

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

September 27, 2006

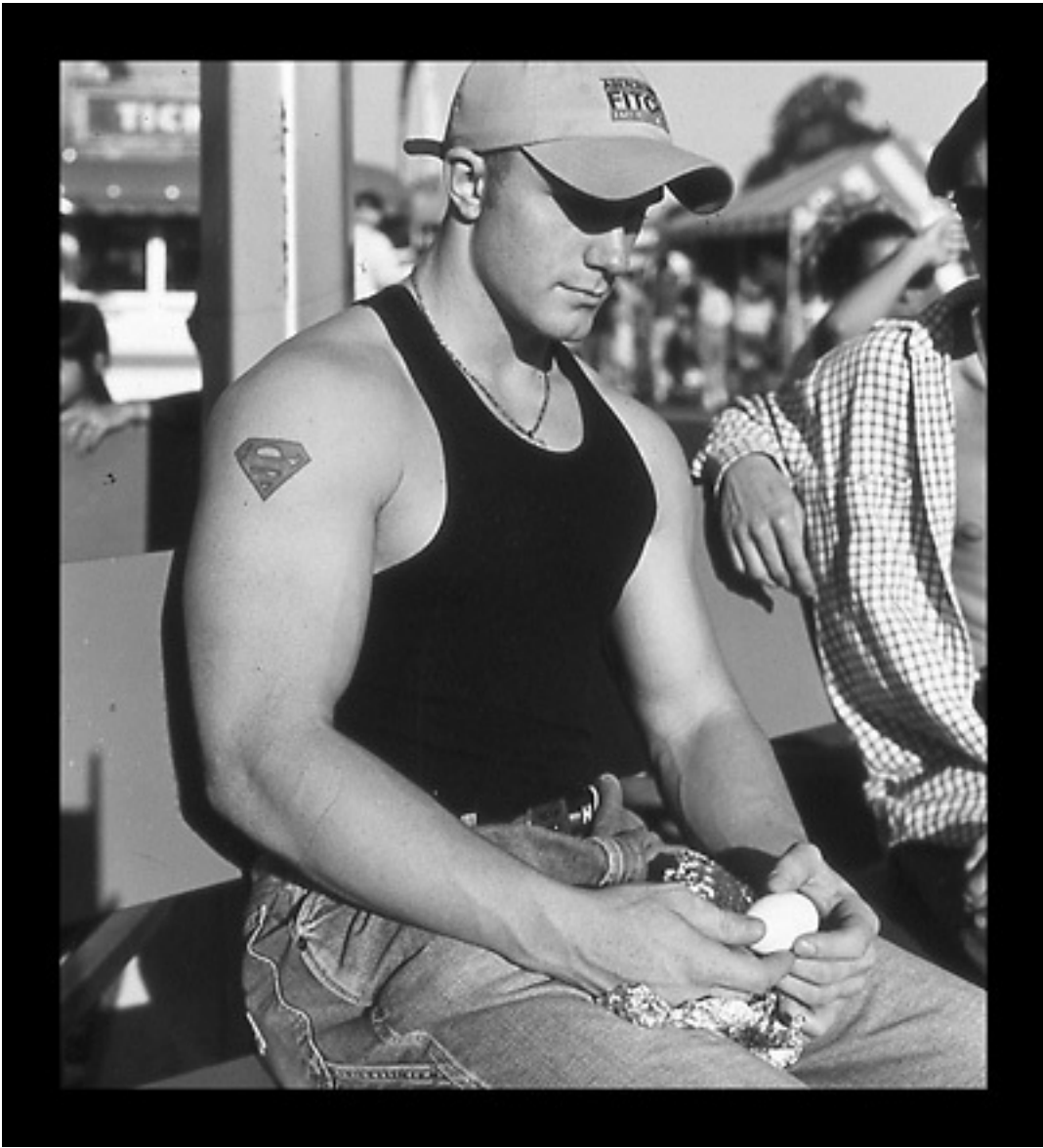
## FAQ: How do you find your subjects?

Filed under: [FAQ's](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:10 pm

I try to keep the process fluid. Years ago I did a project called *From Here to There*. The idea was that one picture leads to the next. An example:



Boy with chicken



Young man with egg (and superman tattoo)



Superman suit

While working on this project I made a trip down the Mississippi River. After awhile I saw the river as a metaphor for this kind of improvisational wandering. I decided to make the river the explicit subject while continuing to play all of these games beneath the surface.

I still play these games. Now I usually have a list of subject I'm looking for. With Niagara, for example, this list included things like motels, love letters, couples, and so forth. I feel a bit lost if I don't have anything specific to search for. But the list is just a starting place. It gets me involved in the landscape. Once I'm engaged any number of things can develop.



## 14 Comments

1. I remember you speaking to this question about your process (specific to the Mississippi project) during your exhibition opening at the Des Moines Art Center (Downtown) and I have to say that it really struck a chord with me.

My first impression upon hearing about your "idea lists" is that I felt somehow "let down" to hear that the process might be so fluid and seemingly unpredictable (unplanned observations??) – (why this place, and why this particular picture... etc) I think I was searching for an understanding of the structure behind the series in order to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the work. Trying to find the thread. Maybe I was trying to find the keys to reading the story.... Now, with more reflection – I think that the "improvisational wandering" you described really is repeatedly evident in the subjects you decided to picture along the way. I have to say I really enjoyed and appreciated the pictures "in real life" they are quite nice. For example, my personal favorite of the series is the picture of Johnny Cash's boyhood home... I'd like to believe it was a happy circumstance to come across this during your travels... but even if not .... the picture of Cash's ultra modest home speaks volumes to the person / place phenomenon.... it makes me wonder if that is what may have been the driving force behind Cash's success as a musician....

Anyway – I look forward to seeing many more such "projects". I sense that you have a way of knowing it when you see it.... great work.

*Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — September 27, 2006 @ [11:45 pm](#)*

2. Are there similar punning/visual links in the sequencing of the "Mississippi" book?

*Comment by [guybatey](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [3:31 am](#)*

3. that superman costume is great and the list of ideas makes a lot of sense.

*Comment by [j zorn](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [6:34 am](#)*

4. Yes, Guy, there are examples. Next to the picture of Charles Lindbergh's bed is the picture of Charles (holding the model airplanes). I love that both pictures are related to aviation and both are named Charles.

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [6:49 am](#)*

5. Reminds me of the constant thematic echoes and resonances throughout Franks "The Americans".

I really like this idea of a sort of abstract narrative flow in photo books, like a poetic or dream connection – the way if you analyse some of the bizarre jumps you get in a dream, they've often based on a verbal pun.

*Comment by [guybatey](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [7:35 am](#)*

6. Steven Maklansky, photography curator at the New Orleans Museum of Art, did a show a few years ago , titled 64 degrees of separation. He was able to link 64 images from the collection, similar to your idea. Great minds indeed! W

*Comment by [William Greiner](#) — September 28, 2006 @ [7:46 pm](#)*

7. Just wondering.. Once you find and approach your subjects do you take the photo there and then? Or arrange a meetup at a different location on another day...?

*Comment by [Theodore Williams](#) — September 29, 2006 @ [1:04 pm](#)*

8. More often than not, I take the picture there and then. But on occasion the subject is short on time and we meet up later or at a different location.

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — September 29, 2006 @ [8:18 pm](#)*

9. I did a similar project about 4 years ago titled Surreal Serial. It's 55 images linked serially by form or subject. It's on the web at <http://www.blakeandrewsphoto.com/serial/index.html>. Much less subtle than The Americans but still a very fun project.

*Comment by [Blake](#) — October 2, 2006 @ [4:16 pm](#)*

10. I live in Bogota-Colombia-, and I'm really impressed by the way you approach people here (Dog days project). Were you particularly close to the people you take portraits of or you just take the picture there and then...?  
I am also particularly concerned with how the light works in a place like Bogota. If you compare your different projects with the one you did in Bogotá, there's a huge difference in terms of color and definition. There's a big difference in taking photos in the tropic than taking photos in the north or in the south. What I mean is that the nature of light in Bogota is very different than the one you have up north or down south...  
Sorry for my english...

*Comment by [perezmatico](#) — October 5, 2006 @ [12:20 am](#)*

11. good food for thought...

i'm trying to put together a portfolio at the moment, and editing down from a big body of work can be tricky, particularly when dealing with 'one off' images as opposed to projects. i try to make stylistic links - trying to make images flow together with an atmosphere. however, the idea of connecting small visual links is great, and even when going out for an afternoon shooting would lend purpose to the exercise.

take it easy.

ben

(by the way, i bought your mississippi book in may from amazon. it still hasn't arrived. don't worry, i'm blaming them not you!)

*Comment by [ben](#) — October 6, 2006 @ [5:51 pm](#)*

12. Alec,  
surely you're not reading your list, driving, and photographing your list all at the same  
time?....

happy shooting,  
Jeremy

*Comment by [Jeremy](#) — October 14, 2006 @ [8:46 pm](#)*

13. [...] Alec Soth w swoim wczesnym projekcie From Here To There posługuje się schematem, w którym każde kolejne zdjęcie wynika z motywu na poprzednim zdjęciu (na przykład chłopek trzymający kurczaka - mężczyzna z jajkiem i tatuażem symbolu Supermena na ramieniu - strój Supermena wiszący w garderobie itd.). O ile tego typu ścisły projekt przypomina raczej literacki twórczo Georga Pereca, to z całą pewnością był to bardzo rozwijający projekt. W trakcie realizacji kolejnych tematów Soth często wypisuje sobie listy scen/pojęć/obiektów które w jego wyobraźni odnajduje jako punkty zaczepienia do opisanie danej historii i poszukuje ich w rzeczywistości. [...]

*Pingback by [hordziej | blog](#) » [Blog Archive](#) » [W poszukiwaniu narracji - Broomberg & Chanarin - Fig.](#) — August 25, 2007 @ [11:05 am](#)*

14. [...] A falta de assunto é tema comum entre escritores, cartunistas, fotógrafos, blogueiros... Enfim entre criadores em geral. Eu não tenho nenhuma fórmula mágica para resolver esse impasse. Mas tem gente que tem. O fotógrafo Alec Soth (de novo!), membro da Magnum, tem uma receitinha boa, o projeto "From Here to There". A idéia é fazer com que uma foto se conecte com a outra através de algo que esteja dentro dela. Nas imagens acima, por exemplo, o menino segura uma galinha no colo, na fotografia seguinte, um fortão está com um ovo na mão e no seu braço direito aparece tatuado o símbolo do supermam. Na próxima imagem o superman aparece representado por uma capa. Com o passar dos anos Soth listou uma série de objetos que precisa fotografar para que o ensaio ganhe continuidade. Legal, né? [...]

*Pingback by [Falta de inspiração « Granulado](#) — September 28, 2007 @ [10:48 pm](#)*