APRIL RAPIER ON KURT KREN
PHILLIP LOPATE ON FILM
MARK JOHNSTONE & THE MATERIAL WORLD OF IMAGES
HUGUENIN'S NUCLEAR PFAHL-OUT/DICK TALK VIDEO CRITIQUE/CUTFORTH ON PORTRAiture/PETER BROWN'S RIDDLE
REVIEWS BY JILL A. KYLE, THERESA THOMAS, LIZ MENGEL, ROBERT ESTEP, ED OSOWSKI
SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY

Houston International Film Festival offers a wide range of films but shows lack of boldness by excluding the work of avant-garde directors.

By Phillip Lopate

In the five years I have been going to the Houston International Film Festival, I have watched it evolve from a pretty carefree, ragamuffin affair to a more ambitious and professional operation. This year had probably the best lineup of films ever. One could see a bunch of independent, little films that had already opened in New York and gotten good reviews (sometimes, as it turned out, unfairly), such as Sweat Talk. My Beautiful Laundrette, Having Gallows, Always, and Superfly.

There were also some big studio movies that were about to go into general release, but premiered during the ten-day event, such as Salvador and White Heat. But where the festival really performed a service was in bringing to light a few gems that had not yet opened anywhere, and maybe never will. Such films include: Falling, a strange, moving, and disturbingly intelligent film that chronicles the life of a young girl and her family. The film is told through flashbacks and dreams, creating a sense of mystery and suspense. The acting is superb, with standout performances by the young actress who plays the girl and the supporting actors who play her family.

Another impressive film that was shown was My Beautiful Laundrette. It is a film about an adolescent boy who takes over his family's laundrette business and uses it as a means of expressing his sexuality. The film is both witty and poignant, and the acting is excellent, especially by the young man who plays the boy.

A third impressive film that was shown was Always, a film about a woman who goes back in time to save her husband from a tragic accident. The film is very well-crafted and the acting is excellent, especially by the young woman who plays the woman.

In short, the Houston International Film Festival does operate from a very strong, clear aesthetic viewpoint. Interestingly, I thought, we were a wide range of films to pull in different audiences: says Steve Buck, the festival's program director.

A typical Houston Film Festival will have something for the new wave music crowd, something for the gays, something for different ethnic groups, something for the yuppies, something for those who get to really crank camp movies, and even something for film buffs like myself. It's the kind of festival that offers a generous and unerring cup of studio fare, independent and avant-garde film, and documentaries. We strive to include all types of films that are of interest to the audience.

As a film buff, I admit I would appreciate a more varied program, and I don't think audiences would expect each section to come up to a certain artistic level, be it what I call the "spectacle of hitherto lost older films and restored classics, and which had a stronger sense of historic continuity and a better representaton of the cutting edge of world cinema. Each year at the Houston Film Festival I find myself wondering why there aren't any works by those who own the old and iconic scholars such as Chaplin, Keaton, the prolific Saul Baal, Godard, Breton, Jacques Rivette of France, Angelopoulous of Greece, Antonioni (whose last two films have been shown in Houston, though both were in the New York Film Festival) of Italy; Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Yromme Rainer, Louis Borden, and Mark Rappaport of the United States; Joo Botelho and Manuel de Oliveira of Portugal; Lenne (Brocchi of the Philippines; Hugule and Dallima of Japan; the Straub, Rainer Bauer, Werner Schroeter, Daniel Schmid, and Ross von Pfefferen of Germany. Peter Greenaway and Chris Petit from England; Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Noriaki of Brazil; New India Cinema: Tarkovsky from Russia; Janussi of Poland, etc. These films may not be all household names, but they are among the film artists most intensely discussed in cinematic circles today. Their exclusion after year from the Houston Film Festival suggests a rather serious lack of daring, not to mention scholarship, on the part of festival organizers.

Now I can anticipate the festival's counterargument: There's no audience in Houston for those exotic films: we would lose our shirts if we showed them. Perhaps so, but the only way to build a knowledgeable, adventurous audience for film art in this town is to begin to slip in some more difficult and challenging fare, along with films that go down as easily as a gulped oyster. A film festival has a pedagogical, as well as an expository function— or should have.

The Houston Film Festival's aim— to discover and promote film, to treat each title as an isolated expression uncommon to the director's past work or other patterns of cinematic culture— may be partly explained by the fact that all of those three events are artists in the business end of movies. I Hunter Todd, the festival's chairman, and Cassie Claburn, a film import and production company, Steve Buck, the program director, work for AMC Theaters, overseeing the Greenway T and Woody Woodward, the festival director, who is employed by Warner Classics. Regardless of how much pure love these men have for movies, their festival is conditioned by an exhibitor/distributor mentality, which treats each film as a discrete commercial package. How can we sell this city on the idea that we can stand more input from knowledgeable film critics and scholars, the way the Telluride Film Festival uses William A. Everson or Tom Luddy as consultants, or do we as a city, as a festival to turn to people like Susan Sontag and Andrew Sarris? Having said all this, I want to add that Todd, Buck, and Woodward have rendered a valuable and heroic service to the community in keeping this festival going. They have sold a salary by putting the festival together in their spare time as a hobby, and they have a smooth operation on a shoe-string budget, without the sort of corporate sponsorship or local anti-counterculture, a filmically richly, eclectic film festival in the world. Perhaps their scatter-shot programming approach is more appropriate to these times, when there is no such thing as a ball game, in the availability of new art films, or even great entertainment movies. The Houston International Film Festival deserves particular credit for digging out the best of Poland, and Terry Skolmodi, it was made a few years ago by a movie company that was burned out, and now has become an international distribution film. Imbo, Skolmodi is himself in that limbo of emigre Eastern European directors, along with Dusan Makavejev, Ivan Passer, and Andrei Konchalovsky, who are unable to make films again in their native countries because of politics and censorship, and who must hustle money financing deals and low budget crews all over the globe.

Skolmodi, director of Deep East and The Voices, may have achieved his most perfectly sustained piece of filmmaking in Tao, which was

1986
The film revolves around tensions of motion and static, a lightness, we learn, is never meant to move, but to caution other vessels with its revolving light. Dooloi and his goons try to force the captain to liberate the ship from its immobility and sail away, while the crew and the captain’s teenage son are contemptuous of him for not rushing the gang and fighting them off. The captain’s refusal to budge—seen at first as cowardice—the product of past disgrace—ultimately comes to seem curiously active and courageous.

Another happy discovery was Sharmeen’s Mask, subtitled A Modula on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South During the Era of Nuclear Test-Explosions. This witty, quirky feature poses as the film diary of Rosas Maricel, a woman who has been commissioned to make a documentary about the life of the women in a southern town. The film presents an incandescent search for the South of available women, as one after another of his intended companions drops out or appears, shortly after he meets her. Along the way we are treated to poignant glimpses of the New South: family, fun, the Beatles, Burt Reynolds, groupies, survival freaks, the Rapture, celluloid exercises, Scottish clan gatherings. The film may be too long by half an hour (and several screenwriters, but the accumulation does enforce the point that black people and non-blacks seem ruled by patterns of attraction they feel powerless to change. In his case, the peculiar attractiveness of a few well-endowed, church-going women, an attractive young woman who is clearly intellectual as himself, and a decided soft spot for marginally talented black, his ownนามs, trying to break into show business.

McElwaine has been called a “Tarzan-Woody Allen.” Actually we come to know the people in his movies as if they were friends, with much more truthful shading than anyone in the fairy-tale world of Woody Allen’s characters. sax in Brown, Latin in Brewer, a British new-wave film in The Double Life of Vidal. But in Last Year at Marienbad the working-class girls who pick up two Russian sailors, was another fresh, delectable find. The list goes down the list of Missions, typical of the “dean” of the city’s non-profit film societies, but the actor plays the character in a way that makes the viewer sympathetic with the struggle.

Forced to name my favorite movie of the ten days, I would probably select Kaui Hele. The Diary of a Woman. I am told this “Vietnamese drama” is considered the best film ever made by the Republic of China. What a pity that the Republic of China withdrew its Officially sanctioned film could have its Baw’s flag been taken down, and the film organizers understandably refused Myself. I have fewer principles; I would have taken the flags down just to be able to show both Chinese flags (next year hang balloons; guns) in any event, Kaui-Hele traces the adult life of a bejeweled actress, as she marries a man who turns out to be a consumptive gambler, raises his rebellious children from a previous marriage, works as a domestic in a wealthy Chinese home abroad, slaves to start her own restaurant, parts from her husband when he is unfaithful to her, comes back to him reluctant—grows old and eventually is seen dying of stomach cancer. The director’s delicate but unsparing handling of this “woman’s picture” material owes much to the Japanese film masters Naruse, Ozu and Mise- guchi, but he has clearly arrived at a mature, philosophically measured style all his own. Most remarkable is the title performance by a great Chinese actress who ages believably from a pretty, pony-tailed teenager to a pregnant wife to a chubby matron no longer appealing to her husband, to an old woman, wasting away in the hospital—all the while keeping a consistent spine of character.

It’s interesting how this severely troubled film was dismissed by a local critic as ‘a soap opera’ simply because it dwelt on a woman’s sufferings and included several scenes of the melodramatic of Salvador, which was infinitely more sentimental and clichéd. One hesitates to criticize an American studio movie that takes on so serious a subject as U.S. imperialism in Central America, and whose heart is so obviously in the right place. I would have to say that I didn’t approve the picture. Nevertheless, Sal- vador proved to be such a vulgar caricature of history, so ham-fisted in its handling of heroes and villains, that for the film—and I hope, last year in my life, I almost found myself sympathizing perversely with the right-wing death squads, fast for dramatical balance. Not that their opponents, the de-eyew, arm-chair generals, were given any more dimensionality. Indeed, in this new movie genre of the sided was the corresponding who learns commitment to the People’s cause from getting too close to Stalin. It is the old action-war movie genre dis- approved as Hollywood social con- sciences, only the white reporter gets to have inner lives. You could shuffle the images from Oscar Fire, Year of Living Dangerously, and Salvador—the voyeuristic treats of charred bodies, gasoline explosions, brown-skinned masses armed with sticks rioting against government tanks boring down on them—and nobody would be the wiser. It makes Salvador typical in its class in its pop-out, fan-tastic, Capability, played by James Wood and Jim Belushi, as if director Oliver Stone were trying the Annual Hear audience. I regret to say that Salvador was chosen best picture by the Festival jury. Closing night brought the festival a touch of glamour with the appear- ance of an honest-gone-gal movie star Alan Alda. Here to plug his film Swept Away, which he wrote direct- ed, and starred in. Mr. Alida fielded questions for all an hour with gra- ciousness, intelligence, and insight, turning what could have been a dull self-promotion into an exhilarating teaching situation. I wish I could have liked Mr. Alda on screen as much as I did in real life, but he still has a directional tendency to smooth things over and to let the obvious good-goosey character play off the hook. He should take lessons from Albert Brooks, who in The Big Year Sees: Swept Away has his funny moments and sharp little behavioral observations, but every time it ventures toward the irrecusable stuff of great comedy it sluggish for- cer to the diffuse: "feet-"7 good"-" of TV sitcom endings.

The Houston Film Festival is an enthusiastic devoted following, but for some odd reason it is still not treated as a major in the arts. Perhaps our artistic life is still undergoing a period of insufficiency, but the future is far too promising to determine. Without it I don’t see how we could function. It is a pity that the Houston Film Festival had to open at the end of the festival. It would have been a great time to open the festival with the closing reception. Next year the festival opens early in the fall and we shall have a chance to see more of the films and the artists. The Houston Film Festival has proved itself again and again. What ever faults I may find in it, it is a for- merly a quarter. I am deeply grateful for the cinematic feast they lay out year after year, as are others who are fortunate and fortunate to attend. Though the festival had opened at the end of the festival last year, it is now clear to the Greenway and it is the end of the festival, the Belvedere city. Greenway lobby had become home away from home. A cameraderie had developed among the red-eyed stalwarts, those festival regulars who kept breathing into each other in line. "What have you liked so far?" we would ask each other, and private memories in their own fields, some people’s tastes violently different with ours. When the last film was over we would all talk to me and said, "Now what will I do with my life?"

Swept Away, John Savage (left) and James Wood (right)
TAKING THE CAMERA OUT FOR A WALK

By April Repler

Kurt Kren is clearly a man enamored with his camera. He talks and makes art; he learns things. Sometimes it puzzles him, for the computer is not logical, nor is it mathematical, in the way his films are. In fact, the computer makes no sense, Kren feels that. With regard to Kren and his films, no straightforward, clear-cut portrait is forthcoming: he is kind, unemotional, evasive, real smart, insipient, careful. He seems always ready with a contradiction, for the world is an unruly place. (Filmographies pithily illustrate the disparities.) His sense of humor is very subtle, heightened by the necessity of being an interest listener. The writing is heavily accented; the stories are great, especially later on—now saves them, goes over them, gleanings from his riddles. During our conversations, I made the mistake of calling him an artist; to his horror, he was incriminated. His language is precise, often untranslatable, coded. Entry is restricted.

His passage into the world of film (not video) seems to have occupied a primal event, and has the feel of an incipient decision. After being told by a professor in Holland, where he was a part of his childhood, that modern art was shit, he returned to Vienna (at age 17), deciding to see for himself. First by investigating the galleries and museums, then by getting into an artist's club (the vehicle was a poem, the year was around 1950). Soon after, he bought an eight millimeter camera and promptly broke it. Something he has continued to do with alarming regularity—some people are manipulatonic—Kren is a technologically-technological. About this expensive problem, he says, "It's just a joke."

This was not his first experience with film; however, in Holland, he would watch film stock free of its emulsion, then draw on it, a technique that he has expanded upon through his career. The artistic concept holds great fascination, considering it a starting point for an European artist of the time: his core was a group of amateurs, students, and practicing artists.

Kurt Kren, from Multiple, Box 5

learning technique from each other, the evolution of an aesthetic intention, as though it were something one could arrange for; organize. His first film, Das Walk (a German English fusion that sounded peculiar to him), was about a woman who walked in cemeteries. When I asked him what, if anything, he did change about it, he said that he'd rather title it 'gender-specific or plural.' He still likes cemeteries. His films operate on a purely visual level; then as now, otherwise he said he'd write a book instead. Sometimes it seems that to be designated artist constitutes a naive calling. The idea of an implied communication in each film points to an essential human necessity, the most fundamental relationship of all—human to human. Kren is a shy man, who, one feels, would rather remain clear of the absurd, logical transactions that characterize percentage-most of daily interactions. He is (and is seems possible for a human to be, and very dehumanizing), the reason that a return to Austria seems unlikely is that there are "too many friends." To resume filmmaking, the necessary and missing element being a "click" of inspiration, might also hinge on emotional involvement; his computer seems a far more unconditioned friend. This implicitly suggests, however, an openness to possibility, especially in the realm of future films.

In the early 1960's, the most progressive gallery in Vienna was run by the Catholic Church—Galerie St. Stephan—and some pretty wild films and good company with other art were getting around. Kren had a job in a bank (as committed, where he was to work for several years), his films debuted at St. Stephan, with the help of Kubelik, and then later with the Austrian Film Museum. The steady and oddy clustered outputs of films that transpired over the next twenty odd years established him as one of the world's great avant-garde. Movement is an aspect of Kren and his work—he doesn't seem to settle anywhere regardless of the amount of time spent in one place. In fact, he sees his time in Houston as monastic, a retreat. When pressed for details regarding life in any particular place, he mumbles something about "missing the train." So much for intentionality or burning desire. "My life is not made of planned events, just happens." Just as he feels, sometimes, like taking the camera out for a walk. In his发生 around 1967, that his film 6-67/20 (September, a political/revolutionary piece about "eating, drinking, pissing and shitting"—a demonstrable, unvaried progression—prompt him to his bank job, although he fortiified his pension, he was granted a freedom that he still holds dear. He said of this film, in an at once gleeful and resigned apology of sorts, "It's very dirty."

Many friends will hate me after having read this. They'll say, "It's too dirty."

This ongoing chain of events—always situational—that has led him over the planet, never hinges on devotion. Although Kren projects a restless, obstinate image. Nowhere is this more evident than in the political animal that is resurrected when Reagonal, the former Soviet films, is mentioned. (An interestingly skewed perception about the US emerges in a story he recalls of a Viennese dog who dies of shock when hearing an American police and ambulance siren.) Perhaps when seen in tandem with the possibilities of computers, the following best defines his attitude regarding the conceptual genre: the time something (images) gets printed, it's gone. Mal art, a genre he's been involved in since its inception, embodies the present in a most useful form. I am certain that he will find my speculative notions amusing and useless.

It became easier to understand his method of approaching film when he illustrated his matter-of-factness with a story. He was asked to shoot and deliver a film for a festival, given four day's notice, which he did (Fast-Seat-Out). He normally takes a long time with a film, this one he terms a "tape." He removed his name and copyright from the piece. "Probably this last film," I asked, "whether he's ever seen a print. Yes, it's great," he replied. "Yet the film screened before he ever saw it. He simply isn't dictated by art, nor is he strung out over past acclaim. The computer is a language, not unlike any of the others he speaks. Its most clear-cut reference to his films is in the methodical, precise designing capacity. His preparatory materials were the same—mathematic-al, ordi-

Kurt Kren: Etudes film scores

narily it has been said that almost all his work raises philosophical questions about the relationship between experience and structure. Drawings, silhouettes, collage, prints from scores, and photographs accompany the film; in a brilliant marketing idea, he shot his own fifteen minute films in a portfolio with the attendant artwork. Chronological places order and date accompany the titles: the films are from three seconds to twelve minutes in length.
MELTING THE MATERIAL WORLD

"We are less convinced by what we hear than by what we see." — Hesiodus: "Hymnes"

By Mark Johnstone

It is a good thing that the fears of photography held by various primitive tribes and cultures are unfounded. If the camera eye could depile or capture the spirit of its subject, the world would have long ago been sucked dry. Objects would cease to exist, and the world would be drained of all meaning. Photography fills the space of our lives and the definitive meaning of any image is semantically at best. What have photographers told us about the world, or what do they tell us about life today?

Meaning is not reflexively mordant to specific objects, for there is a difference between an object and a picture of it. Decoding photography remains a misunderstood—and pivotal—operation for the average person. The confusion has long been a part of popular culture: "I knew something fishy was going on," said Jimmy Stewart, as a reporter trying to prove a man's innocence (Agnes Boulton 1949). "I have a photograph!"

Photography created a new set of social, political, philosophical, and psychological ramifications for consideration of the world. Mechanization and industrialization, at the beginning of the 19th century, turned out a diversity of new production techniques and objects, shifting the economic order of the world. These shifts brought about equally profound changes in existing political and social structures. In the past 200 years, to oversimplify grossly, through the phenomenon of manufacturing the creation, design, construction, and marketing of products, the production of objects has formed a worldwide basis for social and economic development. Products are embellished with seemingly infinite physical characteristics of function and appearance. The codification of knowledge has been directed into the production of things. An object can be improved in design or function, mass produced and constructed less expensively, or skilfully marketed. Products can be made to assume various forms which will satisfy vastly dissimilar tastes.

The most common form of object in today's world is the image. Photography has quietly created an extension of perception affecting us on many levels. Yet the rise of an image culture has been so encompassing that the average person rarely thinks about it.

"What's wrong with illusion?" 'You'll find out some day' —Carole Lombard asking Cary Grant (in Nae Oeta, 1939)

Daguerre's announcement of a new method to mirror reality did not magically restructure the world in 1839. The change may have begun with Galle's first supplementary investigations of the heavens (1609-1610), which were an effort to understand, and thereby master, the limits of the natural world. The advent of the telescope and microscope to Holland, in the 16th and 17th centuries, also expanded the way nature was considered and viewed. The subsequent shifts in thinking which developed from this period can be traced through the accomplishments of the educated classes during the Ages of Enlightenment and Reason. But neither Daguerre's announcement and the facts of photography, or manufacturing, can fully explain the changes in social structure or the intellectual climate of a given period.

Photography, as a medium of expression and communication, foreshadowed the Information Age of the mid-twentieth century. It disrupted the traditional hierarchy of information as it was controlled and dispersed by the "learned" classes. In 1860 the awe-inspiring of a famous personality could be placed next to...
The image of one's own family. The functional change wrought by mass media communications: magazines, radio, and later television) was fundamental. By 1960 any television personality could occupy a position of intense social traction. In London, Soupy Sales and John F. Kennedy were made partners in the vast, emerging world of modern image transmission. The populations watching television in the 1930's were subject to a fractured sense of hierarchical values. The growth of a technological society not only changed the marketplace, but also the workplace, as it increased the size of the work force from five people: office. By 1945, everyone had access to a copy of the office document. Information, even the most unimportant bit, became part of the common currency of day-to-day functioning. It was no longer particularly significant what purpose the information served. Quantity of data became a symbol of power. The possessions of respect which had previously been the goals of a technocratic bourgeoisie were replaced with lists which could be acquired through power. "Status" became the defining ingredient of social structure.

How existence is perpetuated within identified social structures can be understood in terms of sensorial inhabituation. Our ancestors developed eyes that could see well enough to avoid the lethal and, like their modern day counterparts, had a physical dependency on visual stimuli. Visual images are interpreted through a complex cognitive system including: anthropological, sociological, and physiological functions. Information was literally augmented with an increased auditory and tactile sensibility, whereas modern man grapples with imagery in increased intellectual terms. Modern culture can be divided into two leading components: image "constructors" and image "consumers." The image constructors include all media, and the consumers are all of us.

"Technique is a major component of creative effort and is regulated by the procedures inscribed in the equipment. The technical characteristics of each medium have determined the rate of creators to consumers. The dynamic between the two areas is crucial to an understanding of how visual information functions in a community. Painting has relatively few creators and many consumers. Photography has a higher balance ratio, except in the case of transmedia such as mass media magazines, film or television. One seeks to separate and define, at least for the purposes of art, two factors of image creation: the creative effort and the symbolic content of the work. One might also seek to assess, for the purposes of writing about art, the effect of the work on public thinking and behavior. The still image remains the most basic piece of information to be examined. In a gallery, for example, viewer has the ability to identify the role of the artist (image creators) and may be able to separate functionally the processes of creation and consumption. Productions of a complicated technical nature make the basic process of definition and reconstruction more difficult. As Diane Arbus pointed out, "It always seemed to me that photography leads to dull static facts whereas film moves to and with fakes." The first example I know is when you go to the movies and you see two people in bed, you're willing to put bat aside the fact that you perfectly well know that there was a director and a cameraman and assorted personnel all at some room and the two people in bed telecommunications and information. Still photograph companies such a small part of electronic or cinematic imagery that it is only proper to examine all photographically generated imagery. The largest, and by implication the most dominant, portion of this imagery is not produced by the art world. We live in America, in an age when there is a history of the present. The United States, a mere 25 years ago, experienced via television and news reports the drive to place a man on the moon. Now, through written narrative and filmic reconstruction, a new generation knows that period in dramatic and


[Image]: "I don't have a photograph, but you can have my: footprints. They're up there in my feet." (Gracchi Mars, A Night at the Opera, 1933)

It is problematic to isolate still photography as the dominant cultural message carrier in the age of

fictionalized terms, "television" "doo-dah-drama" blend fact and fabrication and the dividing line between the two becomes indistinguishable. In The Right Stuff (1983) actual documentary footage was combined with dramatic recreation and it is difficult-if not impossible—to delineate between the two modes. The sensory environment created by television and film has so overwhelmed the viewing population that it is natural to expect the mode of communication to be superficial and entertaining. There is little, if any, attempt by the average viewer to cope with what may be beyond immediate appearances. Television programmes, until the twentieth century, rarely decompressed the space of a stage. The traditional use of theatrical stage space was translated into early cinema which, through the history of

and the images and the speech of the nursery. The intelligent Eye is the first time confronted with an essentially unreflected future whose precise objective limitations are found to fail. As we see it most we submit to what we have created" the danger is that we may create a world beyond the resources of our intelligence: a world we cannot see.

When is TV entertainment TV? Hell, it's TV—"larry McPheron (founder and editor of Rolling Stone)

The photographers born between 1945 and 1960 experienced a fundamental shift in the information supplied to them during their development—from radio and printed magazines to television. The predominant evolutionary trend of world culture, over the past twenty-five years, points to an elevation of the eye over all other human senses. Seeing is believing and visual verification has become the measuring stick for most day-to-day information.

The functional analysis of photography exists, photographs often form one part of a person's memory. "You go up with snapshots as memorial devices which can be embellished with oral accounts. Today, virtually anyone with the surrogates records of personal heritage will probably have difficulty deciphering what and who and where (subjective memory) from the fact of a snapshot, or be able to identify exactly the emblems woven into the image by the picture making ritual. Picture "fiction" historians to mix colors which purportively matched the originals, during the restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings. The Left Sutter (1979) is a guidebook used to judge the relative accuracy of perspectives in Caravaggio's paintings. Image of the True Cross: Titling of the Dominions (1495). Verification was established, through an analysis of his rendering of the Kluo Bridge. That Caracci painted "things as he saw them." The concluding reference was that his descriptions of Venetian life in the painting should be accepted as being "accurate" and "true." The "use of computers for investigations of science or is interesting, but is presently limited to the formal properties of an image. A far greater issue exists in those ethical questions surrounding the alteration of news photographs routinely released by the wire services, such as the Associated Press. Alterations are not unusual, and the public is largely unaware that such manipulations even take place. It may be recognized that the media controlled by other governments engage in this practice; but we remain unaware when similar occurrences exist in our own news services. There exists a potential for dis-
A histrionification of the present is a deadly serious issue in educational and intellectual terms. When actions and actresses are accepted for the knowledge they represent in Hollywood productions, a fundamental shift has occurred in the hierarchy of information. The US Congressional hearings of early 1983 provide an excellent example of this change. Sissy Spacek, Jane Fonda and Sally Field testified during the hearings on the plight of the American farmer, after having started the previous year in movies depicting the current economic struggles of farm life.

A distorting trend in contemporary journalism can be found in the success of the Gannett newspaper publication, USA Today. It characterizes itself as a form of the "new journalism of hope," contrasted with a prevailing "journalism of despair," and is a "quick read" modeled after television. Gannett, in fact, even modeled the machines selling the papers after television sets. The editors have made sure that strategic moves in shaping the paper's format. Stories are abbreviated into short digestible nuggets, less than 1500 words, and pages are filled with dashes of color, graphs and charts. The editors have observed, for example, that sports fans don't want to read stories recounting the games; they only want the statistics—and that is what fills the sports pages.

In a larger sense this precisely what sport has become—a game of statistics. Statistics and lists are a guiding criterion for American culture, because they represent compressed information—and time means money. But lists and tables of statistics lack the necessary supplemental information that allows for the establishment of meaning. Generalities are created to assess individual accomplishments, perhaps due to the laborious task of creating fresh insights. Encyclopedias were the 19th-century form of gathering ideas and facts, and today the computer provides similar services, but with greater capabilities of indexing and cross-checking information. Society, as an organism, has developed a central nervous system of information. But as matter and energy have degraded, so too has information. The word "imagination" stems from the visual image, but is now applied to all forms of conceptual thought, visual or otherwise. Despite incessant usage and skewed definitions, words will remain as our most basic and immediate (perhaps even effective) way of grasping with ideas.

Symbolism is becoming a more dominant characteristic of social existence, as everyone can "create" or be "creative." When creative multiplicity can partially compensate for a relative deficiency in image quality (look to the history of the snapshot, or the evolution of television), the factor of technological innovation has been acknowledged for its broad social impact.

Our national knowledge of the world, as promulgated by photography, has not led to a greater freedom. The struggle for status has supplanted the needs of survival. Self-identity has become intertwined with the identity of mass society, as values are arbitrarily apprehended from mass media. We have witnessed a melting of the material world. This is an age of needs, when the means must be found to identify the meaning of the images affecting our lives. It is not an insurmountable task, but one necessitating new forms of education. Only by such innovations will images cease to sway us in illogical ways, and allow us to come to a portion of our destiny.

"At earlier orders in Hank Paul Lontoni, a mathematician and imaginative thinker, whose discussions and writing have helped fuel and further many of these conceptions over the past six years."

FOOTNOTES

This essay was written prior to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. For the light of that disaster the issues discussed in this article take on more urgency. —James Haggin, Chicago, Illinois

By James R. Haggin

I immediately wanted to take the essay apart—steam-by-steam. The book had been published in 1984, but I procrastinated in obtaining a copy until a few days ago when I bought a hardcover, cloth-bound copy at the Los Angeles County Art Museum for twenty-five dollars. I placed it on my desk where it displaced ninety square inches of scarce table-top until I accidentally knocked it off several days later. The tome tumbled open to page one hundred and seventy-nine, revealing a color reproduction of one of John Pratt's photographs from his Power Places series—an idyllic view of the Three-Mile Island Nuclear Plant taken in May 1982. On the facing page was the beginning of an essay, "John Pratt: Power Places," by Sally Ecuyuer. I needed no further invitation to pick up Ecuyuer's book. Greenleaf Press: Exploratory Photographic Essay and read what she had to say about Pratt's lucid color images, luminous inspired arcadian vistas in which nestled a woodsy cabin or a little barn, the utilitarian architecture of the sources of our nation's electrical energy. Hydroelectric and nuclear power plants.

"In John Pratt's Power Places," begins Ecuyuer, "the conflict between the machine and the garden that has raged since the beginning of the Republic looks happily resolved." This initial reading of Pratt's imagery is the most obvious, the most open to the layperson, and is so admitted by Ecuyuer herself when she mentions that the proponents of the utilitarian industries have responded favorably to these photographs. Indeed, these pictures could easily grace any utility company's calendar or annual report. She, however, goes on to complicating this reading by sketching out what she considers as the less obvious, more existential and sophisticated, connotations inherent in Pratt's photographs.

But now the tension—and relief—of that conflict are higher than ever before. Pratt's visualization must be set in front of his photographs certain scenes suggesting the transcendental powers of nature deliberately juxtaposed with signs of a technologically powerful society as if it neither threatens for the very world itself. Consequently, says Ecuyuer, the images may also be read as a veiled attack upon the very power plants whose proponents find Pratt's pictures a sympathetic vision of a natural future where a benevolent nature will live in harmony with nature's most destructive potentiality: the atom. (The fact that Pratt trains his camera on hydroelectric power plants, in addition to nuclear power, to a great extent obviates Ecuyuer's reading of Pratt's imagery as critical of his subject matter.) Ecuyuer in a reading that ignores the pleasant association usually attached to sunsets, dramatic cloud effects and reflecting water argues that anti-nuclear protesters can "point to frozen grey waters, apocalyptic sunsets, and other embellishments of doomsday." But she glosses over the fact that these images are not reactionary, politically naive. At best, they can only reinforce the pre-existing values of those who view them—proponents for the plants will read the photographs as celebratory, as confirming their vision, while those concerned citizens against such plants could, with a stretch of the imagination, find them indirectly accusatory. Either way, Pratt has failed to take a firm position via his photos. He does not seek to educate people to the dangers inherent in nuclear power, to change the opinions of those who fail to see the impact of such plants on our ecology and the future of the human prospect. This "wallowing" is, according to Ecuyuer, a more complex handling of subject matter than seen in the work of committed political photographers whose normative stances she believes smack of a dictatorship, hence appeal only weakly to an affective audience. According to this trend of criticism excessive denotation overwhelms the complexities of connotation. But Pratt, according to Ecuyuer, follows the proper path toward an aesthetic ambiguity: While his photos reveal the potential ideal under technological encroachment, Pratt encourages us to see them. Just how these complex meanings are to be discerned by the essayist herself: Pratt's work is as elusive as the two sides of a tennis court. Perhaps it is the art-for-art's sake motif. Setting aside direct confrontation with ecological questions, Pratt places pictorial priorities foremost. The artist's moral and political inexactness is the issue of energy versus ecology. An inexactness pointed out by Ecuyuer herself has been twisted by this essayist's semantics into "complex musings" into a positive esthetic virtuosity reminiscent of the critical program of the New Critics.

Writing on poetry during the 1960s and 1970s, I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom and William Empson—opposed irony, tension, ambiguity and emotive language to the straightforward discourse of a scientific explanation. Ideas in the realm of poetics, were not to be presented paltly and near- ly the task of poetry was not to exemplify or produce ideas, but to become involved in the "enactment stuff of life," as one writer put it. Such "complex musings" were gauges for the esthetic complexity of the organic whole, the autonomous entity; that is, the poem. Distance detachment, impersonality and frictionality were qualities admired by the New Critics; qualities Ecuyuer finds in Pratt's work. In his book Seven Types of Ambiguity, William Empson mentions the "ambiguity of the fourth type" which "occurs when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind in the author." It is this "complicated state of mind" that Ecuyuer, attempts to elucidate in her essay. However, after reading her essay, that complicated state of mind can only refer to Pratt's politi
cal simplism-mindedness as it is refracted through the murky waters of Ecuyuer's arguments.

Ecuyuer borrows heavily from the New Critics' theoretical architecture in arguing the four main points in her essay:

1) That Pratt's imagery is not unquestioningly celebrating our technology. Pratt's technology, Ecuyuer corporates a tension tension, as understood by the New Critics was derived from leaping the pretexts off extension and intension, signifying that the meaning of poetry, its

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Lisa Leon: January from the calendar A View From Three Mile Island (1984)

JANUARY

SPOT

FALL, 1986
BRINGING UP DICK AND JANE

The video tape Dick Talk by X was shown on repeat at the House of Commerce for Photography (May 21 – June 29) in connection with the exhibition Recoding Sexuality. According to X, "a 44-year-old video producer," Dick Talk was made: "Because I could no longer stand the tension between what I said to myself about sex and what I said to others. The languages were so far apart that I had to demystify the expression of ideas, feelings, questions, observations, and most of all, laughs, about an interiorly lucid and agreeable life. I could share other experience... why not sexuality? I was sure other women felt the same way. I am sure men do too."

So I rounded up some good talkers, women who knew what they knew about themselves and what they didn't. I promised them and myself anonymity because I didn't want to hurt family members and friends who would not approve of such talk. And, none of us is independently wealthy. I asked three women to shoot, light, and do the audio on Dick Talk believing we could talk more freely away from a male audience. The crew was created to be trusted. The best part of Dick Talk is that I believe it is true. The following critique of Dick Talk was written by sex writers F. L. G. and three House of Commerce for Photography who also wish to remain anonymous.


whisper—then say "oh my god, my mother would not be safe—to a homely, enclosed phone booth—not alienated—that you can be who you are."

A: Here they are showing pictures from Playboy and the way they show lots of hair—and it is so funny cause all the pictures and diagrams that I don't seem to be into the image of men think that sexuality—like the woman in the beige suit is much more intellectual about it.
B: And that this woman is preening like a bird—strokling her navel—have you ever seen anyone put polish on like that?
C: The slang they use—it's a man's vocabulary—like right out of some porno magazine.
D: It's like she has gotten all her information from that kind of magazine and she's just spilling back what she's picked up along the way.
A: But the first time I saw the tape—I giggled and delighted that women could get together and talk like that—and now to see it again I guess I'm getting more critical—I don't care for the things "nail-polish" is saying.
B: Perhaps it's a pun of the fortunes of seeing it the first time was the nervousness attached to it—they were going to say—what they were going to do—the anticipation factor—but I remember the woman strongly associate with them—and everything—our first experiences like the Playmate magazines and me with my father's handkerchiefs all tied around our faces I loved the smell of my father's after.

Look up, Baby. Look up and see Dick. See Dick go up, up, up.
D: And my father with his pipe, the smell of tobacco.
C: I had to make a phone call from a public phone booth and the cigarette smell of the open phone booth was very sexual—like a man had there before me—this perverse thing—and I felt very sexual with that beautiful smell—and I walked there in the phone booth and thought oohhh.
A: But another point is that sexu

A: Here they are talking about the sexual differences between men and women. Dick didn't seem to be into the image of men. They think that sexuality—like the woman in the beige suit is much more intellectual about it.
B: And they think that the sexual differences between men and women are really significant.
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A: But another point is that sexuality is not just men...
B: Yeah, and here they are equating women with a 'slippery' man—how do they come to have one—we don't have one.
A: And what you are saying that...

The whole thing was that the woman in the blue dress and the woman in the white shirt when they would start in on something and what they did—the others won't take up on it and go on—there wasn't any crosswise.

A: How many of the others kept changing
the situation and the nature of the size or the specifics—while other consultants were trying to expand upon something and be more thoughtful about it away from the box.

B: Or maybe a certain amount of dissatisfaction that comes with time and broken relationships and misjudged implications and so on that becomes frightening—it would have been wonderful to have wandered into a different sociological group and move in some satisfactory way with a whole or half-time or do it so that they didn't—and they mentioned things and kept on mentioning.

A: Maybe stylistically different. B: But across the line. I don't think they are different—black, white, blue.

C: I think so—it's cultural heritage—like how we speak of American pride.

A: But when it comes down to the actual interaction between that man and that woman, I don't think it's much different in any culture.

B: Don't think any man likes to hear women talking about them or that are comfortable with any kind of explicit sexual coverage— nude photos or whatever—if the roles were reversed in movies, wives.

A: In the history of art, it's always been the man who was cherished, whether he was a poster or painter of nude women, or something that was made up in words and—whatever—"she," as a woman, would die laughing—I can't imagine men being coy or presenting themselves to us in that way—some photographers have tried to deal with that myth—like when

PERSPECTIVES

REGIONALISM: A SENSE OF PLACE PART TWO

In the spring issue of SPOT, April Roper wrote the first of two articles on regional art, "Why Regional Postmodern Don't Suit Their Work Seriously (Enough)." The Texas Landscape, expected by counterculture mainstay Paul Klee, in the Museum of Fine Art, Houston (May 7 - September 7), offers Roper a little salver for the viewer of the greens in a regionalist theme——the sustainable land of "Boz."

By April Roper

Quotations from the slave-state papers, which are part of the Titus Landau collection, 1900-1986, from memory in somewhat con-
temporary accouterments to the writer.

With most every conceivable genre of print and every conceivable genre of mixed media represented by 82 artists, 22 of whom are photographers, the issue is photographic vision in attendance, the quote (although made applicable only to the民众 through the medium) "The Shaw"—no burden of precedent, only the choice, the simplicity, the inaccuracy. The work is in all respects a continuum-based on a dominant underlying theme of the land of "Boz"—not its people, nor their objects. The historical juxtapositions are representational, the paintings and works on paper are expansive thoughtfully. The sculpture is cursory and clichéd. But they are in some sense our history and the essence of the art as a story of beginnings and metaphors are as curious and searching as it is to incorporate all the correct formulas—feathers and bones, all to grand vises, cows and manure, moving region to region, the clichés commonplace, and the sweet spots are lost in the fray. Georgia O'Keeffe departs from the pack as does Charles Williams and Earl Staley as exemplary non-conformists, but most other people try to imitate such concepts as "sky" or best capture them without going through the necessary steps step by step.

There are more than enough implied connections and comparisons drawn between painting and photography (demonstrated in the placement of the art; excluding the obvious—light-sensitive emulsion on stretched canvas (Bob Wade's) faded vintage-looking "Whitney Texas Persuader" of dead wolves hanging on a fence, photographs used in collage, hand-colored photographs—to spark a tie between the two historically at odds media. Although this point in its favor, the overall selection stacks up with photography being safe and documentary, painting and paper works interpreted as an obsession with the most generic clichés and icons rarely superceding cute, a direct descendental presence. If I am, admittedly, not much of a fan of contemporary art, I have found. Sometimes the sculpture incorporates a feeling of collapse (Guy Johnson in "Under the Photograph Shoe"), which represents the kind of experience one often has when contemplating the concept "landscape" in the context "Texas." (This manner of categorization comes from my own experience, the experience of the work again and again, more often than not.) Environmental sculpture in its design, wild vacillates between that which edifies structurally (and pedagogically) by contradiction and that which attempts an integration more from anamorphic to_acceptable passive both share the absolute ab- 
vocation of fusion. Neither tradition is simply seamless. Whether a construction whose design is to surround the earth or make a sense of growth from its surround-
ings ultimately succeeds has little to do with precedent or originality. However, for conceptual origins are rarely identified, these localities, spatially, are the concept of forming tons of concrete into boxes, in order to reform the landscape (Donald Judd, near Marfa, Texas) has less in com-
mon with the "space in the show (or place)" the show mottos) than it does with some conceptual notion or translation of "of the world, not the world." Indulgences in wrenched excess are more shirrors to power the land taking something away from the mer-
formance and performance—steel and concrete are manipulation into relative wilderness at best a feeble attempt, for nature wins time every time. So much for Andrew

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The notion of packing up and wandering around the disproportionately large underdeveloped areas of Those areas is not new nor pervades the older photography, from Strand's "Telephone Poles, Texas," 1915 to Robert Frank's "The Big Country," 1950, or Del Rio, 1956, as well as the more recent, what part of the country could be made with less and satisfying a place to disappear into and new from: loaded and uninfluenced except by the purity of the experience? The FSA photographers came to document history: what began as a sociological study whose influential traditions extend into such work as Garry Winogrand's "Hippie Hollow, Lake Travis, Austin, Texas" 1973 the inclusion of the female nude here, (the only departure has endured as a body of art transcending genre and the expectations attached. Russell Lee's "Round Up, Nagwonner Ranch," 1955, is another such transmigration from thematic to interpretive transgression of the essence of an old tradition and the instatement of a new round-up style using helicopters, science and efficiency replacing the cowboy. Arthur Roth- stein's vision of the prairie and Dorothea Lange's record of the drought, "Dear Dalfent, Dear," among others of the standard set by a timeless intention applied to hierarchical and poetic is not enough. John Dowling's and Suzanne Bloom look to an altered land, comparing and contesting ideas about grandeur and reduction in nature: the former in a 1981 aerial image of the Houston Ship Channel (black and white), the latter in a 1979 image: "White Oak Bayou Series G-27" color. They are, upon initial encounter, dispassionate and unreserved: the scale of the subject matter's force upon humanity and the evidence of man being the obvious distinctions. We, both controlled by man, both controlled in the same removed scheme of things the incomparable E. O. Goldbeck record the existential vision, here in a barren San Antonio, Texas Park Pool, a huge crowd in attendance. There is no substitute for this repository of sociological/humanistic information, and the realizations are excessive misin- deed to Mr. Goldbeck for his attending to the details of ordinary life. Vernon Fisher's "Running on Empty," 1978, acrylic on paper, whose title perhaps refers to Jackson Pollock's abstraction on loneliness, has an emotional similarity as a remotely powerful rendition. It incorporates a run in text, a stream of consciousness discourse about empty gas tanks and radials there is always the battery, and has the feel of a hand painted photograph, the realism of the event carrying over as though it were an actual record, the real thing. It is what one would expect of an illustrated journal entry.

Some areas of the planet seem to exert a more metaphysical influence on others than others. Big Bend is one such area, its magnetism drawing the obligatory landscapers and the brave thinkers, alike in rela- tively measured numbers. Each art- istic endeavor here is to some degree transforming a vision, a function of the spatial outcroppingess. Its impossibility, ostensible beauty, its unfathomable otherworldliness. Ansel Adams' image of Big Bend is stylized in his tradition, a severe reduction far more dedicated to his disciplined definition of beauty, then a world-standard that art followers counted on. Gaye Williams, expres- sing any such notions or standards, removes Adams' anachronistic place of exploring instead the unique colors and organic icons in "Umb- iled." Big Bend, "1984" round the mountains, Man, man's futile efforts at integration disappearing in the dry heat, that which remains just barely holding on, the sun-bakeded plastic flowers that mean one thing only — death.

The result, a hand-painted mural, is a far more personal interpretation, whereas Adams transformed Big Bend in accordance with vision, Big Bend forever altered Williams, and he is far the richer for it. His "Peace Road" reference the landscape standard as well: that of immutable timelessness, in his static imagery of the monolithic he may as well be photographing dinosaurs in pre- historic times. This consistent unifi- cation is comforting, and it offers to the viewer a perspective regarding the world that is three-free, unequivoc- ally filtered. Laura Gilpin, whose work in portraiture is extreme and potest, is poorly represented here. her "Palm Avenue," 1947, little more than a notation made at arm's length.

Perhaps the most provocative line of questioning is inspired by the comparison of certain images, such as Danny Lyon's "Cotton Picker," Ferguson Unit, Texas. 1967-69 of black prisoners and Lewis Hine's "Cotton Picking near McKinney, Texas. October, 1913" fit whites in the field presumably free. Another pair, Carl Myrdan's "Loungers Hang Around the Donal Club Lamoonish in Free," 1937 and Lee Friedlander's "Texas, 1965" charac- terize the idios of the West, and its logical evolution, from muddy streets and muddy boots to cafes and suits. LeRoy Gottlob's "Teenager fro- culated in futile gesture of control, his shadow as a market of time and intention. Oddly the other Fried- lander image included ("Uttold, 1977") is very pertinent to the discovery in the style of Adams. The physical comparison between Mary Perry's circuit camera photographs of Amarillo, Texas, 1984, and while bushes similarly long and nar- row oil on paper, is startling and joy- ous. Perry's few, empty spaces, a train running parallel to the bottom line, finds its abstract mirror opposite in Booth's work.

The homage to found-in-nature iconography and allusiveness, in the Photography of nature that McManaway, Michael Tracy, and Gaye Johnson. Gaye Johnson is peculiar and stum- bled, the removal and installation or reproduction of the organic serving to imbue it. All the above mentioned artists call upon every trick in the pack and junk-art col-lector's book in Free," 1937, and Lee Friedlander's "Texas, 1965" charac- terize the idios of the West, and its logical evolution, from muddy streets and muddy boots to cafes and suits. LeRoy Gottlob's "Teenager fro- culated in futile gesture of control, his shadow as a market of time and intention. Oddly the other Fried- lander image included ("Uttold, 1977") is very pertinent to the discovery in the style of Adams. The physical comparison between Mary Perry's circuit camera photographs of Amarillo, Texas, 1984, and while bushes similarly long and nar- row oil on paper, is startling and joy- ous. Perry's few, empty spaces, a train running parallel to the bottom line, finds its abstract mirror opposite in Booth's work.

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The author is the reason photography has such a shaky footing as an art form. I want to work to reveal something that was not previously known. The psychology of the photographer or artist must come forward and play a role in the finished work. "Sometimes you can hide behind a photograph but you can't hide behind a line." - G. B. N. Nienstra

Man Ray set us as a good example but we have regressed. What the world doesn't need is another pretty picture. Some friends are photographing photographers. I see this not only as a comment on our media-based culture but also as a reflection of the fact that everything has been photographed. A hundred times. Photography no longer bear any relationship to anything other than an endless, grinding series of visual statements. The issue of photography is a false track. The medium is invisible. I forget it. Lift from the film whatever interests you and follow your intuition. It is the only route to whatever power there is left in the process in its relation to life. I tell Dan Graham I know what I'm trying to do with photography. I want to show a central kind of truth about it: that's contained in what I consider the dress of my existence, test strips. The strip, made of the most interesting part of the image, accumulates in piles of truth about something that can only be told. I catch myself thinking that they probably contain a more interesting picture than that finished print on the wall. Bethany Jacobson asks me why I don't use the test strip. Because I think I may hate what the test strip made up of them looks like. I think I may hate what the people I photograph constantly have to tell me to go ahead and make a mess to subvert the idealized perfection of the photographic image. "Photographs are also lies," I say. "Photography does not exist. You are reenacting the photographer in the picture." Then Fishell's portrait photography working becoming even more unpredictable. The result is a performance between the person photographed, myself, and the camera. I want the finished work to reflect these aspects. It's odd that we think portraits can reveal something hidden about the person portrayed, yet we do not see that they speak just as much of the person who made the portrait. It's impossible for me not to see the portraits as mirroring my own desire of being equally that which I want to see, as well as that which is shown to me. Photographing women the camera obviously becomes a phallic extension, through which I am intimate with them and take what I wish. But what about the men? The portrait with Jean Fisher makes me realize that the missing element in the construction of these works is myself. I start playing me against myself. Before the camera she displays an embarassed privatized image of femininity, then turning the camera on me. for me to become a parody of my own expectations of her. The work is hard for me to take. I feel I am nailed in it both physically and culturally.

From this work I realize I can no longer handle the images I collect without being aware that they are also references to an unconscious meaning that is demanding to be brought out.

By Roger Coford

My portrait work began as a group of experimental photographic works in 1984. They grew out of a feeling of fruition with conventional photography, i.e., the static image lying behind a glasslike surface in which any presence of the artist is excluded. For me, photography was always a sequence of images connected either in time or in the consciousness of the person who had taken them. What follows is an outline of some of the problems I saw in photography. The notes begin by referring to painting, but I was, and still am, a painter, though I've worked mainly in photography for the last fifteen years. In painting it is not so much an issue about how things look as about how things feel. Photography is almost exclusively about how things look. I'm cutting up photographs and sticking them together so that I can get details from different frames all into one picture. The photographs are portraits of people. I know. One thing can be said in favor of photography in this respect: It is revealing. Most of us have lots of trouble with photographs of ourselves. I search all the frames of the films for details that really interest me. These details of various images become a key for me as to what is interesting about this medium. Thoughts on the portrait of Kim Gordon work fast so that ideas stay ahead of the medium. By this I mean, what interests me in the images should stay ahead of any consideration of them as photographs. Think about the irrational. It is possible to subvert the rational construction of the world that the camera constantly works against. Some of the things wrong with conventional photography is that the medium speaks for itself and tells us next to nothing. Yet, another picture of the world, the direct photography of the nineteenth century where the world was seen freshly through photography or only exists for us today in the family snapshot-album. In this, it was Carl Andre who once said, "Photographs are like rumors (i.e., unverified information of uncertain origin). What I went from photography is the possibility of working creatively with the medium after the pictures have been taken and definitively the process by which a picture is constructed to show in the end result. Photography, as a mechanical means of reproduction, naturally avoids this issue. This, plus the fact that there's no visible presence of the State of Photography. This is a question that is often posed to me—usually by non-photographers or people at parties who really want to know whether or not to buy an auto-winder. Just the same as an interesting question and one that deserves an answer. We can safely say that the State of Photography is not California. Neither is it New Mexico, Texas, or even an informed state of being. In fact, it is becoming more amorphous every day, for, at present, unless the descriptions we give (1) photography and (2) its state are so restrictive as to render the whole discussion simple and boring, we will quickly find ourselves out on another limb with thoughtless and definitions so broad that they threaten to vaporize. The middle ground these days is almost nonexistent. So in order to speed things along I'll simply say three things: (1) The State of Photography has always embraced both extremes, (2) the State of Photography takes on many guises. It is The State of Photography that is good. It was born in the mid-west—in Debacle Illinois to be exact. It votes there and spends its holidays there at the family home. Its parents are insurance agents. It has a brother who went to Princeton and a sister who went South and went bad. Grandparents, uncles, cousins, and aunt all proliferate and the Debacle area is littered with friends and relations. But, as I say, it moves around and it changes.

In fact I saw it just yesterday in Palo Alto, California. On University Avenue. I know I saw him on sight: shabbily shuffling yet still self-contained, possessed by a deep sadness. I passed him by and pretended to recognize him as a painter I know. "David?" I said. "Oh," he said. "How do you know you're friend?" "My name's David," he said. "I know. I mistook you for someone else." I'm the State of Photography. "What do you want?" He had big regal bearing and tone. I don't know what to say so I said, "In Palo Alto, huh?" He stared at me with greatHJ identity discarded. It cleared his throat and resumed his shuffle down the street. My advice is: keep your eyes open and be prepared. I was surprised. Finding the State of Photography in the normal Palo Alto is like finding Jesus in the manger. It's unexpected. You might want to put together a list of questions to ask him.

I once met a dog who was the State of Photography. All photographic ideas resided in his tiny canine brain. The past and future of photography were all up there. He being at that moment the present, was looking intently at a woody worm caterpillar. A very intense and well-involved dog. But he knew all about Algot to Evans to Frank (a double play combo of major league photographic wisdom if ever there was one) as well as all the various references and meanings of the worm body language. He had one of those miniature cameras that were used to be advertised on the backs of comic books hooked to his dog collar. He seemed to have had one so engrossed he was in the black and red woody worm. As I watched, the mind of Photography was at the caterpillar and then rushed to a corner of the yard where a squirrel was climbing down a trumpet vine. Of all its guises, the State of Photography is perhaps best represented by its vaporizing in its vaporized form. It then comes into its own most forcibly as it fuels a mountain of anger, peace, pure energy and great spectral beauty that it earthy and founded all at once—an aesthetic steam bath that sweats out all our mistakes, misgivings and tangents, leaving the bare bones of form. If a photographer is around after a vaporized State of Photography has been in a
REVIEWS
A REVIEW OF THREE EXHIBITS

by Jill A. Kyle

In order to test the reliability of the critic's aesthetic judgments, I randomly selected three images from the exhibition and asked her to write a review of them.

The first image was a photograph of a sunrise over the ocean. The critic described it as "a beautiful and serene moment, capturing the essence of the sunrise and the vastness of the ocean."

The second image was a photograph of a cityscape at night. The critic described it as "an impressive capture of the city at night, with the lights of the buildings creating a pattern that is both visually striking and thought-provoking."

The third image was a photograph of a person holding a flower. The critic described it as "a simple and touching moment, capturing the beauty of the flower and the emotion of the person holding it."

In conclusion, the critic's reviews were consistent with the aesthetic judgments of the images, indicating a high level of reliability. As a result, I would recommend using her as a critic for future exhibitions.
the message it presents. Photographer Haig Junajian and painter Tracy O’Neill create a mixed-media scene of a cafe during Los Angeles’ predicted earthquake. What first appear to be scratches in the red painted surface are actually strings suspending bottles, plates, trays and chandelier in an "earthquake-proof" fashion. An interplay between tragic and comic suspense fashioned by collaborative elements within a genre scene: it is at the same time an assemblage of paint and photo, a reminder that it is all a spoof of artifice.

As a whole Glam Iliad does not work on the same level as an organic advertisement, an advertisement for Polcard itself, a marketing strategy for selling the product, but not ideas—except for one: the "art" of Polcard. What gets overlooked by the show of sophisticated Polcard technology is the most distinctive feature of all these images: the fact that each picture constitutes a singular artifact, since there is no reusable negative behind it. The relationship between each print’s visual content and its uniqueness gives each an important historical value. In the spirit of Benjamin, these images remain in the clutter of history while being released critically into the present, and in that sense they are "autistic." But even if it occurred to them, people of Polcard would give scant attention to Benjamin’s theory that photography’s ascent to fine art status was virtually predicated on its claims to aura in quality which he described as being comprised of singularity and uniqueness, the very qualities which produced authoritative presence in an original work of art.

After all, how many potential Polcard users ever heard of Walter Benjamin? In Daniel Baker’s Urban Transplant pictures, a keen sense of formal relationships, especially abstract patterns of verticals and horizontals, and the graphic sense of mood and movements of city dwellers provide an underlying dislocation into rural settings from being merely scenic displays of disjunctive toymakery aimed at trivializing the human figure. His work, fresh, provocative, variously sad and funny, mirrors the extent to which interpersonal relationships in daily existence are governed by social structures and economic circumstances. Baker works in hand-colored photomontage: a variation of the technique that the Berlin dadaists found to be such an adaptable vehicle for carrying socio-political commentary during and after WWI. Baker is subtle, yet he comes within screaming distance of the spirit of dada by dissociating figures from their normal environment in order to suggest irony and criticism by their juxtaposition. In "Specula tions" (1985), two farmers stand on an isolated country road and scowl silently at a couple of business-suited moguls a stone’s throw away. Political implications are obvious—real estate developers (anti-environmentalists) prey on naive residents of rural areas—but the weightily-presented subject is more amusing than disgusting. In fact, without Baker’s sense of humor, and there is never a loss of concern for human feelings because of it, the repeated themes of psychic dislocation might begin to seem a bit academic.

Never too reliant on technique, nor too curious about how things will look, Baker locates what will work. He emphasizes variety in the image: the better to proliferate the dissonance of figures in corn-field situations as though they were the truth. In "Wilderness" (1984-85), four career types clad in green work briskly through a desolate field, behind them, barren trees stand like boxes doggedly tracking employees. A weird scene, it is not surreal, nor are any of Baker’s images, and therein lies their greatest fascination—they are improbable, but not impossible. Even the delicate hand-coloring in the photograph is not at odds with a sometimes weighty content, but contributes to the tone. The effect is oddly natural, as though the mind sees in terms of information content in other words, in black and white, while emotions affix themselves to certain images, assigning them color. But what is most real and most disconcerting about Baker’s tableaux are the nameless, but easily recognizable, tensions on all the faces, the silence, the lack of communication in the encounter. We are served the ultimate paradox of our own high-tech, mass media culture: where conventional relationships between language and communication no longer exist.

Although the genre and technique vary, works by the three 1983 HCP Fellowship recipients can be considered within a single critical frame.

Doherty, Paula Goldman, and Stephen Peterson—can be considered within a single critical frame.

Doherty, who draws her stylistic inspiration from painting, specifically taking cues from impressionism, shock colors and bold brushstrokes and other exotic flowers at very close range. Through effects of color, light and blotted form, she projects a sense of movement and plasticity that defy the fluidity of time passing. Easily identifiable in some prints, flowers are blurs of saturated color. When Doherty uses a flash to get some definition in the blossom form, the added contrast of petal outline against cottony middle ground foliage makes an interesting relationship to the geometry of an architectural foil in the background. The frame of time itself is expanded in Doherty’s images by catching the foreground flower object with an instantaneous pop of light, a split second within the larger time segment of an extended exposure.

On the other hand, Stephen Peterson’s “in frame” topographical photographs evoke the stillness of ceasing time. His subjects, open vistas along Texas highways and agricultural belts or the lazy small

Paula Goldman: Commercials for the Way We Live series. 1986

tions nearby, all without even a minimal trace of human passage, seem imperious to change. Like quiet pockets in a world of flux. Peterson, who shoots with the same subjective detachment as the seventies "new topographic" photographers, has an obvious concern for formal, geometric elements in both town and landscapes. Clusters of cylindrical grass silos in "Muleshoe, Texas: two gasoline storage tanks in "Colita Petroleum: Inc" are perfectly, classically centered--the same is true for an irrigator in a barren grain field in "West of Lamesa, Texas: a post office in "Amar". A meticulous technician, his work scrupulously clean and reflecting a delight in order. Peterson at times lessens the vitality of his concepts by working his images too tightly. He is more consistently successful in the use of a color idiom that, through subleties of color and light, and natural effects of light, registers his subject matter in a more context as much as its topographical exactness does.

The role of consumerism in American life--a theme celebrated usually with disguised irony by pop artists in the 60's--is still the source for pattern as well as merely mechanically produced imagery. Picture "Of Gold's Canvases for the Way We Live series of black and white prints deals with the cliched themes. But she is very clever with composition, and she adds her own humor and wit. It is a tough assignment, considering the complex implications related to the meaning behind her images. What I am referring to is the sense of being overwhelmed by the endless horizons of our contemporary consumer culture. The more objects comprising the media--the more we are faced with an excess of regurgitated images, which command our gaze but because they are void cannot return it. It is the relentless dissemination of up and presents in her work as the double agent we all practice when given the freedom of self-treatment. Still victims of the pop milieu of consumerism, we constantly confront glamorous doubles of our own doubling. In one print, a boxing match is projected on the living room rug, two kids reroute the fighting action by playing with their toys. The image is their smiling approval. In another, a young boy, dressed up in front of a bowl of cereal from a box labeled "Gold Cap Action Stars" unaware that what the cereal box will become by eating the cereal is a drawing. Anger is both the objective in her observations, but not so much as to hide a certain degree of innocence. Sorting through the exquisitely gauging, one image against another, judging relations between technical values and image content, eventually converts to a lesson. No matter how diverse photography appears--and the gap is considerable between the medium's ultimate value as art and its social significance as a tool of mass culture--it is much easier to theorize about these distinctions than to apply them to actual works in an attempt at categorization. And that may be the most distinctive concern about photography today.

FOOTNOTES

WORKS OF ENIGMATIC BEAUTY

Mixed media photographs and sculpture by Paula Fridkin were shown at The Menil Long Gallery during Houston's spring introductions. 1986 program of exhibitions.

By Therese Wurd Thomas

The Menil Long Gallery of Houston, a participant in introduction 86, hosted a one-woman show of mixed media works by Houston artist photographer Paula Fridkin. The show was comprised of photographs and sculptures whose common denominators were the intense and eloquent use of color, pattern and texture. How the individual, especially women, perceive color and how she responds to that image through the use of composition and medium is what Fridkin has worked with in the past--surfaced intermittently in the work. The dilemma of color has always been a problem for her; she has referred to her desire to create work which is "ultimately pleasing to the eye." She has spent twenty plus photographic portraits, a good number have achieved an enigmatic beauty. Escaping the traditional white or monochrome mat typically associated with portrait photography, Fridkin selected or created canvas and backdrops using a variety of media. Upon first inspection, the elements of pattern and color which comprised the original image of each photograph, seemed to play a subsidiary role to the persona captured on film. Under closer scrutiny, leather, lace, glitter, sand, stone wall paper and fabric, are carefully and/or frenetically combined to inform the viewer about the person the photograph had been. Although similar in format and size, the portraits did not form a cohesive series but rather a distinct collection of subjects. The viewer was presented with individuals simply and comfortably at ease with themselves, individuals dressed up to one or more occasions, others who perceive themselves and are perceived by others as bulbs of local comedy, or as parade of certain characteristic types. "Buttercream #1: a young girl who obviously enjoyed playing dress-up. She has a kind of innocence about her," Fridkin, her favorite Minnie Mouse T-shirt, Paul's high-heeled shoes and a ton of costume jewelry. The entire photograph was patterned and textured by the costume. What started out as a black and white print (as did all of the photographs in the show) had been layered and augmented with a bold addition of color and glitter. The mat, a petit floral design on fabric, acted as a counterpoint to this precarious image.

In the sculptural works executed concurrently with the photographs, Fridkin's total control over her subject matter was demonstrated. Pattern and image are one and the same. "Love Paula, Heart #1:" a heart shaped assemblage of plastic devils and carvations, cosmetic containers and nails, along with "Love Paula, Heart #2:" a similar construction with a web-like expanse restraining plastic toy phones and prescription bottles, address the ambivalence of love and beauty. Unlike the portraits, the all over pattern of these intricate works is almost simultaneously neutral background and coded object.

The Fridkins emerged unashamedly from one medium to the next without hesitation or lack of determination. It will be interesting to see how she expands and perfects her work in the future.

LETHARGIC PHOTOS AND EVAPORATIVE CAPTIONS

Wisconsin Summer and VCR Film Stills: Photographs by Dick Blais and Low Therese were shown at the Male Chorus Gallery, July 12 - August 9.

By Liz Mengel and Robert Estep

As part of the Houston Art Dealers' Association's Introduction 86, the Graham Gallery is presenting the works of Dick Blais and Low Therese.

Blais is presently chairman of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Department of Film. He was born in NYC and was raised in San Francisco. His intellectual background is in literature and theatre. He is the director, filmmaker and literary critic. His work in photography began in 1970. Blais's work is a series of approximately 20 black and white photographs, documenting a family outing and entitled Series From A Wisconsin Summer. On initially walking past these photographs one is struck, if not overwhelmed, by an evocation of summer heat and the atmosphere of one of Wisconsin's numerous lakes. A second viewing, followed by a third, produces an odd sort of reversal, and Blais's photographs begin to resemble nothing so much as the adequate. If ultimately boring snapshots of a stranger and his family, this is due less to any inherent banality in the subject matter itself as to a sense of uninspired vision, of lethargy at work behind the lens.

As for the photographs themselves, the technical merit of black and white photography is apparent. Dark areas being black, white areas being white, and the gradations of grays showing Blais's competence in developing and printing. Whatever the lack of both atmospheric and compositional interest somewhat negates the purely technical merit. Thomas is presently Director of the Houston Center for Photography. He was born and raised in San Francisco. He has taught photography at both the University of Arizona - Tucson and San Francisco State University. He has lectured and published extensively. Thomas VCR Film Series consists of photographs of black and white Hollywood film production stills. Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's on video tape with color and phrases added to them. The color was added by manipulation of the color balance in the monitor and a character generator was used to add the phrases. The photographs were then recopied into still color photos. In contrast to Blais's approach to undemanding work, Thomas' present series makes a direct attempt to engage the viewer on various levels of intellectual inquiry. According to Thomas, the imposed captions are intended to distance the viewer from the original context of the stills and lead him to an involvement with the pressing issues of space and time, memory and language. Although even a cursory viewing of these images would naturally lead to questions beyond those provoked by the photographs, Thomas has the audacity to have curiously loaded the dice to his own disadvantage. He has done so by employing both captions from opposite ends of the spectrum of accessibility. Thus, while the faces of Marlene Dietrich, Grace Kelly, Claudette Colbert, Norma Jeane, and James Cagney possess an undeniably iconic value in terms of sheer familiarity, Thomas' own phrases are cryptic to the point of resisting comprehension. In any event, both captions hold great diversity as the most provocative. The sole possible exception is his use of a still from Franke's Borderland with the caption of "Trouble in the Family," which is neither obscure nor particularly relevant in terms of space, time, memory or language. It is, in any thing, a bit reminiscent of Mal Maguire.

A number of the phrases do have a certain amply prophetic or rhetorical charm, such as "Twilight of the Rose," "White Float," and "Wooden Castration," but their relevance to the designated stills appears to be mutually interchangeable and redundant. In short, the film still possesses an aura of "the moment" that remains long after Thomas' phrases, however clever they occasionally are, have evaporated.

Liz Mengel and Robert Estep are freelance photographers. This is their first review of the photographs of Robert Rauschenberg printed in the summer issue of SPOT.

Dick Blais: Wisconsin Summer. B/W. 16 x 20"
THE HOLLOW VICTORY OF DEATH

By April Repler

Dorothy Lynch was, by many accounts, a woman blessed with the spirit of living. She graced others with an empathetic understanding; when her own life-threatening crisis arose, she called upon that same empathetic reserve, removing her self from the pain of an impending mortality in order that the record be clear and helpful. In Exploding into Life, and with text by Dorothy Lynch and photographs by Eugene Richards, the simplicity of feeling and portrayal draws out paradoxical relations between opposites—hope and despair, sorrow and joy, loving and selfishness—and how they work around and influence each other until the lines are finally and fully blurred. This is a powerful and unforgettable account of the cause and effect between basic emotions called to the trenches when the shit hits the fan.

At first glance, the task of photographing the illness and decline of one's lifetime companion seems out-of-hand, impossible short of a descent into an emotionally muddled realm. Richards photographs recognize and celebrate the same joy and triumph that emerged in through the despair of cancer: the triumph of knowing one's own life well enough to get on with the living of it while time exists. Occasionally, it becomes difficult to recall where a piece of information was derived from, so beautifully do the pictures and text merge as one complete history. Few, if any attempts were made by either Lynch or Richards to romanticize or idealize the hopelessness of death at a too-early age. It is an honest account, painstakingly told; one tries to disengage from Lynch's steady gaze through tears of outrage and premature acceptance, only to be drawn immediately back, oddly contorted. There is great peace in Lynch's truth. Neither journalistic embellishments nor euphemisms take the place of reality in Lynch's journal, nor does Richards shy from the misery, for example, chemotherapy sickness. But for Lynch this abnormality is converted to a fact of altered life. He is uncomplaining and objectively positively.

This account is extremely moving for many groups. One, cancer patients surviving family members, counselors to the oncologists, the photographs aren't a mere time-compasspressed record of their lives—they serve as a guide from surgical scars to Ayars to loss of sexual identity and appetite. Lynch in the text addresses the issue of photo-documentation: "Perhaps you should make photographs of the whole thing. If there aren't any pictures of mastectomies, maybe you should take pictures of mine." "No." Gene says lookingスポット。 "I couldn't. We have no permission to photograph inside the hospital. And a camera would be in the way when I am with you. "You go on. I'll bully him. You're always criticizing me and our friends for not recording the important events in our lives. So began the disorganized labyrinth of procuring permission, symbols of the loss of control experienced when being treated (and usually experimented upon in the process). The documentation thus extended to other patients, a full-hearted, generous and necessary gesture that was treated with suspicion and guilt by the medical community and the families of patients, and greeted with acceptance and understanding by the patients themselves.

Fear rises and swirls throughout the text, as each new encounter with cancer is faced. Yet Lynch's behavior is constant, her humanism and caring overwhelming all else. One image of Lynch at an elderly patient's in-hospital birthday party shows the "guests" wearing party hats. At sunrise and sad as the atmosphere might have been, Lynch is radiant, a complete participant. Part two of the book, the treatment, removed Lynch from everything familiar. She was imprisoned in the cold steel and harsh light of hospital sterility, routinely tortured with toxic drugs and radiation. In the hope that her cure would be the one that worked, in spite of the odds and a grim family history. In no way did she attempt to be instructive; which accounts for the success of her attacks on the seeming absurdity of the procedures; the indescribably mediacalized that doctors fall back on when the simple truth is too difficult to deal with. She also encountered some unfathomable and cruel, if well-meaning characters along the way, whose ignorance was nothing compared to the trained indifference of doctors to patients with cancer. In this too, she was uncomplaining and objectively positively.

THE LOOK OF NEW MEXICO


By Ed Osowski

The photographer who chooses to work in New Mexico does not face an easy task. He or she must first contend with the examples of others who have already been there. An almost endless list—Ansel Adams, Laura Gilpin, Paul Strand, Eliot Porter, Edward Weston, Paul Caponigro—of photographers who have photographed and, in several cases, lived in New Mexico imposes a burden of vision and subject, and of purpose on the photographer working there today. Two recent publications have released a variety of ways of dealing with the weight of those masters of the past. The Essential Landscape: The New Mexi
can Photography Survey, the more impressive of the two publications, is a response in the worlds of its editor Susan Werner to the "transformation and decisive change" some have perceived in the physical and social look of New Mexico over the past two decades. It records how twelve photographers, commissioned by the Museum of New Mexico, saw the state in the first years of the 1980s. Informing them were the examples of other important surveys of the past—in the nineteenth century the projects of Timothy O'Sullivan and William Henry Jackson; in the 20th century, the work of the FSA photographers. If they had a charge, then, it was to preserve, through their photographs, what New Mexi
can looked like at a specific time in its history.

The effort to "preserve the look" raises the question of what "landscape" means in the title The Essential Landscape: its tradition, for photographers as well as for painters, is especially rich and landscape is now again very much in vogue. The land, all that surrounds
Thérèse Berton: Franciscan Mission, Albuquerquoise

Thérèse Berton's photography of the Franciscan missions in New Mexico tells us something old, but clean, and abroad, and cute, if you will. When Wilder returned eighteenth years later to photograph the region, he found a new adobe wall now disfiguring the entrance to what looks like an upscale restaurant.

In the street scenes of Miguel Gonzalo and the portraits of Anne Noggle the world has receded to a backdrop against which are set small, personal dioramas: Gonzalo's subjects prefer the camera. Flash their featureless faces and their adolescent sexuality look ever so slightly troubled by, not the camera, which they embrace, but by their own lives. What imposes on them is not the world but their own psyches. Noggle writes that what attracts her to her subjects is how they represent the "uncommon" that is alive and well and living in New Mexico: "She feels an obvious fondness for her subjects, but her reach is limited. So unique are her subjects that one cannot move beyond them and the rooms or spaces they inhabit to any reading of the relation to the world beyond. Noggle's people remain fiercely unique. Calendar is always disappointing because its reach is so limited. It fails to stretch our perceptions, rarely shocks us with new awareness, but rather pulls us into complacency and a dull acceptance of the stasis quo. Five of the twelve photographs in The Essential Landscapes are among the fifty-eight represented in New Mexico. U.S.A. Three pieces, along with words by Ray Barret, Paul Caponigro, Eric Porter, Stephen Cooper, Douglas Kahn, Robert Salzman, William Davis, and William Van Dyke, are the best for the collection for what they locate in the land is a stance, a permanent configuration of vision, and a commitment to the pre-crescent detail, to the very "thinness" of the material world. But the majority of the photographs is New Mexico. U.S.A., a catalogue of two exhibitions organized by the Santa Fe Center for Photography shares many of the shortcomings of calendartype. The images in New Mexico U.S.A. rely on the safety of stereotype and glorify the obvious to make their points. The images in "Color." Carnival: the cultural juxtapositions are too obvious, too cute. Michael Miller's "Shoddy Sculpture Garden" is again, clever and tired, an image we have seen too often before. What dominate are photojournalistic versions of what the editor, Barbara Fritzen, would like us to believe life in New Mexico looks like.

While New Mexico, U.S.A. disappoints with its numerous over-worked images, The Essential Landscapers suffers from a more serious problem: its two co-authors. The Essential Landscapers collects eight essays by J.B. Jackson, a cultural geographer, and subject of one of Anne Noggle's portraits, Jackson's essays, interesting in themselves, do little to illuminate the photographs they accompany. But, more distressing, an editorial decision was made to print a mere handful of the 180 photographs in the survey at full-page size. The actual catalogue of the exhibition does a service to these twelve photographers: reducing their works to a 2 by 4 inch image renders them partially unreadable. And, in the case of Robertstein, Harris and Logsdon not printing them in color makes them even further difficult for those submitted to the survey. Last summer, on a trip to Santa Fe I saw the pieces commissioned for The Essential Landscapes. The publication of that exhibition only hints at the beauty and strength of many of those works.

The exhibition was a collaboration between HRHRC and the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery: an important and resourceful collaboration. The book is both scholarly and engaging, the result of Flukinger's renowned research abilities, relentless and absolute. Its format is one of the least and most accessible of any historical writing or catalogue: one reads a text first, after which individual photographs are positioned over a descriptive few paragraphs, discussing artist, process, general applications, and other issues. Its clarity and simplicity make available a concentration of interest and hard-to-find information, making it invaluable as an art or photo-history text. In fact, one wishes for its companion volumes—France and America— to suggest a starting point—as an alternative to Newhew's book, which in comparison, seems truncated and anecdotal. The range of images used is an innovative imperative from the norm, using obscure and better known imagery in enlightening juxtaposition.

Ideas and factual data are drawn full-circle, an entirely different level of material is brought to light, and parallels and connections are startlingly innovative and detailed. Flukinger presents information in a logical progression, enabling the reader to piece together an extremely attractive and seminal eight decades, a time period that revolutionized the world. His editorial intentions are born of thoughtful and informed dialogue with contemporary imagemakers and educators, reflecting an open-mindedness that clears the reader's way, encouraging further inquiry. Flukinger calls upon other disciplines as well, adding scientific, sociological, psychological, political and literary disciplines and commentary as responsive to tangential issues that arise quite naturally in the course of processing new information. The Formative Details is wry and challenging, representative of the kind of work one has come to expect and enjoy from Flukinger, evidenced in his lectures, paper curatorial skills, and insightful intellectualism.

The exhibition provided a rare opportunity to see first-hand a vast and exciting collection of the foundations of photography. The book far surpasses the concept of a solitary catalogue: it contains a wealth of marvelous information and opinion, an indispensable addition to the artists or historians library.

Camille Silvy: Multiple Portraits of John Leech, ca. 1860 (Gernsheim Collection).

The Formative Decades: Photography in Great Britain, 1839–1920

By April Rugler

Roy Flukinger's brilliant and erudite volume, The Formative Details: Photography in Great Britain, 1839–1920, University of Texas Press, 1985 was originally conceived as an exhibition, the first in nearly two decades drawn from the Photograph Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. The Gernsheim Collection, purchased in 1963, was seen officially as a supplement to the HRC's British literary material: the merging of the two created one of the world's largest collections of photographic material. In addition to the Photograph Collection, HRC (now HRHRC), of which Flukinger is cura-
WOMEN IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Anne Tucker, photographer, critic, and curator of photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will participate in the conference. Women in Photography, Making Connections, at Syracuse University, October 10, 11, and 12, 1986.

"This conference will give women a chance to talk about their work—drawing from personal and professional experiences and sharing their insights into the complexities of women's roles in the visual arts. The panel discussions on October 11 and 12 will provide forums for further discussion of issues related to the arts and the social roles of women photographers. The conference is part of a three-year project to explore the role of women in the arts. For more information, call (512) 477-1054.

HELLO FROM HOUSTON

Postal cards published by the Houston Pub-
lic Library Association for Sesquicentennial of Bay of Houston

From its archive of nearly 60,000 photographic images, Houston Public Library has selected fifteen views for reproduction as postcards to honor the Sesquicentennial of the Bay of Houston. Called "Hello from Houston," the postcards were reproduced to match the period from 1860 to 1919. These particular views were selected for a number of reasons: statesmen, doctors, and social workers in the Library's collection. And they contain the signs—sometimes, but not always—of Houston's growth and change.

Each card is dated and identified. The earliest image, from 1860, shows a paddle wharf modeled by Allen's Landing while its cargo was being unloaded. In the most recent image, taken in 1959, Main Street, which became downtown Houston is shown locked in a traffic jam. Between these two what emerges is a record of Houston's "urban" presence. This is a scene where traffic, cars, homes, and buildings jostle for space. And when its citizens retreated as they do in the only public photographs whose photographers are known. Frank L. Schiefer's "Sew to the Day Outing." It was a spot outside Houston where they sought relief from its crowds. Nearly 7,000 photographs in the Houston Public Library collection have been catalogued using the guidelines developed by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House. Glaser says, and more will be processed as staff permits. What dominates now, she adds, are photographs which provide a good record of Houston's architectural development. Donations to the photography collection are always encouraged. The photographs of Schiefer, donated by the Bank of the Southwest, too, are featured in the collection. Recent additions have been made by the Houston Chronicle and Houston Post which now routinely send their older negatives to the Library. Glaser recommends that their gifts are tax-deductible and contributions can be made by contacting her or Louis Marzella, who heads the Houston Metropolitan Research Center at Houston Public Library.

"Hello from Houston" was funded by a donation from the Friends of the Houston Public Library. The portfolio cost $5.00 and can be purchased at all branch libraries and at the Central Library's fax and video rental and Science and Social Sciences Depts. Glaser hopes to see other photographs reproduced in the future. Funds from the sale of "Hello from Houston" will allow the Library to purchase a special piece of "Hana" for its collection.

ED ORLOFF

MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY PHOTOGRAPHS AT BLAFFER GALLERY

As the focus of Blaffer Gallery's celebration of "Raza Mexicanas," the exhibition "El Tiempo de las Fiestas," Mexican 1900-1938 will be on view from September 19 through October 19, 1986. This is the first retrospective exhibition of Cassio's work, one of Latin America's most important photographers, during the early twentieth century. Cassio was a Mexican photographer who turned to photography in the most effective way to communicate with the public. His work covers a period of turbulent social change within Mexico (1900-1938), spanning the era between the feudal state governed by Porfirio Diaz through the Revolution to the creation of the modern Mexican nation under Obregón and Cardenas. As founder of the first Photographic Information Agency, he compiled a comprehensive collection of photographs for his colleagues.

Along with the Cassio photographs, Blaffer gallery will present complimentary exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, video tapes by Manuel Pellerin and Manuel Urbina of Autónoma University, and a performance art piece by San Antonio artist George Condo. The panel discussion, "Mesas Redondas," will be held on Saturday, October 4, 9-11 p.m., in Dudley Hall beside the Blaffer Gallery. The panelists are: Faith Pulliam, photographer; Mexico Carlos Monsivais, poet; social historian, writer; Mexico Hugo Guirrnera-Wega, cultural anthropologist, Mexican American museum. For more information contact Sarah Gilia (713) 749-1230.

COLLECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO MEET AT HCP

Interested in collecting photos and in the history of photography? We're forming a group which will meet at HCP for the first time. Call HCP (529-4751) and leave your name and number. We'll get in touch and let you know when the meeting will take place.

Milt Mannix, Frank Cooper

1986 HCP FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

Due to the number of strong portfolios submitted this year, the award money was split four ways. Instead of the usual three. Awards of $1,125 each were presented to Rod Castil-
lo, Bill Franke, Frank Isak, and David Pont. The "winnings" will be shown to their portfolios at the Annual Members' competition. This year's competition was judged by pho-
tographers Peter Brown and Paul Hester and gallery director Betty Moody.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND POSTMODERNISM

As part of the College Art Association's regional conference. October 28—November 1. Mem-

Photographer Unknown. Main Street. Houston, 1939.
SNAP JUDGMENTS

In which we measure the depth of meaninglessness, perhaps, though it wasn't killed by critics.

Theatrical, the poetic, each one on the arm of a European consort. Symphonic music again pretends to genius. No-one cares to speak to fashionable jazz.

Chromatic gods stay away, and Christ doesn’t come until late. Prophecy, for once, is science. Formulas gather in knots, speak in caballistic conversations, the big bang. They try to make the Uniform Field. Communism holds sway in a contract and capitalist society, there is a racket when someone calls Democracy a nasty name. “Our friends don’t call us Capitalists.” Democracy says, “because that is something that we are talking about.”

Democracy has the urge to plug someone, but uncharacteristically, walks out instead, trailed by attendants.

Photography offers Bloody Marys to all of the meanings, save the Gods. Child-bearing takes a nap, and the celibate Betrayed-by-Children asks for something strong. Shoe-heal lenses account for the clicking at the approach of our servant-paper. Essential points will fade from the negatives before further photographic prints time to print. Photographic essays on the market, more susceptible Meanings (Design-in-Shadow, Beauty-in-Flowers, Ascendable Forms with mezzotints from its pockets, but the Meanings have been annihilated once seduced.

Meaninglessness died a slow death. It was a funeral with all the usual obituaries till it was certain that the funeral had been properly performed. Nothing can be done to prevent the death, it just happened, and all the Meanings are laughing in the hallway, each assured it has the pending power struggle in control. It was real Art that caused the first infection, and much later swelled the symptoms. Jackson Pollock until Meanings expired in a cough of paint. Thousands of signed Picasso sketches couldn’t encourage its recovery. Julian Schnabel meanwhile was writhing in its stool, had to stuff it dead body, stabbed his leg, it is still alive.

When the will is read, the murderers will get nothing. They have sucked their remains, and would hardly notice additional Meaninglessness wealth.

Not that the various Meanings won’t be jealous, when a substantial education fund is formed for the Accumulated Meanings will try to shut it down. But Meaninglessness was wise in this gift. Other Meanings will be remembered for its grace. So it may be a long time, always. During its long and solitary life, it never forgot its views on anything, at all, maybe upon suicide now and then, when doing the town with Vanity, combining their persuasive skills. Photography will be granted a strap on for a long stay at an eastern college, and a Meaningless chair will be endowed. Meaninglessness history will be explained by the revisionist Gabriel of Vietnam. By Sislin or by Donald Regan and Edwin Meese, unhelpful but from contrary sources.

But you suggest that Meaninglessness is maybe not dead. “We still have clothing habits.” The Houston flat runs identical news items day after day. And what about Los Angeles? But the stability of Meaning still hasn’t hit its stride! CONSIDER WHAT CAINS WE’RE MADE.

Nations solidly behind single religions. The U.S. and its European allies (Angela Merkel) so the Soviets and their evil totalitarian bloc are all united in Christian-style moral authority, a taste for imperial architecture, and Nineteenth Century rationalist thought. The Islamic nations, and the tiny plastic explosive nation of the laws, the Divine, that the Meanings shall be crowded off the shelves some day, by irresistible logic and familiar logic, delivered not by Coca-cola but by MRWA.

Enough! You say “Please make your meaning clear.” Photography doesn’t need remedial education. What will Photography get from this now that Meaninglessness has croaked?”

Photography has no optics to see, as Literature does. After so much promiscuity with Meaninglessness in Paris. Likewise Picaire says here’s the tom-stocks of scrappy Painting and Carving Sculpture misanthropist brooch of Brunat’s mass. Photography will not be reduced like those other arts. To rendering portraits of their final, faithful, inspiration, pleasant Profit, pimped and plumed. Photographers will ride the uprising because THEY NEVER ABANDONED MEANING. They never knew meaninglessness at all.

They are the people of substance. The people involved with material facts. This comes from hawking darthrooms, luggage lights, and watching chemical changes. Photographers believe in matter, and when something more in essence. It would give their photos value if it showed upon the prints.

We do know certain photographers, however, who unwittingly became the beloved acquaintances, just before its death. I don’t mean the snap-shotter’s just because the interest is interested in photos of Six Camaro. The nearest photographers are those who seek the Meanings most. Aaron Siskind is an obvious candidate. Some Callahan is too Minor White. With his films of making the soul look silly was ever a counter. Gupta carved towards danger’s meaning and then was dismissed. Man Ray and Warhol merely suggested the meaninglessness of Art. They get credit for its demolition to a more ironic than by-pass surgery. All these master fencers, and Shirley Levine. Martha Rosler, Richard Prince, all these coincident additional sense. Their contributions are the two-dimensional meanings of their names.

Decent-minded photographers, you who are serious and exhibit in galleries and affirm the visual world. I am always at your openings! AND MEANINGS COME TO YOUR OPENINGS TOO! Shiny Aspirations. Desires for influence. Hopes that One WILL See One’s Ripple Effect, the things that exhibiting photographers live for. THESE COME TO YOUR OPENINGS. I personally am always watching to see if a photographic exhibition has the slightest effect, aside from stirring the vehement rejection of work, by one’s closest friends. Those Meanings never abandon you however, they remain true. Meaninglessness bid them to stay with you. Photographers, and recommend you to Fame.

FROM THE Houston Center for Photography wishes to thank the follow ing for their support in the initial Three-Year Fund Campaign, 1983-1986:

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BY VISIONARY JOE
Meaninglessness is dead. Photography missed the obituary, but luckily it’s the servo at the wake. All the principal Meanings will be there, dressed so fine. The Fine Arts dinner, one paired up, another with a finely chewed face, the

Photos by Rita Colman

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The Third Biennial Photograph Auction to benefit the HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY. Saturday December 6, 1986 at the Paramour Bar and Grill 401 McGowen at Brunson. Preview at 11 am. Auction at 1 pm.

In addition to photographs by nationally known photographers this year's auction will feature a limited number of round trip tickets for destinations in the U.S. and Mexico, courtesy of CONTINENTAL AIRLINES.

A Preview Exhibition of the Photographs for Auction November 22 - December 5, 1986 at HCP, 1441 W. Alabama.

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To be included in the catalog. Items should be received no later than October 31, 1986.