

# SPOT

A PUBLICATION OF THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY FALL 1989 \$2.00



Mel Rosenthal

"We shouldn't have had to go to that funeral today. He was only 15 years old. It's hard to fight in the mountains. The Contra has good equipment and the planes supply them at night. But we're winning. If the Americans invade us, Reagan and Bush will be very surprised. It'll be like Viet Nam. We'll never surrender." (Young soldier after his friend's funeral.)

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## PHOTOGRAPHY & CONFLICT IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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DERRILL BAZZY  
RICHARD LEWIS  
MEL ROSENTHAL  
WENDY WATRISS

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: THE SESQUICENTENNIAL / FILM / EXHIBITIONS / BOOKS

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## CONTENTS

### COVER

Mel Rosenthal, *Soldier, Tipitapa, Nicaragua, 1987.*

"This young Sandinista veteran works with the families of soldiers. I photographed him a few hours after the burial of a close friend, another victim of the Contra war. I used his comments in the *Tipitapa Photographic Exhibition*." (See pp. 4-5)

## FEATURES

### PHOTOGRAPHY AND CONFLICT IN CENTRAL AMERICA

- 4 The *Tipitapa Photographic Project* by Mel Rosenthal  
Photographs are used in a sister cities project between New York and Tipitapa, Nicaragua.
- 6 An Interview with Wendy Watriss by Olive Hershey  
Houston photographer Wendy Watriss speaks of her experiences photographing in Nicaragua and El Salvador.
- 9 Documenting Death: Children and Mothers of the Disappeared by Joan Seeman Robinson  
Richard Lewis' photographs of the *CoMadres* inform others about human rights violations in El Salvador.
- 11 A Conversation between Derrill Bazy and Carole Kismaric  
A college exchange program in Colombia led to Derrill Bazy's involvement as volunteer and photographer for refugee projects in Honduras and Mexico.
- 14 Other Americans by Lois Parkinson Zamora  
Six recent books exemplify diverse approaches to "the other" in Latin American, and to political issues in Guatemala, in particular.

### 150 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

- 16 Photo History Makes Its Own Picture by Bill Frazier  
Curatorial practices, national origin, and other factors influence the representation of photo history in sesquicentennial shows, books, and magazines.
- 20 Streets and Trees by Rachel Ranta  
Ranta reflects on memory, drawing, photography, and place, in looking closely at photographs by Walker Evans and Robert Adams from *The Art of Photography* exhibition at Houston's MFA.

## PROFILE

- 22 Earlie Hudnall by Julie Lee

## FILM

- 23 Dreyer Up Close by John Inglis  
Carl Dreyer's silent films developed the technique of the closeup to reveal the experiences and nature of oppression.

## EXHIBITIONS

- 26 Defining the Line by Louis Dobay  
Eugene Richards works in *Below the Line* to reveal ways of being poor in America.
- 26 Reaching Places: The Photographs of Richard W. Schaeffer by Roberto Cofresi  
Schaeffer's images make us tourists everywhere and nowhere.
- 27 Beyond Permission by Anne Roberts  
In this show artists explored personal modes of expression and altered images.
- 29 Lukewarm, Hot, and Cool by Joan Seeman Robinson  
Diverse approaches showed up in HCP's 1988 *Fellowship Winners Exhibition*.

## BOOKS

- 30 Exiles and Personal Exposures by David Lazar  
Erwit's humor is broad in comparison to Koudelka's more subtly ironic perceptions.
- 31 Recycled Ansel Adams by Stanley Moore  
Three new Ansel Adams books show different aspects of a familiar master.
- 32 Leaving History and Entering the World of Ideas by Ed Osowski  
Photojournalism continues to elude easy definition in two new books.
- 33 Visual Pleasures and Construction Workers by Wendy Sterba  
Ann Chwatsky's *The Man in the Street* doesn't deeply rethink problems of the male gaze.

## DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Messages
- 34 Books Received
- 34 Letters

**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.

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By now my file on the Corcoran/NEA/Mapplethorpe/Serrano/Helms debacle is three inches thick and weighs a couple of pounds. Buried in all the prose, it seems to me, there are still a few undeveloped issues.

Conservatives like James Kilpatrick, Samuel Lipman, and Hilton Kramer defend themselves against the charge of censorship, insisting that artists should be free to do what they want – so long as it is not at the taxpayers' expense. But since the NEA is just about the only source of support for artists whose works are too new or controversial to secure corporate funding or commercial success, cuts here amount to *de facto* censorship.

Texas Representative Dick Armey says "Let the people who are interested in art fund it." The strange irony in this is that Mapplethorpe *did* earn both fame and fortune in the private sphere. On the basis of critical recognition, exhibitions, publications, and monetary success (a single Mapplethorpe print sold for as much as \$20,000 – compared to the \$30,000 grant in question for the traveling show), Mapplethorpe was an undisputed luminary of the art-photographic world. What are the publicly-supported art museums supposed to do once a photographer like Mapplethorpe has become famous in this way? Ignore him and hope he'll go away? How exactly can the "public/private" split be maintained? Presumably the organizers for the traveling Mapplethorpe exhibit were responding to, and trying to educate the public about, a taste and a vision that had already become institutionalized in that complex economy of private/commercial/critical forces which we call the art world.

Representative Armey says it would take the average working man or woman 276 days to earn the \$45,000 spent by the NEA to support Serrano's work and the traveling Mapplethorpe exhibit; he asks whether John or Jane Taxpayer would elect to spend 276 days' worth of income on these shows. (How does he know? It's not as if they'd get all that money back, anyway, if the NEA hadn't spent it!) How many days (or years) do they work to buy a Stealth bomber? Wouldn't they rather use that money for braces, Reeboks, or trips to Disneyland? And how about accountability to Jane and John (and us) for our tax dollars lost in the HUD scandal, or the \$166 billion being spent to subsidize the S&L industry? These games of numbers and comparison-contexts are endlessly fascinating. Put the NEA's budget of \$169 million per year up against the \$560 million spent by France on dance, theater, and music, or the \$4.5 billion spent by Germany, for example. Or, put it up against the \$240 million we're going to spend here in Houston to rebuild the Southwest Freeway – to make renovations that will be obsolete within ten years.

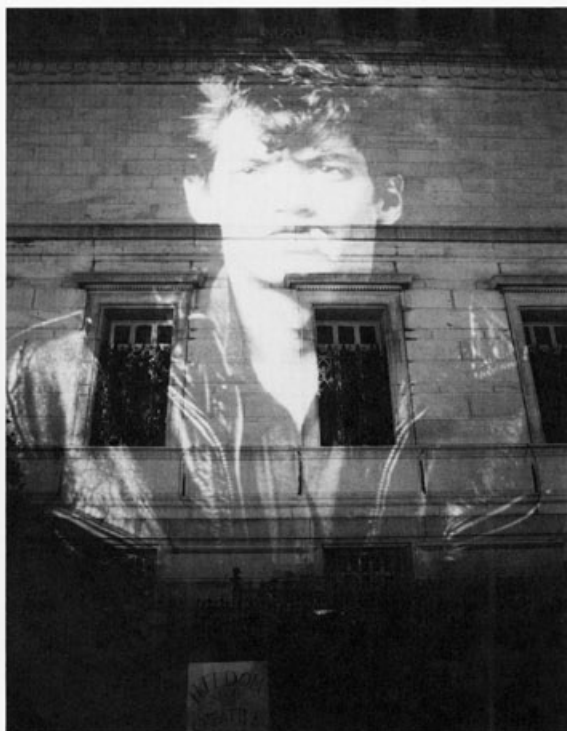
Critics think the art establishment has one mind and one voice, championing Mapplethorpe simply because "there is in the professional art world a sentimental attachment to the idea that art is at its best when it is most extreme and disruptive" (Kramer). Or again, the "professional art world" expects that the viewer's role is "only to approve" (Lipman). These charges are patently false. A balanced review *Arts Magazine* published of the Mapplethorpe exhibit – before all the hoopla erupted – concluded that "Mapplethorpe contributed beautiful, significant icons to the cultural image-pool, stretching the notion of what is acceptable to view, but his aestheticizing and emphasis on surface gloss severely limit the stretch." Our very own journal, *SPOT*, published a piece by reviewer Robert Hobbs harshly criticizing Mapplethorpe both for his objectification of men and for his racism (*SPOT*, Spring 1988). Keep in mind that *SPOT* and similar publications are also supported by the NEA, which thereby advances critical dialogue in "the professional art world," fostering intelligent debate about the merits of this work at a level of critical understanding we hope is somewhat higher than the plane occupied by Congressmen who either refuse to look at the photographs or label them "dirty pictures."

Kramer has long been upset that NEA money goes to artists who criticize our government's policies. Helms' office phoned one NEA-supported organization to ask why an exhibition included pictures of Communists. Don't turn to Wendy Watriss' portrait of Daniel Ortega on our page 6, Senator Helms! In this issue *SPOT* is using at least some NEA money to discuss work by a number of committed and articulate artists and photographers from across the country – from Seattle, Houston, New York, and Boston – who have worked to effect social change in conflict-ridden areas in Central America, and who are openly and harshly critical of our foreign policies in that region.

The conservatives build from an unfounded presumption that what's already enshrined in the art museums has some sort of different nature from what's new. They speak of having a "socially desirable impact" (Kramer) or of making art that will "elevate, enlighten, console and encourage our lives" (Lipman). Kilpatrick allows that *some* photography is art: "I think of such photographers as Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and Alfred Eisenstaedt as artists." But I wonder if he knows about Ansel Adams' work at Manzanar (discussed by reviewer Stanley Moore in this issue). When he tried to depict oppression of Japanese-Americans, Adams' books were tossed into the flames. To our country's discredit, this sort of art ran counter to "public standards of decency and civility" (Kramer). But who was right? Even Congress has now acknowledged that the public standards were wrong. The conservatives should re-read their John Stuart Mill: "However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that, however true it may be, it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as dead dogma, not as living truth" (On *Liberty*, Chapter II, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion").

Senator Helms wants the NEA not to support work that will "offend people's taste." Should the work of the photographers discussed in this issue, who oppose our government's Central American policies, not be seen and considered? The U.S. is still committed to giving the Contras \$45 million in aid, despite the recent five-nation Central American agreement to disband them. This follows eight years and how many other millions of dollars of aid (not counting the millions to Somoza). Do the pictures of the "disappeared" people we have included in this issue – people tortured and brutalized in part as a consequence of our government's Central American policies – "offend people's taste"? What's the real obscenity here?

Cynthia Freeland



Robert Dawson, 1989

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Kids in New York sending messages to Tipitapa. 11/87



Students acting as village "scribes" in Tipitap. 11/87.

## THE TIPITAPA PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT

By Mel Rosenthal

### Background

The *Tipitapa, Nicaragua, Photo Exhibit* is the most visible part of a project that I have been involved with for two years. The show itself consists of 50 photographs I made in Tipitapa accompanied by a text with information about the town. Beneath many of the pictures are quotes taken from messages sent to people in New York City by the people in the photographs. The exhibit comes out of an interesting and, I think, important interaction involving people in Tipitapa, people in the Upper West Side of Manhattan and myself as photographer. This interaction is resulting in an exhibition that keeps changing. It has been shown in schools, churches and other community centers in New York City. As you read this it is showing at the Labor Gallery of the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies in New York City where it will be until December 22, 1989, and where many union members will see it.

The project grew out of a short trip to Tipitapa, Nicaragua that I made with three other people in May of 1987. We went as representatives of a committee from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where I live, to see if it was possible to set up a sister city relationship. Our purpose was "to get acquainted," gather information about Tipitapa, and establish working relationships with people there. We only had four days to meet with people and visit institutions such as schools, health centers, co-ops, community and political organizations and religious centers. I took pictures while the other three interviewed people the Mayor arranged for us to meet. I quickly got tired of taking pictures of those meetings and began to wander around by myself. The Mayor, Luis Fonseca, who had been a poet and medical student before the revolution, was very well-liked and his introductions gave me great access to people.

There was much to do. I needed to show in both black and white and color what the town looked like, make portraits of important or representative people, give some sense of economic, social, and religious processes, and be able to show what daily life there was like. I like photographing in Nicaragua and felt that I could do all that in a short time. When I'm somewhere other than home, everything seems new and fresh, my eyes seem sharper and my brain, eye and fingers work better together than usual. Photographing in Central America and particularly in Nicaragua is especially challenging. For most of us who are drawn to that part of the world, the political lines are clear. We feel that the United States government is wrong and is supporting the bad guys, which motivates us to do as good

a job as we possibly can. Someone once asked me why so many photographers keep going to Central America and I ventured the opinion that perhaps for many of us it is our Spanish Civil War. (It would be interesting to explore why this wasn't true for Viet Nam and that unpopular war.)

### The Project

As I photographed, I was struck by how poor Tipitapa is and how hard life is for the people. It is an agricultural community lacking in industry and business. There's a big sugar refinery and a prison, both of which are outside of town. When we were there the area was suffering from a severe drought. It is hard hit by the U.S. government's "low intensity" war against Nicaragua. Sewage flows through the main streets of the town because there isn't enough money to lay pipes or fix ones that have been broken. Large sections of the town have no drinking water except from wells, and they are contaminated by sewage much of the year. Consequently many people get sick and children die. The local clinic and satellite health posts are often

out of medicines and desperately need basic essentials. The great strides in implementing preventive health measures have been set back by the war and the imposition of the U.S. government's intensive economic embargo. In April 1989, the last time I heard from someone there, fourteen children had died that month from infantile diarrhea, malaria and other preventable illnesses.

The tremendous drain on the economy caused by the war results in terrible problems in the schools. Most of the local schools are out of pencils and paper. Students frequently share chairs and desks, and in one school the students bring chairs from home to the school every day. One school I visited had few blackboards, and the ones they had were broken. The people we talked to in Tipitapa said they hoped the sister city program would provide help with major needs such as the sewage problem and lack of clean drinking water, and would help supply health and educational materials. As I photographed I kept that in mind and spent a lot of time photographing kids, schools and health processes (I was lucky that one of their

many vaccination campaigns was going on).

When I got back to the U.S., we put together a slide show/talk to introduce people in the Upper West Side to the town of Tipitapa and her people. It was very successful. Our local government Community Board endorsed the sister city relationship. We also made slide shows for use by people who were organizing medical and educational projects. Within a few months our committee was sending shipments of health and educational supplies to Tipitapa.

Meanwhile, I printed the first version of the *Tipitapa Photo Exhibit* and we wrote an introduction to Tipitapa. We also selected quotes from the interviews that we felt represented our experiences to be put up with the pictures. This exhibition was shown at a large community center in our neighborhood. Well-known writer Margaret Randall read from her work on women in Nicaragua at the opening as a benefit to raise money for medical aid to Tipitapa. The exhibition then moved to a number of other community centers including the Riverside Church, and plans were made to have it begin to be shown in the six or seven schools which wanted to be paired with schools in Tipitapa.

I made prints of 200 Tipitapa pictures and sent two copies of each to the Mayor with a note asking him to make sure that people in the pictures got copies. (Frequently, I photograph people who wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to have themselves photographed and who don't have good photographs of themselves. Giving them pictures of themselves has become an integral part of my photographic practice. I want the people in my pictures to be one of my main audiences, and I feel that everyone should have good pictures of themselves. I find that the ongoing interaction with my subjects is very valuable and that I learn a great deal from their responses to my work.) I also sent copies of the 50 pictures that were in the exhibition that was circulating in New York City. Before I had left Tipitapa, the Mayor had agreed to put them up in the town hall with sheets of paper underneath them so that people in the pictures could write messages to the people in New York City. He was going to send me the messages so that I could translate them and put them under the pictures in our exhibition.

I went back to Tipitapa in November of 1987. I was very excited about going back. I hadn't heard anything from the Mayor or anyone else and wondered what had happened to our project. When I arrived I found that conditions had gotten worse. The U.S. Contra War against Nicaragua was exacting a terrible toll. The economy was in chaos. There were epidemics of malaria and dysentery. The health center was out of antibiotics, asthma medicine,

Funeral for a 14 1/2-year-old killed in the Contra war. 11/87.





and most stomach medicines. A lot of young people had lost arms or legs. (A major tactic of the Contras is to plant mines in the fields or along the roads.) Considering the situation there, photography was not a great priority, but I wanted to get the show up and I wanted to make the pictures I felt were missing. I particularly wanted to make more photographs in the schools, in agriculture, and on everyday life. Having already received my pictures of themselves, people were glad to see me and happy to help. Many suggested new picture possibilities.

Putting up the exhibition turned out to be a comedy of errors or, more accurately, a study of what happens when you have good intentions but don't have enough experience or knowledge, i.e., nothing worked out as I had planned. Most of the walls of the town hall were concrete so I used heavy duty double-sided stick tape to put the RC prints up. By the next day, they were all on the floor. The tape was no match for the heat and humidity. Good gaffer's tape might have worked, but I didn't have enough with me. Two of the walls had some wood sheets on them. Luckily I had brought lots of pushpins as part of the supplies for the schools. Using them I finally got the pictures up. My great plan to have people write messages under the pictures of themselves also turned out to have some problems connected to it that I hadn't foreseen.

Many people who had comments to make weren't in the pictures. Some of them were annoyed with me until I took pictures of them for the next exhibit. Some people weren't living there any more or couldn't be found. Many of the comments didn't provide much information, nor were they interesting. Even given the great success of the literacy campaigns in Nicaragua, there were still people whose writing ability was minimal. Many of the most literate people wrote very rhetorical things about the revolution and how nobody would surrender, which was the patriotic slogan of that year. We solved some of the problem by having a few of the high school students spend some time at the "gallery" and act as village scribes. By the end of the week, dozens of people were coming in every day to see the pictures and to write or dictate messages to New York City. I spent a few hours a day there and spoke to the people. People loved the pictures and felt empowered by them. They used the pictures frequently as an opportunity to engage in oral history. I learned a great deal about the history of the town, about the revolution, the fight against the United States, and about the power of photography.

I spent a lot of time photographing in the schools. I had brought with me hundreds of letters from children from the New York schools that are paired with schools in Tipitapa. As part of their curriculum these kids are learning about Tipitapa and the history of Nicaragua. Many of them speak Spanish or are learning it, and, as part of their work, send letters to their pen pals in Tipitapa, who write back and tell them what their lives are like. Some of these letters are in Spanish and some are in English

Tipitapa; the well is frequently contaminated when the ground water rises and meets the sewage from the outhouse. 5/87.



from students who are learning it. Many of the letters of the kids in Tipitapa and the kids in New York City are very moving, and one of the teachers in the sister city project may work with a teacher in Tipitapa to edit a book of the letters. This has turned out to be a unique and wonderful cultural interchange for them all.

When I came back, I made prints of the new work from the schools and health centers and we added new slides to the shows. We translated the messages and added them, along with some of the new pictures, to the exhibition. The new exhibition has been in a number of schools and colleges and we use the exhibition as a starting point to get new people interested in our sister city. We continue to send aid to Tipitapa. Last month our committee shipped over 30,000 pencils and thousands of dollars worth of antibiotics and other medical supplies there. Other people have begun to visit and photograph in Tipitapa and the slide shows grow. We are sending photographs of the events here and of the New York City people to Tipitapa where the Mayor puts them up in the town hall.

#### Afterthoughts on the Project

I frequently act as an artist, a photojournalist, a documentary photographer, a commercial photographer, a teacher and a critic. I sometimes feel alienated from photography and its many different worlds. I think about the relationship of photography to reality and to power relations, and about how important it is to continually confront the assumptions behind how we represent reality. The Tipitapa Project has redeemed much of photography for me. In a recent letter from a friend in Tipitapa, she asks for photos of three boys I photographed on that last trip. They were killed this year fighting the Contras, and the families have no pictures of them.

*The Wisconsin Coordinating Council publishes a book on all the sister cities projects in America. For further information, write P.O. Box 1534, Madison, WI, 53701; phone (608) 257-7230.*

*Mel Rosenthal is a photographer and directs photography programs at Empire State College of the State University of New York. His particular concern is the relationship between changing social conditions and their influence on individuals. He is best known for his work from the South Bronx, Cuba, Viet Nam and Puerto Rico. His work has appeared in magazines and newspapers throughout the world and has been shown in many galleries and other exhibition spaces. He has received a number of fellowships and awards.*

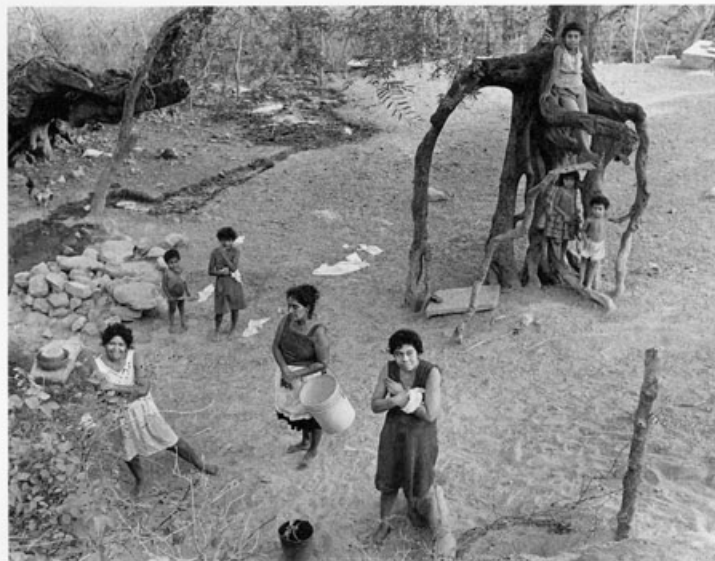
*The following people worked hard on this project:*

Penny Coleman	Kirk Condyles
Ricky Flores	Michael Kamber
Sara Kleeman	Roberta Perry
Carolyn Reed	Ken Wittenberg
Donna Katzin	

**All photographs by Mel Rosenthal**



"Send a thought to New York." Tipitapa, Nicaragua, 11/87.



Women at well that is drying out in Coloma, one of the rural areas of Tipitapa. We are making a poster to raise money for water projects. 5/87.

Children, Tipitapa. This picture will be used for a poster for a campaign to collect used eyeglasses. 5/87.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH WENDY WATRIS

By Olive Hershey

Wendy Watriss is a Houston-based photojournalist and writer. She has done work on health problems caused for Vietnam War veterans by Agent Orange, on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., on refugees from drought in West African Sahel, and on Black cowboys in Texas. From 1984 to the present Watriss has engaged in photodocumentary work in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras for Village Voice, Mother Jones, and MS magazines. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, and her work has been widely exhibited and published. She is co-founder of a public foundation for social change in Texas, the Live Oak Fund for Change.

Olive Hershey's conversation with Wendy Watriss took place Wednesday, July 19, 1989.

**Q:** Would you tell me something about what you think photojournalism is?

**A:** It's a way of bringing events and realities and things about what people are and what they're doing from different parts of the world—basically recording for people who don't have the time, the will or the ability—or the interest, really, to see those things. So I think that photojournalism is a tool of communication. There's been so much discussion about what is record and what is truth, and I don't want to get into that. I hesitate to say that it's a record. What it is is one person's visual observation of what is happening. But the wonderful thing about a camera and film is that they are so transportable, and so easy to work with, and then it's so accessible once the product is there. So it's a wonderful form of communication because you don't need language, in a sense, because it's a universal language. People read it, certainly, in different ways so it's never a totally universal language, but it can communicate very directly.

**Q:** When you went to Central America did you have a hard and fast idea of what you wanted?

**A:** In all the trips to Central America I had assignments because I had to find a way to pay my own way down there. Actually, I would like to go down and have what I call the luxury—my own psychological luxury—of just photographing what I saw and what I wanted.

**Q:** Who were you working for?

**A:** The first time I went down to do a slide presentation and a series of black-and-white photographs for a consortium of progressive liberal unions on the west coast. We were trying to present an alternative vision to the official AFL-CIO position on U.S. policy in Central America. So they were taking a small delegation of local union officials down there from California and Oregon. What they wanted to look at was what the electoral process was and how it was coming together in Nicaragua in 1984, the union situation there, and how the people were living.

**Q:** That seems an extraordinary



Daniell Ortega, Rosario Murrillo, and their sons.

project for a group of union people to do.

**A:** Yes. It was fascinating because there were Blacks and Filipinos and Hispanics as well as whites, many of whom came from what we would consider the less privileged sectors of our society and had never left the U.S. before and had never seen reality in a developing country. They were appalled and shocked at the conditions of poverty and what people were having to put up with.

**Q:** How many of them were there?

**A:** There were about fifteen.

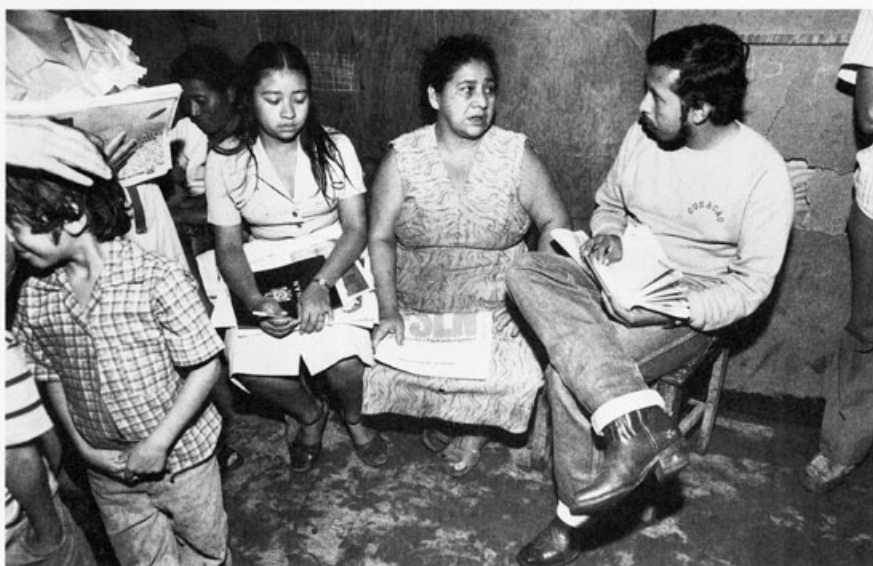
**Q:** How long were you there?

**A:** I was there three weeks. The rest were there for a week.

**Q:** And that was when?

**A:** 1984. A month, maybe a month and a half before the elections. And then when I came back I was so—I mean what it did was basically deepen my anger about U.S. foreign policy, and I wanted to go down with somebody I trusted who I thought was a good writer and actually cover the elections. And I knew a writer in California named Mark Cooper who'd done a lot of work in Central America, was in Chile during Allende's tenure, in fact was translator for Allende. Mark

Sandinista explaining policies in a village.



and I had done some work together in Cuba. So I called Mark up enraged at the media coverage of pre-election events in Nicaragua and said "Let's try to get down." So we did. We got an assignment from *The Village Voice*. And McClains and *L. A. Weekly*, and so we went out to cover the election.

Actually my work there was pretty free. We covered the campaigns, and I photographed all the various parties. You know, the

parties running, three to the left and three to the right. And the party most closely aligned with the Contras pulled out of the election maybe a month or so before the elections. Later they claimed that they had been ready to participate in the elections but the C.I.A. had said "Don't participate." I tend to think that's right, in the sense that I think that the Americans had put a lot of pressure on them not to participate. The strongest potential party to



In Nicaragua, the West coast union leaders talking to a nurse in a clinic at a sugar factory. Timal, Nicaragua, 1984.

Sandinistas came into power and said they were going to hold elections, and then they began to procrastinate. And we [the U.S.] tried to bully them into it. So they held elections in 1984. There were either six or seven other

the right did not participate, which made it easier to discredit the election.

**Q:** Where did you go on that trip?



**A:** We went to Managua and Matagalpa, and, in the north, Jinotega, which was fairly near where there was a lot of Contra fighting, Leon and Masaya.

**Q:** Sounds like you could have been in trouble.

**A:** Not really, because the Contras weren't attacking at that point in the central and southern parts of the country and they weren't attacking major towns. We were out in the country at a couple of places where there had been contra attacks two days earlier. It would have been a fluke if we had encountered something.

**Q:** Did you find it pretty challenging to get around, to get people to trust you, to get the pictures that you wanted?

**A:** Well, logistically it's challenging in all those countries; it's hard to get around because there aren't a lot of cars and gasoline. We did for one week in Managua find a freelance car rental person and did rent a car. But he didn't want to go up into the northern parts so we rode buses and hitchhiked on trucks, which was a lot of fun. We spent one of the most interesting nights of that first trip up in Matagalpa. This was covering the Sandinista campaign before the elections: how they were going house to house and talking to people about what they stood for. They had very nice brochures, and I had actually some nice pictures of them on dirt floors with practically no electric light except for my flash, talking to people about what their campaign meant and what they believed in politically and what they hoped to do for them. They had very frank discussions because they also asked the people what their complaints were and what they needed, and there were some fairly heated discussions, quite critical. It was a time when there was a shortage of beans, for example, and the roads were difficult to pass, and it was hard to get produce down from the villages to the bigger towns. And there was inflation, so that was bad.

So we got back to Matagalpa very late that night, having made no arrangements to sleep anywhere, and of course the two or three hotels we found were totally booked. So we spent about three or four hours going door to door. We even went to the police station. There was no room anywhere so I said to Mark, "I suggest that we go to the hospital. You know they'll put us in an office or they'll put us on the floor." So we went into the old hospital in Matagalpa. We slept on the concrete floor—they did give us a blanket, and we spent the night listening to the moaning of patients, and then the weirdest thing happened. About 4:30 in the morning I heard this combination of singing and lamentation and crying from the door of the hospital. And it kept on and stopped and then kept on and it was this quite beautiful old woman. And she would stand up and then she would sort of get down on all fours. She was just wailing, you know, to anybody who'd listen. She did nothing but wail for the next three hours.

Her children had been killed in a Contra attack. She came from a mountain area where there was a lot of fighting, and the stress of living in that area and having her

children die drove her crazy. She would come every night to the hospital. At that time there was only one psychiatric hospital in the country, in Managua, and the hospital in Matagalpa was simply waiting to get an army truck or something with one place in it so they could send her to Managua to get psychiatric help. She was just, you know... and by about nine o'clock she would leave. I don't know where. I mean, I guess they knew where she was. They were feeding her. She would disappear into the countryside and then come back at night.

**Q:** That's a story.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** A litany of grief.

**A:** You could make out bits and pieces, I mean, of syllables but they were not coherent sentences.

And then the next week we talked to several Sandinistas who were running ministries. One was domestic economy and the other agriculture. Mark knew Rosario Murillo, the poet, you know, Ortega's wife. We stayed at the Cultural House that puts up artists and writers. We had lunch and Mark interviewed her, and I photographed.



Doctor Vickey Guzman, founder of Salvadoran Association for Rural Health, talking to members of farm cooperative near Candelaria de la Frontera, West Salvador. 1986.

She is a very attractive woman and is in fact distantly related, I think, to Sandino. Rosario loves children; I think she's had children since I was there, and at that time she had five. So there were at least four squiggling, squirming, very young children at the table. And she apologized for the fact that there were no people bringing food in, serving. Then she told this wonderful story about how when they moved into the house maybe two or three years earlier. I think the previous family had left, and when they left they left cars in the garage, clothes in the closets, servants in the house. The servants were very upset because Ortega never felt comfortable being served, so he would always go out to the kitchen to get the food. This upset them greatly, and they felt that the proper kind of relationship between servants and the family was not being encouraged. So they left.

**Q:** What about Ortega? Did you



Tanks in the streets of Managua at the time when a U.S. air strike was feared (1984).

talk with him?

**A:** Well, we did eventually. It was very funny because after the elections we put in a request to talk with him. It's a little like waiting for Fidel, waiting for Ortega. Because first his assistant said "Well, maybe you'll have to wait for an answer," so we waited, and then he called and said "It'll have to be tomorrow afternoon." So we waited, and that was impossible. So we actually changed our plane reservations, which is a very risky thing to do in Nicaragua because you never know if you can get another one.

bit outside Managua where we cool our heels for another hour and a half.

It's a completely surrealist kind of scene: all of a sudden two soldiers come to the back of the house and say "Follow us to the front door." An open jeep drives up, and it's Ortega driving the car. He says "Get in," so Mark is in back and I'm in the front seat. No doors, no windows. I mean the three of us—Ortega, Mark and myself. I mean, anybody could have assassinated us any minute. We drove around for about an hour and a half; he was talking, showing us Managua.

morning, everything would shake like an earthquake, and you'd know the plane had come across. Remember, this was the time when Reagan accused them of having MIGs delivered. It turned out that was total nonsense. But Nicaragua was getting ready, there were tanks in the streets. They were getting ready for what they thought would be an air strike or something. And so the planes were used as harassment, and the tension kept building up.

**Q:** People were really frightened.

**A:** Students were going off in labor brigades. There was a big ceremony where they were supposed to go off to the north to pick coffee, but they were told they were going to have to stay in Managua because they might have to defend the barrios and become civil defense units. There was training for these kids in what to do in case of an air raid. People were scared. And there were these young kids up on top of tanks, kids that looked no older than sixteen on these old Russian tanks.

**Q:** Were there any Russians in Nicaragua?

**A:** Not that I saw, but I'm sure there are—and why shouldn't there be? And I saw Cuban doctors and construction workers and so forth. But the East European and Soviet advisors tend to stay pretty much out of sight.

**Q:** How was the medical situation? Had we begun the embargo when you were there?

**A:** They hadn't started the embargo when I was there but they needed medicine. It wasn't as bad as it is now—they needed antibiotics and some everyday medical supplies. But the clinics were working, in fact, they were just about to open a new hospital in Matagalpa. I think the Dutch and the Swiss helped build it. There were clinics for basic medical care where there had been absolutely no medical care before.

**Q:** When you were in the country did you visit cooperative farms and see some of that? How was that? Looked pretty good?

**A:** Yes. One of the things I was really shocked about in Nicaragua was the terrible lack of infrastructure in rural areas. I saw several farms appropriated by the government from wealthy landowners, and even on these farms the rich owners had left terrible housing, mud huts, cement block structures. No facilities at all. No fences or roads. My conclusion was that the landowning class had simply raped the country and took all the money out.

**Q:** When you went down were you already strongly opposed to American policy in Central America?

**A:** Yes. I had already formed my opinions. Everything I saw reconfirmed them. Yes.

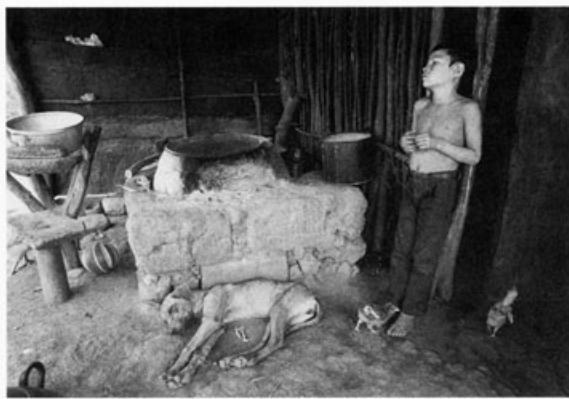
**Q:** Most Americans don't seem to give very much of a damn about Central or South America.

**A:** Or anything outside their house. Certainly outside the United States. I think there was a poll a couple of years ago that most Americans weren't even aware of the difference between

People lining up at the polls in the morning to vote in the elections (1984).







The kitchen of a campesino house. The boy was not in school because there weren't any schools in this area, in western Salvador near Santa Ana (1986).

Nicaragua and Salvador or where they were. No, most people don't know and most people don't care.

**Q: What about women in Nicaragua? How are they doing?**

A: They're doing much better than in previous times. However, you are still dealing with the Latin culture. And while women have positions and work and education that they didn't have access to before, their lives are very difficult. That is, they have most of the domestic chores—child rearing, child caring, you know—cleaning house, making food. I mean, men still don't participate in that very well... Then you have problems of living in a society where all the logistics are difficult. It's difficult to get around. You can wait for a bus for an hour and a half because there's not enough gas to keep the buses running.

It's just difficult; everyday living is difficult unless you're middle class or upper middle class and have a car and access to black market gasoline. But certainly in terms of rights women are much better off, and there's better maternal and prenatal care.

Now, you know I haven't been down to Nicaragua in the last four years; the whole quality of life has deteriorated because of the war, and European countries have cut way back on their aid and investment also because of pressure from us. There is The National Endowment for Democracy, which is a travesty because it's funded partly by the U.S. taxpayer. I mean it's part of government and not part of government. Part of its funding comes directly out of Congress, and part from private sources, and, I would assume, foundation sources. It is essentially a very conservative organiza-

Election campaign rally of Socialist Party of Nicaragua (PSN) in Managua, during the 1984 elections. PSN considers itself to the left of the Sandanista Party on many economic issues.



nalists it's that contact with novelty and freshness and things we don't know that stimulates visual ideas and visual energy.

I look at my Central America work as very beginning work. If you look at the layers and levels in how you react to something creatively, I was reacting at a very simple visual level there, even though in my mind I had a very sophisticated understanding of what was happening there. But it was literary understanding, intellectual understanding, which had not translated itself, really, into effective visual terms. I didn't have a visual story I could do an illustrated magazine piece. But with many of the images I don't feel that I really got into those deeper layers of creative expression.

**Q: What does emotion have to do with this?**

A: ....I'm not sure....I think that my mind was so loaded with information. I was thinking about data and information and not just responding visually. And I felt very emotionally strongly all of the time. But I didn't allow that to find its personal form of expression. For me I think that can be a

tion that is non-profit, tax-exempt, yet it has funnelled money into partisan political contests, not only in Nicaragua but in countries all over the world.

**Q: If you're a photojournalist and go someplace without preconceived ideas, are you making a story in your mind?**

A: I think very few photojournalists go with no preconceived



Las Hojas, in western Salvador. The commemoration of a 1983 massacre at an Indian farm cooperative. Under pressure from landowners, the Army went in and slaughtered 80% of the men in the cooperative.

idea, I mean even if they say that they don't, I think in the back of their minds they have an intellectual or philosophical or visual structure. But it may change when they confront reality.

For me the interesting things happen by being in another culture; I mean color has a different meaning in that culture; physical structures are different. All your visual senses are assaulted in good and bad ways—in new ways, so everything is much more heightened. Now some photographers work entirely differently. The great Czech photographer, Sudek, you know, photographed in and around his studio for much of his life. I think for many photojour-

nalists problem visually and photographically. I'm some-body who tends to read a lot, to load my mind with information about things that interest me; I want to try to figure things out. Photography isn't about figuring things out, really, at all. It's about visual communication at the simplest level, particularly if you're a documentary photographer. You strive for images that have a lot of depth and therefore are going to resonate through several layers of knowledge and emotion. But in its essence it's such a simple form of communication compared to writing and music. It's a reductive form of communication.

**Q: Then I keep thinking of what you said about the first versus the second or third time you went to a place and having had time to experience those visual images in a different, certainly more profound way, it's sort of like—I always have a chance to rewrite, and you don't, necessarily.**

A: That's right. Unless you keep going down again and again. And I think at this point if I went down again it would be to try to explore my own personal visual response to the place rather than trying to tell a story or illustrate something. But I'm torn between five or six other projects that I want to get started. And the other thing is that there is marvelous photography on Central America,



Students in a school built by refugees at a resettlement project, El Barrillo.

and I don't know if I have anything more to contribute to Central America with my own work.

Certainly I have an abiding interest, and I certainly work at it a lot. The other thing is that what I'd like to do is the kind of thing that would take months of living down there, and I'm not sure right now that's what I want to do.



Refugee children's drawing of the bombing of their village.

**Q: Talk about those things you want to do.**

A: Actually I get superstitious but I'll tell you. The two that are most bugging me are one, a project on prison. The other is concerns the decay of our urban landscape. I don't think people realize the extent to which this has happened.

But I would love to go back for a while. One of the things I found enormously moving was the few days I spent at one of the refugee resettlement areas in El Salvador. Just the will of the people to overcome what they had gone through, losing everything, being bombed out of their homes, living as real victims—and then forcing the government and the economic and political establishment to let them back on their own lands. They had to rebuild from scratch, with all the memories of having lived in tunnels, then rebuilding their lives on the same land, and at the same time having to endure soldiers coming in at night and pretending they were guerrillas, seeing if they would support them. There's no easy quick way to translate that kind of experience into photography. It's being there.

I have worked most in the western part of Salvador photographing. There's a project started by a wonderfully interesting woman our age near Santa Ana, the first woman in her family to become a professional—certainly to become a doctor. She's getting money from individuals, churches, and then some development funds. And she's not a sentimental do-gooder or a politically active person. She has a genuine feeling about people, about what is fair and just, and an uncanny ability to communicate with campesinos.

She grew up in a provincial capital, of middle-income middle-class family with some education. She's not a peasant campesino. But she really knows how to work with them, and she knows how to talk with them straight and they trust her. And she's disciplined about the way she works and she's very courageous, not in an obvious way.

She went to medical school in Mexico, and part of the residency training was to go out and do social services, and it turned out she went into a village in a very poor area where there was a lot of land reform conflict. She was horrified by what she saw there, the poverty of the campesinos. Her life was threatened, and when she finally went back to Salvador she started working at the hospital at Santa Anna but became immediately aware of the terrible need for her in the countryside. So she started to work with some communities on the outskirts of town, and then people heard about her in outlying villages and came to see her. Then she started taking a train, she would be away three or four days. She had this funny hat that she'd stick out the window of the train and the train would go through these mountainous villages and she would wave her hat, and the people would know she was on the train.

**Q: The time you'd have to spend in Central America to cover that kind of story reminds me of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*—that kind of depth.**

A: Yes. Going in for two or three days or even a month wouldn't do it.

**Q: You'd have to be there a year.**

A: Yes. You would. I don't know that the work that would come out would be necessarily very profound. But I loved being in El Salvador. I love the shapes and the colors, the liveliness of the people, their emotional response to life.

Olive Hershey published a volume of her poetry, *Floating Face Up*, in 1984. Her novel *Truck Dance* was published by Harper and Row earlier this year. She teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston.

All photographs by Wendy Watriss



Richard Lewis, family members of the Disappeared, El Salvador, 1986

## DOCUMENTING DEATH: CHILDREN & MOTHERS OF THE DISAPPEARED



By Joan Seeman Robinson

*Richard Lewis's photographs of the CoMadres, or the Mothers of the Disappeared, were shown at Diverse Works in February. The exhibition was closed due to the fire which destroyed the building; it will be remounted at Diverse Works' new site this fall.*

One of the earliest uses to which photography was put was to document the deceased. The postmortem portrait made it possible for ordinary people, those who could never have afforded to have family portraits painted, to capture the likeness of the recently dead. It must have been then, as it is now, astonishing to hold a life-like replica of a loved one in the hand, to marvel at its composure—mouths closed (often faintly smiling), eyes shut as if in a state of sleep, hair freshly arranged and often still wet from combing, beards trimmed, bodies scrubbed and freshly scented. It's nearly impossible, except with a fierce effort of the imagination, to comprehend that they're dead. And why is this? Partly because they're composed to look alive. Because so rarely do we ever see the dead, and when we do...? Americans lust for artificial preservation and customarily have open-coffin viewings. The idea of death is unacceptable in modern culture. Life is now medically attenuated to grotesquely artificial lengths in order to avoid the trauma of the final departure.

The dead are also photographed to document atrocities. Most of us have never looked at the amazing archives of the victims of political assassinations in Central America, for example. These images were made by anonymous photographers for the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission which uses them to record body counts of political killings before the dead are carried off to dump sites. They also provide evidence of death for the families of children who have disappeared. Fifteen such images of the *desaparecidos* were shown at Diverse Works last February alongside Richard Lewis's photographic portraits of the Mothers of the Disappeared, or the CoMadres as they are called in El Salvador. Lewis obtained them from the office of the CoMadres, located in the archdiocese of San Salvador, and brought them back for this purpose—to create a wordless, non-didactic context for the photographs of the Mothers.

The victims are young, mutilated, and almost unrecognizable. Clearly none of them could have survived the calculated viciousness of their attackers. Unlike the repose so artfully suggested in commemorative portraits—partly for the survivors so that they could believe that the deceased died in peace—these are agonized terminations. Fired on at close range, they've lost parts of their heads. They're often mutilated, necks slashed, bruises are in evidence. Why not clean kills, tidy eradications, if the intention was to eliminate opponents? Each proof of death resounds with the evidence of torture and disfigurement in order to demonstrate that suffering was intended and even prolonged. And even in black and white, the tarry blood is viscous, fetid stench is sensed, the maggots are near. These are warnings to the survivors to remain at bay. They're meant to terrorize, to neutralize opposition. These kinds of documents are not made to prolong family memories but to help bring them to a conclusion. They are for the survivors who live daily with their own kind of terminal condition: their lives were crippled when their children were killed.

In 1986 Lewis photographed fifty of these women. He extended a three-day visit to a conference of the National Unity of Salvadoran Workers in San Salvador to a two-week participation in relief work with the CoMadres. Lewis's own political position is anti-interventionist. Long interested in Latin American culture and an experienced traveler in Central America, he returned to observe the continuing effects of what he regards as "the United States' corrupt and unjustifiable foreign policy. I intended to meet the CoMadres and to document their tragedy, tenacity, courage and

strength."<sup>1</sup> A formality of his first visit to their office involved going through the Book of the Missing, a spiral-bound photo album, while sitting in their presence. The Mothers sat in a circle as each one gave a testimonial. Lewis responded saying that he wanted to talk to them at length about their experiences. Subsequently he worked alongside them and attempted to depict them as unique individuals in various dress and in different locations.

Using a camera-attached flash he made half-length closeups. The women gleam against dark backgrounds; the details of their physical condition—polite expressions and tired eyes, modest clothing (some are in the dress of the Mothers—dark gowns and white headscarves), are brought to the fore. They're alert and willing participants in the documentary process. In the installation one visits each of them in sequence and they look directly at us. We know who they must be because adjacent to each is a smaller photograph of the head of a "*desaparecido*." This in turn seems to heighten the pallor of the starkly lighted women's faces.

Why were these works—two series from different sources but literally linked by blood lines—shown in a fine arts context? Susan Sontag has pointed out that shocking images "will seem different on a contact sheet, in a gallery, in a political demonstration, in a police file, in a photographic magazine, in a general news magazine, in a book, on a living room wall."<sup>2</sup> Isn't this precisely where we'd expect such appalling and volatile material to be defused? Aren't we expected to attend to aesthetic considerations, which would in the process mute our reactions to the brutality before us?

Not even in war-time photojournalism have such images been shown. From the Second World War to Vietnam, both military censorship and the photographers' self-censorship staunchly any direct focus on mutilation, especially of faces. The general public never sees them. (How pale by comparison now seem the tabloid shots of "disasters" Andy Warhol used for his silkscreen paintings in the early 60's.) Such records are for specialists; they're used in medical training and by morticians, and by insurance companies in court cases. Police photograph crime scenes; the Nazis photographed the work of SS butchers. The armed forces photograph battles and war crimes, combat infantrymen carry cameras even into free-fire zones—and in the modern state they're used as a standard means of surveillance and control.

In El Salvador and elsewhere they document torture and assassination in order to provide, along with testimonials and witness accounts, substantiation of the abuses of human rights. Forensic physicians assist in this process, using the photographs to prove murder. And families need them—these most hideous of all the visions they will ever have of their children, in order to marshal their moral outrage in defense of their memories.

In a gallery setting they're askew and they throw us off balance. It's difficult to maintain any equilibrium or even to speak when faced with such material. Something like language is urgently needed in order to reclaim the familiar, but words are absolutely inadequate to bridge this sense of inequality—between us, and death, and the survivors' permanent loss. There is mystery attached to images of the dead. Whether they're serenely intact or with faces blown away, we feel that if we look harder, intently enough, something beyond the visible will be revealed. But there's such a difference between those just "passed away" (to where?) and those who've been slaughtered. Then we ask, "Why?" and "By whom?" while looking at bodies and thinking, "Is that really all there is?" But these waves of reactions follow that first plummet into silence that Roland Barthes says is caused by "the traumatic image":

...truly traumatic images are rare, for in photography the trauma is wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene 'really' happened. The photographer had to be there. That becomes the photograph about which there is nothing to say.<sup>3</sup>



And the photographer of such images? He or she's in a war zone, going after the kill, tracking the stalkers, in these kinds of cases performing anonymously. Social documentarists like Lewis enter the loop to bring this ugly core out into the world.

Richard Lewis's presentation is ostensibly simple but strategically complex. At *Diverse Works* he not only secured a new audience for a cause he's concerned about, but he's staking a claim for the enlargement of the parameters of socially concerned photography. A.D. Coleman wrote recently that "the photodocument now finds itself hard put to re-enter the academic and postmodernist circles." One fault in the genre, he says, "...is that by pretending to objectivity it either avoids political responsibility for its effects or denies its own hidden agenda, or both."<sup>4</sup> But Lewis has set up several fronts on which he's defining this territory.

First he's lifted the photographic evidence, the forensic identity image, and placed it in a new setting where it functions discursively with the larger portrait of the family survivor. The Mothers survive, alive, responding intently to the photographer. But they're estranged from the dead. The evidentiary photographs are proof of murder, supporting the case prepared by the Human Rights Commission. And they support the case prepared by Lewis, who wants us to undergo the encounter he had with the *CoMadres* and their Book of the Missing in San Salvador. He's arranged the living in life-size next to the dead, who exist now only as pages in a notebook, and placed these "pages" at the level of their hands and ours, as if on a tabletop. Then to see them, we must re-enact Lewis's visit, step up close and bend over, and move back to find ourselves facing the Mothers. And do this over and over again, fifteen times. Without text or subtext or any other directorial manipulation, he's converted a vacant exhibition environment into a chamber for the witnessing of massacre. Even here in Houston, his installation announces, we can experience some degree of the pathos surrounding these lives. He had "a great respect for the subject matter," and "wanted people seeing these images to ask questions about what is occurring." Part of that process involved sending his prints to the Washington, D.C., office of the *CoMadres*, which has published them.

In the novel *Del Corso's Gallery*, Philip Caputo wrote vividly about transformations in photojournalism in recent wars, from Korea to Vietnam to Beirut. In guerilla wars all structures are scrambled and disguised, no sides can be identified and no fronts can be determined, subterfuge and surprise are the tactical principles, civilians and combatants are often indistinguishable, stalemates are standard, and attrition is a strategic plan, operating as an exhausting continuum. *Del Corso*, a combat photographer, ruminates, after moving to Beirut from Vietnam to continue his work:

*Without the spectacle of war, the drama and the heroism, he felt as if he were working in a vacuum... If he had a conscious purpose it was to understand, and the woman lying in the street like some experimental animal seemed like one of the keys to the secret.*<sup>5</sup>

Do keys to such secrets lie in images of the slaughtered? After seeing an exhibition like this one we understand more of the reasons why the dead are photographed. Aren't all such images taken in wartime essentially political? Which side was the victim on and which side the perpetrator? And there are the moral questions: are these victims civilians rather than combatants, and were the killings justified under the existing "codes" that the military (and their opposition) always purport to follow?

But we must also ask ourselves how they are photographed. What makes an image "work," and for what purposes and what audiences? What angle, what lighting, what degree of closeness or distance, clarity, blurring, graininess or glossiness of the print will make an image useful, or memorable... or saleable to the news services? Donald Kuspit, the art historian and critic, says there can no longer be anything

romantic or ennobling about images of war dead. "There is a documentary approach generally applicable to the revelation of modern war" (my italics) which...

*...involves the renunciation of any imaginative humanistic treatment through which war might be seen as the realm in which the tragedy of human existence is disclosed.*<sup>6</sup>

Seventy thousand civilians have been killed in El Salvador in the last eight years in a war which has been called "our Israel" or "our Ireland."<sup>7</sup> A United States Army Colonel who supervised the training of American military advisors praised El Salvador for its "sunshine, beaches, fresh shrimp and pretty women."<sup>8</sup> At the same time paramilitary groups trained by U.S. advisors are "disappearing" those who threaten their oligarchical and military control of the country. El Salvador is the most densely populated and one of the poorest nations in Central America. "La situación," as it is called, cries out for "la solución," but with the election of President Alfredo Christiani, who is supported by Roberto d'Aubuisson, founder of the ARENA party which instituted the death squads (and whom former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White called a "pathological killer"), there are expected to be increases in the killings which already have been stepped up in the last two years. This is "a land where moral ambiguity and a propensity to homicide define the political landscape."<sup>9</sup>

In 1987 a strategy for continental security was secretly adopted by the armies of fourteen Latin American countries and the United States, in which the commanders "opted for a permanent state of control over civilian government, while still preserving democracy."<sup>10</sup> This control included new norms for combat "that took into account the phenomenon of nonconventional warfare, including terrorism and subversion."<sup>11</sup> This secret agreement is based on a new definition of subversion in which social mobilization in Latin America is believed by these military leaders to be directly related to international communism. Therefore all organizations that promote better living conditions are regarded as 'the enemy.'<sup>12</sup> This summer the Senate Intelligence Committee charged the F.B.I. with improperly linking the names of 2,375 United States citizens and 1,330 groups with international terrorism because they were opposed to U.S. policy in Central America, and with passing that information on to the Salvadoran National Guard.<sup>13</sup>

Over 1,000,000 Central Americans have fled their homes in the last decade in fear of violence and to escape political repression; over 100,000 of them are Salvadorans who are now living in Houston.<sup>14</sup> We might imagine some of these refugees looking over our shoulders this fall as we attend the reinstallation of Richard Lewis's exhibition at *Diverse Works*. At the first showing, Amnesty International set up an information table at the suggestion of the directors of *Diverse Works* and the encouragement of Richard Lewis, where they distributed copies of their publication, *El Salvador: "Death Squads"—A Government Strategy*. At their monthly local meetings people sign up to write letters to protest extra-legal arrests, incarceration, tortures and executions. To quote Hanna Arendt, "The climax of terror is reached when the police state begins to destroy its own children, when yesterday's executioner becomes today's victim."<sup>15</sup>

*I want to thank Ben DeSoto, Houston, Frank Blake, Amnesty International, Houston, and Anne Wallace, Amnesty International, San Ignacio, Texas, for their advice and assistance.*



Richard Lewis, a member of the Mothers of the Disappeared Human Rights Organization in El Salvador, 1986.



#### Footnotes

1. Telephone interview with Richard Lewis.
2. Susan Sontag, "The Heroism of Vision," *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1976), p. 106.
3. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," *Photography in Print*, Ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), pp. 532-533.
4. A.D. Coleman, "Documentary: Solution or Problem?" *The New York Observer*, 12/26/88-1/2/89, vol. 2, no. 49.
5. Philip Caputo, *Del Corso's Gallery* (New York: Dell Books, 1983), p. 325.
6. Donald Kuspit, "Uncivil War," *Artforum*, XXI/3, April, 1983.
7. James Le Moyne, "The Guns of Salvador," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 5, 1989, p. 20.
8. Le Moyne, p. 54.
9. Le Moyne, p. 20.
10. Samuel Blixen, "U.S., Latin America sign secret defense plan," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 16, 1988, p. 21.
11. Blixen, p. 21.
12. Blixen, p. 21.
13. "Thousands touched by FBI probe, Panel rips agency for infiltration," *Houston Chronicle*, 7/15/89.
14. Linda Barth, "Home of the Brave," *Houston Metropolitan Magazine*, July 1989, p. 35.
15. Hanna Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 55.

Joan Seeman Robinson is a Visiting Scholar at the Menil Collection. She is currently curating an exhibition on environmental issues in the Gulf Coast Region called *This Land; The State of Texas, to open on Earth Day, April 22, 1990, at the Lawndale Art and Performance Center.*



Derrill Bazy, a Boston-based photographer, received a MassProductions Grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities in 1988 to produce a book of his photographs taken in Nicaragua and Guatemala from 1982-1989. He is currently working for Oxfam America, and teaches documentary photography at the Massachusetts College of Art.

Carole Kismaric spoke with Bazy this summer about his involvement in photographing refugees in Central America. The interview turned into an extended conversation; SPOT is publishing one part of it, and a second part will be published in *VIEWS*, the Journal of the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University.

**Carole Kismaric:** What has always interested me about photography is the photographer's relationship to his subject, so fundamental, yet so complicated. It seems to me that it is this relationship that dictates everything that follows -- from what a picture looks like to how it is pumped into the image system of the world. What do you understand to be the relationship between the photographer and his subject?

**Derrill Bazy:** The subject comes first, followed in importance by photography. The photographer uses the medium as a tool that reveals his subject, communicating what's going on by spending time with the subject. But the critical issue is to communicate, and for that I feel that words are as important as photographs. Each is powerful in its own way, but the two together can be intensely dynamic, communicating an informational and experiential whole.

**Q:** Does that mean you feel or accept photography's limitation as a descriptive medium?

**A:** Of course there are limitations. Photography is not necessarily objective just because it's photography. What's objective is how photography is used. The old phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" may have some truth to it, but there are only a few photos in the world that are actually worth a thousand words -- pictures that can speak as well without words and with words. I'm talking specifically about documentary photography.

**Q:** Tell us more about what you mean by "speak," about what a photograph can "give up."

**A:** I believe photography is a language, and any language is based on the need and ability to communicate. Documentary photography is meant to communicate, so when I refer to "speaking," I refer to photography's language being parallel to the language we are speaking right now. Photography is a dialect of everyday language, but since it is not our common, main language, sometimes it falls short in fully communicating to people. At such moments, words can be more effective than photographs.

**Q:** What then do your photographs, "speak about?"



Chichicastenango, Guatemala (1988). Each year to celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, people dress up as different caricatures.

# DERRILL BAZZY

## A CONVERSATION BETWEEN

# CAROLE KISMARIC

**A:** For the subject I am essentially dealing with -- refugees -- you have to consider the situation as a whole: how a group got where it is, the fact that they are a group at all; how many they are; and what their needs are. But when you're there in the camps photographing the subject "refugee," it really boils down to the one person you are photographing. How did that one person get there? What is his story? What happened to her child? What's going on to the left of the photo that you couldn't fit in? What's happening behind you while you're taking the photo? What happened yesterday to these people; what's going to happen tomorrow?

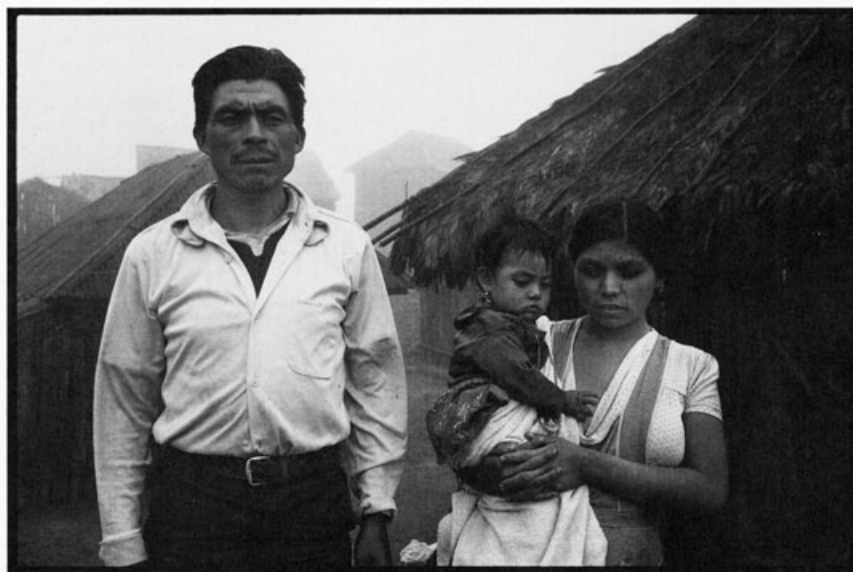
**Q:** What are you saying? That all those things just described, which are not literally in the picture, are the facts that are available to the photographer -- facts he must somehow incorporate into his representation of the subject?

**A:** Such facts make the picture deeper. I think for someone to...and again, we are talking about how the viewer sees... communicate the "facts" of an event there has to be an intense communication between the photographer and the viewer. I was there. I saw this; I smelled it; I heard it; I sensed it. The viewer wasn't. They just see what's in the 35mm frame. For them to understand what was going on, probably 99% of the time words are needed to prod and get the viewer past the frame, both in time and in space.

**Q:** OK, but if you were to think of a photograph as a layered experience, with information embedded in the picture, how does that information make its way from the photograph, through you, to the viewer? What is the first accessible level if there are no words? What do you as a photographer try to communicate first?

**A:** The first level is hard to describe. Certainly in dealing with refugees, I want to convey people's dignity -- not that these people are victims. In one sense they were forced out of their countries and have suffered tremendous hardship, but they have dealt with their lives in the best way that they could for themselves and their families. They are survivors who are trying to move in a positive direction.

Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, in Las Cascadas (1987).



**Q:** In that sense your photography is determined to be humanistic. The first thing you are concerned about putting across is the human quality.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Let's trace the evolution of how you came to understand your subject. Where does the idea of refugees enter your life; when do you decide you want to picture them? What decisions do you start to make?

**A:** The critical period for me was a summer spent studying Spanish in Colombia, South America.

**Q:** Had you ever been in that part of the world before?

**A:** I had never been outside the United States before. After class each day, I would walk around the city, going to as many places as I could. Some were cardboard and tin shack villages. Anywhere you went there were people on the street, in need of help or medical care. That really affected me. I had led a very sheltered life and never knew such poverty existed.

**Q:** Were you walking around as a person, or as a photographer?

**A:** As a person. I had taken a few photography classes at the University of Florida, so I was starting to think about photography. But the experience of walking around and taking things in as a person was the important contact. The other fact I realized was that Colombians did not like the United States. So, there I was part of an oppressive force. I was totally shocked, because I had been raised to believe that we Americans were the good guys, that everything we did was for the benefit of those around us -- we were truly a "Christian nation." On several occasions I was hustled out of a movie theater or a concert hall because the audiences were ready to erupt into an anti-American riot.

**Q:** When was this?

**A:** 1976, our bicentennial year.

**Q:** Were you talking to people, as you were walking around, as a means of penetrating the first layer of experience? Were you consciously trying to move through the obvious?

**A:** I was very much on the outside. I had no real contacts to get inside. My reaction was visceral.

**Q:** Did what you see frighten you in ways that ultimately were incorporated into the pictures you made? On one hand, you could have decided to make obvious pictures of "victims of poverty," or you could have tried to depict your reaction to this powerful experience. Which did you do?

**A:** What I saw just shocked me; it shook me. It shook two of my major, fundamental beliefs: that life was good out there, and that what the United States did as a nation was good. People were willing to accept me as an individual, but not as a U.S. citizen. Instead of doing good for the world, my country was an oppressor. To suddenly be an oppressor, and not the good guy, disturbed me tremendously.



Guatemalan refugees in Posa Rica, Mexico, at a typing class sponsored by the Catholic Church for health promoters and elected representatives in the refugee camps (1987).

**Q: What did you do with this new knowledge?**

A: At first, I can't say I did anything in particular. I continued to walk around, rolling these ideas around in my head, trying to talk about them with others. Eventually I made the decision to change my direction. My map had been charted to make me a professional architect, living a good life with a wife and kids. Then I realized that being from the United States, seeing what I had seen, left me with a huge responsibility.

**Q: Your first trip really led to such a dramatic change of direction?**

A: Yes, I call it my conversion experience.

**Q: That's amazing.**

A: It took a long time for it to all become real - another four years of marking time, of hoping I could get involved in work that would be humanitarian. I saw things very generally; I wanted to help people who needed help in a very paternalistic way. Eventually the opportunity opened up to go to Honduras. I had to look on a map to find out where the country was.

**Q: Let's pause before you go on with the Honduras trip. What was your relationship to photography in 1982? You'd taken a few photography courses, been to Colombia, and been hit between the eyes with an overwhelming subject for picture-making. Were you taking pictures? Was photography of any use to you?**

A: For about two years after the trip, I printed photos, from negatives made in Colombia. Jerry Uelsmann had opened my eyes

photographically and made such an impression on me, I actually dropped out of his class, because I was so overwhelmed by what he was saying.

**Q: He is supposed to be a remarkable teacher.**

A: He is. He went right to the core of what I was stuck on and was able to help me past. So I basically did these blends, that represented my inner struggle between what the Colombian trip was and my values which had been challenged.

**Q: What were the negatives that you were working with from the trip? Did they have anything to do with the experience you described earlier, or were they just benign images?**

A: Very few had people in them. They were mostly of religious architecture which as a subject - to get back to that idea - reflected my inner struggle. They were not directly related to the issues I was moving towards, but there was a glimmer. That went on for a couple of years. Then, I went back to architecture school to get my graduate degree.

**Q: So you did get an architecture degree, then began photography seriously?**

A: Actually, I started photography within the architecture program. For my thesis I decided to go the Yucatan and photograph people, something I'd never done before. I'd never really had the courage to point my camera at people. I felt a connection to the Yucatan having been there before, so I went, and I felt strongly about the images that came out. But again, I wasn't really dealing with a specific issue

or subject as you would call it. I was just one more step along the way - breaking down my barriers.

**Q: Is that another way of saying you were trying to find your subject?**

A: In one sense, I didn't see the Yucatan as a subject; I saw it as a place where I could probably feel free to photograph people. I wasn't going there because of an issue. I went there because it was cheap to get to, and because I enjoy the area. After making that trip, my purpose became to find something humanitarian to do, and it was during this period that I applied to the Peace Corps and to several other groups. Nothing worked out. I finally got to go to Honduras. When I went, I almost did not bring my camera, because I was going to work in a refugee camp. I was not going to be a photographer. (Once, prior to being in Honduras, I had given away my camera, because I felt that it was getting between me and trying to help people.) That's why, though I consider myself to be a photographer, I consider myself primarily to be

**the subject that obsessed you, I can't imagine how a truly, authentic, original picture can result.**

A: Sometimes that connection can happen spontaneously. When I got to Honduras in 1982, I still didn't know what a Sandinista was. I had no sense of the politics in Central America. As far as the distinction between myself and my work as a photographer, the camera stayed in the bag for about two months. That time was spent getting to know what was going on; I needed to get to know these people before I had any right to point the camera at them.

**Q: Did you know you were going to be there for a length of time?**

A: Yes, it was a one year commitment. When I arrived I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life.

**Q: Why?**

A: My first week was really hard. I barely spoke Spanish. Morocón was a horrible place. There was

graph of them sitting around the casket. To me it was very significant. All of a sudden it was like, here's something I can do for them. For once I'm not "taking" a photograph. To me it's significant that the verb we choose to use about photography is "take" - you "take" a photograph. Who really benefits when someone takes a photograph? The person in the picture or the person taking the photograph?

**Q: Did it make you feel more connected to your subject, to be needed by them? Or by having their confidence?**

A: It did, but by that point, we had all been through so much in Honduras, the staff working in the camp, and the refugees, that there was a sense of camaraderie.

**Q: Describe who those refugees - your growing subject - were.**

A: I was at a camp of Miskito refugees, who came from the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, near the border, along the Rio Coco River. They had fled Nicaragua



Miskito refugees in Morocón, Honduras. The man at the right was the main representative of the refugees in the camp. The young girl was his niece; she died of dehydration due to fever, which is common in many refugee situations (1983).

someone involved with refugee issues. The camera has become the tool to deal with an issue that I feel very strongly about.

**Q: It makes sense, and it's really an unusual thing to admit, because many photographers who work on different projects never consider they might be helping by making a photograph. Clearly you feel a different alignment; that is very interesting.**

A: Photography is a very important tool, but it's one of many. We're talking too much about me.

**Q: Actually, we're not talking just about you, but about you as you understand your responsibility as a person who uses photography as an expressive form. It's important to discuss because many photographers don't think about their responsibility to their subject. But back to Honduras, to the time when you almost didn't bring your camera. How would you describe the difference between yourself as a human being facing the grinding poverty, who wanted above all else to alleviate the misery in front of him, and the person who might want to get a thrilling photograph? Clearly most photographers are driven in one direction or another - toward one kind of subject over another. Until you've connected with**

nothing but mud and rain, and dysentery. We ate rice and beans three times a day, which, coming from a middle-class situation, was a shock. Now I look back and realize it was the best experience I have had in my life. But then I questioned, "What am I doing here?" No roads led to the village; it was out in the jungle. The only way to get there was in a small plane, which flew only when the runway wasn't so muddy that it couldn't land.

**Q: Do you remember when you had learned enough, felt familiar enough to relate to the experience as a photographer?**

A: I can't really remember when I sensed that. There just came a point when I decided, "Today I'm going to pull out the camera and go into the camp." Because I think I had a day off. I do remember the day when I felt my photography was accepted in the camp. That was the day when the leader, Wilfred, and one of his children came running up to me and said, "Look, get your camera. Please come and take a photo for us." So I grabbed my camera and ran off to the camp. One of his nieces had died, and the family asked me to take one last photo-

during the intense fighting between the Contras and the Sandinista government. They fled because the Sandinista army cleared the border area of villages so they could develop a free zone to fight the Contras without fear of shooting innocent civilians. They located these villages inland from the border in camps called, "Tasba Pri," which is Miskito for "the promised land." Unfortunately, the people really did not want to move (part of the indigenous tradition throughout the world is a real connection with the land.) So about 15,000 to 20,000 fled into Honduras to avoid going to those new camps.

**Q: So for that reason they were refugees.**

A: They became refugees justifiably so. The relocation of these people and their villages was too brusque, and it was against their will, though it was not like Guatemala where the army came through massacring whole villages. At least the Sandinistas were respecting people's lives. In one sense the Miskito relocation was intended to be for the people's benefit. The Contras had spread rumors that they were all being taken away to be shot, and

Three Miskito Indians who are ex-Contras in Tranquera, on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. They are leaders of a group of Contras who signed peace agreements with the Sandinista government, which allows them to keep their arms and receive ammunition and food from the Sandinistas. In effect, they become the local militias in the conflict areas of the Atlantic Coast. The Sandinistas signed such agreements with the Miskitos because, unlike the other Contras, they don't aim at overthrowing the government. Protecting the villages from Contra attacks allows the Sandinistas to withdraw and to reduce tensions in the conflict areas. (March 1989)





many people fled into Honduras—at that point because of resentment over their relocation. So in the refugee camp there was considerable Contra activity. In fact there was training with arms going on in the camp while we were there, as well as forced recruitment. There was really nothing we could do about it, because the U.S. State Department, the Honduran government, and the army were very much in support of what was going on.

**Q: What was your job there?**

**A:** I just did a lot of odd jobs. After about four months, I became responsible for a region called the Rio Patuca and helped move some 2,000 people from a muddy river area to a place where they could rebuild their houses and villages and try to lead a normal life, while they waited to go back to Nicaragua. In the camp we were becoming aware of the political situation, but we were still very naive. We thought that if these people could have land to farm and live in villages similar to

to, something that needed to go off to Boston the next day to get in the paper. I didn't enjoy working that way.

**Q: Were the pictures any better or any worse?**

**A:** It's hard to tell. I would say they were acceptable. I was dealing with a fairly horrible situation.

**Q: What were the pictures of?**

**A:** One was a village where a massacre of twenty-two people happened last November. It was difficult because we were interviewing people about how the army massacred people, and the people were being more open than they should have been. The army had presented a version to the international press that it was the guerrillas who did the massacre. It was a story that came unraveled at every point. But the army told these survivors that if they didn't hold to the official story, it would happen to them, too. They were really in a tenuous situation. But they were also

against using certain photos. It was hard for me not to be able to spend more time with these people. And maybe that's a personal thing that says I don't want to be a photojournalist in the traditional sense. And maybe it says that photojournalism is wrong, that photojournalism has to somehow gear itself so that it spends more time with people rather than rolling into a situation for fifteen minutes and then presto!

**Q: But it's not just a problem for photojournalists. It's about how information gets manufactured. You get just so near and no nearer. When you're away from the event, you stare at this raw material and have to "report" on what's happening. So you fill in the gaps, maybe not with the truth, but according to predispositions, prejudices that may be conscious or unconscious. To say that it's imperfect is a joke. It's more dangerous than that. But let's get back to the subject, and how it describes itself to you as you move through the point in time when you recognize it as your subject to when you started pursuing it and then describing it to yourself. Let's talk about your transition from**



Miskito refugees in Honduras. The men are returning from their fields on the other side of the Rio Patuca. In this area there was land available for the refugees to farm, so they could become self-sufficient—a rarity for refugees anywhere. (1986)

Guatemala and Mexico I started taking photographs as soon as I arrived.

**Q: Was there more urgency to make pictures?**

**A:** Arriving there, yes. Every time we'd go into the camps, we thought it would be the last, because if we were caught we would have been deported from Mexico. And indeed, after two or three visits we were caught. But we managed to persuade the authorities, after an hour or so of yelling back and forth, that we were, in his words, "Good guys."

**Q: Imagine a situation in which there was a choice to act on behalf of the subject or to make a photograph of the subject that could have a powerful effect on how people thought of the subject. Is there any doubt in your mind what you would do?**

**A:** This is a Catch-22. The importance of the picture of the kids running down the napalmed road in Viet Nam changed viewpoints all over the world. It's hard to tell how you would react at the moment.

**Q: Actually forget the moment. React to the question intellectually.**

**A:** To tell you the truth, I'd say I would have to opt for the individual. I think you'd just have to put down that camera and...

**Q: You'd help first, then see if you could still make a picture?**

**A:** If I were in a refugee camp that was attacked by the Guatemalan army, and in front of me someone was shot: I have an choice between taking the picture and putting a tourniquet on someone to save his life. I would obviously have to act to help the person. Otherwise it would be exploitation. Think of it: trying

She wanted to show me her traditional clothing from Guatemala. It sits in a box awaiting her return like the Eucharist in the Tabernacle. Mexico is not the place to wear these clothes—it is better to look Mexican now. She says there will be a day when she will put on her own clothing and return to that place where her umbilical cord is buried. But for now, the box must remain closed, and she must wait.



Chajul, province of El Quiché, Guatemala. Behind the glass is a life-size statue of Christ carrying a cross. According to local legend, every once in a while this statue will leave to walk to another place to visit a similar statue elsewhere in the country. The statue is important to the people, who are afraid that one day it may not come back. So they put statues of Roman centurions there to guard it. When the Army took over the village in 1978, they laughed about these centurions guarding Christ, and said, "If you really want your statue to be safe, you'd have kaibiles (the elite of the Army) to guard it. So the people stripped the statues and put on them some clothes the Army gave them. Now the statues are themselves part of the religious scene—the cans are for offerings, and names are hung on them as part of religious requests.

their original ones, they would be less interested in fighting for the Contras. It was a naive theory, and one that was doomed to fail because the Contras were determined to recruit people by force.

You asked before about the interaction that happens between myself and the person I am photographing versus what I'm experiencing when I'm a refugee worker. In one sense I don't really see a distinction. I'll be speaking with someone, trying to find out what their needs are or about something that happened, or just to hear their story. All of a sudden, I'll see that it's an image, and because they know me, I can reach into my bag and pull out the camera and they don't have to stop talking. I can take photographs, and they know I'm listening because they know me. Oftentimes, there is an unknown quality that comes through. When I was in Guatemala recently photographing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, there were times when I had to turn off in terms of being involved in people's lives, just because I only had "x" amount of time to take a photo

tired of covering for the people who killed their husbands. They didn't want to tell the lie anymore. So there we were in this really intense situation with about ten to fifteen minutes to talk to these villagers. To make things worse, there were other people around whom we didn't know. Afterwards, there was the question of what to do with the photos. Could we really show them, because if the quotee we were using got identified with the photo, the person could be in very serious trouble.

**Q: Well, what does that tell you about the manufacturing of news? For the most part that's how journalists move through an event. The reporters have to extract information from circumstances in perpetual flux. Most of the time you can't even think through a viewpoint.**

**A:** I don't know what it says. I know the press is often guilty of feeling that "getting" the news is more important than protecting someone's life. And in one sense, we probably were good journalists because in the end we decided

the Miskitos in Honduras to the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico.

**A:** In one sense I never really thought about what I was doing as a cohesive document until maybe four years after I'd first entered the refugee camps. My experience with the Guatemalans was, once again, more than photographic. Things began to change for me when I realized what was happening politically. I began getting involved with the Catholic church, trying to help the refugees however I could as they came across the border. This was mid-1983, the worse time in Guatemala.

**Q: Did you really think you could make a difference to the situation?**

**A:** We had to do what we could. We obviously couldn't deal with the whole situation because that included some 50,000 people. But in the camps we had access to, we felt we could help in a material sense. Involvement with the Guatemalan refugees started as a fundraising effort more than a photographic one. Though in



# OTHER AMERICANS

By Lois Parkinson Zamora

Other Americas by Sebastião Salgado. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 111 pages, \$35.00.

Bearing Witness by Gertrude Blom. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. 149 pages.

Los Todos Santeros by Hans Namuth. London: Dirk Nishen Publishing, 1989. 127 pages.

Los Ambulantes: The Itinerant Photographers of Guatemala, photographs by Ann Parker, Text by Avon Neal. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982. 149 pages, \$14.95.

Granddaughters of Corn: Portraits of Guatemalan Women by Marilyn Anderson and Jonathan Garlock. Willimantic, CT: Curbside Press, 1988. 124 pages, \$19.95.

Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny by Jean-Marie Simon. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987. 256 pages, \$19.95.

The "other" has recently moved from the margins to the center of literary critical consciousness. In the study of non-Western, non-first world literatures and literary cultures, critics have become increasingly sensitive to the various kinds of "centric discourse" (ego-, ethno-, Euro-, logo-, phallo-) that condition our critical perspective and distort our readings of texts.<sup>1</sup> Ten years ago, the cultural and expressive domain of the other was virtually unexplored by literary critics, but is now explicitly acknowledged in our critical vocabulary, and in our interpretive methods and concerns. It is high time.

The current discussion of how to approach alterity without appropriating it, how to stand outside (or at least, beside) one's own inevitable "centrisms" – in short, how to let the other speak for herself – has been advanced by the increasingly interdisciplinary orientation of critical theory. Anthropology, structural linguistics, ethnography, have suggested models for the relativizing of Western values and achievements, and for conceiving of the other not as an object of knowledge but as a subject in discourse, a partner in dialogue. Instead of representing the other in one's own terms, one may hope to establish a dialogue, that is, a situation where the cultural utterances of the other can be perceived and acknowledged as other, as different from our own and yet also related to our own in the dialogic framework we may have succeeded in establishing.

In short, literary critics, like anthropologists and ethnographers, are recognizing that we do not speak from some timeless point beyond relations of interest and power. Our language, as well as the language of the texts we read, is ideologically grounded and impelled. Surely the same is true of the photographic "language" of the six books I am reviewing here.

These photographers attempt in their different ways to establish a

meaningful dialogue with the other. They have all chosen to photograph the people of cultures other than their own, and each exhibits a conscious intention to give voice to their otherness. Not surprisingly, some of them are more successful than others.

In discussing these collections of visual art, I will use literary terms – voice, dialogue, utterance, language – because they seem metaphorically appropriate to the expressive potential of photography. But I should also recognize that it is more complicated to capture otherness with a camera than with a pen, for the camera is an unmasked intruder into the worlds recorded in these books as a pen need not be. The photographer who enters a Guatemalan village or a Mexican rain forest with his/her photographic equipment must inevitably seem at first to be an exotic invader: his/her technological invasion upsets, at least initially, any possibility of a natural or balanced dialogue. The camera itself becomes an awkward other in the dialogic scenario, increasing the distance of the photographer from the culture and the people whom he/she wishes to engage. The nature and duration of the distance will depend (as we see in the books under review here) on the intentions and personality of the photographer, as well as on the situation of their subjects.

In assessing these books, then, I will be asking myself what structural and structuring significance the camera and the photographer have on their subjects, and how otherness may be obscured, as well as revealed, by their presence. Of course, the camera always mediates between reality and its photographic embodiment, but in collections such as these under review, it may be particularly important to examine the extent and nature of that mediation. This initial question will lead, I hope, to useful observations about the photographs as works of art.



Sebastião Salgado

I will begin with the photographer who seems to me least successful in his attempt to create a dialogue with his subjects. Other Americas contains Sebastião Salgado's photographs taken in a number of Latin American countries. Salgado, a Brazilian living in Paris, has also photographed Africa extensively, and like those photographs, these are stark, black and white, highly aestheticized visions of deprivation. I have said that these collections contain photographs of cultures other than the photographer's own, and though Salgado is a Latin American photographing Latin Americans, my generaliza-

tion nonetheless applies. Salgado takes photographs of (as Alan Riding puts it in his introduction to the volume) "the world of the powerless, of those who from the barren sierras and deserts of Latin America watch as their nations change without them. And it is this world, held together by birth, family, and death, and by myth, faith, and fatalism, that Sebastião Salgado has penetrated." The people in Salgado's photos would hardly recognize their lives in such schematic terms, and I suspect they would also wonder what happened to the vital span between birth and death. Salgado repeatedly photographs bodies laid out for bleak burial in bleak landscapes. And when his subjects are not corpses, they seem nonetheless frozen in their misery and sadness. This is an elegaic record of a world pronounced dead by the photographer.

Salgado's subjects could hardly share his sentimentality either. They are, after all, in the midst of their own lives. They do not view themselves from beyond some apocalyptic end, as Salgado seems to be doing. Nor could they share his external, first-world perspective. Alan Riding's phrase, "their nations changing without them," accurately describes Salgado's implied perspective: that of outsider with a larger world view than his subjects'. His camera angles are rarely straight on but rather sharply below or above the subject; the surroundings of the human figures are rarely in focus; the light is often low, portentous. These techniques are apparently intended to heighten the elemental importance of Salgado's subject matter, but they tend instead to visual grandiloquence, and have the additional effect of distancing the world of the photographs from the viewer. Of course the subjects of these photos are undeniably distant from us, the consumers of their images, and it is important to recognize that fact. Dialogue with the other requires the recognition of difference, but this recognition must be a starting point, not a conclusion. Here, it impedes the dialogue rather than encourages it. There is too much of the white man's burden, too much patronizing in these images, too many of the hierarchical assumptions that have made Westerners insensitive to cultural otherness.

An anecdote in Salgado's preface reflects the difficulties of establishing relations with the other, even in one's own geographical territory, and suggests Salgado's failure to do so with his camera. In a village, Salgado tells us, a man asks him to "tell the people in heaven of his good behavior in this vale of tears, for he was absolutely sure I was an emissary of the divinities, sent to his village to photograph and describe." Salgado ends his preface on this note, with no evidence to refute my own suspicion that the photographer believes it himself.



Gertrude Blom

Bearing Witness and Los Todos Santeros present images of indigenous communities taken by European-born photographers. The photographers themselves have come to belong to the communities they photograph. Gertrude Blom to the Chiapas region of Mexico on the Guatemalan border, Hans Namuth to the Guatemalan village of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, in the province of Huehuetenango. Both Blom and Namuth are accepted by the inhabitants of their chosen regions as recorders, historians, demographers. Their work is avowedly anthropological in this sense: both recognize that their photographs will serve as records of disappearing cultures and ways of life, though this was not the original intention of either, and both would wish it otherwise.

In 1940, a young Swiss woman, Gertrude Duby, left Europe to join other refugees—social democrats, pacifists, communists, Jews—in Mexico. There she worked as a journalist, taking pictures to supplement her stories. (Unlike the young Manuel Alvarez Bravo, whom she met almost immediately in Mexico City, she did not consider herself a serious photographer.) In 1943, she went to Chiapas to write about the Lacandon Maya, and there met and eventually married the Danish cartographer and archeologist, Franz Blom. Since settling in Chiapas in the mid-forties, Gertrude Blom has been an inspired recorder of the Lacandon's way of life, and she has engaged in permanent battle to save the Lacandon rain forest from the lumber industry, and from homesteaders (themselves victims of Mexico's over-population and inequitable land tenure system.) Now eighty-eight years old, she still presides over her center for the study of the Lacandon in San Cristóbal de las Casas, and maintains close contact with her people. This extraordinary life has recently been the subject of a PBS documentary, *La reina de la selva*, made by the Houston documentary film-maker, Robert S. Cozens.

Blom's black and white photographs seem to be visions from the primeval world of legend or myth. Many of her photos separately, and certainly the collection as a whole, create a mood that is lyrical, harmonious, spiritual. Selected from thousands of photos taken between 1943 and 1978, these shots show small groups of Lacandon, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal. They walk along a deserted path, pole a dugout canoe through still water, kneel before a plaster statue with a European face, their own faces also reflecting transcendence, but of another kind. Sometimes Blom's subjects look at the camera, more often not: the viewer feels that the photographer is one of/with the community, an invisible agent of our entry into it. Her knowledge of

her subjects, and her sensitivity—her affinity—to their culture is clear in these images, and gives us the strong sense that we are seeing this world from the inside, rather than through the eyes of someone from elsewhere.

Blom also photographs the landscape. Here, her perspective is intrusive and intentionally polemical. We see huge mahogany trees felled and numbered, the rain forest shrouded in smoke. This is photography that grows out of social action, not photography as social action.

These photos communicate a social and cultural consciousness (and conscience) that go beyond the image as such. The title of her collection is well chosen: she bears witness in both a moral and historical sense, and her images are haunting testimony to her commitment. Through Blom's images, the Lacandon speak for themselves.



Hans Namuth

In the personal essay of remembrance that introduces *Los Todos Santeros*, the German-born photographer Hans Namuth describes his first visit to the Guatemalan village of Todos Santos Cuchumatán in 1947, in the company of his Guatemalan wife and brother-in-law. He went to that village because of an American scholar, Maud Oakes, who was living there at the time. She had written studies of the people, the Mam Maya, and was considered by the Todos Santeros (the residents of Todos Santos) to be a shaman. Namuth acknowledges the gift of insight that Oakes's books gave him: "twenty-nine years after meeting Maud Oakes for the first time, I set out to write, with black and white photographs, a visual sequel to her study." In his introduction, Namuth includes small reproductions of photographs taken on his first visit in 1947, but the collection itself is comprised of photographs taken in visits to Todos Santos in 1978, '79, '80, '81, and '87. In his introduction, he also includes photographs of himself in his improvised, open-air studio, photographing seated subjects and surrounded by spectators—curious family and friends. The photographer, unabashedly "other" in this village, writes that he hopes to photograph all of its inhabitants, one by one, couple by couple, family by family.

The faces in Namuth's portraits are young and old, somber and laughing, bold and shy, but in these portraits, what dominates everything are the eyes. Namuth writes that he appreciates the "mysterious and unsaid" in the Todos Santeros, and one immediately feels the locus of this ineffability in his subjects' eyes. Almost all of them look directly at the camera (at the photographer), as if wishing to make a statement about themselves, and also to say something beyond themselves. Namuth captures the

idiosyncracies of the individual personality and the dynamics of family and community relations. A gesture, a glance, a detail of dress can suggest both private and public truths.

In the series of photographs that comprises section V of this collection, Namuth asked his sitters to bring along an object of value: one young man brings his horse, a girl her pig on a leash, others bring musical instruments, a picture of Christ and the Bible, a loom, a stack of dog-eared paperbacks. Namuth manages to convey volumes of information in a simple object: the visual detail inauspiciously, almost off-handedly, becomes an icon, a talisman, the symbol of a life. Here the photographer seems intuitively to have posed the question of how the Todos Santos orient themselves in the world of symbols which is their culture. The Todos Santos offer their thoughtful responses, and gladly accept the photographic record that Namuth returns to them.

To the extent that they embody a collective portrait of Todos Santos, Namuth's photographs have an instrumental function in the culture where they were taken. Clearly they tell the culture something about itself. Though we constantly feel Namuth's presence (and the structuring eye of his camera) in his photographs, we never feel that his subjects are co-opted. On the contrary, the photographic medium, in concert with the personality of the photographer, facilitates the dialogue. The Todos Santos collaborate with Hans Namuth in recording their communal self.

defines the *ambulantes'* business practices, photographic technology, etc.) Parker's photographs are in color, as the *ambulantes'* are not, but otherwise, they faithfully convey the form and feeling of this public art. Herein, perhaps, lies the problem. Parker is too faithful to the *ambulantes'* formulaic vision. She rarely establishes her own visual perspective or any palpable rapport with her subjects. Rather, she is an invisible, silent onlooker in the photographic dialogue between the *ambulante* and his customers. Parker might have become a participant in that dialogue by showing the human activity behind the photographic façade. Occasionally she does: one shot shows an *ambulante* waiting for customers, another shows three women giggling shyly in recognition over the print the *ambulante* has just made of them. But for the most part, Parker chooses to stand in the shadow of the *ambulante*, and thus to mask her otherness. Her failure to imagine and embody her cultural difference in her visual perspective results in her exclusion from the cultural conversation. Her photographs present no more than a vicarious experience of the other.



Marilyn Anderson

Jean-Marie Simon, in *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny*, and Marilyn Anderson and Jonathan Garlock, in *Granddaughters of Corn: Portraits of Guatemalan Women*, inscribe themselves politically into their images of the Guatemalan people. Both collections are polemical in intent: both aim to educate a U.S. audience, via images and text, to the horrors of the political and military violence in Guatemala, and to the U.S. complicity in that violence.

Both of these collections intersperse written text among their photographs, as if unwilling to rely on visual images alone to tell the story of the country that has suffered more violent abuses of human rights than any other country in the Western hemisphere—100,000 political killings and 38,000 disappearances over the past twenty years, in a country of only 8.5 million. The text of *Granddaughters of Corn* describes atrocities visited upon innocent civilians by the military, and lists the women who disappeared between January, 1983, and August, 1986: their names run relentlessly along the bottom of every page. "Tania Elizabeth Herrera Rodríguez, 16, bilingual secretarial student, disappeared in Guatemala City, June 17; Thelma Judith Flores Lemus, 17, student, abducted by unidentified men, Zone 5, Guatemala City, June 12; Indira Sayonara Aguilar García, disappeared in Guatemala City, June 24; Edna Concita Ramos Alvarado, disappeared in Guatemala City, June 26; she was

pregnant at the time." So the grisly list go on and on.

Black and white photographs of women and girls accompany the descriptions of rapes and murders. The women are shown weaving, standing in doorways and against mud walls, sitting on a doorstep. They often look impassively at the camera, as if to say that the hidden war in their country is but one more injustice imposed upon their culture from outside, one more hardship to be suffered in silence.



Jean-Marie Simon

In her collection, *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny*, Jean-Marie Simon also seeks to uncover Guatemala's hidden war. Her photographs document actions, displacements, upheavals—in short, the movements of contemporary history—as none of the other collections under review here does. Whereas the photographs in the other collections have a quiet, timeless quality, Simon's are photojournalistic in their intention to show current historical and cultural process. Their natural color, straight-on perspective, and arrested action shots lend credibility to Simon's "coverage." Her human subjects are presented as caught in a succession of destructive historical events that they can neither direct nor control.

Simon foregrounds the horror of the *desaparecidos*. She writes:

*The term desaparecido (literally 'disappeared,' referring to government kidnappings), acquired its grammatical versatility as both a verb and participle ('to be disappeared,' 'he was disappeared') in Guatemala almost a decade before the term was exported to Chile and Argentina. As a result, there is hardly a Guatemalan alive who cannot name at least a dozen friends, relatives or colleagues killed or 'disappeared' over the past decade.*

Like Anderson and Garlock's list of names and dates in *Granddaughters of Corn*, Simon's reference to the insidious verbiage of totalitarianism implies that this story needs more explanation than visual images alone can provide. Simon goes beyond Anderson and Garlock, however, in presenting a political history of the disastrous violence in Guatemala during the last three decades.

Simon, who has been a consultant to Amnesty International and Americas Watch in Guatemala since 1980, begins her account with the overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1954. President Arbenz had instituted important land reform legislation in 1952, and encouraged the formation of labor unions. These democratic reforms were threatening to U.S. business interests, especially to the United Fruit Company, which had enjoyed tax-exempt export privileges on its banana monopoly since 1901, and controlled one-tenth of the Guatemalan

economy through exclusive rights on the Guatemalan railroad and telegraph systems. United Fruit Company was then Guatemala's largest landowner, with some 555,000 acres of land. The land reform legislation required the expropriation of all idle lands exceeding 223 acres, though cultivated land was not affected and the owners of expropriated land were to be reimbursed with government bonds. President Arbenz offered United Fruit \$1.2 million in compensation, but the company wanted \$16 million. Ms. Simon writes that the company then "enlisted the aid of two close contacts, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, C.I.A. director Allen Dulles, and the U.S. State Department embarked on a destabilization campaign and propaganda blitz to convince the public that President Arbenz was a Soviet sympathizer." In June, 1954, the Guatemalan Army and business leaders, backed by the C.I.A., took control of the government. Simon continues,

*The next President, hand-picked by the United States, was Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, a furniture salesman in Tegucigalpa since his exile there in 1952, after having plotted to overthrow President Arbenz. Castillo Armas was flown into Guatemala in the U.S. Ambassador's plane and the coup marked the beginning of systematic repression in Guatemala.*

Simon describes the process by which the Guatemalan army consolidated its absolute power in the name of democracy, justifying its repressions as necessary preparations for the establishment of democratic institutions. Simon writes, "For example, in December, 1984, when confronted with allegations of continuing army violence in the Guatemalan highlands, then head-of-state, General Mejía Victores, replied, 'Isn't the killing of three hundred, five hundred Indians worth it to save the country?'" General José Ephraín Ríos Montt, who preceded Mejía Victores, is quoted as saying, "We are not killing Indians we are killing Communists."

Simon explains the rural counterinsurgency program developed in the early '80s to "kill Communists": "By incorporating one million peasants into a civil patrol system—unarmed, unremunerated patrol duty required of all rural males—and corralling some seventy thousand internal refugees into 'model' villages (permanent containment areas under military control), the Guatemalan military has ensured its domination over every facet of daily life." Simon also addresses the training of military recruits—often very young men from the same Indian communities that they will later patrol. She interviews a young recruit who explains that as an Indian, he felt inferior. But the army gave him a sense of power: "You leave the Cuartel [barracks] feeling very macho. You begin to insult people, and you are taught never to take any shit from civilians." This boy has learned that he will either be abused, or abuse. He has chosen the latter.

Much of the political violence has centered in Guatemala's rural highlands, or *altiplano*, where the country's Indian population is concentrated. After Bolivia, Guatemala has the highest concentration of indigenous peoples in Latin America: fifty-five per-

cent of the country's population are descendants of the Maya, and belong to twenty-two language and ethnic groups. Simon writes of the disastrous consequences of the army presence in the *altiplano*.

*Where there is a military presence, religious rites and local festivals have been curtailed if not prohibited, and Guatemala's Indians are more impoverished now than ten years ago. Precious work time is forfeited for civil patrol duty, and many villagers are required to betray their neighbors by becoming army informants in order to put food on their own families' tables, or simply to save their lives. Present-day counterinsurgency has probably done as much to alter Indian life as the Spanish Conquest and its aftermath did in four centuries, and one cannot help but wonder if the culture that the Mayans have sustained since the sixteenth century will endure even fifty more years.*

Simon constantly points to U.S. involvement in Guatemala's civil war. Beyond her damning historical account, she documents current U.S. military and business support of the military regime. One photo shows a former U.S. military attaché, Colonel George Maynes, observing a civil patrol rally in Nebaj, Quiché; the text accompanying the photograph describes his relationship to the local civil patrol commander.

In another section of text, Simon quotes members of the American Chamber of Commerce: those interviewed enthusiastically support the government death squads as necessary to combat Communist infiltration into the country. (More than three hundred companies with U.S. interests operate in Guatemala, so there is much money at stake, and much investment in maintaining the entrenched system of economic privilege.) Simon reports that since 1954, Guatemala's "AmCham" has played an active role in lobbying to influence U.S. congressional policy; their rhetoric is indistinguishable from that of the Guatemalan right-wing. Indeed, concludes Simon, many Guatemalan right-wingers are themselves active AmCham members.

Simon's text is consistently informative, infuriating, disheartening. Her photographs are as incisive as her text. Again and again, Simon shows us how violence becomes domesticated, how life continues under state-of-seige conditions, albeit tragically. We see army camouflage uniforms everywhere, worn by Presidents and peasant recruits; and we see the un-uniformed members of the EGP (the Guerrilla Army of the Poor) running through a field with sticks instead of guns. Government soldiers direct an Indian festival. A cadet in a class at the Military Academy holds up a beautifully embroidered *huipil*, the blouse worn by Indian women, as if to confirm his knowledge of the enemy. The current civilian President, Vinicio Cerezo, ties his necktie in front of his bathroom mirror, his pistol in a holster under his arm, his wife proudly looking on. We also see the nude body of a young woman lying on a morgue table in Guatemala City, her hands cut off at the wrists and placed on her chest, her face mutilated. The accompanying text attests her innocence.



Ann Parker

The dialogic relation created by Namuth becomes especially clear when one contrasts his collection to *Los Ambulantes*, by Ann Parker. This collection resembles Namuth's in presenting groups of indigenous Guatemalan people who self-consciously pose for the camera. But in this case, the camera belongs to the itinerant photographers—*los ambulantes*—who set up their studios on the plazas and sidewalks of villages. Parker photographs over the shoulder of the *ambulante*, showing her (their) subjects standing stiffly in front of brightly painted backdrops with hovering angels, fruits and flowers, or skylines, and streamers floating overhead with the words *Jamás te olvidaré*, *Para ti*, or simply *Recuerdo*. Parker's subjects do not look directly at the camera but stare into the middle distance or cast their eyes down; they have dressed in their finest *huipiles*, *rebozos*, *fajas*, *calzones* for the occasion, and their discomfort is often apparent. Occasionally Parker also photographs the *ambulante*, posed with his camera in front of his own backdrop, his pose as artificial as that of his customers.

The static formality and stylization of Parker's photographs is of course integral to the popular cultural mode she documents. (Avon Neal's introduction further



Simon's sympathies are with the victims of this violence, and she expresses their dilemma movingly. She also captures the furtive outlines of their victimizers. Her photographs thus present a double image of the other: the Guatemalan people whose lives and culture are threatened by political violence, and the external agents of that violence. In that second image of otherness, Simon shows us ourselves.

# Footnotes

1. For a survey of recent critical and analytical approaches to literature and art as cultural discourse, see James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard, 1988). A useful discussion of dialogic criticism is contained in Lane Kauffman's essay, "The Other in Question: Dialogical Experiments in Montaigne, Kafka, and Cortázar," forthcoming in *The Interpretation of Dialogue* (University of Chicago, 1990), a collection of essays edited by Tullio Maranhão.
2. Needless to say, Simon's assertions are controversial. The review of her book by Cornell Capa in *The New York Times Book Review*, occasioned a letter to the editor from Daniel James calling Capa's review naïve and Simon's history "revisionist." James justified C.I.A. involvement in the 1954 coup as a response to the Communist infiltration of Arbenz's government. His letter occasioned yet another letter that identified James as a "draftsman," if not the "architect," of the coup. See *NYTBR*, June 26, July 24, August 14, 1988.

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# PHOTO HISTORY MAKES ITS OWN PICTURE

By Bill Frazier

On the occasion of the one hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the invention of photography, numerous efforts have been made to celebrate this most common art form. This article will examine three such celebratory exhibitions, originating in Houston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. These exhibitions raise a number of issues which are central to the history, interpretation, and reception of photography. A discussion of some of these ideas will bring us to study various texts briefly. In so doing, it may also lead to an understanding of factors which affect our reading of photographic history.

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The *Art of Photography* exhibition which was shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston this past spring includes nearly five hundred photographs made by Europeans and Americans during the past one hundred and fifty years. After its closing in Houston, the exhibition traveled to Canberra, Australia. It opens at the Royal Academy of Arts in London on September 23rd and closes later this year on December 23rd.

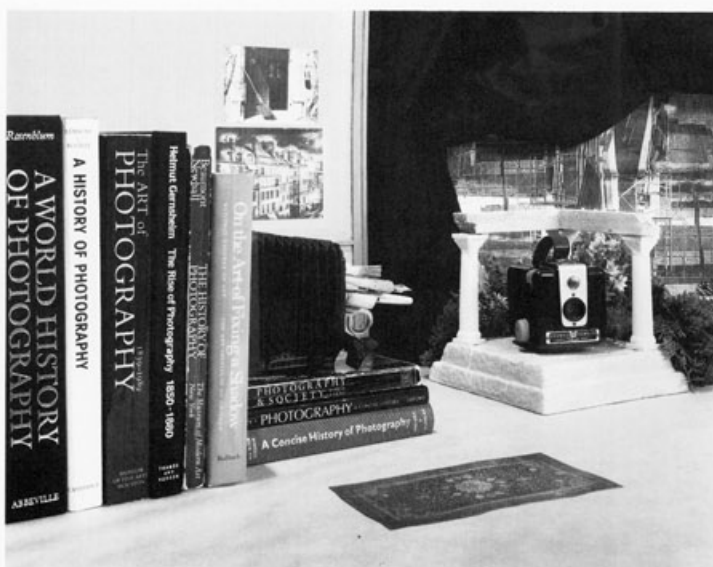
The principal curator for the exhibition is Daniel Wolf; Mike Weaver and Norman Rosenthal assisted in the selection process for the exhibition, and Weaver edited the handsome catalog which contains almost 500 reproductions sequenced by Wolf. Anne Tucker, the Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston had a consulting role in the process, but the role of the Houston museum was largely organizational.

The exhibition presented marvelous opportunities for close study of photographs which are rarely brought together and made available to the public. The exhibit was divided into fifteen sections variously organized by subject, process, period or style. These subdivisions provided a historical and chronological framework which was generally helpful to viewers.

As with any broad categorizations, there were occasional oddities. For example, works by Robert Adams and William Eggleston were shown in a section with photographs by Minor White entitled "Visionary Styles." Both Adams and Eggleston have seemed intent upon mere description, preferring to let the cultural record of our neighborhoods and possessions establish a dialogue with viewers. While their deadpan, dispassionate approach Adams and Eggleston is interesting and important to any discussion of recent approaches to landscape, "visionary" seems a bit too much here, especially by comparison with Minor White's Zen meditations and efforts to intersperse photographs with short haiku-like verbal messages.

One remarkable feature of this exhibition is that it is a handsome collection of original works which had been printed either by the artists or with their supervision during their lifetimes. Most of these autographic prints were in pristine condition, and the show reflects the careful connoisseurship which Daniel Wolf has practiced as a photo dealer in New York.

On occasion, certain salons in the museum seemed almost a perfect grouping of types of imagery. For example, in the second room of the exhibition there were the sharp-focus, heroic portraits of the new intellectual elite in Paris which Nadar made in the late 1850's and early 1860's. His work presents the image of the stalwart cultural revolutionary. These pictures were hung opposite calotypes by the Scottish duo Hill and Adamson. These prints from



Bill Frazier, *Simulations: Photo History Makes its Own Picture*, 1989.

paper negatives with their indistinct textured passages seem almost painterly, yet they retain their essential photographic qualities. Elsewhere in this room, Julia Margaret Cameron was represented by her large soft-focus portraits which frequently present an individual as an allegorical representation of a religious or literary figure. Her images have an indefinite, ephemeral quality. Finally, there are the portraits of Abraham Lincoln made by the Scotsman-turned-American Alexander Gardner. Gardner, who worked for Mathew Brady in a Washington studio, made a portrait of Lincoln which is filled with nobility, yet still manages to suggest elements of the American President's earthy humanity.

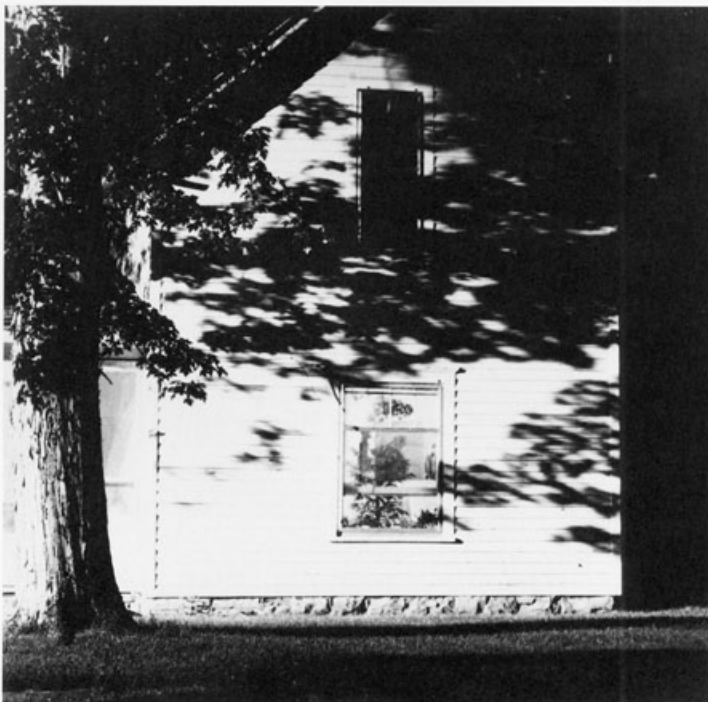
Unfortunately, this room did not give an accurate picture of nineteenth century portrait practice. Despite this grouping of magnificent images, several things were missing. There were no tintypes, a kind of image that was quite common in the United States. In Europe, the inexpensive portrait often took the form of the *carte-de-visite*. The absence of these two forms of popular portraiture indicates a curatorial penchant for the rarefied example and the

exclusion of the more common form of photography. This predilection became more noticeable in later sections of the exhibit as well.

The introductory room of the exhibit contained calotypes by Fox Talbot and daguerreotypes by various practitioners. From viewing this first room, one could assume that daguerreotypes were typically rather large and commonly recorded still lifes, landscapes, historical architectural motifs, and on occasion, portraiture. In practice, however, the daguerreotype was often tiny and nearly always used for portraiture. There were some portraits in this section of the show by the Boston firm of Southworth and Hawes. The remarkable daguerreotype of an "Unidentified Girl with Gilbert Stuart Portrait of George Washington" and a shirtless self-portrait by Albert Sands Southworth are testimony to the expressive possibilities of this medium, which produces images on small silvered copper plates.

About one third of the way through the exhibition, gallery viewers came to face a wall of five images taken by the young Paul Strand. These photographs, taken from

Robert Adams, *Berthoud, Colorado*, 1979. Private collection; included in *The Art of Photography*.





# P I C T U R E

1915-1918 were hung together and established the stylistic break between nineteenth century photographic practice and work done for the new modern age. This shift toward modernist formalism looked fresh and exciting. Strand's photographs from this era such as "Wall Street, New York" (1915) and "Shadows, Twin Lakes, Connecticut" (1916) demonstrated that the subject of photography had changed. Strand photographed light, form and shadow to create images which are essentially abstract. As Stieglitz had recognized, this young photographer had made images which marked a radical departure from earlier efforts. Photography's attendant reality and dependence upon subject had finally been overcome in this early work by Strand.

These bold images were the introduction to a room which contained work by the three kings of the American modernist *avant garde*—Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston. They are represented by a total of 41 images, many of which are recognized as important within the history of the medium. The early abstractions by Strand, "The Steerage" (1907), "Equivalents," and portraits of O'Keeffe by Stieglitz, and the images which Weston made of Armco Steel, nudes, and sand dunes, represent important work by these early modernist artists. There is also a marvelous portrait by Weston of the photographer Tina Modotti reciting poetry. This large grouping of images could have been reduced by a third, however, without diminishing the accomplishments of these three men, thereby allowing room for others to be included. The importance of the contributions which these artists have made to the development of the medium is not being questioned here, only the curatorial infatuation with the notion of the master photographer.

Throughout the exhibition, there were numerous artists who were represented by comparatively large numbers of works. This concentration of attention on a relatively small number of photographers establishes those practitioners as perhaps overly important. While it is wonderful to see 16 calotypes by Talbot and 15 images by Stieglitz, this concentration made it necessary to exclude many and underrepresent some. Timothy O'Sullivan was represented by only three images, Francis Frith and Henri Le Secq had only two prints each in the exhibit, and the Bisson Brothers were accorded a single photograph. According to this exhibition, there are a handful of artists who are so influential that concentration upon their work will reveal some truth about the nature of the medium. Instead, this process effectively minimized the contributions of some, like O'Sullivan, and obscured the very significant accomplishments of dozens of others, especially of many women, whose participation in photography has made it unique among all media in the history of art.

The *Art of Photography* exhibition presents a version of the history of the medium which is inaccurate and misleading. Of the nearly one hundred artists in the show, only four are women; Julia Margaret Cameron, Diane Arbus, Susan Meiselas, and Cindy Sherman are the sole representatives of a very large group who have made significant contributions to the medium. A few of the women who might have been included are: Gertrude Kasebier, Imogen Cunningham, Anne Brigman, Frances Benjamin Johnson, Berenice Abbott, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Gisèle Freund, Esther Bubley, Lisette Model, Jan Grover, Connie Hatch, Barbara Kruger, . . . The list could continue almost indefinitely. Many more women might have been included had the primary curators not chosen to enhance the already substantial reputations (and commodity value) of work by so many men by includ-

ing 10 to 15 examples of their production. Additionally, there are no photographs by minorities who also were able to participate in photography to an extent that was without precedent.

It could be argued that not all of these women have made significant contributions to the medium, but the same could be said for many of the men whose work is included (Joel Sternfeld comes to mind as one such example). In the 1937 exhibit celebrating the centennial of photography's invention, a young Beaumont Newhall managed to include over a dozen women in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. This show took place well before the advent of the current feminist movement of the last two decades. Surely Anne Tucker, the Curator of Photography at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, must have found this exclusion difficult to accept. Rumor had it that she entertained the idea of mounting a small ancillary exhibit of photographs by women artists who are represented in the permanent collection of the museum, but had to abandon it because there was not any additional gallery space available after the huge exhibit had been installed in the upstairs galleries of the museum. As it stands, the *Art of Photography* and its companion publication of the same title represent revisionism at its worst. They demonstrate the sad fact that patriarchal interpretations of history operate to effectively censor the many noteworthy contributions by women. The argument here is not with those artists whose work is included in the exhibition. Rather, it is with Wolf, Weaver, and Rosenthal, and the other curators listed in the catalog (six men) who have assembled their own rather narrow and precious view of the photographic art, and in the process, distorted the unique social realities of photographic practice in the past 150 years.

Women did not come to photography accidentally. In the nineteenth century, as the industrial revolution began to change the fabric of our cities, it caused a major social change. For the first time in history, large numbers of women entered the work force. By the time that photography was made available to the general public, women had been a part of the working class for a generation. The sewing machine, which was introduced at mid-century, was a mechanical device that fit with accepted perceptions of respectable work for women because of its domestic associations.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the camera was a tool which could afford a woman the chance to balance work with domestic responsibilities because photography could easily be done in the home.

Photography, the sewing machine, and later, the typewriting machine, gave women employment options which did not compromise their need to earn an income, and which conformed with public perceptions about proper conduct for women.<sup>2</sup> Though substantial opportunities for exploitation continued to exist, photography was one of a very few occupations for women which was considered respectable, and their participation in all aspects of photographic practice has a well-documented history. For these reasons, and other more current ones, their near exclusion from this anniversary celebration is most unfortunate and seriously mars the presentation.

Another troubling aspect of this program is the type of curatorial and editorial control which Mike Weaver seems to have exercised over the catalog. Weaver's heavy-handed approach and his interpretive impulses might be better understood by examining briefly a 1986 publication of his entitled *The Photographic Art*. In this book, twenty short essays condense history and relate Weaver's rather odd views about the development of pictorial traditions in Britain and the United States. For Weaver it seems that all pictorial content is symbol-

ic. In a section of the book entitled "Concerted Arrangements"<sup>3</sup> he attempts to construct an iconography for photographs of groups of people. A Renaissance print by Raimondi is included to establish an art historical pedigree for, it would seem, any trio grouping in almost any photograph. Eugene Smith's picture of Welsh miners (1950's) is said to express the three ages of life: childhood, adulthood, and old age. A picture from Paul Strand's Mexican Portfolio becomes a *retable* of a *sacra conversazione*. A picture made in Ireland by Josef Koudelka (1972) shows three men conversing while kneeling on their walking sticks. Their posture immediately suggests for Weaver oblique references to the bent-knee posture at Calvary. From reading Weaver, it would appear that any image with three people must surely refer to the Holy Trinity and three-figure pyramidal compositions from the Italian renaissance. Weaver stands ready to apply cultural significance to any formal pictorial device.

Weaver does not acknowledge the influence which vernacular imagery must surely have had upon the nature of photographic practice. With George Eastman's introduction of the Kodak in 1888, photography was available to almost everyone. After this time, the nature of photography changed. Once it was put into the hands of the middle and lower classes, the medium began an evolution which was dictated by popular usage. This new form of photography was completely independent of the art historical conventions with which Weaver is preoccupied. For example, Paul Martin, who worked in England at the turn of the century, and whose work is not included in *The Art of Photography*, could be said to be typical of this new class of photographic practitioner. He was essentially a tradesman who, having been displaced as a wood engraver, earned a living doing photography. He came from a social class that could not afford the luxury of a classical education, and it is therefore, unlikely

Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, 1924. From the Target Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; included in *The Art of Photography*.



Julia Margaret Cameron, *Pomona (Alice Liddell)*, 1872. Lent by Erich Sommer; included in *The Art of Photography*.



Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907. From the Target Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; included in *The Art of Photography*.



that his pictures of street merchants had complex iconographical layers of meaning.

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Though the exhibit and catalog of *The Art of Photography* contain many exceptional images, the primary curators have engaged in what this writer considers to be an abuse of curatorial prerogative. To consider how this effort compares to another, let us examine the catalog entitled *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow*<sup>6</sup> which was published this year as a joint effort by the National Gallery of Art and The Art Institute of Chicago, accompanying an exhibition which originated in Washington, D.C. In the opinion of this writer, this large volume represents a more thoughtful response to this anniversary.

In the introduction to the catalog, the curators and essayists Sarah Greenough, Joel Snyder, David Travis, and Colin Westerbeck state that they do not wish, "... to dwell on personality or develop a profile of the master photographer, but rather to chart the evolution of certain ideas. . . ."<sup>5</sup> This task has been accomplished by including many major figures and work which is less well-known, such as vernacular imagery, space photography, photo montage, and altered photographs. Theirs is not a purist interpretation but instead one which allows for the role which the amateur played in the history of photography. Consequently, the essays construct more of a history of the medium and studiously avoid the kind of kingmaking and mythologizing with which Wolf, Weaver, et al. seem to have been preoccupied in *The Art of Photography*.

In the first of these essays, entitled "Inventing Photography,"<sup>4</sup> Joel Snyder avoids the pitfalls of excessive categorization and tries to help the reader understand the imagery and the period from a broad perspective. He acknowledges the civic, social, and historical factors which created the climate in which photography was invented and which contributed to its success and growth.

The second essay in this book, entitled "The Curious Contagion of the Camera,"<sup>7</sup> by Sarah Greenough, covers the general period from 1880-1918, during which photography was made available to all classes of society. This section begins with a discussion of the hand camera. It reproduces several anonymous photographic tondos which were made using the first Kodak cameras. Greenough writes, "The legions of hand camera enthusiasts created new subjects, new criteria of pictorial structure and function, new theories, and a new critical

vocabulary. In so doing, they shook the very core of the medium. . . ."<sup>8</sup> This section of the book presents some very important practitioners who were not artists per se. Jacob Riis, for example, used photography as a means to an end in his social reform efforts.

This exhibit, as it is represented by its catalog, presents a substantially different view from those who would link the masters of the medium together to form an artistic monolith. These curators have resisted the rather antiquated views of artists as cultural giants, and instead have presented them as sensitive respondents to cultural conditions, subject to the varied influences which affect society at large. Consider for example, the work of William Eggleston whose approach to landscape cannot be understood without recognizing that Eggleston may have been influenced by snapshot imagery.

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On the west coast, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art assembled an exhibit with a slightly different focus. A *History of Photography from California Collections* was organized by Dr. Sandra S. Phillips, the Curator of the Department of Photography. The regional focus was reflected not only in the list of lenders, but also in the subject of many of the images. Various historical associations and libraries from across the state had made loans from their archives. As a result, this show had a decided community flavor which was refreshing.

In the galleries there were large cases which held oversize folios opened to mammoth plate prints by Carleton Watkins and others. The long panoramic photo of San Francisco made by Eadweard Muybridge (1878) documents the city as it existed a generation before the great quake and fire which destroyed the city. Photography's relationship to the press and photojournalism was illustrated by the presence of magazines, which presented the original context in which the images were published. In short, this exhibit embraced the fine art aspect of photographic practice as well as its more pedestrian history. There were also a great number of women represented in the show. While some of the names were quite unfamiliar, work by Imogen Cunningham, Anne Brigman and others indicated that photography in California involved women as well as men.

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As we have seen from these three

**Photographer Unknown. Untitled (Men and Women), c. 1889. International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House. From *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow*, National Gallery of Art.**



# THE MIL

For a century and a half, from the daguerreotype to the disposable, innovators have

**1839** Daguerre publishes instructions immediately after the French government designs details of the daguerreotype process. The 78-page manual is an instant hit.



**1839** The Propylaea at Athens by Caspar P.O.J. de Lathouère is a typical early daguerreotype. Buildings are lowered subjects. What else can hold a pose 15 minutes!



**1839** The arrival and capture of Philadelphia's Central High are the subjects of the oldest extant American photograph, shot by U.S. Navy official Joseph Saxton.



**1840s** Exposure time is reduced to half a minute, allowing nude models to pose as comfortably for a daguerreotype as for a portrait. This is an early French example.



**1844** In his London studio French daguerreotypist Antoine François Jean Claudet introduces the painted background, using it in his portrait of colleague Talbot.



**1844** Talbot begins publishing serially *The Pencil of Nature*, a book of photographic plates "impressed by the agency of Light alone." Queen Victoria buys a copy.



**1845** Friedrich von Martens, a German printmaker living in Paris, inserts a panoramic camera with a lens that moves horizontally in an arc of more than 150 degrees



to capture an image on a curved plate. This is Martens's view of the Left Bank as seen from the roof of the Louvre. As in all daguerreotypes the image is reversed.



**1853** G. N. Bernard's picture of burning mills in Oswego, N.Y., is one of the earliest news shots of a disaster. He later runs ads offering images of the fire.



**1854** Cheaper than the daguerreotype, the ambrotype (example: Portrait of a Male Hunter) is a glass negative with a dark backing that makes it appear positive.



**1854** Cartes de visite, photographic calling cards, are patented in France. "Cartes-mania" spreads abroad, and everyone from dancing girls to royalty collects them.



**1856** The ferrotype is introduced. Later called the tinterotype, it is a cheap, lightweight, sturdy and suitable for mounting in albums that it occupies the ambrotype.



exhibits, the personalities and views of writers and curators do influence our reading of historical material. In reviewing some of the texts in use recently in photo history courses, we can further understand how various factors influence the interpretation provided in a given text. For instance, the nationality of the writer may skew the emphasis. Gisèle Freund, who was born in Germany but moved to France during the second world war, is a respected photojournalist and writer. Her publication *Photography and Society*<sup>9</sup> gives priority to the French inventor of photography, Daguerre. This lively history is filled with many insightful remarks about the relationships between political and social events, and comments on how these may be seen in the photography of the time. Freund's nationalistic chauvinism is evident however in her treatment of Fox Talbot, who is summarily dismissed with four sentences as the inventor of the calotype in England.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, Ian Jeffrey's publication *Photography: A Concise History*<sup>11</sup> is biased toward contributions by Britons. Daguerre is mentioned in only a single instance and his process is never described. Nationalistic bias may have encouraged the curators for the Houston show to overlook artists who were not from Britain, France or the United States.

In this country, one of the texts most frequently used is that which Beaumont Newhall has adapted from the catalog for the 1937 MOMA exhibit *Photography 1837-1937*. Currently in its fifth edition, *The History of Photography* is well-organized and thoughtful as it progresses from the earliest photographic experiments through the decades to the mid-twentieth century. Recent scholarship has created a few holes in the section of Newhall's book which covers the years from about 1850-1890, but in general, the text is adequate until the period of about 1940. There is a bit too much emphasis upon technical development, which is not often given much of a social context. The major deficiency in this text is that its sections covering work since 1945 are rather sketchy and not very informative. Contemporary photographic practice is not reviewed at all.

In 1955, Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, who as collectors are almost single-handed-

ly responsible for the preservation of many nineteenth century images, wrote a history of photography. A revised edition entitled *A Concise History of Photography* (1965) is an interesting and thorough compendium of well-known works and a few lesser-known images. Gernsheim has begun updating this history and has published two volumes: *The Origins of Photography* (1982), and *The Rise of Photography 1850-1880: The Age of Collodion*. This later publication is typical of the type of photography book which has evolved over the past ten years. The more recent publications are distinguished from their predecessors by the quality of their reproductions, which attempt to approximate the tones and value ranges of the original work being reproduced.

Gernsheim includes in his history of the medium notes on technical developments and equipment. He also discusses aspects of the medium which are frequently considered unimportant. There is a humorous anecdotal account of a dubious class of photographic businessmen who were complete charlatans.<sup>12</sup> Their inclusion in this history helps explain the enthusiasm for the new invention which was in such demand that it led many unqualified people to hurriedly open photographic establishments. Elsewhere, Gernsheim states flatly that Matthew Brady's role in Civil War photography was that of an "organizer"<sup>13</sup>; in so doing, he avoids the kind of myth-making that has clouded an accurate understanding of the contribution which Brady made. Gernsheim writes, "... the aura surrounding Brady is quite disproportionate to his merits as a photographer."<sup>14</sup> It will be interesting to see further efforts in this series.

In 1986 Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé edited a text entitled *A History of Photography: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, which was translated into English in 1987. In his introduction Lemagny writes that the editors decided to invite numerous authors from Europe and the United States to contribute to the volume.<sup>15</sup> This diversity of authorship helps avoid any consistent nationalistic slant. What emerges from this effort is a thoughtful group of essays that convey the varied social, political, and national complexities



# MILESTONES

enriched the uses of the photographic process, enriching our perceptions and our world

1840 Probably the earliest known photograph taken by New York chemistry professor John William Draper. It will be unearthed in a Greenwich Village bookshop in 1969.



1840 Self-Portrait: as a Drowned Man by Hippolyte Bayard, the first to print direct positive pictures on paper; longpous the photographer's eclipse by Daguerre.



1840 The first camera specially designed for it is invented by Vannieu mathematician Joseph Max Niépce; it takes circular pictures.



1841 The Calotype (Greek for "ready-to-print") process is patented by W. H. Fox Talbot. The McCandlish Children, c. 1843, is by D. O. Hill and R. Adamson.



1845 The earliest photomicrograph—a daguerreotype camera was combined with a solar microscope—are published. Here: a magnified view of frog blood cells.



1846 This rendering of the first painting operation—by Boston dentist W.T.G. Morton, using sulfuric ether as an anesthetic—is one of the earliest medical photos.



1846 A U.S. brigadier general and his staff ride through Saltillo during the Mexican War (1845-48), the first war to be documented photographically.



1849 Sir David Brewster designs a twin-lens scope for viewing stereographs. Until the end of the century, the device is so popular it is claimed that no home is without one.



1850 The first snap-action shot—of a bombshell fired from a cannon in London—is taken by Thomas Stoddard with a photograph camera he designed.



1850 Henry Peach Robinson creates a composite photograph, Fading Away—a visual rendering of a scene by Shelley—by joining four negatives on one sheet of paper.



1850 The Pyramids of Sakkarah are recorded by Englishman Francis Frith, who publishes the photo album. Frith's some times were made in darkness.



1860 From a tethered balloon 1,200 feet over Boston, James Wallace Black takes the first American aerial photo. Similar had mapped Paris by air two years earlier.



of photography as it has been practiced by artists, photojournalists, private individuals, and the state.

A section of the book entitled "Photography and Contemporary Art" written by Philippe Dubois is a most thorough assessment of the interaction between photography and other art forms during this century. It includes a discussion of photography and other contemporary art practices, such as conceptual art, environmental art, pop art, and performance art. Dubois and the editors are willing to let the formalist notion of the photograph as a strangely whole and complete object be challenged. In this last section of the book, photography is shown as enmeshed within contemporary artistic practice and frequently dependent upon a contextual relationship to some other work.

Fox Talbot is nearly missing from this work as well. (Despite the varied nationalities of the contributors, the editors may have allowed some nationalist fervor to color their views of history!) Though Talbot is mentioned several times throughout the book, he is represented by only one small reproduction of the "Latticed Window" from 1835.

In what is easily the most ambitious undertaking of photo history in a single volume, Naomi Rosenblum has assembled *A World History of Photography*.<sup>16</sup> This volume has over 600 pages and more than 800 reproductions in color and black and white. It discusses hundreds of practitioners and has two sections which present technical histories. There is periodically a portfolio of sorts which presents work with shared concerns virtually without interpretation or comment. In these sections, work such as "The Galerie Contemporaine," a collection of images picturing influential personages from nineteenth century France, is published to give a view of such work unencumbered by subjective interpretation. There are similar sections devoted to Alexander Gardner's images of the Lincoln Conspirators, the Western Landscape, and medical, scientific, and space photography.

Rosenblum's project allows for much information to be included. Typically, survey books published for markets in the United States concentrate upon France, England and the United States. While it is

true that much of the activity took place there, there were important things happening elsewhere. Rosenblum presents Canadian and Latin American photographers as well as practitioners from Eastern Europe, Italy, and Spain who are not usually represented in survey texts. Important figures are briefly profiled in a manner which meets the necessity of biographical and stylistic discussions while avoiding the tendency to dwell upon these photographs.

*LIFE* magazine, which has had a role in shaping our reception of photography since it began publication in 1936, printed an issue in the Fall of 1988 celebrating the sesquicentennial of photography. Not surprisingly, the editors of *LIFE* adopted a broader interpretation of photography than some museums have. The issue includes sections and photo spreads on numerous subjects—fashion, photojournalism, portraiture, cameras, sports photography, advertising, historical figures in the medium; and it even includes a section on present-day art photography which reproduced work by Joel-Peter Witkin, Cindy Sherman, Sarah Charlesworth, John Baldessari, and Barbara Kruger. (It would seem that *LIFE* is more up-to-date than some of the museums.) These various sections are interspersed with advertising. Polaroid has an ad for its new Spectra camera which presents pictures of ten attractive women perhaps as a sample to testify to the merits of the product. Casio advertises its electronic still camera. Fuji, Kodak, and Nikon are lined up with Chevrolet, Clausen pickles, and porcelain horses from the Franklin Mint in support of photography's anniversary. The publishers bring us the miracles of the good life, as well as a few rather bizarre juxtapositions.

This *LIFE* also includes an interesting section entitled "Milestones"<sup>17</sup> which is essentially a photographic timeline. It begins in 1839 with the frontispiece of Daguerre's publication and ends with an image of a hand tossing a Fujicolor Quick Snap into a waste bin. There are some marvelous stops along the way—the advent of the baseball card in 1887, the first photo

booth in 1925, and the first drive-thru Fotomat in 1967. These milestones are technical, political, social, and on occasion troubling—such as the coining of the term "photo opportunity" in 1969 as a euphemism for controlling public access to our president.

In typical *LIFE* fashion, the editors have devoted one section to images from small town portrait studio as representative of all such enterprises in late nineteenth century America.<sup>18</sup> This gallery of ordinary citizens from Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, demonstrates the formula which made *LIFE* so popular. As Freund has noted<sup>19</sup>, the periodical frequently told its stories by using specific people who led rather ordinary lives. In this case, the formula is applied to the past. We see here an American version of the *Galerie Contemporaine* populated with more plebeian types.

No photographic history or recollection would be complete without a section devoted to snapshots. These informal, private images are what most of us know of photography. For the most part, snapshots are quite unremarkable, yet we in the United States are estimated to have made about fifteen billion of them in 1987. *LIFE* asked ten writers to contribute a favorite snapshot and write a brief note about the image. While the pedigree of the maker does add a certain cachet to these pictures which snapshots do not ordinarily have, their inclusion does make this *LIFE* issue rather more complete.

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Exhibitions, encyclopedic catalogs, and histories do as much to create a history of the medium as artists or photojournalists do. It is necessary when reading any history or viewing an exhibition to understand that sequencing, editing, and curatorial choice effectively present a specific personal view which is far from objective. As we construct them, our histories reflect both present-day knowledge about a given period and present fashion. Changes in emphasis, omissions, and privately held theories tend to get in the way and can confuse the issues. Let the reader beware.

Carleton E. Watkins, *Yosemite Valley from the "Best General View,"* c. 1866. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase with funds donated by Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Clarke. From *The Art of Photography*.



Page spread from *LIFE* magazine, Fall 1988

## Footnotes

1. C. Jane Grover, *The Positive Image* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 10-11.
2. For more information, see Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 116-150.
3. Mike Weaver, *The Photographic Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 63-68.
4. Sarah Greenough et al., *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1989).
5. Greenough, p. xviii.
6. Greenough, pp. 3-38.
7. Greenough, pp. 129-154.
8. Greenough, p. 129.
9. Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980; first published in France in 1974 by Editions du Seuil).
10. Freund, p. 50.
11. Ian Jeffrey, *Photography: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
12. Helmut Gernsheim, *The Rise of Photography 1850-1880* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 30.
13. Gernsheim, p. 106.
14. Gernsheim, p. 106.
15. Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé, *A History of Photography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 9.
16. Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1984).
17. *LIFE*, Fall 1988, pp. 26-34.
18. *LIFE*, pp. 108-113.
19. Freund, pp. 140-59.

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# STREETS AND TREES

by Rachel Ronto

In a 1976 essay entitled "Drawn to That Moment,"<sup>1</sup> John Berger contrasted the process of drawing to taking a photograph in terms of what can be retrieved from each after the fact. Specifically, Berger states that although equally static as images, the stasis of a finished drawing or painting "presupposes another view of time." A thing seen at any given moment will disappear, Berger writes. But the act of drawing, with time for looking and response, offers a greater challenge to the "flux of disappearance" or time than a photograph when employed as a tool to record appearances. He explains that:

*The photographed image has been selected for preservation. The drawn image contains the experience of looking. A photograph is evidence of an encounter between event and photographer. A drawing slowly questions an event's appearance and in so doing reminds us that appearances are always a construction with a history. (Our aspiration towards objectivity can only proceed from the admission of subjectivity.) We use photographs by taking them with us, in our lives, our arguments, our memories; it is we who move them. Whereas a drawing or painting forces us to stop and enter its time. A photograph is static because it has stopped time. A drawing or painting is static because it encompasses time. (p. 149)*

Berger's starting point for this examination was a drawing he had done of his dead father in his coffin, a poignant and final moment. More than any other kind of record—a letter, keepsake, or photograph—the drawing contains and returns to Berger his father's life. Referring to the two-dimensional stillness of his drawing he explains that the "space that my drawing offers for my father's return into it is quite distinct... And here it is incidental that I am looking at a drawing which I drew myself. An equivalent drawing by anybody else would offer the same space."

The statements made in this essay, about looking at past life represented in two dimensions, came to mind while viewing the recent exhibition at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*. Two photographs in the show, of city life from very different eras, seemed to address the subjects discussed by Berger, the disappearance of an experience and its recapture through an image.

Walker Evans' photograph, "Main Street, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., 1931," and Robert Adams' "Ft. Collins, Colorado, 1979," are categorized separately in the catalogue for the exhibition. Evans' work is classified as "documentary" and Adams' as "visionary." Temporarily eschewing both these interpretive categories and the titles provided by the artists, an effort to read these images seems to involve three parts. One part takes in the information about some past event that a photograph can give the viewer. Another aspect of reading the images is to see through the image to the artist and statement behind it. Finally, the viewer as third party brings his or her own thoughts and associations.

Evans' photograph of a city street and Adams' of a tree in an empty parking lot represent some of the same things. We see pavement and curbs with small squares of ground reserved for trees. The presence of cars is indicated indirectly in Adams' photograph through the painted parking slots in the foreground and the concrete curb that makes an island around the tree. Three cars are heading towards the viewer in Main Street. Activity is again only implied in the Adams' picture by the lights we can see just over the tall grass, some distance away. Overcast sky and reflections of buildings, cars and trees on wet, paved sidewalks and street on Main Street underscore the difficulty in determining if it is morning or afternoon in a photograph. Judging from the contrast between the silvery tops of the cars and their dark sides, it is some time just before or after midday. In Adams' photo it is just night. The solitary tree is in full flower, so the season in which



Walker Evans, *Main Street, Saratoga Springs, New York, 1931* (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

the photograph was taken was summer. The leafless trees in Evans' picture have been pruned, with no new growth yet sprouting to cover up the amputations. It is late fall, dead of winter or early spring. As preservations of scenes in time, these two photographs deliver something similar to what one would expect from drawings or paintings of the same subjects, in terms of hour of execution.

Deciding when the photographs must have been taken draws more fully upon the experience and age of the viewer. This information can be gleaned from each of the works by vastly different means. In Evans' work, vague notions of the where and when of technological and economic developments come into play. The models of the cars in Evans' picture vary, but many of them look exactly the same. Not knowing specific dates of car issues, and being equally hazy about when gaslights were phased out, I would guess that the cars are early mass production models (somewhere between Ford's Model T and a '55 Chevy) and that the street lamps are probably simple incandescent bulbs. Even without knowing about Evans' photographic documentation of rural and urban America, but informed by the works of others, in text, film and photography (the cars in *The Untouchables* looked like that) one could still conclude that this is a representation of an American city, circa 1930.

The more recent landscape by Adams, despite its reduced elements and narrower focus, offers information that is matched up to memories of experiences by the viewer, rather than from the mental sorting of previous texts and reproductions required by Evans' photograph. Artificial light floods the foreground; the streetlight in absentia is brighter than the picture perfect crescent moon. This tree on its island in an ocean of poured concrete, next to an untended field of weeds and grasses could have been photographed in countless cities. Knowing the type of tree could limit the field, possibly, to North America. This edge of parking lot suggests the shopping mall, school, strip center or amusement park that is the reason for its existence. The half-hearted attempt at re-landscaping with a seedling tree and a couple of shrubs is the m.o. of American real estate developers. Adams' picture is really a representation of disregard for the amount of available earth as a

precious resource in itself, in favor of its value as commodity (as real estate) on a colossal scale. The concomitant leftover ground, the field beyond the tree—unsuitable, unusable or not yet ripe for development—is a familiar view that recurs in astounding variety, particularly near freeways. When the title reveals that this view is other than a representation of the American city in which one lives, the reaction might be, "No kidding? I've seen that tree a million times."

In neither landscape is the exact location of the place photographed readily apparent or necessary to an understanding of the image, without the addition of a title or other explanatory text. That each is of its time is possibly more easily seen at a date later than when the pictures were taken, as with all other images. That they are peculiarly American photographs, i.e. that they can be "placed," has to do with the intent of the photographer and the importance of that association in the work. Robert Adams wrote of the decisions that determine the photograph in "Truth and Landscape," in a book of his collected essays, *Beauty in Photography; Essays in Defense of Traditional Values*:

*That a photograph is unlikely to be a laboratory record is evident when we think about how it is made. Most photographers are people of intense enthusiasms, whose work involves many choices... Behind these decisions stands the photographer's individual framework of recollections and meditations about the way he perceived that place or places like it before. Without such background there would be no knowing whether the scene on the ground glass was characteristic of the geography and of his experience of it and intuition about it—in short, whether it was true.<sup>2</sup>*

Looking again at Berger's phrase in light of this statement by Adams, it is not clear how a drawing "contains the experience of looking" and a photograph does not, but simply preserves it. The phrase seems to refer to the keenness of observation and time required to make a drawing, which thereby allows the richness of experience to seep in more. We use photographs, Berger says, we move them, whereas a painting or drawing stops us and we let it move us. This interpretation of how





Robert Adams, *Fort Collins, Colorado, 1976* (courtesy James Schubert Gallery, Houston)

images act on us seems an attempt to reduce time and vision to controlled substances. If drawings and photographs are equally abstract as interpretations of reality, points at which decisions are made in the creative process are irrelevant once the object is on its own in the world. The value to the viewer of the visual experience of the object is arrived at over time.

Information taken in visually from an image simply varies from individual to individual. With Evans' photograph, for example, the response of a viewer who had the experience of living during the Depression would be very different from one who had not. Berger's statement points out, by default, the real strength of photography with the respect to the passage of time, as residing in the nature of its abstraction. Minor White described the deceptively close-to-life abstraction that photography presents as follows:

*Abstraction in photography is to reach towards the non-objective without ever breaking camera's strongest point—the magic of its tether to visual reality.<sup>3</sup>*

If the kind of information or documentation a lens can transcribe were not a necessary factor in the work, presumably alternative media would be employed. The inescapability of the photographic image confronts a viewer with a thing different from a written account or drawing or painting of the same subject. Partly, the difference has to do with the built-in objectivity of the camera lens—a gift, especially if, as Berger says, "Our aspiration towards objectivity can only proceed from the admission of subjectivity." Anyone who has mugged for a snapshot and looked at it later can attest to this, or reread a journal entry one wrote with full confidence in the lucidity of the account. The point was more profoundly put by Mondrian in 1941 when he said, "If objective vision were possible, it would give us a true image of reality."<sup>4</sup>

This gift is a tool that Evans says requires:

*...absolute fidelity to the medium itself: that is full and frank and pure utilisation of the camera as the great, the incredible instrument of symbolic actuality that it is.<sup>5</sup>*

"Utilisation" of the camera implies subjective use, and this becomes the big divide between Evans' and Adams' photographs in the second reading of their works. Adams' composition, which we could title "moon over urban blight," navigates, without circumventing, the obvious nature-versus-bulldozer theme. It is a picture of solace and despair that doesn't

name names. It seems instead to allude to those moments when acceptance of or resignation to what is lets in a little awareness of what can be lost. Robert Adams' photographic style has been called "visionary." Critic Ben Lifson writes in the exhibition's catalogue that the means of expression used in visionary photography

*...are also those of visionary art. First, a reduction—of information, of motif, of visual vocabulary and of detail. Second, exaggeration of what's left. The overall effect is of an intensified world whose simplified detail and diminished variety seem to be due to a purification, either a purification of the world itself, or a purification of our perceptions. In other words, a heightened reality, a vision.<sup>6</sup>*

A critical part of Adams' photograph is how little it ultimately relies on the recollection of visual experience alone. What first drew me to the picture was what Berger called the space of the image. The piece of landscape in the photograph lets in what could be around it, but also the memory of a sum of senses. One is the sense of solitude felt alone, outdoors, late at night. Mentally preoccupied after a class or meeting or dinner, walking out to the car on clear and temperate summer night, one can take note of the moon and the warmth of a light next to the dark. If it turns out the car has been stolen or a tire is flat, that momentary connection with one's surroundings is sustaining. Adams, in the same essay quoted from earlier, discussed his own questions about the value of photographing ever bleaker landscapes:

*Landscape pictures can offer us, I think, three verities—geography, autobiography, and metaphor. Geography is, if taken alone, sometimes boring, autobiography is frequently trivial, and metaphor can be dubious. But taken together, as in the best work of people like Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston, the three kinds of information strengthen each other and reinforce what we all work to keep intact—an affection for life.<sup>7</sup>*

The subjective aspect in *Main Street*, from Evans' own description of his intent for photography is, in contrast to Adams, a record of visual experience in the most inclusive way. In the following excerpt from his 1969 essay, "On Photography," Evans writes:

*...the matter of art in photography may come down to this: it is the capture and projection of the delights of seeing; it is the defining of observation full and felt.<sup>8</sup>*

In looking beyond the sheer craft of Evans' photo as object, and after ruminations on Model A's, the search for power lines and other attempts to root the components of this image in time, the completeness of the view becomes evident. Outlines of the city gradually disappearing into the whiteness of a rainy day could inject mystery into one's response to the picture, but do not. Neither is nostalgia deployed by the funereal stateliness of the old cars, stone boulevard, barber pole and tidy street. There is no sense that all was well with the world when things were less cluttered. Despite the cars cruising for a parking space and all the signs of imminent activity, Evans' photograph seems, surprisingly, more remote than Adams', emotively impenetrable. No curiosity is really aroused about the individuals who were undoubtedly just inside the doors to the buildings, or about what it felt like to walk down that street. The photographer has documented a place in time and gathered in all the possibilities from his fourth-floorish vantage point, then passed the ball to the viewer. The photograph is so much about the visual, instead of emotional aspects of the view that finally one's curiosity is transferred to the present.

Evans' being where he was and simply looking opens up the present as a point in time, like his photograph. The obviousness of the present allows much to be overlooked. A purely visual account, even under the guise of an aesthetic, can sometimes tell us more about ourselves than we care to know. What we look like becomes strange and a little foreign after a relatively short period of time. It is impossible to tell what will be familiar or, more ominously, acceptable in the future. (I am thinking of the mutants in *Star Wars*.) Evans' photograph is an instruction, really, of how to look at the moment at hand.

That photographs are about appearances can give us cause for reflection. The word "we" could be substituted for "drawing" in Berger's sentence, quoted above; like a drawing, we "slowly question an event's appearance and in so doing" remind ourselves "that appearances are always a construction with a history." Some appearances are worthy of the record as symbols. Any created object is of the past, and is an encompassing of time for the viewer. Photographs are a reminder of how enormous is the sense of sight. So if Adams' photograph does not name names or Evans' does not try to label experience, they give disappearance place and presence.

#### Footnotes

1. John Berger, "Drawn to That Moment," *The Sense of Sight* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 149.
2. Robert Adams, "Truth and Landscape," *Beauty in Photography; Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* (New York: Aperture, 1981), p. 15.
3. "The Revolving River of My Thought: Unpublished Writings of Minor White," in Peter Bunnell, ed., *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes* (Princeton, N.J.: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1989), p. 26.
4. "Piet Mondrian," *Twentieth-Century Artists on Art*, ed. Dore Ashton (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 11.
5. Walker Evans, "from 'Photography' (1969)," *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*, (London: The Royal Academy of Arts, 1989), p. 301.
6. Ben Lifson, "Inner Vision," *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*, p. 339.
7. Robert Adams, p. 14.
8. Walker Evans, p. 302.

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# PROFILE: EARLIE HUDNALL, JR.

By Julie Lee

Earlie Hudnall, Jr., writes that "My photos are mere archetypes of my childhood; they represent a literal transcription of actuality—the equivalent of what I saw or felt." These words appear in a personal statement about his work, and they are quoted in articles and biographical material going way back. We have to assume that he means what he says quite literally.

As is evident in his images, Hudnall works intuitively with children of a certain age. He quickly and clearly identifies with the "Marching Boys" and the "Bouncing Boys," delighting in their innocence, exuberance, and creativity. Perhaps he knew these boys, but my guess is that he did not—not well, anyway. If he knew them too well, they could not serve as archetypes (for Earlie and his buddies or brothers-)-they would have their own names and identities.

But the photos Hudnall chooses to exhibit as his personal work are not just about children. They are about the world he knew as a child, a world he has learned to find and return to wherever he is and whenever he can. In the wards of Houston Hudnall is able to find vestiges of small town and rural life in the big city—remnants of a neighborhood where people knew one another. He strikes up a conversation with an elderly lady because she reminds him of his grandmother, who was the historian of his family, the story-teller, the keeper of the scrapbook full of photos and mementoes. He feels at home here.

Nostalgia and memories are not only what Hudnall's photos are about. The children he photographs are confident and eager; their elders are warm and wise and venerable. Hudnall offers his photos as affirmation of what he sees and gently nudges the viewer toward the beginnings of understanding. There is also an implicit regret. Childhood and old age represent for him the continuity of life, but the period in between is a kind of "no man's and no woman's land," relatively scarce in the work he chooses to exhibit. His portrait of "The Family" is a notable (and welcome) exception.

I wonder if the same sort of selective focus would remain if Hudnall had stayed and worked in his home town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Hudnall grew up as one of six children; his family lived on a large piece of land near the edge of town. Everyone on the block and in the neighborhood knew everyone else and everyone else's children. Hudnall tells of getting two whippings for a misadventure, one at the home where it happened and another when he got home. Photography as an interest was inspired by his father's tradition of taking family pictures on fourth Sundays after church, and by his grandmother's descriptions of the way life used to be in the country. He listened to her and thought about how nice it would be if there had been pictures.

After serving in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, Hudnall returned to Hattiesburg in January, 1968. He was thinking about re-enlisting, but his mother was trying very hard to interest him in other alternatives. He had applied to Southern University and been accepted before he joined the Marines. He knew he wanted to study art. That January he visited with a friend from high school who was home for a semester from Texas Southern University in Houston. His friend told him that TSU had a strong Art Department and spoke well of life in Houston. Hudnall applied and was accepted. In September of 1968

took the bus from Hattiesburg to Houston, then took a cab to the campus, and he has been there ever since.

In 1968 TSU did not offer a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. It did offer a Bachelor of Art Education, and the Department was headed by the legendary and inspirational Dr. John Biggers. Hudnall followed the required curriculum, which included drawing and composition, ceramics, weaving, sculpture, student teaching, production of a one-man show, and painting a mural in Hannah Hall. Dr. Biggers allowed him to substitute photography in his one-man show, creating the first combined major in art and photography.

Hudnall had bought a camera in Vietnam. He was eager to use it and found that using it was a good way to meet people. On June 19 (Juneteenth), 1969, TSU students gathered on a lawn for a picnic and celebration. Hudnall and Nathaniel Sweets took pictures of the occasion. They went to Sweets' room and loaded film in the closet. Sweets was a photography major and knew how to process his own film. At that time the Photography Department at TSU was very small, and students were not allowed to use the facilities after class hours. But there was a darkroom in the Art Department, and before long Hudnall and Sweets had received permission from Dr. Biggers to use it.

Hudnall was able to use his interest in photography to help himself through school financially and later to work himself into a job. He learned bits and pieces from different people—from Sweets, Herbie J. Provost (who was the tennis coach and who owned his own studio), Mr. Evans of the Photography Department, and Alvin McEwing (who loaned him a Yashikamat 124G with an 80mm. lens). Hudnall worked on student publications and generally became known as the person to call on whenever there was need for a photographer.

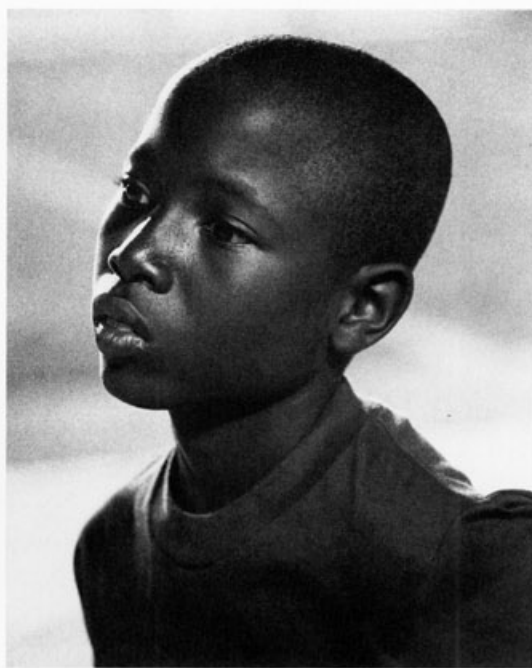
One day a TSU philosophy professor, Dr. T.H. Freeman, sought him out in Hannah Hall: "Are you Earlie Hudnall? Mr. Evans sent me to see you. I need a photographer. Do you want to come and talk to me?" They went to Dr. Freeman's office in the King Center and talked about the Model Cities program, which was just starting up at the time. TSU was involved with the City of Houston in a Model Cities training program, and Dr. Freeman had been named Director of the program. Hudnall was hired to document conditions in the wards of Houston. During his junior and senior years Model Cities met every Tuesday and Thursday evening. When Hudnall graduated he stayed on as the photographer with the Model Cities program, and after this program was phased out in the mid-1970's he continued to work with the University. His job gradually evolved into that of staff photographer and advisor to student publications. He is now with the Office of Development, and he can still be called on to cover almost anything at TSU.

The Model Cities program got Hudnall out of the university and into the wards of Houston. The work he produced there gave him reason to return, and documentation is still important to his sense of himself as a photographer. Hudnall is a photographer who appreciated long before he had a camera that certain people, moments, and memories were very significant to him, and that photographs could be affirmations of life. In this sense, he is a photographer of the old school. No matter that there are other photographers who are setting about exploring the ambiguity of the medium; his heroes are Walker Evans and James Van Der Zee.

Hudnall has been encouraged by responses to his work in recent years, and with good reason. In 1981 the Cultural Arts Council of Houston commissioned him to do a series for a permanent photography exhibition at Kashmere Gardens Library. In 1982 he had two exhibitions in Houston, one at the University of Houston's M.D. Anderson Library and one at Sutton's Black Heritage Gallery. His one-man exhibition, *Images of the Wards*, was shown at the Houston Public Library downtown in 1984, and in the same year he took part in a group show at TSU, *African-American Photographers of the Southwest, 1950-1984*. In 1986 his work was included in three major exhibitions, at *Diverse Works* in Houston; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and at the Photo Center Gallery, Tisch School of the Arts, New York City.

In 1988 during FotoFest Hudnall was part of a group show at Barnes-Blackman Gallery. He took his portfolio to the Meeting Place where it was reviewed by Petra Benteler of Benteler-Morgan Galleries, which now represents Hudnall. Benteler and her partner Susan Morgan plan to show his work, along with that of Debbie Fleming Caffery, during FotoFest '90. Morgan remarks on the style and power of Hudnall's images and compares them to certain images made by Lisette Model. She is working now on placing Hudnall's work in other galleries and would like to help him find a way to publish it. "His body of work is large," she says, "and the style and quality are consistent enough to make publication a reasonable goal."

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Earlie Hudnall, Jr., *Profile of a Boy*, 1988.



Earlie Hudnall, Jr., *Marching Boys*, 1977.

Earlie Hudnall, Jr., *Lady, Scarf*, 1984.





Films of Carl Th. Dreyer were shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from July 7–30, 1989.

In the MFA's recent retrospective of Carl Theodor Dreyer's films, held in honor of the centennial of his birth, Houston viewers had the chance to evaluate his work, most of which is rarely shown in North America. Dreyer came to film from journalism in 1912 and is credited with writing forty scripts between 1912 and 1919. He directed fourteen feature films from 1918 to 1964, spanning the late silent film era and the first three and a half decades of sound. He wrote the scripts for the films he directed, including melodramas, comedies, romances, and his own form of refined tragedy.

In effect, Dreyer reshot one film over and over, accounts of individual suffering set within different genres. While he made films for the commercial market, the techniques he developed have continued to intrigue and influence members of the French New Wave, German New Cinema and the American Independent Cinema. One way of viewing his works is as the development of an imagery for suggesting what individuals feel when oppressed. In this article I will focus on Dreyer's use of the closeup to build pictures of character's emotions amidst suffering in his silent films, up to and including his *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1927). While this article will only comment on his silent works, he continued to use the techniques he developed in these films during the sound era.

The motion picture closeup has been used excessively since the late 1920s to offer an audience intimacy with "its" film stars. Hollywood has used the closeup to encourage audiences to become dependent on specific film personalities. Dreyer's development of the closeup influenced the German psychological cinema of the late 20's (Pabst) and through it, the Hollywood imagery of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich which laid the foundation for the classical American closeup of the 30's and 40's. But Dreyer's closeups were different. He rarely used the same leads twice, avoiding the sort of heterosexual bond between director and star that Sternberg built with Dietrich. His imagery is concerned instead with suggesting the emotions of a character.

In Dreyer's films there is neither a clear capitalist nor a clear Marxist program; but he often depicted oppression set within political crises. Dreyer, a Dane, lived through some of the cataclysmic events of the first half of the 20th century, something an American critic can too easily forget. Working first as a journalist and after 1912 as a scriptman and talent scout, he was able to witness at first hand the Marxist and Socialist upheavals and poverty of postwar Germany. He met with and hired White Russian emigres in Berlin for his 1921 production of *Love One Another* (*Die Gezeichneten*, 1921) and also worked as a director in France, Sweden and Norway.

Dreyer's first four works are set within specific social and political events reminiscent of the contemporary European conflicts. The tyranny of bourgeois social and legal customs are depicted in *The President* (*Præsidenten*, 1919) and *The Parson's Widow* (*Prästänkan*, 1920). The French revolution is presented in one sequence of the *Leaves from Satan's Book* (*Blade af Satans Bog*, 1919) alongside a sequence in which a group of Bolshevik raiders assault Finnish citizens on Finnish soil. *Love One Another* (*Die Gezeichneten*, 1921) unrelentingly pieces together a picture of a Russian community's pogrom against its Jewish members. This film depicts racial and political violence rather than offering a political solution to tension. A boy sees his father defend himself against a member of the mob. The father stands reading a manuscript of the scriptures while a man approaches him from the front, slowly raising an ax which violently crashes into the father's head. The last image is of the remaining Jewish community members car-



Carl Th. Dreyer, from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1927.

## DREYER UP CLOSE

rying their belongings down a country road in search of a more hospitable locale, with no assurance that they will succeed.

These early films often present acts of violence and oppression framed within political turmoil. What is interesting about Dreyer's depiction of violence is the use he makes of the closeup shot to reveal the feelings of the oppressed. *Leaves from Satan's Book*, Dreyer's second film, presents four narratives of intolerance. In one, a Soviet supporter scares a woman, Siri, sufficiently so that she kills herself with a knife. Her facial imagery, which would become a Dreyer hallmark, reveals her decision to kill herself. In a closeup she smiles in a triumphant way after plunging the blade in her breast, her eyes open and close and her head lowers. Because Siri's fate might not actually have "been worse than death," today her satisfaction at cheating her attacker of his prey appears strange. But Dreyer has used the closeup to reveal not only her decision but also her satisfaction. Like this one, his later films would often involve a female as the oppressed.<sup>1</sup>

Dreyer does not sketch revolutions, in general, as evil, but does depict particular individuals involved in revolutions as evil. The leaders of particular bands of revolutionaries make decisions which cause the death and suffering of others. Political statements are vapid and half-hearted. They include, in *Leaves From Satan's Book*, the melodramatically stirring "I only did it for the sake of Finland"—a remark any good member of the left as well as the right could make.

Rather than primarily offer images of politic conflict, Dreyer constructs images of individuals deciding whether to act within or against political and social norms. He films revolution on the small scale. Dreyer's recurring theme is that of individual decision-making and suffering. It is this which he pictures in his closeups. His first film, *The President*, presents images of a man, Victor, who becomes a judge and in this capacity comes across his own daughter Victoria, whom he had earlier abandoned with her mother for his family estate

and career. Victoria, who has also been abandoned by a lover, is charged with killing her baby. Victor must once again face the decision whether to protect a woman or his career.

Dreyer edits together an interesting group of images which frame the images of Victor deciding. His colleagues throw a party and organize a torch parade in his honor. The film uses images of two single file groups of torches set against blackness which move towards a point of convergence. Finally, the torches come together and form a brilliant mass of exhilarating power. This image of a fire composed of two conflicting streams of light is directly followed by an image of the face of our decision maker. His face tightens slowly as he turns away from the window and looks down, revealing his dilemma, deciding between male career and daughter. When Victor turns away from the window, the audience already knows why he is concerned, since

the narrative has already spelled out his dilemma. His "looking down" is not presented in full closeup, yet it is only his face which signifies his suffering. Both in *The President* and *Leaves from Satan's Book* there are many images of heads and shoulders against backgrounds in which the activity occurs on the face.

The facial expressions of the actor Halvard Hoff, who plays Victor, could be called fine according to melodramatic conventions—after all, he does not wave his arms and beat his chest. But his expressions are not remarkable. His repertoire includes the smiles, frowns, and angry looks of early cinema. The early films of Dreyer are filled with such facial expressions and they limit his ability to produce images of subtle emotions. While most of the faces he focuses on, except for a number of his leads, are not beautiful, they are interesting. We see crowds of people with faces conjured up as if out of a late 19th century

Carl Th. Dreyer, from *The President*, 1918-19.



travelling portrait gallery. In fact Dreyer chose individuals on account of their faces (or beards) whether they had acting experience or not. His choice of interesting heads carries on a tradition of the Danish cinema he first encountered when scriptwriting in 1912. Benjamin Christensen's first film *L'X Mysterieux* (1913) includes images of the head and shoulders of particularized and expressive woman and men 'thinking', 'talking' and 'feeling triumphant'. Even the sparseness of the decor of these films would become a mark of Dreyer films.

Dreyer has said that he did not work according to any particular film theory and prided himself on his ability to work with others in developing styles appropriate to a particular text. This was the theme of the Jorgen Roos 1966 documentary *Carl Th. Dreyer* screened in the MFA series. Yet he has offered general comments on the sort of cinema he attempted to construct. Dreyer in his article called "Swedish Film" (1920) criticized the American cinema of the late teens for its excessive activity and reliance on special effects, saying that it "lacked soul." Cinema which "lacks soul" for Dreyer is something like a puppet show, where expression is wooden and limited.<sup>2</sup> Dreyer clarified in his article "New Ideas about Film" (1922) the direction he thought cinema was taking: "Environmental description, painting a mood, detailed psychological accounting are not only permissible - they are a condition."<sup>3</sup>

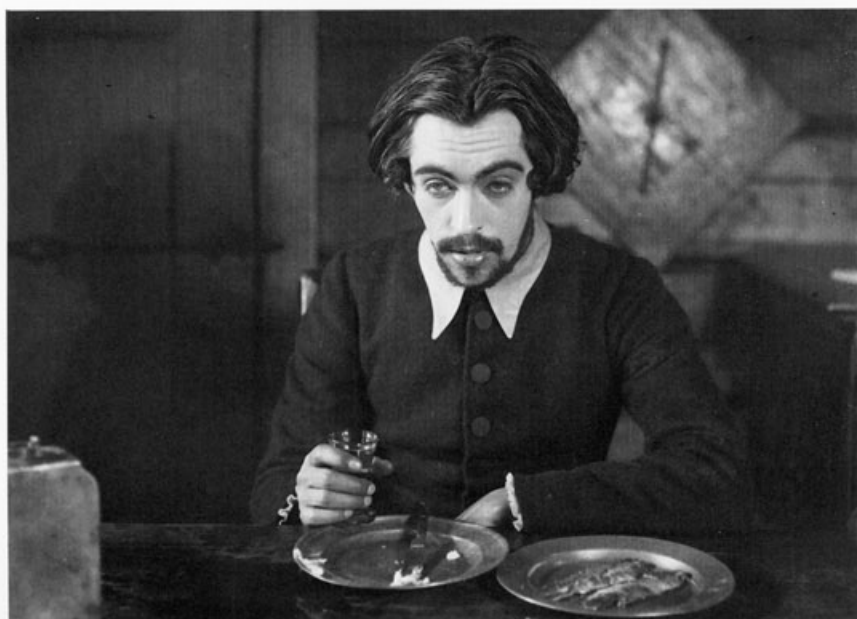
Dreyer is an exponent of a type of psychological cinema which presents images of the human face as pictures of an individual's psychological experience. This cinema differs from the psychological cinema of Pabst and Hitchcock which manipulates the viewer into subjectively experiencing various emotions. Dreyer's films are often described as spiritual or mystical, words which do not exactly offer clarification. His use of facial imagery is better described by a statement made by Ludwig Wittgenstein (another 1989 centennial birthday celebrant): "The human body is the best picture of the human soul."<sup>4</sup> It is through closeup images of the human body, and especially of the face, that Dreyer suggests what a character feels.

Dreyer's last five silent works from *The Parson's Widow*, 1920 to *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1927, focus only on a few individuals. He provides a greater number of images of a limited number of faces which together build pictures of a few particular individuals. Beginning with his third film *The Parson's Widow* (*Prästankan*, 1920) closeup images of desire and decision achieve an increased prominence edited within a narrative and spatial frame. In this film Sofren, a young aspirant to a pastorate, preaches in a competition for the post. After the competition Sofren and the others learn that in order to attain the post they must succeed at another trial. The new pastor must (according to an old law) become the fourth husband of Margarete, the deceased pastor's widow. Sofren and the two other candidates await her entrance. He eyes the elderly woman as she modestly walks in and seats herself. Sofren sits expressionless, eyes focused on the ground. In a mid-shot he closes his eyes and opens them. Attention is focused on his face. Margarete walks over and asks if he would like to see the parsonage, firing her first shot in a battle for survival.

Next we are shown images of Sofren eating a breakfast feast Margarete has prepared. Energetically he grabs a glass of schnapps, drinks and smiles. A title card notes that he is drawn to a herring on a plate as if by a magical force. He eats it in a mid-shot; joy spreads across his face. He grabs the glass and empties it. His head begins to wobble slightly. His eyes move, less focused than previously, looking over towards Margarete. She looks fifty years

younger, cute and boisterous. As he humorously teeters he holds his hands out to Margarete and says that he loves her and would like to stay here and have good days. He marries Margarete.

Dreyer constructs in these comic closeup and midshot images of intoxication the lure of prosperity as Margarete and Sofren battle to achieve what they desire. This betrothal sequence is an example of a complex arrangement of images, reflecting Dreyer's ability to organize a script which isolates the face in mid-shots and closeups. But, many of the mid-shots and closeup shots in *The Parson's Widow* do not have such a coherent organization as the ones in this sequence. Margarete tells Sofren and his fiancée turned "sister" that her first husband married an old pastor's widow in order to get his first post. When Sofren admits that he has done the same,



Carl Th. Dreyer, from *The Parson's Widow*, 1920.

Margarete looks genuinely surprised. This surprise is itself surprising since she, who is no fool, has seen him attempt to get into his "sister's" bed on one occasion. It could be argued that Margarete only acts surprised in the closeup, but Dreyer does not clearly indicate that she is only feigning surprise (as is his practice). After this scene Margarete no longer dominates the household but spends her day at the grave of her first husband. These images, along with the closing shots of Sofren and his new wife, represent a saccharine turn from the political wrangling of the first part of the film. The verve built up during the first two-thirds of the film wanes here into an insipid ending, which shows the sweet smile of Margarete on her deathbed with the closing title "She taught you to be a good housewife and me to be an honorable man." The sweet smile of Margarete is not in itself incongruous but becomes so in relation to the surrounding imagery. Closeup shots become appropriate or inappropriate in relation to the "framing" narrative in which they are embedded.

Another framing device Dreyer uses was common to the cinema of the teens. In *The President*, *Leaves from Satan's Book*, and *The Parson's Widow*, many facial closeups are highlighted by a surrounding blurry-edged black frame; this was accomplished through masking. The audience can still see the background and objects adjacent to a character. After *The President* the faces of individual characters in closeup are occasionally set against a background which is so dark that only the face is visible. When the prostitute looks up at the lawyer Jakov in *Love One Another* the background is almost completely black. Even though her face does not fill the screen, only it is visible. Dreyer has concentrated attention on the face through the technical manipulation of the background and light.

The bite of the earlier films is absent

from *Michael* (1924), but it does provide Dreyer's most striking use of the closeup up to that time. It is the story of a famous painter who becomes lonely and dies when rejected by Michael, his male model and adopted son. When the "Master" attempts to paint the eyes of a sitter, Princess Zamikoff, with no success, he asks Michael to try instead. Dreyer then offers a split-second closeup of Michael's face. The skin on his face ripples, signifying his energy as he chooses to compete for the "master's" attention (as well as for that of the princess). The next image shows the princess' forehead framed in blackness. Her eyes, black pupils set against white skin, are accented by the surrounding darkness. Next we see his face turned slightly to view her; he wears a mischievously endearing grin. The image of the princess' forehead and eyes is significant in that the masked

etc. are simply plain for all to see. We can with certainty get no closer, go no deeper. The audience sees who they are, good and bad alike. In contrast stands the first image of Louise Brooks in Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1928). She coolly holds a silver-tipped liquor bottle under one arm and money in her purse. The viewer can read a multitude of interests and designs into her closed lips, direct black eyes and determined jaw. What she is capable of will become partially evident in the film. No group of images discloses her soul or expresses who she is. We cannot say that she is "bad" or "good". In short she is not a Dreyer character.

*The Master of the House* (*Du Skal Aere Din Hustru*, 1925) provides a more feminist frame for Dreyer's use of closeups. In this film John criticizes and nags his wife to the point of an emotional and nervous breakdown. Mads, his former nanny, and his

wife's mother, talks his wife into taking a rest. Mads proceeds to restructure John's family skills.

The closeup of John's drooping face when he is punished as he had previously punished his son are not especially significant closeup images. But this film does pictorially carry out the theme stated by one title card, namely that, "He has seen himself through the eyes of others". The "eyes of others" include those of the audience who have seen his aggressive facial expressions in mid-shot and closeup. This work is important for presenting the social problem of domineering husbands along with a grassroots "family" solution. This message was enhanced by the use of closeups, causing it to be popular enough to run on forty-one screens in Paris and established a European reputation for Dreyer.<sup>5</sup>

Dreyer's reputation as a maker of spiritual films rests in the United States on his *Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1927), a film that makes frequent use of facial closeups and bare backgrounds. The faces of Joan and her judges stand out

prominently in this work, leaving the viewer no longer with two or three main characters but with an intimate view of the suffering and decision-making of a single individual.

In Dreyer's earlier films he would often blacken the area around a person's face, lending significance to the face. In the *Passion of Joan* his use of the closeup becomes more complex. He frequently crops off the top of Joan's head, the bottom of her body, or sides of her face, disrupting the viewer's picture of Joan's entire body and its position in contrast with those few people and objects which surround her. Furthermore, closeups and mid-range shots are often angled or even upside down (when guards and people enter the castle) in relation to surrounding images appearing rightside up. Dreyer also positions images of Joan looking in one direction followed by other images of her facing in another direction. These contrasting images make it difficult to picture her location and position within the room.

The simplification of the background and the lack of positioning images in this film prevent viewers from forming a picture of each setting, as could be done in *Master of the House*. While we see faces and objects in closeup we are not allowed to get to know a building, to enjoy its corners, or get close to its candles (one of the chief joys of Margarete in *The Parson's Widow*). In the *Passion of Joan of Arc* backgrounds are strangely blank in comparison to Dreyer's earlier films. Since images of characters are not presented here within clarified settings, the characters seem not to be located within a specific time and space.

Dreyer offers instead images of parts of the human body, mostly faces, in closeup, shown often at interesting angles or cropped, prompting the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to note that Dreyer avoids images of the relation of faces to



bodies within their setting in order to concentrate instead on facial affect.<sup>7</sup> The imagery of the face of Renée Falconetti, the actress playing Joan, signifies a sort of distillation of suffering, listening, anger and decision cut off from social circumstances. Dreyer's use of conflicting closeup images create a Joan who is not the cohesive collection of reactions and actions we would call a character. Even though we speak of her by a single name, by continuing to call her 'Joan' we merely attribute unity to a woman who actually becomes fragmented through oppression. We see conflicting images of someone caught in a battle, someone with no place to stand, someone urged to choose how and whether to survive, who has her clothes taken and her hair cut off. Only this expressing face is hers. It has not yet been taken away.

Dreyer does not offer an audience a safe perch from which to view this historical pageant. The personal conflicts we associate with Joan loom in size. As Dreyer removes the cinematic means of distancing the audience from the film by his use of closeups, he lures the audience into intimacy with Joan's struggles. As she – this not quite rational or unified character – is scourged, stripped, and shaved (all evocations of Christ) and removed further from a historical period, the audience is manipulated to empathize with her fragmented and denuded hopes and fears.

This woman is caught between deciding whether to say that the voices she hears comes from an evil source and thereby attain the eucharist and retain her life, or admit that she hears the word of God and be put to death. Burgundian Christian leaders (under pressure from the English, against whom Joan has led the French army) have her bleed and ask her to admit that it is the devil's voice she hears. With the temptation of both life and the eucharist at hand, she

says that it is the devil's voice. Her most expressive facial expressions occur subsequently when she announces that she has lied and faces death.

Falconetti's recantation of her confession occurs near the end of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Dreyer's previous use of closeup images of a wheel brandishing over a hundred blades implies that her punishment will not be humane. She will certainly face a horrible death. After her hair is cut she tells the barber to call the judges back. Dreyer uses increasingly quick images of Joan, of her biting her fingers, her darting eyes, quivering lip and chin. He shows her face inclined upwards, tears on her eyelashes and forehead cropped. Next we see the top of a judge's head, his eyes looking subdued. Then Dreyer cuts to Joan's face which shakes and looks down. Her face looks up again with tears flowing; her eyes close slowly as her face rotates to the left; her eyes open. The regular movement of Falconetti's face adds a liturgical solemnity to her decision. She is the oppressed. Trembling, her eyes close; her face angles back to center and her eyes open, facing up, then down in utter grief. These moments of intense closeups yield intimate drama. Falconetti's face continually moves, as does politically motivated "justice". According to the rules Joan must die. This intensely moving sequence of closeups is followed by images of her procession to the stake, along with images of her body burning and slumping over in the flames.

Joan's facial movements as constructed in this remarkable sequence do not include the typical movements such as abruptly looking down or smiling so common in Dreyer's silent films. Instead he relies on cinematically uncharacteristic shots, showing in closeups extremely expressive elongated facial turns of quivering illuminated skin. These are not fetishistic, far from it, they imply psychic presence and terrific

suffering. This sequence establishes and confirms Dreyer's reputation for being able to disclose the human soul. We can simply see pain on Joan's face, an expressive display of what she feels. It is difficult to believe that the actress Renée Falconetti could play this role for Dreyer while continuing to perform comedy in the evening. Perhaps this evening relief allowed her to express tragedy without drowning the mobile freshness of her visage in theatrical seriousness.<sup>8</sup>

The powerful seldom record the facial expressions and emotions of those they assault. Joan's tears in closeup are not just hers alone but, abstracted from a historical period, they are catharsis-bearing images of all unrecorded disappointment and fear. But oddly enough Joan is not defeated. Dreyer does not just put together images of a woman suffering. While Joan does

Dreyer neglects this aspect of Joan powerful person and military leader.

Stopping the film at Joan's moments of prayer when she is receiving communion, Dreyer freezes single frames of her looking upwards as if her voices lived on a big hill in the sky. Dreyer here plays upon the kind of 'hopeful' pictures which abound in countless missals and prayerbooks and encourage passivity towards authorities. But beyond the sickening passivity of these shots Dreyer has participated in a collection of closeup images which suggest the terrific nature of extreme fear and the capacity of oppressors to stifle active reactions.

Dreyer would not again use so many closeup images in any one feature film. In his first sound film, the complex and neglected *Vampyr*, 1932, Dreyer treats win-

forced on us that his desire to suggest emotion visually by closeups was only fulfilled in this work when he was able to collaborate with someone who had the abilities of a Falconetti. It is interesting that it was with the skills of a talented woman that Dreyer could achieve his aim, since so often his films deal with oppressed females. Her face in its expressive movement raises even individual still-shots of audacious mediocrity into vehicles of extremely subtle yet powerful emotions. Dreyer was able to construct with Falconetti a film which decries the institutionally sanctioned cruelty individuals can promote, through a complex montage of closeups. They constructed a film which uses the closeup in a critical manner, in contrast with Hollywood's practice of choosing a director only if he could give Garbo a "look" which would sell.



Carl The. Dreyer from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1927.

express enormous suffering when facing her death, she also looks relieved when receiving communion. Dreyer is not replicating the oppression of woman. His Joan stands for all who do what they think is right no matter what the consequences, making this an impressive work about virtue.

The silent films Dreyer directed incorporate many uses of the facial closeup, some intriguingly complex like those in *Michael* in which Michael gazes at the eyes of the princess, and others less interesting, more typical of melodramatic images of the early silent film. While *The Passion of Joan of Arc* ranks as a high point among Dreyer's works in its use of the closeup, it too includes many of these typical 'theatrical' images. Soldiers are shown only as tormentors. The analogies with the life of Christ are far from subtle. The anger of the main judge shown at an extreme angle like a giant towering over Joan could be likened to that of a smokestack.

Anger itself is an emotion which Joan curiously enough does not display. Even the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on Ephesians 4:26 acknowledges that anger can be a good thing when justly directed. But Dreyer's Joan is the obedient Joan, severely abused without uttering an unkind glance. How much more appropriate would be a hint of hate or defiance. Andrea Dworkin, commenting on "Virginity" in her recent book *Intercourse*, a work which analyzes the oppression of woman in relation their role in sexual intercourse, notes the activity of Joan in contrast to the respectfully passive female:

*It is hard to believe that she did not kill; but whether she did or did not, she was an exemplary martial liberator – nearly unique in the iconography and history of the European female, that tamed and incomprehensibly peaceful creature.<sup>9</sup>*

dows, doors and passageways like faces. They stand expressing the loneliness of a desolate house and its strange inhabitants. The *Day of Wrath* (Vredens Dag, 1944) again takes up the oppression of women. Many mid-shot images occur with white faces against dark backgrounds similar to those in *The Parson's Widow*. Dreyer also used many mid-shots in *Ordet*, 1954, and *Gertrud*, 1964, reverting back to the style of his *The President*, neglecting the closeup in exchange for the use of dialogue. From the *Day of Wrath* onwards Dreyer, like Eisenstein after his *Alexander Nevsky*, 1938, departs from his formalist experiments in the fragmentation of characters and constructs images of characters who speak within their settings. The medium of the sound film allowed Dreyer's characters to say what they earlier expressed largely through their faces.

There is a marked development in Dreyer's use of the closeup in his silent films. He first used black masking to frame mid-shots of individual characters against backgrounds in *The President*. Characters' faces are more prominent in *Leaves of Satan's Book*, placed as they are against dark backgrounds. In *Michael* Dreyer offers images of eyes and foreheads, and of whole faces, which he has masked to the edge of the skin without even a hint of background, further isolating the face. In *The Passion of Joan of Arc* he develops his skills of isolating and fragmenting the face. He directed closeups of cropped faces and closeups of faces against white backgrounds. The human face fills the entire screen from edge to edge without any black masking, achieving a type of intimate imagery.

Dreyer's closeups in his *Passion of Joan of Arc* are not just technically more advanced than those in his earlier silent films. The closeup images of Falconetti as Joan are more expressive. The conclusion seems

#### Footnotes

1. See Mark Nash's *Dreyer* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), for an insightful psychological account of sexual politics of Dreyer's works.
2. Donald Skoller, editor, *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, translated by Gwen Morgan and Mari-Louise Penchoen (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), p. 27 and p. 28.
3. Skoller, *Dreyer in Double Reflection* p. 35.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The English Text of the Third Edition*, Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1958), p. 178e.
5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 40e, remark 220.
6. David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 211.
7. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 106-107.
8. Donald Skoller, *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, p. 47.
9. Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), p. 84.

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All film stills courtesy of the Film Stills Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Eugene Richards, from *Below the Line*

## DEFINING THE LINE

By Louis Dobay

*Below the Line: Living Poor in America*, photographs by Eugene Richards, were on view at HCP from March 17–April 23, 1989. Richards also participated in a symposium on social documentary photography, co-sponsored by HCP and the Glassell School of Art, on April 1, 1989. *Below the Line* has also been published by Consumers Union (Mount Vernon, New York: 1987).

Living poor in America is at once absurd and not without a shabby gentility, so one might infer from the faces of Eugene Richards' subjects in *Below the Line: Living Poor in America*. Richards' photographic reportage on the conditions of the working class relies heavily on the settings and images of Depression era documentary photography—gray, spoiled land and decaying dirt streets. But unlike the shocked and mournful faces of Depression era photography, here we see the faces of people who have adjusted to their surroundings, if only with cardboard and string.

The subjects were interviewed and speak conversationally about marriages, bad business, motherhood, fatherhood, being in the Navy, living in a shanty-town, etc. What is seen in their faces is given voice in their descriptions of living poor. One of the people living "below the line," Delia Milagros Torrez, says:

*In the coldest part of the winter, all kinds of people, homeless people, crowd in here to get off the streets. In summer, they can lay down anywhere. But when it gets down to zero and below, everyone knows they can come in here. The shacks don't have any heat, so we crowd together in the family house. We're all over each other, sleeping on top of each other to keep warm. This can get hard on me.*

The voices of the people describe the hazard and suffering of living poor. There is also a subtle turning of the view as to the capacities and strengths of "poor people." Ms. Torrez goes on to say,

*I get a lot of hassle from the men. They want to push that macho attitude on me, and they can't. That's one of the lessons that they learn here. That women have minds of their own and they're creative. They can build, they can do a lot of things. That's hard for them to accept.*

In this way a redemptive rather than a pathetic view of the photographs' subjects as individuals emerges.

Richards uses interviews to qualify the images, so that within this context we are allowed sight of intelligent, philosophical individuals reflecting on their experiences. Ms. Torrez, to be sure, is poor. She speaks of what is important to her as a woman, and in this, she shares the concerns, hopes, and insights of many, regardless of their circumstances. She does not define herself by the substance of her environment, but rather, by the quality of her dreams.

There is in this work, a feeling that these individuals are creatively engaged in the act of living. They do not appear archetypal, as two-dimensional Dickensian urchins. Materially impoverished, they are, in comparison to the dazed prosperous one finds in *Knott's Landing* or sees on the national news, at least understandable and direct. We can identify, if not with the impoverished surroundings, then with the individuals who carve a richly textured, human life out of that desert.

Richards' work, then, is less about poverty and more about the spiritual qualities of his subjects. It is the opposite of the kind of pristine architectural urban photography in which one often sees people that seem to blend in with the buildings as though they too were made of stone.

In this photography, the American poor of the eighties suffer, but manage. As horrible a realization as it may be, "poor" is now a class whose members have little choice but to make do with

the refuse of the "not poor." Our mock-revulsion at the idea that poverty is manageable to the poor, and "acceptable" to the "not poor" is undermined by these photographs. The question of relevance or effectiveness of social documentary photography is often posed in emotional terms—does it move its audience? But to show the condition of poverty as it really is, is perhaps a better basis of evaluation. The question implied by these photographs is, what does it mean to work and be poor; to be literate and poor; to be thoughtful, dignified, articulate, and yet, remain below the line.

Documentary social photography in the context of such pervasive and random poverty can serve little more than to familiarize those above the line with those below the line, the way a brochure explains the animals to the car passengers in the San Diego Zoo. If that is cruel, the premise that an intangible, ineradicable line separates poor and not poor so neatly is more than cruel. This work is not, then, primarily concerned with poverty as such. It is concerned, rather, with defining what lives "below the line"—and by implication, the line itself. It tells us that the line that may once have demarked a fluid, changing, "low" domain is now an unyielding impervious catch-all the height of a clothesline.

Richards' primary concern is to define just what poverty is now for those living below the line—but from the point of view of the people living in that state, not from the point of view of those living above the line. Richards' poverty is not horrible, neither is it graphic. It is instead delicate and oddly commonplace. This photography does not challenge its audience to empathy or some external act towards the poor.

The poverty we see is unusual to neither the poor nor those who view such squalor in galleries. Of vital interest to Richards is people. Richards' success, then, is not so much as a documentarian, but as a portraitist. To the extent that social documentary photography is about the times, how individual's lives are affected by the times in which they live, Richards has provided a portrait of individuals who live in poverty, but who, except for the line, are just like you and me. This is the poverty of the commonplace, rather than the exceptional or heroic. It is a poverty that can strike under ordinary circumstances. These individuals live in this state without a hope of ever leaving it. Richards gives us Gauguin's peasants recreated in the distant image of American plenty. It is a picture of what we have ended up with in spite of our best efforts. In this historical sense, it is ultimately a societal decay that Richards has pinpointed.

People below the line are the working poor who manage to survive somehow in the desert of America's industrial decline. And living below the line is a Sisyphean work performed against a backdrop not of hell, but rather, of the timeless twilight of American prosperity.

Louis Dobay has written for *Artspace*, *Artscene*, and *Public News*. He has recently moved back to Houston from New York, and he now works for Gulf Publishing Company.

## REACHING PLACES: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF RICHARD W. SCHAEFFER

By Roberto Cofresi

An exhibition installation of Richard W. Schaeffer's photographs was on view at the FotoFest gallery at the Four Seasons Hotel from May 12–July 15.

*Tell me thy place and I will tell thee what thou art.*

—paraphrase of a proverb by Miguel de Cervantes<sup>1</sup>

When on vacation we put aside our personalities that waver between work and play and become full time players. Sometimes we become familiars in a new place; we change ourselves, our attitude, mood, and manners to the point where we are no longer visitors but participants in the system of the place. A web of visiting spots covers the land; places where being a visitor is to participate in the system of the place: these are the places that become idealized in our minds—Disneyland, Las Vegas, the Rockies, The Caribbean, Rio de Janeiro, Fiji, ...Heaven.

Like photographs, visitors take on a passive attitude towards a place; our stay is temporary, so our selves don't find rewards in reformation. As visitors we look and record without affecting change. But while we are cumulative archives of our travels, photographs only capture one moment at one place. Still, the implied realism of a photograph can show us a place with an impact words can't match.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes they can show us places that we never even thought existed.

The exhibit installation of works by Richard W. Schaeffer at the Four Seasons Hotel can immediately be related to conventional exhibits in your neighborhood gallery. The photographs are window-matted, framed and hung evenly at a comfortable height; they are lit by ceiling spotlights, and the walls are painted a nondistracting tan color. One might initially notice that the sepia tone of the photographs, their silver frames and the tan color of the walls form a unified tonality throughout the gallery; but it is when we start to move from wall to wall that Richard Schaeffer's photographs, the FotoFest gallery, and the Four Seasons Hotel become physically and conceptually interwoven. They all come together then as a place, the exhibit as an installation. How do I as viewer and you as reader stand in relation to this place? Are we visitors? Do Schaeffer's photographs welcome us as visitors?

The images are grouped in walls according to subject. One of the two photographs on the first (introductory) wall shows a forest, a big tree close-up on the left with other trees fading back towards the distant mountains. Almost in the center, surprisingly and in a mysterious space, is a light switch. It is not embedded in the tree, but rather appears to float in front of it. The forest becomes a photomural with a light switch in the center. The other photograph shows a sign (about the same size as the light

switch) beyond which all we see is darkness, in front of it grass. The sign reads "possible sonic booms." With these photographs we are introduced to a paradoxical interaction of spaces; natural and man-made environments support each other in mysterious relationships. On one hand there is a warning about possible sound explosions that we won't hear in a landscape that we can't see. On the other hand we are offered a light switch that illuminates a forest and flattens it at the same time.

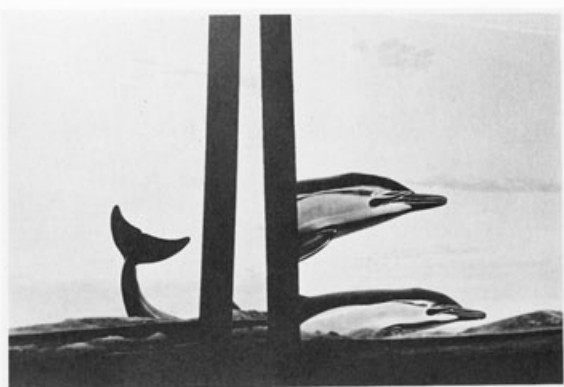
Through the next walls the paradoxes become more complex and fantastic. One wall shows white figures that appear animated in contrast to mysterious backgrounds: a close-up of a white foot looks monumental next to a tiny street light; another figure takes a backwards dive into a dark void. The images in this group remind me immediately of De Chirico's painting "Song of Love." De Chirico shows a white head reminiscent of Michelangelo's "David" and a giant red glove hanging from a freestanding wall; in front lies a green ball. To the left the background shows a distant city skyline, to the right a large building with tall archways. Even though De Chirico and Schaeffer rely on similar visual elements, the places they show us are essentially different. We experience the place in the painting as mediated by the person of the painter.

Photographs, on the other hand, struggle between inviting us to the place of the photograph or that of the photographer. Schaeffer relies on this tension to create a surreal environment, an environment in which the fantasy place is interlocked with the real one, so that being a visitor is not so much of a vacation any more.

On the next two walls animals and humans are, respectively, the central subjects. On the animal wall we see, among others, a monkey looking puzzled at a coil of cables as large as its head; a sea turtle flying up towards the ceiling of a plain-looking room (these rooms will appear more and more often as we move through the exhibit); two silver dolphins swimming in clear water divided by vertical black stripes that run through the image. In these images different proportions, places, and styles of representation are juxtaposed, increasingly moving us away from familiar places into more fantastic, surreal ones. The question of whether these are real animals or representations of them becomes difficult. The silver dolphins appear as active as the undersized monkey. In this context even a "realist" photograph of two turtles mating is difficult to pin down as "real": is it a photograph of a zoo, or a photograph of a page in a scientific book?

The humans in these images, on the other hand, are all drawn, sculpted, obviously appropriated, or collaged. The representations take on an increasingly animated attitude towards their environment: a drawn African man is spotlighted by tubular ceiling lights as he runs away from the wall, another man in golfing slacks dashes around a large antique vase; two large eyes look out of the wall as we look back at them. While the representations come alive, the minimal descriptive elements of the places (ceiling lights, vents, electric sockets, light switches) have started to





Richard Schaeffer

reflect our own space. The plain-looking rooms have given way to what look like exhibition spaces—spaces like the one where I as a viewer stand, spaces that you as a reader might “visit.”

On a separate wall two photographs serve as a conclusion to the exhibit. A factory worker turns a wheel on a machine, and a group of doctors are dressed and ready for surgery. The space is “realistic” and the places recognizable. But in the context of the previous images it is the gallery space itself that has become surreal, its proportions, its context, and its place. (Upon closer examination the worker image turns out to be a poster—one can see the creases where it folded. As to the doctors, I’m still debating whether they are waxed or real.)

Instead of being passive visitors at the gallery, Schaeffer’s photographs actively interact with the viewer’s environment. From wall to wall the juxtapositions in images become more fantastic, but instead of leading to a mysterious surreal world, the mysterious surreal world leads us back to our own space. The surrealism of Lewis Carroll’s Alice books or of Salvador Dali’s paintings, for example, rely on taking us to fantastic worlds where we find reflections of our own place. In Dali’s “Impressions of Africa” we see the back of a canvas on an easel; the painter behind reaches out to the viewer while behind him a fantastic landscape evolves. The painter’s gesture is at the same time a warning and an invitation. Schaeffer’s images are more like Rene Magritte’s, especially ones such as “La Condition Humaine 1 and 2.”<sup>16</sup> He brings the fantastic right into the space where we as viewers look at the photograph: “The ‘non-place’ emerges ‘in person.’”<sup>16</sup> While in Carroll’s and Dali’s work we are encouraged to be visitors, in Schaeffer’s the fantasy of visiting is itself offered to us as a present reality.

As I finish viewing the exhibition installation, an understanding emerges: it has its place, and I can visit it whenever I want. But as I turn to exit I find, towards the side of the main gallery space, and semi-hidden by a plant, a final wall, a sort of coda. It is squeezed in close to the glass that separates the gallery from the rest of the hotel so that one can either go outside and see the images through the glass or stand close to them in the narrow space between glass and wall. These are four “straight” photographs: a car inside the mouth of a bulldozer, an auditorium with geometric shapes carved into the back wall, four jars of chocolate-covered insects (ants, bees), and a drinking fountain in the corner of two walls decorated with bullet heads. The realism in these final pho-

tographs doesn’t keep them from showing fantastic juxtapositions of proportions (can a car really fit in the mouth of a bulldozer?), objects (where is it that they eat chocolate-covered insects?), and spaces (why should there be such a design on the back of an auditorium?). But as opposed to the other photographs in the gallery, these are free from the conflict between the photographer’s hand and the realism of the image; the surrealism is “real.” Looking at these last photographs, we are free to be visitors to the fantastic places they show us. Their place is not the gallery but the streets, rooms and shelves outside. These places are surreal galleries like the one on which we stand, where being a visitor is no easy task, *Believe it or Not.*

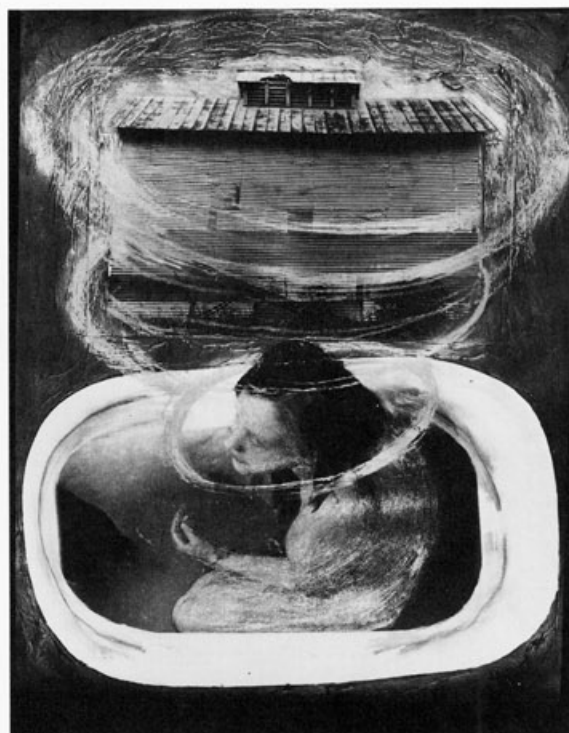
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After exiting the exhibit, sitting in the hotel lobby, I thought of Zecharia Sitchin’s book *The 12th Planet*, in which the metaphor of humans as visitors is taken to an extreme. Sitchin “conclusively validates” through archeological and historical research that civilization is the result of interbreeding between the cave dwellers of prehistoric times and the *Nefilim*, a civilized race from *Marduk*, the 12th planet. The belief that humanity is a race visiting our world, sustained through intense polemics of the “man-vs.-nature” type, is important to Schaeffer’s work. In the exhibit installation our desire to be visitors, first by going to the Four Seasons Hotel, then by entering the gallery, and then by looking at surreal imagery, is constantly thwarted. Sitting outside the gallery as I write this, I begin to notice the lobby of the hotel. The ceiling lights are similar to many of the ones in the Schaeffer photographs. Electric sockets and light switches jump out from the walls around me. Representations of flowers cover the carpet and chairs, and some real plants fill a garden. And on a table nearby a sculpture of a lion proudly stands as if keeping guard. In our age of large oil spills, overwhelming pollution, and increasing environmental conflict, we increasingly realize that other places are our own—that we all live in one place. After Schaeffer’s exhibition I sensed that the people walking past and I became part of the place, not just visitors in it. At the Four Seasons Hotel I felt at home.

## Footnotes

1. What Cervantes said was, “Tell me thy company and I will tell thee what thou art.”
2. As digital processes become more common, the implied realism of photography might give way to labels similar to those used for books and films: fiction, non-fiction, documentary, feature, etc.
3. Reproduced in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism* (New York: Barron’s Press, 1978), plate 25.
4. Reproduced in Ades, plate 50.
5. Reproduced in Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), plates 2 and 27.
6. See Foucault, p. 41. James Harkness, the volume’s editor and translator, comments that “Foucault seems to be contrasting the ‘non-place’ of mystery to the ‘common place’ of ‘ordinariness.’”
7. Zecharia Sitchin, *The 12th Planet* (New York: Avon Books, 1976).

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Lynda Frese, *Halo*, 1989 (photo-collage and painting)

## BEYOND PERMISSION

By Anne H. Roberts

Beyond Permission, an exhibition of works by Gregory Davis, Lynda Frese, Gordon Holler, Kim Mosley, Charles Schorre, and Kim Stringfellow, was shown at HCP from April 28, June 11, 1989. The show was curated by Geoffrey Brune and R. Lynn Foster.

Conscious Art, by Erik Moore, was shown at the same time in HCP’s Gallery X.

*Beyond Permission* could be retitled as “permission to be intimate, self-revealing, and expressive.” Curators Geoffrey Brune and R. Lynn Foster report in the catalog accompanying the exhibit that they looked for work which had been manipulated throughout the imagemaking process, which looked “beyond the documentary, beyond the act of recording, to construct evidence of fabricated realities and narratives of myth.” While the unique eye of the photographer is recognized as highly personal regardless of its mechanical/technical qualities, this personal expression seems more obvious in mixed-media and painterly photography. Away from the darkroom, in contemplation of the event that sparked the documentation, these artists edit and make additions to compose a more multi-sided picture of the memory.

The brooding landscapes of Lynda Frese prove the strength of painterly additions as an amplifier of personal expression. The atmosphere of the bayous of her Louisiana home combined with her California painting background to infuse these photographs with an almost palatable sense of place. Each begins with a photographed diptych, one black and white photograph mounted above another, often upside down. She then adds a subtle overpainting of greys and

whites to one particularly strong group of related images:

“Lighthouse 88,” “Measurement 88,” “River Styx 89,” and “Fold 88.” “Lighthouse” depicts a man partially submerged in water combined with soaring architectural elements, evoking man’s feeling of transition from humble beginnings to abstract thought, even spirituality. “Fold” continues these ideas with shapes not unlike amoebas or first lifeforms surmounted by a photograph of sky/texture and voids. Subtle color activates “Levee Crossing,” where a levee with silvered, spiked plants forms the roots of a wine-red veined onion. The top picture also contains other foliage with a wooden chair. In the center of the picture is a painted gold mass. This textured deposit extends the levee’s light and relates to the idea of the earth’s creative beginning from light itself. All the work in the installation emphasizes these ideas of primal beginnings, all life flowing from watery, swampy roots.

Frese’s pieces with feminist themes continue an interesting contrast of textures, but too many bosoms, overt reds and membrane-like forms seem, for her ability, a tired imagery.

Small textural photographs are only a starting point for the abstract collages of Houston artist Charles Schorre. *Pages from Books Unpublished* is an ongoing series of some 20 years, utilizing photographs, new paintings and drawings, and his own appropriated images, all with their unconscious relation to his large abstract canvases. Star maps, earth/desert textures, bird or angel’s wings, and nudes are a few of these current concerns.

Some 15 years ago Schorre spent time in Arabia on a grant, and it continues to influence his work. No doubt in the desert, starry skies are dominant, contrasting with subtle earth tones or oasis-like intense blues and greens. “#292” combines the texture of a photograph of wind-etched rocks with circular motifs repeated in swirling painted sand. “#412” relies on the colors in the

original photograph being repeated in watercolor, making the transition from photograph to painting very fluid, total-encompassing all the mystery and beauty of nature. "#280," of the same time group, 1986-87, shows a dialogue between the hot, yellow-ochre land and its yellow-brown snakes, with the cool mauves of caves and mysterious paintings. Schorre creates these unusually bright colors by a special aging process which not only produces unique color, but also takes the paint back to its roots in nature.

The series with nudes, bird wings, turbulent skies with their bright purples, mauves, and dramatic deep blues, often becomes too busy and obscures the possible Renaissance-inspired, mythic meaning. The best of the nudes are ones done in tones of greys, with black and white photography, as in "#230," where a partially covered nude stands opposite a drawn, highlighted symbol or map, evoking tattoos, earth line drawings or even etched cave markings.

If Schorre's work is highly refined and colorful, Gregory Davis's is the more fragmentary pages of a journal. With large areas of unused white space, xeroxed reproductions, and amateurish snapshots, these pages seem as intimate and immediate as drawings, forming a narrated memory of childhood.

The carefully balanced works are very pale, images small as the memories they celebrate, like a scrapbook, where fragments are rich with meaning, implied and understood: a turquoise-blue velvet hat, a sketch of a baseball glove, a faint page from a yearbook, and a diving, blindfolded boy with a hint of the future soldier. "After the Game" is an altered color photo of a boy and fence which incorporates the idea of sun, heat, remembrance. Another obscured photo shows what is possibly the entrance to the football field. The text remembers one perfect moment—an 11-year-old boy walking home, wishing things would always stay the same. A diagonal is drawn through image and off the page, then rephotographed. This further removal from the actual event, though only a mechanical process, allows the overall picture to include not only the emotional moment but also the eye/mind's peripheral fragments.

Gordon Holler trained as a painter, and his large photographic screenprints with their pastel coloration include elements of performance and printmaking. They resemble a story board idea or stills from a movie drama. Holler makes only 20 large prints from each negative, and says that each is treated differently according to random differences which occur in each print.

The best pictures show a dramatic tension with figures poised against a background of strong diagonals. They utilize a scene-of-the-crime graininess and pale colors, showing two or three figures in some sort of potentially violent event. In "#66, Advancing Figure #4," a large, grey-blue figure faces another figure, partially obscured, possibly nude. It's a strong scene of waiting, blocked action. Figure series #61, "Falling Figure," in greys and light blues, has one man falling from a car while another tries to help or pushes him out—all this in front of the diagonals of city

buildings. Contrasting color adds drama to #50, "Running Figure," with bright white illuminating and obscuring the figure on the ground, while another in heavy boots, outlined with dark browns and siennas, walks away. Again the strong diagonals of the hazard signs contribute to the drama by blocking the background and adding a symbol of tension.

Performance, usually site-specific, is also important in the work of artist Kim Mosley. Mosley vowed to have 15 "experiences" during his 75-hour trip to Houston. His photo-narratives function as a kind of diary, in colorful comic-book style, with the artist taking the hero-figure role. After-the-fact editing, compiling, and "musings" are very important to this work. More than random recollections, these essays focus on Mosley's almost manic ability to process information. The resulting photo-essays (emphasis on essay) utilize puns, *double entendre*, and unusual juxtapositions of ideas and image. The pieces are very busy, kinetic, as if the viewer followed Mosley around the city, listening to his reactions and stories. This presence of the artist's personality as well as his self-portrait in each piece, "a la Lucas Samaras, is like a one-man drama by a famous raconteur.

Often Mosley combines too many unrelated experiences and subjects in one piece, so the result is confusing. Perhaps there were enough experiences to make more pieces, or some judicious editing could remove sections too cute or direct. "Peace (sic) #14" was less filled with writing and seemed to have photographs grouped around one subject. Yolanda's beauty salon, with a pet shop, parrots and a rodeo cat, the artist in a red shirt, an ever-present freeway, and ornate red and snake cowboy boots compose a picture of the impact of Hispanic culture on Houston.

There is also a southwestern/Hispanic influence in the portrait/shrine constructions of Kim Stringfellow. Each colored portrait (one red, one blue, and one orange and brown) shares an equal space with a carefully constructed found-object shrine or altar. The problem occurs not with the interesting portraits, which combine an unusual use of color and subject-to-background geometrics, but rather in making a connection to the religious icons. The most successful is "Shrine #3" where an antique light fixture and drapery form the background for a hazy figure in the blurred foreground, pensive, perhaps thinking of a memory. It's the *memento mori* combination which doesn't connect in the intended way, perhaps because the subjects of the portraits are too young or not Hispanic. Generally something this well-crafted speaks of a serious subject. If it's early death, it just didn't translate.

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Also religious in intended message is the installation of Erik Moore's huge portraits in the small Gallery X space. While *Conscious Art* could have used a trusted friend's editing of the number of pieces included, the black walls, ceiling and floor are very effective for setting off the life-like photographs—almost like a performance. Moore includes a rather self-important "Warning"



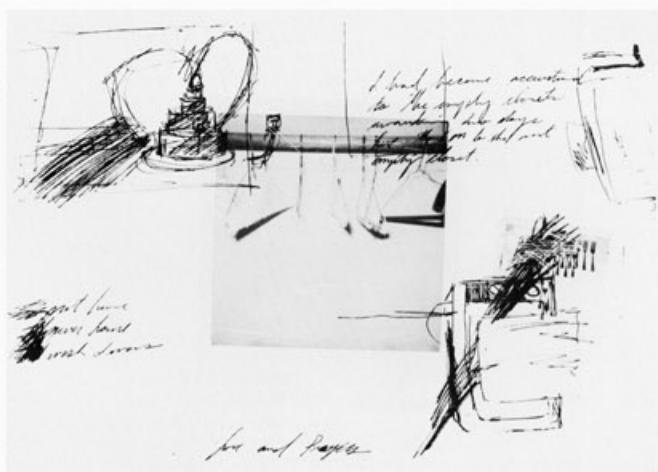
Gordon Holler, Figure Series #56, Two Figures, 1980

catalog; he basically thinks Christian imagery is an archetype in our Western culture, with the idea of sacrifice still an important part of everyman's sense of self.

One of the most powerful pieces is "Saint Peter on the Cross," where a life-sized man hangs upside down in a crucified position. The lightly stuffed and three-dimensional figure against its dark background is very startling. Equally arresting is "St. Stephen," lying on the floor, surrounded with real and photographed rocks. Moore would like to relate these pieces of martyrdom to some obscure contemporary ideas, but just how is not defined. Actually the models are rather Anglo-Saxon, upper-middle class, and look to young to be in this situation.

The same problem infuses "The Great God AM" which is a dramatic piece, forcing the viewer to look inside its small triangular opening to see a greatly enlarged triangle symbol from the dollar bill. In other words, an ancient symbol is part of our currency; therefore admittedly very relevant, but in what way? Less relevant are the images of arrow-pierced bodies, perhaps a little redundant; again some editing could have helped the main pieces have more impact. The Gallery X space serves its well-intended purpose with this installation. It creates more ideas than it resolves, but conveys a good sense of Moore's photographs as work-in-progress (which I hope is what they are).

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Gregory Davis, Love and Prayers, 1989

Charles Schorre





# LUKEWARM, HOT, AND COOL

By Joan Seeman Robinson

The 1988 HCP Fellowship Exhibition of works by the award winners, R. Lynn Foster, Paul Vincent Kuntz, and Liz Ward, was held at HCP from June 16 - July 30, 1989.

First you encounter Liz Ward's revolving display rack, then Paul Vincent Kuntz's photoessays on life in the Third Ward, and back in the corner there's a room full of R. Lynn Foster's "prostitute altars." On turning around you see big blue eyes watching you; more of Ward's installation. It's all a little bit like going to Guy's News on South Main, one of the best magazine emporiums I know of. Their magazine racks rotate too, you have your choice of periodicals on almost any topic, and when you finally work your way to the back of the store you're within earshot of the heavy breathers on the other side of a barrier, looking at X-rated magazines. Little wonder that when I got the the rear of the HCP's 1988 Fellowship Exhibition, I passed two middle-aged ladies moving quickly past Foster's cubicle, gasping with distaste, saying they didn't want to see such stuff. No, thanks!

Of the three, Kuntz works in the most familiar genre, out of a modest wish to do a historical recording of life in the low-income Third Ward, the "bot-toms" area around Sampson and Elgin streets. There are three series represented here: patrons in the Hot Torch restaurant and poolroom, the owner and kids at the Sun Down Low Rider Bicycle Shop, and another on trainees working out at the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association. The restaurant facade and one interior wall are photographed frontally, creating neat rectilinear patterns, and the diners, pool players, and a dishwasher are each represented alone, creating a quiet mood. But in some of these Kuntz puts his camera at table-top height, distorting the foregrounds: condiments loom large, and pool balls fly forward with threatening speed. It's gimmicky and distracting, as if he's not quite sure of his quieter voice or the ability of subtle details to carry an equally dramatic weight.

Much more successful are the cluttered dynamics of the outdoor bicycle shop where wheels of all sizes suggest spin-offs in every direction. The rapt concentration of neighborhood kids, who are earnestly intent on making things work, is captured naturally here. Wheels and gears, frames and chains are staggered every which way, creating a transparent webbing within which the boys' bodies are bent as they reassemble this stuff. This is *real* recycling—these are mechanical challenges, thrifty necessities, cultural imperatives!

In contrast, R. Lynn Foster's *Prostitute Altars* are intended to be confrontational and to assault any viewer's sense of propriety. These are large, clumsily worked and cumbersome constructions of aluminum and plex, framing black and white photographs of naked whores who are staring right back



Liz Ward, *The Tree of Knowledge*, 1989 (toned cyanotype)

at us. Overall, these big objects are like doorways whose peep-holes have been jettisoned for quicker access to their tricks. Hustlers like these are in a hurry; the bottom line is on the bed and their scores turn profits only if the turnover is rapid. Foster has installed them in cheap "chapels," like rooms along a corridor. The frames around them are emblazoned with glowing neon labels reading "TRICK," "MARY," and "Border Crossing." These women are the avid antitheses and mocking underworld counterparts of respectable madonnas, whose opposite virtues would be purity, constancy, and maternal nurturance.

"TRICK" is a belly-length close-up of a broad-bosomed dyed-blond who is wearing a grin. Her body gleams wetly. The trick is on us: She's not a woman. This isn't a groin shot, and that's the secret the photographer is withholding from us. Dark-haired "MARY" sits spread-legged at "some distance from the camera. Foster wants to include the empty white areas of the rooms—its walls, the headboard, the tautly stretched sheets. The "Border crossing" blonde lies on her belly, stiletto heels at one edge and a messy dressing table at the other.

But what they all share is layers of grime. Their faces are mask-like, caked with chalky makeup—sooty eyes and blackened mouths. The only real color in these black and white tableaux is in the attached neon signs advertising their fictitious identities. It's the details they're embedded in that give them away: really dirty rags and towels strewn on the floors and the bed, and the smears and the cracks on the walls.

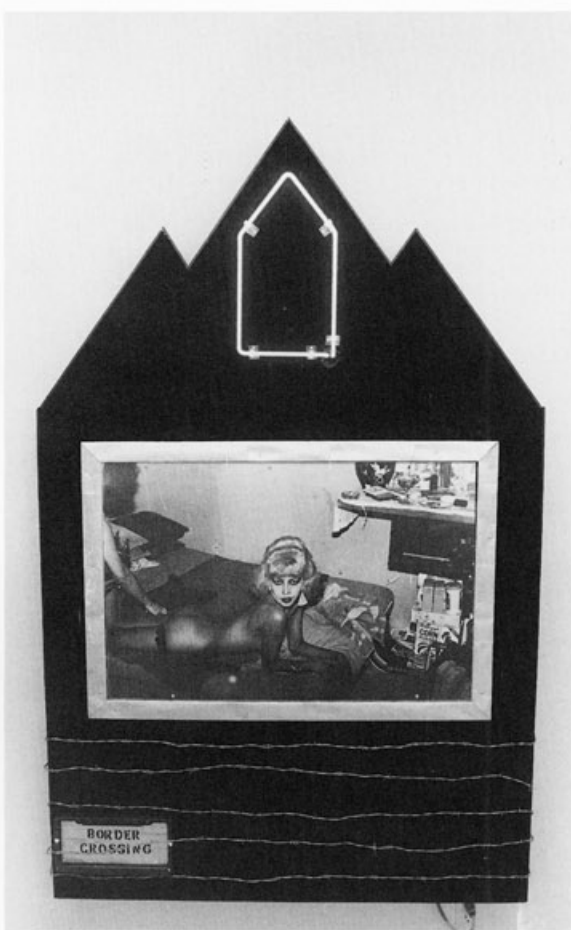
Foster uses a flash for illumination. The girls don't seem sexy or particularly erotic, the images aren't tantalizing or very pornographic. These are dark places,

the rooms are like cells. This is just a waaay low-down life. The only intercourse intimated here lies in the exchange between them and the work of the photographer. And Foster knows the photohistory of prostitution, paying homage in a smaller, additional series called "Sacred Prostitutes" to those nineteenth-century postcards which were used for erotic stimulation, including one sassy image in the "little girl" category.

Liz Ward's two installations, by comparison, look refined, cool, and elegant. She has a panoptical vision which scans purportedly random ideas, and then she asks how we process the information she provides us—both visually and mentally. How do we think about what we see? She's represented here by two projects, the *Tree of Knowledge* and *Trompe l'oeil*, in which she prints over texts, using the cyanotype process, creating overlays on top of pictorial images and words. For the *Tree* the basis is pages from the *Golden Home and High School Encyclopedia*, and for *Trompe l'oeil* it's a braille edition of Webster's *Student Dictionary*. Thus she's using as her "canvas" categories of knowledge, as well as definitions of the words used to convey all that knowledge. The *Tree of Knowledge* requires sight in order to be read, but its legibility is obscured by overprinting.

*Trompe l'oeil* requires touch in order to be read, but it's impeded by covers of glass. In both cases we experience sensory deprivations, making us even more aware of our dependence on our own sensory apparatuses as well as on language systems, in order first to apprehend and then to interpret the world around us.

The *Tree* is a revolving metal book rack whose baskets hold acrylic-framed pages which are overprinted with large leaves. It's like a *Tree of Life*, in form, as



Lynn Foster, *Border Crossing*, 1989

well. Book pages of course are literally made of the bodies of trees; they are a kind of "fruit." Ward claims to be providing randomly selected categories of "knowledge," but review some of these entries and then reflect on the associations they call up: "air, gravity, crystalline structure, plants, and the North Pole." Then shuffle them into these additional headings: "airplanes, bombs, the Dred Scott decision, artificial respiration." And look back at the leaf shapes, which we now see are just voided areas around which light sensitized paper gives them their definitive contours.

In *Trompe l'oeil*, blue eyes and blue hands, which are "signing"

tating between a self-conscious straining for pleasing formal arrangements, a reserve about engaging with his human subjects, and an inclination to infuse them with some kind of characteristic action. R. Lynn Foster's presentation tricks—the great big photographs and the clunky metal frames—I find effective. The girls' come-on is made more immediate but it's also more depressing. These encounters aren't romanticized, and these cats really do look caged. Liz Ward's reserve, by comparison, makes us aware of our own sensory selves. She prompts us to reevaluate our relationship to the world, and to realize how nuanced and complex this interdependence really is.



Paul Vincent Kuntz, *Sundown Low Rider Bicycle Shop*, 1987, from the series *Inside Houston's Third Ward*

words for the blind, are printed over braille-punched papers. Each is framed in small format and then arranged like blinking, intermittent glances over two adjacent gallery walls. Only the sighted can see them, and they remind us once again that many cannot hear language at all and must depend upon a manual structure for the spoken word.

To sum up, I think that Paul Vincent Kuntz's focus isn't clear enough yet. He seems to be hesi-

By David Lazar

*Exiles* by Josef Koudelka, with  
 Essay by Czeslaw Milosz. New  
 York: Aperture, 1988.  
 Unpaginated, 61 plates, \$39.95.

*Personal Exposures* by Elliott  
 Erwitt. New York, W. W. Norton  
 & Co., 1988. 255 pages, 240  
 duotone photographs, \$60.00.

Looking at Elliott Erwitt's retrospective book, entitled *Personal Exposures*, and Josef Koudelka's second book of photographs, *Exiles*, illuminates the differences between the natures and tones of alienation born of political exile, in Koudelka's case, and the mostly milder expression of cultural and political criticism of Erwitt. In some ways they demonstrate the distinction between the expatriate and the refugee.

Erwitt's early life is not dissimilar to Koudelka's experience. He came to the United States from Italy as a boy, in the late 1930's, with his Russian Jewish father. His mother, of Eastern Orthodox background, joined them later in Southern California. Erwitt is not an expatriate proper, but the majority of his photographs are European, on assignment in the



Elliott Erwitt, U.S.A. 1964

earlier work, and on his many peregrinations later on. Perhaps these baroque combinations contribute much to Erwitt's sense of serendipity. The photographs are frequently delightful and often whimsical. Many have entered the mid-to-late century repertory and are well-disseminated. Erwitt is an ironist, best when darkest, but with no cold eye. At his worst, he is a humorist, registering contrasts that are too obvious, too flaccid. His spectrum is the visual equivalent of Mark Twain. Two photographs illustrate this range. In "East Hampton, New York, 1983," an art class sketches a

lame anti-intellectualism.

On the other hand, Erwitt's revelations of barking at the dogs in his pictures, or honking his pocket horn at subjects, are delightfully open challenges to documentary purity.

Erwitt's dogs provide a running commentary, comic relief from the obliviousness of the human subjects they contrast with. One snarls on the lap of a complacent matron in Brighton, a beagle turns in disgust from a carcass hanging in a butcher shop in Saint Tropez, another refuses to yield to the cheesecake cheerfulness of an American family. As

somehow life-affirming. The young man and woman will fade, but they retain their dignity.

Most of Erwitt's human subjects fall into three categories: slightly foolish-looking Americans; European working classes, beleaguered and surviving, seemingly vestigial; and vapid European exhibitionists and/or hedonists. Erwitt maintains his distance from all of these. When he captures what are essentially foibles, the dispassion works against him, the satire not sharp enough. But, again, Erwitt has produced work which far exceeds these categories and limitations.

Elliot Erwitt's retrospective is well-earned. If not deserving of the highest laurels, it is nevertheless a distinguished, sometimes superlative body of work. In tandem with Koudelka, it suffers, and this is not completely fair. But I kept wondering what Erwitt would have produced if his escape to the West had been on different terms, his obsessions and his roving more desperate or driven. We should be grateful for his more or less benign vision, while we are reminded of the urgency that historical and political necessity can create or deny.

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Josef Koudelka has been living in the West since 1970, first in England, then France, where he has resided since 1980. He left his native Czechoslovakia after having published, in the West, a celebrated series of photographs covering the death of Prague Spring. His work is stunningly beautiful, grainy shadow-filled shots that express a vision of alienation that is nowhere arch, but on the contrary deeply involved in the enigmatic symbolism of gesture and ritual. The reconciliation of compassion and mystery—a condition which sounds more awkward verbally than Koudelka's visual unification—distinguishes these photographs.

Whereas Erwitt's tableaux tend to be close-ended (at their worst the essence of a joke, a punchline), Koudelka's work is highly poetic, his style a language not easily paraphrased.

The alienation at the heart of *Exiles* is a kind of yearning. A boy sensually embraces the pacific statue of the Madonna while Jesus is nailed to the cross, looking up at the two. Some pages earlier a prostrate turtle lies dead in an indeterminately hostile landscape. What would be ironic in direct contrast—the kind that Erwitt seeks out in his arrangements—is softened by the distance almost to the point of a subliminal relationship, never threatening to assume too clearly the nature of the contrast. Through such discretion in the arrangements, *Exiles* achieves a unity all too rare in photographic books. The connections between photographs are possibilities that encourage our own yearning. Hope and despair hang in the balance.

Such is the case with "France, 1975." A child sleeps in a wicker carrying-crib, a basket in other words, in a drab alley by a partially visible doorway. If the crib is a basket, what then is the alley but urban bullrushes. With the basket in the foreground and a trace of water by some garbage cans in the background, the basket almost seems to move toward us, heightening the allusion. But this is suggested, not insistently or necessar-

ily. Neither does the photograph demand social commentary. The child is, after all, by a door, possibly open, and is not necessarily an image of abandonment. Nor is the alley so squalid as we may first be conditioned to think. This is what I mean by irony than turns, by tone that is open, but not neutral.

Koudelka shares Erwitt's fascination with dogs, but these animals share the physical conditions of people—two are haunted and hungry-looking—in a misery that is particularly theirs. Their otherness is respected; they aren't anthropomorphic vehicles for suggested readings of human absurdities, which is not to suggest that such use is undecidable, but is more predictable. In "France, 1987," a black dog prowls the center foreground at the end of a long wide causeway in a park. It is in motion over an open grate. Nearly a silhouette, its personality is subsumed by a kind of wanton hunger, but it is not an abstraction. In the left background, a man stands still in his own distant exigency. They are not quite impenetrable. Both are driven by desire, and the photograph takes on the brooding tone of an essay on kinds of hunger.

Koudelka's photographs are often like *film noir* (which is quite Catholic in sensibility: the focus on sin, stark black and white, pure and fallen women, confession . . .), with no literal deaths but those of the spirit, certainly no big payoffs. Disintegration coalesces into shadows, the ghosts of souls torn away from communal life, but not out of choice or hope for gain as in Hollywood's dark and conservative cautionary tales. Koudelka's sensibility is decidedly Eastern European. The photographs are almost exclusively from Western Europe, but the ambience invokes the desultory images of Communist bloc countries we are used to, a challenge to the West's consumerist propaganda.

As a literal exile—homelessness internationalized—Koudelka understands the metaphorical implications of this condition. Exile is the state of isolation from one's own culture; one need not be unable to go home again to experience alienation from the grammar of an integrated existence.

Josef Koudelka begins to sound unremittably glum. But there is wit and occasional joy in his work, such as in the *zofig* couple wading in Spain, veering recklessly through knee-deep water, and an eye for the the terrible beauties of landscape and suffering faces that transcend specific boundaries and offer hope through recognition.

As Czeslaw Milosz says in his Introduction, "On Exile," "the only remedy against the loss of orientation is to create anew one's own North, East, West, and South, and posit in that new space a Witebsk or a Dublin elevated to the second power. What has been lost is recuperated on a higher level of vividness and presence." In finding his loss endemic, Koudelka forces our dark self-recognition among the community outcasts.

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Josef Koudelka, France 1987

female model. The catch: the model is clothed, the students naked. The comedy, or absurdity, if one shares in Erwitt's sense of it, is built-in. He clearly finds the situation amusing, but, despite his title, does not manage to personalize this exposure. It is rather facile.

More trenchant, less "funny," and highly relevant at the moment, is a photograph of a man on the beach in "New York City, 1975." His head is obscured by a flapping American flag, and his hands are cushioned on bloated hips. His breasts are ample. This is comic, but a more cutting comedy, an explicit criticism of the fatuousness of American complacency and self-representation. We see a vision of grotesque prosperity and sexless self-satisfaction.

Erwitt's own self-representation in the introduction to his book is occasionally refreshing, though not quite as often as he believes. His off-the-cuff, shotgun bad-Hemingway prose, the pose of regular guy who happens to be an artist but doesn't want to be mistaken for an *artiste*, sounds disingenuous at times and leads to some unfortunate statements. He says, "Some people say my pictures are sad, some think they're funny. Funny and sad, aren't they really the same thing?" Well, no. Or: "I certainly don't use those funny words museum people and art critics like." I can appreciate a good harangue against intellectual obtuseness, but this is rather

commentary these are ephemeral fun to look at. But when Erwitt isolates the dogs and gives them their day, their dogginess transcends mere whimsical doggerel. "Puerta Vallarta, 1973," a fascinating *menage à trois* of dogs, displays their uncoordinated social responses, poised between pawprints in the sand. This interaction is more disorienting and more interesting, while ironically more familiar, that the dog's eye-view of humans that Erwitt is fond of.

Strangely, it seems to me than many of Erwitt's least "typical" photographs are his most effective. The long-shot of a dog on a dirt road which leads to a backdrop of monolithic high-rise apartment buildings in Brasilia, for example. Or a bird in flight, the only living thing on a side street of Orleans. One wishes that a man who can capture scenes so eerily tense and compelling, so full of restraint and incipient feeling as the photograph of a man and his son at table, the boy's arms wrapped around the man's, an obscured older woman's face in the right foreground watching them ("Wyoming, 1954"), would yield less to light fare, and would understand that his distinctive style does not require such broad strokes. His photographs are more startling individually, as a consequence. His shot of a young couple intensely conversing between rows of mummified remains in Guanajuato is both horrifying and



# RECYCLED ANSEL ADAMS

By Stanley L. Moore

*Manzanar* by John Armor and Peter Wright. Commentary by John Hersey, Photographs by Ansel Adams. New York: Times Books, 1988, 167 pp. \$27.50.

*The Mural Project* by John Armor and Peter Wright. Photography by Ansel Adams. Santa Barbara, CA: Reverie Press, 1989, 112 pp. \$34.95.

Ansel Adams: Letters and Images 1916-1984. Edited by Mary Street Alinder and Andrea Gray Stillman. Boston: Little, Brown and Company (New York Graphic Society) 1988, 402 pp. \$50.00.

Ansel Adams, arguably the greatest of American landscape photographers, continues to excite the interest of the public. His work spanned sixty-eight years and involved all manner of photography: portrait, commercial, editorial, government service, and documentary, as well as his more widely known fine art landscapes. Additionally he kept up a lively correspondence with dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people until his death. Three recent books, *Manzanar*, *The Mural Project*, and *Letters*, give an inside look at some of his less well-known work, as well as a peek into his personality. The *Manzanar* work is Adams' only essay into documentary photography. It looks at the lives of Americans of Japanese descent who were imprisoned in concentration camps due to war hysteria and racism. The mural project was intended to provide large-scale photos of Western national parks for the Department of the Interior's museum in Washington, D. C., but was never completed. Finally, the letters are a collection of Adams' correspondence for many years, along with a number of photographs.

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In March 1942, a little over three months after America's entry into World War II, the government posted Civilian Exclusion Orders which interned approximately 125,000 people of Japanese ancestry who lived in the western United States. Seventy percent of these were actually native-born citizens. The remaining 37,500 would have been citizens had they been permitted to apply.

Anti-Asian prejudice had earlier reduced the inflow of Japanese, particularly unskilled laborers, and by 1924 all such immigration and naturalization had been forbidden. Against this latent bias came the shock of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The rapid gains made by the Imperial armies frightened all Americans, but especially those on the Pacific coast. A few false alarms of Japanese attacks and bogus submarine sightings inflamed the populace against the "yellow menace." This emotion, instead of being soothed by responsible leaders, was actually exacerbated by the commanding officer of the Western Defense Command, Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt. DeWitt



Ansel Adams, Tom Kobayashi, from *Manzanar*

was openly racist. He seems to have been a man of limited intelligence and overheated imagination who had an exaggerated idea of his authority over civilian populations. DeWitt began to agitate for mass relocation of the Nisei (as the first-generation American citizens were known).

Interestingly, more conservative members of the government (notably Attorney General Nicholas Biddle) opposed the suspension of habeas corpus while the more liberal officials pushed the idea. In any case, for many reasons, outlined very ably in John Hersey's essay in *Manzanar*, "A Mistake of Terrifically Horrible Proportions," these people were shipped off to several concentration camps well away from the west coast. Manzanar, located in Inyo County, California, not far from Yosemite National Park, was one of these.

At its height, Manzanar held over 10,000 people under crowded conditions in tar-paper-covered shacks on a desolate plain surrounded by mountains. Here the Nisei made themselves a community with churches, schools, sports teams, clinics, and even a newspaper. They accepted their imprisonment reasonably well and made the best of their situation.

Ansel Adams was an acquaintance of Ralph Merritt, the camp director at Manzanar, and he accepted Merritt's invitation to photograph the settlement in 1943. Restrictions on his photography kept Adams from showing the barbed wire and guard towers, so that these pictures give an idealized view of life in the camp. Nevertheless the photographs also imply a constricted and regimented existence. There are many formal and informal portraits which are mostly upbeat, with just a few depicting sorrow or helplessness. "Tom Kobayashi" on page 136 shows a man in profile facing left; the edge of a cornfield is stretching back towards steeply rising mountains. The photo is made from a low angle and emphasizes Kobayashi's somber expression as he has turned away from the field of growing food and towards the desert with its immovable mountains.

Many photographs show Nisei at work and play or at home, while a few are mainly scenic big sky and mountain pictures with the camp only providing foreground elements. Ansel Adams published many of these photographs in *Born Free and Equal* (1944) which was ill-received, occasioning some public book burnings; so he relinquished the copyright to the book and donated the negatives to the Library of Congress to await a more favorable time.

With the recent token compensation given by Congress to the Nisei, this book is timely and gives an opportunity to see an aspect of Adams' work which has been relatively unknown. The text by Armor and Wright complements Hersey's essay well, giving a more complete look at life at Manzanar. The book has a horizontal format, with the text shifted to the right, and it uses Japanese characters as design elements (with a glossary in the back); these features, along with its exceptional photographic reproduction, make *Manzanar* a treat to read. They also make the serious content more accessible, and thus all the more horrifying.



Ansel Adams, Navaho Woman and Infant, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona (from *The Mural Project*)

Unfortunately, Peter Wright and John Armor's other book, *The Mural Project*, does not fare as well as *Manzanar*. Ansel Adams maneuvered Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes into commissioning him to photograph the national park system with a view to producing monumental murals for a Department of the Interior museum. These were to complement painted murals, which were much in vogue in the 1930's and early 40's. Adams eagerly sought this commission not only to get his work seen by many people, but also to receive a stipend as a consultant—\$22.22 per day as well as four cents car mileage, train fares, expenses, film and supplies. He began traveling and photographing in the late summer of 1941, going to Grand Canyon, Carlsbad Caverns, Yellowstone, and various other parks as well as to visit Indians on their reservations. World War II brought an early end to this project and for various reasons (among them probably Adams' own reluctance to continue) it was not taken up in the post war era.

By the end of 1942, Adams had sent 225 photographs to the Department of the Interior while

retaining the negatives (which have since been lost) at Yosemite in a vault. Wright and Armor located the prints in the National Archives and have published them here along with excerpts from various speeches, books, and papers by Theodore Roosevelt. Since these texts do not fit well with the pictures, they appear to have been added as an afterthought. For example, a Roosevelt statement on forest preserves heads the chapter on Carlsbad Caverns. The authors state that the reproduction is in Adams' mature style, with high contrast, etc. This is a defect rather than a virtue. Of course it is difficult to envision the pictures as gigantic murals by looking at small reproductions, but many of them look exceedingly dark. Several of the photographs look familiar, as Adams also made personal negatives that differed only slightly from the government work, but some images are interesting only because of their departure from what is considered his usual style.

The Carlsbad Caverns photographs, being artificially lit at unusual angles, restricted Adams to renditions that are much more abstract than the bulk of his work. "The Rock of Ages, Big Room" (page 62) is almost Siskind-ish in aspect. Large areas of black which are either foreground formations, background

voids, or shadows from extreme side lighting give an otherworldly effect. The chapter on Southwestern Indians has photographs of churches and adobe ruins, together with some self-conscious portraits of Native Americans. The ruins and churches, like "Church, Ancoma Pueblo," page 32, are photographed from low angles, making them seem monumental and awesome (though this might be a constraint of the intention to enlarge these images to wall size).

A little tighter editing overall would have been in order in this book. The Grand Canyon images are too similar (see, e.g. pages 10 and 12). Inexcusably, one image is reproduced twice, "Ancoma Pueblo, New Mexico," on both page 33 and page 82. This book is disappointing for dark reproduction, poor editing, and the sentimentality of 19th century text which should have been omitted. It may have been better to have let these pictures sleep in the archives or else to have produced them as murals, as originally intended. But if you are an Ansel Adams addict, these hidden photos will probably divert you for an hour.

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A much longer diversion awaits those who tackle *Letters and Images*. Beginning when he was 14 years old, in 1916, and ending shortly before his death in 1984, these letters outline Ansel Adams' life in an intensely personal way. The by now almost lost art of letter writing (which might revive via the otherwise pernicious fax machine) was in considerable vogue throughout the 19th century and first half of this one. Such letters can give a remarkable view of a person's life and times, and they do so in Adams' case. Photographs interspersed with the letters, and generally contemporaneous with them, add considerable, if incidental, interest. Incidental, that is, only in comparison to the personality that glows through the writing. Adams was such a strong and vibrant man that he sometimes seems as luminous as what he caught on his negatives. The early letters, to family members and childhood friends, show a dutiful son growing up in the first half of this century. One touching example is a letter to his father that expresses his love and his doubts about his ability to live up to his father's expectations (page 9). The reply (page 13) is gentle and shows a confidence between father and son that was no doubt as rare then as it is now. Early letters to Adams' longtime sweetheart and later wife, Virginia Best, are revealing of much tenderness and love.

Letters to his wife in later decades are missing (possibly they are too intimate) in favor of correspondence about his art, mostly with Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston, and Alfred Stieglitz. It is interesting to see Adams' growth as an artist, the slow crystallization of his views of art, the feuds and laughter of personal interaction, and his increasing concern for the environment. These letters show a very humane man of high integrity and even virtue who lived a long, rich, full life.

The images in *Letters and Images* are reproduced well and definitely enhance the text. The editors, Mary Street Alinder and Andrea Gray Stillman, have done an excellent job in assembling the letters and appropriate replies. This reader felt considerable disquiet at perusing the later correspondence of a man so recently gone; one wonders just what was left out, and why. It seems that the publication of these letters could easily have been delayed a couple of decades—perhaps to Adams' centenary in 2002. But for anyone not put off by a bit of voyeurism, this book is extremely rewarding.

\*\*\*

All three of these books show something about Ansel Adams and his work that has not been widely known to date, and in this respect all are valuable. For a beautiful presentation of an ugly episode, look at *Manzanar*. For those interested in curios and abandoned byways, there is *The Mural Project*. For art, personality, human interest, and a self-affirming life, read the *Letters*.

Stanley L. Moore is a Houston area chemist and photographer.

# LEAVING HISTORY AND ENTERING THE WORLD OF IDEAS

By Ed Osowski

Marianne Fulton. *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company (New York Graphic Society), 1988. 325 pages. \$40.00.

John Loengard. *Life: Classic Photographs: A Personal Interpretation*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company (New York Graphic Society), 1988. 192 pages. \$24.95.

History is less a matter of what actually happened than of what we believe happened.... What's accepted as truth depends on what evidence is presented and on how it is interpreted.... In the modern world, whoever controls the media to some extent controls the perception of history, and even, now and again, the events of history.<sup>1</sup>



Yoichi Okamoto, May 1966

Huynh Cong Ut's justly famous 1972 photograph "Terror of War" was released through the Associated Press and reproduced thousands of times. One suspects (and hopes) that for any person who was twenty years of age or older in 1972 the photograph has seared itself into consciousness: in the photograph's center a young Asian girl, naked, runs toward the camera, a scream the viewer can almost hear escaping from her mouth. Her arms are held adrift, weakly, and increase the symbolic representation of her powerlessness conveyed by her exposed genital area. Four other running children flank her; to her right a clothed boy's mouth is twisted in a cry. Behind the children, like a wall, moving toward the viewer and into the comfort of our world, are four soldiers, figures of power and authority. The landscape through which they all move is blank, bleak, anonymous, anywhere.

I describe Cong Ut's photograph because, like the war during which it was taken, I suspect that the photograph may be, for a new generation, something not quite as terrifying, riveting as it was for this reviewer when first seen. Quite simply, its power to shock, hurt, and outrage has not been diminished, and its effect on the psyche remains like a knife drawn across the flesh.

Marianne Fulton reprints Cong Ut's "Terror of War" in her magisterially comprehensive *Eyes of Time*, but she recognizes that this photograph's context has, in a sense, been lost for a wide body of viewers. She adds this caption, her own words, one assumes, "South Vietnamese forces follow terrified children fleeing down Route 1, near Trang Brang, South Vietnam, June 8, after an accidental aerial napalm strike. Girl at center has ripped off her burning clothes."<sup>2</sup>

Does this photograph still possess the "power to shock, hurt, and outrage" I suggested earlier? More importantly, are those legitimate concerns to be raised by a genre of photography—photojournalism—that claims to possess the following attributes: that it is objective; that it provides a clear and unemotional illustration of a particular event; that it presents the viewer with a precise encapsulation of what actually was happening when the photographer took that photograph; that the photograph is a historical document that can be used to read and understand the past.

These questions are legitimate because the link between the word and the photograph has never been as removed from sub-

jective concerns as its proponents would have one believe. Fulton's work, and a new book by John Loengard, *Life: Classic Photographs*, make clear that for many photojournalists the interests of documenting what happened have always warred with deeper, politically-motivated concerns.

Describing and trying to define photojournalism, Fulton writes:

*Photojournalism as communication is an ongoing process: getting, delivering, and publishing the picture are not the end, but one part of the conversation that is the news, and that, in turn, becomes history. Photojournalism lives in a larger world of ideas—it is never a monologue.... Its responsibilities remain unchanged, and they are still immense: to see, to understand, and to share the story of history as it happens.<sup>3</sup>*

History and ideas exist in two different realms, one in, the other above, time. Linking them as Fulton does brings photojournalism out of its second-class status, where its function is simply illustrative, but also burdens it with a heavier responsibility. To capture "the essence of the situation, isolating the significant from the trivial" is how Fulton goes on to define photojournalism.<sup>4</sup> "Essence" is a peculiar word, Emersonian almost, a word that repudiates the specificity of the image and directs its contents at some broader philosophical context (Fulton's world of ideas). The title of Cong Ut's photograph urges us to read it as an image which distills the "essence" of all war.

If the "essence" of war (its chaotic and senseless destruction and its brutal victory of menacing adult forces over the innocence of childhood) describes the full content of Cong Ut's photograph, it also lies behind and informs Yoichi Okamoto's "May 1966" (Fulton, p. 196). Okamoto was the first official White House photographer, asked to fulfill that role by Lyndon Johnson. In "May 1966" Johnson, Dean Rusk, and Walt Rostow turn their backs to the camera and stand in isolation. The arrangement is formal but blank. Rusk and Johnson stand framed in windows and look into the glare of light. Rostow, separated from them, stands several feet away, the space divided by the arc of carpet and wooden floor that acts like a barrier. The surface calm and stasis are heavy; Okamoto has uncannily captured separation and emptiness. This is not a photograph of "history" although it records an event (the

arrangement of these three men in a particular way on a particular day). Here, the men's dark suits, their props of power and protection (considered and remembered against the nakedness of Cong Ut's naked fleeing girl) do not guard them from the cold isolation the photograph captures.

"Essence" is a word that runs, like a motif, through both books. In his introduction to Fulton's book Robert Mayer first uses it.<sup>5</sup> And in her "Introduction" Fulton further defines what she means. She writes that photojournalists "look for the essence of the situation."<sup>6</sup>

Fulton's book has a bleak and troubling quality which makes it far different from the optimistic tone that suffuses Loengard's work. She reprints, in toto, W. Eugene Smith's 1948 photo-essay "Country Doctor," which first appeared in *Life*, Sept. 20, 1948 (Fulton, pp. 182-184). She is extremely generous with the examples she provides: four images from Donna Ferato's series on domestic violence (Fulton, pp. 233-234), four images from Mary Ellen Mark's "Streetwise" (Fulton, pp. 228-229), and three examples from Julio Mitchell's unpublished book on the elderly and poor Jews of New York's Lower East Side (Fulton, p. 227). By contrast, Loengard offers only one of Mark's photographs from the same series and in his book it comes across with an artificial quality and without the thorough sense of human abuse and suffering the work possesses in context (Loengard, pp. 110-111).

Loengard was picture editor at *Life* for fifteen years in the 1970's and 1980's, and began his career as a staff photographer there in 1956. His selection of works published over the past fifty years is a "personal selection," he writes, of those classic images that "retain their power to surprise. Their depiction of a subject is telling and concise. They are rich in detail. They are apt, dramatic, and simple."<sup>7</sup>

What Loengard's book also points out in its arrangement is how *Life* has served to anaesthetize the viewer with its focus on "the strange, the peculiar, the startling, the different."<sup>8</sup> For Loengard, there is no moral difference between Alfred Eisenstaedt's "Drum Major" (Loengard, pp. 52-53) and the image which precedes it (of a baby swimming) or the images that follow it (of a menacing snake and of an Israeli "Mirage Jet" whose shadow passes over the bodies of four Egyptian soldiers killed in the Six-Day War).

Loengard's book is filled with such juxtapositions—Rita Hayworth by Bob Landry (1941) set against a group of female body-builders (1981) (Loengard, pp. 58-59) or Mary Ellen Mark's "Mike and Rat" (1983) which is immediately followed by Henri Cartier-Bresson's famous image of the artist Henri Matisse, sketching, as he firmly holds a white bird in his left hand (Loengard, pp. 110-113). Wonder, delight, amazement, and amusement—these may indeed be the qualities



Anonymous, *Mirage Jet*, 1967

Loengard respected and for which he searched. But, as the arrangement of *Life: Classic Photographs* shows, these qualities also weaken the photograph. The arrangement also directs the viewer away from the more disturbing elements in the photographs.

The Eisenstaedt photograph "Drum Major" (it also appears on the cover of the book) is especially rich in elements that force the



Milton Greene, *Marlene Dietrich*, 1952

viewer to question whether delight and amusement are adequate responses. Surely, on the surface, this is a photograph of freedom and joy. Seven children laughingly follow the highstepping routine of a drum major. But the photograph does more than just record that special, specific moment (it is dated 1950). Loengard writes that he at first hesitated to run the photograph because he found it "too cute. I thought the kids looked too perfect."<sup>9</sup> Would this photograph "work" if the first figure, the drum major, the leader, were a woman, or if the first child, not the last two, were a girl? I think not. Eisenstaedt's photograph is inextricably linked to its time, to a period when it was inconceivable that women could or would assume positions of leadership. The tightly controlled joy these children are experiencing comes from their being in (and belonging to) a world with no threats—girls following boys, order is maintained. They march in an enclosed compound, tall brick walls keeping the world of danger and risk at bay. Here sunlight dapples, but



does not threaten, the grassy surface across which they proceed. Shadows pose no menace but merely create patterns against which they proceed. Only to the viewer now can the photograph be read as an example of social and political conditioning.

Loengard's book is not without value. One who was raised on the weekly appearances of *Life*, and, like this writer, eagerly awaited each issue, will appreciate the opportunity to see again so many familiar images. But it is to Fulton's book that one turns for a more thorough discussion of what photojournalism means. Her book consists of five essays (two by Fulton herself), over 300 images, biographical references, a truly impressive bibliography of articles and books that is ten pages in length, and an index. It accompanies an exhibition organized by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, where Fulton is an Associate Curator. (If anything, Fulton's technical discussions may lose some readers.) In her version, photojournalism has moved from an almost naive use of the camera and its possibilities of recording and serving the word to a more committed (and decidedly leftist) use of photography to shape and disturb the viewer. The influence of Robert Frank is clear and unmistakable.

Fulton's book is not just about photojournalism in America, and Frank's influence on this field raises a particular question. The essay by Colin Osman and Sandra Phillips, for example, deals exclusively with photojournalism in Europe in the 1920's and 1930's. But Fulton never really makes clear whether a distinction exists in her eyes between photojournalism and documentary photographs. What Fulton does know is that more than twenty years separate Ray Mews' "Home from Vietnam" (1966) (Fulton, p. 220), in which a solitary couple, he missing one leg, embrace on an empty airfield, from Eisenstaedt's famous "V.J. Day at Times Square, New York City" (Fulton, p. 159). With Mews we have moved from celebration to sobriety, from joy to pain, from community to isolation, from belonging to alienation, from history to ideas.

If one concept links both books, it is that they together demonstrate how the photojournalistic image is an exercise in shaping, defining, and creating a dramatic presentation of an event. When Cartier-Bresson defined the "decisive moment," he was also defining an approach to photography that sought to cast it as an approach to art-making that contained narrative structure and order. For both Loengard and Fulton, there is nothing casual about the examples they present.

That photographs of war, destruction, and chaos seem to dominate in these two books is no accident, because those occasions offer the opportunity to photograph life at its most extreme and dramatic. And what is clear is that the concept of the "photo-opportunity," in which an artificial and exploitative shape is placed on reality, is not a recent invention of the presidential image makers. Carl Mydan's "MacArthur" (Loengard, pp. 134-135) is as much about MacArthur's return to the Philippines forty years ago as it is about exploiting that return (actually his second) to achieve

maximum propagandistic and personal effect.

Finding the dramatic moment (or the "essence" to return to an earlier concept) depends on a belief that reality can be organized into a coherent and defining context. It means that order can be imposed on the flux of things, people, and events that are the photographer's subjects. It means that photojournalism tells stories, creates fictions, puts a shape on reality, and is no different from any other type of photography. It means finally, that history, when it enters the world of ideas, is never finished.

#### Footnotes

1. Vicki Golberg, "The Battles for Truth," *American Photographer*, May, 1989, p. 22.
2. Marianne Fulton, *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company. A New York Graphic Society Book. 1988), p. 213.
3. Fulton, p. 249.
4. Fulton, p. 240.
5. Fulton, no page.
6. Fulton, no page, "Introduction".
7. John Loengard, *Life: Classic Photographs: A Personal Interpretation* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company. A New York Graphic Society Book, 1988), p. 8.
8. Loengard, p. 8.
9. Loengard, p. 50.
10. Loengard, p. 52.

Ed Osowski is employed by the Houston Public Library; he also reviews books for the Houston Post.



Ann Chwatsky, from *The Man in the Street*

## VISUAL PLEASURES AND CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

By Wendy Sterba

Ann Chwatsky, *The Man in the Street*. E. P. Dutton, 1989. Unpaginated (132 pps approx.), \$19.95.

Ann Chwatsky's *Man in the Street* is unhampered by singleness of purpose or a clear concept. By trying to be all things to all people it minimizes its impact and thus fails to depict what Chwatsky designates the "pleasure in engaging in a task that results in a tangible product that is satisfying in a deep-rooted way."

Upon initial examination the book would seem to be steeped in objectification at its crassest and most superficial level. There are ample images of unclad torsos and bulging forearms and stances which affirm our worst suspicions of the macho image. In the Foreword, the photographer admits to this sense of voyeurism, to what she calls "a woman's appreciation for a man's body." Certainly this is in keeping with one branch of the feminist school, which cries for complete equality, including the co-opting of male gaze, and thus empowerment. The camera has frequently been identified as the natural instrument of voyeurism, a concept used effectively in analyses of ways in which phallus, male gaze, and voyeurism are inextricably linked in numerous Hollywood films.

Chwatsky confesses that photographic "looking" made her feel as if she was "entering a man's world... Perhaps it was my way of emulating the behavior of the men in the streets who comment

and whistle at the women walking by." Yet this very objectification undercuts the goals she claims to have set for her work, "to create an awareness of people we see every day yet seldom notice." In no way can awareness be equated with objectification, and although Chwatsky waxes poetic about "the natural beauty of the 'everyday' man," she apparently reveals her more sincere personal investment later when she speaks of her childhood experiences watching her father at work and the intrinsic characteristics of workingmen, such as their forced interdependence, spirit of camaraderie, and even their dreams.

There is no doubt that Chwatsky has an extremely good eye for image and composition. Several images are quite striking in their presentation and organization. In one striking shot, the very organic figure of a man is dwarfed by the geometry and complexity of the girder construction that he is climbing. Chwatsky also uses construction works' abundant textures to her best advantage, playing-off the fabrics in shirts against the iron netting and plastered walls that form the backdrops for her shots. In one of her best pictures, two plaster-spattered workers lounge on an iron fence-railing set before a vertically shadowed wall. The image is lively although the figures are at rest.

Unfortunately, not all her work exhibits such excellence. The quality of the prints is generally very poor. Dust spots show in full effluence. The choice of format severely limits the effect of many of the images. Naturally, the most impressive shots are printed the largest, but the decision to spread some shots across double pages has led to crease lines that bisect the composition and continuity of the subject. These pictures are in any case too large to view at a comfortable distance and still maintain a sense of

the whole, unless one has the arm length of an orangutan.

Photographic technique is also frequently sloppy. Many shots lack crispness and clarity, while others confuse by excluding too much of the work environment with which the subject is occupied. Far too many shots present headless workmen, because the glare of sun casts dark black hat-shadows across the top half of the face. This effect could have been used intentionally and quite effectively in a work concerned with the dehumanizing nature of hard labor; however that, as we know, would be another story. Many shots are underexposed, seeming to drown in lifeless greys, while others contain no definitive black tones. The simple use of fill flash could have rectified most of these errors, rendering clumsily backlit and heavily shadowed subjects with clarity and detail.

One of the most effective aspects of the book is probably the workers' own quotes which serve as captions to the images. These are to a large extent more interesting than the images themselves. They serve Chwatsky in good stead. Several times I found the intriguing individuality of the quote drawing me back into a picture to see if I could see any of the verbal expression in the physical one. The common result was that I noticed an image was not as bad as the dust spots and offputting format had initially led me to believe. Reading the caption reveals the apparent disinterest of a glove-clad middle-aged man to be instead a concern with increasing waste in the construction business. "When I was a kid thirty years ago, I got pleasure from ripping it all apart. As I got older I started to appreciate the finished product." Suddenly his look speaks to the weariness of age and the need for accomplishment.

Ultimately Chwatsky has made both good and bad choices. She made a good decision in interviewing and quoting her subjects, but a bad one in choice of printing and format. The book would have been much more enjoyable if the photographer had made a strong, clear statement of her purpose. She could have chosen to center on physicality, the male body from a woman's point of view, or, in keeping with her interviews and foreword, she could have more blatantly pursued a personalized presentation in a collection of images exemplifying the male construction worker in all his variety, degrees of committedness, and individuality. Unfortunately the final product is neither fish nor fowl. Nor is it simply photos of men in the streets, but what it is, is difficult to determine.

Wendy Sterba is a Professor of Film and German Literature at the College of St. Benedict in Saint Joseph, Minnesota.

## LETTERS

### Seasons of Light

April 13, 1989

The Editor:

The best thing about Peter Brown's *Season's of Light* is that it always resists the heavy certitude of Elizabeth McBride's review. "The writing is intended to add content to the photographs," she claims, "and in some examples it does.... But all too often these texts seem to fly away from themselves in facile prose...." I don't know if it is ontologically possible for writing to add content to photographs. Images, written or photographic, which are things themselves, are also fragments of something else and signs without a certain signified. Fragments and signifiers, as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes argue, are free and at play, a condition that for some of us is their liberating glory. Peter Brown's book is celebratory of this condition, always beautifully playful, and, ah! light. It is a very intelligent book and often very funny, as it attacks in pieces like "Vermeer Will Be 368 in the Year 2000" and, especially, "The Bedrock of God's High School," the pretensions Elizabeth McBride would apparently like to see give weight to the work. She doesn't want to read this book; she wants to prescribe another. And if "You've got to bleed on the page" is not a writing-workshop cliché, I don't know what is. The Donald Barthelme I knew never used clichés. Neither does Peter Brown.

Sincerely,  
Terrence Doody  
Professor of English  
Rice University

\*\*\*

11 April 1989

When the *Seasons of Light* portfolio was published, I was very envious. Most of us want to have done something of that quality, to say nothing of the monumental task of doing it, getting it done, finished! There it is...out there!

My wife and I later became owners of one of these fine packages. Therefore, I could go to it when I desired, give it some time, receive, imagine from it, get with it!

When the portfolio was published this year in book form and signing night came around, we were out of the city. Since we had one of the original edition I was slow in getting around to the printed book - until, in fact, I read Elizabeth McBride's SPOT coverage.

After reading what Elizabeth wrote about it, I wanted to see it and especially read "Poems and Essay by Denise Levertov." So I got a book and read it, and became even more envious.

What Levertov did for me was wonderfully describe the reading of pictures, photographs, the process of seeing, receiving, re-seeing.

I would highly recommend this book to those who do not know how to be with photographs, to those who've only glanced while walking, to all of us who need meditation stations (because *Seasons of Light* is full of them).

The Levertov work is also cor-



Peter Brown

rectly positioned in this book for me. She openly writes how she felt about the task she was given, her doubts, etc., then goes about the very innovative process of giving to and receiving from the images. Given time, each viewer has always the opportunity of giving what has been seen another dimension. This work of Levertov's placed at the end of the book causes me to start all over at the front again, to discover what more I can find.

P.S. It has helped me a little to write this down, but I'm still envious.

Charles Schorre

## BOOKS RECEIVED

The following books have been recently received and are available for HCP members to examine in the HCP Library:

Abbott, Berenice. *Berenice Abbott: Masters of Photography Series, No. 9* (New York: Aperture, 1989)

Adams, Robert. *To Make it Home: Photographs of the American West* (New York: Aperture, 1989)

Allard, William Albert. *The Photographic Essay, American Photography Masters Series with an introduction by Sean Callahan* (Little, Brown and Company, 1989)

Andreyev, Leonid. *Photographs by a Russian Writer: an undiscovered portrait of pre-revolutionary Russia*, edited and introduction by Richard Davies with a forward by Olga Andreyev Carlisle (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1989)

Ballerini, Julia (ed.). *Sequence (con) Sequence* (New York: Aperture, 1989)

Bunnell, Peter C., with Maria B. Pellerano and Joseph B. Rauch. *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes* (Boston: Princeton University Art Museum, in Association with Bullfinch Press/Little, Brown and Company, 1989)

Burrus, Hari. *I Do Not Sleep with Strangers: Confessions of a Tennis Pro* (Houston: Black Tie Press, 1987)

Carter, Keith. *From Uncertain to Blue* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1988)

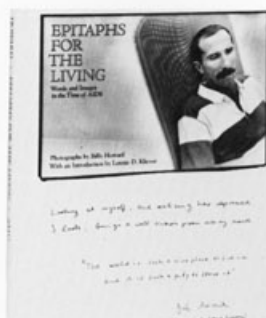
Chwatsky, Ann. *Man in the Street* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988)

Demarchelier, Patrick. *Fashion Photography, American Photography Masters Series, A New York Graphic Society Book with an introduction by Sean Callahan* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1989)

Evans, Walker. *Walker Evans: American Photographs* (Boston: MOMA/Little, Brown, 1988)

Feininger, Andreas. *Nature in Miniature* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989)

Fulton, Marianne. *Eye of Time: Photojournalism in America* (Boston: New York Graphic Society/Little, Brown, 1988)

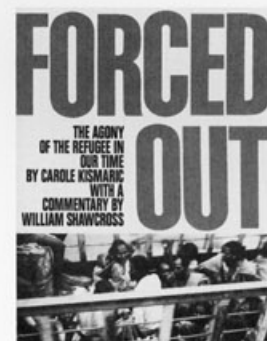


Howard, Billy, with an introduction by Lonnie D. Kliever. *Epitaphs for the Living: Words and Images in the Time of AIDS* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989)

Hurth, Robert & Sheila Hurth. *Pro Techniques of Wedding Photography* (Los Angeles: Price Stern Sloan, Inc., 1989)

Janis, Eugenia P. and Max Kozloff. *Vanishing Presence* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989)

Kenna, Michael. *Night Walk*, with an introduction by Jerome Tarskis (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1989)



Kismaric, Carole. *Forced Out: The Agony of the Refugee in Our Time*, with commentary by William Shawcross, co-published by Human Rights Watch and the J. M. Kaplan Fund (New York: Random House/W. W. Norton & Co./William Morrow & Co./Penguin Books, Ltd., 1989)

Lloyd, Barbara. *The Colors of India* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988)

McAuley, Sheet. *Sign Language: Contemporary Southwest Native America*, with an introduction by N. Scott Momaday (New York: Aperture, 1989)

Martin, Richard and Harold Koda. *Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989)

Pfahl, John. *Arcadia Revisited: Niagra River and Falls from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario*, Essays by Estelle Jussim and Anthony Bannon (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1989)

Ponsold, Renati. *Eye to Eye: The Camera Remembers* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1988)

Rattazzi, Priscilla. *Best Friends*, with an introduction by Giovanni Agnelli (New York: Rizzoli, 1989)

Raymond, Lilo. *Revealing Light*, with an introduction by Mark Strand (Boston, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1988)

Rossi, Guido Alberto, with text by Franco Lef evre (New York: Rizzoli, 1989)

Sauveur, Daphne de Saint. *The French Touch* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1988)

Smith, Joshua P., with an introduction by Merry A. Foresta. *The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1980's* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

Weston, Edward. *Edward Weston: Masters of Photography Series, No. 7* (New York: Aperture, 1989)

Willis-Thomas, Deborah. *An Illustrated Bio-Bibliography of Black Photographers 1940-1988* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988)

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