CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHY

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 14, 1982
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Abstract

The negative/positive process of photography as we know it today was invented by an Englishman, William Henry Fox Talbot, in the 1830s. Within years of its appearance, the 'Talbotype' was being used to produce portraiture, landscape and documentary photography alike. Though technical improvements were continuously being made, the thematic applications of those early days are still in evidence a century and a half later, in the 1980s. The documentary approach, in particular, remains a motivating impulse for the majority of contemporary British photographers who, for the most part, are concerned with using the medium as something other than an 'abstract'.

As such, there are unique characteristics to British photography which distinguish it in Western Society today. In examining the reasons for this, an historical overview has been provided, with special emphasis placed on the photographic movements in Britain between the two world wars.

Ten contemporary photographers are looked at in depth, each of whom as been personally interviewed with regard to establishing the predominance of a documentary approach to the medium. A discussion of their current bodies of work is also included in support of the thesis. Finally, other prominent figures from the British photographic community have been asked to comment on the state of British photography today.

Thesis Supervisor: Starr Ockenga
Title: Associate Professor of Photography

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PREFACE

This paper is about the photography being done in Great Britain today, the early 1980's. At the outset, I would like to more thoroughly define the three words of my title and briefly indicate why I have chosen this topic of study.

What exactly do I mean by Contemporary British Photography?

'Contemporary' means I could have chosen Bill Brandt, and had a host of publications to turn to for reference. But I believe that enough attention has been given to him already as the 'only' noteworthy English photographer of this century. In John Szarkowski's famous volume, *Looking at Photographs*, for example, he claims that in this century in Britain "Brandt has worked virtually alone."[1] Or I could have selected the youngest, and presumably the freshest, photographers. Yet I believe that most of these newcomers, many of them recent graduates from photographic courses around the country, have not yet made a significant enough statement in their own work, or contribution to the field, to be worthy of a study of this nature. So I focused on what might be called the middle-generation of photographers. In so doing, however, I was facing the largest and most prolific group of British photographers.

According to Bill Jay, the British Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Arizona at Tempe, "The typical American art photogra-

pher cannot name one contemporary British photographer. All the publicity travels one way, from America to Britain and never in the reverse direction."[2] From my own experience here in Massachusetts, I can only agree with Mr. Jay. There are, however, several of the older middle-generation photographers who, I'm assured, will soon be getting one-person exhibitions in the United States. Among them are David Hurn, Patrick Ward, Ian Berry, Raymond Moore and, of course, Donald McCullin who has already had considerable exposure here. An awareness of these promised exhibitions, from Claus Henning, the Director of the General Exhibitions Department of the British Council in London, prompted me to look primarily to the younger middle-generation and, as it happens, my peers.

'British' is the second term to be defined in my title. That, at least, seemed self-evident. When I returned to England this past summer to further research my topic, I'd decided to definitely limit myself to photographers who were born, bred and currently working on British soil rather than consider any of the several noteworthy foreigners who have made Britain their home. This point, however, was to be challenged in many instances and most particularly by a Finnish woman who was eventually included in my study. Britain sees itself as a multi-racial, multi-ethnic culture and not a single person quibbled with the inclusion of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. As will be amply illustrated in the section devoted to Ms. Konttinen, her work has been widely accepted and promoted in Great Britain through exhibitions, fellowships and awards of every kind. Thus, 'British' for the purposes of this paper, refers to those people who live and work in Great Britain, and whose work exemplifies an attitude or approach to

photography that is not at odds with current trends among native-born photographers.

Thirdly, as I was asked by the Editor of the *British Journal of Photography*, Geoffrey Crawley, what do I mean by 'photography'? That is, of course, an enormous question. However, there is a very primary distinction which I made when considering photographers for selection: there are those who primarily photograph at the direction of others, and there are those who primarily photograph at their own direction. I have opted for the latter and in so doing, will not be giving attention to medical photography, high-street photography, fashion and advertising photography or, in short what is commonly referred to as 'commercial photography.' Personally I prefer to avoid employing the label 'commercial photographers' because it somehow assumes that 'other' photographers don't want to make money from their work. Such is hardly the case. Thus I have limited the scope of this paper to an examination of contemporary photographers whose work is nationally recognized by museum and gallery curators and as such would conceivably be referred to today as 'creative photographers' or 'fine-art photographers'; and/or whose pictures frequently appear in magazines, periodicals or books which feature photography.

As a further limitation, I decided to confine my study to the work of ten individuals. With that decision, came an even more difficult one: which ten? In determining that, a multitude of factors came into play.

I think it is appropriate and important here at the outset to indicate that my own personal interest and involvement in British photography is more than just a superficial attachment that has been prompted by academic

necessity. I have visited Great Britain frequently for over twelve years. My first trip there was in 1970 when I needed an escape from Portugal into my own native language. I was a very young photographer at the time and on that visit made my first acquaintance with *Creative Camera* and *Album* magazines, to which I immediately subscribed. After spending four years in Portugal, I moved to Paris and in the summer of 1975, I met a number of British photographers at the Photographic Festival in Arles, in southern France; I was finally convinced that I had more in common with the photographic climate of Great Britain than I did with what I saw around me in Paris. With few exceptions, the work that got published in magazines devoted to photography were variations on the theme of 'girly' pictures. I found this to be ironic in that France was culturally and politically a very stimulating atmosphere. Yet photographically, it was stifling and depressingly sexist to a young woman photographer like myself. So from 1975 to 1977, I probably visited England no fewer than a dozen times, continued the friendships that had begun in Arles and gradually made a wider circle of photographer friends in and around London. My own work found its way into the *British Journal of Photography* and other magazines, I was offered an exhibition at The Photographic Gallery in Southampton and as a result of that show, which was a series of self-portraits I'd been working on for two years, the BBC featured my work in a television broadcast called "Arena: Program of the Arts." Within two years, it became obvious to me that I needed to leave Paris and move to London. I lived in London from 1977 to 1979. While there, I continued my own work and during that period of time was asked to exhibit both at the Photographer's Gallery

in London and at the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield; additionally my work was published in most of the English publications devoted to photography, from *The Creative Camera Yearbook* to *Camerawork* to periodic portfolios in the *British Journal of Photography*. I also taught photography at the London College of Printing and the Camberwell College of Arts and additionally set up a photography program in a north London youth club, Young Playmakers.

It is the familiarity that I have with contemporary British photography that makes the writing of this paper a more rewarding task than can perhaps be said of some of my colleagues' chosen theses. Indeed, it is the same familiarity that made the selection of only ten photographers such a challenge. The task was further complicated by the fact that the ten photographers selected were not merely going to be the subjects of my investigations, but also the participants in an exhibition of the same theme funded by the British Council and the M.I.T. Council for the Arts. Seen then, additionally, from a curatorial point of view, the choice of ten had to make sense; that is, beyond the sense of gallery space limitations.

After considerable research and reflection on my part -- ranging from extensive historical and contemporary readings to a first-hand awareness of the situation there -- it seemed essential that the selection be weighted in favor of those photographers working in the documentary genre. More than anything else, the documentary approach is the genre for which Britain has long been identified. Within the last five years, for instance, several articles have appeared on this theme alone. The best known among them was written by William Messer in 1976, titled "The British Obsession",

and published in the *British Journal of Photography*. As I will discuss in further detail in Part I, the roots are there in the nineteenth century work, gain a great deal of mementum in the 1930s and remain a steady force through to today. In fact, with the exception of Raymond Moore, all of the photographers listed at the beginning of this preface are undeniably documentary photographers.

It would be wrong of me to assert, however, that documentary photography is the only work being done by credible British photographers. There are at least two other traditions -- that of portraiture and landscape -- which, when combined, probably equal the number of photographers producing documentary work. In my opinion, the strongest contemporary practitioners of these genres have also been included among the ten. Through them I hope to investigate what the general attitudes seem to be regarding the attention given in both the photographic press and exhibition spaces alike, to the documentary tradition.

At this point it must seem curious to the American reader that documentary photography should be given any attention at all in discussing the important photographic trends today. It has been my observation, admittedly from a distance, that throughout the seventies in the United States, the 'content' school of photography certainly took back seat to the 'form' or formalist approach among the majority of photographers. And just as there are some who predict, and many who worry, that content will soon be finding its way back into American cameras, there are likewise many in Britain today who fret over what they see as the inevitable results of the virtual tidal wave of American influences that flooded the country

in the past ten years in the form of magazines, books and touring exhibitions. It is not that the British were or are disinterested in what is happening in the United States. They just don't necessarily want to import it wholesale, especially not at the risk of sacrificing their own rich traditions in the process.

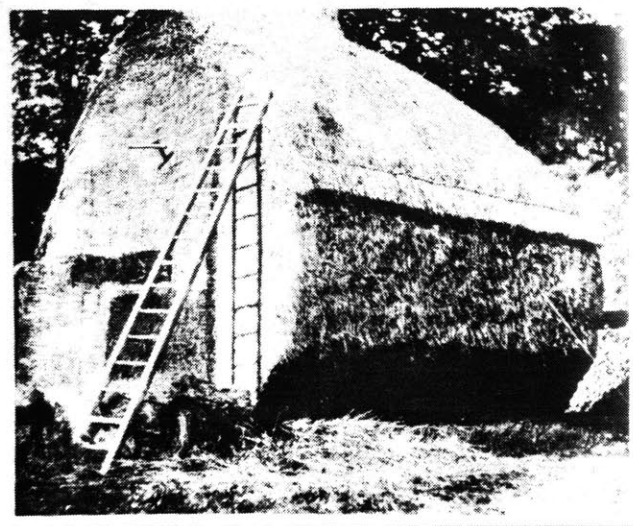
In conducting the research for this paper during the month of July, 1981 which I spent in Britain, I tape-recorded interviews with sixteen people (photographers, curators, editors, photographic historians and lecturers alike) and met and discussed my project with thirty-two others. Combining these most recent impressions with my readings and prior knowledge of the photographic community in England, I hope to investigate and substantiate the importance of the documentary approach to photography as it continues in Great Britain.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

The present has always been influenced by the past. By way of setting the stage for this study of ten contemporary British photographers, I think it is relevant to take a brief look at both their distant and more recent photographic influences.

William Henry Fox Talbot: Father of British Photography

All modern photographers owe a great debt to one Englishman in particular, William Henry Fox Talbot. As the inventor of the calotype, or negative/positve photographic process he bequeathed us a system whose principles we still use today when making as many reproductions as we like from one single image.



"The Straw Stack, c. 1840"
by W.H. Fox Talbot

Fox Talbot was not only an inventor, but a gifted photographer as well. In introducing the protagonist in her book *Fox Talbot and the Invention of Photography*, Gail

Buckland claims that:

> *"The photographs by William Henry Fox Talbot are the foundation of photography. They are images about light, about nature and about man's quest for understanding. They are a search for photography itself. Each picture is a celebration -- a celebration that it is possible to capture light rays -- hold them and pass their traces down through time."* [1]

When we recall that during the first years of experimentation with his new process, Fox Talbot had never seen another photograph, it makes us want to consider even more carefully what he, the first photographer in England, chose to focus his attention upon. For the most part his images appear to be simple studies of the items in and around his home at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire: trees, haystacks, fountains, bridges, etc. Yet in discussing Talbot's *The Straw Stack*, the photographic historian Ian Jeffrey asserts:

> *"There is very little of consequence in the later history of photography which was not, in one way or another, anticipated in the work of Fox Talbot. The opposition between nature and culture which is the form and content of so much photography made during the 1930s was incisively established in the 1840s with the rural ingredients which came readily to hand."*[2]

In his introductory essay to *The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950*, Mr. Jeffrey goes on at some length about the formal considerations (...regular forms, sharp lines, intersecting planes, geometries of light and shadow...) which led Fox Talbot to arrange his pictures the way in which he did. Though I am not in disagreement with any of his observations, I would like to simply add one basic point which I think he omits. I believe Fox Talbot, that highly skilled craftsman with his newest invention, positively rejoiced in *documenting* the beautiful rooms and windows of his abbey as well as the objects of interest on the surrounding

grounds and in the village of Lacock, most of which belonged to him.

Talbot did portraits and landscapes, too, though probably not as frequently as studies like the haystack. The portrait of his wife Constance dated October 10, 1840, however, is the earliest confirmed photographic portrait on paper. Colin Osman, Editor of *Creative Camera,* wrote, "If the Welfare State was unthinkable in 1839, there were many who cared about the condition of the working people. Fox Talbot's pictures of the people who worked on his estate view them with an almost feudal benevolence that was soon to die out."[3] And the lyric beauty of his landscape pictures rivals much of the work in that genre that has been done since.

As a true Victorian, Talbot was primarily a man of ideas. He was at once a scientist, Member of Parliament, etymologist, botanist and last, but not least, a member of the landed gentry with the means and time available for his many pursuits. He'd carefully patented all his inventions, but by 1840 the daguerreotype was so close to becoming a viable commercial enterprise that Talbot decided he'd ought to think about commercializing his calotypes. His first licensee was a painter of miniatures, Henry Collen, who practiced the calotype, or Talbotype, professionally in London. That venture was apparently not tremendously successful, however, for either Talbot or Collen. Shortly afterwards, a close friend of Talbot's, Sir David Brewster, introduced the calotype to a Robert Adamson of Scotland. Since the calotype had not been patented in Scotland, no licence was necessary for Mr. Adamson. This time Talbot had managed to place his invention in the right hands, but presumably failed to profit monetarily from the move.

As I hope I have briefly illustrated, it is not merely out of obedient respect that we should consider Talbot's technical and aesthetic contributions to the medium. I believe it can be argued that the roots of documentary, portraiture and landscape genres alike can be found in the production of this one seminal figure in the history of photography.

Roots of Portraiture

Since the bulk of early nineteenth century photography tended to be formal portraiture, I would now like to take a look at some of the aspects and several of the most heralded figures in this genre.

Shortly after Mr. Adamson had begun experimenting with this new calotype process, he was approached by the Scottish painter, David Octavius Hill, who had also heard about the process. In 1843, Hill's primary interest was for practical purposes; the calotypes could be used as an aid with his paintings. He had recently undertaken his monumental group portrait of the First General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. Enlisting the efforts of Robert Adamson, together they photographed the hundreds of ministers. Later Hill copied the calotype prints when painting the portraits on canvas. The two men worked in this partnership for five years, until the

"Newhaven fishermen, 1845"
by D.O.Hill and R. Adamson

early death of Adamson in 1848. "When on exhibition, their pictures were described as being the work of Robert Adamson, 'under the artistic direction of D.O.Hill.'"[4] As illustrated by the photograph of Newhaven fishermen however, these men did not only photograph ministers and other important figures of the time.

By the early 1850s there were many professional photographic establishments in the major cities of Great Britain. Most of them dealt exclusively with portrait photography. "The number of portrait establishments in London alone rose from three in 1841 to sixty-six in 1855 at the end of the Crimean War and over two hundred in 1861, of which thirty-five were in Regent Street."[5] Portraiture was only possible with the help of chair-mounted neck clamps, and painfully long exposures were necessary in any lighting conditions other than direct sunlight. The result of all this was a predictably standard look to all the studio portraiture of the day. According to Ian Jeffrey:

> *"They were poor times for art in photography right through from 1860 until well into the 1880s. The public was master, and was both generous and undemanding: undemanding of originality, that is." 6*

But to those who practiced photography merely as a trade, this lack of imagination really posed no great problem as the trade itself was flourishing. For decades, in fact, the Victorian photographic exhibitions only had two categories: 'Portraits' and 'Other'.

> *"Socially, the majority of Victorian portrait photographers appear to have been drawn from the ranks of the lower-middle class and -- although often possessing artistic talent -- reveal a commercial attitude in a field that was expanding rapidly."7*

In other words, the lure of rags to riches was more promising to the

vast majority of Victorian portrait photographers than the dubious artistic rewards only to be achieved long after death.

Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll are two of the more noteworthy portraitists of the last century; though each of them gained a certain amount of recognition for their talents during their lifetimes as artists, their respective statures have certainly grown considerably more in this century. They were not the only people who were beginning to use photography as an artist's means of expression. But unlike the majority of Victorian photographers, these two did not emerge from the lower-middle classes, thus neither of them had any need to consider setting up their own studios for commercial reasons. Mrs. Cameron, the wife of a wealthy diplomat who was frequently abroad, took up photography late in life to save herself from boredom. Lewis Carroll was an eminent mathematician by the name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, and of course wrote under the pen name, Lewis Carroll.

Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits are ranked among the most famous photographic masterpieces of the last century. In terms of camera style, she was far ahead of her time and quite different from the general run of commercial portrait photographers. From her first introduction to photography, her interest was keen and she very quickly imprinted her own unique style in her works. Ian Jeffrey said of her:

> *"Mrs. Cameron's stated aims were 'to ennoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and the ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and Beauty."*[8]

She cared very little for technique. Her plates were often covered with dust marks. The soft focus and blurred effects which she produced,

"Daisy, 1864"
by Julia Margaret Cameron

however, were by her own choice. Her lighting techniques were actually years ahead of her time: though conducting her sessions in a glasshouse, which had light coming in from all directions, Mrs. Cameron controlled that light very carefully, "caring little for the comfort of her sitters in holding these long poses. Somehow, as if appreciating the genius of the woman, all her subjects tolerated her impositions."[9]

According to one of her nieces, Laura Troubridge:

> *"Aunt Julia photographed every one she met, great people and small ones. Darwin and Huxley, Sir Henry Taylor, Tennyson and Watts, were all sitters; while at the same time, no tourist was safe. Men and women gazing quietly at the sea or walking down the dusty lanes that zigzagged between flowering hedges, were liable to find themselves bidden in a way that brooked no denial into her studio, where, a few moments later, they would find themselves posing as Geraint, or Enid, Launcelot, or Guinevere, or any other legendary hero or heroine; and they would learn more about their own faces than the looking-glass had ever told them, for Mrs. Cameron had the real artist's faculty of piercing through the outward structure to the very soul of the individual."*[10]

Mrs. Cameron organized an exhibition of her work to be shown in a gallery in the West End of London; in this way she thought that photography would be assimilated into the pattern of High Art. Apparently the exhibition was quite a failure and signalled the end rather than a new beginning for her in photography. According to Ian Jeffrey,

"Her failure was that of an outsider who attempted to reform the photographic world which, basically, she despised. Her large scale, soft-focus portraits were intended as an example for and a disparagement of the photography of her time and the more clearly this was seen the more suspicious photographers became of her example."[11]

It is a tribute to both Julia Margaret Cameron and the British photographic community today that her famous Hershel Album now belongs to the National Portrait Gallery in London. In 1974, after the album had been successfully bought at auction by an American collector, the British Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art refused it an export licence. The public at large was give a limited amount of time to raise fifty-two thousand pounds sterling (approximately one hundred thousand dollars) to outbid the American buyer and prevent the album from leaving the British Isles. Thanks to the contributions of over four thousand companies and individuals, the vast sum was raised and soon afterwards Colin Ford, Keeper of Film and Photography at the National Portrait Gallery, proudly exhibited their new acquisition.

Lewis Carroll was a true perfectionist, unlike Mrs. Cameron, his friend and contemporary. Often however, he was regarded as nothing more than an amateur photographer. He specialized in photographing children, especially little girls. It is particularly interesting to note that it was during one of his searches for models that he first met Dean Liddell's young daughter, a four year old by the name of Alice. Yet according to John Hannavy in *Masters of Victorian Photography*, "While becoming famous as a writer, and especially as the creator of Alice, Lewis Carroll quietly progressed to a position in the ranks of the top six portrait photographers of his time."[12]

The first few decades of photography, therefore, were primarily dominated by portrait photographs. With the vast numbers of commercial studio portraitists combined with the few 'artistic' portraitists who are so well remembered today, it seemed clear that the portrait, as a genre, was here to stay in photography just as it had been in painting. But what did photography manage to accomplish that painting could not? Not only did photography bring the possibility of portraiture to nearly every family in the country, by being far less expensive than a painting, it also allowed the viewer to reflect upon a reality previously only interpreted by the painter. For the first time, the camera allowed people to examine expression in detail.

The Victorians came to know a new form of portrait, one which, unlike a painting, did not have to summarize a person's entire life as an example to future generations. And the underlying concept of portraiture continued to evolve for the remainder of the century. As technical improvements occurred with the passing decades, the portrait photographer increasingly crossed the border into documentary as he moved outside the studio.[13]

In fact, whether inside or outside of the studio, Alan Thomas, author of *Time in a Frame: Photography and the Nineteenth-Century Mind*, asserts in the conclusion to his chapter on portraiture that "the vast number of Victorian portrait photographs are best read as social documents; again and again it is not the portraitist's art but the cultural meaning which, along with historical detail, gives interest to the photograph."[14] So even though the works of figures like Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll are to be appreciated for their artistic merit, just as they both hoped, it is perhaps from the countless unrecognized portrait photographers

of the commercial trade that we owe our gratitude for their contribution to our knowledge of the way people actually looked and dressed in Victorian Britain.

Landscape or Views Photographers

Before turning to the concept of photography as a social document, however, I would next like to look at the third genre of my study that has its roots solidly in the nineteenth century, that of landscape photography.

After Fox Talbot, who primarily photographed the landscape in his immediate vicinity, the next generation of photographers in Victorian Britain to concern themselves with the land were the so-called 'Views Photographers.' As Alan Thomas says,

> *"The roving nature of the Victorian views photographer's work makes him appear a bolder figure than his studio-bound cousin, the portraitist. There is evidently a wider contact with life, and some of the compositions, notably the views of natural scenery with their strong formations and open skies, suggest a freedom of attitude that contrast with the rather fussy decorum of studio portraiture...Some views photographers were simply domesticated adventurers, settled into a reduced sphere of travel, others, in tune with the advertising phrase 'Portraits and Views', a common rubric, varied their studio work with local outdoor scenes."15*

Thomas divides these early landscape photographers into two groups: the expeditionary photographers, like Roger Fenton, and the domestic views photographers, like Francis Frith or George Washington Wilson. The expeditionary photographers, of course, had special challenges-- from rare, difficult to reach subject matter to increased technical difficulties -- but on return to the homeland, generally profited from the uniqueness

of the glimpses of the exotic and the wild which they had brought back with them. The domestic views photographers did not work under such intense pressure, but as was usually the case with portraiture, also didn't have a challenging public. In other words, with respect to pictures of local scenic attractions, the public was satisfied with conventional, stereotyped images rather than any adventurous interpretations that might be undertaken by the photographer. Basically people wanted pictures of what they already knew, not what the photographer might by chance discover. "A great deal of views photography...provides souvenirs, satisfies curiosity, and demonstrates the owner's acquaintance with a larger world."[16]

The most lasting direct result of this phenomenon of the views photographer was the postcard, with a view on the back side. Another indirect result of this in Britain was that the views popularized the notion of communing with nature, and established a ritual of taking country walks. According to Alan Thomas, "...the walking holiday was established -- and remains -- as a morally elevating activity which is part of English life."[17] This ritual continues through today. Any visitor to Britain now, on scanning the bookshop shelves for maps, will also encounter a large selection of books on short and long country walks. The accompanying system of public footpaths, throughout the British Isles, is so pervasive that it is possible to go in any direction out of any city and have a lovely choice of walks through the countryside. A popular map in Britain, in fact, is the Ordinance Survey map. It is such an enlarged version of an area that it indicates the routes of every public footpath as well as every farmer's gate and stream to be encountered along the way.

One of the most highly regarded views, or expeditionary photographers

from the last century was Roger Fenton, although he is primarily remembered as a pioneer of war photography. Not unlike most of the famous early photographers, Fenton came from an immensely wealthy family. He trained as a solicitor and once he had begun his legal career, he took up photography as a hobby. He quickly became very active as a photographer, and also very involved in the promotion of photography itself. Not only was he a founder member of the Calotype Club, he was also part of the formation of the Photographic Society -- now the Royal Photographic Society.

The years 1854/1855 were especially important ones for him. In those years he produced the very first photographs of the Royal Family, began a long association with the British Museum -- eventually becoming the museum's official photographer -- and left on his expedition to the Crimea where his pictures of the Crimean War signal the beginning of modern photographic coverage of wars.

Valerie Lloyd, the present day curator of the Royal Photographic Society, agrees that Fenton is best known for his pictures of the Crimean War. Since working with the society's collection, however, she now contends that the "power and beauty of much of the rest of his work has been almost entirely overlooked."[18]

In a 1979 issue of *Creative Camera*, devoted solely to the work of Fenton and Julia Margaret Cameron, Ms. Lloyd goes on to assert that

"The Long Walk at Windsor"
by Roger Fenton

The Long Walk at Windsor, one of his first landscapes, is a seminal photograph..."a picture probably not equalled in its formal boldness until Robert Frank's photograph of the *American Highway U.S. 285, New Mexico*, one hundred years later."[19]

The two leading views photographers back in the British Isles were Francis Frith and George Washington Wilson.

According to Alan Thomas, Frith's success was not so much his photographic artistry, but in the thoroughness with which he worked. He photographed everything possible that might be considered 'A View', and in the process produced clean, matter-of-fact photographs that had fine overall detail.

In his book *Victorian Cameraman: Francis Frith's Views of Rural England 1850-1898*, Bill Jay describes Frith's approach:

> *"After a few years of hard and uphill work, Frith's photographic business at Reigate began to make money. Frith aimed to take photographs of every possible city, town and village in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, including famous beauty spots, beach scenes, churches and historic monuments, parks and palaces, country trades, rivers, waterfalls, triumphs of industrialisation, festivals, ceremonies and pageants."*[20]

The aim was to print and widely distribute postcards of all these pictures.

George Washington Wilson also had one of the earliest publishing houses of photography, his specializing in stereoscopic viewcards. Though it arrived later on the scene than Francis Frith's, or Colnaghi of London, his factories in Aberdeen, Scotland "went on to become the largest photographic publishing concern in Europe, and perhaps even in the world."[21] He does not often figure in the histories of photography, but to overlook his contributions is to do him a great injustice. As much as anyone, he

seems to deserve a position in the forefront of Victorian photography.

> *"George Washington Wilson...extended the range of photography by producing the first photographs in which the sun itself, rather than just its reflected sparkle, actually appeared. His 'Lock of Park' and 'Oban, Sunset' were milestones of landscape photography, beautifully composed, perfectly executed and, quite justifiably, were classed even by his contemporaries as equalling the finest achievements of the artists."*[22]

In fact, with a single exposure in the hustle of Princes Street in Edinburgh in 1858, George Washington Wilson gave photography its first snapshot. Wilson had experimented with a combination of the small stereo plate -- which required a shorter exposure than the larger landscape plates -- and the use of iron protosulphate instead of the usual, slower pyrogallic acid used at the time. The results of his experiments permitted him to use an exposure of one-sixth of a second, as compared with the many seconds used by his contemporaries. With the plate in place, he would then remove the lens cap with one hand and instantly cover the lens with his bonnet which was in the other hand, apparently taking one-sixth of a second for the whole operation.[23]

With this advancement, he was able to record for the first time the bustle of life in city streets: the long exposures required before his discovery had never been able to include the people in the scene because they had always moved in and out of the frame during the length of the exposure. When his photograph of Princes Street in Edinburgh was first shown people responded by saying that it was "infinitely superior to those 'cities of the dead' with which we have hitherto had to content ourselves."[24]

After 1880, however, Wilson "turned increasingly to a kind of anthro-

pological picture making of the peasantry at work, ploughing, grinding corn, digging potatoes and peat. Instead of the blandly composed images for tourism which had preceded them, these pictures both reflect and transcend the genres on which they were based."[25]

"Princes Street, Edinburgh"
by George Washington Wilson

George Washington Wilson's technical contribution, along with the tendency of the views photographers to photograph railway lines and bridges, brought outdoor photography back into the urban setting.

At this point we arrive at a curious question: though these three men made their reputations and fortunes as views photographers, is that the best description for them? 'Views' or 'Landscape' photographers seems correct enough when considering their unpeopled studies of rural settings. Yet when they did begin to include people in their scenes, it no longer seems appropriate to simply remember them as early landscape artists with the camera. It is not that such a remembrance is negative, or unjust, but it somehow seems inadequate. Could we not, as well, consider them -- like the majority of Victorian portraitists -- as pioneers in social documentary work? In the case of Francis Frith, at least, Bill Jay would go even further than that. In the introduction to his book, *Victorian Cameraman*, Jay refers to Frith as a "remarkable man who had bequeathed us the most extensive, important and well-preserved collection of British

documentary photography to have survived more or less intact."[26] In actual fact, the remaining collection contains an estimated 60,000 glass plates and 250,000 original prints. Many, many glass plates were destroyed. In the late 1960s, the employee's of Frith's company "smashed with hammers thousands of the earliest, pre-1886, and now extremely valuable, glass plates and mixed the pieces with concrete to make the floor of an outhouse."[27]

Before continuing this thumb-nail sketch of historical influences in Britain, it is important to include a word here about my method of proceeding. If the reader has by this point gotten the impression that I am trying to dissect the history of British photography and simply pigeon-hole important figures according to strick labels, this I regret. Such is not my intention. From my own personal experiences with photography, and indeed with life in general, I know that it is futile and counterproductive to think in terms of a slot for this, a slot for that and there you go, the whole story is told. In particular, I might cite the great work by Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook,* as an example of what I would instead ultimately hope to achieve:

> *"...it is divided into five sections and separated by stages of the four Notebooks, Black, Red, Yellow and Blue. She keeps four, and not one because, as she recognises, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness -- of breakdown. Pressures, inner and outer, end the Notebooks; a heavy black line is drawn across the page of one after another. But now that they are finished, from their fragments can come something new, The Golden Notebook."*[28]

In other words, I don't really believe that photographers are only portraitists, landscape artists or social documentarians but that there are combinations of all of these, and more, in each camera user. If I discuss

the work in this paper in terms of categories or compartments, it is only as an aid to discussion and presentation of the various approaches possible. Besides, for the most part photographic historians have applied the labels long before I even picked up the reference books. Once we reach the work of the ten contemporaries who are the focus of my study, however, I hope to be able to eventually put away the individual colored notebooks and see them instead as interdependent parts of an integrated whole which in my mind distinguishes contemporary British photography today.

Moving on from the views photographers, therefore, we should now consider the work of two men who cannot be overlooked, but who are at the same time good examples of photographers difficult to categorize. I am speaking of Peter Henry Emerson and Frank Meadow Sutcliffe.

P.H.Emerson was born in Cuba of an American father and English mother. His early childhood was divided between Cuba and Massachusetts and he moved to England around the age of ten.

> *"Emerson was clear thinking, highly intelligent, logical and had an enormous capacity for hard work. He also epitomised our stereotype of the Victorian gentleman, for he was rich with independent means, arrogant, insufferably patronising to all he considered beneath him and selectively condescending to those whom he had to accept as his equals."*[29]

Emerson wanted to rid photography of the contrivances which other photographers -- like the image manipulator, Henry Peach Robinson -- had been so fond of. According to Peter Turner and Richard Wood in *P. H. Emerson,* he reacted against the "sugar-sweet sentiment he found in the 'pictorial' pictures of his contemporaries" wanting to replace it with a "truer, more analytical expression based on his newly acquired understanding of the history of art."[30]

With his own photography, he worked only when the light was absolutely right for his ideas and relied basically on nature itself for his subject matter. His own photographic style was honest and direct; even if its soft, unfocused quality does look thoroughly romantic to us today, it was decidedly simple and natural at the time when compared to the dominant 'high pictorialists' who controlled the English scene at the time. His best remembered images are those produced with Thomas Goodall, a painter friend. Together they worked on the portfolio of pictures, *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* "...which combined photographs of the wild sweeping East Anglian *landscape* with *documentary style* studies of the farm labourers and marsh men at work."[31](Italics mine.)

"During the Reed Harvest"
by P.H.Emerson

After his book *Naturalistic Photography* appeared, there was a furor among the photographic community, led by his opponent, Robinson. A great number of articles and debates centered on the merits of fuzzy versus sharp pictures. This was because Emerson had suggested having only the principal part of the image in focus, "all else subjugated to it."[32]

Emerson believed that photography was a partner to the naturalistic school of painters, like the work of François Millet. And the softening of the image which he promoted was to greatly influence photographers for the next few decades, both in Britain and abroad.

Emerson was himself a living example of inconsistency, however. While on one hand he was being championed as the true proponent of art photography, on the other he was sincerely concerned about the social and economic conditions that existed in the polarized and feudal community of Norfolk, the conditions that led people to poaching.

> *"Herein lies the paradox of Emerson; according to his own statement at the time he set out to produce pictures whose purpose was to give aesthetic pleasure -- documentary is a term never once mentioned, let alone discussed. Yet his photographs are undoubtedly documentary. He could almost be construed as the first 'concerned photographer'. His verbose discourses on photography as art appear inconsistent with the impression of genuine sympathy with the environment he photographed created in his books. What makes Emerson so difficult to comprehend is that he was confused by his own diversity."*[33]

Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, regarded by Emerson as an important contemporary, was also recording the life of his area, Whitby, but in his case it was a town and its people that were the subjects of his focus. These sympathetic, yet straightforward, studies of his own native fishing village, give us a very fine document of English coastal life at that time.

> *"Sutcliffe was involved in the establishment of a group of photographers known as the Linked Ring in 1892 and this group devoted itself to the 'complete emancipation of pictorial photography' from the rut in which it had been entrenched for so long -- an exact parallel with Emerson's own aims."*[34]

I should point out that it is my understanding that the 'pictorial' photography that they were reacting against was the H.P.Robinson school of oil-daubing and over-manipulation rather than what is also remembered as the 'pictorial' movement after the turn of the century, led primarily by Alvin L. Coburn. In fact, both the naturalistic photographers, Emerson and Sutcliffe, could be seen as the forefathers of that later artistic pictorial period.

In the 'Notes to the Exhibition' from *The Real Thing* catalogue, both of these men are included under the heading of 'Art Pictures'. However, as is well known among students of photographic history, in 1890 Emerson lost all his fervour and retreated from his earlier position of defending photography as one of the true arts. He announced that "the limitations of photography are so great that, though the results may and sometimes do give a certain aesthetic pleasure, the medium must always rank the lowest of the arts."[35]

"An Unwilling Pupil"
by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe

Whatever the import of Emerson's change of heart, I have demonstrated that it would be erroneous to categorize the work of either Sutcliffe or Emerson as 'Art Pictures' alone. Their photographs, whether portrait or landscape, are clearly motivated by the documentary impulse.

Early Documentary Photographers

In 'The Language of the Ordinary', the concluding chapter in his book *Time in a Frame*, Alan Thomas begins by suggesting that the previous chapters of his volume have been ineffectual if they have not "suggested how firm were the barriers of convention and of commercial necessity which prevented a photographer of normal interest from going beyond portraits and views for

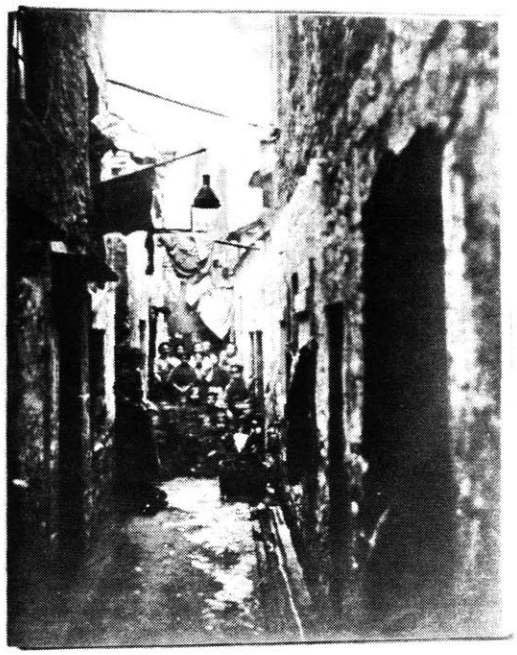
his subject matter."[36] So it was difficult for the nineteenth century photographer to go into the back streets and photograph the areas where the majority of people lived because for one thing it was unfashionable, and for another financially unrewarding. Luckily, there were exceptions, even if they were few and far between when compared with the vast numbers of portrait photographers.

Many of the early documentarians were primarily interested in recording the events of the day. Among these were Samuel Smith, who produced a record of the building of a bridge in his home town of Wisbech in Cambridgeshire; Philip Henry Delamotte, who photographed the re-erection of the Crystal Palace in South London; and Henry Dixon who photographically documented the building of the Holborn Viaduct. Others fucused on the construction sites of the various International Exhibitions in London, or the laying of water and gas pipes and the building of tram lines. As we will see in the work of photographers other than Emerson and Sutcliffe, the life of rural and urban peasants was also amply documented.

In discussing the beginning of documentary photography, Alan Thomas further asserts that the interchange of commerce exerted a stiumlating effect in creating the documentary form:

> *"Documentary photography, for instance, which had no real roots in graphic art appears to have been nurtured by the market appeal which was gradually revealed for various kinds of photogrphic reporting. War early proved itself, in its unbeautiful aspects, as marketable; ethnographic studies made by government photographers went both to museum archives and to bookshops on fashionable boulevards, for the civilised West was curious about the remote and the primitive; closer to home, photographs of the poor, and of deplorable living conditions, though made for reports or institutional records, could attract the public eye and turn a coin or two. A documentary aesthetic, not originated by the market place but encouraged by it, became visible and worked its effects on other forms."*[37]

Thomas Annan was one such photographer who, in the late 1860s, made pictures of Glasgow for the City Improvement Trustees. They are some of the best known examples of photography being used to record the improvement and rebuilding of cities during the second half of the nineteenth century. Recording the old closes of the city, they provided the administrators of Glasgow with mementos of the evil, cramped conditions of the old order.[38]



Glasgow slums by Thomas Annan

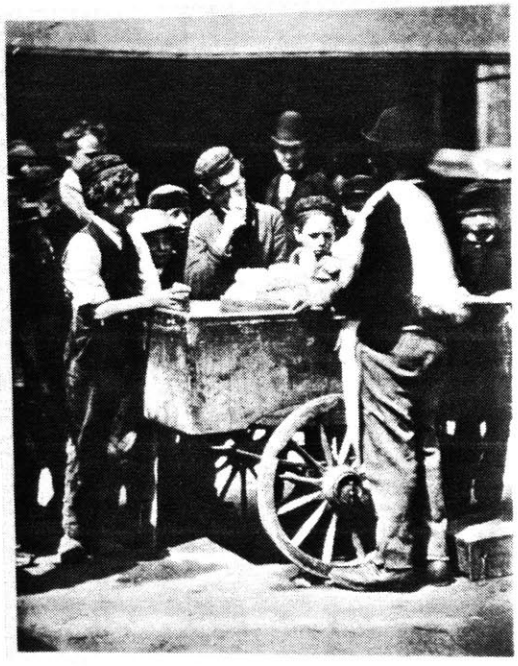
It is perhaps regrettable that Annan's photographs of these tenements were so beautiful. Alan Thomas describes them as "so firmly and sensitively composed for picturesque effect that they create strikingly memorable views of alleyways, dramatically shadowed, and tenement cliffs fluttering with washing hung to dry."[39]

As an even more important example than Thomas Annan of early documentary work, Thomas cites a series of photographs of Birmingham slums in the mid-1870s, directed by the town's mayor, Joseph Chamberlain. He refers to one picture by an unknown photographer which reveals an

A Birmingham yard. Unknown photographer

empty courtyard where a group of four small children huddle at the foot of a wall. The children seem to be there almost by mistake, yet it is exactly their presence which makes the image so riveting and historically significant. Likewise, according to Thomas, "...the Birmingham slum series provides a better aid to understanding the form than the more accomplished work of Annan, where the artistry, so naturally executed, conceals itself..."[40]

In the late 1870s, John Thomson went into the streets of London to photograph people at their daily work. He photographed in markets and quiet and busy streets alike, and his subjects were primarily the various vendors, musicians and street folk of all kinds. In retrospect, it is truly amazing how casual and natural his photographs seem given the cumbersom nature of the equipment of the time. In 1877, together with the writer Adolphe Smith, he produced *Street Life in London*, which was published in monthly installments. Smith's text described Thomson's street characters, which were photo-mechanically reproduced by the Woodburytype process. Later the installments were bound as one volume which has since become a collector's item. I was privileged to see a copy of this a few years ago in England. The Woodburytype is a process that renders exquisite detail, making this volume a treasure comparable to the



"Halfpenny Ices"
by John Thomson

issues of Stieglitz's *Camerawork*. The images by Thomson are today remembered as some of the earliest photographic documents of urban living.

Another of the memorable documentary figures from the latter part of the last century was Sir Benjamin Stone. This industrious photographer first began his career as a collector of the commercial pictures which George Washington Wilson produced.

> *"The photographic journals of this period are full of announcements of buildings to be torn down, areas to be altered, and photographic 'record societies' being formed. The most famous and most organized of these was Sir Benjamin Stone's National Photographic Record Association. Its steering committee, heavily biased toward the upper social strata, included historians and many influential people of the photographic community. Stone, himself a Member of Parliament, stated, 'As early as 1889 I took my camera with me on my trips through England, always with the same object -- to show those who will follow us, not only our buildings, but our everyday life, our manners and customs.'"*[41]

Paul Martin is perhaps the most important documentary figure to look at from the nineteenth century. In their book *Paul Martin: Victorian Photographer*, Roy Flukinger and Larry Schaaf claim that "The photographs of Paul Martin have that peculiar flavor of real life that is the foundation of true documentary work."[42]

Paul Martin was born in France in 1864 but his family moved to London in 1872 to escape the uncertainties they encountered under the rule of the Paris Commune. He lived the remainder of his eighty years in England.

Martin was originally a wood engraver who worked illustrating newspaper and magazine articles by this hand-crafted process. With the technological progress of photography, he was put out of work, and soon took up photography himself. In their book, Flukinger and Schaaf present

an abundance of meterial regarding Paul Martin's life and development as a photographer, because they see his work as a kind of symbol of the economic, social, technical and aesthetic basis of photography at the time. The University of Texas at Austin where they teach holds an extensive collection of Paul Martin's photographs donated by Helmut Gernsheim. After long and involved research into this body of work, Flukinger and Schaaf offer: "In our minds, there is no other figure whose work so completely summarizes the death-throes of nineteenth-century pictorialism while materially helping to usher in twentieth-century realism."[43]

Though Martin's place in the history of photography appears undisputed, there are, however, differences of opinion regarding his motivations for taking pictures. Alan Thomas includes him in his chapter covering the early documentary photographers: "In its candour the work of both Martin and Riis represents the finest achievement of social realism in the century, and magnificently anticipates modern photography."[44] Yet Larry Schaaf, though he rocognizes Martin as a documentary figure, contends that at first "the pictures seemed very obviously to be a unique British parallel to the work of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine" but that "this would later prove not to be the case." He goes on to say that Martin's role took on a whole new significance as it became apparent that he represented in his own life a miniature history of the rapid rise of amateur photography near the end of the century."[45] Still another opinion is offered by Asa Briggs in her essay entitled "Photography as Social Documentation". She claims that "For London, Paul

Martin's unposed street life pictures of the 1890s are as invaluable to historians as they were astonishing to contemporaries."[46]

"Children of the Poor in the Nineties" by Paul Martin

In practice, Paul Martin carried on very much in the footsteps of John Thomson. However, as he was working twenty years later, technology had been able to provide him with a portable hand camera. He was one of the first photographers to profit from the new systems that removed all of the sensitising and development processes from photography. His camera was a Facile, and he used it at the astonishing speed of one-quarter to about one-tenth of a second. Martin carried his camera under his arm, wrapped as a package. In so doing, he was able to walk rather inconspicuously through the poorer sections of London capturing images of the street life that so interested him.

> *"Martin's particular contribution to this field of work is his extension of the subject matter through the penetration his concealed camera allowed him. He entered, in particular, the world of lower-class amusement and exploited the natural gaiety and unguarded informality he found there: children dance at a street corner, beach strollers gather before a Punch-and-Judy, couples flirt and embrace. Characteristically, Martin is good humoured and not cruel in his exposé of the ordinary people at play: he celebrated the jovial spirit of life and had photo-reproduction been in a more advanced state would have enjoyed great popular success in photo-magazines such as* Picture Post *and* Life."[47]

One might ask why Paul Martin's camera was wrapped as a package.

Flukinger and Schaaf refer to hidden cameras as a phenomena of the times:

> *"The idea of a hidden camera, observing without being observed, appealed to a sense of curiosity and fit in well with the rise in detective and mystery fiction in the popular literature of the day. Cameras were disguised as books, watches, or field glasses. There were cameras hidden in hats, in ties, in walking sticks, and in purses... For all their absurdity of design, however, the hand and detective cameras immediately made photography available and attractive to a far wider range of amateurs."*[48]

The existence of these hand cameras, and their accessibility to a much larger number of people, meant that certain changes were soon to be occurring within the medium. The 'professionals' were disturbed because now photography was within the grasp of everyman. Eventually this would affect the choice of subject matter. And the fact that the use of the camera was more fluid meant that the approach to subject matter would also undergo changes. This relative ease of production added even more fuel to the argument of whether or not photography could legitimately be called an art.

Unlike someone such as F.M.Sutcliffe, Paul Martin never posed his pictures. He was a pioneer candid photographer; he took snapshots. The term 'snapshot', itself, was novel in Martin's day, when applied to photography, that is. Originally it was a hunting term. But in 1860, Sir John Herschel suggested:

> *"What I have to propose may appear a dream; but is has at least the merit of being a...realisable one...It is the...representation of scenes in action -- the vivid and lifelike reproduction and handing down to the latest posterity of any transaction in real life...I take for granted nothing more than...what photography has already realised, or...will realise within some very limited lapse of time...the possibility of taking a photography, as it were, by a snap-shot -- of securing a picture in a tenth of a second of time."*[49]

In addition to being a pioneer snap-shooter, Martin was also credited

with being the first night-photographer. Yet after about 1896, he moved towards more conventional photography, produced pictorial images that were to be accepted by the Linked Ring, as well as composite images reminiscent of H.P. Robinson. Then later around the turn of the century, he turned 'professional' and together with a member of the West Surrey Photographer Society set up a firm known as Dorrett & Martin, known for a few years as a supplier of pictures to the illustrated papers. At this time, then, Martin became a press photographer. This was a highly insecure profession at the time, however, and his firm eventually turned instead to the rather more lucrative business of making photographic buttons, primarily for use in election campaigns.

Whether or not Paul Martin was interested in social commentary in his pictures is unclear, but he was certainly a documentary photographer -- one of the first and one of the best, in fact, at the end of the last century. His pictures show us a great deal about a time and a particular class. Flukinger and Schaaf contend that had he lived thirty years later, he probably would have been a photojournalist like Brassai or W.Eugene Smith, or sixty years later, perhaps a television news cameraman. "His orientation towards mass communication instilled in him an active documentary sense." They go on to conclude, however, that the enormously strong pressures of conformity "warped and eventually swallowed the spirit of investigation in him."[50]

The technical improvements of the end of the last century lent quite a hand to the emergence of social documentation with the camera -- it was, after all, easier to get those glimpses of everyday life with more portable equipment. And the mundane side of the business was being taken

care of more and more by Kodak.

With these few lines, Alan Thomas concludes his book reflecting upon the importance of documentary photography:

> *"It evidently took the Victorians, both the photographers and the public, some time to learn this visual language based upon detailed particulars, and to appreciate the spirit of examination and discovery in which it best functions. The city, notably in the unlovely world of the back streets, offered material best suited to encourage awareness of the revelatory powers of the camera... But in the recording of ordinary life there could be no evasion of the problems of actuality, a difficult medium in which to work. The products of the Victorian documentary camera, in their extreme unevenness, ranging between sophistication and painful ineptness, reflect most sensitively the keenness of the struggle of a new art to find itself."*[51]

Photography in the New Century

Even though Flukinger and Schaaf regard Paul Martin's work as signalling the death of nineteenth-century pictorialism, the pictorial genre seems to me to have dominated much of the first twenty to thirty years of British photography in the twentieth century. After sponsoring two major exhibitions on British photography, in fact -- the first in 1972, *"From today painting is dead": The Beginnings of Photography*, and the second in 1975, *The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photography 1840 - 1950* -- the Arts Council of Great Britain seems to concur as they devoted their third major exhibition to the photography at the turn of the century and called it *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900 - 1920*.

The pictorial period in British photography does not have a strong sequel in the 1980s however, and therefore I am not going to deal with it in any great detail in this paper. The revival of the gum-print, the

cyanotype and other alternative photographic processes, which was so popular in the United States during the 1970s, had an almost imperceptible counterpart in Britain during the same period. Nevertheless, there were a few pertinent points covered in the catalogue to the exhibition, *Pictorial Photography in Britain*, which warrant a brief glimpse at some of the occurrences at that time.

It was in my readings about this period that I first uncovered tensions between the photographic community of Britain and the United States. In the essay written to accompany the exhibition it is curious to note that John Taylor, the author, begins by lamenting the fate of British photography. He claims that, like with French painting in the nineteenth century, the avant-garde won all the attention in photography around the turn of the century, and this avant-garde was comprised of all Americans: Clarence White, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, etc. He continues:

> *"But in Britain, the power of convention dispelled the threat of avant-garde novelties. This has resulted in a regrettable neglect of the British contribution to photographic history,, which has been regarded as being irrelevant to modernism, as if modernism and the method of its study were something other than local and historical circumstance."*[52]

This essay, written in 1978, shows among other things the sensitivity which exists in Britain today regarding the attention they've received in history. For example:

> *"...from 1902, when the Photo-Secessionists began exhibiting as a group, and American work was commonly seen in the Photographic Salon, they presented a challenge that quite disrupted the condition of photography in Britain. The Photographic Salon of 1908 was deemed a failure because it excluded toom many Links and included too much work by a clique that became known as 'The America Selecting Committee'"*

They single out Coburn and Steichen as the greatest offenders:

"English contributors have been...either rejected altogether, or represented very badly, whilst the Americans are in more than usual strength. This becomes very significant when it is remembered that five Americans were on the hanging committee and still more significant is the fact that two of them are represented by thirty-nine and twenty-one works respectively."[53]

The feeling about the American participation in the Salon of 1908 was so intense that Mr. F.J. Mortimer, Editor of the *Amateur Photographer*, quickly went to the premises and seized the rejected pictures before they were returned to their owners. From these, he selected 128 prints and organized what is known as the *Photographic Salon des Refusés*, named obviously after the famous Parisian exhibition by the Impressionists in 1863. The exhibition the following year did not include any Photo-Secessionists. Yet by 1910, a division had occurred among the members of the Linked Ring and the London Salon replaced the Photographic Salon of the Linked Ring. By 1911, there was yet another schism amongst British photographers and the defeated Links eventually organized an exhibition in 1911 which was known as *The London Secession*. In spite of my obvious sympathy with British photographers, I could imagine that after the *Salon des Refusés* of two years earlier, and then *The London Secession*, certain members of the international photographic community must have been wondering when the British would come up with a title of their own!

Bill Brandt

While we are on the subject of British sensitivity to American attitudes and opinions, this is perhaps the time to examine the importance of this

century's great British photographer, Bill Brandt. While he is not universally regarded by Britons as the most important British photographer, he is certainly agreed to be the best known. For some, in fact, he seems to be the only figure of the twentieth century who is really worth knowing. Here I allude not to the British opinion of Brandt but to the treatment given him by John Szarkowski in his celebrated book, *Looking at Photographs*.

> *"For purposes of approximate truth, it might be said that photographic tradition died in England sometime around 1905 -- coincidentally the year in which Bill Brandt was born."*[54]

He goes on to explain how Brandt spent time on the continent as he was growing up and, in fact, moved to Paris in the late twenties to study with Man Ray.

> *"When Brandt returned to London in the thirties, England had forgotten its rich photographic past and showed no signs of seeking a photographic present. In the forty years since, Brandt has worked virtually alone..."*[55]

With all due respect to Mr. Szarkowski, he is wrong. England did not forget its rich photographic past, and with regard to the photographic present in the thirties, it is Mr. Szarkowski, not the English, who has overlooked it. Not only is it unfair to have only included this one contemporary British photographer in his entire book, but his assessment of twentieth century photography in Britain simply reveals a distressing lack of knowledge on the subject. Let me quickly add that such a lack of knowledge would not surprise me from the majority of American photographic educators and historians, but to hear it from the person who is commonly regarded in this country as the champion of the realistic school of photography is a hard pill to swallow, at least for an Anglophile like myself.

The British didn't particularly care for it either, as one might well expect. In his long article *On British Photography*, Gerry Badger begins by referring to Szarkowski's statements and then offers what I regard as a somewhat cowardly defense:

> *"Foreigners, no matter how distinguished, should be discouraged from making such patronising conjectures upon a subject about which they could but know little, even though the substance of Szarkowski's remarks differed little from similar statements by many British commentators."*[56]

Badger does go on to justify his statement by saying that there are few Britons who feel confident enough in their knowledge of twentieth century British photographic traditions to venture a firm opinion or rebuttal to Szarkowski's comment. In 1981, this seems incredulous to me because the more I research and read about British photographers of this century, the more fascinated I am by how important and influential many of them were in their involvement with the major events of this century. They are worthy of recognition and further study. Putting these other photographers aside for just a moment, let us again turn to Bill Brandt who is admittedly one of the most important photographers of this century.

Though born in England, Brandt was educated in Germany, spent four years as a young man in a Swiss sanitorium, and at the age of twenty-four went to study with Man-Ray in Paris. This was in 1929, and his years on the continent were integral to his growth as a photographer. Not only was he influenced by Man-Ray, but also by the Surrealists de Chirico, Dali and Louis Bunuel. Like many of the Surrealists, heavy doses of documentary became incorporated into Brandt's photographs.

When Brandt returned from France, he published his first two books,

"Edith and Osbert Sitwell, Renishaw Hall, Yorkshire 1945"
by Bill Brandt

"Coal-miner's bath, Chester-le-Street, Durham, 1937"
by Bill Brandt

The English at Home (1936) and *A Night in London* (1938). The first of these is particularly noteworthy for it was in this book that Brandt revealed the extreme class differences that existed in England. In laying out the book, he very deliberately accentuated these differences by juxtaposing his images of the pampered aristocracy with depressing images of the miner's homes and deplorable working conditions. In his introduction to the book, the critic Mortimer writes:

> *"One of the pleasures of being English is to return to this country after a longish time...for an hour or two you have caught a surprising vision of your country and your countrymen, you have noticed a hundred details that are peculiar to England; you have, in fact, been able to look through foreign eyes. Mr. Bill Brandt is British by birth but has spent most of his life abroad...shows himself to be not only an artist but an anthropologist. He seems to have wandered about England with the detached curiosity of a man investigating the customs of some remote and unfamiliar tribe."* 57

Perhaps it was because of his expatriate status that Brandt was able to see so objectively the class differences in England. By 1937, he had

become part of a larger pilgrimmage to document the industrial north of England. Most of his photographs from this period were not published until later, however, when they were used by the popular magazine *Picture Post* in defense of the establishment of a Welfare State in Britain.

At the end of 1938, Brandt produced what photographic historian David Mellor regards as his most effective social documentary photo essay, "Enough of All This." It dealt with the housing conditions which led to a general rent strike. The set of pictures included repeated images of children set in darkness and captioned "Children are growing up in these conditions in 1939." A few months later, World War II broke out.

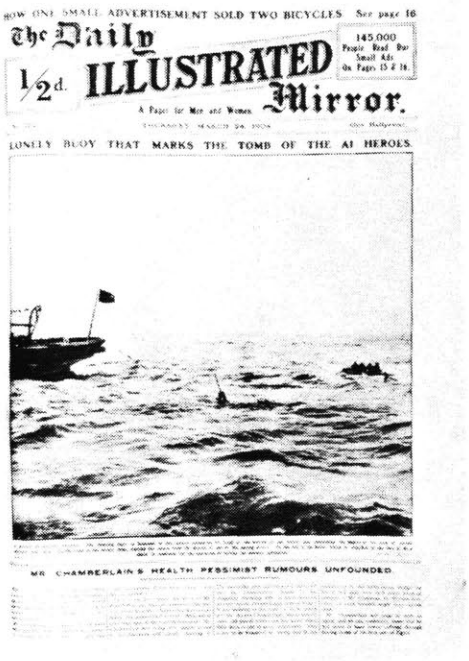
Because of the appearance of *Picture Post* and other illustrated magazines, independent freelance photographers had begun to appear. Bill Brandt was among them. During the war, he produced pictures for *LIFE,* and was commissioned by the English Ministry of Information to document the conditions and morale of East-Enders who were staying in the subway stations at night. He subsequently was asked to document the bombed buildings in London, and eventually in the provinces.

Throughout the forties, Brandt's photographs, many of which are well known to all photographers today, were used a symbols of the times and of the Nation. Norman Hall said of him, "To my knowledge no other photographer has demonstrated such a continuity of attitude towards his art which can only be described as pure 'Englishism'...it is the very essence of his art and should be recognised as such."58

After the war years, Brandt became more involved with photographing the landscape as well as the nude. These studies, which have been widely published, are at least as well known today as his documentary work. Yet

in Britain, his influence has primarily made itself felt through his earlier, high contrast images of England and the English. Colin Osman told me last summer, however, that he doesn't think Bill Brandt will actually ever again influence a photographer because his influence is now so all pervasive. "One can't discover Bill Brandt for oneself anymore," he said.[59]

Press Photography



Perhaps the most important point to make regarding Bill Brandt, however, is that he was not working alone. To borrow Mr. Szarkowski's approach, I would like to instead cite 1904, the year before the birth of Bill Brandt, as the year in which a major force began. It was on Januray 7 of that year that the *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, the world's first newspaper to be exclusively illustrated by half-tone photographs, was launched. The importance of newspaper photography at that time cannot be overstressed. It was the only way in which the man in the street came into direct visual contact with the world he lived in. "His horizon was lifted beyond his street, beyond his village and his native town, without the intervention of any visualising artist."[60]

Press photography was underway. However, at the beginning of the century, the cameras still in use were heavy and cumbersome. They didn't necessarily need tri-pods and glass plates, but they did require physical strength on the part of the photographer, strong lighting and preferably a subject that would stand still. And for all their efforts, most of the press photographers of the turn of the century are unknown since they did not receive credits for their photographs. In fact, press photographers enjoyed very little respect in the beginning. Tom Hopkinson, longtime Editor of *Picture Post*, suggests they were unwelcome at most events because they had to use 'flashlights' -- an open pan of magnesium powder which was touched off by the photographer. These small explosions made such a cloud of distasteful smoke that the subjects were often left gasping for breath.

Then came the invention of the small camera. "...in the mid-twenties came a development which would transform newspaper photography...The camera was the Ermanox, a compact instrument for which lenses were available of far greater light-passing power than any then in use."[61] Shortly afterwards came the Leica and the Rolleiflex. At first, a photographer using these cameras was often considered by his colleagues as wasting time and getting in the way. It took several years before Fleet Street was convinced of these small cameras, partially because all the darkrooms had to be re-equipped with enlargers that would make these images of a useful size for reproduction -- something quite unnecessary with the larger formats that only required contact printing. Speaking about the technical photographic progress at the turn of the century, Colin Osman states:

"The real difference between the 1900s and the 1930s was not a difference in what the photographer wanted, but simply that more portable equipment extended the range of subject material that could be obtained, just because he was able to go where previously it had been physically too difficult or commercially too expensive."[62]

This period can probably best be characterized by two main forces: the erosion of Pictorialism, and the forming of the mass media: not only newspapers, but magazines, films, etc. After the successful appearance of the *Daily Illustrated Mirror*, many more illustrated newspapers were started in England including the *Daily Sketch*, the *Illustrated London News* , the *Daily Herald*, etc. In a 1920 article in *Amateur Photographer and Photography*, it is claimed that "millions of our fellow Britons are proving daily that their preference is for the straight and unfaked hand camera photograph. They prove their choice by buying millions of 'picture papers' every day. Because throughout the world an interest in straight and true and real honest to goodness photographs is tingling through the very limb and tissue of our modern, interested age."[63]

However, the period between the two world wars was somewhat of a paradox in Britain. On one hand, there was economic growth in some of the newer, technological industries such as aircraft, motorcars, etc. But the older coal, iron, steel and shipbuilding industries were badly affected because of the increasing monopoly by American and Japanese companies. This led to wide-spread unemployment which became one of the dominant concerns among the documentary photographers of the period.

In his essay "Patterns of Naturalism: Hoppé to Hardy" written to accompany *The Real Thing* exhibition in 1975 (an exhibition incidentally heralded by Colin Osman as "the most ambitious and the best attempt that

has been made to show British Photography as a whole."[64]), David Mellor talks about the importance of photography in the twenties and thirties:

> *"Not only was photography the ideal means of presenting the truth in the most unmistakeable and persuasive way but it was inextricably associated with visions of a democratic future. The miniature camera had brought photography within the range of all. In Germany especially, the future was felt to lie with photography as the great democratic art in the new collective age which was about to be achieved."* [65]

It is interesting to note that in his entire essay, Mellor attributes a lot of influences in Britain at this time to the Germans and the Soviets, but none to the Americans. When I spoke with him in London this past summer, he offered:

> *"When I set out with Ian Jeffrey in '73 and '74 to do* The Real Thing, *(this may sound shocking), we deliberately did not read Beaumont Newhall, because we didn't want to have anything to do with American perspectives. We were chauvinist, narrow-minded...it was necessary...! it was like forming a new State in Africa. We were kind of aware that there was this looming shadow over us, but we didn't want to know about it.*
>
> *What is most pertinent to me, and to people like Ian Jeffrey and Terry Pepper at the National Portrait Gallery, is the idea of setting up a History of English Photography in the twentieth century, which does not repeat the kind of American ethno-centrism which you find in the standard histories of photography. But in America itself there are questions now over the Newhall type of history. For example, the almost total omission of German photography..."*[66]

Personally, I fully understand and totally support Mellor's method of approach and justification for it in researching the material for *The Real Thing*. It is precisely the course of action which I have taken in the writing of this paper: my bibliography will probably cite no more than three or four references which were published in America. Recalling John Szarkowski's comments on Brandt along with my American colleagues' scant

knowledge of British photography in general, this appeared to be an essential course of action.

As already mentioned, I spoke with Colin Osman while I was in London.

In addition to being the Editor of *Creative Camera*, Osman was also responsible for curating a recent major exhibition for the Arts Council of Great Britain entitled *The British Worker: Photographs of Working Life 1839-1939*. This exhibition, and the handsome accompanying catalogue, are truly a contribution to the history of British photography. Osman ferreted out a great many photographers who were previously unrecognized, such as William Johnson Jennis Bolding, Geoffrey Bevington, William Henry Boyer, Robert Carling and Mark Parkinson. With studies such as this appearing more and more frequently in Britain, it should not be long before more British photographers have the confidence necessary to defend themselves against the claims of the established American photographic historians like Szarkowski.

When asked about the documentary tradition in Britain, Osman was not in total agreement with others I spoke with regarding the importance of the first thirty years in this century. Instead, he thought that the strongest period for documentary work in Britain was first with the Victorians, and the Victorian need-to-know... and then again with the col-

lapse of the Weimar Republic in Germany when Hitler came to power. When I asked specifically about the twenties, he answered that there was a mark of decline to almost triviality in the reportage, explaining this as a kind of reaction to the devastation of the first World War. "It was such an experience here that no American can really comprehend it. You lived in permanent contact with the mud in the trenches, if you were at home... Did you know that we have a Zeppelin bomb in the basement? We have; they dropped it on here but it didn't go off... I think that this was such a huge dose of reality that there was a reaction to it." Hence, according to Osman, came the appearance of unimportant stories, in the same say as *LIFE* magazine was doing in the forties and fifties. "You know, when *LIFE* did 'The Day in the Life of a Vassar Girl.' I mean, no one can pretend this is serious."[67]

A third person I spoke with regarding British photography early in this century was Susan Todd, Research Assistant in Photographic History in the Communication Arts Department of Sheffield City Polytechnic. Ms. Todd specializes in a study of the thirties and claims that the material from this period is badly in need of proper examination -- examination that places the work in its proper social context rather than a study of 'art objects.' I am grateful to her for giving me a copy of her as yet unpublished extended essay, "Approaches To and Uses of Social Documentary Photography in Britain in the 1930s." In her work, she examines the development of 'press photography' and 'documentary photography' but asserts that she is very concerned when people just say 'the documentary movement' and lump them all together when discussing the thirties because there are

significant differences between the major forces and photographers of that period. Her paper deals primarily with four independent organizations: *The Daily Herald*, *Picture Post*, Mass Observation (a fact finding body that wanted to give the masses a voice) and the Workers Film and Photo League.

The *Daily Herald* is one of the illustrated newspapers that I earlier referred to as being so popular in the period. It was originally established in 1919, and according to Ms. Todd, "was seen as a radically Left organ of the Labour party."[68] In her discussion of the newspaper, it is important to note that Ms. Todd quite clearly regrets the fact that with the passing years, the radical element of the newspaper was to be eliminated, and by 1929 it already presented a more moderate line. As an example, she cites an incident in 1936 where the editors of the *Daily Herald* actually appealed to their readership not to oppose a march by the British Union of Fascists -- "a strange position to adopt for a paper purporting to represent the Labour movement."[69]

Photography played an important, if secondary role, in the *Daily Herald*. The concept of photo-essay had not yet come about, but the single photographs by James Jarché were widely used as parts of the feature articles, which is incidentally how most photographs were used by their competitors as well. Like other photojournalists, Jarché's position was distinctly inferior to that of the people who did the 'real' job of writing and editing the paper. "Although James Jarché was perhaps the most celebrated newspaper photographer in the early 1930s, he was always sent out *with* the journalist, to provide illustrations to text, to take photographs which reflect the attitude of that journalist."[70] Because of this, the

various picture editors felt free to crop and alter in any way they liked the pictures brought back by the photographers.

Ms. Todd seriously questions this use of photography, as merely illustrations to the text, because she feels that the full potential of the image -- as intended by the photographer -- often went unexplored. Chopped and cropped by the picture editors, she claimed that these photographs then stressed...

> *"...the characters of the people presented in the images and placed them as far as possible in a timeless setting. This form of presentation makes the articles human documents instead of social documents. If the articles were truly social documents the emphasis could be placed on the problems that the industry suffered and the article then used as propaganda against the conditions the workers faced."*[71]

Before leaving her discussion of the *Daily Herald*, I would like to point out one important observation that I have made in doing this research. While I sit here in America writing about and affirming the actual *existence* of photographers and photographic channels of communication in Great Britain during the first half of this century -- for I know well that it is not only John Szarkowski who is ignorant in this respect, but daresay that nearly all of my potential American readers will be likewise -- my peers in England (all of whom are schooled thoroughly in the Photo Secession, the FSA photographers, and other significant developments in photography in America), are able to quickly bypass these elementary considerations and move directly to the more important task of assessing and analyzing the work under consideration from this period. Thus, Susan Todd can write on one hand that "It cannot be denied that the *Daily Herald* attempted to provide an alternative social reality by giving more prominence to the problems of subjects such as the mining and shipbuilding industries,

that other popular dailies dealt with in far less detail," but she can also go on to criticize that "Their way of mediating this social reality hinged around the policy of characterization of problems apparently ignoring the need to relate them to the wider social and political implications. The general effect of this was one of de-emphasis of the real problems."[72]

As elementary an assessment as this may seem to some, it is nevertheless light years away from any critical thinking about the uses of photographs that I have been witness to since my return to the United States. This is an important point to make because ultimately it reflects part of the reason why the documentary approach to photography continues to be significant in Britain today. My British contemporaries are committed to grappling with social and political issues in their daily existence; they actively discuss national and foreign policies and take a lively interest in the workings of their government. In short, they are concerned with the substance of their own lives and that of their society. Though they certainly do appreciate and respect a decent standard of living, they do not seem to dwell unnecessarily on superficial concerns, like whether or not their 'flats' have the most lavish furnishings or their wardrobes have a change of clothing for every day of the month. The basics serve them rather well. In other words, I believe that the British are at least as concerned, if not more concerned, with the content of their lives as they are with the form. The same can be said of the majority of photographs which are made in Great Britain. There are reasons for this, and these will be revealed as this paper proceeds.

Before continuing, however, let me just add that in this respect I find the British photography which is produced today to be of infinitely more universal interest than the majority of 'formal' work which I've seen produced during the last decade in the United States. As an example, let met cite the exhibition *Photography: A Sense of Order -- Formal Issues in Recent Photographs*, currently being shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Philadelphia, which appears to group the best known contemporary photographers in America. Among them are Lee Friedlander, Steven Shore, Ralph Gibson, Michael Bishop, Joel Meyerowitz, William Eggleston, Lewis Baltz, Robert Adams and Frank Gohlke. As the masters of the formal approach, these photographers have unquestionably contributed significantly to our growing visual vocabulary. In the case of such committed and proven imagemakers, I would not argue that their pictures rely on form alone. However, in the hands of beginning photographers, the emphasis on form over content has had disastrous results. Unfortunately, this approach seemed to spread like wild fire during the seventies in America and gave rise to what I consider to be a tremendous body of meaningless drivel, with each new photographer seeking his or her ingenious new scheme that would put them before the public eye, which was, in itself, lured into thinking that form was all that was necessary. As Peter Turner, formerly co-editor of *Creative Camera* so humorously put it when talking about the American syndrome: "You go along to a gallery, but they say, 'Well, this is great, but this looks like so and so's work.' So you just think up some entirely bizarre new gimmick, like machine-gunning a Xerox copier while it's reducing already toasted SX-70's and you've got it, you've hit

the nail on the head! Nobody has done this before and everybody gets terribly excited."[73] And somehow, content was virtually lost in the process.

The reason why this has happened is a subject for study in itself, though I might surmise that it is in part a reflection of American society at large as it layered on more and more color television sets and more and more microwave ovens but didn't seem to mind that health care was only available for the well-off or that the public transportation system was quietly rotting away.

So I doubt if an exhibition that dealt exclusively with formalist concerns would be likely in Great Britain today. Yet let me stress my point: The British photographic community is not unconcerned with style, form, perspective, composition, presentation or whatever we may choose to call it; but they are equally concerned with the communicative value of the image; that is, the content. They have something to say, and they use their photographs to help them say it. This point should become much clearer once I discuss the work of the ten contemporaries who are the focus of this study. For now, it's best to return to the thirties.

Mass Observation, The Film and Photo League and Picture Post

When writing about Bill Brandt, I mentioned that he participated in a pilgrimage to document the northern, industrial cities of England. The new interest in the north was the result primarily of a phenomenon known as Mass Observation. In 1936, a small group of upper middle class intellectuals and artists began an investigation into the popular culture of the day. They called their study Mass Observation and aimed at investigating

human social behavior. This study is firmly rooted in the documentary movement of the era, both in Britain and abroad. According to David Mellor, in fact, "it was the focus and climax of thirties' Documentary in Britain."[74]

The two founders, poet and journalist Charles Madge, and the anthropologist Tom Harrison, were "aware of the serious gap between what ordinary people, 'the mass,' actually thought and what the press, media and political leaders said they thought... Mass Observation set out to give the masses a voice."[75]

The research started in Bolton, a representative northern industrial town. This became known as the Worktown Project. The photographer, Humphrey Spender -- otherwise known as 'The Lensman' for his work on the *Daily Mirror* -- soon joined the project. The examination of Bolton eventually became Mass Observation's best known enterprise, partly because of David Mellor and Derek Smith's re-discovery of Spender's photographs.

Mass Observation was not affiliated with any particular political party or persuasion. It primarily wanted to document the process of social change and of private and public opinion. It saw itself as a fact-finding body, but one that would be far more neutral than what they saw as the slanted press coverage of the day. "Newspapers not only state THEIR version of the facts, they also state THEIR version of the public opinion of the moment."[76]

It operated like this: there was a team of volunteers, 'ordinary people,' who kept diaries and gave reports of their everyday lives. There was also the core of poets, writers and artists who made more subjective observations since they were presumably not 'ordinary people,' not part

of the 'masses' per se. The diarists and observers made frequent reports on a variety of subjects ranging from the Abdication crisis to football matches. It was all part of what its founders described as the 'anthropology of ourselves.'

An example of a typical observation from the open market:

> *"Woman 36. Middle class. Dressed in grey hat, coat, brown shoes, low heels, sour face. Small dog in car. Left car. Entered fish market. Bought fish after some minutes argument about price and quality. Came back to car. Went to veg. stall, bought cauliflower, returned car. Came back, looked at several fruit stalls, argued about price of pears -- bought six, chose each one, examining them very carefully for bruises, etc. Seven minutes."*[77]

Humphrey Spender's photographs were regarded as being important, but not more important than either the diaries or the observations. Tom Harrison, the founder, wrote that "the use of scientific instruments of precision, photography, film technique... will provide a check on our observation."[78] Unfortunately, only two of the fourteen books that Mass Observation eventually published included photographs.

According to Spender, there was always a Golden Rule governing his work: "if anyone knew they were being photographed then it was a failure -- it had to be unobserved."[79] One of his best known images from the Worktown Project is a photograph of a Funeral Cortege. Partly because of Spender's placement of another observer in the lower right hand corner of

"Funeral Cortege, Davenport Bolton, 1938" by Humphrey Spender

of the picture, we are convinced that this photograph did not break the Golden Rule. That figure also becomes one that we, the viewers, identify with thus establishing ourselves as objective onlookers as well. We are not a part of this procession. We witness it from a distance, just as the man in the lower right corner.

By 1940, Mass Observation operated on a much larger scale with more than two hundred voluntary documentary observers keeping diaries of the air raids, or what they heard people saying about Hitler, or Churchill, or Jews. This self-proclaimed 'nationwide intelligence service' then fed back these opinions and views to the mass society. David Mellor thinks that to some extent it succeeded in its original aims:

> "...*findings, besides being published in Mass Observation books and newsletters became widely publicised as a Best-Selling Penguin Special,* Britain, *in* Daily Mirror *and* Picture Post *features and in frequent BBC broadcasts.*"[80]

Susan Todd would not agree that Mass Observation succeeded in its goals. As early as 1937, Mass Observation talked about some of the potential uses for its findings and thought that advertising agencies could make use of this knowledge to sell their products to clients. Todd concludes:

> "*A complete reversal of Mass Observation's original intentions. Mass Observation's original intention of objectively documenting social habits and behavior became used as a form of societal control... I feel the very open nature of Mass Observation's structure and its dominance by upper middle class artists and intellectuals paved the way towards firstly, its use by the Ministry of Information and finally as a tool of Market Research...*"[81]

Mass Observation continues today. In 1948, it formed as a company. Despite the fact that it was theoretically still concerned with social

research, its money was coming primarily from the new commercial interests that emerged after the war and indeed it soon became concerned primarily with consumer research. In an interview conducted by Shirley Read, the Managing Director of Mass Observation Ltd., John Parfitt said that he nevertheless found it regrettable that today there is left a vacuum of serious social studies. As he sees it the problem is that politicans would prefer not to have things measured because they see themselves as links between the government and the people "and if you go around measuring and find that what they are saying is not what people appear to want then clearly that could be embarrassing. Nobody would put the money up to carry out these studies."[82]

The Workers Film and Photo League, established in 1934, is another example of how photography was seen as an important tool of documentation in the thirties. Unlike Mass Observation, however, the WFPL did have specific political affiliations. It was linked with the Communist International at the time of the 'left turn' in Britain between 1928 and 1935 and as such it was interested in directly agitational culture. As stated in their manifesto, their aims were to produce and popularize films and photographs of working class interest, and in so doing, to develop a political consciousness among the working class. In this it differed dramatically from Mass Observation because it did not want to simply document aspects of mass culture; it wanted, instead, to show how workers were attempting to solve the problems they faced.

Terry Dennett, who is Jo Spence's collaborator in the exhibition I curated for M.I.T., has written a substantial and well-researched article on the WFPL. In it he includes an excerpt from their manifesto dealing

specifically with the importance of photographs:

> *"There are thousands of workers in this country who own cameras but who only use them for taking an occasional snapshot. If even a number of them were to photograph the conditions around them -- in the factories, workshops, dockyards, railways and country side, in their streets -- we should have an invaluable record of working class life, which would enable workers in different branches of industry to understand each other's problems. This vivid understanding of the problems of other workers will help to bring the workers in different branches of industry and in different districts closer together. It will thus actually become a weapon in the struggle of the whole working class."*[83]

Dennett goes on to describe the League's East London still photo section as the "first and major photography group in London."[84] What exactly he means by that, however, is somewhat unclear on several counts, among them the fact that the League was never large in size; its meetings were rarely attended by more than a dozen or so people.

Along with the emphasis on workers photography -- even though occasionally professional photographers contributed work to the League -- came the recognition of the importance of text. Words accompanying the images were used to impart more information and direct the reading of the images. This practice, with its roots in the WFPL of the thirties, has an important sequel in British photography today. I will later examine it more thoroughly in my presentation of Jo Spence's work, making reference then to the various components of this movement in the 1980s.

Picture Post is unquestionably the most celebrated of all the various media using photography in Britain in the thirties. When I spoke to David Mellor about the British documentary tradition, however, he was quick to remind me that we can't lose sight of the fact that it's really a European documentary tradition. And when he continued, "Actually, the

whole shooting match was run by Germans and Hungarians," he was no doubt referring to *Picture Post* as much as anything else.[85]

With the oppressive aftermath of World War I as well as Hitler's rise to power, scores of talented journalists and photographers fled to England for refuge. Among them were the founders of the British magazine: *Picture Post*'s first editor, Stefan Lorant, was a Hungarian Jew who had already been imprisoned by the Nazis, and the paper's first two cameramen Hans Baumann (later known as Felix H. Man) and Kurt Hubschmann (or Kurt Hutton) were Germans who had previously worked on magazines in Berlin and Munich. These refugees did not only carry many skills with them, but they also brought a host of new ideas related to graphic and editorial magazine and newspaper content.

Stefan Lorant first started the *Weekly Illustrated* with Odham's Press in 1934. After running into conflicts with the management, however, he soon left the firm. After several years, it became clear to him that he had to start his own paper and be his own editor. So with a few hundred pounds lent to him by a girlfriend, he launched a little magazine called *Lilliput*, which incidentally published many of Bill Brandt's pictures. When *Lilliput* was recognized by the new firm of Hulton Press as a great success, they offered to buy it from Lorant and set him up with a new picture magazine, *Picture Post*. Stefan Lorant was to be picture editor with Tom Hopkinson taking charge of the text.

Both Lorant and Hopkinson wanted the new magazine to be strongly political. "But being 'anti-Fascist' meant being 'left-wing' -- and our proprietor, Edward Hulton, was a staunch conservative,"[86] said Hopkinson

in his introduction to the book *Picture Post* published in 1970 by Penguin Press. With the scare of World War II already in the air, however, Hulton was persuaded that everyone would want to see war pictures and the magazine would have a public. According to Colin Osman,

> *"He went along with this liberal idea because during the war the whole of the country was Liberal or Labor... Everyone was thinking in terms of what Britain was going to be like after the war. So Hulton may have believed, but if not was easily persuaded to produce a magazine that had enormous liberal tendencies, and was left of center, at times to a point of radicalism."*[87]

Osman then spoke about the instant success of the magazine. It was launched with half a million copies, and it sold out in twenty-four minutes. They doubled it for the next issue, and that was sold out in about three hours. They doubled it again, and within five weeks they were up to over three million.

Even the left-wing photographic publication in Britain today, *Camera-work*, celebrates the contribution of *Picture Post*:

> "Picture Post *is legendary... The magazine quicly created a political credibility by ridiculing Hitler and Mussolini when the Establishment Press, led by the* Times, *were fawning over the Dictators."*[88]

In 1940, Hopkinson got a phone call from Lorant saying that Hitler was getting too close; he was leaving for New York. Tom Hopkinson was then thrust into the position of editor, a position he held until 1950.

> *"...in my time as Editor, I was never happy unless I could see in every issue some topic which was going to be discussed and argued over. I was convinced that in order to survive the magazine had to be provocative and controversial."*[89]

Picture Post can roughly be likened to *LIFE* in America. Born at approximately the same time, it was also a weekly magazine that was large

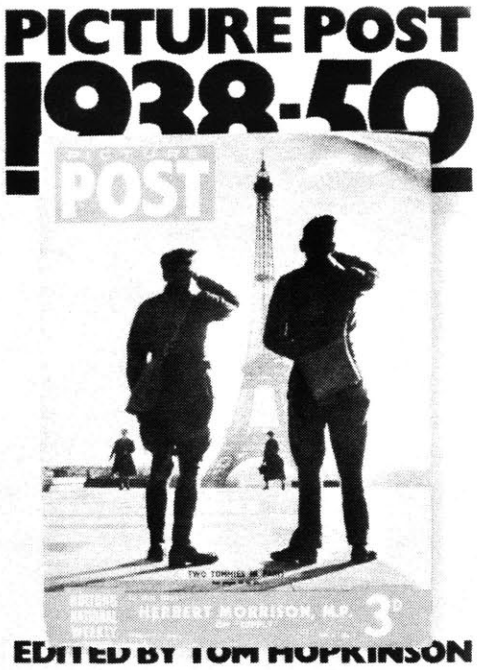
format, newsworthy and amply illustrated with photographs. Most British I talked with, however, think it was superior to *LIFE* because essentially it had more integrity. In the words of Colin Osman:

> *"...go through famous photographers you know who've complained about* LIFE*! ... but have you ever heard anyone complain about working for* Picture Post *under Tom Hopkinson? And these people were turning up two stories a week, when* LIFE *was taking three months for the stories. A) they were working hard and B) they had a responsive and responsible management I don't think anybody at* LIFE *ever thought they had that."*[90]

The photographers working for *Picture Post* were certainly envied by newspaper photographers. The journalists were always instructed to put the photographers' needs ahead of their own and to help them in every way possible. Hopkinson's theory was that a journalist could always work on the details of his story later, but if the pictures weren't there, the story wasn't there. This attitude, revolutionary at the time, provoked one of his journalists to accuse him of treating the photographers like Royal Children!

Picture Post used pictures by the best photographers of the day: Bill Brandt, Bert Hardy, of course Kurt Hutton and Felix Man and also Humphrey Spender who had gotten the sack at the *Daily Mirror*, presumably for having too much respect for the people he was assigned to photograph. Unfortunately, it was not until 1944 that the photographers received credit for their pictures. Colin Osman suspects this was because England was at war with Germany at the time and therefore it was probably not a terrific idea to have German names scattered all over the magazine, even if those same people hated Hitler more than the British themselves.

In essence, *Picture Post* was a magazine for the British people. It was full of information pertinent to their present and future lives. And its overall impact depended greatly on photography. Today, it is revered by most photographers in Britain, but also criticized by some.



The writer Stuart Hall, for example, in his often quoted article "The Social Eye of *Picture Post*" talks about how tragic it was that *Picture Post* did not make more use of the recently arrived political photo-montage artist and refugee, the now famous John Heartfield. He admits that *Picture Post* accurately recorded the substance and quality of ordinary life: its 'social eye' was a clear lens. "But its political eye was far less decisive... There is a rhetoric of change and improvement there, of people capable of resilience and courage; but there isn't anywhere a language of dissent, opposition or revolt."[91]

Tom Hopkinson must have been very disappointed to read that. It was eventually because of his strong voice, which amounted to opposition to the management at the outset of the Cold War, that he lost his job as editor. The crucial moment came in 1950 over a story about American troops' brutality to Koreans. Colin Osman explained it to me:

> *"The photographs were there, the story was there and Tom Hopkinson wanted to run it, but Hulton killed it. And Hopkinson said, 'If you kill this story, you'll have to sack me.' They wanted him to resign and he wouldn't. And he was sacked. Now that was the moment* Picture Post *lost its integrity."*[92]

Picture Post struggled along for a few more years. Its price went up, its readership dwindled and it eventually died in 1957.

Other Links to the Present Day

In establishing the documentary tradition in twentieth century Britain, I have primarily emphasized movements and organizations that I felt were important in defining these roots. Certain specific photographers have been cited along the way -- Bill Brandt, James Jarché, Humphrey Spender, Kurt Hutton, Felix Man and Bert Hardy -- as participants in the growth and development of this tradition. Many others, who were not directly involved with the organizations I have described, also deserve attention. One such photographer was Horace Nicholls.

Though I doubt that any American student of photography has ever heard his name, he has been referred to by Gail Buckland (in *Magic Image*, a book she co-authored with Cecil Beaton) as "one of England's greatest photographers;" and Sir Tom Hopkinson (he was eventually knighted) wrote in March, 1980 that "Horace Nicholls will be recognized as one of the greatest twentieth century photographers."[93]

Nicholls was primarily a news photographer. He was born in Cambridge in 1867 but emigrated to South Africa as a young man, just in time to witness the bloody Boer War at the end of the century. His photographic coverage of that war was used in various English journals and newspapers back home.

Just after the turn of the century, Nicholls moved back to England, published a book about the war and began a lecture tour to tell about his

experiences in South Africa. In his peacetime photographs, the ones which were far less marketable than the war pictures, he probably reveals more of his own true interests. He seemed to be fascinated by crowds, and one of his favorite subjects was Derby Day at Ascot. He photographed the people there, not the horses.

According to Rob Powell, who wrote a two part essay on Nicholls recently for the *British Journal of Photography*,

> *"...in many ways Nicholls' 'sporting' photographs, taken in the period from 1902 to 1914, form his most satisfying work. They are significant in both their content and technique, and in the best of them the documentary and the aesthetic elements in Nicholls combine, and his true stature emerges. Even if his career had stopped here, these photographs alone would merit him an important place in the history of British photography."*[94]

When World War I broke out, Nicholls enlisted immediately. Since he was 47 at the time, however, he was not sent overseas. Instead he became the Official Photographer for Great Britain. The pictures he took were therefore obviously intended as government propaganda. Looking back at them now, however, they are also valuable examples of social documentary. Powell describes one set of images from this period, for example, as a series of blank-faced, naive men and boys being examined by doctors, caught up in a huge machinery -- "a production line of slaughter;" and another series about

"Painting the Shells"
by Horace Nicholls

the women who also become victims of the exploitation of human resources "in a war entirely brought about by men."[95]

As with Horace Nicholls, I could write similar passages about photographers like James Henry Cleet who photographed the shipyards in South Shields around the turn of the century, and then later did a photographic study of the Housing Clearance Project there in the 1930s. Or like George Rodgers, one of the four founders of Magnum along with Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, and David Seymour. Or Thurston Hopkins, the principal photographer for *Picture Post* after Tom Hopkinson had left the magazine.

Or then moving into the sixties, I could look at figures like Patrick Ward, Ian Berry, David Hurn and, of course, Donald McCullin or Tony Ray-Jones and still have other names to cover. And still be discussing the work of major figures of this century who have contributed -- or in the case of the latter group, are still contributing -- to the documentary tradition in Great Britain today. But space does not permit me to discuss *all* the possible photographers leading up to the seventies, or this paper would never arrive at the presentation of contemporary work. Besides, many of the prominent figures of the sixties will be referred to when discussing the work of the ten photographers I have chosen for my focus of contemporary photography.

But what about the other genres? The portraitists? The landscape photographers?

When David Mellor was asked by the Arts Council of Great Britain to curate an exhibition that was to be the sequal to *Pictorial Photography in Britain 1900-1920*, he obviously had to confront these questions himself. His exhibition, *Modern British Photography 1919-1939*, was unfortunately no

longer touring when I arrived in England in June. I deeply regretted this because I felt that there was a gap in my own knowledge regarding the non-documentary photographers of this period and would have liked to see this exhibition for help. Instead, I had to make do with the catalogue. Precious little is written elsewhere on the subject in this particular era.

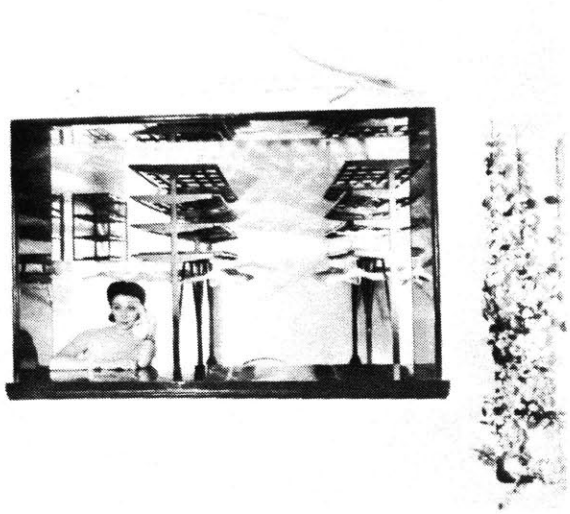
Luckily the catalogue includes many photographs as well as a lengthy essay by Mellor as an introduction to the period. In the essay, Mellor traces not only the effects of the time on documentary and portrait photography, but also brings forth new considerations of fashion and advertising, commercial and industrial, especially under the New Objectivity style that was coming into England from Germany. No references at all were made to the landscape photography of the period.

Mellor claims that there was a decline in studio portraiture between the wars. The reason for this was that department stores began to offer mass-produced portraits, like the introduction of the Photomaton in 1928 (which delivered eight small photographs in three minutes). He says this contracting market "could only, it seemed, be widened by adopting novel styles."[96]

Although Mellor refers to a number of portraitists I'd not heard of before -- Bertram Park, Dorothy Wilding, Herbert Lamber, Barbara Ker-Seymer, Madame Yevonde and Howard Coster to name but a few -- he concludes his introduction to them by saying that "from about 1934, the style of Documentary reportage began to invade all the photographic genres that had previously incorporated naturalism."[97]

Even in his more lengthy treatment of Cecil Beaton, unquestionably the most highly regarded British portraitist of this century, Mellor deals

with him in five separate categories, the first of which is "Cecil Beaton: the Documentarist."



"*Hat Check Girl, 1937*"
by Cecil Beaton

"Documentary reportage also permeated and transformed the photographic travel book, to such an extent that Cecil Beaton's New York *, published in 1938, contained some extraordinary exercises in this style. Some by Beaton, like his* Hat Check Girl *(1937) were hybrid fashion/ documentary."*[98]

Beaton eventually went on to work for the war effort through the Ministry of Information. In fact, some of his documentary photographs of the effects of the war in England were published in American magazines and were instrumental in convincing the United States government to come to the aid of Great Britain.

Beaton's importance as a portraitist cannot, however, be overlooked in this paper. I will deal with it in more detail in Part II when I discuss the work of Brian Griffin who acknowledges a definite influence from Beaton. For the moment, suffice it to say that Beaton was not only a strict portraitist but one who occasionally employed 'documentary devices' in his work such as the apparent realism which is stated in the *Hat Check Girl* and whose skills as a photographer do not reside in the genre of portraiture alone but were also part of the greater documentary movement of the time.

Turning now to landscape photographers, the task becomes even more difficult. As already mentioned, David Mellor did not refer to any landscape work being done from 1919-1939 in his catalogue to the *Modern British Photography* exhibition. It's quite understandable that little work was done in this genre during the forties since England was being ravaged by the second World War.

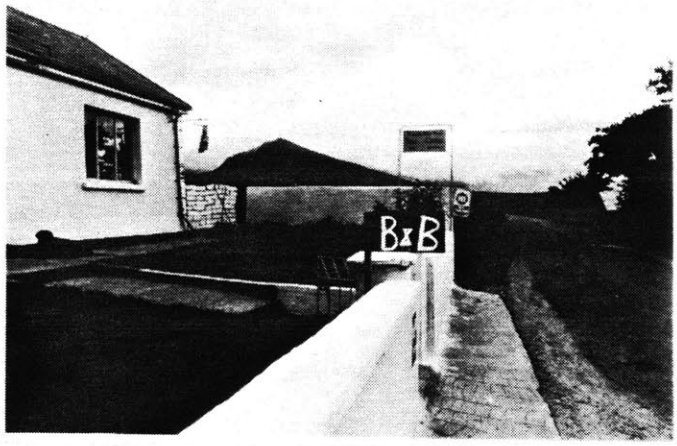
Here, however, Bill Brandt is perhaps one exception. Personally, I doubt that he was the only British photographer who produced any landscapes at that time, but one thing is clear; he is the only one I have managed to find who has received any recognition for it thus far.

According to Mark Haworth-Booth, Keeper of Prints and Photographs at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, Brandt's series of landscapes were made between 1944 and 1948. In writing about Brandt's landscapes in the catalogue to the exhibition *The Land* , an exhibition on twentieth century landscape photographs which Bill Brandt incidentally was asked to curate, Haworth Booth says:

> *"...In making his first landscapes, Brandt sought out places with a strong charge of the past about them, such places as the Malvern Hills, Stonehenge, Avebury. His photographs cut a new channel back to those places and the influence of his images has remained strong in the last thirty years. They are among the best known landscape photographs ever made."* [99]

Apart from Bill Brandt, there is only one other British photographer who has received attention as a landscape photographer leading up to the seventies, and that is Raymond Moore. Formal recognition of his work has in fact been very recent; it came with the 1981 publication of a monograph of his work called *Murmers at Every Turn.*

Raymond Moore originally trained as a painter at the Royal College of Art in the early 1950s, but had turned exclusively to photography by 1956. For years, he spent his summers on a beautiful island called Skomer off the Southwest coast of Wales. Haworth-Booth, who also wrote the introduction to the Moore monograph, called this area 'Ray Moore Country.' But in talking about Moore's pictures that were taken there, Haworth-Booth says that there is nothing of the conventional beauty of the place that comes through in his work. "He has continually travelled to such remote and wonderful places but the concerns of his art are quite different."[100]



"1971"
by Raymond Moore

Haworth-Booth confesses that after working with Brandt on *The Land*, he secretly hoped that every photographer he met would make mighty, romantic images like the Master. "It took me several years to recognize that Ray Moore is his own man. He invented something out of nothing. A style, a mode of seeing and reflecting on what is seen, a way with landscape that insists on being true to *his* experience."[101]

As a result, Moore's pictures can be seen as almsot the extreme opposite of Brandt's. They are quiet, personal studies of the commonplace, and his prints are small, carefully-crafted precious objects.

Raymond Moore has enjoyed some recognition in the United States through exhibitions he's had at the Art Institute of Chicago, the George

Eastman House and the Carl Siembab Gallery in Boston. In Britain, he is now regarded by some as the man who heroically carried the torch through many years when very few British photographers were turning their cameras toward the land.

This brings me to the end of my discussion on what I find to be the pertinent historical influences on the majority of the photographers, as defined in my preface, working in Britain today. I have stopped short of the seventies because that entire decade saw a tremendous resurgence of photographic activity in Britain and needs to be dealt with when discussing the contemporary work. In the next section, I will set the stage for my ten chosen photographers by describing some of the relevant photographic occurrences that took place in Britain in the 1970s, which directly or indirectly affected the growth of photography.

Before leaving this part of my study, however, I would like the reader to reflect back with me over the photographers and movements I have described. I am convinced: more than any other genre, the documentary approach was the primary force in British photography.

PART II: THE RENAISSANCE IN BRITISH PHOTOGRAPHY

The war years had provided documentary photographers with ample raw material. The post-war years, however, were relatively lean in comparison. This was magnified by the fact that film was rationed and with an importation ban on all German photographic equipment, there was not a lot of equipment around that wasn't pre-war. And then gradually came a growing rise of interest in photography, with a minor explosion of sorts taking place within the last ten years in Britain. This period has often been referred to as the 'photographic renaissance.' Most people I spoke with think of it as having taken place in the seventies, but there is some support for going back to the late fifties and early sixties in establishing its roots.

By the end of the fifties, *Picture Post* was no longer around. However, one magazine that did begin to get the attention of the diminished photographic community, if not the general public, was *Photography*. Its editor, Norman Hall, guided the magazine through these uncertain years until the mid-sixties. In the pages of his publication, he presented the work of international photographers as well as British and campaigned for a greater appreciation of the potential of photography. As would be fitting in the harshest of the Cold War years, his was not a political, but an aesthetic approach to the medium. Today he is credited by many with keeping the creative aspects of British photography alive in troubled times.

Bryn Campbell, a gifted photographer in his own right as well as a former Picture Editor for the *Observer* newspaper, would cite 1961 as the starting point of the photographic revival. That year saw the publication of two photography books in England: Bill Brandt's *Perspective of Nudes* and Michael Peto's *The Dancer's World*.

Yet Gerry Badger, writer, photographer and critic, would point to the whole phenomena of the "Swinging Sixties" as creating the "spirit of inquiry and apparent disregard for established convention of all kinds which nurtured, among other things, a new interest in the photographic medium."[1]

The sixties indeed saw the whole of Britain exploding with surprising, unexpected breakthroughs: it was the decade of Pop Art, Carnaby Street fashions, Vidal Sassoon haricuts, and of course the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. And it was the decade, too, which claimed the photographer as one of its symbols of change. The type of photographer who was idolized in the sixties, however, was similar to the protagonist in Antonioni's film, *Blow-Up*. There the profession of fashion photographer was made to look especially glamourous and appealing. England was soon to see a significant rash of young men wanting to become the David Baileys and Sam Haskins of the world who daily got to work with, and incidentally boss around, the beautiful 'birds' of the day. One of the points made by Geoffrey Crawley when I spoke to him in July was that he feels to this day British fashion and advertising photographers are unchallenged in the world.

The irony of *Blow-Up*, of course, is that the vital photographs that form the plot of the film story were actually taken by one of Britain's most serious young photographers, Donald McCullin.

Like his contemporary Phillip Jones-Griffiths, Ian Berry, Patrick Ward, Bryn Campbell, David Hurn and Tony Ray-Jones, McCullin was not a photographer who had come from the privileged classes. This entire new generation of picture-makers differed greatly in this respect from their predecessors of both the last century and much of the early part of this one. What had allowed McCullin and the others to develop as photographers was in part the establishment of the Welfare State after the war. Among other things, the Welfare State guaranteed a national health program, subsidized government rental housing, comprehensive unemployment insurance and educational grants to qualified aspirants. Most importantly, it finally signalled the decay of the rigid class system in Britain that we outsiders recall so well in the contrasting images given to us by Bill Brandt. With this erosion, a whole new generation of youths from the industrial centers or depressed urban areas of the country could strive for more than becoming professional athletes.[2]

David Mellor tends to regard Don McCullin as the photographer who was the real link between the earlier documentary photographers and those who came after. As a hefty endorsement for his assessment, he also told me that when Brandt was asked in an interview in 1966 if there were any young photographers he liked, he answered that there was only one, McCullin.

Donald McCullin is unquestionably one of the strongest war photographers of all time. His energy, courage and commitment put him in a class which he shares with very few others. Yet, it is not his aesthetic which was to have the most impact on the up and coming photographers. Though his importance cannot be denied, I personally think that I would

have to instead point to Tony Ray-Jones as being the pivotal figure in linking the past approaches to the documentary aesthetic to the present and future tendencies.

"Glyndebourne, 1967"
by Tony Ray-Jones

"Brighton Beach, 1967"
by Tony Ray-Jones

When he was a young photographer/graphic designer, Ray-Jones studied in the States, first at Yale, and later with Richard Avedon, Robert Frank and Alexi Brodovitch. In 1966, he returned to a Britain which, in his eyes, was at best waking up after a long nap. Compared to the level of photographic activity in the States, he was initially quite depressed with this situation, but then came to regard it as virgin ground for some of the new ideas he had racing around in his head. He quickly embarked on a personal project which amounted to a visual examination of the delightful

and often curious mannerisms and customs of the British. In his pictures, he showed an uncanny ability to choreograph a scene.

In his long article "On British Photography," Gerry Badger asserts that "In essence, Ray-Jones made the first serious, highly individual and cohesive document of English life since Brandt in the thirties, a document of such obvious worth that it both spurred his near contemporaries in British photo-journalism and inspired the young."[3]

And in writing about his own work in *Creative Camera* in 1968, Tony Ray-Jones offered this:

> *"Photography for me is an exciting and personal way of reacting to and commenting on one's environment and I feel that it is perhaps a great pity that more people don't consider it as a medium of self-expression instead of selling themselves to the commercial world of journalism and advertising."*[4]

For me, the key words in this statement are "the personal way of reacting to and commenting on one's environment" that single out Ray-Jones as being so influential a figure in the seventies. In these words, he confirms his interest in dealing with the real world out there -- "one's environment" -- which attaches him firmly to the interests of his predecessors of over a hundred years of picture-making in Britain; in this respect he carries the torch. Yet he reacts to and comments on that environment in a "personal way" and this is what clearly sets him apart from those who went before him. And this set the stage for so much photography done in Britain over the next ten years.

Peter Turner would agree:

> *"Tony turned it all around and showed them where it was at. He recognized the limits of the magazine requirements early, worked hard, and, with his extra energy and American experience, set it in motion. His influence wasn't only visual but demonstrative and ethical -- just doing it showed them there was another way."*[5]

And in his major six-part article on British photography published in 1977 in the *British Journal of Photography*, the American photographer/critic William Messer also takes the opportunity to laud Tony Ray-Jones' contribution. Among the many complimentary comments he includes is one I've chosen as another example of presenting Ray-Jones as a pivotal figure: "He handled the medium with wit and imagination, an affinity for the surreal and unexplained, and a thoroughly dedicated documentary spirit.[6]

"Bognor Regis, 1967"
by Tony Ray-Jones

It is important to note that Messer attributed to him a "documentary spirit" rather than referring to him as a "documentary photographer." It is an important distinction to make because it is essentially this point which separates Ray-Jones from his immediate contemporaries and establishes what I believe to be the shift in emphasis for British photographers. The story unfortunately has a sad ending. At the very early age of 31, Tony Ray-Jones died of leukemia in a London Hospital. It is hard to estimate the impact his work might have had if he were alive today.

When Ray-Jones returned to Britain in 1966, he needn't have been totally despondent because there were important glimmerings of movement on the horizon. Bill Jay, editor of an amateur magazine, *Camera Owner*,

was looking for financial support for his floundering publication. He turned to the right person, Colin Osman. Not only the publisher of a successful periodical about racing pigeons, Osman was also a photographic enthusiast. He purchased Jay's magazine for one pound sterling. That union represents the beginning of *Creative Camera*, to this day still published by Osman's Coo Press.

Bill Jay was the first Picture Editor for *Creative Camera*, but he often took suggestions from David Hurn and Tony Ray-Jones as to the contents of the magazine. These two occasionally served as guest editors, in fact. In the early days the number of American photographers published was "unnervingly large for a British journal" according to William Messer, but he nonetheless goes on to insist that Jay was only interested in the educational value those pictures could provide. "The only flag raising was photography."[7]

Creative Camera instantly became a significant new forum in both British and international photography. Brandt's *Shadow of Light* was also published in 1966 and the year was significant for still another reason: it was the founding of the Derby School of Creative Photography by Bill Gaskins in the Midlands.

In 1970, Bill Jay left *Creative Camera* to found his own magazine, *Album*. Interest was really stirring among British photographers with the publication of these two fine magazines. Unfortunately, beset by financial difficulties, *Album* only lasted twelve issues. So many other things began happening, however, that its passing was not a major setback.

Two other figures who were to become pillars of the current photographic community also emerged at this time. The first of these was Sue

Davies, who founded the Photographer's Gallery in London; the second, Barry Lane, was appointed Photography Officer of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1973.

Sue Davies had previously been working with a series of photographic exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and was caught by the growing interest in photography. She was aware of the medium and how it wasn't catered for in terms of gallery exposure. When she got the idea of opening a gallery devoted solely to photography, the first obstacle to overcome was, of course, a financial one. She'd located a building in the heart of London's busy theatre and book-shop district, the West End, but at first had no idea how to finance the venture. I spoke with her this summer and she told me the story:

> *"I found a man who was issuing the Gernsheim's portfolios and he said he would pay me the first year's rent, which was 2,000 pounds, if I would show his portfolios as they came out...and there were only four a year, and only ten pictures in each and they only took up a corner of the gallery -- they were good things anyway, -- and so I said fine...I raised about a thousand pounds by writing around to photographers themselves; they sent me 'fivers' and 'tenners' and rude letters saying it was never going to work and promises of money that never came, at least not enough. To do up this building, it only cost about five thousand pounds... to put in the fire escape and do the walls. And I borrowed that. I borrowed that from the bank, off my house, really. And I paid that back when we did an auction at Sotheby's. And the first photography auction, really, in Sotheby's was a charity auction on our behalf... we raised about 6,000 pounds..."*[8]

The gallery opened in January of 1971 and was an overnight success. Within a short time, it was regarded as one of the best photographic galleries in Europe. Sue Davies' philosophy was suited to the needs of Great Britain at the time: she would simply show the best of what was available -- whether it be fashion, reportage, sports, imported shows from Europe or

America, etc. Her curatorial approach was eclectic and adventurous. There would be something for everyone to see at the Photographer's Gallery.

When the Photographer's Gallery began, the Arts Council of Great Britain had no photography panel. According to Davies, "It was partly because the gallery existed that there ever became a panel that would occasionally advise on photographic questions if asked by the (established) Art Panel."[9]

At the urging of Barry Lane, an energetic arts administrator who had been influenced by Bill Jay, the Arts Council finally initiated a separate grants program for photographers and photographic exhibitions. This was in 1973, and in the same year, Lane was also appointed Photography Officer. That year saw the beginning of a tremendously active support system for both individual photographers and the medium at large. According to Barry Lane, this official encouragement was vital in Britain because photography had not been properly recognized by museums and galleries, hence there was little, if any, support from either purchasing work or organizing exhibitions.

The Photography Committee was compromised of various members of the British photographic community ranging from photographers themselves to critics, editors, lecturers, etc. At one time or another, at least five of the exhibitors in the M.I.T. show sat on the Committee. The primary function of the committee was to review applications from individual photographers as well as organizations and agree upon the dispersal of funds. In 1977, William Messer wrote that:

"Arts Council budgeting and support for photography has more than doubled every year since the grants began in 1973, to the point now where Arts Council financing is becoming an umbilical, a photographic life-line without which the entire, impressive, newly erected structure of institutions and development in the medium would collapse. This is not exaggeration: everything from galleries to individual photographers to much of the photographic publishing underway, is dependent upon some form of financial aid, often nearly total." [10]

Messer was right. Today the Arts Council has three organizations in London alone who receive annual subsidies -- the Photographer's Gallery, the Half Moon Photography Workshop and the Blackfriar's Settlement. It partially supports at least five galleries outside of London. The aim is generally to provide living photographers with darkroom facilities, direct commissions for work, fellowships and residencies, teaching and exhibition fees and purchases of work produced.

Additionally it has publication schemes whereby interested commercial publishers would receive subsidies from the Council to offset the costs of bringing out books by contemporary photographers. And it has exhibition grants which are trying to encourage local museums, colleges or galleries to plan shows of contemporary work.

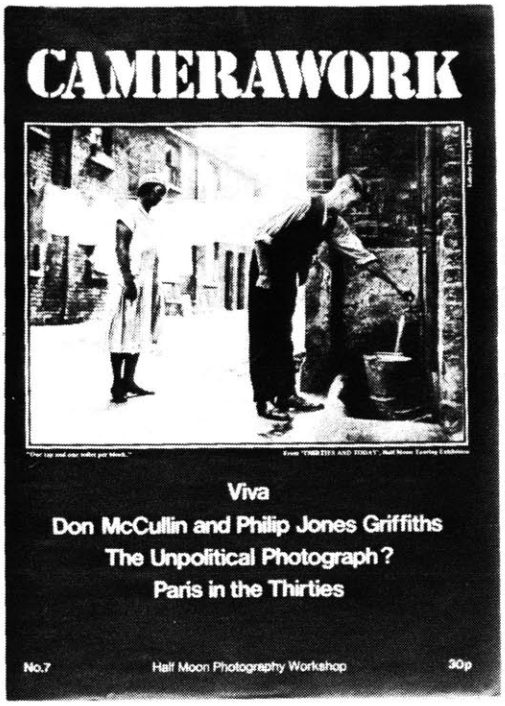
The Council, and its management, have their critics to be sure, but generally speaking Barry Lane is respected for the contributions he has made in acting in the best interests of a wide variety of photographers. The Photography Committee was disbanded in 1979, however, and the Council has been attempting to redefine its role ever since. Early in 1981, a "Working Party" was established to decide what the future steps must be. When I talked to people in the summer, I heard many conflicting opinions, some of which will emerge when discussing the individual photographers'

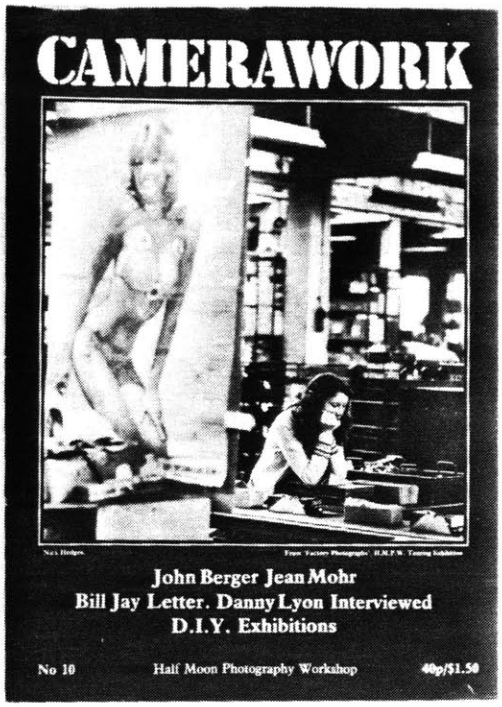
work later in this section. Official minutes of the "Working Party" proceedings were confidential, so I await the final report as eagerly as everyone in Britain.

Thus the Photographer's Gallery and the Arts Council of Great Britain were two highly important institutions throughout the entire decade. Together they recognized the needs of young, emerging photographers and in so doing, contributed substantially to the growth of interest in photography. But there are other significant events of the decade that also must be noted. Let's return to the early seventies and outline some of them.

From 1971 - 1973, three other photographic galleries were also born in England. The Half Moon Gallery was started in London. It was a grass-roots gallery in the foyer of an alternative theatre in the working class East End. The Half Moon was launched by two American women, Wendy Ewald and Ellen Aronis but rescued by Ron McCormick when the founders soon after returned to the States.

McCormick stayed with the gallery until 1975 when he moved north to Newcastle. Under the new leadership of Mike Goldwater and Jo Spence, the concept expanded into a publishing venture as well and became known as the Half Moon Photography Workshop. On a semi-regular basis, a team of many volunteers produced *Camerawork*, a beautifully printed tabloid-type paper that is devoted to issues of social and political concern as they are related to photography. Writing about them in 1977, Messer said, "They are a place with a heart and a conscience, of the social sort. They began in a posture of community involvement and have never lost these





politics, no matter how large they define that community to be."[11] Besides Jo Spence, two of their other most active members, Terry Dennett and Paul Trevor, are also participants in the exhibition at M.I.T. By the late 1970s, however, there was a philosophical schism in the group; Spence and Dennett left, setting up their own organization, The Photography Workshop. The Half Moon thrives to this day, now installed in greatly expanded premises, the rehabilitation of which has been almost exclusively financed by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Both the newspaper and their system of travelling exhibitions continue, with growing support and involvement from the working class community where they are located.

Two galleries were also opened outside of London: the Impressions Gallery in York in 1972 and The Photographic Gallery at Southampton University in 1973. The gallery in the northern tourist town of York was

founded by Valerie Williams, an incredibly energetic and enthusiastic curator who made good use of her Arts Council support by researching and showing the work of little-known British photographers from the past. The University Gallery founded by Leo Stable had a particular charm of its own: it was housed in a spacious stairwell which was skylit and adjacent to the campus bookstore. Thus it was ideally located for reaching a previously unsuspecting student audience.

At the same time as these galleries were being established, the prestigious National Portrait Gallery in London's Trafalgar Square also appointed Colin Ford to the position of director of the newly established photographic department. It was this same department which shortly thereafter successfully won the battle of keeping the precious Julia Margaret Cameron pictures in Britain. And the Victoria and Albert Museum in London opened its first major Arts Council supported exhibition on photography: *'From Today Painting is Dead' The Beginnings of Photography*. The following year was noteworthy for yet another reason. It was the year in which M.I.T. Press published a stateside version of Don McCullin's earlier, smaller book *The Destruction Business*. The American version was enlarged, both in scope and format, and was published under the title of *Is Anyone Taking Any Notice?* Both volumes, of course, revealed McCullin's horrifying images of war, to date probably the most grueling examples of man's injustice to man that have ever been recorded on film.

Unfortunately, 1972 was also a year which marked two sad changes for the British photographic community. It was the year that Tony Ray-Jones died. And it was also the year that Bill Jay left England to study photo-

graphy with Beaumont Newhall and Van Deren Coke at the University of New Mexico.

In the same year that Jay went to America, however, an American instructor, John Mulvaney, now head of the Art Department at Columbia College in Chicago was invited to teach in Britain. He was brought over by Bill Gaskins, head of the combined photographic courses at Trent Polytechnic at Nottingham and the Derby School of Creative Photography. After a year, Mulvaney was replaced by another American, Thomas Joshua Cooper. In the succeeding four years that Cooper spent teaching in the Midlands, he was to create such a commotion that people are still talking about him, and his widespread influence, today.

It's worth looking at that influence for a moment, but first a word should be said about the educational system that Cooper found on his arrival: it was, and is, substantially different from higher education as we know it in America. To begin with, education in Britain is largely state operated. As such, it is relatively inexpensive when compared to the high costs of tuition in the States. Furthermore, as already noted, it is usually possible for qualified, interested applicants who can't afford the fees to receive full subsidies, plus stipends, for attending a course. The facilities in the five polytechnics and colleges that I am familiar with are all excellent, being fully equipped with colour processors and numerous individual black and white darkrooms, as well as full-time technicians on hand to deal with any equipment problems. In this respect, they make most facilties at American institutions, certainly at M.I.T., pale by comparison. In 1977, William Messer claimed, however, that there

was a high price tag for such a public investment: in return, the educational institutions were supposed to churn out individuals who were primarily "productive" rather than anything else. "Creativity, and 'visual literacy,' in British photographic education therefore are nearly subversive and dissident courses of action and thought."[12]

Although Messer is exaggerating here, there is a grain of truth in what he is saying. It was re-iterated to me time and again whenever I probed in my interviews about photographic education. The fact is that until the seventies, there was very little of it to be found anywhere; that which there was merely existed as a side-course for painters and designers in art colleges who needed to know how to make slides of their work. With the new photographic awareness of the decade, the field of education was changing slowly, too. Both John Blakemore and Paul Hill were already teaching at Trent/Derby and they had gotten the ball rolling. For Thomas Joshua Cooper, however, that ball was rolling at a pace he just couldn't identify with.

After living in Europe for such a long time, I know from first hand experience that a good many Americans are intolerant of existing conditions when they travel abroad. The rest of the world -- not even the western world -- does not necessarily eat lunch in twenty minutes, drive roomy cars (or cars at all for that matter), bathe every day, or speak English. The oft-quoted term 'the ugly American' is related to the fact that U.S. citizens wish foreigners *would* do all the above, and more, so that they, as travellers, could have all the conveniences of home while *en route*. Missionaries are, of course, the worst examples of people actively trying

to convert others over to their own set of beliefs. I don't know, and furthermore, it isn't important, what religious affiliation Thomas Joshua Cooper has. I do know, and I think it is significant, that he was a preacher in America before arriving in England. The fervour that comes across in some of his statements about the British photographic scene strike me as having an almost missionary zeal to them. Witness, for example, his condemnation of newspaper photography, "the ultimate in transitory experience:"

> *"Passion for the fleeting and the flip seem to dominate* what is *and it is because this passion seems to spread like an uncontrollable disease that a stand must be taken now to eradicate this condition once and for all."*[13]

There is something about this quote which brings forth images of a fair-skinned, perspiring priest in Africa shouting "These natives must be clothed and made to hear the word of God!"

To be fair, I must say that the above quote was taken from an article written jointly by Cooper and Paul Hill in 1974, entitled "Can British Photography Emerge from the Dark Ages?" As such I cannot be certain who the author is of these fiery words.

The article in itself, though brief, revealed the Midland Group on the Offensive, and was important in that respect. It primarily lashed out, and basically condemned, photographic education as it existed in Britain: "For the last half a century we seem to have been enduring -- with a few notable exceptions -- a photographic Dark Age... And as with most edifying situations a large part of the blame must lie with those who are supposed to educate us."[14] It went on to accus the British of being primarily a word-oriented society and one that has not been very visually aware since

the Industrial Revolution. As grandiose as that sounds, I frankly think it is quite easy to refute by stating that the society, i.e., the mass of people, has *only* been visually aware since the Industrial Revolution, and that *because of photography*.

Though I find the article flawed in many respects now, I must nevertheless admit that it was well-intentioned and doubtlessly ruffled a lot of dormant feathers that needed a jolt. For example, how could I argue with: "It cannot be stressed too greatly that the endeavour to express oneself creatively by means of the camera is not, and never will be, a superfluous pursuit."[15]

Yet, in retrospect, Cooper's methods bother me. Apparently I am particularly sensitive to Americans wanting to remake the world in their own image. In Portugal I witnessed the beautiful landscape of Lisboa, laid out on seven small hills from time immemorial, be destroyed by the erection of an 85 story Sheraton Hotel right in the middle of it. In Paris, I applauded the French Académie for outlawing the increasing use of 'Franglais' in the newspapers. And in England, I shuddered when an American lecturer at the London College of Printing looked out over the panorama of the city and actually said to me, only partly in jest, "Just think, Linda, one day it will all be America."

So it is probably because I have tried in my own life not to be guilty of American cultural imperialism that I am cautious about overrating the importance of Thomas Joshua Cooper's presence in England. Who did he think he was, anyway, trying to brush aside a documentary tradition that was over a century long for the sake of metaphoric images of birch trees?

On the other hand, of course, it would be seriously wrong of me to simply dismiss his impact, because it was undeniably strong. And it was important.

Furthermore, I owe a debt of personal gratitude to Tom Cooper for inviting me over from Paris to attend the Minor White seminar in 1976, an event which was certainly a memorable one for me. And I must also thank him for initially alerting the *British Journal of Photography* to my work. That gesture subsequently resulted in the publication of a portfolio of my pictures in the journal, including the cover image.

With that said, I can now continue the saga of Thomas Joshua Cooper. For better or worse, he had the British world of creative photography in a tizzy from roughly 1974 to 1978. With his strong stances, unending energy and genuine devotion to his students' work, not to mention his own fine portfolio of pictures, Thomas Cooper was a sort of legend in his own time. He had extremely high expectations of his students, and they in turn performed to meet his demands. The contemporary appreciation of the fine print probably could be said to have arrived on the plane with Tom Cooper, along with an awareness of selenium toning, air-drying prints, acid-free board, etc., etc. His own prints were meticulously produced, often with the help of one or two of his students dodging parts of the image at the same time as he was. It was not uncommon for him to print an image over fifty times to get it exactly right. He usually made contact prints from 5x7 inch negatives, and they were generally very dark prints. This, too, became a trademark of the polytechnic. Within a couple of years of his arrival, the rest of the country was referring to the new school of thought as the 'small dark prints from Trent.'

Cooper was a disciple of the American Masters: Minor White, Harry Callahan, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston and friends. He clearly didn't like what he found in Britain -- the documentary/reportage spirit with humorous shades of Tony Ray-Jones or rendered in a contrasty, Bill Brandt fashion -- so he waged virtually a one-man war against it. The influence he had with his own students was phenomenal. Speaking of them he said:

> *"It would take me a small book to explore and explain the reasoning behind my belief that the fullness of the future of British photography lies almost exclusively with these students now. They are killing off, and with damn good reason, the tired, repetitive, lazy, thoughtless, almost completely unimaginative type or obsession with a certain boring position in photo-reportage that the British have held to, almost stubbornly, for 45 years or more."*[16]

With all this friction in the air, however, interest was growing by leaps and bounds and British photography was a force to be reckoned with. In 1974 an exhibition, "Young British Photographers" was organized for the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford. Chris Steele-Perkins, one of the curators, is currently a Magnum photographer. The show he helped assemble definitely had a documentary spirit to it, though much of it already showed signs of a more personal documentary nature. The exhibition eventually travelled to the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. Then in July, 1976, the Seventh International Photographic "Rencontres" in Arles, in the South of France, hosted an exhibition called "New British Photography." There were lectures and slide presentations and many of the exhibiting British photographers were in attendance, from the well known to some of the emerging students from Trent. It was a fine showing and there was a new sense of confidence among the British photo community in general as a result.

Among the various exhibitions in Arles that summer was one by David Hurn, a Magnum photographer who had recently launched a photography program at the Gwent College of Higher Education in Newport, Wales. It was a two year course called Documentary Photography which both solidly respected the British photographic traditions while at the same time it provided an innovative approach to the study of that genre.

Last summer I spoke with Hurn. He explained his philosophy to me by saying that what he really wanted to offer was a course which expanded the interests that people already had through the use of photography. Applications for the course, in fact, have to fall within three categories:

> 1) Candidates (with or without qualifications) who have considerable feeling for experience of an activity to which photography can add another dimension (social work, health or welfare services, travel, politics, journalism, etc.).
>
> 2) Graduates of any discipline who feel that the ability to take photographs would be a positive aid in their work (sociologists, anthropologists, zoologists, teachers, architects, etc.).
>
> 3) Candidates who have had experience in photography and whose portfolio of work shows individuality and sensitivity.[17]

What happens, of course, is that many of these people love photography so much that they become photographers in the end.

The program has attracted a long list of well known photographers as visiting lecturers including Sir Tom Hopkinson, Josef Koudelka, Don McCullin, Patrick Ward Paul Hill and Tom Cooper. Two of the current full time members of the staff are Ron McCormick and Keith Arnatt, both of whom are included in the exhibition I've curated for M.I.T.

When I also interviewed McCormick in Newport, he told me that their selection process is in fact very stringent, with a lot of time spent es-

tablishing whether or not the potential students for the course were mature enough to know quite well what they wanted to do with photography. So far their track record is remarkably good: in over six years, only two people have left the course, and in both cases, it was becuase they couldn't keep up the intense pace that was demanded of them.

Given the rather pronounced differences in teaching approaches between David Hurn and Tom Cooper, I was very surprised to see that he was on the list of visiting lecturers. I spoke to Hurn about the middle seventies, which in retrospect I see as being the years where the American influence was at its strongest. Hurn staunchly maintains, however, that the teaching traditions in Britain are too firmly established to move over to anything resembling the American system. When I then questioned Cooper's profound influence during those years, Hurn replied:

> *"Marvelous influence! And so what has happened out of that wonderful influence? He turned out a whole mass of students 99% of whom have never shot a picture since, and the other one percent that have are probably shooting very nice pictures. So who cares?... Ultimately, what it means is that if it's no good, it will die; and if it's any good, it will live."*[18]

Besides these two radically different approaches to photographic education, there was yet another beginning to make itself known in the capital. It was the Polytechnic of Central London, and it is possibly the school which is receiving most of the attention now in 1981. We will look at it more closely once we discuss the work of Jo Spence who is currently a student there.

In 1977, an important article was published in the *British Journal of Photography* which had previously been in U.S. Camera. The British

publication released it in six weekly installments with a generous number of photographs. It was written by William Messer, who is currently the director of the Photographic Gallery in Cardiff, Wales. Messer has spent much of the last ten years living in England, during which time he gradually researched the material for his article. Based on an earlier article written by Paul Hill, Messer used the title "The British Obsession," referring to the evolving documentary/reportage genre which was of course so pervasive in Britain, but added to it: "About to Pay Off?"

The article began by stating that British photographers were slowly moving towards international recognition:

> *"They are not going about this amidst great fanfare and fireworks, not at the cost of serious alteration to the medium. Rather they have been willing, even dedicated to quietly pursuing characteristic concepts and ideals, trafficking familiar corridors in well-known structures, abandoned years ago by the bulk of American photographers who were convinced they led nowhere..."*[19]

He ponders *why* the British are doing documentary-type work in 1977, which he sees as a kind of retreat from the tremendous activity of 1974, 1975 and 1976. He primarily attributes the return to the fact that journalists around the world were at that time heralding the re-emergence of British supremacy in the medium and felt that a lot of photographers were returning to familiar waters; and he cites the crumbling economy at the end of the seventies as being another factor in the re-appearance of the importance of documentary work:

> *"... a lot of photographers were not quite ready to be new messiahs. For them, such a backward move represents a desire to make sense to themselves again, to get their feet back on the ground, out of the clouds of 'airy'fairy artiness.'"* [20]

It is important to note that Messer characterizes the resurgence of interest in a documentary approach as a 'backward move.' This assessment

was not only made by foreigners like himself. It is in fact an accurate representation of the spirit that prevailed in England at that time. Masses of books, magazines, exhibition posters and success stories from America were flooding the British Isles. The message was clear: it's all happening in the United States. Therefore, in the eyes of many, the course of action was obviously to follow in the American footsteps. And particularly from 1974 - 1978 -- the years which witness a virtual tidal wave of imported American books -- a significant proportion of young photographers did just that: they tried to imitate what was going on in the States. The only problem was that the stimulation behind that work was borrowed, and the images inevitably showed it. David Hurn put it this way:

> *"I think a great mass of young photographers who went in a certain direction -- have found that it just doesn't work so well in England, in this ambience, with the history, even the climate, the light, just the visual things you have here."*[21]

So by the end of the seventies there was a curious backlash of sorts against American influences. It was not so much directed at specific individuals as it was against the whole phenomena. Thomas Cooper, who was moving on from the Nottingham experience by this time, commented on this situation in talking about his students for Messer's article: "They are fighting to overturn this (American) influence and are aiming to re-create a new and vital British photography that will be a force in its own right to reckon with, and a powerful one at that."[22]

Messer himself looked again at the British reaction:

> *"... among the newest, youngest, most impressive imagemakers I've met there is little of the self-absorbed, self-impressed, or self-promoting attitude one might be prepared to find in their American counterparts. They are hooked into something and seeking the follow through. American attitudes, stances, and ideology are all pretty meaningless to them at this point."*[23]

There was a lot of excitement and a tremendous growth of activity in photography during this entire period. Galleries that were solely devoted to the medium were now sprinkled throughout the country, the Arts Council of Great Britain had recognized photography as worthy of support, numerous major exhibitions were organized, new publications of all kinds had appeared and photographic courses were created which reflected both traditional British values as well as more international points of view. Yet with so much renewed activity in photography, it seemed all very confusing at times, particularly near the end of the seventies.

Peter Turner, as co-editor of *Creative Camera*, was in as good a position as anyone to assess future directions. In 1978, he said, "We are now in the throes of establishing new directions for photography (in Britain) and a style that is uniquely our own will surely emerge. There is every indication that it will grow out of our reportage tradition..."[24]

In the next section, we will look closely at ten photographers, who, in my opinion, represent a cross section of the best photography being done by serious and dedicated British photographers today. Their work falls loosely into the three genres which I have been discussing thus far: documentary, landscape and portraiture. These photographers are the same ones I have included in the exhibition "Ten Contemporary Photographers in Britain," and thus reveal the real fruits of my curatorial efforts. In discussing their lives and the approaches and attitudes they have towards their own work and photography in general, I hope to show that, as Peter Turner predicted, *the unique style which has emerged in Britain has indeed grown out of their reportage tradition.*

Even more importantly I want to stress that through the efforts of these photographers, as evidenced in the work they produce, *the tradition is not merely repeating itself.* Instead there is a constant process of evolution taking place. These photographers may or may not be documentarians like Frith, Fenton, Wilson or Cleet; they may or may not be photojournalists like Humphrey Spender, Horace Nicholls or Thurston Hopkins. But the spirit of concern for the world we live in -- which is the core of documentary photography -- is alive in their work. They have respected the traditions from whence they came, and they have shaped them to fit the needs of their own times and expressions.

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHERS

Four of the contemporary photographers who are included in my study can in my opinion best be defined as documentary photographers. As we examine them one by one, however, I shall illustrate how they have differing approaches to the documentary genre.

Paul Trevor

Photo by Paul Trevor

The first photographer I want to introduce is Paul Trevor. I have chosen to present his work first because more than the others, he represents what we think of as the traditional reportage approach to the genre. As an example of this we can look at the picture reproduced here. It is an image he made during the Lewisham riots in 1977 when masses of anti-racists turned out to block a demonstration by the National Front, a self-proclaimed racist organization. The event, as depicted in this photograph, became more of a confrontation between the 'friendly, English bobbies" and the anti-racists than anything else and as such was given widespread

attention in the media, particularly the Left-wing press. Trevor's image -- with its strong graphic description of the schism that existed between the mounted police and the vulnerable, yet steadfast marchers was used as a symbol of the tension that erupted in Lewisham.

The theme of the people versus the power structure appears often in Trevor's work. In another example, we can see a more light-hearted interpretation of it. Here a child, armed with a toy pistol and a mocking expression points his weapon at a bobby who has his back to him. There is obviously no threat; the whole battery of police in the background don't even blink an eye. Yet it is a moment which reflects a spirit which must exist in the community at large. Otherwise, why would a child assume such a stance?

"Brick Lane, Aldgate, London, 1978"
by Paul Trevor

Paul Trevor was born in London in 1947, though he lived on a Kibbutz in Israel between the ages of two and eight. He has lived in London ever since. As a young man, he worked as an accountant until he seriously took up photography when he was twenty-five. Besides one or two part-time courses, he is largely a self-taught photographer who currently does exclusively free-lance work.

While talking with him, I was very impressed with his concerned, clear-thinking discourse about the medium. Yet Paul Trevor is not known for his

teaching, writings or criticisms as are a few of the other photographers we'll look at. As such, there was no published material written by him that I could additionally turn to for my research. Furthermore, there were no reviews of his work nor interviews with him done by others that he could provide me with either. And to make matters even worse, his busy schedule allowed him so little time to talk with me while I was in London, that I was unable to tape record an interview with him myself while I was there. Instead, I have had to make do with a few written responses to some questions I put to him through the post.

Nevertheless, Paul Trevor is well known and well respected throughout the English photographic community. His inclusion in the exhibition was recommended -- without any soliciting on my part -- by editors, gallery directors and fellow photojournalists alike. His photographs speak for the British and about the British, and it is by his pictures alone that he is so highly regarded.

In considering his work for the show, Trevor gave me several boxes of pictures to look at, most of which revolved around one theme: urban Britain. The final selection included images taken from two separate projects he'd worked on.

The first project was undertaken with a photography group called EXIT and is about life in the inner city areas of Britain. This work will be published by the Open University in London in 1982. The poster image for the M.I.T. exhibition has incidentally been chosen from this group of pictures. It is a delightful street scene from Liverpool where a squirming, laughing child in a bathing suit is being held in the air to

"Mozart Street, Liverpool L8"
by Paul Trevor

"The Swing in Our Alley"
Detail of a photograph
by Paul Martin.

be sprinkled by a neighbor's garden hose. It is a joyous moment, and even more so when one recalls that scenes like this in Britain are of necessity highly infrequent. To begin with, it is rarely warm enough to dress so scantily; and furthermore, it is usually the sky above the provides abundant amounts of water to wet the street, not a garden hose. This image took me back to the photographs of Paul Martin -- the snapshots of the nineteenth century East Enders. A line from an earlier quote which I cited regarding Martin's work could, in fact, be equally applied to Trevor's: "Characteristically, Martin is good-humoured and not cruel in his exposé of the ordinary people at play."[1]

The second project from which Trevor selected images was a photo-essay about his neighborhood in London, the East End. As previously mentioned, the East End is predominantly working class and poor. It is an area where the grey skies mix with the grey building facades in perfect

harmony, a harmony of visual pessimism. Yet Paul Trevor is not interested in conveying a depressing image of the East Enders. His photographs at the same time record these less-than-ideal living and working conditions and provide an uplifting impression of the place and the spirit of the people who live there. Witness, for example, the lively, positive spirit -- complete with a dozen thumbs in the air -- being revealed by the group of 'Teddy Boys' and their girlfriends from the well known Brick Lane area.

"Brick Lane, Aldgate, London, 1977"
by Paul Trevor

When I asked Trevor if he felt there were any particular people who had influenced him, his answer was not Paul Martin or Tony Ray-Jones, however. He cites his main influences to be his life around him, including his friends and family as well as strangers. He did mention that if anything, he probably felt mainly influenced by his father's pictures in the family album. He furthermore disliked the idea of allying his work with any particular genre..."I don't categorize work. I dislike labels -- they limit, restrict, inhibit..." though his name surfaced automatically whenever I spoke with people about contemporary documentary photographers. [2]

When I told Trevor that I thought documentary work continued to be a primary focus for British photographers, his response to that assessment was somewhat surprising:

"Out of a population of 60 million Britons there are probably no more than two dozen photographers seriously and professionally committed to what you call documentary photography -- hardly a major focal point! But if you compare the work of those two dozen photographers with contemporary mainstream American photography then the 'social awareness (=documentary?) of the former highlights the lack of it in the latter. This raises some interesting questions about the nature of American society in general and the cultural role of its photographers in particular."[3]

It was an interesting reply for two reasons. First, his qualifying words 'seriously and professionally committed' suggested to me that perhaps he wasn't the best person to ask. Being such a serious professional himself, it was difficult for him to have any objective overview of the situation he was so much a part of. It was not unlike asking one of the best 'sauciers' in France, a country whose cuisine is distinguished by its sauces, if chefs were still dedicated to this art in his country. Out of respect for his own reputation and high standards, he would probably also respond that there might be a couple of dozen, whereas to the outsider, there are hundreds of restaurants in Paris alone that are noteworthy for that embellishment.

I then queried Trevor's attitudes about American photography. He seemed to have a high respect for American photographic traditions, which he considered richer and more vibrant than the British, and of lasting value for other than Americans themselves. Overall, in fact, he feels grateful for the influences which the history of American photography have given him. "But in recent years, in my view," he wrote, "a great deal of American photography has shown itself to be largely trivial, self-indulgent and uninteresting -- a perfect expression of the plight of middle-class America." He regrets that "some British photographers don't believe

enough in their *own* experience" and "have predictably created some more trivial, self-indulgent and uninteresting work" by imitating contemporary American photography.[4]

In response to my question regarding photographic education in Britain, Trevor answered that he thinks it has improved remarkably since 1972, when he was first entering the field. In recent years, he has done some part-time teaching himself, but finds that there are inherent problems with this sudden explosion of interest in photography:

> *"The growth of full-time photo courses has created two major problems -- (a) Establishing particular 'schools' or approaches to photography in which students find themselves producing very similar work. (b) How does the theory of a course correspond with the reality of the world outside? i.e., how will all these extra photographers survive?"*[5]

Trevor declined to answer my question regarding his own particular photographic directions in the years to come. He said he is much more concerned about his direction as a person -- "the changes keep happening and I suppose life is reconciling what you do with what you have become."[6]

He was somewhat unwilling to offer any predictions regarding the future for British photography either: "Can I predict the social, economic, political and technological forces that will operate on British culture in the next ten years? No. The only thing I'm prepared to predict about British photography in general and mine in particular is that there will be much, much more of it. I hope its quality keeps up with its quantity."[7]

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen was first mentioned in the preface. She is Finnish by birth but has lived in England since the late sixties. She first came to Great Britain to study at the Polytechnic of Central London, known then as the Regent St. Polytechnic. Her first choice was to become a photographer, but she specialized in film-making instead because she thought she would be more successful in making a living doing filmediting. While at the Polytechnic, Konttinen became friends with a group of final year film students who wanted to start a film company outside of London. One of these, Murray Martin, suggested Newcastle-upon-Tyne as he had lived there previously as a student and was attracted to the industrial northern cityscape with its working class community. There were about half a dozen interested students at the time. When they made the move north, Konttinen went with them.

After a period of adjustment, "those that liked it stayed; those that didn't left," as she puts it.[1] From the original group, however, four stayed together for the following seven years. They called themselves Amber Associates and their aim to this day is to creatively document the

northeast of England. Eventually they bought two spacious old buildings on the Quayside; the area was becoming derelict and the buildings were being sold very cheaply. Today there are four partners in the group -- two from the original group and two others.

Shortly after the move to Newcastle, Konttinen returned to photography because she found that with the support of Amber, she could make a living out of it, meagre though it was at times. As early as 1970, she started exhibiting her work locally, all the while doing free-lance work for Finnish and English magazines, television and film. In 1972, she was the winner of a two year fellowship in Creative Photography awarded by the Northern Arts/Northern Gasboard. The BBC made a documentary film about the work she produced from that project.

> *"That film still reflects our attitude to the region and to the people we work with here and I got immense response to that film, from people all over the country, stating that it was the first film about working class people that was made with real affection and warmth and wasn't just caricaturing, which is how the media tends to portray the working class even in fiction and in documentary."*[2]

Since 1972, Konttinen has received grants every year from various local arts associations.

In 1976, Amber decided to start a public phase for the group and the Side Gallery and Cinema were established. After producing work for a number of years, they didn't feel they had adequate outlets for their efforts. Prior to the setting up of the Side, there was only one art gallery in the region that occasionally accepted photography. Originally they saw the gallery as being a one-room display area that would house a permanent collection of their owrk which they would change from time to time. Then they decided to invite in someone from the outside and Ron

McCormick -- another of the exhibitors in the M.I.T. show -- was chosen to be their first gallery director. McCormick's ambition was to place the Side Gallery on the map and it soon became the most spacious gallery in England until the expansion of the Photographer's Gallery in London in 1980. After a year or so, however, there were internal conflicts: McCormick and the Amber collective did not always see eye to eye and McCormick moved on to a position at the Newport School of Documentary Photography in Wales where he still works today.

Murray Martin, the founding member who initially suggested Newcastle, began to play a larger role in the running of both the Side and its parent organization, Amber Associates. Martin's unique policy is to raise money to enable him to commission photographers throughout the region. In 1980, in fact, he gave out more money to photographers than the Northern Arts Association. His inspiration for this approach came from the Farm Security Administration in the United States. Last year Russell Lee visited the Side and Martin did hours and hours of interviews with him. Now he first establishes an area of interest in terms of subject matter, and then he finds a photographer to take it on. He sees his role as a patron for photographers.

I asked Konttinen if she could sum up the basic philosophy of the Side Gallery:

> *"Well, I think it's unique for the very reason that it does have a policy, that it does not show just any photography because it is acclaimed elsewhere as being worthy; it does have its roots in the documentary tradition. Then it can spread into other areas. It's not limited to Amber's own production policies, which are limited to class culture in this region. But the Side policy embraces photographers from all over the world and work done all over the world. It's quite diverse. But it does not include the conceptual approach to photography and first of all it has to be very high*

quality photography as one of the criteria. It has to have both form and content in other words, both are equally important... Content isn't overpowering...And the photography we have here is always shown in a context. We don't just have one-man shows for the sake of showing that one man's work. It has to be linked in to a wider look at subject matter, or whatever. ...You can see that we have shown August Sander to Cartier-Bresson."[3]

Therefore, unlike the Arts Council of Great Britain, which is obliged to disperse money to all trends of photography, Amber Associates have made a personal choice in favor of one particular stance. This is sometimes viewed as a kind of threat in the region, however. Even though they are not aligned with any political party, their interest in the working class is often seen to be on the Left by the local councillors, who then challenge whether or not they have the right to public monies. According to Konttinen, "We work from a humanist point of view. If there is a political ideology in this group, it is humanism rather than left-wing politics, or any other kind of party politics. It is seen as a threat in any case; it inquires into things, which could be seen as frightening."[4]

Amber Associates in general, and Konttinen in particular, tend to work around themes. When they showed the work of a South American photographer, for example, they brought in films and had a public debate around the role England plays, unwittingly, in South American Indian culture. "It's a way of consciousness raising and a way of spreading knowledge about the issues," according to Konttinen.[5] A couple of years ago they decided they would do a short season around the Quayside itself, where they work and live, which was threatened by demolition. Buildings were already beginning to be torn down.

"So we wondered what we could do in our setup to arrest that process and we set out to do a group project on the Quayside and first of all

we produced a body of photographs. I went and photographed all the people who worked on the Quayside, the people in the offices, business caretakers, etc., and Graham Smith went and photographed the outsides, the visual magnitude of the place. He did a beautiful body of work on the bridges and the buildings. And we produced a film which is one of the nicest films we've made, in fact. It was almost like the social, cultural and financial center of Newcastle until it was decided that the coal industries should be wiped out in this country, and that's when the Quayside disintegrated."[6]

With the photographs and film in hand, they then planned a public debate to which they invited planners and architects and the general public. There was standing room only. As a result, there was a competition planned for re-designing the Quayside and some of the historic buildings have been saved. In fact, the Council have now decided to spend five million pounds on the renovation of the Quayside. In talking about this process, which took place in 1979, Konttinen feels "that in a very concrete way you can affect things through this art; you can affect social change. That was a very encouraging experience for us."[7]

Thus, starting in 1969 with a visual response to an area and a feeling for the working class, this group realized that many of the things that they appreciated and integrated in their own work were disappearing. Konttinen thinks that working class culture and values are being knowingly wiped out.

"There are forces that are working to erode the working class culture in this region and all over the country. The working class has been undermined in many ways. So from the gentle celebration it progressed to wanting to give confidence to working class people in thier own culture...you know, showing the work to them and in fact helping them realise their lives have values and have an important culture which is no less than the middle class or upper class culture and that they shouldn't let it be eroded and that they should give it the value that it has."[8]

With the cultural changes in the area underway, they felt propelled to

see why it was happening and who was responsible until eventually they began struggling to help stop that process. Konttinen thinks that the social awareness that has come into the group has made the work much more powerful artistically because now it has more direction. They are still not making direct political statements, however, and she doesn't believe they ever will.

To talk about the philosophy and activities of Amber Associates is to talk about Sirkka Liisa Konttinen, so thoroughly is she a part of the whole process. In her own pictures, one of the most successful series she produced as a 'gentle celebration of the working class' was her beach series.

She first began taking pictures at the beach in 1972 when she was awarded the large fellowship. In 1974, she was asked to exhibit the work she had produced during the two year award, and she mounted a massive exhibition of nearly four hundred photographs. One entire room was devoted to the beaches, and in that room she included recordings of beach noises...the sounds of the waves, dogs barking, children shouting in the background. In the beginning she felt quite nervous about walking around with a camera on the beach -- thinking herself an unwelcome intruder -- but the activities that take place on the English seaside were so fascinating to her that she persevered.

In 1978, she was then commissioned by the Side Gallery to document the beaches and she photographed for three solid months of a "rotten summer."[9] Yet, no matter how unbearable the weather is, the English still go to the seaside.

From the Beach Series,
by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen

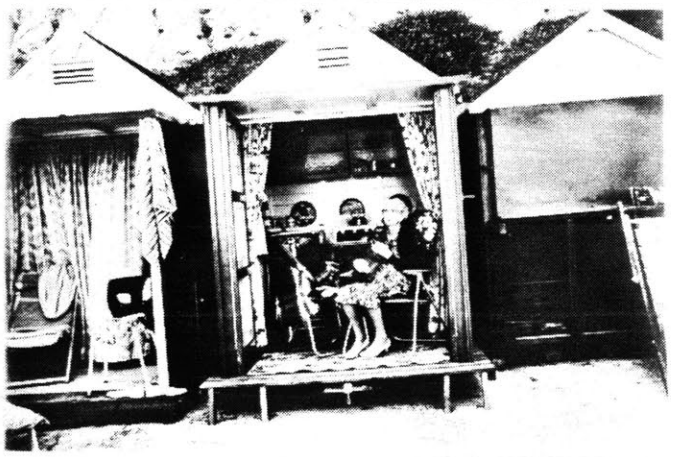
"Trippers Having a Paddle"
Detail of a photograph by
Paul Martin

"That almost became the theme of my project. When it was raining, the family would have their picnic under a blanket rather than run away. All would go on. It was incredible. In mid-March, you would see girls come out of the foggy, frozen water when you can hardly bear to be there in your fur coat or whatever. And they go for a swim and do cartwheels on the sand. There are lots of curious things that must be true of the English...of testing yourself in that sort of weather and you also get the one phenomena which I've photographed time and time again of young girls going wading into the sea in all their clothes. I get a feeling it's just another dare they do, and for excitement...to do something totally unconventional...to go and get soaking wet in their party dresses and then to travel home like that on public transportation all dripping wet. It's a giggle. But still it beats me how they can do it...throwing each other in the water knowing that you have no change of clothing. It happens all the time."[10]

Unlike in the South, the beaches around Newcastle are beautiful, clean stretches of white sand. The people flock to the coast, as Kontinnen says, from March through October, though there are rarely more than two or three days per season that I would personally consider as suitable for sunbathing, let alone swimming. They arrive in large chartered buses which bring them from their neighboring villages and towns. They bring picnics and newspapers to read and then

rent windbreakers to keep the sand from blowing in their lunches or the wind from tearing apart their reading material. It is not uncommon to see one or two members of a family dressed in winter jackets while the others are wearing bathing suits. Despite the less-than-ideal weather conditions, however, the children can still run around and be free to dig in the sand. For the adults, it is at least a day in the fresh air, and according to Konttinen, whatever the weather, it's going to be an improvement on the kind of life they would be leading in their own backyard. Besides, if the weather gets too awful even for the English, there are always the amusements and the adjacent fairgrounds.

From the Beach Series,
by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen



"Scarborough, 1968"
by Tony Ray-Jones

When I told Konttinen that I had some reservations about including her in my study and exhibition because she was not born in Britain, she pointed ou out to me that she didn't see any contradiction there. After all, Britain is a multi-racial society. "It's no longer -- and never will be again -- pure Celtic blood. I think you have to accept that and live with it it."[11]

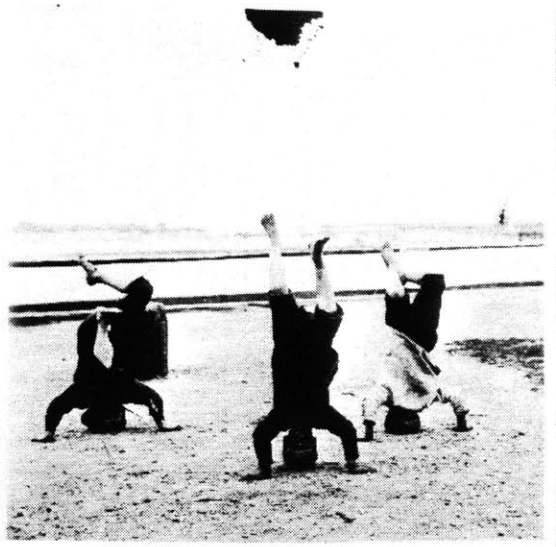
Furthermore, she has been generously endorsed by both the British Council and the Arts Council of Great Britain, where she is currently one of three people in the country who sits on the Photography Purchasing Committee.

And her own personal work clearly subscribes to the British traditions of photography. Not only is she a chronicler of English customs similar to Tony Ray-Jones, but like him, too, she has invested a considerable amount of time on the peculiarities of the seaside resorts...such as showing old ladies protecting themselves from the elements so they can get on with either their tea or their fish and chips.

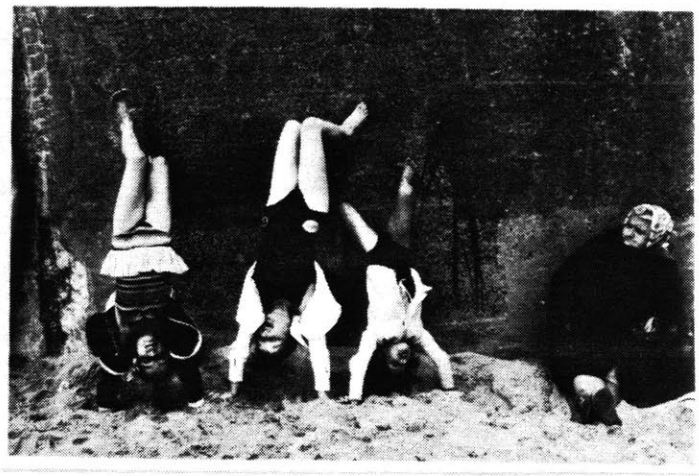
Or going back even further in British photographic history, we can cite roots of Konttinen's work in the photographs of Paul Martin, In the 1890s, Martin also photographed young ladies at the seaside wading in the water in their Sunday best.

And if we look at Martin's trio of boys standing on their heads and compare them to Konttinen's trio of girls who also have their feet high in the air, we can see that there is a remarkable similarity in the spirit of events being documented. The striking difference, however, between these images is that Konttinen, in her inclusion of the skeptical grandmother figure, is introducing a personalizing element that wouldn't have appeared in the Victorian snapshot. Through this grandmother/onlooker, we the viewer witness the scene more with her eyes than with our own: 'Those silly girls! Don't they know they'll break their bones doing that?' Or 'Why, this is positively indecent, and to be photographing it!'

From looking at both her life and her work, it is clear that Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen is among the most dedicated documentary photographers in



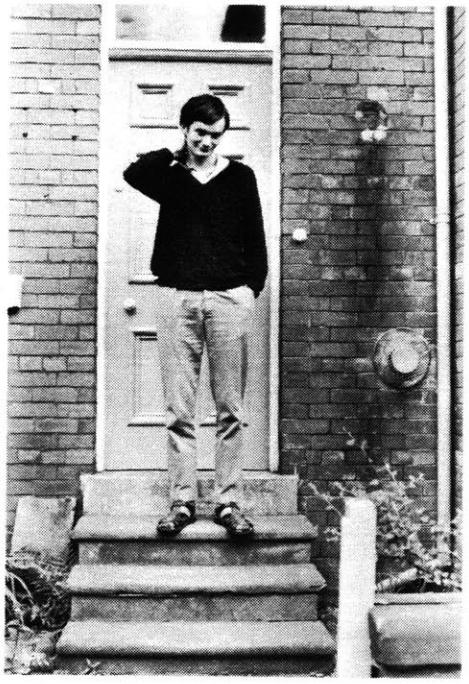
"Jersey, 1893"
by Paul Martin



From the Beach Series
by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen

Britain today. As a result of her position on the Purchasing Committee, however, she sees that a lot of 'fine-art' photography is also currently being produced in Britain now. Although she doesn't condemn that kind of work, it understandably doesn't interest her much because she sees it as having little value in terms of content or meaning. Her only fear would be that such work could gain such a foothold in Britain as to ultimately threaten the continued development of the strong documentary tradition, the tradition to which she unquestionably belongs.

Martin Parr



Martin Parr

Martin Parr wanted to be a photographer from the age of fourteen when he first watched his grandfather making bromoil prints in the darkroom. Five years later, in 1970, he went to study photography at Manchester Polytechnic. Parr was nearly thrown out of college after his first year, however, because the scores on his theory exam were so bad. It was only because one of the first year tutors liked him that he actually managed to stay on the course. Like elsewhere, the program was very commercially oriented at that time. Looking back on it now, though, he thinks it was nevertheless quite good because he and his close friends, Brian Griffin and Daniel Meadows, had to really fight to justify what they wanted to do. In the long run he thinks this sharpened him and asserts that in the end they were accepted.

In recalling his education in Manchester, Parr remembers that it was Brian Griffin who invited him to his flat to show him Robert Frank's *The Americans*. It was almost a bit naughty, "like smoking in school", he said, to be looking at such work, or that of Tony Ray-Jones.[1] He thinks it was more exciting to discover it that way, however, than going into well-

stocked photo libraries like students can do today. His course included no history of photography and at that time he claims that the lecturers never would have heard of any of these people.

A short time later Bill Jay went to the polytechnic to lecture, and Parr says that it was the most influential talk he's ever heard. It was like a revelation to him. Jay showed many slides and spoke with an unbridled enthusiasm, aware that he was part of a renaissance.

When he graduated from the polytechnic, Parr worked for a charity for nine months doing a set of photographs on community relations. The series he produced included Hindu weddings, shopfronts, people on the street and so forth and were left with the charity. Unable to find work, Parr then signed on the dole for eighteen months.

At this time, he began work on one of his first thematic projects: "Home Sweet Home" at which time he started his environmental presentations of his photographs. He had a one-man exhibition of this work in 1974 at the Impressions Gallery in York. Today Parr prides himself on the fact that this was seen to be quite a controversial show. From the Impressions exhibition, for example, the *Guardian* gave him an incredibly bad review and then six months later when the work was shown at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol the *Guardian* gave him a rave review.

In 1974, Parr moved to Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire where together with a potter, a painter and a sculptor he set up the Albert Street Workshop. Unlike Amber Associates in Newcastle, the Albert Street collective simply wanted to share the ren, phone and heating expenses in a place large enough to allow each of them to get on with their work. He lived in Hebden Bridge until 1980 and produced some of his most memorable work to date in that

"One of the things I like is to have a project with a good name to it," he said.[2] Among the projects he produced while living in Yorkshire were "Beauty Spots" -- which is the British way of indicating tourist attractions -- and "The NonConformists", the latter of which was a major documentary spanning all those years. In 1980 it was exhibited at the Half-Moon Gallery in London and is currently touring England. Yet another project that was produced over the same period of time has perhaps the most catching title of all: "Abandoned Morris Minors of the West of Ireland." Morris Minors, for the uninitiated, are tiny British automobiles. This project must have greatly interested Parr because in 1980 he left Hebden Bridge to take up residence in Ireland.

Parr is a prolific photographer who has always worked with a 35mm camera and currently feels no particular attraction to any other format. The mere idea of dragging around a view camera is abhorent to him. "I'm too busy enjoying what's around me to think of that...the camera goes in my bag and off I go." As a photographer, he places himself somewhere between documentary and Fine Art, but agreed with my assessment that the documentary approach continues to be the main impetus for most of his contemporaries. When I asked him, however, if he could speculate why that might be the case, he answered that he's not really interested in thinking about the reasons why. "If I were paid to teach people the history of documentary photography, I'd willingly go into it...But I don't regard myself as an academic at all. I'm a working photographer, reacting to and reflecting the things around me. And I go out of my way to actually find the things that do mean something to me."[3]

Like Paul Trevor, therefore, Parr is dubious about whether or not he

wants to be regarded as a documentary photographer. There are of course good reasons for this, largely stemming from the years in the middle seventies when to be one was becoming increasingly unfashionable. Yet, also like Paul Trevor, Parr's name surfaced often when I spoke to people about the exhibition I was curating. He is regarded as a documentary photographer by most, but it is important to distinguish Parr's documentary approach from the first two photographers I discussed. Unlike Trevor, his work is not likely to ever record a newsworthy event, such as the Lewisham riots; his eye is not attracted to that. And though, like Konttinen he lived in one area for a number of years, he never adapted a particular stance vis a vis that area as she clearly did. Instead, Parr's work has become increasingly personal. In writing about his NonConformist project, for example, Val Williams, the director of the Impressions Gallery, had this to say:

> *"A searching below the surface which took him to early-morning swimming ceremonies and decaying methodist chapels has seemingly, led him to venture even beyond the real and into an area where the phenomena of light, form and space are invaded by the non-real...Few photographers, particularly with the growing reputation in the field of documentary photography which Parr has earned, would dare, or need, to take such a chance."*[4]

In his most recent series, "Bad Weather", Parr has deliberately taken even greater risks. When I met with him in Yorkshire, he showed me two large notebooks full of work prints from this project. While admittedly there were many which I couldn't imagine tying in with his stated theme, there were many more that worked perfectly. He spoke with enthusiasm about the project, explaining how ideally it would be another environmental piece when he exhibited it, complete with wind machines and raincoats on hand for the spectators. Yet he, too, regards this work as a risk because

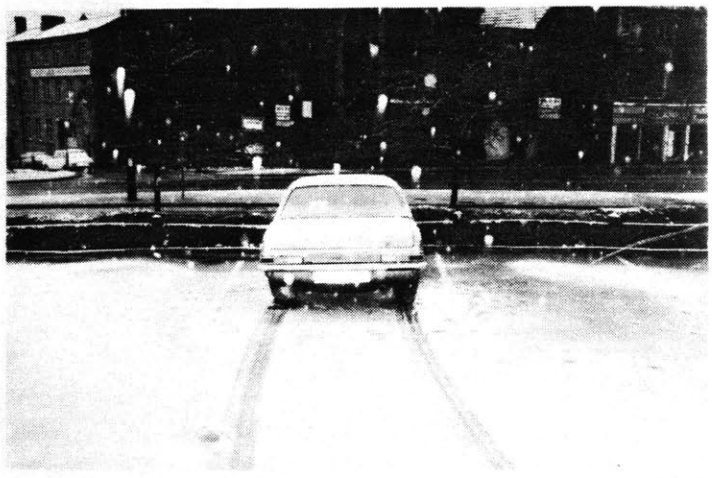
it is very different than anything else he has ever done. He explained that some of the pictures would obviously be of bad weather and some would be more subtle, where the viewer would actually have to search for the evidence of bad weather. "I feel that unless I'm actually producing something which is keeping me excited, you know, is something new, I may as well retire and teach before my time."[5] As such, Parr looks forward to the controversy which he thinks this work will provoke, hoping that will lead to the eventual publication of a book of his work.

Parr's ultimate ambition, in fact, is to have an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art. "It's just a sort of quirky goal that I have which I hope to achieve within the next twenty to thirty years," he said. On a recent trip to the States, he dropped off his portfolio at the Museum of Modern Art, and when he returned to pick it up he was told that Szarkowski wanted to meet him. "He was very encouraging and said he liked the stuff. He had just been looking at some Atget prints and told me to look at them. 'These are much better, but keep trying and come back in a few years time';he said the content and the form are not yet married as one, and that's my problem. And I agreed totally. It was just fantastic...suddenly I actually came into the presence of someone... who put me in my place...At the time I would have been twenty-six, an upstart, you know going well for my age... Even though British photography is going well, the renaissance is going well, the Arts Council has done a great job, there are just two or three people in this country who actually know what good photography is."[6]

Not only did Parr receive encouragement from John Szarkowski, but he had good reason to speak so well of the Arts Council of Great Britain as

he has consistently received financial encouragement from them. "They've made me, because I've had thousands of pounds off them, without which I wouldn't have been able to do the work that I've done." He has in fact had four separate grants from the Arts Council. Initially he received 260 pounds for the "Home Sweet Home" project; next he received one thousand pounds to work on the "Hebden Bridge" and "Beauty Spots" projects, followed by another 2,500 pounds for the same work; most recently he was awarded three thousand pounds to do the "Bad Weather" series.[7]

One of the photographs from this series shows a lonely car in a parking lot. It is snowing, and the photographer's flash reveals the snow flakes in big suspended circles. The car has just parked because the tire tracks are still fresh, as are the footprints (of the photographer?) around the car. In the rear window, there is an 'L', the obligatory sign carried by drivers who are still learning and haven't yet received their permanent licences. Both the 'L' and the snow have significance for the British which is not easily translated into an American appreciation. It rarely snows in Great Britain. When it does, it is an event in itself. The car is as much in a state of suspension as

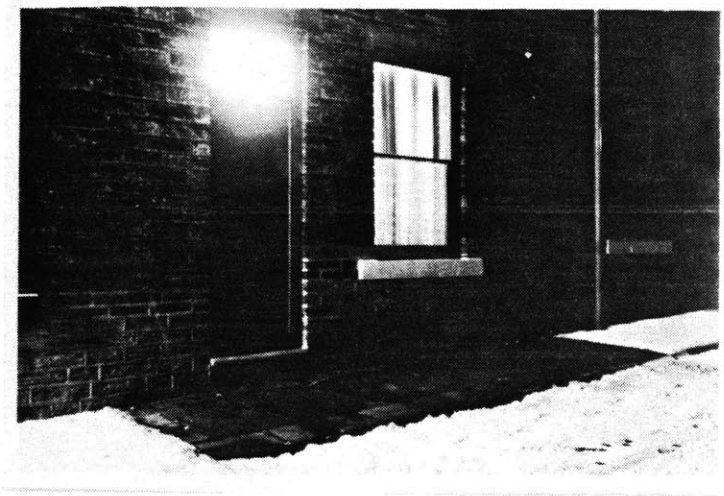


"Halifax, West Yorkshire, 1980"
by Martin Parr

the snowflakes in this picture, but to an American who shovels twenty or more inches every winter, the subtle English humor of the image is probably going to be lost.

The director of the Impressions Gallery wrote this about another photograph from the series:

> *"In another photograph, taken in Hebden Bridge, we see the most ordinary of doors in the most normal of streets, a beacon of rectangular light shines from the glass panel of a door and reflects on the snow outside, but domesticity rules, the wilderness of the snow has been distanced from the house by a careful symmetry of snow clearing; the boundary of the house is rigidly defined by straight lines, the facade is surreal in its own assured blandness -- is there life, or merely surface?"*[8]



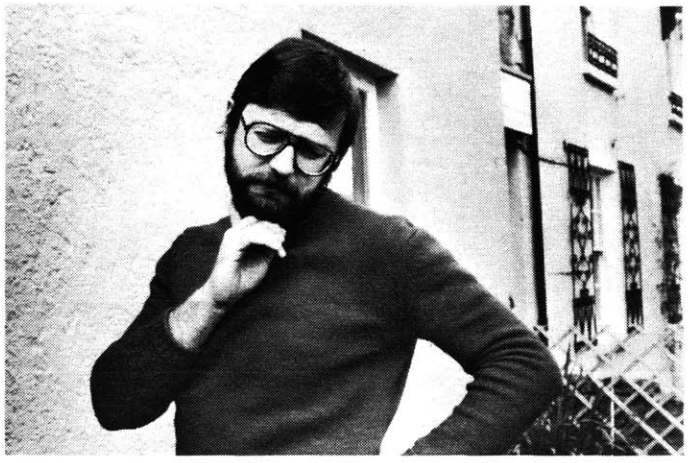
"Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, 1979"
by Martin Parr

It is entirely possible that the intricate mysteries of Parr's personal documents of bad weather will be lost on an American audience. In going through the work prints with him, however, I suggested two dozen images or more which in my opinion would succeed on either side of the Atlantic. Whether or not his final choices will ultimately make the statement he desires is yet to be seen. It is often difficult for a photographer to edit his own work, and in this case my selection as curator would have been somewhat different from his. In some of the images he chose, for instance, it is hard to detect any particular sense of weather at all. In the final

analysis, however, it is his statement and as a respected and adventurous young British photographer, I trust that his decision on the images best expresses what he personally wants said. The curator, Val Williams, is respectful of the challenge he offers us all in this latest set of images. As the person who has been most responsible for exhibiting his work in Britain, it is appropriate to conclude this section with her thoughts:

> *"In Martin Parr's documentary work, the language of his photographs had become a familiar, if still subtle one. At first sight, these latest photographs seem trivial, but on deeper consideration, an awareness grows that the language of these photographs is perhaps an unfamiliar and hitherto untaught tongue, and thus, difficult to learn."*[9]

Ron McCormick



Ron McCormick

Ron McCormick came to photography rather by accident. Orginally he was a painter. When he first had a chance to study photography at Liverpool College of Art, he rejected it because he thought it was so terribly complex. Looking back at that rejection now, he regards it as an accurate reflection of the way photography was taught before 1970: "partly art, partly science and a hell of a lot of mystification."[1]

In 1968, he did a post-graduate course in painting at the Royal Academy Schools in London. More and more his paintings were becoming environmental assemblages and eventually he bought a camera to document the changes that were taking place in his work. Photography was not taught at the Academy Schools, however. He learned everything he needed to know at this point from a friend, who incidentally introduced him to it in such a way that his previous terror diminished. Soon he began to carry the camera along with him as he went out gathering material for his paintings. Within a very short time, he realized that what he was bringing back to his studio recorded on film was as important as the objects

for his assemblages.

This revelation caused him to take a long, hard look at what he was actually doing. Concurrently, he was beginning to question the role of the painter in a society where the artist has no obvious means of earning a living, and furthermore who carries on his work with little respect from the community. Photography presented him with a way of breaking down these barriers. Besides, he was beginning to think of things in other than painterly terms.

Coming from Liverpool, which McCormick describes as a "very basic, raw society",[2] he was used to a way of life where people reacted and responded to one another on very fundamental levels. It was for that reason he says he felt at home in the East End of London. He regards his move to London and his first year at the Royal Academy School as a time when he was learning a lot about himself. Before he knew it, he was beginning to build a picture of the unique community where he lived. Needless to say, the established figures at the Academy were not thoroughly behind his switch to photography. Yet in their own way, McCormick remembers them as being supportive.

In 1971 he left the college and was completely absorbed in the photographs he was producing of his community. At the same time, publications and exhibitions, which I earlier outlined, began appearing in Britain and he naturally gravitated to these places. As he began to develop contacts with the growing photographic community, he was offered the possibility of having his first exhibition, *Neighbours - Spitalfields to Whitechapel* , at the Whitechapel Library.

Just down the road from the library, still in his neighborhood, was

the Half-Moon Gallery which by this time had presented three exhibitions. McCormick became very friendly with the place and was regularly helping Wendy Ewald run it when he learned that her semester abroad had come to an end and she was returning to the States.

As the only real alternative to the Photographer's Gallery, and the only viable possibility for young, emerging British photographers, McCormick thought the Half Moon had to continue. Wendy Ewald offered him the fourth exhibition there, which then coincided with both her departure and his taking over at the helm. He spent the next three years running the gallery, trying all the while to build it into something more substantial. Though there were no grants available at that time, there was a lot of good will around and he tapped that spirit. After a couple of years, there was a desire to improve the quality of the exhibitions and posters and so they applied to the new Arts Council Committee who granted them an annual subsidy of six hundred pounds.

For his own survival, McCormick was breaking into free-lance work. By this time, however, he had a wife and child to support and so began to limit his connections to the Half Moon in favor of developing his own means of earning a living. In 1973, he got an offer from the Arts Council to take part in a project called "Two Views" with Josef Koudelka, Ian Berry, Chris Killip and others. In 1974, he worked with yet another group on a project called "Inside Whitechapel."

A variety of groups were forming at this time and McCormick and his new friends were no exception. About ten of them got together and decided they would set up an agency. Week after week, they discussed how they would do it but because of financial shortcomings as well as ideolog-

ical differences, the proposed agency never got off the ground. Out of those discussions, however, four of them decided to make a capital commitment to get something concrete happening. At precisely this same time a woman who was the president-elect of the Royal Town Planning Institute -- an august body that oversees all planning in Britain -- wanted to have McCormick and this new group look at the way planning affects people, or what it's really like to live in a planned environment.

> *"At that time, Britain's cities were being gutted left, right and center. We were recovering from the after-affects of the war. Most major cities had had the hearts bombed out of them. (There were) terrific housing problems for people...just replacing the housing stock that had been lost during the war. People were living in overcrowded conditions. There was a big move to re-house all of these people. The cities had to be rebuilt."*[3]

McCormick felt very strongly about all of that. Coming from Liverpool, he knew first hand the mess that things were in there. So the group was to produce an exhibition called *Problem in the City* for the Planning Institute and somehow McCormick had managed to wrestle total editing control from them. This new responsibility provided these young photographers with a real opportunity for examining their roles as communicators: What were they going to look at? What did they think it was important to say? They were united in wanting to make a strong, cohesive statement on something they all felt very passionately about.

Three of the eight pages in the very first issue of *Camerawork* are devoted to *Problem in the City*. They consist of a lengthy group interview with all of the photographers who participated in the project. Through the opinions of these people, the entire process is well documented, giving the pros and cons of working as a team and finally revealing that the Planning Institute was not overly thrilled with the critical

results the photographers had produced. At one point in the interview, McCormick sums up his relationship with photography as he saw it in February, 1976:

> *"I don't see myself as a photographer as such. I just happen to use this tool, this medium at the present point of time, you know. Tomorrow, if I found a better, more relevant, more concise way of saying what I've got to say, then I would turn to that. I would not promote photography in its own right. I see it as an art form that has a particular relevance and particular preciseness, and I'm not going to support it as an abstract. This is what this exhibition is about."*[4]

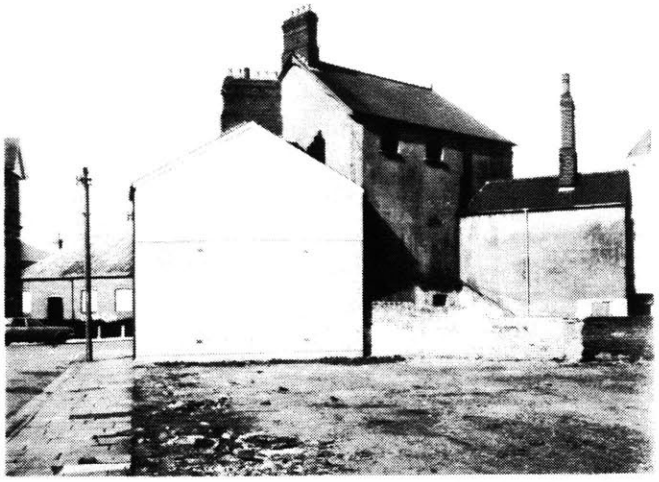
Last summer when he talked about the *Problem in the City* exhibition he told me that his interest for it had initially grown out of his work in the East End and furthermore he linked it with the work he is producing today. Almost by way of updating his earlier comment published in *Camerawork*, Ron offered this:

> *"I don't subscribe to the view that a photographer can operate as an artist in a vacuum and make his images and that these are just beautiful pieces of work that people can go and look at on gallery walls. Apart from being concerned with the fine image myself, a large part of my concern has to do with content; it has to do with communication. I have something to say. And I demand an audience. I'm very concerned about the audience. I work on bodies of work which I hope are going to find an audience. And that audience is not necessarily in a gallery, although I may use a gallery as the platform to present my ideas. I would be equally happy with a book or some other form. But I'm concerned about contributing to a dialogue about issues that are not personal and private issues for me but are common issues. So you find this thing continually through my work."*[5]

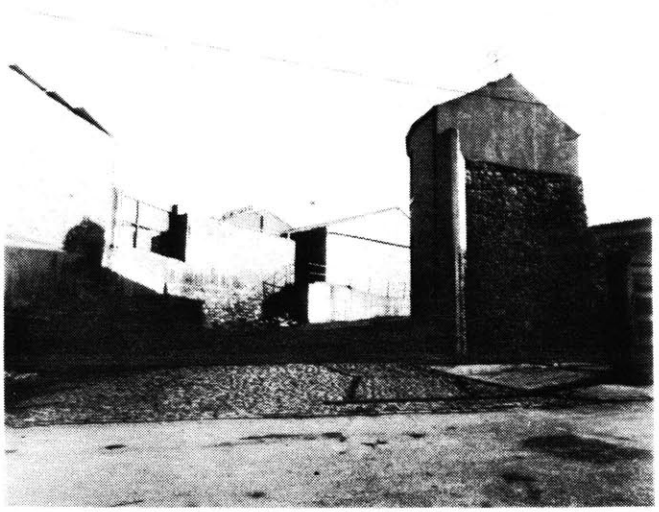
Before we look at specific examples of his current work, however, I would like to continue tracing his evolution as a photographer. As valuable an experience as *Problem in the City* was, it unfortunately made very little money for the photographers. Simultaneously, Ron was also doing part-time teaching and working as a free-lance photojournalist.

The conflict of trying to work for an editor on one hand and produce pictures that were meaningful to himself on the other eventually became too great a burden for him. When he was then offered the opportunity of teaching full-time for a year at Sheffield City Polytechnic, he jumped at the chance. And near the end of his term, he got a phone call from Murray Martin in Newcastle to see if he would be interested in helping Amber Associates set up a gallery at The Side. According to McCormick, they essentially offered him free reign in terms of setting up the gallery saying as well that he could set his own salary. What they didn't tell him was that there was no money for that salary to come from. "Part of the job was that I had to find my own salary," he told me.[6] Within six months, however, exhibitions were underway. But by the time another six months had passed, McCormick had already made plans to leave. As he explained it, he didn't really fit into the Amber set up, and David Hurn in Newport had already offered him an Artist-in-Residence position there. With all these moves, and the subsequent changes it made in his work, McCormick found that it was becoming more and more difficult to find a market for his pictures. He'd completely left photojournalism and as these new approaches took him down different roads he had to find other ways to earn his living. Teaching began to look very attractive to him. When Hurn offered him a full-time position on the course at Newport, he accepted with pleasure.

By that time he was working with a large format camera photographing urban landscapes which are far from picturesque. "I wouldn't find an immediate market for them with the Tourist Board," he said.[7] Indeed, the subject matter of McCormick's new images is at best very bleak. He has



"Newport, Wales, 1981
by Ron McCormick



"Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England 1977"
by Ron McCormick

recorded the depressing buildings and areas that constitute the typical urban landscape for town residents in 'developed' countries. By and large, the structures have too few windows, are crowded together and show absolutely no concern for the aesthetic sensibilities of the urban dwellers. They are rigid and unwelcoming. In stark contrast to the lush, green countryside of Wales, these spaces are cold and gray and lack any sense of grace. They are a testimony of the mess man has made of his environment at the end of this century.

Yet, in one picture, we do get a glimpse at a sympathetic town planner's approach: a curved brick dividing wall has been erected in the barren cement courtyard instead of a straight one, and two brick circles have been included for what? trees or plants? But they are empty. As is the whole area. We see curtains in

windows so we know people live there. But in this picture, as in the others, the people are hidden from view. Occasionally we see evidence of them, more often than not they have retreated to more comfortable ground.

"Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England 1979"
by Ron McCormick

In his documenting of these areas, however McCormick has remained neutral. With the fine detail of a large negative, he simply and directly records and presents these spaces. There is no attempt at manipulation or persuasion on the part of the photographer. Instead, his precise handling of the situation allows the subjects to speak for themselves, and the message is grim. As viewers we feel uncomfortable: we are in the presence of carefully crafted, warm-tone photographic prints while looking at some of the most dismal, empty and uninviting spaces we can imagine. The aesthetic consideration shown us by the photographer almost serves to highlight the lack of it by the town planners.

When a forty-odd print exhibition of this work, *Evidence of Things Seen* was shown in Wales this year, it was reviewed in the *Guardian*, Hugh Adams assessed the work like this:

> *"It throws up the whining, miserable planner, the aesthetically dead local councillor, the vicious entrepreneur, and above all, a resignation to squalor. McCormick's creatures are, did they but know it, the victims and he delineates their fate without shrillness, without the usual beaux arts tendency to view the decorative excesses of the*

working classes as intrinsically funny or camp.

Here the dross of a post-industrialised mass society is laid bare, the detritus is presented unemotively and we are invited to draw our own conclusions. It is in the detail that McCormick excels, for everything is understated and more effective for it..."[8]

Ron McCormick is a self-acclaimed photographer. When I asked him if he could give me his definition of what that meant, he answered by saying that, like photography itself, it means different things to different people. He distinguished, for example, between what it means to him personally and what it means to the course of study at Newport:

"For me, it involves a very, very strong social element. I believe that photography can contribute to the understanding of situations, events, phenomena and can help enlighten. And I think that the best documentary photography actually does that. A lot of times, those situations and events that are important to me are social. They are to do with our environment, the social environment which is peculiarly English; it's to do with revealing, illuminating problems and a hundred and one things that are of concern to me and to a lot of other people as well." 9

But he thinks that is only one part of the spectrum, as there is clearly a very important role for the photojournalist -- the recorder of events -- as well. In the program at Newport, as we have seen, they also encourage students whose concerns are not necessarily social: for example, the botanist who wants to use the camera to document and investigate flowers. They avoid teaching photography as an abstract.

In talking with McCormick about the broader scope of documentary photography in Britain, he thinks he can himself be cited as a pertinent example. Though he came to photography from a Fine Arts training, he found himself -- despite that background -- in something he would call a 'mainstream':

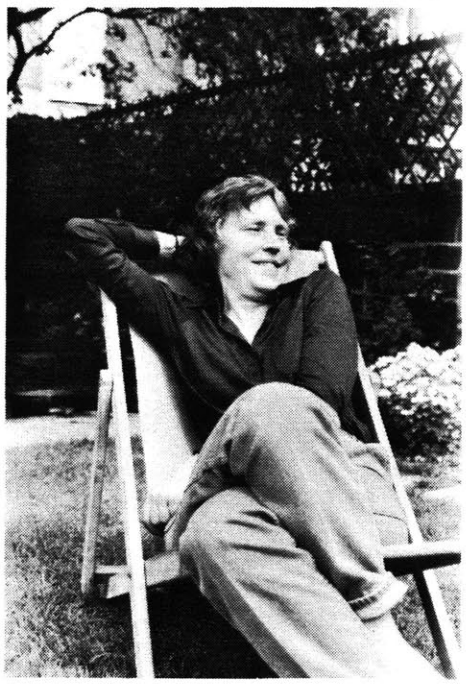
"I don't think that's a coincidence. It obviously has a lot to do with the development of a particular visual culture. And I think that something is identifiably British. I think also it is to do with a social and a cultural expression which goes back through many, many generations and years. Let's look at the development of photography not just in recent times, but let's take it right back to 1840...You've got Fenton, Frith, George Washington Wilson...going around documenting...I mean, it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the photograph! It is documentary by nature!"[10]

After a quick tracing of British photography through the turn of the century, through the important thirties, McCormick then claimed that in building on all of that as a base, there are now people, like himself, who say that photographs are not *just* evidence. Photographs are also aesthetically of some value. This evolution, witnessed in photography in general and in McCormick's work in particular -- especially when we recall his statement in 1976 regarding *Problem in the City* where he says very firmly that the message is more important than the medium -- has come about partly because of the sheer abundance of visual imagery we are confronted with in our everyday lives. In the work of Paul Trevor, Martin Parr and certainly Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen we witnessed a similar evolution, where the quality of the visual image is as important -- but not more important -- than the message, or the content, of the image itself. "You walk out into the street. We're having visual images projected into our eyes everyday, he says.[11]"As a result, he is still vitally interested in the message that he personally is trying to get across, but he is no less interested in making pictures that are a response to the visual awareness which is increasingly a part of our twentieth century lives.

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHERS

The next three photographers in this study concentrate on photographing various aspects of the landscape. With the information I gathered in meeting with them, however, I shall reveal how there are documentary elements in each of their differing approaches.

Fay Godwin

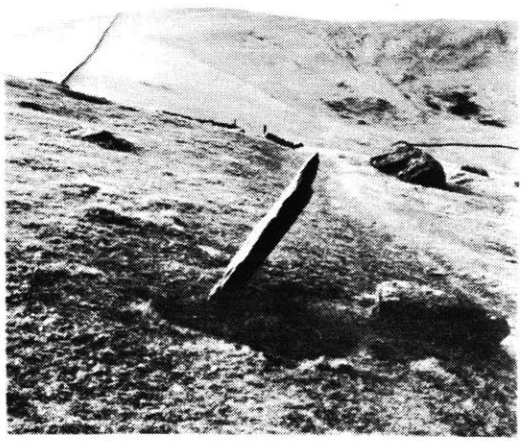


Fay Godwin

Fay Godwin is regarded today as one of Britain's leading landscape photographers. Yet she also came to photography quite by chance. Although she had always taken snapshots of her family, she never considered photography seriously until her husband left her and she had to bring up the children alone. She then worked day and night to create a career out of an untutored talent. Her sad situation was soon made tragic when she learned that she had cancer. What she also had, however, was an amazingly strong will to survive and despite grueling hospital treatments and demanding dietary regimes,she has managed to do just that. Her health has improved

considerably now and her career has flourished.

In the context of my study, I consider Godwin's work as representative of the more traditional approaches to the landscape. The majority of her images provide us with a foreground, a middle ground and a horizon line above which we find a sky that as often as not has heavy, threatening clouds. Given the sumptuous, highly revered English countryside, it is no surprise that Godwin's pictures evoke the romantic beauty of the place. Her sympathy with the different regions she photographs brings these places to us and we in turn wish we were there, despite the indecisive skies.



"Markerstone. Old Harlech/ London Road"
by Fay Godwin

Godwin first began landscape work when the publishers Wildwood House asked her to provide the illustrations to John Anderson's *The Oldest Road* , which was a study of the prehistoric Ridgeway, the ancient route over the South Downs. The reproductions in the resulting book were of a very poor quality, unfortunately, but Godwin was also invited to exhibit the images at the Photographer's Gallery where her prints started selling almost immediately. In terms of print sales, she is probably the best-selling living photographer in England today.

For Godwin, however, the primary satisfaction came from working on the project. She made this her aim: to co-author books with different writers. Her next opportunity came with Shirley Toulson doing *The Drovers*

Roads to Wales. These roads were used almost into modern times when the Welsh herders would bring their livestock into England for fattening and subsequent sale, this ritual being very important for the rural economy of Wales. Together, Toulson and Godwin traced the tracks, in words and images, by which these herds were moved across the borders. In a review in the *Financial Times*, William Packer said of the pictures:

> *"Miss Godwin makes this remote and beautiful country visible to us in a magnificent set of images. The grandeur of mountain and moorland scenery is a commonplace of the guide book, at once obvious and sentimental. In reality it is the very devil to manage in its subtlety and simplicity. Her achievement is to do just this with a disciplined, unaffected directness, and a sure eye for composition and emphasis. She accommodates detail with distance."*[1]

Godwin's next two books were *Islands* done with John Fowles in 1978 and *Remains of Elmet* with the poet Ted Hughes in 1979. The latter of these two books is concerned with the Calder Valley region, the last corner of the Celtic kingdom of Elmet, and incidentally very near the Hebden Bridge area where Martin Parr lived for many years. The poet, Hughes, was intimately acquainted with this region and over the years watched the collapse of its industry and the thinning of its population, both of which greatly increased after the war. He describes the Calder Valley as "the 'last ditch' of the last British Celtic kingdom to fall to the Angles."[2] His poems express his regret for these changes while Godwin's photographs reveal the old canals, derelict farms and ancient paths across the empty landscape.

Mark Haworth Booth claimed that Fay Godwin's natural medium is the illustrated book. In referring to her pictures for this volume, he called them her best achievements to date:

"Her gift is that of interpretation and commentary...Her mastery of the elusive grammar of greys as a printer is obviously appropriate for this landscape...The moorland around Hebden Bridge does not offer much. Except sometimes. Then something happens for the photographer and the poet."[3]

Godwin painstakingly waits for that something to happen. It can take her up to two hours with her tri-pod firmly in place, focused on one view, until the light and clouds change to be just as she desires. "A contact sheet will have twelve pictures, all identical to look at, and I can't imagine how I could have thought it necessary to do twelve until I started to print, and *then* the differences begin to emerge," she said.[4] She has used as many as seven rolls of film on one view, and usually goes through three or four. These are carefully processed to her specifications by one of the assistants she has working in her home in London. She often is too busy shooting to keep up with her own printing as well and has in recent years had experienced young printers work under her close supervision.

Though Godwin was pleased to be included in the exhibition at M.I.T. and was happy to provide me with copies of reviews and articles done on her work, she wouldn't grant me a taped interview. She apparently loathes interviews and furthermore, they take up too much of her time when she could be working. In future, she is only going to give interviews to people who will pay her for her time.

One interview that she did grant Robert Haas this year in the English *Camera* magazine luckily provided me with a bit of welcome information for this study. Haas was discussing her most recent book, *Romney Marsh and the Royal Military Canal*, co-authored with Richard Ingrams. At one point in the article Haas asks Godwin how she sees herself as a photographer

and in what direction her work is going. Her response is significant:

> *"I feel that my work is totally in the documentary direction, which surprises a lot of people. I keep being asked about 'art', but as far as I'm concerned the question of art and photography is a non-starter. I'm a 'photographer'; whether in fifty or a hundred years time somebody decides that some of the pictures have some artistic value is really up to them, it's nothing to do with me... I don't think there is any divorce between working in a documentary way and a creative way."*[5]

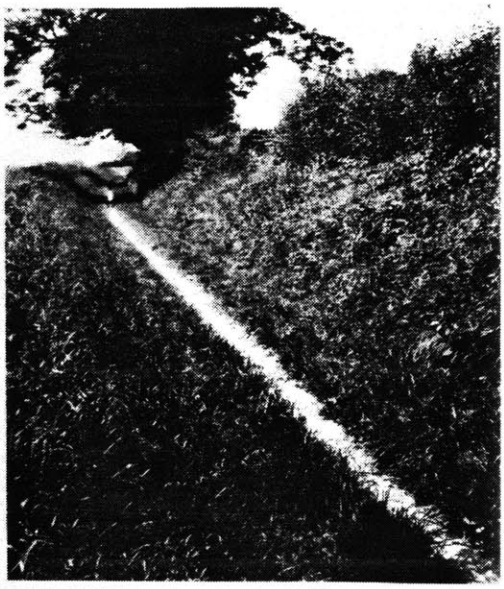
She goes on to say that she is perfectly aware that a lot of very experimental work done in photography these days is non-documentary. She sees absolutely nothing wrong with that and in fact likes a lot of it very much. "...but it isn't the way *I* work. Most of my work is quite firmly rooted in reality."[6]

In a *British Journal of Photography* review of the Romney Marsh work, Time Imrie, the critic, guarantees the authenticity of the Marsh pictures. He spent his childhood not far from the Marsh and testifies to "the softness of the light, the delicate shifts of the sky, the still opaque water like misted glass, the well-loved but lonely churches."[7]

For him, one of the great appeals of these photographs is their essential Englishness, claiming that even if the viewer had never been to England, they would know these pictures couldn't have been taken anywhere else. If that is indeed true, it certainly testifies to the documentary accuracy of the photographer.

It is not surprising that Fay Godwin would cite Bill Brandt among the photographers who most influenced her. It is interesting in fact to compare one of Godwin's well known images of a paved path and reservoir above Lumbatts in Calder Valley to an image produced by Brandt in 1950 called *The Pilgrim's Way*. To my knowledge, this image was reproduced for the

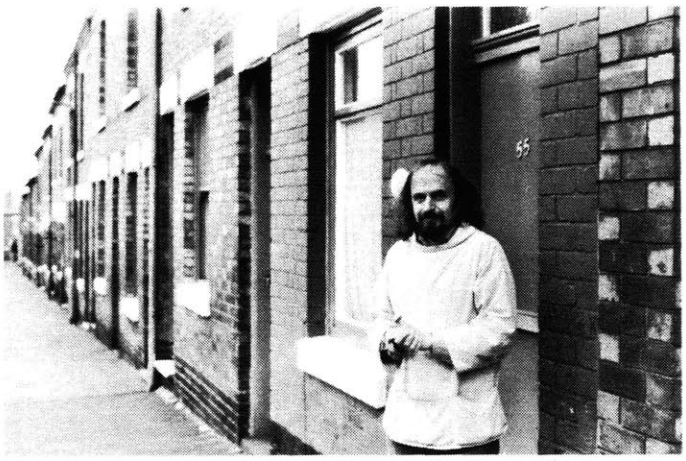
"Calder Valley, 1977"
by Fay Godwin



"The Pilgrim's Way, Kent 1950"
by Bill Brandt

first time in the 1981 catalogue to the Bill Brandt retrospective at the National Center of Photography in Bath. Godwin, therefore, most likely couldn't have known it before. Yet the theme of paths and roads which has been so recurrent in her work was also an early concern in his landscape pictures.

Brandt himself appreciates Godwin's work and included her, along with Raymond Moore, in the now well known exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum *The Land*. Together -- though from different generations -- these three photographers have had a strong influence on young landscape photographers. They have devoted much of their time to documenting the beautiful landscape of Great Britain, and as evidenced by the widespread sale of both books and prints, the appreciation the British have shown them for their concern and interest has been no less profound.



John Blakemore

John Blakemore was born in Coventry three years before the start of World War II. When he was three years old, his city was destroyed by bombing and he was evacuated to the country, where he lived on a farm. Although at that time he clearly didn't think this contact with the landscape would be particularly significant in his later life, he now tends to believe his attraction to nature stems from this experience.

When he was twenty, "doing my time in Her Majesty's Service," his mother sent him a copy of *Picture Post* which had a selection of photographs from the *Family of Man*. Blakemore was very excited by these pictures and asked his mother to send him the book. It was right then and there that he decided to become a photographer. "...Basically because at that time I was quite political and, looking at the *Family of Man*, idealistically I thought that if a copy was dropped on the desk of every world leader, the world must change for the better. I felt I wanted to be working around that possibility if photography was a way to work for change, to show people what was happening and what the world was like." He was a nurse in Libya then and it took him about six months to save enough money

to buy a camera. His first photographs were pictures of street life in the Arab villages. When he returned to England in 1956, he saw an exhibition of Cartier-Bresson's work and that further confirmed his decision.[1]

Within a short time Blakemore put together a portfolio and started freelancing:

> *"I had no idea what free-lancing entailed. I knew that things called photo agents existed, and I got a list of these. I thought, 'if I go in, they'll buy my photographs.' I went down to London and spent a day going round these places. In most of them I was there for about ten seconds before being shown the door."*[2]

The Black Star agency, however, gave him a chance, making him one of their Midlands representatives. His first assignment was to photograph car factories; by good fortune, he had a friend who was a union organizer at the plant, so he was allowed to spend the time he needed getting the required pictures. But Blakemore never even saw these. On this assignment, and those that followed, he put the rolls of film on the train and occasionally would get a check in the mail for his efforts. He found the whole process very unsatisfactory so within two years he switched to working in a studio and doing documentary work on his own time. This continued through to the end of the sixties. "The landscape I never thought of as an area which I would take up at all."[3]

In 1968, Blakemore was divorced from his first wife. At that point, he began reading about Eastern religions and started experimenting with various drugs. He began to lose confidence in the possibility of affecting social change, thinking it was much more realistic to develop and change oneself. He moved to London and within six months decided he no longer wanted to be a professional photographer, and instead got a job as

a printer. By the time another six months had passed, he was tired of London and with the money he had saved, he went to spend the winter in Wales.

It was in Wales that he became aware of the dynamic of the landscape. He went on long walks everyday and eventually found a large rock up in the mountains where he would go and sit. He didn't take any photographs. He just sat and listened to the wind.

In 1970, he began teaching at Derby, where he incidentally still teaches today. On a trip with a student he began talking about the problem of creative block. Blakemore hadn't taken a single picture in eighteen months, the longest period of infertility he'd experienced since he became a photographer. Some of the students were going to do a small exhibition in a few months time and they invited him to join them. He agreed. He'd now committed himself and had to take some pictures. With a borrowed Bronica, he went to Wales for the weekend and shot the whole of the exhibition in two days.

> *"The thing that struck me most about this part of Wales was the way it existed on two levels; it was a very wet area so the surface was very lush, but the actual flesh of the landscape was very thin and the bony structure of the rocks pushed through. Because of the underlying harshness, all the trees stopped growing when their roots got down to a point where they were no longer tapping the soil but were onto rock. They became tremendously twisted by the processes of the landscape. I felt it was these processes that interested me; I immediately drew an analogy between the scarring and twisting of the landscape and my own emotionally tender situation after my recent divorce. Another feeling I had was for the continuity of the area; trees grew out of the rock and assumed a rock-like hardness themselves. These were the threads that interested me, and which I began to try and photograph."*[4]

Blakemore has been taking pictures in the landscape ever since. Quite unlike Fay Godwin, however, he is not concerned with showing a geographic area in his photographs. He doesn't want to make pictures that

reveal Wales or Derbyshire. Yet the places where he works are very important to him personally. He needs to have a feeling of familiarity with them. Going back to the same places again and again have become a ritual. He says his favorite method of working is to be alone camping; that way the relationship with nature becomes a very organic process. If that's not always possible, he defines rituals. He always goes out very early in the morning, for example, when it is still dark so that he can experience the birth of the day with the birth of the light.

In 1974 when he was photographing a stream in Derbyshire, he suddenly became aware of the importance of the sound of the water. He would find a place to sit and just close his eyes and listen to the sounds of the place for half and hour or more.

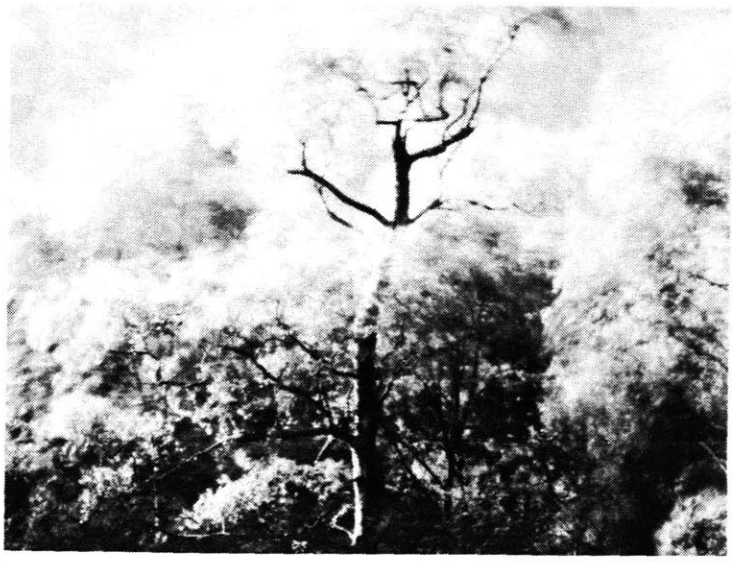
> *"And this seems to work in a number of ways. On one level you make yourself vulnerable; you open yourself to a certain way of relating to the landscape. The other level is that places have their very significant sounds. When I first worked with wind, for example, I thought it would be like water and it would be a continuity. And it was by listening to the wind that I first realised that it wasn't. I find this is a way of expanding into the landscape. I don't really see it as being a meditation; I see meditation as being a way of seeping into oneself. This is a way of trying to expand oneself into the landscape; it's just the opposite of meditation. What I've also found is that when you open your eyes, because you've been sitting in this self-imposed darkness, you are capable of seeing with tremendous clarity. When you first open your eyes, the light has a tremendous power and tenderness."*[5]

Blakemore is probably best known in Britain for his work with water. He spent several years photogrphing the small Derbyshire stream. The Arts Council paid tribute to his body of work in 1977 by publishing a monograph as the third issue of *British Image*. Over the years, Blakemore has also been the recipient of three Arts Council awards. He has mixed emotions about the bursary system, however. He thinks that it takes a

a photographer quite a while to reach a point where he is doing work that represents a personal feeling towards the medium. There has to be a balance between this period when the photographer is making his way, and when he is able to get financial support; if this happens too soon, Blakemore believes there is a danger of stifling or confusing the photographer's natural development.

Movement, which he sees as the essence of life and growth, continues to be a source of inspiration for him. His most recent series of pictures translates this sensitivity from water into the sylvan landscape. To capture the essence of the wind in a still photograph, however, requires some masterful hand-lind of the medium. He often selects what appears to be a quiet spot in the forest and makes multiple exposures -- sometimes as many as twenty or thirty -- on a single sheet of film. In this way, he manages to capture the subtle nuances which one long exposure would not afford him. The resulting images are so

"Ambergate, Derbyshire, 1981"
by John Blakemore



Detail of above photograph.

delicate, and the selenium-toned prints so exquisite, that reproduction of any kind does them an injustice. Nevertheless, perhaps by looking at one example together with an enlarged detail taken from it, we can see the stillness in the foreground ferns contrasted with the movement that occurs near the tree tops. Here the feeling of energy shifts from the wind through the leaves to the growth and profusion of the forest floor: together there is a continuous living texture.

When Blakemore completed this body of work, he wanted to use one word or phrase to title it that would encapsulate these feelings of energy, flow and movement. "I'd read quite a lot of Eastern philosophies and I really liked the idea of the universe as being the dance of god, 'Lila'. This seemed very appropriate to me. It seemed to be what the landscape was about. And so I used the word 'Lila'".[6]

In the nineteenth century, John Ruskin wrote a five volume *magnum opus* called *Modern Painters* where he dealt extensively with the question of landscape. At one point he asked some questions which are worth consideration:

> *"...might it not be better to delight in the actual landscape itself than in some image made of it? Can one really compare the sustained experience nature itself will provide with the second-hand emotions evoked by a picture? Is it not a waste of time to produce pictures of the landscape at all?"*[7]

With the possible exception of the first question, the other two must be answered in the negative when confronting John Blakemore's photographs. Their rich metaphoric qualities allow thoughts in each of us to wander aimlessly for a time, to day-dream, as it were, in their midst. They are a sheer delight to look at.

Do they, however, function in any other capacity? How, if at all, can

they be placed in the context of this study on the predominance of a documentary approach among contemporary British photographers? Admittedly the links seemed tenuous to me and in all honesty I must claim that I primarily see his pictures as introspective, personal studies. Nor is he regarded as a documentary photographer by any of his peers. When I asked Blakemore his thoughts on the matter, however, I got some surprising responses.

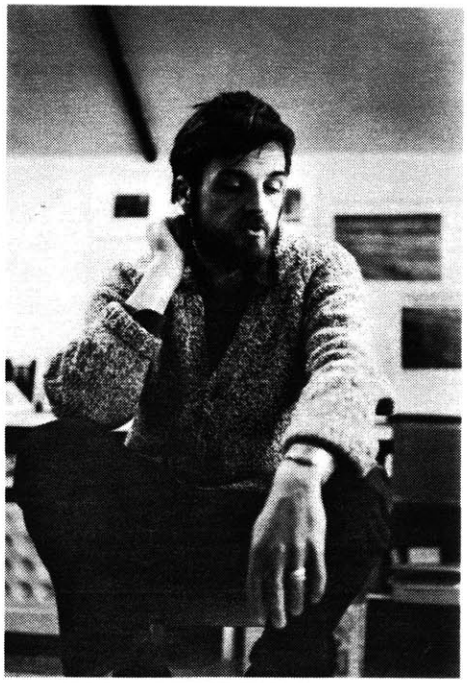
He explained that from his first winter in Wales, he saw the twisted tree trunks he'd been photographing as being documentary in a sense... documenting what had happened to those trees. At a certain point, then, he became connected not just with the physicality he'd been photographing but with his own emotive state at that time. When he puts these, and all his later pictures in sequences, he again sees a connection with documentary. He thinks the impetus for this came from his early documentary work where he always worked on photo essays and little photo stories: he never really saw things as individaul photographs.

> *"I would define documentary much more as the photographer's attitude toward the medium, the way he used the medium, than in relation to just a specific area of subject matter. In this sense, I see that a lot of my work is documentary, and really I think it's an acceptance of the descriptive base of the medium; it's acknowledging a significance of the subject matter or the things that you're photographing; it is a translation of the reality that the camera was pointing at; so in that sense I see documentary perhaps as being wider than the normally used definition."*[8]

Blakemore agrees that the documentary tradition is the strongest in British work, and that it's still continuing today. However, he finds it confusing when people in some way separate self-expressive work and

documentary. "It seems to me that the fundamental nature of the medium is about a response to reality, whatever that may be, and that the socially concerned work is only one possible area of that. I think in a way my work has a sort of social significance." Blakemore explains this as being an ecological concern. He defines part of the problem with our twentieth century culture as being the separation from nature which we experience in our daily lives. Because of the distance, it is easier for us to continue destroying our environment. Thus, he concludes that "it may be that areas of work which aren't normally considered as being socially significant (now) become significant when the nature of society itself changes, and when the realizations and directions which people take may have to be shifted."[9]

Paul Hill



Paul Hill

Of all the contemporary photographers included in my study, Paul Hill is probably the best known outside of the British Isles. His work has been published and exhibited extensively on the Continent and sporadically in the United States as well. Together with Tom Cooper he interviewed a number of revered twentieth century photographers and published these talks in a volume called *Dialogue with Photography*. In serial form, these interviews also appeared monthly in *Camera* magazine. At home, his name is firmly linked with Fine Art Photography, largely stemming from the Paul Hill/Tom Cooper years at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham. But his involvement with photography has a longer history than meets the eye, and as a photographer, he is constantly evolving. His most recent work was exhibited at the Camden Arts Center, in one of London's boroughs, when I last visited England. Superficially it appears to be a radical departure from any of the 'self-expressive' work he had previously become known for. On closer examination, it is perhaps more of an expression of who he is than his earlier, mid-seventies work. It is important to first trace his background as a photographer, however, before looking at specific examples of this work.

Hill was born at the outset of World War II. In the fifties, he trained as a newspaper reporter and spent several years as a columnist on an evening paper in Wolverhampton. Gradually he moved towards photography, becoming a full-fledged free-lance photographer by 1965. Very quickly he was contributing to major English publications such as *The Observer, Financial Times, Telegraph Magazine, NewSociety,* and so forth. By the close of the sixties, he began seeing more of the work of photographers like Cartier-Bresson, Brandt and Eugene Smith -- all of whom he considers as early influences -- as well as the various international figures whose work was then appearing in *Creative Camera.*

When Hill was contributing his work to *The Telegraph,* Bill Jay was their picture Editor. Jay knew Bill Gaskins, who was setting up the course in Nottingham, and recommended Hill for part-time lecturing. Soon Hill was teaching a course dealing with social documentation; he did this until 1974 when they asked him if he'd like to teach full-time. Two years later he became head of the program.

From the outset, Hill found teaching at an art college to be very stimulating:

> *"I thought that as someone who had been involved in journalism for many years -- like twelve years --that I hadn't really looked at the basic qualities inherent in photography. I'd always been involved in the subject matter, the event, and so forth that was unfolding in front of the camera. And so I decided to experiment a bit, and I took as my theme light."*[1]

Hill now considers that the self-imposed theme of 'light' provided the key for this change of direction in his work. People and places were no longer as important in his pictures as was 'light', his new subject matter. After a few years, however, this gave way to ideas regarding

tension. Members of his immediate family and those closest to him were usually the figures appearing in fragments of these pictures. When I met with Hill, he talked about this series of images saying that "...the things that I cared most about seemed to be the most fruitful subject matter one could deal with as a human being...I can put my hand on my heart and say that I was photographing things that were important to me as a human being rather than as a photographer."[2]

While that may indeed be the case, though we must recall that this is a statement made in 1981 regarding work done in the mid-seventies, it sounds strange coming from Hill given his current concerns. It has the ring of something that a photographer more concerned with social commentary would say. It is especially ironic when we remember that at the time Hill was pursuing this work, he was also leading a national campaign to re-evaluate the importance of documentary approaches in British photography. From a 1973 article he wrote entitled "Photojournalism -- The British Obsession", we can clearly read his opinions on the matter at that time:

> *"In my view, we should ask ourselves if photo-journalism is really as important as the candid, slice-of-life supporters would have us believe, or whether it has, in fact, become a cliche which deserves to be swamped...Pictures of old age pensioners in slum tenements, starving Africans or wounded Asians have become devalued by repetition. They look like the ones taken last month in Belfast, Bangladesh, Biafra -- or was it Cambodia?... So if* content *cannot alter matters, does hope lie in* form*? Will art have the most telling impact in the end? I think so...To me, photography should be about expression rather than the communication of information."*[3]

So despite his own personal human concern for his subject matter, Hill was firmly aligned, in writing at least, with the formalist approach from the time he ceased working as a photojournalist in the early seventies. And many of his images from this period are memorable for precisely that

reason: 'formally' he created tension in the photographic frame. Whether or not this feeling of tension was enhanced in the viewer through knowing that the people represented were often family members is open to speculation. But from early images such as a little girl's white-stockinged legs hanging perilously over steep cliffs, to hands floating lifelessly in swimming pool waters, to more recent images such as the one reproduced here, of a child whose head appears ready for the guillotine, we have a series of images that reflect not so much about the 'world out there' as the world inside of Paul Hill's imagination.

"Girl in anorak, Matlock, Bath, 1977"
by Paul Hill

Hill claims that these pictorial investigations were largely the result of the stress and strain he experienced in 1976 and 1977 ... "tough years for me mentally... which in fact came out in the work rather than in any hysterical outburst on my part."[4] He regards the presence of children in these pictures as primarily a vehicle for expressing his own vulnerability. Gradually, however, the children, and all of the people, got pushed more and more to the edges of the frame.

This evolution in his images coincided with Hill's decision in 1978 to leave his full-time position at Trent and devote himself more to his own work and his own approach to teaching. In 1974, he and his family had renovated two eighteenth century cottages in Derbyshire. One of these

they lived in and the other they used to give workshops. They called the complex The Photographer's Place, and have since added yet a larger building. The workshops have included a diverse group of photographers, from Aaron Siskind to Raymond Moore.

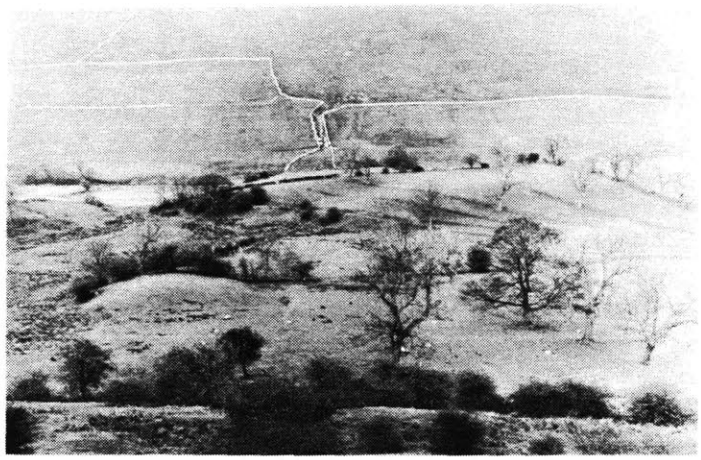
With all the pressures of institutional teaching, the country cottage had been very good to Hill. Once he left his steady job, however, life on the quiet rolling hills of Derbyshire took on another cast. The winter of 1979 was particularly brutal for England, with atypically heavy snows falling on the Midlands. "I felt in a very insecure position myself, having given up a job and so on. I started to look at the surface of the land and started to photograph the landscape around me."[5]

It is interesting that Paul's feeling of vulnerability was again responded to through photography. But perhaps even more interesting this time was his choice and treatment of subject matter. Hill had lived in these idyllic surroundings for five years yet had never photographed them. Doing so, he said, was a great release for him:

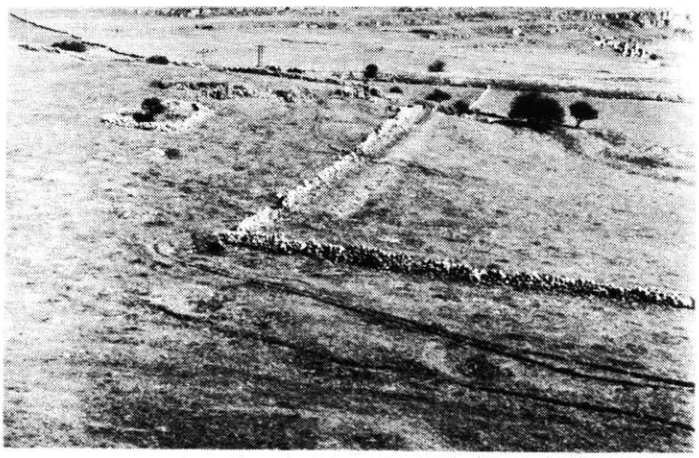
> *"Ther is a sort of melancholic quality about it, I think; and then the traces of man as it were, the appearance of man in the landscape, were things that fascinated me in this area before...the lead mining, the quarrying, the tracks, the old ways through the land that man had stepped before. And it seemed at that time not unconnected with my first obsession, what I wanted to be when I was in secondary school, and that was an archeologist. And so interest and attractions towards those areas, shots of archeological sites and so forth, had all sort of started to make sense."*[6]

As a child, Hill had grown up in a rural setting and had lived until he was twenty-one in small market towns. Until very recently, he has also been a mountain-climber. "In fact, one of the reasons that I became very interested in photography was as a climber, recording and showing

people views of where I'd been. And so it all started to be rather cyclical."[7] Now Hill is trying to reflect both that hereditary involvement with the land as well as look at the sort of interference with the land by the hand of man. In this respect, he is not unlike both John Blakemore and Fay Godwin. Stylistically, however, they are world's apart. Where Godwin's are more akin to traditional painterly depictions of landscape, and Blakemore's give us the more involved, mystical approach, Paul Hill's, on the other hand, offer us a broader, more detached, almost bird's eye point of view. We have no billowy clouds or silvery leaves to admire in these pictures. Rarely do they show horizon lines, and our attention is seldom focused on any *thing* or *area* in particular. What they offer us instead is an unromantic, unidealized view of the land only, as we have inherited it today, occasionally dotted with non-descript trees, low walls made of stone, or other unremarkable traces of both time and culture.



"Stonewall Complex, Under Whitle 1981"
by Paul Hill



"L-shaped wall, Harborough Rocks, 1981"
by Paul Hill

Part of Hill's stimulation for continuing this series of pictures came from the work of two seventeenth century writers, Thomas Hobbes and Charles Cotton, who had defined seven locations in Derbyshire as being 'The Wonders of the Peake'. When Hill went to visit these Peak District 'beauty spots', he knew he would have to position himself in one particular way to confirm our stereotyped idea of the picturesque. Such, of course, was far from his intention. Instead, he photographed the various places in matter-of-fact ways, portraying none of the stereotypical beauty that the views photographers of the last century would have focused on.

In this series, Hill has turned to the land to grapple with photography's unfortunate ability to make everything beautiful:

> *"It's been something that's been going on in my mind and it came out in a documentary done many years ago by the BBC which they called 'Beautiful, Beautiful'; it happened to show a lot of starving kinds and things like that. That is it: a beautiful photograph can have really horrendous subject matter, and at the end of the day, becomes an artifact photograph, a thing which you view, or stick on a wall, or whatever. And this sequence, called "The Investigation Into Beauty" tried to deal with that."*[8]

With this set of pictures, Hill has helped to contribute to a new approach of photographing the land in Great Britain. With his formalist concerns firmly in control, he is now simply and directly dealing with the 'world out there', but it is a world which is very real and immediate to him as an individual. They are no longer puzzling for the viewer; the mysterious, soul-searching messages from the photographer are not immediately discernable. This switch in approach by Hill has not gone unnoticed by members of the British photographic community. Some think he is confused and giving up; others seem to welcome the change as being more authentic than previous bodies of work. In claiming that Paul Hill is among the

photographer who have done something particularly significant in the last few years, Ron McCormick went so far as to add, "It's interesting that Paul seems to be swinging back into the documentary mainstream."

Such a swing, if it is indeed true, would not be hard to understand given the nature of Hill's background as a photographer. It would, however, be harder to comprehend given his public proclamations during the mid-seventies. This summer I asked him about the article "Can British Photography Emerge from the Dark Ages?" which he co-authored with Tom Cooper. Hill claimed responsibility for the article title which, he said, was prompted by his training as a journalist: it needed a snappy title or it would go unnoticed. Regarding the contents of the article itself, he asserted that their primary intention was to put right an imbalance which they felt existed in Great Britain:

> *"...not that Tom or I wanted to have everybody going around rejecting documentary,photojournalism and the utilitarian sort of approach in photography and all become fine artists, but just to say that there are different areas of photographic involvement which have been virtually untouched in a very, very sophisticated culture. There seemed to be a lot that needed to be done, seen and explored that had been neglected. And that's all it was, really."*[10]

I asked him how today, in 1981, he would answer the question he posed in the 1974 article. He paused and then said that he thinks things have moved on a pace since then. He believes that now there is a re-awakening in terms of using photography in different areas, whether it be personal expression, social or political comment or whatever. In what I regard as a revision of his former position, he says that:

"Now it photography will only become relevant as an integral part, an important part of our society if the ideas which are pursued in photography are ideas of our time...inform us more, move us more, but don't seem to be totally about itself... a sort of art for art's sake thing. It's got to be about other things, photography, to my way of thinking...

And then later in our talk he added:

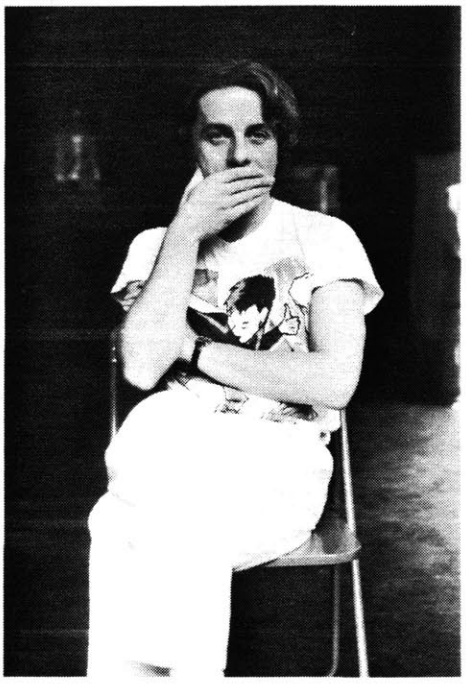
I think the medium has got to be really about, and reflect, more the world that we're a part of. And the strategies and systems and everything else that are inherent in becoming a success have got to be dispelled very, very quickly; we've really got to get on with something a little more important than being artistic superstars. I think that is the problem really. I think that we should be conscious of not falling into that trap in this country." [11]

Paul Hill is not likely to ever again be a free-lance photojournalist. But the spirit that moved him to write the provocative articles in 1973 and 1974 is also a part of history now. I personally think that widespread questioning regarding American influences in contemporary British photography which took place at the end of the seventies coupled with the simultaneous growth in confidence among British photographers vis a vis their own traditions has allowed previously unexamined resources to be tapped. The current work of Paul Hill --at once a personal interpretation *and* documentation of the land-- may well be an example of this.

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS

The final three photographers of this study are best known for the pictures they take of people, even though only one of them can strictly be called a portraitist. With all of them, however, the documentary tradition in Great Britain has influenced their approach to and use of photography.

Brian Griffin



Brian Griffin

Brian Griffin is on his way to becoming Britain's leading portrait photographer. Now in his early thirties, his work has already been widely exhibited and published throughout Britain. In 1974, he was included in the group exhibition *Young British Photographers* and in 1979, he was invited to participate in a major exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* at London's Hayward Gallery. He has also had one-man shows at The Photographer's Gallery and the recently opened Contrasts Gallery, both in London. Besides having been published in *Creative Camera*, a large portfolio of Griffin's work was featured in the *British Journal of*

Photography Annual, 1980. It is important to point out that most of the work for which he has received attention, however, was initially produced on assignment. These came from magazines like *Management Today, Harpers and Queen,* or *Vogue,* or for advertisements for Rolls Royce or Benson and Hedges cigarettes, or more recently for recording artists like Jo Jackson or Lena Lovich. More than any other photographer in my study, and perhaps in Great Britain today -- with the exception of Don McCullin -- Griffin's talent has been sought after by the commercial and the art world alike.

Originally from Lye, Worcestershire, which is just outside of Birmingham, Griffin describes himself as a "real cliched working-class kid." He studied and worked in engineering for five years until he was twenty-two. At that point he came to regard this work as fruitless and opted instead for a career in photography. From 1969 until 1972, he followed the same three year course at Manchester Polytechnic as Martin Parr, who was one year behind him. In looking back at their early friendship, Griffin claims that it was essentially humor that formed the basis of their relationship, "our way of looking at the English, in our own separate ways." He tells of how they used to go off to fairs or festivals and have competitions with one another..."and dev them all up and see who'd got the best picture." And how they used to play Polaroid games, too, as part of their self-imposed training: "...we'd all be in one room and you'd have two minutes to take a picture without moving anything...to see who could take the best picture. And then you'd have two minutes moving anything you wanted, and take a picture...to see who could take the best pictures."[1]

Griffin found the actual course structure to be as limiting as Parr did, but he regards the time spent there as invaluable. If nothing more it provided freedom from Mum and Dad..."and experiencing basic things from drugs and sex and liberation from the tight, claustrophobic world that I lived in as a kid." It was also worthwhile for the access it provided to a good library. In confirming Parr's comment, there were very few photography books, but Griffin didn't seem to mind. For him it was the art books that really mattered. So much so, in fact, that he regards the current preponderance of photographic books to be almost a hindrance. "...people probably go to that section and then don't go to the art section. So you end up with rip-offs of American photography." This, too, is lamentable to Brian. "It's terrible, really, because I think the European culture is very strong and very rich. It's got a hell of a lot to offer."[2]

From college, Griffin went directly to London where he walked the streets for months trying to get his first job. Finally he was asked to be a staff photographer for *Management Today*, but shortly thereafter opted for free-lancing with them, and other magazines, instead. Most of his work at this time involved photographing the poor, and such things as hospitals, foreign cars being delivered and so forth, all for various assignments. The photo-journalistic taking of street portraits gradually gave way to taking portraits for album covers, finding his own studio in a desolate London suburb called Rotherhithe, and then exercising a more deliberate will over the entire process. In fact, if there is one way of describing Griffin's goals as a growing photographer, it is the constant

pursuit of control. "It's debatable -- control over people, control over the environment -- it's a debatable thing. But that's what I based my first ten years on...it was gaining control over what I was doing that interested me, really."[3]

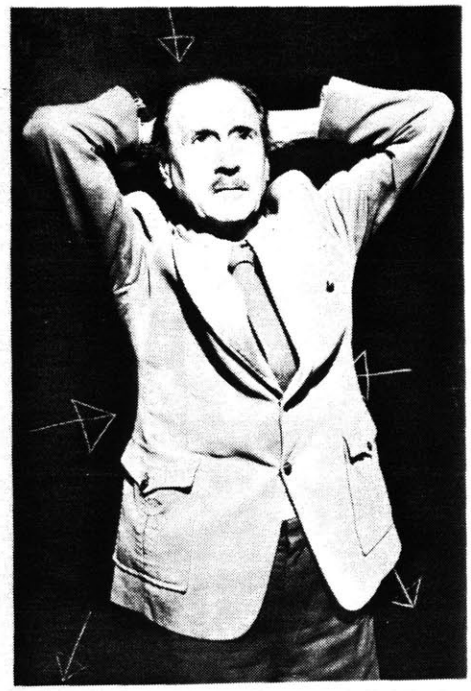
The missing link in his system -- for which he is profoundly grateful -- is that everything in his studio can be controlled except the people themselves. And the more willing they are to go beyond the planned procedures with him, the more successful he usually considers the sessions. Basically he believes that people really like to act, to treat the sessions with him as fun, almost as if it were a day's outing somewhere. When they are co-operative, Griffin orchestrates a way of presenting them which makes use of theatrical gestures, but gestures which he feels are somewhat in keeping with the person he is photographing. For this, he credits his inspiration to the portrait photographers of the thirties, particularly Cecil Beaton. "Beaton realised that people enjoy fantasy...I feel people want to escape. I also feel that if you can put fantasy right across the front and then put all the social message underneath, that's when it gets really strong, and that's why I'm really into. Beaton did it."[4]

In comparing Griffins' portrait of Marshall McLuhan to Beaton's of Salvador and Gala Dali, we can see the effect of Beaton's influence. In each instance, world famous figures were willing to submit to the photographer's imagination. With these enigmatic gestures, both portraits give us a tension that somehow echoes the emotions of the people being photographed.

In writing about Brian Griffin's portraits in a recent issue of *European Photography*, Ruper Martin, curatorial assistant at the Photogra-

pher's Gallery, had this to say:

> *"What Brian Griffin does is to subvert our expectations, and make us look at the man behind the mask, by creating a surreal situati in which the subject is asked to act in an unusual and stylised manner. The portraits become reflections on the disparity between the man and his particular occupation, and with their symbolism and sense of absurdity, recall the bowler-hatted businessmen of Magritte."*[5]



"Marshall McLuhan, 1978"
by Brian Griffin

"Salvador and Gala Dali, 1936"
by Cecil Beaton

But decoration and gesture are not the only elements that Griffin admired in the early portrait photographers. Again in the case of Beaton, his dramatic use of lighting also intrigued him. Among photographers today, Griffin is known as much for his innovative and daring use of lighting in what would otherwise be rather boring commercial assignments as for anything else. He uses it deftly to echo an emotion or to bring a surge of energy into the picture. Rupert Martin thinks that light has

an almost symbolic power for him. If we again compare an early Beaton portrait of Jean Cocteau with one of Griffin's, we see a combination of all of the elements discussed thus far. In each there is theatre -- from willing poses to carefully controlled, atmospheric lighting. If anything, Griffin's is even more successful as a fantasy. While we imagine Cocteau as an agreeable subject, we can only wonder how he persuaded Manolo Blahnik, a distinguished businessman who runs a number of high quality shoe shops, to hold a ladies feathered slipper in such a dramatic fashion. In actual fact, Blahnik had asked Griffin not to show his blemishes, and Griffin agreed that he wouldn't. "He put a shoe on his hand and said, 'these lights are ferocious' and he put his hand up to his head and cut the light going on to his face -- shadowing his spots."[6] In still another comparison, we see Griffin's portrait of actor, George Cole, clearly surpassing the relatively late portrait of W.H.Auden done by Beaton in 1954. Beaton may have provided the impetus for this sort of formal portrait with the use of a mirror

"Manolo Blahnik"
by Brian Griffin

"Jean Cocteau, 1932"
by Cecil Beaton

(though I am not suggesting that Griffin literally borrowed this, or any other, of Beaton's ideas) but it is Griffin who has executed the concept brilliantly. Who better to portray than an actor, blinding his own face with strong lights for the survival of the character seen in the mirror? Here, as in others, we see his careful staging, lighting and overall control delivering the intended, intriguing result.

"George Cole, Actor"
by Brian Griffin

The series of pictures from which these three Griffin portraits have been taken were recently published in a book entitled *POWER*.

> *It's basically a complete cross-section of the British business world, academic world, union world; just take an isolated, random section, but not necessarily the most important people in Britain or the most powerful people. Everything from a PR man in Kent through to a retired office manager in Glasgow, down to the man that manufactures shoes through to the works manager of a trouser company, through to the head of Rolls Royce Aerospace and the head of the Union, Glen Murray. So it's a real diverse sort of cross-section."*

"W.H. Auden, 1954"
by Cecil Beaton

Considering the true power structure in Britain, one would expect to find the Murdochs, the Goldsmiths, the Managing Director of British

Petroleum or the various heads of government. But Griffin considers that his point is better stated by not using such obvious choices. He thinks his selection of key industrialists and politicians, generously sprinkled with local managers and directors, ought to make people think more about the power structure that exists closer to home.

Deliberately, Griffin has inserted only one woman in the book. Out of approximately five hundred commissioned portraits from which these images were drawn, there were only twelve women. It would therefore have been incorrect, in his view, to have included a higher percentage in his final selection. Besides, he thinks such a bias against women is nothing so much as a true reflection of the nature of the power structure as it currently exists.

The true beauty of the book for Griffin resides in the coherence that comes across between his images, the accompanying text and the designer's lay-out. He is proud that it is not going to have what he considers a stodgy, duotone, fine-art presentation. Instead, it will have almost a "journalistic magazine feel...and the general flavor, I say, is a little bit to the Left."[8] With luck, they will place it on shelves that contain sociology and psychology books as well as in the photography section of the booksellers. The resulting gallery showings, in his opinion, are basically fun and somewhat important now for his own promotion as a photographer. Yet Griffin makes no bones about the fact that he is trying to reach a large audience. "My photography of the future -- to the masses as opposed to the photographically knowledgeable."[9] And, as I quoted him earlier, beneath the veneer of the posing, the theatrics and the lighting,

the social message is driven home. "I do feel that my businessmen pictures are a very strong social documentary set of images; I feel that I've got through to a lot of truth by doing set-up images."[10]

Despite assessing his own work as being of a documentary nature, Griffin does not totally subscribe to my contention regarding documentary photography throughout Britain. If one focuses on the middle generation, as I have done, he is in agreement. And in certain schools around the country, such as David Hurn's in Newport, he thinks the tradition is still being perpetuated. But if we look at the photographers who are attending all the various colleges and universities today, such would not necessarily be the case. As an example, Griffin told me that he occasionally lectures at a college in Bournemouth and there I might find one of twenty students devoted to documentary work. "There was a tremendous amount of Tony Ray-Jones stuff flying around in the seventies... I'd say that the people in their early twenties are actually breaking away from that." [11]

As our interview was drawing to a close, I asked Griffin if there were any other portrait photographers of the middle-generation that I should pay attention to. With genuine humility, he answered, "That's a hard one. There's a rock photographer that's been copying us for a couple of years." Then he continued:

> *"There must be somebody, somebody fantastic! Someone said that famous runner from Gateshead, what was his name, a long-distance runner, Brendon Foster; they said, 'Brendon, you are the finest 10,000 meter runner in the world.' He said, 'No, I'm not. I'm not even the best in Gateshead.' Which is true. In other words, there is some bloke down there that's much better than me, but he hasn't developed himself. It's like being an A&R man and not finding the next Beatles. But they're there. When*

I first went to America, I thought, 'There are three hundred million people here, and here I ***am in this little*** *British Airways aircraft coming up to work. GEEEEZ. One in three hundred million. I can do it!' ... I bet there is someone here, in Rotherhithe." 12*

By way of demonstrating Brian Griffin's delightful spirit and manner of expression, I have included this amusing anecdote. With such a warm, human attitude, it is not surprising that he puts even the most guarded and powerful at their ease, rendering them prey to his own ideas and interpretations of them. Though he is superficially a rather shy and mild character to meet, surprises of every kind wait beneath the surface. His humor is intended to penetrate, but not to be malicious. And in the process, he is sensitive to all points of view. Witness the closing remarks on our taped interview:

Benedict-Jones: Could I take your picture while you're sitting there, Brian?

Griffin: Oh, god, yes!

(After general laughter:)

Did you like that, Linda?

Jo Spence

Jo Spence

I first met Jo Spence on a visit to England in 1975. In a small, dimly lit room above the Half-Moon Gallery, she was stapling together the first issues of *Camerawork*, some of which I subsequently carried back to Paris with me for its first appearance in France. In the seven years that have elapsed since that time, Spence has gone through significant changes in her use and analysis of photography. Her story is a fascinating one and actually begins long before her connection with the Half-Moon. Today, at the age of forty-seven, she is a 'mature student' at the Polytechnic of Central London, where she constantly pursues new ideas and radically challenges old, traditional ones. As well as being a student, she is also a nationally celebrated Feminist and Socialist whose work -- written and photographic -- is continually sought after by BBC producers, gallery curators and left-wing publications alike. Her current use of photographs may well be representative of what will be produced more and more in Great Britain in the decade we've just begun.

Born into a working class family, Spence has lived in London most of her life except when she was evacuated during the war and lived in the

country. She first became 'consciously' involved with photography at the age of seventeen when se went to work in a general photographic studio. She started out as a typist but during the course of the eleven years she spent there, she basically learned how to run the non-photographic side of the business. At age twenty-eight, she decided she knew enough about photography from watching other people do it; she now wanted to be a photographer herself. On a day-release scheme from work, she went to Ealing Technical College. The whole experience she regards as a disaster, however, because she couldn't adjust to the slow pace of college where an assignment would be given and could be handed in as much as a week later. College simply didn't seem to have any relationship at all to the hectic tempo of studio work.

After a short time she abandoned this along with her job at the studio and looked for work as an assistant. Within the next couple of years, she worked for two different photographers doing everything from getting the models to setting up all the props to putting the camera on a tri-pod. Then the photographer would take the picture. "Do you detect notes of bitterness here?" she asked me in our interview.[1]

When she was thirty she got married but that only lasted for two years. Then she ran off to Ireland with a disc-jockey where they lived in poverty up in the hills for a year. At this point, Spence started taking photographs of the people around her, "And I suppose I was sort of trying to develop a documentary style without actually understanding that that was what I was doing." What she discovered while living there, however, was that the photographs she took of the people in their everyday lives were not at all appreciated by the people themselves. They wanted, instead, to

be photographed in their Sunday best. "And that was the beginning of an awareness of a conflict between what I saw and what they wanted."[2]

After a year, she returned to England where she was greeted by a stroke of good fortune: a friend asked if she would like to take over his studio as a portrait photographer in the chic borough of Hampstead. "I was totally depressed at the time and absolutely doped up to my eyebrows on Valium because I saw my life as a complete failure as a woman. I had a broken marriage; I had a broken romance. And I wasn't a particularly good photographer either."[3]

For the next seven years Spence ran this studio, living what she called a rather bohemian life. She not only worked in her studio, she lived there, too, photographing all different kinds of people including models, actors, writers and basically whoever came in. In retrospect, she thinks she was a really good quality high-street photographer trying always to break out of what she saw as a Kodak-mentality which was so pervasive in that genre. "...the minute you run your own studio, of course, you have to buy your own materials and the representatives from the different companies come round... Kodak and Ilford shower you with literature...And there was a whole philosophy wrapped up in Kodakology, a whole type of aesthetic is wrapped up there. This has been quite difficult actually to get rid of; I don't particularly want it."[4]

Her portraits at this time could best be described as a kind of environmental realism, with each session a sort of striving to uncover something lying under the surface of the sitter's personality. Today, Spence looks at her approach at that time with great skepticism, regarding it as a kind of voyeurism.

By about 1970, she began to become fairly disenchanted with herself as a photographer. Concurrently, her health was failing her. One of her clients in Hampstead was an Indian homeopathic doctor who suggested that sh'd better stop taking all her steroids and toxins or her liver would cease functioning. Following his advice, she spent some time on a health farm where she met a woman who was very centrally involved in the Children's Rights Movement. They instantly became friends.

> *"It changed my life because the people I met through her were mostly libertarian who weren't particularly party political but were very political with a small 'p' and were highly concerned about the way in which children were brought up, socialized, etc., and the way that children lived their lives in the nuclear family, what schooling does to you, what bad health authorities can do to your health. A lot of the Children's Rights Movements in this country had to do with power relationships."*[5]

Together with some other people, Spence then set up The Children's Rights Workshop in Britain which looked for alternative education schemes. She established a photography project which examined different styles of photography, mostly within the documentary genre. They asked people to submit their work so that they could see how different attitudes to photography would actually bring about different types of images of children which in turn make us believe different things about children. Through this project, Spence began to understand what it was to be a documentary photographer. She began as well to understand where her own photographic influences had come from as a woman photographer: they hadn't come necessarily from photography itself but more from the values of mass media. "I'd taken on board certain ideas about what constituted being a woman and then translated it into my photographs through soft treatment for women, different types of lighting for men."[6] Since then, she has done

an incredible amount of media analysis, particularly around girls' and women's magazines and fairy stories. Some of her current work includes an analysis of Cinderella.

While she was still working with the Children's Rights Movement, Spence had the opportunity to travel abroad for the first time in her life. She went to Sicily, North Africa and various places in Europe. As a result of this journey, she began to realize the disjuncture between the First World and the Third World and just how privileged she was as a white person with the living standards as they existed in Britain. On her return to England, she became a dedicated documentary photographer and continued exploring different alternatives to education, this time working with the gypsies.

A woman she met was setting up on-site schools in gypsy encampments with the intention of teaching them about their own, rather than the state, culture. Following the writings of Paulo Freire, the renowned Brazilian pedagogue, her teachings aimed at politicizing them and Spence's photographs were used as a starting point for literacy. This experience, however, convinced her that there were some very basic problems with the nature of documentary photography:

> *"As soon as I started to shift onto what I saw myself as the negative aspects of their lives, in other words, the fact that they're a minority group and that they're harrassed and state legislation has nicely prevented them from having the sites that they want...but how do you document legislation or racism...when I took my photographs onto the sites, the gypsies hated them. They said that I showed them as victims and they didn't see themselves as victims at all."*[7]

So, despite her intentions to become a documentary photographer... "there are a lot of documentary photographers in this country that I

admire..."[8] she then decided, and by now has staunchly confirmed, that she does not want to be a documentary photographer. In partial justification for her stance, she told me:

> *"Documentary photography is not, in any way, an image of reality. It's a style of photography, which I've written about in the paper. And I think it's very difficult for people who aren't photographers to understand that it is a style and it is a genre of photography and that it has very specific historical meanings that come at the time when the photographs are taken but shift as time goes on. Photographs get seen and used in different places and in a different context."*[9]

As an example of her point, Spence referred to a big campaign that has taken place over the last ten years towards getting more positive images of women; that is, pictures of women showing them engaging in work activities that they were not usually seen to be involved in. It didn't take long to realize, however, that any photographs taken of women at work could be turned around and used in a commercial context to sell something. "If you take a photograph of a woman in a laundry, looking tired at a machine where she is handling sheets all day long, that might be within the documentary style but it can go straight into an advert for headache powders within the advertising world."[10]

The paper which Spence referred to in the quote above is a long essay she wrote entitled "How Relevant Is Documentary Film Theory to the Work of Documentary Photographers?" A large portion of the essay is devoted to films and reveals her involvement with this medium through her work with the British Film Institute. She laments the fact that though there are currently several critical organizations for film -- such as the Society for Education in Film and TV, the British Film Institute, plus the periodicals *Screen* and *Screen Education* -- there are no parallel institu-

tions in photography, apart from the Arts Council of Great Britain. Hence, most of the work being done in Britain with regard to a new analysis of the role and importance of photography (transcending the science of technology and sensitometry) is being done by isolated individuals. Spence sees Victor Burgin, a lecturer at the Polytechnic of Central London where she is a student, as a leader in this field. In most other institutions of higher learning that offer photography programs, however, the various photographic instructors...

> *"...are scared off by the inherent 'anti-human' scientific approach in the notion of the 'construction of the image/subject' (and clearly their fears are well founded because 'construction/deconstruction/ reconstruction' does seem to leave aside 'how' the codes are articulated, inflected and read, which -- for lack of a better term -- seems to ignore the notion of poetics and dialect. To put it into a biological metaphor, 'if you take a flower to pieces, after all is said and done, you are left with a dead flower'".* [11]

Spence finds this lack of theoretical development in photography to be a truly lamentable situation. Without it, she seems to contend, we keep plowing forward with only our inherited, and outworn notions of the past, "their emphasis on creativity, self-expression, vocational skills and a craft-based attitude to technology" which though they may have served a purpose in the early days of the history of photography, are sadly inadequate now. She believes that what is needed is a new 'agenda' for discussion, and one which is more broadly based than the 'revolution of perception' which may be taking place within higher education.[12]

In her discussion of documentary photographs, she cites the definition of the term 'documentary' according to the Time-Life Series on photography: "The term documentary came into use during the depression years, when pictures of poverty stricken farmers awakened Americans to the need for

reform... (but) there has always been much more to documentary photography than the recording of the world's ills...it must convey a message that sets it apart from a landscape, a portrait, a street scene...the best examples make us think about the world in a new way."[13]

From this she claims that since the beginning documentary photography has been seen essentially as a 'transparent medium'; though for the documentarians themselves, the most useful developments were faster films and lighter weight equipment which made their practice even more intrusive:

> *"As photographers' equipment was less observable so they themselves could vanish more into the background, thus convincing themselves that it was now possible to get an even more exacting documentation or 'reality', as they now had less influence on the reality they purported to record. Documentary photography, which 'operates in no distinctive context' has never really examined itself theoretically."*[14]

As the paper continues to discuss the documentary tradition of still images, she claims that this tradition depends upon the viewer's willingness to say, 'yes, you are right, the world is how you perceived it' of the photographer's work. She regrets that documentaries are not expected, and never really have been, to challenge the dominant forms of representation or the dominant political order. If and when they do, they are generally suppressed or considered problematic. Here she cites both Victor Burgin and the American, Alan Sekula as two people who have made concerted efforts to reveal the ideological implications of advertising and who have attacked the sterility of modernism in much current photography.

As already mentioned from my interview with her, Spence does not

believe that documentary is or can be realistic. If it cannot be realistic, however, she suggests that it is better to think of what we are offered as a *re*presentation. She further suggests that a possible form this *re*presentation may take would be similar to something we see in the works of the Russian filmmaker, Vertov or the Cuban, Santiago Alvarez: "...construct *from* documentary material in order to introduce new spatio/temporal relations and offer a critique of the world by revealing different layers of reality..." The Cuban Alvarez accomplished this with various techniques from montage to cartoons to newsreel footage to clips from dominant cinema while constantly shifting our perception. Yet he doesn't "hide behind the naturalism of the traditional documentary."[15]

Spence, herself, has been applying this approach to her own personal work for several years now. The first large public display of it came in the summer of 1979 when it was exhibited at London's Hayward Gallery in the Art's Council sponsored *Three Perspectives on Photography* exhibition. The work she showed there represented a major shift away from previous problems she had dealt with such as how to earn a living through photography, how to express herself as a woman and how to discover who she was as an individual. Though she claims these issues were still in need of attention, she didn't think she could even make sense of them unless she first asked herself some questions about the nature of visual representation itself.

This crisis which she felt vis à vis a philosophy of photography led her onto an analysis of her own 'self-image'...

"...and to a final understanding that photographs are not transparent reflections of reality, nor can they even be said to be 'biased', but that they are constructed through a series of choices which involve complex technology, technique and the use of various codes, as well as unequal transactions between the photographer and the photographed, and between the photographer and the institutions which constitute and reproduce photographic practice."[16]

After twenty-seven years of photography, therefore, she finally rejected the 'various fictions' she made about other people as an advertising, portrait or community photographer. This rejection came about because she felt convinced -- much as in the case with the Irish peasants and the gypsies -- that she was producing images which fixed them into particular class and gender positions which were not always to their advantage. As a Socialist Feminist, she is now interested instead in:

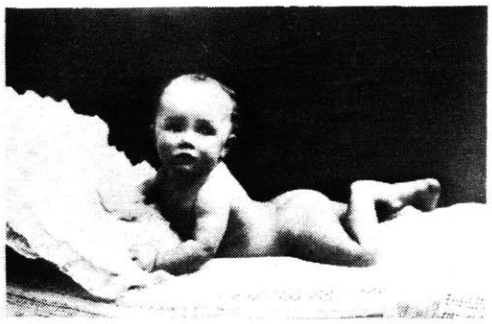
"...forms of representation which will encourage men and women to understand that they are constructed within structural and power relationships, not just social and psychological ones. With this knowledge we can learn to be more actively engaged in shaping our lives, both economically and politically, whilst fighting alongside other oppressed groups for radical change."[17]

I am including two of her well known images which were shown in the *Three Perspectives on Photography* exhibition. Along with all of the other images of herself in the show, these pictures are part of the 'visual history' she has collected of herself. In looking at these and later images produced by Spence, it is necessary to approach them with a different set of expectations than we have grown accustomed to in looking at photographs. When I spoke with her in the summer, one of the points she made repeatedly was that she sees her role in photography as an educator as much as anything else. In considering her images, therefore, we must be willing to challenge our traditional and well-learned approach to photographic appreciation. Her images are not meant to please us or

gratify our visual appetites. Rather they are demonstrating the various conventions and techniques which operate within photography.

She regards part of her dilemma in forming a philosophy for photography as stemming from the fact that she is a materialist. As such, she believes that the cause for everything is here on earth. This presents a formidable problem because...

> *"...if the cause of everything is explainable...how do you begin to show that if you want to work with photography?...In shifting away from the documentary mode myself, I'm trying to move it towards a more poetic mode of photography but it's not a poetics based on metaphysics; it's not a poetics based on the fact that by looking at a photograph -- in the sense of a Minor White photograph -- that I will be able to understand some inner state and unconscious level by looking into the picture. I'm trying to work more in terms of theatre, that's the only way I can put it, where I actually set up and stage things, and work very much through symbols."*[18]



Me at 8½ months

Me at 44 years 9 months

by Jo Spence

How I'd really like to be remembered aged 44

by Jo Spence

She is currently working with other people, who are like actors and actresses in her pictures yet have full knowledge of what she is trying to do. This way,

she encounters none of the problems she had with documentary photography:

> *"...which is basically using people as camera fodder for your own fantasies, or your own beliefs, which can be tantamount to a fantasy. The whole genre of concerned photography totally disgusts me. I can see why people are involved in it, and I can see that it is well meant, but I see absolutely no reason why one group of people should have the right to document the lives of others. Far better in my opinion would be to go back to the ideas of the thirties where people photographed their own lives, so you get away from the division between artist and non-artist."*[19]

The work Spence has produced for the exhibition at M.I.T. has unfortunately not yet arrived so I am unable to include any reproductions of it here. Together with her close collaborator, Terry Dennett -- incidentally with whom she established The Photography Workshop in 1975, which co-founded the Half-Moon Photography Workshop, published *Camerawork* and has since gone on to publish a substantial volume of essays entitled *Photography/Politics: One* -- she has continued her work on styles of photography, taking as a starting point the woman's body. Their partnership is not unlike that of the early portrait photographers, Hill and Adamson where Hill chose the subjects and arranged the poses and Adamson handled the camera and developed the prints. Terry Dennett is the Adamson of this pair and functions largely as her technician, operating the camera while she is often the subject of the image herself. Dennett is also a critic and I have earlier made reference to the essay he wrote on the Workers Film and Photo League of the thirties. It was at Spence's request that they both be given credit for the work in the exhibition at M.I.T.

The pictures they produced operate on two levels and are to be double-hung in the show to emphasize this fact. On the first level they are

trying to make a shift from the woman as object of the look across various styles of photography -- from anthropological photography to nude in a landscape to a Les Krims type of photograph where the woman is mutilated. The second level will try to point out what the first level is doing and thereby comment on photography itself:

> *"We're trying to make a shift from the woman as object to the woman as subject, so that people can begin to understand that 'woman' has been used within photography, particularly for the pleasure of the male look, and that that has negated the possibility of women actually making an identification, except through male eyes...And the shift is from woman as sexual being to woman as active being. But coming back to the notion of positive images, it doesn't mean to say that women are the greatest things since sliced bread or that we're victims. It's just trying to make a shift in how you get meaning from a photograph. And the series of photographs we're doing is shifting more from a realist image or a pictorial image towards a symbolic use of the image."*[20]

Spence does not regard this as a didactic sort of photography; it is not to be seen as propaganda. It is instead trying to cause 'shifts' so that the viewer will have altered his or her sense of 'what something means' after going through the images from beginning to end.

I regard Jo Spence's work as being highly important for the purpose of my study, though I don't necessarily expect her photographs to be well received by an American audience. She has continually challenged the status quo, whether it be in her own personal life or within the fabric of the society in which she lives. Her initial attractions to and uses of 'documentary photography' was not atypical of the impulse that has operated among other British photographers. Her departure from the use of that genre, however was *not* a retreat from confronting the problems, concerns and issues of our time into the 'revolution of perception' which

she sees to be at the heart of what if primarily being taught in schools of photography today. Rather, her solution was to push it one step further into the realm of a direct challenge of the medium itself and its conventional uses. In so doing, she still confronts the issues that are most urgent for her -- those of power relationships and the position of women in present-day society. Yet even though she has abandoned the usual path of the documentary photographer, she still sees the process of documentation with a camera as being a vital part of the process of making a 'shift' in our use of photography:

> *"I try to work now so that people who own cameras can begin to document their everyday lives and talk about it in very different ways so that they can see a relationship between themselves and what happened in the past. Because if you can see that, and you can understand that there is a continual process going on of power struggles, if you like, between groups and factions, then instead of the view which is what I grew up with that it's always been like it is and there is nothing you can do to change it -- always harking back to the good old days so we could be like that again which is the period I went through after the war -- Instead of a notion that you have to strive very hard to maintain the status quo, what you begin to get at is the notion that things are always changing, continually transforming themselves, but that you're not aware of the way most of these things work."*[21]

In reference to my contention for this study, Spence fully agrees that there is a uniquely strong voice in Britain around documentary photography. But from her perspective, she regards it as a tragedy that most documentarians don't understand what they're actually doing "because they presumably still work under the illusion that a photograph is a reflection of what you're looking at."[22]

I have devoted this much space to Jo Spence's work for several reasons. To begin with, as a critic and photographer, she has provided

me with more material -- written and taped -- than any of the other contemporaries. Furthermore, she has grappled with the notions of documentary photography for a much longer period of time and in far greater depth than I have. Her opinions, insights and conclusions have all been fascinating and very challenging for me to digest. In the presence of this new philosophy and approach, I feel that I have but scratched the surface and once again lament the lack of critical thinking I have encountered in my own formal photographic education in America. I will make reference to her work and approach in the conclusion to this paper because I feel it is going to be increasingly significant in the years that lie ahead.

Keith Arnatt

Keith Arnatt[1]

In stark contrast to Jo Spence, we will now turn to Keith Arnatt, the last photographer in the selection. Arnatt was born in Oxford in 1930. From an age point of view, that makes him the oldest contemporary included in this study. Yet from another point of view, he is really the youngest as he has been seriously pursuing photography for the shortest period of time.

Originally Arnatt was trained as a painter, first at Oxford School of Art and later at the Royal Academy Schools. Eventually he became a sculptor, and in the early sixties he was involved in a style related to Minimal Art. By the end of that decade he began producing 'situations' and at this point gained a considerable recognition as a Conceptual Artist. It was at the Museum of Modern Art in New York where much of this work was initially shown in an exhibition called *Information*. Subsequently he became well known throughout Europe for his situation performances. One of the characteristics of this work, however, was that it was so ephemeral in nature that the only way in which it could be

shared with an on-going audience was through photographic documentation. And this is what provided Arnatt's introduction to photography. Prior to this time he had neither knowledge nor interest in the photographic process. As we have seen with other photographers in this study though, no structured photographic education had really existed in Great Britain before the seventies. As he put it,

> *"I think the tradition in this country of photographic education only began a few years ago. Prior to that I think photography was a kind of service which was open to fine artists and graphic designers and photographic technique was taught but there was certainly no discussion about pictures or philosophy involved. It was simply a service, offered in art schools."*[2]

Therefore, the first time he used photographs, he got other people to take them for him. He acted as a director of sorts. After a few years, he began to consider the photographs interesting for their own merits, some of them for their sheer ambiguity. Soon he structured situations in the real world so that he could photograph them; the photographs would no longer be merely records but the end product. At this point, he had become so interested in the process that he started using the camera himself. For several years thereafter, he continued working in a "standard conceptual way" using photographs and text and his work continued to be well regarded throughout the Continent. Then gradually a change came about in his relationship to photography:

> *"It wasn't until a few years ago when I began to re-examine my work in premise, the fact that my art was in a sense about art, that I became rather dissatisfied with this situation. It seemed to me rather esoteric. And quite by chance, at that time, David Hurn came to college, and I started talking to him about photography. He introduced me to people like Walker Evans and so on and it was then that my interest in photography, in a more traditional sense, really blossomed. From that time since, I've been caught and captivated completely by photography."*[3]

Becoming acquainted with the work of the strong documentary figures in the history of photography such as Walker Evans and Ben Shahn convinced Arnatt that such work was more socially relevant than the kind of work he had previously been producing. This, along with the fact that such work was more readily accessible to more people, became especially important to him.

Particular types of photographs attracted his attention, notably the snapshot. He began to model photographic projects that he was working on upon this idea of the snapshot, and the series of pictures I selected for exhibition at M.I.T. were inspired from this source.

The series I am referring to is called "Walking the Dog." Arnatt's conceptual background has been retained to a certain extent in the presentation of this work in that he sees the final series of forty prints as 'one piece'. Due to space limitations, only half of these will be shown at the Creative Photography Gallery, however, but there are a sufficient number to retain a true flavor of the entire series.

Before looking more closely at these pictures, I want to point to some possible roots for Arnatt's works. With respect to approach, we might first of all consider the nineteenth-century documentarian, Sir Benjamin Stone. During the 1890s, we remember that there was a widespread interest in making photographic inventories of nearly everything from roads to bridges, from slum housing conditions to street life in London. Bill Jay wrote that "Sir Benjamin Stone's record of the folk life of Britain in pictures during this decade is the most notable attempt to achieve a documentary programme...Stone was really a conceptual photographer, recording the idea rather than the course of an event."[4] In his

recording of people with their dogs, the exact same statement could easily be applied to Keith Arnatt, so successfully has he blended his concept with the documentation process.

The choice of subject matter is delightfully British by nature, as well. I have never been any place where I have seen such reverence for dogs as in Great Britain. Tony Ray-Jones recognized this national idiosyncrasy and produced a number of memorable images of the famous Crufts dog show, of which I am including two examples here. In the first we see a typically humorous scene where the characters have been so carefully choreographed as to give the humans roughly the same sense of importance in their minglings as the dogs. In the second image, we see a more intimate portrayal where a female owner seems almost to be consoling her canine companion in their shared stall. Though Tony Ray-Jones' images called our attention to this British whimsy before Keith Arnatt

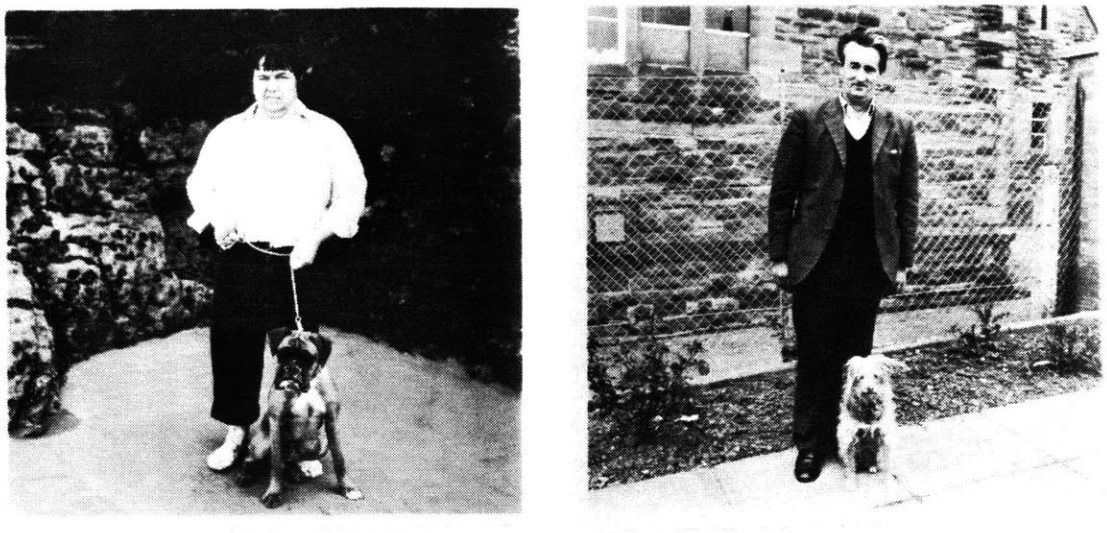
"Crufts dog show, 1968"
by Tony Ray-Jones

"Crufts dog show, 1968"
by Tony Ray-Jones

had even made friends with a camera, it is Arnatt's judicious amplification of the theme which deserves more of our attention now. The relationship depicted in the second image by Ray-Jones is both comical and heart-warming, but in fact a mere appetizer when compared to the series produced by Arnatt.

More than with any other question I put to him, Arnatt was interested in talking about the dog pictures. He described the process in great detail and it was so fascinating that I am going to include much of it here. Before embarking on the dog pictures, however, Arnatt had recognized that he was primarily interested in photographing people. Conveniently, he lives very near a tourist attraction in the west of England called Tintern Abbey, a place where many people visit toting their cameras. Carrying one was actually the norm there, so for Arnatt it was an ideal place to begin. On the whole, people didn't seem to mind being photographed, but he found they were much more willing in pairs than individually. "If you asked them individually, they began to wonder, not unnaturally, why they were being singled out. So I photographed them in pairs."[5] By chance, Arnatt eventually came across some pictures where one of the people would be holding a dog on a leash. Most of the dogs were not looking at the camera, though, and that slightly irritated him. He decided to start photographing people with their dogs, rightly assuming that, as with the pairs, people would mind less not being photographed alone. Inevitably, they would assume that the dog was more important, or was the intended central ingredient in the picture.

In pursuing the pictures, Arnatt wanted to try and give the impression



From "Walking the Dog"
by Keith Arnatt

that in a sense the dog, as the person, was posing for the camera. When he broached the people with the idea, he explained his technique to them:

> *"As soon as they had agreed, I said 'I'd like you to look at the camera when I take the picture.' And I explained that I also wanted to get the dog to look at the camera, so I asked what the dog's name was and the moment before I pressed the shutter, I would call the name of the dog, Bonzo, for example. And at that moment press the shutter. In many cases this worked. The dog looked with a kind of riveted gaze at the camera, and so did the people. But more often than not, it didn't work at all. What really happened was that when I had explained that I wanted the dog's attention, and I called the dog's name, the owners would look down at the dog to see whether the dog was responding in the way that I wanted it to. So I got an awful lot of pictures of dogs looking fixedly at the camera, with people looking down at their dogs."*[6]

That obviously didn't work, so Arnatt scolded the owners and tried again. The second time was usually a failure because the dog was by this time bored with the whole process. Calling its name was no longer sufficient. "So I had to resort to barking, or pretend growling. The dog, of course, again looked but in these cases very often the owners simply

collapsed with laughter," he said.[7] So he had to produce hundreds upon hundreds of negatives to get the final forty images for his piece.

Another aspect of the project that interested Arnatt was that people often told him that they 'knew' what he was setting out to do. "They would say, 'I know what you're doing. You're trying to make it appear that dogs look like their owners, or owners like their dogs, aren't you?' That amused me and I quite liked that idea. Of course, I don't believe it. And I think the photographs, although some of them might suggest that owners and dogs do look alike, I think there are some photographs that suggest quite the opposite."[8]

While there are a number of images where the physical resemblance between human and animal is distinctly absent, like in one case of a fat woman and a tiny, skinny dog, the majority of the pictures tend to be like the people expected. Some, like the two pictures on the previous page, are such perfect examples of similarities, it seems hard to believe that the match wasn't orchestrated by the photographer himself. It wasn't of course and on the whole the pictures show a great deal of both human and animal diversity, both psychological and physical. In each case, the pair seems to, in one way or another, compliment each other.

A monograph of this work was produced to accompany the exhibition of the same title at London's prestigious Anthony d'Offay gallery. George Melly, a professional blues singer with John Chilton's Feetwarmers was asked to write the introduction. In it, he said this about the pictures:

> *"These photographs are about the relationship, often extremely subtle, between dog and man, owner and possession, two legs and four, pride and love, trust and suspicion. They are often, if unmaliciously, funny, and frequently touching." 9*

Melly claimed that from the beginning, Arnatt decided to pay no attention to background or composition, the dog and its owner being his only concern. While I wouldn't argue that this was his primary concern, I think there are examples such as the plump woman with her tongue out,standing in front of a butcher shop holding her dog who also has its tongue sticking out. The size of the woman and the hanging pork chops, combined with the hanging tongues,appears to me to be far too interesting a background for it to be total chance. The wagging tongues were lucky, of course, but not the choice of the fat woman and the window display of meat. Many of these details were culled in the editing process, to be sure, a process which Arnatt declared to be the most creative task of all.

by Keith Arnatt

"Walking the Dog" succeeded in accomplishing what Arnatt had desired: as a body of work, it appealed to a large audience, and to people who are photographers and non-photographers alike. In my opinion, it is a superb body of portraiture which will only gain in importance as time goes by. The gestures, the attire, the hairstyles and certainly the background information as well all serve to document a particular aspect of the British at this point in the twentieth century. When I asked Arnatt if he would comment on the documentary nature of his work, he replied:

"I think I would say that there is a strong documentary aspect to what I do, but there is this ingredient which I like very much in photographs which I tried to incorporate in the photographic series, and that is that photographs in a way draw attention to some aspect to how they were achieved. Therefore there is a kind of reflexive aspect to them. My photographs are as much about photographs, and therefore that puts them in the kind of modernist bracket. I wouldn't claim that they were strictly documentary although as I said they would certainly have a documentary aspect to them. I do think there is a tradition of documentary photography in this country, a very long one and a very good one. And I still think it persists."[10]

Arnatt did go on to say, however, that due to the amount of recent photographic literature which has appeared, things are changing rapidly, and he thinks that whatever differences there are between American and English photography, these are gradually disappearing because of that information. With respect to his own work, the only quality which he thinks makes it distinctly British may be something to do with the weather. In looking at American photographs, he is always struck by how clear and bright they are and how most of them appear to have been taken in sunshine.

Arnatt is obviously too much a part of his own work and environment to acknowledge that there is indeed something very British about his pictures. The weather is undeniably an element, but the combination of dress, mannerism, gesture and atmosphere are in my opinion unquestionably British, without even mentioning the obvious devotion between human and animal for which the British have long been credited. I was actually somewhat surprised to hear him say that his photographs are as much about photographs as anything else because he earlier expressed dissatisfaction when he came to realize that his art was about art. In any event, I

I personally feel that this work is a fine example of the possible marriage between content and form, and will ultimately be regarded as an artistic documentation of its time.

Though Arnatt wasn't willing to predict what lay ahead for either British photography in general or his own work in particular, he did mention that he has recently been photographing the industrial waste-lands around Cardiff and Newport in the south of Wales. Meanwhile, he continues to teach at the Newport School of Documentary Photography with both David Hurn and Ron McCormick.

CONCLUSION

A few days before I moved back to America in 1979, I went to the opening of a major exhibition on recent British photography at London's Hayward Gallery. It was called *Three Perspectives on Photography*. I have already referred to it several times in this thesis; Brian Griffin, Martin Parr and Jo Spence were among the seventeen exhibitors in the show, and Paul Hill was one of three curators. It was an important statement for British photography because a large exhibition of contemporary work was being shown at one of Britain's most prestigious art galleries. It was also significant because it represented a breakdown of the three most current areas of interest among British photographers. The section that Paul Hill curated was loosely defined by him as the Fine Art/Documentary section, in which he included Martin Parr and Brian Griffin. The second area was devoted to Feminism and photography and included Jo Spence's work. The third section was a socialist perspective on photographic practice; while it included none of the people who finally made up the exhibition at M.I.T., it did feature the work of Victor Burgin, introduced in this study in the section on Jo Spence. (Incidentally, Victor Burgin was invited and very willing to participate in the M.I.T. show and this study, but was unable to co-ordinate anything with me during my brief summer visit to Britain.)

It was sometime after my move to America that I began thinking seriously about that exhibition. In comparison to what I saw being published

and shown in the United States, the British exhibition was radically different. For Feminism and Socialism to be granted two-thirds of a large, public, officially sanctioned arena, with Fine Art/Documentary sharing the final third plainly indicated that these forces were not fringe occurrences. Together, they displayed a cross-section of the interests of current-day British photographers. Clearly the Feminists and Socialists concerned themselves much more directly with existing social, economic and political issues than did the group of photographers that Paul Hill had assembled.

One of the most basic points made by the Feminists, for example, was that of the six participants in that section, only two of them had ever received any previous recognition to speak of. Women photographers are rarely given their share of the limelight in publications or exhibitions in Great Britain. Paul Hill's section included no women; a spring, 1981 issue of *Creative Camera* with the encompassing title of *British Photography Now* included no women; and a summer, 1981 exhibition at the Photographer's Gallery called *New Work in Britain* also included no women photographers. Most people I spoke with about this lamentable situation regarded it as a natural result of the fact that society as a whole has trained little girls not to be concerned with technology, and they assured me that the situation was gradually changing. That may or may not be the case, but in any event it is a substantial subject for study on its own: such a study was, in fact, conducted during the last year by Anna Tait, the new Picture Editor of the *British Journal of Photography*. During my summer visit, I was one of the people interviewed

for her research though I have not yet seen the results of her inquiries.

The Socialists also represent a growing force in British photography. Someone like Jo Spence could just as well have been included in this section as in that of the Feminists, for example. The work being produced in this area is often spearheaded by the Victor Burgin contingent at the Polytechnic of Central London...the school, incidentally, that Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen attended in the early seventies. The photographic historian, David Mellor, whom I have quoted before, believes that this area is currently the growth area, with the conceptual work of people like Burgin clearly taking precedence over any of the dominant influences of the seventies. "The question of the politization of photography in Britain is a very important area. There is no real parallel in American photography," he said. He suspects, however, that ultimately the overtly political statements will fall back towards documentary. "The kind of agit-conceptual pieces may be depoliticized...but remain very much critical...yet without the edge that is lost in theory."[1]

The mere fact that such a grouping as the *Three Perspectives on Photography* exhibition had achieved national recognition continued to intrigue me as the weeks and months of re-integrating myself in America passed by. I eventually came to conclude that the British had indeed managed to secure a voice in photography that was distinctly different from the American influences they had witnessed through much of the seventies, and that their statement was decidedly and honestly linked to both their national identity and their photographic past.

In any event, it is simply incongruous to expect British photographers

to produce pictures like their American counterparts. Though we speak a common language, our countries are basically very different, having experienced different economic, political and cultural developments. I certainly cannot imagine seeing an exhibition today at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, equally divided between Fine Art/ Documentary, Feminism and Socialism and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Yet that would be the equivalent of the Hayward exhibition.

Can these differences between British and American photography be explained as simple differences of taste? Obviously not. In my opinion, the strong documentary tradition in Great Britain which I have outlined at length in this paper provides the root structure for the majority of the work exhibited in the *Three Perspectives on Photography* exhibition as well as for the work of the ten contemporary photographers I have selected for this study.

Furthermore, I believe that it is the result of the economic, political and cultural factors that form the history of Great Britain which have in large part determined the strength and duration of the socially-concerned approach which lies at the root of documentary photography. As Ron McCormick so clearly stated,

> *"Apart from being concerned with the fine image myself, a large part of my concern has to do with content; it has to do with communication. I have something to say...I'm concerned about contributing to a dialogue about issues that are not personal and private issues for me but are common issues."*[2]

There are fundamental differences between Great Britain and the United States. In outlining the historical development of British photo-

graphy, I alluded to some of those differences. I likewise think it is important to point out what some of those differences are currently because of the role they play in determining the outlook and expression of contemporary photographers.

Politically, Britain stands midway between a corporate, capitalist country like the United States and the social democracies of Scandanavia. The post-war establishment of the Welfare State, as I have previously mentioned, guaranteed things such as a comprehensive National Health program, extensive public housing and social security programs, all of which are now part of the fabric of British life (even though the present Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher has, like the Reagan administration, launched a massive attack on these social support systems.) The British trade unions have historically been much more linked to socialist political movements than their American counterparts, and continue to be so. Education differs radically in that, at the age of twelve, all students are directed into either grammar, comprehensive or technical schools and a relatively small percentage of these students go on to higher education. Those that do are more often than not involved in career-oriented courses rather than liberal-arts programs as we have here in the States. Though the photographers in my study occasionally bemoaned this state of affairs, it must also be noted that there is not the glut of Master of Fine Arts Degrees that we find in America.

Furthermore, the Arts Council of Great Britain has consistently supported organizations and events which have specific social and political aims. *Camerawork* magazine and the Blackfriar's Settlement have already

been mentioned in this regard. To that may be added *Ten-8* magazine, The Side Gallery, the recent exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* and a 1980 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum on Donald McCullin's war photography, among other things.

The most basic difference, however, is that in the final analysis, Great Britain is no longer a society of plenty with a thriving economy. The effects of two wars, the repercussions from the loss of her Empire, combined with a decaying industrial system and perpetual class conflicts have left Britain basically unable to keep up with Western competitors. The flowering of the pop culture in the Swinging Sixties -- with its Beatles, Carnaby Street, Twiggy and Sam Haskins Superstars -- was in fact but a brief escape from their own past into a glamorous, affluent, post-industrial society which the foundations of British society did not and could not sustain.

The early seventies were riddled with problems. In 1974, for example, the Conservative Heath government fell after strikes by the miners reduced the work week in England to three days a week and inflation was running near thirty per cent. That crisis resulted in the installment of Harold Wilson's, ans subsequently James Callaghan's, seemingly reformist Labour governments which carried the country through to 1978 when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party was once again elected. The decade ended in a deep economic depression which has not improved to this day. Today's chronic unemployment was in part responsible for the 1981 summer riots in Liverpool, Southall and elsewhere which were the largest and most destructive in British history. And the massive defense spending proposed for nuclear weaponry has resulted in the angriest and largest demonstrations

in the history of the country.

The relationship this all has to photography is not negligible. To live in British urban centers today is to continually confront oppressive realities and broken dreams. In many respects, they are islands struggling to stay afloat, despite the veneer provided by the Royal Family. The ever-present gray, drizzly skies don't help the spirit much, either. In comparison, the United States has reached and maintained a general level of affluence far surpassing that of Great Britain. Ultimately this means that British photographers in general have had far less time to devote to artistic self expression than their American contemporaries. For most of the population, in fact, taking up photography as an outside interest has been a luxury they could ill afford. It follows, too, that the potential British audience has not had the capacity of the affluent, purchasing public in America. For example, there are no investment incentives from the private sector in Great Britain as they exist in the States for the support and promotion of photography. As director of the Photographer's Gallery, Sue Davies is probably more aware of this than anyone. When I spoke with her, she cited a phenomena in the States whereby a gallery will issue a portfolio at a pre-publication price of perhaps $1,500, knowing that on publication it will be $2.000 and then $3,000 the following year. Investors can then buy it at the pre-publication price and give it away the next year making money for themselves by way of a tax break while they are supporting photography-as-an-art in the process. Britain has absolutely nothing like that. The people who buy photographs in Britain must actually want those photographs for themselves as there are no schemes for making money from them. She explained:

"All over England the rich do not buy visual art. All those places on Cork Street are surviving selling to foreigners, mostly Germans and Swiss. Unless they're selling hunting pictures, or something. The Queen has a lovely gallery and she has a lot of things and she has somebody who buys art for her, but on the whole the rich establishment in England are very keen on hunting, shooting and fishing, and painting and maybe the ballet. I think our theatre is excellent, but I think the visual arts have always had the smallest bit of cake."[3]

For a multitude of reasons, therefore, it is now possible to see why photography in Britain has evolved in the manner it has. There are many pressing social issues to contend with. The luxury of retreating into artistic expression through the use of the camera is an avenue which is not financially or philosophically open to very many. Those that do involve themselves with photography often feel compelled to participate at some level with the issues of the day. To varying degrees, I think this can be said of all the contemporary photographers included in this study.

Throughout this paper, I have employed the term 'documentary' as a distinctive genre or style of photography that I contend has been dominant throughout British photographic history. Though I carefully defined the terms of my thesis title in the preface to this paper, I have consciously avoided fixing a definition to the word 'documentary'. In refraining from doing this, I hoped instead to provide a picture, through the presentation of various individual photographers and photographic movements, of the breadth and richness which this term 'documentary' can imply. It would have been easy enough to quote a Time-Life definition, as Jo Spence

did, or pluck a description from *Webster's* early in the paper, i.e., 'factual, objective presentation (as a film or novel).' But then I would have arrived at this point trying to prove or disprove whether my chosen contemporaries were factual and objective or not. That sort of discussion was clearly not the purpose of this paper.

Instead, by introducing ten contemporary British photographers, with the support of examples from their historical development, I have expanded the concept of 'documentary' beyond what has been elsewhere concisely defined. Therefore, in using the term 'documentary' in 1982 when discussing British photography, I am using it in the broadest sense possible. To be sure, there are components of reportage and photojournalism which are possible, though not binding. There are likewise elements of social criticism and commentary which occasionally come forward. Some documentary photographers seek to portray, some to transform, others to transcend some aspect of reality. Of the contemporary photographers in this study, I believe there are several combinations of these elements in their work. The very concept of documentary photography has been expanded by these, and other, contemporary British photographers. For them the genre has been more of a window than a door; it has provided them with unlimited avenues of expression and examination.

In the presentation of the ten individual photographers I amply revealed their attitudes regarding both the documentary traditions in Britain as well as their opinions of how their respective bodies of work

fit into that ongoing tradition. The majority of them supported the contention of my thesis. Before concluding this paper, however, I would like to reveal how several other prominent figures in the British photographic community viewed my thesis.

As already pointed out, David Hurn is a Magnum photographer and the head of the Newport School of Documentary Photography. When I asked him if he could define the focus of the middle-generation of British photographers, he answered by saying that "...in the main it would be true to say that the people that tend to have the major reputations are nearly all very pure documentary photographers." He amplified his answer:

> *"I think that in Europe the documentary photographer has been a much more thinking human being, who has had something very positive that they wish to say. Very often this has come from a long, educational, political upbringing or something, through an absorption of certain kinds of culture. But really and truly they are, if you want to use the word, they're artists who have decided that photography is the medium that they wish to communicate what they have to say best."*[4]

In talking about the younger generation, however, Hurn feels that they have gotten muddled in their thinking as a result of the gallery world:"..somehow it's almost as though they feel they should go out and shoot art. Now I don't believe you can do that. I believe the history of photography very clearly shows that the art comes after the event. If you do it well enough, somebody else can call it art."[5]

At the end of the seventies, Hurn had the opportunity of spending a year in America on a cultural exchange program organized through the British Council. He chose to spend the time in Arizona. While there, he presented work of contemporary British photographers at a local S.P.E. conference and received standing ovations from his audience. "You know,

it was as though there was a kind of photography that had been totally forgotten which you could actually do...that there was a kind of photography which...has a link with reality and was accepted."[6]

* * * * * *

Roger Taylor is head of the Communication Arts Department at Sheffield City Polytechnic in the north of England. Generally speaking, he did not support my thesis. In his opinion, the documentary tradition was artificially revived in the early seventies, via the work of Bill Brandt, as simply a way of establishing photography as an art: "Brandt is the one that was pulled out of the bag and given the name of Fine Art." He assumes that the reason for this was because documentary was "clearly aligned with filmmaking and cinema verite...it seemed to present a face to a public institution like the Arts Council where it would find some sympathy...But I don't think documentary photography is any stronger in its traditional roots than any other kind of photography. It's only a commercial branch of photography."[7]

When I pointed out that publications like *Camerawork, Ten-8* and recent issues of *Creative Camera* have shown primarily documentary-oriented work, as well as recent major exhibitions such as the *Three Perspectives on Photography* and Don McCullin shows, Taylor answered by saying that has been the case because these are all Arts Council sponsored organizations and events. He implied that the majority of panel members on the Arts Council have been people with a bias towards documentary, hence that is why the support has been distributed during the seventies in the manner it has.

The primary reason why Taylor regrets the amount of attention devoted to the documentary genre is because of its 'stylistic aesthetic.'

> *"That's not a very neat phrase, but the aesthetic by which it presents itself to the outside world has not moved. If you look at the work of a number of photographers who are currently in practice and the work of Humphrey Spender and others who were working in the thirties, there is not a jot of difference between them. Same compositional devices, same arrangements, same kinds of things: BANG, you know."*[8]

Taylor would have preferred to have my thesis simply contend that the documentary genre is one of many things going on in that country:

> *"I think there is a whole body of documentary photography that is moving away from traditional documentary concerns. More often than not, when we look at the documentary, it's to do with the human condition. And there is a whole body of documentary that is not just about those humanistic concerns, but moving more towards formal concerns. It's moving towards other things which are externalised and is given in evidence of humanistic tradition and people are actually in there. And I think you could begin to make the translation from pure documentary through to the remaining work."*[9]

To a large extent, I believe that the inclusion of such photographers as Paul Hill, Ron McCormick and Brian Griffin does address the evolution that Taylor is referring to here. He did concede, however, that if such formalistic studies had been put forth in the early seventies, the re-birth of British photography might not have been so successful:

> *"Documentary was the one definable area of photography, if you want to put names to style, by which photography was able to pull itself up by the bootstraps and make itself kind of recognisable and make itself acceptable. It could give itself a public face through that because it was the most public face of all the kinds of photography that existed in Britain. It was the one that was most readily seen and most readily accepted. It has a particular drama, humor...you know, all of those things are within that and you can deal with it. If you'd said, no, we're not going to do that; we're going to use Fine Art that happened to be conceptual, we'd have got nowhere."*[10]

* * * * * *

The Photographer's Gallery in London is another sore point with Roger Taylor,and others I spoke with as well. While it was almost a revolutionary concept when it began, it has now become part of the Establishment and as such undergoes much criticism. The most frequent attack leveled against it is the sheer proportion of the Arts Counci budget which it consumes every year. In the eyes of its critics, this prevents more of a variety of things from developing throughout Britain. The number of American travelling exhibitions it shows has also come under fire. Many of the photographers I interviewed expressed anger and dismay over the fact that the gallery has decided to devote only one show a year to contemporary British photography.

As director and founder of the gallery, Sue Davies is the recipient of much of this criticism. Though no one I spoke with would deny her their respect and admiration for the trailblazing efforts she provided in the early seventies, the general spirit I encountered among the established photographic community is that it is time for a change. Whether or not a more general public would agree is another matter. Her centrally located London gallery is constantly full of visitors and to a large extent her eclectic approach caters to their taste. In her opinion, this is the path which is really in everyone's best interest: "I would like to continue showing all the things, the heroes and the new and everything." When I asked Davies about my thesis, she referred to the summer exhibition at the gallery, *New British Work*, and said:

> *"I would have agreed with Roger Taylor a couple of years ago because I was at that point saying, 'my god, if people go on saying that the basis of British photography is documentary, we are never going to get out of this hole. ...But then looking*

around for stuff for this show, on the whole, to me the best work is an expansion of the documentary tradition. It is changing, and how they attack it is changing. It's very individual, and I think that's the most British bit, if you like...

And I don't think any more that they want to copy America; they want to find their own way, and it's good because we did go through about four or five years all over Europe, not just in England, but wherever you went, it was baby Gibsons and baby Michaels. With the reportage, they haven't had to go through that. They've got a lovely, solid tradition to grow out of... It can expand over a lot of things. It doesn't mean just going out and doing the latest riot." [11]

* * * * * *

As mentioned earlier, Colin Osman is not only the Editor of *Creative Camera,* but also curated the exhibition *The British Worker* which was really devoted to a history of the documentary movement in Great Britain. In his opinion, Robert Frank was a seminal figure in the birth of modern British photography. For Osman, Frank introduced the concept of a horizontal or overall point of view with new formal, compositional ideas. As much as he admires Frank's contribution, he sees potential problems there for the genre as a whole:

"The danger is that once you escape from the confines of the strictly photo-journalist documentary, you uncork a jar of smoke. I think this is what you're talking about and what we're beginning to suffer from a little... It just floats out and floats everywhere. Documentary must be within some sort of discipline. It can be the discipline of the printed page, it can be the discipline of a television documentary, it can be the discipline of a book. Once you release it form all discipline and say anything goes, then it is liable to dissipate itself into empty formalism."[12]

A further concern of Osman's is that on the whole we have been victims of a distortion of photographic history:

"Much of the important British photojournalism has been unavailable. For example, the man who worked from the first issue of Picture Post *to the last, was Kurt Hutton. His negatives are all in the Radio Times Hulton Picture Library. They don't even have his name on the*

card index. Now if you compare him with any photographer in LIFE *not only is his name on a card index, but there is an enormous publicity machine exploiting his reputation. We are slowly unlocking some of these sources of photography for the thirties.*

I think the other part about this is, in terms of photo-journalism obviously, the LIFE *magazine book-publishing division or whatever it is, is only going to promote* LIFE *photographers in their history of photojournalism, unless it can't avoid others. Most of the photographers who feature in the Time-Life history are contributors to Time-Life...it's quite reasonable! But it is a distortion. At times, I suspect that it goes just a little bit beyond that and that when there is a choice, the choice has been made in favor of an American rather than a non-American. It is distortion and suppression in its hardest terms. There has not been any enthusiasm in America for researching the real pioneers of photography."*[13]

This concern about historical studies was re-iterated by various individuals throughout my research. Professor Margaret Harker, author of *The Linked Ring* wrote in a June, 1981 issue of the *British Journal of Photography* about this problem when she reviewed the European Society for the History of Photography's first Symposium:

"The need for contextual studies was emphasised by more than one lecturer so that the history of photography is not studied in isolation but related to the developments in social consciousness, to the habits and customs of a period, and to political awareness, in addition to the influence on photography of developments in other visual art forms and its influence on painting and print-making..."

A promising indication is the emergence, during recent years, of some scholarly books on a number of important Movements and on individual photographers but what is also needed is a book on the history of photography interpreted in the context of social and technological change and the demands of society on the medium for communication and illustration as well as artistic expression."[14]

* * * * * *

Finally, I would like to turn to the interview I had with Peter Turner. Currently one of the directors of Travelling Light, an organization which distributes and publishes photography books. Their most recent publication is Brian Griffin's *POWER*. From 1969 to 1978, Turner was the co-editor of

Creative Camera and as such, probably had as many portfolios of work by British photographers pass under his gaze as any other single person. During the time that he was there, he not only witnessed but participated in the evolution of British photography throughout the seventies. Though Turner basically supports my thesis, he does so somewhat regretfully:

> *"It suddenly occurred to me one day in 1975 or 1976 that there was a whole group of active photographers and they were still thoroughly committed to making their own images. By that, I mean that the wiles of commerce hadn't seduced them totally. The only situation they knew was that if they wanted to make pictures, they might be able to get a grant for it; and once they'd done it, there was a place to put them. And that's a fundamental change. Now I think that if the economy hadn't gone down the tubes, then I would suspect that toward the end of the eighties, there would be a very different kind of attitude prevailing in this country vis à vis the idea of documentary because things were just beginning to gain momentum. If the economy hadn't made the changes that it had done, I'm sure that at the end of this decade, things would be a lot different. In which respect, I'm agreeing with you about your thesis about the prevalence of documentary."* [15]

Early in this decade, Turner was invited by Allan Porter to guest curate an August 1980 issue of *CAMERA*magazine which would be devoted to contemporary British photography. In the issue, Turner wanted to make a point about documentary photography in Britain:

> *"I wanted people to realise that a lot of what they think of as British photography isn't necessarily the complete picture, and also a lot of what people think of when they think about documentary in this country actually has roots and meanings in areas other than the one of the photographic document."* [16]

Ron McCormick is the only photographer who Turner and I have in common in our selections. While I admire much of the work in that issue of *CAMERA*, I feel it represents more of the younger generation's concerns than that of the younger middle-generation as I have chosen for my focus. As such, I believe that from a less involved, i.e., more objective point of

view (albeit less well informed than Turner's) -- which I perhaps now have living away from Great Britain -- my selection is actually more representative of the total spectrum. I don't think Turner would disagree with that, though I doubt that it would please him given his own personal preferences: "Because of my own interests and my own sensibility, I tend to be more interested in, on a personal basis, a number of American photographers than I am in a number of photographers in this country."[17]

Turner agreed that the differences which exist between Great Britain and the United States should be clearly established before indulging in photographic comparisons:

> *"What we have to recognise in this country, and some people don't I feel, is that what happens in this country is what happens in this country. And that's what it is. It's not a case of saying, 'Is there anybody as original as Brian Griffin working in America? Is there anybody here as good as Lewis Baltz? Why don't our middle generation of photographers make images that look like Lee Friedlander?' and so on, you can go on with these comparisons for hours. The fact is that they don't,we don't, you don't and there are reasons for this and those reasons should be looked at. Some people here feel a bit ashamed. And they shouldn't do. Absolutely not. It's different, that's all."*[18]

Turner went on to describe some characteristics of the British which set them apart from their American contemporaries:

> *"As a country, as a nation, we are best summed up in the kind of work that somebody like Tony Ray-Jones did, to a lesser extent you can see it in Patrick Ward's work, and Ian Berry and David Hurn. Amusement at the eccentricities that make us what we are. So that's what gets photographed. But it gets photographed from the same standpoint...that is one of being enormously sympathetic. I mean, there are no barbs there. Somebody like Garry Winogrand finding midgets on the street...none of that. If we are going to try and compare those two kinds of documentary, Americans are much more upfront and open and direct. If Winogrand thinks some lady over there has got nice tits, he's going to get right in there and do it because that's what he thinks. But the English are just not like that; the English are much more reserved; they're*

much more polite, they're more subtle...they have a much greater code of convention to work within and of course if affects their photography. As a whole the English do tend to be quite humanistic. That surely directs their photography."[19]

In further defense of the need to recognize these differences, Turner said in his introduction to the issue of *CAMERA:*

"From the United States came images of a kind to lend real authority to claims that the heights to which the medium might aspire lay in the realm of self-expression. A romance began: it still continues, but slavish imitation has given way to more serious contemplation. As borrowers we have discovered the true lack of consequence in waiting for that brief moment when Cumbria looks like California, or 42nd Street craziness can be found on the Charing Cross Road. We have also discovered a continued need for integrity (a word passed down from the photojournalists, discarded and now rediscovered). In short, if photography is to live up to the claims of depth in meaning and intelligence made by its champions, then it must portray the culture in which it demands to be placed."[20]

I would actually go one step further than Peter Turner in hoping that British photographers feel less ashamed of the realities which are theirs. Instead, I would implore them to value the rich traditions they are heir to and to confidently carry on their own course of evolution.

As I have previously expressed, it is not my intention in this paper to pigeon-hole British photographers in the categories that historical research has provided for us. My aim was rather to present a picture of the cross-section of contemporary British photography as it exists in the early 1980s. In so doing, I have put forth notions of what the possible roots of this work may be as well as suggesting possible shifts that may be coming in the future. Now I believe I have arrived at the point where I can put away the multi-colored notebooks...reportage, photojournalism, portraiture, landscape...and assemble all these pages

into one volume which has as its binding a concern for content as well as form, a respect for the past as well as an interest in the future. There will be people on both sides of the Atlantic who challenge the findings and comments throughout this paper, and rightly so. I am the first to claim that this study represents but one opinion. That it might provoke further dialogue on the subject would gratify me immensely and further justify its existence.

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APPENDIX: MY PERSONAL WORK

In the spring of 1969 my husband, Christopher, and I were presented with the possibility of leaving the United States. For me, the idea of moving to Portugal with the man who was to become a famous athlete there was a mixed blessing: I'd had humbler aims, like becoming an English Literature teacher. Still, it was an opportunity not to be missed and when we were given a new 35mm camera as a going-away present, I looked forward to months of happy snapping.

Unfortunately, the beginning wasn't all that happy. Though our location in the fishing village of Figueira da Foz was undeniably beautiful, I somehow couldn't relate to it. From one day to the next I'd been asked to change from an active and productive college student to a lady of leisure in a sun-drench foreign world where I didn't speak the language. I set myself to the task of learning Portuguese, of course, but it came slowly, especially in a social atmosphere where women were intended primarily to be seen, not heard. I was becoming more and more knotted up inside, finding my only release when taking pictures. Luckily, being photographed was a rare experience which the Portuguese peasants enjoyed; the pleasure was mutual. My camera became my sole means of communication. I took hundred of pictures of those beautiful faces.

Time passed and I had learned the language of the country. But in the process, of course, I had also begun to learn the language of the camera. It was no longer possible to set it aside even though it wasn't

'needed' in the same sense as when I first arrived. I even began considering the possibility of calling myself a photographer.

I approached the *Diario de Lisboa*, the best daily newspaper at that time, with a portfolio of my work. They loved it and did a big center spread of my pictures. When they learned that the much talked about *jogador/treinador* of basketball was my husband, they encouraged me to do sports coverage for them. I was thrilled. I went to most of the games anyway and was frankly pretty bored just filling up the front row bench with the other players' wives, so this suggestion provided me with a sort of mini-*raison d'etre*. The Portuguese women were mildly horrified by my 'unfeminine' involvement with the game; the other photographers, all male, felt threatened enough to suggest that everything I was doing was wrong. But I would stay up all night after those matches, processing, printing, then delivering the film by 4 a.m., and my pictures always appeared the next day in the paper. I loved it, for awhile. But it soon became repetitive, the fee was unbelievably low compared to the hours of work I was doing, and on top of it, I had to struggle to get paid.

In the spring of 1972, I did my last sports coverage. A series of games had been arranged between the American players in Portugal and the teams of the former Portuguese colonies of Mocambique and Angola, and I was asked to cover them. Not only would this be a nice swan-song for my short-lived career as a sports photographer, but it would also enable me to photograph black Africans in their own countries, or rather what were to soon become their own countries two years later with the overthrow of the dictatorship in continental Portugal.

The experience of being in southern Africa was incredible. The sounds, the tastes, the smells, all the feelings I was having belonged to a range of sensations I'd never before felt. But whenever I turned my camera towards the people to whom this environment rightfully belonged, I was rejected. They did not want to be photographed. They covered their faces with their hands, with newspapers, with anything. I felt the intruder that I obviously looked like to them. What gave me, a white woman from across the waters, the right to go there and take something of them away with me when I left? Though I in no way shared the sympathies of my government with respect to these countries, how were the people I wanted to photograph to know I wasn't an enemy? They were suspicious, and had every right to be. Their gestures and heartfelt reactions to my camera taught me more in a few days about what we call photojournalism or reportage than I'd ever had occasion to learn before. One did not just simply descend, capture on film and depart. It was then that I learned in a very concrete way that honest reportage or documentary photography takes commitment, involvement and years. I returned to Lisboa, sadder but wiser. A few months later I put together my first exhibition entitled *Imagens de Portugal* which included probably forty of my best portraits. But even while I was hanging it, I couldn't put out of my mind the questions that had been provoked by travelling in Africa. The show met with considerable success, travelling to a number of places in Portugal. And I was left wondering where to turn next.

The next two years conveniently avoided the whole question. We left Portugal and moved to France. It was my turn to be the bread-winner,

so I took a job just outside of Paris teaching English as a foreign language to a whole company of upper-middle-class executives.

My private world then began falling apart. On my twenty-sixth birthday, my father died and I suddenly had an uncomfortable understanding of the concept of age. Christopher and I, for a dozen confusing reasons, separated. And though it had been a lucrative position, I decided to leave my job which had become boring, leaving me always too exhausted to photograph. Two years had passed and I hadn't shot more than ten rolls of film.

So for the first time in my life, I was confronted with all the philosophical and existential questions we'd studied about in school: Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? These questions were real this time and my desire to respond to them opened the doors to a whole new approach to photography. For the next few years I found myself almost exclusively taking self-portraits.

Initially, I was very secretive about it. Slowly, I began sharing my results with others, usually apologetically...often in fear of condemnation for doing such 'self-indulgent' work. To my surprise, this criticism was very rarely leveled against me. Somehow, by being honest to my own feelings, my self-portraits managed to communicate something which others found it possible to relate to. In her introduction to *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing says, "At last I understood that the way over, or through this dilemma, the unease at writing about 'petty, personal problems' was to recognise that nothing is personal, in the sense that it is uniquely one's own. Writing about oneself, one is

writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions -- and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas -- can't be yours alone."

Coming across these words was a joyful experience for me. In her lucid and eloquent manner, Doris Lessing expressed concerns on writing about herself that were so like the concerns I had in photographing myself. With her unwitting support, I outgrew the fears that my work could only be of real value to myself.

The period of intense introspection, however, came to a natural pause in the autumn of 1977. By that time I had adequately confronted, if not answered, most of the questions I had been facing. The pictures I'd produced enjoyed considerable exposure, as I mentioned in the preface. *Arena*, a BBCII transmission dedicated to the arts, featured my work on one of their programs, the Galerie Fiolet in Amsterdam published *Time-Release*, a limited edition portfolio of fifteen original prints, and I was offered a number of exhibitions and publications both in Europe and America. With all this attention, I was both gratified and slightly worried. I didn't want to continue taking self-portraits merely because they had been successful in getting my name in print. Some of the concerns I'd dealt with in the beginning were still very much a part of me, of course, like the pictures relating to the issue of motherhood. Some concerns, however, belonged more to my past and I didn't intend to resurrect them artificially for the sake of others. A time would perhaps come again for self-portraiture, but in 1977 I was ready for a change.

I moved from Paris to London where I eventaully began teaching part-time in the Photography Department at the London College of Printing.

This provided me with enough income to survive and enough time to continue working on my own pictures. I slowly began turning the camera away from myself, sometimes using the microcosm/macrocosm framework of the automobile for help. I responded to the layered sense of reality this gave me while benefitting from the shelter of the forms in my field of vision. When I was finally ready to do without these, I got out of the car and, camera in hand, confronted a less personal, structureless world, which I sometimes tried to personalize, sometimes structure.

In May, 1979 I had an exhibition at the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield, England. It was a large exhibition which I called *Quiet Places* because looking over the pictures I'd produced over the ten year period I'd been photographing, it seemed to me that my favorites were all quiet images. These are the words I used for the introduction:

> *It was ten years ago in May when I first started taking pictures. That space of time has allowed me to live in four countries and learn many new languages, both verbal and visual. In the beginning, the world was a window to me and whatever I saw through that pane of glass was fair game for my film. As time went on I began seeing my reflection in the window until it eventually became a mirror. Finding visual expression of the emotions I felt inside myself then pre-occupied me for several years. Most recently, I've been trying to integrate the two visions by retaining the strength of what I've learned from each.*
>
> *The pictures are drawn from that ten-year period. They reflect some of the concerns I've dealt with personally...concerns like presence and absence...like singularity, duality or plurality...and the delicate balance that usually exists between interior and exterior realities. In choosing which pictures to hang here, I noticed that the ones which separated themselves from all the others had a very peaceful quality about them. Hopefully this exhibition will communicate the contentment I have felt from wandering among these quiet places.*

Shortly after that exhibition came down, I moved back to the United States. The decision to do so, however, was not really my idea. I had reconciled many differences with my husband, Christopher -- was was by now a musician -- and we were living together with other people in a 'squat', or occupied house, in London. For his career, it seemed essential that he return to the States. In fact, he'd already stayed in Europe longer than he wanted to on my behalf. I had a strong suspicion that our renewed, and healthier, relationship wouldn't survive having the Atlantic Ocean between us, so I decided to accompany him. It was not an easy decision and surely not a very fashionable one in these times. But I'd had enough gratification from my work in photography to know that that wasn't all there was to living. As important as it was for me (and continues to be), my career as a photographer was not about to call all the shots.

The first few months in America were, as predicted, spent in a state of semi-culture-shock. After I'd lived in Cambridge for three months, I received a letter from the London College of Printing in England asking me to come back and teach a three-week workshop for them. I hadn't found any similar work here and besides, it was too tempting to resist, so I went back for a month. On my subsequent return to the States, I decided that if I was going to live in America, I needed to get a Master's Degree so that I could be eligible for the kind of higher-level teaching I'd been doing in England. Within a few days of the application deadline, I learned about the program at M.I.T. It would mean going deeply in debt, which I'd never done, but it seemed to be the American way so I took a

gamble and enrolled. Besides, all those years of living abroad had me, as well, cognizant of the myth that 'it was all happening in America' so M.I.T. seemed as suitable a place as any to jump in the deep end and find out.

As I write this, it seems incredible that two years have passed since that time. It's too soon for me to evaluate much of what has happened as a result of my M.I.T. experience but with respect to my own personal work, it passed through many phases during that span of time. After a year of what amounted to considerable experimentation for me -- primarily at the Visible Language Workshop and the Center for Advanced Visual Studies -- I felt somewhat dissatisfied with the fruits of my efforts. The processes I'd exposed myself to were often intriguing, yet my results always appeared so unresolved. For my second year, I decided to make my inquiries more manageable: I set out to perfect my use of the 4x5 inch view camera by doing a project that was somehow meaningful to me personally.

As I've already intimated, I no longer felt the inclination to do self-portraits. Yet, in the midst of all the de-personalized, high-tech imagery I was witnessing, I felt compelled to connect with human beings. I began an ambitious project whereby I would do portraits of the many different kinds of people who live in Cambridge -- from the Nobel prize winners to the recent immigrants from Greece. It would be an investigation akin to that which August Sander did in Germany in the thirties.

Within a short period of time, however, it became obvious to me that one year was not enough time for this project. In having to narrow my

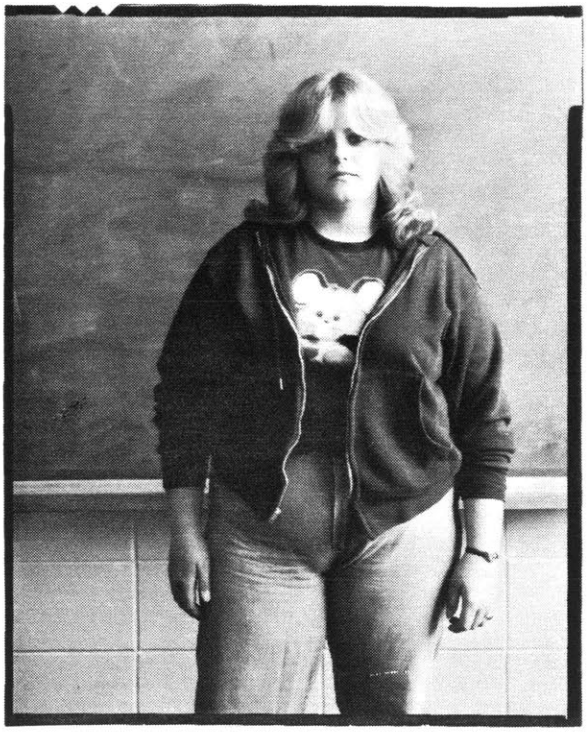
focus, I looked to the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, the only public high school in the city, as a kind of microcosm of Cambridge itself. The precarious status of public education today concerns me greatly and any vote I could cast in its favor was of interest to me. Besides, by making portraits where the students agreed to be photographed, I no longer had to confront the problems I'd encountered long ago in Africa of 'stealing' something from them.

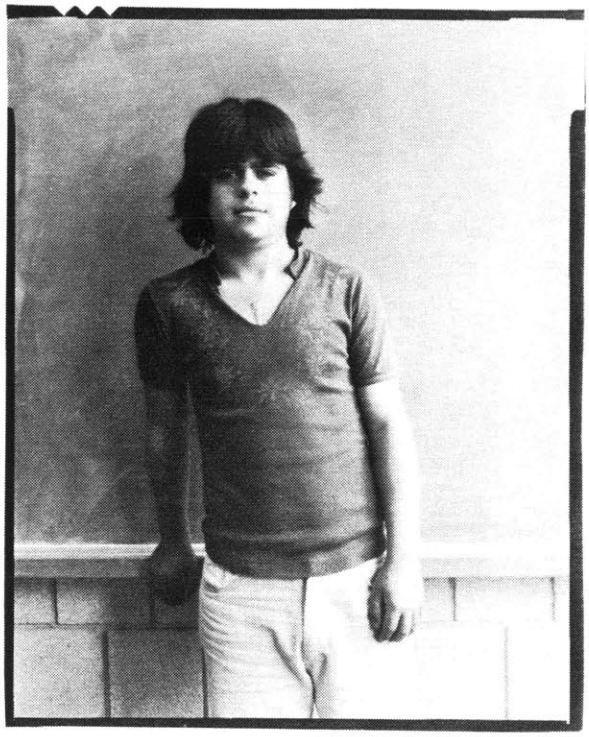
Twenty five of the pictures were eventually hung for my thesis exhibition, of which six are being reproduced here. The final selection included more girls than boys and more whites than blacks. There was a healthy percentage of immigrants, and very few 'rich kids'. Of course, I had no idea whether the students I photographed were rich or not, but statistics told me that most of the wealthy Cambridge families sent their

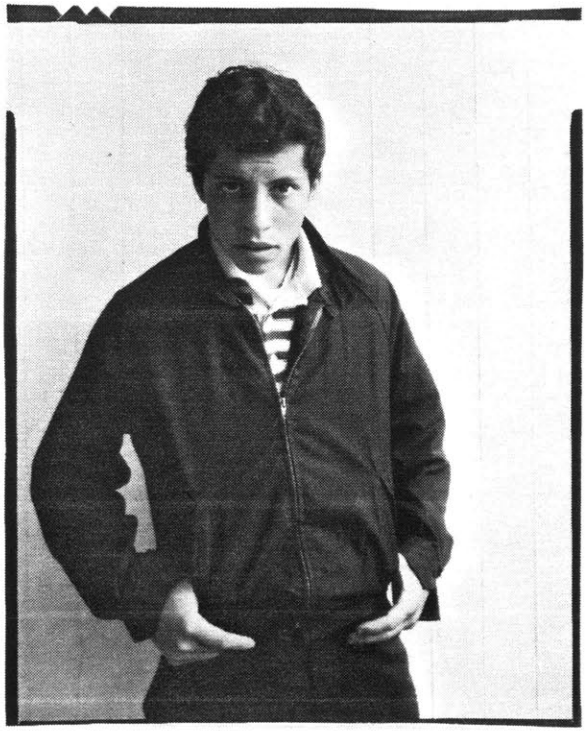
children to private schools and 'visually' this appears somewhat confirmed in the high school atmosphere.

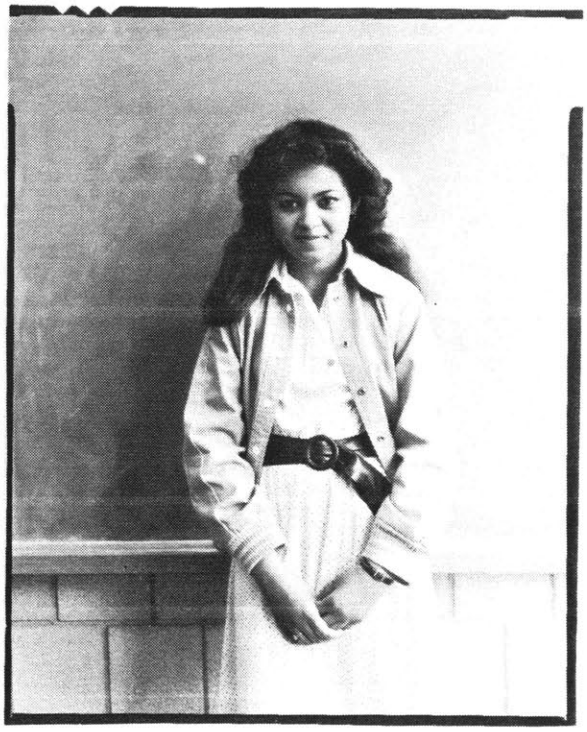
I never asked the students to smile or not to smile for my pictures. They alone decided how to arrange themselves and what expression to wear. I only asked that they look at the lens of my camera. In that way they would be looking directly at the eventual viewer of the photograph.

Though I could claim August Sander as a conceptual influence in the production of these images, I would have to cite Irving Penn as the stylistic influence. Through an appreciation of his *Worlds in a Small Room*, I came to firmly believe in the power of both natural lighting, with its three dimensional clarity, and simple backgrounds, which allow the subject to come forth. In the high school environment, I came to see the blackboards, lockers and brick walls as a kind of









seamless paper at times. The lighting, however, proved to be somewhat of a challenge: often I was forced to use inconveniently long exposures and wide apertures which occasionally interferred with my desire for sharp detail throughout the image.

In one sense, I see this as a finished project. I think in many ways I have accomplished what I set out to do and I believe that my pictures convey the strength and individuality of adolescence I was hoping to achieve.

Yet in another sense, perhaps this is only the first chapter in a new volume of work. I am still interested in extending the scope to include all Cantabrigians. As I complete my program at M.I.T., however, I am seven months pregnant and unable to carry around all of the heavy equipment necessary for view camera work. The immediate future holds many changes in store for me, and the present is almost too busy to witness. In another ten years, I'll be far better qualified to comment on my personal work of the early 1980s.

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