

'Surrealistic and disturbing'
Timothy O'Sullivan as Seen by Ansel Adams in the 1930s

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Timothy O'Sullivan's photographs of the American West, taken between 1867 and 1874 under the employ of the Clarence King and George M. Wheeler surveys, are today accorded a central role in photographic history and in cultural perceptions of the frontier. Beginning in the 1970s—a century after their production—and continuing to the present, historians have sought to discern the meanings and uses O'Sullivan's pictures had in their own day; concurrently, artists have devised projects to revisit or reinterpret the Western sites, most now altered by human incursion.¹ This essay examines an intervening historiographic and artistic moment, the 1930s—a decade marking the first “rediscovery” of O'Sullivan and his insertion into modernist photographic history. The process of co-optation forced proponents of this rediscovery to confront basic issues of meaning and form in photography and ultimately to choose certain values at the expense of others. The resulting narrative is deceptively seamless and overdetermined, recasting or erasing past pluralism while scarcely revealing the debates, often personal and impassioned, through which it was forged. A closer look at the reception of O'Sullivan in the thirties reveals the intellectual and aesthetic investments at stake.

The protagonists referred to above are as follows: Ansel Adams, San Francisco-born classical pianist turned fine-art photographer, ambitious and in thrall to the romantic, symbolist vision of Alfred Stieglitz; and Beaumont Newhall, Harvard-educated art historian who had secured the post of librarian at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935. Both men went on to achieve high visibility in the miniscule photography world before the close of the decade, and their prominence and influence would grow steadily through their long lifetimes, Adams dying in 1984

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and Newhall in 1933. Together with Edward Weston, Adams was a founder in 1932 of the West Coast group f.64, whose members dedicated themselves to embracing and presenting what they termed “camera vision”: a “straight,” purist, machine-age aesthetic relying equally on intuition and execution.²

In New York, Stieglitz endorsed this vision when he showed a selection of Adams’ photographs at *An American Place* in 1936.³ Meanwhile Newhall, had just been given the monumental task of curating a centenary exhibition on the history of photography by MoMA director Alfred H. Barr, Jr.⁴ The show, “Photography: 1839–1937,” opened in March 1937, followed in 1949 by the publication of Newhall’s incredibly influential *History of Photography*, which in a revised edition



Fig. 1. Ansel Adams, *Grass and Burned Stump, Yosemite Sierra*, ca. 1935, gelatin silver print. Ansel Adams Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. ©Trustees of The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona

remains a standard text in the field.⁵ In 1940, the combined efforts of Adams and Newhall led to the founding of the photography department at MoMA, a major victory in the ongoing battle for the medium’s fine-art status, installing it in the citadel that even Stieglitz, to his lasting fury, had been unable to infiltrate.

Influential though they already were, neither Adams nor Newhall had yet formulated his mature understanding of the photographic medium. The quiet,

intimate, formally reductive pictures Adams showed in 1936 (Fig. 1) stand in contrast with the sweeping, monumental landscapes he produced in the 1940s and for which he became famous (see Fig. 8). As for Newhall, his 1937 MoMA survey was decidedly pluralist, incorporating scientific and commercial examples and featuring European formal experiments alongside American straight photography. This range reveals Newhall's significant conceptual debt, which he freely acknowledged, to the massive "Film und Foto" exhibition held in Stuttgart in 1929, organized by László Moholy-Nagy.⁶ (Moholy was subsequently on the advisory council for the MoMA show.) By contrast, straight photography triumphs, virtually unchallenged, in later editions of Newhall's *History*.

In the 1930s, many competing voices spoke about the nature and potential of the photographic medium; Adams and Newhall reached the end of the decade determined to chart its course. This meant narrowing down the options for current and future practice on the one hand, and outlining a corresponding historical

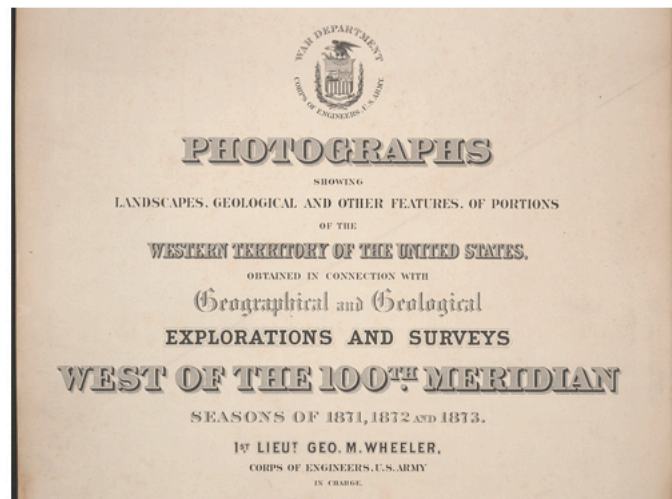


Fig. 2. Title page, Photographs Showing Landscapes, Geological and Other Features, of Portions of the Western Territory of the United States. Obtained in Connection with Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, Seasons of 1871, 1872 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, [1875]). Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Gift of Ansel and Virginia Adams

tradition and canon on the other. In their respective fields, both had to make decisions whether to include or exclude, emphasize or marginalize, connect or oppose, certain artists, theories, techniques, and meanings.

In this evaluative (and narrative) process, which was systematic in some respects and improvised in others, both O’Sullivan and Surrealism came under consideration. Newhall was familiar with photography’s early pioneers, from inventors William Henry Fox Talbot and Jacques-Louis-Mandé Daguerre, in England and France, to Mathew Brady in the United States. Owing to his membership in the team of photographers hired by Brady to document the Civil War, O’Sullivan could be counted among these founding figures. Newhall was unaware of O’Sullivan’s subsequent Western Survey work until January 1937, when Adams brought to his attention an 1874 album he had acquired from mountain climber and *Sierra Club Bulletin* editor Francis Farquhar, *Geographical Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian*.⁷ (Fig. 2) Led by Lieutenant George M. Wheeler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this expedition included two photographers—O’Sullivan and William Bell—and covered large areas of present-day Nevada, California, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. It was O’Sullivan’s second trip west: he was “on loan” to

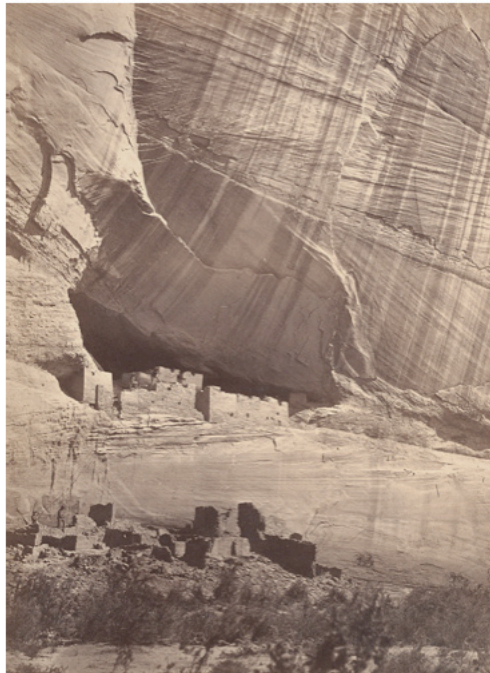


Fig. 3. Timothy H. O’Sullivan, *Ancient Ruins in the Cañon de Chelle, New Mexico, in a Niche 50 Feet above Present Cañon Bed*, 1873, albumen silver print in *Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys...*, [1875]. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Gift of Ansel and Virginia Adams

Wheeler's military expedition from Clarence King's civilian-staffed Fortieth Parallel survey. The album Adams described to Newhall contains twenty-five plates, contact prints (approximately 7 x 10 3/4 in.) made by the wet collodion process on albumen paper, mounted on stiff sheets printed with descriptive legends.⁸

Adams offered to lend the album for the *History of Photography* exhibition, characterizing O'Sullivan's photographs as "extraordinary—as fine as anything I have ever seen."⁹ Newhall—guessing correctly that this was the same O'Sullivan whom he knew as a Civil War photographer—expressed immediate interest: "I am . . . keen to see them because you consider them so fine (and) judging from your work I have faith in your taste."¹⁰ At this point, the two men were new acquaintances, still addressing one another as "Mister," but their mutual respect is quite evident. Newhall included the album in his exhibition, opened to O'Sullivan's now-famous picture of the ancient ruins in New Mexico's Canyon de Chelly, and reproduced the same image in his book (Fig. 3).

How would O'Sullivan's pictures have been seen at this moment, 1937, by these two men, each deeply engaged with the art of photography and seeking to understand the medium's essence? From Adams, one might expect reverence or at least respectful recognition of a forerunner in the field of Western landscape, but his recorded thoughts do not indicate such identification. Writing to Newhall, he described the photographs in the Wheeler album as "technically deficient, even by the standards of the time but nonetheless, surrealistic and disturbing."¹¹

This rather curious statement requires some close analysis. First, the diagnosis of technical deficiency seems unjust, and in an earlier letter Adams did acknowledge that the results were "all the more startling when one remembers the difficulties of processing the plates."¹² O'Sullivan is today greatly admired for his mastery of the exacting and often exasperating wet collodion method, which required the operator to prepare, expose, and develop a glass plate negative in the field, using volatile chemistry in total darkness and stifling heat. Despite its demands, collodion was considered an improvement over the previous paper-negative methods because of the precise detail and tonal range carried by the grain-free glass plate. Because the emulsion was most sensitive to the blue end of the spectrum, skies tended to be overexposed and would thus print very dark—hence the practice of virtually all landscape photographers of masking out the skies to produce an uninflected white field. O'Sullivan not only made rich negatives in the field, he got excellent prints from them upon his return to Washington.

Some fifty years later Adams used a view camera not radically different from O'Sullivan's in structure, but had at his disposal much more sophisticated lenses and shutters, as well as variable-contrast papers and panchromatic gelatin silver film,

which is equally sensitive to all colors in the spectrum.. Adams was keenly interested in technical improvements, eager to try new tools and knowledgeable about old ones. His remark about O’Sullivan refers to “standards of the time,” to which earlier photographs should be held. But he was, inevitably, applying the standards of his own time—not only, or even primarily, standards of technique but also of

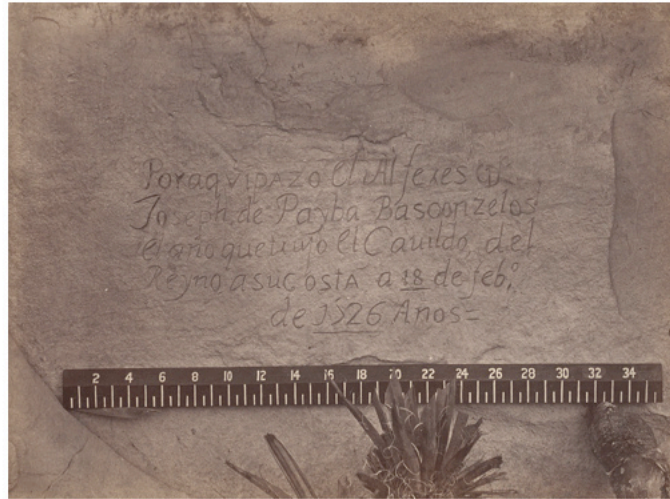


Fig. 4. Timothy H. O’Sullivan, *Historic Spanish Record of the Conquest, South Side of Inscription Rock, New Mexico, No. 3, 1873*, albumen silver print in *Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys...*, [1875]. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Gift of Ansel and Virginia Adams

meaning. This leads to the second part of the sentence: “but nonetheless, surrealistic and disturbing.” Granted, at the time of Adams’ writing little or no research had been directed at recuperating the intended uses or initial reception of O’Sullivan’s photographs by their original commissioners and audiences. But the terms “surrealistic and disturbing” are clearly both anachronistic when applied to the 1870s, since their use and their linkage are rooted in the early twentieth-century modernist avant-garde.

Another letter written by Adams at around this time—in March 1937, while Newhall’s exhibition was on view at MoMA—addresses the same issues with a slightly different inflection. He addresses his idol, Stieglitz, urging him to visit the show, look at the album, and ask the staff to show him the page with the *Inscription Rock* image. (Fig. 4) “There is something in that print,” Adams announced, “that out-sur-s the sur-realists to say nothing of its magnificent tonal scale.”¹³ Returning to O’Sullivan’s landscape compositions, Adams went on to wonder if

the orthochromatic emulsions of the nineteenth century didn't have their own aesthetic advantages, particularly in the skies, which "sometimes had a grand feeling of light that we can't seem to get today with the balanced films. Am I becoming a reactionary?" There is an internal contradiction here. Did Adams see O'Sullivan as an individual genius, Surrealist *avant la lettre*, or as a naïve primitive, Surrealist in spite



Fig. 5. Ansel Adams, *White Gravestone, Laurel Hill Cemetery, San Francisco, California*, 1933, gelatin silver print. Ansel Adams Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. ©Trustees of The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona

of himself? Of course, the two models of artistic production were firmly linked in the thinking of the day. O'Sullivan was a prototype, but what sort of photography did he prefigure?

The next few years offered no precise answer, as Adams, Newhall, and Stieglitz continued to ponder O'Sullivan's role in the story they wanted to tell about the medium. In 1941 Newhall and Adams, by now on a first-name basis, collaborated on an exhibition titled "Sixty Photographs: A Survey of Camera Esthetics" to commemorate the founding of the Department of Photography at MoMA. The O'Sullivan album, which Adams had donated to the museum in memory of his

California patron Albert Bender, again made an appearance.¹⁴ Newhall told Adams at some length about Stieglitz's visit to the show—an occasion that Newhall had anticipated with some trepidation, because his relationship to the older, iconic figure was rather fragile. That the curator even had a relationship with Stieglitz, who bore MoMA a longstanding grudge, was largely due to Adams' diplomatic efforts. Both Adams and Newhall dearly wished to earn Stieglitz's good opinion, and they could consider their admiration of O'Sullivan validated when Stieglitz declared: "Nothing better has been done."¹⁵ Adams, following up with Stieglitz about the same exhibition, ranked *Inscription Rock* the third best print in the show, the first and second being those of Stieglitz himself and David Octavius Hill, a Scottish calotypist active in the 1850s and much admired by Stieglitz. In fourth place, Adams nominated his own picture of a gravestone. (Fig. 5) He did not comment on the formal commonalities—physical motif, frontal presentation, shallow picture plane—between his photograph and O'Sullivan's. But his exegesis alludes, perhaps unintentionally, to a sort of automatism, to the unconscious: "I have a queer feeling about that photograph; something outside of me; something dictated by far more than my own awareness."¹⁶

This comment reveals Adams' personal interpretation of Stieglitz's essentially symbolist concept of Equivalence, according to which the photographic artist could transform the objective facts of the world into subjective, expressive, and poetic forms. By the 1920s, when Adams first took up the medium, another aesthetic had evolved, one that retained a sort of mysticism but eschewed painterly effects.¹⁷ The primary exponent of this aesthetic was Edward Weston, whom Stieglitz, not surprisingly, criticized for his virtuosity. Much later, Adams took exception to his "voluptuous effects."¹⁸ Weston must be counted as a key contributor to Adams' conception of Surrealism.¹⁹ The two Californians were well acquainted, with Weston the elder and more established, and they admired each other's work. As demonstrated by their joint participation in the short-lived but precedent-setting group f.64, they shared an urge to establish particular expressive and technical parameters for the medium of photography. But as their pictures and correspondence reveal, they did not always agree on these parameters. Surrealism was a point of contention between them in the early thirties, though often appearing only between the lines. For example, Adams challenged Weston for attempting to imbue his images with symbolic or psychological significance.²⁰ Weston countered by pointing out that he made things look more like themselves, not different from themselves—in other words, he dealt in essences, not transformations or distortions. And he disliked having to explain himself. "After all, Ansel," he wrote in January 1932, "I never try to limit myself by theories; I do not question right or wrong approaches when I am

interested or amazed—impelled to work. I do not fear logic, I dare to be irrational, or really never consider whether I am or not.”²¹

Weston’s contact, beginning in the 1920s, with the European and Mexican avant-gardes gave him a certain authority on the subject within the otherwise rather insular West Coast community.²² This is not to say that Weston’s notion of Surrealism corresponded to that of Man Ray, Maurice Tabard, or Brassai—or even to that of Moholy, who had invited him to curate the American section of the 1929 “Film und Foto” exhibition. Techniques such as multiple exposure, solarization, and collage were anathema to Weston’s doctrine of straight photography: he refused



Fig. 6. Edward Weston, *Nude*, 1935, gelatin silver print. Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. ©1981 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents

even to crop his negatives and insisted on uniformly sharp focus, hence the name of group f.64, which indicates the camera aperture for greatest depth of field. Perhaps more useful comparisons can be found in surrealist painting. Weston always claimed to have been “more deeply moved by music, literature, sculpture, painting than I have by photography.”²³ He could have seen Dada and surrealist art at the home of patrons and friends Walter and Louise Arensberg, whom he visited for the first time in 1930; before that, he would have encountered it in various avant-garde magazines. As American interest in Surrealism grew in the thirties, the original French tenets were modified by groups such as the Los Angeles–based Post-Surrealists, who

sought to explore the unconscious without relinquishing rationality or naturalism. An underlying premise links the seemingly divergent ideas of the French Surrealists, their American counterparts, and the straight photographers of f.64: the primacy of vision, “defined as primitive or natural.”²⁴ To compare key statements from the two contexts:

Aragon (1924): Objects metamorphosed before my very eyes: they did not assume an allegorical stance or the personality of symbols; they seemed less the outgrowths of an idea than the idea itself.²⁵

Weston (1931): I am . . . trying . . . to know things in their very essence, so that what I record is . . . a *revelation* or a piercing of the smoke-screen artificially cast over life by irrelevant, human limited exigencies, into an absolute, impersonal recognition.²⁶

Perhaps, therefore, the similarity between nude studies by Brassai and Weston (Fig. 6) is more than superficial resemblance, although they cannot be collapsed too hastily: their practices remain divided, according to Rosalind Krauss, on the issue of the natural, a notion or ideal rejected by the Surrealists and upheld by the straight



Fig. 7. Timothy H. O’Sullivan, *Bluff Opposite Big Horn Camp, Black Cañon, Colorado River*, 1871, albumen silver print in *Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys...*, [1875]. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Gift of Ansel and Virginia Adams

photographers.²⁷

This has taken us into Surrealism proper but some distance from O’Sullivan. To return to the central question: How did Ansel Adams transpose his idea of Surrealism—tossed out though not precisely defined in letters to Newhall, Stieglitz, and Weston—to the landscapes of the survey photographer? Certainly he would not have ascribed to O’Sullivan a deliberate intention to produce “surrealistic and disturbing” pictures. O’Sullivan was a man of a past time, about whom next to nothing was known and who worked with absolutely no artistic pretension, or so it seemed from the perspective of the early to mid-twentieth century. Herein lies a key component of O’Sullivan’s importance for Adams and for Newhall: his innocent eye. Completely unaware, they believed, of the idealizing conventions of painting, O’Sullivan used the medium of photography purely, directly, and honestly—exploiting and revealing its essential qualities without even setting out to



Fig. 8. Ansel Adams, *The Tetons and the Snake River*, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, 1942, gelatin silver print. Ansel Adams Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. ©Trustees of The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Courtesy Centevr for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona

do so. Adams, and others fighting against the competing aesthetics of pictorialism and experimental formalism, pointed to models from the past such as O'Sullivan to prove that photography had always been, or was inherently, straight and realistic.

Realism itself is based on representational conventions and the camera does not always support those conventions. It can distort, flatten, and confuse. For the photographers of group f.64 to make pictures corresponding with their pre-visualized images, they had to select and manipulate their equipment and subjects very carefully, engaging in contrivance just as skillfully as the Surrealists. Critics could thus see in the f.64 pictures a "heightened sense of realism brought about by the sharpness, the sense of hardness, the clarity of detail and texture."²⁸ This heightened realism recalls the visual faculty described by Breton in "Surrealism and Painting" (1925) as "an advantage over the real, over what is vulgarly known as the real."²⁹

O'Sullivan was concerned with realism in the sense of legibility, we may assume, but not with an idea of the "primitive eye" or "natural vision" as pictorial models. Yet beginning with Adams and Newhall, he has been associated with the achievement of something beyond vulgar realism, that is, mere recording or description. Is this claim supported by the photographs? Certainly some of O'Sullivan's pictures present us with disjointed spaces, illogical proportions, bizarre juxtapositions, and other compositional peculiarities that confounded even Adams, who was familiar with the actual places depicted. Joel Snyder, who has written perceptively about O'Sullivan for the past twenty-five years, offers several examples. In *Hot Springs Cone, Provo Valley, Utah*, a disembodied head sits atop a forbiddingly abrasive lump of tufa, the figure's position demonstrating the cone's hollowness, but at the same time creating a strange silhouette against the featureless sky.³⁰ In *Ogden, Utah*, the viewer's location is unclear, our view encompassing the spreading plain perhaps from a rise or ridge.³¹ The tiny figure does not function as a point of entry into the space, for the likelihood of the man's reaching the distant town on foot and under a threatening sky seems slim. Nor does he necessarily function as a measurement of scale, considering the clarity with which sagebrush, rooftops, and distant snow-capped mountaintops are rendered.

Reversals of situation and scale occur in *Bluff Opposite Big Horn Camp*, in which the camera is evidently on the ground and mountains loom overhead, their scale indeterminate and their three-dimensionality contradicted by the sky's flatness. (Fig. 7) Yet another type of disorientation is created in *Shoshone Falls, Snake River, Idaho, View across Top of the Falls*.³² The long lens eliminates the ground, suspending the viewer much as the long exposure time suspends the water in blurred, snowy swaths. Above, the horizon line, as in *Bluff*, forms a stark graphic line, forcing us to read the picture in separate parts rather than as a harmonious whole.

This type of discontinuous reading would have gone against Adams' ideas about photographic art. As John Szarkowski has proposed, Adams' true subject—the motivation for all his intrepid mountaineering and darkroom wizardry—was atmosphere, “the way that light dissolves weight.”³³ If this is true, it helps account for Adams' equivocal response to O'Sullivan's typically airless pictures: he admired the “grand feeling of light” of the masked, white skies, but himself became famous for his tonal range, codified in the so-called Zone system.³⁴ He admired O'Sullivan's *Cañon de Chelle* sincerely enough to undertake a modern version of the same motif in 1942, but he did not pursue this compositional precedent in his subsequent work.³⁵ Instead, in his best-known images of the west's expansive spaces, Adams achieved the breadth and depth of conventional landscape painting, an overall effect dependent on variations in sky as well as terrain. (Fig. 8)

As Adams' and Newhall's ideas about photography solidified in the 1940s and beyond, so did the role of O'Sullivan. Research revealed additional anecdotal detail about the survey expeditions, fleshing out the image of O'Sullivan as a heroic explorer contending with a harsh environment. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, he came to be seen as an artist. Adams was quite clear about this in an interview of 1972: “O'Sullivan had another level of vision . . . that extra dimension of feeling. You sense it, you see it.”³⁶ The curators of the 1975 exhibition “The Era of Exploration” likewise singled out O'Sullivan for “the intense esthetic consciousness of his vision” and went so far as to draw a parallel between his landscapes and those of Paul Cézanne.³⁷

Surrealism had apparently ceased to function as an interpretive gloss on O'Sullivan's work. Newhall and Adams, in order to establish O'Sullivan as a founding father of American photography, could not dwell on the “disturbing” aspects of his pictures. Instead, they looked for other kinds of evidence or affinity to support the contradictory assertion that he was both an innocent eye and a consummate artist, because this in turn supported their ideas about photography's essence: its independence from painting, its truthfulness, its capacity to depart from ordinary perception and stimulate insight, and its Americanness.

In making a nationalistic claim for straight photography at this time, Newhall and Adams drew strength and inspiration from Stieglitz, who frequently characterized his own work as American, named his gallery An American Place, and in 1934 became the subject of a collection of adulatory essays entitled *America and Alfred Stieglitz*. Remember also that Walker Evans's *American Photographs* appeared in 1938, the same year Robert Taft published *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History 1839–1889*.³⁸ A telling passage in Newhall's 1937 exhibition catalogue downplays the competing aesthetic of European formalism by dismissing Moholy's

influential published texts as “somewhat abstruse.”³⁹ For straight photography to triumph, it had to have straight antecedents. With this lineage running through the center of photography’s history, pictorialist and surrealist practices could be marginalized as dead ends or aberrations.

The resulting history of photography fails to account for the “surrealistic and disturbing” qualities in O’Sullivan’s pictures, but that is an interpretive lapse, not a structural lacuna. The real omission is of Surrealism itself, presumably on the basis of its foreignness and aesthetic/technical impurity. To call O’Sullivan a Surrealist would, of course, be anachronistic. But to acknowledge that his pictures capture the inhospitable, frightening, and puzzling aspects of the Western landscape would set the stage for a richer, more inclusive photohistory, in which the medium’s early practitioners could be seen in relation to diverse followers. Surrealism can help us understand photographic realism in new and productive ways.

Archival Sources

Correspondence between Ansel Adams and Beaumont Newhall, Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston, 1936–45. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive AG31:1:1:46, 77–78, 91.

Correspondence between Beaumont and Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams, 1936–45. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Collection AG48:1.

Correspondence between Edward Weston and Ansel Adams. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Edward Weston Archive AG38:1.

Ansel Adams interviewed at the Bancroft Library, May 1972. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive AG31:2:14:7.

1 For notable assessments of survey photography beginning in the 1970s, see Weston Naef, et al., *Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860–1885* (Buffalo and New York: Albright-Knox Gallery and The

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975); Joel Snyder, *American Frontiers: The Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan, 1867–1874* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1981). On the NEA-supported Rephotographic Survey Project of 1979, see Mark Klett et al., *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984). The 1975 exhibition “New Topographics” represents another grouping of landscape photographers referring to nineteenth-century Western views as source material; see William S. Jenkins, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography and Film, George Eastman House, 1975).

2 See Therese Thau Heyman, ed., *Seeing Straight: The f.64 Revolution in Photography* (Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1992); and John Raeburn, “Group f.64 and the Problem in California Photography,” in *A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

3 For a thorough study of the 1936 exhibition, see Andrea Gray, *Ansel Adams: An American Place, 1936* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1982).

4 As is well known, Barr had curated “Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism” at MoMA the previous year, 1936.

5 Newhall’s exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, and then followed by an extended essay, *Photography: A Short Critical History* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), and the full-length book study, *History of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

6 Christopher Phillips, “The Judgment Seat of Photography,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 19. Phillips notes that Stieglitz “not only declined to cooperate with Newhall, but also refused to allow his later photographs to be represented.” On Newhall’s 1937 exhibition and the subsequent formation of the photography department at MoMA, see Maria Morris Hambourg, “From 291 to the Museum of Modern Art: Photography in New York, 1910–37,” in *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 60–63.

7 The full title is *Photographs Showing Landscapes, Geological and Other Features of Portions of the Western Territory of the United States, Obtained in Connection with Geographical and Geological Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian Seasons of 1871, 1872, 1873, 1st Lieut. Geo. M. Wheeler, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, in Charge* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1875). Adams discussed his acquisition of two versions of this album when interviewed at the Bancroft Library in May 1972; typescript, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel

Adams Archive, AG31, p. 390. See also Joel Snyder, *One/Many: Western American Survey Photographs by Bell and O'Sullivan* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 2006), 14; and Snyder, "Aesthetics and Documentation: Concerning Critical Approaches to the Photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan," in *Perspectives on Photography: Essays in Honor of Beaumont Newhall*, ed. Peter Walch and Thomas Barrow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 130.

8 The object described here is in the collection of the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson—the second copy Adams acquired, after giving the first to MoMA in memory of Albert Bender. "Of course I was foolish to give it away, but nobody realized their potential value"; Bancroft interview, 390. In 1937, when shipping that album to MoMA, he told Newhall it should be insured for \$50; Adams to Newhall, January 20, 1937; Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Collection, AG48.

9 Adams to Newhall, January 12, 1937, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31.

10 Newhall to Adams, CCP archive, January 15, 1937; Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31. For a thorough analysis of primary materials documenting O'Sullivan and his career, see Robin Kelsey, "Timothy O'Sullivan: Surveys of the American West," in *Archive Style: Photographs and Illustrations for U.S. Surveys, 1850–1890* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 75–142.

11 Adams to Newhall, quoted in Joel Snyder, "Territorial Photography, in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 193.

12 Adams to Newhall, January 12, 1937, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31. On O'Sullivan's technical mastery, see Snyder, *One/Many*, 75–79; and *American Frontiers*, 111.

13 Adams to Stieglitz, March 21, 1937, copy in Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31; original at the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, MSS 85.

14 *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 2, vol. 8 (December 1940–January 1941), Fig. nos. 32 and 33.

15 Newhall to Adams, January 1, 1941, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31: "He (Stieglitz) said he had a personal prejudice against Moholy, and would refrain from commenting" on the rayograph included in the exhibition. Then Adams wrote to Stieglitz: "In retrospect, I feel the

- exhibit is *slightly* overburdened with Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Evans, and Cartier-Bresson. That is, overburdened with their collective viewpoint”; January 14, 1941, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31. Newhall’s shifting allegiance away from Moholy to Stieglitz is traced in Phillips, “Judgment Seat,” 20–21.
- 16 Adams to Stieglitz, January 14, 1941; Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31.
- 17 Keith F. Davis, *An American Century of Photography: From Dry-Plate to Digital* (Kansas City and New York: Hallmark Cards, Inc., in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995), 98.
- 18 Adams, Bancroft interview, p. 56.
- 19 Another potential source or thread for further investigation is Berenice Abbott and her views on Surrealism, centered around Eugène Atget, and on nineteenth-century American photography, especially that attributed to Mathew Brady and thus including O’Sullivan, which would enhance and expand the present study.
- 20 Ansel Adams, review of Edward Weston exhibition, *Fortnightly*, December 18, 1931, p. 22; clipping in Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31.
- 21 Adams to Weston, January 28, 1932; Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Ansel Adams Archive, AG31. See also Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 68.
- 22 For background, see Terence Pitts, “Alternate Currents: Surreality in California Photography,” in *Pacific Dreams: Currents of Surrealism and Fantasy in California Art, 1934–1957*, ed. Susan Ehrlich (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1995), 39–45.
- 23 Weston, quoted in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Karen E. Quinn, et al., *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts in association with Bulfinch Press / Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 91.
- 24 Rosalind Krauss et al., *L’Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Washington, D.C., and New York: The Corcoran Gallery of Art and Abbeville Press, 1985), 20.
- 25 Louis Aragon, *Nightwalker (Le Paysan de Paris)*, trans. Frederick Brown (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall 1970), 94, quoted in Krauss, *L’Amour fou*, 25.
- 26 Weston, “Statement,” in Peter C. Bunnell, ed., *Edward Weston on Photography* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983), quoted in Davis, *American Century*, 98–99.
- 27 Krauss, *L’Amour fou*, 91. For an untitled nude by Brassai, see Krauss, 94, Fig. 85.
- 28 Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation*, 65.
- 29 André Breton, “Surrealism and Painting,” in *Art in Theory 1900–2000*, ed. Charles

Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, U.K., and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 458.

30 *Hot Springs Cone* is reproduced in Snyder, *One/Many*, 67.

31 *Ogden, Utah*, is reproduced in Snyder, *American Frontiers*, 55.

32 *Shoshone Falls* is reproduced in Snyder, *One/Many*, 23.

33 John Szarkowski, *Ansel Adams at 100* (Boston, New York, and London: Little, Brown and Company, in association with San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 23.

34 See Ansel Adams, *The Negative, Exposure and Development*, Ansel Adams Basic Photographer Series, Book 2 (Boston: New York Graphic Society).

35 Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 61.

36 Adams, Bancroft interview, 18. Later in the same interview, Adams reiterated: “The people who made the photographs in the time of Brady and the frontier were undoubtedly not aesthetically conscious. We’re reading into them our aesthetic qualities. The only one that really had the thing that I would accept today as great seeing was O’Sullivan” (415).

37 Naef et al., *Era of Exploration*, 136. The entry on O’Sullivan was written by James N. Wood.

38 See Snyder, *One/Many*, 14–16, for a discussion of the Americanness of these sources: Waldo Frank et al., *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Literary Guild, 1934); Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938); Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1838–1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1938). In Taft’s account, O’Sullivan’s Western survey photographs are cited without aesthetic interpretation. Instead it is William Henry Jackson, official photographer of the Hayden surveys, who is said to have “brought to this work an artistic temperament” (293).

39 Newhall, *History* (1937 exh. cat.), 70.