

**Su Braden**  
**COMMITTING**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**

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**For Alice**



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*Su Braden*  
*Brighton, January 1983*

# Introduction

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This book could not have appeared without the enthusiasm and research of Paul Carter, the founder of Blackfriars Photography Project. The main theme of his research, financed by the Arts Council of Great Britain, was the development of 'community photography' projects between the mid-1970s and 1980. Many of his ideas and much of his research material appear within the general thesis of this book.

The Arts Council also helped finance the further research, which included visiting individual projects, and the writing through a publishers' grant. I am grateful for all the help I received,

most especially from Paul Carter himself, and also from many of the individuals involved in projects mentioned in the text.

I hope that the arguments presented here will offer grounds for debate, not only on photography, but in many areas of development work that relate to communications. I hope it will be useful not only to photography students and project workers but to all groups who are printing and publishing material which includes photographs, from campaign material, community newspapers, to trades union pamphlets and posters.

# 1. Subject and predicate

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Almost since the invention of photography, photographs have provided the possibility of both evidence and counterfeit. For those who felt that to produce social change they had only to present the world with the pictorial 'evidence' of squalor, poverty, ill health, war or torture, the camera became the obvious means. Yet the photograph does not hold the key to 'pure' information any more than the written word or the painted picture. Photographic images can be, and are, touched up, montaged, composed, posed and superimposed.

As views about the nature of social change have developed, with the emphasis moving from social reforms imposed from above, to social action taken by the people concerned at first hand, so photographic practice which sets out to 'record' subjects of social concern has been brought into question. Above all the notion of the photograph as an independent and self-sufficient source of evidence has been confronted with one in which the *meaning* of the photograph is understood to be inseparably tied to social consciousness, culture and custom.

As the complexity of the interrelationships between photographer, subject, photograph and audience has become more apparent, so the question of access to, and self-representation through, the photographic image has come to be seen as equally important, socially and economically, as access to the written word. A principal question has emerged – whom does the photograph represent? Do the photographer's own ideas about the subject dominate the way the picture is taken and shown and, if so, is this bias (negative, positive, class-bound, or simply personal) apparent to those who see the image?

Photographs offer information, yet they, especially, are not neutral tools. They appear to offer the bonus over the printed word that they are accessible to even the illiterate and they come under the everyday perusal of those who seldom open a book or read a newspaper. Consequently, as a purveyor of dominant cultural bias, photography is capable of forming the vanguard of any invasion: an invasion where the incursionists take with them the ideologies, conventions and often the context from their own world as they launch themselves upon the world of others. Alongside popular music and television, photography is the modern tool through which the dominant culture transmits its philosophies.

The alternative to cultural invasion is the



**Matchgirls. c. 1890. Swan Vesta, East End of London, the first women's strike over pay and conditions in Britain. The carefully posed photograph portrays the nobility of labour among squalor, rather than the real concerns of the subjects. Photo: National Museum of Labour History, London.**

altogether more conscious, more painstaking one, described by the educationalist Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1972) as 'cultural synthesis', in which the incursionists become collaborators, integrated with the people and acting with them in collective authorship.

Incursions by members of one cultural world into another have frequently stemmed from philanthropic concern on the part of those who are economically better off for those less well off than themselves. This kind of concern has produced, on the one hand, a long tradition of social reformers in the West, among them some remarkable campaigning photographers and photojournalists and on the other, activists like the worker-photographers, all motivated by the desire to produce social change. Their experience provides a

number of examples of photographic practices from which to study some of the structural and philosophical problems of photography with its opposing tendencies.

What kind of collaboration can there be between photographer and photographed which will ensure that the person behind the camera is not appropriating the identity of the person in front of the lens? What structures are there which encourage participation in the process of production and publication of photographic images and ensure that cultural identity is not forever determined by the demands of big capital? It is only by examining the practices, successes and failures of those who have set out to use their photographic skills to promote social change that the structures determining participation in what on many fronts has become a high technology medium can be understood.

Jacob A. Riis, a Danish immigrant to America in the 1870s and an ex-police reporter turned social reformer, worked at the turn of the century to fight for the elimination of slum conditions on

New York's Lower East Side. He sought to produce evidence which would offend the consciences of eminent and wealthy New Yorkers and force reforms upon landlords. He found that the most effective way to tell the story of the squalor, poverty and despair of the East Side tenements was to visit the crowded streets, dossers' halls and overcrowded rooms with a camera and flash, often in the small hours of the morning. In this way he was able to take telling pictures of interiors and living and sleeping conditions.

For all his humanity and in spite of his success in getting a certain number of rehousing schemes established after the publication of his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1901), Riis's attitude towards the poor was fundamentally based on pity and it appealed to the sentiment of pity in others. He was not concerned to reveal causes to the poor themselves to enable them to fight their own case. His intention was to use his photographs to reform the existing order but not to tamper with its established hierarchy.



Jacob A. Riis: 'Five cents a spot'— unauthorised lodgings in a tenement building.

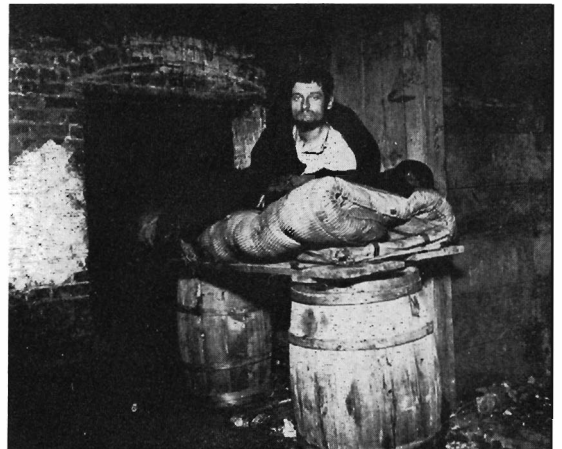
Copyright: Alexander Alland from *Jacob A. Riis: Photographer and Citizen*, London, Gordon Fraser, 1974.



Jacob A. Riis: Street Arabs—night boys in sleeping quarters, c. 1890.

'Are you not looking too much to the material conditions of these people,' said a good minister to me after a lecture in a Harlem church last winter, 'and forgetting the inner man?' I told him, 'No! for you cannot expect to find an inner man to appeal to in the worst tenement-house surroundings. You must first put the man where he can respect himself. To reverse the argument of the apple: you cannot expect to find a sound core in a rotten fruit.' (Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 1901, p. 209)

In contrast to both the views presented above, the churchman who wishes to save souls before bodies, and the reformer who seeks material welfare for the poor before education, much contemporary thinking takes a different stand. Paulo Freire offers a philosophy on poverty and underdevelopment that proposes a robust respect for the ability of the poor to act on their own behalf. He stresses the need for those who wish to help from the outside to consider the fundamental causes of the poverty they are hoping to abolish and he emphasises vitally the importance of the poor themselves participating in the overthrow of inequality.



Jacob A. Riis: One of four pedlars who slept in the cellar of 11 Ludlow Street—rear.

Lewis W. Hine, working like Riis in America in the early part of the century, was convinced that his photographs, which bore witness to the harshness and dehumanisation of the new industrial age, could bring about social change. From 1908 until the first world war his principal

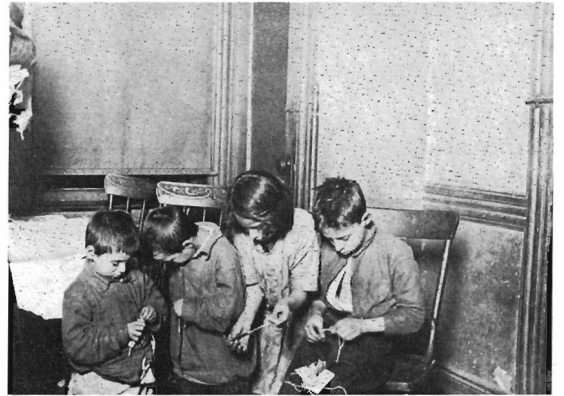


**Lewis W. Hine: Factory boy, glassworks, 1909.** Copyright: International Museum of Photography, New York.

concern was his work as investigator and cameraman for the National Child Labour Committee.

Hine was determined to expose the exploitation of child labour. His photographs of the period cover the lives of working children from New York and Washington down to the Deep South. They express indignation and a great concern for the individual identity of each child photographed. Nevertheless, in his own terms, Hine did not feel he had achieved his aim of using the camera where words had failed. Despite his concern, despite the contact he established with many of his subjects, he remained an interpreter of their suffering to audiences who were themselves mainly adult and middle class. Although in later life Hine began to despair of the effectiveness of his work, he never saw this failure in terms which embraced his own social position. He was, in fact, working in an age when the labour movement in America was fast growing. But few people of Hine's social group would have felt it more important to engender indignation among the working class on *its own behalf* than to imbue the middle classes with indignation *on behalf of* the conditions of working people.

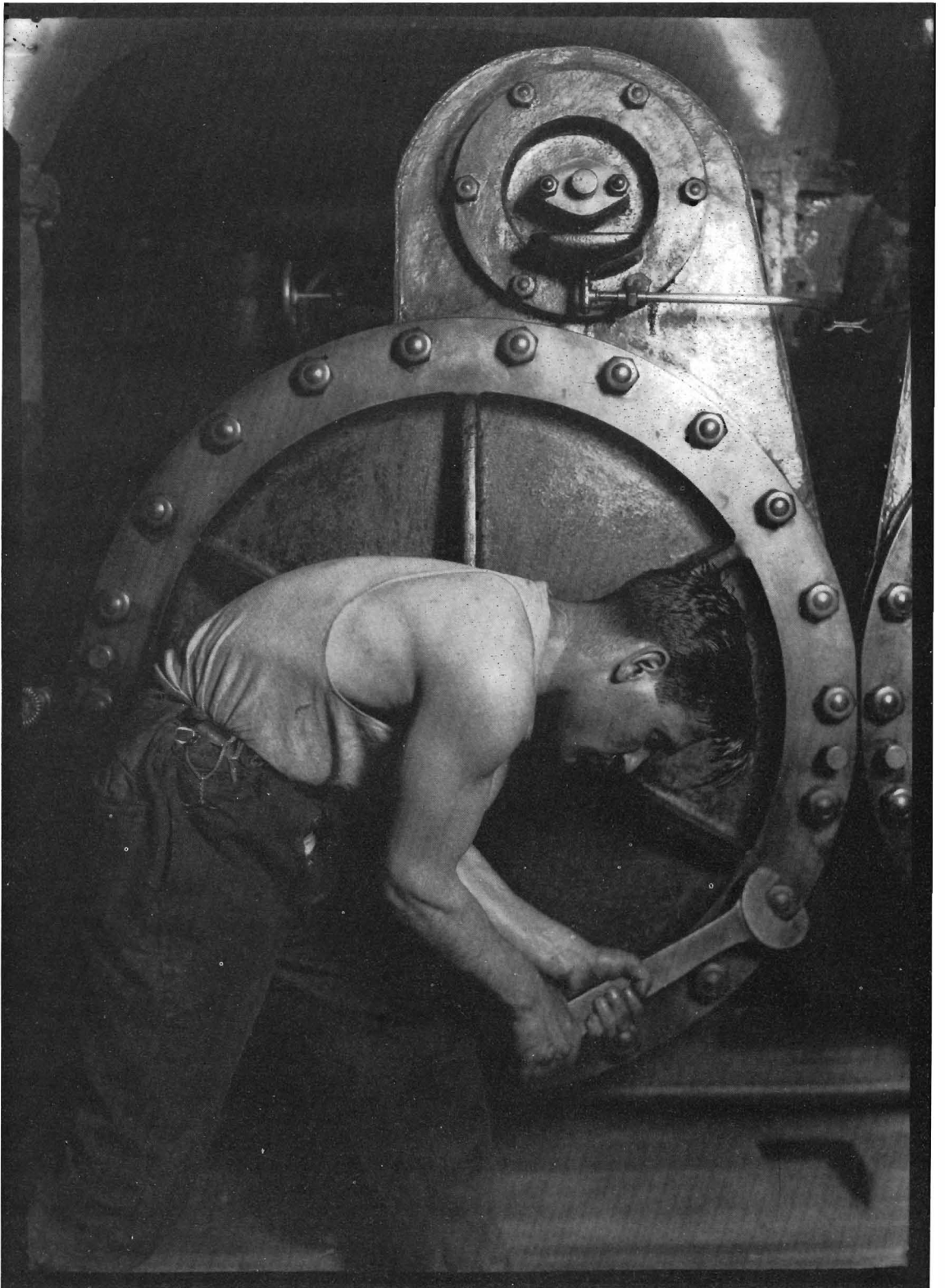
Returning to New York after a first world war spent in Europe, Hine set about a photographic study of 'Men at Work', hoping to find a more popular audience and reveal to working people



**Lewis W. Hine: Children stringing milk tags, Newark, 1923.**

*right: Lewis W. Hine: Steam fitter, 1921.*





# Det finns mat åt alla

Jordens resurser räcker till  
för att livnära oss alla  
– om de utnyttjas på rätt sätt.  
Men ofta fördelas de fel och ojämnt.







Walker Evans: Sharecropper's family, Hale County, Alabama, 1936.

the status and value of their 'new age' industrial employment. But again he failed to find the context or public he had intended for these photographs and they reveal a greater isolation between the subjects and the photographer than Hine's earlier work. In fact they present an interesting contrast to the photographs taken by the members of the Workers' Film and Photo League in the United States during the same period (discussed later in this chapter and in Chapters 2 and 4).

In Hine's 'Men at Work' series the machines appear as equal if not dominant partners with the men who manage them, while the worker-photographers were concentrating, not on the aesthetics of mechanisation, but on their first-hand experience of the social and economic results of mechanisation and workers' actions in the struggle to survive.

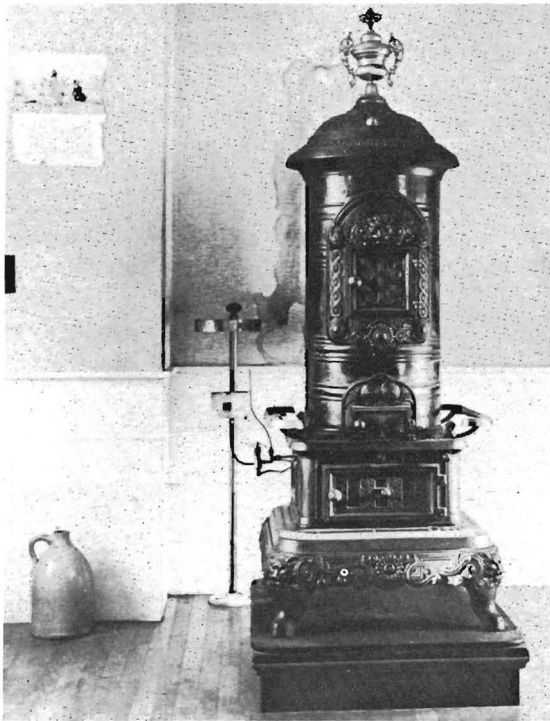
The work of Walker Evans, undertaken from a

yet entirely different personal perspective, apparently fulfils the prophecy of a dehumanised America which haunts Hine's later pictures. Commissioned by the Farm Security Administration, Walker Evans's pictures, published as *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Ballantine Books, 1966), were taken to record the plight of the rural poor of the Midwest in the thirties. They made his name but did little to free the subjects themselves from their conditions. The meticulous studies of light and shade which are the hallmark of Evans's photography do not discriminate between the beauty he finds in the poverty-stricken farming family standing in front of their Alabama shack and that which he finds, for example, in the iron stove in a New England country house. Both subjects are an expression of his art and skill, delightful to the eye. Yet it seems that the lack of any equality between Evans's view of himself as a skilled artist-photographer and his view of his

left: Poster from Swedish Aid Agency: Lutherhjälpen. 'The resources of the earth are sufficient if only we share them with one another.' A campaign against third world poverty which stands out for its positive imagery.



**Walker Evans applied the same meticulous treatment of light and shade to inanimate objects. The stove, from Heliker House, Cranberry Island, Maine (1969), reveals a technique which applies little distinction between the beauty of this object and that of the sharecroppers in their poverty.**



subjects as the impassive objects of his studies does little more than romanticise their condition and aestheticise the human suffering. The subjects themselves, the rural poor of the thirties or at least the younger survivors who have been revisited (BBC 2, 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men'), recognised that while Evans received acclaim, they and their parents saw little change. The beauty of their own impoverished homes bathed in the momentary sunlight of a photographic instant was overshadowed for them by years of grinding poverty. Although Hine was perhaps less concerned than Evans with his artistic achievements as a photographer, both men appear to have found it difficult to relate to their human subjects as equals, with the result that in his later years Hine tends to depict men and machines as one and Evans to equate animate with inanimate matter as equally aesthetic subjects for his photographic skills.

The worker-photographer movement developed

in Europe (principally Germany, Holland and Britain) and America in the 1920s and 1930s was a section of the Workers' International Relief (WIR), instigated by Lenin in Berlin in 1921 to promote international relief for Russia's famine and developed through the introduction of illustrated socialist literature. In Germany, for instance, workers were called upon by the communist magazine *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ) to act as worker-reporters. In Holland, the Association for Popular Culture, founded in 1928 in order to show Soviet films, announced in 1930 a course in photography to 'train members to become Photo-Workers' Correspondents' (*De Tribune*, 24 July 1930, p. 4). In England, the Workers' Film and Photo League had a number of small but active branches in London and their manifesto (1935) stated:

There are thousands of workers in this country who own cameras, but who only use them for taking the occasional snapshot. If even a number of them were to photograph the conditions around them – in the factories, workshops, dockyards, railways and countryside, in their streets – we should have a valuable record of working class life, which would enable workers in different branches of industry to understand each other's problems.

In Germany, where the worker-photographer movement had its roots, workers who photographed the rise of Fascism took enormous personal risks, creating their own visual imagery to counter the heavy symbolism of the Nazi Party. The process of learning to use the camera was seen not merely as technical instruction but as a process of self- and class-awareness. As Erich Rinka, the former general secretary of the Association of Worker-Photographers of Germany remembers:

Let us be quite clear, most workers with photographic interests did not come to us with the intention of fighting with their cameras; they came to practise photography to learn technique. This is why we had to lead them to class-conscious photography above and beyond the technique and practice of the medium. This was done by various methods in different groups... We usually went out to take photos in groups of twos or threes, always including one class-conscious worker. The discussion of the photos was not merely a photo-technique, but was also a political training. (*Creative Camera*, no. 197/98, May/June 1981, p. 72)

The worker-photographer movement, despite its ultimate disappearance and its inevitably haphazard documentation, offers a historic pre-



**John Heartfield: photomontage for AIZ cover.** 'The message from Geneva: Where moneybags exist, there is no place for peace.' 'In Geneva, seat of the League of Nations, police fired machine guns on workers who demonstrated against Fascism. Result: 15 dead and over 60 wounded.'

cedent for a popular move to intervene in the professional mass media's domination over public information. Its emphasis, particularly in Germany and America, on the process of educating awareness, passing on skills through their workshops, independent of formal institutions of education, is as revolutionary as was the conscious recognition of the separate character and value of working-class culture. A further strength of the movement was the fact that it originated, not with producers, but with distributors, thus ensuring that the work always had an outlet. The weaknesses came inevitably from lack of continuity and development.

Yet in Germany most notably, the shape of its potential, so brutally arrested by the oncoming war, may perhaps be indicated by the growing respect and co-operation between members of the movement and the radical bourgeoisie such as George Grosz, John Heartfield, Nagel, Tucholsky, Weinert, Becher and Wolf.

In America, the Workers' Film and Photo League (WFPL) became known as the Film and Photo League (FPL) in 1933. WIR offered material



**Worker Photography:** *Workers' Illustrated News* no. 20/1929.

and moral support for strikers and their families. The league's membership of between 75 and 100 had the aim of providing militant workers and the unemployed with the skills to create a photographic record of the class struggle, while at the same time providing photographic material for radical publications and meeting an expanding demand from the liberal and mainstream press.

Workshop classes played a large part in the league's programme and led to a greater critical awareness, among those who took part, of the 'language' and conventions of photography. They were critical of the glamorisation of commercial photography as well as the beautification and portraiture of bourgeois art-photographs in the tradition of painted portraits and landscapes. The league's exhibitions chose subjects similar to those dealt with by Hine, Riis and Walker Evans, but looked at Roosevelt's New Deal from a left perspective. The New York League's proposed (although possibly never realised) exhibition, 'The City Child' (1935) ('New York Photo Activities' in *Filmfront*, 1, no. 3, January 1935, p. 14) was

designed to raise consciousness, not among the middle classes, but among workers and parents about the 'home, school and recreational background of the New York City Child'. The way in which the photographers, working from Chicago, New York and San Francisco as well as Europe, became both participants in, and observers of, their own photographic explorations presents somewhat the same case for the acquisition of skills in relation to perceived needs as proposed by Freire's literacy programmes. The greater critical awareness and interest of the worker-audiences (in contrast to Hine's experience) bear witness to the success of the methodology. The American League only finally dispersed under pressure of McCarthy's anti-communist witch-hunt in the 1950s.

The key to the success of the worker-photographer movements in Germany and America, in particular, appears to have been the instigatory role played by the magazines which distributed their work. At the same time these outlets influenced and limited the photo-



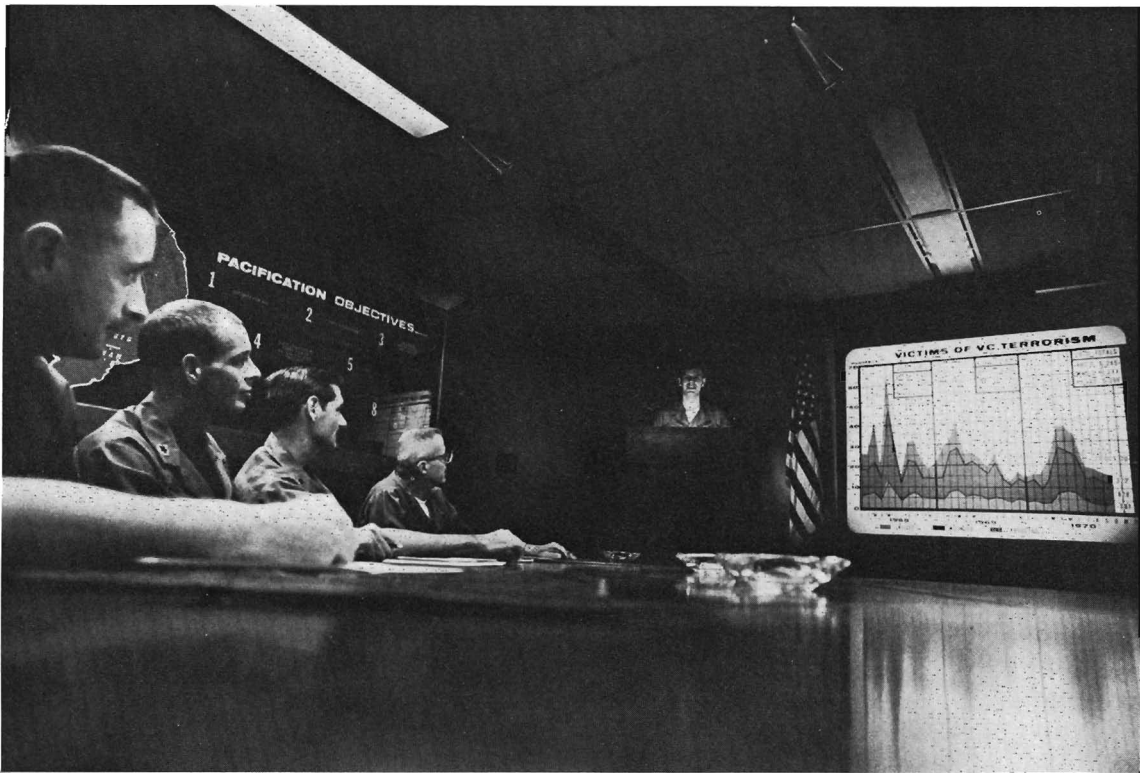
**Worker Photography: Nazi march under police protection, Berlin, Neukolln, 1930.**

journalistic nature of the work itself. The worker-photographers were encouraged to see photography as a reporting and recording tool and there was consequently little experiment with other forms such as illustration, photomontage, humour and so on. Yet innovations, such as the introduction of the photo-series, point to the fact that there was some debate of such matters as the ambiguous interpretation of the single image. However, with the limited material available to us it is not possible to make a complete assessment of the work in any one country, nor, therefore, any real comparison of the national characteristics. It seems that the American worker-photographers may have been drawn more from the ranks of the radical middle classes than in Germany, where the extreme polarisation of the political situation may have made the value and risk of photography more immediately apparent to those with no previous access to the medium. In America the members of the Film and Photo League, because of their close relationship with the unions, were often able to scoop the mainline press with their photographs of pickets and work processes. Reading between the lines, the mobility and availability of these photographers seems to indicate that they may have been people who today would be working for a radical news photography agency on a freelance basis. However, they, like their German colleagues, were not able to survive once the radical presses had been stifled by political

repression during the McCarthy era.

The relationship between the press and the photographer is one to which we will frequently return in this book. Many professional photo-journalists complain that their pictures are misused; that editors will only select the blandest images. Even so, few professional photo-journalists take matters into their own hands and go into print on their own behalf over an issue which they feel has been misrepresented in the press. One of the exceptions was freelance photographer Philip Jones Griffiths. His extraordinary collection of pictures and text on the Vietnam war, *Vietnam Inc.* (Collier Books, 1971), while ostensibly about the effect of the war on Vietnam and the Vietnamese people, was most effective because it told the American people things about themselves, their 'civilisation' and the role of their own sons, husbands, brothers and fathers in the war, which filled them with shame and disgust. The book was a brilliant weapon against the super-real war propaganda by which the media had presented a picture of Americans defending the Third World from the ravages of communism. It revealed not only the brutalisation by the Americans of the Vietnamese but the brutalisation that the war produced in the young Americans themselves, caught in the theatre of false propaganda. As Griffiths states, ambiguity could not have been avoided by using the pictures alone. The text which he provides is absolutely





Philip Jones Griffiths. Pacification, alias 'Rural Reconstruction', or 'Revolutionary Development', or 'WHAM' ('winning hearts and minds'), is Americanisation. Inside the briefing room at the MACV headquarters in Saigon, which is where officers 'have the validity of their own perspectives reinforced.' Philip Jones Griffiths' own captions from *Vietnam Inc.* (New York, Macmillan 1971) locate the images within the context of his campaign for American withdrawal from the war.

necessary to tie down dates and places and to provide interpretation of the pictures. He recognised that photographs themselves are now too overlaid with their own cultural conventions and exploitation to be entirely trustworthy. But as Susan Sontag says in her book, *On Photography* (Allen Lane, 1977), 'Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one – and can help build a nascent one.'

Philip Jones Griffiths was not, unlike the earlier photographic campaigners, appealing to the American people simply on the basis of pity for the Vietnamese, nor did he fall into the trap of trying to speak to, or on behalf of, the Vietnamese people themselves with his pictures. Photographing the American military personnel at their war-work in contrast to the Vietnamese they were destroying, he appealed to the sentiments of self-disgust, shame and anger at the cruelty, brutality and dehumanisation of the situation, which lay deep in the Western Christian ethic. Where photographs of Vietnamese suffering alone would have taken their place in a spectrum of anaesthetising horror pictures, dating from the first world war, through Belsen and any number of famines, to

pictures of firing-squad victims in South American states, pictures of Americans, brutalised by their own brutality, with carefully documented texts, had a new power to arouse an active anger. He appealed to aspects of Western collective culture to which he saw himself belonging. And, by taking the publication and production of his pictures into his own hands, Jones Griffiths made a political intervention which offers another contribution to the development of reforming photography.

When W. Eugene and Aileen M. Smith - Eugene, an American, and Aileen, half American, half Japanese - placed themselves and their photographic and journalistic skills at the disposition of the people of Minamata, a small town on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, they too set up a new and entirely different relationship with their 'subjects'. Minamata had a history of a 20-year fight against pollution caused by the local factory of the chemical manufacturing company, the Chisso Corporation; its mercury contamination of the environment caused a crippling disease of the brain, known as the 'Minamata disease'.



'The peasants spend most of their lives in their rice fields and when they die they are buried there. Thus, they believe their spirits will pass through the soil into the rice when they die, so that their souls will be inherited by their descendants when the rice is eaten. . .' caption by Philip Jones Griffiths *Vietnam Inc.*

The Smiths saw world pollution as their own fight. Long before they went to Japan they were personally involved in the overall battle against environmental pollution. They went to Minamata to learn about what had happened there, to publicise it and over a period of three years to join the local fight that Minamata residents and victims were waging to win compensation from the Chisso Corporation.

Thus the Smiths saw their roles as supporters of the existing campaign in Minamata, in their own and the local interest, as well as in international terms. They provided photographic evidence for the campaign; their photographs were used in leaflets, press campaigns and on placards, and they took on the role of political interventionists in the world situation through the publication of their book *Minamata - a Warning to the World*. In it they make specific comparisons between the pollution at Minamata and that perpetrated by industries in other parts of the world.

If Paulo Freire's 'cultural synthesis' is taken seriously, the essential ingredient is the collective and equal relationships he proposes as the basis for the processes of learning and teaching. The motivation behind offering or using the skills of photography to bring about social change is very

similar to that behind taking literacy to the illiterate. If the initiative is not to result in a cultural invasion, overpowering, subjugating and even perhaps wiping out the cultural world of the recipients, the photographers/intervenors must be prepared to become integrated participants



W. Eugene and Aileen Smith: photographs from their book, *Minamata*, London, Chatto and Windus 1975. The patients negotiate with Shimada, President of the Chisso Company, responsible for polluting the sea and causing the crippling Minamata disease.



W. Eugene and Aileen Smith: Yanei Ikeda, disabled by Minamata disease.





**W. Eugene and Aileen Smith: 'Direct negotiations': patients and supporters at the gates of the Chisso factory at Goi hold up photographs as evidence.**

in the cultural concerns and values of those in whose world they are operating.

This principle, if accepted, enables us to consider a number of different ways in which photography can become a collective practice, in which the relationship between photographer, subject and photograph can be radically changed. These include:

1. *The collective photographic project which results from collectively held conceptions and a collectively taken initiative.* Example: The worker-photographer movement was initiated by socialist magazines and received an active response from workers which indicates that they recognised the importance of the proposal. The movement subsequently took on its own momentum in which the worker-photographers created their own initiatives – collectively planning and discussing individual photographs and campaigns.

2. *The photographic project which results from collective organisation.* Example: The Minamata project in which the protesters against the Chisso Corporation collaborated with Eugene and Aileen Smith to produce photographic evidence to promote their case. While some of their photographs,

out of context, may indeed evoke pity, the context they are given within the publication *Minamata* and, of course, within the campaign itself, dismisses all notion of passivity on the part of the victim community.

3. *The photographic project that has collective impact.* Example: Philip Jones Griffiths's *Vietnam Inc.* which appealed to the collective Western moral opinion and self-image. (This last example achieves collective participation in social change because the images, unlike commercial advertising campaigns, reverse rather than reinforce supposedly commonly held views of an event.) Unlike the early social-reformist view, Jones Griffiths presents the perpetrators of injustice with an insight into themselves.

It is useful in this context to compare the approach of Lewis Hine to the exploitation of child labour by American business, with that of Philip Jones Griffiths to the American destruction of Vietnam. Griffiths, by presenting a choice of images – the aggressor and the aggrieved, the guilty and the innocent, the brutal, the brutalised and the brutalisation – appealed to active anger in his chosen Western audience. Lewis Hine, by producing images, however beautiful and touching, of only one side of his story, appealed only to pity and by choosing to appeal to that emotion he also selected the audience for his pictures, which were not the captains of industry but reformable and reform-minded people. What would the effect have been had Hine offered a wider choice of images, had he pictured the exploiters as well as the exploited?

It is the contrast between the intimacy of the life of the Vietnamese shown in Griffiths's photographs, their joys, toil and sorrows, as opposed to the remoteness of the planning of the American war machine – the American generals and their wall maps – and again the bitter destruction of humanity on both sides, which sets off our collective Western 'ethical' response.

The consciousness-raising value of presenting a choice of opposing images was first explored in the early thirties by El Lissitzky and John Heartfield in their photomontage works. (This is more fully discussed in Chapter 4.)

Although the different approaches to collectivity which have just been described, together with the earlier history of the social-reformer photographer, has formed a specific background to the kind of current British photographic practices to which the major part of this book will be devoted, these recent initiatives receive their immediate inspiration from an even more pervasive cultural change which has come about over the past 15 years. During this period many parts of the world have seen the rise of a new kind of autonomous libertarian and left organisation.



**Phil McCowen: Mrs Desai at the Grunwick strike, London 1977. A picture which encapsulated the opposing faces in the struggle—a rare phenomenon in press photography, even on the left.**

They have included co-operative movements and squatting, gay liberation, anti-nazi, anti-nuclear and pro-abortion groups and the development of community action, together with community arts and community presses and, most fundamental, the women's movement. 'Community' photography (the question of definition of 'community' is discussed in Chapter 3) and 'radical photo-journalism' grew and found their identity as a service to and reflection of these movements. The relatively small number of photography groups involved makes it inevitable that these photographic practices cannot be rated in the forefront of new political movements but it is no less important to be clear about their roots and about the ideology from which they have grown.

Elizabeth Wilson, writing in *Women in the Community* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), suggests, 'The growth of community work and the growth of the women's movement both date in this country from the same period, the late sixties with its upsurge of political consciousness.' She asks what it is that community workers (and presumably, community photographers) had learnt from the 'women's movement'. 'In the first place that daily life is political . . . Perhaps most important of all, the women's movement, whatever its difficulties and contradictory tensions, has de-

manded the right for women to speak for themselves. This is the first demand of all oppressed peoples' (p.9).

A whole range of statements date from this period, expressing concern not just for better access to the means of expression, but for a qualitative examination of the implications of the established conventions of the communications and arts media. The early 1970s saw the formation of the Association of Community Artists which put pressure on the Arts Council of Great Britain to reconsider the way in which cultural expression had become dominated by centralisation and the conventions of 'high art'. At about the same time the Independent Film-makers Association was formed in opposition to 'dominant cultural practice in film-making and distribution'. By the early 1970s a number of 'community' photography projects had been set up with the specific aim of re-examining the practice and conventions of photography, notably at the Half Moon in the East End of London, where Jo Spence and others launched the critical magazine, *Camera*work.

At this time, too, a number of photojournalists who had become disillusioned with the controls imposed on their work by the mainstream press set up their own co-operative agencies, such as the

Alternative News Service and Network, which joined the earlier established Report, in order to provide pictures for political newspapers, magazines and community presses.

Writing in the first issue of *Camerawork* (no. 1, February 1976), Jo Spence of Photography Workshop summarised the basis of the discussion as it had emerged:

Every day, photographers produce countless images, most of which will never be seen by a mass audience. However, those that are seen, in newspapers, magazines and on high street hoardings, play an important part in our lives. With their messages – both explicit and hidden – they help to shape our concepts of what is real and what is normal. They give us information about the sort of sex roles we are expected to play in society, contribute to our image of ourselves, to our expectations and to our fantasies.

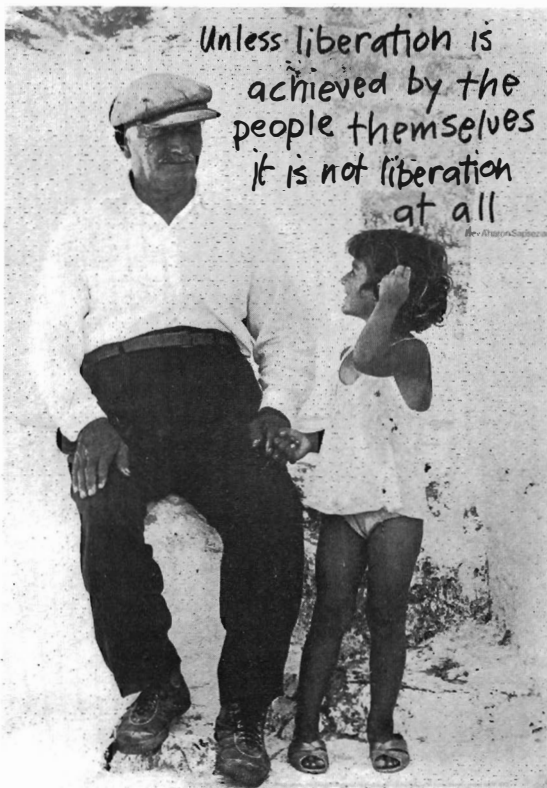
It is important to look at the context from which these images spring and at the background of the people who produce them.

While radical photojournalism took on the role of finding and distributing images of and to the

## 25 Jahre Menschenrechte 25 Jahre Folter



**'25 Years of Human Rights: 25 Years of Torture'**  
for Amnesty International, by Edition Staeck.  
The image and caption set up a series of  
oppositions in the mind of the viewer from which  
decisions are demanded.



For once the Third World is not presented as 'poor', 'dirty', 'unclothed' and in need of being taught how to manage itself by a richer, cleaner and better dressed western world. Ikon Productions.

left, community photography projects had the potential to teach visual skills at a local level. Their role, again potentially, was to introduce the notions of visual literacy and the ability to decode images, an understanding of the fundamental manipulation of the media in the contexts of local issues and through the production of support material for local community action.

From the beginning, and almost without exception, the wider implications of the new autonomous movements on the libertarian left and the specific opportunities to create a new radical aesthetic afforded by the initiatives in community media have been ignored by the orthodox left. The reaction of the labour movement to the importance of building a working-class politics of representation – to the notion of visual literacy as an educational step to political literacy and political participation – has been in direct contrast to the revolutionary vision of the Third World countries where illiteracy was seen as a fundamental block to raising working-class consciousness.

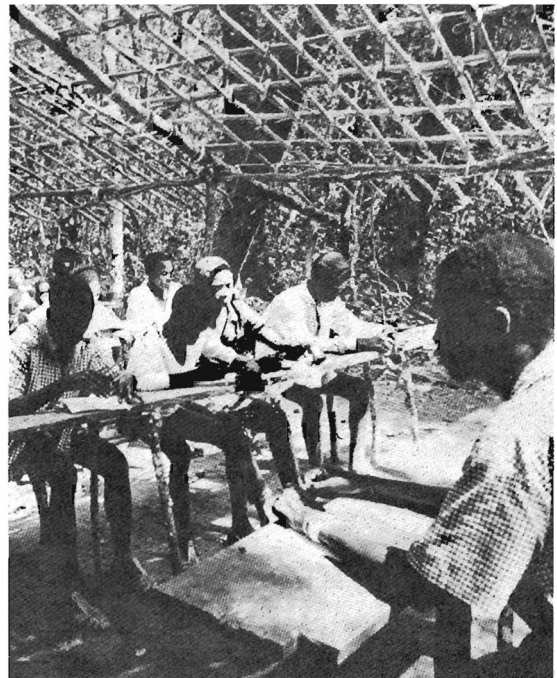
The implication of seeing photography as a



**John Sturrock of Network was one of the few photo-journalists tolerated among the protesters in Lodge Lane, Toxteth, where he took this photograph of the impoverished inner-city landscape, lighted by a burning shop, in July 1981.**

collective activity is revolutionary. It implies a process of co-learning and integration on the part of photographer and photographed and, often, co-ownership of the tools: camera, darkroom and means of publication of the images through posters, slide shows, books or magazines. Co-authorship of the photograph has the same implication as co-authorship of the written word. It is just as important in learning to represent oneself with photography, as it is with the written word, that even the instructional primers should be the products of collective experience.

To teach those who do not yet know to learn in their own terms, Freire points out, it is first necessary for the teacher to learn from the pupil about the pupil's own culture. In this way the pupil perceives that what is being offered is not a new culture, but a tool with which it will be possible to express the reality of the cultural world she or he knows, as well as to learn or borrow from other cultures.



**Forest school in Guinea-Bissau, where mutual learning and teaching methods developed by Paulo Freire were implemented.**

## 2. Mass distribution is 'dirty'

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Anyone who thinks of the masses only as the object of politics cannot mobilize them. He wants to push them around. A parcel is not mobile; it can only be pushed to and fro. Marches, columns, parades, immobilize people. Propaganda, which does not release self-reliance but limits it, fits into the same pattern. It leads to de-politicization. (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media', *Raids and Reconstructions*, Pluto, 1977.)

Who controls a photograph? Is it the photographer, or the subject, or the manufacturer of the camera or film? Or is it the publisher and distributor? The question sets one off on a trail as rife with conflicting clues as a good detective story. The final twist includes the inevitable re-examination of the original question. It makes more sense if we ask, 'Who *could* control the photograph?'

Among the factors which determine accessibility by working people to photographic technology and practice, an underlying and crucial concern is the complex issue of how the photograph can be used to communicate in the wider ideological, social and political contexts of the published media. Enzensberger criticises the tendency of the new left to ignore the issue of publication and mass distribution networks in favour of more craft-bound media, such as silk-screen and even one-off exhibitions. The new left, he says, from the very beginning of the student revolt, during the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in California, have found the electronic media 'dirty' and its hardware, such as the computer, have been favourite targets of aggression. (See 'Constituents of a theory of the media', as above.) The students for all their radical pretensions took a conservative view of the electronic mass media with which they feared to come to terms.

It may be said that in some respects the students were justifiably prudent. Very often it is the case that the higher the technology the greater the controls that are imposed on its use. Access to publication and distribution is inextricably linked with access to the necessary technical equipment and skills. Even at the level of one-off prints, whether access to photographic equipment and skills is provided through technical simplification or education, there is surely never anything neutral about access. There is no such thing as

open access. Equipment and skills do not seem to have values. They appear to be available for any, even conflicting, purposes. Yet, despite the variety of access to resources and skills, dominant practices develop, some encouraged by the very design of the cameras and other equipment, others helped by the unequal distribution of materials and knowledge. Photographic equipment manufacturers, someone lending their camera, the art department of a school, a camera club or community resource centre will all favour particular practices, although many may not be conscious of their judgements. Those providing access do not necessarily proscribe practices, instead they try to encourage the ones they favour. Sometimes the conditions under which the access is given are overt. A photographic course, for example, will publish a prospectus which by defining a curriculum will limit its possibilities. On the other hand, 'community' projects seldom offer a detailed 'course' to the people in their locality. They usually advertise 'come and learn photography'. This can mean social documentary photography, 'creative' photography or darkroom skills. In most 'community photography' projects the tutors do not favour practices which support the ruling ideology and prefer to encourage those which question it. This is not necessarily explained to the people who enrol in the classes or to the funders, though both may eventually work out what is favoured!

Manufacturers encourage different practices for different groups of people and this is demonstrated through their advertising policies. They invite us to take pictures on simple equipment, during the holidays, but not on the picket line. Simultaneously they are encouraging the police to buy sophisticated equipment to use in the surveillance of pickets. Kodak, Ilford and a number of 'independent' scientific research departments work on a whole range of surveillance techniques for use by the army, police and other 'special' organisations.

In his 1888 marketing campaign to promote his first simplified mass-produced camera and the idea of the 'family snap', Eastman had suggested that a 'collection of these pictures could be made to furnish a pictorial history of life as it is lived by the owner, that will grow more valuable every day that passes'. Life as it was being lived by working-class people in the 1880s was very tough, but the design of Eastman's camera did not make it possible for them to photograph crucial elements

of their histories such as working conditions in the factories or the insides of their homes. Even very much later, as we will see from the Manchester family photographs collection discussed in the next chapter, there are few photographic records of the interiors of working-class homes.

The value that Eastman had in mind was not the valuable role that the documentation of the lives of working people could play in their understanding of their own social conditions and in their efforts to change society. He was thinking of the value in nostalgia which had the opposite effect - helping people to accept the world as it was - to recelebrate the high spots and to convince themselves that their lives were all sunny scenes. Photography, as it is generally understood, taking pictures on the simplest equipment and having enprints made for family use, has been created by simplification rather than education. The simplification has been achieved by restricting the amount of control the photographer has over equipment and processing. With electronic flash built into the cheapest cameras, people can now photograph the insides of their homes. As Enzensberger points out, however, such access to the production of photographs is only token if isolated from the questions about how the photographs can be published, used and seen.

The question of access to the means of publication and distribution, and 'self-reliance' for the masses, as it was expressed by Enzensberger (mass participation in the mass media), cannot long remain a separate question from that posed by Paulo Freire when he asks: Who writes the primers? What motivates participation? In the case of visual images and their dissemination we are speaking of technical primers, as opposed to reading primers, but the principle is the same. Technical literacy in the modern world is the logical extension of language literacy.

Technical access to photography and, by implication, to the publication of images has been largely determined by the natural profit motives of the manufacturers of cameras and processing materials. The fact that photographic skills are generally thought of as being instantly accessible is due to the decision of the manufacturers to concentrate from the very beginning on simplification rather than on a complete system of training, to make photography accessible to as wide a buying public as possible. In doing so, they have not only imposed many restrictions on the type and quality of photographs that most people produce, but also on the way the majority of us view the use and distribution of photographic images.

The broad issues of control of the distribution and nature of photographs and the conservative attitude of both the 'new' and 'old' left to any close engagement with, or strategy towards, the 'dirty',

new and electronic mass media are further complicated by the practical questions of the sites where such an engagement could take place in Britain today. What are the organs, the organisations, the contexts in which people can collectively develop a practice and publish and distribute their work?

In looking at the problem of distribution I am aware that this can never be a theoretical issue alone. It must always be tested and experienced, and I shall look at a number of specific areas of photographic practice to try to determine the ways in which control and participation in the production and distribution of photographs can be exploited. At the back of all photographic practice, however, and the different interpretations due to class and customs, lie the controls imposed on and by the development of the technology. I shall call it the logic of capitalism and it is a key thread in the story of who controls the photograph.

Publication and distribution of photographic images represent the end of a process that began with a concept and the making of a negative and passed through a number of production processes. All these processes are determined by and determining of the ultimate form of the product and its distribution. If we are to understand how these various stages may be adapted to the cause of self-reliance, we must also examine how self-reliance has been denied.

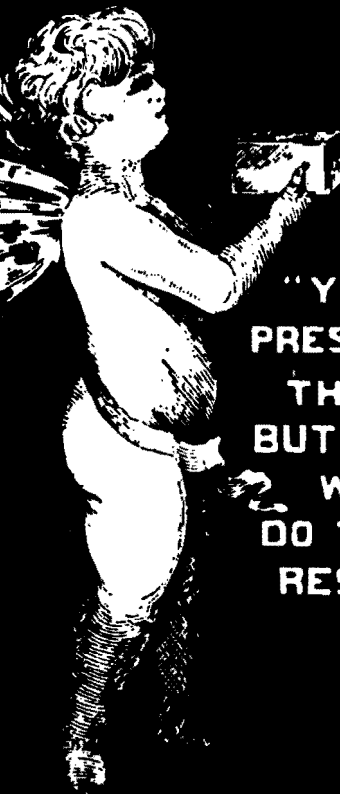
As the patents on earlier photographic processes began to expire or were relaxed, the price of equipment and materials dropped. New and cheaper processes were developed and photographic portraiture became a booming business extending from sixpenny street photographers to the court and aristocracy.

Mass immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States in the first quarter of this century coincided with the availability of this instant means of recording familiar faces in unfamiliar places and sending the photographs back home. Mass consumption of photographs primed the mass consumption of cameras.

The Eastman Dry Plate and Film Company held patents on roll film and designed the most significant camera to use it. Eastman called his camera a Kodak. The product was conceived, from the beginning, with an international mass market in mind. Even the name, Kodak, was scientifically worked out so that it could be pronounced the same in most languages.

The Kodak camera, introduced in 1888, had only three operations compared to 10 or more on earlier cameras, the result of the imposition of a number of technical restrictions which appear to be practical but are in fact dictated by marketing logic. Average picture-taking conditions were conceived and the controls of the camera were

# MODERN CAMERA



"YOU  
PRESS  
THE  
BUTTON  
WE  
DO THE  
REST."

AN APPROPRIATE WEDDING PRESENT



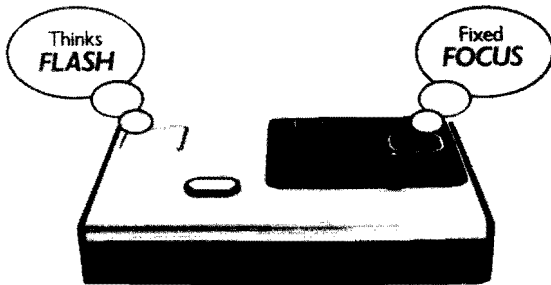
fixed to give good results only within a given situation. A lens of a certain focal length, a point of focus, a lens opening and a shutter speed were all selected by the manufacturer.

None of these could be adjusted by the photographer. These restrictions were not a problem as long as the photographs were taken within the manufacturer's ideal conditions. The public was told it had finally been given the freedom to take its own pictures.

Simplifying the camera would not, in itself, have made photography widely accessible without the new developments in the processing of films and prints. The complexity of these processes were not just simplified for the photographer but eliminated altogether. The new dry gelatine materials made mass production processing possible. Photographers could more easily afford to have their developing and printing, 'D and P' as it came to be called, done commercially. Eastman capitalised on this. His camera was preloaded with film at the factory. When all the exposures had been taken, the camera was sent back to the company where the film was removed and developed. The prints and the freshly loaded camera were then sent back to the photographer.

The most significant thing about the Kodak's prints (there were a hundred from each film) was that they were small, about two and a half inches across. As the camera did not include a viewfinder, those prints did not often have a great deal of precision or lend themselves to mechanical reproduction or publication. The 'D and P' facility completed the manufacturers' formula for mass access to the production of photographs which has persisted until today; cameras with restricted controls and the commercial processing of small prints.

Eastman's simplification really paid off. He



*previous page* Kodak promised to do our thinking for us in the 1930s and has continued to market the same theme right up to the 1980s.

mounted a persuasive advertising campaign under the slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest.'

The market which had been opened up by the introduction of simplified cameras was kept satisfied for decades by successive generations of 'box' cameras, all based on the concept of fixed focus and exposure control.

Although this was by far the largest market for photographic equipment, it was, of course, not the only one. The number of professional photographers continued to grow. Among this group the principal concern was to produce photographs for reproduction. They needed cameras with which to take pictures under a wider range of lighting and physical conditions than was possible with a box camera and to be able to control precisely the aperture and shutter combinations needed. For reproduction larger pictures of higher technical quality were required than could be obtained from the lenses of simple cameras.

Until the 1920s most cameras used by professionals were cumbersome. For high quality they used large format roll and plate cameras. In the 1920s, however, the first miniature cameras were introduced in Germany and these were to affect the photography of both highly skilled professional and amateur photographers and, more recently, those who use simple cameras.

Miniature cameras used 35 mm roll film and the first was the Leica, marketed in 1924. These cameras had fast high-quality lenses which allowed photography in low light without a flash. The photographer could move more freely in relation to the subject than ever before and techniques were developed for taking 'candid' photographs, leading to the styles of documentary photojournalism used by *Life* magazine and *Picture Post* from the 1930s onwards. Among the difficulties faced by photojournalism, not least of which was resentment on the part of the writers, was the problem of getting photos on to the printed page. The techniques did not become widespread until the turn of the century. At the same time it was necessary for the commercial press to create a public demand for pictures. By 1919 the New York paper, the *Illustrated Daily News* (later called *Daily News*), was launched as the first word and picture tabloid-format paper. By 1924 the *Daily News* was the largest circulation paper in the United States.

In spite of the manufacturers' natural emphasis on meeting the growing professional photojournalist market for their equipment from that period onwards, it is interesting to note that at a similar moment the communist magazine, *Berliner Illustrierte*, was in circulation, later taken





over by AIZ (see Chapter 1) when worker-photographers were recruited to provide the photographic images. Through the movement's workshops and darkrooms and through its network of magazines, worker-photographers gained the expertise to use cameras with fully adjustable controls and developed the chemical formulas to print their own films to suit the specific needs of their work on industrial and political subjects. The example of the worker-photographers provides evidence that fully controllable cameras could have been made accessible to a wide public from the beginning, with the consequent access to publication, had the manufacturers been prepared to instigate training.

From that period on the professional use of photographic equipment was far outstripped by the creation of amateur consumption. In 1963 George Eastman's company, now called Kodak Limited, miniaturised the box camera. A new film based on the 35 mm width was introduced in the form of the 126 drop-in cartridge. This meant smaller, lighter and easier-to-load cameras. The basic fixed control was retained. Kodak called their versions of the camera 'Instamatics' and mounted a publicity campaign under the heading of 'Simple as Blinking'.

Like cars, cameras have to change every year if the market potential is to be maintained. Older models must be shown to be redundant and the manufacturers' logic is to invest in the development of the equipment in a way that will allow them to offer the public a whole series of new 'discoveries' or tricks, year by year.

In the early 1970s the cartridge concept was miniaturised even further with the introduction of the 110 format. The cameras became smaller than a packet of cigarettes. Kodak called their 110 cameras 'Pocket Instamatics'. They are seen by the manufacturers as the ultimate design so far for the encouragement of picture-taking. They hope their size will encourage children to take more pictures and women to carry them in their handbags. Like the original Kodak, however, these cameras have been designed with a restricted range of purposes in mind. Enlargement for publication is generally unsuitable from such small negatives and poor lenses. Even Kodak's booklet *Help Your Community . . . through Photography* says, 'If you plan to make enlargements for display or publicity regularly, buy a camera that uses 126, 135 or 120 film. Do not buy one that uses size 110 film.'

The popular automated 35 mm 'compacts', developed largely by the Japanese camera industry

with their relatively fast lenses, produce larger negatives which give enlargements adequate for reproduction. Although these cameras, too, have the aperture and shutter speed combinations programmed by the manufacturer. Even the most sophisticated 35 mm cameras, the single lens reflexes (SLRs), have reached a wider market because their controls now have an automatic 'option'.

Cameras are of course not the only piece of technology which can influence the perceived uses of photographs. The flash has developed a long way from its early dangerous days of burning magnesium tapers or powder. Taking pictures inside buildings no longer poses problems, although as with cameras the cheapest, most available flash units, advertised as being 'easy to use', have to be employed within stricter limits than those designed for the professional market. The manufacturers assume that the subject will be no more than ten feet or so away in a small room.

Although the makers have found ways of simplifying some cameras and flashes, they have not had equal success in making other photographic technology easy to use at a low price. Enlargers, for example, require some concentrated learning and trial and error before success can be achieved. As a consequence, the non-professionals who buy them are mainly serious amateur photographers who are also the consumers of a wide range of specialist magazines advertising cameras, accessories, studio and darkroom equipment.

The means of the distribution of photographic images discussed in the following sections reflect many of the conventions established at the beginning of the technological and educational development of photography.

As early as the 1850s people who bought the first lower-priced cameras found that they had to acquire some sort of training. The conditions under which this training was developed constitutes another link in the story of 'control' or, at least, lack of neutrality in the matter of access to photographic skills. Some existing institutions, such as the Royal Polytechnic Institution and King's College, London, responded to demand for photography courses, while others, such as the Photographic Institution in New Bond Street and the London School of Photography, were specially set up. At the same time, photography became part of the training offered in military and naval establishments and in departments of science, medicine, astronomy, meteorology and architecture. Photographic societies were instrumental in forming a view of photography as 'art' which still exists widely today. They debated the latest developments in the science, technology and art of photography. But, in spite of the early developments of the mass production and sale of photo-

*previous page: One of the first widely distributed photographic images: Colossal Figure at Abu Simbel, produced as a postcard by Francis Frith, 1857. New York Public Library.*



William Fox Talbot. Calotype, a process first introduced in 1839.

graphic prints, such as Frith's postcards, dating from the 1850s, the amateur 'art' photographers persisted in seeing themselves as artist-craftsmen. They concentrated on the refinement of the one-off photographic print, using complex methods of production to achieve 'artistic' results.

Members of photographic societies took a snobbish attitude to the snapshot and championed themselves as the keepers of the art and craft of photography. Many of these societies have remained centres of technical training and, even though they are no longer such exclusive clubs for the middle class, most are still established around the notion of the photograph as an art object. A minority encourage social documentary photography and have done surveys of working-class life for record purposes but, needless to say, they certainly do not share the ideology of mutual consciousness-raising of the worker-photographer groups.

The contrast between the techniques that are required to produce one-off prints for, let us say, an exhibition of photographs and those involved in the reproduction of prints for mass distribution demonstrate the gulf which exists between craft and industrial processes. It is easy to appreciate the contrast between the relative ease of access to technical resources implied in the production of one-off prints and the more complex and costly business of gaining access to resources for the mass reproduction of images. Nevertheless, there are, within the production relationships of all these kinds of process, possibilities for collective representation and participation at several levels.

Exhibitions and displays of prints represent both the most straightforward means for distributing photographic images and, inevitably, the one most laden with overtones of the aesthetic standards that apply to the art world. Tape-slide productions, on the other hand, while still consisting of a series of one-off prints, recall a history of lantern slides shown by explorers, lecturers and teachers rather than an art-world background. The press is the most obvious means by which to publish photographs yet the left presses have a less successful record in this country in relating the use of photographs to their political views than those in the radical political movements of Latin America. As we have seen from our initial mention of the worker-photographer movement, this form of publication could be one of the most fertile areas for the development and distribution of images representative of the left.

The re-emergence of printshops in Britain since the 1970s as places where members of local community organisations can learn to use print resources follows in the footsteps of a political tradition which dates back to the eighteenth century of rapidly produced political images sold on the streets. Today their task is to revitalise



**Immigration from Eastern Europe to the West during the second half of the 19th century, caused a great boost in popular portraiture, as pictures were needed to send home. A Jewish immigrant from Poland to the East End of London in the 1850s.**

popular intervention in a form which can be widely distributed and could provide a political antidote to the dominant cultural imagery of the advertising hoarding.

It is within the context of an examination of these various modes of production through which images are published and distributed that I will try to assess the relevance and compatibility of the proposals made by Enzensberger and Paulo Freire. Enzensberger says that the masses must confront the new technology of communications if they are to be truly represented. Freire offers a proposal for mutual learning and teaching which, applied to the technological paraphernalia of mass communications, suggests that the way to mass participation is to rewrite the primers of the technology itself.

From the beginning, then, it seems clear that in examining the issue of who controls the photograph, analysis of the content, the means of production, publication and distribution are all essentially interlinked.

In the early days of the photographic society,





*Workers' International Pictorial*, published 1924–25 in Britain, was one of the first socialist newspapers here to have a photographic policy.

the exhibition was firmly stamped as the territory of the art photographer. Their exhibitions followed the Royal Academy tradition of painting exhibitions, with large groups of photographs on diverse themes. So much so, that the social-reform photographers, such as Jacob Riis, working at the turn of the century, did not consider the exhibition as a forum for their campaigns. Riis followed the conventions established for the distribution of scientific or geographical material by producing either lantern-slide lectures or special publications.

This domination by the craftsman-artist faction, in the early days of photography, over a specific form of distribution, may be seen as a failure on the part of socially concerned photographers to use exhibitions as a means of reaching the public. Alternatively it may be an accurate reflection of the in-built shortcomings of this means of distribution. There were, nevertheless, some early exceptions in the shape of exhibitions with a social-reform theme, such as that sponsored in 1908 by the *Daily News* on 'Sweated Industries'.



Photographic equipment advertised to the amateur market by a glamorous girl on a beach, implying that owning such equipment could provide an entrée to a 'desirable' life-style.



William Jones: Coalface, c. 1906. A Welsh worker-photographer who documented his own life and work.

The social-reformist character of such an enterprise is confirmed by the list of the exhibition's council which included the authors George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, as well as labour politicians Keir Hardie and Mrs Ramsay MacDonald with numerous clerics and philanthropists. The owner of the *Daily News*, George Cadbury, of chocolate fame, a humanitarian factory owner, commissioned a series of photographs on the exploited female workers in the Black Country, near his village of Bournville. It was the sort of photographic exhibition that perhaps aimed to change the policies of fellow factory-owners and politicians, but certainly did little to help motivate collective action on the part of the exploited workers themselves.

The worker-photographer groups were among the first both in Europe and America to develop exhibitions around themes connected with social campaigns which represent their own interests first hand. We may imagine that the public for exhibitions such as 'America Today' included families, friends and fellow workers who would have been attracted as much by the fact that they knew the photographers as by the familiar subject matter itself. That exhibition was covered by the *Daily Worker* (15 August, 1933) which reported, '[It] breathes with the fire of workers' struggles

and makes the pink-ribbon photographic salon display look like the last stage of pernicious anemia.' The majority of the work produced by worker-photographers, however, was intended for reproduction in the socialist press which was seen by the instigators of the movement as having a far wider public impact. It is significant though that the members of worker-photographer groups were often drawn from people who already had an interest in 'amateur' photography. It may be that their use of exhibitions as a means of distributing campaigning photographs arose out of their earlier experiences in 'amateur' shows.

By 1937 social-reform photography was shown in the Museum of Modern Art in New York as 'The History of Photography 1839-1937' and, by the 1950s, 'The Family of Man' exhibition at the same museum demonstrates the establishment of a new tradition of exhibitions in which social documentary photographs can be seen as 'art'.

It was a massive show meant to be a celebration of life - the good and the bad. No comment was made about the causes behind the different living conditions juxtaposed in the photographs and the only understanding that could come from the collection of pictures was that, in relation to any particular individual viewer, life is either better or worse for some than for others.



Every man beareth the whole stamp of the human condition. — Modigliani



**Family of Man exhibition: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1950. An exhibition which established the tradition of seeing social documentary photography as 'art'. While the photographers were named, the subjects or even their contexts, were not.**

In 1971 the Photographers' Gallery was opened, the first exclusively photographic gallery in Britain. One of its first exhibitions was entitled 'The Concerned Photographer', including work by photojournalists Robert Capa, David Seymour and Eugene Smith and displaying mainly photographs of war and disaster.

The show was designed to create concern among the viewing public for the areas of disaster photographed, but the images had no captions and the overall effect was to create heroes out of the well-known photographers rather than concern for the victims of violence they had photographed. The point was brought home on the opening night of the exhibition when the well-dressed viewers raised their whisky glasses to the photographers as they stood surrounded by their images of horror.

There was considerable disapproval of the Photographers' Gallery, particularly of the way photographers were hailed as 'heroes' and the fact that 'original' photographs were joining the commodity market as collectable art objects. Since its opening, however, a couple of dozen photographic galleries have been set up throughout the country, with the help of the Arts Council

and regional arts associations, either in imitation of, or in reaction against, the concepts of the Photographers' Gallery. The Side Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne is one which adopts a somewhat different policy. It concentrates on showing social documentary photography about industrial life. Most photography galleries, however, even the Side, have emphasised educating the public in art appreciation through the distribution of exhibitions of finely printed photographs and the accompanying catalogues. Until recently they did not feel it was their role to teach the basic techniques of photography.

Currently the few galleries running classes mostly stress the high-quality craftsmanship demanded by the art world. The Half Moon Gallery in London is an exception, with a policy of making technical expertise relevant to the needs of local people. Directed in the early seventies by photojournalist, Ron McCormick, the idea of the gallery was to show pictures of London's East End and other working communities in the East End environment. From small beginnings in the foyer of a community theatre their premises now provide space for a gallery, the *Camerawork* publishing project and large darkrooms.

The Half Moon policy is based on the teaching programmes of the 'community photography' projects which developed during the 1970s, to some extent in reaction to the creation of the photographic galleries. 'Community photographers' wanted to bring the possibility of producing and distributing photographs into the context of community life and so set up facilities and training opportunities in contexts which they felt were more accessible to working people.

Currently, the Half Moon Gallery is one of the main distributors of politically concerned photographs. Titles of their touring shows include 'Bringing It All Back Home' about reporting on Northern Ireland, 'Portugal: A Social Revolution', 'Women' photographed by women, 'Using Photography' about how community groups can use photographs, 'Life in the Orkneys', 'Teesside Industrial Communities' and 'Brick Lane - a Community under Attack'. Most of these exhibitions are collections of images showing the 'social reality' of particular groups of people but offering little visual analysis of that reality. Although they are available to groups involved in local campaigning to use as background information or a morale boost, there is little in the exhibitions which can prevent them from being read and consumed in much the same way as the photo-reportage in the Sunday magazines.

In the mid-1970s the Whitechapel Gallery, an East End neighbour of the Half Moon, mounted two exhibitions about the run-down area in which it is situated. These shows attempted to make documentary photographs relevant to the people in the area by choosing them as the subjects and prime audience for the photographs. Ian Berry was commissioned to produce the first exhibition giving his individual view of the area and its inhabitants. For the second, a group of three photographers were commissioned to give a variety of 'points of view' and, in an attempt to involve local people more closely, they were lent Polaroid cameras and invited to contribute their photographs alongside those of the professionals.

The intention behind these exhibitions did not include any specific concepts for social change in the area and people were left to draw their own conclusions as to why they had become the focus of so much pictorial attention. This form of 'participation' is, of course, very token. It involved no prior collective discussion or agreement about the aims behind the exhibition, or the point of view being expressed, nor any real equality between the local and 'professional' participants. Neither did the professional photographers seize the opportunity to learn about local life and needs or how they might have given support to local organisations. Far from bringing culture to the uncultured, this kind of intervention may simply be seen as a version of cultural invasion, whereby

the particular culture of the area is neutralised by the stylistic conventions of the dominant culture. While the three professional photographers used the full range of professional skills and equipment at their disposal, the local participants were sent out with cheap Polaroid cameras with fixed focus and fixed exposures. It seems that in addition to the absence of mutual teaching or learning which might have made such an exercise useful, the organisers fell in with the consumer propaganda promoted so successfully from the beginning by photographic manufacturers, that simplification is a more profitable way to sell photography than is education.

There is an intrinsic difference between this kind of local participation in a photographic exhibition where the locals use snapshot cameras while the professionals use expensive and sophisticated equipment and the kind of exhibition mounted recently by Bootle Art in Action. This group, whose work will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, have developed a project where, as in the worker-photographer movement, the teaching of photography and the production of photographs on specific themes is seen as part of a continuum which begins with collective political and social consciousness and consciousness-raising and ends with the distribution of their images through publications and exhibitions. Shortcomings of the Bootle project result not from the group's conception of photography as a means through which they can present their own views and distribute them through mass reproduction, but rather from the absence of any distributive network on the established left in Britain, which might parallel the worker-photographer publications.

Photographic exhibitions are seen by many community organisations in Britain not primarily as a means of enabling people to express themselves and come to terms with a new technology, but as a means of alerting people to subjects of immediate concern such as health or housing, and providing a focus for meetings and discussions. Yet, although such displays avoid the pitfalls of emulating art exhibitions, few of these small shows do more than repeat the old formats of black and white prints and captions. Gone is the kind of inspiration which led El Lissitzky, the Soviet artist and typographer, to plan the whole of the Soviet pavilion for the exhibition *Pressa* in Cologne in 1928. There each section of the exhibition with the theme, book, journals, newspapers and posters was designed to show off the subject matter in the most appropriate way, so that the audience walked through a whole environment of moving, printed matter. But gone, too, is the kind of backing from the organised left which might make the necessary finance available. In fact, the majority of photographic exhibitions mounted by



# BOOTLE



## A PICTORIAL STUDY OF THE DOCKLAND COMMUNITY

A COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT IN BOOTLE



socialist photographers or local community organisations today depend for their public on a combination of familiar context and content. Within this framework they campaign in shop windows, local libraries and community halls for better facilities for the disabled, better housing and more play-spaces and they 'celebrate' local streets and faces.

Almost alone among this genre of exhibition creators,\* the Hackney Flashers Collective, a group of socialist feminists, have proved that it is possible to move from the local context to the wider social and political arena without losing impact. They produced an exhibition in 1978 which not only unequivocally states their point of view about women and children but also successfully undermines dominant images and attitudes about these subjects. The visual devices used in this exhibition, 'Who's Holding the Baby?', grew out of the group's experience of their previous exhibition 'Women and Work' in which they felt their pictures 'failed to question the notion of reality rooted in appearances'. They thought 'the photographs were positive and promoted self-recognition but could not expose the complex social and economic relationships within which women's subordination is maintained' ('Three Perspectives on Photography', Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979). In 'Who's Holding the Baby?' they began to experiment with many devices to overcome these limitations: juxtaposing naturalistic photographs with media images, speech bubbles, text, cartoons, montage and graphics, in order to raise the question of class and 'connect the image of the social and economic relations that are not obvious within it' and show why a struggle for child-care facilities was necessary.

Despite the use of text in this exhibition, it is the visual material which dominates. Words are kept to a minimum with slogans and facts in large letters and short passages enlarged for easy reading. Unlike many other exhibitions where the long passages of small typescript create the impression that a book has been pasted on the walls, 'Who's Holding the Baby?' is full of visual, informative and entertaining surprises, which help to locate the meaning of the photographs.

Although the exhibition and many of the photographs were set and conceived in Hackney, they have been used all over the country in community centres, women's groups, courses and conferences. Even at its most 'prestigious' showing, as part of the Arts Council's 'Three Perspectives' exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in

\*More recently the Cockpit Gallery has begun to distribute a series of small laminated exhibitions on a wide range of social, political and feminist issues which are available for hire.

previous page: El Lissitzky, Health exhibition. Entrance to Soviet Pavilion, Dresden, 1930.

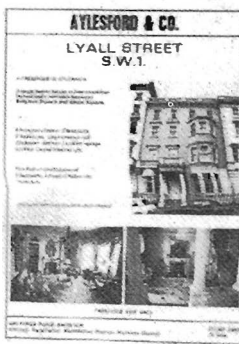
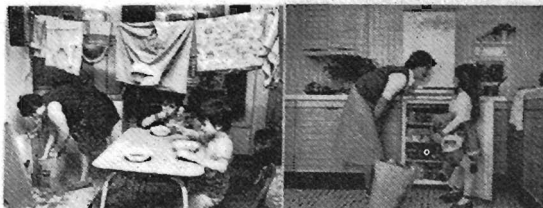
London in 1979, the don't-do-anything-but-look-atmosphere did not entirely succeed in neutralising the message of the Hackney Flashers' contribution.

Exhibitions which present a collection of photo-



3

## Who's holding the baby... and where?



Display panel and detail from 'Who's Holding the Baby?' an exhibition on childcare by the Hackney Flashers Collective, 1978.

graphs without any specific comment by the people who produce them are like archives. The value of an archive cannot be measured simply in terms of its bias or by the fact that it exists. Its potential is not realised until it is intensively researched and connections made between its different items. An archive invites this work and activity. Most exhibitions, on the other hand, suggest this work has been already done.

The tape-slide show appears to offer an advantage over the exhibition both in respect of the degree of participation it can offer at the point of distribution and because of its completely separate development from the art world.

The first projected images were paintings made on glass, projected as 'magic lantern' slides to form travelogues and stories. Slides were not made from photographs until the transparent albumen on glass photographic emulsion was developed in the late 1840s. The lantern slide was adopted by social reform photographers such as Jacob Riis, who earned a large part of his living touring the United States, giving illustrated lectures on such themes as 'The Battle with the Slum', documenting the reforms of the 1880s and 1890s, and 'Tony', about a boy who 'needed help if he was to grow up as a useful member of society'. (Jacob A. Riis, *Photographer and Citizen*, Gordon Fraser, 1975). British examples include John Galt (1863-1942), a Scotsman who worked for the London City Mission where he was 'Missionary to the London Cabmen'. He was a keen photographer and around 1893-94 took a series of photographs of life and conditions in the slums in the East End which he had made into a lantern-slide lecture. He travelled the country giving his lecture to raise funds for the mission.

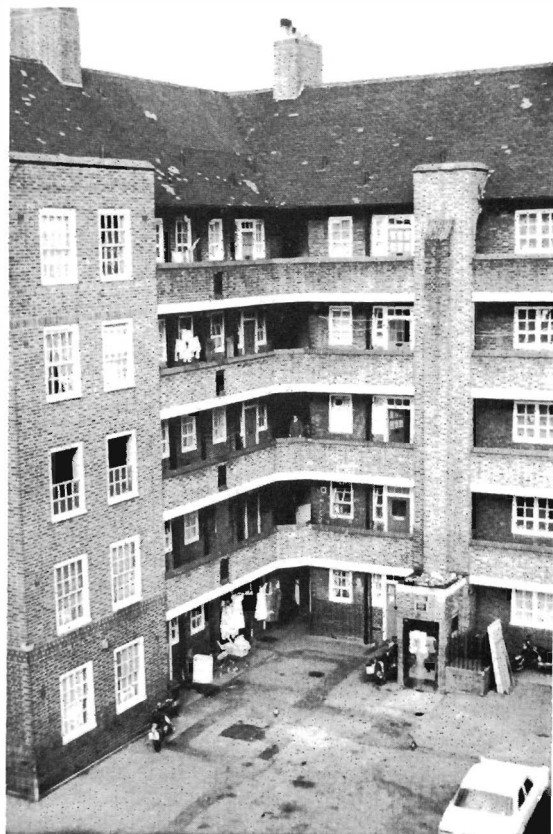
A more unusual example of the use of slides by a worker to support the struggles of his own people was that documented by the Welsh Arts Council in their exhibition 'Coal Face 1900'; the work of William Jones. In the early 1900s Jones had made a series of lantern slides to accompany his father's lectures campaigning for the formation of a Miners' Federation.

This idea of using slides of familiar subjects and contexts within a campaign is one which has been used and developed by many contemporary organisations. It was not, however, until the end of the 1950s, when high-quality colour slide film was perfected, that slides were widely used. In the 1960s this material affected a number of photographic practices. Some amateur photographic societies became less concerned about darkroom processes, which had been seen as a central element in the control of the craft of photography. And, as simpler electronic changing systems have become more cheaply available, an increasing number of local organisations involved in campaigns have bought or borrowed slide carousels



**Slide/photomontage: 'Products on the move', Paddington Printshop.**

with pulse cues to make their own tape-slide shows. They are mainly used to 'trigger' discussion. A public meeting is called. The prospect of a colourful film show helps motivate people to attend, especially if it includes pictures taken in the locality. The lights go out, everyone sees the same pictures and hears the same commentary



**Coin Street tape slide from section dealing with improvements to housing conditions on existing estates/Blackfriars Settlement Photography Project.**

together and in the same order until the whole argument is given, the lights go up and the subject of the show is discussed.

Editing a tape-slide production can be relatively simple and new material can be incorporated from time to time. The use of slides cuts out the expensive enlarging of prints and permits the cheap use of colour. Similarly it is easier to reproduce words on tape than to find a suitable printing form for an exhibition. Tape-slide locates the meaning of a photograph in the commentary and the sequencing of the image. But although sophisticated sequencing is possible, using montage or multiple projection, these methods can prove expensive and are more widely used by commerce for conferences and seminars than by community organisations. In spite of a few interesting experiments with photomontage slides, most tape-slide shows follow the social documentary convention of 'showing it like it is'.

To reach a wide public, nationally or locally, photographs must be distributed not as original prints but in reproduction. Yet, in distribution, as in education, we can be sure there is no neutrality. Most of the photographic images we see are those reproduced in the mass media, mainly in the press and to a lesser extent on television. Enzensberger rightly points out that, in its present form, media like television or radio do not serve communication but prevent it. They allow no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media', *Raids and Reconstructions*, Pluto, 1977).

What Enzensberger says of television and radio is also true of the commercial press. The photographs it uses are controlled by the editorial staff of each publication who, in the end, are only accountable to the proprietors. Editors will occasionally publish a photograph taken by one of their readers if no professional photographer was at a 'newsworthy' event, but principally they use photographers who will work to their briefs and who are in their pay. Even in the amateur photographic press, the majority of photographs are taken by professionals.

The strict division of roles between photographers and readers is highlighted in the book *Pictures on a Page - Photojournalism, Graphics and Picture Editing* by Harold Evans, ex-editor of *The Times* and the *Sunday Times*. In his preface he says: 'This is a book for the people who put pictures on pages; and for all of us who look at them in newspapers and magazines. I hope it will stimulate the professionals and entertain the ordinary reader' (Harold Evans, *Pictures on a Page*, Heinemann, 1978).

Evans's book is an informative catalogue of picture taking and editing techniques. He is interested in teaching these to 'professionals'. He

seems to think 'readers' do not or, perhaps, should not, dabble in them. We, on the other hand, are interested in the production area in which editing and distribution of photographs might be wrested from exclusively 'professional' control.

We have already seen that when photojournalists such as Philip Jones Griffiths and Eugene and Aileen Smith wish to 'control' the use of pictures they are sometimes driven to producing their own publications. These photographers managed to get the co-operation of commercial publishers on their own terms. For the most part, however, alternative and left groups who wish to distribute images and text, unmediated by the commercial press, have to publish them independently. These groups and their publications fall into two broad categories, those who can afford to own large presses or to use commercial printers and those which depend on small non-commercial presses.

PAPER OF THE BANK AND FILE TO THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

ISSUE 18 MARCH/APRIL 1981

# Building Worker

## AT LAST: FIGHTBACK STARTS

RESISTING THE LATTER PART OF THE...  
GENTLE SOUL...  
ONLY THE START...  
GARDNER'S BOMBERS...  
COUNTRY HALL...  
BELL MEAT

### COSTAIN LAMBETH

PHOTOGRAPH BY TAYLOR-POWELL

## TAYLOR-POWELL

PHOTOGRAPH BY TAYLOR-POWELL

From *Building Worker*. A 'good' example of the boring use of photography by small presses.

Among the publications which fall into the first category are magazines like the *Leveller* and *Spare Rib* produced by independent collectives; newspapers like the *Morning Star*, *Socialist Worker*, *Newsline* and *Tribune* published by parties on the left; and the journals of the trade unions. The *Leveller* has a circulation of 21,000, the *Morning Star* 60,000, and *Newsline* something







visible', to present reality from more than one point of view so that the public can make connections between different aspects of experience and come to see and understand the exploitation and power relations which characterise our social conditions. Then real events are not simply reproduced to illustrate a writer's point, but are relayed, as visual material, juxtaposed with the choices they represent in life itself.

Experiments in how to juxtapose elements of reality within photographic images began in the 1920s. John Heartfield developed the medium of photomontage, the creation of composite images from different photographs and text. This is more fully discussed later in this chapter in the section on posters. The worker-photographers sent pairs of photographs, picture sequences and photo-essays to the workers' press. The photographic library Dephot was set up in Germany in 1929 with the idea of producing sequences of images where single photos were inadequate to describe a complex social, economic or political issue. As Robert Golden pointed out, some of today's left publications have renewed their interest in such techniques. The challenge is to develop them further, bearing in mind that images that try to reveal the complex nature of class relations,

racism or sexism are in competition with simplistic but stunning advertising photographs. The present commercial trend is to use the currency of feminism within commercial advertising as in the chocolate advertisement on TV. 'She's too liberated to be bought After Eight' is a good example of the recuperation of radical ideology through clever marketing psychology.

This trend can, in turn, be re-reversed.



Walter Ballhause, worker-photographer: S. A. patrols.



Walter Ballhause, worker-photographer: Boys from the grammar school.

# A day in the life of 'PICTURE POST'



Here comes "Picture Post" through the letter-box. It's a funny thing but young Tony is generally down early on a Wednesday and he's on to it like a flash.



Tony can't read all "Picture Post" before breakfast. But this morning he's lucky — Dad has a letter from the Income Tax which demands his undivided attention. For once, he goes off to town without his copy of "Picture Post."



Mother finds the "Picture Post" when she's dusting. Over her eleven o'clock cup of tea, she has a good dip into it — almost forgets the time.



After lunch, Dora the maid finds it. She dreams over it, while the washing-up water gets cold.



Daphne gets home from her A.R.P. duty and she's in a hot bath, reading "Picture Post," as fast as she can make it.



Daphne leaves "Picture Post" in the bathroom. The plumber who's come in to put new washers on the taps reads it during his tea break.



Dad arrives home and after dinner he makes himself thoroughly comfortable for an hour with "Picture Post."



Dad's gone to the Home Guard — and taken "Picture Post" with him. His corporal is very glad he did. He says when you're on all night, you want something to read.



And there in the guardroom we leave "Picture Post." It's going to start a new cycle of life tomorrow. It will be going on for months to come — you never see "Picture Post" thrown away.

Read **PICTURE POST** in comfort — order it at home  
MULTON'S NATIONAL WEEKLY

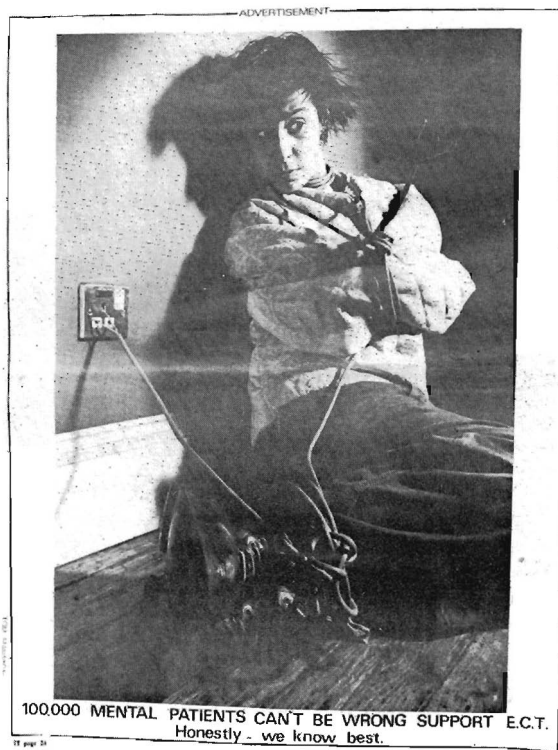
*International Times* is an alternative newspaper, which when first published in the 1960s regularly drew on advertising conventions to make a clear statement of opinion. Their stock in trade, like advertising, was the set-up photograph. Sometimes made to fill the whole of one of their tabloid-size pages, the message was blatantly humorous or sarcastic, a rare technique in the aligned left publications. In fact there are some serious lessons to be learned from this humorous genre. Although it is true, of course, that the 'set-up' photograph fixes the evidence, so-called 'candid' shots are often just as carefully constructed. The idea of the 'set-up' press photograph can be viewed in two ways: that it allows the subject(s) some control and participation in the published image; and that it offers the possibility, so seldom exploited by the photographed, of taking control of the image by presenting the photographer with a specific view of the subject. On demonstrations, for example, marchers often 'ham it up' to get the attention of the photographers or take extra care that their placards face the cameras to increase the chance of the messages on them being recorded and published. Generally, however, demonstrators hold as 'conservative' views about visual communications as do the photographers and publishers. Photographs are better exploited if they record a consciously constructed message, but few marchers pay much attention to 'dressing' the march for the cameras. Models of cruise missiles, coffins and blow-up whales are about as far as people go to catch attention.

*Private Eye's* right-wing radical style of humour offers another example of a way in which the meaning of a published image can be controlled. It takes the photographs used by the mass media and transforms their meaning by changing the caption or adding comments in cartoon bubbles pasted on the pictures. (This technique not only expresses an opinion but may help to undermine the credibility of mass media news pictures.)

The fanzines (magazines) produced during the late 1970s and early 1980s by groups of punks also benefited from an anarchic attitude to the use of other people's words and pictures. Photographs were lifted from other publications, cut up, pasted down and scribbled over or matched with text. There was no pretence that photographs should show the world the way it is. They were used to express the way the producers of the fanzines saw themselves and their world.

Magazines like the feminist publication *Spare Rib*, which have a collective decision-making structure, encourage their photographers and readers to directly influence photographic policy.

previous page: *Picture Post* later adopted the picture series technique.



***International Times* (IT). The 'set-up' photo—a mock-up advertisement.**

*Spare Rib* specifically responded to criticisms about its use of photographs, drawings and design by setting aside one of its issues as a special 'visual' number. They are keen to use readers' photographs and cartoons. The general look of the magazine has improved since the special issue, but photographs are still used to illustrate or decorate an article, rather than make a thought-provoking statement about feminism.

This sort of publication is just one stratum of left and alternative publishing. The other is made up of the hundreds of newspapers, newsheets, reports and leaflets published by small groups and printed on presses owned by local political party branches, union branches, community centres, community print shops, community arts projects, students' unions and charities. Many are produced by photocopying, by far the simplest, although not the cheapest or most versatile way of reproducing images and text. The new table-top machines are simple to use, designed for the 'typing pool'. They print good-quality type and line image but find solid blacks and photographs more difficult. The more sophisticated of these machines can now reproduce colour and this has led to groups launching colour productions using Polaroid photographs montaged with typescript. But a great



Rats demo for better housing in Paddington—dressed for the press photographs by Paddington Printshop.

many organisations still reproduce photographs on electronic stencils and duplicators.

Access to photographic reproduction at a popular level has, like the taking of photographs, been the subject of the 'logical' controls of the manufacturers. For example, during the 1960s the photographic-based system of litho printing began to replace the more craft-based, slower and more expensive letterpress system. Photographs were expensive to reproduce by letterpress because a cumbersome copper half-tone 'block' had to be made of each one and skilfully set in a frame with the heavy metal type. In litho, a 'screened' photograph (i.e. a half-tone converted to a series of dots) can be pasted down on paper along with the type. Pictures and words are then photographed together to produce a negative the same size as the page. A thin aluminium printing plate is made from this negative ready to put on the press.

At the high end of this technology there are the huge, speedy, colour continuous presses, while at the lower end the small black and white presses have begun to come on to the second-hand market, and to be picked up by local organisations to print their own material. For a relatively low outlay it is possible to obtain a second-hand A4 press, which can be operated with very little instruction, and on these machines it is reasonably easy to

print readable text but more problematic to get good reproduction of photographs.

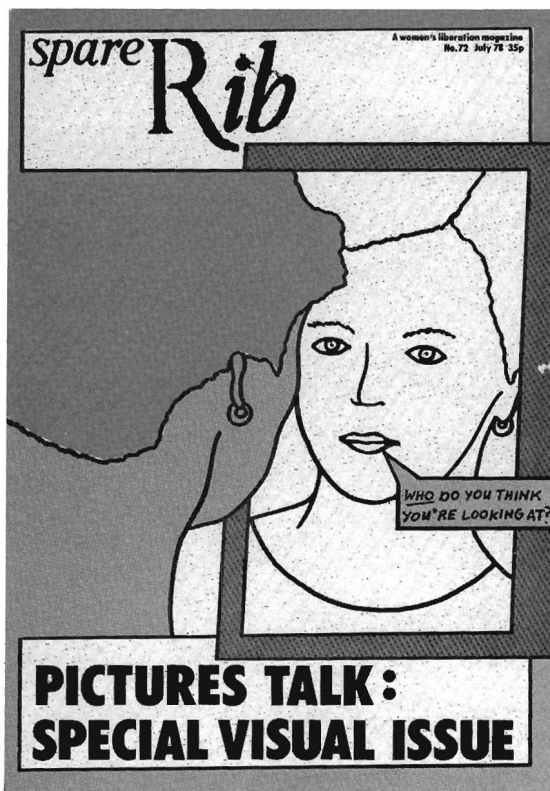
Despite these difficulties and the virtually indecipherable images that sometimes result, a high proportion of local publications printed by the left on small presses include some photographs. Their photographic policies, however, are essentially the same as those of the larger circulation left press, rooted in a conservative view of visual communication. Like the larger publications they lack a clear socialist photographic policy.

The most common photographic 'fault' is that small images are used, reminiscent of those in family snapshot albums and often taken from a great distance away from the subject. In response to this criticism a photographer of one local alternative paper explained that he didn't want to seem to intrude on his subjects 'like professional press photographers do'. At the same time he felt that it was important for the publication's relationship to the community to include as many local faces as possible (however distant). The fact that some community press photographers feel they may be regarded as 'intruding' highlights one of the problems many small publications find in trying to 'democratise' the production process. They hope that normally 'passive' readers will

become journalists, photographers, editors, designers, printers and distributors. In fact the structures of these publications mostly drift towards more conventional models because so few people come forward to help. Within the production group things may be done collectively, with everyone sharing the jobs and editing decisions, but with few submissions of articles or photographs from outside, this collectiveness does not generally spread into the rest of the community. The originators end up having to act as reporters about people and events and, while they may identify closely with some of these, they inevitably find themselves reproducing the professional relationships of reporters and subjects. Even in those localities where there are 'community photography' projects, few local non-commercial publications have what could be called an efficient system of local photographic correspondents. A policy of using local photographic subject matter in these papers is designed to help the community look at itself and identify with the issues which affect it directly, but here too, there are inherent limitations. For the local community to get a perspective on its issues, photographs taken elsewhere can be useful to put local concerns in a national perspective. In theory the local publications could use the same agencies as the national left press do. (These agencies offer a very reasonable sliding scale of publication fees.) In theory they could get low-cost photographs from other local publications. In practice there is still no network for this.

It may be said, in general, that the community press has little notion of exploiting the visual background, the visual comparison or the visual future. If there is a photograph of someone who is exploited in some way, it tends not to show who is exploiting them and how. It is the same with a call for improvements in the environment. They tend to concentrate on problems and effects rather than causes and alternatives.

The printed poster is one of the most obvious and versatile means for publishing and distributing images. Since the second world war, advertising posters, both commercial and cultural, have used fewer and fewer words as they have appropriated the realist and surrealist language of photography. By contrast, the development of the language of photography in the poster committed to non-commercial interests and social change in Britain appears to lag behind in the analysis of the use of purely visual symbolism. This section will examine the economic and production roles behind non-commercial poster-making and the development of the use of photography in a number of specific poster workshops. How does the political climate in Britain affect the development of photography and a radical practice in



*Spare Rib*: taking special care with images.

poster-making? And, most important, how does access to the technology and technical literacy affect popular participation in the creation and distribution of imagery in this form?

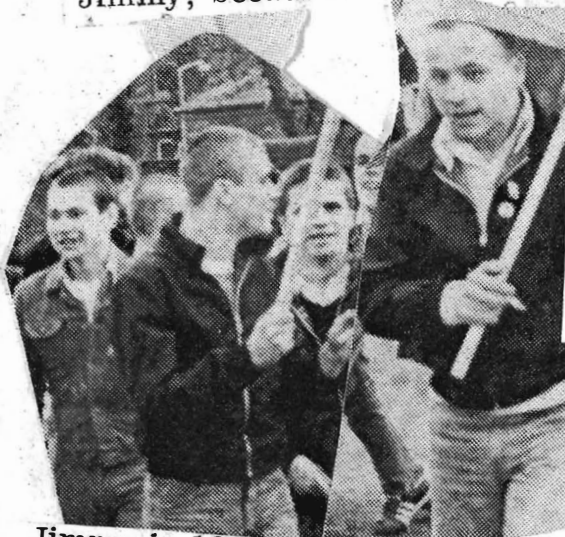
Non-commercial posters in Britain today are generated from two broad sources: national agencies – charities and campaigns – and the smaller presses and design collectives established by community and radical groups.

Looking at the use of photography in posters for national political, social and charitable campaigns, it is clear that these posters use a genre and a language developed and made familiar to the public through advertising. The famous Snowdon photographs for the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign showing children in wheelchairs with the hand-written captions, 'He'd love to walk away from this poster too', relate directly to a whole series of commercial posters depicting children, facing the camera, with direct messages in a childish hand. They are epitomised by the photographs of small children with the hand-written slogan 'Beanz meanz Heinz'. The Shelter campaign posters for the homeless and the War on Want and Oxfam posters for the starving are designed to work in stark black and white opposition to the lush full colour claims of those advertising consumer durables. And, like those



PICTURES - VIRGINIA TURBETT

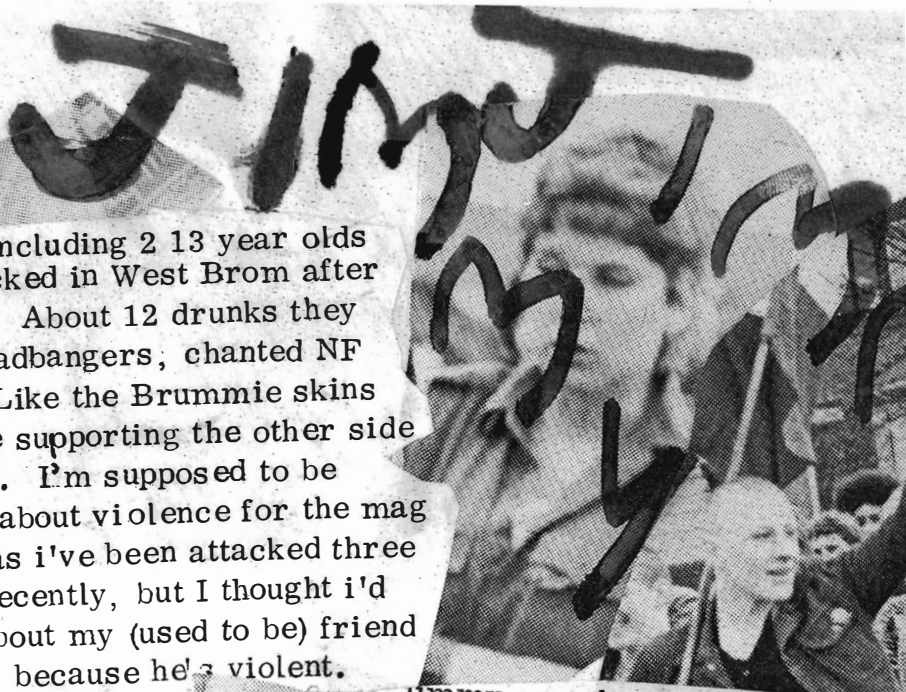
5 of us including 2 13 year olds got attacked in West Brom after a demo. About 12 drunks they were headbangers, chanted NF at us. Like the Brummie skins we were supporting the other side that day. I'm supposed to be writing about violence for the mag seeing as i've been attacked three times recently, but I thought i'd write about my (used to be) friend Jimmy, because he's violent.



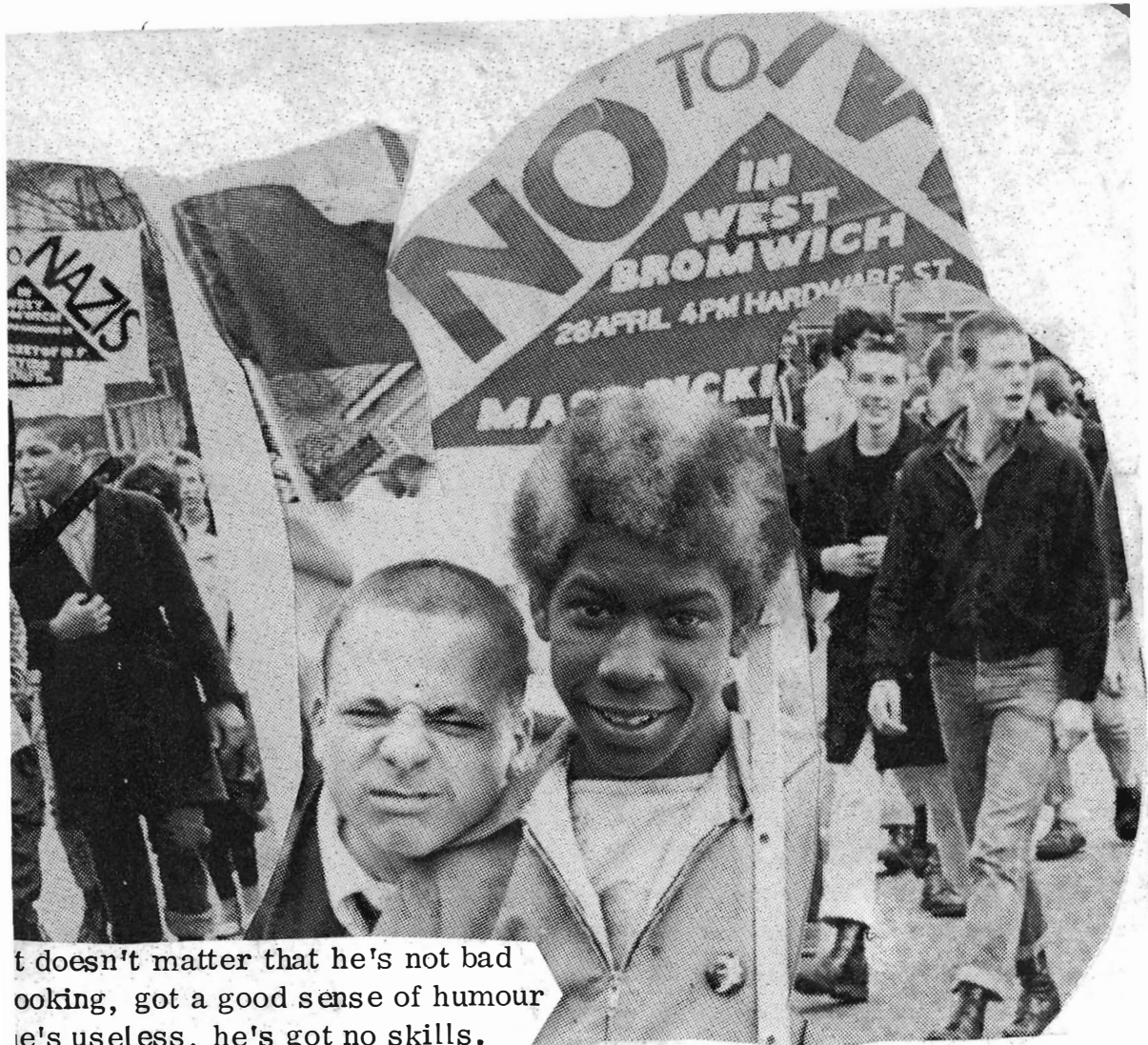
Jimmy says he doesn't like them. He's got NF T-shirts and badges. He's got Union Jacks on his walls and a poster with NIGGER on it. Jimmy's British-he's not a member of the NF, but ne thinks they're hard. He doesn't know much else about them except they say 'wogs out'. Thats good enough for him.

Jimmy is 19 and he's been out of work most of the time since he came out of Borstal. He's done D.C. for assaulting the police and the borstal whack was for theft. He took food, money for clothes, cars for joyrides. But saturday football aggro isn't enough for Jimmy any more. He's got a new hobby. He jumps blacks and gives + a good kicking.

He says he might have a job if he send the blacks back. After all it's hard to admit to yourself that you can't get a job because you've got a record, because you can hardly read and write and anyway you won't work 40 hours for £20 a week take home pay. To the rest of the world, Jimmy is a failure.





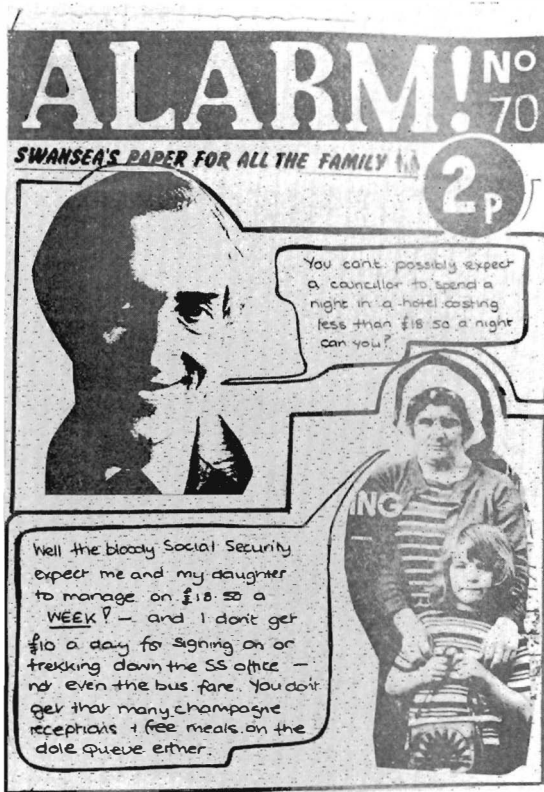


It doesn't matter that he's not bad looking, got a good sense of humour he's useless, he's got no skills. He doesn't count and he knows it. He's angry, to the council, he's a scandal, they hate him because he treats our houses like the shit they are. His mother doesn't know what to do with him, the cops would like to arrest him even if it's only for pissing up against the wall, after all Jimmy's a trouble maker with a capital T! He feels inferior

but as long as there's NF putting it about that blacks are the cause of Jimmy's problems then he can kick at the world by kicking the blacks. He can pretend he's not bottom of the heap and as long as the blacks keep fighting back, Jimmy can always say that the blacks started it.

The police will probably get Jimmy again. Next time it'll be jail. What will you do when your'e 30 Jimmy, ? But do the NF care? He's served his purpose and there are plenty more where Jimmy came from !





*Alarm*, a community newspaper, makes points cheaply and effectively on its front cover, using xerox and recycling other people's photographs. By using pictures which have already appeared in the commercial press, *Alarm* may educate its readers towards a more critical viewing of mainline press images.

photographs used in the commercial advertising sector, they are presented as 'evidence' of specific 'reality'. The most significant exceptions to this form of charitable-aid advertising can be found in some of the posters produced by Christian Aid and others among the more radical members of the World Council of Churches. They show positive images of the Third World, accompanied by captions or other photographs which question Western attitudes and Western complicity in Third World poverty.

Historically, there have been perhaps three major design innovations in the production of the socially or politically committed poster, which have challenged the familiar realist and surrealist forms of imagery used in commercial advertising. The first is photomontage developed initially by El Lissitzky in his posters for the Russian revolution and John Heartfield in his work against

*previous page*: layout produced by the Guttersnipe Collective.



Muscular Dystrophy poster: photo given by Lord Snowdon.



Anti-Vietnam war poster by Karen and Ronald Bowen. Montage based on 1945 Rosenthal photograph of US troops planting the Stars and Stripes.

Fotomontage: John Heartfield

# AIIZ

WILLST DU  
RÜSTUNGS-AUFTRÄGE,  
SO FINANZIERE  
FRIEDENSKONFERENZEN



CHOR DER RÜSTUNGSINDUSTRIE:

»EIN FESTE BURG IST UNSER GENÈVE«

Fascism in support of the German Communist Party and the Spanish Republican government. Both artists owe a debt to the Bauhaus Dadaists who used real objects within the frame of their pictures – inviting viewers to transpose the real and surreal.

El Lissitzky and Heartfield broke away from the idea of 'reality' and 'evidence' in their photomontages and instead juxtaposed contrasting images which left the viewer with the 'role' of making a decision. This form was taken up by others, as for instance, in the US anti-Vietnam war poster that re-used the famous 1945 Rosenthal photograph of soldiers planting the stars and stripes at Iwo Jima (replacing the banner with a peace rose), in which the photomontage poses the viewer the problem of making a *choice* between two or more 'realities' possible. The authors of this poster were Karen and Ronald Bowan. The style was later adopted by others including notably Klaus Staeck in West Germany.

The May 1968 Revolution in Paris produced a second innovation in the hand-drawn posters designed with speed and wit (owing something to both the Polish and the earlier Russian agitprop poster traditions) and conveying a sense of immediate reaction to the immediate present. These posters were produced by a variety of anonymous hands from the Atelier Populaire in the occupied premises of the school of Beaux Arts. The third innovation emerged in the richly coloured Cuban revolutionary posters. The strong colours and simple forms of these images reflect the American graphics training of many artists involved and a synthesis with Cuban political culture.

It is relevant to note here Enzensberger's criticism of the 'craft' hand presses adopted by the students to print the posters during the May 1968 manifestations. Why, he asks, did they not 'carry out agitation among the workers in modern offset'? He marvels at the archaic romanticism of these revolutionaries. 'It was not the radio headquarters that were seized by the rebels, but the Odeon Theatre, steeped in tradition' (*Constituents of a Theory of the Media*). Had such mass production methods for printing been adopted in either Paris or Cuba both the issues and the images might have received more immediate world-wide distribution. As it is, OSPAAL (The Organisation of Solidarity with Asia, Africa and Latin America) and COR (The Commission for Revolutionary Action), in Cuba, currently produce only on offset litho and in very large editions, but during the 1960s the most remembered images

*previous page*: John Heartfield, cover for *AIZ*. 'If you want to sell arms, finance peace conferences. Chorus of the armaments industry: Geneva is our creed, God and strength.'

of revolutionary Cuba at the time were the photo-poster of Che Guevara wearing a red beret and the photograph of the dead Che Guevara, published by the CIA. Strangely, both images of Guevara are reminiscent of images of Christ. The first, alive with the beret, resembles medieval portraits of Christ with a halo, the second, as John Berger pointed out, that of the dead Christ by the Renaissance painter, Mantegna. Strong, beautiful, political and romantic and locally relevant though the hand-pressed images of revolution may be – they cannot compete, in the broader context, with the actuality of the electronically transmitted photograph.

The problem of distribution is made more complex by a vicious circle which is determined by both economics and the nature and expectation of left imagery. In Britain today consensus politics does not encourage the mass production or the mass consumption of socially or politically analytical visual material. The most obvious reason for this is the appropriation by the established left of the aesthetic codes of the established right. There is no socialist policy for the arts in Britain today and therefore no signifi-



'Castrate all libertines, Vote Christian', Edition Staeck, 1972. A conscious allusion to a 1936 Heartfield poster, showing Hitler sharpening his knife over a white cock symbolising France – with the caption: 'Don't be afraid – He's vegetarian.'

OUI  
usines  
OCCUPEES

A hand-drawn silk-screen poster featuring the word 'OUI' in large, bold, black letters at the top. Below it, the words 'usines' and 'OCCUPEES' are written in white, blocky letters on a dark, textured background that resembles a stylized factory or industrial structure. The overall style is graphic and expressive, characteristic of 1960s political posters.

'Yes. Occupy the factories'. A hand-drawn silk-screen poster produced by the Atelier Populaire in Paris 1968.





Photograph of Che Guevara, killed in Bolivia, distributed world-wide by the CIA.

cant support for the development of a socialist aesthetic.

Artists and workers wishing to express socialist ideas in visual form may even do better to apply to the Arts Council of Great Britain for subsidy, interest and support than to the Labour Party, the Communist Party, or the TUC. This context is quite dissimilar to the polarised climate of John Heartfield's Germany in the 1930s or even to that of Klaus Staeck today, who has access to the distribution network of the German Social Democratic Party.

The photojournalism of both *Lilliput* and *Picture Post* in the late thirties and early forties were certainly influenced by European photographers in the use of series of images and photomontage but, even when Britain was living through its most dramatic exposure to the effects of Fascism and war, society here remained largely untouched by the climate of artistic innovation and polarisation which led to the widespread distribution of radical visual and literary work in the rest of Europe. It is significant that during John

Heartfield's considerable stay in Hampstead as a refugee from Nazi Germany, he was employed and exhibited in London only a very few times and then at the commercial Arcade gallery. The incisive visual language of his photomontage had no touchstone of popular political consciousness upon which to play in Britain.

Today, in Britain, we must look to the unofficial organs, the community and non-commercial poster presses, to find some degree of follow-up to the leads of the rest of Europe, America and the Third World in the development of the radical use of photography in posters aimed to support social change.

In poster-making, as in other areas of production, both cost and production relationships have a direct bearing on the nature of the end product. Looking at the development of the image in community and non-commercial poster-making in Britain, it is important to examine the intentions behind specific production relationships. In this field the forms of intentions can vary from a 'community arts' philosophy of creating social



cohesiveness and identity around the process of the collective discussions; to making the design and printing process accessible and offering technical literacy; or to one entirely centred on 'the product'. It is as necessary now as it was in the 1930s to examine the notion of transforming at source the ways in which ideas are conveyed and in doing so, not only to take charge of the means of production, but to transform the context and climate in which production takes place.

In the early days of community printshops and resource centres (the mid-1970s) the intention was to develop the collective creative process by responding to local needs for posters in a way that would involve local people in the creation of images. The major role of these printshops became, in this sense, a responsive service, based on the intention of building from local needs towards a collective expression of those needs. And, right from the beginning, cost and simplification played a part in limiting the use of photography in favour of hand-drawn images and stencils in community projects.

Alongside the service role of community resource, a more directly interventionist and politically didactic poster-making practice was developed both by some resource print workers and by poster-makers with a more specifically political brief; but here, too, photography played only a

marginal role. In many smaller projects there was a lack both of process cameras and of the expertise necessary for the use of photographs in conjunction with their silkscreen or offset litho presses. Nevertheless, we must ask what has been the principal impediment to using the photograph in the left's poster-making practice, in general? (It is important, perhaps, to distinguish here between photographs in the sense that we are speaking about photography in this book, as images made with a camera, and the photographic process as it can be used in printing. In printing, the photographic process can mean the transmission of an image - print itself, a line drawing, or a photograph - on to a sensitive chemical. Many small printshops, which do not own a process camera, use this system to transfer drawn images, print and photographs on to silkscreen, but the end result will be a line image. This method cannot produce either a black and white tone image or a naturalistic colour representation.) The fact that few non-commercial posters use photographs creates a qualitative difference which is clearly visible between the world they represent and that represented in commercial posters.

There are economic constraints on the use of photographs in the non-commercial sector. At the same time there was unfortunately no back-up from the organised left for the community in-

# Why even Benn doesn't have the answer

**Paul Foot** gave out...  
**Tony Benn** is offering the machinery which failed before... an elected Labour government!

**'People who have property will not let go of any of it - without the most ferocious battle'**

**Benn speaks with a messianic fervour which shines up, strongly against the dull clichés of Labour's leadership.**

**'Flickering candles of industrial resistance to the government... have to be protected and fanned into flame'**

**'The struggle for socialism is most effectively fought by the working people... with industrial power'**

**Pictures John Sturrock (Network)**

initiatives. No collaboration was forthcoming in setting up a distribution network which might have made investment in training and technology viable. As a result there has been as little intensive discussion of the use of photographic images in the context of the community-interest poster as, for instance, in locally distributed newspapers and newsheets.

Manufacturers have seen access to the printed image in terms of much the same kind of market logic as did the manufacturers of camera equipment. The technology was simplified and made easily available where large markets could be quickly exploited, as in the field of office equipment where new and 'better' models of simple-to-operate offset photocopiers are advertised in colour magazines and on TV like new models of motor cars. On the other side of the market, more complicated machines were developed and sold, along with training, to suit specific types of commercial publication: those which also played a major part in the cycle of the upper end of the market economy.

The lack of local access to full colour production for non-commercial posters, a sophisticated and labour saving means of mass image production, relates to both the initial investment and to the distribution outlets. As a result there is little incentive to set up workshops where technical literacy in these processes might need to be developed.

Few non-commercial printshops or poster collectives could contemplate setting themselves up with full colour poster-sized (minimum A3) offset litho presses. Such machines demand almost continuous use to justify the initial capital outlay and the wages of a printer to maintain them in running order. Although silkscreen printing is more labour intensive it works out cheaper in relation to the smaller print runs usually produced by the non-commercial sector. For the East London Health Group and the Film and Poster Collective, who attempt (with, so far, only limited success) a wider distribution of their images through co-operation with national agencies and unions, it is sometimes feasible to put out offset litho four-colour printing to a commercial printer prepared to co-operate and do it on the cheap. A 'commercial' rate for a four-colour print run can vary enormously in different parts of the country but it will always arrive at a price which, without adequate guarantees of distribution and recoupment, is impossible for most community and local political and campaigning organisations to contemplate.

In addition to considerations of cost, political climate and production relations, there are those of quality. The Film and Poster Collective in London make the point that, print-run considerations apart, they choose to use the silk-

screen process because of the greater impact and colour intensity it offers over large flat areas. Although they sometimes put large print orders out to offset litho printers, they feel that the resulting quality of colour intensity was poorer. For them this consideration outweighs the advantage of finer screen and better detail definition offered by the offset process. As a result they use black and white photographs – or drawings from photographs – which are better suited to the silkscreen process.

In cases of large editions produced by the collective, such as the ZANU and Zimbabwean Liberation series (print run 4,000), where the total print runs exceeded the capabilities of silkscreen, smaller sets are silkscreened before the offset litho editions are put out to a printing firm. The result of their preference for silkscreen is inevitably a 'product image' – an ideology – which sets their posters apart from the large, 'realistic' photographs with whose philosophy they compete on the public wall.

In examining the different processes used by radical and local resource printshops in relation to cost, it is important to understand the internal economic organisation of such groups. It should not, for instance, be assumed that the cost of a poster necessarily includes an economic wage for the producer. The wages of Paddington Printshop and the designers of the Some Girls group whose work will be discussed in this section are met by their local regional arts associations. The Film and Poster Collective, working and living as a collective, have developed what they call a 'zero' economy, living and working in rent-free squatted accommodation, offering each other mutual economic support where possible and ploughing money from poster sales back to buy materials and additional equipment. Thus the production costs of their British education series on sexism and imperialism, designed for distribution in schools and educational establishments and sold at £10 for twelve posters, do not include more than a cursory recognition of the many hours of research and discussion that went into the project.

Does freedom from the constraints of 'cost-effectiveness' in terms of production hours, if not in more traditional machine terms, hold back the non-commercial poster workshops from developing a more sophisticated and varied analysis of the use of photographic images in posters? In other words is it possible that the 'otherness' of their life and work economies affects their relationships with, and choice of, 'clients'? Certainly, the stylistic development of groups, such as Grapus, the French graphics collective, who receive neither grants nor welfare, and must be cost effective, even in their relations with the most sympathetic clients, reflects the use of much higher technology, and a more 'commercial'

approach. In this connection let us look again at the two principal differences in the production relationships described above within the context of non-commercial community-interest poster workshops in Britain. Most of the work of such groups as Lenthall Road Workshop in Hackney, Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust in Southwark, the Islington Bus Company and, with certain exceptions, that of Paddington Printshop and Telford Community Arts Printshop consists in offering a resource for local community groups to design and print their own posters with help and supervision from the printshop workers. Groups such as the Film and Poster Collective, Women in Print, See Red, the East London Health Group, some of the work of Some Girls and one or two individual poster-makers, however, see themselves principally as taking an interventionist role in relation to specific issues. It is possible to combine these roles.

The Film and Poster Collective have passed from an interventionist beginning when, around 1968, individual members were influenced by the anti-Vietnam war movement and began producing posters in support of demonstrations and for specific issues such as the Industrial Relations Act, to a stage when they saw themselves principally as providing a resource for the local community and, full circle, back to initiating the interventionist posters that they are producing today.

In the early days of the anti-war posters the style of the collective was influenced first by the minimalist trends around in art schools that stemmed from 1960s' paintings, and then by the simple patterns and strong colours of the Cuban and Chilean revolutionary posters.

Later the group moved to Tolmers Square, one of the most famous London squats. There they ran a print resource, servicing the squatters' movement and building contacts with a large number of British activist and Third World liberation groups. They worked with silkscreen but had no process camera and used the Slade School of Art for photographic work. During this period the production relationships with 'client' groups varied from those where the poster collective designed and printed the posters, to those where members of groups would go along to help with layout and the printing process and become seriously involved in the technology of print.

After the great Tolmers Square squat was lost, the Film and Poster Collective was established at its base in the Euston Road. From here they have consolidated their work and decided upon a more positively 'interventionist' role, working with specifically activist groups and with Third World campaigns. With the latter groups in particular, they try to make the point of passing on the printing techniques. In the long term they

see the local production of posters as the only satisfactory way of overcoming distribution problems in Third World countries.

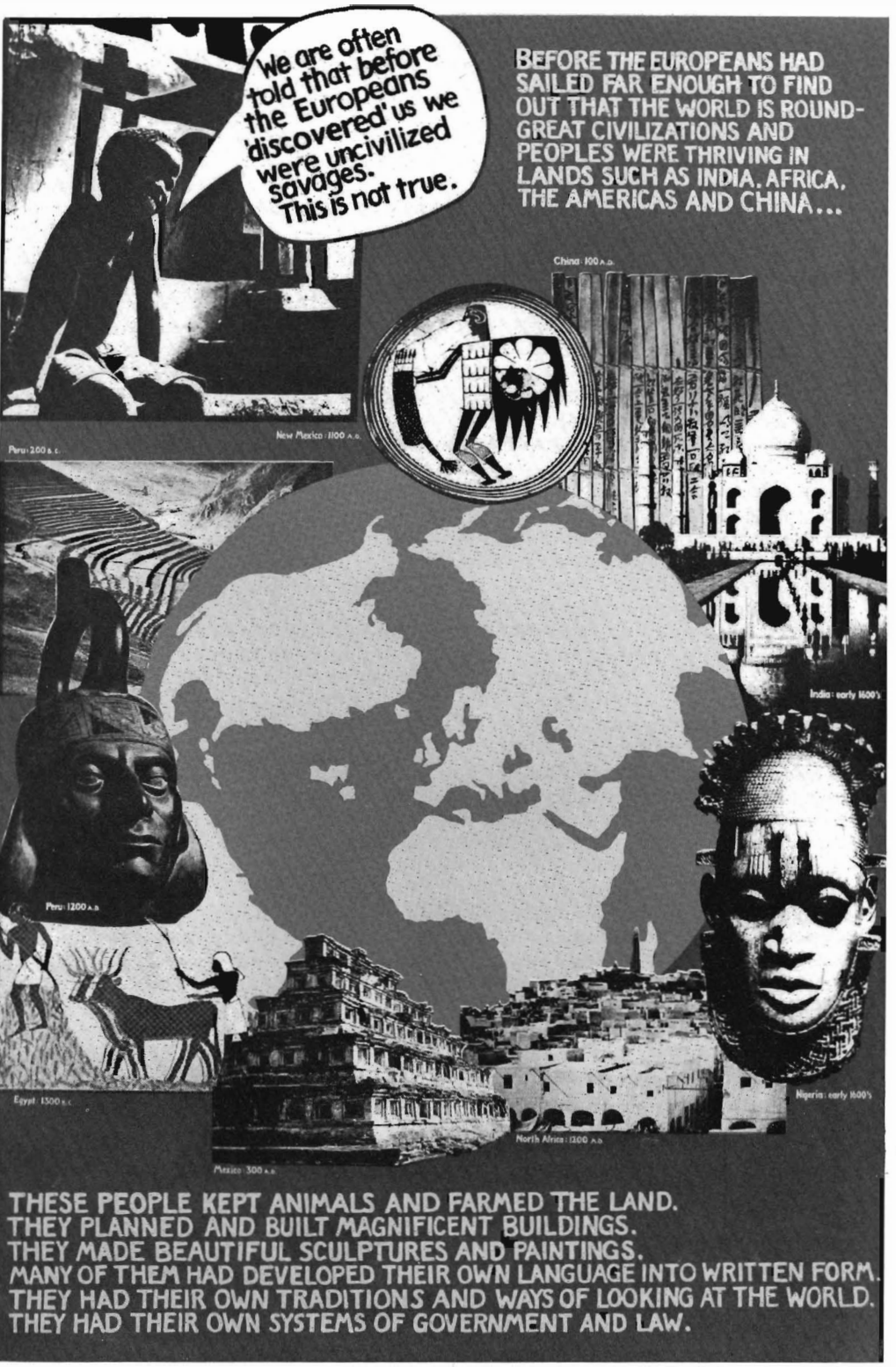
At present, only one-tenth of the collective's posters for such campaigns as the Eritrean or ZANU groups are actually distributed abroad. The bulk of these productions remain in this country and are distributed by students and others as consciousness-raising and informational material. Distribution in the Third World is expensive and local production is seen as being the best way to resolve the problem.

The central initiative of the collective's poster work at present concentrates on sexist and imperialist attitudes in Britain. One series ('Whose World Is Our World?') deals with imperialist attitudes to the Third World peoples and another with feminist issues. Both these projects were researched collectively by the poster-makers and groups of London teachers.

In 'Whose World Is Our World?', words and pictures are juxtaposed, posing the viewer choices in a similar way to other photomontages, but there is considerably more verbal information than in a Heartfield or Staeck poster. The main theme of these twelve posters is the perseverance of imperialist attitudes towards black people in Britain and the false premises on which these attitudes are based. It is a theme that has been used in some charity campaigns such as War on Want and Christian Aid, but with a less specific age range as the target.

The Film and Poster Collective posters look at the insidious post-imperialist myths that give support to modern-day racism in a manner that relates the world and the conversations that children experience outside school to the material they will be studying in the classroom.

The appearance of the posters is remarkably unlike the colour display posters and charts produced for classroom walls by such publications as Pictorial Education (Evans Press). The Film and Poster Collectives say that they have feedback from the schools indicating that kids recognise their posters as relating more to popular cultural material on the streets than to the traditional formality of most educational material. Nevertheless, this appreciation may, on one level, reflect Enzensberger's criticism about the hand-made image of the agitational poster. The silkscreened photographs resemble woodcuts in their texture and feel. The counter argument to be deduced from Enzensberger's critique is that colour offset litho would have changed the quality and quite possibly made the message more powerful by drawing direct comparisons with commercially produced material. The collective and teachers involved in 'Whose World Is Our World?' tried to overcome this barrier by approaching racism from a historic perspective, using old and sometimes



We are often told that before the Europeans 'discovered' us we were uncivilized savages. This is not true.

BEFORE THE EUROPEANS HAD SAILED FAR ENOUGH TO FIND OUT THAT THE WORLD IS ROUND- GREAT CIVILIZATIONS AND PEOPLES WERE THRIVING IN LANDS SUCH AS INDIA, AFRICA, THE AMERICAS AND CHINA...

Peru: 200 B.C.

New Mexico: 1100 A.D.

China: 100 A.D.

India: early 1600's

Peru: 1200 A.D.

Egypt: 1500 B.C.

Nigeria: early 1600's

Mexico: 300 A.D.

North Africa: 1200 A.D.

THESE PEOPLE KEPT ANIMALS AND FARMED THE LAND. THEY PLANNED AND BUILT MAGNIFICENT BUILDINGS. THEY MADE BEAUTIFUL SCULPTURES AND PAINTINGS. MANY OF THEM HAD DEVELOPED THEIR OWN LANGUAGE INTO WRITTEN FORM. THEY HAD THEIR OWN TRADITIONS AND WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD. THEY HAD THEIR OWN SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT AND LAW.

From 'Whose World is Tomorrow's World?' a poster series on imperialism for schools, produced with teachers by Film and Poster Collective, London. (silk-screen)



# Two's company

These pictures show people working in pairs. The bobsleigh riders work as a pair. The front man steers, the back one pushes the sleigh off to a good start. A two-handed saw makes felling a huge tree easier. The sisters in the picture below have been painting together for over 50 years. They often paint horses. One paints the back, the other the front half.

Lots of sports and games need partners. You can see some of them on this page. Can you make a list of others for yourself? Can you name any famous pairs of people in dance, sport or the theatre? What are these couples famous for: Fonteyn and Nureyev, Laurel and Hardy, Starsky and Hutch?

'Two's Company' from *Pictorial Education*, Evans Press, a visual aids pull out paper for schools.

well-known historic prints and photographs in juxtaposition with modern ones and words that attempt to explain the two views of the world. Certainly there are some misleading oversimplifications of issues in the series, as in the poster dealing with India and the British exploitation of raw materials, where a modern-day Indian woman is given the balloon caption, 'Today, people think of India as a poor country . . . but before the British conquered it my country was a land of great wealth.' One could add, 'for the few'. In fact, most of the information avoids this kind of exaggeration.

The series, while perhaps not fully resolving the technical problems of reproduction, has defined and focused on a valuable means of operation for the non-commercial poster-maker. For by maintaining a collective basis for production (through discussion and research with the teachers' group) it has also used this collective pool of study and understanding of complex issues to deal, in terms of content, with a finely balanced critique of current issues and to feed this back to the communities (namely schools) to which the teachers relate. In other words the posters set out not to act as propaganda but rather to build, through the choices they offer, on what the

production collective felt to be a common (but seldom articulated) set of experiences and feelings. They demonstrate to those who have experienced racism – or in the case of the second series, sexism – that they are not alone. The principle adopted by the production groups was precisely that the posters should respond to ideas, thoughts and feelings that were already in existence, to support and clarify a legitimate position against dominant centre opinion. It is an effort which fell short of their aims because of their failure to engage in the politics of mass production and mass distribution.

If we compare the use of photomontage by Heartfield and Staack with this work by the Film and Poster Collective or that of the East London Health Group who use an even greater amount of text in relation to the images, the problem posed by the British context in the use and development of socialist photographic imagery in posters and consequently in participation in mass distribution of imagery becomes more concrete.

Heartfield used his imagery and brief captions to expose the political differences of his day between a Nazi ideology and the marxist view of the world which he himself supported. His critical



DIE FREIHEIT KÄMPFT IN IHREN REIHEN

John Heartfield: 'Liberty herself fights in their ranks', 1936. Heartfield uses Delacroix's 'Liberty leading the people', 1831, to legitimise the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

1936 poster predicting the German invasion of France, 'Don't be afraid - he's vegetarian' in which Germany is personalised as Hitler as a butcher, while France is represented by a cockerel, is opposed by his optimistic photomontage based on Delacroix's painting, which Heartfield captions, 'Liberty herself fights in their ranks'. He positions himself as an optimistic supporter of the working class, while at the same time offering them an alternative ideological perspective.

Why is it that British poster-makers resort to so many more words than was necessary in these Heartfield examples? The problem, put crudely, is that popular cultural symbolism has become at one level more generalised and more generally appropriated by commercial advertising, while at another it is almost too specific. Structural visual analysis exists as an almost exclusively intellectual activity within the confines of universities and polytechnics (see Chapter 4). It is an activity which in most people's lives is under the daily seductive and anaesthetising bombardment of the mass media. The reluctance of the left in Britain to take a positive attitude towards the creation of a visual language expressive of its views amounts to what is virtually a philosophy of iconoclasm.

Meanwhile in Britain (with the notable exception of the popularly adopted walls of Northern Ireland), 'the public wall' yells out slogans for better beds, sexier films and luxury travel, using imagery designed to appeal to generalised social trends, such as female emancipation (by using the popular myth of, for instance, the liberated woman, to sell such commodities as underwear, 'Underneath they're all loveable', or chocolates) while addressing an image of the British as a one class (that is, middle class) society. Specific popular class images have been generalised into popular commercial myth so often as to be almost impotent. In advertising, the poverty of the northern weaving towns is shown to have been as wholesome as Hovis bread, while present-day industrial labour is only represented by shiny finished consumer durables or romantic flash-backs to stereotype images of the past. Those class images not yet used to advertise bacon or a new brand of shirts by commercial poster-makers risk proving ambiguous or unreadable out of their more localised cultural context.

This is not only true of Britain but of most of Western Europe. Yet it is a point which critics from the left are often reluctant to admit. In a comparative critique of the photomontage work of John Heartfield and Klaus Staeck, published in *Camerawork* (Sylvia Gohl and David Evans, 'Political Photomontage', in *Camerawork*, no. 20) for instance, the authors lament the fact that Staeck does not apparently design images that demonstrate a positive commitment to the contemporary socialist working class. Staeck's images, they say, while attacking the Christian Democrat Party and comparing their policies to the rise of Nazism, unlike Heartfield's thirties' work, offer no positive socialist alternative. Yet the authors fail to discuss the fact that at present in modern West Germany, as in Britain, there is no immediate solution to the creation of a broadly accessible positive socialist imagery (as opposed to a defensive or attacking one).

Yet progress towards popular participation in the creation, as opposed to simply the consumption of imagery, has taken some positive, if painstaking steps forward in the last decade. The three following examples from the work of poster-makers in Britain bring different perspectives to a solution.

Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn work as members of the East London Health Group and produce posters that make extensive use of both photomontage and text and are distributed nationally through the Health Service unions. They are clear about the collaborative structure of the group. The print series are part of the process of sharing information between working people with first-hand experience of the Health Service and hospitals and research groups such as Radical



Statistics, Politics of Health, Science for People and activist groups. As designers, Leeson and Dunn are left largely to their own devices as far as synthesis of the information and visual decisions are concerned. They discuss rough drafts and designs and would never go to print without majority approval. While they see their roles within the group specifically as designers, they are particularly concerned with the collaborative structure which provides the sources and checks for their work.

They emphasise that 'cultural practice is not political practice, cultural struggle is not political struggle – they are dialectically linked but they are not the same'. Their point is that while the discourse of art may be dominated by bourgeois values, it also has its own 'internal' traditions, rules and conventions of material practice which have evolved through different historical periods, other societies and practical human endeavour. This practice, they point out, cannot be wholly reduced by the pervading ideology of capitalist society. 'There is a *relative autonomy* in the cultural sphere which we ignore at our peril.' In fact, they say, to do so can lead to an inversion of the whole basis of a socialist cultural practice – 'a stylistic stalinism'.

The membership of the East London Health Group has broadened out and developed from a campaign to fight the closure of the Bethnal Green Hospital. The posters that relate to this first and essentially local issue bear few words and use images such as the façade of the hospital with simple slogans, 'Keep it open'. Both image and slogan were entirely accessible in the local context where the posters were used.

The aims of the East London Health Group developed from this experience. From the local starting point they looked for a poster form through which specific lessons about health and the politics of the cuts, learnt from the Bethnal Green Hospital campaign, could be generalised and made available nationally.

In a national context, they argue, these types of images would become polysemous and could no longer be interpreted by a simple slogan. The context for the new series of posters would be the waiting rooms of health centres and hospitals and the offices and laboratories of health workers all over the country. In these places people would have the time to read a certain amount of text and it was decided to produce posters using the image to attract the viewer to read the text. They hoped gradually to raise the level of visual literacy by ensuring that the images are not ambiguous.

In the poster showing the relationship between multinational capital and the pressure on doctors to prescribe drugs to patients, the photomontage of a besuited line-up of 'capitalists' passing banknotes beside a castle constructed of brightly

*next page: Passing the Buck*  
**The Transfer Price Game**

1. Take a product like Valium (original price £20 per kilo)
2. Pass it through your subsidiaries, preferably using tax havens
3. Raise the price substantially at each transfer
4. But ensure final transaction only shows a 'reasonable profit'
5. Sell your product to the NHS at £370 per kilo
6. Collect 1,890% profit, avoiding DHSS scrutiny on excessive profit

**OBJECT:** to prove your firm 'operates and may be expected to operate against the public interest' (Monopolies Commission report on Roche's activities)

**Third World Game**

1. Take an untried drug like injectable steroid contraceptives
2. Get 'consent' for testing from illiterate or low income groups
3. Usual test groups: 75% black, 25% coloured – no whites!
4. If drug works, sell expensively in developed countries
5. If not, or too many side effects, sell to third world
6. If dangerous, do not release test results – hush it up

**OBJECT:** to maximise profits at lowest possible outlay whilst maintaining a reputation for high standards of safety.

**Control Game**

1. Ensure that drug companies are not nationalised
2. Send each GP 1 cwt of advertising per month, plus lots of 'free gifts'
3. Ensure doctors prescribe by brand name, not by generic name
4. Maintain and exploit patent rights as long as possible
5. Only list possible side effects if required by law
6. Keep all your activities as secret as possible

**OBJECT: TO PUT GREED BEFORE NEED**  
 – Winner takes all

**Photomontage:** Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, A2 full colour poster for East London Health Project of Tower Hamlets and Hackney Trades Councils.

# ***PASSING THE BUCK***

games for multinational drug companies





THE NATIONAL HEALTH

*you can  
if you let*

1973 Tories cut £111 million.

1974 Labour promise expansion

– they restore £47m then later  
make a further cut of £75 m.

1975 Initial projection for 1980s does

not indicate any expansion of the NHS  
– revised figure for 1978-9 represents a cut  
of £152 m over the original plan.

1976 White paper projects 20 % cut in capital  
expenditure by 1980 – they cut £20m more.



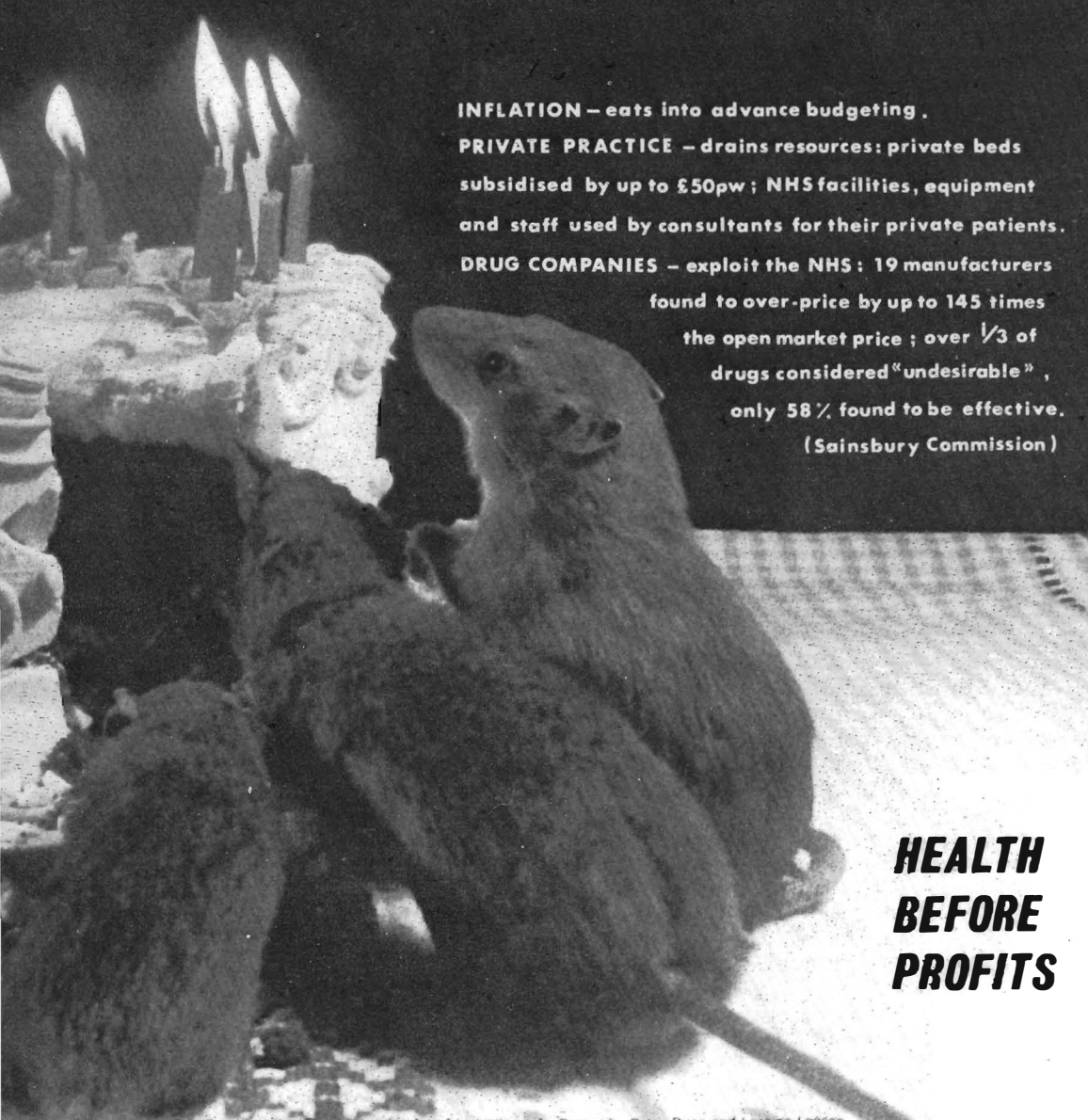
Published by the East London Health Project of Tower Hamlets and Hackney Trades Councils, 20 Whitechapel Lane, London E1 1BB. Supported by NALGO and RHEA.

Rats eating the birthday cake. Photomontage: Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, A2 full colour poster for the



ALREADY THIRTY YEARS ON . . . .

**have it  
them eat it**



**INFLATION** – eats into advance budgeting .  
**PRIVATE PRACTICE** – drains resources: private beds subsidised by up to £50pw; NHS facilities, equipment and staff used by consultants for their private patients.  
**DRUG COMPANIES** – exploit the NHS: 19 manufacturers found to over-price by up to 145 times the open market price; over 1/3 of drugs considered “undesirable”, only 58% found to be effective.  
(Sainsbury Commission)

**HEALTH  
BEFORE  
PROFITS**

inspired by Tower Hamlets Arts Committee and Greater London Arts Association. Design by Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson

London Health Project of Tower Hamlets and Hackney Trades Councils.



# Underneath they're all Lovable

## In Gigi

**'Underneath they're all lovable'. A double recuperation of popular politics, first by the advertiser and then by Paddington Printshop in their photomontage slide**

coloured pills is theatrical and intriguing, while the text explains and expands the issues. The image, like others in the series, becomes more accessible and meaningful once the text has been read. The combination of image and text has the effect of raising the viewer's consciousness both to the interpretation of the purely visual language of the image and to the issue, while ensuring that there is no ambiguity.

Both Paddington Printshop in London and the Some Girls project in Shropshire are currently examining the same problem of visual ambiguity in relation to socially and politically positive imagery together with networks and contexts through which published images can be distributed. Some Girls, like the Film and Poster Collective, produced the majority of their earlier posters on silkscreen and photographs appeared in black and white with an occasional flash of colour.

By 1980-81 Some Girls and members of a 'girls at risk' research project began to produce a series of photo-posters. The series deals with the social and economic pressures experienced by teenage girls. Using some photomontage, the posters had na-

tional appeal and the National Association of Youth Clubs financed a print run of 500 and took over distribution. They were produced on silkscreen by a commercial printer. The workers deliberately chose silkscreen because of the brilliance of its flat colour, but the photographs suffer both because of this medium and from the fact that they are clearly not fully integrated into the colour design of the posters.

As a result of this experience, the Some Girls project began a re-examination, both of their methods of production and their means of distribution. The researchers realised that many of the pressures imposed by wider distribution had interfered with the acquisition of visual literacy and the development of a design and printing process which would be fully accessible to the young women in the group. (This process is fully discussed in Chapter 4.) In spite of the success of the original poster run in terms of the acceptability of the images among the national network of youth clubs, the Some Girls group did not feel that the processes involved had met the needs of the young women by enabling them to fully participate and to express their own ideas.





Some Girls posters. Based on research by Leah Thorn and Carola Adams and designed by Graham Peet and Jonnie Turpie in collaboration with Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group. Published by the National Association of Youth Clubs.

The Some Girls group now view their objectives differently from the East London Health Group, where the aim has been to involve the group of health work specialists in discussions with the designers and in the promotion of the national distribution of the posters, but not in the production process itself. Although initially their ideas were to use local girls as a sounding board for the designs, the Some Girls group came to feel that a gap existed between the designers' interpretation of the girls' ideas and the kind of images the girls themselves would produce if they were fully in control of the technical means of production and distribution. This reassessment of their processes of production, which is more fully discussed in Chapter 4, has led to a great deal of experimentation with offset litho and design layouts which use images and lettering in the actual sizes of the final product. At the same time the group became aware that the time-scale over which any one product should be completed must be shorter where young people are concerned, if the relevance of the subject matter to the producers is to be maintained.

The examples of the East London Health Group and the Some Girls group point to the flexibility of approach necessary and the process of mutual

learning, if the needs of people of different backgrounds and ages are to be met.

Since the mid-1970s Paddington Printshop have also aimed to produce posters with and for people in their immediate neighbourhood. Their priority is to involve people in the process of production and, in doing so, to encourage a closer examination of the issues around which the posters are being used. The printshop workers are involved in a pedagogical process which involves them in learning as well as teaching.

Individuals and community organisations approach the printshop with their poster needs and they are helped to produce the artwork and to print the final product. The principle of using a photographic image as a means of enabling people to overcome the barrier presented by the need to produce drawings is being questioned by the printshop workers, very much in the same spirit that we have questioned the limitations imposed on the control of the camera by Eastman's desire to educate through simplification. John Phillips from Paddington Printshop explained that he sometimes felt that photography had become a technological crutch for human skills and that he had begun to run regular Saturday morning drawing classes for printshop users. He ap-

proached these classes with a series of questions, using Pentels, pencils and pens to provoke reflection about how space can be depicted, how colour relates to emotions and so on.

But the semiological analysis of the image does not consist in trying to reduce everything to one single code, since in this area it is patently obvious that there are any number of codes intersecting each other. Thus in drawing, of whatever kind, elements of a code, or codes, appear at the level of the graphic style itself, and in the features which the artist chooses to portray. In photography such elements are less evident, because they are as it were built into the way the camera operates; but there are levels at which they become manifest, for instance in the choice of angle, focus, etc. (Oliver Burgelin, 'Structural Analysis and Mass Communication' in *Sociology of Mass Communications*, Penguin, 1972)

Phillips's thoughts, implying a return to hand-craft skills, are apparently in opposition to those expressed by Enzensberger at the beginning of this chapter. He sees the dangers of the pressure to produce slick, good-looking posters which will fit in with the traditional aesthetic criteria of the grant-giving agencies, and which can result in

loading 'high quality standards on to local communities rather than allowing people to produce at their own rate'.

'Community artists are becoming so self-important that instead of having the voice of the masses, they may well be inhibiting it,' he says. He emphasises the philosophy of Paulo Freire:

Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality they seek to transform. Only through such praxis – in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously – can help become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Writers and Readers, 1978)

The problem that Phillips has defined, that of imposing a technical method which blocks visual literacy, is born out by the printshop's experience while producing a poster with local immigrants from the West Indian island of Dominica to advertise their island's independence celebrations in London. The poster had been requested by a local independence organisation and was produced in the printshop by a group of London



see previous caption

COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA  
INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

GALA DANCE  
+ CABARET



ARRAWAKS  
MOONROCKS  
BAND  
MERRYMAKERS  
SOUND

ART  
EXHIBITION

AT COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE  
Kensington High Street  
SATURDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 1980  
7.00pm ~ TICKETS £3.75  
~ 1.00am 510 Harrow Road

Transport Workers from Dominica. The all-white printshop workers set out to make the whole production experience as pleasant and as straightforward as possible. They set aside time to help with the layout and a wide selection of photographic images were collected from which to choose the one to use on the poster. The Dominicans themselves were working on shifts on the buses and had limited time for discussions on design before embarking on laying out and printing the final product.

In their anxiety to make the poster eye-catching and successful the printshop workers encouraged the Dominicans to select a single strong image of a dancer taken at the previous year's Notting Hill Carnival by a white photographer. The final design involved two lay-ups and two screens showing a background palm tree, the lettering and the image of the dancer. In retrospect the printshop workers could not be sure whether the Dominicans, using the photographic silkscreen process for the first time, had been clear what the end result would look like. However, at the time the print workers' priority had been to get out a good-looking design which the Dominicans would print themselves using the printshop's facilities.

The questions the printshop workers now pose themselves are how much their white-cultured, design-oriented priorities dominated the coding and therefore the impact of that poster on the Dominican community at which it was aimed.

How does the image of the dancer relate to Dominican concepts of their own culture? The printshop workers had felt that a single figure had more impact than a group image. Significantly though, Dominicans see 'celebration' and indeed performance, as a collective act. The notion of picking out an individual performer is alien to their view of themselves. The written information on the poster similarly reflects not Dominican language or priorities, but rather the priorities and design training of the printshop workers themselves.

The priority of the printshop had been to involve the Dominicans in the physical production process, designing and printing the posters (twice each, using the two separate layouts). John Phillips now feels that the time might have been better spent encouraging them to find their own imagery and text.

Paddington Printshop rightly insist that a first step to mass participation in mass communication is through visual literacy and participation in the creation of visual codes.

Are Freire's and Enzensberger's views of the technology of self-representation really so far apart? It seems from the kind of experience related above that unless community print is to remain within the bounds of the hand-press, it is essential to look both for suitable means of production by which more popular involvement in the creation of imagery is possible and to ensure that the means of production chosen has the backing of a network by which the images can be distributed. The problem of popular access to print and to self-representation, let alone the development of a popular left iconography, is inextricably bound up with the relationship of producers to supportive distribution networks.

The central discussions produced by Freire and Enzensberger are those upon which the present and future discovery and development of modes of self-representation by those so far excluded from active participation in official, mainstream communications networks, is hinged.

It was Marshall McLuhan who wrote: 'Nobody can commit photography alone.' A catchy phrase. And it is true that the process of *taking* a photograph generally involves at least the tacit acknowledgement of others. Viewing it, with freakishly rare exceptions, must also involve other people. But access to the means of production does not implicitly include any collective control, let alone popular access to the means of publication and distribution. If photography is to become a tool which can be committed to popular interest, all these areas of 'control' must be investigated and unravelled.

The photograph, far from representing reality, represents a separation from the real world by offering an image of it. Yet the world, in many senses, is reassured by the photograph, from photojournalism to advertising and the travel snapshot. A woman says to her husband (on the BBC television documentary series 'Great Train Journeys'), as he insists that instead of reading a magazine she should look at the magnificent views of the Andes, 'It's all right dear, I'll see the snaps when we get back home.'

*previous page:* Poster for Dominica independence celebrations in London, using atypical image of single dancer. Dominican workers with Paddington Printshop (silk-screen).

*next page:* Image used for adult literacy teaching, showing a familiar scene of a peasant potter. Paulo Freire.



### 3. Community organising and photography

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The 'community' has become a confusingly fluctuating and ambiguous term. To some, 'community' is nostalgia, an attempt to resurrect 'merry England', dancing round the maypole and all the common folk having a sit-down together. Since the sixties the term has also had the sense of the locational base of struggles outside the workplace. For others, the community is simply where we live, the streets in which we have a nodding acquaintanceship with shop keepers, where our children have friends, where we adults can visit half a dozen houses, borrow a cup of sugar and call the pub 'our local'.

The history of community organising in this country can be traced back to the rent strikes co-ordinated by militant trade unions through the National Unemployed Workers' Movement in 1915 and, later, in the 1930s. The rebirth of a militant community movement in the early 1960s was less closely related to the traditional labour organisations and owed more to the cellular structure of the women's movement and to the popularity among students and the left bourgeoisie first of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and then the anti-Vietnam war movement, with their public marches and rallies.

Community action arose from a political analysis which saw that the left organisations, the Labour Party, the Communist Party and the unions were ignoring rights issues which affected the population at home, such as play facilities, squatters' rights, maintenance problems in rented accommodation, the right to fuel (campaign against rising fuel bills) and more lately the campaign against the anti-abortion bill and the anti-racist campaigns. Early on in the more recent history of community organising, these political action groups gained confidence from the civil rights and anti-poverty movements in the USA and later from the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations.

Since the 1960s, many of the techniques of community organising have been adopted by the state as the easiest and most efficient methods of certain areas of administration. (Community Health Councils and Community Development Projects were set up by the Wilson government in the 1960s and the Six Inner Cities Project and the Urban Deprivation Unit by Heath in the 1970s.)

'Community photography' in this country has links with the history of 'socially concerned' photography referred to in Chapter 2 as well as

with community organising. But 'community photography' projects are almost totally dependent on state grants and, like so many other voluntary movements apparently serving the interests of non-work-bound struggle by working people, vulnerable to either recuperation by the state or to becoming a casualty of the cuts.

This is not to say that the state works with the sinister intent of using community darkrooms as a subliminal distributor of state ideology, but simply that where community photography has gained an independent, organisational identity, such organisations can easily find themselves receiving state subsidy to fulfil roles of community service, which hard economic times have forced the local authority to cut – youth work, community work, play facilities, traditional education. It is appropriation of the same sort that many tenants' associations have suffered, coming to act as a buffer between residents and the local authority and undertaking work which the council would otherwise have to do. As the authors of *Community or Class Struggle?* make clear in their introduction:

Community organising, then, can easily establish groups which negate their own attacks on the State, either by making good the State's failure to provide resources (by providing their own play-groups, community centres and so on) or by making bureaucracy more efficient as when they clarify some need through action which the State could never do (by campaigns for maintenance on estates, parent-teacher organisations etc.) (John Cowley, Adah Kaye, Marjorie Mayo and Mike Thompson, *Community or Class Struggle?*, Stage 1, 1977)

On the other hand, there is the 'something is better than nothing' philosophy. The argument here is that in a capitalist society there is some value in all community activity and that even those projects that are low on political analysis are giving people the experience of working together in a creative way and that this will form the basis of a more politically literate society in the future.

In this chapter we look at the structures through which 'community photography' is organised in this country, bearing in mind the basic objective that Jo Spence of Photography Workshop defines:



It is important that women (and men) understand the ideological process by which their class identity is constructed.

An important concern of all teaching and learning about 'visual literacy' should therefore be with undermining the ways in which dominant forms of visual representation reduce complex issues and relationships to a few 'recognisable' aspects which appear to constitute an acceptable totality. ('Class and Gender in Images of Women', *Screen Education*, 78/79, no. 29)

But we must begin by asking why local communities should need photography at all and how they can use it?

The snapshot is the most familiar form of photography over which all of us can apparently exercise immediate control. I know one octogenarian who has a complete album of family snaps from which she has consistently removed her own head! Snapshots demonstrate people's ideal views of their own identity. They record births, growing children, family parties, holidays, marriages and important family events, but not funerals, family rows or domestic accidents. The snapshot is the recorded memory of the good times, how life should be, produced by the people who will later own the albums. (And if, as with my old friend, they don't want to see themselves in the picture, they are free to take a pair of scissors and still enjoy looking at the rest of the family.)

Normally the only time people hire a photographer in their private, domestic lives is to take passport photographs or formal portraits of individuals or family groups - most usually weddings. Nevertheless, photographers are constantly looking for new markets. For example there is a growing business in the portraiture of family pets and the 'tasteful' photography of pregnant women.

In the organised more public charity or community group context, that is, where the photograph is published and distributed outside commercial contexts, there is a different attitude to 'negative' and 'positive' images. The photographic range is extended consciously to present either a negative or a positive image. There is now some discrepancy, for example, between the negative images which are today seen as unacceptable for British home-bound charities and those that are currently used by aid agencies to raise money for the Third World. The British child welfare agency Dr Barnardo's in an advertisement soliciting funds on behalf of homeless children told the story of a three-year-old girl and her sad fate, but showed only the black and white silhouette of a small girl, with the caption: 'Our children's identities are never revealed so as to spare publicity.' Such concern for the distress caused by

## How much would you pay to give a lost little girl a start in life?

Susie (that's not her real name) attends one of the special day care centres we run for children whose future is at risk. As little as £2 could help her.

She is 3½, the child of a broken marriage, with a violent father. When first she came to us, she was so lost and disturbed, she wouldn't speak and didn't even know how to play.

Now, she's beginning to talk and smile, she enjoys painting, and she's building up confidence in herself so that as she gets older, she may be able to relate properly to others.

Susie's tragic story is typical. Little children like her, defenceless, bewildered products of our confused society are the ones most likely to end up delinquent, making a mess of their own lives, and their own children's lives in turn.

At Dr Barnardo's, we run day care centres with trained and dedicated helpers for these children. And, of course, we run residential homes and schools for children - but we are always concerned to try and keep children and parents together. Our help has no limits, but our money does. Skilled help like this costs a lot - though in the end it can not only give Susie a start in life, but also save society a great deal in later years.

Won't you send what you can afford today? For only £2 you can buy



Our children's identities are never revealed so as to spare distressing publicity.

a set of paints. For £10 we can buy a sand-tray - and little aids like this help so much. For £100 we can feed a child for a whole year at the centre. Everything helps. And it helps even more if you convenient to pay regularly. That way we can claim back tax, so every £1 you give is worth £1.43. Not a penny is wasted, because we are very careful with the money we get, and many fine helpers do voluntary work for us.

Please send what you can to me, Nicholas Lowe, Appeals Director, Room 710, Dr Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG.

 **Dr Barnardo's**

### Dr Barnardo's appeal for funds protect the identity of the subjects.

publicity, showing almost pornographic suffering, is not extended by many fund-raising agencies for Third World peoples. The posters of such agencies as Save the Children and Oxfam still pull on the purse strings by appealing to the pity of those presented as the helpless victims of misfortune. There is seldom any reference to the relationship between Western and Third World economies; cause and effect. Nor is there any attempt to show people in the developing world working on their own behalf. By contrast, community action groups, working on their own patch in this country, often use more apparently positive images. The publicity photographs produced for the annual report of a typical voluntary project working with old people will show the elderly doing a 'knees-up' at a Christmas party or happily playing bingo. Here, too, however, the message is that the elderly themselves are the passive receivers of the well-being provided by others. It is still comparatively rare to find an annual report where the agency, instead of using a photograph of old people enjoying what the organisation has provided in the way of entertainment, are shown campaigning on their own behalf. It is generally thought to be more appealing to show an old couple happily playing cards together than marching with placards to claim an increase in



can currently expect to find: tenants' and residents' associations, housing associations and co-operatives, play action groups, play groups, community nurseries, youth clubs, adventure playgrounds, planning groups, pensioners' action groups, women's groups, women's refuges, community newspaper groups, squatting groups, community transport systems, alternative education centres, community law centres, welfare rights and information centres, sports federations, claimants' unions, community festival societies, environmental groups, community arts groups, single parents' organisations, food co-ops, work co-ops, unemployed union groups, literacy groups, school and community associations and anti-racist groups.

It will not be possible to examine the use made of photography in all these contexts in this chapter, but I will attempt to analyse the principal issues behind the development of what is known as 'community photography', to define some of the anomalies, and to look at the political perspectives involved.

The ideal form for community development and learning to take is surely that in which a group of people initiate the process using outside technical help to meet needs they themselves have defined. If the objectives of 'community photography' were

to promote mass participation in the mass media, there could be no better starting point than a group of people seeking to extend their photographic skills to their neighbours, setting up a darkroom for their collective use and attempting to relate the production of images to their publication and distribution. Such examples are certainly rare but they do provide optimistic working models.

An almost accidental encounter with community arts as a result of producing a community association newspaper in Bootle in 1977 led to the establishment of Bootle Art in Action in the summer of 1978. While working as their community association's voluntary newspaper group, Margaret Pinnington, Alan Parry and Les Edge had set up a photography project with Bill Dolce, a local photographer, and together with other residents in the area they produced a booklet with photographs and text about the run-down area of Liverpool in which they live. The book, *Bootle - a Pictorial Study of the Dockland Community*, with words by Mary Brennan, a local housewife studying sociology, enraged local councillors in the Sefton Authority. The Bootle group's idea had been to use images taken by residents to inform local authorities about the conditions in which their children were growing up; but if the producers had ever been in doubt about the power of the published image, the next few months were to be a lesson in the politics of publishing.

The booklet was distributed by the Bootle Play Action Council who sent it to all Sefton councillors, county councillors, local authority departments, head teachers and the local clergy. The accompanying letter asked them to join with voluntary groups to set up a joint working party to 'look in depth at the problems of Bootle and seek together to bring about improvements'.

It was this request, in addition, we must suppose, to the fact that a group of local people had dared to publish a well-illustrated assessment of their own environment and living conditions, which caused the chief executive officer of Sefton Council, Mr John McElroy, to send a directive to all chief officers: 'Under no circumstances should any officer reply to or acknowledge this letter or in any way offer co-operation or information to this organisation.'

A battle followed in which Sefton successfully fought for the withdrawal of the small Merseyside Arts Association grant to Bootle Art in Action and the group mounted a nation-wide appeal asking for support to win it back. The Bootle group ultimately received the money but there has been no joint working party with Sefton Council and no move to improve local conditions.

The boarded-up house to which the project moved in 1979 from its original base in Margaret Pinnington's maisonette is a hive of activity



Old age pensioners taking up the cudgels on their own behalf. From the Gulbenkian Foundation's annual report, 1981. Photo: Caro Webb.



**Art in Action: Kids on Hornby Road by Thomas Flynn (aged 15).**

where local people now know that they can produce documents and exhibitions that will take their ideas and views to people and communities outside Bootle. The darkrooms are run on an appointment system and are used by about 50 people a week, with an age range from 10 to 70. As Bill Dolce, the photographer who has helped teach the group photography, explains in their second pamphlet, *Art in Action*, published in 1980:

When you are working with people you begin to understand what they require, what their needs are and how they see their photography. Some advance quicker than others. Some aren't interested in taking too many giant steps forward or in putting a lot of expressive feeling into the work. You have to learn to understand the individuals and groups using the project. Many youngsters start off taking pictures of their mums and dads, friends and neighbours and the derelict buildings surrounding the area (the bombdies as the kids call them). They are now becoming more determined in what they photograph. I have to listen carefully to understand what they are after and try to provide the techniques they require. We

also get involved in group activity when everyone contributes on a particular theme and we all work together on its production.

In 1981 they were applying for an Arts Council grant to tour their current exhibition. Discussions during the selection of prints for the show had been long and heated and highly critical, involving all the contributors over several afternoons and evenings, but Alan Parry made it clear that none of them saw the money or the exhibition as any form of status symbol or entrée into the art world: 'We'll use the money to hire a bus. We'll take everyone down to London.' (The exhibition was to have its first showing at the Inner London Education Authority's Cockpit Gallery.) 'We'll take kids down who've never been there. We know that no matter how many grants we get it's never going to change our lives – or Bootle – but it does mean we can share our ideas and achievements with other communities.'

When I visited Bootle Art in Action in 1981 I found the house filled with creative community activists from three of the most economically and environmentally hard-hit cities of Britain –

Liverpool, Glasgow and Belfast. It was six months before the Brixton and Toxteth riots. Sefton Council, far from responding to the peaceful representations by Bootle Art in Action, had banned them from holding exhibitions in any local-authority-owned building.

Les Edge, who worked at Ford, was on strike when one of the few exhibitions held in the Bootle area, outside the small gallery in the house itself, went up in a local college. He went along to watch people's reactions: 'One woman was carrying on saying it was disgusting. I thought at first she meant the photographs, but no, she meant how we live. She saw the bad conditions around her every day, but it was brought home to her by the photographs.'

Edge's comments underline the special quality of the Bootle images and the way in which they represent the people and the environment. They could never, for example, be mistaken – although they too show bad conditions, crumbling housing and poverty – for the photographs taken for a charitable organisation like Shelter. The Bootle pictures do not evoke pity. They show defiance, pride, humour and beauty in the people and the

place. They offer the viewer a choice through both the subject matter and the technical verve and originality with which it is presented. It is not a choice between poverty and a better life but a choice between accepting the waste of talent and people and the beauty that they can find in even such a place, and defiance.

The 'self-portrait' that one young punk has got his friend to press the shutter of the camera for shows the 'photographer' pinned, grimacing, against a brick wall behind a mass of barbed wire. 'Photographer', self-portraitist, subject, victim, all are struggling for freedom. There is humour and anger in the portrait but it is entirely lacking self-pity or self-consciousness. Bill Dolce's technical help and influence can be seen in most of the work. He has enabled both children and adults to overcome the propaganda of simplification put out by the camera manufacturers. The landscapes of broken streets, buildings and waste lands as well as the interior shots of family life show how well he has passed on his experience in lighting, exposure and printing.

The Bootle project is rare. It was created almost accidentally out of local need. Like many other



Art in Action: Jeff James directing his brother Allan, old railway embankment, Bootle Dock.





**Art in Action: 'Self-Portrait' by Eddie Johnson.**

projects described here it is suffering inevitably from its political isolation from any organisation which could offer consistent ideological support. Publication and distribution of the group's photographs, as well as its future development, are hampered by the lack of any adequate socialist publishing network. As a result the group must look for funds from the art world, which, if it is not to be allowed to ignore the work of such a community, would dearly love to annex it.

It is not surprisingly more common in Britain today for photography to be presented from the beginning in local contexts within a framework in which the 'art world' presence and financial benevolence is already strongly felt, that of 'community arts'. Within this structure a number of large multi-media art projects have been created with the intention of enabling people from every walk of life to have access to using media such as drama, film, paint, print and video. The political and social ideologies of these groups vary, very much in accordance with the fluctuating definitions of 'community' outlined at the beginning of the chapter. There are many com-

lications in establishing such projects 'for the benefit of the community' from within a framework of constraints, such as the maintenance of long-term funding or charitable status, and allegiances, such as the 'community arts movement', all of which are often outside the experience of and inaccessible to the very people whom it is intended will 'represent themselves'.

Caroline Blount answered an advertisement to become a 'community photographer' – one of a team of 'community artists' known as Trinity Arts, based in Small Heath, Birmingham. Her period at Trinity Arts highlights some of the pitfalls that await even a highly skilled, well-intentioned newcomer to the field of community communications. While anxious to develop community skills, neither Blount nor Trinity seem to have been clear about the degree of control over the facilities or projects they were prepared to offer local people. As a result, people using the project were, in turn, unclear about whom the whole was intended to serve. It is interesting to trace the source of Blount's desire to work in community arts and to follow the course of her



work at Trinity, because they follow a pattern of development and work in many different fields where skills and technical facilities are offered to people who have not previously been motivated to ask for them.

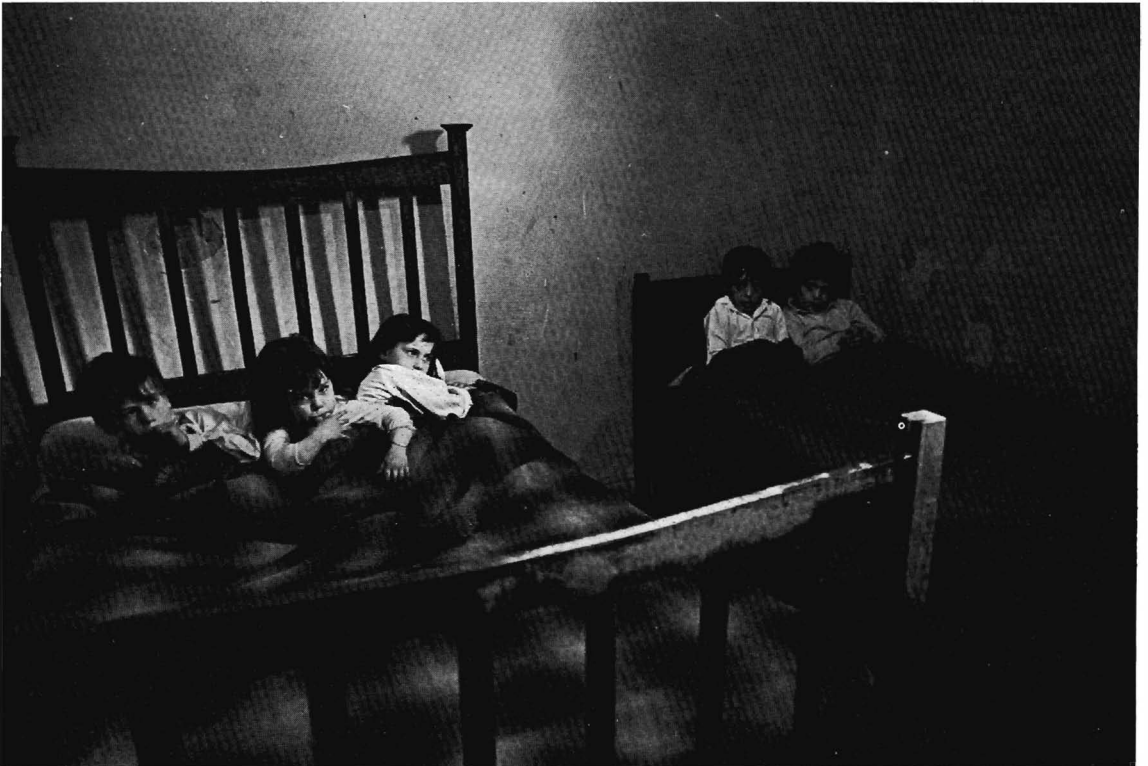
While at art school, Caroline Blount lived with a friend who was doing a final-year thesis on community arts and had been to visit projects such as the Blackie in Liverpool and InterAction in London, but was very sceptical about their activities. Blount herself had been making films and taking them back to project them in the contexts where they had been shot. She said that she wanted to find a way of giving people 'control' over the films she had made. Following her time as a student she looked for jobs where she could use her photographic skills.

I saw this job advertised in the *Guardian*. The job description said that they wanted someone to run photography workshops, to teach photography and create an historical resource for the area. When I came to the interview I got the sense of all the other workers on the project wanting to hand

back control of the media to the people in the area and making resources as available as possible. It seemed as if it was going to be possible for me to make mistakes, explore ways of using photographs and try out things that had never been done before. I didn't have any practical experience of using photography in that way, although I had done other kinds of 'therapy' art. At the interview they told me that I was to encourage people to use my time and skills.

There had been a five-month gap without a photographer at Trinity with the result that there were no established workshops. She felt at the time that the only way to get going was to advertise for people to come in and learn. As we have already discovered, however, few such invitations are made without bias, even where the favoured practice is unconscious.

There was one girls' group, one kind of adult and beginners' group and the rest of the workshop time was spent with specific groups organised by people outside Trinity, like the local Intermediate Treatment Group for young people 'at risk', and



Shelter Campaign photographs for the homeless by Nick Hedges. Contrast them with the Art in Action photographs, taken by people who themselves live in bad environmental conditions. Like Oxfam's, Shelter's fundraising campaign falls into a reforming role which denies that the people most concerned have a voice of their own.



*see previous caption*

Osborn House, the Social Services Neighbourhood Advice Centre, and for two or three sessions on 'an introduction to photography'.

With a view to working collectively to produce photographs around a theme, Blount contacted all the amateur photographers she could, especially the members of a local amateur camera club.

They formed the idea of making an exhibition to go on display during the Small Heath Festival. It was supposed to be about 'work'. Everyone was taking pictures of their workplaces. But the exhibition didn't evolve like that. It came out as a geographical survey of the area with the work shots being fitted in geographically. What they enjoyed most was actually putting the show up. They spent two evening sessions cutting out and mounting photos and deciding where they should go and which parts of the photographs actually worked. Most of them had never done any editing of photographs before and didn't know that you could blow up just part of an image.

The experience gained by this group does not appear to have been built on or developed and there seems not to have been any clear object in getting them together.

A group of Asian girls wanted to do an exhibition, because they had been taking photographs

over a period of a year. Blount discussed the idea with her Trinity colleagues and they agreed that there was a possibility of getting a grant from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). They felt the photographs were sufficiently unusual, taken from inside family life. Unfortunately, however, they did not fully discuss this proposition with the girls themselves. The application went ahead for £500 for a big laminated exhibition which could travel to schools, community centres, the CRE and colleges. There was a long delay of six months before the CRE finally decided to turn this application down. Meanwhile the girls themselves had decided they did not like the idea of such a big and difficult undertaking. They felt that Trinity had taken it over as a prestige enterprise and that they were no longer in control.

As Blount said:

One of the problems of working as a community photographer on my own is that I assess projects when they are over, but I rarely assess the dynamics that go on in the group, mainly because of time pressures. Perhaps what is missing is a sense of who they are doing it for . . . whether they are doing it for themselves or for Small Heath or Trinity. Several members have a funny idea about Trinity and always try to get out of paying for their materials and think, 'Why should we support Trinity by paying?' I don't know where the



Pavarish Group: Trinity Photography Project, Birmingham. Sikh wedding photograph taken for a video of a family wedding.

antagonism came from but there is a feeling that says we don't want to do this for Trinity. We want to do it for ourselves. We want to be separate.

The crucial problem which emerges from the Blount/Trinity approach, apart from the absence of a clear structural relationship with the local community, is the lack of any real engagement in learning from and with them about their own needs. From Blount's account it seems that groups were frequently, if not always, formed according to the convenience of the organisation itself, such as Asian girls or boys, which were convenient for teaching in workshop groups, but tended to preclude any development, through participation in a workshop, towards a wider reference. Thus the initial advertisement and invitation, 'Come and learn photography', was by no means neutral. The account of the Asian girls' exhibition illustrates particularly clearly the dangers of not discussing the uses and means of distribution of photographs within a context which met with the girls' conceptions of themselves.

To get a view of 'community photography' from the other side of the fence I looked at the experience of Steve Fitzpatrick, one of the people learning photography at Saltley Print and Media Workshop (SPAM) in Birmingham. SPAM provides graphic design, silkscreen, photography and film and record-making facilities for groups and organisations in the locality of Saltley. Unlike Trinity, SPAM has declared socialist affiliations.

Fitzpatrick is an apprentice at a local steel-tube factory. In 1981 he had been taking photographs for about four months. He was preparing an exhibition about the factory where he worked and the crisis over redundancies there. He had met SPAM workers at a local carnival.

Jules [Julian Dunn, one of the founders of SPAM] came up with the idea why didn't I do some sort of photographic project, and it all started from there.

Jules had all these brilliant ideas. But it boiled down that because I was at work, I should do a project there. I didn't go round boasting to everyone that I was going to be taking pictures. I



Steve Fitzpatrick: Saltley Print and Media Workshop. Steel tube factory—redundancies take effect, the factory empties.

just found a bit of time and wandered off, camera stuck in my overalls.

I wanted my pictures to be natural. I didn't pose them. I mean if you give them a chance to pose you've had it. If you're in the background you just walk round with your camera all day and in the last half hour you blast off twenty shots of different people, then you don't get them posing. It's more amusing that way. You get prints and show them and you get some blokes hopping around on one leg . . . it's great.

I photograph management too. A lot of them are working-class blokes who happen to be another step up. If they like their face in the picture, they buy it. They're no different from anyone else.

I've photographed top management too.

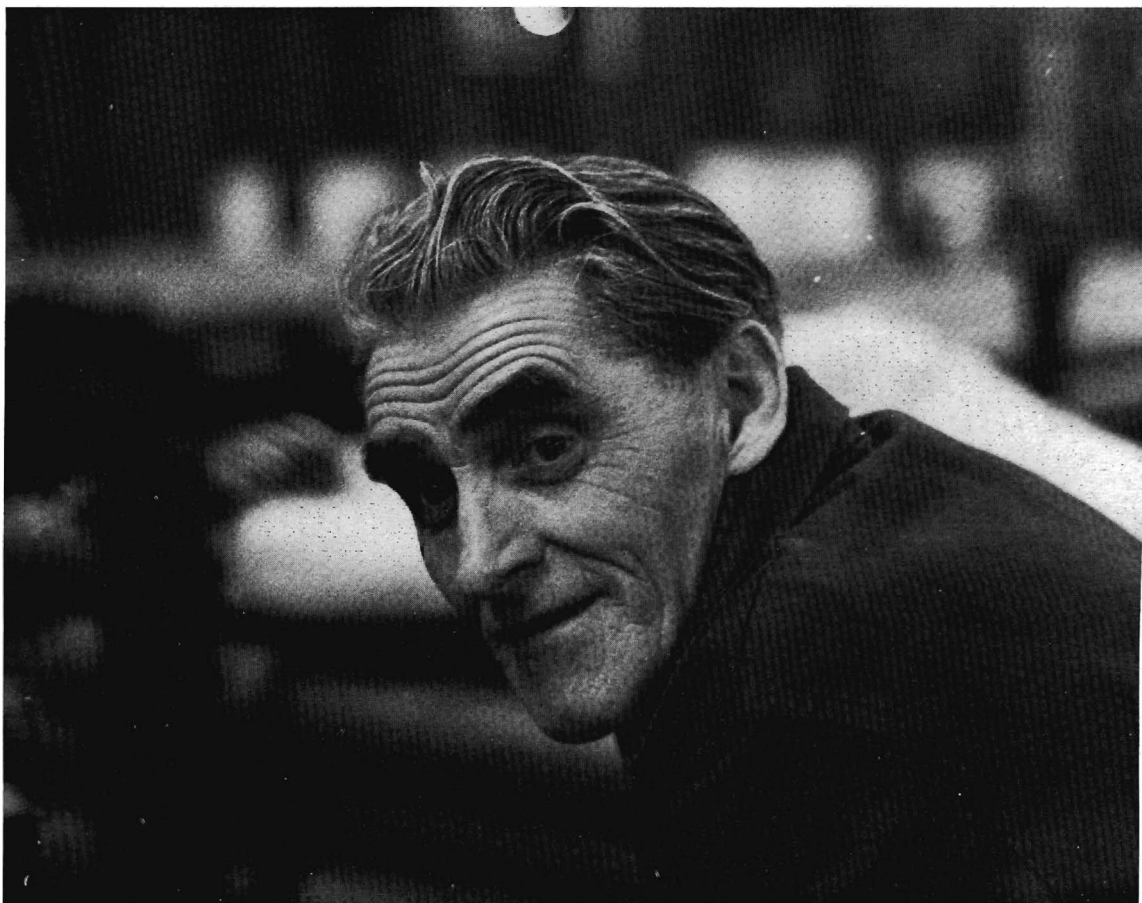
We had an apprentice presentation evening and I was running around like a blue-arsed fly taking photos of everyone. I got loads of directors falling asleep while they were supposed to be giving speeches. I went back and showed them. They were dead chuffed. I don't think that anyone is against it, as long as they don't know what it's for. When I started the project everything was going

great and then redundancy started and the workforce started thinning out in the last few months . . . and it's all just followed on great like a newspaper job, you know?

Frequently Fitzpatrick found that when he showed photographs back to people in the factory, they offered to buy them. The cash these sales brought in had clearly impressed him but he remained convinced that it was important to show the whole series of photographs publicly. The exhibition was planned for the central library in Saltley. He felt that his fellow workers would get a new view of the redundancies at the factory from the exhibition.

If and when there's an exhibition and they can see what it was all about, they can pass comments on it, or even believe it, anything they want. They can take it from there, if they believe it's true, no doubt they'll say something nice.

It seems a pity that at the time of writing SPAM have not developed this kind of work further. The problem appeared to be that Fitzpatrick was left in



Steve Fitzpatrick: Saltley Print and Media Workshop: Steel tube factory worker.

a position where he could only see himself as a variety of a traditional brand of photographer. In no sense had the process he had been engaged on become collective. He had not, at the time of writing, involved the rest of his workmates in representing themselves. They were still left in a take-it-or-leave-it position where they could either accept the view Fitzpatrick had presented of their factory and 'say something nice' or walk away and, presumably, ignore it.

While SPAM have a definite ideology of politicisation and might have played a similar role, if on a smaller scale, to that of the worker-photographers' workshops of the 1930s, offering Fitzpatrick a base and a forum through which to develop a socialist visual vocabulary in collaboration with his workmates, they do not appear to have done so. Above all there does not seem to have been any consideration of a framework for Fitzpatrick's development as a photographer outside the traditional one of going to college and getting a commercial job. He was clear that this was not what he wanted to do but with no network of publications through which similarly socialist-minded photographers can publish their work, the future for young worker-photographers looks bleak. It is important that groups like SPAM, in addition to seeing their work with individuals in the short term, begin to cultivate long-term projects for distributing their trainees' work.

Bob Long's attitude to his role as a 'community photographer' offers yet another perspective on the ways in which attempts are being made to change social conditions for using photography.

Long works with a number of London communities, including women in Holloway Prison and a Saturday Camera Club on the Aylesbury estate in Walworth, as a 'freelance community photographer'. It is a status which gives both him and the groups he works with a flexibility in their relationships which are not always present where a photographer is dependent for her or his job and total income on the 'co-operation' of a particular community.

The Aylesbury project is financed by the Walworth and Aylesbury Community Arts Trust which is a multi-media community arts project established on the estate in 1973. The Saturday Camera Club takes place between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. in a small ground-floor flat which the Trust has established for eighteen months. The group has a social as well as photographic focus and Long says that some members spend more time drinking coffee and talking photography than using the darkroom, but that this atmosphere has provided a context in which debate about the nature and type of photographs the 'club' should take have been possible.

Long argues that no matter what context he is

working in, the only practice he is interested in promoting is one where people represent themselves. 'Different political parties have come along and said, "Support us - let us represent you."' They have failed the people by offering to take over responsibility. Yet enabling or persuading people to take responsibility even for the form and subject matter of their own photographs, demands, if it is not to be a superficial and short-lived exercise, a great deal of time and patience and a real rapport among the group. Long says that most people in the camera club came with the assumption that they would be learning or extending their photographic techniques in order to take better glamour pictures, landscapes or nature shots. After six weeks he had decided that he would have to state his own position clearly. He told them that if they were still to work along these lines after ten more weeks he would have to leave running the club to someone else.

Why had he felt that such a decision was necessary? He said it had been important to clarify that there was a decision to be made; that photography was a medium with which to make decisions. As a result of the heated discussions which came from this ultimatum, one of the group suggested bringing in family snaps and trying to make a study of the individual histories of the members. A project emerged in which four or five of them decided to work together on an exhibition which would contrast the technical development of photography with a world history, through the group's own family snapshots, from commercial portraits of grandad taken in uniform in a 'studio' a few miles from the front in the first world war, to modern-day colour holiday snaps.

It seems that in arriving at this point of equality in debate, where everyone argued strongly for their point of view, it was important that Long, like any other member of the group, felt mobile and free to leave the project. Most other 'community photographer/instigators' who are responsible for fund-raising and administering entire projects would feel restrained from behaving in this way and would be unlikely to feel able to offer the detached choice of leaving the groups they work with without threatening to remove the photographic facilities. Long and his group have not yet begun to tackle the problems of publication and distribution of their work but they have collectively agreed on a framework for their activities. That these are not over-ambitiously radical but rather provide a structure through which the group can become collectively conscious of the way their families have been represented through photography is the strength of this project. It represents a good example of the learning and teaching combination promoted by Paulo Freire and demonstrates a way this process can be instigated in a British context.





Walworth and Aylesbury, Saturday Camera Club. History through family snaps project. 'Taken a few miles from the front at Flanders by professional "enterprising" photographer. Inset—the soldier's wife and daughter. He is the brother of Bob Stocking (82) one of the Saturday Club members. The photograph was sent home as a post card.'



Walworth and Aylesbury, Saturday Camera Club. History through family snaps project. 'Butlins. Pat's Aunt and Uncle in the fifties. Photo in the form of a postcard.'

In some cases photography workers, employed by a community organisation, have undertaken the production work in consultation with community activists, while in others, groups of people have been encouraged to learn photography with a view to providing material for a particular campaign.

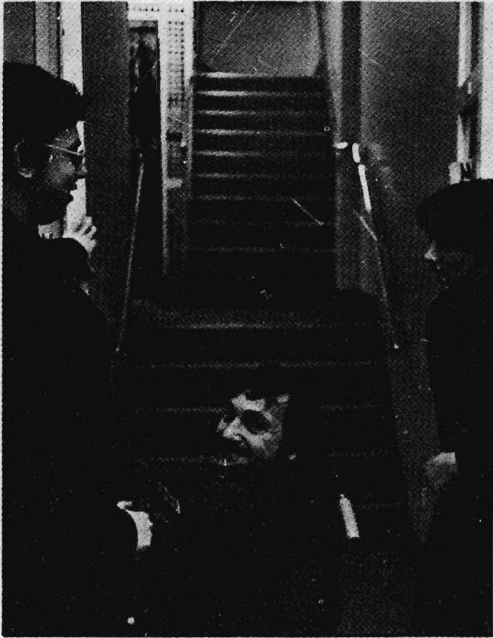
Blackfriars Settlement in Waterloo, London, is a voluntary agency serving as an umbrella to many different projects and providing support for a number of local groups and campaigns. The Blackfriars Photography Project runs photography workshops but also sees a principal aspect of its work as campaigning in conjunction with local action groups. For example, the project produced a series of tape-slide shows in support of the North Southwark Community Group and the Coin Street Action Group to illustrate the implications of the proposed redevelopment of the Coin Street site, which would change the whole environmental nature of their area of Waterloo. The tape-slide shows gave an historical record of what the area used to be like, using local album and archive material and showing the effects of redevelopment since the war, the contraction of

the local residential population with the resulting closure of schools, shops and so on. After preliminary showings and a number of discussions, the action groups were able to formulate and illustrate proposals for what was needed to attract a residential population to the area and to offer alternatives to the planners' schemes for more planned open spaces.

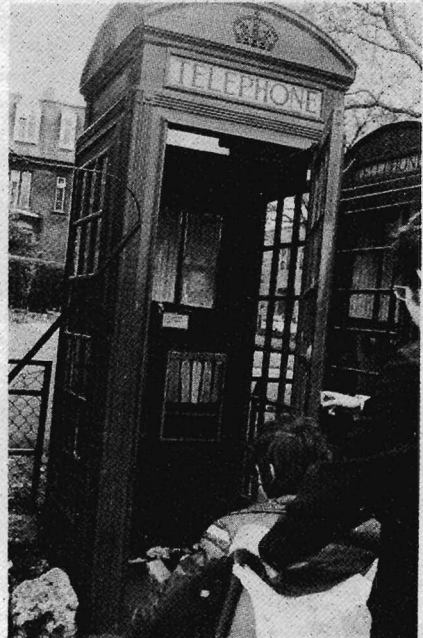
The effect of the first tape-slide show was to create a debate and clarify the issues and it attracted local residents to the public demonstrations and inquiry. Their comments were incorporated into the final tape which presented their case against the developers. This tape included not only the verbal evidence and views of local people but also visual images from within their own homes, through which they were able to personalise the general problems.

Local campaigns need this kind of 'evidence'. It is one of the only means of reply to the formal and often visually slick planners' presentations, in which models, drawings and photographs are used to dazzle the public.

The production process itself, in which the Coin Street tape-slide shows were planned, selec-



Once inside, we breathed a sigh of relief. But then we saw all those stairs!!! in front of us to climb.



Designers never think of people in wheelchairs. Just a little thought could make our lives so much easier.

ted, discussed and distributed collectively, had an education value, not only in politicising and drawing more people into the campaign, but in enabling them to understand the visual vocabulary and methodology behind such public presentations.

Campaigns of this sort can sometimes be more usefully undertaken, however, from conception through picture-taking to production, by the people involved themselves. Trisha Ziff started a photography club for handicapped people in a south London day centre. The exhibition they produced together has proved one of the most effective and least patronising visual documents about the problems of access to public facilities for the handicapped.

The group worked on a series of photographs and captions about access to buildings, phone boxes and so on. They put them together into a dummy book and made three copies to circulate to local day centres. The original prints and captions have been exhibited in a number of other centres and public buildings. Ziff wrote: 'For the group to complete something was very satisfying; to engage in a struggle using various media that before they had not had any access to was very positive. We actually brought attention to shops about the various problems of access' (*Camerawork*, 21, 1981, p. 4).

The collective involvement of this group in a campaign which closely affects their everyday lives created an exhibition which also proves to the able-bodied public that the handicapped need not be viewed as the passive recipients of social reform.

There are certain connections to be made between the development of local photography workshops – 'community photography' – and the growth during the seventies of the worker-writers' movement. Both aimed to increase literacy among groups of people who had not previously represented themselves in the published media.

A number of joint word and image literacy projects were developed from this period, notably by the Centerprise Publishing Project and by the Cultural Studies Department of the Inner London Education Authority's Cockpit Arts Workshop, both in London.

*Paragon Stories*, a reading book produced by 10 fourth-year boys at Paragon School, Walworth, under the auspices of a Cockpit tutor working with a 'social education' course teacher at the school, provides an interesting example of a school-based image and print literacy project.

When photography was first introduced to the boys at Paragon, they simply learnt how to take and make photographs. They were encouraged to photograph each other and at the beginning no attempt was made to be critical of their 'subjective' images. At a later stage the teachers

started a process in which the students discussed, planned and criticised photography in order to extend their view beyond seeing it as a repeatable process of taking more and more pictures to get more and more artful prints. Unfortunately the methods used by the Cultural Studies Department at the Cockpit are at times rather obscurely academic. They introduced, for instance, the concepts of 'hobbyist' and 'technicist' to 'help' the boys with their analysis.

Then they set about introducing ideas about photography beyond the boys' 'cultural expectations of themselves and the medium'. To illustrate that making photographs is a means of constructing meanings and not just a technical activity, they were taught to experiment with photomontage techniques. To show that the point of doing photography could go beyond producing prints and adding them to a private collection, or entering them for competitions, they started to create assignments which resulted in products the boys could see had a reasonable practical value.

One of these assignments was to produce a book for children who had reading difficulties in a local primary school. The boys visited the school, researched the primary school book market, chose where the pictures were going to be taken and divided into groups. The teachers felt that the boys' closeness in age to the primary school children would enable them to produce interesting stories which would motivate reading. It was stipulated that the stories should be situated in the geographic area of the school so as to create further interest.

After much argument the boys chose to make a science fiction story using their new skills in photomontage. The teacher and tutor felt this choice was 'a literary convention' which they understood and valued and of which many of them were sustained consumers. 'It offered them an immediate set of possibilities for redefining social relations, particularly the power relations between themselves (youth) and adults. This was achieved through the imposition of supernatural extraterrestrial powers conferred on them or their agents in the narrative' (*Photography, Class and Schooling*, Cockpit Arts Workshop Schools Photography Project Report, 1978–79, p. 41).

The Paragon boys found it very difficult to cooperate together on such a complex exercise. They were, perhaps, more used to working individually in a prestructured process. The teachers had hoped that the use of photomontage would give them the freedom to express themselves in new ways, but the boys generally wanted to use it to create 'natural looking pictures'. Nevertheless, photomontage seemed to help them control the content more precisely than they might have done had they been dependent upon using, or posing, documentary 'record' photographs.

The schools photography project of the Cockpit's department of cultural studies has undertaken a three-year programme in eight London schools with the idea of introducing what they see as radical teaching methods, using photography. Yet *Paragon Stories* is the only one to tackle the problem of the photograph as a reproducible, published medium. Thus the Cockpit's venture into the legally and physically restricted environment of schools and classrooms, while representing a radical intervention in the curriculum, poses certain interesting questions about the function of distribution and how it relates within the theory of visual literacy.

The Cockpit set up their project with the premise: 'For us photography is a given historical means for making representations of the social, historical and natural world.' They say that photography is a significant educational practice which ranks with the most complex literacy.

Their method is to make photography relevant by focusing the subject matter on the pupils' own lives. They aim to give pupils a way of looking at photographs of themselves. Many of the images the pupils produce are portraits of themselves in various contemporary sub-cultural dress styles and contexts. Studies are made and captions written which discuss this, to them, familiar symbolism.

Two main problems appear from this approach. The first relates to the context of the classroom and school in which these exercises are being introduced. It seems that there is an underlying contradiction in producing and analysing images which often represent the very substance of the student's cultural autonomy, in a school context in which, in the nature of compulsory education, any real 'power' is denied them. It is a contradiction which the Cockpit staff, themselves employees of the local authority, may feel, understandably, that they must contain. Yet it seems that these exercises, far from celebrating and reinforcing the self-representation expressed in these photographs of the pupil's life out of school, risk devaluing the potentially subversive power of their own cultural products.

The second problem relates to the first, but concerns the role of the teachers themselves. The radical teaching principle behind the Cockpit project appears to be trying to give 'power' to the children. What is really needed is a context in which power can be taken and retained by the participants. In Issue 6 of the Cockpit publication, *Schooling and Culture*, this question is discussed by Ken Worpole, the founder of Centerprise publishing project, in relation to teaching English in schools. He asks why children should be compelled to write what no one except the teacher will read.

For many children, writing in school, or as Sartre puts it 'firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot go off', at the secondary stage becomes rather a pointless activity, and one can understand their attitude. As far as they are concerned most of them feel that they know how to write, and question the object of regularly producing work which is perhaps more frequently criticised than praised.

Worpole is critical of some of the most clichéd reasons for children being asked to produce regular written work in school - 'externalising their interior conflicts' - 'enabling them to sort out their ideas coherently' and so on. He points out that 'within working-class cultures, reading and writing have been foremost social activities, shared activities that have not been seen as ends in themselves but as genuine means of communication between men [*sic*] towards an understanding of common problems and mutual enlightenment'. He says that it is generally within middle-class settings that reading and writing is seen as an end in itself 'without any necessarily "functional" overtones' (Ken Worpole, 'Reading and writing - beyond the classroom walls', in *Schooling and Culture*, no. 6, published by ILEA Cockpit Arts Workshop).

It may be considered that allowing the kids the limited freedom to make decisions about which products they bring into the classroom for an educational exercise is little more than containment. However the Cockpit project argues that the students' outlooks and even their lives are changed by insights gleaned from these short bursts of experience. Paulo Freire says that knowing existing knowledge must not be separated from the creation of new knowledge. Unless the existing and the new knowledge has some outlet for progression, it risks resulting in frustration.

To 'allow' freedom reveals the authoritarian nature of the relationship between teacher and pupil. A caption to an exhibition from Tulse Hill School at the Cockpit Gallery in 1981 read: 'A means of allowing [*sic*] students to show/represent aspects of their lives that they place particular emphasis on.'

There are some obvious dangers in the traditional educational approach, dealing with untraditional subject matter. Unless what happens between the teacher and the pupil in the classroom has some possibility for fruition, for distribution, for testing in the real world from which it has been gathered in the first place, is it really worth doing? Does it not risk taming a potentially subversive sub-culture in order that it may be put under the self-conscious microscope of classroom education?

Most of the projects described in this chapter

relate to photographs that are taken in local communities at the present time. The Manchester Studies Photographic Archive collects photographs belonging to local families that were taken before the second world war. The process used for their collection and distribution is, however, rooted in present-day Manchester communities and although nostalgia is an irrepressible ingredient of the collecting and the collection itself, there are more important implications for a local understanding of the immediate past. The need for a photographic archive arose from a local oral and documentary history project set up under the auspices of Manchester Polytechnic. The Manchester Studies Department focused on the history of working people, but it was soon found that besides the oral accounts, the letters and bills, birth, death and marriage certificates, a great deal of the documentary 'evidence' being offered to researchers was in the form of photographs, even whole family albums.

The Manchester Studies Archive of Family Photographs was set up to take the material (local history) back to the people who gave it. At the same time it was recognised that the material is only truly accessible when it is given a context. In the words of Audrey Linkman, who is responsible for the archive's retrieval systems: 'You must explain it (each photograph) in a way that is historically exploitable.' What she means, as she demonstrated by telling me about a school photograph pinned on her office wall, is that details about the context in which each photograph was taken can vastly extend the meaning and relevance of the images. The fact that the photograph was taken at Regent Road School, Salford, in 1919 is enhanced by the information that the children were asked to dress in their Sunday best and that the school classroom was specially prepared, the desks polished and set out with demonstration classroom material.

Over a series of such photographs it becomes possible to trace changes in dress (and also changes in custom of dress for photographs) and developments in school desks and classroom layouts. 'We go to the donor and ask them about the photographs and gather background information about social status, occupation and any other activities that their family engaged in. This information forms the essential context for the photograph.' In this way Audrey Linkman sees the Manchester archive as very unique and different from other family album collections.

Linkman explained how exhibiting the photographs had become one of the principal ways of adding to the collection.

The first exhibition they organised was of photographs from one area of Manchester. One of the girls working on the archive under a Manpower Services employment project came from an



**May Clements, one of nine children born to a Lincolnshire fen farmer. Her eldest sister Alice entered domestic service in Crawshawbooth in Lancashire and later found work there for three of her sisters. This was a typical pattern at that time and helped to ease the burden on the family income when there were fewer mouths to feed. May died of appendicitis in Burnley Hospital while still a young woman. Manchester Studies Archive of Family Photographs.**

area of the city known as the 'Tripe Colony' and suggested a survey which she thought might explain the history of this tightly knit community. The exhibition was conceived as a visual illustration of Robert Roberts's book *The Classic Slum* (Manchester University Press, 1971).

The photographs and tapes were set up in a local school and the archive staff made the occasion a social evening with cakes and sherry. 'It was lovely, everyone came, and a central question emerged - whether the pre-second world war landlords were good or bad.' As a result of the evening a great deal of new material was offered. Phone calls were received: 'My Auntie May was the second one on the left in that photograph of . . . etc. etc. Can I have a copy?' To which the reply is: 'Yes, have *you* got any photos?' A date is made and a member of the archive staff is on her way.

Exhibitions are now seen as among the most





Alice Clements was the first of the sisters to come to Lancashire to work as a domestic servant. She later married Charles Gregory and they ran the post office at Holcombe Brook (near Bury). Their daughter is leaning against the wall dressed in a white pinafore. Manchester Studies Archive of Family Photographs.

immediate ways of taking local photographs back into Manchester communities and, along with slides and lectures, form the basis of the archive's distribution system.

Bundles of photographs, postcards, letters, marriage documents, household bills resembling the contents of the pockets of some forgotten suit or bottom drawer, or family albums that contain a carefully preserved mixture of scented notepaper, romantic mementoes, holiday view postcards, billets-doux, faded snaps, the baby on the rug, the studio portraits and, always, the statutory Manchester photograph of little girls in new Whit-walk dresses, form the material of the family collection. Other special topics include trade unions, leisure activities and specific industries such as the cotton mills.

The retrieval system works from negatives made from the original material by the archive's photographers and two main indexes based on contact-sized photographs, one a family index giving details of the context of each photograph, the other a subject index in which photographs are grouped according to content.

Local libraries get either a careful selection of new material or the complete collections, depending on the degree of enthusiasm the archive staff find in a local librarian. One of the complaints of the Manchester Studies archivists is the lack of

initiative shown by librarians in using the collection.

Asked whether the collection as a whole gave a complete picture of working-class life in Manchester before the 1939 war or whether there were gaps in what had been the subject matter of the photographs, Audrey Linkman explained that there is almost no documentation of everyday events in working-class life and no interiors of ordinary houses. Many of the shots, even when they had not been taken in a photographer's studio, were designed to emulate the poses and compositions of such photographs. The idea that the studio visit and the pose with the back-drop curtain and the aspidistra confers respectability, which 'ordinary' surroundings cannot, still remains today. As a result, where such a visit was too expensive, or where a hard-up high-street photographer ventured into the street in search of clients, the studio pose was still maintained. Even group photographs retain formality, some degree of which may be accounted for by the state of development of photographic technology (slow exposures and plate cameras), but was more likely due to the fact that group photographs were often paid for collectively and represented the poor persons' portrait. The lack of adequate lighting and technological development at the period resulted in very few interior shots of working-

class homes. Those that do exist were often taken as experiments with new equipment, although it appears in general that the acquisition of more modern equipment had little effect on traditional subjects and poses for the photograph.

Yet surprisingly the archive includes many pictures of people at work in factories. Enterprising high-street photographers visited mills and photographed workers by their machines, running a weekly payment scheme by which individuals could pay some small regular sum towards the day when they would be photographed. On special occasions, coronations and national celebrations, factory owners, too, would invite photographers in to photograph workers and machines decked out in unusual finery.

An increasing number of local institutions have begun to collect old photographs, soliciting them from individuals and searching local libraries. Community publishing projects, local history societies, photographic clubs and photographic galleries all use such material for exhibitions and

books. Few of the projects retain the collected photographs as an accessible archive, however, or put them into as detailed a context as Manchester Archive. Few unequivocally present their exhibitions and books as tools for directly supporting working-class identity and struggle.

What is being photographed of working-class life is, of course, tomorrow's history. In the fast-changing inner cities, photographs taken as 'evidence' to support community action may be filed mainly for their historical value in a matter of months. Working-class life has never been so thoroughly photographed. Many photographic students use working people as subjects to practise their skills. Documentary photographers regularly get grants to record working-class places and people who, like species of animals, are thought to be about to change dramatically or disappear.

When Jo Spence, who is a member of both Hackney Flashers and Photography Workshop, says that it is important to 'understand the



**'Working Lives', photograph by Michael Ann Mullen from book published by Centerprise Publishing Project.**

ideological process by which class identity is constructed' in terms of 'visual literacy', she implies that this process may be evolved in a number of different ways.

The Hackney Flashers Collective pioneered photographic work that documented subjects of relevance to women and, in order to do this, worked at a local level. They subsequently showed their exhibitions and tape-slides in a wider ideological and political context as a means of relating their work to issues of class struggle (exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, 1979).

The limitations of documentary photography became apparent with the completion of the 'Women and Work' exhibition. The photographs assumed a 'window on the world' through the camera and failed to question the notion of reality rooted in appearances. The photographs were positive and promoted self-recognition but could not expose the complex social and economic relationships within which women's subordination is maintained. We began to juxtapose our naturalistic photographs with media images to point to the contradictions . . .

There are clearly a number of processes through which local needs for photography, whether as campaign, 'evidence', consciousness-raising or historical documentation, can be responded to, and through which 'visual literacy' can be increased. The parameters of such processes are to be found in the pitfalls and problematics of charity and social-reform photography on the one hand, and therapeutic photographic activity on the other. In between there are community projects and workshops, which in a variety of ways attempt to widen participation in the published image. It is clearly not necessarily a question of 'giving access' and making sure that everyone has a go with the camera. The collective selection of a project in the first place, the planning of the photograph-taking, the selection and distribution of images can all involve collective reappraisal of dominant forms of representation and class positions.

In looking, in this chapter, at some representative examples of 'community photography' practice, I have been aware of apparently ignoring some of those described in the previous chapter, such as printshops, poster-makers and small presses. Obviously these are among the principal distributive channels by which local organisations can express their views and disseminate images and we might expect them to have the effect of creating awareness among community organisations of the need to control and create their own images. Yet, as we have seen, at present the majority of posters and small newsheets

produced by such groups do not make regular or significant use of photography in ways that contribute to the campaigns in which they are involved, or to their self-representation in general.

In attempting to answer the question, why do local communities need photography and how should they use it, I can only point to certain of the positive examples found in this chapter. They need photographic images in order to create *and distribute* an iconography of self-representation by which to counteract the dominant representations of photojournalism and advertising. In fact, at present the vast majority of community organisations and their members see photography as single images reproduced according to conventions established in photojournalism and the snapshot. Alternatively, some community-arts-based photography projects introduce photography as an art or craft skill, with the elements of reproduction and distribution only thrown in as an after-thought. In such projects the effect of the domination of 'art world' ideologies over any accessible form of mechanical reproduction is that sometimes, even where an effort is made to involve 'non-professionals', their needs are overshadowed by the 'favoured' practices; the need to



**Hackney half-term adventure/Centerprise Publishing Project. A local publishing project using photographs of familiar subjects.**

achieve 'success' in the eyes of the funding agencies (the Arts Council, regional arts associations, charitable bodies and/or local authorities).

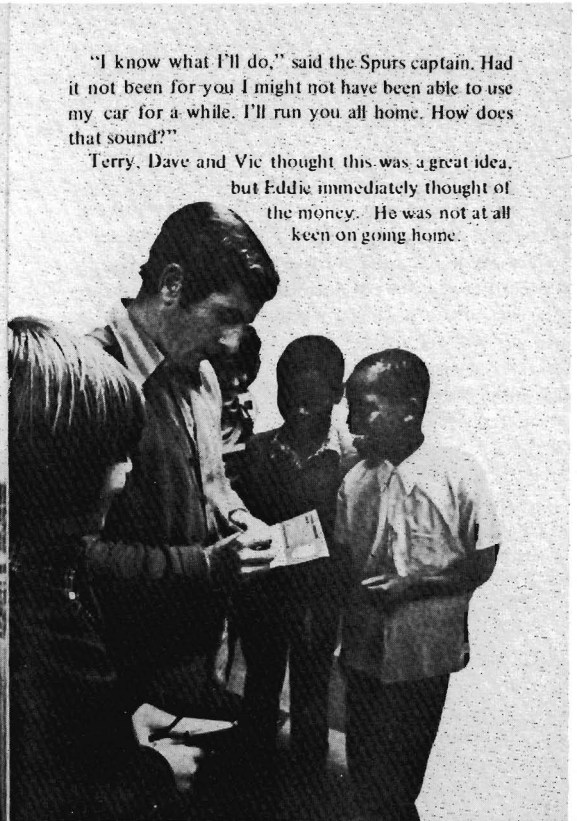
It seems almost too obvious to state that where people fail to discover the form and vocabulary through which they can represent their own needs inside and outside a local forum, their lives and views remain open to misrepresentation in the mass media.

There are a number of projects, such as Bootle Art in Action and the Manchester archive collection of pre-second world war snapshots, which indicate that there is an iconography of self-representation beyond the conventions of either photojournalism, art or commercial photography. Community photography projects offer a potential on-the-ground resource through which visual literacy could be developed and the means and the vocabulary of self-representation established.

"Are these the lads, Bill?" he asked.  
The manager nodded.  
"Well, you boys have done me a great favour. These are my keys. I hadn't realised I had lost them. I'm very grateful to you."  
The boys grinned at each other, all of them feeling a bit nervous and shy.  
"Well, one good turn deserves another," said Alan Mullery. The boys had not said a word.  
"Can we have your autograph, please?" asked Vic.  
"Certainly. I've got some of last night's programmes with me. You can have one each and I'll sign them for you."

"I know what I'll do," said the Spurs captain. Had it not been for you I might not have been able to use my car for a while. I'll run you all home. How does that sound?"

Terry, Dave and Vic thought this was a great idea, but Eddie immediately thought of the money. He was not at all keen on going home.



see previous caption

## 4. The aesthetics of social change

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Two lines of approach can be used in determining the quality of a piece of photographic work. There are the 'formal' properties of an image; the use of lighting, focus, depth of field, composition, atmosphere and so on. On the other hand, there are the social relationships implicit within the photograph: its intended use and its value in the context for which it was intended. In this case the figurative content and the meaning of the symbols implied by such elements as dress, expression, foreground and background information must all be experienced in addition to 'formal' considerations. We must discover how well the subject matter has been 'represented' by the image in the context for which it was destined.

In this sense the formal composition and technical execution of the photograph can be said to represent only a few among the wide range of possible values that can be applied. Other conventional views see the photograph as of purely sentimental or informational value. In terms of photography aimed to influence social change, it seems useful to assess such work as a series of variations or degrees of collective involvement.

Above all, it would be foolish to suppose that, in examining photographic practices which are intended to be active ingredients in the process of self-representation by those whose views are seldom heard, there are absolute standards of excellence which will apply to all processes and all products in all contexts. What might be excellent in a rural situation may be irrelevant in an urban one. What may be important in a post-colonial state may be of little significance in the context of a super-power, or a post-industrial economy. Thus, while qualitative differences in terms of concept or execution of all art, photographs, films and so on are undeniable, what I am describing here is the quality or aesthetic which includes the participation of the subject. I am suggesting that this aesthetic should be seen as the basis from which any other refinements of judgement should grow.

It is important that in replying to the challenge, conscious of its seriousness and complexity, we do not give in to the temptation of perfectionism. We must do what we can today with whatever small resources we have. Only in this way will it be possible to do tomorrow what we could not do today. (Paulo Freire, letter 11 in *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Writers and Readers, 1978)

Collective conception of the project, collective organisation and use of material are the characteristics which should identify the photographic practices we are examining. It is the relationships between the collective selection of projects, the degree of technical literacy developed to enable group participation in design and production and, finally, publication, which determine the quality of the work. It must be clear from the diversity of these characteristics that the decision to devote a chapter of this book to the basic criteria by which photographic projects, conceived in terms of social action, can be judged should not be seen as the search for 'perfectionism'. This area of photographic practice is part of a developing struggle to locate a conscious iconography of self-representation in a Britain where there is little support for such work from either the photographic art world, academia, or the organised left. In such conditions it is hardly surprising that the debate itself, even among the community organisations and socially and politically committed photographers, has been disorganised, unconstructively competitive and above all isolated. Seminars have been set up to discuss how to establish darkrooms and 'community photography projects', without ever questioning in what circumstances and for what purpose such projects are of use. There have been seminars and courses on the problems of funding without anyone discussing the growing determination of the nature of projects by the requirements of the funding agencies. 'Radical photography' has been discussed as the political enemy of 'community photography' and vice versa. The inter-relationships have been largely ignored. The communist inspiration and history of the development of the worker-photographer movement and its struggle against the conventions of amateur photography among its members has not been related to the problems of community photography teaching experience. Nor, on the other hand, has the relationship of the snapshot to the historic archive been admitted as a possible *raison d'être* for community photography projects by those who see themselves as politically superior. Papers have been published which claim that the *only* mode of self-representation is through the use of a pin-hole or plate camera, which ensures that the 'subject' participates in the posing and taking of the photograph.

In this chapter I intend to examine criteria which could form guidelines for the assessment of

a number of different aims and intentions in areas in which intention, processes of photographic production and distribution determine the kind of quality which could be sought in the image.

The initiators of the worker-photographer movement discovered in the 1930s that the involvement of groups in large scale and long-term photographic projects required constant vigilance against the overriding conventions of serious amateur and art photography. The old themes of the landscape, the sunset and the nude have an insidious and repetitive draw on the camera lens. The selection of a project on which groups of people, adults or children can work together and which will sustain analysis of the content of the subject matter in relation to the context of the group and the proposed areas of distribution could be said to form, therefore, the elements of the 'aesthetics of social change'. Even a casual comparison of any amateur or club photographic exhibition with one produced by community organisations such as Art in Action or SPAM in Birmingham reveals fundamental differences. The 'community photography' group does not address itself initially to the interests of the 'photographic community' (although there is always a risk that they may later become seduced

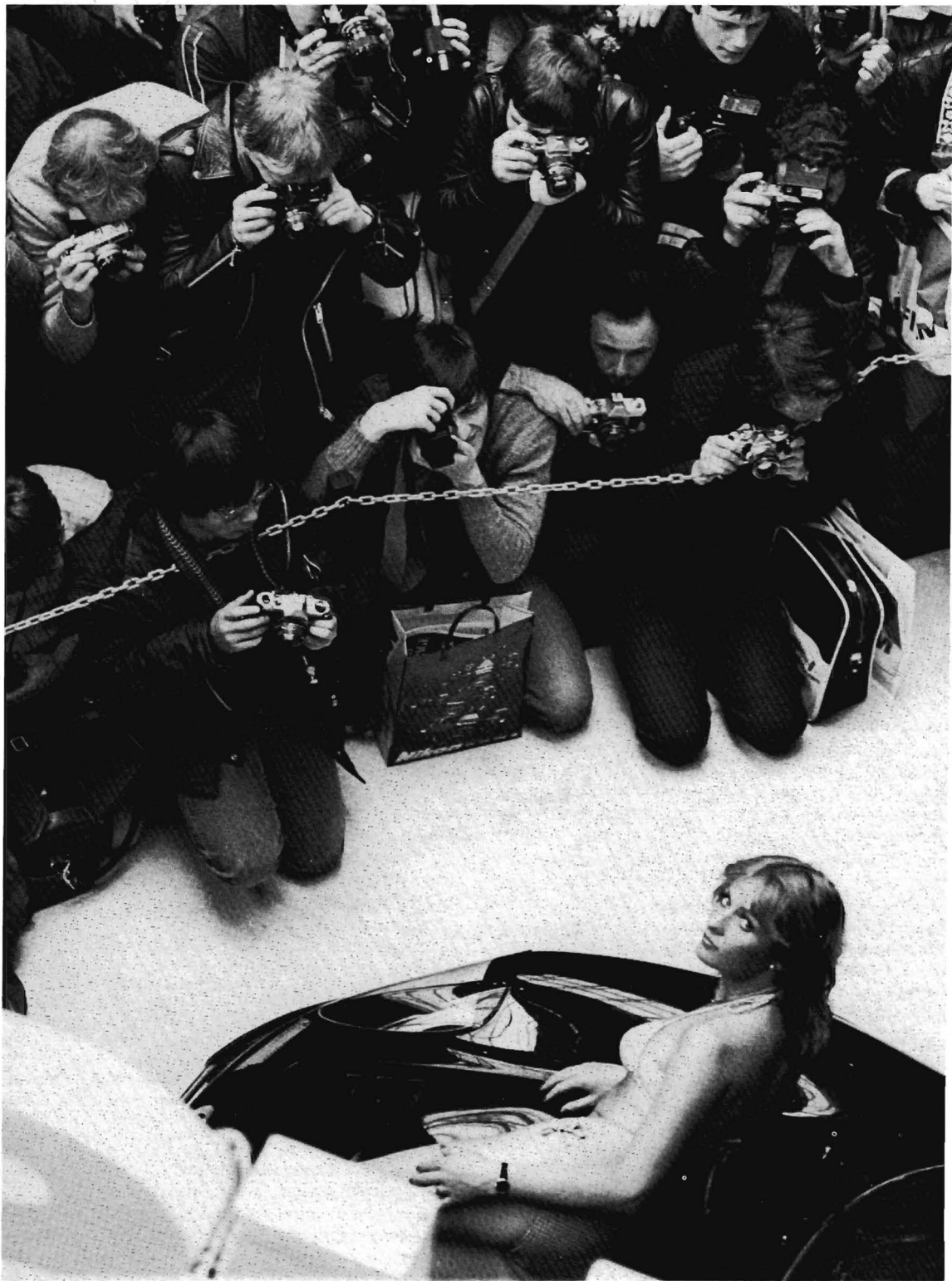
by the charms of *Amateur Photographer* and the wealth of other consumer literature available on photography). At the beginning, though, their priorities are to use photographs in order to represent themselves. They are not obsessed with technical formulae, nor with accumulating elaborate and expensive equipment – characteristics of even beginners among the 'serious amateurs'. This is not to ignore the qualitative variations in the photography of socialist and/or community groups, but rather to emphasise that the aims of such groups in using the medium have a greater bearing on any qualitative analysis than reference to traditional photographic conventions. How does the perceived use of a photograph affect the images produced within one such project?

In Bootle, for instance, photographs were initially required to illustrate local conditions being written about in the community association newspaper. This was the starting point which led to the production group forming Bootle Art in Action and it appears to have produced its own convention in relation to subsequent photographic projects. It is a remarkable characteristic of the photographs of all the members of the group that they do not appear, even in their portrait and self-portrait shots, to be concerned to exclude the



Art in Action: portrait of photographer's sister.





Photography industry dictates subject matter for amateur photographers. One of the favourites—women as sex-objects. Earls Court amateur photography exhibition: Ulrike Preuss.



Women act as assistants while men play 'professional' photographers, photographing 'glamour sessions' at the Earls Court amateur photography exhibition: Ulrike Preuss.

broken-down environment around them or to fall back on more conventional 'studio' poses. Nor could their photographs be mistaken for the 'good times' family snaps. It is unusual that the younger members of the Bootle group, while frequently choosing family and friends as their subject matter, appear, right from the beginning, to have shared the older members' concern for the conditions of their immediate environment and to have found ways of presenting the beauty, the limitations and the humour of their own day-to-day relations with it. A consequence of the original way that the Bootle group saw their need for photographs is reflected in the fact that their exhibitions are conceived as extensions of their publications and both forms reflect a collective expression by the participants of the community's struggle against economic and environmental poverty.

The empathy between the photographer and subject, revealed in the Bootle portrait shots, is another strong characteristic of community photography. It is a quality which professionals and serious amateurs often seek through a process of elaborate 'acting out' between the photographer and model.

The quality is recognised by the Telford project, *Some Girls*. They describe young women present-

ing themselves as subjects for photographs to their peers as offering a more 'trusting' appearance than they would have been able to do to an outside professional photographer. But this quality is easily lacking in community photography work where a project has been contrived or where it has been initiated without achieving any collective agreement of the intention and use of the work. It is a quality which might be termed 'group ideology'.

The photomontage posters produced by Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn with the East London Health Group appear to gain their strength from similarly collectively held convictions, although here the images represent a carefully discussed view held by a group of specialist workers on health matters. The photomontages are produced by Leeson and Dunn to project what are often highly sophisticated debates to a wide public. It is the characteristic qualities of their work, of sophistication and humour, which seem to give it its universal appeal. Yet it is a combination which needs careful handling and it might be supposed that they could easily be misunderstood were the images not securely based in the regular discussions of the local London groups. It is the familiarity of these groups with the issues, grounded in their common experience of the local

# what you staring

# AT

I don't see why girls should be made to be something they're not just for the boys



It makes me sick when girls think they've got to look their best just for the boys.

**Some Girls:** based on research by Leah Thorn and Carola Adams and designed by Graham Peet and Jonnie Turpie in collaboration with Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group. Published by the National Association of Youth Clubs. A set-up photograph but with the subjects' thoughtful collaboration.

fight against the closure of the Bethnal Green Hospital, which enabled the East London Health Group to work collectively and to abstract the issues of more general application with such precision. (See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of this project.)

The East London Health Group's posters owe a debt to the photomontage imagery of John Heartfield, yet what might have been an academic reference does not have the effect of pointing us inward to the 'art community' but rather strikes a chord which directs us to a continuing pattern of state bureaucratized irresponsibility towards the people. Their poster, 'Passing the Buck', has overtones of Heartfield's photomontage of Hitler saluting the masses, while receiving money in the hand behind his back from big capital. 'You can't have it if you let them eat it', depicting rats eating into a large slice of birthday cake is in the thirties photomontage tradition of depicting the 'baddies' as unpleasant animals; in this case the rats are the drug companies and private medicine eating into the resources of the National Health Service.

Working collectively from an understanding of local issues towards a means of projecting this collectively understood and agreed position to a

wider public is an ideal of community media groups. The reverse side of the coin can be seen in some of the unfortunate projects initiated by outside 'experts' with the vague aim of 'passing on skills to the community'. Where these skills include photography there is often no 'use' for the photographs immediately obvious to those involved in the photographic learning sessions. Several projects of this kind were established in Britain alongside multi-media community arts organisations during the seventies. Some, if not all, of the initiators became aware of the problem. The temptation in these conditions is to work towards an exhibition of the photographs taken in workshop sessions but, as we have seen, to achieve the kind of quality found in the Bootle shows the participants must first find a common basis for working together. Without such an agreement there is no chance for any real equality between the technical expert and those whom it is intended will 'represent themselves'. There is no chance of establishing the conditions where mutual learning and teaching can take place.

Yet another way of ensuring collective participation in the selection of a project is demonstrated by Bob Long's approach at his Saturday Camera



**John Heartfield: montage. Inspiration for East London Health Group's poster 'Passing the Buck' (see pages 56-57).**

Club on the Aylesbury estate in London. Confronted with the group's domination by the conventions of amateur photography, he established conditions in which he could make a statement of his own position by offering to leave the project, without threatening to withdraw the darkroom facilities from the users. In confronting the club members with a real issue and a real choice, that of finding their own photographic conventions rather than being dominated by the tired ideas of the amateur photography world, Long took an important step towards establishing the code and standards of mutual rigorousness which form the basis for truly collectively made decisions. In doing so he avoided the kind of compromise and covert paternalism which besets so many community organisation employees and ensured that the photographic project devised by the group was one to which all those taking part felt equally committed.

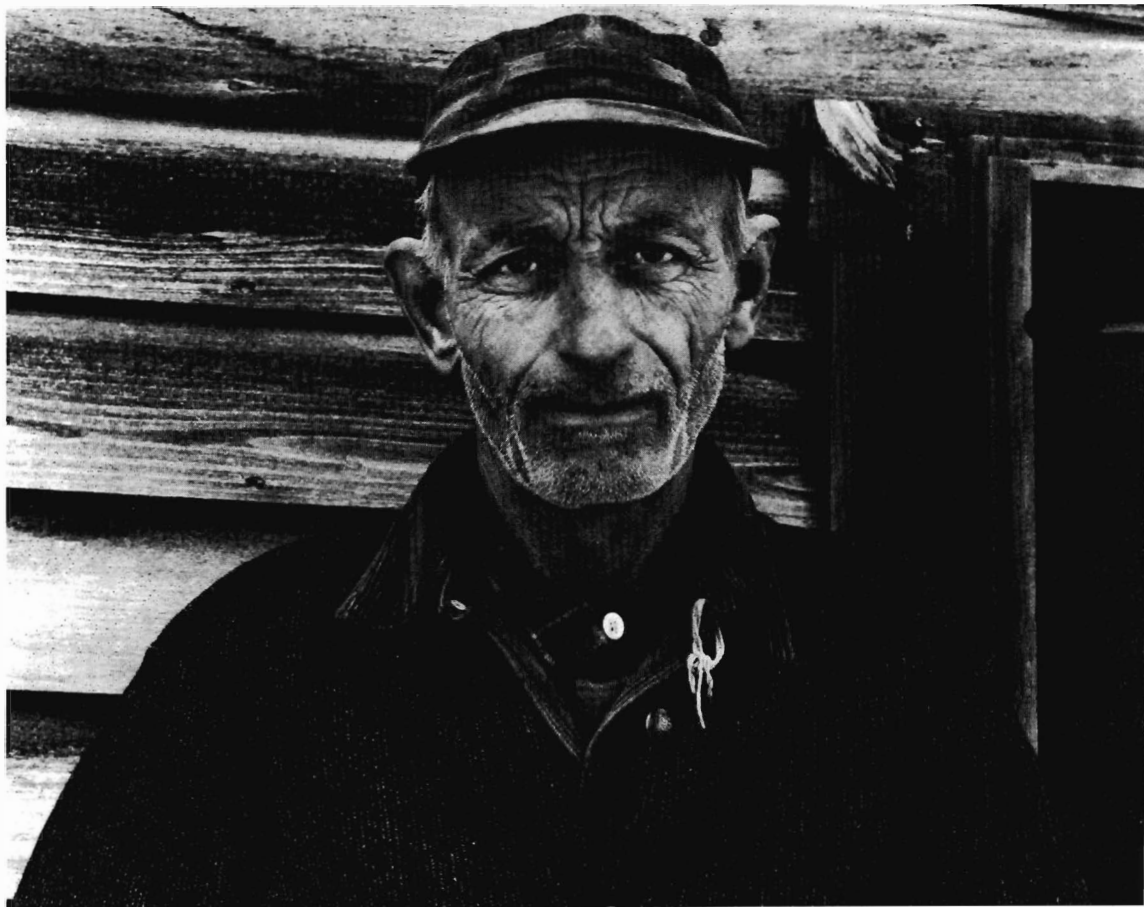
Are we able and is it legitimate to speak of formal aesthetics within the collective processes which are so fundamental to the development of self-representation?

It must be clear that such elements cannot be viewed separately from the collective determination and use of a project. Well-known photographers, such as Paul Strand and Walker Evans, have not succeeded in creating a photographic vocabulary that distinguishes between the beauty which is pleasing to their aesthetic sense and life as it is perceived by their subjects. Evans finds a similar vocabulary of light and shade in rural poverty as he does in New England houses and furniture, while Strand looks for repeated weathered ridges in rock formations and in the face of an aged peasant. The subjects find themselves represented according to the aesthetic and often social codes of the photographers. The domination of a formal aesthetic code of this kind leads inevitably to the domination of professional 'standards' over the representation of the subject matter.

In many of the projects referred to in Chapters 2 and 3 the intention has been to develop technological literacy in relation to photography in order to give confidence to people to use the medium. The intention has been to enable them to intervene in the shaping and recording of their lives in ways that they would not otherwise be able to do.

In these contexts, it would be patently irrelevant, for example, to say that a child's photograph used in a literacy project is not as 'good' as a photograph taken by a photojournalist would have been. Nevertheless, there are criteria which affect the quality of such work and which relate to the conception and use of the images. The question this kind of work poses is whether a synthesis of intention, representation and use has been well conceived and achieved. A project like Judith Harrison's at Mount Pleasant Middle School in Southampton, financed by the Community Relations Council, was intended to encourage child photographers to search for images which related to their own cultural backgrounds and then to use the photographs to find something to write about. It was an exercise in print and image literacy. The fact that Harrison arranged for the result to be simply printed and published as a booklet, *Come to Kingsland Market*, enhanced the children's view of the importance and value of their research. It helped them to see the details of their lives as equally valuable to those of others they read about in books.

Kalwant lives near Kingsland Market. Sometimes when he has got nothing to do he goes to the market to help. He knows lots of people there because his brother used to work at the market. Kalwant sometimes goes to important places like the wholesalers. He would really like to sell chillis and peppers. He thinks this would be the best job. Kalwant finishes one job and starts another. He



Paul Strand: Mr Bennet, Vermont, 1944. Portrait of a face as texture.

trims cauliflower and wheels the barrow. No one tells him: he just feels like it. (Photographs by Jashvir Khela and story by Tarlochen Mandeir in *Come to Kingsland Market*, Mount Pleasant Middle School, Southampton, 1980)

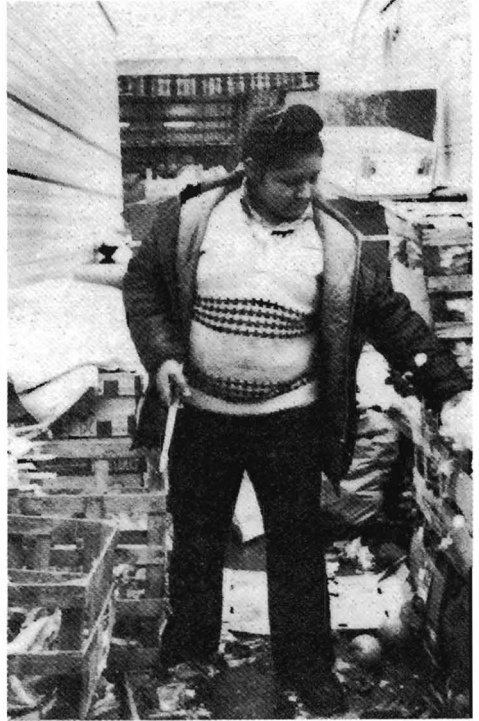
The process here involved the validation of the children's view of themselves and their surroundings. This does not occur in much of the material used in schools where books, especially reading primers, are white, middle class and very anodyne. Many children cannot talk or write about their experiences from memory in the classroom. They need visual reminders to prompt them and it is clearly valuable if the material used relates not just to children in general, but to a particular group of children or even a particular child.

Harrison's project, *Come to Kingsland Market*, was conceived with the teachers at Mount Pleasant Middle School as part of the school curriculum. Unlike certain of the ILEA Cockpit projects described in Chapter 3, they did not ask the children to make private details of their home

life or their personal thoughts part of 'compulsory schooling'. Harrison's approach, although perhaps less sophisticated than the Cockpit's, avoids the risk of appropriation of the children's own protest material into the curriculum. What is clear about both the Mount Pleasant and Cockpit's projects, however, is that they gain certain advantages in consistency from the fact that they have taken place within a school environment. At the same time, in examining the quality of the self-representation in the images produced, it has to be remembered that the context is one in which the basic choice, of being there or not, is denied to the participants. In this sense, none of the school-based projects can be said to have been collectively initiated by the participants. The Mount Pleasant project appears, though, to have been conceived with a certain realisable aim in view, namely to raise the children's expectations of themselves and to encourage reading and to do this within the school curriculum.

In examining the quality of self-representation





Double page spread from 'Come to Kingsland Market' a photography and literacy project for use in teaching English as a second language. Photographed and written by children from Mount Pleasant Middle School, Southampton, directed by Judy Harrison.



- Kalwant lives near Kingsland market. Sometimes when he has got nothing to do he goes to the market to help. He knows lots of people there because his brother used to work at the market. Kalwant sometimes goes to important places like the wholesalers. He would really like to sell chillis and peppers. He thinks this would be the best job. Kalwant finishes one job and starts another. He trims cauliflowers and wheels the barrow. No one tells him to he just feels like it.

Photographs by  
Jashvir Khela

Story by Tarlochen  
mandair

in photography, we are looking for an aesthetic which includes the participation of the subject. Such an idea is relatively new in the history of the medium, as it is in other areas of communications. Traditionally, whatever the media used, once the notion of 'quality' is introduced, the terms in which it is discussed refer back to aesthetic codes embedded in the formal and academic histories of art and literature. Within these aesthetic codes the work is isolated from its context and treated as though it were, metaphorically, placed upon a plinth in a pristine room to be judged in relation to the hierarchically organised record of other, equally socially isolated 'great' works. The arrangements of the work of great painters in galleries and museums bear witness to the dominance of this code which insists that each object be viewed in isolation from its social contexts, or even the political manifestos which they were, in many cases, created to support. The work of the Futurists, the Dadaists and the Russian Structuralists, as it is hung, for example in the Tate Gallery, falls into this category. At the same time this system of judgement gives support to the creation of individual 'stars' of which the capitalist economy and press are especially fond.

The established codes have come to dominate our views about the very nature of judgement of photography, even where it is being used outside the recognised limits of the traditional art world. As a result there is a risk that newly developing codes of qualitative judgement are not accorded serious recognition or analysis, even by those most closely involved.

Until now I have examined 'quality' in terms of collective determination of the use and distribution of photographs. There are several other important considerations which affect the degree of self-determination accessible to groups wishing to publish and distribute photographic images, not least of which are the technical and design barriers that must be assaulted.

Some Girls (see Chapter 2) was funded initially by the National Association of Youth Clubs and the Department of Education and Science. A project arose from field work undertaken with a group of 13- to 16-year-old young women to produce a set of posters dealing with specific issues affecting that age group. The posters were to provide back-up to other materials, including a tape-slide production and leaflets. The photographs for these projects had been taken by the researchers, Carola Adams and Leah Thorn, and some of the young women involved in the programme over a three-year period. Owing to an unfortunate lack of women designers in the locality, the Some Girls researchers engaged two men, Jonnie Turpie and Graham Peet, to join them to work on the design side.

The tape-slide production was the most com-

plex, aimed for use to trigger discussions at youth worker training days all over Britain. Some of the photographs used had been taken by groups of girls two years earlier and a number of them had since moved out of the area. After some discussion the Some Girls group felt it to be important to use the photographs taken by girls, even though they could no longer be consulted. Nevertheless it was still necessary for the content of the tape-slide programme to add photographs from outside photographers and to enlist the help of other girls in the area to 'set up' poses for photographs.

The editorial group, consisting of the two women researchers and the two male designers, were aware of a number of shortcomings in their process. They were relatively pleased with the formal qualities of the end product, but dissatisfied with the degree of 'control' which the young women, whose views it had been intended to represent, had been able to exercise, either over its initial conception or the production and distribution processes.

Some Girls started the subsequent poster series accepting that they had already compromised their position. They roughed out a number of designs and asked the Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group, who had previously worked with Carola Adams, to select the most appropriate style. At that stage Some Girls's main criteria was that the posters should not be rejected by young women; that they should not be patronising like school material. They soon realised, however, that far from merely helping select the style for the posters, the Madeley Young Women's Group should become a central part of the design process. As time went on the process became a collaboration where the researchers felt unable to progress honestly without the agreement of the young women.

Nevertheless, as a result of these projects Some Girls made a careful analysis of the quality of the work they had produced in relation to their initial intentions. They found that they had 'failed' to involve the girls in a realistic way in the selection of the projects and that this was the result of two initial mistakes. First, the project itself had had too much adult investment in its 'success', in a world outside the experience of the girls on whose lives both the tape-slide and the posters were to be based. This had predetermined the fact that the girls had not been presented with a choice of project in which they fully understood the terms of reference. Secondly, the project was spread over three years and this again related to the working lives of the adults concerned, rather than to the time-span in which the girls focused on any of the particular concerns dealt with as the themes for the productions. On the positive side this project had proved of value to the national network of youth clubs and this was felt to be

# YOUNG WOMEN



*Young Women*: magazine produced by Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group.

largely due to the authenticity of the observations made in both the tape-slide and the posters, as well as the context through which the images and text came together – a judgement borne out by high demand for the posters.

A number of interesting printing and photography programmes were developed as a result of the critical analysis brought to bear by the workers, involving small groups in one neighbourhood at a time and ensuring careful discussion of the choice of the projects in the first place. The Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group have produced several editions of a magazine called *Young Women* using multi-colour, half-tone photo-litho. Telford Community Arts printshop provided the printing facilities and the process was designed to enable the women to lay out their texts and photographs together, reducing or enlarging original material to suit. A number of paper overlays were employed to enable the women to take full control of the design process. The booklets are lively and entertaining and, although they are only distributed locally, they are the kind of material which could be circulated more widely should the networks exist. The whole project, planning, writing, taking the pictures, layout and printing, takes two weeks per issue. The products reflect the enthusiasm and immediate gratification of the process.

The photographic image encompasses a process which begins with the conception of the project and the production of the negative and ends with its publication and distribution. Within this process the elements of intention, representation and use all contributed to the quality of the photographic images. Each element plays upon and is affected by the others. The Some Girls posters demonstrated the failure of the relationship of *intention to use* in the way in which they were initially conceived. At the root of the failure was the compromise entered into by workers on the project. Initially the young women had no control over the ideas, nor their use and distribution. The adaptation of the traditional technical means of production for the magazine to using a layout procedure which enabled them to become fully involved in the designs and did not involve making or using stencil-film led to the girls being able to envisage their product from beginning to end and to determine the area they felt suitable for its distribution. The production of *Young Women* represents the progressive acquisition of 'technical literacy' by the group.

When Walter Benjamin, in his essay 'The Author as Producer' (in *Understanding Brecht*, New Left Books, 1973), writes of the need to transform the apparatus of production, it is a reference to the use to which such apparatus is put



Madeley Young Women's Writing and Designing Group at work. Photo: Some Girls.

in ideological terms. In everyday practice, the technical process mediates the degree to which such a transformation can take place. Paddington Printshop analyses the problem in a similar way to the Some Girls group in Telford in relation to the questions they have posed themselves about the degree of access they may be affording users, to many of whom the design process is itself a new form of literacy. In terms of media projects which aim to provide a resource within a socialist ideology, with the purpose of both awakening and broadening consciousness to self-representation, the adaptation of the practical processes of production is of crucial concern. It may need to be seen as a continuing process, as users' requirements and familiarity with the technology develop.

At the stage of the Some Girls project being discussed here, it was necessary to devise a suitable means of production through which the groups could design, publish and distribute their work in their local area, before contemplating wider distribution. The fact that *Young Women* was not distributed by the National Association of Youth Clubs was determined by what was seen as the inappropriateness of the subject matter and form for that particular network. The girls had felt that local references made it more relevant for local distribution. This decision, however, may in turn have been influenced by the kind of distributive outlets and networks available to them. If we compare their productions with some of those distributed through bookshops by the French feminist publishers such as Edition des Femmes (2 rue de la Roquette, 75011 Paris), and conceived for young women of similar age groups, the quality of the Telford productions is apparent. They have an immediacy and freshness arising from their collective working relationships which overcomes the small amount of exclusively local reference.

A further qualitative consideration involves a judgement on the part of the producers about the context and the extent of the context in which a particular work might have relevance. It is a tedious experience watching someone else's holiday slides if you are not a close friend of the family, while one's own slides of equally good or bad formal quality will be of much greater interest. The principle is the same when too wide a public audience is sought for material which is essentially of interest only to one specific locality. Just as the art world sometimes reinforces its own exclusive audience by publicly showing material which is of no intrinsic interest except to those versed in its specific aesthetic codes, so the world of community communications should consider the risk of distributing local material to unsuitably wide audiences.

How many potential audiences and users have been deterred from participation in community

video production, for example, by finding themselves trapped in front of some tediously flickering monitor, watching material which is of no apparent relevance to them? The local community who have participated in its making may find a wealth of useful information as well as entertainment from the self-same tape. The members of the same community may not have seen the relevance to their concerns, nor had such an intense experience, from a national broadcast dealing with the same subject in a more generalised and 'professional' way. The only reason to belittle the local process-loaded production in relation to the national 'professional' production is to maintain an idea of a hierarchy of values. In reality, the two kinds of production have different intentions and uses and their quality is embedded in the accuracy with which these elements are selected.

'Popular' self-government is possible when people, acting as citizens, collectively create policy alternatives rather than only respond to them. This can come about when knowledge of events and ways of looking at events are public, that is, shared with full knowledge of their being shared. Private systems of 'knowings and viewings' have to be transformed into public systems of 'knowings and viewings' in order to form publics whose perspectives will bear upon social policy in ways that can create policy alternatives. The process by which private knowledge is transformed into public knowledge is literally the process of *publication*.

Publication as a general social process is the creation of shared ways of selecting and viewing events and aspects of life. In its most advanced form, it is mass production and distribution of message systems transforming private perspectives into broad public perspectives. (George Gerbner, 'Mass Media and Human Communication Theory' in F. E. X. Dance (ed.), *Human Communication Theory*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, pp. 40-57)

As the East London Health Group moved from the local campaign to save the Bethnal Green Hospital to National Health issues, it was possible for local groups to pass from particularised local themes to a more general ideological and political arena and to abstract issues from the particular to the general. Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn made the transformation of this process into visual terms accessible to the members of the group by producing numerous roughs and layouts, as discussions about the nature of the issue proceeded. In contrast to Some Girls, where the intention was to enable young people to *practise* the design process, Leeson and Dunn instituted a process in which their very differently constituted group, including many already heavily committed

working people, could *participate* in the design decisions.

The different attitudes to access represented by the Some Girls and the East London groups was further determined by their entirely opposite starting points. Whereas Some Girls had begun with the intention of trying to involve their group in the *production* of material intended for national distribution, before they had had sufficient experience of local and less sophisticated production processes, the members of the East London Health Group had already cut their teeth on an extensive local campaign. As a result the group had learnt to work collectively and to use Leeson and Dunn as the designers of the posters, with the health workers acting as advisers.

The success of these two approaches to the collective process demonstrates that while the collective element is essential to ensure the quality of the basic reference of the images (the quality of the representation), the process itself need not always take the same form. In the case of the East London Health Group technical literacy in terms of the printing process was not seen as a first priority. The group had come together with the idea of projecting messages on the particular theme of public health issues in which they were all experts. Their priority was to focus on the visual forms through which these messages could be expressed and it was the need to present new and sophisticated arguments to a wide public which concentrated their attention on visual literacy and the elements of visual coding. The young women involved with the Some Girls group had, at the beginning, less clear-cut objectives which they could not relate, at that time, to a national audience. Access to the technology (technical literacy) of the printing process appears to have been an essential element in giving the girls control over the form and the distribution of their communications.

In the field of self-representation through the printed image, visual literacy is the element of crucial and constant concern because of the problem of trying to come to terms with *who*, at any stage of the process of production and distribution, is defining and understanding the meaning of any particular element of the content. The value or the quality of the images in the process of self-representation can only be assessed as a synthesis of collective participation in the conception and production processes with the group's acquisition of visual literacy skills.

It would be wrong to conclude this chapter without mentioning the work done by semiologists as it affects visual literacy in redefining the way that images can be analysed. Semiological analysis, or the science of signs, as it was developed by Saussure, and the Structuralists Barthes and Levi-Strauss, introduced the concept



**Cigarette advertisement appearing in Africa, an international business magazine. How to become a member of the white bourgeoisie by buying cigarettes. The propaganda role of this advertisement concerns not only persuasion to buy the named brand of cigarettes but to become a member of the social group who smokes this product. The picture gives the necessary information: a well-dressed European man greets a well-groomed black couple in a richly furnished hotel room, with brightly burnished brass lamps and the reading matter of the executive middle-classes, *The Times* and *Paris Match*.**

of a system through which communication is achieved. They discussed the separate functions within a communication of the sign, which is made up of two indivisible components: the signifier (a sound or image or act) and the signified (the idea or concept which is communicated). Structural analysis can be valuable in enabling us to consider content and context – including social content – with a common framework and to include, for instance, the way that the context in which a communication is received can affect the possible meaning or signification of the product.

The danger is that we may follow the road of some linguistic studies to the extreme of reductive analysis. This was the basis of my criticism of the visual literacy projects organised by the Cockpit's Cultural Studies Department in London schools, namely that they had the effect of risking the appropriation of protest codes used by students outside school into projects that took place in a context with which the students had a fundamentally different legal relationship. The tutors had seemingly ignored the value of the context in which a sign has meaning.

The importance of the Paddington Printshop, Some Girls, Bootle Art in Action and certain of the other 'community photography' groups' examples (as opposed to some of the work done in the





Illustration from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy in Process*. Education presented as mutual learning and teaching.

purely academic field where the means of production are not included within the framework of the study) is that these projects have consciously examined the questions that arise from including the production process within the spectrum which begins with the concept of a communication and ends with the distribution of the images. By contrast much of the analysis of visual material which takes place within academic studies is based on finished products, in advertising, TV and so on. The inclusion of the production process and the introduction of the idea of technical literacy has only recently been admitted in academic circles and enables us to consider a number of additional factors which determine the way that images are constructed. We can look at the issues of the latent, as opposed to the explicit, meaning of an image in relation to self-representation, without ignoring the material or conceptual production factors which affect it.

Roland Barthes introduced the concept of the secondary system of signs within a work of art or literature; the idea that where a communication is already understood to introduce a symbolic world, the whole system of signs and significations are interpreted by the reader or viewer as taking place within the framework of imagination as opposed to reality.

The introduction of technical literacy is a vital step in making the different layers of coding – the real and the symbolic – accessible to those who wish to take control of their own visual representations. Thus the field of operation covered by those engaged in community communications may often range between the primary system of social realism and the secondary system of the imagination. Their analysis is based in practice, although an essentially ideological practice. And the practitioners should not feel over-awed by the academics, for theirs is the more exacting task,

the combination of analysis, theory and practice in the context of real people, politics and economics. It is they who must commit theory to adapt practice and practical experience to the refinement of theory. In non-academic practice it is important to include within the system human, economic and technical variations for there are a great many factors which can fundamentally affect perceptions and contribute to even day-to-day fluctuations in both performance and interpretation.

Structuralism offers a basis for combining the development of ideology and practical process. It is clear, for instance, that Paulo Freire's work in literacy has been influenced by structuralist studies in linguistics. Freire is engaged in the educational processes of self-representation and literacy from a practical as well as a theoretical point of view. He is insistent that economic and social factors must be permitted to mediate even the most 'perfect' models if success is to be worth aiming at.

There is a fine line in the producers' relationship to the distribution of the image. Often it is necessary to begin by relating local issues to local audiences, and to grasp technical control in order to understand the coding of images. Only then is it sometimes possible or desirable to abstract and generalise to communicate to a wider public. It is perhaps this aspect of mass participation that Hans Magnus Enzensberger omits when he speaks of the participation of the masses in systems of mass communication.

The aesthetics of social change do not reside in formal or content analysis alone, then, but in a spectrum of values, the initial selection of the project by the group involved, the appropriate production technology, the form of the ultimate publication and the use of the images; their readability within a chosen context.

## 5. St Gregory de-canonised

---

It is the nature of the relationship that a photography of self-representation has to political, economic and social concerns which distinguishes it from a social-reformist practice. This is why the context of contemporary education and the confrontation with what is known as cultural domination or 'hegemony' forms the crucial area in which access to mass participation and self-representation should be examined. The last chapter discussed the elements which contribute to the quality of the imagery of self-representation, now we should look at the value of participation in the published image within a modern society.

In portraiture, as in landscape and in most photographic subjects in between, the history of the making and appreciation of high art still asserts itself. But in photography today the influence of the aesthetic codes established in the art world have, superimposed on them, the manifestly more powerful but equally pervasive codes of advertising and consumerism. Together, these two streams of influence contribute to the domination and masking of the class and economic structures which lie behind the production of the published photographic image. They affect the technology and the content as well as the context of the distribution of the image. Both photographers and painters have been tempted, in various periods, to abandon images and turn to words in an attempt to find a way of unmasking the anaesthetising aesthetic which dominates art and commerce. At these moments print has been felt to be more concrete and less ambiguous than image. And yet no amount of manifestos and analytical texts can match the powerful effect of the image in the arena in which it is published and distributed. The photograph may still require a caption to anchor its meaning but words alone do not hold the same power.

In Chapter 2, we looked at the logic of capitalism and the manufacturer's decision to make photography widely available by the device of entering on a process of simplification of the technology, rather than by any process of education through which the public might have gained wider control of the development and use of the medium. The technology of the published image has emulated the technology of the published word, particularly in the ways in which access to the various means of production has been controlled. Several hundred years elapsed between

the invention of the printing press and the widespread teaching of reading and writing through compulsory education. But the ability to consume print was never equated to the ability to produce it. Even now the machine technology related to publication and distribution remains in the power of those who are wealthy enough to own such resources. And it should be noted, it took four centuries between the invention of the printing press and the development of Xerox, which is indeed widely accessible, but relatively one of the most expensive means of printing.

Some of those in search of a visual form that will reveal the constructs of society say the images without words render meaning ambiguous. The claims made by Pope Gregory for the powerful educational force of images are long outmoded, it is argued:

What those who can learn by means of writing, that do the uneducated learn by looking at a picture . . . That, therefore, ought not to have been destroyed which had been placed in the churches, not for worship, but solely for instructing the minds of the ignorant. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh ed., XIV, 273 (s.v. Iconoclasts))

Not only has his idea been overtaken by the very over-sell of picture material emanating from every kind of secular as well as religious institution but, as Paulo Freire's new pedagogy has demonstrated, the illiterate become literate only when they recognise the relevance to their individual lives of the printed word or image. The massive influx of irrelevant material contributes to their repression and confusion. Freire's idea is to seek out the images and words that are already important to the people with whom he works and to use these as the basis for literacy teaching.

Enzensberger's analysis of the necessity of intervention in the 'mass media' by the mass of the people is not contradicted by Paulo Freire's pedagogy. His teaching, that people should write their own primers, translated into visual literacy terms, amounts to an insistence that the people should be no more intimidated by the micro-chip and the satellite than by the printing press. The technology, determined by the logic of capitalism, should not be permitted to represent them but recuperated as a means through which they may represent themselves. Yet, in spite of the parallel between print and image literacy, there is of

course the essential difference, that everyone believes they can read pictures. So, with Paulo Freire's reading primers, it may be necessary to start the process of dissecting the meaning of images, with a vocabulary based on the most familiar representations.

The self-portrait still provides one of the most successful vehicles for exposing the structures and codes which make visual literacy accessible. As a mode of analysis it has precedents in traditional painting. Rembrandt's series of self-portraits, in which he recorded his own physical and material decline, offer a remarkable contrast to the many of the portraits he produced to represent the well-being of his rich and noble patrons. They provide a key to the social and artistic codes of his day and represent as much a statement about the social and economic conditions around him as about his own life. Many painters and, today, many photographers, have adopted a similarly analytical mode using their own image as a vehicle for an examination of social structures.

A conscious comparison of our own images in the average family album with contemporary media portraits is a useful exercise in understanding the extent to which media codes dominate our view of ourselves. As Benjamin observed, with



**Rembrandt: Self portrait, frowning: bust. Second state of three. Haarlem. In first state signed and dated RHL 1630. The lines crossing the plate were burnished out in third state.**



**Rembrandt: Self portrait, leaning forward, listening. Only state. Amsterdam. About 1628.**



**Rembrandt: Self portrait with long bush hair: head only. Second state of six. Amsterdam. About 1631.**



**Rembrandt: Self portrait in fur cap, in an oval border: bust. Only state. Amsterdam. About 1629. One of four surviving impressions, two of which are on larger paper than this one.**



**Jo Spence: Part of a panel from Beyond the family album exhibition (looking at images of self and re-working them).**



**Rembrandt: Self portrait open-mouthed, as if shouting: bust. Second state of three. Signed and dated RHL 1630. Amsterdam.**

irony, the function of photography is to 'renew the world as from within . . . according to the current fashion'.

By examining the way that she had represented herself, both in self-portraits and in her portraits projected for others to take, Jo Spence, of Photography Workshop, set about trying to understand how her own image had been 'constructed', how her 'look' and her projection to others and to some extent her view of herself was mediated by the media view of women. The contradictions which are carefully concealed, for instance, by the contrived young-woman-about-town portrait, 'A Last Fling at "The Look" – Jo at 29', taken on a day of great depression, with head held high (to conceal the bags under her eyes) and a half-smile concealing her real feelings. This photograph represents the *Woman's Own* and fifties movies' image of a woman whose physical imperfections or suffering must be suppressed and concealed in conformation with a view of women as self-





**Jo Spence: Part of a panel from *Beyond the family album* exhibition (looking at an image of self and trying to understand what is being displaced, or forgotten, is not present in the image). Taken by a boy friend of the sitter. 'A last fling at the look.'**

sacrificial supports to 'a man's world'.

The Cockpit School's photographic project was an attempt to introduce a similar method of 'reading' self-portraiture, as a means of formally introducing visual literacy within the school curriculum. It was unfortunate that, while attempting to enable pupils to unmask social codes and constructions, the tutors appear to have introduced a smokescreen of structuralism, which may well have led the students to assume that the whole experience pertained to an alien culture. Nevertheless, the example is useful as it reminds us that this kind of analytical visual teaching has seldom been included so far within school curricula. Whatever its shortcomings, the Cockpit project has made a noteworthy intervention within a formal arena for learning, where even reading and writing words is seldom related to the critical use of such skills.

Photographic education, both formal and informal, has shaped the perceived uses of photography. On the one hand, photography has become established as an 'art', with all the implied outlets from galleries to pictorial publications and, on the other, it has developed as a technical science, serving many different areas of development, from micro-chips to space-age electronics. At the periphery of these formal educational channels

there are the courses established by the manufacturers of photographic equipment and, on a more casual basis, the manufacturer's literature and advertisements and, ostensibly attempting to question the conditions and premises of the formal and manufacturer's education programmes, there are the local resource centres and darkrooms and independent printshops.

Although formal photographic education is more accessible than ever before in full or part-time courses, the majority aim to pass on techniques that meet the existing needs of the media and science. If the theory of content analysis of images is taught at all, it is generally not approached in a way which is translatable into practice. It must be said though, that with the exception of a handful of independent photography projects and a few publications, such as *Camerawork*, *Screen* (formerly *Screen Education*) and the new *Worker-Photographer* magazine, a minority of photographic schools are the only places where the politics of visual theory are regularly examined at all.

This almost total absence of discussion or conscious analysis outside the formal institutions is a problem for two reasons: first, because the kind of discussion is limited to the kind of theory being expounded by those whose principal arena of operation is *inside* such institutions and, secondly, because these circles receive very limited feedback from outside their own extremely self-contained sphere. The structuralist theories for the analysis of visual material for example, as developed within the institutions of academia, have fundamentally ignored what, for most practitioners outside their forums, is a central issue, namely the production context.

'The distinguishing marks of structuralism have come to be a radical internality of analysis, wherein all the elements necessary to analytic understanding are present within the text' (Bob Slater, 'Advertising, Marketing and Commodity Culture', unpublished, 1980). Bob Slater is a regular contributor to *Camerawork*.

I have said earlier that structural analysis embraces the context of consumption. It includes the general placement of the image; the advertisement, for instance, in relation to the television screen, a glossy magazine or a public wall. But this analysis does not include the context of the social and economic background from which particular groups of consumers may come to relate to particular images, nor the technical and economic production relations which construct the image itself. For example, the power of advertising, based on its intermediary economic role in providing a subsidy that supports the very existence of the commercial media, is largely ignored. It is important to examine how the radical ideas of structuralism, as they relate to visual literacy,





As above, from panel on Subordination.

have become so alienated from practical issues.

Like structuralism itself, advertising owes much to the sciences of psychology and psychoanalysis. In fact since the 1950s these disciplines have been used as back-up to the battle for consumer attention, with psychologists providing 'motivational research' for large international advertising agencies. From the point of view of the structuralist, therefore, advertising proves a rich seam of psychological material. The fact that advertising, although it is both economically and physically an elemental part of the wide range of mass media, appears characteristically as a series of self-contained units, means that individual advertisements lend themselves to being recorded and removed from the context of consumption for examination within the walls of academic institutions. In other words, advertisements are, superficially, compact units of mass media, which apparently provide ideal material for academic study. Yet this fact, which enables the capture of the advertisement within a generalised, non-specific context of consumption, such as a newspaper or a television channel, has had the effect of aiding and abetting the academic's willingness to ignore the production process and context. The underlying economic, social and technical production considerations through which content is defined seldom appear in the 'text' as it has come to be understood. The individual interpretation of a 'text' by consumers, with their own separate economic and social background, is often similarly ignored. As a result, the possibility that the means by which an image is produced has any relationship to its effectiveness as the 'signifier' is also of necessity neglected and subsequently a whole range of elements are in this way designated as being largely irrelevant to analysis of the image, including the effect of the mode of production on the means of distribution and the background brought by the individual viewer to any particular image.

The positive contribution of structuralism to the examination of photography and visual literacy can be seen, not in the theses which reduce or collapse the components of a process in the search for meaning within the finished image, but rather in the expectation which the system has brought of depths of meaning. Structuralism has offered us certain tools with which to see beneath the surface of the apparently closed book of traditional modes of criticism.

Armand Mattelart is optimistic about the individual perceptions brought by the public to the onslaught of advertising.

However, as shown by some studies the audience does not necessarily accept reading the messages sent to it by the ruling class with the code

prescribed by this class and its culture. The receiver does not necessarily adopt the attitude which will make these messages coherent with the bourgeoisie's dreams of stability and the survival of its order. The meaning of a message is not limited to the stage of transmission. The audience may also produce its own meaning. (Introduction to 'Class Analysis of Communication' in *Communication and Class Struggle*, vol. 1, International General, 1979)

If Mattelart's optimism is justified, the elements contributing to individual interpretations of images must not be ignored. We cannot afford to overlook any aspect of production and technical literacy. They can all contribute to the deterrence of mass intervention in the mass media. Writing in Italy in prison under Fascism, Gramsci defined cultural hegemony as the mass of institutions comprised of schools, church, universities, media, unions and the family, which inform the cultural thinking of the working class with bourgeois ideology. He contrasted the insidious effect that the multiplicity of these institutions had on Western Europe, making revolution more culturally distant, with the absence of such institutions under the Tsar in Russia. He came to the conclusion that the inexistence of a comparable complex of institutionalised ideology in Tsarist Russia had permitted a successful socialist revolution to be strategically planned and executed. In Western Europe Gramsci saw that the complete range of bourgeois ideological supports would first have to be overcome.

During the decades since Gramsci developed his theory of cultural hegemony and the dominant institutions, it has become clear that the nature of these institutions is one of 'apparent' independence of the state. 'Independence' is necessary for their credibility since it enables them to claim such indispensable characteristics as being 'balanced' or 'responsive'. At times socialist thinking even penetrates these institutions and they are taken over by pro-left factions. Whole cycles of ideologies can be traced through certain major institutions, together with the resulting purges, such as that which in the aftermath of the May 1968 uprising in France led the state to sack many of the broadcasting workers. And the classic example of a purge of left influence within the major institutions remains McCarthy's witch-hunt of left professionals working in education and the cinema in the USA in the fifties.

Although cultural domination or 'hegemony' affects the mass of the people over a long term and in a multi-faceted way through social, political, educational and religious institutions, those institutions are also liable to be penetrated by revolutionary socialist debates and may at times reflect them. The important factor about such



Terry Dennett and Jo Spence: from *Remodelling Photo History*, a collaboration between two photographers, from panel on Colonisation.

institutions, however, is not whether they pursue a policy of toleration towards representation from the left, but that this occurs within an overall structural context which ensures that these representations are encompassed by dominant cultural messages.

The effect of hegemony is not felt through any one product, a single TV series, film or exhibition, but through the sum of the institutions and daily outflow of bourgeois class philosophies. Class alliances are established in this continuity with all its contradictions.

We must examine the part played by the photograph within this continuity, while at the same time trying not to fall into the trap of exaggerating its importance as a medium over, for example, the radio or television. Yet, although these other media can perhaps have even more impact in penetrating the individual's home, the photograph is nevertheless one of the few elements of visual recording that, like the printed word, can be stored, recalled and re-examined without recourse to further technology.

The problem of the photographic image, once distributed in the main stream media, in the form, for instance, of a press image, is that like the other contents of the newspaper it does nothing to encourage participation or expression on the part of the mass of readership. Even should the paper run an occasional competition for readers' photographs, such participation falls into the category of empty gestures (alongside phone-in programmes and debates between experts on a panel and massive studio audiences, the members of which are directed by the chairperson to be extremely brief).

In setting out to look at how the photograph can become an agent of democracy, I have taken a frankly 'popular front' attitude to the expressed politics of those involved in whatever way in the struggle to transform participation in the production, representation and distribution of the published image. The intention has not been to ignore the distinctions between, for example, the revolutionary aims of the communist worker-photographer movement and the largely social-reformist motives of community photography projects today. Rather, it has seemed that in a period (the 1980s) of political as well as economic depression and repression there is reason to give close examination to the structure of participation itself, to the motivation and the means for collective participation. For while the press in Britain, even the left press, gives very little attention, either in pictures or in words, to oppression outside the workplace and beyond trade unionism and wage issues, community organisation has become both the front line and, at times, the elastoplast for struggle outside the place of work.

The first worker-photographers (see Chapters 1 and 2) were indeed inspired by the stalinists, who, whatever criticism one may make of their politics, taught us how to create a teaching and distributive network for photographs through which the cultural hegemony of the bourgeois press could be opposed.

They introduced training workshops, as well as a distributive network for cultural opposition, which included the establishment of the magazine, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* (Worker-Photographer). It offered workers a context for the development of a radical aesthetic and, at the same time, debated not just the ideology but the technical means. It introduced the concept of a technical literacy which could overcome the advertising propaganda for photographic equipment and the limitations placed by the manufacturers on the logical uses of cameras and films. *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* gave chemical, lighting and camera information which made picture-taking possible in a much wider set of contexts than those suggested by Mr Eastman!

The strength of *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* lay in the fact that it was backed by the Communist Party through its publication the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ). So that in effect it was, from the beginning, an initiative from within the workers' movement and aligned to the ideology of revolution. The fundamental differences between the majority of community photography projects, as well as socialist photographers in Britain today, and the worker-photographer movement in Germany and elsewhere, lie on two fronts: on the absence of any organised left commitment to the aims of contemporary British projects; and on the lack of any coherent strategy to engage working people in the process of self-representation. As a result, where promising projects do exist, they are compelled to create their distributive networks from scratch and to work very much in isolation.

Many British projects may benefit from an examination of the process and strategy of the worker-photographer movement. In particular, the mutual teaching network enabled workers to become collectively conscious of the aesthetic debate within photography and to move towards the substitution of the dominant visual language with one they felt more truly expressed their view of the world. In fact, contemporary projects which encounter problems establishing an aesthetic of representation may draw consolation from those recorded by the worker-photographers. Erich Rinka, the former general secretary of the Association of Worker-Photographers of Germany, remembers these difficulties in his account of the first conference of the movement in 1927:

I am not ashamed to say that in the exhibition shown during the Conference all the features of bourgeois photography were represented. The



*see previous caption: from panel on Self-image.*



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köpfigen Bauarbeiterfamilie, nachdem wir vor kurzem den sozialistischen Alltag in der „24 Stunden“-Reportage aus dem Leben einer siebenköpfigen Moskauer Metallarbeiterfamilie zeigten



journal *Arbeiter-Fotograf* even published a bromoil print on the occasion of the Conference. And that was quite correct – for, if you want to win people for a great idea, you need to start out from things which they actually consider to be great. It is therefore no disgrace that such prints should have been presented at the exhibition and in the journal and that pride should even have been taken in them. Controversy about bourgeois photography had only just begun and then had to be constantly continued.

When worker-photography first started to assert itself it even encountered approval among the bourgeoisie, because it presented something new, e.g. the international orientation. The concept of a series of photos was also a new feature. As far as I know such series had not appeared in any photo studio or at any photo exhibition of bourgeois photography up to that time.

The worker-photographers on the other hand had been oriented from the start towards series and photo reports by the *AIZ*. (Interview, *Creative Camera*, May/June, 1981)

The most pressing problem in relation to photography today remains that identified by Erich Rinka, the rediscovery of meaning and representation within a visual language. Although there are some important differences within this search from that undertaken by Freire in his work on radical pedagogy, many of the problems are the same. The language with which we interpret images has become worn in similar ways as that with which Freire is dealing to teach literacy. As Freire has found, the fibre of the language of interpretation has, like the image itself, suffered many layers of appropriation.

He wrote in his Final Word to the volume of *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*:

One of the points to which I will need to return is that of language. The deeper I go in the Guinean experience, the more importance this problem assumes. It demands different responses under different circumstances. The fact is that language is inevitably one of the major preoccupations of a



Worker-photographer: Eugen Heilig: Homeworkers.



**Worker-photographer: Eugen Heilig: Women's Work. At Phillips in Berlin, 1930-31.**

society which, liberating itself from colonialism and refusing to be drawn into neocolonialism, searches for its own re-creation. In the struggle to re-create a society, the reconquest by the people of their own word becomes a fundamental factor. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, Writers and Readers, 1978)

On the other hand, the meaning of images without words is frequently, if not always, ambiguous. We add captions, we interpret with slogans, balloons, we juxtapose words and images. We use the written language with which we interpret, in our mind, or out loud, the meaning of the image.

A new pedagogy must be found to tackle the visual image, even though images may never again become equivalents of words, if they ever were, let alone independent of them. Yet if we are to learn anything from the worker-photographer movement and from Gramsci's analysis of the nature of cultural hegemony, it seems we should note that those who look to the state-run teaching institutions for revisions or new leads in the

pedagogy of visual awareness may be disappointed. Within the essential characteristics of such institutions in the contemporary Western context, it appears that there is built-in jamming of effective change. By contrast the worker-photographers offer an entirely different model of pedagogy: one which appears to have been much closer to that proposed by Paulo Freire; one in which the participants were by turn both teachers and pupils. The problems encountered by the movement in offloading the visual language of established bourgeois photographic standards can be compared to those of which Freire writes in terms of the spoken and written language. He refers to the hegemony of the reading primer and proposes that the material of the primers should be controlled by the pupils. In the case of photography cultural domination was expressed, from the beginning, through the development of the technology which led to the established notion of photography as a series of isolated possibilities, as an art or craft; as the snapshot or as 'evidence' of the existence of an event or commodity.

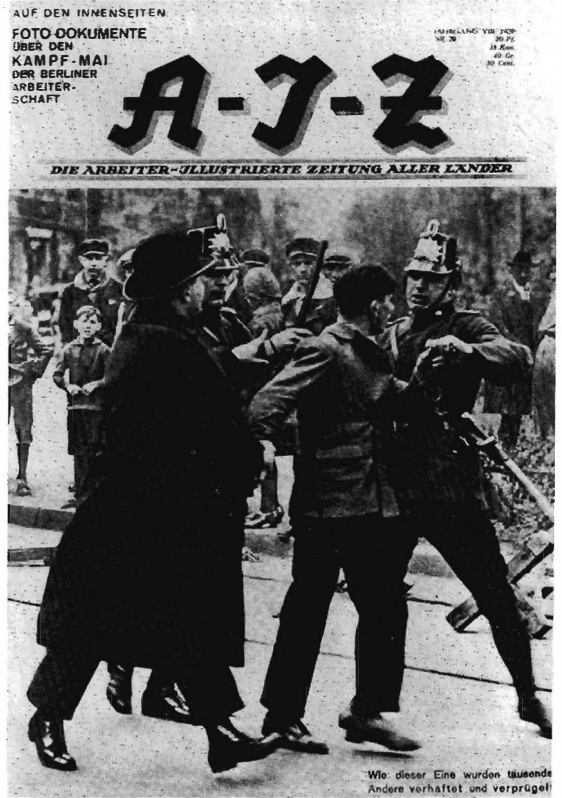
In the case of the written and spoken language, the colonial domination which Freire perceives emanating from both technical and reading primers in the Third World is equally prevalent in the class and sex bias of most teaching materials in Western Europe. The model of the worker-photographer movement is significant because of the realistic ways it sought to counter cultural hegemony among working people, outside the established institutions of work or learning. Freire reminds us that, even where there are radical teachers, it is not in the heads of the educators but in a 'new social practice' that the 'new man and new woman' will be constructed. Each person who knows something must teach someone who knows less, is a philosophy which can all too easily be dismissed as inapplicable to the post-industrial society.

For us, there was no Art, technical competence was a means, not an end. We learnt to use the camera as a weapon in the class struggle and, quite simply through the most realistic presentation, to strive for the greatest expressiveness and vividness in photographs . . . Like the workers' press, workers' photography was to assist in organisation, propaganda and agitation. We found no example worthy of imitation among so-called progressive bourgeois photographers. (Eugen Heilig, an electro-plater and worker-photographer, in *Creative Camera on Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, May/June, 1981)

The relevance of learning and teaching outside formal institutions speaks for itself. It seems that the most important innovations in the development of image literacy have arisen where there has been a dialectic unity between practice and theory, action and reflection. Within the projects reviewed here, the significant developments in the re-examination of visual literacy and of access to representation and publication have occurred where frameworks for collective reflection meet with practical need.

Am I suggesting that 'teachers' are redundant? No. Rather that there is an alternative to the academic removing himself or herself from practical experience; that the worker should have the opportunity to 'take distance' and reflect upon practice. In particular it seems necessary to move towards a much more fluid relationship between school and university and technical training and the world outside.

There would be a place for a small band of educators, well prepared and willing to become completely incorporated into the life of the community. They would participate with the peasants in all the productive activities and would, in addition, take on the task of systematis-



Cover of AIZ: Like this man, thousands were arrested and beaten up.

ing the informal learning . . . They would do it *with* the population, not *for* it. (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*)

It would be a mistake to see such an approach as applicable in Britain only within the spheres of depressed communities, schemes for the unemployed, or as a new experimental programme for low achievers in schools. We have allowed a massive transformation to overtake us; art, religion, politics, friendship and family life have all been brightly wrapped as marketable commodities, backed by the financial and philosophical control of advertising. Ultimately cultural domination is effected through the whole range of social and state institutions over which the individual has lost all sight of control. It is this characteristic which reinforces the notion of collective organisation of the means of intervention and the collective study of the language of self-representation.

While the site for collective learning is undoubtedly outside formal institutions it is disappointing to find many of community photography's projects in the right places but facing, in terms of cultural alliances, in the wrong direction. Too

many of these projects depend for their funding on the appeasement of interests other than those of the people whom they say they are helping 'to express themselves'. But the problem can be rectified: 'Our errors should not discourage us just as our victories should not make us forget our errors' (Amilcar Cabral, the assassinated leader

and theoretician of the liberation movement of the Portuguese colonies).

To achieve cultural synthesis as opposed to succumbing to cultural invasion, access to control over the published photograph and understanding how images communicate messages is an essential first step.



Worker-photographer: Eugen Heilig. No caption.

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