

## Foreword | Professor Zbigniew Szydlo, London 2010.

Too many people take too many photographs. This is one of today's problems. Why? Because it's too easy; anyone can buy a camera and anyone can take a photo. The result? Millions and trillions of utterly useless images, capturing utterly useless moments, which no one will ever look at or reflect upon. This effect is a sign of the times in which we live -times in which the essence and aim of life has been trivialised. This is perceptible not only with respect to photography, but also with respect to all aspects of our existence. Everything that we do is quick and easy; gives pleasure for a split second and is then forgotten. We drive cars, use phones, fly in aeroplanes, travel in high-speed trains, use washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners. We play games on computers, watch television and films, listen to recorded music, make thousands of phone calls and involve ourselves in a seemingly infinite variety of pointless issues. Pleasure and leisure are the aims of our lives. Moreover, we are highly opinionated - we are passionate supporters of sporting teams, we idolise worthless individuals who are created by the media and we obsessively follow social trends. We think that we are enjoying ourselves. We think that we are part of a community and we think that we know something. We think that we are somebodies. In reality however, we are nobodies, and we know nothing about anything. How many people know what a spark plug is and how it works? How many people know how an electric motor works? How many people know how a mobile phone works? How many people know what ammonia is and why it is important? Do we care? Of course not -why should we? Our brain is empty -it is a vacuum. Our whole existence is a vacuum.

How has this extraordinary situation developed, in which so many people, it seems, have lost all sense of purpose and all sense of being? The answer is simple -it has been caused by huge advances in science and technology and in techniques for mass production. Science is the study of Nature. Scientific pursuits satisfy the most basic instinct of the human -a curiosity and wonder about the world around us. During the past 300 years, the results of scientific investigations have exceeded the wildest predictions that anyone could have made. We have arrived at the scientific "utopia" that great thinkers of the past, like Francis Bacon, had dreamt of. And yet -what has this utopia achieved for us? Where is peace, harmony and tranquility? Where is our respect and admiration for the scientific thinkers? Where is the respect for ourselves? Where is the "gentle touch" in our relations with others?

Instead of paradise on earth, clear evidence exists that humanity is being destroyed. With atom bombs, chemical pollution, oil resources diminishing and global warming spinning wildly out of control it comes as no surprise that the prophets of doom are out in force. For 50,000 years humans have existed on the earth, but at no time in it's history have such profound changes been caused on such a wide scale in such a short space of time. These changes are the result of the work of scientists. It is not surprising that scientists, their mode of thinking and their achievements, have been the subject of much discussion. They have also been the inspiration for much creative activity, especially in literature and film. Thoughtful and most interesting people have recognised the significance of science and its makers. These are the individuals who go against the tide of popularism and who maintain their dignity, humanity and creativity. These are the individuals who will bear the flag of humanity in the years to come.



One such person is Stephane Graff. As a young person he had become passionately interested in photography -not only from the aesthetic and creative viewpoint, but also from the scientific and technical aspects. For Graff, the creation of an image by scientific (chemical and physical) means was a source of such profound inspiration, that he has spent his entire adult life exploring the possibilities of this medium. Not only the creative, but also the strictly scientific aspects of the photographic process. As well as seeking new techniques and effects, Graff has also focused his efforts on retrograde and outdated techniques which were used by photographers of the Victorian era. He has experimented with a variety of techniques such as the bromoil and gum dichromate process, which were "left behind" in the 1870's. He has developed these techniques to levels of perfection that even the great Victorians had not contemplated. Furthermore, Graff has devoted a significant proportion of time, using these techniques, to investigate the mind of the scientist.

Today we are able to witness his results - often achieved with single (frequently long) exposures on glass plates, with emulsions and processing chemicals which he himself prepared. Using combinations of curious scientific apparatus in an appropriate setting combined with the "Professore" stereotype -an academic steeped in thought on issues concerning the Nature of the Universe - Graff has produced a series of carefully thought out and supremely aesthetic images. Every single one has had dozens of hours of work put in, to achieve a most satisfying composition with carefully selected lighting, and at the same time focusing on the common theme.

So, what goes on in the psyche of Professore? Experiments have been invented to answer intriguing issues which confront the scientist. The images themselves do not provide the answer of course, but they stimulate thinking, they stimulate discussion, they bring people together. They rightly give a high profile to a profound topic which affects us all.

Through his art and science of photography -Graff has convincingly demonstrated that he recognises the exactness and precision of scientific thinking, the logical development and exposition of arguments and finally and ultimately- the unsolved mystery of the universe.

His photography demonstrates a purity of mind and a recognition of the beauty of the world we live in. He has achieved a level of perfection and spiritual accomplishment which is characteristic of great individuals.

On the use of outdated techniques, on which Graff has spent so much time perfecting, I asked the obvious question -surely you could achieve the same effect using the latest imaging equipment and modern computer software? No, came back the reply. A computer will provide a perfect image, but it will never simulate the tiny imperfections and inconsistencies which can only be achieved by a photographic negative which has been produced by chemical means. It is these imperfections and inconsistencies which lend such a profound humanity to Graff's work. There is a certain universality in this observation -no scientific invention can ever replace the human spirit. It has been said that one picture can speak a thousand words- this is precisely the effect that Graff's images have achieved.