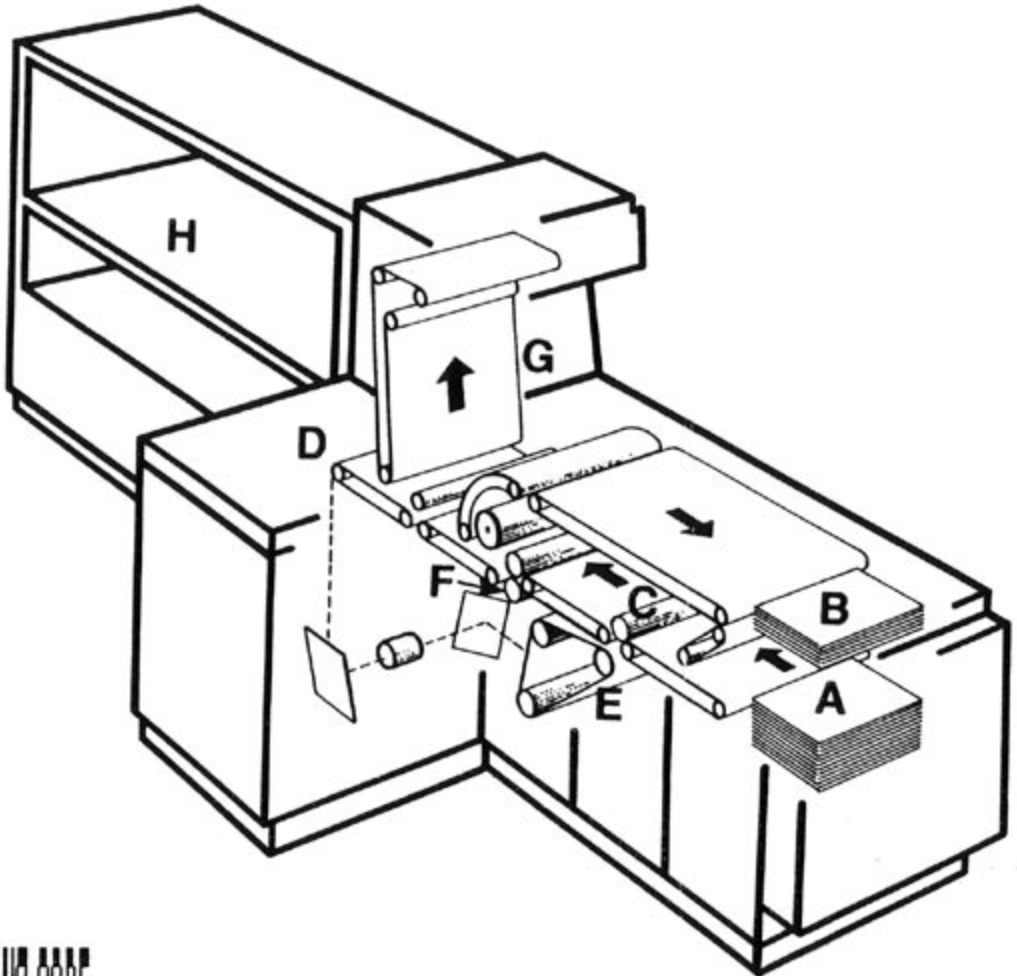


Suzy jumped off the second story onto the ice skating rink. Richard left his credit cards at home. Mary Jo left her poor dog in the car with the windows rolled up. Billy got pummeled behind the dumpster by a minority gang. Timmy got lost. You can still see the blood outline frozen beneath the ice.

\$1.97 (+\$1 postage) to BS PROPS POB 1393 Tempe AZ 85281



PhotoSTATIC Magazine  
<http://psrf.detritus.net/>



ZEN '86