

classical values in art. But, with the rise of modernism in the 20th century, aesthetic standards changed. Photography, however, continued to express the “official” values of Western culture. “The beauty and moral dignity (the two are really one) of the ordinary is at the heart of what we might call democratic classicism, but to top-level intellectuals . . . that ethos is aesthetically heretical,” Seamon observes. Yet these were the values on display in the work of the great 20th-century photographers, such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Henri Cartier-Bresson—values epitomized in the famous

1955 exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, *The Family of Man*.

Since the 1970s, Seamon notes, photography has enjoyed wider critical acceptance, as some avant-garde photographers have abandoned “pure” photography for what he calls the romantic aesthetic. Their work, Seamon argues, “emphasizes the eccentric, ironic, allegedly ‘individual’ response, whereas photography is an expression of communal ideals.” The question, Seamon suggests, is whether by embracing the romantic aesthetic, photography is losing many of its unique and most important characteristics.

OTHER NATIONS

The Liberal Solzhenitsyn

“Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism” by David G. Rowley, in *Journal of Contemporary History* (July 1997), SAGE Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91359.

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, after his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1974, thundered against the West’s materialism and waxed nostalgic for traditional Russian values, disappointed Western liberals swiftly dismissed him as a “Russian nationalist.” Yet when he returned to his homeland in 1994, he was enthusiastically welcomed by Russian liberals—and denounced and vilified by right-wing “nationalists.”

“What went unremarked in the [Western] debate over how liberal or authoritarian Solzhenitsyn was,” writes Rowley, a historian at the University of North Dakota, “was the fact that he stood for something unprecedented in Russian history. He has consistently advocated a Russia by, of and for Russians; he wants the Russian nation to be congruent with the Russian state. It is pre-eminently upon this point that Solzhenitsyn differs from the Russian chauvinist right wing.”

Nationalist leaders such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Gennady Zyuganov are the ones who are mislabeled, Rowley says. They are not nationalists, but imperialists who want to rebuild the old Soviet empire. Solzhenitsyn, by contrast, “is a staunch anti-imperialist.” In his 1990 brochure, *Rebuilding Russia*, he urged that Russia give up its empire, though he hoped

that Belarus and Ukraine, as well as certain traditionally Russian territories within other Soviet republics, would remain part of Russia. A critic of *perestroika* (he favored far more gradual change), Solzhenitsyn is now critical of the Russian Federation, which he calls “a false Leninist invention. Russia was never a federation.”

“Solzhenitsyn’s support of democracy continues to be extremely limited and grudging,” Rowley claims, amounting to “little more than support for a strong presidency and local autonomy.” It is not so much his political principles that distinguish him from the right-wing chauvinists, according to Rowley, as his conception of the Russian state.

Solzhenitsyn “provides an alternative to the messianic concept of Russian imperialism that has underlain the traditional conceptions of Russian national identity,” Rowley concludes. “A consistent and implacable foe of imperialism, Solzhenitsyn is a nationalist of a very modern and Western type.” Indeed, Rowley says, his defense of modern

nationalism may turn out to be his greatest contribution to his country. “If Yeltsin is Russia’s Cavour,” he suggests, “Solzhenitsyn is her Mazzini.”

