

"In which exact part of the human body  
does dignity and glory reside?"

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**As I visited the Museum at the Palace of Cortés in Cuernavaca here in Mexico, I came across a statue with a one legged general. Ever since I discovered that the left leg belonging to the general had been buried with military honors, I have asked myself in which exact part of the human body does dignity and glory reside.** During the burial of the leg—a part of his that had been with him in his heroic acts as a General and had always climbed steep hills with him—

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I was told that a bugle boy played taps while a battalion carefully aligned among the trees of the cemetery, presented arms. The extremity was deposited in the family crypt in a special coffin, and every year on the Day of the Dead, the general would arrive at the graveyard to bring flowers to that part of his body, which had departed ahead of him.

The general would not cry for that portion of himself, but rather sit there and recall the deeds that they had shared together, those were not only war scenes, but also days of dancing at the Officers Club. He would wonder about that part of his own body that had already marched ahead to eternity, he pondered if it might have alighted in heaven or gone to hell. He would stare at the tomb, giving thought to the idea that he now had to follow his leg to hell, or if in fact might catch up with it in heaven.

This story, which I told some years ago, at a conference in California I related to the internet and how we perceive in a Macluhanesque metaphor the computer as being an extension of our body. However this same story comes to mind again only this time in a different setting altogether, as I sit here pondering what happened to my "street photography" pictures that I have been creating over the last few decades in contrast to what I am doing today.

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One could safely place my work in the category of street photography, which is where for the most part, my work takes place. However today, these pictures are not necessarily concluded at the same stage they were before. That is to say, once the image had settled into the films' emulsion, that was it, what was done later on in the dark room would alter things in ways that were rather limited. Today, the image captured by the camera might just be the starting point for the creative journey. Although not all pictures are being transformed further within the computer, many images are indeed being altered to various degrees in ways that go beyond what the darkroom would enable.

It is quite obvious that the skills and criteria that are required for the two settings, the street on the one side, and working with a computer on the other, have to be evaluated with a new set of ideas in mind. Leading the way to the notion of asking "in which part of the the image does dignity and glory reside", in other words. What I photographed in the street or what I did with the image after having worked on the picture in the computer.

Is the term of "street photography" even applicable under such circumstances?, I believe such a question might be a fairly important one to ask.

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My intuition tells me that of course it is still "street photography" in so far as the spirit and interests which led me to capture a specific moment, is still present. The only thing that really has changed has to do with an aesthetic representation. I then started to look back in time, and came to the conclusion that since the advent of photography, technology has always been transforming the aesthetics of street photography. Each new film that would come out or the luminosity of a lens, for instance, would allow us to do things in different ways, and places. The color that was captured was forever changing with each new generation of film that was brought to market.

For some reason, all those gradual changes offered by the technology at the time (mainly, lenses and films), which would affect when we photographed, what we photographed and how it looked to the eye, were never questioned as much as they are being today, because after all such modifications took place in front of the camera lens. It isn't that there were no technological changes over time, which would transform the aesthetics of street photographers, regardless if they were working in color or black and white, because indeed they were always present, but that having such changes take place in the time/space before the image was captured, vs. the, after the image was taken, has made a big conceptual difference.

However the tempo that exists in making the street picture is certainly very different to the more contemplative mood in front of the computer screen. The question then is, would the work done in front of the monitor be the equivalent to the time spent working in the dark room?

If we can come to the conclusion that this is so, then it's very likely that after all the general's leg together with his body will find their common resting ground in the hereafter, much as the term street photography will have come to terms with the work done on the street in combination with a computer. If the computer is the equivalent of a dark room on steroids? then I believe what is going to take place is that we have to reshape our discourse to allow for a very fresh approach to street photography.

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It will probably take another six to ten years, for the curators, critics, theorists and so on, to fully work their way through all these questions in order to arrive at some meaningful understanding of the photographic discourse that is being transformed as you read this. Therein lies one of the biggest challenges, to absorb into the very same process of what is being described, the on going changes underway thus leading to a good answer to the question: " in which exact part of the human body does dignity and glory reside?"

**Pedro Meyer**

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July 5, 2005