Howard BOSSEN, Eric FREEDMAN, Julie MIANECKI
Michigan State University, USA

SHAPED BY FIRE: HOW PHOTOGRAPHERS GAIN ACCESS TO STEEL MILLS

Key words: Photography, Steel mills, Ethics, Law, Access

INTRODUCTION

Shaped by Fire: How photographers gain access to steel mills is part of a larger project, “Molten Light: The Intertwined History of Steel and Photography.” This research contributes to an understanding of how the art of photographers over more than 150 years and across continents can be brought together to illuminate the complex interrelationships of steel—and more broadly, industry—and humankind. They tell, in a unique, symbolic way, a saga of the mid-nineteenth century through the start of the twenty-first century.

The history of photography and the making of modern steel have been interwoven since both were invented in the mid-19th century. Photographing the steel industry has always presented both technical and aesthetic challenges. Yet no obstacle has been more daunting than access. Mere fascination with industrial architecture, the dramatic processes of moving from raw iron ore to finished steel, or the many tasks performed by steelworkers doesn’t establish a right to take pictures of mills. Photographers first need to get inside. Where mills are government-owned, access may necessitate political or government connections. A corporation or its advertising agency may retain a photographer or photographers pull strings to gain entry, talk their way in, or sneak in surreptitiously. Without access, photographers can take pictures only from beyond the perimeter, and even that kind of access may be contested.

ETHICS, LAW, AND ACCESS

Legal and ethical concepts and explicit laws and professional standards overlap but are not identical. It may be lawful for paparazzi to stand on an elevated place, such as a hill in a park, and photograph celebrities’ sexual activities occurring behind a fence in a nearby private yard, yet that creates ethical questions. On the other hand, it may be ethical to photograph leaking drums of toxic chemicals on the grounds of an abandoned steel mill—thus disclosing public health hazards—but illegal to climb over a wall onto private property to make those photos.

Trespassing and privacy statutes and professional ethics codes vary widely from nation to nation, a fact that is particularly relevant for this study involving photographers from many countries who worked in many more countries. Two factors are time and occupation. Because statutes and ethics codes may be amended or revised, photographers in 2013 may face different legal constraints and professional standards than they would have faced ten, twenty, fifty, or one hundred years earlier, even in the same country.

In addition, many ethics codes are silent on the question of access to private property, although some encourage respect in general terms for privacy. Another major consideration is that codes are merely guidelines without force of law.

Most published research relevant to photographers’
access to property examines visual journalists’ access to public, not private property. There are two principal reasons: In the United States, the constitutional guarantee of press freedom imposes obligations on governments, not on private individuals and businesses, including landowners. Also, criminal and civil trespass laws are likelier to be enforced for intrusion on private rather than public property (Bossen, Freedman, and Mianecki).

By obeying the law, the absence of access may severely impair what photographers can do. In explaining restrictions he accepted in exchange for consent to work at a mill in Pennsylvania, American Tom Baril said that a minder limited where he could go in the facility: “So I got, the few pictures I did get, you know I’m happy with….There’s still access to the old part of the mill. But there’s a chain link fence around it. I guess you could shoot over it” (Baril).

Without permission, a photographer may violate trespassing or breaking-and-entering laws at risk of arrest and prosecution. That is what American Mark Perrott did after being refused access to a Jones & Laughlin mill. Thus he rejected Baril’s alternative of shooting over a fence:

I had known from walking around that if you go past the mill, there’s a cyclone fence with barbed wire. But there was a three-foot hole. I didn’t cut it, but there’s a hole in the bushes. I mean, I knew about the hole. And you could go in. And if you went in and it was dark, you could get to a little shed that was like a trainman’s shed, where you could stage your gear. And from there, you could work within the plant and literally be unseen, except for the most critical observer (Perrott).

Photographers facing such situations may make subjective decisions on balancing legal constraints against ethics imperatives. What circumstances justify committing a criminal act by entering corporate property without permission? Should it matter whether the violator photographs identifiable people or only physical objects? Is art a valid rationale for breaking the law? What about a wish to illuminate environmental contamination that may threaten public health or to reveal inhumane, exploitive, or perilous job conditions? Even when the answer is yes, would a judge or jury in a criminal case or civil suit accept a necessity defense (“And Forgive Them Their Trespasses”)?

**PRIOR RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTION**


When access became too difficult, Baril gave up, ending his project prematurely. Perrott circumvented denial of access by crawling through a hole in a fence.
The research question, then, is how have other photographers solved this problem?

**METHODOLOGY**

Based on extended face-to-face interviews and archival documents, as well as biographies, correspondence, and memoirs, this study delves into how photographers achieved access to steel mills in Asia, Europe, and North America.

**DISCUSSION: HOW PHOTOGRAPHERS TACKLE ACCESS TO STEEL MILLS**

Photographers cannot merely walk into an active or abandoned steel mill with a camera. Some are company employees, some are guests of management, and some are trespassers. They always must be inventive. Access accounts disclose much about themselves and the locales they photographed. Several described their working methods once inside a mill. Some also discussed their relationships with minders who accompanied them, and some talked about safety in such dramatic, challenging, and frequently dangerous situations.

Documentary and aesthetic aims, combined with the type of access and cooperation granted by a site owner, greatly influence the images photographers make. How freely they can move around a mill or how minders restrict an image-maker’s movements dramatically affects the images’ content and form.

Photography of steel mills started around the same time that modern steel making became possible through invention of the Bessemer converter (furnace) in 1855. Photographers have actively engaged this subject ever since. Alfred Krupp, the legendary German industrialist, took on Hugo van Werden as the company’s first full-time photographer in 1854 (von Dewitz 41–66). Van Werden received access because of his employee status.

Many, even most, photographs of mills were made under such an arrangement. They were intended to document the company’s work; aesthetic, artistic, cultural, and social aspects were secondary, if present at all. *Molten Light* focuses on photographers who wed artistic vision to industrial content. With rare exceptions, those included in *Molten Light* were not company employees; rather, they were independent documentary photographers and artists.

The stunning character of van Werden’s early photographs and his decades-long relationship with Krupp are even more fascinating because—as an employee—he was tasked with interpreting Krupp’s business vision, not his own artistic vision. Van Werden’s task was to document Krupp’s rapidly growing company. To document the plant’s expansion, van Werden began making periodic panoramas of the Kruppsche Gußstahlfabrik in 1861. These panoramas started modestly and became monumental. The first from 1861 has three panels; the 1867 one, with eleven panels, encompasses the broadest view of the expanding plant. The 1864 panorama was the most conceptually ambitious (von Dewitz).

Van Werden used the slow, cumbersome wet collodion process. He planned camera positions and calculated how much to move the camera to create the next panel. Although a master technician who created extraordinary photographs, he received instructions directly from Krupp and created images to serve the company’s business needs as determined by its head. Krupp decided which elements of his operation to feature (Fig. 1). Placement of carriage wheels, cannons, trains, and people all needed to be considered. Then, a cast of hundreds was assembled, placed properly, and ordered to hold their positions.

Fig. 1. Hugo van Werden, German, 8-panel panorama, Kruppsche Gußstahlfabrik (Krupp Cast Steel Works), 1864, Albumen prints. Courtesy of Historische Archiv Krupp, Essen, Germany
while van Werden made each exposure. His 1864 panorama encapsulates the Krupp enterprise and provides a metaphor for the emerging modern steel industry—labor, transportation, and war are all represented. The completed piece has eight panels; panels three, four, and five incorporate more than 150 employees. Although posed, they were choreographed to look as if they were working. Thus workers became human props to show the intensive manpower the early industrial age required, as well as to showcase the size of the Krupp operation.

As technology evolved, photographic materials became more light-sensitive and lenses became faster, making possible interior scenes of workers and the processes they used. By the late 1890s, industrial photography was common practice; by the early 20th century, steel was being photographed in all regions of the industrialized world. When steelmaking started to contract in the West in the last third of the 20th century—and as it moved east to Asia and south to Latin America—photographers followed.

While possible approaches to photographing steel have expanded greatly since the mid-1800s and processes of steelmaking have metamorphosed from a system that required ever-more workers to today's computerized mills that need only a few highly skilled workers, one thing has not changed: Photography "by its nature...requires direct observation," and photojournalists and other photographers "must be physically present" and can't "construct their reports from second-hand sources (Kim).

Margaret Bourke-White, the pioneering American industrial photographer and photojournalist, solved the access question for the first mill she wanted to photograph through a direct request to a company owner sympathetic to the needs of a charming young photographer. By comparison, she received access for three trips to Soviet Russia through direct government intervention.

Bourke-White described getting access to Otis Steel in Ohio in 1928, before she became renowned—even before she had ever made an industrial photograph. In an unpublished 1933 draft of an autobiography, she wrote about what she learned in the process and how pictures made during those five months were critical to jump-starting her career:

The thing I wanted to do most in the world was to take the first successful steel photographs. I managed to get introduced to the President of a Cleveland [Ohio] steel mill. He had admired my photographs of flower gardens, but he was skeptical about my finding anything artistic in his mill. All I wanted was a chance to try. He gave me permission and fortunately for me went off to Europe. That was splendid because it gave me the chance to make the most exhaustive experiments. The executives at the plant thought I would go down there one night and make a few snapshots. I went every night for a whole winter.

After months of failure I learned the things I wanted to learn about the difficult factory lighting. It was the best education I could have had. After a half a year I had twelve pictures. I had thrown away five hundred negatives for every picture I kept (Bourke-White Folder: Biographical Material).

Bourke-White's mill photographs won notice from American magazine publisher Henry Luce, who in 1929 offered her a position as a photographer for his about-to-be-launched Fortune. Her first major photo-essay, about a hog-processing plant, appeared there. When Luce launched Life Magazine in 1936, her dramatic photograph of the Fort Peck Dam graced its cover. Her visits to Russia (1930, 1932, and 1933) visually documented its rapid industrialization under Joseph Stalin. It is one thing to ask a mill owner in your own city for consent; it is quite another to arrange access halfway around the world in a nation not known for liberal views about communication. While working mostly on still photographs, she also developed a movie script and shot footage for a never-completed documentary. An unpublished film treatment describes a dramatic scene she plans to shoot and then makes a remark that is as revealing about politics as it is about her ideas regarding
the importance of her work as a photographer and filmmaker:

(Shots structural work, showing more Magneto-Gersk—sounds of riveting—flash of Russian men working—flash of women workers—flash of scaffolding—back to me and gas off-take pipe.)

I went to take blast furnace views from above...climb up three sets of ladders...still not high enough...climb up inside of gas off-take pipe...can just get traction with feet...emerge at top...sit on edge...difficulties getting balanced on slope...begin taking pictures...workers begin hammering on pipe...pipe shakes violently but I hang on. At last get picture...make my way down inside pipe...down three sets of ladders...reach ground, call out “Hey you”...Soviet hammerers look up shocked and begin to babble in Russian.

MBW: “I guess God is not only with the Bolsheviks but also with industrial photographers” (Bourke-White Folder: Eyes on Russia and Red Republic).

This film treatment makes it clear that she resolved the access issue; if she hadn’t, she couldn’t have shot the kind of scene she describes. Another typescript in her archive discusses why she wanted to go to Russia, a country that Western photographers had found impossible to get into since the Bolshevik Revolution:

I went to Russia because here was a country doing the most exciting things in the world. Here was a country just beginning to build, just learning how to run factories, and I wanted to watch it happen. And more than that here was a country that felt as I did about industry. Here were a people who thought about dynamos as beautiful, who loved the rush of molten metal in a steel mill just because it was a magnificent spectacle. Who believed as I do that the artist of today will find a real and living beauty in machines because this is a machine age (Bourke-White Folder: NBC).

This typescript underscores why she wanted to work there and how passionate she was about the beauty found in industrial subjects. Another typescript discusses her initial frustration with the process of getting into Russia and then—as an official guest—her unprecedented access to industrial sites throughout the country:

I felt that in Russia was a unique opportunity to record an industrial sequence, an opportunity that had never come before in the history of the world...I got to Berlin and here I met a difficulty. For some time I thought I would not be able to get in at all. I had to wait five weeks for my visa....Perhaps the Soviet Officials did not know exactly what an industrial photographer could be. I thought I would not be allowed to enter when suddenly I got my visa and in I went.

I was in Moscow only two days before I was made a guest of the Government. ... It just happened that I was doing something that they wanted to have done—I was making pictures of industry and they believed, as I do, that industry holds important artistic material and they were glad to have me take pictures of their Five-Year Plan. I was given the most official papers with red seals, purple stamps and red ink signatures commanding Soviet citizens to help me in my work....But I used my papers in all sorts of unofficial ways. If we went to a town where there was a food shortage my interpreter took me immediately to the office of the Chief of Police, displayed my papers with many gestures, we would go marching down the streets with a squad of red soldiers on each side of us straight for the food shops and if there was half-a-pound of sugar in that town, I got it (Bourke-White Folder: Russia).

Bourke-White could not have made her Russian photographs without full official cooperation. She shot still photographs with a view camera on a tripod and, at times, got very close to her subjects, as
evident in her photograph *Iron Puddler*, made at the Red October Rolling Mill in Stalingrad.

In contrast, Peter Nyblom, a Swedish steelworker-turned-photographer, was considerably more constrained in access to the mill that employed him. He and journalist and industrial historian Jan af Geijerstam produced a book, *Mitt i världen, mitt i tiden* (In the Middle of the World, in the Middle of Time) (af Geijerstam and Nyblom), about the mill’s closing, dismantlement, and relocation to India for reassembly into an operating mill. Nyblom remarked that although he was employed there, permission was necessary to photograph. Management often prohibited access to parts of the mill but let him set up a small studio where he took portraits of workers (Fig. 2). When Nyblom and af Geijerstam went to India, they found access easier than in Sweden. Asked about their reception in Bangalore, af Geijerstam responded:

> We were really welcome, both by the owner and by the trade union at the company. I think the main difficulty, … was to get in contact or get to know anything of the unorganized temporary workers and the women at the work site, because those groups of the mills were kind of never seen. Nonexistent, really, … the women, they were working, but we never got any chance to speak to them. And we needed an interpreter, of course.

Although they were never allowed to speak to workers Nyblom could photograph the process of steel-making, as well as make many portraits, including a hauntingly beautiful one of a female worker in the mill clothed in traditional dress (Fig. 3). This portrait in *Mitt i världen, mitt i tiden* is opposite a short section titled “The slag mountain.” Here af Geijerstam describes some of the women’s work:

> Up by the oven several workers began to burn holes for the tapping with an oxygen lance. The women stood still for an instant. They then began to work again. It was not the tapping they waited for. One of them had just gone to fetch a new pickax.

> Two women carried and three shoveled. One man sat the whole time on the tractor and waited for them to finish. The tapping began. It spattered and emitted sparks when the steel ran down the chamber. The women moved aside a bit.

> Farther into the steel mill, at the strand-casting machine, another group of women worked, they also had a male supervisor. They chopped and carried off an enormous slag mountain that was constantly replenished with new layers of burning hot slag (af Geijerstam and Nyblom).

Other images show workers, many of them women, picking through piles of scrap without any protective clothing. Nyblom’s images and af Geijerstam’s words reveal—from a Western perspective—how little regard management had for a safe working environment. They also demonstrate that it is at times not in the company’s interest to grant access to independent photographers and writers.

Gaining access can be most difficult in a country much less open than the United States or Western Europe, as Bourke-White learned in the 1930s. While the world has changed dramatically from when she visited Russia, figuring out how to gain access remains challenging. The difficulty of getting
in and being allowed to work unfettered can be magnified if the company is state-owned like Bao Steel. Noah Weinzweig, Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky’s assistant in China detailed how he and Burtynsky secured entry there, a story involving ingenuity and extensive cooperation from the Canadian government.\(^3\) The story illustrates how the work of an important artist can be used as a tool of diplomacy. And it demonstrates how permission granted from a desire to be diplomatic can also be used as a shield to shift responsibility if something goes wrong. Weinzweig said:

Bao is owned by the government, so we had to go through foreign affairs, in Shanghai. … [E]arly on, I realized that I needed political weight behind this project. … So I went to the Canadian embassy here. And this was the best thing. … I did for our project. I said, “Listen.” I brought in a couple of Ed’s books. … and I said, “My name’s Noah. I’m working for this very famous artist in Canada…. We’re having a lot of difficulty getting into these places. … [I]s there anything you could do?”

There’s this guy…who…was the head of cultural affairs at the time. He was *magnificent.* … And he said, “This is what we’re going to do. We’re going to write you a letter. We’re going to introduce Ed. We’re going to send it to the foreign ministry. We’re going to let them know about it…. In China, you know, everyone liked me, they liked the idea; they liked Ed’s work. They wanted to help. I mean, when I say everyone, I mean managers of big factories and owners and the steel mills and whoever. But it’s a responsibility issue. Ultimately, if we go in there and shoot photographs and something goes wrong—whether during the photography or afterwards, politically—who’s going to take responsibility? With a letter from the government of Canada, it’s the ultimate scapegoat for everyone, because they can just point the blame and say, “You know what? The government of Canada said this

---

**Fig. 3.** Peter Nyblom, Swedish, b. Finland, *The Slag Mountain,* 1993, Bhoruka, India. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the photographer
The guy is a great artist and . . . a national treasure of Canada.” So they can just point the blame somewhere else…. It’s perfect. Once I learned about abdication of responsibility, I figured out how to work the landscape.4

While Weinzweig had solved the problem of getting in, working in China did not always go smoothly. A scene in Manufactured Landscapes, the award-winning 2007 documentary film by Jennifer Baichwal, shows Weinzweig in a heated discussion with Bao Steel officials, one of the companies Burtynsky planned to photograph.5

The officials tell Weinzweig and Burtynsky that photography is not allowed and that the person who gave permission lacked authority to do so. Weinzweig eventually persuades the minders to take them to the site—high ground overlooking mountains of coal used in Bao’s mills. The minders either lack the imagination to visualize the image Burtynsky planned to make or, perhaps, understand that no matter how beautiful the resulting image is, it still raises uncomfortable questions about environmental problems surrounding steel production. Thus through a bit of subterfuge, Burtynsky can make his powerful photographs that draw visual parallels between the created and manufactured landscape.6

Gilles Perrin of France, who photographed Chinese industry in 1999 and 2000, had experiences similar to the bureaucratic problems that Weinzweig and Burtynsky faced. At the suggestion of a Chinese photographer in 1999, Shanghai Municipality officials invited Perrin and other foreigners to photograph the city. Perrin, who works closely with his wife Nicole Ewenczyk, is noted for his humanistic portraits, studies of ceremonial life in Africa, and images of farming, fishing, and heavy industry (Fig. 4). For almost twenty-five years they have been on a global odyssey studying how people live and work. They are concerned with making an artistic and ethnographic record of ways of life before those ways are altered by the pressures of the modern world and are fascinated by those who are shaping the post-industrial world. Perrin, who studied mechanical engineering when young, also studied lighting and had worked in the film industry, asked to photograph steel mills. Ewenczyk recalled their work in China:

As Gilles asked to photograph a steel factory, they arranged the meeting at the mill and we were left alone in the factory so we could go everywhere, photograph what we wanted. It was quite dangerous. Fortunately Gilles knows how those factories work and he knew what to photograph.

Each day, during [the course of] a week, the film was developed by the team; we had contact sheets and negatives back the following day. [The officials] never said anything about the pictures. They printed a book and a few of Gilles’ images were chosen (Ewenczyk).

While Perrin and Ewenczyk had freedom during their 1999 visit to photograph what they wanted,
the situation differed greatly in 2000, according to Ewenczyk:

It was much more difficult as we had to face people who knew nothing about photography in their team, we had to face their stupid bureaucracy. They just wanted images of touristic propaganda and would not listen to our suggestions....It was quite surprising to us that we could have access to the steel mill [because] when we asked to go to a farm, they answered “all pigs are ill” or “all cows are ill, no one can go to any farm.”

The [Chinese] team was … confused between political propaganda and visual communication. As we argued daily, we decided to keep the best images for us and gave them our second choice. [This turned out to be] a good idea as we discovered later they wanted to boycott us. We thought we would be sad not to have any image published, but on the contrary we were really happy because the book printed was of bad quality...

Despite the problems in 2000 they were free to exhibit and publish the work outside of China. Perrin’s panoramic image of the interior of a steel mill illustrates his understanding of dramatic, cinematic lighting. It also reveals the hot, almost Dantesque, quality of a steel mill interior.

American Michael Schultz has worked for many years on a large-scale study of steel mills and foundries (Fig. 5). His work has taken him all over the United States, throughout Europe, and to China. Unlike most other photographers interviewed for this study, Schultz had to solve access problems on a rolling, continuing basis. He needed to determine how permission to work in one mill or foundry could facilitate getting into the next one. Asked what it takes to arrange to gain entry, he talked about trust and respect for a company’s proprietary secrets.

Well, I think that what it takes is the companies must have some sense of trust. If I had one word, it’d be trust. They’ve gotta know that you’re coming in not to take away from

them, and by that I mean secrets, proprietary secrets of how the castings are made. And they've gotta have a sense that you're going to honor your word, that you're not gonna publish your work without their permission. If you can gain that trust, you can gain access (Schultz).

Schultz became a specialist with a deep understanding of processes used in steelmaking and foundry work. His industry knowledge, combined with artistic talent, opened doors to what he described as a “hidden industry.” It was a pattern of one person leading to another, and of friends, colleagues, and even competitors embracing his artistic vision for the industry:

[You get] to know one person who knows another person, because the foundry industry’s very tight, CEOs and presidents and foundry managers know all the other foundries in the area or in their particular sector of castings, they know them, sometimes globally. So you demonstrate that you’re trustworthy and they like work that you do, you can sometimes use them as a reference. Not always a direct reference, but you can reference that you’ve worked in that foundry and the next person down the line will know, “Okay, if so-and-so let you in, then you’re probably a pretty good Joe, we’ll let you in.” So that’s how we worked, we worked on trust (Schultz).

German Uwe Niggemeier has devoted himself to the photography of steel, has worked in many countries and described the access process:

It’s trial and error. You write a letter and then you call later, and you always are lucky to get the right person. If you get the wrong one, that’s the end of it. … The larger the mill is, the larger the company, the more difficult it is because more people are involved in the decision. And with a small company, you often have got a boss or a kind of family run business and they say, “Okay, come in. I like the idea” (Niggemeier).

At one point, he and Schultz made an industrial photographic odyssey together. While Niggemeier managed to get into mills across the world, he found United States Steel (U. S. Steel) less than hospitable. Local police met him at its Clairton, Pennsylvania plant (Fig. 6). Their intention through intimidation was to prevent him from making photographs.

They have a horrible attitude to everything that was pictures from outside. We were really hunted by them. Well, they had no right,
Fig. 7. Uwe Niggemeier, German, Braddock, Pennsylvania, 2007, Analog film, Digital ink jet print. Courtesy of the photographer.

Fig. 8. Mark Perrott, American, Eliza, Fallen Furnace, 1981, Selenium toned gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the photographer.
but we were in Clairton. There was a nice row of old houses, all closed down. Must’ve been four, six bars. Everything’s closed down. And in the back, the mill is still running. And they came out first with their security guard. And we told them, “You have no right to hassle us. We are on public ground here. And they said, “Okay, show us your ID.” … And then a police car showed up; showed ID. Another police car showed up. In the end, we were sitting there in the middle with three police cars around us. And then we traveled on to Braddock, where the other active mill is, and they were already waiting for us there (Fig. 7). We went to the backside on a public road, took a picture from the backside into the mill, and immediately they were there. They came high speed down the road and told us, “You’ve been warned before.” We told them, “You don’t have to warn us, we are on public ground.” And they said, “Well, just wait a minute.”

(...) I have experienced things like this in Poland, where they are very strict about industrial photography. You are not allowed to do anything, even from public roads.

(...) Other mills are just—Especially [Arcelor] Mittal, the company is very open. Though you should expect coming from India that they are, in some way, behind in public relations (Niggemeier).

Steel companies make decisions they believe are in their best interests. While U.S. Steel took a hard line by excluding Niggemeier, Perrott trespassed to photograph its Eliza Works plant in Pittsburgh in the early 1980s. Perrott, who learned of plans to close the plant, believed it should be documented before dismantlement. It was a time of great contraction in the American steel industry as mills closed across the country and throughout Europe. Steel’s golden age had ended in the West, and Perrott wanted to preserve the sad remnants of the industry through a poetic documentary study. His 1981 Fallen Furnace poetically symbolizes the end of Big Steel in the United States and Western Europe (Fig. 8).

Previously he had photographed in several Jones & Laughlin plants and wrote to company President Tom Graham. He recalled that letter:

“Dear Mr. Graham, I think this is a moment in history that can’t be missed. … I’m asking permission to go in and make photographs at my expense. And I’d be happy to sign any waivers of liability that might appease your law department.” Sent that letter thinking, that’s my first step, just ask. Will you let me in? Ten days later I got a letter back from public relations saying, essentially, go to hell. … Having been inside those places and understanding those places, I knew everything they were going to say. … We’re just not going to be part of that in any way whatsoever (Perrott).

Perrott broke the law rather than scuttling the project.

U.S. owners primarily controlled access, whether their mill or foundry was small and family-owned or belonged to a huge multi-national conglomerate. In some instances it was different in Europe where powerful trade unions could demand entry for
people they wanted inside. Bernard Bay of Belgium made his photographs at the request of a union and received great freedom to make the pictures he wanted. His haunting portrait of a steelworker wearing goggles and protective clothing was made in 1983 (Fig. 9).

Bay described that freedom and the collaborative process of working with the union, not with the company:

> When I go out of the school, some people there had already seen my pictures, so they asked me to do pictures in this factory. But they let me do what I would like to do. They don't tell me you have to take pictures of the machines, pictures of the man who works with the machine, like this, like this. No, I was free. And then we made a choice together, inside my pictures…. And we discussed. And if I say, "This is better; I prefer this one," it was okay like this (Bay).

Asked whether management objected to his presence, he replied:

> It was very, very easy at that time, because I took pictures where no photographers were welcome at that time. Because they were closing some places, so they don't want to have a photographer to take pictures, even if it's not controversial photography, it was documentary. But I must say the left unions are very powerful inside the steel industry in Belgium. So I had not to ask the director to go in sometimes (Bay).

**CONCLUSION**

The industry dramatically changed as Western mills shut down; hundreds of thousands of jobs disappeared, devastating communities. Photographers who had been attracted to the drama and power of the industry as industrialization created the modern world began turning their lenses on issues of deindustrialization, industrial pollution, and the dismemberment of mills in the West and their resurrection in countries such as India and Brazil. Since van Werden made his panoramas of the Krupp works at the dawn of the industrial age, photographers have been fascinated by the documentary and artistic possibilities of steel mills. Although coming from many countries and working across more than a century and a half, their stories about gaining access are remarkably similar in many ways. They relate—and maybe exaggerate—how they got inside to create powerful and moving photographs. They also disclose a deep love and fascination with steel as a material, steelmaking as a process, and steelworkers as multi-dimensional people who helped build the modern world. They describe not just how they got in, but also how the specific type of access influenced the images they could make and the technical problems they confronted. Photographing in mills was not merely a job. Rather, it was a labor of love and artistry driven by a passion to reveal what steel meant to them and to society.

In pursuing their mission, photographers learned that the ability to make steel photographs leaves them almost always reliant on corporate or government cooperation. They learned that entry does not guarantee freedom to take pictures of whatever they want, wherever they desire in the industrial landscape.

The first obstacle has always been “how do I get in and how can I find the pictures I want to create?” That became ever more onerous in the aftermath of the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 that made companies and governments warier about allowing access to industrial workplaces and, often, more suspicious of the motives of those requesting access. In addition, society expresses expanding concern about privacy—of individuals and, on a business level, of proprietary information—around the globe in an era when technology makes intrusion increasingly easy.

**Works Cited**

1. And Forgive Them Their Trespasses: Applying the Defense of Necessity to the Critical Conduct of the


Notes

1 More than 30 professionals were interviewed from 12 countries for this project. Photographers from these countries mentioned access issues: Belgium, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Sometimes the access issue related to working in a country other than their own; for example, a Swedish photographer talked about access to mills in India, and a Canadian photographer discussed working in China.

2 In the collodion process, the photographer had to coat the glass plate with light-sensitive material, make the exposure, and then process that glass plate while the collodion was still wet before moving on to the creation of the next photograph.

3 Edward Burtynsky’s China photographs can be viewed on his website http://www.edwardburtynsky.com.

4 Ibid.

5 For more information on Manufactured Landscapes, see the website of Zeitgeist Films at http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/film.php?directoryname=manufacturedlandscapes.


Howard BOSSEN, Eric FREEDMAN, Julie MIANECKI
Mičigano valstijos universitetas, JAV

UŽGRŪDINTI UGNIMI: KAIP FOTOGRAFAI SKINASI KELIĄ Į PLIENO GAMYKLAS.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: fotografija, plieno gamyba, etika, teisė, leidimas

Santrauka

Norėdami fotografuoti metalurgiją, plieno liejyklos darbininkus ar apleistų plieno gamyklų būklę, fotografai privalo gauti leidimą, išduodamą valstybės tarnautojų, įmonių arba profesinių sąjungų. Tačiau jie toks leidimas netrukdo fotografui, kuris pradėtų fotografuoti, kaip tik patenkinti jį dominančias vietas, pažeidžiant taisykles. Šis straipsnis remiasi interviu ir dokumentiniais šaltiniais, tiriama, kaip fotografai Europoje, Azijoje ir Jungtinėse Valstijose susidoroją su šia problema, kad galėtų užfiksuoti vaizdus ir atskleisti plieno ir plieno pramonės poveikį visuomenei, industrializacijos ir deindustrializacijos procesus ar žmonių, dirbančių šiuose fabrikuose, darbo sąlygas. Straipsnyje pateikiamas šių žmonių patirtis kintant fotografijos technologijoms, aptariami teisiniai ir etiniai aspektai, galintys turėti įtakos fotografų pasirinkimui norint patekti į metalurgijos gamyklas. Padarytos nuotraukos pateikia plačiajai visuomenei įžvalgas apie sudėtingą plieno gamybos pasaulį ir jame dirbančius žmones, padeda geriau suvokti gamybos procesų medžiagos, kuri taip dažnai naudojama ir žinoma kiekvienam.