Digital Photography Best Practices and Workflow Handbook

A Guide to Staying Ahead of the Workflow Curve

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Blaise Raphael Russotti

FROM RICHARD ANDERSON:

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Introduction

"The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance."

—Alan Watts

"The illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the camera and pen alike."

—László Moholy-Nagy, "From Pigment to Light," 1936

Publications such as the present volume on digital image workflow are outward recognition of the transformation underscoring our ever-embracing digital world. Once used to describe the rational organization of labor and processes of industrial manufacturing, in the 1980s the term *workflow* took on a contemporary definition related to emergent digital technologies, in particular software processing. It addressed interactions between humans and machines via the objects, networks, data, and images digital technologies produce. For image-makers, particularly those involved with the photographic image, "workflow" constitutes a new technical ordering of the visual image—an ordering tied to the world-view transformation of visual culture.

As this book suggests, the burgeoning practice of digital imaging prompts a reorientation of visual literacy based on the intertwining engagement of the digital and the photographic. The digital mediates the photographic by absorbing, challenging, and reshaping its appearance, use, distribution, and meaning in visual culture. This mediation is not new. It is the expected result when new technologies impact older, existing ones. More than 160 years ago, photography itself proved a mediating agent on painting, and, in its turn, photography was mediated by film. Today, digital imaging technologies are compellingly persuasive and pervasive, subsuming both the still and moving image (film and television) in innovative mediating spaces, including software programs, the World Wide Web, and virtual reality, and affecting societal sites from the domestic and civic arenas to leisure and entertainment. From this perspective, then, the pedagogical objective of visual literacy in the digital realm is newly constructed by mining photography's mediating past, while simultaneously addressing its own mediation by the digital, negotiated in older (print) and newer (virtual) forms of display and user/viewer interaction.

To examine the dynamic interplay of new and older image technologies within social sites, one needs to look no further than the social utility, Facebook. With more than 200 million users worldwide, Facebook casts a wide local and global net over personal and public information, transforming the domestic sphere

of familial customs and the civic areas of government, school, the workplace, and the marketplace. For example, family snapshots once fixed on the supportive matrix of paper and album page are now carried on digital media, enabling outspread access and dissemination via computer or mobile upload to a Facebook user's homepage, social networks, or as a "tagged" hyperlink to depicted user "friends." With the ability to transfer an unlimited amount of image files, users have popularized Facebook's "Photos" application, with its album, face recognition, and tagging features, as the new depository of personal and family memories. Thus both the use and materiality of the domestic family picture have changed, although its photographic underpinning and appearance are largely unaffected. Consequently, the domestic image, along with its associated personal informational data, once relegated to the hermetic world of shoeboxes and album pages, is now on virtual public display, subject to the acquisition, management, and control of other users, as well as the marketplace. In the evolving realm of digital technologies, and as Facebook illustrates, the personal elides with the public, and the digital image, with its invisible trace of metadata, prompts a new awareness of personal responsibility toward the treatment of the digital image.

Like the printing press and the handheld snapshot camera, today's digital technologies comprise a further democratization of the image due to immediacy and global exchange at an economical cost, with immeasurable creative, interactive options. But with greater democratization and greater proliferation of the digital image comes a heightened responsibility for its care and preservation by maker and user alike. In contrast to its analog predecessor of film and paper, the digital image brings a wholly new administrative and technical workflow or constitution of capture, management,

reproduction, and dissemination. Central to all of these component parts is a digital file's metadata, which provides the traceable link between original image capture, processing, use, and subsequent migration and archival preservation. Long present in all image technologies, including analog photography, metadata in the digital realm offers innovative advantages with its ability to embed information and/or link information to single or collective image files. An experienced understanding of metadata, along with digital workflow, is of critical consequence to all makers and users of digital imagery, no matter their creative pursuits. Simply put, it establishes a skilled, learned pattern for the care and management of images, providing accessibility and, in turn, preserving much of their meaningful connections to contemporary visual culture and its evolving history.

While this publication takes up pedagogical strategies of instruction and knowledge pertaining to the digital image, it also emphasizes the contributions of the image-maker in shaping and defining aesthetic, informational, and cultural visual display. Technical processes, here defined as explainable steps and repeatable workflow, belie the explicit craft involved in digital imaging with the possibilities of creative expression. For the image-maker, this is the larger charge when learning and working with new image technologies as it was with older technologies, such as photography. Craftsmanship—the acquisition of skills by training, as this book proposes—posits personal responsibility for the digital image as grounded in experience and expertise. This approach is of utmost importance as student and professional image-makers navigate a digital landscape replete with the "new"—hybrid methods that intertwine the still and moving image in a hypermedia of connectivity and display. The call for visual literacy and

technical acknowledgment of the "new" is very much a vital component for understanding the "now" of our post-photographic era. As the still image continues to sustain its material presence on paper support, and virtual or immaterial creative expression gains in currency, craft must combine with renewed understanding and vision to celebrate, challenge, and refashion convergent aesthetic and cultural uses of the digital image. In this way, practitioners, along with users/viewers, will advance creative invention and the future prospects of our evolving image-oriented world.

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