

# Training Manual – Dan Swart APSSA

## 1: Photographic criteria – identifying good characteristics

### 1.1: Background experience

1.1.1: Anyone who aspires to be a judge of photography should have experienced photography at all levels – from beginner to master and know what to expect from each level. A good judge will be sympathetic to the beginner, offering good technical advice, be able to have realistic expectations and offer well-founded feedback and praise at all the other levels up to 5-star. (See Hendrik Ferreira’s article: On Judging and Evaluation – Opinions.)

1.1.2: Although not necessarily having produced all categories of photography, or being expert in them, a judge should have seen many examples of nature, wild life, pictorial, documentary, visual art, sport, photojournalism, travel, abstract, altered reality, macro, landscape, portraits, nudes and table top. One has to have seen hundreds of examples and know the special characteristics that distinguish each category from the others.

1.1.3: There are some photographers who occasionally buy a book on a famous photographer or look at some photographs in an overseas photo trade magazine (both expensive) but most would rather spend their money on better equipment and only get to see photographs in the local camera club and occasionally see a salon or buy a local photo magazine. This is not enough. In order to make an informed judgment of any photograph one needs to have a comprehensive experience of what really constitutes excellence in photography in its broadest sense.

1.1.4: Some background knowledge of art can empower a judge to identify and understand artistic styles, concepts and ideas that would be foreign to anyone without that knowledge. The art in photography can be related to art principles that apply to painting, the graphic arts, sculpture and even music or poetry.

### 1.2: Emphasizing good characteristics – avoiding nit-picking

1.2.1: Identifying what is good about a photograph should be the first priority for any judge. Then comes the positive feedback – identifying what is not up to standard and what can be done about it in future to improve photographs by that worker. We should avoid the word criticism because of its negative connotations.

1.2.2: Nit-picking is a very negative way of assessing the quality of a photograph in that it can often be off the mark (see “over-valued ideas”) or so minor so as not to really

cancel out the good points about the image. Everyone can learn from mistakes but a judge should not make that experience too painful by dwelling on insignificant “faults”.

Of course it is important to identify inferior technique, poor design, trite subject matter or any other important shortcomings because that is how standards are maintained and improved. But the faults must be important and certainly not the kind of so-called “faults” one would see in any world-famous photograph by an acclaimed master.

1.2.3: Recognizing talent in young photographers, even older ones, is a most important responsibility of any judge. Breaking the spirit of a talented photographer with unfounded and niggling criticism is a style of judging that should be shunned.

## 2: Technical expertise

It is essential for any judge to have specific knowledge and experience of photographic techniques. Most photographers these days are using digital cameras and the younger people have possibly never used a film camera. There are however a few film enthusiasts still working with traditional photographic media, slides, colour negative and even black and white film. Whatever the technology the same basic principles are applicable.

2.1: Judges should be totally familiar with the following:

- Using manual rather than AE programs
- Freezing movement or controlling depth of field with shutter speed and aperture controls
- Effect of lens focal lengths – wide angle, telephoto, fish-eye
- Filters – polarizing, neutral density, graduated
- Limitations of TTL light meters
- Average, centre- and bottom-weighted, spot and matrix metering
- Hand-held incident light meter
- Kodak grey card, 18% reflectance
- Choosing apertures or shutter speeds – A, S or P auto-exposure programs
- Reciprocal relationship between aperture f-stops and shutter speeds
- Equivalent f-stop and shutter speed combinations
- Bracketing
- High-key and low-key
- Under- and over-exposure adjustments for high-key and low-key situations
- Different lighting situations and awareness of direction, quality and strength of light
- The Zone System
- Exposing for highlights and/or shadows
- ISO – sensitivity index

White balance  
Colour temperature – the Kelvin scale  
Colour space, colour gamut  
Shooting in RAW

The above list covers most of what any experienced photographer should be familiar with. The technical particulars can easily be checked in any camera instruction manual or the Internet. What follows are some comments and information about photographic techniques that are important in judging the finished photograph as presented. There is also some information about digital photography that can be useful for educating beginners in this medium.

## 2.2: Checking the histogram on digital cameras

In playback mode many digital cameras have a useful feature: you can check the exposure accurately just after the shot by looking at and understanding the histogram graph representing an analysis of the brightness levels recorded. The display looks like a landscape in silhouette with hills, peaks and valleys. The vertical axis tells you how much of a particular brightness level there is in the picture – the higher the peak the more there is at that level. The horizontal axis represents all the recorded levels ranging from the darkest on the left and the brightest on the right. If there is a gap against the left margin and the values at the right are crowded up against that margin your picture is over-exposed. And the reverse, if the gap is on the right and everything is bunched up on the left it is under-exposed. There is always an exception to the rule – for instance in night time shots or snow scenes.

## 2.3: Blown-out white

Most of these cameras also include a blown-out highlight warning. If the highlights are grossly over-exposed (blown out – beyond the limit) they flash black and white on the screen.

A blown-out area has received more light than it is capable of representing and will appear as pure white. These areas are not capable of being satisfactorily toned down.

It is acceptable to have a blown-out white area in a digital photograph if it is really meant to be pure white without any textural detail. In a print it would be the pure white of the paper base. It would be a mistake to penalize a photograph that includes such a white area if it represents a reality such as a source of light in the picture or maybe a pure white cloud in the sky or any other element that in reality would be pure white, without any textural detail. These areas can be identified as Ansel Adams' Zone IX. In the case of a high-key photograph or a picture with a plain white background as one would see in the work of David Bailey or Richard Avedon, among others, blown-out

white areas are definitely acceptable. However, if an area is blown out that in reality is not supposed to be featureless white then it is a technical error.

Sometimes in digital photography an area of blue sky will be partially blown out and record as an unnatural green colour – the red and blue channels are blown out but not the green. This is also a technical error. It can be corrected with the use of a polarizing or graduated filter to selectively darken the sky while taking the photograph.

The opposite of blown-out white would be total black; a total absence of textural detail in shadow areas; Ansel Adams' Zone 0. Even 95% black (Zone I) could also fall into this category because detail would be almost totally absent. In some photographs, where the loss of detail would compromise the content of the photograph such areas, particularly in shadow areas, one could identify as a technical fault. A totally black background or dark areas that simplify the image and emphasize important details should not however be considered to be faults. There should also be no restriction with regard to what percentage of the total area of the image is totally black.

#### 2.4: Too light or too dark

Ultimately the test for good exposure is in viewing the resultant photograph, either as a projected image or a print. A photograph that has been taken following all the correct exposure techniques may still appear to be too light or too dark. A judge can penalize it for that.

With colour slides the only remedy is at the taking stage, using bracketing and choosing the best from the batch or habitually under-exposing by a half or third of a stop. Digital images that are over-exposed are very difficult, even impossible to correct at the computer editing stage. Blown-out areas usually lack enough information to be restored. Slightly under-exposed digital images can be saved and very dark areas can be lifted enough to show textural detail.

There is sometimes a problem with digital projection in that the background fog of the projector tends to weaken very dark tones that would otherwise appear truly dark on a CRT monitor screen. This can happen even if the projector has been perfectly calibrated. Penalizing a projected image for not including true black would therefore be unfair.

A problem with adjusting brightness or contrast in a digital image is that in extreme cases aliasing occurs. This means that instead of smooth transitions in graduated areas the tones change in steps that look like tide marks. A sky that blends from light to dark is the most likely victim of this kind of editing. A judge should penalize a photograph (intended to be realistic) that looks like that.

## 2.5: Too much or too little contrast

Colour slide films of different types and brands have different contrast characteristics. Ideally a slide film photographer should choose the film most suited to the contrast in the subject but this can sometimes be difficult with only one camera body. Different slide films also have different degrees of colour saturation which would affect colour contrasts. If push or pull processing is available the film can be deliberately under- or overexposed to change its contrast. Under-exposing by one stop and push processing will increase contrast; overexposing and pull processing will decrease contrast. This can more easily be done with monochrome film.

If slides are copied using regular slide film the copies will come out too contrasty. One has to use special low-contrast copying slide film.

Digital photographers can select from the camera's menu which contrast level would suit the subject. Contrast in digital images can also be adjusted at the editing stage.

Too much or too little contrast is also a technical fault that could count against a photograph in competitions. Too little contrast gives an effect of flat tonality; too much, results in inky black shadows and blown-out highlights; an overall harsh effect.

A creative technique that has been popular is to deliberately eliminate some or all intermediate tones to either produce a posterized effect or a high contrast black and white only image. This is acceptable as a powerful graphic representation but can also become a cheap gimmick, an attempt at rescuing an otherwise mediocre image. In all such cases one should ask "does this treatment enhance the quality of the image or is it a cover-up for poor photography?"

## 2.6: "Correct" exposure

If you want to take a photograph that is as close as possible in its rendering of colour and tone value to the original subject then one could speak of correct exposure. Examples of this would be photographing a work of art or a biological specimen.

In those cases there would presumably be an opportunity to compare the photograph with the real thing to check how accurate the rendition is.

Human vision is however seldom quite as strictly objective as that. There are many situations where deliberately emphasizing certain aspects of a subject depends upon an interpretative exposure. Do you want to emphasize the detail in the shadows or do you want to create a silhouette effect? Bearing in mind the limitations of photographic film or digital cameras compared to human vision it is almost mandatory for one to make those kinds of decisions when taking a photograph, if it is to be a meaningful record of what you saw. Camera automation alone cannot do that for you.

Apart from strictly truthful documentation, photography is also a medium of artistic expression, and as such one cannot define for everyone what a "correct" exposure

must be. The “correct” exposure for you, provided you know what you are doing with your camera may quite legitimately not be the same as for someone else.

## 2.7: Sharpness

Sharpness in a photograph is a relative concept. There is no such thing as perfect sharpness. Blow up any photograph beyond a certain stage and it will become blurred or pixilated. Avoid too much enlargement or too much cropping and an optimum standard can be achieved.

Sharpness is achieved by correct focus, lens quality and the resolution of the digital sensor or film acutance. Fast films tend to be grainier and digital sensors with fewer pixels produce images that cannot be enlarged to big sizes without pixilation. Medium and large format film cameras are capable of the sharpest images that can be enlarged up to banner or billboard size. An absence of camera or subject movement during exposure and the use of fast shutter speeds also improve sharpness.

Using a tripod is one of the best aids to achieving greater sharpness.

Using auto focus correctly, i.e. learning how to place the focus target area over the part of the image requiring the sharpest focus is an important technique all photographers should master, also learning when and how to use manual focus

If a photograph is not sharp enough it is not acceptable. Poor focus, too much enlargement, camera or subject movement, inferior optics can all cause an image to be too blurred.

However, there are rare examples of great photographs that are either partially or completely blurred for good creative reasons, either from deliberate defocusing or movement. Creative blur is an acceptable photographic technique.

At the digital editing stage it is important not to over-sharpen an image. This results in obvious halos, an over emphasis of textures and spots and should be penalized. Digital sharpening cannot sharpen a blurred image; it only enhances the sharpness effect by an optical illusion by darkening the dark side and lightening the light side of edges.

## 2.8: Depth of field

Aperture, focal length and camera-to-subject distance affect depth of field. The widest apertures reduce depth of field; as do the longer focal lengths; the nearer the subject is to the camera the more restricted is the depth of field.

Depth of field can be used creatively in order to separate a subject in sharp focus from an out-of-focus background. Subjects like landscapes require extended depth of field – shorter focal length, small aperture, a tripod.

The most difficult subjects with regard to depth of field are those requiring extreme close-up or macro photography. It is almost impossible to photograph a small flower without some part of the flower being out of focus. To penalize a flower photograph for insufficient depth of field may therefore be a sign of technical ignorance on the part of the judge – unless of course the photographer has chosen the wrong part of the flower to be sharp.

Some digital cameras with very small sensor chips tend to have very extended depth of field because of the extreme shortness of the lens focal lengths. Some of these cameras are excellent for close-up photography for this reason. One should bear in mind that some beginner photographers may be using entry-level digital cameras and therefore be unable to restrict depth of field at all. None of these new cameras have a depth of field scale or preview and it is highly likely that these beginners have no idea what it is about.

There has been a rule that the nearest thing in the picture should always be sharp. Some discretion should however be allowed in this case, especially if the correct emphasis is given to the main subject that may not necessarily be in front. Some blurred grass in front of an action shot of a lion kill could be a case in point.

## 2.9: Lighting

A good photograph should show an awareness of lighting: intensity, direction and quality.

The intensity is the strength of the light, ranging from a single candle to a flash brighter than the sun. The brighter the light the easier it is to get a sharp picture.

It is only in a studio set up that a photographer can have complete control over lighting and therefore any studio shot should be more rigorously judged with regard to lighting than any other kind of photography. There should normally be an appropriate brightness ratio between highlight and shadow areas; the lighting should reveal form and texture; and the lighting should look as natural as possible for portrait or table-top photography unless a special creative effect is being implemented.

In a studio the quality of the light source can also be controlled. This means the size of the area from which the light comes. Quality-modifying attachments to studio lights allow for the light to have a soft, diffuse effect or a hard specular effect or anything in between.

Low light photography usually requires big aperture, slow shutter speed and high ISO – all conspiring to degrade the quality of the image with blurring and grain or electronic noise. It is technically more challenging but with expert handling can produce magical results.

The direction of the light source, usually dependant on the time of day, the position of the sun in the sky makes a huge difference to the picture aesthetically. That is why photographs taken around the middle of the day produce the least appealing results. The light at early morning or late afternoon is much better because it is at a low angle and the sky is relatively brighter, softening shadows. It is however unfair to penalize a photograph merely because it was taken at midday. If for example a photographer can capture the mood of a hot dusty street at midday in a Karoo dorp then maybe some latitude should be allowed here.

The direction, quality and colour of natural light can vary tremendously. Clouds in the sky, haze, mist or smoke can also alter the colour balance of the light. Open shade with a blue sky will give a diffused light that has a high colour temperature – about 8 000•K. While the light of the sun through smoke and haze at sunrise can almost equal the colour temperature of tungsten incandescent lighting – about 3 000•K. The afterglow after sunset can vary according to atmospheric conditions: a clear sky will have a very high colour temperature (much higher than what the eye sees); a cloudy sky will reflect the warm glow of the last rays of sunlight and lower the temperature.

Although an understanding of lighting is extremely important in photography, there are other considerations such as capturing the moment or expressing a feeling or mood that can transcend less than ideal lighting.

One of the worst types of lighting is the use of on-camera flash but, paradoxically, some of the world's most celebrated photographic masterpieces were taken with flash.

#### 2.10: Flare

When shooting towards a source of light some non-image-forming light enters the lens and causes a loss of contrast, general fogging and sometimes repeated images of the lens aperture or ghosting. In some situations a degree of flare may be acceptable, such as action shots at a pop concert where stage lights can't be entirely avoided. If the sun is included or even almost included in the picture it will invariably cause flare and ghosting, more so with low quality lenses. One should decide whether a photograph with flare is the result of poor technique and ignorance on the part of the photographer or a deliberate creative technique. The use of a lens hood can prevent flare and ghosting. Flare can be successfully treated by increasing contrast; ghosting can sometimes be treated with the cloning tool or cut and paste.

#### 2.11: Monochrome

Hardly anyone is still using a darkroom these days but there has nevertheless been a resurgence of interest in monochrome photography. Digital cameras are capable of switching to black and white or even sepia and other tinted monochrome effects (possibly a better alternative would be to de-saturate the image in the computer,

thereby allowing the possibility of adjusting the colour channels individually – giving the digital equivalent of using colour filters with black and white film). Most of the best photographs ever taken have been monochrome and some photographers still prefer it because colour can and often does interfere with the coherence of the image.

Some people feel the need to introduce one extra colour to an otherwise black and white image. As with effects like posterization, one should ask: “is this treatment actually better than a straight monochrome image?” The PSSA definition for Honours applications is that monochrome is black and white and one colour only – e.g. it can be sepia but not sepia plus one colour. Currently salons are able to choose their own definition and therefore you should check each entry form for the definition. Evaluating such a photograph is largely a matter of taste. One could say that it gives the picture a lift, makes it more striking and adds impact. Alternatively this technique could be criticized because it gives too much emphasis to the coloured part.

Tone relationships are much more important in a monochrome picture than for colour. A black and white photograph is not just a colour image with the colour removed; it is a totally different kind of photograph. Ideally, except for some high-key or low-key pictures there ought to be a complete range of tones between pure white and pure black. A good black and white picture should sparkle with tonal variations. Converting from colour to black and white usually requires a significant increase in contrast and usually lots of the digital equivalent of dodging and burning-in should be done. Just pressing the “desaturate” button is not enough as it can often give a very flat mid-grey effect. Anyone who has never worked in a darkroom may not realize this.

If a digital image is captured in colour and desaturated the colour channels can still be individually adjusted in order to lighten or darken parts of the picture. For example the effect of boosting the red channel can be similar to using a red filter with monochrome film. Conversion to grayscale or switching the camera to black and white will not allow this.

## 2.12: Cropping

Technically speaking, cutting off parts of a captured image and then enlarging the remainder results in a loss of image quality. Slight cropping however does not result in noticeable image quality loss.

Slides can be cropped by using masks that result in a smaller image that does not degrade the image quality but can reduce the impact of the picture because it may be too small.

In digital terms cropping means ending up with fewer pixels and that limits the size to which the image can successfully be enlarged. If you start off with a 10 megapixel image and you crop off about 5 megapixels this will not make any difference to the

projected image when it is re-sized to the required 1024 by 768 pixel dimensions – there are still many more pixels than are needed.

It is with prints that drastic cropping can cause problems of lack of sharpness, grain or pixilation at bigger enlargements. There are however some image-editing programs that will allow for greater enlargement of the image up to a point by means of intelligent interpolation – Photoshop CS3 and Elements 6 can do this as well as some plug-ins.

There are some persistent myths about the design implications of what is called “amputation cropping”. It is only among very traditional amateur photographers that this old rule still survives. It is not necessarily wrong for a photographer to cut off the top of the head in a portrait. It could even be acceptable for one whole side of a face to be cut off. As for touching or nearly touching the edge of the format this is only a very minor fault that should not detract from an otherwise excellent photograph. It should certainly not be grounds for not accepting the photograph for a salon. The same applies to things like cropping off an elbow or a foot. Radical cropping can add great drama to what would perhaps otherwise be a very ordinary photograph. So-called amputation cropping can be used creatively in order to allow for suggestion rather than overstatement. The part can stand for the whole. Gestalt psychologists have taught us that it is not necessary to always show the entire object. Human perception and imagination can easily fill in the missing parts.

### 2.13: Enhancements

Ever since Fox Talbot in the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers have tweaked their images at the processing stage in order to make minor improvements. Publishers of coffee table wild life books do not use pictures from slides without making subtle changes after scanning.

In a sense, using a polarizing, warming or ultraviolet filter for slides is a kind of enhancement. Digital enhancements such as removing dust specks or scratches and adjusting contrast, brightness, colour balance and saturation merely extend the amount of control that can get the image closer to how the reality appeared to the photographer. All of the preceding techniques do not interfere with the essential truth of the image and therefore do not deserve to be penalized. Nor should close-up cropping of a documentary subject be penalized.

### 2.14: Manipulations

Digital manipulation of a documentary photograph is a different matter and should not be allowed. This includes techniques such as cut and paste, cloning, stitching images taken at different times together, selective burning-in or dodging, using layers to include extraneous elements or to block out unwanted details. Documentary

photography is supposed to be truthful representation of reality and anything that gives a false impression is unethical and unacceptable in this genre.

Manipulations are however acceptable in pictorial and almost any kind of creative photography, including landscape, portraits, nudes, altered reality or abstract. Whether or not some people go overboard with all the filter effects available is a matter for individual assessment: "Has the photographer used the effect for good reasons? Does the effect enhance the image? Does it work? Or is it just a gimmick to cover up inferior photography?"

### 3: Different criteria for different categories

#### 3.1: Documentary photography – wild life, nature, photojournalism, travel, social comment

As has been mentioned before, these categories should not be manipulated.

The essential ingredient of any good documentary image is information. These photographs show you what something looks like; record details of texture, shape and colour; they can also depict behavior of animals or people and processes; capture "the decisive moment".

3.1.1: Photojournalistic pictures would be at home in a newspaper or magazine, maybe accompanying a story of an event of topical interest.

3.1.2: Sport pictures are also a kind of journalistic photography where action is usually emphasized to good effect. In evaluating this category the judges should put themselves in the place of a picture editor for a major newspaper or magazine and decide whether the picture is worthy of page 1, breaking news (top award), editorial, leading feature article or sports page (top award or excellent), other pages (excellent or acceptable) or file 13 (rejected). Newsworthiness, contemporary relevance, visual impact, information, capturing action or emotion and good technical quality are important criteria for this category.

3.1.3: For nature and wild life a suitable application would be as illustrations in a coffee-table book, magazine or scientific presentation.

There are some traditional nature rules that need revision. There is a tendency to treat these rules as holy writ that must be applied blindly and uncompromisingly. For example "there must always be a highlight in the eye" which is an overvalued idea. You can find many examples of excellent wild life pictures by internationally acclaimed masters that do not comply with this and other similar rules, therefore judges are urged not to penalize an otherwise excellent shot because of this and any other petty rule. Another absurd requirement is that a four legged animal must show all its limbs and that

the feet or tail may never be obscured or amputated. The natural environment often refuses to cooperate in adhering to these shibboleths and one should rather be looking for what the whole picture is conveying rather than getting upset by a twig or bit of grass that cuts across the shape of an animal. "More space in front than behind" is also a rule that can very effectively be broken – for example in a shot of a water bird taking off or landing and leaving a wake behind. Foreshortened front or back views of animals should also be acceptable if the information in the picture or the effect is interesting enough – even the Bushmen painted pictures including foreshortening! Showing a tightly-cropped view of part of an animal can also be acceptable. Showing more than a minimal amount of the environment of a specimen can sometimes be better than almost totally isolating it.

Nature photography that tackles conservation issues such as environmental degradation, loss of habitat and poaching should also be acceptable.

The best nature and wild life photographs evoke a sense of wonder; reveal something that is not well known; are motivated and informed by insight into, empathy with and knowledge of nature.

3.1.4: Travel photography should be more than mere holiday snapshots. It should present the experience of travel in a positive light, concentrating on the most picturesque aspects of travel destinations. The best travel pictures show not only the environment but also people, travelers enjoying saunas, swimming pools, beaches, sunshine, boating, water sport, mountaineering, skiing, hunting, on safari – in fact anything that would be appropriate for a travel pamphlet or advertisement for a particular destination.

3.1.5: Social comment is not necessarily a category that is specifically included in club or salon competitions but, looking at most non-club photography, maybe it should. It is certainly one of the most relevant genres in this medium. Here we are looking for pictures of how people live, work, and play, suffer, love or dress. It can also take us into homes, work places, the street, the theatre, clubs – almost anywhere where people do things that some of us may not be aware of. Good social documentary photography shows human behavior, feeling and emotion; something more than a few poor people sitting outside a hut. It should tell an interesting story with insight and empathy rather than a superficial uninvolved snapshot.

As many documentary photographs must capture the action at the right moment, the finer points of photographic design are not nearly as important for them as for pictorial or any other creative category; one should certainly not expect a carefully constructed composition. Aesthetic appeal can often be superseded by scientific, topical or social interest. If however a documentary picture has excellent aesthetic qualities that can increase its value but these qualities must always be judged as secondary to the

requirement of providing factual information. It would be unfair to judge these photographs too harshly on matters such as lighting or composition.

### 3.2: Pictorial photography – landscape, portrait, table-top, nude

3.2.1: Historically, pictorial photography as a category began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the father of this genre was Henry Peach Robinson who created photographic compositions using cut-and paste or photomontage techniques. Since around 1920 pictorial photography has largely been confined to amateur camera clubs all over the former British Empire.

A good pictorial photograph would comfortably hang on the wall of a respectable middle class home together with pleasant landscapes, still lifes or portraits of attractive or interesting people. In other words it should please the eye and not frighten the horses.

The idea behind a pictorial image is that it should be a pleasant picture, easy to understand, relatively simple and balanced in composition.

Over the years there have been some traditional criteria that call for compositional devices such as focal point, asymmetrical divisions of space based on thirds and avoidance of cutting off shapes or touching the edge of the format. These criteria of dubious value are however not central to the character of this category. The formal requirements for pictorial photography need to be updated, as they derive from rather simplistic “rules of composition” established by Sunday painters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then a lot of water has flowed under the bridge and more modern aesthetic principles of design are being taught at colleges that offer courses in photography.

Photographic judges should be aware of the work of leading modern and contemporary exponents of portraiture and landscape such as Yousuf Karsh, Arnold Newman, Herb Ritts, David Bailey, Annie Liebowitz, Ansel Adams, Herman Potgieter and David Goldblatt.

Seeing the work of these photographers should open up what has been a rather closed formulaic approach to these genres. Landscape and portrait conventions in South African amateur photography are extremely restrictive and photographers who have been more adventurous have been penalized for not following them. Judges must be aware that there are many different ways that a portrait or landscape can successfully be photographed.

3.2.2: An excellent portrait need not be a standardized head and shoulders in  $\frac{3}{4}$  view, although it can be that. Environmental portraits are also acceptable, provided that the environment does not compete for attention too much with the person. In this case it would be nit-picking to routinely complain that the background is too busy if is

appropriate for the portrait. Other outdated requirements such as a single highlight in each eye, axis of eyes at an angle, no jewels, etc. are also nit-picking and have no bearing on the main purpose of a portrait: to reveal the character, the personality or even the spirit of the person. Facial expression and body language are two extremely important things to look for in a portrait. Too often judges overlook them and concentrate on composition (according to a formula) and lighting which are of secondary importance.

3.2.3: In a formal studio portrait lighting can be perfectly controlled but should not necessarily be too ostentatiously clever. Posing the sitter and arranging the background are also important but one should bear in mind that the individuality of the sitter should be respected and therefore it is counterproductive for the photographer to impose a preconceived arrangement that may not allow the sitter to express personality and character. Annie Liebowitz, the world's most celebrated contemporary portrait photographer has taught us that the creative collaboration of the sitter in making a portrait produces the best results. There should be a fine balance between flattery and honesty in portraiture.

3.2.4: An excellent landscape can be about space and it should invite the viewer into its space. Other important elements in landscape are the use of natural light to the best effect, line, shape, form, light and dark, pattern, texture, colour harmonies and contrasts and nuances. Perspective, both linear (things getting smaller further away) and aerial (colours and tones getting paler and more bluish in the distance) emphasize depth in space and one should not complain about haze if the background is pale blue with little detail. Linear elements such as the horizon, roads, paths and rivers divide the space or lead the eye into it. Much has been said about placing the horizon on the third division but this should be changed to any division that creates a sense of harmony and seldom but not always exclude placing it halfway up the format – ask the question: “does the horizon in the middle really spoil the composition or am I just applying a rule blindly?”

3.2.5: Still life or table-top photography allows for total control over composition and lighting. It is however difficult to create an excellent still life picture without some artistic flair. Selecting and arranging the objects and then lighting them is not the end of the story. Ideally the objects should be chosen because they relate to each other in terms of size, shape, colour, texture, function and whether they fit into a concept or theme. An excellent table-top picture would be aesthetically pleasing and have an underlying theme, idea or concept.

3.2.6: Nude photography is one of the most challenging genres in pictorial photography. Like table-top, the photographer can have total control over lighting and almost total control over the arrangement – the model ought also to have some creative input. A nude study can also be a portrait or it can involve a close crop of

part of the body, excluding extremities – even the head. Since the liberal 1980s it is no longer obligatory to exclude nipples or pubic hair but it would be considered to be bad taste to be more specific than that – i.e. showing graphic details of genitalia. One has to accept that a nude almost always has erotic connotations – that is almost inevitably part of this genre – and there is a gray area between eroticism and pornography. The best nude photographs celebrate the beauty of the human body in all its sculptural splendor. A judge should be looking for aesthetic qualities and not marking down because of a prudish attitude.

3.2.7 If architecture is included in a picture there are some conventions that tend to be misapplied or over-zealously applied by some judges. For example, some judges will insist that all vertical lines must be perfectly vertical and may not be slanted. In some cases a slanting vertical can create visual tension that may or may not be problematic. One should however not feel that all slanting verticals should be straightened. For example a shot of a tall building from below looking up is characteristically distorted by perspective. This is the way things actually look in reality and there is absolutely no need to try to “correct” that. Views of building facades also need not always to be photographed from straight on; an oblique shot can work just as well and sometimes better.

3.2.8: There has been a tendency to lump any category of photography that does not fit into other specialties into pictorial. This has caused some confusion with regard to criteria. It would be better to establish an open category where universal photographic criteria could apply instead of the demands that the picture should be pretty or pleasant and rather be allowed to deal with disturbing or more expressive and challenging subjects.

### 3.3: Creative – visual art, altered reality and abstract photography

These categories are not easy to judge. Judges should take more time to judge this kind of photography, possibly also even allow limited discussion. Certainly, the old “rules of photographic composition” must fall away completely for these more recent developments. Many practiced judges have experienced difficulty when confronted by an excellent abstract image and awarded a mediocre or low score. Others have been totally bamboozled by altered reality pictures that, because of their novelty and apparent sophistication have received high awards for what amounts to the result of clicking a couple of Photoshop filter buttons.

The traditional understanding of creativity in photography is that it involves unusual techniques but this interpretation is rather superficial. Slapping a starburst filter on the lens never was a particularly creative thing to do; nor is over-sharpening, over saturation, swirl effects without an idea that has some kind of meaning or aesthetic reason.

And that is the key to understanding this kind of photography. We are looking for good ideas and good design, imagination, sensitivity, vision beyond the ordinary and a certain degree of honesty. Creative photographs can convey a mood, a feeling, a beautiful arrangement of elements; they could be expressive and can be aesthetically pleasing like a piece of instrumental music. They can be accessed through an emotional response to the shapes, lines and colours. Some can be more challenging because they do not ascribe to popular notions of beauty. Applying left-brain reasoning or formulas does not work. Judges should hesitate to award a low score for an image they don't understand; one should rather rely more on an emotional and/or aesthetic response.

3.3.1: Abstract photography is possibly the most difficult to appreciate for anyone nurtured in a purely factual approach. Most people who struggle do so because they are trying to interpret the shapes and colours in terms of identifying recognizable objects instead of looking for the way different parts of the image relate to each other and create a special feeling or don't, in terms of visual design, as the case may be.

3.3.2: We should not disregard some creative photographs that do not try to be beautiful but convey a more challenging message by means of symbolism and suggestion. Dark meanings should also be acceptable.

3.3.3: Ever since the beginning of digital manipulation there have been photographers who have delighted in the freedom to alter reality, either by trying to improve composition in terms of sticking to compositional formulas (intersection of thirds) or putting things together to resemble a surrealist painting by Salvador Dali. There is nothing wrong with using these digital editing techniques as such but there are also some technical requirements that too often go unchecked. Images that are made from digital cut and paste techniques and present what is intended as a realistic image should be carefully examined for accurate cutting-out, consistent lighting, and shapes of shadows, accurate perspective and colour compatibility. The free composition images that are not meant to be realistic should also be carefully put together with due regard for principles of design.

3.3.4: Visual art photography as it has recently been defined and practiced in South Africa often involves in-camera manipulations with slide film. Multiple exposures, photomontage (sandwiching two slides together), close ups with drastic cropping and zooming with a slow shutter speed are some of the techniques. There are judges who tend to try and apply "rules of composition" to these images and knock them down because they seem too busy, too simple or lack a clearly identifiable focal point. This is where a judge should have an open mind and try to see in terms of aesthetic or emotional appeal. Almost or completely blurred images sometimes also come into this category and one should be looking at subtle nuances of tone and colour, creating a mood.

3.3.5: There are also some perfectly clear “straight” photographs that are produced with artistic intentions that could be called visual art or photo art. Here one should be trying to understand the symbolic or suggested meaning rather than dismissing the obvious superficial meaning. In these photographs the concept, the idea behind the reality are important rather than formal design qualities or surface appearances. Knowledge of contemporary art may be essential for judging this type of photography.

3.3.6: Prints are judged slightly differently from projected images but the foregoing principles and criteria still apply. A good projected image however does not necessarily make a good print or vice versa. The judging of prints at salons and at club meetings usually involves displaying the print at a distance of about 2 meters in good light. At the second stage of print judging at a salon the contenders for awards are sometimes spread on a table so the judges can look more closely, make comparisons and discuss amongst themselves which are the best pictures. Prints are expensive to produce and require more careful enhancements or even manipulations. Prints are definitely more difficult to produce than slides or images for digital projection.

In addition to the normal criteria a print should also be neatly presented. The mount should be a plain, preferably neutral colour and stiff enough so the picture can be handled and displayed. Garish colours for mounts seldom work. Because a print can also be examined at close quarters it should have very good technical quality. Very small or extra large prints are generally not acceptable – anything between minimum A4 and maximum A3 is usually stipulated and the maximum dimensions of the mount should not exceed 40x50 cm. At a distance of 2 meters an A4 print is usually a bit too small for the fine detail to be seen so A3 is a better size.

## 4: General characteristics and appropriate criteria

### 4.1: Seeing the whole photograph

Various authorities on judging have stressed the need for a judge to see the whole photograph and respond to that rather than getting hooked on minor details that do not necessarily spoil the image.

Except in the case of manipulated images any honest, factual photograph nearly always will include incidental details that may seem out of place. But if you approach such a photograph more as the capture of a moment in time rather than an attempt at ideal composition then these extraneous elements will take their rightful place in your priorities and be more acceptable. At the very least they can be proof that the image was not doctored. Depending on the category one could be more or less tolerant of unwanted details. If the moment is the prime consideration (“the decisive moment” – Cartier-Bresson) almost any extra details could be accepted. Sometimes those details only reveal their relevance after careful analysis of the picture.

#### 4.2: Avoiding harping on over-valued ideas (See the article by Eddie Sethna - Opinions)

Following on from the need to see the whole picture, many of the sticking points tend to be what are called overvalued ideas in the mind of a judge. If a judge comes to the photograph with a template of what he thinks the photograph ought to be, he will point out rules that have been broken and add up a litany of faults that for him negate any value the picture may have. Breaking rules, especially the old-fashioned "rules of composition", rules that are in most cases only someone's idea of what can make a better photograph should not be a valid reason for penalizing an otherwise excellent photograph. Most of those rules are overvalued ideas; they have acquired an inflated value over time by being given the status of requirements rather than what they actually are: suggestions or recommendations or formulas for probable success. And some of them are not all that good as guidelines for good photography mainly because they stifle creativity, originality, spontaneity and lead to mediocrity and uniformity.

The official position of PSSA management for some years now has been "there are no rules for photographic composition". The term "composition" as applied to photography has acquired many negative connotations because of these "rules". Possibly a better term would be "visual design" – a less problematic term suggesting a more creative approach to photography that implies an awareness of elements and principles of design as applicable to photography.

There are many fads among judges that one could call overvalued. Things like insisting that there should always be an odd number of objects in a composition, which is possibly the most absurd of the lot. What some judges call "light traps" – areas of brightness near the edges of pictures – are also very minor intrusions that certainly should not always be reasons to downgrade a picture. They are not important enough to keep on talking about. Then there is the rather daft rule that says symmetry is only acceptable in a religious or architectural subject. Several other examples have already been mentioned above.

A judge must have a sense of what the main priorities are for any kind of photograph and have an open mind as to how those should be achieved. Harping on inconsequential and nonsensical trifles is getting the priorities the wrong way around.

#### 4.3: Emotional response

The first sight of a new photograph triggers an immediate response for any experienced viewer. It usually is an emotional response, a sense of pleasure if the picture is good and could even still be emotional for a bad one or a disturbing subject – in that case the negative emotional response could be disappointment, disgust or horror. A

mediocre or hackneyed picture may elicit a very weak or no emotional response at all. Judges should get in touch with their feelings and that initial response ought to be a major factor in the assessment of most photographs. When in doubt, go back to that emotional response.

Aesthetic pleasure is closely tied to the emotions so a particularly beautiful picture would evoke a strong emotional sense of aesthetic pleasure.

After that one can look more objectively and analyze the picture in terms of specific criteria. Some excellent photographs appeal more to the intellect than the emotions, so in those cases the analysis would carry more weight.

Then there are photographs with disturbing subject matter, especially in some of the documentary categories that need to be assessed in terms of how effectively they convey their information or feeling and a judge should keep an open mind and not impose inappropriate criteria such as for pictorial photography for these pictures. Ugly or sad subjects can also be powerful photographs that can stir the emotions very effectively. In these cases one should be looking for the strength or degree of the emotion evoked – and this need not necessarily be a pleasant emotion.

#### 4.4: Impact and subtlety

In some judging situations where there is pressure on judges to give an instant assessment, there is a tendency for images that have strong impact to be favoured above those that are more subtle. This tendency results in an unwarranted emphasis on impact and sometimes a total disregard for subtlety. Amateur photographers have been conditioned to this prejudice and mostly strive to produce images that have the required amount of impact – and maybe not much else. This results in a simplistic and skewed idea of what photography is about and trivializes amateur photography. Judges should try to see more in a photograph than mere impact. That is not to say that impact is a bad characteristic; only that it should not be the only consideration, above other less obvious and possibly more valuable attributes.

#### 4.5: Personal taste

Personal taste is conditioned by upbringing, education and experience. People from different backgrounds usually have different tastes when it comes to anything with aesthetic qualities and that includes photography.

Problematic taste is when a person likes only one very specific type of photography to the exclusion of most other types. Anyone who has such exclusive taste cannot be a good judge of photography. Such people cannot have their taste changed or broadened by persuasion. No-one can win an argument about taste; it is a very personal thing. As education and experience do play a role in developing one's taste,

exposure to examples of good photography together with sufficient background information can broaden anyone's taste to some extent.

A person who has good background knowledge of many different kinds of photography does not necessarily like all those different kinds equally. Everyone has personal preferences and as a judge one should try as hard as possible to set those preferences aside.

#### 4.6: Salon judging

In some respects salon judging is easier than club judging mainly because one is not required to comment on the photographs. On the other hand it can be demanding in terms of the need to get through hundreds of photographs in a relatively short time – and sadly, in this situation, impact reigns supreme and subtlety loses out. Keeping a consistent standard from the first picture, through all the others in the middle and up to the last is difficult.

Judging experience counts for a lot in this situation as does a clear understanding of the criteria and section definitions. Every salon director is obliged to publish these definitions in the salon program that is sent out to judges and contestants some weeks before the closing date. Judges must be meticulous in applying the requirements of those definitions and if a photograph is disqualified because it does not fit the section the decision must be unanimous and the reason must be clear.

Being a salon judge is an awesome responsibility. Together with co-judges one is in a position to establish or maintain a standard for amateur photography either in Southern Africa or internationally. To be invited to judge for a salon means that your peers respect your judgment and trust you to be scrupulously fair. Anyone with a particular axe to grind ought not to judge for a salon or for that matter even at a club.

Judges for international salons must be particularly well qualified. It is too easy to dismiss some kinds of photography or styles that are unfamiliar because of ignorance or inexperience on the part of the judge. Judges should affirm good international photography and not only the photographs that mimic local styles. Foreign entrants (and even local ones) can present a local judge with a highly original and unconventional interpretation of a particular category that may be difficult to appreciate or evaluate at first glance. The best advice here is to take a second look and try to understand what the photographer's intention may have been before dismissing it as out of court. And bear in mind that marking down an excellent foreign photograph merely because it is out of the ordinary can reflect on the reputation of judges and photography in Southern Africa. International photography of a high standard that is exhibited in this region is a very important positive influence on local styles and standards.

For most salons only a relatively small percentage of entries achieve acceptance and an even smaller number receive awards. That means that most entrants, especially the total rejects, are going to be disappointed. One could say "well that is just part of the game – winners and losers".

Some salon judges feel that they must be over-strict for salon judging as opposed to club judging. How strict the judges are makes no difference to the statistics in terms of the acceptance cut-off point. The top 25 to 30 % for national and up to 35% for international are accepted whatever the scores; the best photographs are usually selected by comparison from among the highest scores. If the cut-off is placed at 11 or 10 (or even 9 for particularly strict judges) it is immaterial – the same number of award winners and acceptances will be selected. The intangible result may not necessarily mean a higher or lower standard of photography but will certainly make a difference to the morale of the unsuccessful entrants. Being excessively strict does not make you a better judge. It may say something about your attitude to your fellow photographers, setting yourself above the rest or being one-up on everybody else or being excessively fault-finding and nit-picking. An over-generous judge is not quite as bad but could be accused of having low standards and being too gullible. The ideal is to be scrupulously fair and neither trying to impress people with your "higher standards" nor your generous nature.

A salon is not just an exclusive competition for amateur photographers where the statistics are the only concern. It should be a public relations exercise promoting amateur photography. Salon exhibitions should be publicized and be on for long enough for the general public to have access. The exhibition, in terms of promoting amateur photography is the most important part of the exercise; the scores and statistics are of interest only to the contestants. Salon organizers should employ every means possible in order to expose the photographs to public view – exhibitions of prints in shopping malls, Internet postings, and circulation of CDs with scanned slides and public slide and/or digital projection shows.

#### 4.7: Ethics

Once a judge has been appointed to a salon they may not enter a photograph in the section they are judging. Nor is it ethical for a close relative, friend or partner to be entered in that section. A judge may enter another section in that salon. In other words no judge should judge their own or work or of any family member or close friend.

It is also unethical for a judge to advise a friend, family or fellow club member about which photographs to enter.

All salon entries are supposed to be anonymous to the judges. If you as a judge recognize a particular photograph as one you have seen before you may not disclose

who the photographer is. In this case you should proceed with the judging as if you had never seen it before. The salon director and assistants will know the names of photographers and should never disclose them to judges during the salon judging. To do so would seriously prejudice the fairness of the salon.

Plagiarism is not acceptable. That means making a close copy or imitation of any pre-existing photograph by another photographer. Blatantly copying someone else's style (although not grounds for disqualification in a salon) is ethically questionable, quite apart from being unoriginal. On the other hand allowing yourself to be influenced by the approach, the ideas or creative strategies of a master photographer is not plagiarism and is to be recommended.

The inclusion of art works in photographs is a contentious issue. If the art work is not by the photographer it should not be an important part of the subject of the picture but can be part of the background as minor element. A straight record of an art work, such as a painting, sculpture, drawing or stained glass window is not acceptable in amateur photography. Only professional photographers commissioned by the artist or an art gallery or museum may legitimately take such photographs. That is why nearly all museums and art galleries forbid photography without special permission. Art teachers and lecturers are sometimes given such permission, stating that they will use the photographs for educational purposes only.

A photographer may not photograph a person who does not wish to be photographed. Prior permission is almost always required. Celebrities and street performers are however fair game although some celebrities require you to have press accreditation to photograph them. Paparazzi photographers go against this rule and can be sued for invasion of privacy. You need the permission of parents to photograph their children. If you are to derive profit from photographs of people you must get them to sign a model release agreement. Photographing minors for profit also requires a model release agreement signed by a parent or guardian. The model release protects the photographer and the model from litigation arising from disagreements about payment.

In nature, wild life and other documentary categories the truth of the original photograph may not be altered beyond minor enhancements. Wild life pictures may not be entered in that section if they are staged, with captive or tame animals. The photographs may only be taken in a wild environment that is not like a zoo or a canned hunting enclosure.

## 5: Understanding content – reading a photograph – story-telling

People who are over concerned about the technical aspects of photography tend to forget that a photograph is a kind of communication that uses the language of visual

elements and design principles to convey information, emotions, thought, ideas, concepts or feelings. One can speak of “reading a photograph” because one is decoding the messages in the photograph in terms of understanding the content and appreciating the way it is conveyed.

Many photographers use the term “story telling”. This has come to mean more than any narrative content the picture may have and in the best sense includes all the other things that are communicated by the photographer to the viewer.

A good judge or any other educated viewer should set aside considerations of mere technique – provided it is competent – and concentrate on reading the content; understanding the “story”.

Over and above excellent technique, the best photographs convey their content brilliantly.

Many judges fall into the easy trap of seeing a photograph only in terms of technique and composition. This is a serious problem because it leads to sterile, trite, meaningless photography. It has trivialized amateur photography to the extent that independent experts take it for granted that all amateur photography is inferior.

### 5.1: Documentary content – information

All photographs contain information in the form of light images recorded on a sensitized surface. In most cases the shapes and colours correspond with recognizable things from the visible world but in some, either through deliberate de-focusing or the mediation of atmospheric conditions will be so vague as to lose their corporeal identity – they will be difficult or impossible to identify.

Appreciating or reading a photograph at first involves identifying the recognizable shapes and placing them in context of one’s visual memory. If a photograph is of something that one cannot contextualize in this way it can be puzzling, mysterious or impossible to understand.

Abstract photography is like that. Some are extreme close-up or macro images that show things not visible to the naked eye and others are the result of drastic manipulations or images of mist, smoke or shadows, reflections and other light phenomena. Any image created by light is a photograph and so these abstractions, although the information they convey is out of the ordinary, should be accepted as a valid kind of photography.

### 5.2: Aesthetic content and honesty

Something that pleases the eye has aesthetic content. It may be by means of abstract elements such a harmony of colour, shape, form, spatial divisions, contrasts or recognizable concrete elements such as a beautiful human face, body or a graceful animal. In documentary photography aesthetic qualities are not as important as they should be in pictorial photography.

There is in photography a tension between the need to inform (documentation and honesty) and the need to charm, delight or give pleasure (aesthetic value, pictorial design). Most of the best photographs have elements of both.

One could criticize an ugly or shocking documentary picture because of a lack of aesthetic content but that would be unfair if it is uncompromisingly honest.

Ugly but honest photographs are therefore acceptable.

It has never been a requirement of art that it should always be beautiful and that includes photography. Some of the greatest examples of both art and photography are ugly; their value rests in their honesty. A long-held dictum for the function of art is that it should hold the mirror up to society.

### 5.3: Metaphor and symbol

Some photographs are not necessarily what they may at first seem to be. Their true messages are cloaked in symbolism and metaphor that needs to be decoded before they can be understood. Even some documentary photographs contain symbols or metaphors. Unraveling these indirect ways of communicating can add value to what may otherwise seem to be simple and obvious pictures.

This kind of photography is difficult to judge or understand unless some kind of key is there to allow one to investigate and analyze more carefully. And that key can often be knowledge of art in general.

### 5.4: Denotative and connotative content

The denotative content of a picture is the obvious depiction of an object that can be identified as that object – a knife for example. You see a picture of a knife and you know what it is.

The connotative content is what that knife may suggest to you by the way it has been photographed. It could, for example suggest preparing food; injury; murder; masculine power; or it may be pointing at something else and drawing our attention in that direction.

### 5.5: Suggestion

Closely related to connotative content is the way a photograph can suggest an idea without stating it obviously. There has been a tendency for judges to miss this important quality in some photographs. Suggestion can come from subtle facial expression, the juxtaposition of incongruous elements or partially shown details.

### 5.6: Studium and punctum

Roland Barthes, the renowned linguist and philosopher coined the terms studium and punctum. He pointed out that in unraveling the meaning of a photograph there are basically two levels at which one can understand it. The studium is the superficial, obvious meaning; the punctum is a detail in the photograph that takes you through to

another level of meaning. He likened it to a small hole or slit through which you become aware of a deeper level of significance.

Punctum has absolutely nothing to do with the main point of interest or "focal point" in a picture. It often is what at first sight may seem to be an insignificant detail in the composition. Its importance is not in terms of composition or design but in understanding the meaning of a photograph.

### 5.7: Humour – irony

Study the work of a photographer like Elliott Erwitt and you will realize that humour and ironical humour in particular can be important subject matter for photography. Erwitt is also a master of capturing the decisive moment. Some judges tend to downgrade humorous photographs in the mistaken belief that they are trivialities. It takes great skill, foresight and luck to capture one of those moments and that should be recognized.

The best humorous photographs are spontaneous rather than contrived.

Photographic irony is when the picture shows what is really going on and the person or people in the picture do not realize it.

### 5.8: Expression

Photography, like other art forms is a medium for self-expression. Once a photographer has found their unique vision and style the photographs are as much about the person behind the camera as they are about what is in front. By selecting certain types of subject matter, choosing particular angles of view and framing, photographers express their personalities.

It may only become apparent to a judge what a particular person's photography is expressing after seeing a panel of photographs. One can then also become aware of a personal style, personal interpretations of themes and the consistency of a photographer's output.

Then there are also facial expressions and body language of human and animal subjects. It is especially in portraiture and social comment that these expressive qualities acquire huge importance. A portrait that has a perfect composition (if indeed there is such a thing) and beautiful lighting can fail dismally if there has not been enough rapport between photographer and subject. Photography has the power to look beneath the surface facade that people put up in the presence of strangers. But the photographer must first set the mood, establish personal contact and trust before that will happen so that a sitter can open up enough for an honest portrait to be taken. Excellent portrait photography is not just technique and composition – much more than that: it is a record of an interpersonal relationship and a moment of honest self-revelation, self expression.

### 5.9: Mood

Photographers often talk of mood when in fact what they really are referring to is a colour cast. An overall colour harmony or colour theme can however go a long way to

creating a mood. The important attribute of mood is that it is an emotional rather than a technical thing. The mood of a picture should rather really be understood as its emotional content and that can be influenced by many more things than just a colour cast. The mood of a picture often communicates at an unconscious rather than a conscious level. It is not something you can analyze with cold logic.

### 5.10: Feeling

It can be argued that in all art forms feeling is the most important thing to communicate. One must have sensitivity to appreciate feeling. It involves empathy with the subject and maybe also with the photographer. Picking up feeling from a photograph is a special talent that some people do not have and maybe they should not judge photography. Like mood, feeling is a subliminal part of content. The photographer must of course have captured a feeling for anyone to pick it up. It is a mysterious, mostly un-nameable, even spiritual quality that cannot be adequately explained; it is the x-factor in excellent photography.

When a picture that in every other respect is excellent, perfect lighting, perfect make-up, perfect hair, perfect pose – and maybe even good enough for the cover of a magazine – and there still seems to be something wrong: it is the feeling. This often occurs with professional photographers and professional models, who are merely fulfilling the editor's brief but just don't get the right feeling in any of the shots. And in many cases you can't put your finger on exactly why that is so.