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# MUSIC, VISUALIZATION AND THE MULTI-STAGE ACCOUNT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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*Like his contemporary, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams claimed that visualization is essential for creating fine art photography. But, unlike Weston, he believed that a print from a negative is like a performance from a score. In his analogy, a photographer's visualization is like a musician's composition: once it has been set down in a 'score', it can be expressively rendered by different performers, making it possible to create and critically appreciate 'performances' with different qualities. I argue that this music-photography analogy makes Adams's conception of photographic visualization more fruitful than Weston's alternative. However, while I agree with Adams that a print is analogous to a performance, I criticize his idea that a negative is like a score. I argue that he holds a traditional, single-stage conception of photography, which led him to overlook a key distinction between undeveloped film and the developed negative. The multi-stage account of photography that I defend not only remedies this problem but also shows how Adams's proposal can be fully realized in digital photography. Most significantly, it invites theorists and practitioners to expand the music-photography analogy by considering wider varieties of music—not only performances from a score.*

## 1 Introduction

The photographer Ansel Adams was a classically trained pianist who proposed an analogy between fine art photography and classical music. In his analogy, a photographic negative is like a musical score, and prints are like performances. A negative produced by photographic ‘visualization’ is analogous to a score produced by musical composition. The negative can be interpreted in different ways during the printing process, resulting in prints with appreciably different qualities, like different musical performances. A composer’s score can be reinterpreted by many different performers. Likewise, although the photographer who created the negative may create their own prints, other artists can reinterpret the negative and print it differently.

I find this music-photography analogy compelling, though I will recommend modifications. I suggest that full benefit from the analogy can be obtained through a multi-stage account of photography rather than the single-stage account assumed by Adams. While Adams is right that a print is like a performance, his idea that a negative is a score is imperfect. When he frames the analogy, he does not incorporate a key distinction between undeveloped film and the developed negative.<sup>1</sup> He is led to this conflation because he holds a traditional, single-stage account of photography. Correctively applying a multi-stage account will separate the conflated process stages and deliver a coherent and enlightening version of the analogy.

The multi-stage account of photography opposes the orthodoxy of single-stage accounts in the history, theory, and philosophy of photography (Phillips 2009a; 2009b; and Wilson 2013).<sup>2</sup> Single-stage views suppose

1 He does, of course, recognize the technical difference, and his books describe the science of the development process in exceptional detail. My point is that he conceptually equivocates between two different process stages when he frames his music-photography analogy.

2 See Costello (2017) for a detailed analysis and critical comparison of orthodox and new theories.

that a photographic image has been generated once a camera exposure has occurred. A multi-stage view holds that an exposure occurring during a photographic event only produces a photographic ‘register’, which is not an image, and that subsequent rendering of the registered information is necessary before any photographic image is generated (Wilson 2021; 2022).

Elsewhere, I have argued that intractable problems of aesthetic scepticism and epistemic dogmatism can be traced to the single-stage view of photography, which supposes that a photograph is fundamentally mind-independent because it is autonomously created (Phillips 2009b). The multi-stage account counters that dominant view and unlocks both types of problems by demonstrating that mind-independence is not a fundamental characteristic of a photograph (Phillips 2009b; Wilson 2022). Philosophers have developed versions of the multi-stage view to discuss photographic art (Lopes 2016) and fiction (Atencia Linares 2012). In computational aesthetics, the multi-stage account has significance for understanding photographic imagery and photographic imagination in computer vision, machine learning, and AI systems (Chávez Heras & Blanke 2020). It also has relevance for discussions of computer-generated art (Pan 2020), including ‘Deepfakes’ (Carlson 2021).

I am grateful to the editors for an invitation to say more about the new theory in relation to art and aesthetics. I have previously argued that a merely causal relation to photographed objects does not by itself determine the pictorial subject of a photograph (Phillips 2009a); that photography presents distinctive opportunities for the exercise of artistic intentionality (Wilson 2012; 2022); and that the ‘photographic event’ provides a basis for aesthetic interest in the causal provenance of a photographic image (Phillips 2008; Wilson 2013). My aim in this paper is to show that the multi-stage view promotes new ways of thinking about the creation and appreciation of art photography, applicable retrospec-

tively as well as in the future.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Photographers and Philosophers on ‘Visualization’

Ansel Adams argued that there is a fundamental distinction between functional photography and fine art photography, which he also calls ‘creative’ or ‘expressive’ photography. In his view, technical craft is important in all photography, but fine art photography requires more than an excellent standard of fundamental craft techniques. It also requires ‘creative-intuitive’ achievement: “The creative-intuitive forces must dominate from the start in all expressive work. If not, the whole concept of photography as a creative medium would be invalid.” (Schaefer 1999, 131)<sup>4</sup> While his claim about expressive work could apply to fine art in general, Adams makes a specific claim about photography: expressive work in photography is impossible without ‘visualization’.<sup>5</sup>

The term visualization refers to the entire emotional-mental process of creating a photograph, [...]. It includes the ability to anticipate a finished image before making the exposure, so that the procedures employed will contribute to achieving the desired result. (Adams 2003a, 1)

Visualization is, for Adams, the most important aspect of art practice. Everything else – subject selection, image management, negative development, and print production – is subordinate (Adams 2003b, 2). He describes visualization variously in interviews and his writings, including his technical manuals, but the idea is particularly compelling when he elaborates on ‘visualization’ through an analogy with music.

3 Dominic Lopes (2008) has argued that holding an incorrect conception of photography may entail that all our aesthetic appraisals to date are wrong. A new conception of photography may make new and correct appraisal of photography possible.

4 Relatedly see Adams (2003b, 5-6).

5 It is necessary, but not sufficient. He acknowledges that visualization can be part of functional photography. His point is that creative expression is not possible without visualization, not that visualization on its own delivers art.



Visualization of the final picture is essential in whatever medium is used. The term seeing can be used for visualization, but the latter term is more precise in that it relates to the final picture – its scale, composition, tonal and textural values, etc. Just as a musician ‘hears’ notes and chords in his mind’s ear, so can the trained photographer ‘see’ certain values, textures and arrangements in his mind’s eye. (Schaefer 1999, 131)

Adams trained as a classical pianist and pursued a dual career in music and photography until he finally chose photography. He was obliged to justify the status of his work against an art market that was hostile to the notion of fine art photography. He believed, justifiably, that critics were either willing to appreciate the technical craft of photography or to value Pictorialist photography that imitated the artistic effects characteristic of painting. There was little willingness to appraise the artistic achievements distinctive to photography as a creative medium. His task, in his art, mentoring, and writing, was to demonstrate the importance of visualization for the creation and appraisal of fine art photography.<sup>6</sup>

Several of his contemporaries, particularly fellow members of the f.64 ‘Straight Photography’ group, shared Adams’s view that visualization, sometimes called ‘pre-visualization’, constitutes an essential require-

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<sup>6</sup> Rather than invent the term ‘visualization’, might it be best to adopt the term ‘composition’, as it is already a familiar term in photography? No, the distinction between composition and visualization is significant. Principles of pictorial composition were first established in painting and graphic arts. Accordingly, composition in photography describes a process of selection, governing the formal arrangement of elements inside the frame, such as the position of objects, their shapes, colours, and relative sizes. A photographer is said to compose the photograph before pressing the shutter, and a photographic image can be described as well composed, or poorly composed, as when a family group has their feet cut off. Composition is a feature of all photography, not specific to fine art photography. In this sense composition is merely one aspect of visualization. To discuss art photography, ‘visualization’ is a more precise term which best fits an analogy with ‘composition’ in music.

ment of fine art photography.<sup>7</sup> Edward Weston wrote:

Since the recording process is instantaneous, and the nature of the image such that it cannot survive corrective handiwork, it is obvious that the *finished print must be created in full before the film is exposed*. Until the photographer has learned to visualize his final result in advance, and to predetermine the procedures necessary to carry out that visualization, his finished work (if it be photography at all) will present a series of lucky – or unlucky – mechanical accidents. (Weston 1943, 172 – emphasis in the original)

Despite explicit statements of artistic intent and first-hand accounts of artistic technique, some philosophers have remained sceptical about photographers describing visualization. While fully accepting that photographers make extensive claims about their intent during the photographic process, strict theoretical commitments have licenced philosophers to deny that it is possible for intentionality to genuinely permeate the causal-mechanical process.<sup>8</sup> Visualization, sceptical philosophers can argue, describes a style of working distinctive to some photographers, but it does not alter the essentially mind-independent nature of photographs.

My counterargument has two aspects. First, methodologically, I claim that the perspective and knowledgeable testimony of photographers counts for more than philosophers have recognized.<sup>9</sup> Second, theoretically, I claim that rejecting the single-stage account and accepting

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7 Weston presented the concept that he would later call pre-visualization as early as 1922. Adams came to the idea independently and was the first to publish a definition of visualization, in 1934 (Alinder 2014, 53).

8 This view is most prominently argued by Roger Scruton (1981). Michael Morris on the other hand rejects sceptical arguments that rely on a zero-sum relation between mind-independent mechanical factors and intentionality (2020, p. 112). See also Costello and Phillips (2009).

9 See Wilson (2012, 56, 63-65). Also, Wilson (2022).

a multi-stage account removes the default philosophical idea that appears to justify scepticism – the idea that a photograph is inherently mind-independent, so intentionality can only be extraneous. Instead, the multi-stage account replaces it with the idea that intentionality can play an integral role in the photographic process. Theoretical commitment to the multi-stage account reinforces my methodological approach: when it is accepted that intentionality can play an integral role in the photographic process, photographers' testimony describing visualization carries more weight. Philosophical aesthetics stands to benefit if this theory and method are extended to other cases where photographers describe their art practice.

Taking seriously photographers' testimony and perspectives does not mean uncritically accepting every claim—not least because photographers disagree with one another. Not all photographers are proponents of visualization, and not all proponents of visualization support the music-photography analogy. Weston, for example, is committed to visualization but does not support the analogy with music.<sup>10</sup> Philosophers can critically evaluate specific claims and propose alternatives. In my case, I will argue that the music-photography analogy makes Adams's concept of visualization more fruitful than Weston's concept of pre-visualization. Adams and Weston both assume a single-stage account of photography, which leads to problems in their theoretical positions. But once revised in accordance with a multi-stage account, the music-photography analogy delivers creative and critical benefits and best accommodates the wide range of innovative practices found in digital photography.

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10 Three photographers surnamed 'Weston' appear in this discussion. I refer to Edward Weston as 'Weston' and include forenames when referring to his sons, Brett and Cole.

### 3 The Music-Photography Analogy

For Adams, the main point of the music-photography analogy is to afford photographic visualization a status similar to musical composition.<sup>11</sup> By claiming that a photographer is like a composer, Adams argues that creative photography can be appraised as fine art. He works through further implications of this analogy, starting with the idea that a composer of classical music produces a written score, which can then be performed. The equivalent stage of the photographic process, the production of a negative, is a creative achievement that requires personal vision informed by technical skill.

The key to the satisfactory application of visualization lies in getting the appropriate information onto the negative. This can be compared to the writing of a musical score. (Adams 2002, x)

Adams claims that, in photography, the negative is the score, and prints are performances.

The negative is similar to a musician's score, and the print to the performance of that score. The negative comes to life only when 'performed' as a print. (Adams 2003b, 2)

The print is our opportunity to interpret and express the negative's information in reference to the original visualization as well as our current concept of the desired final image. We start with the negative as the point of departure in creating the print, and then proceed through a series of 'work' prints to our ultimate objective, the 'fine print'. (Adams 2003b, 3)<sup>12</sup>

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11 Which is not to substantively claim that music and photography are alike in all, or even many, respects. The analogy is heuristic: it presents and explores an idea.

12 'Work prints' are analogous to rehearsal performances, where an interpretation can be worked out and practised before the final recital, or 'fine print'.

I consider the making of a print a subtle, and sometimes difficult, 'performance' of the negative! (Adams 2003b, 127)

The next implication of the analogy is that the production of a print from a negative is a distinctive kind of creative achievement that merits its own appraisal. A classical musician does not merely carry out a performance, but actively creates a performance:

The point I wish to emphasize is the dual nature of printing: it is both a carrying-to-completion of the visualized image and a fresh creative activity in itself. (Adams 2003b, 9)

The creativity of the printing process is distinctly similar to the creativity of exposing negatives: in both cases we start with conditions that are 'given', and we strive to appreciate and interpret them. In printing we accept the negative as a starting point that determines much, but not all, of the character of the final image. (Adams 2003b, 1)

The emotionally satisfying print values are almost never direct transcriptions of the negative values. [...] When you are making a fine print you are creating, as well as re-creating. (Adams 2003b, 5)

This leads to the idea that, like performances, different prints can vary in their appreciable qualities.

We know that musicianship is not merely rendering the notes accurately, but performing them with the appropriate sensitivity and imaginative communication. The performance of a piece of music, like the printing of a negative, may be of great variety and yet retain the essential concepts. (Adams 2002, x)

And, finally, the analogy grants that performances of the photographer's 'score' may include reinterpretations created by different artists, also allowing the use of new techniques and technology. Writing towards the end of his life, Adams was willing to embrace this idea:

Photographers are, in a sense, composers and the negatives are their scores. They first perform their own works, but I see no reason why they should not be available for others to perform. In the electronic age, I am sure that scanning techniques will be developed to achieve prints of extraordinary subtlety from the original negative scores. If I could return in twenty years or so I would hope to see astounding interpretations of my most expressive images. (Adams 1985, 305)

This personal reflection comes years after a thought-provoking episode in Adams' art practice. When he published *Portfolio VI*, his publisher convinced him to limit his print run by destroying his original negatives. Deliberate destruction was a fairly common practice for photographers seeking to increase the selling price of their work. Adams, however, expressed remorse and regarded it as further evidence that the art market was at odds with the true nature of the medium:

Photography is a medium that theoretically allows unlimited printing from the negative; negatives should never be intentionally destroyed. I cannot accept the value of artificially produced scarcity as more important than the value of creative production. (Adams 1985, 306).

Whereas Adams resolved to preserve his negatives as a collection of scores that could be performed by others, the photographer Brett Weston took a different stance. He claimed that it was only possible to retain the necessary 'excitement' of his work by developing and print-

ing straight away.<sup>13</sup> When that state of mind had gone, he lacked the necessary ‘enthusiasm’ to return to his old negatives and, as the ‘mood’ required was ‘too personal’ for another person to grasp, Weston concluded that “No-one can print another photographer’s negatives” (1980). On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1991, he ceremonially burnt thousands of his negatives.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4 Creating and Appreciating Fine Art Photography

While the claim that a negative is analogous to a score and a print is analogous to a performance might sound to a philosopher like the start of an attempt to specify constitutive identity conditions of a photographic artwork, this would miss the point. The purpose of this music-photography analogy is to explicate the creative process that a photographer undertakes, the artistic achievements required at various stages, and the scope for interpretative contributions by different artists. The analogy is helpful for understanding photography as a creative medium and, interrelatedly, for critically appreciating the qualities of photographic art. However, it does not aim to deliver the kinds of ontological distinctions that philosophers are inclined to prioritize.<sup>15</sup> Adams is not asking: What is the artwork? What is the art object? What are its identity conditions or persistence conditions? Rather, he is concerned with how fine art photography can be created and how it should be appraised—not how it is ontologically constituted. My discussion

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13 ‘Excitement’, like ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘mood’, can be understood here as a characteristic of ‘visualization’.

14 Brett Weston was the eldest son of Edward Weston. His conclusion was somewhat surprising because he was a renowned printmaker of fine prints from his father’s negatives. Ultimately, his stance is consistent with his art practice; he chose to hand over that printmaking role to his younger brother, Cole, and concentrate on his own art photography.

15 Aaron Ridley (2004, 13) argues that ontological commitments are not the most helpful starting point to discuss music. He recommends adopting a ‘baggy musical ontology’ that doesn’t foreclose interesting questions.

here is in the same spirit.<sup>16</sup> In this section I explore the merits of the music-photography analogy as Adams envisaged it. In the following section I will raise some difficulties that need to be addressed to obtain full benefit from the analogy and note some surprising consequences.

#### 4. 1 Creative Achievement

The art of classical music is not the creation of a written score, plus a performance. It is the creation of a composition, which is manifested in a written score, and in performances from the score where aesthetic qualities of both the performance and the composition can be appreciated. By analogy, the fine art photography that Adams championed is not the creation of a negative and a print. It is the creation of a visualization, which is first manifested in a negative, and fine prints from the negative in which aesthetic qualities of both the print and the visualization can be appreciated. For Adams, a fine art photograph is not merely a print from a negative—it is an ‘expression’ of the photographer’s visualization.

For me, a photograph begins as the visualization of the image which represents the excitement and perception of that moment and situation. The print represents excitement, perception and expression (performance). (Adams 1985, 271)

To understand Adams’s idea, I find it helpful to think of ‘expression’ as expressive rendering, where ‘rendering’ gives the print its tangible substance and appearance, thereby contributing properties to the visual image. Comparably, a musical performance could be considered the

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<sup>16</sup> For this reason, I am not here engaging with philosophical discussions of photography and music that focus on Goodman’s autographic/allographic distinction, or the identity conditions of photographic artworks.



expressive rendering of a composition.<sup>17</sup>

As with musical composition, visualization needs to be understood as one kind of artistic achievement within an extended and interdependent creative process. Visualization is visualization of the final expression. Expression is expressive rendering of an initial visualization. But visualization of an expression and expression of a visualization are different kinds of artistic achievement. In music, the general term 'musician' can be sub-divided into distinct types of creative contribution and artistic achievement: composer and performer. In art photography, an artist is likely to be described as a 'photographer', although further sub-division would be possible in principle.<sup>18</sup> Art photographers are unlikely to embrace novel titles as ugly as 'visualizer and renderer', analogous to composer and performer, but the underlying idea merits reflection.<sup>19</sup>

In classical music, different types of creative contribution and artistic achievement are attributed to the composer and the performer, but classical music is not two entirely separate artistic endeavours, composition plus performance, bolted together. The creativity of the composer and performer are interdependent. The composer creates a composition that has its first manifestation in a written score, and the score is

17 Adams (2002, x) remarks that "musicianship is not merely rendering the notes accurately, but performing them with the appropriate sensitivity and imaginative communication".

18 Existing terms within the photography industry include 'printer', 'print maker', 'technician', and 'photo finisher', but with these terms the status of creative contribution is unclear or undervalued. Adams employed printing assistants and spotters, even when producing his fine prints, but he would not have considered them creative contributors. They were implementing instructions, not producing new interpretations. By comparison, Adams sometimes created exhibition fine prints using negatives from other photographers. On these occasions, he viewed his own contribution as a creative interpretation and was explicit that his aim was to create superior quality prints.

19 Adams uses the phrase 'photographic interpretation' to describe the production of a print from a negative. 'Visualizer and Interpreter' might be one way to describe the different roles.

not its last manifestation. The work of creating a composition does not entirely come to an end when the written score has been produced. Rather, the performer who interprets the score in performing the music gives expression to the composition. Some features of the composition will only be determined in the performance and do not appear in the written score.

Just as different photographers can interpret one subject in numerous ways, depending on personal vision, so might they each make varying prints from identical negatives. (Adams 2003b, 1)

Classical composition is a creative exercise of musical intelligence.<sup>20</sup> One who exercises musical intelligence creatively must understand how the work will sound when it is performed. While the composer may subsequently direct a performance of that work according to a particular interpretation, the same score can be performed with many interpretations.

Musical intelligence is not musical precognition or predetermination. The composer envisages performances while understanding how a range of interpretations are possible. We need not credit the composer with preconceiving every future interpretation to appreciate composition as an achievement that encompasses those interpretations. Performances routinely take place on orchestral instruments that did not exist when the composer was alive. Where Adams explicitly embraced this aspect of his analogy, Brett Weston apparently did not.

The analogy with music helps with understanding creative attribution. It is the proper acknowledgement of different kinds of artistic achievement and creative contribution, particularly when multiple artists have contributed. In music it is possible, but not necessary, for the composer

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20 I owe this formulation to conversations with Aaron Ridley.

and performer to be one and the same artist.<sup>21</sup> Market pressure forced early art photography to conform to an expectation that the fine print should come from the hand of the photographer. In functional photography, by contrast, photojournalists could delegate print-making.<sup>22</sup> The music-photography analogy offers a way of understanding photography that liberates it from distorting influences of this kind.

## 4.2 Critical Appreciation

The music-photography analogy is also useful for considering appraisal, or critical appreciation. Someone listening to classical music can critically appreciate both the performance of the music and the composition. It is coherent to love a particular composition, but hate a particular performance of it, or simply to enjoy one performance more than another. It might be possible to love a composition so much, that you believe no performance has yet done it justice. In art photography, it is already common for critics, including artists, to prefer one fine art print over another version. The music-photography analogy invites us to take a step further—to make space for the idea that someone appreciating fine art photography can critically appraise not just the print, but also the ‘visualization’ expressively realized in the print.

In Adams’s analogy, the photographer’s visualization is first set down in a negative, just as a composer sets down a composition in a written score.<sup>23</sup> It is possible to appreciate a visualization without examining the negative, just as a composition can be appreciated without examining

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21 I refer to a singular ‘composer’ and ‘performer’ for simplicity. In practice, a single composer or single photographer is common but, like any art form, multiple artists may be involved in any stage of the creative process.

22 In practice, Adams himself retained this view and believed that he alone could produce definitive prints of his work. But, in theory at least, he recognized that a more liberal stance befits photography as a medium.

23 The word ‘score’ is sometimes treated as synonymous with ‘composition’, and sometimes construed as an abstract object. I have used the term ‘written score’ to indicate that I am talking about a concrete object.

the written score. The relevant objects of appreciation are not the print and the negative.<sup>24</sup> That would be analogous to appreciating a performance and a written score, which is not how musical appreciation works. A musician or musicologist will take direct interest in a written score, but someone listening to the music is appreciating a performance from the written score, rather than a performance and a written score. Similarly, someone viewing a photograph can appreciate a print from a negative, without needing to examine both the print and the negative. It is possible to listen to many performances without ever reading the written score and view many print versions without ever seeing the negative.

The music-photography analogy carries another interesting implication: no single print counts as the final expression of the photographer's visualization, and no collection of prints can exhaust the potential for critically appreciating the visualization.<sup>25</sup> When fine art photography is analogous with music, it has no terminus. It is always possible for further prints to be produced, like further musical performances. Critical appreciation of a visualization is not exhausted by viewing all the existing print versions—more interpretations can be produced, using new techniques and technology. Seen this way, fine art photography is inherently open to the future.

## 5 Critical Comparison of Adams and Weston

Adams and Weston both considered visualization the essence of their art practice, but Weston did not subscribe to the music-photography analogy. It is helpful to contrast their views to acknowledge that different conceptions of visualization exist, and that visualization is compatible with different kinds of art practice. I suggest that the music-pho-

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 24 In the next section I will note that there is a problem with equivocation in Adam's view. He wants to treat negatives as written scores, but negatives are also performances.

25 Brett Weston disagreed. He believed that the photographer's own version was definitive and final.

tography analogy offers a more fruitful understanding of visualization than Weston's approach.

Weston believed that the photographic image was, in its essence, finalized at the moment of exposure and chose a printing method that deviated as little as possible from this ideal. He placed the developed negatives directly onto photosensitive paper and 'contact printed', without enlargement or cropping, using a single source of light.<sup>26</sup> The result was designed to be as close as possible to the 'image' that he had pre-visualized while focussing an optical image on the ground glass of his reflective camera.

My way of working — I start with no preconceived idea—discovery excites me to focus—then rediscovery through the lens—final form of presentation seen on ground glass, the finished print previsualized complete in every detail of texture, movement, proportion, *before exposure* — the shutter's release automatically and finally fixes my conception, allowing no after manipulation—the ultimate end, the print, is but a duplication of all that I saw and felt through my camera. (Weston 1981, 311-312)

Weston's print-making practice contrasts with the methods employed by Adams, who used sophisticated darkroom equipment, including enlargers and multiple light sources, to reinterpret different prints from each negative. Although Weston and Adams both espoused visualization, Weston's method does not fit the music-photography analogy. Weston did not conceive of his negative as a score, but perhaps, rather, a printing-plate. His printing process was not conceived of as an interpretative performance, but a faithful duplication of the image through negative-positive reversal.

.....  
 26 "Edward Weston produced his extraordinary photographic prints in a spartan darkroom where the most elaborate device was an old dry mounting-press; his prints were made without enlarger, using only a contact printing frame beneath a bare light bulb suspended from the ceiling." (Adams 2002, 195)

When illness prevented Weston from printing his own negatives, his sons Brett and Cole took over. Although Weston did not personally endorse the music-photography analogy, the prints produced by his sons have different aesthetic qualities. Art critics have judged Brett's prints to be superior, perhaps because he was also a fine art photographer in his own right. When printing his father's negatives, Brett creatively re-interpreted the work. So, if the music-photography analogy is applied, critical appreciation of these prints can acknowledge a dual contribution: Weston's original compositions can be appreciated in Brett's expressive 'performances'. We could suppose that Brett and Cole produced different interpretive performances and the former have been judged superior. However, the music-photography analogy also allows for a different comparative evaluation. Consider two cases: a print made by someone who attempts to 're-create' Weston's own interpretation and a print made by someone who attempts to express Weston's pre-visualization while producing a new interpretation.<sup>27</sup> The former might be appreciated for its technical craft; the latter would be appreciated not just as technical craft, but also as a creative achievement.

Of course, this application of the music-photography analogy runs contrary to how these artists and their curators at the time regarded their work. In his autobiography, Adams critically evaluated a Weston retrospective. He objected that significant implications of the music-photography analogy had not guided curatorial decisions, nor were they made evident to viewers of the exhibition.

In 1983 I saw an exhibit of Edward [Weston]'s work in San Francisco. Old and new prints from the same negative, silver prints in contrast to early platinums, some prints made by Brett and some by Cole, all set on the walls along with prints made by Edward himself. There were 'project prints', proof prints, reproduction

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<sup>27</sup> I have suggested this contrast just to make a theoretical point. I do not intend to imply that it accurately illustrates the difference between Cole and Brett's work.

prints, original fine prints and modern interpretations. There was no respect for the importance of printmaking by the artist, thus no decisive message, ‘This is Edward Weston’s creative intention.’ I was dismayed and bewildered. Prints from Edward’s negatives made by Brett or by Cole are very fine and I enjoy them too. Yet Edward’s prints proclaim the artist in their own inimitable way. It is the comparative display, without even informing the audience that the negatives were performed by several individuals, that disturbed me. Hearing Bach played on the instruments of his time has a certain magic; hearing him played on the noble grand pianos of our time is an altogether different experience. I prefer the latter, but I must respect the former. I would not want to hear them both at the same concert. (Adams 1985, 214)

An early observation by Alfred Stieglitz can be turned into a tool for comparing Weston and Adams. In 1899 Stieglitz wrote,

In engraving, art stops when the engraver finishes his work, and from that time on the process becomes a mechanical one; and to change the results the plate must be altered. With the skilled photographer, on the contrary, a variety of interpretations may be given of a plate or negative without any alterations whatsoever in the negative, which may at any time be used for striking off a quantity of mechanical prints. (1899, 120)<sup>28</sup>

Weston can be compared to the engraver—he believed that the photographic image is completed during the exposure period, and after that point no alterations are possible, or, at least, not permitted. Devel-

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 28 In 1897, he favoured methods of enlargement and cropping, claiming that “the prints from the direct negatives have little value as such”, and the “the making of the negative alone is not the making of the picture” (Stieglitz 1987, 217). At that time Stieglitz championed Pictorial photography, but even when he cast aside Pictorialism, he still maintained that interpretations of negatives are superior to contact printing. Weston’s method is, of course, a reaction against the Pictorial tradition, but arguably he threw the baby out with the bath water. Adams also rejected Pictorialism but retained the baby. Stieglitz considered Adams’s work superior to Weston’s.

oping the negative and making a contact print were supposed to produce faithful copies of the visualized image, without introducing any changes. By comparison, Adams fits the description of the 'skilled photographer', who believes that a variety of interpretations can be created without any alterations to the negative.

Weston's art practice is built upon pre-visualization, but it has a narrow conception of how pre-visualization leads to a fine art photograph. The endeavour only succeeds insofar as the print is exactly as pre-visualized, or as close as possible. This is an extremely demanding and restrictive requirement. Adams builds his art practice upon visualization, but the music-photography analogy provides an expansive conception of how visualization leads to fine art photographs. The endeavour succeeds when the artist creates an expressive print in which an interpretation of the visualization can be appreciated, but the possibility of further interpretations is unlimited. This offers creative and critical benefits that are not available to Weston.

## **6 Revising the Analogy**

To obtain all the potential benefits of the music-photography analogy, the version proposed by Adams needs modification. I will retain the idea that visualization is like composition, and the idea that prints are like performances, but I will revise the idea that a negative is like a written score.

In music, a written score has no sonic properties, but, in photography, a negative is an image with visible properties—it is in fact a photograph, albeit one with negative tonal values. If print photographs are analogous to performances, it is also reasonable to say that a negative is a kind of performance. This does not imply that the negative cannot be used as a score, but it does imply that the relationship between a negative and a print is not straightforwardly analogous to the relationship between a written score and a musical performance. Raising this point as an objection to Adams complicates and jeopardizes an otherwise



elegant analogy. If developing the film to produce a negative counts as creating a first performance, rather than writing a score, what does this imply for darkroom printing? Should we now have to say that darkroom printing does not use a written score to create a performance, but uses one performance to create another performance? I will return to this difficulty later and argue that such complications can be absorbed into the analogy.

Even if this complication can be smoothed over, the objection might seem unnecessarily pedantic. Evidently in his art practice, Adams himself used the negative as a 'score' for rehearsing work prints and producing fine prints, and he viewed print-making as the activity of creating a performance. He did not conceive of the negative as a photograph; only the print was construed as a photograph. However, his collection of negatives was as important to him as his final prints.<sup>29</sup> This view of the negative would fit his analogy of a composer who has produced a collection of scores. As he explicitly treated the negative simply as a score, we should not expect him to count the development of a negative from an exposed plate or film sheet as creating a performance from a score.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, his own writing betrays an important ambivalence. Despite his explicit claims, there is evidence that he would be amenable to the idea that the negative counts as an expressive rendering of the pre-visualized image. In 1927, he created *The Face of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park* and later described the experience of developing the plate and seeing his visualization realized in the negative image:

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29 Brett Weston explicitly disagreed. For him, the finished print was the artwork. This is consistent with his decision to destroy all but twelve of his negatives.

30 That said, in *The Negative*, he extensively details complex factors in the development process that deliver superior or inferior qualities in a negative. He states that the process is fundamentally the same as developing a print. (Adams 2002, 181-192).

This photograph represents my first conscious visualization; in my mind's eye I saw (with reasonable completeness) the final image as made with the red filter. [...] I can still recall the excitement of seeing the visualization 'come true' when I removed the plate from the fixing bath for examination. The desired values were all there in their beautiful negative interpretation. (Adams quoted in Schaefer 1999, 152)

Adams described meeting Paul Strand, around 1930, when Strand had with him a collection of negatives but no prints. Adams viewed this collection with pleasure and appraised the aesthetic qualities of the negatives, such as the tones and clarity of expression. This can be seen as the expert appreciation of one composer admiring another musician's written score, but it is also undeniably the appreciation of a visual image, analogous to a performance.

They were glorious negatives: full, luminous shadows and strong high values in which subtle passages of tone were preserved. The compositions were extraordinary: perfect, uncluttered edges and beautifully distributed shapes that he had carefully selected and interpreted as forms – simple, yet of great power. I would have preferred to see prints, but the negatives clearly communicated Strand's vision. (Adams 1985, 88)

In Adams's theorising, he conceives of the negative as a written score, and there is evidence that this is how he worked from his negatives in practice. But throughout his reflections and critical comments, it is apparent that he also recognizes that the negative is a photographic image and can creatively express a visualization.

Even if I am correct that a negative is not simply equivalent to a written score, it would be too strong to claim that a negative has equivalent status to a fine art print. So, it cannot be considered a performance in the full sense that Adams has in mind. The same is true of proof prints,

work prints, and other items that are merely part of the workflow, and so fall short of a fine art performance.

I am persuaded that a print is analogous to a performance, but not persuaded that the correct analogy for a written score is a negative. While I have found some support for an objection by pointing to ambivalence in his critical practice, this is not decisive. I have conceded that a negative image would not count as an expressive performance and that in art practice, a negative can function as a written score. However, this is not the end of the matter. My remaining objection is based on a deeper disagreement: Adams is committed to a single-stage conception of photography. In the next section, I will argue that the multi-stage account offers a more coherent version of the analogy, where the written score is analogous to a photographic register, not a photographic image.

## 7 Inheriting and Rejecting the Single-Stage Account

I noted that taking the perspective of photographers seriously does not mean that claims should be uncritically accepted. This is not only because photographers sometimes hold contrary views. More importantly, Adams, Strand, Stieglitz, Weston, and many others inherited and maintained a traditional ‘single-stage’ conception of photography that is not just a preconception, but also a misconception.

The single-stage view of photography is the notion that a photographic image is produced and secured during the exposure period. When Weston states that “the recording process is instantaneous, and the nature of the image such that it cannot survive corrective handiwork”, he means that by the end of the exposure period, an image has been created. As he puts it, “with the shutter’s release the isolated image becomes unalterably fixed.” (Weston 1934, 316).

In their technical craft, Adams and Weston were acutely aware of the material difference between undeveloped film and a developed negative. However, when theorising about their art practice, they looked

past these differences and proceeded conceptually as if an exposed but undeveloped film were already, in a sense, a negative image. This is because they were influenced by single-stage orthodoxy. The single-stage account supposes that a photographic image is created during exposure and initially exists as an invisible latent image on undeveloped film.<sup>31</sup> The latent image is made visible during the development process, so the developed negative supposedly displays the very image that was initially created during exposure.<sup>32</sup> This is a misconception. Developing a negative is not a process of revealing a concealed image. Rather, chemical deposits that do not yet form an image are materially converted into an image. The negative image is a photographic image that exists for the first time only when developing and fixing is complete.<sup>33</sup>

Making an exposure—allowing light to interact with a photosensitive surface—is not equivalent to making a negative, but Weston and Adams treated it as such. For Adams, exposure is the exposure of the negative, or ‘negative exposure’ (Adams 2002, 219). He also commonly refers to his exposed but undeveloped plates or sheets as ‘negatives’. However, this terminology harbours a conceptual confusion because ‘negative’ is short for negative image. A plate that has been exposed but not yet developed is not truly a negative because it is not an image. It only becomes an image after a rendering process.

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31 Adams writes: “On exposure, the light produces an invisible *latent image* composed of crystals that will form image silver when developed, but have not yet undergone any detectable change.” (2002, 17 – emphasis in the original). His technical description is accurate—undetectable crystals have been produced by the action of light—but his ideological claim is wrong—the crystals do not constitute an invisible image.

32 Weston writes: “What is known as my “fine technique” is simply an intelligent awareness of values and textures, and the power of translating the image on my ground glass through comprehensive focusing and instinctive exposure – into my silver emulsion – thence on into the development of the latent image and the final printing in platinum.” (1922, 227)

33 See Wilson (2021) for a historical discussion and critique of the notion of the ‘invisible latent image’.

The dominance of the single-stage view reflects the curious fact that photography has not established a distinct noun in English to refer precisely to a plate or film sheet that has been exposed but not yet developed.<sup>34</sup> The term ‘exposures’ is occasionally used, but these items are customarily referred to as ‘undeveloped negatives’ (or ‘undeveloped prints’ if talking about a later stage of the process). The prefix ‘undeveloped’ is often dropped, and they casually become ‘negatives’, which generates ambiguity. For example, after a trip to the mountains, Adams writes that he has in his bag a dozen good negatives—when, in fact, he is carrying exposed but undeveloped film sheets.

Adams, Weston, and others proceeded on the assumption that when they had completed an exposure, they had, in all relevant respects, already secured the negative image. The exposed but undeveloped plate held the same status as a negative. Adams and Weston had such mastery of development technique that they were entitled to anticipate results with reasonable certainty, so they could afford to treat securing correctly exposed film as sufficient for securing their desired negative. But the notion of an invisible latent image is a myth and, contrary to their own art theorising, when Adams or Weston developed a negative, they were not making visible an image that already existed.

I can agree with Adams that the exposure of a plate or film sheet produces a kind of score. But, prior to development, I do not agree that the item in question is a negative. Recall that in Adams’s view,

The key to the satisfactory application of visualization lies in getting the appropriate information on the negative. This can be compared to the writing of a musical score. (Adams 2002, x)

But notice that Adams does not observe that making an exposure and making a negative are two different stages. For him, the information

<sup>34</sup> I would be interested to know if there are languages which do recognize a distinct term.

that can be retrieved from the negative is simply the information that was put there during the exposure. I suggest that writing a score is like making an exposure—it is not like developing a negative. Therefore, the written score finds its proper analogy in the exposed but undeveloped plate or film. This does not mean that the written score is analogous to a latent image. Instead, it is analogous to what I call the photographic ‘register’ in my multi-stage account of photography.<sup>35</sup>

Visualization informs the creation of the photographic register. The photographic register is not an image, but it is analogous to a written score. Image-rendering using information from the register is like a performance from a score. Hence, a photo-chemical negative image is a one-time performance. While the idea that the development of a negative is a one-time-only performance seems like a problem, the analogy can absorb this difficulty.

In negative-positive photography, two photographic events must occur. The first photographic event produces a register that is rendered into a negative image. The second photographic event occurs in the darkroom, passing light through the negative to create a new register that is rendered into a positive image. Every time a negative is used to produce a print, there is scope for ‘creative-intuitive’ composition during the darkroom photographic event.

## 8 Implications of the Revised Analogy

I owe it to Adams to consider a generous reconstruction of his position that removes the conflation mistake but still fits his original analogy. Adams could accept that, for photography, a conjoined process of, first, creating a photographic register and, second, developing a negative image is analogous to a musician writing a score. However, he might insist that the developed negative remains the item analogous to the written score.

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35 See Wilson (2021).

Charitably, this would allow Adams to avoid my conflation objection. But it is not a good reason to accept his view as his position is contingent on, and limited to, the negative-positive process that he worked with. It would restrict the application of his analogy to one kind of photographic technology and fail to apply it to any process that lacks a negative. Fortunately, an alternative is available that better fits the spirit of his analogy.

If we look to technologies that are photo-electrical rather than photo-chemical, the true spirit of the analogy emerges. Digital photography does not involve a negative-positive process. Although a RAW camera file is sometimes called a 'digital negative', this is a misleading homage to the chemical past. It stores unprocessed data direct from the camera sensor and the data must be selectively processed to produce a visible image. A RAW file is therefore equivalent to exposed but undeveloped film rather than a developed negative.

In chemical photography, each individual register can only be developed once.<sup>36</sup> It is not possible to return a negative, or print, to its undeveloped state. A digital RAW file is a score that can be performed unlimited times and has the potential for expressive re-interpretations while still retaining all the original unprocessed data. Photo-electrical photography fulfils Adams's analogy far better than photo-chemical photography.

Adams's analogy is specific in two respects: he is thinking about classical music within a composer-performer paradigm and fine art photography within a negative-positive paradigm. Music and photography are each vastly broader than these specific paradigms, so there is scope to expand the music-photography analogy in several directions.

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36 In practice, a previously developed image might sometimes be put through secondary 'development' processes, such as selenium toning, which can sometimes amplify information in the register. This does not undermine the main philosophical point, which is that a photographic register is not yet an image, and any photographic image must have gone through a rendering process.

One critical response to the multi-stage account of photography has been: consider examples x, y, z—Do they count as photographs or not? Setting aside the separate question—Is this art or not?—the music-photography analogy may help here. Not all music has the classical composer-performer paradigm. Not all music is tonal. Not all music is performed live. Synthesized instruments create ‘performances’ that human performers would not be able to achieve. Improvisation is possible. Sampling is commonplace. Rather than looking for an answer to the narrow question ‘Is x a photograph?’, perhaps we need an answer to a different kind of question: Is this a rendering from a photographic register? The result would produce two very broad categories: items with and without a photographic event in their causal history. Even when a photographic event has occurred, evidence of that aetiology would only be salient in the final product to a greater or lesser degree, so there would be enormous diversity across the full range of cases. In comparison, the question ‘Is this a photograph?’ permits a simple answer in a much narrower range of cases.

## 9 Conclusion

In opposition to prevailing scepticism, Adams sought to convince the world that photographers could create fine art. It was widely believed that the medium of photography is inherently unfit for expressive art because photographs were the mind-independent products of a largely mechanical process. The f64 Straight Photography group were among the first to argue that photographers could create fine art in virtue of the medium, rather than in spite of the medium. But, ultimately, they shared the same single-stage preconception as their sceptical opponents. I have suggested that claims about visualization in art practice become more plausible and powerful if the single-stage preconception is replaced with a multi-stage account of photography.

Single-stage accounts attempt to make room for artistic creativity by looking at decisions and interventions on either side of the interval



during which the image is supposed to come into existence. This is unsatisfactory. If it were true that an image is autonomously produced at the moment of exposure, photographic creativity would be limited to preparations before the image is created and modifications of the image after it has been created. With these limitations, the single-stage view cannot meet the challenge of aesthetic scepticism. The multi-stage view can meet the challenge because it denies that an image comes into existence during exposure. The production of the image is a multi-stage process that necessarily includes the registration of light during a photographic event, while extending, concertina-fashion, to activities before and after that event.

I have rejected the idea that exposed but undeveloped film holds an invisible, latent image. But this is compatible with acknowledging, figuratively at least, that a different kind of latent image is important in photography. This is the 'image' visualized by the artist before the photographic event occurs. As Geoffrey Batchen puts it, "the image comes before the photograph (which is merely its reproduction), and the film is already inscribed with a picture before it is ever exposed to light." (2001, 52). This is what Weston meant when he said that "the *finished print must be created in full before the film is exposed.*" (1943, 172) and why Adams wrote "Visualization is a conscious process of projecting the final photographic image in the mind before taking the first steps in actually photographing the subject." (2002, 1).

Taking seriously the testimony of photographers cannot carry any expectation that photographers will express a consensus view of photography or art practice.<sup>37</sup> Instead, the expectation must be for philosophers to recognize a plurality of art practices, precisely because the agency and intentionality of photographers is internal rather than

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37 Garry Winogrand produced thousands of photographic 'registers' but did not develop them as negatives. Adams created thousands of negatives that he did not have time to print. Brett Weston destroyed all but twelve of his negatives after he had created prints.

external to the photographic process. Yet, photographers hold different views. Philosophers taking seriously the testimony of photographers may be a step towards photographers engaging in dialogue with philosophy—hopefully concluding that philosophical investigation can have significant implications for creative and critical practice.

In Edward and Brett Weston's view of fine art photography, the print is the only thing that really matters, and the photographic image visible in the print came into existence at the moment of exposure. Subsequent process stages merely reveal and present that image to best effect. This conception of the creation of a photograph fully embraces the fantasy of the single-stage account of photography. Pre-visualization in combination with an engraver-print-maker model of art practice simply reinforces that fantasy.

Like Weston, Adams presupposes a single-stage view of photography, but the composer-performer model of art practice puts him in a better position. The music-photography analogy obliges him to recognize the importance of negatives as well as prints, unlike Weston who considers the negatives redundant once a definitive print is accomplished. Adams does not consider a negative to be a performance; in his eyes, it is a written score. I have argued that negatives and prints are both photographic images, so the negative is not properly analogous to the written score. The proper analogy lies with the register. Adams fails to distinguish between the register and the negative because the single-stage view promotes the conflation of these distinct process stages. The multi-stage account of photography pulls apart these process stages but creates a new problem for the analogy: in chemical photography, the development of a negative would be equivalent to a score that permits a one-time-only performance. It is possible to accommodate this difficulty while maintaining the music-photography analogy, but a different application of the analogy is also available. When the photographic register is a digital RAW file, it serves as a written score that can

be reperformed without limit—just as Adams envisaged. Adams offered a visualization-based art practice in combination with a music-photography analogy. When revised in light of the multi-stage account of photography, this opens new ways of understanding creative and critical practice in both chemical and digital photography.

Critics, theorists, and practitioners have expressed concern that the medium of photography may degenerate or disintegrate as chemical technology increasingly gives way to digital technology. Combining the multi-stage account of photography with the music-photography analogy produces a far more optimistic perspective. For creative artists and art appreciators, digital technology makes it possible to realize the full potential of the music-photography analogy, which opens exciting new ways to create and appreciate art photography in the future. At the same time, applying the music-photography analogy to the history of chemical art photography makes it possible to retrospectively survey art history to find unrecognized or underappreciated examples of the composer-performer paradigm.<sup>38</sup>

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38 This article has been on my mind for years and I have presented variations on many occasions so I am indebted to more people than I can mention. However, I must sincerely thank the editors and reviewers of *Debates in Aesthetics*: Claire Ancomb, Eleen Deprez, and Daniel Cavedon-Taylor, for their patience and generosity.

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