

Digital Photography:
Captured Images/Volatile
Memory/New Montage

SF Camerawork
San Francisco, California
June 9 - August 13, 1988

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Photography and Belief in the Computer Age

To many early observers in the nineteenth century, the promise of photography lay in its potential for objective documentation. Subjectivity was recognized as an inevitable part of not only the written word but also of visual records. This concept of the photograph as a representation of truth has always been flawed and open to question, but still remains within the culture today, an operational belief.

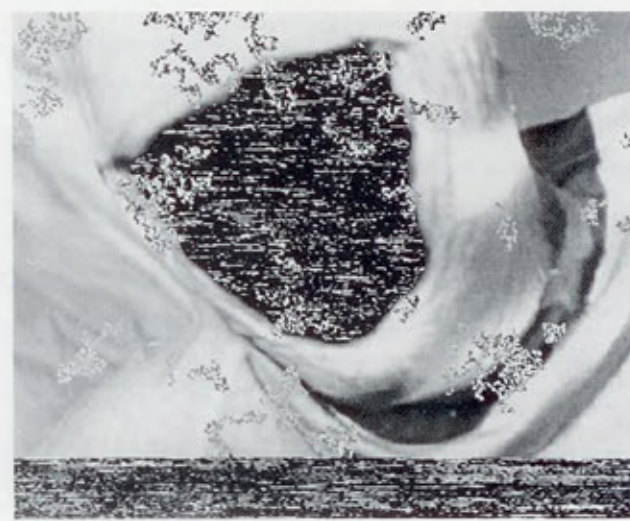
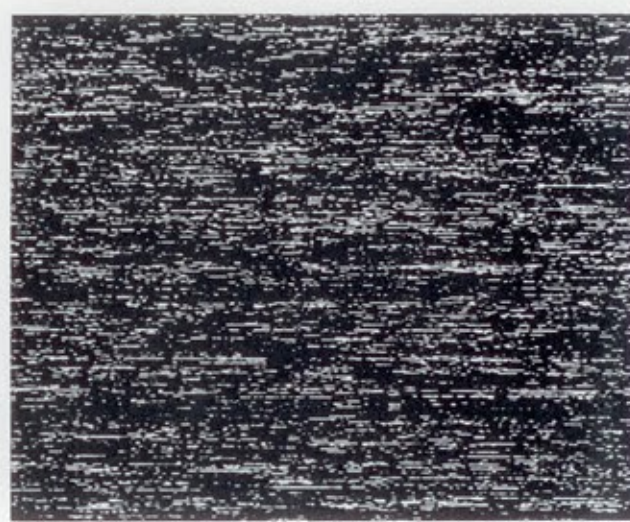
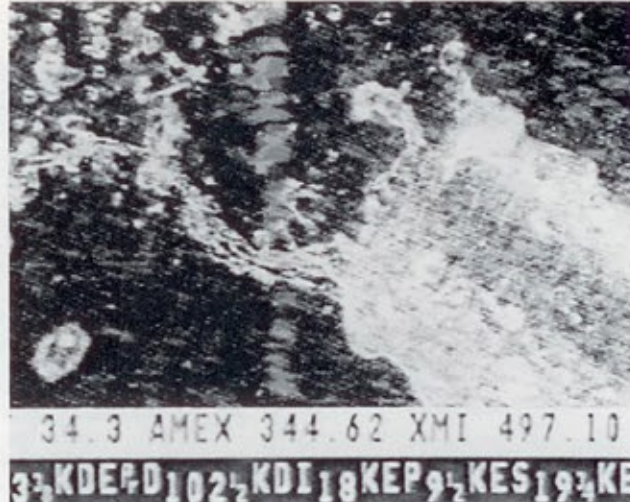
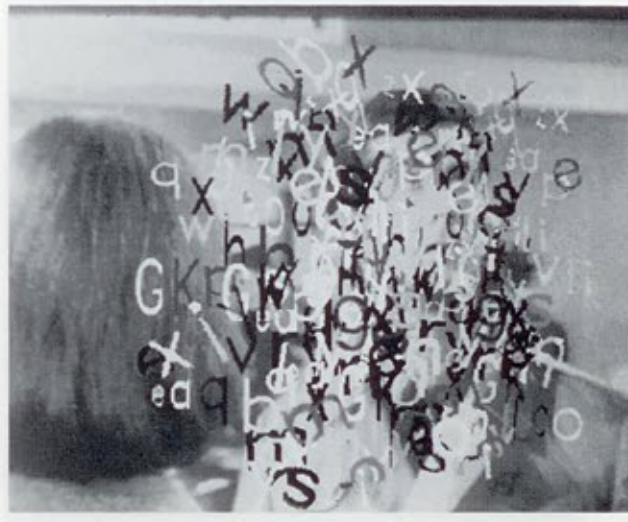
The application of computerized image enhancement systems raises further ethical and philosophical questions about notions of belief in photo-representational media. Those who have access to digital image-processing systems have the capacity to alter, reconstruct, or create imagery reflective of the "real world" that might be passed off as representing accurate data.* If we consider that images articulate ideological positions and are symbolic in structure, then the digitally processed photograph becomes a powerful tool as photographs tend to have a persuasive impact. They imply the potential for verification - there is the general presumption that the image must have been dependent to some extent on a real world visual event.

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My artistic work during the past ten years has dealt with the discrepancy between the photograph as a record of transmitted light and the assigned cultural meanings that it conveys. Projects and exhibitions have considered aspects of photography's problematic nature and syntax: The representation of time and space, the effect of text as a connotative device and the impact of industrial/commercial pictorial references. From a cultural perspective, some of the work has dealt with the exposition of submerged social and historical structures in visual conventions, and the cultural conditioning that dictate the photographer's decisions and the viewer's responses.

GEORGE LEGRADY

George Legrady is an artist who works on integrating photography with computer technology. He received an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1976. His work has been exhibited widely including solo exhibitions at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art; LACE, Los Angeles; Yajima Galerie, Montreal; CEPA, Buffalo, NY; SF Camerawork and P.S.1, NY and selected group shows at Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Lijnbaan Museum, Rotterdam. His recent projects include a commission for the Los Angeles Metro-Rail; a documentary of public iconography in China and a documentary of iconography in Eastern Europe. His publications include *Floating Objects, Everyday Stories* and *Stock Footage*.



My current work with digital technology considers visual structuring that is not only context dependent (vantage point, editing, image/text, cropping, etc.) in its treatment but also fictionalized through electronic alteration. Narratives are created through photographic events that never existed in the real world. The images are assembled from digitized video sources and reconstructed through diverse means of electronic retouching. The narratives are believable as they refer to recognizable events, familiar representational genres, or social situations that we all experience. Some of the images are visually indistinguishable from conventional photographs whereas others incorporate the full capabilities of digital technology to stretch the ways photographic images can be represented. For instance, concepts about "noise," filtering and digital enhancement have been borrowed from telecommunications and are incorporated through image processing algorithms to expand definitions for a new visual vocabulary. These applications have necessitated acquisition of programming skills so that software could be developed that would make the computer perform according to personal needs.

The intention is to engage the viewer in considering the discrepancy inherent in an image that looks objective on the surface but is in fact subjective, manipulated and therefore a challenge to the conventional notion of belief in photographic representation.

*For a more in-depth discussion of this issue especially as it relates to the electronic transmission and processing of news imagery, see Zone V: *Photojournalism, Ethics, and the Electronic Age*, Howard Bossen, *Studies in Visual Communication*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Summer 1985.

George Legrady
Los Angeles, May 1988