

influence

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Publisher/Editorial Director:

MARTINEZ, Raul

Editor in Chief: **DIKKERS, Jan-Willem**

jan@influencemag.com

Executive Editor/Director of Photography:

BLANK, Gil *gilb@influencemag.com*

Design Director: **KAYE, Michael**

Associate Art Director: **KASHIWAGI, Nobu**

Senior Designer: **PARK, Soohyen**

Designer: **COREA, Matias**

Associate Editor: **JONES, Kristin M.**

Editor of Inspiration Images:

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RENARD, David (Netcirculation)

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MATADIN, Vinoodh

Destroy the Girl with the Pearl Earring,

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influence

Welcome to the debut issue of *Influence*, our new magazine about the ever-changing forms of artistic ideas. *Influence* was created not so much with a particular niche or pursuit in mind, like art, music, fashion, or even culture in general, but out of the desire to explore how the ideas that shape those creative ventures are continually mutating to fit our lives.

We'll discuss the amorphous definitions and fluid interactions between what have previously been considered discrete categories: various media, past and present, "high" and "low," sublime and ephemeral. We'll ask about the meaning of original gestures, and ultimately the value of the individual in a hyperspeed society. *Influence* traces the infinitely complex web of ideas and relationships that binds each of these worlds together, inspires the genesis of new forms, and ultimately determines what the world comes to perceive as the contemporary narrative.

We've purposely built the flow of the magazine to echo the pace and fractured pattern of contemporary life. You'll find randomized images and discursive strands of conversation interspersed throughout the magazine, ideas that drift in and out of focus unexpectedly.

For our first issue, we explore that metaphoric concept of fracture as it relates to our everyday experience: how the things we take for granted can so suddenly appear alien, untenable, and infinite. It's that zone of knowledge within our sight but just beyond our grasp that all art approaches, with trembling and wonder in equal measure.

In keeping with our wide field of view, our assembled contributors have taken on a dizzying mix of topics. Louise Neri talks about Grimm's Fairy Tales and SARS, Ulf Lundin stalks his next-door neighbors, Walead Beshty contemplates the zombification of the American landscape, Inez Van Lamsweerde destroys a Vermeer, Danny Goodwin mounts spy cameras on weather balloons to make surveillance photographs of his own backyard, and Kurt Andersen and Lawrence Weschler discuss soundbites, the adoption of standardized time, manufactured authenticity, capital punishment, and harmonic convergences.

If it sounds overwhelming, that's just as it should be.

BY **GIL BLANK** I ORIGINALLY DISCOVERED THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF LOUIS BRAWLEY AND DANNY GOODWIN ON SEPARATE OCCASIONS, BUT AS I PUSHED FURTHER DOWN INTO EACH OF THEIR ARCHIVES, SOME ODD SIMILARITIES BEGAN TO COALESCE. FOR ALL THE DIVERGENT ASPECTS OF THE IMAGES, THERE WAS A RELATABLE APPROACH, A DISSOCIATION WITH THE ELEMENTAL DESIRE THAT UNDERLIES ALL PHOTOGRAPHS I KEPT IMAGINING LOUIS' SERIALIZED FIGURINES AS A WISH LIST OF IDEALIZED BRIDES. DANNY'S PIECES HAD A MORDANT EDGE, BUT APPLIED TO VERY NATURAL-FEELING ENVIRONMENTS, AS IN THE SHOT OF A CHILD IN A SANDBOX VIEWED FROM WHAT SEEMS TO BE A SPY SATELLITE. HAVING FIRST ESTABLISHED FOR MYSELF THE COGNITIVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PHOTOGRAPHERS, I SOON DISCOVERED THE PERHAPS NOT ENTIRELY COINCIDENTAL FACT THAT THEY ACTUALLY KNOW EACH OTHER QUITE WELL. A DISJOINTED E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE THREE OF US ULTIMATELY LED TO A FACE-TO-FACE MEETING FOR THE UNLIKELY PURPOSE OF FINDING OUT SOMETHING MORE ABOUT WHAT THE IMAGES REFUSE TO SPEAK OF ON THEIR OWN. BY THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, NO MORE HAD BEEN RESOLVED THAN EVER IS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS THEMSELVES.



GOODWIN, Danny

Danny Goodwin is a New York-based artist working primarily in photography and video. He is the head of the Combined Media program in the art department at the University at Albany, State University of New York.

BRAWLEY, Louis

Louis Brawley's multimedia work has been exhibited internationally since 1992, when he completed his MFA at Hunter College in New York City. In addition to photography, his work concentrates a great deal on painting, incorporating ideas gained from frequent traveling. He is represented by Pierogi 2000 in Brooklyn.

pinhole camera

A pinhole camera is a rudimentary device in which light passes in a straight line through a tiny hole (as opposed to a larger glass lens that requires refraction) in one end of an opaque box or can with a black interior, projecting an image onto film or sensitized paper. Images produced with pinhole cameras have limitless depth of field but tend to have soft focus. Among other things, the principle of the pinhole has also been used to image X-rays and to achieve greater depth of field in flight simulators.

(p. 114–115) **BRAWLEY, Louis**
Untitled, 1997. Fuji Crystal Archive print mounted on wood, © 2003 Louis Brawley. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

DANNY GOODWIN My work has always been this kind of Faustian negotiation with perceived truth. That's been my obsession, to tell myself the same joke over and over again, this constructed reality. There is a kind of resistance to description that's like walking around without your glasses on: you can tell yourself these little lies and be comforted. Like you were saying, the hope aspect of looking at the perfect bride. Louis actually photographed my wife and I in our wedding outfits—

LOUIS BRAWLEY Oh, that's right, I almost forgot. **GIL BLANK** Of course you did. Perfect. **DG** There's a kind of distillation, or perhaps abbreviation is more like it: a lot of these pictures are more like the way you see, or read information in your life. Certainly more

than the way an 8x10 negative reveals anything about the way you see. **LB** I'd been doing this kind of Pop imagery—it was kind of blended through performance—and I'd done a book, and video, and painting; it was a mishmash of things. I was never interested in photography, so I approached it as a tool, kept it low-tech, and made a joke out of the notion that you could even make a portrait document. What I really wanted to do was access the primitive mechanism of photography, so I took everything out. I stripped down the composition and all those considerations: everybody stands in the middle; everybody holds their hands in the same way. The pinhole camera I used actually maintains infinite depth of

field when focused properly, but I negated that in order to make it idiotic. In the process it becomes a kind of Rorschach test. **GB** Danny, before the surveillance shots, you seemed to take the opposite tack from Louis with your photo-sculptures, which were like fake, hokey spy-gadgets—bombs in candy bars, and so on. Intensely precious items. **DG** Well, I had figured I'd just make these things, these beautiful little tiny objects with this painful level of description. I wanted to have some kind of surprise in there. They're crafted objects, because I found that if I didn't physically cut it, it just didn't look real, it looked like a lie... **LB** Ah ha... **DG** Right, which lie? What I'm fascinated with now is something



Microsoft TerraServer

Microsoft's TerraServer is an online database of maps and aerial photographs of the United States. The name refers to both "the earth" or "land" as well as to "terabyte" (a measure of computer storage capacity).

Minox

The German manufacturer Minox pioneered the development of miniature cameras, starting with the first Ur-Minox in 1938, which was smaller than a cigar and lighter than a cigarette lighter. Minox cameras have been widely used for espionage.

(p. 116 top) **GOODWIN, Danny**
Chimney, Slingerlands, NY, 2002. Seven-color pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

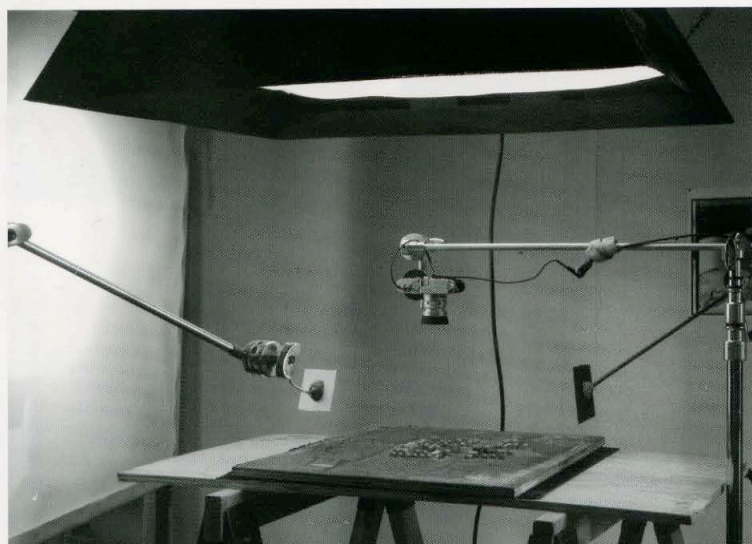
(p. 116 bottom) **GOODWIN, Danny**
Aerial Surveillance Forgery Kit (Stills), 2002. Quad-black pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

(p. 117) **GOODWIN, Danny**
Sandbox, Slingerlands, NY, 2002. Seven-color pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

like Colin Powell's Powerpoint presentation to the U.N. Security Council before the war. The lying aspect is something I latched onto; I started out by trying to make the lie as complicated as I could. I was building and crafting these sets, as you see in the black-and-white pictures, and making these plausible fictions. Then I photographed the sets themselves, but changed some of the information to kind of... I don't know who I was trying to throw off, but to, you know, throw *them* off. And then I started making "actual" pictures: I was pretending to follow myself around with a remote surveillance camera, a balloon-mounted camera that I built. I staged this, and made some videos in which I was actually more interested in recording the failed launchings, and watching

the equipment be destroyed, getting caught in power lines and so on. And then I thought that it would probably be only a little more difficult to really do it than to fake it. You go through the same formal gestures that you do when you're faking it anyway, so I was curious to see what the "real" pieces would look like. Of course, I get these pictures that look exactly like the fake ones look. **GB** You've lost me. Is this a performance right now? **DG** The color shots aren't sets—those are "real," captured from microwave cameras mounted on balloons. I made some 40x60-inch prints that are just eye-popping in their lack of description. You make it bigger and there is just less and less to see the bigger it gets. The black-and-white pictures are of models based on my bicycle routes in

the last three places I lived, segments of it. **LB** How did you choose the segments? **DG** I plugged the longitude and latitude coordinates of specific addresses, like my studio or my office or wherever, into the Microsoft TerraServer. They're these satellite images, and they're terrible, and they cost a fortune if you really buy them, so you don't bother; you just steal them and build a model and fake it. **LB** So you build the model from a satellite photo that you found online, and then you photograph the model to make it look as much like the first photograph... **DG** Yeah, because I tried to steal them, you know. I thought I'd get a big monitor and take a screen capture. But I ended up building models and photographing them with a Minox, a tiny little spy camera. That's why I



document the decoy sets along with the “real” views. Because most of the images of the sets used to make the photographs are not really the way they were made. It’s easy to make a complicated, compelling set, a tempting construction. **LB** So these shots are models? **DG** No, the color shots are real. **LB** They’re real? **DG** They’re real. **GB** They’re real models. **DG** No, those are from a balloon, from up in the air, sending a cordless phone signal down to a mini-DV deck. It’s video, and I just grab stills. The camera ends up disappearing — I’ve never managed to recover one. **GB** What, you just send them off into the ether? **DG** Well if you tether them, you’ll see the strings. You just use really cheap cameras. You start it, then you just let it go, and watch the monitor **GB** So some poor

sucker finds the thing in a few days... **LB** And he thinks, “They’re watching me!” **DG** Some of the shots are from really high up, like a thousand feet up. That figure in a lot of them is me, watching the watching. Some of this is my backyard, and there’s my neighbor... Some of these look so good they’re like models. My neighbor had just hydro-mulched his lawn — you know that green stuff — and it looks exactly like the H-O model railroad turf. It looks so fake it’s unbelievable. **GB** You don’t say. **LB** That dissonance is fully illustrated here, today, with what this country is going through right now; the paranoia that’s the first word on everyone’s mind. **DG** “Total information awareness.” You can see in the playground picture — it’s crafted so that I could assert this surveillance

over the most mundane activity. **GB** That idea of total information awareness is a slippery one, because you mentioned before that photographs will show less than what the human experience is like, despite offering a surplus of raw information. **DG** Information can’t just be collected — it has to be read. Right now we collect several terabytes of information from satellites a day, so we have to come up with these complex visualization models for how to deal with it. They call it “vacuum cleaner surveillance.” **LB** Who decodes that? **DG** Now they’re discussing artificial intelligence programs that scan contexts. They build portraits of people based on their automated car toll badges, credit card receipts, Internet transmissions... **GB** A composite model

based on peripheral information, rather than direct depiction, of which Louis’ works are a kind of analogue. **LB** I’m working toward an immediate disinformation. Danny’s work is a more convoluted disavowal, where the more information you get, the less you know. **GB** Are any of these people you photographed personal acquaintances of yours, people whom you might say you “know”? **LB** They all are. I put them in dresses designed for a specific performance, then lined them up and shot them. People look at them and think they’re dolls, that they’re models. **GB** Staged confections. I keep thinking of them as these little hardened jewels, both inviting and resisting inspection and ownership. **LB** There’s a study I’ve been reading about that contends that our ability to



see and perceive certain images is genetically programmed. Our capacity for processing the implications of certain forms is predetermined. There's another story of a man who first gained sight after living blind for his life, and couldn't grasp the cognitive mechanics of visualization at all. He had no context. **DG** A lot of that has parallels in artificial intelligence. We learn a lot more about how the brain works from AI than we can figure out about AI from how the brain works. One of the big conundrums of AI is machine vision: the computer has problems accepting new information and doing anything useful with it. Typically the most well-funded artificial intelligence programs are military, and the problem is that you have what's

called an executive artificial intelligence, a decision-making AI, but it's incapable of deciding what it knows based upon new information in that video field. It can only compare it to a database of things it already knows, or has seen before. **LB** What we see is what we already know. There has to be a framework that you already possess. **GB** So you've propped up a kind of vacant armature in the place of a standardized portraiture. There's the attempt to induce new meanings into these corrupted facsimiles. **LB** I'm poking around in what you do know, because it's so unfamiliar. **GB** Naturally the only things worth investigating are the things that are resistant to knowledge. Beckett said that if he knew what his plays were about, he

wouldn't need to write them. I find these pictures so poignant as subversions of portraiture because, of course, the thing we want most to know is each other. It seems to me that the whole iterated series is a compound photograph, accreting a perception, allowing for interpolation. **LB** I find it increasingly bizarre how we see, what it is we're looking at, and how our decision-making facility functions. It's disorienting because it's so arbitrary — how we end up making distinctions between things, which may have originated from a purely functional mechanism when we evolved. I'm legally blind, and as a kid I used to play this game where I would see how far I could go into this fuzz and still function.

At what point does recognition begin?

artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is a machine's ability to imitate intelligent human behavior in initiating self-directed decisions, as well as the area of computer science dealing with the simulation of intelligent behavior in computers.

BECKETT, Samuel

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) was born in Dublin but eventually settled in France, after abandoning the academic world to write full-time. He was a companion and secretary to James Joyce, and during wartime he was a member of the French Resistance. Beckett's bleak, witty, and economical masterpieces of prose fiction include *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *The Lost Ones* (1970); among his contributions to the Theater of the Absurd are *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1959), and *Footfalls* (1976). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

(p. 118 top) **GOODWIN, Danny**

Aerial Surveillance Forgery Kit (Video), 2000. Quad-black pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

(p. 118 bottom) **GOODWIN, Danny**

Playground, Shartlesville, PA, 2000. Quad-black pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.

(p. 119) **GOODWIN, Danny**

Slide, Slingerlands, NY, 2002. Seven-color pigment inkjet print on Somerset Velvet, © 2003 Danny Goodwin. Courtesy Pierogi 2000, Brooklyn.



