

THIS IS OUR FIRST actual 'digital issue', in the sense that every feature has a digital theme. In the early nineties, in the wake of the 150th anniversary of photography, digital issues and exhibitions began analysing the impact of new technology on photography. Photographers and photography organisations were quick to identify with the new technologies. It was obvious that the camera would have a special relationship to the computer – collecting visual information from the real world for easy access in the cyber world. Electronic publishing offered a new way of accessing and distributing images. And because computers could also produce images which could be mistaken for photographs, it meant the end of an era in which photography could be said to be anchored in the real. One of the early debates was about the undermining effect of electronic technology on the photograph's authority as testimony. There was also much discussion about the ethics of image manipulation and the implications, for copyright owners, of an uncontrollable distribution network (the Internet).

Essentially, electronic art exists in hard-copy or interactive forms. In the early nineties there were very few interesting hard-copy digital images – the exception being the work of Nancy Burson and Inez van Lamsweerde. Both used morphing technology to give form to monsters that hitherto existed only in the imaginations of scientists (Burson's bizarre portraits pooled the best known 'iconic faces' from specific social groups – say politicians or beautiful women – and combined them according to the logic of statistics; van Lamsweerde's eerie, androgynous figures were the nightmare scenarios of genetics). Both artists feature in this issue. Starting on page 10, Peter Ride maps out the terrain and argues that the defining quality of digital art is its interactivity. Interactive art promised to manifest something theorists had been talking about for ages – the shift in the production of meaning from the producer to the consumer. At this time virtually no one but academics had access to the Internet, and CD-Roms were still rare. Computer games were around, of course and interactive electronic art did exist in a low-key fashion – computers within video installations were programmed to engage viewer response. (On page 34 Ed Baxter airs his doubts about the claims made for interactivity.) Interactivity did not become so massively hyped until a few years later when the sophistication and spread of technology enabled more people (in the West) to access electronic spaces. The big breakthrough came in 1993 with Pedro Meyer's CD-Rom, *I Photograph to Remember*, in which traditional reportage became simply part of a narrative constructed for an active user. The German theorist, Florian Rötzer, recognised that Meyer – a documentary photographer – had violated 'the unspoken agreement between the photographer and

his audience to accept the myth of photographic truth'.

*Creative Camera* has pursued an organic approach – at first we included features which concerned the relationship between computers and photography (our 25th anniversary edition included a large feature about digital photography). Then, just over a year ago, when it seemed that digitisation was changing all levels of culture, we created our web site and began regular coverage which encompassed galleries – as well as all of the new spaces for photography, CD-Rom, Internet, cyber-archives. Now the pace of change is mind-numbing. As we go to press Kodak, in a telling development, takes another step closer to abolishing silver-based technology and making photography as much part of computing as games. It is already possible to take digital photographs, instantly download them, manipulate them, then e-mail them. Now Kodak will post you industry-quality A4 colour prints when you e-mail any image to their lab.

Experts call this 'post-photography' which implies that 'photography' has been superseded. Is it the end for silver-based photography? Well, level-headed thinkers such as Tapio Makela (interviewed on page 14) say that digital and conventional will co-exist happily – each having its own special characteristics. At last most people realise that the camera image is not the impartial mirror of reality it was once believed to be. Only some reportage photographers are still threatened by this. Many image-makers – such as Vibeke Tandberg (page 18) – require, as a condition of their work, that the viewer be aware of the unstable nature of camera images. Tandberg's faked family snaps stand or fall on a perceptible distinction between the real and the false. Another computer artist who effaces the 'computer effect' is Olga Tobreluts (page 28), one of a group of 'new academics' based in St Petersburg. Perhaps the formal ancestors of Tobreluts' weird idylls were the baroque montages of Soviet agitprop magazines.

Both Makela and Peter Ride agree that the most radical aspect of digital technology is that it offers new contexts in which photography can be produced, encountered and distributed. Peter Ride explains that the apotheosis of the new technology is multimedia. By merging hitherto separate mediums (text, music, still and moving images) multimedia spells the end of 'medium purism' and demands that galleries and art magazines, for example, think again about compartmentalising art forms. This issue does not attempt to predict the next development. It simply offers an updated (soon-to-be-obsolete) map of photography and digitisation in 1997. Some articles and all web sites mentioned in this issue can be accessed from the *Creative Camera* web site at <http://www.artec.org.uk/channel/creative>

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