Alec Soth's Archived Blog

Spectrum 2.0

Filed under: <u>aesthetics</u> — alecsothblog @ 3:26 pm

Following <u>my post</u> on <u>David Goldes</u>, David emailed me the following thought: "Perhaps reconfiguring your spectrum and labeling it informational at one end and experiential at the other would allow science and art to be thought of as two ways of knowing and not as polarities."

I think this is a significant upgrade:
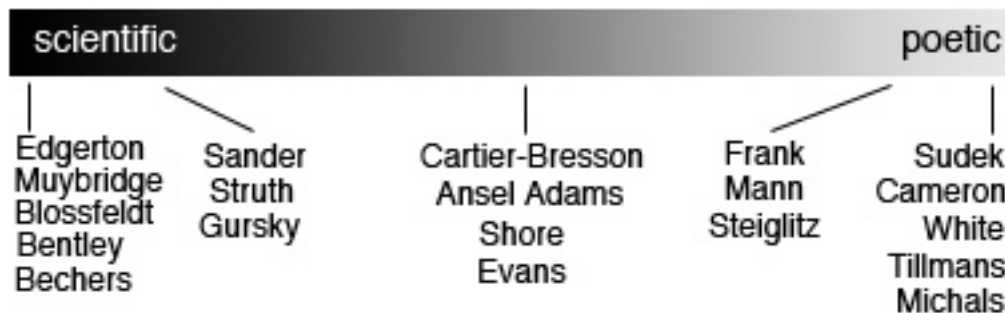
Here is my assignment:

1. If this is the X axis, what would make an interesting Y axis?
2. Assign a number to ten photographers: Bechers (0), Cartier-Bresson (5), etc.

1. x) Informational/Experiential

   y) Good/Bad

   Comment by guybatey — December 20, 2006 @ 3:46 pm

2. I was going to reply to your first post on your diagram. But for some reason I can't see the article without the RSS feed.

   But I will stick with my initial reaction that this spectrum is too scientific:) I envision a circle. No axis needed. Somewhere off your current chart, informational meets experienal (I would argue emotive) and it completes the loop.

   Thanks again.

   Comment by Sean Cayton — December 20, 2006 @ 4:05 pm

3. May I suggest another spectrum?

   form ————- narrative

   Form is the purely visual. Narrative is purely descriptive.

   A Weston non-representational abstract would be pure form. A photo ID would be pure narrative. Somebody like Martin Parr would just be on the form side of the balance. I would place someone I admire – Alex Webb – here too. Some of HCB's early work would be nearby. The Bechers are an interesting case where it really isn't about cooling towers, but repetitive forms. Sherri Levine's work? All narrative.

   – Shannon

   Comment by Shannon Ayres — December 20, 2006 @ 4:29 pm

4. This is a great discussion and the upgraded spectrum is great. This scale is so much easier for me to think about. I found it tough judging my work in the stigma of scientific vs poetic. Sean's response, that there is a circle where both meets is also very pleasing.

   As for assigning photographers to this spectrum, I find that a tough task. You put Struth at the scientific end in the prior post. I know when I look at his work, it is on the surface extremely informational but the more I look at his work, the more experiential it feels in that his "experience" of the place is strongly communicated. Maybe I'm mis-applying the term? Maybe Sean's suggestion of "emotive" is better? Or that Struth should be placed where the two extremes complete the loop?

   Comment by Glenn — December 20, 2006 @ 4:37 pm

5. Todd Deutsch sent me a great link of similar charts and graphs on Jessica Hagy's blog

   Comment by Alec Soth — December 20, 2006 @ 4:38 pm

6. a) a couple ideas for a "y" axis:

   formal/informal – view camera users on one side and snapshooters on the other.

   or, as alec has mentioned before, 'wall' vs. 'book' photographers. more specifically, one image vs. a series of images.

b) the work of minor white and aaron siskind, during the abstract expressionist influenced era, would be a 9, almost purely 'experiential.'

Comment by john kerren — December 20, 2006 @ 5:05 pm

7. Fascinating idea, and endlessly entertaining. This is probably my idea of the best blog post ever.

   Alec Soth – 7
   Joel Sternfeld – 4
   Philip Lorca-diCorcia – 8
   Walker Evans – 5
   Paul Strand – 5
   Jeff Wall – 3
   Roe Etheridge – 6
   Ryan McGinley – 9
   Brian Ulrich – 5

   If you can figure out the Y Axis, you should probably just publish a book of writings.
   I'd read it.

   Comment by Dylan — December 20, 2006 @ 6:19 pm

8. I can see this could be fun (I was going to suggest "height" as a Y axis) but I, too, kick against the restriction of intersecting just two variables. I remember reading a life-changing Christmas cracker motto in 1973, which said "There are two types of people in the world: those that like to believe there are two types of people in the world, and those that don't".

   Perhaps we've all played with Photoshop curves so much it has become a "natural" metaphor…

   Comment by Mike C. — December 20, 2006 @ 6:21 pm

9. y = people/place

   Comment by Juan — December 20, 2006 @ 6:43 pm

10. Maybe intuition/intellect for a y axis?

    Comment by Shannon Randol — December 20, 2006 @ 7:30 pm

11. […] As a responce to this post made by Alec, I thought I'd indulge in atleast a portion of his assignment: […]

    Pingback by SHANE LAVALETTE / JOURNAL » Blog Archive » Spectrum 2.0 — December 20, 2006 @ 7:33 pm

12. Oh, and for the Y axis:

    scale of prints
    (large/small)

    Comment by Shane Lavalette — December 20, 2006 @ 7:47 pm

13. I think the venture itself in its attempt to illustrate a fluid (nebulous) state with a static image resides entirely at the informational end of its own spectrum. You need instead something that contains within it, infinite space, like a brain or a universe.

    Comment by Jorn Ake — December 20, 2006 @ 7:48 pm

14. If you like Jessica Hagy, you'll love the grand old ad-man Hugh McLeod's cartoons. His sentence = "cartoons drawn on the back of business cards"
http://www.gapingvoid.com

Comment by Michael K-S — December 20, 2006 @ 7:53 pm

15. how about mike johnston's "tough" and "sweet"?

http://www.luminous-landscape.com/columns/sm-june5-05.shtml

Comment by aizan — December 20, 2006 @ 8:41 pm

16. I agree with the form—narrative y axis, but I think that it should be more general, more like form——content.
Jeff Wall with content on one end and Minor White on the other…

Comment by Jeff Rich — December 20, 2006 @ 9:03 pm

17. I agree with Juan.

Y= landscape / portraiture

Comment by Lee — December 20, 2006 @ 9:07 pm

18. Why not make the X-axis time and the Y-axis information/experience?

Comment by Taylor — December 20, 2006 @ 9:35 pm

19. How about color-BW as a y axis? Some people go with garish/oversaturated colours (landscape people; Martin Parr) or eye-biting BW contrasts (Corbijn), while others prefer more muted tones either in BW (Mann, Cameron) or in color (late Evans work, some Eggleston).

Comment by Michel — December 20, 2006 @ 9:46 pm

20. Ha, this post is very interesting but starts to strike up some questions in my mind…

The first being…Where does this need for classification spawn from, and what good (if any) can come of it?

The second being…How valid can any sprectrum become? (especcially since it is mostly based upon the opinion of the viewer and how they interpret the work of the artist)

Comment by Chad M. — December 20, 2006 @ 9:47 pm

21. chad- i would take it more as just photo-nerd type fun with a hint of intellectual curiosity.

Comment by john k. — December 20, 2006 @ 9:55 pm

22. Not valid at all. But if it helps 'strike up questions' about the 'the viewer and how they interpret the work of an artist', then maybe it is a worthwhile exercise.

Comment by Alec Soth — December 20, 2006 @ 9:56 pm

23. Very true, I wasn't trying to be pessimistic about the exercise, it was more based off of curiousity in how it came about.

Alec, where would you put Edgar Martins work from "The Diminishing Present" series?

Comment by Chad M. — December 20, 2006 @ 10:05 pm

24. How about this:: a three axis triangular plot, with objective at one corner (Bechers), experiential at another (Minor White) and transformative (Caponigro's Apple, for example) at the third. A triangular plot allows one to plot ratios of three things perfectly. Something plotting along a side contains none of the apex opposite to it.

There is also a chart that I don't have a reference to that I saw a few years ago. plotting time along the horizontal and musical influence/heritage between various musical artists that could be reinterpreted for photography.

Comment by Tom Frost — December 20, 2006 @ 10:50 pm

25. Y could be predictable or unpredictable possibly?

Comment by David Wilson Burnham — December 20, 2006 @ 10:57 pm

26. For fun … how about adding a Y-axis to gauge Useful / Useless and a Z-axis plotting a chronological timeline….!

Comment by Matt Niebuhr — December 20, 2006 @ 11:58 pm

27. photographically traditional vs photographically experimental

Comment by jason — December 21, 2006 @ 12:45 am

28. hi, [sorry my forrigner-english] but: is this diagram for us photographers or for a photography-viewer ? in the first case, y could be the same as x. sometimes one go out with a plan, it can be exececuted fine or, somthing else can happen, intuitive change, luck, trubble etc and one comes back with something "experienced" something unplanned. the other way around is possible too ! maby snapshots are less experienced than we give them credit ? when are we really looking at whats really going on ? Time shold play a factor (think this diagram shold have 3 dimentions) experience can stricke after the shot, when later reviewing the contactsheet !! No?

Comment by zoe — December 21, 2006 @ 7:44 am

29. Y= theory-based (more/less)

Comment by Kaarel — December 21, 2006 @ 9:21 am

30. Y = taken vs made?

Comment by Clint — December 21, 2006 @ 1:04 pm

31. how about this for a y-axis:

political vs apolitical

or

sebastiao salgado on one end and brett weston on the other.

Comment by ryan — December 21, 2006 @ 1:40 pm

32. oops. that "or" shouldnt be there.

    Comment by ryan — December 21, 2006 @ 1:44 pm

33. We were talking about this at dinner last night and shot several ideas around. In the end we settled on, "spontaneous vs. deliberate."

    Are there any artists that might easily fit in the middle of the quadrants formed by these two axes?

    -Jordan.

    Comment by Jordan Husney — December 21, 2006 @ 2:53 pm

34. how about:

    Y= personal (autobiographical) to impersonal (formal)

    …or is that too close to what the X axis is about?

    Comment by colin smith — December 21, 2006 @ 6:04 pm

35. David Goldes' pictures are spectacular. thanks for the link.

    Comment by j zorn — December 21, 2006 @ 6:49 pm

36. Hey Alec, thanks for fixing the spelling error (experiential) — and for the 'A'! Haha.

    Comment by Shane Lavalette — December 21, 2006 @ 7:33 pm

37. how about a z axis:

    with Fiction on left and Truthiness, factual, unstaged or manipulated on the right.

    Comment by Harlan Erskine — December 22, 2006 @ 2:01 am

38. Technical – non-technical

    Gregory Crewdson at one end, Richard Billingham at the other.

    For how two axis work with politics – going beyond the left-right axis, check this out. Take the test and see how far you can get from George Bush.

    http://www.politicalcompass.org/

    Comment by colin — December 22, 2006 @ 6:00 am

39. Here's a shot at it – I think August Sander is much more experiential than informational – the informational aspect comes from his technical control, the experiential aspect from his subjects. Similarly for Rineke Dijkstra.

    August sander – 7 (but 10 on the technical)

    Diane Arbus – 8

    Martin Parr – 3

Daido Moriyama – 10

Gregory Crewdson – 0

Hendrik Kerstens – 7

James Nachtwey – 4

Rineke Dijkstra – 7

Wendy Ewald – 10

Weegee – 9

Comment by colin — December 22, 2006 @ 6:39 am

40. How bout this.

    X Axis = informational -> experiential
    Y Axis = conceptual – > formalism

    Comment by Joseph Peila — December 23, 2006 @ 12:39 pm