

## High Values

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A friend of mine recently told me, “You are totally obsessed with high values.” He was not referring to my stock holdings (I have no idea what their values are) but to my photographs.

High values are those areas in a black and white photograph that are near white, but have some tone and texture. Subtle differences in high values can have dramatically different effects on the emotional response of the viewer.

High values are often not an accurate representation of the actual tonal values of the objects in the photograph. Darkroom (or computer) manipulation can change both individual tonal values and the relationships among them, creating an interpretation that can vary dramatically from reality. Anyone who has been to Yosemite National Park knows that the Yosemite of Ansel Adams’s photographs does not exist.

This violation of expectation can make the viewer uncomfortable. We may feel uneasy, for example, when a church we know is white is printed as a light gray. We are expecting the photograph to represent reality and with black and white it definitely doesn’t.

It is the decision of the photographer whether to depart from reality, and how far. In extreme cases, this interpretation, this unreality, can make the objects in the photograph unrecognizable, or nearly so. At the very least, it will cause viewers to pause and look more carefully, perhaps asking themselves, “What *is* that, anyway, and why does it make me feel the way I do?” High values seem to provoke this response more frequently than other tones in a photograph.

On my desk is a small, superficially unremarkable photograph of the Point Reyes peninsula (north of San Francisco). I look at it and melt. If I am angry or tense, it calms me immediately. Why? I have no idea. Tones and zones and textures can’t explain it. That is the magic of photography: that it can create such an ineffable emotional response in the viewer.

I began consciously exploring high values in my photographs five or six years ago, but a look through my proofs of the last twenty-five years shows that I have indeed been obsessed since the time I began trying to make serious photographs. The photographs in this essay are a sample, without regard to subject matter, of these explorations.

Richard Halliburton



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RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Window, Taos Pueblo, NM*  
7 × 9 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2003



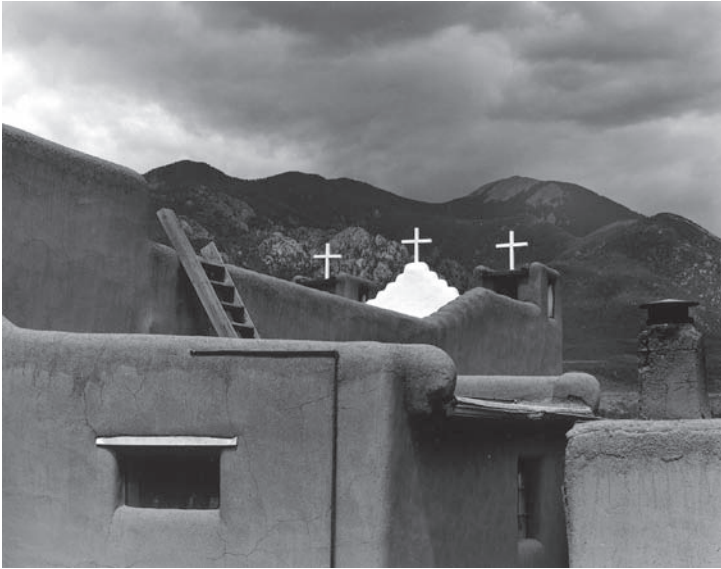
RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Spruce Tree House, Mesa Verde National Park*  
7 × 9 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
1995

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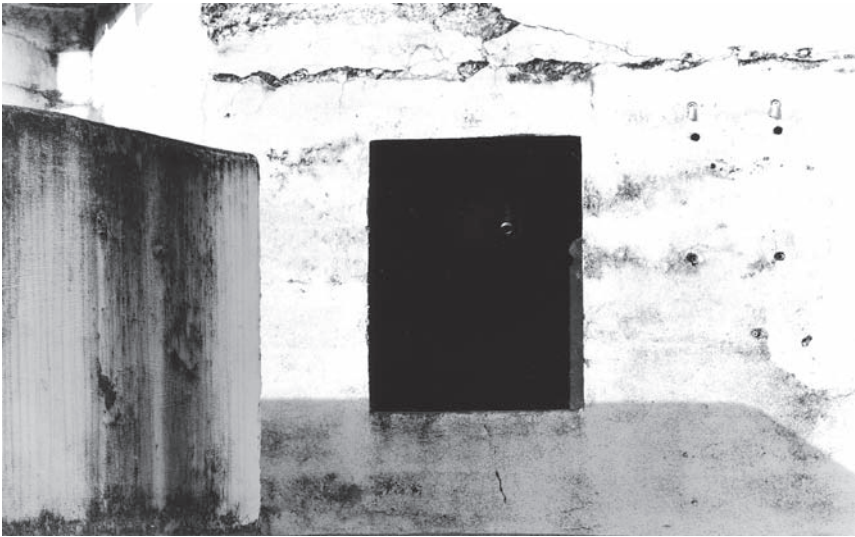


RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Windows, Fairfield Hills, CT*  
9.5 × 7.5 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2007

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RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Crosses, Taos Pueblo, NM*  
9.25 × 7.5 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2003



RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Battery Chamberlin, San Francisco, CA*  
9.25 × 6.75 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2006

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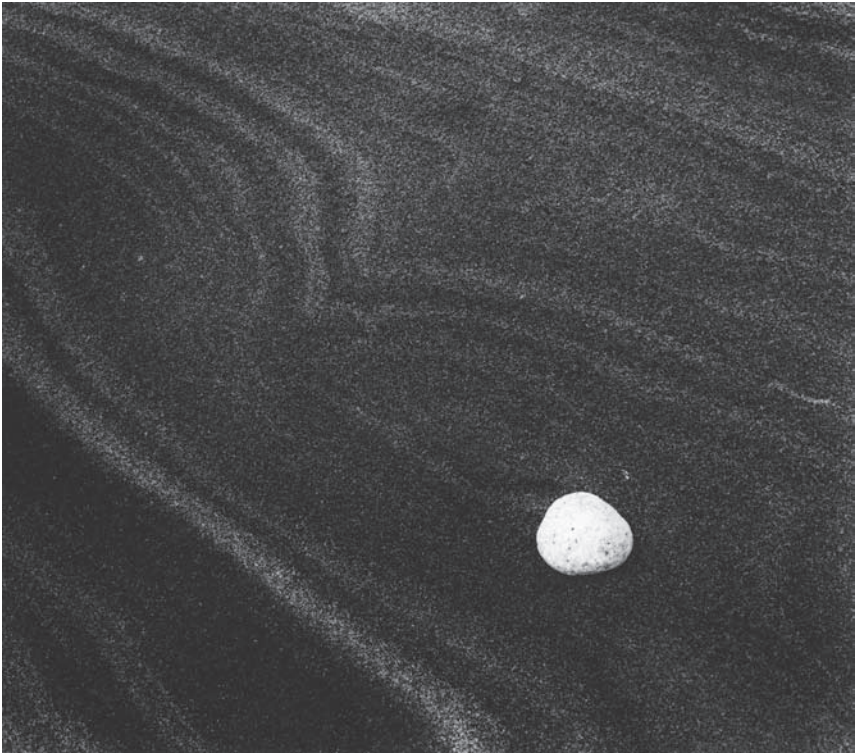


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RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *Column with Vines, Bethel, CT*  
7.5 × 9.25 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2003

Richard Halliburton



RICHARD HALLIBURTON, *White Stone, Block Island, RI*  
8 x 7 inches  
Silver gelatin print  
2000

Richard Halliburton is professor of biology at Western Connecticut State University. He teaches courses in genetics, evolutionary biology, and related subjects. He does research in population and evolutionary genetics, and is author of *Introduction to Population Genetics*, a leading textbook in the field. He spends his free time wandering the wild places of the world, in search of truth in black and white. His subject matter is traditional (some would say old-fashioned) and his equipment is outmoded (some would say archaic). He uses a folding wooden view camera little changed from those of the nineteenth century. His photographs have been exhibited and published in a variety of venues.