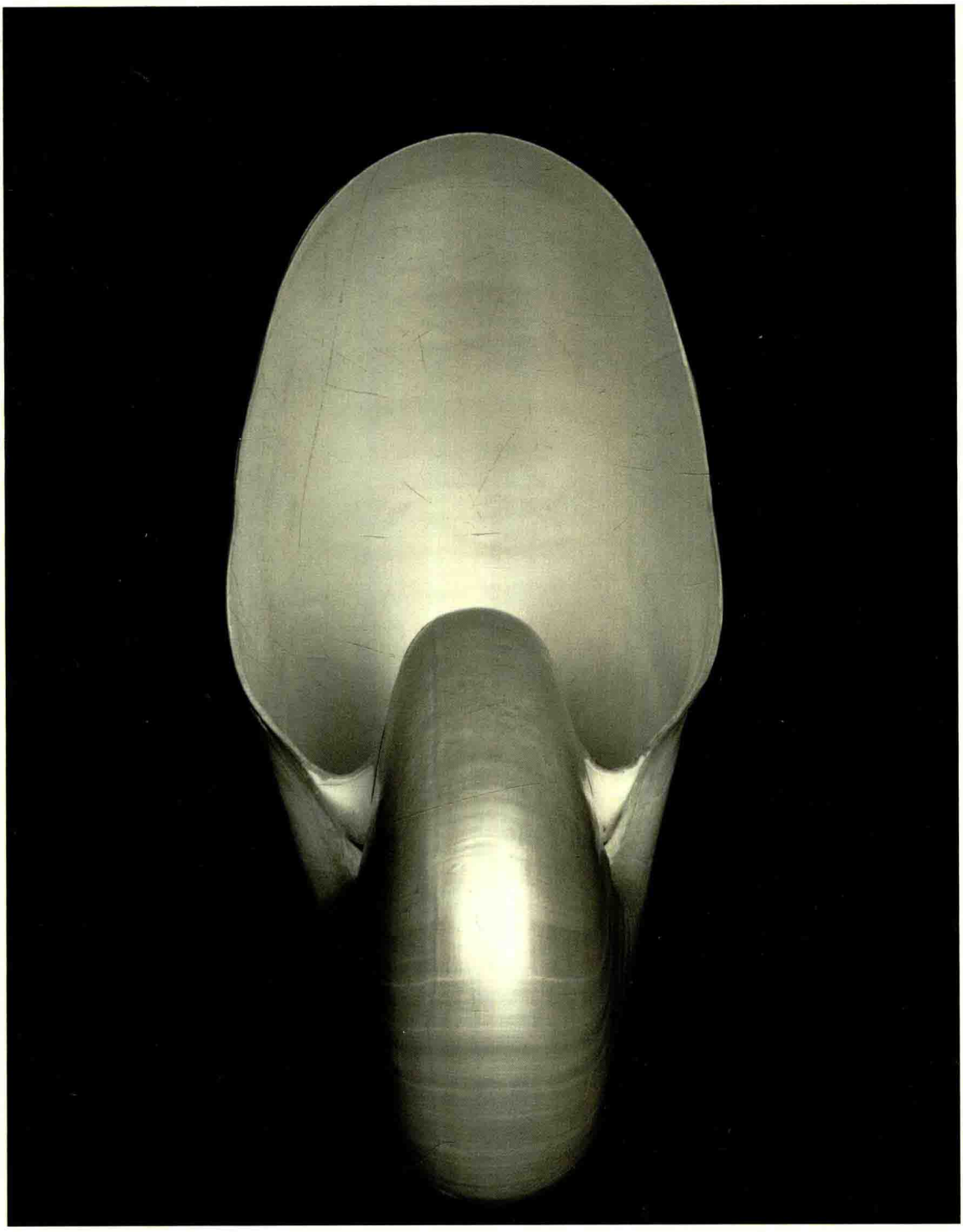


EDWARD WESTON

aperture

EDWARD WESTON

The Flame of Recognition

His photographs
accompanied by excerpts from the Daybooks *& Letters*

Edited by Nancy Newhall

aperture

Edward Weston: The Flame of Recognition
Photographs by Edward Weston
Excerpts from Weston's *Daybooks* and Letters
Edited and with an Introduction by Nancy Newhall
Preface by Ansel Adams

Front cover: *Shell*, 1927

1965 and 1971 Editions:
Editor: Nancy Newhall
Contributors: Ansel Adams, Beaumont Newhall, Nancy Newhall, Brett Weston, Cole Weston, Dody Weston Thompson

Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, 2015:
Project Editor: Susan Ciccotti
Separations: Thomas Palmer
Typesetting: Jordan Romanoff
Production Manager: Matthew Harvey
Production Assistant: Luke Chase
Proofreader: Madeline Coleman
Work Scholars: Emma Holland, Lauren Zallo

Additional staff of the Aperture book program includes: Chris Boot, Executive Director; Sarah McNear, Deputy Director; Publisher: Lesley A. Martin; Kellie McLaughlin, Director of Sales and Marketing; Amelia Lang, Managing Editor

Fiftieth Anniversary Edition
Printed in China
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014956144
ISBN 978-1-59711-310-6

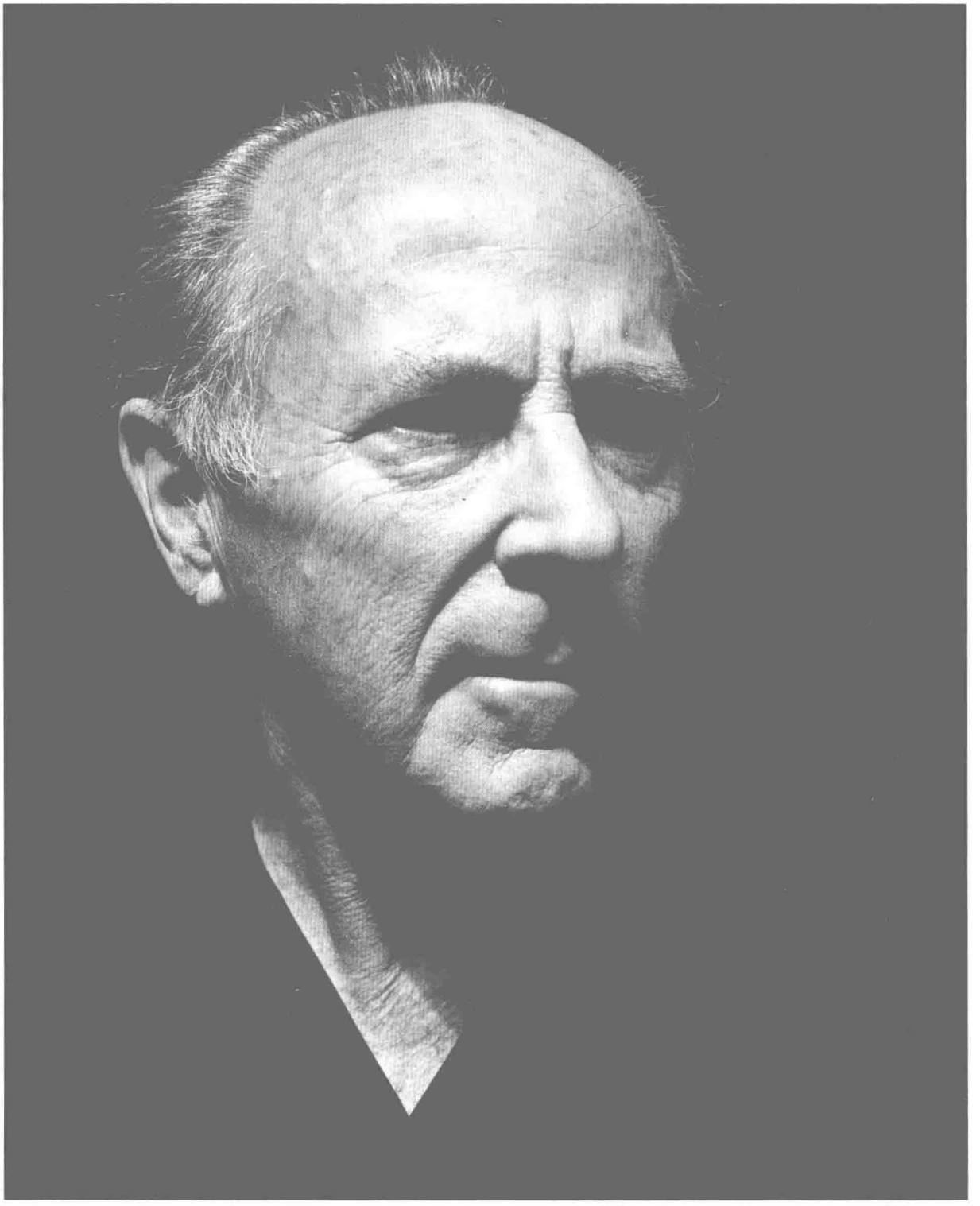
Aperture Foundation books are distributed in the U.S. and Canada by:
ARTBOOK/D.A.P.
155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, N.Y. 10013
Phone: (212) 627-1999
Fax: (212) 627-9484
E-mail: orders@dapinc.com
www.artbook.com

Aperture Foundation books are distributed worldwide, excluding the U.S. and Canada, by:
Thames & Hudson Ltd.
181A High Holborn
London WC1V 7QX
United Kingdom
Phone: + 44 20 7845 5000
Fax: + 44 20 7845 5055
E-mail: sales@thameshudson.co.uk
www.thamesandhudson.com

aperture
Aperture Foundation
547 West 27th Street, 4th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10001
www.aperture.org

Aperture, a not-for-profit foundation, connects the photo community and its audiences with the most inspiring work, the sharpest ideas, and with each other—in print, in person, and online.

The Flame of Recognition



Photograph of Edward Weston by Ansel Adams, ca. 1950

EDWARD WESTON

The Flame of Recognition

His photographs
accompanied by excerpts from the Daybooks *& Letters*

Edited by Nancy Newhall

aperture

Foreword

In his daybooks, Edward Weston was trying to focus himself as man and photographer. To be alone and to think, free for an hour of family, friends, loves, he rose in the dark before dawn and poured down on the page in his massive scrawl whatever was seething in him. The "headaches, heartaches, bellyaches" he later found so revolting that in 1923 he burned all except six or seven pages, and in the 1940s when publication of the daybooks just as they stood was proposed, he went through them with a razor cutting out names and comments until the pages were full of holes and sometimes sliced to ribbons. What endured for him, as for us, are his attempts to analyze his change and growth and—"my work is always a few jumps ahead of what I write about it"—to understand the strange flashes of vision that came through his camera.

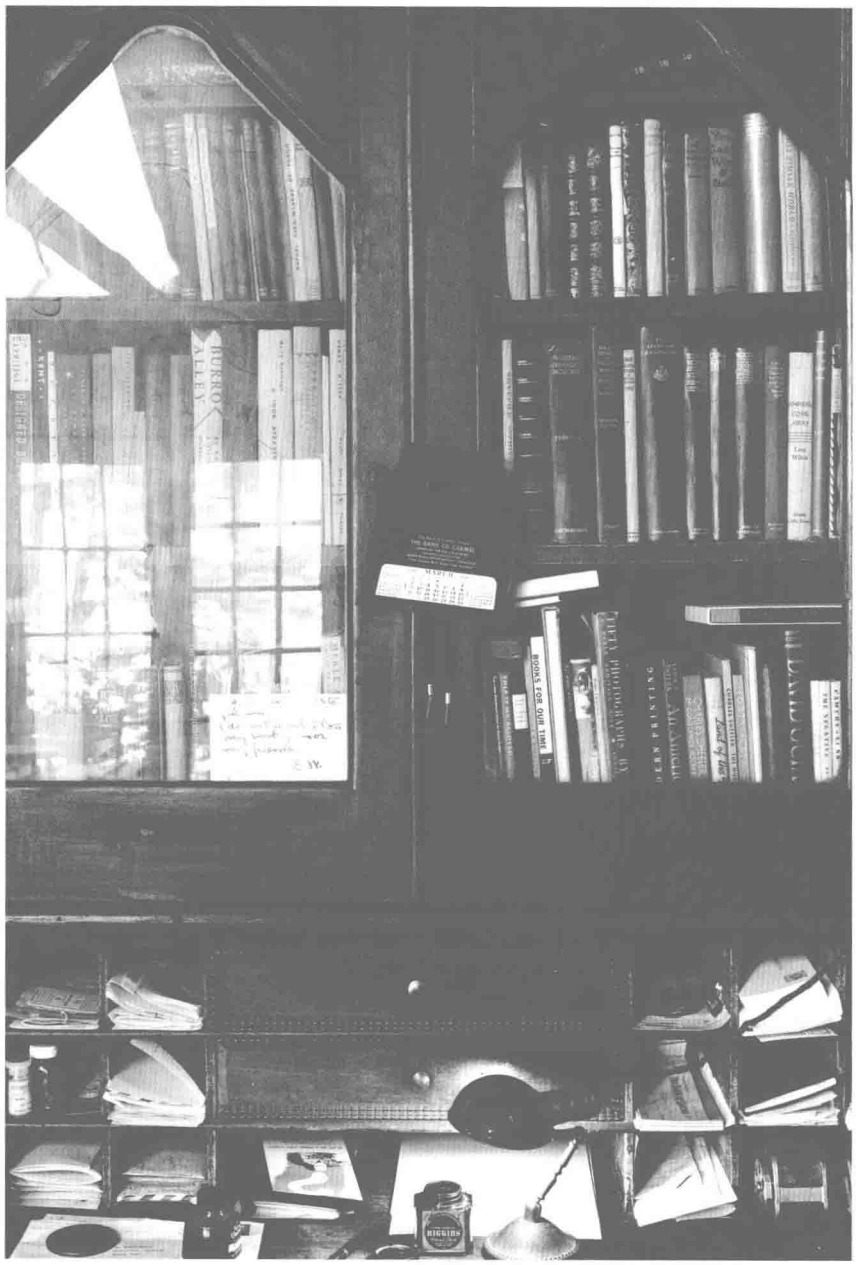
In photography he had had to find his way alone, first because as a boy he was too shy to ask and later because, when the fashionable attitudes and easy successes were behind him, the only photographers who would have understood him were, so far as he knew, three thousand miles away on the East Coast. He did see them once, briefly on a journey to New York City in 1922. The rest of the years he wrestled alone with his medium and himself. Painters, poets, dancers, musicians among his friends helped by their affirmations and insights into his work; great art, especially music, helped him form his goals. But how in a medium so young, so little understood, did one define art? And how could a creator live?

Films were slow in those days and exposures long; his old 8 x 10 was rickety and his bellows often leaked. And to the last, he trusted his own feeling for light more than any photoelectric meter. Deliberately he stripped his technique, his living, and seeing of unessentials and tried to concentrate on the objective and eternal—only to find that he could not and would not be bound even by his own dogma. How could he tell what he would see on his ground glass tomorrow?

In the early 1930s he ceased to be alone; his own sons were growing up, other young photographers were coming to share the search, he had love and companionship in his work. And he had solved his basic problems; he had worldwide recognition. The daybooks ceased in 1934, partly because the need for them had ceased, partly because he had always doubted his ability to write. From then on we glimpse the movements of his thought through his letters.

In this volume, Edward Weston speaks for himself, in his own words and photographs, of his long search "to present clearly my feeling for life with photographic beauty . . . without subterfuge or evasion in spirit or technique."

Nancy Newhall, 1965



Photograph of Edward Weston's desk by Dody Weston Thompson, 1952

2-21-'31
Peace again! - the exquisite hour
before dawn, here at my old desk---
seldom have I realized so keenly,
appreciated so fully, these still,
dark hours.

Preface

In the six years since Edward Weston passed away in Carmel, California, he remains in memory as a man of great spirit, integrity, and power. To me, he was a profound artist and friend in the deepest sense of the word. Living, as I do now, within a mile of his last home, sensing the same scents of the sea and the pine forests, the grayness of the same fogs, the glory of the same triumphal storms, and the ageless presence of the Point Lobos stone, I find it very difficult to realize he is no longer with us in actuality.

Edward understood thoughts and concepts which dwell on simple mystical levels. His work—direct and honest as it is—leaped from a deep intuition and belief in forces beyond the apparent and the factual. He accepted these forces as completely real and part of the total world of man and nature, only a small portion of which most of us experience directly. As with any great artist or imaginative scientist, the concept is immediate and clear, but the "working out" takes time, effort, and conscious evaluations.

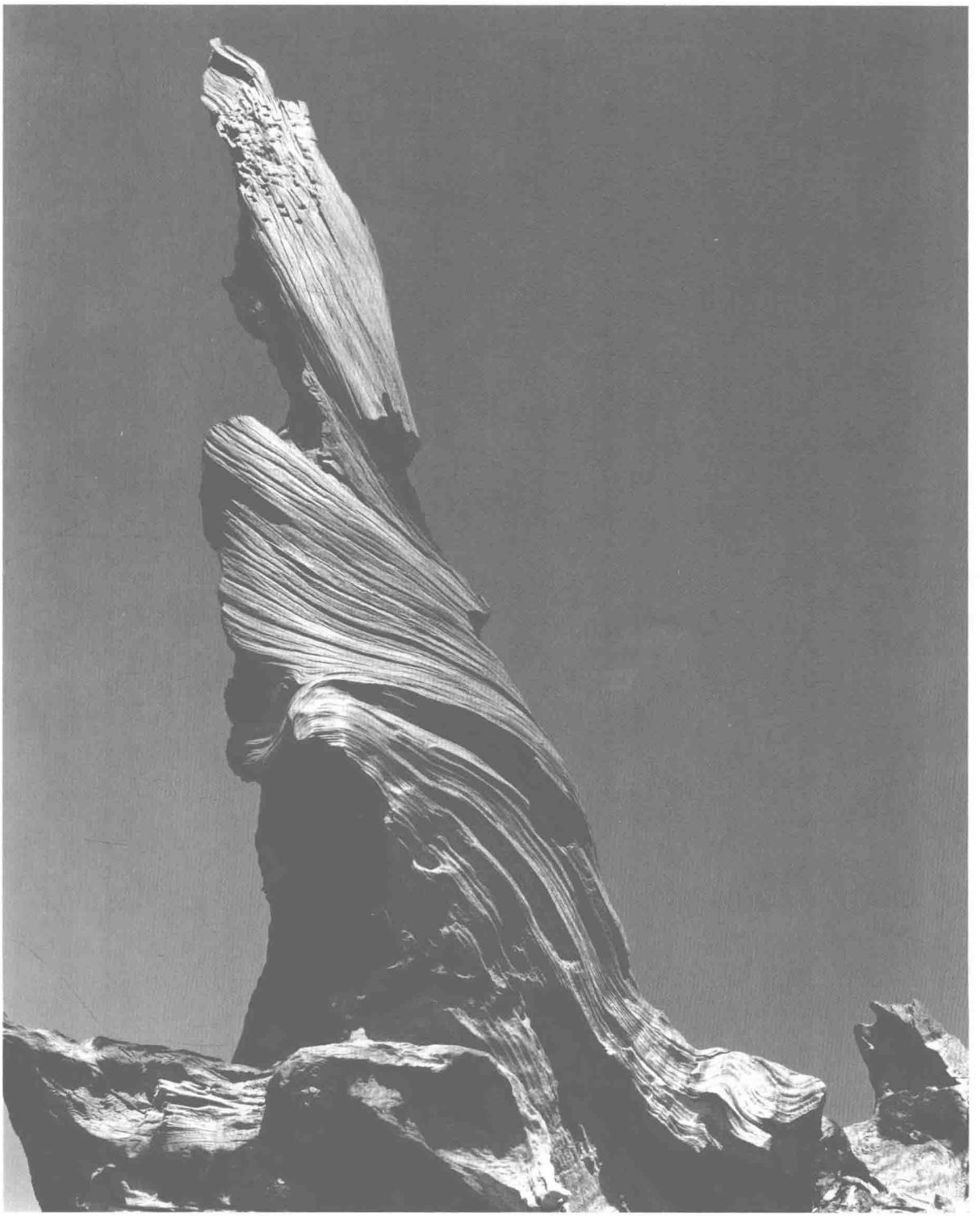
Edward Weston's work stood for him as a complete statement of the man and his art. He favored the grand sweep of creative projects. He was aware of the loneliness of the artist, especially the artist in photography, photography where out of the uncounted thousands of photographers only a handful of workers support the best of photojournalism, illustration, documentation, and poetic expression. And it was Weston who accomplished more than anyone, with the possible exception of Alfred Stieglitz, to elevate photography to the status of fine-art expression.

His approach bypassed the vast currents of pictorial photography, photojournalism, scientific-technical photography, and what is generally lumped together as "professional photography" (portraits of the usual "studio" kind, illustrations, and advertising). Through *his kind of* photography he opened up wonderful worlds of seeing and doing.

Many were the students and experts whose lives and concepts were profoundly modified by Edward's non-aggressive, non-preaching, but ever-comprehending approach to people and their expression problems. "Seeing" the Point Lobos Rocks was one thing, but encouraging another person to "see" something in his own way was the most important thing of all.

Edward's works need no evaluation here. I would prefer to join Edward in avoiding verbal or written explanations and definitions of creative work. Who can talk or write about the Bach partitas? You just play them or listen to them. They exist only in the world of music. Likewise, Edward's photographs exist only as original prints, or as in this monograph, in superb reproductions. Look at his photographs, look at them carefully, then look at yourselves—not critically, or with self-depreciation, or any sense of inferiority. Read the material from his *Daybooks* and letters so carefully compiled, edited, and associated with the photographs by Nancy Newhall. You might discover through Edward Weston's work how basically good you are, or might become. This is the way Edward Weston would want it to be.

Ansel Adams, 1964



Snag, Point Lobos, 1930

The Flame of Recognition

April 7, 1930, Carmel

The flame started first by amazement over subject matter, that flame which only a great artist can have—not the emotional pleasure of the layman—but the intuitive understanding and recognition relating obvious reality to the esoteric, must then be confined to a form within which it can burn with a focused intensity: otherwise it flares, smokes, and is lost like in an open bonfire.

So writing I do not place the artist on a pedestal, as a little god. He is only the interpreter of the inexpressible, for the layman, the link between the known and the unknown, the beyond. This is mysticism—of course! How else can one explain why a combination of lines by Kandinsky, or a form by Brancusi, not obviously related to the cognized world, does bring such intense response. . . . Granted the eye becomes excited, Why?

July 26, 1929, Carmel

I recall my dissatisfaction before going to New York, 1922. I was changing, and going in the right direction too: Stieglitz—my two hours with him focused me. Yet "Steel" and several other things made in Ohio, before seeing Stieglitz, were a forecast of my present work. In fact, I still show them as part of my present.

Armco Steel, Ohio, 1922

Crepusculo, 1924

September 13, 1923, Mexico City

I should be photographing more steel mills or paper factories, but here I am in romantic Mexico, and, willy-nilly, one is influenced by surroundings. I can, at least, be genuine. Life here is intense and dramatic, I do not need to photograph premeditated postures, and there are sunlit walls of fascinating surface textures, and there are clouds! They alone are sufficient to work with for many months and never tire.

January 7, 1924, Mexico City

I am finishing the portrait of Lupe. It is a heroic head, the best I have done in Mexico. With the Graflex, in direct sunlight I caught her, mouth open, talking and what could be more characteristic of Lupe. Singing or talking I must always remember her.

Guadalupe Marín de Rivera, 1924

February 3, 1924, Mexico City

I wanted to catch Galván's expression while shooting. We stopped by an old wall, the trigger of his Colt fell, and I released my shutter. Thirty paces away a peso dropped to the ground.

March 10, 1924, Mexico City

For what end is the camera best used? . . . The answer comes always more clearly after seeing a great work of the sculptor or painter . . . that the camera should be used for a recording of *life*, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the *thing itself*, whether polished steel or palpitating flesh.

I see in my recent negatives . . . pleasant and beautiful abstractions, intellectual juggleries which presented no profound problem. But in the several new heads of Lupe, Galván, and Tina I have caught fractions of seconds of emotional intensity which a worker in no other medium could have done as well . . . I shall let no chance pass to record interesting abstractions but I feel definite in my belief that the approach to photography—and its most difficult approach—is through realism.