



At the Edge of the Light: Thoughts on Photography and Photographers, on Talent and Genius

David Travis

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David Travis, the Curator of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago, is among the select few whose views on the subject are in focus and worth a close look. He has lived, breathed, and contemplated photographs for the past three decades and is among the small number of critics and writers whose knowledge of art, technique, and history (not to mention linguistics, mathematics, poetry, and philosophy) has enabled him to transcend the typical blather that surrounds photographs and get to the emotional, technical, and esthetic core of genius at work. In these seven essays, revised, rewritten, and expanded from his lectures, he presents his thoughts on some of his favorite subjects: Weston, Stieglitz, Kertész, Brassai, and Strand. His knowledge is such (often enriched by first-hand acquaintance) that he can, and does, discuss more than images or personalities; he understands what informs the work, from what milieu it derives, under what influences it matured, how it evolved, and how it succeeded. He is an art historian willing to venture far beyond the periphery of traditional academic fences; to discuss game theory (quite literally), the mathematics of G. H. Hardy, the poetry of Rimbaud, Valéry, Rilke, and Goethe, the philosophy of Nietzsche, the extravagance of Henry Miller.

Not since Szarkowsky's *Looking at Photographs* has so much singular and informed intelligence been brought to bear on this most recent of the fine arts. This is not so much a book of art criticism as a journey of philosophical inquiry. It is a text that completely understands the limitations, and potential glories, of the form within its wider context, celebrating the march of individual genius that has slowly, but inexorably, transformed a technical curiosity into an accepted art.

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