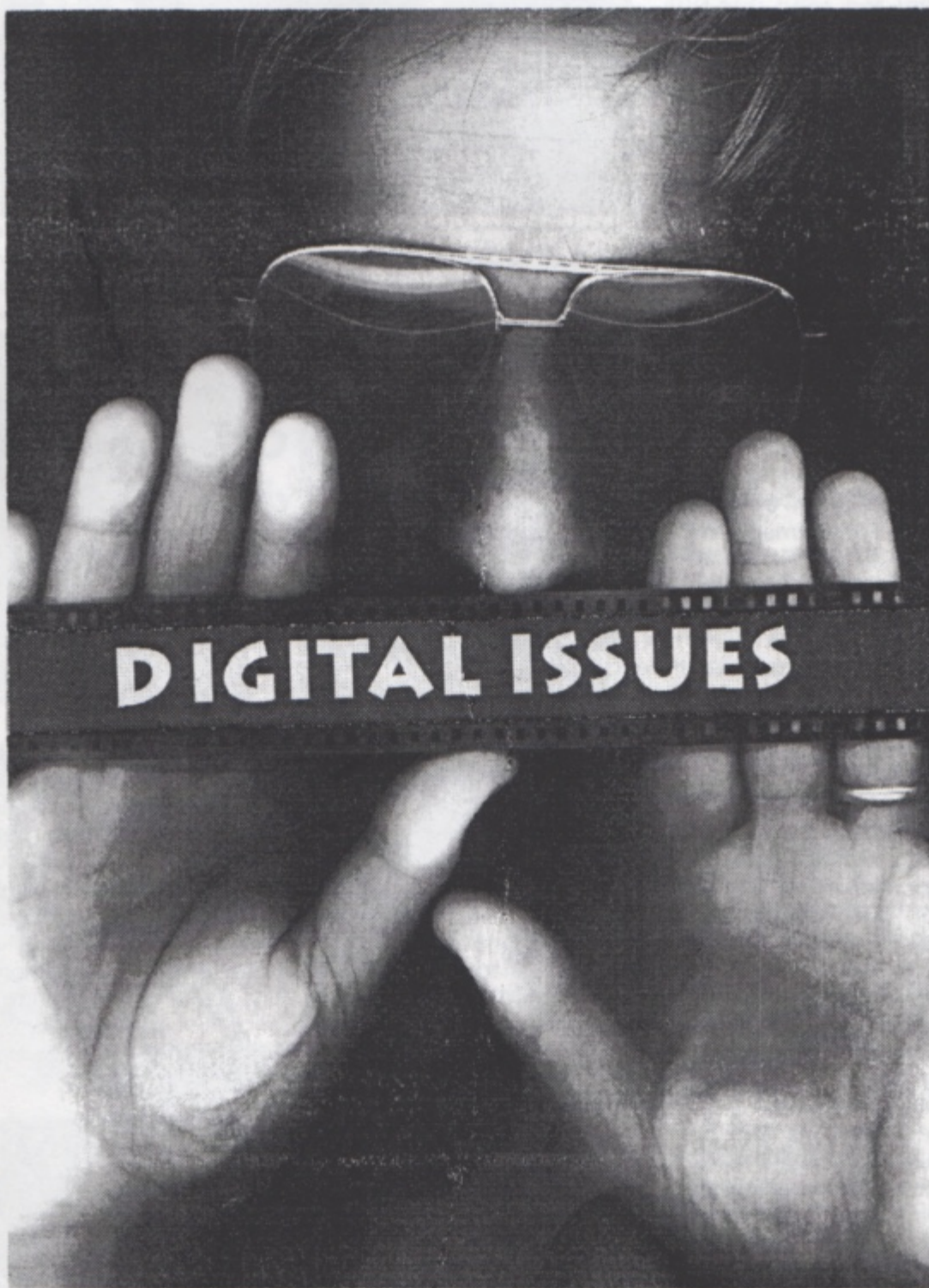


LIPSERVICE

JOURNAL OF LONDON
INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHY
MARCH 1995

DIGITAL: peter marshall / ron geibert / ritva raitalo



OTHERS : dorothy fletcher / davyd davis / roger estop / jill staples / virginia kouri / gracie webb

scanner self-portrait of the editor

state of the art technology

Peter Marshall

While writing this I open each issue of a computer or photo magazine knowing that I will have to make revisions as new products and processes are announced. By the time you read it, some details will certainly be out of date. Also some simplifications are necessary for a nontechnical audience - anoraks please disengage pedant mode!

Digital Imaging

Progress in the replacement of film by digital imaging is currently fairly slow. Image size is one problem; the digital equivalent of a single 35mm image occupies, in uncompressed form, approximately 40 Mb. (Around 30 normal 1.44Mb floppy disks!) Fortunately compression techniques can reduce this considerably, but files are still large. Kodak have just announced the DCS 460, a high quality digital back to fit a 35mm camera, with a 3060x2036 pixel imaging device giving roughly film quality. The back has a rechargeable battery pack good for around 30 exposures, and spare batteries can be bought. The large file size means a time between shots of 12 seconds, and the second drawback is the \$27,995 price tag. The cheaper DCS420 - around one third of the price but only a quarter of the pixels - may be of more interest. As well as these Kodak/Nikon models there are also similar Canons planned. To date all 35mm conversions have suffered from the small size of the light-sensitive element, which has the result of increasing the apparent focal length of the lenses by a factor around 2. New models due from Nikon and Fuji later this year include optics to get round this problem, making wide-angle views possible.

Large format backs are already in use for such purposes as catalogue photography, and the extension of this technology into other print-related areas can only be a matter of time as the technology improves.

One Canadian newspaper recently announced that all its photography would in future be digital

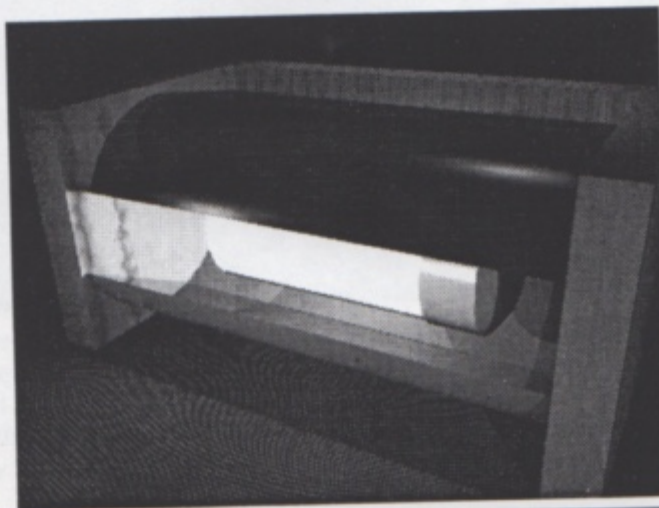
Low cost solutions use similar technology to a normal video camera to produce single frames at typical resolutions of 320x240 or 640x480. These can produce near photographic quality at around enprint size, but are more suited for applications where the screen is the intended output device. Low technical quality does not of course preclude the artistic use of a medium - indeed it may even enhance it. Somewhere out there are around 100,000 digital/still video cameras - so someone must be using them. One Canadian newspaper recently announced that all its

photography would in future be digital - others are likely to follow in the near future.

Camera-less imaging is also a rapidly growing area; photorealistic results can be produced by computer programs of scenes that are defined in program files. The freeware ray-tracing program POV was used to calculate the image below producing colours, textures and light effects. On a reasonably powerful PC this took about 8 hours.

Conversion to digital images

For those interested in digital manipulation of their pictures, the cheapest way to get your work into digital form is Photo-CD. Take your film (neg or tran) in for processing, request the service and a CD with your images scanned at high resolution is returned. Scans on already processed film cost from 50p to £20 per image (depending on quantity and quality!). You can buy your own film scanner from around £900 up, although from reading the reviews I would suggest £5000 is a sensible price to pay. A CD writer to store your



Design for
adjustable
angle light.
Ray-trace by
Joseph
Marshall

Selected student work from each year at Spelthorne College is saved on Photo CD for future reference



Examples of easily applied effects using Adobe Photoshop (or other similar software). The author produced these on a PC, but the software is virtually identical on a Mac.



images on will cost another £2500 or so. The Kodak format is a proprietary one, but you can use other formats to write your own files.

For those with only a small fortune, A4 flat bed scanners that handle 24 or 32 bit colour (required for high quality) at around 400-600 lines per inch cost around £700 or so. Add a couple of thousand for computer and software and you can scan your prints to give files suitable for moderately serious work. The cover picture was produced using a similar monochrome scanner. Flatbeds sometimes have transparency adapters, but the quality from these is low. Hand held scanners? Don't even think about it.

Digital manipulation

Programs such as Photoshop (Mac or PC) allow you to correct your pictures in various ways - improving contrast, burning and dodging, removing colour casts, spotting, removing (or adding) lampposts growing out of people's heads etc. They also allow you a control over colour and tonality to give effects such as solarisation, negative images, bas-relief etc at the click of a button - Man Ray eat your heart out! Photomontage is like falling off a log.

solarisation, negative images, bas-relief etc at the click of a button - Man Ray eat your heart out!

Toning and hand-colouring no problem. There is perhaps little new in any of this, (although some of the effects are probably not achievable even by complex masking and darkroom techniques) but it all becomes so easy - and with practice can be absolutely seamless. A good example of this are the 'documentary 3

fictions' of Pedro Mayer - such as 'The strolling saint' which was in the recent V&A Street exhibition. (see also reference at end)

Printing

Reproduction for publication has for some time involved conversion of images into digital form. For single or small runs of prints, very high quality can be obtained using expensive Iris ink jet printers - for example the fine-art prints produced by Nash editions, including exciting images from Robert Heinecken and Olivia Parker (and some rather boring ones from others!) You can get laser copy type printouts for around £3 to £10. Cheap inkjets can produce interesting results - so long as you are not after 'photographic' quality, as can laser printers for black and white - as used for this magazine. I have a small platinum print which provides an interesting hybrid of old and new. The original 11x14 neg was scanned, then adjusted and retouched before being printed at 1800 dpi (dots per inch) by an Iris inkjet printer onto film which was then exposed onto Palladio platinum paper. There is no obvious screen pattern even when examined with a magnifier - it looks just like normal photographic grain.

Digital Publishing

Perhaps the most exciting area at the moment involves the new possibilities in publishing offered by digital media. Photographs are increasingly becoming available on CD-ROM - privately produced catalogues of photographer's work (like my own **London Pictures 1992** - 5000 images from one year with a computer searchable index - already looking very dated), image anthologies from Hulton and other libraries and stock photo collections. Perhaps the most interesting offering to date is Pedro Meyer's **'Truths & Fictions: A Journey from Documentary to Digital Photography'** with commentary

by Jonathan Green. Watch out for **From Silver to Silicon** awarded a publishing grant. The replacement for the photography book is suggested by Microsoft's Art Gallery, presenting the National Gallery's huge collection together with text, commentary and animations.

Essentially it could be a whole library on a disk for you to explore.

Imagine a Weston Disk, where from an image you could jump to a related passage from one of the Daybooks, to various commentaries on the picture, to background material on the subject, to related images by Weston, or by others; biographical details, technical details, movie clips, etc. Essentially it could be a whole Weston library on a disk for you to explore. The Museum of London is currently working on a book on **Photographers of London** which will be accompanied by an exhibition and a CD-ROM, and most publishers of photography will be thinking on similar lines. Cost is one motive; The origination costs for a CD can be as low as three figures, and the duplication cost only around 20p per disk, comparing very favorably with printed images and text. But the new interactive possibilities of the medium - multimedia - making use of still and moving images, photographed and drawn, and also music, sound effects, spoken and written text also excite interest. The **Internet** provides another publishing medium. Today I connected to a World Wide Web page on a computer at the National Library of Congress in Washington USA, searched their collection of Civil War pictures, downloading an image of Gettysberg, as well as a bibliography of civil war photography - all for the price of a ten minute local phone call. The colour work of the FSA is available too, with black and white scheduled

to be on-line next year. There are quite a few 'exhibitions' and photo articles scattered around the net - another well-known one featuring Ansel Adams. Or you can 'telnet' into the University of Texas and their rapidly expanding database of exhibitions and biographies from 1839- 1995 and see if your name is there yet. Or join a mailing list to ask questions on alternative processes to experts such as Mike Ware, Dick Bostock, Luis Nadeau and others. Look out for my article on photography on the Internet, hopefully appearing in a magazine near you shortly.

Conclusions

Digital photography is only in its infancy, but already we can see some of the implications and opportunities it offers. Change to a digital medium may be forced on us in any case, as digital storage replaces film for both family snaps and professional work. Film - particularly modern emulsions - needs large scale production, and this may collapse very suddenly in the not too distant future. Alternative processes could survive the end of photographic paper, but few of us could or would revive calotype or wet collodion. Perhaps most importantly - beyond the largely technical views above - the transition to digital will result in a complete conceptual repositioning of photography - stretching perhaps to breaking point that already strained link between the photograph and the subject which gives the medium its peculiar immediacy and power.

References:

Most magazines seemed to have had an issue on digital photography, but far and away the best introduction - certainly in terms of pictures - is **Aperture 136: Metamorphoses: Photography in the Electronic Age** (1994). Anyone with a connection to the Internet might like to E-mail me for a copy of my Netscape bookmark file of photo URLs.

The view from Wright State

Ron Geibert

A darkroom built today would not appear to be that different from one built 15 or 20 years ago. An enlarger is an enlarger! Over a decade ago university administrations reluctantly plunked money into our dark basement refuge and probably planned to forget us. They certainly didn't expect anyone back in the following year or two requesting a complete upgrade of the "obsolete" facilities! Oh, how things have changed! The digital age has now put small fine arts departments between a 'rock and a hard place.' How does one introduce this new technology and art without depleting the entire department budget on one or two pieces of equipment?

I have found multimedia and CD-ROMs to be one solution. A short two years ago I took the plunge into pixel purgatory. After a workshop on Photoshop, and spending six months begging for a computer from my college dean, I created the digital files for a Macintosh CD-ROM that served

as the publication for an exhibition for which I was curator. **The New Street Photography**, published in early 1994, featured work by artists including Mitch Epstein, Larry Fink, Joel Meyerowitz, Martin Parr, and Henry Wessel. The response to the kiosk installation was overwhelming. Rarely a moment went by that students and gallery visitors were not gathered around the 16-inch screen, clicking up images and biographical information, or listening to the audio commentary. Of course, it delighted the administration to see such a quick "payback" on their investment. They have shown their appreciation through support for a new exhibition and CD-ROM which will survey international photography in the 1990s.

I am incorporating multimedia into my classroom as well. Using new user-friendly Kodak software, in conjunction with their new *Portfolio CD*, I have created instructional CD-ROMs

for use in my History of Photography course. Plans are also under way to offer next year a CD-ROM course where students will create their own presentations, as well as design kiosk presentations for our gallery. The CD-ROM requires Photoshop work as simple or complicated as the student wishes, and exposes them to graphic design, sound recording, and editing. Presentations may be stored on the hard drive at no cost to the student or cut as a multi-platform Kodak *Portfolio CD* for as little as what a couple of boxes of photographic paper cost. We avoid the prohibitive hardware and output costs of dye-sublimation prints, and individual digital files for photographs are rarely larger than one megabyte, making expensive RAM less of a concern. There is little "go for a cup of coffee" processing in multimedia. Finally, the students learn a skill applicable in the commercial world.

Multimedia is concerned less with traditional print issues and more with what and how photographs communicate. I am finding it, combined with the traditional darkroom and silver-based printing, to be an exciting compromise that opens up new areas of investigation and discussion in our fine arts department.

Ron Geibert is a Professor of Art at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, USA

Call For Entries:

**PHOTO-
GRAPHY
in the
1990s.**

International survey on CD-ROM and exhibition with collection purchases juried by museum curators from Chicago, Houston, New York, and Paris.

For prospectus contact Wright State University Art Galleries, 3640 Col. Glenn Hwy, Dayton, OH, USA 45435 FAX 513-873-4082

Entry postmark deadline: June 15, 1995

Taking the plunge

To find out more about Digital Imaging try a course - such as those organised by Peter Goldfield at Duckspool. See later in this issue for more details on Duckspool.

You will also find various computer courses organised by your local Adult Education department - possibly including classes using Photoshop.

Ritva Raitalo

IN THE CITY



PHOTOMONTAGE using Photoshop

workshops, shows, newsletters, etc

Duckspool

Workshops this season include Digital Imaging (17-21 March, repeated 15-19 Sept), John Davies, John Blakemore, Dewi Lewis, Sharon Kivland, John Goto, Fay Godwin. US visitors include Jan Groover on Constructing the image, Magnum photojournalist Susan Meiselas, and the unmissable Charlie Harbutt - one of whose workshops changed the life of Peter Goldfield, providing the inspiration which eventually led to him setting up Duckspool.

Costs vary depending on the length of course (weekends to a week) and the fame of the leader - in the range £190-£390 including accommodation and meals. If you've not been before, the food is great (so is the cider and the company), the accommodation is basic and the darkroom is unprintable! Highly recommended.

Get full details by phoning 01823-451305.

Male Image News

is a free A5 newsletter available from Dept MIN, Garden Flat, 20 Lonsdale Rd, London W11 2DE (enclose SAE) featuring images of athletic-looking young men in various states of undress 'for those interested in the male form' including photographers and models.

It states 'All of the images appearing in this newsletter are of models aged over 18. Mention or appearance of any person or organisation in Male Image News does not imply anything about their sexual orientation or beliefs.' Mention of MIN in LipService certainly doesn't imply anything about me either.

Islington Arts Factory

2 Parkhurst Rd N7, has darkrooms for hire at £10 for 3 hours, exhibition space and various photography courses. There is also music, dance and painting and drawing. Details from 0171-607 0561

Second Sight

is a new publication for Independent Photographers supported by Eastern Arts, which aims to 'promote the practice and teaching of good quality, thoughtful photography, and the development of theory and creative writing on contemporary and historical photographic issues.'

Published 3 times a year - next issue March 1995 - from galleries or by subscription (£6 individuals, £10 institutions per annum) from Second Sight, c/o Wellum Cottage (1 Hall Farm Cottages) Swainsthorpe, Norwich, NR14 8QA. Norwich 661663 or 0508 471376.

Photofusion

in Brixton - just behind the station (17a Electric Lane SW9 8LA) organises a range of workshops, events and exhibitions. They also have darkroom and studio facilities for members.

On show 12 April-23 May is the work of Slovakian photographers, Rudo Prekop, Kamil Varga and Peter Zupnik. Each photographer is also giving a workshop - on Still-Life, Experimenting with Light and Painting onto your prints respectively.

Dates and prices on 071 738 5774

Camerawork

is down the Roman (121 Roman Rd, Bethnal Green, E2 0QN) and offers exhibitions, courses and darkroom facilities.

For details contact Helen Sloan or Barbara Hunt on 081-980 6256 E-mail cam@camwork.demon.co.uk

North Paddington

Community Darkroom is at 1 Elgin Avenue London W9 3PR. and offers workshops, courses, darkroom, studio and equipment hire to Westminster residents. Details on 071 286 5543

IPSE

highlights include a Spring Workshop with John Goto and Peter Kennard, 29-30 April at Micklepage. Contact Jill Staples for details on 0444 881891. Sam Gardener has a show of Chilean landscapes at the Trinity Arts Centre 1-19 April, and the IPSE show is at St Julians, Sevenoaks 25 May to 28 June.

The Photographers' Place

Paul Hill's place in Derbyshire was the first proper workshop in this country and is still going strong - workshops with Paul, Thomas Joshua Cooper, Fay Godwin, Mike Ware and Greg Lucas. Similar to Duckspool but a better darkroom. Details on 01335 390392

Los Pinos

Apartado de Correos 102, 29754 Competa (Málaga), Andalucía, España offers similar workshops in a sunnier climate at from £395 per week. Details on UK phone / fax 01386 841715

letters

Tony Mayne writes:

Dear Editor,

I am currently in the process of writing an MA dissertation on photographic documentary work which chronicles 'the oppressed'. The most obvious progenitors of such 'anthropological' work are Riis and Hine. I am looking at such modern exponents as McCullin and Salgado.

Moyra Peralta's picture and article on the cover of November's LipService interested me in this context. Almost any LIP member (including myself) might have done similar work. In the spirit of her letter [vol.2, issue 2], I would be extremely interested to read in LipService comments from any LIP members who might have views about the choice of such a subject matter.

I am not interested in the rightist moral view that the man preferred to smoke rather than pay for lodgings, nor the leftist view that Ms. Peralta should have offered him her spare room for the night. My interest is why she, and we, photograph such people; what she, and we, want to achieve with such photographs (history shows that few photographs change anything in the way the photographer intended); and, especially, whether it is appropriate to view such pictures on gallery walls and in serious photographic publications such as LIP SERVICE (would 'Socially committed' journals be a more appropriate platform for their reproduction?).

Yours faithfully,

Tony Mayne

Letters are welcome on anything connected with photography - including responses to Tony's letter - please send them to: Peter Marshall, 31 Budebury Rd, STAINES, Middx, TW18 2AZ or E-mail them to petermarshall@cix.compulink.co.uk

My thanks to the several people who wrote brief notes commenting favourably on the last issue.

My immediate thought on Tony's letter is that so far as the example he chooses to write about is that his comments appear to have chosen to separate it from the text which accompanied it, and he appears to underate (perhaps through lack of awareness) the commitment to work in this area (not only photography) of the person concerned.

Few individual actions result in immediate large-scale effects (despite chaos theory), but may - together with a million others - play an important part in establishing a climate of opinion that leads to change.

Finally where are these 'socially committed journals' and who reads them?

PM



Dorothy Thelwall

from 'Compost Heap Series'

See article at right. Dorothy has an exhibition 'The New A1 Motorway in Yorkshire' at the Old School Arts Workshop, Middleham, Yorks, 3 March- 2 April (closed Mon & Tue)

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE NATURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

DAVYD DAVIS

Being relatively new to photography, and very new to London Independent Photography, I decided it might be a good idea to attend an LIP print viewing evening in an effort to gain some insight into the nature of photography. What follows are some impressions and thoughts gleaned from that evening.

The print viewing took place in Virginia Khuri's studio, an elegant space devoted to the art of enjoyment, selection, and photography. Within this captivating space, those of us present countered Walter Kerr's notion of the decline of pleasure by taking pleasure in viewing and discussion that had very little utilitarian value, yet not without profit for some - certainly for me (1).

Many impressions emerged throughout the evening, but the central one - so beautifully orchestrated and conducted by Mick Williamson was the simple pleasure of photography in all its complex and contradictory aspects and concepts. These aspects and concepts seem to embrace philosophy, art, architecture, craftsmanship, culture, history, humanism, mysticism, psychology, the quantum idea, technology, and a pronounced sensitivity to living on the part of many captivated by the medium. I came to feel that there is an overwhelming correspondence between photography and philosophy. I recall that Ansel Adams, at the first great photography conference to be held in the United States at Aspen, Colorado in 1950, cautioned against over-intellectualising photography, yet he went on to do just that throughout the period of the conference (2). For all sorts of reasons, photography seems to be a vocation or avocation that cannot escape intellectualising or philosophy, and if photographers fail to address this circumstance,

then others will - witness Barthes, Beloff, Benjamin, Sontag (3).

During the evening, numerous ideas in photography were explored - if only briefly. To cite but a few: the debate between the notion of photography projects that are planned in advance and those that emerge from negatives or proof sheets; ideal camera formats for various subjects; different paper types and grades; portraits that compliment or fail to compliment; photographing one's family; constructed images; patterns of human distancing in photographs; various experimental techniques; and, photographs as expressions or homages to distant or dead friends or family. Most of the ideas considered came from viewing various prints.

The prints offered for viewing were wide ranging in subject and technique. Helen Griffiths invited us to experience what I thought of as photography as a kind of performance art with photographs of photographs blowing in the wind, and she introduced prints that touched upon the ideas of Jun'ichiro Tanizaki in his book, *In Praise of Shadows*. We saw some of the thinking involved in putting together a constructed image; saw the results of a variety of experimental techniques; and saw a farm and youthful travel documented. We were also introduced to a series of prints that were of exquisite measure by Dorothy Thelwall using items within a compost heap as subjects (see *left*) and composing a series of images with profound metaphorical implications regarding human ageing and humanism in general. She also produced equally beautiful geological images that seemed to interface the organic and inorganic.

I left the LIP print viewing evening with ideas as to the

nature of photography crashing into each other. Suddenly, photography seemed quantum-like in many ways. As the observer seems to influence the experimental in quantum physics, the photographer seems to influence the photographic results even when photographing the inorganic. Very quickly, I came to think of photography as an organic process wherein the photographer, subject, and result are a unity. This unity includes the making of the negative, development of the image, and presentation of the result.

I came to think that individuals like Virginia Khuri and Dorothy Thelwall see where many fail to see, then invite others to see as well. Some accept the invitation; others reject it. Khuri and Thelwall do not interfere in the process, rather they are part of it - a realisation of process and reality.

As photography moves into digital mode, it is in some ways embracing facets of the arts and crafts movement of a century ago. Alternative techniques in printing abound (4), and many (like Dorothy Thelwall) echo the arts and crafts movement ideal that creative manual work (as in the photographic process as now generally practised) provides personal fulfilment (5).

SOURCES

- (1) W. Kerr, *The Decline of Pleasure*, 1962.
- (2) J. S. Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture*, 1983.
- (3) R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1982; H. Beloff, *Camera Culture*, 1985; see P. Marshall, 'Short on History', *LipService*, 1994; S. Sontag, *On Photography*, 1978.
- (4) See for example, *Camera and Dark-room*, Dec. 1990.
- (5) M. Greensted, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Cotswolds*, 1993.

Figuring out Thomas Struth

Roger Estop

I find Thomas Struth's work unsatisfying: the pictures are dull, the approach is inconsistent, his representation of 'the city' is unfocussed and does not acknowledge the strong legacy of urban landscape and urban portrait photography, and it's difficult to know what the work is really about.

I find Thomas

Struth's work unsatisfying: the pictures are dull, the approach is inconsistent.... he was the most prominent photographer in London last year

Why worry? Struth enjoys critical praise; he was the most prestigiously prominent photographer in London last year - a solo show at the ICA and work in two major group exhibitions - the Hayward's *The Epic and the Everyday* and the Barbican's *Who's looking at the family*. With this kind of exposure his work demands scrutiny.

Struth takes three kinds of photographs; urban landscapes in Europe, Japan and the USA; family portraits; and people looking at famous paintings in museums. Despite being exhibited mixed in with the rest, the museum pictures are to my mind a different project and so I have only given some thought to the landscapes and portraits, in particular their visual interest, Struth's method, and his intentions.

Visual interest

The landscapes are mainly flat and lightless, the portraits are unsmiling, both of which characteristics cause the viewer to immediately contemplate the materiality of the subject matter. Otherwise composition is conventional - landscapes are all middle distance, the portraits are rigidly posed. There is a lack of frisson, no internal dynamic within the pictures. It is this conventional composition and the lack of incident that makes the images seem timeless. The material realism, and the timelessness in Struth's pictures gains critical admiration. Paradoxically it is the avoidance of formal interest that works in his favour. Ian Jeffrey said in a review, 'He may be an observer and commentator, but not one who tries to interpolate any sense of his own giftedness or even privileged access to the truth.' The fine quality, high definition, plate camera images contain lots of detailed information but these are not beautiful images, nor are they rich in their bleakness like Michael Schmidt's Berlin photographs, for example; nor are his portraits alive in their neutrality like Nicholas Nixon's group portraits.

Struth's Method

Struth is regarded as a cool, neutral observer of facts, but there are inconsistencies in his work. While most of his landscapes are black and white, some are in colour; most are unpeopled, but the Tokyo image is full of people; most are single image pieces but in Rome he has a three image piece, and in

Chicago a larger group is hung together. These inconsistencies undermine the cool, neutral qualities outlined above.

Struth is constantly linked to Bernd and Hilla Becher who he studied under. The Bechers adopted a self-denying, stringently systematic approach to achieve their aim of neutrality and objectivity. Their choice of method and subject tackled problems of interpretation and representation inherent in the medium. Struth however does not follow in this disciplined approach, he does not seek to reduce the complexity of an urban scene by a uniform, mechanical method.

You feel as if he has flown in, taken some pictures near the hotel, and moved out

Indeed the opposite is the case; cities are randomly selected, viewpoints vary; each city is represented in just two or three images without evident system. All the great urban landscape photographers are highly systematic. Atget, Abbott, Evans; Shore, Eggleston, Baltz worked in specific areas to which they developed a commitment. They undertook a survey within their own subjective parameters. The body of work reveals the photographer's programme. Struth does not reveal his parameters or provide any evidence of a programme. You feel as if he has flown in, taken some pictures near the hotel, and moved out. There needs to be a system when his subject is so big. Any urban photograph contains

so much detailed information, about architecture, history, economics, politics, at both broad level - the civic symbolism of a building, to the mundane - a parking ticket on a car. Systematic methods are needed to clarify intentions.

Struth's intentions

The lack of a systematic method makes it more difficult to know what Struth's mission is, what the pictures are about. Urban landscapes and portraits are inevitably about a general urban human condition, but their meaning must always start from the localised and specific qualities of the place shown in the picture. Most photographers develop the meaning of the specific place by emphasising a particular aspect of the urban experience, for example, signs of everyday transactions, the vulnerability of built fabric, the politics expressed in physical structures, frictions between old and new. Struth does not reveal the themes developing from the place in his pictures, rather the ICA exhibition notes simply tell us that *'Struth explores the complex nature of human relations and urban space at the end of the 20th Century.'* A ludicrously sweeping ambition which only fuels my scepticism.

Richard Sennet, the eminent American sociologist has graced Struth's latest book with an essay and I think Sennet may provide a key. His books, in particular, *The Fall of Public Man*, deal with the problem of social withdrawal, the abandonment of externally orientated public life in favour of internationalised and personalised life. He does explicitly explore the complex nature of human relations and urban space. This helps me to make sense of the Rome and Chicago images; the Roman piazza is a dynamic public space expressed in the surrounding architecture (crudely handled by Struth by taking images of three sides of the piazza),

the Chicago housing represents isolated personal lives organised around dead spaces. It also links the landscapes and portraits - the public spaces and private family lives counterposed. But he doesn't make it very clear, the urban scenes need to give precedence to buildings, not the space; they do not provide the human scale reference points of detail to provoke a sense of the everyday meaning of the space; some spaces are in fact busy and lively. Most importantly, his pictures do not distinguish the essential cultural differences between his chosen cities, as these affect the public and private aspects of urban life.

There is a wealth of potential in expressing the contemporary urban manifestation of the public/private rift and Struth, if this is what he is trying, only manages a muddy representation of the issue. His point of view and shift lens make these look like architectural photographs, his choice of housing areas suggest a social interest; he is most likely exploring public/private interactions but is failing to convey the relation between individual and family life and public space. And that is because he is not systematic or thorough, and because he is too much in love with his plate camera.

he ... is failing to convey the relation between individual and family life and public space.

How does he get away with it?

Struth has been embraced by the world of Fine Art. The Bechers dogged work over the years was ultimately given due recognition by the Art world and straight photography gained a new art credibility. Struth's work is in the

Tate Gallery collection. This takes Struth partly out of the tired world of photography criticism, and its references back to Atget et al, and into a critical world informed by conceptual art. In this context, the ICA can grandly state that *'Thomas Struth dissects the mental state of the modern metropolis' ...allowing the photographs to become metaphors despite the materiality of their subject matter'*; and the *'Struth's photographs draw subtle but telling parallels between the formation of individual personality through the dynamics of personal relations and the formation of a civic identity through the dynamics of social relations'*, despite not actually showing in his photographs any sense of personal or social relations - remember his unsmiling portraits deny any sense of relationships. In a conceptual art context, Struth and his critics can happily ignore all the accumulated wisdom about the problems, paradoxes and misrepresentations of the photograph.

There are two, amongst others, pitfalls in photographic criticism which Struth benefits from. Firstly, the critic gives credit to the photographer for the wealth of minute detail in a picture when this is a fundamental characteristic of the large format medium; the camera's function is mistaken for artistry. Secondly, the critic mistakes emptiness or vagueness in an image for fullness of meaning. Struth's depiction of places where nothing is happening can thus be interpreted as an insight into *'the psychology of the city through its empty spaces' (ICA) or 'an open research closed within photographic form.'*

Thomas Struth now enjoys major artist status. For me, the visual content, the method and the stated intention of Struth's photography reveal flaws in his quality of seeing, emotional commitment and intellectual rigour, and doesn't add up to great work.

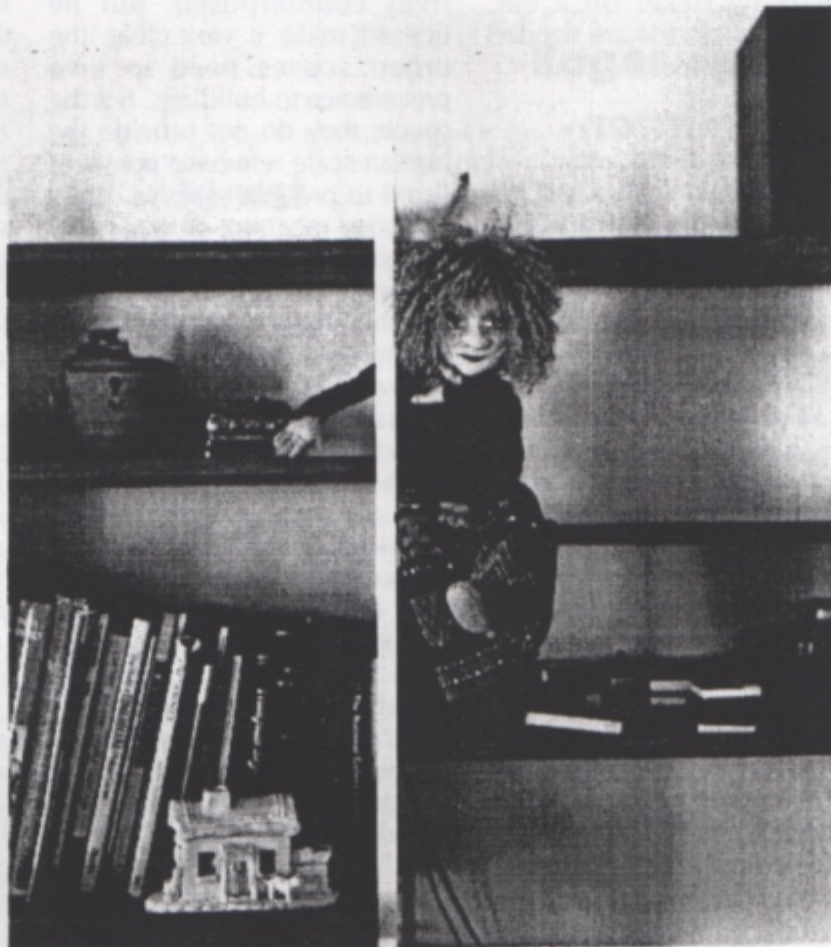
Roger Estop

Jill Staples

I have 3 or 4 ideas on the go at the moment, in various stages of completion. In many ways they are interrelated, for the subjects have all died, two close friends and a shed. The work has become a celebration of my affection and admiration for each of them.

The images I enclose concern my friend Helena. She was a very creative person, working with clay, wood and many other materials. Perhaps her most successful work was making dolls who were much more than dolls, real characters in their own right. Helena and Roy's house and garden are full of the things they both created, many still in the places she left them over two years ago.

It has been my pleasure to celebrate Helena by wandering round making images of her work. These I will put in a book for her husband, Roy.



*Sylvia Simkin
star-studded
transatlantic
Killer-diller
(vocalist)*

My latest photographic project is the result of a train journey across Canada which I took at the end of last October. Before going I thought it would be impossible to make photographs on such a trip. Paul Hill half-jokingly suggested that I make a study of enclosed space; I thought more in terms of studies in movement i.e. blur, but I took my camera anyway.

Once on the train and underway, it soon became obvious that the only thing that was photographable for me was what was immediately beside the tracks - and that this was possible only when the train was stopped, or nearly stopped... The result is anything but the usual picturesque images of Canadian wilderness and mountains!

A study of the contact sheets reveals some interesting pairings and triads of images which resulted from the restriction of only photographing from my window; I could never have consciously conceived or executed them. I have now printed thirty five pictures and typed up several pages of journal which I will put together in book form. The following are a few extracts of each.

They are pieces of outdated industrial machinery; airplanes are faster, automobiles more convenient, allow freedom. So why do people continue to make long journeys by train? What is the nature of such a journey? Perhaps it has to do with a particular way of experiencing time and space, and in it some faint echo of life's journey.

Time on a train is palpable: as a head-long rush forward, in a long look backward, or from a stationary but fleeting present. Where we have been and where we are going are visibly separated by instants of time framed by a window. It is cinematic time, but it is also 'real' and the face in the window becomes, for a brief moment, a part of the passing scene. Here is time for the play of imagination.

Space on a train is experienced as both intimate and immense; in the solitude of a single cabin it is closed, compressed, highly tactile; but through the window a world endlessly unfolds and expands beyond the tracks. Experienced only by sight, it is cinematic space and we are prisoners condemned to watch a seventy-two hour film as the train, a long ribbon of silver segments flashing through a vast landscape on two shining tracks, crosses the breadth of a continent. Here is space for the play of imagination.



My window is on the right side of the train and faces North. North in Canada means great stretches of wilderness right up to the North Pole, through snow country, cold, untamed, pure. North means something beyond civilisation, something beyond my knowing; it is territory for dreaming and it begins just behind the fruit laden apple trees here at the edge of the tracks.

BESIDE THE TRACK

Virginia Khuri

Tantalising glimpses of other lives. What is life like in these passing places, these towns, villages and isolated homes? And as for the people watching from places passed, what questions do they ask about the lives framed in the moving windows, caught for a moment glinting in the sun or glowing in the night? Where are they going, these captives? And why?



Ontario wilderness, the wild North. Only train tracks and frail telephone wires connect isolated outposts of civilisation with the modern world. Here ribs of the earth jut through a thin skin of soil, Precambrian granite bedrock sometimes barely exposed, sometimes towering over the tracks in massive folds. This 'Canadian Shield' covers half of Canada; geologic deep time made visible. Where there is soil cover enough, there are dense forests of conifer and aspen; elsewhere lakes, streams and muskeg - a Native American word describing treacherous bogs with no rock base where water-logged soil is deep and extremely unstable unless frozen. It is a rugged landscape of rock, trees and water or ice; the muskeg swallows all else.



Sioux Lookout - what images the name conjures. But how they are contradicted by the dreary scene out the window. Such a name resonates with ideas of wilderness, but the reality is a railway division point, rows of tracks on one side, and on the other three forlorn spruce trees beside a rain soaked road and

nondescript buildings. Rain drops spatter the window; this late in October it could have been snow.

The heart quickens at the thought that today we will reach the mountains. Mystical mountains, as in 'Magic Mountain', they are the highlight of and perhaps the reason for the Journey. Anticipation unites all passengers. First sightings are to the south; mountains do not appear in my window until much later. The train climbs steadily upwards through the foothills in bright sunshine; suddenly straight down the tracks at each curving, the gleam of snowy peaks. The magical mountains peek above the treetops and slowly grow.



I would like to think of the country beyond the tracks to the north as wild, rugged, remote and undiscovered, an unspoiled wilderness. It is wilderness, but I am coming to acknowledge now that it is not unspoiled and can never again be 'undiscovered'. There is no place left on earth to be discovered - and little left undamaged by mankind's greed. Fortunately what little that is left is still sufficient to give intimations of that vast unknown territory so necessary to the imagination.



3am at Biggar and the other silver 'Canadian' passes on its way from Vancouver to its destination, Toronto. Destination...destiny. A disparate group of people board a train at noon in Toronto and travel toward Vancouver, the destination; or the reverse. A train and two tracks circumscribe a journey through time and space. The train travels in the present, toward the future, leaving behind places and people, and where the tracks go determines what is seen; what is beside the tracks is what can be known; what is beyond can only be guessed at.

Virginia Khuri

February 1995

(continued from p 16)

It was the empty bits that were calling for attention, the spaces held the message. This may or may not seem odd to the reader, and I must admit it is a difficult idea for me to communicate in words, but I was definitely experiencing some small degree of enlightenment, and furthering my feel for composition and form. These minimalist images although simple to behold, for me, contain obscure and complex signs and signals that dictate the way I approach image making. It may be that the Conscious and (or) unconscious personal decoding and analysis of these components contained in the formal structure of the image (and our preferences for a particular emotional configuration or template), enables us as photographers to develop what is termed style.

Now I could almost touch, taste and smell the space. I don't think until this point I ever truly understood what was meant by the term 'using space' until now. These non-descriptive and self contained images appeared to me as a kind of visual music rather than a description of anything outside of themselves, two personal images recorded for my pleasure and not manufactured to



Graeme Webb

Configuration II

any external specification. These visual expanses hold as much importance for me as the silences and pauses in music. One only has to listen to the 'sound landscapes' of the contemporary Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu or the minimalist compositions of Steve Reich, John Adams and Dave Heath to understand this.

So was it by pure coincidence that browsing in Shipleys Book Sellers in the Charing Cross road some weeks later I stumbled across a book by Gaston Bachelard entitled 'The Poetics of Space'. The preface announced that "the reader will never again see ordinary spaces in ordinary ways".

Was I making progress, watch this (dare I say it) space.

REFERENCES

Art and Visual Perception Rudolf Arnheim,
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The Poetics of Space Gaston Bachelard, Beacon
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The Poetics of Space

Graeme Webb

We do not know what the art of the future will look like. No one particular style is art's final climax. Every style is but one valid way of looking at the world, one view of the holy mountain, which offers a different image from every place but can be seen as the same everywhere.

Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*

During a major project I had become aware of a number of images I felt did not fit within the framework or context of my current work and thinking. Fifteen months had been spent sifting and abstracting images from a tangle of landscapes along side the River Thames for my Contemporary group ARPS distinction. Now this project was over I could revisit these areas, photograph them and try to understand why I was so interested in them. Although each stands (or falls) on its own merit, I have no doubt within my own mind that this diptych holds a certain fascination for me. Originally there were to be three images, but as in all *Menage a trois* there are degrees of conflict and tension between the three. The third's personality was too overpowering.

About nine months into the River project I became aware of small areas that started calling for my attention and recognition. These apparently insignificant and uninteresting features held a certain mystery, they seemed to contain messages that were just outside of my grasp. Daily I would meditate on the compositions. Each had its own story to tell, but it would be doubtful if I had the capability or skill to be the teller.

They both share several things, heavy base structures, large areas of light toned sky expanse (gone are the dramatic cumulus sky-scapes I once favoured), and bisected objects that reveal enough of themselves to be recognised as things that we might just be familiar with.

Neither could be placed within the documentary genre. They do not inform the viewer of where the subject matter is, the scale of the landscape is vague (there is no perspective element) and there is no real reason why they should ever have been brought into this world. They could and have been regarded as boring exercises in breaking the rules of pictorial composition.

On reviewing other images of the River series this approach and use of walls and fence occurs repeatedly. After considering these elements for some time (more so than is probably natural or healthy), it occurred to me that the treatment of these objects was incidental, what suddenly struck me was the importance of the spaces between the objects. These empty areas create the domain and set the perimeters that enable the objects to play their dynamic games and to form relationships. (cont on p 15)



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