

Doug Ischar, from San Francisco Eagle: Gay Bar in Time of Transition, 1986-88

DIANE ARBUS: THE FASCINATION PERSISTS, BY HILL & BLOOM/NEW WORK IN GAY REPRESENTATION

DENNIS HOPPER: ICON OR ICONOCLAST? BY MARGO REECE/KURT KREN FILMS/JAPANESE VIDEOS

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STAFF

Editor: Cynthia Freeland

Design: Jim Tiebout

Contributing Editors: Sara Booth, Karen Lanning, Stanley Moore

Writers: Suzanne Bloom, Sara Booth, Peter Brown, Jean Caslin, Ed Hill, John Inglis, John Jacob, Denise Levertov, T.R. Mackin, Joseph McGrath, Ed Osowski, Margo Reece, Anne Roberts, Joan Seeman Robinson, Wendy Sterba, Carole Tormollan

Advertising Sales: Stephen Peterson

Typesetting: Chart Works

Printing: Drake Printing

Editor's note: Jean Caslin, who assumes the position of Executive Director at HCP on September 1, 1988, was invited to write a special guest edition of Messages for this issue of SPOT.—C.F.

We are pleased to announce that the Houston Center for Photography now has Macintosh computer graphics equipment that will provide both a working facility for artists and desktop publishing capabilities for the Center's publications. HCP gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas for this project. This new program is the brainchild of HCP President Dave Crossley, who will serve as its administrator for the Anchorage Foundation and the HCP. The basic computer tools now at the center were provided by the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, whose chair is Anne Bohn, a member of the HCP Advisory Board.

The Center now has a Macintosh II computer with a color video monitor, a Microtek 400-dot-per-inch scanner for both graphics and text, an Apple Laserwriter II NT printer, state-of-the-art graphics software, and a high-end desktop publishing package called Quark Xpress. Additional information on the computer equipment and the artists' support program will be found in forthcoming issues of the monthly HCP members' newsletter.

Beginning this fall, the Center will offer workshops on the use of the Macintosh II equipment. At the time SPOT goes to press, we are considering "An Introduction to the Macintosh System," "An Introduction to Computer Graphics," and "Photographic Image Manipulation" as likely workshop topics.

HCP will also sponsor workshops offered by Macinterfaced, a new Houston firm that is the first Apple System dealer in the nation. Staffed by eleven technical wizards, Macinterfaced is committed to working with HCP and the artistic community in pushing this equipment to its limits.

As a kick-off for this new program, HCP will be exhibiting *Digital Photography* from October 14-November 13. This traveling exhibition will present a variety of provocative photomontage work using new computer-related material, by eleven artists from throughout the United States.

Digital Photography was curated for San Francisco Camerawork by Marnie Gillet and Jim Pomeroy, and is accompanied by an exhibition catalogue. This survey of electronically recorded/stored and processed imagery will include ink jet and laser prints, photographs, video sculptures, an interactive artists' book, and an interactive computer-video installation. The primary intention of this exhibition is to present significant contemporary art that is produced with affordable electronic equipment and utilizes innovative modes of presentation and distribution. Artists included in this exhibition are Paul Berger, Michael Brodsky, Christopher Burnett, Carol Flax, George LeGrady, MANUAL (Suzanne Bloom/Ed Hill), Esther Parada, Sheila Pinkel, Alan Rath, and Ed Tannenbaum. The creation of *Digital Photography* was supported in part by a Special Exhibitions Grant through the Museum Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Mortimer Fleishhacker Foundation.

A committee of the board met during the summer to discuss renovation plans to accommodate the new computer equipment. The committee members were Geoff Brune, Dave Crossley, Dallas Hardcastle, Gerald Morehead, Sharon Stewart, and Clint Willour. Renovations to the HCP facilities will take place after the successful completion of a small capital campaign to raise needed funds. The renovations will provide additional office space, a secure workstation for the Macintosh computer equipment, and a second, smaller gallery facility that will feature work by emerging and regional photographers.

Volunteers and student interns are needed to help administer the growing programs and services of the Houston Center for Photography. If interested, please contact me or Chris Lunceford at (713) 529-4755.

Jean Caslin

SPOT is a publication of the Houston Center for Photography, a non-profit organization that serves the photographic community as a resource for educational exchange through exhibitions, publications, lectures, workshops, and fellowships. **SPOT** is sponsored in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston. **For details about membership**, contact the HCP at 1441 W. Alabama, Houston, TX, 77006. Telephone (713) 529-4755.

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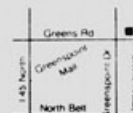
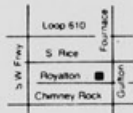
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Line drawing interpretation of *Untitled (7)* (1970-71) by Diane Arbus. This was the last photograph in *diane arbus*.

ARBUS ANCEPS:

AFTERTHOUGHTS ON DIANE ARBUS

By Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom

With Diane Arbus the tendency, always, has been to treat her as an exception. History seems to have conspired that way—photo-history at least, photo-history of a predictable sort, that is.

The large exhibition of Arbus photographs presented at the Hiram Butler Gallery this past spring during FotoFest was an extraordinary event. Such a judgement would appear to be in good faith with the regime of the Exceptional that has hovered like black flies around the closed body of Arbus' work. Appearances, as we are often reminded, deceive (—actually they only simulate deception); nevertheless, it has been virtually impossible not to come under the influence of this reigning notion: Arbus is special, unique, exceptional. From the start it has been the context in which audiences have come to know her and her work; and it seems destiny will extend the rites (and the rights) of exceptionality infinitely into the future.

Those of us who saw John Szarkowski's *New Documents* exhibit at M.O.M.A. in 1967 (Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander were included along with Arbus) have that moment of introduction to Arbus' photographs embedded in our memories: square pictures of a gray and splenetic world. They were unlike anything we had seen before—which is a first requirement of an incipient legend in art. Clearly this was not a kin of "The Family of Man." Indeed, it represented a sensational rupture with the humanist tradition; while at the same time the show became the hinge on which Arbus' career turned. For his part Szarkowski used this occasion to define the new (documentary) photography in terms of subjective modernism, that is, on the strength of a preeminent singularity of (expressive) vision along lines consistent with those developed in relation to abstract expressionism in the 1950's. Arbus (with Winogrand and Friedlander following in the wake of Robert Frank) became the embodiment of the Szarkowskian prescript or canon according to which it is her transcendental subjectivity and her psychological depth of vision that is responsible for the essential and universal "truth" of her photographs. In other words—and quite literally—the real subject of the work is the artist/photographer.

Almost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualization and intensification of cruelty.

—Friedrich Nietzsche¹

We have then a body of unique photo-works whose not-so-secret center (or meaning) is the artist herself. But then the singular creative subjectivity of "Diane Arbus" was further enframined in July, 1971 by her dramatic act of self-negation. Writing about women's suicide, Margaret Higonnet has said, "To take one's life is to force others to read one's death."² The inclination, stereotypically, is to read Arbus' suicide first, as a sign that hers was a "tortured" subjectivity; second, as in some way coded prophetically in the work; and third, as the final sign of her exceptionality. We find ourselves reading the death to understand the work as much as examining the work to illuminate the death. But, in the case of artistic production, biographical subjectivity becomes conflated with creative subjectivity, which in turn tends to marginalize the social world completely, as no more than a distant horizon seen in one-point perspective from the fixed center of the ego. The "world" of Diane Arbus, like that of van Gogh, can only tell a story already written in the "soul" of the artist.

The fact of suicide apparently fuses the life (death) and the art in an indissoluble way. Much the same thing occurred "... when Nietzsche stepped into clinical insanity shortly after the new year in 1889 ..."³ We are drawn, then, to the life history as though it were an annotated map of a labyrinthine mystery.

Biography is a realm also open to entrepreneurial excess. We have in mind Patricia Bosworth's *Diane Arbus: A Biography*, published in 1984 and written, we judge, with an eye for the Silhouette Romance market. Arbus' daughter, Doon, refused reproduction rights to Bosworth with the remark, "The work speaks for itself"—a modernist declaration of aesthetic isolationism that she undoubtedly believes.⁴ Yet if implied in that statement was the position, "I don't want my mother's life decorated by your trivializing prose," then we empathize reluctantly with her protective motive. The book, all 433 pages, is littered with chatty, breezy text and irrelevant narrative images completely unencumbered with substance. For the definitive critique of this great wound in the side of biographical scholarship we recommend Catherine Lord's review in *Exposure*, 23:3, where she describes the book as "hagiography gone berserk."⁵

Even if there were in hand a thorough and responsible critical biography of Arbus, the problem of the Original Self as a seriously faulted, if not discredited, explanatory structure would remain. In the arts, more than other disciplines perhaps, the Cartesian certitude of inner, subjective truth is clung to tenaciously; so much has been staked on the notion of the unified self as the origin or ground of being—and, of course, of creative vision. These issues aside, we suspect that such a biographical study still would not earn acceptance from the Arbus Estate. They have consistently made reproduction rights contingent on approval of the specific manuscript and strongly favor pictures *sans* text. Such intractable control of the photographs is either anticipatory censorship in the name of image management, legend maintenance, or simple blockading of any presumed market competition. Whichever, this repressive practice has led to several pictureless texts on Arbus; and, in our case, to absurd circumventing strategies. It seems to us an entirely reactionary state of affairs—an opinion based on the liberal notion that artefacts of culture are or should be freely accessible to and transmissible in critical exchange. We also believe that taking up an artist's production in thoughtful critique is to offer something more than symbolic homage.

The two authorized monographs on Arbus are well-known, especially the first, published in 1972 (at the time of the major M.O.M.A. exhibition), titled simply *diane arbus (sic)*. It has sold 150,000-plus copies and in *Aperture's* current catalog, which also announces the release of a paperback edition, it is classified as "a perennial bestseller." Arbus' popular fame has been secured, if by this means alone. The book is as minimalist and discreet as the lower case title suggests, highly select in its choice and limit of reproductions. Only one photograph is visible at a time. The only "voice" is that of Arbus herself, edited by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel from transcribed tapes of a workshop and an interview with Studs Terkel. It effectively projects a spare image of Arbus entirely consistent with the model of the exceptional, original, creating self and the belief that each single image should stand on its own, unburdened with interpretation, suspended in an idealized space. Modernism's hierarchy of pure autonomies rules throughout.

The second volume, *DIANE ARBUS: MAGAZINE WORK*, published twelve years later, is a revisionist gesture intended to correct what came to be seen as the art-in-a-void syndrome of *diane arbus*. Once again edited (and designed) by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel, this book confronts the exalting but "misleading" depiction of Arbus' career that the first book presented⁶—or, the misrepresentations of productive context the editors were willing to perpetuate in 1972 in order to ensure Arbus' permanent installation into the white-walled havens of art photography. By 1984, the year of Bosworth, it was apparently the moment for partial correctives: suddenly in the place of lean and austere aesthetics we were given information directly relevant to an understanding of the professional life of a working woman as photographer and writer. Instead of precious pictorial silence we were offered the beginnings of a dialogue with useful personal history. Much of the praise here must be shared with Thomas Southall, whose accompanying essay gives coherence and shape to the documentation supporting the *MAGAZINE WORK* project. However, the modernist model, deflowered but not despoiled by this non-erotic brush with real commercial life, lingers on as the presiding formulation of "Diane Arbus": the artist as privileged signifier.

Has it passed into the unconscious, into the repressed of psychoanalysis? If it still exists today it can only haunt objective reality, haunt the truth itself as its perversion, its distortion, its abnormality, its accident. Irony, if it exists, can only have passed into things. It can only have found refuge in a disobedience to behavioral norms, in the failure of programs, in covert dysfunction, in the silence at the horizon of meaning, in the rule of the hidden game, in the secret. The sublime has passed into the subliminal.

—Jean Baudrillard⁷

So how would we have it with Arbus? One possibility would be a critical line of attack that would pursue the work through a demythified Arbus disengaged from the transcendent sign of exceptionality, etc. A difficult task considering legends are formidable reified objects not easily moved and not subject to some inevitable process of decay. Nevertheless, a thoroughgoing feminist, psychoanalytic, or materialist critique centered on Arbus as a corporeal being with a social history might lead to substantive insight and understanding. A sympathetic, cooperative estate would be, if not absolutely necessary, a great aid and comfort to any such undertaking. *MAGAZINE WORK* points with some promise in that general direction.

A second possibility would be that which was held out, in fact, by the Butler Gallery exhibition; that is, in its specific manner of presentation. The tight hanging of photographs (no space between prints) in long triple- or double-tiered rows, and the unusual number of photographs (approximately 140) were two of the conditions that made the exhibition extraordinary. Perhaps it was nothing more than an aesthetic solution to a practical problem, i.e., how does one make that many artworks look OK in a modest-sized space. But, as a consequence, this installation altered our perspective on the work by breaking with the first principle of rarification: few pieces displayed in an extravagance of space. The close hanging of images in ranks and files subverted the "autonomy" of each individual image. Instead, there was an orderly crowd of images, a *body of work*. No one photograph could be looked at without awareness of the others surrounding it. We should also point out that images were mixed and not matched. The curatorial temptation to sort them into a taxonomy of the "normal" and "abnormal" or bizarre and more bizarre was resisted. Most unexpectedly in all of this, the mythic figure "Diane Arbus" receded into the background. In effect she was crowded out.

What happens if the artist, mythic figure or ordinary mortal, is bracketed as the explanatory source in our experience of the work? Where then do we direct our inquiries? What then is the nature and outcome of our encounter with the work? Do we find ourselves back in the same old modernist ballpark where works of art "speak for themselves"?

The last question needs addressing, if only because of Doon Arbus' stated commitment to this first commandment of high art. The belief that works of art speak for themselves is a patrician concept with a long history, one that became naturalized over the last two centuries and, thus, highly resistant to doubt. Its logic is entirely hermetic and protective of the autonomy of the pure aesthetic experience. Also, always implicitly present in the work—that-speaks-for-itself, and integral to its aura, is (once again) the artist as privileged signifier—or sign-maker. Much more is concealed in this cultural code-phrase than we can or need unravel here. The answer to the ballpark question is, No; not as long as we approach the artwork in an interrogative mood, not as long as we understand ourselves—as viewers—to be more than passive, admiring receivers in the art equation.

The answers to the other questions are set into motion once we recognize the viewer as an active agent in the process or event of reception. Any interrogation of the work must also include a questioning of our response to the work. What, in fact, occurs in the encounter—or collision—between our social and psychic being and Arbus' troubling representations of Otherness? Notice how the language of that question sounds dissonant, slightly out of register or cadence with the "times" in which she produced the work. During the 1960's, issues of representation were raised in the streets and the courts while in the artworld the problematics of representation were resolutely transcended by mainstream modernism. Meantime we have moved into the age of fractal truth.

A politically correct position on the representation of Others requires that photographs be censured for assuming to *stand-in* representation of Others, for attempting to speak for them. Edward Curtis or Jacob Riis are examples. In such cases there is unavoidably an (unconscious) ideological appropriation in which concrete subjectivities are transposed into useful imagistic objects. The trail leading from Arbus' photographs appears similarly marked. Over the past two decades it has become a virtual cliché to conclude

Book Cover, *Diane Arbus, Magazine Work*, Aperture, 1984.





Arbus exhibition at Butler Gallery (installation photo by Rob Ziebell)

that Arbus "fucked over" her subjects, a commonplace to lay the charge of anti-humanism at the doorstep of her celebrity status. Yet the photographs continue to fascinate us.

Fascination, in fact, is what *happens* between us and her photographs. They provide the perverse and uneasy pleasure principle of inverted stereotypes, e.g., "Young Man with Hair Curlers," or "Young Woman with Cigar"—uneasy pleasures because stereotypes are a serious matter. As Sander Gilman points out, "Stereotypes arise when self-integration is threatened." * So there is a certain anxiety in finding the "normal" and "abnormal" confounded; and, yet, there is discomforting *fascination* in that moment of recognition: *déjà vu*, this dangerous metamorphosis has already happened before. Preservation of our "cohesive" selves and our social species is under threat by these photographs. Are we really willing to relinquish hold of our stereotypic order? To scan the tiers of Arbus' photographs is to witness a *Toten-tanz* of stereotypes, a willful tearing of a web of signs. Fascination persists.

These images brought back from a gray and splenetic world function as signs pointing to reason's underside; they stand along the borderline of *unreason*, even seducing us to attend to its protracted silence. If we trace our fascination far enough we will find the photographs are markers of madness. This said, three disclaimers must immediately follow: we do *not* mean that (1) the people in the photographs were mad, (2) Arbus was herself mad, or (3) the photographs are pathogens that will drive those who look at them mad. Any of these notions would be far more sensational than what we are actually proposing.

In the post-activism of the 1980's one is expected to provide theoretical grounding for climactic assertions. At this point we can do so only in crude outline. The sense of madness we are talking about cannot be understood within strict clinical limits, but rather should be seen as a conceptual and emotional artefact of cultural history. Which is one reason to choose this animated term, braided as it is by romantic caricature, in preference to "insanity" or "mental illness." Under the sign of madness we would include a

very broad interpretation of "aberrant being" (a phrase that may best describe Arbus' overriding subject matter), but not because all such beings are mad. It is important to emphasize that our concern is with the response to, the reading of, the fascination with specific images of aberrant Otherness.

Grounding our extravagant claim must necessarily include acknowledgement of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. His entire project is fundamental to any hypothesizing about madness. First of all, madness is the name we give to a particular field of perception over which we attempt to exercise power in the form of knowledge. That is, we try to master it through a reductive and regulating discourse. Representations of madness are divided signs mirroring both an analytic circumscription of insanity and an always immanent eruption of madness as the underside of reason. According to Garth Gillan, writing on "Foucault's Philosophy,"

From that division [between reason and unreason], the work of art appears as the locus for violence that in annihilating reason and the world shows their contours and limits and can move beyond reason by putting it into question. ⁹

As for the compound joint that is formed between madness and stereotypes of Otherness, we have already referred to Sander Gilman. The following long quote introduces us to one last important idea:

Of all the models of pathology, one of the most powerful is mental illness. For the most elementally frightening possibility is loss of control over the self, and loss of control is associated with loss of language and thought perhaps even more than with physical illness. Often associated with violence (including aggressive sexual acts), the mad are perceived as the antithesis to the control and reason that define the self. Again, what is perceived is in large part a projection: for within everyone's fantasy life there exists a play of aggression not essentially different from that of the initial moment of individuation, an incipient madness that we control with more or less success. ¹⁰

What Gilman means by the trauma of "loss of language and thought" is

the ability to speak and be heard in the *dominant* tongue or "code." Even more interesting to us here is the reference to "the initial moment of individuation." This critical moment is placed, occurs, at a point between a few weeks and a few months. In other words, in the crucial transition from a state where the world melds with the child and the bare structures of identity emerge, there is experienced a crisis of anxiety, an inchoate "madness" that in turn is read into memory.

One of the important suppositions we are trying to establish in this crude outline is that a "history" of a pathological mode of being exists within the individual psychic memory as well as the cultural "unconscious." The aggregate of Arbus' photographs functions as a lure to this memory. The stereotypic signs that one so carefully constructs to hold it at bay are met head-on by the dreaded curiosities that have become her hallmark. Gilman also makes it clear

that stereotypic "associations are double-edged." In the most marvelous, protean way they are able to metamorphose into their opposite in a form of value inversion which explains the mutability, for example, of fascination and fear, or, how everyday gestures can appear transformed into indices of dementia. This latter effect—a psychic spanner in the works of the quotidian world—is cumulative with Arbus; although individual photographs imply a pathological disabling of rational structures quite succinctly. See "A Flower Girl at a Wedding, Conn.," and "A Young Man and His Girlfriend with Hot Dogs in the Park, NYC."

In citing madness we are not identifying the nut within the shell of Arbus' photographs. As we hope we have made clear, the essence of their meaning is another game entirely. If we suspend for a moment our self-imposed moratorium on allusion to Arbus' intentions, then we would

Book Cover, *Diane Arbus*, an Aperture Monograph, 1972.



.diane arbus.

conjecture that she believed each of her subjects (especially the freaks) contained their own existential meaning as centered truths, and, therefore, that her best photographs were able to symbolize these same truths. This is not our position. In effect we find that the photographs in our interaction with them function as allegorical signs: they point ELSEWHERE, to a space—or, abyss—outside or between, or beyond either: a space that once upon a time took the shape of a ship of fools.

FOOTNOTES

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 229; quoted in *A Nietzsche Reader*, selected and translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 160-61.

2 Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide," in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 68.

3 Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 1.

4 Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus: a Biography* (New York: Avon Books, n.d.), pp. xi-xii.

5 Catherine Lord, "What Becomes Legend Most: The Short, Sad Career of Diane Arbus: Part I," in *Exposure*, 23:3, p. 7.

6 *Diane Arbus: Magazine Work*, edited by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel, with an essay by Thomas W. Southall (New York: Aperture, 1984), p. 5.

7 Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, translated by Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), p. 55.

8 Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 18.

9 Garth Gillan, "Foucault's Philosophy," in *The Final Foucault*, edited by James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 39.

10 Gilman, pp. 23-24.

Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom are, respectively, Professor and Associate Professor of Art at the University of Houston. They are regular contributors to *Artforum* magazine, and artists who collaborate under the name MANUAL.

KURT KREN AND THE VISUAL PROCESS

By John Inglis



Kurt Kren, *Asylum*, 1975

Kurt Kren was present at a film retrospective of his works at HCP on May 12th, 1988. He has also recently been honored by a retrospective in Vienna, and he was the subject of a PBS documentary, produced by KUHTV, Houston.

A sculpture on the early sixteenth-century carved organ loft of St. Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna illustrates the new emphasis on individual subjectivity in Renaissance art. The entire organ loft rests on a stone figure who peers out of a window, holding a square in its hand. The figure bears the likeness of its maker, the master carver Anton Pilgram. As our eyes meet his, we realize we are being inspected. Instead of concentrating on what we see, we become conscious of the act of looking. In a similar fashion, Viennese-born Kurt Kren's films make us aware of the act of looking and, especially, of the process of perception.

Kren's film *Windowlookers, garbage, etc.* (1962) opens with a shot of old people staring in our direction out of second-story windows set in pastel walls. We are being observed. We see feathers, eggs, newspapers, glass, and living birds scattered on the ground—we move past them as though we are walking. There is a street in front of us—we see legs walking and arms swinging, as though we are observing these actions with eyes downcast. The screen becomes black: in staccato rhythm a tiny crescent moon points up, down, up, down. Images alternate in split-second time. The old people are back, still staring at us. They tilt right, left, right, left. The rapid angular movements and circular motions of these elderly busts assault us—darkness descends—one window—Fin.

Windowlookers... organizes perceptions experienced on a walk through the city in a disorienting fugue-like construction. Just as Anton Pilgram reshaped stone, so does Kren shape and thrust images our way, reshaping us through our experiences of those images. His images rush by, then return. Each image that returns seems new: we must look again. No wonder Kren's exhibitions in the 60's involved repeated screenings. *Windowlookers* forces us to look at and sort through the seemingly inconsequential people and things we often encounter in our every-day landscapes.

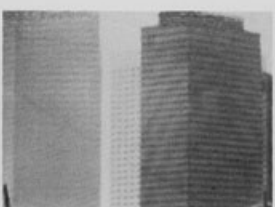
In *Asylum* (1975), five ungeometric pools of light form on a black screen. Five images appear, and then ten images, including fences, pathways, and trees. Images connect with adjacent image patches, forming larger image grids. Five of the images disappear, providing a counterpoint of darkness and light. Two small children walk in a lower-level image, then disappear. Lane images join fence images, pasture images and tree images, under changing seasonal conditions. Even when the screen is full of images, the black grid that frames each image hinders our view of the entire scene. When we realize that these images make up one landscape, we become aware of the multiplicity of circumstances involved in perception. We realize we can never really "know" this pastoral scene, which we can only partially see—the "asylum" or sanctuary Kren enjoyed during a country sojourn when he made this film. As we become aware of the multiplicity of what is perceived, we



Kurt Kren, *Windowlookers, garbage, etc.*, 1962



Kurt Kren, *foot-age shoot-out*, 1985



Stills by Deborah Garza

become aware that we must actively look if we are to see.

Kren, who was present at the HCP screening, says that he is a visual person. He notes, "You see and you don't." His approach does not stem from a theoretical base but from a grappling with immediate experience. Intuitive openness is important to Kren in the making of his films as well as in the viewing of them, and he leaves interpretation of his work to the viewer. Since it is the experience of perception that is being explored, every reading which takes the images presented into full account is a "correct" reading. Because repeated viewings of the same film involve new experiences of the same images, each viewing of a particular film should yield a new reading.

Kren notes the enormous amount of energy needed to make his films. It also takes enormous energy to look at his work, since we are urged to experience our own looking. His three- to six-minute works demand the same scrutiny as a Godardian feature film. Godard's films of the 1960's confronted viewers with images and written words that related to other filmic images, political views, and marketing literature, in building a picture of the "children of Marx and Coca-Cola." His *Masculine-Feminine* (1966), for example, both unites and confronts a youth awakening to the politics of the left and an emerging pop singer intent on building up capital from her record sales. The viewer is placed in a political and economic conflict that he or she must attempt to resolve. In a similar manner, Kren creates a conflict among perceptual images that demand the viewer's effort. As attention is paid to each repeated image, the viewer becomes conscious of the actual looking itself. Kren's films look at us and our ability to look, provoking us to look again on our own.

The recently translated first volume of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's text on film, *Cinema 1*, offers a way to view Kren's concentration on looking.¹ In classifying film-makers, Deleuze describes certain ones, such as the Russian Dziga Vertov in the 1920's, or Michael Snow and other Americans in the '60's, as filmmakers who primarily construct visual images as analogues to individualized experiences of perception. Such images have a "perceptual perspective" when seen in the context of the surrounding shots. These are not shots which develop a picture of characters in an

environment, as Howard Hawks does for example in *Rio Bravo* (1959), where a conflict results when a sheriff battles an inmate and his friends in order to keep him in jail. "Perception-images" are shots which build up a film without a narrative direction—images which present a viewpoint. It is as if the camera has become conscious and recorded images which are not those a particular person would see. These "perception-images" are related to each other by forming a film which presents a subject with a camera perspective. Deleuze summarizes:

...The perception-image finds its status, as free indirect subjective, from the moment that it reflects its content in a camera-consciousness which has become autonomous ... (p. 74).

In viewing a film which seems to perceive again and again, Kren's viewers become aware that a context of viewer/viewed surrounds individual shots. His images thus call attention to their perceptual perspective. It is not the identity of a landscape that is developed in *Asylum*, for example, but a somewhat mechanized psychological processing of images. This is how others picture landscapes and people as entities, as individuals. The focus in *Windowlookers* is not on the garbage or on the old people in the windows, but on our perceptions of them. Thus, the viewers of Kren's films become aware of the rich complex of immediacy and flux involved in the perception of his images.

Kren has lived in Houston since 1983. His last completed film, *foot-age shoot-out*, was made here in 1985. It depicts a battle, set against the sky, among city skyscrapers. It opens with a seemingly innocuous shot of a hand reaching into an open fridge; thus, the battle of the buildings evolves as part of metaphorical description of a conflict among the lords of consumption. Shots of individual buildings, a feel of barrenness surrounding them, are followed by shots of other buildings juxtaposed at contrasting angles. (Opposition among these edifices was enhanced at HCP by the tinny sound of spaghetti western music played on a small cassette recorder.) This imaginary city of power-contrasts constructed by Kren is a city where corporate institutions battle like gunslingers at high noon. These startling images seem to represent corporate

power and battles that heated up in the Houston of the 1970's (before Kren's arrival here), and which continue to characterize the U.S. business scene of the 1980's.

Kren notes that *foot-age shoot-out* was difficult to make because he lacked his usual reservoir of energy; also, the film was completed on a four-day timetable.² And, unlike Anton Pilgram, Kren does not have a medieval guild to support his creative endeavors. A film purist, he refuses to put his work on video, noting the joy he feels at seeing light stretch to a screen in a dark room. Kren works now as a security guard in Houston's Museum of Fine Arts. Having resided in the U.S. during the Reagan years, he recognizes that he came here at the wrong time: positions and financial support for experimental filmmakers are scarce. After a day of paid-watching, Kren simply lacks the energy to make films.

FOOTNOTES

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema, Volume I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; orig. published as *Cinéma I: L'image-mouvement*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1983.)

2 April Rapier, "Taking the Camera Out for a Walk," *SPOT*, Fall 1986, p. 6.

John Inglis, who is on leave from the Basilian Fathers, is a philosopher currently working on a critical study of Gilles Deleuze's film theory.

DENNIS HOPPER: ICON OR ICONOCLAST?

By Margo Reece

Three films directed by Dennis Hopper, *Easy Rider*, *The Last Movie*, and *Out of the Blue* were included in *From Method to Madness*, a Dennis Hopper retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from May 6 through June 18, 1988.

In movies about Dodge City, man, they always put in big mountains, but there aren't any, just wheat fields stretching to the horizon.

—Dennis Hopper¹

It seems fitting that Dennis Hopper was born in Dodge City, that archetypal town of the American West, where social history has been overtaken by myth in America's collective consciousness. Dodge City is a picture in our heads. We recognize it from the movies, from countless westerns, and from television's indefectible *Gunslinger*, where every sundown inevitably led to a showdown. Like Dodge City, Hopper too has come to reside in America's collective consciousness, his celebrity, "known for being well-known"², often coming close to obscuring his real achievements as a director and actor. He has been called everything in the press: a renegade (by critics), a genius (by his peers), difficult and impossible to work with (by directors), demonic (by his ex-wife Brooke Hayward) and most recently, a dandy (by critic J. Hoberman).³ This last label is perhaps the most appropriate, because he has done much to cultivate his image and little to discourage it. In Hollywood, where notoriety is more indelible than fame, the fabrication of personality is usually not entirely unselfconscious.

At times Hopper's career has seemed beyond recovery, as when he was banned from Columbia by telling Harry Cohn (the head of Columbia Pictures) to "go fuck himself," or when he was blackballed from Hollywood for eight years by director Henry Hathaway for refusing to take direction through seventy-eight takes. At the end of eight hours, Hopper broke down and did it Hathaway's way. "Kid, you'll never work in Hollywood again," was the response.⁴ As recently as 1986, Hopper was almost passed over for the part of Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* by director David Lynch, first, "because of his reputation I never thought twice about him," and secondly, for Hopper's insisting that he had to play the part because he was Frank Booth.⁵

Hopper is nothing if not a survivor. His tenacious career has spanned four film generations: the hipsters and the beats of the 50's (he associated himself, both literally and figuratively, with James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant*, and upon Dean's death seemed to inherit the credo attached postmortem to Dean: live fast, die young and leave behind good-looking images); the hippies and the love generation of the psychedelic 60's; the yuppies and the cult of narcissism of the me generation 70's. Now he seems immersed in representing the ambiguous 80's. He is most memorably associated with the 60's, however, probably because he came of age filmically with his directorial debut in *Easy Rider*, 1969.

It is difficult to find a magazine in late '69 or early '70 without a reference to Dennis Hopper, *Easy Rider*, or *The Last Movie*, his 1971 directorial follow-up to *Easy Rider*. His face adorned the covers of many major magazines, including *Time* and *Life*, here smiling like an outlaw, there posing pensively, but always in character with the perennial Stetson



from *Easy Rider* (1969). Directed by Dennis Hopper. (Film still courtesy of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.)

and cowboy shirt. On the cover of one national magazine the golden, glowing marquee of a theater billing *Easy Rider* is juxtaposed against the looming, shadowy, purple spires of a gothic revival church beckoning the faithful to worship. And worship they did. The hoopla surrounding *Easy Rider* was not so much about the critical acclaim the film received (Best Picture by a New Director, Cannes 1969), as about the resounding commercial success it scored. With a reported budget of around \$375,000, *Easy Rider* went on to gross an estimated \$60 million worldwide. Vincent Canby, writing for *The New York Times* in July of '69 said, "The most exciting thing about *Easy Rider* is neither content, nor style, nor statement, but the fact that it was made for less than \$500,000 (less than the cost of one set for some super productions) by young men working outside the movie making establishment and apparently reaching a large audience."⁶

In the late 60's the movie industry was perceived to be in trouble. People simply weren't going to films, especially not to the big budget extravaganzas. *Easy Rider* was in fact originally conceived by Peter Fonda in reaction to a speech by Jack Valenti (president of the Motion Picture Association of America) pleading for industry support in an attempt to produce "quality" family-oriented films like *Dr. Dolittle* (1967)—a \$20 million flop: "I truly don't believe that the entire young audience ... are of a psychedelic breed, hunkered up over their pot and acid, lurching off on supernatural romps and trips"⁷ (probably a reference to Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967), which first brought together Hopper, Fonda and Nicholson, the stars of *Easy Rider*). *Easy Rider*'s success transformed the Hopper image from recalcitrant Hollywood hippie into legitimate filmmaker and "spokesperson for the

age."⁸ The unruly bad boy was suddenly golden.

In retrospect, criticism engendered by the film seems perfunctory, aligned with the reigning ideology of whatever magazine the reviewer was writing for. At the time, many critics seemed curiously reticent about examining in more than a cursory fashion anything that might undermine the credibility of the left-leaning logic seemingly advanced by the film. Writing for *Esquire* in 1981, Jeff Greenfield reflects: "The hostility aimed in reality at long-haired, grass-smoking, adolescents seems to have given *Easy Rider* credibility without the need for logic or proof."⁹ Favorable reviews amounted to not much more than apology for jumping on the cultural bandwagon of the period. Even critical reviews tended to subside into grudging acknowledgement of *Easy Rider*'s popularity, with objections being raised within an overall context of appreciation.¹⁰ Discussion of the film in print tended to polarize issues within convenient cultural clichés: the rednecks vs. the hippies, the long-hairs vs. the short-hairs, the over-the-hill generation vs. the younger generation, the good guys vs. the bad guys (but with a 60's twist, meaning the tolerant vs. the intolerant), and finally, the hippie-Commie-queer-pervert-fags vs. the straights. The most intense discussion centered around whether the film's protagonists (Hopper and Fonda) were heroes of dissidence or not. To the frustration of Hopper and Fonda, *Easy Rider* was widely misread, with many critics claiming Billy and Wyatt as heroes and/or innocent victims. *Newsweek*'s Joseph Morgenstern saw the murders of Billy and Wyatt as illustrating "the wanton destruction of harmlessness."¹¹ *Life*'s Richard Schickel wrote that the "unthinking brutality of a nation, will, on occasion mindlessly kill dreamers it does not understand."¹² Dan

Wakefield, writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, asks, "Why the needless death and destruction of these fairly innocuous, generally pleasant, and harmless young men?"¹³ Only Diana Trilling, riled by the acquiescence of the critics, blasted *Easy Rider* for moral obfuscation and the critics themselves for moral queasiness.¹⁴

The difficulty in interpreting the "message" of *Easy Rider* may have been more the result of various cultural phenomena surrounding the film in the late 1960's than a matter of confusion arising within the film itself. Critics' unperturbed acceptance of the drug dealing in the film may have been an example of the extent to which the drug culture, co-opted by the left, had made good its claim to radical-ideological status and been wiped clean of corruption. Or, critics may have succumbed to their own blind spot, and simply honored the modernist injunction against moralizing about art. Questions about the film's intentions may have been clouded by that other phenomenon becoming apparent in the late sixties, the burgeoning counterculture and the triumph of the merchandiser. Critics often spoke of two narratives: the one they saw and the one they were supposed to see. In describing Billy and Wyatt, Morgenstern ruminates, "There's an authentic emptiness about both of them, a genuine displaced persona, until you ... realize that it's not supposed to be emptiness but eloquence."¹⁵ Trilling comments, "There is a moment when the camera circles the group [the hippies in the commune], moving slowly from one vacant-eyed face to the next: they are the faces of madness, of a perhaps irremediable break with reality, or so they looked to me, but I am afraid that what I saw was not necessarily what the makers of the film intended."¹⁶



from *Easy Rider* (1969). Directed by Dennis Hopper. (Film Still Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.)

There is always money to be made in a revolution, and by the late 60's capitalism's absorptive resilience was becoming more evident; the language of the revolution had already been appropriated for ads ranging from men's apparel to vaginal deodorant sprays. Products of the counterculture became advertisements for the society and were widely believed to be representative of the American way of life. Movies too were commercial products; it was noted that aspects of *Easy Rider* resembled television commercials—"Filming attractive bodies within nature at its nicest suggests the hint of menthol"¹⁷—and seemed to advertise the life style the film depicted. After all, Marlboro Country was still the imaginative place of clean air, pristine landscape and rugged individualism. The co-optation of the counter-culture by industry, and *Easy Rider*'s affinity to promotional techniques, made it difficult to ascertain where advocacy stopped and irony began.

Like Marlboro Country, the America of *Easy Rider* is a pictorial illusion; but, unlike the discourse of

advertising, Hopper's film seeks to expose rather than exploit the illusion. All of the films Hopper has directed (*Easy Rider* 1969, *The Last Movie* 1971, *Out of the Blue* 1980) have as their basis an inquiry into the deceptive nature of our cultural illusions. They investigate how familiar fictional narratives in movies and advertisements reinforce and perpetuate conventions into a cultural infinity. Their focus is on the complicated ideological process in which cultural and social attitudes are enhanced and given form.¹⁸ Hopper's films examine a reality over-determined by the symbolic accretions that have turned so much of America into cultural clichés.

His travelogue treatment of the West as a stock of allusions and attractions available for use, and his cartoon characterizations of Billy and Wyatt—with no more history behind them than the Lone Ranger and Tonto—stem from a Pop Art sensibility, pointing to the status of the image in our culture as commodity and inescapable sign. The self-conscious deployment of popular forms was the basis of Pop Art, perhaps the preeminent artistic movement of the sixties, and one in which Hopper was deeply involved, both as a collector and friend of the Pop artists, especially Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein.

Hopper's deployment of popular form goes further: *Easy Rider*, while proclaimed the ultimate "now" movie of 1969, was a blatantly derivative offspring of the Western and youth exploitation pictures (i.e. films exploiting a trend like bikers, the drug culture, etc.). The equation went something like this: Hell's Angels (and biker films of the 50's and 60's like *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and especially Roger Corman's *The Wild Angels*) + LSD (and drug culture films like *The Trip*)

= the Hippie counterculture (and *Easy Rider*).¹⁹ *Easy Rider*, however, was more than a simple elaboration of a biker picture. It was a deliberate, self-conscious reaction to that most basic of the classical Hollywood genres, the Western. The Western is significant for Hopper because it embodies so many of the myths upon which the national psychology of the United States depends: the frontier, the spirit of individualism, the love of the land, law and order, wide open spaces etc; myths which Hopper was interested in provoking the spectator to examine along with their assumptions about the nature of cinematic reality. Hopper shows what's behind the frontier impulse (imperialism), individualism (self-interest), the love of the land (the desire to exploit natural resources), and law and order (to keep the have-nots from getting what the haves have.)

All Hopper-directed films are latter-day Westerns made against the genre and against classical Hollywood. Genre cinema, having achieved a position of dominance on world screens, serves American political and economic interests; con-

from *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Directed by Nicholas Ray. Starring Natalie Wood, James Dean, Sal Minea, and Dennis Hopper. (Hopper is at upper left.) (Film still courtesy of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.)



sequently, movies made against the genre are invariably political. Hopper's films are made against the genre, by treating the background as familiar, then by constructing the films through significant deviation (though most failed to read the significance of his deviations.) Hopper intends no less than a deconstruction of American cultural myths in connection with Hollywood's complicity in cultural and economic imperialism. Under Hopper's direction the American Western genre is given a function and purpose: to reveal the essential artifice of its gestures and its political and social afflictions. Only a film that is marginal to the genre can break the code, and Hopper's interest all along was in breaking the codes.

Taking the Western as the representative Hollywood film, Hopper attempts a rigorous examination, not only of the form and content of the Western, but of its social function as well.¹⁹ The Western provides the perfect vehicle for Hopper's double preoccupations with Western imperialism—richer over poorer, and representation over truth.²⁰ The West survives as an image in the American mind: a pastoral ideal, a garden of the world, agrarian utopia, or a spectacular raw landscape, which holds adventure, riches and even salvation. The latter version of the frontier metaphor figures heavily in Hopper's work. The unspoiled landscape gave birth to an American version of romanticism in both the idealization of Nature and the kind of "ideal self" that could be realized in it. But as Billy and Wyatt complete their dope deal, throw off their watches and ride off into the West to the strains of "Goddamn the Pusher," we know there will be no salvation. For one thing, there is no longer any frontier. The landscape of *Easy Rider* does not represent our historical past or present so much as it represents our stereotypes about our past. Hopper's cinematic representation of the frontier is mythic in its lack of human desecration.²¹ Billy and Wyatt pass no cars, no tour buses, no billboards, no truck stops, no cheesy motels, no gas stations, not even a park ranger. Only the black ribbon highways on which they ride indicate the inroads of civilization. Although Billy and Wyatt ride continuously through this phantasm, they are never engaged by it; it is a sight. Hopper's postcard perfection exploits the emotional resonances of the sign as a kind of primal American fantasy, while the extreme nature of the image points to its palpable facticity. The image is construct, a license for purple passages, a scenic backdrop, a gift to the camera and the eye, a special and specially preserved version of reality. Only via Hollywood can one travel from California to New Orleans on major thoroughfares completely devoid of other traffic.

Hopper deviates from the genre in more obvious ways as well, simply reversing many Western clichés. *Easy Rider* chronicles a trip from the west coast back to New Orleans and the Mardi Gras, making it in a sense an "Eastern." To the degree that westward movement was expansionist and imperialist, *Easy Rider* is contractive and anti-imperialist. The road west in *The Last Movie* is rerouted south to Peru, the frontier in the United States being so depleted that an American movie company must go to a foreign country to promulgate its moribund myths. Symbolically the trip is a reenactment of the original despoliation of the American West and the exploitation of its indigenous peoples.²² It's the rape, pillage, and plunder scene all over again, only this time by Hollywood, the now more insidious form of imperialism.

Meanwhile, back in the States, the frontier is nowhere to be seen. In *Out of the Blue* remnants of it echo eerily in the static crackle of truckers' disembodied voices filtering



from *The Last Movie* (1971). Directed by Dennis Hopper. (Film still courtesy the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.)

in over the citizens band radio—the only thing still working in the now decaying cab of Don's (Hopper's) wrecked truck. Hopper's on-screen daughter "C.B." (played by Linda Manz) sits with her teddy bear in the truck—which itself sits, derelict, abandoned, and overgrown by weeds in the yard—holding late-night conversations over the C.B. radio. She defiantly hurls her hostility out into the void: "Disco sucks," "Subvert normality," "Kill all hippies." The road west, once symbolic of freedom and renewal, has been reduced to a commercial venture, trucking—and even that has been demolished. The western myth has become pathetic, the elixir of the American road a polluted potion, Don's cowboy dress a parody, his truck driving a perverted form of freedom. What was freedom from societal entrapment has become freedom to traverse sexual taboos. The beautiful black ribbon roads of opportunity which seemed to hold some promise in *Easy Rider* have turned into a dark narrow passage of exploitation leading to a dead end.

Hopper's frustration with the circumscribed limits of classical narrative form can be felt throughout his directorial pursuits. In classical Hollywood, narrative was based

... on a dramaturgy of intrigue and strongly accentuated plot, which managed to transform spatial and temporal sequence into consequence, a continuum of cause and effect. The image or scene not only pointed forward and backward to what had been and what was to come, but also helped to develop motivational logic that functioned as implicit causality The scenes fitted into each other like cogwheels in a clockwork, and that all visual information was purposive, inflected towards a plenitude of significance, saturated with clues that explained motivation and character. Out of conflict, contradiction and contingency the narrative generated order and linearity.²³

In place of strongly accentuated plots, Hopper strings together series of loosely knit incidents that at times appear almost random. This is particularly the case in *Easy Rider* and *The Last Movie* where there is the sense that other incidents recorded on the footage might have sufficed as well as what was shown. Action tends to be episodic, as in *Easy Rider* where long periods of inaction are punctuated by vignettes that move the narrative forward. In *The Last Movie*, the film does not develop a major dramatic conflict that gradual-

ly unfolds through the entire movie; instead, deliberate ellipses are left in the narrative so that scenes end abruptly and character situations are left unresolved. Cutting is emphasized over continuity in the interspersal of non-sequential moments. The single use of the fire flash frame in *Easy Rider* forewarns us (out of context) of Billy and Wyatt's fate (interpreted at the time by some as a state of acid-induced precognition.)

In the first part of *The Last Movie* Hopper intensifies the use of the nonsequential moment by intercutting nonchronologically between the making of *Billy the Kid*, the party scene, the Easter Festival and aspects of the Indians' movie which only gets made much later at the end of the film. The result is a mystification of time (moments seem to exist simultaneously) which undermines the linearity of the narrative and has a disorienting effect on the viewer. In *Out of the Blue* the rhythm is chopped up and frenetic. In the opening sequence Hopper cuts frantically between the oncoming truck, the stalled school bus and C.B. sitting alone in the wrecked cab years later after the accident. The effect is one of being fast-forwarded through the narrative, leaving no time to reflect on what has transpired.

Peter Fonda commented about *Easy Rider* in an interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine*:

We don't give out any information through dialogue. We have a very loose plot, nothing you can follow. You can't predict what's going to happen, and that puts everybody off. People want it predicted for them, they want violence to happen when they expect it to happen, so they can deal with it, they want sex to be a certain way and drugs to be a certain way and death to be a certain way. And it ain't.²⁴

In the traditional popular genres the litany was well known; part of the pleasure lay in seeing how the basic elements would be treated this time around. In place of pleasure Hopper problematizes reading by the way he leaves key structuring events outside the text. What's left out leaves room for speculation on the part of the viewer, about former incidents and relationships before the filmed events. *Out of the Blue* is rooted in a past trauma, which the viewer believes to be the horrific accident referred to repeatedly in nightmare flashes, in which Don negligently crashes his semi truck into a crowded school bus. But the more fundamental trauma is not depicted in the flashbacks or even in the film; the sexual secret of incest, revealed only in the last moments, results in an entire restructuring of the film in reverse. Suddenly the overtones of certain scenes become painfully clear: in the opening scene Don asks C.B. playfully, "Am I as sexy as Elvis?"; later C.B. is counseled by a psychologist, "There's something you're not telling me ..."; when Don picks C.B. up from school, he asks her proddingly if she would like to go on the road with him again. "Remember all the fun we used to have when we went to Mexico?" The knowledge we get from the unfolding text of Hopper's films is cumulative but always changing, restructured retrospectively after each frame.²⁵ The narrative reversal of backward revelation around which *Out of the Blue* is structured leaves viewers anxious and grasping for clues, unbelieving as to how they could have missed the signs posited along the way which would have hinted at the awful revelation preceding the cathartic climax.

The narrative and positions of characters within the narrative in these films do not always follow the traditional rules of plot and character development. For example, in *The Last Movie* it's only in the last part of the film that events begin to coalesce around the main character, Kansas (played by Dennis Hopper) in such a way that his fate becomes the dominant concern and emotional center of the film.²⁶ Hopper's films generally contain little in the way of extended psychological character development. In *Easy Rider* the principals, "Billy and Wyatt" are represented as characters "without history, context or intention."²⁷ Motivational logic and causality are undermined by insufficient data.

In his desire to traverse traditional Hollywood, Hopper, the iconoclast, was not content simply to reverse western clichés or rearrange conventional narrative development. His inclination is toward an avant-garde form, but this is tempered, partly out of respect for the traditional narrative (he was raised on the movies of Gene Autrey, Roy Rogers and Smiley Burnette) and partly by the desire to work (in audience-oriented Hollywood, avant-garde inclinations are subdued by commerce). European directors, supported by government monies, can conduct experiments into the nature of narratives not generated by conventional dramatic supports such as melodrama, quest, investigation or journey; but no such possibilities are open to American directors working in the commercial cinema.²⁸ Form cannot be too dif-

from *The Last Movie* (1971). Directed by Dennis Hopper. (Film Still Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.)



ferent to be understood. Every film must stand on its own in the circuit of exchange—commerce subordinates art. The film must make money. Films that are too difficult (like those with complex narrative constructions) remain unmade or unseen, as Hopper was to find out after *The Last Movie* when Hollywood (reacting to the political implications of the film) only allowed a limited release of the film, then pulled it and shelved it. Instead of following *Easy Rider* with another simple essentially straight-forward narrative, which is what the industry expected, Hopper chose to make a complex, multifaceted, open-ended movie about movies.

The Last Movie's movie-within-a-movie format allowed Hopper to thematize in the structure of the narrative his scepticism about a social and political experience pasted over by ideological fictions and proliferated in the movies. The tyranny of representation he only hinted about in *Easy Rider* in his treatment of the landscape (previously discussed) comes to the fore in *The Last Movie*. *The Last Movie's* first phase is a fundamentally representational exposé of the making of "Billy the Kid;" it reveals the artifice of filmmaking as a commodity manufactured by technicians. In the narratively straight-forward second phase we see what is actually "The Last Movie," a film primarily about what happens to Kansas (Hopper), a wrangler stuntman working for the movie company. He decides to stay on in Peru after finishing the filming of "Billy the Kid" in hopes of striking it rich. This part of the film presents a standard fare of violence, sex, and death; but it also is concerned with the effects of film practice, both on those knowingly associated with the movies, and on those who innocently come into contact with movies (symbolized by the natives). Finally, in the film's last phase, Hopper extends his concerns beyond the artifice of the western film genre and allegories about the role of movies in contemporary life to begin to explore filmmaking itself.²⁹ By intermixing different levels of reality and by breaking itself down, *The Last Movie* begins reporting on itself. In the end, the fictional substance of the film is allowed to whittle itself out of existence, through an interplay of multiple fictional strands and documentary fragments: in outtakes of *The Last Movie*, Kansas is shot repeatedly and staggers off to die, in infinite variations (at one point he gets up and thumbs his nose at the camera); but before he is finally killed, the narrative erodes, self-destructing gradually through more outtakes. This erosion of the narrative is symbolic of the frustration of never being able to say things as you had imagined them, of never being able to find the perfect form within the confines of the medium's and industry's codes.³⁰ Hopper had to pay for violating the sacred trust of never alluding to the unreality of the image:

*Universal wanted me to change the ending, but I said, No, I didn't want the character I played dying. They said, "We don't care if you have won the Venice Film Festival, kill this guy, have a camera fall on him, run him over with a horse, re-edit it and kill him." I refused and they did what they said they were going to do: they released it for two weeks in L.A., two weeks in New York and three days in San Francisco.*³¹

After the trashing he received for *The Last Movie* from the Hollywood establishment, the critics, and a vicious and vindictive press³², it's not surprising that Hopper returned to cinematically sanctioned material in *Out of the Blue*: "I just want to make linear films that everyone can understand."³³ For the most part Hopper's films follow the innovative line in American cinema, progressing



from *Out of the Blue* (1980). Directed by Dennis Hopper. With Hopper, Linda Manz. (Film still courtesy of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.)

by the shifting and modifying of traditional genres and themes, while never quite shedding their support in order to insure audience recognition and commercial distribution.

Hopper's films revolve around a kind of self-demolishing dynamic. The films' narratives are undermined through premonition, repetition and, in *The Last Movie*, reconstruction.³⁴ What originated as a single shot in *Easy Rider*—the random, nearly subliminal interpolation of the final crash, becomes in *The Last Movie* and *Out of the Blue* the central form of the films.³⁵ What looked like rough edges and stylistic uncertainty in *Easy Rider* were really the early components of Hopper's radical aesthetic message. In *The Last Movie* what looks like a rough cut in need of editing is actually sophisticated editing made to look like a rough cut.³⁶ As Hopper's narratives continue to unravel, the implications reverberate out into cultural infinity.

Afterword

In Hopper's new film *Colors* (1988), he returns, to an even greater degree, to cinematically sanctioned

material. *Colors* is standard cop movie fare, thematically conventional and conventionally linear. The gap between conception (desire) and completion (what is actually possible) within Hollywood's codes can be discerned in a 1986 interview with Hopper, in which he pondered what he'd like to do next:

*I'm not interested in doing period things. I want to do things about now. That's my forte ... I'd really like to do a drug picture. It's not a popular time, everybody's going around saying, "We don't do that anymore." They don't want to use that as a device to show the underbelly of Los Angeles. Hollywood, Beverly Hills. It's all over, from wealthy people to poor people. Show the street gangs, the Valley gangs, the barrio gangs. Show the producers, the rock stars, the musicians, that whole area. Use a surfer as the key figure ... I've talked with various people, but they just hang up; they don't want to be associated with a drug picture. But in point of fact, it's a perfect time to do it. Now is the time to do it. The country's a mess anyway, and they're putting out that they're not going to make a movie about it.*³⁷

from *Out of the Blue* (1980). Directed by Dennis Hopper. (Film Still Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.)



The film Hopper talks about making sounds infinitely more interesting than the one that got made.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Tom Burke, "Dennis Hopper Saves the Movies," *Esquire*, September 1970, p. 170.
- 2 James Monaco, *How to Read a Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 424. Daniel Boorstin's famous phrase is listed in the index as the definition of celebrity.
- 3 J. Hoberman, *Dennis Hopper/From Method to Madness* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1988), p. 5.
- 4 Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *Hollywood Films of the Seventies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 48.
- 5 Chris Hodenfield, "Citizen Hopper," *Film Commentary*, December 1986, p. 64.
- 6 Vincent Canby, *The New York Times Film Reviews*, July 27, 1969, p. 58.
- 7 Seth Cagin, p. 61.
- 8 Seth Cagin, p. 66.
- 9 Jeff Greenfield, "Easy Rider: A turning point in film? A profound social message? An endless bummer?", *Esquire*, July 1981, p. 90.

10 Joseph Morgenstern, "On the Road," *Newsweek*, July 21, 1969, p. 98.

11 Richard Schickel, "A Lyric, Tragic Song of the Road," *Life*, July 11, 1969, p. 10.

12 Dan Wakefield, "The War at Home," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1969, p. 121.

13 Diana Trilling, "Easy Rider and Its Critics," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1970, p. 93 and p. 95, respectively. Trilling takes Shaw's quote about the theatre as a point of departure: "Art should refine our sense of character and conduct, of justice and sympathy, greatly heightening our self-knowledge, self-control, precision of action, and considerateness, and making us intolerant of baseness, cruelty, injustice and intellectual superficiality and vulgarity." She compares the high moral function of the theatre to the function of film: "No art exerts more moral influence ... more than personal character is being formed by our film-makers: a culture, a society, even a polity." She also discusses *Easy Rider* in terms of its power for moral and social instruction, and condemns it for being "highly tendentious" but wearing "the mask of disengagement," for "purposive mystification," "conscious evasion," "muteness," for giving "authority to the film's false view of the moral and social life," etc.

14 Joseph Morgenstern, p. 95.

15 Diana Trilling, p. 92.

16 Nora Sayre, "Revolt for Fun and Profit," *Esquire*, August 1970.

17 Robert Phillip Kolker, *The Altering Eye* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 6-7. Kolker gives an explanation of how popular film has become part of the ideological structure reinforcing the social and political status quo.

18 Seth Cagin, p. 61.

19 David E. James, "Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*," *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, Spring 1983, p. 35.

20 Richard Combs, "The Last Movie," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1982, p. 219.

21 Diana Trilling, p. 91. Trilling attributes this, on p. 93, to a seduction of sorts, and to Hopper's being "caught in the dream of a country unscathed by modernity."

22 David James, p. 41.

23 Thomas Elsaesser, "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 70's," *Monogram*, October 1975, p. 13.

24 Elizabeth Campbell, "Rolling Stone Raps with Peter Fonda," in *Easy Rider*, Original Screenplay by Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper and Terry Southern, Edited by Nancy Hardin and Marilyn Schlossberg (New York: Signet Book, 1969), p. 28.

25 Corinne Squire, "'Out of the Blue' and Into the Black," *Screen*, September/October 1982, p. 99. (Her point is applied to all films, not only Hopper's.)

26 David E. James, p. 37.

27 Jeff Greenfield, p. 90.

28 Thomas Elsaesser, p. 18.

29 David E. James, p. 42.

30 Richard Dorfman, "Fathers and Sons," *The Velvet Light Trap*, Winter 1975, p. 44.

31 J. Petley and P. Walsh, "How Far to the Last Movie," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1982, p. 222.

32 David E. James, p. 46: "Film Facts recorded 0 favorable, 2 mixed, and 13 negative reviews. Typical of the reviewers' opinions are 'pure fiasco,' 'an artistic disaster,' 'sorry cinematic melange,' 'the work of a kid playing with a toy,' and 'an extravagant mess.'"

33 J. Petley and P. Walsh, p. 222.

34 Corinne Squire, p. 104.

35 Corinne Squire, p. 104.

36 Richard Dorfman, p. 44.

37 Chris Hodenfield, p. 72.

Margo Reece is a photographer and printmaker who teaches at the Art Institute of Houston.

MONOLOGUE/ DIALOGUE

By Carole Tormollan

From July 8–August 7, 1988, San Francisco Eagle: Gay Bar In Time of Transition, Photographs by Doug Ischar, were on exhibit at HCP. Ischar's work was included in another exhibition this summer, Monologue/Dialogue, organized by Lynne Brown for the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, from June 25–July 23. SPOT asked Chicago writer Carole Tormollan to address the broader context of gay and lesbian representation created by the Chicago show. Also included in Monologue/Dialogue were photographs by Kaucyila Brooke (Tucson, Arizona), Sunil Gupta (London, U.K.), and Janet Pritchard (Albuquerque, New Mexico).

The title of this exhibition, *Monologue/Dialogue*, represents a binary opposition. The term "Monologue" refers to the cultural formations of patriarchy, in other words, to the singular, dominant discourse of white male heterosexual society. The term "Dialogue" refers to those outside of it, often constituted in theory as the voice of the "Other": women, non-whites, non-heterosexuals, who can only be known in relationship to the dominant culture. These four photographers subvert this ideology by placing the "Other" in the center.



Kaucyila Brooke, *Untitled*, 1987 (detail; original in color)

Kaucyila Brooke's photo-comics examine the lesbian alternative. She elaborates in her statement: "If women are the 'other,' then lesbians, without a legitimizing sexual connection to the male, are completely outside patriarchal structure." Brooke explores the application of this theory in her "Untitled" (1987) series. Here, a lesbian couple (played by models) appears in the masculine landscape of Monument Valley. As we follow these women through a sequence of photographs, photo-composites, dialog balloons, and narrative, we witness conflicts between the dominant patriarchal backdrop and their desire to escape this scenario. This is obvious when one of them, dressed in a cowgirl outfit, looks at the landscape and says, "I am free floating without associations." As viewers, we are confronted by the paradoxical relationship between her attire and her statement. While she claims to be outside the codes of dominant culture, her outfit reflects the codes around her. Nonetheless, her perception of herself as autonomous leaves her feeling alienated from this environment. Speaking theoretically, her partner offers an alternative: "You can't talk your way out of an entire culture. You are it and it is you We are surrounded by the language." She then illustrates her statement by shaking her shoe and saying, "This damn sand. It gets into everything." In turn, we realize that escaping from sand in a desert is a fantasy that accompanies Monument Valley. At the same time, however, these lesbians are not taken over by this desert. In the last frame, we see them looking through the lenses of a pair of glasses, implying, perhaps, an ex-

amination of everything else that surrounds them.

Sunil Gupta's "'Pretended' Family Relationships" (1987-88) are a series of twelve triptychs that look at cultural identity within the homosexual community. Formally, each triptych consists of a color print, a poem written by Steven Dodd, and a strip from a black and white photograph. The color prints each show a gay or lesbian couple (also played by models) in a different public or private setting. The poems establish some aspect of the relationship between them, for instance, "Seeing you, seeing me, it all becomes so clear." These combinations are then placed next to sections selected from photographs taken at a demonstration in London on April 30, 1988. This protest was in opposition to a clause in a Local Government Bill that would prohibit the "promotion" and teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship." Gupta was present at a panel discussion, also entitled "Monologue/Dialogue," at Randolph Street Gallery on the evening of June 25th. During this panel, he told the audience that the Clause was passed into law on May 26th. He also explained that this legislation was in response to a school book that had favorably portrayed two gay men raising a child. To date, the implications of this legislation remain unclear, but a critical response has been mobilized.

Gupta's "'Pretended' Family Relationships"



relationships" depict the potential impact of this legislation. The law not only denies homosexual couples a legitimate presence in society, it collapses the expression of difference as well. Gupta exhibits these differences by presenting a diverse range of gay and lesbian couples from various ethnic backgrounds. He places these couples in different London settings, sometimes suggesting through these locations different class affiliations. (It is worth noting that socio-economic issues often polarize gays and lesbians.) The poems express a wide range of experiences, emotions, and human interactions, in addition to speech patterns and dialects. Gupta also appears as a model in one of these "'Pretended' Families," thus calling attention to his own position in this political situation.

By juxtaposing different photographs, Gupta presents a commentary on the British legislation. In the triptych that opens his series, the large color print displays a male couple alongside the Thames River with the Houses of Parliament in the distance. The smaller black and white image next to it shows a bobby on horseback. We can see a spur on his leather boot and the faces of the protesters in front of him. In another triptych, a male couple lies on a bed facing the viewer. The other image shows a man holding a sign with the word "Fight" written on it. While these combinations vary throughout the series, they all share one thing in common: they all provide a presence



Sunil Gupta, from the series *'Pretended' Family Relationships*, 1987-8 (courtesy Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago)

for those who are "normally" absent within dominant culture.

Doug Ischar keeps this aspect rolling, so to speak, in his documentary project, "San Francisco Eagle: Gay Bar in Time of Transition" (1986-88). His exhibit begins, appropriately enough, with a location shot of the Eagle bar in San Francisco. From here, Ischar moves us inside and outside and then all around the Eagle. In other words, Ischar constructs a gay social history, using photographs from Sunday afternoon beer busts at the Eagle, as well as the streets of the Folsom (taken between June 1986 and August 1987) as his frame of reference. He also includes gay publications, autobiographical commentary, and material excerpted from books. As Ischar states in the text

potential void in a social history where lack of record is the rule."

In this respect, Ischar's work is similar to Gupta's—both photographers are attempting to preserve a homosexual presence through representation. However, Ischar's project, with two exceptions (a woman in leather at the Eagle, and a quote in a book mentioning the word "lesbian"), concentrates on gay male sexuality. Ischar's project also confronts a variety of interrelated issues, rather than a specific piece of legislation which conceals its own hidden, interrelated components. Ischar situates himself in the area South of Market in San Francisco. Here, seven gay bars have permanently closed since 1982. Ischar identifies several reasons for these closings, namely: gentrification; AIDS and the political reactions to it; and a general decline in clientele, related to AIDS, politics, and aging.¹ Due to these circumstances, the Eagle has become, according to Ischar, "a microcosm of the pre-AIDS Folsom—a 'melting pot' of bikers, leather men, body builders, and drag queens." Ischar represents this diversity in his work. His color photographs are finely crafted group portraits that present these men communing on Sunday afternoons. Ischar then extracts the layers of meaning that inform our reading.

For starters, Ischar discusses his own sexuality and the fact that looking at these men is a turn-on. In other words, he renders his own position non-transparent, which contributes to the success of his work. This self-referential, doubling-back process is reinforced by a photograph of a hand bill for a photo exhibit that reads "Sadomasochism true confessions..." Ischar makes no secret of the fact that he used to enjoy leather bars himself. Moreover, as viewers we are reminded of the fact that we are witnessing a photo exhibition ourselves.

Next Ischar presents an excerpt

Doug Ischar, from the series, *San Francisco Eagle: Gay Bar in Time of Transition*, 1986-88 (original in color)



from John D'Emilio's book, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983), introducing the notion that gay bars perform a public and collective function. On the same wall we see an older image of the Eagle, as well as a photograph of men standing on a platform, holding up vintage gay-porn images for auction. These additions lend a sense of history to the photographs on display.

In the next wall Ischar examines the erotic aspect of these images from a variety of perspectives. For example, one quote discusses a correspondence between the reclamation of public spaces and the subsequent distribution of gay erotic imagery. Surviving fragments of various publications are presented, hung low on the wall (as "subtexts"). These include, for instance, a mail-order photo-narrative that suggestively shows two men sharing cokes, cigarettes, and then undressing one another. One magazine (*Body Beautiful, Ltd.*) contains a letter from the editor that announces "The U.S. Customs is requesting permission to open mail." This was a response triggered by numerous requests to photographic studios for frontal male nudes. Another appropriated photograph shows two book pages. On the right is a man dressed in leather, and on the left, a text that reads like a leather manifesto. I quote:

In Leather, with its sensuous touch and smell, they have found a symbol which helps them escape from the over-feminized present into a past where men of strength and muscle, power and determination ... were admired and emulated.

This quote suggests that the erotic fantasy surrounding leather is about empowerment and a confrontation of cultural notions of gay male passivity.² It also speaks visually against oppression. By juxtaposing these various texts and images to his own photographs, Ischar constructs several disjunctures that interrupt the erotic reception of these images. A photograph on the opposite wall introduces a critical commentary. It depicts a handbill showing two men hugging; below them is a dollar sign. This suggests the obvious, that erotic photographs are often produced for money. Ischar makes sure we do not forget this other narrative.

Another wall includes photographs that represent activities other than sex. For instance, we see the notice board for the Eagle bar, with messages about a self-help group and a sketch class. One photograph shows an "anti-blow job" logo from the bathroom. Another announces an "AIDS protest for life saving drugs and treatments." At the same time, we see photographs of men at the

Eagle. These portray the diverse range of patrons, once again, but their presence also speaks out against the threat of AIDS. These men are active and not afraid to be affectionate with one another.

The remaining images, on the final wall, continue to reflect diversity. Below them is hung a sequence of black and white photographs taken from *Muscle Teens*, June 1966. We see images of nude men dressed in cowboy adornments, playing guitars, tying each other up, having fun. Ischar reminds us how such images have functioned historically: "In the absence of both sexual and social community, they connected isolated gay men to a shared source of erotic pleasure and, indirectly, to each other." Perhaps Ischar hopes that documentation will help maintain this sexual and social community. (After all, while Ischar constructs this visual record, he is also constructed by it.) In one of the very last images, we see a large American flag in reverse. In the foreground, a muscular-looking man in a bathing suit stretches his arm out towards it. We are reminded that, like the flag, the eagle represents America.



She wanted to be whole
a map did not exist

Janet Pritchard, from the series *Autoviews*, 1987 (original in color) (Photo credit: Linda Backert)

Janet Pritchard's *Autoviews* (1987) is a grid-like assemblage of 18 photographs taken through the window of a moving car. Collectively they signify a metaphorical passage through time and space, suggesting, perhaps, one's self-reflective thoughts. The text which accompanies them fluctuates between the first and third person, offering a self-consciousness without resolution. Formally they refer to the "equivalent" school of photography, offering fuzzy out-of-focus aerial views of trees and sky, and sometimes of the road. One of them includes the rear-view mirror. Others offer us a hand on the steering wheel or a glimpse of a face. It is frustrating to view them in the context of this exhibition—they seem rather self-indulgent when compared to the socially conscious work around them. However, they also represent a coming-out process, which could later evolve into an awareness of others.

FOOTNOTES

1 One of the texts Ischar includes mentions that he met a man who had photographed the South of Market leather scene in the 70's. But the photographs were now destroyed, because "AIDS had made them an unwelcome reminder, a liability."

2 Leo Bersani has some interesting comments on the leather scene in his article, "Is the Rectum a Grave?", *October* 43, Winter 1987, pp. 197-222.

Carole Tormollan is an M.A. candidate in modern art history, theory and criticism at the school of the Art Institute of Chicago.

AN INTERPRETATION OF ANARCHY, MYTH AND EXTREMITY

By Anne Roberts

The Seventh Annual Members' Exhibition was held at the Houston Center for Photography from April 8—May 15, 1988. Photographers whose work was included were Geoffrey Brune, David Chaffin, Cosgrove/Orman, Ben DeSoto, Jim Elmore, C. Leigh Farmer, Jay Forrest, Paul Vincent Kuntz, Sharon Stewart and B. Striewski.

When the Houston Center for Photography was founded—now an amazing eight years ago—one of its many purposes was to provide a space for members to exhibit and receive feedback on their work. Each year in a democratic process of selection, members choose groups of work that are interesting either because of subject matter or technique. By its very nature the Members' Show will be uneven, but it is the evolving nature of this work—an artist onto an idea, creating—which makes the show an exciting one.

The most arresting work in this year's *Seventh Annual Members' Exhibition* comes from three photographers whose formal concerns could not be more different: Ben DeSoto's aggressive documentary, Sharon Stewart's meditative landscapes, and Cosgrove/Orman's expressionistic portraits. All successfully blend theme and method into a fully-realized concept.

Ben DeSoto's installation of photographs of a new music club/anarchy-rebellion demands attention both in its unconventional presentation and controversial subject matter. The viewer could no more ignore the large, plastic-coated, high-contrast, grainy action photographs nailed graffiti-like to the wall, than a group of these frenzied rebels in his own living room, or perhaps within his own psyche. DeSoto's stance takes us into the middle of the action as did the better wartime photojournalists, but there's a sense of personal concern here as well. The young adults pictured here listen raptly, interact with the musicians, or slam and jolt one another with terrific energy, building a mood of out-of-control protest, rebellion, breaking-out and acting-out. Since rebellious music is a crucial part of this society, at the beginning of the installation DeSoto includes a quotation from "The Stars and Stripes of Corruption" by Jello Biafra and the Dead Kennedys.

Jello himself appears in "At the Island," 1983, as a powerfully angry symbol, arm out in protest or defiance, fingers open and clenched, his shirtless body rendered imposing in grainy contrast. In "Cabaret Voltaire," 1986, five white teenagers dance/run together as if they've been involved in some violence, racing to get away. Several are caught up in the moment or in each other, but one boy faces the camera, an ambiguous expression of elation, guilt and fear captured on his face.

In a different mood in "At Raul's, Austin," 1980, the photographer moves close to a beautiful blonde caught with head back in oblivious musical rapture as two enormous painted rats cavort on the call mural behind her. ¹ Beauty and the beast, youthful energy versus society's corruption, compliance or defiance, are all continuing contemporary issues in this work.

A quieter, but no less powerful search for self-understanding and meaning characterizes Sharon Stewart's series, "Time Shadows of Ancient Greece," 1986-88. Stewart makes use of the special qualities of infrared film to produce these soft, grainless, intricately detailed studies of ancient ceremonial sites. Through intensity of focus and careful framing Stewart imbues each site with eerie mysticism, a layering of the seen and unseen, past and present. ² Each site seems elevated, expectant, only waiting for the players.

In #11, the simple stacked stones of the bench of the goddess Demeter rest silently important in the landscape. The particular pattern of cloud in the darkened sky forms an impression of presence, but a careful scrutiny reveals nothing there. In #XII we see Agamemnon's tomb, its open doorway brilliantly lit and surrounded by darkness. A small shadowy triangular opening above the door makes you wonder if there's something there and heightens the

sense of anticipation. In the more detailed #IX, the dark landscape at the left edge draws the eye into the curve of brightly lit columns, around the edges of the ruins, up into the twisted branches and back down to the shadowy areas. The variety of curves and angles, detail and planes is delightful.

The emotional effects of added color, with heavy manipulation of both the negatives and prints, characterize the collaborative portrait work of Charlotte Cosgrove and Helen Orman. In this series of portraits, the artists begin by photographing their friends against a pertinent newspaper background. By combining negatives, collaging in different poses or backgrounds, and adding hand-coloring, the artists compile a layered view of the personality of the sitter, usually at a point of emotionally-charged conflict. In "Honey," 1988, a rather businesslike sitter quizzically holds blue-tinted glasses, while four overly made-up sex-kitten portraits of the same person mug through the newspaper. The overall effect of the added color is dramatic, often amusing or startling. ³

In the larger combined self-portraits this technique achieves pure expressionism. In "Night Fusion," "Ritual" and "Scream," the viewer relates to and identifies with the emotionally charged moment. Particularly powerful is "Night Fusion," where several overlaid faces with multiple eyes, screams and frowns, accompanied by hands placed to the cheeks, form an expression of pure anxiety. The jangled grey drawing in the background blends with the details of the pink lace nightgown and the faces into a powerfully fearful image. Strong stuff.

Also working in a portrait style are B. Striewski, Geoffrey Brune and David Chaffin. Striewski's beautifully rendered three-quarter figures depict friends costumed for a Halloween party. The small toned portraits reveal the idealized persona, often in some romantic situation. One man with handanna-covered eyes faces the firing squad; another wears a hard hat and the serious frontal stare of the Avedon Western portraits, beer stomach pushing out from under his jacket.

Chaffin also presents portraits of friends; his people wear masks and are placed in carefully constructed sets. These large black and white photos are dramatically framed, the subjects and attitudes unusual, the skin tones splendid, but though Chaffin means "to express his own fears and fantasies" ⁴, little is revealed about these persons. The viewer is highly involved but not enlightened.

Geoffrey Brune's composite portraits design personality by assembling clues, leading the eye through a satisfying arrangement of fragments of setting, description or posture. Often pertinent information is missing, so the viewer is stumped. All the parts come together in "To Whom It May Concern" (1988). The eye moves from the added color of the building; down across the six tiny portraits with cigarette and hat; horizontally to electric posts and back across fences; down to a dark, caged, dead-ended area (a drainage ditch?); and finally down into a small, handwritten will. With the major clues assembled, the viewer can return to enjoy additional details.

C. Leigh Farmer's "Dancescapes" and Jay Forrest's "American Flats, Nevada" are large color photographs which emphasize more painterly concerns. Farmer's abstracted photos of movements of performers in a contemporary dance company are blurs of graceful color within the gorgeous hues of the background. Forrest's series paints the complicated layering of years of graffiti on crumbling architectural buildings/canvases. Each careful framing abstracts an area of intricate rich detail.

The site-specific black and white documentaries of Paul Vincent Kuntz and Jim Elmore are installed

on adjoining walls, where it's impossible to miss their dialogue. ⁵ Kuntz has made a two-year photographic study of Houston's Third Ward area, an old, primarily black section of town. ⁶ The pieces exhibited were taken at Malo's Bar on February 21, 1987, during an annual rodeo party. In the comfort and fraternity of a neighborhood bar the subjects dance, or talk in groups, or react to the photographer in their portraits. One man raises his glass as if to salute Kuntz, who appears well-known and accepted by the participants. Each scene is composed using strong contrasts, with dark faces close-cropped set against white or deep black backgrounds.

A man with a gold tooth, or a large woman with arms raised as if to sing along, seem predictable; on the other hand, one photograph of three young women in tight plaid shirts, with arms joined dancing in front of the jukebox, is a wonderfully lively, unconscious image. The figures seem alive, animated, a direct contrast to the more formal, stiff society shown at Elmore's event.

From 1982-1986, Jim Elmore has photographed the Confederate Ball which occurs here annually on Robert E. Lee's birthday. Elmore's statement emphasizes his subjective commentary and point of view, which are obvious enough in the photographs themselves: in one, a young Hispanic maid holding a tray of glasses is caught standing next to Lee's ornately framed portrait. Elmore's framing is wide-angle here, flash illumination approaching natural light. The white, affluent participants are dressed in stiff uniforms, caught in moments of ceremony, being looked at, or in the case of the women in period ballgowns, standing around decoratively.

Instead of treating the ball as only an excuse for a fun party in fancy dress, Elmore's editing shows disapproval; but his best images forget this and are less moralistic. In one, four young debutantes are rising from a moving platform in the floor, surrounded by an orchestra, observers and proud parents. In another, an attractive blonde woman, in a swirling dress with lots of white feathers, is caught dancing in complete abandonment and enjoyment.

Several of the members whose work is shown in this exhibition had work in last year's Members Show. This annual opportunity to see and be seen, to glimpse new work, or to watch familiar ideas develop into finished products, is welcome.

FOOTNOTES

1 DeSoto admits the rats were an unplanned bonus.

2 Stewart's statement speaks of "shifting cadences of myth, time, truth...perceived and unseen joined the past's presence."

3 The artists successfully walk a fine line here between the psychological and campy, and least in those photos exhibited, the viewer doesn't see the "spiritual" alluded to in their statement.

4 From the artist's statement.

5 Much as I would have been tempted, as the installer, to hang these two series near each other, they would have shown better separated. (I mean, this is a review, but enough's enough.)

6 Kuntz has also recently received a Houston Center for Photography Fellowship to continue this work. Congratulations!

Anne H. Roberts is a photographer, former editor and currently, a photo editor on a publication staff.



Jim Elmore, untitled



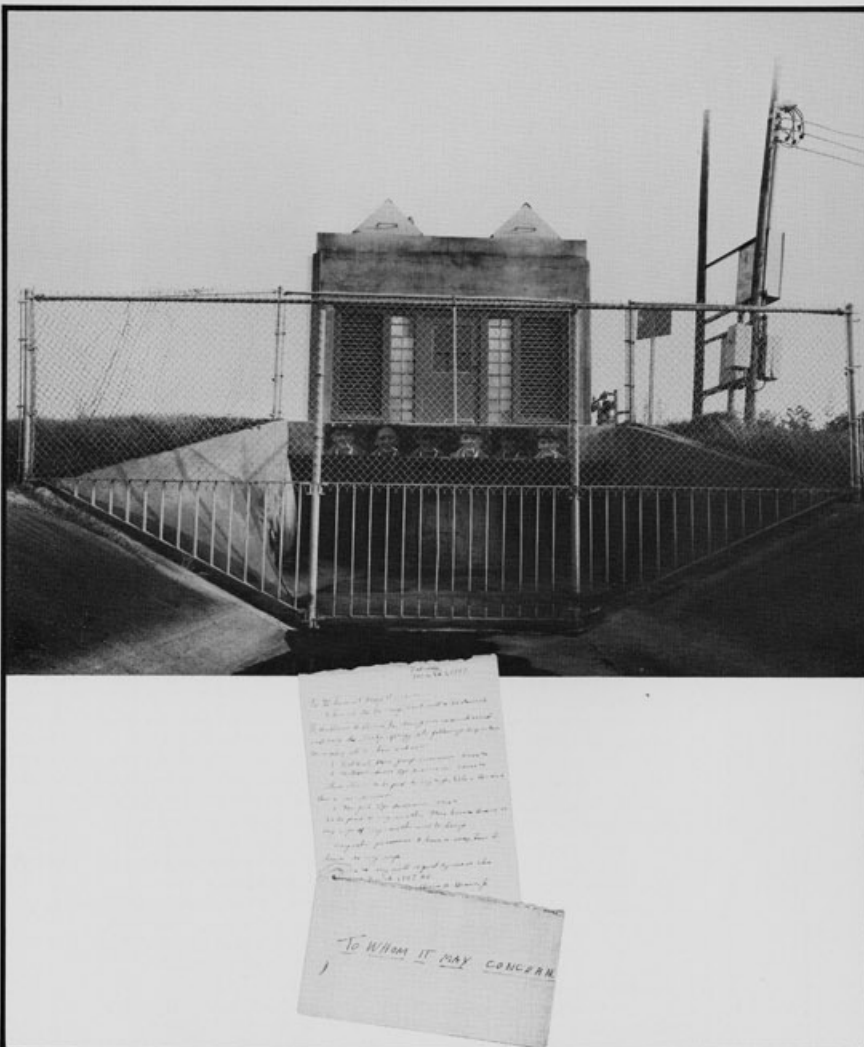
Ben DeSoto, *At Raul's, Austin* (1980).



Sharon Stewart, from *The Shadows of Ancient Greece*, #11



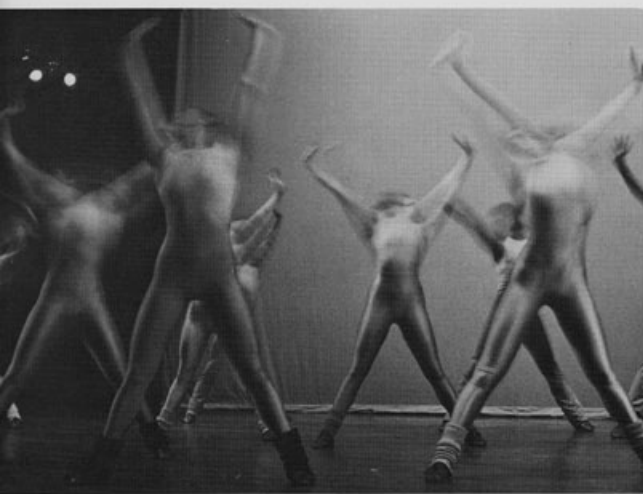
David Chaffin, untitled



Geoffrey Brune, *To Whom It May Concern* (1988). Original hand-colored.



B. Striewski, *Brad*, 1988



C. Leigh Farmer, from *Dancescapes*, 1987 (original in color)



Paul Vincent Kuntz, *Rodeo Party at Molo's Lounge*, 1987, from *Inside Houston's Third Ward*.



Cosgrove/Orman, *Night Fusion* (1987). B&W photo with mixed media (ink, oil).



Jay Forrest, *American Flats* (1987) (original in color)

SUMMER DROUGHT

By Joan Seeman Robinson

Works by HCP's 1987 Fellowship Winners, Jill Goodman, Elizabeth M. Grant, and Carol Vuchetich, were exhibited at HCP from July 8-August 7, 1988.

Is it misanthropic to feel more akin to the stuff in still life photographs than to the subjects in social documentarist works? If content were the criterion, then tattooed nightbirds and handicapped citizens would easily edge out slabs of clay and kitchen cutlery. Why then does the exhibition of HCP's three 1987 Fellowship winners seem largely banal, or at best routine, although two of the winners veer toward society's rim to focus on the eccentric and the disabled in their own hangouts and houses?

Neither Elizabeth Grant's nor Carol Vuchetich's works are sensationalistic or exploitative. Grant's tattoo parlor tribe is eager to be photographed, peeling back garments to present what she calls their "living art." Vuchetich disclaims any intention to trivialize or to beautify the aging and the disabled whom she photographs (and whom she has known and worked closely with for years). Nevertheless, only the occasional image in each series reveals more than a hesitant grasp of the material at hand.

Grant states that she is documenting the people, aesthetics and environment of Houston's tattoo parlors at night. Aside from the

dubious aesthetic properties of the stock images which are transferred by "artists" to the clients' skins, even the results are questionable in these terms—except to the subjects themselves. Unclothing is the essential condition of this "art." Tattooing creates an illusory costuming of the body. Nakedness, full or partial, we see, is "legitimized" when scrimps of flora and fauna are inscribed on the flesh. Ultimately the tattoo proclaims both the exhibitionistic as well as the conformist aspects of the bearers' mentality.

Grant's images needed editing and were too densely hung for the space available. The most effective examples had a claustrophobic cramping of physical space and closeups of bodies, creating ambiguities about what we see and where it is: the interlocking of arms and needles and ornaments, the blunt camera contact with the snake-covered belly, the branded torso with the brass ring notched through its navel. The identities of these people lie not in their faces but in their roles as habitués of a common, camouflaged subculture.

Vuchetich is essentially a portraitist of the invisible citizen. Like recent photo-essayists of the terminally ill, the abused, the retarded and the mentally disoriented, she could be susceptible to charges of voyeurism and manipulation—another form of disenfranchisement of the already helplessly marginal. But her work is restrained. Occasionally she overstates their social insignificance—a woman's head is hidden behind those of her two white dogs; another is effaced by a cloud of smoke from her cigarette; three more are distanced by the intervening stretch of the carpet on which the camera seems grounded.

Some works stand out: the cradling of a man's head in a woman's lap, and the terse dignity of an elderly woman in a floral frock, her wavy gray hair combed back over the top of a tweed-flecked sofa against the severe linearity of horizontal Venetian blinds.

The still life photographs of Jill Goodman make the most subtle demands on the viewer, as well as the most sensuous overtures. Yet they are the most deliberated, the most contrived, and seemingly the most austere of the winning entries in the exhibition.

In a series of studies resembling sepia-toned prints, Goodman mounts a monolithic slab of what looks like brown clay against paper backdrops, variously wrinkled, parchment-like or woven. Stuck or stabbed into the kneaded slabs are bananas, faucets, pegboard hooks, butter, crimped tarlatan, or just more clay balls. In other arrangements, parboiled pasta is tugged or frazzled into clouds of linear tangles; boiled eggs are precisely peeled, plastic forks are broken and stacked; ripe olives and a red votive candle hyphenate a sepia setting like brown eyes and a cup of tomato juice.

Goodman's works are compendia of the senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and equilibrium and balance. They make the viewer acutely aware of one's self—and of the power of the photograph through its very substantive clarity to convince one of ineffables, of tangibles as abstractions presented for contemplation.

What did the crop of this year's entrants to the HCP Fellowship competition look like? If this show seems unsatisfying, slightly disappointing, what were the choices Roy Flukinger, Caroline Huber, and Geoff Wunningham had to work from? If this was the best of the current crop then it is a very young generation. Only one entrant seems to have advanced toward a concise vision, sensibility and definite style.

Joan Seeman Robinson is a Scholar in Residence at the Menil Collection.

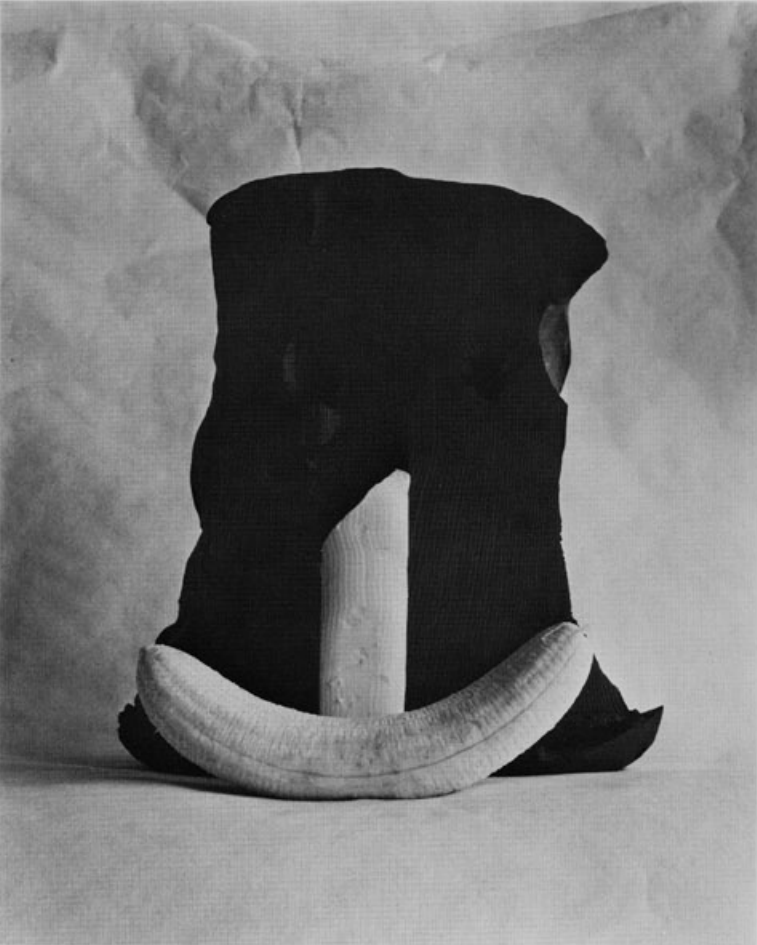


Carol Vuchetich



Elizabeth Grant

Jill Goodman



NOT A CHEAP HOTEL

By Sara Booth

Photographers and Authors: Portraits of Twentieth-Century Writers from the Carleton College Collection was an exhibition organized by the American Federation of the Arts and presented at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from May 15–July 10, 1988.

Every author is eventually digested by the literary institution . . . —Roland Barthes

F. Scott Fitzgerald gazes lovingly into a book, as though it were a mirror, seemingly admiring the stunning image he sees reflected in it. Ionesco reclines on a sofa, the only piece of furniture in the room that is not madly a tilt. Virginia Woolf is tired, E.M. Forester old, and André Gide depleted. Alice Walker is dressed up in purple pants and Jerzy Kosinski is dressed for a Ralph Lauren ad. James Baldwin averts his gaze—one wide side-step and he will be out of the photograph. Simone de Beauvoir, relaxed and smiling, reclines on plump pillows, surrounded by open books, while, above her, her “lifelong companion” 1 Sartre is appropriately pensive. Edna St. Vincent Millay wonders what she’s doing here.

Colette, a little miffed that the caption of her photograph describes her as a “woman writer,” knows why she is here but wishes the curators of this collection had used another photograph of her and had used another caption, perhaps Auden’s comment on her writing—“I am reminded of only one other novelist—Tolstoy.” 2 A little hyperbolic, *peut-être*, but where’s the harm when one considers the hyperbole that surrounds the exhibit as a whole? Does not the exhibition catalogue claim that we are all here because we have had “great impact on modern thought?” 3 Well, it is a little embarrassing, isn’t it? To have such claims made for one, and to be numbered among the great thinkers of the twentieth century, when so many of the great are not here? But, Auden is here, looking perfectly delightful, and reminds us—much to the chagrin of Mr. Eliot and the delight of Mr. Lawrence—that if we are not pleased with our portraits, we should remember that they could have been more unflattering, and, more precisely, that we should remember how it is we come to be here at all:

Lifted off the potty,
Infants from their mothers
Hear their first impartial
Words of worldly praise:

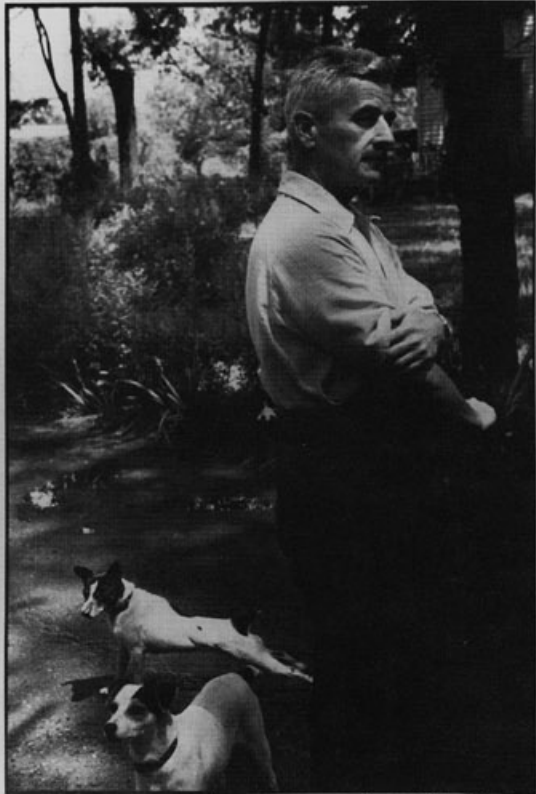
Rodin was no fool
When he cast his Thinker
Cogitating deeply,
Crouched in the position
Of a man at stool.

All the Arts derive from
This uract of making,

. . . to produce a
Deharcissusized en/
during excrement.

Global Mother, keep our
Bowels of compassion
Open through our lifetime,
Purge our minds as well:
Grant us a kind ending,
Not a second childhood,
Petulant, weakspindled
In a cheap hotel. 4

It is this last line that raises the hackles of Mr. Eliot. “See here, Auden,” he sniffs, “this is not a cheap hotel—this is the Museum of Fine Arts. We have been brought together to give bright, able students a sense



Henri Cartier-Bresson, William Faulkner (1947)

of their place in a civilization, in the cultural tradition from which they spring,” 5 quite a “kind ending,” wouldn’t you say?”

The key word here is “ending.” Admittedly, I have put Auden’s words in Eliot’s mouth for my own ends, but there is nonetheless an oddly hermetic finality—Barthes’ “that-has-been” here joined to a “never will be again”—that clings to this exhibit. 6 It is also perhaps an unfortunate confirmation of his notion that the *eidōs* of the photograph is Death. 7 Because it occurred to me after my first visit to this exhibit that I do not think of the authors “suspended” here who are “dead in their graves” 8 as dead at all. Moreover, I realize I don’t like being reminded of it. Virginia Woolf is still debating the matter of her suicide; Hart Crane has not yet moved to the ship’s railing; and Scott Fitzgerald has yet to enjoy his last binge.



George Platt Lynes, W.H. Auden (1950)

This collection was designed to help the students at Carleton College (and presumably others who view it) to see “the connection in things” 9: How is this group of photographic portraits to help us to do this? The captions in the M.F.A. exhibit were certainly no help. All listed the name of the author, the name of the photographer, a few book titles, a line or two about the author, and read more like brief obituaries than anything else. There was nothing to connect author and photographer beyond the fact of the photograph itself and nothing to bind together this diverse group of writers other than the fact

that they happened to have their portraits hanging in the same room and that many of the men photographed were wearing suits. 10

Can this particular group stand as connected without the “help” of Robert Edwards’ foreword and Maria Morris Hambourg’s essay in the exhibition catalogue? More important—why should it? Why should it not be released from the weighty charge its curators have imposed on it and from the rather absurd claim that it depicts “each author in his prime and in his usual place?” 11 (Italics mine.) It would at least spare many of us the teeth-grashing that accompanies the sight of Simone de Beauvoir’s portrait “placed” beneath Sartre’s.

The Carleton College collection contains some truly fine portraits of twentieth-century writers, 12 and it was good of the college to share them with the rest of us. Nevertheless, I have a good deal of difficulty separating the collection itself from one of the pedagogical goals of its collectors—“to give bright, able students a sense of their place in a civilization, in the cultural tradition from which they spring.” It seems that the portraits of these authors are being used in a manner that many of them would have found objectionable, and that they might have resented having their portraits “bought up” to give the students at Carleton or any other institution “a sense of their place.” In addition, there may be students who assume, after viewing this collection, that the group of writers who are part of “the cultural tradition from which they spring” is composed of three Black males, one Black female, three Hispanic males, no Hispanic females, no Asians of either gender, a handful of French, British, and American females, and a whole lot of white men. (Although a footnote to Ms. Hambourg’s essay states that the selection of photographs in *Photographers and Authors* “does not necessarily represent the final form of the collection” 13, I wonder how many students will read this note, and it is disappointing that Carleton’s first sweep of the field netted mainly portraits of “the Big Boys.”) Issues of tokenism and canonicity aside, this preoccupation with the student’s “place” with the writer’s “place,” is a little annoying

and more than a little suspect.

Imagine that I am a teacher: I speak, endlessly, in front of and for someone who remains silent. I am the person who says I (the detours of one, we, or impersonal sentence make no difference), I am the person who under cover of setting out a body of knowledge, puts out a discourse, never knowing how the discourse is being received. . . . in the expose, more aptly named than we tend to think, it is not knowledge which is exposed, it is the subject (who exposes himself to all sorts of painful adventures.) 14

At this, an impish “here-here” from Auden as he watches Eliot’s face for the scowl that’s sure to come:

Keep us in our station:
When we get pound/noteish,
When we seem about to
Take up Higher Thought,
Send us some deflating
Image like the painted ex/
/pression on a Major
Prophet taken short. 15

Amidst scattered applause from those assembled, Dylan Thomas lifts his glass, Jorge Luis Borges smiles, and Gertrude Stein’s voice booms from the doorway, “And where is Man Ray’s portrait of me?”

FOOTNOTES

1 The caption for de Beauvoir’s portrait in the M.F.A. exhibit describes her as “a novelist, essayist, and lifelong companion of Jean-Paul Sartre.” One wonders why she does not receive equal billing in his caption. One also wonders why the public was not given the absolutely crucial information that T. S. Eliot married his secretary.

2 Robert Phelps, *Belles Saisons: A Colette Scrapbook*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), jacket copy.

3 Robert H. Edwards (President, Carleton College), Foreword to Maria Morris Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors: Portraits of Twentieth-Century Writers from the Carleton College Collection*, (Northfield, Minnesota: Carleton College, 1984), 5.

4 W. H. Auden, “The Geography of the House,” *W.H. Auden: Selected Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 126.

5 Edwards in Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors*, 5.

6 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

7 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

8 Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors*, 7.

9 Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors*, 11.

Annie Liebovitz, Alice Walker (1983)



10 More interesting and informative captions might have included some comment by the photographers about their philosophies of portraiture and/or, where possible, some remarks about the sittings themselves, or the author’s work and how (or if) it influenced how the photographer “saw” the author.

11 Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors*, 7.



Gisèle Freund, Virginia Woolf (1939)

12 The range of portraiture styles in the collection is impressive—from Richard Avedon’s stark (and unattractive) portrait of Borges to Gisèle Freund’s almost sensual portrait of de Beauvoir. One nice surprise was George Platt Lynes’ portrait of Auden. It is one of the few portraits in which the author actually looks approachable.

13 Hambourg, *Photographers and Authors*, 15.

14 Roland Barthes, “Writers, Teachers, and Intellectuals,” in *A Barthes Reader*, Susan Sontag, ed., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 382.

15 Auden, *Selected Poems*, 127.

Sara Booth is a free-lance editor who is currently a Ph.D. student in the English Department at the University of Houston.

All photographs courtesy of Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota

BOUNDARIES OF THE WAVE: JAPANESE AVANT-GARDE VIDEO

By Wendy Sterba

Waveforms: VideoJapan, a program of videos curated by Beau Takahara and Carol Loeffler, was screened at HCP on June 6 and June 13, 1988. It will be included this summer in the European Medienkunst in Osnabrück, West Germany, and in the Poetry and Images Festival in Odense, Denmark; it will return to the U.S. next fall. Waveforms is presented in cooperation with ART COM/La Mamelie, Inc.

Commenting on two passages from Rousseau, Derrida writes,

It appears here that man, in as much as he depends upon a soil and a climate, is cultivated, that he sprouts, he forms a society and "The birthplace is not a matter of indifference in the education ... of man." But this culture is also the power of changing terrain, of opening oneself to another culture; man may look far, "he is not planted in one place like a tree," he is engaged ... in migrations and revolutions. From that perspective, one may criticize ethnocentrism in as much as it shuts us in within a location and an empirical culture. ... Difference only appears starting from a certain middle point, a certain median, mobile and temperate, between north and south, need and passion, consonant and accent, etc.¹



Akira Matsumoto, *Alley of Alley*, 1984

If, as Derrida suggests, it is difference that opens up possibilities of meaning, then avant-garde video from Japan promises to signify doubly: with its "difference" both from traditions of Japanese culture and from American/Western conventions. *Waveforms* delivers on both counts. These videos display nothing if not variety, offering limitless opportunities for comparison of difference and meanings. Unfortunately, for this very reason, the video program also seems to lack cohesiveness. Grouped more or less chronologically, the videos offer a panoply of images and experiences with no central motif or message. The viewer must therefore fall back on the two elements common to all these videos, their experimental nature and their cultural origin.

An American audience stands at a twofold disadvantage. First, the technical quality of most of these videos will seem rather primitive in comparison to the accustomed fare of either Hollywood film or MTV videos. As Jenny Rosenbaum points out in her essay on *Waveforms*², there is little financial support of experimental video work in Japan, so artists have a tough time surviving, and it shows in their technique. Seams and noise clutter are in great evidence without adding to or deconstructing the images being shown. This can be overlooked of course in favor of the message, but here the second problem arises. Non-Japanese viewers may find themselves feeling culturally deficient and unable to interpret the undeniably alien images of the Orient.

In a few cases, perhaps surprisingly, this alienation works to our advantage. In Akira Matsumoto's *Alley of*

Alley the viewer is presented with a slice of urban back-street life. A handheld camera takes in all that an idle wanderer might see in wending her/his way through the narrow, claustrophobic alleys of a large Japanese city. Some clever techniques are used, including a subjective panning survey shot, which looks down one path as a possibility before veering into another chosen alleyway. For the unaccustomed Western eye this short presents a marvelous and unexpected view of the Japanese city. One wonders, however, whether the native might not find this relatively long (sixteen minutes) video just a tad quotidian. Had the topic been alleys of the Heights, such a film would have needed a better unified method or message to be interesting to Houstonians, or at least to this Houstonian.



Radical TV, G.I. Joe, 1985

Again, witnessing our own culture from an alien standpoint sometimes has a positive by-product, even in relation to fairly mindless entertainment. A short entitled *G.I. Joe* seems to be a music video composed of quickly interchanged stills of the Lilliputian toy serviceman doing a jerky dance number. Seeing this fair-haired, blue-eyed model playing the lead in a Japanese video is disconcerting. Is this the cultural image of ourselves that we want to be exported and emulated? How should Americans react to the shades of a puppet cultural supremacy?

On the other hand, cultural alienation also has its drawbacks. In Shinsuke Ina's *Hagoromo*, a screen of moving geometrical patterns allows restricted view of two Kabuki dancers in the background. The Kabuki, being a very strict and stylized form of performance, contrasts with the variably transparent screens in the foreground, producing a choreography between pattern movement and human dance. As a viewer not intimate with the nuances of Kabuki, I found myself preoccupied with the scene being played on stage. The foregrounded screen movements and composition became an annoying distraction. Had a *pas de deux* from *Suan Lake* been used, no doubt I would have found the familiar scene combined beautifully with the geometric screens in a major *tour de force*, but instead I felt teased and frustrated.

The most alienating film is Tetsuo Sekimoto's *Koto Buki*. The piece centers on the image of a man in a red and white parachute-cloth costume with his face painted blue. It is a plaintive music video filmed on a rugged beach of Japan's Inland Sea, in which the main character stands on the rocks and gyrates amidst a group of musicians. Later, rather bewildering shots of him climbing into the water are intercut with images of a community of unusual beings, such as a strange white-robed person ringing a bell and a waiflike female singer, also clad in white with a large tamlike hat, from which waft wisps of her hair. There is no apparent narrative, and though the images are mystifying, they are thoroughly enjoyable on a visual level. Rosenbaum's article supplies clarification based on biographical detail, recounting the artist's poetic inspiration in images of sea water reflected in his parents' faces³. Her remarks help to provide the video with some appreciable context; without it, the American viewer finds no universal symbols which deliver the meaning, only culturally and artistically defined signs.

Throughout the series we are asked to examine familiar as well as unfamiliar subjects in a new light. One very amusing piece filmed bodily parts from both sides and then projected them simultaneously on a split screen. A hand on the left reaches out and is mirrored on the right. They touch in the center, merge and dissolve into each other, becoming one prolonged arm. All manner of unusual anatomical creatures are produced as the same fist retracts and twists. The fist is next replaced by even more intriguing body parts. Fingers wriggle, lips kiss and consume, and, best of all, the artist uses his tongue in contortionist fashion to bring to life a strange biological being, which is at the same time shocking and hilarious.

Other videos ask similar questions about our assumptions and definitions of things, showing fingers and tongues protruding from natural images, or household items as protagonists in cartoon fairy tales. One video, *Listen the Body* by Yoshiomi Yamaguchi, asks us to discover the amazing in the ordinary, by depicting the playing of body parts as a musical instrument. By rapping, tapping, and thumping every part of the anatomy, including teeth and fingernails, Yamaguchi concocts a corporeal concert. A similar method may be found in the madness of Yoh Hayafuji, who takes the Japanese syllabary as pronounced by a multitude of participants and produces by intercutting and splicing a veritable symphony of sounds. One suspects that this video is more alienating for the Japanese viewer, for whom the sounds are already invested with meaning. The result must be a kind of syllabic deconstruction in which accepted meanings become questionable. For Westerners the effect is more one of endearment than alienation, as nonsense syllables take on a musical timbre.

Many of the videos ask for a reexamination of our expectations about the visual. Shinsuke Ina's short film aptly entitled *Flow* takes images of running water and lays over them a grid pattern of water flowing in a different direction. The viewer is taught to appreciate the visual beauty and texture of moving water when it is viewed out of the context of the river, where it flows uniformly in one direction. Another video takes a person as central image but shows him motionless in comparison to his background or foreground. The viewer thereby becomes conscious of other aspects of the filmic image, rather than focusing on a central figure, as we are typically invited to do in dominant cinema.

This play with our habits of viewing also indicates a deeper plumbing of the meaning of images. Christian Metz in his book *Film Language* claims that implicit in every image is the statement, "Here is an [x]"⁴. Yet the message in these videos is just the opposite. In Taka Iimura's video *Moments at the Rock*, the subject is quite clearly more than the large rock centrally located in the eleven-minute film. Upon looking closely the viewer discovers that the image being viewed is actually an image on a video screen. Iimura alternates views of the original image with shots of the camera making the image and with the image of the image being made by the first camera. Technical quality is intentionally bad, in order to remind the viewer that this is an image of an object and not the object. Splices are rough and audible, operating in this case in line with Brecht's theory of alienation: reflections of light are a just barely visible reminder that we are viewing the filming of a film and not the actuality.

In another short by Iimura, cannily placed as the first film in the *Waveforms* series, this point is made even clearer. The opening image on our screen is of a man standing next to a television set, on which we see the image of the same man. Both images assert alternately, "I am Taka

Iimura." Each sign invokes the director who is absent, directing our thoughts toward the relation between signs and things. As Edward Brannigan suggests in his article "Here is a Picture of No Revolver!"⁵, filmic images are not all necessarily analogues of verbal language. Here the absence of the filmmaker himself asserts a visual system which goes beyond purely narrational statements of "This is Taka Iimura." Iimura questions the veracity of the image, reminding us that signs, both verbal and visual, are not equivalent to things they signify. Iimura (like other of the *Waveforms* artists) has managed to counter the overemphasis on verbal text so prevalent in current film criticism. The viewer is clearly reminded that verbal text is only a single element of the film, and that it represents a filtered reality in which image need not be a subsidiary of narration.

Thus while it is easy to be critical of these videos for their technical primitiveness and their facile (or absent) storylines, they offer a great deal in terms of examination of image. The exploratory nature of these pioneer artists is all the more evident because of their technical and theoretical innocence. Overwhelmed by the possibilities, they flail out in all directions, questioning the boundaries and limits, but never quite moving beyond tentativeness. Thus the films are more interesting in conception than in execution. These films represent contemporary Japanese video artists as being overwhelmed by the possible, while caught squarely in the middle between tradition and anarchy.



Taeko Kitazima, *Dancing Gyokays*, 1986

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; orig. published as *De la Grammatologie*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 222-223.
- 2 Jenny Lenore Rosenbaum, "Waveforms: Avant-Garde Video from Japan," in *SPOT*, Spring 1988, p. 9.
- 3 Rosenbaum writes, "For Sekimoto, the reflection of the blue water on the faces of his parents is his dominant childhood memory," *SPOT*, Spring 1988, p. 9.
- 4 Christian Metz, *Film Language*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 31-91.
- 5 Edward Brannigan, "'Here is a Picture of No Revolver!' The Negation of Images, and Methods for Analyzing the Structure of Pictorial Statements," *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986), pp. 8-17.

Wendy Sterba is a graduate student at Rice University, where she is writing her dissertation on the image of the prostitute in contemporary German film.

Video stills by Nancy Frank, Art/COM



Taka Iimura, *Double Identities*, 1980

FRAGMENTS OF THE REAL WORLD

By Ed Osowski

Winogrand: Figments from the Real World
By John Szarkowski. Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1988. Cloth, 260 pages, \$45.00.

In 1955, only four years after he had begun his professional career as a photojournalist, two photographs by Garry Winogrand were included in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *The Family of Man*. Both are works Winogrand made while under contract to Henrietta Brackman Associates. The selection of these photographs by Edward Steichen for *The Family of Man* when Winogrand was only twenty-seven years old began a remarkable relationship between Winogrand and MOMA. Before his death in 1984, works by Winogrand were included in twelve exhibitions there. He was among the photographers (Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander were the others) shown in the pivotal *New Documents* in 1967. (He was also included in a thirteenth exhibition, organized by MOMA but not shown there.) Two exhibitions, *The Animals* (1969) and *Public Relations* (1977), were devoted solely to his photographs and occasional books with the same titles. (In Houston, Winogrand's photographs have been exhibited four times—the earliest showing was at Latent Image Gallery in 1971, and the most recent at the Houston Center for photography in 1984.) Now, in 1988, MOMA has organized a retrospective exhibition that examines Winogrand's entire career. Its companion publication, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World*, features a lengthy essay by John Szarkowski.

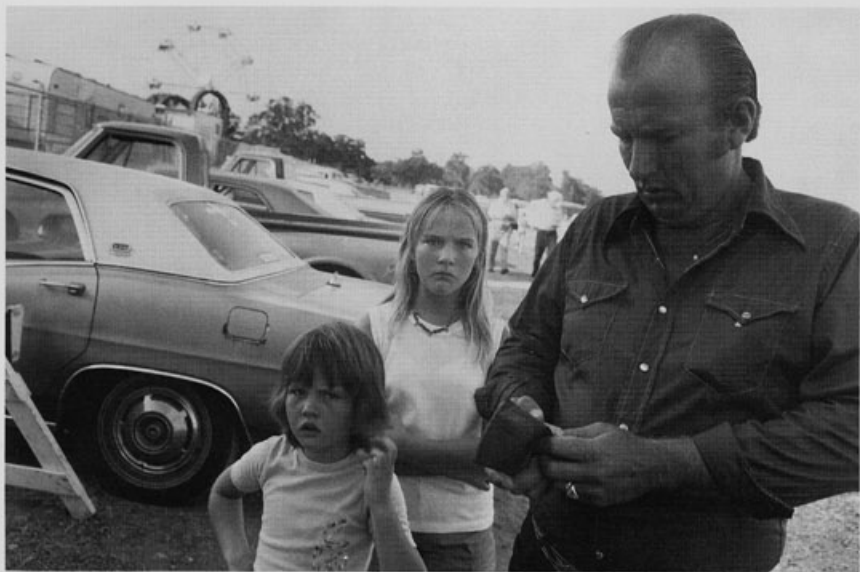
"Loose and baggy monsters"—this is how the novelist Henry James described those novels whose example he rejected. They were, to James, too shapeless, too connected to the stuff of life, and not connected to the shaping framework of art. Winogrand would not have found much favor with James. For, as *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* demonstrates, Winogrand's photographs are efforts to be direct and immediate, to contain all of life, all its confusion and shapelessness. There is little that is intellectual in his work, which seems unmediated by anything that partakes of artifice and the psychological truth after which James strived.

Winogrand discovered photography at Columbia University and set out taking pictures with a determination and an enthusiasm that never left him. He learned the techniques of his craft from friends, mentors, and from his own zealous dedication to taking pictures. His intelligence and sensitivity, both remarkably keen, were basically unaffected by formal academic learning. He left Columbia after two semesters. It was to photojournalism and, later, advertising, that he turned to earn a living, producing works which were sold to *Sports Illustrated*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Collier's*, among others. (Szarkowski's summary of the importance of magazine publishing to photographers in the fifties is excellent.) As late as 1966 Winogrand was still shooting advertising work.

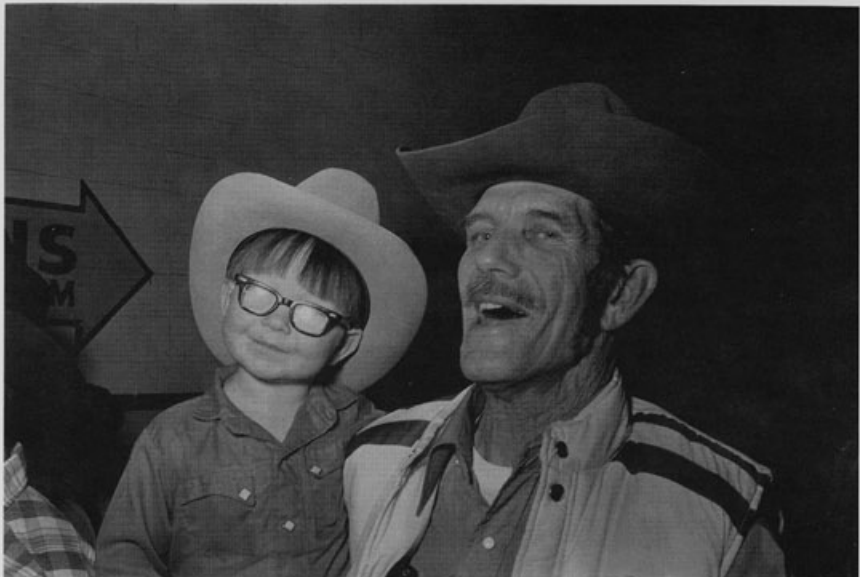
Never comfortable with the restraints of photojournalism and even less interested in advertising work, Winogrand, by the time he turned to documentary work, had nevertheless learned from his years as a magazine free-lancer. His best photographs are descriptive—not of facts that an intelligent viewer, if asked, could reconstruct in words—but of something subtler. What Winogrand observed and then photographed, over and over, are



Garry Winogrand, *New York City*, 1968. (Lent by Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and the Estate of Garry Winogrand.)



Garry Winogrand, *La Grange, Texas* (from "Unfinished Work"), 1977-80. (Lent by the Estate of Garry Winogrand.)



Garry Winogrand, *Fort Worth, Texas* (from "The Fort Worth Fat Stock Show and Rodeo"), 1974-79. (Lent by Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and the Estate of Garry Winogrand.)

moments of restlessness, anxiety, separation, tension, ambiguity. The earliest photograph reproduced in *Winogrand*, "Frosh-Soph Rush, Columbia University" (1950), catches us off guard. This is no typical gathering of college students at play between classes. Hovering over them and about to descend on them is a large black semi-circle. Its weight can almost be felt. Their faces register pain and worry. If it indeed is a game they are playing, then it is the

crushing game of life, the photographer tells us, the game whose stakes are high, and a game already decided against the players. The two photographs from *The Family of Man* deserve attention. Szarkowski reprints one, "Metropolitan Opera Bar," in which two men in tuxedos converse at the bar. The photograph, deliberately out of focus, attempts to capture the "feel" of the occasion rather than its specific "look." Such vagueness must have

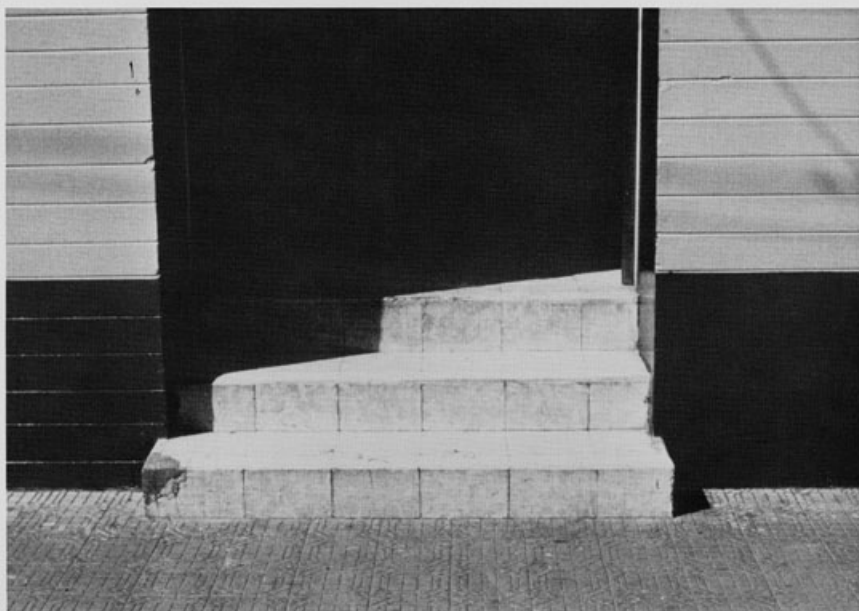
quickly lost its appeal for Winogrand. The other photograph, much more interesting, "Coney Island, New York," is not reproduced. Everything in the photograph is sharp and clear. In the center of the image is a couple, their backs to us. Both wear swimsuits. The man carries the woman, tightly held in his arms, her legs kicking, into the water. To their left is a young boy who has closed his eyes to the scene. Farther off shore, three figures watch the pro-

gress of the couple. One imagines the narrative content of the scene Winogrand records. The man has swept away the woman from her place on the shore and she, perhaps objecting too strongly, perhaps resisting with the coy determination culture and training have given her, is now carried, defenselessly, in his arms. This is, at best, the most innocent reading the photograph affords. But its message is indeed ambiguous. The man's broad, muscular back, set against the woman's lean body, demands that we focus on their struggle, that we realize that beneath their seeming playfulness lies something else—the poses and actualization of the powerful and the powerless. The young boy, try as he might to avoid the scene, is doomed, in a sense, to participate himself in the ongoing battle this photograph, so seemingly innocent, records and fosters. For this photograph is not innocent: by recording a scene we all have witnessed—an extension of the mating ritual in which the man overpowers the woman—the photograph actually celebrates the status quo, participates in its metaphoric and real battle, and grants that battle a certain legitimacy. That one could respond, "But, that's the way couples always act at the beach" actually underscores the extent to which this photograph taps into a social/cultural message. Biography is the least reliable tool with which to judge an artist's career. But certain facts in Winogrand's life, especially his shifting alliances with the three women who became his wives, are instructive. Tod Papageorge, in his appreciative essay for *Public Relations*, describes Winogrand's emotional state as his first marriage floundered and he faced separation from his children: "He was desperate, and with a wild logic photographed over and over again those women he was attracted to on the street." But even before his separation and divorce Winogrand was a master at recording the cultural confusion which surrounds men and women. In "El Morocco" (1955) an elegant woman is dancing with a male partner at the famous night club. Her teeth are bared and she appears poised, ready to attack her partner. Or is she just smiling broadly? In later photographs his women move across the print at odd angles, their heads and torsos split ("New York 1961"). Their eyes either self-consciously avoid the photographer's gaze or challenge him with their own returned gazes. That so many of his photographs of women, of couples, of children, and of children with their parents are troubling is due to the fact that for the sensitive observer/artist, relations between men and women, and parents and children, are, at best, always problematic. In a nearly surreal parody of family structures, his photograph "Central Park Zoo, New York City, 1967" features a handsome couple whose children are monkeys, not girls or boys, dressed in cute ski parkas and pants. Among Winogrand's photographs it is the one closest in spirit to Arbus' troubling works. Winogrand could, of course, drop his cynicism, as he frequently did when he photographed children. His images of children push at the edge of sentimentality, their hints at impending doom and disillusionment almost too obvious. In the cover photograph of *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World*, a toddler emerges from the shadows of a garage, leaves behind darkness to enter light, only to confront a tri-cycle, upended in the driveway. Its angle and the oil stain above it on the driveway are clues that suggest that the child's future is one at risk. What Winogrand photographs is the emotional, if not the physical, distances that separate his subjects. His vision is urban but dates from that period when the American love affair with the city had turned sour. It

has been said that photographers like Helen Levitt believe in the myth of the city as a joyous, boisterous, alive, rich cluster of experiences and opportunities, but Winogrand points in another direction. For him the city has become the place of anonymity and alienation. If it is alive, it is alive with psychic danger. Winogrand was fascinated with action, with the world around him, with things as they moved. His photographs of horses moving wildly, from the series taken at the Fort Worth Stock Show, become metaphors for his "passionate, prodding" curiosity (in Papageorge's words) and for his impatience as well. His vision was dramatic, always alert to those scenes ripest with meaning. Szarkowski observes, "Winogrand, inevitably, was drawn to the dramas" [of what he photographed]. Exploring the possibilities of the wide-angle lens and then tilting the frame allowed Winogrand to enlarge his vision, giving his photographs a context rich with clues that hint at significance. For the last five years of his life, after he had moved from Austin to Los Angeles, Winogrand shot thousands of photographs and printed none. Rolls of film had been exposed but were undeveloped when he died. Szarkowski, with the help of Papageorge and Thomas Roma, has selected works from this last period for the book. It seems clear that, in his last years, the very act of shooting the photograph, hundreds of times, became a non-visual message. Szarkowski's essay, "The Work of Garry Winogrand," is peculiar. He appreciates the packed, charged world of Winogrand's photographs: *It is a world made up of energy, ambition, flaming selfishness, desperate loneliness, and unfamiliar beauty. It was his world, not ours, except to the degree that we might accept his pictures as a just metaphor for our recent past.* And it is the "dense, troubling, unfinished, and profoundly challenging" qualities of his photographs that Szarkowski singles out. But the photographs are, for Szarkowski, "figments," in a standard definition, "fabrications of the imagination." "Figments" strikes this reviewer as precisely the wrong word to use to describe Winogrand's work. What Winogrand offers, rather, are fragments, clues, pieces of a picture. The context is always larger than he could provide. But each photograph adds to that context. Winogrand was a traditionalist who believed that what he photographed was not artifice but art, grounded in the "thiness" of the world. If Winogrand holds any appeal for us today, and if his photographs continue to resonate, it is because of their packed, dynamic, narrative quality. He is indeed a "loose and baggy" photographer for whom chaos seems just around the corner. In his best works he provides the setting and then invites the viewer to create a story, some of it Winogrand's own story, grounded in his own brand of social criticism and psychological insight. There is nothing sterile, neutral, or empty about his photographs. His is the romantic view that all of life, even when filled with pain, is worth recording. Ed Osowski manages the Montrose Branch Library. A frequent contributor to SPOT, he occasionally reviews books for the Houston Post. The exhibition and catalogue *Garry Winogrand were supported by grants from Springs Industries, Inc., and from the National Endowment for the Arts.*

NEW AMERICAN TALENT 1988

By John Jacob



Priscilla Dickenson, *Steps* (1987) (original in color) Courtesy Texas Fine Arts Association

The juried group competition is a concept weighted with ideological ballast. Its overt statement of purpose, local promotion, development, and appreciation of the arts, masks a more subtle strategy—the quest for the new. This quest is fundamental to the perpetuation of the goals of consumer culture, in the arts as elsewhere: as raw materials are consumed, or in the case of the arts, when all that is collectible has been collected, new resources must be sought in order to maintain the momentum of the marketplace.

A juror, preferably one accredited by affiliation with an institution of high art, selects a group of artists as being worthy of the attentions of a (usually lesser—for otherwise there would be no need to hire out) museum. Selection by the “name” juror, especially when there are prizes awarded, brings prestige to the “winners.” With prestige comes bigger and better opportunities. When the artist is sufficiently prestigious, he or she (but usually he) is finally worthy of the renewed attentions of the institutions of high art: a good gallery, high prices; a museum show, higher prices; Sotheby’s, still higher prices.... All this in the name of art appreciation.

In recent years, the institutions of art, from the museum to the gallery to the publishers of art-critical and art-historical materials, have been taken to task for their complicity in marketing strategies and for their subsequent unwillingness to accommodate or even acknowledge the diversity of artistic activities which, since the 1960’s, increasing numbers of artists have become involved with. Extending well beyond the dicta of modernism, many of these marginalized activities propose a more urgent relationship between the artist’s work and current economic and/or political practice. Others seek to unveil the sanctity of the institutions of art, attempting a dissolution of the beaux arts by activities that resist their influence.

The institutions of art may employ several strategies in responding to these activities: (a) welcome them with cautious but open arms (assimilation), or (b) denounce them as possessing no aesthetic value (rejection), or (c) simply ignore them. If we accept the institution as the only structure capable of identifying art for us (through willingness to exhibit it for our appreciation), then its ignorance of any activity (refusal to exhibit) is tantamount to denying the existence of that activity. For many institutions, therefore, ignorance is the strategy of choice.

When viewing juried group competitions, particularly those held in small, “regional” museums, it is well worth recalling these strategies. Such

exhibitions tend, in the acceptance of some works over others, to reveal not only the agenda of the curator who selected them, but often that of the institution he or she represents as well. It is therefore worth asking oneself whether the exhibition indeed represents the diversity of contemporary artistic activities, or whether it suppresses them, seeking to perpetuate the mythology that high art institutions and their representatives are the only legitimate arbiters of “taste” and thus activities not acknowledged by them are something less than art.

New American Talent 1988, a national competition organized by the Texas Fine Arts Association, curated by Richard Armstrong, Associate Curator of the Whitney Museum in New York, and presented by the Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin, is a good example of contemporary curatorial sophistry. More than 3,000 slides, representing the work of more than 700 artists, were reviewed by Armstrong, who selected works by sixty-one artists, nearly fifty percent of whom are women. Works by approximately forty artists from the original exhibition have been awarded “touring citations.”¹

The introduction to the exhibition, written by Armstrong, demands our sympathy for the curatorial task by explaining to us how “taxing” it is to select from slides. Our conspiracy in his selection is enlisted when he explains that “the motivating imperative of any open exhibition is that the jury or juror must like something of what is being reviewed (my emphasis).” We have something in common with the juror: we may not know what art is, but we know what we like.

Armstrong’s introduction frequently contradicts itself. Although “view[ing] these slides in New York no doubt influenced my analysis of them ... [and although] I hesitate to classify it as regional ... almost every kind of regional art except that of Manhattan is evident here.” One cannot help but wonder why, if “assessing art ... is an exercise in temperament and environment” as Armstrong claims, he has chosen not to include the otherwise all-important art of Manhattan in this exhibition. More to the point of this review, however, is Armstrong’s admission: “[although] I am less critical of work in such media as photography and printmaking because I am less familiar with those media ... photography ... constitutes a sizable part of the show’s finalists.”

Having established the criteria for selection as recognition of “ambition” (ambition for what? we may ask) in the artist’s vision and “how fully realized” the work of art is, Armstrong proceeds to identify “the

Nearly all the “travel” photographs, images depicting signs of alien culture, such as those by Priscilla Dickenson, Mark Abrahamson and (perhaps) Amy Blakemore, were isolated from other works and hung on a wall of their own. Mary Kocol’s out of focus “Two Windows” (from the Interior Space series) and Glenn McKay’s enlarged altered SX-70 “Mexican Truck” are the only photographs in the exhibition that indicate an exploration of the photographic medium. For their difference they were rewarded with placement in stairwells. What Mr. Armstrong apparently appreciated in these works, since they are clearly less effective than others at illustrating “fantastic representationalism,” was their “beautiful, clarifying light,” their aura.

It is as if the developments of the last twenty years in the field of photography, many of which share the political and economic concerns of marginalized art activities that exhibitions like this one struggle to ignore, had simply not occurred. Although they are certainly well made, the photographs selected for “New American Talent” appear to have been excavated from an earlier, more innocent period—a time when “good art” was believed to be refreshingly free of such influences.

Examining the equally dubious most widely shared vision” in the paintings selected as “fantastic representationalism”—figurative works that freely incorporate dreamlike imagery of architecture and the landscape.” Thus, the photographs that Armstrong has selected (“landscape is the predominant subject, and much of the work is documentary”) appear in this context to have been chosen less for their significance as individual works of art than for their capacity to echo the concerns of the paintings selected.

The installation of the exhibition grouped documentary photographs like Frank Armstrong’s “Waring, Tx.” (1986), a perfectly centered color image of the Waring General Store and Texaco station, with works like Mona Marshall’s “The Barrens #2,” a realistic charcoal and chalk rendering of an industrial site by night, theoretically proposing a dialogue between the artists. The effect, however, is the denial of difference. If there is any meaning implicit in the separate photographs, it is denied to favor the curator’s concept of “fantastic representationalism,” a style which “speaks to the social condition most artists feel they inhabit.” What social condition is that? And which artists? The photographs are merely used in this exhibition to remind the viewer that the social condition that these paintings allegedly speak of is “real.”

curatorial selections made by Rudi Fuchs for Documenta 7 in 1982, by means of which he sought to reintegrate the concepts of art and beauty at the expense of works indulging in social and/or political interest, Douglas Crimp wrote, “One would hardly have known that photography was recently become an important medium for artists attempting to resist the hegemony of the traditional beaux arts.... Nor would one have understood that this debate also encompasses a critique of the museum institution in its function of preserving the auratic status of art.”² Six years later, in “New American Talent,” the pill of ignorance continues to be doled out with a sugar coating.

That Armstrong (who has had a hand in such blockbusters as the Whitney’s “Biennial,” which featured photographic works by the Starn Twins, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and Clegg & Guttman in its last incarnation, and who is not likely to have missed the Whitney’s recent retrospective of works by Cindy Sherman) seeks to excuse his selection of photographs by pleading ignorance of the medium is absurd and unacceptable. Such self-indulgence indicates a willing obfuscation of contemporary photographic activities.

One could as easily challenge Armstrong’s selection of nonphotographic works. Only one piece in the exhibition, Steve Wiman’s assemblage “On Guard,” represents the possibility of temporal practices that extend beyond the institution. The assemblage is constructed inside a small alcove, the wall of which has been covered by band-aids. A toy robot stands on one side with arms raised for battle, while a photograph on the other shows folded arms, hands over crotch. That this piece is not only out of place but also sophomoric reinforces the curator’s explicit rejection (and our implicit acceptance of that rejection) of all such practices.³

While the names of the artists in “New American Talent” may be new to us, their work is not. Whether Armstrong’s selection is based on the presumption that a Texas audience is too unsophisticated to appreciate contemporary artistic activities is something we cannot know. That it fosters the tenets of modernism, however, is clear. What is left unmentioned is the remarkable similarity of the concept of “fantastic representationalism” to neo-Expressionism, a highly marketable style that the institutions of art cling to desperately, even today (witness the Kiefer phenomenon).

“New American Talent” should be retitled “Typical Curatorial Practices.” It is an exhibition that offers an audience assumed to be distant from the real thing the false assurance that all’s well in the world of art. We still know what we like, and what we don’t.

FOOTNOTES

1 Selected works from “New American Talent 1988” will tour within Texas under the auspices of TFAA’s *Art on Tour* program. At this time the exhibition schedule is as follows: Hardin Simmons University Art Gallery, Abilene, November 1988; Texas Union Art Gallery, University of Texas at Austin, February 1989; Art Institute for the Permian Basin, Odessa, October 1989.

2 Douglas Crimp, “The Art of Exhibition,” in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, A. Michelson, R. Krauss, D. Crimp, and J. Copjec, eds. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 230.

3 Presumably on the grounds that such an assemblage could not be reassembled in other spaces, “On Guard” was not awarded a “touring citation.”

John Jacob, an artist, curator, and writer who has worked extensively with artists in Eastern Europe, is presently preparing an exhibition of photographs by artists from the Soviet Union.

PATRONS AND COMPLICITY

By T.R. Mackin

The Art of Persuasion: A History of Advertising Photography, by Robert A. Sobieszek. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1988; 208 pages, 187 illustrations (81 in full color), \$40.00. Published in conjunction with an exhibition organized by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, and sponsored by Eastman Kodak Company and American Photographer.

The photographs in *The Art of Persuasion*¹ are, for the most part, a well chosen selection, providing an interesting, if not always exciting, visual survey of the history of advertising photography. Much more justification than is necessary goes on in the text of this book, creating an "emperor's new clothes" effect. Robert Sobieszek, who has been the Director of Photographic Collections at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in Rochester since 1981, tries to explain advertisers' motivations as well as photographers' complicity, but he does a good job at neither. His text jumps from issue to issue, provides unrelated bits of fact in digressions, and avoids drawing relevant connections. Sobieszek's own position is hard to pinpoint, as his point of view vacillates.

The book, he tells us,

... is not about the history of photographically illustrated advertising as much as it is about the poetry and prose of those photographs made for and used in advertising. (p. 12)

History is, however, given at least as much coverage as are concerns of poetry and prose. Next Sobieszek claims that the book "... is about great and intriguing images, not about impressive or necessarily successful ads" (p. 12). The former (at least as Sobieszek sees them) are in the majority, but the latter are mentioned more than once.

Sobieszek qualifies his statement of goals every few pages. "What follows is a survey of how photography so suavely entrapped [a Barbara Krugerism] its consumer audience over the last century" (p. 14); this generalized "how" does not become clearly defined. Alternatively, Sobieszek explains,

As a modern art form, advertising photography is not only unavoidable, it is essential. As the first full-length study of this essential art, what follows is certainly incomplete, but one has to begin somewhere in the hopes that others may build on it (p. 14).

It would have been honest, acceptable work to document a visual history of photography in advertising. Instead, Sobieszek has fabricated issues, couching them in fine art terminology (see his discussion of "Futurism, Synthetic Cubism, Vorticism ... Expressionism," p. 33).² Despite relatively heavy documentation (about four footnotes per page), Sobieszek manages generally to avoid confronting any real sociological issues (such as the fact that only two images in the entire book represent non-whites). When he does allude to such issues (such as the role of female nudes and eroticism in advertising), they are not critically addressed. Sobieszek's failure to take up anything like a critical feminist position is evident in his lyrical effusions over lipstick ads shot by Irving Penn and Hiro. About a Penn ad for L'Oréal he writes, for example, that the model's lips were "aggressively smeared with various

hues of lipstick"—but all aggression disappears in his fetishistic description of the resulting ad:

In gentle yet solidly volumetric lighting, the smudges define the lips, articulate their fullness, follow their gesture; yet by a disregard of conventional physiognomic limits they also assume a biomorphic sensuousness of their own. (p. 165)

For the most part Sobieszek's views are pragmatic and middle-of-the-road. Although he quotes Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger early on in his text—presumably to identify himself with the liberal intelligentsia—most of his discussion is couched in modernist terms. In discussing the process in which "editorial imagery" and advertising photography are becoming hybrid, he describes an image, *Martini and Pyramid*, made by Bert Stern in 1955 for Smirnoff Vodka:

Stern's image of a single martini with a twist, placed in the sand in front of a looming pyramid whose top is optically inverted within the martini itself, stands as one of the great advertising photographs of all time, showing us, as Stern said, "something in a way not seen before." [—a sentence in need of a good editor!] Surprise, novelty, and exoticism are combined here with an invention that is totally photographic and honest. (p. 99)

How does this relate to the question of control and motivation which Sobieszek said earlier was raised by Kruger's piece, "We Are the Objects of Your Suave Entrapments" (p. 15)? "Honest"??

There is a lengthy description of the importance of the "Kodak Girl"—"one of the most persistent figures in photographic advertising," on pp. 22-3. Sobieszek describes her as both "fashionably upper middle class" and "the natural product of photography" (p. 22). He does not offer any critical perspective on either claim, concerning social status or the purported realism afforded by early posters' photographic origins. But this comes as no surprise in a book and exhibit sponsored by Kodak itself and organized by the director of the George Eastman House.³

Discussing current trends, Sobieszek quotes critic Amos Stole who wrote in 1924,

Institutional advertising is the making known to the public the fact that the institution employing such advertising [footnote omitted] is also employed in rendering a highly organized and economic service of direct and expressible results of benefit to the public. ... It is a clear expression of why an institution exists. (p. 168)

Sobieszek seeks to explain why he has cited this quote:

This sort of advertising grew out of the twenties, when corporations began to publicize what they were about in hopes of forestalling large-scale public mistrust and animosity. The specific concerns of that era principally differ in terms of language from those of today. (p. 168)

Sobieszek does not give us much insight into those syntactical differences. For all his discussion, we remain aware that advertisers, institutional or otherwise, are concerned with controlling public image to their own advantage. Failure to clarify the point is made worse by the fact that this whole discussion occurs in the chapter, "Triumph of the Image and New Techniques 1980-87" under the subheading "An Electronic Landscape."

Earlier on, in a section titled "Life Styles and Icons" (p. 100) Sobieszek



Unidentified artist, ad for Kodak Cameras c. 1910. Poster IMP/GEH. From *The Art of Persuasion*.

quoted with approval a definition of pictorial representation as non-discursive. His book ignores the real importance of all kinds of signs as language. (A quick check of his index shows references to Roland Barthes, but this discussion of "icons" and non-discursive signs doesn't reflect much awareness of Barthes' views, especially of his brilliant reading of advertising images in "Rhetoric of the Image.")⁴

The Art of Persuasion also provides a light, topical discussion of certain photographers' individual images and of their sometimes unusual techniques. Pete Turner's complex techniques, for instance (we are told of computerized transparencies which are laser-scanned and separated, so as to become first-generation) are said by Sobieszek to provide "... a glimpse into what lies in store for us in terms of photography..." (p. 169).

The photographs in *The Art of Persuasion* are themselves worth perusal for a trip down memory lane, if not for any other, grander inspiration. The text is full of interesting quotes and historical bits of information, and is quite readable—only confusing or annoying in its digressions at times. (One gets the impression that Sobieszek researched this subject not too wisely, but too well.) The "bottom line," according to this book, is that the advertiser remains a necessary evil—the only patron many

photographers/artists are able to find (p. 11).⁵

FOOTNOTES

1 Robert A. Sobieszek, *The Art of Persuasion: A History of Advertising Photography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1988). Further quotations from Sobieszek's book are identified by page number.

2 For other examples of high art mystification, see his discussion of Outerbridge's famous shirt-collar ad, p. 32: "The gentle, organic curves of the collar contrast sharply with the severe squares and right angles of the chessboard pattern over which it appears to hover in tension." He also describes "its simple elegance yet complex geometrics, its compressed, Cubist space and isolation of the product from any naturalistic context..." Or again he says, about one of Avedon's ads in the Revlon series ("The most unforgettable women in the world wear Revlon"). "Richard Avedon gives us a high-relief frieze of monumentalized glamour from around the world, bathed in delicate golden tones..." (p. 166).

3 Kodak sponsorship and other contextual factors make this description of the "Kodak girl" especially bizarre. What might be the self-deconstructive remarks of a Kodak ad manager in 1918, about rendering "humanness" at the same time as pursuing the all-important goal of

"putting across the pleasure of Kodakery," is simply reported by Sobieszek in sober scholarly fashion (p. 23). Sobieszek concludes his account by stating, "... The Kodak girl represents the beginnings of modern advertising photography: clear illustration, the depiction of everyday events, and an atmosphere of attractive normalcy were all combined and directed to a distinctly upper-middle-class consumer market." (p. 23).

4 Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image/Music/Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 32-51.

5 Sobieszek writes on p. 164: "The bottom line, of course, is to sell a commodity—whether it is a product, brand name, corporate or other identity, public or private service, or an idea." This equating of all cultural phenomena as "commodities" which must be "sold" is a (probably unintentionally postmodern) position that permits Sobieszek to assimilate Heartfield to Hiro as both belonging to a single unified tradition.

T.R. Mackin is a Houston writer, editor, and photographer.

PERSPECTIVE VIEW

By Joseph McGrath

Architecture Transformed: A History of the Photography of Buildings from 1839 to the Present. By Cervin Robinson and Joel Herschman. New York: the MIT Press and the Architectural League of New York, 1987. 203 + xii pages; \$50.00.

In the introduction to Cervin Robinson and Joel Herschman's *Architecture Transformed*, Robinson draws a distinction between photography and other visual arts, such as drawing and painting. While drawing and painting clearly exhibit their intentionality simultaneously as a personal and cultural mark, photography must (presumably to be expressive) "remove all doubt on the part of the viewer that pictures, though made by a machine, are wholly intended and therefore an individual's creation" (p.xii). The photographer's intentionality (or personal vision), then, would be expressed through a process of selection beginning with film speed and camera and continuing on to choices about light and placement of objects in the shot. Clearly informed by the fact that he is himself an architectural photographer (and a noted one), Robinson writes that the formal and technical decisions which photographers make hold the key to their individual styles. He finds particular relevance for his view in architectural photography, in that the photographer must "respond" to the clearly presented "given" (the building or room) even more than in portraiture or landscape photography.

This distinction is puzzling in light of the work of any number of prominent photographers. Certainly, the portrait photographer's "response" is complicated by the facts that his or her subject is aware of being photographed, or that the photographer may wish to conceal his or her presence. Yet, rather than preventing an understanding of the photographic portrait as a "response" to a particular "given," these complexities reinforce that understanding—and they may become, in fact, thematic in a photographer's work. Similarly, in landscape photography, the fact that the "given" is frequently less specific than it is in architectural photography calls attention to the craftsmanship and technical expertise in a photographer's response—as in the work of Ansel Adams, to pick an obvious example.

Robinson's conception of style forms the polemical structure on which he develops an historical narrative of architectural photography from 1839 on, divided into four chapters: 1839-1880, 1880-1930, 1930-1970, and 1970 to the present. Robinson thus identifies major stylistic changes as having occurred in 1880, 1930, and 1970.

By writing a history of style defined primarily in terms of technical and formal innovations, Robinson consistently emphasizes the artistic value of photographs over their social significance and influence. For instance, at the end of Chapter 3, in discussing two photographs done in the 1960's, by Eric de Maré and Tim Street-Porter, Robinson acknowledges that Street-Porter's photograph represented a clear departure in subject matter for the English journal, *Architectural Review*, which was accustomed to publishing work like de Maré's. Yet, instead of discussing the impact of this decision, he details the similarities in the technical and formal choices made by each photographer, commenting, "In fact the distinctions between the two are not really so clear" (p. 166). Robinson diffuses the social impact of Street-Porter's intention to show the butcherery "as it really is," by suggesting that the photograph is equal-



Tim Street-Porter, *Irvine New Town, Eglinton Park, butcher department*, 1969.

ly as posed and manipulated as de Maré's photograph of the Royal Creamery. By emphasizing technical and formal issues over the social significance of photographs, Robinson advances an intrinsic, artistic validity for professional architectural photography. He also suggests that the artistic innovations of "amateurs" who take pictures "for themselves" are irrelevant and self-absorbed. Thus, he attempts to advance an understanding of professional architectural photography as art, as well as defend it from criticism that it lacks critical potency by emphasizing its relevance and utility.

In the introductory chapter, Herschman, an art historian, establishes some historical groundwork by identifying two fundamental techniques, both of which extended out of the well-established tradition of architectural drawing, continuing on to form the framework for nascent architectural photography. He describes first the so-called "factual" presentation of a building, in which the photographer assumes a point of view—often from a second or third story window—which imitates as closely as possible an architectural elevation. Secondly, he notes the "experiential" or perspective view, in which the building is photographed from a vantage point which recreates a realistic or experiential view of the building.

Herschman also draws attention to the various architectural subjects to which photographers turned. Stressing the use of the camera as a recording device, Herschman reviews 1860's travel photography, in which photographers such as Felix Beato and James Robertson collected "samples" of ancient or non-western architecture. He also surveys the work of the French Historical Monuments Commission, which was charged in 1851 with recording the disintegrating condition of France's historical structures. These photographic records were influential on architects anxious for examples of authentic period architectural detailing. From Viollet-Le-Duc to H.H. Richardson, architectural practice during this period was dominated by historical revival styles of every stripe. Photographers also attended to the accelerating changes in the built environment during the nineteenth century. Charles Marville recorded the alleys and arcades of medieval Paris slated for demolition, as well as the new boulevards and avenues created by Haussmann's plan for Paris. Finally, photographers also took interest in showing the revolutionary construction techniques used in the emergent "engineering architecture." Photographers avidly put their own revolutionary technology at the service of another,

methodically documenting prefabricated iron-frame exhibition halls as well as providing perspectives of the light, airy, and vast free space they accommodated.

Between 1880 and 1930, Robinson suggests, the factual and experiential approaches became more complex and refined, emerging as fully developed styles of architectural photography. With the development of collotype and photogravure printing processes, photographs could be accurately reproduced and printed amidst text in books and magazines, rather than having to be mounted in albums. Architectural photographs in the factual style were used in magazines such as *American Architect* and *Building News*, which had both a professional and a popular following, as well as in travel books featuring exhaustive collections of views of a particular city, and in governmental surveys of buildings, such as the *Königliche Preussische Messbildanstalt*. By the 1880's, the factual style was no longer identifiable merely by the subject's presentation as an elevation. Rather, it now included both elevational and perspective views and aimed at achieving a clear attitude of objectivity. The buildings or views are generally centered in the composition and framed evenly on all sides, with little attention drawn to the edges of the photograph. The quality of light is de-emphasized, formats are highly regularized, and figures are included merely as an indicator of scale.

Robinson attributes increased interest in a more experiential style during the 1890's to both a change in taste and technological changes in lens design and camera equipment. Just as the photographic elevation developed into a full-blown style, the experiential view developed into a keen aesthetic interest in heightening the viewer's awareness. The photographs capture the texture of building materials, evoke qualities of atmosphere, light, and weather, and emphasize building details over overall form. The well-known works of Eugene Atget, Frederick Evans, Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz represent the zenith of this style at the turn of the century. Their heightened aesthetic sensibility attempted to expand the artistic potential of photography and was seminal in creating a gap between professional architectural photographers and artist-photographers or amateurs who photographed for themselves.

In chapter three, Robinson focuses primarily on photographers in England and the United States who were faced with promoting in architectural journals the modern style imported from Europe. In the opening paragraphs, he discusses the emerging distinction between the professional and amateur in these

two countries. Robinson characterizes the work of the professional as "skillful, technically conservative, predictable and versatile." By contrast, the amateur's work was "awkward, artistically progressive, limited in its purpose and sometimes innovative in subject matter" (p.110). Curiously, he links together as "amateurs" photographers who took pictures for themselves, artists, and magazine editors who supplemented the photographs taken by their professional staffs with pictures of their own. This amorphous group might be described as amateurs in the truest sense of the term, but Robinson's label seems disingenuous, in overlooking its connotations.

The professional, in the employ of architects and publications, turned to the "propagandizing" of modern architecture and photographed skyscrapers, factories, and houses of modern design, together with modern commodities. The amateurs of the 30's and 40's, exemplified principally by Walker Evans, showed an interest in vernacular architecture—the farmhouses and outbuildings of rural America, rowhouses, billboards, and historical architecture. As the differences between these two groups became established, there was a curious change in style. By the 1930's, amateur photographers had adopted a pure, objec-

tive style in the presentation of their simple, architecturally undistinguished buildings. Professional photographers removed much of the atmospheric artiness from the perspective view and began to use it to emphasize the streamlined, dynamic qualities of modern architecture. Juxtaposition with modern modes of transportation, such as automobiles and steamliners, were used to associate the buildings with technological accessories, establishing a modernist utopia. By contrast, the amateur, in Robinson's view, either showed interest in the banal or was sweetly nostalgic in depicting views of a rural New England or Deep South untouched by the twentieth century.

In architectural photography, Robinson suggests, the gap between these two bodies of work has remained in place over the past five decades. Although fashion photography, he notes, has allowed some photographers, such as Richard Avedon and Diane Arbus, to bridge the gap between professional and amateur, architectural photography has not, due to issues of scheduling.

Robinson's argument is perplexing. Not only does he not support his claim about the prohibitive nature of scheduling in architectural photography, but he goes on to suggest that this gap has, in fact, been bridged (most notably in photojournalism) by several photographers. In discussing the work of Ralph Steiner, for instance, Robinson notes that Steiner photographed professionally the modern architecture of William Lecaze, and had taken pictures "for himself" of everyday objects of vernacular architecture earlier in his career. Robinson writes, "It was a characteristic of the thirties to see so much as yet undone that any one photographer could with success play several unrelated roles" (p.121). During the forties and fifties, architect-photographer G.E. Kidder-Smith photographed historical and modern buildings for a series of books on the architecture of Brazil, Sweden, Switzerland and Italy. Finally, Robinson even attributes major stylistic changes in architectural photography during the 70's to the influence of artist-photographers and their renewed interest in architectural subjects.

Robinson does little to clarify differences in the purpose of photographs, whether they were made for books, magazines, or architects, and whether they were

Eric de Maré, *Windsor, Frogmore, Royal Dairy*, 1969.



taken by professionals or amateurs. More important, he fails to discuss in any detail the influence exerted by photography on architectural practice. He does discuss the appearance of editorial photo-essays in architectural journals which attempted both to remind architects of the architectural value of historical and vernacular architecture and enjoin them to respond to the increasing problems of modern urbanization. Yet these essays are discussed primarily in terms of the technical problems they presented and the influence they exerted on other photographers and editors. Robinson's lack of concern for the repercussions of photography on architectural practice is illustrated by the fact that he incorrectly dates the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing Complex by ten years. For many architects and architectural historians, the Pruitt-Igoe demolition in 1972 represents the symbolic death of modern architecture—a turning point in the emergence of post-modern architecture.

In the chapters on 1930-1970 and 1970 to the present, Robinson shows much stronger interest in the work of professional architectural photography (especially, the work done for architectural journals) than in that done by artist-photographers. He mentions in passing the amateurs' continued interest in the architectural everyday (the work of Robert Frank is surprisingly absent from this discussion), then proceeds to follow the path of growing sophistication and influence taken by professionals in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. He sees this work developing into a "fully mature language of photojournalism" (p.172). Robinson also discusses in detail the work of a long list of colleagues such as Ezra Stoller, Morley Baer, and Julius Shulman, drawing the viewer's attention principally to formal and technical concerns (whether or not a particular photographer frames buildings in their urban context, or how he or she responds to the technical demands of a particular camera). The book thus provides an excellent primer for seeing architecture as architectural photographers see it.

The final chapter of the book, however, is disappointing. One expects that the proliferation of photography and its impact on architectural practice over the past twenty years would become the focus of the chapter, particularly in light of Robinson's initial interest in the practical influences of architectural jour-



Walker Evans, Atlanta, billboards and frame houses, 1936. Collections of the Library of Congress.

nalism. Instead, he focuses on a more parochial—albeit significant—technical and formal issue: the increased use of color in architectural photojournalism, and the emergence of a passive formal attitude in the framing of pictures. This focus in the final chapter confirms that Robinson's original intention was to write a history of photographic styles that are earmarked by the matrix of formal and technical decisions a photographer makes.

Unfortunately, as if to avoid some kind of graphic explosion of color in the book's presentation, Robinson illustrates the professional's renewed interest in the quality of light and atmosphere as a result of color photography with black and white reproductions. This seems consistent with the book's general tone of

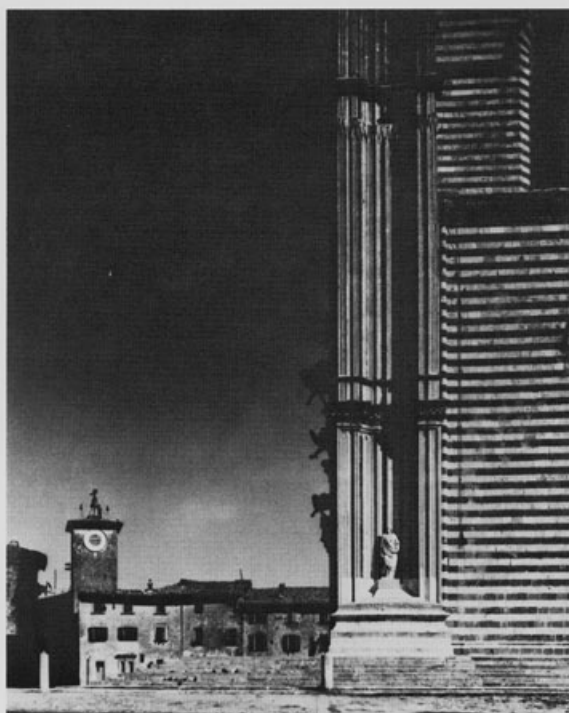
stateliness and polite restraint, in both the text and the impeccable reproduction. Also disappointing is that Robinson acknowledges the renewed interest of artist-photographers in architectural subjects during the 1970's, but again gives them short shrift. (Among others whose work is missing we could think of Joel Sternfeld and William Eggleston.)

To what extent do these photographs represent "architecture transformed"? On the one hand, Herschman succinctly presents and clarifies fundamental attitudes found within a large historical body of photographs. Although this work did not originally present architecture as "transformed," it did establish the avenues along which later architectural photographers would work. Robinson presents and cogently discusses photographs which transformed architecture in the realization of their own aesthetic interests, such as those by Atget and Steichen. His discussion of photographs which transformed architecture through a modernist vision, and of those which later turned to criticize that vision, is equally insightful and intelligent. On the other hand, the more enigmatic, inquisitive and detached eye of the artist-photographer is poorly represented here. Herschman and Robinson's history is illuminating but too narrowly focused for a survey of this scope; it does not invite speculation about a future photography that depends on the achievements or failures of both professionals and amateurs alike.

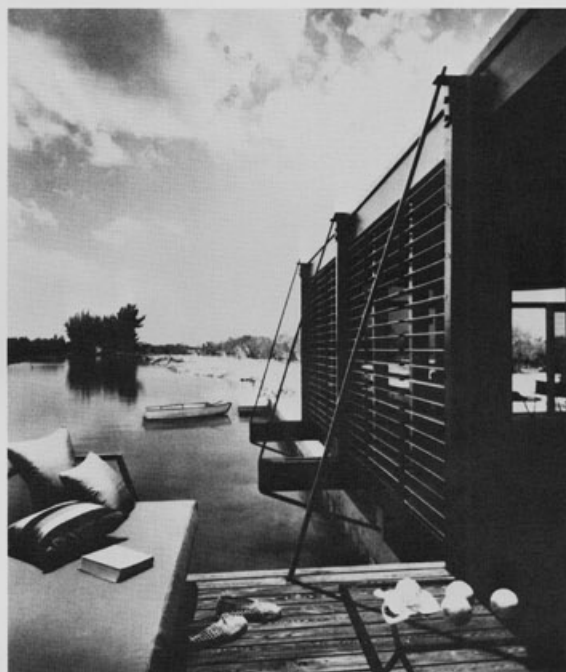
FOOTNOTES

1 Cervin Robinson and Joel Herschman, *Architecture Transformed: A History of the Photography of Buildings from 1839 to the Present* (New York: the MIT Press and the Architectural League of New York, 1987). Subsequent page numbers refer to quotations from this text.

Joseph McGrath is a recent graduate of the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Houston.



G.E. Kidder Smith, Orvieto, Duomo and piazza, ca. 1954.



Ezra Stoller, Sarasota, Cocoon House, 1951.

All photographs from *Architecture Transformed*.

LETTERS

Sekula Replies to Kozloff

July 14, 1988

To the Editor:

Max Kozloff's response (Summer 1988) to my letter concerning Rober Heineken (Spring 1988) places a heavy guilt load on me for placing a heavy guilt load on Heineken. Unfortunately for Kozloff, it's difficult to condemn moralism without sounding like a moralist oneself. But I confess: I did write a nasty and angry letter. And I stand by my argument.

I also want to set the record straight: my letter did not "accuse" Heineken of "not having read" my essay on criminology and physiognomy. Why did Kozloff invent this? (Could it be that my letter wasn't arrogant enough?) Rather, I charged James Huginin with misusing my work in his dubious argument for the subversive character of Heineken's composites. Kozloff more or less repeats Huginin's claim, arguing that Heineken "denatures" the system of television transmission. As Kozloff sees it, "it is not Heineken who is cynical, it's the media managers." My claim is that both Heineken and his ostensible targets share a cynical vision of the world. I do not "defend the TV media against Heineken," but rather suggest that issues of race and gender are contested within and around the media in ways that Heineken's work trivializes. By this I don't mean that television and the press affirm a pluralistic vision of American society, but rather that there is an intermittently visible but quite persistent struggle behind the scenes and from the margins. The Jackson campaign, for example, or the recent discrimination lawsuit brought by Black reporters against the New York *Daily News* have foregrounded many of these issues of race and media representation.

Heineken's ironic distance, however "cheeky" in Kozloff's estimation, does not prevent the artist from reverting to dominant stereotypes. These resonate beneath the "scrambled" identity Kozloff applauds. Could Kozloff really have read Heineken's awkward text, which consistently pulls his composite portraits away from any interesting ambiguity and toward a series of dopey and complacent clichés about race, gender, and age? (And could as careful and mannered a writer as Kozloff have read this text with any esthetic satisfaction?) Furthermore, do Kozloff's claims for Heineken's innocent relation to physiognomic traditions hold up in the face of Heineken's own explicit but sloppy references to this historical tradition? It seems to me that Heineken openly invites a valorizing reading of his project in relation to this history, and Huginin obliged.

Since my argument was manifestly political, it is easy for Kozloff to stereotype me in turn as a member of the "thought police," ignoring the fact that my argument also involved the intellectual and artistic weaknesses of Heineken's work, and not simply his ideological proclivities. This seems to be a standard device for Kozloff nowadays, counterposing the suppleness and freshness of his own encounters with pictures with the thug-like reductivism of unnamed "Marxists" who would, for example, "work over" a photograph of a "poor mufin" for its ideological contents. (See Kozloff, "Photographs: The Images That Give You More Than You Need To See and Less Than You Need To Know," *Photographic Insight*, 1:1, Fall 1987). Of course Kozloff's implied reader here is expected to automatically fill in the

old image of Stalinist orthodoxy bravely resisted by Max the Maverick.

Furthermore, Kozloff insists on seeing me as a critic who relishes "moral superiority" to artists. This characterization seems especially inappropriate since it is as an artist that I have framed an implicit argument against the sort of "denatured" media fatalism practiced by Heineken and many other artists working today. As a matter of fact, I don't write much about contemporary photography, and prefer to enter debates about current practice obliquely, through what I hope are counter-examples. In short, I'm not in the habit of "going out of [my] way to punish inappropriate victims." But I do get cranky about my historical research being used to legitimate work for which I have little respect.

Contrary to positions he has taken in the past, Kozloff here defends the limitless freedom of the artist to work without regard for the historical embeddedness and complicity of signifying practices. Playfulness seems to be enough for Max the Epicurean, polemical alter ego of Max the Moralist.

But were Kozloff genuinely interested in an argument, beyond scolding me for bad manners, he might have attempted a more serious case for the moral dimension and esthetic quality of Heineken's work, instead of paying routine lip service to the artist's "cheek."

Allan Sekula

NEWS

HCP FELLOWSHIP WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The Houston Center for Photography is pleased to announce that the three \$1,000 fellowship recipients for 1988 are R. Lynn Foster, Paul Vincent Kuntz, and Liz Ward. They will exhibit their portfolios next year at the Center.

Each year, the Houston Center for Photography awards three fellowships to Houston area photographers or artists who incorporate photographic media into their work. The recipients are selected via portfolio competition, and are awarded the money to support work in progress.

Judges for this year's competition were Anne Wilkes Tucker (Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) and Walter Hopps (Director, the Menil Collection).

BOOKS RECEIVED

The following are a few of the books recently received and available to HCP members in our library:

Tim Beddow, *East Africa: An Evolving Landscape* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

Beirut: City of Regrets: Photographs by Eli Reed. Text by Fouad Ajami (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

Harry Callahan, *New Color: Photographs 1978-1987* (Kansas City, Missouri: Hallmark Cards, 1988).

Estampes Apocryphes (Apocryphal Images): Exhibition catalogue for exhibit organized in Barcelona, Spain, April 28-May 30, 1988; including work by Evergon, Jordi Guilumet, Jean-Francois Lecourt, Jorge Ribalta, Cindy Sherman, Mitra Tabrizian, Ruth Thorne Thomsen, and Joel-Peter Witkin (text in French)(Barcelona: Primavera Fotografica a Catalunya, 1988).

Frank Gohlke, *Landscapes from the Middle of the World: Photographs 1972-1987* (San Francisco: The Friends of Photography, 1988).

Martin Harrison, *Beauty Photography in Vogue* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1987).

Taishi Hirokawa (Hiro), *Sonomama Sonomama: High Fashion in the Japanese Countryside* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988).

Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé, *A History of Photography: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Charlie Meecham, *The Oldham Road*, with Introductory essay by Ian Jeffrey (London: Architectural Association, 1987).

Tsuneo Nakamura, *Gentle Giant: At Sea with the Humpback Whale* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1984).

Bernard F. Stehle, *Another Kind of Witness*, with Foreword by Geoffrey Hartman and Afterword by Sister Gloria Coleman (Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

Dennis Stock, *James Dean Revisited* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987).

Rick Smolan and David Cohen, *A Day in the Life of Spain* (San Francisco: Collins Publishers, 1988).

CALENDAR

EXHIBITIONS

Art Institute of Houston

September 12-October 6, Student Portfolio Competition. Opening reception on Wednesday, October 5, 5-7p.m. Monday-Friday 8a.m.-9p.m., Saturday 10-2. 3600 Yoakum, 523-2546.

Benteler-Morgan Gallery

September 15-October 21, Manuel Carrillo. November 10-December 3, *Landscapes*. Monday-Friday 10-5 and by appointment. 4200 Montrose, 529-7900.

Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston

September 9-October 23, *Houston Area Exhibitions*. Tuesday-Friday 10-5, Saturday-Sunday 1-5. 749-1390.

Butera's on Alabama

October 3-November 25, Terry Moore. Monday-Friday 7a.m.-10p.m., Saturday-Sunday 8a.m.-10p.m. 2946 S. Shepherd, 528-1500.

Butera's on Montrose

October 3-November 25, Sam Silver. Monday-Friday 7a.m.-10p.m., Saturday-Sunday 8a.m.-10p.m. 4621 Montrose, 520-8426.

Butler Gallery

October 14-November 12, Joel-Peter Witkin. Tuesday-Saturday 10-5. 522-4430.

Contemporary Arts Museum

September 24-November 3, *Texas Triennial*, including photographers Bill Landbrig, Frank Martin, Celia Alvarez Munoz, Wendy Watriss, and Casey Williams. Tuesday-Saturday 10-5, Sunday 12-6. 526-3129.

Diverse Works

September 9-30, *Portraits in the Time of AIDS*, by Rosalind Solomon; Videos by Gretchen Bender. Tuesday-Friday 10-5, Saturday 12-4. 223-8346.

Heights Gallery

September 23- January 8, 1989, *It's All in the Game*, Baseball photographs by Tracy Hart. Tuesday-Friday 1-6 and by appointment. 1438 Herkimer at 15th Street. 868-9606.

Houston Center for Photography

September 9-October 9, *Nagatani and Tracey Collaborate*, Polaroid photographs by photographer Patrick Nagatani and painter Andrée Tracey. October 14-November 13, *Digital Photography*, eleven artists working with photomontage using new computer-related material. November 18-December 22, *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Landscape Photography*. Wednesday-Friday 11-5, Saturday-Sunday 12-5. 529-4755.

Lawndale

September 17-October 15, *Blue Star Three*, Judy Bankhead, Curtis Samson, and Bud Timenn. Tuesday-Saturday 11-5. 921-4155.

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

September 10-November 27, *American Class Room*, Photographs by Catherine Wagner. Tuesday-Saturday 10-5, Sunday 1-6. 526-1361.

EXHIBITIONS ELSEWHERE IN TEXAS

AMARILLO

Southern Light Gallery, Amarillo College

September 1-30, *Off Set Lithographs*, by Scott Hyde. Workroom Gallery: *What is Mail Art?* P.O. Box 447, Amarillo, TX, 79178.

AUSTIN

Laguna Gloria Art Museum

October 22-December 4, *Photographs Beget Photography*. Tuesday-Saturday 10-5, Thursday 10-9p.m., Sunday 1-5. (512) 458-8191.

DALLAS/FT. WORTH

Afterimage

September 6-October 22, Photographs by Michael Kenna. Monday-Saturday 10-5:30. Suite 250, 2800 Routh. (214) 871-9140.

Amon Carter Museum

September 1-October 23, *Images of Plants from the Photography Collection*. October 28-February 5, 1989, *Landscape Photographs from the Collection*. Tuesday-Saturday 10-5, Sunday 1-5:30. 3501 Camp Bowie Boulevard, Ft. Worth. (817) 738-1933.

CLUBS

ASMP (American Society of Magazine Photographers) meets the second Monday of each month at the Graphic Arts Conference Center, 1324 Clay. Social Hour starts at 6:30p.m.; meeting is at 7:30p.m. For information, contact Larry Gatz at 666-5203.

Brazoria County Camera Club

meets at 7:30p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the Arlington Bank of Commerce. Contact Don Benton, (409) 265-4569.

The Houston Camera Club meets at 7:30p.m. on the second and third Tuesdays of each month at the Baylor College of Medicine, DeBakey Bldg., Room M-112. Contact Glenn Stevens, 520-5013.

The Houston Photochrome Club

meets at 7:30p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at St. Michael's Church, 1801 Sage. Contact Joe Sandler at 774-1035.

The Houston Photographic Club

meets at 7:30p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at Bering Church, Mulberry at Harold. Contact John Moyer, 933-4492.

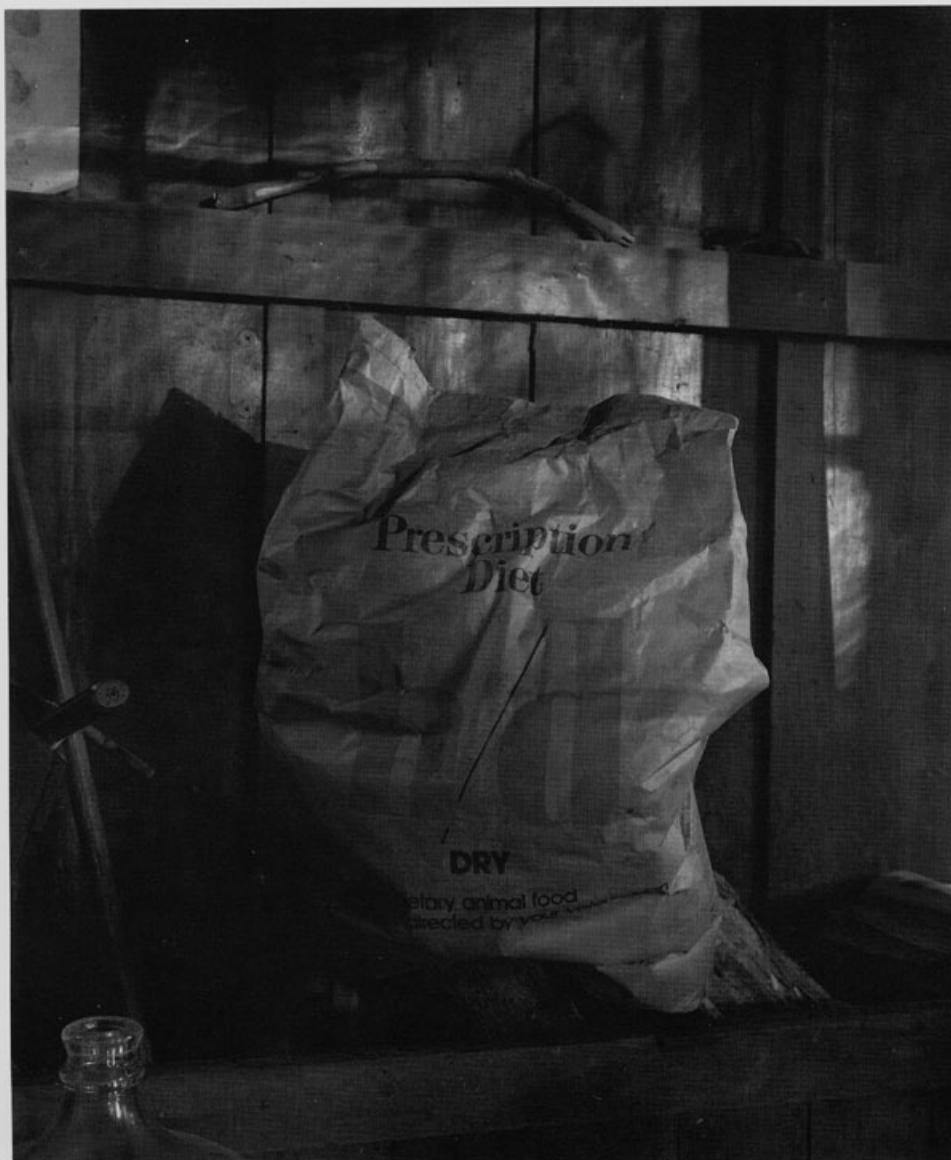
Photographic Collectors of Houston

meets 7p.m. fourth Wednesday of each month upstairs at The Camera Doctor, 3211 Edloe. Contact Leonard Hart, 868-9606.

FM 1960 Photographic Society

meets 7:30p.m. first and third Tuesday of each month at Doss Park, 1500 Frick Rd. Contact Royce Shaddix Jr., 237-3787.

Clarification: The Gisèle Freund photograph of Evita Perón published on p. 5 in *SPOT*, Summer 1988, should have been credited to Photo Researchers, New York. *SPOT* regrets the omission.



A DOG'S LIFE

By Peter Brown

There are many items necessary to the dog's life in this photograph. To name a few: there is food, a lot of it, and food created expressly for an individual dog. There is a throwing stick, slightly curved for sound effect, a classic recreational item. There is a large jar of water for the dog to drink and there is a box of firewood below the bag of dog food, which could be burned for warmth.

There is shelter implied. (The photograph is taken inside.) A pile of newspapers, barely visible in the lower right, could be spread on the floor in the presence of a young dog. There is a topographic map which the owner of the dog might use in taking the dog for walks. Some nondescript tools which could conceivably be used to build the dog its own home can be seen above the bottle, and there is strong warm light in which the dog could lie down and sleep. All these elements add up to a potentially happy life for the dog.

Also implied in this photograph are caring owners (prescription diets and bottled water) and, although it can't be made out because of the length of the exposure, a pet other than a dog may be involved. On the right side of the throwing stick is a severely arched shadow. This shadow is cast by a parrot's perch. My memory is that the parrot was on the perch when I took the photograph, but I may be wrong. Its shadow is not particularly visible, perhaps because the bird was moving. In any case, the dog and the parrot get along very well. Or got along very well. A few months after this photograph was taken, the parrot flew away. Making a big mistake, it now lives somewhere along the cold northern California coast.

But that's not what this photograph is about. It's really about sex. As you can see, the bag is a female torso astride a nude male. She is wearing an h/d Prescription Diet t-shirt and she is ecstatic. She moves her arms and head around so fast that, like the parrot, she doesn't show up in the photograph. The bottle then takes on other meanings, as do the tools and the stick.

That's not true. It's about spiritual light on mundane things. The sacred and the profane. The sacred wood and light and the profane dog food.

And even that's not it. It's about color and texture. Similarities of color. Differences in texture.

What's that strange shape above the Prescription Diet owl's right ear (when it's facing you)? It looks as though a drawer pull or something used to be there. The Prescription Diet owl is staring at you. See its h/d eyes and perked ears? It's a holy owl and has a throwing stick halo.

It's a dog's life. Prescription Diet is a punching bag, a tacking dummy, a sack containing three thousand hamsters, empty, full of charcoal briquettes, and an element in a story still to be told.

A shaggy dog named Hunter-Driffield once invented the H/D curve of photographic exposure. It was the end of the intuitive and the beginning of the scientific in photography. Equivalences never were quite the same after old HD and Alfred Stieglitz, the shaggy dog's elegant owner.

Peter Brown teaches photography at Rice University.

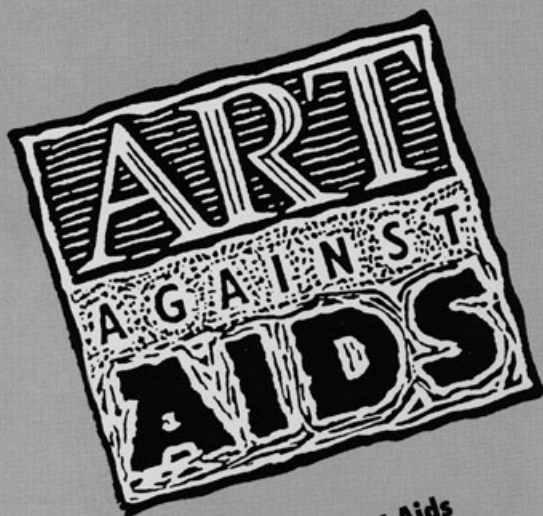
ATHANOR

By Denise Levertov

Tempered wood, Wrought light.
Carved rags. Curled gold, the thin
sheets of it. The leaves of it.
The wet essence of it infused.
Effluvia of gold suffused throughout. The saturation.
The drying. The flaking. The absorption.
It is a paper sack, a paper sack for dogfood, dry,
the dry wafers of a sacrament, a sacred sack,
its brownish pallor illumined, inscribed with red,
upheld by a manylayered substance
plush as moss, chocolate-dark, dense,
which is shadow,
and backed by a tentative, a tremulous
evanescence which is wood
or which is the tardy sunbeam from under cloudbank
just before evening settles,
that percolates through cobwebs and thick glass.
Which is the fleeting conjugation
of wood and light, embrace that leaves wood
dizzy and insubstantial, and leaves light
awestruck again at its own destiny.

Denise Levertov is a member of the National Academy and the Institute of Arts and Letters, as well as the recipient of many honors and awards. Currently she is on the faculty of the English Department at Stanford University.

Photograph and texts from Seasons of Light, Photographs and Stories by Peter Brown, Poems by Denise Levertov (Houston: Rice University Press, forthcoming October 1988). Used by permission.



Houston Art Against Aids

Mayor Kathryn J. Whitmire has proclaimed September "Houston Art Against AIDS Month." "Houston Art Against AIDS" is a grass roots effort uniting individuals and organizations of the arts in a common cause—raising public awareness and funds for direct care and assistance to people affected by Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in Houston.

September events include exhibits, film series, previews, concerts, and theatrical performances, culminating in a major art auction gala on Friday, September 30 at the Decorative Center Houston, 5120 Woodway. "Houston Art Against AIDS" has also published a portfolio of ten prints donated by different artists in the community. Published in an edition of fifty, it includes works by Chuck Dugan, Gael Stack, Melinda Beeman, William Steen, Derek Boshier, Michael Tracy, Eric Avery, Gail Siptak, James Bettison, and Karin Broker. The cost of the portfolio is \$2,000, with all proceeds going to "Houston Art Against AIDS."

All "Houston Art Against AIDS" monies will be channeled through the AIDS Care Fund, a program established in May, 1988, by the Houston-Harris County AIDS Panel with the initial seed money and staffing provided by the United Way.

To donate artwork, obtain a calendar of "Houston Art Against AIDS" events, or secure further information, please call "Houston Art Against AIDS," 524-7833.



ESTHER PARADA, *The Monroe Doctrine: Theme and Variations*, 1987. Laser prints, 168 documents.

DITOGRAPHY

THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY LECTURES & WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOPS, CLASSES

Beginning Black & White Photography Instructor Bill Frazier. Sats 9am-12, Sep 10, 17, 24. \$45 members, \$55 non-members.

Outdoor Portraiture Instructor Carey Sutcliffe. Sep 30, 7-9pm, Oct 1, 2-6pm. \$35 members, \$45 non-members.

Computer Graphics: An Introduction to the Macintosh Instructor David Crossley. Tues 7-9:30, Sep 27, Oct 4, 11. \$100 members, 125 non-members. Limit: 6.

Photographic Composition Instructor Bill Frazier. Sats 9am-12, Oct 8, 15, 22. \$55 members, \$65 non-members. Limit: 10.

The Landscape Instructor Jay Forrest. Muns 7-9pm, Nov. 1, 8, 15, 22, at HCP. \$90 members, \$100 non-members. Limit: 10.

Light, Film, The Zone System, and The Print Instructor Gary Faye. Fri Nov 4 7pm, Sat Nov 5 9-5, field trip Nov 6, critique and discussion Nov 19 9-5. \$145 members, \$175 non-members.

Light, Film, The Zone System, and The Print Instructor Gary Faye. Fri Nov 4 7pm, Sat Nov 5 9-5, field trip Nov 6, critique and discussion Nov 19 9-5. \$145 members, \$175 non-members.

LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS

Digital Dialog Symposium (See details above) At Ron Scott's studio. Oct 22, 9-6. \$55 members, \$75 non-members. See also Keynote Address, below.

Members Preview: Patrick Nagatani, Andree Tracee Gallery talk by artists in current exhibition. 5:30pm, Fri Sep 9.

DIGITAL DIALOG

An all-day symposium on the formidable computer, its applications and implications for photography and other art.

Manual (Suzanne Bloom/Ed Hill) Artists using a computer to create new work

Jim Pomeroy Curator and artist, organizer of exhibition *Digital Photography*.

Raphaelle Retoucher extraordinaire, maker of miracles

Ron Scott Professional photographer, software author, computer artist

Ross Qajar Engineer, Apple Systems Dealer, visionary. Open Discussion will follow presentations.

Also: Demonstration of Casio Still Video Camera, Macintosh and MS-DOS systems, other amazements

Related events:

Keynote address by Jim Pomeroy, Friday, Oct. 21, 7:30pm
ASMP Meeting: Steve Hayman, of Chicago's Digital Image. Thursday, Oct. 20.

Saturday October 22, 9am-6pm Reception 6:30-8

CALL HCP FOR DETAILS (713)529-4755

Members only. Free.

Also: The Making of an Installation Sep 8 6-8PM viewing of installation in progress. Free, open to public.

Keynote Address: Digital Photography An exploration of filmmakers' visions of computers. Jim Pomeroy, co-curator of exhibition *Digital Photography*

William Clift An intimate discussion of his work. Clift will show original prints. Supported by the Lynn McAnahan Herbert Lecture Fund. \$3.50

members, \$5 non-members.

The Center will also hold a book-signing for Clift Nov. 18.

Wednesday Evening Critiques A series of critiques for HCP members only. Free.

Sep 14 Kathryn Davidson, Curator of Prints and Photographs, The Menil Collection.
Oct 12 Petra Benteler and Susan Morgan, owners of Benteler-Morgan Gallery
Nov 9 Bill Graham, owner of Graham Gallery
Dec 14 Clint Willour, HCP president and director of Watson Gallery.