

THE EYE IS A DOOR

Landscape, Photography, and the Art of Discovery

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To see is the root of idea
from *Iδεῖν* (Greek), to see

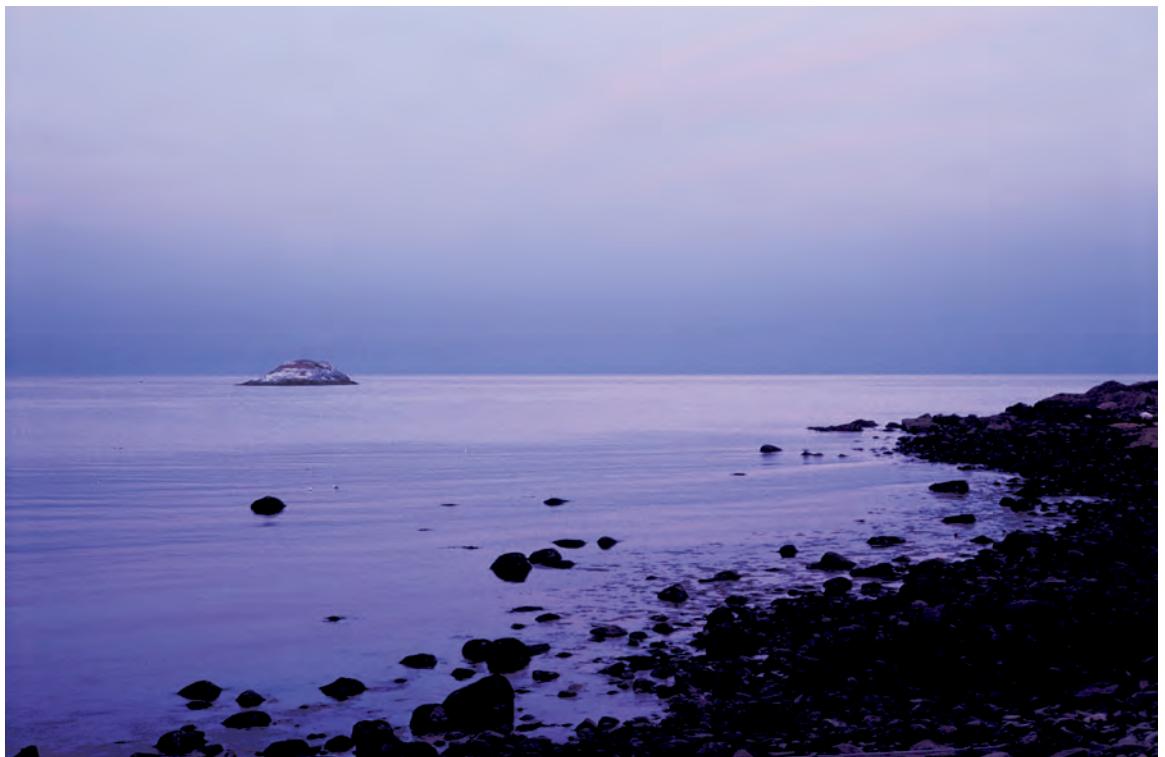
“The camera is a tool for seeing without a camera.”
Dorothea Lange



1 Uluru. Red Centre, Australia. June 1988.



2 Uluru. Red Centre, Australia. June 1988.



3 Nahant, Massachusetts. October 2002.



4 Nahant, Massachusetts. September 2000.

Earth Shadow

THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE EARTH'S SHADOW, I assumed it was unique to where I was, at Uluru, a mythic spot at the heart of Australia: red rock, sacred place, gathering rare rains—*island in a desert sea*. The sandstone monolith looms above red sand and catches fire from the rising and the setting sun. At sunset, tourists converge in an immense parking lot; photographers stand on car roofs, cameras on tripods poised to capture the spectacle. I stepped across the rim of that parking lot, where grey asphalt meets red-orange sand, and walked past the crowd into the desert, my camera loaded with Kodachrome, a slow film that required long exposures in the low light. Without a tripod, I worried that my hands might not be steady enough to record what I was seeing as the sun set and the rock blazed, darkened, and faded. The crowd turned back to buses and cars, though the show had just begun: the flaming light faded from the rock, the sky beyond changing from blue to yellow to magenta, a dark blue line appearing along the horizon. I clicked the shutter for the progressively longer exposures, as the dark line widened into a rising band, intensified, faded, then disappeared into an indigo sky. A luminous pink oval hovered over Uluru. Torn between missing something and being left behind, I ran back to a departing bus. [1](#) [2](#)

Later, in the thirty successive sunset pictures, I saw much my eye had overlooked. While I had focused on the red rock, the sky behind was changing from blue to dusky rose. I saw the same pattern of colors ten years later in a photograph by Galen Rowell (“Twilight in the White Mountains, California”) and learned from Rowell’s text that what I had considered a singular wonder unique to Australia’s Uluru happens everywhere on every clear day, and not once but twice. That dark blue band is earth’s shadow.¹  Now, on a clear day, I look to the east at sunset, to the west at sunrise, to watch that shadow appear for a few moments at dusk and again at dawn—cast onto the atmosphere by the sun passing below the horizon, merging with the darkening night or disappearing beneath the brightening morning light. The sequence of hues is not exact but varies with the presence and distribution of clouds and airborne dust and moisture. On some evenings it is the intense aqua of a robin’s egg, on others

blue-violet. That cap of pale magenta is the “anti-twilight arch,” a reflection of afterglow.⁴ Certain moments of color one may never see again.

My home is on a small peninsula down a mile-long, narrow causeway reaching out into Massachusetts Bay ten miles north of Boston. I am mindful of tides, weather, water, light. Offshore to the northeast is Egg Rock, a lightcatcher. One October evening the sea shimmered iridescent; at sunset, a rosy arch lifted in the eastern sky behind Egg Rock and turned the water rose as well. As the earth’s shadow ascended, shallow waves moved toward shore during the slack water at tide’s turn, reflecting parts of the sky. Rocks along the coast darkened. My camera was on the tripod; the shutter blinked, light streaming through the lens, exposing the film for a fraction of a second before the afterglow faded. A photographer knows how fleeting such instants are. “You captured that rare lilac light,” said a friend who lives beside the water. “I’ve lived here all my life, and I’ve never seen this,” said another neighbor who lives two blocks from the shore.³

“Don’t you like sunsets?” a man protested as I turned my back on a spectacular gaudy sky near Tucson, Arizona, my camera on its tripod pointing east, watching for the earth’s shadow to lift above mountains of pale brown and dark umber across the Sonoran desert. The sky was bluer than the western sky, the colors less saturated, the tall saguaro stems an eerie green. Once I, too, had looked west at sunset, east at sunrise. Now I stand in a place where the view of the sky is broad, the horizon visible, and look in both directions, whether from across a sea or lake or open plain, from hill or rooftop, to observe sunrise/sunset and earth’s shadow. To perceive the earth as a whirling sphere, I watch its shadow move. Sometimes, in the evening when the shadow swells from thin dark line to broad arch, I feel the earth turning.

Stories of being and becoming are embodied in the world, waiting to be read. Some, like earth’s shadow, are cosmic, others are mundane. I search for both, and for the processes that drive the narratives, to discover the patterns that underlie them. I look for places where process creates a pattern that transcends scale, where I can appreciate how similar processes shape the local landscape, the earth, and the universe, like a “galaxy” of sea foam.²⁴ Where human settlement and the landscape’s own deep structure correspond (The Ridgeway³¹, High Plains³²). Where people have shaped and arranged landscape to express identity and idea (Kongenshus²⁸). Where cultures have acknowledged the power of place (Uluru¹¹). To learn to read the stories in landscape, I looked first for places easily read: seashores, deserts, and mountains; the sacred landscapes of memorials, cemeteries, places of worship; political landscapes, as in Washington, DC. Such landscape primers prepared me for more complex readings, as in the Scottish Highlands, the Salton Sea, the Black Bottom of West Philadelphia—all of which hold dark, overlapping stories of natural and human history.²⁷ Some places have unusual power to stir human emotions and inspire stories; I seek these out to understand the source of their power and to learn how a similar power might be found or instilled by design in more ordinary places. I search for places that reflect phenomena too vast or

abstract to experience directly: the collision of continental plates or global warming. I am looking for the extraordinary in the ordinary. The earth shadow I once thought peculiar to Uluru turned out to be recurrent, there for all who have the eyes to see. I had looked but had not seen. My camera recorded a spectacle, but my mind missed the wonder. Years later, my photographs reconstructed the experience so I could perceive pattern, and then seek and find the same phenomenon elsewhere.

Photography is a medium of thought; it is a means of discovery and expression, a way to decipher patterns, to work out ideas, to find and tell stories. Through photography, I want to inspire others to look deeply at the surface of things and beyond to the stories landscapes tell, the processes that shape human lives and communities, the earth itself, and the universe. To pick up a camera and use it to see, think, and discover.

THRESHOLD



5 Nahant, Massachusetts. November 2005.



6 Nahant, Massachusetts. February 2005.



7 Alvar Aalto's studio. Helsinki, Finland. May 1990.



8 Avebury Circle. Avebury, England. June 1987.



9 Hill of Remembrance, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, Sweden. May 1990.



10 Hill of Remembrance, Woodland Cemetery. Stockholm, Sweden. May 1990.



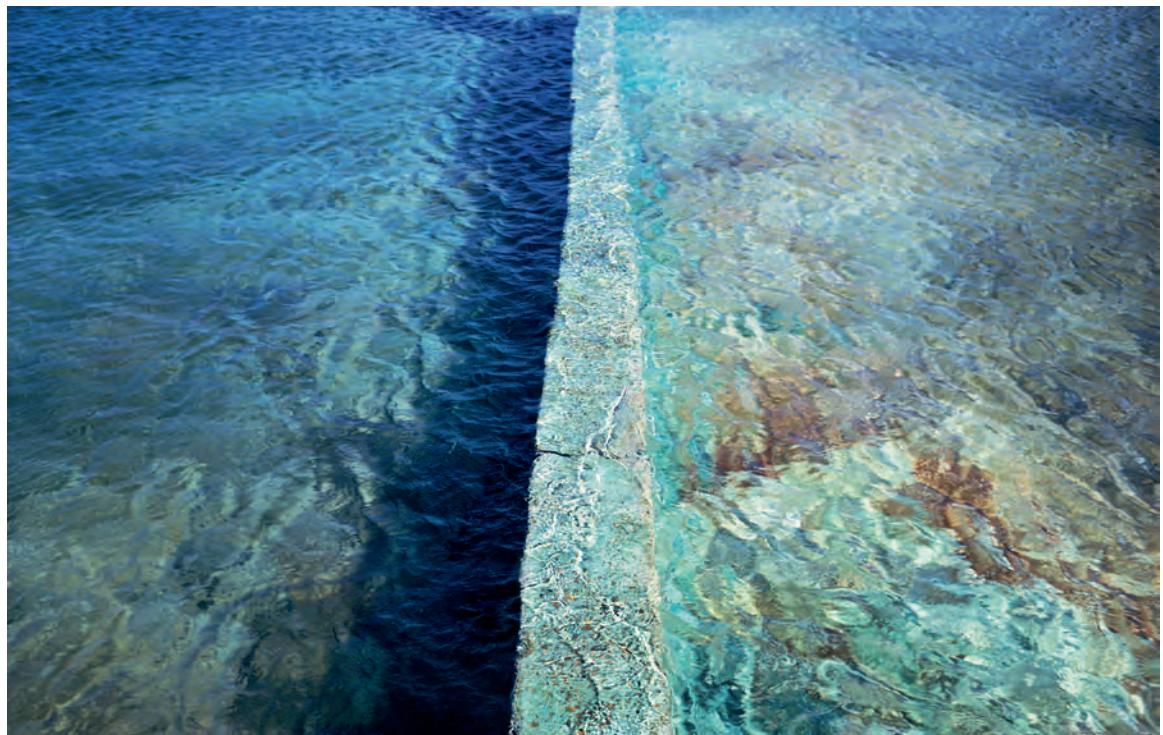
11 Uluru. Red Centre, Australia. June 1988.



12 Uluru. Red Centre, Australia. June 1988.



13 North Head. Sydney, Australia. August 1989.



14 Fairlight Pool. Sydney Harbour, Australia. August 1989.



15 Skeiðará River, Skeiðarársandur, and Vatnajökull. Iceland. May 2008.



16 Sandkluftavatn. North of Þingvellir, Iceland. May 2008.



17 Skaftafellsjökull (Vatnajökull). Iceland. May 2008.



18 Hengill. Iceland. May 2008.



19 West of Vik, Iceland. May 2008.



20 Njal's Farmstead. Bergþorshvoll, Iceland. May 2008.

THE OPEN DOOR

“What Is There, Hidden and Real”

SEAMUS HEANEY COMPARES A POET to a diviner who perceives something that to others is concealed; the poet’s “gift” to be “in touch with what is there, hidden and real...mediating between the latent resource and the community that wants it current and released.”¹ A photographer, too, can be a diviner of things “hidden and real.”

The camera is my diviner’s rod. I feel a tug, pause, scan, and move toward the place where the signal is most clear.² As I look through the viewfinder, the camera channels and brings into focus what I feel, see, and want to know. I aim to see things afresh, ranging broadly, homing in. I try not to impose a topic or a composition, seeking a subject that emerges from the place and its patterns of coincidences and anomalies. But sometimes, what is on my mind influences what I see, and I search to fill in a pattern, tell a story, test an idea. Once I perceive patterns of context and significant details, I try to find a place to stand, to photograph where patterns can be brought together within a frame and with appropriate light. The act of selecting and framing a view can illuminate what I otherwise might miss. Moving up and down and around alters my perspective, separates things, brings them together, shifts emphasis. The frame’s horizontal and vertical lines makes the landscape’s geometry tangible: repose where the horizontal dominates, tension where diagonals predominate or work against the horizontal, as in the slant of wind-driven waves on the sea and along the shore, or in trees leaning away from the wind on an open plain. Framing an image, I place the threshold and shape the view. Looking at the corners of the frame and deciding what to place there can introduce new actors and disclose surprising relationships. I shift the frame and bring them into play.

Subject and story emerge, insisting on refinement in point of view (frontal or oblique, intimate or distant, monumental or diminutive), in mood (mysterious or straightforward, whimsical or grave, ironic or earnest). They suggest what to highlight and what to play down, where to place emphasis (through placement, repetition, contrast), and where and how to draw the eye through composition (centered or off-center,

symmetrical or asymmetrical), rhythm, and proportion. Calculating time of exposure, I am conscious of light, of my stance in relation to its source (behind, ahead, to the side), and of highlights and shadows and the gradient of tones between. Light and the sensitivity of film or digital sensor impose limits; in low light only points in a single plane will be in focus, demanding precision and a decision about subject and significance. I focus the lens, set the shutter's aperture and speed, determining what should be sharp, what blurred, what brightly lit, what in deep shadow. Pressing the shutter captures a vivid image as memory. Things I saw but did not photograph, even images I framed and focused but did not press the shutter to capture, remain blurry impressions. After a few hours of focused looking and seeing, details stream before my eyes like the afterimage that lingers after staring at a bright light. The effect lasts for hours, then gradually diminishes. At night the details signify my dreams.

Many photographers describe their best work as the product of a feeling of connection. Paul Caponigro wrote that "boundaries of separate objects lifted and opened, the land seemed charged with potent force and magic, alive and moving."³ Photography is a way, "if only for brief moments, to sense the thread which holds all things together. The world, the unity of force and movement, could be seen in nature—in a face, a stone, or a patch of sunlight...the photograph the meeting place."⁴

Bashō, the great Japanese poet and a Buddhist monk, advised his followers to "learn from the pine" by becoming one with it and plunging "deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there."⁵ Photographers who become one with their subject may find that "hidden glimmering" and give the inanimate an animate presence. In Wright Morris's photographs, "the object stands there, ineluctably, irreducibly visible": an eroded gully; the seat of a wood swing; a chair, a seat cracked and worn by many sittings; a bed glimpsed through a doorway; a house with weathered clapboards.⁶ □ In his epigraph to *The Home Place*, Morris cites Henry James's "superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning to give out."⁷

I am drawn to photograph a landscape as if it were a person: to capture its distinctive spirit, reveal its history, and show the contexts that shape it. Like Dorothea Lange, "I don't know...where the human leaves off and the inhuman begins." "This sharp division between what is human and what is not human, I don't quite understand.... If I'm dealing with a tree, or with a human being, it is an interpretation...of the world I live in."⁸ I look for light that activates the sense of touch by emphasizing texture. I let a small detail fill the frame, become larger than life, to create a "brimming frame," as Eudora Welty put it.⁹ Sometimes, I compose an image so no one can tell how big or small it is, my purpose to convey patterns that connect scales of space and time. I try to portray a tree or a hill or a wall as animate, because each shapes human lives even as it is shaped by human imagination and human use.

To print a photograph is a form of divining, the computer's mouse and cursor the diviner's rod. Months or years after I made a photograph, an image on my screen

evokes the earlier moment of seeing. Does the image fit the memory? Is the light, the color, true to the experience? I try to feel once more the life of the subject and to bring it forth. Because the printed image is flatter than the experience, I search for depth of space, time, and meaning. To open space into three dimensions and to animate the subject, I increase contrast, separating edges from their context, freeing them. Sometimes, I enhance the perception of depth by desaturating colors in the distant landscape and by increasing saturation in the foreground: atmospheric perspective, a device used by painters that mimics the real effect of the atmosphere, where distant objects appear hazier. I may sharpen significant detail to lend it focus, revisit composition to decide whether and where to crop to eliminate extraneous detail, to draw attention, to refine. The photograph records both a seeing and a response. Paul Caponigro says the experience of printing is a “journey through a landscape of reflection, of introspection.”¹⁰ It is for me.

To sort, select, group, and sequence photographs is a form of divining. I leaf through my photographs until I feel an image tug at me, and put it aside for further study. To edit is to stand again in a landscape, to follow earlier movements and pauses (each photo a pause). Comparing versions of the same scene compels judgment and shows how subtle shifts in position and emphasis tell different stories. Comparing photographs—many miles, years, or lives apart—shows how landscapes play out their themes in particular ways, each a peculiar record of natural and human history, but it also helps me discern common patterns in the physical, biological, and cultural processes that shape all landscapes. Searching for such associations and correspondences, I sift through photographs to draw out the shape and structure of implicit ideas, arranging images in pairs and sequences, searching for pattern.¹¹ My work on the language of landscape began this way many years ago. Twelve photographs selected from thousands, in six sequenced pairs, were a starting point.¹² Gradually, through these and many other juxtapositions, patterns emerged. Each image a thought, each pair an idea, each series or sequence an argument.

The pen, too, is a divining rod, in the field, and later, when I jot down words from a photograph to draw out ideas embedded there, seeking to compose a caption more deliberately, in texts encompassing the pairs and the sequence as a whole. I sometimes write captions in haiku because the kind of thinking the haiku form requires is kindred to the photographs. A haiku is a condensed image, a sketch of a phenomenon or event; it captures a moment. Seventeen syllables, arranged in three lines of 5/7/5, are the frame. And because haiku captions are suggestive, not definitive, clues to what is there (Mount Aso, Japan: leaves flame in dark ash, volcanic dust fanned by wind—cinder, Ring of Fire. ²² Massachusetts Bay: Earth’s shadow rising, blue into rose, tide turning—October twilight. ³). Seasonal reference in haiku underlines the sensual and reinforces the particular. The break—an arresting word, a punctuated pause that divides and bridges ideas—leads to sudden perception, combines the material and the mental, the disparate and the paradoxical.¹³

Filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who pioneered a form of montage, or film

editing, in which successive, disparate shots collide, was inspired by Japanese haikai poetry. Out of the collision of “two given factors,” wrote Eisenstein, “arises a concept.” This applies to photography too. A photographic haiku is a pairing of images whose juxtaposition invokes metaphor, an “imaginative, often unexpected, comparison between basically dissimilar things”; the space between the pair is like the break in haiku.¹⁴ A succession of photographic pairs can be composed like haikai, a chain of haiku where each short poem takes up the suggestion of the one that precedes it and yet opens up a new world of its own. Photography is to seeing what poetry is to writing; a concentrated way of thinking, a condensed telling, a disciplined practice that may produce insight. Conversely, like decisions on where to stand, where to aim the camera, and where to focus the lens, writing within a poetic form demands a precision that may bring understanding.

Narrative finds paths through the images’ territory. One path my pen charted through paired photographs of Scotland, Avebury (England), Dinan (France), Granada (Spain), and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin was “The Poetics of City and Nature,” an aesthetic rooted in the normal processes of nature and of living, linking function, feeling, and meaning.¹⁵ □ □ Central to this theory was the idea of dialogue between people and place and that of storylines connecting a place with all who dwell within it. Words, too, are images, disclosing what I have failed to see or understand. Poetics is more than aesthetics; it implies meaning and, thus, language. I realized that the poetics I sought to define applies to all landscapes, not urban alone, and demands description and codification of a language. The word *story* (and narrative, dialogue, and storyteller) raised further questions. If there are stories in landscape, how are they told if not through a form of language?

With such questions in mind and camera in hand, I found answers in the landscape of Australia, especially the desert at its heart, the Red Centre, where natural and human history meet in Aboriginal songlines and sacred places. To Aboriginals, the Red Centre is a complex, highly ordered territory of sand hills, depressions, water holes, and rocky outcrops, each related to water, plants, animals, and myth. Traditionally, bands of Aboriginals moved within this domain along songlines, paths defined by inherited song. [11] [12] What I saw in Australia sent me back to my archive of photographs, to those of Stourhead (a landscape garden in England I had photographed the year before), to draw out the parallels: overlap of path and storyline; marking of territory, boundaries, and gateways; recognition of refuge; significance of source and sign. What I saw prompted the distinction between the “deep structure” of a place, a function of climate and geological history, and the surface structure, a more ephemeral context that includes human settlements. The following year, in a house and grove of trees on Colorado’s High Plains (the grove an anomaly in that open, arid, short-grass prairie), I found a unified expression of that landscape’s deep and surface structure. [32] Ultimately, the logic of the photographs—singly, and arranged in pairs and sequences—and the writing that came from them and informed them led to a broader theory of a language

of landscape.¹⁶ I became convinced that landscape is more than a text to be read. It is a place where landscape stories are told through the shaping of human settlements.¹⁷ Landscapes speak. They declare origin and assert identity. They proclaim beliefs, affirm and refute ideas. They allude to art, literature, and science.

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson distinguishes between “working hypotheses” and hypotheses derived from fundamental principles. He stresses the importance, in research, of thinking and arguing “inductively from data to hypotheses” and also deductively, “to test hypotheses against knowledge derived by deduction from the fundamentals of science or philosophy.” One must start, he says, from “two beginnings, each of which has its own authority: the observations cannot be denied and the fundamentals must be fitted.”¹⁸ When I was trying to describe and define a language of landscape, I worked from observations, recorded in photographs and field notes, to hypotheses, on the one hand, and, on the other, from the fit of my hypotheses with basic principles of language and design. If landscape is a form of language it must have elements (equivalents of parts of speech), grammar (rules governing how elements are combined), and forms of rhetoric and metaphor. If landscape is a language of *design*, it must serve and promote the pragmatics of design (choosing site and materials, composing shape and structure, fulfilling function, expressing meaning). Photography is a medium of both inductive and deductive reasoning. I shift back and forth in the same place and time between both modes. Aided by the camera, my eye gathers and interprets evidence with and without preconception, seeking to remain alert for the unexpected while searching for what confirms or challenges theory.

Photography became, for me, a form of inquiry, my seeing more intense, my photographs more focused, the camera an instrument of discovery and expression across biomes and cultures. From Asia and Australia to Europe and North America, elements of landscape language told stories of individuals and groups. On my first trip to Japan, in 1990, landscape language reframed the way I saw. My eye was drawn to paths, boundaries, and gateways, to nested enclosures in everyday and sacred precincts, and to their progression from public to private, profane to sacred. I was aware of stepping across boundaries from one domain into another. Gates are prominent in the Japanese landscape, as are bridges, channels, walls, and fences, modified by the deep structure of mountain and sea, river and forest, and the cultural context of Shintoism and Buddhism. These journeys sent me back to my photographs of the Ridgeway, and I found one I had passed over. The Ridgeway’s route along the crest of the downs on a road people and animals have traveled for at least five thousand years is reputedly the oldest highway in Britain. In the sweeping curves of cloud and road I saw that movement is a fundamental process, the path a basic pattern. Sky, earth correspond—cloud’s path and ancient track, a mirrored flowing. [31]

What Robert Frost describes in “The Figure a Poem Makes” applies equally to a photograph: “It begins in delight and ends in wisdom...it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of

life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.” For Frost, “the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn’t know I knew...and the rest follows,” as if “like giants we are always hurling experience ahead of us to pave the future with against the day when we may want to strike a line of purpose across it.” “But,” Frost notes, “the logic is backward, in retrospect, after the act.” My camera has hurled experience ahead of me in the form of photographs that record experience, embody ideas, often “something I didn’t know I knew,” and that chart paths to be divined later on.¹⁹

I disagree with Seamus Heaney when he says the craft of divining cannot be taught. I learned it myself by reading others’ images and by listening to their words, and I teach it too. I ask students to choose a place, to photograph its light, significant details, and metaphors, and, finally, to tell its story in an essay of photographs and words.²⁰ They begin their photo essay by making a storyboard, deciding on the story and then choosing images to illustrate it: a deductive, top-down approach. Usually, the photographs they have taken all semester do not fully tell the chosen story. Dismayed, they announce that they must take more photographs to fill the gaps. Not necessarily, I say, assemble *all* of your photographs, even if there are hundreds, and make prints, each about three inches long. We lay them out on a big table and begin the process of divining their stories and ideas. I sort through each student’s photographs and select those that evoke a strong response in me: ones that are imbued with feeling and idea, fused and amplified by composition. I select as few as possible, just those that give out the strongest signal. Have I left out any you consider your “best,” I ask, or any that *must* be in the story? We pull them in, too, then try out different groups and pairs among the chosen images, arranging and rearranging, searching for ones that speak to each other. We find themes, stories, and metaphors. □ □ We note how perception changes with changes in context and order. Moving the photographs around is important: switching the order can alter the story—the Kuleshov effect.²¹ A pair may work one way but not the other; in what may seem like a logical pair, the two don’t fit, their composition or color at odds. Some photographs seem to snap together, as if magnetically attracted; others spring apart, repelled. Once we’ve tuned our eyes by working with some of the “strongest” images, we troll through the discarded photographs, looking for correspondences and associations, and find new relationships. We look for one image that can stand for the whole, that conveys the sense of place and tells an entire story in a single photograph. That’s a rare find. More often it is a pair, sometimes a threesome or a quartet. We compose an initial draft of the photo essay from this small core, which often suggests a narrative structure, whether linear, circular, or weblike. Gradually, a story emerges; an idea not yet expressed in words but one they recognize as their own. For most students, this is a revelation. Working from information to idea is new to them. The narrative they find is usually a far more intriguing story than the one they had planned to tell. Sometimes it is not the story I saw. They saw their story, their idea. □

Ideas are there, hidden and real, to be discovered. To capture them in photographs and tap them in words is to make sense of them, to mediate “between the latent resource and the community that wants it current and released.”²² My students’ photographs, like mine, are messages, the self recording a dialogue of what landscapes have said and our response, in a language of landscape we had to learn.

The Eye Is a Door

TO SEE IS THE ROOT OF IDEA, linguistically and literally: the word *idea* comes from the Greek *ἰδεῖν*, to see; in English, “to see” may also be “to understand.”¹ Words, in their origins and meanings, disclose the synergy among seeing, thinking, and knowing. *Vision* is not sight alone but also a vivid mental concept, “something not actually present to the eye,” an envisioning of how things might be. *Image*, from the Latin *imāgo*, meaning imitation, appearance, thought, or idea, is the root of imagination and another word for metaphor: image and idea united. *To speculate*, from the Latin *speculāri*, to watch or observe, is to theorize; the word *theory* itself comes from the Greek *θεωρία*, a sight or spectacle as well as a theory. Implicit in this etymology is the belief that the world is the source of ideas, which are drawn out through visual perception in a dialogue between self and surroundings.

To see is to discover. To understand cause and effect, to comprehend the forces that structure society and universe. To learn how ideas, values, and beliefs shape the world, to experience ideas directly, and to learn that ideas have consequences. To envision is to reflect on what once was and imagine what might be, to open a door between mind and world, and to pass through that door. The eye is a door.

But the “doors of perception” are often closed, and the steps between threshold and passage are rarely easy. Aldous Huxley, who took mescaline so he might study human consciousness, expecting inner visions, was “thunderstruck” by what he saw in the outer world, by its richness, the ordinarily unseen, and the evidence his undrugged mind had deleted. Perhaps he did hallucinate, but others—certain painters, photographers, and poets—have testified to seeing, without the aid of drugs, what Huxley saw. The artist’s task is to open wide the doors of perception to sense the world as infinite and continuous, to capture an image that conveys meaning and provokes understanding. The researcher’s task is to observe and test, alert to evidence that challenges or confirms a theory or suggests a new one. To artists and researchers, as to Huxley, the eye is a door. Huxley reflects on the insights the sense of sight affords: awareness of things

in themselves, their being and becoming, a shift from perception of discrete things to their correlations, to self-transcendence and empathy, to a sacramental vision of reality.² Language, Huxley concludes, transmits knowledge but can close the doors of perception by substituting symbols for what the symbols represent, imposing “symbol systems” between the senses and the world.

A word can, indeed, shut the doors. Take the word *nature*, which Raymond Williams called “perhaps the most complex word in the language.”³ “In English, as in French and Latin, *nature* originally described a quality—the essential or given character of something—then later became an independent noun,” the abstract singular disfiguring the multiplicity of meanings. Williams identified two additional areas of meaning: “the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both” and “the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings.”⁴ Nature is an abstraction, a set of ideas for which many cultures have no one name, “a singular name for the real multiplicity of things and living processes.”⁵ The singular quality of the word masks this multiplicity and implies a single definition. When I ask my students for their own definition of nature, their answers diverge strikingly: trees and rivers, but not humans or anything made by humans; a place where one cannot see the hand of humans, a place to be alone; the processes that create and sustain life and the universe; an idea with no meaning or existence outside human consciousness. The meaning of “Nature” that one accepts influences and limits how one thinks about the world. One who assumes that the city has destroyed or displaced Nature is not likely to observe the effects of the natural processes that continue to shape the urban landscape. One who believes that humans are not part of Nature may fail to recognize certain “wild” places as products of human design and may be blind to the possibility of the sublime in everyday human landscapes.⁶ To Huxley, language “bedevils” a sense of reality; one “is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things.” The critical thinker preserves and refines the capacity to look at the world directly, with few preconceptions. Still, language is necessary, and an active and critical eye can open the door that preconception has shut. Huxley acknowledges that language is a means for systematic reasoning and “gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience.”⁷ The search for the precise word to convey a distinction one sees can clarify thought. Knowing the origin of a word can open up meaning.

“Words themselves are doors.” So Seamus Heaney writes and Huxley’s verbal eloquence testifies.⁸ The Danish *landskab* is such a door; in its roots I discern its meaning: *land* as earth, territory, and nation, *skabe* as the verb to shape, *-skab* as association or partnership. I recognize the mistake of English dictionaries, in which landscape is “an expanse of natural scenery seen in one view,” a definition that ignores the word’s Old English origins, akin to the Danish, and I am led to search for that Old English word, *landscape*.⁹ Landscape, then, is more than scenery, more than an attractive picture; landscape, as a word and as a concept, leads one to read the partnership between people and place, a mutual history told through river and city, valley and town, rock and

wall, the physical embodiment of that history.¹⁰ There are whole histories in a word. To rename the features of a conquered landscape, as the English did in Ireland (Burnfoot for *Bun na hAbhann*, Kings Head for *Cnoc na Ri*, Whiteplains for *Machaire Ban*), is an attempt to sever the conquered from their history.¹¹ Without the place name to prompt the original meaning or the story of an event, memory may fade. To lose a language is to lose more than words; it is to lose both memory and meaning. John Montague, in his poem about the decline of Gaelic, mourns “The whole landscape a manuscript / We had lost the skill to read.”¹²

Photographs, too, are doors. To photograph mindfully is to look and think, to open a door between what can be seen directly and what is hidden. A photographer frames a view, bringing certain features into dialogue, excluding others, an act of framing that may create a threshold, as Galen Rowell’s photograph of the earth’s shadow did for me.¹³ Most photographs, however, are not so mindful. They are windows, not doors; they provide a view of scenery, a portrait of a person or group, or the record of an event, but afford no passage to transformed understanding of place, people, psyche, culture, or history. Windows may be refashioned into doors, as Susan Meiselas did when she gathered hundreds of snapshots of Kurdish people and scenes from the 1880s to the 1990s and framed them in a new context of words and images, including her own photographs, to create a history of the Kurds. The result, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, is a doorway into the culture and memories of a dispersed people.¹⁴

When I told a historian of science that I was writing a book about seeing as a way of knowing and photography as a medium of thought, he scoffed, “How old fashioned.” To me, visual thinking is the opposite of old-fashioned; it is timeless. I learned this from personal experience and also from the accounts of others, both recent and long past, from James Watson, who describes how he and Francis Crick discovered the structure of DNA, the “secret of life,” for which, in 1962, they received a Nobel Prize. The two men had been working with a physical model, but it took their colleague Rosalind Franklin’s X-ray diffraction photograph of DNA (shown to Watson and Crick without her permission) to provide the key to the discovery of DNA’s helical structure. “The instant I saw the picture my mouth fell open and my pulse began to race,” Watson wrote.¹⁵ In that image of a double helix, Watson and Crick saw how to revise and reconstruct their own model. Franklin’s photograph was a doorway. In 2008 Osamu Shimomura, Martin Chalfie, and Roger Tsien won the Nobel Prize in chemistry “for the discovery and development of the green fluorescent protein” that permits researchers “to watch processes that were previously invisible, such as the development of nerve cells in the brain or how cancer cells spread.”¹⁶ Recent examples of photography as experimental medium and photographs as evidence in scientific debate are successors to Eadweard Muybridge’s studies of motion and A.M. Worthington’s of splashes more than a century before.

Why, then, did my colleague, the historian of science, consider seeing-as-a-way-of-knowing “old fashioned”? Perhaps because certain historians in recent decades

have challenged scientists' faith in the neutral observer. Or maybe he was thinking of scientists of the past who believed that the camera captured objective truth and who classified phenomena by visual attributes alone (by patterns of shape, structure, color, and texture), the sense of sight their principal means of observation, their errors exposed later by nonvisual measures.¹⁷ The eye can deceive, and seeing is not always believing, but the critical observer takes this into account. "To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry—these are the essentials of thinking," John Dewey cautions.¹⁸ Or perhaps the historian's skepticism about seeing stems from that old prejudice that words are the sole vehicle of rational thought, a fallacy whose ancient roots Rudolf Arnheim traces in *Visual Thinking*. Or maybe the disparagement reflects one side of the long-standing debates about where ideas come from: are they solely an invention of the human mind, or present in the world and waiting to be discovered, revealed, or created in a meeting of mind and world? For those who believe the latter, acute visual thinking is a crucial skill.

Artists who conduct research through visual media, with the results presented primarily in images, are accustomed to skepticism about the validity and value of their findings, as voiced by academic colleagues who reason solely with words and numbers. A series of publications on research in the visual arts by Joaquín Roldán and Ricardo Marín-Viadel counters such skeptics. Their book, *Metodologías Artísticas de Investigación en Educación* (Artistic Methods of Investigation in Education), describes those methods in practice, and another publication demonstrates how the structure of a standard research report could be adapted to visual arts-based research, with each of the parts (abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion, references, and appendices) presented with photographs, alone and in sequence, with few words or none at all. Roldan and Marín-Viadel are part of two related movements, one to advance visual arts-based research, the other to advocate and elevate education in visual thinking.¹⁹

Some medical schools have incorporated the study of art to improve students' skill in visual thinking. Ironically, advancements in radiological imaging and other diagnostic medical tests have been accompanied by the decline of physicians' abilities to examine a patient through sight, touch, sound, and smell. Less adept at and perhaps less trusting of physical diagnosis, doctors order tests to confirm or rule out a symptom's cause, but the tests may pose a risk to the patient and cannot be performed on everyone. In "Training the Eye: Improving the Art of Physical Diagnosis," a course at Harvard Medical School, students study paintings and sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Great works of art, no matter how complex, are composed to convey meaning. Studying such master works is an effective way to train the critical eye to see the world at large, in its competing orders and far greater complexity. The medical students learn to discern patterns of form and color and how to transfer that skill to observing and describing patterns of patients' complexion, posture, and gait. After nine sessions, they are significantly more adept in physical diagnosis than those who do not enroll.²⁰ To diagnose, they must see.

Landscapes, like people, can be stressed. To engage in environmental diagnosis is to recognize signs of poor health (plants or animals dying from too much or too little water or nutrients, neglect, toxicity) and hazards to human life (quaking or slumping ground, flooding). It is also to recognize signs of vitality, to discern the successful as well as the dysfunctional, to distinguish causes from symptoms, and to develop appropriate treatment. Boston's Dudley Street neighborhood, once fully occupied by homes and stores, was, by 1985, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, with 30 percent of the land abandoned. Plans to rebuild were under way, but the diagnosis was mistaken and the plans for treatment flawed. Planners and residents alike believed that the large tracts of vacant land stemmed solely from disinvestment and arson. They missed the pattern of abandonment—many square blocks of vacant land in the valley bottom, few vacancies on hillsides and hilltops—and thus failed to recognize a root cause, groundwater movement in a buried floodplain. The clues were there to be read: building foundations cracked by shifting ground, depressions where water collected after rain, a street named Brook Avenue. Historical maps confirmed the connection between vacant land and a former stream, buried in a sewer a century before. Absentee owners had built rental apartments on the buried floodplain in the 1890s, and within twenty years vacant lots began to appear there, the result of high groundwater, soggy soil, and poor maintenance. Failing to read those stories and thus to distinguish cause and effect, the planners proposed to build houses for first-time homeowners in the valley bottom, where they would suffer flooded basements and worse. Visual illiteracy can be dangerous, the costs measured in ill health and the loss of life and livelihood, and it can conceal potential solutions.

Recognizing pattern and its causes can avert catastrophe and open up possibilities—in the case of buried rivers and vacant land, possibilities for rebuilding neighborhoods while restoring regional water quality. Boston Harbor, in the 1980s, was highly polluted by combined sewer overflows after heavy rains, when storm water mixed with sanitary sewage overwhelmed the capacity of sewage treatment plants and flowed directly into river and harbor. Landscaped parks and playgrounds on the buried floodplain could be designed to detain the storm water above ground in order to prevent sewer overflows and provide other benefits. Boston rejected the idea, but Philadelphia has adopted it. The same correlation between vacant land and buried floodplain exists in low-income inner-city neighborhoods across the United States, including neighborhoods like Mill Creek in West Philadelphia, known locally as “The Bottom,” and at “the bottom,” economically and socially, as well as topographically. By using low-lying open land to detain storm water and reduce combined sewer overflows, Philadelphia plans to rebuild neighborhoods and stands to save billions of dollars.²¹ To see a place in terms of the processes that produce it is to read past and future in the present, to distinguish artifacts from portents, and to plan wisely.

The sense of sight and the capacity for thought are innate, but skilled visual thinking is learned. I had to learn it myself by reading others' images and by listening

to their words, but primarily through the practice of looking, drawing, photographing, seeking and studying pattern, selecting images, and arranging them in sequences. I learn it through teaching too. “Students are now more visually literate than ever before,” some teachers report. That is not my experience. They may have grown up barraged by visual imagery, but these are images as entertainment and persuasion, not as critical thinking. Decades after Howard Gardner’s Project Zero documented the diverse forms of thought and intelligence—the visual among them—American schools still do little to serve or develop visual thinkers.²² Few art classes in primary and secondary schools, if they have survived budget cuts, consider the visual as a mode of reasoning. Students snap photos, often without looking. One student described the difference between how she used to look and how she now sees as an absence of thought and active questioning: “When I would look at a street there was no mental process happening. I wasn’t asking why or how it got to be that way.”

In one course I teach, “The Once and Future City,” the city is the primary text, each student choosing a small site to explore within that larger entity. They look for patterns and for anomalies and for processes to account for both; they search for evidence of past and ongoing natural processes, finding signs of former shorelines in the structure of streets, of water flow around foundations of subsiding buildings, of prevailing wind in the structure of tree branches. They are astonished to learn that many sites in Boston and Cambridge were once underwater. They compare historical maps, tracking changes in streets, buildings, land use, and ownership over Boston’s three hundred years, and seek to explain what processes have shaped these changes. They interpret their observations and test their conclusions against books by other authors.²³ They try to distinguish the significant from the trivial and look for clues to potential trends from which to predict. They draw field maps to record patterns, make photographs of significant details, and write to understand and to communicate what they have found. Experts, in the end, on their small part of the city, they marshal their observations as evidence of neighborhood change and the reasons underlying it. Most important is the quality of reasoning that led there, the evidence and whether its strength is sufficient to support a hypothesis. Students’ websites, presenting their findings to others, are required reading for the entire class. From collective experience, they derive a set of principles for how cities develop. When ideas become real, they find a door and pass through.²⁴

Opening the door is a struggle. “There’s no nature on my site,” one student complained. His definition of “nature” shut his eyes to rainwater flowing across pavement; wind blowing, in blasts in some places, lulled in others; sun shining on warm south-facing walls; iron corroding, stone eroding. “The maps show no changes on my site,” protested another, staring blankly at maps of successive historical periods. She had not spotted subtle changes because she assumed that her site, as a historic neighborhood, had been preserved and frozen in time. Some see too little, others too much, overwhelmed by a flood of perceptions, unable to distinguish the most significant from

the tangential. In the end, they see. “Everywhere I go, I now see patterns and processes,” wrote one student. “As a physics major, I have developed intuition in describing phenomena in terms of equations and in interpreting equations into physical figures. I never before realized that those skills also require visual thinking.”

Children can also learn to read their home environment. In the late 1990s, my students taught at a West Philadelphia middle school in “The Bottom,” then one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods, with a population that was virtually all African American. They led a workshop of eighth-graders (12–13 years old) in an investigation of their neighborhood using primary documents, such as maps, photographs, plans, and newspaper accounts, to trace successive changes from the 1600s to the present. The students broke big questions up into smaller ones, and the children learned to look, to observe, to develop a hypothesis, and then to test it with evidence, searching for significant detail to read the place where they lived. Teachers noticed their students’ new skills of observation and reasoning. John Dewey and others have argued that students must first understand their own environment in order to grasp “the larger geographical scene to which they belong,” but they need also to comprehend that larger context to understand fully the dimensions of their own neighborhood and how it is shaped by external forces.²⁵ Many children had believed that the poor conditions of “The Bottom” had always existed and could never be changed. When they discovered the past in the present, they could imagine a future. Hope became possible. Freed from the myth of an unchanging present, they could imagine alternative futures and ideas for bringing them about.²⁶ To see can be liberating.

When Claude Monet and his fellow impressionists took as their authority the landscape in the open air, they freed themselves from the orthodox perspective of the salon. James Hutton, an eighteenth-century farmer and naturalist who studied the landscape of Scotland, detected phenomena that overturned accepted truths and shocked his contemporaries. He saw in the landscape ongoing processes that explained its geological history; his drawings of rock layers recorded direct observations of its anomalies, its “unconformities.” His authority was not the Bible or other written texts, but the earth itself. His eye was both critical and creative. His *Theory of the Earth*, which became the foundation of modern geology, inspired Charles Lyell’s *The Principles of Geology*, which, in turn, led Charles Darwin to see in finches’ beaks evidence for the theory of evolution. Like Monet, Hutton, Lyell, and Darwin, students who go out into the city and observe sometimes find truths that contradict or challenge orthodoxy. To see can be revolutionary.

For every person, the eye is the door. What one finds beyond the door depends on what is there and what one has the skill to see, but also on what one wants to understand. For Monet it was light and color; for Hutton, the history of the earth; for Lyell, the principles of geology; for Darwin, the theory of evolution. For Franklin, Crick, and Watson, it was the structure of DNA. Aldous Huxley found a sacramental vision of reality; eighth-grade students in West Philadelphia, a sense of a past and hope for a

future. Through Monet's paintings I see the lights of day, in season and place; through Hutton's and Lyle's drawings and the principles they embody, I recognize landscape's significant detail, traces of ancient and ongoing events, and patterns of relationships between life and place. Through West Philadelphia's children, I learn the connection between place and knowledge, self-esteem, and pride.

Beyond my own eye's door are landscapes, the stories they tell, and the ideas they embody. I pass through the eye's door and see: that the natural and the human are one, continuous not separate, landscape a mutual shaping of people and place and a form of language born out of living, a language with which to tell new stories and to envision how to adapt human settlements in life-sustaining ways.

PASSAGE



21 Baker City, Oregon. May 2005.



22 Mount Aso, Kyushu, Japan. October 2002.



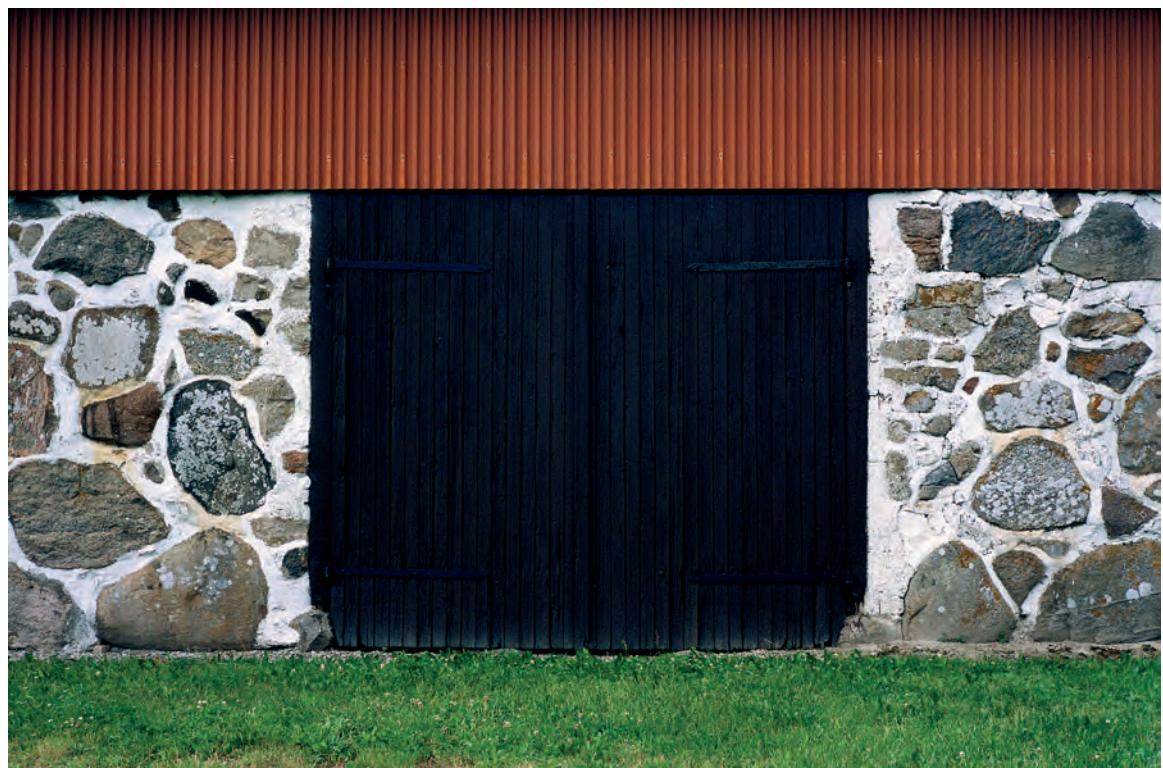
23 Saguaro National Park. Tucson, Arizona. April 1999.



24 Nahant, Massachusetts. March 2002.



25 Isle of Doagh. Inishowen, Ireland. May 2001.



26 Södra Sandby, Sweden. June 2003.



27 Glen Loy, Scotland. September 1978.



28 Heath Memorial. Kongenshus, Denmark. May 1990.



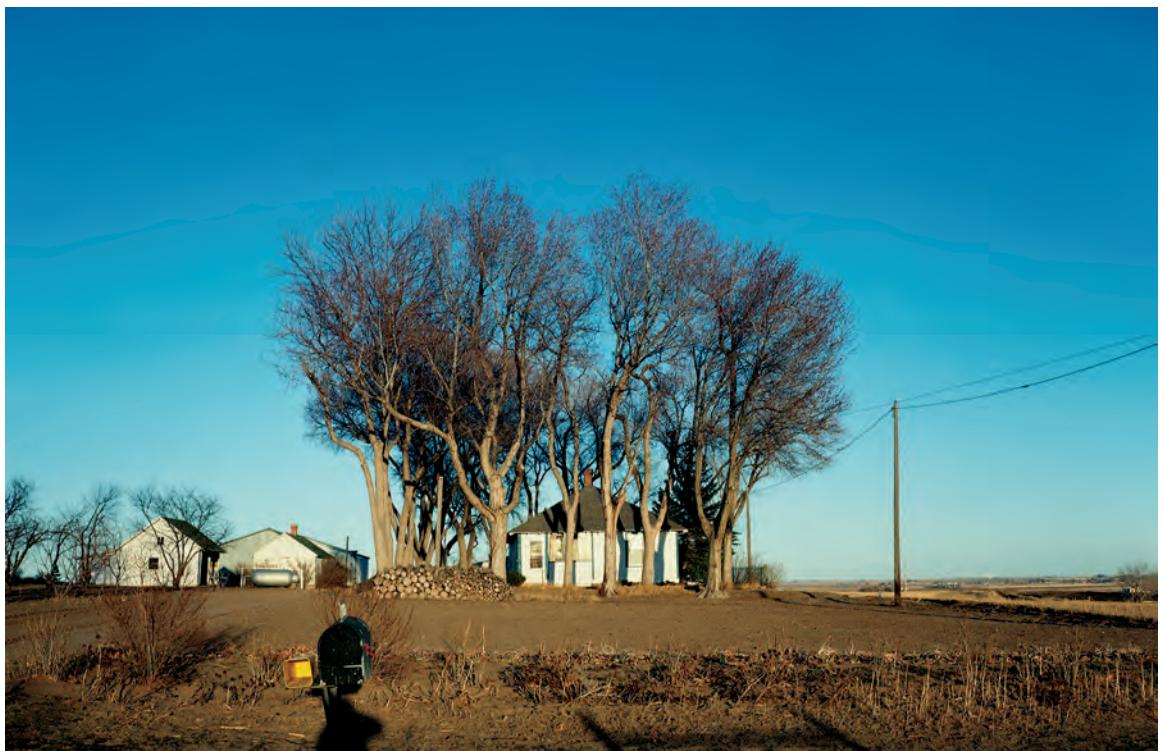
29 El Camino de Santiago. Basque Country, Spain. May 2011.



30 Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, Spain. May 2011.



31 The Ridgeway. Avebury, England. July 1984.



32 High Plains. Eastern Colorado. March 1989.



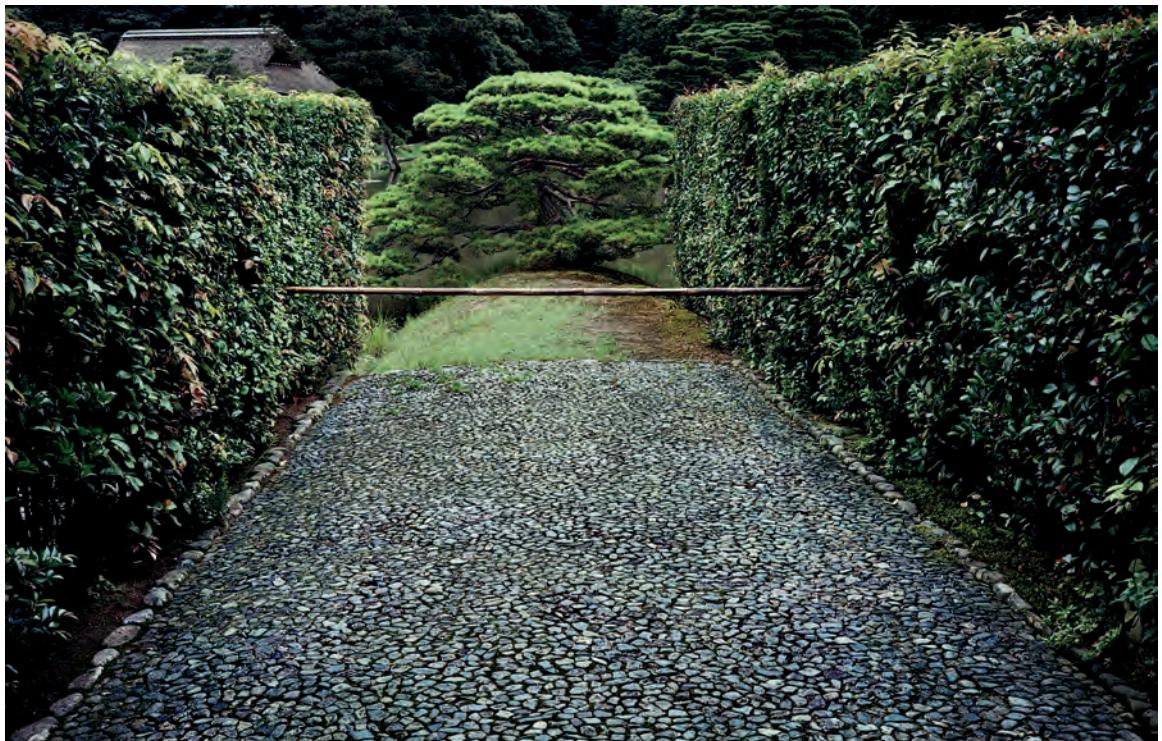
33 Parc de La Villette. Paris, France. June 1992.



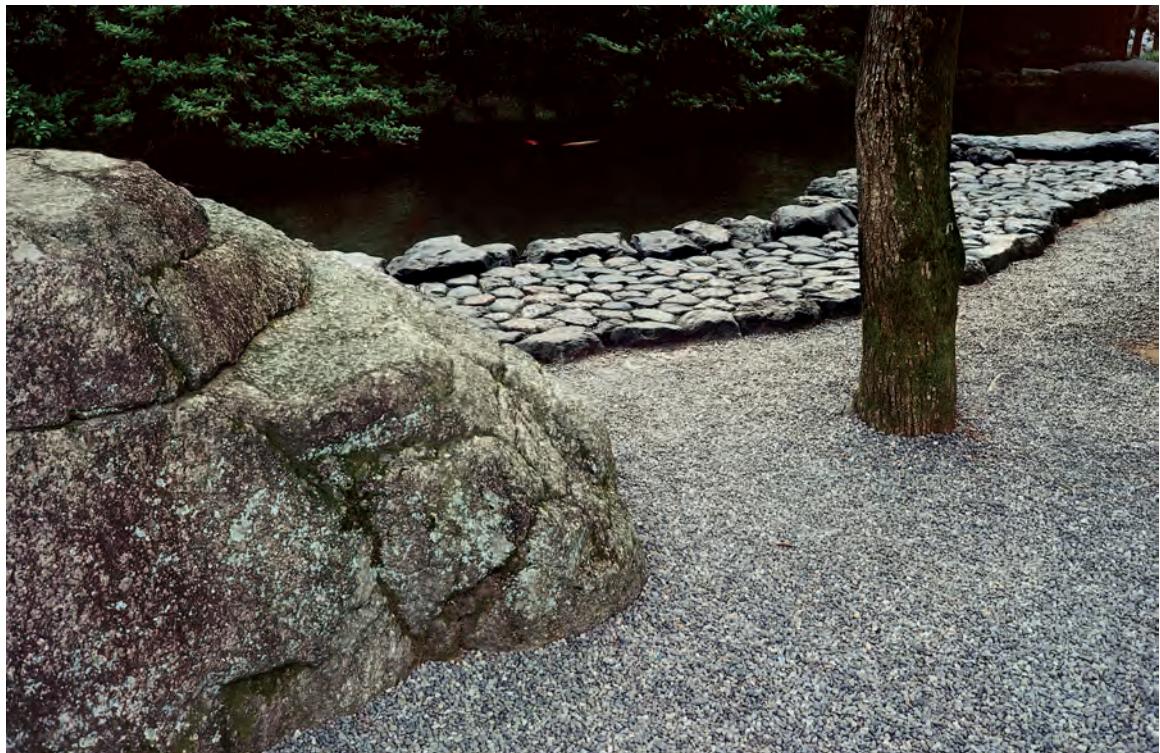
34 Column of Victory, Blenheim. Woodstock, England. June 1987.



35 Parc de Sceaux. Paris, France. May 1993.



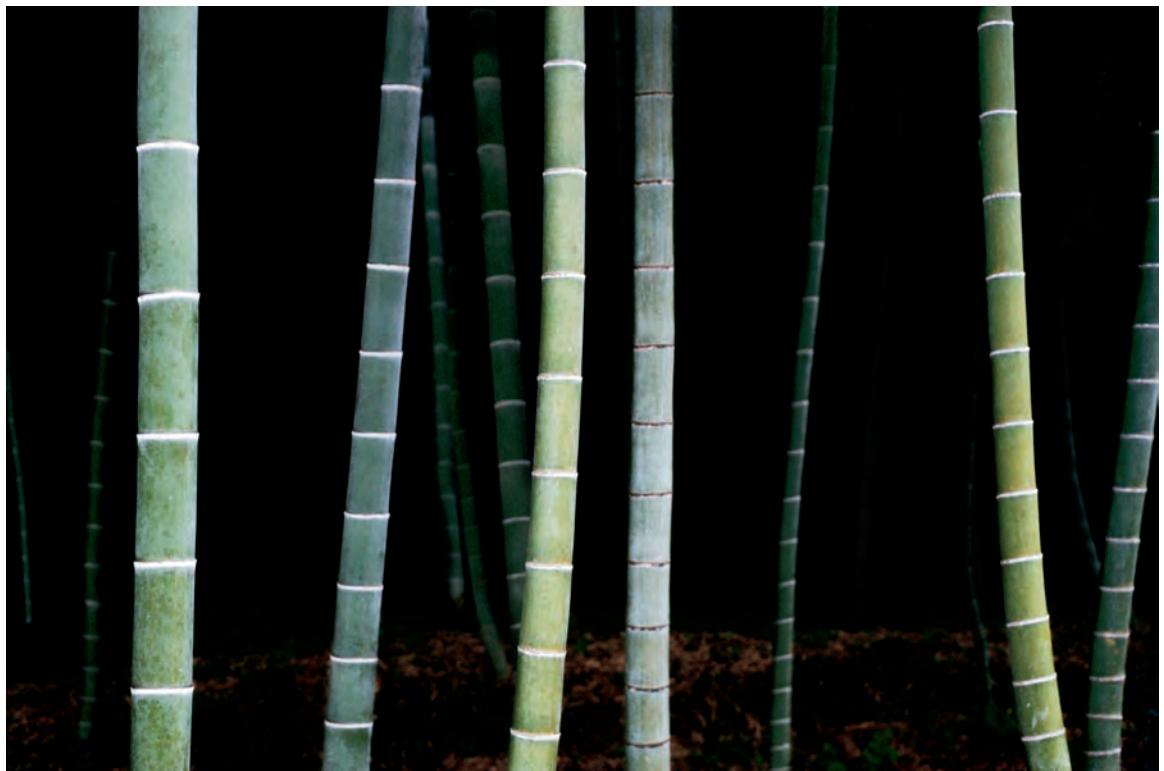
36 Katsura. Kyoto, Japan. July 1990.



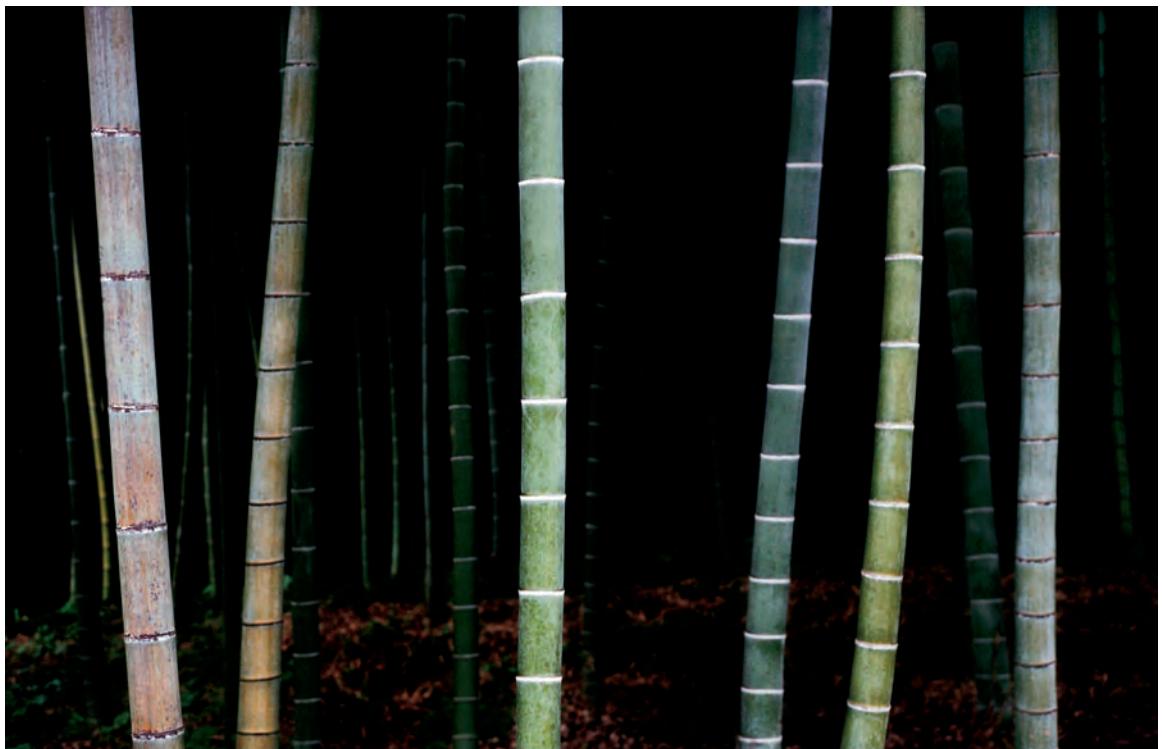
37 Naiku. Ise, Japan. July 1990.



38 Saihō-ji. Kyoto, Japan. October 2001.



39 Saihō-ji, Kyoto, Japan. October 2001.



40 Saihō-ji. Kyoto, Japan. October 2001.



41 Marnas. Södra Sandby, Sweden. November 2008.



42 Marnas. Södra Sandby, Sweden. November 2008.



43 Marnas. Södra Sandby, Sweden. June 2007.



44 Marnas. Södra Sandby, Sweden. June 1998.



45 Skaftafellsjökull (Vatnajökull). Iceland. May 2008.



46 Marnas. Södra Sandby, Sweden. January 2008.



47 Mount Rokko Chapel. Kobe, Japan. July 1990.

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Introduction

SEEING IS FOR ME A WAY OF KNOWING, photography a way of thinking. I see most acutely through the frame of the camera's viewfinder and think most fluently through images. The camera is my third eye, its sensor a third retina, its images a form of thought, speech, and memory. What draws my eye most intensely are landscapes, the stories they tell and the ideas they hold and inspire. My camera frames those stories, homing in on significant detail, zooming out to put detail in dialogue with context. Its lens brings ideas into focus. Its images, paired and in sequence, plot a path to discovery.

The Eye Is a Door invites the reader to join in this process of seeing, thinking, and discovery. It is a book of stories and is also a guide to discovering one's own stories. It is for people who want to use the camera to discover and think, as well as to capture a beautiful scene. The book's focus on landscape reflects my own use of photography to study landscape as the mutual shaping of people and place. Landscape is an ideal vehicle for honing the skill of visual thinking; it is always at hand, whether in city, suburb, or countryside, and its meanings are not just metaphorical but real, practical as well as poetic. To read and tell landscape is a skill essential to the design and planning of human settlements, but once acquired, the skill is transferable to other subjects. Strategies of visual thinking—observation, pattern recognition, repatterning—apply to investigating human health, behavior, and society, meteorology, molecular structure, or any other subject, anywhere—in the laboratory or studio, at home or in the field. Visual thinking is a crucial skill, but one that is widely ignored and rarely taught.

Ours is a visual culture, people say. Images proclaim, entertain, urge, and entice: on television and the Internet, in newspapers and magazines, on flyers and billboards. People may be surrounded by imagery, but few interpret those images deeply and critically. To call ours a visual culture is to be impressed by the volume and intensity of images while ignoring the dearth of visual reasoning. Research shows that perception and cognition are intimately linked and that many people can think more fluently and inventively with images than with words or numbers, yet schools rarely teach visual literacy. Indeed, teachers are all too prone to regard the intelligent visual thinkers who

struggle with words or numbers as “disabled.” There is a “visual turn,” scholars say. An outpouring of books and articles on imagery in recent years has promoted programs in visual culture and visual studies, but the focus is on images and their meanings rather than on the *practice of image-making* and its potential to transform understanding. Never have so many people owned cameras, and never have their snapshots been so widely distributed and shared. The world is being recorded, but to what end? Few use the camera as a way to think. Visual thinking is a powerful ability, and photography one of its tools, but that potential is unfulfilled.

The neglect of visual thinking has consequences. Visual illiteracy, the inability to recognize and interpret visible signs and phenomena—whether natural or man-made—and to express an appropriate response is widespread. Wonders and warnings alike go unseen and undetected. Failure to see and appreciate wonders may impoverish the spirit, but failure to perceive and understand warnings threatens well-being and survival. Illness goes undiagnosed when doctors fail to recognize pertinent visual clues. Policies fail to achieve their goals when the authors, relying on statistics and theory rather than firsthand observation, do not recognize underlying causes. Homes and businesses are built on dangerous ground when planners are blind to evidence of the natural forces that shape the city.

I once thought that the failure of city builders to take into account natural processes was due to lack of knowledge, and I wrote my first book, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design*, to help fill that void. After its publication in 1984, I was surprised by how many people, including scientists and naturalists, resisted or ignored the evidence that cities are part of the natural world. I began to understand that this resistance arose, in part, from an inability to read the signs of ongoing natural processes in landscape. I wrote my next book, *The Language of Landscape*, to help people relearn this fundamental skill. Now I understand that the lack of landscape literacy is part of a larger failure of perception and imagination, with consequences far beyond the design of cities. *The Eye Is a Door* is a sequel to *The Language of Landscape*. The photographs here, alone and in pairs and sequences, present many of the prior book’s arguments and ideas.

This book is the product of personal experience, but it is not a memoir. I agree with the poet Paul Valéry that, sometimes, “it is more useful to speak of what one has experienced than to pretend to a knowledge that is entirely impersonal, an observation with no observer.” “There is no theory,” Valéry wrote, “that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.”¹ I know, for example, that one can reason with images and without words, because I do so myself. I believe that patterns and the ideas to which they give rise are latent in the world, waiting to be discovered, because I have found them there. I reflect on my own visual thinking through photography as one model of practice, since it is one I know intimately.

I am primarily a visual thinker. Writing, for me, is a process of translation from images to words, and yet I was not exposed to formal visual language until graduate school. Before that, I did not even know such a language existed; I had learned of art as

a medium for self-expression and for recording people and places, but not as a means of reasoning. In college, as an art history major, I learned to analyze images, to perceive the ideas embedded there, and to translate these into words. Art history taught me to see more keenly but not to express my own ideas in images. Only later, in a graduate program in landscape architecture, was I taught to use drawing as a medium of visual thinking, a means to grasp a whole and its parts, to display processes and interactions, and to map out the structure of ideas—a bridge from the landscape-as-it-is to what-it-had-been and to what-it-might-become. But photographs were regarded as useful mainly for documentation and communication, not, like drawing, for critical reasoning, and there existed no manual that addressed how to use photography this way. *The Eye Is a Door* is the guide that I wished for.

Why a door and not a window? A window is something to look through, but a doorway is to pass through; crossing a threshold, one enters a new place. To see, to really see, is to open a door. To pass through that door is to arrive at a new understanding. Thus the titles of the book's three parts: "Threshold" (an essay of photographs), "The Open Door" (an essay of words), and "Passage (an essay of photographs). "Earth Shadow," the prologue, precedes the whole; it describes a wonder that most people never see, one example of the ideas and stories that are embedded in the world, waiting to be discovered and read.

The eight chapters of "The Open Door" expand on the prologue: from photography as a tool of discovery to mastery of its craft, from finding a place to stand to the observation and interpretation of light and color, from the deciphering of significant detail to the drawing out of an idea.

"Photography and the Art of Visual Thinking," the first chapter, describes how photography has been, from its invention, a means of discovery, for scientists and artists alike. "The Craft the Subject Demands" disputes Susan Sontag's denigration of photography as an effortless practice, requiring only "a touch of the finger" to produce "a complete work." The "touch of the finger" is, I explain, but part of a process of observing, reflecting, focusing, editing, printing, and sequencing that may last hours, days, months, even years. The nature of the "complete work" and the craft required to achieve it depend on the photographer's subject. To know where to stand, the subject of the third chapter, is to know oneself and one's subject. Moving several feet, or even a few inches, backward or forward, to one side or the other, up or down, can change the whole story. "Lights of Day, in Season, in Place" explains how light varies in intensity, clarity, and color with place, season, and time of day; how it responds to, exposes, or conceals materials, surfaces, and forms, and creates shadows; how light, in turn, is reflected, absorbed, and transformed by surfaces; how light affects mood; how it can be used to evoke feeling and convey meaning. "What Color Tells" depicts color as far more than an aesthetic consideration: color is information. "Significant Detail" explores how such details, alone and in combination, expose larger patterns. Visual thinking is an art of pattern-seeking, of culling the significant from a welter

of the irrelevant or peripheral. Photographers seek significant detail to serve as metaphor—to stand for a larger whole, to hint at the deeper meaning beneath the surface, to tell a story. “What Is There, Hidden and Real” recounts how a photographer can divine the ideas latent in landscape, the camera a diviner’s rod, and how printing, editing, grouping, and sequencing are also means of drawing out the ideas embodied in photographs. “The Eye Is a Door” concludes the book with a discussion of how photographs and words can open (or close) the doors of perception and of what may be found beyond those doors.

The two photographic essays, “Threshold” and “Passage,” embrace the text of “The Open Door,” each part reinforcing and demonstrating the others. Images and words correspond, but a single photograph represents more than a single idea or story, and each photographic pair and sequence of pairs has its own logic. “Threshold” expands on the prologue’s themes and explores what light and color tell and what significant details reveal about the identity of a place. It begins with landscapes whose patterns are clear and stories easily read (like seashores, deserts, and sacred places), then introduces more intricate dialogues among natural forces and human ideas, values, and actions. “Passage,” which concludes the book, juxtaposes images from different places and times in more complex photographic pairings that portray ideas. Collectively, the pairs plot a sequence of ideas about a language of landscape. My book, *The Language of Landscape*, described, in words, the elements, grammar, poetics, and polemics of this language. “Passage” is an argument for the language of landscape, in the form of a visual poem.

Photographs and texts, when placed on facing pages, tie down the image to the written word, can distract the eye, and may impede or discourage careful looking and deep thinking. Separating photographs and text frees the reader to view the images unencumbered, to discover, to bring into play his or her own memories and associations. Much can be read without the author’s mediation, but some knowledge deepens the reading. I invite the reader to experience the photographs both ways: before and after reading the text. Still, some may wish for fewer words. The norm, in a book of photographs, is for the photographer to offer only a brief statement or to remain silent, and for others to write the accompanying essays. But, as the photographer and writer Wright Morris observed, “Words can be as intrusive in their absence as in their presence.”² For me, writing and photography are intimately linked, one informing the other; my goal is for the words to speak in the same voice as the photographs. My hope is that the text opens up the photographs’ stories without closing down other readings.

Some photographers do write and speak about their subjects, goals, and methods. I have learned much from them and have used their experience to reflect and expand on my own approach. While some readers may question the wisdom of discussing the practices of canonical figures alongside my own, even citing some as models, I hope this juxtaposition, and my reference to selected images by these photographers, will aid the reader. These are but a few of those who have practiced photography as a way of thinking and a method of inquiry. Many others could have served as examples;

this is an introduction to photography as a way of looking at and thinking about landscape, not a comprehensive survey.

Photographs discussed in the text are indicated by a color square (□). A number inside the square (2, for example) indicates the photograph's location in the photo essays. Rectangles with no accompanying number (□) refer to photographs that are not in the photo essays; these are listed by chapter, in order of appearance, at the back of the book. To make the book affordable and freely available to students and others for whom the price of a print edition would be prohibitive, *The Eye Is a Door* is also available as an e-book. There are other advantages to the electronic format, including embedded links to the Internet and to photographs discussed in the text, where clicking on an icon will bring up the photograph. For a short guide to considerations in writing and producing a richly illustrated e-book, see my website: www.annewhistonspirn.com. Future advances in e-book technology may well inspire a new edition of *The Eye Is a Door*. Meanwhile, for updates and additional material, please visit the book's website: www.theeyeisadoor.com.