

We're very pleased to be able to devote this entire section of **Afterimage** to a report on the second Conference on Photographic Criticism, organized by A.D. Coleman and held at the Visual Studies Workshop, April 22-24, 1977.

Photographic criticism in an

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Criticism is informed discourse about art for the purpose of increased understanding and appreciation of art. When critics do criticism they do so to inform their audiences about art. When students engage in the critical process they primarily inform themselves, and secondarily their peers, about art, and also gain increased knowledge about themselves, an important effect of the educational process. This paper will expand and clarify the above definition of criticism and give reasons for the desirability of teaching criticism to photography students in an effort equal to that now being exerted in teaching the making of photographs.

When students choose an area of concentration within their general education they are seeking to increase their expertise in that area. Within the chosen field the students develop an ability to perceive complex aspects of problems and situations. As the students gain more experience, their perceptual abilities increase, their points of view broaden, and they develop expanded frames of reference. The experience which leads to this expansion determines not only how and what they see, but their ability to relate what they see to a larger context. As a result, the students acquire perceptual insight; they see not only forms and the relationships of forms, but also the meaning implicit in those relationships. Criticism is an excellent means of doing this.

Criticism is discourse about art, or orderly communication of thought in speech or writing. While criticism is a process which primarily serves to enhance understanding and appreciation about art, it can also strengthen the students' abilities of perception, intel-

lectualization, and communication both in responding to photographs and in making them. For classroom purposes discourse will most often take the form of talk about photographs with a group of peers and a teacher. This proposed talk would ideally be done more often by the student-critics rather than the teacher-critic since it is the students we are interested in educating to the critical process, and learning through doing, particularly in the case of talking, seems an appropriate and trustworthy method. The teacher's role is seen primarily as initiator and facilitator, and when appropriate, as meta-critic. While the authors work primarily with college or adult groups, other art educators working in the areas of response to art have successfully engaged even young children in critical discourse of a substantive nature.

Theoreticians of criticism, particularly Morris Weitz, have shown that critical discourse involves some or all of these procedures: description, explanation, evaluation, and theory. It is noted that these procedures may not be immediately apparent in cursory reading of published photographic, dramatic, film, or other critical reviews, and that stylistic considerations of practicing critics mask these basic procedures in a variety of literate ways. However, in learning about and practicing the procedures of description, explanation, evaluation, and theory, photography students possess categories and a structure which they can use to qualitatively investigate their work and the work of others and intelligently talk to others about their insights.

Description is a data gathering procedure: listing facts, pointing out what is given, and determining all there is to consider about a chosen photograph. Description may also include the identification of relevant elements external to the photograph such as facts about the artist, the relation of the photograph to other works, facts about the objects or persons in the photograph, or in general, facts about the context or causal environment of the photograph. Descriptive information of an historical nature about Eastern European nomadic peoples, for instance, might be

educational context

