

# "The poetry of an image"

by Pedro Meyer

We are told, "Poetry is the other way of using language". Yet when we make reference to other art forms, in our case specifically to photography, we seem to use the term poetry to describe a particular form of imagery, I suppose considering those other ones the equivalent to prose.

Poetry we are also told "is the way it is because it looks that way, and it looks that way because it sounds that way and vice versa". Here we are already bringing in formal elements, which would give photography a more intimate connection with poetry as a language and to help us look at photography.

The perennial quarrel about distinguishing poetry from prose, which is like distinguishing rain from snow – everyone is reasonably capable of doing so, and yet there are some weathers that are either-neither.

And so it was when recently I gave a lecture in Santiago de Chile, that I presented the image (below), of the two men crossing in the background while in the foreground a woman was sitting there at a counter having some food wearing two hats herself.



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For me there is poetry in the forms of this picture, the repetition of the elements in pairs, the two men, their legs taking similar steps in opposite symmetries, the woman with the two hats. There is a tendency of poetry to incremental repetition, variation, and the treatment of many matters and different themes in a single recurrent form such as couplet or stanza. Such thoughts animated me to put the image together such as you see here. Let me repeat, should the term have gone past you without further thought: I put this image together. Yes I did so, digitally. (see the pictures I used, at the end of this article).

After the lecture, I received an angry email from a young man, who thoroughly rejected the notion that such an image had any merit once that I had commented about it's digital origin.

His particular objections were directed to the fact that I had not stood there, like a hunter of the "decisive moment", in the hope of capturing the two men in their corresponding strides, but rather taken the "easy way out" by just implementing my ideas in the computer. He went on to complain, that the poetry in this image was completely lost, as it could only have been achieved by way of the magical moment, that instant when things come together when clicking the shutter.

I imagine that the author of that letter, whom I never met personally, and therefore I have to assume, combined the notions of a Zen archer with those of a photographer, assigned a particular importance to the essence of capturing the image "en vivo". For him, if you will, that was the only poetic moment possible. He had no room for any other option.

Fair enough, I would say. However our critic forgot to include in his equation that there are now other interesting Zen moments as well. Namely, those of sitting in front of a screen and honing in on your particular abilities to arrive at an image that did not exist earlier, or at least not in that state, and which is the main product of one's sensibility. The image does not come together on it's own, you must make it happen. In that sense there is no distinction, between composing images, music and writing poetry. After all, one could also make a case, that poetry is put together from words that were just lying around before.

So we can conclude that it's how you put together the notes, for music, the words for poetry, or the images that were there before, if what you end up with is in fact poetry or just prose. Furthermore, we should also emphasize that photography is no longer solely what it used to be, it has been strongly transformed by all the digital options available today, and with that, has come the obligation to rethink some long held notions of what constitutes the photographic moment and where in does the photographic poetry reside.

Please share your views with us, give us your comments on the poetry of photography, and write in our forums.

Pedro Meyer  
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