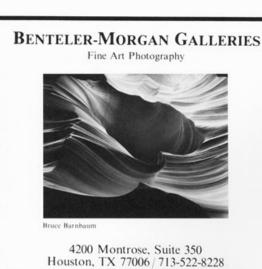


Ben DeSoto, Ramona Guadalupe Ramirez, 1980

THE LEGACY OF WITKIEWICZ, BY JOHN JACOB PAUL VANDERWOOD: PICTURE POSTCARDS AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE GALASSI'S CARTIER-BRESSON: THE (RE)CREATION OF A GENIUS EXHIBITS: GALLERY X/BEEFCAKE/BADEN/ROSTEN/MITCHELL BOOKS: PETER BROWN/KEITH CARTER/CLIFT/NIXON JAPANESE HIGH FASHION/PROFILE: BEN DESOTO



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Halftones: A's Colour I confess that, as a fan, I found it hard to have a reasoned response to the exhibition Diamonds Are Forever: Artists and Writers on Baseball, currently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Especially back in January when the show first opened, it offered such rich escapist pleasures: the lush green fields and sunset tints of Joel Mereyowitz's stadiums; the intense spurt of energy in Mauro Altamura's blurred baserunner; the uncharacteristic cheeriness of Lewis Hine's shot of a 1909 stick-

Tom Seaver was on hand to open the exhibit; he discussed Tom Seaver was on hand to open the exhibit; he discussed mostly baseball, not art. The well-known pitcher was also featured in Annie Leibovitz's American Express advertisement for the show (which American Express sponsored). The Leibovitz photo was not included in the exhibition; Seaver's visage turned up instead in an Andy Warhol acrylic/silkscreen. Despite the Museum's openly avowed aim of being "popular" and attracting new viewers, this show instituted and maintained a strict line between "high art" and the residence of the strict line between "high art" and the residence of the strict line between "high art" and the strict line between "high art" and the strict line between "high art" and the strict line high art was the strict line between "high art" and the strict line high art was the strict line between the strict line high art was the s between "high art" and the pop iconography of baseball: no base ball card images here, no Sports Illustrated reportage, no notorious Jim Palmer underwear ads—which to my mind would have paired nicely with Warhol's Seaver and Nickolas Muray's Babe

paired nicely with Warhol's Seaver and Nickolas Muray's Babe Ruth, or—even better, with Eric Fischl's "Boys at Bat," a disturbing image of a small boy awed by a large—and entirely naked—slugger. (The Fischl, by the way, was in the catalogue, but absent from the show—inappropriate for family viewing?)

When I visited on one recent Thursday (the Museum's free day) the biggest crowds weren't viewing baseball images; 100 or so children were instead taking in the exhibit of contemporary sculpture Inside/Outside with an obvious relish which threatened to spill over into acts of intervention (to the consternation of anxious guards). Included in Inside/Outside were Donald Lipski's bizarre reassemblages of familiar objects: corncobs, old telephones and crystal balls, bits of wire, matchsticks, envelopes, pipes, ...and, yes, even a baseball, preserved forever in wax, hanging from the wall in a steel ladle.

Baseball turned up too at HCP, in a beautifully executed shot of sunlight reflecting off Steve Garvey's bat as a ball approaches

Baseball turned up too at HCP, in a beautifully executed shot of sunlight reflecting off Steve Garvey's bat as a ball approaches for hard contact—one of David Rosten's photographs about genres of photography included in HCP's sesquicentennial celebration exhibit Baden/Mitchell/Rosten. Instead of elevating baseball to the level of "art," Rosten treats "art" (take-offs on Atget, Man Ray) exactly on a par with other genres of photography—the kitschy, useful, familiar, or arousing images of the science journal greeting card, or porno magazine. As reviewer Roberto Ritschy, useful, familiar, or arousing images of the science journal, greeting card, or porno magazine. As reviewer Roberto Cofresi remarks about this work below, one of its strongest effects is to show how the gallery "flattens" images. The same point can be made about work by the other two photographers, Michael Mitchell and Karl Baden, included in this show. Mitchell's conceptual series of studio-shot family portraits (he played no role in creating or selection the images) with a proper wind property and property in the images. creating or selecting the images) puts another kind of popular imagery into the art gallery for our consideration. Baden playfully deflates pretensions of modernist histories of Master photographers. One target of his sometimes wicked recompositions is Cartier-Bresson; for a different sort of deflation of modernist pre-tentiousness about Bresson, see Stephen Small's review, this issue, of Peter Galassi's recent rewriting of the photographer's early history.

early history.

Baden's series, Sex, Death, and the History of Photography, surveys fetishises about bodies and sexuality, drawing ironic attention to imagery of war and violence treated "objectively" and "artistically." In this issue of SPOT we include a study of a different sort of war imagery; San Diego State Professor of History Paul Vanderwood writes about "The Picture Postcard as Historical Evidence." Discovering and reassessing imagery that is nonartistic, familiar and "subjective" is one specialty of contemporary social historians. In postcard portraits from the period of the Mexican Revolution, young boys, revolutionaries, look hauntingly Mexican Revolution, young boys, revolutionaries, look hauntingly out at us, condemned by their captions as "captured, then executed." Other disturbing postcards represent executions arranged for the camera's benefit, or dead Mexican bodies overwritten with

nasty anti-"greaser" messages. Relatively unexplored historical terrain of revolution and the threat of war also form the backdrop for the work of Polish photographer Stanlislaw Witkiewicz, discussed in John Jacob's article, "The Legacy of Witkacy." In a country itself constantly under siege, Witkiewicz searched obsessively for his own "personal essence." He had himself repeatedly rephotographed, adopting different guises, personalities and national identities. His project forms a strange sad complement to Mitchell's series of family por-traits: the hopeless search for some iconic marker, an idealized static Truth about personality or family.

SPOT here begins coverage of HCP's new small Gallery X, SPOT here begins coverage of HCP's new small Gallery X, dedicated to regional, emerging, or experimental artists and new approaches to photography. By contrast to exhibits focused on "high" vs. "low" imagery, revisionist art histories, or fruitless photographic pursuits of essences, the two inaugural shows in Gallery X dealt with photography in its immediate community. Visions of the Future presented an array of large-scale architectural plans and models for HCP's expansion; reviewer Joseph McGrath examines how these designs embodied conceptions of the role of the gallery in its neighborhood. A Stitch in Time the role of the gallery in its neighborhood. A Stitch in Time Saves Nine? presented works by Earlie Hudnall, Jr. and Ben DeSoto concerning the breakdown of the urban community. On the floor of the small square room was Earlie Hudnall's old patchthe floor of the small square room was Earlie Hudnall's old patch work quilt; this much-worn, familiar, and literally flat object became a site for reflection. I thought about how two male photographers saw community in terms of the "feminine" metaphors of sewing and quilt-crafting, and recalled also Jesse Jackson's extended patchwork quilt metaphor for community at last summer's Democratic National Convention. The photographs were jammed in together and unevenly hung in three tiers, so that they created their own conditions of "urban" crowding. The in-tent (and effect) was not to distance and flatten but (in DeSoto's words) to "aggravate."

Cynthia Freeland



Babe Ruth, Nickolas Muray

- SPECIAL NOTICE -

Due to production reorganization, the next two issues of SPOT will be combined into a double issue, (Volume VIII, Nos. 2 and 3) to be published in September, 1989 and mailed to our subscribers.

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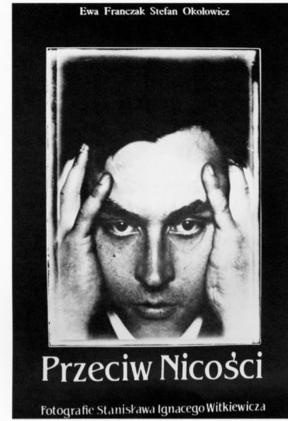
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THE LEGACY OF WITKACY

By John P. Jacob

A tone of critical self-knowledge has been heard in Polish literature since the publicists and preachers of the golden age (the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1492-1572)... and it continued right up to Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz's "Unwashed Souls" and Witold Gombrowicz's "Transatlantic..." Desperate, angry, it frequently exceeds a just measure and is not sparing in the most painful of epithets: 'peacocks and parrots,' a nation of idiots,' 'Polish immaturity.' But it is splendid. It is an unusual case of courage in self-analysis, and the absence or silence of that voice in Polish culture would have impoverished it. The Russians find it highly amazing.'



Book Cover, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, self-portrait, Zakopane, 1912-1914.

I.

Poor Witkacy. He suffered from metaphysical boredom. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), painter, writer, philosopher, photographer, lived and worked in Poland. He wanted to kill himself, but was unable to rely on anyone to carry forth his philosophical inquiries. Instead, he invented alternate personalities, many of whom suffered early death for him. Witkiewicz recorded the characteristics of many of these personalities in an extensive series of staged photographic self-portraits.

Przeciw Nicości, Fotografie

Przeciw Nicości, Fotografie
Stanisława Ignacego
Witkiewicza (Against Nothingness, Stanisław Ignacy
Witkiewicz's Photographs), published in Poland in 1986 following many years of preparation,
is an extraordinary documentation of the artist's photographic
work. Divided into two sections, the book presents a
small selection of the few original prints made by Witkiewicz
which survived the Second
World War, and a much larger
selection of photographs made
of Witkiewicz. The first group
of photographs, most of which
were made during Witkiewicz's
youth, represents the artist's
interest in photography as a
tool for the painter.

tool for the painter.
Witkiewicz's early photographs are dominated by formal landscape and portrait studies. Especially interesting are those made following an alteration of his camera. "For two weeks now I have had a camera to which Helman has attached that lens by means of a water pipe," Witkiewicz wrote in 1912. The alteration enabled him to make extreme close-up photographs, eliminating unnecessary details from the photographic frame. Witkiewicz believed that the eyes were the "mirrors of the soul," through which the essence of the "Particular Exis-

tence" could be captured. In the series of portraits made using his close-up lens, twelve of which have survived, the sitter's eyes are always the center of the image, more often than not illuminated with dramatic side lighting. The techniques of extreme close-up and focus on the eyes continued to play an important role throughout his life.

Witkiewicz's early photographic studies indicate clearly that he had little faith in the capacity of the single image to convey the essence of the thing or person photographed:

What was characteristic of Witkacy's way of taking photographs were whole series of pictures aiming at better penetration to the essence of a motif. Some of his series repeated the same topic, hence his series of locomotives, roads, trees, streams, mountain motifs etc. Some other series consisted in taking photographs of the same locomotive "with smoke" and "without smoke," or from various places, from many "points of view," e.g. portraits of his father seated in the same pose, first 3/4 of the whole figure, then the other photographic portraits: head in profile, head en [sic] face, and a close up of the face, etc."

Witkiewicz's staged self-portraits, which form the larger, second part of *Przeciw Nicosi*, go beyond his early work with photographic series to explore the "Particular Existence" as "multiplicity in unity." "We can imagine the existence of personality only as multiplicity in unity or vice versa," Witkiewicz wrote in *Principles and Statements Implied by the Notion of Existence*, his major philosophical work. "There must be a multitude of different essences in the existence of even the most rudimentary personality so that this unity could exist as a unity as such, and not any

other personality, filled with such, and not any other, essences." With the help of a host of friends and assistants playing minor roles and operating the cameras, the multiple personality that Witkiewicz set out to explore was his own.

II.

As Russia's immediate neighbor to the west. Poland has served for centuries as an en-try way into Russia for foreign influences. At the same time, Poland's own history has re-peatedly been impacted and overwhelmed by czarist and later on by Soviet expansionism. As a result of this mutual interaction, Poland has emerged as one of Russia's tra-ditional adversaries. The relationship between the two nations is characterized by Poland's opposition to authority and by the growth of a pow-erfully nationalistic self-identi-fication. By the end of the 18th century, the territory of Poland century, the territory of Poland had been almost entirely annexed by the Russian, Prussian and Austro-Hungarian empires. The Poland into which Witkiewicz was born in 1885 was still ravaged by the disastruct 1822 of resul trous 1863-64 revolution, which had been led by Polish gentry against Russian domination.

The dominant trend in photographic production in early 20th century Poland was pictorialism. Jan Bulhak, a proponent of pictorialism who operated a photographic workshop in Vilnius, developed the concept of "native photography," claiming that a photograph can "express the nation's vital features in the same way that other arts express them." The pictorialist trend, as expressed by Bulhak, sought to reject the mechanical qualities of photography, by rendering the photographic image closer in expressive quality to the painted image. "We must look for an ideal in painting, for patterns and graphics, and must preserve this approach in photography," expressive terms and proposed in photography, the superior of the painted in painting, for patterns and graphics, and must preserve this approach in photography, the proposed in photography, the proposed in the proposed in photography.

he wrote.

Witkiewicz's father, an amateur photographer himself, encouraged his son's early explorations of photography. Breaking with the common pictorialist belief that the mechanism of the camera inhibited true artistic expression, Witkiewicz Sr. wrote in 1903 that "when the camera has achieved such perfection that it has simply become a part of man's nervous system, photography becomes merely a more perfect and more prompt brush or pen."

Witkiewicz Sr. held that it was precisely photography's technicality which enabled the artist od discover relationships between objects previously unimagined, and therefore unpaintable. Photography was unique and valuable not only for its own properties, but for offering to the painter who understood it a "more perfect memory."

memory."
Witkiewicz was primarily a painter of people. His earliest use of photography was closely related to his work with painting, although many of his photographs of eminent friends, such as Bronisław Malinowski and Arthur Rubinstein, are considered among their finest portraits. Witkiewicz believed that the portrait must penetrate the psyche of the sitter. To accomplish this, he made

multiple photographs of the sitter from different angles. Witkiewicz also experimented with narcotics. Accompanying the artist's signature at the base of his works, a coded series of letters and numbers indicates the drug or blend of drugs ingested prior to the sit-ting.

Witkiewicz also portrayed his friends in his writings, such as the autobiographical 622 upadki Bunga czyki demoniczna kobieta (622 Falls of Bungo, or A Demonic Woman). As Stefan Okołowicz observes,

It is interesting to compare the photographs of those people... with their vivid and expressive descriptions in the novel. However, if we include into this comparison also charcoal sketches of the same period, it becomes apparent that the literary means of expression and pastel portraits are more efficient than photography in recording an intuitive vision of the portrayed person.*

After 1914, Witkiewicz apparently lost interest in the photographic portrait. He continued to experiment with "portraits of the soul" using pastels, and relying on intuition and clairvoyance for entry into the psyche of his sitter. He came to believe increasingly in his own magical powers and his ability to influence everything, from other people to the weather. Witkiewicz never gave up the use of extreme close-ups in his portraits, however, and he continued to use other techniques learned from his experiments with photography, often bringing multiple images of his sitters together on the painted surface. Although he had stopped using a camera, he referred to portrait sittings as taking someone "by the camera," and invited sitters to visit the "Portrait Firm of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz" with the printed slogan, "Come for a camera, and I will paint you a portrait."

III.

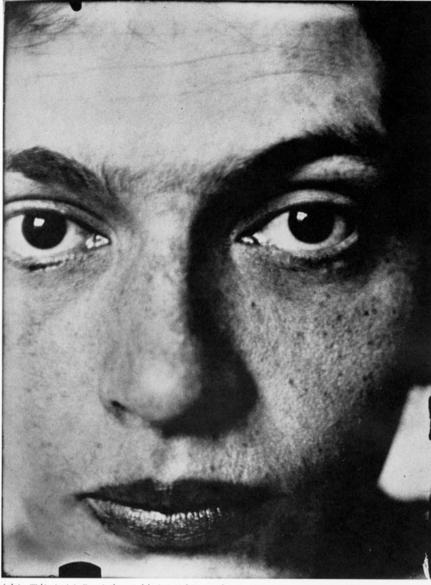
Tomorrow I shall celebrate the day of my late double Stanislaw of sacred memory. I wish he were completely forgotten by the next year, Ignacy Withiewicz [7 May 1912]. An iron mask will cover the childish face of Ignas of old. Maciej will be born. Most horrible of the whole company...[27

January 1912].

And so I am on the verge of madness for the first time... I can feel madness clearly and am terribly scared... A little pile of drawings is all that will be left of me. But if I survive it I shall be this third person indeed—Maciej [of my own might] [February 1913].

I must steel myself against life which is becoming more and more like the truth of my thinking about it. HORRI-BLE... Witkacy [17 April 1913].

Witkiewicz is dead, long live Witkacy. In 1913, according to his letters, Witkiewicz discarded his burdensome former self and embarked upon a long succession of alternate personalities, primary among which was



Jadwiga Witkiewicz (née Unrug), photograph by St. I. Witkiewicz, Zakopane, ca. 1923.



Bronisława Illukiewicz with her daughters Janina and Wanda, photograph by St. 1. Witkiewicz, Zakopane, ca. 1912.

Witkacy. Witkacy believed that the unity of the "Particular Existence," the random combination of essences that is the foundation of the individual personality and its particular limitations, was the source of "metaphysical anguish." He believed, too, that "metaphysical feelings" were not felt by most people, who are too

caught up in the tasks of daily life for the contemplation such feelings require. A work of art, therefore, must be stimulated by metaphysical feelings, and must enable the artist to transform everyday reality into "Pure Form:"

The essence of art consists in creating formal constructions

and not in imitating incidental and chaotic elements of nature. Witkacy recognized some other forms in painting, for instance those that did not meet the requirements of Pure Form, but he did not consider them as art; in such cases realistic painting was just painting, not more... it had nothing in common with true Art created by metaphysical feelings alone."

Similarly, the artist is required to transform the daily events of his or her life, to "compose" events. "It is not enough to exist simply, non-reflectively, passively, negatively," Witkacy wrote in Narkotyki, Niemyte dusze (Narcotics, Lost Souls). "It is necessary to manifest one's existence more clearly, against the background of possible death and surrounding nothingness."13 To alleviate his metaphysical boredom, Witkacy created an ongoing "theatre of life" of which he was the director and principal

The "theatre" in which Witkacy's personality achieves realization and which works within the limits set up by Philosophy and true Art, consists of a number of his activities, both insignificant everyday events and those connected with art and directly related to creativity... Among them: the atmosphere of narcotic séances and experiments in drawing under narcotic influence, the ritual connected with the Portrait Firm and its imaginary employees... creating a specific and odd atmosphere around himself by his excentric [sic], shocking and unusual behaviour... attaching special significance to "normal" every day activities and surrounding them with a singular atmosphere... granting titles and diplomas for nonprofessional but good drawings, such as the Great Sash of Pure Form. And finally: collecting and demonstrating various curiosities and unusual objects... Pilsudski's cigarette-end, Rita Sacchetto's garter, someone's dried appendix... He also had a collection of walking-sticks.13

In his theatre of life, Witkacy created dozens of characters. Among his numerous pseudonyms, several appear to have possessed particular significance. The Portrait Firm of S.I. Witkiewicz, for instance, run by "the Master and Beloved Director," employed Chief of (Civil) Secretariat Witkasieńko, Cash Clerk Witkasiński, General Secretary Witkaze, and Errand Boy Witkasik vel Witkasienko. According to the Firm's list of regulations, upon completion of a portrait, the customer was sent by the Master to the cash desk. There, the master, with a new name and title, appeared to collect his payment. The customer was then sent to the packing department, where the master again appeared, this time as the packer, bundling the portrait and giving advice on framing. In the late 1920's, long after

In the late 1920's, long after he had set aside his camera, Witkacy is reported to have said to artists Marian and Witold Dederko, "You work in photography, I play with it." Photography came to play an increasingly important role in Witkacy's theatre of life as he developed alternate personalities, or doubles, and enacted their characteristics before the camera.

How far was it all removed from Witkacy's aims and achievements in photography before 1914! His first photo graphic studies examined nature, tried to expand the knowledge about man and nature, and recorded external phenomena. Yet in the photographs taken in the 1930's Witkiewicz had ceased to play with the camera and began to play with himself, while the camera served only for recording his artistic ideas. This game resulted quite unexpectedly in multiplying his photographic selves: Professor Pulverston, Lord Fitzpur, Stanley Ignacio Witkacy, Mahatma Witkac, Uncle from California, Tovarisch Peresmerdlov, captain of the Podhale Rifles, cowboy, judge, robber, lunatic, vampire, and dozens of other impersonations which cannot be clearly defined.15

Humorous and satirical, the personalities which Witkacy enacted for the camera were illustrations of the artist's philosophical beliefs, based in an exploration of the multiplicity of his own Particular Existence. Finally, however, there is no knowing which of the characters were, for Witkacy, expressions of his "essences," leaving only the assumption, natural as it may appear, that "all of them in their variety define this unique 'Particular Exis-tence." ¹⁰ We do know, however, that Witkacy continued to have himself photographed, and to collect the photographs of himself in a special album, until his death in 1939.

Witkacy's obsession with photographs of his own face would seem to be related to his belief that a portrait must reveal the psyche of the sitter, that the eyes are the mirror of the soul. "The use of photography by Witkacy... was to 'really' steal away some part of his personality until—through different interpretations of various apparent identities—it was to enable him to reach the point where the "Separate Being" [i.e., the "particular Existence"] would risk self-destruction."

would risk self-destruction."

Witkacy believed that the camera simultaneously revealed and stripped away the layers of personality to reveal "essence" of a being. Like his father, he believed that the camera provided the artist with a "more perfect memory," an already creative vision enhanced by the capability of capturing the previously unsee-able moment. "It is only the lens that gives the images-which is able to 'dig out' from the bottom of our subconscious this desire to replace an object with something more than an imperfect copy, a new object, free of temporal circumstances,"18 he wrote. What is disturbing about Witkacy's selfportraits, therefore, is not so much the futility of his faith in the camera as the way that he positioned himself before it.

According to descriptions, Witkacy was an "entirely tragic" man, troubled by metaphysical boredom and angered by those he considered incapable of experiencing "metaphysical

feelings." Nevertheless, the self-identities that he chose when representing himself to the camera often depicted him as precisely the sort of character that he scorned. In those characterizations, Witkacy appears to defy the camera to do its work on him, to reveal his true "essences." His collection of self-portraits thus appears to constitute more an assemblage of performances than the revelation of a particular presence. It appears possible that Witka-cy realized, by taking advantage of an assortment of cultural stereotypes, that it is often easier to represent to the camera what one is not than to represent what one is.

The "mask of self-irony" that Witkacy wore in such representations, which was not himself, was nevertheless "something quite natural—it expressed his generally critical attitude which did not spare his own person." Neither did it spare the art, tradition, or the history of Poland. Especially, though, Witkacy's criticism was directed toward the "depreciation of values in the West, and... features of the October Revolution."

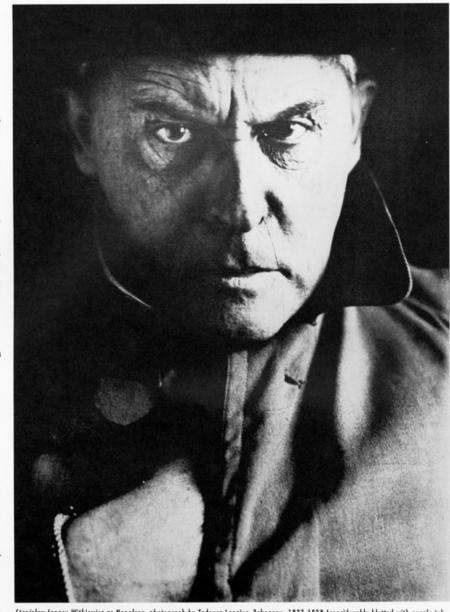
Using the contrasts afforded by such cultural representations, Witkacy sought the representation of an elusive self which exists, but which cannot be captured in a single image. Through the physical enactment of specific characteristics he discovered that the individual's "essences" may be frozen, one at a time, by the photographic frame. Finally, however, only the isolated "essences" and not their "multiplicity in unity" are knowable.

Witkacy's collection of selfportraits must therefore be seen as a monumental and highly self-critical study of the implicit possibilities and impossibilities of the portrait aesthetic. Because they fail to reach any conclusion, however, and because they make the mistake of taking cultural representations to be psychological portraits in their search for 'essences," Witkacy's collection of self-portraits ultimately appears incapable of achieving the level of self-realization that the artist desired. Although Witkacy has taken control of the means of self-representation in his photographic autobiography, he has allowed the text of his story to remain fully determined by others. Perhaps, given the absolute "Polishness" attributed to his work by other Poles, it was an irony (reflecting the right of Poles to write their own histories, even though any accurate history of Poland would have to be written largely in terms of foreign domination) that he was fully aware of.

IV.

I am a chap so wonderfully organized in spite of the horrible extern[al chaos]... that it will be a pity indeed when such an organization dies prematurely... I shall cry dying, "Oh what an organization dies."

Milan Kundera has written



Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as Napoleon, photograph by Tadeusz Langier, Zakopane, 1937-1939 (considerably blotted with purple ink used by Witkiewicz).

that "in Poland the great trinity of Witold Gombrowicz. Bruno Schulz and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz anticipated the European modernism of the 1950's."22 Of these three only Gombrowicz survived the Second World War. Schulz died in Auschwitz in 1942. Gombrowicz, who had departed on a voyage to Argentina shortly before the outbreak of war, never returned to Poland, although he continued to write about his homeland for the rest of his life. On September 17, 1939, while running from Hitler's troops, Witkacy heard of Stalin's invasion of Poland from the East. With nowhere to turn, Witkacy committed suicide.

In Poland, a land where unity has been disrupted and selfidentification denied for centuries, Witkacy's photographs have possessed a special significance, particularly among the generation of artists who have come of age following the thaw of the 1960's but before the era of glasnost, and especially in the shadow of martial law. Witkacy's efforts to discover unity in multiplicity through photography have been recognized not just for their extraordinarily clear vision of his own time, but also for their premonition of the parallels that exist for artists working now.
Witkacy, who was a participant in the October Revolution, was obsessed with developments in the post-revolutionary community and their relation to Poland and himself. He

Dullness, suppression, distrust, and fear—that was the prevailing atmosphere one could feel at once. On the train, almost nobody talked... Everywhere papers, signatures, seals, photographs, examinations, and inspections. The meanness of all that just scared Anastazy [the protagonist of Witkacy's novel]. He also had to submit a so-called 'declaration of work'-otherwise, nothing doing-die of starvation... He got tickets for food, clothes, shoes, and a room in a family of workers... As soon as he finished his lunch, a so-called third-class one, in a canteen for clerks of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, he went to the office... There, they sat him at a typewriter... and he worked until eight o'clock. When he went out he was literally unconscious.25

Witkacy's work has a profound appeal in the days of

post-martial law, post-Solidarity Poland, where he is regarded as a prophet, perhaps even a martyr, but most certainly as a profoundly Polish artist. Witkacy, among only a few others, fought with words and images to preserve Polish and, by extension, human values Witkacy fought against the nothingness which he feared would be the result of post-revolutionary society, in which everyone felt like he was complete rubbish, a stub, spittle on a pavement." In the end, he chose the nothingness of death over the nothingness of Stalinism.

Today, artists continue to produce experimental artworks in Poland. Their work is considered insignificant not only by the State, which has a low opinion of most experimental art forms, but also by other Polish artists, who either do not understand them or are shy of such forms of expression. Most notably, however, they are shunned by the cultural institutions of the West, which tends to have a low opinion of any art forms not generated directly as a result of its own interests. For, like the trinity of Gombrowicz, Schulz and Witkiewicz, and also like the trade union Solidarity, these

artists are as skeptical of the values that the West would impose upon them as they are of those coming from the East.

Summing up the current situation, in which the West is regarded as neither a system of reference for young artists nor as a means of being introduced to the "real" art world, Jacek Dryszkowski, leader of the Quick Collection Culture group has written.

Jasiak went to make a call, but the Americans did not answer... I tried to reassure my friends. So far, I went on, they have been so good... They have always offered new and original actions and forms to be duplicated in the provinces. Why should they fail this time? Let's wait... We all started dreaming of how we would enrich leading world trends with our provincial peculiarities, how we would bravely keep up with the American leaders.. This gave us strength to stand in place. And the years passed. On the side and telling no one, we did a lot, but so as not to break the natural laws and those dictated by the history, we waited. But the great world inspiration did not seem to come... Jasiak made off for Tarnow ... He got back. This is called post-modernistic conservatism, he said... In the frequent seasons there will be frequent returns to the past... They will tell us to sculpt and paint, I bet. And they did... We proceeded to have a beer. We felt as if left just to ourselves. Having no opportunity to imitate, reform, or carry out polemics, we were left a kind of cultural gap ... We kept filling it with our own inventiveness and felt quite satisfied.26

Witkacy's stated hatred of Russian politics and his wariness of the decline of Western values has increased his popularity among young Poles. According to legend, the area of Poland in which the body of Witkacy was buried was annexed by the Soviet Union following World War II. Proud of their great artists, the Poles demanded that the Soviets hand over Witkacy's body so that it could be buried in Polish ground. The Soviets refused. Then, a few years ago, a mem-ber of one of the most controversial groups of young Polish artists travelled illegally into the Soviet Union and took upon himself the task of exhuming Witkacy's bones. There are several endings to the story, each more outrageous than the last. Most likely, perhaps, is the one that tells how the artist sneaked back into Poland, and gave away little bits of Witkacy to all his ad-mirers. Even in death, there is not unity.

Footnotes

Author's Note: Few translations into English exist of Witkacy's writings on art or of critical studies of his work. Those listed in the following notes (assembled for me in Warsaw by Anna Beata Bohdziewicz) are, to my knowl-



Photographic session of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and Janina Bykowiak...Zakopane, summer 1931, extract from Faces series.



Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and Janina Bykowiak, [from] Narcotic Injection.

edge, the only translations that have been printed to date. Because they are all either out of print or extremely difficult to obtain, and in order to give a feeling for the work that has already been done to present Witkacy to a larger public, I have quoted from these sources extensively in my text.

An exhibition of Witkacy's photographic work, with catalog, is expected to open in

September 1990 at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. The exhibition will travel to the ICA in London in late 1990 or early 1991. As M. Urszula Czartoryska, who organized the first exhibition of Witkacy's photographs in Poland, has suggested, it is high time for a psychoanalytic and/or semiotic study of Witkacy's work. Such a study would be facilitated by the publication of a greater se-

lection of the artist's texts in translation. One such publication, scheduled for release in May from Paj Publications, is a selection of Witkacy's writings with a small portfolio of reproductions of his paintings and photographs. Several of Witkiewicz's novels, stories and plays are available in translation. Their titles can be found under the name Witkiewicz, St. I., in Books in Print.



Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz in the uniform of a captain of the Podhale Rifles, photo-graph by Wladislaw Matlak,Nowy Sacz, ca 1935.

1. Kazimierz Brandys, A War-saw Diary, 1978-1981 (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 177

2. Eva Franczak and Stefan Okołowicz, Przeciw Nicośi (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), p. 16. (Also-for import?—Warsaw: Ars Polo-nia, 1986. ISBN: 83-08-01398-8; \$30.00.)

3. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 20.

4. Grzegorz Musiał, "Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. The Consciousness of a Picture of an Image of Consciousness," from Fotografia, Polish Photograph-ic Quarterly, Special Issue, Warsaw 1979, p. 63.

5. Adam Sobota, "Some Notes on the Pictorial Movement, Fotografia Polska, (New York: International Center of Photography, 1979), p. 12.

Sobota, p. 13.
 Franczak and Okołowicz,

8. Franczak and Okołowicz,

p. 11. 9. Franczak and Okołowicz,

Poland.

p. 16. 11. Franczak and Okołowicz, p.

28.

11. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 20.

12. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 20.

13. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 22.

14. Franczak and Okołowicz,

15. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 34. Note: In the Footnotes of Przeciw Nicosci, a full page of pseudonyms appears in Polish.

16. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 34.

17. Urszula Czartoryska, Catalog from the first exhibition of Witkacy's photographs in Poland, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz,

18. Ryszard Bobrowski, European Photography 36 (Gottingen, West Germany: 1989), p. 48

19. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 20.

20. Bobrowski, p. 48.

21. Franczak and Okołowicz, p. 34.

22. Publication announcement of Selected Writings Witkiewicz, St. I., scheduled for publication May 1989, Paj Publications. ISBN: 1-55554-015-5 hard; 1-55554-016-3 soft.

23. Bobrowski, p. 48.

24. Bobrowski, p. 48.25. Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, Contemporary Art from Poland (Alberta, Canada, 1986), p. 17.

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THE PICTURE POSTCARD AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

By Paul Vanderwood

Spurred on by the likes of Fernand Braudel and the French Annalists, social historians aiming to reconstruct the daily lives of ordinary people have been increasingly inventive in their hunt for primary research materials. Not that the written document is no longer king, but sources such as tapestries, old clothing and antiques, gravestones, paintings and advertisements have of late provided fascinating insights into the past, especially into the routine activities of common people, who include most of us. How wonderful to be rescued—even those of us who could barely read and write—from the trashbin of history.¹

tory.¹
Now comes a new source: the picture postcard. How strange that an item so common to all of us has for so long been neglected as a way to illuminate our past. Literally everyone has sent a picture postcard at one time or another; so many of us have stashed away a postcard or two in some envelope as a remembrance, or even mounted a series of them in a scrapbook. Good! Picture postcards should be saved and cherished. Better yet, when no longer of personal regard, they should be turned over to a repository of choice—to a local library or the city university—where they can be catalogued and preserved for historical use.

The heyday of the picture postcard occurred around the turn of the century and lasted until the advent of more sophisticated forms of photojournalism during World War I. Actually, the first such cards seem to have been produced in the 1880's to honor Europe's royalty; formal pictures of emperors and their families engraved on lovely cards were sent to subjects and admirers. England's Queen Victoria herself was an avid postcard collector. Cards of this period also depicted public buildings, monuments and rural scenes. The very best of them were produced by German printing houses, beautiful cards in delicate colors which are among today's most treasured (and valuable) cards.*

Postcards got off to a slow start in America, because the Postmasters' General Offices here could not decide until the end of the century how such a card might legally be sent through the mail. Some say he was opposed to cluttering up the nation's mail with such items. But after a good deal of experimentation--decisions concerning what could be written where on a postcard--for instance, where the address block should go--the postal service in 1907 settled on the split-back card which looks pretty much like the one we have today.

Once Americans caught the scent, they sent picture post-cards with abandon. Why they did so is still the subject of investigation by social historians. Some say they were a reflec-



Observation post used to spot for artillery

tion of our national character, supposedly open, forthright, and to the point. Americans were in too much of a hurry making money to write long letters (although plenty of them certainly did that too). Others note that postcards served the barely literate; a pretty picture would accompany a few scribbled words. The British, as might be assumed, subscribed to little of this phenomenon. There postcardsending remained in extremely bad taste: too curt and undignified. And just imagine sending a message that the postman could read before delivery! Postcards were definitely de classé in Great Britain.

But for Americans, the same prosperity that built a middle class also fueled a bourgeois mentality. Americans were on the move, if not physically, at least mentally. As a result, a good many coffee tables in the living rooms of better-off Americans featured a scrapbook filled with picture post-cards from foreign and "exotic" places. This was one way in which we travelled in those days. Those scrapbooks expressed the energies and ambitions of a people who craved

Young Mexican Volunteers, 1915

status and recognition among the world's great and powerful. Despite this

burgeoning interest in picture postcards, it took spectacular national events to propel picture postcards into their "Golden Era." Those happenings in-volved in 1910 the outbreak of revolution in Mexico along our southern border, fighting which spilled over the line into the U.S.; the assignment of U.S. Army troops along the boundary line; Pancho Villa's daring invasion at

Columbus, New Mexico in 1916 and the Pershing Expedition in response; the mobilization in June that year of thousands of state guards-

that anyone could use for only \$25.00, and at the same time it manufactured special printing paper in postcard size, already labeled for the mails. So virtually anyone could make--or have made--his or her own personal postcard: a picture of one's self with appropriate background, or of buddies, or a scene with personal meaning. Nothing of this sort, of course, was quite as easy to do as it might seem, but the potential was there, and if individuals could not always exploit it, a new breed of free-lance, local photographers could, along with some of the larger commercial printing houses.

The prototype of just such a petty entrepreneur was Walter Horne, a New Englander suffering from the early stages of tuberculosis, who tried the banking business in New York City, did not like it, and so literally rode the rails in his early 20's seeking better times in California. But his ill health finally drove him to the dry, hot climate of El Paso, Texas, where he searched for means to put his enormous energy and venturesome inventiveness to

had his competition, including the big commercial houses, like Cavanaugh in Chicago. Although each individual and outfit tried to patent their cards by writing their names on them, pirating remained common. Even postcard scenes from the Spanish-American War were retitled and sold to an unwary public as supposed depictions of the Mexican Revolution. And the public bought these cards in batches. Horne alone sent them by the thou-sands to Los Angeles and New York. But by far the largest market lay right along the border itself, among those thousands of soldiers and militiamen sent there allegedly to stem raids into the United States and otherwise threaten the Mexicans with invasion in accordance with U.S. Foreign policy at the time.
The Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution erupted in November, 1910, in that country's northwestern state of Chihuahua, just south of New Mexico and Texas. Weapons and other war materiel flowed across the boundary to both sides, courtesy, for the most part, of profit-minded



Ex-prisoner members of the Black Troops "C" and "K" of the 10th U.S. Cavalry (Courtesy of the Carter Rila Collection).

men from all over the country along the border and the experimentation with new army

equipment and designs which carried over into World War I. All of this excitement. plus the invention of new photographic equipment which made it easier to produce picture postcards, cre-ated the material, the means, and most impor-tant, the market, for boom-times in the picture postcard business

card business.
Kodak had for
some time been
experimenting
with a low-cost,
easy-to-use
camera for
mass production. By 1910
it was selling a
box camera

work. Picture postcards became the profitable response, cheap photographic equipment the means and Mexico's revolution and the U.S. reaction, the backdrop.

Horne worked like a demon. He knew the territory and the actors, so he earned many exclusive photographs of the rebellion and turned them into picture postcards. For instance, he got a Mexican officer to stage the execution of an enemy soldier at a prominent plaza in Ciudad Juarez across the Rio Grande from El Paso. Perhaps "stage" is not quite the right word, but Horne saw to it that he was invited to the planned execution, and it did not take place until his camera was ready. Actually, he manufactured three cards from the execution itself, and they became famous as the "Triple Ex-ecution Scenes." They were among Horne's best sellers and can be found in many collections available for scholarly research, including that of Hugh Scott, the American commanding general along the border.

As might be expected, Horne

Americans. The U.S. Government sought to control the political and ideological drift of the rebellion by employing troops to patrol the international line. Arms legally flowed to contenders favored by American foreign policy makers, but smuggling, of course, remained rampant, and an occasional Mexican raiding party crossed over to raid a supply depot.

As positions between warring factions hardened in Mexico. the American government debated who it wanted to win, meaning who would best serve U.S. interests. Fairly early on, perhaps as early as mid-1913, the U.S. decided against the leftward bent of the Villistas and Zapatistas in favor of the more middle-ground and capitalistically oriented Constitu-tionalistas. That meant getting arms and ammunition in favorable hands followed by official diplomatic recognition. Villa responded with his attack on Columbus, which in turn occasioned the Pershing incursion into Chihuahua and the mobilization of 125,000 federal-





Macedonio Manzano, fought with the Constitutionalistus, executed with other captives when they lost.

ized militiamen on the borderthe largest such mobilization of state guardsmen in American history.*

All of this restless scene was captured by the likes of Walter Horne and transformed into picture postcards. What the cards lack in photographic quality (although many in that respect are quite good) they make up for in spontaneity. That is, they capture the moment in a snapshot which from the historian's perspective often proves to be much more valuable than a carefully crafted professional photograph. At least, this is what became obvious after this author viewed more than 25,000 picture postcards concerning the topic at hand.

That seems like a tremendous number of postcards: 25,000. In fact, though they may be more than just the tip, they are certainly not the bulk of the iceberg. What started as a rivulet, the donation of a few hundred postcards to the Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library in Midland, Texas, has risen to a torrent with information of new finds feeding in from everywhere. And if this article holds true to form, it will generate new discoveries.

Taking the museum collection as a springboard (and encouraged by the remarkable assemblage of Horne cards at the El Paso Public Library), a simple inquiry placed in two newsletters of postcard collections caused the deluge. Individuals responded with cards for sale, while others agreed to open their personal holdings for re-

General Francisco Villa



view and research. Three immense private collections were identified. First the owner of the Gotham Book Mart in New York City. Andreas Brown, who must be among the most knowledge able collectors in the world, responded with hundreds of mint-condition cards and information on where to find more. John Hardman, a banker from Warren, Ohio, weighed in with his marvelous collection just on the Revolution itself, and Carter Rila, a government employee who lives in Maryland, followed with his military cards, many of which concerned Mexico. Other batches were discovered at public libraries, in the special collections of universi-

cial collections of universities, at state historical societies stretched out along the border --and even a few at a post card fair in London, in bookstalls along the Seine in Paris, and in a Madrid antique shop. To repeat, picture postcards concerning the Mexican Revolution (and goodness knows how many other topics) are everywhere.

Most of the collections are random, uncatalogued, some in shoe boxes, because no library technician has yet figured out a way to catalogue the cards for research use. Loyola-Marymont College in Los Angeles has an estimated four million cards preserved, but uncatalogued, in file cabinets. The University of California, Los Angeles, has just begun to finger through its immense postcard holdings in special collections. The New York Public Library has just received a donation of 25,000 cards to add to its considerable holdings. And individuals are building their private collections. Overall, postcard collecting is experiencing a kind of renaissance. Prices for cards are going up, some to more than \$100 apiece. And those colorful postcard fairs at which buyers and dealers chat, cajole and bargain with one another are more energized and competitive than ever.

So much for the fun of wandering into the world of picture postcards. But what of working there? Just what might the historian find in these cards—and not just the pictures, of course, because people write messages on postcards.

and with such writings the historian returns to his more familiar world of documents? For example, just what did the study of 25,000 cards concerning the Mexican Revolution and U.S. war preparedness tell us that is new to history?

First of all, the obvious.
Military historians with expertise in weaponry and materiel study the myriad rifles and uniforms pictured in order to sense the place of America's army among the ranking powers. They find America fifth- rate. For instance, they note details of the airplanes pictured and where gerryrigging indicates practical weaknesses in the aircraft. But this kind of very specific analy-

sis is overshadowed by the number of cards dated 1916 and 1917 which depict the nature and scale of military experimentation that was eing conducted along the border. America was starting to flex its muscles. You can see it in the variety of armored cars, some with an anti-aircraft turret up top. These cars may have only been a conglomeration of thick armored plates slapped on a truck chassis, but they, like the assemblages of heavy-duty trucks, presage the pas-sage of an army rooted in a rich cavalry heritage and about to enter the modern mechanized military world.

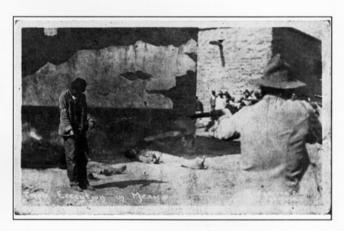
Rolling kitchens, motorcycles with attached cabs sporting a machine gun, truck-mounted signal corps stations, huge barrage balloons, airplanes, pontoon bridges, artillery spotting equipment are all proudly displayed on picture postcards. The soldiers must have been pleased to let folks "back home" know that they were serving in a modern army.

army. What all this might mean in terms of national policy is another question-and one of the most intriguing issues revealed by the postcards. It concerns the nation's posture at the time toward the war raging in Europe. Officially, the Woodrow Wilson administration was promising non-intervention. The country was largely pacifist at the time; it would have been political suicide for the Wilsonians to advocate active participation in European problems. Advocates of a modernized military had limited public and Congressional support. If the U.S. was not going to war, why finance a big, modern army? Then came Villa's raid

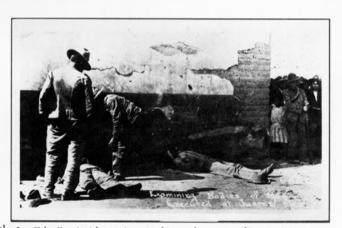
on Columbus, and those who favored a military buildup crowed unpreparedness, to the point that they won Congressional support for all that new equipment that found its way to the border. The Mexican "situation" afforded the opportunity to beef up the military, but what happened might be seen as military overkill. All that materiel sent south, when it obviously held no role for any possible Mexican campaign. What campaign then? Europe?

On the basis of the cards alone it cannot be said that the Wilson administration was saying one thing ("no intervention") but preparing for the opposite, although as we understand today, this sort of sce-









From Walter Horne's triple execution series, depicting the executions of Francisco Rojas, Juan Aguilar and José Moreno, January 15, 1916.



"As he fell after the battle of Agua Prieta, Mexico," 1915.

nario is entirely possible. And the postcards certainly raise this possibility. U.S. historians categorically deny that the Mexican mobilization had much to do with preparing the U.S. for World War I. A look at postcards might revise some of that thinking. The troops drilled and maneuvered, dug trenches, and performed other duties that soon enough were employed in France. In tracking Pancho Villa, the U.S. military intelligence teams established fundamentals in use today: tapping the enemy's telegraph lines, designing decoy messages, and even hiring assasins to eliminate an enemy leader.* And even if the administration did not mean Mexico to be a tune-up for intervention in Europe, the soldiers on the border thought of it as such. They wrote about it on their cards. Some postcard companies even printed this message on their cards. In fact, a good number of those soldiers sent to Europe had had previous experience on the Mexican boundary.

Messages on the cards point to other under-explored historical avenues. Little has been written about U.S. army desertions during the period of Mexican duty. Yet a soldier wrote on a card that he was deserting to the Mexican side, because he got paid better "over there." Indeed, the Mexicans, regardles of political bent, needed the expertise of Americans as machine gunners and artillerymen and paid well for such services."

On another tack was Jody Powell, a Texas state militiaman, federalized and sent to Big Bend country. Powell was a fine cartoonist, so instead of photos, he drew cartoons on his postcards and sent them back home to be posted in a drugstore in his home town of Mineral Wells. And Powell's cards could be pointedly political. How they passed military censorship, if they did, is an unanswered question. After a few months of inactivity, Powell began to wonder what this mobi-lization was all about--specifically, who was so interested in keeping the myth of border troubles alive. Powell had some ideas: it was Wall Street, or American capitalists who stood to profit from an on-going war, or other capitalists with interests in Mexico who wanted to provoke an intervention for their own benefit. Historians have yet to address, not to

speak of to prove, these assertions which may well have validity; but it is certainly interesting to note that soldiers along the border were thinking such things."

The jingoistic character of many of the cards causes one to wonder just what influence they might have had on people far from the border who received them--what influence they had in whipping up red, white and blue fervor for attacking a foreign land. Pictures and messages on cards resemble offerings from some tremendous All-American pep rally along the border. No doubt they fueled nationalism, but the degree of the patriotic fever has yet to be measured.

And perhaps more important, what part did the cards play in forging or reinforcing American attitudes toward Mexicans and their revolution? One thing is certain; the most popular postcards, the ones which proved to be the best-sellers, the ones which appear most often in the collections reviewed by historians, are pictures of dead Mexicans, mutilated Mexicans, burning Mexican bodies. The messages on these cards confirm the point: written on the front of one card, "All Mexicans ought to go where this one has gone [to his grave]," and on another card, "The only good greaser is a dead one." A sailor about to join the American invasion of Veracruz wrote home that he was glad to get the

supreme as they glowered down on dead Mexicans; others stood on the ends of logs that form a pyre for Mexican corpses. These are the images that spread throughout the country via the picture postcard in the first part of this century. It would be worthwhile to study to what degree, if any, that image has changed on cards since then.

Like any rich historical document, picture postcards create more questions than they answer. Something new, a historical posssibility, pops out of the images

on each review. No historical document can tell us everything, or even the truth; they can only contribute to our knowledge, and picture postcards with their messages are making a vital contribution toward that end.

Footnotes

L Braudel's best-known recent work in English is his heralded three-volume The Perspective of the World (New York: Harper & Row, 1981-4). For a splendid example of the Annalist approach see Emmanual LeRoy Ladurie, Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error (New York: Vintage, 1979).

2. For the history of the

picture postcard see: Frank Staff, The Picture Postcard and Its Origins (New York: Frederick A. Praeger 1966), and Dorothy B. Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918 (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982). An overview of the subject appears in Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro, Border Fury: A Pic-ture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness Along the Border, 1910-1918 (Albuquerque:

University of New Mexico

Press, 1988). A book which

1920 (Boston: David R. Godine, 1981). Picture postcards are specifically used to examine British social history in Eric J. Evans and Jeffery Richards, A Social History of Britain in Postcards, 1870-1930 (London: Longmans, 1980).

3. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp. 2-3.
4. Morgan and Brown, Prairie Fires, p. xiii and George Fitch, "Upon the Threatened Extinction of the Art of Letter Writing," The American Magazine (June 1910), pp. 172-3.
5. Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography, from 1839 to the Present Day (New

History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 15; and Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp. 3-6. 6. Horne's life and career, at

 Horne's life and career, at least what is known of it from his private corespondence, is discussed in Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, Ch. 2.

7. Recent summations of the

Paul Vanderwood, Professor of Mexican History at San Diego State University, is currently writing a book about millenarianism in 19th century Mexico. He is also researching the life of Robert Runyon, a photographer in Brownsville from 1910-1930, and later Mayor of that city.

All photos courtesy of the John Hardman Collection, unless otherwise noted.



The Jeffrey Quad (four-wheel drive) had been used by the British in India before the U.S. tested improvements along the border.

Mexican Revolution include John M. Hart, Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), and Alan Knight, 2 vols., The Mexican Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For the mobilization of the militia, see Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp.

191-197.

8. A bibliography of places where the authors of *Border Fury* found the postcards

used in their book ap-

pears on pp. 284-5 of the book.

9. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, p. 193.
10. Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, "Termination with Extreme Prejudice: The United States Versus Pancho Villa," in Harris and Sadler, The Border and the Revolution (Las Cruces: Center for Latin American Studies/Joint Border Research Institute, 1988),

pp. 7-23.

11. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, p. 195.

12. Jody Powell's postcards are in Library Special Collections, Sul Ross University, Alpine, Texas.



Postcard criticizing Wilson's policy of "watchful waiting" toward Mexico

chance to kill Mexicans, and another hoped that the defenders would try to take down the Stars and Stripes over their occupied city so that they could get into a good scrap. Americans sat on horseback smugly beautifully displays picture postcards, to some extent in historical perspective, is Hal Morgan and Andreas Brown, Prairie Fires and Paper Moons: The American Photographic Postcard: 1900-



"As he fell after the battle of Agua Prieta, Mexico," 1915.

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speak of to prove, these assertions which may well have validity; but it is certainly interesting to note that soldiers along the border were thinking such things."

The jingoistic character of many of the cards causes one to wonder just what influence they might have had on people far from the border who received them--what influence they had in whipping up red, white and blue fervor for attacking a foreign land. Pictures and messages on cards resemble offerings from some tremendous All-American pep rally along the border. No doubt they fueled nationalism, but the degree of the patriotic fever has yet to be measured.

And perhaps more important, what part did the cards play in forging or reinforcing American attitudes toward Mexicans and their revolution? One thing is certain; the most popular postcards, the ones which proved to be the best-sellers, the ones which appear most often in the collections reviewed by historians, are pictures of dead Mexicans, mutilated Mexicans, burning Mexican bodies. The messages on these cards confirm the point: written on the front of one card, "All Mexicans ought to go where this one has gone [to his grave]," and on another card, "The only good greaser is a dead one." A sailor about to join the American invasion of Veracruz wrote home that he was glad to get the

supreme as they glowered down on dead Mexicans; others stood on the ends of logs that form a pyre for Mexican corpses. These are the images that spread throughout the country via the picture postcard in the first part of this century. It would be worthwhile to study to what degree, if any, that image has changed on cards since then.

Like any rich historical document, picture postcards create more questions than they answer. Something new, a historical posssibility, pops out of the images

on each review. No historical document can tell us everything, or even the truth; they can only contribute to our knowledge, and picture postcards with their messages are making a vital contribution toward that end.

Footnotes

L Braudel's best-known recent work in English is his heralded three-volume The Perspective of the World (New York: Harper & Row, 1981-4). For a splendid example of the Annalist approach see Emmanual LeRoy Ladurie, Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error (New York: Vintage, 1979).

2. For the history of the

picture postcard see: Frank Staff, The Picture Postcard and Its Origins (New York: Frederick A. Praeger 1966), and Dorothy B. Ryan, Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918 (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982). An overview of the subject appears in Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro, Border Fury: A Pic-ture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness Along the Border, 1910-1918 (Albuquerque:

University of New Mexico

Press, 1988). A book which

1920 (Boston: David R. Godine, 1981). Picture postcards are specifically used to examine British social history in Eric J. Evans and Jeffery Richards, A Social History of Britain in Postcards, 1870-1930 (London: Longmans, 1980).

3. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp. 2-3.
4. Morgan and Brown, Prairie Fires, p. xiii and George Fitch, "Upon the Threatened Extinction of the Art of Letter Writing," The American Magazine (June 1910), pp. 172-3.
5. Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography, from 1839 to the Present Day (New

History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 15; and Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp. 3-6. 6. Horne's life and career, at

 Horne's life and career, at least what is known of it from his private corespondence, is discussed in Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, Ch. 2.

7. Recent summations of the

Paul Vanderwood, Professor of Mexican History at San Diego State University, is currently writing a book about millenarianism in 19th century Mexico. He is also researching the life of Robert Runyon, a photographer in Brownsville from 1910-1930, and later Mayor of that city.

All photos courtesy of the John Hardman Collection, unless otherwise noted.



The Jeffrey Quad (four-wheel drive) had been used by the British in India before the U.S. tested improvements along the border.

Mexican Revolution include John M. Hart, Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), and Alan Knight, 2 vols., The Mexican Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For the mobilization of the militia, see Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, pp.

191-197.

8. A bibliography of places where the authors of *Border Fury* found the postcards

used in their book ap-

pears on pp. 284-5 of the book.

9. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, p. 193.
10. Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, "Termination with Extreme Prejudice: The United States Versus Pancho Villa," in Harris and Sadler, The Border and the Revolution (Las Cruces: Center for Latin American Studies/Joint Border Research Institute, 1988),

pp. 7-23.

11. Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, p. 195.

12. Jody Powell's postcards are in Library Special Collections, Sul Ross University, Alpine, Texas.



Postcard criticizing Wilson's policy of "watchful waiting" toward Mexico

chance to kill Mexicans, and another hoped that the defenders would try to take down the Stars and Stripes over their occupied city so that they could get into a good scrap. Americans sat on horseback smugly beautifully displays picture postcards, to some extent in historical perspective, is Hal Morgan and Andreas Brown, Prairie Fires and Paper Moons: The American Photographic Postcard: 1900-

PORTRAIT OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER AS A YOUNG MAN

By Stephen Small

Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work, an exhibition of photographs from 1932-1934, was shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from De-cember 17, 1988 - February 26, 1989. Peter Galassi, of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, curated the show and wrote a book by the same title (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1987; 152 pages, 4 color illustrations, 125 duotones).

The youth, who daily farther from the east Must travel, still is Nature's priest, And by the vision splendid is on his way attended.

With such "intimations of immortality" must Henri Cartier-Bresson still seize the heart of Dominique Nabokov when she gazes at the portrait of him as an intense youth in her collec-tion (fig. 10). We can thank Peter Galassi, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, for sharing this por-trait with us. This and other choice bits of documentation allow us to become peeping historians as we track our game, an elusive species of street photog-rapher. Our guide would have us believe that in illuminating Cartier-Bresson's nascent tal-ent at work from 1932-1934 he has discovered a keystone of modern art. Yet we realize instead that Galassi has tried to reshape the past. The uncertain first steps of an intense voyeur appear. An artist emerges who would eventually produce a huge body of mature work fulfilling a personal poet-ic vision, but one fairly tradi-tional by comparison with

some of his contemporaries.

An examination of the pictures themselves, along with the accompanying evidence, does not support some of Galassi's conclusions about the aesthetics of this early work or the spirit in which Bresson cre-ated it. The curator has not only spotlighted a particular chronological sequence, 1932-1934, but has equalled the photographer in selecting his frame with previsualization. His book uses the languages of art history and criticism in a style that is a sort of hybrid of objectivity and subjectivity.

Somerset Maugham hinted that criticism was a tricky business, and if done properly, an invaluable service. He stated,

We see composers telling stories, painters philosophizing, and novelists preaching ser-mons... we may still hope that one of these days a critic will arise to ascend the throne once occupied by Saint-Beuve and Matthew Arnold. He could do much.

Galassi beckons us to enter his tent and hear a story that will clarify the dim beginnings of one of our modern heroes. In this context it is important that one be aware both of his shifts of emphasis when he considers the facts and of his



Trieste, 1933 (Museum of Modern Art, New York; lent by the photographer)

highly subjective readings of

One need not have attended the show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to see the photographs, for it merely ac-companies the book. The prints do not gain in scale what they lose in clarity, since Bresson restlessly probed the streets for truffles, not the darkroom. The oldest images do not appear to exploit the qualities of the rich papers available at the time. Placards for the show offer bits of Galassi's complex, uncluttered historical analysis out of context, glorifying Bresson and robbing the viewer of the chance to explore the themes of sustaining interest raised by this unusual project.

The first two images placed at the entrance to the gallery depict charace passersby in front of, respectively, a wall mural and a set of billboards. They may teach us something of Bresson's method that the smaller reproductions in the book (pp. 96-97) do not. In these larger images it appears that Bresson has focused sharply on the inanimate back-drops, waited for his quarry, and shot when the trap sprung. The people in these grey days are out of focus, presumably due to a compromise in choice of depth of field and shutter speed. This accords more with Bresson's own admission of his goals than with the one Galassi ascribes to him, the ful-

the surreal-ist credo. "My greatest joy," Bresson stated once, is the surprise of facing a beautiful organization of forms."s Galassi chooses and values accessibility and clarity over elitist jargon and dazzling sentences without content. He has created a text that yields much stimulating information, though also leading one into contradictions when one tests his thesis. Galassi's agenda calls for placing

Bresson at

the end of a

fillment of

line of successful artistic experiments by Picasso and others (p. 39). He has found some tentative pictures by Bresson that tative pictures by Diesson that essentially copy more innova-tive work (fig. 25, 30, and 33) and occasionally surpass it (fig. 15)—but only in style—and in retrospect lionizes them "as one of the great, concentrated episodes in modern art" (p. 19; Galassi quotes here from Van Galassi quotes here from V Deren Coke and Diana Du Pont). Cartier-Bresson emerges then as "the best and most mature of the Surrealist

photographers (p. 10)." For example, Galassi credits Martin Munkacsi's beautiful "Three Boys at Lake Tanganyika" (fig. 33) with having influ-enced Bresson more than any other photograph—by the artist's own admission—but he then rolls on to state that Within two or three years he [Bresson] had far surpassed it, notably in his pictures of children playing in ruined buildings in Seville" (p. 40). A look at the pictures themselves reveals that Galassi has manu-factured a rootless comparison between Munkacsi's masterfully composed lyric and Bresson's friendly, tense ambiguities. In a process typical of this early period, Bresson grafted his own nervous energy onto more original, prior work in the genre. More importantly, Galassi labels this early work as "blunter, less lyrical" than

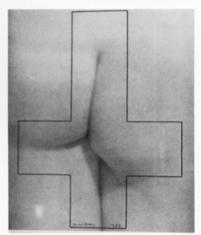
Bresson's post-war images (p. 9). One cannot have it both ways. If one feels that Bresson surpassed Munkacsi's lyricism in an unrecognized brief period of ground-breaking brilliance while still in diapers, it is hard to comprehend how he had room to move on to a mature, more lyrical style—the one he is justly famous for.

Indeed, contrasting Bresson's photos with the work of a true surrealist like Man Ray illuminates what Bresson accomplished. Rather than anticipate or perfect the aesthetics of André Breton's revolution of values, Bresson found his metier in the realm of depiction of forms. He used superficial surrealist techniques of dislo-

cation and juxtaposition (pp. 35-36) to add spice, in the absence of the deeper tensions he was able to unite with form much later (after he had had some meaning-ful life experience). I choose to believe that his "intentional subversion of narrative expectations" (p. 9) oc-curred because at this very early stage he had no meaningful narra tive to tell. He did not invent radically new ways of seeing, as Man Ray did with "Untitled," (1936), or Monu-ment à D.A.F. Sade," (1933).

When he used the vocabulary of surrealism, Bresson tread safe ground in these early pic-tures, as in his depiction of the grotesque (the slaughterhouse of La Villette, p. 84) that fol-lowed Eli Lotar's example (fig. 25). Lotar's image is truly fantastic, animated in stillness, with a disgusting and yet fascinating horror and interest, both moral and aesthetic. Bresson's picture displays the char-acteristic concerns of his first work-an interest in form and texture in the context of a

whimsical, shallow ambiguity that openly clings to earlier ex-periments in the genre. Although Bresson did not ex-hibit the talent of May Ray at this time, like Ray he tried to avoid the trap of producing what Rosalind Krauss (in a thorny phrase) labels "signi-fiers of signification," or "empty signs." It is worth mudwrestling with her essay in the fine book L'Amour Fou to absorb her thesis relating semi-otics—theories of content and meaning—to the flash flood of surrealism. It helps to sort out who drowned, who rode the bull, and who sat on the bank, either fishing or taking snap-shots. Ray could not escape his unique genius or his mixture of



Man Ray, Monument à D.A.F. de Sade, 1933. From L'Amour Fou.

classicism, eroticism, and strangeness. Bresson could not deny his curiosity, nascent humanism, kindness, nor in this very early period, his need to work in the syntax created by the synthetic cubists, under whose influence he had created paintings which he apparently

elected not to preserve.
What saves Bresson's better
photographs from the fate of becoming "empty signs" is his attachment to beauty and to life. He subverts surrealism as often as he subverts narrative.

Pierre Colle, Paris, 1932 (Museum of Modern Art, New York; lent by the photographer)



Jacques-André Boiffard, Untitled, c. 1930. From L'Amour Fou.



A focused emotion may rule (p. 59, 68, 76), or wry humor predominates (p. 61, 69, 73, 89). The best pictures (among them, p. 101, 104, 111) combine wit, form, and an element of surrealism in the form of epiphany to which one may only respond with an amazed shake of the head. Indeed, Bresson owes a debt more to James Joyce (whose influence on him was acknowledged by André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Bresson's closest friend during this period, p. 15) than to the surrealist movement in this context.

Lionel Trilling provides us with some insight into Joyce's idea of epiphany:

Joyce had the 'theory' that suddenly, almost miraculously, by a phrase or a gesture, a life would thrust itself through the veil of things and for an instant show itself forth, startling us by its existence....we perceive the writer's intention to create a form which shall in itself be shapely and automous and at the same time unusually responsible to the truth of external reality, the truth of things and events. To this end he concerns himself with the given moment.....

In 1974, Bresson stated, "I want to prove nothing, demonstrate nothing. Things and beings speak sufficiently." (p. 24). Trilling continues,

He affects to be indifferent to 'meanings' and 'values' ... we are not, of course, for very long deceived....His intense concern with the hard aesthetic surface of the story, his preoccupation with things and events, are, we begin to perceive, cognate with the universe, representative of its nature, of the unyielding circumstance in which the human fact exists."

And so, we should not be deceived, by Bresson or Galassi. The pictures themselves show Bresson's timing and framing to produce his interpretation of things and events, an interpretation conditioned by the sum of the facts of his existence despite another of his disclaimers, that "the artist's life has nothing to do with his work." (p. 10). The average pictures do not deserve the weighty claims Galassi makes for them; the few great pictures allow traditional figure and ground analyses but defy neat description.

The best pictures share a

The best pictures share a youthful ferocity fed by a lucky insanity, the goofy intensity of a novice acrobat—with a net. All epiphanies are not created equal, and Bresson's revelations seem to spring more from children's play* than from a deep investigation of the content of reality by an artist who truly needs his art to live because it is so closely tied to his survival. One remains suspicious of Galassi's grandiose claims for the whole body of work (p. 19), which instead appears to be a mix of confusion, imitation, and genius. Following others, Bresson added a personal touch to the ongoing fusion of epiphany theory, Surrealist motifs, and inventions in painting that occurred around him as he used up his worth.

Galassi struggles to create a peculiar narrative of legitimization which asks us simul-



Dance of the Barong, Bali, 1949 (courtesy of the Menil Collection, Houston)\

taneously to see the early work as both a new, complete and successful oeuvre and as a youthful experiment not intended for publication—an embodiment of the rising deification of personal experience: life as art and art as life. I sometimes daydream of the age when Auguste Renoir could reply to the question, "why do you strive to paint?" with the answer, "why do I relieve my bladder?"

Bresson's early pictures ma-terialized primarily as corollaries of his revolt against his wealthy class status and its expectations (p. 12). Yet he wisely made use of the fertile web of connections in the art world that his class background supplied to him from the time he was five. Although he embraced the world of the dispos-sessed as his own in these years (p. 20), it is hard to imag-ine them embracing him, eating apple pie `a la mode be-cause it was cheap and nourishing (p. 22). In a revealing slur of personal pronouns, Mandiargues switches from classifying Bresson as one of the "Norman grande bourgeoisie (p. 14), to later describ-ing the two of them as "petits bourgeois that we were" (p. 20) (p. 20). Langston Hughes remembered Bresson's father as a wealthy industrialist whom "Henri declared ... could keep his money' (p. 21). That was acceptable, because Mandiargues had re ceived an inheritance (p. 19) to tide them over. In a spirit of honesty and openmindedness, a spirit of receptivity to what the pictures tell us, one may detect the milieu of their production.

Are we also to believe Galassi when he looks at the pictures, and says, "Often the subjects are aware of the photographer, and even when they do not clown or perform for him it is clear that he has won their collaboration" (p. 27)? The pictures themselves tell another story. Bresson hunted with a Leica strapped with black tape. The instrument owed much of its reputation for discreteness to its lack of a through-the-lens viewing option. Instead of a noisy mirror that had to swing out of the way of the film every time the shutter slid, the Leica employed a rangefinder. It was a quiet camera. Of the eighty-seven plates in the book, eleven

are of inanimate objects or animals, thirteen are of Bresson's friends, often posed manneristically, thirty-seven feature people unaware of the camera, at least eight are non-collaborators aware of the act of being photographed, and only eighteen appear to be won over. Of these eighteen, eight are children and five are prostitues.

dren and five are prostitues.

A confirming bit of evidence that crystallizes Bresson's approach to his subjects at this time can be seen in his shot of the resting man in the cafe on the Avenue du Maine (p. 67); barely visible in a dark reflection off the window glass, Bresson holds the camera in a deceptive pose to camouflage his real intentions from the patron he caricatures. He feels like Hamlet lurking around his father's study. In Photoportraits, his companion Mandiargues speaks of his "friendly cruelty," a certain sadism in his

eye and in his lens," and "the sting of Henri Cartier-Bresson's lens (the comparison with an insect is his own)." !!

Similarly, many of his Mexico photographs steal glimpses of families in doorways from odd angles, capture sleepers in the street, or come upon pedestrians suddenly before they can react. In another shot taken at La Villette (p. 59), he has stationed himself in an alcove or around the corner from a sleeping drunk and offers us his perspective by keeping a fragment of the wall in the frame. These pictures comprise revealing self-portraits showing insecurity and alienation, a desire to make points, and a voyeuristic yearning for more experience.

Later he would confront the real and see more in it, creating and finding richer epiphanies appropriate to his maturing vision of people, nature, and how they interact. After

he checked the hundreds of negatives from a hunt to see whether he had won the game, he put the epiphanies through a second selection process to show us ones which were never frightening or inhuman, possibly a key to his success. Even the murdered Resistance fighter by the banks of the Rhine appears to be sleeping in the creeping fog.

Our age faces a crisis of confi-

Our age faces a crisis of confidence, a lack of a supporting mythology and a daily deluge of what appear to be senseless events. Bresson in a few of his early pictures offers us a glimpse of the mature artist who would come to perform the sole function of the doctor as described by Voltaire as he amuses us in our illness. His playful images of ourselves, tossed in a sea of ambiguity, document footprints of reality poetically abstracted for our contemplation. They are, as Freud called his soul-searching in a letter to Jung, "a cure through love."

Footnotes

William Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality."
 W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1986), p. 149.

3. Henri Cartier-Bresson, quoted in Sylvan Barnet, A Short Guide to Writing About Art (Boston: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989), p. 45.

and Company, 1989), p. 45.

4. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, L'Amour Fou (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), p. 15.

5. Krauss, p. 31.
6. Lionel Trilling, Introduction to The Collected Stories
—Isaac Babel (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 16.

American Library, 1974), p. 16.
7. Trilling, p. 17.
8. André Piagre de Mandiargues, Preface to Henri Cartier-Bresson, Photoportraits (New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1985), p. 6.

Ltd., 1985), p. 6.

9. Book jacket blurb, Henri
Cartier-Bresson: Photographer (New York: Little, Brown
& Co., 1986).

10. Mandiargues, p. 8.

11. Mandiargues, p. 10.

12. Mandiargues, p. 13.
13. Henri Cartier-Bresson:
Photographer, Plate 18.
14. Bruno Bettelheim, Freud

14. Bruno Bettelheim, Freu and Man's Soul (New York: Random House, 1984), frontispiece.

Stephen Small is a Houston physician taking a leave of absence from teaching and practicing emergency medicine in order to pursue interests in photography and fiction. He joins the Harvard Anaesthesiology Program this summer.

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PROFILE: **BEN DESOTO**

By Julie Lee

Ben DeSoto is a staff photographer with the Houston Chronicle. Some of his work was included in the Blaffer Gallery's 1988 Houston Area Exhibition. As a result, he was invited, along with Earlie Hudnall, to show some of his work in Gallery X at HCP. Gallery X is a new space at HCP which is dedicated to the exhibition of works by regional, emerging, and experimental artists. Hudnall and DeSoto do not collaborate in their work. Each photographer has a sizable body of personal and professional work, and neither would have had the slightest trouble filling the walls of Gallery X for an individual show. But Gallery X is itself experimental and evolving. Probably for various reasons the two were invited to collaborate on an exhibit to hang from January 25 to February 19. This they did quite happily, and the result was A Stitch in Time Saves Nine? This column, which is also new and evolving, is choosing to profile them separately, DeSoto in this issue of SPOT, and Hudnall in the next.

Ben DeSoto has been on the staff of the Houston Chronicle since 1981. Prior to 1981 he did an internship at the Houston Post, was on the staff for one year and worked for a number of years as a stringer for the Pasadena Citizen. He has never filled out a formal job application for a newspaper; he got where he is by being interested and eager and by "hanging out." He would go by the papers, show some pictures, get a little advice, do a little talking, then return the next month and do the same thing with a few variations, at least enough to show he was eager to learn and willing to work. Sooner or later he would get the call or be in the right place at the right time.

If you are getting the idea that Ben DeSoto's story is very much the story of a local boy making good, you are right. He was born in Jacinto City, educated through high school in Pasadena, learning on an In-stamatic,then using a 35mm Ricoh for the high school newspaper. He went on to study journalism at San Jacinto Col-lege and the University of Houston. Whatever personal and family qualities and attitudes he brought with him to these local schools allowed them to succeed in ways we don't hear about often enough. He has successfully completed twice the number of years of schooling that either of his parents completed. And he gives every sign of appreciating knowledge and education as ongoing spiritual and intellectual processes.

DeSoto says he works for a newspaper because it makes his world bigger. His job brings him into situations to which he might otherwise not have access. And it allows him or pushes him to meet and inCAN YOU IMAGINE

the pleasure waking alive to live another day



UNDERS9 at Almeda Road pla going for some reasons TO DO WHAT

Ben DeSoto, Under 59 at Almeda Road, 1989



Ben DeSoto, Washington, D.C., 1988

teract with persons he otherwise might not have known. As with his education, the combining of his own personal qualities and interests with the credentials and opportunities provided by his job form the matrix for much of the work he produces which is not required by the newspaper. His camera is nearly always with him or within reach. It must be difficult to determine on any given roll of film where one kind of work leaves off and another kind begins. Perhaps his writing in the margins is one way of establishing that his pic-

tures have a life beyond their life in the daily newspaper. Happy and proud in his profession, he seems to recognize the professional limitations as well as some of the problems posed by the documentary tradition in photography. It did not surprise me to learn that some of his heroes were Eugene Smith, Walker Evans and James Agee. However he volunteered, without any encouragement, that he struggles with the concept of himself as a "spy" as well as with the concept of using some one's misfortune to gain, however indirectly, recognition for



Ben DeSoto, Newspaper Collage, 1988.

Though he describes himself now as a "Christio-Buddhistanarchist-punk," DeSoto was raised as a Christian Sect Southern Baptist and almost went into the ministry. When he was working for The Pasadena Citizen, he was able to arouse interest and support for a woman whose home was badly in need of repair. Later, The Chronicle sent him to the Star of Hope Mission, and out of that assignment came his ongoing work on the homeless. He has been researching sources of the problem, recently reading, for example, University of Houston professor John Gilderbloom's book Rethinking Rental Housing. His boss allowed him to connect up with assignments on the subject here in Houston, and what he learned here led him to other cities. During 1988 he travelled to New York, San Francis-co, San Diego, and Washington, D.C. Whatever the purpose of these trips, he was able to connect with the homeless and learn something about the resources available to them. A Stitch in Time Saves Nine? features images from all these

cities as well as from Houston. There are many images, and the style is frantic, feverish. Each image is 16 x 20 and is made up of a 35mm print surrounded by a generous margin in which DeSoto has written and scrawled, often attaching clippings or advertisements which he selects from a collection in a scrapbook. The effect is distracting, childlike, insistent. Size and effect combined are reminiscent of art work done by children in school and attached lovingly, importantly, to refrigerator doors at home. The cumulative effect of so many images, as may be intended, is one of spontaneous growth, as if the problem were multiplying before our eyes and all around us, even where we do not look. The difficulty for the viewer is in knowing which images to move in on in order to read the fine print. Close examination requires movement toward the image. and the viewer becomes more involved. Gut feelings can be modulated to clearer perceptions. The words are not slogans. They are interactive, an attempt to fix a conversation, to hold it in the air as proof of something. Rather than focusing on the homeless people themselves, DeSoto wants to supply specifics about how ongoing circumstances and programs differ from city to city. He emphasizes that though he doesn't have any answers, "I want to talk solutions. I'd rather say, 'What's happening in San Diego with the Regional Task Force is good.' What's functioning at One London House in Houston is working."

DeSoto says this work grows out of "aggravation" and is in-tended to "aggravate." He uses these words frequently, as if they mean something both personal and puzzling to him. They sound a little off-key coming from someone who seems so affable, so engaging. I always thought that being affable and engaging was something that came naturally to certain people. DeSoto insists that it is a struggle, that he really has to work at it, and I find myself believing him. His resumé includes a long list of shows and awards from 1984 -1988, and he works long hours on the job. On Sunday afternoons he volunteers in the darkroom at Ripley House, an old settlement house in the old second ward. The building now houses a large variety of community services.

In addition to his interest in the homeless, other ongoing themes of DeSoto's work include the punk generation, environmental portraits of artists in Houston, his own family, and aspects of rodeo performances. After the Gallery X exhibition closes, yet another aspect of his interests will be on view in Houston; he will be showing parts of a series of work in progress concerning addictions (Reality and Illusions of Self) as part of the exhibition Social Concerns: Can Religion Make a Difference? at the Congregation Beth Israel.

Julie Lee is a frequent contributor to SPOT.

PUTTING THE CONTEXT IN THE PICURE

By Roberto Cofresi

Photographs by Karl Baden, Michael Mitchell and David Rosten were exhibited at HCP from January 11 - February 19, 1989. Karl Baden lectured on his work at the Glassell School on January 21.

In 1988 a major exhibit of digitally produced visual works, Digital Photography: Captured Images / Volatile Memory / New Montage, originated in San Francisco and travelled across the United States, making a stop at HCP in October. The exhibit placed digitally produced works within the context of art photography, hence taking part in an upheaval of activities that inquire, use and promote digital processes as a new form of photography.\(^1\)

The new technology, with its capabilities for easy and endless manipulation of images, adapts itself readily to expressing ideas of hyperreality, shifts in the environment to a more "virtual", less "physical" state, and other, more radical, ideas about the decay of photographic objectivity and the coming of the "age of perfect simulation." But even though digital imagery can be construed as challenging the art history of photography, it involves far more than that. The importance of photographic imagery is constructed within a diversity of cultural contexts that deserve attention and qualification.

In 1989 we commemorate the 150th anniversary of photography: 150 years since Daguerre and Fox Talbot announced their work in their communities. Strategic move or lucky coincidence, either way, the anniversary makes 1989 not just a stepping-stone for advancing the new age of digital reproduction, but also a year for reassessing the values of "analog" photography and its relationship with the new digital technology.

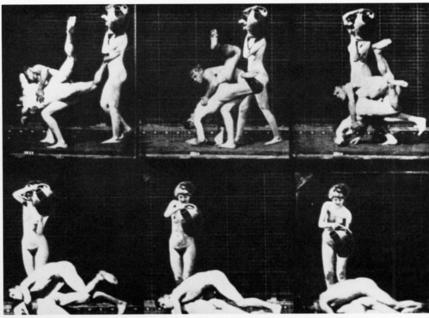
HCP chose to commemorate

this anniversary by showing the work of three contemporary photographers, Karl Baden, Michael Mitchell, and David Rosten, who each use "analog" photography; but their subjects are the various contexts that prove central to understanding this work. Baden's work focuses on the art history of photography, while Rosten explores relationships among breader contexts of the use of

broader contexts of the use of this medium in contemporary society. Finally, Mitchell documents portrait photography in a commemorative gesture for the 150th anniversary of Toronto.

Baden's beautifully windowmatted black and white prints are composed from parts of well-known and other not-sowell-known photographs from the iconography of the art history of photography. In one image, Eadweard J. Muybridge's action study of a naked woman walking with a water jar on her shoulder enters into another Muybridge study of two naked men wrestling. Frame by frame she approach-

es the men as their wrestling



Karl Baden, Woman Pouring Water, Men Wrestling (Eadweard Muybridge), 1988



David Rosten, from David Rosten: The Photographs (a series of work in progress), 1988-9

becomes more heated, and empties the jar over their heads. In another, Diane Arbus' child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, New York, has been relocated within the setting of Cartier-Bresson's photograph of children playing among the ruined walls of Seville, Spain, 1933. On a more shocking note, the face of the Vietnamese man being shot in the head in Eddie Adams' well-known war photo is substituted for the face of the Jack of hearts in Harold Edgerton's stop-action shot of a bullet breaking through a playing card.

Baden reconstructs the art history of photography, irreverently recomposing images by the great "masters" of photography.-Weston, Steichen, Stieglitz, Frank, Arbus, etc., as well as the more popular icons of figures like Edgerton and Eddie Adams. He rejects the serious intellectuality of established art history, while at the same time attempting to refocus it around the more physical fetishisms of sex and death within that history. This apparent contradiction becomes part of a mood roller-coaster ride on which Baden

takes the viewer. While he alternates between provoking, humorous, pretentious, subtle, shocking, seductive, and surreal images, he initiates discussions about the relationship of social documentary, art photography, and scientific experimentation. Baden bases his work on an art historical context, and at the same time he deconstructs that context. But for whom? —Art historians? The work doesn't inquire deeply enough into the points it raises —A general photography audience? But a lot of the history implied falls outside the realm or popular knowledge. Where does Baden belong? In between? Outside of both contexts?

In a slide presentation delivered at the Glassell School, Houston, on January 21, Baden mentioned his recent interest in using media images rather than primarily art-historical ones. An image composed of a recent Smirnoff vodka advertisement and a classically beautiful male nude by George Platt Lynes becomes, then, a clear example for understanding the context of Baden's work. In the Smirnoff/ Platt Lynes composite, the pre-

tentious beauty of a headless nude is made irreverent by a group of elegantly dressed women sitting around a table, laughing. The women casually ignore the naked beauty beside them and are more entertained by a high-heeled shoe that captures all the serious attention the neglected man seems to want. In this composite, Baden's interest in art history and his playfulness and unpredictability, combined with an image from popular culture, establish a context for the art history of photography as it relates to different aspects of our visual environment—advertisements, consumerism, femi-nism. This context then becomes more accessible and intriguing to a variety of audiences—art historians, feminists, sociologists, television viewers, etc.
While Baden shows us small

While Baden shows us small windows into a history of photography gone mad, David Rosten's 20" x 24", unmatted, densely grainy (his final print is made by reshooting his initial image with a disc camera) color prints appear as memories of our experiences of the photographic medium. Starting with a photograph of a jog-

ger on the seashore with a beautiful red sun floating on the horizon, the series on display, part of a work in progress, includes, among others, a Rayograph (a la Man Ray, using what appears to be the inner mechanisms of a clock and a film spool), an X-ray of an outstretched hand, an art gallery installation sho showing minimalist geometric works on the wall, a black and white Wegeestyle street-photo of a person dead or asleep on a gloomy city sidewalk, a gauzy close-up of a red thornless rose on a blue background, an image of a man and woman in a motel bedroom engaged in performing explicit sex, a black and white photograph of a Frankenstein figure in a scary science lab, and a black and white papparazi of a blonde starlet caught by "surprise" as she exits her sport car. The series ends in a highrise night view of a city's downtown. All the images are treated with an equal dose of distancing; the meaning they would derive in their "original" context is secondary to the new context created for our viewing experience on the gallery wall. Rosten takes us through a

Rosten takes us through a "whole lexicon of photographic identities, all of them made by him "• (Rosten, for example, persisted until he was allowed access to a high-tech observatory telescope to take a photo of the moon). The images seem to remind one of specific contexts, while at the same time refusing to remain fixed within those contexts. This lack of a definite context engages the viewer in a struggle for recognition that is being constantly undermined. It is as if one couldn't remember exactly where one saw an image, while knowing that one in fact had never seen the image before.

never seen the image before.

In contrast to Baden's proliferation, Rosten's images have been edited more selectively, creating an almost narrative effect between sunrise and night shot. As we move between the Wegee-style street shot, the x-rated shot (the "climax" of the series), and the papparazi photo, the borders between art, documentary, sexual fiction, and sensationalism are blurred. This blurring of borders, as placed within the context of an art exhibit, creates tension around the position of the work within its usual social structure, and also concerning the gallery itself as representative of a particular social context: one that flatters?

Rosten addresses the social contexts of the photographs by obscuring the definitions of images, distancing them in a mist of confusion. On the other hand, Mitchell works clearly within the range of a specific social context--portrait photography. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Toronto, Mitchell took his family (wife and two kids) to a variety of portrait studios in that city, run by photographers from different ethnic groups. The family went to Greek, Jewish, Chinese, Polish, West Indian, White American, Italian, and Portuguese photographers. Maintaining a documentary attitude, Mitchell's family did not choose the photographs that they liked best for them. Furthermore they didn't remove the photos from the original



Michael Mitchell, Family Portrait, Wong's Photography, Toronto, 1984

cardboard frames which the photographers provide.
Mitchell's documentation of portrait photography is done with little intervention, keeping his hand away from the project as much as possible (he doesn't even touch a shutter the whole time).

The family looks friendly in the Polish photographer's image, and tired in the West Indian's image, reserved in one Jewish image and distanced in the Italian portrait. The differences between the portraits could lead to a discussion of ethnic differences, but this line of reasoning is invalidated when one sees that within the presentation there are three portraits by the Greek photographer and a couple each from different Jewish and Portuguese photographers, and the family seems confortable in some, not in others, indifferent in another. This intelligent choosing of repetitions by Mitchell eliminates the possibility of creating linear categories across the images based on ethnicity.

The picture that we get of portrait photography is one that cuts across a large section of our society. And regardless of who took the picture, certain aspects are made clear, those aspects are made clear, those that all of us have come to ex-pect from a portrait photogra-pher, and that are emphasized here through repetition. "The children have resolved their differences and love mother; father is present and protective while the entire family floats in a limbo outside of history and beyond all time," says Mitchell in the accompanying state-ment. The differences between the photos are presented as the untold story of each portrait--was the West Indian image taken later in the day, maybe after a long drive, or a hard day's work? Maybe the Polish image was taken on a sunny Sunday, or after going for ice cream. Mitchell presents a group of pictures where the im-portance of the image is not its accurate documentation of a reality, or the manipulation of it. Its importance is to be material representation, and commemorative memorabilia of a ritual that includes getting dressed, gathering the family, driving out to the photo studio, having the portrait taken, and all the events in between as experienced by the whole family to-

The three photographers fea-

tured in commemorative ex-hibit all point towards an increased consideration of the rituals within which pho-tography functions: Baden goes part-way toward creating a context for a new art history of photogra-phy that is less pre-tentious, more open and accessible; Ros-

ten, by juxtaposing different contexts which use this medium, induces reflection about those contexts and especially about photographs in the art gallery; and Mitchell firmly establishes the importance of ritual within the context of looking at portrait photography. This exhibit at HCP places criticism of photographic images in a context in which interpretation itself becomes the subject. The meanings that different image-making technologies (analog or digital) construe is, therefore, given a ground that makes the space between them accessible, viewable, connected.

Footnotes

1. There were also symposia on digital processes; from Ohio State University's Photography: The Second Revolution, to the more introductory attitude of New York University's New Technology: Computer Applications in Photography. In Houston, HCP acquired a computer that is the center of various workshops in computer graphics. The discussion was, of course, accompanied by a number of articles in publications such as Afterimage, Screen, and Spot.
2. See Alan Rath's artist's statement in Digital Photography: Captured Image-s/Volatile Memory/New Montage (San Francisco: San Francisco Camerawork, 1988), p. 24; Robert Bowden, "After the Revolution" in Afterimage, vol. 16, num. 2, p. 4; and curator Jim Pomeroy, "Captured Images/Volatile Memory/New Montage" in Digital Photography, p. 2
3. J. Williamson, "A Piece of the Action" in Consuming Passions. Williamson is writing about Cindy Sherman's work; I have substituted photographic identities for Williamson's original feminine identities, and him for her in applying her quote to Rosten's work.

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COME AS YOU ARE

By Erwin Ferguson

Sonomama, Sonomama: High Fashion in the Japanese Countryside, by Taishi Hirokawa. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988. \$25.00, 60 pages.

Magical Power marvelous action! Chopping wood, carrying water... --Ancient Zen Master

Fashion is in itself a bizarre endeavor, but nothing is so strange as the levels of cultural imperialism one finds when perusing a Japanese fashion magazine. We would expect to see a world fresh, completely new, original, and-most importantly-unique. The magazine should be capable of reinvigorating all matters of West-ern style. It was in this sense that Marco Polo sought splendid spices in his travels through the Orient. However, the imagery in Japan's fashion world is a mirror—although a curved and distorted mirror-of the West's. Borne on pages which are reversed in order float images which represent fashion in the conventional American-European modes: for the sake of coolness the models adopt that haughtily superior attitude which threatens to become a scowl: aristocrats abound while servants bear all burdens; women imitate the open-hearted spirited goofiness of the southern Cali-

fornia fifteen-year-old. Culture is not monolithic; in a certain sense it involves a sort of free market. People have to find a connection between the new and the old, or else they will just leave the new aside. Witness the nineteenth century's influx of *Japonisme* into Europe and its tremendous impact upon the Impressionist movement. As the story of art history goes, painting was mov-ing towards flatness, so when the flattened images of Japan arrived, Western culture accepted them. Because traditional Japanese culture overtly embraced certain notions about social class, the various strategies typically used for selling fashion have proved easily adaptable there.

So it was a great surprise, as I walked through bookstores this Christmas—a season during which the publishing industry dumps all kinds of junk photography books on the market—to find Taishi Hirokawa's Sonomama, Sonomama. After years of annuals from Helmut Newton, Norman Parkinson, Irving Penn, and Richard Avedon, this looked like a real change from the usual cliché.

change from the usual cliché. Sonomama—which is slang for "in a natural state" or "just as you are"—is an ersatz documentation of "High Fashion in the Japanese countryside." "Internationally renowned fashion photographer," Hirokawa, accompanied by his ever-present stylist, photographed "peasants" (that's how he refers to them) wearing the designs of Bizi, Issey Miyake, Comme des Garcons, and others. Hirokawa's fash-

much in America, but the few examples I have seen are very typical--high-key electronic flash before a seamless background. His style is a lot like Irving Penn's, showing a fasci-nation with brilliant colors. However in this book Hirokawa makes an attempt at "anti-fashion." He turns against his usual methods and subjects, hoping to create something new. In an interview, he remarks that the peasants were not paid and that "not one person asked for a mirror." In this romantic venture, he believes that the rural folk have an instinctual relationship with the earth. Like all artists of these postmodern times, Hirokawa has a theorythe cucumber theory. The the-ory holds that fashion design-

ion work isn't published very

In the country you still find people who are, in cucumber terms, crooked and a bit smelly but taste great. If designers had real understanding of clothing, their clothes will look just as good on those people as on fashion models. They look as if they have always worn them. If it weren't for the captions—they would just be rural snapshots.

ers are like the farmers who

shapes. He states,

cultivate cucumbers to grow in absolutely straight and regular

Turning to John Berger's essay, "The Suit and the Photograph" (About Looking, 1980), one gains some insight into the mystery of Hirokawa's endeavor. Berger analyzes the role of the mass-produced suit in August Sander's collection of pre-World War II photographs. He finds that the suit has a double life, deforming the bodies of peasants, whom it wasn't designed for, while preserving the "...pure sedentary power" of the aristocrat. Because the peasants have accepted the suit as a status symbol, they also accept it as a symbol of the aristocrat's cultural hegemony. In Berger's analysis, the power is in the "look."

So can it be said that Hirokawa's photographs have a similar meaning? Are these peasants empowered with dignity and grace by the clothes they take on, or do the clothes—like the suits on Sander's peasants—"deform" them? If the subjects themselves had suddenly taken to wearing high fashion, the meaning might be the same; but this is not what happened. In addition, a major difference between Sander's work and Hirokawa's involves the latter's callousness to his subjects' self-respect and dignity.

respect and dignity.

Alas, one of the most disappointing aspects of this book is the fact that we never see the subjects in their own dress.

Considering Hirokawa's self-described goal is to photograph the peasants as they are, it is illogical to clothe them in decorative fashions.

The viewers of this book are given no standards to use in "authenticating" or reading

given no standards to use in "authenticating" or reading these photographs (Hirokawa made no "before" and "after" shots). His project probably has a different impact in Japan, where its citizens have more knowledge of the people and attitudes involved. How-

ever, for Americans, High Fashion is just a marketing tool, a way of making something new and different. This book is a collection of pseudo-events: manufactured photo opportunites which give the viewer a mere illusion of experiencing something.

Fashion photographs, like all photographs, always tell a story; in fashion it is based on two main elements, fetishism of the clothing and the portrait of the personality. The latter is usually subordinated to the former so as to create a new body metaphysic which sells clothing. In Hirokawa's photographs the roles are reversed—the clothing becomes rags, and the personality or individuality of the peasants wins out. Hirokawa chose to shoot these photographs in black and white to allow the people to "come out on top." Thus he has juxtaposed alienated clothing against what he sees as "pure" and "free" spirits in a state close to nature. When these sons of the earth need clothing, they make their own.

Now it's true that the clothing these "peasants" wear do look as if they have been worn all their lives, but the real issue is, would anyone viewing these images be motivated to buy high fashion at outrageous prices? In fact, Hirokawa's project demonstrates the necessity of the fashion photograph and the model in the fashion business. His work shows that the designers do not have "real understanding of clothing"; what they do have is a real understanding of how to sell an image. The model and the photographer use physique and personality to invigorate the clothing with a marketable aura of beauty. The viewer, subjected to the rhetoric of the fashion image, believes that the aura will then be transferred to his or, more typically, her, own body upon purchase Hence, the images of this book are those of fashion failures—charming, happy, au-tonomous individuals living in a true fairytale, like munchkins in Oz.

Hirokawa's photographs fall into a mock heroic stance. The celebratory status of his sitters is just perfunctory. Nearly every shot is taken from a low angle, placing the viewer on his stomach before new romantic idols. Choosing the square frame for every portrait (a shape which suggests stability), rendering all subjects in monochrome (which suggests timelessness), composing every photo with symmetry (an element instrumental to the classical feel). Hirokawa creates a world that's a slight return to the silver beauty of the Hollywood glamor treatment.

His use of electronic flash is subtle. He may have used a large fill reflector to cut the lighting ratios. Whether under a cloudy sky or full sunlight, he approaches everyone with the same techniqe. The residual effect is that there's a little white spark in everyone's eyes—a little bedazzlement—and they gleam with artificial personality. Using a fill flash when it's not really needed is giving the picture a "kick." It's an effective method



Taishi Hirokawa, Farmer and Wife with Their Scarecrow, Kagawa, 1986, from Sonomama, Sonomama

when done just right. The flash separates the foreground from the background, adding slight emphasis to the subject. In a way, it's like photograph-ing a photograph. This was an almost universal technique in the fifties, before fashion photographers roughened up the pictorial scene with available light. Hirokawa's technique makes the world beautiful, soft, and creamy-buffing it to a high satin finish, regardless of the coarseness of his subject. There is no ultimate time or place for these peasants, yet they have become time travellers, moving back into the romantic past and forward to the eternal present we have come to know through the VCR and the late show.

Whether Hirokawa is aware of it or not, his photographic style is similar in attitude to the cinematic style of Pedro Almodovar's Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown. Both use traditional techniques of their respective media culled from 50's paradigms. Both set their focus on people who aren't fashionable; however, the difference lies in the level of self-consciousness in their work. Almodovar's high-octane color, a perpetual visual machine, propels the viewer towards an artificial flourescent fantasy--you know you're witnessing a spectacle and can't forget it. Hirokawa's kerosene monochrome is so common that the viewer is lulled into a pseudo-scientific rationality. Like the hokey movies of Frank Capra, these photographs are chock-full of self-deluded romanticism. Hirokawa intends to sell these pictures as portraits of real Japanese.

The artificiality and staginess of this project is most noteable on pages 42 and 43. On the

right page is a full-figure shot of a Shrine Priest at Kolchi (1986), standing with stoical precision before a shrine, wearing Takayuki Mori; on the left page, there's another full-figure shot of the same Shrine Priest standing before two large trees. Hirokawa has changed his clothing, and he has also changed his environment, but the Shrine Priest's pose is nearly identical in both shots. Consequently, we are given the impression that the world moves, but the priest doesn't. It's an attempt to make the expression "Sonomama" literal. Photographs are artificial, and through this artifice, the personality is rendered eternal.

For the most part, Hirokawa's "peasants" do come across as real—mostly because they are photographed in the environments in which they work and spend their lives. And for the most part they look into the camera with pride, almost defiandly. The horse held by the cattle farmer on page 29 looks absolutely subdued by this powerful woman who's one-fifth its size.

It's when he photographs these people with "oddities," such as "Farmer and Wife with their Scarecrow (1986)" (p. 27) in a field, that I feel most suspicious. All three wear the fashions of Arrston Volaju. The scarecrow has a bemused face painted on his sock-head. You are impressed with the notion that a joke's afoot, only you don't know exactly who's the joker. Another example is Drunken Cab Driver at Cherry Blossom Party (1985)" (p. 21). He stands with lantern in hand, stiff-legged, a buffoon. Hirokawa's intentions may be honest, but these two photographs in particular raise the spectre of Diane Arbus' photographs of the mentally retarded and midgets. And that spectre leads me to think that if Hirokawa had been serious in his efforts or, at least a little self-conscious, he would have given the people in these photographs the courtesy of a name.

As antifashion, this project is doomed. Even the image of the fashion failure, the real person, can still be manipulated for the ends of fashion, because where there's imagery there's power to motivate. In an age when high fashion is in remission, low fashion or the quotidian becomes the new battle order. A visit to the major American fashion magazines of the sixties will reveal a world where the fantasy of high fashion was at its peak. Richard Avedon, editor of the April 1965 issue of Harper's Bazaar, devoted an entire issue to Jean Shrimpton in space fashions and other ex-otica. Within eight months fashion designers met with fashion editors and expressed their dissatisfaction with the "heroic" photographer who did anything for a picture. Even magazine readers complained about "undressed models" and women sitting on "johns." Today, Vogue is filled with a more relaxed form of high fashion—the image generally is of working women, although it's still restricted to the white upper class.

It was in Vogue in the late sixties and early seventies that "real" made its inroads into fashion photography. The editors of Vogue selected, or exploited, Diane Arbus' talent for "social realism," a realism which was rooted in a fascination for the marginal elements of society. Like Hirokawa, she too used the square frame, the

monochrome, and the strobic flash in search of personality. The real people of Arbus' fashion photographs are deply impressed with an aura of weirdness. Like the namesake that the public has bestowed upon her private work, they became "arbus freaks," people "just the way they are."

The most elegant television ad of the year—even moreso than Chanel's surrealist spot for No. 19-features a monkey, ancestral father to man. In the lore of civilization, the monkey is to man what the peasant is to the aristocrat. Sony is presenting the image of the snow monkey who stands upright, Walkman in hand, before mistshrouded mountains and a placid lake, while Puccini's La Bohème moves him to transcend the gulf between beast and intelligence. The argument is that if a beast can enjoy such sensitivity, you the viewer will certainly enjoy it even more.

Hirokawa's work has not reached that level of exploitation, but it could easily be used as a model to sell fashion. It matters not what level of reality resides in the image, only that the image connotes novelty. Like the snow monkey, romantic peasants could be used to turn the fashion world upside down. These new rulers of capitalism.-Sony replaces Coke as the new symbol of capitalist colonialism--may bring similar fables of technology at the service of the majestic and spiritual

Along the book's inner jacket someone has described it as "a beautiful work of art and a thought-provoking commentary on the relationship between people and their clothing." The editorial comments also suggest that it's the intention of the publisher to "inspire spirited discussion." To put it frankly, I doubt that the consequences of this book will be in the form the editor has suggested. The spirited discussion will probably involve jokes about how freakish the people in this book look. I suspect that the publisher is counting more on America's frustration with Japanese commercial success than hoping for any useful discussion. To a nation of style-conscious consumers, this book of "unfashionable" Japanese will induce amused befuddlement. When I showed the book around to some friends, one of them noted that "It looks good, but it sounds

Erwin Ferguson regards himself as a "dedicated amateur"; he has written previously on fashion photography for SPOT.

CAMERA **FUTURUS**

By Joseph McGrath

Visions of the Future: New Architectural Plans for the Hous-ton Center for Photography was the opening exhibit of HCP's new Gallery X, from January 11 - 22, 1989. Curated by Geoffrey Brune, the show included work by ten thirdyear architectural students at the University of Houston Col-lege of Architecture.

It seems appropriate some-now that the inaugural show for HCP's new Gallery X would feature not photography but ambitious architectural propos als for the Center's future growth. The ten proposals in the recent show Future Vithe recent show Future Vi-sions were a selected represen-tation of the work of some 150 University of Houston third-year architecture students. Geoffrey Brune, the show's curator, prepared a functional program for the Center and, along with other faculty mem-bers, issued the six-week design problem to his students. The program called for approximately 5,000 square feet of of-fices, classrooms, support facil-ities, a darkroom, bookstore, and library. Students were also encouraged to include an area to accommodate crowds area to accommodate crowds for openings and gatherings at the Center. Finally, the pro-posals for the new facility were to be sited in HCP's existing lo-cation, expanded to fill the en-tire site of the small commer-cial storefront in which HCP is presently located.

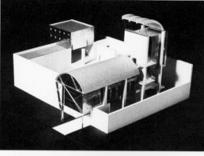
In the brief introductory ma-

terial to the show, Brune claims that in each of the pro-

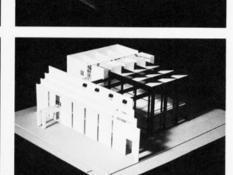
a notion about the role of photography in contemporary western culture is explored. In making space and architecture to express these ideas, the ar-chitecture becomes the mediator between function of the pro-gram and the metaphor of the idea.

Only a few of the students Only a few of the students took on this very formidable task directly, with results which will be noted below. For the most part, the projects seem to have found their inspiration less in observations about contemporary photogra phy than in equally potent ob-servations about the site, the surrounding neighborhood, and in notions which would provide the Center with a unique and characteristic image.

The corner location of the site, on West Alabama and Mulberry Streets, along with the loca-tion of the Menil Collection parking lot across Mulberry Street, provided a strong for-mal skeleton for the develop-ment of many of the schemes. That is, in many instances, the building presents one face to West Alabama but is ap-proached and entered from across Mulberry Street. The conception of the West Alabama face of the building as a "false facade" is rhetorically enforced in several cases. In John Major's proposal, the building presents a large billboard for the display of photography and information. Similarly, Scott Palermo's design offers a rear-projection screen which presents the "two-di-







(top) Edmund Soto, John Knott, (bottom) John Major, Chi La (architectural models photographed by Geoff Brune)

mensional face" of the Center

to the street.

An appreciation of the neighborhood's architectural chara ter has also proven influential in the shaping of these pro-jects. The use of houses along the street as both residences and businesses has spawned a hybrid architectural character. The houses retain their residential features but are also retro-fitted with commercial storefronts, sheet glass and signage. The proposals for HCP show an appreciation for both the houses' ambiguity and their "Do-It-Your-

self" character, re-sulting in many of the proposals in a self-conscious bricolage of architectural

pieces. Valerie Garrett pro-poses a building cut in two by a large ab-stract wedge. The side of the building in front of the wedge (facing West Alabama) contains the main gallery and takes on a commercial character of glass and metal storefront. The rear of the building, behind the wedge, in-cludes offices and support spaces and adopts the hip roofs, brick walls and double hung windows of the neighborhood

(although inordimass of the building itself). Al-though not as literal in their references, the witty, Gehry-esque assemblage of shiny, brightly-colored elements in John Knott's and John Major's proposals also suggests the work of the bricoleur. Knott's main gallery suggests a cross between the system of louvers at the Menil Collection and an industrial air-conditioner. Major's thirty-foot high slab of green travertine (perhaps quarried right from the MFA, Houston) is a satirical jab at the pretenses of High Art. Again, Scott Palermo and Sai Hin Loi both present buildings which are the product of an even more aggressive collage of architectural elements.

Although the funky, contradi-

tory nature of West Alabama Street was clearly conceived of as advantageous, the street's anonymity (as well as the Center's) were seen as problematic. Indeed, for the building to become a neighborhood landmark is almost unavoidable given the propsed Center's size, insti-tutional nature and proximity to the Menil Collection. By far the most monumental proposi-tion is Edmund Soto's two-story metal cube, containing the Center's library and bookstore, perched atop a two-story fa-cade overlooking West Alabacursive aspects shared by many of the schemes. In Sandra Strauss' proposal, the Cen-ter is broken down into several buildings which accommodate various functions and rest together on a large plinth. The plinth organizes the outdoor space surrounding the buildings and is designed to make work accessible outdoors, day or night. Similarly, Knott's, Major's and Palermo's billboards present photographs or information to the street around the clock. Although Edmund Soto safely seals off



from Visions of the Future, (I to r) Valerie Garrett, John Major, Wayne White (installation photo by Geoff Brune)

ma. Sandra Strauss's proposal includes a free-standing three-story circulation tower which serves as a kind of pylon marking a point along the street, in much the same way as the dis-tant Transco Tower. Nearly all of the proposals attempted to reduce the scale of the building by enclosing different program elements in distinctly identifiable pieces. However, the lack of contextual information or even scale regarding the comparative size and appearance of existing buildings in relation to the proposed new Center mitigated the strength of their

Nevertheless, the articulation of individual elements as a resolution of scale conjoins conveniently with the tinkered juxtaposition of pieces in formu-lating one of the strongest disthe Center from the outside world, as one might expect of a Cultural Institution, he too clouds the distinction between indoor and outdoor behind the precint walls, most dramatically in an outdoor theatre suspended below a small tower. Just as Malraux noted (per-haps quixotically, in hindsight) that photography would break down the walls of the museum, many of these proposals ad-vance a similar erosion of the vance a similar erosion of the gallery walls. Yet a certain lack of conviction is betrayed in "taking it to the streets," with the clear distinction of a "grand gallery" as a kind of sanctum outside of which the rowdiest play takes place. Even the leering thugs on the billboard outside of John Major's proposal hardly seem to pose a threat to the cultured tranquility of

his two-story gallery space. Curiously, the size of the gal-leries in many of the proposals suggests an intent awareness of the need to accommodate Big Photographs. In fact, Scott Palermo's proposal includes a large, figurative crane equipped with an enlarger looming over the darkroom in order to facilitate the produc-tion of oversize prints. Such an awareness fused with an obvi-ous appreciation for the commercial use of photographs in billboards, television and film suggests, particularly in Paler-mo's, Knott's, and Major's proposals, a building which is the locus of the ironic meeting of Big Art and Big Media as each sees the one in the other.

As noted earlier, only a couple

of the proposals attempted to mediate particular observations about photography with the functional demands of the program. Wayne White's proposal is essentially an inert rectangular form. Yet in the surfaces of that form, White attempts to make his building "about" photography. The walls, as well as areas of roof and floor, seem to consist of and noor, seem to consist of transluscent glass or glass block. Opaque portions of the gallery walls have been "peeled" away from the surface of the form and placed away from the building. The shad-ows that the bulding would cast at a certain time of year are etched into the surfaces surrounding the building. White seems obsessed with developing a proposal which makes light as seminal to architecture as it is to photogra-phy. The shadows etched into the pavement didactically press the point that the build-ing is always in light. The skylights and glass walls shape the building into both a diffuser of light and a receptor for a changing play of light and shadow

Chi La's proposal features a large free-standing structure consisting of several narrow, two-story layers of maze-like rooms functioning as galleries. Conceived of as a "mask," the structure faces West Alabama and is inspired by a conception of photography as dissem-blance. Behind the mask, though, the remaining program elements are routinely set aside in two adjoining build-ings. Both schemes are less dynamic in their formal compo-sition than other proposals, and are particularly indifferent to their surroundings. Al-though gawky and self-ob-sessed, they are noteworthy in attempting the difficult task of creating an architectural figuration from amorphous ideas about photography. Such an attempt reflects an effort to create a building which is dis-tinctly inspired by photogra-

Taken together, these proposals reflect an image of photography as both populist and eso-teric. They suggest an awareness of the immanence of photographs in our daily lives through both the media and the family album. Yet they also reflect a sense of the charisma of the gallery's art objects, as well as the processes of the camera obscura.

Joseph McGrath is a recent gradu-ate of the graduate program at the University of Houston, College of Architecture

BEEFCAKE

By Ed Osowski

Photographs by Roger Rutherford were on display at the Parkway Athletic Club, 800 Rosine, Houston, in November and December, 1988.

Consider two images from the more than 70 photographs by Roger Rutherford exhibited during November and Decem-ber at Parkway Athletic Club. The first, "Summer Catch," a black and white studio photograph, depicts a muscular young white male model. He turns his back to the viewer, and a fishing net is draped over his body, covering him from head to lower calves, where the photograph stops. "Summer Catch" resembles the male erotic photographs produced in California in the late fifties and sixties that define the word "beefcake": depictions of the male nude with a wholesome, clean, and somewhat coy approach. One is ex-pected to read "Summer Catch" with humor and irony.

Now consider a second image, "Crypt." A color photograph somewhat larger than "Summer Catch," in the exhibition it hung to the left of the first photograph. It is a photograph of a stone tomb, almost abstract in the intersecting planes of light and shadows which cross

it, guarded by a metal fence. The majority of Rutherford's works on display were black and white photographs of wellmuscled nude and semi-nude white and black models. A few depicted male couples; one showed a male-female couple; two showed female nudes; one was of four men; and several, like "Crypt," were abstract studies of architectural details. For the most part Rutherford's subjects varied little-solitary men, in a variety of poses, costumes, light, most feigning no awareness of the photographer's presence, a few confronting the camera and viewer directly. In many, Rutherford cuts the head or eliminates it completely and concentrates on the details of the torso Rutherford, who is a Houstonbased photographer, has achieved some fame with his growing body of male nude photography. One of his pho-tographs appears in Peter Weirmair's Hidden Image and illustrates T.R. Mackin's review of the book's German edition (SPOT, Spring 1988, p.

Shown at an athletic club that markets itself to a gay clientele, Rutherford's photographs are advertisements for what hard work at Parkway Athletic Club can accomplish. In fact, a Rutherford photograph is used in print ads for the health club. (The availability of the photographs for purchase, in a variety of sizes, prices corresponding to the format, or of cards of selected images, was indicated prominently as one entered.) The photographs, displayed in a hallway cut by doors and window, with varying levels of lighting, were



Roger Rutherford, Summer Catch, 1988

shown in what was not the most hospitable setting for looking at photographs. But that same hallway, its doors open to rooms with weights, mirrors, and the signs of athletic activity, also seemed somehow appropriate.

In his piece titled "Intersections" in the Winter, 1988 issue of SPOT (p. 10), Johannes Birringer poses several questions when considering the five headless bodybuilders by Paul Kittelson which stood outside Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum during its First Texas Triennial Exhibition. Birringer asks, "But how can one review such figures? What do they stand for? What metaphor: seduction? explosion? apocalypse?" Birringer's questions remind us that the human body, when depicted in art, has traditionally functioned metaphorically, that it has been used to convey an idea and not just a quantity of information.

The nude photograph is fraught with problems. Unlike other genres, it imposes its political content upon us, forcing questions that landscape or portrait, for example, can avoid. With the nude photograph one is forced to go beond the formal description of the content of the photograph and to ask what that content means. What is its underlying metaphor, in other words. In the case of male nude photographs, one asks how they differ (if at all) from the female nude image. And, one also asks, what does it mean, in the second decade of the AIDS epidemic, as Ronald Reagan passes on to his successor the lega-cy of his impoverished response to the disease, to display the

nude male image.

As Weirmair's book so well documents, the history of male

nude photography is a closeted one, a history of images kept concealed and intended for private consumption by a group of male collectors who, like the purchasers of female nude photography, could afford the prices asked. The availability and costs of male images have been manipulated by a cluster of forces, not the least of which has been their appeal to a limited but sizeable audience of affluent homosexual men. In Rutherford's images, beautifully photographed and printed, bodies stretch, leap athletically, lean languidly, disappear into shadows, reappear outlined by light. His models pose in cropped T-shirts, blue jeans strategically unbuttoned. leather jackets unzipped to reveal hairy chests, jock straps, cowboy boots, ballet shoes. They are covered by beads of sweat or gauzy fabrics. In short, his is the repertoire of the erotic (and sensual) gay male photograph whose view ers are other men. But nothing in these images shocks. They are safe, far less challenging than Robert Mapplethorpe's disturbing images from ten years ago. And if Rutherford's photographs seem familiar, it is because they are, quite simply, male versions of the female nudes that dominate our culture. Beefcake has just replaced cheesecake.

In that replacement one thing has remained constant—the depersonalization of the subject. Rutherford's models are obejcts—to be admired, to be imitated (by long hours at the gym), to be lusted after and dreamed about, to be purchased. In her essay "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth Century Art," art historian Linda Nochlin reminds us of the link between prostitution and erotic photog-

raphy. Women of the demimonde (because of their already compromised economic status) were the first models available to pose for the camera. And their poses, languid, passive, quiet, suggested their waiting availability for the aggressive male purchaser. Nochlin quotes John Berger to emphasize her point that the commercialization of sex and the rendering of the human person as a commodity define the connection between photography and prostitution."In the majority of European nudes there is a clear parallel with the passivity which is endemic to prostitution." The same argument applies to Rutherford's photographs, few of which offer models in control of their sexual powers.

Reinforcing the objectification of the model is Rutherford's tendency to split the body, to sever its parts and bring them into isolation. He returns reg-ularly to bodies without heads, to bodies seen from the chest to the crotch, from the shoulders to the waist. His are images of perfection, but a perfection emptied of all things intellectual (or, for that matter, emotional). In one photograph he pos-es his model, in jock strap and cowboy hat, body gleaming, with the model's eyes blocked by the down-turned hat. If the personality, what distinguishes one person from another, rests somewhere in our mental faculties, or is at least symbolized by the head as the location of those faculties, then Rutherford offers a vision from which personality and intellect have been removed.

His models differ, not in their ability to laugh or weep or know, but in their ability to stretch a T-shirt or fill a pair of blue jeans. They are utterly replaceable, cogs in the wheel of erotic fantasies. Their achievement is, in Stewart Ewen's phrase, "technical." Their "mindless obedience" to working out can be read upon their bodies. "This machineman is one of a generation of desolate, finely tuned loners who have cropped up as icons of American style. Their bodies, often lightly oiled to accentuate definition, reveal their inner mechanisms like costly, open faced watches....If this is eroticism, it is tuned to the mysteries of technology than to those of the flesh"2 Their perfection suggests not liberation but subjugation to the controlling whims of shifting taste. Like animals caught in the trapper's net, they are trapped by desires that constantly vary. It is an eroticism that seems especially appropriate for the waning days of the post-industrial era.

One returns to "Summer Catch" and "Crypt" and sees them from a more chilling perspective. If it had once been possible to read, with humor, the predicament of a hunk "caught" by another person, such an option no longer exists. What one catches is AIDS. What the photograph proposes is that the model is the person from whom one "caught" AIDS that summer. Its placement next to "Crypt" forces one to

this reading. Were it not for the presence of a work like "Crypt," Rutherford's photographs would exist in a timeless dreamscape, a place where history (and biology) do not matter. But "Crypt" pulls them, against the wishes of the photographer, one senses, into a present that is everything the photographs avoid—chaotic, real, threatening, frightening.

It deserves to be repeated that AIDS is not a gay disease, that there are cities, like Newark, where the majority of the people with the disease are heterosexual. To grant Rutherford his credit, his focus on apparently healthy and fit gay men is certainly an antidote to the abundance of images of wasted and suffering gay men with AIDS by photographers like Nicholas Nixon, for example. (One does not know, of course, the sexual orientation of Rutherford's models. Their talent as models comes from their ability to play the role asked of them. In these photographs they play the role of gay men.)

There is a price such photographs exact. They bind the viewer to traditional concepts of beauty and appearance. They raise expectations of sexual fulfillment that the reality of the flesh cannot meet. And by appealing to the desire for the perfect and the ideal, they distract one from recognizing, to borrow the words of art critic John Russell (writing about Lucien Freud), the "horror of the idvllic."

Footnotes

1. Quoted in Linda Nochlin, Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 143.
2. Stewart Ewen, All Consuming Images: the Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 191.

Ed Osowski manages the Montrose branch of the Houston Public Library. A frequent contributor to SPOT, he also occasionally reviews books for the Houston Post.

TWO FROM TEXAS

By Elizabeth McBride

From Uncertain to Blue: Photographs by Keith Carter, Introduction by Horton Foote. Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1988. 173 pp. \$29.95.

Seasons of Light: Photographs and Stories by Peter Brown, Poems and Essay by Denise Levertov. Houston: Rice University Press, 1988. 133 pp. \$24.95.

With the help of an intelligent and enthusiastic new director, Susan Bielstein, the Rice University Press has expanded its ambitions, inviting a wider variety of manuscripts in hopes of improving its reputation and becoming a genuinely distinguished small press. Seasons of Light, Photographs and Stories by Rice Professor Peter Brown with essay and poems by Denise Levertov, represents a serious effort in this direction, one only partially successful. The quality of design and reproductions in this tasteful and handsome book is exquisite. And given the reputation Brown has acquired locally, the publication of his admittedly unusual work is probably appropriate. But there are serious problems in the work itself which one would hope are addressed before Brown's next publication.

Reading this book, one gets a sense of the photographer as a thoroughly nice guy, rather sentimental and loving, careful of feelings, with an apprecia-tion of the small moments and ordinary images which actually do make up our lives. The pho-tographs themselves are beautiful. One's appreciation of the work hinges on the viewer's attitude, though, because the question arises whether beauty is enough when one is faced with photographs so precious and self-referential. There is a claustrophobic feeling to this work which I don't think can be attributed entirely to the fact that most of the scenes take place indoors. The short texts which accompany the which accompany the photographs employ oblique narratives, sometimes autobio-graphical, often imagined, in which Brown manages to bridge successfully his occa-sional tendencies to the surreal within a strain of concrete real-ism. The ability to segué linguistically from one world to another is impressive. But they lack their own integrity. Of course, the writing is intended to add content to the photographs, and in some examples it does--in "Burglars," for instance, a short cheerful, resigned meditation on the serendipitous nature of burglars and the things they leave. But all too often these texts seem to fly away from themselves in facile prose, like the prose poets might write in a fiction workshop, not under-standing that just as stringing words down a page does not necessarily produce a poem, pushing the line out to the edge does not necessarily pro-duce fiction. For the most part, this is writing, not stories. It believe the photographs and the text have the same problem: a highly polished tecchnique which badly cries for more content. As Donald Barthelme tells his students,



Peter Brown, Burglars, from Seasons of Light, 1988 (original in color)



Keith Carter, Diddy Waw Diddy, from From Uncertain to Blue, 1988

"You've got to bleed on the page." In this book, I can't detect a single drop of the photographer's blood. I've seen Brown's photographs and writing before, of course, and in a gallery the work is fun to look at. But when it's published, we expect more; we ask that it leave a significant trace in our lives. For me the answer at this point in Brown's development is that it doesn't.

ment is that it doesn t.

I can sympathize with
Brown's intention in involving
a famous poet (a responsible
charming person and dedicated
activist) in this project. However, Denise Levertov's essay is
shallow and possibly even misleading in differentiating between the nature of inspiration
a writer derives from paintings
and photographs. I believe it's
more likely to be the nature of
the image than the medium

which leads visual art to inspire a writer. It is also facile in that it flips easily from one cliché about writing to another, never penetrating, a problem that one who's never heard a lot of famous writers talk about themselves wouldn't be aware of. It adds nothing but further fragmentation to an already tenuously united book. The poems themselves are, again, facile -- sloppily written, they seem not to be deeply felt, an accusation I don't think one can make of Brown's work. Levertov didn't make her reputation with poems dashed off like these; she is capable of much more. Her hesitation about the project (early in the essay she explains that she almost turned it down) may be an indication of why her contribution didn't successfully bond with the rest of the volume.

Texas Monthly Press has pro-duced in From Uncertain to Blue, Photographs by Kei-th Carter and Introduction by Horton Foote, an equally well-de-signed book. In this study of small Texas towns with lovely and astonishing names --Valen-tine, Welcome, Happy, Elysian Fields, as well as Oatmeal, Diddy Waw Diddy, Dime Box, and Cut 'n Shoot--the elements all contribute to a sense of completion. From the easy affectionate tone of Foote's essay, which addresses the seasons in a town's life, to the uncompromising, realistic pho-tographs, and on to the loving, informative notes written by Pat Carter, the pho-tographer's wife, one moves with a sense of inevitability and surprise, those qualities which combined are said in a poem to lead to satisfaction.

Carter isn't trying to prove anything here, his touch is light, but one can't help noticing that his talents are in service not only to a love of form but an appreciation of human warmth, of what makes a town, the pyramid of relationships necessary to enliven place. In these full-page sepia- and selenium-toned images, he reveals not only the lives of towns, in their in-evitable churches and ongoing domino games, but also the deaths as represented by an empty school, a neglected cemetery, and the carcass of a dog whose dessica

tion is simply realistic, with no

morbidity.

Even those idealistic images which twinge our hearts, such as blacks working with whites to paint a church in Lovelady, or the old black and white men in Diddy Waw Diddy, best friends, who stand with their arms on each other's shoulders, remind us not only of those particular valued moments, but of the moments in which we fail, or do not even try, to achieve closeness. Of the artier pictures, my favorite is one of morning glories in Fate, Texas. Anyone who has morning glories in their yard can appreciate their inevitable spread, and the way these beautiful flowers cover an old, peeling building is indicative of Carter's attitude in general. He uncovers beauty amidst im-

poverishment in photographs which are not cloying but fundamentally realistic.

My one complaint about
Carter's book is that the comments come at the end instead
of on the empty pages which
faces each photograph. Indeed,
Pat Carter's notes are part of
the fineness of this book, and it
could have easily accommodated their expansion. Like the
photographs, they present
their material with a light
hand informed by a deep and
intelligent understanding. She
seems to share her husband's
love of his subjects, and her
writing is precisely matched to
his visual images. From Uncertain to Blue is a true collaboration, one arising from
shared experience, shared purpose.

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Nicholas Nixon, The Brown Sisters, 1983, from Pictures of People

STATES OF LIVING

By Ellis Vener

Pictures of People, by Nicholas Nixon; Introduction by Peter Galassi. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988. 128 pages, 85 tritone plates. \$40.00.

All of Nixon's work is rooted in the physical fact of identity, the fact of each finite person in one finite body.

—Peter Galassi, from

—Peter Galassi, from the Introduction.

If your pictures aren't good, it's because you aren't close enough.

-Robert Capa

The pictures in this book are insistent about showing the people and time enclosed by the edges of the frame and by the opening and closing of the shutter. The plates and printing are beautiful, uncompromisingly sensuous in tone and range, reflecting Nicholas Nixon's choice of medium (full frame contact prints made from big negatives). His medium and tools demand a great deal of conscious attention from the sitter, photographer, and audience to the formalities of composition and technique; yet here those considerations do not impede the freshness and keenness of the photographer's observations.

I began by thinking that these were just beautiful snapshots; but they are highly thought out, carefully observed portraits, made with a great deal of feeling for the lives of the people in them. Nixon and his bulky camera participate with his subjects in a relationship that would not exist if it were not for the purpose of making pictures. This need for collaboration is compounded by Nixon's choice of a wide angle lens requiring the photographer to move into close proximity to his subjects.

One of the primary virtues of making contact prints from an 8 x 10 negative is the startling clarity of the images which result. These images reveal nu-

ances of light and texture, as well as the small tics of emotion that get lost in the physics of enlarging a smaller negative to a viewable size.

Some may regard these photographs as unsympathetic, too formal. Peter Galassi addresses this issue:

Perhaps a few readers of this book will know a few of the subjects. For others an unjust picture cannot be justified because subject and photographer are said to care for each other. (p. 22)

Sympathy may not really be the point. Nixon's is a quiet vision, one that seems to let the people in front of the camera speak for themselves. By contrast with photographs by Winogrand and Arbus and other "street" photographers, we sense no rage or anger being expressed here, but there is no sense of exploitation either

sense of exploitation either.
The three series entitled People with AIDS: Excerpt from a Work in Progress, Old People, and The Brown Sisters are par ticularly direct, generally lack-ing the prettiness that charac-terizes the other two series included in the book (*People*, 1978-1982 and *At Home*). The focus of the AIDS series excerpt and Old People is on a definite mortality, the waiting for a certain death. In the AIDS pictures, an extended portrait over a sharply defined period of time in the life of Tom Moran, the usual layers of hys-teria that surround AIDS are stripped away. This man is suffering premature death. You can see that. But what more can you see? How do you read photographs like these? How can you know that these images are anything like the real truth of who Tom Moran was, and of what he was thinking, feeling, as he posed? The directness of eye contact, stiffness of expression: are they in-dicative of something, or are they only masks demanded by the stress of posing for the big camera? The face in these pictures conveys an internal struggle, a life compressed and collapsed into a seven-month period. A premature death to be sure—but let's assume we never ask for our own death.

In the end, it is only Moran's lone death, and not a shared loss, that Nixon depicts here.

Likewise, the Old People here are waiting for their time to pass. Isolated in an old age home, their aloneness is tangible. As in the AIDS series, all of these photos were made indoors in environments stripped of the details that identify a specific place. The drama in both of these series is what happens between the spirit and the skin. Where Moran seems to be fighting his physical affliction, the old people have become lost inhabitants inside the shell of their bodies. In close-up views—of faces, of hands —muscle and flesh are reduced to skin, bone and veins. Even their names are reduced to initials. Nixon's genius as a photographer is to make these states of living plainly visible; it is a candid vi-sion unclouded by sentimentality or over-analysis. The lengthiest and most emo-

tionally complex portrait series included in the book are the pictures Nixon made of the Brown sisters between 1975 and 1987. Their identities as individuals and as members of a group develop over thirteen ways. The formality of the state of the sta The formality of these pictures (always the same arrangement, each woman look-ing straight into the camera) emphasizes the women's faces and postures, allowing them to express those things that bind and separate family members. Moments are exactly located in time and space. I get the sense that the central character—the real subject—of this portrait series is how the women relate to one another and to the pho-tographer, and the changing nature of these relationships over time. The third from the left is Nixon's wife, Bebe, the one he knows best and the one who knows him best. All portraits, if they are any good at all, will express something from inside the artist that finds its form in the faces of the sitters —sensibility wedded to craft begetting revelation.

Ellis Vener is a Houston photogra-

UNEVEN PLACES

By Stanley L. Moore

Certain Places: Photographs by William Clift. Sante Fe, New Mexico: William Clift Editions, 1987. Unpaginated.

Certain Places, William Clift's book of photographs which was published in conjunction with a traveling exhibition shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth in 1987, bears a somewhat misleading title, as it implies only land-scape work will be included. Fifteen of the twenty-two photographs are indeed land-scapes, but the remaining include still lifes, interiors, and even a single portrait.

even a single portrait.

Clift, in his brief introduction says that this book is "... an opportunity to convey a range of emotional and visual qualities held together by the affirmation of photography." He compares the desert and ocean, remarking on their combination of potential danger and serenity, and mentions that some of this work was done on commission, while most originated from his personal interests.

The oldest (1956) and the first picture in the book is of a candle-lit dinner table set with flowers. It fits with none of the others, neither in style nor in size of reproduction. It seems to be either an invitation to a visual repast or a superfluous filler designed to fill a blank page.

The numbered photos, beginning with a very conventional big landscape showing storm clouds and rainbow, do not appear to be

logically grouped, but instead are haphazardly arranged. An exception to this are the Mont Saint Michel pictures which are shown on suc-ceeding pages. All have a very peaceful air to them but seem suffused with expectancy. The most interesting picture of this much photographed monument is plate 5, "Shepherd's Hut, Mont Saint Michel, France, 1982." It has a quite noticeable brown tone to it and shows a dilapidated mud hut in the left foreground, while a crude table and bench occupy the right foreground. Stretching away into the distance are mud flats upon which St. Michael's mountain appears to float on the horizon. Though it com-prises only a small portion of the frame, it is clearly the focus of the work, as it seems to draw the eye from the mun-dane to the spiritual. But despite this facile intention, the photograph works because of the skillful arrangement of the elements which propels the viewer from area to area with

in the picture.

Another unusual view of the island is plate 8, "Shadow, Sandbar, Mont Saint Michel,

France, 1982." This photograph shows only the shadow of the church upon the mud flats. As in the other picture, the bottom of the frame is firmly rooted in the material world while the top is an insubstantial silhouette written upon impermanent sand leading upward into a cloud-filled sky.

ward into a cloud-filled sky.

The other landscape pictures show a similar preoccupation with atmosphere. Indeed, most show water, either as rain, flooding streams, fog or rivers. In addition, the building interiors show sensitivity to atmospher, this time however in relation to human occupation or use. Among this group the most interesting is plate 18, "Crack, jury chairs, Warren County Courthouse, Warrenton, Missouri, 1975," in which the serious business of justice is carried out in an imperfect but warmly human environment.

There are a few photographs which while workmanlike in execution leave the viewer unmoved. Notable among these are a rope swing which seems pointless and the two so-called portraits which are straightforward pictures of Juan Hamilton's ovoid sculptures. These are, on the one hand, a pedestrian rendition of the piece, and on the other, a showcase of the photographer's technique



William Clift, Crack, Jury Chairs, Warren County Courthouse, Warrenton, Missouri, 1975, from Certain Places

at the expense of the work itself.

A word about the reproduction is in order. Clift obviously exerts a lot of control over his publications, and the end result fully justifies this care. The tritone negatives he uses allow a variety of colored toning on the pictures which, instead of being gimmicky, actually enhances the images. The printing on a cream-colored, slightly textured stock is firstrate, showing plenty of shadow detail without excessive compression of the highlights, while the texture adds a bit of softness which contributes to the atmospherics.

the atmospherics.

This book, while slightly uneven, has the advantage of not overdosing the reader on imagery, as is too often the case; instead, it leaves one wishing to share more of William Clit's photographic vision.

Stanley L. Moore is a Houston chemist and photographer.

BOOKS RECEIVED

The following are books recently received and available to HCP members in our library:

Adams, Ansel. Ansel Adams: Letters and Images 1916-1984, edited by Mary Street Alinder and Gary Stillman (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1988).

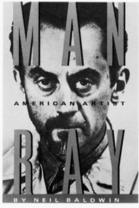
Adams, Robert. Perfect Times, Perfect Places (New York: Aperture, 1988).

Arbus, Diane. Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph. Designed and Edited by Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Aperture, 1988).

Art Resources International.

Money to Work: Grants for Visual
Artists (Washington, D.C.: Art Resources International, 1988).

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Cover, Man Ray: American Artist, 1988

Baldwin, Neil. Man Ray: American Artist (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1988).

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Busselle, Michael. Landscapes in Spain. Commentary by Nicholas Luard (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1988).

Caponigro, Paul. Seasons, Photographs and essay by Paul Caponigro, A Polaroid Book (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1988).

Celant, Germano. Unexpressionism: Art Beyond the Contemporary (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1988).

Chiarenza, Carl. Chiarenza: Landscapes of the Mind (Boston: David R. Godine, 1988)



Bradley Clift, cover for A Day in the Life of California, 1988



Ansel Adams, Half Dome and Clouds, from Letters and Images

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

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W.W. Norton & Co., 1988).

Erwitt, Elliott. Personal Exposures (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988)

Fitzgerald, f-stop. Nightmares in the Sky. Text by Stephen King (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1988).

Gentry, Diane Koos. Enduring Women (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1988).

Gernsheim, Helmut. The Rise of Photography, 1850-1880 (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988).

Goldberg, Vicki, editor. Photography in Print (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1989; originally published 1981, Simon & Schuster).

Hall, Douglas Kent. The Border: Life on the Line (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).

Harker, Margaret F. Henry Peach Robinson: Master of Photographic Art, 1830-1901 (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

Gassan, Arnold. Exploring Black and White Photography (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, Publishers, 1989).

Haworth-Booth, Mark, Rosetta Brooks, et al. British Photography: Towards a Bigger Picture. With seven essays and almost 60 photographers (New York: Aperture, 1989).

Heilbrun, Francoise and Phillippe Neagu. Pierre Bonnard: Photographs and Paintings (New York: Aperture, 1988). Heyman, Ken. Hipshot: One-Hundred Auto-Focus Photographs by a Master Photographer. Foreword by Pete Hamill. Introduction by Deborah Eisenberg (New York: Aperture, 1988).

Hirsch, Robert. Exploring Color Photography (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Publishers, 1989).

Jenner, W. J. F., editor. China: A Photohistory 1937-1987 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988)

Kaplan, Daile. Lewis Hine in Europe: The "Lost" Photographs (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988).

Klich, Kent. The Book of Beth (New York: Aperture, 1989).

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Lemagny, Jean-Claude and Andre Rouillé, editors. A History of Photography: Social and Cultural Perspectives, translated by Janet Lloyd (New Rochelle, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Levin, Mikael. Silent Passage (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1988).

Lichfield, Patrick. Lichfield In Retrospect (Topsfield, MA: Salem House, 1988).

Livingston, Jane with Frances Fralin and Declan Haun, editors. Odyssey: The Art of Photography at National Geographic (Charlottesville, VA: Thomasson-Grant, 1988).

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Janice Rubin, Cousins, 1988

COUSINS

By Janice Rubin

I grew up as a member of a large, closely-knit family which included all of my grandmother's nieces and nephews and their children, as well. In the early part of this century, my grandmother and her five brothers and sisters each made their way from a small village in Poland to Knoxville, Tennessee. In Knoxville, one big white house served as home for several families, and children were raised collectively, until separate housing could be afforded. Still, the brothers and sisters chose to live in the same neighborhood, and holiday time always meant a big family get-together.

The children married and moved to other cities, and now have children and grandchildren of their own. We still get together for weddings and special occasions, but the family event is our annual Thanksgiving family reunion. No one knows exactly when it started, but they say it was in Knoxville, about fifty years ago. Now held in a different city each year, the reunion brings together cousins from far as far away as New York and Seattle. Last year we had over a hundred cousins for Thanksgiving dinner.

I have been photographing the annual four-day Thanksgiving celebration for twelve years. By now, my ubiquitous camera and I enjoy the position of being almost invisible, and I feel free to make photographs of whatever visually excites me. Family relationship is not the theme of the photographs, but it is a piece of information which accounts for the emotional density of some of the images. My hope is that my photographs express both the existence of deep relationships and perhaps the individual, opposing force which sometimes lurks just below the surface of apparent harmony.

Janice Rubin is a Houston-based photographer whose work has appeared in numerous national and international publications, including Newsweek, Texas Monthly, Geo, American Photographer, and the New York Times Magazine. Her current exhibition Survivors of Spirit, photographs on Jewish life in the Soviet Union, is in its 17th city on its North American tour.

Disclaimer

By Olive Hershey

Like I said, Sarita, sex is snarled up in gold rings and varsity jackets, but how would I know, 'cause, hey, nobody asked me yet. I got a thing or three I could tell you, but it all knots up in my mind, anyhow that was yesterday he loved me, or maybe the day before. And now it's just this breathing second, girl, and you got little iron ears, just for decoration.

Stay off the broke-down merry-go-round, the music going daddy-dum-dee, and mama trying to keep on smiling and waving with her free hand and with her other one holding on.

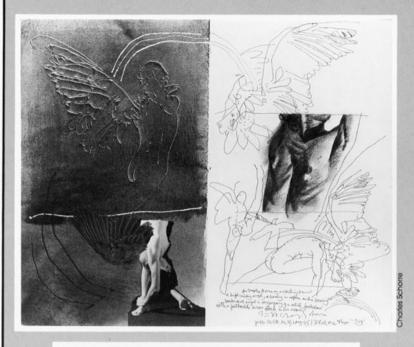
Summers papa slides into the pool, you and me like birds on his back, then he runs down the trail into the shadow stripes and doesn't come back for a good while. And where was mama? In the john at the Mobil, when he drove out on the highway pretending he'd leave her there till we yelled so he'd have to come back, and we never told.

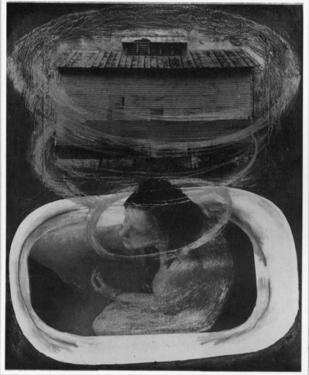
I never told when he braided my hair with onion flowers, and my breasts were puppies like yours. This is okay I said, but what I want to see is your feet; you know he's supposed to have white webbed feet like a frog, but he wouldn't untie his shoes and I kept my shirt on.

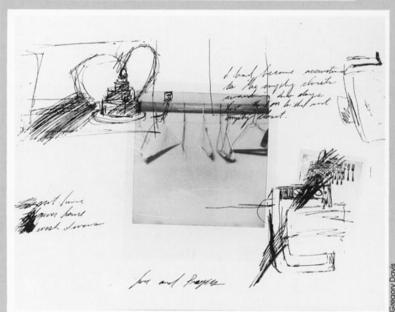
Olive Hershey, who comes from a Texas family, was born in Houston and is a graduate of the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. She has taught creative writing at Rice University and the University of Houston. A book of her poetry, Floating Face Up, was published in 1984, and her novel Truck Dance has just been published by Harper and Row.

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