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**EYE and CAMERA : VOICE and  
TEXT**

**THE INTERACTION OF  
PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES AND  
LITERARY TEXTS IN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL  
DOCUMENTARY STUDIES AND  
THE WORK OF  
GLENN BUSCH**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

*Eye and Camera: Voice and Text* is a general enquiry into ethnography, photography and the composite or hybrid forms of ethnographic photography and social documentary photography. It consists of three theoretical discussion chapters and one extended case study of a major practitioner's work.

Chapter one discusses ethnography as a literary genre. Chapter two, the more important, attempts at providing a theory of what kind of medium photography is and how it produces meaning. Chapter three begins by considering what a specifically ethnographic and social documentary photography is and does before concluding with a survey of several major projects which have made considerable use of photography for the purpose of ethnographic and social documentary understanding.

The concerns of the first three chapters are then brought to bear in a fourth and final chapter devoted to the New Zealand social documentary photographer Glenn Busch. Busch's work (and that of two of his former pupils) has been chosen because of its clear social focus and because he uses combined visual and verbal means of presentation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Eye and Camera: Voice and Text consists of three discussion chapters on the subjects of ethnography, photography, social documentary and ethnographic photography and an extended case study of a New Zealand photographer whose work is addressed in terms of these areas. The overall aim of the first three chapters is to provide a set of open-ended exploratory surveys and discussions of recent theoretical enquiries into the fundamental characteristics of ethnography, photography and social documentary as specific signifying forms.

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s there has been a growing interest in the rhetorical stances, devices, and descriptive strategies, which mark ethnography as a specific literary genre. This critique of textual authority scrutinised the structuring aspects of textual form and the dual relationship of the ethnographer to his or her field experience and the wider discipline of anthropology. It signalled a move away from overarching paradigms (e.g. Functionalism, Structuralism, Cognitive Anthropology, etc.) to the very mechanics of anthropology's basic practices themselves. The problems and difficulties of the field encounter and the process of rendering the results of that encounter into textual form were under examination as never before. My first chapter, "the modes of ethnographic writing", looks at some of the most important features of 'traditional' (or more precisely 'realist') ethnographic writing and at recent modernist / postmodernist attempts to move beyond the limitations of that hitherto and still largely dominant style of writing culture. The chapter focuses exclusively on written ethnography but many of its points apply to or have implications for visual ethnography as well.

Furthermore, just as there could scarcely be said to be a watertight body of theory of ethnography as a literary - scientific symbolic form, but rather a set of useful and suggestive insights, so, likewise, there is no definitive, systematized theory of photography. Photography has proved to be particularly resistant to any such attempt to pin it down and compartmentalize it. In place of this we have a number of flexible paradigms of photographic investigation which can be neatly summed up by means of two pairs of non-binary oppositions: representation versus signification; and ideology versus discourse.

In chapter two, "Photography: representation and signification", I use the first opposition to divide up and discuss a continuum of various positions on the nature or culture of photography as medium. For many theorists the terms representation and signification are either synonymous or, at the very least, imply each other in their operations. Even so, a broad distinction can be made between those theories which stress the 'natural' and mimetic qualities of photography and those which stress cultural and semiotic qualities. The former, 'theories of representation' in my schema, tend to separate photography off from other, earlier, autographic forms of image making on the grounds that it generates 'natural' signs in which signifier, signified and referent are elided. The latter, 'theories of signification', by contrast, see photographs as cultural artifacts shaped by the determining actions of various kinds of code.

When we move from this first opposition to the second, ideology versus discourse, we find two major proponents of a semiotic paradigm in photographic studies, Roland Barthes and Victor Burgin (who combines it with psychoanalysis). These two theorists share an interest in laying bare the ideological effects of photography and photographs. For them the specific codes, devices and signs produced by photography all work to construct certain subject-positions for the viewer who is thereby connected to a set or sets of ideologies circulating within a society. There is a two-way process: photography as a medium and photographers as manipulators of its codes disseminate imagery into a variety of public and private arenas where it acts upon and in turn is acted upon by members of a society.

In contrast to semiotic thinkers with their strong interest in the specifics of photography's signifying processes and their search for the subtle possibilities of ideological effect, those I label adherents of the discursive (or in the case of Pierre Bourdieu, the sociological) paradigm, shift attention from photography as a specific medium with specific properties and effects and subsume it within much larger ensembles of intelligibility. And it is within these larger ensembles that photography which can justifiably be called ethnographic and/or social documentary is most often to be found. My discussion of Bourdieu's sociological theory of photography is located in chapter two where it provides something of a contrast to Barthes's and Burgin's positions, but has something in common with John Berger's call for a

"radial" treatment of the photograph. I discuss the discursive paradigm in chapter three, after making some general points about documentary and before entering into an examination of the specific qualities of visual ethnography and social documentary photography, and before providing several pertinent case studies.

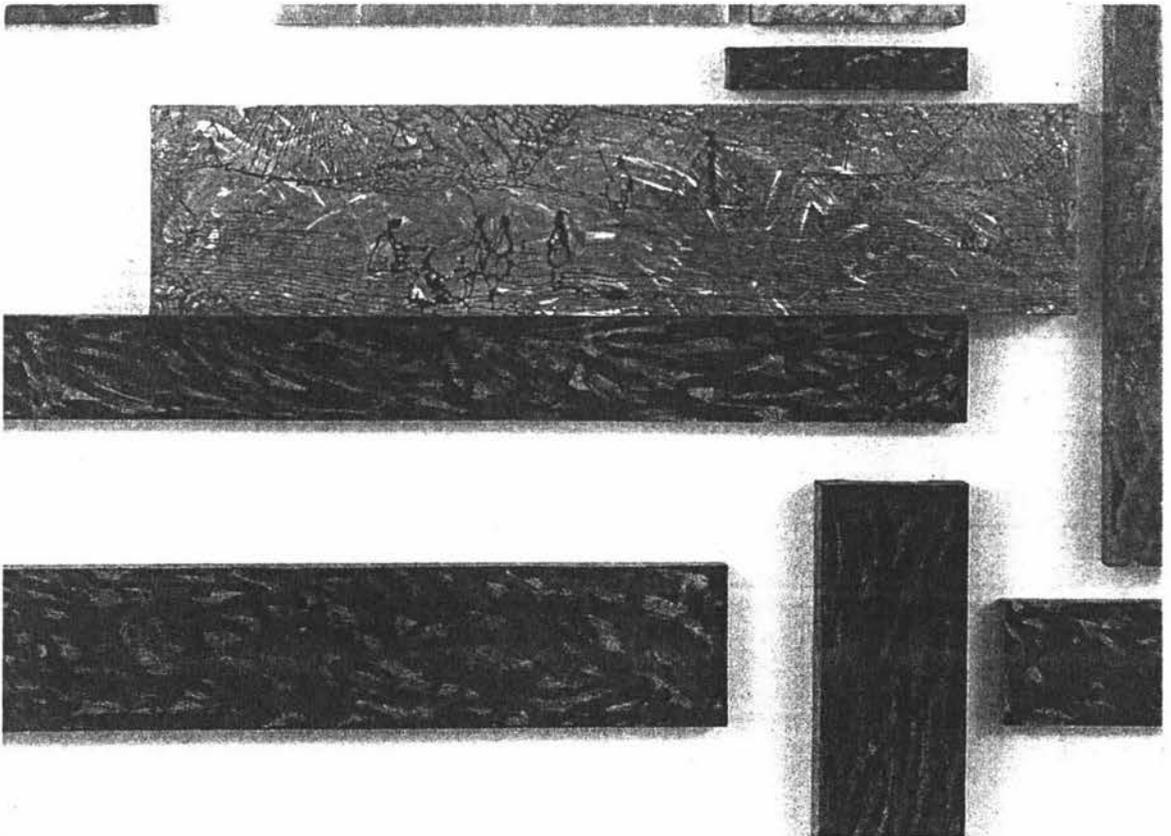
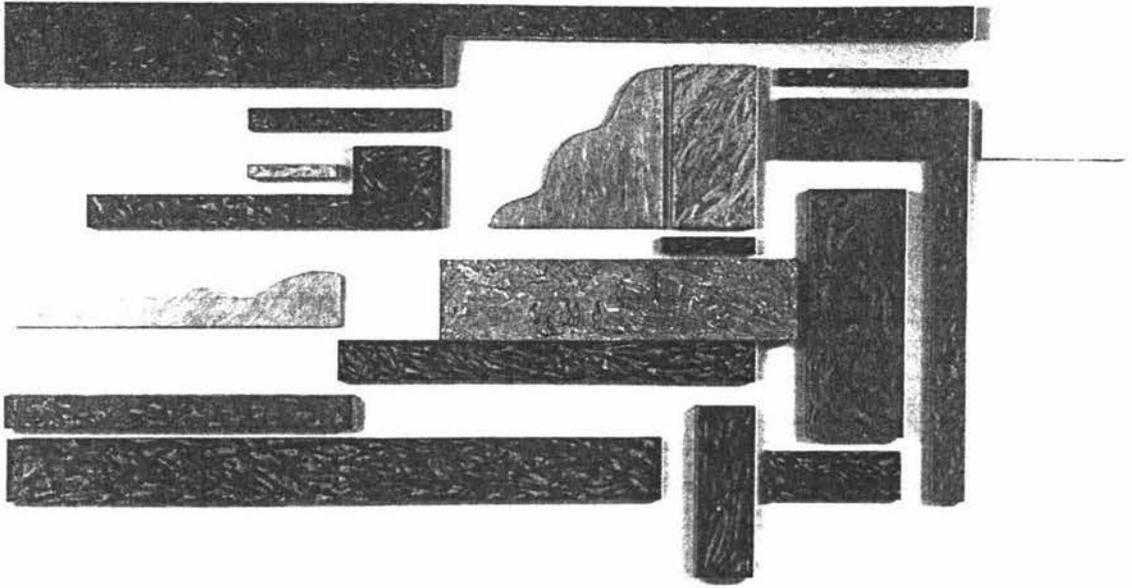
To summarize, chapters one to three amount to a box of theoretical tools, placed at handy reach for the reader interested in investigating the connections between ethnography, photography and social documentary. The first chapter looks at ethnography as a generic and textual form. Chapter two introduces the medium of photography by surveying and commenting on the multifarious theories of the last several decades. And chapter three, "photography: social documentary and ethnographic practices", examines how the ethnographic impulse and the photographic impulse have come together in theory (e.g. Jay Ruby and Karl Heider's work) and practice (e.g. Robert Flaherty, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead). The aim of these three chapters is not to propound a watertight theory of ethnographic analysis which will then be applied systematically in chapter four to the photographic books of Glenn Busch. No such all encompassing theory or model exists nor is it necessary or even desirable that it should. Rather, the aim is to establish the broad contours of the field within which the thesis as a whole operates, in particular, the analyses of chapter four. As a loose tool-kit of theories it is deliberately non-synthetic and does not try to smooth out the fissures that are apparent between the various ideas and concepts it introduces. It is the task of chapter four to achieve some kind of synthesis of some of the material of chapters one to three in a particular practice of reading the works of one photographer / oral historian and his followers.

The photographer in question is Glenn Busch, whose *Working Men* and *You are my darling Zita* are given thorough analyses in the course of the chapter, the former as an attempt to represent the work and life of a group of heavy industrial workers in the Christchurch of the early 1980s, the latter as an in-depth investigation of a group of elderly peoples' reflections on the significance of their life histories.

Since the beginning of his career as a serious photographer, Busch has produced these two major books, both of which combine photographs and interview-based

texts. In terms of subject matter (work and the life cycle) and methodology (social portraiture and oral history) these books clearly aspire to be contributions to visual anthropology/sociology. My analysis of Busch's oeuvre takes this aspiration seriously and describes how the books attempt to realize it and assesses their success in doing so. And while attentive to their aesthetic properties and Busch's status as an artist, it treats the books as more than purely art objects.

Busch's work is quite wide ranging, both in the issues it raises and in reference to other, comparable work; and because of this I have constructed a very broad context for the discussion. This context reprises key elements of chapters one to three (for example, the theme of social exploration) but at the same time introduces new photographic and sociological reference points (for example, social portraiture and the sociological investigation of work). Overall, the chapter serves to bring the thesis to a satisfactory conclusion by both testing and extending several of the theoretical matters raised in the first three chapters.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MODES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING

#### Introduction

In recent years, in what has come to be known as 'Cultural Studies', there has been a strong drive to adopt ethnography as an appropriate methodological tool. Thus sociologists have offered us ethnographies of sub-cultures, educationists ethnographies of the school. The assumption has been that ethnography is nothing more nor less than the most intensive form of participant-observation and that it can be crystalized as a method which will travel without difficulty across disciplinary boundaries<sup>1</sup>. There is much to recommend in this cultural studies appropriation of ethnography which has already produced some excellent studies<sup>2</sup>. It must be pointed out, however, that in this context the term ethnography carries a rather limited meaning which appears to be passing into the common parlance of social science. In what follows, I hope to suggest some of the layers of significance which the term has acquired in anthropological writing.

The main purpose of this opening chapter is to outline and discuss some of the important questions which have come out of anthropology's recent moment of self-questioning. A self-questioning that involves both the manner in which anthropologists play out their field encounters and how they represent the results of those encounters in textual form. This is the only place where I pursue a general enquiry into the specifically anthropological practice of ethnography. The next two chapters consist of another general enquiry, into photography as a form of representation and/or signification (chapter two); and of an examination of what forms a specifically social documentary and/or ethnographic photography has taken (chapter three).

From the outset, it is important to stress that ethnography is not simply one, albeit powerful, research technique among others. Confinement to a circumscribed field location and immersion in the way of life of its people are prerequisites for the carrying out of successful ethnography. This necessitates a dislocation of the anthropologist from his/her habitual

PLATE I



THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S TENT ON THE BEACH OF NU'AGASI

This illustrates the manner of life among the natives, described on p. 6. Note, with reference to Chs. IV and V) the dug-out log of a large canoe beside the tent, and the *masima* canoe, beached under palm leaves to the left.

PLATE II



THE CHIEF'S LISIGA (PERSONAL HUT) IN OMARAKANA

To'uluwa, the present chief, is standing in front (cf. Ch. II, Div. V) ; to the left, among the palms, is the Ethnographer's tent (see p. 6), with a group of natives squatting in front of it.

cultural reference points in an attempt to penetrate other realities. The ethnographer is, therefore, engaged in the hermeneutic project of understanding and interpreting an unfamiliar or defamiliarised and often radically different cultural universe. Consequently, the instrumental image of a researcher treating a field location as a social laboratory where data can be obtained and tested in conjunction with other methods is not appropriate.

Furthermore, in another sense, ethnography is predominantly a textual form for the elaboration of knowledge acquired in the field. It is the distinctive literary-scientific genre evolved by anthropologists to regulate the assimilation of new knowledge into their discipline. I mean by this that it is a literary institution responsible for maintaining the balance between repetition and difference which marks genre production in any field. Each new ethnography repeats the formal moves which signal to a readership an addition to the genre but at the same time variations in subject matter and interpretation secure its difference, its particular contribution.

The emergence of ethnography as the most appropriate vehicle for anthropological knowledge is commonly held to coincide with the publication of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922. Since that time ethnography has come to refer to an extended period of encounter with another culture ('doing ethnography') by an anthropologist who subsequently returns to his/her country of origin to produce a monographic study ('writing ethnography'). The second stage requires the anthropologist to press the concrete particularities of the field study into a universalising frame intelligible to both other specialists and a heterogeneous 'Western' audience. This must be done in such a way as to avoid both an overly abstract and an 'in-my-village' account. Gyorgy Markus summarizes the task of the ethnographer thus: "...he (*sic*) must make this culture intelligible with a universal validity; and he must do this with the conceptual and methodological instruments of his own science; to accomplish this, he must stand simultaneously both inside and outside both the foreign culture and his own."<sup>3</sup>

### **Ethnographic realism**

Marcus and Cushman label the dominant form of ethnographic writing, "Ethnographic realism" which they define as ..."a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a

whole world or form of life". They categorise its basic conventions into the following: "1. The narrative structure of total ethnography; 2. The unintrusive presence of the ethnographer in the text; 3. Common denominator people; 4. The marking of field work experience; 5. The focus on everyday life situations; 6. Representation of the native point of view; 7. The stylistic extrapolation of particular data; 8. Embellishment by jargon; 9. Contextual exegesis of native concepts and discourse."<sup>4</sup>

These are all important features of ethnographic works but something more needs to be said about Marcus and Cushman's initial definition of realism which they present without elaboration. David Lodge defines realism with reference to literature as follows: "the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to descriptions of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture"<sup>5</sup>. This definition has the merit of directing us to the conventional character of realistic writing. It implies that we come to recognise a piece of writing as realistic because our perceptions and expectations have been shaped by prior exposure to related examples. It is this rather than an imputed correspondence between a narrative and a set of actualities external to it which accounts for a work's alleged realism.

However, we might object to Lodge's definition on the grounds that he conflates too many disparate written forms under the heading "non-literary"; and also that it tends to suggest that "experience" in non-literary texts is considerably less mediated. Matters of personal style apart, most historical narratives contain more literary figures than the average piece of journalistic reportage. There is also more freedom in historical writing (although it is often not taken) to move between empirical description and interpretive explanation<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, ethnographic writing is another 'non-literary' mode of Western culture but one which has offered very little, until recently, in the way of representation of experience. In fact, the overall aim has been to avoid an account centred in the experience of any one participant in the fieldwork encounter, whether anthropologist or informant. The pursuit of realist description and analysis of an alien culture has been largely guided by criteria derived from the disembodied natural sciences<sup>7</sup>. The form of the ethnographic monograph, however, has remained inescapably literary and it has not proved desirable to render the result of fieldwork into a straightforward scientific report. Anthropologists have, until recently, rarely given much space to the recounting of their fieldwork experience and even less to active reflection

upon it<sup>8</sup>. When an ethnographer decides to write up fieldwork experiences in the form of a novel, the contrast with a conventional monograph is very striking. Napoleon Chagnon devoted the first chapter of his study of the Yanomamo<sup>9</sup> to an account of the difficulties and problems he met within the field and the strategies he devised to overcome them. But even this, which stands out in the literature for its illuminating frankness, does not match the phenomenological density of Florinda Donner's novelistic rendition of her experience within the same society. One could argue that *Shabono*<sup>10</sup>, like *The Fierce People* before it, attempts "to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life" but it does not follow the path of Marcus and Cushman's nine categories of convention. It is, nevertheless, a thoroughly realist work. Not, as David Lodge would have it, because it "approximates closely to description of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture"; it can only directly be compared with the first chapter of Chagnon's book even though the latter offers incidents and examples for analysis rather than continuous narrative. It is because *Shabono* conforms to the canon of literary realism that it is able to convey a convincing portrait of life in another culture to both an anthropological and a general audience.<sup>11</sup>

The goal of classic realist representations is mimesis, a convincing imitation of external phenomena. In Platonic philosophy, as Gerard Genette has shown, only an imperfect imitation is possible because a perfect one would be the thing itself. It is by means of the imperfections of diegesis (narrative construction of a fabricated world) that the verisimilitude of mimesis is achieved. Genette sees narrative as inclusive of two types of representation which are proportionally blended in any one instance: narration and description. "Narration", he writes, "links itself to actions or events considered as pure processes, and by this it puts emphasis on the temporal and dramatic aspects of narrative ... description, because it lingers over objects and beings considered in their simultaneity and because it envisages the actions themselves as scenes, seems to suspend the flow of time and to contribute to spreading out the narrative in space"<sup>12</sup>. Roland Barthes provides a good example of this realist description with his discussion of Flaubert's view of Rouen in *Madame Bovary*. "The entire description", writes Barthes, "is constructed so as to associate Rouen with a painting: it is a painted scene taken on by language"<sup>13</sup>. It is this descriptive pole of narrative I would maintain that has been especially important in shaping the characteristics of ethnographic diegesis. In this way, ethnography has mimicked the paradox of narrative painting by bringing about the spatialization of temporal elements in a series of discrete scenes.



James Clifford has argued that the classic mode of ethnographic realism is "...based on the construction of a cultural tableau vivant designed to be seen from a single vantage point, that of the writer and reader"<sup>14</sup>. He takes Malinowski's frontispiece to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, a photograph entitled "A ceremonial Act of the Kula", as paradigmatic of this mode of representation. Malinowski and all those who have followed his example secure the authority of their ethnographies by re-presenting typical scenes from an ongoing drama of participant-observation. Clifford suggests that this makes it possible for the reader to be hailed thus: "You are there, because I was there"<sup>15</sup>. The frontispiece, in common with other photographs placed throughout the book, acts as a marker of credibility which provides support for Malinowski's written narrative, centred in an account of the Kula exchange system. Trobriand symbolic exchange is thus rendered intelligible from the perspective of a transcendental subject whose narrative compresses moments of a diachronic field experience into a sequence of static frames. The result is a kind of frozen music designed to reveal the contours of a pre-existent reality.

Pierre Bourdieu and Johannes Fabian have contributed two of the most powerful critiques of this major tendency in ethnographic writing. For Bourdieu the problem lies with an approach he calls "objectivism". "Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a 'point of view' on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges. This point of view is the one afforded by high positions in the social structure, from which the social world appears as a representation (in the sense of idealist philosophy but also as used in painting or the theatre) and practices are no more than 'executions', stage parts, performances of scores, or the implementing of plans"<sup>16</sup>.

Where Bourdieu emphasizes the disembodied abstractions of the observer's stance with his notion of "objectivism", Fabian focuses on the observer's specular biases with his critique of what he terms "visualism". In a passage which begins by examining Levi-Strauss's view of the ethnographer, Fabian proposes the following: "Observation conceived as the essence of fieldwork implies, on the side of the ethnographer, a contemplative stance. It invokes the naturalist watching an experiment. It also calls for a native society that would, ideally at least,



A CEREMONIAL ACT OF THE KULA

hold still like a tableau vivant. Both images are ultimately linked up with a visual root metaphor of knowledge. ...the illusion of simultaneity (as between the elements of a picture that is contemplated, or between the visual object and the act of its contemplation) may lead to utter disregard for the active, productive nature of fieldwork and its inevitable implication in historical situations and real, political contradictions”<sup>17</sup>.

Notice that the tableau vivant, advanced by Clifford as the key trope in ethnographic realism, recurs in the above passage from Fabian; the sense in which Bourdieu uses spectacle and representation in his passage is likewise strictly comparable. It is worth noting that this tendency, revealed by these three writers, is not peculiar to ethnography but pervades Western rationality itself. Fabian defines the wider connotation of visualism as... “a cultural, ideological bias toward vision as the ‘noblest sense’ and toward geometry, qua graphic-spatial conceptualization, as the most ‘exact’ way of communicating knowledge”<sup>18</sup>. In a similar vein, Stephen Tyler has shown through the etymology of Indo-European languages that the visual has long been ingrained as the dominant sensory metaphor for understanding of all kinds. He makes the claim that “...science and our common sense are both metaphysics of substance; our science is but a sophisticated version of our naive physicalism, and both are derived from and are sustained by the metaphysical hegemony of the visual”<sup>19</sup>. He then posits two ways of conceiving thought in Western metaphysics, “...mimesis, thinking as representation (visual) versus kinesis, thinking as communication (verbal)”<sup>20</sup>. It is the former which has dominated and either overwhelmed or reduced the latter to a version of itself.

The consequences of ethnographic realism’s conformity to a visualist mode of mimetic representation have been severe for its temporal and historical dimensions. Fabian has characterized anthropology as primarily an allochronic discipline which works to deny coevalness between self and other. By casting ethnography as “...a science of other men in another time”<sup>21</sup>, anthropology has denied the co-temporality of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies and prevented a dialectical confrontation between the two, grounded in a shared historical moment. The terms self and other carry here a significance which goes beyond actual individuals involved in any given fieldwork encounter. The ethnographer, as Kevin Dwyer has highlighted, is a representative of Western interests and owes his presence in ‘other cultures’ to a structured inequality between the West and non-West. But at the same time the ethnographic enterprise places the anthropologist and by implication the society he

stands for, in a position of vulnerability and openness to challenge by the 'other'. This challenge, however, has not often been met because ethnographers have taken refuge in what Dwyer, rhyming with Bourdieu and Fabian, calls the contemplative stance. This acts to stifle the 'voice' of the 'other' and prevents a problematizing of the ethnographer's own subjectivity.<sup>22</sup>

### **Textual strategies of ethnographic realism**

I have outlined the consequences of anthropology's adherence to the principal genre of ethnographic realism for the shape of the discipline in the previous section. I now want to look more closely at some of the textual strategies which have formed classic ethnography. Ethnography is an intellectual institution for the production of statements, descriptions, discourse and representations of cultures other than the 'Western' ones from which it emanates. We might begin to unpack this proposition by regarding ethnography, in terms of the early Barthes, as a mode of writing, located somewhere between the broad horizon of language and the idiosyncrasies of style. "It is not granted to the writer", says Barthes, "to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms. It is under the pressure of history and tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established"<sup>23</sup>. This should immediately alert us to the historical contingency of ethnography as a special genre, a mode of writing which began to establish itself as the most appropriate vehicle for anthropological knowledge approximately seventy five years ago.

James Boon has recently reminded us that "one trait of symbolic anthropology is the re-recognition that ethnographic description and ethnological comparison occurs as writing, that is, at a symbolic remove from whatever immediacy or presence ethnography presumes to recall"<sup>24</sup>. In order to isolate something we have come to call a 'culture' from an ethnographer's disparate field experiences, it is necessary to perform two operations: displacement and exaggeration. Displacement refers us back to the point made earlier that the ethnographer must stand simultaneously inside and outside both his/her own and the host culture. We might note here that displacement is also a hallmark of the deconstructive enterprise which promotes the unsettling of all fixed identities in textual sites<sup>25</sup>. "An exaggeration of differences"<sup>26</sup>, Boon's definition of the effect of ethnographic writing, is in accord with the semiotic principle that meaning is diacritical; it emerges from contrastive

relations between signs in particular configurations<sup>27</sup>. This is a very different perspective from the widely held notion that a 'culture' is a detachable essence, embedded in the integument of a geographical and social area. The latter view chimes with what Roland Barthes, in a literary vein, calls a work (some content contained between the covers of a book) - whereas the former is comparable with his concept of the text (a space constructed and negotiated between a reader and forms of writing).<sup>28</sup>

Boon's comments steer us away from the documenting obsessions of empiricism towards a view of ethnography as the making of fictional worlds, suggested by Clifford Geertz. Geertz sees the doing of ethnography as akin to the reading of a text by proposing to consider meaningful action itself as a kind of text. He puts it thus: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emanations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shared behaviour"<sup>29</sup>.

James Clifford defines ethnographies as "...complex realistic fictions derived from research in historical circumstances that can never be fully controlled"<sup>30</sup>. The adjective 'realistic' in the term "realistic fiction" points to the major constraint which has surrounded the doing of ethnography: the imperative to capture the 'reality' or 'truth' of the culture and society under investigation. This has often been understood in absolute, unmediated terms rather than as a generic prescription of "ethnographic realism". It is here that the notion of fiction as an act of fabricating or making an artifact as opposed to fiction as the converse of 'fact', assumes an importance<sup>31</sup>. As argued earlier in this chapter, the 'real' is an effect which flows from our mechanisms for constructing it. It does not lie 'out there' fully formed but hidden, waiting to be uncovered by those with the sharpest vision<sup>32</sup>. Thus attempts to expose the 'falsity' of previous anthropological studies such as Derek Freeman's notorious attack on Margaret Mead are misplaced<sup>33</sup>. It makes little theoretical sense for Freeman - but a lot in terms of the publicity generated for him by the popular press - to advance his view as more adequate to the 'truth' of Samoan society. The reason for this is supplied by James Clifford in his excellent review of Freeman's book. "To falsify a powerful cultural fiction", he writes, "one must substitute a potent and persuasive counter-fiction"<sup>34</sup>.

Although it bears little or no resemblance to an orthodox (indeed any) ethnography, Roland Barthes's *Empire of signs* throws into relief the question of fictionality which surrounds any attempt at writing cultural difference. Early in the book he declares: "I can... - though in no way claiming to represent or to analyse reality itself (those being the major gestures of western discourse) - isolate somewhere in the world (faraway) a certain number of features (a term employed in linguistics), and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan"<sup>35</sup>. For Barthes, an encounter with 'Japan' offers an opportunity to rub against a different subjectivity which is held in tension against habitual movements of recuperation to familiar categories. The book follows an aleoteric chain of Japanese signifiers, teasing out their meanings, opposing them to Western 'analogues', etc. Barthes's choice of topics include: Chopsticks; food; pachinko (a slot machine game); the lay-out of the city and its streets; packages and packaging; bunraku dolls; bowing; zen; the haiku; eyelids and yet other topics. The 'Japan' of *Empire of signs* is, in sum, a collection of re-writings of the already written texts which make up the mosaic of Japanese life. A fabrication upon a fabrication.

It is quite evident that Barthes's book violates most of Marcus and Cushman's nine points of "total ethnography"<sup>36</sup>. First of all, instead of providing a narrative structure, the book moves by means of discontinuous jump cuts. In place of the "unintrusive presence of the ethnographer in the text", an engaging dialogue with the reader is established in a conversational voice. "Common denominator people" do not appear (actual people do not feature at all) nor is any information given about the "fieldwork experience". A large amount of space, however, is devoted to the "everyday" in an effort to illuminate the "native point of view".

Neither an ethnography nor a travel book, *Empire of signs* unsettles any notion of 'Japan' or the 'West' as fixed totalities by concentrating its meditations on significant cultural fragments. It is a suggestive model of what a semiotic writing of another culture might look like.

### **The mechanics of ethnographic writing**

I now want to examine the mechanics of ethnographic writing in the light of Emile Benveniste's linguistic theory. One of Benveniste's more important contributions has been to

open up the question of subjectivity in language. This has involved the development of explanatory concepts on the 'parole' side of the Saussurian binary distinction between 'langue' and 'parole'<sup>37</sup>. Benveniste begins by postulating a further distinction between *enonciation* (enunciation) and *enonce* (enounced). The former refers to the means by which a statement or utterance is produced whereas the latter refers to the statement thus produced. It is the "pronominal" forms of language (I and you) which owe their effectivity solely to forms of enunciation. Benveniste points out that: "There is no concept 'I' that incorporates all the I's that are uttered at every moment in the mouths of all speakers, in the sense that there is a concept 'tree' to which all the individual uses of tree refer"<sup>38</sup>. The pronominals are therefore empty forms which exist to enable speakers to stake out shifting positions for themselves in the to and fro of direct linguistic interchange.

Benveniste goes on to distinguish between two different modes of enunciation: *histoire* (history) and *discours* (discourse). By discourse he means "...every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer"<sup>39</sup>. History, on the other hand, "...excludes every 'autobiographical' linguistic form. The historian will never say *Je* or *Tu* or *maintenant*, because he will never make use of the formal apparatus of discourse, which resides primarily in the relationship of the persons *Je: Tu*. Hence we shall find only the forms of 'third persons' in a historical narrative strictly followed"<sup>40</sup>. There is, therefore, a marked split in the historical register between the subject of the enunciation (the historian) and the subject of the enounced (whoever is placed on the historical stage at any particular moment). To be precise, the subject of the enunciation is effectively masked because the marks of enunciation are effaced so that it appears as if "no one speaks ... the events seem to narrate themselves"<sup>41</sup>. According to Benveniste, the aorist (the simple or definite past) is the favoured tense in French for historical writing rather than the perfect. This is because the perfect has the discursive attribute of creating a link between the past and the present from where it is evoked. Use of this tense would produce a participatory kind of account, written as if from the point of view of a witness. "...The temporal location of the perfect", writes Benveniste, "is the moment of the discourse while the location of the aorist is the moment of the event"<sup>42</sup>. Because the vast majority of ethnographic monographs are written in the present tense, it would be reasonable to expect that they would belong in the discursive mode. Certainly, Benveniste groups the present and perfect tenses there, restricting historical utterance to the aorist, imperfect and pluperfect tenses. Ethnography, however, has been overwhelmingly written in what Dan

Sperber calls Free Indirect Speech<sup>43</sup>. The qualifying term “free” is important because ethnographers customarily conflate several informants’ testimonies in their condensed accounts of institutions, rituals, myths etc. The result of this, however, is a form of writing whose mode of appearance is almost exclusively structured in terms of an observation language<sup>44</sup>. Thus arises the paradox of ethnography: Although the fieldwork encounter is a dialogical moment in the present, the resulting monograph renders this into the timeless ‘ethnographic present’ of the third person<sup>45</sup>. The reader is invited to identify with an idealised observer who nevertheless disappears into his/her own omniscient narration.

### **Reading the Country**

In the course of a discussion of James Clifford’s paper “On ethnographic authority”, George Marcus and Dick Cushman raise the issue of dispersed authority. They define this as “...the attempt to overcome the domestication of the ethnographic text by the controlling author through the recognition that knowledge of other forms of life involves several de facto authors who should have narrative presence in ethnographies”<sup>46</sup>. What this means in practical terms has been spelt out by Clifford himself as follows: “Anthropologists will increasingly have to share their texts, and sometimes their title pages, with those indigenous collaborators for whom the term ‘informants’ is no longer adequate, if it ever was”.<sup>47</sup>)

I want to address the question of dispersed authority and the related issue of the experimental ethnographic text by looking at a recent publication from Western Australia. *Reading The Country*<sup>48</sup> offers itself as an exercise in ‘reading’ a particular piece of territory near Broome, W.A., known as the Roebuck Plains. Reading in this instance refers to the process whereby a subject makes sense of a culturally inscribed landscape by deciphering it as a kind of text. It is clear that there is no one way to read this (or any other) landscape but, rather, the possibility of multiple readings from differing perspectives. Accordingly, the book was conceived and takes the form of a layered collage of heterogeneous visual and verbal contributions. The overall co-ordinator of the project - if we except the sympathetic publishing house - is anthropologist Stephen Muecke. He provides a context within which the other contributions can be placed by writing a series of short pieces which are interspersed throughout the book. The first of these is entitled “Reading this book” and the last is an interview with Muecke about the writing of the book. These serve to first orientate and then remind the reader about



*Paddy Roe says: "You want a chair? I always sit on the ground – more better, can't fall down".*

the kind of enterprise s/he is engaging with here. Muecke's other pieces - which, it must be noted, make up the bulk of the book - deal with such topics as Nomadology, the writing of history, bricolage, "Intellectuals, power and truth" and "The disappearance of anthropology". The aim is to provide ways of approaching the other contributions and the project as a whole rather than definitive academic arguments.

I will return to Muecke's role in the project after giving some consideration to its other contributors. Paramount among these is Paddy Roe, an Aboriginal story teller and native of Roebuck Plains. *Reading The Country* carries a number of Paddy Roe's stories which are presented in the dialogic form in which he told them to the others involved with the book. They appear in the kind of "Aboriginal English" which Roe speaks, described in an end note as lying somewhere between a mild accent and a full blown Creole language<sup>49</sup>. Roe's discourse is presented as "...a record of (his) dreaming at its most important nexus: the country itself". The dreaming is seen here as "...a way of talking, of seeing, of knowing, and a set of practices..." alive in the present rather than "...a mythological past (as in 'dreamtime')"<sup>50</sup>.

The third major contributor to the book is Krim Benterrak, a Moroccan born painter now resident in Fremantle. *Reading The Country* contains twenty excellent reproductions of his paintings (gouache and pastel on d'arches paper) which constitute his 'reading' of Roebuck Plains as well as an interrogation of the conventions of Australian landscape painting. Together with Muecke's well captioned photographs these paintings comprise a significant visual component of *Reading The Country* which goes way beyond illustration to provide poetic counterpoint to the verbal passages.

The book also contains: 1. a geological reading of Broome and the Roebuck Plains area by E.M. Lohe<sup>51</sup>; 2. an interview with Peter Yu, a national aboriginal conference representative for the West Kimberleys area<sup>52</sup>; 3. dialogical contributions by Ray Keogh and, especially, Butcher Joe Nangan, a life long Aboriginal associate of Roe.

It should be clear from my account of the book's texture that its authority is not centred in any one contributor. Muecke speaks of it as an attempt at "...constantly deferring its authority to other sites and their guardians"<sup>53</sup>. Speaking about the choice of a theory of

Nomadology as a unifying frame for the book, Muecke says: "It aims to describe practices, ways of living, while avoiding the pretense of describing a whole people. In this sense the book is not about Aborigines. We have tried to avoid the us-and-them division by, first of all, having three authors, three sources of authority, as it were. Also the focus on reading, on the means of communication, shifts attention away from people or society (the concern of anthropology) and from the linear depiction of events in time (the concern of history)"<sup>54</sup>. A privileged place, however, is assigned to Roe's dialogic stories as they represent a special relationship with the area, a voice hitherto missing from most conventional anthropological and historical works. Indeed, the project first began with the desire of Roe and later the others "...to break through silence into form"<sup>55</sup>. Muecke's position in the enterprise is somewhat more complex. Although he refuses the role of conventional anthropological authorship, he does provide an overall commentary which steers the reader in certain directions. Moreover he is alone amongst the collaborators in providing commentary on the others (he discusses Benterrak's paintings but does not explicate Roe's stories; but he does give background information on Roe's life history). Therefore, it might be said that his organizational control over the project is deferred but not displaced to a plane of equivalence with the others<sup>56</sup>. The question remains whether this could have been otherwise if the book was to achieve any kind of coherence.

*Reading The Country* succeeds in becoming a polyphonic as opposed to a monophonic<sup>57</sup> ethnographic text by incorporating - instead of overriding - other voices (the voices of the 'other') into its fabric. In addition, it manages what Gary Wickham has called "an intervention into academic style" by eschewing conventional academic forms of building an argument and of referencing. Wickham notes how the book blurs distinctions between academic and popular categories (he uses the term coffee table to cover the latter but this is not an appropriate term. Whose coffee table?)<sup>58</sup>. As the only 'academic' involved in making the book, we might ask what pressed Muecke to look for other ways of book making. In an earlier paper, he outlines three different but sometimes overlapping "available discourses on aborigines"<sup>59</sup>: the romantic, the racist and the anthropological. Leaving aside Muecke's comments on the first two discourses, we'll concentrate on his objections to the functionalist heritage of Aboriginal Studies. He singles out R.M. and C.H. Berndt's *The World of The First Australians* which he argues "...set the agenda for anthropological studies in Australia"<sup>60</sup>. This book's "functionalist - empiricist" set of contents (origins - archaeology -

kinship - economic life-growing up and marriage - totemism, mythology and ritual - magic and sorcery - law and order - art and aesthetic expression - death and the after life - aborigines today) establishes "...a discourse whose practice excludes the possibility of dialogue with Aborigines ... whatever Aborigines might wish to communicate in the fieldwork situation is lost; it does not become part of this authoritative and official discourse"<sup>61</sup>. It is against the moribund ethnographic strategies of a largely structural-functionalist derived Australian anthropology that *Reading The Country* launches itself. It also comes out of an emergent post-structuralist/modernist community of scholarship which has overseen the large scale importation of continental (mostly French) theoretical rhetoric in recent years. Lyndall Ryan makes an interesting comparison between *Reading The Country*'s use of contemporary French philosophy and published accounts of eighteenth century French explorers who quoted the philosophers of that period. She concludes that: "*Reading The Country* confirms my view that the French explorers had a more imaginative 'reading' of the Australian landscape in the eighteenth century than their English counterparts, who could only read landscapes in terms of the capitalist mode of production"<sup>62</sup>.

## Conclusion

This chapter has raised a number of points of relevance to ethnography. Throughout the emphasis has been on ethnography as a mode of writing rather than ethnography as a set of fieldwork practices. The distinction is, of course, artificial because these two 'moments' must ultimately be seen to form a mutually constraining unity. I have discussed the dominant tendency of the ethnographic genre, namely ethnographic realism (Marcus and Cushman), and pointed out its limitations. The figure of the Tableau Vivant (Clifford), the stance of objectivism (Bourdieu) and the overall drive towards visualism (Fabian) provide the most useful insights into ethnographic realism. They have led ethnography to the ahistorical generalities of allochronism (Fabian) and the contemplative stance's (Dwyer) avoidance of problematizing self and other in the fieldwork encounter.

In the second part of the chapter I have explored the notion of an ethnography as construction of a fictional world. Barthes's *Empire of Signs* represents this operation in an extreme form and by implication throws into relief what must occur in any attempt to write another culture. Benveniste's distinction between history and discourse was then introduced

to animate a discussion of the mechanics of mainstream ethnographic writing. This led into the question of (dispersed) authorship and the dialogic text which was broached by way of an extended commentary on *Reading The Country*.

These themes amount to a selective and hence partial treatment of ethnographic practice. They constitute some of the more important issues that have recently preoccupied ethnographic debates. It is hoped that they will set the scene for what is to follow on the question of visual ethnography. But first we must give some attention to a specifically visual medium - photography.

## Notes

1. See for example, Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: principles in practice*, London: Tavistock, 1983. The opening chapter, "What is ethnography", makes the claim that "...ethnography (or participant observation, a cognate term) is simply one social research method, albeit a somewhat unusual one, drawing as it does on a wide range of sources of information", p.2. The 'limitations' of ethnography as a research method are summarised as follows: "It cannot be used to study past events; its ability to discriminate among rival hypotheses is weak by comparison with the experiment; and, in contrast to the social survey, it is poor at dealing with large scale cases such as big organizations or national societies", p.237.
2. For example, work from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. A detailed discussion of the Centre's approach to ethnography is provided in Robert G. Hollands, "Working for the best ethnography", C.C.C.S. stencilled occasional paper No.79, March 1985. Paul Willis, *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, especially Part I, is the most ethnographically based and celebrated of the Birmingham youth subculture studies. In an afterword to his book, Willis makes the following claim: "The book is not an attempt to give a full anthropological account of the full range of the whole life process of twelve individuals... I was concentrating on certain cultural and symbolic processes within a relatively discrete 'cultural form', focused mainly in the school, and on the transition to work which touched upon many

of these things, certainly, but not as a neutral taxonomical charting of them. Perhaps we should call this a 'cultural ethnography' to distinguish it from anthropological approaches", pp.217-218. It is this curiously misinformed view of anthropological ethnography which has earned Willis the justified censure of anthropologists such as George Marcus in his "Contemporary problems of ethnography in the modern world system", in James Clifford and G. Marcus (eds), *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp.165-193.

3. Gyorgy Markus, "The paradigm of language: Wittgenstein, Levi-Strauss, Gadamer", in John Fekete (ed.), *The structural allegory*, Manchester University Press, 1984, pp.112-113.
4. George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, "Ethnographies as texts", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1982, 11:29, pp.31-37.
5. David Lodge, *The modes of modern writing*, London: Edward Arnold, 1977, p.25. In a similar vein, Stephen Heath argues that: "For a particular society...the work that is realistic is that which repeats the received forms of *reality*. It is a question of reiterating the *society's* system of intelligibility". Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman*, London: Elek, 1972, p.21.
6. Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in the nineteenth century*, John Hopkins University Press, 1973, argues that "...the historian's problem is to construct a linguistic protocol, complete with lexical, grammatical, syntactical and semantic dimensions, by which to characterize the field and its elements in his own terms...and thus to prepare them for the explanation and representation he will subsequently offer of them in his narrative", p.30. White's study of Nineteenth Century historiographical style in terms of mode of emplotment (romantic, tragic, comic and satirical), mode of argument (formist, mechanistic, organicist and contextualist) and mode of ideological implication (anarchist, radical, conservative and liberal) is inspired by theories of rhetoric. Marcus and Cushman's essay on ethnography has been influenced by his approach.

7. In terms of Hammersley and Atkinson's basic dichotomy, the favouring of positivism over naturalism in overall orientation. It seems to me, however, that this distinction does not fit very well with the anthropological (as opposed to the sociological) literature which has tended to fuse the 'positivist' ("...explanations of particular phenomena framed in terms of universal laws"... ) with the 'naturalist' (cultural descriptions as "...embodiments of a rationality that may be described but not endorsed or used"). Hammersley and Atkinson, *op.cit.*, pp.19, 234.
8. An exception is Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on fieldwork in Morocco*, Berkely: University of California Press, 1977, who reminds us that "...anthropological analysis must incorporate two facts: first, that we ourselves are historically situated through the questions we ask and the manner in which we seek to understand and experience the world; and second, that what we receive from our informants are interpretations, equally mediated by history and culture", p.119. Kevin Dwyer, questions the validity of Rabinow's quest for "fundamental otherness" and doubts whether he actually reveals it. He writes: "Rabinow's freedom to decompose and recompose the other has its source in an epistemology in which the moment of 'interpretation' dominates, in an extreme fashion, prior experience...this epistemology, which contrasts with my own emphasis on the recursive rather than linear nature of meaning and with my attempt to bring the reader as close as possible to the experience, necessarily awards to the 'interpreter' the role of the final arbiter of meaning and in so doing, works to erode the integrity of the other". Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan dialogues: anthropology in question*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982, footnote 6, pp.278-279.
9. Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamo: the fierce people*, New York, Holt: Rinehart & Winston, 1st edition 1968.
10. Florinda Donner, *Shabono*, London: Paladin, 1984.
11. Shabono was the subject of a controversy in the pages of the *American Anthropologist*. Rebecca DeHolmes accused the book of being based not on actual fieldwork experience but rather a prior account of life amongst the Yanomamo by a kidnapped Brazilian woman. Debra Picchi faulted the book for being too rooted in

the narration of personal experience and not at all concerned with the 'scientific' description of cross-cultural variables. See Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in common places", in J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds), *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*, *op.cit.*, pp.28-31. Apropos of DeHolmes's position, Pratt comments: "What was at issue was not ethnographic accuracy but a set of problematic links between ethnographic authority, personal experience, scientism, and originality of expression. If Donner really did live with the Yanomamo, why would her text so resemble Valero's? But by the standards of ethnography the opposite question also arises: how could her account not resemble Valero's?", p.29. And, in the light of Heath's comments on realism (see footnote 5), Pratt's summing up of a presupposition of the controversy is illuminating: "Implicitly it was accepted that given a certain quantity of secondary material, one in fact could construct a convincing, vivid, ethnographically accurate account of life in another culture without personal experience in the field", p.29.

12. Gerard Genette, "Boundaries of narrative", *New Literary History*, 8 (1), 1976, p.7.
13. Roland Barthes, "The reality effect", in Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *French literary theory today: a reader*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.13.
14. James Clifford, "On ethnographic authority", *Representations* 1:2, Spring 1983, p.141. Reprinted in James Clifford, *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp.21-54.
15. *Ibid.*, p.118.
16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.96.
17. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*, Columbia University Press, 1983, p.67.
18. *Ibid.*, p.106.

19. Stephen A. Tyler, "The vision quest in the west, or what the mind's eye sees", *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol.40, no.1, Spring 1984, p.24.
20. *Ibid.*, p.33.
21. Fabian, *op.cit.*, p.143.
22. See two papers by Kevin Dwyer, "On the dialogic of field work", *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol.2, 1977, pp.143-151 and "The dialogic of ethnology", *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol.4, 1979, pp.205-224. The full implications of Dwyer's intervention in the field are contained in his book *Moroccan dialogues: anthropology in question*, Baltimore: John Hopkins, University Press 1982, especially Chapters 12 and 13.
23. Roland Barthes, *Writing degree zero*, translated by Anette Lavers and Colin Smith, London: Jonathan Cape, 1967, p.16.
24. James Boon, *Other tribes, other scribes: symbolic anthropology in the comparative study of cultures, histories, religions, and texts*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.20.
25. In Jacques Derrida's writing, displacement has the sense of translation with transformation, a re-writing with a difference of the already written. Mark Krupnick provides an introduction to this concept in the collection of papers he edited called *Displacement: Derrida and after*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, pp.1-17.
26. James Boon, *op.cit.*, Chapter one.
27. Introductions to the principles of semiotics or semiology can be found in: Roland Barthes, *Elements of semiology*, translated by Anette Lavers and Colin Smith, London: Jonathan Cape, 1967; Pierre Guiraud, *Semiology*, translated by George

Gross, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975; and Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and semiotics*, London: Methuen, 1977.

28. See Roland Barthes, "From work to text", in *Image-Music-Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, pp.155-164.
29. Clifford Geertz, "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture" in *The interpretation of cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p.10.
30. James Clifford, "The other side of paradise", *Times Literary Supplement*, 13.5.1983, p.475.
31. C.Geertz, *op. cit.*, p.15.
32. I.C. Jarvie, "The problem of the ethnographic real", *Current Anthropology*, vol.24, no.3, June 1983, p.316: "The Real World is not the external world; the real world is not the world as it seems from any particular privileged vantage point. The decision as to what the real world is, as to what objects populate it, is a judgement, a judgement in which perceptual evidence, along with a great many other kinds of evidence, such as logic, mathematics, the body of theories we hold, and common sense, plays a part". However, Jarvie would not go along with my stress on the constructedness of 'reality'.
33. Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the making and the unmaking of an anthropological myth*, Canberra: A.N.U.Press, 1983.
34. James Clifford, *op.cit.*, p.475.
35. Roland Barthes, *Empire of signs*, translated by Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1980, p.3.
36. See page fifteen of this chapter.

37. Langue refers to the unconscious system of rules which must be presumed to generate any particular instance of language use. Parole refers to an actual, concrete use of language: a speech act or utterance. The two terms presuppose each other: Langue is an abstraction necessary to account for the operation of language as we can only know it in speech and writing; parole owes its appearance to rule governed procedures which produce the 'grammatical'. For further gloss on these terms see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, translated by Wade Baskin, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, pp.14-15, 77-8.
38. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in general linguistics*, translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek, University of Miami Press, 1971, p.226.
39. *Ibid.*, p.209.
40. *Ibid.*, pp.206-7.
41. *Ibid.*, p.208.
42. *Ibid.*, p.210.
43. Dan Sperber, "Interpretive ethnography and theoretical anthropology", in his *On anthropological knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p.19: "free indirect speech is the style which allows the author to tell a story 'from the point of view of the actors', and, the reader to identify with them". Roland Barthes isolates an important property of this style when he writes that : "...the discourse of the traditional novel... alternates the personal and the impersonal very rapidly... so as to produce...a proprietary consciousness which retains the mastery of what it states without participating in it". Roland Barthes, "To write: intransitive verb?", in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (eds), *The structuralist controversy: the languages of criticism and the sciences of man*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972, p.140.

44. J.Fabian, *op.cit.*, pp.86-7.
45. *Ibid.*, pp.84-5.
46. G.Marcus and D.Cushman, *op.cit.*, p.43.
47. J.Clifford, *op.cit.*, p.140.
48. K.Benterrak, Stephen Muecke, and Paddy Roe, *Reading the country: introduction to nomadology*, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1984.
49. *Ibid.*, p.241. For further examples of Paddy Roe's storytelling see his *Gularabulu: stories from the West Kimberley*, edited by Stephen Muecke, Western Australia: Freemantle Arts Centre Press, 1983.
50. *Ibid.*, p.241.
51. E.M. Lohe, "Geology of the Broome and Roebuck plains area", in K.Benterrak et al., *op.cit.*, pp.29-31.
52. "Interview with Peter Yu (21.3.1983)", in *Ibid.*, pp.207-212.
53. *Ibid.*, p.19.
54. *Ibid.*, p.15. Muecke uses the theory of nomadology developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their *Mille Plateaux*. An English translation of that part of the work devoted to nomadology - "traite de nomadologie: la machine de guerre" - is available under the title, *Nomadologie: the war machine*, Translated by Brian Massumi, New York: Semiotext(e), 1986. A complete English translation is available under the title, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, London: Athlone Press, 1988. Muecke gives a fuller exposition of the theory of nomadology than that found in *Reading The Country* in "the discourse of nomadology: phylums in flux", *Art and Text*, no.14, Winter 1984, pp.24-40.

55. *Reading the Country*, p.11. However, Paul Carter does not find the book's attempt to approximate aboriginal 'nomadic discourse' by dialogic textual means to be convincing: "...the implication that, by editing these different versions, by cutting them and overlaying them, we can attain to the multi-dimensionality of an aboriginal narrative seems to me an editorial illusion.... it is a valuable record of the dismantling of certain white historical myths: to suppose there is a natural correspondence between this and the 'nomadic discourse' of the aborigine is to be guilty, it seems to me, of an imitative fallacy", *The road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, p.348.
56. I am alluding here to Jacques Derrida's concept of Differance which combines the following senses: 1. The Saussurian idea that meaning in language results from a system of differences rather than a set of positive terms. 2. The idea that signification is a matter of deferred presence/absence along spatialized and temporalized chains of language. Conjoined to the above is the sense of deference as showing respect to and opening up other sites of significance. See Jacques Derrida, "Differance", in *Speech and phenomena and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*, translated by David B. Allison, North Western University Press, 1973, pp.129-160.
57. These terms come from the Russian post formalist writer and critic Mikhail Bakhtin. See his *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, Manchester University Press, 1984. For comment on their pertinence to ethnography see James Clifford, "On ethnographic authority", *op.cit.*, pp.136-7.
58. Gary Wickham, "An event in publishing, an intervention into academic style", *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3:2, 1985, pp.139-142. Clifford Geertz has reflected upon the boundary shifts in the social sciences and the humanities brought about by certain recent writers and works which render established classifications inoperative. See Geertz, "Blurred genres: the refiguration of social thought", in *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

59. Stephen Muecke, "Available discourses on aborigines", in Peter Botsman (ed.), *Theoretical strategies*, Sydney: Local Consumption series 2/3, August 1982, pp.98-111.
60. *Ibid.*, p.102.
61. *Ibid.*, p.103.
62. Lyndall Ryan, "Reading aboriginal histories", *Meanjin*, vol.45, no.1, March 1986, p.53.

## CHAPTER TWO

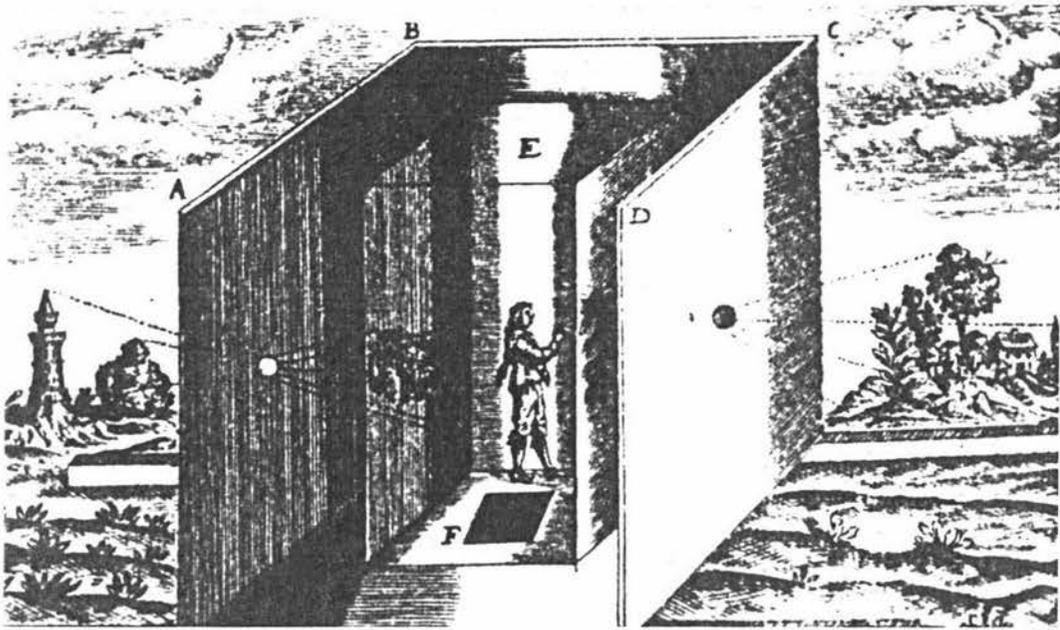
### PHOTOGRAPHY: REPRESENTATION AND SIGNIFICATION

#### Introduction

It scarcely needs saying that photography is one of the most pervasive visual media throughout the world today. Photographs are embedded in manifold everyday situations: in the morning newspaper perused over breakfast, on motorway billboards passed on the way to work, on noticeboards above the desks of workmates, in magazines read at lunchtime, on posters pasted to walls and shop windows, in books read before we go to sleep, in family albums passed round at Christmas, and in slideshows after an overseas trip - to name only some of the most obvious and visible examples. Photographs form part of the social landscape of the twentieth century.

However, photography does not fit comfortably into any of the newer disciplines devoted to the study of mass communications. When people speak of media studies they mostly mean television studies. If photography is given any place in a film studies course it is often only as an introductory component of basic image analysis. An assumption behind all this seems to be that celluloid and electronic moving images constitute the most powerful and important communication sources in contemporary Western societies. Yet as the examples given above indicate, the still photographic image is more widespread. Perhaps even more than the television set which, admittedly, does tend to blend into the living room as a piece of furniture, photographs have become naturalized into their everyday settings. Unlike the now rather consciously planned decision to visit the cinema, the viewing of photographs is as commonplace and automatic as turning on the radio - another relatively neglected medium.

Yet despite the obvious ubiquity and importance of photographs in our lives, it has taken a long time for photographic studies to gain a substantial foothold in the field of media studies. It is really only over the last twenty years that the still photographic image has received sustained attention in theoretical terms. This attention has come in the form of numerous conceptual frameworks and debates all of which share a commitment to analysing the way



photographs generate meaning and how they are implicated in larger structures of meaning. In this chapter I want to address a number of questions of basic importance to the study of photography. These include: what kind of visual image are photographs?. How do we make sense of them? And what repertoire of formal and rhetorical tropes do we employ to do so?

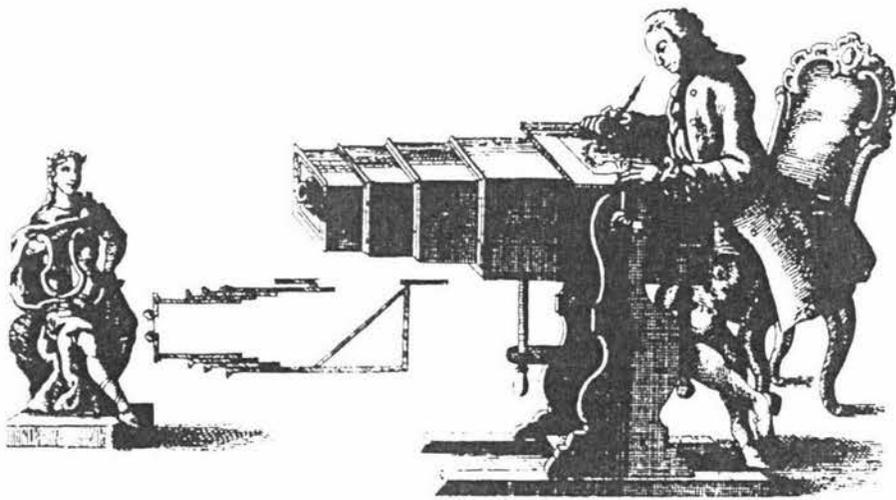
But first let's begin this inquiry into photography with a simple definition: "photography is basically a way of fixing the camera image by the action of light upon substances sensitive to it"<sup>1</sup>. Although this definition would probably conform to most people's idea of photography, it glosses rather too smoothly over two separate moments: image-making and image-fixing. The camera obscura, invented in the mid-sixteenth century, and the camera lucida (1807) are just two of the most well known devices whose perspectival images were used as aids to painting before the advent of photography proper<sup>2</sup>. Yet it is possible to produce photographic images without pointing a camera at an external scene, simply by exposing film (that is to say its emulsion of silver salts) to a light source<sup>3</sup>. It is the bringing together of those two crucial moments after 1839 that has enabled photography to become one of the most powerful commercial and informational media of the past 150 years.

### **Photography and Representation**

Central to practically all forms of visual depiction is the concept of representation. Webster's Twentieth Century Dictionary defines representation as follows:

1. "The act of representing, describing or showing.
2. That which exhibits by resemblance; image, likeness, picture, or statue.
3. Any exhibition of the form or operations of a thing by something resembling it"<sup>4</sup>.

The stress in this definition is on the notion that a representation in some way resembles the object of which it is a representation. But the question then arises as to what kind of resemblance is involved. The philosopher of aesthetics, R.G.Collingwood distinguishes between three differing degrees of representation<sup>5</sup>. The first degree is confined to *literal* representations which aim at no more than a naive and non-selective resemblance to their objects. It is here that Collingwood situates photographs and "literally accurate drawings". He calls the second degree *emotional* representation because it aims by selection of detail and



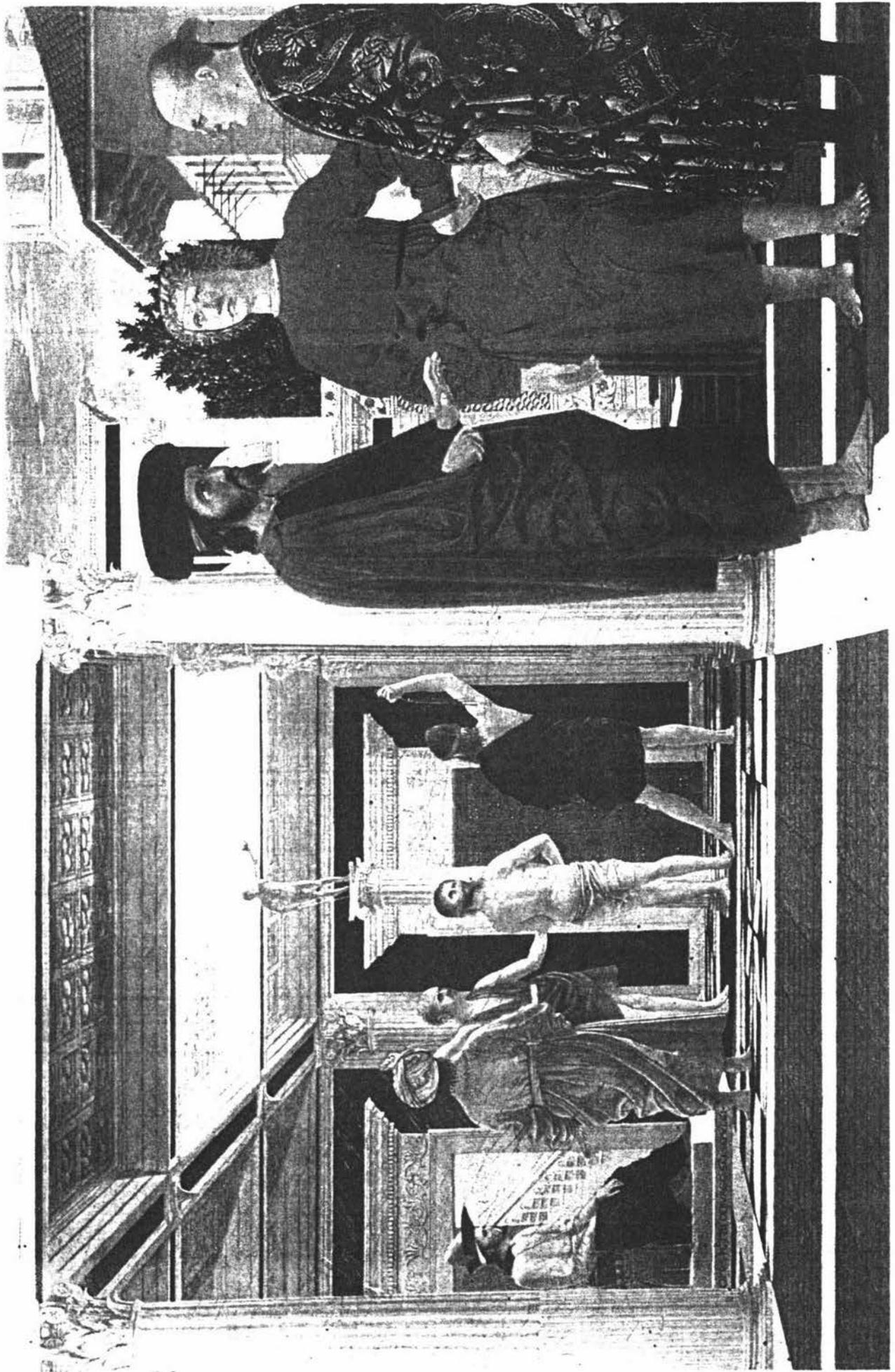
Georg Brander. *Table camera obscura*. 1769.

the enhancement of certain features and the diminution of others to produce in the beholder a similar emotional response to that generated by the represented object. The third degree dispenses with any attempt at resemblance whatsoever but still aims to "represent" an emotional response. Collingwood's theory of representation leaves photography very much on the bottom rung of a ladder which privileges representational (but non-naturalist) and abstract-expressionist painting. But is resemblance a sufficient condition for representation? Nelson Goodman thinks not, arguing instead that: "denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance"<sup>6</sup>. Unlike resemblance, denotation is an intrinsically semiotic term. It carries the sense of a marking off or separating of an entity through the action of signs. Goodman elaborates: "to represent, a picture must function as a pictorial symbol; that is, function in a system such that what is denoted depends solely upon the pictorial properties of the symbol"<sup>7</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that Goodman accords photography a great deal more flexibility than Collingwood when he says: "the choice and the handling of the instrument participate in the construal. A photographer's work like a painter's, can evince a personal style"<sup>8</sup>. On the basis of what I have written so far, I think that a broad distinction can be drawn within the theory of representation between two opposing poles: the mimetic and the semiotic<sup>9</sup>. The implications of this distinction will become apparent throughout the remainder of this chapter.

A tendency to emphasize the mimetic aspect of photographic representation can be found in the writings of Stanley Cavell who claims that: "photography overcame subjectivity...by *automatism*, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction"<sup>10</sup>. A later paper by Cavell distinguishes visual representation (for example, a painting which attempts a *likeness* of an object) from what he calls visual transcription<sup>11</sup>. This tendency reaches its apotheosis in a paper by Roger Scruton who goes so far as to deny that photography produces representations at all. "A film", he asserts, "is a photograph of a dramatic representation; it is not, because it cannot be, a photographic representation"<sup>12</sup>. Like Collingwood, Scruton insists that..."photography can 'represent', only through resemblance". And like Cavell, he sees photography as a form of visual transcription which "...is transparent to its subject, and if it holds our interest it does so because it acts as a surrogate for the represented thing"<sup>13</sup>. Thus for Scruton, photography possesses no transformative properties and any interest it may hold for us lies solely in the externalities it reflects<sup>14</sup>. All the aforementioned theorists of photography as an essentially transparent mimetic mode, sharply distinguish it from painting

and related *autographic* media. It is alleged that the automatic, mechanical basis of photography renders it an altogether different form of representation, free from conscious human manipulation. But is this, in fact, the case? Take, for example, Rudolf Arnheim's claim concerning: "...the fundamental peculiarity of the photographic medium: the physical objects themselves print their image by means of the optical and chemical action of light"<sup>15</sup>. This presupposes that objects possess 'images' which under the right circumstances can be transferred intact on to photographic emulsion<sup>16</sup>. On the contrary, images must be understood to be entirely cultural not natural artifacts which, in the case of photographs, are made possible by the reflection of light from objects and its refraction by the lens of a camera. H. Gene Blocker summarizes the procedures at the disposal of photographers when endeavouring to craft an image: "through the selection of subject, angle, amount, and direction of light, background, sharpness of focus, and light/dark contrast - in all these ways the photographer represents the object from a subjective point of view, expressive of feeling and mood. The photographic subject can indeed be made to say whatever the photographer wants it to say"<sup>17</sup>. Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen use the terms *characterize* and *characterization*<sup>18</sup> to describe the way cameras and photographs construe a pro-photographic scene or object. A particular choice of lens will *characterize* a scene in a certain way as will framing and the regulation of the amount of light let into the lens. The resulting photograph, a product of choices at the shooting, developing and printing stages will amount to a specific *characterization* from a range of possibilities.

Following the terminology of Andre Bazin, we might say that most photographs can be placed somewhere on a continuum between the opposing poles of *registration* and *intervention*<sup>19</sup>. All the writers so far discussed who cast photography in a mimetic mold point to the automatic registration of objects and events in the 'natural' world as the essence of the medium. Opposed to this is the position which lays the stress on human intervention in the manufacture of images as items of culture. In fact, this latter position constitutes something of an ideal type as even the most semiotically inclined writers concede that photographs do differ from more traditional forms of visual depiction. But they do not thereby drive a wedge between say, painting and photography. Both could be said to come under the hegemony of forms of representation dominant in the West since the renaissance. I will give some attention to this matter in what follows.



Rather than looking upon photography as a miraculous invention which burst onto the scene in 1839, opening up hitherto only dreamed of possibilities of realistic representation, it is useful to examine its 500 year association with painting<sup>20</sup>. For, as Joel Snyder points out: "cameras do not provide scientific *corroboration* of the schemata or rules invented by painters to make realistic pictures...cameras represent the *incorporation* of these schemata into a tool designed and built...to aid painters and draughtsmen in the production of certain kinds of pictures"<sup>21</sup>. In connection with this it might be profitable to consider an exhibition mounted by Peter Galassi at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1981, entitled *Before Photography*. This exhibition consisted of both photographs and paintings and its aim, in the words of the accompanying catalogue, was "...to show that photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorsteps of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition"<sup>22</sup>. Galassi contends that photography is in a direct line of descent from the invention of linear perspective in the middle of the fifteenth century. In technical terms this means that: "photography is nothing more than a means for automatically producing pictures in perfect perspective"<sup>23</sup>. However, the aesthetic consequence of this technical facility was that "...the photographer was powerless to compose his picture. He could only, in the popular phrase, take it"<sup>24</sup>. Galassi then applies a binary distinction to paintings, dividing them between what he calls the *synthetic option* and the *analytic function*<sup>25</sup>. Representative practitioners of the former (pre-18th century) mode would be Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) or Piero della Francesca (1416?-92) who worked within the classical Albertian dictates of linear, monocular perspective. Everything in their pictures, so the argument goes, is logically organized and harmonized around a central vanishing point. The *analytic function*, on the other hand, is exemplified for Galassi by Degas and certain early nineteenth century landscape painters. In this case it is a matter of "selective description": "...a new and fundamentally modern pictorial syntax of immediate synoptic perceptions and discontinuous, unexpected forms. It is the syntax of an art devoted to the singular and contingent rather than the universal and stable. It is also the syntax of photography"<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, according to Galassi, the type of view produced by the landscape sketchers and painters who preceded the rise of photography largely determined the course that that medium would take from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In this account therefore, photography maintains continuity with immediately prior ways of representing in painting and the fine arts in general. Upon reflection, however, it would seem that Galassi has been caught

between two conflicting theses<sup>27</sup>: the first insists on a rigid separation between painting and photography as image-making processes; the second insists on the need for an "integrated history of picture making"<sup>28</sup>. Galassi's compromise solution is to claim that photography takes up the new, *analytic function* of early nineteenth century representation. But this is too narrow a view. It is based exclusively on an (high) art historical account of the development of photography which ignores the medium's imbrication in, for example, family, medical, and police discourses or that area Joel Snyder calls "functional illustration"<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, Galassi's contention that because photography was born out of one specific line of "analytic" topographical art practice, it was thereby saddled with the syntax of the particular and the contingent is also too narrow. The corollary of this point is the related claim that photographers lacked (lack?) the ability to compose their pictures. S.Varnedoe has effectively replied to this by saying: "...before photographers learned to control their medium and produce the pictures they were after, photography was not resistant to tradition and therefore modern; it was resistant to intention, and therefore a mess"<sup>30</sup>.

### **Photography and the Sign**

It is time now to examine in more detail the question of photography's semiotic status. But, in this instance, it is not to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) but his near contemporary Charles Sanders Peirce that we shall look for guidance. W.B. Gallie, in his discussion of Peirce's theory of knowledge, notes that: "the characteristic property which Peirce claims to find in every sign-situation is that it is essentially triadic: sign (first term) standing for object (second term) to interpretant (third term)"<sup>31</sup>. Peirce elaborates on his own succinct definition of a sign as "...a representamen with a mental interpretant"<sup>32</sup> as follows: "a sign...is something which stands to somebody for something else in respect or capacity...it addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign"<sup>33</sup>.

It can be discerned from the above passage that meaning, for Peirce, is the result of a truly semiotic process across a chain of signs which only exist within a system of differences. Interpretation in this scheme is an open process of sign combination, development and transformation. Moving on from Peirce's triadic scheme of sign-action, we come to his

trichotomy of sign types. Peirce divides all signs into three categories: icons, indices, and symbols. "An icon", writes Peter Wollen, "...is a sign which represents its object mainly by its similarity to it; the relationship between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but is one of resemblance or likeness..."<sup>34</sup>. Indices, by contrast, "...establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify"<sup>35</sup>. Another way of putting this is to say that there is an existential bond between sign and referent<sup>36</sup>. A symbol, on the other hand, does not communicate through any resemblance or physical connection between sign and referent but rather because "...the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary and conventional. Meaning is not inherent in any symbol, but is dependent on a cultural system of meaning"<sup>37</sup>.

To summarize all this we might say that the relation between signifier and signified in the case of the icon is *mimetic* and *verisimilar*; in that of the index it is *contiguous*; and in that of the symbol it is *contractual*<sup>38</sup>. Realist images or portraits (paintings, photographs, film, video) of people and objects in the animate and inanimate world are examples of iconic signs<sup>39</sup>. Human languages, mathematics and musical notation are all systems of symbolic signs. Examples of indices would include the following: footprints, fingerprints, and medical symptoms<sup>40</sup>; a whistling kettle, thunder clouds and a red light on a washing machine<sup>41</sup>; weathervanes; sundials, a man with a rolling gait who turns out to be a sailor and a bowlegged man in corduroys, gaiters and jacket who turns out to be a jockey<sup>42</sup>.

The question now arises: under what kind of sign do we place photography? At first glance, it would seem that photographs belong to the class of icons whose meaning is largely determined by their resemblance to their referents. And indeed it is true that there is a large iconic element involved in the vast majority of photographs. Nevertheless we here confront what Frank Webster calls "the photographic paradox"<sup>43</sup>: although a photograph appears to be a transparent representation of its referent which does not require translation, it is in fact the result of the encoding and framing of a cultural milieu which does require decoding. It is important to stress that considerations of cultural shaping enter at the encoding stage in the actual production of images (beginning with the photographic apparatus as codifying device and moving through decisions about the 'what' and 'how' of the 'characterization' it is asked

to produce) and not only at the decoding stage which of course proceeds by means of cultural schemas (sets of symbolic signs).

Significantly, what most interested Peirce himself about photographs was their indexical character. "Photographs", he wrote, "especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs (indices), those by physical connection"<sup>44</sup>. Thierry de Duve neatly encapsulates this notion of the photograph as index in the statement which follows: "the referent is not only that to which the sign refers, but also that upon which it depends"<sup>45</sup>.

All three of Peirce's sign types can be used to illuminate particular photographs. Indeed, each individual photograph can be regarded as to some degree a combination of iconic, indexical and symbolic codes<sup>46</sup>. Both the moments of registration and intervention in photographic production are structured by this sign trichotomy. At the moment of registration each photograph is established as an indexical sign by the physical action of light on sensitive photographic emulsion. The iconic codes operative in photography, on the other hand, derive from a photographic apparatus thoroughly embedded in the post-renaissance Western pictorial tradition. The moment of intervention involves the photographer to varying degrees in the manipulation of codes of framing, lighting, developing and printing. Finally, it is at the moment of reception that symbolic codes are activated in specific readings which actualize what until then remain pure potentialities.

### **Contributions to a Theory of Photography**

To carry forward the discussion of photography and the sign I have chosen to examine the work of four writers who have given considerable attention to the nature of the medium. Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, Victor Burgin's anthology *Thinking Photography*, Pierre Bourdieu's *Un art moyen*, and John Berger's *Another way of telling* are four of the most important books on photography published in the latter part of the twentieth Century.

After his earlier attempts at formulating a semiotics of the photographic image, Barthes finally arrived at the point of eschewing systematic theorising in favour of a largely subjective meditation on photography's paradoxes which nonetheless still offers some important concepts to the student of photography. Burgin, in a sequence of carefully argued essays, followed on from Barthes's structuralist-semiological beginnings to attempt the development of a systematic theoretical appraisal of photography using recent advances in semiotics, psychoanalysis and theories of ideology.

Unlike Barthes and Burgin who both focus on the specificities of photography as a relatively new signifying practice, in order to isolate a critical aesthetic of it, Bourdieu by contrast is interested in the sociological effect of photography. He does not go searching for the unique properties of the medium; on the contrary, the very drift of his work is to deny that there are any. Finally, Berger's work differs from the others in that it is tied into his ongoing collaboration with the photographer Jean Mohr to produce carefully structured photo-texts. His reflections, therefore, form part of the mosaic of an attempt at "another way of telling", centred in the visual mode. I will now proceed to a set of brief, outline discussions of the main points raised in these four thinkers' writings on photography.

### **The Semiotic Paradigm in Photographic Studies**

#### *Roland Barthes*

Amongst the most highly influential papers ever written on the photographic image are Roland Barthes' "The Photographic Message" (1961) and "Rhetoric of the Image" (1964). Together with his analyses of specific popular photos in *Mythologies* (1957) and *The Eiffel tower and other mythologies* (English language edition, 1979), they constitute the foundations of a semiotics of the photograph<sup>47</sup>. Of course, the nominal subject of Barthes' last published book, *La chambre claire* (1980), is also photography, but as will become clear later, not in the same way as his earlier papers.

Any discussion of Barthes' contribution to the analysis of photographic imagery should be sensitive to the differing theoretical problematics of his varied career. I will isolate three broadly defined problematics from his work, ever mindful that this compartmentalization is inevitably something of a distortion. The three problematics carry the familiar names of the

structuralist-semiological, the poststructuralist-semiological and my less familiar coinage for the final phase, the reflexive-autobiographical. I will place my discussion of the major essays on photography under these three headings.

### *The Structuralist-Semiological*

Barthes' interest in photography as a site of semiological productivity begins in the 1950s with some of the essays published in *Mythologies*: "photography and electoral appeal", "the great family of man", and above all, "myth today", with its celebrated analysis of the *Paris-Match* cover photo of a *black* soldier saluting the French flag<sup>48</sup>.

But it is not until 1961 with the publication of "the photographic message" in the seminal journal *Communications* that Barthes begins to address photography frontally as a medium. "The photographic message", which draws most of its examples from press photography, begins in classic structuralist fashion with Barthes speaking of the need for "...an immanent analysis of the unique structure that a photograph constitutes", prior to any sociological investigations<sup>49</sup>. Photography, he argues, provides messages which are *continuous* and *analogous* with "reality" but do not transform that "reality". Barthes condenses his argument with his notion of the "photographic paradox" which he explicates as follows: "the photographic paradox can...be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the "art", or the treatment, or the "writing", or the rhetoric, of the photograph)"<sup>50</sup>. The two "messages" of the "photographic paradox" are clearly a redeployment of the semiological terms denotation and connotation<sup>51</sup>, elaborated in *Elements of semiology* (1964) and used throughout *Mythologies* (especially in the example of the photograph of the *black* soldier saluting the French flag). They correspond respectively to the ideas of straight reference and culturally acquired meaning. According to Barthes, photographs may come into the world as uncoded and analogous to it - (although this is debatable) - but they cannot remain free of the simultaneous accretion of cultural connotations which do require decoding.

Turning now to "rhetoric of the image" (1964), we find Barthes grappling with the advertising photograph. He retains the points made about photography in the previous paper but introduces two new concepts in order to deal with the role of language in the overall

meaning of the advertising image: *anchorage* and *relay*. The function of *anchorage* is carried out by a verbal caption which acts to limit the play of signifieds in the connoted message. This fixing effect of the caption (or text) certainly can be seen at work in most press and many advertising photographs; but I would argue that the use of language in the more *sophisticated* imagery is necessarily looser and more associative in the interests of the freer play of viewer phantasy. *Relay* is less common than *anchorage*, mostly found in more extended forms like comics and picture stories which develop a narrative flow. Here language complements the image in a separate but linked register.

Later in the paper, anticipating the drift of his argument in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes goes on to describe the photograph as "the having-been-there" or "the here-now/there-then", "... a decisive mutation of informational economies"<sup>52</sup>. He suggests that: "man's intervention in the photograph (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) all effectively belong to the plane of connotation; it is though in the beginning (even if utopian) there was a brute photograph (frontal and clear) on which man would then layout, with the aid of various techniques, the signs drawn from a cultural code"<sup>53</sup>. He concludes by locating the most fruitful area for the study of the signifying aspects of ideology in photography at the level of the sets of connotators which make up the "rhetoric of the image".

#### *The Post-structuralist/Semiological*

Jumping six years on, to "The third meaning" (1970), we find Barthes analysing a group of stills from Sergei Eisenstein's film, *Ivan the terrible*. This time he divides up the signifying economy rather differently. This is in keeping with his post-structuralist rethinking of the denotation/connotation couplet in *S/Z* where he argued that: "denotation is not the first meaning but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems to both establish and to close the reading)"<sup>54</sup>. He discerns three levels of meaning operating in the film stills: a *communicational* or *informational* level which corresponds to the denotational plane of yore; a *significatory* or *symbolic* level corresponding to the connotational; and, finally, a third and new level termed *significance*<sup>55</sup>, a concept derived from the work of Julia Kristeva.



Drawing with a camera lucida. From V. Chevalier, *Notice sur l'usage de la chambre claire* (Paris: 1834).

The first two levels of the image, the informational and the symbolic, which previously enjoyed separate moments as, respectively, brute analogon (denotation) and cultural connotation are now grouped together under the covering rubric, the *obvious* meaning; while the third, new term, *signifiante* now enters to set up a new binary opposition as the *obtuse* meaning. Signification as understood in classical semiotics proceeded without the presence of anything like the *obtuse* meaning because, in post-structuralist terminology it is in fact a *supplement*<sup>56</sup>. It is "...not in the language- system". It is "...a signifier without a signified, hence the difficulty in naming it"<sup>57</sup>.

### *The Reflexive-Autobiographical*

A decade on from the publication of "The third meaning", Barthes returned to the subject of photography in *Camera Lucida*<sup>58</sup>, his final book. Rather than attempt to do the book justice as, say, a meditation on death, the writer's mother or the phenomenological intentionality of imagination<sup>59</sup>, I will simply gloss the book's main photographic concepts. Barthes begins by, in effect, reiterating the position he first advanced in "The photographic message". "A specific photograph", he contends, "...is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents)...it is not impossible to perceive the photographic signifier, but it requires a secondary action of knowledge or of reflection"<sup>60</sup>.

He continues by introducing the book's major conceptual distinction: the *studium* as opposed to the *punctum*. This distinction is essentially an elaboration of the one proposed in "The third meaning" between the *obvious* and the *obtuse* meaning. Like the *obvious* meaning, the *studium* merges denotation and connotation in the interests of a conventionally coded meaning. It is a matter of "the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture...an average effect...of human interest"<sup>61</sup>. He goes on to tie the *Studium* to the three part schema of *operator* (photographer), *spectator* and *spectrum* (subject): "to recognise the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them but always to understand them...for culture (from which the *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers"<sup>62</sup>.

The *punctum*, on the other hand, harks back to the uncoded, *obtuse* meaning. Where the *obtuse* meaning carried "a certain emotion", which was "...indifferent to the story and to the

*obvious* meaning (as signification of the story)", the *punctum* "...is the accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"<sup>63</sup>. It is an "...element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me"<sup>64</sup>. The *punctum* is often an unpredictable detail in the photograph which seizes the imagination of the viewer in a subtle movement of captivation. It deflects or complicates the conventional avenues of meaning offered by the *studium*. Wary of pinning down the distinction too firmly, Barthes advises that: "it is not possible to posit a rule of connection between the *studium* and the *punctum* (when it happens to be there). It is a matter of co-presence, that is all one can say"<sup>65</sup>. The *punctum*, again like the *obtuse* meaning, is a *supplement*, "...whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph", yet "...what is nonetheless already there"<sup>66</sup>.

In the later part of the book, Barthes warns: "to ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time"<sup>67</sup>. Significantly, the most extended piece of analysis carried out in *Camera Lucida* is devoted to a photo of the writer's mother, carried into the present from a time before his own birth.

Victor Burgin has argued that from the perspective of photography theory, "Camera Lucida...is primarily an evocation of *intentionality* as it strives to conjure the image of a loved person through the intermediary 'medium' of a snapshot. Its significance for theory is the emphasis thus placed on the *active* participation of the viewer in producing the meaning/affect of the photograph"<sup>68</sup>. For, finally, Barthes was very much aware that: "the photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in "lifelike" photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure"<sup>69</sup>.

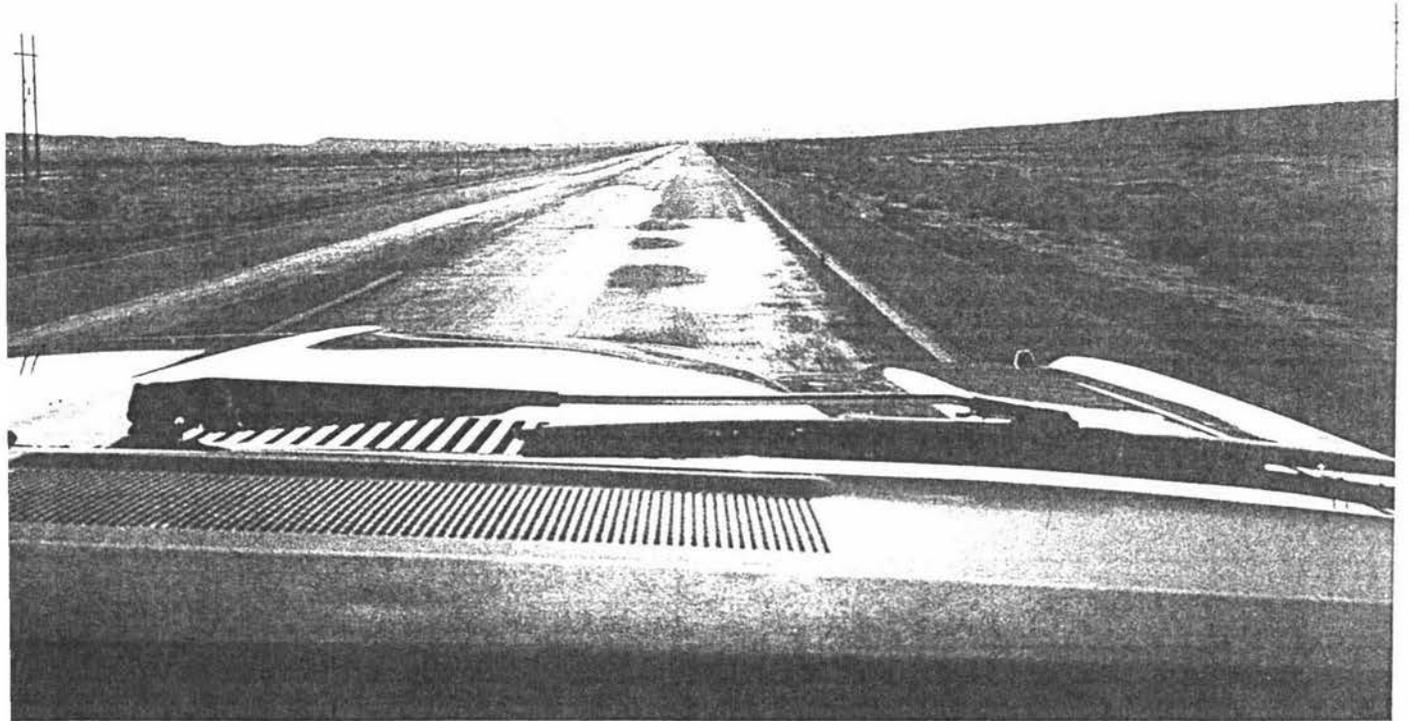
## **The Psychoanalytic Paradigm in Photographic Studies**

*Victor Burgin*

For Barthes, photography was just one amongst the many signifying systems to which he turned his attention. By contrast, all facets of Victor Burgin's career are firmly rooted in photographic practices. A former Senior Lecturer in History and Theory of the Visual Arts at the Polytechnic of Central London School of Communication, he now holds the Chair of Art

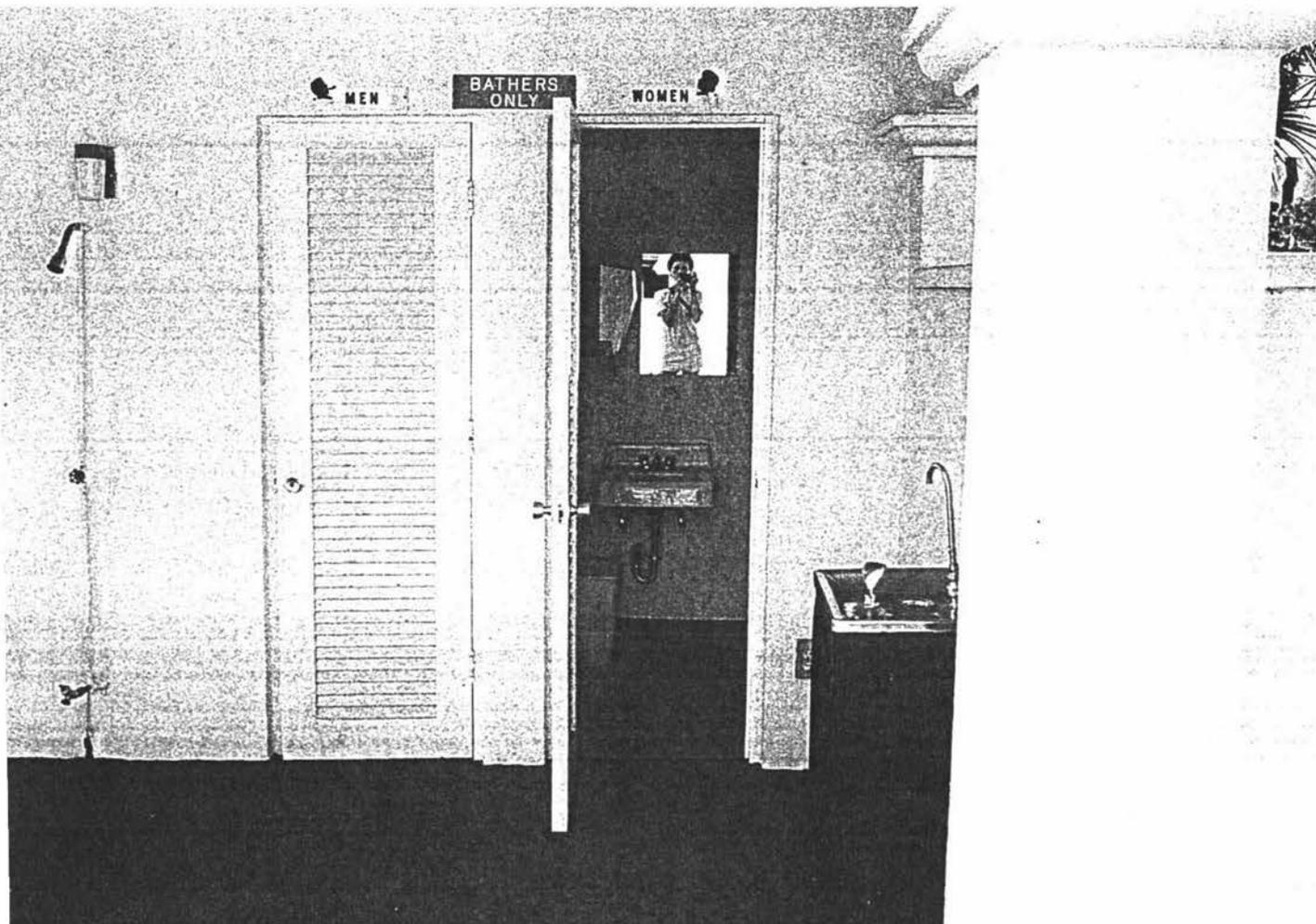
FALSE PERSPECTIVE

Mankind never lives entirely in the present.  
The past, the tradition of the race and of the people,  
lives on in the ideologies of the super-ego,  
and yields only slowly to the influences of the present;  
and so long as it operates through the super-ego  
it plays a powerful part in human life,  
independently of economic conditions.



History at the University of California at Santa Cruz. But parallel to his activity as a teacher and writer of critical theory on photography, Burgin is a practising artist who uses photographically based media and linguistic texts<sup>70</sup>. In response to a question put to him by Tony Godfrey about the purpose of his work, he said: "I consider my work to consist of my interventions across the art institution as a whole; across teaching, writing theory, sitting on committees, giving public talks, taking part in symposia, and so on. The reason I do all this is in an effort to help shift the ground of the institution as a whole"<sup>71</sup>. Burgin's writings on photography theory emerge out of a 1970s British context, principally associated with the journal *Screen* which sought to transform approaches to the audio-visual media, particularly film and television, within the sphere of education. Put summarily, the *Screen* project consisted in a theoretical amalgam of (implicit) Marxism, semiotics and psychoanalysis as these had been redefined in the wake of French (post) structuralism<sup>72</sup>. Burgin's movement towards a greater involvement with psychoanalysis parallels that of *Screen* itself in the 1970s when, after their publication of Christian Metz's "The imaginary signifier" in 1975<sup>73</sup>, they entered a strongly Lacanian phase. Several of the papers which Burgin collected together in the anthology *Thinking photography* (1982) were originally published in *Screen* or *Screen Education* and it is to these I now wish to turn.

The earliest essay in *Thinking photography*, "Photographic practice and art theory"<sup>74</sup> is a review of the major texts of semiology in its first, classically structuralist, period as represented by Roland Barthes and other writers associated with the journal *Communications*. Burgin was well aware of the shifts that had already occurred within semiology at the time he wrote this paper but felt it necessary to introduce the fundamental concepts of the discipline because of their general unfamiliarity within photographic criticism. The essay finds Jacques Durand's work on rhetoric and the advertising image<sup>75</sup> particularly relevant and proceeds to tabulate a kind of 'elements of rhetoric' which is defined (after Durand) as "...a repertory of the various ways we can be original"<sup>76</sup>. The article ends with a plea for equal attention to be paid to both visual and non-visual codes within photographic studies, quoting Christian Metz to the effect that the realm of the "purely visual" is a fantasy and an ideology.



"Oh!"

(A door opens on a memory.)

The following year, during a discussion of "Modernism in the work of art", Burgin follows up the earlier paper with the claim that: "there is no signifying system (as opposed to technical apparatus) upon which all photographs depend... there is no 'language of photography' in the sense of *langue*. There is rather a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw...each photographic text signifies on the basis of a plurality of codes...some of these are peculiar to photography...others are clearly not"<sup>77</sup>. "Looking at photographs" (1977) registers the impact of second wave, 'textual semiotics' in its preoccupation with the construction of subjectivity within representation. Burgin's concern is with the ideological effects of the basic photographic apparatus (to adapt a title from Jean-Louis Baudry<sup>78</sup>) which he describes as follows: "the signifying system of photography, like that of a classical painting, at once depicts a scene and the gaze of the spectator, an object and a viewing subject...it is the position of point-of-view, occupied in fact by the camera, which is bestowed on the spectator. To the point-of-view, the system of representation adds the *frame*...through the agency of the frame the world is organized into a coherence which it actually lacks, into a parade of tableaux, a succession of 'decisive moments'"<sup>79</sup>. It is, however, a tendency of the photographic apparatus to conceal its own textual operations from the spectator who is positioned in such a way as to appear to receive a transparent image rather than 'read' a representation<sup>80</sup>.

Following a lead from the psychoanalytic film theory of the 'look'<sup>81</sup>, Burgin outlines four basic types of photographic look: "the look of the camera as it photographs the 'prophotographic' event; the look of the viewer as he or she looks at the photograph; the 'intradiegetic' looks exchanged between people (actors) depicted in the photograph (and/or looks from actors towards objects); and the look the actor may direct to the camera"<sup>82</sup>. Burgin uses this arsenal of looks to analyse one photo by James Jarche and another by Lee Friedlander, concluding with an admonition to see a photograph as "...a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense"<sup>83</sup>.

Burgin's most recent essay in *Thinking photography* (excepting the introduction), "Photography, phantasy, function" (1980) is a wide ranging exploration of topics such as: the debate on photography in revolutionary Soviet aesthetics (Rodchenko et al.); investigations into perception and the psychoanalysis of looking, especially *suture theory*<sup>84</sup>; and a critique of



**WILDE TIERGARTEN**  
DIE MASSAI-GIRAFFEN  
GESCHENK DER FIRMA  
MÖBEL-HÜBNER  
DIE MASSAI-GIRAFFEN  
GESCHENK DER FIRMA  
MÖBEL-HÜBNER

Die Massai-Giraffen  
Geschenk der Firma  
MÖBEL-HÜBNER

A circular revolving stage, with four walls of booths the size of a telephone booth, is placed in each booth to allow the giraffe to see a circle of the enclosure.

modernist aesthetics with special reference to photography. "When we look at an image", he writes, "it is instantly and irreversibly integrated and collated with the intricate psychic network of our knowledge. It is the component meanings of this network that an image must *represent*, re-activate and reinforce..."<sup>85</sup>.

Employing a Freudian schema of pre-conscious/ conscious (daydream)/ unconscious components of our psychic life, Burgin maps out a reversible process whereby a photograph may animate and be animated by elements of phantasy, memory and knowledge released in the moment of reading. Advertising imagery, especially, is seen to activate the "popular pre-conscious", a repertoire of "common-knowledge", stocked with previous image associations. Art photography, too, can call up unconscious phantasy scenarios as it acts as a "mise-en-scene of desire"<sup>86</sup>.

In a postscript to his *Block* interview, Burgin stated that: "a politics of representation has to be concerned with the phantasmatic...we don't *simply* inhabit a material reality, we simultaneously inhabit a psychic reality - the former, in fact being 'known' only *via* the latter. Psychic reality, the register of the subjective, of emotion (including, of course, pleasure) is organized according to the articulation of sexual difference"<sup>87</sup>.

Burgin's more recent work engages even more directly with the question of the construction of gendered subjectivity. His practice as an artist<sup>88</sup>, producing sequentially ordered panels incorporating photographs and texts, involves him in a related but different process from the writing of clearly formulated theoretical papers. He regards these gallery works as "occasions for interpretation' rather than 'objects for consumption'"<sup>89</sup>, and not as straightforward illustrations of the theories which nevertheless inform their creation at some level. Paramount in his artistic practice is a concern with the question of how the photographic apparatus is implicated in conceptions of looking such as fetishism and voyeurism, placed firmly on the agenda of certain British film makers and photographers in the wake of Laura Mulvey's theoretical work. *Zoo 78* (1978/9), a work made in Berlin, marries a Freudian derived emphasis on the sadistic impulses involved in voyeurism (peep show imagery) with Foucault's notion of the panopticon principle as the basis of the state's investment in the surveillance of its citizens (the Berlin Wall). *Gradiva* (1982), *Olympia* (1982), and *The Bridge* (1984) continue this exploration into the relation between scopophilia

(pleasure in looking) and masculine desire, taking their cue from texts by Freud and in the case of the latter, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, a masterly study of male obsession.

Burgin's central concern with questions of subjectivity should not be taken to mean he is unconcerned with 'social' issues. For in his own words, "psychoanalytic theory does not construct a realm of the 'subjective' *apart* from social life, it is a theory of the *internalisation* of the social *as* 'subjective' - and, as such, has profound implications for any theory of ideology"<sup>90</sup>.

### **A Sociological Paradigm in Photographic Studies**

*Pierre Bourdieu*

Barthes's and Burgin's concern with the photographic sign, with the construction of subjectivity and the movement of ideology and the unconscious in the production and reading of photographs is completely missing from Pierre Bourdieu's writing on photography. Whereas Barthes, clearly alluding to Bourdieu's work, states: "What did I care... about the photograph as family rite?... another, louder voice urged me to dismiss such sociological commentary; looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture"<sup>91</sup>; Bourdieu is only interested in photography as a cultural index within a wider social field.

Throughout *Distinction*<sup>92</sup>, his monumental ethnographic survey of taste formations in contemporary France, Bourdieu uses photographs to elicit responses from the various classes and class fractions in order to calibrate their particular aesthetic dispositions and, at the same time he also studies the overall place of photography in the social life of France and by implication other Western societies. This large scale work has grown out of earlier collaborative studies, one of which, *Un art moyen*, is entirely devoted to an examination of photography as a sociological phenomenon.

Bourdieu's overarching concern with the place of photography in social life has led him to focus particularly on the manner in which it is incorporated into family life in the ritual form we know as 'family snaps'. He begins by suggesting that it is perhaps because photography operates seemingly in a manner similar to ordinary perception that it is thought to produce exact and objective pictures of the world. For Bourdieu, however, this impression of reality is

purely tautological. Here is his summation: “en conferant a la photographie un brevet de realisme la societe ne fait rien d’autre que se confirmer elle-meme dans la certitude tautologique qu ‘un image du reel conforme a sa representation de l’objectivite est vraiment objective”<sup>93</sup>.

He then lists the rigid ‘prohibitions’ and ‘prescriptions’, largely unconscious, which govern the practice of popular photography: the imperative not to move, make oblique framings or shoot in conditions of poor light, but rather to place the person or object photographed in the centre of the frame, at a respectful distance and in a dignified pose; all of which amounts to a form of protocol that scarcely can be called ‘natural’<sup>94</sup>. Bourdieu also notes that some subjects are considered suitable material for photography whereas others are not; and that this, of course, varies considerably with the class location of the participants. Conventional notions of the ‘beautiful’ tend to hold sway at the bottom end of the social spectrum while at the opposite end the ‘aristocratic’ notion that a properly aesthetic treatment can confer significant and pleasing form on any subject/object whatsoever is the norm; considerable variation is to be found in between these two poles<sup>95</sup>.

As far as the aesthetic perception of actual photographs is concerned, Bourdieu’s survey found that most (three-quarters) people’s initial response to viewing a photograph amounted simply to identifying the category or genre to which the object or subject depicted belonged; these responses usually began with the phrase: “yes...it’s a ...”<sup>96</sup>. Responses predicated on formal notions were virtually absent.

Thus, according to Bourdieu, in the making and viewing of popular photography, the aesthetic disposition is completely subordinated to a ritual process in which the family projects and affirms its identity. Bourdieu’s essay concludes by bringing out the pun in the book’s title. Photography is *Un art moyen* in a double sense. Not only is it a middling, average or, indeed ‘middle-brow’ form of ‘art’; it also finds its place halfway between, on the one hand, “les pratiques vulgaires” (the anarchy of barbarous taste) and, on the other, “les pratiques culturelles nobles” (high culture)<sup>97</sup>.

Therefore it is precisely because it is both embedded in popular social practices and in an ambiguous relationship to bourgeois notions of aesthetics that photography can serve as a

subtle indicator (a kind of Rorschach test for aesthetic disposition) in Bourdieu's sociology of taste. Furthermore his theory could be used profitably to throw new light on, say, the endeavours of art photographers - as a dominated fraction of the dominant group of modernist art practitioners - to gain artistic legitimacy for their medium<sup>98</sup>; or if documentary photography was examined as a genre as narrowly circumscribed in its rules as family photography, its presumed objective character would drop away and its projection of community (the family unit writ large) would begin to be seen as equally rooted in a social imaginary.

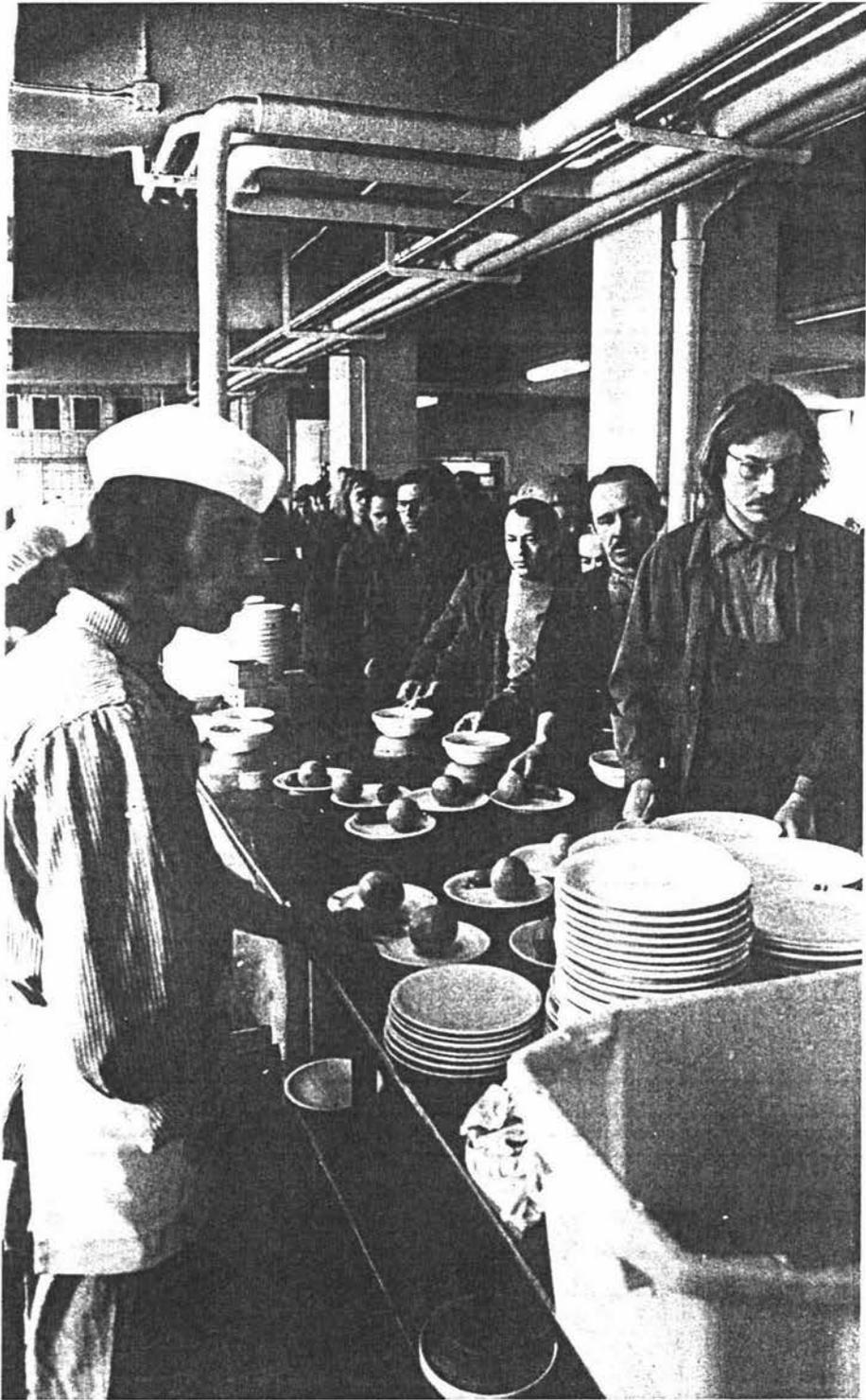
### **Ways of Seeing/Ways of Telling**

*John Berger/Jean Mohr*

*Another way of telling*<sup>99</sup> is the third occasion on which John Berger and Jean Mohr have collaborated on a large scale photographic essay. The first occasion produced *A fortunate man*<sup>100</sup>, the story of a country doctor, and the second, *A seventh man*<sup>101</sup>, a book about migrant workers in Europe.

The greater part of *Another way of telling* consists of 150 photographs made by Jean Mohr and arranged in a narrative sequence by Berger and Mohr. These photographs depict aspects of peasant life, mainly in western Europe. Here I will be concerned principally with Berger's essay "Appearances"<sup>102</sup> which takes the form of a theoretical reflection on photography. This essay follows on from Berger's earlier work in this area which is collected in the first part of the book, *About looking*<sup>103</sup> and, of course, from his general treatment of the image in *Ways of seeing*.

In *Ways of seeing*, Berger made the claim that: "every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights...the photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject"<sup>104</sup>. There are problems with this passage. It is vague about what constitutes a "way of seeing" and ends by attributing it all to the photographer's choice of subject, neglecting to mention any other factors, whether of a formal or ideological nature.

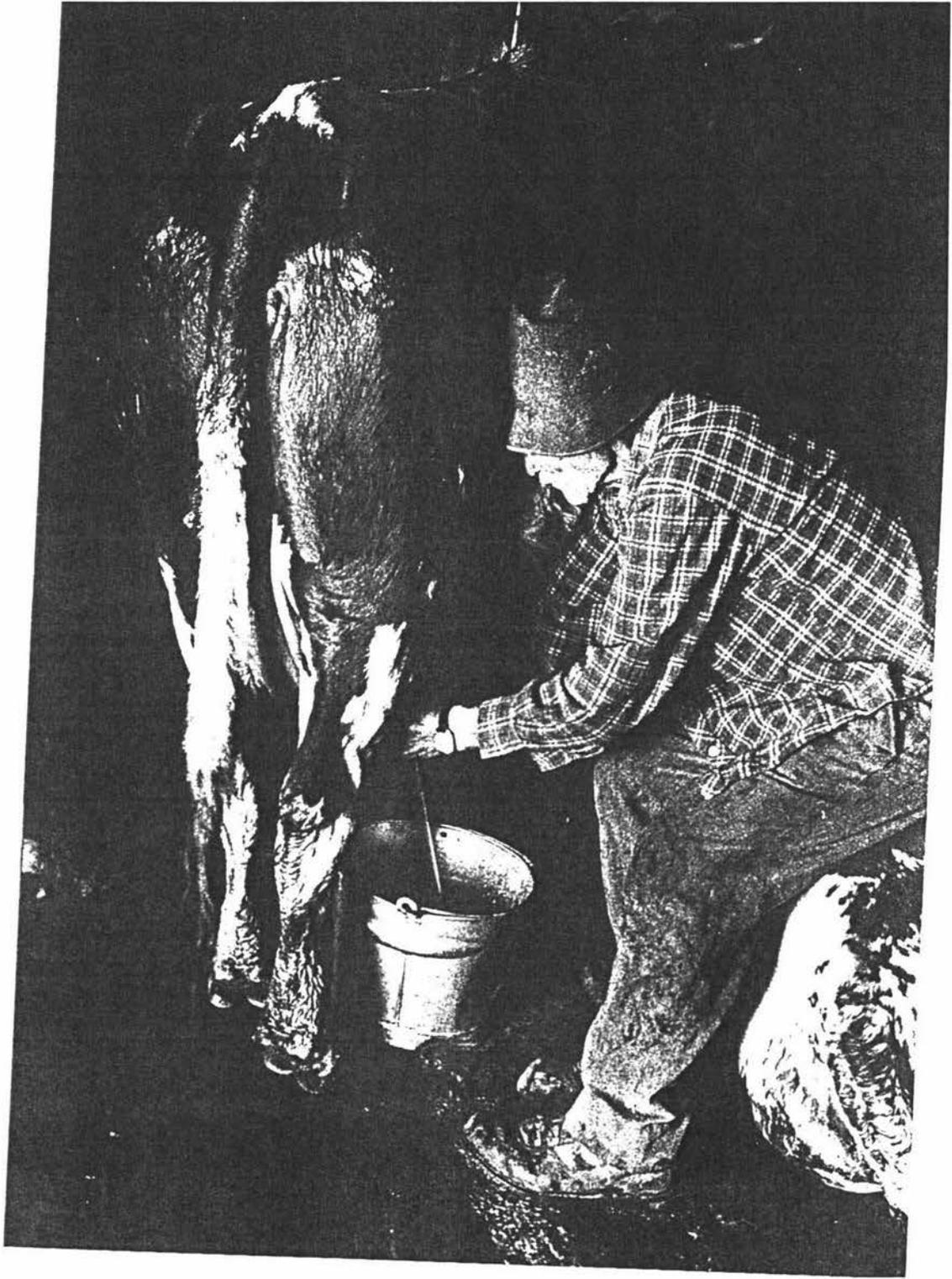


It also seems to suggest that the world is an inventory of already formed, free floating 'sights' waiting to be selected<sup>105</sup>. Again, this ignores the crucial intervention of necessary historico-cultural conventions or schemata which shape our visual practice. In his essays devoted exclusively to photography, Berger, like Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, inclines to the view that photographs are traces (Sontag) or uncoded messages (Barthes)<sup>106</sup>. He does, however, equally emphasize their constructed character which follows from the photographer's intentions and aesthetic choices. He asks: "are the appearances which a camera transports a construction, a man-made cultural artifact, or are they like a footprint in the sand, a trace *naturally* left by something that has passed? The answer is, both"<sup>107</sup>.

For Berger, photography does not possess a language nor does it translate from appearances, rather it quotes from them. Unlike the coded practice of drawing, "the photographic image is produced instantaneously by the reflection of light; its figuration is not impregnated by experience or consciousness"<sup>108</sup>. This goes hand in hand with the weak intentionality and high ambiguity of photographs.

Given these somewhat limiting characteristics, wherein does photography's importance to historical and political understanding lie? In his earlier essay, "Uses of photography" (1978), Berger concluded with the assertion that: "a radial system has to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic"<sup>109</sup>. One way of doing this is by the careful construction of a context for each and every photograph at issue. We must, says Berger, "...construct it with words...construct it with other photographs...construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images"<sup>110</sup>.

But prior to this we should aim at the photograph of the "long quotation". In this type of photograph: "the particular event photographed implicates other events by way of the idea born of the appearances of the first event...A photograph which achieves expressiveness thus works dialectically: it preserves the particularity of the event recorded, and it chooses an instant when the correspondences of those particular appearances articulate a general idea"<sup>111</sup>. Although a photograph (Berger concentrates on the single photograph in his examples) lacks narrative power and is, in fact, a break in a hypothetical narrative chain, it can attain to a kind



of “half language of appearances”<sup>112</sup>. And by means of the “long quotation” a photograph may extend its meaning potential radially and, if not narrate, at least serve to “instigate ideas”.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to providing a general discussion of photography in relation to questions of representation and signification, the purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the work of several of the most important contemporary theorists of photography. The writings of Roland Barthes and Victor Burgin – two major exponents, respectively, of semiotic and psychoanalytic perspectives on photography – work to illuminate the politics of representation and show how photographic imagery contributes to subject construction and ideological positioning. They both stress that photographs are always accompanied by a text or texts whether they are actually typographically inscribed on or near the image or purely implied in intertextual reference, or in an address to the psychological apparatus of the viewer.

However, as the ideas on photography advanced by Pierre Bourdieu and John Berger demonstrate, there are useful contemporary perspectives on photography other than semiotic and psychoanalytic ones. Although Berger’s concept of the photograph of the “long quotation” shares with Barthes and Burgin a focus on the material properties and effects of photography in itself, his advocacy of a “radial” treatment of photographs begins to move things out into a set of multiple contexts of understanding. And with his strongly sociological approach to the way in which photography operates both within family life and within the hierarchies of taste in the wider society, Bourdieu shifts the emphasis even further away from the intrinsic properties and effects of the photographic image.

In the next chapter I will examine – amongst other things and in the context of a sustained discussion of documentary photography – yet another move in this direction, the discursive paradigm in photographic studies, fashioned by writers such as John Tagg and Alan Sekula from leads provided by the work of Michel Foucault.

## Notes

1. Beaumont Newhall, *The history of photography: from 1839 to the present*, New York: M.O.M.A., 1982, p.9.
2. Steve Neale, *Cinema and technology: image, sound, colour*, London: B.F.I/Macmillan, 1985, chapter one: "Photography and the illusion of reality", pp.10-12. Giovanni della Porta fully described the Camera Obscura in a treatise in 1558 and suggested that it be used by artists. It was while using a Camera Lucida, invented by Wollaston in 1807, that William Fox Talbot conceived an idea for his experiments in photography.
3. Hubert Damisch, "Five notes for a phenomenology of the photographic image", *October* no.5, Summer 1978, p.70.
4. *Websters new twentieth century dictionary* (unabridged), New York: World Publishing Company, 1947, p.1443.
5. R.G.Collingwood, *The principles of art*, Oxford University Press, 1965 (1st edition 1938), pp.53-56.
6. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of art*, U.K.: Harvester Press, 1981 (originally published 1960), p.5.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.
8. *Ibid.*, p.9, footnote 8.
9. Anne Freadman draws a similar distinction between theories of representation and theories of signification. The former are: "theories that suppose that language matches the world, and is dictated by it...Some of these are naive, if they suppose a perfect and automatic fit; others are sophisticated if they suppose that representation itself is structured by the rules of the language used". The latter are: "...based on the

abstract, formal or content-less rules as the very condition necessary for producing content-ed texts - or even discontent-ed ones...". Anne Freedman, "Reading the visual", *Framework* nos.30/31, 1986, pp.136-7.

10. Stanley Cavell, *The world viewed*, Harvard University Press, 1979, p.23.
11. Stanley Cavell, "What photography calls thinking", *Raritan*, vol.4, Spring 1985, p.4.
12. Roger Scruton, "Photography and representation", *Critical inquiry*, vol 7, Spring 1981, p.577.
13. *Ibid.*, p.590.
14. It is remarkable how widespread this view is amongst professional philosophers. Kendall L. Walton, for example, is of the opinion that: "photographs are *transparent*. We see the world through them...Nor is my point that what we see - photographs - are *duplicates*, or *reproductions* of objects, or *substitutes* or surrogates for them. My claim is that we *see*, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them". K.L.Walton, "Transparent pictures: on the nature of photographic realism", *Critical inquiry*, vol. 10, December 1984, pp.252-3. For a response to Walton's paper see Edwin Martin, "On seeing Walton's great-grandfather", *Critical inquiry*, vol.12, Summer 1986, pp.796-800. This is followed by Walton's reply, "Looking again through photographs: a response to Edwin Martin", *Critical inquiry*, vol. 12, Summer 1986, pp.801-808.
15. Rudolf Arnheim, "On the nature of photography", *Critical inquiry*, vol.1, September 1974, p.155.
16. Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, vision and representation", in T.Barrow et al. (eds), *Reading into photography: selected essays, 1959-1980*, University of New Mexico Press, 1982, p.70.

17. H. Gene Blocker, "Pictures and photographs", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, no.36, Winter 1977, p.158.
18. Snyder and Allen, *op.cit.*, p.69.
19. Peter Wollen and Sam Rhodie develop this Bazinian dichotomy into a schema for the analysis of avant-garde film. It is also, I would maintain, relevant to a discussion of the still photography image. See Peter Wollen, "Ontology and materialism in film", *Screen*, vol.17, no.1, Spring 1976; reprinted in Peter Wollen, *Readings and writings - semiotic counter strategies*, London: Verso, 1982; and Sam Rhodie, "Avant-garde", in Scott Murray (ed.), *The new Australian cinema*, Australia: C.P.Nelson, 1980. Bazin himself emphasized the mimetic qualities of the medium: "the objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making...we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually represented, set before us,...in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction"., Andre Bazin, "The ontology of the photographic image", in *What is cinema?*, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 1971, p.13.
20. Mark Johnson, "500 years of photography", *Photofile*, vol.4, no.1, Autumn 1986, p.15: "...the eidetic traditions in which photographers work may be seen to have begun in the fifteenth and not the nineteenth century". The question of the relationship of Renaissance codes of perspective, central projection and monocular vision to the photographic image (photography and, in this article mostly, cinema) is examined in Stephen Heath, "Narrative space", *Screen*, vol.17, no.3, Autumn 1976, pp.68-112. On photography specifically, see pp.75-80 where Heath writes: "the conception of the Quattrocento system is that of a scenographic space, space set out as spectacle for the eye of the spectator. Eye and knowledge come together; subject, object and the distance of the steady observation that allows the one to master the other; the scene with its strength of geometry and optics. Of that projected utopia, the camera is the culminating realisation", p.77.

21. Joel Snyder, "Picturing vision", in W.J.T.Mitchell (ed.), *The language of images*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.231.
  
22. Peter Galassi, *Before photography: painting and the invention of photography*, New York: M.O.M.A., 1981, P.12. The impetus for *Before photography* can be traced back to "Before 1839", a lecture by the Austrian art historian, Heinrich Schwarz, first delivered in Baltimore, Maryland in 1963, and attended by John Szarkowski (director of M.O.M.A. at the time of Galassi's exhibition. "As Schwarz put it, the history of photography began in Renaissance Italy, when artists adopted 'what seems to be the most trivial and actually is the most problematic dogma of aesthetic theory - the dogma that a work of art is the direct and faithful representation of a natural object'. This new artistic goal led painters to adopt two artistic conventions, the fixed point of view and linear perspective, both of which are, so to speak, built into photography", Gene Thornton, "The place of photography in the Western pictorial tradition: Heinrich Schwarz, Peter Galassi and John Szarkowski", *History of photography*, vol.10, no.2, April/June 1986, p.86.
  
23. Galassi, *ibid.*, p.12.
  
24. *Ibid.*, p.17.
  
25. *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.
  
26. *Ibid.*, p.25.
  
27. Joel Snyder, review of P.Galassi's *Before photography*, *Studies in Visual Communication*, vol.8, no.1, Winter 1982, pp.113-14.
  
28. This phrase is taken from Carl Chiarenza, "Notes towards an integrated history of picturemaking", *Afterimage* (U.S.A.), vol.7, nos 1-2, Summer 1979. Chiarenza states that: "any viable history of photography has to be part of a history of picturemaking, and any viable history of picturemaking must include photography", p.37. He goes on to suggest that: "photographs, while conforming to renaissance

conventions, began to reveal pictorial possibilities (detail, blur, multiple views, fragmented features) never before seriously considered”, p.40. In this he differs from Galassi who thinks these features were presaged by the painting and drawing of the early nineteenth century and that this constitutes a significant break with renaissance conventions.

29. J.Snyder, *op.cit*, p.113.
30. S.Varnedoe, “Of surface similarities, deeper disparities, first photographs, and the function of form: photography and painting after 1839”, *Arts magazine*, September 1981, p.113. Varnedoe argues for a non-essentialist approach to photography: “as we learn more and more about individual photographers and their individual photographs, we should be leaving behind the idea that photography has a singular aesthetic and be concentrating instead on the varied and various pluralistic aesthetics photographers have developed and can develop out of the potential photography provides”, p.112. He concludes thus: “photographers are not what photography makes of them – it’s the other way round”, p.115.
31. W.B.Gaillie, *Peirce and pragmatism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952, p.115.
32. C.S.Peirce, "Logic as semiotic: the theory of signs", in Justus Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical writings of Peirce*, New York: Dover Publications, 1955, p.100.
33. *Ibid.*, p.99.
34. Peter Wollen, *Signs and meaning in the cinema*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1972 (3rd edition), p.122.
35. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the index: seventies art in America", *October*, no.3, Spring 1977, p.70; reprinted with the title "Notes on the Index: Part 1" in R.Krauss, *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths*, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1985.

36. P.Wollen, *op.cit.*, p.122.
37. Frank Webster, *The new photography: responsibility in visual communication*, London: John Calder, 1980, p.171.
38. David McNeil, "Pictures and parables", *Block*, no.10, 1985, P.12.
39. P.Wollen, *op.cit.*, p.122: "Icons can be divided into two sub-classes: images and diagrams. In the case of images 'simple qualities' are alike; in the case of diagrams the 'relations between the parts'".
40. Rosalind Krauss, "Nightwalkers", *Art Journal*, Spring 1981, p.35.
41. Sylvia Lawson, "The Peirce/Wollen code signs: functions and values", *The Australian journal of screen theory*, no.3, 1977, p.48.
42. P.Wollen, *op.cit.*, pp.122-3.
43. Frank Webster, *op.cit.*, chapter 5, pp.157, 163, and chapter 6, p.190.
44. C.S.Peirce, *op.cit.*, p.106. In an essay on the index as a major epistemological category in certain forms of contemporary art (above all those working with photography and video) Philippe Dubois writes: "On peut considerer qu'une des lignes de fond de ce projet global tient dans l'idee d'un passage de la categorie de l'icone a celle de l'index, passage envisage non seulement comme marque historique de la modernite, mais aussi, plus generalement, comme un deplacement theorique, ou une esthetique (classique) de la mimesis, de l'analogie et de la ressemblance (l'ordre de la metaphore) cederait le pas a une esthetique de la trace, du contact, de la contiguite referentielle (l'ordre de la metonymie)", "L'ombre, le miroir, l'index: a l'origine de la peinture: la photo, la video", *Parachute* no.26, Spring 1982, p.17.
45. Thierry de Duve, "Time exposure and snapshot: the photograph as paradox", *October*, no.5, Summer 1978, p.114. He adds: "in the case of photography, the

direct causal link between reality and the image is light and its proportionate physical action upon silver bromide", p.114.

46. "A code is system of meaning common to the members of a culture or subculture. It consists of both signs and rules or conventions that determine how and in what contexts these signs are used and how they can be combined to form more complex messages", John Fiske, *Introduction to communication studies*, London: Methuen, 1982, p.20.
47. It should be noted that although I use the words semiotics and semiology interchangeably throughout this section, they come from different historical lines of enquiry. Briefly, semiotics is the American term and derives from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, discussed earlier. Semiology is the European term and derives from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure "believed that linguistics should serve as the master pattern for the study of semiology in general, a view which has the consequence of treating all signs as though they are fundamentally arbitrary and conventional like linguistic signs", Margaret Iversen, "Saussure versus Peirce: models for a semiotics of visual art", in A.L. Rees and F. Borzello (eds), *The New Art History*, London: Camden Press, 1986, p.85. Whereas Peirce proposed a much wider typology of signs which included both 'motivated' and arbitrary signs.

However as both semiotics and semiology are concerned with the life of signs in society, a movement from one to the other shouldn't cause any confusion. Also my choice of Barthes as prime exponent of a semiotic approach to photography does not imply that others have not made a significant contribution to the field. The work of Umberto Eco could equally have served as exemplary here.

48. See R.Barthes, *Mythologies*, St Albans: Paladin, 1972, pp.91-93, 100-102, and 109-159. See also "The harcourt actor" and "Shock photos" in R.Barthes, *The Eiffel tower and other mythologies*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1979, pp.19-22 and 71-73.
49. R.Barthes, "The photographic message" in *Image-Music-Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, Glasgow: Fontana, 1977, p.16.

50. *Ibid.*, p.19.
51. In 'classical' semiotics, denotation is a first order 'language' system whose signified is conceived in relatively 'objective' terms. Connotation, on the other hand, is a second order 'language' system of 'subjective' values whose "...plane of expression is itself constituted by a signifying system". R. Barthes, *Elements of semiology*, Translated by A.Lavers and C.Smith, London: Jonathan Cape, 1967, pp.89-94; and Pierre Guiraud, *Semiology*, translated by G.Gross, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, pp.28-29.
52. R. Barthes, "Rhetoric of the image", *Image-Music-Text*, *op.cit.*, pp.44-45.
53. *Ibid.*, p.44.
54. R. Barthes, *S/Z*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974, p.9.
55. Kristeva draws a distinction between the realm of the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*. The former, rooted in bodily drives, precedes the subject's accession to the *imaginary* plenitude of selfhood in the mirror stage and the subsequent entry into the *symbolic* through language. She characterises it as "...a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process;...not a symbolic modality but one articulating a continuum: the connections between the (glottal and anal) sphincters in (rhythmic and intonational) vocal modulations, or those between the sphincters and family protagonists...", Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in poetic language*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp.28-29. It is important to note that the *semiotic* cannot be confined to a phase but persists as a component of the signifying process after the advent of the representational practices of the *symbolic*. *Signifiance*, by contrast with *signification*, is interested in examining how semiotic elements infiltrate and disrupt symbolic elements in signifying practices rather than closing on the univocal meanings of 'classical' semiotics. See Kristeva, *op.cit.*, p.79 where she describes art as "...the semiotization of the symbolic"; and Barthes, "Theory of the text", in R. Young (ed.), *Untying the text*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p.38: "*signifiance* is a process, in the course of which the 'subject' of the text, escaping the logic of the

ego-cogito and engaging other logics (that of the signifier and that of contradiction) struggles with meaning and is deconstructed".

56. "If supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement par excellence since it marks the point where the supplement proposes itself as supplement of supplement, sign of sign, *taking the place of* a speech already significant: it displaces the *proper place* of the sentence, the unique time of the sentence pronounced *hic et nunc* by an irreplaceable subject, and in return enervates the voice. It marks the place of the initial doubling", Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p.281.
57. R. Barthes, "The third meaning", in *Image-Music-Text*, *op.cit.*, pp.60-61.
58. Richard Howard's translation of *La chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (1980) omits Barthes' bibliographic references which are located on pages 185-187 of the French edition published in Paris by Cahiers du Cinema and Gallimard Seuil.
59. These issues and others are broached in: Tzvetan Todorov, "The last Barthes", translated by Richard Howard, *Critical Inquiry*, vol.7, no.3, 1981, pp.449-455; J. Gerald Kennedy, "Roland Barthes, autobiography, and the end of writing", *The Georgia Review*, vol.35, No.2, 1981, pp.381-398; and Douglas Crimp, "Fassbinder, Fox, Elvira, Erwin, Armin and all the others", *October*, no.21, Summer 1982, pp.63-81.
60. R. Barthes, *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*, translated by Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p.9.
61. *Ibid.*, p.26.
62. *Ibid.*, pp.27-28.
63. *Ibid.*, p.27.

64. *Ibid.*, p.26.
65. *Ibid.*, p.42.
66. *Ibid.*, p.55.
67. *Ibid.*, pp.88-89.
68. Victor Burgin, "Re-reading camera lucida", *Creative Camera*, no.215, November 1982, p.734; reprinted in Burgin's collection of essays, *The end of art theory: criticism and post-modernity*, London: Macmillan, 1986, pp.71-92.
69. R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida, op.cit.*, p.20.
70. Victor Burgin was born in Sheffield, Yorkshire, U.K., in 1941. He was educated at the Royal College of Art, London (1962-1965) and at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A. (1965-67). Further information about his individual and group exhibitions as a photographer, location(s) of collections of his work and details of publications by and about him can be found in George Walsh et al.(eds), *Contemporary photographers*, London: Macmillan, 1982, pp.115- 117.
71. Tony Godfrey, "Sex, text, politics: an interview with Victor Burgin", *Block*, no.7, 1982, p.2.
72. The best way to find out about this period is to read the pages of the relevant issues of *Screen* itself. However succinct and sympathetic overviews of *Screen's* 1970s project are provided in: Philip Rosen, "Screen and the Marxist project in film criticism", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol.2, no.3, August 1977, pp.273-87; Anthony Easthope, "The trajectory of screen, 1971-79", in Francis Barker et al.(eds), *The politics of theory*, Essex Sociology of Literature Conference, Colchester: University of Essex, 1983, pp.121-133; a key participant in this project, Paul Willemen, gives his account of the period in "Remarks on screen: introductory notes

for a history of contexts", *Southern Review*, vol.16, no.2, July 1983, pp.292-311. Critiques of the *Screen* position are available in: Andrew Britton, "The ideology of screen: Althusser, Lacan, Barthes", *Movie 26*, Winter 1978/9, pp.2-28; Kevin McDonnell and Kevin Robins, "Marxist cultural theory: the Althusserian smokescreen", in S.Clarke et al., *One dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the politics of culture*, London: Alison and Busby, 1980, pp.157- 231. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and materialism: developments in semiology and the theory of the subject*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, provide something of a general theoretical backdrop to what was happening within the journal's pursuit of rigorous theory for the study of film texts. A sharp critique of this book is presented in: Jonathan Ree, "Marxist modes", *Radical Philosophy*, no.23, Winter 1979, pp.2-11.

73. Christian Metz, "The imaginary signifier", *Screen*, vol.16, no.2, Summer 1975, pp.14-76.
74. Victor Burgin, "Photographic practice and art theory" (1975), in Burgin (ed.), *Thinking photography*, London: Macmillan, 1982, pp.39-83.
75. Jacques Durand, "Rhetoric and the advertising image", translated by Theo van Leeuwen, *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.1, no.2, 1983, pp.29-61. This article originally appeared in *Communications*, vol.15, 1970, pp.70- 95, with the title "Rhetorique et image publicitaire". Durand defines rhetoric as: "the art of feigned speech", which "...involves two levels of speech, the 'literal' and the 'figurative', and "...rhetorical figures are operations which allow the passage from one level to another...", p.29. In the light of Burgin's subsequent strong immersion in psychoanalytical theory it is instructive to place these passages from Durand's work on rhetoric beside this statement from Burgin himself: "when Lacan says 'the unconscious is structured like a language' he is not saying that the unconscious is structured like the grammar of everyday spoken discourse but rather that *the unconscious is structured like a rhetoric*", Burgin in Geoffrey Batchen, "For an impossible realism: an interview with Victor Burgin", *Afterimage* (U.S.A.), vol.16, no.7, February 1989, p.4, emphasis added.

76. J.Durand, *op.cit.*, p.51; and V.Burgin, "Photographic practice and art theory", in Burgin (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.81.
77. V.Burgin, "Modernism in the work of art", *Twentieth century studies*, nos 15/16, December 1976, p.48; reprinted in Burgin, *The end of art theory: criticism and postmodernity*, London: Macmillan, 1986, pp.1-28.
78. Jean Louis Baudry, "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus", translated from *Cinethique* Nos 7/8 by Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly*, vol.28, no.2, Winter 1974/5, pp.39-47.
79. V.Burgin, "Looking at photographs", in Burgin (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.146.
80. *Ibid.*
81. Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, Autumn 1975, pp.6-18; Paul Willemen, "Voyeurism, the look and Dwoskin", *Afterimage* (U.K.), no.6, Summer 1976.
82. V.Burgin, *op.cit.*, p.148.
83. *Ibid.*, p.153.
84. Suture is a psychoanalytic term introduced into cinema studies by Jean-Pierre Oudart and others. Briefly, it refers to the process whereby the subject (the spectator) is related to or 'stitched' into the chain of signifiers which constitute the film's narrative flow. See the dossier on suture in *Screen*, vol.18, no.4, Winter 1977/8, pp.23-76, with contributions by J-A.Miller, J-P.Oudart and Stephen Heath.
85. V.Burgin, "Photography, phantasy, function", *Screen*, vol.21, no.1, Spring 1980, p.70; reprinted in Burgin (ed.), *Thinking photography, op.cit.*, pp.177-216.
86. *Ibid.*, pp.63-4.

87. Jon Bird and Victor Burgin, "Postscript 1982" to Tony Godfrey, *op.cit.*, p.26.
88. Photographic based work from the period 1975-1985 is reproduced in V. Burgin, *Between*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell and London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, along with extracts from interviews, talks and letters.
89. *Ibid.*, p.138.
90. V.Burgin, "Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo", in Burgin, *The end of art theory*, *op.cit.*, p.113.
91. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, *op.cit.*, p.7
92. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, translated by Richard Nice, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984 (French edition, 1979).
93. Pierre Bourdieu et al, *Un art moyen: essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 1965, p.113.
94. *Ibid.*, pp.115-116.
95. See *Distinction*, *op.cit.*, pp.35, 39-47, for Bourdieu's discussion of responses to surveys of taste utilising photographic examples.
96. *Un art moyen*, *op.cit.*, p.126.
97. *Ibid.*, p.137.
98. For a brilliant and solitary example of how Bourdieu's ideas can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of art and advertising photography, see Rosalind Krauss, "A note on photography and the simulacral", *October* no.31, Winter 1984, pp.49-68.

99. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another way of telling*, London: Writers and Readers, 1982. Paul Willis interviews Berger and Mohr about their work together in "The authentic image", *Screen education*, nos 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp.19-30. Jean Mohr (b.1925 in Geneva) has worked professionally as a photographer since 1954. Two of his other notable collaborative works are a long photographic essay on Israel/Palestine with the social anthropologist Kenneth Brown, "Journey through the labyrinth", *Studies in visual communication*, vol.8, no.2, Spring 1982, pp.2-81; and a book on Palestinian lives with Edward Said, *After the last sky*, London: Faber and Faber, 1986.
100. J.Berger and J.Mohr, *A fortunate man*, London: Writers and Readers, 1976 (First published in 1967).
101. J.Berger and J.Mohr, *A seventh man*, Penguin, 1975.
102. *Another way of telling*, *op.cit.*, pp.83-129.
103. J. Berger, "Uses of photography", in *About looking*, London: Writers and Readers, 1980, pp.27-63.
104. J.Berger, *Ways of seeing*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p.10.
105. See *Art-Language*, vol.4, no.3, October 1978, pp.14-17. This entire issue of the journal is devoted to a blow-by-blow critique of Berger's book from a perspective derived from analytical philosophy. A sympathetic re-assessment of *Ways of seeing* is provided by Peter Fuller in *Seeing Berger: a revaluation of Ways of seeing*, London: Writers and Readers, 1980.
106. See Susan Sontag, *On photography*, Penguin, 1977. For Barthes' view, see a previous section of this chapter.
107. J.Berger, *Another way of telling*, *op.cit.*, p.92.

108. *Ibid.*, p.95.
109. J.Berger, *About looking*, *op.cit.*, p.63.
110. *Ibid.*, p.60.
111. J.Berger, *Another way of telling*, *op.cit.*, p.112.
112. The question of photography's relation to narrative is addressed in Manuel Alvarado, "Photographs and narrativity" *Screen education*, nos 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp.5-17. Kevin Halliwell's response, "Photographs and narrativity: a reply", and Alvarado's "Note in response" are in *Screen education*, no.37, Winter 1980/1, pp.79-88.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PHOTOGRAPHY: DOCUMENTARY and ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

In this chapter I propose to discuss some general features of documentary and ethnographic photography. This will be done chiefly by means of brief case studies of important practitioners whose work can be characterised in these terms. With the sole exception of the Mass Observation movement, all these photographers have found a secure place in the standard photographic histories. Either they have been assimilated to a linear history of a documentary tradition invariably contrasted with a parallel one delineating photography's emergence as a medium for art; or, in the hands of certain modernist critics and curators, a more complex procedure has obtained whereby 'documentary' photographers such as Eugene Atget and Walker Evans have been proclaimed truer bearers of an artistic vocation than more obvious photographic artificers.

By choosing to return to these well known figures, I run the risk of reinforcing the view that a coherent, developing tradition of documentary photography has existed from early on in the medium's history. However, this is not the case. Documentary should be seen as an historical category that since its alleged inception with John Grierson in 1926 has been increasingly used to classify a body of mostly film and photographic work from the past and the present. My choice of the photographers discussed hereafter is not predicated on some essential 'documentary' quality which their images might be thought to possess. Rather, it centres on their particular relation to and deployment within larger discursive formations such as the developing fields of (photo) journalism, social surveys and participant-observation ethnography in 'home' societies, all of which arose in the context of massive social change (international and internal migrations of populations, severe economic depression, the threat of war, etc.). Thus a general aporia of the chapter is its simultaneous confirmation and questioning of the idea of a self-enclosed entity called documentary photography.

Recent critical theory has questioned the validity of the continued production of both highly general meditations on the ontology of photography as a medium and the production of one volume histories which attempt to survey a self-contained history of the medium as medium.

These criticisms are unlikely to lead to a complete cessation in production of such meditations and histories. But what they offer for studies such as this one - still to a large degree hemmed in by documentary and authorship frames but dissatisfied with both of them - is a way into more complex lines of enquiry which attempt to connect multiple points in an expanded interpretative framework. "The first step in breaking with the pretentious role of critical overseer and commentator", writes John Tagg, "must be to undertake real historical research"<sup>1</sup>. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to three things: first, it follows on from chapters one and two of the thesis by showing how the two concerns thusfar discussed, ethnography and photography, have met in a variety of late nineteenth and twentieth century movements of social investigation. The actors involved in these movements did not necessarily conceive of themselves as documentarians or ethnographers nor were they necessarily aware of the endeavours or relevance of those who came before them. The important point is to see them as part of their times rather than as bearers of some ongoing tradition of documentary or ethnography. Second, I hope these case studies will help to provide analogous examples of the kinds of issues and problems thrown up when photography is seen as part of a larger field of enquiry. However, before moving on to the individual case studies, I will examine the linked categories of documentary and ethnographic photography.

### **Documentary photography**

In a recent book on documentary photography, the renowned former F.S.A. photographer, Arthur Rothstein has listed the principal features of the documentary approach as follows:

- "1. A straight, simple, realistic technique uncluttered with visual aesthetics and avoidance of manipulation.
2. The finding of significance in the commonplace and ordinary, implying a valid representation of conditions.
3. The revelation of truth through the proof and evidence of the camera.
4. A concern for social issues and causes at all levels of society.
5. The production of honest photographs that are useful, functional, and serve the purpose of education and information.

6. Photography that moves people and influences them to act positively"<sup>2</sup>.

These six points amount to a classic statement of the means and goals of documentary practice as they have taken shape in the first half of the twentieth century. To a large degree, they have survived into the present, albeit in a modified form. Taking each of them in turn, what do these points suggest? The first links documentary with a realist "anti-aesthetic" (Grierson) which shuns artifice in favour of a simple, unadorned, 'straight' technique. The second suggests that documentary's vocation lies in a form of social investigation that looks to the fabric of everyday life for its subject matter and, furthermore, strives to capture this without distortion. The third point postulates the camera as an instrument for the promotion of the 'truth' through the neutral recording of evidence. The fourth implies an extension of the 'truth-value' of documentary photography into the area of social concern. Points five and six rather overlap to the point of redundancy. They declare the ultimate aim of documentary to be to serve the democratic purpose of educating citizens to think and act in light of the provision of clear and honest accounts of social situations. Rothstein's list would no doubt have satisfied major documentary 'impresarios' such as John Grierson and Roy Stryker had they lived to read it. But from the vantage point of the late 1980s/early 1990s, it is open to question.

The implicit theory of representation underpinning Rothstein's and the majority of mainstream theorisations of documentary practices rests on the assumption that direct, unmediated access to an external world 'out there' is possible. These accounts accept a form/content distinction, privileging the latter and downplaying the role of the former. Grierson's famous definition of documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality"<sup>3</sup> conforms to this model by allowing only a secondary ordering role to the documenter who must first capture the 'actual' in its pristine, untamed state. But each constituent form of the overarching documentary genre (films, books, photo-texts) works its component materials into larger narrative/descriptive wholes which can be seen to obey rules similar to those governing novels and fiction films. For, as Hayden White argues, "...the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process"<sup>4</sup>. And in a later article specifically addressed to the question of similarities and differences between (predominantly) verbal and visual histories, White maintains that

"processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization and qualification"<sup>5</sup> are at work in both. I shall return to the question of documentary's epistemological status, in a discussion of different emphases within the basic realist model, later in the chapter. But first I will discuss a group of photographic theorists whose work directly challenges the category of documentary photography.

### **The discursive paradigm in photographic studies**

#### *The Foucauldians*

Historians of photography who isolate a strand of documentary photography, separating it from an opposing strand of art photography and tracing its development through the later nineteenth century up until the present, rely on two central claims. The principal and most strongly held one is that documentary photography provides direct, unmanipulated access to social reality. It is then assumed that if this 'truth' is presented in a sufficiently striking manner to an (more socially elevated) audience, they will be moved to sympathise and possibly act in the cause of social justice.

Proponents of this line take it for granted that the 'neutrality' of the technological apparatus and the philanthropic intentions of the individual photographer make possible an objective view of social relations. However, the belief that documentary provides a form of knowledge outside existing power relations within society and free of dominating conceptions of rationality has been severely challenged by the work of Michel Foucault and his disciples. Foucault's studies of the medical gaze and the panopticon principle in the nineteenth century prison<sup>6</sup> have established a strong connection between controlling forms of vision and the disciplining of both individual bodies and larger populations. All of this has occurred within specific institutional sites (the prison, the hospital, the school, etc.) which have employed the emergent social and human sciences to produce the knowledge necessary to the dissemination of 'capillary' power effects throughout a far reaching 'carceral' network.

Photography is a knowledge producing mechanism which emerged at more or less the same time as the developments outlined above. It is therefore not surprising that it was put to work in the service of various local and state authorities keen to survey the populations under their

jurisdiction. Throughout the nineteenth century, various police, medical and other bodies assembled photographic archives in order to know and control the 'criminal', the 'insane', and the poor in their midst.

Even though Foucault himself did not write anything specifically on photography as such<sup>7</sup>, his genealogical studies of the modern convergence of power/knowledge have inspired important work by John Tagg and David Green. Tagg has summed up the implications of Foucault's work for the study of photography in the following passage:

"What alone unites the diversity of sites in which photography operates is the social formation itself: the specific historical spaces for representation and practice which it constitutes. Photography as such has no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work.... Its history has no unity. It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. And it is this field we must study, not photography as such"<sup>8</sup>.

Aside from passages such as this in his programmatic theoretical essays, Tagg has attempted historically specific analyses of photography's enmeshment in wider discursive networks. The most notable of these is his most recent on the place of photography as a productive force in debates over slum clearance, public health matters and urban (re) development in the Quarry Hill area of Leeds, England<sup>9</sup>. The particular photographic materials Tagg is at pains to situate in their proper historical context consist of a number of albums made between 1896 and 1901 (principally) devoted to the depiction of working class housing and living conditions. He convincingly shows how the insertion of images of dark, "insanitary" and cluttered spaces into government reports contributed to securing their transformation into orderly areas of "space and light".

The kind of nineteenth century photo-documentation analysed in this and other papers by Tagg is related to twentieth century documentary not because it is an earlier example of some ongoing tradition; rather, it is a question of mapping the changing deployment of photography as just one of an ensemble of elements in various strategies devised by the state. It is with enterprises directed by men like John Grierson (U.K.) and Roy Stryker (U.S.A) that

documentary attains self consciousness as a genre with a special relationship to state agencies. But one thing both nineteenth century photo-documentation and twentieth century documentary do share is the tendency to speak, "...to those with relative power about those positioned as lacking, as the 'feminised' other, as passive but pathetic objects capable only of offering themselves up to a benevolent, transcendent gaze - the gaze of the camera and the gaze of the paternal state"<sup>10</sup>.

The photographic theory and analysis of John Tagg<sup>11</sup> takes off from Foucault's genealogies of power/knowledge in the disciplining of human bodies and populations. In a related manner, the more recent work<sup>12</sup> of the American photographic theorist and photographer, Allan Sekula, also looks to Foucault for direction in the historical analysis of photographs. But unlike Tagg, Sekula employs the earlier Foucauldian idea of the archive to investigate how photographs operate materially in history. He understands this operation as: the "...need to describe the emergence of a truth apparatus that cannot be adequately reduced to the optical model provided by the camera. The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical statistical system of 'intelligence'. This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artifact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet"<sup>13</sup>.

The archive, understood in the quasi-linguistic terms of Foucault's archaeology<sup>14</sup>, is a paradigmatic storehouse of images capable of generating photographic statements; an archive provides the general conditions for "semantic availability" but at the same time imposes a relation of "abstract visual equivalence" on all its contents<sup>15</sup>.

In the first of two richly detailed, historically focused essays, Sekula sets about contextualising a selection from the negative archives of Canadian Leslie Shedden who owned and operated a Cape Breton photographic studio from 1948-1968. His main client was the local mining company and its employees. Sekula carries out this contextualisation by suggestively linking the development of photography as a form of mechanical reproduction with developments in the history of the relations between capital and labour over the last two hundred years.

And in another essay published three years later, he enters territory that overlaps with Tagg's project. Taking the period 1880-1910, he compares the different but comparable projects of Alphonse Bertillon, a Parisian police official, and Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics. The work of both men was embedded in a notion of bio-social statistics and physiognomy within which photography was assigned an important role. "The first rigorous system of archival cataloguing and retrieval of photographs", writes Sekula, "was that invented by Bertillon. Bertillon's nominalist system of identification and Galton's essentialist system of typology constitute not only the two poles of positivist attempts to regulate social deviance by means of photography, but also the two poles of these attempts to regulate the semantic traffic in photographs. Bertillon sought to embed the photograph in the archive. Galton sought to embed the archive in the photograph"<sup>16</sup>.

Sekula concludes his essay by arguing against the "safe archival closure" of Bertillon and Galton in late nineteenth and early twentieth century history. Their respective projects survive, he argues, in the surveillance methods of the modern state and the biologically determinist ideologies of the new right movements of recent times<sup>17</sup>. He thus manages to carry out the difficult Foucauldian task of tracing a genealogy into the present.

### **Ethnographic photography**

Attempting to distinguish social documentary from ethnographic photography is rather like trying to differentiate sociology from social anthropology. A simple definitional division of labour would allocate the photographic investigation of 'western' industrial societies to social documentary and that of 'non-Western', preindustrial societies to ethnographic photography. One objection to this is that the self/other dichotomy underpinning it can just as easily be operative within the investigator's 'own' society (e.g., in the study of ethnic subcultures). Another is that it implies that only certain societies are amenable to ethnographic description; whereas, in fact, as a theoretical and methodological practice, ethnography should be able to be practised anywhere. We should, that is, be equally free to call Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's work in Bali a documentary study of child rearing; and James Agee and Walker Evans's study of Alabama share croppers, an ethnography of tenant farming. But even so, the kind of photography more closely associated with anthropological projects is both less widely known and more difficult to accommodate within conventional histories. It

does not usually appear within the pages of general photographic histories nor within particular histories of documentary. Also, until quite recently, little or no attention has been paid to visual anthropology (film, photography, and video) as a region of the anthropological discipline as a whole. I don't propose here to provide an outline history of the photographic work that has been done within anthropology. Rather, I wish to address some of the questions raised by a predominantly visual approach to ethnography.

A good place to start is with Jay Ruby's question: "Is an ethnographic film a filmic ethnography?"<sup>18</sup>. In his attempt to answer this question, Ruby sets out the following four elements of a definition of ethnography:

- "1. The primary concern of an ethnographic work is a description of a whole culture or some definable element of a culture.
2. An ethnographic work must be informed by an implicit or explicit theory of culture which causes the statements within the work to be organized in a particular way.
3. An ethnographic work must contain statements which reveal the methodology of the author.
4. An ethnographic work must employ a distinctive lexicon - an anthropological argot".<sup>19</sup>

Before deciding whether 'ethnographies' that are largely or wholly visual in form can meet these criteria or indeed whether they even should, I want to compare Ruby's list with one quoted in chapter one. Recall that Marcus and Cushman defined "ethnographic realism" as "...a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life"<sup>20</sup>. This definition and Marcus and Cushman's related stipulation that ethnographic realism exhibits "the narrative structure of total ethnography" is quite close to Ruby's first point. His second point, however, does not find any obvious counterpart in Marcus and Cushman's list; this is perhaps because Marcus and Cushman are concerned with the literary properties of all "ethnographic realist" texts (i.e., almost all ethnographies), common to ethnographies whatever their implicit/explicit theoretical orientation (Ruby mentions Marxist and British structuralist positions). Ruby's third point may be more a prescriptive statement of what ethnographers should do rather than description of what they normally do, at least with rare

exceptions until relatively recently; again, there is no obvious counterpart in Marcus and Cushman's list. But Ruby's fourth point is matched by Marcus and Cushman's emphasis on "embellishment of jargon" and the "contextual exegesis of native concepts and discourse".

In sum, there is a reasonably high degree of congruence between Marcus and Cushman's and Ruby's lists of distinctive features of ethnographic writing. Marcus and Cushman's list is confined to written ethnography whereas Ruby's is designed to cover visual forms as well. The former detail the main generic and literary features of what they regard as the dominant form of ethnographic writing; theirs is an investigation internal to strictly anthropological ethnography itself. Ruby, by contrast, is faced with the problem of establishing a set of criteria which will enable him to evaluate whether a particular visual text belongs to the ethnographic genre or not; he wants to know what properties any visual text must exhibit in order to be admitted to the genre of ethnographic realism.

Ruby's paper is exclusively concerned with ethnographic film making. He argues that the simple adoption of the conventions of documentary film, uninformed by anthropological theory and ethnographic methodology will not lead to the production of a truly ethnographic film. Perhaps the main problem with most documentary films is their heavy reliance on voice over narration which not only tends to dominate the visuals but often completely overrides the voice of the 'other' or prevents it from emerging. Although I should add that the device of omniscient narration is not confined to documentary films but is also a hallmark of written realist documentaries.

Apart from Ruby's papers, the only other major, early attempt to interrogate the specifics of ethnographic film - for it is film not photography that is seen as the primary visual alternative to written ethnography - is Karl Heider's *Ethnographic film*<sup>21</sup>. After stating that "no ethnographic film can stand by itself", that it must supplement or be supplemented by written materials, Heider sets out a list of the attributes of ethnographic film. His extensive "attribute dimension grid" includes the following items: "ethnographic basis/ relation to printed materials/ whole acts/ whole bodies/ explanation and evaluation of the various distortions/ basic distortions/ basic technical competence/ appropriateness of sound/ narration fit/ ethnographic presence/ contextualisation/ whole people/ distortion in the film making process: time and continuity/ inadvertent distortion of behaviour/ intentional distortion of behaviour"<sup>22</sup>.

This comprehensive grid of prescriptions for separating the truly ethnographic film from the less or not very ethnographic is only applicable to photo-texts to a limited degree. The first, highly general question of a given text's ethnographic basis is, of course, very much to the point; Heider's digital scale moves from "uninformed by ethnography" to "deeply shaped by ethnographic understanding" and can serve to make initial broad divisions but may be overstretched in borderline cases or instances where definitions need to be questioned. The second point, the question of the relation to printed materials does not really arise in connection to ethnographic photography which rarely, if ever, appears without accompanying text. As to the matter of whole acts and whole bodies, photography is predisposed to the fragmentary presentation of parts and moments by virtue of its production of single, discrete images. This can lead to the precise analytic breakdown of acts into sequential units as in Eadweard Muybridge's suites on human and animal motion<sup>23</sup> or Bateson and Mead's photoanalysis of Balinese child rearing patterns (to be discussed shortly). In the case of social documentary photography, whether 'ethnographically' conscious or not, ideals of the 'good shot' often outweigh the simple coverage of important social details. It follows from this that these photographers do not necessarily feel obliged to acknowledge any 'distortions' in their work; for one person's distortion may be another's artistic licence. Of Heider's three points on technical competence, appropriateness of sound and narration fit, only the first applies to photography, and for social documentary photographers this is usually very high.

The very important question of "ethnographic presence" involves more than the mere acknowledgment of the ethnographer's actual presence in the field and opens onto questions of reflexivity and representation. Examples of this are quite rare in ethnographic film, although there are signs of a move away from the dominant mode of 'observational cinema'<sup>24</sup>; Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'été*<sup>25</sup> is probably the most famous example of a self-consciously reflexive ethnographic film. Purely visual examples of the signalling of ethnographic presence in still photography are, however, conspicuous by their absence; if anything like it is achieved in photo-texts, it is by means of accompanying written language. A classic example of this would be James Agee's reflections on his and Walker Evans's presence amongst the Alabama sharecroppers who are the object of study in *Let us now praise famous men*. I will have more to say about this book later on in the chapter.

In order to achieve adequate contextualization, ethnographic photo-texts must marshal a sufficient number of revelatory and complementary images that are also well supported by written texts. This is the principal way in which they can work against the problem of "isolated behaviour shown out of context". The remaining four dimensions in Heider's grid are elaborations on his third, fourth, and fifth points and we need not go into them further here. To sum up, Heider's "attribute dimension grid" is useful in drawing up a profile of the characteristics of an ethnographic film (or photo-text) with scientific pretensions; a film or photo-text which aims to some degree to emulate written ethnographies and bracket itself off from run-of-the-mill social documentary. However, more flexible criteria need to be applied to works not expressly conceived within an ethnographic framework.

One obvious difference between the place of photography and film in ethnographic practice is that whereas very few ethnographers take movie cameras into the field - although the advent of portable video is changing this considerably - most, if not all, take a still camera. This has resulted in a relatively small body of ethnographic films, but a huge number of monographs with a handful of illustrative photographs; while the number of anthropologists or photographers of a strong ethnological persuasion who have presented the results of their fieldwork principally by means of photographs is very small indeed. But there have been some and I will proceed now to brief summaries of the efforts of the main figures in the field.

*Franz Boas (1858-1942)*<sup>26</sup>

Although he once studied aspects of practical photography, Boas himself did not take any photographs in the field. Rather, he employed a professional photographer, Oregon Columbus Hastings who, to cite one instance, took 189 photographs amongst the Kwakiutl in Fort Rupert during November 1894. Even so, Boas - also credited with inventing the technique of photo-elicitation - closely supervised the taking of these photographs, acting in something like the capacity of a film director. The style of these photographs is more 'documentary' (neutral backgrounds, everyday clothes) than the later, 'pictorial' (soft focus, posed, costumed, theatrical) portraits of, say, Edward S.Curtis<sup>27</sup>.

Boas selected photographs taken during the 1894 expedition and used them in the monographs, *The social organization and secret societies of the Kwakiutl* (1897) and *The Kwakiutl of Vancouver island* (1909). The 1897 volume was able to feature half-tone reproductions as this technique came into use around 1890 and it stands as one of the first anthropological texts to include photographs<sup>28</sup>. Boas's preferred fieldwork method was not participant-observation but the making of texts in the native language; photographs as reproducible 'text-objects' were capable of incorporation into these texts as a minor but not unimportant part.

But although he was a pioneer in the use of photography in anthropology, Boas was aware of the limitations of the medium, as this passage shows: "the character and future development of a biological or ethnological phenomenon is not expressed by its appearance, by the state in which it is, but by its whole history...the outward appearance of two phenomena may be identical, yet their immanent qualities may be altogether different"<sup>29</sup>. The question arising here is can or should photography do more than record surface appearances and if so...how?

### *Robert Flaherty*<sup>30</sup>

Robert Flaherty is known chiefly, perhaps exclusively, as the maker of a small but very important group of ethnographic films; less well known is his activity as a still photographer in the period 1910-1921. Prior to the completion of his film on the Inuit, *Nanook of the north* (1922), Flaherty produced some 1,500 still photographs. Very few of these were published at the time; some appeared in journal and newspaper articles while a group of photogravures was published in 1922 as *Camera studies of the far north*.

Because of his tendency to screen out any sign of acculturating influences on the societies he filmed in and his restaging of defunct cultural practices for the camera, Flaherty is commonly regarded as a highly romantic film maker. In this view, his portrayal of 'traditional' culture as the ethnographic present is in fact a rather idealised recreation of the (ethnographic) past.

In her essay on Flaherty as photographer, Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker counters this position by citing several photographs that document Inuit engagement with technological

(modern stoves) and ideological ('Christian' church going) change. Danzker divides Flaherty's Inuit portraits into two categories:

1. "Studio-type":- these "...closely reflect both painting and photographic conventions of the nineteenth century".
2. "Confrontation":- "in the confrontation portraits the viewer is literally confronted, through direct eye contact, by the subject".<sup>31</sup>

It is the second group Danziker values above the first; she places them on a par with the films. She concludes by posing three areas of concern to Flaherty's photographs and indeed all photographic "documentation of people exotic to ourselves":

- "1. The use and exchange value of the images, for both the photographer and the subject.
2. The moral responsibility of the photographer to his or her subject.
3. The 'objectivity' or 'authenticity' of the image and the intrinsically exclusive rather inclusive nature of the photographic and filmic frame".<sup>32</sup>

Measured against the first point, Danziker notes that although Flaherty did provide some of his subjects with portraits, his "primary audience was the social and political elite in the southern communities, especially his sponsor, Sir William MacKenzie..."<sup>33</sup>. With regard to the second point, she uncovers evidence that Flaherty or his wife Frances may have renamed some of the subjects of the Inuit portraits. As to the matter of 'objectivity' or 'authenticity', she considers the manipulation involved in Flaherty's 'expeditionary' style documents to be minimal; likewise the Inuit portraits insofar as ethnographic detail is largely absent. She finds the most manipulation/distortion in the photos taken during the period of the shooting of *Nanook of the north*. Her overall conclusion is that despite his individualizing/personalizing of many of his subjects, Flaherty's photographs remain "...rooted in notions of the noble savage".<sup>34</sup>

*Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson*<sup>35</sup>

One of the most important bodies of photographic and filmic ethnography was amassed during a two year period in Bali by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. Mead, a former pupil of Franz Boas, maintained a long term interest in the possibilities of visual anthropology<sup>36</sup>; Bateson, a former pupil of Alfred Haddon (a pioneer in the use of ethnographic film), "...took all the pictures, devised innovative forms of notes and did most of the final photoanalysis"<sup>37</sup>. Mead and Bateson took some 25,000 still images in the field.

In contrast to Flaherty's often posed portraits or reconstructed field shots, Bateson and Mead "...tried to shoot what happened normally and spontaneously, rather than decide upon the norms and then get Balinese to go through behaviours in suitable lighting"; they "... treated the cameras in the field as recording instruments, not as devices illustrating (their) theses"<sup>38</sup>. To further this end, they "never asked to take pictures but just took them as a matter of routine, wearing or carrying the two cameras day in day out, so that the photographer himself ceased to be camera conscious".<sup>39</sup>

The book which finally came out of this field experience, *Balinese character: a photographic analysis*<sup>40</sup> carried a selection of 759 images (grouped on 100 plates) from the total of 25,000 photos taken. Commenting on the relation between photos and text, Mead and Bateson wrote: "Each single photograph may be regarded as almost purely objective, but juxtaposition of two different or contrasting photographs is already a step toward scientific generalization... the introductory statement on each plate provides in many cases, an extreme of generality whereas the detailed captions contain a blending of objective description and scientific generalization"<sup>41</sup>.

Although Jacknis claims both Mead and Bateson were opposed at the time to positivistic goals in social anthropology and advocated, in Mary Catherine Bateson's phrase, "disciplined subjectivity"<sup>42</sup>, *Balinese character* has very much the appearance of a strongly objectivist document. In Barthesian terminology it aspires to be all studium (the accurate description of cultural norms) and nary a scrap of punctum<sup>43</sup> disturbs its analytic (frame by frame) surface.



With Gregory Bateson, in  
Tambunam Village (Iatmul),  
Sepik District, New Guinea.  
(Courtesy of Gregory Bateson)

Some thirty years after the publication of *Balinese character*, Bateson and Mead exchanged some differences on the question of visual anthropology. Bateson had come round to the belief that "...the photographic record should be an art form". Mead, by contrast, maintained that, "...if it's an art form, it has been altered; and she asked, "why the hell should it be art?"<sup>44</sup>. In spite of their differing re-evaluations of the visual work they did in Bali, both Mead and Bateson concluded their conversation with the claim that in the intervening period, nobody had used a camera to look at anything that mattered<sup>45</sup>; and looking at the paucity of visual material in the ethnographic literature one is inclined to agree with them.

### **Social Documentary photography**

As early as 1859, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, in her essay "photography", drew attention to the fundamentally 'documentary' vocation of photography: "photography's... business is to give evidence of facts, as minutely and impartially as only an unreasoning machine can give. Photography is sworn witness to everything presented to her view...facts which are neither the province of art nor of description, but of that new form of communication between man and man"<sup>46</sup>. Documents are commonly held to have some necessary connection to questions of factual evidence or proof. Photographs have been regarded as especially unimpeachable in this matter because of their apparently unmediated registration of an external reality. The logical outcome of following a position like Eastlake's is to end by classifying all photographs as essentially documentary (of something). Opposed to this essentialist view of photography - that it is the nature of the medium to record facts - is the view that documentary photographs are the result of a specific type of intention on the part of the photographer<sup>47</sup>. The presupposition here is that it is possible to identify a pure documentary intention to neutrally record the facts of a delimited situation. Yet this doesn't take us very far from the essentialist position because it still relies on the idea of the ineluctably mimetic nature of photography. It simply adds the psychological dimension of an author making a choice - presumably between 'expressive' concerns and 'informational' ones. But the actual development of photography gives us no reason to suppose that these latter concerns are either antithetical or can be kept apart. Missing from both the 'essentialist' and 'intentionalist' ontological positions on documentary photography is a grasp of the pictorial conventions or schemata which shape the production of meaning in any visual medium and constrain the manner in which meaning may be appropriated by historically positioned viewers.

The first half of this chapter has presented a wide-ranging discussion of both documentary and ethnographic photography. The second half will extend this by focusing on several historical examples of socially oriented photographic work conducted by documentary movements on conditions and events within their own societies. In providing brief discussions of four different 'social documentary' photographers or photographic movements, it is not my intention to contribute to the isolation of an ongoing lineage of such photography. Rather, it is to look at four examples of how photography has played a part in broad movements of social enquiry by seeing the photographs in a wider social context. However the accounts of social documentary photography in America and Great Britain which follow are necessarily brief and schematic. They aim to do no more than point towards some of the more significant convergences between a visual mode of depiction and the 'ethnographic' impulse.

### **Social documentary in the U.S.A. and the U.K.**

"Documentary: that's a sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear...the term should be documentary style...you see, a document has use, whereas art is really useless".  
- Walker Evans

For the purposes of my discussion in this section, I have settled for the more precise phrase 'social documentary' in preference to the general one of documentary photography because it helps us avoid the implication that in a trivial sense all 'unmanipulated' photographs are documents of some kind. Naomi Rosenblum comments on the use of the phrase as follows: "a tandem phrase, social documentary, is sometimes used to describe works in which social themes and goals are paramount, because the word documentary could refer to any photograph whose primary purpose is the truthful depiction of reality"<sup>48</sup>.

All the major single volume historians of photography from Beaumont Newhall and the Gernsheims to Ian Jeffrey and Naomi Rosenblum agree in tracing a line of social documentary from its beginnings in Jacob Riis, through to Lewis Hine and on to the F.S.A. photographers of the latter 1930s. Here, I will try to go beyond the limited scope of their historicist

narratives by drawing upon recent, revisionist perspectives on these varying bodies of work. Some attention will be given to each of the photographers named above and to the Mass Observation movement in England.

The successful pursuit of social documentary's typical themes and goals would not have been possible without the prior and parallel development of institutions such as the popular press; small and large scale social survey projects; mixed literary and sociological genres such as 'social exploration'; and new signifying forms like the photo-essay and the photographic book.

### **Social exploration**

One form of social enquiry whose genesis predates the rise of photographic social documentary but clearly has had a shaping influence upon it is a branch of Victorian ethnographic writing known as social exploration. In the period stretching roughly from the middle of the nineteenth century until immediately before the First World War, a number of English journalists, philanthropic reformers and social investigators fashioned "...a distinctive branch of modern literature in which a representative of one class consciously sets out to explore, analyse and report upon the life of another class lower on the social scale than his own"<sup>49</sup>. Representative examples of the genre would include Henry Mayhew's *London and the London poor* (4 volumes, 1851-1862) and Charles Booth's *Life and labour of the people in London* (1902-03). In a passage from the latter book, Booth's description of his field-work method brings to mind the ethnographic tableau vivant effect I discussed in chapter one:

"The special difficulty of making an accurate picture of so shifting a scene as the low-class streets in East London present is very evident, and may easily be exaggerated. As in photographing a crowd, the details of the picture change continually, but the general effect is much the same, whatever moment is chosen, I have attempted to produce an instantaneous picture, fixing the facts on my negative as they appear at a given moment, and the imagination of my readers must add the movement, the constant changes, the whirl and turmoil of life"<sup>50</sup>.

While Mayhew, for his part, makes explicit the quasi anthropological impetus behind social exploration in his characterization of the genre's purpose as "...supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth"<sup>51</sup>. The public, in this passage, is unequivocally assumed to be middle or upper class and in need of enlightenment about the existence of poverty and inequality in the darker recesses of British society ('darkest England').

Although I have said that the classic period of social exploration literature falls within the period 1850-1913, it continues in modified form throughout the twentieth century: in the 1930s with George Orwell's *The road to Wigan pier*; in the early 1960s with Clancy Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock*; in the 1970s with Ken Coates and Richard Silburns's challenge to the claims of the welfare state, *Poverty: the forgotten Englishman*; and into the Thatcher blitzed 1980s with Beatrix Campbell's *Wigan pier revisited*, a radical, feminist critique of the foundations of the genre. In an article for a photography journal, Campbell directly addresses the problems and limitations of social documentary photography rooted in a social exploration form. "The limits of photography", she writes, "also extend to the whole tradition of representations of the poor... The tradition does not deal with poverty as a political problem. In the case of the written text, there's a long history of the genre, the journey to discover the essence of the nation which always takes you to those who are excluded from the processes of forming national consciousness... Orwell's... political conclusions are more complicated than the old philanthropic tradition, but he still does assume the political passivity of the so-called masses"<sup>52</sup>.

In the course of the previous chapter, specifically in discussing Victor Burgin's work, it emerged that it is neither particularly accurate nor fruitful to study photographs as if they were a purely visual form. We noted that more often than not photographs of many kinds usually appear either with captions attached or embedded in blocks of type, or as part of an essay or book.

All the projects profiled from this point on had recourse to both photographic and literary means of representing the material findings of their respective methods of social enquiry. In the section of the chapter devoted to Jacob Riis, I sketch the circumstances which enabled



JACOB A. RIIS. *Bandits' Roost, New York*. 1888. Gelatin-silver print from the original negative. The Museum of the City of New York, New York.

him to become, in effect, one of the first reform photo-journalists by combining his own photographs alongside his written text, even if in a somewhat primitive form. Most of Lewis Hine's publications were incorporated into the reports and publications of the sociological projects he worked within; but he also issued a book of his own photographs with text called *Men at work*.

Although the fieldwork for *Let us now praise famous men* was carried out after the heyday of the Farm Security Administration project, its conception and methodology would not have been possible without the FSA precedent. Walker Evans was, of course, a member of the original FSA team but it was his collaboration with the brilliant writer James Agee that produced arguably the finest photographic book of the period. The final case study of the chapter returns us to the place where social exploration literature began, the United Kingdom, where contemporaneous with the work of the FSA a group known as Mass Observation placed a great deal of importance on photography as a major part of their research arsenal.

#### *Jacob Riis (1849-1914)*

Riis, a Danish immigrant to the United States in 1870, spent his early days there in the slums of New York. He went on to become a police-court reporter for the *New York tribune* in 1877, remaining there until 1888 when he joined *The evening sun*. 1890 saw the publication of his most well known book, *How the other half lives*, which prompted Theodore Roosevelt, then the city's Police Commissioner, to dub him "the most useful citizen of New York"<sup>53</sup>. Riis continued to publish a stream of books, some fourteen in all, until his death in 1914. Coterminous with his career as a writer of books - the period of his journalistic reporting stretches from 1876-1901 - Riis embarked upon a gruelling, illustrated lecture tour schedule which took him to many different parts of the U.S.A.

Riis's books were aimed at the conscience of New York's respectable citizens. They were instrumental in leading to social reform from above of some of New York's worst tenement slums, particularly those in Baxter Street and Mulberry Bend. Riis's reform idealism sprang from strong roots in Christian belief. He believed that the poor will always be with us but he did not accept that this necessarily entailed the existence of slums. He was, however, not



JACOB A. RIIS. *Home of an Italian Ragpicker, New York*. 1888. Gelatin-silver print from the original negative. The Museum of the City of New York, New York.

above the occasional moral homily as the following passage on tenement clothes lines demonstrates: "they are poverty's honest badge, these perennial lines of rags hung out to dry... the true line to be drawn between pauperism and honest poverty is the clothes line. With it begins the effort to be clean that is the first and the best evidence of a desire to be honest"<sup>54</sup>. His reply to a compliment for his progressive "muckraking" from the Russian anarchist Prince Pieter Kropotkin was the blunt statement: "I don't like the Reds".<sup>55</sup>

Although long valued as a journalist, author and social reformer, Riis's estimation as America's first notable social documentary photographer is a relatively recent phenomenon<sup>56</sup>. Prior to the Museum of the City of New York's first solo Riis exhibition in 1947, his photography had been virtually ignored. Only three of the 300 pages of Louis Ware's *Jacob Riis: police reporter, reformer, useful citizen* mention his photographs; while the two photographic histories published in 1938 – Newhall's *Photography: a short critical history* and Robert Taft's *Photography and the American scene* do not mention Riis at all. It is due to the determined efforts of Alexander Alland Snr, who rediscovered the Riis collection in 1946, that his photographs are now regarded as an important part of his work.

Riis's photographic work took place over a ten year period, roughly from 1888-1898. Immediately prior to this, in 1873, *The New York daily graphic* was the first paper to publish news photographs. But by 1890 when Riis came to publish *How the other half lives*, there was still no perfected half-tone process for reproducing photographs. As a consequence the first edition of the book carried only a handful (17) of weak half-tones; and 38 of Riis's photographs were redrawn by artists for inclusion in the book but they lack the power of the originals.

What enabled Riis to begin taking photographs in dark tenements, usually at night-time, was the invention of portable flash powder (Blitzlicht Pulver) in 1887 by Adolf Milthe and Johannes Gaedicke. Riis, accompanied by various members of New York's society of amateur photographers, entered tenement buildings equipped with cameras and pistol lamps that fired magnesium cartridges. He later wrote in *The making of an American* that: "our party carried terror wherever it went. The spectacle of strange men invading a house in the mid-night hours armed with pistols which they shot off recklessly was hardly reassuring... and it was not to be wondered at if the tenants bolted through the windows and down the



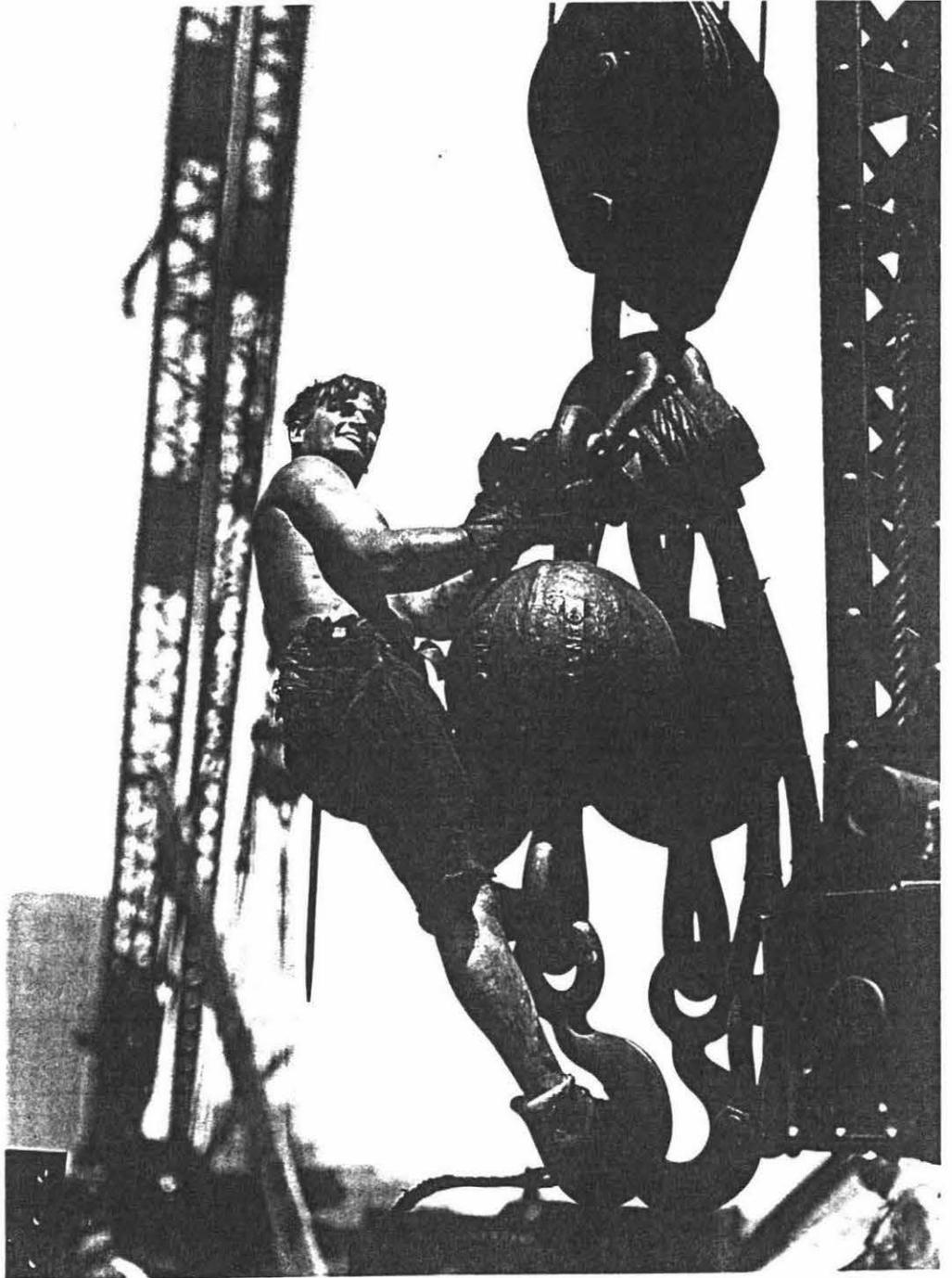
Lewis W. Hine. Carolina cotton mill, 1908.

fire-escapes"<sup>57</sup>. Riis's method of photographing has been aptly described as one of "hit-and-run-and-pay-if-you-must"<sup>58</sup>. This may account for the almost complete absence of traditionally posed portraits in *How the other half lives* (there is only one that comes near in the first edition) or of subjects "...sufficiently composed to return the glance of the photographer"<sup>59</sup>. Riis's incorporation of photographs into the body of the text - and his extensive use of charts and statistical tables as well - undoubtedly gave his first book an authority and an impact it might not otherwise have had; or not to the same degree. Riis, however, was primarily a journalist and only a casual photographer in that his involvement with photography only covered a brief period and, as mentioned previously, had a "hit and run" character. Finally, rather than follow the post-war modernist attempt to assimilate Riis unproblematically to the history of (documentary) photography, it would be more fruitful to place him within what Sally Stein calls "...a literary tradition of the urban picturesque".<sup>60</sup>

#### *Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940)*

A graduate in Sociology and Pedagogy of the Universities of Chicago and Columbia, New York, Lewis Hine is a major figure in social documentary of the early twentieth century. "The setting for Lewis Hine's work", writes Alan Trachtenberg, "was the broad movement for social welfare that arose early in the century, in the progressive era..."<sup>61</sup>. In 1901 Hine joined the staff of the Ethical Culture School which had been founded in 1876 by Felix Adler who later became chairman of the National Child Labour Committee. At the suggestion of the school's principal, Frank Manny, Hine, who taught Nature Study and Geography, initiated a photography programme at the school. In keeping with the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey which informed much of the progressive era's educational policy, Hine, in his articles, emphasised the practical, heuristic benefits of photography as a pedagogical tool.

In 1904 Hine, the school photographer, went to Ellis Island, New York, the gateway through which European immigrants had to pass in order to gain legal admission to the United States. Opened in 1892, it has been estimated that by 1932 over 60 million people had passed through it. Between 1904 and 1909, Hine documented this phenomenon with a series of largely frontal social portraits of the different ethnic groups involved. These pictures mark the emergence of Hine as a technically and formally accomplished photographer.



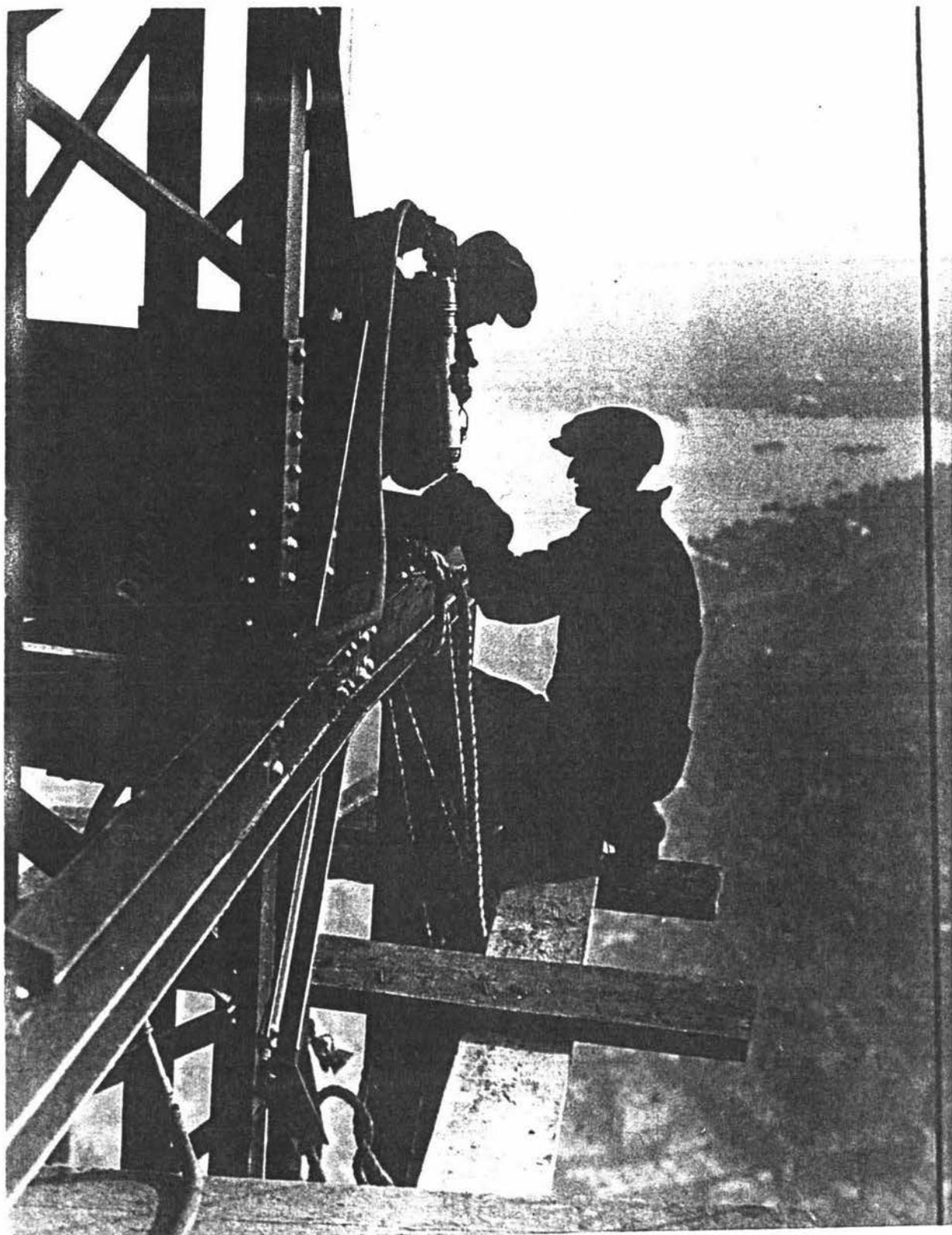
In the Hoist,"  
Empire State Building,  
1931

In 1907 Hine was invited by Paul Kellog, managing editor of the journal *Charities and the commons* which in 1909 became *Survey*, to participate in the Pittsburgh Survey, a large scale study of an industrial city. He took pictures in Pittsburgh over a three month period and, together with the charcoal and pastel drawings of painter Joseph Stella, they amounted to an important visual contribution to the survey. The survey was eventually published in six volumes, each of which contained photographs by Hine, some having appeared earlier in three special issues of *Charities and the commons* devoted to Pittsburgh material.

Under Kellog's direction, as Alan Trachtenberg notes, "the survey investigators - social workers and specialists in such fields as labour economics - combed the city to uncover facts about the ethnic composition of Pittsburgh's workers, their housing conditions and family life; about the cost of living, the quality of education and recreation, and working conditions; about wages, hours, and the workers' exposure to industrial accidents"<sup>62</sup>. This is the context within which Hine produced the first of his photographs of industrial labourers and the work process in all its complexity; he continued to do so throughout the remainder of his working life.

From 1908 to 1918 Hine worked as staff photographer for the National Child Labour Committee, an organization formed in 1904 by progressive social workers, educators, etc., like Jane Addams, a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1931. Throughout this period Hine travelled extensively to work sites in many parts of the country and made thousands of photographs and written reports. Much of this work was published in NCLC pamphlets and the *Survey* while some was used by Hine for posters (e.g., "Making Human Junk") and what he called time exposures (e.g. "Hiding Behind the Work Certificate") which constitute early examples of photomontage (images and text). All this material was aimed at alerting public opinion to the abuses of child labour, in the interest of long term reform. The extent of exploitation of child labourers is very evident in the following note made by Hine in February, 1911 in South Carolina:

"Nine of these children from eight years old go to school half a day, and shuck oysters for four hours before school and three hours after school on school days and on Saturday from 4 a.m. to early afternoon"<sup>63</sup> - Maggioni Canning Co.



LEWIS W. HINE. *Steelworkers, Empire State Building, New York, 1931.* Gelatin-silver print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

During this period, Hine delivered a slide lecture entitled "Social Photography: how the camera may help in social uplift", in which he claimed: "the greatest advance in social work is to be made by the popularising of camera work, so these records can be made by those who are in the thick of the battle".<sup>64</sup>

After a brief period during World War I as photographer for the American Red Cross in Europe, Hine proceeded to change the emphasis of his photography in the inter-war period. He no longer spoke of "social photography" as such but rather of "affirmative photography" or "positive documentation". He considered that he had done a sufficient amount of "negative documentation" of such things as the poor circumstances of new immigrants or the appalling situation of child labourers. He turned now to celebration of the dignity of human labour in his "work portraits". Yet these photographs retain a critical edge because they ranged themselves against a purely machine aesthetic ascendant at the time and "...against the camera of the time study man"<sup>65</sup>. A strong selection of these studies was published in 1932 in a book for schools, *Men at work: photographic studies of modern men and machines*. In his preface to the book, Hine writes: "cities do not build themselves, machines cannot make machines, unless back of them all are the brains and tools of men. We call this the machine age. But the more machines we use the more do we need real men to make and direct them"<sup>66</sup>. What follows on from this preface are action portraits of men at work in a wide variety of industries: aeronautical workers, coal miners, railroad workers, tire makers and the makers of the machines themselves. The most striking sequence, however, is of the Empire State Building under construction. Hine procured these spectacular shots of construction workers poised on scaffolding against the New York City skyline by taking his camera up amongst them; they have a kinetic, futurist feel to their visual vitality.

Hine is reported to have summed up his career thus: "there are two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated"<sup>67</sup>. Both of these objectives required Hine to fuse the two poles of photographic practice which are habitually regarded as in opposition: the informative and the affective. In relation to this issue, it is interesting to note the number of articles written which turn upon a comparison between Hine and Alfred Stieglitz. A reviewer in a 1920 issue of the journal *Literary digest* compared Stieglitz's "the Hand of Man" with Hine's "Handling Hot Metal in a Pennsylvanian Shop". The reviewer concluded that "...each presented a different



82 Lewis Hine. *Powerhouse Mechanic*, ca. 1925 (print 1939), 19" x 13" s

view of industrial America. Stieglitz, a romantic vision from a transcendent perspective; Hine, a human document of social reality"<sup>68</sup>. Over fifty years later, Estelle Jussim in her essay, "Icons or Ideology: Stieglitz and Hine"<sup>69</sup>, argued for overcoming the polarity of the "art-for-art's sake" formalism of Stieglitz versus the "art-for-society's sake" social concern of Hine. This, however, rather misses the point which is well made by Allan Sekula towards the end of a paper which contains an explicit comparison of Stieglitz's "the Steerage" with Hine's "Immigrants going down Gangplank, New York". Sekula writes: "a Hine photograph in its original context is an explicit political utterance. As such, it is immediately liable to a criticism that is political, just as "the Steerage" is mediately liable to a criticism that is political"<sup>70</sup>. Sekula concludes that Hine like Millet and Tolstoy belongs to the category - realist mystic. This is because: "his realism corresponds to the status of the photograph as report, his mysticism corresponds to its status as spiritual expression".<sup>71</sup>

### **Documentary criticism in 1930s America: the Farm Security Administration project**

America in the 1930s saw the flowering of the photo documentary book whose beginnings lay in the work of Riis and Hine. Perhaps the finest example of this genre is James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let us now praise famous men* to which we will turn our attention shortly. But first it is necessary to say something about the Farm Security Administration Project out of which emerged several of the major documentary books of the period.

In 1935, a former Columbia University economics lecturer, Roy Stryker was appointed head of the Historical Section of the Resettlement Administration, an initiative of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal government. Previously, Stryker had made use of photographs for an economics textbook as well as in his lectures at Columbia; and when his department was reorganized as the Historical Section of the F.S.A. in 1937, he resolved to compile a record of the decade's rural problems and solutions. For this purpose he gradually assembled a team of photographers which at one time or another included: Arthur Rothstein, Russell Lee, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Jack Delano, John Collier, John Vachon, Marion Post Wolcott.



Edwin Rosskam, a former photographer and picture editor for the F.S.A., has recently described the purpose of the project as: "...to inform the widest possible segment of the American people about the rural problem that existed and about the government programme established to meet it"<sup>72</sup>. Stryker differentiated the approach of the F.S.A. from standard photojournalism. The magazines and papers, he said, tended to photograph an event whereas the F.S.A. strived to photograph a condition. For Stryker, "a good documentary should tell not only what a place or thing or a person looks like, but it must also tell the audience what it would feel like to be an actual witness to the scene"<sup>73</sup>.

Stryker's overriding concern was to use social documentation for the purpose of promoting social change by providing encyclopedic photographic materials which could be integrated into various contexts: government reports, magazines, newspapers, exhibitions, etc... He directed his photographers to subjects such as the "relationship between density of population and income of such things as: pressed clothes, polished shoes and...wall decorations in homes as an index to different income groups and their reactions"<sup>74</sup>. In Edwin Rosskam's phrase, these photographs were "never intended for framing"<sup>75</sup>, for Stryker had a fundamental distrust of "art" in relation to documentary photography. This brief was carried out to the letter by photographers like Russell Lee but occasionally led to differences of opinion with others such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. Nevertheless all the F.S.A. photographers fell within the bounds of social documentary which, according to William Stott, "...shows man at grips with conditions neither permanent nor necessary, conditions of a certain time and place..."<sup>76</sup>.

*James Agee and Walker Evans: Let us now praise famous men*

In April 1936, James Agee was approached by Eric Hodgins of *Fortune* magazine to write an article on cotton tenant farming for the "life and circumstances" series. Agee enlisted Walker Evans as photographer for the assignment and together they carried out two months fieldwork amongst three Alabama families over the summer of 1936. But *Fortune* rejected the initial article as both unsuitable and too long. This, however, was not the end of the matter for Agee's "plans for work: October 1937" refer to an Alabama record. He notes: "we lived with one and made a detailed study and record of three families, and interviewed and observed landowners, new dealers, county seats and villages...throughout 6,000 miles of county"<sup>77</sup>. The work-notes go on to conceive the Alabama record as neither journalism, art



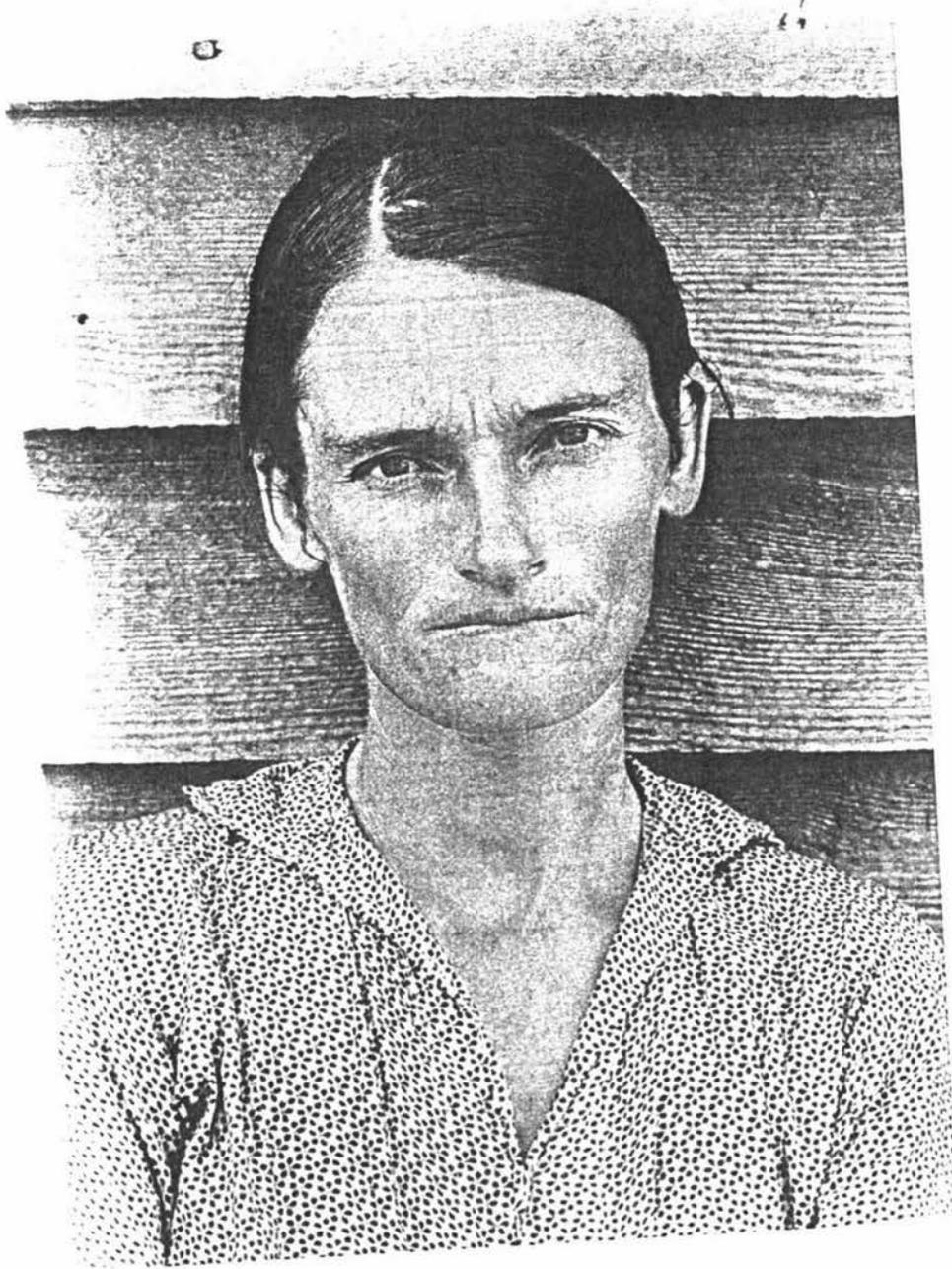
nor invention but as a kind of analytical, skeptical 'scientific' report. Agee aims "...to tell everything possible as accurately as possible; and to invent nothing. It involves, therefore, as total a suspicion of 'creative' and 'artistic' as of 'reportorial' attitudes and methods, and it is likely therefore to involve the development of some more or less new forms of writing and observation"<sup>78</sup>. Chief amongst these new forms of observation (and writing) is photography and Agee envisages a central part for it in the finished work: "...a strict comparison of the photographs and the prose as relative liars and as relative reproducers of the same matters".<sup>79</sup>

The manuscript was completed and submitted to Harpers and Bros in 1939 but they rejected it. It wasn't until September 1941 that publication was achieved with Houghton Mifflin. But by then, events in Europe had turned the public's attention from 1930s concerns (depression, unemployment, drought, etc.) to the spectre of war and fascism. As a consequence this remarkable book passed virtually unnoticed.

*Let us now praise famous men* is a much more self-conscious and complex work than any of the other photo-documentary books which preceded it in the 1930s. Something of Agee's ironic style is contained in the following passage from the early part of the book: "...this is a book about 'share croppers' and is written for all those who have a soft spot in their hearts for the laughter and tears inherent in poverty viewed at a distance, and especially for those who can afford the retail price; in the hope that the reader will be edified, and may feel kindly disposed toward any well-thought-out liberal efforts to rectify the unpleasant situation down south, and will somewhat better and more guiltily appreciate the next good meal he eats".<sup>80</sup>

Agee isolates "four planes" in the treatment of his Alabama field experience:

1. Contemplation in media res - notes taken in the field, many of which appeared in the "on the porch" sections.
2. Straight narrative, as it happened - a more or less straightforward 'journalistic' account of events.
3. Recall and memory from the present - passages written some time and distance from the field with all the 'imaginative' reshaping that implies.



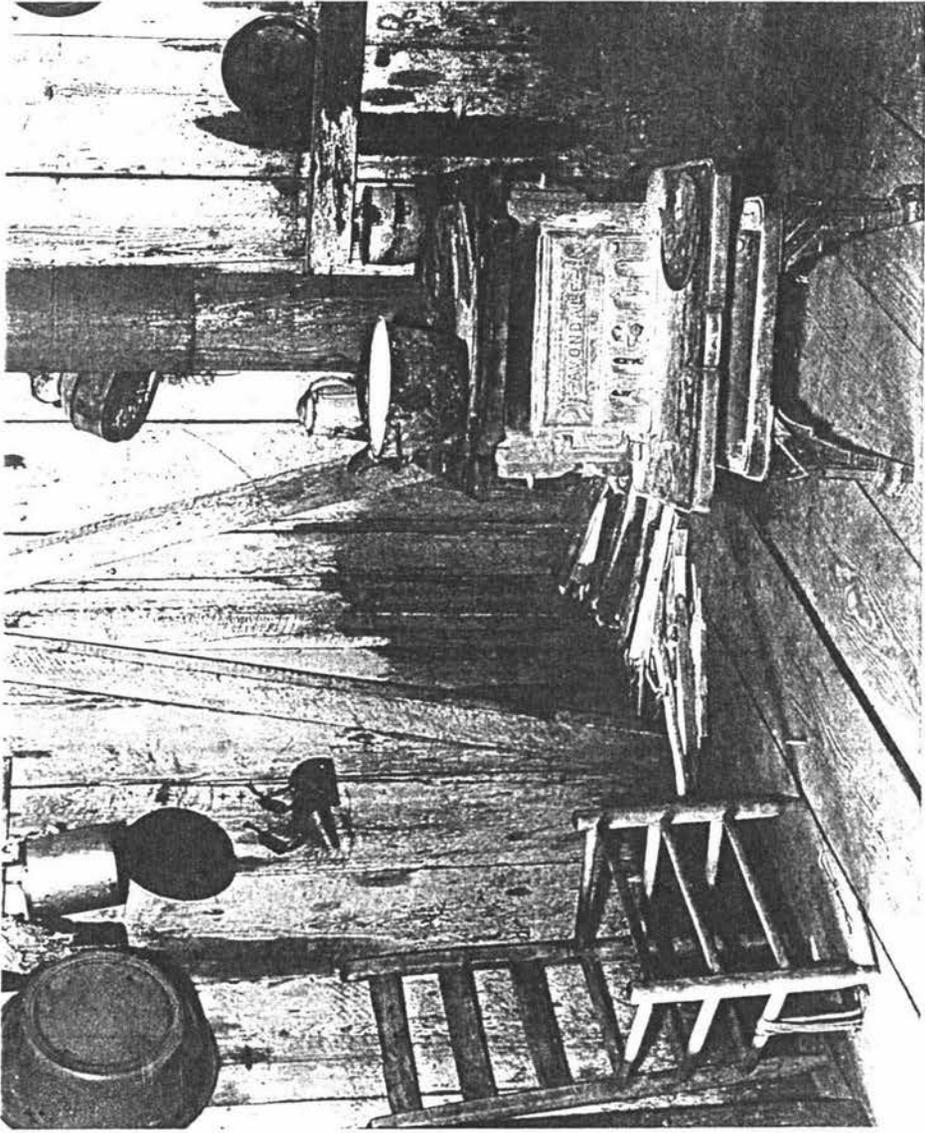
4. Problems of recording - this refers to epistemological and ethical questions of how to make over field experience into textual form. The reflexive sections.<sup>81</sup>

In keeping with the close attention paid to the form of his written text, Agee placed great importance on Walker Evans's photographs. "The photographs", insists his preface, "are not illustrative. They, and the text, are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative"<sup>82</sup>. It is indeed unlikely that Evans's photographs would have illustrated Agee's words because, as several commentators have noted, they possess quite different styles. Overall, in terms of a straightforward binary distinction, Agee's prose style tends towards the 'subjective' in that it enacts a simultaneous identification with his 'subjects' and an examination of his own subjectivity. Evans, on the other hand, strives for a rigorous kind of 'objectivity' and attains a certain distanciation from his 'subjects'.

The first (1941) edition of *Let us now praise famous men* opens with an uninterrupted sequence of 31 photographs without captions. The second edition (1960) doubles the number of images to 62, while retaining the position of the sequence at the front of the book, but reduces the actual size of the pictures. This distinguishes it from the other major photo-documentary books of the period which attempt to blend words and pictures throughout. Here they stand as two self contained contributions which nevertheless do strongly bear on each other.

In these pictures, Evans favoured a direct, frontal style of portraiture whereby his subjects look directly at the camera, having been allowed to fully compose themselves in advance. These images may have a formal, 'objective' veneer but they result from relationships formed over a period of time in the field. William Stott remarks of Evans that: "...he records people when they are most themselves, most in command, as they impose their will on their environment"<sup>83</sup>. This is particularly evident in the portrait of Annie Mae Gudger (real name Annie Mae Burroughs) of which Lionel Trilling wrote in his 1941 review: "...it was 'sat for' and 'posed' and not only does this pose tell more than could be told by unconsciousness of the camera but the sitter gains in dignity when allowed to defend herself against the lens".<sup>84</sup>

It is a testimony to the power of these photographs that as Agee himself stated: "if I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of



cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement"<sup>85</sup>. When Evans turns his camera from the faces of the tenant families to photograph the interiors of their houses he produces pictures of what he subsequently called "the anatomy of someone's living" which bring out its "unconscious arrangement". He was to refine this aspect of 'American vernacular' in a later work - the pristine *Message from the interior* (1966).<sup>86</sup>

In many ways, *Let us now praise famous men* stands as the polar opposite of Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You have seen their faces*<sup>87</sup>, very much the quintessential 1930s photo-documentary protest against poverty. In his later years, Evans recounted its impact on Agee and himself to William Stott: "...a double outrage: propaganda for one thing, and profit-making out of both propaganda and the plight of the tenant farmers. It was morally shocking to Agee and me. Particularly so since it was publicly received as the nice, the right thing to do. Whereas we thought it was an evil and immoral thing to do. Not only to cheapen them, but to profit by them, to exploit them - who had already been so exploited. Not only that but to exploit them without knowing that that was what you were doing".<sup>88</sup>

By contrast, Agee and Evans's book is profoundly concerned with "the moral and existential accountability of knowledge"<sup>89</sup>; and that may account for a renewed interest in it from an ethnographic perspective. "The reader", in the words of one critic, "is asked to undertake the same spiritual journey Agee makes in the book - the transformation from hunter, to seeker, to initiate".<sup>90</sup>

### **Documentary criticism in 1930s Britain: Mass Observation**

At the same time as some of the most important documentary work of the American 1930s was being done within the framework of a government agency, a group of like-minded individuals in England were establishing a movement which came to be known as Mass Observation. The three co-founders of M.O. were anthropologist Tom Harrisson, poet and journalist Charles Madge, and poet, painter and film maker Humphrey Jennings. Tom Jeffery has identified the three fundamental concerns of M.O. as follows:



Cotton weaver. Bolton 1937

Humphrey Spender

1. "...a fascination with what they called myth and superstition in national life..."
2. "...a deep distrust of the (opinion) poles, and criticism of the inability of the press to fulfill its supposed function..."
3. "...the great gulf of ignorance dividing rulers from ruled, class from class"<sup>91</sup>.

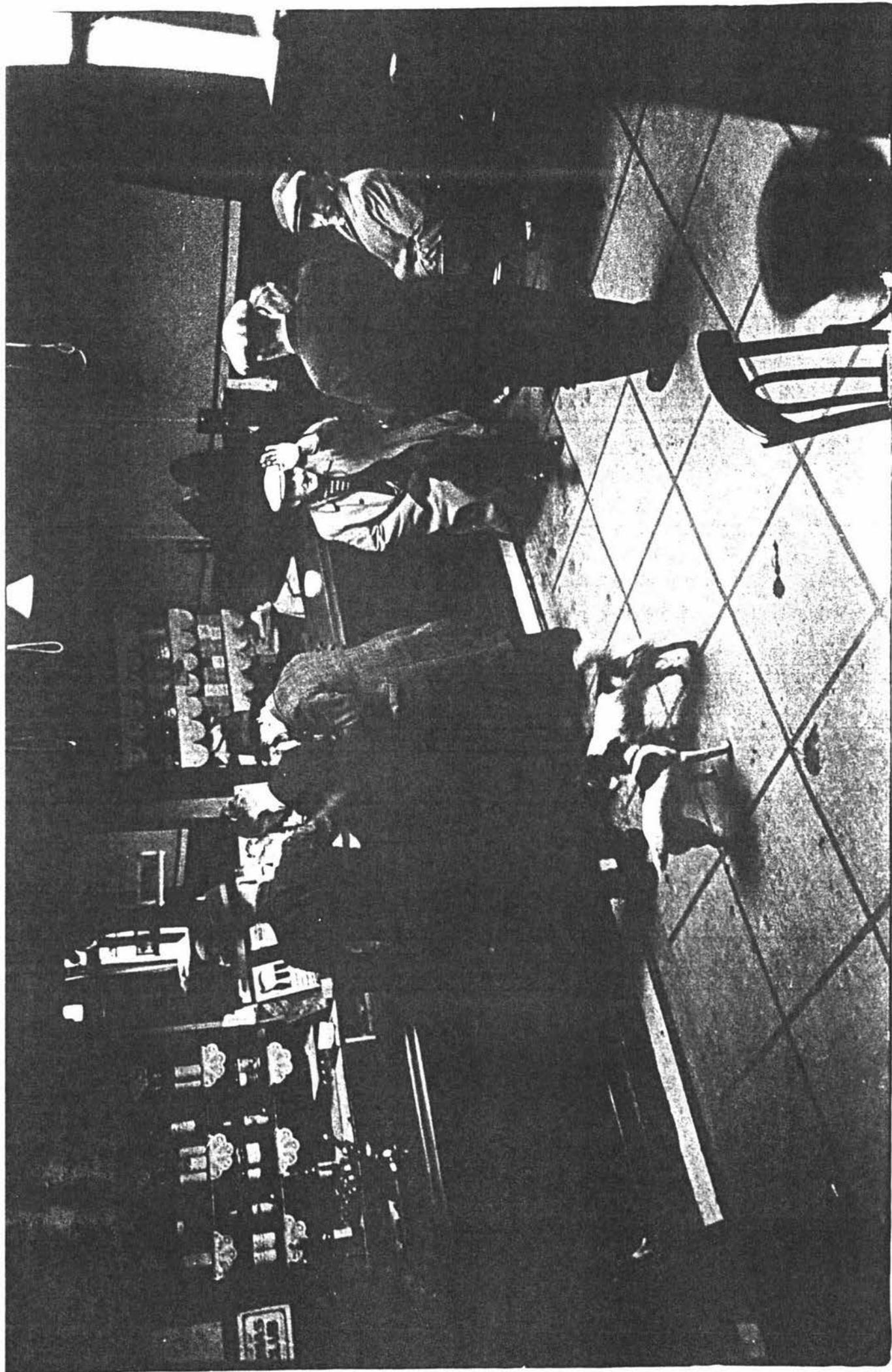
An early M.O. pamphlet declared that "the anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream" and went on to state M.O's aim as: "...to be a scientific study of human social behaviour, beginning at home. Such a study has already been begun by anthropologists in the case of primitive peoples, and tentatively by psychologists and sociologists in civilized countries"<sup>92</sup>. M.O's approach to domestic social investigation was thoroughly qualitative. From Harrison, it acquired the participant observation orientation of social anthropology. From Madge and, especially Jennings<sup>93</sup>, the surrealists' interest in mapping a "mass unconscious" by means of "mass fantasies" and "dominant images" entered the methodological mix.

M.O. employed three main methods of gathering information: through diaries kept by 'ordinary people'; observation of behaviour on ritual or public occasions by teams of observers specially trained for that purpose<sup>94</sup>; the involvement of writers and visual artists for specific projects. Initially M.O. operated from two geographical bases: one in London, centred on Madge's house in Blackheath and co-ordinated by himself and Jennings; the other in Bolton where Harrison assembled a group of sociologists and artists such as William Coldstream and photographer Humphrey Spender.

The major work to come from the London based team was *May the twelfth*, a report compiled from the responses of over 200 observers throughout the U.K. and Europe to the coronation of King George VI. As well as the diary entries of its team of observers - who were here responding to public events with an eye to publication - the final report contained newspaper clippings and some transcriptions of dreams. *May the twelfth's* editors-in-chief, Madge and Jennings argued that M.O: "...is more than journalism or film documentary, because it has as its aim in view not only of presenting but of classifying and analysing the immediate human world".<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, in a small house in 85 Davenport Street, Bolton, Tom Harrison was immersed in the Worktown Project. "When we were studying life in Bolton", recalled Harrison, "we penetrated the environment without anyone realising that we were studying it. We all took jobs locally: I had one with Walls Ice Cream, then in a cotton mill, and as a lorry driver. We were quiet people. You see if the observer is observed, the observation is probably invalid..."<sup>96</sup>. This covert, "espionage" perspective on social observation is echoed in the title of an essay anthropology professor Bronislaw Malinowski wrote for the Madge/Jennings edited *First years's work in mass observation: "a Nationwide Intelligence Service"*.<sup>97</sup>

From the beginning, photography had a great deal of importance for M.O. The first M.O. pamphlet spoke of its team of observers as: "the cameras with which we are all trying to photograph contemporary life"<sup>98</sup>. As already mentioned, amongst the group of writers and artists who joined Harrison in Bolton was the photographer Humphrey Spender. Spender completed approximately 20 weeks of unpaid work in Bolton before going off to join *Picture post* at its inception. His photographs were to appear in the two M.O. books. In the notes to an exhibition of his 1930s Worktown paintings and photographs, Spender states that he saw photography as important because it was "the system with which people can be pictured by the people for the people"<sup>99</sup>. Yet in a recent interview he talks of the immense gap which divided the southern upper-class 'social explorers' like himself from the northern working class. He never spoke to any of the people he photographed who, in effect, spoke a completely different language from him, "...the main anxiety, purpose, was to become invisible and to make my equipment invisible, which is one of the reasons I carried around an absolute minimum of equipment, which was often concealed in a dreary old Mackintosh"<sup>100</sup>. Spender shared Harrison's belief, quoted earlier, that observation (and photography) had to take place without attracting the attention of the observed if it was to be successful. His photograph, "the Vaults, unidentified Pub Bolton 1937", contains evidence of his detection by one of the men he was photographing at the time. But rather than 'invalidate' his observation, it complicates it in an interesting way. It captures a moment of communicative tension between photographer and subject, poised between acknowledgment and threat; for Spender, however, his intruder status revealed, it marked the moment to cease photographing in that setting. Don MacPherson has written that: "Spender's photographs define the onlooker's position as that of the anthropologist, whose rational observation of the savage and the exotic only confirms his own existence as "human" and therefore universal"<sup>101</sup>. This is



The Vaults, unidentified pub. Bolton 1937

a rather vague and sweeping criticism which nonetheless contains a grain of truth. A more precise objection to Spender's 'ethnographic photography' would point to its enclosure within a 'visualist' and 'objectivist' discourse. This is something common to the whole M.O. enterprise with its positivist conception of 'pure' observation. But read within the complex and contradictory context of 1930s socio-political currents, these photos and texts are fascinating indicators of the possibilities and limits of social documentary enquiry.

Looking back on M.O. in 1975, Harrison summed it up as: "... a several pronged reaction to the disturbed condition of Western Europe under the growing threat of fascism. In particular, M.O sought to supply accurate observations of everyday life and real (not just published) public moods, an anthropology and a mass documentation for a vast sector of normal life which did not, at that time, seem to be adequately considered by the media, the arts, the social scientists, even by the political leaders".<sup>102</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The ethnographic and social documentary projects surveyed in this chapter, although different in focus and separated in time and space, all to a large degree share similar means of formal presentation. I'm referring here to their sharing of a common textual form, the photographic book which combines images and words in varying quantities. *How the other half lives*, *Men at Work*, *Let us now praise famous men*, *Balinese character*, and *May the twelfth* are amongst the most outstanding examples of this late nineteenth and twentieth century literary-visual genre.

However, the United States and Great Britain are not the only countries in which the photographic book has thrived. There have been a number of notable examples of the genre in New Zealand too. In the next and final chapter, I examine in detail the work of a local photographer who has concentrated his efforts almost exclusively towards the end of producing photographic books. The purpose of this chapter is not only to analyse the major works of Glenn Busch, the photographer in question, but also to deploy and test some of the concepts and issues raised in chapters one to three.

## Notes

1. John Tagg, "Contacts/worksheets: notes on photography, history and representation", in Terry Dennett and Jo Spence (eds), *Photography/politics: one*, London: Photography Workshop, 1979, p.194; reprinted in John Tagg, *The burden of representation*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988.
2. Arthur Rothstein, *Documentary photography*, Boston: Focal Press, 1986, p.18.
3. See John Grierson, "First principles of documentary", in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on documentary*, London: Faber and Faber, 1966, pp.145-156. And Stuart Hood, "John Grierson and the documentary film movement", in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, pp.99-112.
4. Hayden White, "The fictions of factual representation", in *Tropics of discourse*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p.125.
5. Hayden White, "Historiography and historiophoty", *The American historical Review*, vol.93, no.5, December 1988, p.1194.
6. See, respectively, Michel Foucault, *The birth of the clinic*, Translated by A.M. Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1973; and *Discipline and punish*, Translated by A.M. Sheridan, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.
7. But for an example of Foucault's attention to a specifically visual text see his analysis of Velasquez's Las Meninas in *The order of things*, Translated by A.M. Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp.3-16
8. John Tagg, "The burden of representation", *Ten*.8, no.14, 1984, pp.11-12; reprinted under the title "Evidence, truth and order: photographic records and the growth of the state", in *The burden of representation*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp.60-65.

9. John Tagg, "God's sanitary laws: slum clearance and photography in late nineteenth century Leeds", *The burden of representation, op.cit.*, pp.117-152.
10. John Tagg, "Introduction", *The burden of representation, op.cit.*, p.12.
11. Space does not permit a discussion of David Green's contribution to a discursive approach to photography. The reader is referred to his useful survey article, "On Foucault: disciplinary power and photography", *Camerawork*, No.32, Summer 1985; and his paper, "Veins of resemblance: photography and eugenics", *The Oxford art journal*, vol.7, no.2, 1985, which may be profitably compared with Allan Sekula's work on Francis Galton.
12. Sekula's important early essays and photo-texts are collected in *Photography against the grain, essays and photo Works, 1973-1983*, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984.
13. Allan Sekula, "The body and the archive", *October*, no.39, Winter 1986, p.16.
14. For Foucault's general theoretical statements on archaeology and the archive see his *The archaeology of knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1972.
15. Allan Sekula, "Photography between labour and capital", in Benjamin Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (eds), *Mining photographs and other pictures 1948-1983*, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983, p.195; and Sekula, "The body and the archive", *op.cit.*, p.17.
16. Allan Sekula, "The body and the archive", *op.cit.*, p.55.
17. *Ibid.*, p.62.
18. Jay Ruby, "Is an ethnographic film a filmic ethnography", *Studies in the anthropology of visual communication*, vol.2, no.2, Fall 1975.

19. *Ibid.*, p.107.
20. George Marcus and Dick Cushman, "Ethnographies as texts", *Annual review of anthropology*, 11:29, 1982, pp.31-37.
21. Karl Heider, *Ethnographic film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976.
22. *Ibid.*, pp.112-117.
23. On Muybridge see Marta Braun, "Muybridge's scientific fictions", *Studies in visual communication*, vol.10, no.3, Summer 1984, pp.2-21.
24. Colin Young, "Observational cinema", in Paul Hockings (ed.), *Principles of visual anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975, pp.65-79.
25. On *Chronique d'ete* see the special issue of *Studies in visual communication* edited by Steven Feld, vol.11, no.1, Winter 1985.
26. My account of Boas' relationship to photography is heavily indebted to Ira Jacknis's comprehensive paper, "Franz Boas and photography", *Studies in visual communication*, vol.10, no.1, Winter 1984, pp.2-60.
27. On Curtis see Christopher M.Lyman, *The vanishing race and other illusions: photographs of Indians by Edward S.Curtis*, New York: Pantheon Books in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982.
28. On the 1897 and 1909 volumes see Jacknis, *op.cit.*, pp.36- 42.
29. Boas cited in Jacknis, *op.cit.*, p.44.
30. The following account of Flaherty's relation to still photography is based on Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "Robert Flaherty/photographer", *Studies in visual communication*, vol.6, no.2, Summer 1980, pp.5-32.

31. *Ibid.*, p.13.
32. *Ibid.*, p.22.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. What follows is largely based upon Ira Jacknis, "Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: their use of photography and Film", *Cultural Anthropology*, vol.3, no. 2 , May 1988, pp.160-177.
36. See for example her "Visual anthropology in a discipline of words", in Paul Hockings (ed.), *Principles of visual anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975, pp.3-10.
37. Jacknis, "M.Mead and G.Bateson in Bali", *op.cit.*, p.161.
38. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese character: a photographic analysis*, New York: N.Y. Academy of Sciences, 1942, p.49; quoted in Jacknis, *op.cit.*, p.165.
39. Jacknis, *op.cit.*, p.165.
40. Mead published a further 'photographic' volume on Bali with Francis Cooke Macgregor, under the title *Growth and culture: a photographic study of Balinese childhood*, New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1951.
41. Bateson and Mead, *op.cit.*, p.53; quoted in Jacknis, *op.cit.*, pp.169-170.
42. Mary Catherine Bateson quoted in Jacknis, *op.cit.*, p.171.
43. For a definition and discussion of these terms see chapter two of this thesis.

44. "Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the use of the camera in anthropology", *Studies in the anthropology of visual communication*, vol.4, no.2, Winter 1977, p.78.
45. *Ibid.*, p.80.
46. Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, "Photography", quoted in Margery S.Long, "Photographs in archival collections", in M.S.Long et al, *Archives and manuscripts: administration of photographic collections*, Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984, p.9.
47. For a discussion of 'essentialist' and 'intentionalist' definitions of documentary see Joel Snyder, "Documentary without ontology", *Studies in visual communication*, vol.10, no.1, Winter 1984, pp.78-95.
48. Naomi Rosenblum, *A world history of photography*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1984, p.341.
49. Peter Keating, "Introduction", in P. Keating (ed.), *Into unknown England 1866-1913: selections from the social explorers*, London: Fontana and Manchester University Press, 1976, p.12.
50. Quoted in Carol Ann Parssinen, "Social explorers and social scientists: the dark continent of Victorian ethnography", in Jay Ruby (ed.), *A crack in the mirror: reflexive perspectives in anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, p.210.
51. Quoted in Keating, *op.cit.*, pp.13-14.
52. Beatrix Campbell, "Wigan pier revisited", *Ten*.8, no.15, 1984, p.40.
53. Quoted in Charles A. Madison's "preface" to Jacob A. Riis, *How the other half lives*, New York: Dover Publications, 1971 (First Edition, 1890), pp.v-viii.
54. Riis, *ibid.*, p.41

55. Riis, quoted in Alexander Alland Snr, *Jacob A. Riis: photographer and citizen*, London: Gordon Fraser, 1975, p.25.
56. I owe these points and much else in this section to Sally Stein's excellent article, "Making connections with the camera: photography and social mobility in the career of Jacob Riis", *Afterimage* (U.S.A.), vol.10, no.10, May 1983, p.9 (-16).
57. Riis, cited in Alland, *op.cit.*, p.27.
58. Sally Stein, *op.cit.*, p.13.
59. *Ibid.*, p.14.
60. *Ibid.*, p.10.
61. Alan Trachtenberg, "Ever the human document", in Naomi and Walter Rosenblum (eds), *America and Lewis Hine: photographs 1904-1940*, New York: Aperture, 1977, p.120. The writing of this section has been guided by a reading of Trachtenberg's useful paper.
62. *Ibid.*, p.126.
63. Quoted in Trachtenberg, *Ibid.*, p.126.
64. *Ibid.*, p.133.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Lewis Hine, "preface", *Men at work: photographic studies of modern men and machines*, New York: Dover Publications, 1977 (first edition, 1932), no pagination.
67. Lewis Hine, quoted in Jonathan L. Doherty's introduction to *Men at work*, *Ibid.*, no pagination.

68. Cited in Trachtenberg, *op.cit.*, p.135.
69. Estelle Jussim, "Icons or ideology: Stieglitz and Hine", in Jerome Liebling (ed.), *Photography: current perspectives*, New York: Light Impressions Corporation, 1978, pp.52-64.
70. Allan Sekula, "On the invention of photographic meaning", *Artforum*, vol.xiii, no.5, January 1975, p.43; reprinted in Victor Burgin, (ed.), 1982, and Allan Sekula, 1984.
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72. Edwin Roskam, "Not intended for framing: the F.S.A. archive", *Afterimage* (U.S.A.), vol.8, no.8, March 1981, p.10.
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74. Roy Stryker quoted in John Tagg, "The currency of the photograph", in Victor Burgin (ed.), 1982, p.126.
75. Edwin Roskam, *op.cit.*
76. William Stott, *op.cit.*, p.20.
77. James Agee, "Plans for work: October 1937", in *The collected shorter prose*, Robert Fitzgerald (ed.), New York: Ballantine, 1970, p.133.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*, p.134.

80. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let us now praise famous men*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1939/1941, p.4.
81. *Ibid.*, p.243.
82. *Ibid.*, p.ix.
83. William Stott, *op.cit.*, p.269.
84. Lionel Trilling, "Greatness with one fault in it", *Kenyon Review*, vol.4, no.1, Winter 1942, pp.100-01; quoted in Charles Wolfe, "Direct address and the social documentary photograph: 'Annie May Gudger' as negative subject", *Wide Angle*, vol.9, no.1, 1987, p.60.
85. Agee and Evans, *op.cit.*, p.13.
86. On this work see Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's message from the interior: a reading", *October*, no.11, Winter 1979, pp.5-16.
87. Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, *You have seen their faces*, New York: the Viking Press, 1937.
88. Walker Evans quoted in William Stott, *op.cit.*, pp.222- 223.
89. This phrase forms part of the title of Elvi Whittaker, "The ethnography of James Agee: the moral and existential accountability of knowledge", *Canadian review of sociology and anthropology*, 15, 1978, pp.425-432.
90. John Rogers Puckett, *Five photo-textual documentaries from the great depression*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Research Press, 1984, p.147.
91. Tom Jeffery, *Mass Observation: a short history*, University of Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, , December 1978, p.2.

92. Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, "Mass Observation", 1937 pamphlet cited in "Mass Observation", *Camerawork*, no.11, September 1978, p.1.
  
93. For an account of the full complexity of Jennings's intellectual formation see David Mellor, "Sketch for an historical portrait of Humphrey Jennings", in Mary-Lou Jennings (ed.) *Humphrey Jennings: film-maker, painter, poet*, British Film Institute, 1982, pp.63-72.
  
94. At important public events, "...our observers will each be watching the social reactions within their own local environment. They will be the meteorological stations from whose reports a weather-map of popular feeling can be compiled". Harrisson and Madge, *op.cit.*, p.1.
  
95. Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, *May the twelfth*, quoted in Anthony W. Hogkinson and Rodney E. Sheratsky, *Humphrey Jennings: more than a maker of films*, Clark University Press of New England, 1982, p.38.
  
96. Tom Harrisson quoted in Tom Picton, "A very Public Espionage", *Camerawork*, no.11, September 1978, p.2.
  
97. Cited in David Mellor, "Mass Observation: the intellectual climate", *Camerawork*, no. 11, September 1978, p.4.
  
98. Harrisson and Madge, quoted in *op.cit.*, p.1.
  
99. Humphrey Spender quoted in David Mellor, "Humphrey Spender and the visual imagination of Mass Observation. A descriptive chronology", in *Humphrey Spender: worktown photographs of Bolton and Blackpool taken for Mass Observation*, exhibition catalogue 1977, quoted in Tom Jeffery, *op.cit.*, p.26.
  
100. Humphrey Spender in conversation with Tom Picton and Derek Smith, "Humphrey Spender: M.O. photographer", *Camerawork*, no.11, September 1978, p.7.

101. Don Macpherson, "Nation, mandate, memory", *Camerawork*, no.11, September 1978, p.7.
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## CHAPTER FOUR

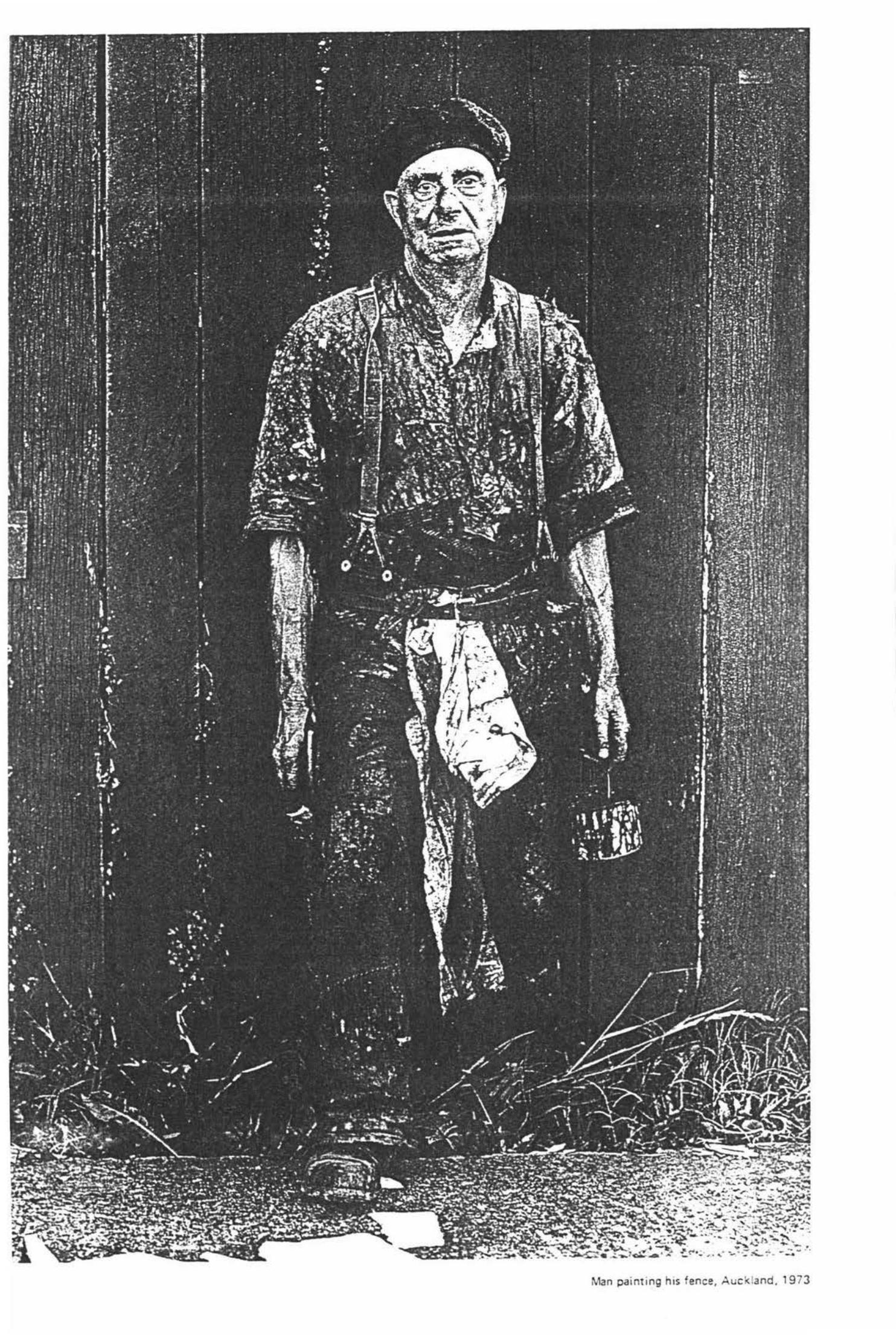
### THE PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOKS OF GLENN BUSCH

#### Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to bring together matters arising from the discussion of ethnography, photography, and ethnographic & documentary photography in the three previous chapters. This will be done by assessing their relevance to the work of one local photographer, Glenn Busch. I have chosen Busch's work because of its clear social reference and also because of its combination of visual and verbal means of presentation. The main focus will be on his book and exhibition, *Working Men* (1984), but some attention will be given to earlier photographic work and his later, more heavily literary book, *You are my darling Zita* (1991). In addition to this, in the course of the chapter I will also discuss other work by some of Busch's contemporaries (Bruce Connew, Brian Griffin, Kenneth Quinn, Jane Ussher) and pupils (David Cook and Julie Riley), as well as earlier photographers whose work has affinities with Busch's (August Sander and Diane Arbus).

#### Glenn Busch: Early Work

Glenn Busch was born in Auckland in 1948. What little information there is about his background is somewhat ambiguous. The only substantial profile article written on him states unequivocally that "... his background was working-class. His childhood homes included a caravan, bach and transit camp"<sup>1</sup>. Yet, earlier and later biographical notes on Busch repeatedly state that his father was a psychoanalyst<sup>2</sup>. I am not aware that the profession of psychoanalyst is a working-class occupation; nor that class position can be determined solely on the basis of the type of residence the family concerned live in. Moreover, it is likely that the residences referred to by Stocker were temporary/transitory: the economic prospects for a psychoanalyst in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s New Zealand must have been quite precarious. Likewise, simply because Busch's "formal education was patchy", and "he undertook various manual



Man painting his fence, Auckland, 1973

labouring jobs"<sup>3</sup> before settling in to the metier of photography, also seems insufficient reason for describing his background as working-class. However, what the straitened circumstances of his childhood and the varied work experience of his adolescence/young adulthood most probably did provide were the foundations of a strong interest in and sympathy for the lives of 'ordinary' working people. But as to the influence, if any, of his father's psychoanalytic practice, it seems far from coincidental that Busch's major projects have involved him acting as interlocutor for the verbal unburdening of other people's lives.

Busch first became interested in photography in 1969, but his interest did not quicken into a major one until 1971 after he visited an exhibition of Brassai's work at the Auckland City Art Gallery. He then studied privately with John B. Turner, photographic guru and lecturer in photography at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, who has remained an enthusiastic supporter throughout his career. Since the mid-1970s Busch has been active in the local photographic scene. His earliest exhibited and published work is already imbued with his characteristic photographic subject-matter and style. His late 1973 exhibition of 30 prints at Auckland's Petar/James Gallery, seven of which made up his first published portfolio in *Photoforum*, reveals his overriding interest in unadorned social portraiture of, particularly, elderly and 'ordinary' (i.e. working class) members of New Zealand society. This portfolio is accompanied by a review of the exhibition written by Simon Buis, himself a photographer, who notes that the images lack "contemporary overtones" but do participate in "...what is becoming a national move to record New Zealand 'as it is', and in this case, its people, 'as they are'"<sup>4</sup>.

Exactly one year later, *Photoforum* published reproductions of a ten-edition, five-print portfolio made by Busch over a period of one month while resident at the Marylands Special Home and School for Boys in Christchurch<sup>5</sup>. Again, these photographs of individual handicapped boys are vertically composed and shot frontally against walls of various kinds. The subject-matter of this early work clearly takes off from the general tendency of social documentary photography to gravitate towards the margins and the "Lower Depths" (in Maxim Gorky's phrase) of the social formation. While, in terms of style, many of these images resemble the social schematism or physiognomy of German photographer August Sander's *Face of Our Time*, a resemblance greatly magnified and

made much more apparent with the publication of the *Working Men* portfolio. Still other photos from this period are closer to Diane Arbus's work, not surprisingly as Arbus is a direct descendant of Sander's project. I will provide a detailed account of the affinity of those photographers with Busch's work when I come to discuss the *Working Men* portfolio.

In the mid-1970s, at the same time as he helped set up the third New Zealand gallery, Snaps in Auckland<sup>6</sup>, exclusively devoted to the showing of photographs, Busch was involved in drafting a proposal for the establishment of a government-funded Photographic History Unit. Although the proposal was not successful in achieving its aim, the published document is interesting in its own right both in relation to the theme of this thesis and Busch's own subsequent career. The proposal takes the United States Government's Farm Security Administration project (1935-1943) as its precedent and argues for the need to set up something similar, but much smaller, in this country. It asserts that: "...documentary photographs, in addition to their immediate value, have a vitality which increases with age"; and that "...truth universal and applicable as a measuring stick to life, is the objective of the documentary attitude"<sup>7</sup>. The document concludes with the claim that, "photography is a medium uniquely suited for the development of national self-awareness".<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of the proposal, the authors suggest a list of 16 appropriate topics for the proposed Photographic History Unit to investigate. Topic number eight is listed as, "Working men and industrial relations". In 1981, six years after the publication of this proposal, Busch spent a year lecturing in photography at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, alongside proposal co-author Larence Shustak. He also produced a small portfolio of photographs of men working at the Christchurch Gas Works that was to be the catalyst for his major book and exhibition of 1984, *Working Men*.



WARREN ATLAS

## **Working Men: Image + Text**

*Working Men* was published as a book by the National Art Gallery, in the same year as they mounted and toured the project as an exhibition. Both the exhibition and the book consist of 30 photographs taken in the early 1980s and 30 transcribed & edited interviews recorded in the same period, all of them concerning manual workers involved in heavy industries. My focus in this chapter is on the book as the more enduring or 'permanent' inscription of the project. However, when useful, I will comment on the exhibition incarnation of the overall project.

The most noticeable aspect of the book's appearance is its Fine Art qualities. It is a large, square, softback (but reinforced) volume that most closely resembles a high-quality exhibition catalogue. This is unsurprising given that its sole publisher is the (then) National Art Gallery and that it first went on sale during the exhibition at the Gallery's bookshop. However, *Working Men* (the book) is clearly intended to be a free-standing, self-sufficient artifact in its own right that can work quite independently of the exhibition; furthermore the exhibition and its duration and itinerary are not mentioned in the acknowledgments section of the book. Arguably, and certainly for this writer, the project works much better in book form where there is a much more even balance between the photographs and the texts. In its exhibition form, the matted and framed photographs exercised a hegemony of the visual over the texts which were reduced to the status of long-winded labels and captions. And, further to this, exhibitions which require large amounts of on-the-spot reading are often greeted with impatience by gallery visitors with limited time. Within the book, the photographs, although occupying full pages, are fully integrated within the flow of their respective texts. Even so, as I will argue later on, they still to a large degree stand out from and above the type-set page.

Returning to the overall appearance of the book, in addition to its general Fine Art feel, the cover and the internal layout exhibit a classically Modernist look: clean, uncluttered, minimal, black & white, symmetrical & geometrical. In this aspect, the book replicates and complements the basic properties of the late-Modernist art gallery space, the standard white cube with its perfectly arranged rows of identically presented images on bare white walls. The photographs themselves are high quality duotone separations,



DANIO ER. MARI

excellently printed on 150 gsm "premier high gloss art paper from Cartierre Burgo of Italy"<sup>9</sup>. Thus, although the Sociology Department of the University of Canterbury (and specifically Bill Willmott and Bob Gidlow) are thanked in the acknowledgments, alongside the National Art Gallery and the Southern Regional Arts Council, *Working Men* does not look like a potential contribution to visual sociology. It is most likely to be found, I would suggest, amongst other lavish & expensive Fine Art publications on an antique or high tech display table. The implications of all this will emerge further on in this chapter.

### **Working Men: Labour + Gender**

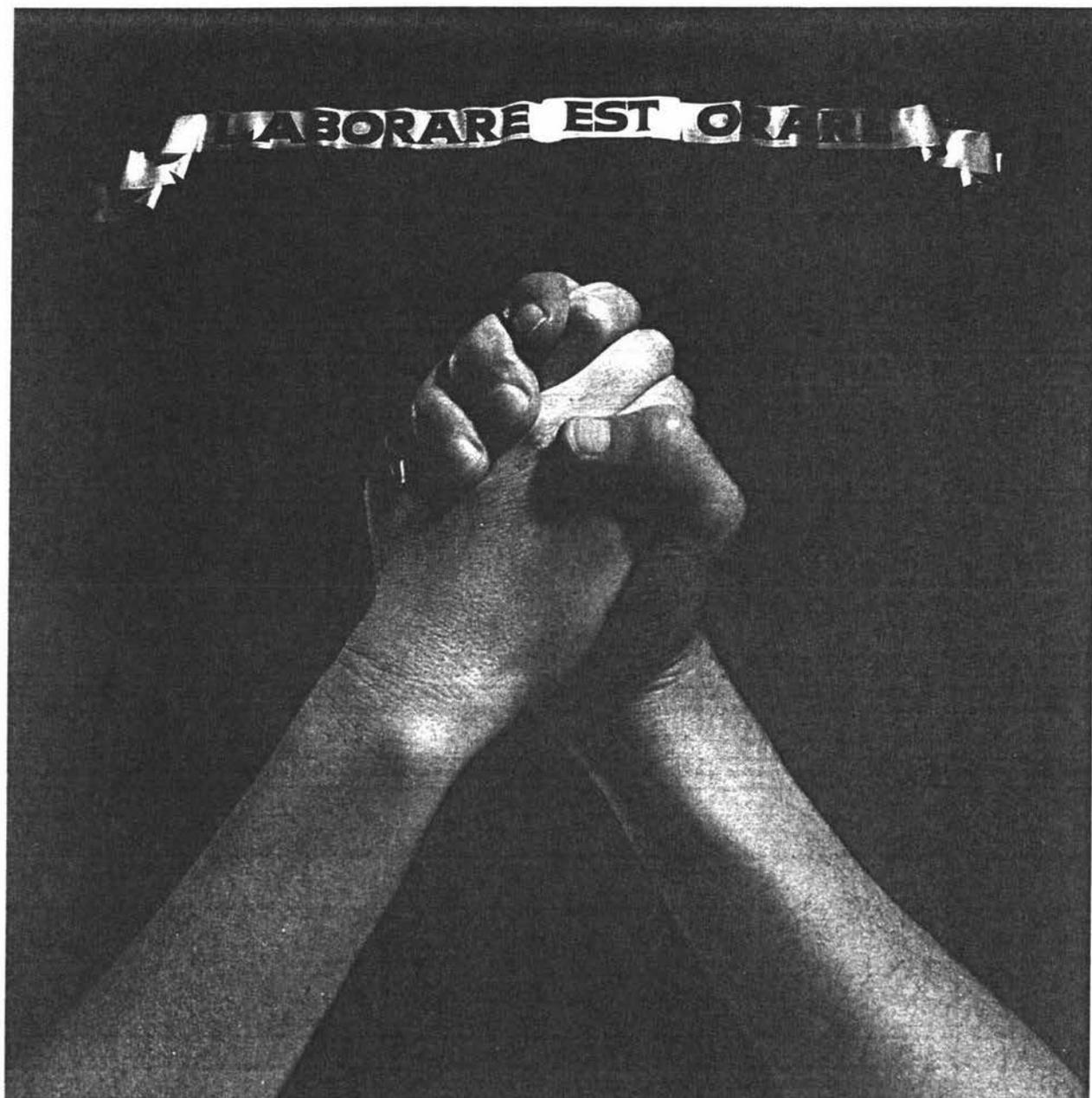
Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of *Working Men* as a form of visual and verbal social documentary, I want to give some preliminary attention to several issues pertinent to the examination of a book of this kind. These issues are to do with the question of the representation of work or, more specifically, human labour and by extension its relation to social class, and the representation of gender, the relative presence and absence of images of masculinity and femininity. In the course of the chapter, I will deal with each of these matters both in relation to themselves and to each other.

### **Labour Iconography**

At the close of his analysis of "Man and woman in socialist iconography", Eric Hobsbawm concludes thus:

"The iconography of the movement since, say, World War II, is non-traditional. We do not at present have the analytical tools to interpret it, e.g., to make symbolic readings of the main modern iconographic medium, which is ostensibly naturalistic, the photograph or film"<sup>10</sup>.

Hobsbawm's contention that photography and film (and I would add video) are now the main media for the representation of working people received local confirmation in the



**Mary-Louise Browne and Frank Stark**

*The Division of Labour*, 1990. Photo-mural: Triptych.  
Photography by Neil Pardington.

**LABORARE EST ORARE**



**LABORARE EST ORARE**

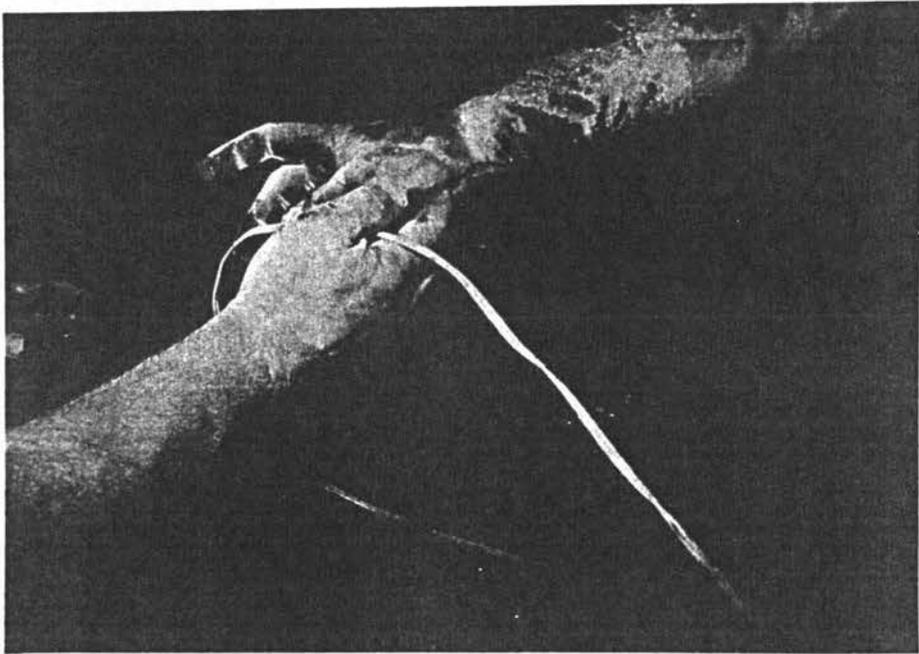


form of an exhibition that took place at the Wellington City Art Gallery in late 1990. *Art and Organized Labour* included a fair amount of painterly work by artists such as Denis Knight Turner, Garth Tapper, and Sally Griffin that is still to a large degree amenable to analysis in traditional labourist iconographical terms. But the largest component of the exhibition comprised photo-mechanically based still and moving images that did not fit so easily into traditional labourist iconographical codes.

One work, specially commissioned for the exhibition, *The Division of Labour*, a cibachrome photo-mural tryptich by Mary-Louise Browne and Frank Stark, explicitly addresses a central iconographical language or code which stretches back well before the era of industrial capitalism to artisanal times and will, I think, remain central to future, post-fordist, post-centralised planning economies reliant on keyboard culture. Each part of the tryptich, headed by the phrase "Laborare est orare" (to work is to speak or pray), signifies a different quality: strength/solidarity; comradeship/friendship; and the quasi-sacred; all of which have been important to labourist representation<sup>11</sup>. Absent, however, is the masculinist upraised fist of industrial muscle; for these are the hands of women. In this regard, Hobsbawm has remarked on the presence of feminine figures in the representations of the democratic-plebeian revolutions of the nineteenth century (e.g. the Paris Commune of 1848) and their relative absence in the proletarian and socialist movements of the twentieth century<sup>12</sup>. But, nowadays, in the wake of the modern feminist movement and the increased presence of women in the paid workforce, it is not surprising to see their re-emergence in recent symbolic representations.

Another example, also included in the *Art and Organized Labour* exhibition, of the re-working of traditional labour iconography in recent photographic work is from Bruce Connew's *Beyond the pale*. Two images are especially relevant here: "Firing wire strong man state coal mine, 9 mile, Westland, 1986", in which the outstretched hands of two miners meet in an actual and symbolically co-operative act; and "Drilling - kiwi coal party mine, 10 mile, Westland, 1986" which represents a less delicate co-operative labour. In contrast to the abstracted symbolism of the Browne/Stark tryptich, Connew deals with this iconography in an apparently realist style. But he is still working with the same set of visual codes.<sup>13</sup>





## **Worker Portraiture**

I will move now from the general codes of labour iconography to the particularities of worker portraiture. At the risk of greatly oversimplifying the matter, I would suggest that the portraiture of workers can be divided into two functional categories: the honorific and the ameliorative. The former, dedicated to honouring work as a noble activity and the physical prowess of the worker, is the predominant mode throughout photography's first fifty years (approximately 1840 to 1890). The latter, dedicated to showing harsh conditions, poverty and society's underside, in order to improve them, is the ascendant mode throughout photography's second fifty years (approximately 1890 to 1940 and beyond). There are, of course, exceptions that cut across or go against this neat division. One of them is August Sander whose work is of particular significance to Glenn Busch's photography and I will discuss him in detail later in the chapter. But for the moment this broad distinction will serve the purposes of my argument as it proceeds to the question of the representation of work and power.

## **Power**

Any discussion of the representation of working men, whether they are engaged in actual work or not, is always shadowed by the question of power. Whereas early honorific portraiture showed workers who were somehow (albeit in a limited and often ideologically loaded sense) empowered by their occupations, later ameliorative social documentary portraiture more often showed workers as disempowered by invisible but objective forces or overpowered by the might and scale of the machines they worked with. And then there is the related question of the absent but implied contrast between photographs of those without economic and symbolic power (e.g. manual workers) and those considered to be obviously powerful (e.g. management).

Amongst Busch's contemporaries, the English photographer Brian Griffin has made the question of power and its modalities the central object of his photographic enquires. Two of his photographic books are especially relevant here: *Power* (1981) and *Work* (1989). The first is an album of photographs, with text by Richard Smith, of "British management in focus". Management in this definition takes in: "the directors, the







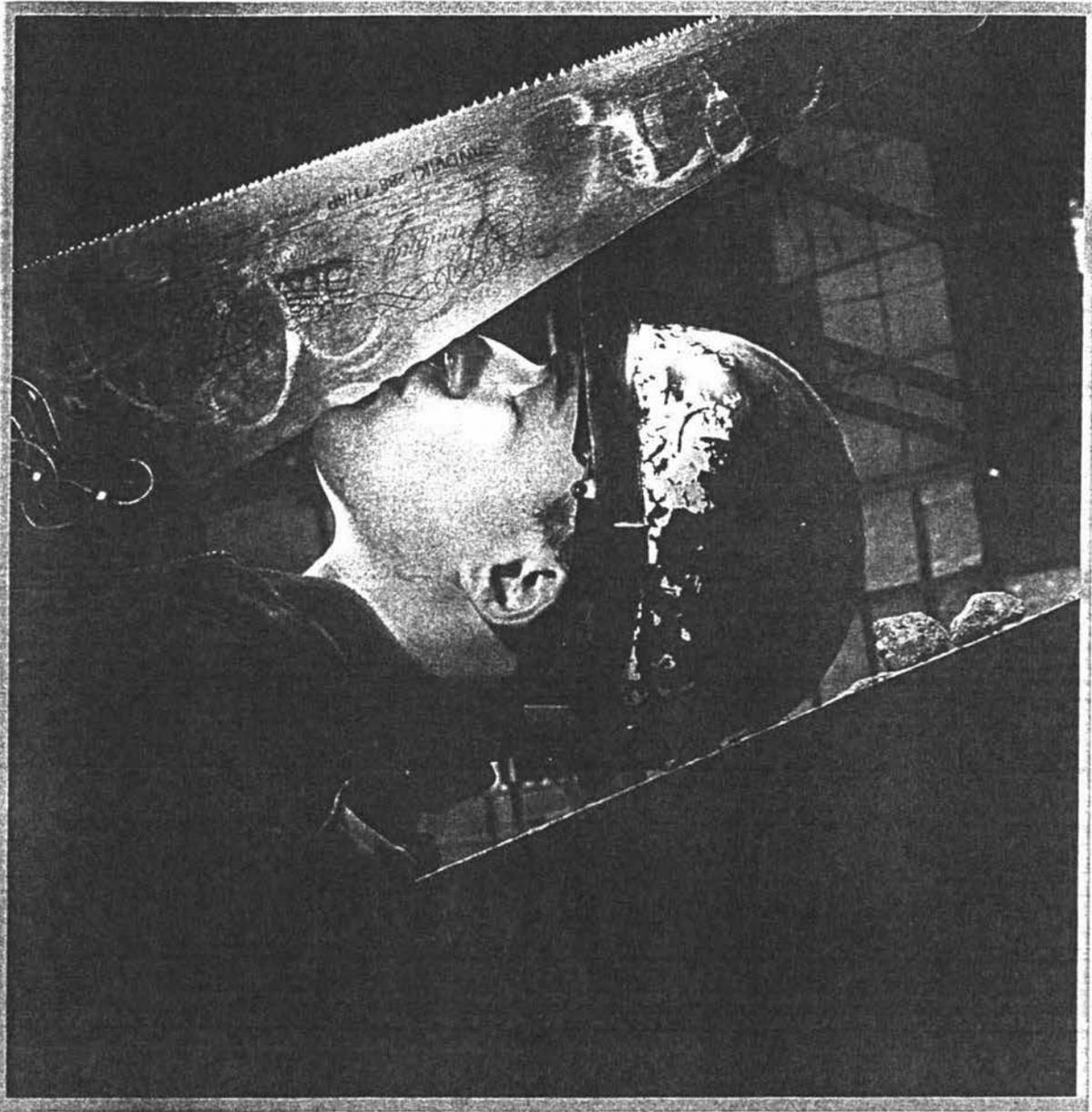


politicians, the trade unionists (!), the educators, the motor manufacturers, the stylists, the entrepreneurs, the appointed, the media, the consultants, and the executives". And although it is true that these portraits reveal a group of decision makers "totally bereft of glamour" and confirm that in this society like ours "power remains invisible"<sup>14</sup>, Griffin's achievement is to convey this in photographs that are bland and very quirky at the same time. For example, the photograph of Air Chief Marshall Sir Peter Fletcher shows an unsmiling, non-descript man who is holding a airbus model across his mouth to uncanny (mildly surreal) effect<sup>15</sup>. Sir Kenneth Keith of Castleacre is captured in a sparse (except for two exotic plants) boardroom interior, again staring directly at the camera with his right hand placed on top of the globe<sup>16</sup>. Once more the effect is both anonymous and slightly sinister. Sir Monty Finniston, on the other hand, is placed inside a neo-classical wall-hanging where his authority both merges in and stands out slightly alarmingly<sup>17</sup>. Finally, the anonymity and the behind-the-scenes mediating power of the television chief executive are very well signified by the double portrait of George Cooper<sup>18</sup>. *Power* is a fascinating photographic book in which words and pictures work well together to convey the unruffled, strangely-normal surface of corporate power.

## Work

A kind of companion volume to *Power*, *Work*<sup>19</sup> shifts Griffin's style from the tension and balance between conveying the familiar and defamiliarizing it at the same time. With these photographs, Griffin moves into a neo-baroque escape from any vestigial realism into a purely allegorical treatment of work and workers. "Broadgate, London 1986" has its hard-hatted worker reclining diagonally to the picture plane, with a beautifully embossed/engraved manual saw placed to his lips. "Eric Foster, Broadgate, London 1987" shows Foster struck in a heroic statuesque pose on a plinth, holding a steel rod, placed between the exterior of a building and a motorway ramp pylon. Griffin has commented on these photographs thus:

"The reason I got the men to kiss the tools was that after my father died I wanted to show the worker as hero. I felt that most photographers never show this. They just stand the worker in front of the camera holding their tools and 'document' them... I wanted to



BROADGATE, LONDON 1986.  
Commissioned by Rosehaugh Stanhope Developments plc.



ERIC FOSTER, BROADGATE. LONDON 1987.  
Commissioned by Rosehaugh Stanhope Developments plc.

imagine that these working men were heroes in the sense that they would have a fitting memorial, and not be buried in some communal grave like their forefathers, and lost to memory. I imagined them buried instead in a cathedral, like medieval knights, who were buried in wonderful tombs, with their effigies holding swords as symbols of heroic status"<sup>20</sup>.

With these photographs, Griffin's work attains considerable expressive power whilst avoiding absurdity. The overall effect is of a group of photos of workers and work that remain contemporary but reach for the status of (post)modern emblems by means of their constructed character and heightened artifice. They serve to provoke thought as much if not more than empathy in the viewer. They reinvent the honorific function of portrait photography for the late twentieth century.

### **Base and Superstructure: Working Men, Great Men & Muscle (Wo)Men**

#### ***Kenneth Quinn***

In the same year as *Working Men* was first exhibited and published, the Alexander Turnbull library in Wellington initiated another, rather different, project of photographic portraiture. Kenneth Quinn, a former professor of Classics at Otago and Toronto universities and also a photographer, was commissioned by the library to photograph "New Zealanders prominent in intellectual and cultural life", including writers, artists, musicians, actors, producers, teachers, publishers, critics, administrators and patrons. According to a document published by the library, "the object is to place on record how a certain group of people looked at a particular point in New Zealand history"<sup>21</sup>. The portraits so far made have been displayed for a lengthy period in the foyer area outside the entrance to the Turnbull Library on the first floor of the National library building in Wellington.

Kenneth Quinn has photographed the subjects who make up this portrait gallery in a uniform manner, their head and shoulders are contained within 400 x 500mm black and white exhibition prints (with smaller master copies for archival purposes). Each person is identified by name and a brief summary of achievements and positions held. A



Sir Guy Powles, KBE, CMG, ED (June 1984)  
*Lawyer, soldier, diplomat. New Zealand's first Ombudsman, then Chief Ombudsman; Race Relations Conciliator; writer and commentator on international affairs, administrative law and race relations.*



Evelyn Page (May 1984)

*Painter. Foundation member of The Group, Christchurch; retrospective exhibitions National Art Gallery 1970, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts 1982; represented in the public collections of the National Art Gallery, Auckland City Art Gallery, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Sarjeant Gallery, Dowse Art Museum, Alexander Turnbull Library.*

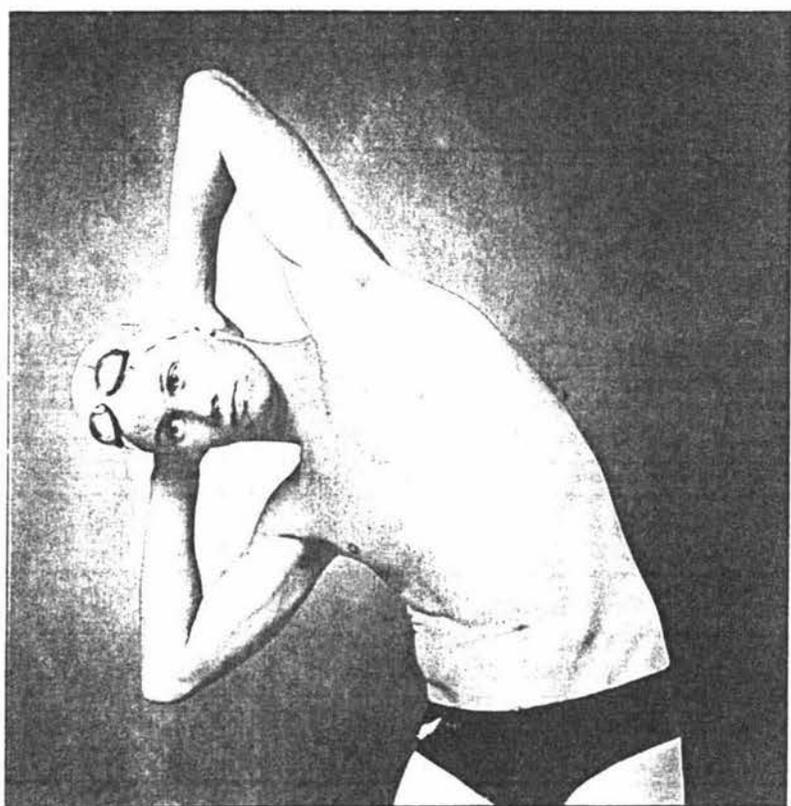
comparison with *Working Men* reveals that whereas the descriptive titles of its portraits are bare, minimal and generic (e.g. "Matt King - labourer - gasworks - Christchurch 1981"), the images themselves are far more elaborate than the plain functional shots of the "eminent New Zealanders" series. It would seem, then, that one of the effects of Busch's efforts to imbue his portraits of 'humbler' New Zealanders with the aura of photographic history is to reverse Alan Sekula's contention that, "...every proper portrait of a 'man of genius' made by a 'man of genius' has its counterpart in a mug shot"<sup>22</sup>.

Busch's project attempts to rescue his subjects from historical oblivion and the generic anonymity of their job descriptions by means of photographic 'art' and the permanent inscription of oral testimony. Quinn, in contrast, seems confident that the high individuality and distinctive associations of his subjects shines through the better for being underplayed in a plain portrait style coupled with a bare list of distinguished achievements. However, both Busch and Quinn's attempts at portraiture, in the words of Alan Sekula, "...are motivated by an uneasy belief in the category of the individual"<sup>23</sup>. The source of Busch's unease can be found in the tension between the sociological rationale of his project (the demand for a representative portrait of New Zealand working men) and its personal-political rationale (the desire to honour those 'hidden from history'). Whatever unease visits Quinn's project is probably to do with a lingering thought that high quality mug shots and bare lists of institutional affiliation make these people only marginally more distinctive than bureaucrats (or reduces their appearance to little more than that of interchangeable public servants). The mythic juices of 'creativity' have been siphoned off.

The most striking and significant difference between these two bodies of work, however, is the manner in which they point up a schism between the representation of manual and mental labour. This dichotomy has been central to advanced industrial societies (but is undergoing certain revision in post-industrial economies) and is incarnated in the very compositional form of these two photographer's pictures. All Busch's subjects appear in full-length portraits, attired in working clothes, placed within or beside metonymic fragments of their places of work, often holding the tools of their trade. Quinn's "eminent New Zealanders", on the other hand, regardless of their particular cultural field all appear in identical head and shoulders shots against a neutral black background, as examples of the life of the mind.



Jane Ussher, *Mike O'Rourke* 1984, black-and-white photograph



Jane Usher, *Anthony Voss*, 1984. Black and white photograph.

The photographs of the people in Quinn's series have no bodies (or, rather, are literally disembodied); they live, we are invited to believe, mostly inside their heads. In this regard they not only contrast with the photographs of workers in Busch's exhibition/book but also with another thematic set of portrait photographs also initiated in the crucial year of 1984 (the election of the fourth Labour government). I'm referring here to Jane Ussher's portfolio of photographs of the 1984 New Zealand Olympic team, *the Olympians*.

### *Jane Ussher*

Obviously any successful photographs of highly trained, top level athletes must in some central way focus on the bodies of their subjects. Jane Ussher's photographs do fulfill this major requirement but, unlike routine sports photographs in newspapers and advertisements, they also do more. There is a cerebral quality to some of the pictures, suggesting both the power of concentration and thought and the agonies involved in competing at this very high level. There is also a highly stylised and indeed idealised quality to the portraits which lifts the subjects to an almost mythic and certainly iconic status as embodiments of a kind of superior will - suitably tempered with the requisite kiwi modesty.

One commentator has spoken of the photographs' adoption of a "...bizarre series of poses vaguely reminiscent of classical statuary"<sup>24</sup>. Whether consciously or not, Ussher may have derived this quality from exposure to the work of German film maker and photographer, Leni Riefenstahl. *Olympia* (1938), Riefenstahl's film of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, deliberately invokes the forms and poses of classical Hellenic sculpture and architecture in order to idealize the heroic meeting of matter and spirit (will) in the athletic human form; and, in the process, to inaugurate the tenor of the modern sports film (documentary). Riefenstahl's fixation on the perfect Aryan form in her films of the 1930s is followed up in the 1950s with her photographic book on the ritualized bodies-in-motion of the Nuba<sup>25</sup>. It would be going too far to suggest that *The Olympians* is directly invested with influence from Riefenstahl's inherently ambiguous, allegedly fascist, aesthetic but there are clear formal similarities.

At the same time, Ussher's exclusive use of the studio tent, and her poses, backgrounds and lighting recall certain of the works of American photographer Irving Penn, particularly his *Worlds in a Small Room*<sup>26</sup>.

### **Working Men: Social Documentary + Ethnography**

It is clear from Glenn Busch's involvement with the proposal to set up a government photographic unit and from his early photographic studies that he sees his work as a form of social enquiry. I would suggest more specifically that his work is a contribution to a branch of twentieth century documentary (image and text) which is best described as social portraiture. I have already introduced the subject of worker portraiture and will return to the genre of social portraiture, both in itself and in relation to Busch's work, further on in this chapter. But first I want to consider Busch in relation to the broad area of social documentary (and ethnographic) photography discussed in chapter three.

Despite its publication towards the end of the twentieth century, *Working Men* fits quite comfortably into a lineage of social investigation extending back as far as the first half of the nineteenth century. I refer to a loose genre of writing and image-making known as social exploration, already examined in chapter three. A recurring image throughout the British literature - stretching from William Cobbett, Friedrich Engels, and Henry Mayhew to George Orwell, and Ken Coates & Richard Silburn - is that of England as an "unknown country". In *London labour and the London poor* (4 vols, 1851-1862), Henry Mayhew writes of "...supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth"<sup>27</sup>; George Sims, in *How the poor live* (1883), of venturing "...into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the general post office"<sup>28</sup>.

Much later, writing from within the developing British documentary film movement - itself arguably a direct descendant of social exploration literature - John Grierson makes the claim that: "our literature is divorced from the actual... Our gentlemen explore the native customs of Tanganika and Timbuctoo, but do not travel dangerously into the jungles of Middlesborough and the Clyde"<sup>29</sup>. And, to take another example from the 1930s, here is Tom Harrisson, the founder of the Mass Observation documentary

movement, having recently returned from a period of anthropological fieldwork in the New Hebrides: "The wilds of Lancashire or the mysteries of the East End of London were as little explored as the cannibal interior of the New Hebrides or the head hunter hinterland of Borneo...so when I came home from that expedition, I determined to apply the same methods ...in Britain"<sup>30</sup>.

Both the Griersonian documentary film movement and the Mass Observation group sprang from a frustration with the perceived limitations of modern liberal democracy. 'Ordinary people', they felt, were not well served by the mass media; nor were the voices of 'ordinary people' being heard across the society as a whole. They considered that right across the divisions of society there was a generalized 'need-to-know', a need for knowledge and information that was not being satisfied.

A strong echo of this view - most cogently put by Walter Lipmann in his book *Public Opinion* (1922) - can be heard in the following comment by Glenn Busch: "there is really not enough dialogue in our country. Ordinary people can think and talk about things - we need the politicians to debate and discuss but I think we need more dialogue between people"<sup>31</sup>. Thus Busch, a latter day social explorer, attempts to introduce to the conversation of our liberal-democratic society a set of voices not normally heard there. The major dichotomy of this society that he seeks to redress is between a literate middle class which has access to and makes considerable use of mass cultural institutions and a working class which doesn't. In the first instance, he sets himself the characteristic task of the social explorer, a task "...in which a representative of one class consciously sets out to *explore*, analyse and *report upon*, the life of another class lower on the social scale than his own"<sup>32</sup>. In the second, he carries out the ethnographer's task of overseeing the passage from orality to literacy of a form of knowledge embedded in the living speech and memory of a group of manual workers. It is the case, therefore, that in order to communicate convincingly with the audience or reading community of which he is a representative, Busch's encounter with these particular working men must be rendered into textual form (images and words) and thereby undergo transformation prior to its transmission.

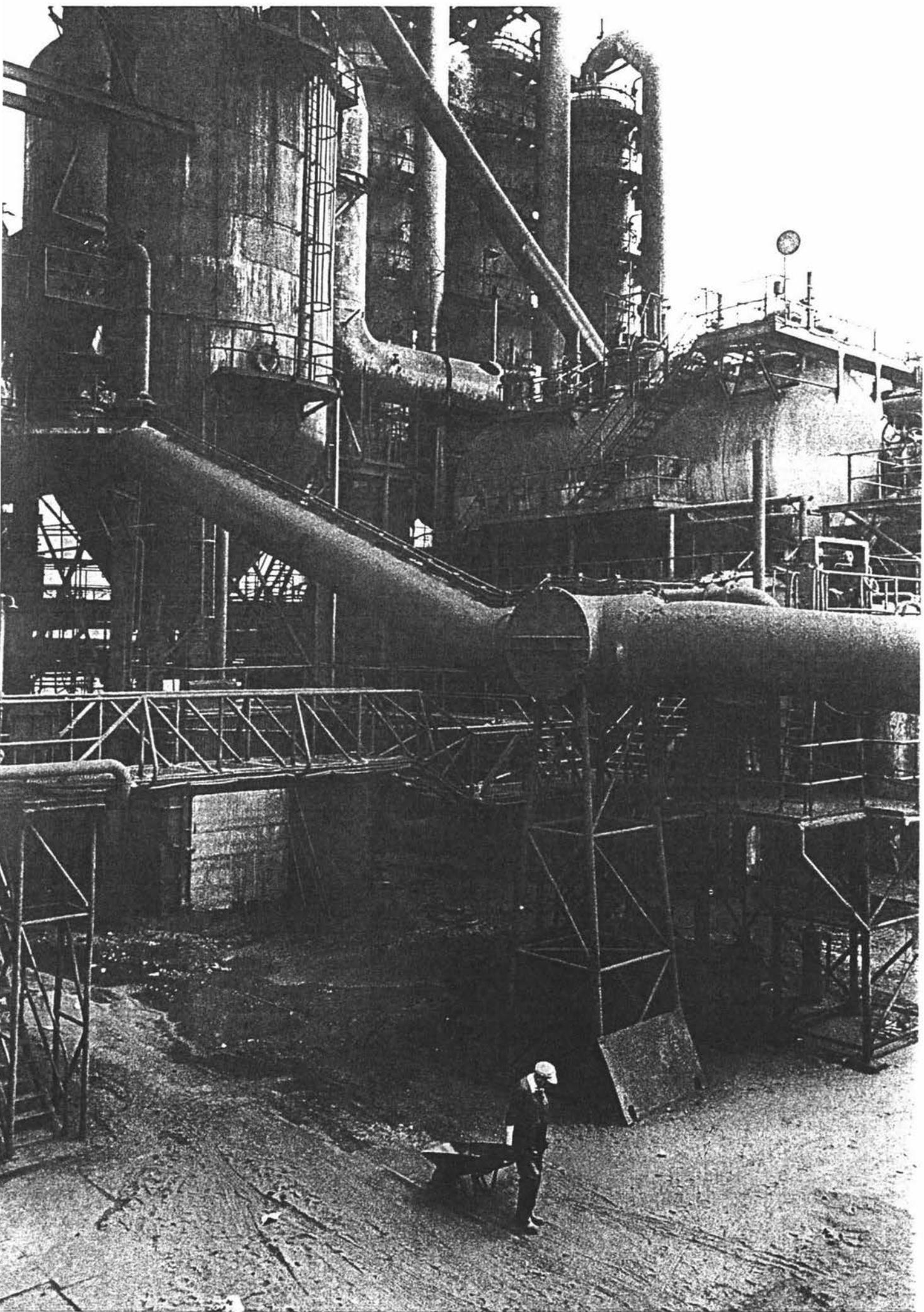
## From Word To Text

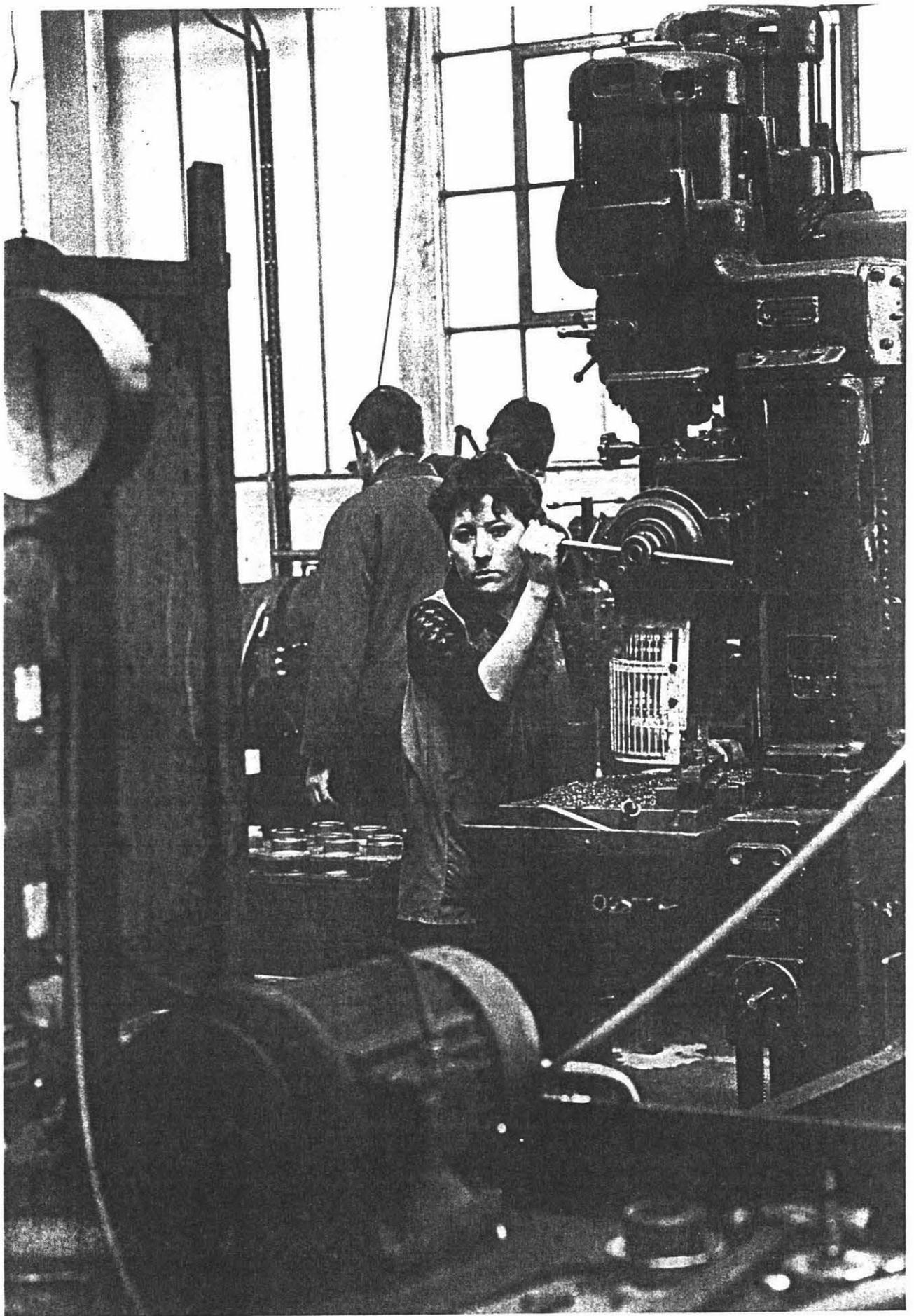
Before examining in more detail the manner in which Busch *textualizes* his workers (informants), we will look at how other writers have handled this process. My first example comes from Britain in the 1960s. When Ronald Fraser and *New Left Review* conceived their project of compiling a series of personal accounts of work, they decided to ask the participants to write their own stories directly. Fraser explains the rationale behind this in his introduction to the second volume:

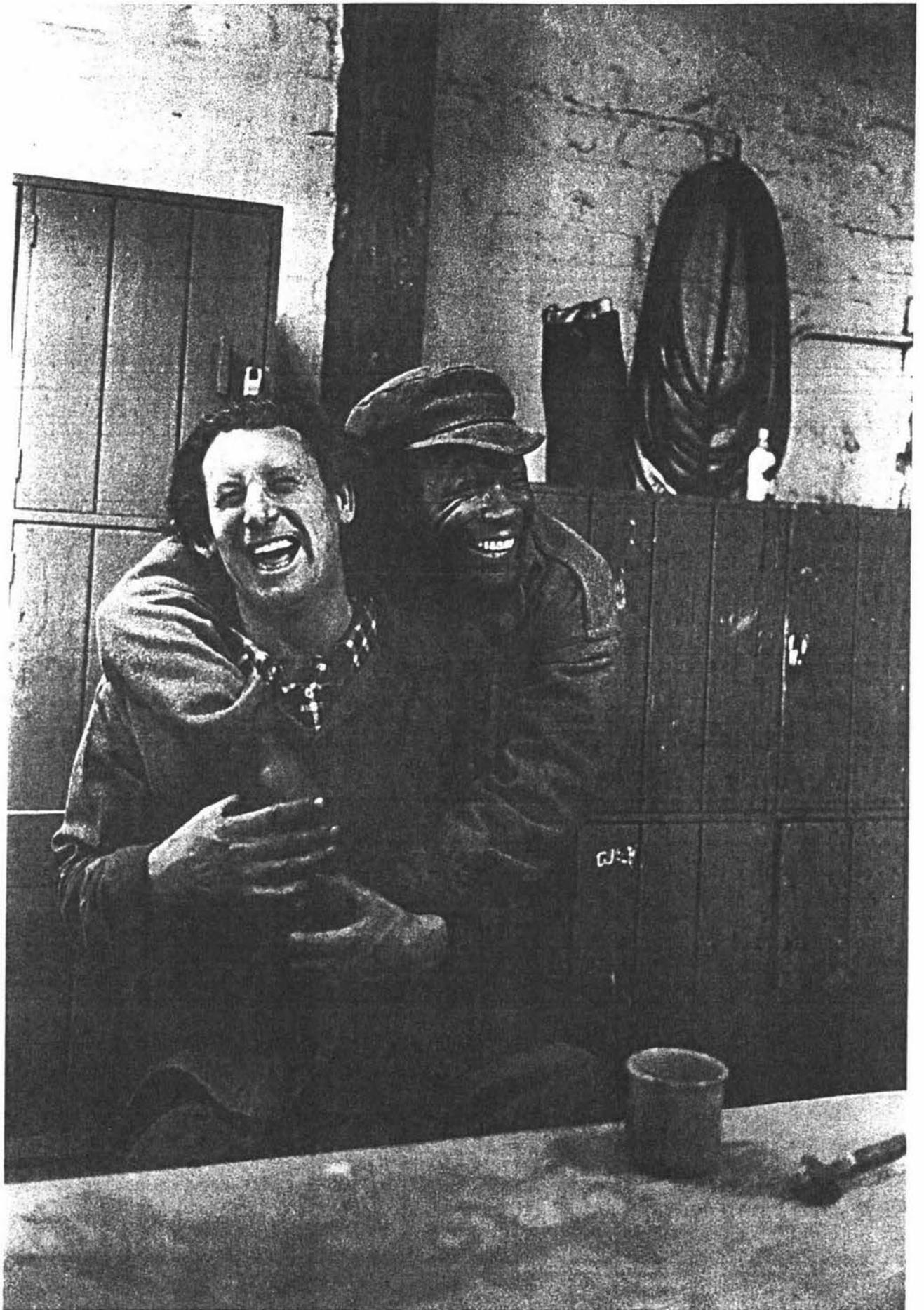
"It has been asked why, in originating these personal accounts, *New Left Review* did not use a tape-recorder to record the experiences of the 'less articulate', as the critics have put it. The choice not to do so was quite deliberate: we did not want to introduce an outsider, an interviewer with a set of questions to whom the subjects would necessarily have to react and perhaps furnish an equally set series of answers...It was, incidentally, a far harder task for the contributors to confront themselves alone on paper than to face an interviewer"<sup>33</sup>.

Having handed over the process of textualizing their own work experiences to his contributors, the editor then set out to cover as wide a range of work experience as possible. The two published volumes include not only contributions from manual workers but also from an accountant, a house-surgeon, a house-wife (*sic*), a social worker and many other occupations. In addition to this variety, both volumes contain contextualizing introductions and end with important (afterword) essays on work in general by Raymond Williams ("The meanings of work", volume one) and Alvin Gouldner ("The unemployed self", volume two). All of these elements coalesce to provoke thought in the mind of the Penguin reader about the meaning and variety of work in advanced industrial societies.

My second example, *Working* by veteran American oral historian Studs Terkel, contrasts with the first because it would not have been possible without the use of a tape recorder. Working with a large, socially diverse group of subjects, Terkel's introduction to the transcribed interviews quotes from the preface to his earlier book, *Division Street*:



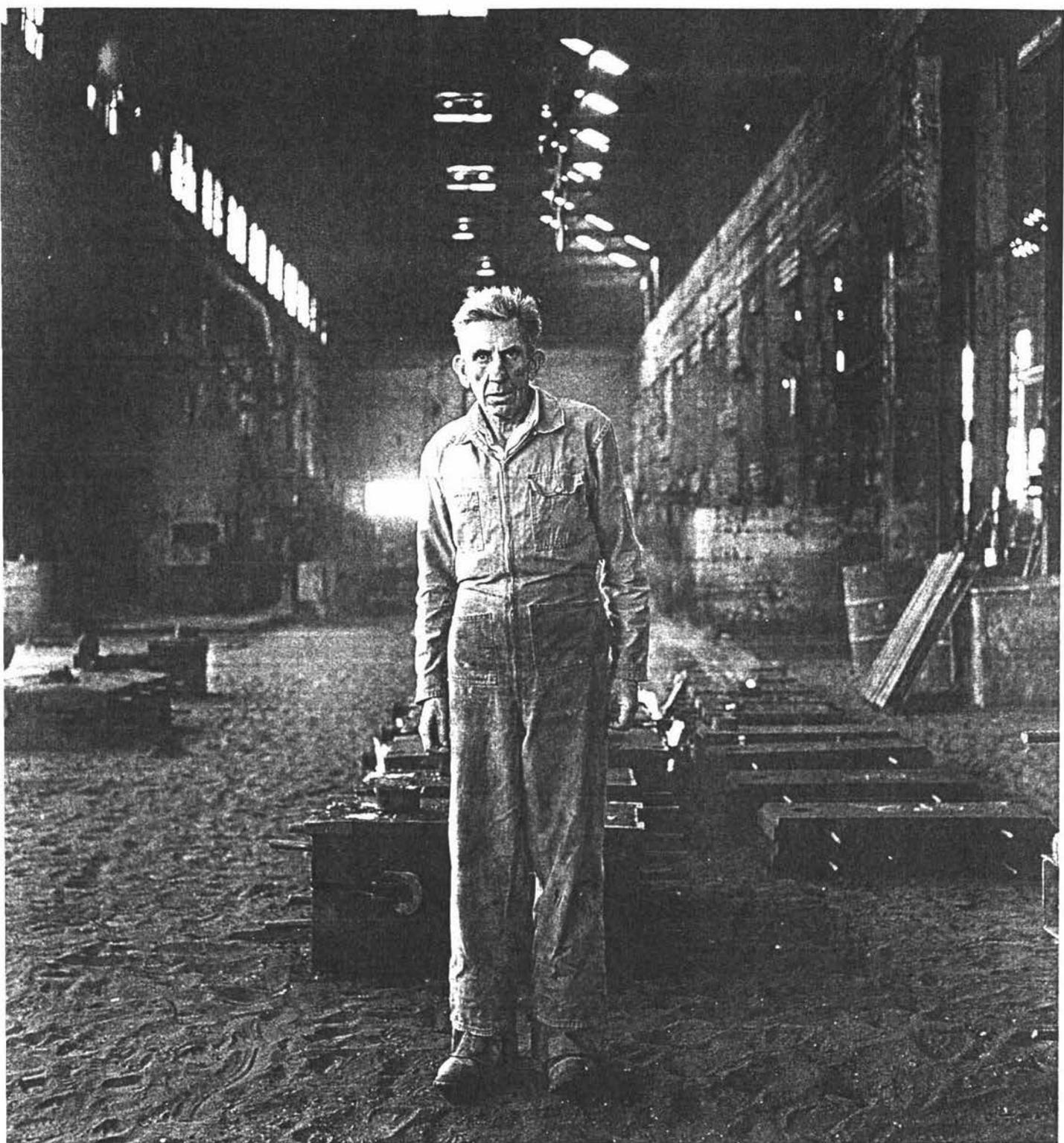




*America*: "I realized quite early in this adventure that interviews conventionally conducted were meaningless. Conditioned cliches were certain to come. The question-and-answer technique may be of some value in determining favoured detergents, toothpaste and deodorants, but not in the discovery of men and women"<sup>34</sup>. For this reason, Terkel opted for the looser, conversational mode which yields the insightful, wide-ranging results to be read in *Working*.

My third example is a project more directly comparable with Busch's - *Born to Work* (1982), a photographic book by Nick Hedges and Huw Beynon<sup>35</sup>. This project, which culminated with the publication of *Born to Work*, was first presented in public as *Factory Photographs* (1978), a touring exhibition of photographs and accompanying extracts from interviews with workers, both carried out by Nick Hedges, formerly a staff photographer for Shelter (a campaigning organization for the homeless). The book combines Hedges's skills with those of Huw Beynon who had previously investigated people's experiences of the work process in *Working for Ford*, and *The Vickers Report*.

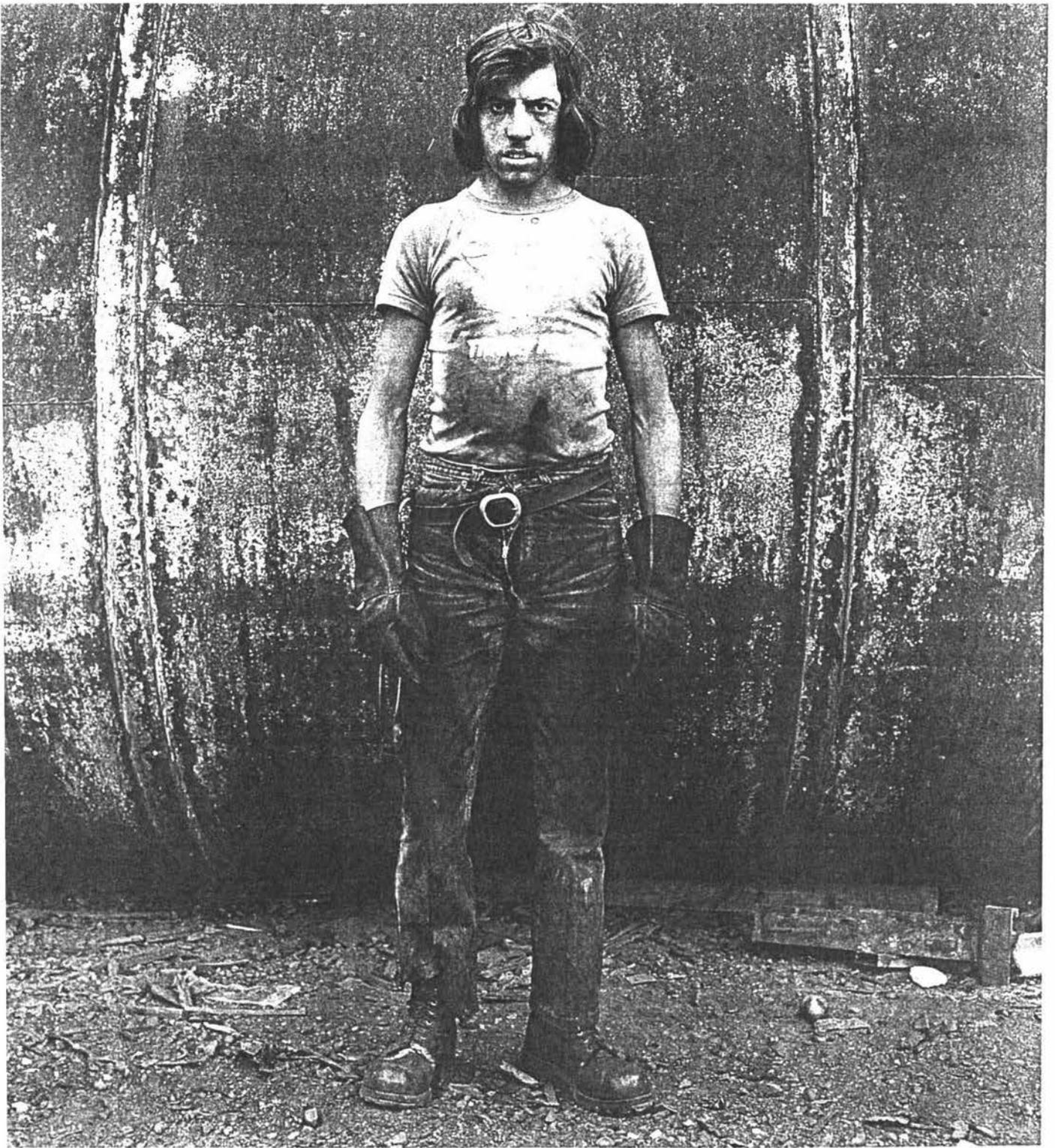
In *Born to Work*, Huw Beynon builds an account of factory work in contemporary England by interpolating extracts from the interviews conducted by Hedges at various workplaces and from already published sources with analytical material on work itself. This enables him to simultaneously profile the contemporary work process (1970s/1980s) and provide an historical and political argument about its particular shape within modern capitalist economies. Hedges's black and white photographs, taken at a number of mostly northern English industrial locations, are scattered throughout the book, sometimes occupying a single or double page spread but mostly located above, below or beside columns of type. When working people - and by this I don't just mean men because *Born to Work* registers something of the vast increase in, particularly part-time, female employment that has accompanied the increasing rise in male unemployment over the last 25 years in most Western style democracies - are featured in the photographs and interview extracts, they are as likely to be women or members of non Anglo-Saxon ethnic groups as they are to be the archetypal white male manual worker. These photographs show working people either actively engaged in their work, or socializing at tea and lunch breaks, or simply lost in thought beside the often monstrous machinery.



JOE SANFORD

The three books discussed in the previous paragraphs all mobilize an active, questioning perspective on the character and place of work in modern capitalist societies. All three have a somewhat untidy, sprawling character which suits the chaotic and multifarious nature of work in a rapidly changing era. The makers of *Working Men*, by contrast, appear to have striven to sublimate its contents into a purely aesthetic register. To rework a phrase from the American artist Barbara Kruger, *Working Men* invests in a hoped for "divinity of the masterpiece"<sup>36</sup>. Glenn Busch presents us with 30 carefully composed portraits and 30 carefully transcribed and edited monologues. He provides no introduction or afterword where we might learn why he chose to document this part of the socio-economic spectrum rather than another; nor indeed any justification why his focus is partial rather than an attempt at comprehensiveness. Furthermore, his exclusive concentration on male manual workers ignores other, now arguably working class occupations and, especially, the entire field of women's work<sup>37</sup>. Even the book's inclusions tend to blur important sociological distinctions by placing relatively skilled and unskilled, younger and older workers all under the same homogenizing rubric of 'Working Men'.

The book's title has a timeless, ahistorical ring to it. Yet, what these men share is not simply the fact that they are all men who work - something they have in common with others in a large number of social formations throughout history - but rather the condition of being wage labourers in a small-scale, developing and changing capitalist economy in the South Pacific region. They are therefore required to participate in a socially determined, swiftly changing and now disappearing set of occupations which offer very limited space and scope for self-realization. According to Stanley Aronowitz, "work is that human activity which expresses creative achievement and corresponds therefore to part of desire, our will to objectivate ourselves individually and collectively by creating objects or social relations"<sup>38</sup>. If this claim is true then few if any of the men represented in this exhibition and book are engaged in work in Aronowitz's sense. This is because, as the Moroccan poet and social scientist Tahor Ben Jelloun puts it in his study of North African migrant workers: "capitalism desires anonymous men, emptied of their desires, but full of labour power"<sup>39</sup>. With the rise and development of the capitalist mode of production, the conception of work as a universal human productive activity, well expressed by Aronowitz, has been progressively overtaken by another which restricts its meaning to paid employment and recodes it as wage labour.



THE REV. WOODHOUSE

Furthermore, the category of labour itself has acquired "two modern senses: first the economic abstraction of the activity; secondly the social abstraction of that class of people who perform it"<sup>40</sup>. We can see from this development, then, that Busch's subjects (or more precisely the objects of his photographic gaze and interviewer's attention) are part of this socio-economic process which re-constitutes them specifically as wage labourers rather than generally as working men.

But how does all of this relate to Busch's project in as much as we can identify its motivation. Surely, like any good social documentor - and Brett Riley celebrates *Working Men* as "... this country's most important social documentation ever"<sup>41</sup> - Busch has simply shown us what he saw with his own eyes and recorded what his informants had to say, finishing up with what another reviewer, begging a multitude of questions, called "... a fascinating representation of the real"<sup>42</sup>. Busch himself, as a participant at a seminar on oral history, has used a classically realist metaphor for the process of representation, claiming that in his work: "both pictures and recorded speech are windows into people's inner lives"<sup>43</sup>. For a whole host of reasons which I've provided in considerable detail in the course of chapters one and two, this metaphor is both problematic and quite bankrupt; "people's inner lives" do not transparently present themselves to the gaze of an observer poised at an open window, nor do they find their way onto audio tape purely of their own accord.

In addition to its subscription to windows and mirrors metaphorical underpinnings, there is an even more fundamental way in which *Working Men* is a thoroughly realist work. This has to do with the manner in which all traces of Busch the photographer and interviewing subject are effaced from the finished text. Busch's subjectivity is screened out, nowhere to be found, although it is obvious that it has played a major role in heavily shaping the composition of the photographs and the shape and content of the verbal texts. Well and good, it might be said, given that one of the self-justifying ideologies of 20th Century social documentary is its claim to let the people 'speak for themselves'. But nowadays in emerging forms of reflexive ethnography, the people (one's informants) not only speak for themselves, they invariably speak to others, especially their main interlocutor(s) - the interviewer(s) and ethnographer(s). And also, it's important to emphasize, they speak to the reader entirely by means of the textual form in which their likeness is portrayed and their words inscribed. Busch, however,



THOMAS AMU'ETI

presents as immaculately conceived monologues - the spontaneous outpourings of unstopped and unstoppable subjects - what were in fact dialogues in which he would have played a major shaping, eliciting, and participating role. But all of this is missing from the final, edited version and presumably much (exactly how much we are not told) of the interviewee's total material as well. The question remains how was the final version arrived at and to what extent did Busch's involvement shape its ultimate form? It does not receive an answer from within the text.

It follows that because he suppresses the mechanics of his involvement in his own project, Busch has no vantage point from which to begin to mount a cultural critique of wage labour in contemporary New Zealand society. Thus his book becomes either a High Art version of salvage ethnography which seems to imply: 'this is how they are, I have captured and preserved their uniqueness in case (or before) it is swept away and you do not see their like again'. Or else it becomes a High Art version of redemptive ethnography implying to the reader/viewer: 'gaze upon them, their atavistic working conditions have survived the onslaughts of modernization and remain a gleaming, authentic residue'.

"...Images that are meant to make an argument about social relations can 'work'", writes Martha Rosler, "but the documentary that has so far been granted cultural legitimacy has no such argument to make. Its arguments have been twisted into generalizations about the condition of 'man' which is by definition not susceptible to change through struggle...The liberal documentary in which members of the ascendant classes are implored to have pity on and to rescue members of the oppressed, now belongs to the past"<sup>44</sup>. I don't think *Working Men* is asking members of the ascendant classes to rescue or even pity its subjects. In a society like New Zealand, widely misrecognised as "classless", they'd be unlikely to feel the need to bother anyway. Rather, they'd be more likely to contemplate the images and words of these labourers in a haze of hyper-aesthetic detachment. The prime source of appeal of these photographs and the book as a whole for such an audience is their undeniable possession of the quality of aura - that sublime *je ne sais quoi* surrounding great works of art which Walter Benjamin expected photography to dissipate, perhaps mistakenly in light of the accelerated museumification of photographs in recent decades.



RONNY LEWIS

## Working Men as Social Portraiture

Earlier in this chapter I cited Eric Hobsbawm's contention that photo-mechanical methods are now the main means for representing the labour movement. Hobsbawm dates this change from the end of World War II. But, of course, photography has been used in the general portraiture of workers for much longer than this, as I pointed out previously with my distinction between honorific and ameliorative portraits. From the moment of its widespread introduction, photography has increasingly usurped the place of the traditional fine arts in the production of portraits of all kinds. Today it is far and away the dominant means of making a portrait and portrait photographers continue to do good business. But this apparently comfortable state of affairs should be tested against John Berger's claim that the genre of portraiture has declined because, "increasingly for over a century, fewer and fewer people in capitalist society have been able to believe in the social value of the social roles offered"<sup>45</sup>. And if we place this assertion beside the even more fundamental claim made by Roland Barthes concerning "the advent of myself as other... a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" that has developed during the age of photography, whereby "through photography we see a development from otherness as escapist option, when the belief in the unitary self still prevailed, to otherness as inevitability, with the irretrievable collapse of the unitary self"<sup>46</sup> - then the prospects for a social portraiture project on working men in 1980s Christchurch would not seem to be very promising. Yet the quality of aura is a powerful force when it comes to addressing a gallery-going and art-book buying audience. When aura reinfuses a genre of social portraiture, seemingly made obsolete by late twentieth century factors, it seems to bear out Walter Benjamin's warning that "cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance".<sup>47</sup>

If the photographs in *Working Men* (and even in their own way the texts too) possess an auratic quality, from where do they derive it? The ultimate sources, I would argue, are the photographic portraiture styles (from daguerreotypes on) of the nineteenth century. But closer to our own time and in our own century, and much more directly comparable with Busch's images, is the work of the twentieth century German photographer August Sander.





Pastrycook

## *August Sander*

Yet to compare the photography of Glenn Busch with that of August Sander is no simple matter. First of all, there is the question of the differing social contexts within which the two men produced their portraits. Whereas Busch confines himself to a highly selective view of the New Zealand working class, Sander's photographic series, such as *Face of Our Time* (1929); *Trades, Classes and Professions*; and *German Land, German People* attempted nothing less than a comprehensive inventory of all social classes in Weimar Germany. Indeed, given that he held an essentially evolutionary view of society, the breadth of Sander's corpus is not surprising. And although all of his work was produced in the twentieth century, Sander's philosophical outlook was shaped by nineteenth century ideas. There is, of course, a strong evolutionary strain to much mid and late nineteenth century thought whether it be Comtian positivist sociology or even Marxism in its various versions. In Sander's case, however, as Ian Jeffrey has argued, the direction of social evolution goes from the peasantry and the traditional middle classes, who are associated with the past, to the intelligentsia, associated with a developing socialism<sup>48</sup>. Sander's project involved "...a series of portraits sequenced in a 'sociological arc' that began with peasants, ascended through students, professional artists, and statesmen, and descended through urban labour to the unemployed".<sup>49</sup>

Sander was also wedded to nineteenth century modes of enquiry through his rigorous pursuit of taxonomical classification and full frontal, formal portraiture. His work assumes that physiognomy, posture and reaction to the photographic encounter are indicative of relative social position and attitude. These assumptions are not unreasonable but they do depend on a classificatory schema which, as Peter Wollen puts it, "...is completely predetermined. Sander's portraits exemplify a social analysis which precedes them and is in no way made explicit by them"<sup>50</sup>.

Read within the changing context of a socially fractured Weimar Germany, Sander's portraits are of great interest as fascinating but contradictory documents. Today, however, Sander enters a time machine and joins a line of photo-portraitists for whom a home has been found in the art museum. Thus what began as a nineteenth century stylistic survival, harnessed to an ambitious if narrow form of visual positivism, feeds



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Geldbriefträger  
(Köln, 1928)

*Postman delivering money  
(Cologne, 1928)*



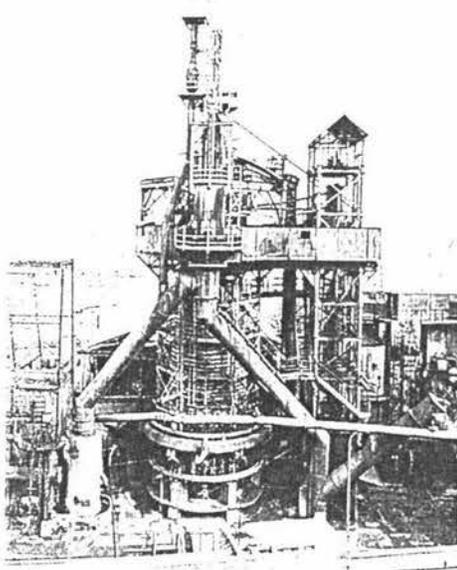
Odd-job man

into the work of a 1960s photographer such as Diane Arbus, to form a precondition for the appearance in 1984 of Glenn Busch's *Working Men*.

The reminted images of Busch's exhibition and book seemed to one reviewer to possess "...a timelessness...some could be Victorian, others are almost medieval"<sup>51</sup>. Is this because the work environment of the early 1980s New Zealand manual labourer resembles that of the Victorian era or indeed the Middle Ages? Or, rather, is it not because Busch's photographic style actively constructs the appearance of these men as if they belonged to or had stepped out of these eras? Clearly, *Working Men* does not just provide simple, straightforward and objective documentation of the survival of archaic work practices and situations. Writing of Sander and Diane Arbus, Max Kozloff makes the interesting observation that: "they photographed people of our own heritage...as if they belonged to...ritualized societies. The 'opacity' of a third-world tribe yields to the greater transparency with which we are accustomed to view ours"<sup>52</sup>. This statement is also true of Busch's photographs and perhaps it is in reaction to this tendency that Robert Mannion wrote the only negative review of *Working Men* that I've come across. In a short and slightly glib piece, Mannion takes Busch to task for providing a picture of, "...the noble industrial savage"<sup>53</sup>. Yet, upon reflection, this is not such a fanciful idea for aspects of the essentially eighteenth century notion of the noble savage were later superimposed on the new urban labouring masses of the nineteenth century. This much is made clear by a work such as Louis Chevalier's "labouring classes and dangerous classes in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century"<sup>54</sup>. But, as I see it, behind Mannion's objection to *Working Men* is the thought that it offers a very partial, sentimental and regressive image of New Zealand working men which freezes and fetishizes residual types of manual labour and chooses to ignore emergent movements within service industries and what could be called the proleterianization of white collar work.

Within the kind of photographic portraiture practised by Sander, it is alleged that in the depiction there is a dialectic between social type and individual person. That is to say individuals are said to emerge or stand out in spite of or perhaps even because of the fixed, formal framework applied to their portrayal. But this shouldn't strike us as particularly remarkable because positivism is quite capable of combining rigid





Hilla and Bernd Becher (Germany) b1936 and 1931  
*Blast furnace Hütte, Siegen Westfalia, Germany*  
c1975  
No 12 from the portfolio *Industrial Buildings*  
gelatin silver print 399 x 304mm

taxonomies of all kinds with an approach known as methodological individualism which holds that society is really nothing more than an aggregation of individuals.

It would seem then that this is the also the case with *Working Men*, because, rather than constituting a collective portrait of a representative sample of the New Zealand working class, it merely adds up to an atomised series of thirty individual photographs and personal stories. A possible back cover blurb might read: 'there are 100,000 stories in the naked workplace, these have been 30 of them.'

In a comprehensive and wide-ranging article, George Baker has argued recently that Sander's work turns on a conflict between his attempt to redeem the language of portraiture, already undermined by early modernist pictorial innovations, and his use of "a rhetoric of empiricist, scientific observation"<sup>55</sup>. As a result of this conflict, so the argument goes, Sander's photographic practice readmits a repressed dimension of narrativity alongside an array of 'uncanny' effects. Thus Sander's work stages the crisis and decay of conventional portraiture as much as it merely appears to recycle it. Baker concludes his discussion by suggesting that Sander's inheritance has been taken up in two opposing directions. On the one hand, the politically astute work of Berndt and Hilla Becher and Thomas Struth; on the other, the historically myopic portraiture of Diane Arbus ("at her worst") and Richard Avedon ("at his best") who "remain blind to the obsolete historical aspects of Sander's project" and "end up repeating and replaying the historical crisis embodied there - not as tragedy... but as farce"<sup>56</sup>. In light of her oblique but still apparent affinity with Sander's portraiture mode and because traces of her presence can be detected throughout Busch's photographic corpus, a brief discussion of Arbus's work is now in order.

### *Diane Arbus*

Born in 1923 to an upper middle-class Jewish family from New York, Diane Arbus enjoyed a brief period of concentrated media and art-world attention from the late 1960s until her suicide in 1971. Since then she has become something of a mythological figure in the world of photography, a troubled artist whose suicide seems to confirm the authenticity of her attraction to outre and disturbing imagery.



Loser at a Diaper Derby, N.J. 1967



The King and Queen of a Senior Citizens Dance, N.Y.C. 1970

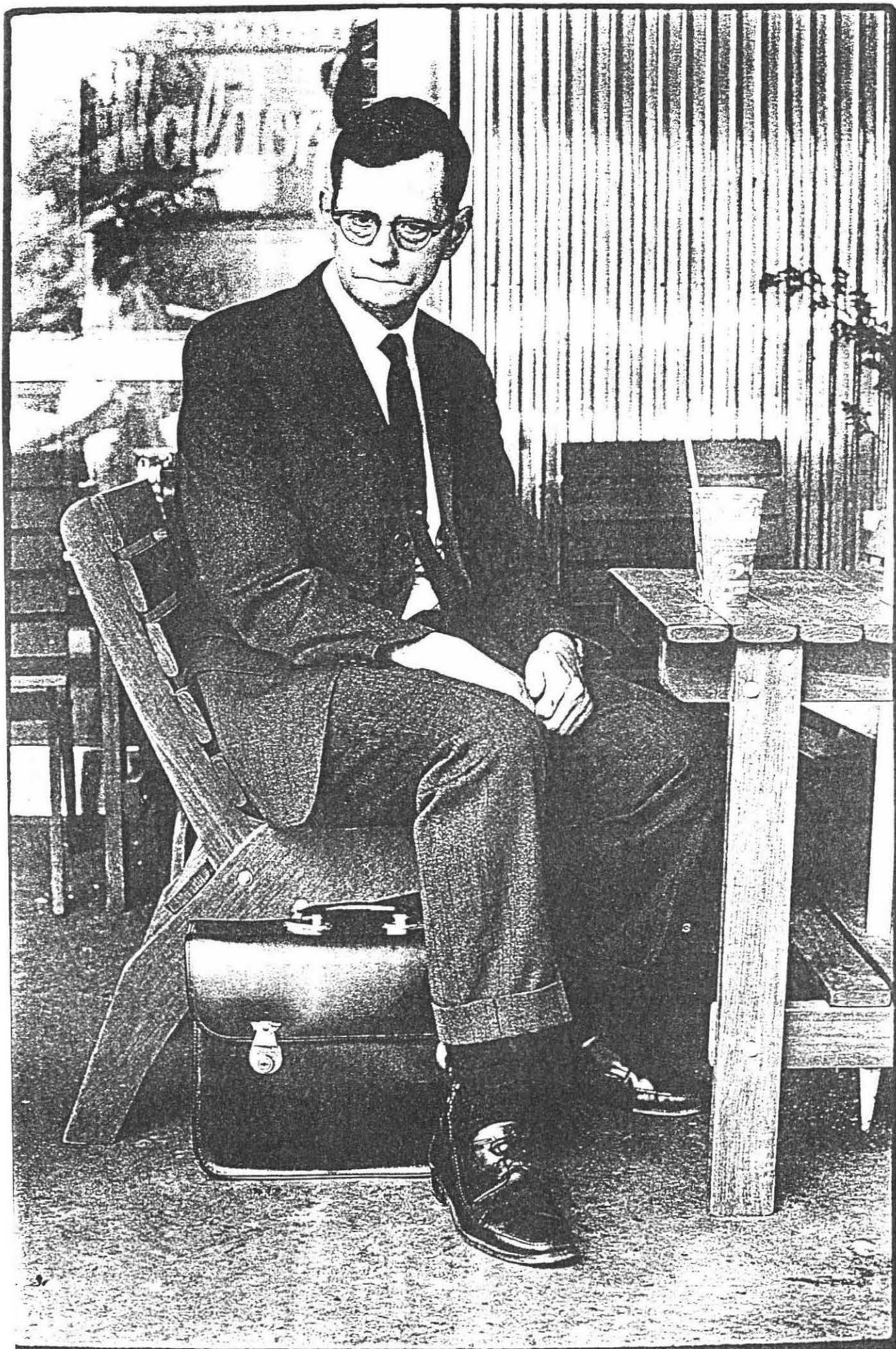


A young man and his girl friend with hot dogs in the park, N.Y.C. 1971

Arbus first came to more widespread attention as a result of her inclusion in a significant MOMA exhibition of 1967 curated by John Szarkowski, *New Documents*, which also included the work of Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand. But, although the word document is contained in the exhibition title, the images of these three photographers and Arbus in particular are far removed from the classic documentary photography of the period stretching roughly from 1920 to 1960. In a press release for *New Documents*, John Szarkowski characterizes the exhibition as follows: "In the past decade this new generation of photographers has redirected the technique and aesthetic of documentary photography to more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life but to know it, not to persuade but to understand. The world, in spite of its terrors, is approached as the ultimate source of wonder and fascination, no less precious for being irrational and incoherent"<sup>57</sup>.

Like her teacher Lisette Model and August Sander before her, Diane Arbus was essentially a portrait photographer. In comparison to these two photographers, however, the social range of her photography is quite narrow. And while it may be true that her work redirects "the technique and aesthetic of documentary photography to more personal ends", like many classic social documentarians and portraitists she very much operates with (upper) middle class definitions of 'otherness' and this factor largely determined the kinds of subjects she gravitated towards. The drift of her work, though, was to invert the values normally ascribed to her two social categories of subject, the middle class and the social deviants and outcasts of bourgeois society. The latter, many of whom have been referred to as 'freaks', are transformed into what one writer termed "aristocrats"; while the former, regardless of their own self-images, are converted into "...a sideshow of oddities".<sup>58</sup>

As already noted, it was Max Kozloff who first drew attention to the affinity between the photography of August Sander and Diane Arbus. Both share what Carol Armstrong, in a recent article on Arbus alone, describes as "...the durational look, the privileging of the pose and of physiognomic detail, and the centred compositions characteristic of nineteenth century photography"<sup>59</sup>. However, this commonality, rooted in the idea of photography as "an act of scrutiny", must be qualified by an awareness of the markedly different inflection each photographer gives this 'nineteenth century' mode. Armstrong sees Arbus as practising an "id theory of photography", a "deliberately 'flawed'



Man at an outdoor cafe, Auckland, 1972



Glenn Busch (NZ) b1948  
*Man with a transistor radio, Auckland, 1973*  
gelatin silver print 253 X 201mm

version"<sup>60</sup> of the mode detailed above. This is one obvious and major difference between Sander and Arbus. Another relates to relative indices and degrees of social coherence in their portraits. "The world which Sander described", argues Shelley Rice, "was a world in which self-images and social standings were in accord"<sup>61</sup>; the world as constructed in Diane Arbus's photographs is virtually the opposite of such stability and security.

### **Busch in Relation to Sander and Arbus**

Although I am uncertain of the extent of Busch's knowledge of Sander's work, it's safe to assume that he would have been familiar, at the very least, with Gunther Sander's biography of his father which is illustrated with a large number of photographic prints. That book was published in 1973 and was given an illustrated review by Max Oettli in the pages of *Photoforum* the following year<sup>62</sup>. In any event, though, the important point is not so much the question of direct influence but rather that *Working Men* is structured by a very similar mode of photographic discourse. As early as 1972/3, Busch was already producing single images that bear all the hallmarks of Sander's characteristic photographic style. But it is a decade later, with the appearance of *Working Men*, that Busch fully approximates to something resembling the taxonomical ambition of a project like *Trades, Classes and Professions*.

The question of Arbus's influence on Busch is rather easier to determine. Throughout the 1970s her photographs made a considerable impact in New Zealand photographic circles. As mentioned above, this began with the appearance of her work in the important American photographic exhibition of the late 1960s, *New Documents* (1967). It accelerated after her death with a MOMA retrospective in 1972 and the publication of an Aperture monograph at the same time. Well before this retrospective toured Australia and New Zealand (1976 - 9), then, her work was being enthusiastically received locally. Its effect on Busch can be gauged by looking at two photographs from the period 1972/3: "Man at an outdoor cafe, Auckland, 1972" and "Man with a transistor radio, Auckland, 1973".<sup>63</sup>



In their historical survey book on New Zealand photographers, John Turner and William Main make this claim for Busch's early work: "the psychological undertone of Busch's early work comes more from his personal quest for meaning, than the influence of Brassai, Diane Arbus and August Sander"<sup>64</sup>. This claim does not strike me as particularly convincing because it seems to me that these pictures do owe the bulk of their "psychological undertone" to precise photographic precedents; and this is not necessarily to be lamented as a bad thing. The work of Busch that does operate close to Arbus's characteristic territory but achieves an effect a little different from it (only call it "his personal quest for meaning" if you must) is to be found in the *Marylands Portfolio* (1975)<sup>65</sup>; and, much later and after the appearance of *Working Men*, the small-scale image and interview piece, "Stares and Whispers"<sup>66</sup>.

To conclude this section, then, it is clear that Busch's inheritance from Sander does not place him on the "New objectivity" line occupied by the Bechers and Thomas Struth. As I have already suggested, he seems unaware of or untroubled by the problems involved in using a Sandersque, *neue sachlichkeit* portraiture style from 1920s/1930s Germany within the quite different context of early 1980s New Zealand; a period of incipient crisis in social relations and realignment in the forces and relations of production. On the contrary, he seems content to simply assume the surface characteristics of a previous style, regardless of its appropriateness to circumstances far removed in time and space.

But having said this, I would wish to add that the photographs in *Working Men* retain a certain straightforward humanist integrity untouched by Arbus's highly idiosyncratic "id" or "biological" practice of photography or, for that matter, the kind of style solipsism practised by Richard Avedon in his *In the American West*.<sup>67</sup>

### **Working Men: A Conclusion**

About a decade before the exhibition and publication of the photographs and texts that make up *Working Men*, the English photographers and photo-historians, Terry Dennett and Jo Spence drew up the following list of questions:

"We can ask the following of our photographs of working class people; do they indicate a struggling class or an apathetic one? Do they show people as objects or subjects? Do our pictures heighten the awareness of the working class's own strength and value as a group? Do the pictures form part of a 'narrative' in which previously unseen or unrecognised elements of working class experience are discernable (as opposed to the more universal 'human' experience concentrated on by most photographers?"<sup>68</sup>.

What Dennett and Spence are calling for here is a break with the paradigm of humanist documentary photography, the province of a kind of 'traditional' (Gramsci) or 'universal' (Foucault) photographic intellectual. In its place, they wished to substitute a more politically engaged and theoretically aware form of photographic practice, the province of a newer kind of 'organic' (Gramsci) or 'specific' (Foucault) photographic intellectual. We shouldn't forget, though, that their questions and directives were posed in a society unavoidably recognised as riven and divided by class factors and distinctions. In contradistinction, New Zealand society is marked by a widespread and persistent myth of classlessness. At one level, *Working Men* could be seen as a conscious attempt by Glenn Busch to counteract and give the lie to this mistaken construction. One journalist (and/or his sub-editor) certainly saw it this way because he gave his news feature the title "Working Men shatters our classless society"<sup>69</sup> (it is surely the myth rather than society itself that is allegedly being shattered here). Yet within the article itself, "an old union activist from way back", Jock Hunter, is quoted to the effect that: "it's a patronising piece of rubbish...the working class would never make progress if they were like that...the book promulgates the concept of the working class as thick, moronic and not fit to take charge"<sup>70</sup>.

Before we get to view the photographs or read any of the texts, an introductory statement by photographic enthusiast Desmond Kelly leaves us in doubt *that Working Men* is essentially a humanist documentary endeavour. Kelly opines that: "if the photographs reveal the stark difference between the reality of working class jobs and the comfort of middle class occupational conditions, the statements underline themes of aspiration common to the whole nation"<sup>71</sup>; and further on he suggests that "the drudgery, the dirt, and frequently the danger of their occupations may wear them out, but it never seems to diminish their faith in the humanity of man..."<sup>72</sup>; and finally Kelly

sees Busch as just another in a long history of artists "...reacting to the harshness of inequality and affirming human values in times of stress"<sup>73</sup>.

Perhaps we shouldn't place too much importance on an introduction by someone other than the photographer-interviewer-author of *Working Men*, although we can presume that it has his endorsement. But what of the contents of the book itself? Do they provide evidence to the contrary, evidence of "a struggling class", of "subjects" with "strength"? As I've already argued, we don't find any of these qualities in the photographs themselves because there the aesthetic priorities of the photographer are paramount. Each working man is simply an element - admittedly the key or dominant one - in uniformly geometric compositions heavily laminated with photographic aura from the past. If the photographs, in the revealing words of Des Kelly, have "...that element of individual signature" which he says Walker Evans "...identified as the distinguishing feature of the work of fine artists"<sup>74</sup>, then presumably, it is in the texts that we find the 'signature' or 'voice' of the 30 working men. We certainly don't find direct evidence of Busch's own 'voice' because, as I've already pointed out, it has been carefully screened out. However, it does not follow that there is no trace of Busch's 'signature' in the finished texts because it is only through his mediating agency that they have been brought before us.

Although Brett Riley concluded his report by claiming that: "in the end...it's the photographs that count. The text without the portraits would be academic"<sup>75</sup>; most reviewers and commentators have singled out the texts for special praise as an innovative addition to documentary expression in New Zealand. Thus, John B. Turner: "the text is the guts of it", but "the photos are more than icing"<sup>76</sup>. Alistair Morrison: "the stories, told quickly, overtake the images"<sup>77</sup>. Janet Bayly: "it is in their words that the men speak more" ..." it was this dimension (of oral history) which swung the power of the document as a whole for me, into something deeply moving, interesting and enlightening"<sup>78</sup>. Yet in the midst of all this praise for the emergence of Busch the oral historian we shouldn't forget that throughout the history of social documentary, the combination of image and text rather than the purely photographic book is the norm; although the two roles are not always taken by the same person.

Referring back to chapter three, we can cite these major examples: *How the other half lives* (text and photographs by Jacob Riis); *Men at work* (text and photos by Lewis Hine); *You have seen their faces* (photos by Margaret Bourke-White, text by Erskine Caldwell); *An American exodus* (photos by Dorothea Lange, text by Paul Taylor); *Let us now praise famous men* (photos by Walker Evans, text by James Agee); and *Balinese character* (text and photos by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson).

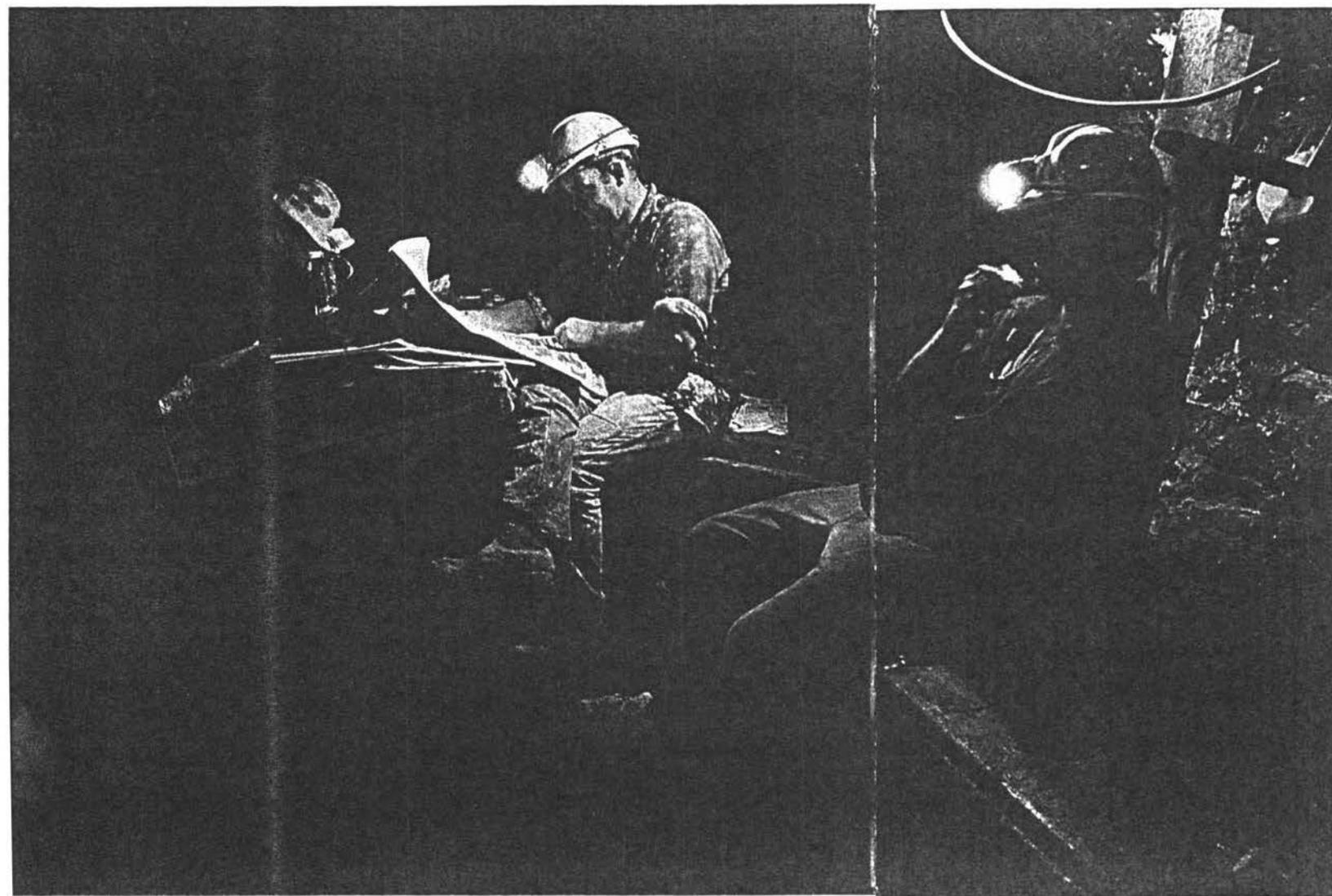
### **The 'School' of Busch**

Before concluding this chapter with a discussion of Busch's most recent book, *You are my darling Zita*, I want to give some attention to the work of two of Busch's former students, David Cook and Julie Riley. At the beginning of the chapter I referred to and quoted from a proposal to set up a government funded photographic history unit, co-authored by Busch, Larence Shustak, and John Orbell. Although, as I have noted, this initiative was not successful, in this section I want to suggest that something has in fact come from it, albeit in a much more informal, modest and indirect way, through the work of Cook and Riley as well as that of Busch himself.

#### ***David Cook***

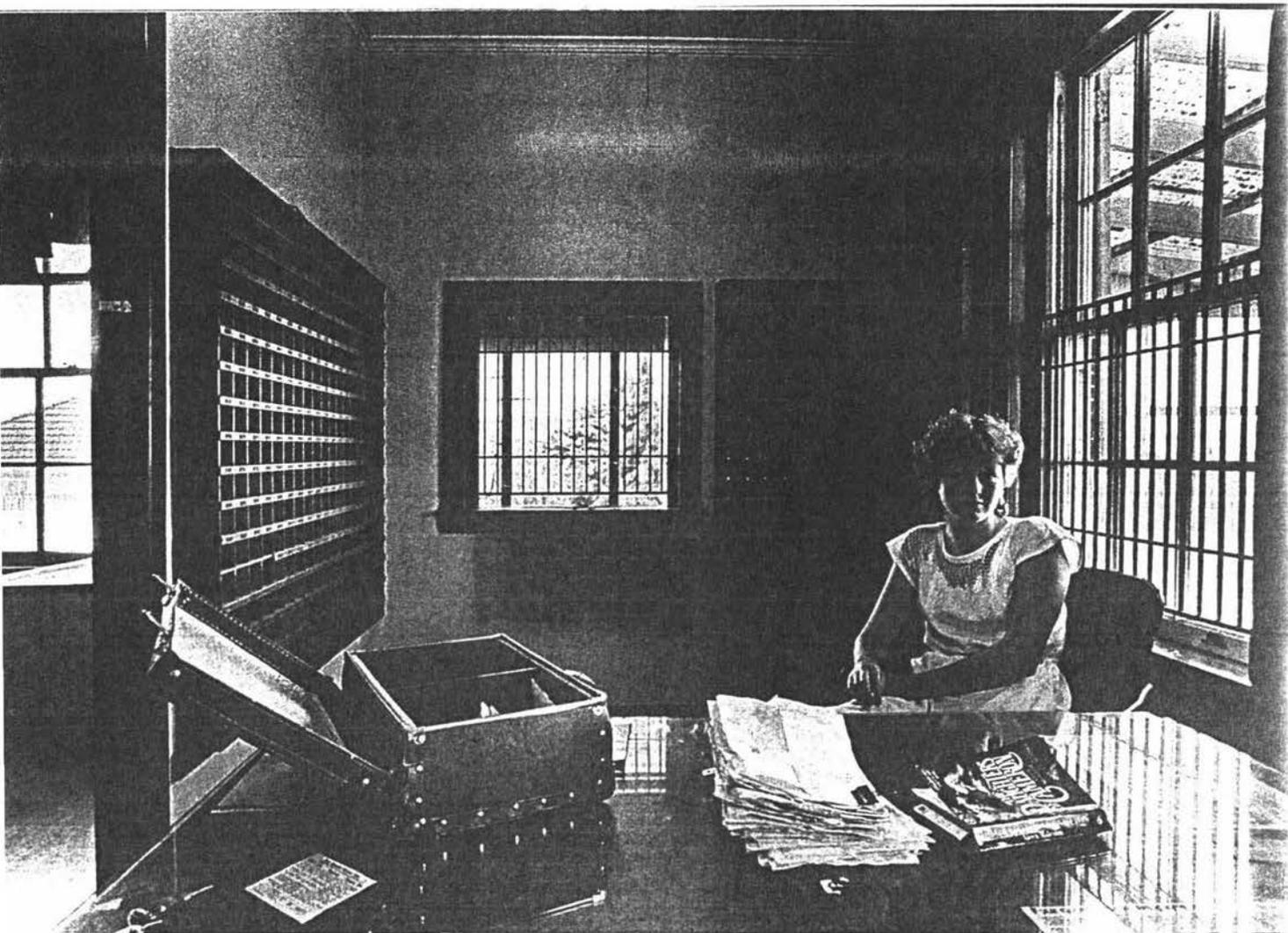
Through a combination of the example of his own work and his teaching at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts (Ilam) from the early 1980s onwards, Busch could be seen to have inspired a small school of photo-essayists / oral historians who have had books published on the heels of *Working Men*. The first of these to appear in print was authored by David Cook, whose *Rotowaro: the last days of a Waikato coal mining township* was published in 1985<sup>79</sup>.

While still a Dip.F.A student of photography under the tutelage of Busch and Shustak, Cook (born 1959) completed his first published photographic essay, *Darkness conquered: the Salvation Army in New Zealand*, in 1983. After graduating from Ilam, he was employed on a Department of Labour "Project employment Programme" to carry out documentation of the closing of the mining township of Rotowaro in order to make



Mahon's Underground Coal Mine closed down in October 1985 after a 26 year lifespan; it was the last of the State-owned "bord and pillar" mines in the North Island. In this more traditional method of mining the air becomes full of dust as explosives are fired to loosen coal from cavernous underground 'rooms'. A scraper-loader machine fills the 600kg skips which are hauled along rails to the surface.

As Mahon's mine closed down workers were absorbed into the newer underground mines at Huntly.



Claire Tomelty, pay clerk at the Rotowaro State Coal Mines Office (above) and Violet Osborne, Postmistress at the Rotowaro Post Office (right).



way for an opencast mine. The project was undertaken for the Department of Arts, Photography and History of the Waikato Museum of Art and History, and became the second exhibition in the Museum's series "recording contemporary issues of importance in the Waikato". Cook took approximately 8000 images for the Museum's historical archive and of these 35 were displayed in its exhibition space and 39 were printed in the accompanying book/catalogue.<sup>80</sup>

The booklet is a genuine social documentary photo-essay, blending images with text. Cook writes a brief but useful introductory essay as well as providing lengthy captions to the photographs and quoted statements from members of the community. Important as the continuous captions and quotes are, though, and they are incorporated into the layout of the pages, the predominant element throughout is the photographic. Within an overall classic, almost F.S.A. social documentary photographic approach, Cook marshalls together a great variety of images. These include: long, horizontal panoramic shots of mining areas (pp.28-29); posed location portraits of miners (p.22), and other workers in the Rotowaro area (p.22); 'candid' shots of miners at work (pp.24-5); and community members at play (pp.8-9). Cook's aim is to build up as comprehensive a picture as possible of the life of a small town based around a single extractive industry. Appropriately, then, his photographs eschew overtly aesthetic effects in favour of straight documentary qualities that convey specific details about a particular way of life. Two years after completing the major part of the project, Cook himself said of his own photographic philosophy : "I've always been more of an observer of detail – that's why I did a botany degree before fine arts; I enjoyed looking at detail. I saw botany as more and more like an art. Photography and botany aren't unrelated - They're both minute observation and dissection"<sup>81</sup>.

*Working Men* and *Rotowaro* are both underpinned by a kind of salvage ethnography impulse. Yet a comparison of the two books reveals the latter to be a far more conceptually sound sociological work than the former. Whereas Busch gives us 30 individual variations on an idealised type of heavy industry male manual worker, Cook concentrates on a specific regional industry and establishes its links with and importance to a specific place and community. His focus is thus inherently sociological (a variety of people as part of a small scale society), whereas Busch is more interested in imparting to the viewer/reader the human essence of a group of individuals united

only by the fact of being examples of a particular form of labour. Where *Working Men* is the work of an abstract humanist, *Rotowaro* is the work of a site specific visual sociologist who wanted his camera to "...become a voice for the people"<sup>82</sup>.

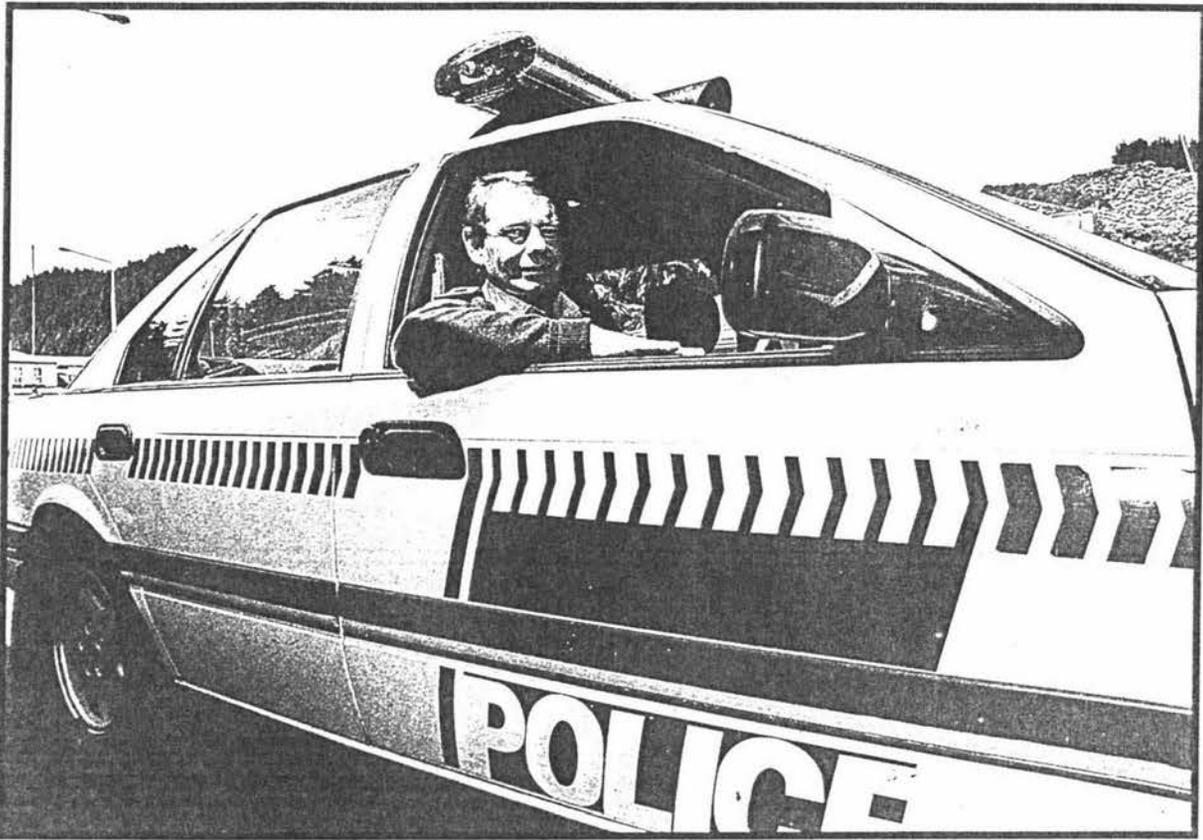
### *Julie Riley*

Five years after the exhibition / publication of *Rotowaro*, another graduate of the photography department of Ilam, and also a student of Busch and Shustak, produced the first of two books combining photographs and text. The work of Julie Riley is much closer in form to that of her teacher, Glenn Busch, than is David Cook's. The reason why this is the case is not because of any similarity in photographic style but because of Riley's extensive use of taped interviews/oral histories of her subjects, in addition to her continuous blending of images and text.

Riley's first book has a number of features in common with *Working Men*. Titled *Men Alone*, the book is a study of twelve men who live by themselves in remote or isolated places around New Zealand<sup>83</sup>. Thus, like *Working Men*, the book is premised on the belief that a series of interviews with and photographs of men who belong to a certain social category, that is to say 'dropouts' from mainstream society, will yield insights into their condition. Riley has followed Busch's procedure of taping lengthy interviews with her subjects, editing out her questions, and crafting the results as a continuous first person narrative. The range of life span and experience covered, however, is much wider and longer than in the case of *Working Men*, which brings *Men Alone* closer in type to *You are my darling Zita*; without, of course, going into as much depth as that book's chapters do. Also, the photographs in *Men Alone* are not restricted to portrait shots (either formal or informal) but include shots designed to give a clear idea of the kind of environments these men live within.

Riley's second book, *Our Town*<sup>84</sup>, published three years later, to some degree resembles David Cook's *Rotowaro* project, except that it wasn't prompted by the urgent need to salvage a disappearing township. Again, Riley presents interviews with twelve different subjects but this time they all belong to the 'same' community, the small west coast (South Island) town of Reefton. I place the word same between quotation marks





quite acceptable.' Well to me it isn't acceptable, but that's my personal view and I think there's a lot of parents just like that. She was given free expression around the town, which she wanted to have, and apart from a few jokes, and that's fair enough, she was tolerated by Reefton people. But people in Reefton are like that. They may not like, but they do tolerate.

My wife bought one of Mouse's paintings, and when she bought it I said, 'You're not buying that. Bloody Mouse painted that. I'm not having a bloody painting of hers in my house.' I was just winding her up, but she wanted that painting and she bought it.

But it's just such a waste, her whole life. I mean, her parents, I know, were bloody disappointed. It must be frustrating for a parent. I mean my kids aren't that age and touch wood I've still got a bit to go. I've told mine, if you want to go ahead and get a bloody bike or be a homosexual or whatever, don't bother about coming home.

I've been working in Reefton for 11 years now. I'm from here. I was born and bred here, same as the other policeman in Reefton. I came here on a three-year term. They couldn't fill the vacancy so when it was advertised the third time they put a three-year term on it and that you'd have the vacancy of your

because, clearly, the former Christchurch punk musician and artist called Mouse inhabits a somewhat different Reefton (or inhabits Reefton differently) than, say, the local policeman (also interviewed). Riley's black and white photographs, like Cook's of Rotowaro, exhibit the wide variety of subjects and themes necessary in order to cover the range of life in a small town.

But rather than resembling the archival, F.S.A. style documentation of *Rotowaro*, *Our Town* is closer to the project pursued in a television documentary series like *Heartland*; except that its interviews are longer, have more depth, and the images are a gritty black and white not a 'Toyotaesque' ("welcome to our world") technicolour. In sum, *Our Town* is a superior kind of human interest photo-journalism. Along with *Men Alone*, Riley's second book has none of Busch's artistic (*Working Men*) or literary (*You are my darling Zita*) aspirations.

### **You Are My Darling Zita**

Seven years after the appearance of *Working Men*, the Godwit Press published Glenn Busch's second book, *You are my darling Zita*, in 1991. *Zita* continues Busch's broadly sociological investigations (Peggy Koopman-Boyden of the Canterbury University sociology department receives the largest credit in the acknowledgments) but takes his interest in oral history and its literary crafting much further. Comprised of five lengthy chapters, the book "...started as a photographic project on coal mining"<sup>85</sup> but by a series of chance encounters turned into something completely different. *Zita*'s theme is the experience of old age as recounted by four individuals (three women and one man) and a married couple. Thus, by again focusing on a submerged and marginal (in terms of mainstream-dominant media) segment of society, Busch confirms his imbrication in a classic social documentary strategy.

To compare the 1994 reprinted soft-cover edition of *Zita* with the first and only edition of *Working Men* is to register immediately some similarities but more in the way of differences. The most apparent similarity is the almost identical cover designs of the two books. *Zita*, like *Working Men*, features a black and white photograph on a white (a creamier white than that of *Working Men*) background, with only the book's title (again



JOHN

MURIEL, when I met her, was already a very confident and capable woman. She was intelligent—she had an MA degree—and she was a very able speaker. She seemed to me to be everything I wasn't—I put her on a pedestal. She was, I suppose, the first and only real

JOHN AND MURIEL MORRISON



underlined in black) and the author's name accompanying it. Turn the two books over, however, and it is immediately clear that *Zita* is a conventional example of a commercial book publisher's product (the back carries a descriptive contents summary, a note on the author, and a 'blurb' quote from Michael King's *Metro* review). In other words, *Zita* is a 'proper' book whereas *Working Men* (mainly published by the National Art Gallery) looks more like an exhibition catalogue. Size is important here too. *Working Men* is a large, square, medium-to-slim volume; *Zita* is much smaller and fatter - a typical paperback size.

Opening *Zita* confirms what the cover suggests. The interior pages are composed largely of type which vastly outnumbers the much smaller quantity (proportionally speaking) of photographs placed within each chapter. Thus, if in *Working Men* the photographs have a slightly more dominant presence than the text, *Zita* overwhelmingly announces the arrival of Busch the writer. Busch the photographer, while not completely absent, assumes a minor role throughout the book.

There is a total of 72 photographs in *You are my darling Zita*. None of the photographs are captioned or credited in any part of the book but it seems likely that they derive from two different sources. The majority (65), have been obtained from the private collections of the people involved in the book. They are black and white snapshots of individuals, married couples, families, and friends and they cover a reasonably lengthy time span stretching from childhood to very late middle age. The remaining photographs (7) are the only ones that are contemporaneous with the texts and it is fair to assume that they were taken by Busch himself. They do not depart markedly from the look of the other photographs in the book because Busch seems to have consciously adopted a snapshot style in place of his trademark aesthetic manner. Very few of the photographs occupy a whole page, most share page space with paragraphs of type. Compare this to *Working Men*, all of whose photographs are placed on single pages in the manner of plates. In *Zita*, Busch's own photographs are placed mostly at the end and in some cases at the beginning of each chapter. The personal snapshots are, understandably, placed beside or near the events to which they refer in the text (e.g. a photograph of Muriel Morrison in academic dress is situated above John Morrison's comment that "she was intelligent - she had an M.A. degree - and she was a very able speaker")<sup>86</sup>.





Whereas Busch's use of the camera and already extant photographs is minimal and downplayed, his use of the tape recorder and the editor's pen is pushed to the forefront of the enterprise. Much more than with *Working Men*, the emphasis is on the voice of the subjects rather than their appearance; and rather than just one major aspect of their lives, the focus is on their lives as a whole and what they have come to mean over time. *Working Men* contained no direct comment from Busch himself, so it is interesting to note that he has written a personal introduction to *You are my darling Zita*. After describing how the project got underway, he states that: "I didn't want an interviewer - subject relationship; the honesty I was asking for had to be reciprocal. That I now feel very close to all the people who appear in this book means a great deal to me"<sup>87</sup>. This statement indicates that Busch does not see his book as a distanced, "objectivist" (see chapter one) piece of sociological research but as a form of personal, existentialist encounter not dissimilar to the kind of dialogic anthropology practised by reflexive anthropologists such as Kevin Dwyer and Vincent Crapanzano (see chapter one). His introduction as a whole bears this out with its movement between memories of his relationship to an elderly forbear ("Nana") when a child and accounts of his relationships with the elderly people chosen to be in his book.

However, once we reach the first chapter of the book, there is a change in the address and stance of the writing. Towards the end of the introduction, Busch declares that: "from the outset I decided to remove myself - in the form of my questions - altogether. My feeling is that the impression of a voice allowed to speak without interruption - a voice saying something in the most direct manner - communicates a far greater intimacy than a page intruded upon by questions"<sup>88</sup>. Busch's self-effacement here is not as complete as in *Working Men*; his introduction helps to prevent that. However, while one would want to agree that in purely literary terms the chapter reads much better and more forcefully as the direct outpourings, the 'voices' of the people concerned, in their final printed form the texts do lack the interactive push-pull dynamic of, say, Martin Buber's I - Thou situation. Implicitly it is evident that Busch did achieve the 'reciprocal honesty' he was looking for on a personal and ethical level. But at the textual level there is no evidence of a dialogical reciprocity in the book's representational apparatus. Ultimately this may be justified by appealing to a 'letting the subjects speak for themselves' documentary ideology. This position gained its strength as a reaction against the 'voice-of-God' soundtrack commentaries in earlier documentary films and obviously that's not

what I'm looking for here. But because Busch's moment of 'reflexiveness' ends with his introduction, his book tends to resemble those ethnographies that reserve their comments on the field experience for the preface or introduction and then proceed with an entirely conventional set of third person characterizations.

Busch does not misrepresent his subjects (they are hardly 'informants' but are clearly more than simply "friends" as he would have it) nor the validity of their life histories. Quite the contrary. But at the same time, as with *Working Men*, he does misrepresent the interpersonal, two-way nature of his 'field' practice by means of the textual form he adopts. No doubt to Busch himself, his subjects, and most of his readers, these objections will appear 'academic', but my purpose once more is to interrogate Busch's work by way of questions raised in the opening three chapters of this thesis; it is manifestly not to deny the high quality of this work, nor to judge it in any absolute way, nor to deny that there are other quite different ways of assessing and evaluating it.

Busch himself comes close to recognising the dilemma (if that's what it is) I outline above, in the following statement: "there is a paradox of sorts in the making of a book of this kind. The premise of the book is that these are the words and feelings of real people. But this reality is reflected through the medium of a writer whose task has been to gather, select, arrange and present the words that convey its essence"<sup>89</sup>. Although I don't wish to deny Busch the status of a writer here, his actual procedure is closer to that of a documentary film director who has chosen to make a film on the twilight years of six ordinary but remarkable people. His assemblage of first person 'voices' and interpolated 'archival' and recent pictures to some degree resembles, say, Gaylene Preston's film *War Stories* (now also a book!). The "personal testimonies" of the six people in *Zita* are engaged in something parallel to what one commentator has called the "video testimony" of *War Stories*'s six subjects<sup>90</sup>. If that is the case - and I think it is - then *Zita* is a very powerful artifact indeed because it is engaging with the wellsprings of popular memory at an imaginative level way above the rudimentary oral history/low level sociology of *Working Men*'s texts. And, to sum up, the quotation above does at least acknowledge the writer / photographer / director's' mediation at the same time as the book as a whole removes it from sight.

## Conclusion

Twenty one years ago, in a review of the Auckland City Art Gallery's permanent photographic collection, the photographer Gary Baigent had this to say about the inclusion of work by Glenn Busch: "the number of Glenn Busch prints could have been reduced by half. He is an unoriginal and an overexposed photographer purely through the political pushing by John Turner and himself". He went on to conclude that "...Busch and (Clive) Stone have little or nothing in common with the people in their photographs and produce exploitative and abusive work as a result. For example Busch's boys from Marylands School"<sup>91</sup>.

These judgements were made at a time when both Busch and other powerful players in the wider New Zealand photographic scene were, amongst other things, under the spell of Diane Arbus's photography. And while not explicitly faulting Busch's work of this period on the grounds of its derivative and 'exploitative' character, I have concluded that it inherits the weakest and most problematic aspects of this line of photography.

Six years after Baigent's comments were made, *Working Men* was launched at the National Art Gallery in Wellington. The upshot of my extended, critical analysis of this work is that both in terms of its photographs, its texts and the combination of the two, it fails as a work of scripto-visual anthropology. It simply does not engage with the early 1980s socio-economic or discursive context in which it purports to operate. Instead it complacently recycles an unmodified Sanderian typological photographic mode and combines it with a non-reflexive and limited form of oral history. The result is an uncritical aestheticization of an arbitrarily delimited area of contemporary New Zealand social life.

Having said this, however, I also conclude that Busch's interest in and hopes for a truly revealing and useful role for documentary photography - as outlined in his *Landfall* proposal - have met with some fulfillment and success in the work of his pupils, David Cook and Julie Riley; and in his most recent book, *You are my darling Zita*. Busch and his pupils have been and remain the only current practitioners from an art-world background who have attempted seriously to use a balanced combination of images and text within the form of the photographic book with the aim of carrying out sociological

investigations. However, the more their work leaves the arena of both orthodox and post-modern photographic aesthetics, and the more it approaches the concerns of ethnographic and sociological studies, the more urgent it becomes that it receive a full anthropological analysis. This is what I have attempted to do in this final chapter of my thesis, by bringing to bear on a particular local case study all or at least many of the concerns of chapters one, two and three.

## Notes

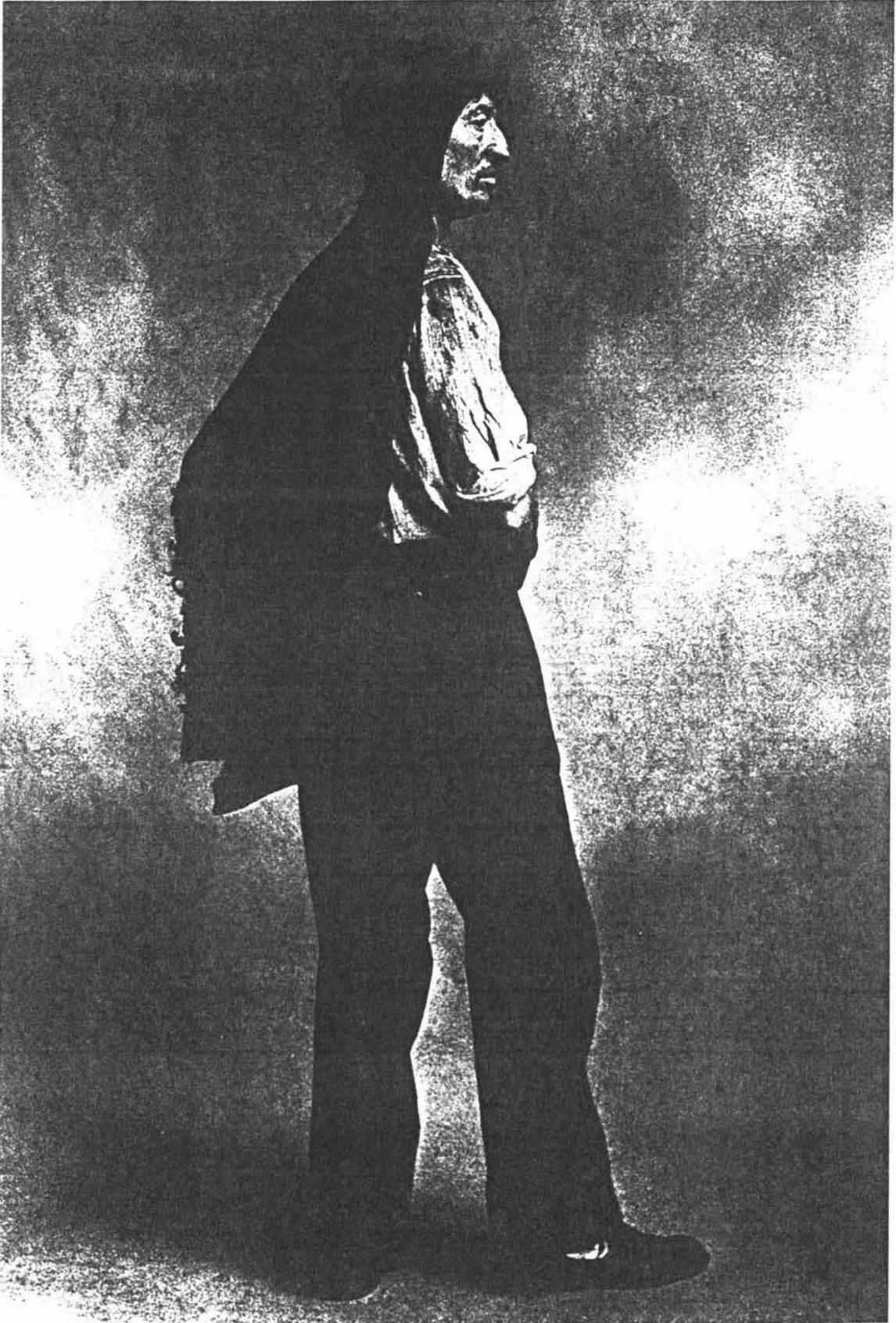
1. Mark Stocker, "Glenn Busch: photographer and writer", *Art New Zealand* 67, Winter 1993, p.93.
2. See, for instance, Ken Coates, "Images of men at their work", *New Zealand Herald*, 7.4.1984, section 2, p.4; and a brochure entitled "Picture of the month... at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery", published by the Gallery in early 1984 to accompany the display of Busch's photograph "John Mahia, shift worker, gas works, 1981". William Main and John Turner, in their historical anthology of New Zealand photographers, refer to Busch as "the eldest son of a well known psychotherapist", *New Zealand photography from the 1840s to the present*, Auckland: Photoforum inc., 1993, p.65.
3. M. Stocker, *op.cit.*, p.93.
4. Simon Buis, "Exhibition Review" (photographs by Glenn Busch), *Photoforum*, no.19, April-May 1974, p.26.
5. See "Glenn Busch", *Photoforum*, no.25, April-May 1975, pp.11-15.
6. See Ted Quinn, "Interview with Glenn Busch and Murray Cammick of Snaps - a photographer's gallery: part one", *Photoforum*, no.36, February-March 1977, pp.25-27; "part two", *Photoforum*, no.37, April-May 1977, pp.25-27.

7. Larence N. Shustak, John M. Orbell and Glenn Busch, "Precedent and proposal: the case for a photographic history unit", *Landfall*, no.114 (Vol. 29, No.2), June 1975, pp.153-4, 155.
8. *Ibid*, p.160.
9. Glenn Busch, *Working Men*, Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1984, p.115.
10. Eric Hobsbawm, "Man and woman in socialist iconography", *History Workshop Journal*, no.6, Autumn 1978, p.135.
11. See Gregory Burke and Ann Calhoun (eds), *Art and organized labour*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1990, pp.126-128.
12. Hobsbawm, *op.cit.*, p.124.
13. Two other images from *Beyond the pale* are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue of *Art and organized labour* (p.90), in the section headed contemporary photographers (pp.86 - 100). Also included in both the exhibition and the catalogue are images and texts from the following projects: Busch's *Working Men* portfolio (1984, pp.96-97); David Cook's *Rotowaro I and II* portfolios (1985/9, p.93); Geoffrey Short's *The unemployed project* (1983, p.95); Jan Nauta's *Dusty* project (1984, p.99); and the work of several other contemporary New Zealand documentary photographers.
14. Dick Hebdige, "Posing... threats, striking... poses: youth, surveillance, and display", *Substance*, nos 37/38, 1983, pp.68, 69.
15. Brian Griffin (photographs) and Richard Smith (text), *Power: British management in focus*, London: Travelling Light, 1981, pp.20-21.
16. *Ibid*, pp.13-15.
17. *Ibid*, pp.22-23.

18. *Ibid*, pp.104-105.
19. Brian Griffin, *Work*, London: Black Pudding Publishing, 1988.
20. Brian Griffin, "Work", *Ten*.8, no.33, 1989, p.16.
21. "A Turnbull photographic portrait gallery of eminent New Zealanders", Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust, no pagination.
22. Alan Sekula, "The traffic in photographs", *Art Journal*, vol.41, no.1, Spring 1981, p.16.
23. *Ibid*.
24. Gwen Stacey, "Kiwi olympians", *Art New Zealand* 33, Summer 1984, p.54.
25. Leni Riefenstahl, *The last of the Nuba*, New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
26. Born in New Jersey in 1917, Irving Penn is one of the twentieth century's most famous and accomplished fashion photographers. Even so, Penn himself often has been most happy and stimulated as a photographer when engaged in his 'ethnographic' photography projects which began with a *Vogue* shoot in Peru in 1948. Since then he has made photographic expeditions to document "...Enga, Okapa, and Tambul warriors in New Guinea, ritually scarified beauties in Dahomey, Turbaned village elders in Morocco, and the Chetri women of Tibet", and several other ethnic groups (Martin Filler, "Sharp Penn", *Vanity Fair*, March 1990, p.226). In his book *Worlds in a small room* (London: Studio Vista, 1974) Penn describes himself as "an ambulant studio photographer" (the book's subtitle) because all the photographs were taken inside his portable tent studio. "I've tried to work outside the studio", he told Martin Filler, "but it introduces too many variables that I can't control" (*op.cit.*, p.186). Penn's book, as Jay Ruby has noted, is clearly a form of popular ethnography, but not one constructed by means of a set of field snapshots (see Jay Ruby, review of *Worlds in a small room*, *Studies in the anthropology of visual communication*, vol.4, no.1, Spring 1977, p.63). In his



ree Dahomey Girls. courtesy *Vogue*. ©1974 by Irving Penn



Coal Man, London, courtesy *Vogue*, 1951 by The Conde Nast Publications Ltd



*Pastry Cooks, Paris*



*Lorry Washers, London*

introduction to the book, Penn explains that: "I had accepted for myself a stylization that I felt was more valid than a simulated naturalism" (*op.cit.*, p.8). Penn's set of portraits of "the small trades", taken in various studios in Paris, London and New York, "jumping quickly from country to country, photographing more or less similar people in all three places" (*ibid*, p.16), can be compared and contrasted with Sander's and Busch's social portraits. Even though the latter two photographers eschew the studio for the work location and produce marginally less posed portraits, they share a similar formal, geometric schematism (more pronounced in the case of Busch) with the renowned fashion photographer on his 'ethnographic' holiday. However, Peter Wollheim rightly advises caution in comparing Penn's *Worlds* to Sander's physiognomic portraiture because, "...if Sander's aim was to portray Men Without Masks, Penn's is just the opposite, and *Worlds* could be subtitled, 'Masks Without Men'" ("Irving Penn and the metapsychology of Beauty", *Photo Communiqué*, vol.3, no.2, Summer 1981, p.14).

27. Quoted in the introduction to Peter Keating (ed.), *Into unknown England 1866-1913: selections from the social explorers*, London: Fontana & Manchester University Press, 1976, pp.13-14.
28. *Ibid*, p.14.
29. John Grierson, "Flaherty", in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary*, London: Faber and Faber, 1966, p.142.
30. Tom Harrisson, quoted in Tom Jeffery, *Mass Observation: a short history*, University of Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978, p.20.
31. Quoted in "Working men have their say", *The Dominion*, 9.4.1984, p.8.
32. Peter Keating, "Introduction", *op.cit.*, p.13.

33. Ronald Fraser (ed.), *Work 2: twenty personal accounts*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, pp.18-19. The first volume, *Work: twenty personal accounts*, was published by Penguin in 1968.
  
34. Studs Terkel, *Working: people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do*, London: Wildwood House, 1975, p.10.
  
35. Nick Hedges and Huw Beynon, *Born to work*, London: Pluto Press, 1982.
  
36. For a reproduction of this work see page 14 of the catalogue *Barbara Kruger*, Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1988.
  
37. In my discussion of the work of Lewis Hine in chapter three, I draw attention to the wide variety of manual occupations depicted in his "work portraits", collected together in the publication *Men at Work* (1932). As Jonathan Doherty notes, "...by 1920 Hine had begun to dedicate himself almost exclusively to documentation of the worker in America" ("Introduction", in J. Doherty (ed.), *Women at work: 153 photographs by Lewis Hine*, New York; Dover publications, 1981, no pagination). During his lifetime, Hine's major published record of the American worker covered male workers only. Yet throughout the period from 1907 to 1938, he produced a large quantity of photographs of women workers. Two volumes of *The Pittsburgh Survey* examine the question of working women; one in particular, *Women and the Trades* (1909) is exclusively devoted to them; the other, *Homestead: the households of a mill town*, largely. A caption Hine attached to one of his photographs of a homemaker in her kitchen indicates his progressive views on the nature of 'women's work': "the home-maker deserves recognition as one of our workers" (quoted in *ibid*). Although Doherty could find no evidence of an intention on Hine's part to publish a volume of photographs called *Women at Work*, in light of captions or labels on the back of the photographs, he speculates that "...it is ... possible that he (Hine) intended a companion publication to his famous *Men at Work*" (*ibid*). And although, in comparing the 'positive documentation' of women and men workers, "the glorification of the women worker is not as powerful as that of the male worker" (*ibid*), it is indeed remarkable that in a working life that ended more than forty years before the

**Horace Walter Nicholls** 1867-1941



*The trolley driver, London 1917-18  
Imperial War Museum*

publication of Busch's *Working Men*, the attention given to the work of women should have been so great and so careful.

Another example of the documentation of women's work in the early twentieth century is provided by the work of the British photographers G.P. Lewis and Horace Nicholls. Their images are not as historically exceptional as Hine's because they are restricted to the period of the First World War and "...what was known as 'substitution': women taking men's jobs in order to release them for the front" (Jane Carmichael, "Home Front 1914 - 1918: the photographs of G.P. Lewis and Horace Nicholls", *Creative Camera* 247/8, August 1985, p.62). The commissioning body was the Women's Work Committee of the Ministry of Information and because of this there is a very high proportion of photographs of women workers in the collection. The subjects covered include a woman working as an acetylene welder, another operating a filter press in a glucose factory, yet others shown feeding charcoal kilns for sugar refining, and a group of women loading sacks of coke (*ibid*, pp.60-61).

38. Stanley Aronowitz, "Why work?", *Social Text* 12, Fall 1985, p.39.
39. Tahor Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes*, quoted in Paul Rabinow, "Masked I go forward: reflections on the modern subject", in Jay Ruby (ed.), *A crack in the mirror: reflexive perspectives in anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982, p.180.
40. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976, p.147.
41. Brett Riley, "The integrity of Glenn Busch: working class heroes", *Christchurch Star*, 11.4.1984, p.12.
42. Sheridan Keith, "Talking about the job", (review of *Working Men*), *Art New Zealand* 32, 1984, p.61.

43. Quoted in Elizabeth Isichei, "Speaking volumes", *New Zealand Listener*, September 13, 1986, p.50.
44. Martha Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)", in *3 Works*, Halifax: the press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981, p.80.
45. John Berger, "the changing view of man in the portrait", in Nikos Stangos (ed.), *Selected essays and articles: the look of things*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, p.39.
46. Quoted in James Lingwood, "Self-portraits Staging-posts", in Lisa Appignanesi (ed.), *Identity, the real me*, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987, p.20.
47. Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction", in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, p.227.
48. Ian Jeffrey, *Photography: a concise history*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1981, pp.133-5.
49. Naomi Rosenblum, *A world history of photography*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1984, p.378.
50. Peter Wollen, "Photography and aesthetics", *Screen*, vol.19, no.4, Winter 1978/9, p.22.
51. George Theobald, "Let's get physical", (review of *Working Men*), *P.S.A. Journal*, vol.7, no.3, 16.4.1984, p.16. Another reviewer likened the experience of viewing the exhibition to "... time travel to the Age of Empire (19<sup>th</sup> century British)", Ian Wedde, "Working Men photographs centrestage", *Evening Post*, 18.4.1984, p.47.
52. Max Kozloff, "The uncanny portrait: Sander, Arbus, Samaras", in *Photography and fascination*, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1979, p.157.

53. Robert Mannion, review of *Working Men*, *New Outlook*, no.11, July-August, 1984, p.45.
54. See Hayden White, "The noble savage theme as fetish", in *Tropics of discourse*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p.193.
55. George Baker, "Photography between narrativity and stasis: August Sander, degeneration and the decay of the portrait", *October*, no.76, Spring 1996, p.110.
56. *Ibid*, p.113.
57. Quoted in Carol Armstrong, "Biology, destiny, photography: difference according to Diane Arbus" *October*, no.66, Fall 1993, footnote 13, p.36.
58. Shelley Rice, "Essential differences: a comparison of the portraits of Lisette Model and Diane Arbus", *Artforum*, May 1980, p.71.
59. Carol Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p.47.
60. *Ibid*, p.46.
61. Shelley Rice, *op.cit.*, p.71.
62. Max Oettli, "August Sander" (review of Gunther Sander's *August Sander, photographer extraordinary*), *Photoforum*, no.21, August-September 1974, pp.24-27.
63. See "Glenn Busch Portfolio", *Photoforum*, no.19, April - May 1974, p.27 ("Man at an outdoor cafe"), and Athol McCredie, *Politics and photographs*, Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1987, p.8 ("Man with a transistor radio").
64. William Main & John Turner, *op.cit.*, p.65.
65. See "Glenn Busch", *Photoforum*, no.25, April-May 1975, pp.11-15.



Jobosz, uranium miner  
Ch Rock, New Mexico, 6/13/79

66. Glenn Busch, "Stares and whispers: conversations with Jeanette Irvine", *New Zealand Listener*, 9.5.1987, pp.30-33.
67. Richard Avedon, *In the American West*, New York: Abrams, 1985. Laura Wilson's "Background" piece in this volume identifies the "men and women who work at hard uncelebrated jobs, the people who are often ignored and overlooked" (echoes of Busch on *Working Men*) as the objects of Avedon's attentions. In "Through Eastern eyes", *Art in America*, January 1987, Max Kozloff notes that the "transgressive stare" of Avedon's 8 x 10 inch camera stems "...from a knowledge of the German August Sander, whose catalogue of social types Avedon makes much harder edged and of Diane Arbus whose ecstatic, guilty transgressions Avedon routinely refrigerates", p.96. Stephen Frailey, "Richard Avedon: in the American West", *The Print Collectors Newsletter*, May-June 1986, qualifies Kozloff's first point by maintaining that "Avedon's is not a methodically topographical pursuit in the tradition of August Sander...", and that he has focused on "...a social class that despite its economic diversity is unified by a sense of abandonment and betrayal by contemporary society and the realization of its impending irrelevance to the fabric of that society", p.52. Finally, as Richard Bolton argues, "the great consistency of Avedon's work is derived from his unwillingness to see human experience as manifested in anything but style. But labour, decay, and death do not exist as generalized types, nor as style; they exist in history and in specific social realities", "In the American East: Avedon incorporated", *Afterimage* (U.S.A.), September 1987, p.14.
68. Terry Dennett & Jo Spence, "The unpolitical photograph?", *Camerawork*, no.7, July 1978, p.8.
69. Alistair Morrison, "Working Men shatters our classless society", *New Zealand Times*, October 21, 1984, p.4.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Desmond Kelly, "Introduction", *Working Men*, *op.cit.*, p.6.

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Cloud Wright, slaughterhouse worker  
Ira, Nebraska, 8/10/79

72. *Ibid*, p.7.
73. *Ibid*.
74. *Ibid*, p.6.
75. Brett Riley, *op.cit.*, p.12.
76. John B. Turner, "History of New Zealand photography", unpublished lecture (tape), Wellington: National Art Gallery, 18.5.1985.
77. Alistair Morrison, *op.cit.*, p.4.
78. Janet Bayly, "Books" (review of *Working Men*), *Photoforum Wellington Newsletter*, no.18, July 1984, pp.10, 11.
79. David Cook, *Rotowaro: the last days of a Waikato coal-mining township*, Hamilton: Waikato Museum of Art and History, 1985.
80. Four years later, a second exhibition, *Rotowaro II: Off the Map*, was mounted by the Waikato Museum of Art and History. See Brenda Tennant, "Off the map: Rotowaro II", *Art New Zealand* 53, Summer 1989/1990, pp.74-76, for an account of how this follow-up exhibition records "...the sad demise of the small Waikato township...through to its recent demolition" (p.74).
81. Quoted in "Going under", *Photoforum Review*, no.32, April 1987, p.21.
82. *Ibid*, p.23.
83. Julie Riley, *Men alone*, Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1990.
84. Julie Riley, *Our town: voices and images from a New Zealand town*, Auckland: Reed Heinemann, 1993.

85. Glenn Busch, *You are my darling Zita*, Auckland: Godwit Press, 1991, p.ix.
86. *Ibid*, p.189.
87. *Ibid*, p.xv.
88. *Ibid*, p.xvii. In this passage, Busch echoes Oscar Lewis who writes in his introduction to *The Children of Sanchez* (1961): "In preparing the interviews for publication, I have eliminated my questions and have selected, arranged, and organized their materials into coherent life-stories. If one agrees with Henry James that life is all inclusion and confusion while art is all discrimination and selection, then these life-histories have something of both art and life", Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964, p.xxi.

However, in contrast to Busch, Lewis goes on to give a detailed account of the editing processes which have shaped his published material (see pp. xxi-xxii).

89. *Ibid*.
90. Laurence Simmons, "Guardians of an absent meaning" *Illusions* 25, Winter 1996, p.27.
91. Gary Baigent, "Like a bolt from the blue", *Photoforum*, June/July 1976, p.10.

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