PHOTO–EDITING
AND PRESENTATION

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Photo Developing Volume 1

PHOTO–EDITING AND PRESENTATION
A Guide to Image Editing and Presentation
for Photographers and Visual Artists

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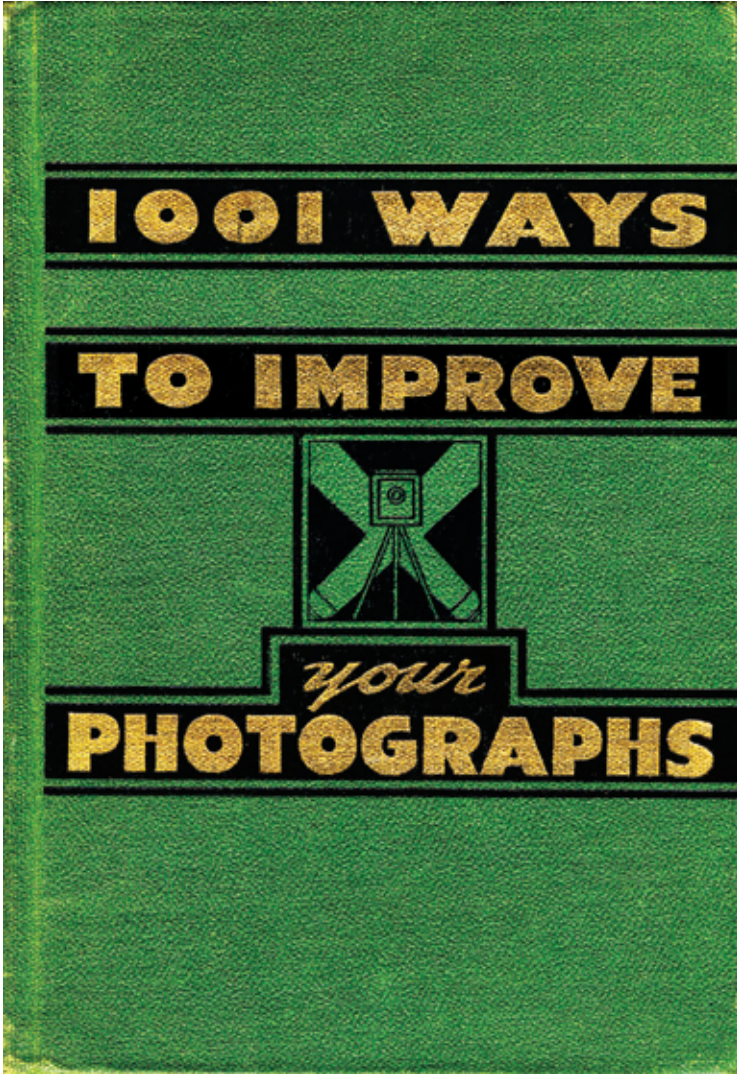## INDEX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The book you are reading is not about improving your photographs. There are no tips or tricks of this nature to be found. Instead, use it to help clarify your content and your meaning—not only to your audience, but more importantly to yourself.
    1001 Ways to Improve Your Photography. *Edited by Willard D. Morgan. New York: National Educational Alliance, 1945.*

INTRODUCTION

The main thesis of this book is that the editing and subsequent presentation of your work is no less than the creation of meaning. Very few, if any images (especially the disembodied, decontextualized artifact/arty-fact we call the photograph) make sense when read as a single image. The very act of photography implies isolation. Individual photographs, for the most part, are an instantaneous and impossibly brief sample out of the continuum of time, space (and indeed life) that surrounds us constantly. It is only when images begin to accumulate and are contextualized within a narrative, series or sequence (or perhaps some form of text) that their message becomes accessible and intelligible.

To simply continue to make images without addressing the context within which they are viewed is to erect a wall of visual noise. Such a wall can easily, almost invisibly, separate the perception of images from our understanding of them.

The second thesis is that the images we make do not necessarily reflect a conscious process of perception and cognition. Instead, like dreams, they can often present us with insights that come from areas of the brain whose functions are more intuitive, even more primitive. The fact that these messages can happen at all in this manner, via a medium that is so mechanistic in nature, is truly a miracle. Yet all too often these messages are ignored in favor of what we know (or think we know) rather than the evidence of what we have seen.

Carefully and respectfully embarking on a process that recognizes, even embraces, this apparent disconnect is the point of editing. For only when a cumulative picture is assembled do our intentions, desires and achievements start to make sense. This is very difficult—but the rewards are great.

Finally, be aware that these various suggestions are just a starting point. Again to use the metaphor of a dream, remember that there are many books, usually located beside the supermarket checkout cash register, which promise to tell us what our dreams mean. On rare occasions they can provide an insight, but such insights are usually over-generalized. Constructing meaning can only occur when the reading of your own personal symbols is specific to you. The techniques described in this book can help, but they are still just techniques. Only you can take the next step which begins with the simple leap of faith that all of the expressions of value that we call our photographs (or images) have a message—intended or not. Therefore, give them the opportunity to be seen and heard.

Above: An image from the Encyclopedia of Source Illustrations, a facsimile volume comprising all of the 266 plates contained in The Iconographic Encyclopedia of 1851. *Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, Morgan and Morgan, 1972.*

CHAPTER I
BASIC EDITING STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

All photography is a process of selection. Initially the photographer goes out into the world and selects slivers of time and space. Subsequently, after the images are processed, individual images are selected from the proof sheet and printed. Finally there comes a stage when these images accumulate to the point at which another selection process comes into play. This final stage is called editing. However, this simple term understates the importance of this act. More correctly, it is literally the creation of meaning.

It needs to be understood at the outset that the initial process of selection when making the image(s) is very different from the stages that follow. When one is actually photographing, there is no doubt that it is helpful to have an idea in mind. However, at the same time one also needs a mental set that is a mix of receptivity and intuition. Frequently, judgments must be made in a fraction of a second. Although you might have a plan when setting out to make pictures, once you start, quite often new events and viewpoints are presented that could never be anticipated—and it is good practice to respond to these unexpected occurrences.

In comparison, the processes of selection that follow are far more analytical and conscious. All of the images you made, for whatever reason, are now part of your inventory and should be seen as having equal weight. The serendipitous images (or discoveries) are just as important as the images made with a more conscious and purposeful mind-set. The receptive and intuitive mode necessary to make pictures must now be

tempered with analysis and objectivity. If you can, try looking at your images as if they were made by someone else.

The important question to ask is not, "Does the work say what I wanted it to say?" Instead ask, "Can I take responsibility for what it is saying?" This is a fine but important distinction. Editing, and ordering your work is a creative act with its own consequences and effects. Additionally, it is also a reminder that, from time to time, one will receive new insights and learn new things when one engages with a medium.

In this chapter we will examine a variety of ways to facilitate this process. Firstly we will examine how to maximize the feedback inherent in the totality of your initial response to the world. Following this there is a discussion of the disjunction that can occur between what you intended and what you actually have done. Finally, a variety of editing strategies are outlined that will assist you when organizing your work.
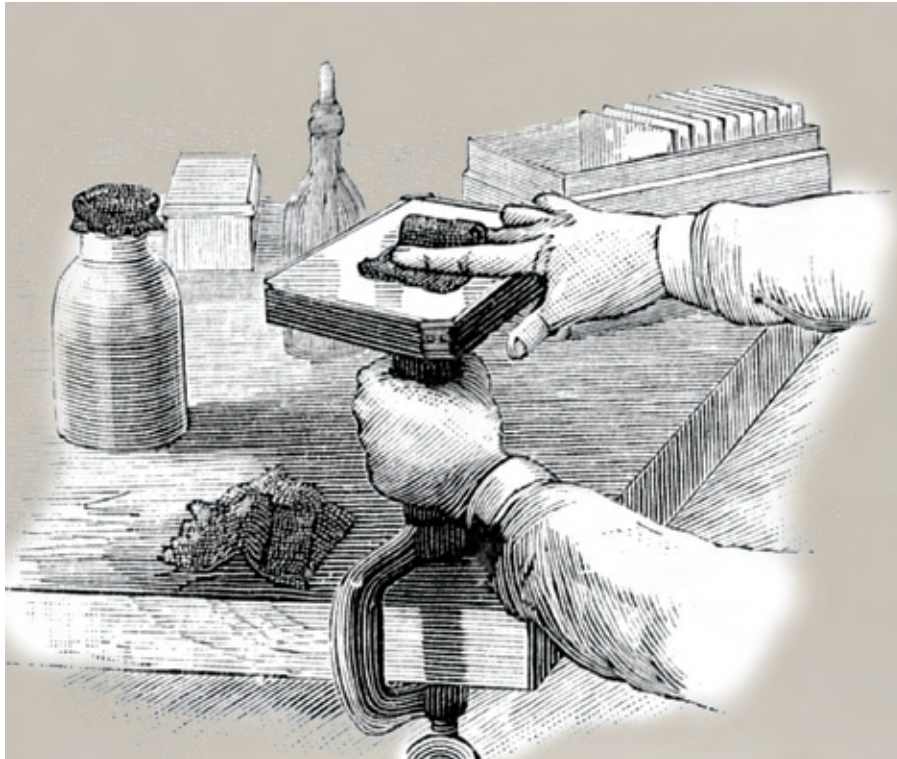
Opposite: A Daguerreotype plate being polished prior to sensitizing it with mercury vapor. As each image was unique and time-consuming to make, there was no opportunity or need to make hundreds of images to get the one great shot. Courtesy of George Eastman House, Rochester, NY.

THE INITIAL EDIT

When we go out into the world to make photographs, seldom do we select one or two viewpoints, make a couple of exposures and return home content to make one or two prints. More often than not, dozens, if not hundreds, of images are made. Why?

Probably the simplest reason is that we can! Both digital and 35mm cameras permit, even encourage this level of production (consumption?). So the choice is clear: if it is mindless excess, stop it! If however, it is not, then why ignore the totality of the response in favor of a search for the single great shot?

The reality is that every photograph is always an expression of value. Each time the shutter is pressed, a choice is being made. You are saying that what you saw/thought/felt what was in front of the camera was more important than other alternate events/objects/people that could have been photographed at the time. Put another way, seldom do you make a picture of something you either don't like, or know to be bad. Not only that, each of the images was made in sequence where, even unconsciously, each succeeding decision to make an image was conditioned by the frame or frames that preceded it. Why then, when looking at the results of your efforts for the first time are these facts ignored in favor of the search for a single image? It is much more useful to take responsibility for all of the photographs you make, and, at least initially, regard each of them as having equal weight and value.