

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

July 11, 2007

## Why all the TP?

Filed under: Papageorge — alecsothblog @ 4:58 pm

A couple people have questioned my motivation for devoting so much time on this blog to Tod Papageorge. As I hopefully made clear in my first post, I'm not in awe of the Yale mystique. I don't have aspirations for teaching there. I've been asked to visit, but declined (unlike every other school, they don't pay travel expenses). Nor was I in awe of Papageorge. I'd only seen a handful of his beach pictures and didn't think much of them.

The reason for all of my attention to *Passing Through Eden* is simple – I think it is a great book. But more to the point, it is the kind of book I aspire to make.

I once wrote (here) that I see most photographic practice falling on a spectrum with the two poles being Science and Poetry. Having posted a poem every Friday for the last 44 weeks, you might guess which side of the spectrum I find myself on.

My primary goal as a photographer is to make a great book within the tradition of literary photo books (*The Americans*, *Treadwell*). So when I encounter a new book that achieves that status, I want to know more.

Not long ago I read a fantastic book by J.M. Coetzee. Every so often I'd stop reading to take a look at his author picture. For better or worse, when you love a book, you want to know more about the author. In the case of Tod Papageorge, my knowledge of him and his work was very shallow. I wanted a better picture.

After all of the analysis and wordplay, I was doubtful that Papageorge would submit to further scrutiny. But he answered my request for an interview quickly and, as you will read soon, with great intelligence. Stay tuned.

The Papagorgy isn't over yet.

## 6 Comments

1. Alec, I haven't been able to keep up with all your Papageorge posts (just some skimming so far, hoping to catch up over the weekend), but every time I see a new Papageorge post under your name in my Google Reader, I smile. I know nothing about him (other than his position at Yale), and the only work I've seen of his I've seen on your blog. I smile, though, because I can totally relate to that experience. You nailed it with your analogy of turning back to look at Coetzee's picture as you read his book. When you love someone's work, you just want to know more about him.

Keep it up! Whether I come to like Papageorge's photos or not, this frenzy of posts about him isn't something I'll soon forget.

*Comment by Liz — July 11, 2007 @ 6:45 pm*

2. Hey Alec, time for me to jump into your blog after long time only reading. My compliments to you and all who are making this blog the worlds best one .WOW. Amazing for a photobookseller to read your TPP book statement. Hope to give some good information to the blog from germany.... !

*Comment by Markus Schaden — July 11, 2007 @ 7:55 pm*

3. wonderful thoughtful posts. and you have great aspirations. and i must see this book. i'm wondering if you could name some other favorite literary photo books?

*Comment by j zorn — July 11, 2007 @ 8:26 pm*

4. I have to say that the moment when photography really hit me was when I understood the exact same relation you have been referring to lately. I have already hinted you on this but if you haven't done so, after this post I have to really advise you to get your eyes on "FAR CRY" (steidl!) from Paulo Nozolino. After one year messing around with a camera and seeing my first humbly acceptable results, that book was like an explosion in every way I could imagine.

Also, from my very humble poetry repertoire I have to suggest you (again, if you haven't done so already) a close look at the surrealists. Everything that for me doesn't work on the visual arts is compensated there.

This Papageorge week has been just as inspiring as greatly amusing, hah!

*Comment by Tomé Duarte — July 11, 2007 @ 8:35 pm*

5. I have watched the progression of Mr. Soth's blog since near its inception too. It was interesting to read the dialogues and thoughts coming down via a blog from someone who had acquired such reknown from the upper rungs of the a.w. Many photographers with this type of clout rarely have a website, much less a blog! So kudos Mr. Soth, you changed all that. You can be 'the guy who made high art blog well'.

As for your post today, I was very pleased to hear the reference to a much earlier post regarding the relationship between science and poetry and the inherent value of this relationship in photography. That post has kept me visting your blog on a daily basis since last October.

Here are my thoughts on science, poetry, Yale, and TP. First, I think there is no better marriage of science/technology and poetry/vision than photography. This includes film, video, and still photography. Great art is that art which transcends itself. To this end, we see that the subjects of Corbet and Fluabert are paralleled by the subjects of Robert Frank and Kerouac. Both are operating within the context of their own time, their own respective blip on the time-line of human development becomes their muse in a way. They harness the weight of their 'contemporary-ness' and translate it as art. In this way art becomes a tool for future generations to understand older realities.

That said, I believe Todd Papageorge has translated his 'time', his 'contemporary-ness' effectively. I'm not concerned with how similar his approach was in comparison to other photographers of the time. I'm also not concerned about his 'strike-outs' early on. It is enough for me to see through his lense and so through his pictures at what he wanted to direct our attention. Perhaps he felt Central Park in the 1970s to be something later generations could benefit from having seen. Perhaps not. Either way, his pictures are pictorial—always drawing the eye from far to near, left to right, and back again to a soft eye stare. His textures enliven, his players intrigue, and his setting provides the gravity in an otherwise overly discordant 'dream'.

I go to a school at which 4 out of the 5 faculty members in the photography department have been through the program at Yale—Some older, some younger. Many times my proffesors lament their connection with the program as it has become a kind of 'star-machine'. This September when I return to campus to finish my senior thesis for my BFA it will be interesting to hear what my faculty will say about the 'anti-star' Papageorge and his recent, or should I say, almost ancient acheivements.

p.s. to the above Markus Schaden, thanks for ringing in. David from Dashwood in NYC put me on to you. I forgot the name he gave me until I found you again here. I automatically recognized your name when you mentioned something about germany. You do amazing work with your site! Love it!

*Comment by pinocchio — July 11, 2007 @ 9:53 pm*

6. That was fantastic. Thanks.

*Comment by ford — July 12, 2007 @ 10:18 pm*